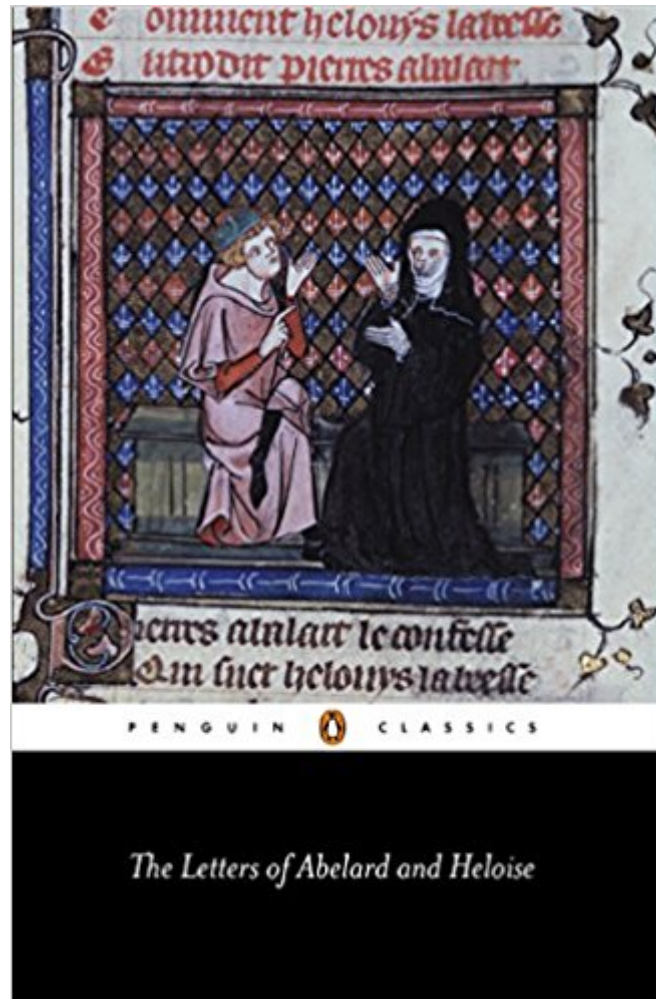


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# The Letters Of Abelard And Heloise (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

One of the world's most celebrated and tragic love affairs Through the letters between Abelard and Heloise, we follow the path of their 12th-century romance, from its reckless and ecstatic beginnings when Heloise became Abelard's pupil, through the suffering of public scandal and enforced secret marriage, to their eventual separation. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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## Customer Reviews

By any standard, the tale of Heloise and Abelard is an extraordinary story => brilliant young philosopher seduces brilliant beautiful student, passionate affair ensues, she gets pregnant, and they secretly marry -- but her relatives feel he has wronged her terribly, and in the middle of the night they break in and castrate him, after which both take refuge in the church. This book begins with a well-written introduction by Betty Radice, which gives an overview of the story. The letters, written years after the affair, are of great eloquence and depth of thought and feeling. Through them, the couple works to transform their 'earthly love' (which had continued to burn in Heloise's heart) into a spiritual bond that turns out to have similarly great passion and transcendence.

Although the letters are steeped in religious debates and intrigues of the time, their beauty makes the love behind them seem as alive today as it was so many centuries ago ...

When a subject is as ineffably touching as the love story of Abelard and Heloise, it'll drive you continuously to dig more and deeper into the story. So after the novel "Stealing Heaven" by Marion Meade, the film based on the novel entitled with the same name, as well as the poignant musical "Rage Of The Heart" by Enrico Garzilli, in which Peter Abelard was sung by Michael Ball and Heloise by Janet Mooney, I read the book "The Letter Of Peter Abelard And Heloise". If all of the previous works I have encountered are artworks carrying more or less the creators' imaginations as well as their biases, then this book of letters, not only a true documentation of these two extraordinary human minds, but also a true portrayal of these two extraordinary human souls, provides the resources where you could reach the truth and make the judgment of your own. Peter Abelard is a far more complicated human being than any artwork could deal. This is a man who was blessed with talent that's so distinctive, born with the charisma that's so appealing, and yet, tormented by the tragedy that's most appalling. The letters included reveal the connections of Abelard and Heloise years after both of them took vow to monastery life. You'd feel that the tragic consequence of their love relationship had created a different Abelard, from whom the words were more focused on his devotion to God and his advice to Heloise on the same subject, also his keenness on his study, and his somewhat apathy towards their previous relationship, for which it could be easily mistaken as selfishness or indifference. But it'd be very unfair to blame Abelard for negligence. If we are able to see that this is a man who had suffered unimaginable infliction and unbearable humiliation, for which he himself believed to be the punishment for his sin, it becomes all so understandable of his words of remorse and his dedication. I believe that after the tragedy, he tried to hide his pain and forget the past in order to re-live his life. After all, he had paid the highest price for his love to Heloise. However, despite all these, his deep love and emotions towards Heloise could not be concealed but be felt between the lines written to her and from the *Historia calamitatum: The Story of His Misfortunes*, written by Abelard to a friend. Although their love that once reached its peak was forced to come to an end so suddenly, later on through letters it had been restored in an unusual spiritual way and on a new level of depth. Heloise, an equally extraordinary human being as Abelard, on the other hand, was simpler and more straightforward, and yet, with a mind that's almost as acute and a heart that's braver and more passionate. When disaster struck upon these two lovers, she took the veil and entered the abbey in obedience to his wishes, only for her love to Abelard. Her sentimentality could be fully felt from her emotional

outpouring of tears, grieves, and longings in the letters. The walls of Abbey never stopped her from loving Abelard, to whom the love she confessed and never denied to be beyond her love to God. Her perspective about true love is most incisive. Her talking about sensuality of flesh is very frank. When responding to Abelard on the subject of virtue and chastity, her strong arguments and copious quotations from various resources are simply brilliant. This is a woman, with exceptional beauty both inside and outside as well as the most admiring courage, who cannot be judged conventionally. The text translation is eloquent, literary, and beautiful. These letters, once written many centuries ago and once were the only connection between two passionate hearts, are still compelling to read nowadays. In their own words, they told the story, in which they were teacher and student; friend and lover; husband and wife; brother and sister; and ultimately, two inseparable souls.

I have been fascinated by the story of Heloise and Abelard ever since reading the book *Stealing Heaven* in 1979. Reading these Letters was heartbreaking to me. This is my take on the whole thing: obviously Peter and Heloise had a deeply passionate sexual relationship. For Heloise, this grew also into an affair of the heart. For both of them it was an affair of the mind. What could be more enticing to a man than a woman of Heloise's intellect and passion? However, it was also the Middle Ages. Heloise was from a prominent family with an uncle high in the Church hierarchy. She loved Peter, as women do, with body, mind and soul. I believe he loved her deeply, but it is different with men. And as long as he was a whole man, I believe he acted honorably. But there is no way around it: her pregnancy was a disaster. What were they to do, what could they do? It is not as if he and she could live together married happily ever after. He faced ruin when she became pregnant: everything he was was put at great risk--his life's work was at stake, his standing in society, his reputation, his position at his University. They marry in secret, she hides away in a convent waiting to be rescued and carried off by her husband to a life of what? She doesn't care--she only wants to be with the man she loves. But what about him? How does he see this future? I feel sorry for the guy. But all this is moot, because her uncle has him castrated. At that point, he changes. No one seems to be acknowledging the effect this would have on him. The most important underpinning of his feeling for Heloise, i.e., testosterone-induced lust, is suddenly gone. Then add in the humiliation, pain, etc., etc. There you have it. His only option was the Church. Her only option was the Church. But how very differently they embarked upon that life. To him it is a welcome refuge. He can continue to live his life of the mind in that setting. He is surrounded by other celibate men. He has no sexual feelings anymore. He is a different person. Whatever feeling he had for Heloise is cut

from him. Indeed, he sees the whole thing as sinful, dirty, to be repented of. She, on the other hand, is in an entirely different situation. Religious life for her is not a refuge, but a prison. She has no access to her child. She has lost her love and lover, against her will. Not only are they separated, but the man she loves no longer loves her. It would have been better for her had he died. But to read his letters to her, wherein he totally rejects and condemns and regrets what she treasures most in her life and scolds her for not doing the same is heartbreaking. The letters make perfect sense to me. She was tormented by her love for him till old age cooled her ardor. She set her considerable mind at work on managing her religious order, but it was second-best, by far, till she was older. Since she adored him all her life, she engaged with him in the only manner he would allow: letters regarding religion and the religious life. I don't know how she bore it for all those years. No doubt about it: the uncle is the villain. Both Heloise and Peter suffered greatly: she had her heart torn from her, and he had his manhood torn from him.

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