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*The Repentant Abelard: Family, Gender, and Ethics in Peter Abelard's Carmen ad Astralabium and Planctus*. By Juanita Feros Ruys. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. xvi, 355. \$110.00.

Juanita Feros Ruys, in her recent critical edition of Abelard's *Carmen ad Astralabium* and his *Planctus*, offers a substantial and incredibly important contribution not only to scholarship on Abelard, but also scholarship on twelfth-century gender and poetics. The scope of Ruys' project is clear from the start. Not only does she offer the first full English translation of Abelard's *Carmen* and the first English translation of all six *Planctus* as a complete set in one text, but she also provides a critical analysis that is closer to a scholarly monograph in its own right than a critical introduction to her translations.

In her introduction, Ruys sets forth her overall thesis, and the source of her title, *The Repentant Abelard*. While acknowledging that these texts were lightly read and studied due in part to the lack of translations, she identifies her guiding claim as one that would establish the mid-1130s as a time when Abelard's thinking shifted and he became more repentant—not the sort of monastic repentance that he demonstrated following his castration, but rather a time when “Abelard came to realize, largely prompted by Heloise's allusive references to this in her writings to him, the losses he had sustained in distancing himself so effectively from his wife and son” (1-2). Rhetorically, Ruys notes a shift in Abelard's tone, away from the “brash, defiant, and defensive tone that marked [his] *Historia*” and towards a darker, more philosophical and moralistic tone in the *Carmen* and the *Planctus* that was intended for his wife and son. Ruys claims that this shift in philosophy, style, and audience was one wherein an older Abelard, aware of his own mortality, was transitioning from the man of the correspondence, who saw family as “a burden to be left behind” in devotion to spirituality, to the man who wrote the *Carmen* and the *Planctus*, which depict “complex considerations of family” (4). In pursuing this larger claim, Ruys makes several compelling structural and thematic arguments about both texts, all in addition to her valuable translation work.

The translations themselves demonstrate an impressive focus on detail. Ruys provides here both the Latin and her English translation of each text, retaining metrical formatting where necessary and, following Abelard, striving to be simple and direct in her translation. The Latin versions of the text are thoroughly marked with marginal notes, and while the English translations are not notated quite as thoroughly within the text, both the *Carmen* and the *Planctus* are each supplemented with extensive end notes, which are curiously placed as separate chapters—chapter five and eight respectively. These “note chapters” are exceptionally thorough, with the notes on the *Carmen* being the longest chapter in the book at seventy three pages. In this supplementary material, Ruys does far more than addressing issues of Latin grammar, vocabulary and syntax—though she does do that—she also links the texts to ongoing debates in Abelardian scholarship while simultaneously connecting the text of the *Carmen* and the *Planctus* to Abelard's other texts and themes. Several of her notes, including one that links the *Carmen* to Abelard's use of military/battle imagery as a metaphor for pedagogy in his *Historia* (217),

serves to fill in the gaps that were created due to lack of access to these two late Abelardian texts.

Ruys' most compelling work appears in her analysis of the *Carmen ad Astralabium*. She initially establishes the fact that the modern scholarly opinion of the piece is less than complimentary—Abelard's poetic advice to his son has, on more than one occasion, been compared to Polonius's advice to Laertes. Where previous scholars have seen haphazard and inconsistent bits of sentential advice, Ruys identifies a subtle interconnectivity—an interconnectivity that she describes as “sinuous”—that links the various sections of the *Carmen* not systematically, “but...strung together paratactically” (21). By translating the entirety of the *Carmen*, Ruys is able to demonstrate that the themes conveyed are not broken into distinct sections, but rather are connected via themes that link one section to the next in order to provide a compendium of ethical thought rather than simply bits of paternal advice. Ruys offers an attempt to systematize Abelard's thought, providing an example of this “sinuous” structure in Abelard's advice on friendship in the *Carmen* (22-24). This unorthodox yet highly effective structural charting of Abelard's argument demonstrates Ruys' thesis emphatically, as well as explaining—via a discussion of previous editorial attempts to break the *Carmen* into “distinct subsection[s]” (22)—why this sinuous structure has been heretofore unnoticed. Through such an analysis, Ruys notes that the negative criticisms of this text have been the sole product “of an insistence on breaking it, almost by editorial force, into distinct sections that can be simplistically labeled, rather than accepting the natural flow of its ideas” (24). By looking at this “natural flow,” Ruys demonstrates that what appears at first to be repetition and contradiction of ethical positions in the *Carmen* are, in fact, moments when “Abelard makes a fine distinction upon an earlier argument, or approaches the same problem from a different perspective” (25).

Beyond her structural argument, Ruys offers twenty pages of analysis exploring the textual afterlife of the *Carmen*, particularly the disconnect between the expectations of the genre it purports to represent. In doing so, she offers readings of glosses, marginalia, florilegia and more paratextual elements—several of which are published in the book's three appendices—in order to show the variety of uses the *Carmen* has seen through the centuries, including its likely use as a Latin/grammar pedagogical text in one surviving manuscript and her speculation that “by the later Middle Ages, the *Carmen* was being read as though it were a *speculum principis*... that is, a text of pragmatic political advice, rather than of ethical behavior” (49-50).

Ruys begins her analysis of the *Planctus* by demonstrating several inconsistencies in genre, expectation, and Abelard's previously established positions. Where laments tend to depict an ideal, Abelard's subjects “always remain intensely human and deeply flawed” (61). While Abelard, in his instructions to Heloise's Paraclete, had previously theorized the lament as a “religious, female, and more typically a communal genre,” three of his six *Planctus* “are voiced by individual male speakers who lament not a religious loss but a secular one” (63). Ruys uses these inconsistencies to suggest that



Abelard wrote the *Planctus* primarily as a gift for Heloise, addressing many of the topics that most concerned her in their correspondence. The argument in this chapter did not seem quite as focused as her earlier chapter on the *Carmen*. At various points, Ruys used the *Planctus* to make arguments ranging from the intended narrative order of the series of six laments to representations of gender and religious sacrifice and aspects of Abelard's philosophy—specifically his positions on the lack of earthly consolation, the flaws of temporal justice, and his position on friendship. The most compelling arguments in this chapter deal with gendered voicing and homosociality, which primarily focused on two of the *Planctus*, the *Planctus uirginum* and the *Planctus David super Saul et Ionatha*. In the former, Ruys explores the masculine voice used by Jephthah's daughter and her corresponding feminization of her father, while in the latter, Ruys argues that David's lament over Jonathan represented the kind of gender-absent and sexless love ideal that could serve as a future model for Abelard and Heloise's relationship (71). Highlighting the varied theses of this chapter, Ruys closes with four mini-studies based on the *Planctus*.

While the importance of this text cannot be underestimated, there were several minor criticisms. The first is perhaps a personal preference, but the translations were in separate chapters rather than the more conventional facing page format. Considering the importance Ruys placed on using her translation to focus attention on the Latin, it was a bit surprising that the translation was arranged in this way. Another concern is that this text seems to have too many interests. The apparent lack of focus in the *Planctus* analysis chapter mentioned above runs through several sections of this book. To be fair, the concern here is not that the arguments are flawed or uninteresting—just the opposite. Ruys has so many interesting readings that some of them end up unexplored. For example, in her introduction, Ruys suggests that Abelard, "as both a biological father and a castrated monk" may have possessed "a unique personal insight into and relationship with" the contemporary gender ambiguity of the portrayal of Christ as mother (4). Ruys spent just one introductory paragraph on the topic, and it seems to contain so much more potential for analysis, particularly considering her treatment of gender representation in the *Planctus* chapter. In a similar vein, the last few pages of the chapter on the *Planctus* offer a short reading of the homoeroticism in the *Planctus David super Saul et Ionatha*. Ruys opens with a dismissal of such a homoerotic reading in order to claim that Abelard intentionally suggested such moments of homoeroticism only to retreat from them, thereby isolating eroticism from any kind of gendered labeling (90). The concept was fascinating, but her exploration felt a bit too rushed, tucked into the end of a larger chapter.

The third potential concern is the fact that the guiding thesis, the thesis that gave the text its title, seemed at times to be incidental. In her conclusion to her analysis of the *Carmen*, for example, Ruys returns to her larger thesis that these two texts represented Abelard's return to a focus on his family. She states that the *Carmen* was "something of a family affair: the combined thought of Astralabe's parents powerfully summarized by Abelard in a

thousand lines of intellectually demanding didactic verse and presented as a gift of loving instruction to their son, Astralabe" (58). The brilliant textual and poetic analysis that Ruys offers in the *Carmen* chapter not only does not seem to support this conclusion—it seems to actively refute it. In her analysis of the likely impetus for Abelard's composition of the *Carmen*, Ruys notes that the poem was Abelard's way "to make sense of a disordered world and reassert a recognizable order" (15) and that the poem was most likely a reflection of "Abelard's state of mind in the mid-1130s ... rather than a concerted effort to educate his son on his entry into adulthood" (16). She even suggests that it was possible that "Astralabe was the fortuitous addressee of the text that resulted from his father's own needs" (16). At various points in this chapter, the *Carmen* is defined both as a text intended as a loving gift from father to son and as a text that was the product of a man's personal and political crises, with the son as an incidental recipient.

These criticisms are minor, however, particularly considering the doors that Ruys' monograph opens in the arena of Abelard scholarship. In many ways, these minor flaws are unfortunate by-products of the greatest strength of Ruys' work. This text is more than a scholarly edition of a new translation. Ruys brings to bear an impressive amount of research and scholarly acumen to offer one text that likely could have been two—a scholarly edition of the *Carmen* and the *Planctus*, with an introduction about Abelard's second repentance, and a scholarly monograph offering an analysis of gender, poetics, and homosociality in the works of Abelard. Regardless, this is a text that will be on the shelves of every serious Abelard scholar.

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## Personalia: Articles

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