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Questions Concerning the Edition of the 'Goldberg Variations' in the *Neue Bach Ausgabe*



Erich Schwandt

The world has been waiting for almost 250 years for a completely authoritative text of the "Goldberg Variations," which were published in Bach's lifetime (in 1741 or 1742) as the fourth part of the *Clavierübung*. Balthasar Schmid of Nuremburg engraved them with great care; nonetheless, his elegant engraving contained a few wrong notes, and some slurs, ties, accidentals, and ornament signs were inadvertently omitted. In addition, some of the ornaments are ambiguous, and some blurred. In the absence of Bach's autograph, Schmid's engraving must remain the primary source for the "Goldberg Variations," and Bach's own 'corrected' copy¹ takes pride of place over the other extant copies corrected by Bach.

When the *Bach Gesellschaft* (hereafter *BGA*) published the "Goldberg Variations" in 1853², the editor, C. F. Becker, followed his own copy of the original engraving fairly closely; however, he introduced some rather

1. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. 17669.

2. *Bach Gesellschaft Ausgabe*, III (Leipzig, 1853), 263-308.

arbitrary readings of notes and ornaments, as well as some accidentals of doubtful merit. His edition was severely criticised by Edward Dannreuther³, who took the *BGA* to task for introducing false ornament signs, especially for the mordent. (*BGA* consistently prints  instead of .) Dannreuther suggested that the *Bach Gesellschaft* should, at the very least, publish a list of *errata*.

Hans Bischoff, in his monumental edition of the keyboard works of Bach, tried to set out all the variant readings of the printed and manuscript sources. In his footnotes of the variants he frequently condemned the *BGA* for its lapses. In his edition of the "Goldberg Variations"⁴ Bischoff was careful to inform the reader when he found the original engraving to be ambiguous or unclear. His footnotes are scrupulous and informative.

Ralph Kirkpatrick, in his 1938 edition of the "Goldberg Variations," strove to present a clean text: there are no fingerings or other performance indications.⁵ The canons are printed both in open score and in keyboard score, and he has offered written-out interpretations of the most difficult ornaments in small type above the staff. In addition, where the ornament-signs are ambiguous (as is the case in Variation 16), he offers the performer a choice by printing both signs. Kirkpatrick's critical report deals with the principal textual problems of the "Goldberg Variations." Both Bischoff's and Kirkpatrick's edition were exemplary for their time; however, neither is completely satisfactory as a text. Rudolf Steglich's edition of 1973 was revised by Paul Badura-Skoda in 1978.⁶ It incorporates *some* but not all of the new material of Bach's personal copy. There are one or two wrong notes, as well as a few wrong ornament signs.

The *Neue Bach Ausgabe* (*NBA*) has presumably risen to the challenge of presenting, perhaps for the first time *ever*, an authoritative, reliable, and error-free text of the "Goldberg Variations."⁷ The editor is Christoph Wolff. Wolff's qualifications as editor of the "Goldberg Variations" would seem to be beyond reproach. As is his custom, he consulted all extant copies of the original print, as well as all the numerous manuscript copies, and he went through them with a fine-tooth comb. In his critical

3. Edward Dannreuther, *Musical Ornamentation*, 2 vols. (London, 1892). See Vol. 1, 201-210, and Vol. 2, 179, for his discussion of the "Goldberg Variations."

4. *Joh. Seb. Bachs Klavierwerke*, IV (Leipzig, 1883), 14-49.

5. Published by G. Schirmer, New York.

6. Published by Henle, Munich.

7. *Neue Bach Ausgabe* (Kassel, 1977). Ser. V, Bd. II, pp. 67-115. The edition is also available separately.

report (*Kritischer Bericht*, hereafter *KB*)⁸ he presents a detailed description of variant readings, including the "new" readings transmitted in the remarkable "Handexemplar" of Bach, with its many annotations and corrections in the composer's own hand. The "Handexemplar" was supposedly Wolff's principal source.

It is interesting that of the seven extant copies corrected by Bach, none has quite the same emendations as another; however, the fact that some of the handwritten emendations, additions, and deletions-by-erasure in the "Handexemplar" are unique gives this source a greater importance than the other corrected copies. Wolff is quick to remark that none of the corrected copies, by itself, could have served as the basis for a second edition of the "Goldberg Variations."⁹ Scholars will welcome the new readings stemming from the composer himself.

The user of this edition will be surprised to find a great many "new" appoggiaturas (see Variations 9, 23, 24, and 26), an appoggiatura moved forward by one 16th note (Variation 23, bar 23), "new" accidentals (Variation 8, bar 19, and Variation 17, bar 17), and "new" time-words (Variations 7 and 25). He will be pleased with a page-layout that makes for a clarity not to be found in other editions of the "Goldberg Variations." The layout of the whole set is page-for-page and system-for-system identical with that of the *BGA*, and the reader might like to make the comparison. The *NBA* is much more spacious and "airy" than the *BGA*. Its engraving is beautifully done.

8. The *Kritischer Bericht* was delayed until 1981. The relevant pages are 91-118.

9. *KB*, 108.

Example 1. *Bach Gesellschaft Ausgabe*, 'Goldberg Variations,' Variation 16 (beginning).

Variatio 16. Ouverture. a 1 Clav.

Example 2. *Neue Bach Ausgabe*, 'Goldberg Variations,' Variation 16 (beginning).

Variatio 16. Overture. a 1 Clav.

3

6

9

10

12

Example 3. Balthasar Schmid's original engraving of the 'Goldberg Variations,' Variation 16 (beginning).

Variatio 16. a 1 Clar.

Ouverture

17.

Unfortunately, there are errors in the volume, and some of these are so grave as to make this edition unsuitable for purposes of performance, study, or analysis. It seems to me that Wolff took the 1853 *BGA* as his working copy, entering changes and additions to this copy as the basis for the new engraving, and making deletions by means of "white-out"; however, he did not clean up the *BGA* sufficiently. The *BGA* raises its ugly head at every turn; indeed, some of the faulty readings of Wolff's edition seem to come directly from the *BGA*.

The editorial principles of the *NBA*¹⁰ stress the need for a reliable and error-free text that will be faithful to the sources. Thus, all editorial additions, emendations, and changes, whether made in the light of the most recent Bach researches, or made to elucidate some obscurity of the sources, are to be differentiated by the use of smaller type for editorial ornaments and accidentals, and by the use of dotted slurs and ties for those supplied by the editor. Further, the notation is not to be *transcribed*: while it is to conform to modern practice, it is to retain as much of the appearance of the original as possible.

In spite of these clear guidelines, Wolff throws caution to the wind, introducing one arbitrary reading after another into the main text of the "Goldberg Variations." Accidentals that have no basis in any source appear in normal type. Pitches of notes are changed on the mere authority of "parallel passages." Ties and slurs are redistributed to solve *non-existent problems*. Ornament signs are misread and misprinted, and sometimes they are altered to make Bach consistent with himself. Bach's notation is "improved," and Wolff explains his improvements by pseudo-scientific arguments.¹¹ Finally, Wolff does not even mention some of his arbitrary changes in the *KB*, and the reader is left to shift for himself: there is no opportunity of discovering Wolff's reasoning.

* * * * *

Some examples are in order, and we will focus on Variation 16, the "Overture." The "Overture" is the most carelessly presented variation

10. Editionsrichtlinien musikalischer Denkmäler und Gesamtausgaben, ed. Georg von Dadelsen (Kassel, 1967), pp. 61-81. The principles are summed up in the preface to *NBA* Ser. V, Vol. II, p. 5.

11. For example, the slur in the bass in Variation 15, bar 28 has been removed. In its place is an editorial tie in *normal type* joining the g of bar 27 to the g of bar 28. Wolff explains (*KB*, p. 117): "Bg 1. - 2. Note, als Artikulationsbogen problematisch; NBA setzt Haltebogen in Angleichung an Stimme II—vgl. auch die zahlreichen Überbindungen der Unterstimme (T. 1f, 18f, 19f, u. öfter)." What he does *not* explain is (1) why the slur is a problem, and (2) why such a drastic solution is necessary.

in Wolff's edition.¹² The following discussion is summarized in Table 1 and Table 2A. (A list of *errata* for the rest of the set is presented in Table 2, A-F.)

Table 1. *NBA*, Variation 16, *errata*.

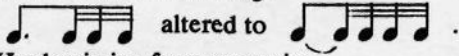


Bar	Voice	Note	Comment
3	S	1	Dot missing.
5	B	1	Trill termination missing.
6	S		 altered to  .
7	S	1	Hook missing from arpeggio.
8	S	1	Trill termination missing.
13	S	5	Hook moved from middle line to second space.
15	S	1	Turn sign inverted. In the engraving it stands over the b of the bass.
15	B	2-6	32nds beamed together in the engraving.

Table 2. *NBA*, "Goldberg Variations," *errata*.

A. Mordents with false sign: .

Variation	Bar	Voice	Note	Comment
Aria	1	S	3	
	3	S	1	
	5	S	3	
	8	S	5	
	8	B	3	
	9	S	3	
	17	S	1	
	17	T	3	
	19	S	6	
2	1	A	2	
	3	S	2	
5	11	B	5	
7	1	B	1, 3	
	3	S	1	
	9	S	3	
	10	S	6	

12. For those who would like to compare the *NBA* with the engraving, a facsimile of the original is printed in *Bach: The Quarterly Journal of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute* 11 (1980), 3-40.

12	5	A	2	Editorial.
	30	S	5	
13	5	S	4	
	20	S	4	
	24	S	9	
14	1	S	1	
	2	S	3	
	17	B	1	Editorial.
	18	B	3	
16	2	S	1	
	5	S	8	
	6	B	1	
	6	S	14	Note 12 in the engraving!
	9	S	11	
	13	S	3	
	14	B	1	
17	12	S	8	Sign correct in bar 10!
20	9	B	3	
	10	B	3	Editorial.
	11	S	3	
	12	S	3	
	18	B	5	
23	9	B	4, 7	
	10	B	1, 4, 7	
	11	B	1, 4	
	11	B	7	Editorial.
	17	S	1	
24	24	B	1	
	24	S	4	
	26	A	2	Editorial.
27	9	B	1	
	10	S	1	

B. Editorial appoggiaturas not logged in *KB*.

7	32	S	1	
25	26	S	7	
	27	S	7	
	29	S	7	

C. Editorial accidentals printed in normal type.

4	32	B	4	The c' is natural in all sources.
14	25	S	15	The g' is natural in all sources.

D. False notes.

8	3	S	2	The engraving has d'. According to Bischoff, two MSS have e', but Wolff does not cite them.
17	29	B	1	All sources have b. Wolff has changed the b to g on the authority of a <i>custos</i> .
26	14	A	2	All sources have d".

E. Signs changed for "consistency."

11	13	S	1	Trill with prefix ("doppelt-cadence") in engraving is changed to an ordinary trill to make it consistent with bar 5.
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F. Editorial tie printed in normal type.


15	27-28	B		The tie is editorial. The engraving has a slur over g-f#, which Wolff has deleted.
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
(1) NOTATION. In bar 3, a dot is missing after the first 8th note in the right hand. In bar 6, for reasons unknown, Wolff has changed the dotted 8th-three 32nd-note figure of the original to an 8th tied to four 32nds for two beats and two beats only. In bar 7, the original has a hook at the bottom of the arpeggio sign, but the hook is missing in *NBA*. In bar 13, the original has the hook sitting on the middle line, indicating an appoggiatura rising to the c". Wolff has moved it down to the second space, suggesting an appoggiatura which falls to the a'. In bar 15 the original has the turn sign standing over the b in the bass. Wolff has it standing over the g; moreover, he calls for an *inverted turn*, an ornament first described by C. Ph. E. Bach.¹³ In the same bar the original has the short notes beamed together, but Wolff splits the beams into two groups.

(2) ORNAMENTS. In bars 2, 5, 6, 9, 13, and 14, the mordents of the original are presented as trills with termination. (I will return to the *NBA* and the mordents presently.) In bars 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 11, the trill signs in the original are ambiguous. They might be interpreted as trills

13. The inverted turn, according to Walter Emery, *Bach's Ornaments* (London, 1953), 31, was not used by J. S. Bach. Wolff states (*KB*, 114) that only the normal turn sign is used in the "Goldberg Variations" — no variant forms are logged. It is likely that the inverted turn stems from Wolff's "working copy" — the *BGA*.

with prefix (Bach's *doppelt-cadence*) or as trills with *appuy* (Bach's *accent und trillo*). Wolff has opted for the latter in spite of the fact that the engraving leaves room for doubt. Indeed, the difference between the two signs in the engraving is, according to Wolff, "minimal und kaum zu erkennen."¹⁴ Wolff ignores the termination of the left-hand trill in bar 5 and the right-hand trill in bar 8. These are clearly visible in the engraving. The termination-by-hook in bar 8 was pointed out by Walter Emery¹⁵ more than 30 years ago. (Emery, incidentally, was co-editor of the volume under discussion, contributing his edition of the second part of the *Clavierübung*, as well as some essays in the *KB* on the engraver of the "Goldberg Variations.")

The lapses in this single variation characterize the entire edition. Nowhere is the carelessness more evident than in Wolff's readings of the ornament signs. He has chosen to use:  to stand for mordent throughout the edition. The false mordent signs are presented in Table 2A.

Wolff, perhaps in a misguided attempt to be faithful to his source, has reintroduced a problem that has already been solved by previous editors of the "Goldberg Variations."¹⁶ The engraver of the "Goldberg Variations," Balthasar Schmid, engraved nearly all the mordent signs as extended mordents; however, the stroke through the wavy line is not placed consistently or carefully. Wolff states¹⁷ that the "normal" shape of the mordents in the engraving is . Unfortunately, this is the ordinary sign for trill with termination (Bach's *trillo und mordant*). It has never meant mordent, whether single or extended. Wolff's version of the mordent sign appears, of course, in all the standard Tables (Donington, Neumann, Emery, etc.), and means trill with termination, period. Imagine a new generation of performers looking up this sign, and then playing wrong ornaments because they are in the *NBA*.

* * * * *

In conclusion, what good is it to know the color of the ink used in printing the "Goldberg Variations": or to know that the watermarks of the paper include lions, stars, and serpents; or to know that the *Aria*

14. *KB*, 114.

15. *Bach's Ornaments*, 64-65, Examples 120-21.

16. See the comments of Bischoff and Kirkpatrick in their editions of the "Goldberg Variations."

17. *KB*, 114. Wolff does not say how he arrived at his conclusions. He presents the ornaments in tabular form, showing first the standard shape, next Schmid's standard shape, and last, the variants of the engraving.

could not have been entered in Anna Magdalena's *Clavierbüchlein* before 1738; or to know that certain notes in the engraving are faint because the plates were not sufficiently inked? What good are exhaustive reports¹⁸ on important matters and *minutiæ*, all neatly tabulated, when knowing all these things does not result in a perfect and error-free edition of the music?

Something must be broken in the mechanism when musicological "overkill" produces 27 pages of Critical Apparatus (roughly two-thirds of a page of words per page of music) and then gets the notes wrong. I believe that the *Neue Bach Ausgabe* should seriously consider withdrawing Christoph Wolff's edition of the "Goldberg Variations."

18. KB, *passim*.