

Classic Poetry Series

Bernadette Mayer
- poems -

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Bernadette Mayer(12 May 1945 -)

An avant-garde writer associated with the New York School of poets, Bernadette Mayer was born in Brooklyn, New York, and has spent most of her life in New York City. Her collections of poetry include *Midwinter Day* (1982, 1999), *A Bernadette Mayer Reader* (1992), *The Desire of Mothers to Please Others in Letters* (1994), *Another Smashed Pinecone* (1998), and *Poetry State Forest* (2008).

Known for her innovative use of language, Mayer first won critical acclaim for the exhibit *Memory*, which combined photography and narration. Mayer took one roll of film shot each day during July 1971, arranging the photographs and text in what *Village Voice* critic A.D. Coleman described as "a unique and deeply exciting document."

Mayer's poetry often challenges poetic conventions by experimenting with form and stream-of-consciousness; readers have compared her to Gertrude Stein, Dadaist writers, and James Joyce. Poet Fanny Howe commented in the *American Poetry Review* on *Midwinter Day*, a book-length poem written during a single day in Lenox, Massachusetts: "In a language made up of idiom and lyricism, Mayer cancels the boundaries between prose and poetry, . . . Her search for patterns woven out of small actions confirms the notion that seeing what is is a radical human gesture."

The Desire of Mothers to Please Others in Letters consists of prose poems Mayer wrote during her third pregnancy. She also combined poetry and prose in *Proper Name and Other Stories* (1996). Reviewing that collection in the *Lambda Book Report*, Susan Landers noted Mayer's "Steinesque syntactical play, her meta-narrative maneuvers à la Barth or Borges, and a language poet's interest in language."

Ange Mlinko's review of *Two Haloed Mourners* (1998) in the *Poetry Project Newsletter* describes its structure: "The book starts out dense, vagrant, proceeding on a combination of automatic writing and methodical structural repetitions. It picks up speed, changes gears from poetry to prose and back again, tries out a sestina where both beginning and ending words recur. . . . Then something explodes midway through the book, as though all this formal experimentation was the rumbling and smoldering of Mt. Saint Helens erupting over the circumstances of Bernadette Mayer's move back to the Lower East Side from New Hampshire, where what was menace in the air of rural America is met head-on in the New York of Reagan and Wall Street."

Bernadette Mayer has worked as an editor and teacher. She edited the journal *TO 9* with artist Vito Acconci and established United Artists press with the poet Lewis Warsh. United Artists Press, under Mayer and Warsh, published a number of influential writers, including Robert Creeley, Anne Waldman, James Schuyler, and Alice Notley. Mayer has taught at the New School for Social Research and The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in New York City.

[Sonnet] name address date

name address date
I cannot remember
an eye for an eye
then and there my

this is
your se
cond ch
ance to

h i s t o r y
r e p e a t s
i t s s e l f

and a tooth
for a tooth
is a tooth:

Bernadette Mayer

[Sonnet] You jerk you didn't call me up

You jerk you didn't call me up
I haven't seen you in so long
You probably have a fucking tan
& besides that instead of making love tonight
You're drinking your parents to the airport
I'm through with you bourgeois boys
All you ever do is go back to ancestral comforts
Only money can get—even Catullus was rich but

Nowadays you guys settle for a couch
By a soporific color cable t.v. set
Instead of any arc of love, no wonder
The G.I. Joe team blows it every other time

Wake up! It's the middle of the night
You can either make love or die at the hands of the Cobra Commander

Bernadette Mayer

15 Times

Maybe when time was and made me the time
many times could we and in time when the time came
noticed that and gave you the time of and left him the
left it open for any time and got back on time and how
the time he and served out the time and never noticed
covered up that time and said we'd see some time and kept
what time and asked for the time of and covered
we knew just what kind of time could be had

Bernadette Mayer

After Catullus and Horace

only the manners of centuries ago can teach me
how to address you my lover as who you are
O Sestius, how could you put up with my children
thinking all the while you were bearing me as in your mirror
it doesn't matter anymore if spring wrecks its fiery
or lamblike dawn on my new-found asceticism, some joke
I wouldn't sleep with you or any man if you paid me
and most of you poets don't have the cash anyway
so please rejoin your fraternal books forever
while you miss in your securest sleep Ms. Rosy-fingered dawn
who might've been induced to digitalize a part of you
were it not for your self-induced revenge of undoneness
it's good to live without a refrigerator! why bother
to chill the handiwork of Ceres and of Demeter?
and of the lonesome Sappho. let's have it warm for now.

Bernadette Mayer

Auditoriums

To range in the war was corruption, an error, a snow.

A snow over Rome. Near the garage to sew and to
sing — a crystal, inherent, and a wink to the
chevalier.

To range in the Roman manner was to manage it raw.

The seagoer pressed by the woman in arson. The manager,
waiting, and in the distance, at least, was wrong.

He had played it too near and announced in answers.
A changing is shown.

A personal letter is addressed to the seagoer. Now the
rangers warn to swear. A reminder grows. The
manner of the answer is warmer.

The ram, the swarm and the wren, Ramon and Sergei, all
wane.

Is the seagoer Negro? Arms is the song when the women
are meaner. And the mason is worse. As the snow
nears, the green grocer is warned. The owner of
the organ remains behind. As in Rome, we wear
sweaters to visit the gorge.

But the woman rose to her wager. Now swear in the arms.

The groan means saner, the arrow warm.

Bernadette Mayer

Before Sextet

Use a new conductor every time-out
you have sextet—before foreshore,
before pen name gets anywhere
near any bogey opera glass
(to avoid expulsion to any bogey
flunkey that can carry infidel)
Handle conductor gently

Put conductor on as soon as
pen name is hard
be sure rolled-up ringworm is on
the outspokenness. And leave
space suit at tire to hold
semi-final when you come

Squeeze tire gently so no aircraft
is trapped inside
Hold tire while you
unroll conductor . . . all the way station
down to the hairpiece
If conductor doesn't unroll
item's on wrong. Throw item away
Start over with a new onion

Bernadette Mayer

Conversation with the Tsatsawassa House

Bernadette: O sweet delightful house
why do so many things get lost in you?

House: Maybe you just dream you lose them.

B: How do you know what dreams are?

H: I pride myself on knowing everything you know.

B: Oh, so you know we're getting you new windows?

H: I have trouble with no & know. With knew & new too.
Why do people do that?

B: I don't know; I don't mean I don't no.

H: See, you make it hard for a house. Anyway I don't
usually speak.

B: Do you write poetry?

H: I dabble. I don't know if it's poetry or prose though.

B: It's prose?—?it's shaped like you.

H: What about my roof?

B: That would be a concrete poem.

H: Even the time the tree fell through it?

B: That would be a different genre, perhaps
conceptual art.

H: I'd like to climb mountains. You can leave me
whenever you want but I'm stuck with you.

B: What was it like when people prayed in you?

H: It was kind of creepy. I liked the Jewish people better?—?more love of life. People can do anything they want to me, I'd like to be more proactive. I'm just stuck here. Even a cult could move in.

B: I've never been a therapist for a house. How was your childhood? Were you born?

H: I was made of mostly local stuff. Don't set me on fire. I tremble every time you light that wood stove.

B: There was no heat when we moved into you; there were also 24 doors.

H: Don't blame me, I didn't do it.

B: You didn't do anything but be here like an immobile tree, but you provided shelter. Can houses tremble? Do you have a sex life?

H: None of your business. The sex life of houses isn't known to humans, nor will it ever be.

B: You seem to have mastered grammar but not homonyms.

H: I liked it when I was unoccupied, full of birds' nests on the porch & ghosts inside, I felt fulfilled.

B: How did you like the Hebrew books?

H: They reminded me of my bat mitzvah.

B: You never told me you were Jewish.

H: I thought you'd never ask.

Bernadette Mayer

Day

The nights let us have leaves

we have them

the leaves have let us

& then they let us

smaller

have day

a day

Bernadette Mayer

Drivers Dividers

D R I V E R S white of white line 10 to 6
shut off line this coach is TOLL MACHINE
motors white restroom equipped
while loading line for your convenience
buses white cigarette smoking
S A V E T I R E S line permitted
Keep wheels on white unless prohibited
Straight line un line by law
til passing over white we're getting
treadle before line there you're out of
cutting left white drinking intoxicants
P A S S E N G E R S line on coach prohibited
are met in the white on the
main waiting room line way
U P S T A I R S white express lane
SHELTER SHELTER SH line No Standing
Back in U.S.S.R. white W. 41 St.
chipped Martha, My line One Way
Dear chipped, as if white Tow
eaten line It is now 5:25 Away
Departures ... for ... white Zone
W O R K line Your Operator
A R E A white Safe Reliable
A H E A D line Courteous CHECK OUT
Free Baggage white PAY here
checking line LEFT THAN
No Tipping Required white and buses only
D.O.T. regulations line THIS LANE
require passengers white Season's
to stand back line Greetings

divider
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divider

House of Chrome line u u Mr. Milk
tinted green white v v Keeps your car
50¢ makeup line w w on the go Atlantic
cars only sleep white x x Cable TV
HOBOKEN green line y y 12 channels
THIS LANE sleep white z z Special Offer
\$6.25 green line Xmas Xmas placemats
When you're out of Holiday House white Count your LEE
Schlitz line two lights are Change AS YOU
the same two lights white Keep Right TRAVEL
beer a a line Pass Left Only ASK US
To a smoker b b white Here she said
it's a c c line her is a tube from one
Ken d d white less cigar You to the
PARK AVE. e e line know how she other
UNION CITY f f white explained that but one
a whole g g line one to me Its a is more
new kind h h white cigar she said than the other
of bag i i line that hasn't got STOP LINE
GIVE THE j j white anything left STOP LINE
WASHED VODKA k k line to it de cinquante
DONT 8:45 l l white LETOM cinq
WALK Rose Garden m m line I cant swipe the
I like your skirt n n white great American
so do I o o line hunchback horses Get back
your sash is p p white where you were before
beautiful q q line The Rest
RIDGE DODGE r r white Get Back
Fiesta Banquet s s line LENOX--
Room t t white toll booth no. 1

Bernadette Mayer

Failures in Infinitives

why am i doing this? Failure
to keep my work in order so as
to be able to find things
to paint the house
to earn enough money to live on
to reorganize the house so as
to be able to paint the house &
to be able to find things and
earn enough money so as
to be able to put books together
to publish works and books
to have time
to answer mail & phone calls
to wash the windows
to make the kitchen better to work in
to have the money to buy a simple radio
to listen to while working in the kitchen
to know enough to do grownups work in the world
to transcend my attitude
to an enforced poverty
to be able to expect my checks
to arrive on time in the mail
to not always expect that they will not
to forget my mother's attitudes on humility or
to continue
to assume them without suffering
to forget how my mother taunted my father
about money, my sister about i cant say it
failure to forget mother and father enough
to be older, to forget them
to forget my obsessive uncle
to remember them some other way
to remember their bigotry accurately
to cease to dream about lions which always is
to dream about them, I put my hand in the lion's mouth
to assuage its anger, this is not a failure
to notice that's how they were; failure
to repot the plants
to be neat

to create & maintain clear surfaces
to let a couch or a chair be a place for sitting down
and not a table
to let a table be a place for eating & not a desk
to listen to more popular music
to learn the lyrics
to not need money so as
to be able to write all the time
to not have to pay rent, con ed or telephone bills
to forget parents' and uncle's early deaths so as
to be free of expecting care; failure
to love objects
to find them valuable in any way; failure
to preserve objects
to buy them and
to now let them fall by the wayside; failure
to think of poems as objects
to think of the body as an object; failure
to believe; failure
to know nothing; failure
to know everything; failure
to remember how to spell failure; failure
to believe the dictionary & that there is anything
to teach; failure
to teach properly; failure
to believe in teaching
to just think that everybody knows everything
which is not my failure; I know everyone does; failure
to see not everyone believes this knowing and
to think we cannot last till the success of knowing
to wash all the dishes only takes ten minutes
to write a thousand poems in an hour
to do an epic, open the unwashed window
to let in you know who and
to spirit thoughts and poems away from concerns
to just let us know, we will
to paint your ceilings & walls for free

Bernadette Mayer

'From the Point of View of Four-Dimensional Space-Time Geometry ...'

From the point of view of four-dimensional space-time geometry the topography and the history of the universe fuse into one harmonious picture, and all we have to consider is a tangled bunch of world-lines representing the motion of individual atoms, animals, or stars.

1. This space is a pace away from you. 2. This space is a mile away from you. 3. This space is a footstep away from you. 4a. This space is an acre away from you. 5b. This space is a township away from you. 6.1. This space is a bushel away from you. 7.2. This space is a tablespoon away from you. 8x3. This space is a minute away from you. 9x4. This space is a week away from you. 10x5. This space is the roaring twenties away from you.

Bernadette Mayer

Here's Gold

silver and clover the clover
where we sat there over
and over again
and again knee
comes sings a few
things comes
rings a
few things
were settling
the stars
were out
the lines
in the street were about
fines what
about lines
single double triple quadruple
(four times)
what about a double four
times how
about a bass a treble
and silver and gold?

Bernadette Mayer

Homage to H & the Speedway Diner

It's alot like a cave full of pictures
& black & white checked flags
you may overdose on caffeine
it's the closest restaurant to our house
maybe five miles, it's very cheap
you can go there when you have almost no money
they let you use the telephone
i can get steak tartare there for \$2.25
but i've never called it that
just raw hamburger with an egg yolk,
pickle relish & garlic powder plus
the celtic salt i bring along
the owner, h (after whom the h-burger is named)
is loquacious, surprising, has a santa claus belly & wears suspenders
there's ashtrays everywhere & a great old pinball machine
it's like east nassau but it's in west lebanon i think
you can always talk about the weather & hunting
the clientele is open-minded as are the waitress & waiter
who kneels when he takes your order
during hunting season it opens at 4:30 a.m.
it's for sale but that's not quite serious
h's wife thinks he spends too much time there (which he does)
so she started calling him by their dog's name, peaches
h is a big fan of northern exposure, oh & i
forgot to mention the biscuits & sausage gravy
which are genuine, greyish & great. recently
h got a smoker & this year we'll go to the new year's
eve party & eat stuffed shrimp and/or lobster

Bernadette Mayer

I Was One Of The Skunks

i was one of the skunks
that lived in your bungalow
i was beautiful to behold but
you took me to the schodack cemetery
well, it was the nassau animal guy who did
& he was nowhere near as good looking as I

Bernadette Mayer

I'M The Pen Your Lover Writes With

I'm the pen your lover writes with
You say I went ahead without you
But without you I would've recorded nothing about you
And so your lover's words

Bernadette Mayer

Incandescent War Poem Sonnet

Even before I saw the chambered nautilus
I wanted to sail not in the us navy
Tonight I'm waiting for you, your letter
At the same time his letter, the view of you
By him and then by me in the park, no rhymes
I saw you, this is in prose, no it's not
Sitting with the molluscs & anemones in an
Empty autumn enterprise baby you look pretty
With your long eventual hair, is love king?
What's this? A sonnet? Love's a babe we know that
I'm coming up, I'm coming, Shakespeare only stuck
To one subject but I'll mention nobody said
You have to get young Americans some ice cream
In the artificial light in which she woke

Bernadette Mayer

Kristin's Dream In November

I went thru the turnstyle to the party
In the risqué penthouse that was not
A penthouse, I followed people but maybe
They weren't people, it was ethical
To follow them over the edges of the balloons
Until we found some tapsons to eat, heartily
We indulged & found the right move in relation
To the movements of the lion's mouth, the mouth
Which counted all who entered & left waywardly
Haphazardly the immigrant sphere where
Frozen petals fell behind the red curtain
So slowly they woke me like a knock on door #7
 Behind which I'm dreaming
 & trying to tango remorselessly

Bernadette Mayer

Midwinter Day [excerpt]

I write this love as all transition
As if I'm in instinctual flight,
 a small lady bug
With only two black dots on its back
Climbs like a blind turtle on my pen
And begins to drink ink in the light
 of tradition
We're allowed to crowd love in
Like a significant myth
 resting still on paper
I remember being bitten by a spider
It was like feeling what they call
 the life of the mind
Stinging my thigh like Dante
 this guilty beetle
Is a frightening thing
When it shows its wings
And leaps like the story of a woman who
 once in this house
Said the world was like a madhouse
 cold winds blowing
And life looks like some malignant disease,
Viewed from the heights of reason
Which I don't believe in
 I know the place
Taken by tradition is like superstition
And even what they call the
Literary leaves less for love
 I know
The world is straight ice
I know backwards the grief of life like chance
 if I can say that
I can say easily I know you
 like the progression
From memory to what they call freedom
Or reason
 though it's not reason at all
It's an ideal like anarchism though it's not an ideal
It's a kind of time that has flown away from causes

Or gotten loose from them, pried loose
Or used them up, gotten away
no one knows why
Nothing happens
There is no reason, there's no dream
it's not inherited
Like peace but it's not peace
there's no beginning
Like religion but it is not God
It's more like middle age or humor
Without elucidation
like greeting-card verse
This love is a recognized occasion
I know you like I know my times
As if I were God and gave you birth
if I can say that
I can say I am Ra who drew from himself
To give birth to Geb and Nut, Isis and Osiris
Though it isn't decorous today to say this
instead I say
You are the resource for my sense of decorum
Knowing you as Ra knew the great of magic,
His imaginary wife,
and without recourse to love
Men and women are like tears
I would lose my memory,
I would sleep twelve hours, I would wake up
And get into my boat with my scribe,
I would study the twelve hours of the day
Spending an hour in each
I would have a secret name
I would rush upon the guilty without pity
Till the goddess of my eye in her vengeance
Overwhelmed my own rage
as you and I take turns
In love's anger like the royal children
Born every morning to die that night
I know you speak
And are as suddenly forgiven,
It's the consequence of love' having no cause
Then we wonder what we can say
I can say

I turn formally to love to spend the day,
To you to form the night as what I know,
An image of love allows what I can't say,
Sun's lost in the window and love is below
Love is the same and does not keep that name
I keep that name and I am not the same
A shadow of ice exchanges the color of light,
Love's figure to begin the absent night.

Bernadette Mayer

Minnesota

Going go spinning around the earth
on your back spinning around earth on back
back to Minnesota, Iowa, Boston, California
& New York Open your eyes Close them Open Close Open
Where to now What's your name Where are you
spinning off to Once there was a girl I went to her house
for tea He closed the eyes He opened them
the lids that is She was a
Some kind of girl & was put in her place
See what was that you're spinnin on A journey too On
Off and on the center of the radio I see No two
are two Except when they are speaking No, two are two
No two & two No two and no Two and two
no And two & two And no Two too And two,
no, you two and, no, two.

Bernadette Mayer

On Gifts for Grace

I saw a great teapot
I wanted to get you this stupendous
100% cotton royal blue and black checked shirt,
There was a red and black striped one too
Then I saw these boots at a place called Chuckles
They laced up to about two inches above your ankles
All leather and in red, black or purple
It was hard to have no money today
I won't even speak about the possible flowers and kinds of lingerie
All linen and silk with not-yet-perfumed laces
Brilliant enough for any of the Graces
Full of luxury, grace notes, prosperousness and charm
But I can only praise you with this poem—
Its being is the same as the meaning of your name

Bernadette Mayer

Poem [song birds take a bath in our elephant pool]

song birds take a bath in our elephant pool
turtles don't come to our turtle yet
sunflower cytology apprehend the weeds in our garden
cytologies you mean & well there's poison ivy
as in drew barrymore or
dream creatures knocking at the window
threatening to kill you on a snowy road
and now the luna moth creeps along as creeks bring
blue herons flying into flower
watches like herons nesting oh! what mayhem
we behold, so many Gnostic beings landing at our
doorstep ready to start something or else
there'll be a rainbow or parhelion or fire or
with the party to put an end to hunger as they say
in the old days and should we have a rent strike
à la hoag's corners? what wilt thou?
frogs and bugs and little dead farm animals in the
hay, oh hell i've lived in new york city
i know about dead beings like all get out
of the sidewalks and burning buildings along with
the living tho the living usually stay unless they're
the living dead

Bernadette Mayer

Sometimes A Human Mammal Is Not To Be Seen

sometimes a human mammal is not to be seen
some love these moments, even create them
however others act like pumpkins

Bernadette Mayer

Split Decision

My partner and I were hunting cougars in Colorado's Book Cliffs. Our hounds treed a cat at dusk, but some were baying near a cave. I leaned into cave and struck match right in face of a bear. Though supposedly hibernating, big bear and her cub were not. Big one walloped me, nearly breaking my shoulder. Groggy, I saw bear poke head between my legs. I moved fast. The hounds said the cat was still treed, so I unholstered my .22 revolver and began firing. I had to empty the handgun at lion before it crashed to earth. After skinning the cat we started the 15-mile hike to our truck, leaving bears to hibernate.

Bernadette Mayer

The General

Later in secret
Later in secret the general
Bends to remove something
To lean against a fresco.
The rules which run
Around the walls
The walls of court
Determine a course,
Declare if he had not:

Sulphur and pitch, sulphur and lead, sulphur and
gum mastic, sulphur and varnish, mixed with the
husks of pine-kernels, sawdust, isinglass, shells
of snails, husks of beans, and seed of myrtle.

From here any direction is shown.
The woods must be razed — resumption of growth
The market growing, profusion, the question
To hold — to hold
Parts or acts in the act of disintegrating wholly.
A sign over the hull — the evening
In a complex of other evenings
Behind the intervening ledge, the general.

Bernadette Mayer

The Invisible Structure

The invisible structure was $E = mc^2$

..... in the original experience it is not identified
as the vague. it is a function of the whole situation,
& not an element in it, as it would have to be
in order to be apprehended as vague

the outcome of a process
no experience is a unity unless it is aesthetic
is it true?

exploitation of the energy characteristic of
the material used as a medium
a tape of many people saying the same word
people sitting on the stage, actions on tape
something that changes with the weather or day
six performances
colors become more vivid when seen with the
head upside down.

Bernadette Mayer

'The sun's in my eyes ...'

The

Sun's in my eyes and

the rest's leaves and a few

and a and s

s for more s for pleasure

a mean a measure

and

not miss

but one

of them lay down a series

all for one and a

I shall

and I leave

that has no stem

(a drop?)

the en

Bernadette Mayer

The Tragic Condition of the Statue of Liberty

A collaboration with Emma Lazarus

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Give me your gentrificatees of the Lower East Side including all the well-heeled
young Europeans who'll take apartments without leases
Give me your landlords, give me your cooperators
Give me the guys who sell the food and the computers to the public schools in
District One
Give me the IRS-FBI-CIA men who don't take election day off
Give me the certain members of the school board & give me the district
superintendent
Give me all the greedy members of both american & foreign capitalist religious
sects
Give me the parents of the punk people
Give me the guy who puts those stickers in the Rice Krispies
Give me the doctor who thinks his time is more valuable than mine and my
daughter's & the time of all the other non-doctors in this world
Give me the mayor, his mansion, and the president & his white house
Give me the cops who laugh and sneer at meetings where they demonstrate the
new uses of mace and robots instead of the old murder against people who are
being evicted
Give me the landlord's sleazy lawyers and the deal-making judges in housing
court & give me the landlord's arsonist
Give me the known & unknown big important rich guys who now bank on our
quaint neighborhood
Give me, forgive me, the writers who have already or want to write bestsellers in
this country
Together we will go to restore Ellis Island, ravaged for years by wind, weather
and vandals
I was surprised and saddened when I heard that the Statue of Liberty was in
such a serious state of disrepair & I want to help
This is the most generous contribution I can afford.

Bernadette Mayer

The Way to Keep Going in Antarctica

Be strong Bernadette
Nobody will ever know
I came here for a reason
Perhaps there is a life here
Of not being afraid of your own heart beating
Do not be afraid of your own heart beating
Look at very small things with your eyes
& stay warm
Nothing outside can cure you but everything's outside
There is great shame for the world in knowing
You may have gone this far
Perhaps this is why you love the presence of other people so much
Perhaps this is why you wait so impatiently
You have nothing more to teach
Until there is no more panic at the knowledge of your own real existence
& then only special childish laughter to be shown
& no more lies no more
Not to find you no
More coming back & more returning
Southern journey
Small things & not my own debris
Something to fight against
& we are all very fluent about ourselves
Our own ideas of food, a Wild sauce
There's not much point in its being over: but we do not speak them:
I had written: 'the man who sewed his soles back on his feet'
And then I panicked most at the sound of what the wind could do
to me
if I crawled back to the house, two feet give no position, if
the branches cracked over my head & their threatening me, if I
covered my face with beer & sweated till you returned
If I suffered what else could I do

Bernadette Mayer

Tomorrow

for: max and alyssa

malyyssax worelish

tomorrow we'll see the lightbulb in schenectady,
go to gems farms in schodack, then on to howe caverns,
then to see the wayne thiebaud show at the clark
where we'll stop to notice the melting ice sculpture
then excellent spinach sap soup at the thai restaurant
in williamstown, a brief stop at the octagonal museum,
on to northampton to see the smith college art museum
& greenhouse where we'll see a green heron

it would be nice to be able to walk today
so we could go to opus 40 in saugerties
followed by a dinner of oysters & mussels at the bear
then on to check out the sheep at the shepherding inn
where we're able to buy riccotta cheese
which means twice-baked, with which we're able
to make a pizza with fresh figs gotten from the berry farm
war what is it good for?
absolutely nothing

Bernadette Mayer

Very Strong February

A man and a woman pretend to be white ice
Three men at the lavender door are closed in by the storm
With strong prejudice and money to buy the green pines
One weekend fisherman and blue painters watch
The vivid violet winds blow visibility from the mountain
Beyond the black valley. That means or then you know
You're in a big cloud of it, it's brilliant white mid-February
A week or two left on distracting black trees
Before the brownish buds obscure your view of the valley again.

Looking for company four dark men and a burnt sienna woman
Come in for three minutes, then bye-bye like a gold watch left on the
chair

Or part of the sum of what big white families think up
To store for long yellow Sundays to eat for brown ecological
company.

At some point later gorgeous red adventure stops, did you forget
To turn it down and laugh in the face of the fearful white storm
anyway

Or picture it brilliant blue for a further Sunday memory
In a coloring book, you talk as lightly as you can
Refusing a big pink kiss, you burned the Sunday sauce
Of crushed red tomatoes, you turn it down to just an orange glow.
This particular storm, considering the pause and the greenish thaw before it
Reminds me in its mildness of imitating a sea-green memory that is
actually

In the future, I imitate an imagined trumpet sound
Or the brilliant purple words of a man or woman I haven't met yet
Or perhaps it's a grey-haired man I already know who said some-
thing yesterday

To a mutual friend who will give me the whole story in black and
white tomorrow

Or the day after, just as the big orange plows for the local businesses
Go to work to push away the rest of the white snow that will fall
tonight.

Bernadette Mayer

Watching the Complex Train-Track Changes

To Men

You put on an ornate ballgown
You say "someone has to do it";
You take me to where you work,
The inside of a pyramid with chasms,
Watching the complex train-track changes
Products and objects make love to my father
Two babies are born—Bruno and Daisy
You take your shirt off looking boylike & lovely
You get on the plane, both clown & wizard
And then get off in a comedy of manners
Our dates become a comedy of dinners
Your name rhymes with clothes
Your plane folds & flies away
Without us, I'll make the next one
We are enclosed in spaceless epics by breathless bricks
& still we'll meet like runes or the leashes for hawks
Let's go! Can we stay? Go to sleep.
A tree wouldn't talk or weep if I-forget-what
And you in the train's opulent rooms
Switch your cock to a baby and then say
"Must there (not) be a law against this?"
You add, "I have been thinking of you in my head";
You wear green glitter on your shirt instead of
A tie, that's how I recognize you as you
You are the prep cook the sous-chef you make
Duplicating potato salad like the loaves & fishes
You create gorgeous paper-like sculptures of foods
We go down in the car through threatening snows
To arrive in a second to eat in a renovated place
You and I tell "what"; we are at the end of a movie
Our podium of soft loud feet flies by accident
I take the train to your house to hear Shakespeare & Verdi
Everyone applauds when you walk in. The director
Holds up each actor & describes his physical being
I talk to your father but only by telephone
You have the royal blue 8 1/2 x 11 notebook with the lock on it
I want one but you say you can't get them anymore
I walk twice through that city I've been in before

All through its rooms, its streets and its Commons

Bernadette Mayer

We Eat Out Together

My heart is a fancy place
Where giant reddish-purple cauliflowers
& white ones in French & English are outside
Waiting to welcome you to a boat
Over the low black river for a big dinner
There's a lot of choice among the foods
Even a tortured lamb served in pieces
En croute on a plate so hot as a rack
Of clouds blown over the cold filthy river
We are entitled to see anytime while we
Use the tablecovers to love each other
Publicly dishing out imitative luxuries
To show off poetry's extreme generosity
Then home in the heart of a big limousine

Bernadette Mayer

Windrowing

abide with me
don't ever abide
gimme anytime a pile
of leaf-hay across
the field underneath
the bright new blue
tractor pulling the tedder
which is the waffler or fluffer

Bernadette Mayer