

## Dearer to Me and More

*sorrow equal to the love*  
*- Héloïse d'Argenteuil du Paraclet*

Dearer to me and more honorable to you  
for me to be your lover than your wife  
and all authorities she cited agreed  
scholars and marriage are incompatible.

What could there be in common between bookmen  
and wetnurses or books and distaffs?  
Or sacred or philosophical reflection  
and squalling babies? And besides she said

they both knew getting married would never  
satisfy her outraged uncle. Yet he  
in his folly persevered and she  
in hers acquiesced so that her kinsmen

despite having given him the kiss of peace  
severed from him what had most given offense;  
and she, after giving birth to a son she consigned  
to clergy, herself took the habit and vows.

After the separation they exchanged epistles  
in which she declared her love for him and for God  
(his wife, the Father's bridesmaid) beseeching  
him to recognize her and her desire

as real and one, to admit again their love  
for each other, to not deny his own feelings  
but confess his love no more mere lust than hers  
or God's (of which they and theirs were but signatures),

to acknowledge that human needs and desires enliven  
both body and soul and in no wise conflict  
with the immaterial perfection of reason  
he in his intellectual pride seeks —

spiritualizing motherhood and human  
birth as abstraction, metaphorizing the body  
away as his had in part been excised —  
but are embodiment, figures of the quest.

In one she wrote: What king or philosopher  
could match your fame? What district, village or town  
did not long to see you? In your absence  
every wife and maiden desired you

each in your presence was on fire.  
In another: you left many love songs  
which won you worldwide popularity  
for the charm of their words and tunes

that kept your name on everyone's lips,  
airs of such beauty that even the unlettered  
did not forget you or our love  
for which many women envied me.

And again (with her usual precise Latin):  
I was ever more pleased with possessing your heart  
than with any other happiness,  
the man is what I least valued in you.

It's said (though to this day some disagree)  
that for the rest of their lives living apart  
they never touched again save with their minds  
and in exercise of the holy offices

of their respective orders. She was renowned  
throughout the West even before the scandal  
as a learned polymath and brilliant author  
of subtle theological treatises.

An *adolescent* he had called her, half his age  
when they met; *Reverend Abbess* forty-some years later  
when he died. It's also said (and likewise disputed)  
that she had him dug up from his first grave,

had his remains boiled, boned and dried  
had the skeleton entombed in the oratory  
of the Paraclete Abbey he had given her years before  
where she when she died was lain next to him.