

The Title Page of J.S. Bach’s *The Art of Fugue* and the Question of Authorship ¹

ANATOLY MILKA

No Bach scholar has ever seen the title page of *The Art of Fugue* or, for that matter, even the name of the work written in Bach’s own hand. This is why it is still uncertain who, in fact, conceived of the title. The problem first emerged when Philipp Spitta raised doubts, which later spread to other Bach studies,² as to whether the title *Kunst der Fuge* came from Bach himself.³ We do know that the name *Kunst der Fuge* was altered throughout the compositional process of the work as a whole. The reasons for these alterations, once revealed, might cast light on the puzzle of the title’s authorship.

Four variants of the title are known today: two handwritten, and two in print.⁴ The earliest of those preserved was that written by J.C. Altnikol.⁵ The inscription reads:

*Die
Kunst der Fuga
d. Sig[?] Joh. Seb. Bach.*⁶

The next, chronologically, is probably the second handwritten variant, inscribed by Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach (?)⁷ and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach on the grey-blue cover of the folder that contained all three supplements to *P200*. The inscription can be dated sometime between 1748 and 1752:

1 The present article is a chapter from the forthcoming book by the author, *Rethinking J.S. Bach’s Art of Fugue* (Ashgate, trans. Marina Ritzarev, ed. Esti Sheinberg). This is a new and updated version of his book in Russian, *Iskusstvo fugi I.S. Bakha: k rekonstruktsii i interpretatsii (The Art of Fugue by J.S. Bach: Toward its Reconstruction and Interpretation)* (St. Petersburg: Compozitor, 2009).

2 See Klaus Hofmann, *Die Kunst der Fuge* (BWV 1080). Neue Bach-Ausgabe, Band VIII/2.1–2. 2 Notenbände und Kritischer Bericht (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1996), 23; Erich Bergel, *Bachs letzte Fuge* (Bonn: Brockhaus, 1985); Peter Schleunig, *Johann Sebastian Bachs “Kunst der Fuge”* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1993); Mikhail Semenovich Druskin, *Iogann Sebastian Bakh* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1982); Jacques Chailley (Ed.), *L’Art de la fugue de J.S. Bach. Étude critique des sources: remise en ordre du plan, analyse de l’œuvre, au-delà des notes*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1971).

3 “Wenn wir auch nicht sicher wissen, ob der Titel ‘Kunst der Fuge’ von Bach selber her stammt...” Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*. Bd. 2 (Leipzig, 1880), 678.

4 The autograph is in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Musikabteilung mit Mendelssohn-Archiv, Mus. ms. autogr. Bach P200. Henceforth *P200*.

5 The title page has an additional inscription, “in eigenhändiger Partitur,” written in parentheses and located about an inch lower than in the figure shown here. One of the subsequent owners of the manuscript, Georg Poelchau (1773–1836), added this inscription decades later, after the death of C.P.E. Bach but prior to 1824.

6 The question mark in square brackets marks an unclear sign, which will be discussed later.

7 Christoph Wolff identified the title as “inscribed by Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach.” Wolff, *Bach: Essays on his Life and Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 267-68. However, Klaus Hofmann classified the title as written “von unbekannter Hand.” Hofmann, *KBviii/2*, 48.

[Die] Kunst
der Fuge
Von J[.]S.B.⁸

The first printed variant of the title appears on the cover page of the 1751 edition. It reads:

*Die
Kunst der Fuge
durch
Herrn Johann Sebastian Bach
ehemahligen Capellmeister und Musikdirector zu Leipzig.*

The title page of the 1752 edition has exactly the same wording, with a few layout differences: here the word “Herrn” is positioned on a separate line and is written in capital letters; the words “zu Leipzig” are separated from the rest in a final line:

*Die
Kunst der Fuge
durch
HERRN
Johann Sebastian Bach
ehemahligen Capellmeister und Musikdirector
zu Leipzig.*

Each of these four title page variants has unique traits that deserve discussion. First, however, the possibility that the title itself, *Die Kunst der Fuge*, may have been invented not by Bach but by someone else, should be contemplated. The feasibility that by 1744, after several years of working on this new work, surrounded by family members, pupils and friends who knew his work, and often copied parts of it, the possibility that it wasn’t given even a temporary name, is very close to nil. The starting premise, therefore, is that J.S. Bach did have some kind of a working title, with which those in his close circle were probably familiar. Assuming that giving a different title to this work, without the author’s consent, is hard to imagine, the working assumption of this study is that Bach himself gave *The Art of Fugue* its title.

Nevertheless, the title of a work is not synonymous with what appears on the title *page*. The latter has its own structure, on which Bach bestowed a special significance that often transcended the literal meaning of the title itself. Nevertheless, the fact is that the title page of the fair copy of *The Art of Fugue* (the main body of P200) remained blank for a long time (the exact period has yet to be established).

However, what has been established is that Bach began working on *The Art of Fugue* in “about 1740 at the latest, more likely at the end of the 1730s.”⁹ The beginning of Bach’s cooperation with Altnikol is documented in the composer’s letter of recommendation on the latter’s behalf, written in September 1745.¹⁰ It appears, therefore, that the recto of the autograph’s first page

8 The [Die] in square brackets was written by C.P.E. Bach. See Hofmann, *KBviii/2*, 48.

9 Wolff, *Bach: Essays on his Life and Music*, 271.

10 *Bach-Dokumente*, Vol. I: *Schriftstücke von der Hand Johann Sebastian Bachs. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed, Werner Neumann & Hans-Joachim Schulze (Kassel; Basel; Tours [etc.]: Bärenreiter; Leipzig: Veb Deutscher Verlag für Musik,

remained blank for several years (from about 1740)—an interval of time that seems quite strange. What could have been the reason for this delay? A comparison of Altnikol’s inscription with the other three might provide an answer.

The Title Page of the Autograph P200

This title is organized in three lines:

Die
Kunst der Fuga
d. Sig[?] Joh. Seb. Bach.

The unnecessary juxtaposition of German and Italian, quite uncommon for a title page, immediately attracts attention. It differs from the three other variants of the title page, which are written exclusively in German, underscoring the peculiarity of this combination. In fact, this has led several scholars to doubt the authenticity of the title.¹¹ What might have prompted this mixing of languages?

A look at paragrammatic compositions that were widespread in German culture throughout the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century may provide an explanation.¹² Figure 4 shows a fragment from the *Poetischer Trichter (Poetic Bullhorn)* by George Phillipp Harsdörfer.¹³ It features a paragrammatic composition where the words “Jesus ist Christus” are equal in their numerical value (218) to “unser Helfter und Heile,” thus creating a pair of symbolical synonyms.

1963), document 81, 148-49; *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans T. David, Arthur Mendel, & Christoph Wolff (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), document 240, 224-25.

11 Bergel, *Bachs letzte Fuge*, 57; Schleuning, *Johann Sebastian Bachs “Kunst der Fuge,”* 179.

12 The concept of paragram is used here as defined in Ruth Tatlow’s fundamental PhD dissertation “LUSUS POETICUS VEL MUSICUS, Johann Sebastian Bach: The Baroque Paragram and Friedrich Smend’s Theory of a Musical Number Alphabet” (London: King’s College, 1987), and in her book *Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), which might generally be summarized as a message or symbol encrypted in words (poetical paragram), notes or other textual units by means of some numerical codification. She expands on these ideas in several of her later articles, such as “Collections, Bars and Numbers: Analytical Coincidence or Bach’s Design?” in *Understanding Bach 2*, ed. Ruth Tatlow (2007), 37-58, and “Bach’s Parallel Proportions and the Qualities of the Authentic Bachian Collection,” in *Bach oder Nicht Bach: Bericht über das 5. Dortmunder Bach-Symposion*, ed. Reinmar Emans & Martin Geck (Dortmund: Klangfarben, 2009), 135-55.

13 Georg Phillipp Harsdörfer, *Poetischer Trichter, Die Teutsche Dicht—und Reimkunst ohne Behuf der Lateinischen Sprache*. Dritter Theil (Nürnberg, 1653), p. 72. Harsdörfer (1607-58) was a poet and scholar, the author of fifty volumes of poetry and other works, and a member of several literary societies, one of which he founded.

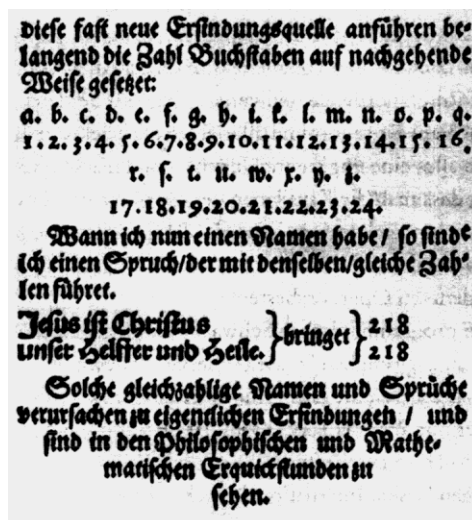


Figure 1 Numerical alphabet and paragram in Harsdörfer’s *Poetischer Trichter*

There are instances of Bach using similar techniques. It has been confirmed that Bach paid serious attention to paragrammatic constructions as early as the mid-1730s. In his later works, he applied this technique extensively, especially in the B minor Mass (and most clearly in the *Symbolum Nicenum*).

The first version of *The Art of Fugue*, finalized in the manuscript P200, was created between 1740–42 and 1746.¹⁴ The fact that paragrammatic compositions from that period have been spotted frequently in his cantatas and oratorios does not exclude their presence in instrumental music, where the compositional evolvment is not necessarily related to a text. In such cases, paragrams would feature in the title and the title page.

The length of the title supports attempts at its interpretation as a paragram. In comparison with other works by Bach, such as the *Inventions*, *Sinfonias* or the *Well Tempered Clavier*, which feature longer titles, a longer title would be expected here, too, particularly since *The Art of Fugue* is such a fundamental work.¹⁵ Yet, the first two variants of the title are brief.

It is most likely that Bach, always very particular with regard to signs and symbols of his own name in different variants (Bach=14; J.S. Bach=41; Johann Sebastian Bach=158), could not have resisted the temptation to exploit the numerical proximity between the following:

Die Kunst der Fuge = 162
 Johann Sebastian Bach = 158

Only four digits separate between the title and the composer’s name, and Bach did not miss this

14 Yoshitake Kobayashi, “Zur Chronologie der Spätwerke Johann Sebastian Bachs: Kompositionen und Aufführungstätigkeit von 1736 bis 1750,” *Bach Jahrbuch* 74 (1988), 70.

15 For example, the full title of *Well Tempered Clavier* reads: *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier oder Prælua, und Fugen durch alle Tone und Semitonia, so wohl tertiam majorem oder Ut Re Mi anlangend, als auch tertiam minorem oder Re Mi Fa betreffend. Zum Nutzen und Gebrauch der Lehrbegierigen Musicalischen Jugend, als auch derer in diesem studio schon habil seyenden besonderem Zeitvertreib aufgesetzt und verfertiget von Johann Sebastian Bach. p.t: Hochfürstlich Anhalt–Cöthenischen Capel-Meistern und Directore derer Camer Musiquen. Anno 1722 (The Well Tempered Clavier // or // Preludes and Fugues / through all the tones and semitones / both as regards the tertia major or Ut Re Mi / and as concerns the tertia minor or Re Mi Fa / For the Use and Profit of Musical Youth Desirous of Learning / as well as for the Pastime of those Already Skilled in this Study / drawn up and written by Johann Sebastian Bach / p.t: Capellmeister to His Serene Highness the Prince of Anhalt–Cöthen, /and Director of / His Chamber Music /Anno 1722).*

opportunity to create here, too, a pair of symbolical synonyms. The process of matching is not simple: one has not only to match digits, but also to retain the meaning of the text. Bach found a brilliant solution: in the word “Fuge,” he changed just the last letter, resulting in “Fuga,” the Latin (and Italian) form of the same term. This resulted in a rather odd linguistic combination, particularly when compared with the more familiar later versions of the title, where the spelling is entirely German. However, although not common, such a spelling is acceptable as an “admissible atypicality,” widely used among encoded Baroque inscriptions. The composer, therefore, arrived at the unique title on the cover of *P200*: “Die Kunst der Fuga,” generating the required match:

Die Kunst der Fuga = 158
Johann Sebastian Bach = 158

The result is a typical paragrammatic composition. Interestingly, 158 is not just the numerical expression of Johann Sebastian Bach; the sum of digits in this number is equal to the numerical value of Bach (2–1–3–8), a fact of great importance for the composer:

$$(1+5+8) = (2+1+3+8) = 14$$

It is hard to imagine that such a paragram is a mere coincidence, and that Bach did not notice it. On the contrary, there is reason to believe that he invested much intellectual effort into matching numbers and letters. We should remember, however, that the phrase “Johann Sebastian Bach” is only a suggested abstraction, a possible reference whose numerical value the composer could have had in mind for the paragram of the first two lines in this title page.

The above considerations encourage a similar approach to the analysis of the third line of the title page. The numerical sum of its letters is 108. This number is so distant from 158 that in order to find its paragrammatic meaning one needs to look for some other principle of codification. The only datum we have, thus, at this stage, is the first expression of a possible paragram:

d. Sig[?] Joh. Seb. Bach = 108

Friedrich Smend first mentioned the number “84” that Bach wrote at the end of the *Patrem omnipotentem* in the B minor Mass, sealing the 84 bars of the section. Taking this as a starting point, Robin Leaver proposed an analytic method looking at the symbolic meanings encapsulated in the number of bars of each section in the Credo. Later, Anthony Newman mentions the match between the number of letters in the poetic text (84 letters) and the number of bars in the musical text (84 bars).¹⁶ Combining this method with our analysis of the titles of *The Art of Fugue*, we matched the third line on *P200*’s title page with the number of bars in the first three fugues of *The Art of Fugue*. The reason for choosing the first three fugues is that they share an important feature: they, and only they, leave the theme rhythmically intact (starting in half notes). Their total number of bars is 111. Although the numbers do not match, and there is therefore still no finalized paragram, the difference between the data is small:

16 Friedrich Smend, *Edition of the B Minor Mass by J.S. Bach, KBii/1* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1956), 333; Robin A. Leaver, “Number Associations in the Structure of Bach’s CREDO, BWV 232,” *BACH* 3 (1976): 17; Anthony Newman, *Bach and the Baroque: European Source Materials from the Baroque and Early Classical Periods, with Special Emphasis on the Music of J.S. Bach* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 2nd edn. 1995), 196.

d. Sig[?] Joh. Seb. Bach = 108
 Number of bars in fugues I, II and III = 111

This small mismatch may be related to the fact that the numerical value of the title’s third line remains unclear: one sign, here replaced by a question mark, is indistinct, and although visible, is not easily read. Unsurprisingly, various scholars have interpreted this mark in different ways. For instance, Christoph Wolff reads it as the abbreviation “di Sig.,”¹⁷ Peter Schleuning as “di Sign,”¹⁸ and Klaus Hofmann as “d. Sigl.,” writing the last letter in cursive script.¹⁹

We could offer yet another reading. In eighteenth-century German manuscript practice, this figure used to serve as a conventional abbreviation. It had the character of a capital “C” in cursive Latin. The sign is derived from the initial letter of the French word *coupure* (a cut), marking a truncated word.²⁰ Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach, for example, used it quite often to abbreviate certain words. The word “Graflicher” in his letter to the State Graf Wilhelm Schaumburg Lippe, on 24 May 1759, is written as “grafC” (Figure 2). The word “Bückeburg,” from which he wrote a letter to Breitkopf, the publisher, on 20 November 1785, is written “BückebC.” So too is the word “exempel” in another letter to Breitkopf from 23 November 1784, written “exemC,” and the word “Herm” a letter, also to Breitkopf, from 17 December 1786, is written “HC.”²¹ The sign “SigC,” therefore, probably means “Signor,” and the “d.” marks the Italian word “di” (or, to accept a further linguistic mixture—“der”), abbreviated here for the sake of the paragram.

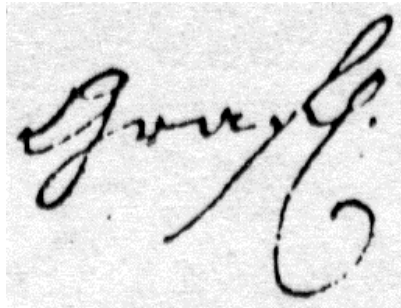


Figure 2 The inscription “GrafC” from J.C.F. Bach’s letter to Graf Wilhelm zu Schaumburg Lippe, meaning “Graflicher.” J.C.F. Bach, Letter to Wilhelm zu Schaumburg-Lippe, 24 May 1759. Courtesy, Niedersächs. Landesarchiv, Bückeburg (NLA Bückeburg F 2 Nr. 2642).

Interpreted as a “C,” the letter carries the numerical value 3, allowing the following calculation:

d. Sig[C] Joh. Seb. Bach = 111
 Number of bars in fugues I, II, and III = 111

The above findings indicate that what at first may seem a strange linguistic concoction of French, Italian, and German abbreviations, truncations and so on is probably a result of paragrammatic games, introduced to suggest and supplement meanings to written excerpts.

Another puzzle relates to the choice of the person who wrote the inscription. Why was the title page not written by J.S. Bach, but by another person? What prevented Bach himself from

17 Wolff, *Bach: Essays on his Life and Music*, 267.

18 Schleuning, *Johann Sebastian Bachs “Kunst der Fuge,”* 179.

19 Hofmann, *KBviii/2*, 23.

20 The capital “C” was used to mark truncated words especially in eighteenth-century epistolary and formal etiquette, which was largely based on French. The term is also used to mark a cut in music or for the abbreviation of neumes.

21 All three letters to Breitkopf are housed at the Breitkopf & Härtel archive.

inscribing it, especially since the title page had been left blank for such a long time? The presence of Altnikol’s hand in the inscription is not coincidental: Bach needed his name to be written in the third person. Bach never referred to himself in the third person, nor does he ever write in his own hand the words Signor, Herr, or their variants in score inscriptions. The letters “SigC,” marking the word “Signor,” were required for their numerical value. The solution might have been to ask someone else—Altnikol in this case—to write the title in his own hand.

An understanding of the importance that Bach attached to paragrammatic constructs in his works might help to solve a question posed earlier: why was the cover of manuscript *P200* left without a title for such a long time?

The many years that passed between the completion of the work and the (paragrammatic) writing of the title might imply, at least to a certain extent, that the title somehow depended on the content of the composition itself. For example, the numbers of bars in each fugue—at least in the first three fugues—was correlated with the title inscription. It is clear, therefore, that the title could not have been finalized before at least several of the compositions in this cycle had been completed. Furthermore, it is probable that Bach’s composition of the work as a sequence of fugues and his planning of the title page as a paragrammatic construction progressed in parallel. Finally, and most importantly, if the paragram contained in the title is the result of Bach’s own work, then the title, too, should be considered as solely his.

The Title on the Cover of the Supplements Folder

In all probability, Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach wrote the title page that appears on the gray-blue folder cover (Figure 2) sometime between August 1748 and the end of 1749, when he left Leipzig for Bückeburg. During this period, the third version of *The Art of Fugue* was created. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that this title (albeit not necessarily its composition) might have been written later, sometime between 1750 and 1752. The title reads:

[Die] Kunst
der Fuge
Von J[.]S.B.

Any idea of linguistic mixtures is here abandoned: the whole title is in German.²² The article *Die* was added later, by Philipp Emanuel, probably after his father’s death, and could not reflect Johann Sebastian’s intentions. Moreover, it is unclear if the word is crossed out or underlined. The numerical value of the whole text (without the article “Die”) does not tell us much. The last line is odd, too; *von* is written in the middle of the line, suggesting that initially it might have been intended to stand alone in the line, like the word “Kunst.” The initials “J[.]S.B.” look a little indecisive, more like a later addition to the line instead of being symmetrically situated on the next line.

Like the title of the earlier version, this one is puzzling, too. Why was the title originally written here without the article “Die”? Was it due to some kind of structural idea or manipulation of letters and numbers? And why would Emanuel add the article “Die” to the title? Was it deleted or emphasized by an underline?

The title’s brevity suggests that Bach had originally intended to present the title as a

²² Although the last letter in the word *Fuge* may recall the letter “a” in modern Latin script, here the whole inscription is written in Gothic cursive, where it is definitely an “e.”

paragrammatic composition. As we see in the case of the title of the autograph, it can be correlated with the musical text. However, the history of this whole cycle is rich with various versions of the music itself. We do not know to which one of them this particular title, written on the folder that contained later supplements, could relate given, at this point, that it seems unproductive to seek the numerical sense of this title. Therefore, these and other questions related to this presentation of the title remain, for the time being, unanswered.

The Titles in the Two Printed Original Editions (1751 and 1752)

Most studies share the opinion that the final wording on the title pages of the 1751 and 1752 printed editions (figures 3 and 4) belongs to Carl Philipp Emanuel. J.S. Bach usually (and especially in printed editions) wrote his title as “Directore Chori Musici Lipsiensis,” and never as “Musikdirector,” particularly not with a “k.” In fact, he always spelled words derived from “music” with a “c.”

Comparing the two texts, we see that they differ only in their typographic design, but that their wording is identical. Judging from its laconic form and its meaning, the 1751 title page recalls the two earlier handwritten titles, both lacking a detailed description of the work’s content and its purpose, stating only the title (*The Art of Fugue*) and the composer’s name. This peculiarity supports the assumption that J.S. Bach was fashioning the paragrams.

The last line on this page introduces an additional remark mentioning the former Capellmeister and Musikdirector. This addition could not have been inscribed by Johann Sebastian: it was Philipp Emanuel who published the printed edition. The incongruities within this variant of the title result from modifications originally initiated by J.S. Bach, which Emanuel edited while preparing the work for posthumous publication, without suspecting that he might be hindering the composer’s intention. This interpretation is supported by the presence of words in the title that are uncharacteristic to both J.S. Bach and Philipp Emanuel. Any attempt to separate elements that, in all likelihood, were generated by paragrammatic intentions from those dictated by the new circumstances of a posthumous edition, should begin with a close examination of the first printed edition’s title page:

Die
Kunst der Fuge
durch
Herrn Johann Sebastian Bach
ehemahligen Capellmeister und Musikdirector zu Leipzig.

Judging from the design, Emanuel added only the last line and the word “Herrn” before the name of the composer, as required by the new situation.

There are several reasons to suggest that Emanuel merely edited a title that he had seen in writing at an earlier time. The first indication is the presence of the word “durch.” The point is that Emanuel’s title pages, regardless of the ways in which the composer is presented, or whether they are in German, French, or Italian, never present the word “durch,” despite its being very common in titles of other contemporary composers. Moreover, the *handwritten* title pages by Johann Sebastian, as well as those by Philipp Emanuel, never use the word “durch” in a phrase presenting the author.²³

23 A similar occurrence is found in Bach’s composition *Musikalisches Opfer* (BWV 1079). Bach never used the term “ricercar” for his fugues, although this term served as a synonym for “fugue” in Germany of the seventeenth and

It is unlikely that Emanuel would have decided to change his approach in this case alone, and it would also be uncharacteristic that, in the process of publishing *The Art of Fugue*, he would have concerned himself with questions of paragrammatic composition. It is improbable, therefore, that the “durch” came from Emanuel. If indeed this is the case, it is reasonable to deduce that the word was introduced in accordance with the expressed wish of J.S. Bach.²⁴

What would the original title page have looked like? Removing ourselves from the printed title with Emanuel’s probable editing, that is, anything that would not have been written by J.S. Bach, would result as follows:

Die
Kunst der Fuge
durch
Johann Sebastian Bach

Apart from the word “durch,” there is nothing special in this title, which is in complete accord with the two handwritten titles. This suggests that all the variants of the title page could have originated only from one source: the creative mind of Johann Sebastian Bach.

We turn now to other “admissible atypicalities,” having already determined that, in the title page of *P200*, they are results of the paragrammatic manipulation of letters and numbers. The insertion of the word “durch” in the title page of the printed edition might have served a similar purpose. In such a case, the presence of this word in the title acts—if not as a proof then at least—as an indication of the probability of such a process.

To conclude, the proposed reconstruction of the composer’s original title page, intended for the first printed edition, is based here on three arguments:

- the four-line construct and its laconic presentation may suggest the possible presence of a paragrammatic component;
- the printed title no longer uses a German–Italian combination (the word “Fuge” is written in its German variant);
- this impression is reinforced by the uncharacteristic word “durch” that is interpreted here as indicating paragrammatic manipulation.

What Do the Fugues Tell Us?

A comparison between the fugues in the autograph and the contrapuncti in the printed editions shows that Bach refashioned the fugues in certain ways while preparing *The Art of Fugue* for print. Each change is puzzling because of its seeming purposelessness, and there are no signs of any connection between them.

eighteenth centuries. The only time Bach did so was when he needed to work with words, such as to compose an acrostic, as in “Regis Iussu Cantio Et Reliqua Canonica Arte Resoluta.” It is clear that the word “fugue” did not fit that task. See Anatoly Milka, “*Muzykal’noe prinoshenie*” *I.S. Bakha: k rekonstruktsii i interpretatsii* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1999), 177-92.

²⁴ The word “durch” before the composer’s name carries a nuance of formality and high literary style, where official solemnity had to be highlighted. Bach used it only in cases that had to do with members of royal families or some special municipal event. Even in such rare instances, the word appeared only in the printed title pages. One example is cantata BWV 71, composed in 1708 for the election of the magistrate of Mühlhausen in Thuringia; another example is in the *Drama per Musica*, BWV 214, composed for the birthday of Maria Josepha, the Queen of Poland and the Court Princess of Saxony, on 8 December 1733.

Firstly, Bach changed the principle of organizing the fugues at the beginning of the cycle. Instead of the existing sequence of pairs of fugues in the original autograph, he grouped the first four fugues and renamed them as contrapuncti. To that end, he added to the printed edition a new fugue (contrapunctus 4) on the basic theme, without any rhythmic changes—a fugue that does not exist in the autograph at all. Moreover, comprising 138 bars, this new fugue is disproportionately long in comparison with the first three, which appear in the autograph as, respectively, 37, 35, and 39 bars long. Why did he need this new giant fugue, and why was it located precisely at the fourth position in the printed edition?

The transformation did not leave the first three fugues untouched. While their rhythmic values remained intact, the meter was changed from 4/2 to 2/2, a procedure that doubled the number of bars, resulting in 74, 70, and 78, respectively. Why?

In addition to doubling the number of bars, Bach added several bars to each of the first three fugues: four bars were added to the first fugue, two to the second one, and six to the third (see Table 1). While we could regard these as simple corrections, a musical analysis shows that the new bars make no real difference. Each of these fugues could exist (and indeed still exists in concert practice) as it appears in the autograph. It seems that the manuscript and the printed variants of these fugues have equal artistic value. What then could have been the reason for these inessential extensions?

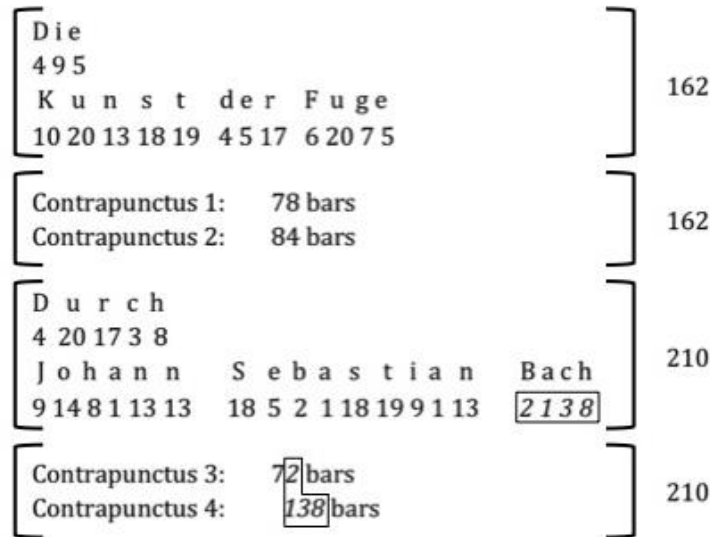
Previously, among the changes made between the second and the third version, Bach had changed the ordering of the first three fugues. Fugues II and III in the manuscript changed places, respectively becoming contrapunctus 3 and contrapunctus 2 in the printed edition. Whereas there were important structural reasons behind these changes, it seems that there were some additional calculations that contributed toward these modifications, which are summarized in Table 1.

Manuscript		Printed edition		
Name	No. of bars	Name	No. of bars before addition	No. of bars after addition
Fugue 1	37	Contrapunctus 1	74	78
Fugue 2	35	Contrapunctus 2	78	84
Fugue 3	39	Contrapunctus 3	70	72
		Contrapunctus 4	138	

Table 1 Reorganization and Resizing of the First Set of Four Pieces

While one might assume that these changes reflected Bach’s artistic concept, it is nonetheless impossible to ignore the fact that they were all, in one way or another, related to one element: the number of bars. It is quite possible that a “letters and numbers” manipulation has a role here, too.

The hypothetical four-line design of the title could allude to the first four contrapuncti of the cycle (just as the three-line design of the autograph’s title alludes to the first three fugues). The possible correspondence between the numerical value of the title’s letters (a tentative paragram) in the first printed edition with the number of bars of the first four contrapuncti in that edition²⁵ is shown in Scheme 1.



Scheme 1 Presentation of a Hypothetical Paragrammatic Correspondence between Number of Bars and the Title Page Wording in the First Original Edition (1751)

This unbelievably precise correspondence, of course, could have been a mere coincidence, but that would be very unlikely. Such significant changes in this part of the cycle would hardly have occurred unless as a result of an intentional and sophisticated process.

The letter sequence in the name Bach, 2–1–3–8, as reflected in the numeric alphabet, is framed at the end of the last line: “Durch Johann Sebastian Bach.” They also appear, in this order, in the framed number of bars of contrapuncti 3 and 4: [7]2, 138. The two sets (of words and numbers) end in the same way, both related to Bach’s name.

The edge of the thread is the last fugue, known as contrapunctus 4, which did not exist prior to the first printed edition. The number of its bars, 138, differs disproportionately in scale from fugues I - III of the manuscript, which initially were 37, 35, and 39 bars long, respectively. Its digits, 1-3-8, coincide strangely with the three last letters of Bach’s name: A–C–H. The missing B, numerically equivalent to 2, was required just before this figure. The composer, thus, had somehow to envisage a way to manipulate the number of bars of contrapunctus 3 to end with the digit 2. If we assume that Bach wished to construct a paragram that matched the total number of bars of contrapuncti 3 and 4 to 210, which is the numeric expression of “Durch Johann Sebastian Bach,” we would be looking for a 72-bar long contrapunctus ($210 - 138 = 72$), thus requiring an addition of two bars to the existing 70 of contrapunctus 3—which is exactly what happened.

None of the original three fugues in the manuscript, with their 37, 35, and 39 bars could approach—even remotely, either by itself or in any combination—this desired number of 72. Bach’s “Columbus’s egg” solution was to double the number of bars in the three first fugues by changing the meter from 4/2 to 2/2 without altering even one note. The operation rendered three contrapuncti

25 Olga Kurtch presented this analysis in her “Ot pomet kopiistov—k kompozitsii tsikla Iskusstvo fugi,” in *Vtorye Bakhovskie chtenia: ‘Iskusstvo fugi,’* ed. Anatoly Milka (St. Petersburg: SPbGK, 1993), 76-93.

of 74, 70, and 78 bars, respectively. Since cutting any finished fugue is infinitely more time consuming than extending it, and since the digit 2 was needed at the end of the third contrapunctus, Bach picked up the only candidate for this purpose—fugue II—added two bars to it, and positioned it as third in the set of four first contrapuncti. In this way, he strengthened the four-set character of this group (rather than the former pairs), and also created a numerical paragrammatic equation between text and number of bars—the total paragrammatic value of the third and fourth line in the title with the total number of bars in the third and fourth contrapuncti, with the additional meaning of the letters of his name reflected in the last group's bar numbers.

If the above reasoning is correct, a similar match should exist between the number of bars in the first two contrapuncti and the first two lines of the text: “Die Kunst der Fuge.” The total of its numerical equivalent is 162. Indeed, this is exactly the sum of bars of Contrapuncti 1 and 2 in the printed edition. In order to reach the number 162 in the remaining fugue I and fugue III, which had 74 and 78, 10 more bars were required ($74 + 78 = 152$). Bach extended these fugues, adding four and six bars to them, respectively: the new contrapunctus 1 now has 78 bars, and contrapunctus 2, 84 bars—a total of 162 bars.

This analysis shows that there are absolutely no changes in this part of *The Art of Fugue* that cannot be explained as paragrammatic constructs entailing modifications based on numerical calculations, made to match the text of the title page with new bar numbers for the first four contrapuncti.

The interpretation of the title pages of *The Art of Fugue* (autograph and printed editions) as paragrammatic constructs offers answers to some of the questions presented above. It also relates to the changes made while preparing the handwritten variants of *The Art of Fugue* toward the printed version. Without this understanding of the title pages, it would hardly be possible to supply reasonable answers to these questions. Paragrammatic constructs do not appear spontaneously or by chance. The more elements there are in a paragram (letters and numbers), the less the probability of it being coincidental. This inevitably leads us to the conclusion that the hypothetically reconstructed title page, proposed above, most probably existed, and that the author of the paragram could only have been Johann Sebastian Bach himself.