"Centonate" Chant: "Übles Flickwerk" or "E pluribus unus?"

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By LEO TREITLER

If the criticism of art aims to demonstrate the individuality, the unity, and the coherence of art works and aims to show that these spring from the creative impulse, what are critics to do in the face of works that appear to recompose old stuff and that bear the mark of many, or of no, hands?

In 1795 Friederich August Wolf published a study about the Homeric epics which was meant to be purely philological, but which in the end stirred up exactly these issues of aesthetics; it caused a great sensation.[1] For Wolf made powerful arguments to show that the works that stood as paragons of the genius of European literature had in fact been handed down from diverse origins through a process of successive transmission and revision; his evidence suggested that great Homer was a chimera.

With this work Wolf appeared to pull down the Homeric poems from a stature we can measure in this verse, written by Goethe in 1774:

Artist's Morning Song

I step up to the altar,
And read, as is fitting,
My devotional prayers
From sacred Homer.

Questions about originality and about unity and diversity in art occupied Goethe's mind throughout his creative life, and often they were focused on the Homeric Problem.[2] His attitudes toward Wolf's arguments shifted back and forth: the arguments were irrelevant to an aesthetic appreciation of the poems, which is a matter of feeling, not knowledge; the arguments were sound and showed the poems to be the products of nature; they showed that, despite their diverse origins, the poems manifest the powerful tendency of poetry toward unity, etc. Goethe spoke of these shifts as the "systole and diastole" of his mind. In 1821 he addressed a poem to Wolf in which he recanted his earlier conversion to the scholar's arguments.

[1] *Prolegomena ad Homerum, sive de operum Homericorum prisca et genuina forma variisque mutationibus et probabili ratione emendandi* (Halle, 1795).

[2] See Joachim Wohlleben, "Goethe and the Homeric Question," *Germanic Review*, XLII (1967), 251–75.

Homer, Always Homer—*e pluribus unus Homerus*

Sharp-witted as you are,
You freed us from all reverence,
And we agreed too quickly
That the *Iliad* is but a patchwork.

Let our weakness trouble no one,
For youth inflames us,
Now do we think of it as a whole,
Experiencing it joyfully as a whole.

In 1916 the classicist Wilamowitz picked up on Goethe's fourth line and wrote:

Whoever . . . believes that the *Iliad* has sprung through one sudden act from individual lays . . . renounces historical understanding. He considers it, as it is, a wretched patchwork (*ein übles Flickwerk*) and is concerned with it only to separate the good bits from the collector's worthless mortar.[3]

The epithet stuck, and as these things happen, it came to be known in the literature as the expression of Wilamowitz's attitude to Homer—the very attitude against which he had polemicized.[4]

The field of plainchant studies has had its problems about the origins of its objects, too; and the same questions about unity and diversity—in the objects and in their origins—have been of central concern. The questions have somewhat come to rest, and the way they have settled—to the extent that they have—has very much influenced the shape of the field.

Around the turn of this century, two quite separate traditions converged into critical and scholarly attitudes that informed the Gregorian reform movement. One is the tradition of belief about the origins of medieval western chant. The other is the tradition of belief about the coherence and indivisibility of art works as consequence of the unity of artistic creation.

In Carolingian times, ideological, political, religious, and ecclesiastical factors combined with the facts of musical performance and transmission

[3] U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Die "Ilias" und Homer* (Berlin, 1916), p. 32. The translation is from William M. Calder III, "Ein übles Flickwerk," *Classical Philology*, LXIV (1969), 35–36.

[4] See Calder, *op. cit.* The issue over the question of patchwork or unity in the Homeric epics has never been resolved. But in some circles it has been set aside, and the Homeric Question reformulated. For a summary and bibliographical citations, see my essay "Homer and Gregory: The Transmission of Epic Poetry and Plainchant," *The Musical Quarterly*, LX (1974), 333–72. The issue is still very much alive in the German-speaking countries; see Harald Patzer, *Dichterische Kunst und poetisches Handwerk im Homerischen Epos* (Wiesbaden, 1972). Patzer shows that the work of the Parry school regarding formulaic composition and the oral transmission of the epic has met with considerable resistance in those countries, in large measure because of its threat to the conception of creative unity in Homer.

in the creation of the doctrine of an authentic, original body of plainchant called "Gregorian." The sense in which one has understood Gregory's role as its creator has varied from the idealized, metaphorical connotation transmitted in the pictorial tradition showing Gregory receiving the chant from the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, to the more realistic sense suggested by the remark of John the Deacon (*ca.* 870) that Gregory "compiled" an "antiphonarius cento," that is, an antiphoner put together from diverse sources.[5]

What matters most about this doctrine is not the variety of its modes of expression but its central idea, which runs through all of them: that Gregorian chant, as it is transmitted in the sources of the Middle Ages, is a unified body of work, of uniform origin. The idea of a moment of origin does not exclude a redaction as the creative act. Gregorian chant was a canon, authentic, uniform, inspired, as surely as were the books of the Bible.[6] The objective of both the medieval and the modern Gregorian reform movements was and is the restoration of that canon as such.[7]

During the time when the modern plainchant restoration was getting under way, aesthetic ideals that prevailed among music historians of all interests added an explicit emphasis to the tradition about uniform origin. The Gregorian canon was regarded as the product of a uniform creative act, of a controlling artistic will. This emphasis provides the underpinning for the doctrine that Gregorian chant is uniform in its principles of musical style, that each chant is informed and made coherent by the same overall principles of artistic design, and that the consistency of those principles is demonstrable through the systematic analysis of the melodies.

[5] See Treitler, "Homer and Gregory," for a discussion of this tradition.

[6] It is a matter of side interest here that there is a parallel, older pictorial tradition in which St. Jerome is shown receiving the Vulgate from the dove (see J. Croquison, "Les Origines de l'iconographie grégorienne," *Cahiers archéologiques*, XII [1962], 249–62). In 1912 Dom Raphaël Andoyer characterized Gregory's work as one of "organization and revision rather than of composition, strictly speaking." Gregory's sources, in Andoyer's hypothesis, were the melodies transmitted as what is now mainly known as "Old Roman" chant. He describes the process of transformation as one of "fixation, of definitive purification, of absolute perfection of the genre. This apogee is occupied by the Gregorian oeuvre. St. Gregory, as the tradition of the high Middle Ages affirms, is the greatest musical genius of Latin Christian antiquity, and the pre-Gregorian chant, in that it permits us to understand the creative activity of the great Pope, is, for that reason, more interesting to us." ("Le Chant romain antégrégorien," *Revue du chant grégorien*, XX [1912], 69–75, 107–14.) Bruno Stäblein has long been arguing for essentially the same assessment of Gregorian chant, most recently in "Die Entstehung des gregorianischen Chorals," *Die Musikforschung*, XXVII (1974), 5–17; he places the time of the redaction about a half century later, however. The views of Andoyer were called to my attention by Dr. Jürg Stenzl of Fribourg, Switzerland, whose informed conversation has contributed much to my thinking about this essay.

[7] This is still reflected in the new critical edition of the Gradual. Dom Gajard has transmitted and endorsed Dom Guéranger's remark: "When manuscripts of different epochs and countries agree on a version [of a phrase], we may be certain that we have retrieved the Gregorian phrase." (*Le Gradual romain: Édition critique*, Vol. II, *Les Sources* [Solesmes, 1957], p. 11.)

The discipline that is comprised by that study is what Peter Wagner called "gregorianische Formenlehre" and what Dom Paolo Ferretti called "estetica gregoriana."[8] That the disciplines they describe come to the same thing, and that they rest on the same premises, we shall soon see. As their two books, whose titles provided these designations for the discipline, have had the greatest continuing influence on analytical-historical studies in plainchant down to the present time, I shall focus the discussion for a moment on the question of their objectives and premises, through specific citations of their texts.

In the introduction to his *Formenlehre*, Wagner took it as his objective to set forth the forms of the Gregorian melodies according to historical and aesthetic criteria—to penetrate to the essence of Gregorian art through the study of form. There were two requirements: access to the old medieval melodies, not the corrupted editions in use since the seventeenth century, and an approach that combined stylistic analysis with aesthetic examination.

What is meant by aesthetic examination is a search for the sources of beauty in the melodies. That is no idealistic or subjective thing; it is open to systematic, objective analysis. It is a matter of laying bare the principles of musical logic, the aesthetic norms, the *künstlerische Gestaltungskraft* of Gregorian chant. The principles of musical logic are such as these:

The *Periodengesetz*, a norm for the melodic phrase as an arch that stretches to a point of maximum tension and returns to the point of departure.

Principles of symmetry, relating antecedent phrases to consequent ones.

The principle of architectonic organization, building on the first two principles.

The relationship between an underlying architectonic *Gestalt* and its melodic elaboration.

In his discussion of the Alleluias (Pt. III, Sec. II, Chap. 6), Wagner distinguished an old layer whose melodies are "regel- und planlos" from the majority of transmitted Alleluia melodies, which are models of symmetrical organization. The later melodies are the work of "aesthetic deliberation," and they differ from the earlier ones as a "skillfully laid out flower bed" differs from a "luxuriantly proliferating growth."[9] (What

[8] Peter Wagner, *Gregorianische Formenlehre: Eine choralische Stilkunde: Einführung in die gregorianischen Melodien*, Pt. III (Leipzig, 1921). Paolo Ferretti, *Estetica gregoriana, ossia Trattato delle forme musicali del canto gregoriano* (Rome, 1934).

[9] Wagner erected a watershed for the separation of the two layers on foundations that have always seemed insecure: he saw a transition to the new style in the Alleluia *℣ Adorabo*, assigned to the celebration of the Mass for the dedication of a church.

this alleges for the earlier Alleluias is, in principle, a curious proposition about any traditional art—that it is, in effect, incoherent. That this seems not to have troubled Wagner may be read as a sign that his assessments of earlier—and also of "Oriental"—chant are hardly more than a backdrop for his characterizations of composed Latin chant since the Gregorian era. I shall want to return to this issue when it comes time to speak of "centonized" chant.)

The idea of "composition" served Wagner not only for the distinction between early and late chants, but also for the basic ontological classification of the repertory and hence for the basic plan of his book. The repertory falls into "bound" forms—recitation formulas and such that are more-or-less fixed and whose selection is determined by the text to be intoned—and "unbound" or "free" forms, whose melodies are freely composed within the constraints of form called forth by the liturgical moment.

Ferretti's title is also explained in the introduction to his book. "Musical aesthetics is the science or the philosophy of the beautiful applied to the art of sounds. It promotes . . . the understanding of the artistic work itself. . . . Musical aesthetics occupies itself only with the architectonic structure or construction and with all the constructive elements of a musical composition. [It is] the theory of musical form," for "form constitutes the essence of the work itself, and [is] the primary source of all the properties and qualities of beauty, objectively considered" (pp. vii–viii).[10]

Ferretti alludes throughout to the "composers" of Gregorian chants, even to "Gregorian melody-writers," as "artists," creating under the inspiration of their "personal genius" and under the guidance of the "logic" of musical and musical-textual principles. Those principles he sets forth with a *Klassifizierungsfreude* that is well enough known. Their application by the Gregorian composers resulted in chants that are "organic," "harmonious," and "homogeneous."

Inasmuch as the earliest such celebration took place in 608 on the occasion of the consecration of the Parthenon in Rome as a Christian church, Wagner took that date for the beginning of the new style. Risky as that conclusion may be on evidential grounds, the period it suggests is about right from the viewpoint of the tradition concerning the origins of the Gregorian style. Perhaps that argued in its favor.

[10] Here, as later, Ferretti reflects a viewpoint of Benedetto Croce, whose *Estetica* of 1900 was widely read in the first decades of this century: "The aesthetic phenomenon resides in form and is nothing other than form" (Chap. 1, p. 16; I cite the German edition [Leipzig, 1905], for it is the only one available to me at the moment). "Every [artistic expression] is a unique expression. [Artistic] activity consists of the smelting of impressions into an organic whole. That is what one has always meant to say in introducing the idea that the art work requires unity. . . ." (We note the explicit emphasis on the *activity* as the source of artistic unity. This is apparent in the formulations of Wagner and Ferretti as well. Further on this point, see fn. 12.)

"The aesthetics of the musical form of Gregorian chant was born and developed gradually with the rebirth of the old liturgical melodies, restored to their genuine and traditional purity" (p. viii). Ferretti, like Wagner, conceived that the restoration of the Gregorian canon, based on the premise of original creation, was a precondition for the study of Gregorian form. Then, with the old melodies in hand, they both aimed to confirm that premise by demonstrating through systematic analysis the artistic integrity of the individual melodies and the stylistic uniformity of the repertory. *Gregorianische Formenlehre* and *Estetica gregoriana*, on the one hand, and the Gregorian reform movement, on the other, were interdependent from the start.

If Gregorian chant embodies the aesthetic ideal of a unity that springs from the creative act, how does that square with the facts of its transmission—especially with the fact of its use and reuse of standard melodic material? How, as Wagner asked, can a satisfactory art work result from the setting together of standard melodic passages?

Ferretti found a general way to assimilate that fact in an interpretation of plainchant composition that had been published in 1881 by François August Gevaert: "Whereas in the modern epoch the composer's first objective is to be original, to invent his own motives with their harmony and instrumentation, the composers . . . of liturgical chant worked in general with traditional themes, from which, through a process of amplification, they produced new chants. . . . In music, as in architecture, invention consists in constructing new works with the aid of material taken from the common domain."[11] It is of primary importance for Gevaert that the difference is only in the source of the material, not in the creative process of composition or in the artistic value of the product. The comparison with architecture is pointed. It makes no more difference, so far as the creative process and its products are concerned, whether the composer invents his tunes from scratch or bases his work on traditional tunes, than it does whether the architect finds his material in the quarry or in a ruin.

The reuse of traditional material in the plainchant was in no way perceived as evidence against the efficacy of the artist concept or the plausibility of the doctrine of original creation in that domain. On the contrary, the genius of Gregorian composers is manifested in the skill with which they transformed traditional material. That is an interpretation of the artist concept that corresponds exactly to the broadening of the doctrine of original creation to include revision and redaction,

[11] Ferretti, *Estetica gregoriana*, p. 89; François August Gevaert, *Histoire et théorie de la musique de l'antiquité* (Ghent, 1881), pp. 315–16. From Gevaert's publication of 1895, *La Mélopée antique dans le chant de l'église* (Ghent), we learn what he had in mind: the role of whole melodic models—of *thèmes*—in the transmission of the Office Antiphons, which he compared to the roles of the ancient Greek *nomoi* and the Indian *ragas*.

whether by Gregory the Great, by his successors in the papacy, or by anonymous papal or imperial composers.[12]

When Wagner posed the question of whether an amalgam of standard melodic passages could qualify as art on his terms, he was rhetorically imagining the reaction of a hypothetical reader to his discussion of "wandering melismas"—a concept he had just introduced. With this term Wagner referred to a phenomenon in the transmission of the Mass Graduals: the recurrence of standard melismas throughout modal groups of Gradual chants. (I shall turn in a moment to his answer.) Similar things about the transmission of the Office Responsories had been reported by Walter Howard Frere.[13]

Ferretti called attention to the spread of this phenomenon through the Gregorian repertory and dubbed it "centonization." In his theory of Gregorian aesthetics, he established "centonization" as one of the principal techniques of composition and "centonate" chants as one of the main categories of its formal types. As far as Wagner and Ferretti are concerned, the phenomenon was understood, instantly upon its recognition, in the light of the aesthetic doctrine that I have summarized here. There was nothing forced about that.[14] Their descriptions of the phenomenon read like new expressions of the same doctrine. The idea of centonization falls right out of the theoretical context in which it was first articulated. This will be clear from a few passages of Wagner's and Ferretti's texts. (Wagner did not say "centonization," and, on another level of which I shall come to speak, that is an important fact. But his conceptual filing of the phenomenon is exactly parallel to that of Ferretti.)

Ferretti:

One takes from the fund of traditional music a certain number of formulas belonging to a certain modal and melodic type, and one welds them, one

[12] Croce afforded positive theoretical support for this interpretation. The passage cited in fn. 10 continues thus: ". . . that is to say [the work requires] unity in diversity. [Artistic] expression is a synthesis of multiplicity and diversity in unity. . . . Whoever has the idea for a tragedy, throws a large number of impressions into a melting pot; expressions that are long familiar are smelted with new impressions into a single mass, just as one might place in a furnace unformed brass lumps together with the most refined statues. In order to create a new statue, the old refined ones must be reduced in the same way as the formless lumps" (pp. 20–21). This image makes clear the real meaning of Croce's precept that the aesthetic moment is in the *form* (see fn. 10), for the *substance* of art, as opposed to its form, is comprised of *impressions*, which are natural and given. The creative act is, therefore, an act of assimilation and synthesis, the act of transforming impressions into expressions. This also makes clear the sense in which it is the creative *activity* that is the cause of unity in art.

[13] *Antiphonale Sarisburiense* (London, 1901–5), Introductory Volume.

[14] Historians of science have lately been quite seriously interested in the way that the background of theoretical beliefs against which scientific observations are made condition the way in which phenomena are reported. See, in particular, Norwood R. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery* (Cambridge, 1958), and Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962).

chains them together in such a way as to make an organic whole, homogeneous and logical. At first glance, the melody thus gained will appear to have been created in a single impulse. One will call it original, as it is natural and harmonious in all its parts [pp. 95–96].

The Gregorian melody writers . . . ["le melografi Gregoriani" (*sic*)—Gevaert had spoken of the "melographes" of Antiquity; this is revealing of an attitude of which I shall come to speak shortly] composed chants that are true centos, in which musical formulas, taken from here and there, were skillfully bound together [p. 117].

Wagner (in response to his own rhetorical question):

True, one can gather together various stones that, considered in themselves, impress the connoisseur for their polish, their sparkle, and their rareness. But if a valued piece of jewelry is to be produced from them, then they must be given a rich setting, they must be tastefully grouped, and they must be artfully joined together. Are the old melismas chained to one another in this way? The answer is entirely in the affirmative. . . . In connecting such passages together, the old *Choralisten* [translation is dangerous here] showed a mastery that has just now been uncovered again [p. 395].

Willi Apel,[15] at the conclusion of his review of the Graduals, associated himself with these views of Wagner, but went him one better:

These melodies, fascinating in their analytical detail, are equally admirable for their synthetic quality, for their cohesion and union. In fact, the perception of their structural properties greatly enhances their significance as unified works of art, no less so than in the case of a sonata by Beethoven [p. 362].

These passages make two kinds of assertions about centonized chants: they present a theory about their composition and a statement of their value. Why do the assessments have such an ideological ring? What was the need that brought forth these encomiums that border on mania? The music is wreathed around with laurel as it emerges from obscurity into instant monumentality. One has the strong impression that the theory of centonization is functioning to maintain the music on the pedestal to which it has been raised, and that the exercise of *gregorianische Formenlehre* reaches its consummation in these panegyrics. In the conceptual world in which our authors operated, the only alternative could be the assessment of the melodies as wretched patchworks.[16]

[15] *Gregorian Chant* (Bloomington, 1958).

[16] There is something reminiscent in this about the way that certain other canons of art have been ushered into a revival: the architecture and sculpture of classical antiquity in the eighteenth century, J. S. Bach and, later, Palestrina, in the nineteenth. In all four instances, the revival was more than a matter of archeological restoration. The art works in view were reborn already clad in baptismal dress that bore the marks of the strong values of their midwives. Their very appearance—dress and all—served to confirm those values. But History—i.e., written, construed History—*has* this background.

Before, I suggested that the establishment of a *gregorianische Formenlehre* and the Gregorian restoration were interdependent. A more accurate portrayal would be that the restoration had two aspects that are separable only in abstraction: an archeological side and a critical side. The theory of centonization belongs on the critical side. For the remainder of this essay, I want to focus on that, in its aspects as both compositional theory and analytical theory. Having considered its importance for the Gregorian reform movement, I want to reflect on its adequacy as a theoretical account of the plainchant transmission.

I shall begin by attempting a very general description of the phenomenon that the theory is meant to explain, and I shall do my best to do so without implying explanations. My description is in three parts.

1. The repertories of Gregorian chant are transmitted in melodic families that are consistent with respect to liturgical category, to modal designation, and to certain musical features, comprising principally melodic strategies or form and recurrent melodic material. The members of a melodic family are related through those features, and they are distinguished from one another in that they have different texts. That will clarify what is meant by "family" and what by "transmission."

2. In the transmission of melodic families, it is the more melismatic passages that are most stable from one melody to another. A certain number of recurrent melismatic passages, or formulas, provide one of the defining characteristics of melodic families of certain types.

3. These are primarily the psalmodic chants of the Mass and Office that come down from a time before the practice of musical notation. Underlying every psalmodic chant is a stereotyped melodic procedure with very sharply defined points of departure (intonations and initial formulas) and arrival (medial and final cadences) that articulate the melody. It is at these points of articulation that the melodies show the most stereotyped formulas and that they show them most often. Standard formulas tend to occur with decreasing frequency as the melody moves away from the opening and with increasing frequency as it moves toward the cadence. That is, a melodic family may have a standard opening formula that occurs with high frequency at openings. There may be a formula that immediately follows the opening formula, and the tendency is that it may occur in fewer melodies than the opening formula, but not in more melodies, and so on.[17] For each such family, then, a certain number of

[17] In other words, it is *not* normally the case that a nonstereotyped opening is immediately followed by a stereotyped formula, or that a stereotyped formula is followed by a nonstereotyped cadence. The formulas seem to attach to one another with initial and final formulas as anchor points. This general aspect of the phenomenon of formulaic construction is cautiously described here as a tendency. It is very clear in particular cases (a number are described in Treitler, "Homer and Gregory"), but it cannot be stated as a general law for all groups of psalmodic chants in the absence of further systematic studies of transmissions from this point of view. Stated in the most general terms, however, the point is hardly surprising. The melodies move

formulas may be identified, and individual melodies of the family will show these in greater or lesser degree, separated by passages that are more variable. The principal genres that are thus characterized are certain groups of Office Antiphons and Responsories, certain groups of Introits and Graduals of the Mass, and all of the Tracts. The phenomenon of stereotyped openings and cadences is not restricted to these categories. But of all the chants, the psalmodic ones proceed with the highest degree of regularity through phrases marked by cadences and reinitiations, and they show the phenomenon of formulaic stereotyping in the highest degree.[18]

I want to focus this last observation in a slightly different way. The identification of a chant melody as "centonate" is far more than a descriptive statement. It embodies an assertion about how the melody was composed and an assertion about how it works as a melody. The phenomenon that it thus interprets is not restricted to the usual categories of "centonate" chant but is a central fact of plainchant transmission. That is why the theory requires review.

We have seen the answer that the theory of centonization provides to the question of how the chants were composed; that is, how did they come to have the appearance they have? I want to try a brief formulation of an alternate account as background for further reflections on the theory.[19]

The point of departure is a reminder of something that we know. Most of the music we are talking about had its origin and was widely transmitted before the age of musical notation. The composition of the chant—whatever that may mean—and its transmission took place through the medium of performance. We have the music we are attempting to analyze from written sources, but it came down first through oral tradition and then underwent redaction. Unless we believe that the redaction removed all of the characteristics that the music bore through its oral transmission, any account of it must pay heed to that transmission.

When transmission takes place through performance, the controlling condition is the need to keep the performance going, without notation,

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from points of departure and seek goals, and the points of departure and goal points are the most hardened aspects of the piece. That seems musically sound, and in an oral tradition it would have special utility. I shall have more to say along these lines below.

[18] Concerning the association between psalmody and standard formulas, see Helmut Hucke, "Psalmodie als melodisches Gestaltungsprinzip," *Musik und Altar*, V (1952–53), 38. For a detailed study of a single family of psalmodic chants, the Tracts of mode II, see Treitler, "Homer and Gregory." Apel (*Gregorian Chant*, pp. 323–30) offers an analysis of the same family according to the theory of centonization. His book provides the most complete survey available of the phenomenon of formulaic composition in the Gregorian repertory as a whole.

[19] What follows is a brief summary of an account that I have proposed in "Homer and Gregory."

without a catalogue of formulas, without a given line on which to improvise. There was not much time to deliberate from phrase to phrase, and there was no opportunity to revise. That imposes on us a necessity to consider that any of the general or particular features of a plainchant melody of which we wish to give an account *may* represent an accommodation to this condition.

In place of the paradigm in which one presumes an act of composition that produces a piece which, in the absence of writing, is submitted to memory and then repeatedly *reproduced* in performance, we might think of a repeated process of performance-composition—something between the reproduction of a fixed, memorized melody and the extempore invention of a new one. I would call it a *reconstruction;* the performer had to think how the piece was to go and then actively reconstruct it according to what he remembered. In order to do that he would have proceeded from fixed beginnings and sung toward fixed goals, following paths about which he needed only a general, configurational sense, being successively reinforced as he went along and recognized the places he had sung correctly. Different places in the melody would have been fixed in different degrees in his mind; there would have been some places where it would have been most helpful to him to have a note-for-note sense of exactly how it went and others where he could go by this way or that, making certain only that he passed through particular pitches or pitch-groups of importance and that eventually he arrived at the goal that he had before his mind's ear, so to speak. But there was always a tendency for paths to be worn smoother the more he sang the melody. And this might have been so also for the tradition in which the singer worked, including the other singers of his generation and those of other generations.[20]

In place of the idea that the formulas preceded the composition of chants and that composition consisted of putting them together, we might presume just the opposite—that the formulas are actually consequent to the composition of the chants. It may well be that they became stereotyped through precisely such a tradition as the one I have just set forth. The positions of the formulas within the melodies, that is, played a crucial role in the process of the oral reconstruction of chants, one that brought about their classification as formulas.

As corollary to this interpretation, one can also offer an alternate

[20] The central thought here is that the transmission of the music is more a matter of reconstruction than of reproduction, hence that its production and transmission are not sharply distinguishable. This idea is meant quite deliberately to cut across the traditional concepts of "improvisation" and "composition." And, although the context here necessarily involves us in reflection about *oral* transmission, there is no intention of implying that such a situation is uniquely characteristic of oral traditions. The idea of transmission through reconstruction cuts across the categories of "oral" and "written" as well. I shall present a general exposition of this idea in its applicability to a wide range of medieval practices in the *Bericht über den Internationalen musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress Berlin 1974,* to be published by Bärenreiter Verlag.

account of the well-described unity and organic coherence of formulaic chants—something it has never been my design to dispute. It is not that this quality is a consequence of the judicious selection and skillful combining of formulas by the composers but, rather, that the formulas of a melodic family have grown up within the same matrix, and as each has developed in a particular functional position in the melody, each will naturally give the impression of being very well suited for its position. And since it is the case, as Wagner observed, that the melodies do follow a logical progression, the progression of formulas also gives the impression of being logical.[21] There is no need, however, to account for the uniformity of the melodies *despite* their formulaic nature, nor to count that quality a special triumph over adversity.

The other side of the compositional theory of centonization is its analytical theory. The beginning of an analysis according to that theory is the comparison of all the members of a melodic family and the identification of the recurrent melodic formulas that belong to it. These are usually classified as to their normal functional position within the melodies of the family and provided with a system of labels that take account of the functions of the formulas and also of the variants. (Apel's system of labeling also takes account of the pitch to which each formula goes, so his analyses give, at once, some sense of a tonal outline of the melody.) Passages that cannot be identified with standard formulas are usually identified as "free" passages, although some analysts label such passages as formulas in any case. The result of this general procedure is an analysis of the melody in terms of its formulaic content and its formal arrangement.[22]

Trying to compare these two sides of the centonization theory with the alternate interpretation of the formulaic phenomenon I have suggested is difficult. Attempting the comparison leaves one with a sensation not unlike that experienced when confronting the sort of drawing Gestalt psychologists like to show: there is only one set of stimuli on the paper, but one sees, say, either a duck or a rabbit—never both at once.

Perhaps the crucial point on which the two approaches diverge is that the centonization theory presents a static view of the process of composition, whereas it would seem that an account of a process of *oral* composition through performance should emphasize the dynamic nature of the process, stressing, as I have already suggested, the inexorable

[21] It is hard to believe in the possibility of the continued stable, oral transmission of musical utterances that are *not* logical and coherent on the basis of some set of principles; a stable transmission would not seem to be possible without them. We do not require the premise of artistic intent to account for them, and we can hardly count their very *existence* as the special feature of a style. It is hard to think that Wagner had anything particular in mind when he spoke of the early Alleluia melodies as being unplanned and unregulated other than to provide a contrast for the clarity and order of the new chants.

[22] For a concise illustration of the method, see Apel's summary analysis of the Tracts of mode VIII in *Gregorian Chant*, p. 319.

forward movement of the process.[23] That accounts for the failure of centonization theory to raise any questions about the *utility* of the formulas for the composers. *Why* should one have used traditional material to such an extent? Purely as a matter of cultural or aesthetic value? That also accounts for the failure of the theory to raise any questions about the patterns and orders in the occurrence of formulas within melodies, although centonate analysts have long recognized the *fact* of such patterns and orders. What sense does it make that all the Tracts of mode VIII begin with the same formula? All of Beethoven's pieces in G do not have the same beginning.

The static conception of composition incorporates an attitude toward the material elements as fixed, as *res facta.* The elements are *there*, and one composes with them in that one performs certain manipulations with them and on them. Ferretti laid out an entire classification system for the operations that composers performed on the formulas in putting them together into compositions (suppression, addition, contraction, etc.). Apel speaks of "insertions," "reductions," and "omissions." Omissions from what? Reductions of what?

This way of thinking ties directly into Ferretti's designation of the composers as melody *writers.* If that was a slip, it betrays a conceptual structure by which Ferretti was bound. The idea of centonate composition is hardly conceivable apart from the context of writing. It suggests a composer at his work table. The only alternative is to think of it as functioning through memory. But that requires a notion of transmission through memory in which the faculty of memory acts like a sheet of parchment on which impressions are made.[24]

These problems point to serious inadequacies of centonization theory as an account of the production of plainchants. The heart of the difficulty with the theory, considered as *analytic* theory, is best approached through a close look at the "cento" concept itself. The Latin word means "patchwork," and it has been taken into the musical vocabulary from the field of late classical literature. There it refers to a poem or some other composition that has been put together out of lines of text from diverse preexisting sources. Their juxtaposition pointedly creates new meaning that is not communicated by them individually. Often that effect has rhetorical intent. So in early Christian times one recombined lines from Virgil in centos that revealed the Christian thought that had lain hidden in those lines.

Fernand Cabrol and, following him, Ferretti demonstrated that the

[23] In the only published criticism of centonization theory known to me, Helmut Hucke wrote, "Ferrettis Centotheorie ist eine bezeichnende Fehlleistung unlebendiger Überanalyse. . . ." ("Zu einigen Problemen der Choralforschung," *Die Musikforschung,* XI [1958], 385–414.)

[24] The place of memory in theories of plainchant transmission is discussed in Treitler, "Homer and Gregory."

texts of plainchants are frequently centos of lines or expressions from scriptural sources that may be quite diverse.[25] The art of juxtaposing texts of diverse scriptural origin was brought to a high point by the writers of tropes, and there the rhetorical purpose seems quite evident.[26] Ferretti clearly intended such an interpretation of formulaic chants in characterizing them as centos. For he wrote that, like the liturgical writers, the melody writers took their formulas from here and there ("formule musicale prese quà e là," p. 117), and their special merit is that they forged such organic unity out of such diversity.

Are there, in fact, such things in music? The last of J. S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations* incorporates a tune whose text begins "Ich bin so lang nicht bei dir g'west" and concludes "Kraut und Rüben haben mich vertrieben." If one doesn't know the references, it all sounds perfectly coherent; if one does, he has the added experience of coherence and diversity and is amused in the bargain. Sometimes, various late medieval practices in which melodic material from here and there is combined (the *motet enté*, for example), have been referred to under the heading of cento. The propriety of that is not clear, for what we do not know is whether the quotations were intended as, and would have been recognized as, citations.

A modern example comes to mind, and, because it is so arch in this context, it can jolt us into consciousness of what is being said with the centonization theory. In the murder scene of Berg's opera *Wozzeck*, the instant after Wozzeck has plunged the knife into Marie's throat, and as she lies dying, a succession of motives representing associations in Marie's life flashes through the orchestra. All of the language about centonate chant is appropriate to this case: the *composer* has *judiciously selected from here and there* (from several earlier scenes) *fixed* motives and he has *skillfully combined* them into a *unified whole*. In the original sense of "cento," a special point of meaning derives from the juxtaposition that is not in any of the constituent parts individually (Marie's life passes through her fading consciousness).

There are such things in music. But "centonate" chant is not such a thing. The constituent formulas of such chants are not taken from here and there, they are by nature of the one context in which they arose and with which they remain normally associated.[27] Their juxtaposition is a

[25] Fernand Cabrol, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (Paris, 1910), Vol. II, Pt. 2, cols. 3255–59; Ferretti, *Estetica gregoriana*, pp. 110–11.

[26] Paul Evans has shown how, for example, Old Testament passages were given concrete Christian meaning in being brought into juxtaposition with New Testament texts. See *The Early Trope Repertory of Saint Martial de Limoges* (Princeton, 1970), Chap. 4.

[27] I have repeatedly said that formulas are *normally* uniquely associated with a single context. I do not mean by this to overlook or contradict the well-known fact that formulas *have* been transferred from one context to another. There are abundant anomalous cases in which this occurs, but there is also a deliberate and widening

natural outcome of their development, and they are in no way citations.[28]

The efforts to analyze "centonate" chants in the light of a mosaic lead consistently into a nest of unresolved troubles that mean the failure of the method. To this point I have questioned the assumption that if we are able to pick formulas out of a melody then it must be that the composer laid those formulas into the melody. (The positivist roots of this idea are not very far below the surface.) But even before we reach that assumption, isolating the formulas is itself far from a routine matter. We can bring out the main problems in considering a centonate analysis recently published in this JOURNAL by Kenneth Levy.[29] The objective is not to cavil over this or that point of the analysis but to bear down on problems that are inevitable because of the poor fit of the theory of centonization to its objects.

Example 1 below is reprinted exactly as it appears in Levy's article. The music therein comprises two melodies: an Alleluia (a) and an Offertory (b), both of which represent, in Levy's view, a melodic tradition of Ravenna. Letters in boxes identify the constituent formulas in Levy's analysis. The letters M and N represent cadential patterns (the numbers above the groups of notes in M designate the parts of a six-element psalmodic cadence). An asterisk represents a connecting neume in the case of an additional syllable of text. Table A shows the layout of the texts on the left and Levy's résumé of his analysis of the music on the right. Example 2 contains a tabular arrangement prepared by this author of the formulas identified in Example 1. It has the formulas of each group of variants arranged for easy comparison, whereas Example 1 shows all the formulas in place.

The following remarks raise questions about the analysis and the stylistic assessments based on it. They are not meant to reflect on the other aspects of Levy's article. All the questions follow from this one: how can formulas be identified? In asking this question, I must state some premises.

If there is any point in speaking of formulas at all, it is that they play into the transmission, or the composition if you will, of the chants to which they belong. We recognize them through the study of the transmission and the understanding of the purely melodic and melodic-textual dynamics of the melody type. Whether we hold the centonate view of the formulaic phenomenon or take the alternative view that I put forward earlier, we must have some boundary criteria for identifying

practice of melisma transfer. The concept of *neuma* refers to such a practice (as in the case of the "triple neuma" reported by Amalar—see Apel, *Gregorian Chant*, p. 343). But these are phenomena that belong to a tradition later than the period of the oral composition of the bulk of the repertory with which we are concerned here, and they usually involve longer, formally closed passages. See fn. 31.

[28] That, too, was observed by Hucke in the article cited in fn. 22.

[29] "The Italian Neophytes' Chants," this JOURNAL, XXIII (1970), 181–227.

Example 1

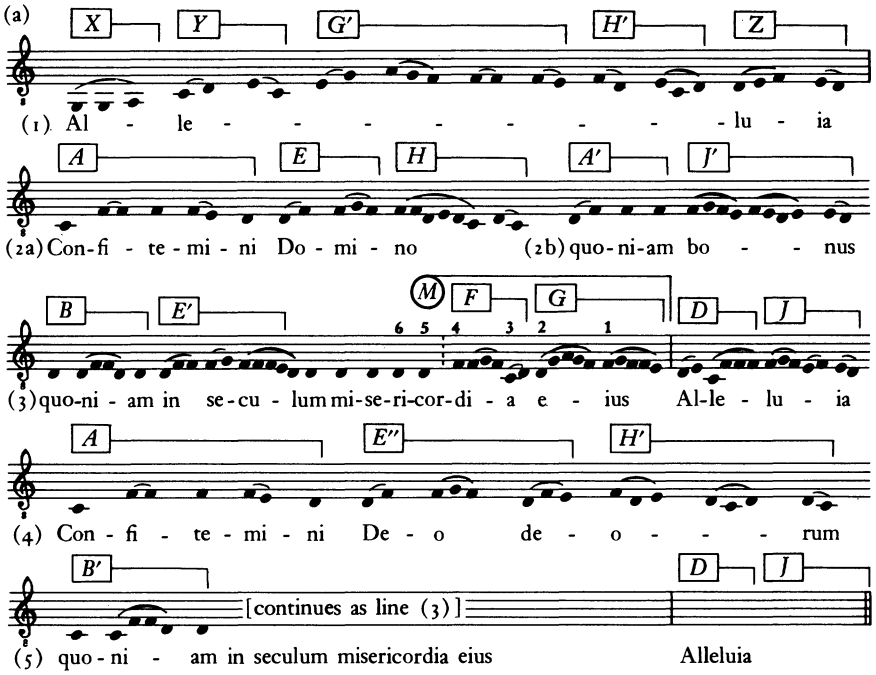


TABLE A: TEXT

(1) Alleluia
(2) *Ps.* 135: Ia + Ib
(3) *Ps.* 135: Refrain + Alleluia
(4) *Ps.* 135: 2
(5) *Ps.* 135: Refrain + Alleluia

(6) *Gal.* 3: 27a
(7) *Gal.* 3: 27b + All. (= *repetendum*)
(8) Doxology A + *repetendum*
(9) Doxology B + *repetendum*

a formula and distinguishing it from other passages. For the identification of a formula is an assertion of the existence of a piece of more-or-less fixed or stereotyped stuff—material that the composer put into this or that place or that the singer held in readiness for performance upon reaching a certain point in the melody. Either way, we want to be able to say with some confidence, here is that formula, there it is not, and there again is a variant of it. If we cannot do these things with confidence and with criteria that are demonstrable, we will have lost the point of the analysis, for then we would have no reason to think that the formula was any more distinct in the mind of the composer or the singer than in

Ex. 1 (continued)

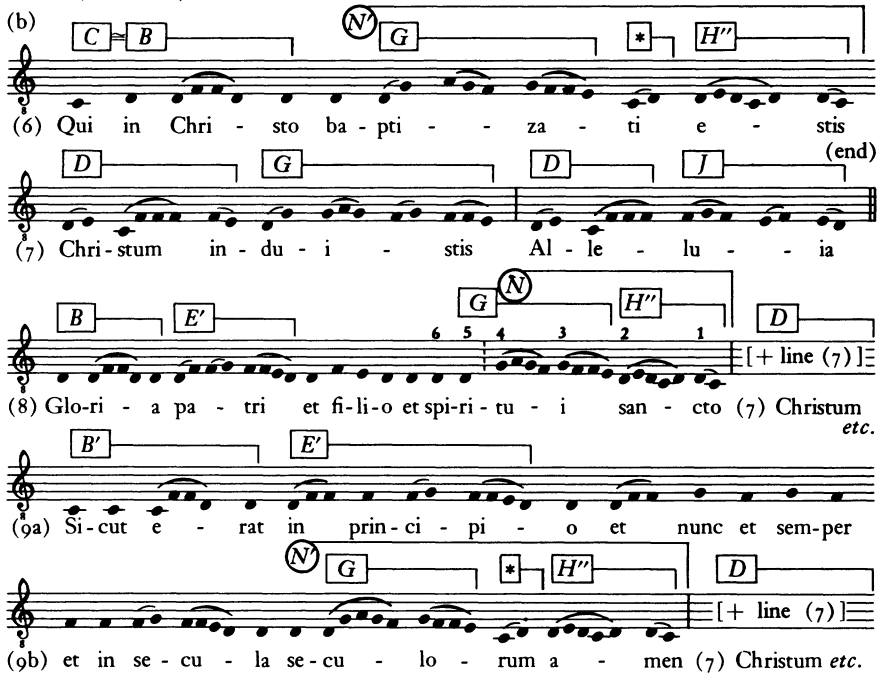


TABLE A: MUSIC

Alleluia I
Psalmodic I + *Psalmodic II*
Psalmodic III + *Cadence M* + *Alleluia II*
Psalmodic I
[= line (3)]

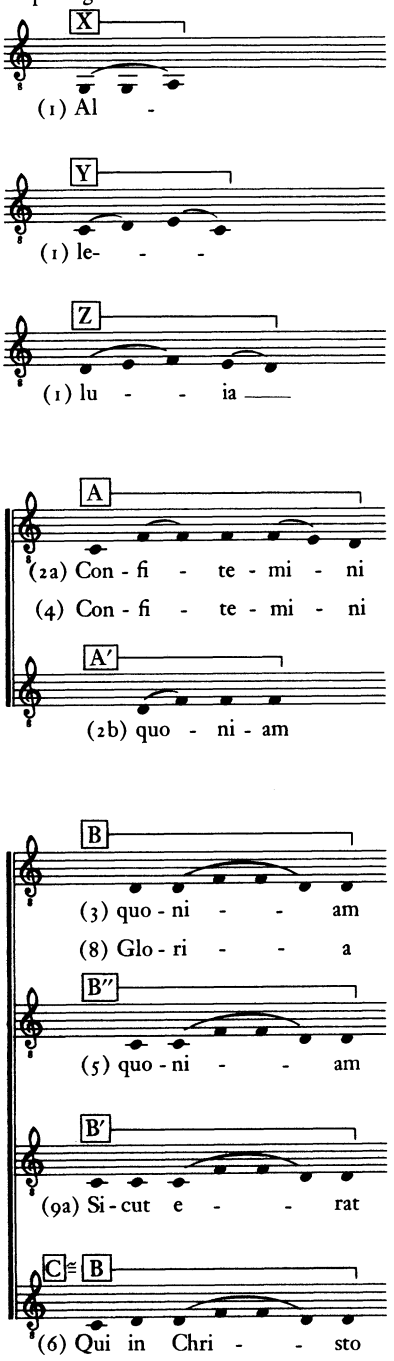
Free-Centonate + *Cadence N'*
Free-Centonate + *Alleluia II* (= *repetendum*)
Psalmodic III + *Cadence N* + *repetendum*
Psalmodic III + *Cadence N'* + *repetendum*

that of the analyst. And in those circumstances we could not make the assertion we meant to make by identifying the formula in the first place.

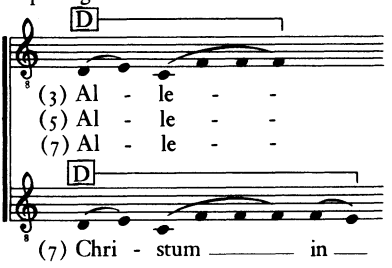
The least subtle of the problems presented by Levy's analysis will demonstrate the point: the identification of the unique formulas X, Y, Z, and F. (Levy, still much with the literal sense of "cento," writes of X, Y, and Z that they are "cut from different cloth.") Why X and Y should have been split off from one another as separate formulas is not clear. But the more important question is, what is meant by identifying them as formulas at all, given that they are unique in this group? The same question arises in the case of F. To be sure, it returns in line 5, but it does so

Example 2

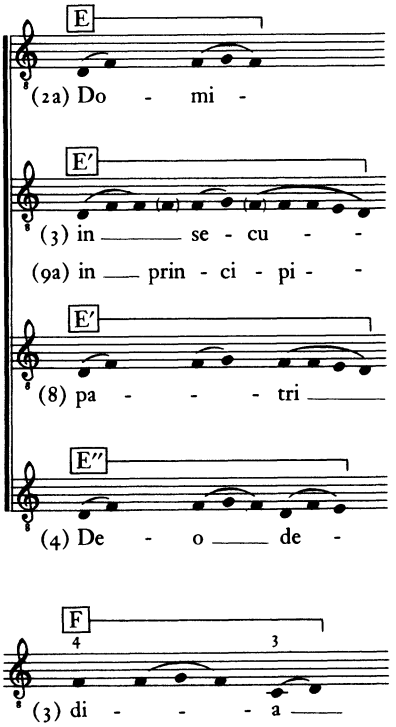
"Opening Formulas"

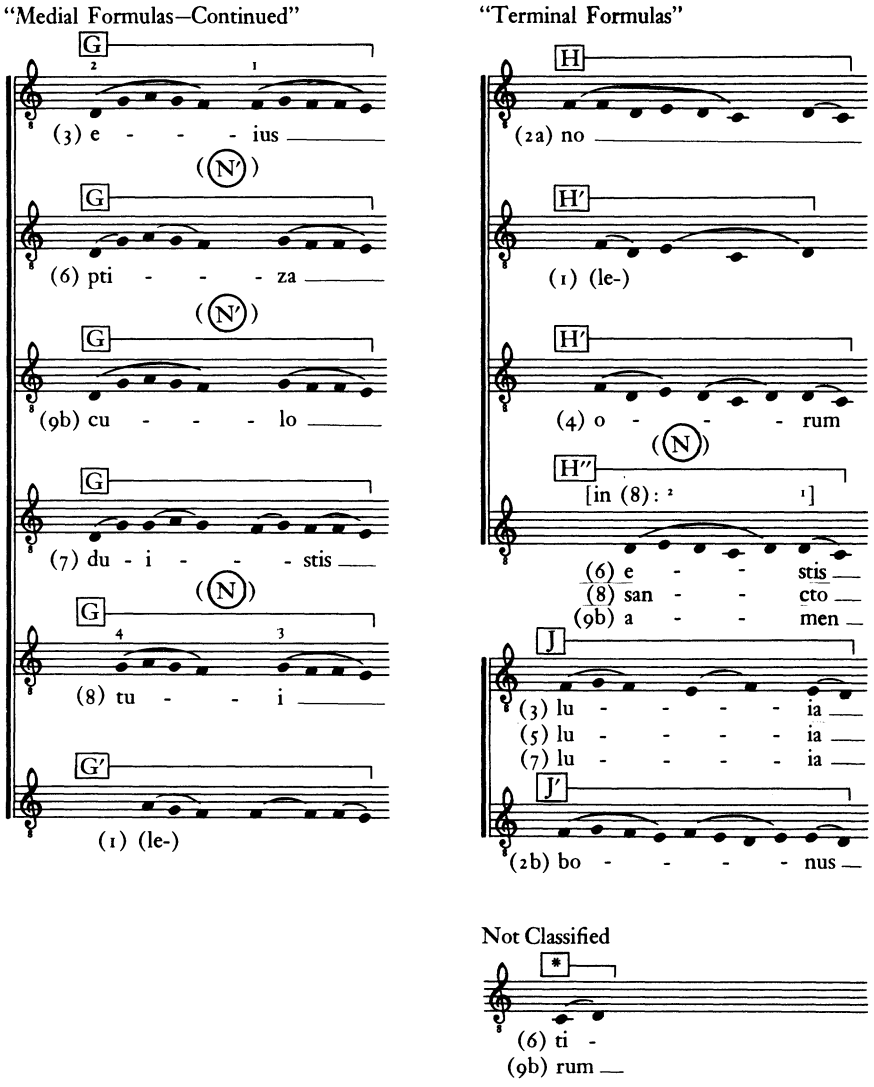


"Opening Formulas—Continued"



"Medial Formulas"





then within the repetition of another phrase. That is a different matter. (I shall return to Z in connection with H'.)

In other analyses (particularly those of Apel) such passages as X, Y, Z, and F would simply be marked "free." In Apel's analytic tables they are identified by a number, which gives the number of syllables of text that have been "freely" set. As even these passages are represented by ciphers, there is an appearance on the paper of an orderly centonate structure in which every note is accounted for. But it contributes nothing to understanding. (A point is made of this here because it is important to

be aware how far the impression of centonate structure is an artifact of the system of labeling and classifying. We shall encounter other signs of that further on.) "Freely composed" is not an adequate analytical concept. It evades the analytical issue, and if it really means to say that passages so designated proceed without regulating principles, then that is implausible for reasons already given in connection with Wagner's remarks about the early Alleluias. This problem with respect to nonformulaic connecting passages infects the process of identifying formulas, for if we are not aware of how the "free" passages are regulated, we cannot act with confidence in designating formulas—especially when we observe the license with which the concept of "variant" is applied in such analyses.

Consider first the passages identified as A and A′. What they have in common is that they rise to *f*—nothing more; one rises from *c*, the other from *d*; one falls from the *f*, the other does not. Considered in context, A′ is an anacrusis to the agogic accent on the first syllable of "bonus." Why should we consider it a *formula*? And why a variant of A? The labels A and A′ say, presumably, "A is a certain fixed thing, and A′ is a variant, a version, of it." And that assertion reaches beyond the classification of groups of notational symbols on paper into the realm of suppositions about the process of composition or performance. Why else use these labels?

Consider, however, the B formulas. These illustrate my meaning about the identification of a formula. In each case there is a four-note neume with a repercussion on *f*, falling to *d*, and then the *d* repeated on a new syllable. That is a configuration one can seize, and its formulaic nature is confirmed by its recurrence, each time with those characteristic features. (Why the opening of line 6 requires the complicated designation C ≅ B is not clear, for it does not appear to stretch the bounds of the B group any more than, say, B′ in line 9a).

Formulas fade into variants; variants into "free" passages or unique formulas. And over them all hovers another specter: the tendency for all the melodies of a mode to follow certain general patterns peculiar to the mode. The formulas E will illustrate; I shall try to state the rule for them: "After an initial period[30] that falls to *d*, rise again with a *podatus* *d–f* to *g*, and then move down to *f*, either stopping there or continuing on to *d*." The question arises, is it a case of formula E or one of its variants whenever something answering to this description occurs in a piece in the D mode? Or put it this way: when the rule has been stated, what is added by labeling such passages as formulas? The question is

[30] I use the word *period* in Wagner's sense, referring to an arch-shaped gesture or phrase that comes to rest and that is the smallest closed formal element of a chant melody. That seems often, but not always, to be what Levy has in mind with the designation of a formula.

important, for the label implies that the passage is known and transmitted in this form as a formula.

The G formulas are still more problematic. They are most nearly alike in the cadential pattern N, which is stereotyped as a whole. In each of those cases the formula moves to a four-note figure *g–f–f–e*. The G formula in line 3 is almost like that; the one in line 7 less so. But taking into account the G′ in line 1, all we can say about all the G″s is that they involve some sort of embellished *g–f–e*, with or without an initial ascent from *e* or *d*. Is that so special for pieces in the D mode that it should be designated a formula wherever it occurs? An obvious alternative is to identify all of cadential pattern N as a formula (but that depends on whether H″ is properly regarded as a distinct formula associated with H and H′; we shall come to that). Then again we could give G′ a new label, but that would augment the complexity of the analysis and add yet another formula. It shows how much the prime symbol (′) contributes to the impression of centonate structure, but also how much uncertainty must often be overcome in using it.

The G group of formulas shows another effect of the labeling system on the appearance of centonate structure. According to Levy's analysis, in going through the melody, we encounter first a G′ formula, then a G. That gives the impression that both versions are *there* and the composer has chosen to use the variant first. It also tends to favor the assertion that G′ *is* a variant of G. But it is not clear why the version that is heard first should be called the variant and the one that is heard later, the original. The same question arises with respect to the H's and J's. It suggests that formulas really are being viewed as fixed and prior to the composition of the chant, and that this view of centonate composition is a presupposition that is merely being illustrated by the analysis.

As with the G formulas, those labeled with an H or its primes include a group that shows formulaic identity—the three marked H″. Again, these occur within the cadence N. The other H's have nothing in common with H″, save their all hanging around the tones *e–d–c*. (Why the two passages marked H′ should have identical labels is not clear. They are not only different in content and goal tone, they occupy different positions in the phrase.) In view of this, there is no apparent reason left to find two distinct formulas in the cadence N.

This takes us back to Z, for its identity as a formula depends on the integrity of H′ as a formula, and that is now in doubt. Indeed, what is there about the boundaries of the H group that would be violated if Z were regarded as a part of H′? The question is raised not as a serious proposal, but in order to point up the arbitrariness of these decisions. There is a different sort of basis for designating Z a formula: it begins and ends on the final; it is a little period, in Wagner's sense. But that raises again the problem of confusion between the structural elements by which a

melody articulates and the formulas in which it is transmitted. The problem is inherent in the theory of centonization.

It must be their formal articulation that Levy refers to when he finds in the melodies a "tidy sense of order." One has the impression that that quality of articulating clearly is being interpreted in the light of a "centonate infrastructure" and a "tight centonate scheme." But the two do not amount to the same thing at all. The phrases of a clear phrase structure cannot simply be taken to be the formulas out of which the melody is constructed as a cento without making the cento concept completely redundant.

These characterizations constitute Levy's critical assessment of a style (a "Ravennate" style) that he proposes we should newly recognize. In a more modest way it is reminiscent of Ferretti's and Wagner's assessments of the emerging Gregorian style. And it suffers from the same weakness of circularity. For we have seen how arbitrary the identifications of formulas are; how insuperable are the problems posed by the attempt to find one's way through the gradient from formula to variant to non-formulaic passage; and how complex the effort becomes to lay it all out as a mosaic. Only a fierce determination on the part of the analyst can hold together these "centonate" structures. And the more refined the systems of classification and labeling, the further away the analysis recedes from any sort of realistic and plausible representation of how the melody goes, and how it was produced and transmitted.[31]

Behind the versions of plainchant that have come down in writing is a complex history of transmission. The principal factors are the procedures of oral composition and the processes of redaction and rationalization associated with the writing down. The theory of centonization, whose deep-lying premise is that the chants as we find them are the

[31] In fn. 27, I referred to melisma transfer as a phenomenon distinct from what is understood as "centonate" composition in plainchant melodies. After completing this essay I became aware of a new instance that nicely demonstrates the point. Charlotte Roederer has published a transcription of a second verse for the Christmas Alleluia, *Dies sanctificatus*, from the Aquitanian gradual Paris, B. N., MS *f. lat.* 776 ("Can We Identify an Aquitanian Chant Style?" this JOURNAL, XXVII [1974], 75–99). The melody is identical to that for the first verse except for the setting of the opening phrase, "Ortus est sicut," principally an extended melisma on *est*. Because the melisma is not a part of the melody for the first verse, and because the second verse does not occur at all in Gregorian sources, Miss Roederer concludes that the melisma is an indigenous piece of Aquitanian melody. But it is, in fact, the melody for the opening phrase of the verse *Libera me de ore leonis* (variously the 10th or 11th verse) of the Gregorian Tract *Deus, Deus meus* for Palm Sunday. As this is one of the oldest Gregorian Tracts, and the melisma is recognizable in the oldest Gregorian sources, we may presume that it has been transferred to the Aquitanian Alleluia, *replacing* the opening melisma of *Dies sanctificatus*. Here is a case where all of the language of centonate analysis and composition theory would apply, and that is instructive, for it is a fundamentally different phenomenon from that to which that language is normally applied.

products of uniform acts of composition, tends willy-nilly to confound those factors and to obscure the history.

It is time for a brief peroration. The answer to the question posed in my title is: "neither; the question is wrong."

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