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Voicing your Voice: The Fiction of a Life

Early Twelfth-Century Letter Collections and the Case of Bernard of Clairvaux

Abstract

In following the evolution of the ordering principles of letter collections of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, this contribution tries to demonstrate that a *corpus epistolarum* is much more than a collection of individual missives. The collection as a whole has a message to convey. Careful analysis of the arrangement of the letters and of the different accents it creates does not perhaps teach the modern reader much about events of the time but it does have a great deal to teach him or her about the compilers' qualities and the messages they wanted to convey. The article wants to achieve this aim by presenting the epistolary collections of Gerbert d'Aurillac, Hildebert of Lavardin and Bernard of Clairvaux.*

1. Introduction: The Problem of Letter Collections

Nearing the end of his still fundamental and classic exposition on letters and letter collections (1976), Giles Constable in a (very) small paragraph touches on the problems encountered in the edition of letter collections.

> With regard to editions of letter collections, the editor is faced with the series of questions, outlined above, concerning authorship, compilation, sources, and arrangement. From a practical point of view, the most troublesome of these is likely to be arrangement, since the editor must decide whether to print the letters in the order found in the manuscripts (or in a manuscript) or to rearrange them as best he can in terms of chronology, subject-matter, or recipient. […] No one of these solutions is fully satisfactory […] and they illustrate the difficulties facing the editor of a collection with a complicated text-history. (Constable, *Letters* 65)[1]

1. To illustrate his point, Constable refers to the article of Schaller.

Nothing more is said about this process of editing and the reader is left with a somewhat uncomfortable impression. This uneasiness is increased by the relatively large amount of attention given to the importance of collections as the sole means of conservation of medieval letters (Constable, *Letters* 56–62). The open-endedness of Constable's conclusion with regard to the edition of letter collections appears to be the result of a real sentiment of impotence regarding the editorial choices to be made. And it leaves open the door to editors to interfere freely with their sources and to impose on them the message they themselves want to convey to the public, or rather the approach they prefer for reading these letters.

One particular approach appears to dominate the editing of premodern letters, which can be summarized along these lines:

> Like most of the collections of the period, these letters carry no dates and are not arranged in a coherent order in the manuscripts. Several letters of the same date or relating to the same topic are often found together, as we should expect; but sometimes companion letters are widely separated. […] Most of the intervening letters cannot be dated, but those which can do not suggest any approximation to a chronological order; and the position of a letter in the manuscript is never secure evidence of its date. (Millor *et al.* lii)

It would appear that in these lines the "coherent order," *i.e.* the order "we should expect," is equated with "a chronological order." The editorial choice then is obvious: "We have arranged the letters so far as possible in chronological order" (Millor *et al.* lii). Similar chronologically oriented expectations for the supposed normative way of conservation and transmission of letters can be found throughout the history of text edition and criticism. Introducing his commentary on Cicero's *Ad Familiares* of 1555, Girolamo Ragazzoni explains his own approach to the letters:

> Since the letters were put together in ancient times without preserving the order of dates, our goal must be that the letters are separated according to their individual times, and transcribed. Various benefits result from this operation, above all – through joining events with their times – the easier comprehension of the one from the other, and the possession of a continuous history both of Cicero himself and of those years.[2]

2. "Id est, ut, quoniam nullo servato temporum ordine compositae quondam fuerunt, ipsae per tempora sua digererentur, atque describerentur. Quo ex labore cum alia multa commoda consequuntur, tum illa in primis, ut propter negociorum, temporumque coniunctionem et facilius alteram ex altera intelligamus, et ipsius Ciceronis, eorumque annorum contextam historiam habeamus." Quoted and translated by Gibson, "Letters" 395–96. I am grateful to Cristiana Sogno for drawing my attention to the articles of Roy Gibson that form a welcome complement to the largely historical approaches of the abundant medieval letter collections.

And in the online commentary on the edition of Hildegard's letters by Oxford University Press, the editor, J. L. Baird is praised, because "[f]reed from the organizational restraint of the Latin edition of the letters, he has arranged them in roughly chronological order […]. As a result, this fascinating collection serves as a kind of life in letters."[3]

Both quotations show the motivation behind this seemingly obsessive quest in modern scholarship for chronology in pre-modern letter collections. Letters are considered an important source for historiography. As such it is not the collection as a whole that matters, but the individual letter. The collection is considered a more or less casual compilation of independent documents and the primary task of any editor should be to bring order, *i.e.* chronological consistency to the 'chaos' of textual transmission.

This attitude, however, forces pre-modern mentality into a specifically modern frame of reference. Roy Gibson has rightly remarked concerning ancient letter collections "that the preference for ordering principles other than the strictly chronological was, in fact, a *cultural* preference" ("On the Nature" 72).[4] Atomizing pre-modern letter collections into their constituent parts thus is tantamount to an utter denial of their reason for existence and erects an insurmountable barrier for a true understanding of both the textual material and the compiler (be he the author or not) or context linked to it.

Of course, similar objections have already been made since the rise of scholarly interest in medieval letters and letter collections.[5] Editors nonetheless continue to re-order letters chronologically, *i.e.* in the most convenient way for their primarily historicizing purposes. The reasons for this scholarly stubbornness are easy to understand. Few pre-modern text forms have had a comparably complicated transmission. Normally speaking, no two manuscripts offer the same arrangement. An authorized autograph, of course, is always missing and its reconstruction is made even more difficult whenever it is clear that there exist different redactions of the same corpus and by the same redactor. For many letter collections from the twelfth century, rightly labelled the Golden Age of Latin letter-writing, this is known to be the case, as we will see below.

In such cases, choices have to be made, but unfortunately editors do not always mention the original arrangement in the manuscript tradition. In many cases, they give the already quoted argument that there is no "coherent order in the manuscripts" (Millor *et al.* lii), that the collection "has no apparent organizing principle behind it"

3. Reference found in Gibson, "On the Nature" 58 n. 7.

4. Elsewhere Gibson gives a nice overview of the editorial practices since the early modern period. Early eighteenth-century France seems to have played the decisive part in establishing this emphasis on chronological order in letter collections: "Letters" 404–05, referring to Altman.

5. An excellent and neutral survey of scholarship in medieval letters is offered by Ysebaert. Ysebaert also summarizes and defines the most important problems and suggests a methodical checklist with the most urgent questions a scholar should ask him or herself when approaching a medieval letter collection. The ultimate aim, however, remains to open them up to historical interpretation.

(Haseldine xxxvi), or that the letters "are in no ascertainable order" (Constable, *The Letters* 2:79). On closer inspection, however, these statements become much less evident than one might at first presume. Most pre-modern letter collections are definitively organized according to some consistent ordering principles, though these are often of a very different nature than our modern preconceptions would lead us to expect.

Pre-modern cultural preference turns out to be based not on historical presuppositions with their chronological premises but rather on rhetorical principles. Gibson distinguishes two major patterns of arrangement in ancient letter collections: the arrangement by addressee or general topic (either separately or in combination) and the arrangement for the sake of (artistic) variety ("On the Nature" 64). The former structural principles have long been known to scholars of medieval letter collections. The latter, however, is all too often forgotten. "Modern scholars often equate the rhetorical principle of *varietas*, *i.e.* the successive alternation of similar texts, with a lack of structure and thus tend to qualify the often open composition of a letter collection as a chaotic succession of individual pieces" (Köhn 689).[6]

The all too emphatic historical focus of many scholars, when dealing with medieval letter collections, seems to have blindfolded them to the actual "organizing principles." Taking into account the different "cultural preference" of pre-modern authors, based on rhetorical instead of historical principles, our approach to letter collections should start from an entirely different perspective. They can no longer be perceived as 'merely' a compilation of separately interesting source materials. They have their own meaning, based on their individual constituents but transcending them as a whole.

For this reason, a study of a letter collection in its integrity may render more results when it is approached for what it is: a macro-text, *i.e.* a "sign" or "semiotic unit" "in its own right generated by independent texts, whose meaning does not correspond to the mere sum of the meanings of the individual texts," but whose constituents although they "compose a new and broader semiotic entity, in turn autonomous and independent," "do not lose their original autonomy" (Santi 147).[7] A letter collection indeed consists of originally independent units with an originally autonomous signification, put together to form a new meaningful unit that derives its significance from its constitutional parts but also informs the tenor of each of its constituents as far as they can no longer be regarded uniquely as au-

6. "Moderne Forscher setzen freilich manchmal das rhetorische Prinzip der varietas als Abwechslung in der Abfolge ähnlicher Texte mit mangelnder Gliederung gleich und qualifizieren die zugegebenermaßen offene Komposition einer Briefsammlung als chaotische Reihung von Einzelstücken ab."

7. Santi refers to Corti. I am grateful for the stimulating discussions with Mara Santi on this topic.

8. Santi 152: "[…] the short story collection is a potentially metamorphic form because in different editions of a collection authors can change not only the components of the macro-text but also their sequence. In this respect, it is noteworthy that while in a novel or in a single short story a redefinition of the narrative sequence changes the plot but not the story, in the macro-text each alteration of the sequence modifies the structure of the book, and the structure affects the function and the meaning of each text within the whole […]."

9. Ysebaert 29–31 exposes the artificiality and untenability of the categorizations proposed by scholars. See Constable, *Letters* 56–57 for one of the most influential attempts.

10. Perhaps a word is in order about the translation and projection of terms and techniques from modern literary scholarship onto medieval letters and letter collections. The terminology of macro-text is borrowed from short-story-studies. One might ask if an equation between narrative texts and letters is admissible here. A letter is indeed not a narrative text. It rather constitutes an element in a larger 'narrative' context, if one permits the application of narrativity to the historical sequence of events in which the letter has its part. It will be clear, however, that, viewed from this perspective, the letter does not truly change its constitutive functionality. Its 'narrative' frame changes from factual to textual but the letter functions as a constitutive element within both frames. Yet, as we will see, exactly this transition from fact to text allows the compiler of a collection to remodel the historical narrative of factuality into a much more self-fashioned narrative of textuality. This remodelling of factuality into text will contain one of those potentialities of fictionalizing history that has been the focus of my research in recent years. See Verbaal: "How the West was Won," "Trapping the Future," "Getting Lost in Worlds" and "Epistolary Voices."

tonomous entities but likewise have to be considered parts of a whole.

This changed perspective will have some far-reaching consequences for the scholarly approach to medieval letter collections. When the collection itself is considered as the transmitter of a preconceived message, its tenor will depend in the first place on the arrangement of the letters. A different arrangement changes the meaning of the collection.[8] This explains the rather nebulous boundaries between the different categories of letter collections that scholarship has tried to establish.[9] An originally 'literary' collection can be re-arranged to constitute a manual of the *artes dictaminis* and thus become an entirely didactic collection. It can also be re-arranged in order to offer a more coherent linear narrative or a chronological history of events. In that case, the collection is likely to take the form of an administrative or archival record, a so-called register, or that of a modern historical reconstruction.[10]

The same set of letters can potentially give rise to a range of collections with differing significations. In all of these cases, the arrangement of the collection depends on the objectives of the compiler. And even these may be subject to fluctuations. For it is altogether imaginable that in arranging successive collections one and the same compiler will change his perspective and thus give a different meaning to the different redactions.

All these preliminary remarks are necessary to understand the approach taken in this contribution. Here, individual letters will not be treated as documents *in se*, but rather as the building blocks that help give meaning to the entity of which they are part and from which they receive their new context (that is, in fact, their unique context for both the modern scholar and the original reader). The starting point of our approach is the significance of the collection as a whole, and to understand it we have to discover the rationale behind its arrangement of the letters it contains and behind the changes it underwent. Only in this way does it become clear how the early twelfth-century collections discussed in this chapter escape all attempts at systematic categorization.

2. The Epistolary Turn of the Eleventh Century

In sketching the evolution of the genre of medieval letter-writing, Giles Constable assigns a pivotal role to the letter collection Gerbert

11. No reason for this particular emphasis is given, however.

12. Previous letter collections of non-monastic origins tend to be limited to the archival type or 'registrum.' They are not (or less) characterized by a deliberate, artificial or thematic arrangement.

13. That is to say, the first editor made this letter number 217 of the collection but did not want to edit the text, because "Das Stück gehört weder der Form noch der Überlieferung nach zur Briefsammlung Gerberts. Es ist kein Brief, sondern eine umfangreiche Abhandlung[…]." ("The piece does not belong with respect to form nor with respect to transmission to the letter collection of Gerbert. It is not a letter but an extensive treatise […].") Weigle 258 note.

14. Such is the arrangement in the oldest manuscript kept in Leiden Universiteitsbibliotheek (Vossianus lat. Q. 54), written at the monastery of Micy during the earliest years of the eleventh century. See Riché and Callu 1: xi–xv and xxii–xxx.

d'Aurillac compiled and edited himself during his second stay at Reims, between 984 and 997 (*Letters* 31).[11] Several aspects indeed seem to characterize this collection as a turning point when compared to the preceding period. First of all, it is not a monastic collection, even though it contains Gerbert's letters while he was abbot of Bobbio.[12] Furthermore, it constitutes a well-considered unit whose backbone is formed by two successive and closed series of letters, preceded and separated by a choice of texts that for the most part are not letters but that actually give the entire collection its final significance.

A short survey of its contents will be necessary to understand the importance attributed to this specific collection. It opens with the acts of the contemporary Episcopal Council, held at St. Basle in 991, during which the current archbishop of Reims, Arnulf, was deposed and Gerbert nominated as his successor. Then follow excerpts from the acts of the Councils of Carthage (418–24), assembled by Gerbert to defend the legitimacy of the Episcopal Council against papal attacks. A long letter to Wilderod, bishop of Strasburg, opens the first part of the actual epistolary corpus. In this letter (incorporated in the corpus as Ep. 217 by the modern editors[13]), Gerbert gives another account of the way he was elected to the archbishopric and defends its legitimacy against the papal accusations. This is followed by the first series of letters (Ep. 1–180), largely arranged in chronological order and covering the period from Gerbert's nomination as abbot of Bobbio in 983 to his departure from France and installation in Germany as the teacher of Otto III in 997. This first sequence is closed by a second conciliar file, concerning the Synod of Mouzon and the Council of Reims, both in 995, on which occasions Gerbert defended his position once more. Then follows the second series of letters (Ep. 181–212), in which chronology no longer plays a part. It opens with the later letters, concerning Gerbert's departure from France in 997, and continues with letters testifying to his contacts and activities as an archbishop and focusing on the years 994–97. The collection closes with a letter on the construction of a celestial sphere, addressed to Gerbert's friend Constantin of Micy, who probably was the addressee of the entire collection.[14]

As this is not the place to enter more deeply into all the secrets of this extraordinarily interesting collection, we will limit ourselves to pointing out a few aspects that can be of importance when compared with the later collections that will occupy us. First of all, the collection is divided into two separate sections that could be rough-

ly characterized as devoted to the external and the internal aspects of Gerbert's archbishopric, or its context and its responsibilities. This bipartition will return over and again.

Furthermore, the collection is enriched by documents that strictly speaking do not belong to an epistolary corpus, as most modern editors would understand it: the excerpts from different Councils and Synods. But they give the entire collection its apparently political meaning. Gerbert actually assembled this collection in order to support his defence of a legitimate election to the archbishopric. For this reason, it did not need to be exhaustive. It contains only a selection of Gerbert's correspondence during these years. Other letters that belong to this same period and even to this same topic have come down to us, yet they were not included in the collection because they did not contribute to the overall meaning the collection (a macro-text forming an autonomous semiotic unit) was meant to convey (Riché and Callu 1: xxiii–xxvi).

Yet, the political message was not the only one. The collection covers a wide variety of different topics, mostly concerning Gerbert's scientific interests. Even poems are inserted, thus creating a collection that in many aspects reminds one of the classical models Gerbert apparently had in mind, notably Symmachus' correspondence (Riché and Callu 1: xxviii–xxix). Thanks to these aspects the collection could be used as a model for letter-writing and some of his letters indeed are transmitted in later manuals. It remains uncertain if this was also Gerbert's primary objective, but given his pedagogical talents and preoccupations it cannot be excluded as an option.

Gerbert's collection shows the importance of an overall interpretation of an epistolary corpus as a meaningful entity in itself. It also points to a renewed awareness around the year 1000 of the possibilities of collecting and editing one's letters for a specific use. In Gerbert's case, his objective might have been both political and pedagogical. Both objectives remain important during the eleventh century, when the Investiture Controversy in particular gave rise to numerous letter collections of political intent. However, to our purposes these are less interesting. Instead, we consider an entirely different collection that had an enormous impact upon almost all the later corpora of the twelfth century.

The letter-collection of Hildebert of Lavardin († 1133), bishop of Le Mans (1096–1125), archbishop of Tours (1125–33), is generally acknowledged to be one of the most influential of the entire Middle Ages. It quickly became an official model at the schools and Peter of

15. Peter of Blois, Ep. 101: "Profuit mihi, quod epistolas Hildeberti Cenomanensis episcopi styli elegantia et suavi urbanitate praecipuas firmare et corde tenus reddere adolescentulus compellebar." ("It proved helpful to me that as a youngster I was obliged to study and to learn and memorize the letters of Hildebert, bishop of Le Mans, as they excel in their stylistic elegance and their high culture.") Quoted by Köhn 693 n. 29.

16. All information on Hildebert's letters is still largely based upon the classic work by von Moos. For the list with manuscripts, see 360–65.

17. In the older editions, letters 56 and 57 are usually edited under one heading, while in the manuscripts they are clearly divided (von Moos 326).

18. There is, however, no evidence that points towards an independent circulation of this oldest core. All manuscripts seem to show that the collection was transmitted only in its final form, containing ninety-three letters. Perhaps only one indirect and very feeble argument could be put forward to plead for the independent circulation of the oldest nucleus, as we will see later. Otherwise this primary collection must have been limited to a circle of close friends or perhaps even only to personal reading in such a literary circle.

19. Notably by Dieudonné, who was the first to draw new attention to Hildebert, making use of his letters in a historical context. See esp. p. 142: "[…] à dire vrai, en dehors des motifs qui ont fait préférer telle lettre à l'exclusion des autres, nous ne croyons pas qu'aucun ordre ait présidé à l'arrangement de ces morceaux choisis." ("[…] to tell the truth, leaving aside the motives behind the choice of a certain letter to the exclusion of the other ones, we do not believe that any order governed the arrangement of the chosen pieces.")

20. "Im Gegenteil, das Ineinander verschiedener Einteilungsgesichts-punkte, die sich ergänzen, scheint auf einen feinsinnigen, mehr literarisch als biographisch interessierten Ordner hinzuweisen."

Blois († 1211/1212) still referred to his having learned by heart the entire correspondence and its beneficent influence upon his own letter-writing.[15] More than one hundred manuscripts transmit Hildebert's letters, half of which come from the twelfth or very early thirteenth century,[16] which proves its success at the schools. In spite of this importance, however, or rather as a consequence of it, given the enormous number of manuscripts, a modern edition of the letters is still lacking.

The collection itself has known a transmission that largely goes back to two related traditions, one of which, labelled the A-tradition, appears to contain an older nucleus that may have been assembled by Hildebert himself. To this oldest corpus of fifty-seven letters,[17] all dating from the period of his bishopric at Le Mans, other texts and letters were added, probably after his death, to make a kind of memorial for the deceased archbishop. The collection is thus bipartite, like the collection of Gerbert, but with the difference that in Hildebert's case the second part (Ep. 58–93) apparently was not revised and edited by the sender himself (von Moos 332–34).

Our attention will thus be devoted primarily to the oldest part of the collection, containing the letters 1–57, that may have been collected and edited by Hildebert while still bishop of Le Mans.[18] When one looks closely at this corpus, its arrangement seems less disordered than has been suggested.[19] Basically, we can recognize a certain chronological organization in which the letters proceed in time from c. 1106 to 1120. This timeline, however, only offers a very loose frame and many of the letters are not placed in a strictly chronological order. Other structural principles were recognized by von Moos: the grouping together of letters to the same addressee or on the same or a similar topic, the gathering of letters in a rhetorically higher style at the beginning of the corpus, the accumulation of the longer sermon-like letters near to each other but with shorter letters in between. His conclusion therefore was that the arrangement "seems to point to a refined arranger, who was more interested in literary than in biographical aspects" of the collection (von Moos 332–33).[20]

This conclusion is amply confirmed when one analyzes the collection from a rhetorical (or poetical) point of view.[21] Immediately it strikes the eye that some more obvious structural principles that one might expect to find are not applied at all or only in a loose way, such as the chronological one. The letters are not, for example, arranged by addressee, although von Moos seems to have recognized such an arrangement in Hildebert's collection. Letters to or concerning the

21. Influenced by Antiquity, we tend to approach pre-modern texts from a 'rhetorical' point of view, but especially in the period we are concerned with these rhetorical premises were applied more in poetics than in prose, thus legitimating somehow the equation of both labels (poetics as rhetoric). I do not think the difference sometimes made between rhetoric as concerned with discourse in general and poetics as applying to concrete texts is really helpful.

same person are scattered over the entire corpus, as is the case with those addressed to Serlo of Séez (Ep. 7, 40, 50). The letters to Matilda of England, given as an example by von Moos, in reality appear at different positions within the corpus (Ep. 10, 15, 16, 44, as well as Ep. 49 on her death). Hierarchy forms an important structural principle in many collections, but is not applied in this one either: the letters to pope Paschalis II (Ep. 18, 19) are positioned between letters to addressees of completely different stations (Ep. 17 to an archdeacon, Ep. 29 to Adela of Blois) and the sequence of the different stations does not correspond to any existing secular or spiritual rank.

A desire for variety surely must have played its part in the final distribution of the letters. Yet, it is too weak as a structural force to satisfactorily explain the entire arrangement, which seems to obey other coordinating concepts. The opening and closing of the corpus prove to be deliberate choices within a well-conceived plan (von Moos 332). The first letter, addressed to William of Champeaux and known under the heading *De conversione* (On conversion), praises the famous master of the cathedral school of Paris for leaving behind his ambition and the cupidity of secular teaching and choosing the monastic life. Hildebert moreover wants to dispel certain reproaches that, as a monk, William ought not to teach any longer.[22] The last two letters (Ep. 56 and 57) are addressed to Henry I of England. They console the king on the death of his only son and heir, who perished in the White Ship disaster (1120). Hildebert does not write a lamentation but he wants to remind the king of his duty to make himself his own first subject. His letter can be read as an exhortation to the Stoic *apathia*, the spiritual force that knows how to face up to adversity (von Moos 107–18).

Both at the start and at the end of the collection, Hildebert appears as a spiritual guide for leading personalities in the secular and ecclesiastical spheres. Moreover, the collection apparently spans an evolution from the beginning of spiritual life (the conversion of William) to the mortal end of man. An educational aspect comes to the fore. William is a teacher of the young. Henry has lost his son. Hildebert thus positions himself as the guide or teacher of those who are confronted with the young.

This pedagogical strain seems to be one of the most important leitmotifs in the collection. For example, it contains an entire treatise on the spiritualization of the three female states: those of the widow (Ep. 31), of the virgin (Ep. 36) and of the mother (Ep. 42). But the theme is spread over three different long letters, close to each

22. A summary and interpretation of Ep. 1 can be found in von Moos 103–07 and 136–38.

other but not adjacent. The corpus also includes an entire treatise on the virtues and vices of government: the importance of mortality to Matilda (Ep. 15), of *clementia* to Adela (Ep. 26), of the combination of the active with the contemplative life to an abbot (Ep. 37), the dangers of cupidity to a bishop (Ep. 48) and the importance of moral strength to Henry (Ep. 56 and 57).

Besides the pedagogical strain, man's mortality returns as a common thread in the collection's evolution as expressed by the succeeding letters. The first letter to Matilda congratulates her for recovering from her illness (Ep. 10). In the manuscripts, it is followed by Hildebert's Carmen Minor 4, which sometimes bears the title *De morte*. It reminds Matilda that death does not make any difference between the social ranks. The last letter concerning Matilda (Ep. 49) is addressed to Bernard, bishop of St. David. Hildebert thanks him for the notice about Matilda's death and promises to pray for her. In between, Hildebert writes Matilda on her marriage and all she enjoys as free gifts in life (Ep. 15), thanks her for the gift of some candleholders, of which he gives a mystical interpretation (Ep. 16) and assures her of his continued affections (Ep. 44).

These letters form a coherent narrative about life and death and about Hildebert's relation with the queen. They are not grouped together, however, because their arrangement is governed by the rhetorical device of disjunction or *articulus*, as it is called in the poetics of Hildebert's friend Marbod of Rennes.[23] Indeed, when we take a closer look at the corpus, it becomes clear that different strains or different narrative lines are interconnected and interwoven. This can already be noticed in the spiritual treatises: the letter to the abbot on the combination of the active and the contemplative life (Ep. 37) follows the letter on virginity (Ep. 36).

But the letters concerning marriage also seem to form a consistent narrative. It opens with a letter to Serlo, bishop of Séez, where Hildebert submits a problematic or even uncanonical marriage to his judgment (Ep. 7). The same topic returns in a letter to Walter, archdeacon of Séez (Ep. 17), and in the letter to Geoffrey, archbishop of Rouen (Ep. 34). This strand concludes with a letter to Raynald, bishop of Angers, requesting that he lift the excommunication of a certain Lisiardus, who has been unjustly accused of forcing a girl into an uncanonical marriage (Ep. 43). Meanwhile, spiritual marriage is treated in the letter to a widow (Ep. 42).

The letters concerning Raynald of Angers similarly constitute a proper narrative strand. They open with the letter to Rudolf,

23. Marbod of Rennes, *De ornamentis verborum* 11: "Articulus dicitur, cum singula verba intervallis distinguuntur intercisa oratione." ("When single words are separated by intervals because of a cut-up phrasing, it is called Articulus.") Marbod of Rennes 10–11.

archbishop of Tours, in which Hildebert advises against Raynald's consecration because of his uncanonical election (Ep. 9). Then Hildebert addresses two letters to Raynald himself, in which he first tries to persuade him in a kindly and somewhat paternal fashion (Ep. 12), but then takes a sharper tone in the next letter (Ep. 13). In a following letter, he asks Raynald to let him know the content of a letter Raynald has received from the pope (Ep. 29). Apparently, this papal letter has settled the entire situation, because Hildebert then recommends Raynald's brother to Henry I (Ep. 32). Tensions, however, remain, because Hildebert apologizes in a letter to Marbod for having recommended the latter's nephew to Raynald in vain. He accuses Raynald of ingratitude, given that his nomination was greatly due to Marbod's influence (Ep. 35). Two other letters conclude this strand, both addressed to Raynald: one on the excommunication of Lisiardus (Ep. 43), the other asking Raynald to be merciful to a priest who had forgotten to provide himself with unleavened bread and thus used leavened bread for the Eucharist (Ep. 45).

The collection seems carefully constructed in order to follow several narrative strains that intertwine, sometimes coincide, sometimes develop themes that have been or will be treated in a more didactic way in the longer letters. Simultaneously, succeeding letters are often linked by the technique of *concatenatio* or *conduplicatio*, as it is presented in Marbod's poetics.[24] Most often this link is thematic, as almost every letter continues a topic from the preceding one while it opens up a new topic that will be taken up again in the next one. In a few cases, the link is the addressee. But it can be a quotation: Ep. 30 and 31 both quote from Augustine's *Ad Macedonium*. Or it can be a person: Ep. 37 is addressed to the abbot of St. Vincent, who is mentioned in Ep. 38 as a mediator.

Hildebert's letter collection offers the reader a very elaborate arrangement that can only be characterized as refined artificiality. There is no doubt that this artistic subtlety must be considered an integral part of the message the collection conveys. Hildebert was known as one of the most refined poets of his day.[25] His poems are scattered over numerous anthologies and poetry books that bring their editor or scholar to even greater despair than his letter collections.[26]

Yet, the attention he paid to the composition of the whole proves that the collection was more to him than just a codex with letters. He made it into a book *in* letters and it has to be understood as such. Now, its narrative is not a simple (auto)biographical one. It shows

24. Marbod of Rennes, *De ornamentis verborum* 25: "Conduplicatio est, cum ratione amplificationis, aut miserationis unius, aut plurium verborum iteratio fit." ("Conduplicatio is when for reasons of amplification or of pity one or more words are repeated.") Marbod of Rennes 20–21.

25. He is considered the most important representative of the so-called school of the Loire, to which Marbod and Baudri of Bourgueil also belong. I am preparing a work on the poetics of this movement.

26. Gibson, "On the Nature" 72 rightly draws a parallel between letter collections and poetry books.

the reader many of Hildebert's affairs and relationships with people, but it does not show them in some historical or clearly didactic frame. The key to the correct understanding of the collection seems to lie in its opening letters, which plead for the combination of an active ecclesiastical life with study and literature. William is pressed not to quit his teaching – as if he were even considering it. The letter addressed to him by Hildebert is not meant to change William's intentions but rather to explain Hildebert's own attitude as presented in the letters. It is an introductory letter to the collection that offers an image of Hildebert as the ecclesiastical dignitary who remains a teacher, not of secular philosophy but of the true Christian philosophy. The letters present their author from the beginning to the end in the guise of the truly spiritual philosopher.

But he is not only a teacher of the true philosophy; he is also a poet and exquisite literary writer, combining a dedication to stylistic refinement with his official duties. The second letter to Rivallo, a poet and pupil of Marbod, touches upon this problem. Rivallo apparently suffers exile and is on some military expedition. Yet, in spite of this, he manages to remain a poet. He writes and reads and Hildebert praises him for doing so given the turmoil that surrounds him. This is exactly the message his book *in* letters wants the reader to understand. In spite of all his obligations and duties, Hildebert manages to remain a poet and refined literary scholar. We might even gather that it is precisely because of his combination of refined literature with true Christian wisdom that Hildebert remains the high-class teacher who not only passes on his knowledge but also knows how to elevate his pupils both spiritually and in the concrete world.[27]

27. Of this last aspect, several of his recommendation letters can bear witness. In the last letter of the corpus, just before the concluding ones to Henry I, Hildebert thanks Aimericus, bishop of Clermont, for the nomination of William of Séez to the function of archdeacon. It forms the conclusion of another series of letters concerning William: Ep. 14, 51, 54 and possibly also 4.

3. The First Reactions: Peter the Venerable and Bernard of Clairvaux

As mentioned above, Hildebert's letter collection quickly met with great approval and exercised a huge influence on the twelfth-century cult of letter-writing. Its immediate effects might be recognized in two letter collections whose earliest redactions can be dated to around 1140. At that date, Peter of Poitiers, secretary of Peter the Venerable, put together the first collection of letters of his beloved abbot that can be reconstructed (Constable *The Letters* 2: 16). Apparently, he based his collection on an already existing one that had been arranged by Peter the Venerable himself, to which he added the letters

he could get hold of and had kept himself. This resulted in a collection of 108 letters that would increase to 196 letters in the final, posthumous redaction.

In the edition of *c.* 1140 two parts can be discerned according to different ordering principles. From letter 58 onward, the arrangement is chronological. In this letter, Peter the Venerable reproaches his secretary for having left his service, and tries to convince the latter to return and resume his duties towards his abbot and friend. Peter of Poitiers obeyed and from 1134 on remained the faithful companion and notary of his abbot. When organizing the first letter collection around 1140, he apparently used this long letter as an introduction to the part of the correspondence that he had been compiling himself (Constable *The Letters* 2: 79–80).

The organization of this earliest corpus may lead us to two remarkable conclusions. First, Peter of Poitiers' personal intervention led to a strictly chronological arrangement of the letters which he had been collecting. He followed what may have been his personal archives, or, alternatively, a chronological strand of his personal experience as Peter's secretary. Letters 1–57, moreover, the collection he found and used as the nucleus of this first editorial work, "are in no ascertainable order," as the modern editor states (Constable *The Letters* 2: 79).

However, is it a pure coincidence that this first collection contains exactly fifty-seven letters, *i.e.* the number of letters Hildebert's collection also contains?[28] If Peter the Venerable had knowledge of this earlier collection and took it as his model, limiting himself to the same total, could it not be that in that case he followed another arrangement founded on what I have termed 'refined artificiality'? I cannot analyze the organization of the collection thoroughly here, but a first closer look at the sequence of the letters immediately shows that those to Pope Innocent II form the structural backbone of the collection. Each letter to the pope introduces a new topic, even if the topic is treated in only one further letter. Neither a chronological nor a hierarchical succession seems to have been important for Peter's choices. The papal letters constitute a structural element, nothing more. Yet, they demonstrate that Peter the Venerable has been pondering the possible organization of his letters and that he did not automatically organize them chronologically.[29]

Peter the Venerable's earliest collection gives an indication of the impact Hildebert's letter collection may have exercised upon future collectors. The way the corpus of letters of Bernard of Clairvaux came

28. Peter of Blois' first letter collection contains a selection of 93 letters, *i.e.* the same number contained in Hildebert's final collection. See Köhn 693.

29. This contradicts Bernhard Schmeidler's much disputed assumption that a chronological arrangement of letters in a collection is typical for a sender's arrangement while a non-chronological order rather suggests that the collection is based upon an addressee's archive: Schmeidler 7–9. See the discussion of his thesis and the reactions to it in Ysebaert 18. One could even come to a somewhat opposite conclusion: a chronological arrangement might be due to the intervention of secretaries who will stick more to the factual order and be less inclined to rearrange the letters according to literary or artificial criteria.

into being could give another. The letter collection of Bernard has been the object of extensive studies, notably by the editor, Dom Jean Leclercq.[30] He distinguished three different redactions: a short one (B), containing seventy letters and datable before 1145 as it does not contain any letters later than 1143; an intermediate one (L), containing 241 letters and datable to around 1147 (no letters from after 1146); and the final one (Pf), containing up to three hundred letters, which was completed posthumously (Leclercq, "Introduction").[31]

Bernard's letter collection has thus known an evolution similar to those we have already encountered. It was subject to a strong selection and knew a slow growth into the final version. Yet Bernard's collection is different from the others. Firstly, because each phase of its evolution has left clear and visible traces and secondly, because the differences between the first redaction B and its successive versions show a radical change in arrangement. This first collection B survives only in thirteen manuscripts all stemming from the filiation of Morimond, which in general preserves the older versions of Bernard's oeuvre (Leclercq, "Lettres" 158).

The editor did not consider B to be the result of Bernard's own editorial work, but rather a compilation based upon an addressee's archive (Leclercq, "Lettres" 160).[32] A closer analysis of the collection, however, contradicts a similar conclusion. The arrangement appears to be highly artificial, even displaying a sort of deliberate anti-chronology. While the temporal range covers the early 1120s to 1143, the letters concerning the problems of Morimond in 1124–25 appear only at the very end of the collection.[33] Similarly, the opening block of five letters, concerning contacts with the Orders of the Benedictines and the Carthusians, contains letters from 1129, 1127, 1136, 1124/5, and 1133.[34]

The structural principle of this first collection seems to be rather based upon "loose topic" (Gibson, "On the Nature" 64). The letters are organized according to topics, starting in the monastic world and ending in the secular Church, just as the first and last letters in Hildebert's collection were deliberately chosen for these positions. The collection opens with a long *laudatio* to the abbot of Anchin, in which he is praised for his being a father rather than a judge, when confronted with injuries his monks inflict upon him (Ep. 65).[35] B concludes with the long letter-treatise on the duties of a bishop (Ep. 42), dedicated to Henri de Boisroque, surnamed the Sanglier (Boar), archbishop of Sens.[36]

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30. Leclercq, "Lettres" 125–225 and Leclercq, "Introduction" 1974. But also, Haseldine, "Friends" 243–79.

31. The ending of the ultimate collection Pf is unclear. The edited version contains three letters (308–10), of which letter 308 is certainly spurious and the authenticity of 310 is much disputed. Many manuscripts do not contain them.

32. No argument is given to support this statement.

33. Morimond was the fourth daughter abbey of Cîteaux, founded in 1115, *i.e.* almost contemporaneously with Clairvaux, and put under the guidance of Arnold. After ten years of difficult survival, Arnold decided to leave the foundation and to travel to the Holy Land where he hoped to found a new monastery. As he had not asked permission of Stephan Harding, abbot of Cîteaux, who was absent at that period, Bernard took the lead in trying to persuade Arnold and the monks that followed him to return. Arnold refused but died on January 3rd 1125. For a short survey and bibliography, see Gastaldelli 1048–50 (commentaries to the letters 4–6). In B letters 359 and 4 of the modern edition appear at the positions 61 and 62.

34. Bernard more often used an a-chronological or even anti-chronological narrative sequence. The most remarkable example is his Third Sermon for the Annunciation. See Verbaal, "Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons for the Liturgical Year" and Verbaal, "An Introduction."

35. SBO [= Sancti Bernardi Opera] VII: 159–61. The letters are numbered according to their position in Leclercq's edition, based upon the final, posthumous collection Pf.

36. SBO VII: 100–131. See Gastaldelli 1068–72 for commentary, note 1068–69 for the political context of the letter.

37. Another indication of the highly artificial arrangement can be found in the total number of seventy letters. Bernard pays much attention to numerical or mathematical structures, as can also be seen in the construction of his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* and in his *Sermons for the Liturgical Year*. See Verbaal, "The Sermon Collection."

38. That this first collection B contains a strict selection is clear when comparing it to the later collections. For the same period (early 1120s to 1143) the number of letters included increases from seventy in B to 220 in L and to 230 in Pf! Around 1140, Bernard was also working on his two other greater compositions. He was occupied with writing the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* (eighty-six when finished) and he made the first selection from his liturgical sermons in order to create a homiliary for the Liturgical Year, of which four different versions are known. See Verbaal, "The Sermon Collection" xii–xxii and Leclercq, "La tradition" and "Introduction" 127–30.

Bernard's first letter collection thus opens and ends with two emphatically meaningful letters, just like Hildebert's did. The first half, more or less until the thirty-seventh position, is mostly monastic in orientation, while the second half focuses upon the secular Church. In the monastic part, love as the foundation of an abbot's acts seems to be the central leitmotiv, manifesting itself in all different kinds of relations and problems the abbot has to deal with. Letters treating the conversion of younger people to Cistercian monasticism return at regular intervals and give a kind of rhythm to this part. In the second half, letters concerning the papal schism take up a similar role, framing several other topics that present themselves in this way as consequences of the disorder in the Church.[37]

Looking at the collection as a whole, it seems to convey the image of Bernard as a spiritual teacher, not so different from the role Hildebert ascribed to himself in his original collection. It distinguishes itself, however, by its emphatically monastic perspective – as if Bernard wished to stress the fact that only the monastic life could form ideal spiritual counsellors for the Church. The entire letter book then becomes an answer to Hildebert's edition, almost trying to transcend it and thus reduce its significance. Many of the themes Hildebert touched upon return, but often with a remarkable twist. An abbot who made a mistake out of negligence during Mass gets an answer and advice from Bernard himself, whereas Hildebert referred the priest in a similar case to his immediate ecclesiastical superior. In turn, Bernard addresses countesses, nuns, abbots and masters. He advises the latter to give up their secular teaching for the true philosophy of Christ, thus opposing his view to that of Hildebert. The most eloquent indication that Bernard put together this collection as an answer to Hildebert may be the insertion of his own letter to Hildebert, in which he reproaches the archbishop of Tours for not having acted according to the example of Innocent II during the papal schism (Ep. 124). It can be read as an indirect indication that Hildebert is not the true spiritual teacher, given that he had been unable to make the correct spiritual choices.

Bernard's oldest letter collection clearly is not the work of some unknown monk, acting on his own authority. Rather, it unmistakeably betrays the hand of a master, of Bernard himself. He organized a selection of his letters into a coherent entity[38] that was meant to answer Hildebert's collection as it must have become known in the late 1130s. The character of the collection is therefore not only artistic due to the arrangement, but due to the fact that the arrangement amounts

to a true piece of literature: a literary reaction to the highly-sophisticated writing of the archbishop of Tours. The spiritual significance of the collection even seems to be less important than its being a response to Hildebert's collection, and perhaps this purely literary motivation displeased Bernard so much in the end that he decided to take up the project once again and give it an entirely different form, with a completely different meaning.

4. Constructing your Life

When Bernard resumed his project to collect his letters in a meaningful corpus, he changed their arrangement radically. In both later versions L and Pf, the letters are put in a strictly chronological order. Apparently, he departed completely from the original thematic and literary composition. Yet, his choice of a, to modern eyes, seemingly normal chronological structure after having tried a more overtly artistic one does not mean that he abandoned all his literary ambitions. On the contrary, the new collection shows even a more exquisitely literary character. All the artifices Hildebert applied in his corpus are implemented but often in a less conspicuous way. And this seems almost inevitable when the increased number of letters is taken into consideration.

That the arrangement becomes, in Bernard's hands, an artistic technique of the highest degree, can best be demonstrated by the analysis of some of the constituent blocks within the corpus. The letters concerning the confrontation with Abelard and his condemnation at the Synod of Sens in 1141 (Ep. 187–96) make up a separate and impressive file that had not been inserted in the first compilation B. In their final state, they are arranged in such a way as to offer the successive documents of a true lawsuit, containing the Exordium (Ep. 187–88: *captatio benevolentiae* and *propositio*), the actual Charge (Ep. 189–91: *narratio*, *argumentatio* and *peroratio*), the Exhortation of the Jury (Ep. 192–93), the Verdict (Ep. 194) and the Implementation or rather the Consequences (Ep. 195–96).[39]

This coherent block on Abelard is inserted against the backdrop of a wider juridical context in the collection that first arises in letter 150 with a *laudatio* of the pope for several interventions in ecclesiastical problems and closes in letter 205 with the defence of a master who was unjustly accused and punished. In these fifty-six letters, smaller and greater conflicts are touched upon, but the *affaire*

39. I have elaborated this part of the corpus in Verbaal, "Sens: une victoire d'écrivain." As to the date of the Synod of Sens in 1141 instead of the traditional 1140, see Mews 342–82. Within this file, both letters 189 and 190 (the most fundamental both in the juridical file and in the appreciation of Bernard's historical part in the Synod) were clearly written for the collection itself and played no role in the actual trial.

40. Apparently, it is not the master himself who is considered the danger but his teaching that is continuously connected with the revolutionary preaching of Arnold of Brescia. Abelard is presented in his person and in his teaching as subversive to the established authorities. As such he is considered co-responsible for the assaults on authority that are evoked in the preceding cases and letters.

41. Fulco was persuaded by his uncle to leave the regular canons after having joined them. Robert entered Cîteaux and followed Bernard to Clairvaux. He was, however, approached by the prior of Cluny who reminded him that his parents had promised to let him enter Cluny. Robert was prevailed upon and left Clairvaux. Both these events took place around 1119. Bernard wrote his letter to Fulco almost immediately (c. 1120) but the letter to Robert was only written in 1125. The reason for this delay is not clear. As Robert left Clairvaux, Bernard was recovering from a grave illness and was separated from the community for a year. See for context and commentary Gastaldelli 1046–48.

42. The letter to Robert is known as the letter in the rain without rain, because Bernard dictated it to his secretary when it had started to rain. Only the letter remained dry, no raindrop falling upon it. That is why Bernard's secretary, Geoffrey of Auxerre, said he put the letter in the opening position. Geoffrey mentions the miracle and his placing the letter in front in his Fragmenta nr. 21. See now Geoffrey of Auxerre 285 lines 341–54.

Abelard clearly constitutes the core topic and is presented somehow as the climactic result of the impotence of the Church to intervene and to resolve the preceding cases. In the letters that follow the section on Abelard, several smaller problems are touched upon, but all of them seem to head towards a satisfactory solution, as if the condemnation of the master had allowed for the peace to return in the Church.[40]

As this example shows, the return to chronology as an ordering device automatically implies the return of narrativity. While the collections of Hildebert and Peter the Venerable convey, first of all, a non-narrative signification, Bernard's choice for the more traditional order gives him the opportunity to create a continuous narrative through his letters, supported by the texts themselves. He combines this narrative with the literary artifices that had been introduced by Hildebert in order to endow the sequence of his activities in life with a more encompassing and transcending significance as well as providing a chronological account of his activities. To arrive at a proper understanding of the ultimate meaning of the second version of the collection, it is appropriate to look at its first letters. Hildebert used the first letters of his collection as an introduction that steered the reader into a correct reading attitude. In his first collection, Bernard had proven himself a good Hildebert pupil. His first letters had also laid the foundation for the interpretation of the entire corpus. This also applies to his final letter collection.

This final version of the collection opens with two letters to young men who had promised to join the Cistercian adventure but, in the end, did not keep their word. Both letters appear in the first collection B but there they appear only after the monastic opening block. Already in the second version of the collection, L, they are moved to the front, thereby gaining in importance and in a way constituting the key to a right interpretation of all that follows. Moreover, their order is inversed. Originally, the letter to Fulco of Aigremont (Ep. 2) was placed first, followed by the letter to Robert of Châtillon, Bernard's nephew (Ep. 1).[41] According to Geoffrey of Auxerre, Bernard's secretary, it was he who inverted the order of the two letters, but that would have been acceptable only if Bernard himself had already placed them in front position.[42] When they were inverted, their chronological order was also inverted. The letter to Fulco preceded the one to Robert, but the original order also reflected an interior succession: Fulco did not live up to his word, while Robert broke the vow he had already pronounced.

43. Ep. 2.6 to Fulco: "Alioquin oportet te solvere vota tua, quae distinxerunt labia tua" (SBO VII: 17). Almost the same in Ep. 1.9, SBO VII: 7. In Robert's case, moreover, Bernard asks whose words have the most weight: the vow of the father on behalf of his son or the vow the son made himself (Ep. 1.8, SBO VII:6).

The central point in both letters is the accordance of word and deed. A man has to fulfil the promise he has made. "You need to keep your vow, the one your own lips pronounced," may be considered to be the central phrase of both letters.[43] Unity between word and deed is presented as the topic of these opening letters and thus becomes one of the more important interpretative strands within the collection. This, however, gives the letter collection an entirely different and even bewildering significance.

The disjunction between word and deed indeed proves to be one of the central themes within the collection, connecting almost all the different events, even those that seem to have no connection at all. Bernard repeatedly depicts the schism, for example, as a scission between the word of the Church, standing for unity and justice, and the reality of her factionalism and division. The disjunction between word and deed reappears in the many conflicts over bishoprics or other ecclesiastical functions, in the conflicts between the King of France and his most important vassal, Theobald of Blois-Champagne, in the dissension between the masters at the schools, in deviant opinions on religious matters, etc. And in all these circumstances, Bernard's voice strives to restore unity, to bring those in discord back to ecclesiastical authority, to speak as the voice of the Church.

Reading the corpus, one is baffled by the evolution Bernard's voice undergoes. Halfway through the collection his voice takes on an authority that equals that of the Church herself and climbs to prophetic heights (and finally even seems to identify with the Vox Dei). Bernard presents himself as the herald of the Church (Ep. 150), as David confronting Goliath (Ep. 189) or as the Bride herself (Ep. 187). He repeatedly takes up the words of Paul or Christ as if they were his. With the vigour of the Old Testament prophets, he excites, damns and bans. And then, all of a sudden, in the last part of the collection, cracks begin to show. The voice becomes tired, ill and broken.

When considering the corpus as a macro-text, one is struck by the tragic narrative it incorporates. The organization of the letters in their smaller units within the chronological frame offers a widely-varied range of different elements, but each topic is linked to the preceding and the following one(s) so as never to surprise the reader. Actually, one of the major messages of the macro-text is the interconnection of the different affairs. One sees how the sender of these letters, the main character of the narrative, simply slides from one affair into the other. Taking up his responsibility in one case makes it almost impossible to not do so in the next one – an all too common

human problem. Bernard's occupations tear him ever more outside the monastic atmosphere, and for this reason the blocks of letters dealing with monastic affairs are inserted at crucial positions within the entire collection. They occur as points of self-accusation and reflection, becoming ever rarer in the second part.

It is no accident that, in two significant places, two telling images occur of the monk Bernard had been. Just before his involvement in the papal schism, Bernard compares the life of a monk with that of acrobats who walk on their hands. Like the latter, a monk offers a spectacle to the world by living his life the opposite of the way people in the world live their lives (Ep. 87). This statement becomes important when trying to explain Bernard's actions as depicted in the letter collection. His interventions have to be considered as those of the outsider whose views and objectives are different from those of people living in the world and he can for that same reason voice the perspective of the ultimate Outsider.

After his actions in the world and just before the final part of the collection, Bernard accuses himself of being the chimaera of his century, neither cleric nor layman (Ep. 250). At this point in the macro-story, it sounds like a painful self-analysis, announcing the last part of the collection, in which disappointment and failure throw their shadow over almost all letters. Actually, this is the same accusation he had launched against Abelard, *homo sibi dissimilis*, earlier in the letter collection: "who has nothing of the monk except the name and the habit."[44] Bernard thus constructs a conscious link between himself and the master he fought.

Bernard organized his letter collection to give an account of a man attempting to bring order into the world, to give a direction to worldly affairs from within the spiritual core that is the monastery. What makes the macro-text so much more than just a historical document, however, is the tragic context in which the letters are embedded. The final part of the collection shows us a man who has failed – perhaps not from the point of view of his own convictions but surely in terms of what he has achieved and how his achievements were appreciated in the world. The image Bernard fashioned of himself in his letter collection proves to be much less heroic and self-laudatory than generally presumed. It is the image of a man who realizes that he has spent much energy on a lost cause. And the events he has had to confront are not presented to offer a view of early twelfth-century history, but in order to show us the tragic story of a man whose growing conviction of being a tool of God, of being the Voice of God,

44. Ep. 193: "nihil habens de monacho praeter nomen et habitum." SBO VIII: 44–45. Compare to "Nam monachi iamdudum exui conversationem, non habitum" ("Long ago I took off the life of a monk but not his habit.") Ep. 250.4, SBO VIII:147.

gives way to a realization in the end that the world has never been and will never be ready to hear and accept the Word of God. And that God never spares his prophets.

Conclusion

In following the evolution of the ordering principles of letter collections of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, this contribution has tried to demonstrate that a corpus epistolarum is much more than a collection of individual missives. The collection as a whole has a message to convey. Careful analysis of the arrangement of the letters and of the different accents it creates does not perhaps teach the modern reader much about events of the time but it does have a great deal to teach him or her about the compilers' qualities and the messages they wanted to convey, be they political (Gerbert), literary (Hildebert) or a combination of both. Bernard's portrayal of a tragic life through his letters would have been impossible without Hildebert's discovery of letters as a literary medium. This potential had to be grasped before letters could become the building blocks of a new narrative, telling the story of their compiler's choice.[45] For, as much as the reader may be drawn into the tragic story of Bernard's monastic life, Bernard himself as its compiler and organizer will always remain the ultimate outsider with respect to the story he is telling and with respect to us who read it.

45. It must be noted that Abelard, Bernard's lifelong rival, also discovered the potential of the letter medium as a means to fashion your own life story. His *Historia calamitatum* and the entire correspondence with Heloise can be considered as a constructed file for the use of the Paraclete. See Verbaal, "Trapping the future" and Verbaal, "Epistolary Voices." Bernard did visit the Paraclete around 1131 as member of a papal visitation, for which the correspondence to my assumption could have been arranged. Did he get to know these texts at that occasion? Personally, I doubt it. It remains remarkable, however, how kindred these two men were in almost everything they touched. For Bernard visiting the Paraclete, see Abelard's Letter 10 in Smits 120–36.

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