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Forum: What Shall We Read?: A Textbook, Yes. But..., Donald Jay Grout, A History of Western Music

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truth about himself and about the societies in which he lived. He demonstrated the willingness to integrate new knowledge into old, to seek experiences that may challenge the status quo, and to decide what ideas, skills, and personal qualities contributed to a greater sense of self, of purpose, and of worldview. In his experiments, Gandhi did not merely accept the practices and beliefs he encountered, but assessed the strengths and flaws in each culture and society.

Critical of the “superstitions” in his own traditions, in the West he embraced ideals of legal equality (even if imperfectly realized). He was forced to reassess these Western ideals in light of racial and religious discrimination and legal injustices that he experienced. His “experiments with truth” speak of the quest to find moral truths that could be applied to all humanity. He built his legacy by adhering to principle, pursuing a goal unrelentingly, striving for social justice, and believing that people, no matter how far from the seat of power, can change their society by changing themselves.

Through Gandhi, I learned that experiences could be used to reshape oneself. I realized that every culture and society has something to offer and something to learn. These lessons supplement, and sometimes challenge, that with which I am most familiar and most comfortable. If what I learned from Gandhi did not change my life in a single, blinding flash, it certainly shaped my interests, my goals, and my worldview. ■

Faith J. Childress is a history professor at Rockhurst University.

A TEXTBOOK, YES. BUT...

Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music*

Alice V. Clark

As strange as it may seem to anyone who has survived the music-major history survey (popularly known as “Music Mystery” or “Music Misery”), I have to admit that one of the books that most profoundly changed my life is Donald Jay Grout’s *A History of Western Music*. While I wouldn’t necessarily recommend even the latest edition of this famously difficult book to the unwary, it opened my mind to the idea of music as part of cultural history. I entered college intending to become a high-school music teacher, largely because that was all I knew aside from performance. The notion that music could be studied, like Shakespeare’s plays or Monet’s paintings, allowed me to combine academic interests with the music that I loved.

Of course, Grout is a textbook, so we read it in combination with lectures and an anthology of musical works compiled by our teacher. I therefore have to admit that what excited me may well have been the context in which I read the book as much as the book itself. Ever since then, I suppose much of my most important reading has been a sort of communal act, tied up especially with the act of teaching.

Since part of the purpose of this essay is to discuss books others may want to read, I should suggest some perhaps more suitable for an educated lay audience. The Cambridge Opera Handbook series contains many books that serve a broad spectrum of readers; some technical discussion may be a bit difficult for non-musicians, but there is much in this series that does not require specialized musical training. James Hepokoski’s volume on *Otello*, for instance, has a fascinating discussion of how Arrigo Boito and Giuseppe Verdi developed the libretto from Shakespeare’s play, while Peter Branscombe’s study of Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* has the most nuanced discussion I’ve seen of the relationship of that work to Masonic thought. Susan McClary provides a lucid explanation of the musical languages of *Carmen* and their interactions, culminating in the annihilation of both Carmen and her music.

Sometimes we forget that music does the same cultural work as a novel or film and can be studied in similar ways. I challenge you



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to pick up a book on a musical topic related to your interests. Even if your life isn't changed, you may find a new way into a world you thought you knew. ■

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THE PROVIDENTIAL FACT

Alexis de'Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

John Coleman

Tocqueville's two-volume, *Democracy in America* is a book more often cited than truly read, let alone studied. Like the bible, it allows evocation by people of widely different political stripes. An often claimed Tocqueville quotation, "America is great because America is good" doesn't actually exist anywhere in its pages.

Some commentators evoke Tocqueville as if the America he described still exists. Who in his right mind would believe that an enlightened foreign visitor would now come, as Tocqueville and his friend Beaumont did in 1831, to study America's uniquely humane prison system, with its emphasis on rehabilitation? As John Noonan displays, in a *tour de force* chapter on Tocqueville in *The Lustre of Our Country* there were things about the America of 1831 that Tocqueville either missed or purposely omitted since they did not fit his vision for democracy in France. Patently, it was democracy more than a snapshot of America that Tocqueville sought: "I confess that in America I saw more than America; I sought the image of democracy itself with its inclinations, its character, its prejudices and its passions, in order to learn what we have to fear or hope from its progress."

Tocqueville saw many shadow sides of America. He thought its capital punishment barbaric. He warned of the anti-democratic instincts of industry, and, after 1840 in his letters, he shows strong misgivings about an emerging American imperialism, poor political leadership and the reckless spirit of American capitalism. Presciently, he wrote: "All those who seek to destroy the liberties of a democratic nation ought to know that war is the surest and shortest means to accomplish it... Recently, one of my students lamented that the current administration never seems to have heeded

Tocqueville's insistence on the pre-conditions of democracy (rough equality of conditions, a middle class, separation of powers, an independent judiciary) in their quixotic quest to export democracy to places which lack all such pre-conditions.

Much of my own scholarly writing has focused on key motifs in Tocqueville: civil society, the public church, the nexus between religion and morality, a balance between liberty and equality. But, in a more religious sense, I have found Tocqueville's work helpful in doing what I like to call "cultural discernment." Tocqueville saw democracy as a 'providential fact', something which would emerge willy-nilly. He knew it had shadow and destructive sides and wrote to coax out its promise. I have recently been teaching and writing about globalization, which I see as a 'providential fact,' and trying, in the spirit of Tocqueville, to tease out the pre-conditions for a humane rather than a predatory globalization. ■

John Coleman, S.J., is a professor of sociology at Loyola Marymount University.

FINDING A VOICE FROM HOME

Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*

Eric Gansworth

Louise Erdrich's novel, *Love Medicine*, recipient of a National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction in 1984, was heralded as an intimate and sweeping lyrical view of contemporary American Indian life, exceeding implicit criteria for fiction of merit, moving its readers with subtle portraits of its complex characters, who breathed with their impassioned lives and familiar heartaches with each experience. For a majority of readers, it was a trip into an exotic pocket of this country: reservation life through the 20th century, as viewed from within, but for me it was a view into a possible life.

This novel traces the intricate connections among reservation families in North Dakota from the 1930s to the 1980s with an unflinching yet considered eye, allowing its characters to tell their own necessarily compromised versions of their life histories and asking the reader to realize we each own our personal stories and that the burden is on us to understand those narratives.

I grew up on a reservation not unlike the one described in *Love Medicine*, among equally tumultuous