QUEERING THE CLASSICS: GENDER, GENRE, AND RECEPTION IN THE WORKS OF HROTSVIT OF GANDERSHEIM

by

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Abstract

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This thesis examines how the world’s first female dramatist, the tenth-century canoness Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, challenged pedagogical interpretations of gender in her imitations of Roman literature. The dissertation finds that while Hrotsvit imitated the content and form of Ovid, Terence, and Virgil, she denaturalized the binary conceptions of gender promulgated in their works by inverting the specific markers of gender identified in pedagogical texts associated with them and by linking those behavioural markers to imbalances of social power rather than to biology. Studies of the sex/gender system in the early medieval period have tended to focus on medical discourses which attribute gendered behaviour to biology. My doctoral research uses untapped primary sources to prove that gender was not invariably thought to be tied to biology in the medieval cultural imaginary. The commentaries, glosses, and other pedagogical texts on classical literature used in medieval classrooms presented readers with a concrete set of ideas about gender, including highly specific linguistic and behavioural expectations. While scholars have increasingly begun to analyze commentaries on classical literature for insights into medieval gender norms, the majority of this work has focused on the dissemination of ideas about masculinity in male homosocial schools during the twelfth century and beyond. My research contributes to this conversation by asking how early medieval female readers responded to the educational discourses on gender which they encountered in the female-led classrooms of women's religious institutions. The thesis is
also innovative in its proposal that Hrotsvit’s book of saints’ legends was written in imitation of Ovid. Overall, the dissertation revises current understandings of the sex/gender system in the Ottonian period, demonstrating that ideas which resemble the social construction of gender were circulating centuries earlier than previously thought.
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### Table of Contents

Chapter One  
*Sum animal capax discipline*: Gender and the Reception of Hrotsvit  
1

Chapter Two:  
“Subject to Confusion”: Destabilizing Gender through Genre in Hrotsvit’s Terentian Comedies  
44

Chapter Three  
*Communi similis conamine voti*: Gender and the Reception of Virgilian Epic in Hrotsvit’s *Liber Tertius*  
135

Chapter Four  
The Christian Metamorphosis of Ovid in Hrotsvit’s Book of Legends  
194

Bibliography  
242
CHAPTER 1:

Sum animal capax discipline: Gender and the Reception of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim

[N]on denego praestante gratia creatoris per dynamin me artes scire quia sum animal capax discipline sed per energian fateor omnino nescire.¹

I do not deny that, with God’s grace, I know the arts by means of my own inherent ability, since I am an animal capable of learning. But I confess that I do not know them entirely by means of my own actions.

— Hrotsvit

The lines cited above are taken from a letter the tenth-century Saxon canoness Hrotsvit of Gandersheim wrote to “certain wise male patrons” of her book of dramas.² This passage emphasizes two concurrent ideas—that Hrotsvit derives her intellectual gifts from God [praestante gratia creatoris] and that she is responsible for actively utilizing those gifts in order to learn [per dynamin me artes scire quia sum animal capax discipline]. The compact nature of the Latin language enables Hrotsvit to encompass both of these ideas simultaneously within the final clause [sed per energian fateor omnino [me artes] nescire]. Here Hrotsvit both ascribes credit to God for her intellectual abilities (“I do not know the arts only by means of my own actions”) and also attributes any gaps in her erudition to a lack of effort or activity [energian] rather than to a lack of inherent capability [dynamin] (“because of my own actions, I do not know the arts entirely”).

Peter Dronke has suggested that Hrotsvit’s use of the words dynamin and energian are a purposeful allusion to Jerome’s letter to Paulinus on the importance of

¹ Hrotsvit, Epistola ad quosdam sapientes huius libri fautores, in Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, Opera Omnia, ed. Walter Berschin (Munich: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2001), 135, ll. 5–8. All references are to Berschin’s edition unless otherwise noted. All translations are my own.
² Hrotsvit, Epistola ad fautores, p. 134.
learning the scriptures. Dronke translates these two words in the specific Aristotelian sense of potentiality (“potentially”) and actuality (“in actuality”), a move that mirrors Jerome’s and Hrotsvit’s use of the Greek philosophical terms in their letters instead of Latin versions of these words. Although many English translations of the New Testament, including the King James Version, render Paul’s ἐνέργεια and δύναμις interchangeably as “power,” in the Vulgate Jerome clearly attempts to replicate the Greek differentiation between the two terms through his consistent use of operatio and virtus, respectively.

Indeed, like ἐνέργεια and δύναμις, operatio and virtus convey the difference between actively utilized power and the capacity to be powerful.

The concept that Jerome conveys to Paulinus and that Hrotsvit conveys to her male patrons—that God grants gifts (intellectual or otherwise) to people and that people are responsible for the degree to which they utilize those gifts—ultimately stems from the New Testament, most notably outlined by Paul in Romans 12:3 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. By using these specific Greek terms, Hrotsvit not only demonstrates the extent of her own learning, but also underscores the difference between capability and action.

Hrotsvit thus draws upon patristic and scriptural precedent both to praise God and to call attention to her own personal agency in a number of different ways. In his letter, for example, Jerome encourages Paulinus to devote himself to learning the Scriptures even if their content seems rather obvious, explaining that biblical passages “offer one

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3 Peter Dronke, Women Writers of the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 74. For an edition of Jerome’s letter, see PL 22: col.0540–0549. The terms to which Dronke refers occur in section 2 (Habet nescio quid latentis energiae viva vox) and section 3 (Mollis cera et ad formandum facilis, etiam si artificis et plastae cessent manus, tamen tη δυνάμει totum est, quidquid esse potest).

4 See for example, 1 Corinthians 1:24 (virtutem for δύναμιν) and Ephesians 1:19 (operationem for ἐνέργειαν). Here and throughout the Vulgate is cited from Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem, ed. Robert Weber et al. 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).
meaning on the surface, and another underneath,”⁵ that “multiple meanings lie in single words,”⁶ and that “in the same passage, a learned person may hear one thing, and an unlearned person another.”⁷ In a similar way, by writing in a purposefully ambiguous style, Hrotsvit mimics biblical models of writing and invites patristic modes of interpretation. In co-opting and redeploying such authoritative methods of writing and interpretation, Hrotsvit demonstrates that she is capable of understanding and reproducing the style of divinely-inspired texts.

Hrotsvit also directly adopts the specific sort of humility underpinning the church father’s conception of Christian knowledge. Jerome rails against those who are unaware of their own ignorance, writing: “to teach what you don’t know is similar to the entertainment provided by snake oil salesmen, and, if I may speak with annoyance, it’s even worse if you don’t know what you don’t know.”⁸ Hrotsvit’s confession that she “does not entirely know the arts” and her further statement at the end of the same letter that “I know that I don’t know” both acquit her of the sort of presumption against which Jerome preaches.⁹ Such statements also align Hrotsvit to Jerome himself, who likewise admits: “I am not so insolent and stupid that I promise to understand these things. . . . but I confess that I wish to do so.”¹⁰

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⁹ scio quod nescio. Hrotsvit, Epistola ad fautores, p. 135, l. 21.
¹⁰ Non sum tam petulans et hebes, ut haec me nosse pollicear. . . sed velle fateor. Jerome, Ad Paulinum, PL 22: col.0549.
Yet for Jerome, there are right and wrong ways of learning and sharing one’s own knowledge. In particular, Jerome repeatedly expresses distaste for those who would dare to teach among or learn from women:

Alii adducto supercilio, grandia verba trutinantes, inter mulierculas de sacris litteris philosophantur. Alii discunt, proh pudor, a feminis, quod viros doceant: et ne parum hoc sit, quadam facilitate verborum, imo audacia edisserunt aliis, quod ipsi non intelligunt.¹¹

Some, with a contracted brow, weighing out grandiose words, philosophize about the sacred scriptures in the presence of mere women (muliercules). Others—for shame!—teach men what they learn from women: and as if this weren’t enough, with a certain facility of words, with even more audacity, they will explain to others what they themselves don’t understand.

Reading Hrotsvit’s letter to her patrons alongside Jerome’s letter to Paulinus in terms of gender thus reveals the extent to which Hrotsvit’s declaration of intellectual capacity and ability is, in fact, subversive. Hrotsvit ironically draws upon the misogynistic language used by Jerome in her own letter to her wise male patrons, acknowledging that they “have considered my little work, that of a vile little woman [muliercule], worthy of [their] admiration. . . judging that there was some knowledge of the arts existing in me whose subtlety far surpassed my womanly capacity.”¹² Later in the same letter, Hrotsvit explicitly distances herself from the belief in women’s inferiority not only by making a learned reference to Boethius’ feminine personification of philosophy, but also by referring to the belief in women’s inferiority in the passive voice:

ne in me donum dei annullaretur ob negligentiam mei si qua forte fila vel etiam floccos de panniculis a veste Philosophie abruptis evellere quivi praefato opusculo inserere curavi quo vilitas meq inscientiq intermixtione nobilioris materiae illustraretur et largitor ingenii tanto amplius in me iure laudaretur quanto muliebris sensus tardior esse creditur.¹³

¹³ Hrotsvit, Epistola ad fautores, p. 135, ll. 12–8.
Lest the gift of God be annulled in me on account of my negligence, if by chance I was able to pluck threads or even pieces of fuzz from Lady Philosophy’s robe, I took care to insert them in my aforementioned little work, so that the vileness of my ignorance might be embellished by the intermixture of nobler material and that the granter of natural capacity might be more justly praised in me to the extent that womanly sense is believed to be slower [muliebris sensus tardior esse creditur].

Significantly, the wording of the epigraph above suggests that Hrotsvit herself frames intellectual capacity and agency as non-gendered. By referring to herself with the neuter term animal, Hrotsvit implicitly undermines the naturalness of the sexist distinction between men and women propagated by Jerome’s epistola ad Paulinum. Crucially, Hrotsvit not only adopts Jerome’s ideas about Christian learning, but also critiques his argument regarding women’s innate abilities. This passage, then, not only evidences Hrotsvit’s integration of Christian tradition in her texts, but also her willingness to engage with them in a critical manner.

The ways in which this passage has been rendered by prominent translators of Hrotsvit’s works, however, provide an excellent window into a fundamental problem underlying much of the English-language research on Hrotsvit—namely, that scholars hold so many inaccurate preconceptions about what a tenth-century canoness could or could not have thought that they misread or mistranslate Hrotsvit’s texts to better fit their own biases, and, in doing so, flatten out or blatantly ignore crucial subtleties within Hrotsvit’s writing. Unfortunately, as many English-language literary critics seem to depend on translations as cribs to tackle Hrotsvit’s difficult medieval Latin style, the interrelated issues of temporal prejudice and imprecise translation have particularly serious implications for the integrity of Hrotsvit studies as a whole.

Specifically, published English translations of the aforementioned passage diminish the force of Hrotsvit’s statement about capability and activity as a result of their debatable interpretations of the canoness’ Latin. Writing under the pseudonym
Christopher St. John, Christabel Marshall’s translation makes Hrotsvit appear much more timid and self-deprecating than does Hrotsvit’s original Latin text: “I will not deny that through the grace of the Creator I have acquired some knowledge of the arts. He has given me the ability to learn—I am a teachable creature—yet of myself I know nothing.”\(^{14}\) Marshall’s addition of the word “some” mitigates Hrotsvit’s initial declaration that she “knows the arts,” a statement which Hrotsvit herself only qualifies at the end of her sentence; her choice of the word “teachable,” again, is markedly more passive than Hrotsvit’s original “capax.” Most egregious, however, is Marshall’s rendering of the final clause—she collapses per energian into “of myself,” erases the understood subject and object from the parallel phrase per dynamin me artes scire, and assumes that omnino with a negative always means “not at all.”\(^{15}\) Given the context not only of the rest of the sentence, but also of the following section in Hrotsvit’s letter, wherein she laments that she has failed to put as much effort in as she should have towards her education,\(^{16}\) the argument that Hrotsvit believes she knows nothing by herself (or about herself) is insupportable.

Katharina Wilson, the most-widely cited translator of Hrotsvit’s works, likewise suppresses the full import of Hrotsvit’s declaration of intellectual ability in her rhyming translation of the epistola: “I do not deny that by the gift of the Creator’s grace I am able to grasp certain concepts of the arts concerning / because I am a creature capable of

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\(^{15}\) Lewis and Short, for example, states that omnino with a negative can also mean, among other things, “only,” “altogether,” or “entirely,” translations which make a great deal more sense than “not at all” given the context of this particular passage.

\(^{16}\) Perspicax quoque ingenium divinitus mihi collatum esse agnosco sed magistrorum cessante diligentia inclutum et proprię pigricia inertię torpet negelectum. Hrotsvit, *Epistola ad fautores*, p. 135, ll. 8–11.
learning / but I also know that through my own powers, I know nothing." Wilson’s addition of the phrase “certain concepts,” her reading of omnino... nescire as “I know nothing,” and her imprecise translations of per dynamin and per energian work together to mask Hrotsvit’s scripturally-based conception of personal agency. By obfuscating Hrotsvit’s Pauline interpretation of the relationship between God and intelligence and by failing to pick up on the gendered dynamics at play within the passage, Wilson and Marshall effectively turn a strong statement of confidence into a traditional humility topos. In short, Wilson and Marshall make Hrotsvit say what they expect her to say rather than what she does say.

Unlike Marshall and Wilson, Dronke, as previously mentioned, notes in his translation of the passage Hrotsvit’s specific distinction between capacity and action. His interpretation is, on the whole, accurate, as he even renders the neuter animal as “living being.” Yet by translating the sed clause in the same manner as do Marshall and Wilson—“I confess I am utterly ignorant in actuality”—Dronke likewise undermines Hrotsvit’s statement about personal agency through an overly rigid conception of the meaning of omnino with a negative. Hrotsvit does not admit that she is “utterly ignorant,” only that her knowledge is limited due to her own actions. Her statement thus is much more than an example of “mock-humility” taken to an absurd extreme, as Dronke would have readers believe.

Although such unwillingness to grant Hrotsvit agency is likely unconscious, it is nevertheless representative of the frequent scholarly dismissal of the possibility that

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18 Dronke, Women Writers, 74.
19 Dronke, Women Writers, 75.
Hrotsvit was capable of engaging with rhetoric, religion, or society in a critical manner. This unwillingness can be attributed to latent prejudice against the intellectual and political culture of tenth-century Saxony, against the medieval Church in general, and against medieval women in particular. Indeed, Sandro Sticca’s claim that “it would be inconceivable to suppose that in the tenth century, in a monastic environment thoroughly Christian and orthodox, a nun would openly imitate in language and structure the pagan plays of Terence” provides a neat exemplification of the ways in which the aforementioned prejudices can intertwine and serve to foreclose rigorous textual analysis.\(^\text{20}\) In contrast, my thesis will take Hrotsvit’s claims concerning her capacity for critical engagement, as well as her statements regarding her authorial project seriously, through a careful reading of her entire canon. Specifically, my thesis will explore how Hrotsvit combines Christian narrative with classical literary genre in order to reveal the Christian religion’s inherent potential to destabilize rigid conceptions of gender and to argue specifically that women’s innate spiritual and mental capabilities—as well as their propensity for sin—are the same as those of men.\(^\text{21}\) Defining literary genre as a combination of content and form, I will argue that Hrotsvit structures her three books of Christian legends, dramas, and epics upon the work of three particular classical authors whose content implicitly revolves around issues of gender and the gendered body—Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the plays of Terence, and Virgil’s *Aeneid*, respectively.

Hrotsvit’s specific use of Pauline language in her dedications, prefaces, and texts, as well as her descriptions of men and women, suggest that she bases her conception of


\(^{21}\) Throughout this thesis, I define gender as the set of social expectations ascribed to physical, sexed bodies.
gender primarily upon Paul’s declaration to the Galatians that “there is no male or female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ.” Just as with Jerome, however, Hrotsvit only accepts those aspects of Paul’s teachings on gender which destabilize traditional dichotomies between male and female, while explicitly rejecting Paul’s arguments against allowing women to preach the gospel or to exercise authority over men. To take but one example, one of the ways in which Paul justifies his sexism is to claim that women are inferior because “Adam was not deceived, but woman was deceived” [Adam non est seductus mulier autem seducta]. In contrast, Hrotsvit dismisses the notion that Eve was the sole cause of humanity’s fall in her legend Maria, stating that the birth of the Virgin Mary ended the “prior discord” [prior. . . discordia] which had existed between “the celestial citizens” [celestes. . . cives] and the “earthly citizens” [terrigenas. . . habituros] whom the inhabitants of heaven “previously had scorned on account of the merits of their parent Adam” [prius e meritis Adam sprevere parentis]; in the same vein, Hrotsvit also refers to the devil as “the author of evil who deceived the first created man” [Auctor. . . scelerum, qui decepit protoplastum]. Hrotsvit, moreover, defies Paul’s repeated assertion that women should remain “in silence” [in silentio] by referring to herself as the “Strong Shout of Gandersheim” [Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis] and dares to exercise authority over (male) church authorities by using apocryphal sources despite potential objections. Indeed, Hrotsvit openly defies the authority of received tradition by claiming in regard to her apocryphal sources that “what seems to be false

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22 non est masculus, neque femina. Omnes enim vos unum estis in Christo Jesu. Galatians 3:28. All biblical quotations through this thesis are taken from the Latin Vulgate; all translations are my own.
23 1 Timothy 2:14.
24 Hrotsvit, Maria, p. 11, ll. 209–14.
25 Hrotsvit, Basilius, p. 95, l. 33.
26 1 Timothy 2:11; 1 Timothy 2:12.
27 Hrotsvit, Liber secundus: praefatio, p. 132, l. 8.
now perhaps will be proven true” [quod videtur falsitas forsan probabitur esse veritas].

She likewise defies the Pauline prohibition against female preachers by declaring: “I am not so in love with myself that I would cease to preach the virtue of Christ. . . in order to evade criticism.”

For Hrotsvit, being Christian allows women to break out of traditional molds rather than holding them in.

Importantly, while Hrotsvit at no time questions sex as a natural category, she nevertheless consistently suggests that the category of gender is separable from that of sex and that gender is socially constructed. I will argue that Hrotsvit specifically chose her source materials in order to focus upon this theme. Moreover, I will argue that Judith Butler’s conception of the social construction of gender, particularly as articulated within *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, provides a helpful theoretical framework for understanding Hrotsvit’s approach to gender. Hrotsvit draws upon certain Pauline statements in order to show that, as Judith Butler puts it, “[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a repeated set of acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”

Specifically, I will show that Hrotsvit uses Christian theology in order to “deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender,” while acknowledging that these “compulsory frames” exist in both the secular and Christian worlds.”

Other scholars have attempted to read Hrotsvit through a specifically Butlerian framework and have likewise stated their intentions to

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explore the ways in which Hrotsvit points to the social construction of gender. To this point, however, such work ultimately has suggested that Hrotsvit replaces traditional masculine values found in classical and Christian literature with traditional feminine values. Kate Olson, for example, concludes that “[w]hereas Virgil creates a founding epic appropriate for a patriarchy, Hrotsvit writes a feminine epic appropriate for a matriarchy,”\textsuperscript{31} while Helene Scheck declares that “Hrotsvit’s female-centered texts. . . . redefine and reposition masculinity in relation to femininity.”\textsuperscript{32} Such work thus reinforces the naturalness of ideas about masculinity and femininity rather than exploring the ruptures within those categories. In contrast, my work will argue that Hrotsvit questions the validity of gender as a natural category through her strategic use of Christian theology and will suggest that this questioning extends to her presentation of classical genre.

Indeed, although past research has been interested in the intertwining themes of classical reception, Christianity, and gender within Hrotsvit’s works, the fundamental methodological problems discussed above unfortunately have served to obscure the exact relationship between them. As such, a discussion of past work conducted on Hrotsvit is necessary in order to highlight the specific ways in which my thesis represents a crucial intervention in the study of the canoness’ texts.

\textit{Hrotsvit: Background and works}

The little we know regarding the specifics of Hrotsvit’s life has been scraped together from the information she provides about herself in the dedications and prefaces

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\textsuperscript{32} Helene Scheck, \textit{Reform and Resistance: Formations of Female Subjectivity in Early Medieval Classical Culture} (Albany: SUNY Press), 165.
to her texts, as well as in her texts themselves. Regarding the date of her birth, Hrotsvit relates that she “was born a long time after” [lonto post tempore] the lifetime of Duke Otto I of Saxony (mid-ninth century to 912)\textsuperscript{33} and describes her abbess Gerberga II, born in the 940s, as being “younger in age, but... more advanced in wisdom” [aetate minor sed... scientia provectior] than she.\textsuperscript{34} Hrotsvit dedicates all of her books to Gerberga, who became abbess in 955. Hrotsvit’s description of several individuals living at the time she was writing the Gesta Ottonis—Archbishop Bruno I of Cologne\textsuperscript{35} (who died in 965) as well as Archbishop Wilhelm of Mainz\textsuperscript{36} and the Saxon queen St. Mathilda\textsuperscript{37} (who both died in 968)—demonstrate that Hrotsvit composed her epic before these dates. Finally, Hrotsvit explicitly mentions the coronation of Otto II as co-emperor in 967 but does not note Otto I’s death in 973.\textsuperscript{38} As such, the general consensus is that Hrotsvit was born sometime during the 930s and produced the bulk of her work over the course of the 960s and into the early 970s.

Hrotsvit was a member of the religious community at Gandersheim, a prominent foundation of canonesses established by the ancestors of Otto I in the mid-ninth century.\textsuperscript{39} Although the canonesses, who came from noble backgrounds, made vows of chastity and obedience, they could own property and were free to come and go from their convents as they chose.\textsuperscript{40} Furthermore, during Hrotsvit’s lifetime, Gandersheim operated

\textsuperscript{33} Hrotsvit, Primordia coenobii Gandeshemensis, p. 326, l. 525.
\textsuperscript{34} Hrotsvit, Liber primus: praefatio, p. 2, l. 10–1.
\textsuperscript{35} Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 277–8, l. 53–65, particularly 63–5.
\textsuperscript{36} Hrotsvit, Liber tertius: praefatio, p. 273, ll. 1–4.
\textsuperscript{37} Hrotsvit, Gesta, p. 276, ll. 22–4.
\textsuperscript{38} Hrotsvit, Gesta, p. 304, ll. 1493–9.
\textsuperscript{39} For a good overview of the evidence regarding Gandersheim’s status as a foundation of canonesses, see Mary Marguerite Butler, Hrotsvitha: The Theatricality of Her Plays (New York: Philosophical Library, 1960), 52–61, as well as the essays contained in Gandersheim und Essen: vergleichende Untersuchungen zu sächsichen Frauenstiften, ed. Martin Hoernes and Hedwig Röckelein (Essen: Klartext, 2006).
\textsuperscript{40} For more on the life of canonesses at Gandersheim, see Butler, Hrotsvitha, 52–61.
as “a small, independent principality ruled by women” as a result of Otto I’s decision in 947 to give the institution “the immunity of his patronage, granting the right of election as well as all the things collected there by [his] royal predecessors to the nuns of the monastery.” Imperial immunity allowed Gandersheim to answer directly to the king and to the pope rather than to local nobles and bishops. As a particular consequence of such immunity, the abbess of Gandersheim (who, during Hrotsvit’s lifetime, was Otto I’s own niece Gerberga) was granted a non-voting seat in the Imperial Diet and was able to control her own mint, court, and standing army. Furthermore, Gandersheim, like other female religious foundations in Saxony, served as a centre of learning for the daughters of the elite, and, as Katrinette Bodarwé has recently shown, their educations were every bit as rigorous as those of their male counterparts. Indeed, Hrotsvit herself references the existence of a strong female learning community in the preface to her book of legends by thanking two of her female instructors, Gerberga and Rikkardis, for their role in her education.

While living at Gandersheim, Hrotsvit produced three books of legends, dramas, and historical epics, respectively written in accordance with the conventions of specific Roman literary genres and composed in classicized Latin verse. Although there is some evidence that Hrotsvit may have authored at least three other works in addition to the eight legends, six plays, and two epics definitively ascribed to her, one of these works,

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42 *inmunitate patrocinii donamus, sanctimonialibus eiusdem cenobii electionis arbitrium concedentes omniaque a predecessoribus nostris regibus illuc collata.* Otto I, “Diploma no. 89. 4 May 947,” MGH DD O I, p. 171.
Johannes sive tituli in libro apocalypse, can only tenuously be linked to the canoness and the other two (vitae of Pope Anastasius I and Pope Innocent I) are now lost. Hrotsvit’s extant material, however, consists of saints’ lives, martyrs’ legends, and Saxon imperial history gleaned from a variety of different sources including “ancient books written by known authors” [antiquis libris sub certis auctorum nominibus conscriptis] “apocryphal writings” [apocrifis], a man who “attested that he had seen” [vidisse. . . attestatus est] the martyrdom of Pelagius, and several witnesses to events in Ottonian history whom Hrotsvit claims “told [her] what ought to be written” [mihi qui scribenda ferebant].

The overall scholarly consensus concerning the early reception of Hrotsvit’s works is that they were neither well-known nor especially influential. The German humanist Conrad Celtis is often credited with “rediscovering” Hrotsvit’s texts in 1492, and the title of his 1501 folio edition of her works—Opera Hrosvite illustris et virginis monialis Germane gente Saxonica orte nuper a Conrado Celte inventa—undoubtedly has

46 This short poem on the apocalypse of Saint John has been credited to Hrotsvit on the basis of its placement between her dramas and epics in the most complete manuscript of her works (Codex Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 14485, fol. 130r). As folio 129v of the same manuscript contains the last verse of Bede’s poem De virginitate, the attribution of the apocalypse of Saint John to Hrotsvit is uncertain. Wilson translates the poem in her Florilegium of Hrotsvit’s works, and Berschin includes a photocopy of fol. 129v and an edition of the apocalyptic poem as an appendix to his 2001 edition of Hrotsvit’s works (269–70.) The most influential argument for Hrotsvit’s authorship can be found in Hugo Kuhn, “Hrotsvits von Gandersheim dichterisches Program,” Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift 24 (1950): 181–96.

47 Around the year 1532, the monk Bodo of Clus Abbey referred to a damaged manuscript containing Hrotsvit’s Primordia coenobii Gandeshemensis and two otherwise unattested lives of the popes Anastasius I and Innocent I, the relics of whom were housed at Gandersheim. Bodo attributed these Vitae to Hrotsvit, and reported that the texts were written in the same “versu hexametro” as Hrotsvit’s epic on the origins of her religious foundation. Bodo, Syntagmate ecclesiae Gandesiane, in Scriptores rerum Brusvicensium 3, ed. G.W. Leibniz (Hannover, 1711), 712. This codex is now lost.

48 Hrotsvit, Liber primus: epilogus, p. 131, ll. 2–3.
49 Hrotsvit, Liber primus: praefatio, 1.
contributed to the persistent notion of the canoness’ medieval obscurity. But while it is indisputable that Celtis’ edition exposed Hrotsvit’s works to a much broader audience than they had previously enjoyed, manuscript evidence nevertheless suggests that at least some of Hrotsvit’s works continued to be copied and adapted in Germany and in parts of eastern Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Portions of Hrotsvit’s legend Maria and her play Sapientia appear in an eleventh-century manuscript from Klagenfurt. Her dramas Gallicanus, Dulcitius, Callimachus, and Abraham are preserved in their entirety in a twelfth-century codex from Cologne and Gallicanus appears on its own (albeit without authorial attribution) in a twelfth-century collection of saints’ lives from Aldersbach. Hrotsvit’s work was integrated into other hagiographical and historical texts as well. Gallicanus, for example, was incorporated into the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century Magnum Legendarium Austriacum, and seventeen lines from Hrotsvit’s epic on the foundation of her religious community at Gandersheim were

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52 The manuscript upon which Celtis based his edition (which features a woodcut of the authoress illustrated by Albrecht Dürer) is the Codex Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 14485. The most complete manuscript of Hrotsvit, Clm 14485 contains all of her works with the exception of the Primordia. Berschin has recently suggested that the condition of the end of the Clm 14485 codex (which abruptly cuts off the Gesta Ottonis) may indicate that the Primordia was originally contained therein, though he admits that such a conjecture cannot be proven. Walter Berschin, introduction to Hrotsvit: Opera Omnia, ed. Walter Berschin (Munich: W.G. Saur Verlag, 2001), xii. The Primordia survives in two codices from the mid-sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries, respectively: Hildesheim, Dombibliothek 534, fol. 142r–152v and Hannover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek MS XXIII 167, zu II, 26, fol. 1′–14′. For the rediscovery of the Hildesheim Primordia in the 1960s, see Hans Goetting, “Das Überlieferungsschicksal von Hrotsvits Primordia,” in Festschrift für Hermann Heimpel 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972): 61–108.
54 Klagenfurt Studienbibliothek Perg.-Hs. 44.
55 Cologne Stadtarchiv, cod. W 101, fols. 1′–16′.
56 Codex Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 2552.
included in the *Annales Paderbornenses*.\(^{58}\) In addition, two vernacular translations of Hrotsvit’s work survive: an early thirteenth-century German translation of the *Primordia* contained within Eberhard’s rhymed chronicle of Gandersheim\(^{59}\) and an Old Hungarian version of *Dulcitius* dating from the early sixteenth century.\(^{60}\)

Despite the evolving picture of the medieval manuscript attestation of Hrotsvit and the subsequent awareness that her works were respected enough to be preserved and adapted several times over the course of the Middle Ages, her historical significance still tends to be attributed to her sex rather than to any particular literary skill on her part. Scholars thus have been accustomed to praise Hrotsvit for her achievement of several apparent firsts in the field of literature, dubbing her, among other things, the first playwright of the post-classical period, the first female dramatist, the first female epicist, the first female historian, and the first female German poet. Such emphasis upon Hrotsvit’s sex is not without merit, as the scope of her writings does differ considerably from the majority of extant works composed by other early medieval women. Surviving examples of early medieval women’s literature are overwhelmingly autobiographical or semi-autobiographical in nature, consisting of private letters, pilgrimage accounts, advice manuals, descriptions of personal religious experiences, and hagiographical narratives about personal acquaintances.\(^{61}\) In contrast, Hrotsvit’s compositions are distinguished by

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\(^{60}\) The Old Hungarian *Dulcitius*, contained within the *Codex Hungaricus Universitatis Budapestiensis 6*, seems to have been based either upon the Clm 14485 or upon a lost manuscript rather than Celtis’ 1501 edition. Katharina M. Wilson, “The Old Hungarian Translation of Hrotsvit’s *Dulcitius*: History and Analysis,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 1.2 (1982): 177.

\(^{61}\) Due to the relatively small amount of surviving writing by women in the early medieval west, the majority of scholarly work on medieval female authors has tended to centre upon the later medieval period. For a general overview and excerpts of writing by early medieval women, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Women and words: texts by and about women,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*,
her explicit redeployment of classical genre, language, and style for the promotion of the Christian faith. Thus, although Eva Cescutti is correct to point out in an extended discussion of the issue that Hrotsvit was not the only learned female writer in Ottonian Saxony, she ignores the crucial fact that Hrotsvit was a rara avis in terms of her choice of genre and content.\textsuperscript{62}

While some instances of classical appropriation by other late antique and early medieval western European female authors are known today—including a 690-line Virgilian cento by the fourth-century writer Proba and a brief satirical epigram by a woman named Eucheria in the sixth century—Hrotsvit’s corpus stands apart not only in terms of its size and generic breadth but also in terms of its overall literary program. Scholars like Peter Dronke\textsuperscript{63} and Robert Talbot\textsuperscript{64} have argued convincingly that Hrotsvit’s literary efforts are an attempt to create a new canon of literature based upon classical models but with content appropriate for a revitalized Christian Roman empire centered in Saxony and ruled by the Ottonian dynasty. Indeed, throughout her tales of Christian saints, martyrs, and political leaders, Hrotsvit not only makes frequent allusions to classical culture, she alerts her audience no less than five times to the fact that she has


\textsuperscript{63} Dronke, \textit{Women Writers}, 59.

written her hagiographical legends in dactylic measures,\textsuperscript{65} bluntly states that she intends her religious dramas to be Christian substitutes for the immoral “fictions of Terence” \textit{[Terentii. . . fingmenta]}\textsuperscript{66} and, in her epics on the life and ancestry of Otto I, refers to the ruler by imperial Roman titles, including “Augustus of the Romans” \textit{[Augustus Romanorum]}\textsuperscript{67} and “Caesar Augustus” \textit{[cesar augustus]}\textsuperscript{68}.

\textit{Hrotsvit and classical reception}

Given Hrotsvit’s emphasis on classical culture throughout her texts, it comes as no surprise that much of the literary criticism on Hrotsvit has studied her mode of classical reception. Significantly, however, Hrotsvit’s direct reference to Terence in the preface to her plays in addition to her status as the first medieval dramatist has contributed to disproportionate attention being paid to her plays at the expense of her other works. The concentration of the academic community upon Hrotsvit’s dramas—a concentration which is not limited to those particularly interested in medieval classical reception—is implicitly related to the general assessment of Hrotsvit’s works: since her writings typically are not credited with having much intrinsic literary merit, they tend instead to be valued for their degree of historical uniqueness. As a result, Hrotsvit’s hagiographical legends and historical epics regularly have been disregarded while her ground-breaking dramas have been studied in detail. Researchers with a specific interest in classical reception essentially have ignored Hrotsvit’s legends, though her epics have

\textsuperscript{65} Hrotsvit, \textit{Liber primus: præfatio}, p. 2, l. 16; \textit{Maria}, p. 4, l. 20 and p. 22, l. 531; \textit{Gongolfus}, p. 44, l. 78; \textit{Liber primus: prologus [II] ad Gerbergam abbatissam}, p. 94, l. 4.
\textsuperscript{66} Hrotsvit, \textit{Liber secundus: præfatio}, p. 132, l. 6–7.
\textsuperscript{67} Hrotsvit, \textit{Primordia}, p. 328, l. 567.
\textsuperscript{68} Hrotsvit, \textit{Liber tertius: præfatio}, p. 271, l. 9.
received somewhat more consideration. Although scholars most often plumb Hrotvit’s epics for historical material regarding the Ottonian period, recent studies have begun to look at the epics from the standpoint of literary analysis and have compared Hrotvit’s adaptation of Virgilian epic heroism with Christian and Germanic heroic traditions.

Still, the overwhelming bulk of inquiries into Hrotvit’s classical reception remains concentrated upon her dramatic works, and, in particular, upon the interpretation of the following statement made by Hrotvit in the preface to her plays:

Sunt etiam alii sacris inherentes paginis qui licet alia gentilium spernant Terentii tamen fingmenta frequentius lectitant et dum dulcedine sermonis delectantur nefandarum notita rerum maculantur. Unde ego Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis non recusavi illum imitari dictando dum alii colunt legendo quo eodem dictationis genere quo turpia lascivarum incesta feminarum recitabantur laudabilis sacrarum castimonia virginum iuxta mei facultatem ignioli celebraretur.

Indeed, there are other people who, clinging to the sacred pages, nevertheless rather frequently are in the habit of reading the fictions of Terence, and they are polluted by the knowledge of unspeakable things while they take pleasure in the sweetness of his mode of expression [sermonis]. For this reason, I, the “Strong Shout of Gandersheim,” do not object to imitating [imitari] through writing that man whom other people worship through

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69 One notable exception is Katharina Wilson, who devotes a chapter of her monograph Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: The Ethics of Authorial Stance (Leiden: Brill, 1988) to the legends. The amount of space Wilson devotes to the legends, however, still reflects the overall scholarly approaches to Hrotvit’s material. Wilson’s chapter on the legends (25 pages) is about the same length as her chapter on Hrotvit’s prefaces (24 pages) and significantly shorter than her chapter on the epics (34 pages). The dramas, not unexpectedly, receive nearly as much attention as the epics and legends combined (56 pages).


reading. According to the ability of my small talents, the laudable chastity of holy virgins may be celebrated in the same kind of writing [dictationis] in which the disgusting depravities of lascivious women used to be recited.

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, explorations of the relationship between Hrotsvit and Terence have focused particularly upon the words glossed in the above translation: *sermo, imitor,* and *dictatio*. Scholars have usually defined these words narrowly even though these terms had multiple meanings throughout the classical and medieval periods.73 Dictatio could refer either to dictation or writing in general, while *sermo* had a wide range of meanings, including speech, conversation, and subject matter. *Imitor* likewise had several meanings, including to reproduce, to resemble, to copy, or even to replace. Yet within the arena of Hrotsvit scholarship, *sermo* and *dictatio* both have been understood to refer only to the formal style of Terence’s language,74 while *imitor* has been interpreted rigidly to refer to direct quotation of Terence and strict conformity to the linguistic and stylistic rules of Roman drama as conceived by classical and late antique rhetoricians.75

Those clinging to the notion that *sermo* and *dictatio* necessarily denote style and form, however, have overlooked Hrotsvit’s own explanation regarding her strategy of Terentian imitation. Hrotsvit writes in the preface to her dramas:

*Hoc tamen facit non raro verecundari gravique rubore perfundi quod huiusmodi specie dictationis cogente detestabilem inlicte amantium dementiam et male dulcia colloquia eorum quae nec nostro auditui permittuntur accommodari dictando mente tractavi et stili officio designavi. Sed <si> hęc erubescendo*

73 I refer here and throughout my thesis to the definitions given both by Lewis and Short and by the Medieval Latin Lexicon unless otherwise noted.
74 See, for example, Dronke who states that “Hrotsvitha claimed she had gone to Terence for style and form. . . . Yet Hrotsvitha does not imitate Terence metrically, and her diction owes more to Vergil and Prudentius than to him.” (*Women Writers*, 72). Likewise, Kenneth DeLuca claims, “The key word here is sermo. Hrotsvitha’s concern is with the “language” (or “diction”) of these writers” (“Hrotsvitha’s “Imitation” of Terence,” *Classical Folia* 28 (1974): 94). Similarly, Wilson, in her rhymed English translation of the above passage, rather imprecisely renders sermonis as “style and diction” (Wilson, *Florilegium*, 41).
75 See, among others, Wilson, *Ethics*, 79.
neglegerem nec proposito satisfacerem nec innocentium laudem adeo plene iuxta meum posse exponerem.\textsuperscript{76}

It often caused me to be ashamed and to become flooded with a deep blush that, compelled by this type of writing, I dragged across my mind through writing and described through the duty of my pen the illicitly detestable madness of lovers and their evilly sweet meetings, subjects which are not even permitted to enter into our hearing. But if I neglected these things out of embarrassment, I could not fulfill my intention, nor could I relate the praise of the innocent to the best of my ability.

It is clear from these lines that Hrotsvit sees content—in particular sexual content—as a crucial component of Terentian imitation. She is “compelled” [\textit{cogente}] to speak of sexual situations [\textit{inlicite amantium dementiam et male dulcia colloquia eorum}] in order to “fulfill her intention” [\textit{propositio satisfacerem}]—her intention, that is, “to imitate [Terence] through writing” [\textit{illum imitari dictando}], a goal which she differentiates from her concurrent desire to “relate the praise of the innocent” [\textit{innocentium laudem. . . exponerem}]. While content is not the only thing that Hrotsvit must reproduce in order to imitate Terence correctly—she also stresses the fact that she is writing in “dramatica. . . serie,” or dialogue—she obviously considers it to be an indispensable part of the equation.

Such an interpretation—that content could legitimately be considered an essential aspect of genre in the Middle Ages—accords with the statements of the popular seventh-century encyclopedist Isidore of Seville on classical drama and specifically on Terence as an author of comedies. Isidore states the following concerning comedy and tragedy in book eight of his \textit{Etymologies}:

\begin{quote}
Sed comici privatorum hominum praedicant acta; tragici vero res publicas et regum historias. Item tragicorum argumenta ex rebus luctuosis sunt:comicorum ex rebus laetis. Duo sunt autem genera comicorum, id est, veteres et novi. Veteres, qui et ioco ridiculare extiterunt, ut Plautus, Accius, Terentius.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{77} Isidore of Seville, \textit{Etymologiae} VIII.7.6–7, in \textit{San Isidoro de Sevilla: Etimologías}, vol. 1, ed. José Oroz Reta and Manuel A. Marcos Casquero (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1982), 708. Isidore famously labels what we now refer to as Roman New Comedy as Old Comedy.
Comic writers deal with the actions of private individuals, but tragedians deal with public affairs and the stories of kings. Again, the subject matter of the tragedians concerns sad things, and that of the comics happy things. There are two types of comic writers, that is, the Old and the New. The Old, who amuse by means of a joke, include Plautus, Accius, and Terence.

Hrotsvit follows this definition of Terentian comedy perfectly, weaving jokes and comedic scenes into plots that deal with such happy subjects as the conversion of the dissolute and the ascension of virgin martyrs into Christ’s heavenly bridal chamber. In addition, according to the definitions of comedic writing as further clarified by Isidore, “[w]riters of comedy are those who would recount in word and gesture the deeds of common people, and in their plots represent the defiling of virgins and the love affairs of courtesans.”

Without exception, all of Hrotsvit’s plays fall within these parameters, dealing with the threat of rape, the conversion of penitent whores, and the infliction of sexualized torture. Finally, by not inserting her own voice into her plays, Hrotsvit also adheres to Isidore’s observation that in the dramatic [dramaticum] mode, “the poet never speaks like he does in comedies and tragedies.” According to the definitions of Isidore, then, Hrotsvit does succeed in imitating Terence. This suggestion is not a new one, for as early as 1911, Creizenach observed that “[Hrotsvit’s] view of the nature of comedy must have been formed by a theorist who, like Isidore, considered the lascivious love affair essential to the genre.”

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On the basis of the debatable assumptions about Hrotsvit’s use of the words *sermo, imitatio, and dictatio,* however, the majority of more recent scholars have judged Hrotsvit either to have fallen woefully short of her intended goal of Terentian imitation or, more generously, to have done the best she could given a limited understanding of the norms of classical drama. W.T.H. Jackson’s assertion that “it is ridiculous to call them ‘imitations’ of Terence” and Arthur J. Roberts’ declaration that “[t]here is no Terence in these texts” remain typical of the more negative appraisals of Hrotsvit’s imitative abilities.81 Others, while decrying Hrotsvit’s failure to replicate Terence’s exact style and form, nevertheless have identified multiple parallels between Hrotsvit’s works and those of Terence, including the number of her plays, her use of dialogue, her deployment of classical dramatic techniques like eavesdropping and disguise, her inclusion of comedic scenes, and her insertion of both direct and indirect Terentian quotations.82 Carole Newlands, for example, focuses on key points of congruence between Terence’s plots and those of Hrotsvit’s *meretrix* plays, but nevertheless labels Hrotsvit’s claims to imitate Terence as “somewhat disingenuous” because she does not precisely adopt Terence’s “style and form.”83 Cornelia Coulter admits “a faint hint of Terence’s themes may be traced in the importance of the courtesans’ roles in *Abraham* and *Pafnutius,* and in the prominence of the love elements in some of the other plays,” but nevertheless concludes “the connections with Terence remain few in number, and the one outstanding similarity

is that in both authors a story is developed by means of dialogue.”\textsuperscript{84} Katharina Wilson, on the other hand, is so invested in finding evidence of classical and late antique stylistic practices in Hrotsvit’s works that she does not deal directly with the content of the dramas and interprets Hrotsvit’s plots only in the most simplistic of terms, even while recognizing that “Hrotsvit feels compelled to imitate Terence’s depictions of forbidden passion and tempting eroticism.”\textsuperscript{85} Moreover, failing to substantiate her repeated claim that Hrotsvit believed “that form and content are separable entities,” Wilson ultimately criticizes Creizenach for “referring to comedy as defined by subject matter, not to Hrotsvit’s conception of the dramatic form.”\textsuperscript{86}

There are a few probable reasons why so many people studying Hrotsvit’s method of classical reception choose to focus on form and style at the expense of content. Undoubtedly, this attention to form and style is in part a reflection of the scholarly concerns and interests of modern classicists. But another clearly important reason why some scholars are uncomfortable exploring Hrotsvit’s adoption of Terentian content appears to be their persistent conflation of subject matter and authorial approval of that subject matter; thus, despite all evidence to the contrary, researchers cannot accept that Hrotsvit, like Terence, was purposefully concerned with issues of sexuality because to do so would indicate, to their minds, that Hrotsvit approved of sex. Even Albrecht Classen, thus far the only scholar to acknowledge the predominance of sexual themes within Hrotsvit’s works and to identify her deployment of those themes as a purposeful strategy


\textsuperscript{85} Wilson, \textit{Ethics}, 85. Wilson ultimately suggests that the plots of all of Hrotsvit’s plays argue “that the Christian, aided by divine mercy, can overcome all earthly obstacles on his or her pilgrimage to the celestial kingdom and that the most fundamentally Christian purpose in life is to devote one’s self to the service of God and be, thus, a catalyst of others’ salvation,” a process which she interprets Hrotsvit as mirroring in her efforts to compose Christian dramas based upon pagan sources (84–5).

\textsuperscript{86} Wilson, \textit{Ethics}, 60.
of Terentian imitation, ultimately views such sexual content as evidence that “despite her honest religious intentions, Hrotsvit actually became more Terentian herself. . . than she would like to admit.”

More typical, however, is the complete denial of Hrotsvit’s use of sexualized Terentian content. Along these lines, Sticca comments:

Although, unquestionably, Hrotsvit affirms that she is trying to imitate Terence, it is obvious that what attracts her is his dulcedo sermonis and elegantia, grace of idiom and refinement; her imitation is limited to form and style. . . . The material of her stories is morally different from that of Terence; it is drawn from the annalists of the Christian faith. It is perfectly clear, therefore, that by imitating Terence she means that she is using the same literary form.

It is, however, a grave mistake to ignore the particular ways in which Hrotsvit talks about Christianity within her plays, especially since Hrotsvit represents sexuality more graphically in her dramas than Terence ever does. While Terence only describes sexual activity through reported speech, Hrotsvit’s sexual situations occur “onstage,” and in addition to depicting rape, prostitution, and premarital sex—subjects which recur throughout Terentian comedy—Hrotsvit also exposes her audience to scenes of fetishism, necrophilia, incest, and sexualized torture. In light of these facts, Kenneth deLuca’s 1977 evaluation of Hrotsvit’s take on Terence—one with which Wilson, for example, explicitly agrees—bears quoting in full:

Considering the evidence at hand, why such a howl of moral outrage from Hrotsvit? To speak of the “wickedness” of Terence’s matter seems to stretch even tenth-century morals to the breaking point. Perhaps Hrotsvit’s sense of humour had grown dull. Or perhaps she had fallen victim to an overly rigorous spirituality (she has an unhappy tendency, for example, to equate the true Christian life with one of absolute virginity). More probably, however, she simply did not understand the ways of the imagination, nor the concern of literature to comment on, rather to reform, the human situation. This is why, instead of accepting

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88 Sticca, “Comic Realism,” 149.
89 Wilson, Ethics, 79.
Terence’s prostitutes and love-smitten young men as part of the comic landscape, she saw them as a threat.\textsuperscript{90}

In the hands of scholars like deLuca and Wilson, Hrotsvit’s difference of opinion concerning the proper interpretation of sexual activity becomes not a critique of Terence, but a “howl” evidencing her “lack of understanding”; the fact that Hrotsvit encourages her audience to consider the potentially negative consequences of unchecked sexual desire becomes evidence of “an overly rigorous spirituality;” the fact that she does not “[accept]” the violent rapes committed by “love-smitten young men” as just another “part of the comic landscape” becomes evidence that “her sense of humour had grown dull.” Such assessments are typical of Hrotsvit scholarship, though authors often attempt to mitigate the harshness of their critiques by broadening their criticism to the tenth-century as a whole. Thus deLuca praises Hrotsvit for “on some few occasions . . . transcending her own heavy handed piety” and concludes that “[t]o have done this little in the mid-tenth century is to have done a great deal indeed.”\textsuperscript{91} And Peter Dronke, in a more fanciful turn, relates Hrotsvit’s supposed metrical imperfections and alleged lack of originality to the artistic deficiencies he considers indicative of Ottonian culture as a whole: “[we] might say, especially with her poetry in ancient forms, that she tried to press too much of her own thoughts and feelings into frames as classically elegant, and as confining, as those used by the Ottonian miniaturists, where, for all the finesse, something a little aloof and rigid tends to remain.”\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{91} DeLuca, “Terence,” 102.
\textsuperscript{92} Dronke, \textit{Women Writers}, 83.
Hrotsvit the Christian: Education and religious philosophy

Despite the commonplace assumption that Hrotsvit failed to understand the complexities of the genus dramaticum (whether in terms of style, form, or humor) due to her status as a tenth-century Saxon canoness, another vein of scholarship has worked to establish that she was a clever and well-educated individual given her region and time period. As mentioned above, Wilson’s monograph *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: The Ethics of Authorial Stance* argues that Hrotsvit’s canon reflects general knowledge of late antique and patristic rhetorical and literary theory. In a series of articles on Hrotsvit, Wilson also has highlighted within the dramas evidence of the canoness’ familiarity with etymology, mathematics, music, and the arts. Building on research developed and supported by Wilson as the editor of both of the English-language essay collections published on Hrotsvit to date, other scholars have somewhat simplistically interpreted Hrotsvit’s repeated references to material from the quadrivium (arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music) as a crucial part of a rhetorical strategy to use learning as a means of showing how much more intelligent Christians are than pagans.

Indeed, in order to situate Hrotsvit the would-be classical imitator more firmly in the Christian tradition, some researchers have attempted to identify specific indications of

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the influence of liturgy,\textsuperscript{95} hagiography,\textsuperscript{96} and the exegetical tradition\textsuperscript{97} upon her work. Still others have attempted to discern strains of patristic and late antique theology running throughout her works, and such endeavors have focused for the most part upon Boethius and Augustine. David Chamberlain, for example, has explored the influence of Boethius’ \textit{De musica} on Hrotsvit’s legends and dramas, and Wilson has linked Boethius’ \textit{De arithmetico} with her detection of numerical symbolism in Hrotsvit’s plays. While Chamberlain and Wilson interpret such Boethian references to music and arithmetic as emphasizing the harmony of God’s universe, William Provost reads Hrotsvit’s dramas as reproducing the concepts of free will, providence, and fortune as articulated in Boethius’ \textit{De consolatione philosophae}.\textsuperscript{98} Eril Hughes, on the other hand, interprets the dramas as a purely Augustinian examination of the “use and abuse of worldly objects and beauty,”\textsuperscript{99} while Stephen Wailes regards Hrotsvit’s entire corpus as an Augustinian take on the conflict of the flesh and spirit and the relationship of the Christian to political life.\textsuperscript{100}

Indeed, despite the emphasis on Hrotsvit’s relationship to Terence (and, to a lesser extent, Virgil) in work on her dramas and epics, most of the inquiries into Hrotsvit’s education have focused on discovering elements of the Christian tradition within her

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works rather than tracking the ways in which she might have specifically deployed classical or more contemporary sources (Christian or otherwise). A few attempts have been made, however, to explore such material within her work. For example, David Day has shown that Hrotsvit’s legend *Basilius* demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of Roman, Germanic, and canon law.  

Studies like Day’s thus reveal the potential of such research to provide fruitful information regarding the state of education in the tenth century. Thus, while the overall focus of educational research into Hrotsvit’s works has centered upon the influence of Augustine and Boethius, it might also behove researchers to examine the references to the several other authors appearing in Hrotsvit’s work from the classical period on up to the canoness’ own day, including Ovid, Alcuin, Aldhelm, Arator, Avitus, Einhard, Isidore, Juvencus, Prudentius, and Venantius Fortunatus, among others. In addition, it might prove useful to examine the extent to which elements within Hrotsvit’s works that have been identified as Christian may in fact harken back to earlier classical precedents. It would be interesting, for example, to look for traces of Calcidius’ translation of Plato’s *Timaeus* within Hrotsvit’s works, particularly in light of recent work by Henry Mayr-Harting on the extremely Platonic nature of some previously unpublished glosses on Boethius’ *De arithmetico* from tenth-century Cologne which were made during the time Gerberga’s uncle Bruno I was bishop there.

A more serious problem, however, often plagues the work of those studying Hrotsvit’s education—the tendency, that is, to assume that Hrotsvit does not engage with

102 Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 8. Wilson states that “Hrotsvit probably knew many of these authors through *florilegia*” only (*Ethics*, 53).
the thinkers of the past but instead merely regurgitates their views. Such readings tend to situate Hrotsvit as a completely orthodox, unquestioning Christian who could only engage with her religion through the mediation of male authorities. Thus William Provost, in crediting Boethius as the true force behind Hrotsvit’s dramas, necessarily denies Hrotsvit agency as an author in her own right: “What I have called the Boethian voice seems to me clearly to be the controlling voice of Hrotsvit’s dramas, not only shaping their central themes but also providing the force and direction of their plot movements, accounting for the main features of the characterizations and supplying much of their tonality.”

Likewise, Stephen Wailes assumes Hrotsvit’s total reliance on Augustine for her conception of the conflict between the flesh and spirit, stating that while “there is no reason to doubt Hrotsvit had heard and possibly read Paul’s words on flesh and spirit. . . her own spirituality and understanding was not formed directly from the study of passages in his letters” because the “relationship of tenth-century Christians to the Bible was not that familiar;” Wailes’ assumption, unsupported within Hrotsvit’s texts (which make direct reference to the Vulgate in several places and directly echo Paul’s letters in others), leads Wailes to argue that “the authority and popularity” of Augustine’s *De civitate dei* “[justifies] the assumption that Augustine’s delimiting of two communities with reference to the Pauline conflict of flesh and spirit was familiar in Hrotsvit’s circle, and thus to her.” Here, Wailes confuses probable familiarity with Augustine with total acceptance of the church father’s doctrines. Moreover, Wailes’ especial interest in Augustine’s concept of the two cities inspires him to interpret each of Hrotsvit’s works as allegorical reflections on the spiritual meaning of public and private

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life in Ottonian Saxony, and to ignore gender (among other things) as a potential factor in shaping the human experience. Specifically, Wailes’ myopic focus upon Augustine’s *De civitate dei* leads him to downplay the prominent role of the gendered body within Hrotsvit’s texts, though he does admit that Hrotsvit’s treatment of the body “could not be taken in any simplistic way as expressing a dualism in which corporeality was simply the enemy of spirituality.”

**Hrotsvit and gender**

Despite the relative indifference of scholars like Wailes to issues of gender, studies of gender (often linked to studies of sexuality) have become the most popular avenue of Hrotsvit research over the past twenty-five years. Having observed that the majority of Hrotsvit’s works focus on women to a greater extent than do other early medieval texts, those researching the topic typically endeavor to discern Hrotsvit’s views on gender through an analysis of her treatment of female characters. In general, scholarship on Hrotsvit’s conception of gender has suffered from three serious methodological problems—a lack of theoretical grounding, a failure to interpret Hrotsvit’s works within an accurate historical context and, perhaps most egregiously, a lack of direct engagement with her texts themselves.

First, those researching Hrotsvit’s depiction of gender do not frame their analyses in a theoretically rigorous manner. Scholars often interpret Hrotsvit’s depiction of gender within a binary framework wherein it is assumed either that Hrotsvit speaks for all women (regardless of class or religion) or that she speaks in support of the patriarchy. Barbara Gold, for example, characterizes Hrotsvit as “not only a chronicler of women’s

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tales but also a creator of women’s history. . . . able to shape and to influence women’s 
ways of knowing.”¹⁰⁸ At the other end of the spectrum, Ulrike Wiethaus concludes that 
“‘femininity’ as a positively coded abstraction did not exist for [Hrotsvit]” since the 
canoness “affords no room for the voices of women of the peasant class, or for the voices 
of Jewish or Muslim women.” On this basis, Wiethaus determines that Hrotsvit fully and 
unequivocably supports the Christian patriarchy: “[w]hat Hrotsvit explores and even 
celebrates in her writings is only the patriarchal Christian ideal of womanhood, defined as 
female strength in the service of male sexual ownership, female eloquence in the service 
of Christian ideology, female loyalty unto death to male authority figures who insist on 
their power over them.”¹⁰⁹ First of all, such stringent dichotomies between male and 
female, interpreted as evil and good, respectively, ignore the general tenor of, as well as 
inarguable facts about, Hrotsvit’s texts. Specifically, the assumption that individuals a) 
can operate outside ideological state apparatuses like the Christian religion or b) cannot 
simultaneously resist specific aspects of an ideological state apparatus even while 
existing within it, ignores the important theoretical work on ideology carried out by 
philosophers like Althusser, Foucault, and Butler. Such interpretations ignore the ways 
in which Hrotsvit attempts to destabilize patriarchal Christian notions about gender from 
the inside, showing that, as Butler puts it, “to operate within the matrix of power is not 
the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Barbara Gold, “Hrotswitha Writes Herself: Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis,” in Sex and Gender in 
61.
Composed between 963 and 973,” in Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, ed. Brown et al., 105.
¹¹⁰ Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1999), 
40.
Yet those analyzing gender within Hrotsvit not only ignore helpful theories, but also misinterpret the theories they do use. Eva Cescutti claims to base the arguments within her monograph *Hrotsvit und die Männer* upon Judith Butler’s theories, particularly on the social construction of gender. Cescutti, however, completely ignores the key role of subversion within Butler’s thought. Instead, she uses social construction merely to justify her delimiting of three discrete gender paradigms correlating to what she considers to be the three medieval social classes: laboratores (those who work/peasants), bellatores (those who fight/aristocrats), and oratores (those who pray/religious). Ignoring the peasants, Cescutti focuses upon the conception of gender within the class of bellatores, whom she problematically associates with oral tradition, and the oratores, whom she similarly associates with the written tradition. Cescutti crucially ignores the fact that as a canoness of noble descent, Hrotsvit belonged to two of these supposedly distinct social classes. Although Cescutti is acknowledging, like Butler, the way in which multiple gendered discourses can exist at once, her idea that social classes are clearly delimited and that their conceptions of gender are likewise discrete, is faulty. Moreover, Cescutti argues that, as a result of their adoption of virginity, oratores like Hrotsvit are asexual and de-gendered, and that, because of this erasure of sexuality and gender, Hrotsvit is able to overcome the social limitations placed upon her sex by the bellatores and to gain access to writing as a means of communication.\textsuperscript{111} Disregarding for the time being Cescutti’s problematic distinction between oral and written cultures, her assumptions about virginity are likewise simplistic. Indeed, as Sarah Salih has shown in her discussion of late medieval English conceptions of virginity, “[i]f virgins are not necessarily women, 

\textsuperscript{111} Wo dieser Differenzdiskurs stillgestellt ist, lösen sich „Männlichkeit“ und „Weiblichkeit“ auf. Über ihren ORDO wird Hrotsvit handlungsfähig und bekommt Zugang zu MEDIUM. Cescutti, *Hrotsvit und die Männer*, 286.
nevertheless they are not men either: the original gender continues to be relevant;”\textsuperscript{112} moreover, as Salih argues, “virginity is not a denial or rejection of sexuality, but itself a sexuality, by which I mean a culturally specific organisation of desires.”\textsuperscript{113}

Second, despite the fact that studies of gender in Hrotsvit are at the very least implicitly New Historicist in terms of approach, much of this research nevertheless ignores the mass of primary and secondary sources available on Ottonian Germany and relies instead upon misconceptions about early medieval society put forward in non-specialist secondary literature. Such oversights may be due to one or both of the following factors—first, the lack of adequate linguistic facility on the part of the researchers either in Latin (the language of the primary sources) and/or in modern German (the language in which much of the secondary research on Ottonian Saxony has been carried out), and second, the non-specialist status of the majority of academics writing in English on Hrotsvit (a good deal of whom study late medieval female spirituality in the broadest of senses and whose work on Hrotsvit is a mere dalliance into the early medieval period). I will give a small sampling of the sorts of errors running rampant throughout such scholarship. Based upon a reading of a 1998 study on French chivalry and an eight-page review article of recent work on post-Carolingian kingdoms from 1993, for example, Ulrike Wiethaus describes tenth-century cosmopolitan Saxon society under the centralized rule of Otto I as “militaristic, characterized by fluctuating alliances among tribal leaders.”\textsuperscript{114} Amidst some interesting ideas concerning the ways in which feminist and religious interpretations of Hrotsvit’s plays might be harmonized, W.

\textsuperscript{112} Sarah Salih, \textit{Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England} (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2001), 17.
\textsuperscript{113} Salih, \textit{Versions of Virginity}, 10.
Barrett Huddleston quotes the twelfth-century theologian Bernard of Clairvaux and refers to him as “an early church father in extensive circulation at the time of Dulcitius’ composition.”\textsuperscript{115} And in arguing that Hrotsvit purposefully chose an oral source for her legend of Pelagius, “asserting her own authority as a hagiographer rather than adhering to the orthodoxy of a Latin source,”\textsuperscript{116} Ronald Stottlemeyer seems unaware that the earliest written sources for Pelagius—a Latin vita by the Spanish priest Raguel and a Mozarabic liturgy—both date from the late 960s and thus were almost certainly not available to Hrotsvit as models.\textsuperscript{117}

A more specific problem with historical context in studies of gender and Hrotsvit is the failure on the part of scholars to view the medieval church as anything but a completely monolithic, patriarchal, and inflexible institution. Indeed, many scholars continue to judge Hrotsvit’s conception of gender not through the lens of the canoness’ own spiritual worldview, but through a mishmash of twentieth-century feminist thought. The imposition of anachronistic worldviews upon Hrotsvit’s work and a simplistic and negative perception of medieval Christianity have led scholars to assess Hrotsvit’s conception of gender as inherently misogynistic. Wiethaus, for example, characterizes Sapientia, a Christian mother who encourages her daughters to embrace martyrdom in order to more quickly unite with Christ, as “a mother who sacrifices her daughters in the name of patriarchal authority, in part surely also a sign of her own weakness.”\textsuperscript{118}

Similarly, although Daniel T. Kline does attempt to read Sapientia’s support of her

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\textsuperscript{117} See Manuel Díaz y Díaz, “La pasión de San Pelayo y su difusión,” \textit{Anuario de estudios medievales} 6 (1969): 97–116. The liturgy alternatively has been dated to the 930s or 940s, but since it is in Mozarabic, it remains an unlikely model for Hrotsvit even if it were written at this time.
\textsuperscript{118} Wiethaus, “Sexuality,” 136.
\end{flushleft}
children’s martyrdoms within the context of medieval theology, he nevertheless feels
compelled to add that “[p]arenting toward death, whether Christian or not, is sensible
from this privileged theological perspective, but I am not sure that makes it right.”\footnote{119}
M.R. Sperberg-McQueen even explicitly declares that she is “not concerned with
explaining Hrotswitha’s works as products of their historical (Christian) context”; thus
freed from the trouble of understanding medieval Christianity, Sperberg-McQueen is able
to conclude that because Hrotsvit remained devoted to the Christian religion, her plays
necessarily “conspire to reassert male control over women’s bodies.”\footnote{120} Such simplistic
readings do not give Hrotsvit enough credit for being able to engage with her religion or
enough credit to the potential flexibility existing within the medieval Church itself.

Even more surprising than the lack of regard for Hrotsvit’s historical context is
the lack of regard for Hrotsvit’s own words. This seems in part a result of scholarly over-
reliance upon translations of Hrotsvit’s texts. The mediation of a translation always
hampers close textual analysis to some extent, but the dubious quality of readily-available
English-language translations of Hrotsvit seriously undermines the possibility of
recognizing the subtlety of Hrotsvit’s carefully worded arguments about gender. In
particular, the widely-cited translations of Katharina Wilson—who attempts to imitate
Hrotsvit’s poetic writing by translating her works into rhyming couplets—are often
misleading. For example, Hrotsvit writes in the \textit{Gesta Ottonis}: “But I do not believe it is
proper for a fragile woman, having been placed in the solitude of a quiet monastery, to
speak of war, about which she ought not to know” \textit{[Sed nec hoc fragilis fas esse reor}

mulieris / Inter coenobii positae secreta quieti, / Ut bellum dictet, quod nec cognoscere debet]. Since Hrotsvit in fact describes war, and references a variety of deaths caused by hanging, drowning, and the sword, her use of the word debet, ought, differentiates gendered expectations of women and their lived reality. Wilson, however, erases this differentiation by translating Hrotsvit’s “ought not to know” into “does not know.” Wilson also obscures Hrotsvit’s subtle reminder about the lack of choice on the part of the girls entering the monastery, rendering Hrotsvit’s passive positae, “placed,” into the more active verb “residing;” likewise Mary Bergman deviates from an otherwise literal interpretation of the passage by translating positae “abiding.”

Reliance on inaccurate translations causes some scholars to miss the nuance of Hrotsvit’s approach to gender. Basing her reading of this section of the Gesta Ottonis on Wilson’s translation, Wiethaus argues that Hrotsvit claims that she “cannot and should not write about war.” Yet Hrotsvit herself clearly never claims that she “cannot” write about war—she merely points out that she has been taught that to do so is improper and that she ought not to attempt it based upon that expectation.

Another problem with English-language translations of Hrotsvit is that they tend to make her writing less sexual and humorous. Larissa Bonfante explains her decision to deviate from Hrotsvit’s original style in the following way:

The translator is initially tempted to render into the spoken language of our day, perhaps even slang, the free casual style many fast-moving speeches call for. . . . But one soon finds that such language diminishes the serious import of the speeches and jars with the scenes of prayer or conversion. . . . Unable to find a

121 Hrotsvit, Gesta, p. 284, ll. 243–5.
122 Wilson, Florilegium, 107.
123 Sister Mary Bernadine Bergman, “Hrotsvitae Liber Tertius: A Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary,” PhD diss. (University of Illinois-Champaign, 1943), 57. Prior to its recent digitization, Bergman’s dissertation was much less accessible than Wilson’s Florilegium and, as such, has not been cited with the same regularity despite its more literal interpretation of Hrotsvit’s Latin texts.
modern, colloquial English flexible enough to move with equal ease between these two world, so different now for us, I found myself going back to Tillyward’s translation with renewed respect. His heavier, somewhat archaic, classical rendering serves better to unify the various parts of the play, as passages of prayer or exhortation ring out in the solemn English rhythms of the King James Bible.\textsuperscript{125}

Thus Larissa Bonfante decides to render the pious Drusiana’s straightforward exclamation: “Back off! Back off, you disgusting pimp!” [\textit{discede, discede, nefande leno}]\textsuperscript{126} into the decidedly more prim: “Move away, move away from me. Unspeakable man, you are no better than a flesh peddler.”\textsuperscript{127} Likewise, Wilson translates the disguised Abraham’s speech to his niece Mary in the following way: “This is not a fit place for complaints, where jolly guests convene. . . . I didn’t come all this way / to join you in lamenting your sins but to be joined to you in making love and being gay.”\textsuperscript{128} Yet Abraham’s specific language is even more erotic—and thus much more disturbing—than Wilson’s translation suggests: “This is not a suitable place for a complaint, where guests unite in sexual intercourse,” he huffs. “I didn’t come here to lament your sins with you; I came here to have sex with you.”\textsuperscript{129} By not acknowledging that ribald language and pious devotion could exist in the same work, Bonfante and other translators erase for their readers Hrotsvit’s particular brand of humor, her particular strategy of classical imitation, and her particular vision of the proper interpretation of gender and sexuality within a Christian context.

\textsuperscript{126} Hrotsvit, \textit{Calimachus}, p. 180, l. 14.
\textsuperscript{127} Bonfante, \textit{Plays of Hrotswitha}, 59.
\textsuperscript{128} Wilson, \textit{Florilegium}, 85–6.
Thesis trajectory

The chapters that follow bring together these disparate avenues of research—classical reception, Christianity, and gender—in a rigorous analysis of Hrotvit’s entire canon, arguing that Hrotvit adopts classical genre in order to explore the ways in which the introduction of Christ’s new law affects received notions of gender not only in terms of the lives of saints and martyrs depicted in the dramas and the legends, but also within Hrotvit’s own cultural milieu as depicted in her epics.

While this introductory chapter has presented an historiographical overview of previous approaches to Hrotvit’s work, positioning the thesis as a necessary intervention into a field long marred by inadequate historical research, hampered by limited language facility, and plagued by the recurring specter of sexism, the next chapter examines the presentation of gender in Hrotvit’s most famous book, her book of dramas. The second chapter, “Subject to Confusion: Destabilizing Gender through Genre in Hrotvit of Gandersheim’s Terentian Comedies,” makes the case that careful attention to Hrotvit’s appropriation of Terence as outlined in the prefatory materials to her book of plays reveals new ways of understanding the complexity not only of the medieval reception of Terence, but also of Hrotvit’s literary intervention into early medieval discourses on gender and sexuality. Specifically, the chapter argues that Hrotvit exploits the sexual content and dialogic form of the Terentian genre—features considered in the late antique and early medieval commentary traditions to be constitutive of the genre—in order to fulfill her explicitly-stated (though hitherto overlooked) objective of praising God through the destabilization of binary conceptions of gender.
The third chapter, “Communi similis conamine voti: Gender and the Reception of Virgilian Epic in Hrotsvit’s Liber tertius,” focuses on the depiction of gender in Hrotsvit’s epics as compared both with Virgil and with Carolingian examples of Virgilian epic. Although the majority of literary studies on the two poems of Hrotsvit’s liber tertius (the Gesta Ottonis and the Primordia coenobii Gandeshemensis) have focused on the canoness’ reception of epic, other scholars have criticized the tendency of these analyses to rely upon hazy definitions of the genre. Yet while criticism of the vague way in which the term “epic” has been deployed in previous studies of the liber tertius is certainly legitimate, it does not follow, as some have claimed, that the Gesta and the Primordia are not epics. This chapter will demonstrate that reading Hrotsvit’s liber tertius alongside the commentaries on the Aeneid and vitae Virgilianae that circulated in the early medieval schools reveals not only that Hrotsvit’s historical poems are clearly Virgilian epics according to early medieval understandings of the genre, but also that her epics are part of a longer, specifically Carolingian tradition of Virgilian epic literature written in praise of living emperors. Importantly, attention to the broader context of the early medieval reception of Virgil enables us to see that Hrotsvit’s treatment of female characters within her Virgilian epics constitutes a more subtle reading of the Aeneid and its approach to women than has previously been acknowledged—one that, significantly, stands in direct opposition to the gendered reception of Virgilian epic in the Carolingian period as exemplified in the anonymous Karolus magnus et Leo papa and Ermoldus Nigellus’ In honorem Hludowici christianissimi Caesaris augusti. As scholars have shown, in addition to explicating questions of grammar and rhetoric, ancient pedagogical texts on Virgil presented a concrete set of ideas about gender to Roman students, ideas which
were then internalized through repeated processes of reading and interpretation in the male homosocial classroom environments of the classical period. The ubiquity of Servius’ commentary on the *Aeneid* in the early Middle Ages (including the documented presence of two ninth-century copies of the text in the library at Gandersheim), as well as the widespread distribution of other Virgilian pedagogical texts, including Donatus’ *Interpretationes Virgilianae*, suggests that early medieval schoolchildren were exposed to the same kind of gendered indoctrination through the reading of the *Aeneid* that ancient Roman schoolboys experienced. Nevertheless, while early medieval educational environments were typically homosocial, they were not exclusively male. Inmates of female religious institutions would have been introduced to Virgil and commentaries on the *Aeneid* by a female teacher, and would have discussed and interpreted the Virgilian tradition with other female students; Hrotsvit herself, for example, speaks glowingly of the instruction she received from her female teachers Rikkardis and Gerberga. This chapter will suggest that the inculcatory force of the Virgilian pedagogical tradition’s approach to gender was not so strong as to preclude the possibility of other interpretations of the meaning of gender in the *Aeneid* by a female medieval audience. Specifically, this chapter will examine Hrotsvit’s approach to two Virgilian motifs—the association between women’s death and foundation, and the characterization of women as instigators of war—as well as her engagement with Virgil’s depiction of female political figures, demonstrating that while Carolingian authors adapted these Virgilian epic conventions in a way that accorded with the Roman pedagogical tradition’s interpretation of gender, and that as a result deemphasized the important roles played by women in ninth-century politics, Hrotsvit adapted them so as to undermine Roman norms of masculinity as
perpetuated within the commentary tradition, and to represent the Ottonian political system as one in which both men and women rightfully engaged as equal partners.

The fourth and final chapter, “The Christian Metamorphosis of Ovid in Hrotsvit’s Book of Legends,” examines Hrotsvit’s collection of hagiographical poems. The stylistic and thematic diversity of Hrotsvit’s book of saints’ legends has presented critics with a variety of hermeneutic challenges. Given the heterogeneity of the legends themselves, it is not surprising that, barring comparison of Prudentius’ work with that of Hrotsvit, intertextual examinations of Hrotsvit’s legends have been limited in the main to hagiographical source work concentrating on the provenance of individual legends or on the comparison of select legends with later versions of the same stories. Most literary or cultural examinations of the book of legends, too, have avoided studying the work as a cohesive unit, and instead have read the poems on an individual basis or in conjunction with Hrotsvit’s epic and dramatic works. In fact, Hrotsvit’s book of legends has only rarely been discussed as a whole, and attempts to find an overarching theme for the book in its entirety have enjoyed limited success. The identification of additional literary models for Hrotsvit’s book of legends might help illuminate a work that has proven resistant to interpretation. This chapter will raise the possibility that Ovid’s works on divine change—namely, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and his book of exilic poetry, the *Tristia*—may serve as important intertexts for Hrotsvit’s legendary poems, and will explore the ways in which Hrotsvit unsettles the inscription and reception of sexed bodies within hagiographical literature through her use of a particularly Ovidian topos of corporeal mutability. In Hrotsvit’s book of legends, the divine transformation of the material world through the enactment of bodily miracles—and in particular God’s
transformation of Mary’s body through the miracle of the Incarnation—makes manifest God’s immanence in all of creation, including the bodies of women. But if the miraculous for Hrotsvit reveals both the physical and the ontological instability of the body (a theological move which facilitates an undermining of the gender binary), hers is still a universe in which the particularity of bodies—and specifically the particularity of sexed bodies—still matters; indeed, Hrotsvit’s Ovidian book of changes suggests that the historical specificity of Christ’s incarnated male (hetero)sexual body opens up new possibilities for chaste women to experience union with the divine, a merging envisioned in explicitly sexual terms. Crucially, even if such a sexual union is a spiritual abstraction, it is one with expressly corporeal resonances, somatic implications made all the more meaningful by the fact that Hrotsvit persistently describes souls as maintaining the physical form of their material bodies after death. Ultimately, in the book of legends, the corporeality of women’s bodies—the very corporeality consistently disdained by patristic, late antique, and early medieval male writers—becomes for Hrotsvit the privileged point of access, metaphorical or otherwise, to the divine, a form of spiritual union not available to men.
Chapter 2:
“Subject to Confusion”: Destabilizing Gender through Genre in Hrotsvit of Gandersheim’s Terentian Comedies

Since questions of gender and genre have long dominated scholarship on the six hagiographic plays of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, it seems curious that to date the relationship between these two categories within the poet’s dramatic corpus has not been rigorously interrogated. This gap in research can be attributed both to a lack of interest in (or unfamiliarity with) the subject of classical reception on the part of those examining gender within Hrotsvit’s plays and to a pervasive belief on the part of scholars investigating Hrotsvit’s mode of classical reception that the canoness, as a chaste member of a tenth-century female religious community, must necessarily have been interested in Terence’s linguistic and formal style to the exclusion of his content—content which, admittedly, Hrotsvit openly indicts on the grounds of sexually “polluting” its Christian readers.\(^1\) Importantly, however, any separation between gendered analyses of Hrotsvit’s plays and studies of the plays’ relationship to the Terentian genre can only be sustained by ignoring the canoness’ own words concerning her definition of the Terentian genre and her objectives as a writer of Terentian comedy. In particular, indifference to the specificities of the prefatory materials to Hrotsvit’s book of plays (comprised of a general preface and a dedicatory letter to her unnamed male patrons) has led scholars to discount Hrotsvit’s explicit statements regarding her conception of the Terentian genre and, consequently, to fail to appreciate the ways in which Hrotsvit exploits the contours of this genre in order to achieve her authorial goals. In response, this chapter will make the case

\[^1\] Hrotsvit, Liber secundus: praefatio, p. 132, l. 4–8. The specific verb Hrotsvit employs to describe Terence’s pollution of his Christian readers, *maculo, -are*, has sexual connotations in classical, patristic, and medieval Latin. For a discussion of the frequent euphemistic use of verbs of defilement to refer to the sexual act in Latin literature, including *maculo, -are*, see Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 198–200.
that careful attention to Hrotsvit’s appropriation of Terence as outlined in the prefatory materials to her book of plays reveals new ways of understanding the complexity not only of the medieval reception of Terence, but also of Hrotsvit’s literary intervention into early medieval discourses on gender and sexuality, specifically arguing that Hrotsvit exploits the sexual content and dialogic form of the Terentian genre in order to fulfill her explicit objective of praising God through the destabilization of binary conceptions of gender.

Reading Hrotsvit’s reception of Terence: reassessing the question of genre

Style and form

It has become a truism among those discussing Hrotsvit’s reception of Terence that the canoness herself indicates in the preface to her book of plays that she has decided to write in the Terentian genre in order to provide her fellow Christians with morally-edifying chaste content (the opposite or “inversion” of Terence’s sexual content) wrapped not in the banal Latin of Christian literature, but in the same delightful Latin style that attracts Christian readers away from spiritual material and toward the morally-corrupt works of Terence in the first place. As evidence for this view, scholars have cited a

series of statements made by Hrotsvit in the preface to her book of plays, specifically calling attention to Hrotsvit’s assertion that many Christians (including herself) at times prefer pagan literature to Christian scriptures “on account of the eloquence of their more polished mode of expression,”3 her attribution of the popularity of Terence amongst Christian audiences to “the sweetness of his mode of expression,”4 and her declaration that she intends to “imitate [Terence] through writing” in order that “the laudable chastity of holy virgins might be celebrated in the same kind of writing in which the disgusting depravities of lascivious women used to be recited.”5 Sandro Sticca’s interpretation of Hrotsvit’s prefatory remarks encapsulates the traditional opinion on Hrotsvit’s reception of Terence, and bears citing in full:  

That Christians «pro cultioris facundia sermonis gentilium» (attracted by the polished elegance of style of pagan writers) prefer frivolous pagan literature to the useful sacred writings, Hrotsvit cannot approve of, although she does not entirely exonerate herself. She also criticizes that even men who are deeply attracted to the Holy Scriptures and despise pagan authors read Terence time after time and enjoy the charm of his discourse. Although obviously this criticism implies that Terence was an especially preferred and widely read author, it also implies that his utilitas was to be found only in exemplary style and language. Hrotswitha’s basic interest in him is purely linguistic and solely for this reason she is writing her six plays which are formally modelled after the six Terence comedies and also linguistically compete with this auctor. Hrotswitha’s imitation of Terence must not be looked upon in terms of the traditional concept of aemulatio which referred exclusively to content but rather as a limited kind of imitatio which outwardly expressed itself in the number of plays and the use of dialogue in them. And this is as it should be, for Hrotswitha’s intention was to substitute for the sinful dialogue between Terentian lovers the example of the chastity of virgins and the mortification of hermits.6

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3 pro cultioris facundia sermonis. Hrotsvit, Liber secundus: praeafatio, p. 132, l. 2.
6 Sticca, “Comic Realism,” 150.
Considering the widespread prevalence of this understanding of Hrotsvit’s preface, it comes as no surprise that the vast majority of work on Hrotsvit’s reception of Terence has eschewed examination of Hrotsvit’s content and focused instead upon the investigation of Hrotsvit’s “style.” While the dearth of linguistic borrowings from Terence within Hrotsvit’s plays led some of Hrotsvit’s early critics to deny the existence of any substantive links between the work of Terence and Hrotsvit, more recent scholars have identified several parallels between Terence’s literary techniques and those of Hrotsvit, including but not limited to the use of dramatic devices like eavesdropping and disguise, the insertion of comedic scenes, a reliance on expository dialogue, and a realistic differentiation of characters’ behaviour along the lines of age, class, sex, and religion.

All the same, such correlations are broadly drawn, and most scholars have followed Cornelia Coulter in lamenting that “the connections with Terence remain few in number, and the one outstanding similarity is that in both authors a story is developed by means of dialogue.” Indeed, Hrotsvit plays have been repeatedly characterized not as comedies,

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9 Helene Homeyer and Katherine Wilson have done much to increase scholarly awareness of the stylistic aspects of Hrotsvit’s imitation of Terence. See Homeyer’s brief discussion on the subject in her article “«Imitatio» und «aemulatio»,” expanded within the general introduction and individual commentaries to the plays contained within her subsequent edition of Hrotsvit’s oeuvre, *Hrotsvitate Operae mit Ein u. Kommentar* (Munich: Schöningh, 1970). Building upon the work of Homeyer, Wilson has examined formal stylistic parallels between Hrotsvit and Terence in a series of articles on the subject; she includes an extended discussion of Hrotsvit’s reception of Terence in *Ethics*, 54–110. See also Kenneth DeLuca, “Hrotsvit’s ‘Imitation’ of Terence,” particularly 97–101.

10 Coulter, “‘Terentian’ Comedies,” 528. Emphasis appears in original text.
but as “dialogized legends,” and the hermeneutic potential of Hrotsvit’s use of dialogue itself has consistently been minimized. In the end, even those critics who have unearthed persuasive evidence of formal and stylistic parallels between Hrotsvit’s plays and those of Terence express scepticism about the extent to which the canoness’ plays might be considered true examples of the Terentian genre—Katharina Wilson, for instance, argues that Hrotsvit adheres to the formal definitions of the Terentian genre as outlined by the grammarian Evanthius, but downplays the success of Hrotsvit’s imitation of the genre by asserting that Hrotsvit simply “tried to make [her dramas] as classical and Terentian as possible” and that she merely “seems to have attempted to create formally strict dramas.”

Whatever one’s opinion on the quality of Hrotsvit’s stylistic imitation of Terence, however, the canoness’ awareness of and attention to stylistic characteristics of Terence’s writing come into even sharper focus when viewed within her historical context. Although Hrotsvit did not replicate Terence’s complex meter in her own plays, for example, her choice to employ rhymed prose appears significant in light of the spirited debates waged throughout the Middle Ages over whether or not Terence had written in verse. Moreover, the frequent integration of the fourth-century rhetorician Donatus’

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11 See, for example, Bert Nagel, Hrotsvit von Gandersheim, 56–7 and Marianne Schütze-Pflugu, Herrscher und Märtyrerauffassung bei Hrotsvit von Gandersheim (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1972), 8, both of whom prefer to the plays as “dialogisierte Legenden” while distancing her works from the genre of classical comedy.
12 Wilson, Ethics, 60–6. Cf. Helene Homeyer, who claims that Hrotsvit was “untroubled by the theories of the grammarians on tragedy and comedy, which were unknown to her” [unbecherwert von den Theorien der Grammatiker über Tragödie und Komödie, die ihr bekannt waren]. Homeyer, “«Imitatio» und «aemulatio»,” 976.
13 Wilson, Ethics, 57. Emphasis is my own.
14 Academic squabbling concerning Terence’s meter was so rampant that it became the subject of a joke in Terentius et Delusor, an eleventh-century dramatic fragment in which a frazzled producer of Terence’s works shouts at the classical playwright in frustration: “I don’t know whether it’s prose or verse! Tell me! Tell me! What is it?” [“An sic prosaicum, nescio, an metricum. / Dic mihi, dic, quid hoc est?”] MGH PLAC 4: 1089. A further example of this debate can be found in the eleventh-century Codex Halensis’ commentary on Terence, which cites the authority of the fifth-century grammarians Rufinus and Priscian in
commentary on Terence (to which Evanthius’ work was often appended without attribution) into the scholia of early medieval copies of Terence’s work, including the famous ninth-century illuminated Terence from Corbie, Vatican Library MS lat. 3868, lends credence to Katharina Wilson’s suggestion that Hrotsvit purposefully replicated the distinctive stylistic features of the Terentian genre identified within that tradition.  

Nevertheless, despite the near ubiquity of the belief amongst scholars that the praefatio to Hrotsvit’s book of plays indicates that she is interested in reproducing Terence’s style to the exclusion of his content, and despite the persistence of the belief that Hrotsvit’s use of dialogue is relatively unimportant, it is imperative to recognize that this is not an inevitable—or, indeed, a responsible—conclusion to draw from Hrotsvit’s explanatory comments.

To begin, while most scholars have assumed, with Kenneth DeLuca, that the canoness’ use of the word sermo in the preface to her book of plays specifically demonstrates that “Hrotsvit’s concern is with the “language” (or “diction”)’ of Terence, the word sermo had a much broader semantic range in both classical and medieval Latin than such a narrow reading suggests.  

Early medieval lexicographical authorities defense of the position that the plays were written in meter; see the Commentum Brunsianum, in P. Terentii Afri Comoediae Sex, ed. Paul Jakob Bruns (Halae: Regneriana, 1811), 1:3–4. The subject of Terence’s meter remains hotly debated; the most detailed (and useful) account of Terence’s meter can be found in Cesare Questa, La metrica di Plauto e di Terenzio (Urbino: Quattro Ventri, 2007).


16 Kenneth DeLuca, “Hrotsvit’s ‘Imitation’ of Terence,” Classical Folia 28 (1973), 94. For similar readings of the word sermo, see, among others, Sticca, “Comic realism,” 149, and, more recently, Stephen Wailes, Spirituality and Politics in the Work of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (Selingsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 18. I have attempted to encompass the multifaceted connotations of sermo by translating the term as “mode of expression.”
including Isidore of Seville, Rabanus Maurus, and Papias the Lexicographer, for example, all assert that the Latin translation of the Greek term *dialogus*—“a conversation between two or more people”—is *sermo*, “so called because the one is entwined [seritur] with the other.”  

Even more importantly, however, while Hrotsvit certainly professes that Christians who read Terence are attracted by “the sweetness of his sermo,” and acknowledges that she herself is sometimes attracted to pagan literature because of its “more cultivated sermo,” she specifically distances her writing style from that of Terence with the marked exception of her use of dialogue.  

Regarding her imitation of Terence’s style, Hrotsvit specifies:

Non enim dubito mihi ab aliquibus obici quod huius vilitas dictationis multo inferior multo contractior penitusque dissimilis eius quem proponebam imitari sit sententis. Concedo. . . si autem vel pro mei abiectione vel pro vitiosi sermonis rusticitate nulli placet memet ipsam tamen iuvat quod feci quia dum propriori vilitatem laboris in alii. . . opusculis heroico ligatam strophio in hoc dramatica vincam serie color perniciosas gentilium delicias abstinendo devito.  

Honestly, I do not doubt that it will be thrown in my face by some people that the baseness of this writing is much inferior to, much more limited than, and entirely different from the sentences of the man I’m proposing to imitate. I grant that. . . but even if [my work] pleases no one, either on account of my own worthlessness or on account of the lack of sophistication of my defective mode of expression [sermo], I’ll still be happy that I did it, because although I avoided the pernicious affectations of the pagans by abstaining from them, I embellished the vileness of my labour by binding this work in a dramatic sequence, having tied my other little works. . . in heroic strophes.

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17 Dialogue est conlatio duorum vel plurimorum, quem Latini sermonem dicunt. Nam quos Graeci dialogos. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* VI.8.2-3, in *San Isidoro de Sevilla: Etimologías*, vol. 1, ed. José Oroz Reta and Manuel Marcos Casquero (Madrid: Biblioteca de Auctores Cristianos, 1982), 582. Rabanus Maurus (*De universo* 5.5, PL 111: col.0122B) and Papias (*Elementarium doctrinae rudimentum* (Mombritius: Venice, 1491), 334; http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00057499/image_334) follow Isidore verbatim. The fact that no less an authority than Isidore of Seville conflated *sermo* and *dialogus*, and the fact that writers in the ninth (Rabanus) and eleventh (Papias) centuries did the same, raises the possibility that the tenth-century Hrotsvit might have been aware of the association.

18 Cf. Dronke (*Women Writers*, 72) and Newlands (“Hrotswitha’s Debt,” 1986), who, despite arguing that Hrotsvit’s primary interest seems to be in Terence’s content, both erroneously assert that Hrotsvit specifically claims to have only imitated Terence’s linguistic style and label her as “disingenuous” for failing to do so.

By conceding [*concedo*] that her work is stylistically dissimilar to Terence, by contrasting her use of dialogue [*dramatica series*] with her previous stylistic choices, and by mitigating what might otherwise be considered a standard humility topos concerning the quality of her writing through her claim that she “avoided the pernicious affectations of the pagans by abstaining [*abstinendo*] from them” (as opposed to being incapable of reproducing them), Hrotsvit effectively undercuts anyone—medieval or modern—who would fault her for her supposed *rusticitas sermonis* in comparison to Terence, or who would claim that she was overly concerned with emulating Terence’s style other than through her use of dialogue.\(^{20}\)

In actuality, despite claims to the contrary, the devaluation of dialogue and the prioritization of style over content within studies of Hrotsvit’s reception of classical comedy do not arise from Hrotsvit’s own words, but appear to be the result of an attempt on the part of some academics to fit Hrotsvit’s plays neatly within a long-established narrative of the medieval reception of Terence, one which insists that early medieval intellectuals, unaware that Terence’s plays were designed for public performance by actors upon a stage, prized the playwright not as a dramatist, but as a stylist, and in particular as a source of pithy bon mots concerning the vagaries of human behaviour.\(^{21}\)

This interpretation of the medieval reception of Terence assumes that medieval individuals did not understand that Terence’s plays were intended to be performed on the

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\(^{20}\) Katharina Wilson’s supposition that *delicias* must refer to the sexual content of pagan writings (*Ethics*, 77) cannot be sustained either contextually (as Hrotsvit is discussing style) or etymologically (as *delicia*, -ae carries with it the sense of a stylized ornamentation, affectation, or mannerism rather than a sense of carnal pleasure); her assumption that Hrotsvit uses the phrase *dramatica series* to refer to the broad generic category of drama in opposition to the generic subset of comedy is likewise untenable given the fact that Hrotsvit parallels her current use of *dramatica series* with her former use of *heroicum strophium*, or dactylic hexameter (*Ethics*, 57).

grounds that there exists no clear evidence testifying to the performance of Terence’s plays in the Middle Ages and on the grounds that certain medieval authors, most prominently Isidore of Seville, appear to have envisioned classical comedy as a form of recitative in which playwrights read their works aloud to an audience while a group of mimes enacted appropriate movements. This alleged ignorance of the performance of Roman comedy on the part of medieval individuals has been taken to evince not only the incomplete and partial understanding of classical culture in the Middle Ages, but also to indicate that medieval interest in Terence must have been purely stylistic in nature; the fact that medieval Christian intellectuals, as upright inheritors of Augustine and Jerome, would necessarily have been interested in Terence’s eloquent style to the exclusion of his lewd content has been taken for granted, and Terence’s widespread popularity as a school author in the Middle Ages and his frequent appearance in medieval florilegia have been seen as further proof that he was valued chiefly as a poetic model. Read in the context of such beliefs about the medieval reception of Terence, Hrotsvit’s plays have been assumed to be “literary exercises”—in particular, school dialogues or reading dramas—concerned with the transmission of Christian content to, and the acquisition of Latin style by, its readers, and while it is generally accepted that they were likely to have been read

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22 Isidore describes the orchestra as the place where “comic and tragic poets ascended during their competitions and sang while others performed gestures” [poetae comoedi et tragoedi ad certamen conscendebant, hisque canentibus alii gestus]. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* XVIII.44, in *San Isidoro de Sevilla: Etimologías*, vol. 2, ed. Jose Oroz Reta and Manuel A. Marcos Casquero (Biblioteca de Auctores Cristianos, 1983), 418.


aloud—either privately or publically, by an individual accompanied by mimes or by several individuals reading allotted roles, at the convent or in the Ottonian court—such readings have generally not been thought to constitute “a fully-fledged performance, with the element of impersonation dominating.”

In the main, correctives against the uncritical acceptance of these assumptions about the medieval reception of classical comedy within studies of Hrotsvit’s plays have been concerned with the question of performance; theater historians in particular have critiqued other Hrotsvit scholars for interpreting the absence of evidence of the performance of Hrotsvit’s plays as evidence of absence, for ignoring and at times purposely obscuring embedded stage directions in Hrotsvit’s plays, and for marginalizing Hrotsvit’s “school dialogues” or “closet dramas” from the dramatic tradition through the adoption of an overly restrictive (and ultimately ahistorical) conception of what true dramatic performance must entail. While such scholarly interventions have exposed the limitations of the traditional approach to the question of performance in Hrotsvit’s plays, they have not explored how the imposition of an inherently performative literary form upon Hrotsvit’s hagiographical source materials might work to achieve the canoness’ authorial goals. An examination of the interplay between Hrotsvit’s dialogic form and the content of her works seems especially critical in light of new research on medieval

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26 Dronke, *Women Writers*, 58. Wilson likewise undermines the legitimacy of such performances by referring to the term in scare quotes at *Ethics*, 104.
and early modern education, which has demonstrated that role playing was an essential aspect of the pedagogic strategy of school dialogues, and could be exploited either for regulatory or subversive purposes in the classroom.  

Indeed, Hrotsvit need not even have intended her plays for use in the classroom or for public reading in order for her to have been cognizant of and attentive to the performative elements of Terentian dialogue, as work by Courtney M. Booker on the ninth-century abbot Paschasius Radbertus’ life of Wala, the *Epitaphium Arsenii*, has recently shown.  

Although past scholars have seen the many Terentian references scattered throughout Radbertus’ *Epitaphium* simply as an effort on the part of its author to bear witness to the breadth of his learning, Booker points out that Radbertus not only explicitly fashions the court of Louis the Pious as a *theatrum* in which the social “inversion and confusion” characteristic of Terentian comedies plays out, but that the abbot also employs the concept of performance—that is, of role playing—as a leitmotif throughout the *Epitaphium*, both at the level of the text’s framing device (a monastic dialogue) and at the level of content through the use of Ambrosian pseudonyms which cast the text’s historical figures within “typological “roles’,” as actors playing their parts within an unfolding political drama.  

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30 Most recently Mayke de Jong, “‘Heed that saying of Terence’: on the use of Terence in Radbert’s *Epitaphium Arsenii*,” in *Carolingian Scholarship and Martianus Capella*, ed. Mariken Teeuwen et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 273–300.

31 Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, ed. by Ernst Dümmel (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1900), 68.

32 Booker, *Past Convictions*, 44.

33 Booker, *Past Convictions*, 47.
generally (as, for example, shown by the colloquies of the tenth-century abbot Ælfric of Eynsham and his disciple Ælfric Bata)—and Terentian dialogue in particular (as evidenced by Radbertus’ monastic dialogue on the life of Wala)—was associated with the concept of role playing by early medieval intellectuals, and that authors were aware of the implications that the imposition of a performative structural form upon their works held for the achievement of their ideological aims. Given this, and given Hrotsvit’s own emphasis on her use of *dramatica series* in the preface to her plays, it seems prudent to examine how the performative aspects of dialogue might interact with content in Hrotsvit’s plays to achieve the canoness’ authorial goals. The necessity of examining the interaction between form and content in Hrotsvit’s plays becomes even more pressing in light of the fact that, despite the alternate obscuration and denial of this basic fact within the scholarship, Hrotsvit’s prefatory materials specially outline two ways in which the canoness intends to imitate the Terentian genre: through the replication of Terence’s dialogic form and sexual content.

*Early medieval understandings of Terentian comedy—subject matter*

As has been frequently noted, Hrotsvit states in the preface to her book of plays that she is writing in the Terentian genre “so that the laudable chastity of holy virgins might be celebrated in the same kind of writing in which the disgusting deprivities of lascivious women used to be recited.”34 Importantly, this declaration does not, as many scholars have assumed, indicate that Hrotsvit intended to replace Terence’s sexual content with chaste content (an assumption, in turn, which has enabled many scholars to

discount Hrotsvit’s depiction of sexual practices as an insignificant by-product of the author’s glorification of female chastity). Indeed, Hrotsvit makes it abundantly clear that she was “compelled by this type of writing”—that is, by the Terentian genre—“[to drag] through [her] mind while writing and [to describe] according to the duty of [her] pen the illicitly detestable madness of lovers and their wickedly sweet meetings,” arguing that “if [she] neglected these things out of embarrassment, [she] could neither fulfill [her] intention, nor could she relate the praise of the innocent to the best of [her] ability.” Hrotsvit thus indicates not that she will erase Terence’s sexual content, but that she will interpret this material in a new way.

Hrotsvit’s wording also makes it clear that she considers sexual content an essential component of the Terentian genre. As Wilhelm Creizenach noted over a century ago, this statement suggests that Hrotsvit’s “view of the nature of comedy must have been formed by a theorist who, like Isidore, considered the lascivious love affair essential to the genre”; at the same time, Creizenach believed that this definition only held true for four of the canoness’ six comedies, and did not elaborate further on potential connections between Hrotsvit and Isidore on the grounds that detailed analyses of the canoness’ isolated dramatic exercises were unwarranted in a survey of the

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38 Creizenach specifically claims that “[d]ies trifft in der That für die Mehrzahl ihrer Komödien zu. . . zwei darunter behandeln die Bekehrung gefallener Mädchen, zwei andere stellen dar, wie die begehrene Liebe an der Standhaftigkeit heiliger Jungfrauen scheitert” (*Geschichte des Neueren Dramas*, 18).
development of medieval theater. But while the implications of Creizenach’s connection between Isidore and Hrotsvit have not been explored in the wider scholarship, a more thorough investigation of Isidore’s definition of Terentian comedy reveals that the entirety of Hrotsvit’s dramatic corpus accords with Isidore’s conception of the genre.

The seventh-century encyclopaedist Isidore of Seville defined classical comedy in general, and Terentian comedy in specific, in Books 8 and 18 of the *Etymologiae*, his systematic overview of the Greco-Roman cultural heritage. Regarding the style of classical comedy, Isidore comments in his section on poets in Book 8 that all comedies are composed in “the dramatic style of writing, in which the poet never speaks”; he further specifies that “the content... of the comics is derived from happy things,” that “comic writers deal with the actions of private individuals,” and that Terence in particular belongs to the class of comics “who amuse by means of a joke.” In Book 18, in a section focusing on comic writers, Isidore reiterates that “comic writers are those who describe in words and in gestures the deeds of private individuals,” adding that they invariably “portray the defiling of virgins and the love affairs of prostitutes in their

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40 Cf. Katharina Wilson, whose rejection of Creizenach’s suggestion on the grounds that he is “referring to comedy as defined by subject matter, not to Hrotsvit’s conception of the dramatic form” is insupportable given Hrotsvit’s own prefatory comments (*Ethics*, 19).


Hrotsvit’s familiarity with Isidore’s *Etymologiae* is almost certain. Manuscript evidence suggests that by the beginning of the ninth century copies of the *Etymologiae* could be found in all the major cultural centres of Europe. Moreover, thirty-seven complete or nearly complete copies of the *Etymologiae* survive which predate the tenth century, and historical documents, including a booklist dated to 833 from the cathedral library at Cologne, demonstrate that copies of Isidore’s works were available within Hrotsvit’s own region in the early medieval period. Nevertheless, the structure and content of Hrotsvit’s plays provide the most convincing evidence that Hrotsvit was familiar with Isidore’s conception of Terence. To begin, Hrotsvit quite obviously accords with Isidore’s criteria for a writer of comedy, as she explicitly writes her plays in dialogue and does not insert her own voice into these works (a technique which, in contrast, she frequently employs in her legends and epics). Likewise, Hrotsvit’s plays center on the personal choices and life paths of private individuals (though interpersonal conflict in the plays is often influenced by the political concerns of characters who hold positions of power), are filled with jokes ranging from the philosophical to the scatological, and end happily with the ascension of the holy into heaven or the entry of the converted into the Christian community. Yet most importantly, and what has not yet

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been acknowledged in the scholarship, the plots of all of Hrotsvit’s plays correspond to Isidore’s definition of comic subject matter, concentrating either on threats to the sexual integrity of virgins (as in the *Conversio Gallicani principis miliciæ*, the *Passio sanctarum virginum Agapis Chionë et Hirenië*, the *Resuscitatio Drusianë et Calimachi*, the *Lapsus et conversio Marië neptis Habrahë hermicolë*, and the *Passio sanctarum virginum Fidei Spei et Karitatis*) or on the exploits of prostitutes (as in the *Conversio Thaidis meretricis* and the *Lapsus et conversio Marië neptis Habrahë hermicolë*).

In fact, the association between the Terentian genre and sexual content was common in the early Middle Ages. Some individuals took a condemnatory stance against Terence’s humorous sexual content. We have seen, for example, that in the ninth century Paschasius Radbertus, in addition to likening the Frankish palace to a *theatrum* and comparing the social upheaval of 833 to the social instability characteristic of Terentian plots, drew upon Terence’s use of dialogue for metadramatic purposes in his life of Wala; importantly, he also appears to have drawn upon the association of Terentian comedy with sexuality by describing the palace as a “brothel in which an adulteress rules and an adulterer reigns.”47 But while Paschasius’ disapproval of Terentian content and his linking of the palatial *theatrum* with prostitution clearly aligns with the kinds of anti-theatrical sentiments expressed by patristic authors like Tertullian, his condemnatory stance does not appear to have been shared by much of the Christian elite during the late Carolingian and early Ottonian periods. For example, Ruotger, biographer of Bruno (archbishop of Cologne and uncle to Hrotsvit’s abbess Gerberga II), attempts to demonstrate the extreme holiness of his subject by pointing out that “although some,

shaking themselves with endless laughter, guffaw at the scurrilous and farcical things which were performed in comedies and tragedies by various people, [Bruno] always used to read them in a serious manner, as he reckoned the value was in the composition of the words, not the subject matter”; Ruotger’s account of the divergent reception of “scurrilous” dramatic material in Ottonian Germany clearly indicates that the archbishop’s appreciation for the style, rather than the content, of classical comedies and tragedies was a pious exception to the rule even in religious circles. Other early medieval sources also indicate that Christian audiences tended to prefer Terence’s content to his style. The declaration of a popular ninth-century commentary on Terence, for example, that “the usefulness [of Terence’s works] is entertainment, for no other type of play is as entertaining,” reminds us that early medieval audiences were just as likely to be amused by Terence’s humorous material as awed by his linguistic prowess. In Hrotsvit’s immediate cultural milieu, the work of the tenth-century bishop and legate Liutprand of Cremona specifically demonstrates not only that sexual humour was en vogue in the Ottonian courtly circles of which Hrotsvit was a part, but also that Terence was openly associated with such humour—Liutprand litters his Antapodosis with lewd anecdotes about penis size, insatiable sexual desire, and inadvertent genital

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49 Peter Dronke has made the interesting proposition that Hrotsvit’s ascription of Terence’s popularity to his sweet sermo might constitute a “teasing allusion” to Bruno’s discerning literary tastes (Women Writers, 70).
50 utilitas est delectatio, nullum enim genus carminis adeo delectabile. Commentarius recentior, in Scholia Terentiana, ed. Friedrich Schlee (Leipzig: Teubner, 1893), 165. Remigio Sabbadini refers to this text as the Expositio, a title which has been adopted more frequently in the scholarship (“Biografie e commentatori di Terenzio,” in Studi italiani di filologia classica, vol. 5 (Florence: F. le Mounier, 1897), 289–327).
and connects his own use of sexual humour with the work of Terence by directly quoting the classical playwright in the punch-line to a particularly bawdy story concerning the discovery of a missing belt tucked away in a woman’s vaginal canal.

Nevertheless, although a handful of scholars have rightfully noted that Hrotsvit imitates aspects of Terence’s sexual content (Peter Dronke, Marco Giovini, and Carole Newlands, for example, have argued that Hrotsvit imitates Terence in her depiction of prostitution, while Albrecht Classen has argued that Hrotsvit and Terence share a preoccupation with extramarital sex), none have linked this thematic similarity to the medieval definition of the Terentian genre, and most have assumed that Hrotsvit represents sexual content solely to exhibit the holiness of Hrotsvit’s chaste heroines in resisting sexual temptation. Reading Hrotsvit alongside the full range of late antique and early medieval ideas about classical comedy, however, allows us to see that Hrotsvit, far from being “disingenuous” in her claim to have imitated the Terentian genre, closely accords with the generic conventions of classical comedic writing as understood in the early medieval period. Crucially, doing so also sheds light on the precise ways in which Hrotsvit engages with medieval understandings of the structure, content, and purpose of Terentian comedy in order to achieve her authorial goals.

The wording of Hrotsvit’s claim in the beginning of her preface that Christian readers “are sexually polluted” [maculantur] by Terentian content and of her statement that Terence’s sexual subjects “are not permitted to enter into [her] hearing” [quae nec

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nuesto auditui permittuntur accommodari] suggests that the canoness is directly engaging with the enduring theologically-based antipathy toward the theater first articulated by the Christian apologist Tertullian in the second century and regularly repeated throughout the early Middle Ages, a position which condemned the theater on the grounds that Christians exposed to the representations of immoral sexual activity depicted in theatrical productions would be impelled to imitate those same behaviours themselves.\textsuperscript{56} In particular, Hrotsvit’s statement that Terence’s content is not permitted to enter into her hearing recalls Tertullian’s famous justification for condemning theatrical spectatorship on the part of Christian individuals:

\begin{quote}
Cur quae ore prolata communicant hominem, ea per aures et oculos admissa non videantur hominem communicare, cum spiritui appareant aures et oculi nec possit mundus praestari cuis apparitores inquinantur? Habes igitur et theatri interdictionem de interdictione impudicitiae.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

Why are those things that defile a man when they come out of his mouth not considered to defile him when they come in through his ears and eyes, especially since the ears and eyes serve the spirit, and the spirit cannot be clean when its servants are filthy? The theater is therefore prohibited to [Christians] because of the prohibition of sexual impurity.

Indeed, the notion that the theater sexually polluted Christians via their bodily senses continued to be reiterated throughout the early medieval period. Writing in the fifth century, for example, Salvian of Marseilles likewise maintained that it was impossible for Christians to view erotically charged theatrical performances without being personally implicated in the sexual deeds represented on stage:

\begin{quote}
In theatris vero nihil horum reatu vacat, quia et concupiscentiis animi et auditu aures et aspectu oculi polluentur: quae quidem omnia tam flagitiosa sunt, ut etiam explicare ea quisperiam atque eloqui salvo pudore non valeat. . . . Itaque in illis imaginibus fornicationum omnis omnino plebs animo fornicatur, et qui forte ad spectaculum puri venerant, de theatro adulteri revertuntur. Non enim tunc
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56} Hrotsvit, \textit{Liber secundus: praefatio}, p. 132, ll. 7–8; 16–7.

tantummodo, quando redeunt, sed etiam, quando veniunt, fornicantur; nam hoc ipso quod aliquis rem obscenam cupit, dum ad immunda properat, immundus est. 58

None of our senses escapes guilt in the theaters, because our souls are polluted through carnal desires, our ears are polluted through listening, and our eyes are polluted through the gaze—indeed, all of these things are so shameful that no one can describe them or even mention them and still retain their decency . . . . And in this way, through those representations of fornication, the whole populace commits fornication within their souls, and if by any chance some people arrive at the show chaste, they return from the theater as adulterers.

While Tertullian and Salvian were writing at historical moments when classical Roman theatrical practices remained a part of public life, their anti-theatrical ideas also held cultural currency in Hrotsvit’s own time, as evidenced by a mid-tenth-century sermon by Atto, Bishop of Vercelli. Atto, like Tertullian and Salvian before him, contends that Christians cannot be exposed to representations of sexual activity—or represent those activities themselves in the context of performance—without being tempted to engage in such behaviours themselves:

Non laetantur in theatris, ut scenici; non in epithalamiis et cantilenis, ut mimi; non in saltationibus et circo, ut histriones vel idolorum cultores, quos, heu! quidam Christiani adhuc in multis imitantur. Quid enim miserabilius senibus, quid turpius juvenibus, quid perniciosius adolescentulis, quam stupra virginum et libidines meretricum turpi gestu et blanda voce cantare, ut spectatores suos talibus insidiis ad suas provocent corruptiones? 59

Don’t delight in theaters, as actors do; don’t delight in wedding songs or old songs, as mimes do; don’t delight in dancing or in the circus, like performers or idol worshippers do—people whom— alas!—Christians still imitate in many ways! For what is more miserable for old men, or more indecent for youths, or more dangerous for adolescents, than to sing with a charming voice and with indecent movement about the defiling of virgins and the passions of whores so that, by means of such snares, they provoke their spectators into their own corruptions?

Germana Gandino has convincingly argued that Atto is referring here to actual performative practices rather than simply employing stylized classical tropes in a literary sermon, and it is worth noting that his description of these performances as involving “the

58 Salvian, De Gubernatione Dei 6.3, MGH Auct. ant. 1.1: 70.
59 Atto of Vercelli, Sermo IX. Item in Albis, PL 134: col.0844C–D.
defiling of virgins and the passions of whores” suggests that he is directly attacking the
genre of classical comedy. Importantly, one of the key differences between Atto’s
position and the position of anti-theatrical writers like Tertullian and Salvian is that Atto,
now writing in a society which has been thoroughly Christianized, not only refers to the
dangerous mimetic effect of viewing performances with sexual content, but also claims
that the performance of such content is immoral. This concern with the moral dangers of
theatrical impersonation on the part of Christians was long-lasting, and in the twelfth
century was repeatedly expressed with regard to the performance of church-sponsored
liturgical drama by members of the religious. In his De investigatione Antichristi, for
example, Gerhoh, provost of Reichersberg, warned that priests performing plays on the
topic of the Antichrist “don’t, as they assume, present the imaginary likeness of the
Antichrist, but in reality complete the sacred rites of his iniquity on his behalf;” while
Herrad, abbess of Hohenburg Abbey, complained that when “the clerical habit is
removed and the condition of a person having served in the army is adopted, with no
difference between a priest and a soldier, the house of God is confused with the blending
of lay and cleric,” specifically denouncing, among other things, the destabilizing
effects—on both viewer and performer—of the juvenile lasciviousness [juvenilis lascivia],

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61 sacerdotes . . . Antichristi . . . non, ut ipsi estimant, imaginariam simulitudinem exibent, sed in veritate . . . iniquitatis ipsius misterium pro parte sua implent. Gerhoh, De investigatione Antichristi 1.5, in MGH Ldl 3:304.
carousing \textit{[commessationes]}, drunkenness \textit{[ebrietates]}, and offensive humor \textit{[scurrilitates] and ioci inimici]} depicted by clerics within liturgical dramas.\textsuperscript{62}

Despite the persistent notion that Hrotsvit approaches Terence’s sexual content from the same kind of morally-based anti-theatrical sentiment discussed above, it is clear that Hrotsvit cannot be operating within a hermeneutic tradition that conflates hearing or thinking with doing, or performing with condoning. In point of fact, Hrotsvit quite obviously does not condone the kinds of sexual behaviour—rape, sexualized torture, incest, necrophilia—that she herself depicts in her plays. Instead, it seems more likely that Hrotsvit adopted the approach of the late antique and early medieval commentary tradition on Terence, a tradition that claimed that Terence presented a mirror of reality from which people might derive moral lessons.

In the early medieval period, marginal glosses and extended commentaries were used to illuminate the meaning of a given text—whether in terms of language, content, or historical context—for contemporary readers. As such, glosses and commentaries on Terence, whether grammatical or explanatory, remain the primary resources for the early medieval reception of Terence, providing a window into some of the ways in which early medieval audiences interpreted the classical playwright’s works. Two related commentary traditions were particularly popular in the early Middle Ages—the late-antique commentary on Terence by Aelius Donatus, the fourth-century grammarian and teacher of St Jerome (the prefatory materials to which commentary contain a life of Terence taken from Suetonius and remarks on the genre of comedy which excerpt the

work of Donatus’ near-contemporary Evanthius), and the anonymous Carolingian Expositio, which depended indirectly upon the Evanthian section of Donatus. A direct source of the eleventh-century lexicographer Papias, whose widely-influential Elementarium Doctrinae Rudimentum helped shape the view of later medieval literary theorists on the genre of comedy, the Expositio was the source of much of the information contained within Terentian scholia from the twelfth century (at which time Terence experienced a resurgence of popularity) until the fifteenth, when Donatus re-emerged as the preferred source on the classical author and to which century we can date our earliest full copy of his commentary. Nevertheless, it is clear that Donatus’ commentary was popular throughout the Middle Ages, and much of his work was integrated into early medieval glosses on Terence, including the sixth-century Scholia Bembina, the tenth-century Scholia Victoriana, the ninth- or tenth-century Scholia Parisiana, and the scholia found in Vatican Library MS lat. 3868.

While Katharina Wilson has already suggested that the canoness based her stylistic imitation of Terence on the generic criteria established within the prefatory materials to Donatus’ work, I would like to propose that Hrosvit also engaged with the late antique and early medieval commentary tradition at the level of content. Both the Expositio and the Evanthian section of Donatus’ commentary discuss the content and purpose of Terentian comedy, characterizing Terentian comedy as a “mirror” [speculum]

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63 Sabbadini dates the Expositio to the Carolingian Renaissance (“Biografi,” 327). The Expositio is Sabbadini’s term, whereas Schlee reers to the commentary in his edition of the text as the Commentarius recentior.

64 Henry Ansgar Kelly, Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 62.


that reflects the realities of social life.\textsuperscript{67} Evanthius defers to an otherwise unattested opinion of Cicero for his definition of comedy, claiming that “comedy, as Cicero said, is an imitation of life, a mirror of behaviour, and a representation of reality” \textit{[comoediam esse Cicero ait imitationem uitae, speculum consuetudinis, imaginem ueritatis]} which demonstrates to its audience “what is useful in life and what ought to be avoided” \textit{[quid sit in uita utile, quid contra euitandum].}\textsuperscript{68} The Expositio echoes these claims, but is more specific than Evanthius about the contours of the social “reality” represented in Terentian comedy, explaining that within the plays of Terence “as if in a mirror and in the form of common life, you will discover what ought to be avoided, and what ought to be attained. For morality is exposed there—the morality of various ages, as in the case of the old and the young; of the sexes, as in the case of men and women; and of rank, as in the case of servants and free people.”\textsuperscript{69} The commentary tradition thus gives Terence’s audiences the credit to determine for themselves what behaviour is commendable within Terence, and what behaviour ought to be shunned, while maintaining that the range of behaviours depicted within his plays is essentially realistic.

\textsuperscript{67} In her assessment of the links between Hrotsvit and Evanthius, Katharina Wilson ignores Evanthius’ comments on comedic content in order to focus on the structural features the late-antique grammarian associates with the genre (see \textit{Ethics}, particularly 60–72).


In her own plays, Hrotsvit likewise claims to depict lived reality—the historical exploits of Christian women—and gives her audience the credit to witness bad behaviour and to be able to identify it as such without being thoroughly implicated in the same crimes. Importantly, however, Hrotsvit challenges the pedagogical tradition’s interpretation of Terence’s depiction of reality at the level of gender. In part because of Terence’s reputation for realism as expressed within the commentary tradition, scholars have long turned to Terence for insight into ancient Roman conceptions of gender. Much of this work has concentrated on the commentaries of Donatus, which, as Dorota Dutsch has observed, are the “most important source for speech mannerisms attributed to women” in the classical period. As Dutsch has demonstrated in her study of feminine discourse in Roman New Comedy, Donatus’ remarks on feminine linguistic markers in Terence reveal a variety of cultural expectations about women—namely, that women are anxious, self-pitying, ingratiating, weak, and long-winded, traits manifested in their inability to get to the point when speaking and in their focus on personal problems, as well as in their use of specific interjections, expletives, blandishments, and expressions of fear. Crucially, despite the fact that scholars have looked to Donatus for information on Hrotsvit’s conception of the formal aspects of comedy, no one to this point has made the connection between Donatus’ preoccupation with gendered speech and behavioural expectations within Terence’s corpus and Hrotsvit’s own obvious interest in the subject of women’s behaviour. The remainder of this chapter will argue that Hrotsvit exploits the generic conventions of Terentian genre—sexual content and dialogue—in order to challenge the ideas about gender promulgated in Terence’s comedies and in Donatus’ commentary on those works.

Gender and genre in Hrotsvit’s plays

Hrotsvit’s statements on gender

Hrotsvit reveals her purpose in imitating Terence’s genre in the dedicatory letter to the unnamed male patrons of her book of plays. After thanking these men for generously taking the time to read “the little bitty work of a worthless little woman,”\(^7\) Hrotsvit informs them “this alone is my intention in writing, this alone is the cause of my sweat—that the bestower of wit might be praised more fully in me to the extent that womanly sense is believed to be slower.”\(^2\) Superficially, Hrotsvit’s statement reproduces misogynistic conceptions of women, suggesting that only a force as mighty as God can enable naturally slow and worthless little women to possess intelligence and strength. However, Hrotsvit’s use of the passive verb *creditur*, “it is thought,” when referring to women’s alleged intellectual stolidity is subversive in its presentation of female inferiority as a belief rather than a fact. Even more importantly, Hrotsvit’s overall project of glorifying God through the praise of her female self—praise that she states will necessarily be commensurate to the degree that society believes women lack moral and intellectual strength—is radical in its implication that denying women’s intellectual and spiritual potential amounts to denying the power of God. In effect, Hrotsvit states that she is imitating Terence in order to praise God through the destabilization of the behavioural expectations associated with her biological sex—in modern terms, through a destabilization of gender.

Hrotsvit describes the particular ways in which she believes her imitation of

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\(^7\) *opusculum vilis muliercule*. Hrotsvit, *Epistola eiudem ad quosdam sapientes huius libri fautores*, p. 134, ll. 10–1.

Terence will lead to the praise of God through the destabilization of gender expectations in the general preface to her book of plays. Again, Hrotsvit’s preface lays out two ways in which she intends to imitate the Terentian genre—through the use of dialogue and through the description of “the illicitly detestable madness of lovers and their wickedly sweet meetings”; again, according to Hrotsvit, she must depict this sexual content, even though “it is not permitted to enter into [her] hearing,” because it is an integral feature of the Terentian genre. But Hrotsvit also justifies her inclusion of sexual content by claiming that “the more the flatteries of the insane for the purpose of seduction are made public, the greater the glory of the supernal helper is proven to be, and the greater the victory of the triumphant, especially when feminine fragility conquers and masculine strength is subject to confusion.” Again, the majority of scholars have deduced from this statement that Hrotsvit includes sexual content in order to demonstrate the virtuous forbearance of holy virgins in the face of sexual temptation. But this interpretation is untenable in light of the actual content of Hrotsvit’s plays. Critically, with one offstage exception that ends very, very badly, Hrotsvit’s heroines are not faced with sexual temptation—they are confronted with unwanted sexual violence and exploitation. Indeed, Hrotsvit does not, as some have claimed, depict “love... in all its attractiveness,” but instead chooses source material for her plays in which female characters are faced with abandonment, incest, necrophilia, sexualized torture, prostitution, and threats of rape. Yet if we read Hrotsvit’s preface in light of her letter to her patrons, we can see that her claim to imitate Terentian content in order to demonstrate the glory of God—a glory

74 Dronke, Women Writers, 184.
especially manifested in instances in which feminine fragility conquers and masculine strength is subject to confusion—explains the mechanism by which she intends her literary project to work: Hrotsvit is arguing that her imitation of Terence’s sexual content will help her destabilize gender expectations, and that the destabilization of gender expectations demonstrates the glory of God.

The early medieval context

Importantly, Hrotsvit’s implicit argument for the social construction of gender within the prefatory materials to her book of plays goes against the grain of many early medieval theories of the nature and meaning of sex difference. Early medieval medical authors derived their ideas on sex and gender from competing classical models of sex difference—a one-sex model which saw women as incomplete men, and a two-sex model which saw women as separate from and inferior to men—and combined aspects of both models within their own analyses of the sex/gender system. While these two models differed from each other in their understanding of the sex/gender system, both classified women as inferior to men—“the one-sex model. . . through its claim of female inversion and defection from a male norm, and the two-sex model through its privileging of male difference.” Early medieval medical conceptions of the sex/gender system thus shared the common assumption that “male and female were. . . binary and hierarchical: the weak and passive female compared to the strong and active male.”

75 Joan Cadden, Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 52–3.
While early medieval medical discourse supported the idea the women were intellectually, morally, and physically inferior to men, the potential destabilization of this binary had long been a part of Christian tradition, one first articulated in Paul’s declaration to the Galatians that, for Christians, “there is no Jew or Greek, no servant or free person, no male or female, because you are all one in Jesus Christ.”\(^78\) Yet despite the intimation within Paul’s message that corporeal and social distinctions are meaningless in light of the divine revelation of Christ, for Christian exegetes, the advent of Christ destabilized the rigid dichotomy between male and female not by rendering the sex/gender system obsolete, but by enabling women to become virtual men. In his famous letter to Lucinius, for example, Jerome upheld that the pious adoption of chastity on the part of Lucinius’ wife enabled her to transform “from a woman into a man” \[^de femina virum\]\(^79\), while Ambrose maintained in his commentary on Luke that “she who does not believe is a woman and is still designated by the name of her physical sex, but she who believes becomes a perfect man.”\(^80\)

Although evidence suggests that early medieval Saxon women enjoyed a greater degree of agency than did women living in other regions, women who defied gendered expectations within tenth-century Ottonian culture also tended to be depicted as men rather than as capable women.\(^81\) Writing a few decades after Hrotsvit’s literary career flourished, for example, Thietmar of Merseberg said of Theophanu, who acted as regent of the Holy Roman Empire from 983 until her death in 991, that “although she was of the

\(^{78}\) non est Iudaeus neque Graecus non est servus neque liber non est masculus neque femina omnes enim vos unum estis in Christo Iesu. Galatians 3:28.


\(^{80}\) Quae non credit, mulier est, et adhuc corporei sexus appellatione signatur: nam quae credit, occurrit in virum perfectum. Ambrose, \[^Expositio Evangelii Secundum Lucam\], PL 15: col.1844C.

weaker sex, she watched over the defence of her son’s kingdom like a man.”

Significantly, Ottonian female rulers were sometimes referred to in official documents and personal correspondence with the masculine forms of their political titles; a prime example is Beatrice, duchess of Upper Lorraine, who was called dux (rather than ducatrix) once in a charter by Otto II in 983 and several times within the letters of Gerbert d’Aurillac, later Pope Sylvester II. Even more strikingly, female Ottonian political figures also saw fit to adopt this strategy of male identification themselves—Theophanu, for instance, called herself imperator (rather than imperatrix) and domnus (rather than domna) in a legal document from 990.

Despite the fact that women like Theophanu and Hrotsvit’s own abbess Gerberga II could wield a high degree of political power and influence—as abbess of Gandersheim, Gerberga, in fact, controlled her own standing army, could mint her own coins, and held a (non-voting) seat on the Imperial Diet—some within the early medieval church resisted such expressions of female political power, and justified their desire to exclude women from political discourse by referring to Paul’s dictum that women ought to be silent in church. In his *De ecclesiasticis disciplinis*, a canonical collection composed in the early years of the tenth century, Regino of Prüm, for example, expressed distaste for the participation of religious women in politics, a perspective which directly echoes the

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85 Theophanu, gratia divina imperator augustus... anno dominice incarnationis DCCCXC, anno vero imperi domni Theophanii imperatoris XVIII. Theophanu, “Diploma no. 2. 1 April 990,” MGH DD O III: 876. Theophanu, herself a member of the Byzantine royal family, may have picked up on such cross-gender identification in the figure of Eirene, who controlled Byzantium from 797 to 802 and who referred to herself with the masculine title of basilieus in two surviving legal documents. For more on Eirene, see Rudolf Hiestand, “Eirene basilieus—die Frau als Herrscherin im Mittelalter,” in *Der Herrscher: Leitbild und Abbild in Mittelalter und Renaissance*, ed. Hans Hecker (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1990), 253–83 and Liz James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001).
nineteenth canon of the 896 Council of Nantes and which was itself repeated in the early
eleventh century in book 8, chapter 85 of Buchard of Worms’ *Decretum*:

Cum Apostolus dicat: *Mulieres in ecclesia taceant, non enim permittitur eis loqui,*
mirum videtur quod quaedam mulierculae contra divinas humanasque leges attrita
fronte impudenter agentes, placita generalia et publicos conventus indesinenter
adeunt, et negotia regni utilitatesque reipublicae magis perturbant quam disponunt,
cum indecens sit et etiam inter barbaras gentes reprehensibile mulieres virorum
causas discutere, et quae de lanificiis suis et operibus textilibus et mulieribus inter
genitiarias suas residentes debuerant disputare, in conventu publico, ac si in curia
residentes, senatoriam sibi usurpant auctoritatem. Quae ignominiosa praesumptio
fautoribus magis imputanda videtur quam feminis. Unde, quia divinae leges, ut
supra monstratum est, hoc contradicunt, et humanae nihilominus idipsum
prohibent, ut feminae nihil aliud prosequantur in publico quam suam causam. 86

Since the apostle says *women ought to remain silent in church, for it is not permitted for
them to talk,* it seems strange that certain little women [*mulierculae*], against divine and
human laws, shamelessly going about with brazen countenances, ceaselessly visit general
councils and public assemblies, and disturb rather than settle negotiations of the kingdom
and services of the republic, even though it is indecent and also reprehensible for women
to discuss the matters of men among foreign people; and it also seems strange that
women who ought to talk about their spinning and textile work and other womanly
matters, staying in their own workrooms, instead usurp senatorial authority in the public
assembly, as if they were presiding in the curia! This presumption seems to be thought
more disgraceful for the patrons of the women than for the women themselves. Whence,
since these behaviors contradict divine laws, as demonstrated above, as well as human
laws, women ought not pursue anything in public except their personal
legal business.

Given the context of religious and political discourses on powerful women in
Ottonian Saxony, Hrotsvit’s simultaneous assertion that she is both a weak little woman
[*muliercula*] 87 and the Strong Shout of Gandersheim [*Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis*] 88
is salient; she does not need to become a man to exercise her talents, and her characters
do not need to become men to embody strength and determination in the face of danger
and conflict. As L.M.C. Weston has observed, even while Hrotsvit and her chaste female
characters resolutely demonstrate supposedly masculine qualities of sexual self-control,
assertiveness, and intelligence, they remain women throughout—the canoness does not

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86 Regino of Prüm, *De ecclesiasticis disciplinis et religione christiana, collectus,* PL 132: col.0317C–
0318A.
subscribe to “Jerome’s dictum. . . that chaste women effectively become male.” In her imitations of Terence, Hrotsvit is determined not to undo sex but the meanings ascribed to sex, demonstrating that gender is a set of behavioural expectations which has been ascribed to nature but which is actually the effect of power imbalances within patriarchal society, power imbalances which are particularly evident in the policing and performance of female sexuality within such cultures.

*Intersections of sexuality and gender in Terence and Hrotsvit*

To understand how Hrotsvit uses the framework of the Terentian genre to destabilize gender expectations, however, it is first necessary to examine how sexual content is related to gender in Terence. Classicists have long noted that Terence employs sexual content as a means of exploring the processes by which young men acquire proper elite Roman masculinity, defined primarily as the sexual and economic domination of women and other social inferiors, and characterized by the exercise of self-control. The humour of Terentian comedy is derived from the problems caused when its adolescent heroes break the rules of sexual propriety, raping or impregnating citizen girls or becoming overly involved with prostitutes, activities that threaten the social and economic statuses of the heroes’ families. Masculinity is threatened when youths go about the sexual domination of women in a way that infringes on the masculinity of other male citizens by rendering those men powerless; depriving other citizen males of the rightful power is the real crime committed by these youths—whether by denying the male guardians of their rape victims to the ability to use their female family members as

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objects of sexual exchange or by depleting their own male guardians’ economic power by overspending on prostitutes. Nevertheless, as Vincent J. Rosivach has observed, since Terence’s comedies end in the marriage of their heroes to suitable wives, “the happy endings of New Comedy are a reproduction and thus a reaffirmation of the legitimacy of the current social order.”

Moreover, while the specific way in which the youthful Terentian heroes initially engage in sexual behaviour may be threatening to their own masculinity as well as that of other men, as Sharon L. James has pointed out, “the coercive male sexuality that marks [these young men also] shows them in the process of becoming dominant men rather than remaining weak, dependent *adulescentes*,” in that their treatment of women embodies “the male sexual values that characterize Roman sexuality.” And if adult Roman masculinity is defined through social control, and in particular the sexual control of women, it is worth emphasizing that this social control is seen throughout Terence’s plays as the manifestation of a biological imperative. In act 3, scene 4 of Terence’s *Adelphoe*, for example, Hegio excuses the actions of Aeschinus, a young man who has raped one of Hegio’s female relatives, as follows: “The night, love, wine, youth induced him—it’s human!” Likewise, while Aeschinus’ adopted father Micio labels Aeschinus’ rape of a young female citizen as “a big sin,” he also refers to it as “a human one,” and asserts that “other good men have often done the same thing.”

As we have seen, Hrotsvit, like Terence, centres her plots on the defilement of virgins and the love affairs of prostitutes. But while Terence ultimately celebrates the

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acquisition of adult masculinity via the socially-acceptable sexual domination of women by men in his plays, Hrotsvit states in the preface to her book of plays that she is writing in the Terentian genre so that “the chastity of holy virgins might be celebrated,” and, as we have seen, she wishes to destabilize the binary conceptions of gender as laid out in Terence as a means of demonstrating God’s power. Importantly, Judith Butler’s account of gender and its relationship to the heterosexual matrix is useful both for thinking through the ways in which Hrotsvit’s introduction of the theme of religious chastity into the framework of the Terentian genre works to destabilize binary conceptions of gender and for understanding how that destabilization of gender works to demonstrate the glory of God. According to Butler, binary gendered behavioural expectations are rooted in what she terms the heterosexual matrix, “a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.”94 In other words, Butler suggests that the compulsory practice of heterosexuality not only supports but also necessitates binary understandings of gender in which the male/masculinity is assumed not only to be the opposite of, but also superior to, the female/femininity. All patriarchies, including the ancient Roman world in which Terence lived and in which Hrotsvit’s plays were set, as well as the canoness’ own medieval society, depend on the adherence of their subjects to this particular model of the sex/gender system, a model which both begets and legitimates the patriarchy’s refusal to grant women full access to political power and its limitation of women’s personal agency on the basis of their presumed physical and intellectual inferiority. Since patriarchy is a

political system based on men’s control of women’s bodies, patriarchy must preserve the heterosexual matrix’s biological and moral division between masculine/male and feminine/female in order to survive.

Conflict in Terence arises when this binary division is threatened by the imprudent sexual behaviour of male adolescents, but masculinity and patriarchy are affirmed not only in the nature of the sexual misdemeanors of Terentian youths, but also in the resolution of these crimes through citizen marriage. In contrast, as I will argue, Hrotsvit’s insertion of a Christian perspective into the framework of the Terentian genre destabilizes rather than reaffirms masculinity as presented in Terence and discussed in the Terentian commentary tradition, highlighting the extent to which the binary sex/gender system is predicated upon the social—and in particular the sexual—control of women, and suggesting that such a hierarchical power differential crumbles in the face of unwavering belief in the omnipotence of the divine.

Destabilizing reception: gender and genre in Hrotsvit’s Terentian plays

Again, the popular Terentian commentary known as the Expositio indicates that Terence’s representation of gendered behaviour was considered in the early medieval period to be a classic example of the playwright’s penchant for and dedication to realism, an assumption that can also be found in Aelius Donatus’ influential Commentum Terenti. As will be further discussed below, Donatus’ Terentian commentary in particular expresses detailed expectations about gendered behaviour that are not flattering to women. Since Hrotsvit almost certainly would have been exposed to such commentaries in her study of Terence, whether through personal reading or exposure to such ideas in the
classroom, it is therefore not surprising that in the prefatory materials to her book of Terentian plays Hrotsvit also signals an interest in interrogating gendered expectations and subjecting those gendered expectations to confusion. Importantly, analysis of Hrotsvit’s adaptation of her source materials with specific attention to Donatus’ claims about women’s behaviour suggests that Hrotsvit was aware of and responding to the conversations about gender taking place in the Terentian commentaries available in the tenth century. Specifically, Hrotsvit appears to adapt Christian sources whose subject matter aligns with the Isidorean definition of Roman comedy in order to undo the association between biological sex and the behaviours Donatus classified as innately feminine, implicitly suggesting that these behaviours are not related to nature but instead reflect an imbalance of power in social relations.

Most of the work on Donatus’ understanding of gender in Terence has focused on the specific lexical mannerisms he identifies as feminine in Terence’s comedies, and has sought to expand the grammarian’s observations through statistical analyses of the gendered use of these individual words and phrases in Roman New Comedy more generally.95 Although such literature has made mention of some of the behaviours identified by Donatus as typically feminine, overall the emphasis has tended to be placed on vocabulary, and especially on the gendered use of particular oaths and polite modifiers,

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the gendered distribution of the *mi*-form of address, and the distinctive interjections used by each sex.\(^96\)

Analysis of the distribution of vocabulary along sex lines in Roman comedy has been a primary way in which classical scholars have attempted to gain insight into the ways in which women spoke, or were perceived to speak, in the ancient world, and Donatus’ commentary has been an invaluable resource for the identification of this vocabulary.\(^97\) Nevertheless, an emphasis on statistical data in analyses of gendered discourse in Roman New Comedy has at times obscured the overall thrust of Donatus’ remarks. For example, recent scholars examining gendered discourse in Terence have overlooked the fact that Donatus glosses *hem* as “a feminine and matronly interjection” at *Ad Hec.* 347.\(^98\) This oversight may be attributed both to the fact that *hem* is not consistently glossed in Donatus’ commentary as feminine and to the fact that a statistical accounting of the word in the Terentian corpus indicates a predominantly male usage.\(^99\) Donatus’ gloss of *hem* as feminine, however, suggests that the grammarian was not exclusively concerned with identifying gender-specific words and phrases, but was also interested in speech as an indicator of broader patterns of gendered behaviour. This is also suggested by the fact that Donatus frequently qualifies his identification of specific words as feminine by observing that the lexical mannerism he is singling out is simply

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\(^96\) In particular, Hofmann (1950) notes that gendered linguistic differentiation in Terence seems to indicate different ways of being in the world, and that women’s language in Terence tends to cluster around expressions of subjectivity and relational speech. Dutsch includes a useful catalogue of the instances in which Hofmann discusses these issues in *Feminine Discourse*, 8–9, especially n24.

\(^97\) See, for example, Adams, “Female Speech,” 76–7, and Dutsch, *Feminine Discourse*.


\(^99\) I have counted 8 instances of the female use of *hem* in Terence and 102 instances of the male use of *hem*. While only 11% of the lines in Terence are given to women (670 out of a total 6075 lines), this nevertheless equates to a slightly higher use of the word *hem* by men at the rate of once every 52.99 lines, as compared with once every 83.75 lines for women.
one example of many similar mannerisms that mark innate femininity. For instance, commenting on *Eunuchus* 656, Donatus notes that “‘mea’ and ‘mea tu’ and ‘amabo’ and *other blandishments of this kind* are associated with women.” Likewise, in glossing Mysis’ use of the phrase *mi anime* in act 4, scene 2 of the *Andria*, Donatus characterizes “soft, feminine speech” as that which is “interwoven with many blandishments,” of which *mi anime* is but one illustration.

An awareness that Donatus is concerned not only with identifying gendered vocabulary but also, and perhaps even more significantly, with the way in which that vocabulary is indicative of broader patterns of gendered behaviour can help us understand how Hrotsvit specifically attempts to destabilize gender in her Terentian plays. As previous scholars repeatedly have pointed out, Hrotsvit’s primary mode of imitating Terence is clearly not linguistic. As such, it is not surprising that Hrotsvit does not employ many of the gendered words and phrases used by Terence and identified as such by Donatus. The exclamation *au* and the polite modifier *amabo*, cited by Donatus as markers of female speech and often discussed in studies of Terence’s gendered language due to their restriction to women in his corpus are, for example, nowhere to be found in Hrotsvit’s plays. Nevertheless, one indicator that Hrotsvit is interested in unsettling the gendered expectations expressed by Donatus is that the canoness appears to degender at least three specific linguistic markers that Donatus labels as feminine by associating them exclusively with men—the *mi*-form of address used in combination with a personal

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102 According to Adams, *amabo* is used 11 times by women in Terence, and is never used by men (“Female Speech.” 61: 65). Donatus comments on the gendered use of *amabo* at *Ad Eun.* 656.1 and *Ad Hec.* 824, and on the gendered use of *au* at *Ad And.* 751.1, *Ad And.* 781, *Ad Eun.* 680.2, and *Ad Eun.* 899.3.
name, the self-referential use of the adjective *miser, -a, -um*, and the use of the word *hem*.

Hrotsvit’s inversion of these gendered lexical mannerisms might reasonably be deemed incidental; indeed, none of these mannerisms were used exclusively by female characters in Terence. More compelling, however, is the fact that Hrotsvit persistently associates with men the behavioural mannerisms associated by Donatus with women. At multiple points throughout his commentary on Terence Donatus claims that women are long-winded, self-pitying, ingratiating, anxious, and prone to distortion—a cluster of traits that Hrotsvit’s characters (typically male, though not always) consistently display when placed in social positions of non-power. Specifically, when Hrotsvit’s male characters lose control over women—and particularly sexual control—they begin to demonstrate the array of behavioural mannerisms identified by Donatus as feminine. Crucially, the fact that these behavioural mannerisms do not occur in Hrotsvit’s hagiographical source texts suggests that Hrotsvit is purposefully attempting to destabilize Terentian masculinity by associating the behaviours labelled by Donatus as feminine with a lack of social control rather than with biology. Importantly, however, Hrotsvit’s revision of Terentian gender is more nuanced than a simple inversion of the

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103 At *Ad Eun.* 6561, Donatus refers to *mea Pythia* as a feminine blandishment. For statistics on the gendered distribution in Terence of the *mi*-form of address in combination with a personal name, see J.N. Adams, “Female Speech,” 69. In Hrotsvit’s dramatic corpus, use of the *mi*-form of address in combination with a personal name can be found at *Gallicanus*, p. 141, l. 6; *Gallicanus*, p. 154, l. 16; *Calimachus*, p. 180, l. 17; *Calimachus*, p. 190, ll. 9–10.

104 According to Donatus, *mulieres interpositio tò misera* (*Ad Hec.* 87). For statistics on the gendered distribution of the self-referential use of *miser, -a, -um* in Terence, see Adams, “Female Speech,” 73. In Hrotsvit’s dramatic corpus the lone appearance of *miser, -a, -um* in apposition to the subject of a first-person verb is found in the speech of a Roman soldier at *Gallicanus*, p. 162, l. 20.

105 Hrotsvit, *Dulcitius*, p. 175, l. 23; *Calimachus*, p. 182, l. 5; and *Abraham*, p. 201, l. 17.


107 Donatus, *Ad Ad.* 291.4.

108 Donatus, *Ad Ph.* 1005; *Ad Ad.* 289.1; *Ad Ad.* 291.4; *Ad And.* 685.1


110 Donatus, *Ad Ad.* 291.2; *Ad Ad.* 291.4.
gendered expectations put forward by Donatus. In Hrotsvit’s dramatic corpus both male and female characters embody the behavioural characteristics identified by Donatus as feminine when they misjudge the importance of social conventions in relation to Christian revelation. Overall, Hrotsvit’s dramatic corpus argues that temporal power is moot in comparison to God’s omnipotence, and suggests that the recognition of God’s power necessarily destabilizes the hierarchical social relations upon which the sex/gender binary depends.

*Conversio Gallicani principis milicię*

Hrotsvit’s bipartite play the *Conversio Gallicani principis milicię* adheres to the definition of Terentian content as outlined by Isidore, as the play’s action is set in motion by the attempted defiling of a virgin. In the first section, the pagan Roman general Gallicanus endeavors to marry Constantia, a sworn virgin, against her will, but through her prayers is instead converted to Christianity along with his daughters; the second act, meanwhile, traces the circuitous effects of Constantia’s response to Gallicanus’ sexual threats (the conversion of many, and the martyrdoms of Gallicanus, John, and Paul). 111

In Hrotsvit’s hands, Gallicanus’ attempted defiling of Constantia and its myriad ramifications become not, as in Terence, a means of manifesting masculinity, but instead a means of denaturalizing the binary sex/gender system. In particular, Hrotsvit

111 Hrotsvit is clear that Gallicanus’ abandonment of Rome is due in part to his desire to avoid seeing Constantia, whom he still lusts after and loves “more than his parents, more than his life, and more than his soul” [praebentibus, praebitu, prae anima] (Gallicanus, p. 155, ll. 13–4). Significantly, this detail does not appear in Hrotsvit’s source, the *Passio SS. Johannis et Pauli*. Hrotsvit’s Gallicanus is eventually martyred in Alexandria; John and Paul, on the other hand, are martyred after having attracted the attention of the pagan emperor Julian by “wandering around freely distributing Constantia’s wealth” [Libere vagant thesauros Constantia erogant], wealth which she would not have retained control over had she not avoided marriage (Hrotsvit, Gallicanus, p. 158, l. 9). The distribution of Constantia’s wealth by John and Paul is included in the *Passio SS. Joannis et Pauli* (Acta Sanctorum for June, vol. 7, p. 140).
strategically expands her source material to emphasize the way in which the binary sex/gender system relies on the sexual control of women by men, and to demonstrate the way in which ruptures in the fabric of the heterosexual matrix reveal that the specific lexical behaviours identified by Donatus as feminine in his commentaries on Terentian comedies are rooted not in biology but in social relations.

As the *Conversio Gallicani* opens, the emperor Constantine faces a potential political crisis as a direct result of the clash between the patriarchal power structure in which he operates and his daughter Constantia’s decision to adopt a life of Christian chastity. Although Rome is under threat from marauding Scythians, Constantine’s most powerful and effective general, Gallicanus, has to this point refused to defend the empire in its time of need. Upon being questioned by Constantine as to why he has neglected his duties, Gallicanus reveals that he has withdrawn his services as a bargaining chip, and indicates that he will resume his military position only if granted his request to receive the hand of the emperor’s virgin daughter in marriage. Here Hrotsvit strategically adapts her source material to expose the way in which patriarchal power hinges on the traffic in women, imbuing Gallicanus’ ultimatum with the rhetoric of economic exchange. In contrast to Hrotsvit’s source, which does not use the language of the market to describe Gallicanus’ request, Hrotsvit’s Gallicanus repeatedly refers to Constantia in material terms, contending his past services deserve “the highest recompense of reward” [*summam . . recompensationem mercedis*] \(^{112}\) and referring to Constantia both as a form

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\(^{112}\) Hrotsvit, *Gallicanus*, p. 137, l. 18. Both *merces* and *recompensatio* have particularly material resonances and in specific are suggestive of market exchange. Gallicanus again implicitly refers to Constantia as a “reward” (*merces*) at *Gallicanus*, p. 137, ll. 21–2. In contrast, Hrotsvit’s source does not employ the language of market exchange to describe Gallicanus’ request to marry Constantia (*Passio SS. Johannis et Pauli*, 33).
of “profit” [praemium]\(^{113}\) and “repayment” [retributio].\(^{114}\) By framing Gallicanus’ demand in economic terms, Hrotsvit explicitly highlights the fact that Constantine’s continued access to power is dependent on his ability to participate in the material exchange of women for sexual purposes. Without the ability to trade Constantia within the patriarchal system of exchange, Constantine loses the personal and political authority that marks him as male. In Hrotsvit’s hands, Constantine’s speech begins to reflect this loss of masculinity, specifically through his adoption of the kinds of lexical mannerisms associated by Donatus with women.

That Hrotsvit’s characterization of Constantine might be purposefully engaging with Donatus’ remarks on gender is perhaps most evident in act 1, scene 2 of the play, a scene which, in some ways, closely follows her source, the *Passio SS. Iohannis et Pauli*.\(^{115}\) The *Passio* describes Gallicanus as “very powerful,” and notes that his request to marry Constantia is supported by “the counts and prefects of all the magistracies together with all the people;”\(^{116}\) as a result of this pressure, Constantine becomes “completely depressed, and extremely sorrowful, knowing that his daughter, placed in a sacred way of life, could more easily be killed than conquered.”\(^{117}\) Constantia, noting her father’s concern, “[tries] to alleviate her father’s worry” with the following speech:

\[
\text{Si certissimum non haberem quod me non deserat Deus, recte formidini meae et solicitudini tuae locus aliquis cederetur. Cum vero certa sim de Deo, depone omnem solicitudinem tuam, et te daturum me illi conjugem repromite; ita ut, si Scytharum superaverit gentem, victor simul et consul me accipiat. Hujus autem sponsionis gratia duas filias suas virgines, quas ex amissa conjuge natas habet,}
\]

\(^{114}\) Hrotsvit, *Gallicanus*, p. 138, l. 2.
\(^{115}\) Hrotsvit’s source, the *Passio SS. Iohannis et Pauli*, was divided into two parts on liturgical grounds. See *Acta Sanctorum* for June, vol. 7, pp. 33–5; 140–1.
\(^{116}\) et quoniam bene erat potens, omnium potestatum Comites ac Praefecti cum omni populo Romano id fieri postulabant. *Passio SS. Iohannis et Pauli*, 33.
mecum usque ad nuptiarum diem esse permittat: secum vero Praepositum et Primicerium Joannem et Paulum esse grantanter admittat: ut ille me per meos familiars, alloqui et cognoscere valeat; et ego illius, per ejus filias, votum, Moresque et institutum cognoscam.\textsuperscript{118}

If I were not completely certain that God would not desert me, I would justifiably give way to my fear and your anxiety. But since I am certain about God, put away all your anxiety, and promise that you will give me to him as his wife—that if he conquers the Scythians, he will receive me both as a victor and as a consul. But in acknowledgment of our betrothal, let him permit his two virgin daughters, whom he had with his dead wife, to remain with me until the day of our wedding, and let him joyfully allow John the praepositus and Paul the primicerius to stay with him, so that he can get to know me through my servants, and I can learn his wishes, habits, and way of life through his daughters.

The \textit{Passio} concludes the episode at the end of Constantia’s remarks with the brief comment that “all these things were done just as Christ’s virgin ordered.”\textsuperscript{119}

Hrotsvit greatly expands this scene, particularly in terms of her development of a speaking role for the emperor. Intriguingly, Hrotsvit’s Constantine adopts the same lexical mannerisms identified by Donatus as feminine in his commentary on Terence—he is unrelentingly self-pitying, long-winded, ingratiating, and disposed to distortion.\textsuperscript{120}

“I’m overcome by anxiety of the heart, I’m afflicted by oppressive sadness,” he tells Constantia when he approaches her to discuss Gallicanus’ request.\textsuperscript{121} Pressed for clarification by his concerned daughter, Constantine launches into a long-winded explanation focusing on his own emotional state, a response so rambling, in fact, that Constantia interrupts it to encourage her father to come to the point:

\begin{verbatim}
CONSTANTINUS: Tui causa contristor.
CONSTANTIA: Mei?
CONSTANTINUS: Tui.
CONSTANTIA: Expaveo. Quid est domine mi?
CONSTANTINUS: Piget dicere ne contristeris.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Passio SS. Iohannis et Pauli}, 33.
\textsuperscript{119} Facta sunt haec omnia sicut virgo Christi disposuit. \textit{Passio SS. Johannis et Pauli}, 33.
\textsuperscript{120} As Constantine’s mother Helena makes a non-speaking appearance in the play, it can be assumed that Constantine is not an old man, and is therefore not demonstrating the \textit{senile} . . . \textit{tardiloquium} also referred to by Donatus at \textit{Ad Hec.} 741.
CONSTANTIA: Muito magis contristor si non dixeris.
CONSTANTINUS: Gallicanus dux cui frequens successus triumphorum primum inter principes dignitatis adquisivit gradum cuique ope sepissime indigemus ad defensionem patrię
CONSTANTIA: Quid ille?
CONSTANTINUS: Desiderat te sponsam habitum ire.\textsuperscript{122}

CONSTANTINE: I’m completely depressed because of you.
CONSTANTIA: Because of me?
CONSTANTINE: Because of you.
CONSTANTIA: Now I’m really scared. What is it, my lord?
CONSTANTINE: It pains me to say it because I don’t want to make you sad.
CONSTANTIA: I’ll be much sadder if you don’t tell me.
CONSTANTINE: The general Gallicanus, the frequent success of whose victories has earned him the foremost rank among the nobles and whose help we very often need for the defense of the country—
CONSTANTIA: What about him?
CONSTANTINE: He wants to marry you.

In this exchange, Constantine’s focus remains on himself—\textit{he} is sad because of Constantia; it pains \textit{him} to explain the situation to his daughter. The tendency to pity oneself while speaking, Donatus notes, “is characteristic of women,”\textsuperscript{123} as is the tendency to ramble.\textsuperscript{124} Constantia’s response to her father’s revelation, on the other hand, is direct and unequivocal—she would “rather die” than marry Gallicanus.\textsuperscript{125} Without reference to emotion, Constantia lays out a series of facts for her father, reminding him that she pursued a path of chastity with “[his] consent, and [his] permission”\textsuperscript{126} and that she will “never be able to be compelled by any kind of torture to violate the sacred oath of [her] way of life.”\textsuperscript{127} In direct contrast to her father’s lexical mannerisms, Constantia’s measured defense of her position—lacking any trace of self-pity, long-windedness, or flattery—does not align with the expectations of feminine speech put forward by Donatus.

\textsuperscript{122} Hrotsvit, \textit{Gallicanus}, p. 139, ll. 24–5; p. 140, ll. 1–10.
\textsuperscript{123} Proprium est mulierum, cum loquentur. . . se commiserari. Donatus, \textit{Ad Ad}. 291.
\textsuperscript{124} Donatus, \textit{Ad Hec}. 741.
Moreover, while Hrotsvit’s source does not comment on the root of Constantine’s anxiety, leaving open the possibility that the emperor’s inner crisis might stem from the clash between his Christian beliefs and a sense of obligation to his endangered subjects, Hrotsvit makes it clear that Constantine’s concerns are entirely rooted in self-interest:

Sed hinc coartor nimium, quia, si, quod debet fieri paterno more, te in proposito permansum ire consensero, haut lev e damnum patiar in publica re; si autem, quod absit, renitor, aeternis cruciandus poenis subiacebo.\(^{128}\)

I’m really constrained by this situation, because if I allow you to continue to go along in your way of life, which ought to happen according to ancestral custom, I would suffer great harm in matters of the state; on the other hand, if I do not yield to you, God forbid, I will be subject to the tortures of eternal punishment.

Here Constantine does not express concern about the potential repercussions of the situation on the res publica, but instead expresses alarm at the possibility of personal suffering in the political sphere [\textit{damnum patiar in publica re}]. The emperor also glosses over the ramifications of the situation for his daughter. Constantine’s references to his own constraint, suffering, and subjection reveal that he is preoccupied more with his own difficulties than with his daughter’s predicament. Importantly, this behaviour is typical of Terentian mothers, who, as Dorota Dutsch has observed, “tend to shift their attention from their children's urgent needs back to their own concerns.”\(^{129}\) Above all, however, Constantine’s remarks exhibit an inability to distinguish between significant problems (eternal damnation) and insignificant problems (worldly concerns)—a trait once again thought by Donatus to be characteristic of women.\(^{130}\) As does her model in the \textit{Passio}, Hrotsvit’s Constantia draws attention to this lack of perspective. “If I despaired of divine help aiding me,” she tells her father, “this would be the most terrible thing possible for

\(^{129}\) Dutsch, \textit{Feminine Discourse in Roman Comedy}, 112. Dutsch points to the example of Myrrhina in Terence’s \textit{Hecyra}, who worries about herself as her daughter gives birth to a child born of rape.
\(^{130}\) Nam haec omnia muliebria sunt, quibus pro malis ingentibus quasi in aceruum rediguntur et enumerantur nullius momenti querelae. Donatus \textit{Ad Ad.} 291.
me. . . . But no cause for sadness remains for one who believes in the kindness of the Lord.”

Given Hrotsvit’s clarification of Constantine’s motivations, Constantia’s statements concerning her father’s despair take on a new cast from those expressed by her precursor, serving to condemn in her father the relentless self-focus which Donatus associates with women.

Even after Constantia solves her father’s immediate dilemma by formulating a strategy to convert Gallicanus and his family while simultaneously convincing him to go to war, Constantine’s continued absorption with secular affairs leaves him in a position of vulnerability. Hrotsvit reflects this power dynamic by having Constantine continue at the scene’s conclusion to embody the kinds of behaviour that Donatus associates with women. Specifically, Constantine showers his daughter with “soft,” flattering speech, a lexical mannerism which, as we have seen, Donatus repeatedly states is characteristic of women.

“Oh daughter, daughter!” Constantine cries. “You have sweetened the bitterness of your sad father with the incredible sweetness of your speech to such an extent that, on account of this, I will never be worried by anything again!”

The emperor’s cloying exclamation, “woven with many blandishments,” is marked by the same kind of verbal excess Donatus associates with women’s speech. Constantia’s brief retort to her father’s mollis oratio, however, draws attention to this excess, marking it as other. “Non est necesse,” she tells Constantine. “That’s not necessary.”

As Sharon L. James points out, “the primary role of women of all ages, in

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131 Si enim divinum desperarem adesse auxilium mihi quam maxime mihi potissimum esset dolendum. . . .
132 Nunc autem nullus relinquitur locus mesticie presumenti de domine pietate. Hrotsvit, Gallicanus, p. 140 l. 16; p. 141, ll. 1–2, 4–5.
133 Donatus, Ad Pho. 1005; Ad Ad. 289; Ad Ad. 291; Ad Ad. 353; Ad And. 685; Ad And. 788.
135 mollis oratio et feminea multis implicata blandimentis. Donatus, Ad And. 685.
Terence’s theater, is to be subject to the urges or control of men.”\textsuperscript{135} The behaviours that Donatus designates as intrinsically feminine reflect this positionality. Specifically, Donatus associates lexical mannerisms that are relationally oriented with women. Flattery, self-pity, and loquacity are mannerisms that work to wear down the interlocutor’s defenses and create a sense of intimacy between speaker and addressee. In a patriarchal environment that denies women access to full self-determination, influencing others through relational speech becomes a means to power for women, who, because of their sex, are politically and socially marginalized. Constantia’s decision to remove herself from the heterosexual economy—a decision enabled by her recognition that secular authority is meaningless in relation to the omnipotence of the Christian God—has in turn enabled her to act outside of the binary gender expectations created and enforced by the strictures of the heterosexual matrix. Constantia’s detachment from worldly concerns means that, as she herself points out, she can no longer be controlled by others.\textsuperscript{136} Importantly, Hrotsvit draws upon the assumptions promulgated in the Commentum in Terentii comoediae in order to reflect this detachment. While the matrons, prostitutes, and female servants of Terentian comedy constantly rely on relational speech in order to forward their aims in a society that affords them no right of self-determination, Hrotsvit’s Constantia has no need to employ relational speech in order to achieve her goals. Constantine, meanwhile, flounders, having on the one hand accepted the truth of Christian doctrine, and on the other remaining deeply enmeshed in secular affairs. This fundamental insecurity, rooted in social relations, is reflected in his lexical mannerisms, mannerisms that parallel the relational speech patterns associated by

\textsuperscript{135} Sharon L. James, “Gender and Sexuality in Terence,” in A Companion to Terence, ed. Antony Augoustakis et al. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 177.

\textsuperscript{136} Nullis enim suppliciis umquam potero compelli. Hrotsvit, Gallicanus, p. 140, ll. 18–20.
Donatus with women. Hrotsvit's inversion of the specific gendered speech patterns identified by Donatus in this scene thus suggests that such lexical mannerisms are rooted in social relations and do not represent a social manifestation of a biological imperative.

*Passio sanctarum virginum Agapis Chionë et Hirenë*

Hrotsvit’s second play, the *Passio sanctarum virginum Agapis Chionë et Hirenë*, likewise adheres to Isidore’s definition of Terentian comedy, as its plot likewise pivots around the attempted defiling of virgins. The play centres upon the arrest, imprisonment, and martyrdom of three virgin sisters—Agapes, Chonia, and Hirena—living in fourth-century Thessalonica. The sisters are persecuted by government officials not simply for refusing to participate in pagan religious rites, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, for refusing to conform to imperial Roman conceptions of gender. Specifically, the play demonstrates that the binary sex/gender system as conceived in Terence and Donatus is dependent on the participation of men and women in compulsory heterosexuality, and that failure to comply destabilizes binary conceptions of gender. The play demonstrates this by destabilizing the meaning of rape in relation to masculinity as presented in Terence and by having the virgin sisters avoid behavioural mannerisms identified by Donatus as feminine while having men in positions of non-power adopt those mannerisms.

In the opening lines of the play, the emperor Diocletian attempts to convince the virgin sisters to sacrifice to the gods by using the kind of compliment-laden, wheedling speech associated by Donatus with women:
The brightness of your freeborn lineage and the fairness of your beauty require that you couple with the nobles in the palace under nuptial law, which I will approve to take place by my command if you are willing to deny Christ and bring sacrifices to our gods.

Compliments are speech acts that negotiate interpersonal relations, “[attributing] credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.”

Having hitherto failed to convince the sisters to follow Roman social conventions, Diocletian resorts to relational speech in order to gain a sense of connection, and thus of power, over the girls, a move which again suggests that what Donatus identifies as feminine lexical behavioural mannerisms are in fact lexical mannerisms associated with positions of social disadvantage. Importantly, however, these lines also encapsulate the piece’s primary ideological conflict by demonstrating the ways in which cultural institutions like religion and the law are inextricably entangled with ostensibly natural categories of gender. In Hrotsvit’s source, Diocletian frames his offer of marriage to noblemen as a means to power, telling the sisters that he will give them “husbands from [his] palace, through whom [they] can become important.”

Hrotsvit, on the other hand, erases any reference to the possibility that the institution of marriage might work as a conduit for women’s access to social power. Instead, Hrotsvit’s Diocletian defines the girls in terms of their bodies (parentalis ingenuitas and pulchritudo), and presumes that his offer of marriage will be irresistible to the young sisters due to the fact that their

139 dabo vobis maritos de palatio, per quos illustres esse possitis. De sanctis sororibus Agape, Chonia, et Irene, 248.
bodies “require” them to have sex with men in a manner sanctioned by law.\textsuperscript{140} Hrotsvit’s Diocletian thus depicts earthly marriage as an institutional state apparatus which provides a social framework for the inherent (hetero)sexual needs of women. His bribe, designed to entice the sisters to leave off the practice of a religion which does not recognize the legitimacy of his rule, is predicated on his unquestioning belief in the naturalness of the heterosexual matrix. By providing the virgin sisters something their bodies need, the emperor presumes he is making them an offer that they, as women, should be literally unable to refuse.

If compliments are themselves “cultural constructions that reflect agreed upon ways of behaving,” the negative response Diocletian’s compliments elicit from the young virgins demonstrates the extent to which the gendered expectations upon which the emperor’s compliments are predicated are themselves socially constructed.\textsuperscript{141} In both the substance and delivery of their rejection of the emperor’s offer, the young girls defy the expectations of the binary sex/gender system presented in Terentian comedy and its associated commentary tradition. Their ability to reject what their bodies are supposed to “require” and their decidedly harsh speech in framing their refusal (Chionia, for example, calls attention to Diocletian’s \textit{stultitia}, while Agapes warns that his failure to acknowledge “the status of God omnipotent” is dangerous to “[him] and the republic [he governs]”) render them incomprehensible to the emperor, who labels the sisters insane.

\textsuperscript{140} Significantly, while in the \textit{De sanctis sororibus Agape, Chonia, et Irene} Diocletian mentions the girls’ noble birth, observing that they are “from good families” [\textit{generosas}] and “born from noble stock” [\textit{nobilis ortas stirpe}], he makes no mention of their physical form (248).

[insanit; bacchor]\textsuperscript{142} and eventually orders that they be tortured for their “presumption of verbosity” [praesumptio verbositatis].\textsuperscript{143}

In framing Diocletian’s response to the sisters’ reaction to his offer, Hrotsvit makes strategic changes to the wording of her source which suggest that the emperor considers the girls’ destabilization of gendered expectations to be as much a threat to his rule as their initial refusal to sacrifice to their gods. First, Diocletian’s use of the word bacchor to describe Chionia’s behaviour—a word not used in Hrotsvit’s source—suggests that the emperor’s concern is connected to a patriarchal impulse to sexually regulate the sisters’ bodies.\textsuperscript{144} By having Diocletian associate the virgin sisters with a word that connotes the social disorder and sexual frenzy associated with the often violent Bacchic rites, Hrotsvit alludes both to the social instability engendered by the sisters’ devotion to the new religion and to the resoundingly sadomasochistic sexual dimension of their personal relationships with Christ, for whose love they desire to be “mangled by torture.”\textsuperscript{145} Like the bacchantes, whose practices were ultimately outlawed in the Roman Empire, the young sisters undermine the authority of the ideological framework upon which Roman culture is built by transferring their sexual energy onto a divine figure, a move that enables them to operate outside of the gendered expectations of that culture as


\textsuperscript{143} Hrotsvit, Dulcitius, p. 166, ll. 15–6.

\textsuperscript{144} De sanctis sororibus Agape, Chionia, et Irene, Acta Sanctorum for April, vol. 1, p. 248. In the source, Diocletian declares that Agapes is insane [insanit] and orders Chionia to removed without comment after she defends her sister against this accusation.

\textsuperscript{145} Hoc optamus hoc amplecitimur ut pro Christi amore supplitiis laceremur. Hrotsvit, Dulcitius, p. 166, ll. 17–8.
a result. Since patriarchal power depends upon the large-scale subordination and control of women on the part of men, Diocletian’s power both as a politician and as an individual is ultimately predicated upon a binary sex/gender system in which sexed bodies are given meaning through heterosexual practice, and his use of the word *bacchor* to describe Chionia’s behaviour reflects the extent to which the girls’ destabilization of gender expectations threatens that power.

Secondly, Hrotsvit makes a subtle change in her framing of Diocletian’s reasoning for torturing the girls. In Hrotsvit’s source, Diocletian responds to Hirena’s statements on the Roman gods by declaring that “these words ought to be removed with torments.” Hrotsvit’s Diocletian, on the other hand, declares that “the presumption of this verbosity ought to be removed with tortures.” Hrotsvit changes the focus of Diocletian’s grievance from the words themselves to the presumption that those words reflect, suggesting that Hrotsvit’s Diocletian is more concerned with Hirena’s refusal to submit to his authority than with her disdain for the Roman gods. In the context of Hrotsvit’s stated desire to imitate Terentian comedy, these changes are salient. If the primary role of women in Terentian comedy is to submit to the authority of men, then Hrotsvit’s virgins are radically refusing to conform to these expectations.

The destabilization of binary gender expectations continues throughout the piece. Rape is one of the primary means through which masculinity is attained and manifested in Terence. Hrotsvit strategically adapts her source for the *Passio sanctarum virginum*

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147 *Ista verba tormentis tollenda sunt.* *De sanctis sororibus Agape, Chionia, et Irene*, 248.

148 *Huius praesumptio verbositatis tollenda est suppliciis.* *Hrotsvit, Dulcitius*, p. 166, ll. 15–6.
Agapis Chionė et Hirenė to destabilize masculinity as presented in Terence and Donatus. In both the Passio and its source, Dulcitius, the Roman governor entrusted by Diocletian with torturing the girls, attempts to rape them, but, thoroughly befuddled by the grace of God, instead rapes the kitchenware in the foyer of the storage area in which the girls are being held; his intended victims, safe in an inner chamber, watch through a keyhole, laughing.\textsuperscript{149} Importantly, Hrotsvit draws attention to the importance of this scene by doubling Dulcitius’ failed penetration of the girls at the level of the physical setting. In Hrotsvit’s source, the girls are in the same space as Dulcitius when he attacks the kitchenware.\textsuperscript{150} Hrotsvit amends this to have the girls placed “in the interior chamber of the office, in the foyer of which the servants’ containers are kept.”\textsuperscript{151} Hrotsvit’s Dulcitius thus fails to penetrate \textit{[intrabo]}\textsuperscript{152} the second set of doors [an attested euphemism for external female pudenda]\textsuperscript{153} behind which the virgins have been locked, while the girls gaze at him through the cracks of the doors \textit{[rimulas], likewise an attested euphemism for the opening of the vagina]}\textsuperscript{154}.

As Hrotsvit scholars have observed, Dulcitius’ sexual assault of the pots and pans above all makes visible the objectification of women upon which rape is predicated,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The use of the metaphor of kitchen utensils to refer to female genitalia is well documented in Latin (Adams, \textit{Latin Sexual Vocabulary}, 86–9). Hrotsvit’s insertion of two additional terms in the scene—\textit{vas} and \textit{cacabus}, in addition to the \textit{olla} and \textit{sartago} of her source—may serve to multiply the euphemistic sexual references to comic effect.
\item Hrotsvit’s source mentions only that the girls were locked up in a “room” [cellam] and that “all the kitchen utensils were kept stored there in the place where they were enclosed” [in quo autem loco illae errant clauseae, Omnia utensilia culinae illic reposita habebantur]. \textit{De sanctis sororibus Agape, Chionia, et Irene}, 248.
\item On the sexual connotations of \textit{intrabo} in Latin with specific reference to the act of penetration, see Adams, \textit{Latin Sexual Vocabulary}, 176.
\item Adams, \textit{Latin Sexual Vocabulary}, 89.
\item Adams, \textit{Latin Sexual Vocabulary}, 95.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
while the girls’ witnessing of the scene effectively reverses the objectifying male gaze.  

If masculinity is manifested and attained in Terence’s comedy through rape, Dulcitius’ masculinity is obviously threatened by his inability to successfully violate his female captives. Hrotsvit signifies this loss of masculinity by having the character of Dulcitius begin after his failed attempt to rape the girls to exhibit the behavioural mannerisms associated by Donatus with women. Coated with grease and soot from his dalliance with the kitchenware, Dulcitius emerges from the vestibule completely unrecognizable to his followers; his immediate underlings flee from him, and the palace guards call him “a vile and detestable monster” before kicking him down the stairs. Humiliated by these insults, and miraculously unable to see the filth with which he is covered, Dulcitius engages in the sort of illegitimate, self-pitying complaint that Donatus reads as explicitly feminine, crying:

Ve ve quid contigit? nonne splendidissimis vestibus indutus totoque corpore videor nitidus et quicumque me aspicit velut horrible monstrum fastidit?  

Oh no, oh no, what is happening? Don’t I seem to be clothed in the most splendid garments and sparkling clean in my entire person? And yet everyone who sees me disdains me like a horrible monster!

The masculine Dulcitius has become a neutered monstrum both in his eyes and in the eyes of his fellow Roman citizens, and he displays this loss of masculinity through his lexical behaviour.

Importantly, after having been brought to his senses by his wife, Dulcitius specifically relates this neutering to his previous failure to sexually control the virgin

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156 *vile ac destabile monstrum scissis et nigellis panniculis.* Hrotsvit, *Dulcitius*, p. 169, l. 16.
157 Hrotsvit, *Dulcitius*, p. 169, l. 20; p. 170, ll. 1—3.
sisters, as evidenced by the fact that he attempts to seek revenge by ordering that “the lascivious girls be presented and publicly stripped naked, with all their clothing taken away, so that in turn they may experience what our derision is like.”\(^{158}\) The sexualized punishment that Dulcitius envisions and the sexually-charged vocabulary which he employs to describe that punishment (*lasciviae, ludibria*) demonstrates the extent to which Dulcitius links his own power with the sexual control of women.\(^{159}\) Dulcitius’ attempt to regain his sense of masculine power by sexually violating the young virgins, however, is unsuccessful. As his soldiers report, “the virgins’ clothing clings to them like skin, and the governor who urged us to strip them is snoring, immobile.”\(^{160}\) Far from reclaiming his masculinity through sexual domination, Dulcitius is rendered impotent; he “can’t be roused [*excitari*] in any way.”\(^{161}\) Diocletian’s reaction to Dulcitius’ predicament, meanwhile, confirms that the threat that the young virgins pose to Roman society is as much tied up with their destabilization of gender as it is with their refusal to worship pagan gods. “I will direct Count Sisinnius to enact vengeance,” Diocletian thunders, “lest these vile little women boast that they made sport of our gods and their worshippers with impunity.”\(^{162}\) Seeking to limit not their actions but their ability to boast of them, the emperor once more demonstrates as much concern with the potential audacity of the girls’ speech—audacity incongruous with their position as socially

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\(^{159}\) *Ludibria* is the term used by Liutprand to describe his sexual jokes, and, as Balzaretti notes, the term is related etymologically to *ludus*, which has a sexual connotation in Latin (“Liutprand,” 115n5); *ludibria* is used with a sexual connotation by Ambrose, *Epistola 5. Ambrosius Syagrio*, PL 16: col.0893A. On the sexual connotation of *ludus*, see Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 162.

\(^{160}\) vestimenta virgineis corporibus inherent velut coria sed et ipse qui nos ad exspoliandum urgebapt presertit sedendo. Hrotsvit, *Dulcitius*, p. 170, ll. 16–8.

\(^{161}\) nec ullatenus excitari potest. Hrotsvit, *Dulcitius*, p. 170, l. 18.

\(^{162}\) Sed ne viles mulierculæ iactent se impune nostris diis deorumque cultoribus illudere Sisinnium comitem dirigam ad ultionem exercendam. Hrotsvit, *Dulcitius*, p. 171, ll. 3–5.
subjugated and marginalized “little women”—as with the specifics of their behaviour. Diocletian’s use of the word *illudere* twice to characterize the girls’ treatment of Dulcitius, moreover, again suggests that the virgins’ position outside of the heterosexual matrix has destabilized masculinity by disrupting the power dynamics of rape, as *illudo* carries with it the sense of using another for sexual pleasure.\(^{163}\) Just as the girls’ witnessing of Dulcitius’ rape of the pots and pans reverses his objectifying male gaze, so too does their “making sport” (*illudo*) of Dulcitius reverse the gendered power dynamics of rape.

Like Dulcitius and Diocletian, Sisinnius, the count who ultimately orders the sisters’ deaths, defines the virgins in sexual terms (referring to them as *lascivae puelle*), and threatens Hirena in particular with sexual torture if she does not comply with his demands.\(^{164}\) “I will order you to be led to a brothel and for your body to be disgustingly defiled,” he warns her. “If you are a companion of whores, you’ll be polluted, and won’t be able to be counted among the fellowship of virgins.”\(^{165}\) Here again Hrotsvit disrupts Terentian masculinity, this time by thoroughly divesting rape of its power. “Sexual pleasure merits punishment, but compulsion merits the crown,” Hirena retorts. “It’s not an offense unless the soul consents.”\(^{166}\) If the act of rape is meaningless to Hirena in the context of her Christian faith, rape loses its function as a form of control; if Terentian masculinity is attained and manifested through the sexual control of women, Hirena’s stance radically undermines that masculinity. Sisinnius, like Diocletian and Dulcitius

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\(^{164}\) Hrotsvit, *Dulcitius*, p. 171, ll. 6–7.
\(^{165}\) Faciam te ad lupanar duci corpusque tuum coinquinari. . . . Si socia eris meretricum non poteris polluta ultra intra contubernium computari virginum. Hrotsvit, *Dulcitius*, p. 173, ll. 14–5, 18–9.
\(^{166}\) Voluptas parit poenam necessitas autem coronam nec dicitur reatus nisi quod consentit animus. Hrotsvit, *Dulcitius*, p. 173, ll. 20–1.
before him, reflects this loss of masculine power through the display of behaviours associated by Donatus with women. After Hirena temporarily escapes his clutches with God’s help, for example, Sisinnius moans in self-pity and confusion: “Oh no! I don’t know what I should do. I’ve been destroyed by the sorceries of these Christian girls!”  

The destabilization of the count’s masculinity, however, is marked even more starkly in the speech of Hirena herself. After Sisinnius fatally shoots her with an arrow (an action described using common euphemistic expressions of male sexual activity—*strenue extende arcum, iace sagittam*), Hirena makes it clear before she dies that the count’s phallic weapon is working to her advantage and not his, and that his masculinity remains destabilized:

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Infelix erubesce Sisinni erubesc teque turpiter victum ingemisce quia tenellę infantiæ virgunculę absque armorum apparatu nequivisti superare. . . . Hinc mihi quam maximum gaudendum tibi vero dolendum quia pro tui severitate malignitatis in tartara damnaberis ego autem martirii palmam virginitatisque receptura coronam.  
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Blush, Sisinnius, blush for shame and groan that you have been shamefully conquered, because you could not overcome the powerlessness of a delicate little virgin without resorting to weapons—my death is a source of joy to me, and a source of sorrow to you, because you will be damned in the underworld for the severity of your malice, but I will receive the palm of martyrdom and the crown of virginity.

*Resuscitatio Drusianæ et Calimachi*

Hrotsvit’s third play, the *Resuscitatio Drusianæ et Calimachi*, adheres to the Isidorean definition of comedy by dealing with the attempted defilement of a virgin. In the play’s title character, Hrotsvit presents her most stereotypically Terentian lover. Calimachus is an *adulescens* sexually obsessed with Drusiana, a Christian virgin living in

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168 On the widespread use of sexual metaphors from weaponry in Latin, including the imagery of the bow and arrow, see Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 19–22.
a chaste marriage with her husband Andronicus, a local prince. Like Terence’s adulescentes, Calimachus feels entitled to women’s bodies to the point of rape, but this entitlement is presented ad absurdum; not only does Calimachus threaten to rape Drusiana when she spurns his advances, but he also attempts to have sex with her corpse after her death. As in Hrotsvit’s source, the sixth-century Virtutes Iohannis, Calimachus’ assault on Drusiana’s body is interrupted by the sudden appearance of a phallic serpent that fatally poisons Fortunatus, the guard bribed by Calimachus to provide him access to Drusiana’s tomb. Calimachus experiences a vision of a divine figure ordering him to “die, so that [he] might live,” and promptly expires. The Lord then appears to Drusiana’s husband Andronicus and the apostle John, telling them that Calimachus and Drusiana are to be raised from the dead to glorify Christ’s name. John resurrects the pair, and Calimachus expresses appropriate remorse regarding his actions. Drusiana prays for Fortunatus to be resurrected so that he too might be given a second chance at repentance, but unimpressed with being brought back to life and hostile to conversion, Fortunatus quickly dies again, and the play culminates with John’s delivery of a thanksgiving prayer.

Hrotsvit destabilizes Terentian conceptions of gender in the Resuscitatio in two primary ways—first, by suggesting that the sexual control over women which defines Terentian masculinity is not compatible with a Christian worldview in its overvaluation of the temporal and the bodily over the eternal and the spiritual, and secondly, by linking the behaviours Donatus identified as feminine not with bodily sex but with social positions of non-power. To begin, Sharon L. James has observed that Terentian masculinity is defined by the belief of citizen males in their “sexual rights to the bodies of

\footnote{morere ut vivas. Hrotsvit, Calimachus, p. 188, ll. 1–2.}
others without regard for their feelings or experience. In this sense, Terentian masculinity is necessarily predicated on sexual objectification in its inherent indifference to the interiority of women and other social inferiors. Significantly, Hrotsvit reworks her source material to draw attention to the fact that the Terentian masculinity embodied by Calimachus is premised on the objectification of women. Calimachus’ description of Drusiana to his friends, an exchange that does not appear in Hrotsvit’s source text, highlights the extent of this objectification:

**Transcript:**

**CALIMACHUS:** Amo.
**AMICI:** Quid?
**CALIMACHUS:** Rem pulchram rem venustam.
**AMICI:** Nec in solo nec in omni ideo atomum quod amas per hoc nequit intellegi.
**CALIMACHUS:** Mulierem.
**AMICI:** Cum muliere dixeris omnes comprehendis.
**CALIMACHUS:** Non omnes aequaliter sed unam specialiter.
**AMICI:** Quod de subiecto dicitur non nisi de subiecto aliquo cognoscitur. Unde si velis nos enarithmum agnoscere dic primam usyam.
**CALIMACHUS:** Drusianam.

**CALIMACHUS:** I love.
**FRIENDS:** What do you love?
**CALIMACHUS:** A sweet thing; a beautiful thing.
**FRIENDS:** That’s neither one thing specifically nor everything generally—what you love can’t be understood through this kind of talk.
**CALIMACHUS:** Woman.
**FRIENDS:** When you say “woman,” you include all of them.
**CALIMACHUS:** Not all of them equally, but one especially.
**FRIENDS:** What’s being said about a subject can’t be understood without specifics. So if you want us to understand, tell us her name.
**CALIMACHUS:** Drusiana.

Calimachus’ objectification of Drusiana in this scene, most strikingly in his repeated characterization of her as “a thing” [*rem pulchram, rem venustam*], prepares the audience for his dismissive attitude toward her feelings in the next. In another exchange unique to Hrotsvit, Calimachus, after telling Drusiana that he is attracted to her solely on account of

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171 James, “Gender and Sexuality in Terence,” 183.
her beauty, repeatedly disregards her subjectivity and agency as she attempts to rebuff him:

**CALIMACHUS:** Adhuc tua parvi pendo tuique lasciviam fastidio sed te ipsum penitus sperno.

**DRUSIANA:** Nihil aliud nisi indignationem.

**CALIMACHUS:** Credo te hanc sententiam mutatum ire.

**DRUSIANA:** Non mutabo percete.

**CALIMACHUS:** Forte.173

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CALIMACHUS</th>
<th>I’m still not angry with you, maybe because you’re blushing to admit what my passion is stirring up in you.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DRUSIANA:</td>
<td>It’s just anger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALIMACHUS:</td>
<td>I think you’ll change your mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRUSIANA:</td>
<td>I definitely won’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALIMACHUS:</td>
<td>Maybe you will!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Calimachus’ failure to listen to Drusiana indicates a lack of respect for her feelings, his ultimate response to her rejection of his advances confirms that his disregard for her agency is rooted in the sense of entitlement to women’s bodies that defines Terentian masculinity, as his parting words, not found in Hrotsvit’s source, explicitly threaten the chaste woman with rape. “I will not cease, I will not stop, I will not desist until I’ve overcome you in an ambush,” he tells her.174 As James points out, Terentian youths “commit rape in a form of male mastery over a woman,” a mastery which is both the hallmark and right of Terentian masculinity.175 Calimachus’ threat succinctly articulates the power dynamics of Terentian masculinity in its implicit assertion of his right to her body.

Hrotsvit undermines the legitimacy of Terentian masculinity’s claims to power, however, by depicting necrophilia as a symbolic manifestation of the spiritual implications of the objectification of women, strategically modifying her source’s

175 James, “Gender and Sexuality in Terence,” 188.
depiction of Calimachus’ assault on Drusiana’s corpse to suggest that Terentian masculinity is built on a fetishization of the temporal that is necessarily inconsistent with the eternal and spiritual perspective of Christian ontology. For example, in creating a speaking role for the guard Fortunatus, Hrotsvit uses the character’s comments to Calimachus regarding Drusiana’s corpse to draw attention to the body’s status as a temporal object:

Corpus adhuc integrum manet ut reor quia non languore exesum. . . est. . . . Si placabis muneribus dedam illud tuis usibus. . . . Ecce corpus nec facies cadaverosa nec membra sunt tabida. Abutere ut libet.176

The body’s still fresh—I think because it wasn’t wasted away by a long illness. . . . If you throw some money my way, I’ll give it to you to screw. . . . Look at the body! The face doesn’t look dead, and its limbs aren’t rotting! Abuse it as you like!

Fortunatus’ use of the neuter “it” to refer to Drusiana’s corpse draws attention to the body as an object; while illud refers back to the neuter corpus, it also serves to erase Drusiana’s personhood, an individuality still present in Calimachus’ reference to her as “the dead woman” [mortuam]. Moreover, Fortunatus’ references to decay [nec facies cadaverosa nec membra sunt tabida] point to the body’s morbidity even while observing its saintly state of preservation.

But while Fortunatus’ comments frame Calimachus’ actions as a perverse fetishization of the temporal, Calimachus’ own comments as he prepares to rape the corpse suggest that this fetishization is tied up not so much in the “pleasure of the flesh” [carnali. . . delectatione] to which Andronicus later attributes Calimachus’ necrophilic actions, but rather to the gendered power dynamics that mark Terentian masculinity.177

“Oh Drusiana, Drusiana,” the youth exclaims before attempting to defile her corpse.

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176 Hrotsvit, Calimachus, p. 183, ll. 3–5. For the sexual charge of usus, see Adams, Latin Sexual Vocabulary, 189, and utor, 198; on the sexual sense of abutor, see also 198, referring to Genesis 19:8.

177 Hrotsvit, Calimachus, p. 185, l. 19.
“With what affection of the heart did I worship you? With what sincerity of love did I embrace you with my whole being? But you always rejected me! You always contradicted my wishes! Now it’s in my power to attack you with whatever sexual abuses I want.” Here Hrotsvit amends her source to explicitly emphasize issues of power [potestas] in relation to Calimachus’ desire, and to frame Calimachus’ necrophilac impulses as a reaction to his inability to control Drusiana while alive [abiecisti, contradixisti]. Hrotsvit thus suggests that sexual desire and rape are rooted in a desire for power and an overvaluation of the temporal that is incompatible with a worldview in which God is both eternal and omnipotent.

In the Resuscitatio, then, Hrotsvit implicitly destabilizes Terentian masculinity by revealing the temporal power on which it is predicated to be meaningless in light of Christian revelation. But in contrast to her strategy of destabilizing gender in her first two plays, Hrotsvit does not destabilize Terentian masculinity in the Resuscitatio by having men embody the lexical characteristics identified by Donatus as feminine. Instead, Hrotsvit makes strategic changes to her source’s depiction of Drusiana to suggest that the

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179 In the Virtutes Iohannis Calimachus does not frame the rape as a reassertion of masculine power: Etsi viva non voluisti coitus me cum subire consortium mortuae tibi irrogabo iniuriam. . . Quid profeceisti, infelix Drusiana, negando viva quod mortua sustinebis? Nulla certe fuisset iniuria si tua aspirasset voluntas [Though you did not wish to have sex with me while alive, I will assault your dead body. . . What good did it do you, unhappy Drusiana, refusing when you were alive what you’ll endure now that you’re dead? Certainly it wouldn’t have been an assault if your inclination had been favourable]. Virtutes Iohannis, in Acta Iohannis: Textvs alii – commentarivs indices, CCSA 2, ed. Eric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), 807.

180 A counterexample is the distraught Andronicus’ use of hem in scene 5 as he reveals news of his wife’s death to the apostle John (Hrotsvit, Calimachus, p. 182, l. 5). In this instance, Andronicus’ state of bereavement might justify his “feminine” outpouring of grief; alternatively, his use of hem might also signal his lack of control over the situation, and thus constitute further evidence of the social construction of gender.
behavioural characteristics associated by Donatus with women are in fact entirely
dependent on the speaker’s social power. In contrast to the virgins of the Conversio
Gallicani and the Passio sanctarum virginum Agapis Chionë et Hireṇ, Drusiana, like
Constantine, is a Christian whose preoccupation with secular matters renders her
vulnerable to the attendant pressures of patriarchal society, a position that Hrotsvit
reflects in the lexical mannerisms employed in Drusiana’s prayer for death.

Scholars have fundamentally disagreed on how to interpret Drusiana’s prayer for
death following Calimachus’ initial declaration of love to her. Some, like Kathryn
Gravdal, have viewed Drusiana’s request positively as “the ultimate form of resistance,”
a demonstration of “the female power to petition and the eternal and perfect justice of the
Christian God who unfailingly rewards the faithful.”181 On the other hand, Stephen
Wailes has taken a much different interpretive approach, seeing in Drusiana’s prayer
evidence of sinful despair.182 Reading the specific changes Hrotsvit makes to her
source’s version of Drusiana’s prayer alongside Donatus’ comments on gender provides
some evidence that Hrotsvit adheres to the latter view. In Hrotsvit’s source, Drusiana
prays for death as follows:

Utinam. . . nondum repatriassem, ne huius causa mali oboriretur. Si enim fuisset
repletus iste verbo dei, nunquam tantum incidisset errorem. Ego igitur causa tanti
vulneris infirmae animae fui, et ideo solve me hac vita, domine
Iesu, et ad te citius
evoca ancillam tuam.183

If only I hadn’t yet returned to my country, so that the cause of this misfortune would not
have arisen. For if he had been filled with the word of God, he would never have fallen
into such an error. I, therefore, have been the cause of a great wound to a fragile soul, and
for this reason, Lord Jesus, release me from this life, and quickly summon your
handmaiden to you.

181 Gravdal, Ravishing Maidens, 31. See also Case, “Re-Viewing Hrotsvit,” 537, and Scheck, Reform and
Resistance, 159.
183 Virtutes Iohannis, p. 804.
Importantly, Hrotsvit modifies this speech to have Drusiana display several of the specific traits Donatus suggests are inherent to the female sex:

Eh heu domine Iesu Christe quid prodest castitatis professionem subisse cum amens mea deceptus est spetie? intende domine mei timorem. Intende, quem patior dolorem. Quid mihi quid agendum sit ignoro. Si prodidero civilis per me fiet discordia. Si celavero insidiis diabolicis sine te refragari nequeo. lube me in te Christe ocius mori ne fiam in ruinam delicato iuveni.\(^\text{184}\)

Oh no, alas, Lord Jesus Christ! What use was it to have been placed under a profession of chastity, when that insane man has been beguiled by my appearance? Lord, pay attention to my fear! Pay attention to the sadness I’m suffering! I don’t know what I ought to do. If I make this known, there will be civil discord on my account. If I keep it secret, I cannot thwart a diabolical ambush without you. Command me to die quickly in you, Christ, lest I am brought to ruin by that wanton young man.

In contrast to the Drusiana of the *Virtutes Iohannis*, Hrotsvit’s Drusiana explicitly displays the fear [*mei timorem*], self-pity [*intende quem patior dolorem*], self-focus [*ne fiam in ruinam*], and anxious confusion [*quid mihi quid agendum sit ignoro*] that Donatus marks as innately feminine. Above all, however, in its questioning of the use of her profession of chastity and its contemplation of God’s absence, Drusiana’s prayer betrays a disturbing failure to accurately assess the nature and magnitude of Calimachus’ threat to her chastity, a tendency for distortion which Donatus also claims is inherent to women. Importantly, as with Constantine, all of these mannerisms are a manifestation of Drusiana’s overvaluing of the temporal over the eternal.

Indeed, the specific situation faced by Drusiana is parallel to the circumstances faced by the virgins in Hrotsvit’s first two plays. Like Drusiana, Agapes, Chionia, and Irena are threatened with rape, and, like Drusiana, Constantia courts civil discord by refusing a suitor’s sexual advances. Nevertheless, when faced with challenges comparable to those faced by Drusiana, an unyielding adherence to the eternal worldview of Christianity enables these virgins to cast aside any concerns about negative temporal

\(^{184}\) Hrotsvit, *Calimachus*, p. 181, ll. 8–15.
outcomes. Although her chastity has been put in jeopardy and the fate of the Roman Empire hangs in the balance, for example, Constantia remains calm, reminding her father that “no place for grief is left for one who trusts in the goodness of the Lord.” And when Sisinnus attempts to terrorize Hirena into submission by threatening to throw her into a brothel, the young virgin remains unperturbed, pointing out that “it’s only an offense if the soul consents.” The sworn virgins of Hrotsvit’s first two plays, then, interpret the world around them from the perspective of eternal salvation. Unmoved by all things transitory, the virgins are no longer subject to the secular social hierarchies that seek to oppress them, and their behaviour reflects this positionality. In contrast, Drusiana, like Constantine, is a Christian who remains troublingly preoccupied with worldly concerns and, ultimately uncertain as to the extent of God’s power, is herself rendered powerless. Importantly, Drusiana’s distortion of her situation recalls Donatus’ claims concerning women’s tendency “[to pile up and enumerate] complaints of no importance, as if they were enormous disasters.” While the virgins of Galicanus and Dulcitius are able to properly assess the relative importance of temporal concerns in comparison with matters of eternal salvation, Drusiana remains distressed by the prospect of inciting civil discord and worries that she will be “brought to ruin” if she is raped. Both fears expose a fundamental lack of faith, an underlying anxiety that she explicitly expresses when she states that she cannot prevent being raped without God’s help [sine te]. In this sense,

187 Nam haec omnia muliebria sunt, quibus pro malis ingentibus quasi in aceruum rediguntur et enumerantur nullius momenti querelae. Donatus, Ad Ad. 291.4. In contrast, Dorota Dutsch reads Ad Ad. 291.4 to mean that in women’s speech “the genuine reason for anguish is not merely fragmented, but is in fact replaced with a series of inconsequential concerns” and that “the woman expresses a lesser wish to substitute for her deeper desire” (Feminine Discourse, 23). Importantly, however, Donatus’ wording does indicate that the problem is one of substitution (i.e., the replacing of a significant concern with an insignificant concern) but one of distortion (i.e., the mistaking of an insignificant concern for a significant concern).
Drusiana’s sin is parallel to that of Calimachus. While Calimachus overvalues the temporal both in terms of the body and in terms of his own power, Drusiana falls into despair through a similar failure to put the temporal in proper perspective. Drusiana’s clinging to the temporal puts her in a position of powerlessness that is manifested in her speech.

*Lapsus et conversio Marię neptis Habrahę hermicолę*

In her next two plays, Hrotsvit again destabilizes Terentian masculinity, this time through plots that deal with the love affairs of prostitutes; this subject matter, like the defiling of virgins, was argued by Isidore to be constitutive of the comedic genre. The first of the two plays, *Lapsus et conversio Marię neptis Habrahę hermicолę*, loosely follows the fifth-century *Vita sanctae Mariae meretricis neptis Abrahae eremitaе.*

Abraham, a hermit, is granted custody of his seven-year-old orphaned niece, Maria. The hermit and his friend, Effrem, decide the child should be enclosed, and she readily agrees, having been promised that doing so will enable her to traverse the circle of the zodiac to marry Christ. That Maria’s education on the meaning of chastity is somewhat lacking is indicated by the fact that as an adult Maria runs off with a man who has pretended to be a monk and loses her virginity to him. She immediately regrets her actions, and, despairing of divine forgiveness, turns to prostitution. When Maria’s uncle learns of her location, he disguises himself as a suitor and sets out to bring her back to the fold. The disguised hermit hires his niece for the evening from her pimp, only revealing his true identity as she begins to kiss him. After a lecture from her uncle on the folly of lustfulness and

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188 *Vita sanctae Mariae meretricis*, PL 73, col.0651D–0660C. The vita of Maria is extracted from the *Vita sancti Abrahae*, attributed to the fourth-century deacon Ephrem.
despair, Maria repents and voluntarily returns to her enclosure, where she dons a hair shirt and lives a life of indefatigable abstinence.

From the play’s outset, Hrotsvit problematizes Terentian masculinity in her depictions of the hermits Abraham and Effrem.\(^{189}\) While adult men in Terence are no longer defined through active sexuality, as are the still developing comic *adulescentes*, they are, nevertheless, still governed by the norms of masculinity, defined as control over their families, women, and other social inferiors; this control over family is often manifested through a preoccupation with the arrangement of suitable marriages for their dependents.\(^{190}\) As the *Lapsus et conversio Mariae* opens, Abraham is occupied by these same concerns, consumed specifically by his desire to police the sexuality of his seven-year-old ward and to betroth her to the only man whom he considers an acceptable groom—Christ. As Abraham explains to his fellow hermit, Effrem:

> Quiddam agendum mihi exestuat mente. . . . Est mihi neptis tenella. . . cuiusque causa continua sollicitudine fatigor. . . . Id scilicet curo ne inmesa eius serenitas pulchritudinis alicuius obfuscetur sorde coinquinationis. Exaestuo mente gestiens illam Christo desponsari.\(^{191}\)

There is something I need to do which is seething in my mind. . . . I have a young niece. . . on whose account I am worn out by continual worry. . . . My concern is this: that the immense fairness of her beauty might be darkened by the filth of some sexual pollution. . . . I’m seething in my mind, passionately desiring to betroth her to Christ.

Abraham’s eroticized language reveals a highly charged libidinal investment in the control of female bodies that is not present in the source text.\(^{192}\) The hermit describes his young niece’s body in sexualized terms, drawing attention to her physical form and

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\(^{189}\) The character of Effrem does not participate in the action of the *Vita sanctae Mariae*, although Maria mentions him once (col.0654A) and Abraham mentions him twice (col.0657B–C).

\(^{190}\) On gender and the *senex* in Terentian comedy, see James, “Gender and sexuality in Terence,” 178–82.


\(^{192}\) Compare Hrotsvit’s source: Abraham simply “saw her, and ordered her to be enclosed in a space adjacent to his cell” [eam senior cerneret, in cella sua exteriori jubesendi]. *Vita sanctae Mariae*, col.0652D.
imagining what might happen to her body sexually [pulchritudo, sordes, coinquinatio].^193

The hermit also twice describes himself as “burning” [exaestuo] with anxiety over his niece’s sexual future, an erotically-charged word that Hrotsvit uses in the Passio sanctarum virginum Agapis, Chionię, et Hirenę to describe Dulcitius’ desire to have sex with the trio of sisters.^194

At first, Effrem recognizes that Abraham’s anxiety over Maria bespeaks an unchristian preoccupation with worldly concerns. “What does it have to do with you, a conqueror of the world and its cares?” he questions his friend.^195 But when Abraham specifies that his niece is beautiful and that he is concerned with controlling her sexuality, Effrem declares his fellow hermit’s impulses to be “laudable” and ventures forth with him to convince Maria to commit to a life of virginity.^196 Effrem’s tactics of persuasion in the play’s second scene, moreover, directly reveal his own libidinal investment in controlling Maria’s sexuality. He implies to the young girl that she can reach heaven only “with the integrity of her body undiminished” [Illibata corporis integritate]^197 and, more tellingly, in his address to her elaborates not on the theological underpinnings of chastity but on the sexual rewards she will reap in heaven if she remains pure:

Nam si incorrupta et virgo permanebis angelis die fies aequalis quibus tandem stipata gravi corporis onere abiecto pertransies aera supergradieris aera instabilemque planetarum et cursum perlustrans solis ducta per semitas zodiacum percurrres circulum nec subsistendo temperabis gressum donec iungaris amplexibus filii virginis in lucifluo thalamo sui genitricis.^198

^194 Exaestuo illas ad mei amorem trahere. Hrotsvit, Dulcitius, p. 167, l. 9.
^195 Et quid tibi triumphator saeculi cum curis mundi? Hrotsvit, Abraham, p. 196, ll. 7–8.
^196 Laudabile. Hrotsvit, Abraham, p. 197, l. 1.
^197 Hrotsvit, Abraham, p. 198, l. 9.
If you remain intact and a virgin, you will become equal to the angels of God, and, finally surrounded by them after you have cast aside the heavy weight of your body, you will pass right through the atmosphere, and advance through the ether, and wandering through the unstable course of the sun and planets, having been led through the paths, you will race across the circle of the zodiac, and you will not temper your step by stopping until you are joined to the embraces of the son of the virgin in the light-streaming bridal bed of his mother.

While Effrem claims that Maria will cast aside her body’s weight after death, his description of the experience of heaven nevertheless is expressed entirely in physical terms; he describes her journey through the stars in terms of bodily motion, and envisions her interactions with Christ as physical—and explicitly sexual—encounters [*iungarīs amplexibus*]. \(^{199}\) In these first two scenes, then, Hrotsvit presents, as Regula Evitt Meyers has observed, “an ambivalent portrait of Abraham and Effrem who come across as co-conspirators obsessed with controlling Mary’s body and procuring her inviolability.” \(^{200}\)

But while Meyer ultimately argues that the hermits’ behaviour communicates their incestuous desire for Maria, the hermits’ preoccupation with controlling Maria’s sexuality can also be viewed as a commentary on Terentian masculinity’s libidinal investment in the domination of women’s bodies. \(^{201}\) Such a reading is supported by the hermits’ reaction to losing control over Maria’s body in the play’s third scene, set twenty years later. Upon discovering that Maria has fled her enclosure and lost her virginity, the hermits begin to exhibit behavioural characteristics which Donatus associated with women, focusing on their own suffering, exaggerating their problems, expressing fear and sadness, and rambling. When Abraham rushes to tell Effrem of Maria’s fall from

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\(^{199}\) For the use of *iungo* to describe intercourse, see Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 179; for the euphemistic use of *amplector* and its derivatives to describe the same, see Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 181. The sexual connotations of the vocabulary used in Effrem’s description of Maria’s relationship to Christ are made explicit when Abraham, disguised as a brothel patron, later employs the word *iungo* to describe his desire to have sex with Maria (*Hrotsvit, Abraham*, p. 209, l. 12).


grace, for example, he opens with a circuitous speech that concentrates on his personal suffering:

**ABRAHAM:** Frater Effrem si quid mihi utriusque casu fortunę inerro tur te primum adeo te solum consulo unde ne sis adversus querimonìę quam prosequeor sed fer opem dolori quem patior.

**EFFREM:** Abraham Abraham quid pateris? cur plus licito contristaris?

**ABRAHAM:** Incomparabili s luctus mihi contiguit intolerabilis dolor me afficit.

**EFFREM:** Ne fatiga me longo verborum circui tione sed quid pateris expone.

**ABRAHAM:** Maria mis optima filia quam per bis bina lustra summa diligentia nutriti summa solertia instruxi.

**EFFREM:** Quid illa?

**ABRAHAM:** Ei mihi perit.

In this exchange Effrem draws attention to the very aspects of his friend’s speech that accord with Donatus’ comments on women’s linguistic behaviour, criticizing Abraham’s roundabout way of communicating [*longa verborum circu tione*] and condemning the intensity of his emotion as both excessive and unlawful for one who has supposedly renounced the secular world [*plus licito, numquam fuit fas*]. But once Abraham has specified that his concern is with Maria’s loss of virginity, Effrem reveals himself to be

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203 That the *tardiloquium* exhibited by Abraham is indicative of a feminized state and not his old age is suggested both by the fact that Effrem calls attention to this behaviour and by the fact that in the following scenes Abraham has no trouble coming to the point. On Donatus’ link to *tardiloquium* as a characteristic of the elderly, see *Ad Hec.* 741.
as affected by the world outside his cell as is his fellow hermit, and begins, like Abraham, to embody “feminine” lexical mannerisms, including the employment of interjections denoting sorrow and fear, a focus on his own suffering, and a proclivity for exaggerating his troubles. “My entire body’s disturbed; all my limbs are enervated!” groans Effrem. “Alas! What a grave loss. . . . Oh, a victory equal to this among the rank of hermits has been hitherto unaccustomed for evil spirits!” “We are now the property of demons,” Abraham agrees.204

That Effrem can so easily cast aside his own admonishments about the dangers of worldly engagement when Maria’s chastity is in question suggests that he, like Abraham, has failed to recognize the extent to which his actions are shaped by a continued subscription to the assumptions and demands of the heterosexual matrix. Although their adoption of chastity and their commitment to lives of solitary devotion ideally ought to sever their ties to patriarchal society and its attendant pressures, in practice both Abraham and Effrem remain so thoroughly invested in maintaining a masculine identity defined by the control of women’s bodies that they support the breaking of religious vows in order to do so. When Abraham announces that as soon as he locates Mary, he will visit her “disguised as a lover”205 and will be open to eating meat and drinking wine to maintain the charade, for example, Effrem assures him that “one who, descending from the rigor of a strict way of life for a time, does not disdain to become like weaker people so that he

might more effectively recall an errant soul is not considered guilty of a violation in [Christ’s] most discerning examination.”\(^{206}\)

But while a similar justification for Abraham’s breaking of his vows can be found in the *Vita sanctae Mariae*, Hrotsvit makes subtle changes to her source material that raise the possibility that the motivations of Hrotsvit’s Abraham may not be as pure as Effrem’s confident statement suggests.\(^ {207}\) Significantly, in the *Vita sanctae Mariae*, Abraham does not decide to seek out his niece in disguise until after he has found out that she is living in a brothel; even then, the *Vita sanctae Mariae* does not explicitly refer to Abraham’s costume as that of a lover, but instead states that he dresses as a soldier, “just like someone desiring to explore a country or a town dresses in local garb so he won’t stand out.”\(^ {208}\) In contrast, Hrotsvit’s Abraham makes the decision to visit Maria dressed in the guise of a lover *before* he finds out that she has become a prostitute. Indeed, when he first formulates his plan, Abraham has only been told that Maria, despairing of forgiveness after her loss of virginity, has “devoted herself to vanity,” a phrase which the hermit twice repeats in his lament, and that indicates merely that Maria has entered the secular world.\(^ {209}\) Indeed, two years after this conversation, Abraham is clearly shocked when informed that his niece has become a prostitute:

**ABRAHAM:** Dic obsecro.

\(^{206}\) Nec in discreetissimo eius examine reus praevaricationis habetur qui a strictioris rigore conversationis ad tempus descendingo imbecillioribus assimilari non respuit quo efficatius animam revocet quæ erravit. Hrotsvit, *Abraham*, p. 204, ll. 13–7.


\(^{208}\) Tanquam quispiam patriam cuiuslibet vel civitatem cupiens explorare, habitum incolarum loci illius, ne facile agnoscatur, assumit. *Vita sanctae Mariae*, col.0655A–B.

\(^{209}\) vanitatiique elegit deservire (Hrotsvit, *Abraham*, p. 201, l. 16); ipsamque vanitati dixerunt deservire (Hrotsvit, *Abraham*, p. 203, ll. 17–8).
AMICUS: In domo cuiusdam lenonis habitationem elegit qui tenello amore illam colit. Nec frustra nam omni die non modica illi pecinia ab eius amatoribus adducitur.

ABRAHAM: A Marię amatoribus?

AMICUS: Ab ipsis.

Abraham: Qui sunt eius amatores?

AMICUS: Perplures.

ABRAHAM: Ei mihi O bone Iesu quid hoc monstri est quod hanc quam tibi sponsam nutrivi alienos amatores audio sequi.

ABRAHAM: Tell me where she is, I beg you.

FRIEND: She chose to live in the home of a certain pimp, who takes care of her with tender love—and not for nothing, because every day a huge amount of money is brought to him by her lovers.

ABRAHAM: By Maria’s lovers?

FRIEND: By her lovers.

ABRAHAM: Who are her lovers?

FRIEND: There are a lot of them.

ABRAHAM: Woe to me, oh good Jesus! What type of evil omen is this that I hear that she whom I raised to be your spouse has other lovers?

While in the “Vita” Abraham disguises himself under duress, knowing that this is the only way he will be granted access by to Maria, Hrotsvit’s Abraham decides to approach his niece as an amator before he knows that doing so will be necessary to see her, suggesting, again, an obsession not simply with remedying her fall from grace but with his lack of sexual control over his young niece’s body.

Although Hrotsvit closely follows the plot of the Vita sanctae Mariae in her description of Abraham’s experience at the brothel, she makes strategic changes to her source material that suggest she is interested in exposing Terentian masculinity’s libidinal investment in controlling women’s bodies. To begin, Hrotsvit transforms Abraham’s disguise from that of a soldier to that of Terentian adulescens; indeed, Abraham himself describes his behaviour as that of a youth, declaring that to ensure that Maria does not recognize him “now, now it is necessary to pretend, now it is necessary to press on with

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jokes like a lascivious young man.” Importantly, however, as is shown through a comparison with Hrotsvit’s source text, the extent of Abraham’s sexualized performance is unnecessary, suggesting that more than circumstantial exigency may be at play in his actions.

In Hrotsvit’s source, the hermit’s statements regarding his desire to see Maria work on two levels. While Abraham allows the brothel owner to assume that he has come to see Maria out of lust, he never directly states that this is the case. “I heard . . . that you have the best girl, whom, if you allow it, I would very much like to see,” Abraham tells the brothel owner. “I ask . . . that you produce her presence for me, so that I could eat with her today, for according to rumour I’ve found this girl to be much praised.” Importantly, although the brothel owner clearly takes Abraham’s intentions to be sexual, Abraham’s words are not; the hermit refers to Maria only as “the best girl” [puellam optimam] and remains silent as to the grounds on which he’s heard her praised by others. Later on in the text, the disguised Abraham’s declaration that he “came a long way for the love of her” is likewise ambiguous, seeming to confirm his sexual motivations to his fellow characters on the one hand while revealing his sacred mission to the readers of the vita on the other.

In contrast, Hrotsvit’s Abraham explicitly states that he has come to see Maria for sexual purposes, focusing both on her physical form and his desire for her throughout his stay at the brothel. Referring to Maria as an “extremely beautiful girl” [praepulchra . . .

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211 Nunc nunc est simulandum nunc lascivientis more pueri ioci instandum. On the sexual force of iocus, see Adams, Latin Sexual Vocabulary, 161–2.
212 Audivi . . . quod habes puellam optimam; quam si juberes, libentissime perviderem . . . Quaes. . . ut mihi praeuentiam ejus exhibes, ut possim cum ea hodie epulari, multum namque ex auditu comperit ipsam laudari puellam. Vita sanctae Mariae, col.0655C.
213 longi namque itineris intervalllo, amore ejus adveni. Vita sanctae Mariae, col.0656B.
puella], Hrotsvit’s Abraham tells the brothel owner that he has come “because [he] is enticed by the possibility of perceiving one whose beauty [he] has so often heard praised by so many,” and that, as a result of the reports of her physical attractiveness, he is “burning with love for her” [ardeo in eius amore]. Hrotsvit also makes Abraham demand Maria’s sexual attention when he actually meets her. Although the vita implies that it is the unknowing Maria who instigates the physical interaction between herself and Abraham, Hrotsvit has the hermit deliberately seek out sexual contact with his niece. Abraham orders Maria to “come and give [him] a kiss,” and when Maria responds that “not only will [she] pour out sweet kisses, but also stroke [his] old neck with constant embraces,” he affirms that “that’s what [he wants].” Finally, Hrotsvit makes Abraham display sexual aggression in his response to Maria’s public breakdown. In both the vita and the Lapsus et conversio Mariae, Maria begins to sob when she embraces her uncle, having sensed the scent of the holiness emanating from his body. Significantly, the vita’s Abraham takes a gentle approach to calming down his niece while remaining in character; “how, when we are partaking in joy, did you come to recall your sins?” he asks her. Hrotsvit’s Abraham, on the other, uses this opportunity to drive home once again his sexual intentions. “This is not a suitable place for a complaint, where guests unite in sexual intercourse,” he huffs. “I didn’t come here to lament your sins with you; I came

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216 Ad haec beatus senior, ne agnosceretur, veluti cum quadam serenitate ait ad eam: Modo cum laetitiae nos intersumus, tu peccata tua commemorare venisti? Vita sanctae Mariae, col.0656A.
here to have sex with you.” If Abraham’s adoption of the guise of an amator even before his discovery that Maria has become a prostitute suggests that his ultimate goal is to regain control over Maria’s sexuality, his over-the-top performance of Terentian youth masculinity also may be read as a sign of his libidinal investment in reasserting his masculine domination over his niece’s body.

In both Hrotsvit’s source and in her play, after Abraham finally gets Maria alone, he reveals his identity, convinces her that her sins can be forgiven, and leads her back to the hermitage to embrace an ascetic path once more. Again, however, Hrotsvit makes subtle changes to her source material in this scene of reconciliation that suggest that Abraham’s concern for his niece is not only rooted in an altruistic impulse to bring back a lost sheep to the Christian fold, but also in a personal desire to regain control over his niece’s body. When Hrotsvit’s Abraham discloses his true identity to Maria, for example, he describes himself as “the one who betrothed you to the only begotten son of the celestial king.” By including this detail, not found in the vita, Hrotsvit’s Abraham positions himself as a Terentian father, whose masculinity is defined in part by the arrangement of suitable marriages for his dependents; the comment also reveals an assumption that it is Abraham who rightfully controls Maria’s sexuality. In addition, Hrotsvit stresses Abraham’s obsession with controlling Maria’s body by having him, in contrast to the Abraham of her source, link his love for Maria to her willingness to obey him. In both the vita and the play, Abraham’s offer to take responsibility for Maria’s sin

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is what finally enables her to leave off her despair. But while the Maria of Hrotsvit’s source reacts to her uncle’s offer by proclaiming her repentence and praising her uncle’s compassion, Hrotsvit’s Maria responds by explicitly resubmitting to his control. “In no way do I struggle against your wishes, but I submissively embrace what you order,” she tells him. “Now I believe you are truly mine, the daughter I raised,” Abraham answers her. “Now I believe you are worthy of being loved above all others.” Here Hrotsvit’s Abraham clearly links his estimation of Maria’s worthiness to her willingness to be controlled, an element that is entirely absent from her source material, and which again suggests that the hermit’s motivations may be at least partially grounded in a desire to reclaim his masculine domination of his niece’s body.

Finally, in the play’s closing scene, Hrotsvit also renders Abraham’s motivations more ambiguous than those of vita’s Abraham. After Maria has been re-enclosed and has begun her penitence, Abraham visits Effrem to provide his friend with an update that stresses his own role in his niece’s conversion and his control over her body, elements that are, again, missing in the description of Maria’s penitence in the vita. Indeed, when Hrotsvit’s Abraham emphasizes his own role in redeeming Maria, telling Effrem that “I certainly got her, and, rejoicing, I led her back to the fold,” Effrem’s response suggests that Abraham’s self-focus may be slightly inappropriate. “I believe that it happened through the grace of divine visitation,” he counters. Even more tellingly, however, Hrotsvit’s Abraham celebrates his control over Maria’s penitence. In the vita, Maria

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\(^{219}\) Super me... sit iniquitas tua (Vita sanctae Mariae, col.0657C); In me sit iniquitas tua (Hrotsvit, Abraham, p. 213, l. 9).

\(^{220}\) MARIA: In nullo umquam tui renitor votis sed que jubes obtemperanter amplector. ABRAHAM: Nunc fateor te vere meam quam nutriti filiam nunc censeo te prae omnibus fore diligendam. Hrotsvit, Abraham, p. 213, ll. 12–5.

appears to be in charge of her own penitence; in any event, any outside direction she
might receive is left unmentioned. But in Hrotsvit’s play it is clear that Abraham is in
charge. As Abraham tells Effrem, Maria orders her life “according to my wishes. . . .
Whatever I propose she ought to do, however difficult, however serious, she never fails to
submit.” Abraham thus positions himself as in charge of Maria’s “tender body"
[corpus tenerum]—a body that he specifies is tormented [macerata] and suffers [pati]
because of its submission to the authority of the soul [animę . . . imperium]. Abraham’s
continued focus on controlling Maria’s body throughout the play, particularly in light of
the “feminine” behavioural mannerisms he and Effrem display when faced with the loss
of that control and other changes Hrotsvit makes to her source text, suggests that Hrotsvit
is engaging with Terentian ideas of masculinity, and problematizing adherence to secular
ideas of masculinity in a Christian context.

Conversio Thaidis meretricis

The Conversio Thaidis meretricis, based on the sixth- or seventh-century Vita
sanctae Thaisis, centers on the conversion of the prostitute Thais by the hermit Pafnutius,
her subsequent enclosure as a penitent, and her eventual death. While Pafnutius, like the
character of Abraham in Hrotsvit’s Lapsus et conversio Marię, is a hermit who, in an
effort to morally redeem a prostitute, problematically gains an audience with his target by
disguising himself as a potential lover, the majority of scholars have viewed Pafnutius’
interest in Thais as an expression of his principled righteousness, and his sexual ruse as

222 Iuxta meum velle. . . . Quicquid ipsi agendum proposui quamvis difficile quamvis grave haut abtrogavit
223 Nam induta cilicio continuaque vigiiarum et ieiunii exercitacione macerata artissimę legis observatione
corpus tenerum animę cogit pati imperium. Hrotsvit, Abraham, p. 216, ll. 6–8.
ethical in the context of his larger Christian mission. Nevertheless, attention to Hrotsvit’s specific adaptation of her source material in relation to the gendered tropes of Terentian theater suggests that Pafnutius’ motivations may be more ambiguous than previously assumed. Indeed, a closer reading reveals that Pafnutius’ actions appear to be driven less by Christian altruism than by a discomfort with the way in which Thais destabilizes the foundational tenets of Terentian masculinity, a social ideology to which the hermit, ostensibly removed from worldly concerns, latently adheres.

The play opens with Pafnutius’ concerned students questioning their mentor as to why his countenance, usually so serene, now appears troubled. Pafnutius responds that his “countenance is dark because [his] heart is depressed,” and somewhat obliquely cites the existence of free will as the source of his existential torment. Specifically, the hermit links his depression to his determination that the commitment of sin constitutes “an insult to the Creator,” although he simultaneously acknowledges that God’s “invulnerable majesty cannot be affected by insults” and that free will exists because “it pleases the Creator.” Despite this recognition, however, Pafnutius is unable to set aside his conviction that the exercise of free will constitutes an outrage to divine sovereignty, and in the end resorts to arguing with hypotheticals to justify his sense of indignation on God’s behalf. “If I may transfer our fragility to God metaphorically,” Pafnutius asks his students, “what greater insult can be related than that [humankind]...
alone should fight against His power, under whose governance the greater world is willingly subjected?  

The hermit’s thought experiment, a troubling conflation of his own concerns with those of God, reveals a deep-seated anxiety about the limits of control. Importantly, as Pafnutius himself reveals, this anxiety is explicitly gendered. When pressed by his students to provide more details about the root of his sadness, Pafnutius explains that his distress has directly arisen from a contemplation of the socially destabilizing effects of the local prostitute Thais’ professional success:

non dignatur cum paucis ad interitum tendere sed prompta est omnes lenociniis suę formę illicere secumque ad interitum trahere. . . . Nec solum nugaces vilitatem suae famililariis rei dissipant illam colendo sed etiam praepotentes viri pretiosę varietatem suppellectilis pessumda non absque sui damno hac ditando. . . . Greges amatorum ad illam confluent. . . . Qui amentes dum ceco corde quis illam adeat contendunt convitia congerunt. . . . Deinde into certamine nunc ora naresque pugnis frangendo nunc armis vicissim eiciendo decurentis illuvię sanguinis madefaciunt limina lupanaris. . . . Hęc iniuria quam deflevi factoris hęc est causa mei doloris.  

She does not condescend to strive toward annihilation with a few men, but instead is eager to entice all men with the allurements of her form and to drag them with her to annihilation. . . . Not only the inconsequential squander the meagreness of their property in worshipping her, but very powerful men also do away with a variety of expensive household goods in enriching her, and not without financial damage. . . . Herds of lovers flock to her. . . . Insane, they pile abuses on each other while they argue with confused minds about who might visit her. . . . Then, with a fight having broken out, now by shattering mouths and noses with blows, now by flinging weapons at each other, they soak the entrance of the brothel with the filth of rushing blood. . . . This is the insult against the Creator about which I wept; this is the cause of my sadness.

As does her source, Hrotsvit stresses here the destructive economic and social impact of Thais’ business. Yet while the source describes Thais’ patrons simply as “many men” [multi], Hrotsvit draws social distinctions between the lovers which have particular

229 ut usum nostrę fragilitatis metaforicę transferam in deum quę maior iniuria dici potest quam quod eius imperio cuius gubernaculis maior mundus obtemperanter subditur solus minor contraluctetur? Hrotsvit, Pafnutius, p. 219, ll. 2–5.
gendered implications in the context of Terentian theater.²³¹ Hrotsvit makes it clear that the *amatores* who frequent Thais are not just the *iuvenes* who later lead Pafnutius to Thais’ door—they are also “very powerful men” *praepotentes viri*, examples of the Terentian *paterfamilias* whose gender role, as Sharon L. James has pointed out, “is defined by properties and by mastery over his surrounding and subordinates.”²³² Hrotsvit’s Thais thus explicitly threatens Terentian masculinity not simply through the financial pressures she exerts on comic *adulescentes*, as is expected in Terentian theater, but more subversively through her economic domination of adult men, whose masculinity is determined both by their financial power and by their sexual control of women.

In other ways, too, the impact of Hrotsvit’s Thais on gender relations differs considerably from that of Terence’s *bona meretrices*. Although Terentian prostitutes financially threaten the families of the young men who court them, they nevertheless serve as mechanisms for the reaffirmation of citizen values by helping to reunite families and establish suitable marriages.²³³ In contrast, Thais’ presence leads not to the creation of social connections that reinforce masculine control over the family, but to a dismantling of those connections and that control through the instigation of male-on-male violence and, potentially, through gender-destabilizing sexual activity, as indicated by the *iuvenes’* suggestive proposition to Pafnutius that they visit Thais as a group.²³⁴ If in many ways Hrotsvit’s independent prostitute is one of the most Terentian characters of her dramatic corpus in terms of her name and profession, the canoness has also made the

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²³¹ *multi propter eam vendentes substantiam suam ad ultimam pervenirent paupertatem; sed et lites inter se conserentibus amatoribus suis, frequenter sanguine juvenum puellae limen replebatur. Vita sanctae Thaisis meretricis*, PL 73: col.0661A.
²³² James, “Gender and Sexuality in Terence,” 179.
²³³ James, “Gender and sexuality in Terence,” 190–1.
²³⁴ Si placet tecum peregmus. Hrotsvit, *Pafnutius*, p. 228, l. 15.
character of Thais more explicitly threatening to Terentian masculinity than any of her
typological predecessors.

Importantly, Hrotsvit also emphasizes Thais’ destabilization of masculine power
by having Pafnutius adopt the behavioural mannerisms Donatus associated with women
in his commentary on Terence, including long-windedness, a propensity for calling
attention to one’s own pain, and a tendency to exaggerate or misconstrue situations in a
negative fashion. Although Donatus identifies such behaviours as innately feminine, as
we have seen, Hrotsvit denaturalizes this connection by associating them with a social
positions of non-power, and, in the context of her reception of Terentian theater,
Hrotsvit’s clustering of these specific mannerisms in Pafnutius’ speech highlights the
extent to which Pafnutius’ own sense of masculine power is threatened by Thais’
destabilization of binary gender relations. In his rambling attempt to explain the source of
his depression, for example, Pafnutius expatiates on the fundamentals of neo-Platonic
cosmology for dozens of lines before his students interrupt, begging that he “reveal [to
them] the cause of [his] sorrow lest [they] be crushed by the weight of curiosity for an
even longer time.”\footnote{Enuclea nobis causam tui meroris ne diutius frangamur ponedere curiositatis. Hrotsvit, 
Pafnutius, p. 225, II. 8–9.} The students’ comments thus cast the hermit’s verbosity as the kind
of negative \textit{tardiloquium} that Donatus associates with women’s verbal behaviour.\footnote{Pafnutius refuses to come to the point even when asked directly by his students, claiming that “when
[the students] find out, [they] won’t be happy to hear it” \textit{[Si quando experiemini auditu non delectabimini].}
Hrotsvit, \textit{Pafnutius}, p. 225, 10-1. Pafnutius’ demurral echoes Constantine’s long-winded introduction in
\textit{Gallicanus} (p. 139, I. 16 ff.).} Hrotsvit similarly signals Thais’ unsettling effect on Pafnutius’ sense of masculinity by
having the character focus on personal suffering throughout his speech \textit{[cor contristatur,
vultus obscuratur, deflevo, meus dolor]}, a lexical mannerism that Donatus claims is a
natural characteristic of women.\textsuperscript{237} Above all, however, Pafnutius’ attitude toward Thais’
behaviour is indicative of the same analytical deficiencies for which Donatus condemns
the female sex. Commenting on \textit{Adelphoe} 291, Donatus states that the matron Sostrata
“complains like a woman, and, analyzing matters through her own confusion, in anxiety
renders those things which are insignificant important”\textsuperscript{,238} he also claims that “all these
[mannerisms] are feminine, in which, as if they were enormous disasters, complaints of
no importance are piled up and enumerated.”\textsuperscript{239} In these comments Donatus accuses
women of an inability to properly assess the nature and relative importance of the issues
at hand, and attributes this lack of analytical insight to their overwrought emotions
[\textit{anxiety, confusion}]. Pafnutius likewise demonstrates an inability to analyze situations
properly and exhibits a tendency to distort or exaggerate what he perceives as problems,
placing his own gendered anxieties on God despite knowing that such an exercise is
purely hypothetical.

That Pafnutius’ true concern is with his sense of masculine control over women
and social inferiors is suggested not only by his attribution of his own \textit{fragilitas} to God
but also by his initial conversation with Thais. After Thais reveals to the disguised hermit
that, despite her sinful activites, she believes that “the merits of each person are weighed
on the scales of [God’s] justice, and that either punishment or prize is delivered to each
person, exactly as they deserve,” Pafnutius breaks down, bemoaning Christ’s failure to

\textsuperscript{237} proprium est mulierum, cum loquuntur . . . se commiserari. Donatus, \textit{Ad Ad}. 291.4.

\textsuperscript{238} muliebriter queritur et ex perturbatione sua aestimans metu multa facit ea, quae pauc\textit{a} sunt. Donatus, \textit{Ad Ad}. 291.2.

\textsuperscript{239} nam haec omnia muliebria sunt, quibus pro malis ingentibus quasi in aceruum rediguntur et enumerantur
nullius momenti querelae. Donatus, \textit{Ad Ad}. 291.4. On the interpretation of \textit{Ad Ad}. 291.4, see this chapter,
65n187.
immediately punish those who have willfully sinned.\textsuperscript{240} \textquotedblleft O Christ,\textquotedblright he wails, \textquoteleft how the patience of your benignity toward us is to be marvelled at, you who see people knowingly sin and nevertheless hold back from destroying them!	extsuperscript{241} When a confused Thais then asks the hermit why he has begun to tremble and cry, Pafnutius retorts: \textquoteleft I am shuddering at your presumption, I weep for your ruin because you knew these things and you ruined so many souls! I condemn you with as much justice as you had presumption when you knowingly offended the majesty of divinity.\textsuperscript{242} Kristen Allen has quite rightly pointed out the importance here of Pafnutius\textprime s identification of presumption as Thais\textprime s primary sin, specifically in her certainty of God\textprime s forgiveness for her transgressions.\textsuperscript{243} But if Pafnutius correctly identifies Thais\textprime s sin as presumption, he does not recognize that this sin is also his own. As Pierre Miquel points out in his study of the use of the word *presumptio* in early monastic literature, the sin of presumption was commonly viewed as an overstepping of boundaries, encompassing a range of behaviours including \textquoteleft imposing one\textprime s own will\textquoteright [imposer sa volonté] and \textquoteleft stepping over Providence\textquoteright [enjamber sur la Providence].\textsuperscript{244} It is precisely this kind of presumption that Pafnutius displays, specifically in his tacit assumption that he is entitled to impose his own will on Thais and to judge her in place of God. While Thais\textprime s presumption is rooted in her belief that she

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{240}\textsuperscript{240} Estimo ipsius aequitatis lance singulorum merita pensari et unicuique prout gessit sive supplicium sive premium servari. Hrotsvit, *Pafnutius*, p. 229, ll. 15–7.
\textsuperscript{243}\textsuperscript{243} See Kristen Allen, \textquoteleft Sicut scintilla in medio maris: Theological despair in the Works of Isidore of Seville, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, and Dante Alighieri\textquoteright (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009), particularly 196–212.
\textsuperscript{244}\textsuperscript{244} Pierre Miquel, \textquoteleft Preasumere–Praesumptio dans l\textquoteleft ancienne littérature monastique,\textquoteright* Revue bénédictine* 79.3–4 (1969): 424.
\end{footnotes}
will necessarily be forgiven of her sins, Pafnutius’ presumption can arguably be traced back to his conflation of temporal masculine authority with God’s omnipotence.

Pafnutius’ presumptuous stance is also evident in his habit of emphasizing his own role in Thais’ conversion over that of God, a predilection that is without precedent in Hrotsvit’s source text. When discussing his part in Thais’ conversion with the abbess in whose convent he wishes to enclose the former prostitute, for example, Pafnutius frames himself as the active agent, with Christ playing only a secondary role. “With me entreating, and Christ cooperating, she fled the frivolities which she had been pursuing, and now knows chastity,” he tells the abbess.245 When the abbess stresses that it is God who is “the author of the change,” Pafnutius quickly changes the subject.246 Later, when Pafnutius’ disciples ask what went on with Thais, Pafnutius’ first impulse is, again, to focus on himself. “Exactly what I wanted,” he tells them. “She’s weeping for her crimes in a cramped little cell.”247 As happened with the abbess, it is Pafnutius’ disciples who remind their teacher that the conversion ought to be attributed to the divine. Finally, when Pafnutius visits his fellow hermit Antony, his instinct is, again, to emphasize his own role in Thais’ conversion. “Now, coaxing her, I charmed her lascivious soul with sweet exhortations; now, threatening her, I terrified her with very sharp warnings,” Pafnutius informs his friend. “She yielded in the end.”248 Tellingly, in Pafnutius’ last retelling of Thais’ conversion story, God drops entirely out of the picture. Pafnutius’ desire to control Thais is most explicitly evident, however, in the hermit’s final exchange

247 Iuxta meum velle... In exigua cellula deflet sui commissa. Hrotsvit, *Pafnutius*, p. 239, ll. 6, 8.
with Abraham, in which he describes Thais as “my prisoner” [*mea captiva*], a characterization that renders her the passive object of domination. Ultimately, while Pafnutius serves as the impetus for Thais’ conversion and penitence, and intermittently provides her with solid spiritual advice, Hrotsvit sprinkles her adaptation of her source with details that suggest Pafnutius’ motivations in converting Thais are ambiguous, and may at worst represent the presumption that lies at the heart of Terentian masculinity—the notion that male authority over women and social inferiors trumps the authority of God over all living beings.

Passio sanctarum virginum Fidei Spei et Karitatis

Hrotsvit’s final play, the *Passio sanctarum virginum Fidei Spei et Karitatis*, discusses the martyrdom of three young sisters, Fides, Spes, and Karitas, the daughters of the Italian noblewoman Sapientia, at the hands of the Roman emperor Adrianus and his advisor Antiochus, ostensibly for the crime of refusing to worship the Roman pantheon and inciting others to do the same. The play makes it clear that Sapientia and her daughters threaten the republic not simply because of their religion, however, but more specifically because of the destabilization of gendered authority that their religion encourages. As the play opens, Adrianus frames the behaviour of Sapientia and her daughters, newly arrived in Rome, as something that both “can confuse the republic, and wound its tranquility of mind” and “seems to fight against [the emperor’s] political power.” Importantly, when Adrianus incredulously asks Antiochus if he really

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believes that “the arrival of such insignificant little women will bring any kind of harm to the republic,” Antiochus specifies that Sapientia and her daughters have weakened the control of Roman male citizens over their wives through their preaching:

**ANTIOCHUS:** Et quod maius potest rumpere civilis concordiam pacis quam dissonantia observationis?

**ADRIANUS:** Nihil gravius nihil deterius quod testatur orbis Romanus qui undiquesecus christianę caedis sorde est infectus.

**ANTIOCHUS:** Haec igitur femina cuius mentionem facio hortatur nostrates avitos ritus deserere et christianę religioni se dedere.

**ADRIANUS:** Num pręvalet hortamentum?

**ANTIOCHUS:** Nimium nam nostrę coniuges fastidiendo nos contemnunt adeo ut dedignantur nobiscum comedere quanto minus dormire.

**ADRIANUS:** Fateor periculum.

That it’s as much about sexual control as religious control is also suggested by the fact that the emperor attempts to assimilate the girls’ practice of Christian chastity into a socially-acceptable Roman context by urging them to worship not the gods in general but the virginal Diana in particular. The sexualized torture of Sapientia’s eldest daughter, Fides, likewise indicates that the imperial concern over the girls is as much about the reassertion of masculine authority as it is about the enforcement of Roman religious observance. When the tortured twelve-year-old asserts that “it is not I, but the weak torturers who are flagging, and streaming with sweat from exhaustion,” the emperor


responds by attempting to sexually humiliate her, ordering “that the nipples be sliced off from each of her breasts, so that she may at least be restrained by shame.”

Fides, however, remains unabashed, and the miracle that follows her mutilation serves to celebrate the femaleness of her body, thus resisting the emperor’s attempts at gendered degradation. “You have wounded my inviolate breast but you have not hurt me!” she shouts at her would-be tormenters. “Look! Instead of a fountain of blood, a wave of milk has burst forth.”

But above all Hrotsvit suggests that the Roman authorities’ concern revolves around the loss of sexual control and the resulting destabilization of masculinity by having them adopt behaviours that Donatus associated with women. Specifically, the emperor Adrianus hopes to use flattering speech—in his words, blanda alloquutio—in order to convince Sapientia and her daughters to leave off the advocation of the socially-destabilizing Christian practice of female chastity; Antiochus readily agrees that this strategy “is more useful, because the fragility of the female sex can very easily be softened by blandishments.” These comments recall those of Donatus, who states that “the conversation of women does not proceed without blandishments,” and that “it is characteristic of women when they are speaking to flatter others.”

But while Donatus and Hrotsvit’s male officials associate flattery with women, the use of flattery by the imperial rulers in Hrotsvit’s texts exposes blanda oratio not as a trait associated with

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254 Fac Antioche ut gemellę pectoris particulę abscidantur quo saltim rubore coerceatur. Hrotsvit, Sapientia, p. 256, ll. 8–9.
255 Inviolatum pectus vulnerasti sed me non lesisti. En pro fonte sanguinis unda prorumpit lactis. Hrotsvit, Sapientia, p. 256, ll. 12–3.
256 Mea tu blandimentum est, sine quo non progreditur colloquium feminarum. Donatus, Ad Ad. 289.1.
257 Melius est nam fragilitas sexus feminæ facilius potest blandimentis molliri. Hrotsvit, Sapientia, p. 248, ll. 10–1.
258 Proprium est mulierum, cum loquentur... aliis blandiri. Donatus, Ad Ad. 291.4.
bodily sex, but as mechanism to control the behaviour of others, often when other means are impossible or ineffective.

Like the emperor Diocletian in the *Passio sanctarum virginum Agapis Chionė et Hirene*, the emperor Adrianus, in a position of non-control, attempts to use relational speech to connect with Sapientia by attributing positive characteristics to her, but fails due to his fundamental misunderstanding of the Christian worldview held by her and her daughters. When he first sees “the little women” [mulierculē], Adrianus is “stupified by the beauty of each one of them, and cannot admire their graceful demeanor enough.”²⁵⁹ He thus values them for their appearance and lineage—the primary markers of female value in the sexual economy of the patriarchy—and attempts to flatter Sapientia for those qualities. To begin, Adrianus addresses Sapientia with the same kind of soft speech interwoven with many blandishments that Donatus ascribes to women. “Distinguished matron,” he wheedles. “I coaxingly and serenely invite you to worship the gods so that you can enjoy our friendship.”²⁶⁰ When Sapientia replies that she is neither interested in worshipping the gods nor in being friends with the emperor, Adrianus continues to use flattery in an attempt to influence Sapientia’s behaviour, endeavoring to break down interpersonal boundaries between the widow and himself in order to gain a modicum of control:

Adhuc mitigato furore nulla in te moveor indignatione sed pro tua tuique filiarum salute paterno sollicitor amore. . . . Videris esse summis natalibus orta. . . . Claritas ingenuitatis rutilat in facie et sapientia nominis fulget in ore.²⁶¹

Even though your fury has not yet softened, I still have not been provoked into being angry with you—rather, out of fatherly love, I am concerned for your well-being and that

of your daughters. . . . You appear to have been born from the highest parentage. . . . The brightness of your nobility glows in your face and the wisdom of your name sparkles in your mouth.

Sapientia’s response, however, highlights the gulf between her Christian value system and the patriarchal values of the Roman emperor:

sanguinis superbia nobis sit parvi pendenda. . . . Frustra blandiris non flectimur tuius suadelis.\(^{262}\)

The nobility of our blood hardly ought to be valued. . . . You’re being flattering for nothing—we are not going to bow to your cajolery.

The emperor’s efforts to control Sapientia and her daughters through speech fail, as do his efforts to control them through violence, because he cannot understand their Christian worldview that recognizes no authority but that of the omnipotent Christian God. Overall, attention to the gendered mannerisms outlined by Donatus as they appear in Hrotsvit’s plays suggests that the “confusion” from which Antiochus hopes to protect the Roman republic in the *Passio sanctarum virginum Fidei Spei et Karitatis* is in fact the same gendered “confusion” that Hrotsvit states in her preface she hopes to enact in her Terentian plays.

\*Gender destabilization and form: concluding thoughts*

As we have seen, reading Hrotsvit alongside Donatus suggests that Hrotsvit is attempting to demonstrate that adherence to a Christian worldview necessitates the destabilization of the foundational tenets of Terentian masculinity, and most particularly Terentian masculinity’s obsession with the sexual control of women. Given Hrotsvit’s destabilization of the gendered assumptions outlined by Donatus, it is worth contemplating whether her decision to retain Terence’s dialogic form was intended to

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\(^{262}\) Hrotsvit, *Sapientia*, p. 248, l. 28; p. 249, ll. 6–7.
further her authorial goal of subjecting masculine strength to confusion. Whether Hrotsvit’s plays were intended for performance or for private reading, her use of dialogue lent itself to subversive purposes in its demand that its readers or performers embody the personas of members of the opposite sex. By taking on the voices of men taking on supposedly “feminine” mannerisms, or by breathing life into the words of women demonstrating supposedly “masculine” characteristics, readers and performers alike would have participated in multiple layers of gender play. In “performing” these dialogues—reading silently or aloud, onstage or in a classroom—Hrotsvit’s audience becomes an active participant in her exposure of the social contingency of gender.
CHAPTER 3:
Communi similis conamine voti: Gender and the Reception of Virgilian Epic in Hrotsvit’s Liber Tertius

The third book of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim’s oeuvre as it comes down to us consists of two historical poems written in internally rhymed dactylic hexameter—the Gesta Ottonis, an account (with significant lacunae) detailing some of Otto I’s most noteworthy military triumphs up to his imperial coronation in early 962,¹ and the Primordia coenobii Gandeshemensis, a narrative of the foundation of Gandersheim, the female religious community of which Hrotsvit was a part, by Otto I’s ancestors in the ninth century. While the Gesta has been transmitted in a single tenth-century manuscript from St. Emmeram now held at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (the same manuscript used by Konrad Celtis for his 1501 printed edition of Hrotsvit’s works),² the Primordia was first rediscovered by the sixteenth-century monk Heinrich Bodo,³ who described in his history of Gandersheim a tattered copy of the poem which “scarcely saw the light of day in our own age, being covered by dust for a very long time, and deprived of some folios,”⁴ and from which “many letters and even whole sentences were missing due to age.”⁵

Bodo also noted the existence of two additional historical poems by Hrotsvit (vitae of the popes

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¹ The significance of these lacunae remains up for debate. Hans Goetting has hypothesized that they were created accidentally. “Das Überlieferungsschicksal von Hrotsvits Primordia,” in Festschrift für Hermann Heimpel zum 70. Geburtstag, vol. 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1972), 94–96. Stephen Wailes, on the other hand, has raised the interesting possibility that the missing sections may have been removed due to political censorship. *Spirituality and Politics in the Works of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 215.

² Munich Clm 14485.

³ Bodo was an inmate of Clus, a daughter-house of Gandersheim. Bodo’s Syntagma ecclesiæ Gandesianæ, completed in 1532, covered the history of Gandersheim from its founding in 856 to 1531. For more on the *Syntagma* and its preservation of historical material, see H. Bresslau, “Bodo’s Syntagma de constructione coenobii Gandesiani und die darin überlieferten Kaiserurkunden,” *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 23 (1898): 134–45.


Anastasius and Innocentius, whose relics were obtained by Gandersheim’s founders) prefixed to the *Primordia* and likewise written in dactylic hexameter; Bodo’s testimony thus suggests that Hrotsvit’s book of historical poems may have originally contained four works.⁶ Although the manuscript reported by Bodo is now lost, the *Primordia* as we know it today has been preserved for us in two early modern handwritten copies (the seventeenth-century Hildesheim, Dombibl., 534/II, ff. 142r-152v and Hannover, Niedersächs. Landesbibl., MS XXIII.167, ff. 1r-14r, made in 1707) used as the basis for separate editions by Leuckfeld and Leibniz in 1709 and 1710, respectively.⁷

While the *Primordia* is preceded only by a brief, six-line overview of the poem’s subject matter, the *Gesta* is accompanied by a lengthy preface and two separate dedicatory prologues. It is from the introductory materials of the *Gesta* and a few scattered internal references in the *Gesta* and the *Primordia* that we derive information regarding the dating of the poems and the circumstances of their composition. The prefatory materials to the *Gesta* identify four intended readers for the work, each a powerful member of the imperial family. The two prologues to the *Gesta* are dedicated to Otto I and his son Otto II, respectively, while the preface to the *Gesta* is addressed to Hrotsvit’s abbess, Gerberga II, daughter of Otto I’s younger brother, Duke Henry I of Bavaria. The preface also notes Gerberga’s request that Hrotsvit submit the poem for critique to Otto I’s illegitimate son Archbishop William of Mainz, who served as Otto II’s co-regent

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during their father’s campaigns in Italy during the early 960s. This passing reference to Archbishop William indicates that Hrotsvit composed the praefatio to the Gesta prior to William’s death in 968. An early reference in the Gesta to Otto I’s legitimate brother, Archbishop Bruno of Cologne, describes the prelate as still living (he died in 965). Both the dedication to Otto II and an internal reference in the epilogue to the Gesta indicate knowledge of Otto II’s coronation as co-emperor in 967. We can thus assume with some degree of certainty that Hrotsvit began the Gesta before Bruno’s death in 965, and completed it at some point between Otto II’s coronation on 25 December 967 and the death of William on 2 March 968.

The exact dating of the Primordia, on the other hand, is much less assured, although Hrotsvit’s reference at lines 81–82 to “the modest book” she had previously composed about Otto I suggests that the poem was at the very least written after the Gesta.

Hints about the ideological impetus behind the composition of the liber tertius also appear in the poems’ prefatory materials. We learn from the preface to the Gesta that Gerberga specifically ordered Hrotsvit to write a poem commemorating her uncle’s imperial achievements.

“Let it not pain your benignity to examine what you know was made at your command,” the

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9 At Christus. . . Ipsi dona dedit tantæ preclara sophiæ, / Quod non est illo penitus sapientior ullus / Inter mortales fragilis mundi sapientes. Gesta Ottonis, p. 278, ll. 61, 63–5. Hrotsvit makes no mention of Otto I’s elder half-brother, Thankmar, who revolted against Otto in 937 in a dispute over the possession of Merseburg; Thankmar was the product of Henry the Fowler’s first marriage, which was dissolved on the grounds that Thankmar’s mother, Hatheburg, previously married and widowed, had entered into convent life before her union with Henry and was therefore not eligible for remarriage.

10 In her prologue to Otto II, Hrotsvit reminds the young emperor that he “harmoniously [holds] an equal distinction of full imperial power, bearing the royal scepter in [his] delicate right hand” [Par decus imperii retines concorditer ampli, / Conportans dextra sceptrum regale tenella]. Hrotsvit, Prologus ad Ottonem [II] imperatorem, p. 275, ll. 17–8; in the epilogue to the Gesta, Hrotsvit briefly describes how Otto I “advanced his son, now coming after him, namely Otto, a king at his nurse’s breast, to the authority of imperial honor” [Ipsius prolem post illum iam venientem, / Scilicet Oddonem, nutricis ab ubere regem, / Ad fasces augustalis provexit honoris]. Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 304, ll. 1496–8.

canoness enjoins her abbess at the outset of the praefatio. “Indeed, you imposed this burden upon me—to run through the deeds of the august Caesar in verse.” Hrotsvit mentions twice more over the course of the praefatio that Gerberga ordered her to write the poem. These repeated references to Gerberga’s commissioning of the Gesta, especially when read alongside Hrotsvit’s oft-cited complaints regarding the impossibility of finding reliable historical sources for the poem, serve to divest the canoness of responsibility for the text’s composition. Given Hrotsvit’s concerns regarding her lack of sources and the strong emphasis she places on Gerberga’s commissioning of the Gesta in the poem’s preface, then, it is all the more striking that Hrotsvit makes no mention of Gerberga’s role in the creation of the Gesta in either of her dedications to the two Ottos. In fact, in her dedication to Otto I, Hrotsvit completely obscures Gerberga’s commissioning of the piece, claiming that “the devotion of my heart [devotio mentis] is sole motivation behind this work.” The discrepancy between Hrotsvit’s description of her own role in relation to the creation of the Gesta in the preface to the poem and in her dedication to Otto I raises the question of whether Hrotsvit’s claims of devotio mentis are disingenuous—a question made all the more resonant given that Hrotsvit explicitly attributes her creation of the Primordia (a poem celebrating, in her words, “the origins of the convent at Gandersheim which the powerful leaders of the Saxons constructed”) to her devotio mentis as well.

Hrotsvit’s sincerity (or lack thereof) with regard to her political motivations for writing the liber tertius is particularly relevant to any discussion of the genre of her poems given that the

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12 non pigescat vestri almitiem perlustrare quod vestra confectum si ignoratis ex iussione. Id quidem oneris mihi imposuistis ut gesta cesaris augusti. . . metrca percurrerem ratione. Hrotsvit, Liber tertius: praefatio, p. 271, ll. 7–11.
13 In addition to the example above, see Hrotsvit, Liber tertius: praefatio, p. 272, ll. 5–7, 18–23.
14 As Hrotsvit grumbles to Gerberga, “I did not find these things written down previously, nor was I able to elicit verbal reports from anyone in chronological order or in sufficient detail” [haec eadem nec prius scripta repperi, nec ab aliquo digestim sufficienterque dicta elicere quivi]. Hrotsvit, Liber tertius: praefatio, p. 271, ll. 13–4.
15 Causa sed est operis tantum devotio mentis. Hrotsvit, Prologus ad Ottonem [I] imperatorem, p. 273, l. 16.
Gesta and the Primordia, at least superficially, share a common goal—to provide the Ottonian dynasty with an imperial history depicting the family’s political ascension as the manifestation of a divinely-mandated translatio imperii from the Frankish people to the Saxons. The presumption of the sincerity of Hrotsvit’s authorial motivation has led many scholars to place the historical poems firmly in the generic tradition of the panegyric, with the Primordia being thought to provide the historical and spiritual context for the moral and political greatness of Otto I as celebrated in the Gesta. Nevertheless, although critics have not fully explored the possibility that Hrotsvit’s introductory claims of devotio mentis may evidence political ambivalence on the part of the canoness, recent studies of the liber tertius have begun to question on other grounds the degree to which Hrotsvit’s historical poems are genuinely “devoted” to the Ottonian imperial cause, unearthing in Hrotsvit’s outwardly laudatory poems evidence of subtle critiques both of Otto I’s relationship with the papacy and of his relative neglect of Gandersheim in comparison with his support of more recently-established female religious communities like Quedlinburg.

Such historically based analyses are part of a broader overall trend in the scholarship on Hrotsvit’s liber tertius. Indeed, since the Gesta and the Primordia contain a great deal of information regarding contemporary events, some of it unique, most scholars who have examined the poems have done so from an historical perspective, employing the texts as primary

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sources for ninth- and tenth-century secular and ecclesiastical politics, or comparing Hrotsvit’s historiographical approach to that of other Ottonian writers.\(^{20}\) Several of these studies have focused in particular on Hrotsvit’s approach to women’s history and more generally on the role of Ottonian abbeys in the production of women’s historical writing during the period.\(^{21}\) Literary analyses of the *Gesta* and the *Primordia*, on the other hand, have not been as numerous. Most literary studies of Hrotsvit’s *liber teritus* have concerned themselves in the main with Hrotsvit’s reception of the epic genre, though an interest in the implications of Hrotsvit’s status as a female author runs throughout this vein of scholarship as well.\(^{22}\) Dennis Kratz and Katharina M. Wilson, for example, have argued that Hrotsvit’s historical poems, while clearly drawing upon the classical and medieval historical epic traditions, create a new kind of feminine Christian heroic

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epic by using Old Testament characters as models of heroic kingship and by emphasizing peace instead of war,²³ while John O. Ward and Henk Vynckier have viewed the Gesta Ottonis as a gendered take on the ninth- or tenth-century Latin epic Waltharius, concentrating on the parallels between Hrotsvit’s description of Adelaide’s flight from Berengar and the Waltharius’ account of its eponymous hero’s escape from the Hunnish court.²⁴ Still others, like Patrick McBrine and Kate Olson, have traced the linguistic and thematic connections between Hrotsvit’s historical poems and Virgil’s Aeneid, with Olson expressly casting the poems as feminine inversions of misogynistic narrative elements of the masculine Virgilian epic.²⁵

As Jay T. Lees has pointed out, however, many discussions of epic in relation to Hrotsvit’s liber tertius define the genre only hazily and, even then, often in modern terms.²⁶ Kate Olson, for example, completely overlooks medieval conceptions of the epic genre in her attempt to situate Hrotsvit in the epic tradition, instead referencing definitions of epic generated by the modern literary critics Mikhail Bakhtin and Georg Lukács, and further citing Aristotle (who would have been unavailable to Hrotsvit), Erich Auerbach, and Walter Benjamin in a footnote.²⁷ But even if it is true that those who have argued that Hrotsvit’s historical poems are epics have not provided enough evidence to support such a claim, it does not follow, as some have argued, that these poems are not epics. In fact, upon closer examination, it is clear that arguments against defining Hrotsvit’s historical poems as epics are, like the studies they critique,

ultimately rooted in modern conceptions of the epic genre. While Lees, for example, proposes that it is preferable to refer to the *Gesta* and *Primordia* as “poetic histor[ies]” rather than epics\(^28\) on the grounds that Hrotsvit “avoided literary formulations typically associated with epic poetry, such as speeches, catalogs of gifts, developed scenes, and descriptions,”\(^29\) he neglects to provide any evidence that such devices were thought to be constitutive of the epic genre in the medieval period. Likewise Wolfgang Kirch, in making the influential claim that Hrotsvit’s historical poems “lacked not only historical sources, but also literary models,” relies not on early medieval definitions of the epic genre to reach this conclusion but on idiosyncratic aesthetic determinations.\(^30\)

In contrast to previous research which has privileged modern definitions of the epic genre, this chapter will demonstrate that reading Hrotsvit’s *liber tertius* alongside the commentaries on the *Aeneid* and *vitae Virgilianae* that circulated in the early medieval schools reveals not only that Hrotsvit’s historical poems are clearly Virgilian epics according to early medieval understandings of the genre, but also that her epics are part of a longer medieval tradition of Virgilian epic literature written in praise of living emperors. As this chapter will show, attention to the broader context of the early medieval reception of Virgil enables us to see that Hrotsvit’s treatment of female characters in her Virgilian epics suggests a more subtle reading of the *Aeneid* and its approach to women than has previously been acknowledged, one that, significantly, stands in direct opposition to the gendered reception of Virgilian epic in the Carolingian period.

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\(^{29}\) Lees, “Political and dramatic irony,” 797.

as represented in the anonymous *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* and Ermoldus Nigellus’ *In honorem Hludowici.*

**Hrotsvit and the early medieval reception of Virgil**

Manuscript and literary evidence suggests that Virgil was widely read in the early Middle Ages. Birger Munk Olson has identified 170 manuscripts or fragments of Virgil dating from the ninth to the tenth/eleventh centuries alone.\(^{31}\) In terms of literary imitation, the *Aeneid* appears to have been especially influential for late antique and early medieval Christian authors. Writers as diverse as Proba, Arator, Venantius Fortunatus, Aldhelm, Alcuin, and the anonymous composer of the *Waltharius* mined the structure and content of the *Aeneid* to compose works in a variety of genres ranging from the biblical epic to the religious treatise.\(^{32}\)

That the *Aeneid* would hold such a significant place in the early medieval cultural imagination is not surprising given the centuries-long prominence the poem enjoyed as a classroom text. The *Aeneid* had enjoyed a central role in the standard Roman curriculum from

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shortly after Virgil’s death in the first century, and it continued to be a foundational text in late antique and early medieval schoolrooms. Early medieval intellectuals also continued to use late antique commentaries to understand the *Aeneid* both in the classroom and in their own work. Two primary interpretative strains can be deciphered in the late antique commentaries on the *Aeneid* which circulated throughout the early Middle Ages—the allegorical approach taken, for example, by the early sixth-century writer Fulgentius in his *Expositio continentiae Virgilianae secundum philosophos moralis*, and what Christopher Baswell has referred to as the “pedagogical” approach, perhaps best represented by the commentary of the late fourth-century grammarian Servius, but also embodied by Tiberius Claudius Donatus’ *Interpretationes Virgilianae* and by the explanations of the *Aeneid* detailed in the various Virgilian *vitae* and *periochae* preserved in early medieval manuscripts.  

Though it has tended to receive far less attention in scholarship on the medieval reception of Virgil than the allegorical approach, the pedagogical approach, which attempted to provide students with the grammatical and historical information necessary to understand the *Aeneid* as well as to explicate the meaning of potentially confusing or ambiguous passages, was by far the more influential throughout the medieval period. In the ninth and tenth centuries in particular, the reading of Virgil could not be easily extricated from the reading of pedagogical commentaries on Virgil, and specifically from the reading of Servius. Indeed, Valerie Edden has observed of ninth- and tenth-century manuscripts of Virgil that it is “striking. . . how rarely the poems occur without either continuous commentary or marginal scholia, and how frequently the commentaries are found on their own

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34 For a critique of the modern scholarly overemphasis on the allegorical interpretative approach, see Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 47–9.
without a text of the poems.” We can assume, based on evidence surrounding early medieval reading practices in general and the holdings of the Gandersheim library in particular, that Hrotsvit would have encountered the *Aeneid* through the intervening medium of Servius specifically, and, most likely, the pedagogical commentary tradition in general; indeed, we know that Gandersheim’s library held a ninth-century copy of the *Aeneid* glossed with Servius (from which a single leaf now survives) as well as a stand-alone edition of Servius’ commentary on the poem.

Pedagogically-oriented commentaries and lives of Virgil promulgated in the early Middle Ages defined the form, purpose, and content of the *Aeneid* for their readers in very similar ways, with Servius’ description of the qualities of the Virgilian epic providing an especial point of reference for later commentators. In the preface to his commentary on the *Aeneid*, Servius outlines the *Aeneid*’s form, content, and purpose as follows:

> nam est metrum heroicum et actus mixtus, ubi et poeta loquitur et alios inducit loquentes. est autem herocicum quod constat ex divinis humanisque personis, continens vera cum fictis; nam Aeneam ad Italian venisse manifestum est, Venerem vero locutam cum Iove missumve Mercurium constat esse conpositum. Est autem stilus grandiloquus, qui constat alto sermone magnisque sententiis. scimus enim tria esse genera dicendi, humile medium gradiloquum. intentio Vergilii est, Homerum imitari et Augustum laudare a parentibus.

Its meter is heroic and its mode mixed, in which the poet speaks and introduces other speakers. But [*the Aeneid*] is also heroic because it involves both divine and human characters, containing true things along with fictions. Indeed, it is evident that Aeneas came to Italy, but it is understood that Venus speaking with Jove or sending Mercury is made up. The *Aeneid*, moreover, is written in a grandiloquent style, which consists of lofty speech and great sentiments. For, as we know, there are three ways of speaking: humble speech, middle speech, and grandiloquent speech. Virgil’s intention, meanwhile, is to imitate Homer and to praise Augustus through his ancestors.

Later, in glossing the opening lines of the *Aeneid*, Servius further delineates the *Aeneid*’s subject matter:

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36 Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, 404.8.4 (15) Novi.
37 Gandersheim, Stiftskirchenbibliothek, s.n., 1r+v.
38 Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii*, 1.pr. I follow Alison Keith in citing Servius from the Harvard edition, Rand et al. (1946) for *Aeneid* 1-2 and Stocker et al. (1965) vol. 3, for *Aeneid* 3–5, and from Thilo and Hagen (1884) for *Aeneid* 6–12.
ut sit sensus talis ‘arma virumque cano, genus unde Latinum Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae’, mox illa revoce ‘Troiae qui primus ab oris’; sic enim causa operis declaratur, cur cogentibus fatis in Latium venerit. 39

The meaning is like this: “I sing of arms and the man, whence came the Latin race and the Alban fathers and the high walls of Rome.” Remember, after that it says: “who [came] first from the shores of Troy.” In this way, the work’s subject is declared—how Aeneas, compelled by the Fates, came to Latium.

Other pedagogical texts found in manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries make the same broad claims regarding the form, content, and purpose of the Aeneid—that it is written in dactylic hexameter, 40 in a lofty style, 41 and in mixed mode, 42 that its subject matter is the journey undertaken by Aeneas and the battles he undertook in pursuit of the founding of what would eventually become the Roman Empire, 43 and that its double purpose was to imitate Homer 44 and to praise Augustus and the Roman people. 45

Crucially, an awareness of the pedagogical traditions on the Aeneid available in the tenth century allows us to see that Hrotsvit’s historical poems can justifiably be labelled as Virgilian

39 Servius, In Vergilii Aeneidem commentariori, 1.1.
41 As indicated by several texts contained in manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries: Periochae Gudianae, in VVA, 216; Periochae Vaticanae in Encyclopedia virgiliana, ed. Francesco della Corte, vol. 5, part 2 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana), n. 288, 466–467 at 466 [hereafter EV]; Vita Gudiana I, in VV, 213–6 at 215; Vita Noracensis I, in VVA, 237–9 at 239; Vita Philargyriana II in VVA, 187–92 at 188. The Periochae Gudianae, attributed to John Scottus, are preserved in the Vita Gudiana I; the Periochae Vaticanae are likewise attributed to John Scottus.
42 For example, in the sixth-century Isidore, Etymologiae 8.7.11; and in the Vita Leidensis, preserved in two manuscripts of the ninth and ninth/tenth centuries, in VVA 245–8 at 248.
43 Periochae Vaticanae, in EV, 466; Vita Leidensis, in VVA, 247; Vita Monacensis, in VVA, 227 et al.; Vita Philargyriana I, in VVA, 175–86 at 184–5; Vita Philargyriana II, in VVA, 191.
44 Periochae Bernenses II, in VV, 282–90; Periochae Gudiana, in VVA, 216; Vitae Gudiana I, in VVA, 216; Vita Leidensis, in VVA, 247; Vita Monacensis I, in VVA, 230; Vita Philargyriana I, in VVA, 175 and 180; Vitae Philargyriana II, in VVA, 188.
45 That the Aeneid was written in praise of Augustus constitutes the guiding principle of Donatus’ interpretation of the Aeneid; see Tib. Claudius Donatus, Interpretationes Vergilianae, 1.2.7–25 (for Georges’ Teubner edition of Donatus here and throughout I cite volume number, page, and line number). The idea that the Aeneid was written to praise Augustus is echoed in the Periochae Gudianae, in VVA, 216; Periochae Vaticanae, in EV, 446; Vita Leidensis, in VVA, 247; Vita Monacensis I, in VVA, 228; and 230–1; Vita Noracensis, in VVA, 238–9; Vita Philargyriana I, 180; Vita Philargyriana II, in VVA, 191. For an extended discussion of Donatus’ linking of the Aeneid to Augustus, see Raymond J. Starr, “An Epic of Praise: Tiberius Claudius Donatus and Vergil’s Aeneid,” Classical Antiquity 11.1 (1992 Apr.): 159–74.
epics according to the specific definitions of the genre as articulated in the late antique and early medieval periods. Just as Virgil himself was thought to have patterned his epic on the work of an ancient poet (Homer), Hrotsvit likewise models her historical poems on Virgil’s Aeneid by adhering to the generic contours of the epic as laid out in the Virgilian pedagogical tradition in general and Servius in particular. The Gesta and the Primordia are written in dactylic hexameter, in a lofty style, and in mixed mode (as opposed, for example to the dramatic mode in which the canoness composed her Terentian comedies). Moreover, just as Virgil was thought to have written the Aeneid in order to glorify the emperor Augustus through a celebration of his ancestors’ achievements, Hrotsvit explicitly states that her purpose is to praise a living emperor and his ancestors and to commemorate the rise of an imperial people through the depiction of the historical founding of a ruling dynasty and the military exploits of that dynasty’s ruler. That these formal and thematic parallels constituted a purposeful strategy of Virgilian imitation on the part of the canoness is further indicated by the Virgilian flourishes found throughout the epics, particularly evident, as Patrick McBrine points out, in Hrotsvit’s employment of the Aurora topos to signal the imminent appearance of the divine in the Primordia.⁴⁶

Yet the practical goals of the pedagogical tradition on the Aeneid were not limited simply to the identification of generic norms and stylistic quirks or, for that matter, to the rote acquisition of grammatical and rhetorical skills—pedagogical texts on the Aeneid also served as tools for the affirmation and reproduction of social norms in the classroom through their moral pronouncements on the behavior of the epic’s characters and their interpretations of the symbolic meaning of the epic’s narrative. Indeed, the exemplary function of epic poetry was not lost on the commentators themselves. Tiberius Claudius Donatus, for example, explained in the prologue to his Interpretationes Virgilianae that “the sailor takes from [Virgil] what he might

⁴⁶ McBrine, Thematic Focus, 278–9.
learn with regard to the reckoning of his duties, while fathers and sons, husbands and wives, the emperor and the soldier, the best citizen and the most esteemed inhabitant of the country are acquainted with what they ought to imitate."\textsuperscript{47} The \textit{Vita Philargyriana II}, attributed to the late fifth-century grammarian Iunius Philargyrius, likewise specifies that the purpose of the \textit{Aeneid} is to be instructive.\textsuperscript{48}

As Alison Keith has demonstrated in her Bourdieuan reading of the educational role of epic in the Roman period, epic poetry and the commentary traditions associated with the epic genre played a crucial part in the articulation and dissemination of cultural expectations about gender in the (almost exclusively) male classrooms of the Roman period.\textsuperscript{49} In addition to explicating questions of grammar and rhetoric, pedagogical texts on epic poetry, including the work of Virgilian commentators like Servius and Donatus, presented a concrete set of ideas about gender to young Roman students, ideas which were then internalized through repeated processes of reading and interpretation in male homosocial classroom environments. As a central part of Roman and, later on, early medieval school curricula, then, the \textit{Aeneid} and the pedagogical texts associated with the epic worked as agents of cultural reproduction in the classroom, endowing male students from an early age with the knowledge about social relations—and in particular, about gender—necessary for them to function successfully in their patriarchal societies and to perpetuate the gendered norms of those societies both as children and as adults.

\textsuperscript{47} habet denique ex eo nauta quod discat in officiorum ratione, habent quod imitentur patres et filii, mariti et uxorres, imperator et miles, civis optimus et patriae spectatissimus cultor. Tib. Claudius Donatus, \textit{Interpretationes Virgilinae}, 1.5.7–10.
\textsuperscript{48} propter doctrinam. \textit{Vita Philargyriana II}, in \textit{VVA}, 188.
The specific expectations about gendered behavior and relations between the sexes presented in the *Aeneid* and the pedagogical tradition are, in the main, not favourable to women. To begin, Servius’ commentary on the *Aeneid* and Tiberius Claudius Donatus’ *Interpretationes Virgilianae* propagate and naturalize a range of stereotypes about women, suggesting that women are irrational,\(^{50}\) physically and mentally weak,\(^ {51}\) easily influenced,\(^ {52}\) and superficial,\(^ {53}\) and as such are under typical circumstances constitutionally unfit for political and military responsibilities.\(^ {54}\) Although Servius and Donatus limit themselves in particular to interpretations of the meaning of the behaviour of female characters in the *Aeneid*, modern scholars have demonstrated the extent to which the theme of male superiority which runs throughout their commentaries operates at the level of the symbolic in the *Aeneid* proper, pointing out, for example, the *Aeneid*’s association between female death and male foundation and its narrative emphasis on female characters as instigators of war.\(^ {55}\)

The importance placed on the gendered dimension of education in the classical curriculum was not limited temporally to the ancient Roman period, and does not appear to have been substantially affected by the cultural shift from paganism to Christianity. A letter penned by Cassiodorus around the year 533 on behalf of the Ostrogothic King Athalaric and addressed to the senate of Rome, for example, demanded that the Senate maintain the salary of grammarians on the grounds that such instructors played a fundamental societal role in shaping

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\(^{50}\) On feminine *furor*: Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii*, 5.6; on feminine irrationality and impatience: Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii*, 9.475; 11.782.


\(^{54}\) Servius *In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii*, 1.323 and elsewhere.

the minds and characters of young men. Late antique and early medieval Christian writers also appear to be cognizant of the long-term effects of the gendered lessons imparted to boys through their reading of the *Aeneid*. In his analysis of Virgil’s portrayal of the divine in the *Aeneid*, for example, St. Augustine demonstrates both an appreciation of the enduring influence of early reading material on “young minds” (*teneris animis*) and familiarity with the sorts of gendered readings of the *Aeneid* promulgated in the Virgilian pedagogical tradition:


Then there’s Virgil, whom little boys read so that the great poet, the brightest and best of all, having been absorbed by their young minds, might not easily be able to fade away into oblivion—as, according to Horace, “A new jug will preserve the scent with which it was first filled for a long time.” Of course, in Virgil, Juno, who is hostile toward the Trojans, is introduced, provoking Aeolus, king of the winds, against them and saying: “A people iminimal to me crosses the Tyrrhenian sea, carrying Troy and their conquered household gods to Italy.” Given this, should the Trojans, if they wanted to be prudent, really have entrusted Rome to these conquered household gods so that the city would not be conquered? No! “But,” someone will inevitably say, “Juno’s just like an angry woman [*irata mulier*] who doesn’t know what she’s talking about!”

In referring to Juno as *irata*, Augustine both echoes the same terminology used by Servius to describe the supposedly characteristic fury of women and demonstrates in his conversational style the sort of gendered interpretative moves that would have been familiar to students in the

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late antique classroom. An awareness of the indoctrinal force of the *Aeneid* is also on display in texts read and preserved (and, in some cases, perhaps written) in the early medieval period.

The *Vita Noricensis II*, for example, preserved in a ninth-century manuscript (St. Paul in Lavanttal, MS Samblasianus 86, 1r-1v), directly cites Augustine’s pronouncements on the lasting effects of reading the *Aeneid* on little boys (*parvuli*).

The ubiquity of Servius’ commentary on the *Aeneid* in the early Middle Ages as well as the widespread distribution of other Virgilian pedagogical texts, including Donatus’ *Interpretationes Virgilianae*, suggests that early medieval school children were exposed to the same kind of gendered indoctrination through the reading of the *Aeneid* that Alison Keith has argued ancient Roman schoolboys experienced. Nevertheless, while early medieval educational environments were typically homosocial, they were not exclusively male. Inmates of female religious institutions would have been introduced to Virgil and commentaries on the *Aeneid* by a female teacher, and would have discussed and interpreted the Virgilian tradition with other female students; Hrotsvit herself, for example, speaks glowingly of the instruction she received from her teachers Rikkardis and Gerberga. Would the Servian interpretation of the meaning of the *Aeneid* have been so easily accepted in a female monastic environment? Would the inculcatory force of the Virgilian pedagogical tradition’s approach to gender have been so strong

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58 Although Servius describes both male and female characters with the adjective *iratus*, he ultimately characterizes *ira* as a particularly feminine emotion (*In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii*, 11.782). Virgil, it should be noted, does not use the adjective *irata* to describe women, and attributes the emotion of *ira* to men and women alike.

59 *Vergilium nempe propterea parvuli legunt, ut videlicet poeta magnum omnium praeclarissimus atque optimus teneris ebitus animis non facile oblivione possit aboleri, secundu illud Horatii: Quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem / testa diu.* "Vita Noricensis II," in *VVA*, 240.

60 Three copies of Donatus’ *Interpretationes Virgilianae* date from the Carolingian period: Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Plut. 45.15, which belonged to the abbey of St. Martin of Tours (late eighth century), Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. lat. 1484 which belonged to Lupus of Ferrières, and Vatican, MS Vat. Lat. 1512, made in Luxueil.

as to have precluded the possibility of other interpretations of the meaning of gender in the *Aeneid* by a female medieval audience?

To understand Hrotsvit’s imitation of the *Aeneid*, it is necessary to keep in mind that the *Aeneid* itself presents a more ambiguous take on the patriarchal sex/gender system than the commentary tradition allows. Importantly, one of the functions of commentaries is to untangle grammatical and moral ambiguities in a given text. This objective necessarily requires the advancement of particular interpretative stances at the expense of others. An examination of which hermeneutic possibilities a given textual interpreter attempts to foreclose can provide insight into the cultural anxieties raised by the text in question. We can see evidence of the tension between the *Aeneid*’s nuanced approach to question of gender and the cultural expectations of the *Aeneid*’s late antique Roman audience in the interpretations of the character of Dido in the work of Servius and Donatus. Both commentators, for example, repeatedly characterize Dido’s political achievements as unusual, underscoring the gap between social expectations of women and Virgil’s depiction of a capable female leader.\(^6\) In these instances and others Servius and Donatus reveal their own discomfort with Virgil’s portrayal of gender and seek to explain away potentially subversive readings, and in so doing call attention to the ruptures present in Virgil’s text.

It is clear that tenth-century authors like Hrotsvit would have come into contact with a pedagogical tradition that defined the subject of Virgilian epic as state formation, and that construed political foundation as a particularly masculine enterprise. Attentive readers would also have been aware that the establishment of masculine political order in the Virgilian epic is accomplished at the expense of women, represented symbolically through an association

between foundation and the violent deaths of women, a connection between women and the outbreak of war, and the suppression of women’s political leadership. The remainder of this chapter will argue that while the Virgilian commentaries circulating in the tenth century worked to erase any tensions around the legitimacy of masculine domination expressed in the *Aeneid* in their interpretations of problematic passages, Hrotsvit exploited the ambiguities of the *Aeneid’s* presentation of women to promote a gender-inclusive political order.

But if Hrotsvit’s mode of classical reception ought to be understood in terms of gender, it also must be understood in terms of her reception of Carolingian history. Hrotsvit herself signals that she is purposefully engaging with the Carolingian past by sounding the theme of *translatio imperii* in the opening lines of the *Gesta Ottonis*:

> Postquam rex regum, qui solus regnat in æcum,  
> Per se cunctorum transmutans tempora regum  
> Iussit Francorum transferri nobile regnum  
> Ad claram gentem Saxonum nomen habentem . . .  
> Filius Oddonis magni ducis et venerandi,  
> Scilicet Henricus, suscepit regia primus  
> Iusto pro populo moderamine sceptra gerenda.\(^{63}\)

After the king of kings, who alone rules forever, transforming the conditions of all kings by his own power, ordered the noble kingdom of the Franks to be transferred to the famous Saxon people. . . . Henry, the son of Otto, the great and venerable duke, first took up the royal scepter to be administered in lawful government for the people.

Just as the *Aeneid* itself tells of a divinely-enacted *translatio imperii* from the Greeks to the Romans, so too, Hrotsvit tells us, does her book of epics narrate the divinely-sanctioned transfer of imperial power to the Saxons from the Franks, who in turn had seen themselves as the divinely-chosen inheritors of Roman political authority via the Byzantines.\(^{64}\) The imitation of classical literature in the Carolingian and Ottonian periods was an artistic manifestation of this religio-political ideology, with both dynasties fashioning themselves as the pious leaders of a

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\(^{63}\) Hrotsvit, *Gesta Ottonis*, 1–8.  
\(^{64}\) See, for example, Anskar, *Vita S. Willehadi*, MGH SS 2:381, ll. 41–8.
revived Christian Rome. Two Carolingian epics, composed in imitation of Virgil and written in praise of living emperors, celebrated the movement of imperial power to the Franks, with each framing their respective rulers as the true founders of a renewed Roman empire—the anonymous *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* and Ermoldus Nigellus’ *In honorem Hludowici*. Importantly, the patrilineal gender hierarchy promoted in pedagogical interpretations of the *Aeneid* was maintained in the Carolingian reception of the Virgilian epic. In contrast, an examination of gendered Virgilian epic tropes in Hrotsvit’s *liber tertius* suggests that the canoness is purposefully teasing out the narrative tensions in the *Aeneid* that were occluded in the pedagogical texts on the *Aeneid* and in the Carolingian reception of Virgilian epic, opening up a new space in the epic genre for an unabashedly approbatory representation of the central role of women in political life. By linking women’s political activity to Christian sanctity, moreover, Hrotsvit subtly casts the Ottonian dynasty as politically and spiritually superior to its Roman and Frankish predecessors, who, in their epic representations of political rule, obscured and subverted royal women’s administrative responsibilities and political capabilites.

*Gender and the Virgilian panegyric epic in the Carolingian period*

The *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* (also referred to as the *De Karolo rege et Leo papa*, the Aachen epic, and the Paderborn epic) is a 536-line hexameter poem that deals with events taking place in and around the court of Charlemagne in 799, the year preceding the Frankish king’s elevation to the imperial throne by Pope Leo III.\(^{65}\) The poem has been thought on the grounds of internal and external evidence to comprise part of the third book of a longer work written in

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praise of Charlemagne. Among other events, the poem describes Charlemagne’s oversight of the construction of an unnamed city (often, though not unproblematically, assumed to be Aachen), a royal hunt, a dream vision experienced by Charlemagne concerning the ouster and mutilation of Pope Leo III by his political enemies in Rome in the spring of 799, and the subsequent meeting of the exiled Leo and Charlemagne in the recently-founded city of Paderborn in Saxony later that year. A single ninth-century copy of the poem survives in a composite miscellany now held at Zurich; the fact that the poem served as a model for both Ermoldus Nigellus and Notker suggests that it enjoyed broader distribution than its survival rate might seem to indicate. While there is no solid evidence to point to the identity of the poem’s author, many scholars have been tempted to attribute it to a wide range of Carolingian luminaries, proposing Angilbert, Einhard, Modoin, and, recently, Charlemagne’s cousin Gundrada, as possible candidates. There is also little consensus regarding the precise dating of the poem, although most agree that it was probably completed before Charlemagne’s death in 814.

The idea that the Karolus magnus et Leo papa is the third and only extant book of an original four-book poem written in celebration of Charlemagne has entered the general scholarship. The argument is based on parallels between the first 13 lines of the poem and the introduction to the third book of Venantius Fortunatus’ Vita S. Martini. See Dieter Schaller, “Das Aachener Epos für Karl den Kaiser,” Frühmittelalterliche Studien 10 (1976): 134–68. Rosamond McKitterick has made the convincing suggestion that the city under construction in the Karolus magnus is in fact Paderborn, given the date of the poem’s action and the fact that the church in Paderborn was consecrated in 799. Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 141.


Helmut Beumann argued for a date of 799. “Das Paderborner Epos und die Kaiseridee Karls des Großen,” in Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa, Ein Paderborner Epos von Jahren 799 (Paderborn: Bonifacius-Druckerei, 1966), 1–54. Other scholars suggest that the poem was composed in the first decade of the ninth century, or slightly after. See
Critics have long pointed out the multiple, sustained connections in language and content between the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* and the *Aeneid*.\(^{71}\) Nevertheless, the question of the poem’s genre remains the object of scholarly scrutiny. Alfred Ebenbauer expressed some hesitancy in labelling the poem an historical epic, consistently referring to the text as *das Gedicht* or *das Paderborner Gedicht*, including his discussion of the poem in a section on historical writing under Charlemagne rather than in his section on Carolingian historical epic, and ultimately arguing that the panegyric qualities of the poem ought to be stressed over its epic elements.\(^{72}\) In the context of such assessments it bears repeated mention that according to late antique and early medieval understandings of the *Aeneid* it is impossible to separate the panegyric from the epic genre. In fact, there is no doubt that the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, whether read as a fragment of a lengthier text or as a self-contained work, conforms to the parameters of the Virgilian epic set out in the commentary traditions in use during the early Middle Ages, and, in particular, to the generic parameters set out by Servius. While we cannot know if the missing books of the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* praised Charlemagne indirectly through his ancestors, as Virgil did with regard to Augustus in the *Aeneid*, it is clear that Charlemagne as depicted in the surviving fragment of the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* collapses the boundaries between Augustus and Aeneas, being described both as a reigning Augustus and as the *pius* founder of a renewed Rome.\(^{73}\)

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\(^{72}\) For Ebenbauer’s arguments concerning the genre of the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, see *Carmen historicum*, 75–90, but especially 77.

\(^{73}\) For example, *In honorem Hludowici*, MGH PLAC 2: p. 368, ll. 91–6.
The other surviving Carolingian epic written in praise of a living emperor—the *In honorem Hludowici* of Ermoldus Nigellus—draws upon the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* as one of its models.\(^7^4\) We have no solid evidence regarding the person of Ermoldus outside the biographical evidence presented in his surviving work, two verse epistles addressed to Pippin I of Aquitaine and the *In honorem Hludowici*, addressed to the emperor Louis the Pious. We know, at least, that Ermoldus was active in the 820s. Internal evidence suggests that the *In honorem Hludowici* was composed between the summer of 826 and the winter of 828.\(^7^5\) The poet also mentions having participated in a military expedition with Pippin in 824.\(^7^6\) Sometime after this campaign and prior to the composition of the *In honorem Hludowici*, Ermoldus was exiled from Aquitaine to Strasbourg. Although he is circumspect about the specific reason for his exile, Ermoldus freely acknowledges in the *In honorem Hludowici* that he is, at least to some extent, guilty of the crime with which he has been charged.\(^7^7\) Ermoldus’ exile constitutes the driving force behind the composition of all of his surviving poetry, as the poet reiterates throughout his verse epistles and in the *In honorem Hludowici* his hope that his literary efforts will bring about an end to his banishment.\(^7^8\)

While the question of the *In honorem Hludowici*’s exact genre has been the subject of debate—it is written in elegiac verse rather than the dactylic hexameter expected of epic—its content and scope, if not its meter, plainly align with the definitions of Virgilian epic put forth in the pedagogical tradition on the *Aeneid*. As Thomas Noble has already suggested, Ermoldus’ choice to write an epic in elegiac meter need not affect our classification of the text as a Virgilian

\(^7^4\) Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, 111.
\(^7^5\) On the dating of the poem, see Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009), 120.
\(^7^6\) *In honorem Hludowici*, MGH PLAC 2: p. 262, ll.135–6.
\(^7^7\) Non tamen excuso me illius, crede, reatus / Inmunem, quo sum trusus in exilio. *In honorem Hludowici*, MGH PLAC 2: p. 79, ll. 759–60.
\(^7^8\) *In honorem Hludowici*, MGH PLAC 2: p. 4, ll. 23–5; p. 5, l. 13; p. 24, ll. 613–4; p. 79, ll. 747–68.
epic. The apparent incongruity of elegiac verse with the epic genre can be understood most effectively as a reference at the level of form to the autobiographical situation driving the composition of the entire work. It is highly likely that Ermoldus’ state of exile—the motivating force behind his writing— influenced his decision to compose an otherwise thoroughly Virgilian epic on the deeds of Louis the Pious in the elegiac couplets associated with Ovid’s exilic literature.

In fact, Ermoldus signals an explicitly Virgilian epic framework for his poem with an opening double acrostic clearly echoing the famous first lines of the Aeneid: *Ermoldus cecinit Hludoici caesaris arma*, “Ermoldus sings of the arms of the caesar Louis.” Ermoldus also demonstrates a Virgilian epic mindset in drawing parallels between Louis and Aeneas and consistently using Aeneas’ most famous epithet, *pius*, in relation to Louis, long before the moniker became widely associated with the Carolingian emperor. The poet also works hard to establish Louis’ credentials as the true founder of a new Christian empire, a task complicated by the fact that Louis inherited the throne from his father Charlemagne, the first ruler to hold the imperial title in the west since the collapse of Rome. To this end, Ermoldus focuses on Louis’ establishment of many [multiplicities] religious foundations, and emphasizes the emperor’s active

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79 Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 120.
80 Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 120. Cf. Walter Berschin, who follows Max Mantius in arguing that the poem’s mood is elegiac rather than heroic, while admitting that Virgil is the author most extensively cited by Ermoldus and noting that literary scholars have consistently categorized the text as a panegyric epic. Biographie und Epochenstil in lateinischen Mittelalter (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1986), 3:222. See also Mantius, “Ermoldus Nigellus,” in Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters (Munich: Beck, 1911), 1:552–7.
81 In honrem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2:4, ll. 1–35.
82 In honrem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2:45, ll. 143–6.
83 In honrem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2:4, l. 138; and elsewhere. Charlemagne is also referred to as *pius* at In honrem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2:33, l. 289 and elsewhere.
85 In honrem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2:11, l. 191.
taming and cultivation of wilderness landscapes through the construction of monasteries.  

Moreover, while Ermoldus acknowledges that Charles was the first Frank to adopt the title *caesar,* the poet consistently argues that Louis’ political and religious achievements surpass those of his ancestors, including his father.  

Indeed, at close of his poem, Ermoldus accentuates the thematic importance of Louis’ role as a dynastic founder by implying that the emperor, having already expanded the boundaries of his own empire beyond those of his Frankish and Roman predecessors, might one day assume the imperial seat in the East:

\[\text{Arma patrum nullo quae non valuere duello,} \]
\[\text{Sponte sua, capere, te modo regna petunt;} \]
\[\text{Quod nec Roma potens tenuit, nec Francica iura,} \]
\[\text{Tu retines Christi nomine cuncta, pater.} \]
\[\text{Organa quin etiam, quae numquam Francia crevit,} \]
\[\text{Unde Pelasga tument regna superba nims,} \]
\[\text{Et quis te solis, Caesar, superasse putat} \]
\[\text{Constantinopolis, nunc Aquis aula tenet.} \]
\[\text{Fors erit indicium, quod Francis colla remittant,} \]
\[\text{Cum sibi praecipuum tollitur inde decus.} \]

Those kingdoms that the arms of your ancestors could not conquer in any battle now embrace you of their own free will. You, *pater,* hold fast everything that powerful Rome and Frankish law did not master. In fact, even an organ, which Francia never saw, whence the arrogant Pelasgian kingdoms are swollen with conceit, and for which alone Constantinople used to think itself superior to you, Caesar, the palace at Aachen now holds. Perhaps it will be a sign that they might yield their necks to the Franks, since their particular distinction has now been taken from them.

It is clear, then, that in every sense except meter, Ermoldus is interested in presenting a thoroughly Virgilian epic account of Louis’ reign. Indeed, in his own words, he is concerned above all with depicting “the deeds of the arms-bearing *caesar*” [*Caesaris armigeri . . gesta*], an imperial *pater* who, like Aeneas, is “distinguished in war, powerful and pious” [*insignis*.

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86 Ermoldus describes the foundation of Conques at *In honorem Hludowici,* MGH PLAC 2:11, ll. 197–206 and MGH PLAC 2:13, ll. 263–6, and of Inde at MGH PLAC 2:40–1, ll. 587–96.
87 *In honorem Hludowici,* MGH PLAC 2:26, ll. 67–8.
88 *In honorem Hludowici,* MGH PLAC 2:29, ll. 167–90; MGH PLAC 2:31, ll. 245–8; MGH PLAC 2:36, l. 415.
89 *In honorem Hludowici,* MGH PLAC 2:76, ll. 635–42.
90 *In honorem Hludowici,* MGH PLAC 2:5, l. 5.
Marte, potensque, pius]91 and who “[surpasses his] ancestors in skill and faith” [Praecellisque tuos arte fideque patres].92

Both the Karolus magnus et Leo papa and the In honorem Hludowici have been examined in relation to their treatment of women. Such readings have characterized the poems’ depictions of female presence at symbolic events celebrating male political power, such as the presence of Charlemagne’s daughters in the hunting procession in the Karolus magnus et Leo papa or Judith’s presence in the baptismal procession of the Danish king, as depictions of active political participation.93 But an examination of the two works in light of women’s actual roles at the Carolingian court and in the context of the early medieval conceptions of the Virgilian epic instead reveals that the poems promote the patrilineal agenda of the Virgilian epic and its associated pedagogical traditions by obscuring and delegitimizing women’s involvement in government and, in the case of the In honorem Hludowici, by symbolically maintaining the gender hierarchy through an association between women’s death and foundation and an association between women and the outbreak of unnecessary war.

In order to place the depiction of women in the Karolus magnus et Leo papa and the In honorem Hludowici in context, it is first necessary to examine the historical evidence on the political role of women during the Carolingian period.94 The late ninth-century treatise De ordine palatii, claimed by its author Hincmar of Reims to be modelled on a work of the same name by Adalhard, abbot of Corbie and chief advisor to Charlemagne, provides the most detailed

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91 In honrem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2:6, l. 44.
92 In honrem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2:31, l. 248.
description of the queen’s official duties in the Carolingian period. The fact that the role of the queen as described in the eighth-century *Capitulare de villis* accords with that of the *De ordine palatii* suggests that, as concerns the gendered distribution of labour in the court, the *De ordine palatii* accurately portrays the system of governance in place during the reign of Charlemagne, when its model was said to have been composed, and during the reign of Louis the Pious, in whose court Hincmar lived and worked as a young man. According to the *De ordine palatii*, the queen held prominent administrative duties, being primarily responsible for the general management of the palace and the oversight of royal funds alongside the treasurer [*camerarius*], who worked directly under her [*sub ipsa*]. Specific responsibilities delegated to the queen included the equipment of the royal household, the provisioning of the palace, the distribution of military salaries, and, in certain circumstances, the procurement of gifts for foreign litigations.

The queen’s powers also extended outside the palace. The *Capitulare de villis* informs us that the queen’s orders, like those of the king, had to be followed by stewards across the kingdom, and that she likewise had the authority to determine punishments for disobedient subordinates; an example of the exercise of this latter authority can be found in a document describing the confiscation of a murderer’s property by Charlemagne’s third wife, Fastrada. A similar picture of the queen’s role emerges in Agobard of Lyons’ invective against the Empress Judith, in which he asserts that it is the queen’s duty to “diligently [administer] the government of the

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95 On the *De ordine palatii*’s dependence on Adalhard, see Hincmar, *De ordine palatii*, c. 12, MGH Fontes Iuris 3: 54.
98 *Capitulare de villis*, cc. 16, 27, 47, and 58, MGH Capit. 1:84, 85, 87, 88.
99 *Capitulare de villis*, c. 16, MGH Capit. 1:84.
100 “Formula no. 49. Praeceptum de rebus reddendis.” MGH Formulae Merowingici et Karolini aevi 1:323–4.
kingdom” [gubernacula regni diligenter exercet] and specifically defines the queen as “a minister responsible for the control and management of the palace and the kingdom” [adiutrix in regimine et gubernacione palacii et regni]. Agobard’s use of the multivalent noun adiutor to describe the queen’s role—a word signifying both helper and government minister—neatly exposes the Carolingian queen’s position as both a marital collaborator and as an administrative official with the ability to exercise real power. Collaborative decision-making can be seen at play in a 791 letter written by Charlemagne to Fastrada, in which he asks that she organize the performance of litanies in honour of a military victory, leaving the specific details up to her [in tuo... arbitrio]. Other evidence from the Carolingian period demonstrates that the queen could wield a good deal of practical political influence in the court and the battlefield, including, in the case of the Empress Judith, the ability to control the appointment of high-level positions and to determine the fate of prisoners-of-war.

Given the indispensable role the queen played in the day-to-day functioning of the government, Janet Nelson has convincingly argued that after the death of Charlemagne’s last wife Liutgard in 800, his daughters collectively took on her administrative duties; she has further suggested that the emperor’s infamous reluctance to allow his daughters to marry might have stemmed from the fact that “he needed their political help within the household and court.”

102 Agobard, Liber apologeticus 2, c. 8, in Opera Omnia, 316. The use of the noun adjutor, -oris with respect to civic office, see Liv. 33, 43; Suet. Aug. 39; id. Tib. 63; id. Calig. 26; Cic. Q. Fr. 1, 1, 3, Quint. 2, 5, 3 and elsewhere.
106 Janet Nelson, “Women at the Court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regimen,” in Medieval Queenship, ed. John Carhi Parsons (New York: Palgrave McMillan), 59. Scheck’s recent description of Charlemagne’s daughters Rotrude and Gisela as being “abbesses or at least prioresses” surrounded by an entourage of nuns in Karolus magnus et Leo papa is not supportable (“Nuns on Parade,” 23). To begin, the virgines who surround the sisters are not necessarily nuns, as the term cannot be decisively interpreted as referring to consecrated virgins rather
But other evidence makes it clear that aristocratic women besides the queen could, more generally, exercise political power in the Carolingian period. The *Capitula cum primis conferenda* of 808, for example, mentions that Charlemagne’s daughters, like their brothers, engaged in lordship, controlling their own *hominès*, vassals or military retainers. Other aristocratic women served as local administrators, both in their husbands’ absences due to military or court responsibilities and, in some instances, after their husbands’ deaths. Dhuoda, wife of Bernard of Septimania, speaks of remaining in the city of Uzès, apart from her husband and children, in order to defend her husband’s interests on the Spanish march, while the life of Liutbirga describes the widowed countess Gisla as “travelling out of necessity, because she had to manage properties in many places.”

*Women and politics in the Carolingian Virgilian epic*

But despite the key roles that Carolingian women played in the administration of
Frankish governance, female political power is obscured in both the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* and the *In honorem Hludowici*. Attention to the specific mode of classical reception in these epics suggests that the occlusion of women’s political agency, and particularly that of the queen or empress, in the Carolingian Virgilian epic may be linked to interpretations of the purpose and meaning of the epic genre circulating in schools of the period. As described by commentators like Servius, the *Aeneid* is an explicitly patrilineal narrative, tracing the foundation of what would later become the Roman Empire by the Trojan exile Aeneas as a means of praising one of Aeneas’ supposed male descendants, the emperor Augustus. Virgil accentuates the male role in the creation of the Roman people by referring to his title character as “father Aeneas” [*pater Aeneas*],\(^ {111}\) and as the “origin of the Roman race” [*Romanae stirpis origo*].\(^ {112}\) The patrilineal emphasis of the narrative is also foregrounded in Book 6, when the ghost of Aeneas’ father, Anchises, points out to his son, who is visiting Hades, the male spirits who are to be reborn as Aeneas’ illustrious Roman descendants, including Romulus, Julius Caesar, and Augustus, among several others.\(^ {113}\)

The surviving fragment of the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* explicitly draws upon the model of the *Aeneid* to highlight the theme of patrilineality in its discussion of Charlemagne’s role as ruler and dynastic founder, repeatedly referring to the Frankish sovereign as *pater Karolus*\(^ {114}\) and drawing further parallels between Charlemagne and the famously *pius* Aeneas\(^ {115}\)

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\(^ {112}\) Virgil, *Aeneid* 12.166.


\(^ {114}\) *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, MGH PLAC 1: 369, l. 149; 1:370, l. 177; 1:373, l. 294; 1:374, ll. 308–9; 1:378, l. 487.

\(^ {115}\) Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.220, 1.305, 1.378, 4.393, 5.26, 5.286, 5.685, 6.9, 6.175, 6.232, 7.5, 8.84, 9.255, 10.591, 10.783, 10.826, 11.170, 12.175, 12.311.
by calling Charlemagne *pius Karolus*. The poem likewise emphasizes Charlemagne’s paternal role by designating him *pater optimus* and remarking that he is “powerful in his authority as father” [*genitoris nomine pollens*]. The description of Charlemagne’s children riding out for a hunt, a scene itself based upon the hunt in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, also highlights the theme of patrilineality in its specific focus on male ancestors and in the fact that any personal characteristics mentioned alongside the overwhelmingly sartorially-oriented descriptions of Charlemagne’s children serve merely to redound upon Charlemagne himself. When describing Pippin’s departure for the hunt, for example, the poem emphasizes that the prince’s name and his outstanding personal characteristics derive from his male ancestors, including Charlemagne:

\[
    \text{Hinc Pippinus avi sequitur de nomine dictus,} \\
    \text{Restaurat proprii qui publica gesta parentis,} \\
    \text{Bellipotens, animosus heros, fortissimus armis,} \\
    \text{Seque suos inter famulos fert ductor opimus.} \]

Pippin, called by the name of his grandfather, follows hence, he who renewed the public deeds of his own parent. Valiant in war, courageous hero, powerful in arms, the rich leader carries himself among his attendants.

Likewise, while Charlemagne’s daughter Bertha is described as being endowed “with a strong voice and intellect, and possessing a glittering character and appearance,” the anonymous poet immediately notes that “her speech, mannerisms, and eyes recall the person of her father” [*Voce, virili animo, habitu vultuque corusco, / Os, mores, oculos imitantia pectora patris / Fert*]. Charlemagne’s children thus are depicted not as individuals, but as reflections of Charlemagne’s paternal power, both in terms of his genetic potency in the case of Pippin and Bertha and, in the

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116 *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, MGH PLAC 1: 379, l. 532. For the poem’s construction of Charlemagne as Aeneas, see Zwierlein, “Karolus Magnus—alter Aeneas,” pp. 44–52
117 *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, MGH PLAC 1: 368, l. 93.
118 *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, MGH PLAC 1: 371, l. 198.
120 *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, MGH PLAC 1: 371, ll. 220–3.
case of his other children, in terms of his wealth, as materially demonstrated through his
offspring’s rich fur-lined clothing, fine jewelry, and other ornaments.

The *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* also emphasizes patrilineality through its purposeful
reappropriation of imagery and language originally deployed by Virgil to describe the character
of the powerful queen Dido and her construction of the city of Carthage. In the first book of the
*Aeneid*, Virgil depicts Dido as a strong ruler, emphasizing her role as a city founder and as a
dispenser of justice. In portraying Dido as “pursuing the work of the future kingdom” [*instans
operi regnisque futuris*], Virgil makes it clear the Punic queen has direct oversight over the
construction of Carthage: “she was dispensing laws and precepts to men, and was meting out the
labour of the works in just portions, or distributing it by lot” [*Iura dabat legesque viris,
operaque laborem / partibus aequabat iustis, aut sorte trahebat*]. Virgil also draws attention
to Dido’s active participation in the foundation of the city through the use of the active verb to
describe the queen’s role in the construction of an impressive shrine dedicated to Juno:

> Hic templum Iunoni ingens Sidonia Dido
> condebat, donis opulentum et numine divae,
> aerea cui gradibus surgebant limina, nexaeque
> aere trabes, foribus cardo stridebat aenis.\(^{123}\)

Sidonean Dido was building [condebat] an enormous temple to Juno, rich with gifts and with the
goddess’ presence, in which bronze lintels and beams entwined with bronze were rising up, and a
hinge was creaking on the bronze doors.

Dido’s powerful role as founder and her reputation for justice are recognized not only by the
*Aeneid*’s omniscient narrator, but also by the characters in the poem. Illioneus, for example,
addresses her as the “queen whom Jupiter has allowed to build a new city and to restrain proud
nations with justice” [*Regina, novam cui condere Iuppiter urbem / iustitiaque dedit gentis*
\(^{121}\) Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.504.
— the same activities and abilities that Anchises later suggests ought to be the purview of Aeneas’ future male descendants. Finally, Dido also kindly receives the exiled Trojans into her kingdom, an action that Aeneas suggests demonstrates the queen’s piety, justice, and upright character.

Interestingly, in the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, the description of the character of Charlemagne is thematically based upon the *Aeneid*’s description of Dido in her role as a powerful ruler, city founder, and welcomer of exiles. Like Dido, Charlemagne uses bronze to build a capital city featuring a divine temple, is described as restraining the proud, and receives and supports a pious and prominent personage unjustly exiled from his own land (in this case, the mutilated and semi-deposed Pope Leo III). In this way, the Carolingian poet shifts the focus of Virgil’s narrative from the relation of a story of female foundation and rulership to an exclusively male account of foundation and rulership, obscuring the matrilineal possibilities raised, though ultimately dashed, by the *Aeneid* itself.

The other ways in which the anonymous poet appropriates the character of Dido suggest that this obscuration of Dido’s power in favour of advancing a patrilineal narrative is purposeful. Importantly, Charlemagne is not the only character for which Dido serves as a model in the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*. The epic’s author also associates Charlemagne’s wife, Liutgard, with Virgil’s Carthaginian queen. But while the anonymous poet connects Charlemagne with the

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128 For a description of the temple’s construction, see *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, MGH PLAC 1: 368–9, ll. 111–26.
129 *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, MGH PLAC 1: 367, l. 36–7, among other instances.
130 The poem focuses on Pope Leo III’s exile and his reception by Charlemagne from line 335 onwards. *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*, MGH PLAC 1: 374 ff.
figure of Dido as described at the height of her political authority, a character in full possession of her mind and replete with the qualities necessary for the competent stewardship of the state, the poet pointedly models Liutgard on a thoroughly different Dido—the Dido who has been supernaturally manipulated to fall desperately in love with Aeneas.

It is significant that the poet models Charlemagne on the Dido described prior to the gods’ interference with her free will and models Liutgard on the Dido transformed by Venus and Cupid, as the Virgilian pedagogical tradition explicitly differentiated between Dido’s character before and after divine intervention. For Donatus and Servius, the pre-enchanted Dido is without doubt an exception to the rule when it comes to gendered behaviour. Donatus comments, for example, that the queen’s issuing of laws and precepts is intended to be understood as particularly remarkable because “men were acquiescing to the orders of a woman” [quid adquiescebant viri iussis feminae], while Servius declares that Virgil’s famous description of Dido as ruler – dux femina facti – “must be uttered as if it were extraordinary” [pronuntiandum quasi mirum]. In fact, Donatus ultimately interprets Virgil’s praise of Dido not as a reflection of women’s abilities, but as a means of indirectly praising Aeneas [Aeneae iam praestruens laudem qui ab ea suscipi hospitio et amari commeruit]—the same interpretative move the author of the Karolus magnus et Leo papa makes when relating Bertha’s virilis animus back to her father.

But if Dido’s innate strength, prudence, justice, and intellect are initially described in the commentary traditions as the purview of exceptional women—women whose exceptional qualities, moreover, merely reflect those of the men to whom they are connected—both Donatus

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133 Servius, In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii, 1.364.
and Servius consistently conflate the negative behaviour displayed by Dido after she has been compelled to fall in love with Aeneas with the behaviour of all women. Thus for Donatus Dido’s suicide is not an effect of the insanity imposed upon her by divine forces, but instead an example of women’s inherent weakness [levitas sexus], a weakness that he claims is manifested in women in a propensity to self-harm and a tendency to be overcome by the madness of love [amoris . . . furore]. Likewise, while Virgil frames Dido’s suicide as an example of “what a mad woman can do” [furens quid femina possit], Servius’ gloss refers to “the well-known madness of woman” [notus . . . feminae furor], suggesting that furor is a characteristic of women as a group.

Given this interpretive context, the specific passages on which the author of the Karolus magnus et Leo papa chooses to base his respective portraits of Charlemagne and Liutgard may hold particular significance. In describing Liutgard’s preparation for the hunt, the author of the Karolus magnus et Leo papa directly recalls a scene in which the besotted Dido, “lingering in her bedroom” [reginam thalamo cunctantem], beautifies herself while her royal entourage is forced to wait. Like Dido, Liutgard “lingers for a long time in her bedroom” [thalamo cunctata diu regina], bedecking herself in purple and gold before embarking on a hunt with her beloved. That Liutgard’s dawdling, like that of Dido, inconveniently holds up the departure of her hunting party is indicated by the poet’s observation that “Charlemagne finally attempts to leave” [procedure tandem / Temptat item Karolus] once Liutgard arrives at the city gates.

In the commentary tradition, Dido’s lengthy preparations for the hunt are interpreted

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137 Virgil, Aeneid 5.6.
138 Servius, In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii, 5.6.
139 Virgil, Aeneid 4.133.
140 Karolus magnus et Leo papa, MGH PLAC 1: 370, ll. 182–3.
141 Karolus magnus et Leo papa, MGH PLAC 1: 371, ll. 197–8.
through a gendered lens. Servius explicitly interprets Dido’s lingering as a reflection of her womanly nature:

133. CUNCTANTEM morantem. atqui amatrix debuit festinare; sed pathos natura superarat, ut Terentius *dum moliuntur, dum conantur, annus est.* deinde haec morabatur studio placendi.\(^{142}\)

133. LINGERING delaying. A woman in love ought to hurry, but [Dido’s] nature has overcome her passion. As Terence says, “While [women] exert themselves, while they make an effort, a year goes by.” In sum, she was delaying in her eagerness to please.

Elsewhere, both the commentary traditions on the *Aeneid* and the *Aeneid* itself frame the kind of attention that Dido and Liutgard pay to their apparel and ornamentation as an indication of women’s innate superficiality and love of material objects. According to Virgil, for example, Camilla pursues Chloerus in battle out of a “feminine desire” [*femineo. . . amore*] for material objects.\(^{143}\) Servius glosses Virgil’s use of *femineo* here as meaning “impatient and irrational” [*inpatienti, irrationabili*].\(^{144}\) Donatus likewise frames this feminine love of ornaments as irrational, suggesting Camilla meets her doom at the hands of Arruns specifically because she is “blind with desire” [*caeca. . . cupiditate*] for Chloerus’ clothing.\(^{145}\)

Given Servius’ characterization of women’s lingering as an innate, irrational habit (Dido ought to have been hurrying) and the portrayal of women as having an inherent, irrational obsession with the material, the choice on the part of the author of the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* to base the depiction of Liutgard on *Aeneid* 4 is striking. Just as Dido’s central role in government is obscured in favour of a narrative that advances Aeneas at all costs and depicts women as superficial and irrational, the central role Liutgard played in the real-life Carolingian court is entirely obscured in the *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* in favour of a detailed description

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\(^{142}\) Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii*, 4.133.

\(^{143}\) Virgil, *Aeneid* 11.782.

\(^{144}\) Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii*, 11.782.

of her purple hair ribbons, gold and beryl cloak-fastener, crown, twice-dyed purple dress, and necklace made of precious stones.\textsuperscript{146} Indeed, although critics like Dennis Kratz have assumed that the anonymous author of the \textit{Karolus magnus et Leo papa} “seems unaware of the irony of . . . connecting Charlemagne with Dido” and “seems not to realize the implications of allusions linking Charlemagne’s wife to the unfortunate Dido,” it is just as likely that the poet is engaging strategically with Virgil’s bifurcated presentation of the character of Dido in order to draw out the patrilineal focus of his own narrative and to reinforce the gendered readings of the \textit{Aeneid} as promulgated in the pedagogical tradition on the text.\textsuperscript{147}

Ermoldus Nigellus likewise creates a patrilineal epic narrative at the expense of female political agency in the \textit{In honorem Hludowici}. This obscuration of women’s political power can be seen, for example, in Ermoldus’ description of a meeting between Pope Stephen IV and Louis prior to the latter’s imperial coronation at Reims, a scene which recalls the meeting of Charlemagne and Pope Leo III at Paderborn in the \textit{Karolus magnus et Leo papa}.\textsuperscript{148} Stephen constructs himself as feminine in relation to the masculine Louis in his initial meeting with Louis, comparing himself in an extended biblical analogy to the Queen of Sheba, impelled by the report of Solomon’s wisdom to visit the Hebrew king. Here and in later conversations, Stephen constructs Louis as an imperial \textit{pater},\textsuperscript{149} superior in politics and religion to his ancestors.\textsuperscript{150} The pope also presents Louis as superior to biblical kings, and particularly to Solomon, in terms of piety and political power:

\begin{quote}
Tu tamen es potior, tu rite potentior extas,  
Ille umbram retinens, tu quia vera colis.  
Ille fuit sapiens nimium, sed cessit amori;
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Karolus magnus et Leo papa}, MGH PLAC 1: 371, ll. 188–91.  
\textsuperscript{147} Kratz, “The \textit{Gesta Ottonis} In Its Contexts,” 202.  
\textsuperscript{148} Godman, \textit{Poets and Emperors}, 120.  
\textsuperscript{149} Ermoldus, \textit{In honorem Hludowici}, MGH PLAC 2: 31, l. 246 and elsewhere.  
\textsuperscript{150} Ermoldus, \textit{In honorem Hludowici}, MGH PLAC 2: 31, l. 248.
Tu sapiens caste vivis amore dei.
Israel ille fuit regnator solius arcis;
Tu pius Europae regna potenter habes.\textsuperscript{151}

You are nevertheless superior; you are more powerful [than Solomon]. He was holding fast to the shadow, but you, of course, worship the truth. He was very wise, but yielded to love; you wisely live in the chaste love of God. He was the ruler of Israel alone; pious, you powerfully hold the kingdoms of Europe.

The pontiff also genders imperial authority as masculine when crowning Louis emperor by envisioning the past and the future in entirely patrilineal terms:

\begin{verbatim}
Conferat omnipotens, auxit qui semen Habrahae,
Ut videas natos, unde voceris avus;
Dedat progeniem, duplicet triplicetque nepotes,
Semine ut e vestro crescat opima seges,
Quique regant Francos nec non Romamque potentem,
Donec christicolum nomen in orbe sonat.\textsuperscript{152}
\end{verbatim}

May the Omnipotent, who increased the seed of Abraham, grant that you see children, whence you will be called “grandfather.” May he give you progeny; may he double and triple your descendants! May a fertile crop grow from your seed, and may they rule the Franks and also powerful Rome until the name Christian sounds throughout the world.

Ermoldus’ patrilineal focus becomes even more evident when the pope turns to crown Louis’ hitherto unmentioned wife Irmingard:

\begin{verbatim}
Ave, femina amata deo,
Sit tibi vita, salus longos distenta per annos,
Coniugis observes semper amata thorum.\textsuperscript{153}
\end{verbatim}

Hail, woman, beloved of God! May you have life and health for many years, and may you, beloved wife, always honour your marriage.

Given the many lines of praise heaped upon Louis, the pope’s blessing of Irmingard is glaringly perfunctory. In his scathing attack on Louis’ second wife, Judith, Agobard of Lyons indicates that the queen’s political role was so crucial to the administration of the kingdom that Louis was impelled to take another wife:

Igitur cum christianissimus et piissimus imperator domnus Luduuicus bone coniugis, fide

\textsuperscript{151} Ermoldus, \textit{In honorem Hludowici}, MGH PLAC 2: 32, ll. 267–72.
\textsuperscript{152} Ermoldus, \textit{In honorem Hludowici}, MGH PLAC 2: 36–7, ll. 441–6.
\textsuperscript{153} Ermoldus, \textit{In honorem Hludowici}, MGH PLAC 2: 37, ll. 454–6.
et moribus sibi congruentis, consorcium amisisset, necesse fuit, ut aliam sibi acciperet, quæ ei posset esse adiutrix in regimine et gubernatione palatii et regni. \(^{154}\)

Therefore, when the most Christian and pious lord emperor Louis had lost the partnership of his good wife to death, a woman who had been similar to him in faith and character, it was necessary that he take another wife who could be an aid to him in the direction and management of the kingdom.

This passage not only affirms that the queen’s work is “necessary” \([necesse]\) for the government to function, but also suggests that the queen had a hand in the day-to-day rule of the realm as well as a say in long-term political planning, as both *gubernatio* and *regimen* connote the sense of steering and guidance. In contrast to Agobard’s emphasis on Irmigard’s political significance, however, Ermoldus completely truncates Irmigard’s governmental responsibilities while drawing attention to those of Louis’ military and spiritual duties as emperor. Whereas the character of the pope carefully outlines Louis’ imperial duties during his coronation speech—he must care for the church, rule the empire, enrich the papacy, and serve as a spiritual and military leader, in addition to begetting heirs—Stephen’s speech to Irmigard implies that her sole responsibility is to attend to the *torus* (literally, the marriage bed). \(^{155}\) Indeed, while the pope’s delimitation of Irmigard’s sphere of concern to the *torus* points to the royal procreative imperative, the exclusive focus on the masculine role in reproduction in the speech immediately preceding the address to Irmigard effectively minimizes the queen’s contribution even in this process.

It is possible, of course, that Ermoldus kept Irmigard’s appearance brief because he was dedicating his epic to Louis and his second wife; his use of the word *torus* (the same word used by Virgil to describe the bed which Dido shared with Aeneas, and upon which she commits suicide) and his reference to the pope’s wish that Irmigard enjoy a long and healthy life,

\(^{154}\) Agobard, *Liber apologeticus* 2.8, in *Opera Omnia*, 316.

moreover, might constitute an ironic reference to the queen’s early death. Yet a similar erasure of female political power is also apparent in Ermoldus’ depiction of the empress Judith, opening up the possibility that the marginalization of Irmengard at the coronation at Reims is part of a broader strategy on the part of Ermoldus to emphasize the patrilineal concerns of the Virgilian epic genre at the expense of political verisimilitude.

Like Irmengard, Judith’s important role at court is completely obscured in favour of a narrative that advances masculine authority. Contemporary accounts indicate that Judith was a powerful figure in Louis’ court. In addition to what we can surmise about Judith’s administrative duties from documents like the De ordine villis and the De ordine palatii, we know that Judith’s power was so great that she was perceived to be a threat by Louis’ elder sons, who repeatedly revolted against their father in the early 830s in explicit protest of her influence. That the rebels justified their actions by accusing Judith of having had an affair with the chamberlain Bernard of Septimania—the palace official over whom she, as queen, had direct supervision and worked with most closely in the carrying out of her administrative duties—may be an indication not simply of misogynist impulses, but more particularly of the extent to which the authority afforded to the queen in her administrative roles could be perceived as threatening. Certainly Judith was at the height of her power when Ermoldus was writing in the late 820s. An 829 letter from Agobard to Louis protesting the emperor’s recent revocation of a decade-old succession plan in order to accommodate Louis’ and Judith’s son, Charles, speaks

156 Virgil, Aeneid 4.659.
to the effectiveness of Judith’s political maneuvering, demonstrating that she was successfully able to advocate for her own child and to create political change that favoured him at the expense of provisions previously made for Louis’ adult sons.\textsuperscript{158}

Ermoldus gestures toward Judith’s political authority only once, and then in the text’s supplementary materials. In the final lines of the epic’s postscript, Ermoldus points to Judith’s powerful role at court, begging that she use her considerable influence to end his exile:

\begin{quote}
Tu quoque digna sibi coniux, pulcherrima Judith, 
Quae secum imperii culmina iure tenes, 
Confer opem lapso, allisum solare misellum, 
Erige labentem, carcere solve reum, 
Ut vos altitonans per plurima tempora saecli 
Sublimet, salvet, ditet, honoret, amet.\textsuperscript{159}
\end{quote}

You, too, most beautiful Judith, a worthy spouse for [Louis], you who rightly hold with him the heights of the empire [quae secum imperii culmina iure tenes], bring help to a fallen man, comfort a poor, broken-down man, raise up a man who is sinking, release a guilty man from prison, so that the Thunderer for many years might exalt, save, enrich, honour, and love you.

But while Ermoldus refers to Judith as a co-ruler of the empire in the postscript to his epic, it is notable that references to Judith’s political power are almost entirely absent in the epic proper. To be sure, there are some glimpses. In book 4, Judith joins her husband, stepson Lothar, the nobles, and the Frankish commoners in a ritualized act of gift-giving following the baptism of the Danish king Harald and his followers at Ingleheim, with each member of the Frankish party bestowing gifts upon their Danish social counterpart. In the procession following the ceremony, Ermoldus describes Judith as being accompanied by the nobles Manfred and Hugh, who, walking in step with the empress, “venerated the distinguished lady” [\textit{dominam venerantur honestam}].\textsuperscript{160} She also participates in a feast and hunt celebrating the Danes’ visit.

Importantly, however, Judith’s key role in palace administration and decision-making is

\textsuperscript{159} Ermoldus, \textit{In honorem Hludowici}, MGH PLAC 2: 79, ll. 763–8.
\textsuperscript{160} Ermoldus, \textit{In honorem Hludowici}, MGH PLAC 2: 70, l. 425.
glossed over throughout the epic in favour of a narrative that celebrates Louis’ total control of
the palace. Ermoldus presents the baptism and the subsequent feast and hunt in which the Danes
participate as spectacles specifically designed to demonstrate Louis’ power to the foreign
litigation; indeed, while the Danes experience a general sense of wonder at all of these events,
Ermoldus tells us that the Danes “especially marvelled at the great king’s riches, and they saw so
many things happen at his command” [regis praecipue mirantur praemia magni, / Imperiis cuius
currere tanta vident].¹⁶¹ In fact, the Danish king Harald explicitly interprets the opulence of the
baptism, feast, and hunt as evidence of Louis’ divine right to imperial rule, and submits his own
kingdom to Louis’ dominion on those grounds.¹⁶² In such a context, Judith, like the royal
women in the Karolus magnus et Leo papa, features not as a powerful woman in her own right,
but as an ornament to Louis, kissing his knee¹⁶³ and reclining with him on a golden cushion.¹⁶⁴
Judith’s relationship to her toddler son is also described within the parameters of the patrilineal
epic narrative being advanced by Ermoldus. When Charles sees the band of hunters go by in
pursuit of a dying deer during the hunt with the Danes, Ermoldus tells us:

Quam puer aspiciens Carolus cupit ecce parentis
More sequi, precibus postulat acer equum;
Arma rogat cupidus, pharetram celeresque sagittas,
Et cupit ire sequax, ut pater ipse solet.
Ingeminatque preces precibus; sed pulcra creatrix
Ire vetat, voto nec dat habere viam.
Ni pedagogus eum teneat materque volentem,
More pueri iam volet ire pedes.
Pergunt ast alii iuvenes, capiuntque fugacem
Bestiolam, inlaesam mox puero revehunt.
Arma aevo tenero tunc convenientia sumit,
Perculit atque ferae terga tremenda puer.
Hunc puerile decus hinc inde frequentat et ambit,
Hunc patris virtus, nomen et ornat avi,

¹⁶¹ Ermoldus, In honorem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2: 70, ll. 441–2.
¹⁶³ Ermoldus, In honorem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2: 71, l. 474.
¹⁶⁴ Ermoldus, In honorem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2: 73, l. 544.
Qualis Apollo micat gaudiens per culmina Deli,  
Latonae matri gaudia magna ferens.  

Seeing it, the boy Charles wanted to follow it like his father, and demanded a swift horse. He eagerly asked for weapons, a quiver and swift arrows, and he demanded to go in pursuit, just like his father did. He begged and begged, but his beautiful mother forbade him to go, and would not let him have his way. But neither his teacher nor his mother was able to control his will, and the boy, like a boy, sped off on foot. Some youths pressed on, captured the fleeing little deer, and soon brought it back to the boy uninjured. The boy picked up weapons suited for his young age and struck the trembling back of the wild animal. The boyish honor frequents and seeks him, the strength of his father and the name of his grandfather decorates him; like Apollo he shines, rejoicing on the heights of Delos, bringing great joy to his mother Leto.

In this passage, Ermoldus concentrates on Charles’ youthful masculinity [puer; more puer pueri; puerile decus] and imitation of his father [parentis more; ut pater ipse solet]. Judith cannot control her son’s masculinity, a masculinity that is a reflection of his father’s strength [patris virtus]. Thus Ermoldus minimizes Judith’s influence even in the domestic sphere while emphasizing Louis’ paternal power.

Symbolic treatment of women in Carolingian Virgilian epic

In addition to obscuring women’s political leadership, as does the Karolus magnus et Leo papa, Ermoldus in particular exploits the symbolic associations between women’s death and foundation and between women and the eruption of war in his epic. Although these associations are not explicitly drawn in the late antique and early medieval pedagogical traditions on the Aeneid, such links accord with the connections made in those works, particularly between women and furor. As Augustine’s comments on the Aeneid in the De civitate dei demonstrate, late antique and medieval writers often reproduced gendered readings of the Aeneid in their own texts. In his Commentary on Micah, for example, Jerome uses Virgil’s famous line – varium et mutabile semper femina  

165 Ermoldus, In honorem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2: 72–3, ll. 519–34.  
166 Virgil, Aeneid 4.569–70.
twelfth century, Virgil had himself become associated with misogyny, with legendary material about his life depicting him at odds with false and lustful women.\textsuperscript{168} Given the negative connections between Virgil and women in the Middle Ages, it is not outside the realm of possibility that Ermoldus was deliberately reproducing a Virgilian ethos in making gendered links between women’s death, foundation, and war.

As Alison Keith has demonstrated, the linking of the sexualized female corpse to the foundation of masculine political order is not limited to the \textit{Aeneid}, and is a feature of Latin epic more broadly. Nevertheless, the trope was particularly important to Virgil, who, as Keith points out, “retains and even enhances the importance of the sacrificial female for the Latin epic plot with the wholesale adaptation of the motif in the \textit{Aeneid},” liberally revising and expanding his source material in order to do so.\textsuperscript{169} Significantly, just as the deaths of Creusa, Dido, and Camilla facilitate Aeneas’ establishment of masculine political order as ultimately manifested in the foundation of Rome, so too does female death facilitate the establishment and expansion of the Frankish cultural order by Louis in Ermoldus’ \textit{In honorem Hludowici}. Book 1 of Ermoldus’ epic treats Louis’ tenure as the king of Aquitaine under his father Charlemagne, his defense of the Spanish march, and his siege of Barcelona. In the midst of recounting this political history Ermoldus pauses to provide a foundation narrative for Conques, one of the many religious institutions established in Aquitaine by Louis during his reign as king, but the only one, as Ermoldus tells us, which his epic discusses \textit{[E quibus en unum cartula nostra canit].\textsuperscript{170}}

\textsuperscript{167} Jerome, \textit{Commentariorum in Michaeam prophetam libri duo}, PL 25: col.1220C–D.

\textsuperscript{168} See, for example, John of Alta Silva, whose Virgil interprets the behaviour of an evily lustful queen, who falsely accuses her stepson of rape after he rejects her sexual advances, as reflecting the nature of all women, exclaiming: “O . . . furor, o scelus, o nequicia, o malicia muleris, o vere monstrum, mulier, monstruosius cunctis monstris!” John of Alta Silva, \textit{Dolopathos}, ed. Alfons Hilka (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1913), 87. On the association of Virgil with misogyny, especially in the High Middle Ages, see \textit{The Virgilian Tradition: The First Fifteen Hundred Years}, edited by Jan M. Ziolkowski and Michael C.J. Putnam (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 828 ff.

\textsuperscript{169} Keith, \textit{Engendering Rome}, 112.

\textsuperscript{170} Ermoldus, \textit{In honorem Hludowici}, MGH PLAC 2: 11, l. 194.
addition to serving to establish the piety of the nascent Christian emperor, the story of the
foundation of Conques sets up the king as an epic hero in the mold of Aeneas, a ruler whose
establishment of cultural order is predicated upon the violent death of a woman.

The episode opens with a description of Louis’ construction of the foundation at Conques.
Ermoldus depicts Louis in an active role as founder [fundavit, coluit],\(^1\) imposing order upon the
natural landscape, a place that “once was fit for wild animals and birds, unknown to man on
account of its wildness” [olim namque feris avibusque canoribus aptus, / Ignotusque homini pro
feritate fuit].\(^2\) The narrative then shifts to recount the events leading up to the foundation. As
Ermoldus tells it, the property was previously inhabited by a man named Datus and his mother,
the latter of whom was captured, along with their possessions, by Saracens raiding the region.
Following the attack, the enraged Datus and his comrades pursue the marauders, confronting
them at one of their fortresses. From there, the story quickly takes a turn for the violent:

\[
\text{Tum iuvenem muri quidam compellat ab arce,} \\
\text{Voce cacinnosa dicta nefànda dabat:} \\
\text{‘Date sagax, nostras modo quae res vexit ad arces} \\
\text{Te sociosque tuos, dicitnamque precor.} \\
\text{Si modo, quo resides, tali pro munere nobis} \\
\text{Dedere mavis equum, quo faleratus abis,} \\
\text{Nunc tibi mater eat sospes seu caetera praeda;} \\
\text{Sin autem, ante oculos funera matris habes.’} \\
\text{Reddidit orsa sibi Datus non digna relatu:} \\
\text{‘Funera matris age; nec mihi cura satis,} \\
\text{Nam quem poscis equum non unquam dedere dignor;} \\
\text{Inprobe, haud equidem ad tua frena decet.’} \\
\text{Nec mora, crudelis matrem consistit in arce,} \\
\text{Et nato coram dilaceravit eam.} \\
\text{Namque ferunt, ferro primo secuisse papillas,} \\
\text{Et capite absciso, heu! ‘tua mater!’ ait.}\(^3\)
\]

Then someone from the height of the wall addressed the young man, and offered
abominable words in a boisterous voice: “Wise Datus, pray tell what matter has now brought

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you and your companions to our stronghold? If you want to surrender the horse to us as a gift, the one on which you’re sitting all decked out, your mother may now go to you unharmed along with the rest of the booty; otherwise, you will endure your mother’s death before your eyes.” Datus returned words to him unworthy to relate: “Kill my mother! It’s not trouble enough to me, for I will never deign to give you the horse you demand. You vile man, it is hardly fitting for your reins.” Immediately, the cruel man stood Datus’ mother on the bulwark and tore her apart in front of her son. For they say that with the first blow he cut off her breasts. Then, having cut off her head – alas! – he said, “Your mother!”

Dismayed at his mother’s death, the repentant Datus soon turns to a life of piety. News of Datus’ now exemplary way of life eventually reaches Louis. The king summons him to the palace, and, after a day of conversation, they decide to build a monastery on Datus’ property. The interlude comes to an end with the pair laying the first foundations for Conques.

Here as in the Aeneid the sexualized, violent death of a woman is related to the establishment of masculine cultural and political order. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Ermoldus chooses to tell the tale of the foundation of Conques out of the myriad of options available. Rather than reading the narrative of the foundation of Conques as a digression, we might instead interpret it as a deliberate engagement with a fundamental motif of Latin epic, one necessary for establishing Louis as a true Virgilian hero. Importantly, as with Aeneas, Louis’ political power is established via the death of an innocent woman, a death which legitimizes Louis’ Christian rule in relation to that of the Saracens and which serves as a catalyst for his imposition of a Frankish social order onto the landscape through his construction of the foundation at Conques.

In addition to their deaths being linked with state foundation, so too are women linked to the outbreak of war in Latin epic. In the Aeneid in particular, both mortal women (Helen, Dido, the Trojan women at Drepanum, Amata) and immortal female beings (Juno, the Furies, the Harpies) are associated with the eruption of conflict. As Keith points out, “the men who wage war in the Aeneid emerge as the proponents of peace, while the advocacy of war is displaced

\[174 \text{ As the episode is characterized, for example, by Thomas F.X. Noble, Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, 134 n.21.} \]
onto a series of militant women."¹⁷⁵ In such a context, men stand out as the founders and preservers of political order, whereas women are fashioned as threats to that order. In the In honorem Hludowici, Ermoldus draws on this tradition in placing the responsibility for the outbreak of war firmly on the shoulders of the wife of Murman, leader of the Bretons. Book 3 of Ermoldus’ epic treats Louis’ suppression of an ongoing rebellion by the Bretons. At the start of the book, Louis sends an emissary, Witchar, to urge Murman to submit his people to Louis’ control. Witchar presents a compelling case for peace, supporting his arguments with a number of references to ancient myth, including Virgil’s account of Camilla’s failed attempt to defeat Aeneas.¹⁷⁶ But as soon as Murman has begun to be persuaded by Witchar’s arguments, their conversation is interrupted by the machinations of Murman’s wife:

Iam iam cunctantem Wichar sermone polito  
Cooperat atque minis flectere rite datis,  
Mente venenata thalamo cum perfida coniux  
Murman ad amplexus more superba petit;  
Oscula prima genu libabat, et oscula collo,  
Oscula dat barbis, basiat ora, manus.  
Itque redit giro, tangitque perita per artem,  
Officiumque cupit insidiosa dare.  
Suscipit ille miser tandem hanc, strinxitque la  
Datque locum voti, coniugis acta placent.  
Et petit infelix aures, longeque susurrat,  
Avertit sensus moxque mariti animum. . . .  
Wicchari. . . . mulier funesta restinxit  
Verba, martiali pectore fixa boni.¹⁷⁷

Just when Witchar had begun to persuade the stubborn man with polished speech and well-delivered threats, Murman’s perfidious wife, with her poisonous mind, comes out from the bedroom and in her haughty way seeks her husband to embrace him. First she poured kisses on his knee, then on his neck; she gives kisses to his beard, she kisses his mouth and hands. She goes around and around in a circle. The skillful woman deceives through her art and, deceitful, desires to be of service. The miserable man finally lifts her up, and draws her tight with his arm. He gives her an opportunity for her desire. His wife’s actions are pleasing. The wretched woman seeks his ears, and whispers for a longtime. She changed her husband’s feelings, and then his mind. . . . The deadly woman extinguished the words of Witchar that had been fixed in her good husband’s heart.

¹⁷⁵ Keith, Engendering Rome, 77.  
¹⁷⁶ Ermoldus, In honorem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2: 45, l. 144.  
¹⁷⁷ Ermoldus, In honorem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2: 45–6, ll. 163–74, 185–6.
In addition to undermining peace talks, Murman’s wife also insults Witchar’s masculinity, addressing her husband as follows:

‘O rex atque decus Brittonum gentis optimae
Dextera cuius avi nomen in aethra refert,
Unde tuas talis coniunx pervenit ad arces,
Hospes,’ ait, ‘pacem, bellave sive canit?’

“Oh king and glory of the noblest people of the Britons, whose right hand carries the name of his ancestors to the ether, from what place does such a woman come to your stronghold, and does this stranger sing of peace or war?”

As in the pedagogical tradition, women’s power is presented as abnormal and threatening to masculine power. Indeed, when Murman heeds his wife’s advice and enters into an ultimately unsuccessful campaign against the Franks, the Breton people explicitly blame Murman’s wife for their defeat and their leader’s death in battle, proclaiming: “Our Murman died, struck by a Frankish spear, trusting too much in his wife’s words!” [Murman noster obit Francisco cuspidem tactum, / Credulus en nimium coniugis alloquis!].

Women and politics in Hrotsvit’s epics

In contrast to the obscuration of women’s political authority found in the Virgilian epics of the Carolingian period, Hrotsvit draws attention to women’s political authority throughout the Gesta Ottonis and the Primordia coenobii Gandeshemensis. She overtly points to female co-rulership by describing Mathilda as “co-reigning” with her husband Henry the Fowler [Conregnante sua Mathilda coniuge clara]. She also refers to three queens—Liutgard, Ecgwynn, and Adelaide—with the official title consors regni, “partner in government.” By

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178 Ermoldus, In honorem Hludowici, MGH PLAC 2: 46, ll. 189–92.
180 Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 276, l. 22.
181 Liutgard: Hrotsvit, Primordia, p. 318, l. 308 and p. 324, ll. 470–1; Ecgwynn (unnamed in Hrotsvit’s text): Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 278, l. 80; Adelaide: Gesta Ottonis, p. 298, l. 665.

Hrotsvit similarly emphasizes women’s co-rulership in her depiction of Ida, the wife of Otto I’s son and one-time heir apparent Liudolf. In the \textit{Gesta}, Ida shares political authority with her husband and father-in-law by travelling alongside them on the royal itinerary,\footnote{Illam nec habitare locis voluit segregatis / Rex idem. . . / Sed ceu reginam regnum transire per amplum, / Quo sic dilectus sentiret filius eius / Dulcia gratiolae semper munuscula magnae, / Ipsi cum sponsa regni sociatus in aula. Hrotsvit, \textit{Gesta Ottonis}, p. 324, ll. 461–6.} the journey undertaken by Ottonian rulers both “to take symbolic possession of the kingdom,” and, more practically, to fulfill their administrative duties throughout the realm.\footnote{Rosamond McKitterick, “A King on the Move: The Place of an Itinerant Court in Charlemagne’s Government,” in \textit{Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires}, ed. Jeroen Duindam et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 146. John W. Bernhardt, \textit{Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany}, c. 936–1074 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) provides a thorough overview of itinerant kingship during the Ottonian period.} Significantly, Hrotsvit specifies that Ida joined the royal itinerary at Otto I’s request. The death of Otto’s wife Eadgyth just before their son’s marriage to Ida left the kingdom without a queen. Otto I’s desire to have Ida take part in the itinerary “like a queen” [ceu reginam] indicates the crucial role the queen played in itinerant government, suggesting not only that the queen’s duties were so essential that they needed to be fulfilled immediately after Eadgyth’s death, but also that there was value in training Ida to perform the duties of a queen before her own husband ascended to the throne.

Hrotsvit also directly shows royal husbands and wives working together to achieve religio-political goals throughout her epics. This is particularly evident in Hrotsvit’s depiction of the relationship between Oda and Liudulf. She describes their efforts to build the monastery at
Gandersheim as “the joint endeavor of a similar wish” [communi similis conamine voti]\(^{185}\) and she consistently uses the plural to describe their foundational activities [iuxere; decreverunt; tradebant; pergebant; visitabant; deposcentes].\(^{186}\) When Liudolf addresses the pope regarding the couple’s desire for Gandersheim to be granted relics and papal immunity, he consistently speaks in the third person plural [venimus; nitimur; gerimus; perficiamus; flagitamus; tradimus], simultaneously recognizing and drawing attention to his wife’s interest in and contributions to the project.\(^{187}\) Similarly, when Liudolf orders the clearing of the forest surrounding Gandersheim, Hrotsvit specifies that he made the decision “with the consent of his beloved wife Oda” [Consensuque suae dilectae coniugis Odae].\(^{188}\)

Hrotsvit also explicitly depicts women carrying out the specific political duties that were required of them as co-rulers. In particular, Hrotsvit frequently portrays royal women fulfilling their advisory and intercessionary duties, duties that, as recent scholars have emphasized, were essential to the proper functioning of the itinerant governments of the Carolingian and Ottonian periods.\(^{189}\) Although Hrotsvit refers to Liudolf as Gandersheim’s “first founder” [primus. . . conditor], for example, she emphasizes that “the origin of the entire structure proceeded from Oda’s exhorting prayers” [processit origo / Omnis structurae precibus poscentibus Odae].\(^{190}\) Similarly, while Hrotsvit describes Duke Otto finishing the walls of the convent, she clarifies that he does so “according to his mother’s orders” [iuxta praeepta parentis], and notes that the date of Gandersheim’s dedication is determined on Oda’s advice.\(^{191}\) Other women, too, exploit

\(^{185}\) Hrotsvit, *Primordia*, p. 310, l. 101.
\(^{186}\) Hrotsvit, *Primordia*, p. 310, ll. 108–9, 113; p. 311, ll. 121, 123.
\(^{187}\) Hrotsvit, *Primordia*, p. 311, ll. 135, 137; p. 312, ll. 145–6, 155.
\(^{188}\) Hrotsvit, *Primordia*, p. 315, l. 229.
\(^{189}\) For a recent examination of the centrality of intercession in early medieval systems of governance with particular attention paid to the role of the queen, see Sean Gilsdorf, *The Favor of Friends: Intercession and Aristocratic Politics in Carolingian and Ottonian Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).
\(^{191}\) Hrotsvit, *Primordia*, p. 320, l. 373–5.
their roles as intercessors for the benefit of Gandersheim, including Oda’s daughter Liutgard, wife of Louis the Younger:

Ergo sui natam, Liutgard de nomine dictam,
Nutu clementisregis praestante perennis
Elegit clarus Francorum rex Hludowicus
Regni consortem sibimet sociamque perennem. . .
Quae regina quidem nobis ad prosperitatem
Facta suae dignum sanctae matri famulatum
<Consensu> regis praebens, proprii senioris,
<Maxima> coenobio permisit commoda nostro.\textsuperscript{192}

Therefore, by the will of the loving and eternal king, the famous King Louis of the Franks chose her daughter, called by the name of Liutgard, to be his partner in government and his eternal companion. . . . Indeed, having been made queen to our good fortune, offering, with the consent of her own husband the king, a worthy service to her holy mother, she entrusted the greatest gifts to our convent.

While in these instances and others Hrotsvit depicts men and women working alongside each other for the civic good, the canoness is also unequivocal in her assertion that women are capable of being leaders in their own right. In the \textit{Primordia}, Hrotsvit provides several examples of capable female leaders in the religious sphere. She describes Hathumoda as governing the administration of the convent for over two decades.\textsuperscript{193} The abbess Gerberga, likewise, is described as ruling,\textsuperscript{194} protecting, and instructing the inmates of Gandersheim\textsuperscript{195} while drawing on her various political connections to gain material benefits for the monastery.\textsuperscript{196} And Oda, who in her later years resides in the convent, also appears throughout the epic as a competent leader, guiding the direction of Gandersheim for over half a century.

Hrotsvit’s epics depict women independently exercising secular power as well. The

\textsuperscript{192} Hrotsvit, \textit{Primordia}, p. 318, ll. 305–8; 310–4.
canoness’ materially-focused commentary on Queen Liutgard’s death a few years after that of
her husband Louis, for example, indicates that politically-connected women retained their power
even as widows and could distribute wealth according to their wishes:

Liudgardis regina, sui dignissima regni
Consors, tantorum quae nobis causa bonorum
Exitit, e mundo discessit (pro dolor) isto
Non sine nostrarum magno rerum detrimento.197

Queen Liutgard, [Louis’] most worthy partner in government, who was the source of so many
good things for us, departed – alas! – from this world, not without a great loss to our interests.

But Hrotsvit’s most notable depiction of secular female rulership can be found in her
portrayal of Adelaide in the Gesta Ottonis. When Adelaide’s first husband, Lothair II of Italy,
dies, Hrotsvit describes him as “rightly leaving the kingdom of Italy to be ruled by the highest
queen whom he joined to himself in love” [Italiae regnum linquens merito retinendum / Summae
reginae, sibi quam sociavit amore].198 Although Adelaide is overthrown in a coup, Hrotsvit is
quick to state that the queen “was so brilliant, with such a great intellect, that she could have
worthily ruled the kingdom left to her if the people had not soon affirmed bitter treachery”
[ingenio fuerat praelucida tanto / Ut posset regnum digne rexisse relictum / Si gens ipsa dolum
mox non dictaret amarum].199 Adelaide’s previous political actions, moreover, are what Hrotsvit
claims attract Otto I to her in the first place, asserting that the Saxon people repeatedly point to
Adelaide’s previous political support of the Ottonians when promoting her to the king as an ideal
candidate for his remarriage.200

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197 Hrotsvit, Primordia, p. 324, ll. 470–3.
198 Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 292, ll. 469–70.
200 Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 296, ll. 588–97.
Symbolic treatment of women in Hrotsvit’s epics

In addition to emphasizing rather than obscuring women’s political authority, Hrotsvit also differs from her Carolingian counterparts, and in particular from Ermoldus, in her inversion of gendered Virgilian tropes surrounding the female advocacy of war and the association of women’s death with foundation. Unlike Virgil and Ermoldus, who attribute the outbreak of war to mortal women, and, in Virgil’s case, to goddesses and the Furies as well, Hrotsvit consistently attributes the outbreak of war to mortal men and to an explicitly male Satan. Similarly, in contrast to Virgil and Ermoldus, who associate foundation with women’s death, Hrotsvit associates foundation not with the death of women (or men), but with the death of the pagan past, portraying both women and men as engaged and active contributors to the foundational process.

In the Gesta Ottonis, Hrotsvit depicts Satan, gendered male through the use of the masculine epithets antiquus inimicus, vetus hostis, and malignus, as the source of the initial civil conflict that broke out among the Saxon people in the late 930s:

O quam tranquillum ridens deduceret čvum  
Fortunata satis nostre res publica gentis,  
Quę nimiris imperio regis regitur sapientis,  
Si non antiqui mala calliditas inimici  
Turbaret nostrum secreta fraude serenum!  
Denique devictis aligenorum bene telis  
Exoritur nostris subito discordia fortis,  
Leserat et plebem bellum civile fidelem  
Plus quam bellorum structura frequens variorum.  

Oh how tranquil a time the smiling and very fortunate republic of our people would have passed, our republic that is ruled by the authority of an exceedingly wise king, if the evil cunning of the ancient enemy had not disturbed our peace with secret deceit! In short, after the spears of the foreigners had been completely subdued, discord suddenly sprang up among our own people, and civil war injured the faithful populace more than the frequent succession of different wars.

201 Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 281, ll. 165; p. 282, l. 203; and p. 301, l. 729.  
202 Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 286, l. 318.  
203 Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 301, l. 732.  
204 Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 281, ll. 163–71.
Hrotsvit likewise characterizes the second outbreak of civil war in Saxony as “an evil deceit of the ancient enemy, the contrivance of a much more degenerate crime than the first,” and attributes the third outbreak of civil conflict, involving the attempted assassination of Otto I at Quedlinburg Abbey on Easter Sunday, 941, to Satan as well:

Sed nec sic veteris finem sumpsit dolus hostis,  
Qui semper fragiles temptat pervertere mentes  
Post factum facinus suadens superaddere peius.  
Fertur percerte quorundam pectora bile  
Tanto pestiferi tandem penetrare veneni,  
Ut mortem regis vellent inferre fidei  
Ipsius et fratrem populo preponere regem;  
Nec timuere diem paschsæ sanctum maculare,  
Si posset fieri, fuso cum sanguine iusti.  

The trickery of the ancient enemy, which always tries to pervert fragile minds, did not then end after that time, but instead urged them to add an even worse outrage. It is said, very reliably, that he penetrated the hearts of certain men with such great a madness of pestilential poison that they wished to bring about the death of the faithful king himself, and to place his brother in front of the people as king; and they did not fear to pollute the holy day of Easter, having poured out the blood of the just man, if they could have done so.

Finally, the canoness also blames Satan for the outbreak of the final bout of civil war covered in the epics, the rebellion of Otto I’s son Liudolf in the early 950s, characterizing the conflict as “the renewed plague of the ancient enemy” [antiqui renovata lue inimici], in which the devil “first agitated all the leaders of the kingdom, hoping the ruin of the common people soon would occur” [Regni rectores primum turbaveret omnes / Sperans interitum plebis mox esse futurum].

Importantly, however, Hrotsvit simultaneously blames the devil and mortal men for the outbreak of civil conflict. In addition to attributing the first outbreak of civil war to demonic forces, for example, Hrotsvit also states that it took place because “the impulse of certain men

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207 Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 301, l. 729.  
208 Hrotsvit, Gesta Ottonis, p. 301, ll. 733–4.
was not kept within due bounds” [\textit{conflictus quorundam non moderatus}].\textsuperscript{209} And just as the devil incites men to war throughout the \textit{Gesta}, so too do men incite other men to engage in conflict. Eberhard of Bavaria,\textsuperscript{210} Gilbert of Lorraine,\textsuperscript{211} and a succession of other, unnamed, men\textsuperscript{212} persuade each other as well as Otto’s brother Henry and his son Liudolf to rebel against the king’s authority and enter into war. Like Ermoldus, Hrotsvit associates war-mongering with seduction, consistently employing sexualized rhetoric to describe the masculine incitation to war. The dukes Eberhard and Gilbert “persuade Henry, brother of the faithful king, stroking him with evilly alluring words” [\textit{Henrico regis fratri suasere fidelis / Mulcentes nimium verbis ipsum male blandis}].\textsuperscript{213} Elsewhere, Hrotsvit uses the same sexualized language to describe Henry’s regret over having given in to the enticements of devious, war-mongering men:

\begin{quote}
Hoc quoque deflevit nimiis persepe lamentis,  
Quod male blanditis horum cessit suadelis,  
Ipsum qui verbi corruperunt simulatis.\textsuperscript{214}
\end{quote}

He very often wept over this with exceeding laments—that he yielded to the alluring persuasions of these men who corrupted him with feigned words.

Finally, just as Hrotsvit shifts the role of the sexualized, seductive epic war-mongerer from women to men, she also actively works to distance women from any blame they might shoulder for the outbreak of war, as evidenced in her characterization of Liudolf’s rebellion:

\begin{quote}
Denique famosi natus regis Lidulfus  
Ut cognovit amicicie signis satis aptis,  
Quanto perfectae fidei dilexit amore  
Henricum regis fratrem regina fidelis,  
Quodque suę fidei studio se subdicit omni,  
Tangitur interni iaculis secreto doloris  
Haud ira fervens, odii nec felle tabescens,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{209} Hrotsvit, \textit{Gesta Ottonis}, p. 281, l. 173.  
\textsuperscript{212} Hrotsvit, \textit{Gesta Ottonis}, p. 286, ll. 321 ff.; p. 301, 744 ff.  
\textsuperscript{213} Hrotsvit, \textit{Gesta Ottonis}, p. 283, ll. 215–6.  
Sed super amissso care genitricis amore
Ex egri latebris ducens suspiria cordis;
Deceptusque malis permultorum suadelis
Pertimuit fragilis pro consuetudine mentis,
Quod post non uti donis debet honoris
Condigni, sed forte locum subire secundum.
(Quod fieri Christus numquam permetteret aequus,
Si staret regnum iusta sub pace quietum.)

In sum, when Liudolf, son of the famous king, perceived in perfectly appropriate signs of friendship with what great love of perfect faith the queen loved Henry, brother of the faithful king, and that she subjected herself to him with all the zeal of her faith, he was secretly struck by the darts of internal grief, neither burning with anger, nor wasting away from the poison of hatred, but drawing forth sighs from the depths of his sorrowful heart over having lost through death the love of his dear mother. And deceived by the evil persuasions of very many men, he feared according to the custom of his weak mind that afterwards he would not enjoy the gifts of appropriate honour, but perhaps would be moved to second place (which impartial Christ would never have allowed to happen, if the kingdom had remained quiet under a just peace).

The canoness’ comments on the origins of Liudolf's rebellion are revealing. Although Hrotsvit ultimately blames Liudolf for the conflict, citing his “weak mind” \textit{[fragilis mens]} and the recent loss of his mother as mitigating factors, she appears to be countering possible alternative narratives, defending Adelaide and Henry from allegations of an illicit relationship by referring to their behaviour as “perfectly appropriate” \textit{[amicicie signis satis aptis]}. By portraying any rumours about Adelaide as the product of the clouded thinking of a grief-stricken stepson, Hrotsvit effectively shuts down any arguments that may attempt to lay the blame for the rebellion onto Adelaide as well as any associations that might be made between women’s sexuality and war.

But if Hrotsvit inverts the Virgilian trope of the war-mongering woman in the \textit{Gesta Ottonis}, her adaptation of the Virgilian association between women’s death and foundation is

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
more nuanced. Although Kate Olson has argued that the death of Duke Liudolf in the *Primordia* inverts Virgil’s linking of women’s death with foundation, thus creating “a feminine epic appropriate for a matriarchy,” Liudolf’s death does not in fact accord with the Virgilian foundational paradigm. In Virgil and his successors like Ermoldus, women’s death always precedes foundation as a necessary antecedent to the foundational process. Hrotsvit, on the other hand, is clear that the process of building the monastery has already begun when Liudolf dies. Far from framing Liudolf’s death as facilitating Ganderheim’s construction, as does Ermoldus with Datus’ mother in regard to Conques, Hrotsvit explicitly refers to the duke as Gandersheim’s “first founder” (*primus...conditor eius*), a role that he actively and enthusiastically takes on in life.

Indeed, if the death of anything plays a role in Hrotsvit’s foundation narrative, it is the death of the pagan past. Hrotsvit frames Liudolf’s clearing of the forest where he and others have witnessed the appearance of mysterious lights in the night and where he is to build Gandersheim as an explicit break with the classical world:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nec mora, cum nebula terras nox texerat atra,} \\
\text{Undique silvestris per girum denique vallis,} \\
\text{In qua fundandum fuerat praenobile templum,} \\
\text{Ordine disposito cernuntur lumina plura;} \\
\text{Quae simul arboreas umbras noctisque tenebras} \\
\text{Clare pollentis scindebant luce nitoris.} \\
\text{Hinc simul astantes domino laudem referentes} \\
\text{Omnes esse locum firmabat sanctificandum} \\
\text{Eius ad obsequium, qui luce repleverat illum.} \\
\text{At dux caelesti non ingratus pietati} \\
\text{Consensuque dilectae coniugis Odae,} \\
\text{ Arboribus mox succisis spinisque resectis} \\
\text{Omnino vallem mundari iussit eandem;} \\
\text{Silvestremque locum Faunis monstrisque repletum} \\
\text{Fecit mundatum divinis laudibus aptum.} \\
\text{Hinc, quos poscit opus, prius acquirens sibi sumptus}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{217}\) Olson, “What Hrotsvit Did to Virgil,” 130.
\(^{218}\) Hrotsvit, *Primordia*, p. 317, l. 280.
Protinus ecclesiae construxit moenia pulchrae.\textsuperscript{219}

Without delay, when the night had covered the earth with a dark mist, in every direction in the circle of the forested valley in which the well-respected temple would be built, they discerned many lights in a regular order. At once they split the arboreal shadows and the gloom of the night with a bright light of powerful brilliance. At this, at once giving praise to the Lord, all those who were there all declared that the place ought to be sanctified for the worship of the one who had filled it with light. But the duke, not ungrateful for celestial goodness, with the consent of his beloved wife Oda ordered the entire valley to be cleansed, with the trees soon cut down and the thorn-bushes cut back; and he made the forested place filled with fauns and monsters clean and fit for divine praises. First acquiring for himself the funds that the work demanded, henceforth he immediately constructed the walls of the beautiful church.

Hrotsvit’s reference to classical forest deities in this passage represents an interesting twist on Virgilian foundational tropes. In Virgil, foundation is accomplished not only through women’s death, but also through male domination of feminized landscapes.\textsuperscript{220} In Ermoldus, too, the wild and explicitly fecund \textit{[Vinetis, pomis, seu dapibus variis]} landscape at Conques is tamed by Louis.\textsuperscript{221} But in Hrotsvit, Liudolf, with the support of his wife, dominates not a feminized landscape, but a classicized landscape. The power dynamic thus shifts from the domination of male over female to the triumph of Christian over pagan, a shift that parallels Hrotsvit’s own reception of the classical epic genre.

Claims that Hrotsvit’s epics are matrilineal rather than patrilineal or feminine rather than masculine thus fall short in sustained analysis of her foundational narratives. Men and women are equally responsible throughout the \textit{Primordia} for successfully constructing the monastery. If Liudolf is Gandersheim’s first founder, it is because Oda pushes him into it, after having been encouraged by her own mother to do so. If Otto finishes the walls of the convent,\textsuperscript{222} he can only do so because his sister Hathumoda miraculously discovered rocks suitable for construction.\textsuperscript{223} Such examples proliferate throughout the text. As we have seen, Hrotsvit likewise shows women

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{219} Hrotsvit, \textit{Primordia}, pp. 314–5, ll. 218–34.
\item \textsuperscript{220} See, for example, Keith, \textit{Engendering Rome}, 36–64.
\item \textsuperscript{221} Ermoldus, \textit{In honorem Hludowici}, MGH PLAC 2: 11, l. 204.
\item \textsuperscript{222} Hrotsvit, \textit{Primordia}, p. 320, l. 373.
\item \textsuperscript{223} Hrotsvit, \textit{Primordia}, pp. 315–7, ll. 238–79.
\end{itemize}
working alongside men in the political sphere. Hrotsvit’s epics thus present a new paradigm in which men and women work together, a more accurate reflection of a world where women could and did exercise political authority. Indeed, a few years after the composition of Hrotsvit’s epics, the Ottonian empire would be ruled for over a decade by women—by Adelaide’s daughter-in-law Theophanu, who famously referred to herself as imperator and domnus, and, after Theophanu’s death, by Adelaide herself.\(^{224}\)

Overall, attention to the Virgilian pedagogical tradition shows us that while Hrotsvit may not have had access to written historical sources for her texts, this did not mean she was without a literary model. Attention to the definitions of Virgilian epic circulating in early medieval schools, like the ninth-century copies of Servius at Gandersheim, enables us to expand our understanding of the epic genre in the ninth and tenth centuries, and to understand the ways in which Virgil was received and deployed for political purposes both by the Carolingians and the Ottonians. But attention to the medieval pedagogical tradition also allows us to more fully appreciate the extent of Hrotsvit’s learning and the nature of her subversion of epic norms. Hrotsvit did not need to write a matrilineal epic to subvert the Virgilian tradition and subtly critique the approaches of the Carolingians who came before her. She merely had to reflect more accurately women’s participation in and contributions to political life, while undermining the oppression of women woven into the fabric of the Virgilian epic’s symbolic discourse and perpetuated by her Carolingian precursors.

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\(^{224}\) Theophanius gratia divina imperator augustus. . . . anno dominice incarnationis DCCCXC, anno vero imperii domni Theophanii imperatoris XVIII. Theophanu, “Diploma no. 2. 1 April 990,” in MGH DD O III: 876.
CHAPTER 4:
The Christian Metamorphosis of Ovid in Hrotsvit of Gandersheim’s Book of Legends

The question of the literary model for Hrotsvit of Gandersheim’s first book—a collection of religious narratives composed in dactylic hexameters and elegiac distichs—has been treated as a closed subject in recent scholarship. Walter Berschin, for example, has remarked that “the only model for [Hrotsvit’s] book of verse legends can be Prudentius, who originated the classical Christian cycle of metrical saints’ lives in the Peristephanon,”¹ while Stephen Wailes has made the slightly more forceful assertion that “when one examines literary history to discover possible models for Hrotsvit’s cycle of poetic stories, the only work of likely relevance is Prudentius’ Peristephanon.”² Hrotsvit’s legends clearly share several points of contact with Prudentius’ late fourth-century collection of poems on Spanish and Roman martyrs. On the level of form, Hrotsvit and Prudentius both compose their Christian legends in multiple meters and explicitly mention their use of dactylic measures.³ In terms of content, four of Hrotsvit’s eight legends are, like the poems of the Peristephanon, martyr narratives, and the subject matter of two of these passions particularly evokes that of the Peristephanon—both the Peristephanon and Hrotsvit’s book of legends conclude with a poem on the martyrdom of St Agnes, and Hrotsvit’s account of Pelagius’ martyrdom in tenth-century Córdoba recalls Prudentius’ geographical fixation on

² Stephen Wailes, “The Sacred Stories in Verse,” in A Companion to Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (fl. 960): Contextual and Interpretative Approaches, ed. Phyllis R. Brown and Stephen Wailes (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 92. Citing the same passage from Berschin which I have cited above (see note 1), Wailes claims that Berschin likewise “concludes that only the Peristephanon . . . comes into question as a model for Hrotsvit” (93); this is a slight misrepresentation of Berschin’s argument, as Berschin does not actually claim that the Peristephanon was Hrotsvit’s only model, but that Prudentius was Hrotsvit’s only model.
Spain.⁴ Hrotvit’s literary nods to the late antique Christian poet also extend beyond the imitation of his series of martyr narratives; her legends are replete with distinct verbal borrowings culled from almost the entirety of Prudentius’ literary corpus,⁵ and she inserts amongst her legends a verse table blessing reminiscent of the *hymnus ante cibum* found in the *Cathemerinon*, Prudentius’ book of lyric hymns.⁶

Despite such similarities, the considerable differences between Hrotsvit and Prudentius are nevertheless worth emphasizing. The correspondence between the two authors is far from exact, and Stephen Wailes himself has conceded that “were it not for the shared concept of a hagiographic cycle in verse, and the central importance of Prudentius for Hrotsvit, one might doubt the connectedness of the works.”⁷ In terms of structure, for example, the *Peristephanon* is longer and more metrically diverse than Hrotsvit’s book of legends. Prudentius employs eleven different meters or combinations thereof in the fourteen poems of the *Peristephanon*, while Hrotsvit uses only two meters across eight legends; Prudentius shows a preference for complex Horatian verse patterns, while Hrotsvit sticks to the dactylic hexameter and elegiac distich.⁸ Moreover, unlike the *Peristephanon*, which is comprised solely of metrical hymns on the martyrs, Hrotsvit’s legends are interspersed with verse dedications and prayers, preceded by a prose preface, and followed by a prose discussion of Hrotsvit’s oral sources.

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⁵ Helene Homeyer identified in Hrotsvit’s legends discrete verbal borrowings from six of Prudentius’ works—*Apotheosis, Cathemerinon, Contra Symmachum, Hamartigenia, Peristephanon,* and *Psychomachia* (*Hrotsvithae Operae*, 494–5).
⁶ Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon*, in *Prudentius* 1: 6–8, ll. 18–31; the text of Hrotsvit’s blessing is edited in Berschin, *Hrotsvit: Opera Omnia* (2002), 93, as the *Benedictio ad mensam*.
⁷ Wailes, “Sacred Stories,” 94. One assumes Wailes roots his belief in “Prudentius’ central importance to Hrotsvit” in the sheer number of direct citations of Prudentius included in Hrotsvit’s legends.
Hrotsvit’s book of legends also differs dramatically from the *Peristephanon* in terms of content. The canoness places less narrative emphasis on bodily suffering than does Prudentius and stresses miraculous manifestations of divine power to a greater extent; indeed, while Hrotsvit’s placement of the passion of Agnes at the end of her book of legends signals a certain indebtedness to the *Peristephanon*, her decision to base her version of the passion of St Agnes on the miracle-laden fifth-century *Vita sanctae Agnetis* of Pseudo-Ambrose instead of the more laconic narrative found in the *Peristephanon* concurrently distances her legends from the work of the Spanish poet.9 The scope of Hrotsvit’s book of legends also extends beyond martyrdom to include apocryphal stories on the Holy Family (*Maria, Ascensio*) and accounts of non-martyr saints (*Basilius, Theophilus*). In fact, Hrotsvit’s legends are strikingly disparate in tone and content, with plots ranging from adultery and murder (*Gongolfus*) to the ascension of Christ (*Ascensio*). And although some of Hrotsvit’s legends bear resemblance to some of the others—there are two legends which focus on Satanic pacts, there are two virgin martyr narratives, etc.—as Wailes has put it, it is “hard to bring the life of Gongolf and that of Pelagius into thematic connection with that of Theophilus and the miracle worked by St Basil except by using very large concepts.”10

The stylistic and thematic diversity of Hrotsvit’s book of legends has presented critics with a variety of hermeneutic challenges. Given the heterogeneity of the legends themselves, it is not surprising that, barring comparison of Prudentius’ work with that of Hrotsvit, intertextual examinations of Hrotsvit’s legends have been limited in the main to hagiographical source work concentrating on the provenance of individual legends or on the comparison of select legends.

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9 The version of Pseudo-Ambrose can be found in the *Acta Sanctorum* for January, vol. 2, pp. 715–8.
with later versions of the same stories.  Most literary or cultural examinations of the book of legends, too, have avoided studying the work as a cohesive unit, and instead have read the poems on an individual basis or in conjunction with Hrotsvit’s epic and dramatic works.  In fact, Hrotsvit’s book of legends has only rarely been discussed as a whole, and attempts to find an overarching theme for the book in its entirety have enjoyed limited success.  Hugo Kuhn’s suggestion, for instance, that virginity constitutes the overarching concern of Hrotsvit’s entire literary corpus, including the legends, stretches credulity in that at least one of the poems (Dionysius) has no discernable link to the topic of virginity and others touch upon this theme.


14  Cf. Marco Giovini’s Indagini sui Poemetti agiografici di Rosvita di Ganderheim (Genova: Università di Genova, Facoltà di lettere, 2001), which focuses almost exclusively on the identification of possible sources for Hrotsvit’s Latin phrasing in her book of legends; some of Giovini’s suggestions of verbal borrowings are more convincing than others.
only in the most oblique of ways.\textsuperscript{15} Other propositions, on the other hand, have veered dangerously into the general—for example, “the nature of divine justice and divine grace,” which Katharina Wilson identifies as the unifying theme of the book of legends, could easily be said to be the theme of all Christian literature,\textsuperscript{16} while Ferrucio Bertini’s claim that “the goal of these legends is to provide edifying examples of lives lived in imitation of Christ and the Virgin” essentially refers to the aim of all hagiography, and sheds no light on Hrotsvit’s particular approach to the genre.\textsuperscript{17}

The identification of additional literary models for Hrotsvit’s book of legends might help illuminate a work that has proven resistant to interpretation. Hrotsvit’s deep engagement with Prudentius need not preclude the existence of other significant intertextual relationships between Hrotsvit’s legends and the works of previous authors, and given Hrotsvit’s participation in the \textit{renovatio} of the pagan literature of the Roman period for a revived Roman empire under the Ottonians in her books of plays and epics, it is specifically worth examining whether or not her legends, too, might be linked to classical Latin literature.\textsuperscript{18} While Hrotsvit’s legendary cycle contains verbal echoes of Virgil, Ovid, Statius, Lucan, Cicero, and Lucretius, her linguistic borrowings from these classical authors are so brief that critics have summarily dismissed the possibility that Hrotsvit was purposefully engaging with the works of these authors, and have


\textsuperscript{17} il fine di tali leggende. . . è quello di fornire esempi edificanti di vite condotte a imitazione di Cristo e della Virgine. Ferruccio Bertini, “Rosvita, la poetessa,” in \textit{Medioevo al femminile}, ed. F. Bertini et al. (Rome: Laterza, 1989), 70.

instead assumed that Hrotsvit likely derived her citations of pagan Roman literature from grammatical works and prosodic florilegia.\textsuperscript{19} Nevertheless, while direct citation might help us to determine the range of classical authors with whose work Hrotsvit was directly or indirectly familiar, it is crucial to remember that direct citation is not the primary way in which Hrotsvit imitates pagan Roman authors in her books of classicized plays and epics. Although Hrotsvit’s book of plays contains a few direct citations of Terence, for example, her primary strategy for imitating the classical playwright rests not on citation but on the imitation of his dialogic structure and sexual subject matter.\textsuperscript{20} Likewise, while Hrotsvit’s epics contain some verbal echoes of Virgil, the canoness imitates the \textit{Aeneid} principally through the use of dactylic hexameter and through a recasting of the epic’s fundamental thematic concerns into a contemporary Christian context, providing foundation narratives for the newly-established Ottonian dynasty in the same way that the \textit{Aeneid} provided a foundation narrative for Augustan Rome.\textsuperscript{21}

Although Prudentius was without doubt an important literary model for Hrotsvit’s book of legends, this chapter will propose that Hrotsvit’s book of legends (like the books of plays and epics that followed it) may be modeled on the work of a prominent classical author. Specifically, this chapter will raise the possibility that Ovid’s works on divine change—namely, Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses}, and his book of exilic poetry, the \textit{Tristia}—may serve as important intertexts for

\textsuperscript{19} Such is the conclusion Homeyer draws from Hrotsvit’s use of Virgil, Statius, Lucan, and Ovid (introduction to \textit{Hrotsvithae Operae}, 16). The notes to Homeyer’s 1970 edition of Hrotsvit’s works remain the best resource for Hrotsvit’s allusions to classical authors, although they are by no means exhaustive; her appendix on the most frequently cited authors in Hrotsvit (Prudentius, Sedulius, Terence, and Virgil) is particularly helpful (494–6).

\textsuperscript{20} See chapter two of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{21} For views on the importance of the foundational aspects of the \textit{Aeneid} during the medieval period, see, for example, the early twelfth-century accessus on Virgil by Conrad of Hirsau: “Nota cunctis historia est de excidio Troiae, quomodo propter Helenam decennali obsidione Troia vexata et capta est a Grecis, ex quibus profugus Eneas Italian petit, urbem condidit, Turnum devicit, Romanis a se quondam originem et virtutis et generis dedit sicque magna in Italia grassando in omnis crudelitate tandem fulmine caelitus extinctus est. De haec igitur historia materiam et intentionem Virgilius acceptit.” Conrad of Hirsau, \textit{Dialogus super auctores}, in \textit{Accessus ad auctores; Bernard d’Utrecht; Conrad d’Hirsau, Dialogus super auctores}, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 121–2.
Hrotsvit’s legendary texts. While it cannot be stated unequivocally that Hrotsvit modeled her book of legends on the work of Ovid, the linguistic, thematic, and formal parallels between Hrotsvit’s book of legends and Ovid’s poems on divine change are nevertheless suggestive, and bear exploration in full. Specifically, this chapter will argue that reading Hrotsvit’s book of legends alongside Ovid’s poems on divine change facilitates the recognition of the existence of an underlying thematic and formal cohesion within the book of legends, a unity of purpose which the book of legends previously has been considered to lack, and illuminates the ways in which Hrotsvit’s book of legends, like her books of plays and epics, engages as a whole with issues of gender and embodiment through the medium of classical genre.

**Ovid, Hrotsvit, and divine change**

Ovid himself linked the *Metamorphoses*, an epic work about “bodies changed into new forms,” with the *Tristia*, a compilation of elegiac poems written on the subject of Ovid’s exile to Scythia, on the grounds that these works shared a common theme despite their formal differences. In the *Tristia*, for example, Ovid argues that “the portrait of [his] changed fortune”—that is, his exilic poetry—“can be counted among those changed bodies” found in the *Metamorphoses*, “seeing as [his] fate was suddenly made different than it was before”—

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22 Other scholars have raised the possibility that Hrotsvit was familiar with the work of Ovid, but have dismissed the evidence for such knowledge as negligible; see, for example, John Newell, “Education and Classical Culture in the Tenth Century,” in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Rara Avis in Saxonia?* ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Ann Arbor: M.A.R.C., 1987), 132; Bert Nagel, *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, 431; Wilson, *Ethics*, 152. Rudolf Köpke denied that Ovid had any impact on Hrotsvit’s work (*Ottonische Studien zur deutschen Geschichte im zehnten Jahrhundert II: Hrotsuit von Gandersheim* (Berlin: Ernst Seigfried Mittler und Sohn, 1869), 144), but missed several Ovidian references later identified by Helene Homeyer (*Hrotsvithae Opera*, 1970) and Marco Giovini (*Indagini sui Poemetti agiografici di Rosvita di Gandersheim*, 2001); on Giovini, see note 14 above. This thesis identifies potential Ovidian allusions overlooked by Homeyer and Giovini.


24 For an extended reading of the theme of metamorphosis in Ovid’s exilic literature, Elénora Tola, *La metamorphose poétique chez Ovide* (Louvain: Peeters, 2004).
lamentable now, though at another time it was joyful.”

Ovid similarly links his exile with the *Metamorphoses* when in *Tristia* 1.7.8 he declares that those of his friends in Rome who gaze upon his image as a means of communing with their exiled comrade would be better served by reading the *Metamorphoses*, as the poems therein, which “tell of the changed forms of men,” “constitute a more accurate portrait” of Ovid than does any artistic rendering of his physical appearance. In both of these instances, then, Ovid connects his exile—and by extension the poetry he composes about his exile—to the *Metamorphoses* on the grounds that his exile is yet another example of the kind of change described in his epic.

Importantly, the *Metamorphoses* and the *Tristia* share a more specific mutual focus than simply change itself. As Ovid makes clear, the *Tristia*, like the *Metamorphoses*, is concerned with divine transformation. In the opening lines of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid specifies that the changes described in his book were enacted by the gods. Similarly, throughout the *Tristia* Ovid underscores the fact that the dramatic change in his circumstances—his physical relegation to the region of Pontus at the hands of Augustus and the emotional turmoil caused by this displacement—has been divinely wrought. Ovid again and again refers to himself as having been struck by a divine bolt, and he repeatedly refers to Augustus as a living god throughout the work. At *Tristia* 3.8, for example, he calls Augustus “the god whom [I] have seen,” and

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28 Inter alia: *fulmen*: *Tristia* 1.1.72; *Tr.* 1.4.21; *Tr.* 2.144; *Tr.* 2.179; *Tr.* 3.4.6; *Tr.* 4.5.6; *Tr.* 5.2.53; *Tr.* 5.3.31; *ignis*: *Tr.* 1.1.81; *attonitus*: *Tr.* 1.5.3; *telum Iovis*: *Tr.* 4.9.14. Ovid also deploys this image in the *Ex Ponto*; see, for example, the use of *fulmen* at *Ex Ponto* 3.2.9 and 3.6.17.

29 Whether or not Ovid actually believed in Augustus’ divinity, he explicitly framed both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Tristia* as works dealing with divine change. Moreover, to assume that Ovid’s discussion of Augustus’ divine
describes Augustus’ divine capacity to enact change in language which recalls the fantastic bodily transformations found in the *Metamorphoses*: “[Augustus] alone can give you wings and flying cars,” Ovid ruminates in an aside addressed to himself. “Let him grant you a return, and immediately you will have wings!”31

The *Metamorphoses*, then, is in Ovid’s own estimation a series of interlinking stories concerning the subject of divine change, an epic text which ultimately culminates in the poet’s own exile from Rome as chronicled in the elegiac poems of the *Tristia*. As meditations on the nature of divine power and on the relationship between divine beings and the mortals whose lives (and bodies) they shape, the *Metamorphoses* and the *Tristia* present a particularly pagan worldview, one in which humans hold no guarantee of redemption in this world or the next. And as Ovid is only too aware, the granting of divine forgiveness within the framework of pagan Roman culture is, in the end, completely arbitrary; as he puts it in the *Tristia*, “the gods are wont to be placated,” but only “from time to time.”32

Hrotsvit’s book of legends parallels Ovid’s writings on divine change in several key ways. Hrotsvit states that she has taken as her subject God’s *facta stupenda,*33 his marvels, she explicitly refers to these marvels as “changes,”34 and she describes these changes using the

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32 *solet interdum fieri placabile numen*. Ovid, *Tristia* 2.141.
33 Hrotsvit, *Ascensio*, p. 41, l. 150.
34 For example, Hrotsvit, *Maria*, p. 34, l. 864; and *Gongolfus*, p. 56, l. 413.
Ovidian vocabulary of metamorphosis;\textsuperscript{35} moreover, Hrotsvit, like Ovid, writes about these divine changes in dactylic hexameters and elegiac distichs. But if Ovid presents a series of stories about divine transformation which ultimately stresses the fundamental estrangement between humankind and the divine, and which ends with the poet’s permanent exile at the hands of an unforgiving ruler who is both God and man, Hrotsvit creates a cycle of narratives about divine change which explicitly points to divine transformation as evidence of the end of humanity’s exile from the heavenly patria, an act of mercy made possible by the entrance into the world of Christ, who is both “the true God and a full man.”\textsuperscript{36} As Hrotsvit puts it, Christ enacts marvelous changes “so that those living on the round earth might learn that [Christ] [is] and always [has] been the only God”\textsuperscript{37}—the same God, who, crucially, “covered with the veil of a bodily form, opened up the ascent of the steps to eternity for everyone, by which path people might strive to return to the patria they had left behind.”\textsuperscript{38} In fact, it is this Christian perspective on the Ovidian theme of exile—that God has permanently ended exile from the heavenly patria for all individuals “who, after having committed an offense, learn to lament it”—which may help explain the reason why the Gongolfus is the sole legend to have been composed in elegiac couplets, as it is the only legend which features Christian characters who refuse to repent of their sins, and who remain of their own accord permanently exiled from God’s grace.\textsuperscript{39}


\textsuperscript{36} deum verum necnon hominem. . . plenum. Hrotsvit, Theophilus, p. 88, l. 303.

\textsuperscript{37} Quo discant teretem degentes sepe per orbem, / Te semper solum esse fuisse deum. Hrotsvit, Gongolfus, p. 52, ll. 295–6.

\textsuperscript{38} corpore tectus velamine formę, / Ascensum graduum cunctis patefecit in quàm, / Per quos ad patriam tendunt remeare relictam. Hrotsvit, Maria, p. 15, ll. 308–10.

\textsuperscript{39} Qui post commissum discunt deflere reatum. Hrotsvit, Dionysius, p. 107, l. 92.
The early medieval reception of Ovid

Before examining in further detail the evidence that Hrotsvit may have patterned her legends on the example of Ovid, it is first necessary to make the case that Hrotsvit, as a highly educated member of a prominent Ottonian religious foundation, might well have encountered Ovid in her formal schooling or in her private reading, and that there was, in fact, precedent in early medieval culture for the kinds of Ovidian imitation in which Hrotsvit may be said to engage throughout her legends. As will be discussed below, early medieval writers commonly imitated Ovid through the adoption of his poetic form and reproduction of his primary themes as well as through the use of verbal echoes; there is also precedent in the early medieval literary and commentary traditions for directly paralleling Christian stories of divine change with Ovidian depictions of metamorphosis, for describing changes wrought by the Christian god with the Ovidian vocabulary of change, for associating the *Metamorphoses* with Ovid’s exile, and for contrasting the pagan Ovid’s permanent exile at the hands of the apotheosized Caesar with the end of exile brought about by the Incarnation of Jesus. It is crucial, however, not only to point to early medieval antecedents for the strategies of Ovidian imitation which Hrotsvit’s legend appear to adopt, but also to paint a picture of the early medieval reception of Ovid generally, as Ovid’s influence in the early medieval period has tended to be obscured in non-specialist literature; this obscuration has perhaps contributed in some respect to the disinclination of scholars to examine potential relationships between Ovid and Hrotsvit.

The study of Ovid in the early Middle Ages has long been dogged by the scholarly (mis)reception of Ludwig Traube’s notion of the *aetas Ovidiana*, discussed by Traube (in the midst of a series of general lectures on the subject of medieval Latin philology) as part of a proposed periodization scheme for the medieval reception of the classics. Traube argued that the

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40 On Hrotsvit’s educational background, see chapter 1 of this thesis.
twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed the diminution of a longstanding poetic penchant for leonine hexameters in Latin literature and a concurrent increase in the use of elegiac distichs, and he associated this change in metrical tastes with variations in the popularity of specific classical authors:


On the grounds that the centuries can be approximately delimited in terms of the poets who seemed most worthy of imitation, [the twelfth and thirteenth centuries] comprise the period I would like to call the aetas Ovidiana, the period of the eighth and ninth centuries the aetas Virgiliana, and the tenth and eleventh centuries, the aetas Horatiana. In the first period, they sing of the saints in heroic verse, in the second, they tend towards satire and epistle in accordance with Horace, and in the third, the Ovidian distich—in which they even wrote comedies!—knocks all opponents to the ground.

Traube’s proposed temporal scheme is problematic on several levels. His broad brushstrokes occlude the diversity of meters and genres in which Virgil and Horace worked and obscure Ovid’s use of dactylic hexameter in the Metamorphoses. In terms of the ninth and tenth centuries alone, Traube’s scheme fails to account for the Virgilian underpinnings of some of the period’s most significant non-hagiographic poetic works (including the anonymous Waltharius and Hrotsvit’s own political epics) and completely overlooks the Ovidian influences behind texts like the Ecloga of Theodulus or the exilic poetry of the Carolingians.

At the same time, Traube’s cautious wording [ungefähr, neigt man, nachahmenswertesten, etc.] demonstrates awareness that his association of specific Roman poets with particular centuries is at best a generalization, and he clarifies that he is in any event “speaking only of

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learned poetry”—itself a determinedly ambiguous category.\textsuperscript{42} Despite Traube’s own circumspection, however, scholars have tended to refer to the \textit{aetas Ovidiana} not as a means of articulating broad historical patterns in the use of metrical forms but as a shorthand for the veritable explosion of interest in Ovid in the twelfth century and beyond, a growth evidenced by an increase in direct literary imitation of Ovid (both in Latin and in the vernacular), an intensification of manuscript production, a rise in Ovid’s prominence within the school curriculum, and the first flowering of a surviving Ovidian commentary tradition.\textsuperscript{43} But as Stephen Wheeler has noted in his study of the ancient reception of Ovidian elegy, while the term \textit{aetas Ovidiana} “may aptly capture Ovid’s pervasive presence in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it implies that Ovid’s presence in earlier times was not pervasive and hence not significant;” for this reason, Wheeler cautions, the term “may do more harm than good in that it occludes the continuity of the history of Ovid’s reception, particularly when there was no \textit{aetas Ovidiana}.”\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, although it is no surprise given Ovid’s upsurge in popularity in the twelfth century and afterwards that much of the scholarly work on the medieval reception of Ovid has concentrated on the later medieval period, many scholars working on Ovid in later Middle Ages have conflated popularity with familiarity, and have tended to dismiss even the most obvious early medieval interactions with Ovid as cursory and superficial.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{42} Ich spreche hierbei übrigens nur von der gelehrten Dichtung. Traube, \textit{Einleitung in die Lateinische Philologie}, 113.
\textsuperscript{43} See Ralph Hexter’s discussion of shifting meaning of the \textit{aetas Ovidiana} in \textit{Ovid and Medieval Schooling} (Munich: Arbeo-Gesellschaft, 1986), 2–3.
\textsuperscript{45} C.J. Grocock’s comments on the early medieval reception of Ovid in his introduction to his analysis of Ovidian elements in Gilo of Paris’ twelfth-century \textit{Historia Vie Hierosolimitane} are typical: “It is worth recalling, however, that by comparison with the twelfth century, little had been known of Ovid in earlier periods; in the Carolingian court circle of poets, Modoin had been given the nickname ‘Naso,’ and Theodulf of Orléans had imitated Ovid’s elegiac couplets; but other prominent figures of the Carolingian renaissance such as Einhard and Lupus of Ferrières hardly mention him. In Peter Godman’s recent edition of Alcuin’s poem on the bishops, kings and saints of York, only one Ovidian reference is noted (from the \textit{Heroides}). . . . ‘The Carolingian age, had been, in Traube’s phrase, \textit{aetas Vergiliana}; now begins the \textit{aetas Ovidiana}’” (C.J Grocock, “Ovid the Crusader,” in \textit{Ovid Renewed}, ed.)
It is true that if any indication of the popularity of a classical author in the Middle Ages can be determined by manuscript survival rates, the existence of a commentary tradition, or the frequency of citation by grammarians and the like, Ovid’s early medieval star was thoroughly eclipsed by writers like Virgil, Terence, and Horace. Nonetheless, documentary and literary evidence clearly demonstrates that Ovid was read, studied, and imitated throughout the early medieval period. So far, at least sixty-five copies of Ovid’s works or excerpts thereof have been identified in codices from the early Middle Ages, with the earliest examples—a brief cento cobbled together from four lines of book three of the *Ars amatoria* and a fragmentary version

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48 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 10318 [codex Salmasianus]. The fragments comprising the poem are from *Ars* 3.65-66, 73-74. According to Riese, the *terminus ante quem* for the poem is ca. 534 (Anthologia Latina 1: *Libri salmasiani aliorumque carmina*, ed. Alexander Riese (Leipzig: Teubner, 1894), XXV). The poem is edited in *AL 1* (poem 269, p. 216). Only one survival predates the early Middle Ages: two small fragments of a late antique copy of the *Epistolae ex ponto* have been identified in Wolfenbüttel 3036 (formerly Wolfenbüttel 4° 13.11), an eighth-century manuscript that reused the vellum of the fifth-century codex in which the text originally appeared; the fragments are in extremely poor condition. See E.A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores: A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century*, vol. 9 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 1376, 1377; Richmond, “Manuscript Traditions,” 446–7; and Tarrant, “Ovid and Pseudo-Ovid,” 263.
of the *Halieuticon*, the poem on fishing ascribed to Ovid by Pliny the Elder⁴⁹—dating from the late eighth or early ninth centuries.⁵⁰ Verses from the *Amores, Ars, Ex Ponto, Fasti, Heroides, Metamorphoses, Remedia, and Tristia* circulated in prosodic florilegia throughout the period, and lines from each of these works were included in Micon of Saint-Riquier’s *Opus prosodiacum*.⁵¹ Substantive selections from Ovid, particularly from the *Metamorphoses*, appear with some frequency in manuscripts of the period, while complete copies of Ovid’s texts first emerge in the ninth century.⁵² Ninth-century library catalogues from Richenau and Murbach list copies of Ovid,⁵³ and his works are also listed in the tenth-century catalogues of Bobbio and St. Gall.⁵⁴ Ovid’s continued popularity in the early Middle Ages is also evidenced by the proliferation throughout the period of the *Narrationes* of Pseudo-Lactantius, a collection of prose summaries which detail the transformations found in the *Metamorphoses*.⁵⁵ The absence of a

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⁴⁹ Wien, Österrichische Nationalbibliothek Cod. 277. Pliny ascribes the *Halieuticon* to Ovid in *Naturalis Historia*, ch. 32. For the earliest and fullest articulation of the now dominant argument against Ovid’s authorship, see John Richmond, “The Authorship of the *Halieutica* Ascribed to Ovid,” *Philologus* 120.1 (1976): 92–106.

⁵⁰ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 10318 is consistently dated to the second half of the eighth century. Munk Olsen (1982) dates Wien, Österrichische Nationalbibliothek Cod. 277 to the eighth or ninth century; the Austrian national library provides a ninth-century dating in their catalogue.

⁵¹ Munk Olsen (1982). For Micon’s *Opus prosodiacum*, see: Bruxelles, Bibliothèque royal 10470-10473, 9th century; Bruxelles, Bibliothèque royale 10066-10077-VI, 10th century; Paris bibliothèque nationale lat. 1928, 11th century (according to Munk Olsen, this copy only includes verses from the *Ars, Ex Ponto, Fasti, and Remedia*). Other prosodic florilegia containing Ovid’s works can be found in Paris bibliothèque nationale lat.2773-1, 9th century; St Gall Stiftsbibliothek 870, 9th century; Vatican Reg. lat. 215, 9th century; Einsiedeln Stiftsbibliothek, 32-1, 10th century; Berlin Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz lat. 2º 35, 11th century; Paris bibliothèque nationale 4883 A-1, 11th century; and Vatican Ottob. lat. 1354, 11th century.

⁵² Full copies of the *Ars* and *Remedia* can be found in the ninth-century codex Paris bibliothèque nationale lat. 7311. E.J. Kenney, “The Manuscript Tradition of Ovid’s *Amores, Ars Amatoria, and Remedia,*” *The Classical Quarterly* 12.1 (1962): 2. Nearly all of the *Amores* has been preserved in two ninth-century manuscripts, with each manuscript transmitting half of the text. On the transmission of the *Amores* via these manuscripts, see D.S. McKie, “Ovid’s *Amores*: The Prime Sources for the Text,” *The Classical Quarterly* 36.1 (1986): 219–38. For a general picture of the early medieval manuscript tradition of Ovid, Richmond’s succinct overview is particularly useful (“Manuscript Traditions,” 450–1).


⁵⁵ The *Narrationes* was in fact popular throughout the entire medieval period. Copies of the text or excerpts thereof have been identified in fifty-five medieval manuscripts, ten of which predate the flowering of the so-called *aetas Ovidiana* in the cathedral schools of the twelfth century. See Frank T. Coulson and Bruno Roy, *Incipitarium*
true commentary tradition on Ovid prior to the composition of the scholia on the *Metamorphoses* by the late eleventh-century magister Manegold of Lautenbach, however, has contributed to the longstanding perception that early medieval intellectuals were not particularly interested in Ovid. But while Ovid certainly did not enjoy as prominent a role in the early medieval schools as did authors like Virgil, manuscript evidence nevertheless demonstrates that Ovid did occupy a place in at least some early medieval curricula. The school text commonly referred to as St Dunstan’s Classbook, Bodleian Library MS. Auct. 4.32, famously contains a ninth-century copy of book one of the *Ars amatoria* with contemporary grammatical glosses in Latin and Welsh. The ninth-century codex Bern Burgerbibliothek 363, a miscellany compiled by Irish scholars in Italy which included selections from the *Metamorphoses* alongside the work of authors like Augustine, Horace, and Bede, was almost certainly a school text. Connections have also been drawn between the contents of a tenth- or eleventh-century anthology in which excerpts of the *Remedia* and the *Heroides* appear, Eton 150, and the works disseminated in the popular medieval schoolbook now known as the “Liber Catonianus.” In any event, by the close of the eleventh century, Ovid was clearly part of the standard school curriculum. In his *Ars lectoria*, written in 1086, the grammarian Aimericus quotes Ovid extensively in order to make grammatical points.

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Ovidianum (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). Alan Cameron has recently exposed fundamental flaws in the logic underpinning the longstanding, uncritically accepted dating of the *Narrationes* to the sixth century, and has tentatively pushed for a third century date. Cameron, *Greek mythography in the Roman world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23 (but see chapters 1–2 in their entirety). 56 As Cameron has observed, the *Narrationes* is less a commentary than a “mythographic companion” which omits some details found in the *Metamorphoses* while often providing supplemental mythological and prosopographic information. Cameron, *Greek mythography*, 86.


and in his discussion of the types of literature counted Ovid among the nine “golden” pagan authors considered superior to “silver” authors like Plautus, Prisician, and Boethius.  

Literary evidence likewise indicates that Ovid was continuously read and imitated throughout the late antique and early medieval periods, although his popularity appears to have waxed and waned over time. In late antiquity, the fourth-century poet Ausonius, for example, used Ovid as a mythological source for *Epigrammata* and employed the Ovidian vocabulary of change in his descriptions of metamorphosis in the same poem, while the fifth-century Romano-Gallic poet Rutilius Namatianus’ elegiac travel narrative, “De reditu,” purposefully echoes Ovid’s exilic writings. Meanwhile, at the dawn of the Middle Ages, Ovid’s works influenced the Christian poetry of Venantius Fortunatus, and the sixth-century biblical epic “De Sodoma” imitated Ovid in its references to Ovidian mythology, its focus on divine metamorphosis, its episodic narrative structure, and its inclusion of geographical aitia. Although Isidore of Seville, writing in the first half of the seventh century, cited a wide range of Ovid’s works in his highly influential *Etymologiae* (including the *Ars*, *Heroides*, *Fasti*, and

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Metamorphoses), in general there is considerably less evidence for the sustained imitation of Ovid throughout the seventh and into the eighth century. Moreover, while the writings of such luminaries as Bede (673–735) and Alcuin (735–804) contain Ovidian quotations and verbal reminiscences,66 the question of whether these literary echoes can be said to demonstrate direct familiarity with Ovid’s works continues to be debated.67

By the close of the eighth century, however, it is clear that Ovid was enjoying a particular vogue in the Carolingian court despite potential moral objections to his content, a point which is vividly illustrated by Theodulf of Orléans’ poetic defense of the reading of pagan literature, “De libros quos legere solemam.” After arguing that “the anxiety of the pious Church fathers” concerning the spiritual dangers of reading pagan literature “was not appropriate,”68 Theodulf provides mythological examples derived from Ovid’s Metamorphoses to support his claim that “although many frivolous things may exist in the writings of [Ovid and Virgil], an even greater number of true things lie under a deceptive covering.”69 Thus, according to Theodulf, Ovid’s Cupid “is winged because he is capricious, naked because his crime has been exposed, and a boy because he lacks shrewd reason,”70 while “Alcides symbolizes strength and wretched Cacus


67 In the case of Bede, for example, Michael Irvine has argued that the Northumbrian monk’s citations of classical writers like Ovid “come from memory or direct citation rather from scattered references in grammatical works” (“Bede the Grammarian and the Scope of Grammatical Studies in Eighth-Century Northumbria,” Anglo-Saxon England 15 (1986): 40), while Michael Lapidge has concluded that the reminiscences of Ovid in Bede’s works are too indistinct to demonstrate beyond a doubt that Bede had read the Metamorphoses (Anglo-Saxon Library, 111–3).

68 Cura decens patrum nec erat. . . piorum. Theodulf, De libris quos legere solemam, PL 105: col.0331D, l. 11.


70 Quod levis, alatus, quod aperto est crimine, nudus, / Solertique caret quod ratione, puer. Theodulf, De libris, PL 105: col.0332C, ll. 35–6.
symbolizes theft.” But while the *Metamorphoses* takes centre stage in Theodulf’s apologetic poem, it was Ovid’s exilic literature that seems to have held a special place in the Carolingian cultural imagination. Stripped of the bishopric of Orléans and exiled to Angers by Louis the Pious, Theodulf exchanged a pair of elegiac letters with his friend Modoin, bishop of Autun, which imitated the form, language, and thematics of Ovid’s exilic poetry. Modoin, moreover, adopted Ovid’s cognomen, Naso, as his penname and extensively engaged with Ovidian language and themes in his *Liber eclogarum*. Importantly, Modoin’s specific reception of Ovid—and particularly his approach to the subject of Ovid’s exile in his verse epistle to Theodulf—proved influential throughout the Carolingian period. Drawing upon Ovid directly and through the intermediary of Modoin, the bishop of Autun’s exiled contemporary Ermoldus Nigellus composed an epic on Louis the Pious in elegiac distichs (a metrical choice which Thomas F.X. Noble has suggested may represent a nod to Ovid’s exilic literature) and wrote two Ovidian verse epistles addressed to Pippin II of Aquitaine seeking an end to his banishment.

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74 Modoin was not alone in adopting the name of a classical author as his penname; Alcuin called himself “Flaccus” (Horace) while Angilbert referred to himself as “Homer.” See Mary Garrison, “The Social World of Alcuin: Nicknames at York and at the Carolingian Court,” in *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (Groningen: Forsten, 1998), 59–79. Although Andy Orchard warns in relation to Alcuin that the adoption of such pennames “in the quaint gaiety of the Carolingian poetic circle is scarcely proof of knowledge,” Modoin’s relationship to Ovid is more assured. Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 142.


to the city of Strasbourg. A few years later, another exiled Carolingian churchman, Walahfrid Strabo, likewise looked to the writings of Modoin and Ovid when composing his own verse epistle on the subject of exile to the emperor Lothar, though his perspective on exile was decidedly less gloomy than that of his predecessors.

We also see examples of Ovidian citation and imitation in the later ninth and early tenth centuries, although the particular enthusiasm demonstrated by the Carolingians for Ovid’s exilic poetry in the first half of the ninth century appears to wane in the second. For instance, the poem prefixed to the Collectaneum of Hadoard, the librarian of Corbie, is heavily Ovidian, containing, in order of the number of reminiscences identified by Charles H. Beeson, echoes of the *Metamorphoses, Amores, Heroïdes, Tristia, Fasti,* and *Ex Ponto.* Meanwhile, in the tenth century, Rather of Verona cites Ovid’s *Ex Ponto,* among other classical, patristic, and biblical examples, as precedent for referring to a letter collection as a “book,” and directly quotes *Ars amatoria* 3.49-50 (introducing the lines as “that Ovidianism”) in a letter addressed to Count

77 One of Ermoldus’ letters to Pippin specifically echoes Modoin’s letter to Theodulf in its proclamation that “the exile Naso endured many difficulties on account of envy” [Exul ob invidiam. . . multos Naso labores / Pertulit]. Ermoldus, *Carmen Igellii Ermoldi exulis in laudem gloriosissimi Pippini regis,* MGH PLAC 2: 85, l. 187. Modoin had previously reminded Theodulf Ovid “was driven from his country and endured long difficulties on account of envy” [ob invidiam. . . longos Nasos labores / Pertulit, et patria pellitur ipse sua]. Modoin, *Modoini ad Teudulfum Exsulem,* PL 105: col.0344C.

78 On Walahfrid’s connections to Modoin, see Whitta, “Modoin of Autun’s Eclogues,” 730–1. Whitta notes that Walahfrid’s poem not only references Ovid’s exilic literature (both the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*), but also contains reminiscences of the *Amores, Fasti,* and *Metamorphoses.*

79 After observing that “it seems as if it’s characteristic, or maybe even a law, that all poets endure foreign lands,” for example, Walahfrid goes on to claim that however much Ovid “groaned under the freezing cold of Scythia,” he “developed the business of poetry [in that place] to a greater extent than he ever had in within the walls of Rome” [Est veluti proprium et cunctis civile poetis, / Externa regna pati. . . Sub frigore Naso / Congremuit Scythiae, Musarum ubi munere tantum / Excoluit, quantum Romanae moenibus urbis]. Walahfrid Strabo, “Ad Hlotharium Imperatorem,” MGH PLAC 2: 415, ll. 60–4. Walahfrid’s suggestion that exile might not be such a bad thing for a poet puts a positive spin on a trope that often verged on the maudlin in Ovid’s own poetry and in that of his Carolingian imitators.


Nanno of Verona and dated to the end of June 968. As Peter Dronke has pointed out, the embattled Rather was invited to work as a teacher at the Ottonian court in 952, and he has suggested that Hrotsvit, whose writing he believes to possess “a markedly Ratherian ring,” may have been tutored by the exiled bishop; the presence of Ovidian echoes in Rather’s writings raises the possibility that Ovid formed part of the curriculum Rather taught to members of the Ottonian imperial circles of which Hrotsvit was a part, if not to Hrotsvit herself. The most sustained imitation of Ovid in the tenth century, however, is the Ecloga Theoduli, a debate poem in which the female personification of Truth (Alithia) battles with the male personification of Falsehood (Pseustis). While the Ecloga is Virgilian in form, it is Ovidian in content; as Ralph Hexter observes, the poem’s “repeated dismissal of Ovidian fable becomes its central structural principle.” Throughout the poem, Alithia responds to the series of Ovidian mythological tales presented by Pseustis with “true” biblical versions of the themes found in her opponent’s “false” pagan narratives. When Pseustis tells the story of Io’s metamorphosis into a cow, for example, Alithia provides a biblical example of the divine ability to change bodies and minds by relating the Old Testament tale of Balaam’s talking donkey, and when Pseustis recalls Phyllis’

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\[83\] Dronke, Women Writers, 56.


\[85\] Theodulus, Theoduli eclogam, ed. Joannes Osteracher (Uhrfahr-Linz: Verlag des bischöflichen Privatkongresses am Kollegium Petrinum, 1902), p. 40, ll. 157–64. As we will later see, it is to the example of Balaam’s donkey that Hrotsvit, perhaps not coincidentally, points when describing God’s ability to change bodies and minds in the highly Ovidian preface to the legend of Maria.
metamorphosis into an almond tree.\textsuperscript{86} Alithia responds with a description of the metamorphosis of Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt.\textsuperscript{87}

There is thus ample evidence for the reading and imitation of Ovid in the early medieval period, and there exist multiple antecedents for the various strategies of Ovidian imitation which Hrotsvit’s book of legends appears to employ. Early medieval authors purposefully reproduced Ovid’s language, forms, and themes, with texts like the \textit{Ecloga Theoduli} and the “De Sodoma” explicitly calling attention to thematic parallels between Ovidian tales of metamorphosis and Christian miracle stories. But we must turn to the commentary tradition for evidence as to whether or not medieval intellectuals linked the \textit{Metamorphoses} with Ovid’s exilic poetry on the basis of common subject material or juxtaposed Ovid’s permanent exile at the hands of a deified Roman emperor with the end of exile brought about by the Incarnation of Christ. Although the Ovidian commentary tradition began to flourish well after Hrotsvit’s lifetime, the first surviving commentaries on Ovid necessarily build upon earlier interpretative approaches which have not come down to us, interpretative traditions which may have been transmitted orally or in written form. As such, although we possess no commentary on Ovid until the end of the eleventh century, the earliest commentaries on Ovid nevertheless may provide a window onto interpretive approaches to Ovid in Hrotsvit’s own period.

That Ovid’s exilic poetry constitutes a meditation on the same theme as the \textit{Metamorphoses}—that is, divine change—seems not to have been a major preoccupation of the medieval commentary tradition as a whole. While the influential twelfth-century commentator Arnulf of Orléans drew heavily from the autobiographical material found in \textit{Tristia 2} and \textit{Tristia 3.38} [\textit{depositis silva Phyllida flesse comis}].

\textsuperscript{86} Ovid refers to the metamorphosis of Phyllis into an almond tree at \textit{Ars 3.38} [\textit{depositis silva Phyllida flesse comis}]. Here and throughout I cite from \textit{Amores, Medicamina Faciei Feminiae, Ars Amatoria, Remedia Amoris}, ed. E.J. Kenney (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). Ovid also composes a letter in the voice of Phyllis to Demophoon [\textit{Heroides 2}]. Here and throughout I cite from \textit{Heroides}, ed. Arthur Palmer (Oxford: Clarendon, 1874).

\textsuperscript{87} Theodulus, \textit{Theoduli eclogam}, p. 37, ll. 109–16.
4.10 to compose the life of Ovid contained within his accessus to the *Metamorphoses*, for example, he did not draw attention to the fact that Ovid himself linked his exile to the *Metamorphoses*.  

Similarly, while the thirteenth-century Vulgate commentator directly cited Ovid’s own description of the *Metamorphoses* as articulated within the *Tristia* and explicitly attributed this quotation to that particular work, he did not point out that Ovid himself linked his exilic poetry with the subject matter of his epic. Nevertheless, a possible exception to this trend occurs in the earliest known commentary on the *Metamorphoses*, found in a manuscript produced at the end of the eleventh century, Munich Clm 4610. This commentary is partially attributable to Manegold of Lautenbach, a late eleventh-century church reformer and teacher who held administrative positions in houses of canons regular in Bavaria and Alsace. The passage in question occurs at the end of the commentary, containing the text’s final glosses and a closing prayer. These glosses, on *Metamorphoses* 15.622 and 15.836, are directly attributed to Manegold, and consist of a discussion of the family of Augustus. The prayer that follows the glosses, meanwhile, focuses on the import of the Incarnation of Christ:


The Lord Ruler swore and predestined, and he will regret nothing at all: You are a priest in his sight, offering sacrifices forever, according to divine custom and according to the order of the king and priest Melchisedech. Listen, all faithful people, everywhere—our propagator and eternal

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90 The dating of Clm 4610 can be found in the Bavarian Staatsbibliothek’s catalogue entry for the manuscript. The manuscript contains the *Adnotationes super Lucanum* in addition to the commentary on the *Metamorphoses*.

91 Manegold served as the dean of the canons prior in Rottenbuch in Bavaria in the 1080s, joined the house of the canons regular at Marbach in Alsace in 1094, and by 1103 was prior of the same house. Robert Ziomkowski, *Manegold of Lautenbach: Liber contra Wolfelmum: Translated with an Introduction and Notes* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 10; 17.

92 Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 4610 84º [http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00006777/image_169].
maker, lamenting that we were terribly lost, exiled far from our fatherland, sent his son, coeternal
with himself, so that he might deliver humankind. Therefore, universal creator, let the circle of the
world shout in joy for the Lord!

Peter Dronke has suggested there is a link between the closing prayer’s discussion of
exile and Ovid’s own exile, but a closer reading of the text suggests that Manegold is in fact
contrasting Augustus’ attitude toward the exiled Ovid with Christ’s offer of reconciliation and
redemption. To begin, although Dronke assumes that the initial lines of the closing passage are
addressed to Augustus, presumably on the grounds that the gloss immediately preceding the
closing passage provides details on the imperial family,93 it is highly unlikely that Manegold, a
conservative reformer who sided with the pope during the Investiture Controversy and who was
imprisoned by the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV for his stringent anti-imperial beliefs, would
associate any emperor—let alone a pagan emperor—with Melchisedech, who is explicitly
depicted in Hebrews (and elsewhere in Manegold’s own writings) as a prototype of Christ;94 for
although medieval writers may have commonly associated Christian rulers with biblical typus
Christi, including David, Solomon, and Melchisedech,95 Ian S. Robinson reminds us “the idea of
the king as the typus Christi appeared in the polemic of Manegold not, of course, in celebration
of the authority of Henry IV but as a reminder of the duties of the papal anti-king.”96 The
passage’s internal context, moreover, suggests that its allusion to Melchisedech hearkens back not

93 Peter Dronke, “Metamorphoses: Allegory in Early Medieval Commentaries on Ovid and Apuleius,” *Journal of the
94 Manegold states in chapter 12 of his *Liber contra Wolfelnum* that God “preordained sacrifice through
Melchisedech” [per Melchisedech sacrificium. . . preordinavit]; in the same passage, Manegold speaks of “the
highest priesthood and true sacrifice, which had to be carried out by [God’s] son” [summi sacerdocii verique
8: 68–9.
95 Christian rulers were often associated with royal figures from the Old Testament, including David, Solomon, and
Melchisedech. On the figure of Melchisedech in medieval political discourse, see D.E. Luscombe, “The formation
of political thought in the west,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–c.1450*, ed. J.H.
Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 167. On Melchisedech as a typus Christi, see Marco
96 Ian S. Robinson, *Authority and Resistance in the Investiture Contest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press,
1978), 117.
simply to Psalms 109.4, as Dronke would have it, but more specifically to Hebrews 7, a chapter which cites Psalms 109.4 in its celebration of Jesus as the last in the line of the order of Melchisedech and which specifically positions Jesus as the eternal high-priest whose perfect sacrifice of his own life has led to the permanent salvation of the people.

This distinction is especially important to make given the passage upon which the final gloss comments, *Metamorphoses* 15.836. Although the gloss itself is concerned with providing the reader with details of Augustus’ family tree, the passage from the *Metamorphoses* on which it elaborates deals with the apotheosis of Julius Caesar and portends the apotheosis of Augustus. The conclusion of Mangeold’s commentary thus shifts from a gloss on an Ovidian passage dealing with the false apotheosis of the Roman emperor who famously exiled Ovid to a discussion in the closing prayer of the true incarnation of divinity, Jesus, a discussion which purposefully constructs Jesus as the one who came to save the human race, which had previously been “exiled far from their patria.” We thus see in Manegold a link between Ovid’s epic on divine change and his exile, and an implicit juxtaposition of Ovid’s permanent exile with the end of exile brought about by Christ. It is therefore possible that such discussions were circulating in medieval classrooms even before Manegold’s creation of his commentary, and that Hrotsvit herself may have been exposed to such ideas or come up with them herself.

*Ovidian elements in Hrotsvit’s praefatio*

The first hints of an Ovidian subtext in Hrotsvit’s book of legends occur in the book’s preface. In her 1970 edition of Hrotsvit’s works, Helene Homeyer observes that Hrotsvit’s fear

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98 See in particular Hebrews 7: 17–27.
99 On the reference to the future apotheosis of Augustus, see *Met.* 15. 834–9, especially lines 838–9; on the apotheosis of Julius Caesar, see *Met.* 15. 841–2.
that “the talent of [her] meager wit, lying dormant in the dark cave of her heart, might be destroyed by the rust of negligence” [talentum ingenioli sub obscuo torpens pectoris <antro> rubigine ne
glegentiae exterminaretur]\textsuperscript{100} recalls Ovid’s description in Tristia 5.12 of his own “wit, which lies dormant, wounded by long rust” [ingenium longa rubigine laesum / torpet].\textsuperscript{101} Importantly, however, Homeyer’s comments and editorial decisions implicitly work to enact a greater distance between the work of the canoness and that of classical poet than perhaps actually exists. Despite the clear linguistic similarities between Hrotsvit’s preface and Tristia 5.12, Homeyer admits only that “the idea that one’s creative gift could become rusty was already a topos in Ovid,” and directs readers to refer also to Venantius Fortunatus and Sedulius for further articulations of this topos and to Juvencus, Prudentius, and Sedulius for similar uses of the phrase antrum pectoris.\textsuperscript{102} The multiple references to prominent Christian authors in concert with the framing of Hrotsvit’s comments as an articulation of a longstanding topos rather than a specific Ovidian allusion create the impression that Hrotsvit’s phrasing may be as much Christian as classical, if not more.

But Hrotsvit’s articulation of the topos is distinctly Ovidian in a way which Homeyer’s commentary obscures, as the compact cluster of words used to articulate this topos in both Hrotsvit and Ovid [ingenium, torpeo, rubigo] do not occur together in Venantius or Sedulius.\textsuperscript{103} Moreover, Homeyer’s citation of further Christian uses of the phrase antrum pectoris is problematic in that the word antrum is merely supplied, having no precedence in the lone

\textsuperscript{101} Ovid, Tristia 5.12, 21–2. Emphasis my own.
\textsuperscript{102} Die Vorstellung, daß die Schaffensgabe einrosten könnte, schon bei Ovid Topos. Homeyer, Hrotsvithae Operae, 38n8.
\textsuperscript{103} Sedulius uses the phrase torpor cordis in his first letter to Macedonius (Sedulii opera omnia, ed. Johannes Huemer, CSEL 10 (Vienna: Gerold, 1885), 3). Venantius employs the metaphor of rust in the context of a humility topos in his poem to the Parisian clergy: “scabrida nunc resonat mea lingua rubigine verba / exit et incompto raucus ab ore fragog. / vix dabit in veteri ferugine cotis acumen / aut fumo infecto splendet in acre color” (Ad clericum Parisiacum, in MGH Auct. ant. 4.1: 38, ll. 7–10).
medieval witness of Hrotsvit’s preface, Clm 14485, or in the copy of Clm 14485 made by the
humanist Dietrich Gresemund in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, Schlossbibliothek
Pommersfelden, Codex 2883.\(^\text{104}\) Paul von Winterfeld first supplied the noun *antrum* (cave or
cavern) because the phrase *antrum pectoris* occurred in Prudentius and elsewhere in Hrotsvit.\(^\text{105}\) Yet von Winterfeld’s assumption of a scribal error with regard to the supposed omission of
*antrum* rests on more tenuous grounds than the uncritical adoption of his editorial decision in
subsequent editions of Hrotsvit’s works might suggest.\(^\text{106}\) The insertion of *antrum* is not only
conjectural but also grammatically unnecessary, as the substantive use of *obscurus* \(\rightarrow obscurum\)
has considerable precedent in classical Latin; the original phrase, *talentum ingenioli sub obscuro
torpens pectoris*, can easily be translated as is (“the talent of my meager wit, lying dormant in the
darkness of my heart”).\(^\text{107}\) The editorial decision to insert *antrum* is thus more indicative of
assumptions about Hrotsvit’s literary influences than it is reflective of purely linguistic concerns;
in any event, the addition of a spurious Prudentian layer to Hrotsvit’s phrasing certainly obscures
the degree to which her Ovidian allusion can be recognized as such.

Importantly, however, the Ovidian echoes in the preface to Hrotsvit’s book of legends are
not limited to this allusion to *Tristia* 5.12. The preface also contains thematic and verbal
resonances of Ovid’s *Tristia* 1.7, a poem on the *Metamorphoses*. Although Hrotsvit’s
protestations in the preface to her book of legends concerning the poor quality of her writing

\(^{104}\) On the manuscript tradition of Hrotsvit’s works, see Berschin, “Editoris Praefatio,” in *Hrotsvit: Opera Omnia*, particularly X–XXX.

\(^{105}\) *anto addidi coll. Pel. 7, asc. 32 (cf. appar. ad Gong. 373); elocutio Prudentiana (psychom. 6). MGH SS rer. Germ. 34: 3n2.*

\(^{106}\) Karl Strecker [*Hrotstwithe Operae* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1906), 2], Homeyer [*Hrotstwithe Opera*, 3], and Berschin
[Hrotsvit: Opera Omnia, 2] all adopt <antro> in their editions of the preface without comment.

\(^{107}\) See, among other examples, Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, ed. Richard M. Gummere (New York:
Putnam, 1925), 19.3, p. 126. Even if Hrotsvit was unfamiliar with the classical usage of *obscurum* as a noun, the
employment of adjectives in a substantive sense was common in medieval Latin and in Hrotsvit’s own work, as has
been observed by Mary Bernardine Bergman in her doctoral translation of the *Liber Tertius* (University of Illinois,
Urbana-Champaign, 1942), 123n98.
have been considered part and parcel of the standard humility topos found throughout medieval literature, Hrotsvit expresses anxiety over the caliber of her poems and requests the forbearance of her readers toward her work in language which specifically recalls Ovid’s articulation of the same themes in *Tristia* 1.7. Both authors address their readers directly [lector],

asking them to show kindness [venia] toward the errors [vitium] present in the songs [carminae] contained in their little books [libellum]; a memory of *Tristia* 1.7 may also underlie Hrotsvit’s description of her habit of destroying badly composed works at a time when she was “not mature, and still growing in age” [nec matura adhuc aetate vigens], echoing Ovid’s description at *Tristia* 1.7 of his destruction of a copy of the *Metamorphoses* on the grounds that it “was still growing, and undeveloped” [adhuc crescens et rude]. Hrotsvit’s borrowings from an exilic poem on the *Metamorphoses* may presage the relationship, discussed later in this chapter, between her legends and Ovid’s poems on divine change.

Finally, Hrotsvit’s defense of her use of the apocrypha may also signal her interest in divine change and Incarnation. Concerning her reliance on apocryphal sources, Hrotsvit writes:

> Si autem obicitur quod quedam huius opera iuxta quorundam estimationem sumpta sint ex apocrifis non est crimen presumptionis inique sed error ignorantiae quia quando huius stamen seriei ceperam ordiri ignoravi dubia esse in quibus disposui laborare. At ubi recognovi pessum dare detrectavi quia quod videtur falsitas forsan probabitur esse veritas.  

If, however, it is objected that, according to the opinion of certain people, some of the works in this book were taken from apocryphal writings, it is not a crime of wicked presumption but an

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115 Ovid, *Tristia* 1.7, 22.

error of ignorance, because when I began to take up the thread of this series, I did not know that the texts upon which I set out to work were questionable. But when I investigated the matter, I refused to remove them, because what seems false perhaps will be proven to be true.

Hrotsvit’s defense of her use of apocryphal texts recalls the approach taken in a letter attributed to Jerome that in some manuscript traditions was appended as a preface to Hrotsvit’s source for the Maria, the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. According to Pseudo-Jerome, the recognition of the fact that the events contained within the Gospel could be true is more important than whether or not they are actually true:

Quod an verum sit, auctori praefationis et fidei scriptoris committo: ipse enim ut haec dubia esse pronuncio, ita liquido falsa non affirmo. Illud autem libere dico, quod fidelium neminem negaturum puto, sive haec vera sint sive ab aliquo conficia, sacrosanctam sanctae Mariae nativitatem magna miracula praecessisse, maxima consecuta fuisse; et idcirco salva fide ab his qui deum ista facere posse credunt sine periculo animae suae credi et legi posse. But as to whether it’s true, I must leave it to the author of the preface and the trustworthiness of the writer: although I think these things are doubtful, I do not affirm that they are plainly false. But I say this freely—and I think no faithful person would deny that this is the case—whether these specific things are true, or whether someone made them up, great miracles preceded the sacrosanct birth of Saint Mary, and the greatest of all followed it; therefore, those who believe that God has the power to do such things can read and believe them without any danger to their souls and with their faith unharmed.

Pseudo-Jerome justifies belief in the apocrypha on the grounds that its basic theme—the divine power to change, manifested most fully in the Incarnation—is true. This is the theme of Hrotsvit’s legends. Importantly, the ultimate creative (and destructive) power of the divine is also the great theme of the Metamorphoses and the exilic writings. The idea that a greater truth may be concealed under a seemingly deceptive covering is also at the heart of the medieval debate over the value of reading classical literature in general and Ovid in particular; it was

around this tenet that later medieval commentators on Ovid like Arnulf of Orleans and John of Garland framed their moralizing allegorical readings of the *Metamorphoses,* and, as we have seen, it was around this tenet that Theodulf defended the reading of the *Metamorphoses* and the *Ecloga Theoduli* sought to uncover the truth in Ovidian mythology. Early medieval readers may have sensed these undertones of approaches to the reception of classical writers and of the apocrypha when they read the preface, particularly in light of Hrotsvit’s sustained engagement with the *Tristia* throughout the preface.

**Hrotsvit and the Ovidian vocabulary of divine change**

Just as Ovid’s great theme is divine change, so too does Hrotsvit take as her subject matter the divine transformation of bodies and souls. Indeed, Hrotsvit even commences her book of legends with an invocation to Mary that thematically parallels the initial verses of the *Metamorphoses.* In the first lines of the *Metamorphoses,* Ovid sets out his subject matter—*In nova* . . . *mutatas* . . . *formas corpora*—and asks the gods, to whose power he attributes such transformations, to transform his literary endeavor in a similar manner:

\[
\text{In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas corpora; di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illas) 
adspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi}
ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen! 
\]

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My mind is moved to tell of bodies changed into new forms. Gods—for you yourselves changed those bodies—breathe into my undertakings, and draw out a continuous song, from the origin of the world up to my own times.

Hrotsvit’s opening invocation to Mary parallels this Ovidian conceit in the canoness’ plea that God aid her in her literary endeavor:

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Olim sed stultum fari qui iussit asellum
In laudem sancti nominis ille sui
Teque per angelicum fecit, virguncula, verbum
De sancto digne flamine concipere
Atque suę prolis matrem sine sorde pudoris
Effecit cunctis dissimilem meritis:
Si placet ipse meam potis est dissolvere linguam
Et cor rore suę tangere gratiolę,
Quo praestante suę mitis dono pietatis
Grata sibi pangam, te quoque, virgo. . .
. . . purpureum laudare perenniter agnum
Promearer, turmis addita virgineis.121

But he who once ordered a foolish little donkey to speak in praise of his holy name, and
who, by the angelic word, worthily caused you, little virgin, to conceive by the Holy
Spirit, and made you, different than everyone else in your merits, the mother of his child
without the filth of shame—if it pleases him, he can release my tongue and touch my
heart with the dew of his favor, so that, supplied with the gift of his kindness, oh virgin, I
might compose thanks for him and also sing about you. . . [and that as a result] I, added
to the throng of celestial virgins, might deserve to praise the Beautiful Lamb eternally.

Like Ovid, Hrotsvit cites God’s ability to change bodily forms as precedent for and proof of his
ability to change her own body (her lingua and cor); like Ovid, Hrotsvit seeks the divine
transformation of her own body so as to gain the ability to write about other divinely-enacted
bodily transformations—specifically, Hrotsvit informs Mary directly that she wishes to write
about Mary’s own miraculous conception and the even more miraculous conception of her
son.122 The canoness’ discussion of her own body, in concert with her reference to the Old
Testament miracle of Balaam’s donkey,123 shifts focus from God’s ability to change Mary’s body
in specific to his continuing ability to change all bodies across time, up to and including her own,
recalling Ovid’s claim to sing of divine changes ab origine mundi ad mea tempora; Hrotsvit’s
desire to praise God perenniter, meanwhile, likewise calls to mind Ovid’s own perpetuum
carmen.

121 Hrotsvit, Maria, pp. 4–5, ll. 31–40.
122 Addressing herself to Mary, Hrotsvit states that she desires “vel summatim attingere saltim / Laudis particulam,
virgo, tue minimam / Ortus atque tui primordia clara beati / Necon regalem pangere progeniem.” Hrotsvit, Maria,
21–4.
123 Numbers 22:21–35.
Hrotsvit’s interest in divine transformation continues throughout her book of legends. Referring to herself as “she who sings of [God’s] stupendous acts,” Hrotsvit constantly draws attention to “the wonders of [Christ’s] own power” and declares that she wishes “to mark with her pen the marvelous things” which God performs through saints like Pelagius. Divine changes of all kinds fill the pages of Hrotsvit’s hagiographical narratives. Fire fails to burn skin, cool water scorches limbs, and palm trees bend to provide fruit. God animates headless corpses, causes a woman’s mouth to issue farting noises every time she tries to speak, and withers the hand of an unbeliever; pagans convert and apostates who have pledged allegiance to Satan in order that he might transform their material conditions are in turn transformed by God’s grace and brought back into the fold.

All of this might be said to be coincidental; after all, the miracle is part and parcel of biblical and hagiographic literature. Significantly, however, Hrotsvit’s use of a specific vocabulary when describing divine change in her book of legends suggests that she is directly engaging with Ovid. Ovid uses a particular vocabulary when describing the metamorphoses in his book of changes. This vocabulary includes nouns and verbs meaning change, words describing the novelty of change, language describing the fear and surprise with which people react to divine change, and words imparting the suddenness with which divine change occurs.

Significantly, Hrotsvit repeatedly refers to the miracles in her legends as changes, particularly employing the verb mutare, a verb particularly favored by Ovid, and the noun derived from that verb, mutatio. In the Gongolfus, for example, Hrotsvit characterizes the

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124 Hanc quae. . . cecinit tua facta stupenda. Hrotsvit, Ascensio, p. 41, l. 150.
125 Virtutis propriae miracula. Hrotsvit, Gongolfus, p. 52, l. 287.
127 On the Ovidian vocabulary of metamorphosis, see Anderson, “Multiple Change,” 1–27.
burning of the hand of Gongolfus’ adulterous wife in an otherwise salubrious fountain as a “change [brought about by] our ever good-natured Christ.” At the conclusion of the Maria, Hrotsvit refers to the physical and spiritual marvels wrought by God as “the always marvelous changes of [God’s] holy right hand,” while elsewhere she uses the verb muto, -are to describe spiritual changes as diverse as the conversion of an Egyptian ruler, the apostasy of Spain in the wake of the Umayyad conquest, and the taming of dragons and other wild animals. Importantly, in those instances in which Hrotsvit’s framing of the miraculous in the language of change can be compared with a direct source, her characterization of the miracle as a change is without fail unique.

Also suggestive is the fact that Hrotsvit, like Ovid, describes divine changes using the language of novelty. Importantly, Hrotsvit draws from the same vocabulary as does Ovid to describe such changes, employing words like novus, novellus, renovatus, novitas, and recens. Among other examples, Hrotsvit describes the miraculous light that floods Dionysius’ prison cell as a lux nova and refers to the resurrected prefect’s son as a novum hominem. The fact that

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130 miranda sacre semper mutatio dextre. Hrotsvit, Maria, p. 34, l. 864.
131 Et fidei sacre mutatio denique corde / Substitit. Hrotsvit, Maria, p. 34, ll. 849–50.
133 celerum pax quia vera. / Quo regit immensus, firmavit foedere, celum, / Illarum mentes mutato more fideles. Hrotsvit, Maria, p. 30, ll. 750–2.
134 See Hrotsvit, Maria, p. 30, ll. 750–2; Maria, p. 34, ll. 849–50 and 864; these characterizations have no precedent in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. Although Hrotsvit claims in the epilogue to her book of legends that she derived all of her legends from written sources with the exception of the legend of Pelagius, which she claimed to have heard from an inhabitant of Córdoba (Liber primus: epilogus, p. 131, 3–7), the direct sources for the Ascensio and Gongolfus have not yet been identified. While earlier versions of the life of Gongolfus exist, Hrotsvit’s legend does not appear to have depended on these texts. See Wailes, Spirituality and Politics, 105n66; Homeyer, Hrotsvithae Opera, 90–3.
135 See Hrotsvit, Maria, p. 20, l. 476; Maria, p. 25, l. 595; Maria, p. 26, l. 640; Maria, p. 29, l. 734; Maria, p. 30, l. 737; Maria, p. 31, l. 788; Maria, p. 31, l. 790; Gongolfus, p. 51, l. 255; Gongolfus, p. 51, l. 279; Gongolfus, p. 52, l. 285; Basilius, p. 95, l. 40; Dionysius, p. 110, l. 174; Dionysius, p. 113, l. 250; Agnes, p. 124, l. 297; Agnes, p. 125, l. 311; Agnes, p. 125, l. 329; Agnes, p. 126, ll. 333–4.
136 Dionysius, p. 110, l. 174.
137 Agnes, p. 124, l. 297.
none of the instances in which Hrotsvit describes a divine change as novel have precedent in her source texts suggests that the canoness’ use of this trope may be purposefully Ovidian.

Suddenness is one of the defining characteristics of the transformations that occur in the *Metamorphoses*, and writers like Ausonius associated suddenness with divine change as part of their imitations of Ovidian metamorphosis. According to my count, Hrotsvit characterizes fifty-nine of the physical and spiritual transformations in her book of legends as sudden, most commonly through the use of adverbs or adverbial phrases. In each instance in which Hrotsvit describes the immediacy of a supernatural change, she uses vocabulary with Ovidian precedent, and a comparison of Hrotvit’s legends with her direct sources when available suggests that this choice of vocabulary may be purposefully Ovidian. Of the fifty-nine changes described by Hrotsvit as sudden, forty-six occur in legends for which direct sources have been identified; the element of suddenness is unique to Hrotsvit in thirty-six of these cases. As for the ten remaining changes, those changes described as sudden in Hrotsvit’s

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140 In all, I have counted 106 instances of miraculous change in Hrotsvit’s book of legends. Such changes include apparitions, marvelous changes in the natural order, healings, physical changes, spiritual changes, etc.
143 While in most instances the miracle occurs in the source without the element of suddenness, in some the entire miracle, along with the element of suddenness, is unique to Hrotsvit (as at Hrotsvit, *Maria*, p. 24, l. 582); in at least one instance Hrotsvit’s framing of an event as a change caused by divine power is unique, as is her addition of the element of suddenness to her description of that event (Hrotsvit, *Basilius*, p. 99, ll. 138–47).
source texts, Hrotsvit retains an Ovidian descriptor used by her source in one instance, \(^{144}\) substitutes alternate Ovidian words for the Ovidian vocabulary used by her source in three other instances, \(^{145}\) and replaces the non-Ovidian term *statim* with Ovidian terms in six instances. \(^{146}\) While Hrotsvit’s substitutions of alternate Ovidian words for Ovidian words used by her sources seem to have been made on metrical grounds, as she uses each word she replaces elsewhere in her legends to describe divine change, the same cannot be said of her consistent replacement of the non-Ovidian *statim* with Ovidian vocabulary. \(^{147}\) Hrotsvit’s replacement of the non-Ovidian *statim* with *raptim* at *Agnes* 368, a word with the same metrical value as *statim*, raises the possibility that her avoidance of the word in relation to the description of supernatural metamorphosis is purposeful, as does the fact that Hrotsvit uses *statim* in her legends in contexts other than the description of divine change (*Basilius*, l. 206) and in her other works (*Gesta Ottonis*, l. 664).

**Ovidian change and gender in the Hrotsvit’s book of legends**

If we are to read Hrotsvit’s *liber primus* as having been composed in imitation of Ovid’s works on divine change, we must look, too, at what implications this revelation would hold in terms of Hrotsvit’s approach to gender in her legends. Hrotsvit indicates the centrality of gender

\(^{144}\) Hrotsvit retains *subito* (Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, ch. 2) in describing the sudden appearance of an angel to Anna at *Maria*, p. 8, l. 140.


\(^{147}\) *continuo* used by Hrotsvit to describe divine change at *Maria*, p. 25, l. 608 et alia; *protinus* used by Hrotsvit to describe divine change at *Maria*, p. 24, l. 582; *octius* used by Hrotsvit to describe divine change at *Agnes*, p. 129, l. 413 et alia.
in her book of legends by repeatedly drawing attention to the supposed weakness of the female sex both directly \([\text{feminea fragilitas, fragilis calamus, fragilis sexus, vilis mulier}]\) and through the use of self-deprecating diminutives \([\text{indigna famella, Hrotsvithe misella, Hrotsvithe famella, nesciola}]\).\(^{148}\) At the same time, however, Hrotsvit’s comments in the preface to her book of changes also signal an interest in challenging a sex/gender system that assumes women’s innate physical and intellectual inferiority through the use of distancing language that points to negative gendered expectations while at the same time undermining their legitimacy. In describing her composition of the legends, for example, Hrotsvit admits only that versification “\text{may seem difficult and arduous for feminine fragility}” \([\text{metria modulatio feminegg fragilitati difficilis videatur et ardua}]\) not that it is.\(^{149}\) Hrotsvit further undercuts negative assumptions about women’s mental faculties both by preceding this statement with a discussion of the learnedness of her female teachers and by appending to the preface a dedication to her abbess Gerberga asking that she “straighten out the measures” \([\text{dirige stichos}]\) in the text, a request that takes for granted Gerberga’s metrical competence.\(^{150}\)

Given Hrotsvit’s disentangling of gendered expectations from the female body in the prefatory materials to her book of legends, then, it is noteworthy that the legends themselves, though focusing extensively on bodily change, include neither the kinds of physical sex changes scattered throughout the \textit{Metamorphoses} nor allusion to the metaphorical female-to-male sex change that Jerome claimed was initiated by women’s adoption of chastity.\(^{151}\) Indeed, in the lone passage recalling the Hieronymic maxim that righteous women become virtual men, Hrotsvit’s phrasing serves to destabilize the link between gendered behaviour and bodily sex.


\(^{150}\) Hrotsvit, \textit{Liber primus: Prologus [I] ad Gerbergam abbatissam}, p. 3, l. 5.

When the unnamed woman in *Basilius* learns that her husband has signed a pact with the Devil and decides to approach her bishop for help, Hrotsvit describes her as “putting aside feminine weakness and taking up masculine strength with prudent judgment” [molliciem . . . deponens muliebrem / Et sumens vires prudenti corde viriles]. Hrotsvit’s wording thus places the distraught woman in the active position of using her own judgment to navigate between various forms of behaviour that, although ideologically linked to sexed bodies, are demonstrably able to be “taken up” or “put aside” at will.

But even if women do not become men (or men women) in Hrotsvit’s book of legends, the metamorphoses found therein undermine the binary sex/gender system in ways that both recall and transform the gendered dynamics of change in Ovid. Scholars have shown that Ovid frequently genders the unstable *materia* subject to change in the *Metamorphoses* as feminine, and Mairead McAuley has recently charted the ways in which the maternal body, with its multiplicity and generative capacity, becomes for Ovid a means of troping metamorphosis itself. Like Ovid, Hrotsvit also presents the feminine—and Mary’s maternal body in particular—as a paradigm of transformation in her book of legends, with the female body often serving as the site of or catalyst for change. But while Ovid regularly connects the feminine with metamorphosis as a means of testing out the boundaries of epic masculinity, Hrotsvit’s association of the feminine with change serves to constantly recall the role of woman in the Incarnation, and to explore the gendered implications of Christ’s embodiment.

Associations between the feminized changes found in the *Metamorphoses* and the narrative of the Incarnation were made throughout the Middle Ages, perhaps most notably in the fourteenth-century *Ovide moralisé*’s reading of the metamorphosed Daphne and Myrrha as

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allegorical representations of the Virgin Mary’s divinely-transformed maternal body. While Hrotsvit does not draw explicit parallels between Mary and the metamorphosed figures of Ovidian myth, she nevertheless characterizes Mary’s gestation and delivery of Christ, as well as the various miracles associated with her person, with the vocabulary of change employed by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. In narrating the Virgin’s miraculous childhood behaviour, for example, Hrotsvit employs a cluster of vocabulary, denoting suddenness and astonishment in particular, associated by Ovid with metamorphosis; when the two-year-old Mary suddenly [*subito*]\(^{155}\) rushes up the stairs of the temple, the people gathered there are amazed [*mirari*],\(^{156}\) and the priests interpret the toddler’s surprising behaviour as a sign of “something great to be done through her, something truly great and marvelous to all.”\(^{157}\) Importantly, Hrotsvit clarifies that the priests’ prophecy, couched in the language of change associated with Ovidian metamorphosis [*fieri, stupere*], specifically refers to Mary’s marvelous maternity: “what could be believed to be greater—or what could actually be greater—than that a girl carried the great maker of the world, her own parent, in her virginal womb?” Hrotsvit asks her readers.\(^{158}\) Hrotsvit continues to characterize Mary’s body as a locus of change throughout the legends, describing the Virgin’s delivery of Christ as a [*partus . . novellus*],\(^{159}\) depicting her as instantly [*subito*] becoming a mother to all through Christ’s miraculous birth,\(^{160}\) and portraying her

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\(^{157}\) *Quod credi maius vel quod posset fore maius, / Quam quod virgineo portavit ventre puella / Magnum factorem mundi propriumque parentem? Hrotsvit, Maria*, p. 14, l. 297–8.

\(^{158}\) *Quod credi maius vel quod posset fore maius, / Quam quod virgineo portavit ventre puella / Magnum factorem mundi propriumque parentem? Hrotsvit, Maria*, p. 14, l. 299–301.

\(^{159}\) Hrotsvit, *Maria*, p. 25, l. 595. On the use of *novus* and related nouns and adjectives to describe change in the *Metamorphoses*, see Anderson, “Multiple Change,” 3–4.

\(^{160}\) Hrotsvit, *Maria*, p. 24, l. 585.
miraculous appearance and disappearance to an errant bishop with the Ovidian language of suddenness.\textsuperscript{161} In addition, the canoness presents the Virgin as enacting the kind of immediate physical transformations found throughout the \textit{Metamorphoses} on the bodies of others, relating that when the sick but touched the youthful Mary they were healed instantly \textit{[raptim]}\textsuperscript{162}.

Above all, however, Hrotsvit links Mary with Ovidian change by depicting salvific Incarnation as a marvelous transformation and by crediting Mary with providing the corporeal matrix necessary for that transformation. In a passage unique to Hrotsvit appended to the end of the legend of \textit{Maria}, Hrotsvit uses the Ovidian vocabulary of change to depict the Incarnation as the ultimate divine transformation, and to argue, as Augustine does in the \textit{City of God}, that it is the miracle to which all other miracles point back:\textsuperscript{163}

\begin{quote}
O laudanda tue virtutis gloria, Christe
O miranda sacre semper mutatio dextre,
Qui nutu tacito potis es disponere cuncta!
Quis volet ergo tu pietatis munera magne,
Unice nate dei summo similis genitori,
Mirari digne merita vel dicere laude,
Qui nostri causa fecisti tanta stupenda?
Tu sine principio natus de patre superno
Per praecepta patris complesti viscera matris
Ex hac corpoream sumens sub tempore formam;
Quique vales proprio mundum concludere palmo,
Panniculis stringi non raris haut repuiisti;
Et qui stellato resides solio super aethra,
Parvo presepi contractus procubuisti;
Et qui multigenis imponis nomina stellis
Ac pluvie guttas, pelagi quoque solus arenas
Rite potes numero per te comprehendere certo,
Ut fragiles pueri patiente conticuisti,
Tempore virgineas quo suxisti pie mammas.
Insuper Herodem nulla formidine regem,
Sed sola certe fugisti pro pietate,
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{161} subito discessit virgo sacrata. Hrotsvit, \textit{Theophilus}, p. 89, l. 344. Compare Maria’s appearance and sudden disappearance \textit{in somnis} to that of Aesculapius at \textit{Met.} 15.649–64.
\textsuperscript{162} Hrotsvit, \textit{Maria}, p. 17, l. 376.
\textsuperscript{163} See Augustine, \textit{De civitate dei} 22.9. Hrotsvit makes a similar argument at \textit{Gongolfus}, p. 52, ll. 293–6 and \textit{Dionysius}, p. 109, ll. 146–9.
\end{flushleft}
Quo carnis veram demonstrares pie formam;
Et mox absque mora fecisti saxea corda
Nam paganorum mollescere non domitorum
Et sentire tuum solidum per tempora regnum,
Quo te divinis moniti scirent fore signis
Ipsum, qui solo fecisti secula verbo,
Et quem cunctorum cecinerunt carmina vatum.  

Oh, the praiseworthy glory of your power, Christ; oh, the always marvelous change of your right hand, you who can set everything in order with a silent command! Only Son of God, like unto the Highest Father, who will be willing to recount with praise or worthily marvel at the gifts of your great goodness, you who for our sake brought about such stupendous things? You, born without beginning from a supernal father, by your father’s orders made pregnant your mother’s womb, taking from her a corporeal form in time; and you who are powerful enough to enclose the world in your hand did not refuse to be bound in unremarkable little garments; and you who sit on a starry throne above the heavens shrank, and lay down in a little manger; and you, who assigned the names to the various stars and drops of rain, and who alone can comprehend the grains of sand with their exact number, as a fragile child patiently fell silent while you piously sucked virginal breasts. You fled, not out of fear of King Herod, but certainly on account of piety alone, so that you piously might demonstrate the true form of your flesh. And instantly, without delay, you made the stony hearts of the unconquered pagans soften and know your real power throughout time, so that, having been warned by divine signs, they might know you, the one who created the ages with a single word, and whom the songs of all the prophets celebrated.

Importantly, the passage recalls the *Metamorphoses* in its employment of Ovidian vocabulary to describe the process of divine change [*conticiscere, contractare, facere, forma, mollescere, mutatio, similis*] as well as the astonishment [*mirari, stupere*] and suddenness [*mox, absque mora*] with which that change occurs. But the passage is also Ovidian in its explicit linking of change with the feminine. Here and elsewhere Hrotsvit draws attention to the femaleness of Mary’s body—her fleshliness, her generativity, her womb, her breasts flowing with

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165 *conticiscere*: Met. 6.281; *contractare*: Met. 14.95 et al.; *facere*: Met. 1.78 et al.; *forma*: Met. 1.1 et al.; *mollescere*: Met. 4.386 and 10.283; *mutare* (of which *mutatio* is a derivative): Met. 1.1 et al.; *similis*: Met. 1.535 et al.
166 *mirari*: Met. 1.301 et al.; *stupere*: Met. 4.676 et al.
167 *mox*: Met. 13.607 et al. While *absque mora* does not occur in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid’s frequent employment of similar phrases [*haud mora, nec mora, nulla mora, parva mora*] suggests that Hrotsvit’s choice to employ *absque mora* may have been based on metrical grounds.
168 Hrotsvit, *Maria*, p. 11, l. 219; *Maria*, p. 34, l. 872; *Theophilus*, p. 93, l. 450 et al.
169 *Maria*, p. 4, l. 34 [concipere]; *Maria*, p. 15, l. 307 [partus]; *Maria*, p. 24, l. 570 [parere]; *Maria*, p. 24, l. 575 [gignere]; *Ascensio*, p. 38, l. 83 [generare] et al.
170 Hrotsvit, *Maria*, p. 4, l. 29 [venter]; *Maria*, p. 11, l. 219 [alvus]; *Maria*, p. 14, l. 300 [venter]; *Maria*, p. 22, l. 524 [alvus]; *Maria*, p. 34, l. 871 [viscera].
milk—while repeatedly emphasizing that the Ovidian transformation of the Incarnation, a transformation that is necessary for the salvation of humankind, could not have taken place without that female body. In the *Theophilus*, for example, Hrotsvit’s Satan blames Christ and Mary equally for his downfall, announcing that “if anyone wishes to be mine, he will deny in writing Christ and equally [pariter] his girlish mother, through whose birth I suffered an exceedingly terrible loss.” Hrotsvit’s foregrounding of Mary’s essential role in the Incarnation provides a framework for understanding the symbolic function of the feminine throughout the book of legends. As in the *Metamorphoses*, the bodies of living women in the book of legends are overwhelmingly the subjects of corporeal transformation. From the withering of Salome’s hand to Agnes’ astonishing hair growth, from Anna’s miraculous pregnancy to the flatulent speech of Gongolfus’ wife, the marvelous transformations of living female flesh in Hrotsvit’s legends serve to remind her readers of Mary’s metamorphosed body and its central role in salvation. In this way, Hrotsvit’s book of legends, like Ovid’s works on divine change, makes the permeable and multiple female body “stand for the very principle of transformation itself.” But while feminized metamorphosis in Ovid points to the arbitrary, chaotic nature of the universe, as well as humankind’s utter estrangement from the divine, feminized metamorphosis becomes for Hrotsvit a sign of a newly “stable world” [*stabilis orbis*], confirming the truth of the Incarnation as made possible through Mary’s miraculously maternal body.

171 Hrotsvit, *Maria*, p. 25, ll. 598–9 [lactat.../ Uberibus castis]; *Maria*, p. 35, l. 881 [virginas suxisti...mammas]; *Agnes*, p. 116, l. 77 [Factorem proprium lactans sub tempore natum].

172 Si meus esse cupit scriptis Christumque negabit / Illiusque puellarem pariter genitricem, / Per cuius partum patior nimium grave damnum. Hrotsvit, *Theophilus*, p. 82, ll. 114–6. The use of the adverb *pariter* and the direct reference to the physical delivery of Christ [*cuius partum*] are absent in Hrotsvit’s source. See Paul the Deacon of Naples, *De Theophilo poenintente*, p. 490.

173 All of the transformations of individual and mortal living bodies in Hrotsvit’s book of legends happen to women with the exception of the blind man healed by Paul at *Dionysius*, p. 105, l. 29.


175 Hrotsvit, *Maria*, p. 12, l. 225. From *Maria* 209–25, Hrotsvit specifically links the advent of stability into the world with Anna’s conception of Mary.
In arguing that Mary’s fertile body creates the conditions for the transformation of *discordia* into *stabilitas,* opening up the possibility of future salvation for all humankind, Hrotsvit also suggests that Mary’s role in the Incarnation has gendered consequences for temporal society. While Hrotsvit intermittently faults both Adam alone and Adam and Eve together for the Fall, she repeatedly argues that Mary specifically has undone Eve’s sin. In the first lines of the book of legends, for example, Hrotsvit addresses Mary as the “pious virgin who as a parent restored to the world the life which the poor virgin of old had lost.” And in the *Theophilus,* the title character similarly tells Mary that “it is not surprising that I now will be saved through you, through whom, with God granting it, it is clear that everyone was released from the deadly crime of the ancient mother.” By laying the blame for original sin at the feet of both Adam and Eve, and by arguing that Mary has undone Eve’s sin in particular, Hrotsvit makes an intervention into the theological basis for women’s oppression in society and the Church. Although there was already by Hrotsvit’s time a longstanding theological tradition identifying Mary as the *nova Eva* who reversed the negative consequences engendered by the Fall, there existed simultaneously a deeply misogynistic streak in Christian scripture and exegesis which took for granted women’s inherent inferiority to men and which continued to justify women’s oppression on the basis of Eve’s sin. Indeed, both scriptural and exegetical writings blamed the Fall on woman’s weakness and rationalized the continued social oppression of all women on the basis of Eve’s sin. In his first letter to Timothy, for example, Paul justified the

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177 Hrotsvit, *Maria,* p. 11, 214.
178 Hrotsvit, *Gongolfus,* p. 43, ll. 35–6; *Theophilus,* p. 80, l. 69.
180 Sed non est mirum per te me iam fore salvum, / Per quam de veteris loetali crimine matris / Omnem dante deo mundum patet esse solutum. Hrotsvit, *Theophilus,* p. 90, ll. 361–3.
181 On Mary as the New Eve, see, for example, Augustine, “Sermo CXXIII In Natali Domini,” PL 39: col.1990–1.
subjugation of women through reference to Eve’s secondary creation and her central role in the commitment of original sin:

Docere autem mulierem non permitto, neque dominari in virum: sed esse in silentio. Adam enim primus formatus est; deinde Heva: et Adam non est seductus: mulier autem seducta in praevariatione fuit.  

I do not permit women to teach or to dominate men, but to be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not seduced—the woman was seduced into transgression.

Tertullian likewise connected all women with Eve, thus blaming womankind both for original sin and, ultimately, for the death of Christ:

In doloribus et anxietatibus paris, mulier, et ad uirum tuum conuersio tua, et ille dominatur tui: et Euam te esse nescis? Viuit sententia Dei super sexum istum in hoc saeculo: uiuat et reatus necesse est. Tu es diaboli ianua; tu es arboris illius resignatrix; tu es diuinæ legis prima desertrix; tu es quæ eum suasisti, quem diabolus aggredi non ualuit; tu imaginem Dei, hominem, tam facile elisisti; propœter tuum meritum, id est mortem, etiam filius Dei mori habuit.

You give birth in pain and anxiety, woman, and your inclitation is toward your husband, and he controls you—and you do not know that you are Eve? The sentence of God on that sex of yours endures to the present time: it endures, and the charge is unavoidable. You are the entrance of the devil. You are the unsealer of that tree. You are the first deserter of divine law. You are she who persuaded the man whom the devil could not attack. You so easily destroyed man, the image of God. And on account of your reward, which is death, the Son of God also had to die.

For Christian writers like Paul and Tertulllian, Eve thus becomes both a sign of women’s intrinsic mental and spiritual weakness and a justification for their subjection to men. Such arguments assume a binary sex/gender system in which behaviour and capability are intrinsically linked to biological sex (divided into the discrete categories of male and female) and in which the male is presumed to be superior to the female. Hrotsvit exploits the Ovidian theme of transformation in order to undercut any arguments that might blame women for Eve’s sin or denigrate their intellectual or spiritual capabilities by conflating them with her, presenting

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182 1 Timothy 2: 11–4.
Mary’s expressly female body as a site of and conduit for salvific transformation in the form of the Incarnation.

In addition to challenging the assumptions of the binary sex/gender system in her book of legends through her emphasis on the metamorphosed Mary’s transformative reversal of Eve, Hrotsvit also fights back against the notion of female fragility in her depiction of women more generally. Through repeated reference in the legends to the weakness of the flesh [fragilis carnis], Hrotsvit detangles fragilitas from the bodies of women, presenting it instead as a quality of all corporeal beings, including Christ.\(^{184}\) She also presents women as powerful “happy mothers”\(^{185}\) who transmit devotion to God to their children via their maternal bodies\(^{186}\) and as rational beings who can actively interpret and follow God’s law.\(^{187}\) Hrotsvit confronts theologically-based arguments regarding women’s inferiority in the ancillary material to the book of legends as well, reminding her readers that learned women like Gerberga and Rikkardis worked as teachers,\(^{188}\) and demonstrating that she herself felt comfortable making personal judgments regarding the spiritual usefulness of apocryphal texts.\(^{189}\) Indeed, throughout the book of legends, Hrotsvit concentrates on the transformative nature of belief, even presenting herself as able to transform [\textit{transformare}] her own intellect through devotion.\(^{190}\) Overall, by presenting Mary’s maternal body as having transformed Eve’s sin through the Incarnation and having thus enabled the spiritual transformation of all humankind through the process of salvation, Hrotsvit


\(^{185}\) Hrotsvit, \textit{Maria}, p. 14, l. 281–2 [Fortunata. . . genitrix]; \textit{Maria}, p. 15, l. 312 [genitrix. . . felix]; \textit{Maria}, p. 24, l. 573 [genitrix. . . felix]; \textit{Gongolfus}, p. 43, l. 33 [genitrix. . . felix].

\(^{186}\) Hrotsvit, \textit{Maria}, p. 5, ll. 54–5; \textit{Gongolfus}, p. 43, ll. 41–3.

\(^{187}\) Among others: Hrotsvit, \textit{Maria}, p. 18, ll. 401–3; \textit{Basilius}, pp. 99–100, ll. 143–75; \textit{Agnes}, p. 115, ll. 33–40; \textit{Agnes}, pp. 119–20, ll. 160–76.

\(^{188}\) Hrotsvit, \textit{Liber primus: praeftatio}, p. 2, ll. 6–12.


\(^{190}\) Hrotsvit, \textit{Liber primus: praeftatio}: p. 2, ll. 18–22.
destabilizes the links between sex and gendered behaviour assumed natural in theologically-based arguments for women’s oppression.

Yet if the miraculous for Hrotsvit reveals both the physical and ontological instability of the body (a theological move which, as we have seen, facilitates an undermining of the gender binary), hers is still a universe in which the particularity of bodies—and specifically the particularity of *sexed* bodies—still matters. Indeed, Hrotsvit’s Ovidian book of changes suggests that the historical specificity of Christ’s incarnated male (hetero)sexual body shapes the way in which men and women can access the divine.

Again and again throughout the book of legends Hrotsvit emphasizes Christ’s corporeality, drawing attention his fleshliness and bodily suffering. While Hrotsvit acknowledges that all believers have the ability to reach heaven, and all chaste individuals the chance to be joined to the choir of virgins, the canoness nevertheless suggests that bodily sex plays a crucial role in the ways in which men and women relate to Christ, ways that are specifically connected to the maleness of Christ’s own body. Importantly, Hrotsvit envisions the relationships between Christ and chaste men and male martyrs in ways that fit within the framework of temporal male social bonds—as servants, friends, soldiers, athletes, martyrs, or witnesses. In these

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191 Hrotsvit, *Maria*, p. 11, l. 219 [carnem]; *Maria*, p. 11, l. 221 [sanguine]; *Maria*, p. 35, l. 884 [carnis veram. . . formam]; *Maria*, p. 35, l. 895 [sanguine]; *Ascensio*, p. 36, l. 1 [corporeo. . . velamine tectus]; *Ascensio*, p. 36, l. 11 [sanguinis]; *Ascensio*, p. 37, l. 40 [faciem]; *Ascensio*, p. 37, l. 43 [maxillis]; *Ascensio*, p. 37, l. 44 [manus]; *Ascensio*, p. 38, l. 83 [corpus]; *Ascensio*, p. 41, ll. 141–2 [naturam. . . redivivam / Humanam]; *Theophilus*, p. 86, l. 233 [corpus]; *Theophilus*, p. 88, l. 302 [fragilis nostrae velamina carnis]; *Theophilus*, p. 88, l. 306 [terga]; *Theophilus*, p. 88, l. 307 [vultus]; *Theophilus*, p. 88, l. 310 [palmis]; *Theophilus*, p. 88, l. 318 [corpus]; *Theophilus*, p. 89, l. 325 [carnem]; *Theophilus*, p. 89, l. 337 [sanguinis]; *Theophilus*, p. 93, l. 450 [carnis veram. . . formam]; *Basilius*, p. 99, l. 140 [sanguinis]; *Dionysius*, p. 104, l. 2 [In cruce supplicium mortis pateretur amarum]; *Dionysius*, p. 110, l. 179 [corpus].

192 In addition to the numerous references to Christ’s death, see in particular the extended scenes of Christ’s bodily suffering at *Ascensio*, p. 37, ll. 42–4; and *Theophilus*, p. 88, ll. 303–13.

193 Hrotsvit, *Gongolfus*, p. 48, l. 195; *Pelagius*, p. 76, l. 387; *Theophilus*, p. 80, l. 75.

194 Hrotsvit, *Gongolfus*, p. 49, l. 205; *Pelagius*, p. 69, l. 190; *Pelagius*, p. 73, l. 289.

195 Hrotsvit, *Pelagius*, p. 63, l. 2; *Pelagius*, p. 71, l. 238; *Pelagius*, p. 73, l. 299; *Dionysius*, p. 108, l. 120.
relationships, holy men remain at a distance from Christ. In contrast, Hrotsvit envisions the relationship between chaste women and Christ as a marriage.\textsuperscript{199} Crucially, Hrotsvit characterizes the marital dynamic as explicitly erotic, involving sexual union with the divine. The canoness uses erotic language, for example, to describe Agnes’ desire “to enjoy having sex [with Christ] and to be led to his gleaming marriage bed in the manner of a bride.”\textsuperscript{200} The phrasing here—\textit{uti complexibus}—is the very same language used by the unnamed servant in \textit{Basilius} to describe his illicit desire to have sex with his master’s daughter.\textsuperscript{201} Agnes uses similarly erotic language when detailing her relationship with Christ after her death, telling her grieving parents: “Now I have sex with him \textit{[illi coniungor]} in the sweet sexual embrace \textit{[amplexu]} of celestial love—him who I always worshipped with a faithful mind on earth, desiring \textit{[cupiens]} to gaze upon him without end.”\textsuperscript{202}

Crucially, even if such a sexual union is a spiritual abstraction, it is one with expressly corporeal resonances, somatic implications made all the more meaningful by the fact that Hrotsvit describes souls as maintaining the physical form of their material bodies after death. In the \textit{Ascensio}, for example, angels assure witnesses to Christ’s ascension that “this same Jesus, who, having risen before your marvelling eyes, climbed above the high heavens, will certainly

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item 196 Hrotsvit, \textit{Dionysius}, p. 111, l. 201.
\item 197 Hrotsvit, \textit{Pelagius}, p. 63, l. 1.
\item 198 Hrotsvit, \textit{Pelagius}, p. 73, l. 297.
\item 199 Christ as \textit{sponsus}: Hrotsvit, \textit{Basilius}, p. 98, l. 115; \textit{Agnes}, p. 114, l. 5, 19, 23; \textit{Agnes} p. 117, l. 102; \textit{Agnes}, p. 119, l. 138; \textit{Agnes}, p. 129, l. 419. Virgins as \textit{sponsa Christi}: \textit{Agnes}, p. 114, l. 3; \textit{Agnes}, p. 115, l. 52; \textit{Agnes}, p. 117, l. 91; \textit{Agnes}, p. 117, l. 107; \textit{Agnes}, p. 121, l. 207; \textit{Agnes}, p. 121, l. 213. See also the use of \textit{desponsare} at \textit{Agnes}, p. 117, l. 90.
\item 200 sui. . . complexibus uti / Eius et in thalamum sponsarum in more coruscum / Duci. Hrotsvit, \textit{Agnes}, p. 117, ll. 106–8.
\item 201 Hrotsvit, \textit{Basilius}, p. 97, l. 90.
\item 202 Et nunc in celis illi coniugor amoris / Amplexu dulci, quem semper mente fidei / In terris colui cupiens sine fine tueri. Hrotsvit, \textit{Agnes}, p. 130, ll. 451–3. Other examples of erotic language to describe Agnes’ relationship with Christ can be found, for example, at \textit{Agnes}, p. 116, l. 65 [amator] and l. 70 [complector].
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
come as a judge in the same form in which he proceeded to the ether.” Elsewhere Hrotsvit declares that “Christ took his human nature, already brought back to life from the grave, to the exalted throne of his father.” Agnes also appears to retain her physical form after death, remaining fully recognizable to her parents when she descends from heaven among a virginal choir to appear to them after her martyrdom [Agnem... / Conspexere suam].

In Hrotsvít’s book of legends, the permeability and multiplicity of women’s bodies—the very corporeality consistently disdained by patristic, late antique, and early medieval male writers, and so often posited as alternately passive or threatening in Ovid—becomes the privileged point of access, metaphorical or otherwise, to the divine, a form of spiritual union not available to men. Indeed, by bookending her collection of Ovidian legends with narratives that highlight women’s fleshly union with the divine (Mary as Christ’s mother and Agnes as Christ’s spouse), Hrotsvit foregrounds the ways in which the Incarnation metamorphizes the meaning of the female body.

Conclusion

Expanding our scope of analysis in examining the works of Hrotsvit and taking seriously Hrotsvit’s own words in all three of her books allows us to see the ways in which the canoness takes up and challenges the conventions of classical genre and the gendered stereotypes presented both in those works and in Christian exegetical texts. As we have seen, attention to the ways in which early medieval writers discussed classical works in the classroom and imitated those works in their own writings reveals that Hrotsvit was a far more sophisticated writer and

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204 naturam iam de busto redivivam / Humanam solio Christus patris intulit alto. Hrotsvit, Ascensio, p. 41, ll. 141–2.
205 Hrotsvit, Agnes, p. 130, ll. 443–4.
thinker than has previously been acknowledged. Such analysis also has opened up the possibility that her legends, like her epics and dramas, were composed in imitation of classical Roman literature.

While Hrotsvit does not question sex as a bodily category in her literary corpus, she consistently and stridently challenges binary understandings of gender perpetuated by commentators including Maurus Servius Honoratus, Tiberius Claudius Donatus, and Aelius Donatus, as well as the works of Christian thinkers like Tertullian, suggesting that such behaviour is a product of social relations rather than nature. Crucially, Hrotsvit’s works thus demonstrate that ideas concerning the social construction of gender were circulating centuries earlier than previously thought.

Yet Hrotsvit’s defense of women is also much more nuanced than a simple inversion of classical norms. If Hrotsvit’s legends celebrate women for their bodiliness, and suggest that this very bodiliness enables women to enjoy a unity with God envisioned in physical terms, Hrotsvit does not, as some have argued, present a worldview that exclusively privileges women at the expense of men. In her legends and dramas we see examples of wise and good men in characters like Joseph, Andronicus, and the apostle John. And in her book of epics, Hrotsvit subverts the patriarchal force of the Virgilian epic and its reception not through a straightforward inversion of gendered epic tropes, but instead through the presentation of a realistic worldview in which men and women work together and in which women are capable of wielding political authority effectively. Overall, the thesis has demonstrated that careful attention to Hrotsvit’s gendered reception of classical literature opens up new avenues for interrogating, refining, and expanding our current understandings of the meaning of the gendered body in Ottonian Saxony.
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