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*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