

Tomorrow's Prompt

Yes, that little Annie etched in our brains that “tomorrow is only a day away.” Better Bernadette Mayer, who said:

Tomorrow

BY BERNADETTE MAYER

*for: max and alyssa
malyysax 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

Scarlet Tanager (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2005)

Ah, the luminous details! Douglas Crase in his essay on Lorine Niedecker said Walt: “Whitman told us that the effect of true poets was to bring people back from their sickly abstractions to the divine, original concrete.” “Clamp the mind down on objects” is how William Carlos Williams put it. On specific place names that hold their own power. Schenectady is derived from a Mohawk word meaning “beyond the pines.” Specific ethnic food items also add spice. Did Bernadette do all those things in one day? Well, speed was popular back then so it is *possible*, but more likely all these

activities took a month or six weeks to do. Poetry compresses time and energy into a short space (17 lines here) and thus can give it potency, as do specifics. Poetry is not journalism, but journalistic skills sure come in handy if they can be used as a tool in service to the imagination. The imagination takes the facts and arranges them in a way that sounds good, makes sense, opens up the senses, creating something from “a state in which the heat of feeling warms the intellect.”

Your task is to write what you’ll do tomorrow in your neighborhood, town, or place you often visit. Keep it to sonnet length (or not, but don’t sprawl), maybe use the Cover Poem technique, and do clamp your mind on specifics since we know “generalizations and abstractions are the plea of the hypocrite, knave and scoundrel.” When should you finish this exercise? Sí, mañana.



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11:01am
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Casa del Colibrí
(w/ thanks to
Carlton Johnson)