THE NEW MIDDLE AGES

CROSSING the BRIDGE

COMPARATIVE ESSAYS on MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN and HEIAN JAPANESE WOMEN WRITERS

Edited by Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho



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CHAPTER 6

ROMANTIC ENTREATY IN THE KAGERŌ DIARY AND THE LETTERS OF ABELARD AND HELOISE

John R. Wallace

hen one's lover loses interest in the romantic relationship, to what words might one turn to recuperate that relationship? Passages from The Kagero Diary (tenth-century Japan) and The Letters of Abelard and Heloise (twelfth-century France) offer premodern, literary examples of such romantic entreaties from substantially different cultural contexts.¹ In comparing these passages, I will leave aside any evaluation of the effectiveness of their arguments, since both passages are only steps in the progression of a larger rhetorical movement. Further, such an evaluation would lead us toward the individuality of the authors, the specific nature of the romantic relationships in which they found themselves, and the diverse cultural contexts that inform their approaches. All these are valuable areas of analysis. However, my interest is in the similarity of some aspects of these two passages; similarities that, I contend, result from the shared specifics of the situations: individuals out of romantic favor making entreaties to now disinterested lovers. Despite considerable cultural differences, I will identify remarkably similar rhetorical choices: literary forms specifically selected by the writers that in essence require responses from their spouses, complexity of composition that skillfully incorporates substantive arguments, and accusations of failed obligations that are supported by social standards to which the husbands subscribe. It is my position that these common factors are more basically informative as to the authors' choices than are differences resulting from dissimilar cultural contexts, differences that so often are seen as keys to a subtle understanding of texts. "Understanding," in the context of this essay, means to recognize how fundamentally constrained the rhetorical possibilities of the romantic entreaty

can be. In closing, I note that despite impressive rhetorical efforts, both writers essentially fail in what might be considered their goals.

The letters that we have between Heloise (1100 or 1101–1163 or 1164) and Peter Abelard (1079–1142) are correspondence between the two after they took monastic vows. An innovative dialectical philosopher and popular teacher at Mont-Sainte-Genevieve (the center that would develop into the University of Paris), Peter Abelard was at the pinnacle of his early career when the Canon Fulbert, owner of the house where Abelard lived, recruited him as a tutor for his niece. Fulbert's niece Heloise, already renowned for her learning, was approximately 17 at the time, while Abelard was in his late thirties.² As Abelard recounts it in his autobiographical *The Story of His Misfortunes [Historia calamitatum]*, "Her studies allowed us to withdraw in private, as love desired, and then with our books open before us, more words of love than of our reading passed between us, and more kissing than teaching."³

When Heloise became pregnant, the two fled Paris. Abelard attempted to make amends with Fulbert by marrying his niece (over her objections), but his subsequent treatment of Heloise was misconstrued by Fulbert as an affront. The uncle consequently bribed Abelard's servant to admit secretly into Abelard's bedroom two men who, Abelard tells us, attacked and castrated him. Abelard then left Paris to begin his life as a wandering scholar, requiring Heloise first to become a nun before he himself became a monk.⁴ They never lived together again. Around 1132, after about ten years of near silence from her husband, Heloise unexpectedly obtained a copy of his *Misfortunes*. Heloise's letter, in Latin prose, uses this occasion to contact him and plead for a more regular correspondence.⁵ In many ways it is similar to the Japanese poetic entreaty of Michitsuna no Hana.

The Kagerō Diary was completed by Michitsuna's Mother (Michitsuna no Haha, 936?–995?) in the 970s, when a branch of the Fujiwara clan was establishing control over the imperial government through marriage politics. The memoir describes the 20 years of her marriage to Fujiwara no Kaneie (929–990). Kaneie would become the patriarch of this ambitious branch of the Fujiwaras, though during much of the time of the memoir he was still in the early, though promising, stages of his career. Like every generation of patriarchs of his family since his great-great-grandfather Yoshifusa (804–872), Kaneie was aggressively pursuing an agenda of expanding influence over imperial decisions via romantic liaisons that established blood connections between emperors and members of his clan. Michitsuna's Mother thus married into a situation (by her father's decision) where the issue of her fertility was of central importance to her family's fortunes. As it turned out, she gave birth to only one child, whereas Kaneie's primary wife (for aristocrats it was a polygynous society) gave birth to the five children to whom Kaneie would grant all the political advantages. Kaneie proved unreliable from shortly after the consummation of the marriage, and in their third year together, following the collapse of one of his romantic affairs, Michitsuna's Mother writes her husband. The long poem in her memoirs Book I expresses her worries.

A close look at the construction of Heloise's and Michitsuna's Mother's arguments to their husbands makes a meaningful comparison of the passages possible. In her first letter, Heloise pleads for Abelard's return to her life, either by his visiting the nunnery to advise her sister nuns or. if that is not possible, then at least via correspondence. Heloise was in her early thirties when she wrote this letter, about ten years older than Michitsuna's Mother was when she wrote the poem we will read.⁶ Significant events had occurred between the parting of the couple and this resumption of correspondence. When Abelard fled Paris in 1122, Heloise was taken by him out of the city and placed in a convent at Argenteuil, where she remained until all its nuns were evicted because of a claim on the property made by an abbot of a different monastery. In 1129, Abelard bequeathed to these displaced nuns the Paraclete, the monastery he had founded at the time of his own exile, and he made Heloise their abbess. Although it is possible that he might have publicly met with Heloise during this time, her letters insist he neglected the Paraclete sisters even as they struggled to eke out a living in the abbey's rustic setting. In the few years after the gifting of the Paraclete, Abelard wrote The Story of His Misfortunes, and Heloise acquired a copy.⁷ She uses this occasion to initiate correspondence with him, addressing her first letter in a manner that recalls the many ways they are bound to one another, a theme that will form the core of her arguments: "To her master, or rather her father, husband, or rather brother; his handmaid, or rather his daughter, wife or rather sister; to Abelard, Heloise."8

Heloise uses *The Story of His Misfortunes* as more than just an excuse for breaking the long silence between them. She says that reading it has "dealt us [she and her sisters of the abbey] fresh wounds of grief as well as reopening the old" (111), and so claims that Abelard has incurred an obligation to comfort them since his *Misfortunes* caused the pain. She also uses *Misfortunes* as a model of how Abelard can set about consoling them, for if he can write to a friend in such an act of consolation, then he can as easily write to her with the same intention and effect. She quotes Seneca about letters from absent friends: "Thank you for writing to me often, the one way in which you can make your presence felt, for I never have a letter from you without the immediate feeling that we are together."⁹ She echoes Seneca later in her own words to present the primary goal of her entreaty: "While I am denied your presence, give me at least through your

words--of which you have enough and to spare--some sweet semblance of yourself."¹⁰

Further, she uses his autobiography against him when she argues that he should correspond with the nuns and her because, by the account of his own story, they are now his only friends. To help his enemies instead of his "daughters," to "throw the pearls of your divine eloquence to the pigs" (112), to seek to help the stubborn instead of the obedient are all misplaced efforts. She and the Paraclete sisters are closer to him than the man for whom he wrote *The Story of His Misfortunes*. "Think what you owe to your own," she writes.¹¹ "You have done your duty to a friend and comrade, discharged your debt to friendship and comradeship, but it is a greater debt which binds you in obligation to us who can properly be called not friends so much as dearest friends, not comrades but daughters, or any other conceivable name more tender and holy."¹²

Thus her argument deftly makes use of opportunities presented in Misfortunes. Heloise works toward the body of her letter in steps: I have come upon your story and have become so distressed that I sorely need to hear directly from you. If you can write him you can write us, with whom special relationships have existed from long ago, special relationships with special obligations. She steps smoothly from one stage of this argument to the next, borrowing boldness from double entendres. By ostensibly speaking nonromantically for her nun's community, she can contact Abelard. However, that they suggest personal needs is no one's secret (---"not comrades but daughters, or any other conceivable name more tender and holy"). Echoing Romans XV: 20, she writes, "You have built nothing here upon another man's foundation."13 She compliments him by comparing him with Paul's evangelical work, but in the same breath she reminds him of his special obligation to that which he created. Her words may refer to the Paraclete, but she speaks also of her own heart that never knew any man other than Abelard.

In her several letters, Heloise argued variously from the belief that special relationships incur special obligations, but in this letter she places the weight of her words with her relationship as lover and wife:"...you must know that you are bound to me by an obligation which is all the greater for the further close tie of the marriage sacrament uniting us, and are the deeper in my debt because of the love I have always borne for you, as everyone knows, a love which is beyond all bounds."¹⁴ She writes at length about the qualities of true love, asserting that she has never been selfish in her love: "I wanted simply you, nothing of yours."¹⁵ She elaborates on the ideal that true love is beyond covetousness: "God is my witness that if Augustus, emperor of the whole world, thought fit to honor me with marriage and conferred all the earth on me to possess for ever, it would be dearer and more honorable to me to be called not his Empress but your whore."¹⁶ Thus in the conclusion of her letter she argues that the purity of her love sets for him responsibilities: "... consider then your injustice, if when I deserve more you give me less."¹⁷

In her letter, then, she asks for him to recognize obligations derived from commitments that come with certain relationships. Their romantic relationship receives the most elaborate treatment, but the relationship of teacher to student and their current status as fellow servants to God, with him as her spiritual superior, are also evoked. Yet Heloise's letter is laced as well with accusations-however gently put-that introduce what can be described as obligations resulting from misdeeds. She reminds him that the original physical relationship between them was forced upon her:"Wholly guilty though I am, I am also, as you know, wholly innocent."18 (In a later letter he will admit to this: "Even when you were unwilling, resisted to the utmost of your power and tried to dissuade me, as yours was the weaker nature I often forced you to consent with threats and blows."19) She further charges that his past avowed love for her was nothing but lust: "It was desire, not affection which bound you to me, the flame of lust rather than love, so when the end came to what you desired, any show of feeling you used to make went with it.... I wish I could think of some explanation which would excuse you and somehow cover up the way you hold me cheap."20 She argues from this point in her conclusion: "Is it not far better now to summon me to God than it was then to satisfy our lust?"21

Finally, aside from obligations derived from proper relationships and obligations incurred by guilty actions, Heloise describes herself as entirely bound to Abelard: "I have finally denied myself every pleasure in obedience to your will, kept nothing for myself except to prove that now, even more, I am yours."²² Again, she insists, "My heart was not in me but with you, and now, even more, if it is not with you it is nowhere; truly, without you it cannot exist."²³ Of his castration she writes that "[it] robbed me of my very self in robbing me of you."²⁴ As Kauffman suggests, this equation I = you places Heloise squarely within the genre of amorous epistolary discourse.²⁵ Heloise makes herself Abelard's possession, one for which he must care. This has obligations as its reference, but the equation has romantic appeal, too. It grants the pleasure of ownership and, in stating her extreme pain, seeks his compassion as well. These are not arguments of obligation (you should do . . .) but rather entreaties addressing his personal desire (you would want to do . . .).

Heloise uses *Misfortunes* as an opportunity to contact Abelard, reminds him of the web of public and personal obligations to her to which he must attend, quotes from the classics to add authority to her argument, and reiterates her love even as she reprimands him for his willfulness.

Michitsuna's Mother married Kaneie in the autumn of 954. She writes that by the New Year season, his visits to her residence were becoming irregular. Remaining in her own home was not unusual, for in Heian aristocratic culture it was usual practice for the wife to remain in quarters owned by her family. Although couples sometimes established an independent residence, Michitsuna's Mother is a secondary wife of Kaneie, so his calling at her home would be normal. A year into the marriage she discovered a love letter intended for another woman. When the next month he staved away three nights in a row (the length of the Heian wedding ceremony), she used a servant to confirm that he was seeing another woman (named Machi no Koji no Onna). In the autumn of 957, after hearing that this woman had fallen out of favor with Kaneie, she then wrote her choka (long poem), leaving it for him to find. The choka was not the standard poetic form-the standard was the much shorter, 31 syllable waka (Yamato poem). To choose the choka format was in itself a statement, one surely meant to be a wake up call to her lover.

In her poem (which runs more than 120 lines in English translation), Michitsuna's Mother asks Kaneie to behave in more reassuring ways to her and her young son, who requires Kaneie's patronage for his career. The central argument underscores Kaneie's inadequately fulfilled obligations. Kaneie had approached Michitsuna's Mother's father with his proposal of marriage and promised to look after his daughter forever. When the father was assigned a post as provincial governor, he left his daughter in Kaneie's care, reminding Kaneie by letter of his commitment. But Kaneie's visits to Michitsuna's Mother's residence nevertheless became less frequent. Michitsuna's Mother writes: "I had heard he [my father] had left / words for you, those words, / 'Do not forget her,' thus would / it be so, I thought,"²⁶ and later,"'While there is life, rely on me,' / you said, I remember it well."²⁷ But, Michitsuna's Mother complains:

if I consider the dust piled up on mountains of our bedclothes, it cannot even match the number of nights that I have slept alone.²⁸

and,

parting, you said, "See you soon." Thinking these words must be true, our young pine [son] waits endlessly mimicking your voice....²⁹ Coupled with this main argument of unfulfilled responsibilities are Michitsuna's Mother's comments regarding timing. She argues that Kaneie broke his promises too quickly while she has waited cooperatively for too long. She complains that his affection for her faltered almost as soon as the marriage was consummated: "That autumn when first / we met [in physical intimacy], was not the color / of your leaves of words / so pale even then . . ."³⁰ Of her endless worrying she writes: "In times past and now too, / my heart knows no peace,"³¹ and,

yet, I lived in hope that in spring with the line of returning geese, you too would return to your old home [from Machi no Koji's house]. Time passed and no eggs were laid, nothing happened, ...³²

These two main lines of arguments form a strong, braided pair. Michitsuna's Mother argues that Kaneie's responsibilities derive from his own promises; she further argues that such promises should not be forgotten so very quickly, especially in light of her own patience. By silently enduring Kaneie's infidelity for three years, and waiting until the end of his recent romantic affair to voice her concerns, Michitsuna's Mother argues that she has acted well within the bounds of proper behavior, while Kaneie has not. Because timing was an especially valued part of proper social manner in Heian culture, Michitsuna's Mother's own careful conduct and her accusations of Kaneie's misconduct carry especial weight.

Besides such arguments based on promises and norms (publicly supported principles), Michitsuna's Mother approached Kaneie at the level of personal emotions. In portraying herself as helpless, she seeks his romantic sympathy. Comments such as "my heart flows in a river / of tears, the bay never fills" occur so frequently as to approach a refrain. She depicts herself as karmically and emotionally bound to him in ways that prevent her from escape. "What heavy load of sins from former lives binds me to you?"³³ She contemplates leaving him but confesses:

What if I were to go to a world where the tears of grief would not fall onto my sleeves? But if I place on the scales spending my life without meeting you, I know in a moment, I would be wanting you again.³⁴ Yet in confessing love in these terms, in a backhanded way she also hints at the specter of leaving him. She writes: "I would leave / but I do not."³⁵ (The hint is not lost on Kaneie. Angrily he replies, "Do not wait . . . / right now, become bound / to someone unbound."³⁶)

While Michitsuna's Mother describes herself as loving Kaneie so much that she will not leave him, she expresses her anger, too. Noting how meaningless is her son's mimicking of her husband's promise to return, she writes: "Each time I hear it, / I think ill of you."³⁷

In summary then, at the emotional level Michitsuna's Mother seeks Kaneie's compassion for her anxiety about her future and that of their son. In the indirect discourse of describing how destitute his absence makes her, she reaffirms her affection for him. However, at the same time she intimates how she may well break off her relationship with him. Finally, her shards of anger add to the complex mix of emotions in the poem.

In terms of literary form, sentiment, arguments employed, and evocations of social expectations, both epistolary pleas are significantly similar. Generically, it is clear that each woman selected the one literary form that was most likely to require a response from her lover. Heloise's letter blends a request for a letter of consolation [epistola consolatoria], similar to the one Abelard granted to someone less close than her, and a letter seeking advice [epistola deprecatoria].³⁸ Michitsuna's Mother delivered her appeal by verse in a culture where one who left romantic poems unanswered was deemed heartless, or socially maladroit. The weightier choka, especially one built around a plea for greater care to marriage promises, would be all but impossible to ignore. Kauffman has argued that Heloise has both used and transgressed the formal requirements of her selected genre. The Kagerō Diary, on the other hand, is essentially the first memoir of its kind and so cannot be considered as challenging genre restrictions in the same way. Nevertheless, the writers' stances toward discursive restrictions are identical, with both women verbalizing more of their discontent than a wife of their day "should."

For her letter, Heloise fashioned a careful balance between the professional (her request for guidance in managing the nunnery) and personal (her need for Abelard's presence to strengthen her). Michitsuna's Mother similarly pairs public elements (Kaneie's marital obligations) and private ones (her romantic loneliness). The effect of this pairing is not to give the poem a sense of logical balance, as with Heloise; rather, it underscores the source of Michitsuna's Mother's intense unhappiness, since her loneliness results from his broken promises. In other words, attention to public and private needs serve mainly to intensify the poem's emotion. The overall rationality of Heloise's letter, in contrast, is one of its outstanding features and a critical component of her rhetoric. Her interweaving of the public and private relationships that Abelard and she have enjoyed makes a doublepronged argument for the completeness of Abelard's debt.

Both passages are extraordinarily well constructed. In Heloise's case, this care is evident in the prose's lucidity and the regulated flow of the argument, both in its transitions and in how she builds her case in steps leading up to the final request: "it is a small thing I ask of you and one you could so easily grant. . . . I beg you to restore your presence to me in the way you can-by writing me some word of comfort, so that in this at least I may find increased strength and readiness to serve God."39 By the time this diminutive request is made, the weight of the reasons put forward in the letter for granting it are so substantive that the favor would be difficult to ignore. From beginning to end, her letter is structurally impressive. The completeness and balance of her argument, together with the wide range of textual sources from which Heloise draws, afford the reader a strong impression of the author's intelligence. The breadth of her studies, the depth of her thought on ethical issues, and her rhetorical virtuosity are all in evidence in the letters. Further, it is also a common observation by Western classical scholars that her writing style in and of itself is admirable in its Latin eloquence.

In Kagero's case, there is a dazzling array of poetic structures admired at the time, especially kakekotoba [pivot words, words selected and placed in such a way as to generate overlapping grammatical phrases with different meanings] and engo [related words, words that help bind poetic lines by associative meanings]. While these rhetorical effects are easy to create at a simple level, complex compositions are far more difficult. Their quality and proliferation speak volumes for the time Michitsuna's Mother invested in the composition, as well as her poetic expertise. Some scholars conjecture that Michitsuna's Mother was selected by Kaneie as a secondary wife primarily for this poetic skill. Heian aristocrats held in high esteem women with poetic skill, but if Michitsuna's Mother was indeed Kaneie's poetic voice, she was displaying the strengths that attracted him to her in the first place. In this way, she differs little from the choice Heloise makes to write in the learned prose, which was her common language with her scholar-lover and an object of his praise, admiration and, no doubt, attraction.

While Heloise's letter and Michitsuna's Mother's $ch\bar{o}ka$ have a thoroughly constructed feel about them, they do not lack emotive content. The authors argued not just the validity of their complaints, but the veracity of their love, as well. While Heloise says it plainly, Michitsuna's Mother is less declarative, since it was usual for lovers to express their love indirectly. Both writers, however, emphasize how important their lovers were for a feeling of completion. Both women nevertheless note their displeasure as well, though again differently. Now it is Heloise's anger that was moderated—"I was not a little surprised and troubled"⁴⁰—or transformed, such as when she writes, "Your lack of trust in me . . . , I confess, overwhelmed me with grief and shame."⁴¹ Michitsuna's Mother, on the other hand, writes unambiguously that she has "thought-ill" of Kaneie. Yet in her case, too, the balance of her comments is with her need for him, not her displeasure with him.

Heloise and Michitsuna's Mother both present attractive narrative personas, but again with differences. Heloise's appeal is in her blend of alertness of mind, organization of thought, and passion expressed in the language of devotion, obedience, and submission. No doubt these are personal qualities that Abelard found exciting when Heloise was his student. Michitsuna's Mother also emphasizes how bound she feels to Kaneie. though in the language of helplessness and patience instead of devotion or obedience. Within the world of Heian literature, suffering women were thought attractive, but her intensely distraught state of mind was one of the problems with which Kaneie also found himself at odds. As he savs in his reply poem to this choka, "... none other / than this complaining is your sin"42 and," . . . around Mt. Fuji / the smoke [of jealousy] smolders,"43 and so it is difficult to visit her. Indeed, this self-occupied anxiety even today divides audience opinion. Part of the reader's experience of Kagero is this problem of evaluating the narrative voice: is her behavior attractive or even reasonable?

Finally, each writer takes a somewhat different position with regard to whether she believes her husband loves her. Michitsuna's Mother describes that relationship in the terms of a question. The final lines of her poem are:

"while there is life, rely on me," you said, I remember it well. If the white waves roll up on my shore, this is what I long to ask them about.⁴⁴

Michitsuna's Mother asks whether she can rely on Kaneie; she asks because she doubts it is so. Romantic pessimism was practically the only acceptable discursive mode for Heian women, certainly in how they represented themselves in autobiographical narratives. Michitsuna's Mother probably has more cause than many to worry since Kaneie had a particularly large number of affairs during his lifetime. Further, if Michitsuna's Mother's account of their relationship is accurate, he neglected her and acted publicly in ways that would advertise his limited interest. For example, when Machi no Koji no Onna was relocated to a new residence for her childbirth, Kaneie ostentatiously paraded her past Michitsuna's Mother's front gate, though it was not the necessary route.

Heloise's position is more complicated. A good portion of her argument rests on the assumption that Abelard will want to comfort her because theirs was true love; it could not have faded even though they now live apart. One of the striking things about Heloise's letter, when compared to Michitsuna's Mother's poem, is her idealism regarding love. To her, love should be absolute; it should be founded on pure, unselfish intentions that are supported with binding obligations. In the Heian literary world, love is an excessive, unstable emotion more likely to engender suffering than benefits. "True love"—not really an operable term in Heian literature—will be marked by its ephemerality. Michitsuna's Mother's poem works within this context, embracing its pessimism even while asking for a more reliable commitment from her husband.

Heloise for the most part addresses Abelard as if he is the good husband and Christian who cannot but offer his aid to her. Yet at one point in her letter, Heloise indeed doubts that such love ever existed in his heart: "I will tell you what I think and indeed the world suspects. It was desire, not affection which bound you to me, the flame of lust rather than love."⁴⁵ This doubt creates a rift at the very foundation of her letter, which Abelard uses to evade the obligations that he would have to acknowledge if their love had been true: "My love, which brought us both to sin, should be called lust, not love. I took my fill of my wretched pleasures in you, and this was the sum total of my love."⁴⁶ He then says that God loves her better than did he; thus, she should turn her attention to Him.

Abelard can evade her in this way because of Christian teachings that put carnal love in opposition to true love. Romantic doubting is more unambiguous in Michitsuna's Mother's poem, but it causes less of a problem. Despite her pessimism about romance, Michitsuna's Mother can press Kaneie on the issue of reliability, since a husband should be reliable regardless of whether he has retained his original physical attraction or emotional warmth for his wife. Heloise cannot take this tack, since monastic vows voided the obligations of marriage. Undaunted, she boldly appeals to his inner sense of obligation that remains from that relationship.

Heloise's and Michitsuna's Mother's styles of argument differ. Heloise proceeds step by step, covering the various reasons Abelard should at least write. She argues broadly and thoroughly then asks for little in the way of action from him, only increased correspondence.⁴⁷ Michitsuna's Mother, on the other hand, repeats a simple formula, namely, that her husband has not acted reliably, that she has long suffered from this, and thus he should mend his ways. Her request is neither small nor as well defined as is that of Heloise. These differences of argument reflect the training that the two received. Heloise received the highest level of education of the day, studying a similar range of classical subjects as her husband and no doubt learning some of her remarkable rhetorical skill from Abelard, who was known for his exceptional expertise in disputation.⁴⁸ Michitsuna's Mother's education in the arts (especially poetry) and proper social demeanor was intended to help her solve her problems in a context where a woman was expected to promote her husband's career by childbirth and keeping her problems to herself. Her best recourse was an emotional and poetically attractive appeal couched in passive terms, an appeal that would speak to his wish and obligation to care lovingly for her, as well as remind him of her worth.

Despite these different approaches, both writers seek to strengthen their claims by drawing authority from concepts normative to their cultures, to which their husbands subscribed. Heloise drew on Latin classics that she had studied with Abelard and the Bible that both accepted as first authority. She quotes from these texts to add force to her reasoning, of course, but they also outline the very values under which she argues Abelard should make his decisions. Cicero's *On Friendship* [*De amicitia*], which outlines unselfish friendship as one that loyally fulfills one's obligations, is clearly one of the texts that she wishes Abelard would recognize as prescriptive.⁴⁹

Besides quoting authority, Heloise evokes social norms by making the unsatisfactory state of their relationship a public object; she posits a witnessing public that supports her position that he is unfairly neglecting her: "This is not merely my own opinion, beloved, it is everyone's. There is nothing personal or private about it; it is the general view which is widely held."⁵⁰ Michitsuna's Mother also reminded Kaneie that there are those outside the relationship (her father and son) who are aware of Kaneie's fickleness.

As for authoritative texts whereto Michitsuna's Mother might turn, she did not have Heloise's resources, since Heian Japan's classics were written in Chinese, a language that for at least half a century women had been discouraged from learning. She could have drawn more heavily from past poems, but widely admired poems did more to confirm her disadvantaged position than exert any ethical pressure on her husband. She finds a common discourse not through mutually revered texts, but rather in Kaneie's own promises.⁵¹

Asymmetry in romantic relationships is surely one of literature's major themes. The chase, betrayal, imbalances of dominance and submission, rejection or loss—all make compelling romantic narrative. Heloise and Michitsuna's Mother wed while very young to husbands who loomed large in their lives. The depth of their feelings set against the relative silence of

the men they address makes for a sometimes bitter and all-too-real reading experience. In my opinion, it is instructive that despite different cultural contexts their strategies turn out to be quite similar. The dominant guiding principles for these romantic entreaties derive not as much from their respective, diverse cultural contexts as from a nearly identical basic situational structure (perhaps it should be called a power structure): two individuals in disadvantaged positions are appealing for the romantic interest and proper attention to responsibilities from lovers who have lost interest in them. The petitioners, in these cases women, are confined by specific rules of discourse and behavior that they must employ to their benefit, even as they also must transgress those rules if they wish to pack sufficient strength into their arguments. Thus, both women write with exceptional care. They select the literary form that might best work to their advantage, while drawing on broadly held normative concepts that could provide a common ground of discourse and reinforce their appeals. Yet, even when selecting and following these formal requirements, they speak out against the current treatment of their lovers. Both imbue their writing primarily with a loving, nonthreatening tone even as they reprimand and complain or, more precisely, so they are able to reprimand and complain. The balance they strike between asserting their love, crafting an attractive voice, and declaiming their displeasure illustrates well the difficulty of their positions. They are on the precarious cusp between trusting first their lovers, and taking society as an ally to press their lovers to redress the wrongs they have perpetrated.

Ultimately, Abelard will only offer his "presence" in terms of prayers that Heloise is to recite daily on his behalf, several professional letters outlining rules for her nuns, and his corpse, which he requests to be buried at her nunnery. Kaneie, for his part, will not father another child with Michitsuna's Mother; then, after 20 years of an unsettled marriage, he will cease visiting her almost entirely. Her son will never receive the best of Kaneie's attention (though, being a legitimate son of Kaneie, his career still progressed better than most.)

One can ask whether these women succeeded in their brilliant discursive efforts. If the goal had been to change the hearts of their lovers, then of course we will never know. If their goal had been to recover the satisfying presence of their lovers, then we should conclude that, at least by what they have written, they failed more than succeeded. The Heloise we read of in her letters could hardly have thought her life of getting the occasional professional letter from her husband was better than their life together before they had taken monastic vows, and Michitsuna's Mother makes it perfectly clear that 20 years of arguments with her husband, which ultimately led to their parting, was not her idea of a satisfying marriage. However earnest and eloquent Heloise and Michitsuna's Mother were, the fundamentals of the structure—an individual out of favor requesting renewed, sincere love—perhaps means that the chance of successful action, rhetorical or otherwise, was from the beginning simply too remote.

Notes

- I used as base texts for this essay Betty Radice, trans., The Letters of Abelard and Heloise (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1974) (hereafter cited as Radice); and Uemura Etsuko, Kagerō nikki kaishaku taisei [Compilation of annotations to The Kagerō Diary], vol. 1 (Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1983), pp. 360–92. The English translation from which I quote The Kagerō Diary is Sonja Arntzen, trans., The Kagerō Diary (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1997), pp. 89–93 (hereafter cited as Arntzen). My reading of the Kagerō passage, however, is based on the original Japanese. The original Latin text of Heloise's letters can be found in J.T. Muckle, "The Personal Letters between Abelard and Heloise," Medieval Studies 15 (1953): 47–94.
- Irving Singer, Courtly and Romantic, The Nature of Love, vol. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 88. For a description of the training Heloise received, see Elizabeth Mary McNamer, The Education of Heloise: Methods, Content, and Purpose of Learning in the Twelfth-Century, Mediaeval Studies, vol. 8 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).
- 3. Misfortunes, in Radice, p. 67.
- 4. Misfortunes, in Radice, p. 75.
- McLeod addresses the unresolved issue of authorial authenticity and provides references for further reading of this debate. See, Glenda McLeod, "Wholly Guilty, Wholly Innocent': Self-Definition in Héloïse's Letters to Abélard," in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, eds. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 64.
- 6. Kauffman apparently errs when she says Heloise is in her mid-twenties. Linda S. Kauffman, *Discourse of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 76.
- 7. Heloise's first letter, in Radice, p. 109.
- 8. Ibid.
- 9. Epistulae ad Lucilium by Seneca, quoted in Heloise's first letter, in Radice, p. 110.
- 10. Heloise's first letter, in Radice, p. 116.
- 11. Ibid., p. 112.
- 12. Ibid., p. 111.
- 13. Ibid., p. 111. Romans 15.20: "Thus I [Paul] make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, . . ." Bruce M. Metzger and

Roland E. Murphy, eds., The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, new rev. standard ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. NT 226.

- 14. Heloise's first letter, in Radice, p. 113. McLeod argues that this "debt" would mean to twelfth-century readers "marital coitus" and the "Pauline marriage debt." McLeod, "Wholly Guilty, Wholly Innocent," p. 66.
- 15. Ibid. Or, in another translation, "desiring you purely, not what was yours *[te pure, non tua, concupiscens].*" Singer, p. 96.
- 16. Heloise's first letter, in Radice, p. 114.
- 17. Ibid., p. 117.
- 18. Ibid., p. 115.
- Abelard's second letter, in Radice, p. 147. As Verger points out, words similar to Heloise's statement appear in Abelard's much later "Ethics" (1140?). See Jacques Verger, L'amour castré: L'histoire d'Héloïse et Abélard (Paris: Hermann, 1996), p. 123. Clanchy goes so far as to argue that Heloise set the agenda of Abelard's theology. See M. T. Clanchy, Abelard: A Medieval Life (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 277–82. For Abelard's "Ethics," see D. E. Luscombe, trans., Peter Abelard's "Ethics" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).
- 20. Heloise's first letter, in Radice, p. 116.
- 21. Ibid., p. 118.
- 22. Ibid., p. 117.
- 23. Ibid.
- 24. Ibid., p. 113.
- 25. Kauffman, Discourse of Desire, p. 69.
- 26. Arntzen, p. 89.
- 27. Ibid., p. 93.
- 28. Ibid.
- 29. Ibid.
- 30. Ibid., p. 89.
- 31. Ibid.
- 32. Ibid., p. 91.
- 33. Ibid.
- 34. Ibid.
- 35. I've modified Arntzen's "but I cannot get away" (emphasis mine). Arntzen's translation is supported by Uemura, p. 386, and Tosa nikki / Kagerō nikki [The Tosa Dairy, Kagerō Diary], ed. Kikuchi Yasuhiko, Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 13 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1995), p. 116. However, the phrase in question, yuki mo hanarezu, grammatically does not necessarily indicate a potential verb. (The context, however, allows such an interpretation.) It is a short phrase, but whether Michitsuna's Mother is telling Kaneie that she loves him so much that she cannot leave him, or that she, at this point in time, has elected not to leave him, is pertinent in determining what type of effect she seeks.
- 36. Arntzen, p. 97.
- 37. Ibid., p. 93.

- 38. Kauffman, Discourse of Desire, p. 65.
- 39. Heloise's first letter, in Radice, p. 117.
- 40. Ibid., p. 112.
- 41. Ibid., p. 117.
- 42. Arntzen, p. 97.
- 43. Ibid., p. 95.
- 44. Ibid., p. 93.
- 45. Heloise's first letter, in Radice, p. 116.
- 46. Abelard's second letter, in Radice, p. 153.
- 47. McLeod is correct that Heloise appears interested in recovering a sense of self challenged by Abelard's depiction of her in his *Misfortunes*. This is a much larger rhetorical project than simply asking for letters from her husband, but one outside the present essay's analysis of the rhetoric of entreaty. In her argument McLeod addresses in detail the grammatical shift in Heloise's letters between first person singular and first person plural, delineating its effect in merging Heloise's various roles vis-à-vis Abelard and the debts incurred. For Heloise's first letter see especially, McLeod, "Wholly Guilty, Wholly Innocent," pp. 69–70.
- 48. McNamer, p. 49.
- 49. See Michael Grant, trans. Cicero On the Good Life (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 175-227.
- 50. Heloise's first letter, in Radice, p. 116. Radice mentions their common awareness of this text in her introduction. See Radice, p. 18.
- 51. Portions of a chōka in Utsuho monogatari [Tale of Utsuho, 970–999?], a romance of her day, resemble closely the chōka of Michitsuna's Mother. See Muroki Hideyuki, annot., Utsuho monogatari—zen [The complete Tale of Utsuho] (Tokyo: Ōfū, 1996), pp. 329–30. It is unclear which was written first, since neither text can be dated with confidence. If it precedes Michitsuna's Mother's poem (the less likely of the possibilities, however), our author has drawn a great deal of the content of her argument from that poem. Incidentally, in Utsuho the reason for the chōka is explained by the narrator—the brief waka cannot satisfy the composers need for expression. Michitsuna's Mother's reasons were likely similar.