

*The Transatlantic Travels of James  
Thomson's The Seasons and its  
Baggage of Material Culture,  
1730–1870*

LOUISE L. STEVENSON

**T**HE HARRY POTTER NOVELS of J. K. Rowling in this century, the Waverly novels of Sir Walter Scott in the nineteenth, and the four poems by James Thomson published as *The Seasons* in the eighteenth century share blockbuster status, transatlantic reach, and long-lasting popularity. Although their written stories account for much of their success, the material culture that they generated also played a role. The following pages will unfold the story of the first of these transatlantic publishing phenomena, the 5,541-line epic poem *The Seasons* by the Scotsman Thomson (1700–48). The story begins with the first publication in Britain in 1730 and runs to 1870, after the apogee of the poem's popularity in America. By the travels of a poem—or of any literary work—I refer to the way that the work's meanings moved through time and space and across lines of media, class,

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and gender. The discussion here involves the crossing of disciplinary boundaries and the setting aside of several conventions by using a diverse array of resources. Decorative arts, paintings and prints, political theory and philosophy, novels and poetry, newspaper advertisements, and schoolgirl embroidery all have been used as evidence.

This article has two parts. The first discusses the widespread popularity of *The Seasons*. Because Thomson and his poem are known—mainly—to specialists in British literature, this section establishes that Thomson and *The Seasons* were held in high regard from the mid-eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century and concludes by examining a vignette of the story of Musidora and Damon. British, and then American, artists transferred the verbal image of Musidora into prints and paintings. The transition of this image into artists' works documents the travels of *The Seasons* in genteel circles, but I will show that the poem's audience was broader.

Part two investigates the Whig or republican ideas that accompanied the poem to America, from the eighteenth century through most of the nineteenth. This section centers on a vignette, *Autumn*, that recounts the meeting between the gleaner girl Lavinia and her landlord, Palemon. Although the Musidora image and that of Palemon and Lavinia both became subjects for professional artists, the latter won a wider audience. In visual and decorative arts media generated by British manufacturing and commerce, and later in schoolgirl art in Britain and America, Lavinia and Palemon's meeting became a staple of popular culture.

This study of *The Seasons* and its material culture reveals how a poem, considered in contemporary opinion to be of modest literary quality, accomplished far-ranging and deep cultural work in spreading and consolidating ideas. For example, the focus on schoolgirl needlework highlights the role of women in disseminating thought. Through their handiwork, women were able to introduce certain ideas into domestic life and put them on display. The travels of *The Seasons* across the Atlantic, from public meaning to women's needlework, also demonstrate how ideas move



across divides of time, space, and gender. To borrow from historian Laurel Ulrich, *The Seasons* and its travels help to answer one of the more difficult questions in social and intellectual history: 'How does the seemingly private life of households relate to the public worlds of commerce and politics?' Through Thomson's *Seasons*, we will see that even as they stitched, women participated in the political discourse that led to the American Revolution and then helped to secure the new Republic. The journey begins in Scotland, with the genesis of the ideas informing *The Seasons*, and ends in the United States with the decline of the poem's popularity and the demise of needlework in the curriculum of women's academies. The main elements include vignettes in the poem, the fine arts and decorative arts that they inspired, the ideas that they embodied and transmitted, and the methods of their transmission, most notably through women's schools and their needlework curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

Literary critics of our era view Thomson as no more than a second-tier poet and consider *The Castle of Indolence* (1738), a discourse on leisure cast in Spenserian couplets, his best work. Surveys of British literature typically mention Thomson in one lecture on eighteenth-century pastoral poetry or as a precursor of the Romantic poets. In his own day, Thomson gained considerable success and recognition during a brief life. At twenty-five years of age, he left Scotland for London to find patronage and a publisher. A fellow Scot published *Winter* in 1726; and *Summer*, *Spring*, and *Autumn* followed in yearly installments. All four were finally published together as *The Seasons* in 1730, and afterward they were almost always published in that form. Thomson attracted patrons among the British nobility, including eventually even the Prince of Wales, and enjoyed periods of prosperity before his death. He also achieved national honor for writing the lyrics to the anthem 'Rule Britannia' in 1729.

1. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 143; Fredrika J. Teute, 'Roman Matron on the Banks of Tiber Creek: Margaret Bayard Smith and the Politicization of Spheres in the Nation's Capital,' in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 93.

His book-length poem *The Seasons* earned Thomson his greatest fame and made quotations from his works household staples across Europe and in America. In this work, he reintroduced nature as a subject for poetry and created vivid word pictures of sublime landscapes and rural scenes. In Revolutionary America, *The Seasons* was one of the most widely quoted volumes of poetry. Thomson's modern biographer calls the poem 'the most popular English long poem apart from *Paradise Lost*' and claims that during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century it was more popular than most novels.<sup>2</sup>

Many indices attest to the transatlantic popularity of *The Seasons* and its status as a steady seller in the book market. A search in 2001, for example, in the First Search records of the on-line database of the Library of Congress uncovered at least 451 different editions of *The Seasons* currently held in American libraries. During the early nineteenth century, the poem also was published once or twice each in Switzerland, Germany, and France. In Britain, *The Seasons* was published most frequently between 1790 and 1830; on this side of the Atlantic, there were two periods during which frequency of publication peaked. The first began in 1800 and continued beyond 1830. Publication frequency again increased during the 1850s and diminished after 1870 to pre-1790 levels of seven editions per decade.

The inclusion of excerpts from Thomson's *Seasons* and discussion of his poetry in almanacs published prior to 1776 show that publishers expected the poem to win a broad public. (No index to the content of almanacs published after 1776 exists.) A letter published in the March 4, 1735, issue of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* referred to

2. Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 42; James Sambrook, *James Thomson, 1700-1748: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 175. See, for example, contemporary popular discussions by Ashton Nichols, professor of English at Dickinson College, of Thomson's importance at <http://www.dickinson.edu/~nicholsa/Romnat/thomson.htm> and 'James Thomson,' in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 2450. Scholarly assessments appear in Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 236-37, and James Sambrook, 'A Just Balance between Patronage and the Press': The Case of James Thomson,' *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 34 (2001): 137-53.



Thomson as one of the 'two best English poets that ever were.' Benjamin Franklin included an excerpt from *Winter* to fill out the calendar page for December in his 1749 *Almanack*. Purdie and Dixon printed an excerpt from *Spring* in their *Virginia Almanack* for 1772, and George Andrews's *South-Carolina Almanack and Register* for 1764 included a poem about *The Seasons* and its poet.<sup>3</sup>

Through the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, knowledge of the poem seems to have been an expected part of cultural literacy for genteel people. Schools included it in their English literature courses. *Godey's Lady's Book* even printed a joke in which a young man tells his mother that there are six seasons: 'spring, summer, fall, winter, opera seasons, and Thomson's seasons.' Magazine articles often used quotations from Thomson to substantiate calls for modesty or to add credence to some statement about the salutary benefits of the countryside. The *Godey's* joke and one other reference show how the poem could be used to ridicule pretentious behavior: The British author Miss [Eliza] Leslie showed her character Mrs. Blagden approaching garishness by dressing in a decorative sash that featured an image of Palemon and Lavinia flanked by characters from two eighteenth-century novels.<sup>4</sup>

The name Lavinia gives another measure of the poem's popularity. The most popular vignette in *Autumn* introduced the name in 1730. Before the publication of the first American edition in 1777, the name rarely appeared in the colonies, although a ship named *Lavinia* was active in the coasting trade.<sup>5</sup> From the 1790s on, however, the name became an occasional given name in America. For comparison, a search of the name 'Hannah' in the databases of the New England Historical and Genealogical Society produced some 150,000 hits compared to 2,630 for Lavinia. During the nineteenth century, New England and Pennsylvania

3. *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 4, 1735.

4. *Godey's Lady's Book* 58 (1859): 280; 'The Manderfields, Part the Third,' *The Lady's Book* 28 (1844): 111. A selection of articles is: H. T. Tuckerman, 'Thomson, James with Portrait,' *Southern Literary Messenger* 7 (1841): 605; 'Thomson,' *American Review* 9 (1849): 464-70; 'Letter from Uncle Jeremy,' *The Christian Recorder*, June 14, 1862.

5. *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 5, 1752-August 12, 1836, *passim*.

women continued to be named 'Lavinia,' and mothers handing down their name to daughters does not account for its prevalence. A check of African American newspapers indicates that free African American families sometimes named their children Lavinia. During the nineteenth century, the Lavinias most familiar to students of literature and American culture are Emily Dickinson's sister, Lavinia (b. 1833), and Tom Thumb's famous midget wife, Lavinia Warren Bump (b. 1841). The name appears to have appealed to parents from artisan through upper classes.<sup>6</sup>

Comments in British editions that were imported to the colonies before 1777 suggest that the poem's popularity may have extended to both men and women. Signatures of both appear in the eight British editions in the possession of the Library Company of Philadelphia. Philadelphia publisher and bookseller Robert Bell, an emigrant from Scotland and a noted patriot, published the first American edition in 1776. The previous year, he had published the first American edition of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. The title pages of all Bell—and most other—editions of that pamphlet carry this quotation from Bell's fellow countryman Thomson:

Man knows no Master save creating HEAVEN  
Or those whom choice and common Good ordain.<sup>7</sup>

These lines, which implicitly vindicate the American rejection of George III, are taken from Thomson's poem *Liberty* (1735–36). With an education in Scottish political economy and moral philosophy, polished by post-graduate conversation in London coffee

6. I searched for the names 'Lavinia' and 'Hannah' through the cemetery records, church records, birth records, and other records available at the website of the New England Historical and Genealogical Society. With the Lavinias, I spot-checked the records to see if the name had been passed down in a family. I also looked for 'Lavinia' on the sources available at accessible archives, namely *The Pennsylvania Gazette* and *The Pennsylvania Genealogical Catalogue* for Delaware and Chester Counties (1809–1870). Starting with the 1900 decade, the Social Security Administration kept track of the popularity of first names among its cardholders. 'Lavinia' finally disappeared from the top 1,000 women's names in the 1930s.

7. On-line facsimiles may be found at: <http://common.ragnarok.com/> and Early American Imprints, 1st series, no. 14954. Author's e-mail correspondence with James N. Green, December 4–6, 2001.





Fig. 1. A Brady photograph of Mr. and Mrs. Charles S. Stratton (Lavinia Warren and Tom Thumb, *Harpers Weekly*, February 21, 1863).

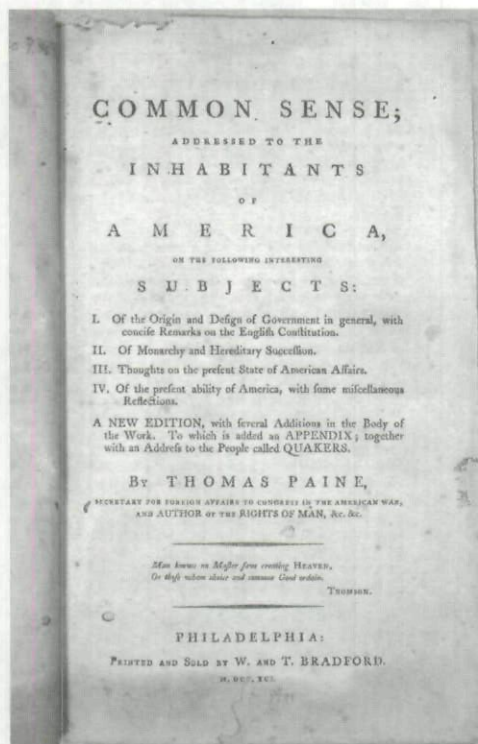


Fig. 2. 'Man knows no Master save creating HEAVEN/ Or those whom choice and common Good ordain.' This couplet from 'Liberty: A Poem' (1736) by James Thomson appeared on the title page of the 1776 edition of *Common Sense* published by another Scotsman, Robert Bell, and since then has been associated with the text. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* (Philadelphia: W. and T. Bradford, 1791). Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

houses of the 1720s and 1730s, Thomson became an advocate of Whig political ideas that could later be applied to colonial protest. The poem traced the history of liberty from the Roman republic through Anglo-Saxon times and the seventeenth-century English revolutions, to Britain in the 1730s. Historian Bernard Bailyn noted Thomson's contribution to the ideas of the American Revolution a number of years ago, although his discussion of Thomson, which is most extensive in his footnotes, ends with the poem *Liberty* and does not pursue Thomson's influence into the 1790s or extend it to cultural politics.<sup>8</sup>

In the new American Republic of the 1790s, the popularity of *The Seasons* increased. The artist Samuel Jennings included stacks

8. Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 42; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 46, 49, 140.



of books at the feet of Liberty in his iconic 1792 painting 'Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences' (fig. 3). In it, an African American woman and her children are shown sitting at Liberty's feet receiving instruction; she holds a pike topped with a liberty cap and sits surrounded by paraphernalia of instruction: a globe, compass, and stacks of books. The spines of the three volumes in the left foreground bear the names of the great British poets of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries—Shakespeare, Milton, and Thomson. Although a possible interpretation of these three volumes might be that they have been set aside, they play a vital role by anchoring one angle of the triangle comprising the central composition of the painting. The line from the stack of books leads from the left corner of the painting up to Liberty's cap and then down again to the second stack. The gray volume on top of the second stack is a copy of the catalogue of the Library Company of Philadelphia, from which subscribers could borrow *The Seasons* and other books.

Quotations from *The Seasons* were published in the periodical literature of the new republic. 'Venerate the plough,' the exhortation to Britons in *Spring*, was adapted and became famous as a quotation addressed to American readers, as in: 'Ye Pennsylvanians, venerate the plough!' Articles about Thomson or *The Seasons* may be found in the *American Magazine*, *Gazette of the United States*, *Massachusetts Magazine*, and *American Museum*. In each of these articles authors quoted from *The Seasons* to criticize vain pursuit of fashion and to call men and women to a simple virtue based on agrarian ways:

O teach me what is good, teach me thyself;  
Save me from folly, vanity, and vice,  
From every low pursuit! and feed my soul  
With knowledge, conscious peace, and virtue pure;  
Scared, substantial, never fading bliss.<sup>9</sup>

9. See 'Happiness,' *Gazette of the United States* 3 (July 2, 1791): 74; 'On Agriculture,' *American Museum*, 2 (September 1787): 296; 'Religion,' *American Museum* 5 (January 1789): 55; 'Character of Thomson's Seasons,' *Massachusetts Magazine* 4 (March 1792): 543-44.



Fig. 3. Samuel Jennings, 'Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences,' 1792. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Published library catalogues show that *The Seasons* became a standard text in all sorts of libraries from the 1770s. Harvard College owned a copy of as early as 1773 and had added another by 1790. College, subscription, mercantile, and apprentices' libraries all tended to hold at least one copy of *The Seasons*, usually as a volume in Thomson's collected works. In surveying published library catalogues in the collections of the Library Company of Philadelphia and the American Antiquarian Society, I had expected to compare the total number of published catalogues that I looked at with the number that listed *The Seasons*. From that first Harvard catalogue forward, however, virtually every published library catalogue of the first forty that I looked at listed an edition of *The Seasons*, which had become a standard work in the late eighteenth century and continued to be so into the last third



of the nineteenth century. Still, it was impossible to tell whether libraries purchased Thomson because of his reputation or because of reader demand.<sup>10</sup>

In Britain and America, enterprising publishers recognized the popularity and durability of *The Seasons*. Publishers in the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries relied upon the packaging of a book—especially, its cover, illustrations, and size—to increase sales. Beginning in the 1790s, they produced *The Seasons* in a number of formats, from pocket-sized to elaborately tooled leather presentation editions. For example, Rebecca D. Smith wrote on the fly leaf of her miniature 1805 edition: 'Given her by her Aunt when a very little girl.' At about this time, publishers also recognized Thomson's *The Seasons* as meriting inclusion in collections of so-called classic works. Thomson's poem was included in editions 'of the most popular English poets.' One publisher claimed that his series included writers of 'Classical fame.' Schoolteachers followed the lead of publishers and chose *The Seasons* as prizes for their students. Inscriptions and labels on editions of *The Seasons* show that they were awarded as 'Rewards of Merit' to students for their exemplary academic performance or conduct. At least one student gave a copy, an 1836 edition, to his teacher.<sup>11</sup>

The decades from the 1830s through the 1860s are noted for especially lavish editions, often merchandised as gift books, or annuals. In his history of embossed leather bindings, Edwin Wolf II

10. W. H. Bond and Hugh Amory, eds., *The Printed Catalogues of the Harvard College Library, 1723-1790* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1996). For nonacademic libraries, see for example, *Rules and Orders of the Dorchester Library with a Catalogue of the Books* (Boston, 1807); *Catalogue of the Union Circulating Library* (Philadelphia, 1814); *Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Apprentices' Library of the City and County of Lancaster* (Lancaster, Pa., 1839); *Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Saint Louis Mercantile Association Library Association* (St. Louis, 1850). See also William J. Gilmore-Lehne, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780-1835* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 110-11.

11. The editions referred to in this note may be found at The Library Company of Philadelphia: James Thomson, *The Seasons* (Philadelphia, 1805). See the advertisement in two editions of *The Seasons*, published in Philadelphia in 1811, one by Johnson and Warner, and an illustrated edition published by T. and G. Palmer; and an edition published in New York, 1836. There are also editions awarded as rewards of merit at the American Antiquarian Society (hereafter AAS).

refers to publishers Uriah Hunt and Sons' 1846 edition of *The Seasons* as an especially noteworthy example of a volume with a highly decorated embossed cover, created for presentation.<sup>12</sup> *The Seasons* was published with or without illustrations—and sold for prices reflecting the presence or absence of such embellishments. The most fully illustrated editions included an engraved title page, a portrait image of Thomson, and one engraving each for autumn, winter, spring, and summer. From the first British editions through those of the nineteenth century in Britain and America, engravings by outstanding artists and engravers such as the Britons William Kent (1674–1748) and Richard Westall (1765–1836), and the American Carl Heinrich Schmolze (1823–61) were included.

Signatures in the books show that men as well as women continued to own the poem through the first decades of the nineteenth century. After 1820, almost all signatures are those of women, but ownership, of course, does not define the boundaries of the reading audience. For example, 'the loyal and most obedient servant of Miss Sally C. Campbell' presented her with a 1730 edition of *The Seasons* in 1808. Thirty-nine years later, Annie B. Whittacker wrote on the title page of *Spring* in the same copy: 'May 17, 1847. Memorable day—NEVER, NEVER to lie forgot.'<sup>13</sup>

Whittacker thought that she never would forget that day in spring because she associated it with a poem of the same name. She could reread the poem and recall the feelings and the setting of that day. Similarly, objects gain desirability because they suggest a book, the person with whom one read it, or the moment of reading it. English eighteenth-century manufacturers capitalized on the popularity of literature and the existence of increasing wealth among the manufacturing and commercial classes in Britain and America to produce objects that today we would call tie-ins or spin-offs. This reciprocally beneficial relationship must have bolstered the profits of both book publishers and ceramics manufacturers. Usually,

12. Edwin Wolf II, *From Gothic Windows to Peacocks: American Embossed Leather Bindings, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 1990), 159.

13. Thomson, *The Seasons* (London, 1730), 21. At The Library Company of Philadelphia.





Fig. 4. *Aetas* (Summer). Blue non-lead glass mug with gilt decoration, 4". ca. 1785–1800. Bohemia or Germany. Courtesy of private collector.

potteries chose to manufacture figures with guaranteed recognition—mythological figures, Biblical figures, and figures from the pastoral countryside, including lambs and shepherdesses. Histories of eighteenth-century British pottery show that British authors whose work inspired extensive manufacture of objects included only Shakespeare, Milton, or Thomson. The purchasers of such pieces of decorative art were the eighteenth-century book-buying public, including the genteel, the wellborn, the aristocratic, and members of the well-to-do middle classes in Great Britain, the United States, and cosmopolitan Europe.

The Thomson publishing boom of the 1790s coincided with these years of manufacturing expansion. Thomson enlarged the subject matter of the decorative arts by popularizing the four seasons in the discourse of that day. A search of the database Literature

on Line, which contains 350,000 works of British and American literature, turned up only two British poems with the word 'season' in the titles that were published in the century before Thomson's *Seasons*. It is worth remembering, though, that since classical times, authors and composers had taken the seasons for their subject matter, using them as a way of dividing time and thinking about its unremitting passage. For example, American poet Anne Bradstreet used the seasons to evoke stages of life in the introduction to her poem 'The Four Ages of Man' (1650). Music lovers are familiar with Antonio Vivaldi's concerto 'The Four Seasons' (1725). In the century after 1730, at least thirteen poems, including ones by Washington Allston (1779-1843) and Timothy Dwight (1752-1815), used the word seasons in their titles, and half of the rest of these poems were a response to Thomson's original.<sup>14</sup>

The themes of Thomson's poem resonated with eighteenth-century thinkers, especially those who pondered the effects of the landscaped environment on human nature to link the progress of human life with the seasons. Contemplation of the landscape, and consideration of the seasons and conditions of nature at different times of year, led readers to think about the state of their own progress through life and their mental and moral health. Authors also gave political meaning to the rotation of the seasons. Implicit in *The Seasons*, and then explicit in *Liberty*, was a message that republics would evolve into empires and that they would in turn devolve to ruin, just as summer and fall inevitably followed spring.<sup>15</sup>

14. G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 213, suggests the manufacture of artifacts inspired by *Werther* but presents no documentation of their manufacture. Similarly, Terry Eagleton discusses material culture traceable to Richardson's *Pamela*, but the citation he gives leads to an unsupported assertion (*The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982], 6). The works are: John Rhodes, *The Country Man's Comfort: An Instruction of the Whole Year: Divided in 12 Months, Four Seasons or Quarters as also into Weekes and Daies, of the Sabbath or Lords Day: and What is the True Keeping of It* (London, 1637); Henry Needler, *Of the Seasons Proper for Angling* (London, 1724).

15. On Thomson, see John Dixon Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening during the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 32; Mara Miller, 'Gardens as Political Discourse in the Age of Walpole,' in Gordon J. Schochet, ed., *Politics, Politeness, and Patriotism* (Washington, D. C.: Folger Shakespeare



In the last decade of his life, Franz Josef Haydn composed his oratorio 'Die Jahreszeiten' ('The Seasons,' 1799–1801), which set Thomson's poem to music and gained popularity just as Napoleon I was extending his conquests across Europe.

During the commercial revolution transforming the British and American economies, Britain, and to a lesser extent France, produced decorative arts for American markets. Continental factories produced sets of glass to which artists applied representations of the various seasons in gilt (fig. 4). British potteries produced earthenware sets of the four seasons, sometimes in several different sizes and for different budgets. In the realm of the decorative arts, the British manufacturer of Chelsea porcelain drew on *The Seasons* to create the figure 'Winter and Spring' (1765; fig. 5). As potteries multiplied—and cheaper methods of pottery making developed—they produced a wider range of figures, some highlighted with gilt decoration.

Though extant Palemon and Lavinia figures in the decorative and fine arts are far rarer than those of the four seasons, they were made over the same time span—from the last third of the eighteenth century through the first quarter of the nineteenth. Their existence confirms the strong commercial influence of Thomson's *Seasons*, for no other literary text combines both names. In the decorative arts, Palemon and Lavinia figures appeared first in plain, unglazed white earthenware. In the nineteenth century, the Derby porcelain manufacturers began to make less expensive figures than these earlier ones of Palemon and Lavinia (fig. 6). In the fine arts, booksellers and print publishers in 1790s London commissioned artists to compose prints of each season. The prints of Palemon and Lavinia were also applied to creamware pitchers, along with quotations from *Autumn*, and were sold to a broader

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Library, 1993), 263–80. It can be extrapolated from Fliegelman that Thomson may have picked up current English thinking about empires. See *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 42. More generally on the relationship of rise and decline to republican discourse, see Joseph J. Ellis, *After the Revolution: Profiles of Early American Culture* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 26–38.



Fig. 5. Winter and Spring, Chelsea pottery. Seeking subjects for their manufactured decorations, English potteries introduced figures recognized from popular literature, including *The Seasons*. Private collection.

public. As their technological capabilities improved and increased, British factories produced Palemon and Lavinia figures and other collectibles for an increasingly large public.<sup>16</sup>

Figures of the four seasons and Palemon and Lavinia are artifacts of what has been called the first consumer revolution in

16. Frank Hurlbutt, *Old Derby Porcelain and its Artists-Workmen* (London: T. W. Laurie, 1928), ch. 1, 40-43, plate 14; Pat Halfpenny, *English Earthenware Figures, 1740-1840* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1991), 53, 59, 100-2, 123, 175. I have drawn the information about earthenware manufacture from both of these books.





Fig. 6. Summer, Derby pottery, 1815. Private collection.

British history. Historian John Brewer emphasizes that in all areas of literature and the fine and decorative arts, things were for sale. He also argues that while poets, authors, and painters might have had moral or political intentions, manufacturers simply wanted to sell.<sup>17</sup>

A consideration of the artistic renderings of the Musidora vignette from *Summer* lends caution against the temptation to see the travels of *The Seasons* as evidence of high culture devolving into popular culture and feminine appeal. In support of these

17. John Brewer, "The Most Polite Age and the Most Vicious": Attitudes towards Culture as a Commodity,' in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, eds., *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 346.

contentions are the many library holdings of copies containing women's signatures, the frequent citation of the poem in *Godey's Lady's Book*, and the use of *The Seasons* in schoolgirl art. While the cultural uses of Thomson's poem changed over time, the word feminized does not comprehend the extent of its appeal or the many uses for its components. When, for example, artists during the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries appropriated the image of Musidora, they showed how the conventions of politeness and poetry could transform female nudity, and possibly even masculine lust, into grist for conversation and salons. The Musidora character appears in 'Summer' as the amoreuse of the character Damon, who has followed her through the forest to a spring. As Thomson writes:

This cool retreat his Musidora sought:  
Warm in her cheek the sultry season glow'd;  
And, robed in loose array, she came to bathe  
Her fervent limbs in the refreshing stream.

A hidden Damon stays to watch the scantily clad, nubile Musidora bathe. This scene inspired prints by noted British artists such as the Scottish émigré Alexander Runciman (1736–85) and by other engravers. Thomas Gainsborough painted a famous Musidora (c. 1780), which now hangs in the Tate Gallery. The image traveled to America in the 1780s and gained admiration among the colonial gentry. One of the early renderings of Musidora, duplicated in enamel, decorated a watch piece that George Washington presented to Martha in the late 1780s. She may not have accepted it as a compliment or thought it appropriate for a married woman to wear, however. After she had an outer casing made to hide the enameling, she gave the watch to her granddaughter and bought herself another one decorated in plain gold.<sup>18</sup>

18. Martha Gandy Fales, *Jewelry in America, 1600–1900* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1995), 129, and conversation, July 4, 2001.



The path of Musidora from England to America also runs through Philadelphia and the work of the artists of the Pennsylvania Academy. The sketchbook of John Lewis Krimmel (1789–1821) shows that in 1813, he copied 'Musidora Bathing' [1813] by the Philadelphia-raised and London-educated artist Charles Robert Leslie (1794–1859), which the Academy was then exhibiting. Leslie had also copied his Musidora—from 'Arethusa Bathing' by the Pennsylvania-born and London-based Benjamin West (1738–1820). The story of Arethusa appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* after which Thomson modelled his Musidora tale. The same painting had inspired Thomas Sully (1783–1872), who made two copies. Thirty years later, in 1845, fellow Academy member Rembrandt Peale (1778–1860) also painted a version, which The Library Company of Philadelphia now displays.<sup>19</sup>

Artists always showed Musidora in a modest pose. Clinging classical-style drapery revealed her ample curves, while light in the forest highlighted her face and bare breasts, and shade or crossed legs hid her genital area. Many of the artists' etchings were no more than four inches by six inches and were intended for display in the relative privacy of an album, which could be perused by oneself or with a companion in a polite salon. When paging through an album, a viewer might address Musidora's nudity directly, in a lascivious way, or retreat to the conventions of art and comment upon the classical drapery, the intertwining shapes of the composition, or the contrast of the foliage with her alabaster skin. For example, an article in *Godey's Lady's Book*, commenting upon Asher B. Durand's 1825 engraving of the Musidora, described how successful he had been in capturing 'a nude female figure, modest in feeling and simple in design.' The critic complimented Durand on 'the gracefulness of the poet' and for his rendering of the smooth whiteness of the flesh, but also noted that Durand's many revisions had erased details. Although tree

19. Anneliese Harding, *John Lewis Krimmel: Genre Artist of the Early Republic* (Winterthur, Del.: H. F. du Pont Winterthur Museum., 1994), 37, and Figure 50.



Fig. 7. Musidora (1853). The vignette of Musidora, featured with Damon in the 'Summer' section of *The Seasons*, is an indication of how the conventions of politeness and poetry could transform the subject of female nudity. Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.



leaves remain etched in great detail, the outlines of Musidora's breasts and nipples are obscured in the painting. The conventions of gentility could thus reveal or efface sexuality (fig. 7).<sup>20</sup>

For several reasons, probably including the suggestiveness of the story and Musidora's nude, though chaste, pose, late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century genealogical records never show Musidora as a first name. Nor did manufacturers ever transform Musidora into an object for the decorative arts or needlework, although those media do display other classical nude figures.

At this point, let me suggest that the previously mentioned ties to *The Seasons* extended the experience of reading the poem into other dimensions. Paintings and decorative arts inspired by literature lengthened the experience of reading by moving it from the here-and-now to the realm of imagination and recall. Objects could create memories and other associations in the minds of viewers any time in their lives. Music, painting, and the decorative arts can trigger memories of a book or of reading it in everyday life. Readers can use objects that recall scenes or characters from a story or poem to remind themselves of a passage in a book or as unspoken testaments to their admiration for the poem. The display of literary objects in domestic settings could also signal to visitors that the owner had sufficiently good taste to appreciate proper literature. Objects also could attract people visually, encourage conversation, and establish circles of affinity. The decorative arts could also be cultural missionaries that beckoned people from the role of observers to that of readers, thus luring them from the materialistic world of the here-and-now into the world of the text, ideas, and taste. The imagination of a reader could create an isolated island or a social world populated with friends, loved ones, and fellow readers. The display of literary material culture and the giving of books as gifts testified to the social intent of literature. Even the appearance of a book itself could evoke emotion. One British woman's gift of Thomson's *Seasons* to

20. 'Our Artists. No. II. Durand,' *Godey's Lady's Book* 33 (1846): 115.

another prompted the recipient to write these verses on a flyleaf of the miniature volume:

Yes, little book! like Elfin sprites of old,  
Thou to thy mistress shalt auspicious prove,  
And while thy leaves exhaustless charms unfold,  
More shall they please, since thee her eyes behold  
A welcome present from a friend they love.<sup>21</sup>

The purchase of decorative arts or images of reading could add an element of the ideal to the material experience of the eighteenth-century marketplace, where most tie-ins originated. Consumerism and literary culture reinforced one another, both from the point of view of the author and manufacturer from that of reader and owner. The purchase of books to feed the mind might lead to further purchases that transformed literary experiences into material ones.

The second part of our discussion, the production of material culture related to the text, starts with the vignette of Palemon and Lavinia in *Autumn*. Here, Thomson begins by directly addressing the manufacturing and consumer revolution of his times. On the one hand, he celebrates the call of London, commerce, and industry in the sense of both hard work and manufacture. 'What'er exalts, embellishes, and renders life delightful,' writes the poet, 'All is the gift of industry' (lines 141-43).<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the excesses of the age clearly disturb him. He criticizes the values of the present by describing it as full of people with 'giddy fashion' and 'low-minded pride,' who are shackled by 'tyrant custom' (lines 188, 222). In juxtaposition to giddy London and its fashion, Thomson offers the hero and heroine of the vignette.

21. *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward with Extracts from her Correspondence* (Edinburgh, 1810), 3 vols.

22. All quotations and references are from *The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (1908; reprint New York: Oxford University Press, 1951).



Lavinia, a gleaner girl, has lost her father. Living in a rural cottage with her mother, she is eventually 'compelled by strong necessity's supreme command' to glean in the fields of their gentleman landlord, Palemon (fig. 8). There she joins the harvesters to gather grain to feed her mother and herself.

In the next scene of Lavinia's vignette, the poet introduces Palemon. Walking alongside the reapers in his fields, Palemon notices Lavinia. Her beauty arrests his eye, and he wonders how she could both be so beautiful and occupy such a low social station. Then, he notices her resemblance to his old friend Acasto and asks if she could be his daughter. Indeed, she is. The coincidence that the noble Acasto's daughter should now be a peasant girl amazes Palemon. Overcome by the generosity that Acasto once had shown him and by the beauty of Lavinia, Palemon bids her to throw aside her gleanings and let him raise her to a higher station: 'The fields, the master, all, my fair, are thine,' he promises Lavinia (line 290).

As rendered by illustrators, the Palemon and Lavinia scene usually included a young girl in empire-style dress, holding a sheaf of wheat. Her appearance is similar to those in the common renditions of Summer or Autumn, the goddesses Ceres or Demeter. The well-dressed Palemon gestures to her, either as if explaining something or in amazement that she is Lavinia, daughter of Acasto. Around this core foreground, artists added various backgrounds and accessories to the image. A retriever dog sometimes accompanies Palemon, providing an emblem of his manliness, through his fondness for hunting, and of his fidelity through the loyalty of the dog. In the background, reapers harvest Palemon's fields. He is always dressed in the latest fashion: from tight breeches, to cutaway coat, to a top hat (fig.9). As we have seen so far, the story of Palemon and Lavinia became the subject of art, watercolors, porcelain, and other decorative arts, including furniture. Popularity, however, sometimes brought ridicule. An 1805, engraved and colored print by James Gillray, published in London by H. Humphrey, depicts Palemon as a ruddy-faced, rustically



Fig. 8. *Lavinia and her Mother*. Color-printed stipple engraving, finished by hand, 7.5"  $\times$  5". Engraved by G. W. White, after a drawing by Emma Creure (London: G. W. White, 1781). Courtesy of a private collector.



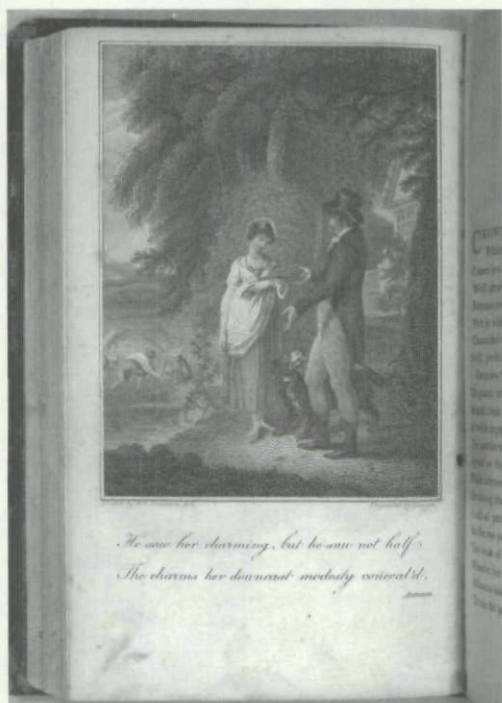


Fig. 9. A scene from the poem, Autumn, representing the moment when Palemon recognizes that Lavinia, one of the gleaners in his field, is the daughter of his friend, Acasto. This engraving by Lawson of a drawing by William Hamilton was one of the illustrations for James Thomson, *The Seasons* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1804), opposite p. 169.

dressed swain wielding a pitchfork (fig. 10). He encounters a middle-aged, bonneted Lavinia as she squats to relieve herself behind a roadside fence rail. The caption evokes more humor by citing Thomson on Palemon's perception of Lavinia:

He saw her charming, but he saw not half  
The charms her downcast modesty conceal'd.  
(Lines 229-30)

Beginning in the late 1790s, genteel images of Lavinia became the subject of schoolgirl art. In women's academies, they supplied inspiration for needlework, generally embroidery on silk. As the popularity of Thomson's poem had increased in the 1780s in Britain and, in the 1790s, in America, so had the rate of establishment of women's schools and academies. The rising popularity of



Fig. 10. The depiction of a rustic Palemon and a middle-aged Lavinia in an engraved and colored print by James Gillray depicts Palemon as a ruddy-faced, rustically dressed swain wielding a pitchfork. Bawdy references such as this, based on Thomson's verse, disappeared in later depictions of the couple. (London: H. Humphrey, 1805). Lancashire Galleries, United Kingdom.

both belonged to the same phenomenon. Beginning in the 1720s and 1730s, and with increasing frequency after the American Revolution, increasing numbers of Britons and Americans gained the desire as well as the means to become genteel. In America, wealth released from trade and manufacture after the end of the Revolution allowed merchants, lawyers, planters, and others to buy the trappings of gentility and adopt its manners, thus fashioning themselves after the model of the British gentry.

Historians date the beginnings of this quest for gentility in America by listing the publication dates of influential titles in the literature of refinement or politeness. These included novels and courtesy books, most prominently Samuel Richardson's novels *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747-48), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-



54), and Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son* (1750). These publications advised men and women about how to behave in polite company.<sup>23</sup> Another way to date the arrival of genteel ways in the colonies is through the founding of schools that offered an education of accomplishments. As shown in needlework expert Betty Ring's study of American schoolgirl art, the first of these schools was established in the 1720s in Massachusetts. Within a decade, fancy needlework schools existed in almost all of the colonies. Newspaper advertisements for such schools sometimes mentioned that a teacher of needlework and French language had arrived recently from England. In the late 1780s and through the 1790s, the founding of schools and academies accelerated, especially in American coastal cities. In inland areas of Pennsylvania, many of the previously existing Moravian academies, for example, the Moravian Academy at Lititz, near Lancaster, began to admit English-speaking students, as German-speaking areas became more integrated into the English-speaking population. The best of these academies offered a curriculum of reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, history, geography, and plain sewing. For an extra fee of about \$3.00, daughters received instruction in accomplishments, including music, French, and various kinds of fancy sewing, such as tambour work, embroidery, and lace tatting.

Ambitious parents in colonial cities quickly learned that the education in housewifery that mothers and wives had received as young women would no longer do. Their daughters had to know how to behave in the genteel social world then being created. Such behavior might win them a proper husband and thus confirm that their parents had attained more than material prosperity. In 1744, the *Boston Evening Post* printed a dialogue in verse between a husband who held to traditional housewifery and his wife who wanted her daughter to benefit from the new education. He told her:

23. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 36.

... I'll have her bred  
 to book'ry, cook'ry, thimble, needle thread  
 First teach her these, and then the pritty fool,  
 Shall jig her crupper at the dancing school.

And then the wife replied:  
 Prithee, my dear, consider and bestow  
 Good breeding on her for a year or two.

...  
 'Tis hard we cannot scrape for one poor chick  
 An only daughter, and a hopeful girl,  
 Who if she'd breeding might deserve an Earl.<sup>24</sup>

A pair of images by the Philadelphia artist John W. Krimmel that appeared in the *Analectic Magazine* in November and December 1820 depicted the impact of a daughter's fashionable boarding school education on a farming family. In the first image, the family is saying farewell to the daughter, and the second shows her homecoming. In 'Departure,' the father counts out his money for his daughter's tuition as he sits at an out-of-date drop-front desk. Beside the desk is a spinning wheel, a symbol of traditional housewifery. In 'Return from Boarding School,' the room has been transformed. Krimmel has replaced the desk with a piano, the spinning wheel with a worktable, and bare floors with carpeted ones. Other signs of fashionable taste include a large scene, possibly embroidered by the academy-educated daughter, hanging over the mantel; she carries a pocket bag and fashionable ringlets adorn her head. The father, who has set his shovel aside and pushed back his hat, sits stunned by the academy bill (fig. 11). Written sources con-

24. Quoted in Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States*, 2 vols. (New York and Lancaster, Penna: Science Press, 1929): 1:130. Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers & Pictorial Needlework, 1650-1850*, 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1993), 1: 21-25, 38, 195; 2: 533; Patricia T. Herr, 'The Ornamental Branches': *Needlework and Arts from Lititz Moravian Girls' School, Between 1800 and 1865* (Virginia Beach, Va.: Donning Co, 1996), 11-59. I thank Trish Herr for allowing me to quiz her on the practice of needlework in general and on various aspects of needlework at Lititz Academy.





Fig. 11. John W. Krimmel, 'The Return from Boarding School,' *The Analectic Magazine* 102 (December 1820). Collection of Franklin and Marshall College.

firm the points about fashion and its expense made by images such as these. In 1805 Ann Ridgely of Delaware, who was then studying geography and needlework in Philadelphia, wrote her mother saying that she needed her veil and shawls. She added that she wanted 'a good many things, which, to appear genteel, are necessary, but I can not afford to get them.' Her mother seemed to agree that 'fashion must be comply'ed with' in this case.<sup>25</sup>

Commercially savvy artists and publishers realized that negative publicity could win them other audiences: those who liked to laugh at the excesses of others, those who liked to ogle, and those who disapproved entirely. In the eighteenth century, an anthology

25. Mabel Lloyd Ridgely, ed., *What Them Befell: The Ridgelys of Delaware and their Circle in Colonial and Federal Times, 1751-1890* (Portland, Me.: The Anthoensen Press, 1949), 273-74; Harding, *John Lewis Krimmel*, 200-203. Barker-Benfield also discusses the British reaction to women's education in *Culture of Sensibility*, 323-26.

compiled by 'Ovid Americanus' burlesqued excerpts from *The Seasons* and other texts.<sup>26</sup> The discourse on gentility was conducted on both sides of the Atlantic. When gentility was ridiculed in the Krimmel images, the Gillray engraving, and the *Godey's* joke, readers understood that people such as the academy-educated daughter or the ostentatiously dressed Mrs. Blagden could take the outward signs of gentility too far. Despite finery and manners, even the genteel often behaved like Gillray's countrywoman, although not along a public road.

The curricula of women's academies and schools were designed with admission to genteel society in mind. Britons and Americans considered piano playing, embroidery, and foreign language skills accomplishments because they were prerequisites. The genteel lady did not refer directly by word or practice to bodily functions or mundane daily activities. Plain sewing or sewing for household maintenance fell into the latter category. If ladies could sew for purposes other than the maintenance of their personal clothing and the manufacture of household goods, it was a sign that their fathers or husbands were sufficiently prosperous to give them leisure time to develop their minds and skills. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society, no lady or gentleman expected a gentlewoman to pursue gentlemanly skills or vice versa. Gender conventions determined the skills one would develop to have a better and more attractive self. In this sense, embroidery, tating, and tambour work allowed women to be more womanly. Their womanliness related implicitly to women's work, namely sewing. Needlework was genteel because it was economically superfluous. Just as eighteenth-century genteel architecture isolated sleeping spaces from spaces for socializing, and food-preparation rooms from dining rooms, genteel women removed their household sewing from the eyes of polite company while they publicly performed the accomplishment of embroidery or other needlework

26. Ovid Americanus, *Lessons for Lovers; With Some Tender and Pathetic Anecdotes* (Philadelphia, 1784).



art. As social historians have shown, American discourse about men's and women's work shifted from the early years of the republic through the antebellum period. Gentrification included the notion that men worked for wages while women did so-called household chores, even though chores were indeed work. In everyday discourse, only labor that was removed from domestic life counted as work and deserved compensation. Thus genteel life removed utilitarian sewing from public scrutiny and made accomplishments a feature of parlor social life.<sup>27</sup>

Ann Ridgely's parents had sent her to Philadelphia to learn needlework despite the high cost because it was vital for social life in salons, halls, and parlors. Skeptics might say that she learned needlework so that she could pose alluringly and attract the attention of a prospective suitor while he conversed with other gentlemen on weighty issues of public import. In eighteenth-century parlors, neither piety and housewifery nor bawdy behavior won husbands who aspired to higher social status. Still, the ability to stitch prettily did not preclude intelligence and the expression of ideas. Some brilliant women who had a great deal to say about life in their times did needlework. Mercy Otis Warren, for example, both wrote the first history of the American Revolution and stitched a needlepoint cover for a handsome mahogany card table that is now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Nevertheless, needlework represented a larger change in the way elite women socialized and deployed their intelligence and sexual power. And, the new cultural context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was accompanied by new sources of power and new constraints on human behavior.<sup>28</sup>

These changes, set in motion by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), continued developing in

27. Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 12-13, 82-83 and ch. 7: 'The Pastoralization of Housework,' 142-63.

28. A provocative essay by Ann Bermingham interprets the rise of the genteel with the analytical tools of an art historian; see 'Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs: The Commerce in Culture and Self-Image in Eighteenth-Century England,' in Bermingham and Brewer, eds., *Consumption of Culture*, 489-513.



Fig. 12. 'Palemon and Lavinia.' Silk embroidery, c. 1825, 18" square (inside frame). (Possibly worked at Young Ladies Academy, Lititz, Pa.) Phillips Museum of Art, Franklin & Marshall College.

the writings of moral and political philosophers, especially at the Scottish universities, over the course of the eighteenth century. As a British Whig, Shaftesbury, according to Lawrence Klein, sought to reduce 'the power of both Church and Monarch' and to increase the role of public-minded gentlemen. He taught that in a free society ideas needed to be shared in settings dominated by neither the dazzle of wealth nor the boorishness of the tavern. Sharing required rules of exchange and institutions.<sup>29</sup> It was the

29. Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 20.



university and belles lettres that would supply the educated elite with the principles and subjects of conversation to knit together a moral leadership class. The university would produce a discourse to unite educated men and teach them how to recognize and act upon their moral natures.

Thomson, who studied divinity at the University of Edinburgh during the second and third decades of the eighteenth century, imbibed Shaftesbury's explanations of how a free society depended upon polite conversation and manners. From his early poems through *The Seasons* and beyond, he drew on Shaftesbury's moral philosophy. Having participated in these lessons, Thomson's poems supplied literature to discuss and inspire loyalty to what he believed were timeless principles of English liberty and Englishness. He wrote poems for the salons of the British gentry and Whig coffee houses hoping they would unite the ruling classes. He hoped that poetry, which offered principles tracing the history of English liberty, would have universal application. Like most enlightenment thinkers, Thomson based his ideas on historical experience, such as those related in *Liberty*, and the experience of nature, as revealed in *The Seasons*.<sup>30</sup>

In the new United States of the 1780s and 1790s, the appeal of gentility and belles lettres resembled that in Britain but acquired a republican cast. Genteel Americans looked for a way of social life to free them from the sectarian, religious debates of the first half of the eighteenth century and they sought a social identity within a transatlantic genteel world. Their enemies were those forces that could prevent unity with the genteel whole and could fracture social unity within America. Enlightenment ideas of education comported with gentility when they offered the promise of universality and reason. As the hymn sung at the founding of Franklin College (1787), an educational enterprise of former University of Edinburgh student Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), declared:

30. Sambrook, *James Thomson*, 20, 71, 97; Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, 175 and ch. 9; Christopher J. Berry, *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 1-22, 109-19, 156-84.

Now doubly blest the favor'd Region,  
 Where Science joins with mild Religion,  
 To raise their grateful Hymns to GOD.<sup>31</sup>

By implication, extreme or strong religion, based on tests of piety or religious experience, obscured the progress of knowledge. Manners and gentility promised a public life of civility and social unity.<sup>32</sup>

The appeal of *The Seasons* depended upon whether readers lived in Britain or America, in the 1790s or the 1820s, in the northern or the southern states, or in one socio-economic class or another. Surely, though, a common appeal must have been the vignette's tale of chaste and generous young love. The story of Palemon and Lavinia reached a broad audience because it involved readers in an action story—the act of inclusion into the genteel world. In contrast, the less popular vignette of Musidora and Damon merely gave readers a tableau of a beautiful woman, even though she and Damon married in the end. Despite Palemon and Lavinia's opposite social positions, their essential gentility or moral character allowed them to bond. Such a message comported with the liberal sentiments then arising in England and America. Liberal sentiments about individual human dignity and worth began to reshape social structures and to encourage the rise of reform movements, such as, most notably, the antislavery agitation of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect in England and of the Quakers in the United States.<sup>33</sup>

A poem that validated young people's choosing their marriage partners from a wide selection of candidates probably held appeal and played a role in the establishment of a broad and self-confident middle-class. Gentility permitted those with proper manners to

31. 'Ode in English,' *Order of Procession and Public Worship, in A Letter by Dr. Benjamin Rush Describing the Consecration of the German College at Lancaster* (Lancaster, Pa, 1945), viii.

32. Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), and Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 187–88, 313–19; David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), esp. ch. 7, 'The College, the Press, and the Public.'

33. See Thomas L. Haskell, 'Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility,' *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 339–61, 547–66.



marry partners of either great fortunes or modest means. Not all women graduating from academies could marry a man of the economic stature of Palemon. Some married penurious, but genteel, men, while others did not marry at all. According to newspaper advertisements, young women listed needlework among their accomplishments when looking for work in a private family. A schoolgirl embroidery displayed in the home of a married woman who had chosen a genteel mate of modest income could carry meaning to either a wife burdened by the labors of young children and a busy household or to one enjoying the chaos. She might recall that once she had enjoyed a moment of gentility even though the current reality of her household labors seemed to deny that. At our most idealistic, we might imagine a young woman tempted to purchase yet another artifact of the transatlantic consumer revolution but restrained by her schoolgirl memories of Palemon and Lavinia's materialistically chaste love for each other.<sup>34</sup>

At genteel academies from the 1790s to the 1830s, women whose parents paid the extra fee learned the technique of embroidery on silk, and they usually completed at least one picture. The pictures took many forms. Showing competency in a variety of stitches, some might be samplers. Others chose paintings by famous artists, such as Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807), whose mythological and allegorical works were appealing, as subjects for embroidery. Other needlework pictures showed a mourning scene for either a family member or a national notable such as George Washington, and, starting in the late 1790s, it became fashionable to copy engravings from popular books. Thomson's Palemon and Lavinia scene, often titled 'The Reaper,' was a favorite. Artists were commissioned to redraw these illustrations on the cloth to be embroidered; the girls then stitched the figures

34. See Woody, *Women's Education*, I: 194; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, based on her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 260-61. On academy founding in the middle states, see Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), chs. 10-11. See also Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), chs. 7 and 9.

and background and returned the piece to the artist for him or her to paint any detailed areas, such as the faces of Palemon and Lavinia. Completed and elaborately framed, such needlework signified that the young woman was accomplished and fit to join genteel society by her skills of sewing, her literary knowledge, and her conversation (figs. 9–10).<sup>35</sup>

The story of Palemon and Lavinia demonstrates Thomson's narrative strategies. In each of his season poems, the poet ruminates on various aspects of nature. Then he interrupts his descriptive passages on nature or philosophy with a narrative interlude such as the story of Musidora or the story of Palemon and Lavinia. Illustrators seized upon these vignettes as their subjects. Thomson composed these stories so that they sounded contemporary, and he combined invention with convention. Knowledgeable or reflective readers might discern that he had drawn on familiar stories of mythic, Biblical, or classical origin. His compositions recast Biblical and classical stories into genteel forms to establish social bonds and not create religious faction or include lewd details, as in the case of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Following this formula, the vignette of Palemon and Lavinia tells a story drawn from the classical and Biblical past. Readers might associate the name Palemon with a minor Greek figure of mythology and Lavinia with Shakespeare's *Titus and Andronicus*. Additionally, Thomson drew the story of Palemon and Lavinia from the Old Testament book of Ruth. The widowed Ruth follows her

35. Among the schools where such embroideries were stitched were Sarah Pierce's Litchfield (Connecticut) Female Academy, Mrs. Rowson and Haswell's Academy in Massachusetts, Saint Joseph's Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland, as well as the Moravian Academies in Lititz and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 1: 20–21. I am making this judgment after reviewing images of Palemon and Lavinia in published works on schoolgirl arts mentioned in previous notes and in the Decorative Arts Photographic Collection at Winterthur Museum, Library, and Gardens. I also reviewed the images in: John F. LaBranche, *In Female Worth and Elegance: Sampler and Needlework Students and Teachers in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1741–1840* (Portsmouth, N. H.: Portsmouth Marine Society, 1996); Olive Glair Graffam, 'Youth is the Time for Progress': *The Importance of American Schoolgirl Art, 1780–1860* (Washington, D. C.: DAR Museum, 1997–98); Betty Ring, *Let Virtue be a Guide to Thee: Needlework in the Education of Rhode Island Women, 1730–1830* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1983).



mother-in-law, Naomi, from the land of her people, the Moabites, to Naomi's home in Judah. There she confounds with her beauty the much older Boaz, a friend of her deceased father-in-law. He marries her and takes care of the widowed mother as well. In the Bible, Ruth is known for her loyalty to her mother-in-law and for her insistence to return with her to Bethlehem.<sup>36</sup>

To make the story contemporary, Thomson transforms Palemon and Lavinia into young lovers. Instead of the elderly Boaz, who would be the age of Lavinia's father, he makes Palemon slightly older than Lavinia (fig. 13). In case readers might miss the point, illustrators underlined Palemon's youthful virility with stylish attire. His shapely coat and trousers reveal his handsome lines. Lavinia casts her eyes downward at his words, but as she has just emerged from a solitary retreat at her cottage with her mother, might she not be embarrassed by Palemon's sudden attention and proposal? Thomson wrote memorable lines, included in every edition of Bartlett's *Collection of Familiar Quotations* since the first one in 1855, to tell his readers of Lavinia's beauty and worth:

A native grace  
Sat fair-proportion'd on her polish'd limbs,  
Veil'd in a simple robe, their best attire,  
Beyond the pomp of dress; for loveliness  
Needs not the foreign aid of ornament,  
But is when unadorn'd, adorn'd the most.  
Thoughtless of beauty, she was Beauty's self  
(Lines 201-7).

The story contains many stock elements of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century popular literature. First, the hero does not recognize the heroine's true identity, and then, a seemingly insurmountable barrier separates them and diminishes their marriage

36. The Book of Ruth 1:16-17.

prospects. Second, Lavinia is devoted to her mother and willingly gleans to support her. Lavinia did not desert her mother for the city, where she might sell her virtue, as parents in both Britain and America feared their daughters might do. Her modest character and beauty win the noble Palemon. He demonstrates his nobility by displaying no lustful tendencies. Realizing her worth, he worries that her beauty and innate nobility will go for naught if she marries a field laborer. Finally, upon recognizing her as the daughter of his former patron, he promises to make all that he owns hers. Thus, innate nobility and gentility triumph over temporary distinctions based on clothing and accoutrements. As Palemon's wife she will possess the wealth to purchase the finest clothes and accessories, but these consumer goods will not corrupt her. The couple's shared belief that true gentility resides in the heart and soul will bind them together in a happy union.<sup>37</sup>

Palemon's love for Lavinia and her rise to a station befitting her inward refinement were but the first eighteenth-century renditions of an oft-repeated story. As historian Richard Bushman has explained, stories such as this one encapsulated the essential promise of gentility and became common, first in eighteenth-century polite literature and then in nineteenth-century literature of sentiment. Here was a heroine, in this case Lavinia, who labored on in hunger, poverty, and obscurity. Yet her refinement brought distinction and imbued her with the destiny of a refined person; regardless of her station in life, she would be discovered and rewarded. According to Bushman, reading about a heroine's entry into a genteel world of plenty, refinement, and social grace fostered readers' own 'dreams of emergence.'<sup>38</sup>

Taken in the sense of personal development and earthly reward, we might say that the story appealed to liberal sentiments. Notice, too, that Palemon falls for Lavinia in a setting unmediated

37. Nina Baym identifies these conventions and argues that they oppose the narrative told by Samuel Richardson in his novels. Had she looked at poetry, she would have found this antecedent. See Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-70* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 25-37.

38. Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 308-12.



by any paternal authority. She has chosen a virtuous path to support her mother, and he has chosen to become her benefactor and husband. At a time when parental authority over children's choice of a marriage partner was declining, Palemon and Lavinia's striking out on their own seems quite contemporary. Within their respective gender roles, both Palemon and Lavinia are free individuals making choices for themselves. And Lavinia is freed from her fate of marrying a 'churl.' Gentility, or living by the rules of politeness, represents cultural freedom for self-development. Lavinia and Palemon had been freed from the narrow boorishness of folkways. With their innate nobility, and his means, they could live free from material and moral confines.<sup>39</sup>

In an opposed sense, the story appeals very much to sentiments that we might call whiggish on one side of the Atlantic and republican on the other. Palemon has allowed the poor of the community to glean. Thomson's late-eighteenth-century British readers took the gleaner story as a covert protest against British landowners who were enclosing their land, thus leading to the further impoverishment of rural folk. As a British commentator pointed out in 1814, many people considered gleaning a right of the poor, with justification in the biblical books of Ruth, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. In Europe, landowners customarily had kept their cattle from grazing for twenty-four hours after harvest to permit gleaning. Then, in the last years of the eighteenth century and first years of the nineteenth century, British farmers had ceased this practice due to what one commentator called the 'repulsive selfishness of our luxurious and expensive times.'<sup>40</sup> Admiration for a landlord who permitted gleaning, thus inspired

39. The first American scholar to identify this revolt from patriarchal authority was Fliegelman in *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, ch. 1, 'Educational Theory and Moral Independence,' and ch. 2, 'The Transmission of Ideology and the Bestsellers of 1775,' 9-66. Especially helpful on gentility is L. E. Klein, 'The Political Significance of "Politeness" in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain,' in Gordon J. Schochet, ed., *Politics, Politeness, and Patriotism: British Political Thought in the Age of Walpole* (Washington, D.C.: The Folger Institute, 1993), 73-108. Jan Lewis also connects thrift, marriage, and republicanism as themes; see 'The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,' *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 44 (1987): 689-721.

40. W. H. Pyne, *Microcosm* (London, 1806-8), 3.

respect for those who recognized ancient rights, did not monopolize the bounty of agriculture, had not been corrupted by the desire for more wealth, and who allowed the poor to glean the bounty of the land.

Because the United States had its peculiar history of yeoman farmers as well as great landowners, Americans would not have interpreted the vignette as a protest against selfish landlords. In late-eighteenth-century American usage, the word gleaner was synonymous with gathering or being thrifty. In literature, the most famous borrowing from Thomson in the 1790s was Judith Sargeant Murray's titling of a novella that she published in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, 'The Gleaner.' In the same issue of the magazine in which an installment of 'The Gleaner' appears, there is an article about Thomson's poem and several other pieces about Thomson or illustrations of his heroine. Thus, it can be surmised that Murray had read at least the Palemon and Lavinia story. She probably was adapting it into prose for her own purposes in her tale of Constantia's efforts to find a mate with not only the appearance, but also the soul, of gentility. Murray innovated by using the term 'gleaner' for her novella, and she was not the last to so title a publication. During the rest of the 1790s and through the 1800s, the word gleaner or its variant, gleanings, was often used as the title for newspaper columns, newspapers themselves, and other miscellaneous publications including school newspapers. Some of these titles carried on the republican implications of the word gleaner, but most used the word exclusively in the sense of collections from a harvest.<sup>41</sup>

In material culture the figure of the gleaner often became conflated with that of the reaper. Both figures called up ideas of thrift

41. See 'The Gleaner, No. II,' *Massachusetts Magazine* (1792): 542-43; 'Character of Thomson's "Seasons,"' *Massachusetts Magazine* (1792): 543-44. Other images from *The Seasons* appearing in the *Massachusetts Magazine* are of Damon and Musidora (August 1792) and Lavinia (June 1793). For examples, see *The Gleaner* (Doylestown, Pa.); *The Gleaner* (Newport, R. I.); *The Gleaner, or Monthly Magazine* (Lancaster, Pa.); *The Gleaner and Luzerne Advertiser* (Wilkes Barre, Pa.); *The Institute Omnibus and School-Day Gleaner* (Pittsfield, Mass.).





Fig. 13. Palemon and Lavinia, an English print offered for sale by a Fleet Street print and map seller. (London: R. Sayer and J. Bennett, 1782)

and industry and of making good use of even small amounts of things or time. Thus, figures of reapers sometimes appeared in British-manufactured decorative arts. American clockmakers, such as Simon Willard, applied British prints of reapers—usually a woman in neoclassical robes holding a rake—to decorate the faces of shelf clocks and tall case clocks.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the vignette of Lavinia had appeal, and *The Seasons* was a safe book. Its vignettes were daring but within bounds. Lavinia was no Moll Flanders, who would use her body to make her way in society. And she was no Charlotte Temple, whom a rake could easily deceive. Lavinia was not going to be seduced, betrayed, and abandoned. Thomson seems a genius of oxymoronic construction. His poem had chaste nudity for the lasciviously minded to ogle at, youthful true love that did not portend a disastrous ending, and the reassurance of harmony between the classes and within nature.

42. See Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book* (London, 1793), 'A Cabinet.' The clock was in the possession of R. Jorgensen Antiques, Wells, Maine.

A tracking of the stories of Musidora and Lavinia modifies how intellectual and cultural historians might understand the paths taken by Scottish philosophy to reach Americans. Historians of the American Enlightenment and of men's higher education in the early republic have emphasized the diffusion of common-sense realism through education and political thought: Thomas Jefferson's Scottish readings, for example, and tutor Benjamin Rush's educational projects for men and women in Pennsylvania, and Scottish émigré John Witherspoon's presidency at the College of New Jersey (1768–94). Most historians implicitly place women and girls as the recipients of this thought; and give only women authors an active role in the transmission of ideas. The study of Thomson recognizes that thousands of American women transmitted ideas derived from Scottish thought through school lessons, letters, needlework, reading, and conversation.<sup>43</sup>

Though we must be cautious not to confuse coincidence with a cause and effect relationship, the popularity of Thomson rose at a moment of rising political conservatism in the 1790s. The Scottish moral philosophy that infused Thomson's work always had emphasized duties over rights. In contrast, Lockean political philosophy and the theory of rights popularized during the French Revolution emphasized individual rights over duties. In the latter half of the 1790s, conservative spokesmen denigrated women's direct political participation and lauded their duties within the domestic realm to blunt the potential application of Lockean natural rights thinking. Emphasis on women's rights might have allowed some of the contagion of the French Revolution to infect the United States, push the American Revolution into the 1790s, and extend its effects to private life. The emphasis on duties helped to contain the effects of the French Revolution and the implications

43. Some exceptions are Fredrika J. Teute, 'Roman Matron on the Banks of Tiber Creek,' 92–94; Rosemarie Zagarri, 'The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 55 (1998): 212–17; and for an explication of the role of the tea table as a site for conversation, see Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Conversation*, ch. 4: 'Tea Tables and Salons,' 99–140. See also May, *Enlightenment in America*, 207–11, 346–47.



of American Revolutionary thought by negating the application of rights to domestic arrangements. Therefore, as historian Rosemarie Zagari has argued, in its 1790s application Scottish thought had a gendered component that permitted Americans to exclude women from the public polity.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, it seems worth saying that the Palemon and Lavinia story affirms a narrative of both rights and duties for both men and women: The right to choose a mate based on inner worth—and not ascribed status—and the duty to recognize gentility by following certain conventions, such as industry, thrift, modesty, charity, and obedience to elders and to prescribed gender roles.

After the 1830s, the reign of belles lettres in higher education declined. Lydia Maria Child noted the decreasing popularity of accomplishments in *The Girls' Own Book* (1834), describing embroidery as 'a sad waste of time.'<sup>45</sup> For another twenty-five years, though, the teaching of accomplishments persisted in schools in the South and West and at some Roman Catholic schools. For example, students at the female academy in Winchester, Virginia, could take embroidery in the 1850s, but not as one of their regular classes. Founders of New England women's academies from the 1830s on, including Catharine Beecher, Mary Lyon, and Sarah Porter, included no accomplishments in their curricula. At Sarah Porter's school in Farmington, Connecticut, girls did continue to stitch each evening into the 1870s, but they kept their fingers busy while they listened to Miss Porter read from contemporary novels

44. Zagari, 'The Rights of Man,' 212-17; and Zagari, 'Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,' *American Quarterly* 44 (1992): 192-215. Another historian who emphasizes gender-determined duties in the late nineties is Jeanne Boydston. See her 'Making Gender in the Early Republic: Judith Sargent Murray and the Revolution of 1800,' in James Horn et al., *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 240-66. Readers will find the theory of duties and rights explained most thoroughly in collegiate political theory from the 1830s to the 1870s; in the early twentieth century, it had its last gasp in anti-suffrage thought. See my *Scholarly Means to Evangelical Ends: The New Haven Scholars and the Transformation of Higher Learning in America, 1830-1890* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and 'Women Anti-Suffragists in the 1915 Massachusetts Campaign,' *New England Quarterly* 52 (1979): 80-93.

45. Lydia Maria Child, *The Girl's Own Book* (New York, 1834), 224.

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