

Five Poems

Catharine Savage Brosman

The Wolves Are Out

A strange effect of this long quarantine:
the wolves are out. Like springtime, death, and war,
it leads men's latent fancies to convene
on love, or something like it.

They explore all avenues. One bluntly asked my name
as I passed by him at a musicale
outdoors; then, gesturing, said, "Your mother came
along, I see." But no!—coeval, *pal*

—both wrinkled women "of a certain age."
(Eschewing masks, I wore a sari, thus
disguising years.) Another personage—
a married man I know—made quite a fuss,

and mumbled "an affair . . . if I were free,"
then rearranged my shirt, *en décolleté*,
as though to guard my virtue! Just a *V*,
it was, though, in good taste and not *risqué*.

A third man shines by courtesy. No hook;
disinterested. I was in a café,
alone, a fork in one hand, and a book
beside me, open. Few were there that day.

Catharine Savage Brosman is professor emerita of French at Tulane University and the managing editor of the *French Review* through eighteen issues; cbrosman@tulane.edu.

I know the manager. “The bill, when you
are ready, please.” “It’s paid,” he said. “But how?
You must be wrong.” “That man who left, in blue,
took care of it.” I understand; just now

I’d glimpsed a figure at the door. But why?
He did not ask my name, nor leave a card,
nor speak; just paid my check and his. I sigh.
The soul of tact. But don’t let down your guard!

Clara's Bees

The back garden is arranged for them—path cleared,
a stand assembled for the hive, fresh plantings,
friendly, flourishing. When the bees will come, though,
is uncertain. They were ordered months ago,
for Easter Week, from Italy! They will be driven,
I assume, by the *Servizio postale* from the *campagna*
to some *ufficio* in the city, thence an airport,
flown across the ocean to New York, then find

themselves—to their surprise?—in Bedford-Stuyvesant.
How adaptable are they? Oh, quite, I think.
Moreover, they are guaranteed—by Ebay! Fancy that.
Apis mellifera: a honeyed name. This past season
during long hours of darkness they slept in, Circadian
like us; being shut up a while for shipping
should not damage them. But the times are bad—
the year of pestilence. Italy is devastated, New York,

worse. Will the plane take off? And can it be *essential*
these days to deliver honeybees? Meanwhile,
Clara has, to occupy her time and thoughts,
her ancient Greek and French, her history, English,
physics, math, and chemistry. We are in suspense,
imagining the garden shortly, all abuzz. What a refuge!
—like the fragrant villa outside Florence
where Boccaccio and his friends escaped the plague.

II

Foretelling mellic words, bees swarmed to land
on tiny Plato's lips as he lay slumbering in his cradle.
Thenceforth he favored them, in deed,
in metaphor: they were the souls of dead philosophers
perhaps, returned, or represented virtues—
both alike and different. Yet with a warning: dulcitude,
said Socrates, is toxic, dangerous to moderation. Oh,
Clara, shining sweetness does befit you,

but, too, the golden mean of thought.—The bees
have landed, stirring from their drowse a bit, sending
scouts, it would appear, to find the nectar
in the marigolds, and waiting, we suppose, for warmer
weather, while the queen stays in her traveling cage
before her sortie to lay eggs. Her troops
are numerous—ten thousand, so it's said. Imagine!
Think of future vectors on display—authentic

bee lines, but with variations, deviations, multiplying
as the little darlings flit from flower to flower—
pollen ready, juices nectarous—in all directions,
to their purpose. It's ballet, but modern
in its choreography. Like Clara, also poised to venture,
all intent, the very image of a body's rationale:
to be, and be one's possibilities—the muscles flexing
toward the goal, the pulse of datum turning to idea.

Bloody Marys

Behold, the [*sic*] Hotel Belle View Royale—
a case of adding French to make a name
(half-right) sound elegant and not banal.
In time, the place may thereby earn acclaim.

Though situated on a lovely bay,
with splendid views, in Aberystwyth, Wales
(reason the more, perhaps, to add cachet?),
its mirrors, polished bar, and famous ales

are known to few. The town is small, remote;
the students at the *uni* cannot pay
for fancy wines and five-star *table d'hôte*.
There's very little custom on this day.

We choose two stools. The barman comes to take
our order. David smiles: "A Bloody Mary."
A puzzled silence, first ("How *does* one make
it? What on earth?" —we read his mind.) A query:

"What *is* it?" A tutorial ensues:
tall glasses, spirits, ice, *tomahto* juice,
Tabasco, Worcestershire sauce ("Oh, this is news!"),
black pepper, celery. To introduce

a Welshman to the drink is a delight.
There's no Tabasco, though, not green, not red,
nor celery. "Those Spanish olives might
do nicely, or a pickled bean, instead."

The fellow comes around; he does his best.
We raise a glass to him, to Cymru pride.
We chatter, drink, and gaze out to the west,
where sunset spreads its silver on the tide,
and, with the barman, speak of *New Orleans*.
For us, a local dinner then, Welsh rabbit.
With or without Tabasco and green beans,
for him, a Bloody Mary's now a habit.

For a Champion

I don't reply to insults often—not my style,
a waste of time. Besides, I was not reared
for such contentious intercourse. But while
I shall be reticent, a friend has cleared

my name—three missiles, launched in my defense!
King Arthur, were he here, with mighty sword,
would not be needed; courtesy, good sense,
poetic wit suffice. The fellow's gored.

He called my formal poems “precious,” “prissy,”
ignoring women's nature, taste, and tone,
and treated me as just a worthless missy.
Had I been vulgar, “woke,” I might have shone.

He thought it must have had to do with race
and bigotry. Troy prejudice, my alibi.
He's quite mistaken; that is not the case,
except in his strabismic, crooked eye.

He singled out a classical allusion,
as evidence of hopeless obsolescence.
I've read his stuff. Banal. To his confusion,
he'll see it all dissolve into putrescence.

So thank you, Sir, for taking up my cause,
my colors, Nature's hues, which he disdains.
Your mighty pen will surely get applause;
he'll get poetic justice for his pains.

A Note to One Deceased

You know I've sold my little summer place
in Colorado, purchased as a get-
away from heat and hurricanes, a grace.
(The dreadful winds and flooding that beset

New Orleans cannot reach so far.) And when
we married, it was *ours*—our balcony
and tree, our view on life, a regimen
of love, delight. But you've been gone, now, three

full years, and reasonable modes must rule.
My father's firm idealism lives in me,
as fine as his was; but he was no fool,
nor I. I vote for practicality,

and recognize, inevitably, change
in everything. *Finis, les longs voyages*
toward shimmering rainbow mesas and the range
of picket mountains. They were not mirage;

we prospered on the *mouelle sustantifique*—
—the marrow of that journey—for our eyes,
continuing all summer by Pike's Peak,
a studied show, yet always a surprise.

You took your genius with you there; it stays,
perhaps, to follow morning shadows, feel
a storm inhabit you, see sunset blaze.
You also were consumed by the ideal.