"Sonata, What Do You Want of Me?": Teaching Rhetorical Strategies for Writing about Music

Alison P. Deadman

Bernard le Bovier de Fontanelle's (1657–1757) frustrated outcry highlights the challenge of expressing the meaning of one medium with another. Taken in the context of Jean Jacques Rousseau's (1712–78) entry on the sonata in the 1768 *Dictionnaire de musique*, this exclamation is used to support the idea that instrumental works are nothing more than a trifling diversion and that in the absence of a vocal part to carry a verbal text the full meaning of a musical composition cannot be realized by the listener. Of course, in the nineteenth-century, Arthur Schopenhauer and other Romantic thinkers would turn this notion around by suggesting that instrumental music was the highest form of art precisely because it was not tied down by concrete image or text. Gustav Mahler's comment of 1896 to the music critic Max Marschalk (1863–1940) is illustrative of the related idea that music was able to be expressive where words failed: "I know, where I am concerned, that so long as I can sum up my experience in words, I would never write any music about it."[1] This challenge—talking about musical works in a meaningful way—is one that we as musicologists spend our career grappling with, and it is a challenge that is also faced by our students.[2]

In their 2013 article, "Making Disciplinary Writing and Thinking Practices an Integral Part of Academic Content Teaching," Kerry Hunter and Harry Tse

I am grateful to Virginia Christy Lamothe of Belmont University and Marian Kelly of Maryville College for commenting on earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful to the members of the South-Central chapter of the American Musicological Society for the useful discussions that ensued when I presented some of this material at our local chapter meeting in 2014.

1. Piero Weiss, ed., *Letters of Composers Through Six Centuries* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1967), 392, reproduced in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1984), 413.

2. I do not claim this challenge only for musicologists as it applies equally to music theorists, composers, and other scholars who write about music. Despite Fontanelle's comment, the presence of a vocal part with text does not necessarily make the job any easier.

Journal of Music History Pedagogy, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 23–40. ISSN 2155-1099X (online)

remark that "Educators and researchers are increasingly calling for the process of writing and knowledge construction to be an integral part of disciplinary learning."[3] In saying this, the authors imply that students need guidance beyond the traditional first-year English courses, and that further guidance should be located within the student's major discipline. In many institutions, the burden of teaching students academic writing falls entirely on the first-year English courses required as part of the general education component of the student's degree. Earlier this year, I was involved in a program review for precisely these courses (first-year English) at a local community college, and it caused me to think in detail about what the goals of these courses are, and what a huge challenge is faced by the faculty teaching them. Introducing students to the general principles of academic writing and the "five-paragraph essay" is complicated enough, but having students write any sort of research paper where the standards and citation styles differ so widely among disciplines is daunting to say the least. Small wonder that students need more guidance when it comes to writing within their discipline. Few would expect a student to take a year of piano classes and then be able to play proficiently; similarly, why do we expect our students to "get it all" in first-year English?

Most musicologists involved in teaching undergraduates know this on some level and yet finding ways to integrate teaching discipline-specific writing into the curriculum can be challenging for already over-burdened faculty and can be met with resistance from students who are unable to make the connection between the mechanics of writing and their ability to engage with music and musical discourse.[4] In this article, I will discuss the ways that I have used Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* in the undergraduate music history classroom and show how I have developed their approach to make it relate even more specifically to our discipline by helping students engage with musical scores as well as verbal texts.[5]

At this point I would like to address some objections that might be raised against the idea of including academic writing skills as a central part of the music history curriculum. Surely those of us teaching music history at the undergraduate level are faced with meeting far too many challenges already: challenges that may include but are not limited to large class sizes, heavy teaching loads,

3. Kerry Hunter and Harry Tse, "Making Disciplinary Writing and Thinking Practices an Integral Part of Academic Content Teaching," *Active Learning in Higher Education* 14, no. 3 (2013): 227.

4. The importance of writing in the music history classroom has been well documented, for example, Carol A. Hess, "Score and Word: Writing About Music" in *Teaching Music History*, ed. Mary Natvig (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 193–204; and Scott Warfield, "The Research Paper," in *The Music History Classroom*, ed. James A. Davis (Farnham, UK and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2012), 124–40.

5. Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say /I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 2014).

and a decrease in the musical literacy of incoming freshmen. One could hardly blame someone in this situation for feeling that it was not their job to teach students how to write or that the amount of material they had to teach was such that there was no space in the syllabus to teach writing. However, I maintain that if we want musicology to flourish in the future, we have to teach students how to write. Musicological discourse is written discourse and if our students are unable to engage in written discourse, they lose the ability to engage in our discipline. If we want to see vibrant new PhD graduate musicologists joining the profession and if we want to have the standard of discourse maintained or even improved in our discipline, we need to provide our graduate programs with students who have mastered the basic mechanics of academic writing so that they can hone their skills during masters and doctoral work. Furthermore, as faculty members teaching a series of sequential classes, we are often placed in an excellent position to teach and reinforce discipline-specific academic writing. Indeed, for many undergraduate music majors, the music history classes are one of the only classes in their major in which they are required to write significant research papers.

It is more than likely that readers of this *Journal* learned to write by reading sophisticated texts widely even while in high school, and certainly in college. They may not have been perusing academic journals prior to graduate school, but perhaps they checked out and read a book in the library on a composer in whom they were interested or read a book on an instrument they played. In other words, they learned in much the same way that a child learns language, by repeated exposure to the rhetorical strategies of academic writing. And yet, we know that our students do not read in this way. In the introduction to a study of "The Impact of Internet and Television Use on the Reading Habits and Practices of College Students," Kouider Mokhtari, Carla Reichard, and Anne Gardner cite reports from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2004 and 2007 and the National Center for Education Statistics in 2005 that show not only a decrease in the practice of reading, but also a concomitant decrease in reading comprehension.[6] How then do we go about teaching our students to do what we as writers now do almost automatically? In "Hidden Meaning or Disliking Books at an Early Age," Gerald Graff (professor of English and education at the University of Illinois at Chicago) has talked about his own experience as a

6. Koudier Mokhtari, Carla A. Reichard, and Anne Gardner, "The Impact of Internet and Television Use on the Reading Habits and Practices of College Students," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 52, no. 7 (2009): 609–19; see p. 610. The studies cited are: National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2005); National Endowment for the Arts, *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literacy Reading in America* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2004); and National Endowment for the Arts, *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2007).

child who read comic books and sports magazines widely but not material that would have introduced him to the strategies of academic writing.[7] Together, he and Cathy Birkenstein have developed a way to teach students the rhetorical strategies of academic writing in a systematized way.

The basic premise of Graff and Birkenstein's work is found in the title of the book: *They Say/I Say*. They explain:

> The central rhetorical move that we focus on in this book is the "they say/I say" template that gives our book its title. In our view, this template represents the deep, underlying structure, the internal DNA as it were, of all effective argument. Effective persuasive writers do more than make well-supported claims ("I say"); they also map those claims relative to the claims of others ("they say").[8]

In making this comment, Graff and Birkenstein are emphasizing that the writer's ideas are important (I say) and that it is not only acceptable but imperative for the writer to engage with what others have said (they say) as part of the process of putting forward their own ideas. This in and of itself can have a huge impact on students who are not accustomed to challenging the things that they read and who worry they are not qualified to put forward opinions that might differ from a published source.

The layout of *They Say/I Say* can be seen in **Figure 1**.[9] Part 1 focuses on helping students grapple with the ideas of other scholars (the "they say" component) by encouraging them to identify and summarize only the relevant parts of their sources; by stressing the importance of providing a summary that is true to the original in both its facts and its tone; by helping students understand that their readers will need some context for any summary they provide; and by illustrating the use of direct quotation to enhance a summary while instilling the importance of introducing and explaining the quotation adequately. In addition to providing examples in their text, Graff and Birkenstein provide templates for students to use. The following template, for example, shows one way to introduce a quotation: "Writing in the journal *Commentary*, X complains that '_____'."[10] Graff and Birkenstein also provide exercises at the ends of chapters for students to use to hone their skills. It is on this first part of the writing process that I will focus in the remainder of this paper, for although

7. Gerald Graff, "Hidden Meaning or Disliking Books at an Early Age," in *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (New York: Norton, 1992), 64–85.

8. Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*, xix.

9. This table of contents relates to the third edition. Each new edition of this text has expanded the focus to include more discipline-specific references; however, music has thus far not been included.

10. Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*, 46.

Figure 1: Contents of Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*

Section	Chapter titles
Part 1: Summary	THEY SAY: Starting With What Others Are Saying
	HER POINT IS: The Art of Summary
	AS HE HIMSELF PUTS IT: The Art of Quoting
Part 2: I Say	YES/NO/OK BUT: Three Ways to Respond
	AND YET: Distinguishing What You Say from What They Say
	SKEPTICS MAY OBJECT: Planting a Naysayer
	SO WHAT? WHO CARES?: Saying Why It Matters
Part 3: Tying It All Together	AS A RESULT: Connecting the Parts
	AIN'T SO/IS NOT: Academic Writing Doesn't Always Mean Setting Aside Your Own Voice
	BUT DON'T GET ME WRONG: The Art of Metacommentary
	HE ~~SAYS~~ CONTENTS: Using the Templates to Revise
Part 4: In Specific Academic Settings	I TAKE YOUR POINT: Entering Class Discussions
	IMHO: Is Digital Communication Good or Bad—or Both?
	WHAT'S MOTIVATING THIS WRITER?: Reading for the Conversation
	ON CLOSER EXAMINATION: Entering Conversations about Literature
	THE DATA SUGGESTS: Writing in the Sciences
	ANALYZE THIS: Writing in the Social Sciences

the other elements are important, I find that the "they say" techniques have the greatest impact on students' writing. As we shall see, these techniques compel students to focus and organize their ideas in ways that set them up for success in the remainder of the writing process.

In my particular teaching situation, I use Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say/I Say* in a class for sophomores that precedes upper division music history classes where students are required to write research papers and program notes. To make this textbook more relevant, I revise Graff and Birkenstein's assignments

so that they use texts that relate specifically to music. Those of us who write about music engage a wide variety of philosophical and aesthetic ideas. We address diverse theoretical and analytical problems, and employ a wide range of methodologies. In addition, we write for the general public, often but not only in the form of program notes. Modifying Graff and Birkenstein's exercises provides the opportunity to introduce students to many of these discourses. For example, an exercise at the end of chapter one ("They Say: Starting with What Others Say") presents a list of six "I say" statements on a broad range of subjects for which students are required to think of a context or situation in which these statements would have more significance; that is, they are required to provide a "They say" component. By replacing Graff and Birkenstein's list with the following list I encourage my students to begin to engage in analytic, philosophic, aesthetic and social discourses about music:

a. My analysis suggests that the sonata is in the key of G minor.
b. Aesthetic ideas drive musical innovations.
c. Proponents of free jazz question standard notions of structure.
d. Female musicians often outnumber their male counterparts in an orchestra.
e. The opera is about the moral and philosophical questions aroused by the development of the atomic bomb.
f. I am afraid that the templates in this book will stifle my creativity.

Some exercises provided by Graff and Birkenstein require students to engage with an existing text. Apart from the challenge of providing a text about music that is both suitable for the exercise and not too advanced for the students, substituting a text provides the opportunity to broaden students' experiences of the variety of musical discourses available.[11] For example, in one of the exercises on summarizing, Graff and Birkenstein ask students to read David Zinczenko's "Don't Blame the Eater" (an op-ed piece that appeared in the *New York Times*, November 23, 2002), and make summaries for two imagined essays with contrasting purposes. The op-ed piece clearly states opinions, and the students in their summaries are challenged to present these opinions fairly and accurately without including their own reactions.[12] Students also have to select which of

11. One of my greatest challenges has been to keep the revised exercises and substitute texts within the capabilities of my sophomores. As an example, I had to simplify the first item in the list above, which had initially read "My analysis suggests that the first movement is in sonata–rondo form" as I discovered that my students had not yet come across sonata–rondo form.

12. Their reactions are, of course, important; but these are part of the response rather than the summary. One of the things that I find so valuable about Graff and Birkenstein's approach is that it compels student writers to be disciplined and clear about what is summary and what is response; what ideas belong to their sources and what ideas are their own.

the points made by the original author are relevant to the focus of each of the imagined essays. When looking for a substitute text, I selected "Why are Opera and Concert Programme Notes so Consistently Awful?" by David Morrison (chief music critic and columnist of *The Times of London*), so that my students have an opportunity to engage with a well-written op-ed piece on music.[13]

As we have seen, Graff and Birkenstein assert that effective academic writing involves presenting your own ideas in response to the ideas of other people. This strategy helps students engage with other verbal texts, but our students also engage with musical texts (scores) and with the realization of those scores (physical sound).[14] This led me to consider how we engage with a musical text and then to experiment with applying the same principles that Graff and Birkenstein use for verbal texts to musical scores. I proposed that the basic rhetorical moves used to summarize (and then respond to) verbal texts could equally well be applied to a piece of music (a musical text). I then prepared documents for my students to supplement Graff and Birkenstein's text: documents that related specifically to music. The results were encouraging and students began engaging with musical texts in a much more sophisticated way. They wrote about both the large-scale structure and the small-scale details and thought about how these two levels interrelate. They chose quotations (notated musical examples) to make specific points rather than to bulk up their papers, and they thought about how the music worked within the context of the musical and cultural expectations of the time in which it was composed. Finally, they were more ready to indicate their own opinions and support those opinions with well-reasoned observations.

The material that follows is based on some of the documents I share with my students. I have focused this discussion on the "they say" portion of Graff and Birkenstein's "they say/I say" template—that is, on how to summarize and quote from the musical score in a way that sets the author up to make meaningful observations in the "I say" component.

If I want my students to consider a musical text as a voice to engage in discussion, I have to help them face the challenge of how to translate the language of music (as represented by musical notation) into the language of dialogue (words). While this might initially seem like a daunting task, I show them that approaching the musical score as if it were a verbal text can prove very helpful. Depending on the type of writing they are doing, a musical text may be the main voice with which they engage (an analytical discussion of a single work,

13. David Morrison, "Why Are Opera and Concert Programme Notes So Consistently Awful?" *BBC Music Magazine* (September 2009): 19.

14. In this discussion, I focus on relating to a musical text, but of course we also react to the realization of those scores. It is relatively easy to insert specific recorded examples into a document that will be delivered electronically and the techniques discussed here could equally well apply to recorded sound.

for example) or it may be one of many voices that substantiates or contradicts a particular viewpoint they want to express or discuss. That being said, it is worth reminding students that during the course of a research paper they will still want to engage the voices of other people as well as that of the musical text, because in so doing they will be relating their discussion to the ongoing academic conversation about music.[15]

Fontanelle's famous exclamation that heads this article imagines the musical composition as a voice to engage in conversation or at the very least an actor on stage who addresses the audience; in this case an actor speaking in a language Fontanelle did not understand. Fontanelle was faced with just the same problem that our students face today when writing about music. Writing just over thirty years after Rousseau published Fontanelle's statement, Augustus F. C. Kollmann (1756–1829) presents a very different model of music and communication. After presenting an outline of the main sections and modulations found in sonata form, Kollmann notes that this pattern

> may be *varied* almost to the infinite. For, the different sections and subsections of a piece may be of any reasonable variety of length, and the said sorts of modulation and elaboration may be diversified without end, as it also appears from the composition of great Composers, and will require no demonstration.[16]

In other words, Kollmann makes clear that sonata form communicated via a series of expectations, the gratification of which could be achieved in many ways.[17] Indeed, a little before the passage quoted above, Kollmann claims that the success of a composition is predicated upon setting up expectations at the opening and providing satisfaction at the end. Of course, Kollmann is outlining narrative strategies that have enabled instrumental music to be more than the trifling diversion that Rameau complained about. Helping students understand these narrative strategies gives them a framework for speaking about music in terms that can be communicated verbally.

15. This may be as simple as going to a respected authority to establish what was the expected norm for that genre at that particular place and time in history.

16. Augustus F. C. Kollmann, *An Essay on Practical Musical Composition* (London, 1799), 5–6, included in Weiss and Taruskin, *Music in the Western World,* 318. This readily available excerpt from Kollmann's book can be interesting material to discuss in the classroom in relation to communication of meaning.

17. Although Kollmann does not state this in so many words, one assumes that these expectations may also sometimes be denied.

How to Summarize a Musical Text

I start the writing assignment by asking my students to consider how (and why) one would want to summarize a musical composition. With regard to a verbal text, we summarize in order to give the reader a context for our ensuing discussion; a "big picture" before we get into the details. The motivations for summarizing a musical text are basically the same. The composition that students summarize may be a short, two-minute song, a 20-minute sonata, or a 40-minute symphony, but no matter the length of the piece (and just as with any verbal text) I believe that there are two main things students need to think about: the large-scale structure of the work and pertinent smaller-scale details. The emphasis that they place on either will depend on the type of assignment being undertaken and the function that the summary serves in the discussion (this will be addressed shortly). If they are discussing large-scale formal issues in a work of some length, the summary should focus on the large-scale issues and surface detail will be subsidiary or not feature at all in the summary; on the other hand, if they are illustrating an aspect of text-setting in an art song, they will want to craft a summary that focuses more on local details rather than the overarching form of the work.

At the beginning of her article on "The Fandango Scene in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*," Dorothea Link provides a summary of the finale of the opera that focuses on its large-scale structure:

> In his examination of early copies of the score of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Alan Tyson was puzzled by something he observed about the third-act finale. The fandango survives in some scores but is missing from others. In its longer version, which is the one performed today, the finale consists of five sections. The first is a march, which commences the wedding ceremony for Figaro and Susanna. The second is a duet for two maidens and chorus, which accompanies the Count's placing of the bridal veil on Susanna's head. The third is the fandango, where the Count reads the note Susanna has slipped him. The fourth consists of accompanied recitative, in which the Count invites everyone to the festivities. The fifth and final section consists of a reprise of the chorus. In the version of the finale from which the fandango is missing, the second section leads directly into the fourth section via an altered cadence that makes the appropriate key change. . . .[18]

By concentrating on the large-scale structure, Link has allowed the reader to see clearly not only the difference between the two versions of the finale (one has a fandango, the other is modified to accommodate its omission), but also how the musical components she references relate to the plot. Using this example, I

18. Dorothea Link, "The Fandango Scene in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 133, no. 1 (2008): 69.

point out to my students that Link has kept the summary focused and has not clouded the issue with comments about key relationships or small-scale details. In fact, Link will not discuss any further musical details in her article. Instead, she takes Lorenzo Da Ponte's account of the suppression and then reinstatement of the fandango in the Viennese premiere of the opera as her starting point and proceeds to examine various archival resources to expand and test Da Ponte's account. Link's opening summary of the finale of the opera helps the reader contextualize the dance that forms the fulcrum of the incident she examines and as such provides my students with a wonderful example of the way that a musical summary can function in a discussion where the musical score is not the main focus.

In contrast to Link's concentration on large-scale elements, Rufus Hallmark pays much more attention to surface detail when he summarizes Schubert's "Gefror'ne Tränen" as part of his discussion of "The Literary and Musical Rhetoric of Apostrophe in *Winterreise*":

> In "Gefror'ne Tränen" the wanderer first declares (stanza 1) that he was unaware of his weeping until frozen tears fell from his cheeks. Then he addresses his tears (stanza 2) and reproaches them for freezing as easily as morning dew, even though they had sprung from his breast hot enough to melt the winter's ice. At this turn to address his tears, the voice and piano drop in register and move to a predominantly unison texture; the voice sings the text to a decidedly less lyrical melody, one that initially consists of only one note and its half-step upper neighbor.[19]

Here I encourage students to notice how Hallmark has skillfully given the reader a sense of the larger-scale structure (with the contrast between the first two stanzas in text and music) while focusing detailed attention on the point at which the poet/singer addresses his tears.

Both of the previous examples are summaries of works with text and they make significant reference to the text or dramatic situation; however, students often have to summarize works that have no text or story associated with them. Again, it is useful to return to Fontanelle's statement of frustration and to Kollmann's description of the way that music works by setting up expectations and gratifying (or denying) them. It is, however, to E. T. A. Hoffmann that I turn for clear evidence of narrative strategies. Students can easily see in Hoffmann's 1810 review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (Op. 67 in C minor) that Hoffmann does not merely talk about the music adhering to or diverging from the expected, but makes frequent reference to the narrative effect of these strategies; for example, having described the music of the first 21 measures of the

19. Rufus Hallmark, "The Literary and Musical Rhetoric of Apostrophe in *Winterreise*," *19th-Century Music* 35, no. 1 (2011): 5–6.

first movement (up to the cadence on the dominant), Hoffmann observes that the effect is to give "the listener presentiments of unknown mysteries." When describing the second theme, Hoffmann points out that it "preserves the mood of anxious, restless yearning expressed by the movement as a whole."[20] How then, does apprehension of narrative strategy help a modern author summarize an instrumental composition? To answer this, I share the following quotation with my students in which Seth Monahan summarizes the first movement of Mahler's first symphony:

> The opening movements of the First and Second Symphonies offer vivid early examples of sonata success and failure, respectively. At first 1/I might seem an unlikely candidate for a model of "normative" sonata form. The exposition is among Mahler's most unusual: a single stream of lyrical melody, based on the *Wayfarer* song "Ging heut Morgen über's Feld," unfolds in three broad stanzas, without conflict of contrast. . . . The development's eccentricities are just as numerous: a lengthy return to the slow-introductory music; a tumultuous premonition of the F-minor finale (m. 305); and the first of Mahler's famed *Durchbruch* passages (m. 352), one that barrels forward so forcefully that it overwrites the recapitulation of the main theme.[21]

This succinct account not only helps the reader see that Mahler utilizes a sonata structure for the movement, but also shows how his music deviates from the expected (normative) structure. Monahan is careful to include the narrative effect of the musical choices Mahler made and it is this that brings his summary to life and connects the reader with the music.

Suspending Aesthetic Judgments in the Summary

In their discussion of the art of summarizing, Graff and Birkenstein encourage students to put themselves in the "shoes" of the author they are summarizing. Adopting the subject position of another, they write

> means playing what the writing theorist Peter Elbow calls the "believing game," in which you try to inhabit the world-view of those whose conversation you are joining—and whom you are perhaps even disagreeing with—and try to see their arguments from their perspective. . . . As a writer, when you play the believing game well, readers should not be able to tell whether you agree or disagree with the ideas you are summarizing.[22]

20. E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony," in *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism*, ed. David Charlton, trans. Martyn Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 234.

21. Seth Monahan, "Success and Failure in Mahler's Sonata Recapitulations," *Music Theory Spectrum* 33, no. 1 (2011): 42–43.

22. Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*, 31.

In other words, when anyone reads an article or a book, they react to the ideas expressed in a range of ways anywhere along the continuum from agreeing wholeheartedly with what the author says to completely rejecting her or his ideas; however, this reaction should not form part of the summary. Music too creates a reaction in its audience: a reaction based on aesthetics and value judgments that also falls along a continuum from rapturous enthusiasm to vehement rejection. As musicians and writers about music, it is vitally important that students know what their reaction is to the music that they perform, study, and write about and that they know why they react the way they do. But this reaction is part of the "I say" portion of the equation that they will contribute later in the writing process. Here they are concerned with the "They say" segment: the summary of how the musical text unfolds. Graff and Birkenstein maintain that "To write a really good summary, you must be able to suspend your own beliefs for a time and put yourself in the shoes of someone else."[23] Their point is that a summary that is liberally peppered with the author's own opinions gives a biased impression of the text that is being summarized. I propose this is equally true with a musical text.

Focusing the Summary to the Purpose of the Writing

Again, if we take Graff and Birkenstein's approach as our model, we find them reminding students that a "good summary . . . has a focus or spin that allows the summary to fit with your own agenda while still being true to the text you are summarizing."[24] In making this comment, the authors are urging students to select information for the summary that is pertinent to the points they want to make, the thesis they want to prove, or the theory they want to discuss. If we return for a minute to the exercise on summarizing a verbal text that I discussed above, I find that my students often have a hard time selecting and emphasizing pertinent information for the two summaries I ask them to provide. As one can tell by its title, Morrison's op-ed piece, "Why are Opera and Concert Programme Notes so Consistently Awful?" focuses on the quality of program notes. During the course of his discussion, however, Morrison also makes a passing statement about the tradition in the United States of not charging extra for concert or opera program booklets. For their first summary of Morrison's piece, I ask students to argue that (contrary to his opinion) there are excellent program notes to be found at operas and concerts. For the second summary, I ask for an essay that questions the viability of the American tradition of providing concert and opera programs for free. Even though I stress that the two summaries should look very different, many students write two identical summaries. It is not until

23. Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*, 31.
24. Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*, 34.

I show them the two summaries below that they really comprehend Graff and Birkenstein's directive to focus the summary to the purpose of the writing.

> Summary 1: In his brief article, "Why are Opera and Concert Program Notes so Consistently Awful?" Richard Morrison, music critic for the *Times of London* complains bitterly about the pretentiousness of program notes which he feels demand explication themselves rather than shedding light on the performance that one is about to witness. Ironically, even when the composer writes about her or his own work, Morrison feels that they hinder rather than help the audience. Even the performers do not escape Morrison's criticism, as he is particularly scathing about the poorly written, overly long and irrelevant performer biographies that give the reader no sense of who the performer is as a person, rather detailing their achievements in mind-numbing detail.

> Summary 2: In the midst of a scathing article on the deficiencies of modern concert program notes, *Times of London* critic Richard Morrison compliments American concert promoters for providing their audience members with program booklets free of charge. He opines that, especially when one has paid a high price for a seat, having to pay for a listing of who is performing what, especially when it is of poor quality and hidden among pages of glossy advertisement and irrelevant information, is shameless.

In other words, the summary does not need to present every point that the original author made as long as the points that are included are represented accurately and given sufficient context for them to be fairly represented.

In my experience, Graff and Birkenstein's comments about summarizing verbal texts also pertain to summarizing a musical text. Here is an example of just such a summary by Susan McClary, taken from a book chapter entitled "Reveling in the Rubble." In this chapter, McClary discusses how a selection of compositions "operate in terms of the codes and conventions in which they engage":

> The first segment of Philip Glass's *Glassworks* (1982), "Opening," evokes an earlier era, even more than most pieces by Glass. Not only does it employ triads consistently throughout, but it makes use of the piano, with all its attendant nineteenth-century cultural baggage. Its two-against-three rhythmic figuration, with its implicit melodic lines that appear only hazily from the web of cross-accented triplet patterns, recalls the Romantic piano music of Schumann or Brahms. Moreover, it parses itself out in tidy, symmetrical four-bar periodic phrases.[25]

This summary leaves no doubt that McClary wants her readers to notice the references to vestiges of a nineteenth-century (Romantic) tradition and she will proceed to discuss in detail the ways in which the opening of this work relies on

25. Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 142.

Figure 2: The effect of a "list summary" (Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*, 36)

established conventions to construct its narrative. Because her focus is on this section, she only summarizes the opening of the work, choosing to point out those features that will be most pertinent to her discussion rather than discussing the function of the opening section in the overall form of the piece.

Music as a Temporal Art: Avoiding the List Summary

Unlike painting or sculpture, which exist in space, music is a temporal art form that unfolds over time. Perhaps it is for this reason that a chronological summary of a piece of music can initially seem like a good idea; however, a writer can very easily fall into the trap of turning a chronological summary into a "list" summary, the effect of which is shown in **Figure 2**.

I like to point out to my students that many features of music demand a chronological summary (that is, a summary that emphasizes the order in which things appear) but there are also many aspects that can more profitably be discussed outside of this chronological sequence. For example, consider Colin Lawson's summary of Brahms's Clarinet Quintet:

> The character and mood of Brahms's Clarinet Quintet is markedly influenced by the degree to which the tonic key of B minor prevails. Even though the Adagio is in B major, it contains a tinge of minor and has a middle section emphatically within that mode. The third movement begins in D major, but the single definite modulation in the first section is to B minor. Its Presto is a complete sonata movement in B minor, turning to D only at the end. Within the finale there is only one excursion from the tonic for the fifth variation in B major. There can scarcely ever have been a work of such length so bound to

> one tonality. Another extraordinary feature is that each movement closes at a quiet dynamic. The thematic material of the Quintet is equally characteristic, with a falling motto theme permeating each of the four movements . . . to produce a cyclic effect.[26]

The first part of this summary focuses on the harmonic relationship to B minor and because harmonic relationships unfold over time, Lawson has chosen to give a chronological account looking at each movement in turn. He has also been very concise and has not stated what is musically obvious—that the first movement (Allegro) is in the tonic key of B minor (because the reader knows that the tonality of the first movement always defines the tonic for a multi-movement composition). Note that the remainder of the summary is not chronological but clusters together the quiet endings and the falling motto theme that are found in all the movements. Consider how much more difficult this information might have been to comprehend if Lawson had relied entirely on a chronological summary.

Helping the Reader to Process a Summary: Using a Table

Referring my students back to Lawson's summary of Brahms Clarinet Quintet, quoted above, I point out that the first part of the summary is a little challenging to follow. This is partly because music works with its own logic and to explain it verbally requires the reader to process a lot of information in a short space of time. For this reason, writers often present their summary in the form of a table, where the complex relationships can be more readily assimilated by the reader. Horace J. Maxile, Jr. makes good use of a table when he discusses the structure of David N. Baker's (b. 1931) song "Early in the Mornin'":

> The ritornello statement is four bars in length and the chord in bar 5 serves as a dominant preparation for the ensuing blues in F. In subsequent restatements of the ritornello, the content of bars 1–4 is unaltered. The chords corresponding to measure 5, however, harmonically prepare the sections that follow. The chord in bar 5 is a jazzy sonority with C7 as the foundation and with altered extensions that reach up to the thirteenth. We also note that this sonority maintains some of the ninth stacks that characterize the introductory sonorities (C/D flat and A flat/B flat). Baker sets the first section of the poem with three twelve-bar blues choruses in F (see [**Figure 3**]).[27]

26. Colin Lawson, *Brahms: Clarinet Quintet*, Cambridge Music Handbooks, ed. Julian Rushton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 47–48. The ellipsis in this quotation omits reference to example 5.1 where the author provides the musical notation of the motto theme as found in each movement.

27. Horrace J. Maxile, Jr., "On Vernacular Emblems and Signification in David N. Baker's The Black Experience," *American Music* 32, no. 2 (2014): 232–34. The original lists this as Table 1; however, for the purposes of this article, I have re-numbered it as Figure 3.

Figure 3: David Baker, "Early in the Mornin'" précis

Bars	Text	Description
1–5		Ritornello (introduction); marked "Slow (mournfully)"
6–17	early in the mornin', J. W. Brown, whippin' his woman knockin' her around	Blues in F; call-and-response texture: marked "Tempo (swing)"
18–29	answer my question if-a you please (hum__), how she gonna answer down on her knees	Blues in F; thicker texture in the piano and added harmonic complexity (tritone substitutions at the end of the chorus)
30–45	groanin' "Buddy, Buddy" (yeah yeah) wake up and go (hum__), get L. C. and Marg'ret he's hurtin' me so	Blues in F; walking bass; more harmonic complexity; chords with colorful extensions (e.g., 11ths and lowered 13ths)
46–50		Ritornello
51–69	Buddy went a flyin', down the stairs, brown pants over his underwear, but L. C. and Marg'ret wouldn't stir said "Buddy we sympathize with her, but from what you say as far as can see, if she'd answer his question, he'd let her be	Gospel–Blues in G; marked "Moderately fast"
70–74		Ritornello
75–99	she never did answer, as far as we could hear, but the sight of that child in his underwear, his head bent down his shoes untied and all comin' back alone down the empty mall was sad. More than I could bear. Makes you wonder if anybody cares anywhere.	F (Dorian mode) quickly gives way to more dissonant chords; Ritornello returns as accompaniment for last words in the text.

Students need to be reminded that tables are valuable tools when presenting complex information, but just like quotations, they should be explained thereby linking the information they present to the ideas the student wants to discuss. This particular quotation and table is useful to illustrate how Maxile could have made the reader's job even easier had he drawn attention to his table before he explained it. I also show students that Maxile's table includes details that he does not mention at this point in the text, but which he will reference later in his discussion.

Musical Quotation as Part of the Summary

Just as Graff and Birkenstein can claim that verbal quotations "function as a kind of proof of evidence, saying to readers: "Look, I'm not just making this up. She makes this claim and here it is in her exact words,"[28] I argue that musical quotations (quoting musical notation) add credibility and accuracy to a summary of a musical text. The quotation will need to be both introduced and explained (i.e., "framed") in the same way that Graff and Birkenstein recommend introducing and explaining a verbal quotation. This can be illustrated by the following extract, which Horace Maxile uses to frame a musical example consisting of the opening of Baker's "Early in the Mornin'." Maxile first introduces the example, then tells the reader what he wants her/him to notice:

> The song begins with a slow, contemplative introduction marked "mournfully" [here Maxile referencs the musical example]. Because it is a recurring event, Ivey referred to the opening measures as a kind of "ritornello" statement and I will use that term as well.[29] This statement includes chordal complexes that involve stacks of ninth intervals, a sonority that Baker favors throughout the song cycle. Also note the chord in measure 4. This is another type of sonority that Baker prefers, consisting of major triads (or open fifth chords) with roots that are separated by a step or a half step. The ritornello statement is four bars in length and the chord in bar 5 serves as a dominant preparation for the ensuing blues in F.[30]

Maxile has helped the reader by drawing attention to the musical example before he explains it (in contrast to the way he referred to his table in the previous quotation). By doing so, he allows the reader to reference the notation while reading the explanation—far easier than reading the explanation and then discovering that the author has provided a notated excerpt. In the latter case the

28. Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*, 42.

29. Ivey, "Willis Patterson's Anthology of Art Songs by Black Composers," 123. Ivey probably chose this descriptor because he likened the song to a mini "opera" and ritornello forms were associated with some forms of opera. [Footnote from Maxile]

30. Maxile, "On Vernacular Emblems," 232.

reader has to go back over the previous explanation now with the added benefit of the musical notation.

Conclusions

I have indicated six broad strategies for constructing the first part of a template that might be rendered "The music says/I say":

- Balancing out the large- and small-scale details in a summary of a composition.
- Avoiding making aesthetic judgments during the summary.
- Crafting a summary that serves the author's own ends by pointing out things he or she wants to emphasize and discuss.
- Considering carefully what parts of the summary need to follow a chronological ordering and what parts can better be presented in other ways (avoiding the list summary).
- Using tables to present multi-layered, complex information to enable the reader to absorb the information more readily (while being sure to explain the table in the body of the text).
- Selecting notated musical examples to add veracity to the author's assertions while being sure to introduce and explain each example.

Encouraging students to utilize these strategies in their writing helps them to organize their thoughts about a composition and allows them to move more smoothly into the "I say" portion that is an integral part of academic writing.

As my students have taken these ideas on board, those who initially were resistant to the material have come back to me and told me how much this approach has helped them in writing projects for other courses, and some who have gone on to graduate school have written to me telling me how this material has helped them write their first graduate papers. What I have presented here is only a portion of the way that Graff and Birkenstein's work can be adapted to the process of engaging with a musical composition. The "I say" component is, of course, also important in academic writing and I believe that Graff and Birkenstein's methodology here is equally adaptable to writing about a musical text.