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# Editing Niels W. Gade's Cantata *Comala*

## *Some problems regarding final intentions*

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Editorial concepts which strive at presenting final authorial intentions in some form, including the concept of *Fassung letzter Hand* (final authorized version) inherited from German philology, have long been commonly accepted among editions of musical works, not least in Scandinavia.<sup>1</sup> In the field of textual criticism, however, such concepts have been heavily criticized and have been on decline for decades. Nevertheless, they are to a large degree still governing the critical editing of music in Denmark as well as other countries. The article discusses some of their inherent problems, and the case study used is Niels Wilhelm Gade's Cantata *Comala*, published in 2013 as part of the complete edition of Gade's works.<sup>2</sup>

### FINAL AUTHORIAL INTENTIONS AND *Fassung letzter Hand*

Various editorial concepts employ the latest, authorized state of a work as the point of reference for an edition, though the applied methodologies and the arguments involved may differ. Editions in line with the Anglo-American 'copy-text' tradition, for instance, usually aim at presenting final authorial intentions in some form. A characteristic feature of the copy-text approach as originally proposed by Walter W. Greg is the distinction between the text's 'substantives' and 'accidentals'.<sup>3</sup> The term 'accidental' in this case is not to be understood in the musical sense, of course; rather, it defines the variable elements of a text not influencing the text's meaning – that is, elements such as spelling and punctuation – whereas 'substantives' are elements making up the meaning, in essence the words. A source close to the author serves as the copy-text, providing not only the base text for the edition but also the accidentals. Using the copy-text's accidentals ensures that some original characteristics or idiosyncrasies such as the author's spelling are retained in the edition. In order to represent the latest authorized state of the text, however, the base text is emended where later sources authorized by the author provide differing substantives – readings distinct in substance such as additions, cuts, or different wording.

1 Among Scandinavian editions explicitly aiming at presenting final intentions or final versions are the editions of works by Edvard Grieg (published 1962–92), Franz Berwald (published 1966–2013), Niels W. Gade (published since 1995), Carl Nielsen (published 1998–2009), and Johan Svendsen (first preliminary edition published 2011).

2 Axel Teich Geertinger (ed.), *Comala* (Niels W. Gade, Works IV:1; Copenhagen, 2013).

3 Walter Wilson Greg, 'The Rationale of Copy-Text', *Studies in Bibliography*, 3 (1950–51), 19–36. Greg's ideas have been further developed by a number of other theorists, not least G. Thomas Tanselle; see for instance Tanselle, 'The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention', *Studies in Bibliography*, 29 (1976), 167–211. An excellent overview of the theory and history of critical editing is given in Johnny Kondrup, *Editionsfilologi* (Copenhagen, 2011).

An underlying assumption is that readings are freely exchangeable between the texts of different sources; that is, they are regarded as independent from each other and from the text they are part of as a whole. Obviously, this approach leads to eclectic editions, mixing readings from various sources. Thus the copy-text method does not aim at presenting the text as it was intended at one particular moment, but rather at establishing what is assumed to be the work's ideal shape, usually meaning a compilation of the most mature readings. The most obvious problem with the eclectic approach is that it produces a text that has never existed, probably not even in the author's mind. Hence, it cannot be claimed to have a reception history, and the edited text does not reflect the state of the text at any particular point in the work's genetic history: it produces a historically blurred construct. This objection may, of course, be raised against all modern editions to the extent that any editorial change in a text, even a small correction, may produce a variant version of the text that has not existed before. Even a diplomatic transcription retaining both substantives and accidentals from the base text changes the appearance of the text and thus creates a new manifestation of the text different from its model by introducing certain elements of its own time such as typography. However, these are deviations at a more subtle level than the combination of symbols that constitute the text and will not be taken into account in the following discussion.

Contrary to the copy-text tradition, the *Fassung letzter Hand* or *Ausgabe letzter Hand* principle is almost exclusively connected with editorial methods that involve the election of a single source as the base text, correcting it only where the text is judged to be in error. It is basically anti-eclectic and ideally produces a coherent version of the text as it was – or as it was intended to be – at the time the author left it. The examination of other sources only assists the editor in detecting errors and finding the most plausible solution to them. In other words, the editor's focus is on the state of the integral text at a certain point in its history rather than on the chronology of individual readings.

Both the approaches of 'final authorial intentions' and *Fassung letzter Hand* tend to have a strong focus on the author (or, when editing music, the composer) in the narrow sense as the single person originally having conceived the work. The individual author is regarded as the only legitimate authority by which the various sources' readings are measured: the closer to the author a reading (or source) can be proved to be, the more weight it receives in the process of assessing the different readings (or sources) against each other. Even if *Fassung letzter Hand* does not *per se* imply an intentionalist concept, in practice the emendations made in such editions will usually also be motivated by the search for what the author had intended. However, in fact the concept only aims at presenting the final *version* – an actual, historical state of the text – whereas the concept of final authorial intentions by definition may go beyond any historical versions in its quest for the ideal text, that is, the text as it is assumed to have been intended by the author.

A general criticism of any editorial principle aiming at reconstructing authorial intentions – whether final or not – has been put forward, though in some cases

this criticism appears to be based on a misunderstanding of what the concept of 'intentions' implies in an editing context. James Grier, for instance, claiming to be leaning on the writings of Jerome McGann, dismisses final authorial intentions as being 'a psychological endeavour (in which the editor attempts to determine the author's intentions)'.<sup>4</sup> But even if editing to some extent must inevitably involve a certain amount of interpretation and hence subjectivity, the process of establishing the 'intended text' in practice has nothing to do with psychology or guessing what the composer might have been feeling or thinking. Establishing the text is a process based on the evidence provided by the available sources combined with the editor's awareness of style, genre, performance practice, historical and social context, etc. The question may in fact be whether 'intentions' is a misleading term for the editorial concept rather than whether the concept itself is illusory.

A more serious criticism of the single-person intentions perspective than the one based on the psychology (mis-)interpretation is that it tends to prohibit understanding 'authorial intentions' in a broader sense or, in other words, as the general but to a large extent non-coordinated striving of a collective of persons involved in the shaping of the work. This collective may include a broad range of individuals such as copyists, publishers, conductors, performers, librettists, censors, critics, stage directors, and choreographers representing an equally broad range of interests. Jerome McGann has strongly advocated editorial approaches aware of this social nature of the work.<sup>5</sup>

The perception of the author as an autonomous individual reveals an inner conflict inherent to the concept of final authorial intentions, basically because the terms 'final' and 'authorial' represent divergent forces which the editor has to balance against each other in the choice between variant readings. 'Final intentions' obviously has to do with temporality: the assumption is that the later a reading is proved to be, the better it is. But over time, the original author gradually loses control over his work. The principle of final authorial intentions may work fine up to the time of the text's delivery to the publisher or of its first performance. From the moment it is handed over to the public or to agents preparing it for the public, external influence on the work's further development is unavoidable and continuously increasing. Copyists, publishers, performers, and others contribute to shaping the work, with or without the original author's knowledge and acceptance. Thus the last version of the work published in the author's lifetime may be quite far from the author's own intentions. Even the fact that the author had a copy of this edition does not automatically mean he had authorized each of its readings, but only that he was aware of its existence. Thus, when trying to determine authorial intentions, the author's actual degree of involvement in the publishing process must in each case be subject to close investigation by the critical editor in order to evaluate and rank the available sources appropriately. In this process, the editor is, more often than not, forced to compromise or to choose between finality and authority, revealing the delusive

4 James Grier, *The Critical Editing of Music* (Cambridge, 1996), 17.

5 See, for instance, Jerome J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago & London, 1983), 42ff.

nature of final authorial intentions – at least as long as the author is defined as a single individual rather than a collective of persons involved in the work's creation.

Despite their differences, the principles of final intentions and the *Fassung letzter Hand* share the basic assumption that changes introduced by the author are improvements to the text; in other words, the text tends to converge towards its ideal state over time – at least as long as the author is in control. This assumption is rarely questioned in music editing, though a revision may in fact leave the work in a heterogeneous, aesthetically less satisfactory state than the original version.

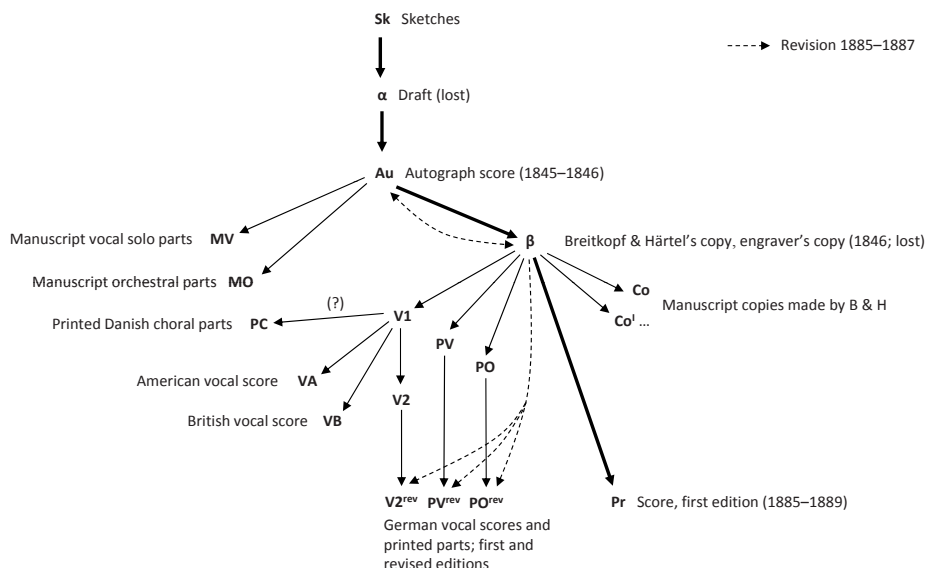
Another general objection against 'final intentions' or 'final version' is that their focus on the chronology of the readings may obscure the fact that variations between different sources to a large degree may simply reflect that they have been produced for very distinct purposes. For instance, a dedication copy not intended for performance is likely to give priority to graphical appearance over detailed dynamic marking, while performance material probably is more concerned with musical accuracy. When it comes to opera, and especially early opera, searching for final intentions is probably not useful at all. An opera is a fluctuating work connected so intimately with the circumstances of the individual performances that the simple chronology of sources may not be correlated to increasing aesthetical quality or the convergence towards the composer's true (or final) intentions at all.

#### GADE'S *Comala*

As stated in the general preface to each volume, the edition of the Works of Niels W. Gade explicitly aims at presenting *Fassung letzter Hand*. As a rule, Gade's copy of the printed score is to be elected the principal source. The general preference of the printed score over the autograph as the principal source is first of all based on the logical assumption that the print(s) will postdate the autograph(s) and thus be closer to final intentions; in other words, finality is given priority over authority. Implicitly, however, this advice also testifies to the edition's awareness that a musical work is not only shaped by the composer's personal artistic intentions but also by its social and institutional context: preferring a printed edition also implies accepting that the engraver's changes may very well be indirectly intended by the composer (by delegated authorization, in essence, the composer trusts that the engraver will improve his work by correcting any errors he may find and accepts that certain changes will be made); the work is considered a product of the intentions of a number of persons. Hence, the edition favours a state of the work that has actually met the public and thus has had a historical impact rather than canonizing a composer's personal or imagined version. Also the *Comala* volume follows these guidelines by electing the printed score as its principal source, even if the question what Gade's final intentions really were turns out to be rather complex on a closer examination.

Gade's cantata *Comala*, a 'dramatic poem for soloists, choir and orchestra', composed in 1845–46 during Gade's stay in Leipzig, is based on an Ossianic poem of the

same name.<sup>6</sup> It was first performed at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig in March 1846 and received more than 80 performances in Germany during Gade's lifetime.<sup>7</sup> Probably the same year a manuscript copy was made for the Leipzig publishers Breitkopf & Härtel, but the work was not engraved and printed until some 40 years later. In the meantime, the publishers sold manuscript copies made from their copy when needed.



Ill. 1. Filiation of selected sources. Based on the stemma in the Gade Edition, p. 213.

Ill. 1 shows a stemma with the most important sources. A few sketches (labelled **Sk** in the stemma) have survived. A now lost draft of the score (**α**) probably existed. Gade's extant autograph fair copy (**Au**) is obviously a source of major importance. From the autograph, the publisher's copy (**β**) was made, which unfortunately is lost. However, some of the manuscript copies of it, sold by Breitkopf & Härtel, have survived (**Co** and a number of similar copies). Also a number of vocal scores (**V1**, **V2**, **VA**, and **VB**), German vocal parts (**PV**), and orchestral parts (**PO**) were printed.

When the first edition (**Pr**) was finally engraved and printed in the years 1885–89, it was based on the publisher's copy **β**. Following the common error method (the so-called *Lachmann* method), readings shared by the sources **Pr** and **Co** but in disagreement with **Au** show that **β** differed from the autograph in some detail right from the

6 In the second half of the eighteenth century, James Macpherson published a large number of poems, attributing them to the Celtic bard Ossian. The poem titled *Comala* was first published in *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem, in Six Books: Together with several other Poems, composed by Ossian the son of Fingal. Translated from the Gae[el]ic Language, By James Macpherson* (London, 1762). Gade had Julius Klengel (1818–1879) prepare a German libretto for his cantata, based on a German translation of Macpherson's poem.

7 See editor's preface in the Gade Edition for details on the work's genesis and reception history.

beginning, while readings shared by **Au** and **Co** witness a number of details in **β** that were changed or forgotten by the engraver when preparing the printed first edition.

In 1848, Gade returned to Denmark, taking the autograph score with him from Leipzig. He used it for all his *Comala* performances in Denmark (in 1850–51, 1856, 1871, and 1887), and he appears to have made minor changes in it on most of these occasions. In Copenhagen, manuscript orchestral and vocal solo parts (**MO** and **MV**) were copied from the autograph, and for the 1871 performance also choral parts with Danish text were printed (**PC**). As a result there is a minor transmission of the work in Denmark which is distinct from the main transmission in Germany and other countries. The last changes in Gade's autograph score were apparently made in connection with the performances in December 1887 – that is, while the printed score was already in preparation. A letter from Gade to his publishers testifies that he had sent a score with a number of corrections – probably a proof – back to Breitkopf & Härtel around early December 1887 which was at exactly the same time as Gade's last performances of the work in Copenhagen. Hence, none of the two sources **Pr** and **Au** can be clearly identified as the one representing Gade's final intentions alone.

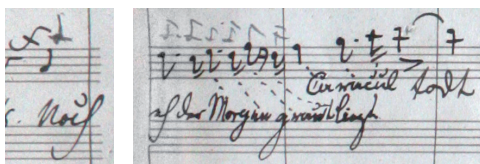
The situation is further complicated by the fact that Gade decided to revise the work in 1885 when the decision was made to print the score. Among other alterations, the revision involved a number of deletions in the brass parts. It appears that changes were made in **Au** and copied from there to **β**, but not all changes were accurately and completely copied in the process. Apparently however, Gade actually intended to include all the changes he had made, since no particular type of changes seems to have been left out. Also, Gade does not seem to have made a distinction between changes made in connection with particular performances (that is, early changes made long before the revision, recognisable as readings in **Au** also found in the Danish performance material – sources **MV**, **MO**, and **PC**) and those made with the print in mind. The fact that not all differences between **Au** and **β** were eliminated on that occasion suggests that Gade sanctioned – at least passively – some of the original readings in **β** (identifiable as the ones shared by **Pr** and **Co**) as well as a number of new ones probably introduced by the engraver. Perhaps Gade did not compare the two scores in every detail, or he did not consider the differences to be sufficiently important to eliminate them in each case.

The revision and proofreading processes considerably delayed the printing of the score, which was not published until early 1889. The revision of the score also caused Breitkopf & Härtel to publish revised versions of the German vocal score (**V2<sup>rev</sup>**), the printed vocal parts (**PV<sup>rev</sup>**), and the printed orchestral parts (**PO<sup>rev</sup>**).

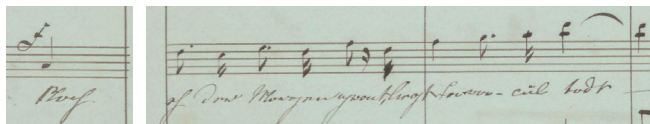
For about 40 years, *Comala* survived in two distinct transmissions: a Danish one embodied by the autograph; and one abroad, embodied by **β** and its descendants. Eventually, however, these two transmissions crossed their paths again, exchanging a number of readings (most changes apparently copied from **Au** to **β**, but possibly also vice versa) during the process of preparing the first edition **Pr**. As a result, the sources leave the work in a blurry state in the sense that some late changes in **Au** did not make it into the first edition, while, on the other hand, new readings were

introduced by the engraver or by Gade himself in the proof, but not copied back into Gade's autograph score.

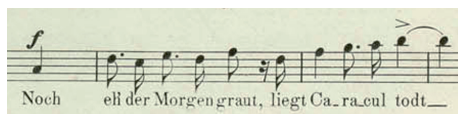
**Au:** Autograph score  
(DK-Kk, C II, 6)



**Co:** Copy as sold by  
Breitkopf & Härtel  
(D-DT, Mus-n 1493)



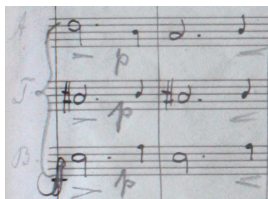
**Pr:** Printed first edition  
(DK-Kk, Gades Samling 32)



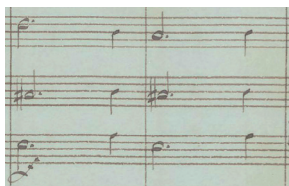
Ill. 2. *Comala*, No. 2, bb. 94 ff.

An example of the former situation is found in No. 2, in Fingal's part (Ill. 2). Gade obviously transposed the part to a higher pitch in **Au**, but the change was either not copied to **β** or a change in **β** was ignored by the engraver. In this case, we must assume that the autograph represents Gade's final intentions.

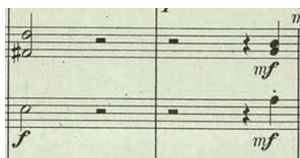
**Au:** Autograph score



**Co:** Copy as sold by  
Breitkopf & Härtel



**Pr:** Printed first edition



Ill. 3. *Comala*, No. 1, bb. 20 f.



The latter situation is visible in a number of instances, for example in the trombones in No. 1 (Ill. 3). Gade's revision included numerous cancellations in the brass parts, but in a few cases – as in this example – such changes are only found in the print. Apparently, Gade did either make this particular change in  $\beta$  only, but not in the autograph score, or introduced it at a very late stage directly in the proof without copying it back into his own score (the pencilled dynamic markings in this passage in the autograph score were most probably added at an earlier date and thus are not to be seen as part of the 1885–87 revision). In this case, the print most probably is in agreement with Gade's final intentions.

The *Comala* sources illustrate some of the problems related to finality: Both sources **Pr** and **Au** are the result of Gade's revision of the work; each of them contains a number of readings from the original version and a number of readings originating from the revision, yet **Pr** and **Au** are not identical. Insisting on representing the latest reading in each case would be problematic, not only because the result would be an eclectic edition, but also because the revision of **Au** and the engraving of **Pr** are intertwined in a way that makes it impossible – perhaps also futile – to determine which readings are 'final' in a strictly temporal sense. As already mentioned, the printed score serves as the principal source for the edition of *Comala* in accordance with the Gade Edition's guidelines, though from a strictly chronological point of view it could just as well have been the autograph.

Either way, at least two weak points of a *Fassung letzter Hand* edition of Gade's *Comala* remain. First, the revised *Comala* is a combination of original readings and readings introduced with the revision. In general, a revision is likely to affect only those passages which the composer feels most urgently need to be changed, while many other passages and details will be left untouched, especially when making changes in an existing source rather than making a new copy in the process. On the other hand, it is very unlikely that Gade would have written exactly the same in the untouched passages if he were to compose the work from scratch in his mature age. The revised work as a whole represents, therefore, neither the young nor the mature Gade, but a patchwork of both. There is no guarantee that such a mixed work would be aesthetically more satisfying than the original, coherent version.

Second, the fact that the score was not revised and printed until 40 years after its premiere, indeed an unusual situation in Gade's *oeuvre*, illustrates that the latest – or final – version is not necessarily the one that had the greatest impact. From the viewpoint of reception history, the most significant version is the one embodied by  $\beta$  since it served as the base text for all scores used for performances of the work during Gade's lifetime except those conducted by Gade himself.

Both of these issues would be arguments for choosing *Ausgabe erster Hand* – the first public version – rather than *Fassung letzter Hand* as the governing principle. From this point of view,  $\beta$  would be the best candidate for a principal source in the *Comala* case, but as already mentioned  $\beta$  itself is lost. In principle, using the common error method, the readings of **Pr**, **Au**, and **Co** would allow a rather reliable reconstruction, especially if the collation would include as many of the

other copies similar to Co as possible, even if this laborious approach may not be realistic for practical reasons.

The example may serve as a contribution to the discussion of editorial principles of future critical editions of music. It illustrates some of the implications of choosing a principle such as *Fassung letzter Hand* and points out some of the alternatives. Aiming at a work's final version may be a reasonable choice in some situations, but it may not be the best in all cases. There seems to be a potential conflict between the desire to apply uniform editorial principles to all volumes of a collected edition and the diversity of possible source situations, some of which may suggest alternative approaches. It may be worthwhile considering – as indeed some editions already do – whether complete editions could improve by allowing the decision, which version to publish, to depend on the available source material and the work's history in each case. Instead of aiming at the same version or state of the work throughout the edition – whether final, original, or first public version – the overall guideline could be a certain perspective: for instance, an edition could place its main emphasis on the composer's authority, or on reception history, or even on aesthetical quality. Then the sources would need to be evaluated in each case according to this overall perspective and the principal source would be elected in accordance with it, even if as a result the edition would contain final versions of some works, and earlier versions of others.

#### SUMMARY

The attempt to represent final authorial intentions in some form is still a common principle in Scandinavian music editions, despite the fact that similar principles have long been criticized in the field of textual criticism. The article points out some of the general problems of such concepts, including the divergent forces of authority and finality. The recent difficulties of editing Niels Wilhelm Gade's cantata *Comala* under the Gade Edition's *Fassung letzter Hand* perspective illustrate these problems. The article suggests that aspects such as reception history or the composer's authority alone may be better points of departure for future editions than concepts focusing on temporality.