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A tale of two seasons: Twelfth-century rulership and power in four poetic debates between Winter and Summer

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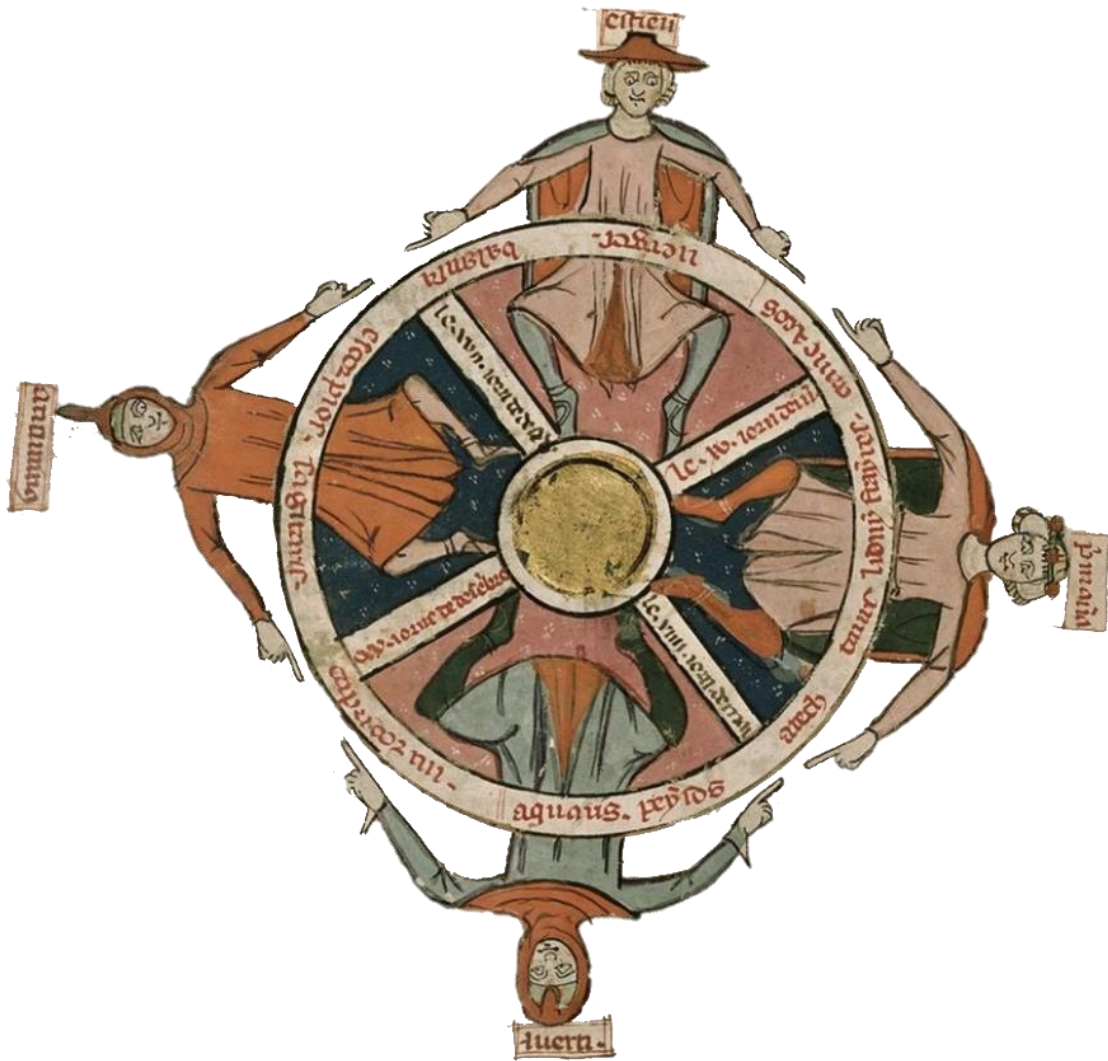
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A tale of two seasons

Twelfth-century rulership and power in four poetic debates between Winter and Summer



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Introduction

The twelfth century is known for its many innovations, both in science and literature. Existing literary genres were expanded upon, but new forms of poetry were also invented. Some of these are clearly identifiable and can even have a known author, but very often, this is not the case. A lot of poetry from this time period is therefore difficult to type, and research on them can be challenging as a result – but at the same time, they can reveal intriguing insights on the twelfth-century worldview. This thesis is focused on four poems from the twelfth century that do just that: *Altercatio yemis et estatis* (hereafter referred to as the *Altercatio*), two versions of *Conflictus hyemis et estatis* (hereafter referred to as *CA* and *CB*) and *Estas et hiems*. These poems all feature a debate between Winter and Summer, in which both seasons are depicted as rulers. In this th *Twelfth-century rulership and power in four poetic debates between Winter and esis*, I explore how their conceptions of rulership and power fit into the general twelfth-century worldview.

Not much is known about these poems. They are all only attested once, in different manuscripts. Interestingly, none of the attestations are actually from the twelfth century: the *Altercatio* was found in a thirteenth-century manuscript, the versions of the *Conflictus* in a manuscript from the fourteenth century and *Estas et hiems* in one from the fifteenth century. The reason why I have specifically chosen these poems is that they were all included in the same edition: *Das lateinische Streitgedicht im Mittelalter* by Hans Walther, from 1920. This is an ambitious volume, which gives a very extensive introduction on debate poetry as a whole and then goes in depth on 21 different poetic debates. The poems cover countless topics and verse forms, ranging from a serious didactic poem about different faiths to a comical discussion between beer and wine. In order to place all of them under the same umbrella, they need to be looked at with quite a large scope. Walther provides exactly this in his definition of a *Streitgedicht*, or a ‘debate poem’, which he gives in his book’s introduction:

Ich nenne hier Streitgedichte im eigentlichen Sinne Gedichte, in denen zwei oder seltener mehrere Personen, personifizierte Gegenstände oder Abstraktionen zu irgend einem Zweck Streitreden führen, sei es um den eigenen Vorzug darzutun und die Eigenschaften des Gegners herabzusetzen oder um eine aufgeworfene Frage zu entscheiden.¹

¹ Walther, 1920 (reis. 1984).

Because this definition is so broad, he continues by explaining that he uses debates from various genres as examples and contextualization. These include the *agôn* in Greek tragedy, Aesop's fables and even prose dialogues. Walther is reluctant to group the medieval poems in his edition into one 'genre', but he clearly intends to see them all in the same light: a discussion between two or more parties, where the goal is either to proclaim one's own superiority or to win an argument over a single statement. Though the poems seem to have been relatively well known in their specific environments, they did not seem to circulate widely - or at least not in standard versions, as the manuscript tradition suggests.²

After Walther, the poems received some attention, but they have rarely been in the centre of it. Most often, they are mentioned in larger volumes or literary histories. In the third volume of his *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* from 1931, Max Manitius discusses a number of debate poems, including the four this thesis is focused on. Because of the enormous scope of this work, he does not go into great detail: he mainly seeks to showcase them, and keeps his reading contained to summaries and some brief context. Some of Manitius' readings do not necessarily translate well into the 21st century. Manitius sometimes makes statements about what he perceives the quality of the poems to be, as well as how 'correct' the Latin is. Walther's edition was reprinted in 1984, after some small revisions by Paul Gerhard Schmidt.³ In 1997, Peter Stotz wrote a chapter on Latin debate poems in a large volume on literary debates from the Middle Ages. He notes that these texts are too diverse to properly distil into one 'genre', but that they have enough in common to at least be regarded as a 'text type'.⁴ His examination of the influence of other genres is more thorough than Walther's: rather than listing every possible debate from antiquity as influential, he takes their actual settings and details into account as well. In 2019, the poems were included in another large volume about medieval debate poetry, edited by Jörg O Fichte, Peter Stotz *et al.*⁵ The introduction of the poems follows Stotz quite closely, also noting – but not overstating – their similarity to other genres. When it comes to the poems discussed in this

² This observation is based on the fact that some of these debate poems have lines in common, even if their topic is different. An example from this thesis is the similarity between *CA* and the *Altercatio Ganimedis et Helene* (which is not included in Walther's edition).

³ This is the edition used in this thesis.

⁴ Stotz' chapter was written in Italian, as part of the volume *Il genere 'tenzone' nelle letterature romanze delle origini* (1997), edited by Matteo Pedroni and Antonio Stäuble. This volume contains the proceedings of a conference; I have used Stotz' original paper in German, which he published independently in 1999.

⁵ Fichte *et al.*, 2019.

thesis, it only features *CA*, for which it also provides a translation. This volume also draws a close link between debate poems and their use in education.

Alongside this, the poems are sometimes mentioned in literature on vernacular debate poetry, but the attention they receive rarely stretches beyond a mention. Dinah Wouters treads into more detail in an article from 2020, in which she connects Hildegards von Bingen's *Ordo Virtutum* to a debate between the virtues that is included in Walther's edition under the title *Streit der Töchter Gottes*. With this, she shows that these literary debates might have had far more influence on other twelfth-century literature than commonly thought, and that they deserve much more individual scholarly attention.⁶ I hope to contribute to this conversation with this thesis, though my focus will not be the literary influence of the four poems I selected; rather, I want to examine how they reflect twelfth-century political and intellectual ideas and values.

Before explaining how I aim to go about this, I feel like some contextualisation on the specific debate between seasons is in order. The earliest example of medieval debate poetry namely also features this as its main topic. This poem is called *Conflictus veris et hiemis* and it hails from the 8th century. I will not discuss it in the rest of this thesis, but it is still important to mention: it contextualises the topic of seasons in medieval debate poems, and it shows an example of how this type of poetry has been interpreted in scholarship.

The *Conflictus veris et hiemis* is sometimes seen as a pseudo-Vergilian poem, and this is not altogether undeserved. The lines used to introduce the debate and its participants are heavily modelled on *Eclogues* 3 and 7 – the only two eclogues to feature a literary contest like this – and they combine existing lines from Virgil in an almost cento-like fashion.⁷ Virgil did not invent the pastoral literary contest, nor the main characters' names, Palaemon and Daphnis: he, in turn, took them from Theocritus' bucolic poems. With this in mind, it becomes tempting to view *Conflictus veris et hiemis* and the ensuing Latin debate poetry about seasons as direct descendants of this tradition, even more so when taking into consideration that bucolic scenery is still very present in the poems from the twelfth century. But there lies a risk in doing this. By only focusing on the elements that fit within the tradition of the eclogue, the debate itself – which really is the core of the poem – fades into the background. This happens for example in Zogg's reading of the *Conflictus veris et hiemis*. He thoroughly examines

⁶ See Wouters, D. 2020. 'Drama and Debate: Hildegard of Bingen's *Ordo Virtutum* in the Context of Allegorical Debate Literature'. *European Medieval Drama* 24: 165-184.

⁷ For examples of this, as well as detailed description of all the other Vergilian references in the poem, see Zogg 2017.

exactly which lines of the poem correspond to Virgil, but does not have much to say about the middle part, except that it is decidedly un-Virgilian. In my opinion, there is a wasted opportunity here, because the stylistic shift he notes is actually very interesting. It has the opportunity to reveal things about the perceived value and perhaps even the purpose of the actual debate portion of the poem. For example, it could also be interpreted as an exercise in Latin, similarly to the tradition of the colloquy.⁸ This reading does the poem far more justice than just viewing it as a mediocre Virgilian imitation. A relevant figure in this aspect is Ademar of Chabannes, an eleventh-century monk and teacher to whom the medieval identification of Virgil as this poem's author is attributed. Ademar is noted for keeping an extensive personal florilegium in which he recorded texts that he presumably found useful for his students.⁹ The florilegium includes this poem, with the header '*Virgilii de vere et hiemis*'. Zogg appears to almost consider this proof that in the Middle Ages, readers had lost the ability to distinguish between the actual Virgil and a clear counterfeit. I do not find this reading to do justice to the intellectual developments and the possible uses of Virgil from this time. In fact, the poem corresponds perfectly well to what students at the time were supposed to know about Virgil, as well as other parts of their curriculum. At any rate, Ademar's inclusion of the poem in his florilegium allows us to infer that the poem was used to educate younger pupils.

Outside of sharing the same topic, the poems featured in this thesis do not resemble the *Conflictus veris et hiemis* very much. This is mostly because they do not borrow from the *Ecloques* quite as strongly. The poems are much longer, do not have the same cento-like structure and do not feature Virgil in any way. But the influence of the *Conflictus veris et hiemis* and the eclogue in general is felt in the setting: three out of the four featured poems are set in a distinctly bucolic environment, where the narrator enjoys a gentle breeze and the shade of a conveniently positioned tree. And, like the *Conflictus veris et hiemis*, they are hardly mentioned in scholarship without being connected to education. For the poems in Walther's edition, however, many more educational and intellectual developments need to be kept in mind: those commonly connected to the twelfth century, particularly with the context of the rise of universities.

In this regard, the practice of *disputatio* is mentioned quite often. These were highly formalised debates that took place at universities starting from the twelfth century, often

⁸ For instance, Ælfric of Eynsham's *Colloquy* offers an interesting comparison: this is also a conversation with very simple language and a lot of repetition, with the purpose of making young pupils more comfortable with speaking Latin.

⁹ Ademar's florilegium has been studied at length by Ad van Els in his PhD dissertation, which has later been adapted into a monograph; see Van Els 2015 or 2020.

meant to assess and answer highly complicated philosophical questions.¹⁰ Walther dedicates an lengthy paragraph to their influence on debate poetry, and this interpretation has not changed much: in 2019, Fichte *et al.* also stressed their importance.¹¹ Literature on vernacular debate poems also tends to mention it, though often briefly; for example, Marijke Spies connects it to the structure of *Vanden winter ende vanden somer*, and Pierre Bec briefly discusses it in his introduction on the French *tenson*.¹² However, according to Olga Weijers, a direct connection is not so easily made. She states that, rather than the *disputatio*, the poems likely take more influence from the classical eclogue or contemporary juridical practices.¹³ For her, the distinction between the genres lies in the overall purpose: whereas the *disputatio* is meant to actually answer complex philosophical and theological questions and get closer to the truth, the poems seem to be composed with entertainment in mind, ‘even if these debates resemble the rhetorical exercises’.¹⁴ She states that ‘the dispute poems can be considered as a particular form of dialogue, or of disputation in the larger sense of debate’, but also that they ‘have nothing to do with the philosophical disputation’.¹⁵ Weijers makes an important point here: simply stating that these debate poems are ‘connected to’ *disputatio* without acknowledging that there is also a key difference is an oversimplification. But, in my opinion, it is difficult to deny the *disputatio*’s relevance as a whole. When debates suddenly become important philosophical devices, it would make sense for them to turn up in a simplified form at an early stage in the curriculum – or, alternatively, to be parodied by a learned author.

Beyond *disputatio*, there are other educational purposes these poems could have served. Fichte *et al.* mention that they could have had relevance for both clerical and urban students: they address moral and theological statements, but also showcase different rhetorical techniques. And, alongside all this, they are able to simply contain and convey information. Their composition has many imaginable purposes – they could have been intended as roleplay between students, it could have been a rhetorical exercise or it could have been an artistic expression of vernacular traditions and rituals, just to name a few. But, regardless of their actual purpose, the poems I discuss in my thesis all have clear references to subjects that would almost certainly have come up in the twelfth-century educational curriculum. Though the educational angle does not necessarily come through in this thesis, I want to stress its

¹⁰ Weijers 2013 serves as the most comprehensive account.

¹¹ Fichte *et al.* 2019, xiv.

¹² See Spies 1990 and Bec 2000. In Bec’s case, this makes sense because early recorded examples of *disputatio* took place at French universities: see Fichte *et al.* 2019, xiv.

¹³ This is also mentioned by Stotz 1999, 166.

¹⁴ Weijers 2013, 55.

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

importance, whilst also noting that this interpretation comes with a certain risk. By only reading them as ‘educational’, a view can arise that these poems are either not sophisticated at all, since their target audience is young pupils, or, inversely, that they are overly serious. Both of these readings do not leave a lot of space for the rest of the world they were composed in. In this thesis, I wish to go beyond just demonstrating how these poems contain educational topics that are typical for the time. I propose a reading that heavily touches upon political themes and theories of rulership, and explores how different power dynamics are envisioned. These are topics that were not only deemed important in the twelfth century, but remained relevant in centuries after: I suspect that this is exactly why three out of the four poems were found in manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth century.

I will engage with these questions in three chapters. In the first one, I will introduce the four poems. I will first offer some reflections on the use of gender, and then briefly summarise the poems. My second chapter is concerned with the relevant theoretical backgrounds. It begins with an overview of rulership in the twelfth century – how did attitudes towards rulers change in the feudal system, what were the most common challenges, and what theories will I be using to contextualize the poems? After this, I discuss the importance of two themes that would likely have come up in twelfth-century education: humoral theory and rhetorical styles. In the third chapter, I will explore how this theoretical background comes through in the poems. I will go over them one by one, focussing on three topics. The first is characterisation. I will engage with how political theories are reflected in the positive and negative traits that are attributed to the seasons, and how rhetoric plays a role in this. Secondly, I look at how the poems engage with the division of assets and the feudal economy, which is mainly reflected in *CA*, *CB* and *Estas et Hiems*. These poems are most strongly focused on the question where power lies, and would therefore possibly have appealed more to an urban audience. I will finally examine the resolution of all poems and assess how they handle the aforementioned challenges with power and rulership. With this, I want to demonstrate that these poems touch upon worldviews and problems that are very typical for the twelfth century, and have significant things to say about the political realities of the time.

1. Introduction of the poems

In this chapter, I want to lay out the full contents of the four poems I selected, the *Altercatio yemis et estatis*, both versions of the *Conflictus hiemis et estatis* and *Estas et hiems*. My first step will be a brief reflection on the use of gender in the poems, in which I explain the different relevant influences and my translation choices. After this, I will briefly introduce and summarize all four poems.

1.1: The use of gender

Before offering any summary or translation of the four poems, I need to explain the use of gender in them. Latin has much more space for ambiguity here than English does, and I cannot reflect every nuance as strongly in my descriptions as it exists in the original texts. In this paragraph, I will attempt to lay out all different depictions of gender as clearly as possible, so that these can be kept in mind when reading the poems.

The poems mainly have variations in their depictions of gender, because they have been influenced by multiple traditions with differing conventions. Two of these are the most relevant. First, there is the *ecloga*, which traditionally features male shepherds. Secondly, there is the genre of Christian allegory, in which the main characters embody larger philosophical concepts and are always female. The poems featured in this thesis are not the first to take influence from both of these genres: in the tenth-century *Ecloga Theoduli*, gender conventions from both are deliberately combined. As the title implies, this is a literary discussion in the style of an eclogue. It was used widely as a school text, and for that reason, it is quite likely that the authors of the later *Streitgedichte* were familiar with it. One side of the debate is represented by Pseustis ('lie'), a traditional shepherd representing the pagan literary tradition, and the other side is Alithia ('truth'), a female allegorical character representing the Christian worldview. Alithia is introduced as an almost Orpheus-like figure. When she plays her music, the river stops flowing. Apparently, Pseustis finds this very bothersome, and he challenges her to a poetic debate. He does not intend to discuss any specific question, like in the *Streitgedichte* defined by Walther and Stotz – rather, he follows the traditional bucolic rules, and just wants to have a literary match. Phronesis ('intellect'), another female allegorical character, is called in as the judge. As the discussion develops, it

quickly becomes clear that Pseustis is at a disadvantage. He does not have any knowledge of the Bible and can only bring up references to classical mythology, which the audience presumably has to interpret as clearly fictional. Alithia, in contrast, keeps giving biblical examples – as her name implies, she is supposed to speak the truth, and her stories certainly would be considered as such by the intended audience. Close to the end of the debate, gender suddenly becomes a pointed topic. When Alithia asks Pseustis a question that classical mythology has no answers to, he says: *Fraude puellari sed non patiar superari*, ‘But I will not let myself be defeated by the deceits of a girl’.¹⁶ Alithia responds with:

*Quatuor imprimis evangeliae rationis
Nitar codicibus, nostrum de virgine corpus
Ut Deus accepit, nec me labor iste gravabit.*
I'll trust the four evangelists and their great books,
which tell how God took on our human body from
a virgin: the effort will not trouble me at all!¹⁷

After this, Pseustis admits defeat and Phronesis asserts the superiority of the Christian worldview. When it comes to gender, Alithia's final statement has multiple layers. On one level, it is a simple assertion of the fact that God needed a female body – that of Mary – to bring Christ to the world. But it also offers an insight into the depiction of gender in allegory. Both Alithia and Phronesis function as mediators between God and the world, as do other female allegorical characters; clearly, this is a position that is inherently connected to their gender.¹⁸

It has often been said that allegorical characters are depicted as female, because the words they represent are so grammatically. In a personification, the obvious image that arises would then also be that of a woman.¹⁹ In the past decades, this interpretation has shifted somewhat, and the grammatical interpretation has often been rejected in favour of viewing these characters as inherently gendered concepts. However, according to Dinah Wouters, the influence of grammar on the idea that personifications are female should not be disregarded

¹⁶*Ecloga Theoduli* 327-328; tr. adapted from A. G. Rigg (2005), found at:

<https://www.medieval.utoronto.ca/research/online-resources/eclogue-theodulus-translation>.

¹⁷ *Ecloga Theoduli* 329-333; tr. adapted from A. G. Rigg (2005).

¹⁸ For more details on female allegorical figures serving as mediators, see Newman 2001, 190 and Delogu 2015, 27.

¹⁹ See, for example, Bloomfield 1963.

completely. In her article *Women Personified* from 2018, she offers a theoretical framework for gender and personification in medieval texts in which she unites the various conceptions of women in a way that does not reduce them to only being ‘in favour of’ or ‘against’ certain readings; rather, it takes the various conceptions of women throughout different areas and shows that they remain consistently applicable.

In general, Latin is quite flexible with grammatical gender and pronouns. The gender of a person tends to overrule the grammar: a man with a name that is grammatically feminine will still be referred to with male pronouns. But in these four debate poems, the line is a lot more vague, as the seasons are not real people. They are personifications: concepts as well as characters, whose grammatical gender is more closely connected to reality than any other personality trait assigned to them. This does not necessarily cause trouble for the interpretation, because if the text has consistent grammatical references to gender, the image that arises is clear. But the four poems from this thesis do not have this, which makes interpreting their gender much more challenging. Though *aestas* and *hiems* are grammatically feminine, they are sometimes referred to with masculine forms, which shows that they are not intended to be typical female personifications. In my opinion, the ambiguity cannot solely be attributed to the fact that they are allegorical figures existing in a classically bucolic setting. As Wouters does in her framework for female personifications, we need to take the social roles of the seasons into account, together with the associations they would have evoked to a medieval audience.

In the most fundamental sense, seasons are forces of nature which create new life. They need to work together for this, which is a process that naturally implies both masculine and feminine participation. Broadly speaking, Summer gets the feminine role in this process. The crops grow in their presence, and with these life-giving qualities, they nurture and feed mankind. In the *Altercatio*, Winter uses this fact to assert his own position of superiority. Because wheat, the most important crop for year-round sustenance, is sown in winter, he sees himself as its father. According to him, this means that he is actually the responsible agent for feeding the population:

*et cum omnis rei pater prolis sit principium
eius vero nutrix mater non nisi mancipium.*

And because for all things, the father is the beginning of the offspring

their mother, as wet-nurse, really is no more than the subservient party.²⁰

This contrast between *pater* and *mater* or *nutrix* comes back a few more times: even in the conclusion, Winter is referred to as *pater* and Summer as *mater*. One would expect that this means the depiction of the gender of both seasons is cut-and-dry, but this is not the case. Both seasons are also referred to as *reges* and *principes*, without any feminine modifiers; this implies that they are a ruler without any exceptions, and the default ruler was male. This brings us to another influence on the depiction of gender in the four poems. Rulership was not technically exclusive to men, but the traits associated with being a good ruler were.²¹ It must be said that in the broader context of medieval personification, typically masculine behaviour is not exclusive to masculine characters. The *Psychomachia* by Prudentius is an important example of this: despite the fact that all characters in this work are fighting in a very physical war, everyone fighting is female. However, the *Psychomachia* has little ambiguity about gender, whereas the *Altercatio* does not specify whether or not the characters are female.

Instead, there are some hints that the seasons really are supposed to be read as male. In the conclusion, Theologia calls out to both with the words: ‘*Viri fortes! Fratres estis*’, ‘Powerful men! You are brothers’. The word endings also seem to suggest a male reading. In the passage cited above, where Winter implies that Summer is a *nutrix*, Summer is also described as *dominatus*. Changing this to *dominata* would not affect the meter in any way, and as such, we can assume that Winter sees his opponent as male. I would like to suggest that he assigns femininity to Summer in order to position him as socially inferior, and not necessarily to represent his actual gender. The feminine terms can therefore be explained as being a rhetorical technique and a metaphor for Summer’s effects on nature. As a character participating in a discussion, both his role as a ruler and the usage of grammar seem to imply that he is male. For this reason, have chosen to translate both seasons with he/him pronouns.

In the other poems, this is slightly different. Part of this comes down to the fact that the specific aesthetics of rulership are not a central topic in *CA*, *CB* and *Estas et hiems*. In *CA* and *CB*, the seasons enter the scene on their own, as the overall setting is a court of justice. They each get a physical description, which in Summer’s case is quite sensual: *contendebat lilio frons et rose gena*, ‘their face contended with a lily, their cheeks with roses’ (*CA*, 3.4) and ‘in

²⁰ In the Middle Ages, *mancipium* does not mean ‘property’ or ‘slave’ quite as pointedly as it does in classical Latin. DuCange states that it can also refer to a son or daughter who can be married off; in that sense, its meaning is more literally ‘unemancipated’.

²¹ Amalie Föbel offers a good overview on this (see Föbel 2013, most notably p. 70); in general, female leaders who were regarded as successful were attributed with masculine traits.

illius roseo vultu se lascivit / Amor, os nectareo sapore condivit, ‘on their rosy face, Amor was acting without restraint / their mouth gave the taste of nectar’ (CB, 5.1-2). *Illius* can be both masculine and feminine; the grammar does not give us a decisive gender here. Based on the sensuality of the description, Fichte *et al.* choose to translate Summer as *Sommer-Frau*.²² They also interpret Winter as a male character, which they concur is not entirely unambiguous. Some word endings refer to *hiems* as feminine (such as *sordida* in 16.1), but in 7.1, the seasons together are referred to as *hii* and not as *hae*. They argue that, for this reason, there must be at least one masculine character present. Walther interprets both seasons as masculine, perhaps in order to create consistency between these two poems and the *Altercatio*. Though I find ‘Sommer-frau’ to be a slightly unwieldy translation, it is hard to argue with the grammatical observations Fichte *et al.* make. However, I personally see so much room for ambiguity that I do not feel the need to prime the reader’s expectation by translating Summer as explicitly female and Winter as explicitly male. In my translation, I will refer to both seasons with the pronouns ‘they/them’. The *iudex* is unambiguously female, and gets the pronouns ‘she/her’.

In *Estas et hiems*, the seasons are both referred to with feminine word endings, according to their grammatical gender. Overall, there is much less of a topical focus on the qualities of both characters. They do not get a physical description at all, and gender does not play any relevant role. Here, I again prefer not to prime the reader too much, especially since gender is not an important topic in this poem. I have also chosen for a neutral approach here, and I use they/them pronouns in my translation.

Finally, I would like to stress that all my translations are simply choices, and they do not reflect the words in the actual text. The most important thing to keep in mind is that in all poems, the seasons have inherent qualities that can be tied to both genders.

²² Fichte *et al.* 2019, 9: ‘Jedoch scheint mir die Art, wie Aestas bei ihrem Auftreten beschrieben wird, eher den Gedanken an eine junge Frau nahe zu legen (...) und ich erlaube mir daher von der “Sommer-Frau” zu sprechen.’

1.2: Introduction to *Altercatio yemis et estatis*

This is the first poem in Walther's edition, and he also dates it as the earliest. Based on the form and the rhyme, he estimates it to be from the beginning of the twelfth century.²³ The manuscript it was copied in is from the thirteenth century.²⁴ Interestingly, this manuscript also contains a calendar poem, a genre of poetry that briefly describes the most important events in each month of the year. This is in line with some of the subject matter discussed in this poem, because we will soon see that the typical events of each season also play a role in this debate. The *Altercatio* is by far the longest of all the poems discussed in this thesis. It consists of 110 stanzas with four lines each, consisting of either thirteen or fifteen syllables. The meter is very regular, though it does switch every four stanzas.²⁵ The poem begins with a description of a *locus amoenus*, after which Summer and Winter enter the scene. They are introduced with a series of basic juxtapositions: old and young, friendly and serious, and restless and serene. Then, Summer takes the word. He speaks in a Goliardic verse, containing thirteen syllables, which gives his lines a light and dynamic quality – especially when compared to Winter's more stern sounding fifteen. He describes different things that happen during the changing of the seasons, but frames his own influence as more positive than Winter's. Winter replies by asking which one of them is the most powerful, and then explains why that would be him. In the lines that follow, some tension begins to develop. Both sides accuse the other of hostile behaviour and declare that they have a right to retaliate, but seem reluctant to actually argue. A description of the months and their activities offers some distraction, but the hostile atmosphere returns when Winter concludes his description by claiming superiority: he is the *pater* because he sows seeds, while Summer is only the *nutrix*. The following stanzas go back and forth on the topic of unpleasant weather.

Eventually, the discussion moves to the relationship between power and property. Either side argues that they are the superior party, because the other season relies on them. It becomes clear that both sides balance each other out perfectly, which makes for a rather undecided debate – something that the seasons clearly find frustrating, and the conversation gradually begins to escalate. Winter starts making complex arguments about the cosmological model and Summer manages to create a stanza with the word 'regnum' in every line. When

²³ Walther 1920, 37: he notes that the form is clean and regular, but also admits that he has little else to go on when it comes to the dating.

²⁴ cod. Götting. theol. 105 f.1 39v-46r; unfortunately, it has not yet been digitised.

²⁵ Manitius 1931 (reis. 1964), 946. There is an exception for when Theologia speaks; her meter alternates in every stanza.

Winter brings up a rather contrived fable to prove that he is more powerful, Summer immediately disproves its moral and adds that this story must have come from his grandmother. The debate continues with comparable displays. But when they start to argue about the strength of the sun, the conversation reaches its breaking point. The seasons almost decide to settle their debate with a practical demonstration, and get ready to wage war. But they are encroaching on divine territory, and Theologia, who turns out to have been watching them all along, suddenly steps in. She admonishes both sides for fighting - not only because they are brothers and it would be wrong, but also because they would never be able to stop.²⁶ The question of which season is more powerful is fundamentally flawed, because it is built on a false premise. God created both of them as perfectly equal opposites who are supposed to work together by alternating. If they want to go to heaven, they need to stop arguing – and if they do not, a horrific scenario in hell awaits them. In the final stanza, Theologia embodies herself in Pax, with Rachel and Leah on either hand. This solidifies the final message even more: the only way to be a good Christian is to strive for peace. But the conclusion also shows that flawed theoretical discussions are wont to create violence, and that worldly leaders need spiritual guidance. I will elaborate on this topic later in this thesis.

1.3: Introduction to *Conflictus Hiemis et Estatis A and B*

Technically, these are two different poems, but as they are very comparable, I will discuss them in one paragraph. Both of them were found in Paris, BNF, ms. lat 11412, f4v-6r and 14r-17r, which dates from the early thirteenth century.²⁷ They also both seem to build on a different poem found in the same manuscript, an *Altercatio* between Ganymede and Helena. This poem is not concerned with seasonal motifs at all, but instead covers a debate about whether heterosexuality or homosexuality is superior. This adds a sexual context to both *CA* and *CB*, especially compared to the relatively chaste *Altercatio*. The similarity to the debate between Ganymede and Helena has led both Walther and Manitius to believe that both of these poems have French origins. They also might have been created as school exercises.²⁸ Not only do they have some literal lines in common, but their larger arguments are built up in

²⁶ *Altercatio* 102.4: *fratres qui vult rodere, nunquam erit satur*, ‘Brothers who wish to slander each other, will never be satisfied.’

²⁷ Walther 1920, 41. A digitised version can be found here: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10032175s/f6.item>.

²⁸ Both Walther and Manitius remark on this: see Walther 1920, 42 and Manitius 1931, 946.

a similar way and they use the same stock phrases with slightly interchanged words. In 20th-century scholarship, *CA* and *CB* have not always been looked upon favourably. Manitius says the following on what he thinks of their quality: ‘Beide Gedichte haben übrigens einen trockenen Stil und sind vielfach eckig und unbeholfen. Bei diesen und den oben berührten Mängeln der Form kann man nur an Schülersgedichte denken’ (946). In terms of rhyme and meter, both poems are again written in Goliardic lines, though they are not as consistent as in the *Altercatio*. The final line of every stanza is in a different meter as well.

Both poems begin with the same line: *Taurum sol intraverat iui spatiatum*, denoting the time of year: it is the middle of summer, and it is very hot. In *CA*, Summer appears to the narrator as they sit under a tree. They are described as a beautiful young person with blonde hair, pale skin and rosy cheeks, with a sensual appeal. Winter, however, is much less pleasant to look at. Their body is smelly and decaying, their lips are frozen together, their face is wrinkly and their hair is weighed down by ice (6). It turns out that this is a legal dispute, as both sides find *causidicos* and there is a judge present. Winter asks why they are being accused and why their rights are taken away, and Summer replies that they should no longer be allowed to rule, because they put a strain on the population. What immediately stands out is how dynamically all actions are described in the beginning of this debate; at times, they almost read like stage instructions. When Winter first speaks, their lines are introduced with *Surgens prius protulit hunc Hiems sermonem / adequatis vocibus ad contentionem*, ‘First, Winter stood up and brought forth this conversation, with a voice fit for an argument.’ When Summer starts speaking, there is again a very stage-like direction about their body language:

Factum est silentium: Estas mox surrexit

terram tuens oculos parumper erexit

respondere properat faciem detexit

ut petita solveret sese non deflexit,

It became silent; soon, Summer stood up

first looking at the ground with their eyes and then stretching their body

they prepared to respond and showed that in their face

they did not turn away from fulfilling what was asked of them (9).

Winter rebukes that Summer’s heat also wears on everyone. Summer then remarks that Winter devours all the newly produced crops, which are grown through Summer’s *temperies*, ‘mild

temperature'.²⁹ Unlike in the *Altercatio*, Winter does not claim to be an active participant in this process. Instead, they have some harsh criticism: *est tua temperies vilis et impura / omne vivens coxerat Veneris iunctura*, 'your moderate temperature is vile and impure / the bounds of Venus have heated up every living creature.' It should be noted here that Winter does not outright reject procreation, but apparently Summer is causing it to happen ubiquitously, and that is a problem. Summer's reply is interesting, because it twists Winter's words around and makes it seem like they reject any form of heterosexual activity: *Hec est felix copula in diviso sexu / culpa non percipitur mutuo complexu* 'That is the happy intercourse between the different sexes / there is no guilt in this mutual embrace (14.1-2). This opens up room for the implication that Winter would be in favour of homosexual intercourse. However, that is not what their reply engages with, as Winter's counterargument is based on the fact that Summer brings forth all kinds of bothersome creatures. After this point, the debate escalates. Summer finds Winter to be offensive and says they will retaliate, Winter says that they accept this retaliation, and Summer then takes the liberty to criticize Winter on multiple accounts. Because of their gluttony, they have no *virtus* left, they are disfigured by old age and nothing will ever satisfy their hunger. The implication is that Winter's old age makes them unfit to rule, because they no longer produce anything and instead, only consume. As in the beginning of the poem, Winter's reaction gets a very theatrical description. Summer's mockery has physical effects: Winter's tongue is tied by shame, they starts to blush, tears stream down their cheeks and they have nothing left to say. Ratio, the judge, comes to a quick conclusion: *Non opus est iudice, nam res pro se fatur / Estas, linguam coibe! Hiems superatur!*, 'No judge is needed, because the case speaks for itself / Summer, hold your tongue! Winter loses! (20.3-4)'

CB is, of course, fairly similar, but seems to be slightly more focused on the legal environment and the use of rhetoric. The beginning is also set in a bucolic landscape, and Summer and Winter join the speaker when he is laying down under a tree. Here, Summer has apparently also been taking away Winter's rights, and the beginning is mostly the same, with a few minor variations. The largest difference occurs right after Summer accuses Winter of devouring all crops without adding anything in return. Whereas in *CA*, Winter causes the discussion to escalate by accusing Summer of sinfulness, Winter's reply here is that their rain is actually needed for the crops to grow. Then they criticise Summer's heatwaves, because of their destructive effect. Summer replies that Winter's hailstorms destroy the vineyards, and

²⁹ It should be noted that *temperies* has more meanings than only 'favourable weather'. Broadly speaking, it refers to anything that has been mixed in the right proportions, including the humours, but also other elements; there is somewhat of a sexual connotation possible.

that is where the escalation of this poem begins. Winter does not particularly like the vineyards, because they promote drunkenness, and drunkenness can lead to lasciviousness. Summer says that Winter is no stranger to carnal pleasures, so they have no right to say anything. Winter then has a very similar argument as they do in *CA*, right before the discussion starts to escalate; namely, that Summer does not take sex seriously enough. Some of Summer's reply is lost, but it is presumably the same: Winter's criticism is taken as a rejection of all sexuality. The debate continues similarly to *CA*, with the main deviation being that Winter is not mocked for their gluttony, but only their old age. Winter is still able to speak after the mockery, and both parties ask for the judge to give her verdict. This happens slightly more elaborately than in *CA*: the actual reason for Winter's loss is not any innate characteristic, but simply the fact that they have not conducted themselves well enough in the argument.

1.4: Introduction to *Estas et hiems*

The final poem in this collection is titled *Estas et hiems*, and it was found in a fifteenth century English manuscript.³⁰ Based on the regularity of the meter, Walther dates it to the late twelfth century.³¹ Unfortunately, it is incomplete, but this appears to have been a deliberate choice by the scribe: the folio ends with 'Explicit etc.' It is not only shorter because of the lack of an ending, but also because the beginning is very brief. There is no description of the setting, but only the narrator announcing that he will recount a debate between the seasons – apparently, with the premise that Summer wants to exile Winter. The criticism is similar to what we have already seen in the previous poems: Winter's terrible weather is devastating for the crops, and they also consume all produce without adding anything in return. Both sides accuse each other of needless cruelty and destruction. Summer then says that they should be free of blame, because their flowers offer pleasure to the people: *aspera relevo dulcem per odorem*, 'I bring relief from heavy things through their sweet scent' (6.4). But Winter finds this to be an argument based on vanity, because flowers only last for a short time.

³⁰ Cambridge, Trinity College O.9.38, f. 45r. The folio in question can be found under the following link: <https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/Manuscript/O.9.38/UV#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=51&r=0&xywh=-2373%2C0%2C7958%2C3785>.

³¹ Walther 1920, 45.

In the next stanza, Summer brings up the topic of nobles. Since they consider themselves to be the main producer of crops, they also claim that all the rulers in the world owe their riches to them. Winter in turn says that these same rulers can relax during their season, and that they are very close. If given the choice, surely those rulers would favour Winter, so naturally Winter should rule over Summer too. Summer uses the same logic: the rulers like them more, so actually they should be above Winter instead. The conversation then moves on to how they treat their inferiors. Winter thinks that their slaves are relaxed, can drink as much as they want and are always clothed, while Summer makes their slaves work hard and forces them to stay naked. According to Summer, their slaves are actually happy to work and feel liberated without their clothes, while Winter's men only grow bored and bloated. This is where the poem ends. Walther suggests that Summer would be the victor of this debate as well, but he bases this on the fact that a later hand has written *Carmen in hiemen*, 'poem against Winter' in the upper right margin. However, I think this could also refer to the beginning of the debate, because Summer is the instigator and starts an argument against Winter. In my opinion, the addition does not necessarily need to indicate the outcome. It seems to be more of a general description of different types of power, without one necessarily presiding over the other.

2. Theories

I mentioned that these poems likely originated in the classroom: they were written for students or perhaps even by students. This fact influences different parts of the poems, because they include some subjects that were likely also discussed in medieval education; more specifically, humoral theory and rhetorical techniques. Though these subjects might not seem directly related to the presentation of rulership, they offer a strong basis for the characterisation of the seasons, which in itself informs the type of ruler they are. Winter and Summer embody certain virtues and vices that a ruler can have, and these are largely dependent on their associated temperaments.

In order to fully contextualize these traits, I will first summarize some notions of rulership in twelfth-century Europe that were broadly universal. Of course, 'Europe' was not a homogenous entity and different areas experienced rulership differently, but there are a few general ideas and developments that can be distilled from this time period. Afterwards, I will move on to how humoral theory is reflected in the poems, and finally, discuss the different debating styles that Summer and Winter have.

2.1: Some generalities of rulership

A lot of work has been done on the topic of 'rulership' in the twelfth century. Most of this is geared towards individual kingdoms or areas, but some of it is more broadly oriented. A fundamental piece of work specific to this time period is *The crisis of the twelfth century* by Thomas Bisson, which describes how lordship developed in the centuries up to 1100, and then lays out some common problems that arose throughout Western Europe as a result of these developments. Bisson's account is relatively chronological. He explains that from the ninth century onwards, people sought lordship for protection, which gradually lead to an influx of powerful figures.³² But this was not always initiated by a collective: sometimes, individual people sought dominion over others, especially if they had obtained a castle or a large property of any other kind. These developments were gradual, but still influential enough that Bisson speaks of an 'age of lordship'. Bisson also mentions that violence was a reoccurring theme. Many of these newer lords had gained their position through physical domination; this

³² Bisson 2009, 22-83.

could be by direct violence in the way that we would interpret it, but also by demanding a cut or share in money or produce (*tallage*). This was sometimes also equated with ‘violence’ or, at the very least, ‘bad customs’ for a lord.³³ Another way in which ‘violence’ could be exacted on people was negligence, as described by Emily Winkler in her chapter on conditional kingship.³⁴ I will return to this topic later in this paragraph, where I will explain why negligence was considered a transgression.

Somewhat paradoxically, the attempts of these newer lords to consolidate their power often led to instability. Many examples can be found of conflicts that stem from the normativity of coercive power in the twelfth century. These are all detailed by Bisson in his book, but they are not so relevant for my purposes. I am rather interested in the theories underlying here, and the different ways in which medieval Latin Europe thought about rulership and kings.

Though Bisson states that ‘power was felt more than it was analyzed’, there are still some ways of thought that are broadly general. One of the reasons for this is the fact that shared knowledge of Latin in newly developed institutions and networks allowed for ideas to travel through regnal borders. Björn Weiler states that ‘these and other factors established an often vaguely defined but nonetheless widely shared expectation of how a political community should be organised, and how it should be governed.’³⁵ The most universally held notion was that lordship and power were ordained by God.³⁶ This played an large role in the attribution of responsibility: it was believed that a ruler did not exist to submit his people, but rather as a servant to them, who was put into his position by God. As such, he was considered to be answerable to God, and would therefore be judged after death according to the fulfilment or neglect of his duties.³⁷ The concept of *universitas* also comes into play here. This word, in the meaning of ‘corporation’, was often perceived as ‘a group that possessed a juridical personality distinct from that of its particular members’.³⁸ The term invited thinking in terms of microcosm and macrocosm, which in turn brings up the metaphor of the body politic.³⁹ I will come back to this topic later in this paragraph, but it is an important notion, because it

³³ Bisson 2009, 163.

³⁴ See Winkler 2017, 37.

³⁵ Weiler 2021, 30.

³⁶ Most literature on the topic mentions this, as it is such a fundamental thought; examples can be found in, Black 1992, Keller 1985 (specifically on Ottonian dynasties), Tierney 1982 and Winkler 2017.

³⁷ Winkler 2017, 37-41.

³⁸ Tierney 1982, 19.

³⁹ See, for example, Walker-Bynum 1995 for some general reflections on the body politic in medieval literature, and O’Daly 2018, 117-144 for a more detailed overview within the context of John of Salisbury.

highlights that the ruler was not seen as separate from the people he ruled over: rather, he was an intrinsic part of a larger community.⁴⁰

There were many theories about what ‘good rulership’ constituted, and a few texts were so widely read that they influenced much of the beliefs generally held in intellectual circles.⁴¹ Most of these are either derived from the Bible or from antiquity. Weiler notes that, of course, not everyone throughout Europe who was writing about rulership would have been familiar with all examples, but the combination of them likely merged into a type of public consciousness.⁴² In terms of biblical material, the stories of Saul, David and Solomon were especially important.⁴³ Outside the biblical sphere, Cicero’s *De officiis* had a massive influence, especially in terms of thinking about royal responsibilities.⁴⁴ An important theme here is the engagement in public life, ‘which was meant to be based on the pursuit of wisdom, justice (with its twin charity), fortitude and temperance’.⁴⁵ A ruler had to be focused on the public good rather than on private ambition – though Cicero does not condemn all ambition, as he associates it with talent for rulership in a general sense. In order to focus his attention to the public good, a ruler needed to have a balanced mindset without a temper clouded by anger, pride and joy.⁴⁶ Cicero also viewed a leader’s inaction and negligence as a serious form of injustice, because every part of life was governed by duty. Inaction was even worse than directly inflicting injury – though it must be said that inflicting injury in itself could take many different forms.⁴⁷

A relevant text for the medieval transmission of these ideas is *De officiis ministrorum* by Ambrose. He borrows heavily from Cicero, but also unites these ideas with Christian values. When it comes to medieval authors using the themes from *De officiis*, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish whether they were using Cicero or Ambrose.⁴⁸ Another influential work was Seneca’s *De clementia*, which was widely copied in the twelfth century. In this text, Seneca stresses the duty of a ruler to be supportive to his people, because only then would they be prepared to defend him. Similarly to Cicero, he urges the ruler to keep his strong

⁴⁰ See Black 1992, 14 and Tierney 1982, 20. Tierney also brings up the theological connotations of the term *corpus* as the mystical body of the church (as opposed to that of Christ in the Eucharist) and how its usage gradually seeped into secular terminology.

⁴¹ See Black 1992, Tierney 1982 and Winkler 2017 for more elaboration and concrete examples.

⁴² Weiler 2021, 40.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ Winkler 2017 (31-32) offers an overview on how this text was directly and indirectly transmitted by various thinkers.

⁴⁵ Weiler 2021, 44; see Cicero, *De officiis* i.24.

⁴⁶ Weiler 2021, 45; see *De officiis* i.26.

⁴⁷ Winkler 2017, 32.

⁴⁸ O’Daly 2018, 103.

emotions (particularly anger) in check. As the title suggests, Seneca has a particular focus on the virtue of clemency: if a ruler acts like a father rather than a tyrant, his people would be more likely to follow him.

Finally, the audience for this literature did not only include members of the clergy, but likely the rulers themselves as well. Manuel Rodríguez de la Peña describes the king as a *miles litteratus*, and stresses that he was ‘the only layman of whom a minimum grasp of high culture was expected’.⁴⁹ This learnedness, which was also associated with the broader concept of *sapientia*, was seen as an important characteristic for a ruler to have. These are only a few examples of the literature used to define and describe rulership in the twelfth century, but they give an indication of some of the key character traits that were attributed to a good ruler. We can keep these in mind for our observations of Winter and Summer as rulers later on in this thesis.

During and after the twelfth century, some Christian authors wrote their own theories on good and bad rulership. There is quite a list of authors who were engaged with this topic, and all the content of all their treatises would be too much for the scope of this thesis. But one thing these authors have in common is that they lived through striking historical events, and they recognized and named bad rulers.⁵⁰ An example of this is John of Salisbury, who was present at the murder of Thomas Becket in 1170. Irene O’Daly states that he utilizes the classical and Christian sources from the previous paragraph in a synthetic way, reflecting a ‘medieval Roman renaissance’.⁵¹ One of his most studied works is the *Politicratus* from 1159, which contains advice to rulers and describes the key characteristics of a tyrant. In this work, John focuses on the theme of nature to define certain duties, with vocabulary strongly reminiscent of *De officiis* and Seneca. He also stresses the theme of nature when it comes to the power of bonds and affection.⁵² John builds out the metaphor of the body politic in a subtle way: he describes the interdependence of all body parts, but also stresses their individual utility.⁵³ He also lays a strong focus on moderation when it comes to the pursuit of virtue and vice, and temperance when it comes to frugality and avarice.⁵⁴ I do not mean to imply that the authors of these poems were directly familiar with John of Salisbury’s writing, but I want to use him as an example of ideas about rulership coming from a contemporary

⁴⁹ Rodríguez de la Peña 2023, 132.

⁵⁰ Bisson 2009, 66-67.

⁵¹ O’Daly 2018, 3-5.

⁵² O’Daly 2018, 99.

⁵³ O’Daly 2018, 117-144.

⁵⁴ O’Daly 2018, 155; 163-165.

intellectual environment. The difficulties described in the poems from this thesis are interesting to read against his political opinions, because they come from the same - increasingly violent - time period, in which difficulties with rulers were intimately felt.

This begs the question: what happened when a ruler was too difficult, and perhaps even harmful to the population? John of Salisbury defines a ‘tyrant’ in *Politicratus* and seemingly condones tyrannicide in iii.15, when he says: ‘*Porro tyrannum occidere non modo licitum est sed aequum et iustum*, ‘Furthermore, it is not merely lawful to slay a tyrant, but even fair and just.’ However, there is some nuance to this topic – Jan van Laarhoven argues that John does not offer a theory of tyrannicide as an endorsement of the act, but rather as a description of what tends to happen to historical tyrants: ‘The real sense is not: “You, murderer, have to kill” but “You, tyrant, will be slain”’.⁵⁵ He therefore proposes a reading that is more admonitory in nature, in order to prevent a hypothetical powerful reader from becoming a tyrant in the first place. Bisson, Winkler and Weiler also treat the topic of tyranny and possible deposition. Bisson stresses the notion of accountability: though rulers were theoretically held accountable for their actions, there was a disparity between moral imperative and arbitrary actuality – especially since, in the end, violence was also a means to achieve power.⁵⁶ Winkler poses the example of the Carolingian king Louis the Pious, who was deposed in 833 after a series of disputes and restored in 834. She stresses that the focal point here does not lie in the deposition itself, but the responses to it: this situation was seemingly viewed as anomalous, and contemporary responses all stressed the fact that a ruler only answers to God, and not so much to his people. Weiler treats this subject within the context of succession. He brings up the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, who was deposed in 1077 by German princes, and Boleslaw II of Poland, of whom a contemporary chronicler implied that he was deposed for ordering the death of St. Stanislas.⁵⁷ But in both of these cases, there was also a strong oppositional elite who had a vested interest in the deposition of the ruler. Overall, it seems like deposing a ruler was something that was rarely done simply based on a king’s actions towards his people, but rather as a political move by the local elite, reflecting more on the constant renegotiation of power between the ruler and them. Still, in theory, a lot of behaviour that is characteristic of a ‘bad’ ruler was considered to be a transgression of the law. For this reason, I think we can consider *Conflictus A* and *B* to be part of this line of thought: though

⁵⁵ Van Laarhoven 1984, 328.

⁵⁶ Bisson 2009, 17.

⁵⁷ Weiler 2021, 142; 147.

the debate is perhaps not reflective of actual situations concerning rulers, legal transgressions can still call for legal procedures.

Finally, I would like to bring up the theme of property. The accumulation and distribution of property plays a central role in all of these poems, particularly in an agricultural context: these texts do not talk about treasures or manpower, but specifically about produce.⁵⁸ This fits well into the context of what rulership actually meant at the time. As Weiler phrases it: ‘Across Europe, elite power centred on the extraction of surplus from a largely agricultural economy’.⁵⁹ Within this aspect, there was an overlap between the secular and clerical elites – the first of which depended on the latter to consolidate their power with religious authority, and the latter of which depended on the first in order to obtain enough resources to uphold their community. There was also overlap in the social sphere, because many high-ranking individuals in ecclesiastical institutions came from local aristocratic families.⁶⁰ This means that it is difficult to draw a strong contrast between clerical power and lay power, because their interests were often interrelated.⁶¹ For this reason, Weiler prefers to frame this conflict as one between ruler and elite, rather than one directly between church and state.⁶² However, members of the clergy could still be critical of lay lordship.⁶³ On one hand, this had something to do with the tension between the clergy as the spiritual authority and lay rulership as something ordained by God. But there was also a material component involved, which had to do with the imposition of *tallage* that, as mentioned earlier, was seen as an act of violence. Bisson treats this issue with nuance. On one hand, complaints about this issue could be exaggerated: ‘it was in the interest of prelates and monks to complain of exactions by lay lords; and since peasants, eager to represent any uncustomary demand as violent, sought to fix obligations in growing economies’.⁶⁴ But at the same time, lordly violence was a very real issue that was felt by people in all levels of society. This tension is also important to keep in mind, especially considering that these poems were likely composed in a monastic context. In the twelfth century, many clergymen were certainly no strangers to questions and debates about the distribution of property and lordly impositions.

⁵⁸ Davies and Fouracre (1995: 2) also state that ‘land was the source of (very nearly) all wealth’. Wealth in turn leads to power because it allows a ruler to hire armed men for defense, but that is not so relevant in these poems.

⁵⁹ Weiler 2021, 33.

⁶⁰ Weiler 2021, 33-34.

⁶¹ This again brings up the notion of the body politic, because every ‘faction’ is considered to be part of a whole.

⁶² Christian Raffensperger also mentions this in his introduction (see Raffensperger 2023). He presents this conflict as a common theme throughout his book, which spans many different areas in and around Europe in different time period, so I think it is fair to say that this was a fairly general truth about medieval rulership.

⁶³ See Bisson 2009, 37, where he brings up bishop Raterio of Verona from the 10th century.

⁶⁴ Bisson 2009, 66.

2.2: Humoral theory

One of the key elements of these debates is the stark contrast between the two seasons. At times, they do not appear to be much more than direct oppositions of each other. Where one is hot, the other is cold, and it goes ever so on. But given the intellectual and educational background of the poems, these differences could also be interpreted with a deeper meaning. I believe humoral theory lies at the basis of many of the exact differences as described, and the character traits influenced by their different humours represent different styles of rulership.⁶⁵ Because the humours are inherently associated with the human body, there is also a connection to the body politic metaphor here, especially given its ubiquity in the twelfth century. Within the human body, an excess of a certain humour could lead to illness. In the macrocosm/microcosm analogy, an imbalance of these within a ruler could also affect the rest of the ‘body’ – the rest of society – and cause illness on a greater scale. The prevalence of this humoral symbolism is therefore likely not only relevant for the individual characterisation of the two seasons, but also corresponds to a broader worldview in the twelfth century. Bisson offers one concrete example of a time period in which princely character was an important topic – the half century following William the Conqueror’s rise to power in England, in which the temperaments of his sons were thoroughly analysed in order to determine whether or not they would be suitable successors.⁶⁶ This is, of course, not enough evidence to suggest that this was routinely done, but it does offer an example of how this theory could be seen as applicable.

The association between seasons and the different humours with their associated temperaments would certainly not have been strange in the Middle Ages; in fact, it already happened in antiquity. In *On the nature of man* from the Hippocratic Corpus, the seasons are directly connected to different compositions of hotness, coldness, wetness and dryness. Blood is hot and wet and associated with spring, phlegm is cold and wet and associated with winter, black bile is cold and dry and associated with autumn and yellow bile is hot and dry and associated with summer.⁶⁷ Galen is also concerned with the proper mixture of things, and

⁶⁵ Humoral theory was quite ubiquitous in medieval thinking and the following elements are therefore not necessarily indicative of a highly intellectual environment, but at the same time, they do signify a base level of learnedness. See, for example, Vaughan 2020 47-66 on medieval theories on nutrition and health, and 91-110 on how – and when – these theories were put into practice.

⁶⁶ Bisson 2009, 156-157.

⁶⁷ See Vaughan 2020, 50 for this exact summary, as well as some additional information on how these associations came to be. Jouanna 2012 serves as another good starting point.

applies the theory of the elements to different seasons as well.⁶⁸ He takes particular care to explain that terms like ‘cold’ and ‘wet’ do not necessarily directly refer to the weather, but rather denote a predominance of one quality over the other.⁶⁹ Because both Winter and Summer also contain autumn and spring, they are associated with two different temperaments: Winter phlegmatic and melancholic, while Summer is choleric and sanguine. Later on, medieval authors would add different associations to these temperaments: an important source to illustrate this is the monk Meletius, who wrote his theory after the sixth or seventh century.⁷⁰ He adds different life stages to the equation, as well as the effect of the different humours on the soul. Jacques Jouanna quotes and translates this exact passage as follows:

ἠθοποιοῦσι γὰρ οἱ χυμοὶ καὶ ταύτην (sc. τὴν ψυχὴν).

1. καὶ τὸ μὲν αἷμα ἰλαρωτέραν (sc. τὴν ψυχὴν) ἀπεργάζεται,
2. ἡ δὲ ξανθὴ ὀργιωτέραν ἢ θρασυτέραν ἢ γοργοτέραν ἢ καὶ ἀμφοτέρα,
4. τὸ δὲ φλέγμα ἀργότεραν καὶ ἠλιθιωδεστέραν,
3. ἡ δὲ μέλαινα ὀργιωτέραν καὶ ἰταμωτέραν.

The humours also determine the customs of the soul.

1. Blood makes the soul more joyous.
2. Yellow bile makes the soul quicker-tempered, bolder or more impudent, or both.
4. Phlegm makes the soul lazier and more foolish.
3. Black bile makes the soul quicker-tempered and more reckless.⁷¹

This Greek quote is probably not the direct way through which the poems’ possible authors became familiar with this theory. It is far more likely that this happened through Isidore of Seville, who includes an explanation of the four humours (IV.v.iii) in terms of the different elements. He keeps his description contained to the four humours and their equivalent elements: ‘Just as there are four elements, so there are four humors, and each humor resembles its element: blood resembles air, bile fire, black bile earth, and phlegm water. And as there are four elements, so there are four humors that maintain our bodies.’ He also states:

⁶⁸ This can be found in *De temperamentis* 1.524K-1.234K, in which he discusses which of the seasons has the most balanced mixture.

⁶⁹ See *De temperamentis* 527K.

⁷⁰ Jouanna 2012, 346.

⁷¹ Jouanna 2012, 347: tr. slightly adapted by me.

‘Healthy people are governed by these four humours, and feeble people are afflicted as a result of them, for when they increase beyond their natural course they cause sickness’, with which he does imply that their presence has a certain influence on the human body, but does not explicitly say anything about the personality traits they are associated with. He also describes the different seasons, to which he ascribes their name by the *temperamentum*, ‘the balance of qualities’ that they all share. By these qualities, he means the same ones that Galen explains: moisture, dryness, heat and cold. Isidorus does not give us the same elaborate model that Meletius does, and it is impossible to know how much the poems’ authors knew about Meletius’ ideas. However, comparing some of the characteristics found in Meletius to the presentation of the seasons is still a worthwhile exercise, as they align quite well.

Winter first of all, is old in most versions: *senior* in the *Altercatio* (4.1) and *facies rugatur* (with a wrinkled face) in *CA* and *CB* (6.3 in both versions). Their laziness (Meletius’ ‘Ἀργυτέραν’) can be seen in the focus on *otium* (*Altercatio* 17.1) and the fact that they prefer mental over physical labor (*Altercatio* 48-49). The foolishness is made more apparent in *CA* and *CB* – or, at least, in the perspective of Summer and the judge – because they are so confident in their own right, that they allow Summer to openly insult them, which ultimately ends in their defeat. In both versions, Winter is also quick to anger. In the *Altercatio*, they immediately get upset at Summer’s implicit criticism, and they are quick to use more vulgar words, such as *fastus meretricii*, ‘the pride of a prostitute’, in 54.3. Alongside all these elements that line up with Meletius, the fact that Winter is depicted as a glutton in all poems seems to be directly derived from Isidore – in V.xxxv.6, he says that the word *bruma* perhaps comes from the Greek βρῶμα, and that this is the reason why people have a larger appetite in winter.

On the other side of the spectrum, Summer fits the description for both the sanguine and choleric temperaments. Naturally, they are younger than winter, with red cheeks (*estuans in facie*, ‘with a burning face’, *Altercatio* 7.1; *contendebat lilio frons et rose gena*, ‘their face contended with the lily and their cheeks with the rose’ in *CA* 3.4) and a friendly countenance (*plus ille iocundus*, ‘the other one friendlier’, *Altercatio* 4.2). At the same time, they are also quick-tempered and bold, because they are the initial aggressor in all poems: in the *Altercatio*, he is the one to first challenge Winter, in *CA* and *CB* they are the main accuser and in *Estas et hiems*, they are trying to banish Winter.

Beyond characterisation, there are a few other aspects that pertain to humoral theory present in these poems. These do not take centre stage, and instead mainly seem to adorn the arguments on both sides. For example, the elements are constantly mentioned: fire and water

take centre stage in Winter's parable at the end of the *Altercatio*, but Summer also alludes to earth in his *luculentum/lutulentum* wordplay. There is also an allusion to the fact that a surplus of certain qualities can make you sick (and that the opposite qualities are, in turn, healing) in the *Altercatio*: when Summer begins the debate by speaking about the changing of the seasons, he says: '*infirmis affectibus mederi studemus*, 'we strive to cure the weak people who are afflicted' (13.2). Finally, there is the focus on *temperies* in *CA* and *CB* – though here it most likely means 'moderate temperature', it can also denote the proper mixture of the different humours. Overall, I would not say that a deep understanding of these references is needed when studying these poems in the light of theories of rulership, but they are relevant for their overall characterization. When we look at how the two seasons are depicted as rulers later on in this chapter, we will see that many of the same character traits more or less directly correspond to the virtues and vices attributed to them.

2.3: Rhetorical styles

Another subject through which the two seasons are contrasted to one another is their rhetorical style, which also helps to mark out their values and personalities. In this paragraph, I will discuss the role of rhetorical styles and the structure of the arguments in the poems, where relevant. I will not focus too intently on twelfth-century rhetorical theory – that would surpass the scope of this thesis – but there is one text I will refer to occasionally when discussing the *Altercatio*: the *Ars versificatoria* by Matthew of Vendôme. This is a treatise on how to write poetry from 1175, which makes it the earliest example of an *ars poetica* in the form it would take in the Middle Ages. It was quite a successful text, and it was most likely aimed at less experienced students.⁷² Not all five stages of the canonized rhetorical framework are featured, but the theory of *inventio* is very important; it makes up approximately half of the work.⁷³ There is no way of knowing if the poems' authors were familiar with Matthew's ideas – especially since they might well predate the *Ars versificatoria* – but, in my opinion, that question is not necessarily relevant. In this thesis, I aim to explore whether these poems reflect general twelfth-century intellectual developments; therefore, I regard any similarities between the *Ars versificatoria* and the poems to be examples of that, and not as an indication

⁷² Copeland and Sluiter 2009, 559.

⁷³ Matthew borrows heavily from Cicero's *De inventione*; see Gronbeck-Tedesco 1980, 236-239 for a more detailed description and explanation of this topic.

of a direct connection. However, there actually are some elements in the *Ars versificatoria* that make the comparison quite fitting. John L. Gronbeck-Tedesco argues that Matthew's application of invention is incredibly suited towards the composition of drama.⁷⁴ While these poems are not plays, they function very similarly, and the different steps Matthew describes actually match up with the structure of the *Altercatio*, *CA* and *CB* nearly perfectly. Secondly, while the *Ars versificatoria* is mainly a treatise, it also has invective elements: the text is directed to Arnulf of Orléans, who Matthew considered to be a rival.⁷⁵ There are no direct parallels to be found here, but it does make it a compelling text to read against the poems.

2.3.1: Rhetoric in the *Altercatio*

In the rest of this paragraph, I will go poem by poem and discuss any rhetorical elements that stand out. In the *Altercatio*, the two characters' styles are the most distinctive from each other. I will begin with Summer, as he is the first to speak. One aspect of his debating style immediately comes through in the beginning: he starts praising his own merits and implicitly criticizes Winter, but does not outwardly act as the aggressor. Winter picks up on this criticism, and because he takes offence, is the one who actually starts the debate. Summer is then able to spin the situation in such a way that Winter is the aggressor, and he becomes the victim. This can be seen in 21.1-2: *nunc palam experior certum inimicum / quem hucusque pacior ut fictum amicum*, 'now I openly discover someone to be my enemy / who, up to this point, I have tolerated as a false friend'. This indicates a style that is provocative: Summer frequently says things that appear to provoke a strong reaction with Winter and then responds to said reaction, implying that Winter has a quick temper and that he is the victim.

Another thing that stands out about Summer's rhetoric is the fact that it is heavily stylized. He often uses interjections, which add pathos.⁷⁶ He also seems to like rhetorical questions, as he asks eleven of them throughout the poem; much more often than Winter, who only does this twice. But what stands out the most is his penchant for repetition and wordplay. 93.3-4 shows this very well: *regnum meum vividum, regnum luculentum / regnum tuum tepidum, regnum lutulentum*, 'my kingdom is alive and shining, your kingdom is tepid and

⁷⁴ See Gronbeck-Tedesco

⁷⁵ Loveridge 2019, 248.

⁷⁶ Some examples of this are 'o' in 66.1 and 74.3 and 'eia eia' in 90.1.

muddy'. Stanza 75 is also a good example of this: in four lines, he manages to use the word *regnum* five times. While this is certainly a creative use of language, the notion starts to arise that Summer does not bring many substantive arguments into the discussion. He appears to be so focused on finding witty comebacks to Winter's words or artificially constructed sentences, that he is missing a very important part: the actual process of *inventio*. Though it is nowhere made explicit in the text that Summer's rhetorical skills are lacking, Matthew of Vendôme seems to support a similar reading. In 2.42, he excludes leonine verses from this treatise, because he does not see them as worthy compared to classical elegiac poetry. At first glance, this appears to discredit Matthew as a source to compare with the *Altercatio*, but when we actually look at his criticism, it lines up with these observations on Summer's rhetoric. In his criticism on this form of poetry, Matthew says:

Item a presentis doctrine traditione excludantus versus inopes rerum nugeque canore, scilicet frivole nugarum aggregations que quasi gesticulations auribus alludunt solo consonantie blandimento, que possunt cadaver examinatum imitari, promptuarium sine vino, manipulum sine grano, cibarium sine condiment, que vecice distente possunt comparari, que ventoso referta sibillo sine venustate sonum distillans ex sola ventositate sui tumoris contrahit incrementum.

Further, let verses lacking content and sweet sounding trifles be excluded from this presentation, namely, frivolous collections of trifles, which like jesters or mimers play to ears with the sole appeal of consonance, which can imitate a lifeless cadaver, a storeroom without wine, a sheaf without grain, rations without seasoning. They can be compared to a distended bladder which has expanded with a noisy windiness and lacking beauty dribbling the sound, drawing its beauty from only the windiness of its own swelling.⁷⁷

Summer seems to exemplify the love for *consonantia* that Matthew describes here, as well as the overarching lack of substance. The fact that the poem itself is composed in leonine verses does not detract from this message: there is little pretention about the seasons actually being good at debating.

Though Winter does not answer to this description quite as closely, he has his own particular rhetorical style. He bases his arguments on intellectual authority, and constantly

⁷⁷ *Ars versificatoria*, 2.43; tr. Parr 1981.

makes classical and biblical references. A few examples of this include 38.1, where he references the Babylonian viper, and 41.3, where he compares Summer to Phaëton. In that particular stanza, he also compares himself to David and Summer to Solomon. This specific comparison is striking, because these two biblical kings were important in treatises about government and rulership in the early twelfth century.⁷⁸ David and Solomon were both divinely ordained to become kings, but both eventually began to err. They were individually forgiven through their continued veneration for God, but their failure also led to unrest among the population. Winter does not make any allusions to their specific stories, and in general, it remains fairly unclear what he means to achieve with this comparison – the only thing he seems to refer to is that he is older than Summer in the same way that David is older than Solomon. The reference seems to be layered: Winter only seeks to namedrop the two kings, because that connects him to intellectual discourse about royalty, but anyone actually familiar with said discourse would recognise that the comparison does not do him any favours.

There are other words Winter uses to signal intellectualism, such as *philocalia* in 25.2, or *ago com prognosticis* ('I spend time with diviners') in 49.2. I will discuss these two references in the next chapter, but I mention them here as additional examples of Winter signalling intellectual authority. In stanza 70, Winter brings the discussion to the level of the cosmos: *Quinque zonas orbis esse prodit cosmimetria*, 'the *cosmimetria* states that the world has five zones' (70.1). In medieval cosmological models, there were indeed five different zones of varying temperatures. These were also associated with the same temperaments that the seasons are governed by.⁷⁹ Finally, in 86-89 Winter uses an elaborate *exemplum*, which I already discussed in the summary of this poem. The fable describes two people who are both tasked to build something to honour their respective gods, Vulcanus and Thetis. The follower of Vulcanus builds an altar with a burning fire, but the follower of Thetis builds a jar filled with water and extinguishes the altar's flames with it. Winter claims that this story serves to explain why water is better than fire. Here, again, the overall effect of the intellectualising tactic falls a bit flat. Summer immediately disproves the point of the fable with the simple observation that fire melts ice, therefore highlighting that Winter's lofty references also do not contain a lot of substance. Overall, the difference in the debating style of the two poems reflect their personalities, which I will discuss in depth in the next chapter. However, it needs to be said that neither side really argues well, on a fundamental level. There is no actual debate, because the question the two seasons are arguing about – which side is more powerful

⁷⁸ See Weiler 2021, 40.

⁷⁹ For example, this is mentioned in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* XIII.vi.

– is nonsensical, as the conclusion shows. There is only a semblance of an argument, and a demonstration of different debating styles, but there is no actual substance.

2.3.2: Rhetoric in *CA*, *CB* and *Estas et hiems*

In these two poems, there is not such a stark contrast between Winter and Summer in terms of their rhetorical styles, but there is a clear loser. This is due to the discussion taking place in a different setting: whereas the *Altercatio* is modelled after an intellectual debate, *CA* and *CB* depict a legal dispute. Winter is being accused of being a bad ruler; they need to defend themselves, otherwise they will be deposed. Rhetorical techniques are obviously very important here, but, once again, these are not necessarily depicted in the most flattering way. There are clear conditions of winning, but there is surprisingly little theory involved. In both *CA* and *CB*, it is not so much about the veracity of the arguments, but about having the last word.

In order to avoid too much overlap with the poems' summaries, I will keep this section relatively brief. In *CA*, we have seen that the debate begins to turn in Summer's favour after stanza 13, in which Winter criticizes the *temperies* caused by Summer on account of being *vilis et impura*, because Venus affects every living creature. It continues:

nata subdit viciis nec non nascitura

cogit amare iocos, Veneris contempnere iura

it subdues all creatures to vices, even those about to be born

it compels to love as a joke, to have disdain for Venus' laws (13.2-3).

We can see that Winter makes an appeal to legality here. Apparently, in Summer, the outside temperatures is driving everyone to commit sexual acts, but in an unlawful manner. Though this seems to be a potentially effective strategy, Summer does not mention lawfulness at all in their reply: instead, they stress the importance of heterosexual activities for procreation so strongly, that they seem to imply that Winter would be in favour of homosexual relationships. Summer's reply uses the word *sexu* three times, again recalling Matthew of Vendôme's criticism on leonine verses. Winter then states that Summer's procreation mostly creates irritating bugs, and that there is no reason for Summer to be praised for any of this. From this

point onwards, the debate gets a new technique: *turpiloquere*, insulting the other party. In stanza 16, Summer says that he will try to match Winter's insulting words, and concludes with *vix poterit verba meretrix tam turpia fari*, 'a prostitute could hardly say such offensive words' (16.4). Winter agrees with this plan, and states that this is the moment to speak openly and honestly about anything, without any shame or reservation. However, this immediately backfires. Summer's insults are as follows:

*A te verecundie virtus est private
 omnis est ingluvies tibi deputata
 palor obit faciem, membra sunt rugata
 nec sedare famem poterunt tibi cuncta create,*
 You are deprived of the virtue of shame
 everything is condemned to your gluttony
 paleness surrounds your face, your members are wrinkled
 and everything created would not be able to sate your hunger (18).

Winter is very embarrassed by these words, and becomes unable to formulate a reply:

*Explanata vicia Hiems ut attendit
 linguam pudor implicat, rubor os accendit
 per vultum ex oculis fletus ros descendit
 rationis indigens fere se defendit*
 When their vices were laid out, Winter stood like this,
 shame tied their tongue, a flush crept up on their face,
 tears descended from their eyes over their red cheeks,
 in want of reason, they nearly defended themselves (19).

But before anything else happens, the judge Ratio takes the word and swiftly concludes the debate, stating that Summer is the clear winner. We can see that the debate might have started out as a legal dispute, but actually ended up being a simple match of insults: one that Winter loses, and as a result, they also lose their power. `

In *CB*, Summer also alludes to wanting to speak offensively, but it reads as more of a warning. Just as in *CA*, Winter invites Summer to speak openly, but the conversation does not immediately move to the insults. Instead, Summer says:

*Hinc tuus propositus nil valet sermo, nam
Christo lites penitus proxime preponam,
Sed nunc tuam primitus arguam personam,
Que pungent medullitus, tibi dicere talia tonam.*

On my side, the conversation that you presented has zero value, because
in my heart of hearts, I pose this quarrel to Christ,
But now, for the first time, I will argue against your person,
I will thunder forth, saying things of such a kind that they pierce to the bone (22).

The invocation of Christ is striking here: Summer is implying that normally, they would be beyond such an argument, because they take the teachings of Christ with them wherever they go. By mentioning this, they add an element of divine truth to everything that they previously posed in this conversation. After Summer insults Winter, both seasons call for a *iudex* to come forward to give her judgement. The *iudex* motivates her choice for Winter as the loser as follows: *Cum tu certa neges, cum iuris, Hiems, modo leges stultaque alleges, tu rationis eges*, ‘Because you deny facts that are certain, because you, Winter, only study legal affairs and cite stupid things as evidence, you are missing reason’ (26). The poem concludes with the *iudex* separating Winter from the earth, and the final line is: *ius est, quod iubeo sanctificante deo*, ‘it is the law, that I order while honouring God’, or, potentially ‘what I order while honouring God is the law’ (27.5). Winter also cares about Christianity: in their attack on drunkenness, they state that they attack the vineyards *de dei consilio*, ‘on God’s advice’ (15.2). But they do not actually include God as a relevant party in how they conduct themselves in the debate, and I think this is where the difference lies. Though the pure arguments of Winter and Summer do not seem to have meaningful differences, the fact that Summer explicitly mentions consulting Christ in the debate turns out to be the crucial point. In this court, it does not matter if you are well versed in law, as Winter is: the guiding principle is, in fact, Christianity. This even goes so far, that the statement of the *iudex* can be interpreted in such a way that anything she says must be obeyed, as long as she says it with God in mind. In my opinion, this can be interpreted in multiple ways. It really was important for anyone studying law to keep Christian values in mind, and Winter might exemplify someone who has lost touch of this

aspect: with this reading, their loss was deserved. But Summer and the *iudex* do not really outwardly show their faith with their actions – they only proclaim it. Therefore, another reading is possible in which Summer and the *iudex* are only performative, and the legal system in which this takes place has lost sight of actual justice.

In summary, both *CA* and *CB* take the form of legal disputes and therefore centre the rhetorical effectiveness of the arguments. However, neither poem represents the court as a place where rhetorical theory is held in high regard. *CA* turns into a battle of insults, in which simply speaking is apparently more important than the actual words. The *iudex* does not need to motivate her decision in any way: Winter's embarrassing inability to reply is enough reason for their loss. In *CB*, Winter loses because of a lack of Christian values in their argumentation, but neither Summer nor the *iudex* seem to exhibit any more of these outside of proclamations. Whether these poems were purely Latin practice for young students or represent a genuine satire of the legal system, is not only impossible to answer, but also not wholly relevant. What we *can* see in both poems is a court that is imperfect, where disputes are judged on brief impressions rather than on legal and rhetorical theory.

Finally, I will mention *Estas et Hiems* only very briefly, as there is little rhetorical theory to be found here. The situation that develops here appears to be fairly similar to the one in the *Altercatio*, where both sides balance each other out. However, there is no real way of telling if this balance is supposed to last up until the end, as we do not know what the intended resolution of the poem would have been.

3. Rulership in the poems

In this chapter, we finally get to the core question of this thesis: what statements do these poems make on styles of rulership, especially within the context of attitudes towards and challenges of rulership in the twelfth century? In order to examine this, I will discuss the rulers in the poems through the lens of three different topics. Firstly, I will talk about characterisation. The different personalities, interests and values of Winter and Summer are highly relevant for the progression of the debates and also align with certain traits that were considered to be ‘good’ and ‘bad’ for a ruler to have. The second topic is property. In chapter 3.1, we have seen that conflicts of power were often related to the possession of land and the accumulation and distribution of produce and property. A very similar dynamic can be found in these poems, and we will see that Winter and Summer have differing opinions on this topic. Finally, I will discuss the resolution of these poems, where possible. The overall moral of a debate changes drastically depending on how it is resolved, and the poems all have various conclusions. I will discuss the poems one by one, highlighting these themes where they are the most relevant. Overall, I aim to connect the political and intellectual themes introduced in the previous chapter to these poems, and with this, illustrate that the depictions of rulership in them are very much in line with common theories and challenges in the twelfth century.

3.1: *Altercatio Yemis et Estaticis*

3.1.1: The presence of rulership

It immediately becomes apparent that the seasons are supposed to be imagined as rulers: the first time they are introduced, they are referred to as *reges duos*, ‘two kings.’⁸⁰ The two of them have their own mounts: Winter has a Moorish dragon decorated with flowers and Summer has an elephant, and both of them have elaborately decorated saddles.⁸¹ The fact that these mounts and their decoration are exotic denotes that the two parties occupy an extraordinary position that not many people would be able to relate to. They also each have a

⁸⁰ *Altercatio* 3.2: *reges duos vehunt venti summa cum iactancia*, ‘the winds bring two kings, with the loudest boasting’

⁸¹ See *Altercatio* 5.

following: six *nobiles* signifying the months, a little over fifty *milites* signifying the weeks and finally, *tirones*, days.⁸² These do not play a very large role in the ensuing debate, but they do establish the two seasons as being part of a hierarchy that mimics one that worldly rulers would be part of.

3.1.2: Characterization

In general, Winter is characterized a little more strongly than Summer. He comes across as cold, stern and generally not very sympathetic. Summer's characterisation reads as more of a foil to this: Winter is needed to fully appreciate the breadth of his character. For this reason, I will begin this paragraph with discussing Winter. The fact that he is not characterized as a very warm ruler, does not mean that he has no positive aspects. One important point in this regard is *sapientia*. We have seen that Winter frequently stresses that he has time for intellectual development, something Summer lacks. This is not merely an expression to denote that he considers himself to be socially superior, but it was a fundamental trait for a rulers to have: according to Rodríguez de la Peña, the king was 'the only layman of whom a minimum grasp of high culture was expected'.⁸³ According to the church, the *literati* were seen as the ruling class, and patronage of high culture became 'one of the missions of the nobility'.⁸⁴ Winter is not proud of his intellectual interests because he is pretentious, but because his learnedness embodies genuine virtue. An example of this can be found in 49.1, where Winter contrasts his company of *urbanis* ('city dwellers' or 'courtiers') with Summer's *rusticis* (farmers). The concept of *urbanitas* in the twelfth century is a multifaceted topic, which I will only touch upon briefly here. As Thomas Zotz explains, the medieval interpretation of the word seems to be influenced by Cicero in three different aspects: to be precise, in the sense of the refined way of life in the city (as opposed to *rusticitas*, the unrefined way of life in the countryside), refinement in terms of rhetoric and a friendly sense of humour. For Cicero, the word was inherently associated with Rome as the *urbs*, but eventually it became connected to a courtly environment.⁸⁵ There is no precise definition of the word's exact meaning in the twelfth century, but we do know that it was related to both

⁸² The *milites* here should probably be interpreted as 'knights' (as denoted in DuCange) rather than ordinary foot soldiers.

⁸³ Rodríguez de la Peña 2023, 132

⁸⁴ Rodríguez de la Peña 2023, 132-133.

⁸⁵ Zotz 2016,297-299.

courtly virtues *and* courtly manners. It implies refinement in many different areas, which firmly distinguishes a powerful person from the common folk. The *urbanus* that Winter mentions here, is not merely a city dweller: he is talking about people who have a strong level of refinement themselves and are intimately affiliated with the court. This is in line with an observation from Bisson: in the early twelfth century, a lord's relationship to his followers began to change. Rather than everyone being equally subservient to the ruler, a system of elite companionship emerged where vassals and knights gained their own claims to power.⁸⁶ The relationship between a lord and this relatively new baronial class would prove to be fickle at times, but Winter does not try to establish supremacy by claiming that he has more loyalty among them – rather, that his loyalty is *courtly*.⁸⁷ Winter is not only cultivating high culture with his interest in intellectual subjects, he is also simply surrounded by more power than Summer is.

However, as we have seen in paragraph 2.3, there is some ambiguity in his intellectual image. This is illustrated well in 49.2, directly following the line about *urbanis* discussed above. Winter mocks summer for dancing, and to illustrate the contrast between them, he says *ago cum prognosticis*, 'I spend time with prognostics' (49.2). The exact meaning of *prognosticis* in this context is unclear, but we can infer that it denotes someone who can predict the future. Within an medieval court, this likely refers to astrologers, as they were commonly active in this environment. In his chapter on prognosticism in medieval western Europe, Matthias Heiduk says the following: 'Erudite astrologers often acted as the personal physicians to royal personages, which enhanced both their own status and that of the ruler, who gained a reputation for being a wise man.'⁸⁸ As astrology was considered to be an actual science, this fits into Winter's self-fashioned image of a wise lord. However, John of Salisbury sees astrology as an example of the frivolity and vice he saw present in courtly milieus, and harshly condemns it.⁸⁹ He does this mainly on religious grounds: to him, the knowledge that an astrologer claims to have on the stars and the 'determining' power ascribed to them is treading too close to God's territory.⁹⁰ This makes the actual value of the *prognosticus* ambiguous. Purely based on the text, one could say that it is simply an intellectual reference to establish Winter as a learned ruler. But I find it very tempting to take

⁸⁶ Bisson 2009, 75.

⁸⁷ Gaining and sustaining the loyalty of this baronial class is a large issue in *Estas et Hiems*. For this reason, I have chosen to explain the exact details of the importance of a good relationship between a lord and this class in the paragraph that discusses this passage, on page 53.

⁸⁸ Heiduk 202, 130; see also Kieckhefer 2014, 122.

⁸⁹ See *Politicratus* 1.10-13.

⁹⁰ Escobar-Vargas 2015, 62.

John's attitude into consideration here as well. In the paragraph about rhetorical styles, we have seen that both sides care more about the appearance of their words than they do about Christian truth. The critical interpretation of *prognosticis* is in line with this image: it serves as another example of the fact that Winter thinks he is very learned, but does not actually understand the topics he talks about.

Winter also has some traits that are unambiguously undesirable. Again, it immediately becomes clear that he is not very sympathetic, especially compared to Summer. In combination with the cruelty that Summer ascribes to him, this could theoretically make him universally disliked. But this is not a trait that contemporary theories mention often – especially if a ruler functioned well, being stern was not regarded as an unforgiveable offense. Winter has one particular trait that could be considered a serious transgression and potentially render him wholly unsuitable to rule: his passivity. In paragraph 2.1, we saw that inaction was considered to be an act of violence from a ruler towards his people. Winter is not entirely negligent – he does take responsibility for sowing seeds, for example, and states how his weather has a positive effect on the state of the world.⁹¹ But that does not take away his enthusiasm for *otium*. The intellectual activities he boasts are only possible to undertake without having a lot of work on the side. Towards the end of the debate, Summer also calls Winter out on his alleged passivity:

*Dic, an sit sub ociis vita transigenda,
an vero negociis ullis exercenda,
Dic et, an sit vicio virtus ascribenda
aut hec huic iudicio prudentis subdenda*

Tell me, whether your life is to be spent subjected to leisure
or if you actually need to engage with any business at all,
and tell me whether virtue should be attributed to this vice
or if, according to judgement of learned people, one should be placed under the other.⁹²

Summer not only questions the role that *otium* has in Winter's life, but also comments on differing standards of virtue. The implication here is that Winter's sense of virtue is skewed –

⁹¹ See *Altercatio* 33.1 for his responsibility in produce; 41.1 on how he presents himself as the instigator for moral behaviour (*decus habes et decorem quibus a me frueris*, 'you have honour and comeliness through that which flourishes because of me').

⁹² *Altercatio* 83.

presumably because he values experiencing *otium* as virtuous – and that this would not hold up under examination under a legal lens. This fits nicely into the theoretical discussion around negligence as we have seen in paragraph 2.1: failure to act could be seen as a serious vice for a ruler. Summer highlights how Winter’s moral stance on this issue does not align with that of an actually learned person, specifically in an implied legal setting, and this entire issue could be considered transgressive. This vice also fits into how Winter as a season is embedded into humoral theory: his phlegmatic nature is associated with laziness and the lack of initiative is also fitting for his old age.

As expected, Summer’s characterization is described along the same lines, but in the opposite direction. To begin with, he prides himself on his friendliness. His presence has a regenerative effect: for example, in stanza 59, he states that *en mea temperie recreatur mundus / tua intemperie pridem gemebundus*, ‘through my moderate temperature the world is rejuvenated / under your immoderate temperate it groans, since long ago’. He also frequently mentions how his presence brings joy (see 69.1.1-2: *mihi, tibi tristia, rident elementa / ad me spectant gaudia, set ad te tormenta*, ‘to me the elements smile, when they are made sad by you, to me they look in happiness, but to you in torment’) and how he adorns the earth with flowers (see 11.3, 37.1 and 61.3). He also mentions some more superficial things, such as clothes, plays and festivals, that boost the mood of the general public. Summer seems to be concerned with every layer of society. Rather than focusing most of his attention on the *urbanis*, he remarks how Winter disturbs every social class: *laicos vel clericos* (laypeople and the clergy) and *milites vel rusticos* (knights and farmers).⁹³ He also presents himself as a solace for the general population and therefore states that his power is more far-reaching than Winter’s.⁹⁴ The overall implication is that he derives his authority from this friendly attitude and the happiness that he is able to bring to everyone in equal measure. This also prevents him from being accused of negligence, because Summer stresses his own active role in all of these affairs.

However, according to Winter, these things are style rather than substance. In stanza 54, he begins by stating that he is responsible for sowing the seeds of grain, which we will look to more in depth in the next paragraph that concerns property. In the two lines that follow, Winter says: *non nos movet flos insanus, fastus meretricii / ludi leves, decor vanus, fallax placor vicii*, ‘we are unmoved by an insane flower, the pride of a prostitute / trifling games,

⁹³ See *Altercatio* 42.1.

⁹⁴ *Altercatio* 51.4, *quod sim concolacio spesque miserorum*, ‘because I am the comfort and hope of the miserable’.

empty comeliness, the deceitful approval of vices' (54.3-4). Another, more brief example of this is Winter accusing Summer of *philocalia*, 'a love of the beautiful' in 25.2. This is reminiscent of a statement that Bisson makes towards the end of his second chapter, in which he says: 'John of Salisbury's disdain for flattery and preoccupation with 'trifles' (*nugae*) are sufficient proof that great lords valued affability and caprice, and cultivated them.'⁹⁵ In this context, Summer's friendly nature could also be seen as slightly disingenuous, or at least as an expression of power rather than an ideal of equality. Some other character traits that Winter accuses Summer of are excessive pride and the cultivation of an environment that encourages vice.⁹⁶ Another element in which Summer does not measure up to Winter is in learnedness. Summer does not explicitly present himself as a *miles litteratus* – though the very fact that he is able to hold a debate in this manner of course implies that he is educated enough.

Both sides have strong opinions on the other party's cruelty and violence, in terms of harsh weather. The fact that violence in itself occurs does not necessarily have strong implications – as we have seen, violence was a central aspect to most experiences of rulership in the time period around the twelfth century, and rulers were not necessarily expected to be peaceful. However, the key point for both parties is the level of harm caused to the earth. On both sides, this discussion starts off fairly lightly. Summer first says that Winter's weather 'horrifies', 'disturbs' and 'annoys' everyone, and explains in which areas they have effect: birds are silent, ploughmen are forced to run inside, the seas are tumultuous and even the sun is able to shine less clearly.⁹⁷ Winter's earlier accusations include that Summer's heat distorts the land, that it brings forth pests and that it causes excessive sweating.⁹⁸ Both sides also explain how they mitigate the other's negative effects. For example, the poor ploughmen Summer describes in stanza 44 have to sit in front of the hearth, to 'recreate' the warmth they feel with him, and Winter's storms are able to cleanse and rejuvenate the land after the heat has dried them out. But these arguments eventually take a more violent turn – both sides begin accusing each other of senseless murder, and are unable to determine which one of the two is worse. In both cases, these deaths are caused by a lack of balance and *temperies*, suggesting that a surplus of a certain temperament can have disastrous consequences. But all is not lost: both sides also have the power to temper each other. The discussion itself is perfectly balanced, because both characters are equally unbalanced.

⁹⁵ Bisson 2009, 83.

⁹⁶ For pride, see *Altercatio* 78.1; an explanation of how Summer breeds vice is 38-41.

⁹⁷ *Altercatio* 35.2; 44-45.

⁹⁸ *Altercatio* 40.2; 46-49.

3.1.3: Property and power

Though this topic is not necessarily central to the debate as a whole, it is quite central to its definition of power. The crux of the question here is responsibility: which one of the two parties takes on the most important role in the development of produce, and therefore deserves to be seen as more powerful? Winter is the first one to lay this out, directly after both seasons explain what happens in the various months. In October, some selected fields get sown first. This most likely refers to cereals, such as wheat and rye. These were winter crops, usually sown around October and harvested in summer, and they were incredibly important because they allowed for the production of bread – an essential part in most people’s diet.⁹⁹ Winter also mentions March as a ‘life-giving’ month (*animandi strenua*, ‘industrious in giving life, 32.3’).¹⁰⁰ In stanza 33, he comes to the following conclusion:

*Et cum omnis rei pater prolis sit principium,
Eius vero nutrix mater non nisi mancipium,
Tu subiectum dominatus habe participium,
Ne presumpti principatus feras precipicium*

And because for everything, the father is the origin of the offspring,
and the nursing mother is really only his property,
you, ruled over, should have a subordinate share,
and not as the leader of what is done beforehand bring about ruin.

Winter takes full responsibility for the sowing of crops, and claims that he should have full power because he is the primary cause for their existence. But Summer finds this point to be overstated. Winter devastates everything with his storms and therefore ‘consumes’ most of this same produce – which means that the part he contributes is actually not that significant in the end.¹⁰¹ Some other arguments follow: Summer accuses Winter of hindering the ploughman’s work (44), Winter argues that he contributes to the economy by supporting the taverns (47) and criticizes the hard work Summer imposes (48). Summer then brings up the term *nutrix* again. Though Winter used it as an insult, Summer turns it around and stresses the

⁹⁹ See Zadoks 2013, 48-50 on various cereals in the medieval period.

¹⁰⁰ Alongside the obvious implication that the winter crops are starting to grow, this was also the time where a secondary spring crop was sown: see Zadoks 2013, 50.

¹⁰¹ This is likely related to the secondary spring crop – these were grown to have more food security overall, but especially to account for a harsh winter.

importance of this position. This is in contrast with Winter's comparative uselessness – in this section, he is accused of being an 'Epicurean'. This is another topic present in John of Salisbury, who heavily criticises this archetype of a ruler.¹⁰² As with the *prognosticis*, this reference seems quite pointed, and serves to connect Summer's criticism of Winter to contemporary criticism of actual rulers. After this, Summer says: *nostra stipe pascimus te velut mendicum*, 'with our donation, we provide your food like a beggar' (53.1). With this, he brings the power dynamic firmly on topic again, and also draws another link between power and responsibility. His contribution to the growing and harvesting of produce is so vital that Winter relies on it, which makes him the more powerful party. The overarching insult works on two levels: because Winter is such a stereotypically bad ruler, his social position turns into the lowest level.

But Winter immediately turns this logic around. He is responsible for the seeds, which also makes him a *nutricius*. This allows him to kindly provide Summer with grain – a staple food that Summer relies on, turning him into the beggar instead. Finally, Summer is also described as a stereotypically bad ruler, like we have seen in the previous paragraph: he is frivolous, with his *ludi leves* and *decor vanus*. We can see that both parties have the means to create sustenance, which binds others to them. They both interpret the fact that the other side relies on them as a sign of superior power, and they consolidate this claim by calling out the other party on weak rulership. Ultimately, it becomes very obvious that neither side prevails here, because of exactly this mutual reliance. Similarly to what we have seen in the previous paragraph on characterization, both sides are perfectly balanced with each other. This illustrates the pointlessness of the debate as a whole and fits within the conclusion, which I will discuss now.

3.1.4: Resolution

In the poem's resolution, there is no ambiguity at all. Both sides are in the wrong – actually, the fact that they are fighting at all is wrong to begin with – and they need to cooperate. We have seen various examples of how both sides lack temperance on their own and are capable of doing serious harm because of this, but they are also able to compensate for the effects of

¹⁰² See *Politicratus* 7 and 8. John is noted for his dislike of Epicureanism, and takes these two chapters to explain why this is the case.

the other. This is also stressed by Theologia, who notes that this is deliberate and all part of the divine plan. She also explains that if both parties do not settle their differences, the consequences will be dire: they will both end up in hell. Conversely, resolving their differences will allow them to go to heaven. The fact that specifically Theologia has the role of a judge is significant, because it corresponds to the notion that God distributes power and has the final say in whether or not a ruler's performance has been adequate. Though the conclusion discusses, at its core, the cosmological position of the two seasons, it can be read as something more broadly applicable. When Theologia tells the two seasons to settle their differences, she does not directly address them, but just tells them collectively to 'harmonize' (*concordo*) the strength of 'cold' and 'heat'. Overall, this is quite a general statement – cold and hot are also elemental properties, so it could theoretically be applied to anything else that is governed by elements. In the paragraph on humourism, we have seen how the notion of the body politic relates to this line of thinking, and I believe that could also be applied here. If a ruler does not strive for balance within himself and, consequently, the realm as a whole, he risks being sent to hell, but God will reward him by accepting him in heaven if he manages to sustain the elements in the right proportions.

However, I believe that this passage goes beyond general advice. When Theologia enters the scene, she travels *arciore via*, 'through the narrow path'. This is a reference to Jesus' sermon on the mountain in Matthew 7:13-14, where he describes that the road to salvation is narrow and challenging; most people end up travelling through the wide gate, which is much easier, but ultimately leads to destruction. The fact that Theologia travels the smaller path implies that the two seasons are currently on the wider road: they are not leading their life according to Christian moral values. This is already implied with the very premise of the debate, as the question they ask goes against God's intentions. Both seasons lack the theological knowledge to understand that they were created as equals, and get stuck in a debate that is impossible to solve. The discussion, that started out purely theoretically, almost turns into a physical altercation because of this, and the stakes are very high – a fight could potentially mean the end of the entire cosmos. This image can easily be reduced in scale: worldly lords without any religious guidance or education are at risk of causing excessive violence. This can be averted, but only by the members of the clergy, as they are the only ones who can provide this guidance. Good rulership therefore requires submitting to – or at least, firmly respecting – religious authority. The conclusion therefore turns the poem into a negotiation of power between the clergy and worldly leaders. Though the original conflict is between two lay rulers, religious authority inserts itself in the debate through the conclusion.

To come back to Weiler, the debate really depicts a conflict between ruler and elite. This reading is supported by the very final image in the poem, where Theologia becomes Pax and holds Rachel and Leah by the hand on either side. These characters were commonly seen as representations of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, and in this final image, they are fully united.¹⁰³ This happens according to a ‘theory’. It would be intriguing to explore this alongside known peace movements and practices that were active in medieval Europe, such as the *Treuga Dei*, but for the scope of this thesis I will not speculate any further on this topic.¹⁰⁴ But whether or not the poem is based on a concrete situation, it does feature the very real threat of violence caused by worldly rulers. It seeks to mitigate this threat by promoting religious education and supporting the role of the clergy within the court, and envelops this all in an elaborate allegorical image that makes reference to many different twelfth-century intellectual developments.

3.2: *Conflictus hyemis et estatis A and B*

3.2.1: The presence of rulership

Neither poem’s introduction explicitly describes the seasons as rulers, but Estas’ first words reveal how rulership is a central topic: see *CA* 10.3, *te plus mundi non vult dominari*, ‘most of the world does not want to be ruled by you’. This immediately shows that this is not only a conversation about the differences between the two seasons, but also a trial in which Winter has to defend their right to rule.

3.2.2: Characterization

Because both *CA* and *CB* are much shorter than the *Altercatio* and clearly favour the side of Summer, the presentation of both characters is less balanced overall. The initial description of the characters is based on stereotypes that can be connected to humoral theory, where Summer

¹⁰³ This interpretation was made common by Augustine; see Catapano 2012 for the full context on this topic.

¹⁰⁴ More context on these movements – although slightly earlier than the twelfth century – can be found in (amongst others) Head and Landes 1992 and Gergen 2002; for the later Middle Ages, Kaeuper 1988 offers more information.

is much more positively introduced than Winter. While some of these differences can simply be attributed to the contrast in age or temperature, there is a strong second distinction: while Summer is flourishing, Winter is in decay. This immediately turns Summer into a far more reasonable party within the context of the debate; they clearly still have a lot to offer to the world, while Winter is only a burden.

When it comes to good and bad character traits, this bias is again visible. In *CA*, there is one sentence in which Winter says that Summer's vices are unable to cultivate themselves in the cold, implying that they appreciate balance and abhor vice, but this comes across as an attack on Summer rather than an affirmation of their own virtue. In version *B*, Winter pays more attention to the balance they bring and how the crops benefit from this. They also value virtue in a Christian context: for example, in stanza 15 they state that, though they sometimes harms the vineyards, they do this 'by God's counsel' (*de dei consilio*), because excessive drunkenness can lead to a state of insanity; however, this is not enough to convince the judge that their Christian values are strong enough. In both poems, the bad traits are amplified much more. Winter is quickly offended by things they consider harmful, but they are unable to properly defend their position. In version *A*, they are described as gluttonous: this is one of the main themes of the poem, and their lack of explanation or counterargument amplifies their unlikability.

In both versions, Winter is also clearly old. This was not necessarily considered a bad trait for a ruler by itself, but a lack of physical power certainly was, as this removed them from the essential position they had in the feudal system: a warrior rather than a councillor.¹⁰⁵ Shulamith Shahar explains that older feudal lords would sometimes retreat from public life. This did not come with an official loss of status, but in practice it was certainly seen as such. Shahar also explains that the old lord who still attempted to behave as he did in his youth was seen as long overdue, and would become an object of derision. A poem by the twelfth century troubadour Bertran de Born describes how it is a joyful affair when an old lord finally leaves his realm in younger hands, and that this act has a rejuvenating effect.¹⁰⁶ Bertran compares this to the changing of seasons, which makes *CA* and *CB* quite compelling to read in this context: not only do they share their subject matter with Bertran, but also their attitude towards older rulers. Within the scope of *CA* and *CB*, Winter's transgression is likely not their age by itself, but more so the fact that they are unwilling to let go of their power. I think this is the central point of the debate – no matter what Winter says, most people would rather not see

¹⁰⁵ Shahar 1997.

¹⁰⁶ Shahar 1997, 121.

them in a position of authority anymore. No rhetorical skill or appeal to legal facts would be enough to convince the judge otherwise.

Another trait is painted to be so undesirable, that it leads to escalation and Winter's ultimate loss in both poems: prudishness. As we have seen in paragraph 2.3, Winter does not really condemn sex as a whole. They specifically take offence to 'unserious' lovemaking – presumably outside the context of marriage – and criticise Summer for inciting this immoral behaviour. But in both cases, Summer manages to twist the argument to imply that Winter is against natural reproduction, and this would eventually make them unable to provide for this subjects. I will elaborate on that specific subject further down, because it ties into the theme of property.

Prudishness in itself does not seem to be a prevalent cause for criticising rulers in the twelfth century, but one element in Summer's counterargument is, especially with the context of the *Altercatio Ganymedis et Helene* that these lines were based on. Summer implies that Winter must be in favour of homosexual relationships, because they do not value heterosexual ones. Klaus van Eickels explains how, within twelfth-century rulership, this is a nuanced subject: the medieval upper class was homosocial, but sexual acts between men were still seen as a sin.¹⁰⁷ Especially in later centuries, accusations of sodomy were frequently made to ruling parties in order to delegitimize their power.¹⁰⁸ There was often an implied element of going against the natural state of things, which, even without the homosexual implications, is exactly what Summer's criticism is based on.

Summer does not get nearly as many bad character traits attributed to them, other than excessive heat and cruelty in the *CB*. But, apart from the introduction, there is not much of a focus on their good traits either. The most important aspect appears to be that they are willing to attack Winter on behalf of the entire world. Their call to action and willingness to provide food for the entire world both fit into the contemporary image of a good ruler. Additionally, in *CB*, they present themselves as someone who takes the teachings of Christ to heart. This reinforces the image of competency, and harms Winter even further: Summer is such a good Christian that they would rather not fight with anyone, but the dire circumstances and Winter's hostility are forcing him to come into action.

¹⁰⁷ See Eickels 2020.

¹⁰⁸ See Bagerius and Ekholst 2015 for further examples of this, or Karlen 1971 on the the transgressive nature of homosexuality.

3.2.3: Property and power

The issue of property and power is central to the debate, because Winter's main transgression is causing an unequal division in food and produce. Summer's justification for 'taking away Winter's rights' is the fact that they are a burden to the earth. Because the world no longer wants Winter as a ruler, Summer can legally lay claim on their rights. Though Winter attempts to turn this argument around by replying that Summer's heat also damages the earth, this tactic is not successful, and Summer continues to argue how Winter's gluttony destroys everything they create. The reason why Winter's defensive strategy does not work as well in *CA* as it does in the *Altercatio*, is that they do not take on enough responsibility in this creation process – in fact, they are even accused of working against it. This opens up the opportunity for Summer to convincingly argue that Winter is nothing but a burden: though they contribute nothing, they lay claim on everything. In *CB*, Winter attempts to mitigate this by stressing that they also play an important part in making things grow.¹⁰⁹ This does not help the final outcome, but the main argument against them is not based on their gluttony causing inequality – rather, on their old age and inferior rhetorical abilities. When taken into the larger context, the main problem here is that Winter's age makes them unable to produce any sustenance.

3.2.4: Resolution

Given the subject matter of these poems, we can infer that they describe the beginning of spring. There are comical undertones, but the overall image is understandable. It has been winter for a while, there is not much food available and everyone is ready for warmer weather, so Winter is 'put on trial' – the only natural conclusion would be for them to be sent away. In *CB*, this judgement is even expressed directly:

*Tempus est discedere, quod debes, redde pace,
passu mundum desere, priusquam minace
Estas te comburere possit sita face!
Ad presens ideo de mondo te phariseo;*

¹⁰⁹ See *CB*, stanzas 13 and 19.

ius est, quod iubeo sanctificante deo.

It is time to leave - which you should, give up in peace,
 leave the world with a step, before Summer
 can set you on fire – which they are allowed – with a menacing torch!
 So at this moment, I divide you from the world;
 it is law, what I command while honouring God (27).

There is a fundamental difference with the *Altercatio* in both of these poems, because there is no call for balance. This difference is already present in the debate's instigation: whereas the discussion in the *Altercatio* is mutually started, this one is apparently based on an earlier transgression. Though only one side gets the favour here, the conclusion is still based on attaining a divinely ordained balance. God clearly intended the seasons to alternate, so the dismissal of one in favour of the other is only natural in this worldview.

But alongside the clear allegorical meaning, the two rulers are also judged by standards that pertain to actual rulership. Winter is not only an ending season, but also a ruler who apparently fails at bringing balance to the world on account of their old age, gluttony and inability to provide. Apparently, these traits have gone so far as to actively cause harm to the general public, and for this reason a legal procedure is started. Winter is unable to defend their actions and consolidate their power in the ensuing trial. In the *CA*, they embarrassingly fail to reply to a string of insults, which causes the judge to step in and proclaim them as the loser. In *CB*, the judge declares them the loser because they have not adequately argued their case and therefore lack *ratio*. Both of these poems hold the implication that rulership is conditional. Because Winter fails to take care of their people, it is legally justified that they get deposed. In paragraph 2.1, we have seen that this would indeed have been considered to be theoretically sound: a monarch's transgressions towards his people would sever their obligations to him. There is not a lot of evidence of this happening in practice, but these two poems demonstrate that there was active thought surrounding the matter nonetheless.

The exact motivations for accusing Winter as a bad ruler differ somewhat between the poems. In *CA*, the issue is mostly material in nature. Winter is gluttonous, but does not contribute much to the creation of produce on their own. Eventually, this would lead to an unsustainable situation. In *CB* there is certainly also an element of gluttony, but the production and provision is more balanced. The real issue is that Winter is still in power, even though they are clearly too old. This adds another dimension to the already present theme of

divine ordination: just as God intended the seasons to alternate, he also appointed new people to positions of power.

3.3: *Estas et Hiems*

3.3.1: The presence of rulership

In his brief introduction, the narrator tells us that the seasons are debating because Summer wants to banish Winter. This implies that this poem is also intended to describe the passing of the seasons. Though the discussion initially gives off the impression that it is only about seasonal archetypes, it eventually turns to how both sides treat nobles, soldiers and servants. This means that, as in the other poems, Summer and Winter are also rulers. The other stanzas get a different context with this added knowledge – the poem as we have it discusses the different effects that Winter and Summer have on the world, as well as their individual preferences when it comes to leading other people.

3.3.2: Characterization

Because there are no introductory stanzas with descriptions to prime the audience, the characterization is not as strong here as in the other poems. Still, there are a number of character traits that can be distilled from the arguments themselves. Most of these are quite similar to those we have found in the other poems, so I will not discuss them in great detail. Winter is, once again, accused of devouring everything Summer produces – though their reply is interesting here, because they seem to consider this a sign of superiority, which is slightly distinct from the other poems.¹¹⁰ They do not defend themselves against the accusation, but pride themselves on the sustainable level of comfort they can provide to their people. Summer mainly focuses on their ability to make things grow that bring happiness, and seems particularly proud of their flowers. Winter uses the counterargument that flowers are only

¹¹⁰ *Estas et hiems*, 3.

temporary, and do not serve any particular purpose other than looking nice – therefore, they lack substance.

Some more character information can be found in how both sides treat their servants. Winter proudly states that theirs are clothed and that they always have enough to drink, which makes them a good leader. According to them, Summer’s servants are forced to work hard and suffer in the heat. Summer, of course, sees this differently: their servants are happy to work outside, while Winter’s workers are drunk and lazy. The images arising here are very reminiscent of those in the other poems. Winter prides himself on the peace and quietness he provides, but he blatantly profits off of Summer for this – they can be considered lazy and negligent. Summer is the main provider, but they are overly focused on beautiful things that lack substance, and they push their servants to work hard. Both sides condemn each other’s cruelty, which we have also seen in the other examples. But both sides also actively pride themselves on their likeability, especially when it comes to certain social groups – which leads into the subject of property and power.

3.3.3: Property and power

This subject is discussed from a slightly different angle than we have seen so far. There is certainly a direct connection to agricultural production and the distribution of produce, but there is also a distinct theme of consolidating power through governing people. The discussion does not begin in this way, but rather with a familiar theme: Summer accuses Winter of ravaging everything that they produced. This motif is brought up a few more times, such as in 4.2, *tu consumis turpiter res per me congestas*, ‘you shamefully devour the property accumulated by me’. But when they bring this up again in stanza 8, they add an additional dimension:

Te cogunt et nutriunt hec, que per me crescent,

Per que mundi principes singuli ditescunt,

Fieri participes omnes inardescunt

Tot bonorum maxime; sed que pauperescunt?

You are driven and nourished by the things, which grow because of me,
through which the leaders of the world each grow rich,

and they all most intensely burn with desire to become one
to share in so many goods; but because of whom do they become poor?

With this statement, Summer presents themselves as the central figure in a feudal system. They are directly responsible for granting the *principes* ('lords', but also a more general description for someone in command) their wealth – and therefore, their power – which naturally places them at Summer's side. Winter is presented as taking this wealth away, which makes them their enemy. Of course, Winter disagrees with this interpretation of events. They state that the lords are at peace during their season, that they become very beloved and that they would rather revere Winter than Summer. This leads to a simple conclusion: *ergo iure debeo tibi dominari*, 'and thus, according to the law, I am obliged to rule over you.' Summer replies with a similar stanza that also culminates in the nobles' favour granting them authority.

This corresponds to the broader theme that rulership was much more than a single person enacting their will, but rather a constant negotiation of political power between rulers and elites.¹¹¹ The fact that both seasons are concerned with how the higher class views them is important, because these people could legitimize or take away their power. It is also reminiscent of a statement by Bisson that we have already seen applied to the *Altercatio*, where he mentions the importance of elite companionship to the rulers that emerged in the twelfth century.¹¹² Given that the manuscript that contains this poem was found in England, it seems relevant to mention that this particular dynamic was very present in Anglo-Norman kingship. According to Bisson, rulership in England was historically stronger and more centralised than it had been in France. This meant that the dynamic between the lord and his barons was also more of a central issue. In her chapter on Anglo-Norman kingship, Laura Ashe explains how new kings would sometimes find themselves in a precarious position, because they would award their supporters with titles and land to secure their loyalty. However, land was a finite resource, so this often meant that older and more established families were disinherited. But these families still sought to protect their own interests, and this often lead to an alternative claimant being put forward. Even though the king was theoretically very powerful in his ability to redistribute lands, his dependence on loyal supporters and the defensive power of the barony could also turn into a weakness.¹¹³ The way

¹¹¹ This is specifically pointed in England at the time, because in the fourteenth century, a lot more literary debates between rulers and subjects were written here. The renegotiation of power transcends the boundaries of the feudal system; for example, this could also have been appealing to an urban audience.

¹¹² Bisson 2009, 75.

¹¹³ Ashe 2013, 185.

in which Winter and Summer both stress their strong relationship with the higher classes shows that they also feel this tension. By their description, the nobles' support grants them *all* power, which turns this into a high-risk situation: a relationship anything short of perfect could make them lose everything.

Finally, some arguments are made about how both parties treat their servants, which I already discussed in the segment about characterization. This treatment is also slightly related to how both sides choose to distribute produce. We have seen that Winter boasts about the fact that their workers get to drink and relax, but it is important to note that this is directly at the expense of Summer's servants:

*Servi tui nudi sunt, mei vestiuntur
meis potus sufficit, tui affliguntur,
siti qui miseriam sepe paciuntur,
bona sed omnimoda meis largiuntur*

Your servants are naked, mine are clothed
there is enough to drink for my men, yours are distressed,
they often left to suffer misery,
but they widely bestow goods of all kinds to mine. (11)

Winter's argument here is twofold. They present themselves as a kinder leader, but also as a leader who is socially and economically superior. This goes to such an extent that it even puts their servants in a luxurious position, because Summer's men hand out gifts to them. Summer responds that their men are not distressed; in fact, they are quite happy, because they are in the direct presence of flowers and fruit. This again shows that they see value in their role of distributing produce, and attributes more power to this. We see a fundamental question arise here: is true power signalled by the ability to lead a luxurious life, facilitated by the labour of others? Or is it found in being closer to the means of production and being responsible for distributing property, without the freedom to do what you please? This question is reminiscent of the idea of the moral economy, as described by E.P. Thompson in 1971.¹¹⁴ I do not intend to discuss this in greater detail, but I bring this up to illustrate that this short poem contains some fundamental ideas about the relationship between property and power.

¹¹⁴ See Thompson 1971.

3.3.4: Resolution

The actual resolution of the debate is, of course, impossible to discern. As mentioned before, Walther suggests that Summer is the ultimate winner of the debate, which he bases on a small marginal note saying *Carmen in hiemem*. This could simply be explained by the fact that Summer is the first speaker in this debate, but the fact that he wants to ‘banish’ Winter also suggests that this is another poem marking the changing seasons. If that is the case, then it would indeed make sense for Winter to be declared the loser. But, unlike the *Conflictus*, this does not become readily apparent from the poem itself. It must be said that Winter’s way of life as they describe it is not sustainable, but there are nowhere near as many elements that suggest their entire presence is unpleasant. Even in *CB*, where they do not separate themselves from working on the land, they are old, wrinkled and decaying. It could be that those qualities were inherently associated with Winter and are therefore still implicit in this poem, but there really is no way to tell. It is virtually impossible to assess how their arguments would have been valued – especially since the poem went through multiple centuries and cultural contexts – because this heavily depends on the general attitude towards how rulers should *signal* their power, rather than how they should behave.

Perhaps the most productive way to interpret the ending – or, at least, what it had become by the fifteenth century – is by reading the words ‘et cetera’ as they are: in the broadest sense, they invite the reader to continue along the same lines. This has a range of different implications, of which the exact particularities and likelihood are not of great relevance in this thesis, but they are worth thinking about. As mentioned before, it could denote familiarity – perhaps this particular poem was so frequently used, that only part of it sufficed for a reader to recall the rest. But, given the fact that it is a debate, we should also keep in mind that it offers flexibility. Especially with the practical role in education these poems could have had, the opportunity to continue crafting arguments without restraints seems particularly useful. In this case, the resolution was apparently considered to be less important to preserve than the debate itself, which suggests that – at least in the fifteenth century – their practical value was valued more than any potential moral statement they contained.

Conclusion

This thesis features four poems that share the same subject matter, but are nonetheless very distinct from each other. The *Altercatio* is by far the longest, spanning over 400 lines. The two seasons are implied to be male rulers, and they are depicted with the most contrast compared to the other poems: not only do they differ in age and appearance, but also in terms of personality and debating style. The poem takes a lot of time to fully lay out these differences, and gradually an image begins to develop. Winter is the sterner of the two, and he paints himself as a true intellectual. His lifestyle has a lot of *otium*, which means he has time for studying topics like philosophy. However, it becomes clear that this image is mostly self-reported, because he does not actually show much understanding of the intellectual references he makes. Summer is younger and friendlier, and his lines have a lighter nature due to having fewer syllables. He prides himself on his friendliness, and argues that he is a better ruler on account of his close relationship with the common man. But he speaks with lines that are so richly adorned, that the overall substance gets lost. The poem gradually works its way up to creating an encompassing view of the cosmos, and seems to be in line with the standard educational curriculum. Both sides take on an active role in the production of produce, and paint a clear allegorical image of their position in the year. However, the intellectual, disputatio-like question proves to be beyond their capabilities: when they risk solving the question with a physical demonstration, Theologia steps in and chides them for beginning this pointless discussion in the first place. If the seasons had any knowledge of God, they would never have begun the debate and risked the entire cosmos as a result. The poem is very layered and rich, and appears to have been created with a genuinely educated audience in mind.

CA and *CB* are much shorter and less complex. Rather than an intellectual discussion, this is a legal one. Winter is apparently a bad ruler, and needs to be exiled. In both poems, they try and fail to defend themselves against this allegation. In *CA*, this happens because of a sexual argument: when they criticise sexual relationships that are ‘not serious enough’, Summer makes it seem as if they disregard sexuality altogether. When the discussion moves towards insults, Winter is unable to reply, and the judge says that there is no need for a formal judgement: Winter clearly lost. In this poem, the discussion starts out as based on substantial arguments, but it quickly turns out that this is not how the trial is won: ultimately, it is about being able to keep talking. *CB* is slightly more elaborate and does not necessarily have much deviation between the arguments of the two seasons, but Summer presents themselves as

someone who explicitly takes the teachings of Christ into account. Winter does not fall quiet, but remains in the discussion until the end. Both seasons ask for the judgement of the *iudex*, and again, Winter loses, but this time, it is because of their inability to argue their case. This discussion is therefore also ultimately based on arguments that can be interpreted as vaguely spurious. Winter is simply less good at convincing the judge, and besides that, they are also old: reason enough to be banished. Both poems can be read as a comical depiction of the changing of the seasons, but they can also potentially be read as a comical depiction of the legal process itself. The fundamental criticism towards rulers is their potential unwillingness to stay in power, even if they are clearly too old for their position.

Estas et hiems is the shortest poem, and offers the least context. The seasons are not introduced with elaborate descriptions, but simply start speaking. The only additional information we get, is the fact that Summer apparently wants to banish Winter. This is reminiscent of *CA* and *CB*, but there does not seem to be any trial or any other legal procedure, nor is it made explicit whether or not Winter has made an earlier transgression. The debate is much more straightforward, as Summer and Winter are really only comparing various contrasting traits they have. Most of these traits are very similar to what the other poems already feature, such as bad weather, Winter's fondness for *otium* and Summer's pride of their flowers. However, the debate does turn into something far more pointed, because it clearly lays out different conceptions of power. Both sides stress that the nobles like them more, because they each have different things to offer. Because they each think that they would have the nobles' support over the other, they both argue that this makes them more powerful. They offer similar things to their servants, and that this makes them each a better ruler. Ultimately, the debate ends without a conclusion, but with an *etc.*; this implies that the debate was either copied down because the readers would have been intimately familiar with it, or that this was more of a generic blueprint for the reader to be continued and finished at will. Held against the other poems, it seems the most historically independent: there is little specific information that points towards the twelfth century. This makes sense considering the fact that it was found in a fifteenth-century English manuscript. Apparently, both the participants and the arguments in the debate remained relevant in that time period and geographical area.

I also went through the twelfth-century historical and intellectual context of these poems, starting with the notion of rulership. Throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, power started to decentralise. Many laypeople suddenly acquired estates and became local leaders, eventually leading to a situation where most people were subjected to new rulers much more

directly than before. This led to an increase in violence in everyday life, as these developments also led to more conflicts. Both regular laypeople and the clergy were directly affected by this. For this reason, it should not be a surprise that intellectual circles started philosophizing about rulership. Many of these theories found their basis in classical texts, such as *De officiis* by Cicero and *De officiis ministrorum* by Ambrose, but united these older texts with contemporary problems. An important figure in this regard was John of Salisbury, whose *Politicratus* I have used as a basis for the comparison with the four poems. One of the most central parts of theories of rulership was the idea that it was ordained by God. A ruler was granted this power by divine right, but therefore also had a duty to follow Christian teachings. If he failed to comply, he would not be judged during life, but would surely end up in hell – a motivation that should have been strong enough on its own, but apparently was not always convincing. John describes various ways in which rulers could exhibit transgressive behaviour, from only caring about flattery to trusting the advice of astronomers and being excessively lazy. The consequences to these transgressions were often not as dire in practice as they were in theory. John seems to condone tyrannicide in an often-cited passage from *Politicratus*, but this is not necessarily quite as pointed – it could simply refer to what John considers to be a logical repercussion from the perspective of the ruler, rather than an inciting remark towards a potential murderer. The notion that a ruler was answerable to God also complicated this issue: surely, the ruler would already be judged by him, and his subjects on earth were not expected to interfere.

The body politic was also an important metaphor, especially in how it ties into the notion of macrocosm and microcosm. The ruler was, quite literally, the head of a political body: if anything went wrong with him, everything else would turn into chaos. But on a microcosmic scale, this meant the ruler also had to take good care of his own health. By keeping the humours in balance, his ability to rule would not be impacted. In the four poems, this theory is also important, because the seasons were associated with different humours. This especially comes through in the *Altercatio*, where Summer is characterized as overly sanguine and choleric, whereas Winter is melancholic and phlegmatic. The humours are visible in their age, appearance and behaviour, and neither side is an exemplary ruler. They both have flaws that would be considered to be transgressive, and they need each other to uphold the delicate cosmic balance.

After this, I discussed the importance of rhetorical styles. In the *Altercatio*, I used the theories of Matthew of Vendôme to illustrate that the leonine meter would not have gone over well in a serious rhetorical discussion anyway, but especially Summer would be considered

bad at debating. His arguments are mostly style, and carry little substance. Winter tries to bring in classical and biblical references to increase his intellectual authority, but falls into the same trap. He does not seem to fully understand the references he makes, which in the end, only serves to make him look pretentious. In *CA* and *CB*, it seems as if rhetorical theories would be important topics, as both poems take place in a court of law. However, there are not many demonstrations of excellent rhetoric to be found here either, and it certainly does not seem to be the basis of winning a legal dispute. In *CA*, the most important notion is being able to say anything at all; in *CB*, it is all about embedding your arguments into a Christian frame, even if it does not come through in anything else you say. *Estas et hiems* does not make any strong statement about rhetorical techniques, because there is very little difference between the two seasons. However, that does not mean that there is nothing to say about it. Both seasons' arguments balance each other out so perfectly, that an image arises in which they truly are equals.

These theories can be found back in all four poems, which I went through with three different topics in mind: characterization, property and power and, finally, their resolution. In the *Altercatio*, the characterization is very strong. Both sides have clear flaws that would have been considered transgressive by twelfth-century standards. Winter pretends to be an intellectual, but lacks proper understanding of the topics he talks about. He is overly focused on *otium*, which makes him lazy, and he is not very actionable – in fact, his main transgression is negligence. Summer, in contrast, is not learned enough. He does not subscribe to the ideal of the ruler as *miles literatus*, he lacks distinguishment and is also vain. It is clear that both sides embody a certain style of rulership, but neither should be aspirational. The question of property and power is mostly a concern of responsibility. Winter argues that he is superior, because he is the *pater* and Summer only a *nutrix*. Without him sowing seeds, no one would have anything to eat. Summer argues instead that his position of *nutrix* is more important, because he is actually the one who directly nourishes the world. Both sides clearly rely on each other, but are unwilling to admit this fact. Because they are unable to come to a satisfying answer, the debate escalates, and they nearly face off in a physical demonstration of their power. However, they are quickly told off by Theologia, who condemns the debate as a whole. There can be no winner, because the question is flawed: God has created both seasons as equals. This conclusion implies that lay lordship can be dangerous without religious guidance, because the lack of Christian morality can lead to excessive violence. Only members of the clergy can prevent this from happening. In my reading, this poem is therefore

a negotiation of power between lay rulers and the clergy that makes clever use of many twelfth-century intellectual ideas, and was intended for an educated audience.

In *CA* and *CB*, the characterisation is not as elaborate. When the seasons are introduced, the narrator heavily favours Summer; Winter, in contrast, is unpleasant to be around and clearly past their prime. Winter's bad traits are amplified more than Summer's good ones are shown. In *CA*, Winter is predominantly gluttonous and lazy; in *CB*, the problem lies more in the fact that they are bad at defending themselves. In both poems, the worst characteristic seems to be Winter's old age. For twelfth-century rulers, this was not a bad trait in itself, but it did become problematic when they were unwilling to let go of their power. In my opinion, this can be read as the heart of the debate: no characteristic, rhetorical trick or argument would have been able to convince the judge of another outcome. Property and power are relevant, in so far as that Winter puts pressure on the entire world by consuming rather than producing. This is especially held against them in the arguments about sexuality, where Winter's reservations against sex are turned into a denial of reproduction. They would not be able to take adequate care of their people if they denied sex altogether, which would make them unfit to rule. The resolution this leads to is obvious: in both *CA* and *CB*, Winter loses. In *CA*, this happens without any deliberation from the judge; in *CB*, Winter is deemed to be worse at debating. The obvious conclusion would then be that these poems depict the changing of the seasons, and condemn older rulers who are unwilling to give up their power. This is presented as a comical trial in which Winter is exiled. I also think that these poems potentially depict a covert parody of legal disputes. If the public opinion has already made up their mind, the actual process is just for show, and a judge can make up laws at a whim by stating that they are honouring God. *CA* and *CB* do not paint the same elaborate picture of the cosmos as the *Altercatio*, but they do comment on challenges of rulership that were felt during the time.

Estas et hiems obviously has the least amount of characterisation, as there are no introductory stanzas that prime the audience. The personalities attributed to the seasons are similar to how they come through in the other three poems: Winter is lazy and likes to rest, while Summer is industrious and cares mostly about vain expressions of beauty. The poem becomes more interesting when we turn to the topic of property and power. First of all, the seasons acknowledge and play with the notion that royal power required the support of the nobility to be legitimate. They use this notion to proclaim superiority. They also discuss the fundament of power, especially when they discuss how servants should be treated. On Winter's side, power is the freedom of distancing yourself from labour, which means that you

can socially distinguish yourself from the common man. To Winter, anyone who works less than someone else has more power over them. For Summer, however, power lies in responsibility. Being closer to the means of production means a sense of control, because it makes even the rich reliant on you. Despite its brief length, this poem actually contains profound and fundamental thoughts of what it means to hold power over someone else. The fact that no conclusion has been copied shows that this topic was still considered open for discussion in the fifteenth century, whether the audience was intended to finish it or elaborate on the idea. Apparently, the questions themselves were deemed more valuable to preserve than the answer.

The *Altercatio*, *CA*, *CB* and *Estas et hiems* all feature a discussion between the seasons, who are depicted as rulers. Though the rulers share many personality traits in all the poems, the overall attitude towards them is quite different. Their power can be ordained and governed by God, or stripped away by an adversary. They can embody lofty parts of the cosmos, or simply function as part of the feudal system. But in all these poems, they are judged by the standards of the twelfth century. The intellectual developments and attitudes towards rulership from the time can be found everywhere in them, and should therefore be taken into consideration. These four poems can show us much more than an insight into the school curriculum, because they all contain the same fundamental political notion. Power may seem like a force of nature. When its balance is thrown off, the entire world can feel the consequences, leading to violence, famine, or even death. But even in the face of adversity, the possibility for a debate still remains. These poems show us that, above everything else, power is *always* negotiable.

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Images

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