

HROTSWITHA'S DEBT TO TERENCE

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Critical opinion remains divided over the merits of the six plays of Hrotswitha of Gandersheim, the tenth-century Saxon nun.¹ Her dramas have been seen as unimaginative transpositions of saints' lives into dialogue, "dialogisierte Legende";² on the other hand they have been praised for their transformation of hagiographical sources through humor and personal insight.³ In this paper I will deal with Hrotswitha's two plays that concern the conversion of a *meretrix*, the *Abraham* and the *Pafnutius*. This was a popular topic in the Middle Ages. Amidst the lives

¹ For a bibliography of Hrotswitha through 1965 see Anne Lyon Haight ed., *Hrotswitha of Gandersheim: Her Life, Times, and a Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York 1965); for a more recent bibliography see Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1984) 55–83, 293–97. Important contributions not mentioned in these works are Erich Michalka, *Studien über Intention und Gestaltung in den dramatischen Werken Hrotsvits von Gandersheim* (Fraudenthal 1968); Dietlind Heinze, *Die Praefatio zu den "Dramen" Hrotsvits von Gandersheim: ein Programm?* (Karlsruhe 1973).

² Such is the opinion of Marianne Schütze-Pflugk, *Herrscher- und Märtyrerauffassung bei Hrotsvit von Gandersheim* (Wiesbaden 1972) 8.

³ Thus Walther Stach, "Deutsche Dichtung im lateinischen Gewände," *Neue Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Jugendbildung* 11 (1935) 343–55, claims that Hrotswitha "hebt sich aus der Masse der Legendenversifikatoren schon dadurch heraus . . . : sie *dichtet*" (348). Sister Mary Marguerite Butler, *Hrotswitha: The Theatricality of Her Plays* (New York 1960), sees Hrotswitha's plays as fully fledged dramas intended for dramatic production. This seems doubtful, given medieval misconceptions about the ancient method of staging plays. The tenth-century manuscripts of Terence's plays contain *Vitae* which describe the plays as recited by a single man in a small booth, often with accompanying mime by several mute actors. See E. K. Rand, "Early Medieval Commentaries on Terence," *CP* 4 (1909) 359–89; Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, Vol. 1 (Oxford 1933) 6–8; Mary H. Mitchell, "Theatre in the Middle Ages: Evidence from Dictionaries and Glosses," *Symposium* 4 (1950) 1–39; Richard Axton, *European Drama of the Early Middle Ages* (London 1974). In the preface to her plays, Hrotswitha makes no reference to the possibility of their dramatic performance; she mentions only the reading of Terence's works (*praef.* 2–3). Certain scenes of Hrotswitha's plays would seem to preclude the possibility of dramatic performance, for instance the scene of torture in *Sapientia* where Hope's body is lacerated and Faith's mutilated breasts miraculously discharge milk instead of blood. My own interpretation of Hrotswitha's plays rests upon the assumption that they were intended to be read or recited, an environment that would be the most conducive to picking up the subtleties of Hrotswitha's imitation of Terence.

of faithful virgins and saintly widows found in the *Vitae Patrum* are four lives of harlots: Pelagia, Mary of Egypt, Mary niece of Abraham, and Thais. The last two come closest in detail to Hrotswitha's two plays.⁴ I propose to show that although Hrotswitha derives her plot for these plays from these two lives and perhaps other similar lives that are now lost, her knowledge of classical literature, particularly of Terence, endows her treatment of the conversion theme with a structural and thematic complexity not found in the prose lives.⁵

Although Hrotswitha claims to be indebted to Terence for style and form, her assertion is somewhat disingenuous, as Peter Dronke has recently pointed out.⁶ Terence was a popular stylistic model in medieval schools,⁷ but Hrotswitha has few linguistic borrowings from him; the predominant language of her plays is ecclesiastical rather than classical.⁸ Moreover, at the start of the preface to her plays, she observes that many Christians who study Terence for style become corrupted by his subject matter. For her own plays she chooses an entirely different theme:⁹

Unde ego, Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis, non recusavi illum [sc. Terentium] imitari dictando, dum alii colunt legendo, quo eodem dictationis genere, quo turpia lascivarum incesta feminarum recitabantur, laudabilis sacrarum castimonia virginum iuxta mei facultatem ingenioli celebraretur. (*Praef.* 3–4)

Through carefully balanced antithetical word-pairs—*turpia/laudabilis*, *lascivarum/sacrarum*, *incesta/castimonia*—she formulates a strong moral response to the Roman playwright. For those who love Terence she tries to provide a spiritually instructive, Christian alternative to his six plays: six plays of her own, whose action is conveyed entirely through dialogue,

⁴ The *Vitae Patrum* is a massive collection of saints' lives and sayings published by Herbert Rosweyde (Antwerp 1628). We do not know the dates for the two lives of Maria and Thais; their origins lie in the fourth century, but in rhetorical treatment they are obviously much later than that. We cannot know with certainty what sources Hrotswitha used, but the *Vita Sanctae Mariae*, *Meretricis* and the *Vita Sanctae Thais* are the closest to Hrotswitha's versions. Her own plays seem to have been without influence on later medieval treatments of these stories. For the two prose *vitae* I use Rosweyde's text as reproduced in J. P. Migne ed., *PL* 73 (1879), cols. 651–60, 661–64.

⁵ This article is based upon a paper delivered at the annual meeting of the A.P.A. in Cincinnati in 1983.

⁶ Dronke (above, note 1) 66–75 provides a careful and insightful analysis of the preface and letter that precede Hrotswitha's plays.

⁷ Thus Young (above, note 3) 2: "The one ancient dramatist who retained something like his full fame throughout the medieval period was Terence. This distinction he won, no doubt, through the clarity and finish of his style and his terse 'sentences'—the presence of ethical nuggets which could be readily extracted from his writing. These characteristics established his plays, or selections from them, as text-books for schools."

⁸ See Kenneth de Luca, "Hrotsvit's Imitation of Terence," *CF* 28 (1974) 89–102.

⁹ All quotations of Hrotswitha's dramas are from the Teubner edition of *Hrotsvithae Opera*, ed. Karl Strecker (Leipzig 1906).

using scenic alterations of time and place, yet whose themes celebrate not disgraceful love affairs but the Christian virtue of chastity.¹⁰

Hrotswitha freely grants that she must deal with the stock subject matter of Roman comedy, secular love, if she is to dramatize successfully the testing and triumph of Christian virtue through the workings of redemption:

huiusmodi specie dictationis cogente detestabilem inlicite amantium dementiam et male dulcia colloquia eorum, quae nec nostro auditui permittuntur accommodari, dictando mente tractavi, et stili officio designavi. (*Praef.* 4–5)

At the same time, through the condemnatory language with which she describes love, she makes clear that her treatment of the stock material of Roman comedy is a necessary evil that involves no abandonment of her moral stance. By “redeeming” Terentian material, she illustrates the divine powers of redemption. Terence’s sinful world has to be powerfully portrayed in order that God’s grace, working through Hrotswitha’s heroic young women, may be seen at its most miraculous:

quanto blanditiae amantium promptiores ad illiciendum, tanto et superni adiutoris gloria sublimior et triumphantium victoria probatur gloriosior, praesertim cum feminea fragilitas vinceret et virilis robur confusio subiaceret. (*Praef.* 5)

But Hrotswitha’s purpose is not only to celebrate the amplitude of God’s mercy; she also wishes to glorify those who triumph over sin. As the final clause makes clear, this triumph is seen at its most glorious in women. Hrotswitha then seems to be suggesting that women have an important spiritual advantage over men, for, being physically weaker, they can achieve an even greater spiritual victory.¹¹

The chief characters of Hrotswitha’s plays are all women. Dronke makes a crucial contribution to the understanding of Hrotswitha’s use of classical literature by suggesting that her chief debt to Terence is not in style but in subject matter, in particular to his treatment of young women:¹²

¹⁰ Chastity, or virginity, is the central theme of Hrotswitha’s first work, the metrical saints’ lives, and of the plays. See Bert Nagel, *Hrotsvit von Gandersheim* (Munich 1966) 54–60 on Hrotswitha’s “Hauptthemata.”

¹¹ A. Daniel Frankforter, “Hrotswitha of Gandersheim and the Destiny of Women,” *Historian* 41 (1979) 295–314 argues that “Hrotswitha of Gandersheim accepted the secondary role which her society accorded women, but she seems to have seen in the Christian dynamics of sin and salvation a destiny which gave women great worth and a basis for self-respect. For all their apparent weaknesses women were not mere adjuncts to men; they had their own superb and unique opportunities to serve as channels of divine grace” (314).

¹² Dronke (above, note 1) 72.

For Terence, like Hrotswitha, had presented with imaginative sympathy a number of young women who were innocent victims. The girls in the *Andria*, *Eunuchus* or *Adelphoi* do not speak, yet in each case they are the focal point of the play's plot. Always the victimized girl triumphs at the close: she wins her freedom, wins her love-match. In the *Andria* and *Eunuchus* the girls, like Hrotswitha's heroines, are even hedged by "miracles"—wondrous revelations that lead to the discovery of their true identity and their distinguished birth. In the *Adelphoi* we see a young girl being rescued, like Hrotswitha's Mary, from a brothel. In the Terentian plays, as in Hrotswitha's, we often witness trickery, deception and disguise employed in a good cause, in order to confound the men who think themselves mighty, the blustering, boastful, or tyrannic ones.

Dronke's point that both Terence and Hrotswitha present the young women of their plays as innocent victims is well taken. Hrotswitha's redemptive strategy, however, depends on a greater final contrast between her heroines and their Terentian counterparts than Dronke allows.

Although Terence's young women—that is, the unmarried females who have not turned to prostitution—may provide the focus for the plot, they never play an active role in rescuing themselves from their stock desperate situations of penury, pregnancy, and dependency on young men who probably cannot marry them. Without exception they are passive, and often they lack a speaking role beyond the offstage screams of childbirth. Essentially they are goods of barter to be disposed of by the monetary transactions and machinations of the men they depend on.

The heroine of Terence's *Andria*, for example, is certainly an innocent victim, for the young man who has sworn to her undying loyalty (she is an orphan and bears him a son) crumbles in front of his father and agrees to do what the old man wants, marry another. Fortunately, thanks to the timely arrival of an informant, the girl is discovered to be nobly born. In the *Andria* things work out for the good by themselves, apart from the efforts of the stock cunning slave, and certainly apart from any effort by the girl. As is typical in Terence's plays, the girl who turns out to be nobly born is strangely ignorant of the fact.¹³ The girl in the *Adelphoi* who is rescued from a brothel can, on the other hand, scarcely be called an innocent victim, for she is a prostitute whose new owner, the *adulescens* Ctesipho, has no intention of marrying her. Her "rescue" is his triumph, not hers, since she is simply switching masters. The *Eunuchus* presents the most problematic treatment of the *virgo*, for

¹³ Glycerium in the *Andria*, for instance, could have learned the truth from her patroness Chrysis. Although Phanium in the *Phormio* has been brought to Athens by her mother in order to search for her natural father, the girl does not impart this information to anyone, not even her husband. Thus she becomes in danger of being sold off to another man.

through trickery and disguise the girl is raped by a man who thinks all women merit such treatment.¹⁴ Subsequently, she is married to her rapist. Her own feelings about this match are never consulted; we hear only of her terrible distress after the rape. She may win a husband, but it is hardly a love match on her side. As "shopworn goods," she can hope for no better marriage. Even the two Terentian women who do play an important part in their plays' action, the *meretrices* Bacchis in the *Hecyra* and Thais in the *Eunuchus*, in the end remain victims of the male society that exploits them.¹⁵ Regardless of her guilt or innocence, the fate of the Terentian young woman is essentially in others' hands.

By making the unusual choice of expressing her hagiographical material in dramatic form, Hrotswitha engages in an implicit dialectic with Terence over the treatment of young women. When seen against the background of their Terentian counterparts, Hrotswitha's heroines demonstrate Christian virtues all the more persuasively. Particularly in her fourth and fifth plays, the *Abraham* and the *Pafnutius*, where the main theme is the conversion of a *meretrix*, Hrotswitha emphasizes the heroic qualities of women beyond that of her sources, both pagan and Christian, for her intention is to redeem the Terentian young woman from her moral and social ambiguity. Hrotswitha's heroines escape from worldly degradation through Christian redemption, acquired largely by their own heroic efforts. The fate of this new type of heroine is not in others' hands, but essentially in her own. In the *Abraham* and the *Pafnutius* Hrotswitha deals with two women at the lowest point of the social and spiritual scale: the one a virgin fallen into prostitution, the other a professional and highly successful courtesan. Yet in the Christian context of these two plays, the ambiguities surrounding the Terentian *virgo* and *meretrix* can be completely resolved through a uniquely feminine triumph.

The *Abraham* opens with a typical theme of Roman comedy, a discussion between an old man and his friend over the proper care for the young person in his charge (in this case his niece, Maria) and the subsequent arrangement of a marriage. Terence's *Andria* opens in a somewhat similar fashion.¹⁶ There a father discusses with a slave his

¹⁴ See Chaerea's speech, *Eunuchus* 382-87.

¹⁵ In the *Hecyra*, the courtesan Bacchis earns the gratitude of her social superiors for her part in reconciling husband and wife, but she does not earn their acceptance. As soon as she has done what they require, Bacchis is dismissed; she does not become part of the social group. Society will not permit her to break free of the stigma surrounding her profession. Similarly Thais, the courtesan of the *Eunuchus*, receives little reward for her major acts of generosity to those above her in the social scale. In the end she remains an article of barter between two of the men she helped.

¹⁶ Helene Homeyer, *Hrotswitha von Gandersheim* (Munich 1973) 45 notes this parallel for the opening scene of the *Abraham* as well as of the *Gallicanus* and the *Callimachus*.

worry over his son's marital future. The fate of Chrysis, neglected by relatives and forced through poverty to turn to prostitution, doubtless serves in the background of Hrotswitha's play as a warning example for Maria, who is an orphan and dependent on her sole relative for protection. The marriage in Hrotswitha's play, however, is a spiritual marriage that involves the consecration of the young girl to Christ. In the language of spiritual eroticism Abraham, her uncle, depicts her heavenly reward for her steadfast virginity: *iungaris amplexibus filii virginis in lucifluo thalamo sui* (2.5). The highest aspiration of a young woman in Terence's world, marriage, here becomes elevated to a spiritual plane through the concept of the mystic union of Christ and the dedicated virgin as *sponsa Christi*.¹⁷

As is typical in Roman comedy, the arranged marriage is thwarted through the girl's loss of virginity: Maria is raped. The spiritual imagery applied to marriage, however, enables Hrotswitha to treat the rape with a moral intensity not found in Roman comedy. Hrotswitha's probable source for this story in the *Vitae Patrum* does not contain the opening scene between the two monastic *senes*, and it makes no mention of marriage, spiritual or otherwise, at this point.¹⁸ By adapting this theme

¹⁷ The source of the nuptial imagery associated with virginity is the Song of Songs, which was generally viewed as an allegorical dialogue between Christ and the Church, or between Christ and the human soul. It was thus from a properly transcendent context that such language could be drawn and specifically applied to the relationship between Christ and women who had chosen to remain virgins. This specific application of the *sponsa Christi* to the unmarried female originated in the early Church. Tertullian provides the first reference to the idea (e.g. *De Virginibus Velandis* 16.2: *nupsisti enim Christo, illi tradidisti carnem tuam, illi sponsasti maturitatem tuam*), which quickly spread in popularity. Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine all wrote treatises on virginity, treating it as a specifically female virtue through the idea that Mary and the virgin birth broke the old curse engendered by Eve: *Mors per Evam, vita per Mariam. Ideoque et diutius virginitatis donum fluxit in feminas, quia coepit a femina* (Jerome, *Ep.* 22.21). The same idea is found at the start of Hrotswitha's *Maria: Quae parens mundo restaurasti, pia Virgo, / Vitam, quam virgo perdidit vetula!* (15–16). From the fourth century we have the first attestation of an actual liturgical ceremony of consecration for a virgin involving the bestowal of a veil (Ambrose, *De Virginibus* 3.1). Later in the Middle Ages a crown and ring were added. Virginity was associated primarily with ascetic qualities such as firm self-denial until the twelfth century, when the humanity of Christ and his love for humankind began to play a major role in the significance of the union. At that time the nascent sexual imagery found in Hrotswitha's plays became fully developed. See Rosemary Woolf, "The Theme of Christ The Lover-Knight in Medieval English Literature," *RES* 13 (1962) 1–16. For a thorough historical study of the development of *virginitas* in medieval thought see John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague 1975). Bugge's specific interest is in the unmarried woman as the bride of Christ.

¹⁸ Dietlind Heinze (above, note 1) 75 points out that the difficulty Terence's women have in securing a firm place in society is matched by the efforts of Hrotswitha's women to approach closer to God: "Denn den Standort der Personen bestimmt nicht mehr ein soziales Gefälle, sondern die Stufen des näher und ferner zu Gott-Seins."

from Roman comedy at the start of her play, Hrotswitha dramatizes Maria's rape as a tragic reversal and prepares the way for Maria's ultimate moral victory. Hrotswitha intensifies the spiritual tragedy of the rape, for Maria has more to lose than the passive Terentian *virgo* because of her active commitment to her marital contract with Christ.

Hrotswitha makes another modification to the theme of marriage. Maria, unlike her Terentian counterparts, has a say in the marriage her elders wish to arrange. At the precocious age of eight she questions them closely on the meaning of their words. Her queries are edged with a certain humor, for she is not afraid to accuse them of linguistic obscurity and longwindedness: *quid circuitione verborum significes, haut intellego* (2.2). She makes sure that she understands what they are proposing before she consents to strive to be the bride only of Christ. Such a characterization of Maria does not appear in the prose *vita* of her life, in which the girl passively accepts her elders' wisdom. Thus Hrotswitha prepares us for the woman who will energetically strive for her own salvation and extricate herself from despair.

With the rape, Hrotswitha introduces other motifs from Terentian comedy, trickery and disguise. In the version of this story in the *Vitae Patrum*, the man who rapes Maria is a monk. He does not trick her, but rather Maria becomes compliant through listening to her lover's alluring words over the course of a year.¹⁹ In Terence's *Eunuchus* the *virgo* Pamphila is raped by a man who is able to enter the house where she is being carefully guarded because he is dressed as a eunuch. In Hrotswitha's play the man is disguised as a monk. The garb of a monk, like that of a eunuch, would seem to preclude the possibility of rape. By borrowing this motif from Terence, Hrotswitha makes the rape of Maria, who, like Pamphila, is being carefully guarded, appear an act of unexpected violence and treachery. Like Terence's Pamphila, rather than the Maria of the saint's life, Hrotswitha's Maria is an innocent victim of a man's treachery, for the loss of her cherished virginity is undeserved. Her uncle's lament that a wolf has stolen his lamb, *lupus meam agnam raperet* (3.14), echoes the lament of Pamphila's protector Thais on the discovery of the rape, *ovem lupo commisisti* (*Eun.* 832).²⁰ In both cases the pastoral image emphasizes the helpless innocence of the girl, although the added Christian significance in the *Abraham* arouses not only our pity but also our fear for the obvious spiritual danger Maria has now encountered.

¹⁹ "Insidiabatur ei quoque multo temporis spatio, ita ut unius anni circulus volveretur, donec cogitationem ejus verborum suorum mollitie enervaret" (Migne, col. 653).

²⁰ All citations of Terence are from the OCT edition of *P. Terenti Afri Comoediae*, ed. Robert Kauer and Wallace M. Lindsay (Oxford 1926). We find the same pastoral imagery in the *vita* when Abraham laments, *agnam meam lupus crudelissimus rapuit* (Migne, col. 654).

The plot of the *Abraham* is unusually neat in its construction.²¹ There are two scenes of successful attack against Maria, first by the lover disguised as a monk, who lures her from her cell, and then by the monk Abraham, disguised as a lover, who leads Maria back to her cell. Hrotswitha places these scenes at equal distance from the beginning and end of the play (Act Three and Act Seven out of a total of nine). Moreover, through the common motif of disguise, she is able to emphasize that the hermit's infiltration of the tavern *sub specie amatoris* (4.5) is an ironically redemptive mirror image of the real lover's infiltration *monachico . . . habitu* (2.4).

The prose *vita* lacks this sharply defined contrasting structure. In Terence's *Eunuchus*, however, Hrotswitha would have found a similar pattern of reversal, for there Pamphila, like Maria, is the object of two attacks, first as a virgin, and then after she has been raped. The first attack is successful. In the second the braggart soldier, Thraso, makes a comically frustrated attempt to carry off Pamphila, for the girl is saved by Thais. Abraham initially takes on Thraso's role in his attempt to gain sole access to the girl. He disguises himself as a soldier and cuts a somewhat comic figure, first when he asks for an epic *sonipedem* (4.5) in the grandiloquent language of the *miles gloriosus*, and then in the tavern where the owner dryly remarks, *Mirror, te in decrepita senectute mulieris amorem spirare* (5.3). But once his disguise is removed, he approximates Terence's Thais in his efforts to save the girl.²²

For both Maria and Pamphila, the second attack involves an upswing in their fortunes. The defeat of Thraso entails the recognition of Pamphila's noble birth and permits her restoration to respectable society. Pamphila takes no active part in this process of recovery. Although her marriage with Chaerea, the man who raped her, rescues her from the degrading social position into which the loss of her virginity thrusts her, her reward is minimal. The effects of the original violence done her must always in one sense remain, since she cannot be released from the power of the man who brutalized her. Significantly, we never hear of Pamphila's reaction to the news of her impending marriage with Chaerea.

Whereas Terence's Pamphila is a prisoner of social conventions, Hrotswitha's Maria has the power to change her lot. What matters is not her social situation but her relationship to God. In the second half of the

²¹ When Butler (above, note 3) 184 claims that for all the plays "the plot structure conforms to the classical pattern marked by singleness of issue and shows traces of anagnorisis, peripeteia, and catharsis," the emphasis needs to lie on "traces." The *Abraham* is less episodic than the other five plays, for it falls into two contrasting halves, the one concerned with Maria's fall, the other with her redemption.

²² Thais, for instance, reveals her deep concern for Pamphila when she cries out in the language of a tragic heroine that she would gouge out Thraso's eyes should he lay one finger on her: *atque si illam digito attigerit uno, oculi ilico ecfodientur* (*Eun.* 740).

play she starts to take charge of her own destiny. Through courageous penance she is able to transcend first of all the wrong done her, and then the wrong she herself persisted in as a prostitute. By living in a desert cell and castigating the flesh, she finally gains more glory with God as a redeemed sinner than as one of the constantly faithful: *nullius namque iusti magis delectatur perseverantia quam impii poenitentia* (9.5). Whereas Terence's Pamphila remains the victim of her earthly lover, Maria triumphs over her lovers by striving to set them an example: *Elaborat pro viribus, ut, quibus causa fuit perditionis, fiat exemplum conversionis* (9.4). In the *Abraham* the meek, exploited Terentian *virgo* becomes the active Christian heroine who is granted due recognition in a Christian society, and indeed in the highest realm of all, the kingdom of God.

Whereas Hrotswitha's source lays heavy stress on Maria's lamentations during her period of penance,²³ as is typical of such lives in the *Vitae Patrum*, Hrotswitha refers only once to Maria's laments (9.3). Instead, the words that Abraham uses to describe Maria's penitential efforts are emphatically those of heroic struggle: *cogit* (9.3), *elaborat* (9.4), *nititur* (9.4). In the *vita* we are told that Maria exceeded all measure of grief, *omnem mensuram doloris excedit* (Migne, col. 658). In Hrotswitha's *Abraham*, however, Maria excels in determination and will: *Quicquid ipsi agendum proposui, quamvis difficile, quamvis grave, haut abrogavit subire* (9.2).

In the prose *vita*, Abraham is distinctly portrayed as a hero whose rescue of Maria represents a triumph over the devil; he is the second Abraham whose victory is greater than that of the Old Testament patriarch.²⁴ The narrative is full of effusive praise for Abraham's courage, as

²³ Abraham's short statement in Hrotswitha's play, *Quisquis eius lamenta intellegit, mente vulneratur; quisquis compunctionem sentit, et ipse compungitur* (9.4) is found in expanded form in the *vita*:

... facinus proprium spe firmissima veniae plangebatur, ... ut nullus, quamvis sine visceribus, non compungeretur, cum voces fletus ejus audiret. Quis enim sic immisericors est inventus, qui lamentam eam agnoscens, ipse quoque non fleret? (Migne, col. 658)

At the end of the *vita* the anonymous author expansively repeats this idea:

diebus ac noctibus in lamentatione magna lacrymisque perseverans, Dominum precabatur, ut plerique praetereuntes locum illum per noctem, et audientes vocem fletuum ejus, nihilominus verterentur in planctum et fletum suum ejus fletu copularent. (Migne, col. 659)

Hrotswitha has only the one reference to *lamenta*. Weeping was the conventional reaction of the *meretrix* to the revelation of her sins.

²⁴ "Venite igitur, admiramini dilectissimi fratres, hunc secundum Abraham. Primum quidem Abraham egressus ad praelium regum, percutiensque eos, Loth nepotem suum reduxit: hic vero secundus Abraham contra diabolum profectus est ad bellum, ut eo devicto, neptem suam cum majori triumpho revocaret" (Migne, col. 655).

this courage is revealed even in his acceptance of food from an inn-keeper.²⁵ In her play, Hrotswitha has shifted the spotlight from Abraham to Maria. At the play's start she emphasizes the symbolism of Maria's name, not Abraham's.²⁶ Abraham still plays a crucial part, but his metaphorical and stereotypical role has been diminished in favor of a more personal one that stresses the qualities of fatherly anxiety and love.

The *vita* ends with Maria's penance completed after three years. Already she has acquired the status of a saint, for people flock to her for healing.²⁷ Hrotswitha omits these details from her play. In the *Pafnutius* as well, she avoids the miraculous elements that are commonly associated with the conversion theme in the *Vitae Patrum*, for example in the story of Mary of Egypt, who can perform all sorts of miracles, including levitation.²⁸ Hrotswitha prefers to stress the humanity of her Maria, who must rely on her own continuing exertions to earn God's grace. She thus prefers to leave Maria in splendid isolation, still striving for her sins. The play ends with the emphasis upon Maria's unceasing efforts for atonement: *Nititur, ut, quanto extitit foedior, tanto appareat nitidior* (9.4). Hrotswitha fashions Maria at the end in the true heroic mold, as someone who knows no limits to her penance but who continues to persevere to win ever greater favor with God.

Hrotswitha therefore enriches her hagiographical source with several stock themes and characters from Terence's comedies: the thwarted marriage; the lover in disguise; the matching scenes of attack; and the innocent *virgo*. She thereby adjusts the problems of Terence's social world to a Christian one in which there is no moral compromise for the female victim.

In addition, Hrotswitha drew on Vergil for several details of the *Abraham*.²⁹ Although the borrowings from Vergil are few, they reveal how Hrotswitha's relationship to classical authors is not based on arbi-

²⁵ E.g. "O vera sapientia secundum Deum! o vere intellectus spiritualis! o vere praedicanda salutis discretio! quinquaginta annis abstinenciae suae nequaquam panem gustaverat; nunc carnes sine haesitatione, ut salvaret animam perditam, manducavit. Sanctorum angelorum chorus, super hac discretione beati hujus ovans, vehementer stupuit, quae alacriter sine ulla dubitatione manducavit ac bibit, ut animam in limo defixam abstraheret" (Migne, col. 656).

²⁶ "... nitere, ut auctricem virginitatis, quam aequivoco aequiperas nomine, imiteris et castitate" (2.1).

²⁷ "Impensius namque ad eam turba populi confluebat, quae pro illorum salute Domini efficaciter precabatur" (Migne, col. 658).

²⁸ Text reprinted in Migne, *PL* 73 col. 671-90.

²⁹ The edition of Paul von Winterfeld, *Hrotsvithae Opera* (Berlin 1892) provides many of Hrotswitha's citations from ancient authors, pagan and Christian. Dieter Schaller, "Hrotsvit von Gandersheim Nach Tausend Jahren," *ZfdP* 96 (1977) 105-14, provides several new references from the long, complex tradition of secular and Christian Latin poetry with which Hrotswitha had to work.

trary imitation of convenient tags but on conscious adaptation of pagan concepts to a Christian context. Hrotswitha seems to have been fully aware of the specific occasions in which her classical borrowings were rooted. By establishing a counterpoint between the classical texts and her transformation of them, Hrotswitha elaborates her redemptive purposes.

The first clear Vergilian reference occurs towards the start of the play. Abraham, grandiloquently describing Maria's age to Effrem—*si unius rotatus mansurni apponeretur, duas olympiades vitali aura vesceretur* (1.4)—borrows two related phrases from the *Aeneid*. The first, *auras vitales carpis* (*Aen.* 1.387), occurs at the start of Venus' address to Aeneas when he lands on Carthaginian shores; the second, *vescitur aura* (*Aen.* 3.339) occurs in Andromache's tearful inquiry after Aeneas' son Ascanius. Both phrases refer to sons; thus Abraham's conflated version has the important effect of establishing him as a paternal figure filled with loving care and anxiety for his kin. In addition, since the first speaker is Venus, it makes him a figure of potentially divine authority to whom the dependent, for the sake of survival, must show continual *pietas*.

At her conversion, Maria addresses to Abraham a phrase from Aeneas' reply to Venus, *o quam te memorem, virgo?* (*Aen.* 1.327). With her adaptation of this phrase, *O, quem te memorem?* (7.16), Maria shows her profound reverence for Abraham as a father figure and a spiritual guide. In addition, at this dramatic moment of reversal for Maria's fortunes, she is implicitly compared to the hero Aeneas. As Dronke aptly puts it, "Mary has at this moment the sense of a superhuman destiny revealing itself to her in human semblance."³⁰ This destiny, like Aeneas', will involve great suffering, but its reward will be the truer one, a prominent place in the heavenly kingdom rather than an earthly one.

Maria's address to an elderly tonsured monk in terms used of the goddess of love has a comic resonance, of course, but there is a serious note as well. For the relationship between Abraham and Maria is portrayed in the play not only as one between father figure and niece, but as one between lover and beloved. At the start of the play Abraham tells his fellow monk Effrem that he is drawn towards his niece by excessive affection, *nimio affectu ducor* (1.3). To describe his anxiety over her spiritual marriage he uses *exaestuo* (1.5), a verb associated with *aestus* and *aestuo*, common metaphorical expressions for sensual and excessive passion.³¹ When he first addresses Maria in the play, he calls her *pars animae* (2.5).³²

³⁰ Dronke (above, note 1) 80.

³¹ Cf. *Pafnutius* 3.12: . . . *illicito amore flagrabas, avaritiae calore aestuabas*.

³² This is an expression used in Latin literature in particularly emotional situations, e.g. Horace, *Odes* 2.17.5 (of Maecenas); Statius, *Silvae* 5.1.177 (of a husband by a dying wife); Persius 5.23 (of his teacher Cornutus).

Such language is not to be found in the *vita*, where nothing is said of the old man's love for his niece. Hrotswitha uses the language of secular love to express the depth and sincerity of spiritual love. Classical literature provided her not only with an erotic vocabulary but also with an erotic context against which, as a Christian, she could react. Abraham's love is not an obsessive, self-destructive malady, as secular love is frequently portrayed in Roman literature.³³ It is directed towards Maria's good, and it redounds to the glory of both of them.

The most complex of Hrotswitha's Vergilian borrowings occurs towards the end of the play. When Abraham leads Maria on the journey back to her cell, he insists upon placing her on his horse, *ne itineris asperitas secet teneras plantas* (7.5). Here Hrotswitha adapts a phrase from Vergil's tenth *Eclogue* in which the lover/poet Gallus laments that his mistress Lycoris has chosen to follow soldiers to the Alps, *a tibi ne teneras glacies secet aspera plantas!* (*Ecl.* 10.49).³⁴ Abraham, like Gallus, has lost his beloved to a life of wantonness; through Christian love, however, he has been able to transform Gallus' passive dreams into actuality. At the same time as the echo of Vergil's tenth *Eclogue* stresses in a most moving way the tenderness of Abraham's love for Maria, it also serves to crystallize the differences between carnal and Christian love: the one inactive and self-destructive, the other active, altruistic, and elevating. Hrotswitha gives Christian meaning to a contrast already built into her source. At the end of *Eclogue* 10 Vergil implicitly contrasts Gallus' sensual obsession for Lycoris with his own love for Gallus, a love which, being free of sexual passion, is a joyful, productive emotion.³⁵

Hrotswitha shows careful artistry in the positioning of this phrase, for it recalls Abraham's use of a quotation from *Eclogue* 1 when he discovers Maria's rape. He laments that he should have known she was endangered *si mens non fuisset laeva* (3.8). In *Eclogue* 1.16, Meliboeus laments that he should have foretold the threat to his farm *si mens non laeva fuisset*. Abraham and Meliboeus are therefore linked through the loss of what they hold most dear, though the one loss is material, the

³³ For instance, at the start of the *Eunuchus*, the slave Parmeno describes love as a form of madness (61–63) and his master Phaedria describes the symptoms of love in terms of an unshakable disease: *et taedet et amore ardeo, et prudens sciens, / vivos vidensque pereor, nec quid agam scio* (72–73). Such language, through Lucretius' ruthless exposure of sexual passion (4.1037–1287), became standard among the Roman love poets.

³⁴ This reference was first noted by Cornelia C. Coulter, "The 'Terentian' Comedies of a Tenth-Century Nun," *CJ* 24 (1929) 515–29. It is discussed in some detail by Gustavo Vinay, *Alto Medioevo Latino* (Naples 1978) 552–53, who emphasizes the tenderness and fragility of Maria, and by Dronke (above, note 1) 79–80, who emphasizes instead the fatherly tenderness of Abraham and who rightly points out that Maria replies in the words not of a girlfriend but of Aeneas.

³⁵ Thus Vergil describes his love for Gallus in terms of a burgeoning alder: *Gallo, cuius amor tantum mihi crescit in horas / quantum vere novo viridis se subicit alnus* (*Ecl.* 10.73–74).

other spiritual. The further quotation from Vergil's final *Eclogue*, when Abraham has regained Maria, is thus structurally appropriate, for it neatly ends the cycle of loss and return.

The phrase has yet another purpose. The path that Maria has now chosen to follow through life can be described symbolically as *itineris asperitas*, a harsh spiritual journey of penance. Hrotswitha has used the Vergilian references to bring out features of her protagonists not developed in her hagiographical source: the tender, warm humanity of Abraham and the heroic perseverance of Maria. Abraham provides an example of the true love that leads man and woman towards God; Maria is in several ways an Aeneas-like figure who has to learn the virtues of endurance and of *pietas*, devotion to kin and to God. It is noteworthy that Hrotswitha avoids putting erotic language, albeit metaphorical, into Maria's mouth. As a victim of carnal love, Maria is kept free of the possible ambiguity such language might entail.

These borrowings from Vergil, few as they are, complement the borrowings from Terence and give Hrotswitha's development of his character types greater conceptual depth. She has rounded out the character of Abraham and treated him with an imaginative sympathy not usually accorded the rather foolish or irascible *senes* of Terentian comedy. Moreover, she underplays the stereotypical aspect of Abraham that is foremost in the prose *vita*, that of the crusader against the devil. Instead, Hrotswitha has partly transferred to Maria the role that Abraham assumes in the *Vitae Patrum*, for at the end of the play Maria emerges as a fighter, the embodiment of true heroic qualities.

Hrotswitha intended the *Pafnutius*, or the *Conversio Thaidis Meretricis*,³⁶ to be a companion piece to the *Abraham*.³⁷ As she announces in the Prologue to the *Pafnutius*, both dramas deal with the conversion of a *meretrix* by means of a hermit disguised as a lover. Hrotswitha's

³⁶ This was Hrotswitha's own nomenclature; the full title of the *Abraham* she gave as *Lapsus et Conversio Mariae Neptis Habrahae Heremicolae*. Her titles emphasize the dominance of the woman's role. For the sake of brevity, I shall retain the shorter titles.

³⁷ According to Hugo Kuhn, *Dichtung und Welt im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart 1959) 91–104, the *Abraham* and the *Pafnutius* make a pair not only within the dramas but within her entire body of religious poetry. He suggests that Hrotswitha gradually conceived of her poetic legends and dramas as a double cycle with close structural and thematic similarities. Thus the *Abraham* and the *Pafnutius* occur in the same position of the cycle as the *Theophilus* and the *Gongolfus*, the fourth and fifth works, and all deal with the victory over sexual sin. It is not my purpose here to discuss the merits of Kuhn's interesting schema; Dronke, in his discussion (60–64), qualifies and develops Kuhn's idea with admirable clarity. One problem that Kuhn does not raise, however, is that posed by the correspondence between the *Abraham* and the first of the poetic legends, the *Maria*. Hrotswitha makes a point of identifying the young girl with her namesake, the Virgin Mary (2.1). For further parallels between the *Maria* and the *Abraham*, see Vinay (above, note 34) 541, 545, 551.

critics, beginning with Max Manitius, have generally seen the *Pafnutius* as a weak imitation of the other play.³⁸ Admittedly, the relationship between Pafnutius and Thais is not emotionally charged, since the two characters are not related. Pafnutius' disguise as a lover is thus devoid of the humor and the dramatic tension found in the *Abraham*. Moreover, the plot is without structural complexity. What has made the play of enduring interest is the character of the prostitute Thais. Although in the details of the story Hrotswitha adheres closely to the saint's life found in the *Vitae Patrum*,³⁹ her development of the character of Thais owes much to Terence. For Thais represents a unique type found in Terence's plays, the *bona meretrix*.

In Terence's plays, we find two types of *meretrix*. Typically she is an avaricious woman who fleeces the inexperienced *adulescens* for everything he has—and more. The words of Clitipho's girlfriend in Terence's *Heauton Timorumenos* are characteristically to the point: "*da mihi*" atque "*adfer mihi*" (*Haut.* 223). In the *Hecyra* and the *Eunuchus*, however, the courtesan seems less concerned with self-aggrandizement than with helping out others. As Donatus first pointed out, in these two plays the traditional character of the prostitute is presented in a new way: she is *bona* and acts *contra officium meretricis*,⁴⁰ as a generous human being with a concern for others.⁴¹ She does not profit from her generosity,

³⁸ Max Manitius, *Geschichte der Lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Munich 1931) 626: "das fünfte Stück ist nur eine schwächliche Wiederholung der *Abraham*." Cf. Nagel (above, note 9) 57: "Der Abraham bezeichnet den Höhepunkt von Hrotsvits dichterischem Schaffen." Michalka (above, note 1) sees the play as a worthy companion piece.

³⁹ Oswald R. Kuehne, *A Study of the Thais Legend With Special Reference to Hrotswitha's "Paphnutius"* (Philadelphia 1922) provides a thorough discussion of the versions of the Thais legend preceding Hrotswitha's play. The story was written down in Greek in the fourth or fifth century, with the name of the hermit given as Sarapion. The version in the *Vitae Patrum*, which Hrotswitha closely followed, represents a somewhat free translation of a much later Greek version. In the *Vitae Patrum* the name of the hermit appears for the first time as Paphnutius.

⁴⁰ Ad *Hec.* 840. See also ad *Hec. Praef.* 1.9; 727; 756; 744; *Eun.* 198 in *Aeli Donati Commentum Terenti*, ed. Paul Wessner, Vols. 1 and 2 (Leipzig 1902).

⁴¹ The heavily moralistic attitude of Gilbert Norwood, *The Art of Terence* (Oxford 1923), who claims that although Thais is a courtesan "that is far more a matter of social status than of morals" (59), and of George Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (Princeton 1971), who describes Thais and Bacchis as "almost paragons of virtue and generosity" (259), has been followed recently by more cautious evaluations. George Pepe, "The Last Scene of Terence's *Eunuchus*," *CW* 65 (1972) 141–45, claims that Thais is worthy of respect because she "shows herself and is recognized as a *patrona*" (142); Charles P. Saylor, "The Theme of Planlessness in Terence's *Eunuchus*," *TAPA* 105 (1975) 297–311, sees Bacchis as likewise taking on the role of *patrona* (308–9); and Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Terentian Techniques," *CQ* 23 (1973) 279–84, cautions that we must not romanticize Thais' relationship with Phaedria nor credit her "with a fastidiousness which neither she nor her audience would have displayed" (284), yet all the same characterizes her as "genuinely good-hearted" (283). David Konstan's observation in *Roman Comedy* (Ithaca 1983)

however, but like the *virgo* she in the end remains a victim of the social system.

In the *Eunuchus*, this type of *bona meretrix* is most fully developed. The chief director of the action from the start is the courtesan Thais, and not a clever slave. Unlike the stereotypical slave, she attempts to manage the other characters in the play out of largely altruistic motives, for she wishes to restore her adopted sister Pamphila to her respected Athenian family while Pamphila is still a virgin. Despite the common stereotype of the courtesan as *avara*, Thais does not seem to be motivated by financial greed. The first reason that she gives for her wish to find Pamphila's family is that *soror est dicta* (*Eun.* 146). Her sense of the family, something the Roman audience would particularly appreciate, is very strong. Thais' main concern is for the girl's happiness; she does not wish Pamphila to remain a social outsider like herself. When she finally hands the girl over to her newly found brother Chremes she makes clear in dignified, formulaic terms that she seeks no financial reward: *hanc tibi dono do neque repeto pro illa quicquam abs te preti* (*Eun.* 749).

Thais hopes for some personal advantage, too, but her interests are social rather than mercenary:

... sola sum; habeo hic neminem
neque amicum neque cognatum: quam ob rem, Phaedria,
cupio aliquos parere amicos beneficio meo. (*Eun.* 147–49)

As a foreigner alone in Athens and barred therefore from citizenship, she looks to a patron for protection. Her social isolation arouses our sympathies. Her lovers can neither practically nor emotionally fulfill her need for acceptance by society, for some family to which she can belong. Yet even the possibility of patronage is of secondary importance to the protection of the girl: *et quidquid huius feci causa virginis / feci* (*Eun.* 202–3).⁴²

that in Greek and Roman society courtesans fell into a broad range of types—"At one extreme, the common whore (in Greek, *pornê*); at the other, the *pallakê*, who could share all but the formal name of wife" (109)—surely provides good reason for not oversimplifying the presentation of the *meretrix* in literature and reducing her to only one type, as does Dwora Gilula, "The Concept of the *Bona Meretrix*," *RFIC* 108 (1980) 142–65. Gilula claims that Roman comedy depicted only one type of *meretrix*, the *mala meretrix*, and that therefore Terence's Bacchis in the *Hecyra* and his Thais in the *Eunuchus* do not provoke any moral problems, for they simply conform to type. Unfortunately, Gilula's discussion of Thais, who plays a much greater role than Bacchis, is brief. Furthermore, she hedges with Thais. While claiming that Thais is "a stock type of a rich hetaera" (164) who cares first and foremost for her income, she admits that this *meretrix* has positive qualities arising from her preference for Phaedria. She ignores Thais' concern for Pamphila.

⁴² It is a weakness of Gilula's argument (above, note 41) that she fails to deal with the scenes in which Thais' hopes for patronage are apparently lost. Here, if anywhere, would

Thais is a strong character, a generous woman whose unselfish actions and thoughts belie the stereotype of the *meretrix*. Yet at least initially, all the men around her view her as true to type. At the start of the play Phaedria's slave Parmeno calls her the usual mercenary Harpy, *nostri fundi calamitas* (*Eun.* 79),⁴³ and Phaedria concurs in blaming her as *scelestam* (*Eun.* 71). When they discover her generous nature they use it to their own advantage, not hers. Because of her unselfish motives, Thais has to suffer the jealousy of her lover Phaedria and the tedious buffoonery of his rival Thraso. In addition, Phaedria's younger brother Chaerea upsets her plans by raping Pamphila. Thais generously forgives the culprit,⁴⁴ but she receives no such generous treatment in return. At the end of the play Chaerea is instrumental in persuading Phaedria to accept the rival Thraso into their household.⁴⁵ What Thais thinks of the proposed *ménage à trois* we never learn. She disappears from the play after she has handed Pamphila over to her brother, and thereafter the men take over the action. Since Thais seems to have tolerated Thraso only for the sake of obtaining Pamphila, it seems unlikely that she would be happy with an arrangement that brings little change but rather consolidates the status quo. Thus, without her presence on stage, the play comes full circle, beginning and ending with a stereotypical view of Thais as a mercenary prostitute whom the men can therefore treat as a mere object.⁴⁶ She is

be the place for Thais in her disappointment to assert the selfish, avaricious nature that Gilula claims she typically possesses. Instead, after the rape she acts first and foremost out of concern for Pamphila, not for herself. The marriage to Chaerea is for the girl's benefit, not Thais'.

⁴³ Parmeno is the most consistently virulent critic of the *meretrix*. Believing all prostitutes to be alike, he not only tries to extricate his master Phaedria from his love affair but he believes that, since all prostitutes are alike in his eyes, Chaerea will be cured of his love for Pamphila once he has slept with her. Towards the end of the play he delivers a diatribe in Lucretian style against the disgusting habits of the *meretrix* (*Eun.* 926–40). Parmeno's understanding of love is shown to be severely limited, since he is wrong about Chaerea's passion for Pamphila. Significantly, he is the only person in the play who is punished.

⁴⁴ With an apologetic reference to how society views her character, she forgives Chaerea by referring to her own *humanitas*: *non adeo inhumano ingenio sum, Chaerea, / neque ita inperita ut quid amor valeat nesciam* (*Eun.* 880–81).

⁴⁵ Ironically, since Thais desires a *patronus*, Chaerea, in the scene of his pardon, begs her to be his *patrona* in the formal language of religious veneration (*Eun.* 885–88). But at the end of the play Chaerea seems to have forgotten his protestations of *fides*. The apparent motives for this *ménage à trois* are financial. Gnatho, Thraso's parasite, persuades the two brothers that Phaedria alone cannot keep Thais in her customary luxurious style: *necesses multum accipere Thaidem* (*Eun.* 1075). Since Thais has never exhibited avaricious desires, we are led to suspect that Gnatho is using the stereotype of Thais as a foil for his own desires for a luxurious life, and that the brothers are only too happy to go along with him. Gnatho's first speech (*Eun.* 232–53) clearly outlines his philosophy of calculated self-interest based on the pursuit of the best food and lodgings.

⁴⁶ Thus Walther Ludwig, "Von Terenz zu Menander," *Philologus* 103 (1959) 1–38, who refers to Thais as a "Handelsobjekt" (28).

vulnerable to exploitation precisely because of her lack of selfishness. The end of the play reasserts the old society and the blind selfishness of its members.⁴⁷

In a soliloquy at the start of the play, an occasion when she has no need to deceive anyone, Thais complains that her lover Phaedria judges her not on her own merits, but according to his fixed preconceptions concerning prostitutes:

me miseram, forsitan hic mihi parvam habeat fidem
atque ex aliarum ingeniis nunc me iudicet. (*Eun.* 197–98)

In the *Pafnutius* Hrotswitha portrays a *meretrix* who has likewise been misjudged by society. She too turns out to be *bona*, but unlike her Terentian namesake, she has the opportunity to fulfill her true nature and escape from social and moral degradation through the highest *patronus* of all, God.

Like Terence's *Eunuchus*, Hrotswitha's play begins with a scene in which we learn of Thais through the words of others. The hermit Pafnutius describes her as possessing the stereotypical qualities of a courtesan: irresistible beauty and an avaricious nature. From a Christian point of view, she ruins her lovers morally and spiritually as well as financially. Through their involvement with her, their souls too are damned: *prompta est omnes lenociniis suae formae illicere secumque ad interitum trahere* (1.24). According to Pafnutius, she is like Satan in her eagerness to gain as many victims as possible to share in her perdition. Similarly, at the start of the *Eunuchus* Parmeno describes love as a form of madness that is full of evils (59–63). Phaedria follows his slave's attack by admitting that his love for Thais is causing his destruction, yet, recognizing the evil, he does not know how to save himself: *vivos vidensque pereo, nec quid agam scio* (*Eun.* 73). Like Terence, Hrotswitha presents love as

⁴⁷ Ludwig (above, note 46) argues that Terence spoiled the ending of his *Eunuchus* by introducing the characters of the soldier and the parasite from Menander's *Kolax*. Pepe (above, note 41) claims that the last scene is "disharmonious" (142) and that this disharmony is intentional on Terence's part. The reason for it lies with Thais, who "is much more than the conventional good-hearted whore; she shows herself and is recognized as a *patrona*. The final scene implicitly denies her claim to this title because societal conventions will not allow her to claim it" (142). Saylor (above, note 41) believes that Phaedria rather than Thais is the real victim at the end, since Phaedria has always been shown to be intensely jealous of Thraso. It is strange, then, that Phaedria does not protest the adoption of Thraso into their group; unlike Thais, who is surprisingly not on stage at the end, he has the chance to say no. Kristine Gilmartin, "The Thraso-Gnatho Subplot in Terence's *Eunuchus*," *CW* 69 (1975) 263–67, defends the ending by seeing Thraso's admittance into the group as a resolution of "the basic human need to belong" (267), yet she does not address the problem that Thais does not properly belong within such a group but remains a social outcast to be exploited by the rest. The men all act in character. None of them has ever looked out for Thais' interests, only their own.

a fatal affliction, a form of death that she intensifies to include spiritual damnation.

Hrotswitha couches in heroic terms Pafnutius' decision to reenter the secular world and combat there the pernicious influence of Thais. The struggle in which he is to engage is seen by his pupils as similar to the one between Christ and Satan during the Harrowing of Hell: *Qui regem prostravit tenebricolarum, largiatur tibi contra hostem triumphum* (1.28). Hrotswitha's Thais is seen initially as a more dangerous adversary than Maria. Whereas Abraham dreams that Maria is in the possession of the devil,⁴⁸ Pafnutius believes that he is engaged in a struggle with the devil in person, for he prays that he may escape *insidiis vitiosi serpentis* (1.28).

This type of opening scene, in which the male protagonist discusses the evil nature of Thais with one or more subordinate figures, is not found in the *Vitae Patrum*. Moreover, although in such stories of conversion the hermit is stereotypically treated as engaging in a battle with the devil—Abraham is depicted in this way in the *Vita Sanctae Mariae, Meretricis*—such a portrayal of Pafnutius is absent from the Latin *vita* of Thais.⁴⁹ Thus Hrotswitha leads us deliberately to expect the worst of Thais, but in both plays, the *Eunuchus* and the *Pafnutius*, we are surprised. In the *Pafnutius* the hermit's "conflict" amounts to very little, for Thais turns out to be knowledgeable about God and is ready for penance. As in the *Eunuchus*, common opinion has misjudged Thais. Her conversion comes quickly; unlike Satan, she does not put up a fight. Her rapid decision to give up her life of prostitution seems typical of her true character, which, as in the *Eunuchus*, is that of a strong, decisive woman. Maria in the *Abraham* is at first reluctant to listen to Abraham's counsel and admit the possibility of divine grace. Her immediate reaction to Abraham's disclosure of himself is to fall on the ground (*Abr.* 7.7). In the version of the Thais legend in the *Vitae Patrum* Thais likewise falls at the hermit's feet and weeps;⁵⁰ in Hrotswitha's play it is Pafnutius who weeps at the moment of Thais' conversion (3.5). Hrotswitha here reverses the normal roles in order to demonstrate Thais' inner strength at a moment of extreme adversity. Although Thais cries out in commiseration, *Vae, vae mihi infelici!* (3.5),

⁴⁸ In his dream he sees a dove being swallowed by a dragon (3.8). Three days later, in another dream, he sees the dove flying free from the dragon crushed beneath his feet (3.10).

⁴⁹ Anton Mayer, "Der Heilige und die Dirne," *BBG* 67 (1931) 73–96 sees the early stories in which saints convert prostitutes as heavily marked by a polarity between good and evil. There are obvious echoes of this in Hrotswitha's initial presentation of Pafnutius as Christian hero engaging in a conflict with the devil. In the *Vitae Patrum* Abraham is presented in this way, but not Pafnutius.

⁵⁰ *Provoluta ad pedes Paphnutii monachi cum lacrymis exorabat* (Migne, col. 661).

she does not prostrate herself, and she remains in sufficient control to question Pafnutius on the proper procedure for penance.

Pafnutius has no need to cajole Thais, as Abraham does Maria. One example is particularly significant. Whereas Maria has to ask Abraham how to dispose of her worldly wealth (*Abr.* 7.14), Thais without prompting makes the doctrinally correct decision to burn her lovers' expensive gifts (3.70).⁵¹ Indeed Pafnutius at first tells her that such action is unnecessary but then defers after all to her judgment (3.10–11).⁵² In the prose versions Thais needs three hours to dispose of her wealth. Hrotswitha speeds up the process and makes her heroine more admirable through her request for an emphatically short period of time.

When Terence's Thais finds out that Pamphila has been raped, she is upset but keeps her head; she does not indulge in stereotypical feminine lamentations. Like her Terentian prototype, Hrotswitha's Thais is a woman who consistently knows her own mind and who can direct her own affairs. Also like her, she has been clearly misjudged by the other characters. In the prose *vita*, Thais' conversion occurs without any preceding build-up to blacken her reputation. Through the contrast she makes between outside reputation and actual character, Hrotswitha, like Terence, is able to emphasize the nobility of her *meretrix* and make her stand out as superior to the men who wrong her.

As in Terence's *Eunuchus*, Thais is continually misjudged throughout the play. Thus Hrotswitha is able to show how far her Thais surpasses ordinary expectations. For instance, while Thais sees to the dismissal of her lovers, Pafnutius underestimates her character, wrongly fearing that her delay means that she has slipped back into the net of secular affairs (5.1). Instead, it is Thais' lovers who remain enmeshed, for they express dismay and anger at the sight of their riches going up in flames (4.5). They cannot understand Thais' actions, despite her open denunciation of her past (4.3–4); her action, to them, is a type of perversion, *Quid hoc monstri est* (4.5). Hrotswitha has elaborated this scene in order to show that, as in the *Eunuchus*, ordinary society cannot understand when a prostitute fails to act according to type.

Furthermore, after Thais has completed three years of penance, Pafnutius still regards her as someone not made for heroic action, *vereor eius teneritudinem aegre ferre diutinum laborem* (10.4).⁵³ In fact, Thais is

⁵¹ The version in the *Vitae Patrum* lacks this interchange between Pafnutius and Thais over the disposal of her wealth.

⁵² My opinion here is contrary to that of Dronke (above, note 1) 295, note 18, who sees Pafnutius as "a relentless, tormenting crusader" and Thais as "humiliated and crushed" by him. Such characterizations pertain more to the hagiographical versions than to Hrotswitha's play.

⁵³ Thais herself conceives of her penance in heroic terms. Before Pafnutius leaves her in her cell, she asks for his pity, *ne frangar in dubio certamine* (7.15), and for his prayers, *ut*

proclaimed in a dream to be now holier than the most pious man then living, the famous hermit Antony. Antony's disciple Paul, to whom the vision is granted, at first thinks the sign is meant for Antony, but a voice tells him that the heavenly bed which he sees is a glory reserved for Thais (11.2).

This bed, *magnifice stratum*, corresponds to the *cubile bene stratum et delectabile* which Thais as *meretrix* offered Pafnutius (3.1), but it is now to be used for mystic, not carnal, union. Hrotswitha adds a detail not found in the other versions: the bed is spotlessly white. Like the four virgins who guard it, the bed thus suggests chastity. At the end of her life—Thais dies fifteen days after Pafnutius comes to assure her of the success of her penance—Thais has overcome her meretricious past so successfully that in Christian virtue she now surpasses even the four guardian virgins.⁵⁴ Unlike Terence's Thais, Hrotswitha's *meretrix* in the end finds true love in her marriage to the Heavenly Bridegroom. Through extreme suffering, she has reached the goal for which Pafnutius counseled her to strive, *superno amatori iam nunc poteris copulari* (5.2).

In the *Pafnutius* as well Hrotswitha departs from her sources by introducing the theme of spiritual marriage. In Terence's comedies marriage is frequently the one solution that will restore respectability to a penurious or pregnant young woman. The *meretrix*, as a non-citizen, does not have this option. Hrotswitha turns to her Christian purpose the stock ending of Terentian comedy. Spiritual marriage with Christ is the goal her heroines deliberately choose and actively strive for; moreover, it can be attained by even the worst sinner of all.

In the *Eunuchus* the main male characters are made to appear somewhat shoddy next to Thais, whose true qualities they fail to recognize. Obviously, Hrotswitha cannot treat her Christian hermit Pafnutius in the same way. But in order to present her female protagonist in the most favorable light, she somewhat undercuts his credibility as Thais' savior. We have already seen how he misjudges Thais' character. He exaggerates the importance of his own role in the conversion both before and after the event. For instance, he tells the hermit Antony that

merear palmam victoriae (7.15). Pafnutius enjoins her to fight like a man, *certa viriliter* (7.15).

⁵⁴ Cf. Cyprian, *de Disciplina et bono pudicitiae* 7: "Virginity makes itself the equal of angels, in fact . . . it even excels them, for it gains the victory against nature in the besieged flesh, which angels do not possess." Quoted in Bugge (above, note 17) 34. In 1 Tim. 1.12–17, Paul explains that Christ has displayed his mercy to the fullest in making Paul, a foremost sinner, an apostle. From Augustine, *de Civ. Dei* 1.16–19 came the idea that loss of maidenhead did not necessarily mean loss of chastity. Since purity is a possession of the soul, it is not lost if the body is unwillingly violated (Augustine takes as an example Lucretia, who he concludes was not unchaste). Since chastity for Augustine boils down to a question of will, perhaps this is one reason why Hrotswitha does not show Maria or Thais willingly participating in sex.

Thais' conversion took a good deal of time and effort on his part (10.3). Yet Thais' conversion in fact took very little time or persuasion.

In some ways Pafnutius is a rather comic character who lacks the sweet nature of Abraham. In the opening scene, which is Hrotswitha's own addition to the play, and which takes up almost a quarter of it, Pafnutius lectures his pupils at length on the subject of Boethian cosmology. Hrotswitha depicts Pafnutius here as a harried schoolmaster rather than as an early Christian hermit. His discourse bores his rather irreverent pupils (1.18). Indeed Pafnutius' pupils, like Pafnutius himself, fall rather short of the saintly ideal associated with the eremitic tradition. They are filled to breaking point with curiosity over Pafnutius' claim that he is troubled, and when Pafnutius reprimands them, they claim they cannot help themselves (1.22). The disciples offer as an excuse the human frailty that is usually associated with the female sex;⁵⁵ they do not then offer models for Thais, who as Pafnutius' new disciple must overcome her frailty, and is determined to do so.

Very subtly, then, Hrotswitha undermines Pafnutius' spiritual authority; he and his disciples are virtuous men but are nonetheless humanly fallible. Pafnutius' original intention was in fact to save Thais' lovers, not Thais herself. We have seen how unworthy the lovers are, for they are spiritually blind and fail to understand Thais' offer of penitence. Thus Hrotswitha prepares the ground for her heroine to surpass in virtue not only her earthly lovers but even her male helper and spiritual guide.

This is not to suggest that Thais is portrayed as some sort of medieval superwoman. Rather, Hrotswitha skillfully reveals Thais' femininity in the psychologically convincing scene where she hesitates to enter the desert cell and is embarrassed to tell Pafnutius that she fears the place will soon become uninhabitable *prae nimietate foetoris* (7.5). Precisely because of her female delicacy, her endurance in the cell is all the more admirable.

In the second half of the *Abraham*, Maria too could be called a *bona meretrix*. Despite an informant's claim that she has an enormous number of lovers from whom she collects money (4.3), she shows no evidence of such avarice, or of lasciviousness, in her "love" scene with

⁵⁵ In the prefaces to her works, Hrotswitha refers in a deprecatory way to her womanhood and begs excuse for her work since she is a member of the weaker sex. In the *Epistola* that precedes her dramas she refers to them as *mei opusculum vilis mulierculae* (3). We should not take such condemnatory diminutives at face value, for protestations of unworthiness are a conventional feature of prose prefaces and of the poetic *recusatio*. Dronke's perceptive analyses of Hrotswitha's prefaces (above, note 1, 64–77) show how tongue-in-cheek Hrotswitha is being. He makes a fitting connection between the playwright and the heroines of her plays (78–79), for like them Hrotswitha, by means of God's grace (and her art), can challenge the masculine world.

Abraham.⁵⁶ She does not conform to the stereotype of the lustful prostitute. While in the prose *vita* Maria initiates the lovemaking with Abraham, in the play it is Abraham, not Maria, who solicits the first kiss and thus brings on her keen remorse (4.3–5). The innkeeper's remark that Maria has never emitted a groan or a sad word in the two years she has stayed with him (6.4) cannot be interpreted as a clear sign that Maria has been happy; rather, she has been presented as someone whose emotions have been frozen by despair. Maria's one remark about her feelings concerning love, *Quicumque me diligunt, aequalem amoris vicem a me recipiunt* (*Abr.* 6.2), is echoed by Thais, *Quicumque me amore colit, aequam vicem amoris a me recipit* (*Paf.* 3.1). Both women show a professional indifference to their various lovers. They present themselves not as active seekers for the excitement of love but as the compliant, passive recipients of men's lust or affection. Although Maria remains more dependent upon her monastic helper than Thais does, her heroic struggles for salvation, it is clear, are her own. But just as Thais has sunk much lower than Maria, so Thais' conversion reaches a much higher spiritual plane.

Two centuries later, Marbod, Bishop of Rennes, wrote a poetic version of the life of Thais. In his *Vita Sanctae Thaisidis*, Marbod, unlike Hrotswitha, exaggerates the stereotype of the *meretrix* and depicts her as enjoying the bloodshed she causes while she lounges on a bed of jewels and gold.⁵⁷

Illa premens stratum gemmis auroque beatum
Gaudet se rixae causam pretiumque fuisse,
Et testes oris rivos putat esse cruoris. (25–27)

For Marbod, there is no contrast between stereotype and actuality. When Thais first meets Pafnutius, she grabs him and drags him to the bed (39–41). Her reaction to Pafnutius' warning words is stereotypically

⁵⁶ I here take issue with Dronke (above, note 1) 71, who describes Mary and Thais as having "enjoyed themselves immensely" in their lives as courtesans. Such a characterization suits the *meretrices* of the prose *Vitae* rather than Hrotswitha's Maria and Thais. Frankforter (above, note 11) justly claims that Hrotswitha's heroines are "noteworthy for their lack of sexual passion" (312) and that "lust appears to be a characteristically male problem" (313). He concludes: "... in her dramatic representation of the sexuality of her feminine protagonists, women are most often portrayed as passive potentials for danger to members of the male sex, not as possessors of an independent drive which sought its own destructive fulfillment. Hrotswitha seems to have accepted the common opinion that a woman's innate sexual abilities were greater than a man's—Thais seems to have single-handedly undermined the condition of most of the men in Alexandria. But Hrotswitha represented a woman's internal fight for salvation as a struggle, not with the active impulses of her own nature but with the strengths of the men who attempt to sin through her" (314).

⁵⁷ I follow the text of Migne, *PL* 171 (Paris 1854) col. 1629–34.

feminine. She is *perterrita* (63), yet, aflood with tears, she is not lacking in a certain coquetry:

Vae mihi, vae, dixit; pedibus senis oscula fixit,
Et lacrymas fundens, et pugnīs pectora tundens
Ore virum blando rogat, et suspiria dando
Ut stans urbe foris expectat eam tribus horis. (64–67)

Marbod's sighing, wheedling Thais is quite different from Hrotswitha's forthright heroine. At the end of Marbod's poem, Pafnutius orders Thais to be led from her cell (141–42). In the earlier hagiographical versions of the story Pafnutius himself leads her forth. But in Hrotswitha's play, although Pafnutius asks for her hand so that he can lead her out, Thais refuses (12.4). With this small but significant difference, Hrotswitha stresses the independence of her heroine. Although Thais asks for Pafnutius' presence at her death—no self-respecting saint, after all, would die alone—otherwise she is alone in her steadfast resolve to achieve salvation.

In sum, by modulating the secular ambitions of the Roman courtesan to spiritual ambitions appropriate to a life of Christien piety, Hrotswitha shows that even the most exploited woman can triumph over time, place, and the circumstances that degrade her. Terence's treatment of the *virgo* and the *meretrix* provoked Hrotswitha into demonstrating the heroic capacity of even the worst of women. In the *Abraham* and the *Pafnutius*, Hrotswitha transforms Terence's passive virgins and noble prostitutes into heroic women who fight for their beliefs and eventually triumph over their male exploiters. Indeed, at the end of the *Pafnutius*, Paul's vision accords Thais a glory greater than that of her learned and philosophical helper. Through judicious departures from her classical models as well as from her hagiographical sources, Hrotswitha develops her own response to the social and moral problems that Terence's treatment of love and women posed for a medieval audience. It may be going too far to see Hrotswitha as an early champion of the rights of women,⁵⁸ since her solution is found not in this world but in the next. Still, her plays deserve esteem for the sympathetic insight they show into the problems faced by women who, in a society dominated by male authority, seek to overcome their *feminea fragilitas* (*Praef.* 5) and triumph over the men who exploit them.

⁵⁸ Cf. Paul von Winterfeld ed., *Deutsche Dichter des lateinischen Mittelalters* (Munich 1913): "Hrotsvit ist sich selbst deutlich bewusst, mit ihren Schöpfungen für das Recht der Frauen zu streiten und nach Ruhm und Ehre der Männer zu ringen" (110).