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HROSWITHA OF GANDERSHEIM:
A STUDY OF THE AUTHOR AND HER WORKS

by

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A.B. in Philosophy, Carroll College, Helena, 1951

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of
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Classical scholars always rightly consider that the great works of Greek and Roman literature are of vital importance and that these works alone supply a standard for judging literary excellence. However, it is possible for the best to be an enemy of the good; this is apparently what happens in Greek and Latin studies. Greek literature of widely recognized value begins with Homer and ends with Aristotle; Latin begins with Plautus and terminates with Suetonius. Medieval Latin literature is considered outside the pale of ancient literature, not to be compared with the finer products of the Augustan Age. The result has been that the great mass of Latin literature written in the twelve centuries between A.D. 200 and 1400 has long been undeservedly neglected, particularly in England and America. From observation, study and research it is evident that within the last half century medieval studies have progressed in all directions with phenomenal rapidity. As a result there now exists a fuller realization that all over Europe during those centuries there were centers of learning where the arts flourished in spite of war and turmoil; that there was a public capable of reading, appreciating and criticising the various forms of prose and verse; and that the authors trained themselves for their task by a prolonged study of the masters of the past. True, there were periods when production slackened

and great works were few; but there were also periods of mental activity that produced many brilliant writers. There was never a period when learning was completely absent.

F. A. Wright, in his enlightening article on medieval drama, mentions three great periods between the decay of the Graeco-Roman civilizations and the Renaissance of the fifteenth century.¹ The first of these occurred in the fourth century when, after the establishment by Constantine of Christianity as the religion of the state, there appeared three distinguished Latin poets--Ausonius, Claudian and Prudentius; also Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, famous not only as a theologian but also as a writer of hymns; finally three men whose works were for many centuries the most widely read of all books--Jerome, translator of the Bible into Latin; Augustine, author of the Confessions and the City of God; and Martianus Capella, author of a veritable encyclopedia of learning, The Nuptials of Mercury and Philology. These seven men were all born within a single, short period of forty years, a phenomenon upon which Wright comments: "...outside the Age of Pericles and the Age of Augustan, it would be difficult to find any period of literature of equal length that could match this in productiveness and genius."²

In the transitional years between this era and the second great age of medieval learning, which occurred five hundred years later, such men as Boethius, Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville, to mention only the most outstanding names, were busily engaged in intellectual writings later much val-

ued as literature.

Then, in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, occurred the period identified with the name of Charlemagne, a European ruler who was not only a brave warrior and a wise king, but also an ardent patron of learning. During his reign he gathered about him in his court a great number of brilliant poets, historians and artists. A comprehensive list of such men would be unnecessary here, but even a few names will serve to indicate the talent that was present in Europe at that time. This school, dedicated to the cultivation of letters, saw fit to give themselves fictitious names, the prominence of which is easily recognized. There was Theodulf from Northern Spain, the intellectual descendent of Isidore of Seville. Theodulf, considered the most important poet of his epoch, bore the name Pindar. Alcuin, called Flaccus, was brought by Charlemagne from York (England) to reorganize the royal school. Alcuin is allowed a great deal of credit for the preservation and continuation of ancient culture.³ Others of the circle include Einhard, the builder of churches; Peter of Pisa, grammarian and poet; and his friend Paul Warnefrid, historian of the Lombards. These men and many others flourished at the court of Charles. The death of the king in 814 did not altogether end the Carolingian Renaissance, for there was an afterglow of poetry, marked by such names as Gottschalk and Sedulius Scotus, which lasted well into the middle of the ninth century.

The seed of the third great revival was sown during the

reign of Charlemagne, and grew to final maturity under the Ottos one hundred fifty years later. About the year 785, the Saxon tribes of Germania were defeated by armies under Charlemagne. Being progressive people they soon began to assimilate the Frankish culture handily. In about a century the Saxons, ambitious people that they were, regained enough power to have the rulership transferred to a Saxon, Henry I, often referred to as the founder of the German Empire. Henry's son and successor, Otto the Great, was crowned king of the Germans at Aix-La-Chapelle in 936. In 962 Otto received the imperial crown from the Pope, which was in effect the beginning of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.⁴ Thus in a period of one hundred fifty years the Saxons had recovered from defeat by the great Frankish warriors, had assimilated their culture, and had replaced them not only as rulers of Saxony, but of all the Germanic Empire of that day. In addition, the continuity of tradition with the ancient Roman Empire, as well as with the Carolingian dynasty, was virtually re-established. Since the political situation of that time was such that Otto the Great and the Empire itself were in close relationship with Italy and the East, the opportunities for cultural advancement of the German people were ripe. Otto, a learned and progressive ruler himself, sought to increase the spread of art and culture throughout his kingdom.

At Otto I's court were to be found learned, cosmopolitan circles of men. In the two-fold interest of strengthening

his empire and encouraging the cultivation of art, Otto found the latter more easily attainable. Owing to his close ties with Italy and consequently the East, the element of classic tradition induced by these ties was received with added stimulus and grace. Monks, well versed in oriental culture, were to be found in the monasteries of Otto's empire. Other learned men and artists were summoned to his immediate court. The number and influence of these men were increased when Otto's son, afterwards Otto II, married a Greek princess, Theophano, who brought in her train Greek artists and workmen, and others who would help to reflect in her German home the learning and splendor of the Byzantine court. It was perhaps with the son of Otto II and Theophano, who became Otto III, that the arts were fully developed since he, more than his father or grandfather, sought out the most learned and brilliant scholars of Europe to advise and enlighten his court. One of these was Gerbert, later Pope Sylvester II.⁵

It was in an atmosphere such as this that the empire of the Ottos showed great cultural growth. Art and learning truly flourished in Germany during this period so that not only the Saxon courts were enlightened but also the abbeys of Saxony where the larger part of the writing and craftsmanship was carried on. Much exquisite work was produced at privileged religious houses as Hildesheim, Corbei and Gandersheim, all of which stands as proof of the high culture that was introduced to, and absorbed by, the progressive Saxons

who less than two hundred years earlier were wild and uncultured.

This Ottonian Renaissance produced many outstanding writers of Medieval Latin literature; among these were Liudprand, Gerbert, Widukind, Rathier, Flodoard and Hroswitha. Each of these authors is significant for the period; however, the last person is the most fascinating of the group. It is Hroswitha and her writings that are of primary importance in this thesis.

NOTES

1. "Tenth Century Feminist," Nineteenth Century Magazine, CVII (Feb., 1930), 266.
2. Ibid., p.267.
3. See Maurice Helin, History of Medieval Latin Literature, trans. Jean C. Snow (New York, 1949), p.29.
4. See Kurt F. Reinhardt, Germany 2000 Years (Milwaukee, 1950), p. 63.
5. Reinhardt, p.64.

"Rara avis in Saxonia visa est"

Henricus Bodo

-CHAPTER TWO-

THE LIFE AND ENVIRONMENT OF HROSWITHA

During the reign of the Ottos, a thousand years ago, in the secluded, but elegant convent of Gandersheim, a Benedictine house in the Hartz Mountains of Saxony, lived and wrote one of the most talented and enlightened women in the history of literature. This extraordinary nun worked, prayed and wrote in the confines of an abbey in an era when, according to an outworn historical tradition, little writing of real literary value was undertaken. If the attitude sometimes accepted in regard to the Middle Ages is sound--that the lamp of learning was but a glimmer--then Hroswitha and her literary achievements are isolated phenomena. If, on the other hand, substantial and creditable information is offered to show that the work accomplished by this author are products of a more enlightened age than is realized, then her work must be considered not only great in itself, but distinguished as example and evidence.

Little is known for fact about the life of Hroswitha. The dates of her birth and death are obscure, as is her family name. Her life in the convent can be thought of as corresponding to custom and tradition. What writings of hers

that are extant are contained in a manuscript now kept in the Munich Library; it is principally from this original that what is known of her life and personality is gleaned. Her works, all of which are in Latin, consist of:

1. Eight metrical legends.
2. Six dramas.
3. Two epic poems and some minor verses.

Discovery of the manuscript in the fifteenth century necessarily initiated the arduous task of research and study of the author and her writings, a study which has continued down to the present day, with intermittent periods of greater interest and activity.

The form of the nun's name as used here is only one of a dozen variations found in historical, literary and biographical works; several other frequently observed spellings are Hrotsvit, Hrotsvitha, Hrotsuitha, and Roswitha. Many fanciful interpretations of the name had been given by interested scholars until the year 1838 when Jacob Grimm, the famous German philologist, cleared up the etymology of the word by explaining that the expression Clamor Validus, used in apposition to Hroswitha's name in the preface to her comedies, was the Latin translation. Grimm pointed out that the form of Hroswitha's Old Saxon name was derived from hruot = clamor, and suid = validus. Hroswitha, as well as clamor validus, therefore means "the strong voice."¹ Up to this time scholars could only conjecture the meaning and etymology of the name.

Knowledge pertaining to her genealogy will probably remain uncertain since even the most industrious scholars have failed to establish her lineage and background with definite proof. Here again only haphazard guesses have been offered, the most prominent of which is that of Martin Seidel, as it appears in the Notitiam Historicam, or general history of the nun preceding her Latin works in Migne's Latin Patrology.² Seidel gives her name as Helena von Rossow, a member of the Brandenburg von Rossow family, a prominent royal Saxon line. The immediate basis for this identification was an old wood engraving found in the abbey of Gandersheim. The veracity of this theory has been too often questioned to be held as reliable. It seems apparent for several reasons, however, that she was descended from Saxon nobility. According to religious and lay historians, the abbey of Gandersheim during Hroswitha's time was an aristocratic institution presided over by an abbess who was an imperial princess, and the house particularly welcomed daughters of royal families.³ Secondly, Bodo, a Benedictine monk of Clusa near Gandersheim, wrote a history of the convent in the sixteenth century which included a biography of Hroswitha. This historian had access to records which have since been lost; nevertheless, in his work Syntagma Gandeshemensis, he expressly states that the nun was born in Saxony.⁴

The dates of Hroswitha's birth and death will probably never be established with absolute certainty because of the lack of definite, factual evidence. In the custom of writ-

ing delightful prefaces to her various works, Hroswitha left what knowledge scholars have of her personality and method of work, and indirectly, sufficient information for making other valid assumptions. When she informs the reader that she was older than Gerberga, who was born in 940, and mentions certain events and personages of the time, scholars such as Paul von Winterfeld have been able to fix the year 935 as the most probable time of her birth.⁵ More detailed and involved information went into the establishment of 1001 as the year of her death. These dates are accepted in most accounts.

Her age at the time of entrance into Gandersheim is equally uncertain. Charles Magnin, a notable French scholar, made a study of the nun and her works in the nineteenth century in which he set the age at twenty-three years.⁶ Others are of the same opinion but their only real basis for this assumption lies in the manifestation of worldly knowledge as witnessed in her works, the contention being that she could only have obtained this through firsthand acquaintance before taking the veil. It is necessary to point out that throughout the Middle Ages it was a common practice to admit girls to convents while still in their teens, then to train and educate them during their youth. There is no definite reason to believe that Hroswitha did not follow convention and custom in this regard, for in no other environment at that time could she have acquired the deep learning revealed through her writings, a study that almost had to be begun at

an early date. In the preface to her poetical works she states that "...when I began [writing]* I was far from possessing the necessary qualifications, being young both in years and in learning."⁷ Throughout her works she offers youth and insufficiency in a humble way as partially responsible for any blemish in her work. The assumption that Hroswitha followed the usual custom and became a Benedictine nun much earlier than Magnin and the others claim cannot be maintained without some explanation for her manifest knowledge of worldly life. ✓

As will be shown in following pages, convents such as Gandersheim were centers of high learning during the Middle Ages. Within the walls of Gandersheim, as in many other religious houses of the Saxon state, were shelved great books of the past, Greek and Roman classics among these. There is evidence in Hroswitha's writings that she was greatly learned in theology, philosophy, the sciences and literature. Her acquaintance with Virgil, Terence, Horace and Ovid certainly indicates that she had an opportunity to absorb worldly knowledge from them. Her familiarity with human strength and weakness, joys and sorrows could have been easily acquired in the deep and varied study that she undertook. Finally, the vast learning itself, as shown in her work, is indicative of an early beginning to her studies. The conclusion that I am trying to reach here is that Hroswitha entered the convent when less than twenty--an intelligent and religious young girl, who labored industriously to enlighten her mind,

* Brackets are mine.

and later to produce truly significant literature.

The convent of Gandersheim had a very colorful and interesting history. In 852, Ludolph, a Duke of Saxony, founded a Benedictine abbey at the request of his wife Oda. In 857 it was removed to its permanent location on the River Gande in Saxony. Upon the death of the Duke, Oda retired to the abbey to live out her life. Her three daughters, Hathumoda, Gerberga, and Christine, in turn ruled as abbesses. King Louis III, head of the Roman Empire at that time, granted that the office of abbess at this convent should remain in the ducal family. Consequently, all successive abbesses were of royal blood, and this custom continued on through the eleventh century.⁸

Hroswitha herself tells a strange and fascinating tale of the early days of Gandersheim in the epic poem, Primordia Cenobii Gandeshemensis, of how the Duke and his wife fulfilled their desire to see the completion of the abbey. Combined with this story is an account of the miraculous manner in which progress was made. The site was chosen after its location was revealed to shepherds of Ludolph in a heavenly vision. The land was cleared and work on the house was begun, though it was not completed until after a second wondrous event occurred. Hathumoda, the ruling abbess, was instructed by a "gentle voice" to follow a certain bird to a nearby hill that would provide suitable stone for completing the masonry work which had been hindered by a shortage of

material.⁹ Regardless of Hroswitha's poetic version of its founding, the convent grew and thrived in the years that followed to become one of the finest on the continent.

The abbey, consisting of vast estates, was independent of the Church in temporal matters. The abbess, probably considered much as a feudal baroness since she held a seat in the Imperial Diet, had her own courts of law and sent soldiers into the field when the need arose. This particular convent, then, differed greatly from others of the time; its prominence in this regard undoubtedly allowed it to obtain additional advantages, particularly for cultural advancement.

As has been discussed in the Introduction, tenth-century Germany under the Ottos was a remarkably advanced country in culture and learning; it was principally within the walls of monasteries and convents that study, craftsmanship and writing were carried on. Gandersheim was in an opportune position to acquire the prominence that it held. One of the first cares of the Benedictine Order for every newly founded house was the formation of a library.¹⁰ Since this was of such importance to the houses, each Benedictine monastery or convent strove assiduously for as complete a library as possible. The status of these houses as centers of learning came to be estimated by their wealth in manuscripts. The enlightenment of the Saxons sought by the Ottos was certainly intended to be brought about mainly through such houses as Gandersheim; this particular abbey

was even further enhanced because of its being ruled over by an abbess of royal descent.

In those times an abbey was practically a self-sufficient kingdom on a minor scale, for in it were not merely the choir sisters, or the religious strictly speaking, but also many lay sisters, some clergy and a host of working people for the estates run by the abbey; in the case of a large abbey, these serfs or laborers would be numerous enough to form a village. The community made everything for their own support--their garments from wool or linen raised on the estate, buildings from their own materials; practically everything was made or grown on the surrounding area. Within the abbey itself the nuns and novices, when not at devotions, were busy with needle and spindle, with writing or copying manuscripts, with the fine arts--music, painting and sculpture. As they rose early, slept little, and worked with a steady system, much was accomplished in a day. Perhaps the notion of higher education for women today is not so modern when viewed in the light of the life that these nuns of the Middle Ages led.

The position of women during this period was rather difficult and unpleasant. It was a time when alternatives for such women as Hroswitha were strictly limited. They could consent to be married to a warrior-knight, or they might enter a convent. The latter choice, though presenting a physically arduous life, was generally appealing in much the same manner that college and a career hold inducements for ambitious young women of the present day. The abbey of Ganders-

heim would have been particularly attractive to such an eager mind as Hroswitha had, for it was a center of light and learning, of hope and peace in the midst of a turbulent world.

For explicit information concerning the education of the nun one must turn again to the prefaces. In the praefatio to her poetical works, Hroswitha gives special recognition to two persons for the wise cultivation of her talents. Upon entering the convent, Hroswitha began her studies under the "learned and gentle novice-mistress, Rikkarda." This first teacher of Hroswitha was concerned with instructing the young scholar in dialectics and rhetoric; no doubt the education was excellent and enlightening. Later the novice came under the influence and guidance of Gerberga, the ruling abbess. It was during the time of direction and inspiration of this woman, a niece of Otto I, and considered one of the most accomplished persons of her time, that the genius of the author began to manifest itself. Gerberga, interested in the development of her charge's poetic ability, encouraged her to persevere that she might create literature for the glorification of her Creator. It was Gerberga who introduced Hroswitha to Roman literature, and, as also mentioned in a preface, to other great authors of antiquity.

Hroswitha showed her deep gratefulness to Gerberga by dedicating the epic of Otto I to her abbess. Within the preface to this work is found an expression of her gratitude:

Illustrious Abbess, venerated no less for uprightness and honesty than for high distinction of a royal and noble race, Roswitha of Gandersheim, the last of the least of those fighting under your

ladyship's rule, desires to give you all that a servant owes her mistress.¹¹

One matter that is now worthy of mention is the magnificent personality of this gifted artist which is reflected not only in her style and manner of expression, but even more candidly in the prefaces. When she exclaims her gratitude to her teachers she does so in a graceful and humble manner, and with a sincerity that is deeply felt. Nevertheless her greatest acknowledgement is to God, Who she felt was the intrinsic inspiration and prompter of her efforts:

I rejoice from the depths of my soul that the God through Whose grace alone I am what I am should be praised in me, but I am afraid of being thought greater than I am. I know that it is as wrong to deny a divine gift as to pretend falsely that we have received it. So I will not deny that through the grace of the Creator I have acquired some knowledge of the arts. . . . He has given me a perspicacious mind, but one that lies fallow and idle when it is not cultivated.

In attitude she might be compared with the great Puritan writer, John Milton, in that she realized fully well the talent given her and felt the necessity for developing her gifts as highly as possible in order to produce written works that in some way reflect the beauty and omniscience of the Creator. In no way does the nun display any personal pride in her accomplishments; her only references to herself are those wherein she expresses the strenuous effort required in her study and writing, with added hopes that she has at least partially fulfilled her obligations.

Hroswitha had other teachers as well as those mentioned, very possibly some learned monks and clerics from neighbor-

ing monasteries. Though she acknowledges these only passing-ly in a preface, it can be reasonably assumed that she studied more advanced and difficult authors under her later instructors.

It is evident from her work that this woman was a marvelous combination of a brilliant, eager mind, and literary talent that would be outstanding in any age. She devoted her efforts to the study of Scripture, the works of the Church Fathers, the Roman classics, history and philosophy, and no doubt to such other fields as music and science. Once her knowledge was expanded and her mind enlightened, she undertook some of her early poetry. As she informs us, her first attempts were unobserved--it was in those quiet moments which must have been difficult to secure in the carefully apportioned and supervised routine of a nun's existence that she began her writing: "Unknown to all around me, I have toiled in secret, often destroying what seemed to me to be ill written, and rewriting it. I have tried to the best of my ability to improvise on phrases collected from sacred writings in the precincts of our convent at Gandersheim."

Following this period of apprenticeship, so to speak, the nun was allowed more freedom for her writing and was encouraged in her efforts by Gerberga. The extant manuscript of her works has the metrical legends in the first section, followed by the six dramas, then the epic poem, de Gestis Oddonis I. Her style, form and expression show continuous improvement throughout the writings; likewise there is a

steady increase of self confidence reflected in her prefatory remarks. The preface to the epic shows her more confident than does the preface to the plays, and very much more than does the diffident preface to the poems. Hroswitha's finished works were passed on to learned patrons, interested scholars and Church hierarchy, not to exclude the nuns of Gandersheim itself, to be read and enjoyed, discussed and criticised. Just how well her efforts were received during her own time can not be definitely ascertained because nothing by way of written criticism survives. Nevertheless, no stretch of the imagination is needed to realize what great enjoyment and inspiration were found by intelligent minds of the period, especially when the author lived in their midst.

During her time it is highly probable that portions of the metrical legends, which are spiritual in substance, were read to the enclosed nuns, since it was then, and still is a common practice to enlighten the minds of members of religious communities with readings from Scripture or other spiritual matter at the evening meal. Her plays may have been read to groups in the convent, and the possibility of their having been acted out by the nuns is not as strange as it may sound. Her panegyric on Otto The Great, written at the request of Gerberga, was presented to Otto II by the author's own hand, a rather significant event if one attempts to ascertain the value of her work and the prestige she had acquired as a literary artist during her lifetime. ✓

In her prefatory remarks Hroswitha pleads youth and in-

ferior knowledge as responsible for error or shortcomings in her work, even up to her final attempt, the epics. One might deduce from this that she probably had done at least the writings that are extant by the time she was thirty. From those few works that are contained in the Emmeram-Munich codex, two possibilities present themselves--either she wrote much which has not been preserved, or she worked very slowly and painstakingly, probably destroying more than she retained. Her own statement regarding her early labors (see p.17) might lead one to accept the second proposal.

It has been reasonably established that Hroswitha lived until the first years of the eleventh century.¹² Assuming this to be true, and also that she wrote until about thirty years of age, then a total of about thirty-five years are unaccounted for, both in her life and as a writer. On the one hand there is the possibility that she continued to produce written works but that they were eventually laid aside in the archives of a convent or monastery and were lost in the centuries that followed. Actually, there is little possibility of anything more of her writings turning up. From the time of the discovery of her existing works in the fifteenth century, there has been intermittent but strenuous research by German and French scholars in an attempt to give a complete study of the life and works of the nun. Nevertheless, there is still a great deal that remains unknown.

If Hroswitha discontinued writing the type of literature for which she is best known, then some explanation is needed,

not only because she was still young, but also because it appears from her works that she was reaching a point of perfection and mastery of poetry. In an attempt to throw some light on my contention that she wrote all of her extant works before she was thirty and then discontinued writing creative literature, two sound probabilities come to mind. First, it must be acknowledged that the nun was an exceptional creative artist. She had inspiration and a deep feeling for aesthetic values in literature. In developing her leonine hexameters she shows continuous improvement in smoothness and polish. Her subject matter is always on a high plane, whether portraying saintly life or the achievements of a great ruler. The spirit or mood of her pieces constantly exhibits intense feeling for sublimity. All of these attributes are indicative of a fresh, young mind. If she did terminate this type of writing around the age of thirty, it should not be considered surprising, since literary history constantly reminds us that fresh, creative writing is most generally accomplished by writers when they are young.

The second reason arises from the fact that she was a nun. As a member of a religious community, Hroswitha had functions and duties to perform. She had prayer and devotions to attend, work to accomplish and probably instructive duties as she was intelligent and learned. A nun's daily routine then, as now, was busy and complete, with little time free for personal activities. It is possible that Hroswitha, because of her literary talent and ambition, was granted time

to write. Nonetheless she had spiritual and manual exercises to which her writing was secondary. As her stay at Gandersheim lengthened, her duties as a nun must have increased, allowing her less time for personal work. With little guesswork one can assume that Hroswitha with her young, fired mind wrote until her primary calling became more important and taxing, and her creative drive was less strongly felt.

NOTES

1. Edwin H. Zeydel, "Ego Clamor Validus," MLN, LXI (April, 1946), 281.
2. Tomus CXXXVII (Paris, 1879), col. 941.
3. See B. Binesse, "Birth of the Christian Drama," Catholic World, CIII (June, 1916), 342-344.
4. Oswald R. Kuehne, A Study of the Thais Legend, (Philadelphia, 1922), p. 48--hereafter cited as Study.
5. Ibid., p. 47.
6. Ibid., p. 49.
7. This quotation and all subsequent quotations from the plays or prefaces of Hroswitha, unless otherwise indicated, are from Christopher St. John's English translation entitled The Plays of Roswitha (London, 1922).
8. See Alice K. Welch, Of Six Medieval Women (London, 1913), pp. 1-5.
9. Cf. Welch, op. cit., pp. 1-4, for English prose translation of poem.
10. A good account of Benedictine houses is found in the Catholic Encyclopedia, II, p. 443 ff.
11. St. John, op. cit., p. xxxiv.
12. See Otto Schmid, "Roswitha," in Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie (Leipzig, 1889) XXIX, p. 284-285.

-CHAPTER THREE-

THE CODEX, PUBLISHED EDITIONS AND NON-DRAMATIC WORKS

Toward the close of the fifteenth century, when humanism was beginning to take hold in Germany, when enlightened and inspired scholars were busily engaged in study, writing and research, the manuscripts of Hroswitha's collected writings were discovered in the ancient library of St. Emmeram Monastery in Regensburg. The finding of this collection proved to be of tremendous importance as the initial step in the study and exaltation of the nun of Gandersheim. Credit for this remarkable find is generally attributed to a prominent German humanist of the time, Conrad Celtes. However, at the present time there is a minor debate as to whether it was Celtes or another contemporary humanist, Johannes Trithem, who actually found the manuscripts among the dusty tomes of the library. The question is treated by Otto Schmid in his article on Hroswitha,¹ but a more modern discussion is presented by Edwin Zeydel.² The latter, in trying the case, gives facts for both sides; he offers evidence that Celtes borrowed the codex from Emmeram to carry out his projected plan of study, editing and eventual publication. In addition to this, Celtes refers to himself as the discoverer in the title and preface to the edition that he had published. The only valid point in favor of Trithem is the fact that he was the first to mention Hroswitha in one of his works, De Scrip-

toribus Ecclesiasticis (Basil, 1494). If Celtes was not the actual discoverer, though it seems altogether likely that he was, at least he was wholly responsible for bringing the nun and her works to the public attention by having the first printed edition published in 1501. A rather interesting question arises at this point--why the long delay of eight years from the time of discovery of the works to the publication? The finding occurred in 1493 and one could expect the usual amount of careful examination, deciphering, research and study that would be involved, not to exclude the then arduous task of the printing process itself. Nevertheless, it is felt by Zeydel that Celtes had a habit of dramatizing whatever he did and caused the publication to coincide with the opening of a new century.³

The printing of the first edition was accomplished at Nuremberg by Hieronymus Holtzel under the auspices of the Rhenish Sodality, a group of humanistic-minded German scholars who were promoting enlightenment in their country at this time. The founder of this group was Celtes himself, an important figure in the humanistic movement, not only in Germany but elsewhere on the continent. A scholar and poet of great prominence, he traveled and lectured over a large part of Europe, including among his acquaintances such men as Marsilio Ficino and Aldus Manutius, both of Italian Renaissance fame. Besides his literary achievements he was noted as an historian and a collector of many valuable manuscripts. In addition to the Sodality at Nuremberg, he was responsible

for those which existed at the same time at Cracow, Prague and Vienna. As a fitting climax to his many achievements, Celtes was crowned as poet laureate by Emperor Frederick III at the instance of the Elector Frederick of Saxony.

According to Zeydel, the Rhenana Sodalitas Litterarum, as it was properly titled, held a meeting at Nuremburg prior to the printing of the first edition for the express purpose of honoring Hroswitha. The fifteen epigrams, written by various members of the group as an expression of their high regard for the nun, were published by Celtes in the preface to his edition. When the work came out it was received with great acclaim, particularly in Germany itself. Previous to the publication, the works were known only to German humanists and men of letters. Within these circles there was much excitement and interest as witnessed in the epigrams and also in Celtes' dedicatory epistle. These tributes not only demonstrate their attitude toward Hroswitha, but they also throw light on the humanistic attitude toward earlier periods of German history and literature. Among those contributing the epigrams were such men as Johann von Dalberg, Chancellor of Heidelberg; Heinrich von Bunau, a Saxon nobleman and official; Eitelwolf von Stein, a Swabian jurist, later one of the founders of the University of Frankfurt; Heinrich Groninger, an authority in civil and canon law, professor at Nuremberg; and Martin Polich, personal physician of Frederick, Elector of Saxony.⁴

The epigrams, all written in Latin with the exception

of the one by Pirckheimer which is in Greek, are devoted to the praise and honor of the marvelous woman of Germanic heritage. Several of the epigrams are given below; one might note the exuberance of the composers as they compare Hroswitha to the Greek poetess Sappho, or speak of the nun in terms of the Muses:⁵

Heinrich von Bunau:

How much the righteous dieties of heaven favor the Germans you can discern in this learned virgin. These poems venerating the ancient holy seers she recounts, and more than Sappho she sings chaste songs.

Eitelwolf von Stein:

You Greek, you Italian, what do you think of this German woman? No less does she also sing Latin words in your manner.

Johannes Tritheim:

Why should we not praise the writings of the German maid, who, were she Greek, would long be a goddess without doubt. In addition she has sung those verses in times long gone by. Thus Phoebus returns after a six hundred years' cycle.

Wilibald Pirckheimer:

If Sappho is the tenth of the sweet singing muses, Hroswitha must be recorded the eleventh.

Johannes Werner:

Hroswitha is now the greatest glory to German lands, learned in weaving Latin melodies in songs. No less refined does she write in prose, following the free comic works of Terence.

Johannes Werner:

Although our native land is called barbarous, unversed in Greek teaching and in Latin, nevertheless a German Virgin could do this with her pen--Hroswitha--what men of Latium could scarcely do.

These inscriptions clearly indicate the enthusiasm shared by the German humanists. Living in an age of discovery, they felt proud of uncovering a unique codex of an eloquent writer of their own heritage. From their humanistic point of view they felt that the nun reflected as much credit on Germany as Terence and Plautus did on Rome and Sappho on Greece. After comparing Hroswitha's work with that of the ancients in quality the humanists further praised her because she was a woman, wrote during the Middle Ages and treated more praiseworthy Christian subjects.

That the importance of Hroswitha was not the concern of just the immediate circle of Celtes, is revealed by an epigram on her by Sebastian Brandt, who, though not a humanist in the full sense of the word, was an important figure in German literature and literary development, probably moreso than any of the others. The epigram by Brandt appeared in his Varia Carmina (1498); the translation given below shows it to have much more merit than any of those printed by Celtes:

The glory of the German name owes much to you Hroswitha; your writings make this glory exceedingly bright. You shine in song, you shape words in Latin, you offer religious comedies, and you sing histories. Who, noble woman, would not admire your noble poems, though you have written it on barbaric soil? Scarcely did the glory of the Ottos bring so much praise to the Saxons as this lone woman did to her people. Hence, whatever merit Germany has she will render to you, who are succeeded by no other learned virgin. Farewell.⁶

Celtes, while studying and reworking the manuscripts for publication, took the not unusual liberty of making

changes in the material for his edition. The most obvious alteration was in his rearrangement of the original order of the material, since he placed the dramas first, with the legends and epic following in that order, apparently because he realized the greater importance of the plays over the other works. Nevertheless, this arrangement was unfortunate since the writings as found in the manuscripts were in the order in which they were written and should have remained so. The codex, having been only borrowed from the St. Emmeram Monastery by Celtes for his work, was returned to the monks. Eventually it was transferred to the Munich Library, where it has remained since. Henceforth the original manuscripts will be referred to as the Emmeram-Munich codex.

Within the first edition of 1501 is a total of eight woodcuts, two of which are remarkably intricate and detailed-- one of them depicting Hroswitha presenting her epic of Otto The Great to the Emperor himself; the second shows Celtes handing a copy of his edition to Frederick, the Elector of Saxony, who, incidentally, bore the expenses of Celtes' work. These two and the other six plates, which illustrate incidents in the plays, have been attributed to the two great woodcut artists of the day, Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach. The two woodcuts described are the work of Dürer; however, the others are without signature and have not been definitely credited to either man. That Dürer knew Celtes and had previously done woodcuts for him is given substantiation by Zeydel, while Cranach's connection with Celtes is unrecorded.⁷ A com-

parison of printed reproductions of the woodcuts has prompted me to make certain conclusions.⁸ The six that depict scenes from the plays do not contain the intricacy and detail of the two definitely ascribed to Dürer; the former are examples of fine craftsmanship but do not have the elaborateness of the presentation scenes. If the six woodcuts are Dürer's they are products of less effort than the first two mentioned, or they are the work of someone else, probably Cranach.

The second important edition of Hroswitha's poetry and drama was issued in 1707 by H. L. Schurzfleisch under the title, Hrosvithae Opera (Wittenberg). This edition is in nearly all respects a reprint of the first, although augmented with biographical and philological notes. Incidentally, the text given in Migne's Latin Patrology is taken from the Schurzfleisch edition. A more valuable edition to the student is Charles Magnin's edition, Theatre de Hrotsvitha (Paris, 1749), since he collated the Celtes and Schurzfleisch texts with the original manuscript, and in addition gives a translation of the works into French. Magnin found readings preferable to those of his predecessors and "restored" some alleged stage directions in the plays which he claimed were omitted by Celtes. The most comprehensive and exact study of Hroswitha and the complete works is that of Paul Winterfeld, Scriptores Rerum Germanicorum, Hrotsvithae Opera (Berlin, 1902), while the last work of significance to appear is Karl Strecker's Hrotsvithae Opera (Leipzig, 1906). The first edition of the complete dramas in English translation was accom-

plished by Christopher St. John, a pseudonym for Christabel Marshall; for her work, The Plays of Roswitha (London, 1923), she consulted chiefly Magnin's text. At the present time there is no complete edition of the entire works in English, although the non-dramatic works were translated by Sister M. Gonsalvo into English at St. Louis University in 1936.

The Emmeram-Munich codex is divided into three distinct sections. The first contains the eight poems or metrical legends; the second, and most significant part, contains the six short dramas; the third contains the long epic poem on Otto The Great. Each of these sections is headed by a lengthy and important preface, while in some instances separate works within each division have been enhanced by prefatory remarks. The second epic, on the founding of Gandersheim, does not appear in the codex; its discovery occurred at a later date so the poem will be discussed following the non-dramatic pieces found in the original codex. The six plays, by far the most important work of the author, will be taken up extensively in later chapters.

Although Hroswitha's fame lies chiefly in her dramatic compositions, the metrical legends were her earliest efforts. Her preface to the poetical works give an indication of her approach and attitude in the creation of the pious legends:

I offer this little book, which has not much to recommend it in the way of beauty, although it has been compiled with a good deal of care, for the criticism of all those learned people who do not take pleasure in a writer's faults but are anxious to amend them. I am well aware that in my first works I made many mistakes not only in prosody but in literary composition, and there

must be much to criticize in this book. By acknowledging my shortcomings beforehand I hope I am entitled to ready indulgence as well as to careful correction of my mistakes.

Here again one may witness the humility and faith of the nun who was desirous of criticism of her work by persons she knew were capable and who would recognize any value in her endeavors. It must be remembered that she labored long and hard to accomplish what work she thought suitable for presentation, permitting no one to read what she had written until she felt the work worthy of public examination. It might also be recalled that Hroswitha tried her hand at original composition secretly at first, often destroying what she was not completely satisfied with and rewriting it. No doubt she was apprehensive lest the critics, in recognizing crudities in her style, might deter her from writing.

In the same preface from which the preceding quotation is taken, another statement, demonstrating her faith and the realization that her talent is a divine gift, may be found:

...I, without any assistance but that given by the merciful grace of heaven (in which I have trusted rather than in my own strength), have attempted in this book to sing in dactyls. I was eager that the talent given me by Heaven should not grow rusty from neglect, and remain silent in my heart from apathy, but under the hammer of assiduous devotion should sound a chord of divine praise. If I have achieved nothing else, this alone should make my work of some value. Wherefore, reader, whosoever you may be, I beg of you, if you think it right before God, to help me by not sparing censure of such pages as are poor and lack the skill of a master. If, on the contrary, you find some that stand the test of criticism, give the credit to God, ascribing all defects to my shortcomings. Do this in an indulgent rather than in a censorious spirit, for the critic forfeits the right

to be severe when the writer acknowledges defects with humility.

If there were ever any doubts as to the sincerity and modesty of this writer they should be completely cleared up by what is conveyed in the preceding passage. In Hroswitha there is one of those exceptional artists who wished that all criticism of her poetry be directed to herself, while any glory from achievement be ascribed to her Creator.

All but one of the legends are written in a metrical form termed the leonine hexameter. This form was attempted by a number of Medieval Latin poets prior to Hroswitha's time, but few achieved mastery in its usage. Technically, it is a dactylic hexameter verse, similar to that used by the Roman poets, who, incidentally, adapted it to their language from the Greek epic writers. In its earlier stages the leonine hexameter, following Greek and Latin poetry, depended on syllabic quantity for its cadences, and in general followed the dactylic stress. However, at some time early in the Middle Ages several important changes were being effected in the hexameter. It must be recalled that in quantitative measures the meter may have the customary three syllables with the accent falling on the first, or it may have only two syllables, the second being long and thereby quantitatively equal to two shorter syllables. This latter type is differentiated from the regular dactyl by being termed a spondee foot. It was by the skillful manipulation of words that the writers of Greek and Latin verse were able to speed up or slow down their lines to conform to the meaning of the poetry, or to

obtain the effect desired from the lines. Moreover, it is essential to remember that although the classic poets were aware of rhyming, they seldom used it. With all the above in mind, the leonine hexameter can be better explained.⁹

The changes that were made in the classic hexameter occurred slowly throughout the Middle Ages, but by the tenth century the line was given a definite caesura, preferably at the end of the third foot, with the syllable just before the caesura made to rhyme with the last syllable of the line. In modern English prosody this would be termed internal rhyme. The following is a typical example:

Lucifer et Stellis, sic es praelata puellis.

The second and perhaps more significant change had to do with the metrics; in brief, it involved a shift from quantitative measures to accentual. The basic characteristic of the latter is the numbering of syllables, while the principle is the strophic grouping of lines which contain an equal number of syllables divided by a fixed caesura. It was not until the eleventh century that the principles of accentual verse were fully developed and mastered so that a regular cadence was produced when the words were read according to their grammatical accent. In analyzing the form and metrics of Hroswitha's poetry it became evident that the nun's adeptness at rhyming and handling of the caesura increased progressively throughout the poetical works. From the analysis it is also evident that the poet was striving for a rhythmical cadence produced by consistent dactylic meters. In her ear-

lier attempts at composing hexameter lines the spondee occurs as often as does the dactyl foot in verses that are almost totally dependent on quantitative measure. However, in her later poetry the dactyl is in almost complete predominance. From every indication the poet was attempting to write the hexameter with accentual measures in mind rather than quantitative. The following two lines from the poem on the Virgin Mary, the first legend in the codex, will help to indicate the nun's early reliance on the quantitative measure:

Unica spes mundi dominatrix inclyta Coeli,
Sancta parens Regis lucida stella maris.

From the following three lines taken from the epic on Otto I, perhaps some of the last poetry that she wrote, it is evident that the author was counting syllables by dactylic feet:

Provida quem domini pariter sapientia Christi
Dignatur servare ducem populo bene fortem,
Belliger ut fortis, belli doctissimus artis.¹⁰

An examination of the Latin legends in the order in which they were written reveals a continuous improvement in polish and form of the hexameters. Although the Latin vocabulary is rather plain and the constructions simple, the verses read pleasantly.

Hroswitha was not only a serious and industrious poet, but she was also a meticulous technician in her poetry. This fact is brought out by Edwin Zeydel in a brief note.¹¹ Zeydel explains that medieval Latin poets were fully conscious of synalepha (the blending into one syllable of two vowels of adjacent syllables as by elision) but that there were few as conscious as Hroswitha or took such pains to avoid it in

their verse as did the nun. Disregarding the dramas, not written in verse, there are 5030 lines of poetry from her pen. Paul von Winterfeld, author of the critical edition, Hroswitha Opera (Berlin, 1902), after remarking "synaloephe rarissima", quotes only seven examples that he had discovered.¹² Zeydel states that subsequent research has not revealed any additional cases, but rather that the tendency of the critics has been definitely in the direction of dissipating five, or even six, of the seven examples.¹³ This project seems fitting in view of Hroswitha's manifest desire to avoid synalepha altogether. However, Zeydel points out one instance (line 204 of Pelagius) where Hroswitha, apparently in her eagerness to avoid an elision, actually does violence to the sense of the passage.

The initial works of the nun through the medium of poetry are two biblical poems--the first dealing with the life of the Virgin Mary, the second with the Ascension of Christ into Heaven. Both of these are in keeping with the tradition of the ecclesiastical writers of Latin poetry during the Middle Ages, with their substance drawn from Sacred Scripture and other Holy Writ. The poem on the Blessed Virgin Mary consists of 859 hexameters and derives principally from the apocryphal Gospel of St. James. Hroswitha's poetical treatment recounts the birth and childhood of Mary, the Annunciation by Gabriel, the birth of Christ, and ends with the escape of the Holy Family into Egypt. In this, as in all of her legends, the author is faithful to the facts as she found them in her study of

spiritual and historical reading; however, she used poetical freedom in the psychological treatment of her characters and in their actions. Apparently she did not realize at the time she was writing that some of her sources were held as questionable by some of the Church hierarchy. In the preface to her poetical works she extends an apology for her oversight:

To the objection that may be raised that I have borrowed parts of this work from authorities which have been condemned as apocryphal, I would answer that I have erred through ignorance, not through presumption. When I started, timidly enough, on the work of composition I did not know that the authenticity of my material had been questioned. On discovering this to be the case I decided not to discard it, because it often happens that what is reputed to be false turns out to be true.

The second legend, on the Ascension of Christ into heaven, has always been an event of great significance in the history of Christianity. Hroswitha's source in this instance was undoubtedly the New Testament, since each of the four Gospel writers give the Ascension fervent treatment. The event is told with much dignity by Hroswitha in her poem of 150 hexameters.

The six legends of saints begin with the martyrdom of St. Gangolf, a Burgundian prince. This is the one instance where Hroswitha departed from the use of the leonine hexameter, as the piece is composed of strophic groups of two lines each, called distichs. The modern term for this form is the couplet, and the distich is similar to the couplet in that a thought is expressed in each two lines. The first line of a distich is a leonine hexameter; however, the second line, though containing internal rhyme, is of pentameter length.

Examples of two such distichs as found in the St. Gangolph legend are these:

Certe non nostrae possunt, dictando carmenae
Composito modulis texere dactylicis,

Munere, spe, dictis recognitans, quo martyrism almi
Pro meritis Christis sit sibi propitius.

The complete legend is made up of 291 distichs. Apparently the poet found more satisfaction in composing in straight hexameters since this is her first and last attempt at this type of verse.

One of the more interesting legends is that of St. Pelagius who lived at Cordova in Hroswitha's own time. The author relates in the poem that the story was told her by an actual eyewitness to the martyrdom. In this Hroswitha indirectly shows us that communication existed between the great intellectual center of Cordova and the Ottonian Empire, a situation that may have had considerable influence on the art and literature of Germany at this time. From the middle of the tenth century until well into the following century the city of Cordova enjoyed such a high degree of literary culture that it was sometimes referred to as New Athens.¹⁴ Although under Arab rule, Christians were allowed peace and given freedom to take part in the great learning at Cordova. The extent to which the influence of this progressive city of Spain was felt in Germany is uncertain, but there is good evidence that it existed.

As related in the legend, the youthful Pelagius was considered such an attractive person that the Caliph Abderrahman,

who then ruled Spain, wished to make the young man his minion. The Christian youth indignantly refused and was handed over to an executioner. His eventual beheading was followed by a miracle, all of which is poetically described in the legend of 414 verses.

The third saint legend, the story of Theophilus, is of notable interest to students of the Faust tradition since Hroswitha's version is the earliest recorded poetical treatment of a diabolical pact.¹⁵ In the legend, Theophilus, while yet a cleric, was deprived of an ecclesiastical promotion; he then offered his soul to the devil in exchange for this worldly advancement. After receiving the desired position, he repented his selfish decision and subjected himself to a burdensome penance. The majority of modern article writers contributing to the Hroswitha study have accepted as axiomatic that her legend is the root source for the Faust idea. This notion should not be flatly accepted as such.¹⁶

Aside from its connection with the Faust tradition, the poem furnishes reliable evidence that it was read aloud to the nuns of Gandersheim at table. The indication is found in the last eight lines of Theophilus; my own prose translation is given below:

O Thou Self-Existent One, begot of the Eternal High Throne before the time of the world, Who, pitying mankind, descended from the Citadel of the Father and assumed the true form of the flesh through a virgin, that He might amend the bitter judgement of the first virgin [Eve].*

He blesses the holy foods of the table set before us by making the meals delectable for those eating.

* Brackets are mine.

What we are and what we eat, or whatever we do, let the right hand of our Creator and Lord bless everything.

The prayer is analogous to a mealtime benediction, indicating that the legend itself was read, probably in portions, at the table. Although mentioned previously, it might be emphasized here that from the early days of religious communities up to the present, it has been a common practice to read matter of spiritual substance to members at the evening meal. If it is accepted that Theophilus was read in the manner described, then it can be reasonably assumed that the other legends were read, since they are all of the same religious nature.

The fifth legend is a recounting of the martyrdom of St. Dionysius, told in 266 verses. The sixth, and final, legend, concerning the martyrdom of St. Agnes, stands apart from the others for its smooth, melodious lines. This poem is an especially fine example of how Hroswitha, though drawing her material from ancient records, adds touches of her own. The story of St. Agnes, a fourth-century martyr, is that she was consigned to a brothel as punishment for openly avowing her Christianity. Her presence there purified the house, and the example of her chastity shamed its frequenters into repentance. Later, when her persecutors attempted to burn her at the stake she emerged unharmed from the fire. The martyr was finally put to death by a headsman. Hroswitha, in keeping with her desire to demonstrate chastity of holy women, seems to have taken special care with this

poem as it is remarkable for its beauty of diction.

It is immediately evident that Hroswitha was enlightened in Scripture and early Church history. The exact sources for her poetic works are not of great importance here, what is important is the fact that through her knowledge and ability she produced her own poetic versions. Whether her poems enjoyed a high reputation during or after her lifetime is not certain, but one student of the nun, Christopher St. John, contends that the St. Pelagius legend was held in high esteem, particularly by Portuguese and Spanish hagiographers who often quoted it. Furthermore, it was printed in its entirety by the Bollandists in the Acta Sanctorum.¹⁷

After completing the eight poetic legends, the author devoted the second period of her writing career to the dramatic dialogues or plays. By the time she completed these her superiors, who must have been well pleased with her accomplishments, no doubt prompted her to undertake the longer epics which are the result of her third, and final, writing period. Hroswitha remarks in the preface to the first epic, De Gestis Odonis I, that she initiated the work at the request of the Abbess Gerberga. In the same preface one may read of the author's attitude in undertaking the task of chronicling Otto's life in verse; the preface opens with an acknowledgement to Gerberga for her inspiration and direction, and for the necessary information concerning royal affairs that she supplied to the author. Farther along in the prefatory remarks Hroswitha humbly expresses perplexity and fear

upon approaching such a vast subject, though she recognizes her duty to utilize to the utmost the talents given her.

The epic has been the object of much concern to interested scholars because it is incomplete as found in the Munich-Emmeram codex. To Justus Reuber goes the credit for being the first to notice two large gaps in the poem. In 1584, Reuber had his Veterum Scriptorum published in Frankfurt. This work included the De Gestis Oddonis I, based upon the text found in the Celtes edition. Reuber observed that a section dealing with the years 953 to 962 of Otto's life was absent, and that the period from 962 to 967 was only summarized.¹⁸ Reasons for the incompleteness of this epic have only been conjectured up to the present time.

The contents of the epic are significant for several reasons, the foremost of these being that it is the personal history of a truly great and colorful monarch, written during his own lifetime in an epic of high poetical quality. In addition, it is considered valuable by historians who have found the account given by the poet of direct assistance in their own historical work.

The second epic, Primordia Coenobii Gandeshemensis, presents a somewhat different problem from any of the poetic works discussed thus far. The poem is not found in the Emmeram-Munich codex, and at no time was part of it. After reposing in Gandersheim for two hundred years, the manuscript of the epic was translated into German early in the thirteenth century by a certain Eberhard whose rhymed chronicle is still

extant.¹⁹ The monk Bodo found a manuscript of the Latin in Gandersheim in the sixteenth century, perhaps the same manuscript that Eberhard had translated. Bodo made a copy of it and then lost the original. In 1709, J. G. Leuckfeld secured a corrupted fifteenth century copy in Hanover and published the poem for the first time. The following year G. W. Leibnitz, better known as a philosopher, improved Leuckfeld's text by consulting Bodo's version in the Syntagma Gandeshemensis, and turned out as accurate a text as existed up to that time. The text of the epic found in Migne's Patrology is that of D. Pertz, who, in the introduction to his text, relates the history of the versions as given above. Regardless of the roundabout manner in which the Pertz text came to its present form, it is generally believed to be sound. One important bit of evidence is the fact that of the seven rare examples of synalepha in Hroswitha's poetry, which were mentioned in Chapter Three, only one is from the Primordia. Had the text been tampered with, perhaps the avoidance of elision would not have come through as it has.

The poem has been given comment in Chapter Two in relation to the founding of Gandersheim; however, it is worthy of a few additional remarks. Although Hroswitha adhered to historical facts for the substance of the epic, she wove into it some fanciful and imaginative lore that gives poetic beauty to the work as a whole. In this manner it serves well to demonstrate the lively imagination of the author.

As a final note regarding manuscripts, one of major im-

portance that must be considered is the Cologne codex. This manuscript was discovered in 1922 by Goswin Frenken in the Municipal Archives of Cologne. It contains the first four plays of the Emmeram-Munich codex (through Abraham) but represents not a copy of this first important discovery, rather it is a better, purer text, and is said to go back to one of several manuscripts sent out from Gandersheim to prominent patrons of the nun after completion of the first four plays. A possible explanation is offered by Zeydel, based on earlier beliefs of Winterfeld, Strecker, and the Cologne codex discoverer, Frenken. The theory is that after Hroswitha finished her first four plays, she showed them to the Abbess Gerberga and others, who had copies made which were sent away to higher Church dignitaries for approval. The conclusion drawn is that the Cologne codex, dating from the twelfth century and lacking both Praefatio and Epistola, was based on such a copy. The importance and consequences of this Cologne codex are discussed in Chapter Six.²⁰

NOTES

1. In Allgemeine Deutsch Biographie, XXIX (Leipzig, 1889), 285-286.
2. See "Reception of Hrotsvitha By the German Humanists After 1493," JEGP, XLIV (April, 1946), 281-283.
3. Zeydel, op. cit., p.241.
4. See Zeydel, op. cit., p.243
5. All fifteen epigrams in the original Latin and in English translation are in Zeydel's article, op. cit., pp.243-245.
6. Zeydel, op. cit., p.245

7. Zeydel, op. cit., p.241.
8. Printed reproductions of three of the woodcuts are in: Rosamond Gilder, "Hrotsvit," Theatre Arts, XIV, 342-343.
9. I am indebted to Professor Marguerite Ephron for a precise explanation of classic hexameter verse.
10. All Latin poetry and prose from Hroswitha's works as presented in the thesis are from the text in J. B. Migne, Patrologiae Cursus Completus (Paris, 1879), CXXXVII, col. 941 to col. 1195.
11. See Zeydel, E. H., "Note on Hrotsvitha's Aversion to Synalepha," Phil. Q., XXIII (Oct., 1944), 379-381.
12. The seven examples are given by Zeydel, op. cit., p.390, along with the arguments for eliminating at least six of the seven examples.
13. Zeydel, "Note...", p.390.
14. See Ulick R. Burke, A History of Spain, I (New York), p. 167-177.
15. See F. A. Wright and T. A. Sinclair, A History of Later Latin Literature (New York, 1931), p. 184.
16. Here I would refer the reader to P. M. Palmer and R. P. More, The Sources of the Faust Tradition, from Simon Magus to Lessing (New York, 1936).
17. The Acta Sanctorum, or lives of the Christian saints and martyrs, was begun in the seventeenth century by Church hagiographers and continues to be written in the present day. It is considered the definitive work of saints' lives in the Catholic Church.
18. See Zeydel, "Reception of Hrotsvitha by the German Humanists after 1493," JEGP, XLIV (July, 1945), 248.
19. According to Zeydel in his article, "Knowledge of Hrotsvitha's Works prior to 1500," MLN, LXI (June, 1944), 383.
20. See Zeydel, "Were Hrotsvitha's Dramas Performed During Her Lifetime?" Speculum, XXII (Oct., 1945), 450.

-CHAPTER FOUR-

THE DRAMAS

ANALYSIS OF GALLICANUS, DULCITIUS AND CALLIMACHUS

The poetic legends and epics of Hroswitha are exceptionally fine products that indicate remarkable literary talent for the age; nevertheless, these works alone are insufficient for granting the nun the honor and praise that she justly deserves. By far her most important and significant works are the six classical plays,¹ the prominence of which lies not essentially in their dramatic qualities, though these are rare and of lasting value, but in the fact that they are plays, classical in form, which stand by themselves in an isolated period between the last days of the classical theatre and the revival and adaptation of classic drama to the modern stage in the early sixteenth century. In order to form a stronger realization of the enormous spread in time from the classic stage to the modern, several facts must be presented: the death of Terence, the last great writer of classical comedy, occurred over eleven hundred years before the time of Hroswitha; if one will admit that the modern drama did not begin before 1500, then there is a period of five hundred years after Hroswitha wrote, for it was during the tenth century the the nun composed her plays.

Historians maintain that the classic theatre decayed and disappeared as Christianity increased in importance in Europe.²

The modern theatre arose during the Middle Ages out of the liturgical services of the Church and owed no debt to the past until the plays of Terence and Plautus were revived, studied and adapted to the Renaissance stage early in the sixteenth century. Hroswitha's plays, based on Terence in a manner, and in all probability the last vestiges of classical antiquity, appear to stand out as phenomena. Nevertheless, the notion that they are isolated should not be too quickly accepted since it is reasonable to assume that any work surviving to the present day may be but a sample of much else that has disappeared down through the centuries. In addition, the conventional view that Hroswitha had no influence on the development of the liturgical drama, which was in its infant stages during her lifetime, is possibly open to question. The matter of Hroswitha's influence is taken up in detail in Chapter Six.

The claim for the plays of Hroswitha, apart from their intrinsic value and interest, is that they are a link, isolated or not, in the tradition of the drama. That the nun was acquainted with the writings of the Roman playwrights is evident from the preface to the plays; but whether she was aware of the art of drama is a dubious matter of great concern. Before attempting a consideration of the latter, it is expedient to study the plays themselves.

The six plays are based on legends which have their origins in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries.³ Through her active imagination Hroswitha modified and enriched the le-

gends without distorting them; further, she did not confine herself to writing on scriptural and liturgical subjects, a limitation which caused many other Latin writers of creative literature to be categorized. It is fairly evident to the reader of the plays where the author departed from the legendary sources and allowed her imagination to create. Briefly, the plays of Hroswitha are as follows:

Gallicanus--the story of the conversion and martyrdom of a Roman commander.

Dulcitius--the martyrdom of three holy virgins, Agape, Irena and Chionia, with a comic interlude by the villain Dulcitius.

Callimachus--about the passion of the hero for the already married Drusiana, of their deaths and miraculous restorations; finally the conversion of Callimachus.

Abraham--the fall of Mary, niece of the hermit Abraham, and her eventual repentance.

Paphnutius--the story of Thais, the courtesan who is converted and does penance.

Sapientia--the martyrdom of Faith, Hope and Charity, daughters of Sapientia.

In general, one notion predominates the dramas--the virtue of Christian women. Obviously didactic in purpose, the plays resolve themselves into conflicts between Christianity and paganism as in Gallicanus, Dulcitius and Sapientia, or between chastity and passion as in Callimachus, Abraham and Paphnutius. Regardless of how precarious or dubious the situations into which her characters fall, one thing is inevitable--Christianity and virtue win out. Hroswitha does not advocate celibacy nor condemn marriage; she merely counsels as more blessed the unmarried state.

One might wonder what could have prompted a nun in a secluded medieval convent to undertake the writing of dramatic works, especially since there is no evidence of any other such literature being written at this time. This question may best be answered by Hroswitha herself in the preface to her plays:

There are many Catholics, and we cannot entirely acquit ourselves of the charge, who, attracted by the polished elegance of the style of pagan writers, prefer their works to the holy scriptures. There are others who, although they are deeply attached to the sacred writings and have no liking for most pagan productions, make an exception in favour of the works of Terence, and, fascinated by the charm of the manner, risk being corrupted by the wickedness of the matter. Wherefore I, the strong voice of Gandersheim, have not hesitated to imitate in my writings a poet whose works are so widely read, my object being to glorify, within the limits of my poor talent, the laudable chastity of Christian virgins in that self-same form of composition which has been used to describe the shameless acts of licentious women.If this pious devotion gives satisfaction I shall rejoice; if it does not, either on account of my own worthlessness or of the faults of my unpolished style, I shall still be glad that I made the effort.

It is pretty well agreed upon among scholars that classical comedy reached its culmination with Terence in the second century B. C. and deteriorated in the first centuries after Christ until it finally disappeared altogether insofar as the writing and acting of drama is concerned.⁴ Although Christianity is held responsible for abolishing dramatic performances, it surely must be credited for the preservation of the works of the classical writers as the writings most certainly found refuge in the monasteries and convents on the

continent. At this point a remark by Douglas Bush seems both pertinent and appropriate:

Before talking about patristic or medieval illiberality we should not forget that at least up to the sixteenth century education and culture were largely promoted and maintained by ecclesiastical effort; that throughout that period, and far beyond it, ecclesiastical authority gave pagan writings a place in education which the modern liberal world would never dream of giving to religious works; and that it was mainly churchmen who copied and preserved the ancient authors for often ungrateful men of the Renaissance to "discover." 5

It was in the tranquil atmosphere of the religious houses that the works of antiquity were preserved, copied and re-copied, and though condemned in substance they were fostered and favored as an education in style. These works were read by the religious, including Hroswitha who apparently thought that they attracted too much attention by their elegance and charm at the risk of moral corruption by their contents. Consequently the author determined to create more virtuous and spiritual dramatic dialogues to replace the plays of Terence as reading material for Christians.

The six plays, standing in the almost certain order of their composition, give clear indications of progressive improvement in the author's technique. Discussion and analysis of the plays are given in the order in which they were originally written, the three earlier plays in this chapter, the remaining three in the following chapter. For anyone reading these works, either in the Latin or in an English translation, it should be noted that the texts of the original plays are written in tenth-century Latin and are in unbroken

units; they contain no subdivisions into acts or scenes and give no indications as to scenery. The argumenta preceding each play were contributed by Celtes while the scene divisions and dramatis personae were added still later by Magnin. The plays should be approached with respect to the time and conditions under which they were written; they are alien to our modern point of view and might be considered crude and two-dimensional in comparison with plays of the modern stage.

GALLICANUS

The first play of the series deals with a legend around the life of St. Constantia, daughter of the Emperor Constantine who ruled Rome in the fourth century. A summary of the play is as follows:

Gallicanus, commander of Constantine's army, was about to depart for war with the barbarians. Because of his fine record he asks that Constance, the Emperor's virtuous daughter, be given him in marriage as a reward. Constantine himself is willing, but he knows that his daughter has taken a vow of virginity. Constance is approached on the subject by her father: after some reflection on the matter she agrees to consider the marriage if Gallicanus is victorious in the forthcoming battle; however, she trusts to Providence that somehow she may keep her vow. Constance requests that the two motherless daughters of Gallicanus dwell with her during their father's absence; her two servants, John and Paul, are instructed to accompany Gallicanus to the war. Later, as Gallicanus' army is about to lose the battle, John and Paul

entreat him to become a Christian. The commander vows his conversion and is miraculously victorious. Upon returning to Rome Gallicanus informs the Emperor that since he has become a Christian and taken a vow of chastity he wishes the engagement to Constance dissolved. After his daughters become Christians, Gallicanus gives away all his goods to the poor and resolves to serve God alone.

There is a distinct division in the play at this point as the action immediately skips over to the time of the Emperor Julien while the interest in the play now centers on John and Paul. This complete change in time, action and characters has led a number of observers to believe that Hroswitha had actually meant Gallicanus to be two plays. However, the situation hardly warrants so strong a notion as this since the entire play is short enough in itself, and the principal characters either appear or are mentioned throughout. Magnin very sensibly indicated the division by calling the sections Part One and Part Two. A summary of Part Two follows:

The scene is still in Rome but now under the reign of Julian. Gallicanus appears briefly to give defiance to the Emperor's orders that he leave the realm or make a pagan sacrifice. After Gallicanus retires to Alexandria word is brought to Julian that he has died a martyr in that city. Meanwhile, John and Paul are pressed by Julian to honor the pagan gods. When they refuse in a good Christian manner, they are martyred by soldiers under the command of Terentianus.

The son of this emissary is seized with a madness, but when Terentianus recognizes the powers of the Christian God, he repents the slaying of the two Christians, becomes a convert, and the son is immediately healed.

A reading of the drama discloses some obvious defects; there is too little plot, nor is there any entanglement to be resolved. For the most part the characters display little individuality. Interest, instead of being unified, is split between Gallicanus in the first part and John and Paul in the second part. In terms of the unities sought by classical writers of drama, the play would be considered woefully inadequate. The nearest the play comes to keeping any of the three unities is that of place, since all of the action, except the battlefield scene, takes place in Rome. It has been noted that time and action in the play are widely spread out-- Part Two takes place at a later time and under altogether different circumstances from Part One. It should be recognized that this was the nun's first attempt at this form of literature and that she undoubtedly learned a great deal while working it out.

Professor Coulter, in an article on the plays,⁶ sets forth an idea that Hroswitha may have followed her sources too closely and thereby caused the major defect in the drama, the obvious and unfortunate split in sequence. Miss Coulter compares Gallicanus with the medieval versions of two stories, one a life of St. Constantia, the other a legend of John and Paul. Miss Coulter suggests that Hroswitha attempted to

combine the two stories into her drama since there was a thread of connection.⁷

As for character development in the play, one may safely say that all characters are rather colorless save Constance, who is presented as an appealing, affectionate and gentle lady with a royal dignity.

There is one particular characteristic of Hroswitha as a writer of dramatic dialogue that is more evident in Gallicanus than in any of the five remaining plays, that is the briefness of dialogue in many instances. This point is given considerable notice by translators who assiduously avoided the tendency to "write up" the brief lines.⁸ Although the trait is evident throughout the dramas, it does not detract from them, especially when they are read in Latin.

DULCITIUS

The plays that follow Gallicanus show progressive improvement in technique and imagination. Dulcitus, the second drama, is much more firm in structure than the earliest play. The story follows an old and widely known legend: the Emperor Diocletian attempts to induce three Christian maidens, Agape, Irena and Chionia, to renounce their faith and wed three young court nobles. When they refuse he orders them thrown into prison under the custody of the Governor Dulcitus. The three are taken to a cell, the antechamber of which is used for storing kitchen utensils. At night as they are singing hymns, Dulcitus approaches the cell with ideas of making love to the girls. A great rattling of pots and pans

is heard, and the girls, peering through a crack in the door, observe Dulcitus claspng the grimy cooking utensils to his bosom. Blackened with soot, he returns to his soldiers who fail to recognize him and flee. Later, Diocletian orders the deaths of Agape and Chionia. They are placed in a fire where, although they are unharmed, their souls pass quietly from their bodies. Irena is ordered to a brothel but by a miraculous intervention she is rescued from the soldiers when two spirits lead her to a hilltop. There her life is ended by an arrow from a soldier's bow.

This play is important and interesting for a number of reasons but particularly for the comic scene where the lecherous Dulcitus mistakes the kitchen utensils for the various anatomical parts of the young girls. This farcical situation is the only outstanding humorous scene in any of the plays, though there are instances in some of the plays where the author includes subtle humor. It should be pointed out that in this incident, just as elsewhere in the plays, a divine intervention brings about the desired outcome; in this case Dulcitus is deprived of his natural powers of perception and deluded in his advances. A bit of the dialogue from this scene will easily demonstrate the humor:

AGAPE. What is that noise outside the door?

IRENA. It is that wretch Dulcitus.

CHIONIA. Now may God protect us.

AGAPE. Amen.

CHIONIA. There is more noise. It sounds like the

clashing of pots and pans and fire-irons.

IRENA. I will go and look. Come quickly and peep through the crack in the door.

AGAPE. What is it?

IRENA. Oh, look. He must be out of his senses. I believe he thinks that he is kissing us.

AGAPE. What is he doing?

IRENA. Now he presses the saucepans tenderly to his breast, now the kettles and frying-pans. He is kissing them hard.

CHIONIA. How absurd.

IRENA. His face, his hands, his clothes. They are all black as soot. He looks like an Ethiope.

AGAPE. I am glad. His body should turn black-- to match his soul, which is possessed of a devil.

IRENA. Look. He is going now. Let us watch the soldiers and see what they do when he goes out.

SOLDIERS. What's this? Either one possessed by the devil, or the devil himself. Let's be off.

DULCITIUS. Soldiers, soldiers. Why do you hurry away? Stay, wait. Light me to my house with your torches.

SOLDIERS. The voice is our master's voice, but the face is a devil's. Come, let's take to our heels. This devil means us no good.

The farcical scene is further extended when Dulcitus attempts to gain admittance to the Emperor's palace:

DULCITIUS. Ushers, admit me at once. I have important business with the Emperor.

USHERS. Who is this fearsome, horrid monster? Coming here in these filthy rags. Come, let us beat him and throw him down the steps. Stop him from coming farther.

This episode is evidence that the author had a delightful sense of humor which she probably would have displayed

more often but for the obvious reason that she was a nun and therefore subject to more dignified thought and expression. It must also be recalled that her intention in writing these plays was to exemplify the virtues of Christian women. At any rate it should be granted that the potential for humor was in her.

The play as a unit holds together well. The action moves along smoothly over a brief period of time. In this respect the play is a great improvement over Gallicanus. However, as in the earlier play, there is no real plot, nor is there a development in the characters of the heroic virgins. What is shown in Dulcitius is the nearest Hroswitha comes to real character development in the drama. The author accomplishes her aim in one respect though-- the unwavering faith and virtue of the three girls is clearly brought out; they defy the pagan ruler and are pleased at the idea of suffering Christian martyrdom. The females are assigned heroic roles while their executioners are represented through in ridiculous guise.

CALLIMACHUS

The third play is ample evidence that Hroswitha did not fashion all of her dramas with an atmosphere of cruel martyrdom and persistence after virtue. Callimachus comes nearer to contemporary dramatic art than any of the others mainly because it contains sentiment, beauty of diction and violence of passion. The story is more tragic in a sense than any of

the others in addition to containing the strongest plot:

A pagan named Callimachus is deeply in love with a devout Christian married woman, Drusiana. When he informs her of his love and intentions she is thrown into a dreadful mental state, not only because of the immorality of Callimachus' advances, but also because she had previously renounced all things that might incite passion, even the natural relations with her husband. Fearing lest she might yield to the temptations of Callimachus, she beseeches her Creator with a fervent prayer that He would end her earthly life. Her prayer is answered; after she peacefully dies, her body is removed to a vault. Shortly after the burial, the passion-maddened Callimachus approaches Fortunatus, who is guarding the tomb, with a bribe so that he might hold the body of his beloved. The depraved Fortunatus encourages and aids Callimachus to carry out this unnatural action. While Callimachus is embracing the body of Drusiana, a serpent appears that fatally strikes Fortunatus. Almost immediately Callimachus becomes so distraught over his odious actions that he also dies. In the scene following, as Drusiana's bereaved husband, Andronicus and the holy man John approach the tomb, they hear a heavenly voice that promises the resurrection of Drusiana and "one who lies near her." After surveying the scene at the tomb, John utters a prayer in the name of Christ that calls Callimachus and Drusiana back to life. The revived young man expresses sorrow for his criminal passion and now wishes to become a Christian. Fortunatus is restored to life

at the request of Drusiana, but upon seeing the triumph of grace and virtue he refuses the gift of life and dies a second death. The holy man John ends the play with a prayer of thanksgiving to God.

It is evident that this play, merely in the story, possesses dramatic qualities far greater than the two earlier dramas. Technically also the play shows improvements; the major action, which covers only a comparatively short period of time, carries through with a rising, uninterrupted flow of events. Callimachus approaches more closely than either of its predecessors to a dramatic convention whereby the entire action is motivated by a single situation. In this play it is the love of Callimachus for Drusiana that generates the plot; the interest centers on these two persons whose characters are drawn with much more skill than any previous individuals in the dramas. The hero is presented as a love-stricken, abnormally passionate transgressor, whose personality develops with the plot. Drusiana takes on another form of the virtuous and firm Christian woman who would rather die than gamble her chastity. Following her resurrection, she displays additional virtues in the forgiveness of Callimachus and in her sympathy for Fortunatus.

A number of commentators on the dramas have made mention of the similarities in spirit and situation between this play and Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.⁹ A reading of Callimachus with this thought in mind certainly stimulates one's awareness to the resemblances. This tenth-century work is

is a romantic story with passionate language; it is extraordinary in its atmosphere considering the time and circumstances of its composition. Hroswitha describes a kind of love that obsesses the soul and dominates the senses of a young man. Lines from the scene where the impassioned lover entreats Drusiana to return the affection which he bears for her are especially moving:

CALLIMACHUS. Drusiana, listen to me. Drusiana, my deepest heart's love.

DRUSIANA. Your words amaze me, Callimachus. What do you want of me?

CALLIMACHUS. First I want to speak of love.

DRUSIANA. Love. What love?

CALLIMACHUS. That love by which I love you above all created things.

DRUSIANA. Why should you love me? You are not of my kin. There is no legal bond between us.

CALLIMACHUS. It is your beauty.

DRUSIANA. My beauty? What is my beauty to you?

CALLIMACHUS. But little now--it is that which torments me--but I hope that it may be much before long.

DRUSIANA. Not a word more. Leave me at once, for it is a sin to listen to you now that I understand your devilish meaning.

CALLIMACHUS. My Drusiana, do not kill me with your looks. Do not drive away one who worships you, but give back love for love.

DRUSIANA. Wicked, insidious words. They fall on deaf ears. Your love disgusts me. Understand I despise you.

CALLIMACHUS. You cannot make me angry, because I know that you would say my passion moves you if you were not ashamed.

DRUSIANA. It moves me to indignation, nothing else.

CALLIMACHUS. That feeling will not last long.

DRUSIANA. I shall not change, be sure of that.

CALLIMACHUS. I would not be too sure.

DRUSIANA. You frantic, foolish man. Do not deceive yourself with vain hopes. What madness leads you to think that I shall yield? I have renounced even what is lawful--my husband's bed.

CALLIMACHUS. I call heaven and earth to witness that if you do not yield I will never rest from the fight for you. I will be as cunning as the serpent. I will use all my skill and strength to trap you.

Drusiana's petition for divine assistance follows this scene; she is granted the swift death that she requests. The following is the lament of Callimachus at the opened tomb of Drusiana; he holds the dead woman in his embrace as he utters:

O Drusiana, Drusiana--I worshipped you with my whole soul. I yearned from my very heart to embrace you, and you repulsed me--thwarted my advances. Now you are in my power, now I can wound you with my kisses, and pour out my love on you.

There is action and atmosphere in the scene at the vault that strikingly prefigures the famous climax to Shakespeare's tragedy. After the deaths of Callimachus and Fortunatus, the saddened Andronicus and his friend John arrive on the scene to discover the bodies of the lover and the guard beside the desecrated vault. In Romeo and Juliet (V, iii) it is Romeo and his friend Balthazar who figure in the tomb-opening; this is followed by the passionate speech of Romeo and finally his despairing suicide. The elder Capulet and Friar Laurence play the important roles in discovering what has taken place at the tomb where Juliet lies. Although a similarity exists

in the scenes, Hroswitha gave her play a miraculous and religious denouement, no doubt invented to justify her venture into a love story, that seems ludicrous beside the tragic ending of Romeo and Juliet.

Hroswitha's play has been called the first modern love drama;¹⁰ after some consideration and study it is apparent that the statement is well justified. Terence, one of the greatest Roman writers of love intrigues, presented nothing so romantic or passionate as some of the scenes in Callimachus. Although a thorough review of the narrative and poetic works of the Middle Ages prior to Petrarch would reveal some romantic stories, none to my knowledge would compare with Hroswitha's dramatic treatment. At any rate it must be conceded a rarity.

The principal characters in Callimachus show much originality on the part of the author. Drusiana is gentle, sympathetic and magnanimous, in general, a marked improvement over the rather colorless heroines depicted thus far. Callimachus' passion is violent and unrestrained as he is portrayed a dashing, worldly young man, not unlike Romeo. The husband, Andronicus, is also quite an imaginative creation; presented as a kindly and forbearing gentleman whose wish is that no one should fall from God's grace, he is somewhat of a tragic hero.

Callimachus, considered as a play, is not without defects, the sudden rapidity of scene changes being the most obvious; moreover, such quick shifts of scene are common to

all six plays, indicating that Hroswitha payed little or no heed to the unities of time and place. This observation is evidence enough to conclude that the nun, in attempting to "write in the manner of Terence", failed to recognize the art of her model in the smooth flow of action.

The first three plays have their good qualities along with blemishes and defects, but they served well to prepare the author for the creation of her masterpiece, Abraham, and two others that are fine pieces of literature--Paphnutius and Sapientia.

NOTES

1. Some writers insist on referring to the plays as "dialogues"; they are definitely more than that, for they have constructed plots with dramatic situations, and contain suggestions of character development. In addition, Celtes entitles them "comedies", no doubt using the term in Dante's sense: "A poetic tale beginning in horrors and ending in joy, using lowly language."
2. See Hardin Craig, English Religious Drama (London, 1955), especially the Introduction and Chapter One. Also E. K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage, II (Oxford, 1903), Chap. Two.
3. I have relied upon information concerning the sources of the legends as found in Alice K. Welch, Of Six Medieval Women (London, 1913), Chapter One, unless otherwise indicated.
4. In addition to the works cited in note 2, above, also see Karl Young, Drama of the Medieval Church (Oxford, 1933), Chapter One.
5. The Renaissance and English Humanism (Toronto, 1939), p.43.
6. Cornelia Coulter, "Terentian Comedies of a Tenth Century Nun," Classical Journal, XXIV, 519.
7. See Coulter, p.519-520.
8. The translators referred to are Christopher St. John and John Heard. The latter has translations of Abraham and

Gallicanus in Poet Lore, XL, 299-328.

9. See St. John, Introduction p.xx, and Kuehne, p.46.
10. See Rosamond Gilder, "Hrotsvitha," Theatre Arts," XIV, 341.

-CHAPTER FIVE-

THE FINAL THREE PLAYS, ABRAHAM, PAPHNUTIUS AND SAPIENTIA

The plays of Hroswitha must be approached with understanding and intelligent appreciation since they do not begin to compare with drama of the modern stage. The three plays previously discussed tend to appear somewhat crude and two dimensional, lacking in depth and smoothness. If one continues to keep in mind the age in which the works were accomplished and the conditions under which the author wrote, along with the fact that she was performing a didactic mission, then the work can be more justly evaluated. These ideas are emphasized here in order to increase the readers' awareness of the outstanding dramatic qualities in the third and fourth plays of the collection. In Abraham and Paphnutius the author continues her departure from the martyrdom idea, now with a more widely appealing theme--that of a fallen woman redeemed through faith and prayer. The moral to be gained from both plays is expressed by the holy hermit in Abraham--"humanum est peccare, diabolicum in peccatis durare."

Abraham is the most finished product of all the plays. A fourth-century Greek legend provided the substance, but her treatment of the story clearly demonstrates creative talent as well as psychological insight. The sentiment expressed, the natural, pathetic dialogue and subtle touches make Abraham more than just a simple portrayal.

In the opening dialogue Abraham tells his fellow hermit, Ephrem, of his orphaned niece who he hopes will follow a cloistered, holy life. Mary is called upon to decide and agrees to her uncle's plan, but only after she is given the explanation she seeks as an inquiring child eight years of age. A period of ten years intervenes, during which time she is enclosed in a cell where she is given regular spiritual instruction by Abraham. Mary undergoes this life until a lover in monk's disguise begins to visit her, with enticements to quit the strenuous, contemplative life. Finally Mary succumbs to his advances and sins with the scoundrel. Her honor now lost, Mary despairs as to leave her holy surroundings and disappear. The now grief-stricken Abraham wishes only to find her and hear a repentance. Word comes to him after two years of waiting that Mary has taken up a life in a brothel. Abraham, after much deliberation, decides to approach her in disguise that he may talk with her and bring about her restoration to purity. In the garb of a soldier, a hat over his tonsured head, he journeys to the brothel and deals with the innkeeper who summons the girl. Mary follows her chosen trade well; she treats the supposed stranger with fondness. As she kneels beside him to unfasten his sandals, Abraham throws off his disguise and entreats his niece to turn from her fallen ways. Upon recognizing her uncle, Mary falls prostrate to the floor in humiliation. When the hermit exhorts her with hope of forgiveness, Mary rises with a determination to leave all her ill-gotten goods, as well as

her sinful past, and goes with Abraham to return to her cell.

In a technical sense the play is well constructed. The scenes are cleverly contrived and the characters clearly defined. The action progresses in a dramatic pattern that offers a situation requiring resolution, rising action that leads to a climactic scene, finally a resolution of the difficulty. Briefly, the pattern is this: Mary, after a long period of sanctity, falls into a life of sin from which Abraham seeks to retrieve her. He succeeds only after many tribulations, the most moving of which are included in the dramatic and realistic repentance scene. There is neither superfluous action or dialogue, nor is there a deficiency that marks some of the earlier plays. The plot is solid and its evolution excellent.

The scenes in the play are handled with delicacy and insight, with little that is vague or obscure. There is an atmosphere of reality in the opening scene with Abraham's proposal and Mary's hesitancy; once the child realizes the necessity of a celibate life for high spiritual attainment, she accepts it. In order to have the story unfold lucidly Hroswitha has several scenes of conversation between Abraham and his confidant Ephrem. These scenes seem natural as well as informative--the two devoted friends discuss situations as they occur, with thoughtful and prudent solutions considered. The character of Ephrem, as well as of Abraham, is developed through these conversations; he is a devout man and a wise counselor, a worthy friend to Abraham.

The disguised hermit's arrival at the brothel shows the author's perspicacity in composition: the keeper is astonished that such an elderly man should be seeking out his young harlot; he boisterously calls Mary to the patron with an exclamation that even the wise and venerable are enticed by her reputation. Up to this point in the story Mary, other than in her appearance as a curious child, has been recognized only through comment as an obedient celibate. After her transgression she fled from the hermitage in shame and horror, abandoning herself to the opposite extreme. When she appears two years later at the brothel in the presence of a supposed patron, she attempts to appear coquettish and perverse; however it is obvious that this is only a mask to cover remorse and distress of mind. Upon recognition of a familiar fragrance in the presence of Abraham she has an initial temporary breakdown. A few lines from this scene are worth reviewing:

MARY. ...It is my business to love those who love me.

ABRAHAM. Come nearer Mary, and give me a kiss.

MARY. I will give you more than a kiss. I will take your head in my arms and stroke your neck.

ABRAHAM. Yes, like that.

MARY. What does this mean? What is this lovely fragrance, so sweet and clean? It reminds me of the time when I was good.

ABRAHAM. [aside]* On with the mask. Chatter, make lewd jests like an idle boy. She must not recognize me, or for very shame she may fly from me.

MARY. Wretch that I am. To what have I fallen? In what pit am I sunk?

* Stage direction is mine, for clarity.

ABRAHAM. You forget where you are. Do men come here to see you cry?

.....

MARY. Oh, that I had died three years ago before I came to this.

ABRAHAM. I came here to make love to you, not to weep with you over your sins.

MARY. A little thing moved me, and I spoke foolishly. It is nothing. Come, let us eat and drink and be merry, for, as you say, this is not the place to think of one's sins.

The author handles the scene well: Mary is not a hardened courtesan, she is an object of pity, driven to this low position through despair. Presently, the two ascend to a room; here Abraham makes known his identity. The scene is worthy of presentation in its entirety since, in my opinion, it is the finest of the nun's efforts:

MARY. Look. How do you like this room? A handsome bed isn't it? Those trappings cost a lot of money. Sit down and I will take off your sandals. You seem tired.

ABRAHAM. First bolt the door. Someone may come in.

MARY. Have no fear. I have seen to that.

ABRAHAM. The time has come for me to show my shaven head, and make myself known. Oh, my daughter. Oh Mary, you who are part of my soul. Look at me. Do you not know me? Do you not know the old man who cherished you with a father's love, and wedded you to the Son of the King of Heaven?

MARY. God, what shall I do? It is my father and master Abraham.

ABRAHAM. What has come to you? Who deceived you? Who led you astray?

MARY. Who deceived our first parents?

ABRAHAM. Oh, Mary, think what you have thrown away. Think what a reward you had earned by your fasting, prayers and vigils. What can they avail you now?

You have hurled yourself from heavenly heights into the depths of hell.

MARY. Oh God, I know it.

ABRAHAM. Could you not trust me? Why did you desert me? Why did you not tell me of your fall? Then dear brother Ephrem and I could have done a worthy penance.

MARY. Once I had committed that sin and was defiled, how could I dare come near you who are so holy?

ABRAHAM. Oh Mary, has anyone ever lived on earth without sin except the Virgin and her Son? Mary, it is human to sin, but it is evil to remain in sin. Who can be justly condemned? Not those who fall suddenly, but those who refuse to rise quickly.

MARY. Wretched, miserable creature that I am.

ABRAHAM. Why have you thrown yourself down there? Why do you lie on the ground without moving or speaking? Get up, Mary. Get up child, and listen to me.

MARY. No. No. I am afraid. I cannot bear your reproaches.

ABRAHAM. Remember how I love you and you will not be afraid.

MARY. It is useless; I cannot.

ABRAHAM. What but love for you could have made me leave the desert and relax the strict observance of our rule? What but love could have made me, a true hermit, come into the city and mix with the lascivious crowd? It is for your sake that these lips have learned to utter light, foolish words, so that I might not be known. Oh Mary, why do you turn away your face from me and gaze upon the ground? Why do you scorn to answer and tell me what is in your mind?

MARY. It is the thought of my sins which crushes me. I dare not look at you; I am not fit to speak to you.

ABRAHAM. My little one, have no fear. Oh, do not despair. Rise from this abyss of desperation and grapple God to your soul.

MARY. No, no. My sins are too great. They weigh me down.

ABRAHAM. The mercy of heaven is greater than you or your sins. Let your sadness be dispersed by its glorious beams. Oh, Mary, do not let apathy prevent your seizing the moment for repentance. It matters not how wickedness has flourished. Divine grace can flourish still more abundantly.

MARY. If there were the smallest hope of forgiveness, surely I should not shrink from doing God's penance.

ABRAHAM. Have you no pity for me? I have sought you out with so much pain and weariness. Oh, shake off this despair which we are taught is the most terrible of all sins. Despair of God's mercy--for that alone there is no forgiveness. Sin can no more embitter His sweet mercy than a spark from a flint can set the ocean on fire.

MARY. I know that God's mercy is great, but when I think how greatly I have sinned, I cannot believe any penance can make amends.

ABRAHAM. I will take your sins on me. Only come back and take up your life again as if you had never left it.

MARY. I do not want to oppose you. What you tell me to do I will do with all my heart.

ABRAHAM. My daughter lives again. I have found my lost lamb and she is dearer to me than ever.

The author treats this brothel scene with extraordinary delicacy; obviously she was aware of the sensitivity of the situation, one that required skillful composition to reconcile the paradoxical elements. A final, natural display of psychological insight into the mind of the redeemed heroine is shown when she returns to the scene of her first fall; she is overcome with distress of mind and refuses to enter the cell which witnessed the origin of her sinful life.

Hroswitha's perspicacity extends indeed to the conclusion of the play. Following the climactic recognition scene and the return of Mary, the action levels off smoothly with

a denouement that takes the form of a conversation between Abraham and Ephrem during which Mary's repentance and restoration is made known.

Like the handling of scenes, the character development of the two principal characters is well done. Abraham is consistently a humble, devout hermit. From the early scenes where he shows deep interest in the care of his niece, through his trials and the restoration of Mary, he always acts in a conscientious manner. He is neither a scrupulous recluse nor an overzealous miracle worker that he could have become under the pen of a less talented religious writer. Finally, it is to be observed in the recognition scene that Abraham acts in a firm but understanding manner, displaying patience and wisdom.

The brief portrayal of Mary as a child is not without merit. Her natural inquisitiveness has been mentioned. This hesitancy to fall right into an abnormal way of life may be considered a foreshadowing of her fall. The degraded Mary is also skillfully drawn. She is not a typical courtesan, but a remorseful girl driven to the depths of despair barely short of self-extinction. When she becomes aware of Abraham's presence, her shame is great. Lastly, it should be recognized that only after the convincing arguments of Abraham does she consent to attempt a recovery.

As a final bit of criticism, it must be allowed that the play has no unnatural sentimental overtones; rather it depicts human nature quite well. Neither does the religious atmosphere

predominate, as the basic plot well indicates.

PAPHNUTIUS

Paphnutius may well be considered a companion play to Abraham. The theme is the same--that of a fallen woman restored to virtue. In several other respects the plays are similar, as will be noted. A summary of Paphnutius is as follows:

The holy hermit Paphnutius is conducting a discussion among his disciples. The unusual sadness expressed in his countenance on this particular day is the cause of speculation among his students. When questioned about the cause of his sadness Paphnutius initiates a long philosophical discussion, at the end of which, the reason for his dejection comes to light. Paphnutius is deeply concerned over the existence of a courtesan, Thais, in the neighboring city; he is aware that a great injustice is being done to his Creator through this fallen woman and her lovers. He resolves to rescue Thais from the wicked life and thereby remove this temptation from men. In disguise the hermit travels to the city to seek out the courtesan. He is well received by the unsuspecting Thais and admitted to her chamber. A remark by the woman concerning God opens the way for Paphnutius to initiate his projected conversion plan. He begins with a stern rebuke of Thais for her wicked life; eventually he succeeds in making her realize the great offense she is committing against God. Thais, feeling remorse and fear, vows to renounce this existence to take up an arduous penance. Before departing

from the scene of her corruption Thais calls together her lovers and sets fire to her ill-gotten luxuries before their eyes as a sign of contempt and renunciation. In the company of the rejoicing hermit she travels to a convent where a solitary cell is prepared for her to live while carrying out her penance. When three years have passed, Paphnutius learns that a disciple of the monk Antonius has had a vision of the glory awaiting Thais in heaven, a sign that God was satisfied with the penitent. At this, Paphnutius visits Thais to inform her that she will die within fifteen days. He is with her in the last hours to offer a prayer for her departing soul.

The similarities between this play and Abraham are immediately discernible: a fallen woman redeemed through the efforts of a holy monk is the theme of each; the element of disguise by each dedicated monk is in both plays; the redemption scenes have similarities; the idea of both courtesans undergoing penance in the confines of a cell is the same; finally, the same moral lesson is basic to both plays. With this much said the obvious problem arises as to whether the glaring similarities detract from the contended literary abilities of the author, or is it to her credit that she has produced two plays with the same basic theme, yet shown such variety in the treatment of the theme. Before attempting an answer it is necessary to evaluate Paphnutius.

Excluding the long opening scene, which by the way demands examination of itself, the play has much dramatic and literary merit. With the exception of the little heed paid

to the unities of time and place, the play is structurally sound. The plot is good, though it is not really strong in a dramatic sense. From the announcement of Paphnutius to seek out the fallen woman the action moves upward: he is found in the town making inquiries as to where the famous Thais resides. Later, when he is received by the courtesan under the pretense of a lover, he is in a position to proceed with his plan of conversion. In the set up preceding the conversion scene, the author displays a touch of creative genius; Paphnutius did not just suddenly break into an admonishment of Thais. The situation is given below to demonstrate Hros-witha's technique.

Paphnutius, after an introductory conversation with Thais, asks if she might not have a secret room in her house:

THAIS. Yes, there is a room like that in this house. No one knows that it exists except myself and God.

PAPHNUTIUS. God! What God?

THAIS. The true God.

PAPHNUTIUS. You believe that He exists?

THAIS. I am a Christian.

PAPHNUTIUS. And you believe that He knows what we do?

THAIS. I believe He knows everything.

After this scheme, a clever contrivance by the author, Paphnutius proceeds:

PAPHNUTIUS. What do you think then? That He is indifferent to the actions of the sinner, or that He reserves judgement?

THAIS. I suppose that the merits of each man are weighed in the balance, and that we shall be punished or rewarded according to our deeds.

PAPHNUTIUS. O Christ! How wondrous is Thy patience. How wondrous is thy love. Even when those who believe in Thee sin deliberately, Thou dost delay their destruction.

THAIS. Why do you tremble? Why do you turn pale? Why do you weep?

PAPHNUTIUS. I shudder at your presumption. I weep for your damnation. How, knowing what you know, can you destroy men in this manner and ruin so many souls, all precious and immortal?

THAIS. Your voice pierces my heart. Strange lover you are cruel. Pity me.

PAPHNUTIUS. Let us pity rather those souls whom you have deprived of the sight of God--of the God whom you confess. Oh, Thais, you have wilfully offended the Divine Majesty. That condemns you.

THAIS. What do you mean? Why do you threaten me like this.

PAPHNUTIUS. Because the punishment of hell-fire awaits you if you remain in sin.

THAIS. Who are you that rebukes me so sternly? Oh, you have shaken me to the depths of my terrified heart.

PAPHNUTIUS. I would that you could be shaken with fear to your very soul. I would like to see your delicate body impregnated with terror in every vein, and every fibre, if that would keep you from yielding to the dangerous delights of the flesh.

THAIS. And what zest for pleasure do you think is left now in a heart suddenly awakened to a consciousness of guilt. Remorse has killed everything.

PAPHNUTIUS. I long to see the thorns of vice cut away, and the choked-up fountain of your tears flowing once more. Tears of repentance are precious in the sight of God.

THAIS. Oh voice that promises mercy--do you believe, can you hope that one so vile as I, spoiled by thousands of impurities, can make reparation, can ever by any manner of penance obtain pardon?

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais, no sin is so great, no crime so black that it cannot be expiated by tears and penance, provided they are followed up by good deeds.

THAIS. Show me, I beg you my father, what I can do to be reconciled with him I have offended.

Following this emotional scene the action tends to level off with Thais' renunciation, her new life of prayer and penance, finally her death.

The scenes making up the play are well-knit units, each contributing in excellent proportion to the development of the play as a whole. In this play, as in Abraham, there are few rough edges, and no lack of depth either in character or in feeling.

Although the stories of Abraham and Paphnutius are similar, there is actually little repetition in the dramatic treatment of them. Granted that Mary and Thais are in somewhat similar circumstances, a comparison of their backgrounds reveals a great contrast. Mary had every opportunity for leading a virtuous life; nevertheless, she fell into harlotry from which she had to be saved. Thais from childhood had lived in immorality, up to the time she was convinced of the evils in this way of life. The conversion scenes in the plays also require comparison. In each instance the holy hermit is disguised, though each for a slightly different reason--Abraham so that his niece will not become too alarmed, Paphnutius simply to cover his hermit's robe. After Abraham makes known his identity he entreats Mary solicitously, counting on her past virtuousness as a means of redeeming her. Paphnutius admonishes Thais severely, hoping that the fear of God's justice will cause her repentance.

There is a note of natural feeling shown when Mary, upon returning to the hermitage, is struck with fear as she sees the cell which witnessed her first fall; after entering another cell she begins her penance. One might also consider that Thais, though vowed to repentance, does not undergo a swift change to hardihood. When shown the narrow cell where she is to spend a long, continuous period of time, she questions her ability to endure. From the discussions in the plays concerning the repentances of each woman, it is evident that Thais' penance is represented as being on a higher spiritual plane than that of Mary.

There are two situations within the drama that are sources of serious criticism. One is the matter of the marvelous swiftness with which Thais is converted. Christopher St. John's statement that it was considered "most unnatural" by critics who witnessed a performance of the play, is followed by the suggestion that Hroswitha believed in miracles, while the average modern person is sceptical.¹ The conversion is rather quick, though it is not entirely untenable.

The second object of criticism is the long discussion that opens the play; this is a difficult situation to defend, in terms of dramatical analysis. The scene is a typical medieval one--a disputation between a scholarly hermit and his student-disciples.² The discussion opens with an explanation by Paphnutius of the microcosm (man) as opposed to the macrocosm (universe). The hermit explains that harmony exists between the components of man (body and soul), even though the

Soul is not mortal nor the body spiritual. It is further explained that harmony cannot be produced from like elements, but only through the adjustment of those which are dissimilar. The subject of music, as recognized in the quadrivium,³ is introduced in order to explain how harmony comes about. The three divisions of music are mentioned: musica mundana (celestial music), musica humana (human music), and musica instrumentalis (instrumental music).⁴ Celestial music, or the music of the spheres, is the main subject of the argument in the scene. This theory, which comes mostly from the treatise De Musica by Boethius, is clearly explained by Paphnutius.⁵ In brief, the music of the spheres results from the eight revolving spheres of the heavens, the earth being fixed.⁶ This action of the spheres forms a complete musical octave. In the discussion, a disciple asks why the music is not heard by them if it exists. The reasons offered by Paphnutius are those of the medieval philosophers: men have become accustomed to the music by reason of its continuity and no longer recognize it; or perhaps the density of the earth's atmosphere prevents transmission; a third possibility is that the volume of sound is too great to penetrate the narrow passage of the human ear; the last proposal is unique--the music of the spheres is so pleasant that if heard by men it would cause them to drop everything to follow the sounds; consequently the Creator prevents perception. Human music is also considered in the discussion. As explained by Paphnutius, musica humana is manifested in the combination of body and soul, the sounds uttered

by men, and the symmetry and proportion of the anatomical parts of the human body. The third type of music, musica instrumentalis, is not treated in the discussion. A consideration of the attainment and value of knowledge brings the discussion to a close.

It is quite obvious that an explanation is necessary to show the justification for this seemingly incongruous situation of introducing the fairly simple plot with a long intellectual discussion which is far out of proportion in its purpose to the remainder of the play. The scene does have a decided purpose: the hermit appears unusually sad on this particular day, and is asked about the cause; he replies that while the macrocosm is constantly obedient to the Creator, the lesser worlds (men) continually resist guidance, one in particular being the source of great injury to God. Here the digression begins. Toward the latter part of the discussion Paphnutius reveals that it is Thais the courtesan who is the reason for his sorrow. From this point the major plot begins to develop.

Two substantial reasons for the inclusion of the introductory scene are to be considered, one which is evident, the other implicit. In the epistle to her "learned partons" concerning the plays, the following statement is found: " I have been at pains whenever I have been able to pick up some threads and scraps torn from the mantle of philosophy, to weave them into the stuff of my own book, in the hope that my lowly, ignorant effort may gain more acceptance through the intro-

duction of a nobler strain..." Little more need be said in this regard since the philosophical "threads" in the opening scene are the obvious results of her intended efforts. On two other occasions erudition is displayed by the author. One is a mathematical discourse in Sapientia which will be discussed in connection with the play; the other treats of logic and is found in the second scene of Callimachus.

The remainder of the sentence quoted above forms the basis of the second proposed reason for Hroswitha's display of learning; it reads "...and that the Creator may be the more honored since it is generally believed that a woman's intelligence is slower." The point made with the preceding statement should be clear--Hroswitha wished to demonstrate through her plays that she, a woman, was capable of acquiring and understanding advanced knowledge. Because of her display of learning, as evidenced in the plays, perhaps one might tend to charge her with pedanticism; such a complaint might be justifiable if it were not for the overwhelming evidence of her humility and sincerity which is present in her work, particularly the prefatory remarks. The author, by means of her literary talent and a great deal of effort, had in mind to demonstrate the intellectual capabilities of women. In addition to her own personal concern and intention, there is a matter here that is valuable to historians, that is, a notion of the type of learning that the women of religious houses of this age were exposed to.

In Paphnutius, as in several other of her poetic and

dramatic works, the nun recognized a theme of lasting interest and literary value. The Thais legend has a long and interesting history, as is shown by Oswald Kuehne in his comprehensive study.⁷ Kuehne gives special recognition to Hroswitha's treatment of the story that has its origin in the fourth century A.D. when, according to the legend, a notorious but beautiful courtesan was converted to a life of Christian virtue by a holy hermit. Kuehne points out that Hroswitha's version, which she adapted from the form of the legend found in the Vitae Patrum, was the first purely literary use of the story, a service that was not to be eclipsed for a thousand years. In the year 1890, Anatole France came out with one of his finest novels, which was based on the legend and entitled Thaïs. France gratefully acknowledged his indebtedness to Hroswitha since he had utilized her play in the writing of the novel. France's work has some notable resemblances to Paphnutius, even in minor details; however, the French novelist departed from the dramatic version in having the hermit lapse into sinfulness after he redeemed Thais; in effect, France turned the whole moral into ridicule. This rejuvenated form of the legend brought to the attention of the modern world the rich possibilities of dramatic and scenic effects; subsequently Jules Massenet, the French composer (1842-1912), turned the novelist's work into an opera libretto, Thais, une Comédie lyrique (1894). The success of Thais as an opera led an American playwright, Paul Wilstach, to revert to the novel and dramatize it for the stage. The play was produced in

New York City in 1911, with the title Thais, The Story of a Sinner Who Became a Saint, and a Saint Who Sinned. The ultimate end of any good dramatic story is, of course, Hollywood; Thais was produced as a motion picture in 1918.⁸

SAPIENTIA

The final play of the six, Sapientia, by reason of its subject matter belongs to the "martyrdom" group which includes Gallicanus and Dulcinius. In practically every regard Sapientia is an improvement over these earlier plays, no doubt a result of the experience gained through the composition of five dramas. A summary of the play is as follows:

The scene is laid in Rome during the time of the Emperor Hadrian (117-138). A Christian woman, Sapientia, and her three daughters, Faith, Hope and Charity are summoned before the Emperor for their proselytizing in the pagan empire. Hadrian asks that they simply worship the pagan gods to obtain their freedom, which they defiantly refuse to do. The Emperor, in resorting to gentler tactics by way of friendly conversation, questions Sapientia concerning her daughters. In giving the ages of the three children (8, 10, 12) Sapientia goes through an elaborate discourse on numbers.⁹ Eventually the four Christians are confined for several days, then brought forward again to Hadrian, who bids Faith to offer sacrifice to Diana; the resolute and defiant girl refuses to comply and is subjected to a series of punishments. She is first flogged, then put on a hot gridiron, next cast into a boiling cauldron. Finally, because she emerged unharmed from these

tortures, she is beheaded. Hope, the second daughter, refuses to honor the pagan diety; consequently, she is whipped, lacerated with nails, thrust into a pot of boiling oil, and finally beheaded. The youngest daughter, Charity, is asked only to say "Magna Diana", which she staunchly refuses to do. After surviving several forms of torture, the girl is thrown into a fiery furnace where she is seen walking about in the company of three angels. When the furnace bursts, five thousand men perish; however, Charity survives the holocaust and is beheaded like her sisters. The mother is allowed to live; she and several matrons of the city bury the remains of the three young martyrs outside of the city. After offering a long prayer, the mother expires near the graves.

The scenes of this well constructed play are unified and connective, each contributing proportionately to the development of the whole. The dialogue is especially good in that it is clear and direct, without the brevity of the earlier "martyrdom" plays. The plot is not strong, nor was it meant to be, since it is evident that Hroswitha has reverted, with a greater determination than before, to her didactic mission of extolling the strength of Christian women martyrs. In her absorption with the martyrdom theme, the author has attempted to make the drama exciting; however, she apparently mistook violence for action when she created the scenes that are filled with horrible detail, most of which is so repetitious as to create monotony.

There is no real character development in the play.

Sapientia acts only as a pious counselor to her daughters who are the centers of interest in the action but are not cast as individuals. One by one the daughters confront the Emperor; they all mingle dignity with impudence in their replies before they undergo their respective punishments. The impertinence demonstrated by the girls is a neat bit of insight on the part of the author. Excluding all of the highly spiritual and humble martyrs in the history of Christianity, there were those individuals, especially in the early days of the Church, whose strong beliefs led them to become defiant and even audacious when confronting their persecutors, just like the youthful revolutionists of Hungary have done in our own day. Regardless of the imperfections in the drama, one thing is certain of the author--although she glorifies martyrdom, she does not romanticise it.

It is apparent from the names of the principal characters, i.e., Sapientia (Wisdom), Faith, Hope, and Charity, that they are allegorical. A search for the source of this story was rewarded by a pertinent and interesting article by George R. Coffman.¹⁰ The author's intent in this study is to demonstrate the significance of saints' legends in tracing historical continuity and literary tradition in the imitation and adaptation of material. The legend chosen by him as an example is that of St. Catherine, who was put to death c. 310 A.D. as a Christian martyr. Coffman presents a summary of the legend as found in his research, then a summary of Hroswitha's Sapientia. With details taken from the summaries,

Coffman shows the close resemblances between the legend and the play. The similarities presented are, in my opinion, adequate evidence that Hroswitha utilized some version of the St. Catherine legend in the composition of her play. The analogy drawn by Coffman is between the Saint and Sapientia, while the suggestion for the three young martyrs of Hroswitha's work is found in the matrons of Rome who were converted by St. Catherine, then subjected to tortures and death for their Christianity.

This study of the dramas would be incomplete without mention of the Latin prose style in which they were written. Kuehne, in noting the additions or changes in the Thais legend made by Hroswitha in her treatment, points out that Paphnutius is written in rhymed prose, a departure from the simple Latin prose of all previous forms of the legend.¹¹ This bit of information led me to a study of the Latin texts of all six plays in order to analyze the prose style and the qualities of the dialogue.

The point has been previously made that the dramatic and structural properties of the plays show progressive improvement. This is equally true of the dialogue, both in expression and construction. The dialogue of the early plays, particularly Gallicanus and Dulcinius, is brief, and at times even lifeless. With Callimachus, the quality of expression picks up, though it does not attain such force and clarity as is witnessed in Abraham and Paphnutius. The quality of the Latin prose parallels the improvements noted. In the

first play, Gallicanus, the lines are comparatively rough, with only scattered traces of smoothness, balance and rhyme. In Dulcitius, though smoothness is not in evidence, there are more balanced phrases and more frequent attempts at rhyme and assonance than in the earlier plays. Balance and rhyme are noticeable throughout Callimachus, but it is in Abraham and Paphnutius that the fine qualities are outstanding; the lines are smooth and melodious as a result of the conscious efforts of the author to balance and rhyme the phrases and sentences. The following examples from Abraham, though taken out of context, plainly demonstrate the nun's skillful handling of rhymed prose:

Rebar pauperibus eroganda, seu sacris esse altari-
bus offerenda.

Convenit ut, quo studio deserviebas vanitati
famuleris divinae voluntati.

Non contra luctor, sed quae jubes amplector.

Additional lines from Abraham show the manipulation of polysyllable Latin case endings:

Aequum est iniquae sordes delectationis eliminantur
acerbitate castigationis.

Finally, an example from Paphnutius indicates balance, aided by the use of superlative adjectives:

Ferunt illam mulieram pulcherrimum, omnium esse
delicatissimum.

The play Sapientia has been neglected in the discussion of Latin prose, but it is comparable to the companion plays with its polished, smoothly balanced lines. Although Sapientia is on a par with Abraham and Paphnutius in diction, it

it is a curious fact that this apparently last-written play fails to measure up in many other ways to the two plays proceeding it. By the time of its composition the author had written five plays, two of which are outstanding. In addition to having a complete change of atmosphere, Sapientia has neither the force nor the spirit of Abraham and Paphnutius. Perhaps by the time Hroswitha finished her fifth play her superiors intervened with a suggestion that the author return to the glorification of martyrs, a theme which offered less inspiration to the imagination and creative spirit of Hroswitha.

To less observant or ill-informed readers of works of this writer, it might appear that some of the material seems a little undignified for treatment by a nun. Such themes as the illicit love story in Callimachus, the concern with harlots and brothels in Abraham and Paphnutius, if considered with little or no comprehension of the entire situation, with slight intellectual insight, would most certainly seem to appear out of place. It should be noted that the plays Abraham and Paphnutius, which take the reader to "bad places", have their origin in the Vitae Patrum, a source which Hroswitha followed closely for most of the subjects of her plays and also for the eight legends. Three of the plays deal with a universal matter--the struggle between the flesh and the spirit; they demonstrate that the evils which are ever present can, and should be, overcome. The strong moral aim of all the plays is easily discernible; however, the modest and wise

nun thought it prudent to write the very explanatory and apologetic preface to her dramatic works, a defense which should surely vindicate the author from any other intent than to morally instruct her readers. Portions of this preface follow:

There are many Catholics, and we cannot entirely acquit ourselves of the charge, who, attracted by the polished elegance of the style of pagan writers, prefer their works to the Holy Scriptures. There are others who, although they are deeply attached to the sacred writings and have no liking for most pagan productions, make an exception in favour of Terence, and, fascinated by the charm of the manner, risk being corrupted by the wickedness of the matter. Wherefore I, the strong voice of Gandersheim, have not hesitated to imitate in my writings a poet whose writings are so widely read, my object being to glorify within limits of my poor talent, the laudable chastity of Christian virgins in that self-same form of composition which has been used to describe the shameless acts of licentious women.

Thus far in the preface is stated the reason for her choice of subject matter in most instances. In short, the nun was willing to fight fire with fire, in order to serve a just and reasonable end. A continuation of the preface shows that Hroswitha did not undertake her project with indifference:

One thing has all the same embarrassed me and often brought a blush to my cheek. It is that I have been compelled through the nature of this work to apply my mind and pen to depicting the dreadful frenzy of those possessed by unlawful love, and the insidious sweetness of passion--things which should not even be named among us. Yet if from modesty I had refrained from treating these subjects I should not have been able to attain my object--to glorify the innocent to the best of my ability. For the more seductive the blandishments of lovers, the more wonderful the divine succor and the greater the merit of those who resist, especially when it is fragile woman who is victorious, and strong man who is routed with confusion.

To add any more to what the nun herself has said would be superfluous, unless one might apply the very apropos French expression of Madame de Staël, "comprendre, c'est pardonner."

It is needless to say that if one compares the best of Hroswitha's plays with any of Terence's, or with the many fine plays from the Renaissance on through to those of the modern era, the difference is vast--so vast that one might be inclined to not consider the tenth-century works as dramas at all. On the other hand, when compared with the miracle and mystery plays produced from three to five hundred years later, the contrast is almost as strongly in favor of Hroswitha. Certainly the three-decker stages with their crude mixture of liturgy and horse play are far inferior to Abraham and Callimachus; the latter may be elementary, but the former are inchoate. Except for purposes of study or research, the liturgical dramas of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are today unreadable, while all six of Hroswitha's plays, though simple, can be read with much satisfaction.

NOTES

1. See St. John, p. xxiii.
2. Kuehne, in his Study of the Thais Legend, p.52, points out the anachronism here. As noted, the legend dates from around the fourth century, or long before such scholastic practices began taking place.
3. The quadrivium, according to medieval scholasticism, comprised four "sciences", i.e., music, astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry.
4. I am indebted to Professor Nan Carpenter for pointing out the division of music was first recorded by Boethius in his treatise, De Musica. The treatment of music by Hros-

witha is conclusive evidence that the nun was well acquainted with the works of this fifth-century Roman philosopher.

5. Liber I, Cap.II, x-xix. For easy reference in an English translation see Oliver Strunk, Source Readings in Music History (New York, 1950).
6. For a good explanation of the music of the spheres as used by Hroswitha see Kuehne, Study, p.54.
7. For complete reference see note 4, p.21 of this work.
8. Kuehne, pp.92-115.
9. Cornelia Coulter, op. cit., p.526, states that the discourse on numbers is based directly on the Institutio Arithmetica of Boethius.
10. George R. Coffman, "A Note On Saints' Legends," SP, XXVIII, 580-586.
11. See Kuehne, p.76.

-CHAPTER SIX-

SEVERAL PROBLEMS WITH RESPECT TO THE DRAMAS

In studying the plays of Hroswitha many problems arise, particularly when the works are considered in connection with the age in which she wrote. Two rather provocative questions are to be considered here. In the preface to the plays the nun states that she intended to "imitate" the great Latin playwright, Terence. The first question then is just where and in what ways did she follow Terence? A second and even more confounding situation is whether or not Hroswitha created the dramas for presentation. Before attempting answers to the questions some generally accepted notions must be reviewed.

Terence (185-159 B.C.) lived and composed in an age when drama was a lively form of entertainment; the competition for the writing and presentation of drama was keen, the result of acceptability profitable. Terence had not only the earlier Greek dramatists, particularly Menander, to draw from, but also such prominent Roman playwrights before his time as Ennius, Pacuvius and Accius, and such competitive contemporaries as Plautus and Caecilius. Drama during this period was a live art; Terence and his fellow dramatists aimed for receptivity by their contemporary society. A widely accepted

notion is that Terence marks the culmination of Roman drama, though actually the writing and acting of other drama continued until sometime in the second century A.D. From the third century on, the presentation of plays was completely absent, although the texts of the dramas, especially those of Terence, were studied and read throughout the Middle Ages for style and enjoyment. Such prominent scholars in the field of medieval drama as Wilhelm Creizenach (Geschichte des Neuren Dramas, Halle, 1911) and E. K. Chambers (The Medieval Stage, Oxford, 1903) adamantly defend the notion that play writing and production was unknown throughout the early Middle Ages.

Karl Young's contention--that by the tenth century the embryonic form of European drama was developing through the liturgical services of the Church--is generally respected as quite sound.¹ Classical drama is thought to have lain dormant during the Middle Ages, not to have been revived as drama until the early sixteenth century in Europe. This is the general view of drama as it developed prior to Hroswitha's time. It is an accepted fact that the plays of Terence were being read by Hroswitha and her contemporaries, lay and religious; one need look no further than the preface to the nun's dramatical works for proof of the great interest in Terence by Hroswitha and her friends (see p.47 of this study).

Hroswitha's remarks concerning the imitation of Terence are, at first, a bit misleading. Gilbert Norwood, in the conclusion to his study of Terence as a dramatic artist, discusses later dramatists influenced by Terence: "...dramatists

have in great frequency paid Terence the sincerest form of flattery²....One is tempted, for example, to discuss the comedies of Hrotsvitha, the accomplished nun of Gandersheim, who in the tenth century undertook to compose dramas which should be edifying imitations of Terence. But the most sympathetic scrutiny reveals scarcely any terentian features."³ The conclusion stated by Norwood is for the most part sound; yet, far from clarifying, the author makes Hroswitha's words all the more confusing.

Clearly there is little in the six plays which can justly be called Terentian. A faint hint of Terence's themes may be traced in the importance of the courtesans' roles in Abraham and Paphnutius, and in the prominence of the love element in some of the other plays, especially Callimachus where passionate love is the dominant force of action. Although noted earlier, it might be emphasized that the nun presents a far more passionate expression of love in Callimachus than is found anywhere in Terence. In presenting her ideas, Hroswitha warns the reader in her preface that she deliberately set out to supplant Terence by showing the inferiority of earthly love to heavenly love; one of the results of this is the leading of the courtesans back to the fold.

The disguise element as it appears in Abraham and Paphnutius may have been suggested by a situation in the Eunuchus by Terence where Chaerea dons the eunuch's clothes to gain access to the girl with whom he is in love. It is to be

remembered that the two hermits in Hroswitha's plays disguise themselves as lovers to save the souls of the women whom they visit.

The humorous element, common to the plays of Terence, may also be witnessed in the nun's plays. The humor of Terence is subtle and written with elegance; he never resorts to farce or burlesque. Similar qualities are in Hroswitha's comedies, with one exception--the encounter of Dulcitus with the sooty pots and pans. Her subtle, intellectual humor, dependent on word play rather than on action, is well analyzed by Harry E. Wedeck in his article, "Humor of a Medieval Nun."⁴ Wedeck presents scenes from the various dramas where the course of the dialogue produces humor of a sort. In general, the conversations that he quotes show the humorous technique of Hroswitha which includes verbal hair-splittings; gentle, ingenious humor; circumlocutory answers; the drawing out of small talk, of statement, of rebuttal. Whether the nun saw anything actually incongruous in the syllogistic reductio ad absurdum by means of scholastic logic is open to debate, but she certainly seems to be hiding a chuckle in most of the cases presented by Wedeck. Perhaps the clearest example of a debatable incident is found in Sapientia; when the emperor asks the ages of the three girls, Sapientia replies:

As you wish to know the ages of my children, O Emperor, Charity has lived a diminished evenly even number of years; Hope a number also diminished, but evenly uneven; and Faith an augmented number evenly even.

HADRIAN. Your answer leaves me in ignorance.

SAPIENTIA. That is not surprising, since not one number, but many, come under this definition.

Professor Cornelia Coulter mentions more definite Terentian tricks of vocabulary and phrasing that are found in the nun's works--the exclamations hercle, edepol, euax, pro dolor, hem; along with idiomatic expressions as non flocci facio and di te perdant.⁵ Further, Miss Coulter mentions that Winterfeld, in his edition of Hroswitha's works, lists in the notes a few phrases which may have a more direct connection with passages in Terence's plays. In consideration of what has been given above, it is important to remember that caution must be used in studying verbal similarities, especially since exclamations and idioms are too common in Latin literature to warrant their usage in arriving at any definite conclusions. Indeed, Professor Coulter notes that the actual number of citations from Terence in Winterfeld's study is less than from Boethius, Prudentius or the Vulgate.⁶

Contrasts between the two authors are many, two of which are worthy of mention. Hroswitha's indifference to the "unities" has been emphasized, whereas Terence took great care to compress the time element, and to stabilize the location of the action. There is no question that Terence was aware of certain rules for drama that were unknown to the tenth-century dramatist whom he influenced. The second contrast concerns human behavior: the situations of Terence's comedies almost invariably turn on the frailty of women, while in Hroswitha's plays, just as invariably, the situations

revolve on the heroic adherence of women to chastity.

In a word, the nun's reflections of Terence remain few in number. The one outstanding similarity is that both authors developed stories by means of dialogue--Terence consciously and according to a prescribed art form; Hroswitha, perhaps unconsciously created dramas, but with moral ends in mind. As an afterthought, it is noteworthy that Hroswitha, intentionally or not, wrote a total of six plays, or a number equal to the six attributed to Terence.

After I had carefully studied and compared the plays of Hroswitha and Terence with regard for plot, character development, incident and dialogue, and at the same time observing the humor and Latin lines of each, it became clear that the nun, in "imitating" Terence, was actually more concerned with moral contrasts than with literary parallels; she wished not to imitate in the modern sense of the word, but rather to produce religious or moralistic forms of reading that would supplant the irreligious works of the Roman playwright. Finally, Hroswitha was not so presumptuous as to attempt to outdo her model; an apology in the preface to the plays shows the humility of the author and her respect for the Latin master:

I have no doubt that many will say that my poor work is much inferior to that of the author whom I have taken as my model, that it is on a much humbler scale, and indeed altogether different.

Well, I do not deny this. None can justly accuse me of wishing to place myself on a level with those who by the sublimity of their genius have so far outstripped me. No, I am not so arrogant as to compare myself even with the least

among the scholars of the ancient world. I strive only, although my power is not equal to my desire, to use what talent I have for the glory of Him Who gave it to me.

Beyond what has been said, one fact remains--Hroswitha developed her stories through the medium of dramatic poetry. The questions now arise as to whether she understood drama and was aware of dramatic principles for actual production--in other words, were the dramas intended to be acted out during the author's own time? The consequences of an affirmative answer to this question are indicated by Zeydel:

The question whether the six Latin plays....were actually performed in her convent during her lifetime has puzzled and divided scholars in many lands for longer than one hundred years. The question is not prompted by mere idle curiosity, nor by any abstract academic desire for knowledge per se, for a positive answer would have serious consequences. It would bring with it the necessity for rewriting much of the history of the early European (not only German) drama between the tenth and the twelfth centuries because that history as now written does not take proper account of Hrotsvitha's dramas as acting plays, and therefore ignores them in their possible relationship to other dramatic activity during the period from about 960 on.⁷

Basically, the attitude of those who deny the existence of drama during the Middle Ages is profoundly expressed by Wilhelm Creizenach in the opening sentence to his monumental Geschichte des neuren Dramas: "In no domain of literature do the Middle Ages show so complete a suspension of the tradition of classical antiquity as in the drama."⁸

The long respected notion that drama, as known in the glorious days of Greece and Rome, lay dormant throughout the Middle Ages until revived by the humanists in the fifteenth century seems to keep many otherwise inquisitive scholars

from considering the possibility of performance of Hroswitha's plays. In general, the attitude of those opposed to the idea of performance is reflected in a statement by Professor Coulter: "Terence's plays had long since ceased to be given on the stage and were regularly read in private, or at the most recited in monastic schools. It was as reading drama that Hroswitha thought of Terence's plays, and as reading drama that she planned her own."⁹

The problem of whether or not the six plays were produced during the author's lifetime is given scholarly and comprehensive treatment, with both possibilities and objections considered, by Professor Zeydel.¹⁰ Zeydel's study, which forms the basis of the following discussion, does not include the majority of recent contributors since, in general, they only reflect variations of theories or notions presented earlier by the more prominent scholars. As a result then, only the contentions of the latter group are offered here.

The most eminent early exponent of the positive school is Charles Magnin. In 1845, Magnin had published his Theatre de Hrotsvitha in which he included not only the texts of the plays and an able French translation of them, but also a scholarly introduction. In this introduction Magnin proposes that Hroswitha witnessed, or perhaps even participated in, performances of her plays within the precincts of Gandersheim. True to his convictions, Magnin divided the texts of the plays into scenes, just as he imagined they were performed by the tenth-century nuns. It was Magnin who is greatly

responsible for initiating the controversy over the production of the plays.

The scholarly edition, Hrotsvithae Opera, by Paul von Winterfeld, appeared in 1902, with a comment by the author in which he shows a refusal to accept the possibility of contemporaneous performance of the plays. A year later Karl Strecker had an article published concerning the nun in which he strongly opposed the production theory as being too ridiculous for consideration. A third vote in opposition to the notion of production is put forth by Wilhelm Creizenach who, though very cautious in his early statements, finally comes to the conclusion that Hroswitha's plays could not have been performed in her own day.¹¹

Those persons who take an affirmative stand on the production theory are as adamant in their opinions as their opponents. It is a significant coincidence that both Miss St. John and Anatole France were moved to the conviction that the plays were acted out in the tenth century by witnessing performances of several of the plays; France saw marionette versions, while Miss St. John attended stage productions of Callimachus and Paphnutius in London. Miss St. John's volume is honored with a preface by Cardinal Gasquet, who writes: "It used to be assumed that between the sixth and twelfth centuries all dramatic representations ceased, but each of these centuries when patiently searched has yielded some dramatic texts."¹² The volume leaves no doubt that both Cardinal Gasquet and the author believe that the plays were acted,

or at least intended for representation. A fourth person interested enough to put forth an opinion is Evangeline Blashfield, who opens her book, Portraits and Backgrounds,¹³ with a chapter on Hroswitha in which she makes out an elaborate case in favor of the the production thesis.

Zeydel, after considering more than twenty writers on the subject of presentation of the plays, remarks upon the fairly even division between affirmative and negative adherents. However, in recognizing that such a problem as this can never be decided by a mere show of hands but only by the weight of evidence or probability on each side, Zeydel offers the essence of some of the basic arguments, both pro and con.

With documented evidence, Zeydel shows that dramatic readings were prevalent during the period, though it is still uncertain whether this was done merely by a single reader or "mime", or by a group of readers. Since such dramatic activity was taking place, crude though it was, it is therefore entirely plausible that readings of Hroswitha's plays in the inner circle of her sister-nuns, or even before the "learned patrons" of her works, were also undertaken. One might also recall that evidence was offered to show that the legends were often read aloud to the nuns at table. It is also possible that the plays were read under similar circumstances. Finally, I would offer here an explanation for Hroswitha's pun on her own name--"I, the loud voice of Gandersheim". It may be a clue that she herself was a bit of an elocutionist, priding herself on her readings.

In turning to the question of actual performance, Zeydel, himself a slight believer that the plays were acted out, refutes several opposing arguments with intelligent and provocative answers. He grants that one good argument is the undisputed fact that neither the praefatio nor the Epistola contain any references to the thought of production. However, the nun's silence on the matter is not considered conclusive proof; therefore, he asks whether performance might not have followed after the Epistola had been written. A not unusual procedure, he proposes, would have been for Hroswitha to complete the works, read them aloud or send a manuscript of the plays to friends, then to make a clear copy dedicated to her patrons. After all the above had been accomplished, she could have concentrated on the performance of the plays.

One of the strongest arguments in favor of production, or intended production, is to be witnessed in the highly dramatic nature of the dialogue itself. Zeydel finds it difficult to imagine that anyone could write such lively dialogue for any purpose but performance. This attitude could be shared by any sensitive person who reads the plays. The following scene serves well to demonstrate the contention previously made; it is from Abraham, where the hermit enters the brothel in search of his niece:

ABRAHAM. Good day, friend.

INN-KEEPER. Who's there? Good day sir. Come in.

ABRAHAM. Have you a bed for a traveler who wants to spend a night here?

INN-KEEPER. Why certainly. I never turn anyone away.

ABRAHAM. I am glad of it.

INN-KEEPER. Come in then, and I will order supper for you.

ABRAHAM. I owe you thanks for this kind welcome, but I have a greater favor to ask.

INN-KEEPER. Ask what you like. I will do my best for you.

ABRAHAM. Accept this small present. May the beautiful girl who, I am told, lives here, have supper with me?

INN-KEEPER. Why should you wish to see her?

Much of the dialogue of the plays is greatly enlivened by the numerous exclamations which seem to almost demand acting and visual representation. One word in particular that occurs frequently is the demonstrative ecce (literally, behold or see). The word points out emphatically a visible object or person. Incidentally, if the word is related to the root oc- in oculus,¹⁴ then Hroswitha's fondness for it is particularly significant.

Magnin and his followers make much of the didascalia or stage directions, which appear in the Munich-Emmeram codex but were suppressed by Celtes in his edition for reasons known only to himself. Particularly does Miss St. John rely on the didascalia of the early manuscript, as practically her whole case is built on the existence of these stage directions. Since Magnin's time the Cologne codex has been discovered which has thrown new light upon some of these readings, weakening his case considerably as is shown by

Zeydel in the following remarks:

The only thing that can be said for Magnin's argument today is that if we are still to put any stock in the alleged didascalia of the Munich codex (the number of which are fewer in the Cologne codex), we must assume that they were copied into it from an acting version which had been prepared. But the question of didascalia need not be labored in any case. Neither the Munich nor the incomplete Cologne codex--our only important sources antedating Celtes and Tritheim--was necessarily the one used as an acting version in Gandersheim (if there was such a version). Therefore we are not justified in drawing definite conclusions for or against the production theory from them. If they contain didascalia, that argues for the theory; if not, it does not prove a case either way.¹⁵

Incidentally, it is quite possible that Miss St. John was unaware of the Cologne codex, and therefore the effect that its lack of stage directions would have on her theory, since the codex was discovered in 1922, and her work was published the following year.

Several additional points, though of less significance than some that have been raised, are discussed by Zeydel as contributions to the debatable question. The first one, originally made by Magnin, is stated by Zeydel in the form of a question: "Since the materials treated by Hrotsvitha in her dramas already existed in narrative form, well suited for reading aloud, or even for declamation, why did she go the considerable trouble of dramatizing them so graphically, unless she was thinking of performance?" The question is provocative but not of much value, principally because Hroswitha was a creative artist who wrote in a manner to suit her own taste. In the case of the dramas, she intended to supplant

Terence's works by her own--written in the same style of composition as the plays she wished to supplant.

The second of the less important points reviewed by Zeydel is a prominent objection raised by opponents of the production thesis;¹⁶ it concerns the swift changes of scene within the plays. Zeydel contends that the quick scene changes can hardly be cited as evidence against the theory of production if one can assume a simple, plainly draped platform stage. Further, in every case of scene shift the dialogue would have transplanted the imaginations of tenth-century spectators to the proper locality and to the proper time. Zeydel corroborates this contention by several examples drawn from the plays. Aside from the production debate, the fact remains that Hroswitha had the adeptness and perspicacity to handle the changes of scene through the dialogue so as not to confound a reader of the plays.

To summarize, two contingencies have been considered: (1) that Hroswitha's plays may have been read aloud; (2) that they may have been acted out at Gandersheim. The first of these seems not at all unlikely in the light of what has been said; the second is presented only as a possibility, not a certainty. If the latter were tenable--though a great deal more factual information is necessary for its acceptance--then it would be logical to call for a thorough revision of accounts of the early development of European drama, with Hroswitha accorded her proper place in this development, not forced into the unnatural position that she now holds--that of a human-

ist five hundred years ahead of her time.

A final problem for consideration here is the possible influence that the nun may have had on literature subsequent to the tenth century, though it must be recognized that few subjects are more conducive to argument, more difficult or dangerous for discussion than the attempt to define the influence which a person or work has had on subsequent generations of writers. In the case of Hroswitha it is a difficult matter. "Influence", generally speaking, is an immediate or continuing force, except in rare cases when it accomplishes a resurrection. How, then, could Hroswitha have exercised any great influence on European drama? Professor Coffman suggests a possibility in his study, "A New Approach To Medieval Latin Drama",¹⁷ wherein he calls for a closer review of certain Latin dramas written between the ninth and eleventh centuries for the influence they may have had on the development of later European drama. Hroswitha figures prominently in his study. (He completely disqualifies the theory of production of her plays during the period). His concern with Hroswitha raises the interesting possibility shown in the following paragraph from his article:

Despite the conventional view that Hroswitha had no influence on medieval Latin drama in its origin and development it seems to me, in view of the evidence, logical to conjecture that in this period of the popularity of the Christmas and Easter plays, some individual, again with a creative imagination, may have caught the suggestion for a miracle play from Hroswitha's dialogues, and from current liturgical drama, as applied to the content of a particular saint's legend and adapted to his honor on his feast day. For we know in general that the process of creating a new literary type is through suggestion rather than through imitation.¹⁸

The notion that Hroswitha's works may have been more influential in the centuries immediately following her own is given more positive substantiation by Professor Zeydel in his article, "Knowledge of Hrotsvitha's Works Prior to 1500".¹⁹ Zeydel takes issue with those holding the attitude that Hroswitha and her works fell into practically complete oblivion after her death about the year 1000, and did not become known again until 1493, when Conrad Celtes (or Johannes Trithem) discovered the manuscripts of her works. It should be readily recognized that the truth or falsity of this allegation is of more than academic significance, for upon it hinges the solution of the further question of Hroswitha's position as a possible factor during five hundred years of important literary development. If the allegation were not true, then it would behoove scholars to search the art and literature of the period for evidence of her influence not only upon the drama but also upon the religious legend and the historical chronicle in verse.

Professor Zeydel offers five valuable points in evidence that the nun and her writings were not quite so unknown from 1000 to 1500 as is generally accepted. The essence of each of five points is given in summarized form below:

1. In his Scriptores rerum Brunsvicensium, G. W. Leibnitz quotes from the eleventh-century Chronica Episcopatus a reference to Hroswitha as the author of a poem on the lives of the three Ottos. Incidentally, if this is correct her poem, De Gestis Oddonis I, had two companion poems which were not preserved.

2. It is now apparent that the Emmeram-Munich codex

was not only the only one known in the Middle Ages. The Opera Hrosvite Virginis Monialis, mentioned in the catalogue of the monastery of Alzelle in 1514 and now lost, was probably one of several copies of the Emmeram-Munich codex. The Klagenfurt fragments of the legend Maria and the drama Sapientia, dating from the eleventh century, represent a manuscript copied from the same Emmeram-Munich codex, then taken to Vienna considerably before 1513. Besides, there must have been another group of manuscripts of the first four plays quite independent of the Emmeram-Munich codex. One, the Cologne codex, has been previously discussed (see p.42).

3. About the middle of the twelfth century, shortly after the accession of the Hohenstaufens, the Alderspach Passional originated. A manuscript of this Passional contains Hroswitha's first drama, Gallicanus, without her name. The play was apparently copied from the Emmeram-Munich codex or from another manuscript available at the time. It developed that this is not the only instance of the use of Gallicanus in such collective works, for it appears in other writings of Austro-Bavarian legendry.

4. The situation with regard to the Primordia Coenobii Gandeshemensis is a bit confused, but here too there is some indication of survival of Hroswitha's memory after the tenth century. It is to be recalled that the manuscript was translated into German early in the thirteenth century by the monk Eberhard (see p.40).

5. It has been claimed by a Russian Scholar, Boris Jarcho, who has devoted many years to Hroswitha research, that certain striking verbal parallels between Hroswitha's dramas and the Vita Mathildis Reginae II, a fourteenth-century Latin poem, point to Hroswitha's influence on the Vita.²⁰

It is to be noted from the above that in each of the centuries between the tenth and the fifteenth there is evidence that the nun's works were known, with some indication that her influence was felt. It is not out of the question that still more evidence of the same nature may turn up in our own time. Patient research may reveal a link between Hroswitha's dramas and the miracle plays--written as they were

by monks, clerics and others connected with monasteries, who may have known Hroswitha's dramas. In such an event the writings that have been called the sidetracked work of a recluse who allegedly left no trace of influence on posterity may yet assume new significance.

Although influence must depend somewhat on a familiarity with that which influences, there is the situation found everywhere in literature where ideas or themes of lasting interest are picked up from earlier literary forms and adapted by later writers to their own work. Hroswitha herself found the suggestion at least for much of her writing in such works as the Acta Sanctorum. In this regard, it can be said that Hroswitha had a deep appreciation for literary values. The exploitations of the Thais legend have been reviewed. In two of her poems, Theophilus and St. Basil, one sees a primitive form of the Faust motive, i.e., the gain of earthly advantages in exchange for the soul. In the former it is ambition, in the latter love, which drives the young men into their pact with the devil. In these two stories the nun utilized a literary theme that was to become still more famous in the hands of Goethe, Marlowe, Thomas Mann, and many others. In the play Callimachus there is witnessed a prototype of drama of passion and frenzy of the soul and senses, which reached the acme of its development in Romeo and Juliet. For a fourth time Hroswitha presented a subject of human interest, and of an immortal nature, in the play Abraham; here she exploited a Latin translation of a Greek legend which she turned into

her masterpiece by subtle touches in sentiment and dialogue. According to Kuehne, the motive of the conversion of a courtesan had always been a favorite among early Christians, but had never been given such delicate treatment as by the nun of Gandersheim. The substance of Abraham and Paphnutius, that is, the conversion and repentance of a harlot, is to be witnessed in one of the delightful colloquies of Erasmus entitled, "The Young Man and the Courtesan." The scene in the colloquy, though half jocular, half moral, is basically the same as that found in Hroswitha's companion plays. In fact, there are resemblances in the dialogue that are startlingly similar. Thomas Dekker, the Elizabethan dramatist, made use of the same motive, but with much less restraint than Hroswitha, in The Honest Whore. Rather than conjecture an acquaintance of either Erasmus (1466?-1536) or Dekker (1570?-1641) with the nun's works, it may be said that both men were near enough in time to the publication of Celtes' edition (1501) to have known, or at least to have heard of its contents.

The relatively recent earnest inquiry into the literature of the Middle Ages has already disclosed much; and it will continue to uncover factual information for a greater appreciation of humanity's indebtedness to the thinkers and writers of the period. Hroswitha will hold a high place of distinction after a final re-evaluation of medieval Latin literature. She could never be considered a great poet, nor a dramatic genius, but she was an acute observer, an avid

scholar, and an adventurous, enterprising woman whose brilliant mind and creative imagination found expression in a variety of literary forms, where she gives both delight and instruction. Hroswitha should not be considered phenomenal, though she far surpassed most of her near contemporaries in her poetry, and outdid them all with her drama forms. Her brief plays contain characterizations often no more than outline sketches; yet, in the quick strokes with which she defines an individual, she shows a master's hand. The comedies have vivacity, directness and, despite much incredibility, an essential veracity which gives them permanent value.

As a concluding tribute it must be conceded that this humble, sincere nun of Gandersheim, with a true devotion to the literary arts, is a credit to her sex, to her country and to the age in which she lived.

NOTES

1. See Karl Young, Drama of the Medieval Church (Oxford, 1933), pp. 1-3.
2. Gilbert Norwood, The Art of Terence (Oxford, 1923), p.131.
3. Ibid., note 2.
4. Classical Weekly, XXI (1928), p.130.
5. "The Terentian Comedies of a Tenth-Century Nun," Classical Journal, XXIV, p.527.
6. Ibid., p.528, note 16.
7. "Were Hrotsvitha's Dramas Performed During Her Lifetime?", Speculum, XX (Oct., 1945), p.443.
8. Creizenach, op. cit., p.1.
9. Coulter op. cit., p.528.

10. "Were Hrotsvitha's Dramas Performed...", op. cit., pp. 443-456.
11. Creizenach, p.3.
12. St. John, p.viii.
13. (New York, 1913).
14. Cf. the article on ecce in Harper's unabridged Latin dictionary.
15. Zeydel, op. cit., p.452.
16. See Coulter, op. cit., p.528; also Karl Young, op. cit., p.4.
17. Modern Philology, XXII, 239-271.
18. Coffman, ibid., p.260.
19. MLN, LIX (June, 1944), 382-385.
20. For Jarcho's Comparison see "Zu Hrotsvitha's Wirkungskreis," Speculum, II, 343-344.

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