

BOOKS

Pride and prejudice

Xavier Dilla

PETER ABELARD. A HUMANIST OF THE 12TH CENTURY

Lluís Nicolau d'Oliver
Obrador Edèndum
474 pages. 35 euros

When, in 1957, the prestigious French historian Jacques Le Goff published *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, he described Peter Abelard (1079-1142) as “the first great figure of the modern intellectual”. It was not an anachronism with the fashionable adjective in the Rive Gauche of existentialist bohemia, the same space where Abelard had gained fame as a teacher 800 years earlier. Against the vision of the Middle Ages as a parenthesis of shadows, Le Goff thus emphasized the importance of Abelard’s rationalist effort, which announces the scholastic dialectic and foreshadows the freedom of the Renaissance thinker. An urban intellectual, a lover of debate and open discussion, Abelard reflects on Greco-Latin Antiquity without renouncing the Christian faith and highlights the limitations of the monastic knowledge model of the High Middle Ages, based on strength of the cited authorities.

At the time when Le Goff was completing that decisive essay, Lluís Nicolau d’Oliver (1888-1961), already in his sixties, had been studying the figure of Abelard for years. With an important political biography behind him (Minister of the Economy, Governor of the Bank of Spain, Deputy Mayor of Culture in Barcelona, deputy in Corts...), Nicolau was a Hellenistic and Latinist expert. According to Josep Pla, Miguel de Unamuno said that “he is the man who knows the most Greek in Spain, but he does not want it to be known”. Nicolau never stopped publishing studies and editions—some of reference—on Catalan history and literature, and on other subjects.

Perhaps this dual condition of scholar and man of action explains the appeal of the ambitious biography of Abelard that occupied him in exile, unpublished until now. It is a historical and philological work of great rigor, solidly documented, but in no way can it be said that it is addressed only to specialists. Nicolau belongs to the admirable species of sages who do not turn their backs on the cultured and curious reader, who hate to write well and to make even the erudite minutia readable, and this is noticeable in

these more than four hundred pages of small print interest hardly falls.

As successful in the physical portrait—the evocation of the harsh Breton landscape, the desolation of the Paraclete monastery, the Parisian bustle—as in the psychological, in which the in-depth analysis of the famous relationship with the young Heloïsa shines, Nicolau it also follows Abelard’s tireless activity as a teacher and as a writer, placing it in the context of the philosophical and theological debates of his time. Proud and arrogant, he ran into an ecclesiastical power that did not forgive him either his free thinking or his love affair with Heloïsa, passionate and wise in Nicolau’s portrayal.

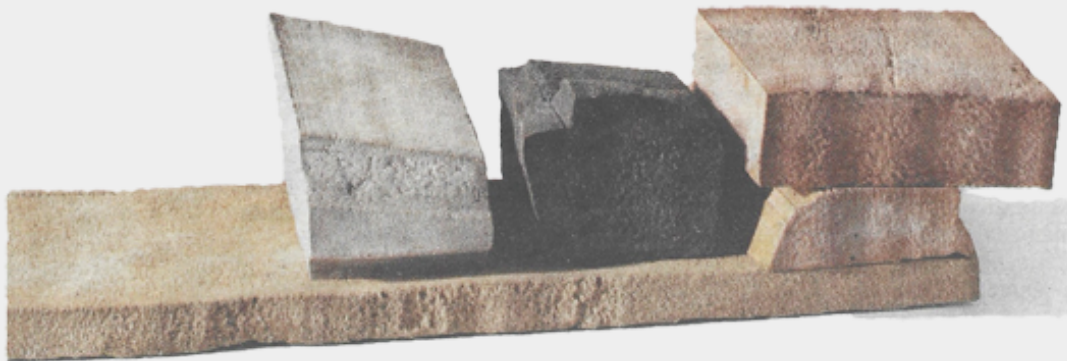
A book by a humanist about a forerunner of humanism, Nicolau was unable to complete or do the final revision of the work, which has been edited by Josep Batalla, translator of Abelard and Heloïsa’s letters. Batalla revised



Abelard and Heloise painted by Edmund Blair Leighton.

Nicolau does historical and philological work of great rigour, solidly documented

bibliography and wrote the final four pages on Abelard’s death. The result is a volume that leaves Nicolau’s talent and ability in a very good place, despite arriving late due to the unfortunate post-war period. In this sense, it is difficult to resist seeing a slight personal nuance at the end of the unfinished typescript of Nicolau’s book, when he comments on the last words written by Abelard: “The dialogue remains unfinished, interrupted; like a funeral column, of shaft broken and without capital”.



One of Joan Furriols’ works exhibited at the El Quadern Robat gallery.

ART

Whispering

Josep Casamartina i Parassols

The informal Italian abstraction of the fifties exerted an enormous influence on Catalan and Spanish art of the time, much more than American abstract expressionism, except in the cases of Esteban Vicente and Juan Guerrero, because then they lived in New York and had integrated. The intense imprint of Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni or Alberto Burri is found in different ways in the immediately subsequent works of Antoni Tàpies, Romà Vallès, Joan Vilacasa or Enric Panadurà—when he left the geometric abstraction, the early sixties—and also in some members of the El Paso group from Madrid, such as Manolo Millares, Luis Feito, Manuel Rivera or the tangential Lucio Muñoz. The Italians brought an aesthetic sense and a taste refined by the textures very different from the energetic gesture and blunt chromatism of the Americans, and their work connected very well with the southern sensibility, although some (Millares, Feito or Rivera) would add drama, and others (Tàpies) a ruled impulse of transcendence.

Joan Furriols (Vic 1937) belongs to a second informalist generation that links, nevertheless, with members of the first one, because some of them started late to do abstraction, like Josep Guinovart or Albert Ràfols Casamada. The early works of Furriols, however, those of the late fifties, are already immersed in abstraction, because then the informal was consolidating quickly and was more accessible to enroll without having to suffer the great dilemma of choosing between figuration or abstraction, as his predecessors had suffered. However, the recalcitrant academic

In El Quadern Robat, the gallery that, by the hand of Anna Belsa, has inherited the most open line of the reconstituted Art-gràfic of the Joan Prats, there are two of these initial works by Furriols, in the small retrospective dedicated to the painter, sculptor and creator of assemblages from Vic. Works and space fit together perfectly, everything seems tailor made. *17 untitled works*, name of the exhibition, is a circular trip in the world of Furriols. It begins with a wood and a perforated iron, in the manner of Burri and Fontana, in which an aesthetic game

Exhibitions on Furriols and Bores show them between figuration and abstraction

established between the distribution of the holes and the drawing and texture of the materials, left as is, without patina, varnish nor painting, looking good. Afterward, however, although the formal part unfolds in a harmonious and very coherent way, the materials will leave reality to become gradually appearance through the makeup of the painting, in an ellipsis that regains continuity from the nineties. In the end, the cardboard becomes metal, and sponges and plastic, stone, in an ironic game of the artist on himself. First everything was what it was and then nothing will be what it seems, but visually everything remains the same. Italianism continues in Furriols, and its sponge stones, of soft and studied chromaticism, refer to the soft and remote forms of the still

lives of Giorgio Morandi. He also plans in the exposed showcase boxes (the best of the choice) the poetic discretion of Joseph Cornell, but without any symbolic reference, beyond the cosmic mysticism that gray and monochrome objects can give off of vibrant pecking.

Francisco Bores (Madrid, 1898-Paris, 1972) is also an artist who painted quietly. Once he achieved a style of his own, in the Paris of the moderns of the late twenties, he did not move from it and deployed an aesthetic of sinuous and flat forms, halfway between figuration and abstraction, with toned colors, without stridency. A very personal production that is recognizable at first glance and maintains a great parallel with that of André Beaudin, one of the artists of the second generation of pupils of the dealer André-Henri Kahnweiler who also, at a given moment, had Bores under contract. Dolors Junyent presents 13 works by Bores, including canvases, gouaches and drawings, most of them small format, in a tour that goes from 1929 to 1970. It is a simple, unpretentious exhibition, in which some interiors from the forties and fifties stand out also, two larger papers from 1970, from a year before he died, which show very well how the Madrid artist knew how to maintain his

JOAN FURRIOLS, 17 UNTITLED WORKS

El Quadern Robat
Còrsega, 267, Barcelona
Until Friday

BORES, MASTER OF THE FIGURATION AND ABSTRACTION

Dolors Junyent Galeria d'Art
Aragó, 268. Barcelona
Until October 28