An Edition and Study of the Old English *Seasons for Fasting*

Chadwick Buford Hilton Jr.

*University of Tennessee - Knoxville*

Recommended Citation

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Chadwick Buford Hilton Jr. entitled "An Edition and Study of the Old English Seasons for Fasting." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Mary P. Richards, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Joseph Trahern, John H. Fisher, Paul Barrette

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Chadwick Buford Hilton, Jr. entitled "An Edition and Study of the Old English Seasons for Fasting." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Mary P. Richards, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

[Signature]

Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research
AN EDITION AND STUDY OF THE OLD ENGLISH
SEASONS FOR FASTING

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Chadwick Buford Hilton, Jr.
August 1983
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the English Department of The University of Tennessee for granting me The Thaler Fellowship which enabled me to examine the manuscript of Seasons for Fasting. I also owe a debt of thanks to the members of my committee, Dr. Joseph Trahern, Dr. John H. Fisher, and Dr. Paul Barrette. But, two people deserve special thanks: Dr. Mary P. Richards, my director, whose learning, energy, good cheer, and curiosity have been an inspiration throughout this project and B. Jane Stanfield, my wife, without whose constant encouragement and assistance this dissertation would not have been possible.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an edition and study of the Old English *Seasons for Fasting*. *Seasons* is interesting to the student of Old English for several reasons: it is the longest regularly stanzaic poem in OE; its English stand on the Ember fast controversy and its attack on lax priests are atypical of OE verse as is the poem's intended lay audience. The dissertation is in three sections: Chapter I introduces and describes the extant text (ff. 257r-260v, British Library MS. Add. 43703), discusses the school of composition, and provides new support for Wulfstan's influence on the poem, describes the language of the poem, provides analyses of the style and the historical and poetic contexts of the poem, and offers some suggestions concerning the sources of the poem. Chapter II consists of the text of *Seasons for Fasting* (based on British Library MS. Add. 43703), textual notes indicating the readings of all other editors, and a translation (the first in English). Chapter III is a commentary keyed to the lines of the poem. The commentary notes relevant criticism on difficult or interesting sections of the poem and offers several new readings.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Manuscript.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Text</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition of the Text</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and Provenance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Composition</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Copyist: Laurence Nowell</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contexts</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. TEXT AND TRANSLATION.</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. COMMENTARY.</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY.</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA.</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASE</td>
<td>Anglo Saxon England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPR</td>
<td>The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMQ</td>
<td>British Museum Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EETS</td>
<td>Early English Text Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHR</td>
<td>English Historical Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELN</td>
<td>English Language Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEGP</td>
<td>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Modern Philology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Mediaeval Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQ</td>
<td>Notes and Queries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMLA</td>
<td>Publications of the Modern Language Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RES</td>
<td>Review of English Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Manuscript

The Old English poem, Seasons for Fasting, was originally preserved in London, British Library, MS. Cotton Otho Bxi, a codex which included the Old English translation of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica, the West Saxon Genealogy (a direct copy of that in the Parker Chronicle and Laws, MS. CCCC 173), the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to 1001, a list of Popes, the Anglo-Saxon laws (portions of II and V Athelstan, Iudex, Alfred and Ine), penalties for adultery, a Burghal Hidage, another statement on hides and defence, the Seasons for Fasting, and herbal recipes (which would not be known but for Nowell's transcription). MS. Cotton Otho Bxi was severely damaged in the Cotton Library fire of 1731, and Seasons for Fasting was completely destroyed. The poem survives today in a copy of MS. Cotton Otho Bxi made by Laurence Nowell in 1562 (now British Library MS. Add. 43703). This copy was unknown until discovered by


2 Humfrey Wanley in his Catalogus Historico Criticus (Oxford, 1705), p. 219 described Seasons for Fasting and printed an incipit: Abraham Wheloc, too, printed eight lines, ll. 87-94, in his Historiae Ecclesiasticae Gentis Anglorum Libri V (Cambridge, 1643-44), p. 96. There is a probability that the transcriptions by both Wanley and Wheloc are more accurate than that by Nowell. For arguments concerning this issue, see P. L. Heyworth, "The Old English 'Seasons of Fasting,'" MS, 26 (1964), 358-59 and R. J. S. Grant, "A Note on 'The Seasons of Fasting,'" RES, 23 (1972), 302-304.
Professor Robin Flower among eight Nowell transcripts donated to the British Museum by Lord Howard de Walden in 1934.\(^3\)

**Description of the Text**

The text of *Seasons for Fasting*, preserved on ff. 257r-260v of MS. Add. 43703, is divided into twenty-nine stanzas each of which has eight lines except for stanza 4 which has 6 lines, stanza 15 which has 9 lines, and stanza 29 which breaks off after 6-1/2 lines. Large capitals begin each stanza, and one occurs within line 100a. A small æ is written within the capital Æ which begins stanza 1. Punctuation (points) closes all stanzas except 14, 15, 17, and 24. Points are used without evident system within the stanzas. In addition to points, \(\rightarrow\) is used irregularly to mark the end of a stanza; = indicates word division. F. 257r has 20 lines; ff. 257v through 259v have 25 lines each; F. 260r has 26 lines and 260v has 19 lines. Nowell made corrections by strike-through, superscription, and/or insertion in lines 18, 51, 57, 66, 72, 76, 82, 111, 114, 119, 161, 163, 164, 170, 175, 180, 191, 199, 203, 223, and 227. Marks indicating inversion Æ...Æ are written above line 220b. Catch-words occur at the bottom of ff. 257r,v; 258v; 259v, and the catchword for 258r is written as the final word of the last line of 258r. Likewise, on 260v the last line of the poem contains the underlined catchwords to wynsealf > to wynbylū for the leechdoms which follow Seasons in the MS.

\(^3\) Robin Flower, "Laurence Nowell and a Recovered Anglo-Saxon Poem," *BMQ*, 8 (1934), 130-32.
Condition of the Text

It is impossible now to ascertain the condition of the original MS of the *Seasons for Fasting* which Nowell transcribed. That the poem was a fragment even in the undamaged MS. Cotton Otho Bxi is attested by Humfrey Wanley's 1705 description of the poem as "*truncatum etiam in fine.*"\(^4\)

Though Nowell's transcription of *Seasons* is not damaged, the metrics reveal lacunae at lines 23a, 44b, 70b, and 173b. Previous editors have concluded, on the basis of the stanzacic form, that two lines are missing in stanza 4 and that an extra line occurs in stanza 15; and, of course, stanza 29 is incomplete. Critical opinion generally follows Kenneth Sisam in ascribing these problems to corruptions already present in MS. Otho Bxi rather than to errors by Nowell.\(^5\)

Date and Provenance

According to N. R. Ker, MS. Cotton Otho Bxi is a Winchester MS. written partly in the mid tenth and partly in the second quarter of the eleventh century.\(^6\) *Seasons for Fasting* appears to have been copied with the later portion of the MS. And, on the basis of the language (West Saxon with some late West Saxon features),


\(^6\) Ker, *Catalogue*, p. 234.
the theme of the controversy over the dating of Ember, and the poem's hortatory closing, critics and editors all agree with dating the poem in the late tenth or early eleventh century.  

School of Composition

Aside from the probability that he was a clergyman, possibly even a bishop or an archbishop, as indicated by the command in Stanza XXIII, "... we bebeōdað burh beorn godes," nothing is known about the author of Seasons for Fasting. However, in support of his contention for a late tenth or early eleventh-century date for Seasons, Kenneth Sisam compares The Creed and Seasons and concludes that these two poems are probably "by the same author: certainly they belong to the same school." This is the school of Archbishop Wulfstan (fl. 996-1023). Though Sisam's argument for a common author of The Creed and Seasons is conjectural, Wulfstan's influence on Seasons for Fasting is readily apparent. There are striking echoes of Wulfstan's sermons in lines 83-85, 164, and 223.

In explaining the proper observance of fasts, the Seasons poet writes:

---


8 Sisam, Studies, p. 48.
Similarly, Wulfstan in his *Sermo* in XL says:

\[ \text{æt æfre ænig cristen man ænge dæge ær nontide naðor ne abyrige ne ætes ne wætes buton hit for unhæle sy.} \]

Although the *Seasons* passage is not a direct quotation from Wulfstan, the similarity in vocabulary and phrasing is noteworthy.

In lines 164-165a, *Seasons* notes that Satan in tempting Christ hoped "æt he stræla his stellan mihte / on þam lichoman." The image of Satan as an archer is common in OE literature, but he usually shoots his arrows into his victims. Consequently, the verb *stellan*, "to attach to, to place on" seems inappropriate in this description. However, the idea that the devil might place or fasten his arrows rather than pierce with them has precedent in Wulfstan's *Sermo de Baptismate*, VIIIc, 11. 65-66:  

\[ \text{. . . ðæt deofol ne ænig his attrenra waepna him on afaestnian.} \]  

In this context *aфаestnian* and *stellan* have similar meanings, and the poet may have chosen *stellan* because it fit his alliterative scheme.  

Similarly, the poet of *Seasons* appears to echo Wulfstan when he says that the bad priest is *mæða bedæled* (ll. 223) --"lacking all continence." These two words otherwise appear in conjunction

---


10Ibid., p. 179.

11See commentary to l. 164.
only in the *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos*,\(^{12}\) when Wulfstan decries a corrupt priesthood: "... Godes beowas sindon mæle munde gewelhwær bedæled."

These echoes point to an author familiar with Wulfstan's works and capable of adapting the prelate's prose to his own poetic needs. Such borrowing from Wulfstan is not without precedent. Professor Dorothy Whitelock has shown that the author of the OE homily *Of Seinte Neote* borrowed from at least two of Wulfstan's sermons, and Professor Mary P. Richards has gone on to show that this homilist's style is also indebted to Wulfstan.\(^{13}\) Like the homily *Of Seinte Neote*, then, *Seasons for Fasting* is the product of an author working out of a tradition influenced by Wulfstan, as reflected in his use of certain specific verbal collocations and themes, especially those which are topical and critical of society.

**The Copyist: Laurence Nowell (fl. 1520-1576)**

Laurence Nowell, Dean of Lichfield, was an antiquarian whose "importance as a pioneer in Anglo-Saxon studies is second only to that of Joscelin."\(^{14}\) He made important transcriptions, and he compiled

\(^{12}\) Bethurum, *Homilies of Wulfstan*, p. 262.


the *Vocabularium Saxonicum*\(^{15}\) which is the forerunner of all subsequent Old English dictionaries. In fact, were it not for Nowell's transcription of MS. Cotton Otho Bxi, the modern student of Old English would not know that the herbal recipes which follow *Seasons for Fasting* ever existed,\(^{16}\) and of course, Nowell's transcription of *Seasons* is the only extant complete copy of the poem. Unfortunately, however, Nowell was not as accurate a copyist as would be ideal. In fact, any conclusions reached about the language of MS. Cotton Otho Bxi based on Nowell's copy are questionable because of his numerous grammatical and orthographic errors. This is not a serious problem regarding items in MS. Add. 43703 which can be compared with extant original versions of these texts (such as The Parker Chronicle and Bede's History), but it severely limits any hope for definite conclusions about the state of the language of *Seasons for Fasting*.

In *Seasons* Professor Sisam finds Nowell guilty of "letter confusion; or . . . false grammatical forms . . . such as 207 lare for lar . . .; and 111 sylfe dryhten for sylfa dryhten; or . . .


\(^{16}\) By the time that Wheloc was preparing his *Historiae Ecclesiasticae Gentis Anglorum Libri V* (Cambridge, 1643-44) and Wanley his *Catalogus Historico Criticus* (Oxford, 1705) the herbal recipes which Nowell copied following *Seasons* had been separated from MS. Cotton Otho Bxi. Nowell's is the only extant copy of the herbals, and the original is presumed lost.
bad spellings like 3 gelared for gelæred, 195 preale for præle, and 80 getinge for getenge.\footnote{17} Sisam further notes confusion of i with e, a with e and æ, and i with y, leading him to the conclusion that the language of Seasons is so confused that "close consideration of its abnormal forms and spellings\footnote{18} is unprofitable.  

R. J. S. Grant has followed Sisam's observations with two important studies of Nowell's accuracy in his transcription of MS. Cotton Otho Bxi. In 1973 Grant compared ll. 87-94 of Seasons as copied by Wheloc in his Historia Ecclesiasticae Gentis Anglorum Libri V with Nowell's copy of the same lines.\footnote{19} Grant shows "that the general sense indicated by Sisam is probably correct" but that "the text of the poem as preserved in MS. Cotton Otho Bxi was already corrupt."\footnote{20} Grant followed up this brief examination of Seasons with an exhaustive comparison of MS. Cotton Otho Bxi ff. 1-36 (a portion of Bede's History and the most continuously legible remnant of the MS.) with the corresponding pages of MS. Add. 43703.\footnote{21} Here Grant determines that "Nowell either did not know or did not care about the value of æ, which he often confuses with a, e, and ea"; that he confused the inflectional endings of -en, -an, and -on causing "distinctions between indicative and subjunctive, infinite and

\footnotesize

\footnote{17}Sisam, Studies, p. 59 and n. 1.  
\footnote{18}Ibid., p. 59, n. 1.  
\footnote{19}Grant, "A Note," 302-304.  
\footnote{20}Ibid., 304.  
\footnote{21}"Nowell's Transcript," 111-124.
preterite plural" to be "undermined"; that he at times changed OE spellings to accord with Renaissance convention; that he is guilty of correcting or standardizing the forms he is copying. In brief, Grant finds MS. Add. 43703 to be "of no use to the student of spellings, phonology or inflections and no dialect indications can be drawn from it."\footnote{Ibid., 121, 124.}

The work of Sisam and of Grant leads to the frustrating conclusion that \textit{Seasons for Fasting} is a text doubly cursed. Given the apparent lacunae at 11, 23, 44, 70, and 173, the crux at 1. 57, the irregular stanzas 4 and 15, it appears that MS. Cotton Otho Bxi was already corrupt before Nowell copied it. The probable imperfections of the original were further compounded by Nowell's inaccuracies. The rub is that without other copies of \textit{Seasons} it is finally impossible to make a definitive statement about whether any problem in the poem stems from Nowell or from his exemplar.

With these limitations in mind, I present the following tentative description of the language of \textit{Seasons for Fasting}. I follow Alistair Campbell's \textit{Old English Grammar}\footnote{Alistair Campbell, \textit{Old English Grammar} (Oxford, 1959).} throughout unless otherwise noted.
Language

A. West Saxon Forms

Vowels of Accented Syllables

1. Prim. Gmc. æ remains æ in: mærne (2), ræde (6), asæde (7), læran (8).

2. Breaking: æ > ea before h-leahtras (16), æ > ea before r + consonant or l + consonant--hearm (13), mearce (43), bearnum (64), wearp (131), bearp (192), etc.; ealdagum (1), ealdor (31), geald (92); beside æelda (68)

3. Diphthongization after palatal consonants: æ > ea--scealt (102)

4. Development of a glide between sc or g and a back vowel: gescead (6), sceacan (38), sceold (8), gearum (62), geond (215), etc.

5. Breaking of e > eo before r + consonant, l + consonant: weorce (12), deorne (40), beorn (45), weorpian (54), weorcum (74), leordun (101), weord (153), etc.; heold (18), heoldon (27), heolp (153), etc.

6. i- mutation of Prim. OE æ > æ: unhæl (84), bedæled (223), beside sacæ (209).

7. i- mutation of io / eWs: onlyht (3), gewyrþan (16), hyrdæ (93), styrc (29), etc.

8. i- mutation of ea to eWs: gewyrðon (25), nyhta (109), etc.

9. Vowels between w and r show none of the eWs falling together as in wur:
   a. forms with weor: weorce (12), weorpian (54), weorcum (74), weord (153), weorces (190)
   b. forms with wyr: gewyrþan (16), wyrd (38), gewyrþpe (91).
   c. forms with wor: woruld (30), wordum (74), worulde (222).

Consonants

Loss of palatal g before d or n, with probable compensatory lengthening: asæd (7).
B. Late West Saxon Forms

1. **IWS smoothing of \( \hat{e}a \sim \varepsilon \) before a velar consonant or after a palatal:** nehstan (152), egum (172), wege (207).

2. **sel > IWS syl, sil:** sylfes (5), sylfne (21, 193, 200), sylf (95), sylfa (99), sylfe (101, 111), sylfan (218), syllad (225).

3. **IWS o > a > æ** in low stressed words such as ñonne, hwonne, ñone (see Campbell (197): mænige (25), mænium (192), hwænne (223).

4. **Change of unaccented ∫g to i (see Campbell (197): mænium (192) beside mænige (25); halig (127) beside halig (134). Spellings in ∫g predominate.**

5. **IWS unrounding of \( \hat{e} > \varepsilon \) before c, g, h:** rihtne (36), higefæste (44), higesynnig (168), dihte (51, 65, 123), emnihtes (68), rihte (128), mihta (129), gestigen (142), higcanne (144), wicgum (147), fulwihtes (155), nihta (157), mihte (164), þicgen (228); beside hyht (35), dryhtnes (9 times), dyhte (95), styge (107), nyhta (109), dryhten (134, 185, 210), þycgen (138). Forms in i predominate.

6. **IWS ∫ < eOE i in low stress:** gyf (35, 168), byď (67), tyd (83, 101), gyd (97); beside gif (172, 175), tid (134, 182), biď (72), hit (106), his (113, 164, 196), him (121, 131), sint (132), hive (200). Words in i predominate.

7. **IWS ∫ < eOE i, rounding of i to ſ in the vicinity of labials and/or before r (see Campbell (197): fyligan (36), gefyllid (37), gefyllan (43), fyra (64), yλcan (75), gehwyldes (76), gehwylce (118), symbel (131), fryna (183, 187, 202), fyrene (140), fyrena (150), gyltig (157), myrcels (172), fylgest (175), dynnissa (189), fylian (212); beside micel (192), filian (102).**

C. Non-West Saxon Forms

1. **Absence of WS i-mutation of \( \hat{e}o > \varepsilon e \):** freond (186).

2. **Kentish/Anglian unrounding of the second element of eo:** feaľa (17).

3. **Instead of WS i-umlaut of ſ, Kentish e:** emb (83).
This analysis of the language of Seasons for Fasting provides no indication of a dialectal origin for the poem other than West Saxon. The quantity and sort of WS and lWS features in the poem override the potential clouding of this dialect that Nowell's inaccuracies might cause. The contention of previous editors that the poem is West Saxon and a late composition is supported.

**Style**

The style of Seasons for Fasting is in accord with the poem's overtly didactic intent. The poet of Seasons teaches by being clear and predictable, by avoiding ornate syntax, strained compounds, and striking alliterative combinations. To say the prosody is not outstanding, however, is not to say that it lacks skill. The poem's organization, use of figurative language, and stanzaic form all mark it as the product of a concerned craftsman.

**Variation.** Variation in Seasons for Fasting is relatively perfunctory. As to be expected in a religious poem, it serves chiefly to reveal the multi-faceted natures of God and Christ and to emphasize the important qualities of their servants and their enemy. God is referred to as *lifes frea* (3b), *heofona heahcyning* (4a, 10a, 53a), *sigora god* (14a), *lifes frean* (19a), *wlance* (54a), *wulddres bryttan* (54b), *wulddres cyning* (74b), *beodne* (76a), *frean* (78a), *ealdre lifes* (81b). Christ is *dryhten* (21b), *leofum* (29b), *rices ealdor* (31b), *deorne de ð-fruman* (40a), *nergend* (152b), *halig heofenes weord* (153a), *ealdor* (167b), *werede wulderfream* (170a). Moses is referred to as *mærne læ reow* (2b), *froda* (42b), *eorl se goda* (106a), while Elijah
is eorl se mæra (120b), mæra þegn (129a), ealda (143a); and Pope Gregorius I is beorn on Rome (45a), gæmna papæ (46b, 94b), rices hyrde (93b). Satan is called Cristes gewinna (160b) and susla weard (168b). Nations of people are leodum (6a), hereiscyype (18a), and leodsicpe (8b), while the horses that draw Elijah's flaming chariot are mærum (146b) and wlangum wicgum (147a).

Of all these terms one alone, wlandscape, draws attention to itself as somehow striking or unexpected. Only in Seasons for Fasting and The Creed is landscape used in OE poetry to refer to the Christian God.24 Perhaps the poet chose landscape to agree with his alliterative needs, or perhaps his use of bryttan, a word so often associated in the poetry with the proud treasure giver, brought landscape to the poet's mind.

Compounding. One of the Anglo-Saxon poet's most important tools was compounding. It gave him great latitude within the limits of alliteration, and, if he were skillful, it aided the writer in precisely shading the emotion and associational content of a poem.25 In 229-1/2 lines the author of the Seasons for Fasting uses twenty-two compounds: ealddaggum (1a), heahcyning (4a, 10a, 53a), leodsicpe (8a, 11a), hereiscyype (18a), bocstafum (26a), ðædfruman (40a), ælmesdæcum (41a, 191a), higefæste (44a), suunnandæge (59a),

24 Sisam, Studies, p. 48.

beodlareow (96b), fæstendtida (97a), lengtendid (105a), symbolbread (122a), eorðburgendum (136b), andlifene (138a), wangstede (145a), higesynnig (168a), wulderfrean (170a), ðæghwanlice (185a, 199a, 210a), ryththicgennde (205a), and morgentyd (220a). The approach to compounding in this poem is entirely mechanical as evidenced by two observations. First, none of these words is strikingly original, including the hapax herescype (18a) (no doubt created through analogy with words like ðeodscape). Second, of the twenty-seven times these compounds appear in the poem, twenty-five of them are in the a-verse, and all of them alliterate. This indicates that the poet, in composing a line, first determined the head-stave and thus the alliterative requirement for a line and then compounded in the a-verse to meet this requirement.

Figurative language. Seasons for Fasting is devoid of the classic OE figure, the kenning. And, in fact, this poem makes use of only one kind of figurative language, the analogy.

Stanza 21 makes the common comparison between Satan and an archer when, in describing the temptation of Christ, the poet remarks that Christ's enemy began to think "pæt he stræla his // stellan mihte/ on þam lichoman" (l. 165). This image is pursued in Stanza 22 where the "higesynnig man" is told that Satan "ne mæg he pæs inne // ahwæt scotian/ gif he myrceil næþb // manes æt egum" (171-2). The comparison in Stanza 22 is expanded to include the man's sins as a target.
Stanza 25 compares a bad priest's relationship to God with an insubordinate thrall's relationship to his over-lord. As a part of Seasons' castigation of lax priests, this analogy serves three distinct functions. It expresses the complex spiritual relationship between priest and God in common social terms accessible to any reader or auditor. It emphasizes both God's majesty and power and the rightly servile status of the priest. Further, the priest/thrall's willful subversion of his proper relationship to his master is accentuated when we are told that he "... ðæs bote ne deð, / ac ðæ æbylligðe // ealdere wrohte / dæghwamlice // dædum niwað" (197b-99). That the priest could remedy this situation but chooses not to and is, therefore, the more contemptible is implicit in these lines.

Stanza 26 continues the consideration of bad priests by telling the "folces mann" to ignore the priest's sinful deeds but to attend zealously to his good teaching. This stanza ends with two difficult lines which have accounted for as much critical commentary as any part of the poem (see textual note ll. 206-207):

```
  drince he him ðæt drofe   duge hlutter ðe
  wæter of wege,    ðæt is wulfdres lare.
```

(Though he should drink dirty water let the pure water which is divine doctrine do you good).

Despite the obscurity of l. 206b, the comparison is relatively clear; the priest's evil ways are dirty water while that which he teaches is pure water.

In discussing the lax priest's behavior, stanza 28 notes that in the morning after mass, he eats oysters and drinks wine. These
actions are judged implicitly when the poet states "paet hund and wulf // heald ða ilcan / wisan on worulde // and ne wiglæð / hwænne hie to mose fon, // mæ ¯ a bedæled" (11. 221-23). In his incontinence the priest has stooped to the level of the beasts. The sinful priest's unnatural behaviour and degradation are made pointedly apparent in this analogy.

Structure

Although *Seasons for Fasting* is not great Old English verse, its structure does show skill, attention, and innovation. Innovation is evident in the choice of the stanza as the basic unit of structure. There is no other poem in OE as regularly stanzaic as *Seasons*, and it is clear that the stanzas are distinct rhetorical units, each modifying an old point or developing a new one. Both skill and attention are apparent in the conscious use of mechanical and logical transitions and in the homiletic pattern of example and response/application which serve to turn twenty-nine stanzas into a coherent, linear verse explication. Even though a fragment, *Seasons* is an intentionally artistic construct as revealed by its structure.

An overview of the stanzaic arrangement of the poem will assist analysis of the structure.

Stanza(s):

1-3 form a unit which recounts Moses' reception of God's law (1), the proper relationship of the Israelites to God under this law (2), the rise and fall of the Israelites, culminating in the Crucifixion and Resurrection (3).

4-6 are both transitional and prescriptional. They shift to first person nominative We to draw the reader/auditor into recognition that Christ was honored by the ancient Christians through fasting (4), that after the Resurrection, Christ went to heaven, and the Christian who follows His counsel may also go to heaven, but no sinful man may enter therein (5): that man should, therefore, praise Christ through almsgiving and fasting as prescribed by Pope Gregory for the English (6).

7-11 enumerate and describe the four Ember fasts. Number one takes place in the first week of Lent in March (7). Number two occurs during the week after Pentecost Sunday in June (8). Number three takes place in the week which is complete before the Equinox in September (9). Number four occurs in the week which is complete before Christmas day in December (10). Stanza 11 notes that these fasts should not be broken before noon unless a person is too ill to properly observe the fast.
12-13 reiterate that a specific schedule of fasts was prescribed by Pope Gregory and should be followed by the English. The Frankish and Breton dating of the Ember fasts is explicitly rejected (12). The rejection of continental practice is legitimated by continued appeal to the authority of Pope Gregory (13).

14-22 are concerned with the forty-day Lenten fast. Biblical precedent for such a fast is given through the exempla of Moses (14, 15), Elijah (16-19), and Christ (20-22).

23 notes the termination of the exempla, commands (we bebeoda) all men to observe the forty-day Lenten fast, and threatens outlawry for those who break this injunction.

24 discusses the mutual responsibility of the parishioner and the priest, particularly during fast times. Emphasized is the priest's importance as an intermediary between God and the Christian.

25-29 continue the examination of priests, taking up the questions of the actions and effects of lax priests. The need for pure priests is expressed (25). The layman is told to follow the Christian teaching of the lax priest rather than his sinful example (26). The bad priest angers God and leads his flock astray, providing a bad example by going to the tavern
immediately after morning mass (27). A spirited description of the bad priest's lying and cajoling the tapster to obtain wine and oysters is concluded with a comparison of the incontinent priest and the hungry hound and wolf (28) and a view of his swearing, ironically blessing his wine, and making excuses for his behavior (29).

One indication that *Seasons* was conceived as a unified, coherent whole is the effective use of transitions in the poem. Some of these transitions are implicit or logical, stemming directly from the narrative, while others are explicit and mechanical. Dobbie fails to recognize the poem's transitional scheme when he remarks that stanzas 1-5 are "somewhat disorganized," 27 and Whitbread agrees that stanza 4 is disorganized though he rejects Dobbie's view of the rest of the introduction. 28 In reality, however, no apology need be made for the coherence of stanzas 1-5. The narrative of stanzas 1-3 is continuous. These stanzas cover Moses' reception of, and order to, disseminate God's law, the Jews' relationship to God under the law, their initial prosperity under this law, their final falling away from God which leads to Christ's Crucifixion, and Christ's Resurrection. Whitbread's observation that stanza 4 is a "slight break in continuity, because it mentions seasons for fasting before

27 Dobbie, ASPR, 6, p. xcii.
28 Whitbread, "Notes on the *Seasons for Fasting,*" 251-52.
the historical preface is quite completed" and that the "reference back in line 31 to the resurrection and the first word ac, 'but,' give the impression of someone trying to get back to his sequence of thought after a false continuation"\textsuperscript{29} are not on the mark. The historical preface is actually complete with the crucifixion and resurrection in line 24. What begins in stanza 4 with the narrator's shift to the nom. pl. We is a pattern, used throughout the poem, of commentary on and explication/application of the biblical exempla. The transitions from stanza 3 to 4 and 4 to 5 are thus logical.

Stanzas 4 and 5 form a unit of commentary and reaction which are precipitated by Christ's sacrifice and miraculous return from the grave in stanza 3. The feasts and sacrifices of 4 are thus the logical honorific responses of the ancient Christians to Christ's actions which are variationally reintroduced, amplified, and explained in stanza 5. The interdependence of stanzas 4 and 5 is both striking and noteworthy. In stanza 4, line 30, we are told that Christ was "womma bedæled." And, of course, it is this fact which allows Him to "... arisan ... // rices ealdor/ of byrgenne" and to seek "eard mid englum" (ll. 31-34, St. 5). Stanza 5 goes on to say that Christ promises a heavenly home to all who desire his "rædum fyligan" (1.36b). But, this stanza ends with the warning that no one may enter heaven who is "womme gewesed"

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 252.
(l. 34), a collocation which is a negative echo of the "womma bedæled" of the last line of stanza 4. In short, the last line of stanza 5 recalls and responds to the last line of stanza 4. This is particularly interesting since stanza 4 lacks two lines. Two theories have been posited to account for this irregularity, both of them assuming that stanza 4 once had 8 lines. Rather, the intentional echoing of the last lines in these stanzas tends to support the view that irregular as stanza 4 may be, it is as complete as it ever was.

Thus, Seasons' effective use of implicit transitions insures that there is no discontinuity in stanzas 1-5. Similarly for the remainder of the poem, the use of mechanical transitions (ac l. 31a, Nuwe 1.39a, Eft 1.120a) in combination with more subtle devices enables the poem to blend both its pedagogic and narrative material into a smoothly flowing, logical exposition.

Another indicator that Seasons for Fasting is a consciously literary production is the pattern of exemplum and response with which the three major sections of the poem are developed and united. Stanzas 1-11 develop the theme of the Ember fasts. Stanzas 12 and 13 provide transitions to stanzas 14-22 which discuss the forty-day Lenten fast. Stanza 23 leads to the final section, stanzas 24-29,

---

30 Sisam, Studies, p. 47; Whitbread, "Notes," 252.

31 It is likely that the same sort of "echoing" is present in stanzas XIV and XV. The last line of stanza XIV reads: "ær he þa deoran æ // dryhtnes anfenge," and the last line of stanza XV reads "gif us þære dugube hwæt // dryhten sylleð." If so, this echo would also indicate that the irregularity of stanza XV is intentional.
which examine bad priests. The presentation of each of these sections is based on this pattern of exemplum followed by response or explanation.

Section one, concerning the Ember fasts, is the most complicated of the three because its development is not strictly linear. Rather, its structure is that of a fulcrum balancing the history of the Jews, which culminates in Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection, against the enumeration and explanation of the Ember fasts. The balance point in this section is stanzas 4-6 which simultaneously respond to stanzas 1-3 and provide transitions to stanzas 7-11. Stanza 4 responds to the example of Christ by explaining that early Christians honored him with fasts and sacrifices. Stanza 5 then reiterates and responds to the resurrection by explaining that the Christian too may ascend to heaven if he follows Christ's counsel and that no sinful man may come into heaven. Stanza 6, likewise, responds to Christ's example by explaining that the Christian should honor Him with fasts and almsgiving as "Moyses maeldæ." Having thus established the necessity for fasting and having sanctioned the practice by appeal to the biblical authority of Moses and the ecclesiastical authority of Gregory (11. 436-46), the poem naturally moves forward to a consideration of current English practice in observing the Ember fasts. Stanzas 7-10 list and date the four Ember fasts, and stanza 11 notes the three fast days (Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday), describes their purpose, and warns all healthy men not to break the fast.
Stanzas 12 and 13 serve to link section one (the Ember fasts) with section 2 (the Lenten fast). Stanza 11 closes with an admonition against breaking the fast, and stanza 12 continues in this admonitory vein, warning the Englishman not to heed the practice of the Franks or Bretons. Rather, the auditor/lector is told to heed the practice "pe supan com/ from Romana // rices hyrde/ Gregoriiæ, // gumena papa" (11. 92b-94). This evocation of Gregory prompts a continued explanation in stanza 13 of how Gregory established the only fast schedule the English should follow. Having thus moved from the specific topic of the Ember fasts to the more general subject of the authority establishing and governing fasts, the poem, with the help of the transition Eac (1.103a), moves into the discussion of the forty-day Lenten fast.

The structure of section 2, though chronological in development, resembles that of section 1 in that it too depends on a pattern of exemplum and response. Stanza 14 notes that Moses began the practice of fasting forty days when he purified himself prior to ascending Mt. Sinai to receive God's law. Stanza 15 recounts God's delivery of the law but then responds to the exemplum by drawing the conclusion that through fasting the Christian may "freode gewinnan/ and ba deopan dryhtnes gerynu" (11. 116-117). The next three stanzas (16, 17, 18) are concerned with Elijah's forty-day fast in the desert before his ascension of Mt. Horeb. Stanza 16 succinctly presents the story of Elijah's fast in the desert and his being nourished by an angel before going up on Mt. Horeb. The entirety of stanza 17 is a response to this exemplum. First, the poet explicitly asks us to
consider Elijah's story: "uton pæt gerine // rihte gehicgan" (l. 128). Next, he compares the contemporary Christian's state to that of Elijah in the wilderness: "We sint on westene" (l. 131a). Finally, stanza 17 ends with a question which stems from Elijah's ascent of Horeb: "hu we munt binne // mærne gestygan" (l. 135). Stanza 18 responds to 17 by answering this question. In stanza 18 the Christian is told to fast "bæt we pæs muntes mægen // mærpa gestigen/ swa se ealda dyde // Elias iu" (142-143).

Stanza 19 continues the story of Elijah, describing his apotheosis, but does so principally as a means of moving into the story of Christ's forty-day fast. Nonetheless, even this transitional stanza is based on the exemplum and response pattern. Here we are told that Elijah ascended into his heavenly home and that Christ too promises us such a home "gif we pæt fæsten her // fyrena gelæ stað / and bone uplican // æpel secað (11. 150-51).

The example of Christ's temptation and fast is accordingly presented and responded to in stanzas 20-22. Stanza 20 notes that Christ fasted forty days "leodum to lare, // pæt hie on lengten sceolan / efen feowertig daga // faesten hewan" (158-59). Stanza 21 presents Satan's ineffective temptation of Christ; and stanza 22 applies the lesson of Christ's defeat of his temptor to the common Christian, noting that the devil will not be able to tempt the "higesynning man" if he ". . . dryhtnes her // daedum fylgest" (l. 175).

Stanza 23 marks the termination of the exempla supporting the Lenten fast. It enjoins all men to observe this fast properly lest
they be outlawed. And, by introducing the subject of the appropriate observance of the fast, makes it a transition to section 3 (stanzas 24-29) which is principally concerned with the effects of bad priests who do not follow these injunctions.

Stanza 24 is purely expository, explaining the relationship of parishioner and priest, and emphasizing the priest's role as intermediary between worshipper and God. But stanza 25 again picks up the exemplum/response pattern which is then carried on to the end of the poem. The noteworthy aspect of stanzas 25-29 is that they present only one extended exemplum—the lax priest. The effects of his evil ways are variously responded to in each of the final stanzas. Stanza 25 compares the bad priest to a rebellious thrall who wrongly refuses to placate his angry master; stanza 26 tells the "folces mann" to attend to the priest's teaching, not his evil ways, and likens the lax priest to a man who drinks dirty water; stanza 27 notes that the bad priest daily angers God and by wicked example leads his flock astray; stanza 28 likens the incontinent priest to the ravenous hound and wolf; stanza 29 breaks off but not before it has twice noted the priest's blasphemous behavior.

The structure of Seasons for Fasting is not haphazard or even casual. It is, rather, a carefully manipulated construct which clearly delivers its intended message. The poet was no literary artist, though he does achieve a rough eloquence and force in the description of the bad priest; but his handling of the structure of Seasons proves him to be an accomplished craftsman.
Historical. An understanding of the historical milieu or the social forces which generate a poem is often invaluable in gaining a thorough understanding of that poem. Fortunately, the historical context of Seasons for Fasting is quite clear. The poem is essentially an occasional piece which is concerned with two contemporary issues: the controversy over the dating of the Ember fasts and the evils of corrupt priests.

Seasons for Fasting places the four Ember fasts in the first week of Lent in March (stanza 7), the week after Whitsunday in June (stanza 8), the week before the autumnal equinox in September (stanza 9), and the week before Christmas day in December (stanza 10). This arrangement for the first two fasts is dependent on the date of Easter. After establishing this schedule for the Ember fasts, stanza 12 informs the worshipper that he should reject Breton or Frankish usage, anciently established by Moses, and observe only that schedule established by Gregory the Great. Stanza 13 continues the discussion of Gregory I as the authority who established the fast schedule for the English. Concerning these stanzas of Seasons, Dobbie writes in the introduction to his edition that our poem ... attributes the establishment of these dates for the Ember fasts to St. Gregory the Great. A different, and presumably older, usage places the Ember days in the first week of March, the second week of June, the third week of September, and the week before Christmas. The somewhat obscure protest against "Frankish" usage in 11. 87-94 of our poem
may well refer to this other dating of the Ember days.\(^{32}\)

In considering the same section of *Seasons*, Sisam notes that an Englishman who crossed the channel at the beginning of the tenth century would find that in France, or at Rome itself, it was usual to keep the spring and summer Ember fasts at fixed dates, in the first week of March and the second week of June. . . . The difference of usage was explained in late Anglo-Saxon times by an ordinance attributed to Gregory the Great.\(^{33}\)

Sisam goes on to suggest that this "ordinance" was spurious; to propose that the inroads of continental usage in England were the result of the Benedictine Reform; to suggest at least some indication of a split observance of Ember, the continental for clerics and the Gregorian for the English layman; and, finally, to note that the law code *Æthelred VI* attempted to settle this controversy by ordering everyone to follow the Gregorian schedule even though other countries might do otherwise.\(^{34}\)

From the foregoing, the speculative state of OE scholars' understanding of the Ember question is apparent. Fortunately, recent liturgical scholarship makes it possible to clear up some questions regarding this issue and to draw some conclusions as well. G. G. Willis' extensive 1964 article on Ember\(^{35}\) is particularly helpful in

\(^{32}\)ASPR 6, p. xciii.

\(^{33}\)Sisam, *Studies*, p. 49.

\(^{34}\)Ibid., pp. 49-50.

analyzing *Seasons for Fasting*. Willis' research makes it apparent that this controversy was not obscure and that the Franks, not the English, were neglecting standard Roman usage concerning Ember. The important points of Willis' article, relative to *Seasons*, are as follows:

1. Original Roman usage established the spring Ember fast in March with no connection to Lent.

2. Under Gregory the Great the spring Ember week was fixed in the first week of Lent.

3. The Frankish empire, however, often followed the older pre-Gregorian Ember observance, placing the fast in the first week of March with no connection to Lent.

4. In 1078 Gregory VII attacked Frankish rule as an innovation and affirmed Gregorian observance as did Urban II in 1095.

5. However, as late as 1222 the Council of Oxford supported Frankish rule, but the Gregorian ultimately "triumphed and has since been observed."  

6. Regarding the summer Ember fast, Roman usage placed the fast in the week of Pentecost.

7. Frankish tradition placed the summer Ember fast in some later week after Pentecost.

8. As in the controversy over the Lent Ember week, Gregory VII and Urban II officially established Roman rule, branding the Gallican observance an innovation. And even though as late as 1222 this innovation was supported by the Council of Oxford, Roman rule prevailed.

This overview of the Ember controversy makes possible the clarification of a number of points in *Seasons for Fasting*. First, though no specific document from Gregory I to the English is extant,  

---

36 Ibid., p. 67.
the poet is evidently correct in attributing the English fast schedule to Gregory.\(^{37}\) Also, it is England that is in accord with standard Roman usage, not France. Thus, the fact that in the eleventh century both Gregory VII and Urban II attacked the Gallican usage as innovative makes it apparent that the English poet is taking a traditional, conservative, and orthodox stance in *Seasons*. The poet's great concern with authority, and his great reverence for written support\(^{38}\) are not only typical of any medieval writer but also natural in a conservative writer who is fighting unsanctioned change. Recognition of the poet's emphasis on the importance of written authority and his own realization that he is in conformity with the practice of Rome may also help in interpreting the one acknowledged crux in *Seasons*.

Stanza 8, line 57b, reads "be gelesen hafað," and numerous attempts have been made to make sense of gelesen (see textual notes to l. 57). Stanza 8 is concerned with the summer Ember fast, one of those for which Frankish observance was different from the English/Roman. This stanza makes the point that this fast "ys to bremenne leodom Brytena" (l. 56b). It then goes on to modify "leodom Brytena" with "be gelesen hafað" (l. 57b). Inflectional endings in MS. Add. 43703 are demonstrably confused, and it is my contention that gelesen is an improperly inflected form of geles--

\(^{37}\)Ibid., pp. 66-69.

\(^{38}\)See stanzas 4, 6, 11, and 15.
"reading, study, learning." Thus these lines should be translated "for the people of Britain/ ... // those who have the learning."

In the context of stanza 8, geles makes good sense because it emphasizes the poet's point that those of the British people who understand—who have read, studied, learned—the proper Roman observance of this fast will know to keep it in the week following Whitsunday rather than at a later date according to some foreign innovation in practice.

Seasons for Fasting, then, is the only extant OE poem which raises a partisan voice in a specific, historically verifiable religious controversy. And, this voice is conservative, orthodox, and that of the majority.39 It is possible to interpret the poet's insistence on the Englishness of his stance as another poetic indicator, along with poems like the Battle of Brunanburh, of Anglo-Saxon national consciousness. This consciousness is, interestingly, expressed in Seasons as an antipathy specifically toward the Franks, no doubt precipitated, as suggested by Sisam, by the influx of foreign clergy during the Benedictine Reform.40

Less historically fixed than its comment on Ember but equally a response to a contemporary problem is Seasons for Fasting's castigation of lax priests. Sisam remarks that the last part of Seasons

39 Sisam, Studies, p. 49. I draw this conclusion from the fact that MSS indicating continental usage are the minority and that English/Roman usage ultimately prevailed.

40 Ibid.
"on priests who keep fasts laxly, gives a lively picture that might be drawn at any period." And, it is true that some OE prose examines the duties of priests and rebukes those who are wayward, but, in fact, no other extant poetry or prose in OE draws the lively picture of the lax priest that *Seasons* does. The priest in the final section of *Seasons* would be much more at home with Langland's Sloth or Chaucer's Pardoner than with his OE counterparts.

Old English prose provides the only contemporary literary precedent for *Seasons*’ depiction of priests. And, generally, the prose of the OE period is more concerned with strengthening the church and protecting it against secular abuse than with exposing and lashing out against clerical miscreants. But the problem of wayward priests is not completely neglected and is discussed by both homilists and legal writers.

The Anglo-Saxon church’s ongoing struggle to protect its own interests makes it no surprise that the vernacular homilies concerned with bad priests are both few and very general in their treatment of the theme. Typical of the homiletic treatment of this issue are the *Blickling Homily Dominica Tertia in Quadragesima* and Wulfstan's

---

41 Ibid., p. 48.


Sermon XVIb. The Blickling Homily for Quadragesima says of the duties of the mass priest that

\[ \text{ba maesse-preostas be Godes cyricena læreowas becb,} \]
\[ \text{ba sceolæn hæora scriftbec mid rihte læcan & læran,} \]
\[ \text{swa swa hie ure fæderas ær demdon. Ne wandige na} \]
\[ \text{se mæsse preost no for rices mannnes ege, ne for feo,} \]
\[ \text{ne for nanes mannnes lufon, þæt him symule rihte deme,} \]
\[ \text{gif he wilde sylf Godes domas gedegan.}\]

The homilist goes on to note that the Bishop must compel the priest mid lufe ge mid labe to observe God's law properly, and the homilist further notes that both priest and layman must be punished for neglecting their duties. By implication rather than by direct attack this homily makes the point that clerical abuses are possible and should be punished. But this is hardly the "lively picture" of Seasons for Fasting.

Of more immediate relevance to Seasons than this Blickling Homily is Wulfstan's Sermon XVIb, a vernacular reworking of his Latin XVIa, Verba Ezechielis Prophete De Pastoribus Non Recte Agentibus. This sermon is concerned with wayward priests and their effects on their flocks and addresses many of the issues raised in Seasons. Wulfstan starts by warning the priests to guard wid Godes yrre (ll. 5-6) lest they ultimately lose their souls (l. 11). He then hits hard at the priests' living in luxury while their flocks have nothing (ll. 11-17) and warns the priests against allowing their greed

---

44 Bethurum, Homilies, pp. 240-41.
45 Morris, Blickling Homilies, p. 43.
46 Ibid., p. 45 
47 Ibid., p. 49.
(gifran) to keep them from properly teaching by example (bisniaè) or preaching as often as they should (l. 21). This line of attack leads Wulfstan into a comparison between priests who cannot carry out their duties because of their worldly encumbrance and mute or leashed dogs who are unable to warn the flock they guard about the devil—se wodfræca werewulf. This sermon is more vivid in its depiction of lax priests than most OE treatments of this subject, but it is still a long way from Seasons. Nonetheless, certain qualities of Wulfstan's sermon XVIb raise the possibility that the poet of Seasons knew this sermon or one very much like it. Four points lead to this conclusion:

1. That the Seasons poet was influenced by and probably borrowed from Wulfstan has already been demonstrated.

2. Bad priests—the general theme of Sermon XVIb is also the general theme of stanzas 25-29 of Seasons, and while literary discussion of priest's duties is relatively common in OE, the theme of bad priests is relatively rare.

3. The specific problem Wulfstan's sermon attacks is that of the priest's luxury and worldliness destroying his effectiveness as the spiritual leader of his flock. This is also the specific theme of stanzas 25-29 of Seasons for Fasting. The principal difference between the sermon and the poem in treating this problem is the result of a different audience. The sermon, intended for a relatively sophisticated clerical audience, is appropriately general, learned, and allusive, while Seasons, directed toward folces mann, is therefore appropriately vivid, specific, and detailed.
4. Wulfstan's use of the hound and werewulf in a sermon about bad priests may have been modified and used by Seasons' author. Wulfstan likens the priest to an ineffective guard dog and compares Satan to a werewolf (the *lupum* of XVIa). The poet of Seasons compares the incontinent priest to both a hound and a wolf (1. 220). In the sermon, directed to a clerical audience, the priest is appropriately depicted as the guard dog, albeit an ineffective one, who should warn his flock against the wolf Satan. But the poem, very interestingly, makes the point that the wayward priest is leading his flock astray, in essence doing the work of Satan, and the poet therefore combines both hound and wolf in the priest. An Anglo-Saxon audience would not have missed the irony of the wolf/shepherd.

The correspondence of general theme and specific figures in Sermon XVIb and *Seasons for Fasting* reinforces the possibility that, again, the Seasons poet has borrowed from Wulfstan. But, perhaps more importantly, these two works provide the modern reader two views of a single issue, one cool, sophisticated, and learned; the other impassioned and emotional. Multiple perspectives on any issue of historical importance are welcome, and the modern student is particularly lucky concerning the problem of lax priests in Anglo-Saxon England; for, in addition to the poem and Sermon, legal writers provide yet another view of this problem.

As would be expected, most laws of this period regarding the church were directed toward protecting, strengthening, and supporting the ecclesiastical system. But, ecclesiastical codes written at about the same time as *Seasons for Fasting* (975-1025) attest to
the currency and historical validity of the poem's depiction of bad priests. *Seasons* exemplifies the lax priest's behavior by depicting him as a tavern carouser who has the eating habits of a hound or wolf, who swears and blasphemously blesses the wine he guzzles, who is a liar tempting God's wrath and leading his flock astray through bad example. Two legal codes which rebuke priests specifically for the offenses described in *Seasons* are Wulfstan's *The Canons of Edgar* \(^48\) (A.D. 1005-1008) and *The Northumbrian Priest's Law* \(^49\) (c.1020-23, also the product of Wulfstan's episcopate according to Whitelock \(^50\)).

*The Canons of Edgar* items 58, 59, 60, and 66 are specifically relevant to *Seasons*. Item 58 orders the priest to guard against oferdruncen and to dissuade (belean) others from drinking. Item 59 forbids the priest's becoming an ealuscop (singer in an alehouse) and in general enjoins against his carousing (gliwige), most likely in the tavern. Item 60 warns the priest to guard against oath taking, and 66 warns any consecrated man who deliberately over drinks either to stop or to forfeit his office. *The Northumbrian Priest's Law*, item 41, likewise forbids priests' overdrinking and becoming tavern singers. These law codes, then, give official verification of *Seasons*' picture of the bad priest. Once again it is particularly


\(^{49}\) *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church, AD 871-1204*, V.I, eds., Whitelock and Brett (Oxford, 1981), pp. 449-68.

\(^{50}\) Whitelock, *Historical Documents*, p. 471.
interesting that the two codes which charge priests with specifically the crimes mentioned in Seasons are associated with Wulfstan, as are Aethelred VI and I-II Cnut\textsuperscript{51} which have statutes governing the observance of Ember. The dates of these codes also help us to narrow the date of composition of Seasons for Fasting. All of these laws were written between 1000 and 1023, and all of them manifest a concern with issues likewise handled in Seasons that are not treated in earlier or later works. It would seem that the problems of the dating of Ember and of the behavior of bad priests were in the air between 1000 and 1023. Consequently, it seems probable that Seasons was composed during the same period.

Seasons for Fasting, thus, has several interesting aspects. It is a testament to English national consciousness; it is a rare vernacular poetic statement on an historically documented religious controversy; it is a critical poem on a theme usually reserved for homilies and laws; it is a learned adaptation of a complex subject for an unsophisticated audience. For the perceptive modern reader, the historical specificity of Seasons for Fasting provides a wealth of insights into early eleventh-century England which many better but more abstract poems cannot provide.

\textsuperscript{51} A. G. Kennedy, in "Cnut's Law Code of 1018," ASE, 11 (1983), 57-70, argues convincingly in support of Dorothy WhiteTock's contention, in "Wulfstan and the Laws of Cnut," EHR, 63 (1948), 433-52, that I-II Cnut were composed earlier than the 1027 date assigned them by Liebermann. Kennedy shows that I-II Cnut were probably written by Wulfstan in 1018. This is one more instance of Wulfstan's concern for issues important to Seasons for Fasting and another indication of his probable influence on the poem.
Poetic. Technically Seasons for Fasting is firmly rooted in Germanic alliterative verse tradition. The poet's conscious use of the stanza as a structural unit, his borrowing from both the Bible and from Wulfstan, and his perfunctory use of compounding and variation all argue against Seasons being an oral composition and are typical weaknesses of late OE verse. That Seasons for Fasting is a late composition within the alliterative tradition is also confirmed by the poem's metrics. The combined percentage of type C, D, and E verses in Seasons is roughly 27.6. This percentage indicates a composition date not earlier than the second half of the tenth century. \(^{52}\) Also, the poet uses the traditional OE poetic devices of compounding, variation, and formula but in a singularly mechanical fashion. While these defects may simply be the result of the poet's ineptness, they seem as likely to be another indication that Seasons is a late composition reflecting the growing freedom of the alliterative tradition. From one point of view, then, Seasons for Fasting is a traditional but late OE alliterative poem of "no high poetical quality." \(^{53}\) But, this is not an adequate view of the piece, for it ignores the fact that one feature of Seasons for Fasting's verse is thoroughly untraditional. This is the stanzaic form which sets it apart from traditional OE verse. Stanzaic structure is not unknown

\(^{52}\)To reach this conclusion, I have applied the techniques used by Thomas Cable in "Metrical Style as Evidence for the Date of Beowulf," in The Dating of Beowulf, ed. Colin Chase (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 77-83.

\(^{53}\)Sisam, Studies, p. 45.
in OE literature. Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer, The Creed, and The Rune Poem are basically stanzaic. But none of these poems is as long, as regularly stanzaic, or as self-consciously artful in its use of the stanza as a prosodic unit as Seasons (see my discussion of structure pp. 16-25).

As with its form, the themes of Seasons for Fasting are both traditional and innovative. The poem is overtly didactic, and its central themes are exhortations to follow God's rule and prosper, to observe the fasts of Ember and Lent as established for the English by the Bible and Gregory the Great, and to beware the luxuriant and wayward priest. Such overt moral instruction is offensive to modern readers nurtured on the "heresy of the didactic." However, to appreciate Seasons for Fasting, one must realize that didacticism was expected and enjoyed by medieval audiences and that Seasons for Fasting is underpinned, ultimately motivated, by one of the key themes in all Christian literature--The Fall of Man.

The theme of the Fall provides a backdrop against which all the other themes of Seasons are acted out. The poet's primary intent


55 The association between fasting and the Fall is made explicitly in Sermon V, Dominica in Quadragesima, A. O. Belfour, Twelfth Century Homilies in MS Bodley 343, EETS, 137 (London, 1909), p. 46, when the homilist says, "Hieronimus cwæ ð swa longe swa Adam hine forhæ fde ð he ðæs aplæ ðs ne onburijde he wunode on neorcxnaewonges ifean; sone swa he ðæs ofetes onbyrijde, swa wæs he utdrifén."
is to explain to the English people when and why they should observe the Ember and Lenten fasts. To accomplish this end, he opens his verse sermon with a recounting of the story of the Israelites--God's chosen people who prosper as long as they follow God's law and decline disastrously when they turn away from God. The poet chose perhaps to show the rise and fall of a nation rather than of the individuals, Adam and Eve, because he wished to emphasize to the English nation as a whole the importance of following God's rule. Interestingly, this national emphasis, particularly the implication that the whole country suffers when it shuns God, was also one of Wulfstan's favorite themes. The story of the Israelites, then, is a reworking on a national scale of the Fall of Man. This story ends with Christ's Crucifixion--the atonement for man's fall.

The Fall and the Atonement story control the rest of the poem. The middle portion dealing solely with fasts (stanzas 7-23) presents the fast as both a celebration of Christ's sacrifice and a ritual attempt by Christians to make themselves worthy, through purification, of that sacrifice. In this way Cleanliness, one of the favorite themes of medieval Christian writers, is also brought into Seasons for Fasting. Moses purifies himself through fasting before receiving the Law, and Elijah does the same before his apotheosis. Even Christ fasts before his confrontation with Satan. Through these exempla the Christian is told that in order to be worthy of Christ, to successfully confront Satan, and to enter heaven, he must be pure; and one way to be pure is to fast.
The themes of the Fall and Cleanliness are united in the final section of the poem. In the wayward priest, the reader is given a contemporary equivalent to the Israelites. Where they were the chosen people of God, the priest is the avowed servant of God. The priest should be the purest of men, and above all, he should follow God's law, thereby leading his flock to spiritual prosperity. But too often he too is an impure sinner who becomes no more than an animal and leads his people astray through his bad example. The extent of the effect of the Fall is thus dramatized through the example of the descent of God's own servant.

This introduction of the example of the bad priest is the important innovation in the poem's treatment of the themes of the Fall and Cleanliness. The poet of Seasons for Fasting breaks away from traditional OE treatment of corrupt clergy in two ways: the explicit and vituperative picture of the priest and the lay audience—folces man. The poem's depiction of the bad priest as a blasphemous tavern carouser, a hound or wolf, a willful slave who defies his master, as one who courts God's anger, engages in strife with God, and maliciously leads his flock astray is unprecedented in OE. The presentation of this caricature to a lay audience, as a warning to them to beware such priests, is doubly surprising. The discussion of the bad priest marks Seasons for Fasting as a rare poetic expression in the vernacular of criticism of the clergy. Perhaps Seasons can be seen as a transitional poem which expresses the movement from doctrinaire support of the Church and its servants to the satiric
cynicism and distrust so brilliantly expressed by later medieval poets.

C. L. Wrenn maintains that *Seasons for Fasting* "is evidently intended for minor clergy."\(^{56}\) Certainly his contention is possible, but it seems more likely from the evidence of the text itself that the audience was non-clerical. Throughout, the poem distinctly labels priests and servants of God as *preostas* (1. 60), *beodlareow* (1. 96), *beorn godes* (1. 178), and various forms of *sacerd* (1. 200). But the priests are always implicitly "other" than the *we* or *pu* that the poem is directed to. The tripartite distinction between the author, the priests, and the men to whom *Seasons* is directed is made explicit when the author of the poem assumes the first person plural and says:

\[
\text{and we bebeodað purh beorn godes}\]
\[
\text{þæt manna gehwilc be for moldan wunað}\]
\[
efen feowertig data fæsten hewe (11. 178-181).\]

That the *manna gehwilc* of line 179 is the audience of *Seasons* is further made evident when the poet directly addresses his audience as *folces mann(a)* in 11. 202 and 212. It is, thus, the man of the people--the common man--who is the audience of *Seasons for Fasting*. Such a reading of *folces manna* is consistent with all other uses of the term in Old English. Ælfric uses varying forms of *folces manna* more than any other Anglo-Saxon writer. The phrase appears at least

seven times in his works, and in each case it is clear that he uses it to refer to the laity. Typical of Ælfric's use of folces manna is his discussion of the resurrection of Lazarus where he writes that after Christ raised Lazarus "manega ðæs folces menn gelyfdon on þone Hælend." Ælfric also clearly marks the difference between priests and the laity when he writes that there "wær on halige sacerdas Gode þeonende, þa mid soðre lære and mid halgum gebysnungum folces menn to Gode symle gebigdon." Folces manna is further used to refer to the laity in the Confessionale Pseudo-Egberti, the Poenitentiale Pseudo-Egberti, Leviticus, the Regularis Concordia, and the Laws of Wihtred. The law code's use of folcesmannes is particularly noteworthy since it provides an official use of the term to distinguish between layman and cleric. The code states:


58 Thorpe, Homilies, p. 206.

59 Ibid., p. 544.


The evidence of these sources indicates a lay audience to be the referent of *folces mannes* in *Seasons for Fasting*. This common, unsophisticated audience in addition to the poet's limitations may largely account for the clear, uncomplicated, unallusive quality of the didactic portions of the poem as well as for the sensational depiction of the wayward priest.

Briefly, then, *Seasons for Fasting* is an Old English poem whose alliterative stanzaic form places it both within and without the OE alliterative tradition. It is a conventionally didactic poem which achieves its ends by tapping into the most fundamental of Christian themes but is finally unconventional in its "English" stance on the dating of Ember and in its delivery of an attack on corrupt priests to a lay audience. And, it is a poem whose very tone and expression are determined by that unsophisticated audience. *Seasons for Fasting* is not great literature, but it is good preaching, simultaneously clearly didactic and effectively lurid.

**Source**

Little definite can be said concerning a source for *Seasons for Fasting*. Sisam remarks that the stanzaic form of the poem indicates late composition and Latin influence. It is tempting to

---

62 Ibid.
63 Sisam, *Studies*, p. 46.
imagine a single Latin or vernacular source for this poem. However, considering the poet's debt to the Bible and to Wulfstan for specific lines, themes, and perhaps, even tone, *Seasons for Fasting* is likely a pastiche of borrowings from and adaptations of both Latin and vernacular writings. It may also be argued that the sources for *Seasons for Fasting* are likely prose. The poem owes much to the Anglo-Saxon sermon tradition as evidenced by its hortatory tone and its inheritance from Wulfstan and Ælfric (for folces manna).
CHAPTER II

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Note

Variant readings are indicated in the textual notes at the foot of each page. My emendations are indicated by an asterisk *. MS = MS. Add. 43703; D = Dobbie; H = Holthausen. Separate references to the edition of Maria Grimaldi have been omitted since she follows Dobbie exactly.

MS abbreviations are silently expanded: 7 = and; ɹ = pæt; ɹ = ge; ō = om; ɹ = im; ū = um; ɹ = mm; ū = un.

MS spelling is retained unless it causes definite confusion or gives an unintelligible word.
I

Wæs on ealddagum Israhela folc

þurh Moysen, mærne lareow,
onlyht and gelæred, swa hine lifes frea,
heofona heahcyning, her on life
þurh his sylfes word sette for leodum,
rincum to ræde, and him runa gescead
sylfum asæde, hu he þone sopan weg
leofum leodscipe læran sceolde.

II

Þa se leoda fruma larum fyligde
heofena heahcyninges, and þa hæleþ samod,
swa hie on leodscipe lærede wæron;
gyf hie wancule weorce ongunnan,
heom þaes of heofonum hearm to leane
asende sigora god, and hie sona to him
fryþa wilnodan and þær fundon ræpe,
gif hie leahtras heora letan gewyrþan.

---

1 Israhela-H] Israheala-MS, D 3 onlyht-[*] anlyht-MS, D, H
gelæ red-H] gelared-MS, D 4 heofona-*] heofna-MS, D, H 5 þurh-D, H]
þurh þurh-MS 8 sceolde-D, H] sceold-MS 11 lærede] lærede-H
III

Feala is mægena pe sio mære þeod
on þam heresctype heold and worhte,
þebdan hie lifes frean lufian woldon;
ac him se ende wearð earm and dreorig
þa hie besyredon sylfne dryhten,
on beam setton and to byrgenne
* * * gedemdon; he þær bedigled wæs,
and þy þryddan dæge þeodum æt wyed.

IV

We þæt gehydrin hæleþa mænige
on bocstafum breman and wítan,
þæt hie fæstenu feower heoldon
and þonne offredan unmae neat,
þæt is lamb oppe styrc, leofum to tacne
þe for woruld wæs womma bedæled.

18 herescype] heresctipe-H 19 þebdan] penden-H 20 dreorig-H]
Ac arisan ongan  

rices ealdor

of byrgenne,  

blæda gefylled,

and mid heofenwarum  

ham gesohte,

eard mid englum,  

and us eallum þone

hyht and hateð,  

gyf we his willab  

35

þurh rihtne sefan  

rædum fyligan.

Na þær in cumeð  

atele gefylled,

womo gewesed,  

ac scal on wyrd sceacan.

VI

Nu we herian sceolan  

her for life

deorne dædfruman,  

and him dogeara gerim  

40

ælmesdædum  

ure gefyllan,

and on fæstenum,  

swa se froda iu

Moyses mælde,  

and we þa mearce sceolan

heoldan higefaeste  

*** mid Anglum,

swa hie gebrefde us  

beorn on Rome  

45

Gregorius,  

gumena papa.

35 hyht and hateð-*] hyht  
hateð-MS] hygb and gehateð-H


healdan-H higefaeste] hygefaeste-H ***] [her]-H  46 Gregorius]

Gregorious-H.
VII

We þæt forme sceolan fæsten heowan
on þære ærestan wucan længtenes,
on þam monþe þe man Martius
geond Romwara rice nemnað,
and þær twelfe sceolan torhtum dihte
runa gerædan in þaes rican hofe,
heofona heahcyninges, herian mid sange,
wlancne weorgþian wuldres bryttan.

VIII

Ofer þa Eastertid oper fæsten
ys to bremenæe Brytena leodum
mid gelicum lofe, þe gelesen hafað
on þær wucan þe æfter cumað
þam sunnandæge þe geond sidne wæng
Pentecostenes dæg preostas nemnað,
on þam monþe, þæs þe me þincæð,
þe man Iunius gearum nemde.

50 nemnað] nemneð -D, H 51 sceolan] sceolon-H dihte-i over y-MS
56 ys] is-H 57 gelesen] geleafan-H 58 þær] þære-D[anr [e]-H
IX

Donne is þæt prydde  þinga gehwelces
fæstæn on foldan  fyra beornum
dihhte gelicum  on þam deoran hofe
to brymenne  beorhtum sange
on þære wucan  þe ærrur byð
emnihtes dæg  ælda beornum,
on þam monpe,  mine gefræge,
þe man September  * * * genemmeð.

X

We þæt feorpe sceolne  fæste gelæsten
on þære wucan  þe bið ærrur full
dryhtnes gebyrde,  and we mid deornum scylan
wordum and weorcum  wuldres cyninge
in þa ylcan tid  ealle gemynde
þeodne deman  þinga gehwylces,
efne swa swa ærran,  and þone arwesæn
leofne leoda frean  lifes biddan.

XI

On þissum fæstenum is se forba dæg
and sixta samod seofoba getinge
and to gelæstanne lifes ealdre
to bremenighe boca gerynum;
emb þa nigoban tyd nan is on eorpan,
butan hine unhæl an gebreatinge,
þæs þe ust boca dom þeodlic demeð

XII

Gif þe bonne secgan suban cymene
bryttan opbe Franca, þæt þu gebann sceole
her on eorpan ænig healdan,
þæs þe Moyses iu mælde to leodum,
na þu þæs andfeng æfre gewyrþe,
ac þu þæt sylf heald þæt þe suban com
from Romana rices hyrde,
Gregoriae gumena papa.

XIII

Dus he gesette sylf ond dyhte

þa þenunga, þeodlareow,
fæ stendtida; we þam forþ nu gyt
geond Engla land estum filiað.
Sancte Petres preostas syppan

lange lifes tyd leordun þæt sylfe,
þæt þu oprum ne scealt æfre filian.

XIV

Eac we feowertig daga fæsten healdan

ær þæm æriste ures dryhtnes,
þæt nu lengtentid leoda nemnað,
and hit ærest ongan eorl se goda,
mære Moyses, ær he on munt styge;
he þæt fæsten heold feowertig daga
and nyhta samod, swa he nahtes anbate
ær he þa deoran æ dryhtnes anfenge.
XV

Him þær gesalde sylfe dryhten
bremne boca craeft, þæle behlæned,
of his haligan handa gescrifene,
het hine leodum þone leoran and tæcan
elda orbancum eallum to tacne,
þæt we mid fæstene magon freode gewinnan
and þa deopan dryhtnes gerynu,
þæ þe leoran sceolan leoda gehwylce,
gif us þære dugupe hwæt dryhten sylfeð.

XVI

Eft Helias, eorl se mæra,
him on westene wiste geþigede,
þær him symbolbread somod mid waetere
dryhtnes engla sum dihte togeanes,
and se gestrangud weard styþum gyflæ
to gefæstenne feowertig daga
and nihta somod, swa he nahtes anbat
ær he on Horeb dun hali ferde.

XVII

Uton ðæt gerine rihte gehicgan,
ðæt se mæra þegn mihta ne hæfde
to astigenne stæppon on ypplen
ær him ðæt symbel wearð seald fram engle.
We sint on westene wul tres blisse
on þæm ænete ealra gefeana;
nu is helpes tid, halig dryhten,
hu we munt þinne mærne gestygan.

XVIII

Sint for englas geteald eorpburgendum
þæ þe dryhtnes word þædum lærad.
We þa andlifene ofstum þycgen
and þone deoran wist, dryhtnes lare;
uton fæstan swa fyrene þædum
on forhæ fenesse her for life,
þæt we þæs muntes mægen mærþa gestigen
swa se ealda dyda Elias iu.
XIX

Is to hicganne hu se halga gewat
of þissum wangstede wuldres neosian;
hine fyren scryd feower mærum
wlangum wicgum on weg ferede
on neorxnawong, þær us nergend Crist
gehaten hafað ham mid blisse,
gif we þæt fæsten her fyrena gelæstað
and bune uplican æpel secað.

XX

Nu wæs æt nehnstan þæt us nergend Crist,
halig heofenes weord, heolp and lærde.
He hine dyppan let deorum þweale,
fulwihtes bað, fyrena bedæled,
and he feowertig daga firsude metta,
eac nihta swa feala nanuht gyltig,
leodum to lare, þæt hie on lengten sceolan
efen feowertig daga fæsten hewan.

Hi ne costude þær Cristes gewinna
on þæm æ nete eald and fræte,
geseah mærne frean mannum gelicne
and þa wenan ongann, wommes gemyndig,
þæt he stræla his stellan mihte
on þam lichoman; næs þæ s leahtra man,
ac on hinder gewat hearmes brytta,
and þær englas hyra ealdor sohtan.

Higesynning man gyf þæ susla weard
costian durre, þonne he Crist dyde,
werede wuldeferfan, womma leasne,
ne mæg he þæs inne ahwæt scotian
gif he myrcels næfþ manes æt egum,
ac he on hinder scrib, and he halig * * *
inglas ærfæste æghwær helpað,
gif þu dryhtnes her dædum fylgest.
XXIII

Hæbbe we nu gemearcod      hu þa mæran iu

bæt feowertig daga      fæsten hewdon
and we bebeodað        þurh beorn godes

þæt manna gehwilc      þe for moldan wunan
ær þam ærestæ       ures dryhtnes      180

efen feowertig daga      fæsten hewe
op þa nigoban tid,  and he na bruce
flæses oppe fyrna,      þæ læs þe he fah wese.

XXIV

Sceolan sacerdas      singan mæssan,
dæghwamlice         dryhten biddan      185

on þam fæstenne      þæt he freond wese
folce gynd foldan     and þa fyrna sceolan

þam sacerdan      secgan gehwilce
and þa dymnissa     dædum betan

wordes and weorces,       wuldres ealdor    190
þurh æimesdæde            eall gegladian.

__________________________________________________________________

XXV

Donne is þearf micel þeode maenium
þæt þa sacerdos sylfne ne gyltan,
no on leahtrum hiora ligege to faeste.
Hwa mæg þyngian þreale hwilcum
wïp his arwesan, gyf he him ærur hæfð
bitere onbolgen, and þæs bote ne deð,
ac þa æbyligbe ealdere wrohte,
dæ ghwamlice dæ dum niwð?

XXVI

Gyf se sacerd hine sylfne ne cunne
þurh dryhtnes ege dugeþum healdan
nu þa, folces mann, fyrna ni gyme
þe gehalgode mann her gefremme,
ac þu lare scealt lustum fremman
ryththicgennde þe he to ræði tæ chð,
ðrince he him þæt drofe duge hlutter þe
wæter of wege, þæt is wuldra lare.

204 fremman] frennan-MS 205 rhyt. . .] riht-H ræði] ræ-ðe-D, H
tæ chð] tæ cþ-D 206 duge hlutter] [opþe þæt] dæ ghlutter-D, H
207 wege] wege [sidan]-H lare] lar-H.
XXVII

Ac ic secgan mæg, sorgum hremig,

hu þa sacerdas sace niwiað,

dæ ghwamlice dryhten gremiað

and mid æles te ælcne forlædað

þe him fylian wyle folces manna;

sona hie on mergan mæssan syngad

and forbegide, þurst e gebæded,

æfter tæppere teop geond stræta.

XXVIII

Hwæt! Hi leaslice leogan ongynnad

and þone tæppere tyhtap gelome,

secgæ þæ t he synleas syllan mote

ostran to æte and æpele wyn

emb morgentyd, þæ s þe me þingað

þæ t hund and wulf healdad þa ilcan

wisan on worulde and ne wigliað

hwæn nne hie to mose fon, mæ ða bedæled.

XXIX

Hi þonne sittende sadian aginnað, win seniað, syllad gé lame,

225
cweðað goddßife gumena gehwilcum

bæt wines dreng welhwa mote,
sæppan he mæssan hafað, meðig þicgen,
etan ostran eac and ðeperre 230

fisc of flode

Translation

The tribe of Israel was in ancient days by means of Moses, great teacher, enlightened and taught, as the Lord of life, high king of the heavens, through His own word here in life established him before the people, as a benefit to men, and to him [God] Himself related understanding of mysteries, how he ought to teach the beloved nation the true way.

Then the leader of the people, and the warriors likewise, followed the teachings of the high king of the heavens just as they in the nation were taught; if they began unsteady deeds, the God of victories consequently sent to them from the heavens affliction as reward, and they immediately entreated peace from him and there quickly found [it] if they abandoned their sins.

Great is the power which the glorious nation accomplished and maintained among the war troop, as long as they desired to love the Lord of life; but for them the end came to be wretched and sad, when they ensnared the Lord Himself, placed [Him] on the tree and into the grave * * * condemned; He was concealed there, and the third day appeared to the people.
4

We learned that many men celebrate and write in books that they held four fasts and at that time offered a pure beast, that is a lamb or calf, as a sign for the Dear One who was spotless before the world.

5

But the Lord of power proceeded to arise from the grave, filled with glories, and with heaven dwellers sought home, home among the angels, and He promises that joy for us all, if we desire through true heart to follow his plans. By no means therein will come [one] cast down with wretchedness, drenched with sin, but that one must hasten to doom.

6

Now we ought to praise here while we live the dear Deeddoer, and for him fill our count of days with almsdeeds and in fasts, just as the wise Moses formerly taught, and resolutely we ought to hold the schedules *** with the English; as the man in Rome, Gregory, Pope of men, wrote them briefly for us.

7

We ought to hold that first fast in the first week of Lent in that month which one calls March throughout the kingdom of the Romans, and there ought to read of the mysteries of the twelve lessons brightly appointed in the house of the Ruler, of the
Highking of heavens, to exalt with song, to honor the proud giver of glory.

8

During the Eastertide is the second fast for the people of Britain, those who have learning, to celebrate with equal praise, in the week which comes after the Sunday which throughout the wide land priests call the day of Pentecost, in the month, so it seems to me, which one certainly called June.

9

Then is that third fast likewise appointed of each of things on earth for the children of men in the dear house, for celebrating with bright song in the week which is before the day of equinox for the children of men, in the month, as I have heard, which one names * * * September.

10

We ought to observe that fourth fast in the week which is complete before the birth of the Lord, and at the same time we ought with all our mind with excellent words and works deem the King of Glory the Prince of each of things, even just as before, and ask the honoured beloved Lord of people for life.
11

During these fasts is the fourth day and sixth together with the seventh immediately following to serve and to glorify with mysteries of books the Lord of life; concerning the none hour [there] is no one on earth, only unless sickness afflicts him, who may earlier taste food or drink, as the judgement of books deems proper for us.

12

If then, Bretons or Franks coming from the south say to you, that you must observe any ordinance here on earth, which Moses formerly taught to the people, you [should] never ever be an assenter to it, but [on the contrary] you [should] observe that same rule which came from the south from the guardian of the kingdom of the Romans, Gregory, Pope of men.

13

Thus, he himself established and ordered times of fasting for the ministry, the priests; we now still willingly follow them forth throughout England. Just as he himself ordained at the throne, Saint Peter's priests throughout long time of life taught the same, that you ought not ever follow others.

14

Also, we hold fast forty of days before the resurrection of our Lord, that people now call Lent, and the good leader first began
it, glorious Moses, before he ascended the mountain; he held that fast forty days and nights together, so he tasted of nothing before he received the beloved law of the Lord.

15

The Lord Himself, surrounded with fire, gave to him in that place glorious skill of books, appointed from His holy hands, commanded him to teach and to declare to the people the wisdom of ages as a sign to all that with fasting we may gain peace and the profound mysteries of the Lord, those which teach each of peoples, if the Lord is to give to us there something of benefit.

16

Afterwards, Elijah himself, the famous man, received food in the desert, where for him one of the angels of the Lord set out feast bread along with water, and he came to be strengthened with supporting food to fast forty days and nights together; thus he ate nothing before he, holy, ascended Mount Horeb.

17

Let us rightly consider that mystery that the glorious thane had not the power to ascend, to proceed, onto the summit before that feast came to be given to him by the angel. We are in the desert with respect to the bliss of glory in the solitude [away from] all joys; now is the time of help, holy Lord, how [ought] we to ascend your glorious mountain?
18

Those who while dwelling on earth teach the word of God with deeds are numbered before the angels. We that nourishment speedily accept and the beloved food, the teaching of the Lord; so let us fast for deeds of sin, in abstinence for life here, that we may ascend this mountain of glories as the old one Elijah formerly did.

19

It is [for us] to consider how the saint departed from this place to seek glory; a fiery chariot with four splendid, proud steeds carried him on the way into paradise, where Christ Saviour has promised us home with joy, if we perform that fast for sins here and seek the heavenly home.

20

Now at last [it] was that Christ Saviour, holy guardian of heaven, helped and taught us. He allowed himself to be baptized in the precious bath, immersion of baptism, freed of sins, and he forty days put foods far away, likewise so many nights nowhit guilty, as instruction to the people, that they during Lent ought to fulfill the fast exactly forty of days.

21

The old and proud foe of Christ tempted him there in that solitude, saw the glorious Lord in likeness to men and began to think, mindful of sin, that he might place his arrows in the body;
there was not with respect to that [attempt] any of sins, but the giver of affliction departed behind and in that place angels sought their Lord.

22

Mindsinful man, if the guardian of torments dare to tempt you, just as he did Christ, glorious Lord of hosts, without sin, he may not therein shoot anything whatever if he has not before [his] eyes a target of guilt, but he goes on behind, and He holy *** merciful angels everywhere help, if you here follow the deeds of the Lord.

23

Now we have marked how the glorious ones formerly held that fast forty of days, and we command, through the priest, that each of men who dwells over the earth, before the resurrection of our Lord, hold fast fully forty days until the ninth hour, and he should not enjoy flesh or sins lest he be outlawed.

24

Priests ought to sing mass daily, to ask the Lord in that fasting that he be a friend to people throughout the earth, and [they] ought to tell the priests each of sins and to amend the darkness with deeds of word and of work, through charity all to gladden the Lord of Glory.
Then is great need for many of people that the priests themselves not sin, nor in their sins lie too firm. Who may intercede for any thrall with his lord if he has before sharply angered him, and the remedy performs not, but performs the offence against the master, daily renews [it] with deeds.

If the priest knows not to conduct himself with virtue through fear of the Lord, now then, man of the people, heed not sins the ordained man performs here, but you ought righteously to perform with zeal the teaching which he for good counsel teaches; though he should drink [the] dirty, let the pure water which is divine doctrine do you good.

But I may say, lamenting with sorrows, how the priests renew strife, daily enrage the Lord and with enmity lead astray each of men of the people who desire to follow them; as soon as they sing mass in the morning [they are] consumed [with thirst], urged by thirst, and after the tapster roam through the streets.

Lo! They falsely begin to lie and often draw out the tapster, say that he might without sin give oysters for food and noble wine
during the morningtide; it seems to me that the hound and wolf hold
the same way in the world and hesitate not when they seize food,
lacking all continence.

Sitting, they then begin to sate [themselves], bless the wine,
pour repeatedly, say "goodlife" to each of men, [say] that anyone
exhausted after he has mass might partake of drink of wine, also eat
oysters and other fish from the water. . . .
CHAPTER III

COMMENTARY

1 Israhela] 3 onlyht, gelæred] 4 heofona] M. S. readings are Israhela, onlyht, gelare, heofna and are emended in concurrence with Sisam (Studies in the History of Old English Literature (Oxford, 1953), pp. 59-60) and Heyworth's ("The Old English 'Seasons of Fasting,'" Medieval Studies, 26 (1964), 358-59) comparison of Wanley's 1705 copy of the incipit of Seasons for Fasting and Nowell's copy of the same lines. Wanley's copy of the incipit in his Catalogus Historico-Criticus (Oxford, 1705), p. 219 reads:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wæs on eallddaggum} & \text{ Israhela folc} \\
\text{būrh Moysen, mærne lærew,} & \text{onlyht and gelære,} \\
\text{heofona heahcyning} & \text{her on life.}
\end{align*}
\]

Sisam notes that "in every case Wanley's is the spelling one would expect," but more important, Heyworth argues convincingly for Wanley's superiority to Nowell as a copyist. In this edition substantial emendations will only be made when there is evidence of a better copy of the same lines.

4 her on life] Sisam notes (Studies (1953), pp. 47-48) that Seasons and The Creed (a roughly stanzaic poem--ASPR 6, pp. 78-80) have two lines in common "that are not found elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon verse." Where Seasons 1. 4 reads

\[
\text{heofona heahcyning, heofona heahcyning, heofona heahcyning, heofona heahcyning, her for life;}
\]

70
Likewise *Seasons* 151 reads

and bone uplican æbel secað

and *Creed* 37 = bone uplican ebel secan.

Sisam goes on to say that *Seasons* and *Creed* share unmaene, "pure," a word not elsewhere found in the OE poetic corpus and both poets "apply the adjective *wlanc* to the divinity." Considering these sharings and other mutual but "less distinctive tricks of style," Sisam concludes that it is "reasonably certain that *Fasting* and *Creed* are by the same author; certainly they belong to the same school."

6 *runa gescead*] "understanding of mysteries." It is, perhaps noteworthy that this poet consistently thinks of religious practice in terms of "mystery." See 11. 53, 83, 117, 128.

12 *ongunnan*] for *ongunnon*. Vowel confusion in weakly stressed final syllables is common in *Seasons*. Most notably -an is often, but not universally, confused for -on in pret. pl. -an for -on occurs at lines 15, 16, 41, 47, 51, 64, 118, 158, 167, and 187 while the correct -on ending is used in lines 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, and 177. This confusion is, perhaps, the result of the decay of inflections since the poem is of late date, but it is just as likely that Nowell is responsible for this confusion. See R. J. S. Grant, "Laurence Nowell's Transcript of BM Cotton Otho Bxi," *ASE*, 3 (1974), 118-21.

15 *frypa*] Dobbie wonders if this is "for frypu, 'peace,' the indeclinable feminine noun" and thus either gen. sg. or acc. sg.; Holthausen says ("Ein Altenglisches Gedicht Über Die Fastenzeiten," *Anglia*, 71 (1953), 199) that *frypa* is a "gen. Sg. nach der u-Klasse."
Dobbie is probably correct here. Throughout Nowell's transcript, errors and confusion of unstressed vowels in final syllables are abundant.

16 [leahtras] Both Dobbie and Holthausen incorrectly read the MS as leothras and emend to leahtras. gewyrpan] Dobbie emends to gewyrpan, "to recover, get better," and Holthausen agrees. Sisam, however, keeps gewyrpan, translating it "abandon." His argument allows the MS reading to be retained and is followed here.

18 [herescype] As Holthausen rightly notes, this is "ein neues Wort."

20 [dreorig] MS reads breoring. All commentators agree that breoring is unintelligible. Dobbie opts for emending to prealic while Meroney (MP, 41 (1943-44), 199), Holthausen and Sisam all prefer dreorig. Dreorig is preferable because it makes good sense and is closer to the MS.

23a For this lacuna Dobbie suggests an adverb or adjective alliterating in d—perhaps deadne, deopne, or dierne. Holthausen agrees with deadne as does Sisam while Whitbread ("Notes on the Seasons for Fasting," NQ, 191 (1946), 250) suggests a noun--dome or dryhtne, and Meroney offers to deade. It is possible that any of these suggestions is correct; however, considering the fact, as Sisam remarks, that in this poem the "proportion of single words omitted... is unusually high" and that "none of them is essential for the sense," the lacunae in Seasons are likely the product of an inept poet who simply could not find an appropriate word to fill out his meter.
25-30] Stanza 4 has only 6 lines and is thus short two lines of conforming to the regular eight line stanza form of this poem. Sisam thinks that since 26 of the 29 stanzas have 8 lines, the irregular ones, 4 and 15 (which has 9 lines), also probably once had the regular 8 lines. He further contends that in stanza 4 "to explain the symbolism of the sacrifice of lamb or heifer, a reference to the crucifixion is needed" and offers two lines "with the content 'yet was crucified by the Jews and buried for dead'" as having "been omitted by a kind of homoeoteleuton." Actually, though meager, the sense of this stanza is complete, and while Professor Sisam's suggestion is reasonable, it is possible that the poet simply had no more to say, and he stopped.

35 hyht] Dobbie tentatively posits this as a decayed form of hyhteð, "hopes," while Holthausen disagrees, maintaining that the shortened word should be hyged from hycgan. Sisam suggests that and should be deleted from 35a, and hyht should be translated "joy." I would suggest that 35a should read hyht and hateð. Nowell abbreviates both and = ȝ and ge(hateð) = Ꞩ (hateð). Nowell forms the ampersand and the yogh very similarly in this line, and it seems likely that he simply repeated the initial stroke of the ampersand form before hateð and automatically completed it as the acceptable but meaningless prefix Ꞩ.

38 gewesed] Holthausen emends to gewered. The change is unnecessary since "soaked" or "drenched" with sin makes good sense contextually. on wyrd] Sisam objects to on wyrd as "unparalleled" and suggests forwyrd, citing Andreas 1549b as precedent. This
change is unnecessary since, unparalleled or not, on wyrd is intelligible.

40 dogear] Dobbie: "It seems necessary to omit the MS do"; As Whitbread notes, "This change seems clearly wrong" (p. 250). In eliminating do, Dobbie eliminates the head stave alliteration in l. 40. Subsequent commentators are correct in seeing dogear as some form of dogra, "days"; Holthausen prints dogra; Meroney suggests dogear; Leslie ("Textual Notes on the Seasons for Fasting," JEGP, 52 (1953), 555) offers dogera. Meroney is right in keeping the MS dogear even though as Leslie says, he provides no "account for the form." The e/ea confusion evident in the spelling dogear is in accord with the general vowel confusion in the MS.

43 mearce] Translate "schedule" in accordance with the expressed idea that Moses of old, and more recently, Gregory I had provided the English with a specific schedule of observance for fasts. Two other attractive possibilities are that mearce is used here in a technical sense as in Byrthferth's Manual (Ed. Crawford, EETS, V, 177, p. 152), the "mark" of the final day or terminus of the Paschal cycle, indicating here the true limit of any of the subject fast periods. And it is possible that mearce refers to literal observation of the appropriate fast days as marked out on the calendars of the period (see English Kalendars Before A. D. 1100, ed. Francis Wormald (London: Harrison & Sons, 1934)).

47 heowan] Dobbie notes there is no other recording of this verb in OE. Nonetheless, it is a favorite of this poet, occurring at 11. 159 (hewan), 177 (hewdon), and 181 (hewe) where it consistently
means the same thing as hegan (which Holthausen emends to). Dobbie
argues that "The alternation of intervocalic g and w is not unpara-
leled; see hiwan, hiwan, 'companions, members of a household.'" No
emendation is required.

51-52 twelpe ... runa] following Dobbie, this refers to the
sabbatum duodecim lectionem, the Ember week lessons for Saturday.

51 torhtum dihte] "brightly appointed" indicating, perhaps,
an illuminated or rubricated copy of the twelpe runa.

52 rican hofe] the church building.

57 be gelesen hafad] Dobbie sees this as meaningless, and
Sisam marks it a crux. Leslie suggests gelesnis, "redemption";
Meroney offers be [his] gelæs[t]en hafad. I retain the MS reading
glesen as a corrupt form of geles--"learning, study, reading," and
57b as modifying 56b.

73 deornum] follow Sisam and Holthausen who read deorum,
"good, pleasing to God, excellent."

80 seofopa] Dobbie is correct in emending since MS feorpa
neither alliterates nor makes sense. getinge] Sisam is right in
considering Dobbie's getinge, "eloquent," a strained reading.
Rather, as Sisam suggests, getinge = getenge, "immediately
following."

85 æt] Emendation is correct here. Variations of the æt
oppe wæt formula are common (see Bosworth-Toller, waet, p. 1159),
and the meaning "food or drink" fits the context. picgan] likewise
Whitbread and Holthausen are correct in emending. In conjunction
with æt oppe wæt, picgan makes sense. Translate 85 "who may, sooner taste food or drink."

83-85] The meaning of these lines is made clear if they are compared to the strikingly similar 11. 16-18 of Wulfstan's Sermo in XL (The Homilies of Wulfstan, ed. Bethurum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 233): "pæt æfre ænig cristen man ænige dæg ær nontide naðor ne abyrige ne ætes ne wætes buton hit for unhæle sy."

88 brytt Franca] Sisam's suggestion that this line should read Bryttan obbe Francan is correct as borne out by R. J. S. Grant ("A Note on 'The Seasons for Fasting,'" RES, 23 (1972), 303-304). Grant, however, disagrees with emending brytt to bryttan because "the usual strong form of the noun would be quite acceptable." Grant's essay is important because in it he compares Whelock's 1643-44 transcription of 11. 87-94 of Seasons as he found it in MS Otho Bxi with Nowell's copy of the same lines. Whelock's transcription of 1. 88 reads Brytt. obbe Franca // pæt pu gebann sceole. Wanley's 1705 copy of the incipit (11. 1-7) and Whelock's copy of 11. 87-94 are the only cross-checks we have on Nowell's copy of Seasons. These cross-checks lead to two conclusions: Nowell was not as careful a copyist as Wanley and Whelock, and MS. Otho Bxi was already corrupt when Nowell copied it.

91 na pu . . . gewyrpe] Following Sisam translate: "You never ever be an assenter to it," reading anfeng as anfenga.

109 anbate] Holthausen is correct in reading this onbat- pret. sg. of onbitan. MS spelling is retained here because vowel
confusion before a nasal is common in the MS (also, see Bosworth-Toller, onbitan, p. 747 for ambite), and the final e is typical of Nowell's careless approach to vowels in unstressed syllables, especially final e, perhaps a reflection of the grammatical meaninglessness of final e in Renaissance spelling.

112 bæle behlæned] "surrounded with fire" refers to dryhten; see Exod. XIX, 18.

115 orbancum] MS onbancum is unintelligible. Orbancum is obviously the intended word.

118 leoran] leora makes no sense and should be leoran as in 1. 114.

124ff.] See I Kings XIX, 4-8.

129 begun] MS hegen, as Dobbie notes, is meaningless here, and begun, indicating the messenger of God, makes good sense.

133 ænete] Dobbie is right in reading this anaede, a dat. sg. of ṃanad, "desert."

140 faestan . . . fyrene] Dobbie and Holthausen translate "abstain from deeds of sin" as in Daniel V, 591.

150 faesten . . . fyrena] see l. 140 and note.

156 firshude] MS firude is unintelligible. Dobbie is correct in emending to firshude, pret. of fyrsian, "to remove to a distance."

164 stellan] Holthausen is wrong in saying "stellan ist sinnlos" and suggesting "stel a 'stahlen, harten.'" Stellan, "to give a place to, set, place," is clumsy, but it makes sense. For expression of the same idea, see Wulfstan's Sermo de Baptismate,

175 gif...fylgest] The MS is accurate here. Following Sisam and Meroney, translate "if you here follow the deeds of the Lord." Dobbie's preference for dat. sg. dryhtne would miss the point of the stanza that the Christian should follow the example of Christ.

179 be for] Both Sisam and Holthausen emend to be ofer which makes better sense than the MS reading. Translate: "Who dwell throughout the earth."

187-190a] Dobbie translates "And they (the folc l. 187a) should tell to the priests each of sins (...) and remedy with [their] deeds the darkness of word and of work," and Holthausen agrees: "wordes and weorces gehört zu dimnissa." A reading more consonant with the ælmesdæde of l. 191a and with the exhortation of stanza 22, to follow the deeds of Christ, would be "and [they] ought to tell the priests each of sins and to amend the darkness with deeds of word and of work."

198-199] Dobbie's reading is unclear, and Sisam translates "but daily renews by his actions the injury of the old offence (ealdere wrohte)." Rather, with Holthausen read ealdere as Prince (the arwesan of l. 196a) and translate "but performs the offence against the Prince, daily renews [it] with deeds."

200-201 hine...healdan] see Bosworth-Toller, p. 518, healdan, IV.

206-207] Following Sisam and Leslie, retain the MS reading. Translate with Sisam, "though he should drink dirty [water], let
the pure water which is divine doctrine do you good." Meroney keeps the MS reading with the exception of offering two minor changes: be swe (l. 206) and as an alternative to be swe, he suggests be dugebe (l. 206). Holthausen sees an allusion to Psalm 109 (110) in l. 206; Schabram ("The Seasons for Fasting 206f. Mit einem Beitrag zur ae. Metrik, "Britannica Festschrift fur Hermann M. Flasdieck," ed. W. Iser & H. Schabram (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1960), 221-240) disagrees with Holthausen.

211 æleste] Dobbie and Holthausen emend to æfest, "enmity." This emendation is followed here despite the attractiveness of Sisam's suggestion that MS ælest = "neglect of religious law." This suggestion is rejected on two counts: it requires the acceptance of a hypothetical paradigm--"æ, æleas, æliest," and Sisam's objection to "enmity" as contextually inappropriate is not valid. Considering the description of lax priests both here and in ll. 192-99, "enmity" is appropriate.

214 forbegide, burste] Follow Sisam who translates this as "'consumed with thirst,'" citing Hine begeb burst (Leechdoms, Ed. Cockayne, ii (1895), p. 60/7); burste gebegede (Christ III, 1510); and ecgum ofbegde (Genesis, 2002) as support for this reading.

222-223 and . . . bedæled] ne wigliað has caused much difficulty. Dobbie tentatively offers "divine, foresee" from wiglian. Sisam suggests ne bewitiað, "take no heed." But the most attractive and contextually sensible reading is that of Meroney who sees wigliað "as the earliest occurrence of English 'wiggle,'" here
meaning 'zogern, zweifeln' (cf. Holthausen, Altenl. etym. Wörterbuch, s. v. wiglian). Holthausen likewise reads wigliač as a variation of wigliaë, 'schwanken, zogern.' Following Meroney and Holthausen, translate: "and hesitate not when they seize food, lacking continence."

223 mæða bedæled] See Wulfstan, Homily 157, l. 19 (Napier ed.).

225 win seniað] Sisam and Leslie are correct in rejecting Dobbie's sinne semað. The troublesome word here is seniað, which Dobbie reads as semað. As Leslie notes, this sort of "Confusion is caused in a number of places in the text because Nowell in his transcription uses a hooked variety of i, which he often joins to the preceding letter if this ends in a minim"; cf. heahcyning (1. 4a, as if heahcymng), nihta (1. 157a, as if mhta), hī (1. 40, as if m), mine (1. 69, as if mne).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. MANUSCRIPT

British Library MS. Add. 43703, ff. 257r-260v.

B. EDITIONS


C. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY MATERIALS RELEVANT TO SEASONS FOR FASTING


Flower, Robin. "Laurence Nowell and a Recovered Anglo-Saxon Poem." BMQ, 8 (1934), 130-32.


Grant, R. J. S. "A Note on 'The Seasons for Fasting.'" RES, 23 (1972), 302-4.


Heyworth, P. L. "The Old English 'Seasons of Fasting.'" MS, 26 (1964), 358-59.


Wheloc, Abraham. Historiae Ecclesiasticae Gentis Anglorum Libri V. Cambridge, 1643-44.


VITA

Chadwick Buford Hilton, Jr. was born in Lebanon, Virginia, on September 29, 1949. He attended public schools in Birmingham, Alabama, Falls Church, Virginia, Sunnyvale, California, and Winston-Salem, North Carolina. In 1967 he enrolled in The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, graduating with an A. B. in 1971. After serving as an officer in the United States Air Force, he entered graduate school at North Carolina State University, receiving his M. A. in 1975. He then taught for a year as an instructor at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. His doctoral work in Old English was completed, with the aid of a Thaler Travelling Fellowship, at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 1983.