



Review

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Decadent Enchantments: The Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes, by Katherine Bergeron. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998. xv, 196 pp.

Derived from Katherine Bergeron's 1989 dissertation, this story about the nineteenth-century revival of Gregorian Chant was first conceived when cultural theory was new to musicology.¹ Inspired by the aims and methods of this new discipline, the book raises many questions about writing history today. Was Thomas Carlyle right, as Bergeron seems to suggest: is history made up less of what is preserved than of what is lost?² This perspective acknowledges the distance many think is integral to historical consciousness. It also gives the historian license to use imagination in reconstructing the past. Yet even as self-reflection may feed an author's passion for work, it poses certain risks. How much distracts from the telling? What happens to history when the author's pleasure in writing it is a nearly exclusive driving force? Integrating intuitive and empirical methods involves challenges. How can historians bridge the gap between subjective responses to an imagined past and realities suggested by documents?

Katherine Bergeron looks to the usual suspects—Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida—to support her approach.³ Like the monks she studies and the critics she cites, she talks about scholarly knowledge as a “fantastic vision” “inescapably bound up with the imaginary,” and about “a scholar's freedom . . . born not of revolution but of reverie” (pp. 69–70). Barthes's *Empire of Signs* exemplifies her historiographic method: an excess of potential meaning (as in Japanese calligraphy, haiku, and pachinko) serves as the stimulus to reflection. What is important is not so much what the objects might mean to whoever created or used them, but how they engage the (foreign) interlocutor, leading to what Bergeron calls his or her “enchantment.” Ironically, as much as she uses Foucault's notion of “language as a phenomenon of sound” and argues for the study of chant as sound—“ineffable vibrations” rather than mere written neumes (pp. 106–7)—the chant itself is an absence (à la Derrida) more than a presence in this book.

The four chapter titles suggest as much. “Restoration and Decay” concerns the revival of monastic life at the Solesmes abbey in western France. Its

1. Katherine Bergeron, “Representation, Reproduction, and Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1989).

2. Carlyle, “On History” (1830), cited in Aleida Assman, “Texts, Traces, Trash: The Changing Media of Cultural Memory,” *Representations* 56 (1996): 131.

3. Especially Foucault, “Fantasy of the Library,” in his *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simons (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 87–109; and Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation. Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, ed. Claude Lévesque and Christie V. McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken, 1985).

Benedictine monks are known for restoring “the oldest surviving genre of European music, the repertory we know today as Gregorian chant” (p. xii). In “Bibliophilia,” the author discusses the fin-de-siècle art of making books to argue for the introduction of aesthetic values into chant editions. “Gregorian Hands” addresses the shift from hand-copied editions to modern ones using the latest technologies. In these chapters, Bergeron does not treat chant as what philologists call “texts,” but rather focuses on the “hands” that copied it and the visual forms by which we know it—the “exquisite books” in which it was published and the “sleek photographs” and facsimiles that brought its history into the present. In the last chapter, “Writing, Reading, Singing,” Bergeron juxtaposes two theories of chant rhythm and chant performance. From this emerges a series of what she calls “tales” about a “war” over the future of chant. Throughout, the author weaves themes of enchantment and decay, her vision of a “past perfected,” and her nostalgia for “ineffable substances” and “natural music” that predates the work of scientific scholarship.

Besides cultural theory, another set of issues underlies the book—issues pointed to in an essay by Bergeron’s dissertation advisor, Don Randel.⁴ For him, “most French music and Spanish music of the nineteenth century” occupies “a position precisely analogous to” music by women composers (p. 17). This statement may be inaccurate (classical music listeners surely know a variety of French pieces, as opposed to hardly any music by women composers), but the analogy is pertinent to our discussion. It suggests that, for some, late nineteenth-century France is still an “other” in musicology, and that a wider range of “others” should enter our scholarly agendas, along with more awareness of our relationship to “otherness.”

The concept of otherness is crucial for Bergeron. Growing up Catholic, she “[came] of age after the Second Vatican Council” in a “generation raised on the flat vernacular of the suburban Church, with its plain-clothed celebrants and folksy guitar masses.” She first heard Gregorian chant not at church but at college, where she also first encountered John Cage and Sun Ra. Much of the curriculum at Wesleyan seemed to her “tinged . . . with strange and compelling otherness.” Her prose documents this experience: chant books seemed “mysterious,” their notation “exotic.” Coming to all this “with an odd admixture of curiosity and piety,” she was drawn to “rediscovering” her own tradition, not its “secret” or “mystique,” but why chant as a scholarly subject has

4. Don Michael Randel, “The Canons in the Musicological Toolbox,” in *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons*, ed. Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 10–22. Here Randel argues for expanding the “canon of acceptable dissertation topics” as well as the “toolbox” of skills used to produce them. This means looking beyond “the work itself,” especially beyond works that can be easily appropriated into the canon or forced to “behave in similar fashion” (p. 14). It also means critically examining notation as the interface between oral and written traditions and seeking new approaches to writing. In some ways, *Decadent Enchantments* seems a response to these freedoms.

“such a prominent position in the modern university” (pp. xi–xii). These attitudes not only set the tone of the book, they also define its historiography, one founded on an Orientalist fascination with something dead and different.⁵

Knowing chant as a living tradition could lead to a different experience of its otherness. For those of us raised in the Catholic Church before Pope John XXIII’s radical reformation of its practices, and for the many Gregorian chant choirs who even today sing Sunday masses, chant has a certain reality. I, for one, sang chant from the *Liber usualis* throughout my eight years of grade school and under the direction of a nun trained in the Solesmes method. At our Gothic (revival) cathedral, my father participated in a Gregorian chant choir who sang the 11:00 Sunday mass. Incense filled the air as they performed and men in brocaded vestments walked down the aisles. I learned about ritual and its power of presence. Does the experience of something living preclude us from having distance, or can an equally useful perspective come from empathy tempered with critical judgment?

There is a danger, however, in focusing on otherness. As Edward Said points out, it often veils agendas relating more to self than other. This is certainly the case for Bergeron’s relationship to chant as a historical subject.⁶ On the surface, the book appears to be a cultural history of the monks who produced the chant Catholics around the world still sing for their services. Bergeron focuses on two of them, Dom Pothier and Dom Mocquereau. The former assumed responsibility for the Solesmes choir and the abbey’s scriptorium in 1860; the latter, who arrived with some prior musical experience, entered the monastery in 1875. By 1889 Mocquereau had replaced Pothier as general director of the choir and in the 1890s took over chant research. To Bergeron, these monks represent “a generation of intellectuals preoccupied with the idea of rebuilding the past, a past they did not know but imagined lost in the political wreckage of the previous century’s Revolution” (p. xii).

5. Gary Tomlinson, for one, has written compellingly about our need to recognize the otherness of our historical subjects as a way to distinguish reality from our constructions. He discusses this perspective, from Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, in “The Historian, the Performer, and Authentic Meaning in Music,” in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicolas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 120 n. 12; and in his chapter “Believing Others (Thoughts upon Writing),” in his *Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 247–52. The effect of this perspective on the writing of history, however, depends on how the historian embraces this otherness and makes use of it. Bergeron’s reverence toward her subject as an “other” fuels her imagination, but doesn’t necessarily help her to see her construction of it as distinct from the thing itself.

6. In his *Orientalism*, Said explains that an Orientalist seeks to represent otherness “(a) that bear[s] his distinctive imprint, (b) that illustrate[s] his conception of what the Orient can or ought to be, (c) that consciously contest[s] someone else’s view of that Orient, (d) that provide[s] Orientalist discourse with what, at that moment, it seems most in need of, and (e) that respond[s] to certain cultural, professional, national, political, and economic requirements of the epoch” ([New York: Vintage, 1979], 273).

They both wanted to use old manuscripts to argue for a kind of monody they ascribed to “Saint Gregory.”

In its approach, however, the book is myopic. Writing almost as if other views on her subject are irrelevant, Bergeron never addresses the fact that today many consider Gregorian chant a historical invention and its hegemony an illusion.⁷ Chant traditions existed throughout Europe and contained real differences in notions of structure, coherence, and even melodic shape. Bergeron holds off all reference to contemporary chant scholarship until a cursory mention in her postlude.

The absence of complicating debates should alert us to the fact that, as in late nineteenth-century French operas about the Orient, the subject is a vehicle for something else. Indeed, as she explains in the introduction, Bergeron’s “goal in such an excavation is not simply to turn up isolated shards of our musicological past.” Her real interest is in contesting certain kinds of musicology and in promoting an alternative. Seeing the Solesmes monks’ work as “constitut[ing] the origins of our discipline,” she wishes to argue that “musicology comes into being . . . through the enchantment of history” and that “it is this enchantment that my own historical narrative attempts to restore” (p. xiv). As much as she thinks she is “listening into those places where history may not be able to speak, but only sing,” her subject is not really chant but the history of two contrasting approaches to making musical editions. Pothier’s and Mocquereau’s “Gregorian products” reflect historical orientations that Bergeron views as mutually exclusive: history as a Romantic dream and history as a discipline.

For Pothier, Gregorian history appeared as the aura of time imaginatively experienced by one who, standing at the end of the historical continuum, looks back—collecting the accumulated residue of the past into a single aesthetic moment. For Mocquereau, such history reappeared as a new beginning, a field of possibilities so vast that its ultimate truth, though glimpsed in the present, could only be assigned to some distant future. In one case, then, the historian imagines himself the repository of a broken past that he would seek to rebuild whole; in the other, the historian engages in a process of accounting for that which must, by definition, remain in pieces—the particles of truth in whose collective totality the past slowly reveals itself. (p. xiii)

In the introductory presentation of these approaches, Bergeron acknowledges that both have some merit. For his efforts to “restore” the old chant “*d’après la tradition*” (p. 153), she compares Pothier to Violet-le-Duc, who “reestablished in a finished state” monuments like the Cathedral of Notre-Dame (p. 8). In his *Les Mélodies grégoriennes* (1880), Pothier surveyed the

7. Leo Treitler, “Inventing a European Music Culture—Then and Now,” in *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, ed. John Van Engen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 344–61.

history of chant notation. For his own version of Gregorian chant, the *Liber gradualis* (1883), he chose a note type that recalls the handmade books of medieval times. He hoped that by its sheer beauty this “edition de luxe” would challenge the *Graduale romanum* by Pustet of Ratisbon (Regensburg), the Vatican’s “official printer” who since 1868 had held an “exclusive fifteen-year privilege for publication of the church’s liturgical books” (p. 39). Pothier’s younger colleague Mocquereau sought to demonstrate the authenticity of their work in another way: by providing unmediated access to the chant manuscripts they owned. In his five-volume *Paléographie musicale* (1889–96), Mocquereau published them in photographic facsimiles. With the miniature, inexpensive *Liber usualis* (1896), he was willing to sacrifice some “typographic artistry” (p. 64) to make chant available to the public at large.

As the book unfolds, Bergeron ties these approaches to reified binarisms—enchantment versus discipline, fantasy versus facts, ear versus eye—within which her own values increasingly shape the discourse. This already characterizes Bergeron’s earlier article in *Disciplining Music*, “A Lifetime of Chants,” in which she harshly criticizes Mocquereau for his scientific rationalism, ignoring the merits of his democratization of chant. She appropriates Hayden White’s notion of discipline as repression—without noting that the Benedictines themselves might have objected to the meaning she ascribes to discipline—in order to suggest that Mocquereau’s facsimile editions prevent “the possibility of speculation, of imagination, what [he] called *fantaisie*.”⁸ *Decadent Enchantments* continues this attack on Mocquereau and the kind of musicology associated with his editions. At the same time, the book elevates an ideology of enchantment, that which, for Bergeron, discipline silences. The elder scholar Pothier reaps her praise to the extent that he seems to have relied on his ear rather than his eye.

To embrace Pothier’s chant as “natural music” based on perceptions of the “ear” rather than the “eye,” Bergeron waxes poetic, frequently referring to Pothier’s “single, beautiful text.” She also alludes to the work of Saint Gregory as if it existed. With little discussion of the music Pothier cobbled together, however, we are given no notion of why he chose one source over another or even what makes this music beautiful. Moreover, by examining only the shape of the neumes and their font, without considering the context that makes them music, Bergeron does not allow the “other” (the music) to resist her theorizing, to elicit other interpretations. She tells us only that “Pothier’s musical sensibility, like that of the original Gregory, flowed from his own ear, the site of all good judgment” (p. 148). To explain “the ear’s authority,”

8. Bergeron, “A Lifetime of Chants,” in *Disciplining Music*, 187. Dom Jumilhac, a musicologist with the Benedictines at Saint-Maur, presents a view diametrically opposed to that of Bergeron, who associates discipline with the eye and enchantment with the ear. He points out that during the Middle Ages, “the ear, of which song is the object, was called the sense of discipline.” See A. Dessus, “Assemblée des Catholiques, mai 1882, Restauration du chant liturgique,” *Ménestrel* (27 August 1882): 309.

Bergeron cites Pothier's discussion of breath and proportion, the "free rhythm of discourse" (p. 109). These concerns may speak more of the mind than the ear, but no matter. To recover the "aura" of the past and the sense of devotion it may have expressed, she concurs with Pothier that "it is better to feel devotion than to define it" (p. 109). Inspiration is the font of knowledge, not calculation. Inventing words for the medieval Christian narrative that may have inspired the illustration of Gregory in Pothier's *Liber gradualis*, she spins her own imaginative tale about "the first Gregorian speech act": how chant "begins in Gregory's ear" ("the corridor to inspiration, a dark path leading to all that is intimate, personal, hidden"), how the Holy Spirit "sets the whole process in motion, infusing Gregory with the intimate feeling that first prompted him devoutly to raise his voice," and how all this led Pothier to theorize chant as "a subjective phenomenon" about which, as he puts it, "we cannot say what it is" (pp. 110–11). Practicing what he preached as a member of a 1905 Pontifical Commission on chant, Pothier argued for "corrections" to a proposed *Kyriale* by simply singing what sounded good to him.

Bergeron misses the irony of promoting the ear over the eye in her focus on the visual beauty of Pothier's editions and its responsibility for her own "enchantment." She is serious when she refers to Pothier's aesthetically beautiful edition as "over nine hundred fantasy-filled pages of print—a typographic wonderland of capitals, illustrations, and ornaments . . . a dream come true in print" (p. 49). Yet she criticizes Mocquereau's more "scholarly" editions for addressing the eye instead of the ear. Assuming that people do not hear melodic variants when they see them printed on the page, she writes, "In the abstract, collective space of comparative philology, a melody . . . inevitably fell silent, becoming nothing more than a lattice, a matrix, a grid," its reception "a form of pure analysis" (p. 96). Little context is provided to understand Mocquereau's approach, such as whether he was aware of Karl Lachmann's famous method of textual criticism that deconstructed the Bible earlier in the century or what he knew about contemporary linguistics.⁹ We are told only that Jules Combarieu and colleagues at the Ecole de Chartes (the French *grande école* for library science) held similar values.

Bergeron's reflection on these approaches suggests distrust and fear. "History," she writes, "seemed much more remote—and therefore more truthful—when it was completely unfamiliar. The methods of comparative philology guaranteed this kind of alienation, blocking the historian's ears in order to create room for the strange new facts spelled out, in silence, before his eyes" (pp. 148–49). Mocquereau's facsimiles, like photography, "promised entirely new levels of surveillance" (p. 77), despite the new possibilities they opened to readers to "reflect, compare, criticize" and "go straight to the source" (p. 92). When Mocquereau traces the "history of a neume," he

9. Philip Brett, "Text, Context, and the Early Music Editor," in *Authenticity and Early Music*, 87 and, citing Margaret Bent on this method, 100.

is “controlling” history.¹⁰ Still, when we look at Pothier’s editions, we must ask ourselves whose edition acknowledges change over time, whose gives voice to the past, and whose represses it. Pothier thought that a shift of control from the editor to the reader would “bring about the ruin of the Gregorian restoration” by encouraging “extravagant theories” and “controversies” (i.e., he feared that people might challenge his choices, his taste, and even, in the last analysis, the authority of the Roman Church and its tradition). Like Pothier, Bergeron rejects Mocquereau’s theory of rhythm, which he taught with silent hand gestures (pp. 88–92; cf. p. 109). But, we must ask, is not “feeling” also something physical, and does rhythm “belong” only to the ear, not also to the body and mind? In Bergeron’s story, all this becomes a “war” between “Gregorian art” and “Gregorian science,” or the “Romantic” versus the “Modern” (p. 103).

Never is the projection of Bergeron’s own taste more pronounced than in her description of Pope Pius X’s preference for Pothier’s “tradition” over Mocquereau’s “archaeology.” For Bergeron, Mocquereau’s potential challenge to the Church’s monopolistic control of the field or his “secularization” of the repertory are less important than this explanation:

It was the act of making a connection to a distant past—*living* the tradition, as it were, through imaginative effort—that defined Pothier’s concept of Gregorian restoration. Rather than cutting the cord, he worked to reattach it, restoring the umbilicus through which the chant itself had been nourished by Holy Mother Church. The Holy Father, needless to say, looked benevolently on such family values. In the end, life won. (p. 153)

Is this what Paul de Man was referring to when he spoke of “persuasion by seduction” (as opposed to “persuasion by proof”)?¹¹ Bergeron may want to free musicology of its disciplines and collapse the psychological wall between subjective perception and objective reality, allowing the two to fuse. Such a method may solve the vexing question of how to reintroduce value judgments in historical writing. But what does she leave the reader with in return? Putting aside her ensuing comparison of the pope’s dilemma with “recent debates in the field of American musicology over the chant’s oral versus written transmission,” we must ask, What are the implications of this argument? What is the life that “won” in this decision? The “presumably autonomous text” over a “network of texts”?¹² Elitist “private property” (p. 88) over “more practical, more democratic” chant editions (p. 91)? Personal taste over informed study? Why, in Bergeron’s world, are these so opposed? Can we not have both? Romantic intuition *and* careful scrutiny of documents, “Beauty” *and* “Truth”?

10. Bergeron, “A Lifetime of Chants,” 189.

11. De Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 18.

12. Randel, “The Canons in the Musicological Toolbox,” 16.

In fact, it was myth that won. The Vatican, seeking a unity of authority, chose to replace what Treitler has called “chanting practices” with a closely controlled collection of “chants.”¹³ Wanting to promote the idea of tradition, the Church hierarchy ignored, then as now, the complexities of history, despite the controversial work of F. A. Gevaert and the debate his books stimulated over the actual authorship of these chants.¹⁴ But regardless of whether “Gregorian chant” originated as part of the Carolingian court’s desire for political hegemony involving “cultural uniformity”¹⁵ or from the hands of Pope Gregory himself, we still need to know why it was important to reassert this tradition in late nineteenth-century France.

Since Bergeron never really answers this question, what history does she give us? She tells lots of stories, some of them quite gripping in their metaphors and allusions. Her book has a plot, suspense, culprits, a war, a resolution, and a coda. Still, the historian’s gaze is very narrow here, perhaps to allow for the work of “enchantment.” It is as if, wandering in the countryside of some mysterious land, the author came upon an old abbey, partially in ruins, entered it, and found a few photographs of people who had lived (or once visited) within, a small library with chant books, some essays about chant, and some unbound journals from the time.

She begins her book by musing about Chateaubriand’s “sentimental history” of Christianity, “an immense monument to faith erected in the face of ruins” (p. 1). His delight in contemplating ruins seems to inspire her own prose—thick, like his, with its own nostalgia and personal confession. Her first subject is decay. She speaks of the abbey’s decay, its “powdery layers accumulated on ancient stone” (p. 3), as a metaphor for chant, though she never explains what musical decay means except, by implication, the effect of multiple hands on its transmission over time. Her point is the need for “restoration” and “not so much removing the decay as, somehow almost perversely, affecting to preserve it” (p. 19).

When Pothier speaks, however, it is not of a pastness “communicated . . . through the very fact of decay” (p. 19), but of the “redemptive function” of Gregorian chant, of modern music’s need for regeneration (p. 20). This inner contradiction reflects the main weakness in the book: its insularity from the

13. Treitler, “Inventing a European Music Culture,” 346–47.

14. In his *La Mélodie antique dans le chant de l’église latine*, Gevaert asserted that the “compilation work” supposedly done by Saint Gregory was in fact “the work of Hellenic popes from the end of the seventh century through the beginning of the eighth and that it was Pope Serge I (687–701) who was the principal inspiration for the antiphonary that received its definitive form under Léon II and Gregory II” (Gand: A. Hoste, 1895). See Lucien Solvay’s review in *Ménestrel* (23 June 1895): 197. See also Gevaert’s *Les Origines du chant liturgique de l’église latine* (Gand: A. Hoste, 1890), G. Morin’s *Les Véritables Origines du chant Grégorien* (Saint-Gérard, Belgium: Bureau de la Revue Bénédictine, 1890), and others cited in Peter Wagner’s *Introduction to the Gregorian Melodies: A Handbook of Plainsong*, 2d ed., trans. Agnes Orme and E. G. P. Wyatt (1901; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), 169.

15. Treitler, “Inventing a European Music Culture,” 347–49.

historical world beyond. Little biographical detail is given about the two main characters. We are not told where Pothier and Mocquereau came from or under what circumstances they joined the order. It would have been interesting to know what motivated Pothier to seek “historical pedigree” in his choice of note type and why Mocquereau wanted to democratize access to chant. Bergeron makes brief, pertinent comparisons between disciplines that shed light on chant editions and practices of the time, such as reading literacy and Dalcrozier eurythmics. But her history is thin on the larger situation of France at the time, its politics, and its people, especially their ideals and their needs as projected on their notions of history. She does not discuss how chant restoration related to liturgical reform at the time; how chant (a very hot topic for many people) was understood; or what led to creating secular schools to teach it. For her, the history of fin-de-siècle France is simply a “muddle” (p. 103), apparently not worthy of concern.

Nowhere, for example, does she mention that restoration meant restoration of the monarchy, for there were three kings between 1814 and 1848, Louis XVIII, Charles X, and Louis-Philippe. This also meant restoration of certain social, political, and religious classes, their lifestyles and values. The two writers whom Bergeron uses to support her exposition were both heavily involved with the old aristocracy. (Chateaubriand chronicled aristocratic lives in numerous volumes; Victor Hugo was a member of the ultra royalists and attended Charles X's coronation in 1825.) Bergeron tells us that an aristocrat, Count Montalembert, financed the purchase of the Solesmes abbey (p. 13), but assumes that what was important to such people was “the aura of history” (p. 24), “a reconstituted past forever frozen in the present” (p. 9). Aristocratic society, however, sought not “a grand, vague medieval past, in all its glorious remoteness” (p. 24), but a past regained for the sake of the future. When republicans captured the majority in the Assemblée Nationale in 1877 and the presidency in 1879, ancien régime sympathizers had reason to fear for the survival of their values and culture. So did the monks, who as of 29 March 1880 (when the first laws guaranteeing free secular education were passed) were forbidden to teach. Those who refused to abide by this legislation were evicted from their abbeys. Was it the Solesmes monks' resistance—coming back to their abbey and ringing the bell defiantly exactly two years later—that made them famous? The Chambre des députés spent days discussing their case, the titled aristocrats crying, “They're French citizens!” while others protested, “They're not French, but Romans!”¹⁶ What did they symbolize in French society, especially for *disenchanted* monarchists? Because the “Solesmes” monks worked at their abbey only up to 1880 and from 1896 to 1901, was Pothier “dreaming” only about the musical past, or did his images have other functions, such as nostalgia for their old abbey and routines practiced before the Revolution? Should not the “bibliophilia” of the times—as

16. *Les Annales de la Chambre des députés* (27 March 1882): 468–73.

well as the meaning of aestheticism, the importance of luxury, and the “canonicity of a single beautiful text”—be examined for the social exclusivity it provided and the escapism it empowered for book owners?

Politics enters Bergeron's story only in the postlude, when she wishes to discuss the Benedictines' attempts to win favor from the Vatican. She notes that after *Motu proprio* (1903) the pope took charge of the copyright for chant editions and created a committee of ten (that included Pothier and Mocquereau) to oversee issues related to chant publications. When it came to differences within this committee, Bergeron's focus remains on the Solesmes monks. Here, as throughout the book, we are told little about the competition they faced from other editors and how their views became hegemonic. Bergeron mentions in passing the first Paris congress for the restoration of plainchant in 1860 (p. 16) and briefly summarizes Pothier's Solesmes predecessors, though offering very little information about Dom Guéranger, who actually began the Gregorian restoration. But important questions remain. How did their work compare with alternative chant theories and editions, such as the *Traité de plain-chant* of L. A. Niedermeyer (who had a school where his ideas were taught) or Abbé Lhoumeau's treatise on chant, also published in 1880?¹⁷ Is it significant that the first reviewers of Pothier's *Mémoires grégoriennes* found value more “for the paleographer than the [performing] artist”?¹⁸ Did the challenge in the 1890s that (contrary to conventional thought) Palestrina did not supervise the chant published by Pustet lead to its loss of Papal support?¹⁹

Bergeron ignores completely that there was an international movement to restore Gregorian chant at the end of the nineteenth century and widespread agreement about the urgency of such work. At Milan's international congress on liturgical music in September 1880, one of six days focused on plainchant. Representatives came from all over Europe. Five represented France, though none was from Solesmes. In May 1882 the General Assembly of the Catholic Church voted to teach plainchant in all seminaries and to create a central plainchant school attached to Catholic universities in Paris and the provinces.²⁰ Another European congress in Arezzo (September–October 1882) focused specifically on “restoring the antique tradition of liturgical chant.” To this end, they organized “Archaeological Commissions” to gather “different versions of true liturgical chant contained in the oldest and most important manuscripts conserved in the diverse parts of Europe”; they projected both a “critical and scientific edition of plainchant” based on the results of this work

17. See Eugène Gigout's review, “Quelques publications nouvelles d'orgue et de plainchant,” *Ménestrel* (11 January 1880): 44–45.

18. Review by Georges Lefevre, *Ménestrel* (21 November 1880): 405.

19. Richard Crocker, “Introduction to the Da Capo Edition,” in Wagner, *Introduction to the Gregorian Melodies*.

20. A. Dessus, “Assemblée des Catholiques, mai 1882, Restauration du chant liturgique,” *Ménestrel* (27 August 1882): 308–10; and (3 September 1882): 316–17.

and a “practical edition” of chant for use in churches, as well as committees to oversee this work.²¹ Were the Solesmes monks on any of these committees? This congress encouraged studies and theoretical publications and bid everyone to “return to sources, origins.”²² Were these entreaties a result of the Solesmes monks’ influence or, inversely, did they have any effect on the Solesmes monks’ work? Did the discussions at Arezzo that threw into question the legitimacy of the Ratisbon *Graduale* come from Pothier’s efforts, or did they help inspire Pothier to come up with his own edition the following year? What was the relationship of the Solesmes monks to other Benedictines, some of whom took part in these congresses, produced their own chant editions, and wrote about the subject? In short, how did the Solesmes theories and editions come to prevail?

Another crucial element missing from *Decadent Enchantments* is an accounting of how the Benedictines’ work figured in the “nationalist rivalries” concerning chant. According to Peter Jeffery, German scholars drove much of the debate over Gregorian dialects at the time.²³ If, as Richard Crocker writes, “the name of Peter Wagner is as closely linked to the restoration of Gregorian chant around 1900 as that of the Benedictines of Solesmes,” and some of his work “remains the most comprehensive, systematic survey of Gregorian chant,”²⁴ why is there no comparison with his perspectives and methods, and no explanation of why the Vatican came to prefer the French tradition to the German one?

Changes in society between the 1880s and the 1890s may also have contributed to Pothier’s and Mocquereau’s differences. After the pope recognized the French Republic in 1891, interest in chant skyrocketed. A market for chant emerged. Challenging the Ecole Niedermeyer and Eugène Gigout’s Ecole de plainchant (started in 1885), the Schola Cantorum was founded in 1894 with the explicit aim of “returning to the Gregorian tradition for the execution of plainchant.”²⁵ Regular classes in plainchant were taught there. Vincent d’Indy required a diploma in Gregorian chant for those entering his composition class. Pothier contributed some of the first articles to its monthly journal, the *Tribune de Saint-Gervais*. Did his ideas influence Scholastic notions of *le discours libre* and *musique libre* or other teaching at the Schola? Congresses on religious music in September 1892 in Grenoble and in July 1895 in Rodez and Bordeaux led to resolutions recommending free courses in Gregorian chant in each French town and an annual competition for its per-

21. “Congrès d’Arezzo,” *Ménestrel* (27 August 1882): 310–11. See also reports on this congress in *Ménestrel* (3 September 1882): 316–18; and (1 October 1882): 348–49.

22. A. Super, “Congrès liturgique d’Arezzo,” *Ménestrel* (1 October 1882): 349.

23. Jeffery, *Re-Envisioning Past Musical Cultures: Ethnomusicology in the Study of Gregorian Chant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 75.

24. Crocker, “Introduction.”

25. “Historique de la société,” *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais* (June 1894).

formance. Did this influence Mocquereau's publication of the *Liber usualis* for mass consumption the following year? Better knowledge of the context in which chant was being discussed in the 1880s and 1890s directly contradicts Bergeron's assertion that the "distinctly pragmatic agenda" underlying the publication of this *Liber* was an "impetus [that] came entirely from . . . Mocquereau" (p. 64). Furthermore, the 1895 congress asked that all journals set aside space for discussing chant and Gregorian theory. *Ménestrel* had been publishing items since the 1880s; in the 1890s so too did family magazines such as *Le Petit Piano*. What role did this discourse play in the ideas promoted at Solesmes? Who else contributed to the mythology of a restored Gregorian chant?²⁶

To answer these questions, we must reflect on how the aesthetics of chant (and chant books) addressed other preoccupations of the 1890s. Bergeron may be accurate in calling Mocquereau's use of technology modern, but the monk had other views about the "modern" when it came to the chant. And he appealed to many when, in the *Revue du chant grégorien* (15 February 1897), he contrasted chant explicitly with "modern art" and elevated the former in no uncertain terms: "the truthful, the beautiful, the good can only be simple [*le vrai, le beau, le bien ne peuvent être que simples*]. . . . The more intelligence is pure, lofty [*pure, haute*], the more it is true." Such words had meaning for those seeking to understand the roots of not only Western music but also Western civilization.²⁷ Pothier's erasure of difference in sources for the sake of the beautiful prototype spoke to those for whom "purity" was a code for racial purity. Mocquereau's comparative methods and attempts to democratize chant access, by contrast, surely pleased the radicals of the Third Republic.

Bergeron's claims that the Solesmes editions represent the origins of French musicology are also questionable. Mocquereau's philology might have been important to medievalists like Pierre Aubry, but there were other editors at the time—some less rigorous in their application of philological methods, some equally so. Bergeron ignores that the *chanson populaire* and scholarship around it played a role in French culture resembling that of chant for the Catholic liturgy. Much that she thinks of as unique to Pothier's work can be said about Julien Tiersot's numerous volumes on the *chanson populaire*. Constant Pierre, by contrast, is a good analog for Mocquereau. His various editions of hymns and music from the French Revolution were just as rigorous, just as "disciplined" in their careful comparison of variants as

26. For example, the composer Vincent d'Indy relates a story in *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais* that he once found a village where, under the direction of a local parish priest, the children were singing "pure Gregorian chant." This is summarized in "Le Congrès de musique religieuse," *Le Petit Piano* (15 September 1895).

27. Note that Gevaert's ideas on the origins of plainchant in ancient Greek music recur in Maurice Emmanuel's *Histoire de la langue musicale* (Paris: H. Laurens, 1911).

Mocquereau's chant editions, though much more historically grounded.²⁸ The story of the Rameau edition, begun in the late 1890s, would also have shed light on the origins of the discipline in France, as would the work of music librarians Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin and Gustave Choquet. And does musicology not include music history? Louis Bourgault-Ducoudray's music history classes, begun in 1878, were so popular that they were reviewed annually in the popular press and attended by the general public as well as Conservatory students.

Frustrated with the modern crisis Max Weber called disenchantment, Bergeron hopes belief will help her understand the past. I can empathize. Perhaps, like Stephen Greenblatt, she sees herself as a shaman, seeking to "speak with the dead."²⁹ Some of us yearn not only to know but also to experience another time, whether we are fleeing the horrors of our own day or feeling suffocated by its limitations. What we are seeking and how we construe the search informs the questions we ask and the history we write. When otherness becomes a pretext for "fantasy," however, history becomes the habitus of one's imagination without "the anxiety of not-knowing."³⁰ When Bergeron declares that "life won," we are left with no doubt as to where she stands, though we are told very little about what anyone else thought. Even if the author's method appeals to those seeking more space for personal expression in musicology, to the extent that she advocates a world of "purity," "unity," and the "beauty" of one voice instead of the potential noise and challenge of multiple voices, she (ironically) leaves little room for the reader's subjectivity and engagement. The reader's enchantment, like the author's, depends on a wealth of detail—the more rich and diverse, the more possibilities for meaning and the more freedom to seek and imagine a space for oneself.

If it is necessarily an experience to be shared, history (I would argue) is always about effects and consequences—voices of the many—just as music is always about more than the text and its creator's intentions. Bergeron gives us an almost incantatory repetition of words, dynamic narrative configurations, and a closed structure; in this way her book resembles historical fiction. But, as Gary Tomlinson writes, "historical understanding is only as deep as its context is 'thick,'" ³¹ and hers, as I have suggested above, is thin. With historical depth replaced by seductive rhetoric, and the production of knowledge overshadowed by ever-present value judgments, what is left is Bergeron's voice, and that voice heralds nostalgia for the beauty and politics of a premodern world. Musicology as mythology has a long history in writing about French music,

28. Pierre, *La Musique exécutée aux fêtes nationales de la Révolution française* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1893), *Musique des fêtes et cérémonies de la Révolution française* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1899), and *Les Hymnes et chansons de la Révolution* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1904).

29. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 1.

30. De Man, *Resistance to Theory*, 59.

31. Tomlinson, "Authentic Meaning in Music," 120.

one that is as problematic today as it was in the 1930s. We need better writing, like hers, but at the same time more awareness of the challenges, responsibilities, and implications of new historical methods.

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Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music, by Judith Tick. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. xiv, 457 pp.

Ruth Crawford Seeger is still something of a fringe figure, familiar to those who specialize in women composers and twentieth-century American art music, but largely unknown to the general public. Many who have heard of Crawford Seeger know her chiefly through her connections to better-known personalities: her friend Henry Cowell and other members of the American "ultramodern" movement of the 1920s, and of course her husband, Charles Seeger, and the folksinging Seeger children. It is the singular achievement of Judith Tick to present, in her wide-ranging and insightful new biography of this remarkable woman, a compelling case for positioning Ruth Crawford Seeger directly at the center of crucial issues—not just for women's music, and not just for American music, but for twentieth-century music as a whole.

Certainly Crawford Seeger (1901–1953) led a fascinating and full life. Emerging from a relatively unremarkable family background with a conventional training as an "American woman pianist," she rapidly established herself within less than a decade (1924–32) as one of the most radically original composers of her generation in America (or anywhere else, for that matter) and became the first woman to win a Guggenheim Fellowship in composition. A developing relationship with Charles Seeger, first as his pupil in composition (starting in 1929) and then as his lover and eventually his wife (1932), seemed initially to coincide with new heights of achievement in her art; most would cite her String Quartet 1931 and the *Three Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg* (1930–32) as pinnacles in her oeuvre. Yet her production of original works ceased in 1932, as she immersed herself in Depression-era politics, the raising of a family (she and Seeger had four children), and, increasingly, the transcription and arrangement of American folk songs.

Crawford Seeger's involvement in American folk music began as an offshoot of the populist temperament of the times and of her husband's connections with the Lomax family. It soon grew into a consuming musical passion, however, resulting in major contributions to the Lomaxes' *Folk Song U.S.A.* (1947) and in three substantial collections that appeared under her own name, the most famous of which is *American Folk Songs for Children* (1948). During this time, Crawford Seeger also made a significant impact on American music education by stressing, through her public appearances as a