

Bianca

2:29 PM (11 minutes ago)

to () re: crocuses

"of course you can publish [my play] but you have to have seen a crocus first! even if it is just a picture of one"

--Bernadette Mayer

I. the social life of harbors

The more I look around the more it seems to make sense. The crocuses have just come out here, so I can write a letter to you now. For some reason moving is on the mind, as I expect it might be on yours too. It took me many attempts to get back here, my current "here" being New York harbor, I have also lived by the buffalo harbor and I'll be there again soon. It took me many attempts to write this letter to you. and I will try my best to make this letter feel like home. Though I don't know if I actually know what home feels like, aside from the people I love. So maybe I'll try to turn this letter into a person.

I don't know actually if I can call any of the places I live in home now, or what I've ever meant by home. My family has a habit of moving, or maybe just me, but I can't name one person I'm related to who died in the same town they were born. But maybe that's common now. What about you? Have you seen those tests on the internet that, offer to tell you (for a fee and access to your camera in order to scan your palm) where the most important places in your life are? Do you think they offer it as an incentive for travel or the opposite?

Letters are often about travel and this one's no different. The last time I was in California, was last spring, or it felt like spring compared to Buffalo. I was staying at my friends Violet and Sophia's house when we got the news about Lyn Hejinian's passing. That morning Violet got the idea to walk to her neighborhood, and I learned that she lived most of her life there. I wondered what that would feel like, but I couldn't picture it. To grow up, to live, and to die in the same city. I don't have a picture of it. I couldn't write a letter about it. The day went on, we ate pastries like we did every morning there, read her poems, cried, and walked back to the apartment.



II. this apt back is wasted on us —→ *ml*

The last time I typed a letter like this,¹ typed instead of written, was to the late Bernadette Mayer, who, as you may know, only communicated by letter, and also had very particular ideas about what home was. I feel like Lyn would have preferred letters too but I didn't have time to ask her.

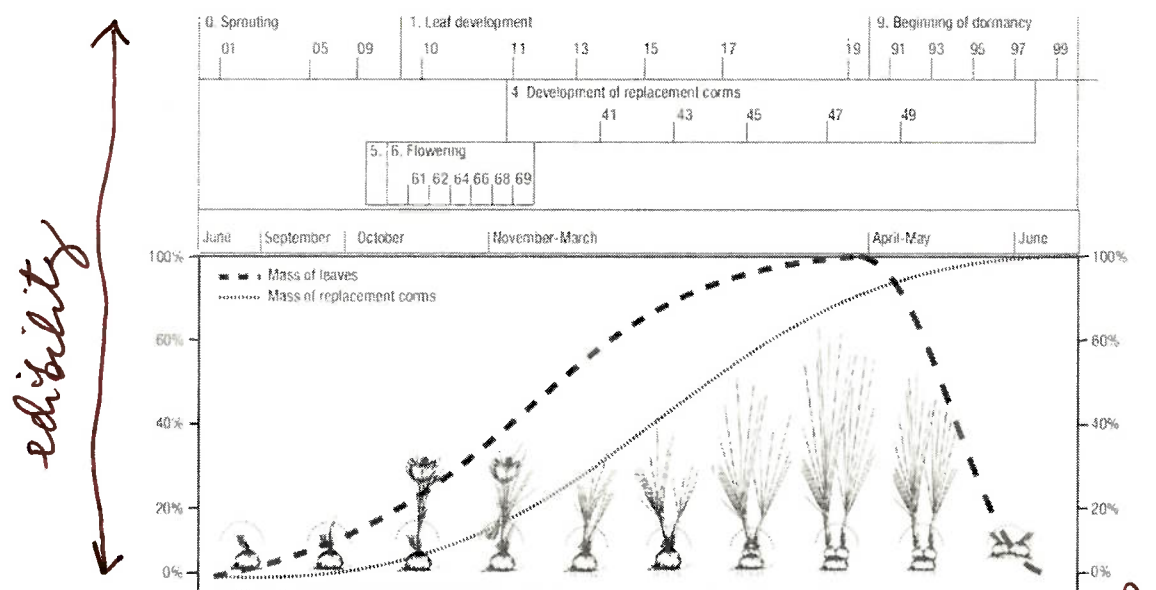
Bernadette's were by typewriter, her belief being that computers are big typewriters, which I mostly share. The font I am using right now, right here, is an ersatz one, while her typewriter was the real deal. I bring her up not simply because of her love, and need of the letter, not simply because I was recently driving through the upper Hudson valley where she lived, but because of her steadfast dedication to living, and how I desperately feel I need it now.

But her letters were typed because it's easier to write with a typewriter when you've had a major stroke—and not a simple question of legibility. Not that legibility is ever a simple question. While I've got your attention, why is one called writing "by hand" and one not? as if fingers do not make their own set of keys when they move across the page—who set up this dichotomy? But at the same time it's funny to think about because who even writes anymore, in this the time of voice-writing. *vs handwriting*

My students' last day of class I make them all write a letter to themselves in the future, to just imagine four years out, and part of me needs that now. Where are you? Who are you living with? What are you writing? What are you reading? I think those are the four questions. Maybe a bit intimate but letters are intimate—have you ever read a letter from the 18th century? Letters could be so juicy, so full of passion that anyone in their possession was suddenly struck with the all-encompassing need to immediately devour them. But it's not just a question of content, what the writing's like, but of genre, what do letters contain. For instance if you read the letters between Jean-Jacques Rousseau and M. de Malesherbes, you realize that they were sending samples of the various mosses (the double-entendre with M. de Malesherbes I'm sure Rousseau found amusing) which grew near where they lived, some 35 different kinds. We're now more interested in graphing the plants,

¹That's not entirely true, I also type my letters to my prisoner pen pal, because he said my handwriting is illegible. My prisoner's handwriting is the most beautiful handwriting I have ever seen.

breaking down sight into a minutia of numbers. It can be comforting to break things down into smaller bits, it being more or less the credo of scientific investigation, or Bernadette's "look at very small things with your eyes and stay warm." But we miss something by not looking at crocuses as something we can put in a stew.



III. and if I did enter into it and agree, I give him neither glance nor certainty that it emanates from our shared tumult of foolish idioms. you kept silent as the dry trumpet went and the natural aspect haunted our souls with its remembrances.

Back in New York Harbor, it's been unseasonably warm for march—even if no one can remember what March is supposed to feel like anymore. Warm enough for the crocuses to come up, along with the current wildfires on Long Island. There hasn't been rain here. You go to the park and watch kids play, kicking up clouds of dirt and dust. My stomach hurts a bit and I am holding back tears so I start walking. I walk to the supermarket, which doesn't have what I need, then walk to the bar, write in my diary, then home.

When I get home my roommate and their lover are back from looking at some crocuses. They show me an Apollinaire poem about crocuses, called crocuses. Only the crocuses are Autumn crocuses—what does it mean that in France the crocuses come out in Autumn? Do we have autumn crocuses? French being a weird form of latin, the French word for crocuses (colchique) is actually the latin family name for the fake crocus, Colchicum. So it's an entirely different flower.

Real crocuses are famous for their being the source of saffron, hailing from Iran. Real crocuses only arrived in Europe in the 16th century. It's worth noting that the corms from which crocuses grow (see fig. 1 above) are also edible, similarly to wild tulip bulbs.

Though very similar in form, autumn crocuses are a separate thing entirely and are referred to as "naked boys" colloquially. This also brings us to the important distinction between true and false crocuses coming from the family Colchicaceae, unlike the true crocuses, which belong to the family Iridaceae. Autumn crocuses are in fact poisonous.

IV. what power lies in flowers



(fig. 2, real crocus)

Rousseau's interest in botany arose towards the end of his life—after he was exiled from Paris, and all of France and his native Geneva—after his eventual settling in Neuchâtel as it was under the governance of Prussia, and his friend Frederick the Great. Looking at plants was something he did on his long walks in the country. Botany is best when it's something you just pick up. His stories about flowers, written alongside his *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, are some of the most enjoyable writing he produced:

Instead of these sad papers and piles of old books, I filled my room with flowers and grasses; for I had at that time just become enthusiastic about botany, a taste for which I owed to Doctor d'Ivernois and which would soon become a passion. No longer wanting to work, I needed an entertaining pastime that I liked and that would not require any more effort than an idler could happily devote to it.

- V. *devonable*
- VI. *where are your petals?*
- VII. *who is your holy spirit?*
- VIII. *try writing w/o making any "statements"*
- IX. *when did you last "idle"? oops*

X. Je n'aime pas les histoires qui sont faites pour donner de la puissance, pour signaler de la puissance, pour corroborer de la puissance. Je n'aime pas l'idée que celui que dirige le monde a le droit de dire « le monde » - c'est ça!² - Edouard Glissant

La créolisation du monde, 2010

I was scrolling across YouTube last night and came across this quote from Glissant. I had watched the documentary some time ago but didn't remember this moment so distinctly. I don't mean to give you the impression that my memory is anything but anarchic. Glissant states later that he is more interested in a poem by a gaucho in the pampa than any poem written in New York or Paris, because they do not corroborate the forces of Power. In my idealist brain, my weird friend Rousseau does this too.

I realize my contradiction, being a writer in "New York." But bringing this little letter full circle, if I may, I am still looking for home. The fake crocuses seem so exposed with just their petals out in the cold air, and yet they grow like that, because it's where they live. I find it interesting that Rousseau ends up in the same geographical place as where he started, despite it all. I wish all countries were the size of towns and you could walk, or take a small boat to a couple different ones in a day, one to get cheese one to get wine, one for fruit. I'm not talking about France, but a world we, the crocuses, and fake crocuses, can all live in.

Wishing you a happy year of pleasure in resisting "power,"

Xx

Bianca Rae Messinger

Replies to:

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² I don't like stories that are created in order to give to power, to show a kind of power, to corroborate this power. I don't like the idea that those who control the world have the right to say, "the world." That's it!
(Author's translation).