



Inside the Day Song: The Temporal Epic

All said is dented love's saluted image.

Bernadette Mayer
from *Midwinter Day*

After a 56-day month of writing poetry postcards, one's own consciousness has been in a Niedeckerian "condense" mode. This has its advantages when considering the sprawl of our time Charles Olson warned about in Projective Verse. How to get back in to a flow that does not stop in the space of one postcard? How to maintain it for a whole day and create something for the ages? Bernadette Mayer and Pierre Joris have some ideas.

Mayer may be best known for her epic written in 24 hrs, *Midwinter Day*, from Winter Solstice 1978. This essay by Megan Burns is a good starting point to understand the method behind Mayer's brilliance:

The experiment, leading the reader through December 22, 1978 from dreaming world to waking and back again, proves that the self is not the subject in this poem, but rather language and words and how this particular day is shaped by them.

Pierre Joris, about his 1986 poem "Canto Diurno #1" said:

...from early on I was interested in ways of breaking down those forms [inherited form and meter} in order to find some kind of open form into which all kind of materials could come. And one way I thought of doing it – and that idea goes directly to the Canto Diurno – was rather than have a traditional formal structure (meaning line structure like the sonnet...) but has that kind of coherence, was to switch from that spatial thing to a temporal thing.

The months of research and preparation Mayer did for Midwinter Day should give you some sense that even master poets don't pull that kind of language out of the air. They need something to work with and that something is language and ideas. In one list poem passage, see how Mayer extracts facts from the daily newspaper, including references to sports teams whose fortunes she likely had little investment in:

So when I write of love I write of
Blinding referendums, bankruptcy intent,
Industrials, utilities and sales
The petitions of a citizens' group
Transportation, births, corrections,
The downtown mall, the toy fund,
The predictions of the meteorologist,
Hearing-aid discounts, oil-price increases,
Ice fishing, diplomatic ties with China,
An exploding oil depot in Rhodesia,
A controversial nuclear physicist,
South Africa's resources of chrome,
And Russia's stores of platinum and tin,
Intercontinental ballistic missiles,
Mexican oil, student assemblies,
Mobile homes uprooted by strong winds,
Book sales, Chris Evert's engagement,
The uses of trees on the banks of reservoirs,

The victory of the Cleveland Cavaliers
 And how the Sabres beat the Flames,
 I write of artists, auto technicians,
 Babysitters, bookkeepers, child care workers,
 Companions, conference managers, cooks,
 Dental assistants and receptionists,
 Designers, electricians, English teachers...

Reading this is addictive. (Typing it as well, which is always a good exercise to get inside someone's head or work.) *Midwinter Day* is also a demonstration of love. Her love of writing. Her capacity for love in general. When I read it there are little coincidences, or resonances that linger. I think of the Tuesday briefing I got from the Washington Post today and it echoes Mayer:

What you need to know: Ukrainian optimism, Primary elections, Cheaper Internet, Alabama manhunt, Tech stocks, Young Thug, Warhol Portrait.

And today I read that Chris Evert has completed chemotherapy for ovarian cancer. The news goes on. Nothing is permanent. When you write projectively, you invite the prophetic in.

Note also how you can get language from anywhere. In our May 2, 2022 interview Pierre Joris said that he asked poet Robert Kelly about his status as a native French speaker:

I want to write in American English. I'm still with this English, what is the best way to get to the core of that language? And he didn't point immediately to writers also, Pound and Olson and company would come in the next half hour. But what he said is listen to baseball commentators. That is the most active use and interesting use of the American language happening right now, live. And so we have that oral tradition and it's true.

You know, I began doing this and I've been a Mets fan ever since. So there was that fascination with language of the way it was spoken and used and the richness of it. And then comes the writing. And the next people he sent me to is Olson and the Black Mountain people. So does that make sense?

And then I hear today about the **minor league baseball broadcaster** (Joey Zanaboni) who says things like:

A strikeout victim is “yanked out of there like a shirtless passenger on a Spirit Airlines flight.” A pitcher is “sharper than a set of cutlery in a limestone quarry.” After Fredericksburg catcher Drew Millas stole home last month, an excited Zanaboni shouted that the play had him “dancin’ like a Spice Girls cover band inside an earthquake simulation.”

This is alive language. It is open. Writing all day for a day will open you up if you let it, I am certain and being open is what we’re after whether we know it or not.

The key to Mayer’s process was **massive preparation**. She had a pile of newspapers to lean on. We have almost any newspaper in the world at our disposal and with a few keyboard shortcuts could have plenty of raw material in the way of news. I’d keep a list of sources with links to the ones you get online *as the poem is going*, so sources are available at least to you. If you’ve done your postcard duty, you have 31 poems to feed your day-long effort. You could do some **Mammal Grafting** with a line from those poems. You could take a line from any of those poems and do a **Phrase Acrostic**. Surely having a **Personal Universe Deck** comes in handy for occasions like this. (You might even want to use it DURING the **Poetry Postcard Fest**.) Try a **Cover Poem** with many poems you love, or writing after the style of poets who have value for you as Wanda Coleman did in *Mercurochrome*, writing after poets like John Berryman, Elizabeth Bishop,

Tom Clark, Louise Gluck and even Allen Ginsberg. You can dig into your own soil and write an Edaphopastoral. There are many methods you can use and you may want to do many as to make this poem as wide-ranging as possible.

How To Do It

I see this effort being akin to Ramadan. When observing Ramadan, one eats before sunrise, fasts all day and then eats after sunset. Taking a cue from that you could wake up on September 1 (or 2, or 3, but soon after the Poetry Postcard Fest), eat breakfast and start writing, stopping only for meals, bio breaks and court appearances. You might want to go from sunup to sundown or 6am to 6pm. Maybe you have the stamina of a young Pierre Joris and can start after midnight, write til 2am, wake at 7 and start writing again until you go to bed the next night. Joris got 20 pages of his Canto Diurno #1 and did have a break for errands. Maybe you sleep in and write from 9am to 9pm. September 1 is not a heavy occasion like the Winter Solstice, but every day has its own qualities, its own history, its own astrological precepts and conjunctions. The day is yours. Write.

7:31am
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Casa del Colibrí



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