



# Heloise's literary self-fashioning and the *Epistolae duorum amantium*

Sylvain Piron

## ► To cite this version:

Sylvain Piron. Heloise's literary self-fashioning and the *Epistolae duorum amantium*. Lucie Doležalová. *Strategies of Remembrance. From Pindar to Hölderlin*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.102-162, 2009. halshs-00418433

**HAL Id: halshs-00418433**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00418433>**

Submitted on 18 Sep 2009

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## Heloise's literary self-fashioning and the *Epistolae duorum amantium*<sup>1</sup>

Sylvain Piron (*Paris*)

By addressing issues connected with memory in two collections of twelfth century Latin letters – the famous correspondence exchanged between Heloise and Abelard<sup>2</sup> and the anonymous set of love letters known as *Epistolae duorum amantium*<sup>3</sup> – this article pursues two different goals at the same time. On the one hand, it will be easily recognised that such personal documentation, not often preserved from the medieval period, offers appropriate material for observing how memories of educated people were constructed, sustained and expressed. But the choice of studying these two collections side by side is also connected to another explicit purpose. Such a confrontation provides an occasion to put to the test the claim made by Constant Mews that the two anonymous lovers are indeed Heloise and Abelard in the early phase of their affair;<sup>4</sup> this test will eventually result in formulating a new argument in favour of this ascription. As will gradually become clear, these two perspectives are in fact closely related, since they are both investigating the ways in which literary memory is shaping personal identity at its most intimate. [104]

In both sets of documents, the women provide the richest material for our purpose. Moreover, the peculiarities of their literary self-fashioning<sup>5</sup> are strikingly similar, to such an extent that it makes sense to argue that both documents present two facets of the same personal story. Thus, my contention is that the evolution that the woman undergoes throughout the *Epistolae duorum amantium* corresponds to the process the young Heloise went through in the early phase of her relationship with Abelard, until reaching a decision that is reflected both by Abelard in the *Historia*

---

<sup>1</sup> The contents of this article have been discussed at great length with Constant Mews. Jacques Dalarun commented on a first version of the initial section, Damien Boquet, Francesco Stella and Stephen Jaeger on the whole text. Nicole Archambeau and Caroline Brothers provided linguistic improvements. I am grateful to them all.

<sup>2</sup> Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum*, ed. Jacques Monfrin (Paris: Vrin, 1974); *Lettres d'Abélard et Héloïse*, ed. Éric Hicks, transl. É. Hicks, Th. Moreau (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2007). I will quote from Monfrin for HC and Ep. II and IV, from Hicks for the remaining letters.

<sup>3</sup> Ewald Könsgen, *Epistolae duorum amantium: Briefe Abaelards und Heloises?* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> Constant J. Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard. Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France*, with translations by N. Chiavaroli and C. J. Mews (New York: Palgrave, 1999). An additional chapter to the second edition, forthcoming in 2008, "New discoveries and insights 1999-2006," presents a number of new arguments in favour of the ascription. My references will be to that new edition.

<sup>5</sup> The notion is borrowed from Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), but used in the more restrictive sense of shaping one's self out of literary models.

*calamitatum* and by herself in her later letters: her refusal to marry, in order to remain only the *amica* of the great philosopher. A close reading of the love letters allows one to suggest that the same unusual decision was made, for the very same reasons and with the same references in mind, by the anonymous *Mulier* of the *Epistolae duorum amantium*.

Such an interpretation would enable us to tie together the events reflected in both letter collections, and therefore to identify the two pairs of writers. In order to make such a move, a series of preliminary steps is required. The whole field is indeed paved with traps and mines. The authenticity of the letters written by Heloise in response to Abelard's *Historia calamitatum* have so often been questioned that it will be necessary to defend it again, mainly by investigating its textual transmission. The next step will allow us to unearth traces of Heloise's earlier writings embedded within the *Historia*. Demonstrating that she actually wrote a letter on the issue of marriage, partly reproduced and edited by Abelard, will prove useful in order to compare her personal story and her moral views on love, with those of the young woman of the *Epistolae* and to emphasize their common feature.

### 1. Approaching the young Heloise

Although Heloise attracts a growing attention as a writer and a thinker in her own right,<sup>6</sup> there is still need to argue anew how and where her voice can be heard in the surviving material at our disposal. During the last two centuries, a controversy has raged over the authenticity of her famous correspondence [105] with Abelard, in a particularly intense mode during the 1970s and 1980s. This is a dispute that has now been settled, as John Marenbon made clear in a recapitulatory essay.<sup>7</sup> A vast majority of researchers agree that Heloise actually wrote the three letters attributed to her within the group of documents known as the "Correspondence", calling by this conventional name a literary artifact made of eight letters that begins with Abelard's *Historia calamitatum* and ends with the introductory letter to his *Rule* for the Paraclete, to which the *Rule* itself is sometimes appended.<sup>8</sup> There is equal consensus over the fact that the Correspondence underwent some form of editing

<sup>6</sup> For instance, see Bonnie Wheeler ed., *Listening to Heloise. The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> John Marenbon, "Authenticity revisited," in *Listening to Heloise*, 19-33 and Id., *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82-93. See also the vigorous plea by Barbara Newman, "Authenticity, Authority and the Repression of Heloise," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22 (1992): 121-157, reprinted in Ead., *Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 46-75. Some of the most important contributions that helped secure the ascription are those of Peter Dronke, especially, "Abelard and Heloise in Medieval Testimonies" (1976) in Id., *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1992), 247-290.

<sup>8</sup> Many editions, including Hicks', do not distinguish the introductory letter that ends with a formal valediction (*Valete in Christo sponse Christi*, ed. Hicks, 138), from the following document.

process at some stage. By whom, when and to what extent are questions that remain open. They should not let any doubt on Heloise's authorship creep in through the back door, and this is why I want to clarify this point.

*The textual transmission of the Correspondence*

Jacques Dalarun has recently made an important contribution to this issue, submitting to a codicological analysis the volume Troyes 802 (henceforth referred to as T) that contains the earliest copy of the Correspondence, and the only one in which the *Rule* is present.<sup>9</sup> Given the length and complexity of this important article, I shall only stress its major conclusions, and discuss some issues that matter for our purpose.

The core of the demonstration shows that T has been neatly corrected, no less than three times, against an archetype, which suggests that both manuscripts were kept in the same place. Paleographically, this copy should be dated to earlier than 1250, perhaps in the 1230's, instead of the last decades of the thirteenth century as was previously thought. A study of additional [106] material found after the Correspondence leads to the suggestion that the entire volume was commissioned by William of Auvergne, bishop of Paris, in 1237.

These are important results that modify our perception of the textual history of the Correspondence, and definitely rule out any notion of a late XIIIth-century forgery.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, they leave some questions open.<sup>11</sup> J. Dalarun wishes to ascribe the production of the archetype to the same place and period as T, on the grounds that a reference to the Deuteronomy found in the *Historia* would reflect a device introduced in the Bible edited at Paris University by Stephen Langton around 1225. Yet, as David Luscombe pointed out, the same numbering was already present in some 12th-century Bibles.<sup>12</sup> The suppression of this dating clue implies that the archetype could have been produced earlier than the 1230s, and that this biblical reference did not need being updated at any moment. However, it is likely that the archetype from which the Correspondence was copied in T was produced in Paris, under William or at an earlier date.

---

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Dalarun, "Nouveaux aperçus sur Abélard, Héloïse et le Paraclet," *Francia. Mittelalter* 32:1 (2005): 19-66.

<sup>10</sup> The final section of the article shows that Abelard's *Rule* was conceived in a "veiled dispute" with Robert d'Arbrissel, of whom he knew the earlier statutes of Fontevraud.

<sup>11</sup> I will not discuss whether T was produced together with a twin volume, as J. Dalarun contends, one being sent to the Paraclete and the other kept in Paris. In my view, the demonstration that only one codex was involved remains unchallenged, cf. C. J. Mews, "La bibliothèque du Paraclet du XIIIe siècle à la Révolution," *Studia Monastica* 27 (1985): 31-67, repr. in Id., *Reason and Belief in the Age of Roscelin and Abelard*, (Ashgate: Variorum, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> David E. Luscombe, "From Paris to the Paraclete: The Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 (1988): 247-283.

J. Dalarun rightly stresses how important is the presence in T, immediately after the *Rule*, of the *Institutiones nostre*, statutes for her monastery drawn up by Heloise after the death of Abelard, in which she shows little concern for his *Rule*. This brief document must have been sent from the Paraclete to Paris on the same occasion as the eight letters forming the Correspondence. As a matter of fact, much more could have been included in the same package. The diffusion of Abelard's writings varies a lot from one work to another: his philosophical and theological writings were spread around by his students across Europe;<sup>13</sup> the *Collationes* are mainly found in England, the *Ethica* in Germany, while the *Hymnarius* written for the Paraclete only circulated in [107] eastern France.<sup>14</sup> Yet a group of works displays traces of a diffusion from Paris after having initially been collected at the Paraclete.<sup>15</sup> Such is the case of *Epistola IX*, providing educational instructions for the Paraclete nuns, and of the *Problemata Heloissae*, answering exegetical questions raised by the abbess, both only preserved in a codex copied in Paris in 1440 and presented to Saint-Victor (Paris, lat. 14511).<sup>16</sup> The remaining Abelardian material, added later at the beginning of the same volume, could have followed the same route.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, it may not be a mere coincidence that two copies of Abelard's *Hexameron* commentary, written at the request of Heloise in the mid 1130s, also stem from Notre Dame.<sup>18</sup> But the most impressive data comes from Nicolas de Baye's *post mortem* inventory. A humanist, friend of Nicolas de Clamanges, and an important figure of Paris' Parliament, Nicolas finally became a canon at Notre Dame in 1413

<sup>13</sup> Luscombe, *The School of Peter Abelard. The Influence of Abelard's Thought in the Early Scholastic Period* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969), 60-102.

<sup>14</sup> Julia Barrow, Charles S. F. Burnett and David E. Luscombe, "A Checklist of the Manuscripts Containing the Writings of Peter Abelard and Heloise and Other Works Closely Associated with Abelard and his School," *Revue d'Histoire des Textes* 14-15 (1984-85): 183-302, and the review by C. J. Mews, *Scriptorium* 41 (1987): 327-330.

<sup>15</sup> Mews, "La bibliothèque du Paraclet," and *Lost Love Letters*, 40-43, discusses the circulation of the Correspondence.

<sup>16</sup> The similarities of both incipits, that echoes one another with an initial reference to Jerome (*Problemata*: *Beatus Ieronimus sancte Marcelle studium quo tota fervebat, circa questiones sacrarum litterarum maxime commendans.*; Ep. IX: *Beatus Ieronimus in eruditione virginum Christi plurimum occupatus.*) lead me to the suggestion that their disposition in this manuscript may reflect the chronological order of their composition. After having asked for information on female religious life (Ep. VI) and obtained answers (Ep. VII-VIII and *Rule*), Heloise turned to the issue of learning, insufficiently dealt with in the *Rule*, and raised precise exegetical questions, to which Abelard first responded in details (*Problemata*), before designing a more general pattern for education at the Paraclete (Ep. IX).

<sup>17</sup> Paris, lat. 14511, fol. 2-17, contains the end of *Confessio fidei 'Universis'*, *Sermo XIV*, *Expositio Symboli Apostolorum* and *Expositio Symboli Sancti Athanasii*. They were not present in the manuscript when Claude de Grandrue prepared his catalogue. in 1514

<sup>18</sup> Luscombe, *The School*, 67. These mss. are now Paris, BNF 17251 and Vatican, BAV, Vat. lat. 4214, that was sold by the chapter to Annibald de Ceccano before 1326, in the same way as Roberto de' Bardi bought the T codex in 1346.

and died six years later, while residing within the cloister. At his death, his vast personal library contained no less than five volumes of Abelard's works. Two of them are described in the inventory as "epistles": a small volume on paper beginning with the *Historia*, and a much larger one, in eight unbound gatherings, starting with the *Rule*. Two more are described as containing "sermons". Finally, another large volume worth [108] ten sol. and probably containing as many gatherings, contained some "treatises".<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, this final volume started with a now lost *Exhortatio ad fratres et commonachos*, written in the 1120s during the first season of the Paraclete, that may have been incorporated in *Theologia Christiana*.<sup>20</sup> In the late XIVth century, Parisian humanists developed an interest in the personal letters of Heloise and Abelard,<sup>21</sup> but Nicolas is unique in his wider interest for Abelard. It can be reasonably suggested that he had bought volumes found within the cathedral library. This collection may have included part of the original package from the Paraclete sent to Notre Dame, or the edited copies produced upon their arrival. The dispersion of Nicolas' books would then account for the loss of these volumes.

Out of these observations, some important points can be made. First of all, we have no documentary evidence to claim that, at any moment before the copy of T, nor afterwards, the Correspondence as it is canonically known, including the *Rule*, was ever conceived as an organic whole. All other witnesses suggest that, out of the Paraclete material sent to Notre Dame, the eight letters were edited and preserved separately from the *Rule*. For instance, a manuscript copied in Paris in 1340, in the house of the bishop of Amiens, ends with a colophon that presents Ep. VIII as the last of the *Epistole Petri Abaelardi et Heloyse, primitus eius amice, postmodum*

---

<sup>19</sup> Alexandre Tuetey, *Inventaire de Nicolas de Baye, chanoine de Notre Dame, greffier du Parlement de Paris sous Charles VI (1419), précédé d'une notice biographique* (Paris, 1888): 121: Item xx cahiers en parchemin contenant les sermons Pierre Abalart, prisiez xxiii s.; 136: Item, les epistres Pierre Abalart, en papier, commençans ou iie feuillet, *ulterius*, prisiees ii. s. [*ulterius* is found in HC, ed. Monfrin, lin. 128]; 179 Item, la Exortacion Pierre Abalard, avec aultres traictiez, commençans ou ii.e feuillet, *cum uterque*, prisie x. s.; 181 Item, les Epistres de Pierre Abalard et viij cayers de luy mesmes, tenans ensemble, le premier commençant *tripartite*, prisie viii s. [The *Rule* begins with *Tripartitum*]; 184 Item, les Sermons Pierre Abalard, sans ays, commençans ou ii.e feuillet, *non esset*, prisie ii. s. [*non esset* features three times in the first pages of Sermo I, in annunciatione beatae Virginis Mariae, especially PL 178, col. 383C, about a thousand words after the start of the sermon]. These were first noted in "A Checklist," n° 212, p. 229.

<sup>20</sup> *Theologia Christiana*, II.46 (CCCM 12, 150) in which he makes a rhetorical appeal: *Numquid hoc, fratres, ad aliquam turpitudinem inclinandum est*. I am grateful to Constant Mews for this indication, and for many more hints on the transmission of Abelard's works.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. C. Bozzolo, "L'humaniste Gontier Col et la traduction française des lettres d'Héloïse et Abélard," *Romania* 95 (1974): 199-215.

*uxoris*.<sup>22</sup> As the [109] description of Nicolas de Baye's library shows, the *Rule* rather belonged to another section of the Paraclete material present in Paris.

The little that can confidently be said about the Paris edition of this material concerns the insertion of rubrics, dividing the *Historia calamitatum* into chapters, and introducing each subsequent letter. The wording of these rubrics excludes the possibility that they could have been formulated either by Abelard or Heloise, since it refers to them in the third person. Such rubrics are present in a number of manuscripts other than T, which means that they were inserted in their common archetype.<sup>23</sup> The fact that the *Rule* is not introduced by such a rubric in T, which rendered it indistinguishable from Ep. VIII, can be one more sign that it was not edited together with the eight letters.

The most important volume of the letters that also presents such rubrics is Paris, lat. 2923 (A). This famous codex was acquired by Petrarch between 1337 and 1343, presumably through his friend Roberto de' Bardi, canon of Paris, who later bought for himself the Troyes manuscript.<sup>24</sup> While the hand of the copyist has been described as being from southern France, the decoration is certainly Parisian, and can be dated to soon after 1270.<sup>25</sup> There, the eight letters, with an initial painted letter depicting a couple (the face of the woman being blotted out), are followed by another group of documents relating to Abelard, introduced by a picture of a man alone. These documents, comprising Berengar of Poitier's writings (his apology for Abelard, written immediately after the council of Sens in 1141 and two other letters), Abelard's [110] *Soliloquium* and his *Confessio fidei* 'Universis', also delivered at the time of the council, form a unitary dossier. To the exception of Ep. XIV, only present in A, the dossier is found in two more manuscripts, one of them also containing the eight letters.<sup>26</sup> Berengar, who was able to access another letter sent by Abelard to Heloise and include it in his *Apologia*, probably spent some time at the Paraclete, 40

<sup>22</sup> Paris BNF, nouv. acq. fr. 20001, fol. 12va. The French translation found in Paris BNF, fr. 920 also has a similar explicit.

<sup>23</sup> Paris BNF, lat. 2923 has most of the rubrics found in T, as well as a supplementary one, at Monfrin ed., l. 45: *De inicio magisterii sui* (referring to Abelard's first teaching in Melun). Paris BNF lat. 2544 lacks a general rubric, but has some of the chapter divisions; the space reserved for the rubrics is often not filled in because the text was too long to fit in. The manuscript in a private collection studied by Colette Jeudy, "Un nouveau manuscrit de la correspondance d'Abélard et Héloïse," *Latomus* 50 (1991) 872-881, produced around Paris, ca. 1340-1360, also has rubrics. Mutilated at the beginning and the end, it starts with HC and breaks off in the middle of Ep. VII.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l'humanisme*, (Genève: Slatkine, 2004; first ed. 1907), t. 2, 220-222, 287-292, edits and comments Petrarch's annotations. Mews, *Lost Love Letters*, 306-7, argues for a Parisian origin of the manuscript, on account of material found in the final sections.

<sup>25</sup> Jeudy, "Un nouveau manuscrit," 880, describes the decoration as Parisian. The filigranes correspond to those produced in Paris after 1270, cf. Patricia Stirnemann, "Fils de la vierge. L'initiale à filigranes parisienne: 1140-1314," *Revue de l'Art*, 90 (1990): 58-73, see fig. 43 and 44 (dated around 1280). This date would fit in well with a renewal of interest in the personal letters, also demonstrated in the same period by Jean de Meun.

kilometers north-east of Sens, soon after the council.<sup>27</sup> Both these circumstances and the later diffusion of the dossier leads to the suggestion that it may have been deposited by Berengar at the Paraclete, and have later been part of the package sent to Paris.

It is thus a fair guess that both the Troyes manuscript and Petrarch's copy have been extracted from the same collection of Paraclete material preserved at the cathedral library of Paris. Owing to his interest in female monasticism, William of Auvergne completed the eight letters with Paraclete documents of a prescriptive nature (*Rule* and *Institutiones Nostre* and other legal documents), while the compiler of Petrarch's manuscript rather picked up documents defending Abelard's personal orthodoxy. Quite uniquely, Nicolas de Baye chose to read the letters in the light of all Abelardian material that could be found within Paris cathedral library. Following Dalarun's approach, [111] subsequent research into the textual transmission of the Correspondence should now concentrate on this broader material.<sup>28</sup>

The following pages of his article (47-53) imagine a more serious editorial intervention on the part of Abelard. What triggers this hypothesis is the opening of Heloise's first letter, mentioning that she has received the *Historia calamitatum* "by chance" (*forte*). To explain away these initial words that he considers troublesome, J. Dalarun contrives a much more problematic solution: to questions initially proposed by Heloise on religious life, both personal and institutional, Abelard

---

<sup>26</sup> The dossier is found with the letters in Oxford, Bodleian, Add C. 271 and without it in Paris lat. 1896. Cf. Rodney M. Thomson, "The satirical Works of Berengar of Poitiers: an edition with introduction," in: *Medieval Studies* 42 (1980): 88-138; Charles Burnett, "Peter Abelard *Soliloquium*. A critical edition," *Studi medievali* 25 (1984): 857-894 (with more remarks on Petrarch's note) and Id., "Peter Abelard, *Confessio fidei* 'universis': a critical edition of Abelard's reply to accusations of heresy," *Medieval Studies* 48 (1986): 111-138. The model out of which the letters were excerpted in Germany in the early XVth Cent. also contained the Berengar dossier, not the *Rule*, cf. D. E. Luscombe, "Excerpts from the letter collection of Heloise and Abelard in Notre Dame (Indiana) ms 30," in R. Lievens, E. van Mingroot, W. Verbeke (ed.), *Pascua Medievalia. Studies voor Prof. Dr. J.M. De Smet* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1983), p. 529-544. A group of later manuscripts associate the letters with more documents related to the Council of Sens, including letters of Bernard of Clairvaux: Paris BNF lat. 2545, lat. 13057, n.a. lat. 1873, and the lost Saint-Victor manuscript GGG 17, to which Berengar's *Apology* was added afterwards, cf. Burnett, "Peter Abelard *Confessio*," 115.

<sup>27</sup> C. J. Mews, "Un lecteur de Jérôme au XIIe: Pierre Abélard," in *Jérôme entre l'Occident et l'Orient*, ed. Y. M. Duval (Paris, 1988), 429-444 repr. in Id., *Abelard and his Legacy* (Aldershot: Variorum, 2001), at 442-443, suggests that Berengar of Poitiers acted as a secretary for Abelard, and may have been the one who brought the *Historia* to Heloise. At the very least, he is probably the one who brought her the *Confessio fidei ad Heloyssam*, inserted into the *Apologia*, and this latter work could have been written while residing at the Paraclete.

<sup>28</sup> Luscombe, "The Letters of Heloise and Abelard since 'Cluny 1972'," in *Petrus Abaelardus (1079-1142). Person, Werk und Wirkung*, R. Thomas (ed.) (Trier: Paulinus, 1980) 19-39, at p. 29, already arrived at a similar conclusion: "the supposed associations of the letter-collection with the 'monastic' copying tradition of the Paraclete should not be over-stressed. ... Paris may have proved a more fruitful centre for the keeping and the diffusion of copies of the Letters in the thirteenth century."



would have responded with appropriate answers, reorganised the exchange of letters, and added afterwards the *Historia calamitatum* as a general prologue to the whole sequence. Such an hypothesis is fraught with huge difficulties, since Heloise's first letter is nothing but a reaction and a comment to the *Historia*, while each of the following letters is responding to the previous one. In order to substantiate such a claim, it would be necessary to delineate precisely the wording of the original letters from Abelard's supposed editorial intervention.<sup>29</sup> In the absence of such a textual analysis, this conjecture has no grounding whatsoever. The parallel with the *Problemata*, in which Abelard answered a list of questions raised by Heloise, could only account for the relation between her letter VI and Abelard's responses in letters VII and VIII. Yet, quite differently from the *Problemata*, here the answers are not inserted into the initial letter, but are kept as distinct documents.

All apparent difficulties can be solved in a much simpler way. The fact that the *Historia* has not been preserved separately from the Correspondence only means that, since Abelard led a wandering life and did not edit a collection of his own letters, the only institution that preserved the *Historia* during [112] the first century after it was written was the Paraclete.<sup>30</sup> The choice of addressing his apology to a fictional friend is a rhetorical device that allowed Abelard to circulate the same document to various audiences. The abbot of Saint-Gildas de Rhuys badly needed to justify the fact that he had deserted his monastery to reestablish himself as a teacher in Paris, but he also had a message to convey to people that had been close to him, presenting his own life as a theological *exemplum*.<sup>31</sup> It is more economical to consider that Heloise was part of that intended audience, rather than to imagine that she obtained the *Historia* indirectly through a third party.<sup>32</sup> On her part, the *forte* should be read as a euphemism meant to express her disappointment that the letter was not addressed to her. We know how sensitive she was about epistolary salutations. Upset not to be the formal recipient of a letter that was nevertheless sent to her, as a

<sup>29</sup> Dalarun, "Nouveaux aperçus," 51, n 166-7, identifies such a nucleus in Ep. II, ed. Monfrin, lin. 38-45 and 76-80, but these sentences are stylistically indistinguishable from the ones that surround them, and built into a rhetorical construction in which the reference to the *Historia* is massively present, cf. lin. 4-38, 69-73.

<sup>30</sup> Luscombe, *The School*, 65. Both remarks that Abelard's letters were not collected and edited during his lifetime, and that isolated documents tend to survive over a long time span only in institutions are made by J. Dalarun, "Nouveaux aperçus".

<sup>31</sup> See Mews, *Abelard and Heloise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 149-151, who thinks that Abelard had Heloise in mind when devising the unnamed friend.

<sup>32</sup> Jean de Meun's French translation, based on various manuscripts, including some that are now lost, has quite a different opening (Eric Hicks ed., *La vie et les epistres Pierres Abaelart et Heloys sa fame*, 45): "Voz homs m'a nouvellement monstré vostre espitre que vous envoyastes a nostre ami pour confort." While "nostre ami" should probably be read as "vostre ami", the initial words implies that the letter was sent to Heloise by a servant of Abelard. Although this phrasing could be Jean de Meun's literary invention, this is nevertheless the most likely means through which Heloise may have received the *Historia*.

reproach, she subtly pointed to the accidental nature of her coming across this document.<sup>33</sup>

In the end, the only solid foundation of J. Dalarun's hypothesis is a reference to George Duby's "enlightening vision" that the Correspondence is "oriented" towards the final letters.<sup>34</sup> G. Duby was but one late exponent of a long tradition that has propounded a teleological reading of the letters, considering that the meaning of the whole should prevail over the meaning of [113] its discordant parts, or even suppress it.<sup>35</sup> In that perspective, the sequel of letters should be read as one "spiritual drama", telling the story of a long and difficult religious conversion, culminating with the *Rule* for the Paraclete. Such an approach was generally connected to a denial of Heloise's authorship of her own letters – an attitude that Duby shared as late as 1995. Now that her authorship has been secured, the teleological approach has become untenable. Instead, one should just accept that these letters represent the various moments of a dialogue, that had some indelible conflictual aspects.

Jacques Dalarun has rendered a great service, demonstrating that the Correspondence, as it has canonically been known to scholars, was first edited by William of Auvergne in 1237. It is then a surprise that the same author, in the same article, should fall prey to a teleological fallacy about the Correspondence itself.<sup>36</sup> The conclusions that can be drawn from his own codicological investigation point to a rather different direction. A bunch of documents, first collected at the Paraclete, was sent at one point to Paris' cathedral, and underwent an edition, limited to the insertion of rubrics. If some male character ever edited the letters at an earlier date, that was probably not Peter Abelard, who never properly edited his own major works and who was, in the last decade of his life, "more peripatetic than ever", as Barbara Newman nicely puts it.<sup>37</sup> Berengar of Poitiers was in a position to intervene, in 1141 or at another moment, and had an interest in defending the reputation of his master. Yet there is no textual evidence that requires postulating an intervention, on

---

<sup>33</sup> Such an explanation is substantiated by the fact that the following sentence discusses the salutation of HC, ed Hicks, 136. Her following letter also begins by discussing Abelard's salutation, Ep. IV, ed. Hicks, 168.

<sup>34</sup> Dalarun's admiration for Duby's vision of Heloise is already expressed in his "Argument *e silentio*. Les femmes et la religion," *Clio. Histoire, femmes et société* 8 (1998): 65-90. The same issue of this journal contains other articles on Duby, some more critical of his approach to the history of women.

<sup>35</sup> The history of the debate on the authenticity has been told many times; see for instance Peter von Moos, *Mittelalterforschung und Ideologiekritik. Der Gelehrtenstreit um Heloise*, (Munich: Fink, 1974), or Mews, *Lost Love Letters*, 47-51. An important presentation and criticism of Peter von Moos' teleological reading is Ileana Pagani, "Epistolario o dialogo spirituale? Postille ad un'interpretazione della corrispondenza di Abelardo ed Eloisa," *Studi Medievali* 27(1986): 241-318.

<sup>36</sup> This is even more a surprise in the face of his latest collection of articles, Dalarun, "*Dieu changea de sexe, pour ainsi dire*." *La religion faite femme. XI<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, (Paris: Fayard, 2008). In this gallery of saintly women, Heloise is obviously the missing figure.

<sup>37</sup> Newman, "Authenticity," 133.

his part or by anyone else, within the text of the eight letters.<sup>38</sup> The more economical solution is that the letters and documents were collected [114] one by one at the Paraclete, and the person who was in the best position to do so was Heloise herself.<sup>39</sup> Ordering the extant documents, without editing them, she would have put together a peculiar memorial for her institution, in the form of an exchange of letters in which could be found a tale of the foundation of the monastery, a life of the founders, and different layers of prescriptions – without any attempt at solving the many contradictions and tensions present in these documents. To add another paradox to this story, Heloise's obsession with sincerity and openness would then be responsible for the endless discussion on whether she ever wrote any of those letters.<sup>40</sup>

#### *Heloise's speech against marriage*

Once this first result is attained, one more step can be taken in the textual quest for the exhumation of Heloise's words. The *Historia calamitatum* includes a chapter entitled *Dehortatio supradicte puellae a nuptiis* – a title inserted at the time of the Paris edition of the Correspondence – in which Abelard gives voice to her arguments against marriage. The peculiarity of this chapter is well known. Nowhere else in the *Historia* does Abelard give so much space to arguments presented by a third party. After having told of their escape to Le Pallet, where Heloise gave birth to Astralabe, Abelard recounts the reactions of Fulbert and his own attempt at negotiating a solution by offering to marry Heloise, on the condition that the marriage would remain secret. Going back to his native land, in order to bring her back to Paris for the wedding, Abelard then reports a long speech of Heloise, in a sequence that amounts to about 8 % of the total length of the *Historia*. In his edition, Jacques Monfrin puts in quotation marks only what is described as the *peroratio* of the speech

---

<sup>38</sup> Following von Moos, "Le silence d'Héloïse et les idéologies modernes," in *Pierre Abélard et Pierre le Vénérable* (Paris: CNRS, 1975), 425-689, at p. 436, Dalarun points to phrases such as *ut iam supra meminimus* (Ep. V) or *ut iam satis alibi meminimus* (Rule), as signs of an editorial intervention by Abelard. Yet, although both phrases could be explained away as internal references within one document (cf. Luscombe, "The Letters of Heloise and Abelard," 38), they are more evocative of a teacher's writing habits than of precise cross-references, as suggests Piero Zerbi, "Abelardo ed Eloisa: il problema di un amore e di una corrispondenza," in *Love and Marriage in the Twelfth Century* W. van Hoecke, A. Welkenhuysen (ed.) (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1981), 130-61, at p. 155. Identifying an editorial intervention within the text of the letters would require to delineate precisely the interpolated passages, a task that has never been achieved successfully.

<sup>39</sup> The suggestion that Heloise edited the collection has been made many times, as recalls von Moos, "Le silence d'Héloïse," 436, n. 19. My conclusion is not the result of wishful thinking, but the most likely outcome of a precise observation of the data.

<sup>40</sup> On this issue, see the careful and subtle studies by Brooke Heidenreich Findley, "Sincere Hypocrisy and the Authorial Person in the Letters of Heloise," *Romance notes*, 45/3 (2005): 281-292 and "Does the Habit Make the Nun? A Case Study of Heloise's influence on Abelard's Ethical Philosophy," *Vivarium* 44 (2006): 248-275.

(lin. 555-557) of which Abelard recognises the prophetic quality. It is legitimate to inquire how much this discourse is reconstructed [115] or invented by Abelard and conversely, to what extent it conveys some of Heloise's original words.

Given the length of the speech and taking the author's declarations at face value, my working hypothesis would be to consider that Abelard incorporated into his own narration extracts of a letter written by Heloise during her stay at Le Pallet, reacting to the marriage plan. For the sake of clarity, I will henceforth use the title *Dehortatio* to refer to the lost document that may have once existed, and contrast it with its rewriting by Abelard within the *Historia*. According to his narrative, the speech would have been delivered to him when they finally met in Brittany. The *peroratio* is indeed presented after a few words referring to Heloise's admission that she failed to convince him, the young woman being described as speaking in tears:

... cum meam deflectere non posset stultitiam nec me sustineret offendere, suspirans vehementer et lacrimans perorationem suam tali fine terminavit: 'Unum', inquit, 'ad ultimum restat ut in perditione duorum, minor non succedat dolor quam precessit amor.'

But when she saw that she could not prevail over my adamant stupidity nor bear the thought of committing an offence against me, she brought her case to a close in tears and sighs: 'There is one thing left for us', she said, 'that in our utter ruin the pain to come will be no less than the love that has gone before.'<sup>41</sup>

Although the *Historia* presents the episode as the report of an actual meeting, the above sentences could nevertheless correspond to the final section of a complex rhetorical construction – Heloise admitting in advance her inability to curb his obstinacy, as well as her willingness not to offend him, before announcing the fatal issue. Setting aside that question, we should now examine in what measure, up to that point, Abelard reproduced within the *Historia calamitatum* a text initially written by Heloise, that he had before his eyes.

Recently, John Marenbon has made a strong argument against such a supposition, remarking that some quotations used in the *Dehortatio* have exact literal parallels in the second book of Abelard's *Theologia Christiana*, expanded in or soon after 1122 from his earlier *Theologia 'Summi boni'*.<sup>42</sup> Exposing at [116] great length the virtues of the ancient philosophers, in order to support the use of their testimonies

<sup>41</sup> Trans. William Levitan, *Abelard and Heloise. The Letters and other writings*, (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2007), 17-18.

<sup>42</sup> John Marenbon, "Abélard: les exemples de philosophes et les philosophes comme exemple," in *Exempla docent. Les exemples des philosophes de l'antiquité à la Renaissance, Actes du colloque international (Neuchâtel, 23-25 octobre 2003)*, ed. Thomas Ricklin, Delphine Carron et Emmanuel Babey (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 119-133.

in Trinitarian discussion, the theologian includes a long section on their chastity and contempt of marriage. That section features three examples borrowed from Jerome's *Contra Jovinianum* that also appear in the *Dehortatio*. Marenbon deems as "incroyable" the possibility that Heloise actually raised these examples and arguments first, in a personal plea against marriage, five years or so before Abelard put them to use in a theoretical context.<sup>43</sup> In reality, what is implied here is a contradiction between Heloise's authorship of the *Dehortatio* and J. Marenbon's understanding of Abelard's changing interests over time; while he was merely using the doctrines of the philosophers before entering religious life, after that turning point, first at Saint-Denis, and even more later on, during his teaching period at the Paraclete, he began to consider them as moral examples of virtue as well.<sup>44</sup> But is it really inconceivable that Abelard could have borrowed quotations that Heloise first provided, in or about 1117? At the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Jerome's writings enjoyed a growing interest, especially in reformist circles.<sup>45</sup> *Contra Jovinianum* was a well circulated text, in a period when the celibacy of priests was a major topic.<sup>46</sup> The likelihood that Abelard knew it and discussed it with Heloise while she was his pupil is far from being null. To treat the matter at the level at which Marenbon himself discussed the authenticity of the Correspondence, one should first look for indications and textual evidence that could help detect what are, if any, the original lines from Heloise, and those possibly written by Abelard. The late Giovanni Orlandi, when asked to define his trade, used to say that [117] "a philologist is someone who reads slowly."<sup>47</sup> At the risk of being dull, this is how I shall proceed.

In matters of "critique d'authenticité," external criteria have priority over internal ones.<sup>48</sup> In the present case, we do possess a strong external testimony in favour of some degree of authenticity of the *Dehortatio*. It comes from Heloise

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129, the rejection is expressed in one brief question: "Si on rejette cette hypothèse, comme incroyable, que faut-il conclure?" Marenbon says he shares in that regard the opinion of Philippe Delhay, "Le dossier anti-matrimonial de l'*Adversus Jovinianum* et son influence sur quelques écrits latins du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Medieval Studies* 13 (1951): 65-86, esp. 73-74: "on ne peut s'empêcher de douter de la véracité du récit. On a vraiment trop l'impression que les paroles rapportées ici ne sont pas d'Héloïse mais de l'auteur de la *Theologia Christiana*". It is remarkable that neither Delhay, nor Marenbon submitted their first impressions to a precise philological inquiry.

<sup>44</sup> Marenbon, "Abélard: les exemples," and *The Philosophy*, 332-339.

<sup>45</sup> This point is well illustrated by Mews, "Un lecteur de Jérôme," who argues that Heloise is in some way the true author of the *Dehortatio*: "Il est sûr qu'elle avait invoqué des arguments contre le mariage." Etienne Gilson, *Héloïse et Abélard* (Paris: Vrin, 1964; 1st ed. 1938), 35-54, took for granted that Héloïse was the author of the discourse, but didn't provide a demonstration.

<sup>46</sup> Delhay, "Le dossier," 71.

<sup>47</sup> I am quoting from a seminar held in common in Milano, on the *Epistolae duorum amantium*, in Feb. 2006.

<sup>48</sup> François Dolbeau, "Critique d'attribution, critique d'authenticité. Réflexions préliminaires," *Filologia mediolatina* 6-7 (1999-2000): 33-62.

herself, in the second letter of the Correspondence that reacts directly to the *Historia*. She acknowledges the fact that Abelard repeated some of her arguments against their fateful marriage – but she complains that he left out the ones that mattered more to her:

*... rationes nonnullas quibus te a coniugio nostro et infaustis thalamis revocare conabar exponere non es dedignatus, sed plerisque tacitis quibus amorem coniugio, libertatem vinculo preferebam.*

‘you did not think it beneath your dignity to set out at least some of the arguments I used when I tried to dissuade you from this marriage of ours and its disastrous bed. You kept silence, though, about most of the reasons why I preferred love over marriage, freedom over a chain.’<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, in the final parts of *Dehortatio*, after having briefly reported her claim that the name of *amica* was dearer to her, and more honest for him (lin. 545-550), Abelard admits that he omits some arguments (*Hec et similia persuadens seu dissuadens*, lin. 550-551). This theme is precisely the one she complains he discarded in his account ; she goes on to present it in a much more powerful way, exposing her notion of disinterested love in the name of which she refused marriage. With all due caution, it can therefore be argued that, in Letter II, Heloise exposes the contents of the second part of her speech, centered on the incompatibility between love and marriage, that Abelard had drastically abbreviated. It would be absurd to claim that she is literally repeating what she had written years before – although, *quoad sensum*, this is most probably the case, as the correct matching between these lines and those of the *Historia* shows. Furthermore, one should take note that she is here adducing another *exemplum* from ancient philosophy, namely the advice given by Aspasia to Xenophon and his wife, reproduced from Cicero’s *De inventione*, about Socrates’ disciple Aeschines, an anecdote that Abelard neither use in *Theologia Christiana* nor elsewhere. This quotation shows Heloise’s ability to illustrate her points with examples taken from the classics; it also [118] suggests that, on the issue of marriage, she could have gathered a dossier of her own. Picking up a rare *dictum* of Aspasia, the female philosopher,<sup>50</sup> only known through Cicero, could be seen as a strong sign of self-assertion as an intellectual in her own right. It is not implausible that the same quotation could have been already present in the original speech. For the time being, one main conclusion has been obtained from Heloise’s reaction to *Historia*. In Abelard’s prose, she recognised the “reasons” with which she had resisted the project of marriage as dishonest for him, and she noted his skirting round the

<sup>49</sup> Ep. II, lin. 154-157, trans. William Levitan, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Nicole Loraux, “Aspasie, l’étrangère, l’intellectuelle,” *Clio. Histoire, femmes et société* 13 (2001): 17-42, reprinted in ead., *La Grèce au féminin* (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 2003), 133-164.

arguments that touched upon her views on love. If we accept that Heloise is the author of Letter II, we are compelled to admit that she had produced, before the marriage, a set of articulated arguments opposing Abelard's decision to marry.<sup>51</sup>

In order to detect whether the first part of this speech corresponds in some way to what we read in *Historia calamitatum*, the next step of this inquiry should consider the general structure of Abelard's report of these arguments. Let us first observe the way in which he switches back and forth from the direct to the indirect mode. Heloise's speech is first reported with sentences introduced by a verb in the third person (lin. 428-442: *Jurabat ... Querebat ... Detestabatur ... Pretendebat ...*); the advice she gave to Abelard are then reported by the latter in the first person (lin. 448-450: *susciperem ... consulerem ... attenderem ...*), apparently transposing in the subjunctive mode verbs that would have been in the imperative in the original speech (*suscipe ... consule ... attende...*). Then, after a first quotation of the *Contra Jovinianum*, the discourse is presented in the first person (lin. 467-545: *omittam ... inquam ...*) before Abelard turns back to putting Heloise's words in the third person when summarising the final section of her discourse. For the most part, this stylistic distinction appears to follow one simple rule: in all the sentences in which the indirect speech is used, Heloise addresses Abelard directly. This device allows him to retain the view-point of the narrator, and to keep the first person for himself. On the other hand, the speech is reported in the direct mode when it comes to general statements about the inconveniences of marriage for the practice of philosophy. Yet this distinction is not so neatly observed throughout. A brief section, at the end of the part reported in the direct mode, does not follow that pattern, since Heloise is here addressing Abelard (lin. 526-536: *quid te ... preferas ... immergas ... non curas ... defende*). It begins with a sentence that deserves further observation: [119]

*Quam sobrie autem atque continenter ipsi vixerint, non est nostrum modo ex exemplis colligere, ne Minervam ipsam videar docere.*

My task is not to give examples of their sobriety and self-restraint, lest I would seem to be teaching Minerva herself.<sup>52</sup>

From a strictly linguistic point of view, it would have been awkward to render this sentence in the indirect mode, since Abelard is here compared to a personification of philosophy. For the very same reason, it sounds unlikely that he would have chosen himself such a turn of phrase, putting to use a Greek proverb transmitted by Cicero, widely known in the period.<sup>53</sup> This protestation of humility towards a more learned

<sup>51</sup> The same point is made by Mews, "Un lecteur de Jérôme," 436.

<sup>52</sup> HC, lin. 526-528. Levitan, 17, omits the use of the first person in that sentence. I am thus adjusting his translation to the literal wording.

<sup>53</sup> The Greek proverb, transmitted by Cicero's *Academici Libri*, is used by many contemporary writers, including Ivo of Chartres or Peter the Venerable.

master is typical of Heloise, and the metaphor she uses fits in with her literary tastes, as does the presence of a rhyming feature (*colligere ... docere*). The connotations of that sentence are noteworthy: she refrains from adding further examples to the one she just gave, on account that he knows what philosophy is all about much better than she does. There are thus strong reasons to consider this sentence as authentically coined by Heloise. That would imply, in turn, that at least some of the examples given above were also hers. By implication, the following lines, told in the direct mode, would represent the strict continuation of the same speech, until the point where Abelard breaks off and turns to the indirect mode.<sup>54</sup>

In order to detect who borrowed quotations from whom, it is necessary to compare the *Dehortatio* with the portion of *Theologia Christiana* dealing with ancient examples of chastity. The theological treatise follows a fairly simple route. It first states a general point (§ 87): the continence of ancient philosophers demonstrates that they were fulfilling a Christian command ahead of its time. The following paragraphs (88-93) provide the biblical foundations of that command, ending with the virginity of Mary, as well as that of the Sibylla. Then, Abelard goes on with a litany of *exempla*, either of chaste or virginal wise men, or regarding their detestation of marriage and sex (94-103), mostly borrowed from Jerome's *Contra Jovinianum*, with Valerius Maximus as an auxiliary source. Interestingly, the final paragraphs are devoted to the chastity of female figures (104-108). [120]

For its part, the *Dehortatio* – leaving aside the first statements related to the personal situation of Abelard and Heloise – follows a much more complex structure. It begins with the famous Pauline advice to refrain from marriage (I Cor 7:27-32), before turning to the ancient examples, starting with the case of Theophrastus that Jerome presents as shameful for the Christians, followed by Cicero's refusal to remarry (both cases, from *Contra Jovinianum*, also present in *Theologia Christiana*). The following paragraph offers a vivid account of the domestic complications that a marriage would entail; it would not only distract from philosophy, but also require the wealth to sustain a household. These remarks prompt a reminder that the philosophical life implies a renunciation of all pleasures and worldly worries, illustrated by a quote from Seneca. The speech then explains that sects of preeminent virtuous men existed among the Jews, the Christians and the Gentiles. This last group is illustrated by a quote from Augustine, referring to Pythagoras as the founder of philosophy. Then comes the disclaimer of humility that we already mentioned, and which serves as a transition towards the culmination of the speech: in view of all these examples, how much more should Abelard, a cleric and a canon, abstain from any impudence. As a coda, emphasizing the sordidness of domestic life, comes the *exemplum* of Socrates receiving on his head Xanthippe's pot of dirty water (also used in *Theologia Christiana*). This elaborated discourse is much more

<sup>54</sup> The rubrics in Jean de Meun's translation are also sensitive to this aspect, cf. *La vie et les epistres*, 16: "Or conclut son propoz la saige Heloys en eschivant le mariaige," at HC, lin. 528.



than a simple criticism of marriage, since it also includes a general praise of philosophical life. Moreover, it is rhetorically built in order to point to Abelard's personal situation.

This difference in intention shows in the way in which both works handle the same examples. The *Theologia Christiana* provides quotations from *Contra Iovinianum* in a longer form. There, for instance, Abelard dwells at length on Theophrastus, whereas the *Dehortatio* only repeats the concluding words given by Jerome. Likewise, the reference to Socrates and Xanthippe leaves out the preceding statement about a second wife. On the other hand, the remark about Cicero continues with a comment not found in the *Theologia*. There is no notable textual discrepancy, but it should be expected that Abelard and Heloise were using closely related versions of Jerome. All in all, the slightly different purpose to which the same quotations are put to use, and the very distinct construction of both texts under scrutiny do not offer sufficient indication that Abelard forged the "theoretical" section of the *Dehortatio*, in order to convey ideas and ideals he developed after his conversion.

If the insertion of such examples was a sign of Abelard's authorship, it should be expected that he also provided the two other quotations present in the *Dehortatio*. The reference to Pythagoras as a founder of philosophy, taken from Augustine, indeed appears in *Theologia Christiana*, but in a [121] different section, since it has no relevance to the question of chastity.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, Seneca's advice to Lucilius, that he should devote all of his time to philosophy, has no counterpart in any other of Abelard's texts. Quite revealingly, references to authentic writings of Seneca are scarce in works composed before the *Historia calamitatum*.<sup>56</sup> The most important one appear in the *Collationes*, in an unusual positive reference to Epicurus.<sup>57</sup> His only other quotations from the *Epistolae ad Lucilium* feature in the *Rule* for the Paraclete and in the Ep. XII addressed to a regular canon.<sup>58</sup> In these

<sup>55</sup> *Theologia Christiana*, II, 38, ed. E. Buytaert, C. J. Mews (CCCM, 12), 147-148.

<sup>56</sup> Seneca is absent from *Theologia Christiana*. The *Sic et non*, (q. 143, sent. 5) ed. Blanche Boyer, Richard McKeon (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 494, quotes the apocryphal *Proverbia Senecae*, as do various sermons. Only the final version of the *Theologia*, refers to an authentic text, *De beneficiis*, 5, 1, quoted in *Theologia scholarium* (II, 123) 469, but the apocryphal letter to Saint Paul is quoted more often, *Commentaria in epistulam ad Romanos*, ed. E. Buytaert (CCCM, 11), 50 and *Theologia scholarium*, 403.

<sup>57</sup> Petrus Abaelardus, *Collationes*, ed. G. Orlandi, transl. J. Marenbon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 102: *Seneca, ille maximus morum aedificator et continentissimae*. The editors suggests that the *Collationes* have been written at Saint-Gildas in the years 1127-32, but there is no compelling evidence that it should be earlier than 1135.

<sup>58</sup> *Rule*, ed. Hicks, p. 510: *Seneca, maximus ille paupertatis et continentiae sectator, et summus inter universos philosophos morum aedificator*; Epist. XII (PL 178, 350B): *Hanc et Seneca maximus ille morum philosophus sententiam tenens, et sic philosophari Lucilio suo consulens*. Edmé Renno Smits, *Peter Abelard. Letters IX -XIV. An Edition with an Introduction* (Groningen: Bouma, 1983), 155-172, suggest that the letter was written during the period at Saint-Gildas, after the transfer of Heloise to the Paraclete, in

references, as in others, Seneca is described as the greatest moral philosopher<sup>59</sup>, a qualification also present in the *Dehortatio*. On the other hand, the *Epistolae ad Lucilium* were a favourite book of Heloise. She makes repeated use of it: in Letter II, to describe the pleasure of receiving letters from friends, briefly in Letter IV, and then again in the *Problemata*.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the close analysis of quotations from the classics ends with a suggestion that reverses Marenbon's views: the *Dehortatio* is quoting from a book well-known and dear to Heloise, and neglected, if not ignored, by Abelard until a late period. [122]

None of the arguments reviewed so far provide any reason to think that Abelard forged, totally or in part, the speech he puts in Heloise's mouth in the *Historia*. A stylistic anomaly can offer a final proof that the whole discourse derives from a letter she had initially written. A careful reading does indeed suggest the presence of an interpolation in the *Dehortatio*, which exactly covers the lines 496-509 in Monfrin's edition. The Seneca quotation is followed by an observation that, what the true monks are now achieving for God's love, the philosophers were accomplishing for the sake of philosophy (line 493-495); the continuation of this remark is to be found at line 510, with the explanation – to which Pierre Hadot would fully subscribe – that philosophy for them was not so much a science as a religious way of life. The intermediary lines offer a didactic reminder of the fact that, among every people, there has always been a group of men achieving the highest standards of virtue: among the Jews, the Nazarenes and other sects, among the Christians, the monks, and among the Gentiles, "as has been said," the philosophers. This *ut dictum est*, meant to close the aside, allows the text to reverse to the original speech. Such a construction suggests that we are facing an interpolation, breaking the structure of a sentence that would otherwise be nicely balanced, comparing monks and philosophers. The insertion, within an initial binary construction, of a third term representing the Jewish heritage, can be seen as typical of Abelard's willingness to put these three branches of humanity on an equal footing. This tendency is already evident in *Theologia Christiana*.<sup>61</sup> It is even more so the case in the *Collationes*, written shortly before the *Historia*, that stages a debate between three characters representing these respective groups.<sup>62</sup> This insertion offers a clear example of Abelard editing an earlier text, in order to bring it in line with views he developed in the meantime. The discrepancy between the two layers of text can also

---

1128-32.

<sup>59</sup> On top of the previous quotations, see Sermo XXXIII (PL 178, 593A): *Seneca quippe maximus morum aedificator beneficium*.

<sup>60</sup> Ep. II, lin. 50-58; Ep. IV, lin. 30-32. See also *Problemata*: *Talis animi compassio naturalis, sive rationalis sit, sive minime, misericordia proprie dicitur, teste Seneca*. On Seneca's slow rise in popularity in the XIIth century, cf. Klaus-Dieter Nothdurft, *Studien zum Einfluss Senecas auf die Philosophie und Theologie des zwölften Jahrhunderts* (Leiden: Brill, 1963).

<sup>61</sup> *Theologia Christiana* I, 136, p. 130.

<sup>62</sup> Petrus Abaelardus, *Collationes*.

be argued for at a stylistic level. The added passage is much less sophisticated than the text into which it is inserted. It is loaded with repetitions that were carefully avoided in the preceding sentence, the opposition *apud nos / in gentibus* being transformed in the series *apud judeos / apud nos / apud gentiles*. The order of words follows a very plain pattern, while the preceding and the following sentences offer more complex constructions. Similar observations could be made on the basis of a more systematic comparison between the *Dehortatio* and the remaining parts of the *Historia* if we were in need of more indications for Heloise's authorship.<sup>63</sup> [123]

Original speech	Interpolation
<i>Quod nunc igitur apud nos amore Dei sustinent qui vere monachi dicuntur, hoc desiderio philosophie qui nobiles in gentibus extiterunt ;</i>	
	<i>In omni namque populo, tam gentili scilicet quam iudaico sive christiano, aliqui semper extiterunt fide seu morum honestate ceteris preminentes, et se a populo aliqua continentie vel abstinentie singularitate segregantes. Apud Judeos quidem antiquitus Nazarei, qui se Domino secundum legem consecrabant, sive filii prophetarum Helye vel Helysei sectatores, quos beato attestante Jheronimo monachos legimus in veteri Testamento ; novissime autem tres ille philosophie secte, quas Iosephus in libro Antiquitatum distinguens, alios Phariseos, alios Saduceos, alios nominat Esseos. Apud nos vero monachi, qui videlicet aut communem apostolorum vitam, aut priorem illam et solitariam Johannis imittantur. Apud gentiles autem, ut dictum est, philosophi.</i>
<i>non enim sapientie vel philosophie nomen tam ad scientie perceptionem quam ad vite religionem referebant, sicut ab ipso etiam huius nominis ortu didicimus, ipsorum quoque testimonio sanctorum. ...</i>	

<sup>63</sup> To take an easy example, the rhyming prose is more abundant in the *Dehortatio* than in any other parts of the *Historia*. See for instance: *per omnia probrosum esset atque honerosum; librorum sive tabularum ad colos, stilorum sive calamorum ad fusos; maxime contempnentes, nec tam relinquentes seculum quam fugientes; ad scientie perceptionem quam ad vite religionem*, etc.

[124] We are now in a position to conclude this inquiry. As he claims is the case, and as her external and later testimony confirms, the whole of the *Dehortatio* should be considered as initially composed by Heloise, to the exclusion of the brief interpolated passage. While writing the *Historia*, Abelard had a copy of the original letter before his eyes and he reproduced it faithfully, partly phrasing it in the indirect mode. He nevertheless committed a major editorial intervention by suppressing most of the second part of Heloise's speech, the one that mattered more to her.

The exact place where Abelard stayed while he wrote the *Historia* is still unclear. However, our findings enable us to surmise that the original version of the *Dehortatio* was part of the minimal library he carried around with him at the time. It is likely that he already had it at hand while working on the second version of the *Theologia* and on the *Sic et non*, in a period when Abelard was running his idyllic rural school at the Paraclete in the early 1120s. This episode is illustrated in the *Historia* with another long quotation of Jerome's *Contra Jovinianum*. Assuming that Abelard picked up quotes from the same work while forging Heloise's speech against marriage years later, John Marenbon finds

une intention d'ironie dans l'emploi de ces textes où l'autorité de Jérôme et l'exemple des philosophes anciens exaltent l'excellence d'une vie monastique dans une oeuvre écrite au moment même où Abelard abandonnait le monastère dont il était l'abbé.<sup>64</sup>

Now that it becomes clear that Heloise has been the first one to refer to these exemples, we can also detect irony in these repeated quotations, but with different implications. The initial Paraclete was the realization of the ideal philosophical life described by Heloise in the *Dehortatio*; what marital life would have prevented, according to her, was rendered possible by the failure of their actual marriage. Acknowledging Heloise's correct predictions, Abelard paid silent tribute to her by developing her views on the incompatibility of marriage and philosophy in the *Theologia Christiana*, before quoting at length her own words in the *Historia calamitatum*.

From the initial sentence of the chapter, introducing the *Dehortatio*, one may wonder whether Heloise's arguments were presented before or after the couple's return to Paris. Yet the narration of the events immediately following [125] the reported speech rules out any doubt. The letter against marriage was written while Heloise was staying at Le Pallet, with Abelard's sister Denise, after the birth of Astralabe. The likelihood that she found there the texts quoted in *Dehortatio* or that she had carried her whole personal library from Paris, when travelling disguised as a nun, is rather weak. Abelard's father was a learned man, but he had entered

---

<sup>64</sup> John Marenbon, "Abélard: les exemples de philosophes," 133.

religious life earlier on, probably taking his books with him. Of course, she may have received later on the books she needed, during her long stay in Brittany, or have consulted them elsewhere, but it could also be the case that Heloise constructed her arguments and gathered her quotations from memory. This hypothesis would suggest that she had reflected earlier, in Paris, on the topic of marriage; she may have both made her mind in advance on that issue, and picked up some relevant quotations to that effect in her favourite authors. It is more doubtful that the couple had the occasion to discuss the topic before Heloise's pregnancy rendered a decision urgent. We do not have any positive evidence as to whether Abelard thought it fit for a philosopher to marry before he was compelled to do so by Fulbert, and there is no point in wondering what his initial views may have been.

At any rate, the ascription of a speech against marriage to Heloise throws some rare and precious light on the discussions that went on between the lovers before their religious conversion, with regard both to their contents, and to their highly literate form. Years ago, Peter Dronke wrote that we should consider the couple's relations as "a literary and intellectual partnership that was not wholly one-sided";<sup>65</sup> Constant Mews and John Marenbon arrived, through different means, at the same conclusion that Heloise exerted an important influence on the formation of Abelard's views, especially in ethics.<sup>66</sup> This analysis of the speech against marriage, considered as an independent text written by Heloise that Abelard kept in his personal library, lends even more weight to that perspective.

## 2. The ascription of the *Epistolae duorum amantium*

The following step of this textual journey will lead us to another hotly debated issue. When Ewald Könsgen edited in 1974 long excerpts from an anonymous love epistolary found in a Clairvaux manuscript, his conclusion was that the couple involved bore strong similarities to Heloise and Abelard, but [126] he resisted the identification.<sup>67</sup> That step was taken 25 years later by Constant Mews, within a more global approach to literary cross-gender dialogue in the 12th century.<sup>68</sup> This

<sup>65</sup> Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (1984), 112.

<sup>66</sup> Mews, *Abelard and Héloïse*; Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*. See also Findley, "Does the Habit Make the Nun?"

<sup>67</sup> Ewald Könsgen, *Epistolae duorum amantium : Briefe Abaelards und Heloises ?* (Leiden, Brill:1974). The subtitle was added by the publisher, not the critical editor, as he makes clear in "Der Nordstern scheint auf dem Pol. Baudolinos Liebesbriefe an Beatrix, die Kaiserin – oder *Ex epistolis duorum amantium*," in *Nova de veteribus. Mittel- und neulateinische Studien für Paul Gerhard Schmidt*, A. Bihrer, E. Stein ed. (München-Leipzig: Saur, 2004) 1113-21. The letters will be referred to by their number, preceded by letter M for the woman (*Mulier*), V for the man (*Vir*).

<sup>68</sup> Mews, *The Lost Love Letters*. The same author developed his thesis with more arguments, most notably in *Abelard and Heloise*, "Cicero and the Boundaries of Friendship in the Twelfth Century," *Viator* 38-2 (2007): 369–84, and in a new chapter added to 2008 edition of the *Lost Love Letters*.

proposal has been received in various ways: some scholars not only accepted the ascription,<sup>69</sup> but also brought forward new arguments in its favour,<sup>70</sup> while others have expressed their scepticism on various grounds, arguing that is impossible to decide and that the outcome doesn't matter much,<sup>71</sup> or just stating their disbelief.<sup>72</sup> The number of critics mounting an argued case against C. Mews' thesis is rather limited, and no one has come close [127] to refuting his claims<sup>73</sup> They will be discussed in due course, along with some other important contributions that throw new lights on some aspects of the letters without offering decisive arguments in favour or against the ascription.<sup>74</sup>

As always with textual studies, the codicological examination has to come first. In the present case, the situation is fairly simple. The epistolary is only known through extracts of 116 letters and poems copied in 1471 by the librarian of Clairvaux, Jean de Woëvre (Johannes de Vepria). While preparing the new catalogue

<sup>69</sup> Barbara Newman, review of Mews, *The Lost Love Letters*, *The Medieval Review*, 2000; Damien Boquet, review of Mews, *La voix d'Héloïse* (French translation of *The Lost Love Letters*), *Médiévales* 51 (2006): 185-188; Elisabeth Lalou, "Quid sit amor?," *Critique* 716-717 (2007): 80-90, just to quote some favorable reviews containing interesting discussions.

<sup>70</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, "The *Epistolae duorum amantium* and the Ascription to Heloise and Abelard," and Id., "A Reply to Giles Constable," *Voices in Dialogue: New Problems in Reading Women's Cultural History*, ed. L. Olson, K. Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame: 2005), 125-66 and 179-86; John O. Ward and Neville Chiavaroli, "The Young Heloise and Latin Rhetoric: Some Preliminary Comments on the 'Lost' Love Letters and Their Significance," *Listening to Heloise*, 53-119; Sylvain Piron, "Enquête sur un texte," in *Lettres des deux amants, attribuées à Héloïse et Abélard* (Paris, Gallimard: 2005), 175-218.

<sup>71</sup> Guy Lobrichon, *Héloïse, l'amour et le savoir* (Paris, Gallimard: 2005); Maria Teresa Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri, in *Lettere di due amanti. Attribute a Eloisa e Abelardo*, trans. Claudio Fiocchi, (Archinto: Collano, 2006). A recent German translation simply ignores the debate: *Und wärest du doch bei mir. Ex epistolis duorum amantium. Eine mittelalterliche Liebesgeschichte in Briefen*, trans. Eva Cescutti, Philipp Steger (Zurich: Manesse Verlag, 2005).

<sup>72</sup> John Marenbon, "The Rediscovery of Peter Abelard's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44- 3 (2006): 331-351, see p. 348-49.

<sup>73</sup> Giles Constable, "Sur l'attribution des *Epistolae duorum amantium*," *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres: comptes rendus des séances* (2001): 1679-93 (the original english version appeared later in *Voices in Dialogue*); Peter Dronke, review of *Listening to Heloise*, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 8 (2002): 134-139; Peter von Moos, "Die *Epistolae duorum amantium* und die 'säkulare Religion der Liebe': Methodenkritische Vorüberlegungen zu einem einmaligen Werk mittellateinischer Briefliteratur," *Studi Medievali* 44 (2003): 1-115; Jan Ziolkowski, "Lost and Not Yet Found: Heloise, Abelard, and the *Epistolae duorum amantium*," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 14 (2004): 171-202..

<sup>74</sup> Dronke and Orlandi, "New Works by Abelard and Heloise," *Filologia mediolatina* 12 (2005) 123-177 (Only Orlandi's part of the article deal with the EDA); Francesco Stella, "Analisi informatiche del lessico e individuazione degli autori nelle *Epistolae duorum amantium* (XII secolo)," in R. Wright (ed.), *Latin vulgaire – latin tardif VIII. Actes du VIIIe colloque international sur le latin vulgaire et tardif*, Oxford, 6-9 septembre 2006, (Hildesheim/Zürich/New York, Olms-Weidmann: 2008); Id., "Epistolae duorum amantium: nuovi paralleli testuali", forthcoming in *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 2008. Both Orlandi and Stella express their scepticism at the ascription, but the results presented in their articles do not rule out such a possibility.

of the abbey's library, the young Cistercian humanist gathered in a personal volume examples of epistolary art, either rare or famous, all found as he browsed through one of the largest monastic book repository of Western Europe.<sup>75</sup> The excerpting of the *EDA* was conducted in that context, for rhetorical purposes; it was executed in a careful, philological mode, with oblique strokes signalling all omissions in the copy. We are therefore in a position to realise that many letters are truncated at places where one would expect to find the narration of particulars, regarding events and actions that the surviving lines refer to in vague and general terms. For instance, in V 12, the scribe kept a formula expressing the man's contentment at the result of a specific action (*certe fecisse iuvat*), without noting the details of that action. In V 31, a sentence in which the man tells how the thought of his friend helped him in certain difficult circumstances is surrounded by two signs of omissions, indicating that the scribe didn't care to report what these [128] circumstances were. The same type of excerption is repeated throughout, to the point of rendering hardly understandable the meaning of some letters that probably had a more narrative nature, such as M 107 and M 112. Out of what is left of these two letters, we can only guess that the woman had important things to say about her personal situation. In the absence of such concrete details, the task of determining the location and datation of the letters, and to identify the characters involved is highly problematic.

An analysis of the Clairvaux manuscript allows us to make a few deductions. The title, *ex epistolis duorum amantium*, was inserted by the librarian, rather than copied from a model, as well the marginal signs M and V, indicating alternatively letters written by the woman or the man. This suggests that the apograph volume was deprived of all editorial apparatus, such as a title and rubrics separating the letters.<sup>76</sup> Some long letters are drastically abbreviated, but apparently only one was totally left out.<sup>77</sup> There is no reason to presume that the original collection contained more letters. As it stands, this is already by far the longest medieval love letter collection. The original manuscript was surely found within the library, as for the other sets of letters excerpted in the same codex. Since the apograph does not appear in the 1471-72 inventory, the librarian presumably kept it for himself. He may have later lent it to some friend who never returned the original manuscript. As for the origin of this volume, although this cannot be taken as a proof, it is worth noting that monks of Clairvaux were acting as confessors at the Paraclete, a situation that could explain how a manuscript initially in the latter abbey could have been transferred to the Cistercian one.

---

<sup>75</sup> André Vernet, Jean-François Genest, *La bibliothèque de l'abbaye de Clairvaux du XII<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. I Catalogues et répertoires* (Paris: CNRS, 1979).

<sup>76</sup> Piron, "Enquête," 179-81 for a detailed demonstration.

<sup>77</sup> The missing item would be a letter from the man, between M 112 and M 112a, cf. Piron, "Enquête," 182-83.

Is this a collection of authentic letters exchanged between a couple of lovers, as the title inserted by Clairvaux's librarian suggests? E. Könsgen concluded that such was the case, by stressing the contrasts between two distinct literary personalities. From one letter to another, the man frequently repeats the same turns of phrase, a stylistic trait employed by the woman only twice. On a more global scale, their vocabularies show distinct features, a fact that the statistical approach by F. Stella confirms.<sup>78</sup> G. Orlandi's examination of the *cursus* reveals a clear discrepancy between the styles of the two writers.<sup>79</sup> On another level, C. Mews has made clear a sharp contrast in their philosophical [129] conceptions of love,<sup>80</sup> and Stephen Jaeger has stressed important differences in their characters.<sup>81</sup> Accepting that they are extracts of authentic love letters would therefore pose no problem, if it were not for some objections raised by Peter von Moos, who claims that the collection is some sort of pastiche written by one or more writers, organised according to a thematic order, and produced at a much later date (late 13th or early 14th century).<sup>82</sup> None of these views stand the test of criticism. The thematic ordering is more than elusive, and amounts in the end to nothing more than noting the changing moods and themes appearing in letters exchanged over more than one year, while postulating that items not fitting with this succession of themes would be later additions inserted randomly. In the absence of a clear and meaningful underlying thematic structure, there is no ground for challenging the apparent chronological order of the collection. The only exception is provided by the final item (V 113), which might be an earlier poem, added at the end of the collection after the correspondence had ceased.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Stella, "Analisi informatiche del lessico", 569: "quello che possiamo confermare in maniera ora direi definitiva è che si tratta di sue scriventi diversi, e quindi che si tratta effettivamente di un epistolario, probabilmente reale".

<sup>79</sup> Dronke and Orlandi, "New Works", 146-65.

<sup>80</sup> On top of the references quoted above, see also Mews, "Philosophical Themes in the *Epistolae Duorum Amantium*: The First Letters of Heloise and Abelard," *Listening to Heloise*, p. 35-52.

<sup>81</sup> Jaeger, "The *Epistolae duorum amantium*."

<sup>82</sup> von Moos, "Die *Epistolae duorum amantium*," and the objections raised in Piron, "Enquête," 213-17.

<sup>83</sup> Piron, "Reconstitution de l'intrigue", *Lettres des deux amants*, 25-26. Due to the lacunary status of most letters and to the contingent process of letter writing that rarely produces a regular alternation of messages, it is not possible to demonstrate that all letters strictly respond to one another. Yet some threads can be identified beyond any doubt on account of their contents, such as 13-14, 18-19, 21-27, 58-64, 71-72, 74-76, 84-86. V 87 alludes to a rift that helps making sense of the exchange 69-76 and the subsequent reconciliation. A coherence can be found in 106, 108 and 109, as the expression of a forced separation, then a reunion of the couple. Other letters are playing with recurring phrases and images, such as 88-89 or 91-93. Although they lack obvious traces that would relate them to the preceding or following letters, all those that appear between the more organised moments of the correspondence fit in within the overall chronological ordering, on account of expression, mood, state of the relationship and degrees of intimacy, to the exception of V 113.



The hypothesis of an artful imitation of real letters is also flawed. As Stephen Jaeger has shown, the letters contain many private references, only intelligible to the recipient, that rule out any other situation than that of the continuous recording of a private exchange.<sup>84</sup> The lack of any understandable motivation for such a pastiche is problematic. It is hard to conceive that a talented writer would have taken enormous pains to respect the stylistic [130] characteristics of the two *personae* of a fictive dialogue, over more than one hundred letter, without a specific purpose. On a formal level, the collection can hardly have a didactical aim, since the letters often follow unusual patterns and rarely stick to the recommended standards of *ars dictaminis*. Neither do their contents provide a satisfactory explanation, since the collection conveys no clear moral message and lacks an overall unambiguous conclusion. The two cases of a fictive epistolary mentioned by P. von Moos, Buoncompagno da Signa's *Rota veneris* and Guillaume de Machaut's *Voir dit*, fit in respectively with these categories; the *EDA* do not. As for a hypothesis that has no known parallel in medieval literature, the notion of gratuitous "exercices de style" sounds at odds with both the repetitiveness of many letters, and the gradual unfolding of a personal story. As for the late date, the author implicitly recanted his views in a recent paper.<sup>85</sup>

All serious objections brushed aside, one should accept that the Clairvaux manuscript transmits remains of an authentic correspondence exchanged between a woman and a man over more than one year. Some clues indicate that the exchange was initially conducted on wax tablets (V 14, 37), a common tool used by students for taking notes or doing exercises, that could provide adequate secrecy for communication between lovers.<sup>86</sup> As the exchange went on, one of the partners copied onto parchment the messages that he or she sent as well as those received. Evidence points that it is the woman who collected the letters.<sup>87</sup> Their relation is clearly that of a female student and her teacher, mutually admiring their philosophical excellence (M 23, 49; V 50). While only a few of his letters reveal his abilities as a logician, she displays throughout the exchange a rich biblical and classical culture. The man is a renowned teacher, engaged in controversies, as is

---

<sup>84</sup> Jaeger, "The *Epistolae duorum amantium*."

<sup>85</sup> von Moos, "Kurzes Nachwort zu einer langen Geschichte mit missbrauchten Liebesbriefen: *Epistolae duorum amantium*", in., *Schrift und Liebe in der Kultur des Mittelalters*, G. Melville ed (Münster, Lit Verlag: 2005), 291: « So scheint mir die genauere Datierung dieser Briefe nach etwa 1180 und vor 1471 heute noch weitgehend offen, auch wenn ich Argumente für verschiedene Zeiten versuchsweise zur Diskussion gestellt habe. » The admission of such a wide range of possible dates only means that the author gives up his earlier views.

<sup>86</sup> Lalou, "Quid sit amor?"

<sup>87</sup> Piron, "Enquête," 184-185. Such a way of collecting letters, combined with the lack of any sign of editorial apparatus, implies that the chronological ordering is the most likely pattern of organisation of this collection

implied by an hymn that celebrates his triumph over a rival (M 66).<sup>88</sup> What is unusual, as compared to other cases of cross-gender medieval dialogue, is that both were apparently [131] living outside the cloister. A striking feature of the woman's lexicon is the absence of all notions typical of monastic morality, from sin to penance.<sup>89</sup> Both of noble origin, they were living in the same town (V 113), the man going away for some periods (M 45). The way in which she speaks of how he prevailed over the French could mean that he was active in *Francia*, while not being a native (M 49). Both were apparently aware of their local fame, and were concerned by rumours over their relationship. It is difficult to assess their precise age, since both speak about their youth in a loose way (M 1, 5, 21, 53, 73, V 26, 50).

The age of the woman has fuelled a minor discussion that hinges on the way one understands the expression *Non michi vetus es* (V 75). P. Dronke argues for an absolute meaning of the adjective *vetus* ('you are not old for me'); being used in a rather ungallant way, it would imply that the woman was in fact not that young.<sup>90</sup> Yet the following proposition, *quotidie cordi meo innovaris* ('every day you are renewed in my heart'), strongly suggests that the verbal group should be understood in a progressive sense ('you are not growing old'). Admittedly, it would have been more correct to write *non veterascis* but *non vetus es* may well have been preferred for euphonic reasons. In another letter (V 96), the man returns to the same image of a daily renovation of love, as opposed to the ageing of passing time.<sup>91</sup> The debated formula should be understood in the light of this latter instance. This would then allow us to conclude the examination of the couple's profile by describing them as a famous philosopher and his brilliant young student, active in Paris, Chartres or a neighbouring city. In other words, and that was already E. Könsgen's conclusion, the couple was more or less in the same situation and place as Abelard and Heloise at the beginning of their affair.

Before deciding whether it makes any sense at all to discuss the likelihood of the ascription of the *EDA* to the famous pair, it is necessary to verify whether the date also fit. The sources put to use in the letters offer the [132] only certain indications. On the one hand, the absence of any knowledge of Aristotle's *Ethics*, on the part of people who claim to be the best moral philosophers of their days and

<sup>88</sup> On that particular point, see the important comments by Jaeger, "The *Epistolae*."

<sup>89</sup> Among the words used in Heloise's letters and absent from the *Mulier* are those related to sexuality, *carnalis*, *casta*, *culpa*, *fornicatio*, *fornicator*, *luxuria*, *prostituere*, *turpitudine*, *virgine* and more generally to moral discipline: *abstinentia*, *continentia*, *confessio*, *contritio*, *incontinentia*, *penitentia*, etc.

<sup>90</sup> P. Dronke, review of *Listening to Heloise*, 138. Mews and Chiavaroli, *Lost love letters*, 281, translate: "you are not outmoded to me."

<sup>91</sup> See V 96 : *Mea verissime in te dilectio de die in diem proficit, nec temporum vetustate minuitur, immo sicut sol quotidie novus est, ita tua suavissima dulcedo novitate sua florescit, germinat, et vivide crescit.* (trad. Chiavaroli and Mews, 301: "Most truly my love for you grows from day to day and is not diminished by the passing of time. On the contrary, just as the sun is new every day, so your most delightful sweetness flourishes in its newness, sprouts and grows vigorously").

debate at length on the theory of friendship, renders a date later than 1250 highly questionable, once the full translation by Robert Grosseteste was available and commented in schools. It is even implausible to posit a date after the first and partial translation, known as the *Ethica vetus*, a text already quoted in Bologna around 1184, and circulated slightly later in Paris.<sup>92</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, the letters of both partners betray a strong literary dependence on the late 11th-century Loire Valley poets, such as Baudri of Bourgueil and Marbod of Rennes. F. Stella recently added many borrowings or reminiscences to those initially noted by E. Könsgen.<sup>93</sup> Such indications leave us with a rather wide margin, suggesting that the letters were exchanged at some point during the twelfth century.

In order to reach a more precise result, a revealing test consists of tracing the presence of rare words whose creation can be distinctively assigned to a precise cultural moment. The woman delights in such rarities, to the point of coining new words herself. Terms such as *inepotabilis*, *innexibilis*, *dehortamen* or *vinculamen*, not found in any other latin writer, do not provide any clear indication of date, since adjectives in *-bilis* or substantives in *-amen* are too easily created. All other unusual words in the woman's letters feature in writers belonging to the same generation as Heloise, like Hildegard of Bingen or Bernard of Clairvaux, or to earlier ones, such as Guibert of Nogent or Robert of Liège (Rupert von Deutz).<sup>94</sup> Following a similar investigation, F. Stella remarks that Abelard is the writer sharing the most numerous [133] rare turns of phrases with the woman.<sup>95</sup> What is significative for the purpose of dating the collection is that no unusual word in the *EDA* makes its first appearance in medieval latin later than the early 12th century. Apart from *scibilitas*, first used by Abelard, the very rare *immarcidus* first appears in an imperial diploma of 1028. On the other hand, the woman is using words that go out of favour after the beginning

<sup>92</sup> The *Ethica vetus* was already quoted in Bologna ca. 1184, cf. Hermann Kantorowicz, "The Poetical Sermon of a Mediaeval Jurist: Placentinus and His *Sermo de Legibus*," *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 2 (1938): 22-41, esp. p. 41 for the quote. The earliest surviving manuscripts are slightly later, and the text was not used in Paris before the early XIIIth Cent, cf. *Ethica Nicomachea. Translatio Antiquissima libr. II-III sive 'Ethica Vetus'*, ed. R.A. Gauthier, (Leiden-Bruxelles: Brill-Desclée De Brouwer, 1972). Even if this partial translation does not contain the chapters of friendship, it brought about a rapid change in the vocabulary of virtues that is not reflected in the *EDA*.

<sup>93</sup> Stella, "Epistolae duorum amantium: nuovi paralleli testuali".

<sup>94</sup> Among unfrequent words, Guibert uses *cervicositas*, *dehortare* (the closest one can find to *dehortamen*), *equipolenter*, *exsaciare*, *indefectivus*, *indesainens*, *precordialis*, *scienciola*, *superciliositas*. Hildegard has *viriditas* (71 times!), *calibs*, *flabrum*, *magisterialis*; Bernard: *cervicositas*, *immarcidus*, *litteratorius*; Rupert: *dulcifluum*, *equipolenter*, *magisterialis*, *superedificare*. These results are based on an interrogation of Cetedoc Index of Latin Forms, Patrologia Latina Database and of the files of the Nouveau Du Cange in Paris.

<sup>95</sup> Stella, "Epistolae duorum amantium: nuovi paralleli testuali". To these, I can add that that Abelard uses the adjective *litteratorius* (in the form *litteratorie scientie*, precisely referring to Heloise, in *Historia*, ed. Hicks, p. 56), while *aequipollenter* is found in Berengarius, *Apologeticus pro Petro Abaelardo*, PL 178, 1868A.

of the twelfth century, such as *dulcifluus*,<sup>96</sup> that was not infrequent in Carolingian times, or the much rarer *dulcifer*,<sup>97</sup> both witnesses to the language of sweetness so important in the high Middle Ages emotional discourse that Barbara Rosenwein recently discussed.<sup>98</sup> This test provides negative evidence, demonstrating that the vocabulary used by the two lovers is consistent with the lexicon available towards the beginning of the 12th century.

Focussing on the poetical parts of the collection and submitting them to a systematic comparison with the corpus of medieval latin poetry, F. Stella found both a confirmation of previously identified trends and some new tendencies: strong inspiration from the Loire valley poets, similarities with French or Paris-trained English XIIIth Cent. poets, and a sharp decline in parallels after the end of the century. His analysis also bring forth a possible objection to the ascription theory. A series of poets active in the second part of the twelfth century are sharing groups of two or three words with the poems of the *EDA*.<sup>99</sup> Yet one should be cautious before deciding how significative such findings are. In most cases, these authors are only alluding to earlier poems that are also used in the *EDA*. Other parallels of two or three words, such as *mens mea sentit* ("my mind feels") can be purely accidental. In my view, only [134] one case can seriously be considered as an actual borrowing or a source of the *EDA*. In his *Entheticus de dogmate philosophorum*, his earliest work, written in a poetical form, John of Salisbury uses the phrase *quicquid mundus habere potest* ("all that the world can contain"), that is also found in the final poem of the *EDA* (V 113).<sup>100</sup> Now, as noted earlier, this piece stands apart in the collection; initially written for a semi-public audience, and not directed to the woman as a private letter, it was added afterwards to the collection as a coda. Thus, it is not unthinkable that it enjoyed some circulation and that it was known by John, who came to Paris in 1136, studying with the greatest masters of the time, starting with Peter Abelard. All in all, this discussion of the collection's date shows that the evidence rather points towards the first part of the 12th century, as Ewald Könsgen

<sup>96</sup> The Patrologia Latina Database shows very few hits for *dulcifluus* later than the first decades of the XIIth Cent, in the *Historia Compostelana* (1100-1139), Richard of Saint-Victor and Thomas of Perseigne, while earlier usages are numerous, from Venantius Fortunatus to Rupert of Deutz or Hariulf of Oudenburg.

<sup>97</sup> Present in Plautus (*Pseudolus*, 1259) or Tatuinus (*Aenigmata* 4, 1), *dulcifer* is used again by Alcuinus and, through him, Froumundus of Tegernsee, (*Poemata*, PL 141, 1300C and 1301A). P. Dronke, review of *Listening to Heloise*, 136, takes this thread as evidence in favour of a Bavarian origin of the *Mulier*.

<sup>98</sup> Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca (NY): Cornell UP, 2006), 110-113.

<sup>99</sup> Stella, "*Epistolae duorum amantium: nuovi paralleli testuali*". These various parallels should be discussed one by one. For the sake of brevity, I am jumping to the conclusions of my examination of the important data gathered by Francesco Stella.

<sup>100</sup> John of Salisbury, *Entheticus maior and minor*, Jan van Laarhoven ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1987), see t. 1, p. 125, v. 300. The editor suggests, 47-52, that the first part was written in Paris when John was still a student. Abelard himself is mentioned, p. 109, v. 57.

had initially concluded by considering literary themes,<sup>101</sup> and as Stephen Jaeger concurred on the basis of the cultural background of the letters.<sup>102</sup> Yet, there is no proof that compels us to narrow the margin to the earlier decades of the century.

This means that the hypothesis of an ascription to Heloise and Abelard cannot be ruled out from the start. It should be taken all the more seriously since we do possess external indications, provided by both of them, that the early phase of their affair involved the writing of numerous letters,<sup>103</sup> while no other known couple fits in so closely with the profile of the anonymous pair. Rather than repeating arguments produced in favour of the ascription, I would like to show briefly that they have not been successfully contested so far. The central argument raised by Constant Mews was his observation that the love letters are accidentally using a technical philosophical terminology, that he considers typical of Abelard. This claim cannot be disproved on a lexical basis, but on a doctrinal one only. Noting that some of these words are trivial, such as *indifferenter*, is not a valid objection since what matters here is the use of that adverb in a certain theoretical context and not in its undifferentiated common use. Likewise, remarking that a term such a *scibilitas* was also used, or rather coined anew, by Albert the Great or Ramon Lull is beside the point, since comparison should only be made with 12th-century authors, none of whom we know of uses this neologism. The only serious objection, which is all but a refutation, comes from F. Stella, who rightfully calls for a systematic survey. C Mews has found positive evidence that traces of Abelardian [135] philosophy surface in the *EDA* – and it is not a problem if they appear mostly in the woman's letters, since the student is hereby trying to stir a philosophical discussion with her master. The contrasted use of the adjectives *specialis* and *singularis*, by the man and the woman, in both the *EDA* and the Correspondence, is fairly impressive. Still, a systematic demonstration would require showing that this terminology was strictly Abelardian, to the exclusion of all other contemporary philosopher. Due to the fragmentary, and often anonymous status of the documentation produced in 12th-century philosophical schools, this task is beyond the abilities of historians. Even if they appear to some as too weak to be a sufficient textual proof of ascription, these indications demonstrate at least that the setting of the letters is a twelfth-century city where the study of dialectics was blooming, Paris being the most obvious candidate.

In an acerbic polemical article, Jan Ziolkowski bases his criticism on a comparison between the man's letters in the *EDA* and later Abelardian writings, "in matters of vocabulary, prose rhythm and prosody, and allusion."<sup>104</sup> His observations bring forth undeniable discrepancies between these documents, although many of his results should be mitigated. Analysing the frequency of function words that are

<sup>101</sup> Könsgen, *Epistolae*, 97.

<sup>102</sup> Jaeger, "The *Epistolae*."

<sup>103</sup> *Historia*, ed. Hicks, p. 56; Ep. II, p. 152.

<sup>104</sup> J. Ziolkowski, "Lost and Not Yet Found."

supposedly used by one writer in a consistent manner, in whatever genre and context, is an important tool for identifying his literary productions. But relying on a selection of five such words, as J. Ziolkowski does, is not sufficient to draw a convincing picture. A more global assessment, provided by F. Stella, shows that strong divergences are limited to some words (such as *autem*, *quidem*, *vehementer* or *scilicet*) while the frequency is comparable for other words (such as *enim*, *sicut*, *tam*, or *tamen*); the overall data can then be described as not “particolarmente significativi”.<sup>105</sup> Out of my own calculations on the vocabulary of both collections, I observe some notable proximities between the woman and the man in the *EDA*, as well as between Heloise and Abelard in the Correspondence (precisely those signs that prompted John Benton to argue for a single author theory in 1975).<sup>106</sup> Yet this shows primarily that people writing to each other tend to use similar vocabularies. The frequency of many function words in the woman’s and Heloise’s letters is rather close (for instance, *enim*, *ergo*, *iam*, *ita*, *nunc*, *pro*, *sic*, *tam*, *unde*), and the mutual overlap of their vocabulary is [136] notable, but certainly not strong enough to claim an identity of authorship on that sole basis.<sup>107</sup>

As for prose rhythm, F. Stella notes that G. Orlandi’s comparison of the *cursus* in the *EDA* and the Correspondence can lead to very different conclusions, whether one chooses to consider rough frequencies (in which case there are striking resemblances between both pairs), or to correct them according to the Pearson test (in which case the resemblances disappears).<sup>108</sup> J. Ziolkowski gives much weight to Peter Dronke’s impression of a stylistic difference between the woman, who constantly uses semi-rhyming prose, and Heloise, who uses it in a more selective fashion; in her prose, “passages that rhyme abundantly, not just in simple pairings, alternate with long stretches that have no rhymes at all”.<sup>109</sup> Yet letter 49, the most elaborate one written by the woman that is preserved almost entirely, fits in rather well with such a description, since it displays an alternance of rhyming and non-rhyming passages, and contains at times multiple rhymes.<sup>110</sup> It could also plausibly be argued that the same person gradually evolved into a more mature literary

<sup>105</sup> F. Stella, “Analisi informatiche del lessico.”

<sup>106</sup> John F. Benton and Fiorella Prosperetti Ercoli, “The Style of the *Historia Calamitatum*: A Preliminary Test of the Authenticity of the Correspondence Attributed to Abelard and Heloise,” *Viator* 6 (1975): 59-86.

<sup>107</sup> My results slightly differ from those of F. Stella, since I include the *Problemata* in the analysis Heloise’s vocabulary, but my conclusions exactly concur with his : “Insomma la Mulier assomiglia ad Eloisa e i due amanti si assomigliano fra loro ben più di quanto il Vir somigli ad Abelardo.”

<sup>108</sup> F. Stella, “Analisi informatiche del lessico”.

<sup>109</sup> Dronke, review of *Listening to Heloise*, 137.

<sup>110</sup> See for instance: ... *cupiditates omnes refrenat*, *amores reprimit*, *gaudia temperat*, *dolores extirpat*; *que cuncta apta*, *cuncta placentia*, *cuncta jocundissima sumministrat*, *nichilque se melius reperire valet*. It can also be the case that in his drastic abbreviation of M 107 and 112, Johannes de Vepria selected the most rhetorically appealing sentences, leaving aside non rhyming passages.

personality, distancing herself from the manneristic rhyming style she had been initially taught. The same type of consideration can be opposed to the sharp divergences noted by J. Ziolkowski regarding the poetical techniques of the man and that of Abelard in his *Carmen ad Astralabium*. Differences in genre, time and context are such that they can easily account for such variations. Furthermore, the castration and monastic conversion of Abelard mark such a break in his life that it could have affected his writing habits as well, in a radical manner. While there is some continuity in his philosophical endeavours, once he became a monk at Saint-Denis, he resolutely turned his back on the Ovidian poet and lover he had once been.<sup>111</sup> It should come as no surprise that, when composing a didactical poem for his son or liturgical hymns for the Paraclete, he [137] reverted to very different techniques and references. In a less dramatic fashion, as soon as they became bishops, both Baudri of Bourgueil and Marbod of Rennes changed their writings habits and poetical styles.

More generally, any attempt at a comparison between the two sets of letters should take into consideration a series of factors. If they are to be ascribed to Heloise and Abelard, the messages and letters excerpted by Johannes de Vepria would have had to have been exchanged in 1114-16, according to my reckoning, while the Correspondence is usually dated to around 1132-33. Moreover, the first messages were written for very private purposes, in secrecy and often in a rush. On some occasions, the man had to answer on the woman's wax tablets while the servant acting as a messenger was waiting at the door. By contrast, the letters exchanged after the *Historia calamitatum* had from the start a semi-public character, since the nuns of the Paraclete were included as an audience for Abelard's letters to Heloise, and they were aiming as much at religious edification or reflection, as at personal communication. A distance of eighteen years, a radical transformation of social positions, and a shift in intentions can explain many changes in literary habits. All this being said, it has to be admitted that Abelard's voice is not easily recognisable in the *EDA*. An explanation can be provided for that fact, since we ignored what Abelard's intimate voice was like during the first years of his relationship with Heloise. Still, this aspect is certainly the weakest point in defence of the ascription, but in the face of remaining evidences, I don't perceive it as an insuperable obstacle.

As concerns literary allusions, J. Ziolkowski's reservations are mainly due to the fact that the *EDA* do not correspond to what he expected the earlier correspondence between Heloise and Abelard to be. It may be disconcerting that Lucan is not quoted more, given the number of reminiscences of the *Pharsalia* found in later works. But this is an argument *e silentio* that cannot be given decisive weight, when compared to positive evidence. In this regard as well, the investigation should

---

<sup>111</sup> For a remarkable unconscious reminiscence of the *Heroides* in *Theologia Scholarium*, see Anne Grondeux, "Turba ruunt (Ov. Her. I 88): histoire d'un exemple grammatical," *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 61 (2003) 175-222.

be more systematic, and may bring forth new parallels. For instance, C. Mews has recently brought to light an element that deserves consideration. A group of three questions from Abelard's *Sic et non*, discussing *caritas* as the foundation of ethical life, gather quotations from Cicero, Augustine and Jerome, which the lovers are using in their theoretical debate, in letters 24 and 25.<sup>112</sup> This is not a case of one casual quotation found in two texts, but of a specific selection of extracts from different authors, not associated in any earlier anthology, and tied together within an elaborate discussion on love in both documents. The plausibility that these references would have first appeared in a real dialogue before their [138] incorporation into a collection of sentences is much higher than the reverse possibility. In such a case, Abelard would have inserted in his anthology of patristic opinions some sources initially provided by Heloise, another sign of the collaboration we already hinted at with the arguments against marriage.

Out of this brief presentation of the debate, it emerges that there is a case in favour of the ascription that has not been convincingly disproved yet. Its strength can be debated, not all scholars may be equally convinced, but it is not acceptable to reject the theory as disdainfully as Jean-Yves Tilliette does, by presenting it as another chapter in the legend of Heloise and Abelard, "à la frontière de la science et du rêve".<sup>113</sup> Arguably, more work should be done, in various directions, in order to narrow the margins of uncertainty that remain. In the following pages, I wish to present a different type of argument based on what I understand to be the personal development of both the *EDA*'s woman and the young Heloise. If the argument is correct, it would allow us to connect the two series of documents, and show how they interweave as two facets of the same story.

### 3. Heloise's moral philosophy

It is high time we introduced some reflections on the theme of the present volume. The question of memory is obviously central for the understanding of both sides of the Correspondence. Abelard's narration of his disasters belongs to the genre of the apology, presenting excuses and justifications for his past conduct and misadventures. This is conducted by using a selective, self-conscious and moralizing memory, that deliberately aggravates the sins he committed, especially in relation to Heloise. Once the task has been performed, the theologian showed no willingness to share more memories with his wife; he only turned back to it reluctantly, in his third letter, to emphasize the sinfulness of their behaviour in Argenteuil's refectory and in other circumstances.<sup>114</sup>

For her part, Heloise demonstrates a very different attitude. The issue that proved to be the most problematic, or even shocking, to generations of interpreters

<sup>112</sup> P. Dronke, review of *Listening to Heloise*, 137.

<sup>113</sup> J.-Y. Tilliette, "Introduction," in *Lettres d'Abélard et d'Héloïse*, ed. Hicks, 13-14.

<sup>114</sup> Ep. V, ed. Hicks, 206.



confronted with her words (and it is fair to recall that they were mostly male and devout Christians) is that her religious conversion was not accompanied by a denial of her earlier memories. She had strong moral reasons for acting in that way; yet those reasons were conflicting with each other. They can somehow be described as the philosophical and the theological side [139] of Heloise's internal drama. One was the sense that nothing could or should undo nor curb her love for Abelard; her whole self had been so totally involved in this love that renouncing it, albeit for religious motives, would have been a self-betrayal of the worst kind. As she memorably puts it in her first letter, if her heart (*animus*) is not with Abelard, it cannot be anywhere else.<sup>115</sup>

The other conflicting reason was her detestation of hypocrisy in the face of God. Submitting herself to a merciless examination, she considered these memories and longings for intimacy with her lover and husband that she couldn't part with as sinful. As Brooke H. Findley has subtly pointed out, the quest for sincerity necessarily implies self-denunciation for being a hypocrite.<sup>116</sup> This should not be mistaken, as has often been done, with a confession of un-Christian feelings. On the contrary, over-emphasizing a failure to live up to the highest christian standards entails a willingness to live up to them. It is in such a context that one of the most famous and vivid medieval expression of involuntary memory should be understood. As Heloise confesses, it occurs in dreams or as a distractions of the mind during the most solemn occasions, provoking uncontrolled gestures and utterances:

For me, the pleasures we shared in love were sweet, so sweet they cannot displease me now, and rarely are they ever out of my mind. Wherever I turn, they are there before my eyes, with all their old desires. I see their images even in my sleep. During Holy Mass itself, when prayer should be its purest, unholy fantasies of pleasure so enslave my wretched soul that my devotion is to them and not to my prayer: when I ought to groan for what I have done, I sigh not for what I have lost. Not only what we did but when and where – these are so fixed within my heart that I live through them again with you in all those times and places. I have no rest from them even in sleep. At times my thought betray themselves in a movement of my body or even in involuntary words.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Ep. II, ed. Monfrin, p.248-251: *Non enim mecum animus meus, sed tecum erat; sed et nunc maxime, si tecum non est, nusquam est: esse vero sine te nequaquam potest.*

<sup>116</sup> B. H. Findley, "Sincere Hypocrisy."

<sup>117</sup> Ep. IV, ed. Monfrin, 193-207: *In tantum vero ille quas pariter exercuimus amantium voluptates dulces michi fuerunt, ut nec displicere michi nec vix a memoria labi possint. Quocumque loco me vertam, semper se oculis meis cum suis ingerunt desiderii, nec etiam dormienti suis illusionibus parant. Inter ipsa missarum sollempnia, ubi purior esse debet oratio, obscena earum voluptatum phantasmata ita sibi penitus miserrimam captivant animam ut turpitudinibus illis magis quam orationi vacem: que cum ingemiscere debeam de commissis, suspiro potius de amissis. Non solum que egimus sed loca pariter et tempora in quibus hec egimus ita tecum nostro infixata sunt animo, ut in ipsis omnia tecum agam, nec dormiens etiam ab his quiescam. Nonnumquam etiam ipso motu corporis animi mei cogitationesprehenduntur, nec a verbis temperant improvisis* (trans. Levitan, 79-80).

[140] Accusing herself of hypocrisy, Heloise reproaches herself with acts that theologians would later discuss as the “first movements” of the soul, and usually declare devoid of any guilt.<sup>118</sup> Abelard, for one, only considered those actions accomplished on purpose, when the deed was rooted in a deliberate intention, as culpable.<sup>119</sup> In the *Carmen ad Astralabium*, he recalled Heloise’s *crebra querela*, her frequent complaint at being unable to repent and regret past pleasures.<sup>120</sup> In reality, her quarrel against herself encompassed two different internal conflicts. The first, and only one that Abelard could perceive, involved the religious necessity to repent and the moral demands of faithfulness towards her great human love. The latter requirement, in turn, was anything but a peaceful one. Among other things, it implied a self-accusation of a different type, that of having brought miseries to her lover.

In order to make my point clear, some general considerations are needed. When historians approach twelfth-century emotional life, they are not confronted with raw feelings that could be analysed in ahistorical psychological terms. All emotions are shaped by many social and cultural constraints that affect the gestures, behaviours, and rhetoric through which they are expressed; even their perception by the historical subject is mediated by the available categories.<sup>121</sup> The perception and enactment of emotions are also, inevitably, connected to ethical judgment. The claim that love as a passion would be beyond reason and morality is in itself a very peculiar moral stance. This is why I am inclined to treat Heloise’s views on love, both as expressed in [141] speculative terms and as enacted in her feelings, discourse and behaviour, as a moral philosophy of its own. This philosophy has much in common with her religious quest for sincerity, starting with her requirement for drawing all practical consequences from the principles she defends. Yet, the two do also conflict, and they represent one vivid instance of the tension between earthly and religious values that is anything but untypical of the first half of the twelfth

<sup>118</sup> Damien Boquet, “Des racines de l’émotion : les préaffects et le tournant anthropologique du XIIe siècle”, *Le Sujet des émotions au Moyen Âge*, D. Boquet, P. Nagy ed., forthcoming, Paris, Beauchesne.

<sup>119</sup> Marenbon, *The philosophy of Peter Abelard*, 249-264.

<sup>120</sup> *Carmen ad Astralabium*, v. 375-384: *sunt quos oblectant adeo pecata peracta / ut numquam vere peniteant super his / ymmo voluptatis dulcedo tanta sit huius / ne gravet ulla satisfacio propter eam / Est nostre super hoc Eloyse crebra querela / qua michi qua secum dicere sepe solet / si nisi peniteat me comississe priora / salvari nequeam spes michi nulla manet / dulcia sunt adeo comissi gaudia nostri / ut memorata iuvent que placuere nimis.* (“Yet there those who past sins still so allure them that they can never feel truly penitent. Rather, the sweetness of that bliss remains so great that no sense of atoning for it has force. This is the burden of complaint of our Heloise, whereby she often says to me, as to herself: if cannot be saved without repenting of what I used to commit, there is no hope for me. The joys of what we did are still so sweet, that after delight beyond measure, even remembering brings relief”, trad. P. Dronke, *Intellectuals and Poets*, 257).

<sup>121</sup> For a convenient introduction to these problematics, see Piroska Nagy, “Les émotions et l’historien: de nouveaux paradigmes”, *Critique* (716-717, 2007): 10-22..

century. The task of the final sections of this article will be to compare Heloise's philosophy of love with the one exposed, in her writings and acts, by the *Mulier* of the *EDA*.

Love is, however, much more than a culturally defined emotion. One of its peculiarities is that it involves the interaction between at least two persons and their environment. For that reason, time, duration and memory are closely woven into it. Love can only exist and develop within a story as the dynamic unfolding of various emotions in both partners, more often than not in contradictory and asynchronous ways. Therefore, the cultural models chosen by or imposed on lovers have generally been found in narratives of different types, presenting a story evolving over time. Heloise and Abelard have captured the Western imagination, as early as Jean de Meun's rendering in the late 13th century; yet, when living their own story, they themselves had in mind some previous models found in classical latin literature. When tracing her own peculiar path, Heloise was drawing her inspiration from feelings and ideals expressed by fictive characters in latin poetry. This is precisely what the notion of her "literary self-fashioning" implies.

From such a perspective, one can easily understand that the *EDA* constitute an extraordinarily interesting historical source. Even in the fragmentary form in which we read them, they provide a unique glimpse into the intimacy of a learned couple, reflecting on their situation, and allowing us to follow the unfolding of their relationship over time. Constant Mews has rightfully stressed the importance of the philosophical debate going on between the partners. Here, I am less interested in their theories than in the way they are put to a test and sometimes contradicted by the deeds of the lovers, and above all, in the transformations of both characters in the course of events. Reconstructing their story enables us to compare it with the one Heloise and Abelard speak about in their letters. I should concede that such a comparison can only be made on the basis of very thin evidence, since the *EDA* do not provide any obvious external clue. For its part, the *Historia* offers only a very cursory and biased account of the period preceding Heloise's pregnancy, which is the one to which the *EDA* would correspond, according to my reconstruction. The subsequent letters, when talking about the past, concentrate on the most dramatic events that followed the child's birth: the marriage, Abelard's castration, and the religious conversion of the couple. Therefore, the practical [142] philosophy of love expressed by both female characters appears to be one of the most appropriate angles for a systematic comparison between both sets of documents. A crucial test would be to detect whether anything in the *EDA* could correspond to the refusal of marriage reflected in the *Dehortatio*. But a general confrontation of ideas present on both sides will already prove quite enlightening.

In the famous volume he dedicated to the couple, despite his misunderstanding of Heloise's claim to be unrepentant, Etienne Gilson makes an excellent point in describing her attitude as inspired by tragic Latin heroines. Peter

Dronke summarised powerfully the same notion by saying that, in her first two letters, Heloise “writes her own *Heroides*.”<sup>122</sup> The comparison most aptly describes the intensity and poignancy of these letters. Yet, since faithfulness to her earlier ideals was a major driving force of her writing, I assume that the same reference to Ovidian heroines can also illuminate the personal choices she made at the very beginning of her relationship with Abelard. As we saw earlier, he did not reproduce in the *Historia* the second part of the *Dehortatio*. After having illustrated with examples of male philosophers that marriage was not fitting for him, it is possible that she brought forward likewise a series of female characters in order to hammer her second point that made her prefer to remain the unmarried friend of her hero. It could be an exercise for students of Latin literature to gather all possible sources of inspiration, a task I shall not undertake here.

The major scene that allows for such a reading, reported in the *Historia calamitatum*, has often been commented on, among other by Mary Carruthers.<sup>123</sup> About to take the veil at Argenteuil, and before stepping up to the altar, Heloise recited Cornelia’s lament in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, accusing herself to have caused the defeat of Pompey, and asking to expiate for it. Cornelia, a well educated young woman endowed with an independent mind and a strong character, may have been an appealing figure for her. But it is only with Abelard’s castration that this particular passage took on a specific personal importance. In the same vein, we should think of Heloise as possessing, within her literary memory, a full range of classic works out of which she was able to extract the relevant scenes, with which she would identify at various stages of her adventurous moral and emotional journey. In order to compare both letter collections, I shall select a few features, present in the Correspondence, [143] that strike me as characteristic of her moral philosophy. Since these texts are immensely famous and easily available, they can be presented in a very synthetic manner.

In the first place, no reader may have missed the tragic tone with which she expresses her readiness to sacrifice everything for Abelard. Not only did she “lose herself”, as she puts it, when entering monastic life at his command;<sup>124</sup> a very serious reproach, expressed in her letters, is that he didn’t trust her at that very moment, and forced her to take the veil first, as if he doubted the strength of her resolution. Fifteen years later, she still has not totally forgotten it.<sup>125</sup> Such a combination of

<sup>122</sup> Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: a critical study of the texts from Perpetua († 203) to Marguerite Porete († 1310)* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 107, who focusses more precisely on the letter of Briseis to Achilles.

<sup>123</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) 222-227 Peter von Moos, “Cornelia und Heloise,” *Latomus* 34 (1975): 1024-1059.

<sup>124</sup> Ep. II, ed. Hicks : *me ipsam pro iussu tuo perdere sustinerem*.

<sup>125</sup> Ep. II, ed. Hicks, 150, Trans Levitan p 61: *in quo, fateor, uno minus te de me confidere vehementer dolui atque erubui. Eque autem, Deus scit, ad vulcania loca te properantem precedere vel sequi pro iussu tuo minime dubitarem*. (That you doubted me in this one thing, my love, overwhelmed me with grief and shame.

extreme love with a readiness to sacrifice oneself is typical of Ovidian heroines, Dido's suicide being probably the most powerful scene of all.

The readiness to lose everything for love, including her very self, has an exact parallel in the desire not to gain anything out of love, except love itself. The doctrine of pure love is perhaps the most famous aspect of Heloise's views. At its most poignant, it is encapsulated in a memorable line: *Nichil umquam, Deus scit, in te nisi te requisivi; te pure, non tua concupiscens* ("God knows I never searched for anything in you, except yourself; desiring you only, not what was yours").<sup>126</sup> This theme was at the centre of the missing second part of the *Dehortatio*.<sup>127</sup> More radically than a wish not to gain anything, it can be interpreted as a desire to vilify her social status for the sake of love. The famous reference to her preference for being called his *meretrix* rather than Cesar's *imperatrix*<sup>128</sup> testifies again for an identification with mythical heroines such as Briseis. As well as literary memories, this doctrine is grounded on philosophical sources, mostly Cicero's *De amicitia*, and on the theology of charity that she knew through Jerome and, among medieval writers, possibly Walter of Mortagne's *Sententia de caritate*.<sup>129</sup> The notion of the gratuitous love of God, transferred to human relations, is not untypical of the twelfth century, although it would be developed more in later decades, but its association with tragic connotations is surely Heloise's special mark. [144]

The third element I would stress may appear to be a secondary consequence of the previous two, but it deserves emphasis of its own. It concerns the exclusive and perpetual qualities of this love. The point is made strongly towards the end of her first letter, when Heloise insists that the real meaning of their love will be demonstrated by the way it ends. If Abelard doesn't provide her with the care he should, that would mean that he was attracted to her by concupiscence only, and not by friendship and love.<sup>130</sup> Although Heloise is here making reference to public rumour, this is no so much a threat as a reminder of a central piece of her morals. A love that ceases, for whatever reason, has never been a true one.<sup>131</sup> This demand for constancy and perpetuity is a major key to understanding the conflict with

---

But, as God knows, I would have followed you to Vulcan's flames if you commanded it, and without a moment's hesitation I would have gone first).

<sup>126</sup> Ep. II, ed. Monfrin, lin. 143-4.

<sup>127</sup> HC, ed. Monfrin, lin. 547-9 and more clearly in Heloise's response, lin. 144-185.

<sup>128</sup> Ep. II, lin. 161-2.

<sup>129</sup> Marenbon, *The Philosophy*, 298-300.

<sup>130</sup> Ep. II, lin. 217-23: *cur post conversionem nostram, quam tu solus facere decrevist, in tantam tibi negligentiam atque oblivionem venerim ut nec colloquio presentis recreer nec absentis epistola consoler; dic, inquam, si vales, aut ego quod sentio immo quod omnes suspicantur dicam. Concupiscentia te mihi potius quam amicitia sociavit, libidinis ardor potius quam amor. Ubi igitur quod desiderabas cessavit, quicquid propter hoc exhibebas pariter evanuit; lin. 259-60: nunc autem finis indicat quo id inchoaverim principio.*

<sup>131</sup> Transferred to theological debate, this is exactly the theme under which Abelard inserted, arguments exchanged in EDA 24-25 in the *Sic et non*, q. 138: *Quod caritas semel habita nunqua amittatur et contra.*

theological values. No religious conversion can erase a human affection that is required to be indelible.

The fourth and final point regards the ambivalent attitude towards the loved man that her heroic ethics imply. On the one hand, the tragic desire of sacrifice goes together with total submission to her lover and master. Many passages can illustrate this point. It may suffice to recall the opening of her second letter, in which she expresses her surprise that he has mentioned her name first in the salutation formula of his letter.<sup>132</sup> But at the same time, her self-abnegation is also the source of the highest requirements addressed to her partner. The construction of her first letter builds on the various reasons why Abelard should have taken care of her, and have written a letter of consolation to her rather than to his unnamed friend. In the first pages, she mentions his duty to take care of the nuns he established at the Paraclete; then, she briefly alludes to the duties he still has towards her, as his wife; but she insists much more strongly on what he owes her because of the passion she always had for him.<sup>133</sup> Of his three relationships to her, as founder of the Paraclete, [145] husband and lover, Abelard responded mainly according to the first, while the third still mattered greatly to her. In this regard, a subtle nuance deserves to be stressed. Even if her love was not forsaking any kind of material or social reward, it called for a form of reciprocity.<sup>134</sup> This ambivalence echoes one present in the Ovidian heroines. Although generally being in a position of inferiority or dependance, as far as social position is concerned, they place themselves on a equal footing when it comes to the ethical demands of love. This is precisely the device that allows them to lament and complain about their lover, in the name of love. Much more could be said about Heloise's practical moral philosophy, but this may be sufficient as far as comparison is concerned.

#### 4. The story behind the letters, and the ethics of love in the *Epistolae duorum amantium*

Reading closely the succession of letters collected and excerpted by Johannes de Vepria, and taking note of elliptic references to exterior events and meetings of the couple, it is possible to reconstruct something of the general outline of the personal story in which both partners are engaged.<sup>135</sup> Since the letters are often

<sup>132</sup> Ep. IV, lin. 2-10.

<sup>133</sup> Ep. II, lin. 123-6: *cui quidem tanto te maiore debito noveris obligatum quanto te amplius nuptialis federe sacramenti constat esse astrictum et eo te magis mihi obnoxium quo te semper, ut omnibus patet, immoderato amore complexa sum.*

<sup>134</sup> Ep. II, lin. 235-7: *Nunc vero plurimum a te me promereri credideram, cum omnia propter te compleverim, nunc in tuo maxime perseverans obsequio.*

<sup>135</sup> See my "Reconstitution de l'intrigue," in *Lettres des deux amants*, 17-27. Ward and Chiavaroli, "The Young Heloise," 83-98, present an account that differs from mine. Roland Oberson, *Héloïse revisitée* (Paris: Hermann, 2008), reconstructs the events on the basis of his unproven (and unprovable) assumption that Heloise was the victim of rapes committed by her uncle Fulbert. If considered as a

reduced to their rhetorical skeleton, there is room for more than one interpretation. Furthermore, temporal indications are very scarce: apart from the celebration of the anniversary of their affair, in letter V 86,<sup>136</sup> only a few allusions to passing seasons may be found here or there. At times, it is possible that more than one letter was sent per day, while at other points, there may have been long delays between two messages. Three or four times, communication has been suspended, either because the man went away, or [146] because both decided to communicate less, in order to lessen the suspicion they aroused. Despite all these hindrances, the contents of the letters still allow us to obtain a general picture of events, sometimes hazy, sometimes more clear.

At the centre of the exchange lies a double crisis, running from letter 58 to 75, that divides the collection roughly into two general periods. They can be contrasted in a purely numerical manner. In the first part, the man writes more letters, to which the woman sometimes does not respond, while the situation is reversed in the second part, where she is more demanding than he is. This impression is confirmed by an indication, in M 9, that the letters are exchanged at his command.<sup>137</sup> Although it can be argued that he may have asked her to write while he was away for a while, this phrase may describe the initial impulse of the correspondence, that could have started under the guise of scholarly exercises. As the exchange gradually gains in intensity, she drags him into a philosophical discussion about love (21-25). This exchange is concluded with one of the most pressing letters by the man, full of explicit erotic imagery, to which she responds in a tactful manner, only wishing her friend some virtues of biblical characters.<sup>138</sup> A similar piece of advice is provided later, in return to a complaint that he can not spend the night with her.<sup>139</sup> This is

---

fictional interpretation of the story, this provides an enjoyable reading. Arguments for considering the letters as arranged in a chronological order are presented above, esp. note 83.

<sup>136</sup> I am not implying that this would be an exact anniversary, but that roughly one year after the beginning of their correspondence, the man took the opportunity to recapitulate major events in their relationship. This may be a *topos*, but there was some good reason to have recourse to it at that point of the story.

<sup>137</sup> M 9 : *Volo et inhiante cupio ut litteris iuxta preceptum tuum intercurrentibus, precordialis inter nos firmetur amicitia* ("I wish and eagerly desire that by exchanging letters according to your bidding, the heartfelt friendship between us may be strengthened," 219)

<sup>138</sup> M 9: *Oculo suo : Bezelielis spiritum, trium crinium fortitudinem, patris pacis formam, Idide profunditatem*. ("To her eye; the spirit of Bezalel, the strength of the three locks of hair, the beauty of the father of peace, the depth of Ididia", 237). The three last images stand for Samsom, Absalom and Solomon. Bezalel, mentioned in Exodus 31,2, was referred to by Baudri of Bourgueil, *Carmina*, 1, 119, ed. J.Y. Tilliette (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 2002) t. 1, 4. The description of Absalom and Solomon originates in Eucherius, *Instructionum ad Salonium libri II*, ed. C. Mandolfo (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004) 188, repeated by Jerome and Isidore. The attribution of only three locks of hair to Samson instead of seven remains a mystery.

<sup>139</sup> M 48: *Nemo debet vivere, nec in bono crescere, qui nescit diligere, et amores regere*. ("No one ought to live, or grow in good, who does not know how to love, and rule his desires," 249), answering to M 47 : *O noctem infaustam, o dormitationem odiosam, o execrabilem desidiam meam* ("Unlucky night, hateful

immediately followed by a second, and even more impressive, philosophical debate (V 49, M 50). Before trying to make sense of the rift that takes place after M 58, we can observe its consequences. The woman starts expressing herself in different poetical forms (M 66, 69, 73), and when she [147] comes back to prose writing, her tone has gained in intensity. Her letters 79, 84, 86 and 88 are certainly the most emotionally powerful of the whole collection, and I will draw most of my arguments from that section. The series that follows is dominated by her disappointment that he does not meet her expectations (M 90, 94, 95, 98), but her reproaches of unfaithfulness do not imply that a third person has entered the stage.<sup>140</sup> It is only a vivid way to express that he is not responding enough to her demands. Although the most important letters in the final part of the exchange are drastically abbreviated (V 106, M 108, 112), the poem V 108 enables us to understand in some measure what happened: the woman was sent away for some time, during which her lover has not dared follow her. Soon after her return, she had important things to tell him, but which elude us, as well as his answer, which the copyist deliberately ignored. We can only perceive out of the brief message M 112a that he took badly some news that she thought of as joyful, causing her grief. And this brought the correspondence to an end.

Making sense of the central crisis can help in understanding better the change of tone in the woman's letters, although most of my general argument would still stand even if that particular interpretation was rejected. The links between successive letters is far from obvious. Very suddenly, the woman declares herself "unjustly deprived of the privilege of love" and asks her friend to "lighten [her] burden" (M 58).<sup>141</sup> In return, he admits his guilt, "I who compelled you to sin" (V 59).<sup>142</sup> Explaining that the bond they had established has been broken, and that she has been deceived by his wisdom and knowledge, her next letter calls for an end to their correspondence (M 60).<sup>143</sup> In reply, he puts all the blame on her, for rejecting him with no reason, and admits to no guilt other than having lamented his misfortunes before her (V 61).<sup>144</sup> She then proposes a way out of their rift, "in such a way that neither you face danger nor I scandal" (M 62).<sup>145</sup> Although the string of messages [148] may seem rather obscure, these last words can barely mean anything

---

sleep, cursed idleness of mine," *ibid.*), that I understand as a complaint at staying alone at night.

<sup>140</sup> Dronke, review of *Listening to Heloise*, 138, argues that these reproaches of infidelity would render the identification with Heloise and Abelard implausible. In my understanding, the context rules out the possibility that she is here referring to another woman.

<sup>141</sup> M 58: ... *illa olim pre ceteris in verbis dilecta, que immerito nunc caret amoris privilegio ... onus meum propensius alleviate.*

<sup>142</sup> V 59: *Ego nocens sum qui te peccare coegit.*

<sup>143</sup> M 60: ... *Si necesse erat rumpi fedus quod pepigeramus ... verba tua ultra non audiam .. sapientia et scientia tua me decepit, propterea omnis nostra amodo pereat scriptura.*

<sup>144</sup> V 61: *Nescio quod meum peccatum tam magnum precesserit ... nullam in te culpam meam recognosco .. Si me amares, minus locuta fuisses.*



other than her decision to remain silent, after sexual intercourse took place, in order to avoid danger for him and scandal for her. It is possible that she took the decision, having noted his willingness not to speak about the event that prompted him to write, in V 61: “if you loved me, you would have said less”.<sup>146</sup> In that letter, he may have been referring to difficulties of a different type as a diversion, so as to avoid a direct discussion of his deeds – his victory over a rival, celebrated soon afterwards by the woman in M 66, suggests that these tribulations were of an academic nature. Anyhow, her offer of reconciliation did not prove immediately successful. In the interval, he had written a poem, lamenting on the fact that she loved him less than he did.<sup>147</sup> This declaration was the cause of a new quarrel (M 69, 71), that he attempts to mend (V 72, 74, 75), until she finally decrees that “further conflict between us should cease” (M 76). In the subsequent letters, in which she declares the wholeness and exclusiveness of her love<sup>148</sup>, an allusion to these injuries surfaces again.<sup>149</sup> Apparently, the offence in words was more resented than the one in deed.<sup>150</sup>

It is a very difficult task to decide on the meaning of imagery that can either convey an erotic meaning or none at all. I would argue that it is only possible to draw a distinction in relation to the context in which these images appear. Before the crisis, as we saw, the woman sent twice to her pressing friend sibylline advice to remain wise and virtuous. No such message recurs in the second part of the exchange. Instead, in similar circumstances, we find brief messages that could be understood as expressing bliss at physical union.<sup>151</sup> P. Dronke, on the contrary, has interpreted a sentence by the woman [149] as a sign that the liaison had not yet been consummated: “you have manfully fought the good fight with me, but you have not yet received the prize”.<sup>152</sup> Yet this reference is more complex; it plays both on the

<sup>145</sup> M 62: *Sic inter nos res agatur, ne et tu periculum, et ego scandalum incurram*. Two omission signs in letter M 62, after *respondeo* and *ligari*, are correctly noted by Könsgen, 35, and not reported by Mews, 269, surrounding the reference to danger and scandal. They suggest that the woman could have been more explicit about the source of the crisis and the solution she proposed. It can be reminded that in the *Dehortatio*, lin. 546, Heloise is also concerned about the dangers Abelard would incur.

<sup>146</sup> V 61: *Si me amares, minus locuta fuisses*.

<sup>147</sup> V 72: *Nunquam ergo dixisse velim quod plus te amem, quam me amari sentiam*.

<sup>148</sup> I tend to give a great importance to the wish expressed in salutation of M 76: *integerrime dilectionis summam* (“fulfilment of the most complete love”, 281).

<sup>149</sup> M 88: *Quicquid unquam michi iniurie intulisti, a memoria actenus non recessit cordis mei, sed nunc pure ac sincere et pleniter tibi condonabo omnia, eo tenore ut deinceps a te tali non moveatur iniuria*.

<sup>150</sup> V 75: *Aliquanto iam tempore formosa mea de fide dilectissimi tui dubitasti propter quedam verba, que subita impulsus contumelia, in ipso doloris cursu dictavi, et utinam non dictassem, quia tu nimis ea memoriter signasti, que rogo ut a corde deleas, et apud interiora tua radicem non figant ...*

<sup>151</sup> See for instance V 78, M 83 (that would deserve a longer exegesis than can be undertaken here), V 111, and the imagery in M 82..

<sup>152</sup> M 88: *Hactenus mecum mansisti, mecum viriliter bonum certamen certasti, sed nondum bravium accepisti*. This certamen should be understood in relation to V 72: *Sic amor noster immortalis erit si uterque nostrum felici et amabili concertacione preire labore alterum, et neutri nostrum constet se ab altero superatum esse*.

Pauline imagery of salvation as a “good fight”, and on the man’s suggestion, when trying to repair his earlier blunder, that they were both engaged in a competition for love, in which neither will accept in being surpassed by the other.<sup>153</sup> My impression is that she only implies here that she is still ahead of him in that regard.

Whatever one may think of such evidence, the total silence of the *Mulier* on the issue of chastity is striking and contrasts with all other known cross-gender correspondence from the twelfth century.<sup>154</sup> The short anthology of love letters from Tegernsee gathers extracts from more than one correspondence, roughly contemporary to the *EDA*, that bear notable resemblances to it. Many *topoi* present in the French collection appear as well in the Bavarian one, albeit in simpler grammatical constructions and with a less sophisticated literary and philosophical background. Another noticeable difference is that these letters contain three lines in which the woman accepts the man’s love, provided it will remain chaste.<sup>155</sup> The same motif appears in most comparable medieval dialogue between men and women. When Dame Constance responds to Baudri of Bourgueil, although she doesn’t doubt his good faith, she wouldn’t contemplate a meeting with her pen-friend without the presence of two or three companions, preferably by day and in a public place, in order to avoid any risk of suspicion and preserve their “columbine [150] simplicity”.<sup>156</sup> The *Mulier* of the *EDA*, as we see her acting, was certainly not afraid of private meetings. It is likely that the initial “bond” between the pair

<sup>153</sup> V 72: *Sic amor noster immortalis erit si uterque nostrum felici et amabili concertacione preire labore alterum, et neutri nostrum constet se ab altero superatum esse.*

<sup>154</sup> I would tend to rule out the hypothesis that such a discussion was left out by Johannes de Vepria, who was more intent on suppressing too overt erotic allusions, as he did in V 112, line 17, but we cannot have any certainty.

<sup>155</sup> Jürgen Kühnel, *Dû bist mîn, ih bin dîn. Die lateinischen Liebes- (und Freundschafts-)Briefe des clm 19411* (Göppingen: Kummerle, 1977) 54: *Attamen si sciero me casto amore a te adamandam, pro pignus pudicie mee inuiolandum, non recuso amorem.* In the final exchange, a man tries to obtain more than just words from the woman, which she energetically refuses, 91: *et exinde putatis, quod post mollia queque nostra dicta, transire non debeatis ad acta. Sic non est nec erit.* The collection is also partly edited, and translated by Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-lyric* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), vol. 2, 472-82, who suggests that these letters are “probably contemporary” with those of Heloise. The manuscript is dated to 1160-80.

<sup>156</sup> Baudri de Bourgueil, *Carmina*, ed. J.Y. Tilliette (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 2002) t. 2, 132: *At circumstarent comites mihi uel duo uel tres/ Quamuis ipse suae sufficiat fidei / Ne tamen ulla foret de suspitione querela / Saltem nobiscum sit mea fida soror / Clara dies esset nec solos nos statuisset / Hoc fortuna loco sed magis in trivio.* Constance further insists, 134: *Ius et lex semper tueatur amorem / Commendet nostros uita pudica iocos / Ergo columbinam teneamus simplicitatem.* Baudri himself expresses his concern about chastity in most of his letters addressed to women, cf. Tilliette, “Hermès amoureux, ou les métamorphoses de la Chimère. Réflexions sur les *carmina* 200 et 201 de Baudri de Bourgueil,” *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome*, 104 (1991): 121-161, at 144-6. I am not convinced that Constance’s answer is an invention of Baudri himself, as argued *ibid.*, 140-3. To the contrary, the *EDA* prove that highly literate cross-gender dialogue was possible, and it is not unlikely that Constance knew very well both Ovid and Baudri’s poetry.

contained a clause of chastity (implicit in the letters as we read them, but perhaps expressed at some point in their discussions). Yet after this bond has been broken, instead of severing all relations as she once wanted to (M 60), she decided on her own to resume communication (M 62). We may surmise that her reasoning was that her moral involvement in this relationship was stronger than her aversion to fornication. This is why she reacted so intensely to the doubts he publicly raised about her feelings. Once the quarrel was settled, she then took on the task of defining a new bond – she uses the word *pignus* (pledge) in M 84, and wishes him “the closeness and stability of a bond” (*vicinitatem federis et stabilitatem*) in M 88 – that could include sexual intercourse on the one hand, but that required high demands on the other hand. Such would be the underlying meaning of the intense declarations that are proffered after the end of the crisis. Admittedly, such a reconstruction is debatable; its only justification is that it makes sense of *all* the elements at our disposal, leaving no word unexplained while adding no superfluous hypothesis.

It is now time to turn to the four points of comparison presented above. The most obvious parallel regards the doctrine of pure love. Although there is no exact repetition of words with Heloise’s famous statements, letter M 49 display parallel views. It strongly contrasts love for the sake of goods and pleasures with the one that connects the lovers; based on virtue, it is self-sufficient, needs no cupidities and refrains from them all.<sup>157</sup> If there is no textual identity, the doctrine expressed, based mainly on Cicero’s *De amicitia*, is unmistakably similar. Along the same lines, in poem 82, she rejects [151] the riches of Cesar as useless, in comparison to the joys provided by her friend.<sup>158</sup> Before deciding whether such notions and metaphors are banal, we should patiently investigate the following points of comparison.

The second one may offer stronger evidence, since the tragic element in Heloise is rarely found in other female (or male) writers of the twelfth century. It is true that, in his very first letter (V 2), the man proclaims his willingness to die for his friend, but in view of what follows, this can be considered as an exaggerated posture, and the woman herself mocks him later on for such a thoughtless promise.<sup>159</sup> Instead, she takes on this theme in a most serious manner. Shortly before the first rift, declaring that only death can separate her from his love, she may still merely be using a commonplace.<sup>160</sup> The truly distinctive note appears slightly later, once both

<sup>157</sup> The central sentence is quoted above, note 110.

<sup>158</sup> M 82: *Si quicquid Cesar unquam possedit haberem / Prodesse tantum nil michi divitiarum / Gaudia non unquam te nisi dante feram* (“If I could have all that Caesar ever owned / Such wealth would be of no use to me. I will never have joys except those given by you...,” 285).

<sup>159</sup> M 69: *Sit memor illarum michi quas fudit lacrimarum / Cum michi dicebat quod moriturus erat / Si tam formose non perfrueretur amore.*

<sup>160</sup> M 53: *Unde non est nec erit res vel sors, que tuo amore me separaret nisi sola mors.*

crises have been resolved. In M 79, she declares in a most unusual manner that she would rather die than be separated from him:

*Tuus honor meum geminasse videretur si usque ad finem fatalem nos conversari liceret pariter. Nunc autem satius eligo mortis terminari periculo, quam vivens dulcifluo tui aspectus privari gaudio*

“Your glory would appear to have doubled mine, had we been equally allowed to remain together right to the ordained end. But now I rather chose to end in the threat of violent death, rather than live and be deprived of the sweet-flowing joy of the sight of you”.<sup>161</sup>

This is an amazing statement. Not only does she describe herself as voluntarily running the risk of violent death by maintaining a relationship with him. She contrasts this tragic situation with a much quieter one in which, living together (*conversari pariter*) until the natural end of both of their lives (*usque ad finem fatalem*), his social status would be reflected in hers (*Tuus honor meum geminasse videretur*). The negative grammatical construction (*si nos liceret*) implies that this prospect has been rendered impossible, while the following sentence shows that she wilfully accepts the consequences. To translate this into more prosaic terms, the only meaning I can come up with for such a situation is that of a marriage, meant to create a community of life [152] until the natural death of the spouses, and where the wife is endowed with the social status of the husband. The opposite situation would render daily meetings more difficult, but she wouldn’t renounce it at any price.

This remarkable couple of sentences is unfortunately surrounded by two signs of omission, which leaves us in doubt as to the exact train of thought out of which they have been extracted. Nevertheless, without stretching the interpretation, we may conclude that this precise letter may have referred to the impossibility of a marriage, enthusiastically endorsed by the young woman. Out of this fragment, it is difficult to judge whether she was just spelling out a situation dictated by the circumstances, or articulating a personal choice. In the latter case, the element brought to the fore in the description of marital life shows that this decision would have been justified by the rejection of any type of worldly honour, which would sound very similar to the reasons expressed by Heloise.<sup>162</sup> The rest of the letter doesn’t conflict with such a reading. In the initial paragraphs, she expresses her difficulties at deciding how to address him and express her joy. After this long rhetorical opening, it is likely that the scribe omitted, as elsewhere, elements of a more factual nature. After the passage under survey and a second omission, the final valediction is introduced by a formula expressing her total commitment to him:

<sup>161</sup> The translation is modified, in order to match my french translation.

<sup>162</sup> Ep. II, ed. Hicks, 144: *si me Augustus universo presidens mundo matrimonii honore dignaretur...*

*Cum omnia factus sis michi excepta solius dei gracia ...* ("Since you are now made all things to me, except for the grace of God alone...", with a reference to Paul I Cor, 22). However one decides to understand the mysterious couple of sentences, it is beyond any doubt that she is insisting that her love is stronger than any social convention.

Although the series of letters that follows is mainly expressing the fulfilment of love, the tragic note is heard again. In the next intense declaration, M 84, the readiness to die is repeated: "Nobody, except death, will ever take you from me, because I would not hesitate to die for you".<sup>163</sup> Later on, in what may be the only trace of humour in a correspondence otherwise excessively serious, the man addresses her as *martyr mea* ("my martyr", V 96), making fun of her tragic proclivities. Before closing this section, it is worth noting that the woman who wrote those letters certainly had Ovid's *Heroides* in mind, since she explicitly refers to them in M 45, comparing her pressing attachment to her lover to that of Byblis towards Caunus, Oenone towards Pâris or Briseis towards Achilles.<sup>164</sup> At the end of poem M 82, Ovidian in [153] inspiration and tragic in tone, but whose meaning is unclear,<sup>165</sup> one line suffices to express this oppressive aspect of her love: *Miserere mei quia vere coartor dilectione tui* ("Pity me, for I am truly constrained by the love of you"). Constant Mews rightly insisted on the reasonable element of her "dilection", a love grounded on a choice that considers mainly the virtues and merits of the chosen one;<sup>166</sup> but once the decision is made, it has to be sustained, and her commitment knows no limits. She identifies with characters who are compelled by love to act beyond reason, of which Byblis, irrepressibly in love with her own twin brother, provides the starkest example. These two trends, based on very different sources of inspiration, do not contradict but rather complement each other. What I find remarkable is that, under both perspectives, she had conceived what her love would entail and require by the time she wrote M 45 and 49, before the relationship reached a critical point. The letters she wrote in reaction to the two offenses she suffered, and in their aftermath, demonstrate her ability to act along principles that she had settled earlier.

The third element retained above, exclusiveness and perpetuity, is closely connected to the previous one, as the positive side to her tragic sense of belonging. Declarations to that effect abound in the *EDA*, especially in its most intense section. Regarding exclusiveness, it may suffice to quote the first line of one of the most important letters (M 84):

<sup>163</sup> M 84: *te nisi mors michi adimet nemo, quia pro te mori non differo.*

<sup>164</sup> M 45: *Non enim me magis possum negare tibi, quam Biblis Cauno, aut Oenone Paridi, vel Briseis Achilli.* Briseis and Oenone are the alleged authors of *Heroides* 3 and 5. Byblis and Caunus are characters presented in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (IX, 447-665), where Byblis also writes a love letter to her brother, of which there are reminiscences in the poem M 82.

<sup>165</sup> Various interpretation have been provided by Dronke, *Women Writers*, 96-97; Mews, *Lost Love Letters*, 112; Jaeger, "The *Epistolae*," 137; Ward, Chiavaroli, "The Young Heloise," 93.

<sup>166</sup> Mews, *Lost Love Letters*, 135-139 and "Philosophical Themes."

“Ever since we first met and spoke to each other, only you have pleased me above all God’s creatures and only you have I loved... I placed you before anyone else in my heart and picked you alone out of thousands, in order to make a pledge with you”<sup>167</sup>.

The same letter, after an omission, goes on to express what she presents as her defining natural quality: “Birds love the shady parts of the woods, fish hides in streams of water, stags climbs mountains, I love you with a steadfast and whole mind” (*mente stabili et integra*).<sup>168</sup> In her following letter, a [154] fireworks of adverbs brings home the same point: “The immense strength of my love, unceasingly, incessantly, unquestioningly and undescribably holding its own course ...”.<sup>169</sup> The last extract of the final long letter echoes her insistence on stability: “I long with desire to have the leisure of being unfailingly devoted to you.”<sup>170</sup> There is little need to emphasize that such declarations form the centre of gravity of these letters. On a lexical level, it is interesting to note the predominance of adverbs and adjectives, qualifying the actions expressed in the letters, rather than nouns. Instead of an articulate reflection on faithfulness, the actual demonstration of her unmovable stability suffices.

Finally, an ambivalent attitude towards the man also appears in these letters. On various occasions, she demonstrates her obedience and submission to the man’s will. The brief M 29 is too elusive to be discussed, whereas the impressive opening of M 71 deserves mention :

“Terrified by the Lord’s judgement, which says, ‘it is hard to kick against the goad’, I send you this unadorned letter as proof of how devoutly I submit myself to your instructions.”<sup>171</sup>

Writing reluctantly, at his command, she does it according to her own feelings, without any salutation, in order to let her irritation show. Throughout, she also emphasizes his greater learning and philosophical abilities. The whole letter M 22, the first one in which she dares to engage in a learned discussion, is mainly

---

<sup>167</sup> M 84: *Post mutuum nostre visionis allocutionisque noticiam, tu solus michi placebas supra omnem dei creaturam, teque solum dilexi, diligendo quesivi, querendo inveni, inveniundo amavi, amando optavi, optando omnibus in corde meo preposui, teque solum elegi ex milibus, ut facerem tecum pignus.*

<sup>168</sup> M 84: *Nemorum umbrosa diligunt volucres, in aquarum rivulis latent pisces, cervi ascendunt montana, ego te diligo mente stabili et integra. ... Velis, nolis, semper meus es et eris, nunquam erga te meum mutatur votum neque a te animum abstraho totum.*

<sup>169</sup> M 86: *Immensa vis tui amoris, indesinenter, incessanter, indubitanter, inenarrabiliter permanens in statu sui tenoris ...* The same declarations are repeated in her next letter, M 88: *Tecum permanebo fida, stabilis, immutabilis, et non flexibilis, et si omnes homines capiendos in unicos scirem, nunquam a te nisi vi coacta, et penitus expulsa, recederem. Non sum harundo vento agitata, neque me a te movebit asperitas ulla, nec alicuius rei mollicia ...*

<sup>170</sup> M 112: *tamen desiderio, desidero indeficienter tuo vacare studio.* Translation modified.

<sup>171</sup> M 71: *Dominica sententia perterrita per quam dicitur ‘difficile est contra stimulum calcitrare’, has inornatas litteras tibi mitto, earum probans indicio quam devote in omnibus me tuis preceptis subicio.*

occupied by the depiction of an internal debate between her willingness to write and her sense of incompetence. Some time later, in M 49, a similar declaration, embedded within her most brilliant philosophical treatise, is now executed with rhetorical bravura. At the same time, on a different level, she displays strong signs proclaiming a relation between equals. This assertion is expressed in five salutations where she breaks the usual rules by naming the sender before the receiver, and describing them [155] both by the same epithet, the first and most obvious case being: *par pari*, “an equal to an equal” (M 18)<sup>172</sup>. While there can be no doubt of his superiority as a philosopher, as lovers, she does indeed perceive them as equals, as the brief M 83 explains with extreme concision: “you know that you are loved by me on equal condition” (*condicione pari*).<sup>173</sup>

The material presented here can be analysed in two different ways. It is possible to handle the evidence without taking into account the hypothetical reconstruction of events presented above. Observing this confrontation from a purely doctrinal point of view, some undeniable convergences appear between the demanding ethics of love expressed by Heloise on the one hand, and by the *Mulier* of the *EDA* on the other hand. Of course, the four points of comparison were chosen in order to reveal these common features, but it should be recognised that they correspond rather well with the core of Heloise’s ethics.<sup>174</sup> Taken one by one, they could be treated as mere coincidences. Considered together, they constitute a network of attitudes and requirements, grounded in conceptual elaborations, literary references and personal experience, that forms quite an unusual combination, at any period of the Middle Ages. In order to be systematic, it would be necessary to show that no such articulate view is found in any other contemporary document. For the time being, it will suffice to test this impression against the collection of twelfth century letters that seems closest to the *EDA*, the already mentioned Tegernsee love-letters.

The resemblance of imagery used in both collections is indeed striking, and would deserve a closer examination.<sup>175</sup> At one point, in the Tegernsee letters, a woman also tries to present her own theory of “true friendship”, with reference to

---

<sup>172</sup> See also M 48: *amans amanti*; 62: *dilecta dilecto*; 84: *amans amainti*; 100: *fidelis fideli*.

<sup>173</sup> M 83 : *Condicione pari per me te noris amari*. Translation modified.

<sup>174</sup> A number of these elements were already noted by Jeager, “The *Epistolae*”, to the same effect.

<sup>175</sup> Dronke, review of *Listening to Heloise*, 137, already stressed many resemblances, and drew the conclusion that the *Mulier* must have had a Bavarian education. Since many other traits rather point to a Northern France background, I would rather draw the inference that both set of letters share a stock of commonplaces in the expression of affections, that may have been first developped in German monastic circles, and notably in Tegernsee under the leadership of Froumundus, but that was shared more widely by the early XIIth Cent.

Cicero and using formulas that are parallel to some expressed in M 49,<sup>176</sup> in the same remarkable letter, she also insists on the exclusive character of her love, and on its everlasting qualities, with phrases [156] that echo some other letters in the Clairvaux manuscript.<sup>177</sup> Yet, nowhere in this collection is there any trace of the tragic elements discussed above. The notion of a virtuous friendship does not evolve into that of a more demanding form of gratuitous love, incompatible with any sort of worldly benefit. Nor is there a shadow of the willingness to die for love. If the male teacher refers to Pyramus and Thisbe, known through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, his female student does not seem ready to identify with any of the *Heroides*. All in all, while the Tegernsee and the Clairvaux collections share a number of images, metaphors and formulas, the young woman of the *EDA* is certainly much closer to Heloise than anyone else.

Yet these parallels make even more sense if we follow the reconstruction of events delineated above, that can be summarised as follows. In the course of their love affair, conducted mainly through exchanging wax tablets, the man committed some acts that, at first, both considered reprehensible – presumably sexual relations for which she was not prepared. After wishing to quit, she decided to resume their relationship, and eventually proposed a new formulation of their bond: she would remain his friend and secret lover, not asking for marriage in reparation, but requiring his full care and attention. He accepted the offer, while declaring himself not perfectly up to the task from the very beginning (V 85). Indeed, soon afterwards, fearing exposure, he began to act more prudently and put some distance between them, which made her furious at him. Yet the most obvious reason for her being sent away for some time is that, indeed, they had been discovered. Upon her return, she had important things to tell that made her happy, but provoked a negative reaction on his part, and which brought an end to their exchange.

This narrative is not the fruit of any wild imagination; it is merely an attempt to account for all the elements that the letters convey, without leaving out any detail.<sup>178</sup> It is a different task to try and reconcile this with the way in which Abelard presents his affair. For instance, locating within the *EDA* the precise moment when he began living in Fulbert's house would be totally hypothetical. Such an endeavour should also be undertaken with a [157] degree of scepticism regarding his account,

<sup>176</sup> Kühnel, *Dû bist mîn*, 70: ... *de amicitia uera que nihil est melius, nihil iocundius, nihil amabilius, dicere ipse rerum ordo concessit. Amicitia uera, at testante Tullio Cicerone, est diuinarum humanarumque omnium rerum, cum karitate et beniuolentia consensio, que etiam, ut per te didici, excellentior est omnibus rebus humanis, cunctisque aliis uirtutibus eminentior, dissociata congregans, congregata conservans, conservata magis magisque exaggerans*. This letter, numbered IV.1 by Kühnel and found a bit further in the ms clm 19411, is not edited by P. Dronke.

<sup>177</sup> Kühnel, *Dû bist mîn*, 72: *Nam a die qua te primum uidi, cepi diligere te; 74: Tu solus ex milibus electis ... in te solo pendeo, in te omnem spem meam, fiduciamque positam habeo; 76: Esto securus, successor nemo futurus, est tibi sed nec erit, mihi nî tu nemo placebit.*

<sup>178</sup> For a more detailed presentation, see my "Reconstitution de l'intrigue."



which he may have deliberately blackened and exaggerated. The *EDA* do not exactly reflect the notion of a strategy to seduce an innocent young woman, although they don't exclude it either, especially in the first part; all in all, however, they rather give the impression that both parties were actively and voluntarily involved. But the description of an exchange of letters as a means for saying things that neither partner would have dared to utter in the presence of the other fits in well with the contents of the letters. As for sexual relations, in his third letter, Abelard records that he forced her by threats and blows, while she resisted, a picture that may in fact refer only to the first occasion discussed above.<sup>179</sup> The final sequence of the *EDA*, as I reconstruct it, appears to match rather well the events recorded in the *Historia*. There is no indication that Heloise was sent away from Paris once Fulbert finally discovered the affair, but Abelard alludes to a separation of the lovers.<sup>180</sup> The *EDA* leave little room for the scenes of immodesty depicted by Abelard after the affair was disclosed, but this could be accounted for in different ways. Finally, the *Historia* refers to the letter in which the young woman announced her pregnancy "with great exultation":<sup>181</sup> as Constant Mews surmised for different reasons, I too consider that letter 112, transmitted in a very fragmentary form, could very well be that letter. The final sad message recorded as 112a shows that his reaction was not what she expected. If he had sent her orders to prepare and move to Brittany, as we can piece together from the *Historia*, we should understand that this departure put an end to their love epistolary, to which Heloise only added later the poem *Urget amor* (V 113), in memory of the earlier phase of the affair. The next letter she wrote, from Le Pallet, would have been the *Dehortatio*.<sup>182</sup> [158]

Without forcing the documentation, and with only a small margin of uncertainty, the letters of the Clairvaux manuscript can be seen as interweaving rather nicely with the account provided *a posteriori* by Abelard. This, of course, cannot be taken as positive evidence for the ascription, but rather as a successful counter-examination of the hypothesis. As far as the succession of events is concerned, there is no major discrepancy between an internal reconstruction of the *EDA* and what was previously known regarding Heloise and Abelard, which would

<sup>179</sup> Ep. V, 210: *Nosti quantis turpitudinis immoderata mea libido corpora nostra addixerat ... Sed et te nolentem et, prout poteras, reluctantem et dissuadentem, que natura infirmior eras, sepius minis ac flagellis ad consensum trahebat.*

<sup>180</sup> HC, ed. Hicks, 62: *O quantus in hoc cognoscendo dolor avunculi! quantum in separatione amantium dolor ipsorum!*

<sup>181</sup> HC, ed. Hicks, 62-64: *Non multo autem post, puella se concepisse comperit, et cum summa exultatione michi super hoc ilico scripsit, consulens quid de hoc ipse faciendum deliberarem.*

<sup>182</sup> I am not attempting here to examine all possible parallels between the *Dehortatio* and the *EDA*. Even if both of the following sentences are common places, it is worth noting their similitude in phrasing. HC, ed. Hicks, 72: *Tantoque nos ipsos ad tempus separatos gratiora de conventu nostro percepere gaudia, quanto rariora*; *EDA*, M 88: *quanto interius plus absconditur, et servatur, tanto magis augetur et multiplicatur.*

render this identification impossible. If they are indeed the authors of the *EDA*, these letters reveal episodes previously unknown, but this fact cannot be taken as an objection against the ascription. It has to be expected that new materials would convey new information. The critical test is rather that nothing, within the *EDA*, is incompatible with the biographical details of the couple. What I do consider as a positive evidence is the exact matching of Heloise's very peculiar ethics of love with those expressed by the *Mulier*, while both women were confronted with a similar situation. In the fragmentary form in which we read it, M 79 alludes elliptically to the impossibility of marital life. This cannot be confused with an argued refusal to marry, since the question was not explicitly raised at that point. Yet it reveals that, at that stage of her love affair, she had already made her mind as to the social situation that fitted her moral expectations, and this excluded marriage. Her notion of disinterested love required that it would not bring her any profit, while her tragic imagination made her ready to face any potential danger.

What is topical for the purpose of this volume is that, quite exactly, she made the most important moral decisions of her life, using examples found within her literary memory. As a young educated noble woman, she had ahead of her two honourable trajectories, either marriage among the high nobility, or a religious career as an abbess. Engaged in a passionate love affair with her philosophy teacher, and losing her virginity in the event, she decided to reject all sources of social honour in order to remain the friend and lover of her master. As some historians have noted, the choice made by Heloise was not in total contradiction with social conditions. It is true that many canons, in Paris and elsewhere, were openly living with their concubines.<sup>183</sup> But this is not quite what the young woman appears to have imagined for herself; she rather foresaw a route for which there was no social model available, and that [159] she could only think of in terms of a tragic Roman heroine, risking her life and humiliating her social status for the sake of love.

As we saw earlier, Baudri of Bourgueil was a major literary inspiration for the *EDA*, especially on the woman's side. The poet-abbot is in fact the author who did the most to popularise Ovid's *Heroides*, not widely circulated at the time, notably by producing some imitations of it<sup>184</sup>. This could be, in itself, one more clue in favour of Heloise's authorship, since she had family connections with him: her uncle Fulbert was once involved in Baudri's attempt at buying the bishopric of Orléans, while her mother may have been a close neighbour of Bourgueil.<sup>185</sup> Yet, if Baudri is the channel

<sup>183</sup> Christopher N.L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), 78-89, and 91 for his impression on Heloise's social situation.

<sup>184</sup> Baudri of Bourgueil, *Carmina*, esp. c. 7.

<sup>185</sup> Following a suggestion first presented by Wener Robl, *Heloisas Herkunft. Hersendis mater* (München: Olzog, 2001), C.J. Mews, "Negotiating the Boundaries of Gender in Religious Life: Robert of Arbrissel and Hersende, Abelard and Heloise," *Viator* (2006): 113-148, argues that Heloise's mother was Hersende of Montsoreau, the first prioress of Fontevraud, who gave the piece of land on which the

through which she became acquainted with Ovid, there is a huge difference in the way she handled the same source. For Baudri, poetical impersonification was mostly a ludic activity, that could be enjoyed safely within the abbey's wall.<sup>186</sup> To the contrary, as Dronke puts it, Heloise's relation to the mythical material is remarkable in that she shows no "playful posture"<sup>187</sup>. Instead, she engages most seriously in her identification with the literary models she has in mind. In the end, the crucial difference between the two women voices we have been discussing is that one was preparing herself for the eventuality of dramatic events, while the other had already been through tragedy. Connecting these two voices, we can better understand the biography of her person who matters, not because she is unique, but because she illuminates a brief and unique moment in history.

### *Conclusion*

As a conclusion, I would like to reflect briefly on the various types of demonstrative evidence that have been presented in the course of this article. The codicological examination is a necessary step, that only delimits a range of possibilities. If it is essential to reconstruct the transmission of the text, in the present case, it reveals little about the context of its production. We only [161] know that an unedited copy of the letters was present in Clairvaux by 1471. The conjecture that Heloise kept with her, all her life long, a thin volume in which she had copied her secret correspondence with Abelard, left it at the Paraclete, and that a Cistercian monk, residing there as confessor for the nuns, found it and brought it back to his home abbey, at some point between the early 13th and the mid 15th century, has the elegance of simplicity, but it cannot be ascertained in any way.

With a set of documents that do not offer any explicit sign of identification, stylistic analysis is essential, in order to assess the cultural background of the writers and the period in which they were acting. A quantitative approach, using various statistical tests, can narrow the margins. As I read them, the data gathered so far points towards the Parisian reception of Loire Valley poets, in the first part of the 12th century. Yet it is unlikely that such calculations can suffice to uncover the identity of the authors. A comparison with Abelard's and Heloise's later writings is hampered on the one hand by the radical changes he went through, and on the other one by the slimness of her known literary output. I fear that a confrontation with other collections of love letters can only confirm the peculiarities of the *EDA*, that displays a remarkable command of classic and patristic authors, as well as a

---

abbey was founded. Baudri wrote Robert of Arbrissel's *Vita*.

<sup>186</sup> Gerald Bond, *The Loving Subject: Desire, Eloquence and Power in Romanesque France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 42-69.

<sup>187</sup> Dronke, *Women Writers*, 108.

familiarity with dialectics. Using only such tools, be it of a quantitative or qualitative nature, it might prove difficult to go any further than Ewald Könsgen did, when he considered the authors as a couple resembling Heloise and Abelard.

But the difficulty of the case is such that there is no reason to limit inquiry to the usual tools. The arguments presented by Stephen Jaeger, showing that the dialogue within the letters reflects an encounter between of two distinct styles of learning, helps in assessing their unique historical situation. If the letters are in part philosophical documents, their doctrinal content should also be considered. This can be attempted on a lexical and textual basis, as Constant Mews has done. The overlapping between love letters and treatises of dialectics is predictably limited. It is already noticeable that some common technical vocabulary can be identified. It is even more important to remark that a set of arguments and quotations, found in a couple of letters, are transposed in the *Sic et non*. What I have attempted to do here has been to reconstruct Heloise's ethics, in order to compare it with those of the *Mulier*. Despite the many gaps that separate the Correspondence of Heloise and Abelard from their early love letters, this is the angle under which more stability can be expected, since she claims forcefully to have remained faithful to her ideals. The result of this comparison, in my view, is conclusive; it should of course be debated and made more precise. [161]

Another type of evidence that I have attempted to introduce is of a biographical nature. The general agreement that this collection of letters reflects a real exchange of messages implies that flesh and blood characters stood behind these words. We are not only confronted with a text, but with actual persons living in a specific historical setting.<sup>188</sup> They interacted, not only by exchanging letters. The messages point to many meetings of the lovers, and hint at various other external circumstances. Proceeding with due caution, it is legitimate to make use of such indications in order to try and reconstruct the context of the correspondence. This operation has to be conducted in two stages, first through precise exegesis of every letter, taking into account the many lacunas indicated by the copyist; then, in a second and more speculative step, by making sense of the succession of all letters. Resorting to historical imagination at that stage is not reprehensible, provided this operation is controlled by a series of strict rules (taking into account every single element available, avoiding unnecessary hypotheses, acknowledging the lacunas, accepting unpredicted results). In this process, it should also be admitted that the letters are fragmentary in more than one sense, since they may not echo all the major events that took place during the period. Although there is room for discussion, my impression is that the general outline of the story that I reconstruct fits in well with what we knew of Heloise and Abelard.

---

<sup>188</sup> The same point was made about the Correspondence by Jean Jolivet, "Abélard entre chien et loup," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 20 (1977) 310, or Barbara Newman, "Authenticity."

All these approaches have their legitimacy, and they also pursue their own specific goals – the biographical one being for instance relevant for the history of gender relations and of emotions. But if we wish to give a global assessment of the authorship question, they should all be taken into account, and duly weighed. If only one would reveal any incompatibility with the ascription to the famous couple, the hypothesis should be discarded at once. On the other hand, the accumulation of favourable clues gradually renders more and more likely this identification. At the present stage of research, we are facing a set of authentic letters, written in the first half of the twelfth century in Northern France, by a philosopher and his student who exactly resemble Abelard and Heloise, displaying the same cultural background and sharing with them a few precise technical words and a set of distinct literary references. If there is no indisputable textual proof, one should be reminded that, when certainty is out of reach, historical judgement is often content with a high level of probability. In the present case, the likelihood that another couple could have lived the same story, felt and expressed the same [162] ideas, in similar circumstances, and in the same area and period, is so thin that, even in lack of total certainty, I find it reasonable to conclude in favour of the ascription.