

Analysis pope's eloisa to abelard essay sample

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Following *The Rape of the Lock*, Popes efforts were directed toward a mode of composition with which he is not usually identified: the elegiac verses *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* and the romantic psychodrama, *Eloisa to Abelard*. The *Elegy* is, perhaps, only partially successful; its chief interest lies in the poets vacillation between a Christian and a Stoic understanding of the ladys death. *Eloisa to Abelard* is another matter altogether. G. Wilson Knight claims that it is certainly Popes greatest human poem and probably the greatest short love poem in our language—a judgment from which few critics are likely to dissociate themselves.

In the form of an epistle to her beloved and banished Abelard, Popes *Eloisa* dramatically expresses the psychological tensions which threaten her reason and divide her soul. Confined to a monastery (ironically founded by Abelard), she receives, at length, a letter from her former lover that reawakens her suppressed passion. (Retrieved from <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/1630.html>) The recrudescence of these feelings not only threatens her stability, but also, in her own estimation, endangers her soul; and her situation is rendered even more poignant by the fact that Abelard, having been castrated by henchmen in the employ of her outraged uncle, can neither respond to nor share in her struggles against the flesh. Here the couplet is used not only ironically to counterpose discordant images, as in *The Rape of the Lock*, but also to reflect, in balanced antitheses, the very struggles of *Eloisas* soul. (Damrosch, p101)

In the extravagance of her affliction, *Eloisa* takes on the attributes of a Shelleyan heroine, preferring damnation with Abelard to redemption without him: In seas of flame my plunging soul is drowned,/ While altars blaze, and
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angels tremble round. Even as she submits to the decrees of Heaven and composes herself to meet her maker, she erotically mingles her love for Abelard with her struggle for salvation: Thou Abelard! the last sad office pay,/ And smooth my passage to the realms of day,/ See my lips tremble, and my eyeballs roll,/ Suck my last breath, and catch my flying soul! Eloisa to Abelard belies the notion that Pope was incapable of composing in the pathetic mode. As Lord Byron observed, If you search for passion, where is it to be found stronger than in Eloisa to Abelard. (Baines, p89) Between Eloisa to Abelard and An Essay on Man, Pope composed a preliminary version of The Dunciad (1728), but it was not until 1742 that the poem appeared in its final form.

References:

Baines, Paul. The Complete Critical Guide to Alexander Pope. New York: Routledge, 2000, p89.

Damrosch, Leopold, Jr. The Imaginative World of Alexander Pope. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, p101.