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Authentic Education: The Example of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim

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Authentic Education: The Example of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim

The Emmeram-Munich manuscript, produced around 980, contains nine of ten surviving verse narratives by Hrotsvit of Gandersheim arranged with her six plays, a poem depicting scenes from the apocalypse, and several prayers in verse, all contextualized by a series of prefaces, dedicatory poems, epilogues, and a letter to learned patrons ("sapientes. . . fautores"), who had read her work and encouraged her.[1] Nearly everything we know about Hrotsvit's life, education, and intentions as a writer must be gleaned from this manuscript, in which she names herself multiple times. In her preface to the legends she also names two teachers, Riccardis and her abbess, Gerberga, who was younger than Hrotsvit but more advanced in learning ("scientia provectior").[2] Hrotsvit specifies that Gerberga had introduced her to other authors, most learned scholars ("sapientissimis"), with whom Gerberga had studied.[3] In her preface to the plays, Hrotsvit announces that she has imitated Terence's Roman comedies but substituted praise for the chastity of sacred virgins where Terence depicts the shameless acts of lascivious women ("turpia lascivarum incesta feminarum").[4] To supplement what Hrotsvit says about herself, readers depend on the internal evidence of her writings, which indicate extensive familiarity with the Bible, with exegetical writings (especially commentaries of Augustine, Gregory, Alcuin, and Hrabanus Maurus), with other ecclesiastical writers (such as Tertullian, Venantius Fortunatus, and Cassian), with hagiography, with pagan and Christian writers (such as Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, Prudentius, Sedulius, Boethius, and Aldhelm), with grammatical and metrical reference books, and with pedagogical commentaries and glossaries. As extraordinary as Hrotsvit's education and

[1]Manuscript heading, *Hrotsvit: Opera Omnia* , ed.,Walter Berschin (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2001), 134. Throughout this essay Hrotsvit's Latin is cited from Berschin's edition. Citations of poetry are given by lines parenthetically in the text. Citations of prose are in notes.
[2] *Hrotsvit*, p. 2
[3] Ibid.
[4] *Hrotsvit*, p. 132.

learning are, the uses to which she puts them are even more remarkable. In this essay I will argue that she uses her education to shape an understanding of human existence, sin, and Christian responsibility that reforms some of the theology she would have learned in ways that are similar to her transformation of Terentian comedy.[5] All her writings promote understanding of human weakness and Christian potential in individual human beings and emphasize the Christian potential and responsibility of men and women alike to live the life Christ modeled and taught.

A prominent element of theology Hrotsvit must have studied is the conflict of flesh and spirit explicitly articulated in Paul's letter to the Galatians 5. 16-23 and amplified and extended in other Pauline letters and by later Christian writers. Paul exhorted the Galatians:

> I say then, walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh./ For the flesh lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to another: so that you do not the things that you would./ But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law./ Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury,/ Idolatry, witchcrafts, enmities, contentions, emulations, wraths, quarrels, dissensions, sects,/ Envies, murders drunkenness, revellings, and such like. Of the which I foretell you, as I have foretold to you, that they who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God./ But the fruit of the Spirit is, charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity,/ Mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity. Against such there is no law.[6]

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[5] See Katharina Wilson's *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: The Ethics of Authorial Stance* (Leiden: Brill, 1988) for extended discussion of rhetorical elements in Hrotsvit's writings that emphasize association of Hrotsvit's writings with "Christ's mandate to all Christians to spread his ideas," p. 5 and passim.

[6] *The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version* (Baltimore: John Murphy Company, 1899; rpt. Rockford, ILL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1971). The Latin is "Dico autem spiritu ambulate et desiderium carnis non perficietis caro enim concupiscit adversus spiritum spiritus autem adversus carnem haec enim invicem adversantur ut non quaecumque vultis illa faciatis quod si spiritu ducimini non estis sub lege manifesta autem sunt opera carnis quae sunt fornicatio inmunditia luxuria idolorum servitus veneficia inimicitiae contentiones aemulationes irae rixae dissensiones sectae invidiae homicidia ebrietates comesationes et his similia quae praedico vobis sicut praedixi quoniam qui talia agunt

The doctrine of Original Sin, named by Augustine, builds on Biblical passages that emphasize the sinful nature of humanity as a result of the Fall. Augustine was reacting against Pelagianism, "the theological system which held that a man took the initial and fundamental steps towards salvation by his own efforts apart from the assistance of Divine Grace."[7] Thus Augustine and later writers stressed "the radical incapacity of the human person to fulfill the will of God without God's grace."[8] Theologians in the Middle Ages and since have often foregrounded scripture that emphasizes the sinful nature of humanity; Hrotsvit's writings foreground both the importance of grace and the unnaturalness of sin.[9]

In doing so, Hrotsvit's writings depict the conflict of flesh and spirit with two significant differences from most other medieval writers. First, she returns to the Pauline model by depicting men and women as equals in matters of the spirit in ways that work against the misogynist habit of gendering the spirit male and the flesh female. Second, her poems and plays present male and female characters who are more attracted to God than to sin; for some the presence or absence of education contributes in surprising ways. Hrotsvit's depiction of a human inclination toward God seems to draw on philosophy, especially as articulated in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*.[10] Notably, though, in Hrotsvit's writings Boethian philosophy is carefully grounded in the New Testament's perspective of a Christocentric universe. Richard McBrien summarizes the New Testament's perspective of a Christocentric universe as follows:

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regnum Dei non consequentur fructus autem Spiritus est caritas gaudium pax longanimitas bonitas benignitas fides modestia continentia adversus huiusmodi non est lex." *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969).

[7] *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. "Pelagianism."

[8] Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism: New Edition* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 175.

[9] Eril Hughes reaches a similar conclusion in "Augustinian Elements in Hrotsvit's Plays," in Katharina M. Wilson, ed., *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Rara Avis in Saxonia?* (Ann Arbor, MI: MARC Publishing, 1987), 63-70. His brief essay concludes that in her plays Hrotsvit "seeks to provide a substitute for the beautiful, seductive style of the pagan writers, a substitute which will turn the mind to the Giver of Talents," 68.

[10] In"Musical Learning and Dramatic Action in Hrotsvit's *Pafnutius*," *Studies in Philology* 77 (1980): 319-43, David Chamberlain brilliantly demonstrates Hrotsvit's sophisticated uses of Boethian ideas and images in "Conversio Thaidis Meretricis." See also William Provost, "The Boethian Voice in the Dramas of Hrtosvit," in Wilson, ed., *Rara Avis in Saxonia?* 71-78.

> All *creation* is oriented toward the *Covenant* between God and the People of God, and the Covenant, in turn, toward the *New Covenant* grounded in the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. The human community and the entire world in which the human community exists is oriented toward Christ and is sustained by him.

And

> *Every human person has this radical capacity* and many, perhaps most, have actualized it by receiving grace.

McBrien continues:

> Catholic theology, from Augustine through Aquinas to the present, has argued, in fact, for a "natural desire" for direct union with God. It is only in the vision of God that the human mind can satisfy fully and definitively its desire to know. No finite reality can satisfy that desire. It is only in the encounter with God, the Absolute, that its deepest spiritual aspirations are fulfilled.[11]

In contrast with many medieval texts that emphasize ways original sin results in a turning away from God, Hrotsvit's writings foreground notable narrative and dramatic examples of desire for direct union with God.

Yet Hrotsvit's examples of humans motivated by a desire for God are nearly always presented in the context of the struggle of the flesh and the spirit. Some of Hrotsvit's characters choose sin, even when given a clear choice between sin and salvation. For example, in the play "Resuscitatio Drusiane et Calimachi," Fortunatus's final lines are "If, as you say, Drusiana revived me and Calimachus is converted, then I renounce life and freely elect to die, for I would rather be dead/ than see such an abundant spread/ of the power of grace in them" ("Si ut asseris Drusiana me suscitavit · et Calimachus Christo credit · vitam repudio · mortemque sponte eligo ·

[11] McBrien, *Catholicism*, 181-82.

quia malo non esse · quam in his tantam habundanter virtutum gratiam sentiscere "). [12] The play provides no explanation of why he chooses death over grace and the gift of salvation, but it dramatizes the foolishness of the choice. No doubt Hrotsvit's audience could think of many examples in history, life, and literature suggesting Fortunatus's choice, though foolish, was far from anomalous.

In Hrotsvit's writings, characters who choose the way of the spirit and allow grace to work in their lives fall into three categories:

1) Some are converted when first exposed to Christianity. An extreme example is Dionysius, an astronomer in "Passio Sancti Dionisii Egregii Martyris" drawn to worship an "Unknown God" when he observes the eclipse that marked Christ's crucifixion. Hrotsvit writes,

> Ast ubi non solitas sensit magus esse tenebras,
> Descripsisse diem dignum ducebat et annum
> Non dubitans designari quid forte stupendi,
> Quod post mysterium declarasset tenebrarum;
> Coniectatque deum signis testantibus almis
> Actenus ignotum mundo mox esse probandum.[13]
>
> ["But when this wise man realized that this darkness was unusual, he thought it proper to note this day and year, not doubting that perchance some stupendous prodigy was being pointed out, which the mysterious darkness had declared, and he conjectured that by these propitious omens, some God as yet unknown was presently to be manifested to the world."[14]

[12] *The Plays of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, trans. Katharina Wilson (New York: Garland, 1989), 66; *Hrotsvit*, 192.
[13] *Hrotsvit*, 104.
[14] *The Non-Dramatic Works of Hrosvitha: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, trans. M. Gonsalva Wiegand (Saint Louis, The Abbey Press, 1937), 215.

While Dionysius is the main character in the story of his conversion and martyrdom, conversions in other poems and plays provide a context for recalcitrant pagans who refuse Christian teaching. For example, "Passio Sanctarum Virginum Fidei, Spei, et Karitatis" begins with Antiochus's and Hadrian's concern because Sapientia and her daughters have converted so many Roman citizens. Those who are converted by Sapientia's teaching—and therefore refuse to eat or sleep with their spouses—though on the periphery of the play nevertheless provide a sharp contrast to the obduracy of Hadrian, Antiochus, and the Emperor Diocletian.

2) Others, like the royal official who begged Jesus to heal his son in John 4:46b-54, require signs and wonders before they will believe; they only convert after Christ's power is made visible to them. For example, in "Resuscitatio Drusiane et Calimachi," after Calimachus has been resurrected by Saint John the Apostle's prayers, Calimachus recounts the cause of his death, which was different from Fortunatus's death from a snake's poisonous bite:

> Mihi autem apparuit iuvenis aspectu terribilis · qui detectum corpus honorifice texit · ex cuius flammea facie candentes in bustum scintillę transiliebant · quarum una resiliens mihi in faciem ferebatur · simulque vox facta est dicens · 'Calimache morere ut vivas' · | His dictis exspiravi.[15]
>
> [But to me a youth appeared, of terrifying sight/ who respectfully covered the naked corpse as He did alight./ From His flaming countenance sparks rained on the place/ and one of them, rebounding, hit my face./ At the same time I heard a voice that cried:/ 'Calimachus, die so that you may live.' Then I died.][16]

[15] *Hrotsvit*, 187-88.
[16] *The Plays*, 61-62

After St. John informs Calimachus that he has experienced the work of Heavenly Grace ("Opus cęlestis gratię"), Calimachus says, "I abhor my former life. I abhor my sinful lust" ("Tedet me prioris vitę · tedet delectacionis iniquę") and "All that I have done, I now despise and find appalling/—so much so that no love, no desire for life I find now enthralling/ unless, reborn in Christ, I may merit to be transformed into a better man" ("Displicet omne quod feci · in tantum ut nullus amor · nulla voluptas sit vivendi · nisi renatus in Christo merear in melius transmutari").[17]

3) Yet other characters are Christians who turn away from God toward sin, after which an intervention of some kind facilitates a change of heart, *metanoia*, which results in fear of eternal damnation and remorse; with repentance comes a reawakening of consciousness of grace. Examples are "Lapsus et Conversio Theophili Vicedomni," "Basilius," "Lapsus et Conversio Marię Neptis Habrahę Heremicolę," and "Conversio Thaidis Meretricis."

In this paper I will argue that it is significant not only that both male and female characters are depicted as converted and as depraved but that the frequency with which characters are depicted as drawn to God more than to sin is evidence of a subtle theological corrective which aligns well with recent theological shifts, especially feminist theologies, theologies emphasizing human desire for direct union with God as a reality coexisting with human sinfulness. To develop this argument I will examine two of Hrotsvit's stories, "Passio Sancti Gongolfi Martiris" ("Gongolf") and "Lapsus et Conversio Theophili Vicedomni" ("Theophilus"), and one play, "Conversio Thaidis Meretricis" ("Thais"). Analysis of the first two stories in the collection will provide some context. Throughout, my point about Hrotsvit as a pious and learned woman and about education more generally will be that Hrotsvit uses her

[17]*Hrotsvit*, 188; *The Plays*, 62.

education in ways that are remarkably similar to what a Jesuit school like Santa Clara University, where I teach, encourages in its students today.[18] Our emphasis is not just on acquisition of knowledge but even more on how that knowledge can be used. We want to cultivate habits of mind and heart and engagement with the world that will allow our students to become the best human beings they can be and recognize their responsibility to use an authentic education for the betterment of others.

"Gongolf" is the third of eight stories in verse that form Book I of Hrotsvit's works presented in the Emmeram-Munich codex. The two stories that precede "Gongolf" in the manuscript are about Mary, the virgin mother of God, and about Christ's ascension. Rather than emphasize a contrast between the attitudes of Mary and her family and later Christians or between Christ's disciples and the characters in subsequent history and in Hrotsvit's poems and plays, the first two poems in Hrotsvit's collected works introduce the themes and purpose of everything Hrotsvit has written.[19] Not surprisingly, the story of Mary's conception, birth, and mothering of Christ presents characters who seem drawn to good rather than inclined to sin. Joachim (father of Mary), for example, lived justly and was worthily zealous in the commands of the law even before he was weaned: "Hic in mandatis genitricis ab ubere legis/ Extiterat iustus

[18] For a different reading, see John Newell, "Education and Classical Culture in the Tenth Century: Age of Iron or Revival of Learning?" in Wilson, ed., *Rara Avis in Saxonia?* 127-41. Although Newell sees parallels between the atmosphere of 20th century elementary and middle schools and 9th and 10th century European monastic schools (129), he argues that Hrotsvit, like other 10th century writers, was limited in her "comprehension of classical literature" by the belief that "familiarity with the pagan poets" was "perilous" (133). Newell writes, "Like her contemporaries, Hrotsvit's own beliefs and values limited what she was able to apprehend and appreciate in classical literature" (134). Newell sees Hrotsvit's learning and 10th century education as a perpetuation of Carolingian accomplishments and a foundation for 11th and 12th century accomplishments. I read Hrotsvit's uses of her education significantly differently but acknowledge that her influence on writers coming after her, before her rediscovery by the German humanists, is slight. Nevertheless, recent study of the education and accomplishments of Ottonian noble women suggests Hrotsvit was not an anomalous rare bird. For an overview, see Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority, from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 100-3. My reading of Hrotsvit's uses of her education is deeply indebted to David Chamberlain's "Musical Learning and Dramatic Action in Hrotsvit's *Pafnutius*."

[19] Stephen Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics in the Works of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 55.

necnon digne studiosus."[20] Hrotsvit goes on to say that Joachim strove to be as good a shepherd as his grandson, Christ, would be in the future. Perhaps this is an example of a supernatural attraction to good rather than a natural attraction, but either way it contrasts with the idea that all humans since the Fall are attracted to sin.

Anna's prayer after Mary's birth provides a more complex example. While the Latin includes multiple echoes of Biblical texts (e.g., Esther 13.9; Apoc. 21.2; 2 Peter 1.7; Psalms 76.15-16; Judith 6.15), most notable is the parallel to Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1.46-55, based largely on the prayer of Hannah/Anna in I Samuel 1-10 but also including many echoes of other scriptural texts. The language of this prayer invites readers to see a parallel between Hrotsvit's writing and Luke's writing: both authors give female characters speeches that glorify and praise God. Both authors expect readers to recognize the significance of the earlier texts. Hrotsvit goes a step further, though, when she has Anna specify that she will join herself as an associate with the sacred ministers of the temple:

> 'Omnipotens rector, solus pietatis amator,
> Clementer proprio fecisti mira popello,
> Aspiciens humilem miserando meam quoque mentem
> Iam desperatę donasti gaudia natę.
> Audeo percerte post hęc tibi munera ferre
> Nec vereor prohibere meum post hęc inimicum,
> Quominus stem sacris templi sociata ministris.
> Hinc te celestes conlaudant sedulo cives
> Condignum carmen modulando perenniter. Amen.' (lines 314-22)

[20] *Hrotsvit*, ll. 54-55.

['Almighty ruler, sole Lover of righteousness, in Thy mercy Thou has done wonderful things for Thy people; regarding with compassion the humility of my heart, Thou hast given to me, despairing of offspring, the joy of a daughter. I dare indeed hereafter to bear gifts to Thee, neither do I fear lest my enemy will prevent my sacrifice and hinder me from frequently joining myself as an ally to the sacred ministers of the temple. For this may the heavenly citizens, in endless melody, praise Thee zealously by singing eternally a worthy canticle.'][21]

Anna, mother of Mary, understands her gifts from God as authorization to bear gifts in return and to undertake an active role in the church, notably through prayer and song. In the poems and plays that follow, through the actions of characters, through narrative comment, and, perhaps most powerfully, through the example Hrotsvit provides with the prayers and song in her own voice, Christian prayer song and prayer are foregrounded as powerful alternatives to sin.

"The Ascension of our Lord," the second story, relates the words Christ spoke to his disciples and to his mother immediately before his ascension. The poem's direct discourse and narrative introducing Christ's words, the words of David the Psalmist, and God himself emphasize the contrast between the possibilities afforded by Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection and the reality of sin resulting from Adam's disobedience. Twice Hrotsvit refers to Christ as the only one able to live without sins ("Qui solus maculis potuit sine vivere cunctis," line 4; "Qui solus culpae fuerat sine sordibus Adae," line 18). However, Christ himself draws a parallel between God sending Him into the world and Christ sending the disciples out to teach His commandments:

'Ut pater in mundum me promisit sibi carum,

Sic ego mitto meos dilectos vosmet amicos.

[21] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 31-33.

At vos in gentes cicius cunctas abeuntes

Illas perpetuę vitę mandata docete

Credentes sacra purgantes ocius unda

In patris et nati pariter quoque flaminis almi

Nomine, quo veteris deponant crimina sordis.' (lines 23-29)

['As the Father has sent Me forth, His dearly beloved Son, into the world, so do I also send you, my cherished friends. But you, going speedily to all nations, teach them the commandments of eternal life, purifying forthwith with the sacred water those who believe in the name of the Father, and likewise of the Son, and also of the Holy Ghost, that thus they may put off the stains of ancient guilt.']

[22]

Christ then goes on to specify that his disciples will be known by the power they derive from Him to cure disease and control savage fiends ("Et virtute mea varios depellite morbos," line 30), if they love their enemies with a sincere heart ("Si colitis vestros puris animis inimicos," line 37). "The Ascension" ends with the words

Postquam naturam iam de busto redivivam

Humanam solio Christus patris intulit alto,

Omnes angelicę submissa voce catervę

Laudabant ipsum, qui regnaturus in aevum

Mortem devicit moriens mundumque redemit,

Ut regnare suos faceret per sęcula servos. (lines 141-46)

[After Christ had taken on high to the throne of His Father His human Body again restored from the grave, all the angelic hosts, in submissive tones, gave praise to Him,

[22] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 75.

Who, destined to reign throughout eternal ages, by His death conquered death and redeemed the world, to bring it to pass that His servants might reign for all eternity.][23]

Christ's servants include Hrotsvit herself and the characters in her poems and plays who choose to serve God. Hrotsvit emphasizes her own role in lines that provide a transition from "Ascensio" to "Passio Sancti Gongolfi Martiris" when she writes,

Haec quicumque legat, miseranti pectore dicat
'Rex pie, Hrotsvithe parcens miserer miselle
Et fac divinis persistere caelitus odis
Hanc, quę laudando cecinit tua facta stupenda.' (lines 147-50)
[May he, whoever reads these lines, say with a pitying heart: 'Gentle King, have mercy on poor Hrotsvit and spare her, and grant that she may with grace from heaven continue to sing thy divine praises, who in verse has set forth thy marvels.'][24]

Note that the word "miscellae," "poor," contributes to the implicit parallel between Hrotsvit's songs of praise and the praises sung "submissa voce" (line 143, in submissive tones) by the angelic hosts.

Although Gongolf was a secular ruler living in the reign of the Frankish King Pippin 750 years later, details in the prayer that introduces the poem and in his story itself suggest an extension of the apostolic mandate Christ placed on his disciples. Before the poem itself begins, Hrotsvit prays to the Creator of Light, the Maker of the world and of all things Who controls all things with His Will and governs them with His authority:

Tu dignare tuae perfundere corda famellę
Hrotsvithe rore tis pie graciolae,

[23] *Non-Dramatic Works,* 83.
[24] *Non-Dramatic Works,* 83.

Carmine quo compto valeam pia pangere facta

Sancti Gongolfi, martyris egregii,

Et laudare tuum semper nomen benedictum,

Qui post bella tuis grata dabis famulis

Premia perpetuę tenui pro vulnere vitę

Mandans in regno vivere lucifluo. (lines 10-18)

[Do Thou deign to overflow the heart of Thy servant Hrosvitha with the dew of Thy sacred grace, so that I may succeed in celebrating in song duly made, the goodly deeds of the illustrious martyr Gongolf; and may ever praise Thy blessed Name, Who after the combat will give to Thy servants a gladsome reward of eternal life for the slight wounds of this life, assigning to them to dwell in the kingdom of Light.][25]

As the poem about Gongolf develops, parallels between the apostles and Gongolf are similarly explicit. In the first part of the poem, Gongolf miraculously moves a fountain from one location to another, after which the water has the power to wash away disease. Gongolf's prayers of thanksgiving after the miracle has been accomplished emphasize the parallel to Christ's message to his disciples in the second story about the Ascension. First Gongolf says,

'Non decet haec meritis' inquid, 'sat credere nostris,

Umquam tantilli nil quia commerui;

Restat multiplices Christo sed pangere grates,

Qui praesens famulis simper adest propriis.' (lines 275-780

[25] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 89.

['It is not becoming that thou shouldst at all attribute these events to our deserts, since I have never merited even the least favor. But it remains that we render manifold thanks to Christ, Who Himself is ever ready to assist His own servants.'][26]

Gongolf then sings 20 lines addressed to God, setting up a parallel between Christ's power, the power of the fountain, and, less explicitly, the power of Christians who trust in God and Christ and carry on the work of Christ's disciples. After the prayer, Hrotsvit uses an epic simile to compare Gongolf's miracle explicitly to Christ's healing of a sick man on the Sabbath at Bethsaida, recounted in John 5.1-9.

This first part of the poem "Gongolf" can be read as a clear statement that the apostolic responsibility Christ assigned to his apostles continues for all Christians, whether lay or religious. Moreover, implicit in the story of Gongolf is the idea that to embrace that responsibility is joyful for those who allow God's grace to work in them. Hrotsvit specifies that Gongolf was drawn to serve God even before he was born. The poem opens with the statement,

Tempore, quo regni gessit Pippinus eoi
  Francorum sceptra regia pro populo
Iureque magnifico rexit Burgundia regna
  Subiectos frenis rite domando suis,
Famosus iuvenis nutritur partibus illis
  Armis prevalidus corpore conspicuus,
Nomine Gongolfus, morum probitate venustus;
  Omnibus hic carus extitit et placidus.
Illum nempe ferunt ortum de germine regum
  Regalemque suis moribus egregiis.

[26] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 103.

Ipsius e matris gremio spes pendet in illo,

Qui verbo cuncta condidit ex nihilo,

Germinis et tanti sese non credit honori,

Sed transit meritis almiciem generis. (lines 19-32)

[At the time when Pippin of the Eastern Empire held the royal scepter for the people of France, with excellent justice ruling the Burgundian nation, restraining by his laws those whom he had as subjects, there lived in those regions, Gongolf, a renowned youth, valiant in arms, handsome in person, and charming in the rectitude of his morals. Dear he was to all, and amiable. They say that he was sprung from a royal race and that he was kingly in his noble manners. Even from his mother's womb the hope of Gongolf rested in Him Who made all things out of nothing by His word, and Gongolf did not put his trust in the splendor of his descent but he exceeded his nobility of birth by good deeds.][27]

At no point in the poem is Gongolf depicted as inclining toward sin. Rather, the second part of the poem depicts his patient and charitable response when his wife and her lover abuse his trust. One effect of the second part of the poem is to dramatize the foolishness of the sinful characters. The love of God and love of his fellow humans Gongolf enacts clearly are infinitely superior to the carnal love chosen by the wife and "clericus." Hrotsvit writes,

Scilicet infelix Gongolfi clericus audax

Ardebat propriam plus licito dominam

Pro dolor, haec male victa dolo serpentis amaro

Infelix cicius aestuat in facinus,

Inherens servo cordisque calore secreto

Legalem dominum respuit ob famulum. (lines 355-60)

[27] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 89.

[It chanced that a bold and wretched scribe of Gongolf was inflamed by a more than lawful affection for his mistress. And woe! This woman, overcome by the bitter wiles of the evil one, speedily was aflame with sinful passion, and clinging to the scribe she, in the secret infatuation of her heart, rejected her lawful lord for the servant.][28]

Like Fortunatus in "Resuscitatio Drusianę et Calimachi," the wife is given ample opportunity to repent. Like Calimachus she experiences the miraculous first hand, when Gongolf tests her innocence or guilt by having her place her hand in the miraculous fountain. Hrotsvit writes,

Que tunc plus iusto confidens corde superbo
Confortante suam demone duriciam
Fundo nudatam committit denique palmam
Nil sperans damni posse sibi fieri.
Inter frigoreas ardens sed comperit undas,
Quid posset nostri dextera celsa dei:
Scilicet in madidis audax ardebat harenis,
Uritur et flammis acriter aequoreis
Et, quę pacificis fastidit cedere verbis,
Cogitur aeternę cedere iusticię. (lines 403-12)

[And the woman, with rash confidence, in the pride of her heart, her own obstinancy yet more confirmed by the evil one, at length entrusted her bare hand to the depths of the water, expecting nothing to happen. Yet she learned, as she burned in the midst of the cooling water, what thing the right Hand of God is able to do. For indeed the haughty woman was scorched amid the sodden sand and was severely burnt by the watery flames;

[28] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 107-9.

and she, who disdained to be subdued by peaceful words, was forced to submit to Eternal Justice.[29]

However, unlike Calimachus, and like Fortunatus, she is obdurate, even after Gongolf pardons her. She joins her exiled lover, who has been taken over by the deceitful wiles of Satan, and together they murder Gongolf. The story ends with a sharp contrast. The narrator says of the wife's lover,

Sed non legalis finem ceu nescit amoris,

Sic vindicta suam nescit habere moram,

Viscera sed subito profudit caelitus acta,

Pridem lęticia quę fuerant tumida; (lines 467-470)

"But just as he knew not the bounds of lawful love, so punishment suffered not itself to be delayed; but , by heaven's decree, he suddenly poured out his bowels and heart, so lately puffed up with pride and sin."[30]

Gongolf's death had been very different: he was called by a celestial throng "to tread the starry pathway to the heavenly abode."

Ocius expirans animam martir bene lotam

Agni lucenti sanguine purpurei

Tollitur ex aura vehiturque per astra serena,

In cęli porta sistitur et domino.

Hic sibi de Christi fertur mox laurea rara

Et manibus bravii palmula perpetui,

Lucentique stola cuneis coniungitur albis

[29] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 111.
[30] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 115.

Per vulnus loeti, quos tenet aula poli. (lines 481-88)

[Then the martyr presently breathing forth the soul well laved in the radiant blood of the Crimson Lamb, was borne aloft and carried through the serene starry sky, and at the gate of heaven placed before his Lord. Thereupon from the hands of Christ there were brought to him the distinguished laurel and the palm of perpetual victory, and through his mortal wound, he, clad in glittering garments, was joined to the white host whom the courts of heaven contains.][31]

The wife lives, but the narrator specifies,

Pestiferis sed mens vitiis male dedita totis
Ad vite rectam rennuit ire viam
Solaque nunc lętę complectens lubrica vitę
Non curat patrię gaudia perpetuę.
Sic hęc infelix commissi criminis auctrix
Fastidit verbis credere pacificis,
Se quia credebat causis totam perituris
Nec spem mansuris gestit habere bonis. (lines 555-62)

[But that mind, that had wickedly given itself up to all baneful vices, refused to move along the upright way of life. And now embracing only the unstable pleasures of a wanton life, she cared naught for the joys of the eternal fatherland. Thus the unfortunate woman, bold deviser of crime that she was, refused to pay heed to these peaceable admonitions, because she committed herself totally to transitory things and strove not to have any hope in imperishable goods.][32]

[31] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 115.
[32] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 119.

Hrotsvit amplifies the punishment the wife suffers in "Vita Gangulfi, Martyris Varennensis," which survives in the *Acta Sanctorum*, where Gongolf's wife experiences a "wondrous manifestation" about her person—every time she opens her mouth to speak on a Friday, the day of her blasphemy, the sound of farting results.[33] Hrotsvit poem concludes with the wife speaking blasphemously to a devout man who urged her to repent. The narrator then says,

> Dixerat, et verbum sequitur mirabile signum
>
> Illi particulę conveniens proprię
>
> Ergo dedit sonitum turpi modulamine factum,
>
> Profari nostrum quale pudet ligulam.
>
> Et post hęc verbum quociens formaverat ullum,
>
> Reddidit incultum hunc tocies sonitum.
>
> Ut, que legalem respuit retinere pudorem,
>
> Sit risus causa omnibus inmodica,
>
> Finetenusque suę portet per tempora vitę
>
> Indicium proprii scilicet obprobrii. (lines 573-82)
>
> [This she said, and lo! a marvelous happening followed her words, according with the taunt she had uttered. For from her came forth sounds so disgusting that our tongue abhors to mention them; and after this, as often as she spoke, so often would that uncanny noise recur; so that she, who had refused to maintain due chastity, was a source of uncontrolled ridicule to all and carried indeed for the rest of her days the mark of her own iniquity.][34]

[33] See Paul Stach, "Die Gongolf-Legende bei Hrotsvit: Bermerkungen zu ihrer literarischen Technik." *Historische Vierteljahrschrift* 30 (1935): 168-74, 361-97, for a detailed comparison of Hrotsvit's poem with the two versions in the *Acta Sanctorum*.
[34] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 121.

Thus the story of Gongolf dramatizes the contrast between Christian love and concupiscence. The placement of the story also encourages comparison to the first story, about Mary, in which Anna's voice makes her an "ally to the sacred ministers of the temple" ("sacris templi sociata ministris," line 320).[35] I believe Hrotsvit depicts Gongolf's love of God and his fellow humans as a far more natural condition than his wife's concupiscence, which the story specifies is encouraged by the devil. Because at no point in the story is concupiscence ever presented as attractive in any way, the effect is an impression that sin is the unnatural condition.

In the fifth poem, "Lapsus et Conversio Theophili Vicedomni," or "Theophilus," concupiscence is presented more attractively. As in the Faust legend, Theophilus signed a contract with the devil, which resulted in public honor and flourishing wealth.[36] However, Hrotsvit's story makes if very clear that what he has gained is empty ("vacuis," line 144). Furthermore, in contrast to Faust, Theophilus's temptation and fall resulted, paradoxically, from his goodness. Hrotsvit writes,

> Cuius mox mentem detestatur pacientem
> Tocius humani generis sevissimus hostis
> Et, qua primates decepit fraude parentes,
> Hac huiusce viri pulsat penetralia iusti (lines 67-71)
> [But the savage enemy of all humankind soon came to loathe this patient soul, and with that same cunning with which he had erstwhile deceived our first parents, he assailed the inmost heart of this just man.][37]

[35] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 33.
[36] This story is frequently discussed as the "earliest account in verse of a pact with the devil and a precursor of the many versions of the Faust legend" (Wiegand note 186).
[37] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 163.

Hrotsvit specifies that Theophilus is out of his mind to reject all virtue ("Mentis virtutem demens abiecerat omnem," line 77). His mind is frail ("eius fragili . . . menti"), but he is not inclined toward sin; rather, the devil had to use all the same treachery and cunning he used to bring about original sin to bring about the fall of Theophilus. In fact, it is precisely the absence of an inclination toward sin that elicited the devil's animosity toward Theolphilus.

Also unlike Faust, Theophilus breaks his contract with the devil after God intervenes:

Tandem caelestis pietas inmensa parentis,
Qui numquam cupit interitum mortemque reorum,
Sed mage conversis lętam concedere vitam,
Condoluit facti meritum periisse benigni,
Quo quondam stabili fulsit celeberrimus orbi
Istec sollicitans omnes clementer egentes;
Moreque divino pietas eadem veneranda
Concutit errantem digna formidine mentem. (lines 149-56)

[The inexhaustible Goodness of the Heavenly Father, who never desires the destruction and death of the wicked but rather to grant a happy life to them upon their conversion, was grieved that the merit of so charitable a life had been lost, wherewith that man had once shone so brightly in the stable earth, being so mercifully solicitous for all the wretched; and thus in manner divine that Adorable Goodness touched this erring soul with a just fear.][38]

Theophilus's lament after he is "conpunctus" (pricked, line 157) with remorse and fear first emphasizes his crime: he recognizes that he has used writing to deny the offspring of the highest father and the sweet mother "patris summi prolem per scripta negavi/ Divineque simul dulcem

[38] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 167.

prolis genitricem!" lines 165-6). Then the lament specifies the lasting darkness in which he will be enclosed (claudar) for all eternity, "united to those dwellers in darkness." He asks what he, a sinner beyond measure ("nimium peccator," line 172) will be able to say for himself at the time of judgement, when each will receive a just reward for his deeds, knowing even the just are barely saved through their merits ("Quando factorum mercedem quisque suorum/ Accipiet dignam satis aequa lance libratam/ Pro diversorum qualitate quidem meritorum?" lines 174-6). His questions turn his mind to Mary, especially her kindness and intercessory powers:

> Nam Christi genitrix celique potens dominatrix
> Flaminis atque sacri templum sine sorde coruscum,
> Hęc eadem virgo partus post gaudia casta,
> Que retro conversis fuerat mitissima cunctis
> Atque sui dulcem numquam tardat pietatem,
> Sola mihi venię potis est medicamina ferre,
> Si pro me proprium dignatur poscere natum. (lines 179-85)
> [For only the Mother of Christ and powerful Queen of heaven and radiant, spotless temple of the Holy Spirit, remaining Virgin after the chaste joys of child-birth, she who was ever most benign to those who are converted to the Lord, and who would never delay her sweet kindness: she alone is able to bring to me the remedy of pardon if she but deign to intercede for me with her Son.][39]

After expressing concern about immediate destruction "if he attempt to beseech her with lips polluted, whom I have but lately denied with frenzied heart,"[40] ("si pollutis illam rogitare

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

labellis/ Coepero, bachanti nuper quam corde negavi," lines 186-7), Theophilus hurries to a temple dedicated to Mary and spends 40 days in penitential prayer.

Mary herself appears to Theophilus as he sleeps. The dialogue that ensues specifies that Theophilus does not deserve Mary's intervention or Christ's pardon. Mary's speech begins with Mary asking why Theophilus presumes, "presumis"(line 214), to hope that Mary's goodness can help him, questions how she could presume, "praesumo" (line 219), to stand before God to ask pardon for Theophilous, and concludes with a reiteration of his presumption, "praesumpsisti" (line 229), and a statement of her indignation at his blasphemy. Nevertheless, Mary does forgive Theophilus because of the intensity of her love for all Christians, especially those who pray and chant hymns in her temple.

Theophilus's lengthy reply invites readers to compare the vain hope offered by the devil to the hope for salvation he derives from knowledge of other sinners who have been forgiven for their crimes: the Ninevites, David, and Peter, who were pardoned for their great sins because they used their voices to express contrition for the sins they had committed with their lips. Yet when Mary demands that he make a confession of faith to contrast with the speeches in which he had denied his faith, he asks how and why such an unhappy sinner as he is could presume to use his polluted lips to speak (literally "touch") God's name (literally "the venerable great holy name of [Him] enthroned on high): "Quo pacto, quo iure quidem contingere tandem/ Altithroni nomen sanctum venerabile magnum/ Infelix ego pollutis praesumo labellis" (lines 285-6). In response to the confession of faith that follows, Mary specifies that holy baptism, her love for her son, and the redemptive power of Christ's crucifixion make it possible for her to approach Christ to ask for forgiveness:

'Propter mysterium sacri baptismatis almum,

Quod suscepisti credentis more popelli,

Et propter dulcem carę mis prolis amorem,

Cuius te precio sacri scio sanguinis amplo

Emptum, pro mundo qui fusus erat perituro,

Procedens sacris advolvor sedula plantis

Eius, quem genui, cunctorum iudicis aequi

Nec parcam preculis studio certante profusis,

Donec ipsius mitem cogo pietatem,

Ut tibi parcendo dimittat tanta piacla.' (lines 335-343)[41]

['Because of the benign mystery of sacred Baptism, which thou hast received according to the manner of the faithful people, and because of my tender love for my dear Son, by the ample price of Whose sacred Blood I know that thou hast been purchased, that Blood which was shed for the redemption of a world that was destined to perish, I will approach and cast myself earnestly at the sacred Feet of Him Whom I have brought forth, the just Judge of all, neither will I stint the prayers but pour them forth with emulous zeal, until I shall constrain His tender Benignity to blot out, by granting pardon to thee, such great offense.']

Three days later Mary returns to tell Theophilus that the compunction of his sorrowing heart ("tristis conpunctio cordis," line 350) has been acceptable to God and Christ, his tears have merited pardon for his sins ("tuae lacrimę scelerum veniam meruere," line 352), and he will not be entrapped by the tortures of hell if he will henceforth passionately desire to stand firmly and faithfully without guile ("'Si post haec perstare cupis sine fraude fidelis,'" line 354).

[41] In this passage Berschin has transposed line 345 to follow line 336 to make sense.
[42] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 177-9.

Remarkably, Mary's word is not enough for Theophilus. After ten lines of flattery, Theophilus asks Mary to retrieve the written contract he had signed, placing himself in the devil's service. He specifies that he fears his soul will be distracted with great peril on Judgment Day if the contract is not recovered. After three more days of penitential prayer, he awakes to find the document on his breast.

The story concludes with Theophilus not only reconciled with Mary, Christ and God but also reintegrated into the Christian community from which he isolated himself when he made the deal with the devil. During mass the Sunday after the contract was returned to him, Theophilus confesses his sin to the bishop and the congregation and tells them of Mary's intercession. The bishop responds with words that echo Hrotsvit's words when she earlier specified God's motive for touching Theophilus's soul with fear. The bishop exhorts the congregation,

> 'Cuncti gaudentes huc iam properate fideles
> Et pia facta dei laudantes mente fideli
> Credite iam dominum propria pietate benignum
> In loeto delectari numquam scelerosi,
> Sed plus conversis vitam dare velle futuram. (lines 396-400)
> ['Come, hasten hither in joy all ye faithful, and, praising the kindly deeds of God with loyal hearts, believe that God, merciful in His Goodness, never rejoices in the destruction of the wicked, but rather wills to give Life everlasting to those returning to Him.][43]

As the speech continues, the Bishop reiterates the power of prayer to elicit Christ's compassionate pardon and specifies that the curse of a sinful human nature was destroyed by the gift of God's grace: "Per quam naturę periit malediction nostrę" (line 409). He goes on to ask Mary to be mindful of Christians who praise Him with heart and faith and tongue and prayer:

[43] *Non-Dramatic Works*, 181.

"Hinc memor esto, dei genitrix sanctissima, nostri,/ Qui te mente, fide, voto laudamus et ore" (lines 411-3). Grace is essential to salvation, but sin is presented far less natural for Christians than songs of praise and prayer.

The action of the poem ends with Theophilus dying in the very place where Mary appeared to him. Hrotsvit specifies that his spirit ascended into heaven ("ascendit ad aulam," line 435), aided by Mary. The prayer that follows emphasizes the conflict between the old enemy of humans ("Humani veterem . . . hostem," line 444) and Christ, who snatched the thing created by his right hand from the mouth of the serpent ("qui straverat. . . /Plasma suę dextre rapines serpentis ab ore," lines 444-45). The overarching message is that love of God should and can be as "natural" as God's love of humans and that Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection—God's loving gift to humans—have made it possible for humans to choose Christ and desire salvation when tempted by the ancient enemy of mankind, who continues to be a threat, even after Christ has vanquished sin and death.

While Christian faith is emphasized in the poem, especially in Theophilus's confession of faith that is a precondition to Christ's forgiveness, the poem seems to be even more concerned with the power and importance of hope and prayer for even the greatest of sinners. In this emphasis, I believe, is one of many echoes of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. In Book V, Prose III, Boethius articulates his difficulty understanding how God's universal foreknowledge can coexist with human free will. After exploring the conundrum, Boethius specifies,

> Si quidem iustae humilitatis pretio inaestimabilem vicem divinae gratiae promeremur, qui solus modus est quo cum deo colloqui homines posse videantur illique inaccessae luci prius quoque quam impetrent ipsa supplicandi ratione coniungi."

> [And so that sole intercourse between men and God will be removed, that is, hope and prayer for aversion (if indeed at the price of a proper humility we deserve the inestimable return of God's grace), and that is the only way in which men seem able to converse with God and to be joined by the very manner of their supplication to that inaccessible light, even before they receive what they seek.][44]

Hrotsvit's poem dramatizes the difficult and perplexing reality that Boethius asks Philosophy about: Theophilus's humility, hope, and prayer allow him to obtain "the inestimable return of God's grace." However, in Hrotsvit's poem the proportion of emphasis is changed. While Boethius's consolation is from philosophy and grace is named in a subordinate clause, in Hrotsvit's work as a whole and "Theophilus" in particular, God's grace is emphasized. The presence of philosophy—and education—are nevertheless also significant. Theophilus's education is briefly mentioned at the beginning of the poem: his parents had consigned (credidit) Theophilus to a wise bishop for instruction in the seven liberal arts. The importance given to education in the penultimate play in the Emmeram-Munich codex, "Conversio Thaidis Meretricis," suggests a greater significance to this detail than is immediately obvious.

"Thais" develops a plot with parallels to "Theophilus" but in a very different context. Significant differences are, first, that Theophilus is both the sinner and the one who, with God's prodding, himself knows how to turn away from sin and back to God. In the play "Thais," a man of religion must inspire the female sinner with hope and urge a turning away from sin, toward God, through penance because the sinner lacks the education that would help her know that God's grace extends even—especially—to sinners. Second, the devil is not a character in the play "Thais." Rather, the harlot Thais is depicted as seducing, enticing, and ensnaring others,

[44] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy with an English Translation*, ed. and trans. S. J. Tester (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918; rpt. 1978), 400-1.

bringing them to damnation, although Pafnutius, the religious who inspires Thais's conversion, does acknowledge the power of the devil as well as of Thais to ensnare him and other humans. Third, rather than God pricking Thais with compunction as He did Theophilus, Pafnutius's students specify that God instilled in Pafnutius the desire to try to convert Thais. Thus the roles played by supernatural beings in "Theophilus" are played by humans in "Thais."[45]

"Thais" opens in a monastic classroom, where the hermit Pafnutius is talking with his students. The students' question about why his face is clouded and dark, lacking its customary serenity, elicits Pafnutius's response that he grieves because of a wrong perpetrated against the creator of humans ("pro iniuria factoris"), a "wrong perpetrated by His creatures whom He created in His own image" ("Ipsa quam a propria patitur creatura ad sui imaginem condita").[46] When the students say that their teacher's words frighten them, Pafnutius replies,

> Even though His Majesty, incapable of suffering, cannot be affected by injury,/ yet when I transfer our own human weakness metaphorically to God, then what greater injury could there be than that the microcosm alone resists the power of Him to whose rule the macrocosm obediently submits?
>
> [Licet illa inpassibilis maiestas affici non posit iniuriis tamen ut usum nostrę fragilitatis metaforicę transferam in deum · quę maior iniuria dici potest quam quod ieus imperio cuius gubernaculis maior mundus obtemperanter subditur solus minor contraluctetur?][47]

The lesson that follows is one of the two most learned scenes in Hrotsvit's writings. Drawing on Boethius's *De Musica* and *Consolation of Philosophy* and probably also on Cassiodorus' *Institutiones*, Hrotsvit presents a school dialogue between Pafnutius and his naïve disciples, in

[45] "Thais" is often compared to the play immediately preceding it, "Lapsus et Conversio Marie Neptis Habrahe Heremicole" because both plays dramatize the journey of a monk to a brothel to rescue a prostitute from perdition. In both plays, the female sinner has not had access to the education available to the monks who rescue them.
[46] *Hrotsvit*, 218; *Plays*, 95.
[47] *Hrotsvit*, 219; *Plays*, 95.

which Pafnutius explains his metaphorical attribution of such an injury to God by means of a lesson on music as a manifestation of divine harmony. For example, he explains that just as music is created by the harmonious joining of high and low tones, so too "contrary elements, brought together in concordance, produce one single world" ("dissona elementa · convenienter concordantia unum perficiunt mundum").[48] But humans, who have been given the rational ability to choose between good and evil, often choose that which seems attractive and in doing so turn away from God and what is truly good. Pafnutius tells his disciples that Thais's shining beauty threatens men with foul shame. When his disciples reply, "No one is unaware of her sordid fame" ("Eius infamia nulli est incognita"),[49] Pafnutius responds, "No wonder, because she is not satisfied with leading only a few men to damnation/ but is ready to ensnare all men with the allurement of her beauty and drag them along with her to eternal perdition" ("Nec mirum quia non dignatur cum paucis ad interitum tendere · sed prompta est omnes lenociniis suę formę illicere · secumque ad interitum trahere"). Thus, as in "Theophilus," concupiscence is presented as superficially attractive. As Pafnutius leaves to visit Thais, disguised as a lover, in his words, "to see if perchance she might be recovered from her worthless and frivolous life" ("si forte revocari posit ab intentione nugacitatis"), he asks his students to pray for him, so that he will "not be overcome by the vicious serpent's guile" ("ne superer insidiis vitiosi serpentis").[50]

Surprisingly, once Pafnutius arrives at Thais's house and she has taken him to a room well furnished for a pleasant stay, she is the one who brings God into their conversation. Pafnutius has asked for a more secret location. Thais has responded that she can take him to a room "so hidden, so secret, that no one besides me knows it, except for God" ("<tam> occultum

[48] *Hrotsvit*, 220; *Plays*, 96; See Sandro Sticca's discussion of this scene in "Sacred Drama and Tragic Realism in Hrotswitha's *Paphnutius*," in Herman Braet, Johan Nowé, and Gilbert Tournoy, eds., *The Theatre in the Middle Ages* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985), 22.
[49] *Hrotsvit*, 225; *Plays* 102.
[50] *Hrotsvit*, 226; *Plays*, 103.

· tam secretum · ut eius penetral nulli preter me nisi deo sit cognitum"). Even more surprisingly, when Pafnutius asks Thais, "What God?" ("Cui deo?") the following dialogue ensues:

Thais: Vero. [The true God.]

Pafnutius: Credis illum aliquid scire? [Do you believe he knows what we do?]

Thais: Non nescio illum nihil latere. [I know that nothing is hidden from His view.]

Pafnutius: Utrumne reris illum facta pravorum neglegere · an sui aequitatem servare? [Do you believe that He overlooks the deeds of the wicked or that He metes out justice as is due?]

Thais Estimo ipsius aequitatis lance singulorum metita pensari · et unicuique prout gessit sive supplicium sive prȩmium servari. [I believe that He weighs the merits of each person justly in His scale and that each according to his desserts receives reward or punishment from Him.]

Pafnutius O Christe quam miranda tuę circa nos benignitatis patientia · qui te scientes vides peccare · et tamen tardas perdere. [O Christ, how wondrous is the patience of Thy great mercy! Thou seest that some sin with full cognition,/ yet Thou delayest their deserved perdition.][51]

Pafnutius's comment here is remarkably similar to Boethius's complaint to Philosophy in Book I, Prose IV: "For although it is perhaps a normal human failing to have evil desires, it is surely a monstrous thing in the sight of God that whatever an evil man conceives can actually be done to the innocent" ("Nam deteriora velle nostri fuerit fortasse defectus, posse contra innocentiam, quae sceleratus quisque conceperit inspectante deo, monstri simile est").[52] Hrotsvit sidesteps any

[51] *Hrotsvit*, 229; *Plays*, 106-7.
[52] Boethius, *The Consolation*, 152-3.

question of whether the men Thais has led to damnation were innocent, but Pafnutius earlier requested prayers to protect him from her evil. Particularly important is awareness of Philosophy's response to Boethius. Although Philosophy patiently allowed Boethius to complete Prose IV and Poem V, developing his complaint in considerable detail, her response in Prose V is not particularly sympathetic. Rather, Philosophy tells Boethius that he has allowed himself to be exiled from his homeland (patria) and become so disordered that she will have to treat him with mild medicines before he will be ready for the harsher medicines necessary for his cure. The language Pafnutius uses calls his wisdom and judgment into question, just as Boethius's language alerts Lady Philosophy to his serious misunderstanding of his situation. Pafnutius seems more attuned to Old Testament ideas of justice than to the promise of grace that the play as a whole elucidates.

Thais next asks Pafnutius, "Why do you tremble? Why the change of color? Why all these tears?" ("Cur contremiscis mutato colore? Cur fluunt lacrimę?"), to which Pafnutius replies, "I shudder at your presumption,/ I bewail your sure perdition/ because you know all this so well,/ and yet you sent many a man's soul to Hell" ("Tui presumptionem horresco · tui perditionem defleo · quia hęc nosti et tantas animas perdidisti")[53] Like Theophilus, Pafnutius is concerned about human presumption in the face of sinful behavior; unlike Theophilus, Pafnutius does not immediately think about Mary or the power of grace. The rapidity of Thais's conversion in the lines that follow is especially remarkable in light of the differences between Theophilus and Pafnutius.

Thais: Ve ve mihi infelici [Woe is me, wretched woman!]

[53] *Hrotsvit*, 229; *Plays*, 107.

Pafnutius: Tanto iustius damnaberis · quanto praesumptiosius scienter offendisti maiestatem divinitatis [You deserve to be damned even more,/ as you offended the Divine Majesty haughtily, knowing of Him before.?]

Thais: Heu heu quid agis · quid infelici minitaris? [Alas, alas, what do you do? What calamity do you sketch?/ Why do you threaten me, unfortunate wretch?] Is something wrong with the translation here?

Pafnutius: Supplicium tibi imminet gehennę si permanebis in scelere [Punishment awaits you in Hell if you continue to dwell in sin.]

Thais: Severitas tuę correptionis concussit penetral pavidi cordis [Your severe reproach's dart/ pierces the inmost recesses of my heart.]

Pafnutius: O utinam esses visceratenus concussa timore · ne ultra presumeres periculosę delectationi assensum prebere [O, how I wish you were pierced through all your flesh with pain/ so that you wouldn't dare to give yourself to perilous lust again!]

Thais: Et quis post hęc locus pestifere delectationi in meo corde potest relinqui ubi solum intestine meroris amaritudo · consciique reatus nova dominator formido? [How can there be a place for appalling lust in my heart now when it is filled entirely with the bitter pangs of sorrow and the new awareness of guilt, fear, and pain.]

Pafnutius: Hoc opto · quo resectis vitiorum spinis emergere posit vinum conpunctionis [I hope that when the thorns of your vice are destroyed at the root,/ the winestock of penitence may then bring forth fruit.]

Thais: O si crederes · o si sperares · me sordidulam milies millenis sordium oblitam offuscationibus ullatenus posse expiari · seu ullo conpunctionis modo veniam promereri [If only you believed or had the slightest hope that I who am so stained,/ with thousands and thousands of sins enchained,/ could expiate my sins or could perform due penance in order to gain forgiveness!][54]

Particularly significant here, I believe, is Pafnutius's hope that penance will bear fruit and Thais's response, "if only you believed or had the slightest hope." Theophilus was guided by hope as well as faith derived from his education; Thais must rely on Pafnutius's hope even though she has herself articulated central articles of faith. For example, after Pafnutius instructs Thais that she must withdraw to a secret place, where she will be able to reflect on herself, her former ways, and the enormity of her sins, Thais replies, "If you have hopes that I will succeed,/ then I will begin with all due speed" ("Si hoc speras proficere · non addo momentum morulę.")[55] Although Thais knows about God and his omniscience and justice, she herself has not benefitted from the education that allows Pafnutius and Theophilus to hope for God's mercy. Yet knowledge of Pafnutius's hope is enough for her immediately to repudiate her past life and willingly accept harsh penance to expiate her sins.

Therefore, the classroom scene at the beginning of the play, with its comic dramatization of the students' resistance to learning, creates a particular poignancy in this scene. The moment Pafnutius offers Thais hope of redemption, she immediately turns away from worldly pleasures and is eager to follow Pafnutius guidance to gain forgiveness for her sins. The play offers no motive for Thais's choice of a life of sin, but it depicts her eagerly embracing the new life

[54] *Hrotsvit*, 229-30; *Plays*, 107-8.
[55] *Hrotsvit*, 231; *Plays*, 108.

Pafnutius offers her. When she says to Pafnutius, "It is up to you to tell me what I ought to do. Chart my course as if drawing a circle" ("Tuum est mihi velut radio praescribere · quid me oporteat factum ire"),[56] she seems to have an intuitive sense that the harmony Pafnutius spoke of with his disciples at the beginning of the play is a far preferable alternative to the worldly pleasures she experienced in her prior life. Moreover, when her former lovers call her insane for burning the treasure she had earned as a prostitute, she responds, "I am not insane, but savoring good health again" ("Non insanio sed sanum sapio.")[57] This passage is reminiscent of the end of Book III, poem II and the beginning of Prose III in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, where Philosophy instructs Boethius, first saying

> 'Each thing seeks its own way back
> And coming back is glad;
> None is consigned to any ordered course
> Save that which links the end ot the beginning
> And makes its cycle firm.'
> ['Repetunt proprios quaeque recursus
> Redituque suo singular gaudent
> Nec manet ulli traditus ordo
> Nisi quod fini iunxerit ortum
> Stabilemque sui fecerit orbem.']

Then continuing in prose,

> And you also, earthly creatures that you are, have some image, though hazy, in your dreams of your beginning; you see, though with a far from clear imagination yet with

[56] *Hrotsvit*, 233; *Plays*, 111.
[57] *Hrotsvit*, 232; *Plays*, 110.
[58] Boethius, *The Consolation*, 238-9.

> some idea, that true end of your happiness. Your natural inclinations draw you towards that end, to the true good, though mistaken notions of many kinds lead you away from it. ['Vos quoque, o terrene animalia, tenui licet imagine vestrum tamen principium somniatis verumque illum beatitudinis finem licet minime perspicaci qualicumque tamen cogitatione prospicitis eoque vos et ad verum bonum naturalis ducit intention et ab eodem multiplex error abducit.']

The harlot Thais has an image, even if hazy, of the true goal of happiness and an inclination to that "true end" of happiness, so that no persuasion is necessary.

I believe the comic contrast between Thais's receptivity to Pafnutius's guidance and his own disciples' obduracy in the opening scene complicates our understanding of the importance and power of education. Pafnutius's students said, "Had we known beforehand that the solving of the knot of our question would pose such a degree of difficulty for us ignorant students, then we would have preferred not knowing anything about the microcosm to undergoing such a difficult lesson." ["Si presciremus quod huiusmodi nodus questionis tam difficilis ad solvendum esset insciis maluissemus · minorum mundum nescire · quam tantum difficultatis subire"][60] Once again Hrotsvit offers her readers—and the audience of her plays—an example of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. But here, paradoxically, the spirit of Thais the harlot is strong while the flesh—and desire for knowledge—of the monastic students is weak.

Like Theophilus, Thais must undergo strong penance to recover from the spiritual sickness that resulted from her life devoted to pleasures of the flesh. Pafnutius says to the abbess who will provide the place for Thais's penance, "But because the sickness of both body and soul must be cured by the medicine of contraries, it follows that she must be sequestered from the

[59] Ibid., 240-41.
[60] *Hrotsvit*, 223-4; *Plays*, 100.

tumult of the world,/ immured in a small cell, so that she may contemplate her sins undisturbed" ("Quia enim ęgritudo animarum · aeque ut corporum · contrariis curanda est medelis · consequens est · ut hęc a solita · secularium inquietudine sequestrata · sola in angusta retrudatur cellula · quo liberius possit discutere sui crimina.")[61] The dialogue that follows emphasizes the harshness of the penance, not just the darkness and narrowness of the cell where she will be enclosed but especially the foul smell that will result from her performing all necessary functions of the body in the one room. Thais says, "I am sure it will soon be uninhabitable because of the stench" ("Nec dubium · quin ocius fiat inhabitabilis · prae nimietate foetoris,") to which Pafnutius replies, "Fear rather the eternal tortures of Hell,/ and not the transitory inconveniences of your cell" ("Formida perpetis crudelitatem gehennę · et desine transitoria pertimescere").[62] The dialogue that follows contains some remarkable details:

Thais: Fragilitas mei cogit me terreri [My frailty makes me afraid.]

Pafnutius: Convenit ut male blandientis dulcedinem delectationis luas molestia nimii foetoris [It is only right/ that you expiate the evil sweetness of alluring delight/ by enduring this terrible smell.]

Thais: Non recuso · non nego · me sordidam · non iniuria fedo sordidoque habitatum ire in tugurio · sed hoc dolet vehementius quod nullus est relictus locus · in quo apte et caste possim tremendę nomen maiestatis invocare [And so I shall./ I, filthy myself, do not refuse to dwell/ in a filthy, befouled cell/ --this is my just due./ But it pains me deeply that there is not one spot left, dignified and pure,/ where I could invoke the name of God's majesty.]

[61] *Hrotsvit*, 235; *Plays*, 113.
[62] *Hrotsvit*, 237; *Plays*, 115.

Pafnutius: Et unde tibi tanta fiducia · ut pollutes labiis praesumas proferre nomen inpollutę divinitatis? [And how can you have such great confidence that you would presume to utter the name of the unpolluted Divinity with your polluted lips?]

Thais: Et a quo veniam sperare cuiusve salvari possum miseratione · si ipsum prohibeor invocare cui soli deliqui · et cui uni devotion orationum deget offerri? [But how can I hope for grace, how can I be saved by His mercy if I am not allowed to invoke Him, against whom alone I sinned, and to whom alone I should offer my devotion and prayer?]

Pafnutius: Debes plane orare non verbis · sed lacrimis · non sonoritate tinnulę vocis · sed conpuncti rugitu cordis [Clearly you should not pray with words but with tears; not with your tinkling voice's melodious art/ but with the bursting of your penitent heart.]

Thais: Et si vetar deum verbis orare · quomodo possum veniam sperare? [But if I am prohibited from praying with words, how can I ever hope for forgiveness?]

Pafnutius: Tanto celerius mereberis · quanto perfectius humiliaeris · Dic tantum · 'Qui me plasmasti · miserer mei' [The more perfectly you humiliate yourself, the faster you will earn forgiveness./ Say only: Thou who created me,/ have mercy upon me!']

Thais: Opus est eius miseratione ne frangar in dubio certamine [I will need His mercy not to be overcome in this uncertain struggle.]

Pafnutius: Certa viriliter · ut possis triumphum obtinere feliciter [Struggle manfully so that you may gloriously attain your triumph.]

Thais: Tuum est pro me orare · ut merear palmam victorię [You must pray for me so that I may deserve the palm of victory.]

Pafnutius: Non opus est monitu [No need to admonish me.]

Thais: Spero. [I hope so.][63]

A number of themes developed in "Theophilus" recur in this passage, such as the efficacy of tears and silent prayer when the sinner's lips are polluted. Differences are equally significant. While forty days of penitential prayer were sufficient for Theophilus to be forgiven, Thais will be enclosed for three years (the plot summary preceding the play specifies five years). While Mary herself intercedes on behalf of Theophilus, Pafnutius and the abbess direct and support Thais in her penance. For me, however, the most poignant difference is in the two sinner's access to hope. Theophilus draws on his liberal education to answer Mary with examples of others who have sinned grievously but nevertheless been saved. Thais, on the other hand, relies entirely on Pafnutius's education and resultant hope—until this scene, when she herself finally expresses hope in her own voice.

The conclusion of the play is as remarkable as the opening lesson on music, Thais's instant conversion, and her acceptance of an extremely harsh penance. After three years, Pafnutius wonders how Thais is doing. He says, "Behold, three years of Thais' penitence have passed, and I don't know whether or not her penance was deemed acceptable or not./ I will rise and go to my brother Antonius, so that through his intercession I may discover her lot." ("Ecce tres mansuri poenitentię Thaidis transiere · et ego ignoro · utrumne deo acceptabilis sit eius conpunctio · Surgam et vadam ad fratrem meum Antonium · quo mihi manifestetur · per eius interventum").[64] Antonius, his disciples, and Pafnutius pray together, to discover whether

[63] *Hrotsvit*, 237-8; *Plays*, 115-16.
[64] *Hrotsvit*, 239; *Plays*, 117.

"Divine Mercy has been moved to forgiveness by the penitent's tears" ("utrumne benignitas divinę miserationis · adhuc <ad> indulgentiam mollita sit poenitentis lacrimis").[65] One of the disciples, Paul, does indeed have a vision of a marriage bed with four resplendent maidens guarding it. He immediately assumes the bed has been prepared for his master, Antonius. However, he reports that a divine voice informed him: "'This glory is not as you hope, for Antonius, but is meant for Thais the whore'" ("'Non ut speras Antonio · sed Thaidi meretrici servanda est haec gloria'").[66]

The dialogue between Thais and Pafnutius that follows, as Pafnutius inquires about Thais's practices during the three years of her penance, clearly articulates the role grace plays in salvation. When Thais says, "Venerable Father, do not take me, stained and foul wretch, from this filth; let me remain in this place/ appropriate for my sinful ways" ("Noli pater venerande · noli me sordidulam his inmundiciis abstrahere · sed sine in loco meis meritis condigno mansum ire"), Pafnutius replies, "It is time for you to be less fearful/ and to begin to have hope and be cheerful" ("Tempus est ut levigato timore incipias vitam sperare · quia tui poenitentia acceptabilis est deo"). When Thais says, ("O, how I desire to avoid Hell's tortures, o rather how I aspire to suffer by some less cruel fire! For my merits do not suffice to secure me the bliss of Paradise" ("O utinam mererer pęnas evadere · vel saltim clementius exuri mitiori igne · Non est enim hoc mei meriti · ut doner beatitudine interminabili"), Pafnutius replies, "Grace is God's gift and a free award,/ and not human merit's reward;/ because if it were simply a payment for merits, it wouldn't be called grace" ("Gratuitum dei donum non pensat humanum meritum · quia

[65] *Hrotsvit*, 241; *Plays*, 118.
[66] *Hrotsvit*, 241-2; *Plays*, 119.

si meritis tribueretur · gratia non diceretur").[67] The play depicts not only Thais's education but also an increase in Pafnutius's understanding of Christian mystery.

Three final speeches, two by Thais and the other by Pafnutius, return to the themes of human discordance and cosmic harmony introduced in the music lesson with which the play opened. First Thais says, "Therefore praise Him all the company of Heaven, and on Earth the least little sprout or bush,/ not only all living creatures but even the waterfall's rush,/ because He not only suffers men to live in sinful ways/ but rewards the penitent with the gift of grace" ("Unde laudet illum cęli concentus · omnisque terrę surculus · necnon universę animalis species atque confusę aquarum gurgites · quia non solum peccantes patitur · sed etiam pęnitentibus pręmia gratis largitur").[68] As Thais dies, 15 days later, she prays, "Thou who made me, have mercy upon me/ and grant that my soul, which Thou breathed into me,/ may return happily to Thee" ("Qui plasmasti me miserere mei · et fac felici reditu ad te reverti animam quam inspirasti").[69] And the play ends with Pafnutius's prayer:

> Thou who art created by no one, Thou who only art truly without material form, one God in Unity of Substance,/ Thou who created man, unlike Thee, to consist of diverse substances;/ grant that the dissolving, diverse parts of this human being/ may happily return to the source of their original being; / that the soul, divinely imparted, live on in heavenly bliss,/ and that the body may rest in peace/ in the soft lap of Earth, from which it came,/ until ashes and dirt combine again/ and breath animates the revived members; that Thais be resurrected exactly as she was,/ a human being, and joining the white lambs may enter eternal joys./ Thou who alone art what Thou art, one God in the Unity of the Trinity who reigns and is glorified, world without end.

[67] *Hrotsvit*, 243; *Plays*, 121.
[68] *Hrotsvit*, 243-44; *Plays*, 121.
[69] *Hrotsvit*, 244; *Plays*, 122.

[Qui factus a nullo · vere es sine material forma · cuius simplex esse · hominem qui non est id quod est · ex hoc et hoc fecit consistere · da diersas partes huius solvendę hominis prospere repetere principium sui originis · quo et anima cęlitus indita · cęlestibus gaudiis intermisceatur · et corpus in molli gremio terrę suę materię pacifice foveatur quoadusque pulverea favilla coeunte · et vivaci flatu · redivivos artus iterum intrante haec eadem Thais resurgat perfecta ut fuit homo · inter candidulas oves collocanda · et in gaudium aeternitatis inducenda · tu qui solus <es> id quod es <et> in unitate trinitatis regnas et gloriaris per infinita saeculua saeculorum.][70]

As I read this play, Pafnutius's understanding of cosmic harmony and human sin is increased through his interaction with Thais. The play does not just depict his pious act of interceding to encourage Thais to ask for mercy, to do penance for her sins, and to open her heart to the power of grace; it also depicts a learning experience for Pafnutius and his monastic brothers, in which they see for themselves the power of God's mercy and grace. The struggle between the flesh and the spirit is dramatized in surprising ways. Thais, who is described in the opening scene as an embodiment of concupiscence, is revealed to desire direct union with God but to lack—for whatever reason—the knowledge Theophilus has that kindles hope in his heart when he recognizes his sinfulness. After Pafnutius offers her that hope, Thais dramatizes a kind of ascetic heroism. The stench Thais endures during her three years of penance encourages readers and the audience of the play to know through their senses the foul reality of sin and the extent of Thais's contrition. The abstract lesson of the opening scene is recapitulated in the concrete reality of human experience through the conversion of Thais. While Hrotsvit certainly does not downplay the reality of human sinfulness, she presents sinfulness in the context of men and women for whom the desire for reunion with God seems far more natural than sin.

[70] Ibid.

In what ways does the education reflected in Hrotsvit's writings parallel the education we offer our students at Santa Clara University? Our Core Curriculum aims to provide knowledge, habits of mind and heart, and engagement with the world that will encourage our students to become active citizens, change agents, who will work to make the world a better place for all. Hrotsvit of Gandersheim's writings suggest habits of mind and heart that allow her to do far more than simply accept the knowledge her education provides for her. Rather, she writes poems and plays which, while carefully orthodox, invite her readers to think about Christian truths in new ways and encourage them to transfer the knowledge gleaned from pagan and Christian writers to the challenges and conflicts they will encounter in their own lives. In particular, her writings invite readers to see beyond misogyny to the reality that men and women are equally capable of sin and salvation and to recognize Christian potential and responsibility for men and women alike to live the life Christ modeled and taught.

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