
Catharine Savage Brosman

Florissant Fossil Beds

The sun has warmed us through the thin, high mountain air, and, panting a bit, we hasten to find shade in ponderosa pine and spruce before continuing along the sunlit path that winds among the fossil beds of Florissant. We've admired the fallen giants' huge remains—Eocene sequoias turned to stone, the limbs long gone but the base still upright, petrified after tides of volcanic fire and ash

roiled across the valley, more than thirty million years ago. There are signs here, too, of paleo-Indians, mixed with artefacts of Uncompaghre Utes and Apaches of the Jicarilla tribe, who left their potsherds scattered in the redwood ruins; too, abundant shale, imprinted with the brittle, delicate debris of ages even earlier—times I cannot imagine—when sediments, compressed, solidified, took hostages—

living witnesses from sea and earth. Remnants hide still among alpine flowers of late August nearly unnoticed, and so ephemeral that, by this evening, many will have dropped or withered.—Surely, then, we must feel closer bonds to them than to the seeds, fruit, leaves, and animals of aeons before ours; yet these frail butterflies in stone, these spiders, bees like fetuses, these flowers, pollens, ostracods

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compressed in shale are eerily familiar, as if—though
not created then—we also might have been there,
in promise as moist bits of protoplasm—a great thought
of the planet come to light much later, like seeds
in volcanic paste, infertile, but whose distant
kindred live now on these slopes—leafy maple,
densely-fronded fir, sharing in immense
commotions—time, while unseemly, tying us together.

In the Brooklyn Museum

Classic architecture facing us—pillars, pediment, and dome,
the image of imposing, institutionalized art;
but here's a new glass entrance hall, sky-lit, feeling open,
vast—and, greeting us, more living than the bag inspector,
are twelve Rodin statues, not life-sized
but enormous, giants of his thought. He cast them extra-
large because the early critics had alleged
his "Le Vaincu" had been molded from a living model—

unacceptable technique; the statue was too good (the pose,
the lifted arms showing the biceps,
the mighty neck and rippling torso, musculature in bronze,
almost breathing). Here's Balzac, naked,
corpulent and vigorous—the vision of the *Comédie humaine*
in person; here, too, the tragic burghers of Calais,
standing alone, the more impressive for it
(hands enormous, palpitant; feet, the very sense of motion,

fit for a colossus; heads, even in their lamentation, strong):
Andrieus d'Andres, the "weeping burgher,"
fingers enmeshed, covering his head in dolor; Jean d'Aire,
holding the city key to be surrendered;
Pierre de Wiessant—like others, rope around the neck;
two more; finally, Eustache de Saint-Pierre,
the bearded burgher, at the center of the monument of six
erected in Calais. All are immense, with eyes far-seeing

in their sacrifice, proclaiming still their fear of martyrdom,
their grief, their pride. The massive presences
confound all critics, as they challenge matter, using
earth in common species—tin and copper ores—fire, and air,
to go beyond it, to surpass the suffering body,
hostage to history—not just the forlorn burghers of Calais,
but vulnerable France, occupied by English
hundreds of years, vanquished on the fields of Waterloo,

once again defeated at Sedan in 1870, amputated of Alsace,
Lorraine. Did Rodin also think of women's bodies—
fragile rose and pale-gold flesh destroyed—
like those he loved (too well), preserved in his erotic sketches?
—We have had enough for now; we round up children,
move into the main pavilion, get our tickets,
visit the European paintings, arranged by genre in a square,
so that portraits on one side stare at our backs as we admire

the landscapes opposite. Then luncheon. But Rodin cannot
be ignored; going out, we stop once more,
marvel, watch the children run among the statues, laughing,
small limbs lively, full of future, friable
though, destined to dissolve in time—even as they resist idea,
the pure bronze of the mind, transcending
such imagined pathos in their midst—art and being in pursuit
of one another, shadows leapfrogging, wrestling in the grass.

North Park

Among tall aspen—leafy, elegant—and spruce, severe,
the road has crested over Willow Creek Pass,
leading from Grand County and the enormous basin-land
called Middle Park into its smaller kin,
North Park. It's neat, as if an architect had laid it out,
with mountains on all sides, setting off
the smooth green stretch of northern meadows. Cattle
animate the scene, some grazing, heads pointed downwind,

others moving single-file, to water, or on some whimsy
of their own. Streams meander here and there, marked
by cottonwoods or willows. Elsewhere, hay
lies in fresh bales or has been stacked already.
A few low spots are alkaline—white or discolored
crystal stuff. The world is well away;
the rustic, unpretentious town where we have lunch
is Walden, and Thoreau, if he were here, would recognize

a kindred spirit, though he might go even farther, settling
by a pond where bison wallow. We too like
the isolation and the vast perspectives, ending only
at blue skylines; and my love for you—still
young—ripples and besports itself in the shimmering light
across the fields, all green and yellow. Yet
I do not love you less in crowds, in dark remembrances
or cramping of the mind, the moments when a curtain

falls across reflection, or the ashen sky weighs heavily.
That is the proof—joy together in this mountain
summer, brilliant even as it wanes, and also in what follows,
necessarily: in North Park, winds bearing down
from the plains and ranges of Wyoming, cold entrenched
(I shiver at the thought), and, for us,
pinched-in winter days, city traffic and routines,
but high ground of the heart, high love, holding us up.

Carrots

A bunch of carrots on the cutting board
have caught the corner of my eye with strange,
self-designating presence. Might they be
five virgins waiting to be sacrificed?
Plump fingers, reddened, puffy from the gout?
Mute nobles lined up for the guillotine?
Or are they, rather, mermaids, bodies slim
and tapered to a point, with leafy hair—

Ophelia's locks, or delicate green strands
in the Sargasso Sea? I do not like
the thought of immolating even flesh
imagined; so I'll think of them as stuff,
just vegetable matter, crisp and hard,
resistant to the knife, a test for teeth.
The tops go first: a quick beheading. Next,
the skin: I take the peeler, scrape away.

"Dice carrots finely," says the recipe.
But what's to keep them rolling from the board?
Bisecting them is tricky; then the halves
must be cut up, and so on, till the bits
are flying to all sides, and meanwhile I
am fearful for my fingers, even eyes.
All this for plain *ragoût*! I'm not a cook,
or barely; less, a surgeon, seamstress, tooth-

extractor with strong hands. Two fragments fall
beneath the table, others down a crack
beside the stove. Farewell. —A friend once said
I didn't seem to care for food. Not so;
the best meals, though, are cooked by someone else,
and, preferably, Texas-style, robust,
with little snobbery. —Back to the board.
Ah well; at least there is no blood to stanch,

and now the orange gems are in the pot,
contributing their color, vitamins,
and taste (if it survives long hours
of heat). Ah, vegetables! Children's bane,
but comfort to the conscience, a relief
from guilty flesh—since from mere cellulose,
insentient, we concoct its opposite,
brilliant conceit of nothingness, of joy.