

Of Sound Mind

*I pray to have my hand beneath her cloak again
- Guilhem VII de Peiteus*

Of sound mind hard body and lusty spirit
leader valiant in battle lover a poet in bed
frolicsome at times passionate at others

yet withal detached, ironic, intelligent
aware of his own interests a man as he said
who desired what I could never have he was they say

the first troubadour though no one knows for sure
and she who might have known kept it to herself
the counterkey it may be to all the finesse of love.

In verse as in life joining together warrior north
and southern courtesy Ovidian clerical meters
Gregorian chant dance tunes and Arabic technique

coarse vernacular and courtly elegance
scholarly parody and barracks vulgarity
chivalric love and artistic self-consciousness

the ethical attitude of feudal-monastic culture
(upper-crust inflection and arch innuendo)
with physical and mystical bodies, coupling

scriptural analogues to mariolatry
with secular conceits from courtly romance, a new
religion of feminine superiority

(years before the newborn Church of Love was crushed
by orthodoxy, royalty and the Holy Office)
a moral force of radical phylogyny

it's abbey the sanctuary his wife took refuge in
after his excommunication for adultery
with his vassal's wife, the *bona Dompna Dangierosa*

his by seigneurial right and her concurrence

who with the balm of joy soothed the wounds he had suffered
since the rout of his army by Saracens in the Holy Land,

woman-friend of his last twenty years a Lady
to be grateful for, to cherish, whose reputation to protect,
her love ennobling, an inspiration to *gentillesse*

her body — their *joi* their song — never could anyone
he said imagine it, not by want or wish
not by thought or meditation its mystery

far beyond ken or cunning of loose women
or crude swordsmen critical clerics or foppish poets
who carry on about love at a distance for *femmes cruelles*

whose reserve they swear will be their very death
but is in fact their fondest wish, their pleasure longing itself
their love a meretricious fantasy at best.

Never slow to accuse of mortal sin a lady
who refused to give her love to her loyal knight,
or to complain when he wasn't getting enough, or to damn

lords who keep their fidelitous ladies under lock and key
ignorant that what they would button up is that wondrous purse
which pilfered returns in manifold what was taken and besides he said

all such precaution is sheer folly for I know
of no woman who does not require her presence acknowledged
or who being of sound mind would not when wronged

take her case where she would find satisfaction
— if denied the courser, she'll claim the palfrey —
or who would have her cuneiform left undeciphered.