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## **Poets Playing Haydn: A Beginning Study of Haydn's Literary Reception**

by Chad Fothergill

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### *Abstract*

In his poem "Playing Haydn for the Angel of Death," Bill Holm plays a Haydn sonata in order to entice Death into a dance, an activity that erodes his appetite for ghoulish work: when the music ends, he will "nap a while and stay away." Death's visit is delayed, at least for the time being. "That's the idea," concludes Holm. "I got it from Haydn." Holm's poem is just one example of a phenomenon that runs throughout Haydn's own lifetime and subsequent reception history, namely the invocation or appropriation of the composer and his music in poetry and literature. In addition to positioning these literary references among the central themes of Haydn reception—for example, characterizations of divinity or childlike naïveté—this essay begins to consider to how these texts might be used to inform aspects of analysis, interpretation, and performance, and hopefully invites more sustained investigation in this area of Haydn reception.

### *I. Introduction*

To read a poem is to hear it with our eyes;

to hear it is to see it with our ears.

—Octavio Paz (1914–1998)

"Play Haydn," writes poet Bill Holm (1943–2009), and soon you will see Death "dancing around his straight-back chair under the lilac bush in the garden." Imagine this scene for just a moment: a cloaked, faceless figure pirouettes through a sweet-smelling galaxy of purple hues, bony fingers gripping the handle of his scythe. Death's implement is reminiscent of an old conducting staff—the same apparatus that dealt Lully his mortal

wound—and bounces off the mossy ground cover in time with his left foot. Death dances as a marionette for its master, Papa Haydn. And if you play Haydn long enough, Death will tire of his cavorting, slow his steps, and settle back into his chair so that he might “nap a while.” Thus, Death’s visit is postponed, at least for the time being. “That’s the idea,” concludes Holm: “I got it from Haydn.”<sup>1</sup>

Holm’s attribution of a divine, bewitching power to Haydn’s music is a theme that can be traced throughout the long and varied arc of Haydn’s reception history as chronicled by Mark Evan Bonds, Leon Botstein, James Garratt, Nicholas Mathew, Bryan Proksch, Thomas Tolley, and Christopher Wiley, among others.<sup>2</sup> For many of his contemporaries, Haydn transcended the boundary between ordinary and sublime and, in doing so, amassed a number of literary and godlike appellations such as “Great Sovereign of Tuneful Art,”<sup>3</sup> “The Shakespeare of Music,”<sup>4</sup> “Orpheus of the Danube,” as well as comparisons to Aeschylus and Sophocles.<sup>5</sup> In 1779, the Spanish poet Tomás de Iriarte y Oropesa (1750–1791) praised Haydn as a source of holy inspiration with the lines, “to your divinity alone, prodigious Haydn, / do the Muses concede this grace.”<sup>6</sup> Writing to

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Holm, “Playing Haydn for the Angel of Death,” in *Playing the Black Piano* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2004), 29–35, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Leon Botstein, “The Consequences of Presumed Innocence: The Nineteenth-Century Reception of Joseph Haydn,” in *Haydn Studies*, edited by W. Dean Sutcliffe, 1–34 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); James Garratt, “Haydn and Posterity: The Long Nineteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Haydn*, edited by Caryl Clark, 226–238 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Nicholas Mathew, “Heroic Haydn, The Occasional Work, and ‘Modern’ Political Music,” *Eighteenth-Century Music* 4.1 (2007): 7–25; Bryan Proksch, *Reviving Haydn: New Appreciations in the Twentieth Century* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015); Thomas Tolley, *Painting the Cannon’s Roar: Music, the Visual Arts, and the Rise of an Attentive Public in the Age of Haydn, ca. 1750 to ca. 1810* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); and Christopher Wiley, “Mythological Motifs in the Biographical Accounts of Haydn’s Later Life,” in *The Land of Opportunity: Joseph Haydn and Britain*, edited by Richard Chester and David Wyn Jones, 196–211 (London: The British Library, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Burney, “Verses on the Arrival of Haydn in England,” in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents, Second Edition*, edited by Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (Belmont, California: Schirmer Cengage, 2008), 267.

<sup>4</sup> Tolley, *Painting the Cannon’s Roar*, 188.

<sup>5</sup> Bonds, *Absolute Music*, 16–17 and 21.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Tolley, 97.

Haydn in March 1804, the Berlin pedagogue Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758–1832) attributed Promethean and prophetic powers to Haydn's spirit:

Your *Geist* has penetrated the holy sphere of divine wisdom. You have brought fire from heaven and with it you warm and illuminate earthly hearts and lead them to the infinite. The best that we others can do consists merely in this: to honor with thanks and joy God, who has sent you so that we might recognize the wonders that he has revealed through your art!<sup>7</sup>

Others, then and now, have sought to frame the effects of Haydn's music in medicinal terms. Writing in 1787, the English philologist Sir William Jones (1746–1794) prescribed Haydn's trios as part of a regimen for good health,<sup>8</sup> and closer to our own time, psychoanalyst Anthony Storr (1920–2001) has claimed on the basis of his own experience that, "no other composer ... has a greater capacity to dispel irritation or banish a mood of depression."<sup>9</sup> In addition to his deific stature and healing powers, Haydn is frequently praised for his invention, wit, and unbounded optimism. In the first installment of Griesinger's biography, the Viennese agent for Breitkopf & Härtel praised Haydn's "pouring forth [of] the slyest humor" alongside his astute "calculation of effect by a clever distribution of light and shade,"<sup>10</sup> thus securing Haydn a place in proverbial gallery of *chiaroscuro* masters along with Raphael, Baglione, and Caravaggio. Writing one year later, E. T. A. Hoffmann found in the symphonies a cheerful agreeableness so infectious as to spread itself over the whole of physical and temporal existence:

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Bonds, *Absolute Music*, 112.

<sup>8</sup> Tolley, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 117.

<sup>10</sup> David Wyn Jones, *The Life of Haydn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 227.

His symphonies lead us through boundless green forest groves, through a jovial, bustling crowd of happy people. A swift succession of young men and girls dance past; laughing children lie in wait behind trees and rosebushes teasingly throwing flowers at each other. A life of eternal youth, abundant in love and bliss, as though before the Fall.<sup>11</sup>

Other nineteenth-century critics, though complimentary, found Haydn to be somewhat mercurial or fickle, his youthful naiveté a liability that obstructed his pathway to true genius. Brendel saw him as a “contented” and naïve character,” a “carefree child playing on the brink of the abyss,” while Hanslick caricatured the composer as a “sprightly, kind grandpa, so lovable you want to kiss him.”<sup>12</sup> An 1867 couplet by Eduard Friedrich Mörike (1804–1875) captured a folksy Haydn who sounds more like a transient bard or minstrel rather than a composer of symphonies: “oftentimes his humor is old-worldly, like the dainty little pigtail / that dances roguishly at his back as the magician plays.”<sup>13</sup>

Yet, a more balanced view of Haydn’s music and persona gradually took hold in the twentieth century. In his study of Haydn’s early twentieth-century reassessment promulgated by Schenker, Bryan Proksch observes that the theorist “took offense that Riemann, like Marx before him, accepted the nineteenth-century view of Haydn as an unfeeling, ‘plain and unsophisticated’ composer interested only in his own ‘predilection for humorous effects.’”<sup>14</sup> Since the mid-twentieth century, critical biographies have fashioned a more dynamic and multi-dimensional portrait beyond the godlike, jovial, and childlike—for instance, a Haydn capable of such brazen acts as publishing his pupil’s music under his own name.<sup>15</sup> More recently, studies in Haydn reception have begun to explore appropriations of his music and character in visual and media arts

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<sup>11</sup> Garratt, “Haydn and Posterity,” 228.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 228–229.

<sup>13</sup> Bryan Proksch, “‘Forward to Haydn!’: Schenker’s Politics and the German Revival of Haydn,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64.2 (Summer 2011), 320.

<sup>14</sup> Proksch, “Forward to Haydn!,” 321.

<sup>15</sup> Wyn Jones, 127–128.

ranging from eighteenth-century portraiture, to film, to trends in recording and distribution of classical music.<sup>16</sup> This essay proposes another dimension that might be more fully developed in Haydn scholarship, namely the reception of Haydn by poets and, by extension, playwrights, storytellers, and all authors who invoke Haydn through reference to either his person or his music.

## *II. Contemporaneous and Contemporary Poetic Depictions of Haydn*

[Complete texts of select poems excerpted in the foregoing discussion are in IV.

Appendix: Complete Poems]

As indicated by the previous quotations by Tomás de Iriarte, Charles Burney, and Zelter, the story of Haydn's reception in verse begins during the composer's lifetime and is especially rich in material dating from his two visits to England in 1791–1792 and 1794–1795. Burney's fawning "Verses on the Arrival of Haydn in England" of 1791 credit Haydn with breaking a spell of uninspiring and seemingly moribund *musicking* on the English isle:

At length great Haydn's new and varied strains  
 Of habit and indifference broke the chains;  
 Rous'd to attention the long torpid sense,  
 With all that pleasing wonder could dispense.  
 Whene'er Parnassus' height he meant to climb,  
 Whether the grand, pathetic, or sublime,  
 The simply graceful, or the comic vein,  
 The theme suggested, or enrich'd the strain,

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Chelk, "The Case of the Blue Uniform: Haydn's First Portrait," *Haydn Society Journal* (2012): 9–17; Alan Davison, "The Face of a Musical Genius: Thomas Hardy's Portrait of Joseph Haydn," *Eighteenth-Century Music* 6.2 (September 2009): 209–227; Melanie Lowe, "The Art of Transition: After Haydn Year 2009," *The Journal of Musicology* 27.1 (Winter 2010): 1–8; and Proksch, *Reviving Haydn*, 216–219.

From melting sorrow to gay jubilation,  
 Whate'er his pen produc'ed was Inspiration!<sup>17</sup>

During his second visit, Haydn was extolled in a poem by Thomas Holcroft published in the *Whitehall Evening Post* on 11 September 1794.<sup>18</sup> Holcroft's paeon in iambic pentameter also imbues Haydn with supernatural power—linking him to the harmony of the spheres—and further describes him as a healer, peacemaker, and weather god. Holcroft, who sympathized with the ideals of the French Revolution and who would be charged and acquitted for high treason by the English authorities in 1795, was so taken with the musical special effects of Haydn's "Military" symphony that he took to writing an *apologia* on Haydn's behalf that countered unfavorable assessments of the symphony which had appeared in some of the London dailies after its spring 1794 premiere. Holcroft writes:

To others, noise and jangling; but to thee  
 'Tis one grand solemn swell of endless harmony.  
 When dark and unknown terrors intervene,  
 And men aghast survey the horrid scene;  
 Then, when rejoicing fiends flit, gleam and scowl,  
 And bid the huge tormented tempest howl;  
 When fire-fraught thunders roll, and whirlwinds rise,  
 And earthquakes bellow to the frantic skies,  
 Till the distracted ear, in racking gloom,  
 Suspects the wreck of worlds, and gen'ral doom:  
 Then Haydn stands, collecting Nature's tears,  
 And consonance sublime amid confusion hears.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Burney, "Verses on the Arrival of Haydn in England," 267. For the complete poem, see IV. Appendix: Complete Poems.

<sup>18</sup> Caroline Grigson, "A Matter of Words: Haydn, Holcroft and Anne Hunter," in *The Land of Opportunity: Joseph Haydn and Britain*, ed. Richard Chester and David Wyn Jones (London: The British Library, 2013), 85.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Holcroft, "To Haydn," <http://poetrynook.com/poem/haydn>, accessed 15 June 2016. For the complete poem, see IV. Appendix: Complete Poems.

Following his death, both Haydn and his music continued to inspire verse-makers and rhymesters as a number of lesser-known examples from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries attest. For example, George Sand's serialized novel *Consuelo* includes the character "Joseph Haydn," who, at various points, falls in love with the title character, braves gunfire to rescue his heroine, and—of course—composes.<sup>20</sup> In George Lansing Raymond's "Haydn" two sisters compete for his affection, and Anthony Hecht's "A Love for Four Voices: Homage to Franz Joseph Haydn" is structured as a four-movement string quartet wherein the conversational space is filled by characters from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Hermia and Helena are the violinists, Lysander the violist, and Demetrius the cellist.<sup>21</sup>

Variations on central themes of Haydn reception—associations with the divine, childhood, humor, character formation—are voiced by later twentieth- and twenty-first century poets as well. In her autobiographical "Adventures in Paradise" (1980), Laurie Duggan recalls "being a baby in baby powder / listening to Haydn and being fed" while Mark Amorose describes Haydn's "hoard of laughter-tempered learning" in his two-stanza "On Listening to Haydn," an exercise in compare-contrast between Haydn and Bach.<sup>22</sup> In "News from Nowhere" Japanese poet Inuo Taguchi attributes a calming and nurturing ethos to Haydn with the lines, "my blood is calm and my flesh is at peace / like vegetation lushly growing while listening to Haydn," and in 2005, a collection of theological reflections inspired by performances of Haydn's *Seven Last Words* contain an epigraph that sounds a common theme in Haydn reception by way of the composer's own words:

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<sup>20</sup> Proksch, *Reviving Haydn*, 29–31.

<sup>21</sup> George Lansing Raymond, *Haydn and Other Poems* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870); Anthony Hecht, "A Love for Four Voices: Homage to Franz Joseph Haydn," *Poetry* 138.1 (April 1981), 1–12.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Amorose, "On Listening to Haydn," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 218 (December 2011): 33. For the complete poem, see IV. Appendix: Complete Poems.

As God has given me a cheerful heart,  
 may He forgive me for serving Him cheerfully.<sup>23</sup>

Each of these poetic appropriations of Haydn and his music open “hermeneutic windows”<sup>24</sup> that not only provide vantage points for observing episodes of Haydn reception in times and places of the past, but allow the experiences and words of these poets to touch and shape our experiences of Haydn in the present. A theoretical framework for these types of intertextual readings can be constructed from a number of scholars whose work is situated at the intersections of music, meaning, hermeneutics, and interpretation.<sup>25</sup> For example, in *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After*, Lawrence Kramer identifies two categories of “intimacy” that arise from the meeting of composition and poetry in a common interpretive space: 1) indirect connections that arise from shared characteristics of genre—Hecht’s appropriation of the string quartet as homage—and, 2) direct connections that arise from the “appropriation of one work by another,” as in the case of *Lieder*, *mélodie*, and virtually all other song types.<sup>26</sup> For Kramer, the intersection of poetry and music offers “a virtually limitless play of explicit connotative relationships” including the tropes, allusions, associations, and ironies present in any composer’s reception history.<sup>27</sup> In turn, the infinite exploration of intertextual relationships envisioned by Kramer comes full circle in observations by Robert Hatten, who remarks (with respect to musical

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Young, ed., *Echoes from Calvary: Meditations on Franz Joseph Haydn’s The Seven Last Words of Christ* (Lanham and Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). For the complete poem, see IV. Appendix: Complete Poems.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence Kramer, “Tropes and Windows: An Outline of Musical Hermeneutics,” in *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1–20, and *Interpreting Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> In addition to the previously cited works of Lawrence Kramer, see Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000); Robert S. Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004); and Michael L. Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

topics) that the “interrelated tasks” which accompany interpretation “demand not only our intelligence, but our empathy and our poetic imagination as well.”<sup>28</sup>

The two poems that form the basis for the remainder of this essay—one shorter, one longer—are offered as starting places for considering the relationship between Haydn and poets, and how this line of inquiry might be brought to bear more broadly on facets of reception, analysis, meaning, and performance. These relationships naturally orbit a hermeneutic circle: Haydn’s image(s) in a given cultural *Zeitgeist* influence poetic conceptualizations of the composer, and these poetic readings feed back into in that very *Zeitgeist*. As summarized by one recent biographer, “a man of the eighteenth century ... speaks with richly variegated voice to the twenty-first century.”<sup>29</sup> Though several other aforementioned poets make mention of Haydn’s music, the writings of Holm and the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer (1931–2015) are notable for the ways in which they reflect central themes of his reception history while simultaneously offering modes of reading Haydn that may be useful for both analysis and performance.

Moreover, both Holm and Tranströmer are keyboardists. Their reception and representation of Haydn must be shaped at least in part by the cathartic and kinesthetic experience of playing. Tranströmer’s autobiographical collection of vignettes, *Memories Look at Me*, recounts how he turned to the piano during a bout of anxiety while a teenager in school. After studying music and psychology at the University of Stockholm, he worked as a psychologist in a number of counseling capacities for juveniles, persons with physical disabilities, and those seeking treatment for drug addiction. A severe stroke in 1990 rendered Tranströmer partially paralyzed on his right side, prompting a number of Swedish composers to shower him with newly composed piano pieces for left

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<sup>28</sup> Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures*, 290.

<sup>29</sup> Wyn Jones, *The Life of Haydn*, viii.

hand alone.<sup>30</sup> Holm, too, was a musical connoisseur who, according one friend, "spent more money on books and music collections than most people spend on food." His extensive collection of printed music and instruments, including a harpsichord, clavichord, and two pianos, confirm this observation.<sup>31</sup> The same friend later reminisced that Holm could be found "at his grand piano at 1 a.m., in shorts, with one leg crossed over his knee, an ashtray next to him, playing Haydn."<sup>32</sup> Like Haydn, Holm and Tranströmer treat the keyboard as a medium for invention and inspiration.<sup>33</sup>

### *III. Two Case Studies: Tranströmer's "Allegro" and Holm's "Playing Haydn for the Angel of Death"*

Since its appearance in 1962, Tranströmer's "Allegro" has become one of his most enduring poems, even inspiring a chamber work, *A Glass House*, for alto flute, bass clarinet, violin, violoncello, percussion and piano.<sup>34</sup> Characteristic of his style are the abruptly shifting and cryptic images such as, in this case, the sharp contrast between the physical interior where Haydn is played and the natural exterior where stones "roll right through" music that is at once transparent and unbreakable. This text invites readers—regardless of familiarity with his other poems—into the inner workings of Tranströmer's creative process: Haydn brings about catharsis, Haydn is his muse. While other composers are mentioned throughout his poetry—Liszt, Wagner, Beethoven, Schubert, Grieg, and even Balakirev—only Haydn takes on adverbial significance for so many senses: his music and persona permeate that which is felt, heard, seen, and sensed in across both physical and philosophical planes.

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Bly, Introduction: "Upward Into the Depths," in *The Half-Finished Heaven: The Best Poems of Tomas Tranströmer*, translated and edited by Robert Bly (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2001), xxi.

<sup>31</sup> Jim Heynen, Foreword to Bill Holm, *The Music of Failure* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xvi–xvii.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>33</sup> Elaine R. Sisman, "Haydn's Solo Keyboard Music," in *Eighteenth-Century Keyboard Music*, edited by Robert L. Marshall (New York: Schirmer, 1994), 270. According to Sisman, "the keyboard represented for Haydn the purest form of inspiration [and] allowed him to speak in a direct rhetorical voice."

<sup>34</sup> See Dimitar Pentchev, <http://soundconvincer.com/portfolio/a-glass-house/>, accessed 1 September 2016.

*Tranströmer: "Allegro"*

I play Haydn after a black day  
 and feel a simple warmth in my hands.

The keys are willing. Soft hammers strike.  
 The resonance green, lively, and calm.

The music says freedom exists  
 and someone doesn't pay the emperor tax.

I push down my hands in my Haydnpockets  
 and imitate a person looking on the world calmly.

I hoist the Haydnflag—it signifies:  
 "We don't give in. But want peace."

The music is a glasshouse on the slope  
 where the stones fly, the stones roll.

And the stones roll right through  
 but each pane stays whole.<sup>35</sup>

Like other instances of Haydn in poetry and literature, Tranströmer's sonnet recalls central themes of Haydn's reception, especially his medicinal and healing powers. Also present is an association of Haydn with democratic, utopian ideals—Haydn as the calm,

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<sup>35</sup> Tomas Tranströmer, "Allegro," in *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems*, translated by Robin Fulton (New York: New Directions, 2006), 65.

rational, and enlightened leader with a voice that can be understood regardless of time, place, and language. Such was the sentiment expressed by Zelter in an 1826 letter to Goethe where Haydn's works are praised as "the ideal language of truth," amounting to "nothing less than the expression of a soul born free, clear, and innocent."<sup>36</sup> Haydn, too, understood and responded to the cosmopolitan and international significance attached to his music, and strove to communicate not just an *Affekt* as in earlier periods, but instill sense of spirit, zeal, and sensibility for the varied audiences that comprised his public audience.<sup>37</sup> As summarized by Tolley:

In his dealings with figures at the height of his career Haydn never allowed his music to be perceived as though it belonged to any particular grouping, or stemmed from any political persuasion, which of course it did not. He thus freed himself, in so far as it was possible, from much prejudice based on political opinion.<sup>38</sup>

Holm's fifteen-stanza poem "Playing Haydn for the Angel of Death" begins with an ode to the cathartic act of playing, of finding a wholeness and centeredness through mechanical routine and fastidiousness. Like Brendel, Hanslick, and Mörike, Holm wonders at first (note the second stanza in particular) if Haydn is too naïve, unable to fathom the complexities of existence and reason with their contradictions like Beethoven and his fellow nineteenth-century symphonists. But by the sixth stanza Holm has stretched his senses far enough to see and hear beneath the musical surface. He finds a mysterious quality in Haydn's music, a hidden meaning that once unlocked may stave off Death for just a little while longer. This progression is worth quoting in full:

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Botstein, "The Consequence of Presumed Innocence," 29.

<sup>37</sup> Elaine R. Sisman, "Haydn's Career and the Idea of the Multiple Audience," in *The Cambridge Companion to Haydn*, edited by Caryl Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>38</sup> Tolley, 57.

*Holm: "Playing Haydn for the Angel of Death"*

The piano tells things to your hands  
 you never let yourself hear from others;  
 Calm down, do your work, laugh,  
 love reason more, your mask less.  
 God exists, though not as church said.  
 To understand this language, you must  
 sometimes patiently play the same  
 piece over and over for years, then  
 when you expect nothing, the music  
 lets go its wisdom.

Play Haydn. First, when I was young  
 he seemed simple, even simpleminded;  
 too easy, too thin, too cheerful,  
 gaiety and dancing in a powdered wig;  
 no hammer blows at unjust fate,  
 no typhoons of passion dropping tears,  
 only laughter, order, invention,  
 the simple pleasure of ingenuity,  
 of making something from next to nothing.

All the geniuses have their own feel  
 inside the fingers. Mozart steps to center  
 stage, takes a long breath, then  
 sings his aria, but Haydn is skinny  
 under the hands; all the fat lives  
 in the spaces between the lines.

You sense that fat jiggling like  
Buddha's belly but can't touch it.  
After a while, you can hear it when  
the notes pass lightly by each other.

But O, the mystery of Haydn is  
the great reason for not dying young,  
for living through rage and ambition  
without quite forgetting their pleasures.  
Suicide, craziness, the bottle, war—  
all rob you of what it is inside Haydn.  
Take this advice: toughen up and live.  
Fifty is a good year; by this time  
something has probably happened, and with luck  
it has tuned and readied the strings inside you.

At fifty, my own life has not come  
to much and my death sits in  
a straight-back chair under a lilac bush  
in the garden behind my house,  
reading my old letters, waiting.  
He is in no hurry to come knock  
on the back door. There's plenty to keep him  
interested in the piles of my past  
foolishness. Yours, too. On the other hand,  
he has no intention of going  
elsewhere, just wants to make sure  
I notice him, every day, alert  
in his straight-back chair.

Open the windows. Go to the piano.

Play a Haydn sonata for him. Begin  
 with an easy, simpleminded one:  
*Allegretto Innocente*, just a tune  
 and a few variations, all in G,  
 the key of lessons for little fingers.  
 Haydn stays in it endlessly to see  
 what can be said with almost nothing.<sup>39</sup>

#### IV. Holm's *Allegretto Innocente* Inspiration: Haydn's Sonata in G, Hob. XVI:40

Holm's choice of repertoire—meant to entice Death into its own strange *Totentanz* around the lilac bush—is a logical opposition in the course of his poem: *innocente* is death-defying, incorruptible; *Allegretto* does not allow for doleful playing. Yet the movement he summons, the first of the G Major keyboard sonata, Hob. XVI:40, is anything but a few “simpleminded” variations in a single tonic. Nor does the movement uniformly project wholesale innocence. Haydn's tempo marking *Allegretto e innocente* is a rarity not only in Haydn's music, but throughout much of the Western canon.<sup>40</sup> Haydn used “innocently” as a modifier at least two other times in his solo keyboard sonatas of the 1770s and 1780s, indicating *Vivace molto innocentemente* in the final movement of the E-minor sonata, Hob. XVI:34, and *innocentemente* in the finale of the D-major Auenbrugger sonata, Hob. XVI:37. Perhaps Haydn's use of *innocente* in Hob. XVI:40 reflects the age and character of G Major sonata's dedicatee, “MARIE ESTERHAZY / Née Princesse de Lichtenstein,” or Maria Josepha, Princess von und zu

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<sup>39</sup> Holm, 29–31.

<sup>40</sup> The Italian guitarist Mauro Giuliani (1781–1829) used the modifier in his Op. 102 variations, “Nume perdonami se in tale istante”; Danish composer Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) marked a section of his F Major string quartet, Op. 44, to be played *Allegretto moderato ed innocente*; and the Russian pianist Nikolai Medtner (1880–1951) instructed that his fourth piano sonata, Op. 11.4, proceed *Allegro moderato, con passion innocente*.

Liechtenstein (1768–1845). In 1783, at age fifteen, Maria had married Nicolaus II Esterházy (1765–1833); the three Haydn sonatas dedicated to her, Hob. XVI:40-42, may have been a wedding gift and were published by Bossler in Speyer the following year.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, the opening phrase of the first of these sonatas, the Sonata in G major, suggests a musical commentary on her young, yet noble stature (see Example 1). The unassuming scalar fragment that comprises the first melodic idea across bars 1-2 begins with an insistent tonic pitch, rising in bar 2 via stepwise motion from dominant to tonic—all over a tonic pedal. The inner voice is wedded to the third of the tonic triad, venturing only as far as its upper subdominant neighbor. The writing is innocent enough, a chaste sonority whose fidelity to musical logic remains above reproach. The *Allegretto* tempo imparts confidence and sensibility. At a slower pace, the result would verge on the pedantic—Death would hardly be inspired to rise from his chair and dance. The antecedent continues to an expected half cadence in bar 4, but the consequent idea is of a more refined character, elegant ascending thirds that gracefully expand to an apex in bar 7, marked *forte*, then subside for the dominant phrasal close in bars 8a/8b. The musical sensibility and requisite technique seem especially suited for the young princess to whom the sonatas are dedicated.

Haydn's writing also evokes the pastoral: the placement of the grace-note ornament in bar 1 amplifies the lilt of the *siciliana* character already present in the left hand's rhythmic pattern. As noted by Elaine Sisman, Haydn rarely used this style, "either in first movements or in variations," even though it is "paradigmatic of the attractive, light, amateur style in sonatas of the period."<sup>42</sup> The evocation of the idyllic is equally paradigmatic in eighteenth-century literature and music. While the development of the *siciliana* "as a topical signifier" has remained, according to Raymond Monelle, "almost impossible to trace,"<sup>43</sup> it was not unknown for eighteenth-century writers to attach a

<sup>41</sup> A. Peter Brown, *Joseph Haydn's Keyboard Music: Sources and Style* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 26.

<sup>42</sup> Sisman, "Haydn's Solo Keyboard Music," 289.

<sup>43</sup> Monelle, *The Musical Topic*, 215.

**Example 1:** Haydn, Keyboard Sonata in G Major, Hob. XVI:40/I, bars 1-24.

The musical score for Example 1 consists of six systems of two staves each, representing bars 1 through 24 of Haydn's Keyboard Sonata in G Major, Hob. XVI:40/I. The notation includes various dynamics such as *p*, *f*, *pp*, and *f*[*z*], as well as articulation marks like accents and slurs. The score features several phrasing marks, including breathes and fermatas. The piece concludes with a repeat sign and a second ending marked with a '2.' and a *p* dynamic.

certain quality of innocence to pastoral scenes. Monelle notes that the *Bucoliques* of André Chénier (1762–1794) exhibit a penchant for “simple love scenes, often involving young children.”<sup>44</sup> Of note here are Monelle’s remarks about Haydn’s distinct engagement with the *siciliana* style:

In place of the rustic skirl of the *pifferari* or the courtly elegance of the *siciliana*, there is an intimacy, a personal quality that arises from the songlike melody and its affecting accompaniment. The music is more strongly subjectivized; this sort of pastoral appeals to immediate poetic experience, to the soul and emotional life of the composer and her listener.<sup>45</sup>

The immediacy and intimacy that Monelle hears in Haydn’s *siciliana* style enters in the B section at bar 12 with a PAC in the dominant and *subito* shift to *piano*. The calm assurance of the 6|8 pulse is suddenly interrupted by four measures of quivering and sighing; the voices in bar 12-13 are subjected to exchange and restatement, *pianissimo*, in bars 14-15. A *forte* interruption in bar 15 leads to the suspended moment of uncertainty in bar 16. Confidence is restored with a tonic response and forthright restatement of A at bar 17. In this light, Holm’s view of the tune as a “simpleminded” trifle seems to gloss over the wealth of contrasts within this opening section, as well the metric and dynamic irregularities—*sforzando* in bar 10 and sudden *forte* outburst in bar 20—that threaten to disrupt the idyll *innocente* of the otherwise graceful allegretto.

These moments of introspection and subjectivity, though, are only a preamble to the trepidation and angst that characterizes the following next section, which opens with a sudden shift to the parallel minor at bar 25 (see Example 2). Here, the pensive and fragmented idea first introduced in bar 12 seems to be the basis for the scalar ascent in harmonic minor, the rise in pitch bolstered by dynamic increase from *piano* to *forte*. *Sforzando* interruptions in bars 27-28 evaporate quickly into fragments that spin out, now *piano* again, across bars 29-30. As a whole, there is little about this passage that is

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

**Example 2:** Haydn, Keyboard Sonata in G Major, Hob. XVI:40/I, bars 25-36.

congruent with Haydn's marking of *innocente*, nor Holm's hope that playing Haydn will distract Death from his impending visit. Neither is Holm's characterization of this movement—"a few variations, all in G, / the key of lessons for little fingers"—remotely close to the exploration of a minor motif across bars 25-36b, and the substantial force—much more than little fingers can manage—needed to grab hold of the eight-part diminished sonority at bar 34.

The whole first page of the sonata, then, is not quite as innocent as Holm would have us believe. This studied, calculated incoherence was one of the charges frequently leveled at

Haydn by contemporaries such as Johann Adam Hiller (1728–1804) and Johann Christoph Stockhausen (1725–1784), both of whom called attention to Haydn's "curious mixture" of noble and common, serious and comic, trivial and touching, "which so often occurs in one and the same movement, sometimes of a bad effect."<sup>46</sup> Yet for all the strangeness of Holm's ironic reading of the *Allegretto e innocente*, he does seem to pick up on Haydn's mastery of contrast in a pithy analysis that alludes to a number of the two-movement, "major-minor" keyboard sonatas of this period:

Haydn gives you two of everything:  
 two hands, two staves, two keys, two tunes,  
 two answers to all your questions.<sup>47</sup>

In the G major sonata, Haydn also gives two movements, as he does in all three of the sonatas for Maria Josepha and several other keyboard works from the period. The *Allegretto e innocente* variations are followed by a *Presto* in rondo form that, like its companion movement, also brims with dualities of dynamic and texture. In her survey of the keyboard sonatas, Sisman has even suggested that the thematic material of the *Presto* is derived from "intensified variation" of the preceding movement's ideas.<sup>48</sup> Like Holm, Tom Beghin sees the keyboard music a powerful rhetorical force that elicits rapt attention from audiences. Beghin's hermeneutic reading, a rhetorical interpretation, of the first-to-second movement transition resonates with the oratorical force Holm hears in Haydn. Beghin's imagined performance is itself a poetic and imaginative description—of the type extolled by Hatten—and is worthy of repeating in full:

Imagine a performance of Haydn's Sonata in G Major, Hob.XVI:40, by a pianist-orator not in an ancient courtroom but in a modern concert hall. After an extended fermata over a dominant seventh chord, which indicates the end of a

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<sup>46</sup> James Van Horn Melton, "School, Stage, Salon: Musical Cultures in Haydn's Vienna," *The Journal of Modern History* 76.2 (June 2004), 269–270.

<sup>47</sup> Holm, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Sisman, "Haydn's Solo Keyboard Music," 290.

movement—a series of alternating variations, in major and minor keys—the keyboardist presents the opening theme one final time, first in its original, unadorned version. But soon he (or she) parses the statement: grotesque, arpeggiated chords (using the rhetorical figure of *hyperbole*, or exaggeration); then two individual questioning figures (the rhetorical figure would be *dubitatio*, or the casting of doubt, asking two short questions: “What do I say? Where am I?”); finally, a *suspensio*, a holding in suspense of a certain outcome, which in this case, to the listener’s delight, happens to be exactly what she had expected, but—surprise!—is thrown right in her face, a truly Haydnesque twist of events. The whole passage functions as a *transitio* between the two movements. And the tonic chord at the very end, in one sweeping gesture, sets a totally new tone, a delightful *attaca* into the presto finale: a transition, indeed, often involves *aversio*, a turning away from the matter at hand.<sup>49</sup>

And in Holm’s final stanza, Haydn’s music has likewise succeeded in turning Death away from his grim task:

As music drifts out the open windows  
 Death is dancing around his straight-back chair  
 under the lilac bush in the garden,  
 trying to make the left foot move in time.  
 Soon he will be tired out but happy;  
 and will nap a while and stay away.

That’s the idea. I got it from Haydn.

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<sup>49</sup> Tom Beghin, *The Virtual Haydn: Paradox of a Twenty-First-Century Keyboardist* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 47.

## V. Conclusion

The poetic imaginations of Tranströmer, Holm, Beghin, and many writers cited above offer spaces for interpretive and imaginative hearings of Haydn's music in public and private settings, of listening not to "skinny" lines but the "jiggling fat" between them. Could Beghin's imagined performance begin with a reading of Holm's stanzas? Could a pianist, trio, or quartet print texts by Tranströmer or other poets in concert programs? Such combinations suggests what, for some, may be an uncomfortable attempt to *programatize* music that is nominally seen as *absolute* and espousing Enlightenment aesthetic emphases on logic, reason, and balance. But as demonstrated through topic theory and contextual scholarship, Haydn's music abounds with suggestion, animation, and description—a rich, multi-dimensional tapestry to which the voices of poets, analysts, and scholars can readily offer expressive and imaginative additions that keep us dancing around a rich hermeneutic circle while the poets play Haydn.

## VI. Appendix: Complete Poems

Charles Burney (1726–1814): "Verses on the Arrival of Haydn in England" (1791)<sup>50</sup>

Music! The Calm of life, the cordial bowl  
 Which anxious care can banish from the soul,  
 Affliction soothe, and elevate the mind,  
 And all its sordid manacles unbind,  
 Can snatch us from life's incidental pains,  
 And "wrap us in Elysium with its strains!"  
 To cultivated ears, this fav'rite art  
 No *new* delight was able to impart;  
 No Eagle flights its votaries durst essay,

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<sup>50</sup> Reprinted from *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents, Second Edition*, edited by Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (Belmont, California: Schirmer Cengage, 2008), 267.

But hopp'd, like little birds, from spray to spray.  
 At length great Haydn's new and varied strains  
 Of habit and indifference broke the chains;  
 Rous'd to attention the long torpid sense,  
 With all that pleasing wonder could dispense.  
 Whene'er Parnassus' height he meant to climb,  
 Whether the grand, pathetic, or sublime,  
 The simply graceful, or the comic vein,  
 The theme suggested, or enrich'd the strain,  
 From melting sorrow to gay jubilation,  
 Whate'er his pen produc'd was Inspiration!

Haydn! Great Sovereign of the tuneful art!  
 Thy works alone supply an ample chart  
 Of all the mountains, seas, and fertile plains,  
 Within the compass of its wide domains. ---  
 Is there an Artist of the present day  
 Untaught by thee to think, as well as play?  
 Whose hand thy science has not well supplied?  
 Whose hand thy labors have not fortified?

Thy style has gain'd disciples, converts, friends  
 As far as Music's thrilling power extends.  
 Nor has great Newton more to satisfaction  
 Demonstrated the influence of *Attraction*  
 And though to Italy of right belong  
 The undisputed sovereignty of *Song*:  
 Yet ev'ry nation of earth must now  
 To Germany pre-eminence allow

For *instrumental* powers, unknown before  
 Thy happy flights had taught her sons to saor.

Welcome, great Master! to our favor'd Isle,  
 Already partial to thy name and style;  
 Long may thy fountain of invention run  
 In streams as rapid as at first begun;  
 While skill for each fantastic whim provides,  
 And certain science ev'ry current guides!  
 Oh, may thy days, from human suff'rings free,  
 Be blest with glory and felicity!  
 With full fruition, to a distant hour,  
 Of all thy magic and creative pow'r!  
 Blest in thyself, with rectitude of mind;  
 And blessing, with thy talents, all mankind!

*Thomas Holcroft (1745–1809): "To Haydn"*<sup>51</sup>

Who is the mighty master that can trace  
 Th' eternal lineaments of Nature's face?  
 Mid endless dissonance, what mortal ear  
 Could e'er her peal of perfect concord hear?  
 Answer, oh, Haydn! strike the magic chord!  
 And, as thou strik'st, reply and proof afford.  
 Whene'er thy genius, flashing native fire,  
 Bids the soul tremble with the trembling lyre,  
 The hunter's clatt'ring hoof, the peasant-shout,  
 The warrior-onset, or the battle's rout,  
 Din, clamour, uproar, murder's midnight knell,

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<sup>51</sup> Reprinted from <http://poetrynook.com/poem/haydn>, accessed 15 June 2016.

Hyena-shrieks, the war-whoop, scream and yell—  
 All sounds, however mingled, strange, uncouth,  
 Resolve to fitness, system, sense and truth!  
 To others, noise and jangling; but to thee  
 'Tis one grand solemn swell of endless harmony.  
 When dark and unknown terrors intervene,  
 And men aghast survey the horrid scene;  
 Then, when rejoicing fiends flit, gleam and scowl,  
 And bid the huge tormented tempest howl;  
 When fire-fraught thunders roll, and whirlwinds rise,  
 And earthquakes bellow to the frantic skies,  
 Till the distracted ear, in racking gloom,  
 Suspects the wreck of worlds, and gen'ral doom:  
 Then Haydn stands, collecting Nature's tears,  
 And consonance sublime amid confusion hears.

*Mark Amorose: "On Listening to Haydn"*<sup>52</sup>

"At the thought of God my heart leaps for joy, and I cannot help my music doing  
 the same."

—Joseph Haydn

If God were only Wisdom-born-of-Power,  
 and from that coming forth that ever was  
 there came no equal Third—eternal Love—the  
 music of the spheres would sound like Bach's

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<sup>52</sup> Reprinted from *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 218 (December 2011): 33.

austere polyphony: toccata's blast,  
 the mighty Father's echo; fugue's cold math,  
 the lifeless shadow of the living Word;  
 and passacaglia's stern and frowning dance.

But Wisdom ever plays before the Lord,  
 delighting in the company of men;  
 and so the music's master, with his hoard  
 of laughter-tempered learning, took a pen  
 and wrote this counterpoint—God be adored!—in  
 which the numbers skip like lambs. Amen.

*Inuo Taguchi: "News from Nowhere"*<sup>53</sup>

If I say "my blood stirs and my muscles flex"  
 that's not seemly  
 my blood is calm and my flesh is at peace  
 like vegetation lushly growing while listening to Haydn

Souls too have downy hair  
 its lucidity billows in the wind  
 Utopia is built on a land called the moment  
 where stones and insects and trees are the aborigines

All my cells  
 wish for gods  
 if I were to carve and polish this very moment  
 there would be no pedestal on which to place it

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<sup>53</sup> Reprinted from <http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poem/item/22232>, accessed 1 May 2016. Translation from Japanese © 2012 Takako Lento.

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