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The issue of the English language in Haydn's German oratorios

There has been much critical debate, in the previous decades, on the textual history of the librettos of Haydn's two German oratorios, *Die Schöpfung* (1798) and *Die Jahreszeiten* (1801). The genesis, progress and performance history of these two texts have been thoroughly examined by such scholars as, for instance, Edward Olleson,¹ Nicholas Temperley,² H.C. Robbins Landon³ and Neil Jenkins,⁴ and whatever aspects have been developed, whichever side has been taken, whatever conclusions have been drawn, all these contributions have paradoxically brought to the fore the quintessential "Englishness" of Haydn's two masterpieces.

The presence of English elements no doubt comes out more prominently in *Die Jahreszeiten*, partly through the indebtedness of Baron Gottfried van Swieten – the librettist of the oratorio – to his literary source, the famous work by James Thomson *The Seasons* (1730),⁵ an extensive epic poem widely read and translated throughout the eighteenth century.⁶ Recent research has also convincingly demonstrated that many portions of Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* were actually very much inspired by Thomson's *Seasons* as well,⁷ to an extent almost comparable to the King James Bible or to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the two texts that are usually cited as sources of inspiration for the original libretto.⁸ Needless to say, the alleged "Englishness" of the libretto of *Die Schöpfung* is mainly derived from the existence of that mysterious and anonymous text, now attributed to Charles Jennens,⁹ that was given to Haydn in August 1795 by his London impresario Johann Peter Salomon. It is that very text, supposedly written for Handel, which was to be, a few years later, abridged and "translated" for Haydn by Gottfried van Swieten, in circumstances once recounted by the Baron himself:

[...] and now a few words on the poem which you choose to call *my* Creation. My part in the work, which was originally in English, was certainly more than mere translation; but it was far from being such that I could regard it as *my own*. [...] I resolved to clothe the English poem in German garb. In this way my translation came about. It is true that I followed the plan of the original faithfully as a whole, but I diverged from it in details as often as musical progress and expression, of which I already had an ideal conception in my mind, seemed to demand. Guided by these sentiments, I often judged it necessary that much should be shortened or even omitted, on the one hand, and on the other that much should be made more prominent of brought into greater relief, and much placed more in the shade.¹⁰

Even though this will probably always remain a conjectural issue – the English word-book referred to by Van Swieten being unfortunately lost –, it has been suggested that the

¹ Edward Olleson, "The Origin and Libretto of Haydn's *Creation*," *The Haydn Yearbook* 4 (1968): 148-68.

² Nicholas Temperley, "New Light on the Libretto of *The Creation*," *Music in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Christopher Hogwood and Richard Lockett (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983) 189-212.

³ H.C. Robbins Landon, *The Creation and The Seasons: the Complete Authentic Sources for the Word-Books* (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1985).

⁴ Neil Jenkins, "Haydn: the Libretto of *The Creation*, New Sources and a Possible Librettist," *Journal of the Haydn Society of Great Britain* 24.2 (2005). Document also accessible from the following website: www.neiljenkins.info.

⁵ James Thomson, *The Seasons and The Castle of Indolence. With Biographical Notice, Instructions, Notes, and a Glossary*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1891).

⁶ It has sometimes been suggested that Van Swieten's source might also have been the German translation by Barthold Heinrich Brockes, a version, published in 1745 and notorious for having displayed both the German and English the texts side by side on facing pages. We shall see in the course of that presentation to what extent the degree of the indebtedness to James Thomson and his poem can be regarded as a relevant element in the appreciation of the English nature of Haydn's two oratorios.

⁷ See Jenkins "Haydn: the Libretto of *The Creation*, New Sources and a Possible Librettist" 24-36.

⁸ See Georg Feder, *Joseph Haydn: Die Schöpfung* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1999). See also Jenkins, "Line-by-Line Analysis of the Creation Libretto Sources," document accessible from www.neiljenkins.info.

⁹ See Jenkins, "Haydn: the Libretto of *The Creation*, New Sources and a Possible Librettist" 5-15.

¹⁰ Extract from a letter published in January 1799 by the German periodical *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*. Quoted in Robbins Landon 5-6. Quoted in German in Olleson 149

English text published by Haydn in the first edition of his oratorio might not entirely be, as was long supposed, Van Swieten's own re-translation of his own German adaptation – as was the case for *Die Jahreszeiten* – but rather a sort of hybrid version back-translated into English from the German, but also incorporating considerable parts of the original English ur-text, or ur-libretto, once written by Jennens and later given to Haydn in London. This argument, first put forward by Edward Olleson in the late 1960s, is now used as scholarly justification by all those who contend, rightly or wrongly, that it is the English version of the oratorio – the one that which was initially published in the original Viennese edition of the work... – that ought to be used in performance in the English-speaking world, as Haydn himself might well have intended.¹¹ The argument is supported by the belief in the historical legitimacy of the English text, which chronologically precedes the German, translated version. Also, and no doubt more importantly, it has been put forward that, at least for a few musical numbers, the relationship between text and music is infinitely better in the English than in the German version, Haydn's music occasionally reflecting ideas that are only present in the English text. Such is the argument that was convincingly developed by Nicholas Temperley in his seminal article "New Light on the libretto of *The Creation*": "It is difficult to resist the conclusion that Haydn had the English text in mind at these points, either in the original process of composition or during revision; and in one or two cases there is some objective evidence to support this position."¹² Needless to say, in his attempt to demonstrate what he somewhat daringly calls "the most striking superiority of the English text,"¹³ Temperley by no account intends to play down the place and importance of the German text which fired and inspired Haydn's imagination and music: "No one doubts that Haydn had the German in mind; it was, certainly, his main text. I am merely suggesting that he also had, at least in the back of his mind, the original English. After all, he wanted his work to be appreciated by English audiences as much as by German-speaking ones."¹⁴ The slightly problematic issue is that, in trying to defend the legitimacy of the original English version in terms of musicality, Temperley implicitly gives credibility to a long-standing tradition of interpretation that has been violently rejected by many critics, not only for the sake of historical authenticity – apparently a debatable issue... – but mainly for promoting a text usually deemed hardly "singable" from a musical and vocal point of view, poor and weak from a literary one and simply atrocious from a syntactic and stylistic standpoint. For a modern appreciation of the text, let us simply quote the conductor Paul McCreesh:

This English version, however, has always been regarded as considerably inferior to the German. There are many places where garbled grammar and syntax, and a propensity to apply German word order to English, reduce the text to nonsense. At other times the rhythmic alterations required for the English language play havoc with the rhetoric of Haydn's music.¹⁵

In other words, in his attempt to rehabilitate a textual version that has endured the harsh flaming of innumerable critics for almost two centuries, Temperley reduces to nothing all the effort of past adaptors and translators to "improve" the English text once published on Haydn's initiative.¹⁶ By concluding that "there are compelling reasons for preferring [that version] to any other, German or English, for performances in the English-speaking world"¹⁷ and, implicitly, for discarding and shelving all the previous self-styled "improved" versions of

¹¹ It need hardly be reminded here that *Die Schöpfung / The Creation* was the first example of a major musical work printed with bilingual underlay for performance in either language.

¹² Temperley 204.

¹³ Temperley 205

¹⁴ Temperley 208.

¹⁵ Paul McCreesh, "The Libretto of Haydn's *Creation*," liner notes in the CD recording released in 2008 by Archiv Produktion (00289 477 7361).

¹⁶ See for instance the following editions of Haydn's work: Joseph Haydn, *The Creation... Compressed from the Score by M[u]zio Clementi and Adapted to an Improved Version by S[amuel] Webbe, Jun.* (London: Clementi, 1810?); Haydn, *The Creation, an Oratorio... With an accompaniment for the Piano-Forte, Newly Adapted from the Score, by the Chevalier Sigismund Neukomm* (London: Cramer, Addison and Beale, 1832); Haydn, *The Creation. Amendments to the English version. Based on the current Novello vocal score. By Herbert Byard* (London: Novello, 1964).

¹⁷ Temperley 211.

the text, Temperley simply annihilates past efforts to acclimatise Haydn's masterpieces to the English-speaking world. However, such a position can also be seen as an invitation to examine, and possibly to re-consider, the English versions of the text that have circulated since the early 1800s. Temperley's final suggestion that "[t]o sing the English text as published by Haydn in 1800, it is necessary to modify the underlay in certain places" and to provide "a scholarly English edition in which this task ha[s] been carefully and modestly carried out"¹⁸ can also be taken as an encouragement to assess what effort has been done in that area since such a statement was made.

It is in such a context that I have chosen to examine some of the many English versions of Haydn's two main oratorios, two works which, probably owing to their strong associations with the Victorians' inbred relish for the oratorio form, and with their strong and close affinity with the Handelian repertoire in particular, have been performed on a fairly regular basis since they were first heard on English soil, usually, but of course not systematically, in the English language. To an English-bred ear of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an incipit like "With verdure clad," "On mighty pens", or "With joy th'impatient husbandman," which all announce well-known Victorian "hits," were all endowed with a proverbial ring and no doubt conveyed more resonance and connotations than their German counterparts: "Nun beut die Flur" (*Die Schöpfung*, N°8), "Auf starkem Fittiche" (*Die Schöpfung*, N°14) or "Schon eilet froh der Ackersmann" (*Die Jahreszeiten*, N°4).

The main purpose of this paper is therefore to examine which criteria have, over the years, motivated some of the modifications – whether they be prosodic, syntactic, semantic... – that have been brought to the successive English versions of the texts once set to music by Haydn. In that respect, we shall see to what extent the presence of a relatively "authentic" source as that provided by the ur-libretto of *Die Schöpfung* highly conditions the treatment received by a given text. We shall also see the part played by what we now call cultural transfer, as well as the weight and importance of musical considerations.

The first part of this presentation will therefore be a short examination of the major English versions of *Die Schöpfung*, bearing in mind the recent and debateable issue of the so-called "superiority" of the original English version. The second part will be devoted to the translations of *Die Jahreszeiten*, an oratorio which, for reasons that we will have to analyse, has given rise to a wider range of perspectives in terms of translation and interpretation. The examination of the modifications brought to that libretto will give us a few indications as to the criteria privileged, at various periods, by the several translators who have, at some stage or other, tried to give new life to the words of this oratorio.

Despite much claim to the contrary, the English text of *Die Schöpfung* – which we will henceforth call *The Creation* – has been given in relatively unmodified form over the years, even though the necessity to somehow revise the text was felt from the very beginning. Muzio Clementi, in his vocal score published in London, as soon as 1801, was the first to realise that the underlay of the English version needed to be improved for performance. Further syntactic modifications were added in 1827, and in 1832, it was the turn of Haydn's pupil Sigismond Neukomm to provide a new version of the text, that which was later to be incorporated in the 1847 Novello edition. That version, which was again to be revised in 1888, then became the form in which Haydn's masterpiece came to be known throughout the English-speaking world, even though many syntactic and semantic problems still remained unsolved. It is that version of the text that can that can be heard in the many historical recordings dating back to the first half of the last century (Isobel Baillie, Norman Walker, etc.).

The point I would like to make here is that despite the innumerable "improvements" made throughout the nineteenth century – the better to be discarded in the second half of the twentieth, in the wake of Temperley's recommendations – the various revisions of the

¹⁸ Temperley 211.

English libretto of *The Creation* remain amazingly close to the initial version published in 1800. Indeed, the versions of the oratorio claiming a radical transformation of the original text have remained purely marginal¹⁹ – with the exception perhaps of the American version made in the 1950s by Robert Shaw and Alice Parker –,²⁰ those that *do* have a performance history displaying an amazing fidelity to the original. In order to demonstrate this point, I shall have a look at two recent English versions of *The Creation*, first the revision made by Paul McCreesh in the wake of Temperley’s recommendations – more a correction than a re-writing – and then Neil Jenkins’s other recent version of the libretto.

When it came out, the text produced by the conductor Paul McCreesh for his CD recording of 2006 was advertised as “a complete and thorough revision” of the English text. A close look soon reveals that all the textual modifications are extremely minor, and no one could fail to recognize the text initially published in 1800. Most of the choruses and recitatives remain virtually unchanged – especially those words based on the King James Bible –, the few exceptions to that principle being mere corrections of either the syntax of the English original, or of Haydn’s initial and faulty word-setting. This is at least what the following example shows:

<p>No.10 Chor Van Swieten (1800) Stimmt an die Saiten, ergreift die Leier, laßt euren Lobgesang erschallen! Frohlokket dem Herrn, dem mächtigen Gott! Denn er hat Himmel und Erde bekleidet in herrlicher Pracht.</p>	<p>No.10 Chor Van Swieten (1800) Awake the harp, the lyre awake! In shout and joy your voices raise! In triumph sing the mighty Lord! For he the heavens and earth has clothed in stately dress.</p>	<p>No.10 Chor McCreesh (2006) Awake the harp, the lyre awake! With shouts of joy your voices raise! In triumph proclaim the might of the Lord! For all the heav’n and the earth has he clothed in glorious attire.</p>	<p>No.10 Chor Jenkins (2005) Awake the harp, the lyre awake! In joy and mirth your voices raise! In triumph acclaim the power of the Lord! For he the heavens and earth has clothed in glorious attire.</p>
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One can indeed see that the third line – “In triumph proclaim the might of the Lord!” – is an improvement in terms of syllabification, in the sense that it now perfectly fits the rhythm provided by the ten syllables of the German “Frohlokket dem Herrn, dem mächtigen Gott.” The translation also rids the sentence of the transitive use of the verb “to sing,” rather awkward in contemporary English. Similarly, the fourth line revises the unfortunate syntax of the original – “For he the heavens and earth has clothed in stately dress” –, while also correcting the original sequence “in stately dress,” which unfortunately had to be sung “in stately dress” in the original edition. Other minor modifications are motivated by a laudable desire to make the English words correspond to their nearest German equivalent in the musical line. Such is the case, for instance, of the following recitative, in which the re-ordering of the final sentence is obviously meant to make the word “God” match its equivalent “Gott” in the German version, the other modifications being once again made for rhythmical reasons:

<p>No.16 Recitativ Van Swieten (1800) Und Gott schuf große Walfische, und ei jedes lebende Geschöpf, das sich bewege, und Gott segnete sie,</p>	<p>No.16 Recitativ Van Swieten (1800) And God created great whales, and ev’ry living creature, that moveth, and God blessed them, saying: Be fruitful all, and</p>	<p>No.16 Recitativ McCreesh (2006) And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, and God blessed them, saying: Be fruitful all: Multiply,</p>	<p>No.16 Recitativ Jenkins (2005) And God created great whales, and ev’ry living creature, that moveth; and God blessed them, saying: Be fruitful all, and</p>
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¹⁹ I am referring to the two versions by Henry S. Drinker (Eulenburg Miniature Score of 1925) and Myfanwy Roberts (Breitkopf Edition N° 118).

²⁰ Joseph Haydn, *Schöpfung. Vocal Score* (New York: Lawson-Gould, 1957).

sprechend: seid	multiply, ye winged	ye wing'd and	multiply, ye winged
fruchtbar alle, mehret	tribes, and sing on	feather'd tribes, and	fowl, and sing on every
euch! Bewohner der	every tree!	sing from every tree!	tree!
Luft, und singt auf	Multiply, ye finny	Multiply, ye finny	Multiply, ye shoals of
jedem Aste!	tribes, and fill each	tribes, and fill each	fish, and fill each
Mehret euch, ihr	wat'ry deep!	wat'ry deep!	wat'ry deep!
Fluten Bewohner, und	Be fruitful, grow and	Be fruitful, grow and	Be fruitful, grow and
füllet jede Tiefe.	multiply! And in your	multiply, rejoice in	multiply! And in your
Seid fruchtbar,	God and Lord	him your Lord and	God and Lord
wachset, mehret	rejoice.	God.	rejoice.
euch, erfreuet euch	.		
in eurem Gott.			

As far as the arias are concerned, the modifications are also mainly meant to tidy up the syntax and reorganise the mostly Germanic word-order of the sentences, as is the case for instance of Aria No 2 (“Now vanish before the holy beams”), in which the notorious and cryptic statement “Disorder yields to order fair the place” – something of a grammatical puzzle – is replaced by the more intelligible “Disorder yields, and order fair prevails.” Similarly, the jumbled syntax of the segment “The marvellous world beholds amaz’d the glorious hierarchy of heav’n” (incipit of N°4) – a fairly misleading phrase... – has given way to the sequence “The glorious heav’nly hierarchy the marvellous world beholds amaz’d,” which of course makes more sense while also maintaining the eighteenth-century “feel” provided by the syntactic inversion of the verb and its direct object.

As we can see, this “revision” can hardly be regarded as a new version of Haydn’s libretto. Quite the opposite, the combined processes of re-ordering, padding out and tidying up the original English hark back to the previous practices of the nineteenth century, the retreat to past usage being explicitly confirmed by the reviser’s admission that he did not hesitate, occasionally, to use some of the corrections made in the nineteenth century: “I do not claim originality for every solution: some of the very earliest editions of *Creation* attempted to resolve some of the problems in the text, and where these solutions are clear improvements (i.e. Neukomm’s vocal score, 1832), I have been happy to incorporate them.”²¹

The revision recently made by Neil Jenkins is obviously cast in the same mould, even though it may be found more academic in the sense that it is avowedly based on all available sources, not only taking note of the original 1800 librettos and further nineteenth-century improvements, but also of original lines by Milton and Thomson, metrical versions of the Psalms that were in usage in the eighteenth-century as well as translations of Virgil that Charles Jennens, the presumed ur-author of the text, was reading at the time he was supposedly writing the libretto.²² Once again, the result is amazingly close to the original text, the revised passages being more often than not the same as those in the McCreesh version, even though the solutions occasionally – but not systematically... – differ, as can be seen from the previous tables: “Disorder flees, and order fair prevails,” “The glorious hierarchy of heaven behold, amazed, the marvellous work,” “For he the heavens and earth has clothed in glorious attire,” etc. More conspicuous than in the McCreesh version is Jenkins’s concern to clarify the text by ridding it of those excesses of eighteenth-century poetic diction that were so much to be derided by the English romantics, Wordsworth in particular. This is how the “finny tribes” of the original simply become “shoals of fish”, “the wing’d tribes” are turned into “winged fowl” and “the fleecy, meek and bleating flock” are more transparently transformed into “flocks of fleecy bleating sheep.” More importantly, what we call, to a certain extent, the “modernisation” of the text is not only stylistic, but also thematic. In a place where Paul McCreesh leaves virtually unchanged those passages about woman’s position and

²¹ McCreesh 13.

²² See Jenkins, “On Preparing a New English Edition for *The Creation*,” document accessible from www.neiljenkins.info.

subjection to man, Jenkins offers a more neutral presentation of the man-to-woman relationship. First of all, he dismisses those passages emphasising woman's virginity:

**No.24 Arie
Van Swieten (1800)**

An seinem Busen
schmieget sich, für
ihn, aus ihm geformt,
die Gattin hold and
anmutsvoll.
In froher Unschuld
lächelt sie, des
Frühlings reizend Bild,
ihm Liebe, Glück und
Wonne zu.

**No.24 Arie
Van Swieten (1800)**

With fondness leans
upon his breast, the
partner for him form'd,
a woman fair and
graceful spouse.
Her softly smiling
virgin looks, of flow'ry
spring the mirror,
bespeak him love and
joy and bliss.

**No.24 Arie
McCreesh (2006)**

With fondness leans
upon his breast, the
partner for him form'd,
a woman fair and
graceful spouse.
Her softly smiling
virgin looks, of flow'ry
spring a mirror, speak
love, delight and joy
and bliss.

**No.24 Arie
Jenkins (2005)**

With fondness leans
upon his breast, the
partner for him
formed; a woman fair,
and graceful spouse.
**Her innocent and
modest looks** are
fairer than the spring,
inspiring love and joy
and bliss.

But also, he considerably tones down Eve's declaration of allegiance to Adam, the reference to woman's obedience to man being rather cleverly replaced by the character's acceptance of God's law – not man's... – and by a statement on knowledge, or rather the lack thereof, something which of course reinforces, somewhat ironically, the allusive announcement of future trouble to come in the Garden of Eden ("wenn falscher Wahn euch nicht verführt"/"if not misled by false conceit", *Die Schöpfung*, N°33):

**No.31 Recitativ
Van Swieten (1800)**

O du, für den ich ward!
Mein Schirm, mein
Schild, mein all: Dein
Will ist mein Gesetz.
So hat's der Herr
bestimmt, und dir
gehörchen bringt mir
Freude, Glück and
Ruhm.

**No.31 Recitativ
Van Swieten (1800)**

O Thou, for whom I
am! My help, my
shield, my all!
Thy will is law to me.
So God, our Lord,
ordains, and from
obedience grows my
pride and happiness.

**No.31 Recitativ
McCreesh (2006)**

O thou, for whom I
am! My help, my
shield, my all!
Thy will is law to me.
So God, our Lord,
ordains. For such
obedience brings me
joy, contentment and
honour.

**No.31 Recitativ
N. Jenkins (2005)**

O thou, for whom I
am! My help, my
shield, my all!
Thy word is just and
right. So God, our
Lord, ordains. To
know no more is my
happiest knowledge,
and my praise.

In this sense, Jenkins's version of the libretto obviously combines the lexical and semantic pruning of the text with a reinterpretation meant to adapt and to conform to the cultural background of his target-audience, the public to whom his translation is destined. Moreover, while taking into account the new cultural and contextual elements – let us not talk in terms of political correctness... –, he also returns to the literary sources of the libretto inasmuch as the newly-provided text happens to be the adaptation of a quotation from Book 4 of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, thereby providing his own personal re-writing with a literary model and with a textual justification:

To whom thus Eve, with perfect beauty adorn'd.
My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst
Unargu'd I obey; so God ordains,
God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more
Is womans happiest knowledge and her praise. (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 4)

Jenkins's version of the text therefore goes one step further than that provided by McCreesh in the sense that he combines the tidying up of the libretto with a reconsideration of some of its contextual elements. In managing to stick to the original version of the text, to return to and expand its textual sources, while also taking into account the new expectations of a constantly changing audience, he shows both his concern to acclimatise the text to its new cultural context and his desire to preserve the authenticity of the libretto, a notion

sometimes overlooked in the various adaptations of Haydn's second oratorio, *Die Jahreszeiten*.

The various modifications brought to the original English text of *The Creation* all remain relatively minor when compared to the numerous re-writings of the initial English libretto of *The Seasons*. This text, long criticised for its supposed unsingability and unintelligibility, can still be found today in the Peters edition.²³ As is usually well-known, it was another "re-translation back into English of Swieten's German, probably by the Baron himself,"²⁴ which was inserted in the first publication of the work. In his edition of the complete authentic sources for the word-books of Haydn's oratorios, H.C. Robbins Landon adamantly refused to publish that version, owing to the "grotesquely stiff language" that "may have been one of the reasons why *The Seasons* was never performed [in England] during Haydn's lifetime."²⁵ Landon preferred to insert a modern, anonymous singing-translation of the libretto...

It is no doubt the poor quality of the early English text – hardly worse, though, than that of *The creation*... –, combined with the absence of a reputedly authentic source – such as the ur-English libretto once given to Haydn –, that led further translators to depart considerably from Van Swieten's original text – far more so than with the libretto of *The Creation* – and to come up with a usually elegant – at least grammatical – version of the text, while also endeavouring, simultaneously, to provide their own new versions with a certain degree of "authenticity." In that respect, the first adaptor to have considerably altered Van Swieten's text was Edward Taylor in his 1840 edition of the work, a version in which the "re-englishing" of the text was conspicuously marked by a considerable return to James Thomson's poem *The Seasons*, as the author of the translation himself made clear in his preface:

The poem of Thomson is the basis of my version, which thus acquires the vigour of an original work, instead of the feebleness of a translation. In the recitatives I have ventured to make a few alterations, in order to adhere to the poetry of Thomson. The songs being in rhymed metre, I have been compelled to deviate from Thomson's text, in order to hollow and preserve the measure of the German poem.²⁶

Taylor's use of Thomson, for example, is particularly obvious in the aria and recitative accounting for the work of the ploughman, in which one can clearly see that the English version by Van Swieten is more a back-translation from the German than a return to the English source, as in Edward Taylor's version:

<p>Thomson (1730) Joyous the impatient husbandman [...] his lusty steers drives from their stalls. [...] [L]aborious man has done his part. ("Spring," ll.34-35, 48-49)</p>	<p>No.4 Arie Van Swieten (1801) Schon eilet froh der Akkersmann zur Arbeit auf das Feld. [...] Der Landmann hat sein Werk vollbracht.</p>	<p>No.4 Arie Van Swieten (1801) With eagerness the husbandman his tilling work begins. [...] The countryman has done his due</p>	<p>No.4 Arie Edward Taylor (1840) With joy th'impatient husbandman drives forth his lusty team. [...] Laborious man has done his part.</p>
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Another example can be found in the reference to the spaniel seeking its prey during the hunting scene:

No.27 Arie

No.27 Arie

No.27 Arie

²³ For a scathing commentary on Van Swieten's translation into English, see Olleson 159-60.

²⁴ Landon 11.

²⁵ Landon 11.

²⁶ See Haydn, *The Seasons. In Four Parts ... The Words Chiefly Adapted from The Seasons of Thomson by Edward Taylor ... The Whole Newly Revised with an Accompaniment for the pianoforte, by W. H. Kearns* (London: Kearns and Lonsdale, 1840). Quoted in Jenkins, "Haydn: *The Seasons*, Programme Notes," document accessible from www.neiljenkins.info, p.2.

Thomson (1730)

[...] the spaniel, struck
Stiff by the tainted
gale, with open nose
Outstretched and
finely sensible, draws
full,
Fearful and cautious,
on the **latent prey**.
("Autumn," ll. 363-66)

Van Swieten (1801)

Seht auf die breiten
Wiesen hin!
Seht, wie der Hund im
Grase streift!
Am Boden suchet er
die Spur und geht ihn
unablässig nach.

Van Swieten (1801)

Behold the wide
extended meads!
See how the spaniel
sweeps the grass!
In search of scent he
gently roves, and
stooping draws along
the turf.

Taylor (1840)

Behold, along the
dewy grass in search
of scent the spaniel
roves.
And still obedient to
command, attentive
seeks the **latent prey**.

Similarly, the next passage also shows a departure from Van Swieten's German and its almost word-for-word translation, a departure marked with what appears as a collection of lexical items selected from Thomson's poem and arranged in a form of linguistic collage:

James Thomson

'Tis raging **noon**; and, vertical, **the sun**
Darts on the head **direct his forceful rays**.
O'er heaven and earth, far as the ranging eye
Can sweep, **a dazzling deluge reigns**; and all
From pole to pole is undistinguished blaze. ("Summer," ll. 432-36)

No.14 Recitativ**Van Swieten (1801)**

Die Mittagsonne brennt jetzt in
voller Glut, und gießt durch die
entwölkte Luft ihr mächtiges
Feuer in Strömen hinab. Ob
den gesengten Flächen
schwebt in niederm Qualm ein
blendend Meer von Licht und
Widerschein.

No.14 Recitativ**Van Swieten (1801)**

'Tis noon, and vertical the sun
darts all his fire, and shoots
through the air serene and calm
his mighty blaze in torrents
down. O'er th'arid grounds and
parched fields of gleaming and
reflected rays a dazzling deluge
reigns.

No.14 Recitativ**Taylor (1840)**

'Tis noon, and now **direct the**
sun darts down **his rays**. **O'er**
heaven and earth the eye
beholds his **forceful blaze**
outspread. **From pole to pole**,
o'er cleaving fields, on arid
herbs and withered flowers, **a**
dazzling deluge reigns.

Other examples clearly show to what extent Taylor's version is more a total re-writing than the translation of a given original. Such is the case of the following passage which completely omits, perhaps in a fit of Victorian prudery, the call to the young men and women to share the joys of sleep:

No.20 Chor**Van Swieten (1801)**

Mädchen, Bursche, Weiber,
kommt!
Unser wartet süßer Schlaf; wie
reines Herz, gesunder Leib und
Tagesarbeit ihn gewährt.

No.20 Chor**Van Swieten (1801)**

Ye lads, ye girls, women come!
Us awaits a balmy sleep, as
guiltless heart, and body sound
and toil of day can warrant it.

No.20 Chor**Taylor (1840)**

Welcome, welcome gentle
sleep!
Soothing balm of every care!
O thou that in the cot of toil dost
quickly close the lids of health.

At some other points, the re-reading – or shall we say "mis"-reading? – of Van Swieten's libretto leads to a complete reinterpretation of Thomson's text. In the description of the harvest, both the German and the English originals refer to some mysterious, unnamed "self-invited guests" ("ungebetnen Gäste") who roam about the fields in search of food. Thomson's poem makes it clear that the "guests" in question are poor gleaners, and the poetical voice clearly appeals to the farmer's charity and generosity:

James Thomson

Behind the master walks, builds up the shocks,
And conscious, glancing oft on every side
His stated eye, feels his heart heave with joy.
The gleaners spread around, and here and there,
Spike after spike, their scanty harvest pick.
Be not too narrow, husbandmen! But fling

From the full sheaf with charitable stealth
 The liberal handful. Think, oh! Grateful think
 How good the God of harvest is to you,
 Who pours abundance o'er your flowing fields
 While these unhappy partners of your kind
 Wide-hover round you like the fowls of heaven,
 And ask their humble dole. The various turns
 Of fortune ponder, – how your sons may want
 What now with fair reluctance faint ye give. (“Summer,” ll. 162-76)

**No.26 Recitativ
 Van Swieten (1801)**

Nun zeigt das entblößte Feld
 der ungebetnen Gäste Zahl, die
 an den Halmen Nahrung fand
 und irrend jetzt sie weitersucht.
 Des kleinen Raubes klaget
 nicht der Landmann, der ihn
 kaum bemerkt; dem Übermaße
 wünscht er doch nicht
 ausgestellt zu sein.

**No.26 Recitativ
 Van Swieten (1801)**

Now on the stripped fields
 appear the self-invited many
 guests that hid and bred on
 tilled earth in quest of food now
 roam about.
 At the small loss, but little felt,
 the husbandman will not
 repine; but yet from
 cumbersome excess preserved
 he would be.

**No.26 Recitativ
 Edward Taylor (1840)**

Lo! Where the plenteous
 harvest waved, a dreary waste
 the plains appear!
 And where the cheerful song
 was heard, the silent fields
 forsaken lie. Now through the
 stubble limps the hare, with
 timid eye and doubtful step; or
 fearful, with attentive ear, lies
 close within her fold.

Here, one can see that Taylor’s version of the passage completely ignores the social and economic dimension of the passage, preferring to interpret the unwelcome guests – in a far more explicit way than Van Swieten, whose translation remains slightly ambiguous – as timid animals (“the hare with timid eye”) trying to find remnants of food in the freshly-harvested fields. In doing so, the translator reinforces the pastoral dimension of the scene at the expense of the bleak, human issue at stake in Thomson’s corresponding passage. At some point, the Victorian translator does not hesitate to introduce his own similes and metaphors, as, for instance, in Simon’s recitative on Virtue right before the final chorus:

**No.43 Recitativ
 Van Swieten (1801)**

Die [Tugend] bleibt allein und
 leitet uns, unwandelbar, durch
 Zeit and Jahreswechsel, durch
 Jammer oder Freude bis zu
 dem Höchsten Ziele hin.

**No.43 Recitativ
 Van Swieten (1801)**

Alone she [Virtue] stays. Alone
 she too may be thro’ life, thro’
 years and time revolving, thro’
 fortune good or bad our guide
 to happiness on high.

**No.43 Recitativ
 Taylor (1840)**

Truth only lasts, and like a light
 that meets the eye of
 shipwrecked mariners, directs
 us through life’s storms, to
 everlasting peace and joy.

Here, the comparison to the “light that meets the eye of shipwrecked mariners” certainly refers to a cultural concept more relevant to an Englishman of the 1840s, than to a representative of a less seafaring nation. Translated librettos of the period often evoked, indirectly and metaphorically, Britain’s glorious colonial power, as well as its maritime supremacy.

Another characteristic of Taylor’s version lies in the translator’s little concern to try and stick to the sound-patterns of the original German. Indeed, the translation mostly relies on its own figures of sound – assonance, alliteration, paronomasia, rhyme schemes, etc... – regardless of the phonic structure of the original. In that respect such sequences as “greener grows” (n°25), “days of deep, sullen sadness” (N°34), which do not find their phonetic equivalents in the pre-existing version of the text, provide Taylor’s translation with an inherent musicality that no doubt accounts for its remarkable longevity. Dating back to 1840, it provided the basis for the Novello edition (1854, revised in 1891) still in use today, even though other English versions of the text have since appeared.

One of them, the translation made in the 1950s by Dennis Arundell, stands out for taking exactly the opposite stance to Taylor’s. Not only does it usually dispense with those traces of poetic diction redolent of Thomson’s poetry, but it also strives to reproduce, in fairly simple, fluid and unencumbered syntax, the sound patterns of Van Swieten’s original German. Here are a few examples:

Van Swieten (1801) No.7 Recitativ [...] der laue West erwärmt und füllt die Luft...	Van Swieten (1801) No.7 Recitativ [...] a placid breeze is moving on ...	Taylor (1840) No.7 Recitativ A humid breeze is blowing...	Arundell (1950s) No.7 Recitativ The soothing West doth warm and fill the air...
No.10 Recitativ [...] beklemmt das bange Herz nicht mehr.	No.10 Recitativ [...] no more affect the tim'rous heart.	No.10 Recitativ [...] no more the timid heart appal.	No.10 Recitativ [...] oppress th'uneasy heart no more.
No.20 Chor mit Solostimmen [...] mit Perlen- schmuck geziert die Flur	No.20 Chor mit Solostimmen [...] the fields in sparkling dress appear	No.20 Chor mit Solostimmen [...] displays a sparkling robe of joy	No.20 Chor mit Solostimmen [...] the pearly sheen adorns the field

More importantly, the concern to find genuine phonic equivalents in the translated text is particularly conspicuous when special effects are achieved in the original libretto, as is the case, for example, in No.16 and 38:

Van Swieten (1801) No.16 Recitativ [...] und fröhlich summend irrt und wirrt die bunte Sonnenbrut.	Van Swieten (1801) No.16 Recitativ [...] and humming wings and wheels about the painted summerbreed.	Taylor (1840) No.16 Recitativ [...] and 'neath the shade, with soothing hum, the sportive insects play.	Arundell (1950s) No.16 Recitativ [...] and happily humming twirl and whirl bright flies the sun has hatched
No.38 Chor mit Solostimme Knurre, schnurre, knurre, schnurre, Rädchen schnurre.	No.38 Chor mit Solostimme Set the wheel a-going, make it snore a-turning	No.38 Chor mit Solostimme Let the wheel move gaily, singing as it circles.	No.38 Chor mit Solostimme Purring, whirring, purring, whirling wheel go purring.

Still more importantly, Arundell also pays close attention to those many passages involving musical word-painting, for which it is vital that the translated text should try to reproduce the idea painted by the music. This is an issue that seems to have overlooked by the previous translator. This is what happens, for instance, in one of Lucas's phrases from recitative No.18 in which the words "auf die Ebne sinkt" end on a low C and D flat, i.e. at the bottom of the tenor's voice. Only Arundell's version reproduces the mimetic relation between text and music, by which the word "sinks" should be heard on the low notes of the tenor's voice:

No.18 Recitativ Van Swieten (1801) [...] und drohend auf die Ebne sinkt.	No.18 Recitativ Van Swieten (1801) [...] and threat'ning sinks upon the plains!	No.18 Recitativ Taylor (1840) [...] preparing th'elemental strife.	No.18 Recitativ Arundell (1950s) [...] and baleful down o'er the plain now sinks.
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Similarly, in No.34, Haydn plays with the long F that the soprano is requested to hold out, on three long bars, on the word "Dauer", in order to suggest the endless length of a winter night. Only Arundell seems to be willing to reproduce that jocular effect, thanks to his use of the word "enduring":

No.34 Cavatine Van Swieten (1801) [...] folget schwarzer Nächte lange Dauer.	No.34 Cavatine Van Swieten (1801) [...] follow, follow long and dismal nights.	No.34 Cavatine Taylor (1840) [...] dismal nights of storm succeeding.	No.34 Cavatine Arundell (1950s) [...] darker nights so long enduring.
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One can therefore see to what extent Taylor and Arundell's translations illustrate two apparently incompatible options, one intent on finding the text's literariness and identity by going back to the inspiration of its direct source, like Taylor's translation, and one intent on following and underlining the inherent musicality of a given original, whatever its own intrinsic flaws. Such is of course the case of Arundell's version, as well as the Decca translation included in Landon's previously mentioned volume. The contextual elements pervading those texts is of course of primary importance, Arundell's version having been produced in a period which, far from caring for the eighteenth-century stylistic frills and niceties of a poet like James Thomson, made much of the issue of textual intelligibility. Dennis Arundell was one of those translators who, in the wake of the musicologist Edward J. Dent, was very much involved in the destinies of the Sadler's Wells, a London theatre particularly active in what was then perceived as an effort to democratise opera, particularly through the use of understandable translated versions.

Of course, Arundell's text can hardly be seen as a definitive translation. The most recent version to date, that made by Neil Jenkins in 2005, marks once again a deliberate return to Thomson's poem, as made explicit in the introduction to the text: "With the greatness of Thomson's poem in mind, coupled with the masterpiece that Haydn made of the music, it seemed sensible to see, once again – just as Edward Taylor had in 1840 – how much of the original could be put back into a new English version."²⁷ Besides, the declared aim of that translation, obviously intent on the creation of a period feel, is further achieved by "choosing appropriate lines of English poetry, ballads and folksongs, from the 17th and 18th centuries"²⁸ while also quoting from the Book of Common Prayer.

Once again, the history of the translations of Haydn's oratorio shows a back and forth movement between innovation and tradition testifying to a swinging movement, or a form of pendulum, between novelty and authenticity. Translated versions of a single work do indeed seem to permanently oscillate between the impossible desire to match the original text in terms of musicality, and the concern to suggest a "period feel" marked by a constant need for authenticity.

The purpose of this paper was certainly not to suggest that Haydn's music was better when performed in English. It merely aimed to demonstrate that, in some cases, looking at translated versions of musical works can also be an efficient way of assessing and understanding how such works were perceived and received by previous generations. In the case of Haydn's oratorios, the multiplicity and the variety of past translated versions testify to the endless and inexhaustible vitality of two works that no doubt will go through many further revisions and adaptations in the future. It is certainly an ironical fact that works initially meant to assert and defend the legitimacy of the German language, in opposition to the alien Italian opera and oratorio,²⁹ should have had so much impact in the English-speaking world, a fact that certainly testifies to the universality, not to say the European dimension, of Haydn's music.

²⁷ Jenkins, "Haydn: *The Seasons*, Programme Notes 4.

²⁸ Jenkins, "Haydn: *The Seasons*, Programme Notes 4.

²⁹ See Temperley, *Haydn: The Creation* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 2-3.

Abstract

This paper aims at assessing the issue of both the English language and the English tradition of Haydn's oratorios *Die Schöpfung/The Creation* (1796-98) and *Die Jahreszeiten/The Seasons* (1799-1801). Indeed, the English origin of each of the two texts, either directly written as an English libretto meant to be set to music (Charles Jennens's text, probably meant for Handel and later to be translated by Gottfried van Swieten) or as the adaptation of James Thomson's poetical work *The Seasons* accounts not only for the long-lasting popularity of the two works, but also for the ineradicable belief that Haydn's masterpieces are essentially *English* works. As many commercial recordings show, the English version of Haydn's text is still currently performed today, and many scholars and performers contend that this is how it should be done.

The paper thus focuses on the *Englishness* of Haydn's two oratorios, especially as far as the verbal text is concerned. It examines several versions of the English "libretto" of *The Creation* – indeed, in order to be adequately performed, the original English always had to be slightly modified, according to criteria that differ greatly when seen from a diachronic point of view... –, as well as the several existing translations of G. van Swieten's adaptation, translation or rewriting of J. Thomson's famous poem. Again, the different translations display a certain amount of variability in their various authors' willingness to return, or not, to Thomson's original text.