

Lyn Hejinian

FROM *A BORDER COMEDY*

for John Zorn

A comedian is a foreigner at border
Or comedienne—antinomian
Performing the comedy known as barbarism
This
An encounter
(Encounters, after all, are the essence of comedy)
With forge and link
Which doppelgangers (perfect matchers) match
With whistling in the left ear
And symptoms of melancholy—gloomy dreams, twitching, jerking,
itching, and swift changes of mood
With the capacity to transform an inaccessible object into something
we long voluptuously to embrace
And ourselves into an unquiet subject—at last! baffled!
Change, then, is the exemplary connection
Between romance and improvement
The curvature of the pine in the pink of the snow
Out of nowhere—uncanny
And falling under a squirrel’s frenzy
The color of the sky is cast in territory belonging to “the public”
Under spell part globe, part departure of a vessel
Passing speech through law
Turning south
Where we’re the oddballs and peppercorns
Picking pace
Like other comic poets
I’ll point out that tragic writers have merely to let their characters
announce who they are for the audience instantly to know everything
Whereas comic writers use original plots
And start from scratch
Shifting points of view with uninterrupted sincerity as in dreams

But more specifically (comedians are always specific) in a dream of
 meeting Richard Foreman as an old man fond of me
 Who later, as a young man, when we are introduced, merely extends
 one finger of his left hand when I hold out my right to shake
 It's clear he doesn't like *A Border Comedy*
 It's an awkward chunk the size of a fist
 I (with the point of view of a man, so I am a man) refuse to laugh
 All night a woman (a spy) and I have been switching identities
 That way we can maintain inconsistencies
 In reality . . .
 Inconsistencies that are part of the world (or rather that are not part of
 the world, since they appear when one withdraws from the world or
 when the world withdraws from one)
 But anxiety in comedy comes close
 Like one's hilarious approaching fate
 Which is a worthy cause
 Asking only some small assuaging sum
 A terminus
 Okay—
 Comedy puts an end to satisfaction
 It puts the fit to a mismatch
 Where the missing villain passes
 For the figure at its shoulder
 Who drops at that moment right down a well
 Under the eyes of some viewer
 And springs forth again—like the bride in the camera—
 At its shoulder
 Looking over, then under, then over again
 And then spinning on its head and taking off into the trees
 To change its name from Melody to Comedy
 For laughs
 But what is laughter?
 Hobbes (1651) laughed in “sudden glory” at recognition of his
 superiority over someone else
 Whereas Bergson (1911) saw it as “something mechanical encrusted
 on the living,”

A punishment to all unsocial persons
For Ludovici (1932) it gave evidence of his superior adaptation to life
For Priestley (1777) it arose from the perception of contrast
And for Leacock (1935) from perception of the contrast between a
thing as it is or ought to be and a thing smashed out of shape
While Schopenhauer (1849) laughed at the accuracy of a perception
that confirmed a thought
And Koestler (1960) at the transfer in a train of thought from one
logic to another
Spiegel (1984) felt it expressed ambivalence, a clash of incompatible thoughts
Freud (1928) saw it as the “triumph of narcissism”
And Gregory (1924) as a relief
Laughter is a lesson in linkage then or in overlapping and belief
Just last night I laughed
At the waste of the time it took to attempt to ogle, tell, and rationalize
At the very same time we lay on the same side of the squint
We were hard on sentiment
But soft on *Buddenbrook*
On impact
In allegory
Or else as *else, gregarious*
Foreigners as allegorists in a field allegorized
As adverse
But not contemptuous
There were ferns, green and russet rocks, stumps, shadows
Under the sun on this side of this coin or sheet
Depicting a child falling from the roof
Its wings blue and difficult to discern but opening magnificently at the
window
His mother later saying he had fallen in calm imagination
But calm must take to an ‘intellectual breeze’
How could there be two suns? two identical dogs?
Calculated—shivering
The field was round so we went around it
We did this with tedious, milch animal timelessness
Since we were coming to a decision
A decision on a top

The upper end, nearest the beginning still spinning
And cream
For wind
And sincerities unknown
And by the way produced an allegory about the impossibility of
separating Granny from Little Red Riding Hood
But asymmetry is unavoidable
Face to face
Between justice and anxiety, scruples and melancholy, paranoia and a
compulsion to satisfy
Without guilt
By paying conscience money to “restore what’s been wrongfully
acquired”
Between two worlds, the world in which one tells and the world of
which one tells
In passwords
Overreach
Against stone access
The lidded horizon
And strips
The boundary then is circumstance
Button
Effect
Entertaining outside talisman and anecdote
Sir Walter Scott claimed to have noticed as a boy that his chief
competitor in school, the boy who was always at the head of the
class, habitually twisted a certain button on his jacket when called
on in class
Then Scott himself rose to the head of the class—just by cutting off
that button
Over the grunting lace
Narration
But narration in its totality keeps secret
It surrenders its meaning to its listener’s desire but covers its secret in
shifts
It is true that it makes but it moves sense
So Bree Smith knew she’d never succeed in teaching cynical Devlin
Hunt anything about love

After all, what chance did an angel like her have with a man who can't
believe in miracles
Are you counting syllables?
Certainly nothing could get between Jessie Burke and her ranch, not
even oilman Brett Murdock
There he sat by the well with a witch
To stare between her open lips as she was letting him eat maggots from
her tongue
The tongue so engaged is a shovel at a sapling
The mother is always supplanted
But don't worry, she'll be back to explain the same old things all over
again
In exchange for sex with her daughters
Gender is useless in such a scene
It offends the ear
Or ears—time is the product of twins, boots, and difference
Experience then is divided
Without such division no rhyme could occur
No repetition or sound recognition
No names
Love is an education through which standards are changed
It provokes extravagant enthusiastic doubt and (sometimes) a tyrannical
metaphysics
And it encourages plagiarism
So that one applies to one person's body strategies one can only have
learned elsewhere
But doesn't remember
Developed in dreams or in the daytime working unconscious
Which draws the finger unexpectedly deeper than ever before into the
eye
Which continues to see it