
In the eleventh century a man was born who would change the face of Philosophy, to whom the invention of the field of Theology could possibly be attributed, and at the same time who would create a scandal of such epic proportions that his name and the name of his beloved have been on the lips of romantics ever since.

Abelard as scholar and lover needs no introduction, but his life as a family man has been sadly neglected. Juanita Feros Ruys attempts to fill this gap, seeking to reshape his reputation beyond these qualities to what he may have considered in his declining years as his defining achievement — that of a family man.

As his health and academic reputation declined in wave after wave of fresh controversy, so to did the one stable factor in his life rise as something that he could cling to in the wreckage. However, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, Heloise and Astralabe, his wife and son, never appeared to waver in their love and commitment to Abelard. If on his death Heloise adopted Cistercian prayers and Astralabe the Cistercian robe, neither gave any prior indication in word or deed that Abelard had anything but their full support, even if he himself appeared to abandon them both over and over.

By meticulously deconstructing line by line the content and meaning of his poems dedicated to the two of them, Feros Ruys asks that we too revisit the assumptions we may hold about Abelard as husband and scholar, and think anew about the constraints the life of the times put on the expression of his voice in the world and how and where he was heard. Through addressing the neglected six laments (*Planctus*) for Heloise, and the long poem he wrote for Astralabe (*Carmen ad Astralabium*).
Astralabium) Feros Ruys takes us again to the same place that we may have often revisited, and asks us to view the words as if for the first time.

Her commitment as a scholar, wife and mother to the voices of the past is refreshingly displayed in this book, which has obviously been in itself a labour of both love and scholarship. Through her own dialogue with the past, she asks that we re-engage what we thought we knew, or did not know but may need to, and translates the complexity of the times to the simple love of a man for his wife and son, struggling always to reach across the divide that he himself created in the execution of how they could best live their lives.

In a book she had previously edited with Louise D’Arcens (Maistresse of My Wit, Brepols, 2004) and to which she also contributed a chapter (‘Playing Alterity: Heloise, Rhetoric, and Memoria’), Feros Ruys cites Gerald Bond (The Loving Subject: Desire, Eloquence, and Power in Romanesque France: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, p.164), in a way which perfectly summarises her own consideration of the subjects she has transformed from cultural artefacts from the past into living agents of a particular time and place doing their best to live according to the cultural mores demanded by the times while still remaining true to their own hearts and minds:

‘I remain convinced about the value of understanding the complex actions and motivations of these people who were attempting the first thorough reworking of the natural and social self since the Christianization of Ancient culture. The very remoteness of their influential efforts creates a critical distance for the observer that helps to keep the object and subject of cultural history from collapsing. Yet we ourselves are in the picture we paint of them, both because we as natural and social agents are making sense of them, and because the sense they make of themselves has become part of the sense we make of ourselves. This reciprocity first drew me to this material, and I hope that I have persuaded others that it deserves and rewards more careful attention.’
Through *The Repentant Abelard* Feros Ruys has persuaded me that the life and mind of Abelard will reward the lives and minds of present-day readers through a revisiting of his life as a family man and what he tried to make of it against the cultural constraints of the times.

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