



Love in Héloïse (1101–1164)

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Héloïse's understanding of love is intimately associated with her unique concept of the equal friendship possible between a man and a woman. Both friendship and (sexualized) love should be founded upon virtue and free choice, as Héloïse argues was true of her love for Abelard (Luscombe: Ep. 2, §12). Views very similar to these on the interrelation between love and friendship between men and women, and the necessity of virtue to both, are expressed by the woman writer of the *Epistulae duorum amantium*, who has been identified as Héloïse (Mews, Letters 25 and 49). But while Abelard and Héloïse agree that the Ciceronian ideal of friendship has moral limits (Ruys 2013, Abelard, *Carmen ad Astralabium*, lines 125–176), for Héloïse love can extend beyond these.

Héloïse claims that Abelard is bound to her as much by her immoderate love for him (“immoderatus amor”) as by their marriage. She describes her submission to Abelard's command that she become a nun as her love becoming a form of madness (“in tantam uersus est amor insaniam”, Ep. 2, §9). Héloïse repeatedly contrasts the animal pull of lust with love based on choice and virtue, arguing that both love and friendship, rightly chosen, will outlast the passion of sex (Ep. 2, §§14, 16). In particular, Héloïse views love as a kind of freedom, in opposition to marriage which is socially mandated and therefore a chain that binds a woman legally and economically to a man.

Although Héloïse has been criticized for focusing on her sexualized love for Abelard at the expense of her son, Astralabe (Atkinson, 128), it is possible to read in Héloïse's writings a deep love of and concern for her child expressed through biblical allusions. In her *Problemata* 31–35 (McLaughlin and Wheeler) her questions address the maternal love of Anna for her son Samuel who was taken from her young in order to serve God (Ruys 2000).

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