

RECALLING THE SUBLIME: THE LOGIC OF CREATION IN HAYDN'S CREATION

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ABSTRACT

In its opening representation of chaos and subsequent depiction of the creation of light, Joseph Haydn's oratorio The Creation famously begins with two forays into the musical sublime. But the work thereafter devotes itself to recalling the sublime, in the double sense of rescinding the sublime and of making it a matter of memory rather than of practice. This process is already under way in the depiction of light; its progressive advance may be measured in such ensuing episodes as the depictions of the first sun- and moonrise and Adam and Eve's climactic hymn of praise, 'Von deiner Güt'. The withdrawal of the sublime gradually becomes coextensive with the creation itself and the place of humanity in the order of creation, reflecting (and refashioning) a historically specific understanding not only of the sublime but also, and more weightily, of the conditions of possibility for knowing the world and defining the human. Despite its forceful articulation in The Creation, however, this was an understanding already well on its way to becoming obsolete by the end of the eighteenth century.

What does it mean to recall the sublime? It is to remember it, for one thing, on the assumption that the sublime belongs to a former time. That is the case with us now: in an age when any movie can create a passable apocalypse and a GPS connection on your laptop can show you any spot on earth, the sublime is an antique. But to recall is also to call back, to take out of circulation, to rescind. That, I suggest, was the case with Haydn when he composed *The Creation* at the close of the eighteenth century. To hear this music today, we have to recall the sublime as it was then. But when we do that, we discover that Haydn was calling the sublime up only in order to call it back, to rescind it. The sublime in *The Creation* is incendiary, but it burns out fast. What really matters about it are its embers.

Why does this happen? Why does *The Creation* withdraw the sublime, and, more than just taking this action, why does *The Creation* – as I will propose it does – constitute itself precisely as the withdrawal of the sublime and therefore as an embodiment of the aftermath of the sublime? What forms does this withdrawal take? What meanings may it assume?

To these questions I wish to propose three answers, which I will put in the form of three sentences, three simple declaratives that add up to the global declarative 'The world is created!'. The reason for the declarative form will appear at the close.

1. The withdrawal of the sublime is the creation as such.
2. The withdrawal of the sublime is the guarantee of essence.
3. The withdrawal of the sublime is the condition of subjectivity.

Before we can elaborate on these statements, we need to examine the sublime itself more closely. I should add as a point of method that, following my usual custom, I will not distinguish musical from cultural analysis, so that each should be understood as going on even when the explicit subject matter is the other.

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The sublime is a conceptual category that became thinkable only when a certain perceptual disorder became desirable. The structure of feeling in eighteenth-century Europe underwent a tectonic shift that both produced and legitimized this disorder as a possibility of experience. Although thinkers on the topic disagreed mightily on just how to theorize it, the one thing they all agreed on is that the sublime momentarily obliterates the apparatus of human understanding. It cannot be grasped, but grasps us instead – and hard.

This metaphor underpins Johann Georg Sulzer's treatment of the sublime in his influential encyclopedia of 1771–1774, the *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*:

Das Erhabene wirkt mit starken Schlägen, ist hinreißend und ergreift das Gemüt unwiderstehlich. Diese Wirkung tut es nicht bloß in der ersten Überraschung, sondern anhaltend; je länger man dabei verweilt und je näher man es betrachtet, je nachdrücklicher empfindet man seine Wirkung . . . [Es] muss da gebraucht werden, wo das Gemüt mit starken Schlägen anzugreifen, wo Bewunderung, Ehrfurcht, heftiges Verlangen, hoher Mut oder auch, wo Furcht und Schrecken zu erwecken sind; überall wo man den Seelenkräften einen großen Reiz zur Wirksamkeit geben oder sie mit Gewalt zurückhalten will.

The sublime operates with mighty blows, is ravishing and seizes the mind irresistibly. It does not have this effect merely in the first surprise but persistently; the longer one tarries with it and the more closely one considers it, the more deeply one feels its effect . . . [The sublime] must be used when the mind is to be attacked with mighty blows, where admiration, awe, vehement longing, high courage, or else where fear and terror are to be roused; everywhere that one wants to give a great stimulus to the efficacy of the soul's powers or to hold them back forcibly.¹

Sulzer's 'or else' (*oder auch*) and 'or' (*oder*) do a considerable amount of work here. His formulation both splits the sublime into opposite extremes – stimulation versus holding back – and coordinates the opposites into an unruffled pair of complementary choices. But Sulzer writes this way for a reason, or, one might say, for reason itself. He celebrates the sublime as 'the highest thing in art', but he is not willing to let the twice-invoked hammer-blows of the sublime entirely knock the sense out of him. The stimulation of the soul's powers limits their forcible holding-back, and it is this limitation that produces the sublime and permits it to endure. The result is something less ravishing and irresistible than it is grand and stately, something measured, in both senses of the term. Sulzer gives its essential principle in the maxim that 'We must for every sublime have a measure by which we endeavour, however much in vain, to measure its greatness'.²

To illustrate this process, Sulzer turns to the biblical injunction 'Let there be light'. The line is obviously pertinent to Haydn, who would no doubt have been familiar with its identification as sublime from Sulzer's own probable source, *Peri hupsous* (On the Sublime) by Longinus, where it is the only biblical example:

Wenn man uns sagt: *Gott habe die Welt aus Nichts erschaffen* oder *Gott regiere die Welt durch bloßes Wollen*, so fühlen wir gar nichts dabei, weil dieses gänzlich außer unseren Begriffen liegt. Wenn aber Moses sagt: *Itzt sprach Gott, es werde Licht und das Licht wurde*, so geraten wir in Bewunderung, weil wir uns wenigstens einbilden, etwas von dieser Größe zu begreifen.

When someone says to us, *God created the world from nothing* . . . we just feel nothing at this because this lies altogether beyond our conception. But when Moses says, *And God said, Let there be light, and there was light*, we are overcome with admiration because we can at least imagine we comprehend something of this greatness.³

1 Johann Georg Sulzer, 'Erhaben', in *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, Textlog.de: Historische Texte & Wörterbücher <http://www.textlog.de/sulzer_kuenste.html> (23 July 2008). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

2 'So müssen wir für jedes Erhabene ein Maß haben, nach welchem wir seine Größe, wiewohl vergeblich, zu messen bemüht sind' (Sulzer, 'Erhaben', in *Allgemeine Theorie*).

3 Sulzer, 'Erhaben', in *Allgemeine Theorie*. Moses is invoked here as the putative author of Genesis.



Our admiration forcibly holds back the soul's powers only in so far as it is itself held back by our imagining that we can measure what we admire. We may *only* imagine this, or imagine it in vain, but the act of imagination imposes itself on the sublime no less than the sublime imposes itself on us.

The introduction and first number of *The Creation* might seem to aim at a musical statement of the same idea – but only on first impression. The pivotal event, the climactic cadence on the word 'Licht', in the primordial *Let there be light*, depends on a forceful, indeed forcible, deferral of the moment of comprehension. A bar strikes astonishment and understanding apart, and understanding never quite recovers from the blow.

First, there is the perceptual shock of the abrupt movement from a whisper to a roar, from the *sotto voce* chorus a cappella to the full-throated chorus shouting over a *fortissimo* tutti with brass and percussion blaring. Secondly, there is the confirming cadence four bars later that normalizes the event and opens the space of the subsequent narrative. But the sublime does not find its measure in the movement from the first action to the second. In the interval there is a moment of seizure in which giving a great stimulus to the soul's powers consists precisely in forcibly holding them back. The hammer-blow strikes as a ringing in our ears. Everyone in Haydn's audience knew the biblical text, knew what was coming; the point of the music was to make them un-know it. The passage is astonishing not because we can imagine that we comprehend such greatness, but precisely because we cannot. For a moment we can imagine nothing at all; the sublime has rendered the imagination powerless. In other words, and whether Haydn was aware of it or not, his treatment of the creation of light aligns itself neither with Sulzer nor with Longinus, but with Kant.

Kant's account of the sublime in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) departs from Sulzer and from Edmund Burke on just these points. Kant regards his precursors' reliance on psychology and affect as merely 'anthropological'. He presupposes that a rigorous understanding of the sublime requires not a description of its phenomenal causes and effects but an examination of its conditions of possibility. The examination itself is too intricate to track here, but its outcome is well known. The sublime arises from a state of blockage in which the thwarting of perception and imagination turns the mind back reflectively upon itself. The mind finds assurance of its own infinitude in that very turn. The disproportion between sensible apprehension and thought becomes the saving excess of thought over the sensible.

There is more at stake here than aesthetic pleasure. With the Kantian turn from a phenomenal to a reflective sublime, 'the mind can make palpable to itself the sublimity proper to its own determination, even over nature'.⁴ This self-recognition belongs to the sphere of what Kant called practical reason, the faculty that connects human understanding to the supersensible world through the apprehension of the moral law. The sublime reveals 'a superiority over nature grounded in a self-preservation of quite another kind than that which can be threatened . . . by [the] nature outside us'.⁵

But here, just at the point of this sublime extension of the sublime, a problem arises. Unlike Sulzer, Kant is indifferent to the sensuous particulars that may serve as a measure to limit the forcible holding-back of the soul's powers. For Kant the sublimity of *Let there be light* would have nothing to do with any light we could perceive or conceive of perceiving, but only with the crossing of the literally unimaginable gap between non-being and being. Hence he chooses a biblical touchstone of quite another kind, and one that explicitly repudiates sensuous participation: 'Perhaps there is no more sublime passage in the Jewish Book of the Law than the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor any likeness either of that

4 'Also heißt die Natur hier erhaben, bloß weil sie die Einbildungskraft zur Darstellung derjenigen Fälle erhebt, in welchen das Gemüt die eigene Erhabenheit seiner Bestimmung, selbst über die Natur, sich fühlbar machen kann' (Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. Karl Vorländer, seventh edition (Leipzig: Meiner, 1990), 110 (§28)).

5 'So gibt auch die Unwiderstehlichkeit ihrer Macht uns, als Naturwesen betrachtet, zwar unsere physische Ohnmacht zu erkennen, aber entdeckt . . . eine Überlegenheit über die Natur, worauf sich eine Selbsterhaltung von ganz anderer Art gründet, als diejenige ist, die von der Natur außer uns angefochten . . . werden kann' (Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 107 (§28)); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 145.



which is in heaven, or on the earth.’⁶ Then, speaking with particular reference to ‘the representation of the moral law and the tendency to morality in us’, he continues:

Es ist eine ganz irrige Besorgnis, daß, wenn man sie alles dessen beraubt, was sie den Sinnen empfehlen kann, sie alsdann keine andere als kalte leblose Billigung und keine bewegende Kraft oder Rührung bei sich führen würde. Es ist gerade umgekehrt: denn da, wo nun die Sinne nichts mehr vor sich sehen, und die unverkennliche und unauslöschliche Idee der Sittlichkeit dennoch übrigbleibt, würde es eher nötig sein, den Schwung einer unbegrenzten Einbildungskraft zu mäßigen, um ihn nicht bis zum Enthusiasm [*sic*] steigen zu lassen, als, aus Furcht vor Kraftlosigkeit dieser Ideen, für sie in Bildern und kindischem Apparat Hilfe zu suchen.

It is utterly mistaken to worry that if they were deprived of everything that could recommend them to the senses, they would then bring with them nothing but cold, lifeless approval and no moving force or emotion. It is exactly the reverse: for where the senses no longer see anything before them, and the unmistakable and inextinguishable idea of morality nonetheless remains behind, it would be more necessary to temper the flight of an unbounded power of imagination so as not to let it mount to enthusiasm, rather than, from fear of the powerlessness of these ideas, to look for help from images and childish devices.⁷

The word ‘enthusiasm’ here translates its German cognate; in eighteenth-century usage both words refer to a state of overemotional conviction, which Kant glosses as a ‘delusion of sense’ (*Wahnsinn*, also meaning madness, craziness). This state is closely allied to another under which Kant usually subsumes it, the ‘delusion of mind’ (*Wahnwitz*) that he calls *Schwärmerei*. This word is untranslatable. Derived from the swarming of bees, it can be rendered as ‘enthusiasm’, ‘fanaticism’, ‘exaltation’ or ‘rapture’, all with a connotation of vertiginous mindlessness. *Schwärmerei* is Kant’s greatest bugbear. Fostering the delusion of being able to ‘rave with reason’ (*mit Vernunft rasen*), it represents the very antithesis of reason.⁸ *Schwärmerei* substitutes the fantasy of private illumination for the work of thought; it makes fetishes of the very likenesses and graven images from which the mind in its sublimity seeks to free itself. In a draft from the 1780s, Kant pursues *Schwärmerei* through its various ‘levels’ and finds self-deification at the top: the conviction ‘that we ourselves are in God and feel or intuit him in our existence . . . In *Schwärmerei* human beings raise themselves above humanity’.⁹

But exactly how are we to distinguish between the giddiness of *Schwärmerei* and the mind’s sublime discovery of its own infinitude? Once the imagination is unbounded, what boundary can we draw to temper its flight? Kant addresses this problem with reference to the moral law, which he claims is safeguarded from *Schwärmerei* as long as its presentation is purely negative: make no graven images. Hold fast instead to a ‘pure, soul-elevating, merely negative representation of morality’ (*reine, seelenerhebende, bloß negative Darstellung der Sittlichkeit*) and its very negativity will be its security.¹⁰ But how is that possible? Or is it possible at all?

Kant would be obliged to say it is not. All his own formulations of the moral law as the categorical imperative take positive form. As imperatives, they could not do otherwise. Each prescribes a definite mode of action: ‘Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a

6 ‘Vielleicht gibt es keine erhabener Stelle im Gesetzbuche der Juden als das Gebot: Du sollst dir kein Bildnis machen noch irgendein Gleichnis, weder dessen, was im Himmel noch auf der Erden noch unter der Erden ist usw.’ (Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 122 (§29)); Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 156.

7 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 122 (§29).

8 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 123 (§29).

9 Immanuel Kant, ‘On Philosophical Exaltation’, trans. Peter Fenves, in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*, ed. Peter Fenves (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 105.

10 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 123 (§29); Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 156 (translation slightly modified).



universal law'; 'Act in such a way that you treat humanity . . . always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.'¹¹ It turns out that the categorical imperative, in any of its five variant formulations, is the one permitted graven image. It is the one exceptional instance of the sublime that exalts the mind without exceeding comprehension, and therefore protects the mind from *Schwärmerei*. Kant himself verges on recognizing this strange turn of events when he subsequently identifies the independence of moral maxims from worldly advantages and non-moral ends as constituting 'the sublimity of maxims and the worthiness of every rational subject to be a legislative member in the kingdom of ends'.¹²

Outside the sphere of the Law, however, the one sphere that Kant wants to protect at all costs, the going is rougher. The only safeguard, and a purely implicit one at that, is Kant's conception of the aesthetic as disinterested contemplation. The lack of worldly interests, the absence of any stake in the aesthetic except the aesthetic itself, is the saving negativity that divides the sublime from *Schwärmerei*. The freewheeling of the imagination that constitutes aesthetic experience becomes a type of legitimate enthusiasm because (or in so far as) it is not directed by any interest. But the moment we step outside Kant's particular aesthetic frame of reference, the problem of separating sublimity from *Schwärmerei* comes back full force.

What if, for example, someone were to compose an oratorio meant to inspire wonder at God's creation and to imagine a human life in harmony with it? Such a work could hardly avoid evoking the sublime in, say, 1799, but on what terms? If Kant is right, not necessarily in theory but just descriptively, then the sublime would be more an obstacle than a goal. Doubly an obstacle: first because the sublime arises at precisely the point where one can no longer apprehend the creation, and second because the sublime threatens to induce a self-deification by which the subject inhabits a spurious world of its own creation. This oratorio – *The Creation*, it might be called – could invoke the sublime only on condition of revoking it. Otherwise the work would re-enact the very break with divine law, the fall of man, which it pointedly declines to represent.

The withdrawal of the sublime is the precondition for a creation narrative from which the fall, too, has been withdrawn – the first chapter of what in Haydn's day would have been called a universal history, the last chapter of which had yet to be written. This withdrawal is not just a matter of omission, nor even of the distinction between representing the fall and intimating it. *The Creation* makes the intimation, and could hardly have done otherwise, but it withdraws the fall by treating the intimation as an irritant. Just before the jubilant final chorus, a sour recitative exiles itself from the paradise of C major and sounds the word of warning. But the recitative lasts all of twenty-five seconds before the finale swallows it up. Like everyone in its audience, the work knows the fall is on the way, but it refuses to dwell on the fact. It acknowledges what it must and then bites its tongue.¹³

The music thus transforms an omission into a commission. In so doing, *The Creation* retrospectively appoints itself a utopian work, and more – a utopian ritual. By concentrating on the provision of divine gifts, the oratorio largely circumvents the burden of sin, the confessional and introspective regime of guilt, and the labyrinth of sexuality. By dwelling on the ordering and inhabiting of the world, it suggests that what has been given may still be received as a plenitude. The withdrawal of the sublime entails this withdrawal of its two pillars, confusion and privation, both harrowingly evident in the instrumental portrait of chaos that opens the work. These attitudes belong to what we might call the 'naive Enlightenment' – naive not in a pejorative sense but in something more like Schiller's contemporaneous sense of unselfconsciousness, only applied to

11 Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 30 and 36.

12 Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 43.

13 In his paper for the *Creation Study Day*, Michael Spitzer noted that the duet of Adam and Eve preceding the admonitory recitative is imbued with sexual innuendo and that the oratorio does not subsequently reach tonal closure; having begun in C, it ends in B flat. Spitzer reads these musical marks as symptoms of what he calls Haydn's pessimism, and while I would not go that far, I also find in them an acknowledgment of what the oratorio excludes – which, as I have just suggested, endows the exclusion with deliberate and deliberative force. In terms of the argument I will make in what follows, that force constitutes a last trace of the sublime, which may be overwhelmed but cannot be altogether obliterated by the ringing affirmations of the final chorus.



the very historical moment from which Schiller separated it. The core principle of the naive Enlightenment is that the world may be faulty but it is not fallen. The resulting faith in reason and in the power of human beings to better themselves through reflection becomes, with a certain touch of enthusiasm, the expression of an unreflective idealism.

It should be clear from these considerations that to say that *The Creation* withdraws the sublime is not to deny that it contains many passages of grandeur, magnitude, intensity and mystery. Not at all: what is withdrawn is more particular. It is the Kantian form of Sulzer's hammer-blows, the combination of an aporetic suspension of sense with a disorienting overload of the senses. Still, this withdrawal does open the door to some very un-grand passages that have caused consternation since the music's own first day. The most notorious of these mundane lapses involve the tone-painting of natural phenomena, and especially of the animals, in the early portions of the creation narrative. These sections have typically been felt to require rationales – excuses – for which the grander passages self-evidently have no need. In the frame of reference that the oratorio invokes, however, this order of values may be exactly the reverse of what it should be. The work of creation in *The Creation* demands a painstaking, systematic dismantling of the sublime, the end of which is precisely the created world. So it is no accident that I will shortly be dwelling on the passages of tone-painting much more than is customary – long enough to suggest both why they have to participate in the withdrawal of the sublime and why, that done, they too have to be withdrawn.

We can now return to the three declaratives and expand on them. To review them: (1) The withdrawal of the sublime is the creation as such; (2) the withdrawal of the sublime is the guarantee of essence; (3) the withdrawal of the sublime is the condition of subjectivity.

1. The withdrawal of the sublime is the creation as such

The oratorio makes this declaration with the same sublime simplicity that Kant admired in the prohibition of images. The instrumental introduction representing primordial chaos begins with a sublime hammer-blow, a loud, thickly scored octave, and then, as it were, stands back while the sublimity thus let loose gradually rises to and through a shattering peak of intensity. The creation narrative begins shortly afterwards, and when it does the number that begins it rescinds the sublime. The creation begins as the sublime ends. Or rather begins to end, for the sublime cannot be rescinded at a stroke. The first number rescinds the sublime precisely by recalling it, revisiting it, as if to let the sublime abolish itself.

The nodal points in this process are what I have called elsewhere the Great Tattoo and the Creation Cadence.¹⁴ The Great Tattoo (bar 40) is the shattering climax of the prologue into chaos, an abortive perfect cadence in a movement that continually slips and billows away from its nominal C minor tonic. The Creation Cadence (bar 86), a climax no less shattering than the tattoo, is the compensating C major hallelujah on 'Licht' mentioned earlier. The passage from the tattoo to the cadence is also a passage from an unimaginable void to the condition of possibility for the formation of images. The first act of creation is the first act of perception.

The chaos movement produces an excess of loosely coordinated textures, gestures, harmonies, timbres and melodic and polyphonic fragments, a big jumble that defies coherent perception. Haydn calls this movement *Die Vorstellung des Chaos*, a phrase well worth taking in its theatrical sense. The movement is not an image of chaos but a presentation of chaos as that which cannot be imaged. The music sets chaos before the listener by confounding the ear. This presentation carries echoes of both biblical interpretation and contemporary science, but its immediate effect is perhaps best understood as a musical version of the movement of atoms in a void. The conception is ancient, proposed by Epicurus and explicated in Lucretius's

¹⁴ See 'Music and Representation: In the Beginning with Haydn's *Creation*', in Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 67–97; see also my 'Haydn's Chaos, Schenker's Order; or, Musical Meaning and Musical Analysis: Can They Mix?', in Lawrence Kramer, *Critical Musicology and the Responsibility of Response: Selected Essays* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 237–262.



philosophical poem *De rerum natura*. But atomism circulated widely in the eighteenth century as a troubling blend of scientific hypothesis and cosmological conjecture. As Robert Boyle put it, ‘atomists explicate [natural] phenomena by little bodies variously figured and moved’. He was talking about the behaviour of gases but might just as well have been referring to the three-note double-dotted figures that stipple the chaos movement as they meander polyphonically through different voices and registers.¹⁵

The nature presented by this music is an entropic mass that tends to fall away into chaos at every opportunity. In so doing, it also tends to hobble or completely block the massive work of taxonomy that eighteenth-century science took as its mandate for demonstrating natural order. Kant reflects the attendant anxiety in a passage from *The Critique of Pure Reason*. When the perception of natural order passes over into its opposite, ‘our judgment of the whole resolves itself into an amazement which is speechless . . . The whole universe must thus sink into the abyss of nothingness, unless, over and above [the] infinite chain of contingencies, we assume something to support it’.¹⁶ The amazement of which Kant speaks is the negative of *Schwärmerei*, a vertigo of nausea rather than of exaltation, and it is equally incompatible with the work of a divine agency – the ‘something’ that we have to assume in order to support the perception of the world as cosmos, which is to say, as a creation.

Haydn dramatizes something like that assumption in the Creation Cadence. The famous perceptual shock delivered by this event makes it a counter-sublime; the Creation Cadence shouts chaos down. The cadence does not cancel the sublime but appropriates it for the act of creation by which the sublime is dispelled. This is an appropriation, however, that can happen only once; it is unique to the founding act of cosmos. Its uniqueness is immanent in the cadence, which is so transparent an elaboration of the common chord that it ends by defaulting on the incomprehensibility that the sublime requires. The cadence does confound perception, and not by intensity alone; dominant and tonic harmony momentarily fuse at its peak. But its conception is perfectly luminous. The tonic arrives; it is C major, so music arrives, the natural scale arrives, cosmic harmony arrives; and all this arrives as an image of being blinded but also enlightened by the first light. Hence the Creation Cadence signals not only an appropriation of the sublime but also a withdrawal from it, or a withdrawal of it, an act from which the whole rest of the oratorio follows. Creation begins by recalling the sublime, but the creation as a phenomenon has no place for it. Its absence allows the divine principle, or the assumption thereof, to support the infinite chain of contingencies.

Another way to describe the same series of events is to say that the Creation Cadence causes the Kantian sublime of overload and unintelligibility to implode, leaving behind the Longinian sublime of articulate power: *Let there be light!* But this exchange of one sublime for another is necessarily transient, as the unique

15 Quoted by William Kerrigan, ‘Atoms Again: The Deaths of Individualism’, in *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*, ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 97. Kerrigan outlines the persistence of atomism and examines its paradoxical incompatibility with the notion of the individual. He also notes a literary tendency, around the turn of the nineteenth century, to isolate sublime passages at the expense of the works that contain them. A similar tendency persists in the reception of *The Creation*. Lucretius describes the collision of elements as ‘an unholy and gigantic civil war’; Ovid reiterates the metaphor (which would become standard) at the beginning of his *Metamorphoses* in a description of primordial chaos: ‘seeds of matter at strife’ (*discordia semina rerum*). Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe (De Rerum Natura): A New Verse Translation*, trans. James H. Mantinband (New York: Ungar, 1965), 146 (book 1, line 381); Ovid, *Metamorphoses: Books I–V*, ed. William S. Anderson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 45. Both authors were widely read during the eighteenth century. It is worth noting, however, that Lucretius understands creation as a happy accident. Chaos consists of ‘a mighty conflict / Of intervals and pathways and connections and weights, / And blows and impacts, and many motions and conjunctions’ (book 5, lines 437–439), which sounds remarkably like a description of Haydn’s *Vorstellung des Chaos*. But one day the seething mass starts, for no particular reason, to ‘sort itself out’. This process is uncongenial to Ovid, who requires the intervention of a divine creator. Hence Haydn’s atomism is Lucretian at one end, Ovidian at the other. For more on the demand for a creator in this context see my ‘Haydn’s Chaos, Schenker’s Order’, 248–252.

16 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin’s, 1965), 519 (division 2, book 2, chapter 3, §6).



status of its utterance testifies. The great *lux fiat!* is a moment of beginning, indeed the beginning of beginning itself, and what follows it must depart from the sublime mode in order to continue in the mode proper to it, which is narrative. Creation has to be told as a story. The call to light is also a call to Enlightenment.

Nonetheless, the sublime does not collapse without a murmur. It cannot be withdrawn by a single act, even one as decisive as the Creation Cadence. The withdrawal must be reiterated in a variety of forms; the reiteration is what produces the order of the created world, the network of interlocking categories and structures constitutive of a nature that can be described taxonomically and given in charge to humanity for both management and pleasure.

Light continues to play a key role in this process – initially in its triumph over darkness at the dawn of the first day (No. 2), which, among other things, involves a repudiation of the chaos key of C minor.¹⁷ But a fuller transformation occurs with the creation of the sun and the moon on the fourth day (No. 12).

The sun–moon narrative recalls several sublime features of the transition from chaos to light, which it re-enacts allegorically while also setting the musical house of chaos in order. With the sun in particular, the heir to original light, the elements of the sublime are distilled and refined. The counterpoint that meandered through chaos is now firmly oriented around the tonic and dominant, the rise to a climax yields a genuine tonic cadence and not a default on one as at the Great Tattoo, and the event leads not to an aimless dominant pedal like the one proceeding from the tattoo, but to a pedal that is strictly teleological. The *fortissimo* tonic cadence is another burst of light, recalling the radiance of the Creation Cadence as well as the Great Tattoo's burst of darkness. The subsequent solar pedal forms the link between the cadence and the explanatory recitative, which prolongs the dominant by taking a subdominant excursion. The recitative orients itself around the long-term resolution in the upper voice of C to C#, which then at the final cadence resolves as leading note to D.

These relationships are all exercises in transparency. They not only illuminate (by rectifying) earlier events but are also perfectly transparent in themselves, grand but not – precisely not – sublime.

Especially transparent is the depiction of the first sunrise, which the recitative subsequently glosses. A succession of nine semibreves, one per bar, ascends in first violins doubled by flutes along the D major scale (see Example 1; the flutes and violins reach a tenth note together, at which point the flutes sustain the semibreve pattern while the violins break into more urgent motion). Starting on the first degree, the ascent traces a full octave over close polyphony on second violins and violas, eventually joined by oboes and first bassoon. The horns chime in as the first violins reach the upper D of the scale, from which they continue through E to the *fortissimo* climax (with the addition of second bassoon, contrabassoon and timpani) on F#.

The arrival at the upper D, however, does not bring with it a tonic cadence or even a tonic chord; that has to wait until the full span of a tenth has been accomplished. But the music under the upper D does prefigure the tonic, and announce the dominant, in a literally fundamental way. In unison, the cellos and basses move down by step from D to A, a process completed by the solo basses beneath the cellos' range; the A becomes the root of the cadential dominant in the second half of bar 9. The cadence follows with the further ascent to F#, the tenth and last one-bar link in the chain. The presence of the F# in the top voice means, however, that that cadence, for all its grandeur, is still only a point of transition. A perfect cadence does not occur until after the emergence of the dominant pedal and its continuation in the first two bars of recitative.

The passage is thus a demonstration of two things. First, it shows the perfection of the creation, emblemized by the power of the scale – a kind of cosmic monochord – and the lucidity of the harmony. Second, the passage shows that in its perfection the created world is dynamic, generative, processual, as emblemized variously by the polyphony under the scale, the bass movement under the upper D, the climactic medial cadence at F#, which, like a sunrise, is both an end and a beginning, and the subsequent prolongation of the dominant until the closing cadence.

17 See Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Concertos and Choral Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 361–362.



No. 12. Recitative

Andante

Flutes 1 and 2

Oboes 1 and 2

Bassoons 1 and 2

Contrabassoon

Horns in D

Trumpets in D

Timpani

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello and Bass

Andante

pp

p

cresc.

pp

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

pp

cresc.

unis.

unis.

cresc.

pp

Example 1 Haydn, *The Creation*, No. 12 (the first sunrise), bars 1–13 (Dover Portable Scores, reproduction of Joseph Haydn, *Die Schöpfung* (Leipzig: Peters, no date), 67–68)

Immediately after that cadence we hear the moonrise, which forms, so to speak, a mirror-echo of the sunrise, with polyphony over, not under, a scale that rises not in the top voice but in the bass. The pattern is less transparent here, perhaps as befits the moon's lesser light, and the instrumental passage coincides with, rather than precedes, the vocal gloss. But the first broad sweep on the cellos and basses spans a tenth, just as the sun's flutes and violins had, and the passage as a whole wends its way slowly to a perfect cadence on G that has been anticipated by the subdominant turn (the addition of C \sharp to D major chords) in the sun's recitative. The conception of the sun and moon as mirror orbs, one greater, the other lesser, is unmistakable. This formation is another sign both of perfection, here framed as symmetry, and of progressiveness: a perfect combination of Enlightenment values, and one that depends absolutely on the withdrawal of the sublime, its absence as suspended presence.



Musical score for Example 1 continued, showing staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Clarinet in Bass (C. Bsn.), Horn (D) (Hn. (D)), Trumpet (D) (Tpt. (D)), Timpani (Timp.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Cello/Double Bass (Vc./Db.). The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *ff*, *p*, and *unis.* The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

Example 1 *continued*

Haydn creates a quasi-pictorial image of this combination by the way the polyphony in both the sunrise and moonrise passages is tightly framed, enclosed, both acoustically and discursively, by the scalar-tonal unfolding. This framing forms another specific antithesis to the Lucretian disorder of the chaos movement, where failure to combine is perhaps the primary way of figuring the void.

The text of the associated recitative figures the conjunction of sun and moon as a marriage, an ancient figure of cosmic harmony as sacred ritual. In Haydn this hierogamy anticipates the human role in the creation at the very moment it also re-enacts the divine role. But it does so in a pastoral mood, conveyed by the gentle polyphony of strings and winds that subtends the mounting grandeur of the sunrise. Most invocations of the Great Marriage are sublime and apocalyptic; Wordsworth, Hölderlin and Shelley, among others, all offer near-contemporary examples, with Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* including a celestial union of the earth and moon. But in *The Creation*, both as an event in the work and in the work as event, the pastoral divine replaces – supplants, displaces – the cosmic sublime.



2. The withdrawal of the sublime is the guarantee of essence

Haydn inherited a tradition of biblical interpretation that identified the intelligibility of the created world with the naming of its creatures. The idea that names are originally mimetic, so that to name something is to reveal its essence, enters Western thought in Plato's dialogue *Cratylus* and still resonates in Walter Benjamin's essay of 1916, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man'. (Benjamin was perhaps the last European thinker to take Cratylism seriously, just at the moment when it was being dismantled by figures as various as Peirce, Saussure, Hofmannsthal and Wittgenstein. Elements of the theory in his essay will prove to be belated echoes of Haydn's practice.¹⁸) In its Christianized form, the ability to name becomes evidence that humanity is created in the image of God; natural knowledge becomes the mirror of divine wisdom. Milton, in *On Christian Doctrine*, explains that without this 'natural wisdom' Adam 'could not have given names to the whole animal creation with such sudden intelligence'. *Paradise Lost* goes a step further when Adam describes the procession of birds and beasts approaching him two by two: 'I nam'd them, as they pass'd, and understood / Their Nature, with such knowledge God endu'd / My sudden apprehension.'¹⁹

The much-maligned musical tone-painting of *The Creation* seeks to produce the same sudden apprehension. Most of the music for Haydn's paradisaical carnival of the animals, accordingly, forms a kind of prelapsarian 'twenty questions' game, a series of riddles with the peculiarity that the answers are never in doubt. In the recitative 'Gleich öffnet sich der Erde Schoß' the music first 'names' the various animals mimetically and then the text states their name and nature. When sung numbers adopt this sequence, they tend to extend it; the transparency of the riddles allows the musical and verbal designations to alternate more freely and sometimes coincide, with each constituting an ecphrasis of the other. As this process is reiterated, it draws understanding reflectively into the principle of mimetic naming as such, so that the series of riddles and answers evolves into a tutorial in the perception of essences. The mimetic principle affirms the traditional identity of knowledge and truth. The individualizing of instruments and instrumental textures mimics the creation of species. The use of successive musical sketches based on mimicry and onomatopoeia, even in rounded numbers, produces the musical equivalent of Adamic naming. The music becomes the symbolic equivalent of the original form of language as such.

At the same time, however, there is an effect of miniaturization, as if we were hearing the musical equivalent of a bestiary, or of Milton's own pseudo-bestiary, a series of illustrations, as for a children's book or an illuminated Bible. This means in particular that the sublime beasts, the lion and whale and serpent, appear as parts of the zoo of the creation rather than as denizens of the deep of the sublime:

frisking play'd
All Beasts of th'Earth, since wild, and of all chase
In Wood or Wilderness, Forest or Den;
Sporting the lion ramp'd and in his paw
Dandled the Kid; Bears, Tigers, Ounces, Pards
Gamboll'd before them, th'uwiely Elephant,
To make them mirth us'd all his might, and wreath'd
His Lithe Proboscis. (Book 4, lines 340–347)

But music's mimetic power does not end here; this is just the beginning. In the standard creation narrative, Adam's naming of the animals is a privilege unique to him. But the oratorio distributes this privilege to everyone in its audience and, by implication, to all humankind. As we apply the names through the music in the course of listening to it, we re-enact and confirm the privilege of essential naming. And in

18 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', in Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 314–332.

19 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey, 1962), book 8, lines 352–354; the quotation from *On Christian Doctrine* is taken from Hughes's footnote to book 8, lines 320–338.



so far as this application involves being attentive to the music, it identifies Adamic naming with music itself and with the subject-position(s) that music creates. This is why Haydn's bestiary must be utterly simple and transparent and risk censure as childish and naive. It must be able to claim universal intelligibility, a failure of which would invoke the very fall of man that the oratorio places in suspension. Only in this way, the music claims, and only through music can the power of language before Babel be recovered, and along with it the essential linguisticity of nature itself, later framed by Benjamin in the principle that 'there is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is in the nature of all to communicate their mental meanings'.²⁰

Haydn prefigures Benjamin's extension of the mimetic principle to the natural world by the cosmological role he gives to the musical image in the broad sense of quasi-pictorial mimesis. As Haydn received it, the narrative of creation takes the form of a division of elements to make a world, the population of that world by the species of an ordered plenitude, and the crowning of that plenitude by the advent of humankind. Everything in such a world is transparently knowable, and as such is subject to representation in each of the two modes that define representation in Western culture, the verbal and the pictorial. Everything with a name has an image too.

With music, however, the distinct identity of these images poses a – distinct – problem. Or perhaps I should say two distinct problems; the difficulty is double. On the one hand, if music addresses the listener at the level of feeling or sensation, mood or affect, then the production of a pictorial image depletes the immediacy that the music otherwise seeks to sustain. Music as image separates itself from and supplants music as feeling. On the other hand, the musical image also stands apart from the continuity of musical utterance, according to a kind of law we might notice in passing: representational music always separates itself from the matrix of nonrepresentational music, never the other way around. The hostility towards tone-painting seems partly to have been based on the experience of these separations as a loss of properly musical expression. A contemporary reviewer pinpointed the problem when he complained satirically that *The Creation* was 'a natural history . . . set to music, where the objects pass before us as in a magic lantern'.²¹ Music could certainly be descriptive in a broad sense, but it could not make reference to specific classes of objects in the manner of images or names without separating itself from and supplanting its own musicality.

Such separations also positively preclude the sublime. As Kant suggests in invoking the biblical prohibition against images, the presence of the image curbs the power of the sublime. The sublime occurs only where the firm outline proper to the image disappears. It occurs just as that disappearance. So the first large process in the oratorio is the movement from the sublime to the image, which corresponds to the movement not from chaos to the creation but from chaos to the condition of possibility of the creation. Hence the first half of the oratorio (up to the creation of man) is full of images: some, like those for the animals, iconic signs at the level of the name, and others, like those for the creation of the sun and moon, pictorial compositions. In the latter case, the musical images work not by mimetic nomination or denotation but by forming an analogical relationship between the composition of a whole passage and some visualizable part of the depicted world.

It is not, however, until the parts of this world have themselves been composed or harmonized into a dynamic, semi-animate whole that the work of creation is complete. In musical terms, that higher-order whole corresponds to the continuous unfolding of non-pictorial music. So the second large movement of the oratorio is from music as image to a music from which the image has been withdrawn: music of which one might say, following Shelley, that the deep truth is imageless, or else, with a turn of dialectic, music that has withdrawn into its own mode of identity and become a purely acoustic image. This is the music of the work's second part, which takes up the creation of humanity in the image – I use the term advisedly – of the couple.

²⁰ Benjamin, *Reflections*, 314.

²¹ Quoted and discussed in my *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*, 67–68. The review was written anonymously by Johann Triest.



The work as a whole, like the divine work it describes, unfolds on a principle of cosmos as analogy.²² First, the withdrawal of the sublime reveals a logic of essence disclosed in the activity of Adamic naming. The medium of that logic is the image, in its primary or primordial form. Subsequently, the withdrawal of the primary image reveals the same logic of essence as a property of music. Music fills the void left by the departed image just as the image has filled the void left by the departed sublime. The result is the emergence of a higher-order image that visualizes – musically depicts – a portion of the order of creation that cannot otherwise be seen. From now on we will be talking about these higher-order images, available mainly and perhaps only through music: images that show the invisible and pictorialize what cannot be pictured. Such images stand at the furthest remove from the sublime – at, so to speak, the tritone of the sublime. To examine them we turn to our third declarative.

3. The withdrawal of the sublime is the condition of subjectivity

In so far as the first five days of creation constitute an extended withdrawal of the sublime with the primary image as its residue, this process must be considered as the condition of possibility for the creation of humanity and for the participation of humanity in the creation. This necessity in turn calls us back both to the official Kantian account of the sublime as the mind's rebounding on itself when its power of imagination succumbs to a shock, and to the unofficial and uncomfortable proximity between the experience of the sublime and *Schwärmerei*.

The sublime is self-obliterating in a double sense: it annihilates itself in the act of revelation and it obliterates the self supposed to witness it. One is not oneself when in the presence of the sublime. In Kantian terms, one becomes oneself, or aware of one's noumenal self, not in the moment of sublime shock but in the moment after. This reflective turn would become musically important for Beethoven and Schubert and for successive generations at least through to Mahler, but it is something that Haydn either does not recognize or does not trust. He thus short-circuits the Kantian process on behalf of a principle that preserves the faculty of reason, a faculty that the sublime shock puts at greater risk than Kant wants to admit. This principle can be stated as a variant of our third declarative: where the sublime is withdrawn, the human appears. And the form in which it appears is the prototype of community, or that which was rapidly becoming this prototype in the nascent bourgeois order of Haydn's Europe, namely the domestic couple, realized musically in forms of reciprocity that exclude the disruptive otherness of the sublime, including that of human sexuality.

The paradigmatic moment of this realization comes at the start of the oratorio's designated Part III in the ensemble 'Von deiner Güt', O Herr und Gott', when the voices of Adam and Eve – intriguingly reversed to Eve and Adam – are heard for the first time and combined with the voices of the chorus. This number, also for the first time, combines all the musical resources of the oratorio – soloists, chorus and orchestra – to form a higher-order, non-visual image, a compositional image, of the living creation, and furthermore of the creation in microcosm. The referent of the image is not a phenomenon in nature but something that has no form independent of the image; in this case the referent is the formation of Adam and Eve as subjects by virtue of their relationship both to God and to each other. As the two sing their recognition that the created world and its wonders are God's handiwork, their musical relationship becomes an image of the mutual love and understanding that bind them together. The Lucretian jumble of chaos becomes a constellation.

The drawing-out of the solo voices draws a figurative picture of this transformation. Adam and Eve begin by singing in counterpoint and then turn to antiphony after a florid climax on 'deiner Hände Werk'. Then, after reprising the climax, they focus above all on singing together, offsetting their rhythmic unison with occasional small flourishes of counterpoint that sound like overflows of pleasure. The text they sing

22 Haydn can thus be said to collate two different historical modes of natural knowledge in *The Creation*: the taxonomic schema of his own time and the analogical schema, a classical inheritance that persisted throughout the early modern period but declined with the rise of empirical science in the seventeenth century. As taxonomy took hold, analogy slipped from a metaphysical to a poetic principle.



acknowledges the world as a gift, but their song goes further and discovers the conditions on which the gift is to be received and enjoyed by the subjects it creates.

Nor is that all. Haydn fashions this number so that it also becomes a reflective image of higher-order image-making, the consummate and consummating form that fills the void of the sublime. Instead of the mind rebounding on itself to enjoy its own infinitude, the music rebounds on itself to make the enjoyment of finitude its own.

The texture of ‘Von deiner Güt’ is the acoustic equivalent of a pictorial composition; it is a musical space built up from different layers of sound that are sustained consistently throughout (see Example 2 for the opening phase of the process). The second violins play in pastoral triplets over a light, detached accompaniment in the lower strings; the first violins repeat and embroider a falling triadic figure; a solo oboe engages in pastoral piping and later gives way to a series of light woodwind chords echoed by soft vibrations on solo kettledrum. The solo voices act out their transformative self-fashioning while the chorus, singing a different text, celebrates their accomplishment by seconding their act of praise. The chorus thus introduces an element of non-alienating self-reflection: it frames the voices of Adam and Eve as an image of human harmony, and this act of framing, brought into the scene that observes, becomes an image of the wider cosmic harmony.

The music thus forms an ordered plenitude of representational forms to match the material plenitude of the created world as imaged by its text, which recapitulates the narrative of creation as a progress from the light of nature to the light of the mind – from the creation of the stars, sun and moon through the vegetable and animal creations to the abode of humanity.²³ And just in so far as this world, or its image, can be enjoyed in suspension of the knowledge that it will fail, will fall, and just in so far as the oratorio defers this knowledge by declining to represent it, the result is a definitive representation of a world in which the sublime is not only not present, but not needed and not missed: a world of spirit fully immanent in nature, a world that does need to be transcended.

In all these respects *The Creation* is both a culmination of an era’s sensibility and a dead end. For the sublime proved unavoidable. Modernity made it so, at least if we understand modernity in Benjaminian terms as the correlate of a ceaseless, increasingly shocking series of ruptures with tradition.²⁴ Modernity’s culture of shock brought with it the demand to engage with ever more difficult forms of the sublime and then to achieve legitimation by reckoning with their aftermath. This mandate, perhaps, is more than anything else responsible for the rapid rise and long persistence of the subsequent cult of Beethoven, with its lop-sided images of relentless heroism. The obverse of this misrepresentation emerged with the equally persistent and only slightly less absurd tropes of Haydn as a fairy-tale good ‘Papa’ – the name-of-the-father without the paternal law – and of Haydn as a witty comedian whose infinite charm papers over his lack of depth.²⁵ *The Creation* represented a worldview that could not survive the widening rift between knowledge and truth by

23 The order revises that of Genesis, which the oratorio has followed in its earlier depiction of the days of creation. The emergent symbolic mandate of the work thus takes priority over fidelity to its presumptively sacred source.

24 See in particular ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’, trans. Harry Zohn, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 313–355. For Benjamin and others modern shock was as much sensory as it was conceptual; in this regard it represents the direct destruction of the world as apprehended in *The Creation*. The end of that world is the beginning of history, a beginning constantly repeated *within* history precisely in so far as history is a manifestation of the sublime. In ‘The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation’, *Critical Inquiry* 9/1 (1982), 113–138, Hayden White suggests that nineteenth-century historiography witnessed an epochal conflict between the acknowledgment and ‘suppression’ of the ‘historical sublime’ – the conception of history, in Schiller’s words, as ‘the pathetic spectacle of mankind wrestling with fate’ (126) – leading eventually to a disciplinary ‘domestication of history’ itself (130).

25 On the Beethoven cult see Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); on the construction of Haydn’s reputation see my ‘The Kitten and the Tiger: Tovey’s Haydn’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Haydn*, ed. Caryl Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 239–248.



No. 30. Duet and Chorus.

Oboe

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello and Bass

Eve

Adam

1 solo

p

p

p

p

p

Von

5

5

5

5

5

5

5

dein - - - er Güt, o Herr - - - und Gott, ist

Von dein - - - Güt, o Herr - - - und

Example 2 Haydn, *The Creation*, No. 30 (aria and chorus, ‘Von deiner Güt’), bars 1–13 (Dover Portable Scores, reproduction of Joseph Haydn, *Die Schöpfung* (Leipzig: Peters, no date), 178–179)

which modernity constituted itself. So the oratorio begins by marking the departure of the very phenomenon – the sublime without limits – that was, at that very moment, bullishly proclaiming that it had arrived.

Yet the quarrel between transparency and mystery remained, and remains. *The Creation* inserts itself in that quarrel not by choosing a side, although it does that, but by modelling the relationship between its choice and the truth. The oratorio both enacts and models what the philosopher Alain Badiou calls a truth



I solo

Ob.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc. / Db.

Eve
Erd' und Him - - - nel voll. Die Welt, so gross, so

Adam
Gott, ist Erd' und Him - mel voll. Die Welt so gross, so wunder bar

Example 2 *continued*

process, which he understands as the form by which truth manifests itself as a wholly historical condition – truth as phenomenon not as noumenon. A truth process consists of a series of reiterative actions representing fidelity to an event that disrupts established forms of understanding.²⁶ This fidelity orients itself by reference to simple declaratives through which the truth is professed; Badiou's prime example is Saint Paul's 'Christ is resurrected', understood in a performative rather than in a theological sense. Haydn's trio of declaratives, adding up to the master declarative 'The world is created', orients *The Creation* by offering opportunities for musical acts of fidelity. I have sought to suggest that the ultimate form of this fidelity is the step-by-step withdrawal of the sublime. But in what do the more proximate forms consist?

Each of Haydn's declaratives suggests an answer of its own. If we take them up in reverse order, they will lead back to the threshold of the larger declarative that envelops them all.

First, fidelity to subjectivity means fidelity to classification. As we have often had reason to emphasize, the eighteenth century was deeply absorbed in the work of taxonomy. The era regarded systematic classification as fundamental to knowledge, especially (but by no means exclusively) in the area of 'natural history' covering the understanding of the animal and vegetable creation.²⁷ The Enlightenment world ideally consists of an ordered plenitude like the one envisioned in 'Von deiner Güt', a perspicuous space in which different classes of beings are distributed and reconciled. (Where forms emerge that defy classification, they count as monsters – another version of the sublime. The era thus also developed a flourishing 'teratology', the science of monstrosity, in order to account for this possibility.²⁸) The harmony of natural forms culminates in, and serves as a model for, the harmony of social forms, which culminate in turn in the relationships of human care symbolized by the marriage of Adam and Eve. One becomes who one is by assuming a place in this order; the birth of subjectivity is the birth of harmonious difference.

26 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), 173–190 and 201–211.

27 The best-known treatment of this topic is Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. unattributed (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 125–166.

28 Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 254–266.



The Creation approaches its close as the prototypical human subjects declare their fidelity to this taxonomic harmony. In “Von deiner Güt” the musical reciprocity of Adam and Eve both concentrates the concord of the world and disseminates it through the pictorial counterpoint and rich layering of instrumental textures that support the vocal interplay. The style of that interplay is something we know well, but thanks to the narrative we are invited to hear the singing of the first couple as if for the first time. With this shift of perspective comes a shift in meaning; every separate thing in creation shines out in its own identity.

Second, fidelity to essence means fidelity to the image. The tone-painting of the early days of creation does not betoken a pictorial aesthetic, a kind of *ut pictura musica* that would in any case be remote from Haydn’s music in general. Instead, the tone-painting exemplifies the modes of intelligibility established by the image. Two of these are especially salient. First, the image arises as an outline bounding and therefore curbing the sublime. Where there is world, there is image. Second, the image secures the principle that even musical infinitesimals, segments of melody without formal or developmental value, remain meaningful as mimetic forms. Such little atoms of mimesis are the reverse of chaotic; they are microcosms of which the more extended form is the analogical portrayal of the world order in motion. Pictorial meaning in music is the condition of possibility for the non-pictorial meaning that constitutes the subjective experience of the world as creation.

Third, and most telling, fidelity to creation is fidelity to finitude. The oratorio pledges that fidelity with the series of reiterative actions that bound and refigure the musical features of chaos: the answer of chaos by light, the answer of the light of creation by the lights of the sun and moon, the metamorphosis of Lucretian randomness to the reiterative dynamics of marriage and of landscape. All of these actions not only exclude the sublime as a disruption of finite perception, but also reject the infinite to which the sublime is a portal. The world of *The Creation* presents itself as God’s handiwork, but its plenitude is robustly secular; its narrative is more deist than Christian. I can imagine Haydn being appalled by that statement, but human handiwork has a funny way of confounding the hand that made it. *The Creation* is no *Messiah*; its genre is closest, perhaps, to that of eighteenth-century loco-descriptive poems like James Thomson’s *The Seasons*, which, of course, supplied the libretto for Haydn’s next oratorio.

This orientation helps elucidate another feature of *The Creation* that I have allowed to hover in the background, its emphasis on the material presence of distinctive sonorities: blaring brass in the Great Tattoo, massed voices in the Creation Cadence, the chain of sustained violin tones in the depiction of the sun, the solo oboe and timpani in “Von deiner Güt”, among many others. By highlighting its own materiality, the music – again assisted by the narrative – renders the medium of creation a medium of pleasure. Doing so is perhaps the oratorio’s most striking intervention in the tradition of creation narratives. Declining to represent the loss of paradise – the fall that plunges humanity into the infinitude of guilt and repentance – might seem intervention enough, but *The Creation* goes further. It proposes to act as if the human senses were still pristine, as if the fall had passed them by, as if in our sensory enjoyment of the world we are now as we were then. By recalling the sublime, *The Creation* allows its audience to forget, however briefly, the unhappy finitude that needs the sublime as its scourge.