

**The Modernist and the Mystic:
Albert Houtin's *Une grande mystique***

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Each of the protagonists develops a vision of this history consistent with the interests linked to the position he occupies within the history; the different historical accounts are oriented according to the position of their producer and cannot claim the status of indisputable truth.

Pierre Bourdieu¹

For those whose musical horizons encompass the recent revival of interest in Gregorian chant, Solesmes perhaps will not be entirely unfamiliar. The identification of this French Benedictine abbey with plainchant dates back well into the nineteenth century and its debates over how to interpret authentically the musical manuscripts of earlier eras.² In the course of that century, Solesmes became synonymous with the liturgical revival more broadly, its prominence dependent in no small measure on the efforts of its founder, Dom Prosper Guéranger (1805-1875).³

Properly speaking, Guéranger was the restorer of Benedictine life at Solesmes when, as a diocesan priest he and several companions commenced living a common life there in 1833, according to a modified Benedictine Rule. A priory had been established on the site in the early eleventh century and, despite natural and human disasters, monastic life continued, until its suppression in 1791 under the directives of the French Revolution. Thus, when forty two years later Benedictine life was resumed at Solesmes those who undertook it did not have direct experience of monastic formation. It was not until 1836 that they assumed the Benedictine habit. The following year the constitutions received papal approval, Solesmes was raised to the status of an abbey and head of the new Benedictine congregation of France, Guéranger made his monastic profession and was appointed abbot, without having made a novitiate or been a simple monk. The title of founder applied to Guéranger thus is not inappropriate.⁴

Already during his seminary years Guéranger had come under the influence of the Mennasian movement and its ultramontanism. While he would distance himself from La Mennais as the latter's positions grew

more extreme, the ultramontaine influence would endure. At Solesmes it found expression in the use of the Roman Missal, the Roman Breviary, support for Roman doctrines, and especially in its campaign for liturgical reform and liturgical restoration. Guéranger and Solesmes loomed large in the fight against the Gallican party in France and the adoption of the Roman rite in dioceses that followed other traditions. Guéranger saw in this effort both a means to unify the church and to counter views of religion as individualistic, moralistic, rationalistic, or nationalistic.⁵

He also held Gallicanism—along with his other *bête noire*, Jansenism—in significant measure responsible for the decline of sanctity in France since the seventeenth century. While the “twilight of the mystics” is said to have occurred with the controversy between Bossuet and Fénelon, already before the Quietist affair opposition to mysticism had emerged. The outcome of that controversy was a severe blow to the mystic current in France and to the contemplative life more broadly. While its liturgical life was central to Solesmes’ living of the monastic vocation, and while study loomed large in Guéranger’s vision of ecclesiastical restoration, at least initially, there is manifestly an openness to the contemplative dimension of that vocation. This element will assume greater prominence over the years, both with Guéranger himself and the Solesmes community. Over time, the Benedictine abbey will cease being a center of liturgical advancement and, accompanying a growing conservatism, there will be a turning inward toward mysticism and contemplation. The founding of a women’s abbey at Solesmes in the 1860s constituted an institutional demonstration of the contemplative ideal and a further step away from the liturgical mission of the first abbey. Guéranger chose as superior of this community Jenny Bruyère (1845-1909), known in religion as Mère Cécile. Together with the third abbot of Solesmes, Dom Paul Delatte (1848-1937), she will figure prominently in the controversies that form the substance of Albert Houtin’s study, *Une grande mystique, Madame Bruyère* (1925, 2nd ed. 1930).

In September of 1887 when Houtin arrived at Solesmes to test his monastic vocation he found a community divided both geographically and ideologically. The French government had expelled the monks from the abbey in 1880, and again from 1882 to 1890. Although the nuns had been allowed to remain in their abbey, the monks were dispersed among the village, making common life difficult. This also created a situation of more frequent interaction between monks and nuns and of growth in the influence of the Mother Abbess over the

monks. She exercised influence directly, through her contacts with monks who were encouraged to avail themselves of her spiritual wisdom, and indirectly through two monks who became virtually her disciples. One of the latter held the position of novice master and in that capacity served as a conduit of the teaching of one whom he regarded as a saint. This occurred with the approval of the second superior of Solesmes, Dom Couturier (1817-1890). Guéranger's successor reinforced moves away from study and scholarship, valuing such only as preparation, sustenance, illumination of the contemplative life.⁶

Thus, in the course of his novitiate, it became apparent to Houtin that Solesmes was a community divided between the “old”—attracted by memories of the community of Saint Maur with its scholarly ideals, and the “young” with their championing of what they regarded as the true tradition of the Order—the contemplative life and personal holiness. Moreover, these differences had taken on party labels, being designated “the Cecilians” and “the anti-Cecilians,” attesting to the abbess's importance. Divergence of opinion was further complicated by personal rivalry as the faction of the young was itself divided in its support of a successor to Dom Couturier between the novice master, Dom Logerot, and Dom Delatte, who had only recently taken vows. Moreover, these divisions were not confined to Solesmes itself, but were also present in its daughter houses at Ligugé (founded in 1853), Marseilles (1865) and Silos in Spain (1880).⁷ Thus Houtin had first-hand acquaintance with the principal figures that would feature in *Une grande mystique*, as well as issues that drove their controversy.

Houtin's own sympathies were with the monastic ideals of the “old.” For a variety of reasons it was determined that his vocation did not lie with Solesmes and he returned to diocesan seminary, being ordained for the diocese of Angers in 1891. Although his novitiate had not been successful, over the next several years he continued to mull over the possibility of a Benedictine vocation and remained in contact with Benedictine life at Silos and at Solesmes. He was able to follow closely the events he would later bring into print.

In reality, *Une grande mystique* is made up of two texts. By far the greater part consists of a memorandum written in 1891 by a monk of Solesmes, Dom Joseph Sauton, setting forth for the Holy Office certain alleged abuses he experienced that compromised monastic life at the two abbeys. A major share of the responsibility for the deviations he placed on Mère Cécile Bruyère. The memorandum he communicated to the

Holy Office in April of 1892 consisted of four parts: an historical section setting forth events leading up to the election of Dom Delatte as abbot in 1890, a theological evaluation of the mystical phenomena claimed by the abbess, a medico-psychological evaluation of her family background and behavior, and a final section noting the state of affairs at Solesmes in 1891. In the first edition of *Une grande mystique* Houtin exercised discretion and did not publish the third portion of Sauton's text. After Houtin's death, his literary executor, Félix Sartiaux, decided to include it in a second edition.⁸ In both editions the memorandum is prefaced by a biography of Bruyère which takes the narrative beyond the point reached by Sauton's memorandum.

Sauton's Solesmes

As [Erving] Goffman argues, narrators assume a wide range of roles in narratives. . . . The narrator can move between such guises as a participant in the narrated events, an eyewitness to their unfolding, a commentator on their social and historical location, an observer who can trace what happened later, an interpreter who can tell why events took a particular course, and a participant in the ongoing, narrative event who can thus point to the significance of these events for the narrating event.⁹

After completion of medical studies and a period of several years spent working with nervous and mental illnesses in Paris, Joseph Sauton became a postulant at Solesmes in 1884. He was then 27. Dom Couturier presided over a monastic community living under anomalous conditions, dispersed outside the abbey. Dom Logerot presided over the novices, and it soon became apparent to Sauton that Mère Cécile was being put forward as the exemplar of the monastic life and the continuator of Dom Guéranger's spirit, over the abbot. For Logerot, the abbess "is the personification of the Church, whose fate has been placed in her hands." The theory of vicarious suffering, prominent in French spirituality at the time, is manifest in his conviction that the voluntary acceptance of her "physical and moral sufferings" play no small role in resisting the trials and tribulations visited upon the church. She is credited with the gift of bilocation, which enables her to assist those at Rome with decisions affecting the church's wellbeing; she possesses the gift of clairvoyance; she can perform miracles; "in a word, this is the greatest saint of modern times."¹⁰

Despite these encomiums of the abbess as “an extraordinary mystic, an eminent saint” (86), Sauton initially was not converted to Logerot’s views. Nor did he think the frequenting of Saint-Cécile by his fellow novices was prudent practice. At several points in his narrative it is apparent that there also are underlying gender issues.¹¹ Sauton countered Bruyère’s claims to have received from Guéranger on his deathbed the care of his monastic sons and daughters as a solemn mandate, with a denial that the abbot could have meant this. For, “more than any other, he respected the plan of God, who places power in the hands of men: the mission of women is carried out in other areas” (88). All the more so when it is a matter of male hierarchy: priesthood, abbacy, direction of the Congregation (88; cf. 99-100). Despite Logerot’s open veneration of the abbess and Couturier’s esteem for her spiritual attainments, Sauton kept his distance, which was reciprocated by a coldness on Bruyère’s side.

After Sauton’s monastic profession in 1885 this state of affairs underwent a transformation. His service as a doctor brought him into closer relations with Sainte-Cécile and its superior, softening his impressions of Mère Cécile. Further, the abbot’s urgings that the abbess could be of substantial assistance to Sauton’s spiritual progress began to have their effect. In effect, Bruyère’s sanctity altered his perception of her femininity: “it was not a woman but a saint with whom I was going to speak, a saint divested of the weaknesses of her sex, a saint clothed with the title and the rarest privileges that the Son of God deigned to accord those whom he named as his spouses, etc.” (100). In May of 1886, with requisite docility, he placed himself under the abbesses’s direction. During his novitiate the novice master had shared the intimate thoughts and experiences of Bruyère’s interior life via his reading of her journal and correspondence. Over 1886 through 1888 Sauton would experience her claims and her character first hand.

If according the Mother Abbess an aura of sanctity did much to alter his perception of her feminine status, it did not as readily transform his monastic ideals. Her language of spiritual maternity, designating Sauton her “beloved little child,” brought through a “mystical death” to a “new birth” and receiving in consequence a new name, her “dear little Tibertius”¹² nursed “at her breast” and nourished with “a virginal milk” (120-122), stood at odds with his militant image of the monk as a disciplined, virile knight of the holy church (105). Through acts of will he suppressed such thoughts, but could not banish them entirely. Nor could the doctor trained in psychopathology be set entirely at rest.

In yet other ways Sauton experienced cognitive dissonance, based on Bruyère's claims to spiritual favors, as those were revealed in her autobiographical and other personal writings made available to him as well as in their verbal interchanges, and patterns of behavior he witnessed over time. He reproduces textually two accounts, dating from the 1870s, of what are apparently visions of Christ (131-133) and his Blessed Mother (134-135), going into fine detail over their respective appearances. In the latter case, through a communication beyond words, "by a kind of mutual compenetration" (134) Mary shared the joys of her own virginal motherhood. To Sauton directly the abbess declared that she received an apparition of Christ who, despite her conviction that it was in the eternal plan of God that she would soon join her Lord and Spouse in his heavenly kingdom, her presence on earth was still required. Later in his narrative Sauton reveals the importance she attributed to that continuing earthly exile. At the death of Cardinal Pie in 1880 she pronounced, "Three of the four columns of the Church are no longer: Dom Guéranger, Cardinal Pie and Pius IX. And yet God cannot let it be borne only by me." To which he comments, "The sole column which remained standing was not Leo XIII, but rather the Madam Abbess of Sainte-Cécile, both Cecilian monks and nuns repeating with no less emotion than conviction: 'Madam Abbess carries and supports the entire edifice of the Church'" (237). Her "sublime mission," subject to the fierce assaults of the Devil, who "saw in her the most redoubtable enemy," required more than the ordinary run of guardian angel. Sauton reports, "The Lord had to this effect delegated Saint Michael to her, with whom she lived in a constant familiarity, and all the other angels that comprised his cortège." To him she avowed, "How lovely are all these angels, my little Tibertius. They flutter about me unceasingly, causing me to hear celestial concerts; sometimes they even deafen me to the point that I am obliged to impose silence upon them." Apparently Dom Logerot's credulity went so far as to impute the dictation of Bruyère's treatise on prayer to angelic dictation, at such rate that she could scarcely keep up with it! (130-131).

Such are a sampling of the claims to extraordinary sanctity. On several occasions the abbess's character struck a discordant note with Sauton. He cites several occasions where she broke confidentiality, both his and others. The abbots of the daughter houses and Dom Couturier himself were not immune to negative characterizations (118-120). In short, she undermined others in order to exalt herself. In light of these behaviors the doctor reemerged to question the monk. But the doctor could also find mitigating circumstances: her aberrations were the effects

of an unhealthy heredity. However, the doctor could not simply confine himself to exculpatory diagnosis. The “beloved child” became the “devoted son” (152) as he sought to express his concerns to his spiritual mother. Her reaction induced a crisis into their relationship:

Until then I never thought that she had anything more than a defective organic constitution leading to the strange need to lie and to toss out spiteful insinuations about others. Such disorders were serious, but still could be reconciled, if need be, with a degree of sanctification above the ordinary . . . (153)

The ferocity of her response and the pride it manifested he could not however reconcile with a high degree of sanctity. On the contrary, it was the very negation of it. All this took place close to Sauton’s ordination to priesthood, which occurred in March of 1888. Around that time he became aware of a campaign conducted by the abbess with the intent of undermining him in the eyes of the monks, the nuns, and even those outside the monastery.¹³ A rift had been created and it would not be bridged.

Thus Sauton migrated and was migrated to the ranks of the anti-Cecelians. The abbess had earlier wielded her influence to secure the appointment of Dom Logerot as novice master. In the interval Henri Delatte (in religion Paul) had entered Solesmes and in him she discerned Guéranger’s true successor.¹⁴ At Dom Couturier’s death in 1890 she worked to secure Delatte’s election as abbot. His success in attaining that position further alienated Sauton.

Having set forth his relations with Mère Cécile, Sauton, in the second part of his memorandum views her claims to sanctity and mystical experience from a theological perspective. Reference has already been made in passing to a treatise on prayer written by the abbess. In 1885 she began writing *De l’Oraison*, destined originally for the nuns of Sainte-Cécile. Later enlarged, it was published and circulated under the title, *La vie spirituelle et l’oraison*.¹⁵ It was not employed by Sauton as an object of direct theological analysis, as in general he found it to be in harmony with the church’s doctrine (236). He based his theological critique on her private revelations of her mystical experiences—and found in them an entirely different person than the one manifested in the published work.

He begins this section with a retrieval of the classic teaching on the possible sources of mystical phenomena: they may be divine, diabolical or naturalistic in origin. He then proceeds to test her visions and revelations against these possibilities. Given the historical importance of visions as warrants for the authority of women mystics,¹⁶ and their salience for Bruyère herself, attention will be confined to his evaluation of them. The two visions reported textually in the first, historical part—those of Christ and his Mother—are retrieved here for theological examination.

As an initial step, he categorizes them theologically as “imaginary visions,”¹⁷ i.e., “a sensible representation, circumscribed within the limits of the imagination, and which presents itself naturally to the mind with as much vivacity and clarity as physical realities themselves”(201). Given the non-corporeal status of the objects of this type of vision, these experiences are very subject to illusion. If naturalistic in origin, visionaries deceive themselves. If supernatural in origin, they may be deceived by a demon. It is necessary to have recourse to the mystical theological tradition to judge whether such visions may be divine.

The visionary experiences of Christ as reported by Saint Teresa serve as a touchstone of comparison with Bruyère’s. For the Carmelite, such interior visions stimulate in the soul an attraction above itself, imprint an image which leaves a deep and lasting impression on the mind, and produces fruits of grace in the soul. For the spiritual masters, there is agreement that such recipients, were they to draw attention to themselves by repeatedly proclaiming the graces with which they have been favored, show by such practices either the natural origin or the diabolical inspiration of their experiences (202-205). On all of these counts the Benedictine abbess’s vision fails to measure up. Hers confines itself to a description of Christ’s appearance, the work of a literary artist adept at surface impressions that fail to convey the intellectual and moral beauty of the God-man. While finely wrought in its detail, the overall effect is literary: an exercise in style, leaving an impression less striking than would viewing some devotional image. Moreover, far from keeping an edifying reticence, she made copies of her vision available to the monks and nuns.

Bruyère’s second vision of Our Lady manifests the same characteristics, which is to say the same defects. In addition, Sauton notes that the communication revolves around the themes of spiritual

maternity that so preoccupied the abbess. In the guise of being about the Mother of Christ it is in reality about the Mother Abbess. Visions rather are to lead to the grandeur, the holiness of God. "Mystical theologians are also in agreement in not admitting, as divine supernatural, wonders whose object would be sterile, childish or grotesque" (211).

After proceeding to evaluate an intellectual vision she reported, accounts of revelations received, her powers of discernment regarding aptitude for a monastic vocation and for progress in the mystical life, and noting once again her lack of virtues that constitute both foundation and fruit of a true mysticism (215), he concludes that her experiences were natural in origin rather than supernatural. The combination of the facts he reviewed and the theological authorities he cited render impossible a divine character to the various prodigies examined (213).

In the third part of the memorandum, the doctor, never very distant, moves to the forefront and renders his diagnosis, laying bare the basis upon which Bruyère's mysticism truly rests. Although part of his clinical experience was gained at the Salpêtrière under Jean-Martin Charcot, Sauton is no reductionist. In his view medical science needs to maintain a certain humility in face of the supernatural, while retaining a utility in detecting illusion or stimulation that proceeds from unhealthy psychic conditions (315). The line between the natural and supernatural is, in the very nature of things, difficult to trace. the supernatural, divine or diabolical, cannot however simply be ruled out. He does note that in his own clinical experience he never encountered "any sign that disclosed a diabolical intervention" (314). The fascination with the influence of heredity evident in latter nineteenth-century literature, such as Émile Zola's Rougon-Macquart cycle of novels, surfaces here. An examination of Mère Cécile's family of origin reveals a legacy of nervous disequilibrium and hysteria, which leave their mark on Jenny Bruyère's own childhood and adolescence.

Hysterics can be divided into three classes: those whose symptoms are purely somatic, those exclusively psychic, and hysterics who exhibit a combination of the two. In Bruyère he finds an example of the second type, or "moral form" of hysteria (319). A psychological study of the abbess yields evidence of the salient traits this type: (1) mobility, in the sense of rapid transitions from joy to sadness, from laughter to tears. Their inconstancy is a constant. In the preceding sections of his narrative Sauton had several times described for his readers such abrupt changes observed in the course of his encounters

with her. (2) a spirit of opposition and contradiction, surfacing in her taking positions to the extreme, either affirming or denying them according to momentary whim or fantasy. (3) a spirit of duplicity—in the contrast between her words of tenderness to her “well beloved sons” spoken to their face, in contrast to marking their tiniest faults and shortcomings behind their backs; of lies—in broken promises of confidentiality surrounding their written and spoken interchanges; of simulation—emerging in her claims to “bilocation, mystical illness, commerce with the Angels and Saints, virginal maternity,” to complete abstention from any involvement in the election of Dom Delatte as abbot, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding; (4) pride and egoism in Bruyère’s need to communicate herself and have communicated by others her spiritual favors, her self-exaltation as self-designated guardian of Guéranger’s legacy at Solesmes and indeed as surviving supporting column of the entire church; (5) an excitability assuming the form of an “erotic mania” manifested in her spiritual maternity that infantized adults and spiritually nursed them at their mother’s breast, expressed in a language of voluptuous imagery that concealed passions under a “virginal veil”; and (6) a hyperactive intellect, compensating for an attenuated affectivity in a fertile imagination, a facile pen, in animated conversation (324-342).

The comparison of these hysterical traits with the unpublished writings and observed behaviors of Mère Cécile “imposes on the doctor the diagnosis of moral hysteria with complications of a veritable mystic and erotic mania [délire].” He notes that mystical delusion is nearly always accompanied by erotic delusion—“a recognized fact in mental pathology” (342). The theological analysis of Mère Cécile’s mystical claims could not sustain a divine origin for those. The medical analysis established to Sauton’s satisfaction their true source: a sick organism whose overfertile imagination gave birth to multiple illusions.

The fourth and final part of Sauton’s narrative may be dealt with summarily. In it he seeks to draw out the dangerous consequences of a spirituality founded on illusion for monastic life and tradition. Not long after his election Dom Delatte opened negotiations with government officials for the reoccupation of the abbey by the monks, and succeeded in these designs. But at the price of being perceived to have capitulated to its demands, thereby compromising Solesmes’s reputation of principled resistance, broken with the tradition of his predecessor and betrayed the legacy of the abbey’s founder. This introduced elements of strain between the new superior and other abbots of the Congregation in

the daughter houses. Also contributing in no small measure to these tense relations was the prominent role the abbess was seen to play in the abbey's affairs. This perception also undermined support that Solesmes had enjoyed from benefactors.

Delatte's regime also exacerbated internal tensions within the community. It was a matter, for Sauton, of the monastery's reaping what the abbess had sown: "cliques, numerous parties which fed malicious gossip, calumnies, competitions, jealousies" (253). Examples were supplied. Moreover, he portrayed the abbot as capricious and contradictory in his directives, autocrat rather than paterfamilias. Nor, when compared with the elements identified by Guéranger as constituting the essence of the monastic life, did Delatte's teaching conform. On the contrary, there were some of these elements that the latter had positively transformed, to the detriment of the quality of life experienced by the community and the very compromise of monastic tradition. Paramount among these tenets was the exalted role accorded to contemplation, reflecting yet again the hand of Mère Cécile.¹⁸ Problems being experienced by the abbey were traced to their source, the "false spirituality that comes to us from Sainte-Cécile" (268). Sauton brings his narrative to a close with a consideration over the likelihood of Delatte's recognizing the danger posed to Solesmes and its source and gives several reasons to conclude in the negative.

Sauton terminated his memorandum in December of 1891. In Houtin's introduction the thread of the narrative is picked up and carried forward to Bruyère's death in 1909. Rather than continue Solesmes's fortunes at this point, a brief consideration of Houtin's perspective on mysticism would not be out of place here.

The larger story in *Une vie de prêtre*, in which Houtin's observations on Solesmes are embedded, traces the impact on him of the intellectual renaissance Catholicism was experiencing toward the close of the century. Houtin became an active participant in the movement for renewal eventually condemned in 1907 as Modernism, an involvement which ultimately led to the loss of his faith and his openly leaving the church in 1912. Thus, when he published *Une grande mystique* in 1925, Houtin would have allowed only one possible source of mystical experience: naturalistic illusion. Among the documents published by Sartiaux as part of the second volume of Houtin's autobiography, *Ma vie laïque*, were some pages his experiences with the Benedictines. He admits that it was only over the course of a number of years that he came

to know “the details of the abbess’s aberrations,” that he came to appreciate “the force, the subtlety, the captivating charm, the insincerity, the morbidity of mystics, their power of auto-suggestion and the strength of their illuminism, their pious barefaced lies, their churchy cabals, all protected and concealed by ecclesiastical authority.”¹⁹ Houtin had come a long way from the young, idealistic novice that had arrived at Solesmes in 1887 to embrace the monastic life. For the freethinker that he had become, “Solesmes was a very significant experience of my life, a lived and living proof of the Christian illusion.”²⁰

Other Solesmes

When a narrative is embedded in an ongoing conflict, analysts are unlikely to assume a one-to-one relationship between accounts and the events they are taken to portray. Nowhere is it more likely that there will be at least two sides to every story, neither of which can be taken as objective. The indeterminacy inherent in narrative representation may not be immediately evident in many contexts, but it cannot be avoided in cases of conflict.²¹

Houtin prided himself on his objectivity as an historian, many times reiterated in his historical and biographical writings, and repeatedly reaffirmed in his autobiography. Mystics presented a special sort of challenge: if knowledge of any soul is difficult, that of a mystic is especially so. In the case of the “great enigmas” that are the mystics, it is not possible to claim “definitive explanation” of their psychology. Nonetheless, it is equally clear that Houtin published Sauton’s memorandum as documentation in anticipation of his history of the Benedictine Congregation of Solesmes. Though that history would treat Madame Bruyère only briefly, even his intended treatment he thought would cause sufficient surprise to benefit from the support of Sauton’s testimony (v-vii). In his review of *Une grande mystique* Alfred Loisy judged the memorandum to be “written with extreme candor and great care for exactness, a great deal of moderation in its judgments,” constituting a record of the day by day, intimate life of two monasteries.²²

Others were more critical. Jean Barzui, whose *Jean de la Croix et le problème de l’expérience mystique* appeared one year earlier than Houtin’s book on Bruyère, in his review did not doubt Sauton’s sincerity. But, given the very character of the document as a denunciation

addressed to the Holy Office, it could not deliver a proven judgment, but rather opened up a problem requiring further investigation, an inquiry that would require examination of the autobiography, the journal of Bruyère's mystical life, and letters that remained inaccessible to the historian. Despite its author's desires, *Une grande mystique* does not supply the data that would be necessary to render an exact image of its subject. "When all is said and done, we are insufficiently informed to study as psychologists, and even as historians, Mme Bruyère's case."²³

Henri Delacroix shared judgments reached by Barzui, but was able to develop them at greater length in the course of a long review article in the *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*. Delacroix notes that Houtin had granted him access to the pages of the third, medical-psychological part of the memorandum, that he had decided to suppress due to the delicate nature of its contents. All the more reason to regret not being able to consult Bruyère's unpublished writings, especially her "Comptes rendus de conscience," since Sauton had based his medical diagnoses in significant measure upon them. He queries, "In all sincerity, would we be able to establish an intimate history of Mme Guyon by relying solely on Bossuet?" Beyond the very character of the document itself there are Sauton's own limitations that are evident: "blinded by his feelings of rancor, by his instinctive and acquired distrust, and by the medical biases that he had acquired in the climate created by Charcot's work" his testimony must be taken as precisely that—testimony, and not veridical history.²⁴ In short, the diagnosis is not only about the clinical subject but can also reveal much about the diagnostician. For example, in Delacroix's estimation Sauton's reading of Jenny Bruyère's behavior during her adolescent years as confirming the presence of hysteria betrays a lack of familiarity with what is to normally expected in the development of young women. On the other hand, his close familiarity with Charcot's work narrows his clinical approach. Hysteria possessed in 1884 a clarity of diagnosis based on a firm set of traits that later clinical would call into question. As it would the close linkage between mystical phenomena and psychopathology. Delacroix concedes that, if there are hysterics, then there is no denying that there can be religious hysterics. But he also argues that mystical phenomena can proceed from valid, if intense, religious experience. Of an intensity that may well find expression in the kinds of excesses, the "mystical extravagances" that Sauton describes. But for all that a valid intensity, accompanied by deeply held beliefs, a lively imagination and an emotivity that are consonant with a legitimate type of religiosity rather than mental disorder. "Sauton was astonished that a spiritual

doctrine as sober as the abbess's could coexist with such an efflorescence of external demonstrations. On the contrary, we have attempted to show that this combination is frequent among the mystics and that the very nature of their spiritual enterprise requires it so."²⁵

If Sauton's memorandum created something of an interpretive problem for later readers trying to gain an accurate assessment of Bruyère and her mystical claims, it had more immediate repercussions for Solesmes, Dom Delatte, and Mère Cécile herself. Sauton drafted his memorandum after being sent by Delatte to Ligugé in 1891, part of an attempt on the abbot's part to lessen tensions in the community. The memorandum, accompanied by supporting documentation, was actually conveyed to Rome in April of 1892.²⁶ It was not until the following year that the Holy Office took decisive action. Delatte was suspended from his functions as abbot and ordered to reside at Subiaco, while an interim replacement governed in his stead. All relations between the two abbeys were interdicted, with the nuns at Sainte-Cécile being placed under the jurisdiction of the local bishop and diocesan priests replacing the monks as their confessors. Although these measures were not publicized, word leaked out and grew into rumors of improper conduct between the abbess and the abbot. Others, more moderate, believed the affair to be confined to matters involving mysticism, interpreting it as a resurgence of quietism with the abbess as a new Madame Guyon. In his narrative of these events, Houtin laconically observes, "The Benedictines, seeing their superior menaced, did not confine themselves to prayer and other mystical means to save her" (61). Among the community of nuns at Sainte-Cécile were members of royalty who used their family connections to solicit Emperor Franz-Joseph and Queen Christina of Spain to intervene on Solesmes's behalf directly with Leo XIII. The outcome was a transformation of a juridical and doctrinal process before the Holy Office into a papally sanctioned diplomatic solution. The apostolic visitor sent to Solesmes conducted his inquiry so as to yield conclusions favorable to the pope's desires, leading to Delatte's reinstatement late in 1893.²⁷

As noted earlier, narratives can exhibit a certain ambiguity, particularly in the case of conflict narratives. Conceptually, theorists distinguish between "narrative events"—the discursive portrayal—and "narrated events"—the words and actions that are related. Thus, "narratives do not simply describe ready-made events, they provide central means by which we create notions as to what took place, how the action unfolded, what prompted it, and the social effects of the events."²⁸

Both Barzui and Delacroix show awareness of these issues in their respective reviews of the Houtin/Sauton renditions. Biographies of Dom Delatte and Mère Cécile authored by monks of Solesmes tell a different story.

Rather disappointingly, Dom Augustin Savaton's 1975 biography of Delatte exercises such great discretion over its recital of the events leading to the abbot's suspension and subsequent reinstatement that "the reader is often left perplexed."²⁹ It is only with Dom Guy-Marie Oury's *Life of Cécile Bruyère* that a fuller account is made available from a different perspective. He acknowledges that Houtin's book has been influential in shaping perceptions of Solesmes over the period it describes³⁰, but challenges it as "a version systematically unfavorable to Solesmes, to Dom Delatte and to Mère Cécile." Its author's motives are questioned, since "he had a score to settle with the hierarchical church, with the condemnations that had struck the group of Modernists of which he formed part, and with all of Christian society that he had known in the period of his clerical youth."³¹ Beyond such direct challenges to the adequacy of *Une grande mystique*, attentive reading of Oury's biography suggests that Houtin's narrative is never very far from the Benedictine's mind. While he could not claim the participant role shared by Houtin and Sauton, Oury could function as commentator and interpreter, thereby shaping the significance of narrated events.

¹ Bourdieu continues, "One sees, in passing, one of the effects of reflexivity: what I have just said puts my listeners on their guard against what I am going to say, and puts me on my guard too, against the danger of privileging one orientation or against even the temptation to see myself as objective on the grounds for example that I am equally critical of all positions." Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 9.

² See Pierre Combe, *Histoire de la restauration du chant grégorien d'après des documents inédits* (Sablé sur Sarthe: Abbaye de Solesmes, 1969). Eng trans. *Restoration of Gregorian Chant: Solesmes and the Vatican Edition*. Trans. Theodore N. Marier and William Skinner (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

³ See Dom Olivier Rousseau, *The Progress of the Liturgy* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1951), ch. 1-3 and 8. Dom Delatte, third abbot of Solesmes, wrote a biography of his predecessor, *Dom Guéranger. Abbé de Solesmes* 2 vols. (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1909-1910). Resolutely chronological, it makes large demands on its reader to detach and reconnect themes that developed over time. Dom Guy-Marie Oury, *Dom Guéranger. Moine au coeur de l'Église* (Solesmes: Éditions de Solesmes, 2000) was written to remedy that defect.

⁴ On the beginnings of Solesmes under Guéranger see Dom Alphonse Guépin, *Solesmes et Dom Guéranger* (Le Mans: Edmond Monnoyer, 1876) and Dom Louis Soltner, *Solesmes and Dom Guéranger 1805-1895* Trans. Joseph O'Connor (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 1995).

⁵For the controversies over the restoration of the Roman liturgy in France see R.W. Franklin, *Nineteenth-Century Churches: The History of a New Catholicism in Württemberg, England, and France* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), ch. VIII-XI; Cuthbert Johnson, *Prosper Guéranger (1805-1875): A Liturgical Theologian* (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1984).

⁶A[ibert] Houtin, *Dom Couturier, Abbé de Solesmes* (Angers: Germain & G. Grassin, 1899), 211. Oury comments, "The perceptible tension at Solesmes itself and in the Congregation between pure contemplation and the intellectual apostolate at the time of Dom Delatte's abbotcy, already existed in the years following the death of Dom Guéranger." Dom Guy-Marie Oury, *Lumière et force: Mère Cécile Bruyère, première abbesse de Sainte Cécile* (Solesmes: Éditions de Solesmes, 1997), 212.

⁷ Albert Houtin, *Une vie de prêtre* (Paris: Rieder, 1926), ch. IV. Eng. trans. *The Life of a Priest* Trans. Winifred S. Whale (London: Watts & Co., 1927). Houtin identified Logerot's tenure as novice master, gained in 1879 with the support of Sainte-Cécile, as the dividing line between those formed earlier, the "old," and those he formed, the "young." Albert Houtin, "Notes sur les profès de l'abbaye de Solesmes" in *La Province du Maine* XIX (1911): 167-173, 191-198, 229-238, 271-277, 292-295, 327-333, 361-367, 385-391 at 367.

⁸Albert Houtin, *Une grande mystique. Madame Bruyère* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1925, 2nd edition 1930). Sauton eventually left monastic life, taking up the practice of medicine in which he had been trained. It was

his desire that his memorandum be published after his death. He confided it to Mgr Mignot, archbishop of Albi for that purpose. after Sauton's death in 1916, Mignot decided that his position as archbishop prevented publication under his auspices, and he passed it on to Houtin. while well aware that some of the protagonists were yet living, he judged it possible to publish the text Sauton had conserved, inviting those with first-hand knowledge of the circumstances to "furnish their recollections and their documents" (vi).

⁹ Charles L. Briggs, "Introduction" to Charles L. Briggs, ed., *Disorderly Discourse: Narrative, Conflict, and Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 26-27.

¹⁰ Houtin, *Une grande mystique*, 94-95. Note: the pagination of the 1925 and 1930 editions are identical where Houtin's introduction, and parts one, two and four of Sauton's memorandum are concerned. Sartiaux added part three as an appendix, covering pages 311-344. Hereafter, page references appearing in the text in parentheses will refer to the more complete 1930 edition.

¹¹ It is also apparent from Houtin's comments in his introductory pages that he is of one mind with Sauton on these matters.

¹² In the hagiographical legends surrounding Saint Cecilia, Tibertius was the brother of her husband, Valerian. The two brothers were converted through her intercession and both were martyred during Roman persecution. See Dom Prosper Guéranger, *Histoire de sainte Cécile* (Tournai: J. Casterman, 1851), ch. VI-X Eng. trans. *Life of Saint Cecilia* (Philadelphia: Peter F. Cunningham, 1866).

¹³ Sauton's marginalization in the Solesmes' community was observed by Houtin during the year of his novitiate. *Une grande mystique*, 43n.

¹⁴ Ollis Henri Delatte entered Solesmes in 1883 and made his monastic profession in 1885. His rise within the community was rapid; by 1888 he had become prior and, during Dom Couturier's last illnesses, virtual abbot. In his autobiography Houtin describes the circumstances of Delatte's election. "I heard that the election had not taken place without considerable difficulty and many regrettable incidents. The rivalry between 'the young' and 'the old,' far from diminishing, had become complicated by all sorts of questions. One of the new Abbot's first acts

was to relegate the other candidate of ‘the young,’ who was his rival but also his former master, Dom Logerot, to a monastery which was considered the depository of Solesmes.” Houtin, *Vie* 120; *Life* 69.

¹⁵ Eng. trans. *The Spiritual Life and Prayer* [1900] (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

¹⁶ See Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), ch. 5 especially.

¹⁷ Visions may also be corporeal or intellectual (cf. 200-202). Sauton gives the text of one of Bruyère’s intellectual visions on page 136 and later subjects it to analysis (214-215).

¹⁸ These is also the matter of the exalted role accorded the Mother Abbess. He warns: “It is not without impunity that one ignores the plan of God in the hierarchy that he has established and, when monks clothed with the priestly character place themselves under the spiritual direction of a woman, they launch themselves onto a path full of dangers, while removing themselves from the laws of the Church, and will only end up powerless.” All the more so when the woman in question manifests mental illness (268).

¹⁹ Albert Houtin, *Ma vie laïque* (Paris: Rieder, 1928), 118.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

²¹ Donald Brenneis, “Telling Troubles: Narrative, Conflict, and Experience” in Briggs, ed., 42.

²² Alfred Loisy, review of *Une grande mystique* in *Revue critique d’histoire et de littérature* (1 July 1925): 243-245, at 244.

²³ Jean Baruzi, review of *Une grande mystique* in *Revue philosophique* (March-April 1926): 310-312, at 312. Baruzi’s *Saint Jean de la Croix et le problème de l’expérience mystique* has recently been republished (Paris: Éditions Salvator, 1999) with an introduction by Émile Poulat. See also Poulat’s *L’Université devant la mystique* (Paris: Éditions Salvator, 1999).

²⁴ H. Delacroix, “Remarques sur ‘Une grande mystique,’” *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique* (15 July 1925): 545-584, at 555-556. Delacroix’s *Études d’histoire et de psychologie du mysticisme. Les grandes mystiques chrétiens* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1908) shows him as sympathetic interpreter of mysticism. Although attributing a naturalistic origin to mystical experience, the achievements of its great representatives argued against a reduction to psychopathology.

²⁵ Delacroix, “Remarques sur ‘Une grande mystique,’” 582.

²⁶The circumstances surrounding the generation of Sauton’s memorandum, as well as a second authored by Dom Martin de La Tremblaye, are recorded by Houtin, *Une grande mystique*, 54-56.

²⁷ This brief recapitulation glosses over the complexities surrounding these measures. Houtin goes into greater detail regarding them.

²⁸ Briggs, “Introduction” in Briggs, ed., 22-23.

²⁹ Dom Lucien Regnault, *Dom Paul Delatte. Lettres* (Solesmes: Les Éditions de Solesmes, 1991), 12n. Dom Augustin Savaton, *Dom Paul Delatte, Abbé de Solesmes* (Sablé: Éditions de l’abbaye de Solesmes, 1975).

³⁰ As a notable example, in his biography of the novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans, James Laver accepts Houtin’s version of events in providing context for Huysmans’s relations with Delatte and Bruyère while in the process of discerning a possible Benedictine vocation. See James Laver, *The First Decadent* (New York: Citadel Press, 1955), ch. 11.

³¹ Oury, *Lumière et force*, 286. Oury acknowledged that Houtin’s 1899 biography of Dom Couturier remains a good reference work. But his later biographical notes on the professed at Solesmes are representative of his style. “they are nearly uniformly negative and partial,” more caricature than characterization (286, 288).