The Fame of Abelard

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Abstract

Abelard pushed the boundaries of group culture by establishing himself as a medieval celebrity, famous to a wider circle of people in medieval France. Fame in the Middle Ages was normally limited to the divine, the holy, and great rulers. But, with the arrival and adventures of Abelard, it came to include a new kind of scholar-celebrity from the minor nobility. This thesis examines how Abelard formed a new type of celebrity culture by adding new dimensions to the meanings, possibilities, and rewards of medieval fame. The complex nature of celebrity culture and Abelard's life sparks interesting questions about how Abelard achieved fame and whether his fashioning of such was an intentional strategy, how people reacted to the emerging idea of individual fame, and the benefits and damages it brought in his case.

Keywords: Abelard; Fame; Celebrity Culture; Twelfth-Century Europe; Middle Ages; Scholarly Warfare

To those who have always believed in me.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

> "Indeed no one has ever gained permanent fame except as the result of what he has written or of what others have written of him" - John of Salisbury[1]

1.1. What did fame mean in the Middle Ages?

Abelard was a master of self-promotion, a town crier calling for the crowd to look at him. Abelard was uncensored and the focus of public talk, an unusual attribute for a medieval scholar as the twelfth century was a time of group consciousness and conformity in life and in thought. There was often a lack of independent thinking and individuality, as citizens were the subjects of a king, God, and church. Abelard bent the boundaries of group culture by establishing himself as a distinct and magnetic individual. Fame in the Middle Ages was (for the most part) limited to the divine and the holy or to great rulers. But, with the arrival of Abelard, it now included scholars and minor nobility. Throughout his life Abelard developed a type of celebrity culture by adding new dimensions to the meanings, possibilities, and rewards of medieval fame. Using his personal skills and a time of change to his advantage, Abelard invented himself as a public figure.

Surprisingly, the fame and celebrity status of Abelard has yet to surface as a separate category of academic discussion. Abelard played an essential role in shaping a new dimension of fame, one based on scholarship, intellectual combat, and a colourful controversial life. Discussing Abelard's life is an opportunity to open a discussion of both his individual fame in the twelfth century and of what fame was in the Middle Ages. The

1 John of Salisbury, *John of Salisbury: Policraticus*, ed. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 6.

complex nature of celebrity culture and Abelard's life sparks interesting questions about how Abelard achieved fame and whether it was intentional, how people reacted to the emerging idea of individual fame, and the benefits and damages it brought to his life. Elements of medieval fame may also provide us with insight into the origins of modern celebrity culture and of the rise of the individual in a time of collective values. Abelard was one of the first to be recognized for his individual life and accomplishments outside of the realms of church and state. Luscombe writes, "the greatest testament to Abelard's fame was the fact he wrote about it himself," provoking reactions of either "enthusiasm or horror".[2] Abelard received opposing reactions from the public, and was aware that these reactions were bringing him personal attention in the form of fame (or infamy).

Before discussing the foundations of Abelard's development of a celebrity culture, it will first be necessary to define what fame meant in the twelfth century. Today, fame is defined as a "state of being widely known or recognized"[3] by the *Collins Dictionary* and as "the state of being known for having or doing something important" by the *Cambridge Dictionary*.[4] The modern concept of fame relies on gaining recognition by a broad audience. Being widely known in the Middle Ages, however, was a more challenging feat as medieval society lacked many of the conditions needed to foster a true celebrity culture. In particular, the medieval world lacked forms of mass communication and cultural or national integration. Achieving fame was not as easy to achieve as it is today and definitely not as clearly established. Abelard's world depended on letter writing and rumour. The printing press was not to be invented for another three hundred years, meaning that all information that was not orally transmitted was spread through hand-copied manuscripts. Information moved slowly, if at all.

Despite the lack of communication, Abelard's manuscripts were found beyond French boundaries in Germanic areas such as Trier and Cologne. Copies of Abelard's *Sic*

[2] David Luscombe, *The School of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 1.

[3] "Fame," in *Collins Pocket Reference English Dictionary*, ed. Fraser Sutherland, Canadian ed., (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 1998) 150.

[4] "Fame," in *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary,* ed. Colin McIntosh, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

et Non and *Theologia* travelled to Italy and other distant lands.[5] And, unlike other scholars of Abelard's day, Abelard's reputation was not solely reliant on his scholarship. Abelard's affair with Heloise sparked legends and stories of tortured lovers that travelled across Europe and across time as tales of their love were recorded well into the sixteenth century. Abelard suits our modern definition of fame, receiving "widespread" recognition but did he fit into the idea of fame as it existed in the twelfth century?

Fama was the term used to describe fame in the twelfth century. The term has origins mainly in Latin but also in French.[6] In France, the terms used to describe fame in the Middle Ages included words we would consider synonymous today such as "well known" and "reputation". Medieval France also used the phrase "a la veue de tote gent" which is translated to "in sight of everyone" to describe fame.[7] Fame in medieval France was associated with being recognized by the public, to being a figure at the centre of attention. This definition is closer to our modern definition of fame. Looking at the Latin root of *fama,* however, takes us closer to the concept of fame as it was used by Abelard and his contemporaries in twelfth-century Europe. In Latin, the word *fama* was connected to "talk" or "speech", thus tying fame to a relationship with others through gossip and rumour.[8] The term *fama* itself originated from a defective verb "for, fari" meaning to speak or say. In essence, medieval fame was based on hearsay.

In the classical tradition, fame was defined as being "chaotic" and "a mix of truth and lies"; the *Aeneid* associated *fama* with a monstrous bird covered in eyes, ears, and mouths that flew around the world.[9] The bird became a symbol of the lifelike quality of

[5] Luscombe, *School of Peter Abelard*, 85-87.

[6] F.R.P Akehurst, "Chap. 4-Good Name, Reputation, and Notoriety in French Customary Law" in *Fama: The Politics of Talk & Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Small (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 77.

[7] Lori J. Walters, "Chap. 6-Constructing Reputations: Fama and Memory in Christine de Pizan's Charles V and L'Advision Cristine in *Fama: The Politics of Talk & Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Small (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 122-123.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid, 122.

rumours; words travelled quickly from mouths to ears to mouths as if they could fly. At its origins *fama* related to being at the centre of gossip.

Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail best define *fama* by describing it as follows: "*Fama* is rumour, idle talk, things people say, reputation, memory, things people know, fame, glory, infamy and defamation".[10] It was a term used to describe the many relationships that went into creating a reputation beyond just "talk". In the case of Abelard, fame was receiving public attention for providing entertainment or amazement. *Fama* was built on a reciprocal relationship with others, and did not differentiate good attention from the bad. Instead, *fama* focused on receiving any type of attention, all that mattered was being talked about, explaining some of Abelard's life choices.

Being famous in the Middle Ages meant to be recognized beyond the walls of your village and outside your professional field. To be a celebrity meant facing the judgement of those who were now witnessing every part of your life and commenting on your personal choices. Fame was to have a quality that attracted the attention of people, made an individual both recognizable and memorable to the public. It took an element of charm to be accepted by society, it required sometimes breaking social order and codes of behaviour. Abelard challenged the social boundaries of the twelfth century by emerging as an individual in a changing society that had previously rested on group consciousness and associations such as vassalage. There were many elements to the terms *fama* or fame, some of which were vague until the arrival of Abelard.

Abelard used a combination of Latin terms to describe his reputation and the attention he was receiving from the public. Using words such as *fama, gloria, honor, nomen,* and *laus*, often synonymously, it is possible to see the varying ideas that Abelard himself associated with *fama*. *Gloria* and *fama* appeared more frequently in Abelard's writings but almost all of these words have been translated into English as one word: fame.

With this vocabulary, fame thus includes or is associated with honour, glory, reputation and name. Honour and glory were representative of the rewards of fame, and

[10] *Fama: The Politics of Talk & Reputation in medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Small (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1.

with the emergence of individual fame people began to admire personal skills and actions. Name and reputation were tied to the level and status of fame. The further a name travelled, the more awareness and fame it earned. Although Abelard used these words interchangeably, he used *fama* and *gloria* to describe his reputation as a scholar, as a fornicator, as a monk, and as an accused heretic. He used these terms to describe the admiration he received from students and to account for the jealousy of his enemies. In contrast, Heloise chose to use words that were translated into "praised" and "revered" to describe Abelard's successes.[11] This new type of fame was not yet a clearly defined term in the Middle Ages, and instead was being defined as Abelard invented it. Medieval fame began to rely on gossip and public opinion. Public talk determined if someone would be remembered as a hero or a villain; both of these titles, however, were acceptable as *fama* in the twelfth century encompassed both fame and infamy.[12] Fame included recognition in all forms; slander and scrutiny were just as valuable to increasing reputation as praise and admiration.

In relation to Abelard, the term *fama*, or fame, was still quite broad in definition. In part, this was because this new type of fame was growing and developing with him. The individual fame of living scholars was unheard of or rare before he emerged. Before him, fame could easily be defined as being the great reputation of the kings and of divine and holy persons. But with Abelard's success, fame took on a new more urban meaning. Abelard forged a new celebrity culture, one that admired individuals who were entertaining and appealed to public interest. Abelard's skill as a logician and his scandalous behaviour entertained a wider community. He gained a reputation for his genius among students and scholars, but the whispers of his jesting in the classroom and affair caused Aeneid's bird to fly free.

Along with the above qualities of *fama,* another special quality is related to what made a celebrity, the quality of charm. Michael Clanchy in "Abelard: Celebrity and Charisma" explores the difficulties in defining fame, especially in terms of charisma.

[11] Peter Abelard, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise,* trans. Betty Radice, rev. M.T. Clanchy (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), pg 52.

[12] F.R.P Akehurst,), 77.

Clanchy cites how complicated it is to define this concept as there is a special *je ne sais quoi* that is held by the famed in order to gain the fixation of the public.[13] In this same article, Clanchy proposes that Abelard's position as a public figure needed to examined as it had yet to be studied, and was especially interesting since St. Bernard had referred to Abelard as a "self-publicist".[14] Clanchy thus justifies the analysis of Abelard's fame and celebrity culture and its significance among academic discussions.

An expert in Abelard scholarship, Clanchy identified an important topic that needed study through an analysis of Abelard's life and fame. How did a young man of lower nobility become a twelfth-century superstar? What circumstances and characteristics allowed such a man to break the bounds of a culture that only recognized kings and divinity as famous? The amount of influence Abelard had as a public intellectual was astonishing for the time he lived in. He filled positions of great importance as an educator and monk, but he also committed some of the greatest sins as a fornicator and accused heretic. How could such a polarizing figure break the bounds of society and create a new category of fame? As an individual, receiving so much public recognition for his scholarly career and personal scandals, his name was whispered thousands of miles from his hometown, which was shocking for the time. The society of medieval Europe was based on group culture, with little or a subdued sense of individual importance. Those who became famous were those who were already separated from society at large by holding positions of great power. But as a minor noble, Abelard did not have a clear path to notoriety. Instead, he forged a new path for himself and others to achieve individual fame. This opened a path to celebrity that still seems familiar to us today.

Reputation in the twelfth century was based on what others claimed about you in letters or whispered about you in public. With the oral tradition, most of what people said was hearsay, but the information was considered valid as it was what everybody knew, making it socially acceptable to rely on this information as fact.[15]

[13] Michael Clanchy, "Abelard: Celebrity and Charisma" in *Religions* 4, (Oxford: University of London, 2012), 1140-1141.

[14] Ibid, 1142.

[15] Chris Wickham, "Chap. 1-Fama and the Law in Twelfth-Century Tuscany" in *Fama: The Politics of Talk & Reputation in medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Small (New York: Cornell University Presss, 2003), 17.

The Middle Ages was much like the children's game of telephone, whispering a sentence down a chain of people, knowing that the message will not reach the end of the chain unchanged. Parts of the message always change. Traces of the original would still exist, but the message suffers the possibility or actuality of miscommunication and alteration at each exchange. Rumours and facts were much like this game, except that personal judgement also influenced the changes. Those who saw Abelard's actions as heretical and sinful manipulated rumours to condemn him, while those who admired his charm and teachings praised him to the public ear. There was a close relationship between talk and fame. In essence, fame was always related to the spreading of rumour or public talk (one of the chief meanings of *fama*).

Before Abelard, attaining fame in medieval Europe required a royal birthright or the hand of God. After Abelard, however, an easier and more attainable route to fame was created for some. Abelard founded a path to celebrity status that was attainable by the lower nobility and scholars, a model that showed that specific actions and education as another road to fame. Throughout his life Abelard worked on building a reputation that would make him publicly immortal, a path that many after him followed but few succeeded in achieving.

Abelard created his own program for success. Abelard gained status and reputation from learning all he could from his masters. After achieving the status of an excellent, if dangerous and disputatious student, Abelard began taking on his masters in scholarly debates to prove his superiority. This tactic not only brought him fame and infamy for testing the loyalty of his masters' students, but also the interest of students all over Europe who desired to be taught in a new way by a new and daring master. This was the first public recognition Abelard received, as he was acknowledged as a prominent master and gained the attention of the scholastic community. But this was not quite full-blown fame. The fame we are discussing required a wider audience, not just the attention of those in one's professional field.

To become famous, Abelard had to take his journey one step further and make an impression on a wider public. Not unlike today, the way to reach the masses was through a racy scandal. Abelard's relationship with Heloise piqued the interest of the romantics

who swooned over his love songs and gossiped about the affair between a teacher and student. Adding to the attention of the affair was the condemnation from members of the Catholic Church; they disapproved of the fraternizing of unwed lovers. Presenting his relationship with Heloise as a story of passionate love, Abelard expanded and polarized his reputation. He pushed public opinion to the extreme, even those who were disgusted by him could not help themselves from arguing over his antics. Acting out and challenging society brought Abelard fame and all the luxuries of celebrity status. Many scholars, including Bernard of Clairvaux, wanted a piece of the action or, at least, resented Abelard's reputation among the young. Abelard's celebrity status was both a construction of his unique life and the lucky circumstances of the historical time in which he lived. The question is how much of his success was contrived and how much was luck and a product of the changing times in which he flourished.

There were famous figures in the Middle Ages, but they belonged to prominent and deserving categories. Saints and sinners were the common subjects of memorialization and weekly sermons across Europe. Some kings, whether dead or alive, achieved widespread fame in song and story, as did Charlemagne. Worldly or secular fame came to few others. Individual medieval men and women were rarely known beyond their local city walls and village taverns. With the luck of his time and some skill, Abelard made himself the exception.

1.2. The changing social and political conditions of the early twelfth century

Abelard aided in the formation of his unique life, but he was also a product of the circumstances of his time. The tenth and eleventh centuries experienced a period of transformation that provided Abelard with the opportunity to invent and re-invent himself. Europe was experiencing rapid change during these centuries, "[c]hurches were built, political and social conditions changed, and people began to move on pilgrimages

throughout Europe."[16] The swiftness of the changes caused instability that influenced the group consciousness and culture of the twelfth century.

Because the monarchies of Europe lacked stability during these years, resulting in a lack of loyalty to kings, vassals began to give their loyalty to their lords over the king. Offering immediate and reliable protection, local lords appeared more beneficial than the distant unstable king did to vassals. England, for example, experienced many changes in rulership between 1035 and 1154. The Danish and Norwegian kings had ruled England until 1035 when Edward the Confessor, at the demand of the Anglo-Saxons, assumed the throne. After Edward's death, Harold became ruler of England. But after defeating Harold at the Battle of Hastings, William the Conqueror, a Norman bastard, came to the throne of England in 1066.[17] The Anglo-Saxons were frustrated by William's takeover, for a foreigner now controlled their future, which further added to their dwindling loyalty to the king.

The French monarchy also experienced multiple changes in the tenth and eleventh centuries. In the tenth century, the Carolingian line was withering under Louis IV, who could no longer effectively rule and so various French nobles were asserting their regional power.[18] French nobles began to dominate the kingdom, owning more wealth than did the king. With Louis IV's loss of effective rulership, Hugh Capet became king and founded the Capetian dynasty in 987. Hugh Capet would face the same problem as did his predecessor, losing power to lords and dukes.[19] Nonetheless, both the old and the new monarchy supported the view that a well-ruled kingdom resulted from a well-ordered society where everyone knew their place. The systematized society the monarchs imagined relied on all subjects fitting into either the warrior, priest or worker class.[20] The rulers believed that as long as these classes were running efficiently and remained loyal to the king the monarchy would survive.

[16] Paul Edward Dutton et al. *Many Europes: Choice and Chance in Western Civilization* (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2014), 250.

[17] Ibid, 250.

[18] Ibid, 242.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid, 243.

During the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Church underwent a reform of its own. Under Pope Leo IX, the desire for papal reform led to the Great Schism of 1054, in which the western Church claimed the pre-eminence of western beliefs and doctrines.[21] Reform continued to evolve during the papacy of Pope Gregory VII, as he proposed to purify the clergy. Though the Church paved a path towards reform, it still struggled with tensions in its relationship with the empire. Believing they each had the right to select the next pope, Rome and the German emperor disputed their respective rights over the control of the Church. This tension continued through the reign of Henry IV, as both King Henry and Pope Gregory VII battled each other for power and authority.[22] Following their power struggle came the First Crusade (1096-1099), promoted by a pope who had hoped to gain back the holy lands and assert its leadership of Christian society. Tensions eroded with the arrival of the twelfth century, a period of relative peace and the emergence of a renaissance of letters, in which a new genre of writing concerned with personal experience and emotion emerged.

The social arrangement of society was also shaken by the historical events of the tenth and eleventh centuries. This transformation of Europe turned the twelfth century into an age of new possibilities as older social structures, norms, and attitudes began to fail or be surpassed. In a time when even kings were having difficulties holding the admiration of the people, there were opportunities to restructure or re-invent fame. The early signs of turmoil in medieval Europe could be seen in the disintegration of the vassalage system. Vassalage was a response to the localization of power; it relied on a lord offering land and protection in exchange for the military support and loyalty of a vassal.[23] Vassalage consisted of a vast network of relations, starting with the king. The king would pass down power in the form of land to suzerains (great lords), and these lords would then divide the land among lower lords, thus distributing in theory the land and power of the king, but in reality making many of these decisions based on their possession of local or regional power. The success of this network of relationships in society depended upon all subjects,

[21] Ibid, 245.
[22] Ibid, 246.
[23] Ibid, 237.

including lords, being nominally loyal to the king and fulfilling their role in a great chain of power.

Maintaining loyalty and power in a secular world dependent upon vassalage relationships proved difficult for the monarchy. Not only were the monarchs starting to be seen as unstable but now the hereditary rights of nobles and the practice of primogeniture infringed upon the king's ability to divide and distribute land as he saw fit. Hereditary rights had been a main cause for the demise of sovereign power. Lords who inherited land received the security of wealth, as crops harvested from inherited land were a source of security and wealth in this agrarian society.[24] With the passing down of land, the monarchy soon found itself without land to hand out, due to recognized inheritance rights; lords often now controlled more land and thus more wealth than did the king himself. The societal structure of the tenth and eleventh centuries was in flux and no longer offered security. People wanted a stable society, but in the twelfth century, they were left with an overburdened system of vassalage and kings with decreasing power.

These were the changing conditions of Abelard's world. With a relatively weak Capetian monarchy and tension between the church and state and with relations between lords and vassals strained, Abelard could create himself as a new man in a time of flux, first within the schools and then within society at large. Abelard invented or rode a new wave toward individuality as the older collectivities creaked and groaned. Group culture and consciousness were distressed and lacked stable leadership, providing a space for an educated opportunist such as Abelard to fashion a new role in society.

Abelard prospered due to the socio-historical situation. Not only was he able to use the circumstances of his time to emerge as a distinct individual, but he also gained protectors due to the shifting power centres in society. Abelard also began to benefit from the growing desire for a new style of education. Parents sought the best masters for their children and were willing to pay very well for their services. In essence, Abelard had the opportunity to take advantage of a new market and a new set of societal wants. Cities

[24] Collin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 40-41. See also Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31 (1980), 1-17.

were expanding in size as the population grew and urban elites emerged. The central educational institution of higher learning in these cities became the cathedral school, not the monastery. Although he would have liked to take full credit for his success as a scholar and as a public figure, the stars had blessed Abelard with the perfect historical circumstances to pursue individual fame. The social and political situation of the twelfth century had not only provided the perfect conditions for fame, but it aided in shaping the unique life of Abelard, one he pursued from an early age.

Chapter 2. Abelard's Rise to Fame

2.1. Abelard's early life

The existing documentation on Abelard's life is a testament to the interesting character that he was, both to himself and to those around him. His letter of consolation, the *Historia Calamitatum*, provides insight into the life of a man who challenged the values of medieval society and viewed himself as living a life of misery. Abelard as a character was a snake, slithering through life, shedding skins, and creating a new identity when he found himself in desperate situations. Giving up his inheritance rights, challenging scholars, and having an affair are just three of the many seminal events in Abelard's life that fostered his fame. Abelard's life and career were full of events and coincidences that allowed him to invent a new type of fame and become one of the most recognizable individuals of the twelfth century.

From his birth in 1079 to his sixteenth year in 1095, Abelard seems to have experienced the happiest years of his life. Born in the city of Le Pallet in Brittany and into a minor noble family with plenty to offer, Abelard's childhood was anything but miserable. Abelard's mother is believed to have been the heiress of the lord Le Pallet and his father was a Poitevin.[25] The Poitevins came from a region of Brittany known for its emerging troubadour culture.[26] It was likely exposure to these men and this cultural ferment that inspired Abelard's father to have his sons educated before entering into military training.[27] The status of his family meant that Abelard never feared poverty. Instead, he was born into a world of opportunity.

[25] Clanchy, 137.

[26] Clanchy, 53.

[27] David Luscombe, ed., "Letter 1," *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice, rev. David Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), 3-5**.** Abelard writes in his *Historia Calamitatum*, "My father had acquired some knowledge of letters before he was a knight, and later on his passion for learning was such that he intended all his sons to have instruction in letters before they were trained to arms."

Abelard was not alone in his state of privilege. He had three brothers, all of whom would be educated at the request of his father; and he had a sister who would become the primary caretaker of his son, Astralabe. First born of his four siblings, Abelard was of special interest to his father. His father stressed the importance of education in the hopes of creating the ideal heir.[28] What Abelard's father probably did not expect was that his first-born would value learning above all else. By the age of sixteen, Abelard was ready to abandon his inheritance rights and enter the scholarly world.[29]

From 1095 to 1102, Abelard spent his time studying under Roscelin in Loches and William of Champeaux in Paris. A practitioner of scholarly warfare, Abelard challenged the foundational teachings of his master William. Desiring to shed his identity as a student, Abelard was now looking to become a master himself. Abelard would spend the next few years attacking and retreating in his fight with William. Corbeil was the first place to which Abelard retreated, a city full of Abelard's protectors. This was the place where Abelard was able to launch his own school and soon after, when the moment presented itself, he moved closer to Paris by opening a school in Melun. But, Abelard was exhausted by the continuous slander and scholarly assaults of his enemy. What Abelard failed to admit was his part in this academic warfare, preferring to play the role of the victim. When the assaults of William were at their height, a suspicious illness struck the ambitious young scholar, causing him to return home to his parents in Brittany. [30]

Returning to Paris after two years at home in 1108, Abelard repeated the events of 1095 to 1105. He again became William of Champeaux's student, challenged William's views on universals, and once again retreated from Paris for Melun.[31] Abelard's behaviour in Paris did not change the second time around, nor did the results. The opportunity to take over his master's throne in Paris only appeared when William withdrew in 1109. Seeing the chance to seize the chair of the cathedral of Paris and establish himself, Abelard attempted his take over. Unfortunately, Abelard's naïve idea of walking in and

[28] Luscombe, 5.
[29] Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life,* 47-48.
[30] Luscombe, 7-9**.**
[31] Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life,* 71.

claiming the city failed. Although William had just left the city, his influence and following were still strong. Camping with students at the church of Sainte Geneviève, Abelard was challenged by Goswin and, unable to defend himself, he retreated to his family in Brittany where he was able to see his parents into retirement. [32] His score in the scholarly battles was no wins and two losses against William.

On his third attempt to enter Paris as an accredited master, Abelard learned from his mistakes. Leaving his parents in a monastery in 1112, Abelard returned to France but chose to work under Anselm of Laon. Studying under the former master of William of Champeaux seemed to provide Abelard the opportunity to start over in the field of divine letters or theology (a term he would either invent or standardize). But his studies under Anselm were short lived, as Anselm had started to fear Abelard's limited training and that the quality of the work he was doing and Abelard's personality would reflect poorly on him.[33] Failure to attend classes was the charge that led to his expulsion by Anselm, but it is more likely Anselm feared being accused of producing a heretic, a dangerous student working under his authority. In fact, Anselm probably misunderstood Abelard's strategy, which was to displace an old master and to take over his position as a cathedral master.

Finally, after facing William and being expelled from Anselm's school, Abelard returned to Paris as a master from 1114 to 1116. Relatively silent and well behaved, Abelard lived in peace as a master at Notre-Dame. In the place from which he had once been expelled for challenging William, Abelard spent the next few years maintaining the peace and establishing himself as a skilled and knowledgeable master of logic.[34]

Some deep part of Abelard, however, courted crisis. Abelard welcomed turmoil back into his life through his notorious affair with Heloise. In 1116, Abelard positioned himself as Heloise's private educator. But his willingness to educate Heloise, as he said later, was only a ploy. Soon after they began to live under the same roof, the two entered into a sexual affair. The passion between the lovers distracted Abelard from his intellectual

[32] Ibid, 92.
[33] Luscombe, 21.
[34] Ibid, 21.

work and he was overcome by their relationship to the point that his work and teaching suffered; instead he wrote letters, love songs, and poems.[35] In 1118, Heloise gave birth to their son, Astralabe, in Brittany. It was then that Abelard started to worry about the illicit affair and the wrath of Heloise's uncle, Fulbert. He tried to appease Fulbert, by promising that he would marry Heloise as long as the marriage was kept a secret. Abelard wished to uphold his own reputation as a chaste and honored teacher, a status that would be lost by marrying. Although Fulbert agreed to these terms, he did not keep the marriage a secret. On the contrary, Fulbert had many of his friends attend the wedding, but still felt that a secret marriage was not enough to make amends, and so Fulbert, furious at Abelard's removal of Heloise from his house, arranged Abelard's castration.[36]

The castration was a turning point for Abelard. Unmanned and humiliated, the castration was one of Abelard's greatest disgraces, causing him to enter the monastery. In the *Historia Calamitatum* Abelard claims the castration was a blessing as it brought him closer to what was important in life, God and knowledge. Monkhood was supposed to save Abelard from rumours and the pity of daily society, but no matter how hard he tried to run, Abelard could never escape. His time as a monk at St-Denis did not last long. Shortly after vowing himself to God, Abelard entered into a dispute with the monks of St-Denis over the identity of their founder. It turned out his passion for knowledge and education ran deeper than his desire to serve the self-image of St-Denis and its monks, and so Abelard retired to a cell to devote himself to quiet reflection.[37] But, students assembled when word spread of his availability and brought him out of his retirement as a master.

A request from students for a treatise on theology was answered by Abelard around 1120. The *Theologia* was Abelard's attempt to explain the trinity to his students, but the text was not well received by Abelard's enemies.[38] Rivals accused Abelard of

[35] Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life*, 21-22.
[36] Luscombe, 45.
[37] Ibid, 53.
[38] Ibid, 55-57.

heresy and he was put on trial in 1121 in Soissons. Condemned, he faced the severe punishment of having to burn his own book and live a life of silence in a monastery.[39]

Freeing himself from the life of silence required the mediation of influential supporters. These men provided Abelard the chance to hold a private cell under the rule of St-Denis but separate from its aggrieved and unreformed monks.[40] Abelard named the newly established oratory the Paraclete. There students collected, bringing Abelard all the necessities of life in exchange for his lectures. The number of students that arrived compared to the students he had in Paris, Corbeil, and Melun. Abelard still had a secure network of followers eager to learn from him. The students and his passion for teaching drew Abelard out of his reclusive monastic life. With his return to the public sphere came the return of his enemies' attacks, this time over the appropriateness of calling his cell the Paraclete. His former rivals resumed their assault on him, forcing Abelard to give up on the Paraclete and become the abbot of St-Gildas-de-Rhuys in Brittany.[41]

At St-Gildas Abelard spent the next several years of his life in misery. Struggling to control its corrupt monks and suffering their death threats on a daily basis, Abelard lived in constant anxiety over what the monks would do to him next. Abelard's relief came in 1129 when Heloise was expelled from Argenteuil by Suger the new abbot of St-Denis. Abelard gifted his ex-lover the Paraclete and began travelling back and forth between his monks and the nuns at the oratory.[42] Abelard's time at the Paraclete again sparked rumours that he had reunited with Heloise, despite his castration. Eventually, Abelard was able to escape the public gossip by leaving St-Gildas for Paris and the school of St-Geneviève. There he revised his condemned *Theologia* as the *Theologia Scholarium.* And, for a second time, the work led to accusations of heresy at the Council of Sens in 1141. Condemned once more, Abelard accepted an offer of sanctuary from one of his protectors, Peter the Venerable at Cluny.[43]

[39] Ibid, 69-71.
[40] Ibid, 81.
[41] Ibid, 91-95.
[42] Ibid, 113.
[43] Clanchy, 159.

After surviving all of these tumultuous events, Abelard died, unable to complete his appeal of his excommunication. Heloise was informed of Abelard's death by Peter the Venerable, who also ensured the body was sent back to Heloise at the Paraclete.[44] Abelard's life was colourful and filled with dramatic twists and turns that were fascinating to all who were able to witness it or who learned of his version of it in the *Historia Calamitatum*.

2.2. An examination of Abelard's public career

The *Historia Calamitatum* provides critical insight into the life Abelard lived and into the fame he achieved. Events that happened throughout his life were constantly adding to the spread of his reputation. In the *Historia Calamitatum*, Abelard writes as if the events in his life are important and creates a persona in which he plays the victim, an outsider punished by a cruel world. The letter itself was an opportunity for Abelard to present his life as he wanted others to see it. Mary McLaughlin describes the text as "a way to escape with a good reputation" by allowing Abelard to explain his choices and the events that occurred in his life.[45] Abelard used his ability to write to further his reputation, hoping to explain himself and appear apologetic for the sake of his audience. The *Historia Calamitatum* was an opportunity for Abelard to manipulate his image and set the record straight or at least correct what people said about him. At the very least, his autobiographical letter provided an attempt to counter the slanderous rumours about him spread by his enemies.

The beginning stages of Abelard's career as a celebrity originated in the opportunities provided to him by his family. Coming from a minor noble family, Abelard was already recognized in his own community for his wealth and status. He wore fine clothes, owned horses, and had servants. The privilege Abelard had through his birthright and social standing was not, however, ideal ground from which to become famous. Abelard was raised as the centre of the family, as all first-born sons were in the Middle

[44] Ibid, 96.

[45] Mary M. McLaughlin, "The Motives and Meaning of His "Story of Calamities"," *Speculum* 42, no. 3 (1967): 468.

Ages. Being the honoured first-born, Abelard did something extraordinary: he relinquished his rights. Abelard writes, “I was so carried away by my love of letters that I renounced the glory of a soldier’s life, made over my inheritance and rights of the eldest son to my brothers, and withdrew altogether from the court of Mars.”[46] He actively chased the life of a wandering scholar when the eldest son was supposed to assume the path to knighthood. Breaking the first of many social boundaries, Abelard was emerging an individual and, due to his lower nobility status, he could afford this attempt to take a different path.

Peter Godman presents a fair argument when he says that Abelard’s “earliest experiences did not prepare him for resistance to his plans for conquest in the scholarly world”.[47] Abelard was not aware of the difficulties he would face in the scholastic world. Part of Abelard’s naïve view came from the examples of the bishops around him who realized they could make riches by teaching.[48] Although it was uncommon for inheritance rights to be declined by a living heir, Abelard most likely never would have attained the same amount of fame as a knight as he did as a scholar.

Leaving his home in Brittany, Abelard entered the educational world, seeking the masters to teach him. His first master, Roscelin in Loches, is not mentioned in the *Historia Calamitatum* although he had a significant impact on the logical learnings of Abelard’s of knowledge. The omitting of Roscelin appears to have been Abelard’s first attempt at creating his grand persona. Roscelin had been tried for heresy in 1092, a year before becoming Abelard’s master. This black mark on Roscelin’s career was still fresh in the public mind, and so claiming a connection to Roscelin would have only added to the accusations of heresy against Abelard. Clanchy agrees that the omission of Roscelin was a sign of Abelard not wanting “to be connected to the heretical man in fear of damaging his reputation.”[49] Separating himself from a heretic was a necessary career move, in order for Abelard to uphold his credibility as a scholar. Despite his best efforts to disconnect himself from his first master, it was common knowledge that Roscelin had been Abelard’s

[46] Luscombe, 5.

[47] Peter Godman, “Fame without Conscience,” in *Paradoxes of Conscience in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70.

[48] Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life,* 55.

[49] Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life*, 24.

teacher. Otto of Friesing provides a record of Abelard's time with Roscelin, but records how "afterwards he made a point of only learning from distinguished men."[50] Nevertheless, it seems that removing Roscelin from his curriculum vitae in the *Historia Calamitatum* is an indication that Abelard was retrospectively shaping his image to please both himself and to influence the audience of his letter of explanation.

The distinguished masters Abelard had after Roscelin would be the victims of Abelard's desire to conquer the intellectual world. During the twelfth century, it was not unheard of for students to open their own schools to try to surpass their masters. Such was Abelard's desire to be the greatest master that he sought to debate with and dethrone the best masters. This led him to William of Champeaux in Paris and Anselm in Laon. He wanted to make a name for himself by beating the best.

People admired masters and teachers for their knowledge, as the twelfth century lacked a mass media to bring reliable knowledge and expertise to the public. Instead, most common knowledge came from hearsay and was unlikely to be true. Abelard could have lived a comfortable life as teacher and remained sheltered under the wing of his master William. Instead, he attacked him in and out of the classroom. Slowly, Abelard began making claims in class that annoyed other students. "[A]s my reputation grew, so other men's jealousy was aroused".[51] What Abelard failed to appreciate was those students and disciples were counting on hanging on to the coat tails of their master, achieving success as he did and advertising their careful tutelage under his supervision. Contrary to his fellow students, Abelard viewed his remarks as a sign of his intellectual ability. Thus, began Abelard's career in scholarly warfare as he states in his *Historia Calamitatum*. He attributed all criticism to jealousy of his intelligence and omitted information in an effort to create his persona. At this point in his writing, there is a gap between his time with William and his "inspiration" to open his own school and begin his teachings in Corbeil and Melun. Abelard never admitted that he was forced to retreat from Paris by his master, was unable to defeat him, and was humiliated when his plan failed. Instead, he repeated various excuses for his attempts to enter Paris between 1102 and 1114. For example, Abelard

[50] Otto of Friesing and Rahewin, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow and Richard Emery (New York: WW Norton & Company Inc., 1953): 83.

[51] Luscombe, 7.

claimed he had to return home on two occasions, once because of illness and the other to see his aging parents enter the monastic life.

Defeated, Abelard attempted to disguise his disgrace as success. By emphasizing the opening of his own school so early in his career, Abelard sidestepped his controversy with William to focus on his personal success. Describing his school at Melun, Abelard boasts, “my school was launched and my reputation for dialectic began to spread, with the result that the fame of my old fellow-students and even that of the master himself declined and gradually came to an end.”[52] Abelard continued to convince his audience that he had embarrassed his old master and was Williams’ equal, if not superior.

Although he was undefeated in the field of universals, William was still not safe from his own student’s attacks. Abelard was unrelenting, “Abelard did not spare his opponents; he exercised the lethal weapons of contradiction, intellectual consistency, and plain speech.”[53] Unfortunately, it would take more than intellect to defeat William. When he returned to be William’s student a second time, Abelard was unable to accept William as his superior; he became the “worst student” and employed “sarcasm that caused people to question his character.”[54] William’s acceptance of Abelard as a student for a second time may suggest that Abelard’s description of their first encounter was exaggerated, for what clever master would have wanted such a disruptive critic in his classroom. It appears as if Abelard intended to mock William’s teaching more than he intended to learn from it. Abelard craved a decisive win, but fought in vain for a second time; Abelard retreated. He charged that William attacked him out of envy, and that he would continue to confront William until he was clearly recognized as his superior.

When Abelard tells of his arrival at Notre Dame he describes it as the ultimate success: “I returned to Paris, to the school which had long ago been intended for and offered to me, from which I had been expelled from the start. I remained in possession of it there in peace”[55]. Abelard boasts of an outstanding victory, as if he had personally

[52] Ibid.
[53] Stephen Jaeger, *Envy of Angels* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 231.
[54] Godman, 73.
[55] Luscombe, 21.

conquered the school that had rejected him. He presented an image of success and praise in his *Historia Calamitatum*, whereas in reality, Abelard was only able to enter Paris after William had withdrawn. But, the way Abelard described his entry into Notre-Dame showed him as in demand, someone people admired and respected in the scholastic community. Abelard knew he had a reputation to protect and did his best to present himself with his best foot forward. To be recognized for conquering the great masters of Paris was more enticing to students and their families than it was to tell them he had entered Paris once a master had decided to retire.

During his multiple battles with William, Abelard continued to focus on expanding his scholarly career. Theology became Abelard's next field of study and Anselm of Laon his new master. This was his opportunity to gain knowledge and a reputation as an expert of a different field, spreading his renown over a larger territory. Abelard was expanding his audience, opening himself up to more ideas and controversy. Envy and jealousy are the excuses Abelard stated for his expulsion from Anselm's classroom, but the official reason was that he had not bothered to appear in class and Anselm had begun to fear that Abelard's glossings of scripture would reflect badly on him. Abelard had a tendency to run away from responsibility. If he could not boast a success in Laon, he could attribute the situation to envy and jealousy. Anselm was one of the few heroes and stalwart characters who had resisted the communal riot that struck Laon in 1112, but Abelard presents him not as a brave and noble figure, but as a petty, past-it old master, with nothing new to contribute to knowledge. In the *Historia Calamitatum,* he belittles Anselm by describing him as a "wildly jealous" man who was attacking him unjustly as had his master William of Champeaux.[56] Abelard presented himself as the victim of scholastic envy anytime his masters fought back or rejected him.

Expanding into theology from logic, Abelard flaunted how he gained a number of students who came to his special one-off lecture on scripture, "liked it so much that they commended the lecture particularly widely, and urged me to provide glosses on the text on the same lines as my lecture. The news brought people who had missed my first lecture flocking."[57] Abelard was gaining new supporters as he became famous for his scriptural

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 19.

and logical teachings. Flocks of students attested to his abilities to entice listeners and to the value of the knowledge imparted. As of this moment, his lectures were turning him into a recognized and honoured master in theology. By taking part in public lectures, Abelard seems to be asking for public attention. Questioning and interpreting scripture in a world of orthodox beliefs would guarantee attention in the form of controversy.

Shortly after his time with Anselm, Abelard found himself teaching at Notre-Dame. According to Abelard, he had entered this position by defeating his old master. Although this was not how it had happened, Abelard was putting his skills of manipulation to work. Showing himself as superior to the old master would gain him the loyalty of their students and attract new ones from far off lands. Abelard described his interpretation of events in his *Historia Calamitatum,* a text written to make Abelard seem apologetic for his wrongdoings and to gain sympathy for the events he could not control. Abelard knew how to manipulate the public. He understood the empathy and sympathy he would receive from playing the victim. Although it must have enraged some, many felt sorry for the poor scholar from Le Pallet who had been mistreated and bullied by rivals. Using his talent with words, Abelard was able to manipulate his image to play the victim while still gaining popularity for his achievements.

Abelard's fame grew by "conquering" his masters, but his personal affairs raised him to a new realm of fame. The affair with Heloise itself was critical to his reputation and success. Clanchy suggests that Heloise was a vehicle for Abelard to gain influence among the senior members of the Catholic Church who would determine his promotion.[58] Tying himself to Fulbert through his niece would be an excellent connection for him to use for advancing his career and to gain recognition as a skilled teacher. Being a master Notre-Dame was impressive enough at Abelard's age. Abelard had already established himself as a scholar before Heloise, but it is at least possible that Abelard tied himself to her for her reputation as an accomplished woman of letters, as he claimed. When he first heard of her, Heloise had a known reputation, for "in the abundance of her learning she was supreme. A gift for letters is so rare in women that it added greatly to her charm and made her famous throughout the realm."[59] Being with Heloise, who had her own admirers, would

[58] Clanchy, 74.
[59] Luscombe, 25.

do nothing but increase Abelard's popularity in society. Although he could not have known the success and infamy the affair would bring him, Abelard's life choices were calculated paths to fame. Abelard latched on to reputable people, which made him influential connections and spread his reputation.

At this point, Abelard had already begun to create a name among women. Known for his charm, his looks, and for his teaching, women flocked to the scholar in admiration and in lust. Women adored him so much that Abelard believed he could have any woman he wished. Abelard writes about his desire for Heloise and the confidence he had in attaining her: "she was the one to bring to my bed, confident that I should have an easy success, for at the time I had youth and exceptional good looks as well as my great reputation to recommend me, and feared no rebuff from any woman."[60] The never failing confidence of Abelard that propelled him to fame can be attributed, at least partially, to the blessing of good looks. His image had created a stir of desire in the women of Paris; just by existing he secured their support, as both Abelard and Heloise claimed.

Abelard chose to court Heloise because she was a reflection of his intellectual capacity and held her own reputation among the learned public. Heloise appeared to be Abelard's equal, a woman who not only admired him but also could challenge him. Godman argues, "Heloise's erudition made her famous. Fame remains the ultimate, the dominant, and – in this instance alone – the reciprocal standard of Abelard's judgement." Heloise had offered Abelard a "feminine reflection of his own image".[61] Abelard was attaching himself to someone who would both share his appreciation of knowledge and craved the reputation he sought for himself. Heloise expressed the same passion for his success as a scholar, and she went on to develop the Paraclete around his teachings and rules. Heloise became a tool for Abelard's success as she supported her lover and dedicated herself to raising his reputation.

The relationship Abelard formed with Heloise was another opportunity for Abelard to create a new identity. The affair consumed him. The role of philosopher was renounced for the role of troubadour. This is because Abelard could no longer concentrate on

[60] Ibid, 27.
[61] Godman, 85.

anything other than his beloved Heloise. He produced beautiful and inspired love songs during their affair. Since this was a time when a troubadour culture began to flourish, Abelard boosted his reputation to unimaginable heights. His songs made both Abelard and Heloise known far and wide. These love songs were still rapidly circulating into the1130s, more than ten years after their affair. [62] Heloise was Abelard's muse.

When Heloise became pregnant, she was sent to Brittany to give birth to their son Astralabe, whom they would leave in the care of Abelard's sister.[63] The removal of Heloise from her uncle's home and from Paris appears to have been a way for Abelard to avoid damaging his reputation. Chastity was one of the many things people praised Abelard for; and it was the virtue Abelard had taken away from Heloise. Moreover, clerics were part of the Church, and twelfth-century reform values mandated that they should remain celibate. Not only did sending Heloise away protect her from the shame of bearing a child out of wedlock, but it also protected him from the revenge of Heloise's uncle, Fulbert. He could not harm Abelard while Abelard held Heloise hostage.

Fulbert feared that he would never see his niece again if he harmed her lover.[64] Using Heloise, Abelard created an opportunity to negotiate the situation to his advantage. In exchange for Fulbert's cooperation, Abelard agreed to marry Heloise in secret. Although it could be argued that this was to protect Heloise's reputation, the secret nuptials were more important to Abelard than to Heloise. Marrying Heloise would bring shame upon Abelard and endanger his continuing career in the cathedral schools. To marry was beneath his status as he was a well-known cleric who had built a reputation around his chastity. He emphasized this by clearly stating that "[T]he marriage should be kept a secret so as not to damage my reputation."[65] Unfortunately for Abelard, the shamed Fulbert did not intend to keep the marriage a secret and the news of his marriage began to spread.[66]

[62] Luscombe, 29. Abelard writes, "I could do no more than repeat what had been said long ago, and when inspiration did come to me, it was for writing love songs, not the secrets of philosophy. A lot of these songs, as you know, are still popular and sung in many places"

[63] Ibid, 33. "I removed her secretly from his house, as we had planned, and sent her straight to my own country. There she stayed with my sister until she gave birth to a boy, whom she called Astralabe."

[64] Clanchy, 22-23.

[65] Luscombe, 33,35.

[66] Ibid, 45.

Damaging his image as a cleric, the story of Abelard's relationship became an infamous piece of gossip. And as previously mentioned, rumour was as good as truth in Abelard's world.

Exploding his popularity or infamy, Abelard's relationship with Heloise caused plenty of rumours. But, no rumours were more powerful than the ones about his castration in 1118. Abelard described the feeling of his castration, "[they] punished me with a most cruel and shameful vengeance of such appalling barbarity as to shock the whole world: they cut off the parts of my body whereby I had committed the wrong of which they complained."[67] This was a significant turning point in Abelard's career. Once boastful and proud, Abelard suffered from the unbearable pity of his supporters. Fallen into a state of despair, Abelard mourned over how great his reputation had been, "how easily in an evil moment it had been dimmed"[68]. Castration had destroyed Abelard's confidence in his ability to carry out disputation or to continue in society as a public figure at all. Abelard ordered Heloise to take the veil and himself left the world by entering the monastery of St-Denis, there to hide his shame and misery. He hoped to put his fame on hold and wallow in his fall.

Old habits are hard to break. Abelard was running away from the difficulties of life as he had done before. He chose to abandon his dreams of fame and wealth when faced with the shame and pity of castration. When things were difficult, Abelard shed his skin and searched for a more suitable identity. Nevertheless, despite his attempt to run away from public life, his reputation followed him. "I had still scarcely recovered from my wound when clerics came thronging round to pester the abbot and myself with repeated demands that I should now, for the love of God, continue the studies which hitherto I had pursued only in desire for wealth and fame."[69] Clerics begged him to return to teaching; he had become an integral part of the scholarly community during his time at Notre-Dame and could now do the same at St-Denis. Abelard emphasized to his audience how much of an asset he was to the schools of France and how it would be a loss for him to stop teaching in order to live a life of solitude. Claiming to give up the desire for a successful career and

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid, 47.
[69] Ibid, 51.

actively giving it up are two different things, of which Abelard could only do one. It did not take long for Abelard to return to the public sphere from the monastery of St-Denis or later from his monastery at the Paraclete.

When word of Abelard's return to teaching began to spread, students flocked to a cell of St-Denis somewhere near Paris that the abbot of St-Denis had monastery had provided for the purpose of his teaching. "[T]here my pupils gathered in crowds until there were too many for the place to hold or the land to feed."[70] There was not enough room for all the students who had come seeking Abelard's instruction. But, the longer Abelard stayed connected to the royal monastery the more animosity between him and the monks grew. He was not the corrupt figure the monastery had been expecting, but Abelard described the monks at St-Denis as unreformed and corrupt themselves. Feeling the tension, Abelard had been happy to take up the provided cell he was offered by the monastery in order to continue his teaching and writing. However, the true controversy of the abbey began once Abelard returned from his first trial and questioned the identity of the founder of the abbey of St-Denis. The abbey believed that the Saint Denis who, according to legend, had been beheaded and then identified the site of the monastery, was also the Denis the Areopagite mentioned in the New Testament, and the Pseudo-Dionysius who had written neo-Platonic treatises; they were all one and the same person and the founder of their monastery. After reading Bede, Abelard knew better and pointed out the fact (as a joke he claimed) to the monks of St-Denis.

In the *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* by Bede, it was stated that Denis was from Corinth and did not originate in Athens as the monastery believed.[71] By questioning the origins of Denis, Abelard had enraged the monks who now labelled him a traitor. Abelard was brought in front of the king and, with the help of his protectors, able to strike a deal freeing him from the now hostile monastery.[72] Abelard was freed from residence at St-Denis under the condition that he did not become part of another abbey; this deal ensured that the reputation of the monastery was not damaged by Abelard's

[70] Ibid, 53.
[71] Ibid, 73-75.
[72] Ibid.

leaving. With the help and donations of his students and patrons, Abelard was able to form his own private oratory, which he called the Paraclete.

But, returning to teaching meant his return to the centre of public controversy and gossip. As Abelard recalled, his students begged him to explain theology and the *Theologia* was only his attempt to fulfill their request.[73] The first version of the *Theologia* was completed in 1120, marking the beginning of Abelard's heresy trials. The text had given old rivals something to attack. Abelard's rivals viewed him as disreputable and despised the admiration Abelard received from his students. The *Theologia* provided the ammunition Abelard's enemies needed to strike him down. Abelard recounts the accusations when his *Theologia* surfaced:

> [R]ivals were therefore much annoyed and convened a council against me, especially those two old opponents, Alberic and Lotulf, who, now that our former masters, William and Anselm, were dead, were trying to reign alone in their place… they were able to influence their archbishop, Ralph, to take action against me.[74]

The desire of Alberic and Lotulf to defeat Abelard only proved what an accredited scholar he had become by the age of forty-three. After spending his earlier years persecuting his masters, Abelard was now the master facing battle. His skill in logic and divinity, along with his fame, made him the master to defeat for fame, credibility, and religious rectitude, and to settle old scores for his attacks on their masters.

A spectacle in itself, the Council of Soissons brought Abelard to everyone's attention. It was unusual for heresy accusations to be taken this far and there was no precedent for them; the experience of the trial is remembered more as a publicity stunt than a trial against the *Theologia*.[75] Heresy was a serious accusation in twelfth-century France, and the number of people supporting Abelard shriveled. In his gloomy description of his journey to trial, Abelard remembers, "my two rivals spread such defamatory rumours

[73] Clanchy, 274.
[74] Luscombe, 57.
[75] Clanchy, 287.

about me amongst the clerks and people that I and the few pupils who had accompanied me narrowly escaped being stoned by the people on the first day we arrived".[76] The citizens Soissons did not know of Abelard before the trial and were outraged that a heretic would be in their city. Abelard's enemies had brought him to a city that had spontaneously executed heretics in the past. To some in this city, Abelard seemed to be the carrier of plague that could damage their eternal souls. Abelard's trial was held in enemy territory, forcing him to fight a battle he could not win. After the trial Abelard, only had a "few" followers still with him, when usually his followers were described as a flock.

Attempting to condemn the master did not have the exact outcome Abelard's rivals had desired. But, they made sure every orthodox Christian knew that Abelard was being tried as a heretic. Unquestioned and without providing testimony, they had Abelard condemned to an arbitrary and harsh punishment.

Abelard's ego was injured, he recalled, "they compelled me to throw my book into the fire with my own hand, and thus it was burnt."[77] Further humiliation ensued when he was forced to recite the Athanasian Creed as a profession of faith: "They even had the text put before me to read in case I should plead ignorance, as though I were not familiar with the words."[78] Although famed for his memory and knowledge, they insulted his intelligence and mocked his ability to recite the common creed. Finally, after publicly suffering these punishments, Abelard was silenced and placed in a monastery like a prisoner. Abelard's rivals had made him undergo the severest of humiliations, but that was not enough to break the scholastic mettle of the master.

The results of the trial had bruised Abelard's' ego and damaged his reputation with potential students and their parents, who would not want their sons taught by a heretic. The burning of his book with his own hands was personally humiliating. Luckily, he was not the only one who felt his treatment and punishment were unjust. Supporters began to spread the news of the trial, "everyone who heard it began to condemn outright this wanton

[76] Luscombe, 59.
[77] Ibid, 69.
[78] Ibid, 71.

act of cruelty; the persons who had been present tried to shift the blame on to others; so much so that even my rivals denied it had been done on their advice".[79] His reputation and respect within the scholarly community was not only strong enough to withstand the humiliating events of Soissons, but also to have gained some steadfast defenders. One particular defender at the trial was Geoffrey of Levés, bishop of Chartres.

In his *Historia Calamitatum* Abelard preserved a portion of the bishop's speech to the council in Soissons. According to Abelard, Geoffrey demanded a fair trial for Abelard and that the accused be allowed to explain himself in front of both the court and the many supporters who were there with him. The bishop reasoned with the court, stating that even if they made the correct judgement, they would still "offend many people, and large numbers [would] rally to his defence".[80] The bishop of Chartres acknowledged not only the popularity Abelard, but also the prejudice the court held against the successful scholar. Abelard's account of Geoffrey's speech acknowledged Abelard's fame as a teacher and the deep "envy" of his rivals.[81] The words spoken by Geoffrey did not free Abelard of guilt, but it did give Abelard another chance. On Abelard's behalf, Geoffrey asked Abelard to be judged by educated men who would understand the ideas of the *Theologia*. Abelard received further support from the bishop as Geoffrey tried to console him, asking him not to take the harsh accusations to heart.[82] The speech, although preserved by Abelard, provides confirmation of the support he had, his fame, and popularity.

The support Abelard received after his trial testifies to his achievements and fame. Like William of Champeaux, Abelard was not going to be forced out of the good graces of society with one attack. Although the trial had hurt his reputation, it had also created a

[79] Ibid, 73.

[80] Ibid, 63-65. "All of you who are present, my lords, know that this man's teaching, whatever it is, and his intelligence have won him many supporters and followers in everything he has studied… If you injure him through prejudice, though I do not think you will, you must know that even if your judgement is deserved you will offend many people, and large numbers will rally to his defence, especially since in this treatise before us we can see nothing which is obvious calumny… Beware lest violent action on your part brings him even more renown, and we are more damaged ourselves by our envy than he is by justice of the charge… if you are determined to act against him canonically, let his teaching or his writing be put before us, let him be questioned and allowed to give free reply, so that if he is proved wrong or confesses his error he can be totally silenced."

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid, 65-67.

polarized popular opinion about Abelard in an increasingly complex and heterodox society. His followers were sympathetic, granting him fame and admiration, and the attack on him by the official church brought him new followers suspicious of the official line and official church. His enemies criticized him and spread slanderous rumours that brought his persona into question, but his name remained at the centre of a circle of gossip.

After the trial, Abelard had broken away from St-Denis and formed the Paraclete with the help of his supporters. At the Paraclete, Abelard saw his reputation begin to rebuild as "[t]he greater the crowds of scholars who gathered there, and the harder the life they led under my teaching, the more my rivals thought this brought honour to me and shame to themselves."[83] Teaching was part of Abelard's identity, and so it should not be surprising he was able to charm his way out of perpetual silence at the monastery and open a new school. Despite his condemnation, students still came to hear his lectures and they were coming by the hundreds, which was remarkable and a testament to his still growing reputation as a teacher. Students generally did their best to avoid associating with those accused of heresy, as Abelard had with Roscelin, but the magnetism of the man in this case continued to attract people.

Unconcerned with stirring up more rumours of heresy, Abelard named his oratory after the Holy Trinity. Although he explains the dedication as a reminder of the comfort God brought him during his times of misery, the name was "criticized on the grounds that it was not permissible for a church to be assigned specifically to the Holy Spirit any more than to God the Father."[84] Rivals attacked him for the controversial name. Abelard claimed he did not intend to produce a new controversy, but whether he intended to or not, he was again at the centre of heresy accusations.

His rivals once again spread slanderous rumours, so many that the community of the Paraclete broke down. His enemies had in effect pushed him out of the Paraclete and he decided, once again, to make an end run around conflict by accepting the position of abbot at St-Gildas-de-Rhuys, well away from France proper. Abelard had been probably been welcomed to the abbey because of his notorious reputation. After hearing of

[83] Ibid, 85.
[84] Ibid, 85-87.

Abelard's affair, its unreformed and corrupt monks may well have believed that he would tolerate or even embrace their corrupt lifestyle. Abelard disapproved of the monks' behaviour, but was unable to reform them. He soon began to receive death threats. Now in a foreign country, which Brittany was at the time, listening to a language he did not know, he was charged with trying to control a small gathering of corrupt monks.[85] To keep his reputation from being destroyed by his inability to handle his monks, Abelard was searching for any respectable way out. In 1129 his opportunity came. Heloise was expelled from Argenteuil after a dispute with Suger the new abbot of St-Denis over the conduct of its nuns and the ownership of Argenteuil. Abelard gave the Paraclete to Heloise and her fellow nuns as their new home, but also gave himself a valid reason for frequently excusing himself from his duties at St-Gildas.

Visits to the Paraclete and providing necessities to the nuns were now a responsibility that Abelard could not ignore.[86] Not to provide for them would be shameful. Abelard took on the role of their protector; and he basked in the admiration of those who witnessed the care he gave to the refugee nuns from Argenteuil. But, rumours still sparked. Rivals whispered about the possibility of the rekindling of his affair with Heloise. The couple's affair was deeply ingrained in public memory, despite the affair occurring over a decade before. Abelard's fame only increased with these rumours. Many discussed the affair while others discussed his ability to care for his monks. How could Abelard gain control of his monks if he was never there? The more people talked, the larger Abelard's celebrity status.

When Abelard returned to Paris in 1133, after writing his *Historia Calamitatum* in 1132, he wrote his revision of the *Theologia*, known as the *Theologia Scholarium.* Abelard had escaped the many tumultuous events of his life without being locked down or boxed in. His constant stream of supporters rescued him and kept him from learning from his mistakes. But his revision of the *Theologia* brought him new attention that led to his trial at the Council of Sens in 1141.[87] Connecting to influential characters again proved beneficial to Abelard. At the trial in Sens, Peter the Venerable was present to protect him.

[85] Ibid, 95.
[86] Ibid, 101.
[87] Clanchy, 37.

Much like Geoffrey the bishop of Chartres at Soissons, Peter the Venerable attempted to reason with the pope on Abelard's behalf, trying to break down the accusations to a misunderstanding. When that failed and Abelard was excommunicated, Peter offered Abelard sanctuary at Cluny.[88]

The admiration and respect Abelard had earned over the years had brought him strong followers who were willing to support him, even if they might face accusations and attacks themselves. Bernard of Clairvaux, an unwavering enemy of Abelard, even tried to undermine Peter the Venerable, who was never a student of Abelard, after he defended Abelard and provided him with sanctuary.[89]

Although the many events of his life proved an important part of his journey to fame, Abelard as a character had a personality that turned all situations into an opportunity to gain fame and status. His confidence (to the point of arrogance) led him to debate with masters when he was just entering the scholastic realm as a student. Otto of Friesing attacked Abelard for his over confidence, claiming Abelard was "so conceited and had such confidence in his own intellectual power that he would scarcely so demean himself as to descend from the heights of his own mind to listen to his teachers."[90] Abelard's natural pride and self-admiration were not always well received, but always caught the attention of those around him.

More attractive than his arrogance was Abelard's charm. Women lusted over his good looks and swooned over his writing, he tells us. His debates with William in the early 1100s made him the twelfth century's bad boy, the one who could draw any woman's attention. In the classroom, his students described him as having a quick wit and being something of a jokester. Abelard inspired his students with his playful character. Abelard's rivals were trapped in a world of tradition and orthodoxy, Abelard was offering something new, an entertaining and exciting education. He attracted students with his electric personality, a trait lacking in other masters of his time who impressed by their august and staid demeanours.

[88] Ibid, 159.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Otto of Friesing, 83.

The success and fame Abelard achieved was a direct result of the many events of his life and his personal desire for fame. Although not all the attention Abelard received was positive, he built an image of grandeur for himself in society. Not even his enemies could deny that Abelard had become a household name and was the topic of much talk. Abelard's unique and eventful life had built a reputation that knew few bounds, and a fame that spread long after his death. The question becomes how and to what extent Abelard used the fame he achieved to his personal advantage.

Chapter 3. Connections and Reactions to Abelard

3.1. How students, Heloise, and critics responded to Abelard

Abelard played the twelfth century's bad boy, effortlessly provoking and attracting controversies and scandals. But the life he lived and recorded allowed him to construct a unique persona and achieve a level of celebrity not seen before, at least from a cathedral master. Not everyone, of course, found Abelard's persona charming. In the *Historia Calamitatum* Abelard repeated Augustine's definition of *fama* as being a relationship with others, a connection made with the public.[91] Abelard's relationship with the public began with his classroom debates and arguments, where he gained followers and supporters, but also made life-long rivals. Exposing his personal life to such a public, Abelard highlighted the centrality of his life, but also fueled rumours. The number of testimonies and poems about the Peripatetic of Pallet that have survived to the present day are evidence of the fame and notoriety he achieved.

There were two reactions to Abelard: admiration or disgust. On the one hand, Abelard was skilled at connecting himself to the right people. He created a network of political protectors who granted him sanctuary during his persecutions and helped him return to Paris when exiled by rivals. Stephen de Garlande, one of his protectors, was the key factor in Abelard returning to Paris in 1132, extending him an invitation when he was at the height of his influence as royal chancellor.[92] Abelard recorded in the *Historia Calamitatum* how Stephen used his influence to free him from his monastic obligations.[93] Abelard's connection to Stephen was part of a greater political alliance. The connection

[91] Ineke van't Spijker, "Inner and Outer in Abelard and Hugh of Saint Victor" in *Rethinking Abelard: A collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Babette S Hellemans and Han Van Ruler (Leiden: Koninlikjke Brill NV, 2014), 100.

[92] Constant J. Mews, "Bertrada de Montfort, Peter Abelard and Adelard of Bath: The Critique of Authority in the Early Twelfth Century," *Parergon* 32, no. 1 (2015): 9-10. http://muse.jhu.edu.

[93] David Luscombe, ed., *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice, rev. David Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), 79-81. "A certain Stephen, the king's seneschal at the time, summoned the abbot and his companions and asked why they wished to hold me against my will…"

between Stephen and Abelard traced back to Abelard's relationship with Bertrada, the controversial queen of France. Abelard had aligned himself with the enemies of his rival, William of Champeaux. William had criticised Bertrada when she came to power, and, unsurprisingly, was replaced by Stephen de Garlande as the archdeacon of the cathedral school.[94] The positive relationships Abelard built with influential people in powerful places appear to have been shaped by their awareness of mutual enemies. Abelard had chosen where his political loyalty lay, and the power of Stephen and Bertrada directly affected his personal circumstances. Abelard's protectors became an important weapon in his fight against the old-boy network that dominated the church and education at the time.

Abelard connected to important people throughout his career, not just politicians, but also scholars. The masters Abelard studied under were outstanding educators, holding the highest positions and forming the most accredited of schools. Roscelin of Compiègne, Abelard's first master, taught young Abelard in the city of Loches. Although Abelard did not give him credit for his instruction, Abelard always linked himself to the best masters and schools he could find, though he never tested Chartres, Orléans, or Poitiers. When he entered the scholarly world, Roscelin was the best master of logic available to Abelard as Roscelin had just established himself under the count of Anjou.[95] The accusations of heresy made against Roscelin, which Abelard would eventually face himself, caused him to distance himself from his first master. Evidence that Abelard cared and mindfully watched his reputation is to be found in the *Historia Calamitatum.* Although Roscelin does not appear in the text, his influence on Abelard could not be burned from the public mind. Roscelin had made an impact on Abelard's understanding of logic, and even Roscelin's words about what it was like to teach Abelard have survived. He described watching Abelard grow from a boy to a man, emphasizing the amount of time he spent with Abelard and the impact he had on his ideas.[96] Roscelin supported the young scholar and, in a way, tried to take credit for his success as an educator, but he also levelled biting criticism against his former student after the affair with Heloise became public. Roscelin was trying to latch on to the success of his rising student, likely in hopes of redeeming himself, but Abelard pushed him away fearing the influence of his first master. Thus, Abelard

[94] Mews, *Bertrada*, 10.
[95] Ibid, 8.
[96] Ibid, 8.

abandoned his master by moving on to study under William of Champeaux, the most prominent of Abelard's early opponents.

There are numerous surviving testimonies filled with disdain for the wandering scholar. Abelard did not seem to mind being the villain; in a way, he seemed to enjoy the conflict and controversy that filled his life. By being at the centre of scandal Abelard was being talked about. *Fama* circulated around his name. The desire to be talked about was stronger than the desire to be liked for Abelard. The controversial persona Abelard created made an impact on the public memory, as the following testimonies reveal.

The *Beati Gosvini Vita* was one of many texts that negatively reacted to the character Abelard portrayed. The text painted Abelard as an imposter among scholars, aiming insults and backhanded comments at him. The *Beati Gosvini Vita* claimed that Abelard's teachings were innovations needing to be disputed. The author of the text saw Abelard as challenging orthodoxy and playing for attention. Abelard, in the author's eyes, was a public nuisance. The text went on to describe how Master Jocelin believed Abelard "a sophist, and that he would behave more life a jester than a doctor, and that following the examples of Hercules he would not easily let go of the club once it was in his hand."[97] Jocelin saw Abelard as less than serious, as a jokester. Challenging Abelard's authority, Jocelin believed Abelard pushed his ideas to the extreme. As a rival of Abelard's, the author presents all of Abelard's flaws. But could it be that Abelard was right? Were these accusations made against him as part of normal scholastic tit for tat, which he took as springing from jealousy? Unlike other testimonies, this author did not have one good thing to say about Abelard. Most others would at least admit Abelard was a popular and skilful teacher.

Yet, the insults against Abelard's teaching in this text did not end there. The *Beati Gosvini Vita* told a tale about a student named Goswin who attacked Abelard when he was giving a lecture, forcing him to defend his teachings on the spot. Goswin demanded that Abelard justify his teachings, to explain his logic. In this story, Abelard is misguided,

[97] Alex J. Novikoff, *The Middle Ages Series: Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance* (Philadelphia: 2013), 81. See also: Richard Gibbons, ed., *Beati Gosvini Vita…*(Douai: M.Wyon, 1620). Latin.

vain, and egotistical. One of Goswin's greater insults is the snide remark that Abelard was a "barking man" in need of being beaten by a stick.[98] Goswin was looking for a way to discredit the words of the master who had gained such sudden admiration. He was doing to Abelard what Abelard had done to others. The author of this text had it in for Abelard, reacting negatively to both his teachings and his character.

Otto of Friesing was much subtler in his disapproval of Master Abelard. As a former student, Otto did give credit to Abelard where credit was due, but the majority of his text consisted of backhanded insults. He described Peter Abelard's homeland of Brittany as being a factory for "clerics endowed with keen intellects, well adapted to the arts", which at first seems like a compliment, an appreciation of knowledge. Abelard is represented as an intelligent master, if only so that Otto could make the case that his own education under the master was solid.

But, this was as far as the compliment went. Otto observed how these same Breton clerics "are almost witless for other matters,' which was the common knock against the bright but flighty Bretons.[99] In the eyes of Otto of Friesing, Abelard was book-smart but lacked common sense and basic life skills. To accuse Bretons of being clever but not serious was to accuse Abelard of being quick but light-headed and unreliable when it came to serious thought. Otto's opinion of his previous master was low. He respected his intellect but doubted all else about him. The final insult by Otto of Friesing was his claim that Abelard was so "conceited and had such confidence in his own intellectual power that he would scarcely so demean himself as to descend from the heights of his own mind to listen to teachers."[100] In other words, for Otto, Abelard was arrogant, believing that there was no master left who could teach him anything, but then Otto was in effect contrasting his own solid and earnest education with the great masters to Abelard's own inconstancy and flightiness; he had broken all the rules that Otto, who had dutifully a normal and uncontroversial course of education, had faithfully followed.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Otto of Friesing and Rahewin, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow and Richard Emery (New York: WW Norton & Company Inc., 1953), 83.

[100] Ibid.

Otto supplies letters sent by a bishop and abbots that accuse Abelard of being a heretic. They claimed he thought he could "comprehend by human reason all that is God" and was a "searcher of his own glory, a contriver of heresies."[101] In their eyes, Abelard challenged orthodox religion. He disgraced religion in an attempt to gain a reputation. Bernard of Clairvaux wanted the papal authority to act against the monster that was Abelard. He wanted to see Abelard condemned for the falsehoods he was spreading. Fortunately for Abelard, he was not punished in the way Bernard was expecting. Unfortunately, this prompted Bernard to write another letter, this time referring to Abelard as a "disease" needing to be remedied.[102] Bernard wanted Abelard persecuted before his teachings could spread. Bernard feared Abelard's spreading reputation growing as a master and theologian. He was desperate to remove Abelard from the canon of orthodox and trustworthy scholars, demanding not only that Abelard be excommunicated, but also all those who supported or defended him.[103] Bernard made it his personal mission to have Abelard silenced. Before further exploration of the great rivalry between Bernard and Abelard, it is important to note that the rivalry originated from William of St-Thierry's distaste for Abelard and his writings.

As his teachings began to spread, the number of Abelard's rivals and enemies increased. There were more and more people looking to discredit the controversial master; Abelard's contemporaries were not impressed by Abelard's rapid success and wanted to put him in his place. When Abelard's *Theologia* reached William of St-Thierry, William claimed the text heretical, wrote up a refutation, and enlisted Bernard of Clairvaux to add political weight to his criticisms of Abelard.[104] Abelard's success was not well received. Both Bernard and William worried about the spread and popularity of Abelard's ideas. An instigator of theological war, William enlisted a dogmatic abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux, as a widely admired Christian authority, to do the heavy lifting of cutting Abelard down to size. Thierry protested the circulating manuscripts of the *Theologia* with the argument, "I fear

[101] Ibid, 84.

[102] Ibid, 85.

[103] Ibid, 87.

[104] Lauge O. Nielsen, "Chap. 8-Peter Abelard and Gilbert of Poiters" in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 105.

that their teaching may be as monstrous as their titles are monstrous".[105] William presented Abelard as a heretic spreading monstrous lies, but left his condemnation in the hands of Bernard of Clairvaux.

Bernard of Clairvaux took up the challenge of attacking Abelard, beginning the greatest rivalry of his and Abelard's careers. Through their intellectual battle Bernard could protect theology and bring admiration upon himself in the process. Ensuring Abelard's teachings aligned with orthodox views, Bernard was ready to pounce on any statement Abelard made. Bernard played only a minor role in the first of Abelard's trials, but in the late 1130s he pounced. Because of Bernard's watchful eye, Abelard found himself at trial for a second time in his career for his writings. Bernard claimed Abelard's writings were flying into too "many cities and castles and even to other lands" including Rome.[106] He saw Abelard and his writing as increasing the danger of heresy the further they travelled. Bernard was concerned both that Abelard's ideas were dangerous to the faith and that he was excessively popular. Bernard made a point of emphasizing the rapid spread of Abelard's ideas—there was, in other words, some urgency to silencing him, for he was infecting the young and the whole Christian body of believers. After the failure to stop Abelard at Soissons, despite the burning of his book, Bernard took up the chance to condemn him in 1140, focusing on the concern for the minds Abelard was corrupting and contaminating with heretical ideas.[107] Bernard also recalled Roscelin's condemnation, for he hoped to provide any and all information that would seal Abelard's conviction and make him appear guilty of heresy in order to destroy his reputation.

In all of these attempts to convict his enemy, Bernard paints a dangerous heretical image of the Peripatetic of Pallet. By others, Abelard was claimed to have had a "dangerously split personality" and "making void the vine of Christ's cross by the

[105] Michael T. Clanchy, "Was Abelard Right to Deny that He had Written a Book of 'Sentences'?" in *Rethinking Abelard: A collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Babette S Hellemans and Han Van Ruler (Leiden: Koninlikjke Brill NV, 2014), 112.

[106] David Luscombe, *The School of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 2.

[107] Ibid, 7.

cleverness of his words".[108] Bernard attacked Abelard's character by presenting the pope a portrait of a manipulative, smooth-talking, heretic named Abelard. He described him as a treacherous fox, cunningly spreading his heretical ideas with the intention of gaining fame.[109] Bernard declared Abelard's writings "evil".[110] Making a point to focus on the border-breaking ideas of the *Theologia,* Bernard aimed to make Abelard appear foolish.[111] Bernard and William feared the application of logic and, indeed, philosophy to theology. Bernard was an established scholar and cleric whose goal was to discredit Abelard as a teacher, especially his influence on the young students gathered in Paris, as he feared the heretical ideas of Abelard would spread. Bernard had taken it upon himself to silence the heretic of Le Pallet.

The rivals of Abelard were not subtle in their attacks, but Abelard was getting what he needed to achieve fame, he was being talked about. These men may have had other motivations than envy and jealousy, but in trying to take down Abelard they may have furthered his success. The more they wrote, discussed, and condemned Abelard the larger place in academic and public discussion he held. His reputation, whether as a heretic or a great master, caught the attention of students all over Europe. And not only was Abelard willing to teach those who flocked to him, he was willing to teach new ideas in new ways unlike his rivals.

The list of enemies Abelard formed during his career was large, but the list of steadfast supporters was not much shorter. Famous for his teachings and controversies, Abelard was drawing students from all over Europe. John of Salisbury, one of the most significant humanists of the twelfth century, studied under him.[112] "John came to hear the

[108] M.T. Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Malden, MA: Blackewell Publishing, 1999, rev. 2005), 328.

[109] Bernard of Clairvaux, Life and Works of Saint Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux. 4 vols., trans. Samuel J. Eales (London: J. Hodges, 1889-96), vol. 2, 543-548. Latin.

[110] Ibid, 393-398.

[111] Davis O'Connel, "Abelard: A Heretic of a Different Nature" in *Discoveries* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1963), 38.

[112] Clanchy, *A Medieval Life, 341.*

legend, the living icon" when he resumed teaching in Paris in 1136.[113]. In the *Historia Pontificalis*, John of Salisbury positively presents his master's teaching style as being "liberal about accepting arguments" and he mentions how Abelard was one of the few teachers who had "striven to promote our progress by developing new doctrines as well as by elucidating old ones".[114] John presented Abelard as someone who tried to further the learning of his students. He continued to praise him by writing how "the Peripatetic from Pallet...won such distinction in logic over all his contemporaries that it was thought that he alone really understood Aristotle."[115] He equated his master with the prince of philosophy. Abelard did his best to give his students the tools they needed for scholarly warfare; John described how Abelard "concentrated on explaining things so that they could be easily understood."[116] The memory John had of Abelard was of an inspiring and skilled master. Abelard was offering a new type of teaching; he was offering explanations and brought a magnetic character to the classroom. As John and others have noted, Abelard had a certain charm that made his classroom exciting. John adored Abelard's willingness to teach and explain, even if his interpretations and ideas aroused conflict among scholars.

John of Salisbury appreciated the rivalries among scholars. Men like Abelard built themselves through battles of scholastic warfare.[117] John's support of and loyalty to his teacher did not end with equating him to Aristotle, for he came to his master's defense in intellectual warfare. When Abelard was criticized for his writings, John of Salisbury made sure to redirect the offense to Aristotle.[118] He claimed Aristotle had been the originator of the monstrosity, and those who chose to repeat his ideas should not be punished. Thus, John absolved his beloved master of any responsibility for the charges against him.

[113] Wim Verbaal, "Trapping the Future: Abelard's Multi-Layered Image-Buidling" *in Rethinking Abelard: A collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Babette S Hellemans and Han Van Ruler (Leiden: Koninlikjke Brill NV, 2014), 189.

[114] John of Salisbury, *The Historia Pontificalis of John of Salisbury*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1856): 177.

[115] Ibid, 21-22.

[116] Ibid, 146.

[117] Verbaal, *Trapping the Future*, xi.

[118] John of Salisbury, *Pontificalis*, 112.

Although John of Salisbury had spent a majority of his time studying under William of Conches and very little time under Abelard, John called Abelard his master. It was unlikely that Abelard would have had such a profound impact on John, yet his admiration for Abelard is evident. It is likely that John was trying to latch on to the success and reputation of his master, much as Otto had done by latching on to his great masters. The *Metalogicon* is, in part, John's resumé. By connecting himself to the Peripatetic of Pallet, John was becoming part of the scholarly world he so admired and creating a name for himself in the process.

Supporting Abelard was beneficial to John of Salisbury and his career, or so John hoped. Why else would John place himself on the side of a condemned scholar? The passion John expressed for extraordinary scholars was not just admiration, but association. Writing, "posterity will honor our contemporaries, for I have profound admiration for the extraordinary talents, diligent studies, marvelous memories, fertile minds, remarkable eloquence, and linguistic proficiency of many of those of our own day."[119] John appreciated what great masters had to offer, and in doing so increased his personal reputation as one who had studied with a range of the "greats". Others had condemned Abelard for his original ideas, they fought to gain a reputation through disputing and defeating masters. By protecting his master, John would have gained the respect and admiration from other scholars and many of Abelard's supporters.

Unlike John, Peter the Venerable was not a student of Abelard. Yet he was, out of admiration and a sense of Christian charity, one of Abelard's greatest supporters. These, however, would not be the only motivating factors for Peter to support Abelard. He offered Abelard protection after his condemnation in 1140, wrote letters filled with praise of Abelard, and returned his body to Heloise when Abelard died. Like John of Salisbury, Peter the Venerable benefited from supporting the controversial master. With the Cistercians and Bernard of Clairvaux beginning to overshadow Peter and the great monastic corporation of Cluny, siding with Abelard provided Peter with the attention he needed to bring his abbey back into focus. Attaching himself to Abelard and becoming one of his greatest supporters not only brought Peter the Venerable to the front lines of

[119] Ibid, 6.

scholarly battle, but it also gained him the support of Abelard's following who also wished to defeat Bernard. Bernard was made to look harsh and unforgiving, while Peter the Cluniac was portrayed as a kindly and charitable Christian.

Many current scholars have used different words to describe the deep veneration Peter the Venerable had for Abelard. Michael Clanchy pointed to Abelard's epitaph to show that Peter the Venerable viewed Abelard as being "without equals or superiors."[120] Helen Waddell referred to Peter's letter to Heloise as written "with a sort of heartbroken passion of reverence" for the dead Abelard.[121] Finally, David Luscombe recorded how Peter saw Abelard as "an Aristotle, the equal or the leader of all logicians".[122] Peter's high regard for the master from Le Pallet is best described through Peter's own words and actions.

"[T]his simple, upright man lived among us, fearing God and shunning evil; and in this way, I repeat, he stayed for some time, dedicating the last of his life to God"; Peter saw Abelard as an honorable and devout Christian as he watched him in his final days.[123] In this same letter, Peter praised Abelard's dedication to teaching by claiming Abelard was "holy, philosophic, and scholarly."[124] Descriptions of Abelard by Peter describe a humble man, which is in sharp contrast to the arrogant young master presented by Otto of Friesing. Peter the Venerable humanized Abelard's last days: "the shabbiness of his attire made him look the humblest of them all [monks at Cluny]. I often marvelled, and when he walked in front of me with the others in the usual processional order [lined up according dates of entry into the monastery], I almost stood still in astonishment".[125] Abelard's rivals described him as an arrogant egotist, but Peter the Venerable presents him as a modest man with no desire for attention.

[120] Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life*, 335.

[121] Helen Waddell, *Wandering Scholars* (London: Constable and Company, 1966), 116.

[122] Luscombe, *The School of Peter Abelard*, 10.

[123] Peter the Venerable, "Letters of Peter the Venerable" in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice, rev. M.T. Clanchy (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 222.

[124] Ibid, 221-222.

[125] Ibid.

Offering his support and professing Abelard's faith when under heresy accusations countered the gossip that portrayed Abelard as reckless and arrogant. Abelard may have once been at the centre of scholarly warfare, but that was not the Abelard that Peter knew. Protecting him, sheltering him, praising him, Peter became recognized as a powerful supporter and enhanced the reputation of Cluny as a centre of humane values and abiding humility. Peter also praised Abelard's fame as he recalls in his letter on Abelard's death to Heloise:

> Thus did Master Peter end his days. He who was known nearly all over the world for his unique mastery of knowledge and who won fame everywhere as a disciple of one who said "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-hearted," steadfast in his own gentleness and humility, thus passed over to him, as we must believe.[126]

Peter declared Abelard had gained a following, but remained humble by continuously choosing to suffer in the name of Christ. It was important to Peter the Venerable to contrast Abelard's popular reputation with a faith filled image of Abelard. If Peter was going to gain attention by associating himself with such a controversial figure, he needed to defend Abelard's Christian faith to ensure he himself was not accused of heresy. Whether or not Peter meant all of these words could be questioned, as his letter to Heloise can be read as a letter of consolation. But, the actions Peter took to protect Abelard late in his life would seem to prove that there was sincerity behind Peter's veneration of the other Peter.

Peter had tried to shelter Abelard from his persecutors and tried to mend the bridges Abelard had burned. Supporting Abelard's appeal to papal authority for what he called an unintentional offence, Peter did his best to reconcile the relationship between Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux.[127] Although unsuccessful, he was able to offer his brother-monk a safe place to hide from Bernard's heresy accusations and found himself at the centre of a contest over reputation and the schools.

[126] Ibid, 223.
[127] Ibid, 215.

In offering protection to Abelard, Peter was also offering his political influence.[128] Using his prestige, Peter asked for Abelard to be able to "remain permanently" at Cluny.[129] He also begged the Church on Abelard's behalf to set him free of his punishment. He continued to lobby for Abelard, writing:

> I your humble servant, beg you, your devoted community of Cluny begs you, and Peter himself begs this on his own part through us, through your sons… permit him to spend the remaining days of his life and old age, which perhaps will not be many, in your house of Cluny, so that no one's intervention shall be able to disturb or remove him from the home… let the shield of your apostolic protection cover him.[130]

The most significant of Peter the Venerable's actions, however, was when he returned Abelard's body to Heloise at the Paraclete and absolved Abelard of his sins.[131] Peter had offered Abelard the greatest gift, eternity with both his lovers, God and Heloise.

Abelard received loyalty and dedication from his supporters, but they profited by linking themselves to his success and fame, as did John of Salisbury. It may not have been Abelard as a friend or great master they had been defending, but Abelard the opponent of old style learning and its masters. Those who protected Abelard were brought into the spotlight and received, on a smaller scale, the benefit of Abelard's fame. They gained status from being involved in scholarly debates, they gained students and wealth, and they started to hear their names whispered in public places. While enemies tried to disgrace Abelard, and as a consequence expanded his reputation, his protectors were rewarded with the benefit of his fame.

No one loved or benefited more from Abelard than Heloise. She was his biggest

[128] O'Connel, 40.

[129] Peter the Venerable, *Letters of Peter the Venerable*, 215-216.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid, 222. "I, Peter, Abbot of Cluny, who received Peter Abelard as a monk of Cluny, and gave his body, removed in secret, to the Abbess Heloise and the nuns of the Paraclete, by the authority of Almighty God and of all the saints, in virtue of my office, absolve him from all his sins."

supporter. As Mews and many others have noted, Abelard seemed to come before God for Heloise.[132] In her own words, Heloise described her love as "beyond all bounds."[133] Heloise recognized the grandness of Abelard's social status. Luscombe pointed out how Heloise used the term "celebrity" to define her lover and how she mentioned "[w]hole districts and towns would be excited at his coming".[134]

When Heloise discussed the origins of her relationship with Abelard, she expressed her anxiety at the tarnishing the "glory" of his reputation.[135] Before he had met Heloise, Abelard had already gained a reputation as a master, but Heloise knew their relationship would attract attention. Heloise was prepared for the envy of the women of France, if anything she revelled in it. Forming a relationship with Abelard was a recipe for public gossip. Not only would this increase Heloise's reputation (as she was already famous for her education), but it would bring her status that she could not achieve as a woman. And she too was ambitious; she said that she wanted to be a philosopher, an extraordinary ambition for a woman in the twelfth century when women were shut out of the cathedral schools as they would later be out of the university. Abelard provided Heloise a door to enter the scholarly battlefield where women of her time did not normally go.

Once viewed as a poor candidate for marriage, Heloise became the focus of the poems and songs by Abelard that melted the hearts of women.[136] Heloise described this lust for Abelard in a letter:

> What king or philosopher could match your fame? What region, city, or village did not long to see you? When you appeared in public, who (I ask) did not hurry to catch a glimpse of you, or crane her neck and strain her eyes to follow your

[132] Constant J. Mews, "Chap. 3-Philosophical Themes" in *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 36.

[133] Luscombe, *Letter Collection*, 131.

[134] Luscombe, *School of Peter Abelard*, 3.

[135] Luscombe, *Letter Collection*, 133.

[136] Ibid, 137.

> departure? Every wife, every young girl desired you in absence and was on fire in your presence; queens and great ladies envied me in my joys and my bed.[137]

To Heloise, Abelard was talented, handsome, and celebrated. She mentioned the love songs being repeated so often they could never be forgotten and how his "manhood was adorned by every grace of mind and body."[138] Abelard's attractiveness and romantic songs made him famed among women, including Heloise.

Heloise not only supported Abelard, she did her best to come to his defence. All accusations made against her beloved she claimed were made by "false brethren" and "slanders from those two pseudo-apostles."[139] And, just like Abelard, Heloise believed the accusations to be acts of envy. Abelard was presenting original ideas in a world that relied on maintaining custom and orthodoxy. Heloise defended her lover, only admitting that he was being challenged for moving away from normal customs. Heloise idolized her lover, presenting him as the ideal man, glorifying him in the eyes of the public.

In their relationship, Heloise sang Abelard's praises as she had done in public, but she was also critical of her lover. It was in their personal letters where Heloise revealed the flaws in Abelard's character. She described how he would lick his wounds without acknowledging hers. "While you spend so much on the stubborn, consider what you owe to the obedient; you are so generous to your enemies but should reflect on what you owe to your daughters."[140] Heloise accused Abelard of always acting in his own self-interest. She claimed him to be selfish for failing to fulfil his personal responsibility to her and the nuns of the Paraclete.

The unwavering admiration Heloise gave Abelard in public was replaced with complaints of his thoughtlessness. Heloise whined about the dissipating affection in their relationship. Insecurities and private truths were revealed in the lovers' personal letters. Heloise complained about the isolation she felt being Abelard's wife. Finally, Heloise

[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid, 123-125.
[140] Ibid, 129.

expressed her sadness over how this loneliness had become a public matter as rumours were whispered about the one-sidedness of their love.[141] She appreciated their intellectual connection and viewed him as a desirable lover, but her complaints revealed that the "perfect" man she helped create in the public eye had flaws.

Despite criticizing his selfishness, Heloise did praise Abelard for the loyal following he was able to cultivate everywhere. In putting his career first, Abelard had built a loyal following of students who followed him to the oratory of the Paraclete. Heloise had found the upside of Abelard's flaws. Developing the Paraclete was an accomplishment, one that became successful due to the support network Abelard had built among his students. Before the Paraclete was given to her, Heloise praised Abelard claiming, "You have built nothing here upon another man's foundation. Everything here is your own creation. This was a wilderness open only to wild beasts and brigands, a place which had known no home nor habitation of men."[142] In the eyes of Heloise, Abelard had attained a strong enough following and reputation to create a school anywhere. He could form a school in the desert and it would be successful.

All of the figures discussed thus far have presented us with strong, polarized opinions of Abelard, but Abelard also gained the attention of some less popular writers and poets. On one hand, the poets ignored the controversy of his life, preferring to focus on the romance with Heloise while ignoring the other aspects of Abelard's life.[143] Meanwhile, other writers took an opportunity to voice their opinion of the master from Le Pallet. Writings by Hugh of Metel described Abelard as elegant and well mannered, but also as a "plague which had struck France."[144] Geoffrey of Auxere called Abelard a "treacherous teacher of theology" and Claremebald of Arras called him boastful and impious.[145] Finally, we circle back to the comments of his first master, Roscelin. After

[141] Ibid, 139. "It was desire, not affection which bound you to me…So when the end came to what you desired, any show of feeling you used to make went with it. This, most dearly beloved, is not so much my opinion as everyone's…"

[142] Ibid, 127-129

[143] Luscombe, *School of Peter Abelard*, 11.

[144] Ibid, 4.

[145] Ibid, 11.

witnessing the catastrophes of his former student's life, Roscelin could not hold back his disappointment. He reproached him for his relationship with Heloise and even seems to suggest that he knew of their ongoing affair.[146] These surviving pieces of commentary demonstrate a disdain for Abelard's personality and teaching, but a fascination with his life and scandalous behaviour. Yet, these small testimonies of disapproval did not surface in the scholarly battles that surrounded Abelard, but should be understood as the common talk about him that even the masters traded in.

The abundance of literary witnesses to Peter Abelard's life offers testimony to his fame, even if people saw starkly different images of him. The public eye was almost always on Abelard. Each of his admirers and rivals promoted their version of the persona of the French master by spreading rumours and gossip. Through his network of friends and enemies, Abelard created a relationship within a wider public that could not turn away from the life he was fashioning. The representations of Abelard are a testament to the reputation, image, and impact he had on the wider world. Abelard was a famous man, an extraordinary accomplishment for the time.

3.2. Heloise's fame as a by-product of Abelard's

The influence Heloise had on Abelard and his fame was significant, however, Heloise attached herself to a man who was already one of the most well-known men of Paris. Whether Heloise attached herself to Abelard for his charm or for his reputation is debatable, but no matter her intention, their relationship linked her to his fame forever.

Heloise did have a reputation of her own before meeting Abelard. Her reputation as a well-read woman had made her attractive to Abelard. Both Peter the Venerable and Abelard both described her as known throughout Paris for being highly educated and for

[146] Ed. J. Reiners, *Der Nominalismus in der Fruhscholastick* (Munster, 1910), pp. 62ff. Peter Dronke, *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1992), 274. Roscelin stated, "You don't even *send* the money to your whore, to pay for your debauchery, you still take it to her yourself. While you could enjoy her, you paid in advance; now you sin even more, rewarding her for the past debauches rather than buying future pleasures".

her rare gift of letters.[147] Peter the Venerable expands on her early fame, describing how she had been recognized as having a mind better than all women and most men; he also mentioned the dedication to philosophy she showed at such an early age.[148]

But it was Heloise's association with Abelard that allowed her to achieve a status that spread beyond Paris's borders much like Abelard's. Twelfth-century women were not part of the scholarly world; they were expected to prepare themselves for a life within the home. Heloise's relationship with Abelard was Heloise's golden ticket out of this path. Abelard admitted that his infatuation for the young Heloise inspired only love songs and caused him to neglect his philosophical teachings.[149] The songs gained popularity and were "sung in many places, particularly by those who enjoy the kind of life [Abelard] led".[150] It was because of these songs that Heloise's name circulated throughout Europe. These songs had begun to turn their relationship and Heloise into iconic tales. Although Heloise was not being recognized for her education, through Abelard she became a twelfth-century symbol of love.

But, the relationship was not the fairy-tale portrayed to the public. The status and attention gained through the relationship came at the price of turmoil and suffering. The couple were admired for the love story they represented, but the cost of their love affair was castration and a secret marriage. At first, Heloise protested marrying Abelard, afraid to compromise the reputation of her chaste husband.[151] Usually described as selfless, it is likely that this was a choice that reflected upon her reputation as well. She would be shamed for ruining the chastity of a clerical man. If Abelard was humiliated, she would be humiliated too.[152]

The affair eternally linked Heloise to Abelard. When Abelard suffered his castration, public attention fell not just on him but on her as well. Some chastised the

[147] Luscombe, Letter Collection, 25.
[148] Peter the Venerable, *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, 218.
[149] Dronke, *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe*, 31.
[150] Ibid, 35.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Clanchy, *Medieval Life*, 167.

couple for their fornication while many others condemned Fulbert for having Abelard castrated after his attempt to satisfy the canon's demands by marrying Heloise. The castrated Abelard wept and cringed when he was "pointed at by every finger, derided by every tongue, a monstrous spectacle to all" as people whispered and gossiped about the relationship and castration.[153] The public had embraced Heloise as a character in the narrative of their times, much as they regarded Abelard as a famous, but brash teacher.

The impact of the affair is shown in how dedicated the public was to following the lives of the young lovers, even after the affair. When Abelard asked Heloise to re-enter Argenteuil the public was outraged. Many people out of "pity for her youth" did their best to convince Heloise to remain in the secular world.[154] Others sympathized with her entering monastic life, admiring the devotion she showed for Abelard.

Years after their affair and entering the monastery, the legends of the love story of Abelard and Heloise continued to spread. As Abelard's tragic love interest, Heloise was the embodiment of love, lust, and its many dangers. The myths built around their love served as precursors to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Poems and stories began to appear about a young woman falling in love with her teacher. The *Episolae duorum amantium*, preserved in a later medieval copy, have been presented as the lost love letters of Abelard and Heloise. The letters contain the exchange between a highly educated woman and her renowned master, who are conducting an affair and discussing the meaning of love and at the same the boundaries and difficulties of their affair.[155]

There is also another poem in the *Metamorphosis Golye Episcopi* that immortalized the love affair between Abelard and Heloise. Written near the time of Abelard's death, the poem told the story of Abelard's wife searching for her beloved husband; the verses recount the tragic turmoil the lovers faced in their relationship.[156] The text spins a tale of a brilliant woman, Philologia, grieving for the loss of a man to whom

[153] Luscombe, *Letter Collection*, 47.

[154] Ibid, 49.

[155] Constant J. Mews, "Abelard, Heloise and Discussion of Love in the Twelfth-Century Schools" in *Rethinking Abelard: A collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Babette S Hellemans and Han Van Ruler (Leiden: Koninlikjke Brill NV, 2014), 27.

[156] Dronke, *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe,* 261.

she had devoted her whole life. Philologia had given everything to her husband and feels abandoned by him, as her love for him was stronger than her passion for knowledge. Philologia's experience as a neglected lover mirrors the life of Heloise as presented in her personal letters to Abelard.

This romanticizing of Abelard and Heloise's relationship in poetry continued in two poems found in a manuscript of Orléans. These two poems criticized Heloise for entering the monastic life, yet empathized with her as a woman who was having her youth stolen. The poet labeled Abelard cruel for abandoning someone who loved him with such depth to a monastery. In these examples of their love, Abelard was a cruel lover while Heloise became the "heroine of love."[157]

Along with endless poetry, there were also epitaphs and songs dedicated to the famous affair. Like the poems, epitaphs criticized Abelard and praised Heloise. To the writers of these epitaphs, Abelard was a scoundrel who corrupted the church, while Heloise was an intelligent and loyal woman who was blinded by her devotion.[158] Heloise developed into a symbol of divine love. The *Reqiuescat a labore* was a song about the widowed Heloise desiring her own death after hearing that her lover had passed away.[159] The depiction of Heloise as a romantic heroine is based on the unconditional love she showed Abelard throughout her life whether they were together or apart.

Scholars have denied that twelfth-century society was interested in scandalous affairs, believing that there was a lack of sentiment for love in the Middle Ages.[160] Heloise and Abelard's affair proved otherwise. Through her relationship with Abelard, Heloise had gained fame as a symbol of romantic love. She was the protagonist of an incessant amount of romantic fiction and their relationship was the centre of much gossip. Society watched, commented, and documented the tragic events of their lives.

[157] Ibid, 264.
[158] Ibid, 267-268.
[159] Ibid, 268-269.
[160] Ibid, 256.

Heloise gained status from her relationship with Abelard, arousing, so she said, the envy of women as Abelard's lover and wife. However, once the marriage of the iconic couple dissolved with their entry into monastic life, Heloise needed to found a new relationship with her now ex-husband in order to inhabit the reputation she had created over the years.[161] Heloise did her best to hold on to the ties she had with Abelard, writing him letters and asking him to answer her needs as a woman of God, this is especially evident in the personal letters Heloise wrote during her time as abbess of the Paraclete.

Heloise did her best to remain connected to Abelard throughout their lives, however, the strongest connection they made after the affair was when she ruled the Paraclete. Abelard had gifted Heloise with the oratory, providing her the tools she needed to recover after being expelled from Argenteuil. It was at the Paraclete where Heloise developed a reputation for her piety and devotion as both a nun and an abbess. Heloise is described by Abelard as being adored:

> [she held] favour in the eyes of all… that sister of mine, who was in charge of the other nuns, that bishops loved her as a daughter, abbots as a sister, lay people as a mother; while all alike admired her piety and prudence and her unequalled gentleness and patience in every situation.[162]

At the request of Abelard, Heloise did her best to fulfill her duty to God. By forming this positive image of herself, society's expectations and criticisms of Abelard grew. Some challenged the "spiritual" image of the couple, accusing the couple of continuing to be "in the grip of the pleasures of carnal concupiscence."[163] This was an obvious slander since the castrated Abelard could no longer be her lover and the religious Abelard had forsaken the flesh. In the *Historia Calamitatum* Abelard confessed to their sinful actions in the refectory during Heloise's retreat to Argenteuil as the wife of Abelard and under the threat of bodily harm by her uncle. There were also some who believed Heloise had become the prime example of a devoted nun and only criticized Abelard. They believed he was not

[161] Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Chap. 1-Heloise the Abbess" *in Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 2.

[162] Luscombe, *Letter Collection*, 101.

[163] Ibid, 103.

doing enough; they wanted him to spend more time visiting and preaching at the Paraclete.[164] It appeared that even monastic life did not make the public stop watching, expecting another scandal, they waited for the drama that surrounded Abelard to surface.

Heloise gained recognition as a by-product of Abelard. She requested Abelard's help in creating a monastic rule specifically for women in order to support her abbey of nuns. The Paraclete was one of few oratories not attached to a male house or head as Heloise was solely responsible for the Paraclete's management.[165] Under her leadership, six daughter houses were established. Abelard did not share the credit as at the time of the great expansion he was facing the turmoil of another heresy charge.[166]

With the gift of the oratory, Heloise was able to turn her image from the "whore" of an illicit affair to that of a well-connected abbess. Unlike Abelard, she did her best not to create lines between friends and enemies; she received visits from Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter the Venerable.[167] She allowed her visitors to comment and make suggestions on how the abbey could improve; Bernard of Clairvaux, the rival of her beloved Abelard, even left Heloise a list of recommendations after his visit.[168] By keeping the oratory free of rivalry and focusing on solidifying its autonomy, Heloise was able to create a sacred space to suit the needs of women. She was critical of the Rule of Saint Benedict, which was written for monks. How could both men and women be "bound by profession of a common Rule, and the same burden is laid on the weak as the strong."[169] To ensure that Abelard provided her abbey with an updated Rule for women, Heloise used their past relationship to shame Abelard into action. She wrote Abelard not so subtle reminders of the "debt" he owed her for the vocational vow she made.[170]

[164] Ibid.

[165] Carl Jr. Kelso, "Women In Power: Fontevrault and the Paraclete Compared," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22, no. 1 (1991): 56, http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7zk7n9c1.

[166] Julie Ann Smith, "Debitum Obedientie: Heloise and Abelard on Governance at the Paraclete," *Parergon* 25, no. 1 (2008): 5, doi:10.1353/pgn.0.0051

[167] Ibid, 60.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Luscombe, *Letter Collection,* 229.

[170] Ibid, 141.

For her success in expanding the Paraclete, Heloise received much praise. Hugh Metel claimed that her reputation was "flying through the void" and he admired her ability to "overcome womanly weakness and [to] have hardened in manly strength."[171] Women joined her community because of the reputation it had developed; the Paraclete had become famed for meeting the needs of monastic women.[172] Peter the Venerable praised her "teaching humility" and was "delighted" by her education.[173] He viewed her "wealth of religion and learning" as preferable "to the richest treasures of any kings."[174] Through the Paraclete, Heloise received renown among the wider monastic community.

Although Heloise was fully responsible for the Paraclete, she still praised and benefited from Abelard's contribution. Without his donation of the oratory or his writing of the female rule, it cannot be certain that Heloise would have succeeded in making a new life for herself, never mind one as prominent as her role as the abbess of the Paraclete. Abelard had been partly responsible for her success as a nun, just as he had been responsible for her becoming a household name during their relationship. Aligning with Abelard provided Heloise with everything she needed to achieve her own post-Abelard reputation and fame. She had the sympathy of the public when Abelard wronged her, and was given the Paraclete where she made her name in the religious realm. Abelard's fame had been the catalyst Heloise needed to achieve something outstanding herself as a loyal and devout abbess.

3.3. Heloise as the architect of Abelard's lasting fame

The amount of influence Abelard had on Heloise is undeniable. He turned an educated young girl into the adored and loved abbess of one of the most successful female run monasteries of the twelfth century. But Heloise also preserved, tended, and expanded Abelard's reputation. Throughout their lives Heloise aided the success of her husband on a personal level, a religious level, and an intellectual level. While he lived, particularly after

[171] Constant J. Mews, "Heloise and liturgical experience at the Paraclete," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 11, no. 1 (2002): 26, doi:10.1017/S0961137102002024.

[172] Smith, *Governance at the Paraclete*, 5-6.

[173] Peter the Venerable, *Letters of Peter the Venerable*, 218-219.

[174] Ibid, 220.

his first trial, Abelard had become something of a counter-culture hero and attracted those whom contemporary society had marginalized. Indeed, Heloise had been one of those, but there were others, including the revolutionary Arnold of Brescia.

When he met Heloise, Abelard was at the height of his scholastic fame. Well known for the controversies he caused and the debates he entered into had made Abelard a challenge to the established order. In a strange way, Heloise and their careers after the castration worked to normalize Abelard. He found purpose in tending to his nuns, and she and her nuns founded the cult of Abelard.

Heloise had always jealously guarded Abelard's reputation as no other did. Even during the final stages of their affair, she had worried that marrying him would damage his reputation and preferred to disgrace herself as his whore than damage the reputation he had built.[175] Heloise accepted keeping the marriage a secret, despite many already knowing about the affair.[176] She was afraid that their marriage would reduce Abelard from an exceptional scholar to a drudge. At the height of the affair, Heloise inspired Abelard to create love songs. These songs that kept their names "on the lips of everyone", with melodies that "ensured that even the unlettered did not forget [them]."[177] The songs of Abelard and Heloise spread so far that "every street and house echoed with [her] name."[178] The story of their love became more popular than Abelard's scholarship ever did. Words and song travelled faster than manuscripts, and rumors travelled faster than spring winds.

The rumors of the relationship became a remarkable story that spread throughout Europe. Abelard continued to feed the fire by writing poetry and songs about their illicit behavior, thus proclaiming to the world their love, but often hiding their identities behind clever puns and asides. The rumour that these lovers were Abelard and Heloise may have threatened his reputation as a chaste scholar but it became the spark to his achieving a multi-dimensional fame that no one had seen before. Abelard was now the protagonist

[175] David Luscombe, ed., *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice, rev. David Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), 33-35.

[176] Ibid, 35.

[177] Ibid, 29.

[178] Ibid, 86.

(and to some the antagonist) of various romantic legends. There were variations of the story, some realistic tales of a young girl and her teacher, others more grand, comparing the couple to Latin and Greek heroes. Peter Dronke recalls one story that has survived, describing the couple as Platinus and Philologia.[179] The affair achieved mythic levels, both as whispers in households and in literature over the centuries to come. Surprisingly, the sexual scandal was admired more than condemned in the rumors and legends that surrounded it.

Heloise's uncle was one of the few who openly condemned the affair. It was on his orders that Abelard was castrated, as Fulbert wanted retribution for his continuing shame over his niece's misconduct and anger at her seducer. Humiliating as it was, the castration proved just another building block in Abelard's career as a celebrity. The castration became a public topic of debate, as his followers and the city gathered outside his home in a "scene of horror and amazement".[180] This gruesome consequence of the affair did nothing but bring the scholar even more attention. If anything, this was another opportunity for Abelard to gain the sympathy of the public by presenting himself as the victim of a cruel act.

Abelard's relationship with Heloise had launched his reputation as a lover in the new more mobile, urban, troubadour world that was taking shape in the early twelfth century. Many now knew his name and many knew his songs beyond the walls of the classroom. By having the affair, Abelard's reputation had broken into a type of fame that did not require royal or divine standing. Even after his castration and monastic life, Abelard's connection to Heloise continued to aid the expansion of his reputation.

After they entered monasteries, Abelard was no longer responsible for Heloise, but it did not stop him from providing care for her or her from demanding his special care and attention. While running the Paraclete, Heloise's support was evident in the way she praised him to her nuns and the roles she assigned to him in caring for the oratory. For

[179] Peter Dronke, *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1992), 262.

[180] Luscombe, 45.

one, Abelard was assigned the role of creator. Heloise placed him at the centre of the community, writing to Abelard, “after God you are the founder of this place, through God you are the planter of our community”[181] and “[f]or you alone, after God, are the founder of this place, you alone the builder of this oratory, you alone the creator of this community. You have built nothing here upon another man’s foundation. Everything here is your own creation.”[182] Heloise praised Abelard for being the architect of the oratory, a role she places just below that of God. Heloise demarcated an authoritative status for Abelard within her community of nuns. To emphasize this Heloise’s final words in the letter in the collection expresses their loyalty, “Speak to us, and we shall hear.”[183]

Beyond acknowledging him as the Paraclete’s founder, Heloise also recognized and supported Abelard as an authoritative figure within the Christian church. She requested that Abelard create a rule that suited women, a rule that would help women live authentically in monastic life.[184] Heloise begged Abelard to create a bridge between the Benedictine Rule (written for male monks) and, what both Abelard and Heloise described as, the weakness of women.[185] Heloise was bringing to her nuns the scriptural rule of Abelard and equating it its authority to that of Benedict.[186] Although Heloise was the governing power, she has placed Abelard as the head of the oratory by making him the authority on adjusting rules and customs for women. Heloise had made Abelard the centre of her abbey. She requested and he supplied a history of nuns for the Paraclete as well as a hymnal special to the nuns and, perhaps, to Heloise herself.

[181] Luscombe, 257.

[182] Ibid, 127.

[183] Ibid, 259.

[184] Julie Ann Smith, “Debitum Obedientie: Heloise and Abelard on Governance at the Paraclete,” *Parergon* 25, no. 1 (2008): 2, doi:10.1353/pgn.0.0051.

[185] Luscombe, 253. Heloise is looking to Abelard as an authoritative figure: “I beg you, who seek to imitate not only Christ but also this apostle, in discrimination as in name, modify your instructions for works to suit our weak nature, so that we can be free to devote ourselves to the offices of praising God. This is the offering which the Lord commends, rejecting all outward sacrifices, when he says…”

[186] Constant J. Mews, “Heloise and liturgical experience at the Paraclete,” *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 11, no. 1 (2002): 32, doi:10.1017/S0961137102002024. Terrence G. Kardong, “Work in the Convents of the Paraclete: Echoes of RB,” American Benedictine Review 63, no. 1 (2012): 29.

Abelard's connection to Heloise had established him as an important figure in founding the Paraclete and in the forming the life of its community of women. And Heloise and her nuns paid special attention to founding a cult of Abelard, preserving copies of the correspondence of Abelard and Heloise and perhaps even the original copy of their so-called love letters. More work needs to be done on this topic, but it is likely that the very legend of Heloise and Abelard was a product of Heloise's efforts at the Paraclete to preserve important documentary witnesses to the life of Abelard. The love letters, for instance, if they are genuine, could only have been kept by one of the two writers of this intimate correspondence and that figure, for a variety of reasons, seems to have been Heloise. The cult of Abelard at the Paraclete was Heloise's doing.

Abelard himself had a tendency to collect supporters and allies who were marginalized and existed as outcasts from the established order. He attracted radicals like Arnold of Brescia, who St Bernard claimed to be Abelard's "armor-bearer" as he was condemned in 1140 alongside Abelard.[187] And sinners who were welcomed into the forgiving arms of the Paraclete. Although many of his followers were marginal to the established orders of church and society, he had also entranced establishment figures. For example, Guy of Castello defended Abelard's *Theologia* and *Sic et Non* and in 1143 and was named Pope Celestine II.[188] Over the years, Abelard had taught many different students, some of whom went on to distinguished careers.

The Paraclete itself became a home for women who did not fit into secular society and were not an easy fit with most monasteries. It was the home of women who were not virgins or martyrs, women who desired an education over marriage.[189] As founder of the Paraclete, Abelard became the leader of women who sought sanctuary from society. He reinforced this role by presenting ideas suggesting these women could still find retribution. Arguing that Mary Magdalen was a devout person despite her sins, Abelard embraced the

[187] Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life*, 337.

[188] Ibid, 34.

[189] Mews, "Heloise and liturgical experience at the Paraclete." and Terrence G. Kardong, "Work in the Convents of the Paraclete: Echoes of RB," *American Benedictine Review* 63, no. 1 (2012): 58.

women of the oratory while gaining their loyalty and admiration.[190] Because of Heloise the Paraclete experienced rapid growth as a place for marginalized women[191] and by presenting Abelard as the founder, she created a cult of Abelard for a gathering of misfit women whom he could count on to be his loyal supporters.

Heloise occupied the central place in cultivating Abelard's fame. Had Abelard chosen any other woman, it is unlikely that she would have had such success in preserving and tending his fame. As Godman suggests, the relationship was much like the story of Narcissus. Heloise was a "feminine reflection" of Abelard's image.[192] Abelard had seen his reflection in her, a misfit desiring recognition and admiration. In protecting her lover, Heloise also protected herself. This symbiotic relationship allowed Abelard to influence Heloise's status, while Heloise secured that Abelard's reputation and extraordinary fame would survive.

[190] Ibid, 32.

[191] Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Chap. 1-Heloise the Abbess" in *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 3.

[192] Peter Godman, *Fame Without Conscience*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 85.

Chapter 4. Reasons for Abelard's Fame

4.1. Advantages and disadvantages

Establishing how Abelard had achieved a new type of individual fame has been the focal point thus far, but it begs the question of why Abelard sought and continued to seek fame? Early in his life, he achieved success as a scholar in France and could have lived a comfortable life as a teacher to the many paying students who sought him out as a master. Instead, he lived a life filled with controversy, pain, and condemnation. Abelard seemed to thrive under the scrutiny of the public eye, but was this quest for fame worth it to him, given the cost?

Abelard's fame brought him the admiration of women, he became an object of desire capable of attaining any woman he pleased.[193] In his *Historia Calamitatum,* Abelard emphasized this with the courting of the young educated Heloise. Abelard stated "she was the one to bring to my bed, confident that I should have an easy success, for at the time I had youth and exceptional good looks as well as my great reputation to recommend me, and feared no rebuff from any woman."[194] Even when he sought Heloise, a woman he deemed his near equal, at least, intellectually, he believed his reputation was enough to peak her interest.[195] Being recognized as an excellent master and scholar was the chief reason he was welcomed into Heloise's life. Fulbert, Heloise's uncle, had invited Abelard into his home under the impression that Abelard would be providing Heloise with an excellent education for free or, rather, in exchange for room and board. Fulbert even gave Abelard permission to beat and punish Heloise if it would aid in her learning, but then that was standard at the time.

[193] Peter Godman, "Fame Without Conscience" in *Paradoxes of Conscience in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 85.

[194] David Luscombe, ed., *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice, rev. David Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), 27**.**

[195] Ibid. Since Heloise held an amount of fame herself, Abelard's reputation must have been grand in order to inspire such confidence. "In looks she did not rank least, while in the abundance of her learning she was supreme. A gift for letters is so rare in women that it added greatly to her charm and made her very famous throughout the realm."

Fame helped Abelard to court his Heloise. But, it also helped him to seduce the imaginations of many women of the twelfth century. He was recognized by women for his learning, his good looks, and the songs he sang. Then, when the poems and songs about his beloved began to circulate, Abelard became even more desirable to the urban women of medieval Europe. His songs made hearts throb. Heloise herself acknowledged that Abelard "made women sigh for love" and how his "manhood was adorned by every grace of mind and body".[196] Strangely Heloise seems not have been a jealous lover, but rather to have basked in the envy of the ogling women.

Abelard's reputation and writings spread throughout Europe. Rivals complained of how his "writings had taken wing and flown into many cities and castles and even to other lands" and how they had even reached Rome.[197] Writings that crossed borders were significant, as without the printing press copies of manuscripts were expensive, time-consuming to produce, and hard to come by. His fame as a scholar and writer allowed Abelard to work in multiple schools in France. His ideas (including the controversial ones) circulated and became subjects of debate. The distanced travelled by Abelard's works and ideas caused students to flock to him, schools to desire him as their master, and an opportunity for Abelard to present ideas that were new and provocative for the time.

Hearing rumours of the great scholar, students flocked both from the schools of rivals and from places far beyond France's borders. They became his biggest supporters and followed him throughout his career, despite the many accusations against him. John of Salisbury, who was destined for a career in the church, did not apparently think that having Abelard as one of his masters would spoil his own reputation. If anything, John must have believed he would benefit from the association.

Even when Abelard decided to leave teaching his students followed him. When he entered the monastic life, Abelard's students "looked like hermits rather than scholars."[198] They chose to follow him into the spiritual realm instead of finding a new master; they

[196] Ibid, 137.

[197] David Luscombe, *The School of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 2.

[198] Ibid, 83.

formed a community that would eventually become the Paraclete. This loyal following of students supported Abelard as a master, but they also supported him financially. Early in his career, Abelard's students aided in his accumulation of riches and success as a master. Later in life, his students funded the needs of Abelard and the materials needed to build the new oratory. His reputation as a great master brought students with full pockets flocking to him.

Before he left the world for a monastic and then the hermit life, Abelard earned his wealth through the many students he acquired. Teaching in the twelfth century was a pay-as-you-go system for students, who directly paid their teachers for instruction. As a famed teacher, Abelard had a number of students supporting him and had the opportunity to make considerable riches by teaching them. Student support allowed him to establish schools such as the ones he began in Melun and Paris. He could move wherever he pleased and students would loyally follow.[199] Many of these students stood by him at his two heresy trials. His reputation allowed him to move all over greater France, "[w]hole districts and towns would be excited at his coming,"[200] or to any city that had a cathedral and school. His fame gave him the freedom of having a teaching career whenever and wherever he desired.

Having a reputation for challenging authority cast Abelard as an outsider, something of a misfit, but one with sympathetic protectors. For he used his fame to make friends with his enemies' enemies and with those challenging the established power structure. People attached themselves to him for "personal reasons" as well as to be associated with his fame, for some of them felt that he was another outcast.[201] Abelard built relationships with a number of dangerous and powerful people. He was known to have good relations with Bertrada, the queen of France whose legitimacy was constantly in question. He was also linked to Stephen de Garlande, who was always in and out of the favor of the royal court, but someone who protected him when he could. For example, Stephen helped Abelard free himself from the sentence of silence imposed on him and

[199] Luscombe, *Letters of Abelard*, 7.
[200] Luscombe, *School of Peter,* 3.
[201] Ibid, 9-10.

sheltered him when he fled his rivals.[202] His various protectors proved to be important for Abelard's survival; they aided him in times of need. Abelard had made friends in high places, friends who were willing to rescue him from the consequences of his various scandals. His reputation as a scholar and outsider brought Abelard to the attention of some very powerful people.

Women, money, and status are all Abelard could have asked for, but one of the most powerful gains Abelard made from his fame was immortality. The memory of Abelard lived on centuries after his death, making him an icon for the breaking of medieval boundaries. Contemporaries and scholars centuries later read and described the life of Peter Abelard. They wrote epitaphs about his passing, ignoring the controversies that surrounded his life and focusing on those actions that challenged medieval Catholic society and its power structures.[203] Abelard was glorified in his passing, and this image has carried into present scholarship and into legends of his romantic affair with Heloise. Current scholarship, including the works of Clanchy, Luscombe, and Mews, continues to discuss the magnitude of Abelard and his career.

The advantages of the fame Abelard experienced were numerous, but they came at a cost. Abelard faced many challenges and painful events in order to reach and maintain the level of fame he achieved. Always at the centre of scandal and controversy, Abelard made enemies and suffered from his own demons. There was considerable darkness behind the great master's success.

Abelard chalked up his enemies to jealousy. He presented his life as a binary contest between fame and envy, if you did not admire him you envied him. Never able to admit that he may have crossed lines that made people cross with him, Abelard could not see the irony in the enemies he made. His rivals did their best to attack his ideas and teachings in order to hold their own students and attract new ones. This was the same strategy Abelard had used; he picked debates with his masters to express his dominance in the scholarly world. Other scholars saw Abelard's success and they too sought out the

[202] Constant J. Mews, "Bertrada de Montfort, Peter Abelard and Adelard of Bath: The Critique of Authority in the Early Twelfth Century," *Parergon* 32, no. 1 (2015): 7. http://muse.jhu.edu.
[203] Ibid, 11.

fame and reputation Abelard was building for himself. He had people who viewed him as the one to dethrone. Controversies about his teachings and writings made him an even larger target to his critics and scholars desiring a piece of his riches and fame. But, sometimes these critics were given valid evidence from Abelard himself. At times, Abelard's ideas and theories pushed the boundaries too hard. At times his writings called into question orthodox teachings. Abelard's *Theologia* rationalized religion with logic, raising questions on the accepted orthodox Christian beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church, but the Trinity may not be susceptible to logical division and rational discourse. Abelard was philosophizing about religion, and it was that boundary breaking that offended Bernard of Clairvaux.

Abelard's famed writings and teaching caught the eye of Bernard, who soon became Abelard's orthodoxy "watchdog."[204] Bernard's goal was to condemn Abelard for his teachings, desiring to return some of Abelard's followers and students to the straight and narrow. But, much like Abelard, Bernard crossed the lines of a scholarly rivalry into personal attacks. Abelard's rivalries led to multiple assaults on his teachings and on his character. He was not only criticized for being devious and corrupt morally, but also because he had blurred the lines between religion, philosophy, and identity. The church controlled such a large part of medieval life that it was very hard to separate one's self from its established ideology. Abelard's personal actions, such as writing the *Theologia* and the affair with Heloise, influenced how other religious figures viewed him. He was likened to a "fox" slowly corrupting the church with his heretical ideas.[205] In the eyes of his enemies, including the pope, Abelard embodied the corruption infecting or threatening to infect the Catholic Church.

The picture Bernard painted led to Abelard's condemnation for heresy in 1141. Abelard was issued a letter of condemnation from Pope Innocent II, sentencing him to silence along with his followers.[206] Forced to "cast into the fire with his own hand the books

[204] Emero Stiegman, "Chap. 9-Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St Thierry, the Victorines" in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 131.

[205] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Life and Works of Saint Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux*. 4 vols., trans. Samuel J. Eales (London: J. Hodges, 1889-96), vol. 2, pp.384. Latin.

[206] Luscombe, *School of Peter*, 7.

that he had published" in 1121 after his first unfair trial, Abelard experienced humiliating attacks throughout his career.[207] His reputation for being a fornicator and for being a heretic haunted his career after Soissons. Bernard formed a vendetta against him, hoping to humiliate him with charges of heresy, but also to undermine the attention given to Abelard and his popularity with students.

Scholars and churchmen were not Abelard's only rivals. He had been disturbed by the intellectual laziness of the unreformed monks at St-Denis, and so had (correctly) challenged their identification of their founder. The monks of St-Gildas, ironically, had probably chosen him as their abbot because of his reputation for loose and outrageous behavior, which they hoped would extend to his supervision of them. When that proved not to be the case, they turned against him but "did not deal with poison but with a sword held to my throat"; Abelard lived his days in the abbey he headed in fear for his own life.[208] Seeing him as the enemy for trying to fix their corrupt ways, Abelard soon found the same hatred he found from his scholastic rivals. They viewed him as an outsider and did not want to be reformed.

Abelard could stand up to his rivals, calling them the "perverted who seek to pervert and whose wisdom is only for destruction."[209] But, he could not free himself from the trap of his own persona. The subject of praise and the victim of criticism, being famous meant that many wanted a say in Abelard's life and decisions. The public was involved in parsing the personal lives of Abelard and Heloise, no longer allowing them a division between the public and private. The relationship between Heloise and Abelard was never quite a private affair, their secret wedding was never kept secret, and members of the community gathered outside Abelard's home after the castration in order to register their shock and offer sympathy.[210] The sins and humiliation of Abelard and Heloise became a common

[207] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Life and Works of Saint Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux*. 4 vols., trans. Samuel J. Eales (London: J. Hodges, 1889-96), vol. 2, pp.84. Latin.

[208] Luscombe, *Letters of Peter*, 117.

[209] Michael T. Clanchy, "Part 2-Was Abelard Right to Deny that He had Written a Book of 'Sentences'?" in *Rethinking Abelard: A collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Babette S Hellemans and Han Van Ruler (Leiden: Koninlikjke Brill NV, 2014), 107.

[210] Luscombe, *Letters of Peter,* 103.

topic of the community gossip mill. An angry Heloise even called public opinion to her side to support her complaints to Abelard,

> It was desire, not affection, which bound you to me, the flame of lust rather than love. So when the end came to what you desired, any show of feeling you used to make went with it. This most dearly beloved, is not so much my opinion as everyone's, not so much a particular or private view as the common or public one.[211]

Heloise presented the argument that even the public, which was sold the glorious fantasy of Abelard, was able to witness the flaws in their relationship. The public was involved in their personal lives, and kept providing their opinions even after the lovers separated to enter monastic life. When Abelard bestowed the Paraclete upon Heloise leaving it under her control as abbess, the public complained that he was not doing enough to support them.[212] When he did, rumours began about another affair between the two of them.[213] There was no way of winning against the public vote in Abelard's Paris. Abelard's reputation attracted the critical eye of the public.

The reputation Abelard developed placed his life under perpetual scrutiny. At times, this may have been worse than having enemies. People's admiration was fickle and maintaining public approval was a full time job. Abelard had created a name for himself, but he was no longer the youthful lover and song-writer of fame, but a castrated monk twice condemned as a heretic. But what is celebrity without heartache and adoring fans? The criticism was just part of the cost of being a public figure.

Was his fame worth what it cost him? For Abelard, it must have been. We cannot know what psychological forces drove Abelard to want and need public attention. The wealth, status, and women, including Heloise, seem to have been powerful motivating factors early on, but he continued stepping into trouble after his castration when wealth, status, and adoring women could no longer have had the same appeal. But, through fame

[211] Ibid, 139.
[212] Ibid, 103.
[213] Ibid.

Abelard also gained a storied immortality. He broke ground in celebrity culture by achieving a level of status not seen before. He had become the centre of attention in the scholarly world for his debates and writings, in the secular community for his affair and scandals, in religion for his accommodating female needs in monastic life, and in theology for trying to rationalize that which was beyond the rational. It would fall to Thomas Aquinas with Aristotle in hand to find a way to pull off that trick without being declared a heretic. In the end, Abelard had become a famous name in many dimensions of medieval life.

4.2. Did Abelard intentionally set out to become famous?

Abelard created a legacy. He imprinted himself on history with scholarship and scandal. But, how much of his success was orchestrated? Was Abelard in full control of his future or was he just blessed by Fortuna? Or was his fame just a product of his particular personality? When analyzing the events that led to Abelard building such a reputation, it does not appear that events were always under Abelard's control. But, it also appears that Abelard believed that no publicity was bad publicity. He did not distinguish fame from infamy; instead, he took every opportunity to remind the world that he was both relevant and important.

Abelard was an opportunist. At times, he intentionally caused scandals and controversies to elevate the status of his name. Praised for his intelligence, Abelard was not unaware of his actions or their consequences. He was extensively educated as a child, and taught to think not only like a noble and a soldier, but as a privileged eldest son. Abelard gave up his birth rights to become an intellectual soldier, and, despite his great infractions, he died a man of the cloth. Spending periods of his life being a devout Christian, Abelard had witnessed other men make claims of "intellectual heresy," but Abelard and his master Roscelin were among the first to be attacked for it.[214]. This is why Abelard's *Theologia* is such a surprising work. This text pushed the bounds of orthodoxy resulting in heresy charges and two trials, an unusual punishment for such written claims.

[214] Heinrich Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages, 1100-1200*, trans. Denise A. Kaiser (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 281-311.

Although Abelard denied the controversy of the text, he had knowingly pushed boundaries and pushed them to the extent that they were heretical or could be misinterpreted as heretical. In this case, rivals accused him of subjecting the Holy Trinity to logical analysis.[215] But, Abelard also benefited from these accusations. Heresy trials were unusual and rarely took place, but Abelard was tried twice and his fame (or infamy) skyrocketed because of them. He became the focus of discussion in both 1120s and 1140s due to these charges and convictions.

Abelard's condemnation in 1140 was of special public interest because it was very uncommon for intellectual heresy accusations to be brought to trial. Abelard had been the centre of one of the two famous trials of his time, the other being the trial of Gilbert of Poitiers.[216] Other scholars, such as William of Conches, had been accused of similar charges, but no record exists of William ever being brought to trial. Why? The pattern of prosecution in the twelfth century, as presented by Paul Dutton, allowed scholars to redeem themselves by correcting their writings in order to avoid trial. It is likely William of Conches was (or at least appeared to be) more willing to correct his work than Abelard or Gilbert.[217] Abelard had been an example for William of the severe punishment that came from upholding controversial beliefs; Bernard and the court had condemned Abelard in hopes of deterring others from supporting ideas that conflicted with orthodox beliefs and, such as in the case of William, it seems to have worked.[218] The lack of intellectual heresy trials and the use of Abelard as an example by the Church made Abelard a public spectacle. It was shocking to see Abelard brought to trial and excommunicated when others who faced similar claims were never charged. Most scholars of the twelfth century would have succumbed to the pressure of orthodoxy, but Abelard's unwillingness to revise and retract his ideas gave the Church no other option than to put him on trial. Although heresy trials were rare and Abelard likely did not expect to go to trial, he probably expected

[215] Otto of Friesing and Rahewin, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow and Richard Emery (New York: WW Norton & Company Inc., 1953), 83.

[216] Paul Dutton, *The Mystery of the Missing Heresy Trial of William of Conches*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2006), 14.

[217] Ibid, 11-12.

[218] Ibid, 22.

that continuing his feud with Bernard would bring him public attention and make him the centre of debate.

Abelard presented ideas that challenged the religious norm. After being charged with heresy, Abelard continued to cause religious conflict by naming his oratory the Paraclete. Denying that he was trying to make trouble, Abelard claimed he was misunderstood for he had dedicated his church to the Holy Trinity who had offered him comfort during his suffering. But, it is hard to imagine, considering that he was invoking the same topic that led to his two trials.[219] After already suffering through accusations of being a heretic, why would Abelard choose such a controversial name? Likely, Abelard was doing a bit of his own public relations and advertising for his new school. This controversy announced Abelard's return from retirement; it beckoned his students to return to him, which they did. His students provided donations and funding that made the Paraclete self-sufficient. The advertisement of the Paraclete allowed Abelard to return to the life of a master he had missed after his castration and disgrace.

After two trials and the controversy over the Paraclete, how could Abelard be unaware that his ideas and sayings would get him into trouble? Abelard's switch from logic to theology was a recipe for disaster, and bound to offend believers such as Bernard. Yet, Abelard began glossing the Bible, especially its more difficult passages.[220] Interpreting and rationalizing holy passages risked violating the bounds of religious acceptance and would lead to Abelard being declared a heretic, but heresy accusations were very familiar to Abelard. He began his glossings by writing a treatise, one that was well received by his students, but that destroyed his relationship with his master, Anselm of Laon. Anselm believed that Abelard was committing heresy or in danger of eventually doing so.[221] Abelard seems to have developed a strategy that caused people to react, bringing him into the spotlight of society. He challenged orthodox views of the Holy Trinity, wrote a book of sentences (or sayings), compiled the *Sic et Non* (*Yes and No)* in which he laid out

[219] Luscombe, *Letters of Peter*, 85-87.

[220] Ibid, 19."At my first lecture there were certainly not many people present… [b]ut all who came liked it so much that they commended the lecture particularly widely, and urged me to provide glosses on the text on the same lines as my lecture. The news brought people who had missed my first lecture flocking to the second and third ones"

[221] Ibid, 55.

contradictions between the Fathers and even a few passages of scripture, and later on revealed his sins with Heloise in the *Historia Calamitatum*. Abelard wanted people to know of him and in so doing create an image that few could ignore.

Abelard did not just exist; he acted. He created a character or persona named Abelard who was always of public interest, if only by being a public spectacle. Revisiting the scandals of his life in the *Historia Calamitatum* and attempting to defend his actions was one of many deliberate attempts to reclaim a positive reputation or to recast the public or official view of this persona of "Abelard". Abelard used the *Historia Calamitatum* and some of the personal letters as a tool to explain his troubles and defend his reputation. In the text Abelard declared "The true story of both these episodes I now want you to know from the facts, in their proper order, instead of from hearsay."[222] Abelard was aware that he was the centre of discussion and of "hearsay". As medieval fame in its origins is related to speech and gossip, this is proof Abelard knew that he was talked about and so famous, and desired to protect his reputation.

In the *Historia Calamitatum* Abelard placed his affair with Heloise centre stage, but it was the only one of his scandals for which he blamed himself, in order, it would seem, to defend Heloise. But, it was also to set the record straight as numerous rumours had spread. By telling the full story of the relationship, Abelard was able to resist and refute allegations that he was again having a romantic affair with Heloise; it was also an opportunity to show that after the first affair he had tried to do the right thing by marrying her. Most other events described in his memoir, he attributed to envious and hateful rivals or to him being the victim of circumstances beyond his control. One reason for this might be that these other events of his life had had a smaller public audience and did not require as much defending.

Written in 1132, the *Historia Calamitatum* returned to many troublesome events from earlier in his life. Why recall them at all? Perhaps, so that he could clean the slate, escape St-Gildas, and return to Paris and to teaching with his reputation restored or, at least, defended. It was a daring but dangerous plan, but he did leave St-Gildas and did return to Paris where John of Salisbury encountered him in 1136. The *Historia*

[222] Ibid, 23.

Calamitatum had reminded that Parisian audience that he had conquered great masters in the past and might do so again.

Abelard's autobiographical letter was also his chance to discuss his actions from his own point of view. The memoir created an opportunity to prove that he had achieved his career through deliberate action and choice. As Clanchy points out, the "*Historia Calamitatum* is the self-told story of how Abelard chose his own destiny and achieved fame (or notoriety)."[223] Abelard used the text to discuss his reputation and success, manipulating the past to reflect a victim who was often wronged by the world and was apologetic for his sins. But he also dealt with some accidents that befell him such as a fall from a horse that left him in great pain and slow to heal. His woes were many, and not all of them self-inflicted. But he spun his major mistakes and failures into victories and asked for public sympathy and forgiveness.

In the 1120s Abelard became known for his scandals and his rivals fed on the many rumours that circulated. But, by the time Abelard wrote the *Historia Calamitatum,* the rumours had died down. In 1132 he felt that he needed to clear his name before he could escape St-Gildas once and for all and return to Paris and to teaching. Along with the personal letters, which began as Heloise's wounded response to the *Historia Calamitatum*, Abelard revisited the events of his life that had brought him to the attention of the wider world. Heloise summarized the scandals that had surrounded Abelard in a personal letter to him:

> You did not gloss over what at their instigation was done to your glorious book of Theology or what amounted to a prison sentence passed on yourself. Then you went on to the plotting against you by your abbot and false brethren, the serious slanders from those two pseudo-apostles, spread against you by the same rivals, and the scandal stirred up among many people because you had acted contrary to custom in naming your oratory after the Paraclete. And finally you went on to the incessant, intolerable persecutions which you still endure at the hands of that

[223] Michael Clanchy, *Documenting the self: Abelard and individual history*, (London: University of London, 2003), 300.

> cruel tyrant and the evil monks you call your sons, and so brought your wretched story to an end.[224]

Heloise's letter recalled the tragedies of Abelard's life but presented them as wrongs done to him by others. She reinforced his idea that he was a victim of malicious people, punished for no good reason. By returning to the events of his life years later, in a time when the public might have lost track of them, the couple took the opportunity to refashion the public memory of Abelard. They could focus on reminding the world of his life as a great master while apologizing for and downplaying the controversial choices and missteps he had made, such as the naming of the Paraclete.

Abelard took this time in his life as a chance to clean up some of the collateral damage he had inflicted during his climb to fame or, at least, to explain it away. The *Historia Calamitatum* also allowed Abelard to frame his life around the most painful events of his life, the affair, its violent aftermath, and the heresy charges that led to the burning of his book.[225] Asking for understanding, Abelard appeared to be an apologetic blaming his mistakes on his youth and youthful pride, but he also needed to reframe the perception of his affair with Heloise. Clanchy describes the *Historia Calamitatum* as being a story of how "Abelard chose his own destiny and achieved fame," believing Abelard used the text for "drawing attention to his own 'fame' and the 'envy'" of other scholars.[226] Abelard's actions appear to have been a calculated road to success, but the *Historia Calamitatum* had a more limited purpose: to extricate him from a monastery where his monks wanted to murder him and to clear the way for his return to Paris. Although he was not known for his social skills, he was intelligent and a charmer. The *Historia Calamitatum* provides evidence of a self-reflective Abelard, but not a particularly self-critical one.

Abelard's relationship with Heloise was also an act of manipulation. For she was one of society's misfits, brilliant, but probably the illegitimate child of an unknown father., There has even been some speculation that Fulbert may have been her father despite the

[224] Luscombe, *Letters of Peter*, 123-125.

[225] Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Chap. 1-Heloise the Abbess" in *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 470.

[226] Clanchy, 302.

public posture that he was her uncle.[227] Abelard had seduced a woman who was the closest a woman could be to his intellectual equal and, by being an ill fit with society, which expected women to marry and produce children, available to him. Heloise was a conscious choice. She was viewed as “the equal of her Peter in feeling, deeds, and intellectual skill” and “the sexual love of Abelard and Heloise [wa]s neither condemned or ignored” by the public.[228] Whether Abelard knew the impact Heloise would have on his life is questionable, but he had chosen an intellectual woman over the many women who swooned over him at the time.

Abelard knew the scandal that would come from bedding Heloise. In the *Historia Calamitatum,* he described the passion of the relationship, and the lust, calculation, and cunning that led to the affair. Instead of discussing the topics of Heloise’s education and their relationship as teacher and student, Abelard reviewed the scandal, drawing attention to every detail as if to flaunt their promiscuity and condemn himself. The affair fascinated the public once his castration brought the whole story out. Abelard had become part of household gossip which opened him to a new celebrity status, a reputation that expanded beyond the world of clerics and scholars.

The marriage seems to have been more than an attempt to appease Fulbert, but one to improve Abelard’s stance in a shocked society. Abelard insisted on the marriage, even as Heloise resisted. In the *Historia Calamitatum,* Abelard does not so much flaunt his scandalous behaviour, as explain it as the by-product of his overweening pride at the time. Although he intended the marriage to be kept a secret so as to preserve his right to teach, he was quick to maintain that he had done the right and honourable thing by marrying his lover. The effect of the publicized love affair lifted Abelard’s celebrity to unheard of heights.

Heloise was the most significant personal relationship of Abelard’s drive to fame, but there were others. As Abelard became an appealing figure among those challenging

[227] Luscombe, *Letters of Peter*, 25. R.H. Bautier, ‘Paris au Temps d’Abelard’, *Abelard en son Temps*, ed J. Jolivet (Paris 1981), pp. 75-77.

[228] Peter Dronke, *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1992), 00.

the system, he gained the protection of controversial figures: the contested queen of France, Bertrada, Stephen Garlande, with his connections in the royal court, and others.[229] These relationships were not a coincidence, for he cultivated powerful men and women who would protect him from the old orthodoxies, or so he hoped. But there was quicksand here, for these high friends were themselves often not firmly secure in their power.

Abelard appealed to a wider public than other scholars could in the twelfth century. He had renounced his noble rights and reinvented himself as a daring young logician. He distanced himself from his roots in Le Pallet to avoid being associated with his native identity and the cliché about flighty Bretons.[230] He gave up his role as head of a noble family to fight religious and scholarly wars. He selected a way of life that was unusual for the first-born son of a minor noble family. And, when his persona became too much for society, Abelard was able to distance himself from it and transform himself once again by becoming a monk. In the later years of his life, as described in the *Historia Calamitatum*, Abelard presented himself as having been filled with youthful indiscretion and, by taking on the role of narrator, distanced himself from the character he was in his youth, the one the public had begun to question.[231] When he was shamed for having an affair, he married Heloise and then entered monastic life. When he was condemned for heresy, he promoted himself as a humble man turned hermit. Abelard created a caricature or persona of himself, presenting an image that was misunderstood and apologetic, but which might appeal to his audience and keep him in their good graces.

Along with changing elements of his identity to fit the expectations of the public, Abelard also had certain personality traits that influenced the growth of his reputation. Brashly confident, Abelard made daring statements. At one point, he declared himself the "supreme philosopher in the world".[232] This was part of the confident character Abelard

[229] See: Constant J. Mews, "Bertrada de Montfort, Peter Abelard and Adelard of Bath: The Critique of Authority in the Early Twelfth Century," *Parergon* 32, no. 1 (2015): 1-29. http://muse.jhu.edu.

[230] M.T. Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Malden, MA: Blackewell Publishing, 1999, rev. 2005), 29.

[231] Peter Godman, "Fame without Conscience," in *Paradoxes of Conscience in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70.

[232] Constant J. Mews, "Heloise and liturgical experience at the Paraclete," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 11, no. 1 (2002): 294, doi:10.1017/S0961137102002024.

had created for himself and was, in part, due to the many masters he had bested in scholarly disputes. He assured the world of his greatness. Although narcissistic, this self-promotion allowed Abelard to emphasize his talents over his flaws. The rumours of his greatness as a teacher and celebrity figure spread over Europe. His out-sized personality was an opportunity for Abelard to spread his good name and attract others to him, a deliberate move to bring him students and wealth. Abelard's family raised him to be special and rewarded him for his intelligence.[233] Abelard's confidence and clever self-promotion made his career.

The many disputes between Abelard and the masters was a tactic used by Abelard to gain notoriety. In other words, the academic controversies advertised his wares to students and their parents who were looking for a master to train their sons. By defeating the great masters, Abelard gained a reputation for being a scholar at the forefront of the new methods of teaching and learning, which was just what students were looking for in the new urban environment of the cathedral schools. Abelard gloated over his defeat of his master, William of Champeaux. In his letter, Abelard wrote of how his reputation grew as he defeated his master and people began to see him as superior to the well-established William.[234] Learning this tactic from his teacher Roscelin, Abelard participated in scholarly warfare with all the greats to advance himself.[235] Abelard took on Anselm of Laon, the great teacher of scripture, and then later would defend himself against the onslaught of Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard accused Abelard of heresy multiple times because of his problematic *Theologia;* Abelard seems to have acknowledged difficulties with the text by revising it three times. As the *Beati Gosvini Vita* describes, Abelard became recognized for being an "inventor of strange and unheard of things and asserted entirely novel claims, and in order to establish his own theories he set out to disprove what others had proved."[236] Newness and currency were what Abelard offered a new generation of

[233] Godman, 70.

[234] Luscombe, *Letters of Peter*, 5, 7.

[235] G.R. Evans, "Chap. 6-Berengar, Roscelin, and Peter Damian" in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 91.

[236] Alex J. Novikoff, *The Middle Ages Series: Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance* (Philadelphia: 2013), 80. See also: Richard Gibbons, ed., *Beati Gosvini Vita…*(Douai: M.Wyon, 1620), pp. 12-18. Latin.

students; he was the new man imparting new ways of thinking and logic was a tool with which to carve away the fuzzy thinking of the old timers. Abelard was openly criticized and condemned for his ideas, yet continued to challenge the norms of society, each time his persecutions brought him even more "renown."[237] What could this be other than a call for attention?

At the same time, Abelard distanced himself from men of lower stature. Knowing the poor public opinion of his own master Roscelin, Abelard abandoned his first master, making no mention of his time with Roscelin in the *Historia Calamitatum* despite the critical influence of Roscelin on his education in logic and Aristotelianism. He preferred to link himself to distinguished men, usually with the intention of defeating them in a scholarly contest.[238] The relationships Abelard forged were to the benefit of his reputation or to protect his person.

David Luscombe and Joseph de Ghellinck discuss the extent of Abelard's fame among scholars, describing him as "the only medieval master whose contemporaries recorded his fame so universally and with such enthusiasm and horror."[239] A dialectician of Abelard's sort was bound to make enemies, just as Socrates once had.

Abelard's intention to become a recognized figure is evident. The most revealing are the numerous passages in the *Historia Calamitatum* where Abelard described his fame. At one point, he quotes Augustine who believed "fama implies a responsibility for others."[240] Abelard had taken this advice to heart. He created a lively relationship both with the public and with his fellow scholars. He now had a responsibility to educate and stimulate the public with new ideas about how best to think. Abelard's discussion of fame also included another quotation from Augustine that stated "He who relies on his

[237] Luscombe, *Letters of Peter*, 21.

[238] Friesing and Rahewin, 83.

[239] David Luscombe, *The School of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 1.

[240] Ineke van't Spijker, "Inner and Outer in Abelard and Hugh of Saint Victor" in *Rethinking Abelard: A collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Babette S Hellemans and Han Van Ruler (Leiden: Koninlikjke Brill NV, 2014), 100.

conscience to the neglect of his reputation is cruel to himself"[241] and men's goals are honourable in the eyes of God. Augustine suggested that reputation was more important than morality and Abelard personalized this belief. By prioritizing his reputation, Abelard could justify his actions.

Abelard feared losing his reputation, as his castration showed, for he worried less about the physical damage done to his body than the loss of his reputation.[242] For now he would become a figure of fun, the butt of crude comments wherever he went in the world. Thus, he abandoned the world for a monastic life. Abelard used the *Historia Calamitatum* to reclaim or remake his reputation, hoping to gain the forgiveness or understanding of people who had condemned him for his sins. In this text, Abelard openly admitted that his life as a monk was less than successful, since he could not get along with the unreformed monks of St-Denis and could not command and correct the corrupt monks of St-Gildas.[243] Abelard belonged in the classroom, not in quiet cell.

Although he may not have had the best social skills, Abelard had some self-awareness and self-reflectiveness, not common features of much of medieval society. Despite this awareness and his designing ways, there were still elements of fortune in the creation and success of his career.

Abelard's intention to become famous is evident in his actions, but there were factors outside of his control that aided his success. Abelard had history and fate on his side. For example, although he took advantage of his education to become a scholarly soldier, Abelard had been blessed with lower noble status. His father required that all his sons receive a good education and this was a distinct advantage for a man wishing to enter the schools. He was trained in Latin, allowing him to read the texts of the ancients; that was the doorway to intellectual life in the twelfth century. Abelard's father was a Poitevin who had started to establish himself in medieval society at the time of Abelard's birth. He was able to offer Abelard connections to powerful people and enough wealth to

[241] Luscombe, *Letters of Peter*, 107.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Clanchy, *Documenting the Self,* 303.

support his passion for the arts. In addition, Abelard's mother was probably an heiress.[244] Fortuna had set Abelard down in a family of some privilege that allowed him to chase his scholarly dreams instead of fighting petty local wars and trying to please greater lords. Growing up with servants and nice clothes, Abelard had had a silver spoon from birth.

Along with the gift of wealth and status, Abelard was blessed with good looks, at least according to him; these looks apparently appealed to many women and aided in his success with Heloise. He relied on his "exceptional good looks" and "reputation" to court his lover.[245] The arrogance and self-admiration of Abelard buttressed the reputation he was building for himself and could not have hurt in the vibrant urban society that was forming in the early twelfth century in northern France. The privilege of an education and the claim of good looks allowed Abelard to act in ways few other twelfth-century men would consider.

Although his relationship with Heloise was a choice, some of the events that propelled him to even greater fame were out of his control. The reach of the affair into the public sphere far exceeded any level of publicity that Abelard could have imagined. This relationship created legends of romance, especially stories of "an impressionable teenager infatuated with her teacher" that would last into the seventeenth century.[246] Their love became an archetype of medieval romance, especially in poetry. Abelard's identity became linked to this relationship, as the public weighed in on his treatment of Heloise as his lover and wife, the daughter of God, and eventually on his treatment of her as the head of the Paraclete.

The most famous moment of the Heloise-Abelard relationship, however, was his castration. Abelard openly flaunted the affair in his autobiography, but the relationship was limited to whispers and gossip as it was taking place in order to hide it from Fulbert. But, the castration became a defining public moment for their relationship and Abelard's life. He became a sympathetic figure for once in his life. Having been unmanned, Abelard

[244] Clanchy*, Medieval Life,* 137.

[245] Luscombe, *Letters of Peter*, 27.

[246] Constant J. Mews, "Chap. 3-Philosophical Themes" in *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 36.

received the heartfelt sympathy of his followers, who believed he had already righted his wrong by marrying Heloise. At first the castration unfolded as he suspected it would, bringing him humiliation and shame, but it led him to a rebirth and new life in the monastery.

Much like the castration, Abelard described the Paraclete as an accident in his autobiography. He described it as being founded by the number of followers and students who followed him into the hermit life. They provided him with the building materials and all other necessities to keep him and his students comfortable. Abelard had no intention to create the Paraclete. Running away from the difficulties he had made for himself at St-Denis, Abelard had secluded himself and his loyal followers. Unknown to Abelard, the Paraclete would expand and focus on praising him.

Part of Abelard's success in emerging as a celebrity can be attributed to history. As discussed in the introduction, this was a time of change. The state of rulership in Europe was breaking down. Education was undergoing a fertile reform in the twelfth century as the older monastic form of religious and rote education was being replaced with cathedral schools, a new generation of masters, and new ways of critical thinking.[247] This period of change offered an opportunity for Abelard to propound new ideas. It was an opportunity for him to dispute great masters and write bold disquisitions such as the controversially entitled *Theologia*. A new world provided an opportunity for a new man of Abelard's sort to break out of the strictures of traditional medieval ways of life and thought.

Finally, Abelard had little control over the spread of his writing. Many of his contemporaries describe how his texts spread all over Europe and made him recognized as a great master.[248] His books became part of libraries and students flocked to his schools. Without the printing press, it is fascinating to see how far his texts and reputation spread. Abelard boasted of their spread, but he had no control over the reception of his ideas.[249] Lucky to have his texts spread, Abelard was able to take advantage of a new

[247] Clanchy*, Medieval Life,* 52.
[248] Ibid, 91.
[249] Luscombe, *The School of Peter, 2.*

group of students who came to him. It was no longer necessary for him to defeat masters in order to advertise his pre-eminence.

Abelard made his best effort to become famous. He presented himself in the best light, connected himself to the right people, and did his best to appear a victim to forces beyond his control. But Abelard's life was an exceptional one, part of it under his control, much of it not. His desire to win fame and the circumstances he found himself in allowed him to emerge as an unforgettable figure of French letters and medieval modernity.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

Abelard created a new kind of fame, both in his own time and the following centuries, one based on intellectual combat and the public person. Born into minor nobility he received an excellent education and was able to renounce his first-born rights in order to pursue the life of a wandering scholar. But his career and style of life led to a series of controversies and never-ending turmoil that attracted the attention of the church, scholastic community, and a wider public across Europe. He had promoters and protectors who could shelter him from the assaults of many of his enemies, but not all. Benefits accrued from the public persona he created, especially fame and position, women and wealth. The times helped him, for twelfth-century northern Europe was undergoing a growth of population, mobility, and institutions. Times of change want new men and women, ones offering new ideas, distinctive voices, and compelling narratives--Abelard was perfectly positioned to step into such a role. He intuitively read his time and shaped it and himself to the purpose.

The immensity of Abelard's life has not been lost on academic study, but the study of his fame has been. As Clanchy noted, Abelard as a public figure is an important and interesting hole in twelfth-century scholarship.[250] He suffered attacks on his character and writings, twice survived heresy charges, found himself an immensely popular teacher, and became a hero for the counter culture of the troubadours and small cities of his day. Many of his followers stuck with him, following him into his hermit retreat and assisting him in the foundation of a new monastery, the Paraclete, where he taught and reflected. [251]

Abelard had pushed his way into an elite society by becoming famous, a significant accomplishment given the rigid social and professional hierarchies of medieval Europe. The significance of his achievement of fame is great enough, but he also forged a new type of fame and provided a model for those who followed him: the scholarly star, lay poet, bon-vivant, lover. Abelard became a public figure in his own right, living a colourful life filled with controversy and surprising behaviour. Fame was no longer limited to saints and

[250] Clanchy, *Celebrity and Charisma,* 1142.
[251] Ibid, 1141.

monarchs, for he had opened up a new dimension of celebrity and fame for medieval men, as, it could be argued, Heloise did for women.

Abelard's fame was a product of his personality and drive, but also of new medieval developments and possibilities, and may have something to tell us about the creation of a new dimensions of fame in the Middle Ages. Although he lived nine centuries before us, the celebrity culture represented by Abelard lives on as a two tiered system of famous political or religious leaders (authority figures) and entertainers in the present. Of the two, the latter are more subject to achieve an unstable popularity that can rise and fall in a moment, but needs constant fuel in the form of new works or events to feed the fires of celebrity. The one great difference between medieval and modern fame, of course, is the emergence of a mass media. Abelard earned his fame at a time without mass communication; the fifteenth-century invention of printing changed all of that and today's electronic media has only speeded up and increased the possibilities of fame and, perhaps, its longevity. But, the essential ingredients of fame then and now are not very different: a compelling life story, materials (be they songs or ideas) to feed fascinations, and eye-catching behaviour. There are still only a few who can become recognized for their talents and controversial lives. Public attention is still piqued by scandal, desiring to see people perform their lives for reputation, wealth, sex, and immortality. Charisma may be elusive, but the famous seem to exude it. Abelard had it, but then so did the Beatles.

But Abelard also served as a medieval example of the cost and rewards of fame. For many, including himself, his life was a morality tale, with lessons about the dangers of greed and desire, fame and wealth, controversy and condemnation. Succumbing to desire and overstepping boundaries are part of the human condition, and Abelard was a prime medieval example. But his youthful desire for fame and fortune found its mid-life pay-back in castration and condemnation. Yet he could not have known what was coming in those early years as he bested revered masters and wooed a learned young woman with his charisma, songs, and fame. And so he broke through the boundaries of medieval society, all the while creating a new kind of daring fame. From his desire for fame came the creation of a medieval celebrity culture, with people promoting their own talents and personae in order to gain reputations and rewards. Troubadour poets in the twelfth century, thirteenth-century scholastics, later medieval public figures like Jean Gerson, and Italian men of

letters would follow Abelard to fame, but the basic mould would be similar, one shaped by attention-getting personalities and publicizing of the self.

In the *Historia Calamitatum,* Abelard presents his best case. He created an image of himself as a victim of an envious world, but guilty and apologetic of having ruined Heloise. He was writing his way back to Paris and the teaching life that would permit his escape from a murderous monastery, but in so doing he outlined the public interest in his life. His audience wanted to know how he had gotten himself into so much trouble and disgrace. He sought sympathy and a new chance to teach and reclaim his life. But beyond the affair with Heloise, he apologized for little, but explained much. The *Historia Calamitatum* may be the greatest and most original work Abelard ever wrote—it was certainly something new, autobiography as *apologia*.

Abelard was a celebrity if by that we mean that he was well-known, desired, and famous. His pursuit of fame, as he himself recognized, was the dominant theme of his life, but he had to shape it anew in a world that had little place for the living famous. Ironically, the other great fame-seeker of the age was Bernard of Clairvaux, but Bernard did it from the inside in the old way, while Abelard created a new path using his own challenging personality and gifts. His life itself was a new defining of fame and its possibilities, rewards, and costs. Unlike his contemporaries, Abelard became famous for being himself. Clanchy argued that the fame of Bernard of Clairvaux was more prominent. But it was also more traditional, institutional, and collective.[252] His fame came from his orthodoxy and its vehicle of distribution was the church. Abelard's fame was self-made, popular, and more unstable. He reached outside the classroom to live a life that was unorthodox. He charmed and infuriated burgeoning Paris by stealing students from his rivals, overthrowing old and respected masters, seducing an impressionable young woman, who longed to be a philosopher, and lived a unique life.

Fama was a term used by Abelard to discuss the attention he received, whether it was good or bad. Intentionally seeking to be in the spotlight, Abelard desired to make a name for himself in the world and Heloise eagerly joined his side, and became the architect of his cult at the Paraclete. The topic of fame in relation to Abelard's life invites a discussion

[252] Clanchy, *Celebrity and Charisma,* 1121.

of the many aspects of fame, then and now. What are the foundational aspects of fame? Are we in control of our own lives and reputations? What are the unique qualities of the rich and famous? How do individuals become exceptional and topics of conversation? The fact that we can ask the same questions about the fame of Peter Abelard and Kanye West suggests the newness of what Abelard was doing in the twelfth century and its relevance to modern fame.

Fame depends upon a reciprocal relationship between the famous person and his or her public. The one supplies attention-inciting entertainment and the public buys it or wants what the famous person provides. The relationship can be broken in a moment, and here we must admit that the medieval time-scale is not the modern one. Abelard was famous over a lifetime for his life, but the modern world is more likely to shift its attention instantly. Even Abelard cannot have been much thought about when in a cell of St-Denis or in retreat at St-Gildas. How loyal and lasting were Abelard's supporters? One of his students did become pope, but would likely not have described himself as an Abelardian. Abelard's level of success in the Middle Ages required sacrifice, but those pains and punishments fuelled the story of his life, giving it depth and dimension. As an agent of change, Abelard's record may be mixed, but as a famous person with a fascinating life story to tell he was unrivalled and not soon forgotten.

Abelard was to a large extent the architect of his fame, with the critical help of Heloise. It may well be, however, that he became more famous in the thirteenth century than he was in the twelfth because of the slow spread of the records of his life. Charm and ego had made possible his mission to become a famous public figure, but it was the whole story of his life that needed completion before the medieval morality play that was the famous Abelard was complete and its lessons remembered.

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