

Catharine Savage Brosman

Tulips in a Vase

They know that they are beautiful. They turn
to show their profile, bend a willowy stem,
adjust their mien (one redhead seems to burn
with languorous henna streaks). Each stratagem

is clever, catching eye and thought. And we
respond indulgently with care and praise:
fresh water, stimulants, the eager fee
for beauty. One, pale pink, attempts to raise

her languid petals, parting at the throat,
while two, sun-yellow, shyly hold a pose
of modesty. Such tactics may denote
an ingénue who shuns the blowsy rose

and innocently keeps *le naturel*;
or can they be in fact some artifice
learned even in the tulip fields, learned well?
Their coquetry is *sui generis*

at least. And ours? It's ancient — budding girls,
old divas, all the same, instinctive, cool,
directed toward the flattery, flowers, pearls
that prove how far each sex can play the fool.