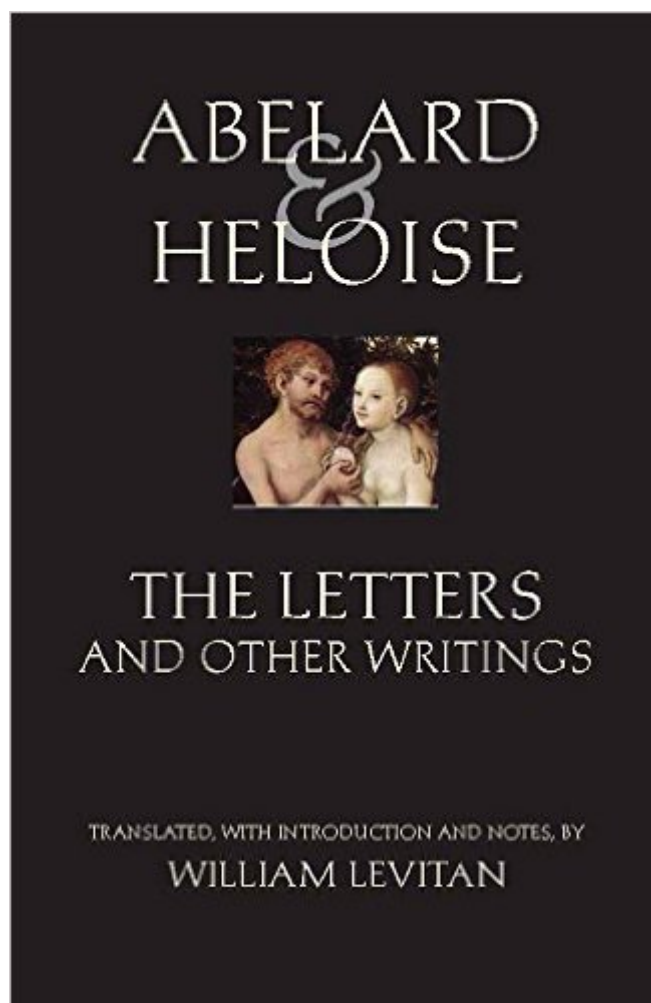


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# Abelard And Heloise: The Letters And Other Writings (Hackett Classics)



## Synopsis

The most comprehensive compilation of the works of Abelard and Heloise ever presented in a single volume in English, *The Letters and Other Writings* features an accurate and stylistically faithful new translation of both *The Calamities of Peter Abelard* and the remarkable letters it sparked between the ill-fated twelfth-century philosopher and his brilliant former student and lover—a exchange whose intellectual passion, formal virtuosity, and psychological drama distinguish it as one of the most extraordinary correspondences in European history. Thanks to this edition, Latin-less readers will be better placed than ever to see why this undisputed milestone in the intellectual life of medieval France is also a masterpiece of Western literature. In addition to the *The Calamities* and the letters—the first complete English translation of all seven in more than eighty years—this volume includes an Introduction, a map, and a chronology, Abelard's Confession of Faith, letters between Heloise and Peter the Venerable, the Introduction to *The Questions of Heloise*, and selected songs and poems by Abelard, among them a previously untranslated shaped poem, *Open Wide Your Eyes*. Extracts of lost letters sometimes ascribed to Abelard and Heloise are given in appendixes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Abelard & Heloise, *The Letters and other Writings*, Translated, with Introduction and Notes by William Levitan. I wish to offer this review as a rebuttal to the reviewer who thought it did not have much to offer aside from some of the poetry. To be sure, if one has a passing knowledge of the story

of Abelard and Heloise, you may expect something different from what is in this volume. All these letters were written after the fateful love affair and ad hoc castration of Abelard, when Abelard is a lecturer in theology at a monastery and Heloise was a prioress at a nearby Abby. Therefore, the lions share of text in the letters deals with matters of how to run a monastery. In that regard, they should be read in conjunction with St. Benedict's rule and Basil the Great's letters on the conduct in a monastery. When the early events in their life are brought up, they appear as object lessons of what not to do, as when Abelard writes, in the fourth letter: Consider then how appropriately God's justice - or rather, it was God's grace - dragged you against your will to the calling you were not afraid to mock, wanting you to atone for that desecration while wearing the same habit you once profaned, to answer the lie with the truth of the event and correct the falsehood of your pretense. Since our store of Abelard's writings in English is so thin, these letters often provide insights into his ethical and theological thoughts on atonement. One will also find evidence here for the feminists case (see especially Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock) that Abelard's atonement doctrines encourage pastors to preach submission to abuse of women and children (I am NOT saying this happens, only that such things are mentioned in feminist writings).

"Since there must never be the slightest cause for you to find fault with my obedience, a bridle has been set upon my words, although my grief itself is still untamed. Your order now is that I moderate myself and refrain at least from writing what is not difficult but impossible to guard against in speech." ~ Heloise

If you are ordering this book to read the love letters of Abelard and Heloise you may be disappointed as I was. Yes, there are a few short romantic letters at the end of the book but they seem to only be an afterthought and might not even be the lost letters they claim to be. I think this book will appeal mostly to religious people who are also interested in the life of nuns in an abbey or monks in a monastery. Heloise asks Abelard for instructions for how she is to run an abbey and his replies are extensive and detailed. Their letters contain many biblical references as well as quotes from famous books they have read. They keep their correspondence very intellectual and instead of writing to each other as lovers, they focus on their responsibilities to God and a higher divine form of love. To give some background to the letters, the book begins with "The Calamities of Peter Abelard." This explains how Abelard and Heloise met and what exactly transpired between them. "Nothing is less in our power than the heart, which is more apt to command us than to obey. And so when the heart's passions rouse us, no one can contain their sudden surge of pressure and keep them from having their effects." ~ Heloise

From this book I can only guess at how Heloise and Abelard managed to be so in love and yet separated for what must have seemed like

an eternity.

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