

He Had Never Known a Woman More

love is the whole history of women's lives
- Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël

He had never known a woman more
continuously exacting (said the lover
she had had longer than any other),
having to have at her disposition

everybody's entire existence every
hour every minute for years on end
or else he said there is an explosion like all
earthquakes and thunderstorms put together.

Taking herself to be an incarnation
of the Cumaean Sybil's alter ego
(swathed in silks and manuscripts, intense,
voluptuous, imperious, feline)

like the lovelorn heroine of her novel
(an artist independent yet vulnerable
emotionally), she became the model
new woman for that new age.

Married to a handsome ambassador, she had
four children who bore his surname
and personally saved at least a dozen people
from the revolutionary beheading machine.

Said to have been the richest woman in Europe
(heiress to her father's Swiss banking empire
the main funding to bring Napoleon down)
she kept up a highly personal vendetta

with the pint-sized Alexander of the day, hosted
the most famous salon of the era and to each
prospective lover recounted the amorous failings
of the previous one. I've always been in love with my father

she said, and had he been younger would have wedded him gladly.
At 51, shortly after marriage to a hussar
young enough to be her son (a little
Scottish melody she said, speech

is not his language) she died. Her favorite word was *enthusiasm* not she said to be confused with *fanaticism*. When the existence of man is expansive it holds something of the divine.