

A Tale of Two Scandals: Cornelia Connelly as *Nouvelle Héloïse*

This is a tale of two scandals. It is a story of two women who courageously defied convention, yet submitted tragically and without reserve to the men they loved. It is a story of two ambitious and charismatic men, whose meteoric rise in the church was surpassed only by the suddenness of their fall. It is a story of two priests married to nuns—and not only nuns, but the founders of congregations—who remained indelibly married in the public eye. From Romanesque France to Victorian England, so much had changed yet so much remained the same, especially where female subordination was concerned. So, finally, this is a story about the *longue durée* in Catholic attitudes to marriage, gender, and women's religious life.

Barbara Newman is professor of English, Religion, and Classics at Northwestern University. Her address is Northwestern University, University Hall 215, 1897 Sheridan Rd.; Evanston, IL 60208. <bjnewman@northwestern.edu>

My first, more familiar narrative concerns a Frenchwoman born around 1100. Heloise, of high though illegitimate birth, received a superb education at the convent of Argenteuil. Raised by her uncle Fulbert, she was granted the rare privilege of private lessons with a famous philosopher, Peter Abelard, who was teaching in Paris. We all know what happened next: Abelard and his pupil fell in love. Their steamy affair ended in Heloise's pregnancy, Fulbert's horrified rage, a clandestine marriage, Heloise's rash denial of the union, and Abelard's castration at the hands of Fulbert's hit men. Given the fame of both lovers, the end of their affair was a *cause célèbre*. Finding the pity of his students even harder to bear than the scorn of his enemies, Abelard became a monk at Saint-Denis, though not before compelling a reluctant but obedient Heloise to take the veil at Argenteuil. Their son Astralabe was left with Abelard's sister on a farm in Brittany.¹ But the lovers' conversion to religious life fueled more scandals. Abelard, who did not suffer fools gladly, had a gift for making enemies. At Saint-Denis, his historical research threatened to deconstruct the monks' patron saint, who also happened to be the patron of the French monarchy. This controversy led to cries of treason and landed Abelard in such trouble that he had to flee by night. Next he tried the vocation of hermit, for which he was totally unsuited, and soon wound up teaching again at a new foundation he called the Paraclete. Here too he got in trouble, partly because his ever-vigilant enemies objected to his oratory's dedication. In the meantime, Abelard was charged with heresy at the Council of Soissons and forced in 1121 to burn his book on the Trinity with his own hands. Eventually he managed to be named abbot of the backwater monastery of Saint-

Gildas, in his native Brittany, but fared no better there. By his own account, his monks tried to kill him with a poisoned chalice.

Heloise too was dogged by scandal. Despite her past, she was elected prioress of Argenteuil. But in 1129 the powerful Suger—abbot of Saint-Denis and no friend to Abelard—had Heloise and her nuns evicted on charges of immorality. These charges may or may not have carried a grain of truth. It is possible that Heloise's regime was lax, though it is certain that Suger had his eye on the nuns' property; and he mobilized the king, the bishops, and the papal legate to enforce his takeover.² At this juncture Abelard reentered the picture, offering the nuns his now-vacant oratory of the Paraclete. Gossip continued to buzz: if Abelard visited, detractors claimed that he could not live without his mistress, while if he stayed away, they charged that he had abandoned his wife. A few years later, when he published his autobiography, Heloise responded with impassioned fury, lambasting his neglect at the same time that she avowed her undiminished desire. But despite the stormy beginning of their correspondence, the two eventually made peace. Abelard endorsed Heloise's teaching role and warmly praised her learning. At her request he wrote numerous works for her nuns.³ Not least, he authored a rule for the Paraclete, although it seems not to have been observed and significantly contradicts Heloise's own rule—a point to which I shall return. When Abelard was again condemned for heresy in 1140, by an even more blatantly rigged council, it was Heloise who secured proof of his absolution and arranged for his burial, soon afterward, at the Paraclete. Surviving him by twenty years, she was buried at his side.

My second narrative belongs to the nineteenth century. Cornelia Peacock, born to an elite Philadelphia

family in 1809, lost her parents in childhood.⁴ Raised by an aunt who gave her a superb private education, at 22 she married a clergyman, Pierce Connelly. The Connells moved in 1831 to Natchez, Mississippi, where Pierce had been named rector of an Episcopal parish. At the birth of their son Mercer, his godfather gave Cornelia a slave as a christening present.⁵ Though Pierce was well-liked in his parish, the honeymoon did not last. Caught up in a wave of anti-Catholic sentiment sweeping the nation, he decided to resist it and better inform himself, with the surprising result that he felt called to convert. Cornelia, though shocked at first, loyally followed. As she wrote to her sister, “against my prejudices and in spite of the horrors which I have always nurtured for the Catholic faith, I am ready at once to submit to whatever my loved husband believes to be the path of duty.”⁶ In fact, after Pierce resigned his parish and delivered his farewell sermon, Cornelia was the first to be received as a Roman Catholic. Pierce waited to make his abjuration in Rome itself, on Palm Sunday 1836, with pomp and ceremony. The Connells soon became the darlings of the British recusant aristocracy in Rome, where they remained until a financial crisis forced them to return home and look for work. Pierce found a teaching post at a Jesuit school in Louisiana; Cornelia joined him as a music teacher. By now the couple had four children, but one daughter died in infancy and their two-year-old son met with a tragic accident. Fearing that her happiness was too great, the devout Cornelia had asked God to demand some sacrifice of her. Only a day later the little boy, playing with the dog, tumbled into a vat of boiling syrup.⁷ After two days and nights of agony, he died in his mother's arms.

But this was only the first of Cornelia's sorrows. Soon afterward, while she was pregnant with their fifth and last child, Pierce announced that he had discerned a call to the Catholic priesthood. This time Cornelia did resist, but as soon as she realized how serious her husband was, she released him, which entailed her own consent to a monastic vocation. Returning to Rome, the couple had a private audience with Pope Gregory XVI, and Pierce was ordained with surprising speed in 1845. As for Cornelia, she became a postulant at the Sacred Heart convent of Trinità dei Monti, bringing her two youngest children with her. But she was not destined to take vows there. In 1846 Bishop Nicholas Wiseman, soon to become Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, called Cornelia to England, where he wished her to found an order of nuns to educate English Catholic girls. Thus, before the end of her novitiate, the 37-year-old Cornelia Connelly, American wife and mother of three, became—not of her own accord, but by the decisions of her husband and her bishop—the first English monastic foundress in two hundred years.

At this point the Connelly saga becomes so tumultuous that I can give only the barest summary. Cornelia's Society of the Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ) suffered more than its share of growing pains—lack of resources, litigation over property, internal discord, hostile chaplains, and increasing strain between Cornelia and her superior, Cardinal Wiseman. These troubles were compounded by the “no Popery” agitation of a public deeply fearful of Catholic emancipation. What Cornelia had least expected, however, was Pierce's rapid disillusionment with his new faith. Unsuccessful in his bids for advancement in the church, he missed his wife and resented Wiseman's ban on conjugal visits. So the frus-

trated Pierce made two hostile, if contradictory, moves in quick succession. First, he wrote a spurious rule for Cornelia's order, which he circulated in Rome without her knowledge. Second, he pulled the children out of their schools and took them to Italy as hostages, with a new demand that Cornelia renounce her vows and return to him. Heartbroken but determined, she refused. The apostate Pierce thereupon sued his former wife in the Court of Arches for restitution of his conjugal rights.⁸

The case of Connelly v. Connelly dragged on from 1849 to 1851, much to the glee of journalists.⁹ In 1850 a judge ruled in Pierce's favor, declaring that a papal decree of separation had no force in England and leaving Cornelia to face imprisonment or a forced return to her husband. While appealing to the Privy Council, she kept a suit of secular clothes in her cell at all times in case she had to flee the realm. Pierce meanwhile scandalized British Catholics with his apostasy, even seeking refuge for a time with the fanatically anti-Catholic Henry Drummond, a wealthy peer who led an apocalyptic sect. Eventually he returned to Italy, where he spent the rest of his life writing anti-Catholic tracts and serving as an Episcopal minister in Florence. Cornelia won her appeal on a technicality, but she never saw her eldest son again, for Mercer died at twenty of yellow fever. The younger children,

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Adeline and Frank, remained with their father in Italy. He managed to estrange them permanently from their mother, returning her letters unopened. But in spite of all this, the Society of the Holy Child Jesus flourished. At Cornelia's death in 1879 it had six convents and schools in England, three in America, and one in France.¹⁰ Amazingly, Cornelia Connelly's case for sainthood was opened in 1959, and in 1992 she was declared Venerable—the first step toward canonization. The *Positio* or formal presentation of her case is the first in history to be written by a woman.¹¹

Since no one has ever proposed Heloise for sainthood, except in the cult of romantic love, why do I call Cornelia Connelly a *nouvelle Héloïse*? I suggest this comparison to probe more deeply into the case of a woman who filled the roles of wife, mother, nun, and abbess, not in succession but in conflict. Legions of women have become religiously active in widowhood, but few if any have faced down so public a scandal caused by living husbands, while simultaneously trying to establish their monastic authority. In the rest of this article, I will compare Cornelia's struggles with Heloise's apropos of three issues: sexuality, motherhood, and the authority of an abbess.

In the France of the *trouvères*, one could speak of sex more freely than in Queen Victoria's Britain, but Heloise would have been scandalous in any age. To dissuade Abeldard from their ill-starred marriage, she made a case for free love, claiming that she would rather be called his mistress (*amica*) than his wife—and even if Augustus, ruler of the world, had asked her to be his empress, she would prefer to be Abeldard's whore (*scortum*)—a word she chose deliberately for its shock value.¹² In Heloise's eyes, the true prostitute was the

respectable wife who married not for love, but for security and money. As if these ideas were not scandalous enough, after ten years as a nun she confessed that she still felt sexual yearnings, even during Mass, and declared that she could never forgive God for Abeldard's castration.¹³ This was no mere private avowal, but a rhetorical performance before an imagined if not actual public. Medieval letters were never truly “private,” and contemporary documents show that Heloise's arguments were well known in French clerical circles.¹⁴ Romantics (including my younger self) have often been dismayed with Abeldard for refusing to respond in kind.¹⁵ But how could he? Neither his castration nor the couple's vows were reversible, so Heloise had either to find a way of coping or face a lifetime of misery, ending in her damnation. Abeldard thus faced the unenviable task of cajoling her to love Christ, her new Bridegroom, in his stead. If his tactics seem ham-fisted to our age, in his own they were supremely pragmatic.

When Heloise said that she would gladly follow Abeldard to hell; that her “heart was never my own, but was always with you”; that in every decision she had sought to please him, rather than God—it was not from marital duty that she spoke.¹⁶ A self-consciously classically lover, she even took the nun's veil with the cry of a pagan heroine on her lips.¹⁷ In Cornelia Connelly we see nothing of the sort. If she too ended by transgressing her culture's cherished feminine ideals, it was not by her choice. Yet in displaying obedience to her beloved, she vied with Heloise. To please Pierce, she braved her family's disapproval; left home for the distant, culturally alien South; abjured her Protestant faith (a drastic step in the 1830s); accepted a life of exile; and finally made the supreme sacrifice of her marriage itself,

vowing perpetual chastity so that Pierce could be ordained. But where Heloise saw opposition—she could obey either God’s will or Abelard’s, but not both—Cornelia saw conjunction. As a dutiful Victorian wife, she followed the principle of Milton’s Eve: “he for God only, she for God in him.” In the end, Cornelia became

a far more committed Catholic than the vain and shallow Pierce. Yet she would never have become one at all without the conviction that God was guiding her through her husband’s will. As she wrote to her sister at the time, Pierce was “all that is estimable and far above what your sister ever deserved or looked for in her husband. It is not for me to praise him, but daily do I thank God for having so blessed me.”¹⁸

In entering religious life, both women faced the extraordinary challenge of renouncing their husbands’ love at their husbands’ bidding. When Heloise proclaimed her immortal longing, Abelard commanded her to desire him no more, but rather the God who had castrated him. Cornelia confronted the same demand, except that Pierce’s self-castration in will alone did not last. So in the end, having fallen genuinely in love with Christ, she had to fight her ex-husband in court to preserve a separation she had never wanted in the first place. Interestingly, it was Heloise who fared better in the court of public opinion. Abelard’s friends and even some of his enemies sympathized with her, while later humanists like Jean de Meun and Petrarch admired her eloquence and uncompromising idealism.¹⁹

Cornelia, on the other hand, fell afoul of both Catholic and Protestant sentiment. The English Catholic hierarchy, impoverished and terribly vulnerable, resented the scandal and expense of “Connelly v. Connelly.” As for the Protestant majority, it eagerly believed Pierce’s lies and blamed Cornelia for destroying her family. Caught between two patriarchies, faced with incompatible demands from husband and bishop, she could win neither public vindication nor private comfort.

Her anguish is clearest—and the historical distance greatest—with respect to motherhood. We do not know what it cost Heloise to leave the infant Astralabe in Brittany, but upper-class women of her day often had their children fostered elsewhere, and it was not unusual for widowed mothers to enter monasteries. Moreover, we have good evidence that Heloise never envisaged motherhood as a career path. Before her marriage, she had even proposed a novel, feminist version of the old argument that a philosopher should not wed. As she put it, “what husband could ever concentrate on philosophy or scripture and still put up with babies howling . . . ? What wife could stand the endless mess of children?”²⁰ Later, in her letters of complaint, she never mentions her son’s absence among her sorrows. Her only reference to him comes in a letter written after Abelard’s death, asking the abbot of Cluny to find the young man a prebend.²¹ We do not know for certain what became of Astralabe,²² nor did contemporaries care, for motherhood in the twelfth century was not an admired vocation. St. Jerome, often quoted by Abelard and Heloise, had zealously praised mothers who steeled themselves against their children’s cries to “become virile” and serve God alone.²³

Seven centuries later, wives were no less subordinate to husbands, but the ideal of motherhood had changed

utterly. Hence nothing hurt Cornelia's reputation more than the belief, fostered by Pierce, that she had willfully abandoned her children. An anti-Catholic pamphlet in 1853 put it this way: "When Rome once depraves the heart, or bows the will, . . . the fountain of all natural affection has been, by priestly art, so dried up within her—as that she can forget her children whom she has borne, as well as the husband whom she has sworn, before God, to obey."²⁴ But Cornelia had never consented to Pierce's abduction of their children. As soon as she realized that he was using them to blackmail her, however, she swore a solemn vow: "In union with my crucified Lord and by His most precious blood, in adoration satisfaction thanksgiving and petition, I, Cornelia, vow to have no future intercourse with my children and their Father beyond what is for the greater Glory of God and His manifest will, known through my director."²⁵ A few letters to relatives reveal the agony this cost her. In 1854 she wrote to her brother that, initially, "my dear children were as much under my eyes as if I had not left the world till their father broke his word and his promises and stole them away from me . . . may God forgive him."²⁶ Four years later she lamented, "Poor darlings! I little thought of their having to suffer in this way, while I can do nothing to help them except by prayer."²⁷ Under English law the children belonged to their father, so there was literally nothing Cornelia could do. In any case the church, in stark contrast with secular norms, still preserved its medieval legacy of valuing marital renunciation as the high road to perfection.²⁸

The motif of the "maternal martyr" occurs so often in medieval hagiography that, if anyone had suggested sainthood for Heloise, her separation from Astralabe might actually have bolstered the case.²⁹ Today, how-

ever, the fate of the Connelly children poses a major obstacle to Cornelia's cause. It does not help that all three apostasized, though her daughter returned to the Catholic fold after both parents died. Cornelia's promoters must therefore show that she bore the loss of her children as a cross, but—this is the key point—not a *chosen* cross.³⁰ The postulator of her cause did try to revive the maternal martyr topos, citing Jeanne de Chantal as an exemplary saint who demonstrated "heroic virtue" by stepping over her son's protesting body as she departed for the cloister.³¹ But most of Cornelia's advocates have shied away from this theme. Her biographers instead link her devotions to the Holy Child Jesus and to Mary, Mother of Sorrows, with her son's tragic death. This dimension of her spiritual life was incomparably deepened by the loss of her other children, though her work as a pioneer in girls' education compensated in some degree for the sadness of her own motherhood.³²

Finally, I turn to the less sensational domain of religious rules, which define a nun's mission and daily life, because both foundresses had to cope with problematic rules composed for them by their former husbands. Heloise had explicitly asked Abelard to create a rule, writing deferentially that "you, through God, are the planter of our congregation, and you, with God, should be the guide of our religious life."³³ Abelard complied, though the lengthy document he produced is an eclectic farrago of the Benedictine Rule, the desert fathers, passages from Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great, and a few provisions specific to Heloise.³⁴ Differences between this text and her own, more practical rule prolonged an old controversy over the authenticity of Heloise's letters.³⁵ Some of the discrepancies concern fairly small matters, but the most important involve

lines of authority. On this subject the two rules cannot be reconciled.³⁶

Abelard was profoundly conflicted about gender. Like every cleric of his age, he could toss off slighting remarks about the “weaker sex” and denounce abbesses who presumed to govern their nuns—or even monks—without male superiors. Yet in his treatise on the dignity of nuns, he produced the most significant “pro-feminine” tract of the era.³⁷ Some scholars have discerned a gradual conversion to feminism where others see only unresolved tension, but in any case, Abelard’s rule for Heloise is so ambivalent as to be unworkable.³⁸ One reason is

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that he envisages a double community of monks and nuns, an arrangement that was common elsewhere but never established at the Paraclete. On the one hand, the whole community should have a male head or provost, but on the other, both monks and nuns should profess obedience to the female head. Abelard calls her not “abbess” but “deaconess,” an exotic early Christian term. He compares the deaconess to a queen and the provost to her steward, who fulfills his lady’s will in all things—save that he “declines in what may do her harm.”³⁹ It is hard to see how such an arrangement could have worked in practice.

As for Heloise, she might have been happy enough with Abelard himself as her superior. But Abelard was still the abbot of Saint-Gildas, and if he should predecease her—which he did—the authority could revert

to her old enemy Suger.⁴⁰ So in fact, the Paraclete had no provost. Heloise styled herself abbess, a more prestigious title than “deaconess,” and exercised the normal authority of that role. Given Abelard’s peripatetic life, his reputation for heresy, and his disastrous failure at Saint-Gildas, the Paraclete undoubtedly flourished under her leadership as it could never have done under his. In fact, despite her unwilling entrance into religious life, Heloise proved highly successful as both monastic reformer and administrator. Before her death in 1163, six daughter houses had been founded or attached to the Paraclete, and its property holdings were vast.⁴¹ In addition to glowing letters of praise from contemporaries, the popularity of the name “Heloise” in the next generation testifies to the esteem in which she was held.⁴²

Despite the troubles Abelard and Heloise faced in reinventing their relationship, both had a deep integrity. Abelard could be intransigent, but he did not lie, and Heloise’s gift for placating superiors equaled his for antagonizing them. Thus she was able to attain the support she needed from popes, bishops, lay patrons, and powerful abbots. Cornelia, to her cost, lacked these advantages. On the one hand, she had to endure Pierce’s outright treachery, and on the other, a long series of conflicts marred her relations with hierarchs. Less than two years after she founded the first Holy Child convent at Derby, Pierce circulated a rule of his own composition in Rome, prefaced by a claim that “the good Lord had long inspired in [him] the desire to found a little Congregation, with the help of a holy person well known to me and quite obedient (*bien docile*) to me.”⁴³ But this was far from the case. When she learned of his act several months later, she sent off an indignant protest disavowing any changes he had made to her rule. Nevertheless, the

spurious text created so much confusion that at Cornelia's death, her own rule was still not approved. A year later, Pierce was claiming that the Derby convent was "worse than . . . a brothel," hence his first duty was "to rescue my blessed wife from the hands of devils."⁴⁴ With a lethal combination of lawsuits, apostasy, anti-Catholic propaganda, and his fraudulent rule, Pierce had made it nearly impossible for Cornelia to succeed in the vocation to which his own choice had driven her.

It did not help that she and Cardinal Wiseman had a falling-out. Concerned that the Connelly scandal was making the church a laughingstock, Wiseman felt a need for rest and proposed that one wing of Cornelia's new convent in Sussex be converted to a seaside residence for his own use. Fearful of yet more scandal, Cornelia said no, infuriating her old ally. Hence Wiseman refused to support her pleas in Rome, where the authorities studied both Cornelia's and Pierce's rules for years without action, still not realizing why they differed. The English bishops meanwhile dragged their feet, refusing to let the Holy Child nuns hold a general chapter to elect superiors. Wiseman insisted that the subsidiary houses should be canonically separate, rather than subject to the mother house⁴⁵—a disempowering move that Heloise, in her day, had managed to resist. The final blow came in 1874 when Bishop Danell of Southwark, Cornelia's immediate superior, presented the nuns with a third rule that he himself had written, imposing a hopelessly complex system of governance. Without warning, he insisted that they set their rule aside and observe his for a "trial period" of three years.⁴⁶ At the end of this time they begged Danell to restore their old rule—beginning with the youngest nun, who declared, "My Lord, it seems to me that the new Rule has been drawn up to correct abuses which

never existed, and it does not lead us to love and obey our Superiors."⁴⁷ All agreed except Cornelia, who remained stonily silent in humility—or despair. But Danell refused their plea and imposed another three-year trial period, at the end of which the foundress died, her life and work in a shambles. It was not until Pierce's death four years later that Cornelia's rule could again be considered in Rome. Ten years after that, in 1893, it was approved in its original, unaltered form.⁴⁸

To conclude, then—was Cornelia Connelly a *nouvelle Héloïse*? The real Heloise, who so vividly imagined herself as a tragic heroine, turns out to have led a less tragic life than Cornelia. Successful abbess though she was, no churchman could call Heloise a saint. Not only did she defend illicit love and confess to religious hypocrisy, but by the standards that count, she didn't suffer enough—or at least, not for the right reasons. Though she portrayed herself as a martyr of love, she recovered from a devastating crisis to be reconciled with her beloved, win the esteem and admiration of her peers, and leave a lasting monastic legacy. But Cornelia—or should I say, the Venerable Cornelia—attained martyrdom on three fronts. As I have shown, she perfectly fulfilled the medieval type of the maternal martyr, suffering the loss of five children through no fault of her own—three to premature death and three to her husband's perfidy, if we count Mercer twice. We can also call her a "martyr of marriage," like other medieval saints who suffered at the hands of brutish husbands. The Connellys might have lived happily ever after if they had remained Protestant—but Pierce's short-lived infatuation with the Catholic Church decreed otherwise. Having first produced his wife toward conversion, he would soon become her relentless persecutor, goading her toward sainthood.

Finally, Cornelia can be seen as a martyr of the church itself, having suffered nearly as much at the hands of bishops as of her husband. Admittedly, I have had to simplify her long, complicated tale. A full and fair account would not gloss over the abrasive side of her character—or the odd moments of silence where resistance might have been more apt. It would also dwell on the unique difficulties attending the restoration of Catholic religious life in Protestant England.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, it seems strange that the defiant Heloise won more clerical favor in the twelfth century than the submissive Cornelia in the nineteenth. For twenty-five years after her death, her name remained under a cloud even among her nuns, who felt that the Society's goals were best served by silencing their founder's scandalous memory.⁵⁰ Returning to the *longue durée*, however, persecution has shadowed the church's most celebrated reformers; I need only mention Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius Loyola. If not a *sine qua non* for sainthood, it certainly helps. After all, Cornelia's long-suffering precursor in the seventeenth century, the Yorkshire foundress Mary Ward, was declared Venerable only a year ago. In each case, it remains to be seen if time, perseverance, and changing attitudes toward women will finally smooth the path from scandal to sanctity.

Notes

¹ These events are known to us from Abelard's autobiography, *Historia calamitatum*, and his subsequent exchange of letters with Heloise. I have cited these from the new translation by William Levitan, *Abelard and Heloise: The Letters and Other Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007).

² M.T. Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 152.

³ The treatise on the dignity of nuns is Abelard's "Sixth Letter"

in Levitan, pp. 127-69. For his hymns see Joseph Szövérfy, ed., *Peter Abelard's Hymnarius Paracletensis*, 2 vols. (Albany, NY: Classical Folia Editions, 1975); a few are translated in Levitan. The *Problemata Heloiseae* (Heloise's questions on Scripture, with Abelard's replies) can be found in J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* 178: 677-730, and his *Expositio in Hexameron* (a Genesis commentary) in PL 178: 731-84. For the sermons see Paola De Santis, ed., *I sermoni di Abelardo per le monache del Paraceto* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002).

⁴ There are now eight biographies of Cornelia Connelly, all but one by members of her Society. I have used the only account by a laywoman: Juliana Wadham, *The Case of Cornelia Connelly* (New York: Pantheon, 1957), and Radekunde Flaxman SHC, *A Woman Styled Bold: The Life of Cornelia Connelly, 1809-1879* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1991). I have also consulted an excellent biography of her husband by D. G. Paz, *The Priesthoods and Apostasies of Pierre Connelly: A Study of Victorian Conversion and Anticatholicism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1986). For a novelistic account see Sheila Kaye-Smith, *Quartet in Heaven* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952), pp. 57-122.

⁵ Flaxman, *A Woman Styled Bold*, p. 18.

⁶ Cornelia Connelly to Adeline Duval, letter of 17 Oct. 1835, cited in Mother Ursula Blake et al., *Positio: Documentary Study for the Canonization Process of the Servant of God Cornelia Connelly (née Peacock), 1809-1879*, 3 vols. (Rome: Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, 1983), I: 79.

⁷ Flaxman, *A Woman Styled Bold*, pp. 72-73.

⁸ This was an ecclesiastical court that, until 1857, ruled on matrimonial cases under English canon law. Divorces granted by this court did not permit remarriage. Otherwise, the only way to obtain a divorce was by private Act of Parliament. *Positio* I: 330.

⁹ Brendan Larnen's play about the trial, *Connelly vs. Connelly* (New York: Blackfriars' Guild, 1961), was staged in New York and Los Angeles fifty years ago. See Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), p. 267.

¹⁰ *The Life of Cornelia Connelly, 1809-1879, Foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus*, by A Religious of the Society [Mary Catherine Gompertz] (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1930), p. 257. As of 1952, at the height of the Catholic educational system, the Society had established four additional schools and convents in England (including Oxford and Harrogate), three in Ireland, one in Switzerland, one in Rome, six in Africa, and twenty-two in the

U.S. Kaye-Smith, *Quartet in Heaven*, p. 118. Many of these are now closed, but the Society has further expanded into Germany and Latin America. See the SHCJ website, http://shcj.org/today_ministries.html

¹¹ Woodward, *Making Saints*, p. 253. The author is Sister Elizabeth Mary Strub, former superior general of the SHCJ.

¹² As recalled by Abelard in *Historia calamitatum* (“The Calamities of Peter Abelard”), trans. Levitan, p. 17; Heloise, First Letter, in Levitan, pp. 55-56.

¹³ Third Letter (in the collection, i.e., the second from Heloise), Levitan, pp. 78-79.

¹⁴ Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental, p. 17 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976); Peter Dronke, *Abelard and Heloise in Medieval Testimonies* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1976).

¹⁵ Barbara Newman, “Authority, Authenticity, and the Repression of Heloise,” in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 46-75 (pp. 73-74).

¹⁶ Heloise, First Letter, p. 61; Third Letter, p. 81

¹⁷ According to Abelard, Heloise tearfully declaimed the lament of Cornelia, the wife of Pompey, from Lucan’s *Pharsalia*—“and with these words, she rushed to the altar, snatched up the veil which the bishop had just blessed, and bound herself to the convent in the presence of all.” *Historia calamitatum*, in Levitan, p. 20.

¹⁸ Cornelia Connelly to Adeline Duval, letter of 17 Oct. 1835, in *Positio*, I: 81.

¹⁹ The letters of Abelard and Heloise were popularized by the poet Jean de Meun, who translated them into French: Eric Hicks, ed., *La vie et les epistres Pierres Abaelart et Heloys sa fame: Traduction du XIIIe siècle attribuée à Jean de Meun* (Paris: Champion, 1991). More famously, he incorporated the lovers’ tale into his best-selling *Roman de la Rose*, which remained by far the best-known version until modern times.

²⁰ Abelard, *Historia calamitatum*, in Levitan, p. 15. Abelard cites Heloise in direct speech; she was in turn paraphrasing Jerome’s treatise *Adversus Jovinianum* (393), and Jerome was citing a lost anti-matrimonial tract by the pagan Theophrastus, sometimes called “The Golden Book on Marriage.” Theophrastus, Jerome, and their numerous medieval heirs all argued that a wise *man* should not marry; only Heloise extended this counsel to women, as I first noted in “Authority, Authenticity,” p. 67. This grammatical nuance was

overlooked in the classic translation by Betty Radice, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974; rev. ed. 2003), p. 14; Levitan corrects the error.

²¹ Heloise, letter to Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, ca. 1144-49, in Levitan, p. 273.

²² He probably became a cathedral canon in Nantes, and may later have been a Cistercian abbot at Hauteville: Levitan, *Abelard and Heloise*, p. 13, n. 26. Abelard wrote a lengthy didactic poem for him, the *Carmen ad Astralabium*, ed. José Rubingh-Boscher (Groningen, 1987).

²³ Barbara Newman, “Cruel Courage’: Child Sacrifice and the Maternal Martyr in Hagiography and Romance,” in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, pp. 76-107 (p. 81).

²⁴ Thomas Hatchard, *Case of the Rev. Pierce Connelly*, 2nd ed. (London, 1853), cited in Judith Lancaster SHCJ, *Cornelia Connelly and Her Interpreters* (Oxford: Way Books, 2004), p. 250.

²⁵ Notebook of Cornelia Connelly, 21 January 1848, in *Positio* I: 298.

²⁶ Cornelia Connelly to Ralph Peacock, letter of 1854, in Lancaster, *Cornelia Connelly*, p. 274.

²⁷ Cornelia Connelly to Ralph Peacock, letter of 18 November 1858, in Lancaster, *Cornelia Connelly*, p. 274. For a moving treatment of Cornelia’s feelings about this loss, see Dorothy Bryant, “Keeping Vows: Cornelia Connelly (1809-1879),” in *Last Words: Imaginary Letters from Real People* (2010). Online at <http://www.dorothybryant.com/LastWords.html>

²⁸ Caritas McCarthy SHCJ, *The Spirituality of Cornelia Connelly: In God, For God, With God* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1986), pp. 73-80. For the history of this idea see Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

²⁹ See Newman, “Cruel Courage’: Child Sacrifice and the Maternal Martyr.”

³⁰ Woodward, *Making Saints*, pp. 268-70.

³¹ Woodward, *Making Saints*, p. 271.

³² McCarthy, *Spirituality*; Roseanne McDougall SHCJ, *Cornelia Connelly’s Innovations in Female Education, 1846-1864: Revolutionizing the School Curriculum for Girls* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2008).

³³ Heloise, Fifth Letter, in Levitan, p. 126.

³⁴ Abelard, Seventh Letter, in Levitan, pp. 170-255.

³⁵ For Heloise's rule see Chrysoygonus Waddell, ed., *The Paraclete Statutes, Institutiones Nostrae: Introduction, Edition, Commentary* (Trappist, KY: Gethsemani Abbey, 1987). On the discrepancies see John F. Benton, "Fraud, Fiction and Borrowing in the Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise," in *Pierre Abélard—Pierre le Vénéral: Les courants philosophiques, littéraires, et artistiques en Occident au milieu du XIIe siècle*, ed. René Louis and Jean Jolivet (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975), pp. 469-506 (p. 474). In 1980 Benton retracted his arguments for the inauthenticity of the letters.

³⁶ For discussion see Enid McLeod, *Héloïse: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), pp. 219-24; Clanchy, *Abelard*, pp. 251-60. Heloise's biographer states that she "worked entirely in harmony with Abailard's wishes" (p. 222), though not slavishly. Abelard's more skeptical biographer says she "ignored" his rule (p. 258).

³⁷ Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Peter Abelard and the Dignity of Women: Twelfth Century 'Feminism' in Theory and Practice," in *Pierre Abélard—Pierre le Vénéral*, pp. 287-333; Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 199-207.

³⁸ See my "Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century," in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, pp. 19-45 (p. 27).

³⁹ Abelard, Seventh Letter, in Levitan, p. 198.

⁴⁰ Clanchy, *Abelard*, p. 258.

⁴¹ McLeod, *Héloïse*, pp. 210-219.

⁴² Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 234.

⁴³ "Memorial of the Rev. Pierce Connelly to the S. Cong. de Propaganda Fide," 10 February 1848, in *Postio* I:299. The original is in French; English translation mine.

⁴⁴ Pierce Connelly to the Earl of Shrewsbury, letter of 28 Dec. 1848, in *Postio* I: 307.

⁴⁵ Wadhams, *Case of Cornelia Connelly*, p. 226.

⁴⁶ Not only did Danell style himself "Bishop Superior of the Institute"; he also sent his rule to the order's American houses with no explanation. Left in the dark, the U.S. sisters assumed that the new rule was Cornelia's high-handed innovation and refused to obey it, provoking a schism.

⁴⁷ Gompertz, *Life of Cornelia Connelly*, p. 235.

⁴⁸ Gompertz, *Life of Cornelia Connelly*, pp. 248-250.

⁴⁹ Susan O'Brien, "Terra Incognita: The Nun in Nineteenth-Century England," *Past & Present*, 121 (November 1988), pp. 110-140.

⁵⁰ Lancaster, *Cornelia Connelly and Her Interpreters*, pp. 51-55.

Palimpsest

Recycling isn't new.

When writing was serious,

words were costly,

vellum was scrubbed,

papyrus washed, reused.

Sometimes earlier uncials

appear in ghostly outline.

A Syriac text of Chrysostom

reveals a Latin grammar:

amo, amas, amat.

What comes to articulation

has layers beneath the surface

deeper than words,

runic letters in languages

we don't quite understand.

Bonnie Thurston