The Genesis of the Love Letter

After ten long years of separation, a copy of the *Historia* supposedly fell into Heloise’s hands. Finally, she had news of her husband. As stated earlier, many *Historians* of the text believe that he intended for his story to circulate within the public domain, and so it is not really surprising that Heloise received the autobiographical account of his misfortunes, but Heloise’s reception of Abelard’s text cannot be considered without reviewing the various theories surrounding the debate on the authenticity of the correspondence. Muckle elaborates on the issue, stating that scholars like J. G. Orelli believed that someone else, possibly a monk, may have written the letters after the death of Abelard and Heloise. Other specialists such as Ludovic Lalanne suspect that Heloise may have edited the love letters after Abelard’s demise. The opposing argument is supported by S. M. Deutsch, Bernhard Schmeidler, and Charlotte Charrier.\(^1\) These scholars share the opinion that Abelard wrote all of the letters himself, and thus created a literary fiction. Moreover, Charrier postulates that Abelard deliberately edited Heloise’s text as part of his self-serving strategy, seeking to benefit from the specific part of her amorous discourse that would enhance his rep-

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utation. In turn, Charrier’s position is discussed at length by critics such as Benton, Vitz, Nouvet, McLeod, Muckle, Dronke, and Newman. Even if they do not entirely share her opinion, these scholars all concur that it is highly possible that Abelard may have tampered with Heloise’s letters. However, Charrier’s theory is challenged by Gilson, who defends the position that the correspondence is completely authentic, and thus functions as a historical record of the two lovers’ lives. In any event, the controversy does not reveal any substantiated evidence, and so it is more interesting to study the correspondence strictly as a literary text. To support Charrier’s position in her monumental work on the legend of Heloise, a close reading of the text will show that Abelard borrows Heloise’s feminine persona as well as fragmenting her epistles. The analysis of the love correspondence will also reveal that Abelard engages in pseudo-feminocentrism in order to flatter himself all the more. Numerous examples of Abelard’s attempt to veil “feminine” desire, as well as Heloise’s erotic pulsions, will be analyzed throughout the course of this study; but, at this point, it is appropriate to consider first some basic characteristics of the epistolary love letter as a preface to Heloise’s first letter.

Altman outlines general characteristics of multiple varieties of missives and considers fundamental aspects of epistolary discourse. Altman’s theories on amorous correspondence provide insight into understanding the structural mechanics of Abelard’s and Heloise’s letters. One of the most important elements of the love letter is that the correspondents write in the present, spontaneously addressing themselves to the absent object of their desire and thus creating a sense of immediacy inherent to the style. The pen bridges the distance that separates the couple and impedes them from entering into direct

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