



## *Friendship in Héloïse (1090-1164)*

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Héloïse's ideals of friendship are drawn from the ancient world, though she does not accept these unaltered. The epistolary exchange between Seneca and his friend Lucilius offers her a paradigm for friendship maintained over great distance, with the letter substituting for the absent friend (Luscombe 2013: Ep. 2, § 4). Héloïse also shares Abelard's sense of friendship as compassionate in the full Medieval Latin sense of the word, so that a friend is one who shares in ("com-") the sufferings ("passio") of another (Ep. 2, § 3). More interesting is Héloïse's attempt to reformulate the classic concept of friendship as found in Cicero's *De amicitia*. This was understood as a moral relationship between two men of equal standing. Héloïse and Abelard endeavoured (ultimately unsuccessfully) to refigure this as an equal partnership between a man and a woman. They envisioned a concept that meshed aspects of marriage and friendship into a form providing unheard of freedom to the woman—she could be a man's intellectual partner, could choose (or not) to be his sexual partner, but need not subordinate herself to him economically or legally through marriage. For this reason, Héloïse accuses Abelard of having violated their friendship ("amicitia", Ep. 2, § 14) when he commanded her to enter a convent once she was his legal wife and he had been sexually incapacitated.

The nature of friendship is also a concern of the woman writer of the twelfth-century letter collection known as the *Epistulae duorum amantium* who has potentially been identified as Héloïse (Mews). Letter 9 adduces a Senecan notion of friendship as a "heartfelt" ("praecordialis") exchange of letters, while Letter 25 articulates a necessary relationship between love and friendship, with the woman signing herself as her male correspondent's "friend" ("amica") who languishes for his love ("amore tuo"). Letter 49 expresses Héloïscean ideals of love and friendship as based upon the beloved's virtue, rather than the mercenary concerns associated with marriage.

### **Primary Sources:**

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