

Margot Fassler. Gothic Song: Victorine Sequences and Augustinian Reform in Twelfth-Century Paris. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. xxi, 487 pp.

At first encounter, the principal title, *Gothic Song*, is likely to arouse both visual images of lofty stone cathedrals and monastic churches, and aural images of *ars antiqua* polyphony—organum, conductus, and motet. The dust jacket reinforces that visual impression with its print of the Abbey Church of Saint Victor, spires towering toward the clouds, flying buttresses thrusting against a three-storied nave, rose window blossoming above the south transept.¹ The subtitle firmly corrects the tentative aural connection by naming a single liturgical genre, the sequence, as the focus of the study. Margot Fassler defends the Parisian sequence's Gothic status in noting its chronological conjunction with construction of the twelfth-century church of Saint Victor and rebuilding of Saint Denis as well as in characterizing it as the "first major musical endeavor of the famed Notre Dame school" (p. 138). She also calls attention to the link between the twelfth-century Gregorian reform movement and "early manifestations of the art often called 'Gothic'" (p. 211). Just as the illustrious reformer Hugo of Saint Victor influenced sacred visual art and architecture (including Saint Denis), so his writings had a marked impact on the Victorine sequences. These remarks justify the title to a reasonable degree, but some attention might yet have been directed toward previous linkages between the "Gothic" and other musical repertoires, such as Ernest Sanders' contention that the thirteenth-century motet was the genre within which "medieval man . . . achieved a quintessential embodiment of the Gothic spirit."²

Some acknowledgment might also have been granted other kinds of new religious song that flourished in the twelfth century: versus (mono-

¹ The engraving apparently depicts the sixteenth-century edifice, which incorporated some elements of the twelfth-century church. Despite the late date of construction, the building displays typically "Gothic" features in this picture, which is also reproduced as plate 11.1.

² Ernest Sanders, "The Medieval Motet," *Gattungen der Musik in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Wulf Arlt et al. (Bern and Munich: Francke, 1973), 528. Christopher Page's recent critique of "cathedralism" in chapter 1 of *Discarding Images* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) shows the need for much more careful examination of this subject (see especially p. 35).

phonic and polyphonic) of Aquitanian tradition, liturgical dramas, ecstatic songs of Hildegard of Bingen, Parisian organum and conductus. The implied geographical limits of the label "Gothic" automatically exclude some of these phenomena from consideration, but the effect is to isolate the Victorine sequence from other sacred "new music" of the time. This study avoids such matters by introducing the late rhymed sequence under the theme of liturgical change and within the straits of genre, in comparison with the earlier west-European sequence tradition. The rationale for a study focused on the late sequence repertory and the milieu in which it was cultivated becomes increasingly clear as one proceeds through this impressive monograph. Still, it will be well if in the future the term "Gothic song" is allowed to extend beyond a single genre.

Fassler presents a remarkably coherent story of how the Augustinian canons at the Abbey of Saint Victor in Paris cultivated the new sequence as an instrument of their political and religious goals. Its narrative components are impressively interdisciplinary in nature, ranging across liturgy, the politics of cathedral and cloister in twelfth-century Paris, the clerical reform movement spearheaded by the Augustinians, exegesis of sacred texts, intertextual connections, and musical analysis. The intersections among these diverse planes reveal the Victorine sequence repertory as an exemplary case of art in the service of institutional purposes.

The coherence of the overall story is matched by the complexity of its argument, which may be roughly summarized as follows. Twelfth-century Augustinian canons regularly favored sequences with new-style rhymed texts that observed regular versification. Because by the early thirteenth century two Parisian churches—the Cathedral of Notre Dame and the Abbey church of Saint Victor—had incorporated relatively large numbers of late sequences into their liturgies, and because Adam of Saint Victor (fl. 1108–1140) achieved renown as a sequence poet, a substantial number of new sequences probably originated in Paris. Although the earliest manuscripts to witness the late sequences in the Notre Dame and Saint Victor liturgies date from the thirteenth century, they testify to a tradition that must have evolved over the preceding eighty to one hundred years. Liturgical commentaries and communal beliefs manifested in the new sequence texts mesh perfectly with doctrines, religious images, and reform theology proclaimed by the influential theologians Hugh of Saint Victor (fl. 1120–1141) and Richard of Saint Victor (fl. 1150–73). These linkages corroborate a common milieu and time period for the theological writings and the sequence texts. The individual melodic tradition the Victorines devised for their sequences—a tradition based on reworkings of two core melodies—permitted them to create families of sequences genetically bound by common musical phrases. These conveyed deep textual resonances so

that an "entire interrelated [sequence] complex resonated with a host of associations" (p. 300). On the musical as well as the textual plane, sequences provided a medium through which the Saint Victor monastic community could affirm, in a performative mode, the beliefs and aspirations of their order.

Since all the music written by the Victorines themselves is based upon the melodies of "Laudes crucis" and (to a lesser extent) "Zima vetus," it thus depicts through its very notes the process of transmission of the power of the cross from the head of the church to the teachers and preachers who form the ecclesiastical hierarchy. . . . [T]he entire section of the sequence repertory completely designed and created by the Victorines themselves became a sounding representative of the idea of transmission and building; when they sang the pieces, they proclaimed their vocation, becoming part of a complex liturgical and musical symbol. (p. 307)

As is so often the case in medieval studies, it is the source situation that poses difficulties. In the absence of twelfth-century Parisian liturgical documents and written testimonials documenting the growth of the new sequence repertory and specifying the contributions of Adam of Saint Victor—the renowned poet whom Fassler has identified as precentor of the Cathedral—the historian must reconstruct the past from oblique angles of perspective. Detailed comparison of twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century sequentiaries from abbeys and cathedrals in Chartres, Nevers, and Limoges indicates that Augustinian canons were particularly disposed to refashion sequence repertoires and more readily adopted new-style sequences than other groups. This propensity would extend in all probability to the Augustinian community at Saint Victor in Paris, the city Fassler designates as the primary test site for examining "the hypothesis that the late sequence was, originally, an 'Augustinian sequence'" (p. 134). The thirteenth-century Parisian manuscripts show substantial concentrations of late sequences at Cathedral and Abbey, such that either qualifies as a likely center of production. Fassler bases her judgment as to the Parisian origin of individual sequences on patterns of manuscript transmission:

pieces are called "Parisian/Victorine" only if they show up exclusively in Parisian sources from the thirteenth century, in the sources cited above [sites for which a Parisian "stream of influence" is postulated] . . . , and in no more than one other center. (pp. 155–56)

On the basis of such transmission statistics, some sixty-two pieces emerge as Parisian in origin. The precision of determining origins in this manner is a matter on which readers are likely to differ. Yet the argument does not

rest on transmission patterns alone, but finds reinforcement in the kernel of religious values and Old Testament typologies in texts and in the melody families favored in the Victorine sphere. It is the confluence of factors, rather than any one factor alone, that imparts a Victorine cast to the late sequences sung in Paris.

Although the message on origins permeates the book, it is not maintained uniformly. A number of passages speak of Adam of Saint Victor's agency with respect to individual items in qualified terms of likelihood or supposition (for example, pp. 253, 256, 272), and even at a fairly late point in the study a note of uncertainty sounds:

[I]t is not possible to know absolutely that Parisian texts and melodies which appear both at the abbey and the cathedral were written by Victorines, even though it is probable that many of them were. Of the majority of texts belonging to both traditions one can say only this for now: they were written in Paris by theologians in sympathy with Hugh's ideas and with Augustinian ideals of reform in general. (p. 290)

The thirteenth-century sources definitely document a special melodic tradition for the sequence repertory at Saint Victor—one that differs in crucial respects from that at Notre Dame Cathedral. Fassler finds that two melodies, those for "Laudes crucis" (feast of the Finding of the Cross) and "Zima vetus" (Octave of Easter) are "the models for all other melodies composed at Saint Victor," but even "Zima vetus" is a "reworking" of the central "Laudes crucis" tune (p. 295).³ Because it circulated so widely, the origins of "Laudes crucis" cannot be localized to Paris on the basis of available evidence (see table 7.1b, p. 159), although the melody is used early in this study to demonstrate "some of the techniques used by composers in the Parisian school of the twelfth century" (p. 74).

Far from viewing the reuse of whole melodies and selected melodic segments as a simple matter of musical economy, Fassler argues that common melodies drew sequences together into meaningful family groups and that musical appropriations and associations served important exegetical functions, bringing textual references from source sequences to

³ Signals about the origins of "Zima vetus" fluctuate. At one point, we are told "it is not unreasonable to suppose" the melody to be "Adam's own gift to the Abbey of Saint Victor" (p. 297), and a few pages later that although the melody "was most likely written by Adam for the abbey, it does survive in other early collections frequently enough to raise doubt" (p. 302).

bear on new texts. Many connections she notes seem quite plausible, such as the choice of the “Zima vetus” melody for two other texts that deal with dramatic reversals (“In natale salvatoris” for Christmas and “Gratulemur in hac die” for the Assumption of the Virgin) (p. 299–300). Similarly apt is the observation that a phrase from “Laudes crucis” dealing with the Pass-over deliverance from the sword appears within “Gaude Roma” (for Saints Peter and Paul) just at the point where that poem mentions Peter’s deliverance from execution by an angel. Besides the textual cue (both passages refer to “gladium” [sword] as the instrument of destruction), the musical reference serves to associate two miraculous deliverances, the Old Testament one of the Jews in Egypt and the New Testament one of Peter (p. 310).⁴ On cognitive grounds, it seems a bit extreme to suppose that all texts associated with a given melody would have echoed in the mind of a singer performing one version (p. 300), but some resonances seem likely.

Other suggested references seem less persuasive, as when phrases in “Gaude Roma” and “Roma petro” that refer to Peter’s crucifixion are said to represent the manner of his upside-down crucifixion through inversion of phrases from the “Finding of the Cross” sequence, “Laudes crucis” (pp. 310–11, shown here in example 1). Two objections may be raised to the “Gaude Roma” example. One is that the figure, a descending series of thirds, first appears in association with Nero’s fury (VIII.1) so that the connection with Peter is not immediate. Moreover, the ascending version of the figure in “Laudes crucis” is associated with four different texts (X.1,2 and XI.1,2), none of which specifically refers to the cross or to crucifixion.⁵ The other objection is that the “Laudes crucis” figure consistently begins the *second* unit in a four-unit phrase, while the “Gaude Roma” figure initiates the *first* unit of four.⁶ The differences in position, combined with different surroundings of high and low registers, ascent and descent, blur the sense of association or symbolic musical commentary. The vexed problem of referentiality, with its various facets of composer intent, performer sensibilities, and audience receptivity, comes to the fore in such discussions. At least in this instance, it should seem possible to have encoded a reference to “Laudes crucis” and to a reverse crucifixion in a more transparent way than is claimed for the “Gaude Roma” passage.

⁴ There is an unnoted textual discrepancy here in the “Laudes crucis” passage. The text version in chapter 4 reads “Nec defusit gaudium / nec amisit filium” (VI.2, p. 71) while that in the musical edition reads “Necque sensit gladium / nec amisit filium” (p. 417).

⁵ A further complicating factor is that “Laudes crucis” 11A ends with a similar descending-thirds figure.

⁶ In “Roma petro” 13, the figure has yet another position, at the end of a second unit.

Example 1**a: Gaude Roma 8**

VII.1: Ne-ro fre-mit fu-ri bund-us ne-ro plan-git im-pi-um ne-ro cu-ius eg-re mun-dus fe-re-bat im-pe-ri-um.

VII.2: Er-go pe-tro crux pa-ra-tur a mi-nis-tris sce-le-rum cru-ci-fi-gi se tes-ta-tur in hoc chris-tus i-te-rum.

b: Laudes crucis 10

XI.1: Is-ta su-os for-ti-o-res sem-per fa-cit et uic-to-res mor-bos sa-nat et lan-guo-res re-pri-mit de-mo-ni-a.

XI.2: Dat cap-ti-uis li-ber-ta-tem ui-te con-fert no-ui-ta-tem ad an-ti-quam dig-ni-ta-tem crux re-dux-it om-ni-a.

c: Laudes crucis 11

XI.1: O crux lig-num tri-um-pha-le mun-di ue-ra sa-lus ua-le in-ter lig-na nul-lum ta-le fron-de flo-re ger-mi-ne.

XI.2: Me-di-ci-ne chris-ti-a-na sal-ua sa-nos e-gros sa-na quod non ua-let uis hu-man-na fit in tu-o no-mi-ne.

Observations on melodic modeling and compositional methods inevitably rely on basic analytic principles that ground associative judgments. In *Gothic Song*, the analytic principles employed to determine melodic relationships are assumed rather than examined. Although detailed consideration of analytic premises would have expanded the volume beyond its already ample girth and added yet another strand to an already intricate weave of topics, some focused commentary on the subject would have benefited the musical argument. More is at stake than nuances in the degree to which Victorine composers and redactors of the sequence repertory relied on two source melodies, for claims about pointed textual connections and resonances depend on the agency of musical associations. These associations anchor a central thesis of this study, that in important families of sequences “the Victorines created a new kind of exegesis, one which depended upon the power of music, as used in *contrafacta*, to interregulate texts” (p. 335).

Questions about analytic criteria arise as early as chapter 4, where the opening of “*Laudes crucis*” is said to be composed according to the “principle of successive variation” (p. 74). Take, for example, the ensuing discussion of the relationship between phrases 3A–B and 2A–B (shown here in example 2a and 2b).

Example 2

a: *Laudes crucis* 2A–B



II.I: Dul - ce me - los tan - gat ce - los dul - ce lig - num dul - ci dig - num

b: *Laudes crucis* 3A–B



III.I: Ser - vi cru - cis cru - cem lau - dent qui per cru - cem si - bi gau - dent

c: *Laudes crucis* 7A



VII.I: Lig - na le - gens in sa - rep - ta

Fassler writes:

Phrase 3A resembles phrase 2A, but it is organized around d' , rather than g , leaping upward to d' at the start and remaining there throughout. Phrase 3B repeats the pitches of the ending of phrase 3A but spaces them out and closes with an abrupt leap back down to g (p. 75)

It is questionable whether 3A particularly “resembles” phrase 2A, since circling motions about a central pitch are not uncommon in the seven- or eight-syllable melodic units of the repertory and since phrase 2A arguably centers on b not g. The d'-c'-b-a descent beginning 3B does not exactly repeat the end of 3A. It fills the gap between d' and b and treats b and a syllabically rather than as a *clivis*, a detail that very probably entails a rhythmic differentiation. The beginning of 3B might be related more directly to the end of 2A, but their different positions within the phrase (one initial, the other medial and cadential) also distinguish them and attenuate the visual association. Units 2A and 3A-B all inhabit the fifth above the modal final, and it is at this background level—more than in specific melodic resemblance—that their basic connection may reside.

The basis for declaring unit 7A to resemble 2A (p. 75) is also questionable (example 2c). Unit 7A inhabits a higher melodic register than 2A, thrusts upward at its beginning, and continues a play on c' as lower neighbor to d' begun in the preceding two or three phrases. Whereas 2A ends on a modally unstable pitch, 7A concludes on a modally stable pitch that by this point in the song is well established.

Similar queries might be posed about some of the modeling relations claimed between sequences. Association between the first units (1A-B) of “Prunis datum” and “Laudes crucis” seems slightly forced (pp. 308-09; example 3a, b). To be sure, both opening cells are “comprised of a decorated g” (p. 309), but the b \flat in “Prunis datum” imparts a singular modal quality to that g that would have been recognized by anyone familiar with Guidonian teachings.⁷ Both passages do involve motion around g followed by a descent of a fourth from c' to g, but there is a marked difference when one passage accomplishes this within a single eight-syllable unit and the other spreads it over two eight-syllable units, also incorporating a b \flat /b \natural shift. Except that it is placed late in the piece, “Laudes crucis” 10A (example 1b) might constitute as plausible a parallel to “Prunis datum” 1B (example 3a). It also seems odd to invoke “Laudes crucis” 4B as a source for segment 4B of “Prunis datum” when “Laudes crucis” 3A provides an exact parallel save the initial note (p. 425; shown here in examples 4a, b and 2b). (On other occasions, two- or three-note “substitutions” form no impediment to association.)⁸ Here, eagerness to find similarities at corre-

⁷ See Guido of Arezzo, *Micrologus*, chap. 8, translated in W. Babb, *Hucbald, Guido, and John on Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 64-65. Fassler's remark that “the B \flat here is to avoid the tritone” does not successfully address the modal differentiation.

⁸ See, for example, “Zima vetus” 6A and 6F in relation to “Laudes crucis” 7A and 7C, respectively (p. 422), or “Gaude Roma” 3B in relation to “Laudes crucis” 3B (p. 429).

sponding locations—so that the fourth verse pairs correspond in both—overrides a more obvious melodic similarity. By the argument used for “Prunis datum” 1A–B, “Prunis” 4C might be labeled an amalgam of “Laudes crucis” 9B–C (example 4a, c). But the modeling pattern of “Laudes crucis” 4A–4B–*new unit* Fassler proposes for “Prunis datum” 4A–B–C looks far more orderly than a modeling of “Laudes crucis” 4A–3A–9B–C. In a rare oversight, the relationship of “Prunis datum” 10A–B to “Zima vetus” 5D–E is not noted, although “Prunis” 10A resembles the “Zima vetus” phrase more closely than it does “Laudes crucis” 9A, the connection indicated (p. 427). These observations are not made to deny the general concept of musical association and its significance proposed in this study, but are meant to alert readers to unresolved analytic issues and to the desirability for further, more systematic, investigation in this area.

Example 3

a: Prunis datum 1A–B

l.l.: Pru-nis da-tum ad-mi-re-mur lau-re-a-tum ue-ne-re-mur

b: Laudes crucis 1A–B

l.l.: Lau-des cru-cis at-tol-la-mus nos qui cru-cis ex-ul-ta-mus

Because of its interdisciplinary scope and the number of different themes it engages, this study is at times difficult to follow. Chapter 12 prepares chapter 13 in terms of liturgical and textual matters, but for the musical issues that are the focus of chapter 13 the reader must revisit chapters 4 and 8. Similarly, chapter 9 with its consideration of canons regular and liturgical reform politics, seems an odd sequel to chapter 8's detailed examination of musical contrafacta in Parisian sequences. Individual readers may well wish to plot their own path through the book in “hypertext” fashion. They will be aided by the detailed table of contents as well as by the “conclusions” at the ends of parts (and of some chapters) that neatly condense the complex arguments and results advanced in the preceding sections. A short epilogue, “Sacred history and the common life,” summarizes the overall message of the study.

Supplementing the body of the text and providing essential primary materials are appendices with repertory lists from twelfth- and thirteenth-century French sequentaries and ordinals, and with editions of eight late

Example 4

a: Prunis datum 4A-B-C

IV.I: De - ci vi - de qui - a fi - de stat in - vic - tus in - ter ic - tus mi - nas et in - cen - di - a.

The musical notation is on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. Brackets above the staff indicate three sections: 4A (first measure), 4B (second measure), and 4C (third measure). The lyrics are written below the staff, with lines connecting the words to the notes above them.

b: Laudes crucis 4A-B-C

IV.I: Hec est sca - la pec - ca - to - rum per quam chris - tus rex ce - lo - rum ad se trax - it om - ni - a.

The musical notation is on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. Brackets above the staff indicate three sections: 4A (first measure), 4B (second measure), and 4C (third measure). The lyrics are written below the staff, with lines connecting the words to the notes above them.

c: Laudes crucis 9B-C

IX.I: is - ta la - tent sed iam pa - tent cru - cis be - ne - fi - ci - a.

The musical notation is on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. Brackets above the staff indicate two sections: 9B (first measure) and 9C (second measure). The lyrics are written below the staff, with lines connecting the words to the notes above them.

sequences accompanied by text translations. The typography in the editions gives pitches in great round noteheads and text in very small typeface. This is a practical means to accommodate extended text lines horizontally across a page and to depict the regularity of poetic form, but in diminishing the visual impact of the text, the small typeface works counter to the message of the study. The large void noteheads of the main editions do contrast effectively with the black notation on small staves used to cue references to source phrases from the Ur-sequences.

For the most part, the book is well produced, with only a few typographical slips. Appendix 5 would be more easily interpreted if accompanied by a key to symbols. Table 8.6, mentioned on page 322, does not exist. The reference is evidently to the list of sequence families on pages 178–81, which occurs within the body of chapter 8 itself rather than as a separate table.

Fassler mounts a persuasive case that this genre of “gothic song” deserves attention for what it can reveal about a religious community and their implementation of new sacred song within their liturgy to further their doctrines, self-images, and religious purposes. Her study is written with fervor, a fervor arising from the excitement of discovery, as well as—I would judge—from admiration at the skill and ingenuity with which the Victorines appear to have encoded their beliefs and values in communal song. Her controlling metaphor is that of a central place with a central creative personality who set forth the first principles of the new rhythmic rhymed sequence. This will seem attractive and highly plausible to many readers. Others will worry over the rationale for regarding most late sequences as Parisian in origin or over the attributions of intent to the Victorine community (pp. 240, 291). In any event, the bold claims advanced in this erudite and imaginative work are likely to encourage more research on the late sequence—on the origins of specific pieces, on the evidence for a central place of production, on principles of musical analysis appropriate to the repertory. Besides fostering further research, this book will serve liturgical scholars, musicologists, and sociologists of art as a comprehensive case study in the uses of art to promote religious reform and to achieve institutional goals.

—Sarah Fuller

State University of New York, Stony Brook