

Brenda-ized City Sonnet

There is a great exercise that actually ends a short interview Bernadette Mayer did with Daniel Kane, October 8, 1998 on the sonnet form.

Bernadette is asked about a writing tip that she would give a 13 year old and she says in part:

A good way to write a sonnet is to walk fourteen blocks. Write one line for each block. I knew a poet, Bill Kushner, who used to do that. I used to see him all the time with his notebook on the street. You can do it easily in a city, because there are all these words around.

Now with cellphones being ubiquitous, one can use that on a walk, or being pushed in a wheelchair, or some other slow ambulation in your neighborhood, or in a town you are visiting to aid your notes for this city sonnet. You can take one picture on each block that you'd write a line about. You can also take a photograph to note the location. I can envision two street signs in one shot that marks the place. I can also see these photographs festooning the poem on the page, or maybe even acting as a sort of weird Euro-haiga. I could even see 14 haiga making up one sonnet.

Of course bringing your pocket journal and just writing a line for each block is a good idea. The notion that this sonnet will have 12-15 lines is key, but 14 is always a good standard to aim for, but don't be anal about it. That a poem this length is also about as much poetry as you can get on the average postcard means that you could write all 31 of your Poetry Postcard Fest poems as walks in your town (or someone else's) using this method. Consider.

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Here's where Brenda Hillman comes in. As we are looking at pages 135 to 146 of *In a Few Minutes Before Later*, take a line from one of the poems of this section to put in your own sonnet. Of course put it in italics and give Brenda credit. Hopefully this adds a bit of weirdness to your sonnet. Lines like:

when you write there's a storm in each sign

or

All this life there you are/ trapped in yourself

ok, technically TWO lines, but they are short and it's a good line

or

Gray loneliness at the heart of awe

Well, you get the idea. This kind of exercise works best when you write a few. One a day for five days ought to give you some sense as to how you might be able to use this approach to making a poem.

Works Cited

https://web.archive.org/web/20000824154715/http://www.writenet.org/poetschat/poetschat_mayer1098.html

Brenda Hillman, *In a Few Minutes Before Later*

<https://paulenelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/HaigaMania.pdf>

