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## From Past to Paradise

### The Letters of Peter Abelard and Heloise d'Argenteuil

The letters of Abelard and Heloise are famous relics from the medieval period. Since recent times most historians consider them as a composite document that has never been intended as an actual exchange of letters. As a result the epistolary form of the texts has been neglected. Here the literary use of the epistolary genre shall be reconsidered in order to historicize the letters as embodying a theatrical performance intended for a monastic audience.

#### Introduction

In a discussion of historical letters and letter collections it is almost prohibitive not to include the famous letters of Peter Abelard (c. 1079-1142) and Heloise d'Argenteuil (c. 1100-1164).<sup>1</sup> Somewhat ironically, however, their fame has to be located within modernity as opposed to medieval culture, which has resulted in vast consequences for the letters' historiographical status.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, since the early nineteenth century a profoundly modern hermeneutic, based on the notion of intimate letter writing, has determined the face of historiography well into the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> As Hellemans has suggested, the modern medium of the letter is accompanied by a lack of distance:

The point of history is to resist classifying letters as autobiographical while, ironically, their author supplies compelling reasons to conclude that the author is the protagonist of the letter.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, the medieval letter is no modern letter and its contents defy modern distinctions between private and public.<sup>5</sup> The dominating modern hermeneutic was largely deconstructed over the course of the closing

decades of the twentieth century, and with this deconstruction attention for the epistolary genre waned in the study of Abelard and Heloise's letters; most scholars now approach the letters as a unified composition. This provides the present article with fruitful substance for a novel examination that questions the letters' communicative purpose. After a more thorough contextualization of the aforementioned historiographical developments we shall turn our attention to the exchange of letters. Consequently, I wish to reposition the letters of Abelard and Heloise in their historical, monastic context by demonstrating how the medieval epistolary genre is utilized as a literary technique in order to stage a consolatory theatrical performance revolving around the struggle of the monastic life, and, more specifically, the burden of memory.

### State of the Art

Within historiographical discourse the letters of Abelard and Heloise generally refer to the composite whole of nine texts found in a thirteenth century manuscript (Troyes Médiathèque 802).<sup>6</sup> The writings, likely composed in the 1130s, start out with a letter attributed to Abelard and addressed to an anonymous friend, carrying the title *A History of my Calamities* (*Historia calamitatum*, henceforth abbreviated to *HC*). This letter features a survey of Abelard's life from his youth until the time that he was abbot at the monastery of St. Gildas, and for this reason it has gained the controversial label of medieval autobiography.<sup>7</sup> The letter's highlights are among others the relationship with Heloise, the castration ensued by her uncle Fulbert's wrath, Abelard and Heloise's conversion to the monastic life, Abelard's condemnation at the council of Soissons in 1121, and the founding of the Oratory of the Paraclete which eventually becomes Heloise's convent. The *HC* is followed by the epistolary exchange with Heloise that covers five letters, provoked by the fact that allegedly the *HC* had fallen into Heloise's indignant hands, for why was the text not addressed to her but to an anonymous friend? Subsequently Heloise longs for Abelard's consolation while he appears to ignore her pleas. Letter six gives the impression of encompassing Heloise's surrender as she abandons her former requests in favor of new ones for a history of women in the monastic life and a suitable Rule for the Paraclete. These requests are subsequently met in letters seven, eight, and the *Rule* that concludes the collection.

The letters' contents and their peculiar manuscript tradition have resulted in critical assessments with regards to their authorial authenticity and the authenticity of the epistolary genre used. These questions used to be intertwined on behalf of the view that if the letters are a forgery of later times, it is implausible to assume that they are in fact genuine letters. As I have mentioned above, an inherently modern hermeneutic based on the notion of romantic love has for a long time been the determining factor in discourse on the letters. Let us first briefly consider the history of this development so that we can assess its implications for the scholarly field, after which we can proceed with an examination of the *status quaestionis*.

The culprit of the modern hermeneutical approach to the letters of Abelard and Heloise can ironically enough be traced back to the medieval period. Jean de Meun's (1250-1305) *Roman de la Rose*, a prime example of courtly literature and one of the few medieval texts referring to the letters, emphasized Heloise's monologue on preferring the value of love to the ties of marriage.<sup>8</sup> This interpretation appears to have captivated (early) modern imaginations. Bernard d'Agesci's (1756-1829) *A Lady Reading the Letters of Heloise and Abelard* (c. 1780, figure 1) provides us with a striking example that demonstrates the prevalence of this modern hermeneutic in visualizations of the letters. The voluptuous lady depicted here is swooning in her self-identification with the subject matter contained in a book the pages of which read 'Heloise' and 'Abe[lard]'.<sup>9</sup> An opened letter positioned next to this book as well as a copy of *L'art d'aimer* captures our attention as our gaze shifts from the woman to that which has caused her rapture.<sup>10</sup> The close allegiance between love and the practice of writing intimate (love) letters can scarcely be overlooked.<sup>11</sup>

Only in recent times the dominance of this hermeneutic did fade and when it did it dragged critical examinations of the epistolary genre with it in its grave. Feßler (1756-1839), one of the first who expressed his doubts concerning the letters' authenticity, voiced his concerns through the lens of the modern hermeneutic by postulating that Heloise's enthusiasm for (womanly) love prevailing over the monastic life must have been the result of an erroneous fabrication.<sup>12</sup> Similar connections between conceptions of love and letter writing still persisted in arguments published in the last quarter of the twentieth century. For instance, when in the 1970s Benton argued that the letters were a forgery of later times, Dronke responded with his comparative analysis of contemporaneous writings demonstrating that the



Figure 1: d'Agesci's A Lady Reading the Letters of Heloise and Abelard (c. 1780). The sensual depiction of the lady as she is swooning over a print version of the letters is striking. Note the opened letter in the foreground. This oil on canvas painting (81.3 cm x 64.8 cm) belongs to the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL, USA. The digital reproduction comes from the author's private collection.

letters did not exceed the emotional boundaries of their time.<sup>13</sup> A paradigm shift took place after scholarly attention for the letters mounted to disprove Benton's hypothesis.<sup>14</sup> Provisional consensus on the letters' authorial authenticity prevailed and made room for more critical considerations of the epistolary genre. In the late 1980s and early 1990s feminist commentators advanced arguments in favor of the letters' authenticity (as letters) in order to prove Heloise's autonomy as abbess.<sup>15</sup> At the other end of the spectrum Luscombe convincingly renewed and reinforced Von Moos and Robertson's overlooked hypotheses that the letters could have functioned as a foundational document for the Paraclete.<sup>16</sup> This current of scholarship, deconstructing the bias of the modern hermeneutic, has grown in breadth with increased attention for the communicative setting of the text in the volume *Listening to Heloise*, recently complemented by *Rethinking Abelard*.<sup>17</sup> To this end Stock's notion of textual communities, which suggests that texts could be communicated beyond their manuscript through oral recitation from memory, has been invaluable.<sup>18</sup> Whereas the letters' communicative aspects, literary contexts, and intellectual frameworks have been explored more frequently, considerations of the epistolary genre often continue to be discussed in binary terms of truthfulness or falsity.<sup>19</sup> This introduces a lacuna when it comes to studies focusing on the communal receptive contents of the letters while respecting their use of genre.<sup>20</sup>

### A Movie Script Ending

In the introduction to this article I have highlighted the discrepancy between the medieval letter and its modern counterpart. Medieval letter writing is kaleidoscopic in its nature and thus shows diverse faces. In the first place a distinction has to be made between the letter as a formal act of communication and the letter as literary genre. Whereas the former served as a popular means of long-distance communication, initially upheld by churchly literacy and from the eleventh century onward by manuals of letter writing, the latter appears to have enjoyed more liberty in operating freely from the so-called *ars dictaminis*.<sup>21</sup> One of the rudimentary foundations on which the medieval letter was written, both formally as well as literary, was the lack of distinction between a personal tone and public communication as its message was generally presented orally in front of an audience.<sup>22</sup> In what follows I will demonstrate how this dichotomy between personal and public,

though difficult to reconcile for modern audiences, allows us to reposition the letters back into their historical context. As we shall see, it is plausible to hypothesize that Abelard and Heloise adhered to a popular contemporaneous use of the literary genre in order to substantiate a theatrical performance concerned about the problem of memory in the monastic search for God through personas modeled in their image.<sup>23</sup>

A first trace of the letters' theatrical essence can be identified in the opening lines of the *HC*:

There are times when examples are better than words for stirring or soothing human feelings; and so I have chosen to follow up the words of consolation I gave you in person with the experiences of my own misfortunes, hoping thereby to give you comfort in absence.<sup>24</sup>

The distinction made between words as comforting in presence and examples as providing comfort in absence seems somewhat paradoxical, but is resolved by taking into account the exegetical character of historiography in the medieval period. In the genre of *historia* literal narration of past events served exegetical interpretations of perceived patterns that ought to expose God's workings in the world.<sup>25</sup> As the title of the letter signifies, then, the text contracts the rift between personal and public by substituting absence with presence as the literal narrative of the personal past is accompanied by an allegorical mode that transcends the immediate temporality of language.<sup>26</sup> Higher truths that go beyond the constraints of space and time reveal themselves through the medium of examples in this scenario.

Moreover, an allegorical reading exhibits how the Paraclete assumes a central position in the *HC* that foreshadows the contents of the letters to come. The Paraclete's centering is actually quite literal as both before and after its discussion the narrative is distinguished by an almost pointillistic character. Abelard's life is drawn on a narrative map that reverberates the rootless wanderings of an intellectual whose home continuously relocates between the intellectual center of Paris and the periphery of his homeland Brittany; meticulous strokes of the pen have skillfully rendered the theme of detachment.<sup>27</sup> This obfuscation between space and time, elicited by Abelard's wanderings, is interrupted by the foundation of his scholarly settlement, the Paraclete. His description of the place foreshadows its future ascetic qualities when he notes that "(...) scholars began to gather there from all parts, forsaking cities and towns to inhabit the wilderness, leaving large mansions to put up little tents for themselves (...)."<sup>28</sup> The Paraclete is fashioned as the

antithesis to the secular life of riches and by doing so it anchors space and time, because this is the place where Abelard finds consolation in his martyrdom; it becomes the haven for the homeless.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, in their embrace of poverty its initial inhabitants "looked like hermits rather than scholars".<sup>30</sup> Besides endowing the Paraclete with religious authority due to its appeal to the primitive church, this close identification of scholars with hermits also alludes to Boethius' (c. 480-525) *Consolation of Philosophy (De consolazione philosophiae)*.<sup>31</sup> This famous treatise features a dialogue between Boethius and Lady Philosophy who argue about the vanity of human affairs and the timeless qualities of knowledge, which enjoyed renewed popularity in the twelfth century. Abelard and Heloise's peer Adelard of Bath (c. 1080-1152) stages a comparable theatrical spectacle between the personas 'philosophia' (armed with the seven liberal arts) and 'philocosmia' (enjoying worldly goods) in his *On the Same and the Different (De eodem et diverso)* as a means of praising the virtues of knowledge over bodily attachment to the world.<sup>32</sup> Bearing this in mind, Abelard's prudent conceptualization of the consolatory role of philosophy - embodied by the Paraclete - diverts attention away from the secular life and anticipates the staging of the persona of philocosmia in great narrative suspense.<sup>33</sup>

A continuation of our allegorical reading into the perimeter of the epistolary dialogue raises the impression that we indeed encounter the persona of philocosmia in Abelard and Heloise's own literary performance. With the passage from the *HC* to the letters, the need for consolation also shifts from Abelard to Heloise. However, discrepancy sets in between the consolation that Heloise wishes to receive and the consolation that Abelard is willing to give. Despite the fact that Abelard and Heloise are positioned as engaging in an epistolary dialogue, they are effectively speaking different languages. Initially the persona of Heloise is unable to find the same amount of comfort in the Paraclete as Abelard in the *HC*:

The lovers' pleasures we enjoyed together were so sweet to me that they cannot displease me and can scarcely fade from my memory. Wherever I turn they are always there before my eyes, bringing with them awakened longings and fantasies which will not even let me sleep. (...) I, who should be grieving for the sins I have committed, am sighing rather for what I have lost. The things we did and also the places and times in which we did them are stamped on my heart along with your image, so that I live through them all again with you.<sup>34</sup>

At first glance a literal reading of Heloise's words reveals someone who yearns for the lost glories of a distant past. Instead of finding her consolation in God, Heloise's source of comfort is her storehouse of memories filled with shared intimacies enjoyed in the company of Abelard. From a modern point of view Heloise, preferring to relive her rose-colored memories, is not unlike the contemporary nostalgic.<sup>35</sup> Yet from the perspective of our allegorical reading such qualifications are wholly misplaced, not in the least because of the concept's anachronism.<sup>36</sup> Specifically, a reading of nostalgia diverts our attention to an interpretation that seems ahistorical for it diminishes the epic contrast between monastic expectations (grief for past sins) and reality (experience of joy in past memories). Perhaps a more suitable conceptualization, which is less invasive to the text's historical cultural context, may be found in Bakhtin's notion of historical inversion. This concept denotes the mythical glorification of the past through generalized categories such as perfection, justice, and harmonious conditions, which Bakhtin deduced from manifestations in Greek literature.<sup>37</sup> Essentially, historical inversion emphasizes the artificial nature of an idealism that postulates that the past is to be favored over and against the present. If in this manner we contextualize the cited passage against its literary nature, the emphasis shifts from a sorrow in temporality to an awareness of tension between the reality of this temporality and the expectation of eternity in the search for (the presence) of God. In short, Heloise's lament may be read as an expression of despair precipitated by the very problem of being trapped in one's inability to distance oneself from past memories.<sup>38</sup>

Besides, Coleman's findings in her seminal study of premodern memory help us to discern how the letters' introduction to the problem of memories is resounded by their contemporary culture of monasticism. On the basis of writings produced by leading Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090-1153), Coleman has identified how memory was imagined to be a stained storehouse for evil deeds that had to be blanching in the monastic struggle.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, she views these writings as strongly performative in nature, which is to say that they actively aspired to purify sinful memories by overwriting them with new, collective, symbolic, and exemplary Biblical examples.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Coleman demonstrates how Bernard, by utilizing knightly and courtly imagery in his language, can be seen to have adapted his texts to an audience of adults who converted to the monastic life after having fulfilled a worldly or ecclesiastical career.<sup>41</sup> Particularly these individuals belonged to an audience carrying with them their fair share of worldly

memories that could potentially inhibit their search for God. Because the practice of child oblation ceased to be practiced in most of the new monastic orders of the twelfth century, the struggle against memory was not only a Cistercian problem but also a more widespread phenomenon.<sup>42</sup> Gradually, it becomes clear that Heloise, the embodiment of a rapidly growing number of women who turned to the monastic life (whether voluntarily through religious fervor or because of social pressures), could have offered an exemplary experience for a monastic readership that was invited into her persona's inner human struggle with memory.<sup>43</sup> Thus, in Heloise's realization of falling short in the monastic life we discern the silent yet slumbering tensions between personal and public characteristics of the medieval epistolary genre.

Furthermore, Abelard offers consolation to Heloise's problem of temporality by referring her to the eschatological paradise. Instead of granting Heloise's desire for "words which would picture for me the reality I have lost"<sup>44</sup>, Abelard deviates from this temporal means of consolation and shifts the object of comfort to the geographical locus of the monastery:

There is no place, I think, more safe and salutary for a soul grieving for its sins and desolated by its transgressions than that which is specially consecrated to the true Paraclete, the Comforter, and which is particularly designated by his name.<sup>45</sup>

In Abelard's words it is literally the Paraclete, the Comforter, which offers solace at times of despair. Even though it might be somewhat tempting to consider this temporal substitution with geography as sufficient, this would neglect the double layer of meaning assumed by the Paraclete. The fact that temporality and spatiality are intricately connected with each other in creation notwithstanding, Abelard applies a tangible distinction in his explanation of Matthew 6:6 in letter five as he comments that "by a room he means a place that is secluded from the tumult and sight of the world (...), such as the seclusion of monastic solitude (...)."<sup>46</sup> His opposition between monastic seclusion and earthly affairs underlines the aims of the monastic life to erase all earthly references to temporality, which was accomplished by a strenuous cycle of repetition that upheld a mimetic model of eternity.<sup>47</sup> In doing so the monastic space assumes the qualities of a paradisiacal *locus amoenus* (pleasant place), which is reinforced by Abelard's allusion to Jerome in letter seven, his historical treatise on women in the monastic life, explicitly identifying the monastery with paradise: "Consider how paradise

is their natural home (...).<sup>48</sup> Detached from the boundaries of temporality, the monastery becomes the new home to yearn for. Instead of nourishing past memories Abelard exhorts Heloise to strive for a life in paradise, which for humankind resides in the atemporal sphere of the prelapsarian past as well as the postlapsarian future.

Accordingly, the epistolary dialogue epitomizes in letter six when both personas culminate in their stylized roles. In this letter we discern the transformation of Heloise. Although the persona of Heloise still put her monastic failure on public display in letter four, the tides have turned in letter six:

If indeed many of those who rashly profess monastic observance today would pay more careful attention to this, (...) and study closely the actual tenor of their Rule, they would offend less through ignorance, and sin less through negligence (...). We see that the world has now grown old (...).<sup>49</sup>

Heloise's critique directed against her peers in the monastic life should not be viewed separately from her observation that the world has grown old, and both elements are host to allegory. Not only do we recognize in this passage the Christian periodization of world history, but also the Ancient topos that the world has been in persistent decline since the end of a certain Golden Age; these two topoi came together in the medieval Christian tradition. The main idea is that at one instance in the past humanity lived in peace, harmony, and people did not age.<sup>50</sup> It may be evident that in the Christian worldview we recognize this as a prelapsarian paradisiacal state, before mankind fell into original sin. In this fashion Heloise's apparent critique makes way for another instance of historical inversion, in which the past this time around is mythologized in the most literal sense of the word, and in contrast to letter four, there is no longer a well-defined temporal referent in her metaphorical outcry of *ubi sunt*.<sup>51</sup> By expressing a complaint about decline in the religious state of affairs in her time, the persona of Heloise exhibits an allegorical manifestation of monastic *contemptus mundi*, contempt of the world, a literary meditative technique that expresses the withdrawal away from the monastic life through an exercise of despair about the world and oneself.<sup>52</sup> The referent of historical inversion thus becomes the moment of salvation that lies beyond earthly life and human history, and the affirmation of this idea is exercised through the very contempt of the present which lies at the heart of the ascetic way of life.<sup>53</sup> Heloise's enactment of *contemptus mundi* is a tour de force that glisters brightly when caught by the rays of historical

inversion. The persona of *philosophia*, Abelard, has succeeded in casting off the shackles of Heloise's *philocosmia*: "As one nail drives out another hammered in, new thought expels old (...)." <sup>54</sup> The so-called silence of Heloise thus reveals the shift from past to paradise in which the personal narratives of Abelard and Heloise represent "a kind of artificial structuring of reality." <sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

In sum, by means of a case-study of the letters of Abelard and Heloise I have tried to demonstrate how the medium of the medieval letter could also be used in a literary fashion, and specifically how the dichotomy between personal tone and public performance reveals a monastic undertaking in this specific case-study. The explicit presence of an allegorical layer imbues the external manifestation of personal narratives in these letters with exemplary value concerning key monastic conventions such as the burden of memory and *contemptus mundi*. To be sure, we have observed that Abelard's persona of *philosophia* combats worldly attachment and eradicates temporality in the process by replacing temporal objects of longing with spatial objects, the past with the monastery. <sup>56</sup> Therefore, the kaleidoscopic nature of the epistolary genre shaped a text that was relatable to an audience of monastic converts, nuns of the Paraclete, who had abandoned their families or whom had been abandoned by their families and dealt with the same 'human' problems as the persona of Heloise. The personal tone of the letters most likely fulfilled their communicative purpose in appealing to a human community with human struggles; they encompass a kind of tutorial based on real life examples. This is not supposed to impose contradiction between the historical figures and their personas. Instead, substantial differences exist between modern and medieval interpretive models when it comes to the distinction between personal and public. Whereas modern minds are more readily drawn toward the intimate details of private pasts, medieval minds probably aimed for the examples that could be deduced from these lives. As such, the literal narrative may have been stylized here and there in order to accommodate the exemplary message that had to be conveyed. Despite the fact that the medieval letter does not allow itself to be identified with the spontaneous, personal, love letter of modern times, I have demonstrated that when enough historical distance is maintained the medieval letter still offers a fruitful, albeit complex, object of examination within historical studies.

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 Noten

1. For more extensive biographical surveys beyond the contents of this article the reader may want to consult Michael Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) and Bonnie Wheeler, *Introduction to Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000).
2. On the contemporary reception of the letters, or the lack thereof, see Constant J. Mews, *Abelard and Heloise* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2005), 13-14.
3. *Idem.*, 14.
4. Babette Hellemans, "The Man without Memory: Peter Abelard and Trust in History," in *On Religion and Memory*, ed. Babette Hellemans, Willemien Otten, and Burcht Pranger (NY: Fordham U.P., 2013), 61.
5. Katherine Kong, "Writing the Subjunctive into the Indicative: Commanding Performances in the Letters of Abelard and Heloise," in *Lettering the Self in Medieval and Early Modern France* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 59.
6. This manuscript is the oldest in existence and dating varies. J.T. Muckle dated it around the end of the thirteenth century to the beginning of the fourteenth based on its Gothic hand, whereas most recent editor David Luscombe dates it c. 1230 based on the copy of another text, the Institutes, which it also contains. Cf. J. T. Muckle, "Abelard's Letter of Consolation to a Friend (Historia Calamitatum)," *Mediaeval Studies* 12 (1950), 142; David Luscombe, ed. and Betty Radice, trans. *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2013). Recently Constant J. Mews in his review of this edition has pointed out inconsistencies in David Luscombe's dating scheme, see "Between Authenticity and Interpretation: On the Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise and the Epistolae Duorum Amantium," *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 76 (2014), 826-7. The letters were also transmitted (fragmentarily) in some fifteen other manuscripts. An overview of these can be found in Luscombe's edition, xxxix-lxxxii. Since the 1990s Mews has also argued that Abelard and Heloise have left us another corpus of love letters, the so-called Epistolae duorum amantium that Edward Könsgen edited in his *Epistolae duorum amantium: Briefe Abaelards und Heloises?* (Leiden: Brill, 1974). These letters were found in a fifteenth century manuscript featuring fragments of 113 love letters between husband and wife. Mews' thesis of these letters as being Abelard and Heloise's is reflected strongly in the aforementioned review article of Luscombe's edition. On top of that he also furnished a translation: Constant J. Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999). Jan M. Ziolkowski has argued against this attribution in "Lost and Not Yet Found: Heloise, Abelard, and the Epistolae duorum amantium," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 14, no. 1 (2008), 171-202.
7. Especially influential in this regard were Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie III.1* (Frankfurt a.M.: Schulte-Bulmke, 1959), 523-627; Mary M. McLaughlin, "Abelard as Autobiographer: The Motive and Meaning of His 'Story of Calamities'," *Speculum* 42, no. 3 (July 1967): 463-488. Criticism against this modern notion has been voiced by Sverre Bagge, "The Autobiography of Abelard and Medieval Individualism," *Journal*

- of Medieval History* 19 (1993), 330 and Peter von Moos, "Abaelard, Heloise und ihr Paraklet: ein Kloster nach Maß. Zugleich eine Streitschrift gegen die ewige Wiederkehr hermeneutischer Naivität," in *Abaelard und Heloise: Gesammelte Studien zum Mittelalter*, Band I, ed. Gert Melville (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005), 243.
8. Mews, Abelard and Heloise, 4.
  9. Mary D. Sheriff, *Moved by Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 230.
  10. Pierre Rosenberg and Colin B. Bailey, "Not Greuze, but Bernard d'Agesci," *The Burlington Magazine* 143, no. 1177 (April 2001), 210. Sheriff, 225-6, also argues that the painting may depict critique based on eighteenth century gendered sensibilities, for the letters were seen as stimulating promiscuity on behalf of what was perceived to be their sensuous nature.
  11. The association between love and letter writing may be viewed within a larger spectrum of melancholy underlying the practice of letter writing in this period. (Love) letters were evaluated in a negative light on behalf of the attachment to the past that they stimulated. See Michael S. Roth, "Dying of the Past: Medical Studies of Nostalgia in Nineteenth-Century France," *History and Memory* 3, no. 1 (1991), 11-5.
  12. Peter von Moos, *Mittelalterforschung und Ideologiekritik: der Gelehrtenstreit um Héloïse* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1974), 40.
  13. John Marenbon, "Authenticity Revisited," in *Listening to Heloise*, p. 21; Mews, "Between Authenticity and Interpretation," 830; Peter Dronke, *Abelard and Heloise in Medieval Testimonies* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1976), esp. 15-30.
  14. For a more comprehensive discussion of the historiographical controversy in the 1970s and 1980s the reader should consult Marenbon (note directly above).
  15. In essence feminist interpretations employed the circular argument that Heloise's intellectual prowess proved the letters' authenticity and vice versa. Cf. Linda Georgianna, "Any corner of Heaven: Heloise's Critique of Monasticism," *Mediaeval Studies* 49 (1987), 221-53; Andrea Nye, "A woman's Thought or a Man's Discipline? The Letters of Abelard and Heloise," *Hypatia* 7, no. 3 (1992), 1-22; Barbara Newman, "Authority, Authenticity, and the Repression of Heloise," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22, no. 2 (1992), 121-157.
  16. David Luscombe, "From Paris to Paraclete: The Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise," *Proceedings of the British Academy LXXIV* (1988), 247-283; Von Moos, *Ideologiekritik*; D. W. Robertson, Jr. *Abelard and Heloise* (London: Millington, 1974).
  17. Specifically influential to this end are Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Heloise the Abbess: The Expansion of the Paraclete" and Morgan Powell, "Listening to Heloise at the Paraclete: Of Scholarly Diversion and a Woman's 'Conversion'" in this volume. Babette Hellemans, ed. *Rethinking Abelard: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014) is a valuable counterpart and continues with interpretations of the letters as literary creation.
  18. Brian Stock, "Textual Communities: Judaism, Christianity, and the Definitional Problem," in *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1990).

19. For example, in his contribution "Abelard and Rhetoric" William Flynn demonstrates the shift from dialectics to rhetoric in Abelard's thought when it comes to the Letter Collection, which may have served justification for Heloise's primacy as abbess by downplaying the status of virginity, see 163-76. Wim Verbaal subsequently contends the notion of the HC as autobiography by means of demonstrating how the narrative's ego is a purely textual construction, alluding to identifications with figures of the early church such as Martin of Tours and Jerome. See "Trapping the Future: Abelard's Multi-Layered Image-Building," esp. 197-207.
20. Somewhat of an exception is Katherine Kong's hypothesis that the letters are genuine, though with a more public than private character, see "Writing the Subjunctive into the Indicative."
21. Malcolm Richardson, "The Ars dictaminis, the Formulary, and Medieval Epistolary Practice," in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction: From Antiquity to the Present*, eds. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 54-6; Ronald G. Witt, "The Arts of Letter-Writing," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism Volume 2: The Middle Ages*, eds. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2005), 80.
22. Ronald G. Witt, "The Arts of Letter-Writing," 70-1.
23. My debt for this argument goes out to Hellemans, who has demonstrated the literary play and performance that is deeply manifested in the *Historia calamitatum* based on existing topoi and auctoritates, see esp. 53-62. Essentially, my reading of the letters poses their protagonists as not unequivocally bearing a one on one relationship to the historical figures of Abelard and Heloise. This is not to say that I dispute the letters' authenticity or suggest that the letters necessarily contain historical falsities with regard to their biographies. Instead, I wish to emphasize the artificial nature of these letters through the suggestion that they could be retrospective self-reflections externalized through the media of parchment and writing meant for public edification. When it comes to the contemporary use of the epistolary genre see Witt, 81. The Loire Valley poets, inspired by Ovid, exemplify contemporary popularity of the letter as a literary genre. Notable members are Marbod of Rennes, Baudri of Bourgueil, and Hildebert of Lavardin.
24. I use David Luscombe's latest edition (note 6) featuring Betty Radice's translation for all citations in this article. My format of citation is Abelard and Heloise, [letter]. [paragraph], [page number]. The cited passage comes from Ep. 1.1, 3.
25. Jane Chance, "Classical Myth and Gender in the Letters of 'Abelard' and 'Heloise': Gloss, Glossed, Glossator," in *Listening to Heloise*, 167; Hans-Werner Goetz, "Zeitbewußtsein und Zeitkonzeptionen in der hochmittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreibung," in *Zeitkonzeptionen, Zeiterfahrung, Zeitmessung: Stationen ihres Wandels vom Mittelalter bis zur Moderne*, ed. Trude Ehlert (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1997), 18-9. Also valuable to take into consideration is Hellemans' view that the HC enacts an account of a search for God: "Abelard and the Poetics of Ingenium," in *Rethinking Abelard*, 307.
26. Bagge (note 7), 333. For the problem of temporality in language in Abelard's thought see Hellemans' analysis of the HC in "Abelard and the Poetics of Ingenium," esp.

- 307-315.
27. Sarah Spence, *Texts and the Self in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996), 73-5; Hellemans, "The Man Without Memory," 62, has also contextualized the wanderings of Abelard against the broader framework of binaries, such as rationality and love, the old monastic world and the university that was to be.
  28. Abelard and Heloise, Ep. 1.52, 81.
  29. Willemien Otten has identified Abelard's narrative in the HC as 'automartyrology,' signifying Abelard's substitution of a saintly narrative for that of the martyr in conflict. She also remarks how the Paraclete lies at the heart of the ascetic conversion. See "The Bible and the Self in Medieval Autobiography: Otloh of St. Emmeram (1010-1070) and Peter Abelard (1079-1142)," in *The Whole and Divided Self. The Bible and Theological Anthropology*, eds. J. McCarthy and D. Aune (NY: Crossroads, 1997), esp. 140-1. I have borrowed the notion of the Paraclete as the haven for the homeless from Von Moos, "Abaelard, Heloise und ihr Paraklet" (note 7), 248.
  30. Abelard and Heloise, Ep. 1.52, 83.
  31. The primitive church (*ecclesia primitiva*) played an important role in the reform ideology of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, signaling the desire to return to the times when Christian hermits founded desert asceticism and monasticism in the fourth century AD. See Glenn Olsen, "The Idea of the 'Ecclesia Primitiva' in the Writings of the Twelfth-Century Canonists," *Traditio* 25 (1969): 61-86. For an English translation of the text see Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. David R. Slavitt, intr. Seth Lerer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 2008).
  32. Bridget K. Balint, *Ordering the Chaos: The Self and the Cosmos in Twelfth-Century Latin Prosimetrum* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 43-56, discusses in more detail Adelard's adaptation of Boethius' text.
  33. Hellemans, "The Man Without Memory," 55, also argues how the HC is filled with developmental indicators enacted through topoi which cast their shadow forward to what is to come.
  34. Abelard and Heloise, Ep. 4.12, 171.
  35. Barbara Newman, for instance, makes the connection between Heloise and nostalgia, see her "Authority, Authenticity, and the Repression of Heloise" (note 15), 138.
  36. The concept of nostalgia was coined in Johannes Hofer's medical dissertation published in 1688. By means of the pseudo-Greek contraction of nostos and algos Hofer described a condition of longing for one's home (*Heimweh*) that he perceived among Swiss mercenaries unable to adapt to foreign customs. His dissertation has been republished in translation in the twentieth century, see Carolyn Kiser Anspach, trans. "Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia by Johannes Hofer, 1688," *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine* 2 (January 1934), 376-391. The literature on the topic is vast. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (NY: Basic Books, 2011) offers an important humanist perspective on the concept of nostalgia and includes a discussion on the historical transition from homesickness to temporal longing. For the social psychological approach I refer the reader to Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, Clay Routledge, Jamie Arndt, Erica G. Hepper, and Xinyue Zhou, "To Nostalgize: Mixing Memory with Affect and Desire," *Advances in Experimental*

- Social Psychology* (2014), 1-85.
37. Mikhail Bakhtin elaborates on the concept of historical inversion in his essay on the novelistic chronotope: "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics," in *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981)(Originally published in Russian in 1937-8), see esp. 144.
  38. To a certain extent I interpret this display of emotion in a similar fashion to what Burcht Pranger has remarked about Bernard of Clairvaux's lament about his brother's death in the Sermons on the Song of Songs. He argues that such display of emotion cannot be viewed in isolation from its literary and monastic qualities, and should therefore not be considered as a spontaneous or authentic expression of emotion. See M.B. Pranger, "Bernard the Writer," in *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 239-43.
  39. Janet Coleman, "Cistercian Blanched Memory," in *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1992), 170-81.
  40. Idem, 175.
  41. Idem, 177-9.
  42. Ineke van 't Spijker discusses this phenomenon among the Victorines, cf. her *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 219.
  43. McLaughlin, "Heloise the Abbess" (note 17), 2-3, 7-10. The origins of child oblation can be traced back to early monasticism in Late Antiquity and encompassed the practice in which parents offered their child(ren), around the age of seven, along with its familial inheritance to the monastery. Mayke de Jong, In *Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) is one of the most recent and comprehensive studies of this phenomenon.
  44. Abelard and Heloise, Ep. 2.1, 123.
  45. Idem, Ep. 3.12, 155.
  46. Idem, Ep. 5.8, 187.
  47. Cf. M. B. Pranger, *Bernard and Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought: Broken Dreams* (Leiden, etc.: Brill, 1994), 5; Hellemans, "The Man Without Memory," 48.
  48. In the twelfth century the concept of the locus amoenus constituted an important typology of paradisiacal landscapes which referred to the eschatological condition. See Bernd Roling, "Das bedrohliche Arkadien: Der Feenhügel in der Theologie und Geschichtsschreibung des Mittelalters," *Das Mittelalter* 16 (2011), 74; Peter Raedts, "Het aards paradijs: de tuin als beeld van geluk," in *Tuinen in de middeleeuwen*, ed. R. E. V. Stuip and C. Vellekoop (Hilversum: Verloren, 1992), 47. Giles Constable has argued that the identification of the monastery with the paradise appears to have been widespread in this period, "Renewal and Reform in Religious Life: Concepts and Realities," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, eds. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 48-9. The citation comes from Abelard and Heloise, Ep. 7.27, 311. This is probably an allusion to Jerome who thought of the monastic cell as provisional prolongation of Paradise which was going to be replaced by the heavenly homeland. Cf. Mette Bruun, *Parables: Bernard*

- of Clairvaux's *Mapping of Spiritual Topography* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 306.
49. Abelard and Heloise, Ep. 6.16, 235.
  50. This tradition was handed down in both Greek literature (for which Hesiod is representative) and in Latin literature (represented by Ovid). Cf. Walter Veit, *Studien zur Geschichte des Topos der Goldenen Zeit: Von der Antike bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (PhD dissertation Köln, 1961), 29-31; Richard McKim, "Myth Against Philosophy in Ovid's Account of Creation," *The Classical Journal* 80, no. 2 (1984-5), 103-6.
  51. Ubi sunt is a literary genre that bears close resemblances to the notion of historical inversion, as it compares the past to the present with a consciousness that the past evoked will never return. For a discussion on this genre see Cynthia Robinson, "Ubi Sunt: Memory and Nostalgia in Taifa Court Culture," *Muqarnas* 15 (1998), esp. 20-21.
  52. M. B. Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity: Essays on the Poetics of Monasticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 2003), 6.
  53. Remieg Aerts, "Prometheus en Pandora: een inleiding tot cultuurkritiek en cultuurpessimisme," in *De pijn van Prometheus: essays over cultuurkritiek en cultuurpessimisme*, ed. Remieg Aerts and Klaas van Berkel (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1996), 15. For a similar study on the tension between past and present and salvation see Frantisek Graus, "Goldenes Zeitalter, Zeitschelte und Lob der guten alten Zeit: zu nostalgischen Strömungen im Spätmittelalter," in *Idee, Gestalt, Geschichte: Festschrift Klaus von See: Studien zur europäischen Kulturtradition*, ed. Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense U.P., 1988), esp. 190-1.
  54. Abelard and Heloise, Ep. 6.2, 219.
  55. Hellemans, "The Man Without Memory," 62. Ultimately we see the search for God continue from the HC into the letter exchange as Hellemans remarks in "Abelard and the Poetics of Ingenium," 307. The 'silence of Heloise' is a historiographical term that refers to the transformation of Heloise in letter six. For example, feminist commentators noted the silence of Heloise as the ultimate triumph of the masculine over feminine voice: Newman, "Authority, Authenticity, and the Repression of Heloise," 156. Strong disagreement was raised by Von Moos, "Abelard, Heloise und ihr Paraklet," 244-6.
  56. My debt for the development of this observation lies with Babette Hellemans for her bright insights on this matter shared through personal communication.

