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Abelard and Heloise: a Marriage of Minds

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To the Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting a thesis written by Abby B. Hieber entitled "Abelard and Heloise: A Marriage of Minds." We recommend acceptance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

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ABELARD AND HELOISE: A MARRIAGE OF MINDS

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

Of the

College of Arts and Sciences

In Partial Fulfillment

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Requirements for the Degree

Of

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By

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Abstract

The scandal surrounding Peter Abelard and Heloise's love story has eclipsed the depth of their individual intellects resulting in many scholars devoting their writings to the couple's overly eroticized narrative. After the condemnation of Peter Abelard and after Heloise commissioned herself into a convent, the relationship between tutor and tutee remained alive through written correspondence. Through an examination of their personal writings, this is paper will suggest that though their story has been adopted under the genre of a romance, this categorization falls short in conveying the highbrow substance of Abelard and Heloise, whose promiscuous beginnings have distracted historians from the intellectual wealth that was the foundation of their longstanding relationship.

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Introduction

During the eleventh century, a well-known scholar named Peter Abelard agreed to tutor a promising young student by the name of Heloise. The pair would begin a love affair which would be shrouded in secrecy and, when it was discovered, became a scandal. They are renowned for this affair. Peter Abelard and Heloise's love story has eclipsed the depth of their individual intellects, or, at the very least, their relationship casts a long shadow over everything else that they accomplished. Their story is so intriguing that many scholars devote their writings to the couple's overly eroticized narrative. So much so that when the average individual hears the names of Abelard and Heloise, he or she more readily connects their persons to a fiery, ancient tale of lost and forbidden love rather than the weighty, intellectual substance behind their relationship.

Many of the writings contributing to the historiography on Abelard and Heloise have furthered the eroticized story of the couple. This includes Michael Calabrese, who describes the correspondences between Abelard and Heloise as "a love story, an epistolary narrative of happiness achieved."[1] Calabrese makes pains to explain the romance between the two and though he does focus on their letters, he evaluates their writing with the sole aim of further highlighting the sexual nature of Abelard and Heloise's relationship. In the end, Calabrese's work comes across as a single-minded one which is absent of the holistic view of the persons his writing concerns. And then there is Michael Bryson's and Arpi Movsesian's, "Fin'amor Castrated: Abelard, Heloise, and the

[1] Michael Calabrese, "Ovid and the Female Voice in the "De Amore" and the "Letters" of Abelard and Heloise," *Modern Philology 95*, no. 1 (1997): 1-26, http://www.jstor.org.winthropuniversity.idm.oclc.org/stable/438942.

Critics who Deny," which focuses intently, almost solely, on the romance in the letters, claiming that they "are among the world's most vibrant embodiments of fin'amor."[2] Bryson and Moveseian place Abelard and Heloise center stage as one of the finest examples history has to offer of Eros.[3] While their evaluation of the pair's romantic love is thorough, it is still limited in that it merely explores a single aspect of the individual lives of Abelard and Heloise.

While many scholars focus on the romance of this story, some look at the astounding literarily contributions of Heloise and Abelard's deep philosophical theses. Bonnie Wheeler's, *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth -century Woman*, unflinchingly presents an image of Heloise as a true, and complex, intellectual. Wheeler describes Heloise as a keen, literary scholar whose sharp mind is worthy of study even if she were never entangled in a particularly publicized love affair. Wheeler invites modern historians to "seek to distance the traditional view of Heloise from the lens of Abelard, and in so doing, to listen with untrammeled ears to a Heloise who has been eclipsed by Abelard."[4] Wheeler's argument pairs well with John Marenbon's *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard,* which questions the one dimensional view of Abelard and Heloise.[5] In his work, Marenbon offers readers perhaps the most extensive look into the philosophical writings of Peter Abelard, arguing that the tutor was ahead of his time in regard to philosophical reasoning, thinking, and writing.

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[2] Michael Bryson and Arpi Movsesian. "Fin'Amor Castrated: Abelard, Heloise, and the Critics Who Deny," *Love and Its Critics: From the Song of Songs to Shakespeare and Milton's Eden*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017), 195–214, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1sq5vd6.9.
[3] The Greek god of erotic love.
[4] Bonnie Wheeler, *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth -century Woman* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[5] John Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Other scholars explore the couple and their relationship later in life. After they were no longer lovers, Abelard was still greatly influenced by Heloise's letters and their long-distance relationship. Constant J. Mews argues exactly this point in his 2005 work, *Abelard and Heloise*.[6] Mews is not distracted by the scandalous plot-points of Abelard and Heloise's story, but instead, peers past their sexual relationship. He argues that the two not only cared deeply for one another, but that they also pushed each other in philosophy, literature, and music. Mews states that even after their physical relationship had ended, Heloise greatly influenced and encouraged Abelard's intellectual interests, causing him to cultivate his ideas and sharpen his writings on theology, philosophy, and literature. In this vein, D.E. Luscombe's 1969 work, *The School of Peter Abelard: The Influence of Abelard's Thought in the Early Scholastic Period*, argues that Abelard and Heloise worked together to make contributions to the academic world; they were not just mere lovers, but two extraordinary minds.[7]

Furthering this notion that both Abelard and Heloise influenced one another after their physical relationship sharply subsided, Thomas Bell looks at their lives, focusing on their communications after their social condemnation.[8] Bell suggests that though their fiery romance had cooled, they never ceased to intellectually stimulate each other. Like Bell, Dr. Juanita Feros Ruys' study continues the conversation that Abelard was even more erudite in his writings after his castration. Ruys looks at works by Abelard that he

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[6] Constant J. Mews, *Abelard and Heloise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[7] D. E. Luscombe, *The School of Peter Abelard: The Influence of Abelard's Thought in the Early Scholastic Period*. *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought: New Series* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), doi:10.1017/CBO9780511896781.
[8] Thomas J. Bell, *Peter Abelard after Marriage: The Spiritual Direction of Heloise and Her Nuns through Liturgical Song* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008).

penned later in his life including *Carmen ad Astralabium,* a didactic poem, *Planctus*, six laments concerning his former lover, Heloise, and their personal letters to one another. Ruys uses them to further understand the complex mind of Abelard which did not cease its thinking after those against him had "cut off those parts of [his] body with which [he] had done that which was the cause of their sorrow."[9]

After the condemnation of Peter Abelard and after Heloise consigned herself into a convent, the relationship between tutor and tutee remained alive through an exchange of letters, liturgical music which Abelard composed for Heloise, and a quiet respect and love for one another's intellectual value. With the prospect of physical intimacy cut from the narrative of their relationship, Abelard and Heloise found a way to remain intimate; which was the very reason why Abelard had fallen in love with Heloise upon first meeting her. For, as Abelard stated, "in looks [Heloise] does not rank lowest, while in the extent of her learning she stood supreme."[10]

This thesis will glean from previous scholarship on the couple, but its focus will rest in the personal writings of Abelard and Heloise. By utilizing the personal, primary sources between the pair, the aim is that an intimate picture will emerge by analyzing who Abelard and Heloise were individually, first, and then how their correspondences influenced one another. Organizationally, this work is structured in tandem with the chronological order of events following the lives of the tutor and his tutee. Chapter I provides a thorough, though relatively brief, background on the couple. This chapter

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[9] Peter Abelard, *Historia calamitatum. The Story of my Misfortunes*, trans. Henry Adams Bellows (Saint Paul: T.A. Boyd, 1922), 16.
[10] *Hist. calam*, 16.

allows Abelard to be introduced as the intellectual that he was but similarly recognizes Heloise for her merits in academic brilliance as well. Positioning these two as intellectual forces will be key in proving their fascinating symmetry in later chapters, as it was this, their intellects, which drew them together.

Chapter II will discuss how, though the relationship was instigated by Abelard, both he and Heloise equally contributed to the relationship physically and mentally. Chapter III will unveil Heloise's thirty-year career as an abbess of the Oratory of the Paraclete and how she was capable of tactfully manipulating priests while advocating for women in the church to have better living conditions. Chapter IV devotes itself to the philosophical writings of Abelard while he spent his time in volunteer isolation. Here, like the chapter on Heloise prior, is where Abelard is viewed outside of his largely publicized love affair. Abelard's image is reconstructed with his philosophical theses placed within the larger body of scholarship pertaining to philosophy; suggesting that he considered theories that would later influence giants in the field such as Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Finally, Chapter V brings the two back together and where the crux of this thesis will be directly supported. After introducing the two and understanding each of them on an individual basis, Chapter V is where the body of literature introduced in Chapter II will be further explored. Connections in their diction, emotional state, and career will be highlighted, suggesting that the couple was so entwined with one another spiritually and mentally that their connection manifested itself in their written words. In all of Abelard's writings, whether on the purpose of one's intent, or virtue gained or lost by an action, or

the sermons and songs he wrote for the nunnery, each of these writings were connected by a common thread and that string was the influence and life of Heloise. If Heloise had not asked it of him, Abelard would not have written *The Problemata Heloissae*. Were it not for her philosophical ponderings on the purpose of intent, he may not have expounded upon Heloise's notion in *Ethics*. Were it not for her unconditional love, Abelard may not have understood the unconditional love of Christ and been capable of writing *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* in such a theologically emotive way. In the same manner, if it were not for Abelard, Heloise would not have had anyone to match her deeply evocative written words or understand her uncommon intelligence for a twelfth century woman.

In chapter three of *The Story of my Calamities*, Abelard is speaking of life after his affair with Heloise. "I devoted myself chiefly to lectures on theology," the monk states, "but I did not wholly abandon the teaching of the secular arts, to which I was more accustomed…I used the latter, however, as a hook, luring my students by the bait of learning to the study of the true philosophy."[11] The avenue of instruction which Abelard practices, echo's the attention that his and Heloise's life story has gathered throughout time. Their story is, at first glance, merely a romance, eroticized, scandalous, and wholly secular. But this only scratches the surface of what Abelard and Heloise's life story has to offer. Though scholars, historians, and romantics may be drawn in by the scandal surrounding the pair "as a hook," what these readers will discover are two extraordinary minds. Independent of one another, both Abelard and Heloise had much to offer the

[11] *Hist. calam*, 87.

scholarly world, but together, the pair excelled in written and spoken insight. So much so was the intellectual bond between the couple, that it can be suggested that were Heloise not to have Abelard as her mental foil, and he her, the pair would not have attained the personal growth that they did.[12] There was, as Shakespeare coined, a "marriage of true minds" which existed between Peter Abelard and Heloise one in which neither time, distance, nor social ridicule could separate.[13]

[12] *Hist. calam*, 87.
[13] William Shakespeare, *Sonnet CXVI* (Evanston, IL: Gray Goose Press, 1992).

Chapter I:

"Adolescence"

Peter Abelard would come to be one of the most well-renowned philosophers of his day. Heloise would become an abbess; overseeing a prestigious convent and positively impacting the way women were viewed in the Church. Both were famous for their minds and their romantic relationship. But who were they and where did they come from? What transpired in Abelard's youth that established a foundation for such a mind to prosper? And which medieval instructors aided Heloise in cultivating her academic pursuits? The origin of these two individuals, their childhoods, upbringing, proclivities, and personalities, should be explored if one wishes to know their persons better. Therefore, before focusing on their striking love affair, one must go back to the beginning, before Abelard and Heloise were a couple, in order to understand them fully.

Pierre le Pallet

1079 CE is generally the agreed upon date for the birth of Pierre le Pallet, who would come to be known as Peter Abelard. Abelard was raised in Brittany, France. His mother was a Breton named Lucia. His father, Berengar, was a Poitevin and a knight who encouraged his son to pursue his academic interests. Abelard would write in his memoir that this paternal advice to take the pen before learning to wield a weapon was the main encouragement in his decision to renounce his inheritance with the le Pallet namesake and give his life chiefly to the pursuit of academics. "I," he wrote in his autobiographical

work *Historia calamitatum* also known as *The Story of my Misfortunes*, "abandoned completely the court of Mars, so that I could be brought up in the bosom of Minerva."[14] Of his father, he recalled:

> I had a father who had won some smattering of letters before he had girded on the soldier's belt. And so it came about that long afterwards his love thereof was so strong that he saw to it that each son of his should be taught in letters even earlier than in the management of arms. Thus indeed did it come to pass. And because I was his first born, and for that reason the more dear to him, he sought with double diligence to have me wisely taught.[15]

Abelard writes that he "was so enthralled by [his] passion for learning that, gladly leaving to [his] brothers the pomp of glory in arms, the right of heritage and all the honours that should have been [his] as the eldest born," and he left his home to seek education in Minerva.[16] This was a bold choice for a firstborn son during the late eleventh century. Monetary comforts would pale in comparison to Abelard's thirst for knowledge both here, at the beginning of his career, and carrying on into elderly age. Abelard writes in the first chapter of his memoir about his passion for "the armory of logical reasoning," especially concerning the topic of philosophy, and that he: "exchanged all other weapons for these, and to the prizes of victory in war [he] preferred the battle of minds in disputation."[17] With the utilization of intellectual weaponry, this battle of the minds in disputation would come to be a common practice for Abelard.

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[14] *Hist. calam*, 2.
[15] *Hist. calam*, 3.
[16] *Hist. calam*, 3.
[17] *Hist. calam,* 3.

Roscelin of Compiègne

During his formative years, Abelard had an academic mentor and tutor, a man known as Roscelin of Compiègne. Born in Compiègne, France, Roseclin was both an ecclesiast and a scholar. He was a teacher at Tours and Locmenach where Abelard attended his lectures on the subjects of philosophy, theology, and nominalism; Roscelin is frequently cited as the founder of nominalism.[18] In Roscelin's accounts, it seems that he sought accolades for the accomplishments of Abelard, and, at the same time, to chastise his student for his haughty, entitled behavior. Roscelin boasted that Abelard was a pupil of his "from being a boy to being a young man."[19] Roscelin prided himself on his time instructing at Tour, Loches, and Besancon where Abelard "sat for so long as the least of [Roscelin's] disciples."[20]

Though Roscelin was concerned with promoting his own academic achievements, not Abelard's, his influence would prove to be a building block in shaping Abelard into an academic, a possibility that has received much less attention when discussions of Abelard arise. While teaching at the cathedral at Beauvais, Roscelin had a plethora of books, both sacred and secular in nature. "Roscelin the grammarian" as he was referred to, supplied a vast diversity of texts which included Boethius's *On Arithmetic* and *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, Priscian's *Grammatical Institutes*, and works from Horace,

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[18] Locmenach is now referred to as Laches, France. Philosopher and historian, Anthony Kenny, discusses Roscelin as the founder of nominalism in his work, *A New History of Western Philosophy* (United Kingdom: OUP Oxford, 2010).
[19] Roscelin of Compiegne, *Epistola ad Abaelardum*, 63, 65.
[20] Roscelin, *Epistola ad Abaelardum*, 66.

Juvenal, Virgil, and Statius as well as Augustine's *Homilies on John* and *De doctrina christiana*.[21] As Constant J. Mews suggests, this information "provides an excellent guide to the kind of texts that the young Abelard would have been expected to study in the late eleventh century."[22]

Though Abelard had a deep appreciation for Roscelin's theories, this did not prevent the emerging philosopher from engaging in debate with him. This would become typical of Abelard, and cause him much angst, even as it cemented his reputation as a top-notch scholar. For Roscelin, Abelard would prove to be a consistently troublesome pupil, not because he was not committed to his studies, but because he was always questioning his tutor's methods and conclusions. These quarrels would begin as harmless, merely annoying in nature, but later on in Abelard's life, after meeting Heloise, Roscelin would fire back with a letter to his former student. In this letter, written in the 1130s, Roscelin would condemn the sexually adulterous relationship the older Abelard had with his young tutee. The words from Roscelin would further tarnish the reputation of Abelard in the eyes of the Church and his image in the view of his contemporaries in the field of academia.[23]

Under the guidance of Roscelin, Abelard would encounter two elements which would hold his interest for years to come. First, as was previously mentioned, Abelard was exposed to—and came to appreciate—scholarship and books. Second, Abelard came to be interested in spirituality while working with Roscelin. In tandem with the scholarly

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[21] Roscelin, *Epistola ad Abaelardum,* 64.
[22] Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 22.
[23] The context of this letter will be further explored in Chapter III.

influence that Roscelin was, his close relationship with the Church gave Abelard an intimate picture of theological matters. Roscelin, being grossly absorbed in the study and practice of the Christian doctrine, reached a point of contention and recrimination with the archbishop of Reims by his definite expression of nominalism as an approach to understanding the Holy Trinity. Roscelin claimed that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were three separate Gods. Though Roscelin meant no ill intent, his claim was seen as blasphemy. In the early 1090s, the Council at Soissons condemned Roscelin's interpretation and he was accused of tritheism.[24]

Fearing excommunication and the possibility of death, Roscelin recanted his theory. With this interaction between Roscelin and the Church, Abelard was not only introduced to complex theological concepts at an early age, thereby opening his mind and exposing his thoughts to spiritual philosophy before he had escaped adolescence, but he would also get a taste of how the Church might respond. The Church clearly reprimanded Roscelin. Years later, in Soissons, 1121, Abelard would have to endure his own accusations of heresy from the Church.[25] Though the relationship between Abelard and Roscelin of Compiègne has largely been neglected from the common narrative of Peter Abelard, the French tutor was the first academic to influence the future monk.

William of Champeaux

[24] *Tritheism* is the belief in the Christian theology that the three persons of the Trinity are recognized as three separate and distinct gods. This was a radical viewpoint as it could be built upon to argue for polytheism.

[25] For further discussion on Abelard's heretical accusation, see Chapter III.

As years passed, Abelard became known throughout Brittany and beyond for his fluent grasp of the liberal arts, especially in the area of dialectic, which would come to saturate his written works. Abelard left Brittany in the year 1100 to study under William of Champeaux in Notre-Dame de Paris. William was under the guidance of Anselm of Laon who, in Paris, founded an academy of scholars who deeply focused on progressing biblical hermeneutics.

William was known as a leading scholar in rhetoric and, most beneficial to Abelard, dialectics. William wrote highly regarded commentaries on Cicero's *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and *De invention*. William was stringent in his pursuit of correct grammar, articulation, rhetoric, and cultivating the "art" of persuasive and compelling speech. Most notably, William was recognized in scholarly circles for his contribution to the discussion and theory of *universals*. One of the most widely discussed topics during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, universals are any two independent, in body and (if applicable) mind, entities that share a common trait. A strawberry and a ruby jewel, for example, are both red and it is this commonality in hue which is the result of a shared universal. Persons, however, share universals in their virtue and moral character. William cemented his career on the assertion that universals are things such a species or genus which are connected and are present within one another.

After a few years of studying alongside the master of dialect, Abelard began to question some of William's conclusions. These questions led to doubt which, in turn, just as with Roscelin, sparked debate. Having gained enough confidence in his own intellectual intuition, Abelard began to challenge William on his theories, and this

resulted in arguments between the veteran academic and the adolescent scholar. Historically, the theory of universals is built on a new approach to logic known as *vocalism*, which was introduced by none-other than Roscelin of Compiègne. In this approach, the theory of logic deals exclusively with the sound of the voice (verbal sounds). This theory contradicted the common stance of the period, which held that not only did logic deal with these verbal sounds, but also with things. Abelard vehemently disagreed with his instructor on two branches of universalism that William honed, that of *material essence realism* and *indifference realism*. By incorporating vocalist ideas he had gleaned from his first academic mentor, he challenged the theories of William. Abelard's argument against William's theories was so refined and infallible that when John of Salisbury compiled his widely acclaimed *Metalogicon*, which is a catalogue of sorts featuring twelfth century theories concerning universals, William's theory is not mentioned, while Abelard's are.

William and his relationship with Abelard would deteriorate, arguably, because Abelard surpassed the intellect of his tutor, though William of Champeaux would later write that it was simply because of "the younger man's arrogance."[26] William relented in his belief in *material essence* and *indifference* in regard to universals, but would not accept Roscelin or Abelard's addition that universals are merely words and/or concepts. Abelard writes in *Historia calamitatum* that "[William] corrected his theory so that thereafter he said that things were the same not essentially but indifferently."[27] After their

[26] Edward Cletus Sellner, *Finding the Monk Within: Great Monastic Values for Today* (Paulist Press, 2008), 238–39.
[27] *Hist. calam*. 3.

lengthy confrontation, Abelard's memoir seems to suggest that he held little regard or use for his tutor, writing that William's "lectures went completely to pieces, so that they could scarcely be recognized to be about dialectic at all."[28] Abelard did not, however, look upon William's character with contempt; rather, his writing suggests that Abelard did respect his intellect:

> I came at length to Paris, where above all in those days the art of dialectics was most flourishing, and there did I meet William of Champeaux, my teacher, a man most distinguished in his science both by his renown and by his true merit. With him I remained for some time, at first indeed well liked of him; but later I brought him great grief, because I undertook to refute certain of his opinions, not infrequently attacking him in disputation, and now and then in these debates I was adjudged victor.[29]

As his writing would suggest, Abelard was only beginning to sharpen his tongue in the combat of intellectual dispute.

Melun & Corbeil: The Misfortunes Begin

A couple of years after beginning his studies with William, Abelard switched from student to teacher. Having gained all that he had set out to from expert scholars, Abelard released himself from the instruction of William of Champeaux. Desiring a school of his own, Abelard established one at Melun; here, Abelard writes, is where "sprang the beginning of [his] misfortunes."[30] Abelard, not being one to refrain from self-praise, stated that he "was given…gifts far beyond the warrant of [his] youth," claiming that "the more widely [his] fame was spread abroad, the more bitter was the envy that

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[28] *Hist. calam*. 3.
[29] *Hist. calam*. 3.
[30] *Hist. calam*. 3.

was kindled against [him].”[31] Writing that William possessed “foreknowledge” of Abelard’s school in Melun and that his former teacher “[w]orking in secret, sought in every way he could before [Abelard] left his following to bring to nought the school [Abelard] had planned and the place [he] had chosen for it.”[32] *The Foreign Quarterly Review* writes that William of Champeaux was naturally terrified at the “ascendency his former pupil was gaining and used all his power to prevent the establishment of the school at Melun.”[33] Apparently, William’s concern stemmed from the thought that Abelard would draw potential pupils away from his own school.

Not only did William fail in his attempts, with Abelard’s school being fully attended by students, but the contention from William angered his former student into a form of retaliation fit for scholars. Abelard, turning from student of William to his rival, saw obvious and “unconcealed envy” in his former teacher’s actions.[34] He decided, after only a short time in Melun, to move his school closer to that of William’s. This change in demographic would result in more altercations between himself and William, which, as Abelard details, was his wish.

> That very place [Paris-the location of William’s school] he had many rivals, and some of them men of influence among the great ones of the land, relying on their aid I won to the fulfillment of my wish; the support of many was secured for me by reason of his own unconcealed envy. From this small inception of my school, my fame in the art of dialectics began to spread abroad, so that little by little the renown, not alone of those who had been my fellow students, but of our very teacher himself, grew dim and was like to die out altogether. Thus, it came about that, still more confident in myself, I moved my school as soon as I well might to the castle of Corbeil, which is hard by the city of Paris, for there I knew there would be given more frequent chance for my assaults in our battle

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[31] *Hist. calam*, 5.
[32] *Hist. calam*, 5.
[33] *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, Edition XXXVI (London. Oct, 1845 and Jan, 1846).
[34] *Hist. calam, 4*.

of disputation.[35]

There exists no doubt that by the time Abelard emerged from the instruction of William, he had bloomed into a confident scholar who was well acquainted with the topics of philosophy, reasoning, and theology; truly, the academic, by his own admission wished for the "chance" for more "battles" on such subjects.[36] From the time of his youth, Abelard was being shaped into a keen, thoughtful, arrogantly confident, articulate, pugnacious individual who was quick to see and note his own afflictions. The amalgamation of these qualities and vices, was the birth of a man who possessed intellectual substance "far beyond the warranty of [his] youth" and whose mind, to requote the beginning of *Historia calamitatum*, "preferred the battle of minds in disputation."[37]

Abelard lectured and engaged in debates all around Paris lecturing and engaging in debates, which gained him both friends and enemies. In this, he hoped to extend his fame. By his late thirties, Abelard was, as author and historian Edwin Paxton Hood writes, "attracting crowds of thousands, over mountains and seas, to enjoy the privilege of hearing him lecture."[38] Because of his mastery of dialectic, Abelard became somewhat of a scholarly celebrity. He had studied under the guidance of Roscelin of Compiègne, who taught him the complexities of nominalism and revealed to him the effect of being labeled heretical in the eyes of the Church. Then Abelard went to seek dialectic instruction from William of Champeaux, and, quite cunningly, used the knowledge he

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[35] *Hist. calam*, 4.
[36] *Hist. calam*, 4.
[37] *Hist. calam*, 4.
[38] Hood, E. P. *Lamps, Pitchers and Trumpets: Lectures on the Vocation of the Preacher*. Forgotten Books, 1867. 160.

learned from each of them independently, against one another. Abelard was becoming an intellectual force within Paris.

Shortly after the opening of his Corbeil school, Abelard was, as he phrases, "smitten with a grievous illness" which was brought upon him by his "immoderate zeal for study."[39] At this time, Abelard decided to take a sabbatical, returning to his native province to rest, heal, and regain his passion for study. Two years passed before the teacher would return to his school. Fearing that he and his rhetoric had grown obsolete, Abelard was thrilled to learn that in his absence his reputation had not been tarnished and that he was eagerly welcomed back into Parisian academic circles. Invigorated and ready for an intellectual sparring match, one of the first places Abelard visited in Paris was the school of Saint Victor, which had been opened by William of Champeaux. In Abelard's absence, William had done all that he could to rebuild his reputation as the leading voice in dialectics. He had joined the abbey of St. Victor and become a cleric; "This he had done," Abelard noted, "in order that he might be deemed more deeply religious, and so might be elevated to a loftier rank in the prelacy, a thing which, in truth, very soon came to pass, for he was made bishop of Chalons."[40]

Under the advisement of the Bishop of Mans, William opened the school while Abelard was away. One can imagine Bishop William's surprise when, during a lecture, his old adversary, Peter Abelard, appeared among the attendees. Keeping silent in the audience, Abelard waited until his former master of studies brought up the topic of universals, the subject which Abelard liked to debate and had emerged the "adjudged

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[39] *Hist. calam*, 85.
[40] *Hist. calam*, 4.

victor" earlier.[41] When the subject of universals presented itself, Abelard attacked with the only weapon he could brandish, disputation. Abelard recalled that, "William had first revised and then finally abandoned altogether his views on this one subject, his lecturing sank into such a state of negligent reasoning that it could scarce be called lecturing on the science of dialectics at all."[42] The years in the countryside had done nothing to dull the mind of Abelard who effortlessly defeated William in their public dispute. "Thus, it came about," Abelard summarized, "that my teaching won such strength and authority."[43] If there had been any doubt of Abelard's mental capabilities or that he had not fully recovered from his weakened physical state, they were nullified with this interaction with William. William, whose following soon began to thin, for his students did not wish to follow the dialectic teaching from a man who had conceded defeat on that very subject from his former student. Having learned from and bickered with the great mind of dialectics, William, Abelard had come to reign as the master of that topic by the beginning of the twelfth century.

The result of Abelard's quarrelsome relationship with William of Champeaux was that Abelard was not only well read on the topic of dialectics, but he was well learned through personal experience. With William, Abelard was forced into an understanding of the subject that went far deeper than his long hours of study could yield to him; far beyond Roscelin's school at Loches which could not compare to the scholarly refinement found at Parisian institutions. From these experiences, Abelard produced his first

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[41] *Hist. calam*, 3.
[42] *Hist. calam*, 6.
[43] *Hist. calam*, 6.

largescale written work, the *Dialectica*.[44] This treatise on logic was an ambitious work, one that he outgrew and later would revise. However, at the time it would act as a literary capstone, cementing Abelard as the top theorist on the subject of dialectics during the twelfth century.

During the years 1113 and 1114, Abelard resumed his teaching in Paris. His lecture halls were quickly filled to capacity with students who were, as Jan Ziolkowski from the Catholic University of America surmises, "enthralled by the novelty of his pedagogy, which challenged them not just to absorb the definitive statements in revered authors, but also to interrogate the text and passages with the strength of their own logic. His magnetism as a master at the cathedral school of Notre Dame contributed to the eventual ascendancy of Paris as a major university town, preeminent in the teaching of dialectic."[45] Though teaching under the banner of the Catholic faith, Abelard instructed his students on secular works such as Aristotle, Plato, Porphyry, Socrates, Beothius, and, like Roscelin had before him, Horace, and Virgil. Indeed, Abelard even garnered criticism from the Church because "many brethren regarded Abelard himself as well as the schooling and thinking he embodied as being irredeemably worldly."[46] Abelard stated that even though it was "contrary to the monastic profession to be concerned with the study of secular books," he could not "abandon the teaching of the secular arts."[47] It was during this tense time of censure from the Church that Abelard would receive a personal

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[44] Petrus Abaelardus, *Dialectica*, second edition, ed. L. M. De Rijk (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1970).
[45] Ziolkowski, Jan M. *Letters of Peter Abelard, Beyond the Personal*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008. 12. Accessed February 24, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt284z8q.
[46] Ziolkowski, *Letters of Peter Abelard, Beyond the Personal*, 13.
[47] *Hist. calam*, 5.

request from Fulbert, a fellow Canon at Notre-Dame de Paris, who wished for the famous teacher to tutor his niece, who was showing signs of becoming a promising scholar.

Héloïse d'Argenteuil

It is unfortunate that records of Heloise, a scholar turned lover who became a nun, have largely been lost to time. The date of her birth is uncertain, but most accounts suggest it to be around the late 1090s or early 1100s.[48] When she was in her teens, Heloise went to live as a ward with her uncle, Canon Fulbert, of Notre Dame, Paris. Fulbert treasured the relationship he had with his niece, regarding her temperament and intelligence in the highest esteem. The majority of what is known today about Heloise comes from Abelard's writings. The scholar seems to have studied her character as earnestly as he did philosophy, theology, and dialectics. Upon meeting her, Abelard writes that "[Heloise's] uncle's love for her was equaled only by his desire that she should have the best education which he could possibly procure for her."[49] Having quickly recognized Heloise's potential for intellectual greatness, Fulbert requested Peter Abelard, who was, as his accomplishments suggest, commonly known through Paris for his logical writings, oratorical skills, and dialectical prowess, to tutor his niece.

Throughout her life, Heloise garnered a reputation for being an uncommonly intelligent woman. Peter the Venerable, who was the abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Cluny during the twelfth century, validates Heloise's superior intelligence in a letter he

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[48] Michael Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 173–74; and *Historia calamitatum*, in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (Penguin, 1974), 66.
[49] *Hist. calam*, 16.

wrote to Heloise after the passing of her husband, Abelard. In it, he writes that Heloise was a "woman who, although still caught up in the obligations of the world, devoted all her application to knowledge of letters…and to the pursuit of secular learning, [so] that not even the pleasures of the world…could distract her from this worthy determination to study the arts."[50] Hugh Metel who was a Cannon during Heloise's time, never met the clever young woman but wrote of her intellectual fame throughout the community, stating that Heloise "had surpassed the feminine sex" and had "overcome womanly weakness and ha[d] hardened in manly strength."[51] Barbara Newman notes that "even Abelard's bitter enemy Roscelin refers to Heloise as a *Puella Prudentissma*."[52] With her reputation for intelligence preceding Heloise, Fulbert likely required no further bribing to persuade the famous tutor into his home. Abelard echoes these opinions in writing that "[Heloise] stood out above all by reason of her abundant knowledge of letters. Now this virtue is rare among women, and for that very reason it doubly graced the maiden and made her the most worthy of renown in the entire kingdom."[53]

His diction suggests that Heloise captivated Abelard by means deeper than the skin. He was drawn to her for the way in which she lived out the values of philosophy to which he was so attracted to. Furthermore, Abelard, being, again, the most well renowned dialectician in early twelfth century Paris, found that Heloise could hold her own in discourse with him. Heloise's "zeal," as he refers to it, for the pursuit of knowledge was

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[50] Peter the Venerable, "Letter (115) to Heloise," in Radice, *Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, pages 217-218.
[51] Constant J. Mews, "Hugh Metel, Heloise, and Peter Abelard: The Letters of an Augustinian Canon and the Challenge of Innovation in Twelfth-Century Lorraine," *Viator* 32 (2001): 59, 91.
[52] Newman, Barbara. "Flaws in The Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation In The Twelfth Century." *Traditio* 45 (1989): 111-46. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27831242.
[53] *Hist. calam*, 16.

the aspect of her character that seized Abelard's mind far before her love captured his heart. Before meeting Heloise, there exists no record of Abelard ever having been romantically connected to a woman. Upon meeting her, Abelard put the last of his adolescence to rest and sought something outside of the classroom: a personal relationship. He was, "determined to unite [himself] in the bonds of love."[54] Heloise also, though only a "young girl," acted on her own accord, apart from the approval of her uncle, and grew into a woman with the introduction of Abelard into her life.[55] It was not long after meeting that the romantic aspect of their relationship, as shall be discussed in the following chapter, started. Though Abelard was older than Heloise, they each grew together, maturing as they began to adopt the same ethos.

[54] *Hist. calam*, 16.
[55] *Hist. calam*, 29. Heloise's exact age is not known though scholars of the pair, such as Constance J. Mews, suggests her age to be in her late teen years to his early twenties. See Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 59, for further discussion.

Chapter II:

"Academics, Lust, and Marriage"

Tutelage at the Fulbert House

Upon starting his romantic relationship with Heloise in the year 1115 CE, Abelard's life would forever be changed. As stated in the previous chapter, Abelard's infatuation with Heloise was based on intellectual merit, not simple physical desire, with Abelard thoroughly considering their potential romantic success prior to pursuing Heloise. Abelard writes in *Historia calamitatum* about his thoughts on the matter:

> Considering everything which customarily binds lovers, I thought I could more easily link her to me in love, and believed that I could do this very easily. I was then of such a name and so distinguished in youth and appearance that I did not fear being rejected by any woman who I might deem to love. I thought that this girl would all the more willingly consent to me as I knew that she possessed and loved such knowledge of letters and that while we were separated, we could be present to each other through mediating writing, and could write many things more boldly than speak them, and thus our conversation could always be delightful.[56]

Abelard was not aware when he penned these words how much the "mediating writing" between them would be bold enough to stand through the ages.[57] It was at this time, when Abelard and Heloise became a couple, that the fundamental reasons behind their attraction to one another became apparent and the foundation stones of what would become a lifelong relationship were established. The purpose of this chapter will be to look at the period of tutelage that spawned the beginning of Abelard and Heloise's

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[56] *Hist. calam*, 13.
[57] *Hist. calam*, 13.

relationship. This chapter will also discuss how both Abelard and Heloise equally contributed to the relationship even in these early stages and that, although Abelard was considered to be the instigator, both he and Heloise were drawn to one another and actively contributed to the relationship, intellectually and physically.

Abelard's account of their meeting suggests that he initiated the relationship with Heloise. There is not a sense of a timeline in his writing indicating the period between his first tutoring lesson and the beginning of a romantic relationship with Heloise. What is certain, however, is that Abelard stressed the sexual debauchery in his memoir. His words indicate that though he may have been attracted to Heloise due to her impressive intellect, their relationship veered away from the world of academia and more towards physical attraction.

> We were united first in the dwelling that sheltered our love, and then in the hearts that burned with it. Under the pretext of study we spent our hours in the happiness of love, and learning held out to us the secret opportunities that our passion craved. Our speech was more of love than of the books which lay open before us; our kisses far outnumbered our reasoned words. Our hands sought less the book than each other's bosoms -- love drew our eyes together far more than the lesson drew them to the pages of our text.[58]

Due to the distraction of his new relationship with Heloise, for his part Abelard seems to have neglected his studies as he became more transfixed with the enticement of romance:

> In measure as this passionate rapture absorbed me more and more, I devoted ever less time to philosophy and to the work of the school. Indeed it became loathsome to me to go to the school or to linger there; the labour, moreover, was very burdensome, since my nights were vigils of love and my days of study. My lecturing became utterly careless and lukewarm; I did nothing because of inspiration, but everything merely as a matter of habit. I had become nothing more than a reciter of my former discoveries, and though I still wrote poems, they dealt with love, not with the secrets of philosophy.[59]

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[58] *Hist. calam*, 19.
[59] *Hist. calam*, 19.

There is no doubt that the man who had devoted his life chiefly to scholarly pursuits had fallen captive to the throws of romantic love and this affair potentially would have costly effects on his public image, which was rooted in his intellect, because in his own recollection he was seemingly turning away from that which made him famous.

While this love affair was taking place and Abelard's "lecturing became utterly careless and lukewarm," rumors began to spread throughout social circles in Paris about his and Heloise's liaisons. This neatly aligns with Abelard's own impression of events. One such arbiter of these rumors was none other than Abelard's former instructor and debate partner, Roscelin of Compiègne. Roscelin wrote a letter to Abelard indicting the scholar for his dishonorable behavior and how it had affected his image.

> I have seen in Paris indeed that a certain cleric called Fulbert welcomed you as a guest into his house, fed you as a close friend and member of the household, and also entrusted to you his niece, a very prudent young woman of outstanding disposition, for tuition. You, however, were not so much unmindful as contemptuous of that man, a noble and a cleric, a canon even of the church of Paris, your host and lord, who looked after you freely and honorably. Not sparing the virgin entrusted to you whom you should have taught as a student and whipped up by a spirit of unrestrained debauchery, you taught her not to argue but to fornicate. In one deed you are guilty of many crimes, namely, of betrayal and fornication, and most foul destroyer or virginal modesty. But "God, the Lord of vengeance, the God of vengeance, has acted freely.[60]

This letter from Roscelin suggests two things about the public's opinion of Abelard. First, that the great scholar had deprived himself of his studies in favor of an improper romance. The second is that the romantic relationship between Abelard and Heloise was not only improper, but also without honor, spurred on by lust, and inappropriate in that

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[60] Constance J. Mews, *Paris, the Schools, and the Politics of Sex. In: The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard,* The New Middle Ages series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-05921-5_3.

Abelard took advantage of the young Heloise, who is described in both Abelard's and Roscelin's accounts as a victim and a distraction. Abelard's writings seem to unintentionally defend Roscelin's claim by stating how he was "utterly aflame with passion" for Heloise and because of this reason "persuaded the girl's uncle, with the aid of some of his friends to take [Abelard] into his household."[61] Abelard wrote that "[Fulbert's] simplicity [in allowing Abelard to get so close to his niece] was nothing short of astounding to me; I should not have been more smitten with wonder if he had entrusted a tender lamb to the care of a ravenous wolf."[62] Abelard notes that instead of "bend[ing] her to [his] will with threats and blows," he did so with tender "caresses."[63]

It would be fitting to presume from Abelard's confessions that he was, indeed, the one initiating and leading the relationship with Heloise, although it is equally apparent that Heloise responded in a manner that met his own enthusiasm and adulterous behavior. She writes:

> I am conquered by my feelings; love troubles my mind and disorders my will. Sometimes I am swayed by the sentiment of piety which arises within me, and then the next moment I yield up my imagination to all that is amorous and tender… Oh, for pity's sake help a wretch to renounce her desires!... I am here, I confess, a sinner, but one who, far from weeping for her sins, weeps only for her lover; far from abhorring her crimes, endeavors only to add to them; and who, with a weakness unbecoming the state I am in, please myself continually with the remembrance of past actions, when it is impossible to renew them.[64]

Although it can be interpreted through her writing that Heloise is more reflective and considers the righteousness of her actions and Abelard is more concerned about his

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[61] *Hist. calam*, 17.
[62] *Hist. calam*, 17.
[63] *Hist. calam*, 17.
[64] Peter Abelard & Héloïse, *Love letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. and ed. Lloyd E. Smith (Girard, Kan.: Haldeman-Julius Company, 1925), 35.

public reputation, both were aware that their actions of physical intimacy out of wedlock were wrong in the eyes of God and unacceptable in the view of the Church.

There, again, exists no firm timeline as to how long Abelard and Heloise were secretly intimate under Fulbert's roof, but it was not long before Heloise became pregnant. There is precious little mentioned between the pair concerning their child. What is written is from Abelard's memoir when he stated that "It was not long after [the affair began] that Heloise found that she was pregnant, and of this she wrote to me in the utmost exultation, at the same time asking me to consider what had best be done."[65] Knowing of the shame that could befall him and her, Abelard writes that "on a night when her uncle was absent, we carried out the plan we had determined on, and I stole her secretly away from her uncle's house, sending her without delay to my own country. She remained there with my sister until she gave birth to a son, whom she named Astrolabe."[66]

There is no reason written by the child's father or mother as to why he was given the name Astrolabe, but a theory posed by William G. East in his work, "Abelard Anagram" in *Notes and Queries* suggests that Heloise devised the name "Astrallabius puer dei (Astralabe, child of God) as an anagram of Petrus Abaelardus II."[67] Perhaps attempting to re-imagine Abelard as an innocent, pure soul in the body of her child is the reason why Heloise chose the unusual name. If not, however, then it could be theorized that, as Constant J. Mews phrases, she names the child Astrolabe as an "instrument

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[65] *Hist. calam*, 20.
[66] *Hist. calam*, 21.
[67] William G. East, "Abelard's Anagram," *Notes and Queries*, 204 (1995), 233.

through which they [Abelard and Heloise] could acquire knowledge of the heavens—a symbol of scientific curiosity."[68] The boy is, in essence, a manifest representation of how, in their pursuit of knowledge, Heloise and Abelard were distracted by romantic love. Heloise's choosing of her child's name may act as an endeavor to re-rout back to the original focus of their relationship, which was, academics.

Concern about reputation, whether Heloise's standing as a woman or Abelard's as an academic, was, in the end, the primary factor that undermined their affair. Though she attempted to keep her promiscuous actions hidden from her uncle, Fulbert soon found out and became enraged that his niece and his home and been defiled by a man he had invited under his roof. Fulbert's response was a mix of fury and disbelief, because the uncle did not want to believe his niece, whom he held in such high regard, would fall into sexual temptation. Abelard noted Fulbert's reaction to the news of his beloved niece's sexual relationship. "A thing so manifest could deceive only a few, no one, methinks, save him whose shame it chiefly bespoke, the girl's uncle, Fulbert. The truth was often enough hinted to him, and by many persons, but he could not believe it, partly, as I have said, by reason of his boundless love for his niece, and partly because of the well-known continence of my previous life. Indeed, we do not easily suspect shame in those whom we most cherish, nor can there be the blot of foul suspicion on devoted love."[69]
The idea that Heloise had engaged in fornication grieved the uncle who loved her so dearly and whom admired her for her supposed commitment to chastity.

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[68] Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*,79.
[69] *Hist. calam*, 18.

Marriage

Having had a child together, the two were married; however, the union was a formality, formed to keep Abelard's social reputation intact, as Abelard wished to obtain approval from Fulbert. Heloise, however, did not wish to marry, despite the fact that they had a son, Astrolabe, together, because she did not want such a powerful mind like Abelard's to be contained within the confines of a marriage.[70] Heloise gleans this from the opinion of the Roman author Seneca, who believed that marriage was inimical to the scholarly life; and she greatly valued the mind of Abelard and his devotion to scholarship.[71] Heloise believed that to completely devote oneself to the pursuit of philosophy, one must live untethered to the bonds of marriage. Heloise also used the opinions of Jerome in her ponderings to Abelard. The 5th century writer believed that marriage would stand in the way of deep philosophical thinking. He wrote that "[w]hen Cicero after divorcing Terentia was requested by Hirtius to marry his sister, he set the matter altogether on one side, and said that he could not possibly devote himself to a wife and to philosophy."[72] Heloise seemed to consider Abelard's mind too great to be distracted by marriage even if she were to be the wife. He, instead, should commit himself to academic pursuits. Like Abelard and Roscelin, Heloise was concerned about Abelard's reputation. Heloise believed that because the marriage would connect Abelard to her through the means of their son, he would be implicated in a sexual relationship out

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[70] The need for a formal union along with the feelings of objection from Heloise to the marriage will be discussed further in chapter three.
[71] Peter Abelard and Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (Empire Books, 2012), 47.
[72] From *The Principle Works of St. Jerome*, tr. W.H. Fremantle, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Vol. VI (New York, 1893), 281, 7, paragraphing and chapter titles supplied.

of wedlock; effectively ruining his career and social respect. Though in their interactions at the time Abelard disagreed with Heloise, years later, in *Historia calamitatum,* he argued Heloise's very point, coming to see that a marriage between them would not have appeased her uncle ("our marriage proved but a weak defense against his revenge"), and it did, in fact, tarnish Abelard's name.[73] It is of value to note, as it will become a common occurrence in this thesis, that Abelard introduced Heloise to the writings of Seneca. She admits to him in her second letter that, "Seneca, with whose writings you made me acquainted," influenced her opinion on the paring of marriage and the scholarly life.[74] Then, years later, Abelard adopts her opinion on Seneca's writing. Thus, tutor influenced tutee who then, in turn, by her own writing and reasoning, led her instructor to her conclusion.

But looking at the affair from Heloise's perspective, she also had a personal stake in their relationship. Heloises' thoughts sound like an early form of feminism in that she wished to remain an unmarried woman because she believed marriage was a formal commitment and romantic love would be caged. In a letter to Abelard, she untangled her thoughts on wedding him:

> tho' I knew that the name of Wife was honourable in the world, and holy in religion, yet the name of your mistress had greater charms, because it was more free. The bonds of matrimony, however honourable, still bear with them a necessary engagement; and I was very unwilling to be necessitated to love always a man who, perhaps, would not always love me. I despised the name of Wife, that I might live happy with that of Mistress; and I find, by your letter to your friend, you have not forgot that delicacy of passion in a woman who loved you always with the utmost tenderness, and yet wished to love you more, you have very justly observed in your letter, that I esteemed those public engagements insipid which form alliances only to be dissolved by death, and which put life and love under

[73] *Hist. calam*, 23.
[74] Abelard and Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, 18*.

> the same unhappy necessity. But you have not added how often I have made protestations that it was infinitely preferable to me to live with Abelard as his mistress than with any other as empress of the world, and that I was more happy in obeying you, than I should have been in lawfully captivating the lord of the universe. Riches and pomp are not the charms of love. True tenderness make us to separate the lover from all that is external to him, and setting aside his quality, fortune, and employments, consider him singly by himself.[75]

Heloise held to her notion that if one was married, there existed an obligation to stay committed to one another by something other than real, romantic love. It was only through the freedom of lawful singleness, that Heloise saw liberation in her relationship with Abelard because he would not be required to love her by the way of holy matrimony, but he would stay committed to her because of love and nothing short of his desire for her.

This rhetoric from Heloise is definite, insightful, and carries the air of a strong-willed individual whose mind is already settled on the matter. In her contribution to the anthology, *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, Jane Chance focuses on the definitive nature and confident tone of Heloise's writing, stating: that "Heloise appropriates the masculinized role of the authority [in her letters to Abelard]."[76] Heloise was not merely an unopinionated medieval woman forced to play the role of damsel, she was a thinker who understood the complexities of what a marriage could bring. Where most women during this time period would hasten towards matrimony in an attempt to salvage what honor they could after such a public affair (which resulted in a child), Heloise thought outside of the traditional bounds of marriage; seeing the act as

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[75] Abelard and Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, 27.*

[76] Jane Chance, "Classical Myth and Gender in the Letters of "Abelard" and "Heloise": Gloss, Glossed, Glossator," in *Listening To Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler, in The New Middle Ages series (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 161.

one that would imprison and cheapen her love rather than liberate her and Abelard. Such complex opinions from Heloise suggest that she was liberal in her thinking and socially aware enough to be considered in modern times as a Medieval feminist.

The Aftermath

In the end, outside forces, including social concerns about reputation that Heloise, Abelard, and Roscelin had all commented on, compelled the couple to adjust the nature of their relationship. Abelard writes that Fulbert spread word of his actions in an attempt to ruin his career. Heloise had, as Abelard writes, "denounced her own kin and swore that they were speaking the most absolute lies. Her uncle, aroused to fury thereby, visited her repeatedly with punishments."[77] Learning of the harassment of his wife, Abelard sent her to "a convent of nuns at Argenteuil, not far from Paris, where she herself had been brought up and educated as a young girl. [Abelard] had them make ready for her all the garments of a nun, suitable for the life of a convent, excepting only the veil, and these [Abelard] bade her put on."[78]

After Fulbert heard of this, he believed that Abelard was attempting to control his niece, be rid of her, and destroy what was left of her life by forcing her to become a nun. The furious uncle hired men to go to Abelard's dwelling one evening. Abelard writes that "they broke in with the help of one of my servants whom they had bribed. There they had vengeance on me with a most cruel and most shameful punishment, such as astounded

[77] *Hist. calam*, 29.
[78] *Hist. calam*, 29.

the whole world; for they cut off those parts of my body with which I had done that which was the cause of their sorrow."[79] The relationship between Heloise and Abelard from this moment forth was altered. She would stay in the convent with veil worn. He would take vows at Saint Denis and go on to teach in Champagne near Quincey after rejoining the Paraclete. Though Abelard and Heloise would be separated physically, for the next twenty years until Abelard's death in April of 1142, the two, through letter writing, would form a bond that would, by their own admission, surpass the relationship they had before the attack on Abelard. In the following chapter, the careers of both Abelard and Heloise will be discussed with their letters acting as an insightful guide.

[79] *Hist. calam*, 30.

Chapter III:

"Heloise and Her Unbreakable Habit"

During their letter writing years, roughly 1129-1142 CE, Abelard was a castrated man who lived in semi-isolation. At the same time, Heloise was living with the nuns in the convent of Argenteuil, although she would not stay there long before moving on to become the well-respected abbess of the Paraclete. This chapter focuses mainly on Heloise (with Abelard being the focal point in chapter IV), exploring the immediate fallout following the whirlwind love affair between Abelard and Heloise, Heloise's emerging career, and the mutually influential bond the two shared despite their physical separation. Through her experiences at the Convent of Argenteuil and becoming an abbess of the Paraclete, Heloise not only formed a remarkable administrative career, she figured out how to participate in society while simultaneously maintaining and utilizing her intellect.

The Convent of Argenteuil

Located just under eight miles outside of Paris, France, sits the Benedictine convent of Argenteuil where Heloise would flee to escape the judgement of her uncle. The commune was not an unfamiliar place to Heloise. As a child, Heloise was educated at Argenteuil, where she would become fluent in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin and also

made great strides in the areas of rhetoric and grammar.[80] After giving birth to her son, Astrolabe, in Brittany, Heloise left the child there to be raised by her sister-in-law, Denise. The fact that the sister of Abelard would be willing to take the 'love child' into her care, may suggest that the Abelard family had a less than superficial relationship to Heloise; one in which the Abelard family, or at the very least, Denise, was supporting the couple with the participation of raising their child. With the child in the care of Denise, Abelard and Heloise "secretly returned to Paris" where they eloped.[81] In the weeks that followed their wedding, Abelard recalls in *Historia calamitatum* that he and his new bride saw each other only "rarely and in private, thus striving [their] utmost to conceal what [they] had done."[82] But Heloise's uncle could not shake the fact that with the reputation of his niece, his own good name was tarnished in the eyes of the community. Therefore, perhaps aiming to distance himself from the sinful actions of his kin, in a fit of vengeance for his own reputation, Fulbert began to spread the tale about Heloise and Abelard's sexual relationship. Abelard surmises it by writing: "and those of his household, seeking solace for their disgrace, began to divulge the story of our marriage, and thereby to violate the pledge they had given me on this point."[83]

The pledge that Fulbert had agreed to was that Abelard would wed his niece to ease the shame of her pregnancy but the marriage must be kept a secret so that Abelard "might suffer no loss of reputation thereby."[84] Thus, when Fulbert chose to speak out

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[80] During the twelfth century in Europe, Latin was the universal language of scholarship and the Catholic Church.
[81] *Hist. calam*, 29.
[82] *Hist. calam*, 29.
[83] *Hist. calam*, 29.
[84] *Hist. calam*, 29.

against Heloise, he was breaking the agreement he made with Abelard. It is interesting to note here that though Heloise did not wish to marry for fear of tarnishing Abelard's reputation (this topic will be discussed further in the following chapter), she also "swore that her uncle would never be appeased by such satisfaction as [the secret marriage]."[85] Her prediction about Fulbert "proved only too true."[86] Upon hearing of her uncles betrayal towards her husband, Heloise was vexed and thus "denounced her own kin and swore that they were speaking the most absolute lies."[87] Heloise came to the defense of her husband but her attempts at protecting his name had an adverse effect. "Her uncle," as Abelard recalls, "[was] aroused to fury thereby, [and] visited her repeatedly with punishments."[88] It is not certain what these "punishments" were, Heloise does not mention them in her writing, but whatever they consisted of, they were vile enough to cause Abelard to act quickly and get Heloise to a safe place. Abelard remarks: "No sooner had I learned this [of the punishments] than I sent her to a convent of nuns at Argenteuil."[89]

Due to the insistence by Abelard, Heloise would then don a habit and veil and quickly rise as a thoughtful and contributing member of the abbey. Heloise saw her act of joining the convent as a way to appease Abelard; she wanted his good name to be protected and he wished for her to be safe from her uncle's cruel harassments. Eventually, Heloise became prioress at Argenteuil. After staying there for a couple of

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[85] *Hist. calam*, 23.
[86] *Hist. calam*, 23.
[87] *Hist. calam*, 29.
[88] *Hist. calam*, 29.
[89] *Hist. calam*, 29.

years, the well-known French adviser to kings Louis VI and VII, Abbot Suger, arrived and gained control over the abbey. Under the guidance of Suger, the abbey was restored and refined in 1129 CE. This 'restoration' was not merely architectural; Suger wished to renovate the abbey from a spiritual perspective.[90] He was a stern leader who viewed the nuns in Argenteuil as grossly dishonoring to the principles of the holy Church, as he saw the women as being outspoken, opinionated, and the very opposite of the 'meek' Catholic expectation.[91] Heloise was a part of the issue confronting Suger. From the start of her career, Heloise's behavior contradicted cultural expectations of the average nun.

While some scholars have cast doubt upon the legitimacy of the allegations against Heloise and her fellow convent members, the medievalist Thomas G. Waldman expounds on these allegations against the nuns in his journal article, "Abbot Suger and the Nuns of Argenteuil."[92] Waldman suggests that, in context, Abbot Suger might have accurately stated the traditional expectations of the role of women, as the position of women in society was shifting during the twelfth century. He states that:

> the nuns' scandalous behavior has been either played down or interpreted as in large part Suger's invention. In fact, the reverse is true; the early history of Argenteuil was a twelfth-century creation, and there may have been grounds for the allegations regarding the nuns' behavior. Suger's attitude toward the nuns should not be seen in isolation but must be compared to

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[90] See Sumner McKnight Crosby, Franklin D. Israel, et al, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis : from its beginnings to the death of Suger*, 475-1151 (United Kingdom: *Yale University Press*, 1987).
[91] Biblical importance of 'meekness' can be further explored in the following passages: Psalm 37:11, Isaiah 11:4, Isaiah 29:19, and 1 Peter 3:1-6 which specifically calls upon women to uphold a gentle and quiet nature under submission to men.
[92] Thomas G. Waldman, "Abbot Suger and the Nuns Of Argenteuil," *Traditio* 41 (1985): 239-72, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27831171.

> what we know, from other sources, to have been his attitude to monastic reform.[93]

Though the allegations against the nuns of Argenteuil may have been exaggerated in parts, there exists a record from the Abbot that the nuns, including our Heloise, were behaving contrary to the acceptable norms and expectations of 'holy women.' Suger was not specific in his writing, stating only that the nuns were engaging in "misconduct." He did so once in his testament (penned June 1137), once in the *Vita Ludovici VI*, and lastly in *De rebus in administratione sua gestis*.[94] Though the allegations against the nuns would be taken seriously, there is little actual evidence suggesting the nuns were misbehaving; in fact, the only complaint of their misconduct is from Suger himself. Heloise biographer in the early twentieth century, Enid McLeod, notes that there exists no true evidence to support Suger's charges and that neither Abelard nor Heloise mentioned the charges in their writing (though this could be in an attempt to avoid guilt). McLeod goes on to suggest that Suger may have falsely charged the nuns in order to insure that Pope Honorius (the pope at the time) would expedite the nuns' expulsion.[95] If this were the case, Suger would have full control of the reformation and renovation of the abbey. In addition, McLeod poses the possibility that since the nuns in Argenteuil were without a proper overseer, Suger used their lack of guidance as proof thereof the nun's bad behavior. This means the nuns could have been acting in any sort of manner, negative or positive, and Suger still would have charged them in order to invoke the

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[93] Waldman, 240.
[94] See appendix for the full text of Suger's testament (penned June 1137), *Vita Ludovici VI*, and the *De rebus in administratione sua gestis*.
[95] Enid McLeod, *Heloise* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971).

change he desired. Casting Heloise and her fellow nuns in a bad light was an easy way to justify change.

In his multiple writings, Abbot Suger insists on the recovery of the abbey and its "purifying" by the banishment of the nuns residing there in each of these pieces. Though none of the writings mention Heloise by name, all three note the misconduct of the nuns as a group and with Heloise maintaining the position of prioress, there is no doubt the former tutee of Abelard would be subject to the same, if not more severe, rebuke as her fellow women. There have been a few theories posed as to why Suger would not mention Heloise in his accounts on the abbey. Waldman suggests that the abbot did not neglect to mention her, but avoided the name Heloise because "he felt it best to pass over her presence at Argenteuil in silence, since by the time he recorded his account of the acquisition of Argenteuil she had become the celebrated abbess of the Paraclete."[96] Challenging the moral character of lesser known/respected nuns was something Suger was not timid with, but the name Heloise had garnered a considerably good reputation in the Church community.

Suger, therefore, may have seen the incrimination of Heloise as a battle not worth the social risk, for there were many persons connected to the Paraclete who held her in high regard. Professor of Medieval studies R.H. Bautier theorized that Suger was so aggressive against the nuns of Argenteuil because it "stems from his long-standing quarrel with the families related to Heloise: the Montmorency, the vidames of Chartres,

[96] Suger's mentioning of the Argenteuil nun's behavior in testament and, *Vita Ludovici VI*, and the *De rebus in administratione sua gestis* were all written in the late 1130's. Heloise and the nuns of Argenteuil were expelled in 1129. Heloise became the abbess of the Paraclete later that same year.

and the viscounts of Chateaudum."[97] Though it cannot be explicitly concluded, there is a likelihood that Suger did not "go after" Heloise in his writing because of the good name that she had earned for herself. Suger feared an attack from her well-connected family if he maligned her, and, therefore, it was not worth the potential damage to his own reputation. What can be concluded is that Heloise was only at the Argenteuil a couple of years and had already risen to prioress, gleaned an exemplary reputation, and would go on to secure a long-standing and well-respected career at the Paraclete. Perhaps Suger was wise in avoiding the name Heloise.

Whether or not Heloise and her fellow nuns engaged in the misconduct Suger proposed is uncertain, but what is certain is in the year 1129, Heloise left the Abbey of Argenteuil by force. Abelard notes her expulsion: "It happened that my abbot of St. Denis by some means took possession of the Abbey of Argenteuil where Heloise--now my sister in Christ rather than my wife--had taken the veil. He claimed that it belonged to his monastery by ancient right, and forcibly expelled the community of nuns, of which she was prioress, so that they were now scattered as exiles in various places."[98] At the mere age of twenty-nine, Heloise would be forced from the abbey which had become her home. But her former lover would not allow his distant bride to be without housing and quickly intervened; suggesting that Abelard still had a protective nature towards his Heloise.

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[97] Waldman, 246. Bautier linked Abelard's debates with the "abbots of Saint Denis and Suger's appropriation of Argenteuil in 'Paris au temps d'Abelard,' in *Abelard et son temps* 69-71." But he even more decidedly linked these events to Suger's personal acrimony with Heloise's family in a 1982 paper at California Institute of Technology.
This connection is expounded upon in Waldman's work as well; which is where the above quote can be found.

[98] *Hist. calam*. 34.

The Paraclete

After hearing of the 'reformation' of Argenteuil and Heloise's dismissal from the abbey, Abelard invited Heloise to preside over a portion of property he had been gifted surrounding the Paraclete. Heloise would spend the rest of her days there. Abelard, having left the Paraclete in favor of the isolation the countryside offered, felt remorse for abandoning his followers and the many friends he had made at the Paraclete. Heloise and her companions immediately left for the abandoned oratory. As the Abelardian scholars of *Lives and Letters of Abelard and Heloise* surmised, "to Heloise and her companions [Abelard] made a perpetual and irrevocable cession of all the property belonging to the deserted Paraclete."[99]

During the next three decades, Heloise would acquire a reputation that exceeded even the sizeable one she earned while at the Argenteuil. In chapter XIII of *Historia calamitatum*, Abelard notes how greatly admired and set-apart Heloise was amongst her contemporaries:

> God granted such favour in the eyes of all to her who was now my sister, and who was in authority over the rest, that the bishops loved her as a daughter, the abbots as a sister, and the laity as a mother. All alike marvelled at her religious zeal, her good judgment and the sweetness of her incomparable patience in all things. The less often she allowed herself to be seen, shutting herself up in her cell to devote herself to sacred meditations

[99] Abelard, *Lives and Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 139.

> and prayers, the more eagerly did those who dwelt without demand her presence and the spiritual guidance of her words.[100]

Though their relationship was morphing into something far different from the physical, fiery affair it had been, Abelard's admiration for his former lover never wavered. Though she was a woman, Heloise made more contributions to the Paraclete than Abelard did in his time there. He recognized this himself. According to the historian Constant J. Mews, "Abelard expressed his admiration for the way in which Heloise was able to make much more of a success of the Paraclete in its early years than he ever could, and idealizes her as someone who was much more successful than he had ever been in becoming a figure much admired and respected by bishops, abbots, and laypeople alike."[101]

It was not only Abelard who wrote about Heloise's good character; there are many letters from highly esteemed individuals. One such person who respected Heloise was an Augustinian canon of Toul, Hugh Metel, who had come into contact with Heloise while she was abbess of the Paraclete on various occasions. The cannon had this to say concerning the young nun in a letter written on his personal stationary and addressed to her:

> If I were winged with the feathers of winds, I would frequently come to your presence, and I would speak, and I would learn. I do not have the desired skill to write to you but the will to find opportunities is not lacking, indeed my soul is eager to see and be seen, to hear and be heard at least by an exchange of letters. For your wisdom/prudence is greater than fame reported, your prudence exceeds clearly and fully the prudence of prudent women and, if it is proper to say, rather

[100] *Hist. calam*, 65.
[101] Mews, 148.

> since it is proper to say, your pen equals or surpasses the pens of doctors, if I may speak saving your peace and your grace.[102]

These stirring words from Metel are just a single example of the affirmation given to Heloise. Other clergy wrote Heloise including Pope Innocent II who promised his protection of her and her nuns: "As much as the female sex is more fragile, so much more do we wish to show paternal care and solicitude towards you, and to provide beneficially for your peace and usefulness/advantage in those things which we can according to God."[103]

Pope Lucius II noted how Heloise "devote[d] [herself] to divine service."[104] Pope Eugene III pledged to give Heloise and her abbey all that they should require based on the good "disposition of the abbess prioress of the Paraclete and her sisters."[105] In his personal letter to Heloise, Pope Eugene III stated that "whatever possessions, whatever goods in fields, vineyards, meadows, woods, mills, waters, tithes, or other things that monastery presently possesses justly and canonically, or should obtain in the future by grant of the papacy, by generosity of kings or princes, by offering of the faithful, or by other just means with God's favor, shall remain firm and unimpaired to you."[106] In Peter

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[102] Epistolae Hugonis Metelli, *Sacrae antiquitatis monumenta historica*, v. 2, ep. 17 (Impressum Stivagii in Lotharingia, 1725-31), 349.

[103] Pope Innocent II, "Letter," *Opera Petri Abaelardi*, 2v, ed. V. Cousin, (Paris: A Durand, 1849, 1859). Pope Innocent II's letter can be found in Appendix IX.iii 1.720-21 and PL179 ep.504 c569.
[104] Pope Lucius II, "Letter," *Opera Petri Abaelardi*, *Paris,* Appendix IX.iv, 1.721, and PL179, ep.4, c.830-31.
[105] Pope Eugenius III, "Letter," *Opera Petri Abaelardi*, Appendix IX.v, 1.721-4 and PL180 ep.238 c.1201-04.
[106] Pope Eugenius III, "Letter," *Opera Petri Abaelardi*, Appendix IX.v, 1.721-4 and PL180 ep.238 c.1201-04.

the Venerable's letter, the diction he uses is clearly of one who views Heloise in high regard. He begins, "To our venerable and dearest sister in Christ, the handmaid of God, Heloise, guide and mistress of the handmaids of God" and continues by placing the medieval woman higher even than himself; "May I ever be granted this grace from you: that you will think me worthy to be remembered."[107]

Heloise received other letters from Pope Anastasius IV,[108] Pope Hadrian IV,[109] and Pope Alexander III[110]—each of whom penned letters, often times lengthy, and all mentioning her remarkable character, piety, sharpness of mind, and devotion to the Church. During her years serving as prioress of Argenteuil,[111] Heloise earned a reputation which would not be blemished after her expulsion from the abbey. Heloise's character and ambitions would prove to be inexorable in cementing her career as an abbess.

A Long-Distance Connection

Though Abelard and Heloise would be separated physically for the next twenty years until Abelard's death in April of 1142, the two, through letter writing, would form a bond that would, by their own admission, surpass the relationship they had before the attack on Abelard. During their letter writing years, Abelard lived in semi-isolation. A few years after his separation from Heloise, he writes to his friend Philintus concerning his lonely conditions. "I live in a barbarous country, the language of which I do not

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[107] Pope Eugenius III, "Letter," *Opera Petri Abaelardi*, Appendix IX.v, 1.721-4 and PL180 ep.238 c.1201-04.
[108] Anastasias IV, "Letter," *Opera Petri Abaelardi,* Appendix IX.vi 1.724-25 and PL188 ep.38 c1028.
[109] Pope Hadrian IV, "Letter," *Opera Petri Abaelardi,* Appendix IX.viii 1.725 and PL188 ep.84 c1448.
[110] Pope Alexander III, "Letter," *Opera Petri Abaelardi*, Appendix.
[111] *Hist. calam*. 23.

understand. I have no conversation with the rudest people."[112] Abelard's only female company, and in fact often his only companionship, is found in letters written to him by Heloise. Abelard greatly respected Heloise and because she was the only woman he interacted with, as a consequence, he viewed women with dignity. Barbara Newman writes that "no one went further [during the High Middle Ages] in the ritual praise of women than Abelard" and that "he [went] much further than other writers were prepared to do."[113] "Abelard is on unusual ground," agreed Alcuin Blamires, during "the middle Ages…in urging female 'authority." [114] This is highlighted not only by Abelard's willingness to heed Heloise's call when assistance is requested of him, but in how Heloise receives his assistance.

One of the reasons Heloise stood out among other nuns, was, indeed her intellect, but also her thoughtful and persistent way of approaching reform within the monastery. When Heloise was abbess at the Oratory of the Paraclete, she saw the need for the monastery to accommodate the growing community of women residing there. The Benedictine Rule, which sufficiently addressed the needs of men living in monasteries, was not applicable to the physical needs that women's bodies required. This issue was noted by Heloise, who wrote to Abelard and made him aware of it as well.

Going against the respect that Abelard had for women, one theory suggests that Abelard saw women as inferior. John F. Benton argues in his work, "Fraud, Fiction, and

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[112] Peter Abelard, *Letter of Abelard and Heloise*, ed. Pierre Bayle (Simon and Schuster, 2012), 32.
[113] Barbara Newman, "Flaws in The Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation In The Twelfth Century," *Traditio* 45 (1989): 111-46, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27831242.
[114] Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Medieval Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: *Clarendon Press*, 1997), 200-207, 202.

Borrowing in the Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise," that Abelard wanted "to put women in their place" thus "he began to fear that Heloise and the nuns needed male control from outside the convent" and for this reason Abelard wrote *Problemata Heloissae* (*Heloises' Problems*) which consisted of forty-two questions of theological concerns posed by Heloise and answered by Abelard.[115] The problem with Benton's theory is a letter from Heloise to Abelard that predates the publication of *Problemata.* In it, she states:

> And so all we handmaids of Christ, who are your daughters in Christ, come as suppliants to demand of your paternal interest two things which we see to be very necessary for ourselves. One is that you will tell us how the order of nuns began and what authority there is for our profession. The other, that you will prescribe some Rule for us and write it down, a Rule which shall be suitable for women.[116]

Here Heloise is not meekly accepting patriarchal authority from Abelard. She is, in her own words, demanding that *he aid her* nuns. Abelard, in what can be read as a submissive tone, replies, "[n]ow that I have completed, as best I could, the first work you requested, it remains for me, God willing, to devote myself to fulfilling your wishes and those of your spiritual sisters regarding the other part of your request."[117] In response, Heloise does not regard the *Problemata* as an example of misogynistic control. Rather, she incorporates his codes at her monastery and they remained there long after the death of Abelard.

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[115] John F. Benton, *Fraud, Fiction, and Borrowing in the Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise*, S.l: S.n., 1972.
[116] Monica Furlong, *Visions and Longings: Medieval Women Mystics* (London: Mowbray, 1996), 33.
[117] "Abelard to Heloise: A Rule for Nuns" *The Letters of Heloise and Abelard,* eds. Mary Martin McLaughlin and Bonnie Wheeler, The New Middle Ages series (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009).

Heloise's insistence that the rules also should address the needs of women led to significant change; it paved the way for more women to choose to become nuns and live as Heloise and her following at the Paraclete. Because Heloise applied the rules for the women's monastery that Abelard provided in writing the *Problemata*, two scholars, Katharina Wilson and Glenda McLeod, note that "the Paraclete thrived under Heloise's thirty-five-year-long administration, adding five new priories and an abbey."[118] Though the pair was separated, they remained important influences on each other. The common side effect of their accomplishments is, as noted in an interview with historian Jane T. Schulenburg, author of "Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100," where Norman Gilliland remarks that "[Heloise] had a [35]-year career as an abbess and yet still that career is overshadowed by [her] relationship with Abelard."[119] An interesting note here is that Heloise lived the life that Abelard wanted for her. Constant J. Mews states that "the ideals that [Abelard] wish[ed] Heloise and her nuns to cultivate are not those of philosophical debate…but silent study and devotion," which Heloise faithfully did all her years as an abbess.[120]

As her performance as abbess can attest, Heloise was not merely the seductive female in this story who lures a well-respected academic into promiscuous actions out of wedlock; she was erudite in her own right. And although Abelard was not with her physically, in fact he only visited her a couple of times at the Paraclete, he remained an

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[118] Wheeler, Bonnie. *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth -century Woman* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[119] Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society Ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001), interviewed by Norman Gilliland, "Heloise and Romantic Love," *French and Francophone Women Writers* (2008).
[120] Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*,160.

ever-present voice in her mind. The same remarkable hold that Abelard had upon Heloise is one that Heloise had over Abelard; this bond and effect will be further discussed in the following chapter when Abelard's time in isolation is expounded upon.

Chapter IV

"His Time in the Wilderness"

After his relationship with Heloise was exposed, Abelard faced many difficulties. From physical mutilation to public humiliation. These hardships left Abelard feeling lackadaisical and the separation from Heloise was another difficulty which he had to suffer. Through the trials he endured, Abelard learned a lesson in humility which would help open the way for him to produce some of his most revered work. Perhaps more than mere coincidence, Abelard's new sense of humility and adjusted mindset also came just as Heloise re-entered his life in earnest, and her influence returned just as Abelard turned back to intellectual pursuits. As this chapter will detail, Abelard's ideas about intentionality and virtue—concepts that were far ahead of their time—may in fact be based on comments Heloise made in her letters to Abelard. It was this couple, processing their own relationship, who came up with these new ideas. Much of this innovative thinking might well have begun with Heloise.

Condemnation

After his castration which alerted the public to his illicit affair and heretical behavior, Abelard's teachings and character were ruthlessly judged. In fact, Abelard remarked that the attack on his body was not as harmful to him as the assault on his reputation. "But alas," he lamented, "I thought, the less I then suffered from the wound, the greater is my punishment now through slander, and I am tormented far more by the

loss of my reputation than I was by that of part of my body."[121] Before reaching Soissons, Abelard recalled that "rivals of mine so foully slandered me with both the clergy and the public that on the day of my arrival the people came near to stoning me and the few students of mine who had accompanied me thither."[122] These "rivals" were attempting to charge Abelard with heresy on the basis of their belief that the scholar was preaching the existence of the Holy Trinity as three separate gods. "They had been led to believe that [Abelard] had preached and written to prove the existence of three gods."[123] However, this was not the case. Attempting to prove his innocence, Abelard wrote that: "No sooner had I reached the city, therefore, than I went forthwith to the legate; to him I submitted my book for examination and judgment, declaring that if I had written anything repugnant to the Catholic faith, I was quite ready to correct it or otherwise to make satisfactory amends."[124] And to show publicly that his book and teachings were free from heresy, Abelard recalls that "every day before the council convened I publicly discussed the Catholic faith in the light of what I had written, and all who heard me were enthusiastic in their approval alike of the frankness and the logic of my words."[125] But his rivals, who did not appreciate Abelard's defense, grew angrier. The fact that he received public praise angered them even more.

In 1121, his enemies got their way and Abelard was charged with heresy. They held him at Soissons to await his trial. Abelard referred to the meeting as an

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[121] *Hist. calam*. 68.
[122] *Hist. calam*. 37.
[123] *Hist. calam*. 37.
[124] *Hist. calam*. 37.
[125] *Hist. calam*. 38.

"ecclesiastical council."[126] Here, he was unofficially charged with heresy and his teachings were condemned. Though the reason for Abelard's commendation hinged on the fact that he was "proven" a heretical teacher, the true motive was his notorious reputation as an adulterer which, in turn, made the Church and scholastic circles he kept company with, look guilty by association. To save himself, Abelard was forced to burn his book. In recalling the bitter memory, he mourned the loss, writing: "I cast that memorable book of mine into the flames" before being ordered to work in the convent of St. Medard at Soissons.[127] Abelard despised his time there and when he was finally released, the once highbrow scholar chose to abandon civilized life and the judgement of his peers in exchange for life of solitude in the wild. He remembers it so:

> I sought out a lonely spot known to me of old in the region of Troyes, and there, on a bit of land which had been given to me, and with the approval of the bishop of the district, I built with reeds and stalks my first oratory in the name of the Holy Trinity. And there concealed, with but one comrade, a certain cleric, I was able to sing over and over again to the Lord: "Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness.[128]

The Wilderness

While Heloise was spending her time honing administrative skills as an abbess, Abelard was tucked away in the French countryside where he became somewhat of a hermit. But his years of study were not wasted in the "wilderness," as he refers to his new home and this period in his life. Abelard, who as his former tutor Roscelin would attest, could be quite boastful and wrote about the many scholars who came from all around

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[126] *Hist. calam*. 37.
[127] *Hist. Calam*. 44.
[128] *Hist. Calam*. 51.

Brittany and surrounding French towns to hear his teaching. Chapter XI: **"**Of His Teaching in The Wilderness," begins as such:

> No sooner had scholars learned of my retreat than they began to flock thither from all sides, leaving their towns and castles to dwell in the wilderness. In place of their spacious houses they built themselves huts; instead of dainty fare they lived on the herbs of the field and coarse bread; their soft beds they exchanged for heaps of straw and rushes, and their tables were piles of turf…my followers buil[t] their huts above the waters of the Arduzon, so that they seemed hermits rather than scholars…And as their number grew ever greater, the hardships which they gladly endured for the sake of my teaching seemed to my rivals to reflect new glory on me, and to cast new shame on themselves. Nor was it strange that they, who had done their utmost to hurt me, should grieve to see how all things worked together for my good, even though I was now, in the words of Jerome, afar from cities and the market place, from controversies and the crowded ways on men.[129]

Abelard's account in *Historia calamitatum* reads similarly to that of a personal journal as opposed to academic writing. In one section where he is comparing his isolation to that of the "sons of the prophets, the monks of whom we read in the Old Testament," Abelard uses quotation marks to give a mock complaint from his would-be envious contemporaries. "Secretly my rivals," Abelard casually labels his critics as enemies, "complained and lamented one to another, saying: "Behold now, the whole world runs after him, and our persecution of him has done nought save to increase his glory. We strove to extinguish his fame, and we have but given it new brightness."[130] It is amusing at times how his audacious sense of intellectual pride leaps from the pages of his writings. Though, to be sure, Abelard had a right to regard himself the way he had

[129] *Hist. calam*. 54. In the following chapter a discussion on how Abelard viewed his calamities and how they, as he stated here, worked out for his "good," will be further analyzed.
[130] *Hist. calam*. 54.

because he did attract a scholarly following and though he may not be humble, he was correct in his assessment of self in that he was highly sought after.

In this same chapter, Abelard remarks that though he was sought after for his teaching, he suffered from "intolerable poverty."[131] So substantial were his financial burdens that though "shame kept [him] from begging," his students were the people who provided whatsoever he "needed in the way of food and clothing."[132] It was his students who also, remarkably, toiled the fields on Abelard's property and erected a building so that he may teach in civility. Abelard writes: "Since my oratory was no longer large enough to hold even a small part of their number, they found it necessary to increase its size, and in so doing they greatly improved it, building it of stone and wood."[133] Perhaps an indicator of his reformation of heart and sensitivity towards his pre-marital sin, Abelard named the building the "Paraclete," as a means to remain, as he states, "mindful of how I had come there a fugitive and in despair, and had breathed into my soul something of the miracle of divine consolation."[134]

It was after some time living and teaching in the wilderness as a self-defined "hermit" that Abelard was called to preside over the Abbey of Saint Gildas De Rhuys.[135] He accepted the invitation and moved to the far off shore of Lower Brittany. Abelard found this time in his life to be even more intolerable than those he spent dwelling in the wilderness. Abelard remarked: "Of the Abbey to Which he was Called and of the

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[131] *Hist. calam*. 54.
[132] *Hist. calam*. 55.
[133] *Hist. calam*. 55.
[134] *Hist. calam*. 55.
[135] Exactly how many years between his time in the wild and when he accepted the invitation to preside over the Abbey of Saint Gildas De Rhuys is uncertain, though it is estimated that he spent 2-4 years as a hermit.

Persecution he had from his Sons That is to Say the Monks and from the Lord of The Land," that the landscape and weather were deplorable and the brethren there uncivilized. "The land was barbarous and its speech was unknown to me; as for the monks, their vile and untamable way of life was notorious almost everywhere. The people of the region, too, were uncivilized and lawless."[136] Even so, Abelard remained at this post for a decade and it was here that he wrote *Historia calamitatum.*[137] Abelard's life story to date was far from happy, as the title suggests. It was this short biographical commentary that would find its way into the abbey of the Paraclete, where Heloise now resided. Abelardian scholar Constant J. Mews, remarks that Heloise may have been the only reader of *Historia calamitatum* during that time. It was this biographical work that moved Heloise to write the first of her letters to him.[138]

It was here, in the wilderness' which included his isolation in the countryside and the Abbey of St. Gildas, with a mutilated body, a mind saturated in the secular arts, and a heart that was softened to religious thought, that Abelard reasoned: "not even divine goodness could redeem one who, having been so proud, was brought to such shame, were it not for the blessed gift of grace."[139] With this reformed mindset, and long after his fiery romance cooled, Abelard would complete his most influential works. Interestingly, it is from this point onward that the life of Abelard and Heloise is largely overlooked, but here as will be discussed in this chapter, is where the true wonder of Abelard and Heloise as individuals shines through.

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[136] *Hist. calam*. 61.
[137] Date *calamitatum* was written*: 1132.*
[138] Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 265.
[139] *Hist. Calam*, 61.

The Letters

After their separation, and while he was garnering attention from his 'followers,' Abelard was still greatly influenced by the mind of Heloise. Heloise, who clearly was a scholarly thinker herself,[140] had ideas at this time that have found their way into many of Abelard's most notable works. To be clear, there was a profound shift in Abelard's life when Heloise came back into it. He had had a humbling experience, and so was ready to start writing again. More importantly, her words—they did not necessarily see one another in person, but exchanged letters—seemingly had a profound influence, which can be seen in the works he produced later in life.

An example of this can be seen in the first letter Heloise sent Abelard upon arriving at the convent in Argenteuil, where Heloise presents the ethical dilemma of intent. Referring to their relationship, she stated "Wholly guilty though I am, I am also, as you know, wholly innocent. It is not the deed but the intention of the doer which makes the crime, and justice should weigh not what was done but the spirit in which it was done."[141] Heloise proposed that it is not merely the action that renders a thing sinful or wrong, but the intention behind an action that reveals whether person is morally virtuous. Furthermore, intention, and intention alone, is the primary aspect that should be considered when casting judgment on a person. This is, indeed, a complex evaluation on intent by Heloise, and it was not lost on the man to whom it was addressed.

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[140] *Hist. Calam*, 61.
[141] Abelard, Peter, *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, eds. D. E. Luscombe and Betty Radice (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), 122.

In his writings on ethics, Abelard expounded upon the notion presented by Heloise. He formulates an argument concerning the role of intention in decision making and moral evaluation of the self, which, as Jean Porter concluded, placed him "ahead of mainstream medieval thought."[142] Abelard takes Heloise's conception of the responsibility of intent and builds upon it. He first gives the moral dilemma in *Ethics*, also referred to as *Know Thyself*, of a "poverty-stricken woman [who] has a little baby at the breast" but does not have enough money to feed the infant, so, "moved by pity for the little baby, she puts him by her side to warm him" but in the end, she realizes that it would be better for him to be peaceful in death than to suffer in life."[143] Thus, "she is driven to smother the one she embraces with the greatest love."[144] Here, Abelard provides a concrete example of a concept found in the musings that Heloise wrote in her letter, concluding that the well-meaning mother cannot be held guilty for the killing of her child because she was acting out of material love; her intent was to protect her baby from the pain of hunger, cold, and illness, even if it meant *she* would be childless.

Abelard goes a step further in supporting his, and consequently, Heloise's point, using the example of both Judas and God the Father wanting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ to take place. Where Judas wished for Jesus to die for personal gain, God wanted Jesus (His Son) to die because He desired to save the souls of mankind from eternal damnation; two vastly different motives for an identical outcome. Abelard would argue

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[142] Jean Porter, "Responsibility, Passion, and Sin: A Reassessment of Abelard's Ethics," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 28, no. 3 (2000): 367-94, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40017862.
[143] Peter Abelard, *Abelard: Ethical Writings*, trans. Paul Vincent Spade (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), 67.
[144] Abelard, *Ethics*, 67.

that it is the intent itself which determines innocence and moral character. In his example, Abelard concluded that God the Father's conscience would be pure based on the deity's goal, while the intent behind Judas' actions would lead to a guilty conscience. It is interesting to note that here in *Ethics*, when he finishes his discussion on the crucifixion of Christ, Abelard chose to use strikingly similar diction that Heloise had in her letter. Where Heloise wrote, "[i]t is not the deed but the intention of the doer which makes the crime," Abelard published within a few years of receiving her letter, "[t]he merit or praiseworthiness of the doer doesn't consist in the deed but in the intention."[145] Abelard rearranged the placement of the words 'intention,' doer,' and ''deed,' but the message is the same.

Comparing Abelard's *Ethics* with the first letter from Heloise, it seems that Abelard concluded his assessment on intent the very same way in which his former lover had in her letter. He remarks that "human beings don't judge about what is hidden but about what is plain. They don't think so much of the guilt belonging to the fault as of the performance of the deed."[146] In other words, people are prone to casting judgement based on the visible actions of a person, not the inner workings and spirit in which the individual acted. A possible negative outcome of this is that someone could be "accused by his enemies before a judge."[147] Even though "the judge knows he is innocent," if his enemies bring forward witnesses, "although false ones…the judge… is forced by the law to accept them. Admitting their proof, he punishes the innocent."[148] Therefore, Abelard

[145] Peter Abelard and Heloise, *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, and Abelard, *Ethics*, 12.
[146] Abelard, *Ethics*, 33.
[147] Abelard, *Ethics*, 32.
[148] Abelard, *Ethics*, 32.

argues that the way to ensure justice is to seek-out the accused's intent. For example, a man can be a killer, and although this, at first reception, is received as a heinous crime, if one learned that the man in question only killed in defense in order to protect the lives of his family, then the intent of that person's crime would not be reprehensible, and he would be deemed innocent and his conscience at ease. As Heloise penned, before the publication of *Ethics*, "justice should weigh not what was done but the spirit in which it was done."[149] From the intimate and intellectually prodding letters of Heloise, Abelard was apparently inspired to formulate a thesis on the virtues of intent which would be sturdy enough to remain relevant when modern philosophers applied his argument centuries later. The pair also experienced this first hand together, as they had a child and found themselves judged despite the love that they clearly had for one another.

Credit for the medieval doctrine of ethical intent is given to Abelard and, to be certain, the scholar did bring Heloise's thoughts into clear, organized focus in his work on *Ethics*. But it was his female counterpart, Heloise, who proposed the notion in the beginning.[150] Though Abelard acted as the written, philosophical mouthpiece, Heloise appears to have been the original scholar to hold these views on intentionality. In fact, based on the chronological order of Heloise's and Abelard's writing, it is entirely possible that were Heloise not to have written Abelard with such a thoroughly manifested opinion on the nature of intentionality, he may not have addressed the topic in *Ethics*.

Intentionality was not the only topic in Heloise's letters that found its way into Abelard's scholarship. In Heloise's second letter to Abelard, she expresses how difficult

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[149] Heloise, *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise,* 65.
[150] *Ethics* is also referred to as *Scito te ipsum* ("Know Thyself").

it is to refrain from denying ones most enticing desires. Heloise certainly makes her deepest desire known. In her letters, fervent lines such as "I cannot live if you will not tell me that you still love me," are common.[151] In a conversation she had with Abelard concerning desire, she assertively informs him that "it is very difficult to tear the heart away from hankering after its dearest pleasures."[152] With her own fall into the desires of premarital sex looming in the foreground of her consciousness, Heloise stated that it is not "only to do good but to abstain from evil" which solidifies a person's virtue.[153]

Later, Abelard formed his own ideas on the nature of desire and abstaining from 'evil,' ideas that can clearly be found in Heloise's earlier letter. Abelard theorized that individuals who have the desire to make a selfish decision but choose not to do so are more virtuous than those who only possess the longing to do good. He provides an example in *Ethics.* If "someone sees a woman and falls into lust. His mind is stirred by the pleasure of the flesh, with the result that he is set on fire for the shamefulness of sex."[154] Abelard reasons that though there is lust in the man's heart, that "if this willing is curbed by the virtue of moderation but not extinguished, stays for the fight, holds out for the struggle, and doesn't give up even when defeated" then there, in the struggle, is where true character and virtue is found.[155] It is only when there *is* great temptation and that temptation is fought against that true virtue is found. Abelard states that those who have sexual temptation have been given "material for a fight" and that through the "struggle,"

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[151] Abelard, *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, 122.
[152] Heloise, *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*. 133.
[153] Heloise, *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*. 125.
[154] Porter, "Responsibility, Passion, and Sin, A Reassessment of Abelard's Ethics," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*: 367-94. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40017862.
[155] Abelard, *Ethics*, 51.

that person "might receive a crown," or, praise for virtuous actions.[156] This sounds very much like Heloise's concept that "abstaining from evil" reflects a person's virtue.

Abelard plays with this concept, which Heloise introduced, in his writings. If a person were *never* in want of doing wrong and only desired to do 'good,' then the person in question would not be very impressive when it came to their moral choices in life. As Abelard writes, "For what great deed do we do for God's sake if we don't put up with anything opposed to our willing, but instead accomplish what we will? Indeed, who thanks us if, in what we say we are doing for his sake, we are [really] accomplishing our own will?"[157] Abelard's theory can be applied to other examples of virtuous abstinence, such as a glutton who must refrain from the temptation to overeat.

His Philosophizing Influence

This theory by Abelard on virtue is noticeably similar to that of eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant believed that people must act out of moral duty if their actions are to be counted as morally good. In the philosophical community, Kant's notions on virtue, detailed in his work *The Moral Law: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, influenced philosophical giants from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, to Friedrich Nietzsche, to modern minds such as Michel Foucault's.[158] The root of

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[156] Abelard, *Ethics*, 51.
[157] Abelard, *Ethics*, 21.
[158] Immanuel Kant and Herbert J. Paton, *The Moral Law: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (London: Routledge, 2005). See R. Kevin Hill, *Nietzsche's Critiques: The Kantian Foundations of his Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 242 for evidence of Kant's influence of Nietzsche. And, see Christina Hendricks, "Foucault's Kantian Critique: Philosophy and the Present," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 34, no. 4 (May 2008): 357–82 for Kant's influence on Foucault.

these philosopher's theories can be traced back to Abelard *Ethics*, which, in turn, can be found in the personal, hand-written letters he exchanged with Heloise. To a large extent, Abelard's theories on virtue would be credited to Kant and although the philosopher from the 1700s surely earned his accolades in the field of philosophy, his ideas on duty mirror those found in earlier philosophers such as Abelard.

Abelard's philosophical quandary on virtue is one that Aristotle wrested with as well. Often referred to as the Father of Western Philosophy, the fourth century BCE, Greek philosopher spent a vast number of pages untangling his theories on virtue in the third volume of his highly praised work, *Nicomachean Ethics.*[159] In it, Aristotle revolutionized the framework surrounding a person's actions and how those actions reveal the character and morality of that individual. For decades, philosophers have cited the theories of Aristotle as the pioneer in ethics and intent, with the aforementioned Kant being heavily influenced by him. But, as Peter King notes, Abelard did not have the same access that Kant did to Aristotle's theories. "The Church Fathers wrote about theological virtues," wrote King, "and their role with regard to grace and salvation, but not about systematic ethics."[160] Further, "Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* would not be translated for another century," and this makes "Abelard's accomplishment [*Ethics*] all the more impressive in this light."[161] In other words, not only was Abelard a talent in writing philosophy, as Kant would be, but he was a creative mind in philosophical reasoning

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[159] Aristóteles, and Hippocrates George Apostle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1980).
[160] Peter King, *Peter Abelard and the Problem of Universals in the Twelfth Century*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Philosophy Department, Princeton University, 1982), 57. Volume 2 contains a complete translation of Abelard's *Tractatus de intellectibus*.
[161] King, *Peter Abelard and the Problem of Universals in the Twelfth Century*, 58.

because he was formulating his logic on ethics prior to the recovery of Aristotle's work.[162] The literature available to other philosophical theorists following Abelard had a wider range of reviews, interpretations, and clarifications on Aristotle. This suggests that these later philosophers were able to grasp a fuller understanding of Aristotle's work because his theories had already been through academic channels, tested, and analyzed by a method synonymous with modern peer review. Abelard, instead, depended only on his ability to reason. But, as it turns out, Abelard had Heloise, and through their shared experiences and reflective letters, the nature of ethical intent and virtue. Indeed, many of these concepts appear to originate with Heloise.

It is intriguing to note that the very examples Abelard provides in *Ethics*, on intent and virtue, cuts close to the bone of his own 'shamefulness' of sexual promiscuity. He was working out the issues he had with his virtue through conversations with the very woman who "stirred the pleasures of his flesh."[163] It may have been this couple, working through issues in their own relationship that led to these remarkable ideas being discussed at such an early date in Western Europe.

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[162] Marvin Perry, Myrna Chase, James R. Jacob, Margaret C. Jacob, and Theodore H. Von Laue, *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics, and Society* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2016), 261-62. The Recovery, Rediscovery, of Aristotle, by translator William of Moerbeke, occurred during the thirteenth century. Abelard would have had access to the Greek and Arabic text, but not one in Latin. This would have resulted in portions of the complex material becoming lost in translation. Also, the teaching of Aristotle's works was "forbidden at the University of Paris during the first half of the thirteenth century" Thus, even after the death of Abelard, the ideas posed by Aristotle (which Abelard had concurred with) were still not embraced.

[163] *Hist. calam,* 47.

Chapter V

"The Secular and the Sacred"

Due to his love of secular writers and thinkers, such as Aristotle, Plato, Porphyry, Socrates, and Beothius, all of whom he discussed with Heloise when he was her tutor, Abelard could not forsake their secular teachings even in his later years when theology was on his mind. "I devoted myself chiefly to lectures on theology," the monk states, "but I did not wholly abandon the teaching of the secular arts, to which I was more accustomed."[164] This love for the secular arts created a unique blend of secular and theological writing. In their written exchanges, Heloise, too, intertwined secular philosophy with the vernacular of a devout person of faith, as in her aforementioned theories on intention. This chapter will focus on the merging of secular ideas from secular texts with sacred reformations of the self that both Abelard and Heloise came to incorporate into their written works and, for Abelard, his lectures. Not only did this intellectual and spiritual merger result in a religious epiphany for Abelard, but it also underscored the importance of Heloise's intellectual contributions to the discussion. In the end, it was the two of them coming to terms with what they had done in their youth that led to an exchange of minds that would be the foundation for some of Abelard's famous intellectual innovations. As they exchanged letters, they also came to understand their own relationship and what they perceived to be God's role in shaping their lives.

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[164] *Hist. calam,* 47.

One area of philosophizing in which Abelard blended both secular and theological thought was in his scholastic approach to theology itself. Another famous monk who lived during the twelfth century, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, was a representative of a monastic version of theology; he capitalized on the importance of *faith* in rationalizing and understanding the mysteries of the Bible and Christian belief system. Abelard, alternately, emphasized a more studious method, one in which the seeker of Biblical understanding does so through *reasoning*. Where St. Bernard believed that faith in God should come from the scripture and the peaching of the Fathers of the Church alone, Abelard sought to study, analyze, and contrast scripture against academic works of philosophy, history, literature, and secular schools of thought.

Abelard certainly expressed this internal tension between the secular and theological perspectives that tore at him in his later years. Towards the end of *Historia calamitatum,* after realizing his misfortunes in life were meant to bring him closer to a "divine" way of living and he "thanked God for [his] afflictions," Abelard wrote of how ardently committed he was to devoting his life to godly ways. For example, he stated that he had "become a philosopher less of this world than of God."[165] Even still, the monk could not pull himself away from the secular arts. For example, he discussed his method of teaching students as a monk in the monastery of St. Denis. He said: "I used the latter, however, as a hook, luring my students by the bait of learning to the study of the true philosophy, even as the Ecclesiastical History tells of Origen, the greatest of all Christian philosophers. Since apparently the Lord had gifted me with no less persuasiveness in

[165] *Hist. calam,* 33.

expounding the Scriptures than in lecturing on secular subjects."[166] Though he "served the Lord alone, to whom [he] devoted all [his] service," Abelard still could not separate the years of academic knowledge that he had acquired from his practice of religious teaching.[167]

In essence, Abelard could not untangle the heady nature of secular education from the heart of spiritual doctrine. Instead, Abelard married the two schools of thought; instructing his students with a curriculum that included figures such as Aristotle, Plato, Porphyry, Socrates, and Beothius, as well as Paul, Peter, the rest of the Twelve Disciples, and Jesus Christ.

Abelard's unique blend of the head and the heart is an approach that was not typical in twelfth century monastic teaching, but it is something that later scholars and artists alike would employ in their approaches. For example, the sixteenth century fresco painted by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel captures this idea of the intellectual being incorporated with the spiritual. Perhaps the most arresting scene in the painting, titled "The Creation of Adam," is that of God straining towards a lazily positioned Adam; their fingers not quite making contact. This mural is clearly highly religious; the fact that God, surrounded by cherubs, is reaching for mankind reflects an ideal image of the creative and saving nature of God toward mankind. This image acts as the 'spiritual' side of the mural; the 'heart.' The 'head' is hidden in the painting itself: the base that the God figure is sitting on in the scene is rendered in the shape of a brain. The

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[166] *Hist. calam,* 33.
[167] Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Steven R. Cartwright (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 336.

painting even boasts an anatomically correct medulla and spinal cord which is visible behind the body of God. In this rendering, God has been mingled with the human mind. The two aspects, thinking with reasoning and believing through faith, are together as one entity. Just as Abelard had united secular resources with theological, faith-based, study, so Michelangelo would later combine faith-based spirituality with human knowledge. Though he united the secular and the sacred, Abelard was clear in his later years that it was vital to look to God as supreme when it came to understanding universal truth through Scripture ("the word of Truth," as he writes) and it was because he accepted the Bible as the book of truth that Abelard warned fellow dialecticians on the dangers of improper reasoning.[168] In *Theologia christiana*, he writes:

> Those who claim to be dialecticians are usually led more easily to [heresy] the more they hold themselves to be well-equipped with reasons, and, to that extent more secure, they presume to attack or defend any position the more freely. Their arrogance is so great that they think there isn't anything that can't be understood and explained by their petty little lines of reasoning. Holding all authorities in contempt, they glory in believing only themselves—for those who accept only what their reason persuades them of, surely answer to themselves alone, as if they had eyes that were unacquainted with darkness.[169]

Abelard, a man who was once labeled "too arrogant to teach" by his first tutor, reasons that, though there is great benefit and even a sense of intellectual obligation, to study and contrast scripture against secular methods of reasoning, dialecticians should be mature enough to recognize that the human mind, mankind's capacity for reasoning, has its

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[168] *Hist. calm,* 37.
[169] Abelard, *Theologica christiana.* 30.

limits.[170] When confronted with the *inability* to reason-out a qualifiable answer to a worldly quandary, even the greatest of thinkers should stifle their arrogance and yield to the mysteries of an otherworldly, supernatural God. In his later years, Abelard acknowledged the limitations of the human mind and cautioned scholars to know where their intellectual limits were.

Pure Love, Freely Given

Naturally, Heloise contributed to this idea. Along with topics of intention and virtue, Heloise wrote to Abelard on the nature of love and she associates her definitions of romantic love to that of the love of God. When Heloise wrote to Abelard that "only a love given freely …is of significance to an ideal relationship," her words could never be more honestly acted out than from a man who had nothing in the way of physical intimacy to gain, and as a result, neither did she. As Abelard came to learn, a love undistracted by the "pleasures of [the] flesh," is freest because it requests nothing lustful in return.[171]

Abelard applied Heloise's self-less principle of free love to a relationship with God. In *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, he wrote that "[t]o love God for what He can give is not to love God freely."[172] In his work, Abelard stated "the grace of Christ superabounded; that is, good things were bestowed *freely* by him, not by virtue of *our*

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[170] William of Champeaux, believed him to be too arrogant to teach, and was, by Abelard's own admission, a man prone to "vanity" of the mind. Peter Abelard and Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 46.
[171] Abelard and Héloïse. *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise,* 43.
[172] Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 34.

merits."[173] Abelard's comments reflect what he and Heloise had come to learn about love and its complexities and how free, or selfless, love can be in a relationship. Abelard realized how he gave into "the pleasures of the flesh," but, that the grace and love of Christ was freely given; just like Heloise's love for him (now absent from physical lust).[174]

Heloise adamantly believed in a "freely given" version of love absent of restraint. For her, the love associated with friendship (*philia* or *amica*) held more weight than romantic love (*eros*). Abelard wrote about her view in *Historia calamitatum*, stating: "[Heloise] argued that the name of friend [*amica*] instead of wife would be dearer to her and more honourable for me–only love freely given should keep me for her, not the constriction of a marriage tie."[175] This is because *philic* love is unbinding. After all, if a "person mistreats or abuses their friends, or if one simply grows tired of his or her friend, there is no obligation to continue the relationship. The troublesome friendship can be dissolved without guilt or public shame. But, as Heloise frames it, a marriage is a "binding" contract that forces an erotic relationship to continue even when the couple no longer holds the same feelings they once did. Heloise stated her views on friendship in her third letter to Abelard: "The name of wife may seem more sacred or more binding, but sweeter for me will always be the word friend [*amica*], or, if you will permit me, that of concubine or whore. I believed that the more I humbled myself on your account, the

[173] Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,* 44.
[174] Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,* 44.
[175] *Hist. calam*, 16.

more gratitude I should win from you, and also the less damage I should do to the brightness of your reputation."[176]

Heloise's viewpoint on *philic* love is rooted, again, in her ethical notions on an individual's intent. She reasoned that a relationship based on an institutionalized obligation—marriage—is less noble than one which is based upon pure, free love. Again, Heloise's idea of purity is founded not entirely in the physical body, but the virtue of one's soul. For example, Heloise believed that the reason her uncle Fulbert demanded that she wed Abelard was his desire to maintain his self-image. Fulbert would be publicly shamed if his niece engaged in a sexual relationship outside of the confines of marriage. And the sexual relationship in question was from a tutor who *he* had sought out and employed and, worse still, the affair took place under his roof. Since her uncle wanted Heloise to get married not for "pure love" but to salvage his own reputation, Heloise felt her marriage to Abelard was based on a crooked intent. In the same way, Heloise believed that if a woman married for financial stability, which was a common and kindly received practice among twelfth-century Europeans, that the intention behind the bride's actions rendered the marriage meritless because the lady is prostituting herself for monetary gain. Her second letter to Abelard summarized her thoughts:

> a woman should realize that if she marries a rich man more readily than a poor one, and desires her husband more for his possessions than for himself, she is offering herself for sale. Certainly any woman who comes to marry through desires of this kind deserves wages, not gratitude, for clearly her

[176] Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise,* letter two, 51-52.

> mind is on the man's property, not himself, and she would be ready to prostitute herself to a richer man, if she could.[177]

Heloise saw her uncle's intentions as without virtue as he wanted to save his public reputation. Likewise, she saw little virtue in women who married to achieve financial security. Neither their intention nor their love were pure. However, Heloise felt that she had married Abelard out of pure, free love, as her intentions were good. As she told Abelard, "God knows I never sought anything in you except you yourself; I wanted simply you, nothing of yours."[178] Here, firstly, Heloise is proving her pure love for Abelard and, secondly, that the judge of her intent rests in the eyes of God.

While the idea that freely loving others with no expectation of some reward besides the love itself might obviously be applied to Abelard's concept of loving God without any expectation of a material advantage in return, Heloise would continue to invade Abelard's thoughts on ecclesiastical matters in other ways. For example, Heloise ardently wrote to Abelard about "plant[ing] the Lord's vine" through preaching the Gospel and uses the example of "Paul [who] had planted the Gospel among the Corinthians."[179] In Abelard's greatest theological work, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, he used the very same Biblical reference stating that "Paul, writing to the Corinthians...teaches that…carnal observances of the law now ought to cease, because they were not revealed in the Gospel…[for just as] the Father plant[ed] a seed to be fruitful and multiply,…we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection."[180] Heloise's

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[177] Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise,* letter two, 51-52.
[178] Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise,* letter two, 51-52.
[179] Abelard and Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise,* 76.
[180] Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,* 65, 229.

written conversation with Abelard that contained her personal understanding of theology had seemingly found their way into his published work.

It seems natural that these two former lovers, in their continued correspondence, might gain a unique perspective on theological questions of morality and love due to their own history and the distinctive nature of their relationship. These exchanged letters, which contained Heloise's thoughts on their relationship, were there when Abelard began to develop his theological theses on the nature of God and the relationship between God and man. In a way, Heloise's letters may well have influenced or even been the basis of several core ideas found in Abelard's theological writings. "Abelard gains through this feministic communicative act a fuller sense of humanity," according to Therese Dykeman.[181] Not only did the letters from Heloise give Abelard new queries to contemplate and theses to formulate, they allowed him to remain connected to a sense of intimacy that can only be experienced through human relationships. In this way, both Abelard, a man who had been mutilated in a most unnatural way, and Heloise, a woman who lost her lover only to find a habit, were able to connect and replace the physical with the spiritual through their letters.

There was a clear spiritual connection between the former lovers. Heloise wrote to Abelard of their bond through her letters, stating, "[letters] have souls; they can speak; they have in them all that force which expresses the transports of the heart; they have all the fire of our passions, they can raise them as much as if the persons themselves were present; they have all the tenderness and the delicacy of speech, and sometimes a

[181] Therese Boos Dykeman, *The Neglected Canon: Nine Women Philosophers: First to the Twentieth Century*. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1999), 49.

boldness of expression even beyond it."[182] Though they were miles apart, to Heloise, reading Abelard's letters was like looking into his conscience; as if she were eyelevel, sitting across the table from him, as if he "were present."[183] Though there was space between them, their souls were still mingled to such an extent that Abelard stated that it "is sufficient wisdom to conceal from all but [Heloise] how confused and weak I am."[184] This was Abelard talking. A man who, as Constant J. Mews admits, was "an arrogant intellectual." Abelard, whose teacher, William of Champeaus, believed him to be too arrogant to teach, and was, by Abelard's own admission, a man prone to "vanity."[185]

The spiritual connection between Heloise and Abelard manifested itself in the different ways that each of them viewed their sin of engaging in pre-marital sex. On the one hand, Abelard viewed his castration as a punishment from God that was inflicted in order to correct his lustful behavior and bring him closer to a divine nature. On the other hand, Heloise, harkening back to her views on intention, saw herself as simultaneously guilty and innocent. Heloise thought that it was the "intention of the doer which makes the crime," and that she was innocent because of her youthful, and therefore pure, desire for Abelard's affections.[186] Heloise admits that she was complicit in the affair, but she believed that she should only be judged on intention itself, not the deed (sex outside of wedlock). In her words to Abelard: "it was not my own pleasures and wishes I sought to gratify, as you well know, but yours."[187] In this letter, she is not placing blame on

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[182] Abelard and Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 67.
[183] Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 68.
[184] Abelard and Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 46.
[185] Abelard and Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 46.
[186] Abelard and Héloïse, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 46.
[187] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter two, 53.

Abelard, rather, she is arguing that her purity of heart was still intact because her intentions were to please another, in this case Abelard. In other words, she was acting out of selfless love towards Abelard not selfish desire.

Indeed, Heloise roots her innocence in intent, and felt that chastity was a state of mind, not a physical process. She notes that, because of her role as an abbess, and the subsequent assumption that she was pure and pious, "men call me chaste; they do not know the hypocrite I am."[188] For Heloise, purity was something deeper and more complex than chastity of the body: "They consider purity of the flesh a virtue, though virtue belongs not to the body but to the soul."[189] In her soul, Heloise viewed herself as pure by consequence of her intentions. And she defines the legitimacy of her innocent love by stating: "Many were uncertain whether I was prompted by love or lust; but now the end is proof of the beginning."[190] Here, Heloise is confirming that it was love that provoked their affair and her devotion to Abelard, as she stated, she was "at [Abelard's] command living with the nuns at Argenteuil," post castration and separation. This, in a way, validated their love since she was still aiming to please Abelard from a selfless perspective.

Heloise believed, however, that because it was not her desire to live a celibate life and commit herself to God as an abbess, she had not earned any of the accolades she received during her time at the Paraclete. In fact, she thought quite the contrary about how she should be viewed. In a letter she would only pen to Abelard, she spoke candidly

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[188] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter two, 53.
[189] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter two, 53.
[190] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter two, 53.

about her hypocrisy: "the outward actions which are performed more eagerly by hypocrites than by saints" are "common to the damned and the elected" and "win no favour in the eyes of God."[191] Heloise viewed outer behavior as a mere symptom. It was the inner motive and intention that determined whether or not someone had a virtuous heart. Though Heloise's actions towards the Church were, in appearance, good, because she had only joined the convent to appease Abelard, they were not an offering to God and thus meritless in her view.[192] To Abelard she wrote:

> I can win praise in the eyes of men but deserve none before God, who searches our hearts... and sees in our darkness. I am judged religious at a time when there is little in religion which is not hypocrisy, when whoever does not offend the opinions of men receives the highest praise. And yet perhaps there is some merit and it seems somehow acceptable to God, if a person whatever her intentions gives no offence to the Church in her outward behaviour, if the name of the Lord is not blasphemed among the infidels because of her [and] she does not disgrace the Order of her profession amongst the worldly.[193]

With this sentiment, Heloise frees herself, though not without introspection, from the guilt of Abelard's castration. In a letter to Abelard, Heloise begins by grappling with her involvement in his "punishment," which brought her such "misery."[194] As is true throughout their letters, Heloise wrote to Abelard in a 'steam of consciousness" that is similar to the format of a dairy. She begins her letter by questioning her guilt in the

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[191] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter four, 70.
[192] Abelard states in Chapter VIII: as Abelard recollects that Heloise "at [his] bidding, [had] taken the veil and entered a convent."
[193] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter four, 70.
[194] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter four, 70.

castration her uncle ordered and the role women historically played in the downfall of men:

> What misery for me—born as I was to be the cause of such a crime! Is it the general lot of women to bring total ruin on great men? Hence the warning about women in Proverbs: 'But now, my son, listen to me, attend to what I say: do not let your heart entice you into her ways, do not stray down her paths; she has wounded and laid low so many, and the strongest have all been her victims. Her house is the way to hell, and leads down to the halls of death.' And in Ecclesiastes: 'I put all to the test. . . I find woman more bitter than death; she is a snare, her heart a net, her arms are chains. He who is pleasing to God eludes her, but the sinner is her captive.[195]

But as her thoughts evolve, she recalls her thoughts on intent and alleviates some of her guilt. "At least I can thank God for this: the tempter did not prevail on me to do wrong of my own consent, like the women I have mentioned, though in the outcome he made me the instrument of his malice. But even if my conscience is clear through innocence, and no consent of mine makes me guilty of this crime, too many earlier sins were committed to allow me to be wholly free from guilt."[196] Heloise does take into account her own sin: "I yielded long before to the pleasures of carnal desires, and merited then what I weep for now. The sequel is a fitting punishment for my former sins, and an evil beginning must be expected to come to a bad end."[197] Though Heloise does blame herself to a certain extent, she still views Abelard's castration as an unjust "punishment" from God, and she

[195] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter four, 70.
[196] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter four, 70.
[197] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter four, 70.

even seemingly holds some animosity towards God for putting them in this position. It is unclear in her writing why precisely Heloise can hold such anger and blame towards God for her husband's mutilation. It may have been that she viewed God as making her an instrument of malice, temptation, as an attractive stumbling block for Abelard. Or perhaps, she was simply mad at God for Abelard's castration even though she herself could not put into words why God should be held accountable; only claiming the unjust nature of the punishment from her own emotional vantage point.

Abelard had a different interpretation of his castration. "Justly God had punished me in that very part of my body whereby I had sinned."[198] Abelard felt God wanted to teach Abelard the error of his lustful ways. Mews writes that the calamities afflicting Abelard were seen not as unjust punishments, as Heloise had viewed them, but rather, as just, "providential opportunities that enabled him to curb those vices of pride and lust into which he had fallen and to acknowledge divine goodness."[199] Abelard claimed that he could not see the state of sensual sin and pride that had overcome him and that a "divine" intervention was necessary. "I," the castrated Abelard divulged in his memoir, "was utterly absorbed in pride and sensuality, divine grace, the cure for both diseases, was forced upon me."[200] He concludes with a hopeful exclamation of his redemption "Nay, in such case not even divine goodness could redeem one who, having been so proud, was brought to such shame, were it not for the blessed gift of grace."[201]

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[198] *Hist. calam*, 31.
[199] Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 151.
[200] *Hist. calam.* 16.
[201] *Hist. calam*, 15.

Whereas Heloise, despite her notions of intent could not completely free herself of guilt and saw Abelard's bodily mutilation as "unjust," Abelard viewed the punishment as a just recompense for his actions.[202] But deeper than an 'eye for an eye' justice, Abelard truly yielded his life to God. Just as he had submitted his dialectical mind of human reasoning to the mysteries of the supernatural, Abelard reached the place in his life, be it a result of desperation or divine intervention or a combination of the two, where he preferred the will of God to that of himself. He concludes his manifesto by turning the attention towards God and, in very Abelardian fashion, *reasoning* simultaneously. He states that:

> We should endure our persecutions all the more steadfastly the more bitterly they harm us. We should not doubt that even if they are not according to our deserts, at least they serve for the purifying of our souls. And since all things are done in accordance with the divine ordering, let everyone of true faith console himself amid all his afflictions with the thought that the great goodness of God permits nothing to be done without *reason*, and brings to a good end whatsoever may seem to happen wrongfully.[203]

His castration, public condemnation, and loss of reputation were all a part of God's plan, which was reasonable.

In all of his academic pursuits, Abelard came to rest on the notion that for those who love God and submit themselves to Him, ridding themselves of sensual sin and pride, that all things will work together for their good. Much as Heloise did in her thoughts on unconditional, "free love," when he was rendered "unlovable" in a self-

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[202] Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter four, 70.
[203] *Hist. calam*, 78.

seeking erotic sense, Abelard was shown the love of God through his afflictions. He comforts his readers (and himself) by writing: “Wherefore rightly do all men say: ‘Thy will be done.’ And great is the consolation to all lovers of God in the word of the Apostle when he says: ‘We know that all things work together for good to them that love God’ (Rom. viii. 28).[204] But then Abelard concludes his memoir with lines which were likely meant as a warning of caution. “Those who yield to their own rather than to the divine purpose, and with hidden desires resist the spirit which echoes in the words, "Thy will be done," thus placing their own will ahead of the will of God. Farewell.”[205]

The entangled nature of Abelard and Heloise’s minds could not be divided through geographical separation. They had committed the same ‘sinful’ sexual act with one another; therefore, both were going through a similar process of self-analyzation and reformation simultaneously. Heloise may have looked at the complexities of intent and judgement more closely at one time that Abelard, but her notions impacted him enough to write about them in a most thorough manner. Abelard saw his afflictions as a just punishment, whereas, Heloise saw them as cruel but both Abelard and Heloise yielded to the Church and devoted their lives to furthering the articulation of Christian ethics. Despite their devotion, neither Abelard nor Heloise could detach themselves from secular academia. Instead, they, especially Abelard, attempted to purify it by integrating it into his curricula at the Monastery of St. Denis while also allowing the Scripture to remain the ultimate truth which accounts for the gaps or limitations in human reasoning. What is

[204] *Hist. calam*, 78.
[205] *Hist. calam*, 78.

evident during their years of separation and into old age, which their letters, theories, and published works suggest, is that Abelard and Heloise remained married in the mind.

Conclusion

From the beginning of their relationship, there existed a mutual attraction between Abelard and Heloise that drew the two together, but it was not merely the physical rush of sensual desire that forged the pair until their deaths. The mutual love of learning and respect for intelligence led to an intellectual bond between Heloise and Abelard that neither time, distance, nor old age could sever. Their experiences as a young couple would later influence and in fact drive each of them to incorporate into their writing what they learned from the incidents of their youth. Perhaps, for instance, Heloise was so taken with the principles of intent because she wished to justify their actions during those early years, hallmarking her "pure" intention of selfless love as an antidote to the sin in which she engaged in. This also alleviated some of the guilt she felt for the castration of Abelard.

Though her writing of intent came across as a romanticized view, where one acts out of the virtue of the soul and can then be left innocent in large part to the consequences of their actions, Heloise's theories are so thoroughly reasoned that it is a disservice to her intellect if history were to disregard her work. Yes, these ponderings of hers were expressed within the informal confines of personal letters, but that does not diminish their quality. As proof of this, Abelard saw their philosophical worth and structured one of his greatest philosophical works, *Ethics*, around the arguments found in Heloise's hand-scrawled letters. *Ethics* would go on to influence minds such as Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Even Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung could, arguably, owe a debt of gratitude to Heloise. The historiography of the

philosophical approach to ethical intent traces farther back than Abelard, to be sure, but the tutor and his keen tutee did play a part in adding to the ever-growing library of thought on intentionality.

In all of Abelard's writings, whether on the purpose of one's intent, or virtue gained or lost by an action, or the sermons and songs he wrote for the nunnery, each of these writings were connected by a common thread and that string was the influence of Heloise, who had such an impact on his life that went beyond the affair they had in their youth. If Heloise had not asked it of him, Abelard would not have written *The Problemata Heloissae.* Were it not for her philosophical reflections on the purpose of intent, he may not have expounded upon her notion in *Ethics*. Were it not for her love "freely" given, he may not have understood the unconditional love of Christ and been capable of writing *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* in such a theologically emotive manner. After all, Abelard was not known for his humility in his youth. His experiences with Heloise not only humbled Abelard, but her own thoughts on the matter found their way into his writings. Nor would the monk have understood the grace of God if he had not entangled himself in the "the snares of the flesh."[206] This grace made Abelard pursue theological study all the more because he gained a personal appreciation for the Scriptures, which had led him from the life of sin and towards one of devotion to God. Rendering Abelard, as stated previously, a "philosopher less of this world than of God."[207] In the end, both he and Heloise became advocates for the teachings of liberty and grace found in the Christian doctrine.

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[206] *Hist. calam*, 33.
[207] *Hist. calam*, 33.

In the same way, if it were not for Abelard, Heloise would not have had anyone to match her deeply evocative written words or understand her uncommon intelligence for a twelfth century woman. In chapter three of *The Story of my Calamities*, Abelard is speaking of life after his affair with Heloise. "I devoted myself chiefly to lectures on theology," the monk states, "but I did not wholly abandon the teaching of the secular arts, to which I was more accustomed…I used the latter, however, as a hook, luring my students by the bait of learning to the study of the true philosophy."[208] This passively manipulative method of teaching Abelard advocated mirrored the structure his and Heloise's life story has garnered over time. This relationship, which, at first glance appears to be only a romance, eroticized, scandalous, and wholly secular, was how their story was introduced to modern readers in *The Romance of the Rose* by Jean Guillaume.[209] But this is merely the surface of what Abelard and Heloise have to offer. Though historians, lovers of romance, scholars, and curious readers may be enticed by the scandal surrounding Peter Abelard and Heloise "as a hook," what they will find at the end of the line are two extraordinary minds so thoroughly intertwined that it is a task for litterateurs to untangle who was influencing whom when perusing their written works.[210]

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[208] *Hist. calam*, 34.
[209] Jean Guillaume and Frances Horgan, *The Romance of the Rose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[210] *Hist. calam*, 34.

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Appendix

TESTAMENT

Argenteuil, a monastery alienated from this church for nearly three hundred years and nearly destroyed by the extraordinary irresponsibility of the nuns, by our own labor we succeeded in having restored, during the pontificate of Pope Honorius (of blessed memory) who confirmed this by his privilege, and the reign of King Louis who conceded [this].[211]

VITA LUDOVICI

VI Pope Honorius was a serious and austere man. When he had learned of the justice of our cause concerning the monastery of Argenteuil, which the deplorable conduct of the nuns was making infamous, through the testimony not only of his legate Matthew, bishop of Albano, but also of our lords the bishops of Chartres, Paris, and Soissons, the archbishop of Reims, Reginald, and many other persons, and when he had read carefully the charters of the ancient kings ? Pippin, Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, and others concerning our rights in the aforementioned place which were presented to him by our emissaries, and with the unanimous consent of the curia, as much because of the justice of our claim as of their disgusting conduct, he restored it and confirmed it to Saint-Denis.[212]

DE ADMINISTRATIONE

When in the very impressionable age of my adolescence, I used to leaf through the ancient charters of the abbey's possessions kept in its chests, and since, because of the dishonest deeds of many persons guilty of fraud, I had to consult our collections of immunities, repeatedly there would fall into my hands the foundation charter of the monastery of Argenteuil given by Hermanric and Numma his wife, in which was contained the information that from the days of King Pippin it belonged to the abbey of Saint-Denis. But because of an unfortunate contract, it had been alienated in the time of Charlemagne, his son. For this emperor made the abbot and the brethren agree to his installing as abbess of the nuns of Argenteuil one of his own daughters, who was refusing an earthly marriage, with the stipulation, however, that after her death it was to revert to the abbey. But because of the disorder in the kingdom caused by the quarrels of the sons of Charlemagne's son, namely, Louis the Pious, and because Charlemagne's daughter lived on until this time, this contract was never respected. Since our predecessors had often tried to recover this property but had accomplished very little, we, after taking counsel with our brethren, sent our messengers to Rome to Pope Honorius of blessed memory, with the ancient charters of

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[211] Printed in Suger, uvres compltes (ed. A. Lecoy de la Marche; Soci?t? de l'Histoire de France, Publications 139; Paris 1867; hereafter uvres).

[212] Vie de Louis VI le Gros (ed. and trans H. Waquet; Paris, 1964; hereafter Vie de Louis VI) 216-18.

foundation and donation and the privileges of confirmation, asking that he investigate and restore our rights through a canonical examination. This man of good counsel, a protector of justice, returned Argenteuil to us with all its dependencies, both because of our rights and, on account of the disreputable conduct of the nuns who were living there in a proper manner, to reform the monastic life. King Louis, son of Philip, our beloved lord and friend, confirmed this restitution, and in a charter given through the authority of the royal majesty he confirmed to the abbey all the regalia he had there. Whoever wants to know more fully the tenor of this recovery will be able to find it clearly stated in the royal charters and apostolic privileges, and if he will carefully examine these questions he will realize the important increase brought by the recovery of the abbey and its de pendencies-namely Trappes, Elancourt, Chavenay, Bourdonne, Cherisy, the land of Montmelian, Mont?reau (which is near Melun), and other possessions. The ancient rent of Argenteuil, which did not belong to the abbey, has been increased by twenty pounds; for formerly we had only twenty against forty now. We used to receive six measures of grain and now we have fifteen.[213]

[213] Printed in *uvres* 160-6.