

Eating The Colors Of A Lineup Of Words

Eating The Colors Of A Lineup Of Words

THE EARLY BOOKS OF BERNADETTE MAYER

Bernadette Mayer

Station Hill

of Barrytown

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Editors' Note

Eating The Colors Of A Lineup Of Words collects for the first time Bernadette Mayer's early poetry books and places them in chronological order. Most were published in small editions and unavailable for decades until the Internet age. One of the books was never published. Dating from 1960 to 1978, when Mayer was between the ages of 15 and 33, these works represent an extraordinary poetic achievement for anyone of any age.

The first book, *Ceremony Latin* (1964), was published privately with help from a friend in 1975, 11 years after its completion. The second book, *Red Book In Three Parts*, dated "1965-66," was originally published in 2002 by United Artists Books, more than 35 years after it was written. The third book, *Story*, was Mayer's first published book, appearing in 1968 as a special issue of *O TO 9*, the magazine she co-edited.

The fourth book, *The Old Style Is Finding Out Something About A Whole New Set Of Possibilities*, has a tangled history. An early version was submitted for the inaugural Frank O'Hara Prize, which was awarded to Joseph Ceravolo in 1968. Mayer expanded the book during the next two years, then couldn't find a publisher. In 1976, a significant number of poems were removed from the manuscript and became the backbone of the first section of Mayer's book *Poetry*. But half of the poems were never published in book form, and most of those were never published in any form, including such early long poems as "A Moving Boat Is a Squeezed Boat: 52 Cards" and "Complete Music of Webern (A Movie)". Four poems were apparently lost. After some back and forth, Mayer and Station Hill decided to publish *The Old Style* manuscript in its entirety, including the poems from *Poetry*, as part of the effort to put Mayer's early books in chronological order and clarify her poetic beginnings.

The fifth book, *Moving*, was published in 1971 by Angel Hair Books, which would become Mayer's principal early publisher. That book-length poem was quickly followed by two much longer works: *Memory*, written in 1971 and published in 1975 by North Atlantic Books; and *Studying Hunger Journals*, written from 1972 to 1974, and published in a short excerpt by *Adventures in Poetry/Big Sky* in 1975, and finally in its entirety by Station Hill in 2011. These two monumental books, totaling 650 pages, stand alongside this collection of early books.

The sixth book, *Poetry*, is now shorter than its 1976 publication by the Kulchur Foundation. The poems remaining in Part I, after the removal of many older pieces, have been augmented by four contemporaneous poems first published in *A Bernadette Mayer Reader* by New Directions in 1992. The seventh book, *Eruditio Ex Memoria*, and the eighth book, *The Golden Book Of Words*, were published in 1977 and 1978, respectively, by Angel Hair. This collection leaves off in the spring of 1978, a few months before Mayer would write her next book-length poem, *Midwinter Day*.

Assembling *Eating The Colors Of A Lineup Of Words*, Mayer and Station Hill have corrected unintentional misspellings, punctuation marks and spaces in earlier published editions and manuscripts. The poet's original spacing has been maintained as much as possible across different book formats, with the exception of the untitled poem beginning "make noise..." which was originally a one-page, handwritten "street work" published in *0 TO 9*. When multiple versions of a poem existed—say, between *Poetry* and *The Bernadette Mayer Reader*, or between *0 TO 9* and *The Old Style* manuscript—Mayer decided which version to use.

MICHAEL RUBY

SAM TRUITT

Author's Note

I wish to express my appreciation to a lot of guys: Bill Berkson, Ted Berrigan, John Cage, Leonard Neufeld, Michael Ruby, Vito Acconci, Sam Truitt, Lewis Warsh, Larry Fagin, Clark Coolidge and to Anne Waldman. And thank you to the great cover-makers of these books: Rosemary Mayer, Ed Bowes, Joe Brainard and me.

Here are explanatory notes for three of the books.

Note for *Story*:

Story includes many stories or “like-stories”: A story I wrote about tripping and falling down. A Kwakiutl myth about hats, one about smoking, a description of a hoop and arrow game, an Italian tale about a man who sold cloth to a statue, one about 14 men who went to hell, a Coos myth about the five word makers, one of a man who becomes an owl, a recipe for true sponge cake, a 19th century letter about etiquette, quotes from Edgar Allan Poe, an article about coral reefs by Louis Agassiz and a list of modern Italian furniture pieces. I interrupted the text at random with words for *Story*: anecdote, profile, life story, scenario, love story, lie, report, western, article, bedside reading, novel, thumbnail sketch, tale, dime novel, narrative poem, myth, thriller.

Note for *Moving*:

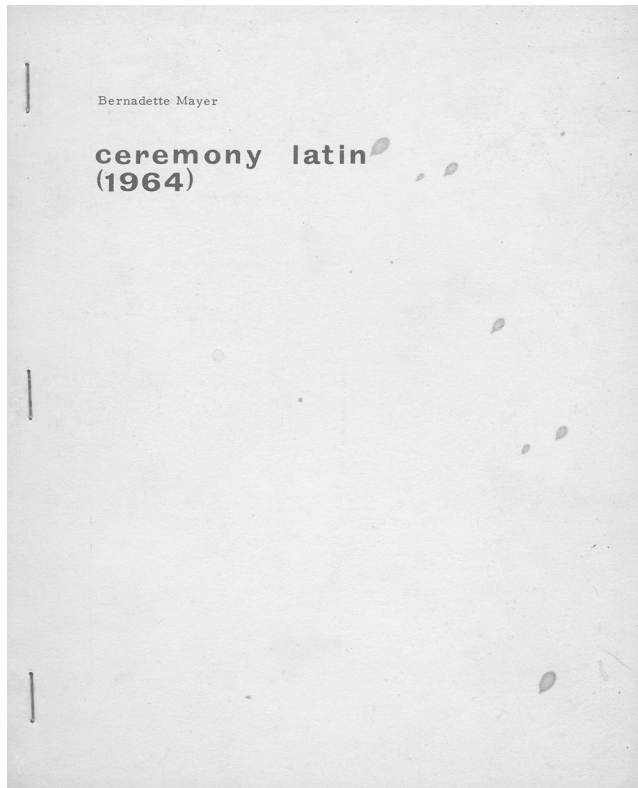
When I moved to Great Barrington, Mass., in 1969, I resolved that I would only write when absolutely necessary. The pages were piled up backwards on my desk. I used source-books like a children's book, *Upheavals in the Earth*. I received postcards daily from the Center for Short-Lived Phenomena, catalogues from Edmund's Scientific, and instructions on how to build a yurt. I wanted to get a lot of mail. Much was inspired by the Whole Earth Catalogue in which there were a lot of free things. I solicited contributions from friends and included them in the book.

Note for *Eruditio Ex Memoria*:

I didn't want to carry around my school notebooks anymore, but I didn't want to throw them away either so I tore random pages from them on which I later based this book. I saved the doodles too.

BERNADETTE MAYER

Ceremony Latin (1964)



Ovid

I. The Golden Age

At first the golden age was the first to spring up, which, with
no avenger protector,
by its own will, without law it was established, a good & right thing.

Not yet had the pine tree felled come down from its own
mountains to visit a foreign land through the clear flowing waves sea.
Not yet were the towns surrounded by deep ditches; there were nei-
ther swords nor helmets; nations passed their leisure time free.

a high room floating away

I can see praying to the sun
or maybe the rain because they cover
everything & come from apparently nowhere

giant people

a desperate feeling like trying to explain
yourself in 25 words, talking faster than your
heart beats, away from everybody with bad music
playing too loud in the room & the chatter growing
louder & further away

two clocks in the same room
ticking out of time—same feeling

reading a poet's life
preconceived ends
real life of the poet

impressions accidental
animals' intelligence

Mary Jemison White Woman
of the Genesee
simple writing w. form personal
James Baldwin stinks
nobody tells the truth

smells
my body is full of sand
yellow and green cannot be
escaped I write like my mother
the doctor

kidney man
I got to buy potatoes
fertile period