

HELOISE AND ABELARD

Opera in Three Acts

music by
Stephen Paulus

libretto by
Frank Corsaro

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*Commissioned by The Juilliard School with the
generous support of Francis Goelet*

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Cast of Characters

HELOISE HERSIND	Soprano
16, niece of Fulbert; young, beautiful, and intelligent	
PETER ABELARD	Baritone
38, a pre-eminent Parisian scholar, known for his teachings, writings, and oratory; tall, good-looking	
FULBERT	Tenor
Mid 50s, a canon, the uncle and guardian of Heloise	
WILLIAM of CHAMPEAUX	Bass/Baritone
Mid 50s, scholar, Archdeacon, theologian and friend of Fulbert	
BERTHE	Mezzo Soprano
Older woman, a nun at The Paraclete	
ABBESS	Mezzo Soprano
Older woman, head of the convent at Argenteuil	
DENISE	Mezzo Soprano
Middle aged woman, Abelard's sister and Astrolabe's caregiver	
JOLIVET	Tenor
40s, a priest	
ASTROLABE	Baritone
17, the son of Abelard and Heloise	
FOOL (Master of Ceremonies)	Tenor
30s, a juggler and the Master of Ceremonies at the All Fools Day celebration	
MAN (Hercules)	Tenor
20s, acrobat posing as Hercules during the All Fools Day celebration	
MALE SERVANT	Tenor
FEMALE SERVANT	Mezzo Soprano

CHORUS OF NUNS AND MONKS SATB
Minimum of 8 female and 10 male voices

STUDENTS (Male Voices from the Chorus) TTBB
Young scholars, students of William of Champeaux- taken
from Chorus of Monks

DR. SALVADOS (non-speaking role)
40, actor

FOUR ACTORS (non-speaking roles)
Four masked men

Instrumentation

2 flutes	timpani
2 oboes	2 percussion
2 Bb clarinets	(plus 2 auxiliary percussion)
2 bassoons	harp
2 horns in F	piano
3 trumpets in C	mixed chorus
2 trombones (2 nd -tenor/bass tbn)	strings (minimum 8-7-6-4-3 players)

Place

Paris and the neighboring town of Argenteuil

Time

12th century

Prologue

1164 A.D. Night in the courtyard of the convent known as The
Paraclete

Act One

1117 A.D. Paris – on a street near the unfinished Cathedral of
Notre Dame, in ABELARD'S study and in a private chapel in
Notre Dame.

Act Two

Paris – on a street near Notre Dame, in FULBERT'S study and in
a ruined
chancery at the convent at Argenteuil.

Act Three

Eighteen years later. The courtyard of the convent at Argenteuil
and in the garden outside the Chapel at St. Remy.

Epilogue

1164 A.D. The courtyard of The Paraclete.

Premiere performances

April 24, 27 and 29, 2002

The Juilliard Theater at The Juilliard School
New York, NY

Conductor	Miguel Harth-Bedoya
Stage Director	Frank Corsaro
Set Designer	Franco Colavecchia
Lighting Designer	Matthew Frey
Costume Designer	Christianne Meyers

The Cast

Heloise Hersind	Lauren Skuce
Peter Abelard	John Hancock
Fulbert	Richard Cox
William of Champeaux	Matt Burns
Berthe	Christina Carr
Abbess	Alison Tupay
Denise	Brenda Patterson
Jolivet	Kenneth Bryson
Astrolabe	Woodrow Bynum
Master of Ceremonies (Fool)	Simon O'Neill
Man ("Hercules")	Brandon McReynolds
Male Servant	Antonio Abate
Female Servant	Deborah Domanski
Chorus of Nuns and Monks	Ensemble: Antonio Abate, Daniel Billings, Gabuka Booi, Kenneth Bryson, Amy Buckley, Lauren Cotten, Christine Clemmons, Deborah Domanski, Matthew Garrett, Waldo Gonzalez, Maria Jooste, Hyun Jee Kim, Ezgi Kutlu, Valentin Lanzrein, Ihn Kyu Lee, Isabel Leonard, Michael Rochios and Benjamin Sosland
Students	Matthew Garrett Waldo Gonzalez Valentin Lanzrein Ihn Kyu Lee
Four actors	Daniel Billings Gabuka Booi Kenneth Bryson Michael Rochios
Dr. Salvados	TBA

ACT ONE

Prologue

Argenteuil, a city near Paris, 1164 A.D. The courtyard of the convent known as The Paraclete. Night. Heloise, aged 63, its Abbess, sits in a chair, her former beauty dimmed and gnarled by physical pain. She contemplates a freshly dug grave looming before her. Behind her, unseen, a responsory hymn written by Abelard, is being sung to inaugurate the feast day of Easter.

HELOISE

Sing! Sing! You wolverines of God. Howl! And with his own chant
draw him near.

BERTHE

(Sister Berthe hobbles out from the convent to confront Heloise.)

Mother Heloise. How much longer can you wait? You're trembling like a
leaf.

HELOISE

Here I sit in his chair 'till he comes to fill it.

BERTHE

To disinter Father Abelard's body is a crime!

HELOISE

Then let it be my crime! Am I not still your Abbess?

BERTHE

Mother Heloise, you will lead us to destruction.

HELOISE

(lost in another thought, oblivious to Berthe)

Waiting...waiting...always waiting....

(suddenly aware of Berthe again)

Torches! Torches! Go see if there are torches on the road! Go look for
the torches! Go!!

(Berthe exits shaking her head)

Was it really twenty years ago

When I last saw you?

And now I'll see your face one final time,

And press your lips to mine.

Embrace your shriveled body in my arms!

Why have I outlived you?
How dare you die on me!!

O Abelard!
Abelard!
Abelard!
O Abelard!

Scene One

Paris -on a street near the unfinished Cathedral of Notre Dame. A scaffolding is being built in preparation for the festivities of the Feast of Fools. Several male voices pick up on the name of Abelard - in mocking tones.

STUDENTS (men)

Abelard! Abelard! Abelard!

WILLIAM

(William of Champeaux, in his mid-fifties, is in a heated discussion with Fulbert - of equal age - a canon at Notre Dame)

This infernal cry of Abelard -

STUDENTS

The Archbishop's favorite,

The charismatic wonder.

He joins us here in Paris -

And robs us of our students.

WILLIAM

A renegade, an opportunist, the dullest scholar in my class. How can you contemplate such a scoundrel to tutor your niece?

STUDENTS

William, William. William of Champeaux.

Archdeacon to the Bishop of Paris,

Scholar extraordinaire,

Orator of savoir faire,

Magister exemplair -

Master Theologian - everywhere!

WILLIAM

Thank you brothers!

Canon Fulbert - any one of my masters here would suit your purpose better - since you would deny me my office.

STUDENTS

As custodian of Notre Dame's holy writ, all blessings of learning spring from him.

WILLIAM

I/i

Yet you, my friend and colleague, will not embrace me in this matter of your niece. Think how this will be perceived when it becomes public knowledge.

FULBERT

It is not from your knowledge that I turn.

STUDENTS

Then what?!

FULBERT

Saving your graces – (*spoken*) Abelard stands now in the forefront of public attention. (*sung*) Students flock to him from all over the known world. You cannot deny his influence Champeaux.

WILLIAM

I see you will cut your cloth to suit the fashion. Mark me you will live to regret your choice.

STUDENTS

Domine; Libera me; Domine.

Scene Two

Peter Abelard's private study. Abelard, 38 years old, kneels in prayer nearby the chair in which we saw Heloise, the elder, seated in the Prologue. In evidence is a lute, Abelard's latest manuscript and other writing materials.

ABELARD

(With the fervor of an evangelist)

Libera me, domine – De morte aeterna! Libera me, a pox on these times, O Lord! And a pox on the prideful – who run amok and claim authority in your sacred name! Yet here I carry on your holy work. On these pages reveal the true mysteries of your trinity. Grant me the grace to complete it! Help me husband your flame. Let me carry it upon my fingertips, each digit a torch of your righteousness. Let me scorch the ignorant and burn off their eyelids so that none may be blind to the truth of salvation! Amen.

(His meditation is interrupted by a servant.)

SERVANT (a young student)

Pardon Father Abelard, but there is a Canon Fulbert here to see you– on important business so he says.

ABELARD

Fulbert? What would that foolish man want with me? If it be to hustle one of his religious “relics,” tell him I cannot afford his prices.

FULBERT

(appears suddenly)

Afford? Afford? Nay, good master Abelard, to give in homage and full respect! A gift!

ABELARD

A yoke! With bells? We are at the advent of the Feast of Fools. Would you make me its ambassador?

FULBERT

It is the halter which fit round the neck of the donkey bearing the holy family toward Bethlehem.

ABELARD

Indeed!

(He looks at his student, who sneaks out with a humorous gait which is not lost on Fulbert.)

FULBERT

May this small offering become one of many.

ABELARD

I/ii

You are too kind, Canon Fulbert. Surely such a fulsome prize by an official of the Church, to such a lowly scholar –

FULBERT

Lowly? You jest! But since we are at it, there lives with me a wondrous child name Heloise. My niece.

ABELARD

Rumor has it she is your daughter.

FULBERT

Would that God had willed it so. She was orphaned at three. She is now sixteen and a prodigious sixteen.

ABELARD

In what way?

FULBERT

Would you believe this wisp of a girl
Speaks Latin – fluently, fluently.
Would you believe she can discourse
on matters of ethics and logic
cogently, most cogently.
And a mere sixteen, a sweet sixteen.
Child of an unfortunate mother, my sister,
Whose own petals withered before her time.
Leaving this child her one and only
Bloom, unattended.
'Till I rescued and planted it
Behind my own garden walls.
There favored with the best nutrients –
She thrived!
She grew!
She flowered
Into this precious rose of rare fragrance
Called Heloise. Ah, Heloise.
Oh, how I dote on her.

ABELARD

(spoken)

What would you have of me with such a wonder?

FULBERT

(spoken)

To lay her blossoms at your feet for further nurturing.

ABELARD

I/ii

(spoken)

I am not a botanist Canon Fulbert. Besides, my students are all male. She would be out of place.

FULBERT

(spoken)

Not if you would provide her with private instruction.

ABELARD

(spoken)

Private instruction? With a female? I have never undertaken the instruction of a female!

FULBERT

(spoken)

May she be the first then. Who but the virtuous Abelard, pre-eminent of men, renown for his celibacy, could train her, restrain her, instruct her and prepare her for a royal marriage. For such do I intend. No Breton lad of lesser ilk shall have her!

ABELARD

A female! The idea amuses me.

FULBERT

I will make it worth your while. If not – there is always William of Champeaux who has already volunteered his services.

ABELARD

I will see her. But I shall reserve judgment.

FULBERT

God bless you sir. By your leave good sir.

(Fulbert goes. Abelard picks up the yoke and jingles its bells.)

ABELARD

(spoken)

Poor old Champeaux. What can you expect from an ass?

Scene Three (Interlude)

The same street by the Cathedral. A small band is playing a popular air. Fulbert is at its end and encounters Champeaux and some of his followers coming from the opposite direction. Bunting is being arranged on the scaffold.

FULBERT

Champeaux! Champeaux! He has agreed. Our pact is made!!

WILLIAM

The Feast of Fools has now begun. Let's pray his eminence will not become its token saint. You'll rue the day, Canon "Foolbert!"

STUDENTS

Hmmm!

FULBERT

Hmmm – yourself.

(He goes his way, dancing off to the band's tune.)

Scene Four

Back to Abelard's den. Abelard is studying the young vibrant Heloise as she looks about his study. It is the day of her first lesson. In her wandering she notices the yoke with the bells.

HELOISE

The Blessed Yoke! I can't believe Uncle would part with it. How much did he ask?

ABELARD

It was a gift!

HELOISE

A gift? God's toenails! Do you really relish such things? I hate them. Bones and chips of wood the witless cherish as God made manifest. There's good trade in it though. A fortune could be made by capping empty jars containing the holy farts of St. Someone or other. It would be believed! Why not?!

ABELARD

If your learning matches your wit – you are a paragon non pareil.

Aristotle posited that women are inferior in all matters of learning and shall remain forever so.

HELOISE

(snaps her fingers)

That! – for Aristotle. He does not merit posterity's nod.

ABELARD

I assume then you are conversant with our many sciences – astrology, philosophy, mathematics, and theology, of course.

HELOISE

Of course!

ABELARD

(spoken)

And if so well versed – what need is there for me in your lexicon?

HELOISE

(spoken)

You're famous. I would have some of that rub off on me!

ABELARD

I/iv

(spoken)

Fame? Is that all I represent? Is that all you know of me?

HELOISE

(spoken)

Oh, I know you had a serious illness some years back and that your fingernails are daily manicured – look at mine –

(Abelard looks askance)

and one more thing.

ABELARD

(spoken)

Namely – ?

HELOISE

We are both – VIRGIN! Aristotle take note – if women be inferior and of a lesser ilk – here, despite his fame, Abelard and Heloise are equal.

ABELARD

Well, shall we be at it then? Our lesson? Shall we commence?

HELOISE

I am all yours dear Master Abelard.

ABELARD

Good. And since Heloise knows so much of Abelard, I needs must probe you on the surest ground – your mind. Let us begin with Plato –

HELOISE

Plato, Plato – why must we now start with Plato?

There's Cato or Catullus, but the latter's a

Vesuvius of logic gone astray.

There's Pericles and Pliny – both philosophical ninnyes.

And heavily upon the shelf are all ten books of Livy.

There's Sophocles, lest we forget,

We've deference for Terence.

But what can be said for Plautus or Demostenes?

Boethius De Musica ascends the stars of heaven

While Aristotle languishes against females

In aeternum.

Plutarch's lives are very wise – if this side of stentorian

While Caesar's commentaries are an ocean of boring on –

Such vain self-aggrandisement in the midst of battle

Make the hallowed bones of our revered martyrs simply rattle.

There's Seneca and Lucan (Have I already mentioned him?)

And Ovid's Art of Love which I insist and shout
No Convent must be without!
But all treatises aside the
Most profound or simplecissimum must step aside
To welcome Abelard's Trinities Mysterium –

I/iv

ABELARD
Stop! Don't you dare go on!

HELOISE
I'm finished. Ave glorium!

ABELARD
(deeply angered, but trying to control himself)
What do you know of my work? It is as yet incomplete.

HELOISE
Its subject and your exposition of it is already clear. You yourself have
publicly spoken of its purpose.

ABELARD
How would you know?

HELOISE
Your students. I disguised myself as one and, hiding in their midst did
hear you speak.

ABELARD
Then where is your respect? You banter like a foolish schoolgirl and
trivialize the knowledge of great men of learning. Aristotle was right!

(Fulbert suddenly appears)

FULBERT
Master Abelard, forgive the manner. It does proclaim her youth –
nothing else of true offense.

HELOISE
(spoken)
Uncle – you were spying!!

ABELARD
(spoken)
Fulbert, I suggest you take your botanical wonder to a nursery. She
needs further pruning!

HELOISE
(*she laughs*)
(*spoken*)

I/iv

I'm afraid I displease him Uncle. I am too headstrong. My willfulness runs counter to his measured step.

FULBERT
(*spoken*)

Then slacken your pace to suit the proper measure child! Your future is at stake. To be a woman and a disciple to the world's first scholar, is an honor to be reckoned with – not to overlook more immediate prospects.

HELOISE
(*spoken*)

Not Theobald again!

FULBERT
(*spoken*)

The self same one. The Count has made bold to ask your learned hand in marriage.

HELOISE

That lecherous old pot-belly!

FULBERT

With a royal sash that dangles past the portly place. You must consider that!

HELOISE

I will not consider that! Or any other that! And you know what he can do with his royal sash!!

(*she dashes off*)

FULBERT

Peter Abelard, noble and most learned sir, do not forsake me! Forgive the riotous blood of youth and lead her to still waters. I promise she will submit herself to your rigid demands.

ABELARD

(*suddenly breaks into laughter*)

She's the first female I've ever tried to instruct. It wasn't half bad. We'll try again.

(*Fulbert kisses Abelard's hand and leaves. Abelard, still chuckling, goes to the mirror and looks at himself. His laughter slowly dies on his lips.*)

Dive thoughts! Down! Down!

Scene Five

Upon the scaffolding in the street near Notre Dame. A group of mimes are performing to the sounds of tabor and flute. Intermittent applause from a small group of villagers. The silhouettes of HELOISE and ABELARD are visible as they continue their lessons. Lights up on ABELARD'S study where HELOISE is accompanying her recitation on a lute.

HELOISE

Fas et nefas ambulant
Passu fere pari
Prodigus non redemit
Vitium avari!

ABELARD

(spoken)
Translate!

HELOISE

(sung)
Right and wrong with equal measures
Pass along the stream
A prodigal cannot a miser's
Avarice redeem
Virtue on the other hand
Should seek a middle means
And contemplate with caution
The two initial extremes.

ABELARD

(spoken)
Well done – although there is no “stream” in the original.

HELOISE

(spoken)
A poetic license I fear. The “stream” implying the woman's part in the walk toward virtue.

ABELARD

(sung)
A charming conceit I grant you – nonetheless.

HELOISE

I/v

(sung)

Have I not been respectful to your verses? Did I not sing them well?

ABELARD

To the contrary. You polish my thoughts to a rare gleam with a freedom of expression any of my male students would find formidable. Now take fresh from my quill the next verse.

Dare non ut convenit non est a virtute

HELOISE

Bonum est secundum quid, et non absolute

ABELARD

Digne dare poteris et mereri tute famam

HELOISE

Muneris, se mi prius noveris intus et in cute

ABELARD

(spoken)

Translate. I shall alternate.

HELOISE

(sung)

One gives all in perfect virtue.

ABELARD

(sung)

However else it might appear.

HELOISE

Goodness is at the center of that sphere.

ABELARD

Practice generosity, give provisions without doubt.

HELOISE and ABELARD

Provided that first you recognize me in your will and out.

ABELARD

Then tell me Heloise, do you truly recognize me both in your will and out?

HELOISE

Where is "out" located dear Master?

ABELARD

I/v

That will be enough for today Heloise. A headache pierces through my temples and bids me stop.

(She steps behind him and starts to massage his shoulders and back. After a while Abelard moves away.)

You may go now Heloise. Please go!

HELOISE

As you wish dear Master.

(She exits.)

Scene Six

A private chapel in Notre Dame. A statue of Christ in his agony. ABELARD kneels in prayer. The voices of nuns and monks are heard in the distance.

NUNS and MONKS

Domine, domine, domine. Libera me. Libera me. Domine, domine.

ABELARD

(Spoken)

You have been my guide, O Lord- my friend. 'Tis nigh seven years since I lost your bliss confounded by the urgings of the flesh. I lost my reason then, but won the fight. Thereafter- my rise, my fame ensued as just reward. Tranquil in spirit, and my flesh subdued, I saw the light of the Holy Trinity revealed- my mission to expound it unfettered by the cares of the body. Now I'm at the agony again. Why? I cannot doubt, but doubt remains and she is but a child. So delicate! So strong! So young! Invade me, Lord! Your will is my command! Invade me!!

(ABELARD leaves the church. In an instant we are in his study. He picks up his lute and starts to compose a song to distract himself.)

ABELARD

Love me Lord most faithfully-
 Feel the adoration
 Of my heart and mind,
 I am always with you.
 Ama me fideliter
 Fidem meam nota
 De corde totaliter
 Et ex mente tota.

(He begins to strum furiously. He breaks off.)

No! No - I am NOT with you. I compose my song to you and think only of Heloise! Heloise!

I call to you
 You do not heed me
 I ask myself
 Why do you leave me
 I need your help
 I am but straw caught
 In a raging storm -
 I barely know her!

My lust for her
 Simply appalls me!
 I practice virtue
 I ask for reason
 While my heart
 Calls for treason
 Against all I revere
 And hold dear
 And which I fear
 Will disappear

If I succumb to what I crave!
 It's all depraved!!
 But I must venture there!
 I feel disgust!
 I am defiled!
 The weeds of vice
 Pull me fathoms down!
 O Heloise! O Heloise!
 Your virtue will not save you.
 I'll pull you down,
 Till I assail you!
 In spite of God
 I claim you as mine!

HELOISE
 My lord!

ABELARD
 Heloise – you!

HELOISE
 It is the appointed time. If you prefer – I'll leave.

ABELARD
 No – stay. I was contemplating on the nature of love, on human love.

HELOISE
 Do you think human love so meaningless?

Without human love there is no point to our deliberations.
 Without it we dabble in endless fabrication.
 Human love is the true subject of our search
 It is the final and only balance in the universe.
 It is the–

ABELARD

I/vi

Enough!

You blather like some foolish convent miss
Ranting pieties beyond your comprehension!
Let us continue our lesson –
On Ovid's favorite topic–

HELOISE

On the nature of love?

ABELARD

On lust! What of lust?

HELOISE

I must ask my Uncle whether he considers that an appropriate topic for a girl of sixteen.

(From a distance the chorus is heard again gathering in sound and strength.)

ABELARD

No need to ask his permission. He commanded you to submit to my rigid discipline. Listen to them out there. Fools! Fools!
(He suddenly grabs HELOISE.)

HELOISE

Peter Abelard. No! You will ruin me. Ruin yourself.

ABELARD

We are already ruined.

(He kisses her with a starving man's awkward passion. She responds slowly, but surely. They sink to the ground.)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

II/i

Scene One

Paris - the completed scaffolding outside Notre Dame.

CHORUS

Oweyo, oweyo, oweyo!!!

FOOL (Master of Ceremonies)

(On the raised platform, during the music)

The Feast of All Fools Day!

When life is transformed.

The world's allowed to go mad

To slake the thirst of parched tongues

Locked in conformity.

(Orchestral prelude continues its carnival atmosphere. Shouts and cries from the CHORUS)

CHORUS

All Fools Day! All Fools Day!

Mortals! Angels! Devils!

Change their face!

A trick for just a day!

(Applause and cat-calls as A MAN does acrobatic contortions. More laughter from the CHORUS.)

FOOL

(drunk)

I am a foooooooooool,

(applause)

A juggler by trade,

But on this special day

A friar made.

CHORUS

Ave Gloria! Ave Gloria ! That's the ticket!

(long razzing sound)

FOOL

Thank you! And so – I don the hood of my stern office.

And for a fee you can step up and confess yourselves to me.

CHORUS

Hail Brother Fool! Brother Fool! Hail!!!

ABELARD and HELOISE
(wearing masks)
All hail!

II/i

FOOL
Maskers, identify yourselves!

ABELARD
I – I – I am Bachus!
(applause and whistles)

FOOL
(gesturing with much ado towards HELOISE)
And you fair maid?

HELOISE
I am Venus! Ave Glori–

FOOL
Veni – veni– venus – veni – veni
(more applause and whistles)
Happy to have you in my confessional! Attention everyone!
Nobody listen!
Apres le fee speak up! Feel free!
(sound of coins falling into a cup)

BACCHUS (ABELARD)
Venus beckoned
From above
Awakened me
Not from any dream of
Revelry
But lost in a desert
Where virtue was its only tree!
Pity me!

CHORUS
Pity thee! Pity thee!
(fake sound of tears)

BACCHUS (ABELARD)
I am her servant now
Bonded in love are we
I'll never set her free
Servant and master – me – Bacchus!

CHORUS

Baccchus! Bacchus!
 Cloven hooves!
 Spiky tail!
 Furry flanks!
 Purple flail!

FOOL

(spoken)

Now fair goddess speak!

VENUS (HELOISE)

As Venus I am Cupid's slave
 And only in your arms
 I crave the sweetness
 Of your honey!

Bacchus make what ever you want of me.
 What else can I ever be when you are my lord and master!

(uproarious response from the CHORUS)

FOOL

Bacchus and Venus openly confessed,
 And for your earthly penance you soon durst marry,
 And be condemned from this day forth to
 Love, honor and obey!

CHORUS (Men)

Oh, I remember love, remember love, . . .

CHORUS (Women)

Oh, love I remember
 With arms so strong and
 Lips so tender
 First love is sweet!
 But soon grows sour!
 Its flames dart up!
 And finally expire!

CHORUS (Men and Women)

Hmmm . . .

WILLIAM OF CHAMPEAUX

II/i

(To his cohorts)

Do you not recognize those two?
The god and goddess of the hour!
A stealthy pair I swear
To use this day of frivolity
To mask their base iniquity.
Look close and recognize the couple!
Frere Abelard and Heloise, his pupil!
Let us follow – casually.
They must not suspect our observation.

FOOL

Who's next?

A MAN

(Nasal; timid)

Me!

FOOL

Pay your fee!
(sound of a coin in cup)
Now who is me?

A MAN

(even more timidly)

Hercules!

ABELARD

(on the perimeter of the fairgrounds)

I saw William of Champeaux here in the crowd.

HELOISE

How did you recognize him?

ABELARD

He wears no disguise. For him there is no holiday. I marked how he did consult his minions. We have been reckless dearest chuck. There will be mischief soon afoot, I fear! Fulbert watches my eyes. His mouth does funny things when he asks of you. We must terminate our lessons by mutual accord!

HELOISE

Never!

ABELARD

II/i

I'll seek permission for you to re-enter the convent.

HELOISE

No!

ABELARD

You will continue your education with the holy sisters there. Fulbert will concede to the plan. Once he has we can find ways to secretly arrange our meetings.

HELOISE

Never! I'll freeze to death in that frozen wasteland –

ABELARD

Only until you are thawed and in my arms again. The place is familiar to Fulbert and he will think you safe on sacred soil.

(Back at the platform, the little HERCULES (A MAN) is being padded with fake muscles and an enormous phallus which becomes his club. He is lifted onto the shoulders of one of the revelers and swung about. Women in the crowd, as well as a few gentlemen, fall at his feet in mock worship.)

CHORUS

Lib-lib-lib-lib-lib-li-bidinous!

Lib-lib-lib-lib-lib-li-bidinous!

Lib-lib-lib-lib-lib-li-bidinous!

What a day! What a day!

What an absolutely

Wonderful,

Impossible,

Irreplaceable,

Indispensable,

Pigeon-toed,

Slanty-eyed

Addle-pated day!

(HERCULES and his little "band" of followers exit.)

Scene Two

FULBERT'S study with his collected religious artifacts. Prominent among them - three skulls. FULBERT enters with WILLIAM OF CHAMPEAUX.

FULBERT
Your visit is truly providential!

WILLIAM
What patron saint is there that comes in threes!

FULBERT
The Three Wise Men. They arrived yesterday from the Indies. I thought no one but you should possess them.
(beaming with enthusiasm and pride while gesturing towards the skulls)

WILLIAM
You honor me too much.

FULBERT
I say let bygones be bygones.

WILLIAM
I appreciate the gesture, but must from good conscience not accept the offer.

FULBERT
Come, come, if it is a matter of price.

WILLIAM
I said of conscience!

FULBERT
-of conscience?

WILLIAM
The purpose of my visit Fulbert – Sunday week I received a summons from the Abbess of Argenteuil to attend the convent. My colloquy with her yielded sleepless nights as to the information she imparted concerning –

FULBERT
Concerning? Concerning –

WILLIAM
Your niece –

FULBERT
Heloise?

WILLIAM
Precisely! I fear to continue lest I stroke the former flames of dissension between us.

FULBERT
As friend and colleague I abjure you speak.

WILLIAM
I will not on peril of my soul –

FULBERT
You leave me tortured with frustration!

WILLIAM
But not for long.

(He goes to the entrance way and addresses a servant nearby.)

Would you ask the Abbess if she would honor us with her presence?

FULBERT
The Abbess – here?

WILLIAM
From her own lips you will hear the history of what I fear to say.

FULBERT
Dear Mother Abbess – why these fulsome tears?

ABBESS
I die a thousand deaths in coming here to you, but my love and supervision of your niece demands I do. Oh, Canon Fulbert, she blasphemes the tenets of her novice vows. In a long deserted chapel, in our cloister, she and Abelard entwine their bodies in lustful exercise.

(She groans and shudders simultaneously.)

Our Order is compromised by this delinquency.

FULBERT
I must see for my self! I must! I must!

ABBESS

Such hunger of the flesh I've never seen.
Entwined, their bodies
Float as in a dream,
Such desire,
Such hunger,
Entwined bodies,
Such desire!

WILLIAM

Abelard, your day has come.
Your reputation will become undone.
You will be vilified,
Vilified and shunned!
Abelard, your day has come.
Abelard, you'll be undone!

FULBERT

I feared knowing this.
In my darkest dreams
I feared knowing this!!

(FULBERT continuing)

It brushed against me like some obscene kiss.
I tingle for it promises dark release
That must be assuaged ere I find peace.

WILLIAM

My carriage is at the ready to return the Abbess to Argenteuil. You may accompany us – if you choose.

FULBERT

I choose.

Scene Three

In a ruined chancery at the convent at Argenteuil. The nuns sing the concluding passages of the Vesper Service. ABELARD waits in the shadows.

NUNS (Women of the Chorus)
Domine, Domine, Domine.
Libera me, libera me, libera me.
Domine.

ABELARD
Black night keep your pitch!
(NUNS: Domine! Domine! Domine!)
This one time let moonlight falter!
(NUNS: Domine, Domine, Libera me!)
My Heloise will soon appear.
Do not raven us with fear.
Mater sanctissima protect all lovers.

HELOISE
(appearing, breathless)
Abelard, oh Abelard!

ABELARD
Come in to the shadows and wreck me with your kisses.

(They kiss)

HELOISE
You have brought your lute. Do you intend to serenade me first?

ABELARD
I thought that I intended this for God, but all I could think of was my Goddess.

(He sings.)

Love me now, most faithfully,
Feel the adoration,
I am with you always,
Even when we are apart.
Who loves you thus suffers love.

HELOISE

II/iii

Oh Abelard – have I brought you this?
I play the silly brazen professing the tenets of love,
While thinking myself safe from it!
“To suffer love” you said.
Oh woe! I am no longer safe.

ABELARD

Dearest Heloise,

ABELARD and HELOISE (DUET)

Love me most faithfully,
Feel my adoration.
I am with you always
Even when we are apart.

HELOISE

Who loves you like this suffers love.

(They are in each others arms. Suddenly ABELARD rises.)

ABELARD

(Spoken)

Did you hear that?

HELOISE

(Spoken)

Hear what?

ABELARD

(Spoken)

Something. Footsteps! Who is there?

HELOISE

(Spoken)

No one, sweet Abelard. It is only your imaginings. Who could know?

ABELARD

I tell you I heard something out there.

HELOISE

Perhaps one of the sisters hurrying. Bare feet make haunting sounds on cold stone floors.

(She caresses and soothes him while humming a melody from his love song.)

Come, come, we must continue my instruction.

Scene Four

FULBERT'S study. *It is the following day. WILLIAM sits by examining one of the Wise Men's skulls, as FULBERT marches up and down in deep distress. He is wearing his official canonical robes.*

WILLIAM

Fulbert there is no other solution.

FULBERT

Oh Champeaux, what a fool I was!

WILLIAM

My reward is your discovery of his true nature.

FULBERT

But I cannot do it! I cannot!

WILLIAM

You can and you must! Before a congregation of our holy fathers. We must proclaim him, defame him!

FULBERT

I will lose my honor! My good name!

WILLIAM

The truth will prove your great defense!

WOMAN SERVANT

Good master – it is your niece arrived who awaits your pleasure.

FULBERT

My pleasure? Show her in.

WILLIAM

I shall remain without. It would not be wise for her to see us here together.

FULBERT

Stand by me William. The Wise Men's skulls are yours – and have I told you of the rose petals found on St. Jennifer at her death? Do not desert me.

(WILLIAM goes into the next room while FULBERT tries to compose himself.)

I must not go mad and ruin what remains of this my sullied life.

(HELOISE enters and kisses her Uncle.)

HELOISE

Dear Uncle – you sent for me? Much as I am glad to see you I fear the purpose of your summons.

FULBERT

You fear it do you?

HELOISE

Yes, dear Uncle. You wish to speak about my promised bridegroom – Theobald! What say we say “nay” to that once and for all.

(FULBERT glowers at her with black anger.)

FULBERT

(very deliberately and intense)

What makes you think he would have you now?

(with growing anger)

What makes you think anyone will have you?

“Love me faithfully,

Feel the adoration of my heart – “

Strumpet!!!

HELOISE

Then it was you!

Abelard was right!

FULBERT

Abelard – I know his kind.

How did he persuade you?

He took advantage of me, – of you

You wanton girl!!

You secretly conspired against me

with that hypocrite devil of a priest.

HELOISE

Call him what you like!

He is my life! My God!

(FULBERT smacks HELOISE and knocks her down. Her removes his stole round his neck and starts to beat her with it. She tries to escape, but continually falters.)

FULBERT
You beast!

HELOISE
I see only one beast, Uncle – pawing at me, stealing kisses at the bedtime hour. My uncle, – would-be lover. There’s the beast! You foolish old man.

FULBERT
Filth! Filth! You little slut!
(He hits her.)

HELOISE
Beat me then! Come and kill the child within my womb. Beat us both to death!
(He hits her again.)

FULBERT
Out! Out! Get out! Get out of my house!

(The SERVANT helps HELOISE out of the chamber as WILLIAM of CHAMPEAUX comes out of the shadows.)

Champeaux! Champeaux! I am destroyed. All peace and harmony are gone. Hell invades me.

WILLIAM
(WILLIAM observes the cringing FULBERT with a mixture of pleasure and disdain.)
Fulbert... Fulbert... There are comforts and small pleasures yet to come!

FULBERT
(timid, meek and defeated)
What comforts does hell provide?

WILLIAM
Why — revenge!

WILLIAM
Revenge is an unofficial sacrament in the Book of Life. Its wine is sweet – the privilege of kings, and who is not? Its blackest waters are but polished floors, upon whose surfaces our honor is restored. The pleasures of revenge are so profound. Perhaps then even God looks away. For in the orbit of his great design the devil must have his day!

FULBERT
(agreeing)
His day –

WILLIAM
(*nodding in return*)
His day –

FULBERT
His day –

WILLIAM
His day –

WILLIAM and FULBERT
The devil must have has his day, too!

WILLIAM
(*quietly, spoken*)
Burn . . .

FULBERT
(*quietly, spoken*)
Twist . . .

WILLIAM
(*spoken*)
Tear . . .

FULBERT
(*spoken*)
Split . . .

WILLIAM
(*spoken*)
Rend . . . No! No Fulbert. Even better! Cut! Do you follow my
meaning??

WILLIAM and FULBERT
(*spoken*)
Cut!!!

Scene Five

HELOISE and ABELARD stand before the old abandoned altar in their secret hiding place. Two candles give ghostly life to the fractured holy images.

HELOISE

Are you sure? Are you sure?

ABELARD

What did the friar decree for us at the Feast – marriage for two fools of God –

(She puts her fingers to his lips.)

HELOISE

You know what this will mean? Your fame, your reputation will be compromised by marriage. A priest of God should have no earthly partner save his Lord. To join so together would be a sin.

ABELARD

Are you sure?

Does not love encompass sinning too?

You are my master in all things – say!

HELOISE

You shame me with all your simplicity, I submit.

ABELARD

Don't submit. Give yourself to me as I to you.

You are mine now as I am yours. I have no one but you now.

Dearest – as man, lover, husband and priest, I will now exercise each one of these.

(Both kneel before the ruined altar. They face each other. The marriage ceremony begins.)

HELOISE and ABELARD

(at the completion of the ceremony)

With this kiss I do thee wed. In nomine Patris, Filii, et Spiritus sancti.
Amen.

(They kiss.)

(Suddenly four masked men break into the lovers' sanctuary. Three of them overcome ABELARD and drag him to the pallet behind the screen while the fourth holds HELOISE.)

ABELARD

II/v

(as he is being dragged away)

(Spoken)

Go Heloise! Run!!

FULBERT

(Spoken)

No! Stay my niece!

(Heloise struggles with the intruder who is holding her.)

(Spoken)

The good Dr. Salvados has prepared an anatomy lesson for you that is most graphic in nature.

To it doctor.

Be my claws.

May the lesson commence.

Go and castrate our "man of God!"

(He follows the doctor off stage.)

ABELARD

(After a silence, Abelard screams in anguished pain)

Aaaaaaaah!!!

(FULBERT returns and approaches HELOISE - his hands darkened by ABELARD'S blood.)

FULBERT

(Spoken)

Look, dear niece – now who is the fool?

(He laughs diabolically.)

HELOISE

(with black anger) (Speech song)

God will damn you to flames and eternal torment, Uncle! You will shriek in pain and madness will destroy your mind.

(She cries out.)

Abelard! Oh, Abelard! Abelaard!!!

(She collapses.)

END OF ACT II

Act III

III/i

Scene One

Seventeen years later. The convent at Argenteuil.

HELOISE

Beloved Abelard, my very soul in this letter speaks.
It has been ten years since last we met.
And love still invades me, dearest Abelard.
Sometimes my thoughts of you wreak havoc in my mind.
Sometimes I embrace myself and recall your arms,
And then my imagination sends me into an amorous disorder.
Yes, I am still at Argenteuil.
And by now I have become its Prioress.
As such I am considered dead and buried to the world.
Yet within my sepulcher there flare up images of you
That eclipse my holy vows.
How do I expunge you? –
You whose breath still seems my own.
In trying to do so I would only deceive my self.
Thus I remain enchained by you dear Abelard –
This in the presence of my holy sisters,
In the very presence of God.

Scene Two

One month later. Morning in the courtyard of the convent at Argenteuil. The sisters enter gradually – singly and in pairs. As the lights come up, ushering in the new day, they are occupied with morning chores. Eventually they begin to talk amongst themselves in small groups becoming more animated and agitated.

BERTHE

What are we to do?

NUNS

Some of us are ill. And others are too old to move.

BERTHE

What are we to do?

NUNS

How could they just force us out –

and foreclose the order?

We are just a poor cloister.

How could they just force us out?

To where?

Close us down!

BERTHE

What are we to do?

NUNS

And all this for not having paid our taxes and tithings!

What will we do?

Who will save us?

Who will rescue us?

BERTHE and NUNS

What will we do now?

What will we do?

Where will we go?

Who will rescue us?

(From immediately offstage the MONKS of ABELARD'S abbey are heard approaching the convent.)

MONKS

III/ii

Holy –
Holy Sisters –
Holy Sisters of Argenteuil –
Hold your peace!
We come as friends.

NUNS

Some of us are ill; others are too old to move. What will we do? Where will we go?
How can you help us? How?

MONKS

Hold your peace!
We have come to help you Sisters of Argenteuil.

ABELARD

Holy Sisters of Argenteuil we know of your plight.
We cannot pay your taxes and tithings, but we offer to you our abbey,
The Paraclete, as your new home.

NUNS

Ave Gloria, Ave Gloria, Ave Gloria!

ABELARD

The Paraclete I assign to you and to your Prioress in perpetuity. My Brothers and I will continue on our journey to Rome and beyond to spread our message of the Holy Trinity. Now we must make ready for the journey. My Brothers will assist you. Now go tell the Prioress we are ready to depart.

BERTHE

Thank you Brother Abelard. I will find her.

(They all depart except for ABELARD who turns to gather his things while not noticing that HELOISE has entered silently carrying her own improvised knapsack.)

HELOISE

Abelard . . .

(Slowly he turns to face her as he relinquishes his own knapsack.)

ABELARD

Prioress . . .

HELOISE

I am still Heloise, your wife. How long has it been since last we met?
Ten years?

ABELARD

III/ii

The others are waiting.

HELOISE

Waiting, ah, no one knows more about waiting than I.
How made you the decision to save us?

ABELARD

You would have been forced to beg upon the highways if I had not interceded.

HELOISE

Was there not perhaps yet another reason – to see Heloise once more?

ABELARD

There is no Heloise. There is only the Prioress at Argenteuil.

HELOISE

Then what of your son? He is now seventeen and about to take his vows for the priesthood. Have you ever seen him?

ABELARD

Never – and you?

HELOISE

No, but your sister who raised him writes and keeps me informed of our son. Is there no love for him in you? A spark?

ABELARD

You must write me no longer. You must blot me from your mind. This is what God demands of you.

HELOISE

And what of love? I speak of human love!
Why have you stayed away from me?
And why did you write so seldom?

ABELARD

You would destroy me again!

HELOISE

You cast me aside when I offered you my love.

ABELARD

Why? Why? Can you utter no other words but “why” and “love?”

HELOISE

III/ii

Yes indeed, why? Why put me away in a convent? Why have me confined?

ABELARD

After the ruthless vengeance taken upon me, where else could you remain secure, but in a convent?

HELOISE

Where all my vows were made to you!

ABELARD

No – to God!

HELOISE

I took the veil just for you! – only because of your disgrace.
I made a triumph of my life, sacrificed all of my beauty unto you.
I continued my love by transforming it into the things you loved most –
Always loving you!

ABELARD

“Love” again!
That’s all you have to say!
You contaminate me with all your urgings.
I gave you up to the care of our heavenly Father in order to – in order to
–

HELOISE

For such a learned man you seem to stammer for words!
I demand an answer Abelard! An answer now!

ABELARD

Ah, Heloise, you have opened old wounds, ancient wounds.
When I could not have you, or be with you,
After I had been punished for my misdeeds
To atone for those sins,
I returned to my studies and dedicated myself to God.
Being unmanned and no longer whole,
No longer the man you first loved, and away from you,
It was then that I realized,
Yes it was then that I realized that I was jealous, yes jealous,
Insanely jealous.
My jealousy and loathing of my lust-filled weaknesses
Brought forth horrid imaginings of my mind.

And I regarded all men as potential rivals
And could not bear the thought of you with another,

So I commanded you to take the veil
To keep you away from other men and make you mine,
For ever mine!

III/ii

I have done what I have done.

(HELOISE moves to comfort him. As she touches him he flinches and recoils while slowly pulling back his cassock to reveal the self-inflicted wounds and scars.)

HELOISE

(almost frightened by the sight)

Oh Abelard, such wounds; how you have punished yourself.

(She turns away from ABELARD and quietly begins to sing.)

Ama me fideliter
Fidem meam nota
De corde totaliter
Et ex mente tota.

(He joins her in the singing.)

Ama me fideliter
Fidem meam nota
De corde totaliter
Et ex mente tota.

ABELARD

My son is seventeen?
Forgive me if you can.

(Without looking back she slowly walks off to join the Sisters.)

Scene Three

One week later. The garden outside the Chapel at St. Remy. ASTROLABE'S novitiate ceremony in preparation for entering the priesthood has just taken place.

DENISE

Father Jolivet, that was a beautiful ceremony!

JOLIVET

Why, thank you Denise. You have done a splendid job raising the boy, splendid job!

If Astrolabe studies hard he will become a good priest, maybe even a great one to rival and surpass his famous father.

DENISE

Heavens, Jolivet!

He doesn't know, mustn't know, about my brother Abelard or his real mother,

the Prioress. Someday perhaps, – someday. If only he knew . . .

(She starts to weep softly.)

ASTROLABE

Knew what Mother? Why are you crying?

DENISE

They're tears of joy for you, Astrolabe.

Father Jolivet thinks you will become a fine priest.

And you know what else is so special about today?

ASTROLABE

Yes, Mother. Father Abelard and the Prioress – my sponsors – are coming to bless me.

What an honor! I am most anxious to meet them.

JOLIVET

They are here already Denise. I will bring them in.

(HELOISE and ABELARD enter accompanied by JOLIVET.)

HELOISE

My boy, my son, you're seventeen yours old.

You seem so tall for such an age.

ASTROLABE

I resemble my Father in that respect I'm told.

HELOISE
Ah yes . . .

III/iii

ASTROLABE

Most reverent blessed Father Abelard – I thank you for your sponsorship.
I am both honored and overwhelmed that one of your great learning and
prestige should take the time to . . .

ABELARD

Little Brother –
Is something wrong?

ASTROLABE

I do not know this man,
And yet I know this man.
There's something in his eyes that tells me to him I am bound.
I find strange comfort in his very presence.
Perhaps God is offering me a ghostly father to replace the one I never
had.
Hallelujah for God's infinite gifts.
Hallelujah for his mercies.

ABELARD

I do not know this boy,
And yet I know this boy.
There's some elusive thing within that binds him to me.
See how he looks at me as if to read my soul!

HELOISE

My son, my boy, my sweet –
Would that I could proclaim myself,
But alas it is too late.
Yet your mother I remain on earth as it will be in heaven.

HELOISE, ASTROLABE and ABELARD
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

(They are joined by DENISE and JOLIVET.)

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

EPILOGUE

1164 A.D. The courtyard of The Paraclete (convent). Faint traces of dawn on the horizon. The elder HELOISE is seated in her chair (as in the Prologue). ABELARD'S coffin is brought before her and the top removed.

HELOISE

Now dear husband – for the last time I use that title.

I will not write again.

Now at last you are mine.

I give myself to you and know God.

How sweet is that moment, dear husband, lover, teacher, friend.

Adieux Peter. Adieux.

(She slowly leans over and kisses him for the final time. From all around bells are heard.)

END OF OPERA