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Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: A Florilegium of her Works

Translated with Introduction, Interpretative Essay and Notes

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Introduction

Long considered the "rara avis" of early Germanic authors, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim has now been firmly placed in the medieval monastic traditions of Benedictine spirituality, and even though her hagiographic plays are without precedent in tenth century European literature, her efforts at the didactic utilization of hagiography are not. In fact, Hrotsvit's dramatization of legendary materials bears testimony to the prominent role that hagiographic *lectiones* played in the Benedictine office and to the gradual rise of the use of hagiographic *exempla* in homiletic texts. While illustrative *exempla* were copied and circulated throughout the Middle Ages, the actual logical organization of homiletic narratives – whereby individual *exempla* became linked with dogmatic or scriptural topics – did not occur until the rise of the preaching orders. As early as the twelfth century, several *exempla* collections, alphabetically arranged and painstakingly cross-referenced, were available for preachers – the best known, perhaps, being Etienne de Bourbon's *Liber de septem donis*. Hrotsvit's thematic linkage of her plays to the liturgy and her utilization of hagiographic sources in a plethora of non-hagiographic genres are, thus, while early and imaginative, yet by no means totally alien to the early medieval literary scene famous for its predilection for genre mixing. To argue against the authenticity of her works on these grounds does not, therefore, seem to be tenable.

Manuscripts

The most complete text of Hrotsvit's works is preserved in the Emmeram-Munich Codex (clm 14485 1–150). This is also the oldest extant copy of her works dating to the early eleventh century. The manuscript, believed to have been produced at Gandersheim, was discovered by the leading German humanist Conrad Celtis in 1494 and was printed under the auspices of the Sodalitas Rhenana by Hieronymus Holtzel in Nuremberg in 1501. The first edition contains six woodcuts illustrating the dramas: two by Albrecht Dürer and four believed to be by Wolfgang Traut. Celtis made emendations to the text but Johannes Tritheim commissioned a complete copy of the manuscript prior to Celtis' editing. This original version is preserved in the Schlossbibliothek of Pommersfelden (cod. 308 (2883)). Additionally, several fragmentary texts of Hrotsvit's works have been discovered in the twentieth century. Goswin Frenken found a copy

of the first four dramas (perhaps the copy Hrotsvit claims to have sent to certain *sapientes* for evaluation). They are preserved in a manuscript of miscellaneous texts in the Cologne Stadtarchiv (cod. w 101, 1–16) and were copied toward the end of the twelfth century, probably from a prototype other than the Emmeram-Munich codex. Another late twelfth century copy of *Gallicanus* was incorporated into the *Alderspach Passionale* (clm 2552, now in Munich) and, as some scholars have argued, in the late twelfth century and early thirteenth century from here into the *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum* without attribution of authorship (Heiligenkreuz Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 12, vol. 278–81; Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, cod. lat. 336, vol. 362–66; Melk Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 675, vol. 234–38).[1]

Biography

All we know of Hrotsvit's biography has to be gleaned from her dedicatory letters and prefaces. She was probably born in the fourth decade of the tenth century, and is likely to have been of noble Saxon descent. She lived as a canoness in the Imperial Abbey of Gandersheim under Gerberga II's rule, and she probably died at the turn of the millennium after having completed her last extant work, the *Primordia*, in 973.[2]

Living in the tenth century Benedictine monastic environment, Hrotsvit's predilection for choosing hagiographic sources that celebrate the hermetical and monastic ideal of *soli-deo vivere* comes as no surprise. It is evident from her work that she considers hermetic life (total solitude in worship) and martyrdom as the two most privileged manifestations of Christian devotion. In eremitic life, as H. Fichtenau observes, "... separation [from the world] was stressed almost to the point of pathos."[3] In an age where temporary solitude (in taking one's meals, spending one's day) was a most serious monastic punishment, eremitism and martyrdom do, indeed, appear to be metaphorical equivalents of self-denial. Two of her plays, *Paphnutius* and *Abraham* particularly, reflect a specifically German brand of monastic hermetism, the custom of "Klausner" and "Klausnerinnen" (*inclusi* and *inclusae*), a practice whereby religious people did not live in a monastery but, rather, next to a convent or church in individual claustration, walled up in a cell without doors. Martyrdom, conversely, is celebrated in two of her dramas (*Dulcitius* and *Sapientia*) and three of her legends (*Pelagius*, *Dionysius*, and *Agnes*); in all but one of the five treatments of martyrdom the saint dies not only as an eloquent witness to the faith but in preserving her/his virginity from persuasive assaults by male antagonists. Both (hermetism and martyrdom) are extreme, even extremist forms of asceticism depicted by Hrotsvit not simply as idealized abstractions of Christological emulation but as manifestations of the eternal human struggle for moral excellence.

1 The most complete editions of Hrotsvit's works are still those of Paul von Winterfeld, *Hrotsvithae Opera* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1965) and Helena Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera* (Munich: Schoninge, 1970). For a full discussion of the manuscript tradition see Sibylle Jefferies, "Hrotsvit and the *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum*," in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, "Rara avis in Saxonia"*, ed. K. Wilson, Medieval and Renaissance Monograph Series, vol. VII (Ann Arbor, 1987), pp. 239–52.

2 She says in the *Primordia* (525) that she was born "longo tempore" after the death of Otto of Saxony (died November 30, 912) and that she was older than her Abbess Gerberga (born c.940).

3 Heinrich Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century*, trans. P. Geary (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 246.

In composing all her texts Hrotsvit is entirely within the mainstream of the didactic hagiographic *exemplum*'s tradition which invariably presented action in the texts as particular and anecdotal. By extension, her treatment of sin and virtue is never abstract but exemplified by specific instances of good and evil behavior and always anchored in a recognizable historic, geographic, and social context, inevitably constructed rhetorically with an eye to its closure conveying its moral.

Hrotsvit's epics exhibit the same concerns for particular detail and moral intention. Her conception of history in general, and of Otto's *imperium* in specific, was more complex and sophisticated than those of Benedict of Saint Andrea and Thietmar of Merseburg, in that she recognized that Otto's imperial title and dignity absorbed his royality. She knew, as Carl Erdmann has argued, "... that Otto's empire had universal preeminence ... [and she] ... conferred upon Otto the Caesarian and Augustan *imperium* and placed him in the same line of succession with the ancient emperors."[4] As such, she is able to anchor his deeds not only in hagiography (by depicting him as the true imperial *christomimētēs*) but also in the lore of ancient Roman grandeur.

Even Hrotsvit's name has been the source of some discussion.[5] She records the nominative form of her name as Hrotsvit (in the "Epistle" [3] and in the prologue [1] to the third book) and the inflected forms as being Hrotsvithae ("Maria" [18], "Ascensio" [148], "Gongolf" [3]) and Hrotsvitham ("Pelagius" [3]). After many fanciful interpretations of her name, ranging from Gottsched's "Weisse Rose" to "Rauschewind" and "rascher Witz,"[6] it was not until 1838 that Jacob Grimm in *Lateini-*

4 Karl Erdmann, "Das ottonische Reich als Imperium Romanum," in *Deutsches Archiv für Geschichte des Mittelalters* VI (1943): 422.

5 The following page is a summary of my note "Clamor Validus Gandershemensis," *Germanic Notes* 14, no. 2 (1983): 17–18.

6 Edwin Zeydel, " 'Ego Clamor Validus' – Hrotsvitha," *Modern Language Notes* 64 (1946): 282.

sche Gedichte des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts recognized that Hrotsvit herself gave us the Latin etymology of her name.[7] She says in the prose introduction to the dramas (3): "Unde ego, Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis non recusavi illum imitari dictando dum alii colunt legendo." Grimm pointed out that her old Saxon name derived from the two words hruot = clamor = voice and suid = validus = strong. As she wrote "Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis" in apposition to "ego", he observed she must have intended it either as a mere Latinization of her name or as a pun. No one before Grimm, not even the German Humanists who so enthusiastically furthered her literary fortunes, has the "faintest inkling of the true derivation" of Hrotsvit's name.[8] In the seventeenth century, Martin F. Seidel even went so far as to consider "Hrotsvit" to be an anagram for Helena von Rossow and claimed, accordingly, that Hrotsvit was a member of the Brandenburg von Rossow family.[9]

"Clamor Validus," however, is both an interpretation of, and a pun on, Hrotsvit's name – one that she chose to represent her poetic program as well as her poetic purpose.[10] It is not merely a Latinization of "Hrotsvit" but, more important, an interpretation of it and an explanation of her self and of her earthly mission as suggested by her name. Seen as allegorization of her name, "Clamor Validus" could be best rendered as "Forceful Testimony" (that is, for God), or "Vigorous (valid) Attestation" (that is of Christian truth).[11]

Nothing is known of Hrotsvit's childhood and ancestry except that she was of noble Saxon parentage. With pride in her descent from the famous

7 Jacob Grimm, *Lateinische Gedichte des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Dieterische Buchhandlung, 1898) p. 9.

8 Zeydel, "Ego Clamor Validus," p. 282.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.* Grimm's contribution to Hrotsvit scholarship rests with his recognition of the connection between her name and the reference to herself as "Clamor Validus." His conclusion, on the other hand, has subsequently been modified. Sebastian Euringer, for example, asserts: "Denn ihr Name bedeutet eigentlich nicht 'mächtiger Ruf,' sondern 'am Ruhm Mächtig,' " and he adds: "Ich wenigstens finde für *hruot* nur *fama, gloria*, nirgends aber *clamor* angegeben, was althochdeutsch *hruop* heissen würde" ("Drei Beiträge zur Roswotha Forschung," *Historisches Jahrbuch der Goerres-Gesellschaft zur Pflege des Wissenshaft im katholischen Deutschland* 54 (1934): 75–83). Thus, when Hrotsvit identifies herself as "ego Clamor Validus" rather than as "Fama (Gloria) Valida," she must have had in mind reasons other than the mere Latinization of her name.

11 Euringer "Drei Beiträge," p. 76, suggests that "Clamor Validus" is a reference to John the Baptist ("ego vox clamantis in deserto: Dirigete viam Domini!" (John 1:24)), with whose mission and zeal Hrotsvit identified herself and who appeared to Oda, the foundress of Gandersheim, in a vision. Interpreting the meaning of her name in this way, Hrotsvit stands in the mainstrean of early medieval thought, which insisted that *sine nomine persona non est* and that every word, every name, like everything, had a transcendental meaning and reflected the divine plan of the Creator.

tribe of the warlike Saxons, Hrotsvit gives us the etymology of the name of her tribe (*gens Saxonum*) in the *Gesta* (4–5):

> Ad claram gentem Saxonum nomen habentem
> A Saxon per duritiam mentis bene firmam.

That she was of noble descent is almost certain, since only daughters of the aristocracy were admitted to Gandersheim, a foundation of the Liudolf dynasty in lower Saxony on the slopes of the Harz mountains, on the border between the dioceses of Hildesheim and Mainz.[12] In 852, thirty years after the first Saxon foundation at Herford, Gandersheim Abbey was established by Liudolf and his wife, Oda, ancestors of the Ottos. Initially the canonesses dwelt at Brunschausen and were moved only four years later to Gandersheim. Five of Liudolf's daughters took the veil, and three of them become the first abbesses of Gandersheim. Hathumonda (852–74), educated at Herford, Gerberta I (874–96), and Christina (896–918) ruled for twenty-two years, and they succeeded not only in enforcing religious discipline but also in making the abbey into a new center of learning. The Liudolfs maintained close ties with their foundations: Liudolf himself was lay abbot of Brunschausen, his son Otto was lay abbot of Hersfeld,[13] and Oda retired to Gandersheim Abbey after her husband's death. Agius of Corvey, brother of the three Liudolf abbesses, gives testimony to the spirit of learning and culture in the abbey in the erudite dialogue of solace which he composed for the canonesses after Hathumonda's death.

The Liudolf dynasty showed a predilection for establishing religious houses, especially for daughters of the aristocracy. That some of these convents and abbeys became centers of learning and culture is hardly surprising, given the illustrious history of female monasticism. "Monasteries for women," as Suzanne Wemple observes, "were centers of civilization and culture in the early Middle Ages."[14] Some scriptoria of Frankish and Merovingian convents were the workplaces of nuns, Cologne and Chelles being the most famous. Bernhard Bischoff, for example, has connected with these scriptoria seventeen codices that contain the names of several female scribes.[15] Indeed, "some of the best examples of calligraphy," Florence E. de Roover remarks, "came from the hands

12 See, for example, Wilhelm Gundlach, *Heldenlieder der deutschen Kaiserzeit* (Aalen: Scientia, 1970), pp. 225ff; Duckett, *Death and Life*, pp. 182ff.

13 Mariane Schütze-Plugk, *Herrscher und Märtyrerauffassung bei Hrotsvit von Gandersheim* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1972), p. 5.

14 Suzanne F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 175.

15 Bernard Bischoff, "Die Kölner Nonnenhandschriften und das Skriptorium von Chelles," in *Mittelalterliche Studien*, ed. Bischoff (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1966), pp. 16–33.

of nuns." Some of these scribes, she points out, were also very prolific: Dietmundis (c.1060–1130) of Wessobrunn, Bavaria, for instance, left a catalogue of forty-five volumes that she herself had copied,[16] and religious women made lasting contributions in the fields of hagiography and hymnography as well.[17]

By the tenth century Gandersheim, like Reichenau, Tegernsee, Saint Gall, Fulda, Corvey, Herford, and Saint Emmeram (with the last four Gandersheim Abbey entertained close connections), was an oasis of intellectual and spiritual activity. Like the other great medieval monasteries, it functioned as a school, hospital, library, political center, house of refuge, center of pilgrimage. As such, it harbored different kinds of people, one of whom might have been the Spaniard who claimed to have been an eyewitness to Pelagius's martyrdom and told Hrotsvit the story of the martyrdom of the new saint in Cordoba.[18] Incidentally, the Emmeram-Munich codex of Hrotsvit's works also contains on the back of the last page eight lines in the old Glagolitic alphabet. They are almost certainly not by Hrotsvit, but they help to date the codex and give testimony to the cosmopolitan atmosphere that prevailed in Gandersheim during the Ottonian Renaissance. The old Glagolitic alphabet was used in Bulgaria and Croatia in the tenth century; perhaps Hrotsvit's abbey or Saint Emmeram harbored someone from the Balkans,[19] or the codex may even have traveled to the Balkans.

Gandersheim was a free abbey directly responsible to the king rather than to the Church. Indeed, in 947 Otto I freed the abbey from royal rule and gave the abbess the authority to have her own court of law, keep her own army, coin her own money, and hold a seat in the Imperial Diet. In 918 the reign of the three Liudolf abbesses was followed by the interregnum of two women not affiliated with the crown but chosen by the sisters from among themselves. The first of these abbesses was Hrotsvit I, whose name Hrotsvit might have been chosen or to whom she may have been related. In 965 the rule of a royal abbess was reinstated with the consecration of Gerberga II (940–1001), daughter of Henry of Bavaria and niece of Otto I, by Bishop Otwin of Hildesheim. During the reign of Abbess Gerberga II, Gandersheim was renowned for its scholastic, cultural, and religious activities.[20]

16 Florence E. de Roover, "The Scriptorium," in *The Medieval Library*, ed. James W. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 609, 610.

17 Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 181. Wemple observes, "While Merovingian legal texts were the products of episcopal and royal courts, saints' lives, hymns, and prayers were closely connected with the monasteries. Nuns left an imprint on this type of literature by introducing feminine ideals into hagiography and leaving a record of their own mystical experiences." Baudovinia's "Life of Saint Radegund," Aldegund's *vita* recording her visions, Hugeburc's "Life of Saint Wynnebald," and the older version from Chelles, of Saint Balthild's *vita* bear eloquent testimony to this observation.

18 Nagel, *Hrotsvit von Gandersheim*, Stuttgart, Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965, p. 47; Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, p. 124.

19 Edwin Zeydel, "On the Two Minor Poems in the Hrotsvitha Codex," *Modern Language Notes* 60 (1945): 376.

The date of Hrotsvit's entrance into Gandersheim is uncertain, but given the traditions of the time, it is likely that she was quite young.[21] She lived, studied, and wrote during the abbey's golden age under Gerberga II's rule, a period of peace, tranquillity, and genuine devotion to learning and service. Hrotsvit's virtuosity in adorning her works with diverse rhetorical ornaments (she uses, as I have argued elsewhere, almost all of the figures and tropes discussed by Donatus, Isidore, and the Venerable Bede), as well as the *etymologia*, *arithmetica*, and *musica* lessons incorporated into her plays, bear eloquent testimony to her training in, and respect for, the *artes*. According to her own statement in the preface to the legends, her teachers were Rikkardis and Gerberga II. It seems that Rikkardis, whom Hrotsvit describes as being "sapientissima atque benignissima magistra," taught her the curriculum of the quadrivium, while Gerberga perfected her in the fields of the trivium. Gerberga herself was educated in Saint Emmeram, the cultural center of Bavaria. It was she who introduced Hrotsvit to the Roman authors as well as to the patristic writers. Like her sister, Hadwig of Swabia, who was known for her connections with Ekkehard II of Saint Gall, Gerberga seems also to have received tuition in Greek;[22] indeed, her knowledge of Greek, as Bert Nagel

20 This is reflected by one of the letters of Otto II to Gerberga in which, sending his five-year-old daughter Sophia to be educated in the abbey, the emperor praised the cultural state of the abbey:

> Nos dilectae conjugis nostrae Theophanae
> Imperatricis Augustae votum et interventionem
> Sequentes filiam nostram carissimam nomine Sopiam
> Deo sanctaeque Genitrici illius Mariae virgini
> Sanctisque confessoribus Anastasio et Innocentio,
> Quorum Ecclesia in loco Gandesheim nominato
> Honorifice constructa videtur, cui etiam Gerbig
> Neptis nostra sub praesenti tempore venerabilis
> Abbatissa praesse dignoscitur devoto animo obtulimus
> Atque sacrae scripturae litteras ut ibi ediscat
> vitamque et conversationem dignam Sanctimonialium Deo
> Ibi servientium imitetur.

21 The first abbesses of Gandersheim entered their monasteries at a young age. Hathumonda, for example, entered Herford at the age of six, and Sophia, Otto II's and Theophano's daughter, was sent to Gandersheim for education at the age of five. However, the suggestion, first voiced by Magnin in his edition of Hrotsvit's works, that Hrotsvit shows such deep understanding of erotic passion that she must have taken the veil rather late in life, enjoyed for a while at least some popularity with German Hrotsvit scholars.

22 Wilhelm Gundlach in *Heldenlieder der deutschen Kaiserzeit* (Aalen: Scientia, 1970), vol. I, pp. 26ff, tells that Hadwig spoke and translated Greek. She learned the language while she

suggests, might have been an additional reason why Otto II's Byzantine wife, Theophano, spent much time in Gandersheim.[23] In addition, as Peter Dronke suggests, Hrotsvit may have received some instruction at court:

> It is possible that she spent some of her youth at the Ottonian court rather than in a convent. One detail here seems to me particularly suggestive. In 952 Otto I had invited Rather, the most widely-read scholar and most brilliant prose-writer of the age, to his court. . . . Ostensibly he came to give Bruno some advanced literary teaching; but the fact that Rather cultivated a distinctive style of rhymed prose, which has notable parallels in Hrotsvitha, makes it tempting to suppose that, in Rather's years with Otto, Hrotsvitha too received instruction from him, and then tried to model some of her mannerisms on his. Especially her longest and most complicated sentences . . . have to me a markedly Ratherian ring.[24]

It was through Theophano that the great culture of Byzantium came directly to Saxony. In addition to transmitting Greek arts and customs, Theophano also introduced many refinements from the court of Constantinople, such as wearing silks and taking baths.[25] She may have been, as Franz Dölger argues, an important factor in the new conception of Imperial majesty at the Saxon court.[26] Significantly, perhaps, for Hrotsvit's dramatic ventures, the Greek princess was related to Constantine VII, author of the *Liber de ceremoniis*. Constantine mentions, among other ceremonial concerns, the substitution of religious pageants for pagan spectacles. Liudprand of Cremona, too, observes that an embryonic church drama existed in tenth century Byzantium. Sent by Otto I as his ambassador to the Emperor Nichephoras Phocas in order to arrange the marriage of Otto II and a Greek princess, Liudprand complained in his work *Mission to Constantinople* that Hagia Sophia was turned into a theater, and he recorded a scenic depiction of the ascension of the prophet Elias.[27]

was engaged to the Greek King Constantino. As a widow, she read Virgil together with Ekkehard II of Saint Gall. In addition, as Nagel (*Hrotsvit von Gandersheim*, p. 43) remarks, the document of Pope John XIII for the abbey records Gerberga's name in Greek letters.

23 Bodo of Clus records that Theophano frequently visited Gandersheim Abbey on holy days. See also Nagel, *Hrotsvit von Gandersheim*, p. 43.

24 Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua († 203) to Marguerite Porete († 1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 5, 6.

25 Anne Lyon Haight, *Hrotswitha of Gandersheim: Her Life, Ties, and Works and a Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York: Hrotswitha Club, 1965), p. 9.

26 Franz Dögler, "Die Ottonenkaiser und Byzanz," in *Karolingische und Ottonische Kunst*, ed. H. Subin *et al.* (Wiesbaden: Frans Steiner, 1957).

27 Cf. Rudolf Vey, *Christliches Theater im Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Aschaffenburg: P. Pattlock, 1960), p. 12.

In addition to visiting Gandersheim frequently, Theophano also sent her daughter Sophia there to be educated. Otto II, soon after his coronation in 973, bequeathed his Seesen property to the abbey, and in 975 he solemnly reaffirmed all previous gifts to Gandersheim.[28] Hrotsvit thus was directly exposed to contact with the Imperial family, which was profoundly Byzantine in its cultural outlook and personal tastes. Perhaps as a result, a large portion of her sources belong to the hagiography of the Byzantine Empire. Four of her legends (*Maria*, *Ascensio*, *Theophilius*, *Basilius*) and four of her dramas (*Calimachus*, *Abraham*, *Paphnutius*, *Sapientia*) have their roots in the hagiography of the Eastern Church. It may be conjectured that Hrotsvit's contact with the Imperial family and its orientation to Byzantine culture and tastes might have been a contributing factor in her interest in Eastern sources.

Works

Hrotsvit's works consist of eight legends, six plays, two epics, and a short poem. The works are organized chronologically and generically into three books and fall into three clearly marked creative periods, the breaks occurring after the fourth legend and the fourth play.[29]

Book I, containing the legends (seven in leonine hexameters; one, *Gongolf*, in elegiac distichs), begins with a preface and a dedication to Hrotsvit's abbess, Gerberga II. The first legend, *Maria*, is a treatment of the Virgin's life based on an apocryphal source, the *Pseudo-Evangelium* of Mattheus. In the exordium to the poem, Hrotsvit introduces her major theme: the exaltation of the virtue of steadfast, obedient, and, therefore, triumphant and life-giving virginity. *Maria* narrates the miraculous conception and birth of Mary, her childhood, and her stay at the temple, her reluctance to marry, the selection by divine judgment of Joseph as her husband, and finally, her motherhood. Mary's glorification is entirely Christocentric – her laudable chastity and exemplary conduct are subordinated to her role as genetrix, and the poem closes with a prayer to Christ. Hrotsvit's second legend, *Ascensio*, the shortest of her works, is drawn from a Greek source describing the ascension of Christ. The third legend deals with the eighth century Frankish knight Gongolf, who lived under Pippin the Short. Gongolf is the meek, courteous, wise, and chaste knight. His magnanimity and virtue, however, became the source of envy for the devil, who uses his favorite weapon, human sexuality, to plot the saintly Gongolf's destruction. Gongolf's wife, crazed with lust for a cleric, not

28 Nagel, *Hrotsvit von Gandersheim*, p. 46.

29 The following description summarizes my description of her works in *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. K.M. Wilson (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1984), pp. 42–57.

only commits adultery but also instigates her husband's murder. Subsequently, she suffers for the deed (and her lack of contrition) by means of a scatological miracle when her blasphemy of Gongolf's miracles is punished by an involuntary fart whenever she opens her mouth. Hrotsvit's fourth legend is based not on a written source but on an eyewitness report. It describes the martyrdom of the chaste Pelagius, a tenth century Spanish saint who died persevering against the homoerotic advances of the Caliph of Cordoba, Abderrahman III. The fifth and sixth legends are the first literary treatments of the Faust theme in Germany and deal with the Greek saints Basilius and Theophilus; both concern men who made a pact with the devil and sold their immortal souls for mortal gain. The sinners are saved at the intercession of Bishop Basilius and the Virgin Mary respectively. In both poems Hrotsvit uses the themes of fall and conversion, sin and salvation; in both she apotheosizes the unlimited power of prayer and contrition that are rewarded by divine forgiveness. The seventh legend describes the martyrdom of Dionysius, the first bishop of Paris. The canoness's last legend glorifies Saint Agnes, martyr for virginity, who rejects the marriage proposal of Sempronius's son in favor of the heavenly bridegroom and resists, with Christ's help, the ignominious attempts of her adversaries to defile her chastity when she is placed in a brothel for punishment. At the conclusion of her earthly sufferings, Christ awaits his virginal bride in the celestial bridal chamber.

The second book, Hrotsvit's most widely known creation, contains her plays, all in rhymed, rhythmic prose. The book is introduced by a dedication to Gerberga, followed by a prose letter to the learned patrons of the book (sometimes identified as Gerberga's former teachers at Saint Emmeram). *Gallicanus*, the first of Hrotsvit's dramas, disseminated in the Middle Ages in martyrologies under the feast days of Saints John and Paul, deals with the conversion and martyrdom of the pagan Roman general Gallicanus. He has been promised the hand of Constantia, Emperor Constantine's daughter, if he wages a successful war against the Scythians. Constantia, however, has taken the vow of chastity, and, therefore, cannot marry him. Through divine intervention and the assistance of Saints Paul and John, Gallicanus becomes a Christian and renounces marriage. Like Constantia, he devotes the rest of his life to religion and dies persevering in his faith. *Dulcitius*, the second play, takes place during the Diocletian persecutions of the Christians and dramatizes the martyrdom of three virgin sisters, Agape, Chionia, and Hirena, who refuse to forego their faith and their chastity (thereby avoiding idolatry and adultery against the heavenly bridegroom). *Dulcitius* contains elements of an almost mimelike character. Dulcitius is depicted as a philandering pagan. He imprisons the girls in a room adjacent to the pantry so

that he may visit them undisturbed at night. The girls, very much afraid, spend the hours in prayer. Dulcitius arrives at nightfall, but when he tries to seduce the virgins, a miracle happens; he is deluded and mistakes the pots and pans for the sisters. He embraces and kisses the kitchen utensils until he emerges so smeared and blackened with soot that his soldiers mistake him for the devil and the guards chase him from the palace doorsteps. This instance of typical medieval kitchen humor is an excellent example of the concretization and visualization of Hrotsvit's hagiographic themes; external appearance is a reflection of the internal state. Dulcitius, whose soul is possessed by the devil, appears as the *imago diaboli* in body.

The third play, *Calimachus*, depicts the sin and subsequent conversion of a pagan youth. Calimachus is passionately in love with Drusiana, Andronicus's wife, who has taken the vow of chastity. Upon learning of his violent passion, Drusiana prays for death in order to forego temptation, and she dies. Ablaze with lust, Calimachus bribes Fortunatus, the tomb guard, in a desperate attempt at necrophilia. Before he can profane Drusiana's body, however, he and Fortunatus both die. They are subsequently resurrected by Saint John, and Calimachus is converted to Christianity. As did Sempronius's son in *Agnes*, so Calimachus vividly exemplifies the Christian paradox that in order to live the Christian has to die to the world first.

In the fourth and fifth dramas, *Paphnutius* and *Abraham*, Hrotsvit again treats of the themes of fall and conversion. Two harlots, representing the most abominable vice of *luxuria carnis*, are converted by two saintly anchorites and consequently live ascetic lives. In *Paphnutius* the courtesan Thais is converted by a saintly hermit who aspires to this task as the result of a vision, while in *Abraham* the hermit is the courtesan's uncle and former guardian. The recognition scene between the aged Abraham, posing as a lover, and his niece Mary in the brothel has evoked especial praise for Hrotsvit's talent as a dramatist. Finally, *Sapientia*, the last of the dramas, deals with the martyrdom of the three allegorical virgins, Fides, Spes, and Karitas, who, like the heroines of *Dulcitius*, willingly face death on earth so that they may earn eternal life in heaven.

Paphnutius and *Sapientia* commence with a dialogue lesson in music and mathematics respectively. In *Paphnutius* the saintly hermit is expounding upon the mysteries of the celestial harmonies to his disciples, while in *Sapientia* the mother of the three virgins confounds the pagan emperor with her arithmetical learning or, rather, her Boethian exposition of numerical values. Book two concludes with a poem of thirty-four hexameters on Saint John's Apocalypse which is believed to have been intended for inscription under the twelve murals of Gandersheim.

Book three contains the two extant leonine hexameter epics, the

Carmen de Gestis Oddonis Imperatoris or, in short, the *Gesta* and the *Primordia Coenobii Gandeshemensis*. The *Gesta*, it has been argued, is one of the most successful tenth century attempts at a Christian epic. Otto the Great is depicted as the ideal Christian ruler – a descendant, not necessarily of Aeneas, but of David. Otto's heroic excellence, as Dennis Kratz argues, comprises characteristics derivative of the *figura* David: *sapientia*, *pietas*, *clementia*, *fortitudo*.[30] He is the earthly replica of the heavenly king, deriving his just power from God. By implication, insurrection against him (and there were more than a few during Hrotsvit's lifetime) is depicted as the work of the devil. Among the female characters of the *Gesta*, Otto's queens Edith and Adelheid stand out; both are depicted as paragons of feminine excellence, described in the superlatives of the hagiographic tradition and in the consciously court-oriented schemata of values.

Finally, the short *Primordia* presents the history of Gandersheim Abbey from its founding until the death of Abbess Christina in 918. The *Primordia* is replete with hagiographic topoi, legendary characters (whose exemplary lives are reminiscent of the heroes and heroines of Hrotsvit's legends and dramas), miracles, and visions. At the same time, the work also manifests a strong political tendency: any part that the Hildesheim bishops played in the foundation of the abbey is conspicuously ignored. Rather, emphasis is placed on the role of the Liudolfs in establishing an autonomous religious house that is to be entirely independent of the jurisdiction and influence of the Hildesheim bishops.

The organization of the three books in this manner shows Hrotsvit to be a master of symmetry and balance. The themes and motifs of the first book are repeated in a different generic form in the second, and there is also a statistical inversion of the predominant sex in the two books: in the legends men predominate; in the dramas women do. The hagiographic themes of the legends and dramas are transferred to a historic context in the third book. In all works the virtuous act serves as a mimetic paradigm of sanctity; Christological analogues are presented in the monastic, as well as the secular contexts.

Hrotsvit's predilection for viewing her act of creating as ordering, patterning, and arranging the details of her sources for the individual work is reflected in her prefatory texts where she refers to her act of writing as "ordinari."[31] It also holds true in terms of the arrangement of

30 Dennis Kratz, "The Nun's Epic: Hrotswitha on Christian Heroism," in *Wege der Worte*, ed. Donald C. Riechel (Cologne, Vienna, 1978), pp. 132–42.

31 For a detailed discussion of her prologues, see K. Wilson, *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Ethics of Authorial Stance* (Leyden: Brill, 1988).

the Gesamtwerk. Indeed, one pronounced particularity of the Hrotsvithean texts is the omnipresent evidence of her fondness for linkage, for ordering in a patterned, harmonious way and imbuing, in turn, the structural composition of her works with numeric symbolism that reinforces her themes. Poetologically, this patterning is the manifestation of the same creative process as that which she described in the prefaces denoting the composition of the texts; it is also analogous to her description of God's act of creation as one of ordering according to number, measure, and weight. Evidently, Hrotsvit considers the creative act to consist of establishing order, setting up precise harmony in the organization of materials and presenting, thus, a striking analogy to divine creation.

Linkage exists on the literal, metaphoric, and thematic levels; it occurs between lines and segments of the same work, between works of the same group (that is, legends, or dramas), and between works of different groups. The more pronounced correspondences exist between groups of works dealing with similar themes: the legends and the dramas, both utilizing the hagiographic plots, on the one hand, and the epics dealing with historical subject matter on the other. While these echoes might be described, on the technical level, as instances of amplification or expolition, that is, the recapturing of the subject from different angles to insure reader compliance, the exact balance of the recurrences between male and female protagonists serves the additional purpose of definition, of the schematization of an ideal applicable to both sexes. In this manner, the formal and thematic redoubling not only underlines unity of intent and the clear perception of all the works as an organic whole, but it also effects a kind of hermeneutic retake: a rereading of hagiographic plots which encourages an accretion of meaning or even reinterpretation, in novel, even strange generic environments.

The initial linkage between the legends and the dramas is effected by the person of Agnes, heroine of the last legend, at whose grave and at whose intercession Constantia, heroine of the first legend, is healed from the double evil of leprosy and paganism. The dramas, like the legends, are linked by double treatment of plots: the two *passiones*, *Dulcitius* and *Sapientia*, deal with the persecution and martyrdom of three allegorical sisters; *Abraham* and *Paphnutius* repeat the fall and conversion theme; *Gallicanus* and *Calimachus* center on the theme of conversion.

The two epics, *Gesta Oddonis Imperatori* and *Primordia*, concern members of the Saxon dynasty in their roles as secular rulers (*Gesta*) and religious rulers/benefactors (*Primordia*). The 34-hexameter-line poem on the Apocalypse of Saint John links the legends and dramas (both hagiographic in theme and liturgical in language) on the one hand, and the epics (heroic/historic in theme, more secular in language) on the other,

by providing description for the twelve murals of the abbey of Gandersheim. The iconographic significance, hagiographic relevance and historic importance of Saint John are linked in his role as patron of Gandersheim and the inspiration of the abbey's founding.

The legends and the dramas are linked individually as well. The four treatments of the fall and conversion theme (*Theophilus*, *Basilius*, *Abraham*, *Paphnutius*) all exemplify the doctrine of heavenly grace for the repentant sinner, the *misericordia* of Christ and his saints. In the legends men lapse; in the dramas women do. In the legends men sell their immortal souls to the devil for earthly gain; in the dramas women sell their bodies to men for gain. In all four treatments, sinners are helped by a member of the opposite sex who is related to them in two of the treatments and unrelated in the other two. In *Basilius* it is the servant's wife who takes the initiative and requests Bishop Basilius's help for the miserable sinner; in *Abraham* it is Maria's uncle who sets out on the long journey to reclaim his lapsed niece. In *Theophilus* the Virgin Mary intercedes for the repentant Theophilus; in *Paphnutius* the saintly hermit of the desert seeks out the famous courtesan Thais in order to convert her.

The four *passiones* exemplify the same sex-inversion. Pelagius and Dionysius are male martyrs, the heroines of *Dulcitius* and *Sapientia* are young girls. The sex of the persecutors, however, never varies: all four are male pagan rulers. All four plots involve the persecution of Christian by pagan; all four contain miracles of Christ's aid to his witnesses. Both *Pelagius* and *Dulcitius* introduce subplots dealing with illicit love and heroically resisted seduction; in both, the protagonists' chastity is contrasted with the antagonists' promiscuity. Both *Dionysius* and *Sapientia* develop plots in which the persecution is triggered by the protagonists' missionary activity which the pagan rulers see as social, religious and political subversion. In *Dionysius* Domitian is angered because his subjects flock to the bishop to be baptized; in *Sapientia* the reason for Antiochus's denunciation of Sapientia is her great missionary zeal to persuade Roman women of the importance of abstinence – Antiochus is outraged because, following Sapientia's preachings, wives no longer share their husbands' table and bed.

Gongolf and *Agnes*, exemplifying the remunerative and punitive aspects of divine justice, correspond to *Gallicanus* and *Calimachus*. *Calimachus*, like *Gongolf*, treats of a married saint – Gongolf and Drusiana are the only two married saints in Hrotsvit's legends and dramas. Both of them, however, live in synesaictical marriage. Both plots involve adulterous lust and the death of the protagonists because of the antagonists' illicit passion. In *Calimachus*, however, Drusiana is miraculously resurrected and Calimachus is converted at her grave, while Gongolf's adulterous wife (as Fortunatus) persists in her iniquity. Again, the sex roles of the protagonists are reversed in the drama: Gongolf, the male virtuous hero of the legend, dies because of the guiles of his lascivious wife and her lover; Drusiana, the virtuous heroine of the drama, is pursued by a handsome youth possessed by adulterous lust.

Agnes and *Gallicanus* both concern the preservation of the heroine's virginity and her vow to the Heavenly Bridegroom. In both treatments the offer to be avoided is of honorable marriage; likewise in both plots the would-be lovers/husbands are later converted and bear testimony for Christ the Savior. This is the only instance of a double treatment of a theme where the sex roles are not reversed: the preservation of one's virginity appears to be a paradigmatically female virtue. In three of the four treatments of the theme the protagonists become catalysts of salvation for their would-be lovers/husbands. In *Gongolf*, the only version with a male protagonist, however, the catalytic role does not succeed but exacerbates the wife's iniquity.

While the linkages of the epics to the legends and dramas are less pronounced, they do nevertheless exist. The historical persons of the two epics are idealized and romanticized so that they resemble the hagiographic heroes and heroines of the legends and of the plays. Otto I, hero of the *Gesta Oddonis*, is the ideal Christian ruler. He is the pious, benevolent and diplomatic hero, resembling Gongolf and the Emperor Constantine of Gallicanus and marked, as they are, by his *iusticia* and *misericordia*, and Otto's designations (like those of Gongolf, Pelagius, and Dionysius) link him with God and his saints. In the *Primordia*, Gerberga is the living embodiment of the love of chastity and of the resolute and unchanging will with which she faces the temptations of the world. Like Agnes, Mary, and Constantia, Gerberga also refuses to marry her bridegroom, Bernhard, because she has taken a secret vow of chastity. Oda, ancestress of the Liudolf dynasty, is the shining example of virtuous motherhood. Like Sapientia, she survives the deaths of her daughters (except for Christina's), all of whom she encourages in their religious endeavors.

The last text attributed to Hrotsvit, *Lives of the Popes Anastasius and Innocent*, is no longer extant.

Hrotsvit's protagonists in all her works are the saints and the Liudolfs. Her texts seek adherence to the monastic ideal and to an epistemology which confirms that truth, that is revealed truth, is recognizable, absolute, eternal and imitable; a truth persuasively conveyed for the moral edification of her readers.

Shine forth in such glory and at such heights of honor
That no other kingdoms will compare with theirs
In might and in power in that particular epoch."
He spoke thus and promptly returned to higher ether
Leaving this sweet solace with the blessed lady.

Interpretive Essay

Genre

All of Hrotsvit's works are generic hybrids. All belong – to one degree or another – to the realm of hagiography. In all the saint and/or the virtuous person becomes the re-presentation of Christ and the mimetic paradigm of Christian virtue which sets a model articulating, in Hawley's phrase, "Christianity's highest sense of itself."[1] As literal as well as symbolic truth "the sacred *vita* lent itself perfectly for genre mixing" since as a direct instrument for religious and moral didacticism it was bound to utilize diverse genres for their recognized mimetic, didactic, or aesthetic functions.

The predilection for the hybridization of genres was, according to Alastair Fowler, especially prominent in the Middle Ages, nowhere more obviously, perhaps, than in hagiographic texts where modal transformations were mandated by the ontological privileging of extra literary concerns.[2] The privileging of aesthetic criteria over moral and pedagogical values in judging the merits of the written word would have been as alien to the early medieval reader/writer as was the concept of pure classical genres. As Alastair Fowler observes,

> They [medieval genres] may be classical, or classical misunderstood, or classical reinterpreted, or vernacular equivalent, or vernacular oblivious, or vernacular artful and innovative. However, as the existence of fairly sophisticated epistolary rhetoric shows, all this is not to be put down to mere incapacity – still less to disregard for genre. We have to look for explanations of the disorder, first in the practical aims of the grammarians, and second in the difficulties that emergent forms present to the genre critic.[3]

Since it has been Hrotsvit's dramas (rather than her legends or epics) that have initiated the authenticity debate and have become the most widely read texts of the *corpus*, I would like to concentrate on exploring the confluence of two generic modes (the hagiographic and the dramatic) converging on their potential for mimesis in her dramas. It is my conten-

1 Hawley, *Saints and Virtue* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. xv–xvi.
2 Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* (Cambridge, 1982).
3 *Ibid.*, p. 146.

tion that Hrotsvit, I believe, composed her hagiographic lessons in a hybrid dramatic form for reasons practical, theoretical, and aesthetic. She chose to graft a pedagogically valuable and morally superior mimetic form, the sacred *vita* (which not only intended to manifest the continuing nature of divine grace or Church dogma but also mandated – by insistence on author-reader interaction – an adherence to and emulation of the ideal promoted), onto a pragmatically mimetic, aesthetically superior, but morally valueless form, Terentian comedy (which not only claimed to be a *simulacrum* of life but was accused by the early Church fathers of inciting improper action by claiming divine precedence for human frailty and by centering its concerns squarely on the human, the facile and temptingly easy pursuit of happiness). She gave her readers what they needed to read in a form they wanted to read. Drama was prohibited and repeatedly castigated by the Church for its mimetic power, although Terence was read in schools because of his eloquence; sacred biography, conversely, was advocated and promoted by the Church as a powerful tool of teaching and preaching because of its mimetic potential, since the life of the saint functioned as a mimetic paradigm; aesthetically, however, hagiographic texts ranged from the marginally literate and clumsily simplistic examples of the early Middle Ages to the ornate and eloquent compilations of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Hrotsvit, then, attempted a perfectly logical and masterfully conceived fusion of two mimetically defined genres by grafting her hagiographic plots and liturgical prayers onto the Terentian form.

According to Thomas Heffernan, sacred biography transcends history because "the essential thing being signified (the presence of the divine in the saint) exists outside a system where sign and signified can be empirically validated."[4] Sacred narratology thus conflates heavenly and earthly ontologies and evokes "the meaning which erupts when these two ontological planes collide."[5]

The Middle Ages were teeming with various forms of hagiographic texts. The *Biblioteca Hagiographia Latina* alone contains over nine thousand *vitae*. They vary in style, length, complexity, linguistic polish, genre, and mode. Saint Augustine's pronouncement offered hagiographers creative license in their composition by extending to them a system which was equipped for symbolic as well as literalist representation, for Augustine held that eloquence without wisdom was empty, but wisdom without eloquence also had limited use. Language, therefore, had to be utilized accordingly to convey the reality demanded by the situation. This

4 Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography* (New York, 1988), p. 9.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

flexibility is usually seen as inherently "anti-sophist" for its insistence, as Thomas Heffernan argues, that the *res* or dialectic of an argument was more critical than *eloquentia*. While this hierarchy was widely accepted in the Middle Ages, it was by no means categorical. For instance, the *Glossa Ordinaria*, in glossing the parable of the talents, equates the bad servant and his single coin with an *intellectus* deprived of his eloquence. Eloquence, on the other hand, is associated with the second servant's duplication of the two talents interpreted as the preaching of the word by using *figura* and *exempla*.[6]

Heffernan's assessment of this distinction's importance to hagiography in general and to the medieval proclivity for hybridization in specific is crucial for an understanding of the practice of medieval genre mixing:

> what is of fundamental importance for this view of narrative in sacred biography is the idea that language is syncretistic; it cannot only harmonize different ontological planes, heaven and earth, but, if necessary, it can also contradict its own required structures to do so.[7]

There is no question as to the hagiographic nature of Hrotsvit's plots nor her privileging the *res* of her themes over the *eloquentia* of her model but there is also no question of her wish to clothe her "wisdom" in elegant garb. Her sources for the dramas are well known and her *apologia* for using the Terentian form often discussed. Lesser known, however, are her methodology of composition and her liturgical and especially doxological framing devices for the plays that serve, I believe, as the critical *nexus* to the services, especially the sermons, and as the diacritical marks framing her attempts to harmonize the vastly divergent ontological planes of Christian instruction with pagan theater, revelatory history and symbolic presentation with the verisimilitude of dialogic presentation.

The structural elements of Hrotsvit's texts bearing obvious associations with the liturgy are the doxological formulas concluding most of her works.[8] The formulas that conclude the individual dramas fall into two classes. One class consists of Trinitarian formulas ("qui regnat et gloriatur in unitate trinitatis. Amen," *Gallicanus*, XIII, 7 for instance), and the other formulas list glorifying attributes ("Ipsi soli honor, virtus, fortitudo et victoria, laus et iubilatio per infinita saeculorum saecula. Amen," *Calimachus*, IX, 33). *Gallicanus*, *Paphnutius*, and *Sapientia* have formu-

6 *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 114, col. 165.
7 Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 9.
8 For a full discussion of the liturgical elements in Hrotsvit's works, see Jonathan Black, "The Use of Liturgical Texts in Hrotsvit's Works," in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, "Rara Avis in Saxonia"* (Ann Arbor, 1987), pp. 165–82.

las belonging to the first class; *Dulcitius*, *Calimachus*, and *Abraham* have formulas of the second.

The first type is modeled after the standard doxological formulas used after each collect in the Mass and Office.[9] The second type is also used in the liturgy (e.g. "Benedictio . . . honor, virtus et fortitudo Deo nostro in saecula saeculorum," Antiphon, trinity, CAO III, 1710). Hrotsvit's utilization of these two different types of liturgical formulas in framing her hagiographic texts is not in itself unusual especially if we look upon the dramas as thematic double-takes of the legends in different form. What *is* notable is the effect of the formulas on the positioning of the dramas as sacred narratology squarely into the pulpit or the refectory as well as their role in reminding their audiences of the metatexts for the plays: the Roman Benedictine Liturgy and the Benedictine liturgical calendar.

The third constituent element of the Hrotsvithean hybrid texts is drama. Hrotsvit's conformity to the general definitions of drama by late Roman and early medieval theorists and grammarians is quite obvious.[10] They all define drama as dialogue and as a narrative beginning in turbulence and ending in tranquility. In fact, Evanthius's definition is still felt as late as in Dante's letter to Can Grande emphasizing comedy's gradual move away from worldliness. I have argued elsewhere and in great detail Hrotsvit's close adherence to the formal precept of Terentian comedy advocated by Evanthius; let it suffice to say here that she follows closely the rules established and promoted by him.

While Hrotsvit follows the formal precepts of drama as described and praised by Evanthius, her plays conform only partially to his thematic definition of comedy; she borrows what suits her hagiographic plots and transmutes or omits what does not.

> Inter tragoediam autem et comoediam cum multa tum inprimis hoc distat, quod in comoedia mediocres fortunae hominum, parvi impetus periculorum laetique sunt exitus actionum, at in tragoedia omnia contra . . . : *et illic prima turbulenta, tranquilla ultima*, in tragoedia contrario ordine res aguntur; tum quod in tragoedia fugienda vita, in comoedia capessenda exprimitur; postremo quod omnis comoedia de fictis est argumentis, tragoedia saepe de historia fide petitur.[11]

9 Liturgical books characteristically include only the incipit ("Per," "Qui vivis") as in the case in *Gallicanus*, II: "praestare domino nostro Iesu Christo, qui vivit" (IX, 2).

10 For a full discussion of Hrotsvit's adherence to the general precepts, see K. Wilson, *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: The Ethics of Authorial Stance* (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

11 Evanthius, in *Donatus commentum Terenti*, ed. P. Wessner, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1962), vol. 1, p. 21.

> (Between tragedy and comedy there is, among others, this difference: that in comedy men of middle fortunes are depicted, as are small dangers, and a happy ending, while in tragedy the opposites occur. In comedy disturbance comes first but tranquility at the end, in tragedy, the exact reversal of that order. In tragedy [the depiction] of life is to be shunned, in comedy, followed. Finally, the arguments presented in comedy are all based on fiction, but in tragedy, on truth.)

Clearly, the definitions are given in terms of subject matter (*res*) – an aspect of drama Hrotsvit admittedly wishes to counteract. Her dramas, she says, are only Terentian in form, but as to their subject matter she vows to present the inversion of the pagan poet's themes: for lascivious women engaged in illicit passion in Terence's comedies, she says, she will substitute saintly and virginal women triumphing over the temptàtions of the flesh; for corrupting pastime she will substitute useful Christian instruction – assertions which earned Hrotsvit's plays the description "anti-Terenz." Because of the superimposition of the hagiographic *res* over the Terentian *eloquentia* inversion is precisely what happens to Evanthius's stratification of comic subject matter. Since Hrotsvit upholds an ideal to be emulated rather than, like Terence, entertaining his audience by comedies of manners representative of his contemporaries, her heroines are seldom *mediocres fortunate*: they face more than *parvi impetus periculorum*, as the plays' torture-scenes and grave temptations attest; while the outcomes of the plays do bring eternal life and celestial rewards to the protagonists, they inevitably suffer martyrdom; while they do desire eternal life, they flee life on earth; and, finally, her dramas, she insists, relate truth and not fiction.

Evanthius's insistence that "in tragedy the kind of life is shown that is to be shunned; while in comedy the kind is shown that is to be followed" is fully borne out in Hrotsvit's statements of dramatic purpose. Similarly, regarding the didactic intent of comedy and the tremendously mimetic appeal of the theater, Hrotsvit is in full accordance with Evanthius – she only wishes to teach something entirely different and to teach it differently: not only by negative but also by positive example. Evanthius quotes Cicero on comedy, "comoediam esse cicero ait imitationem vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imaginem veritatis,"[12] Hrotsvit, too, defines the poetic aim of her dramas in didactic terms; she, however, wishes to uphold a mirror of laudable excellence to which the reader is to rise through emulation.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Hrotsvit's specific reasons for drawing on Terentian drama are not apologistic but aesthetic/poetological: they concern the *amplificatio*, the revitalization of her hagiographic themes presented earlier in the eight legends by the infusion of "new" poetological considerations in the form of an innovative hybridized genre. She wished to use the Terentian form because he was read and enjoyed, and she wished to provide a substitute for that reading and enjoying. He offered her a formal model that, *mutatis mutandis*, gave her an opportunity to present her Christian heroines for the glory of God and the edification and salvation of his creatures. This is a subversive mimesis, which attempts to expose the falsity of what it adopts and interiorizes by substituting good for evil in the very same form of expression. The rhetorical concept for this process of hybridization, imitation as critique to discredit the opponent, is set forth by Quintilian, who advocates the imitation of the adversary as an effective rhetorical strategy for discrediting him. Hrotsvit's strategy is homeopathic, that is, healing by the application of pathogenic agents: to cure *similia similibus*.

In the preface to her dramas Hrotsvit states her authorial intentions:

> There are many Catholics and we cannot entirely acquit ourselves of this accusation, who prefer the vanity of pagan books on account of the elegance of their style, to the usefulness of sacred scripture. There are also others, who, devoted to sacred writings and spurning pagan works, yet read the (*figmenta*) fantastic fiction of Terence frequently, and while they delight in the sweetness of his style, they are stained by the knowledge of [exposure to] wicked events. Wherefore I, the Strong Voice of Gandersheim, did not refuse to imitate in composition him whom other are accustomed to read, so that in the same form of writing in which the shameless acts of lascivious women have been depicted the laudable chastity of Christian women may be celebrated according to the ability of my poor talent. (*Opera*, p. 235)

Her program is developed in three sets of interlocking antitheses: pagan uselessness vs. Christian utility, sweetness of style vs. moral perdition in subject matter, and most importantly, lies vs. truth. Hrotsvit's anger at Terence prompts her response. Her reference to Terence's noxious *figmenta* stands in marked contrast to her own repeated attestations of useful *veritas*, or hagiographic truth, as the source and theme of her works, reflecting in this way her triple purpose: first, she contrasts helpful Christian truths with dangerous pagan lies; secondly, she substitutes chaste Christian women for the pagan poet's lascivious courtesans, thus creating female characters who exemplify traits worthy of emulation; thirdly, she creates Christian alter- or antiplays intended to supplant pagan comedy, at least for her limited audience. This is clearly an exercise in

one-upmanship empowered by the doctrinal superiority of her subject matter, and by her "scholarly" approach to appropriating the genre. In this manner hagiographic truth is conveyed through the depiction of feminine excellence and the glorious triumph of Christianity over paganism is achieved through the victory of faithful, determined and chaste Christian women over amorous, weak and evil pagan men. Her poetic manifesto is subtle. While in the preface to her legends she conforms to the traditional gynocentric concept of the female monastic author as a divinely authorized instrument of God's ongoing revelation by referring to herself, like Hildegard of Bingen and other early female religious writers, as a musical instrument played by the Divine player, in the preface to her plays she does not. Neither does she follow her authorial identification – as Hildegard and Julian do – with repeating the traditional theme of God's choosing feeble women in order to confound mighty men thus endorsing the notion of women's self-evident lack of authority *qua* creationally subordinate females which is counteracted by God's redemptive empowerment. Rather, in a stroke of rhetorical genius, she herself transfers that redemptive empowerment to her heroines who, frail though they might be, will confound mighty men. This authorial empowerment by its clear analogy to the redemptive topos firmly legitimizes her exemplary constructs within the cohesively androcentric boundaries of tenth century monasticism.

In the preface to the dramas Hrotsvit objects to the depiction of the "shameless acts of lascivious women" ("turpia lasciviarum incesta feminarum") for which she wishes to substitute the laudable chastity of holy virgins. This may come as quite a surprise to one reading Terence, for as K. de Luca observes, the Roman poet's depravity is greatly overstated.[13] In fact the Terentian characters' moral wickedness – or even sexual appetite – pales in comparison to that of Hrotsvit's (male) protagonists engaging – or attempting to engage – in diverse sexual aberration from multiple fornication to necrophilia.

Hrotsvit's indignation against Terence, though, springs not necessarily from reading his plays but from the long tradition of Christian invective against the theater, notably the treatises of Tertullian and Augustine. Tertullian and Augustine inveigh against the sexual mores depicted in and inspired by Roman comedy corrupting by condoning and delighting in carnal sin while, at the same time, the divine is dragged down into the mire of human sexuality. The most subversive element of Terence's drama for Hrotsvit must have been the devaluation of the divine at the aggran-

13 Kenneth de Luca, "Hrotsvit's 'Imitation' of Terence," *Classical Folia* 28 (1974): 90.

dizement of the human; the total ontological inversion of sacred narratology where the presence of the divine in the saint imparts the seminal meaning to the plot. The true center of existence in Terence's plays is man; a universe which for Hrotsvit, as it was for Tertullian and Augustine, was devoid of meaning because it was a world with its center totally misplaced. Terence's *humanitas* only has a place at the margins of her world occupied by its rightful center of *divinitas*. This is not to say that Terentian comedy has always maintained (or considered) itself as pure classical form, as uncontaminated genre. It, too, is a hybrid.

Terence, in fact, promises his audience something borrowed and something new, the presentation of Greek New comedy in Roman garb, whereby he carefully distinguishes between plot, thought, and style (or content, presentation, and expression respectively). In the prologue to the *Andria* he says: "ita non sunt dissimili argumento sed tamen dissimili oratione sunt fictae et stilo." What he takes from the Greeks is the plot and certain stock characters and, needless to say, the form; presentation, psychology, and style are his own. He admits to the practice of *contaminatio* regarding his use of Greek plots, and justifies his use of *imitatio* concerning his occasional stylistic and verbal borrowing from talented men by presenting them as worthy of imitation. Hrotsvit, on the other hand, apologizes for her use of formal *imitatio* but takes pride in presenting subject matter and characters diametrically opposed to those of Terence. What she imitates is the *genus dictationis* (that is, the generic form of what she believed the dramatic rules of comedy would require). In terms of style and expression (*dictatio, sententiae*) she knows herself to be inferior to her model; in her source of inspiration, her subject matter and her themes, on the other hand, she sees herself as Terence's superior. What she presents is truth, what she teaches are the precepts of divine revellation, what she upholds is the Christian ascetic ideal. Fortified with the weapons of hagiography, she can battle Terence; fortified with his form of presentation, she intends to lure her readers from pagan drama to sacred *vita*, from Terence's preoccupation with *humanitas* to the proper Christian concern for *divinitas*. And in the process she creates a hybrid form which is neither classical comedy nor sacred legend but embryonic Christian drama paving the way, at least in principle if not in practice, for the mystery and miracle plays of the later Middle Ages.

Hrotsvit's Humor

Far from simplistic, Hrotsvit's humor is a cornucopia of multifaceted and often quite sophisticated instances of self-conscious textual complexities. As an interplay between audience/reader and text/author, access to her humor is predicated on the reader's awareness of the metatext (her

audience's cultural, liturgical, biblical, and hagiographic glossing of the legends', epics' and plays' action). Comic elements range from bawdy scatology, such as the involuntary fart that Gongolf's wife sends forth every time she opens her mouth as a punishment for her refusal to repent and recognize her dead husband's sanctity (a marvelous inversion of the heroic eloquence of Hrotsvit's virginal martyrs), to voyeurism, when the three young innocent virgins in *Dulcitius* are glued to the key hole observing the captain making amorous overtures to the pots and the pans mistaking it for love-making with the girls, to complex interactions between the metatexts of Catholic liturgy, Christian iconography, the "classics" read in school, and the Hrotsvithean texts.

An excellent example for the latter is *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Calimachus*. As the play's title implies, this is a resurrection play, invoking the season of Lent, the temptation and passion of Christ, His descent to the underworld and His resurrection. It is not inconceivable that the arrangement and presentation/reading of the dramas echoed the liturgy stressing, thus, their applicatory, emulatory intention. In fact, I think it quite likely that the thematic double takes of the legends and the plays were intended as parallel construction to the Benedictine Office's practice of double analogical *lectiones* (for the Old and the New Testaments) followed by the sermon illustrating the morals through hagiographic examples. If that assumption is correct, then Hrotsvit would be anchoring the humor and sophisticated complexities of her plays' subtextual running commentary on monastic life and patristic ideology by drawing on her audience's cultural referents, that is to say their familiarity with the Church calendar, the Old and New Testaments, analogical logic as a way of glossing any text, the iconography of Scripture and hagiography and, of course, school authors such as Virgil, Terence and their commentators. Looking at *Calimachus* in this manner certainly enriches the reading experience of the work. The legend analogies to the play, *Basilius* and *Theophilus*, deal with temptation by the Devil, the succumbing of the (male) sinners to that temptation followed by two saintly (male) bishops' efforts to wrestle with Satan and wringing the repentant sinners' souls from him. They are, in other words, stories of epic struggles about spiritual death and resurrection, psychomachias of good and evil concretized in actual battles between Satan and the saintly representatives of the Church. In *Calimachus*, on the other hand, the protagonist is a woman (and a married woman at that), Drusiana, who is both the recipient of temptation and the catalyst of the sinner's conversion and salvation. Unlike the (male) protagonists of the legends, she not only does not succumb to temptation, but subsumes, in part, the salvific roles of the legends' male intercessors. As in other instances of Hrotsvit's sex inver-

sion in her thematic double takes, so here too we see one-upmanship at work, and here, too, we see a female thwarting male power by refusing to allow herself to be the object of desire.

In light of the many metatextual undercurrents, the play's tomb-scene assumes a quagmirish complexity of association. As a passion analogy we see a heroic female's resistance to temptation, her death, resurrection, and subsequent magnanimity in forgiving those who trespassed against her. Unlike at Christ's grave, which was visited by the three Marys coming to anoint his limbs, the male visitors to Drusiana's tomb have a very different anointing in mind. Unlike the angel who guards Christ's tomb, Hrotsvit has the devilish Fortunatus at the entrance and, subsequently, the serpent coiled about the bodies. The serpent, of course, would evoke images of the Garden of Eden and of Lucifer in Hrotsvit's audience; it would, perhaps, also remind them of Virgil's Laokoon and his sons from Statius's commentary on Virgil's account of the Tale of Troy.[14] In the Statius commentary Laokoon's punishment is a result of his act of sacrilege (he and his wife desecrated Neptune's Temple by having sex in the sanctuary). Here too the crime is desecration in an erotic context, made even graver by the intent to commit that most heinous of sexual sins, necrophilia.

Hrotsvit's programatic statement in the preface to the dramas, "to show a frail Christian overcome strong men," is taken here, as elsewhere in the dramas, almost to the point of absurdity. When pursued by the handsome Calimachus (echoing, perhaps, the Greek love-poet's erotic reputation) Drusiana doesn't simply pray for strength to resist him nor for the standard hagiographic miracle of bodily change, not even for *his* departure or demise; no, she implores God to allow her to die to be able to forego temptation, and be the inspiration for another's sin. She thus subtly equates active and passive sinning, so perniciously linked by patristic writers, especially Tertullian, who invariably equate the objects of desire with desire itself. God promptly complies, and Drusiana dies. Calimachus, unlike the analogical legends' sinners, persists in his lust (to show Drusiana's stellar virtue, he has to be made a formidable adversary) and turns to necrophilia. In what might be one of Hrotsvit's most masterful instances of black humor, Calimachus delivers an ardently passionate address to the corpse after Fortunatus, having pocketed his bribe, praises the attractions of the still well preserved dead body. It is noteworthy that Calimachus, and Calimachus alone, this most monstrous of Hrotsvit's

14 On Dante's use of the same analogy, see Joseph Gibaldi and Richard LaFleur, "Vanni Fucci and Laocoon: Servius as Possible Intermediary Between Virgil and Dante," *Traditio* 32 (1976): 386–97.

erotic monsters, is the pagan youth whose initial speech echoes Augustine's (and subsequent Catholic writers') objections to the mimetic powers of festive comedy. Like Terence's young profligate referenced by suggestion, so Calimachus turns to the Gods to invoke divine precedent for his adulterous lust. Again, Hrotsvit's audience, aware perhaps of Europa's, Danae's, Semele's and Leda's helpless passivity, would, if not laugh, then certainly smile at Drusiana thwarting her ardent pursuer, and, by extension, at a frail and chaste Christian woman's victory over the gods of love.

The tomb scene is replete with analogical complexities. Aside from the initial "Lenten" approach by Calimachus, intent on bribing Fortunatus in order to gain access to Drusiana's body – a rather obscene burlesque of the three Marys visiting the tomb – we have another visitation with Pentecostal echoes by Andronicus, Drusiana's husband, and Saint John, their walk interrupted by divine intervention (the resurrected Christ) suggesting the events at the tomb and then voicing the injunction to glorify His name in the resurrected and consequently converted sinner. This missionary, Pentecostal injunction helps to explain the rather surprising turn of events at the tomb: Calimachus, not Drusiana, is revived first; this miracle is followed by a lengthy didactic dialogue of catechism during which the young man repents and embraces Christianity. Only after his function as missionary is concluded (with much verbose preachifying), does Saint John, at Andronicus's request, resurrect the heroine who, in yet one more instance of moral one-upmanship, begs for a second chance for Fortunatus who an hour or so earlier sold her body to Calimachus "to use as he pleased" (VII, 1). Fortunatus chooses to be dead rather than convert, ironically echoing thereby Hrotsvit's heroines' steadfastness in the face of pagan persecutions. The play concludes with a doctrinal lesson expounding the nature of free will and grace, glossing the events, and with a final jubilatory prayer to God.

Hrotsvit's humor, then, while subversive, is by no means radical. She does not supplant the patriarchal paradigm, she never questions the moral (ecclesiastical) hierarchy of virtues and virginity's place at their pinnacle; what she does is to appropriate and invert the paradigm, presenting a hierarchical system of her own in which the young and the female often reign and where the joy of religious devotion is practiced with a smile at the absurd and ludicrous inferiority of the foe and at the, perhaps, equally absurd and ludicrous tradition of patriarchal pretensions.

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