



LYN HEJINIAN

My Life

GREEN INTEGER 39

BOOKS BY LYN HEJINIAN

- A Thought Is the Bride of What Thinking* (Tuumba Press, 1976)
A Mask of Motion (Burning Deck, 1977)
Gesualdo (Tuumba Press, 1978)
Writing Is an Aid to Memory (The Figures, 1978/
Sun & Moon Press, 1996)
My Life (Burning Deck, 1980)
The Guard (Tuumba Press, 1984)
Redo (Salt-Works Press, 1984)
My Life [revised and updated] (Sun & Moon Press, 1987)
Individuals (with Kit Robinson/Chax Press, 1988)
Leningrad (with Michael Davidson, Ron Silliman,
and Barrett Watten/Mercury House, 1991)
The Hunt (Zasterle Press, 1991)
Oxota: A Short Russian Novel (The Figures, 1991)
The Cell (Sun & Moon Press, 1992)
The Cold of Poetry (Sun & Moon Press, 1994)
Two Stein Talks (Weaselsleeves Press, 1995)
A Little Book of a Thousand Eyes (Smoke-Proof Press, 1996)
Wicker [with Jack Collom] (Rodent Press, 1996)
Guide, Grammar, Watch and The Thirty Nights (Folio [Salt], 1996)
A Book from A Border Comedy (Seeing Eye Books, 1997)
The Traveler and the Hill and the Hill [with Emilie Clark] (Granary Books, 1998)
Sight [with Leslie Scalapino] (Edge Books, 1999)
Chartings [with Ray Di Palma] (Chax Press, 2000)
Happily (Post-Apollo Press, 2000)
Sunflower [with Jack Collom] (The Figures, 2000)
The Beginner (A Spectacular Book, 2001)
A Border Comedy (Granary Books, 2001)
The Language of Inquiry (University of California Press, 2001)

TRANSLATIONS

- Description*, Arkadii Dragomoschenko
[with Elena Balashova]
(Sun & Moon Press, 1990)
Xenia, Arkadii Dragomoschenko
[with Elena Balashova]
(Sun & Moon Press, 1993)

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GREEN INTEGER

KØBENHAVN & LOS ANGELES

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*What is the
meaning hung
from that depend*

A dog bark, the engine of a truck, an airplane hidden by the trees and rooftops. My mother's childhood seemed a kind of holy melodrama. She ate her pudding in a pattern, carving a rim around the circumference of the pudding, working her way inward toward the center, scooping with the spoon, to see how far she could separate the pudding from the edge of the bowl before the center collapsed, spreading the pudding out again, lower, back to the edge of the bowl. You could tell that it was improvisational because at that point they closed their eyes. A pause, a rose, something on paper. Solitude was the essential companion. The branches of the redwood trees hung in a fog whose moisture they absorbed. Lasting, "what might be," its present a future, like the life of a child. The greatest solitudes are quickly strewn with rubbish. All night the radio covered the fall of a child in the valley down an abandoned well-fitting, a clammy narrow pipe 56 feet deep, in which he was wedged, recorded, and died.

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Stanza there. The synchronous, which I have characterized as spatial, is accurate to reality but it has been debased. Daisy's plenty pebbles in the gravel drive. It is a tartan not a plaid. There was some disparity between my grandfather's reserve, the result of shyness and disdain, and his sense that a man's natural importance was characterized by bulk, by the great depth of his footprint in the sand—in other words, a successful man was no lightweight. A flock of guard geese are pecking in a cold rain, become formal behind the obvious flower's bloom. The room, in fact, was used as a closet as well, for as one sat at the telephone table, one faced a row of my grandparents' overcoats, raincoats, and hats, which were hung from a line of heavy, polished wooden hooks. The fog burned off and I went for a walk alone, then was lost between the grapevines, unable to return, until they set a mast, a pole, into the ground and hung a colored flag that I could see from anywhere around. A glass snail was set among real camellias in a glass bowl upon the table. Pure duration, a compound plenum in which nothing is repeated. Photographed in a blue pinafore. The way Dorothy Wordsworth often, I think, went out to "get"

a sight. But language is restless. They say there has been too much roughhousing. The heat waves wobbled over the highway—on either side were flat brown fields tilted slightly toward the horizon—and in the distance ahead of the car small blue ponds lay in our path, evaporating suddenly, as if in a single piece, at the instant prior to our splashing in. I saw a line of rocks topped by a foghorn protecting the little harbor from the tide. Fruit peels and the heels of bread were left to get moldy. But then we'd need, what, a bird, to eat the fleas from the rug. When what happens is not intentional, one can't ascribe meaning to it, and unless what happens is necessary, one can't expect it to occur again. Because children will spill food, one needs a dog. Rubber books for bathtubs. Coast laps. One had merely to turn around in order to see it. Elbows off the table. The portrait, a photograph, had been made so that my grandmother was looking just over the head of the observer, into a little distance, not so far as to be a space into which she might seem to be staring, but at some definite object, some noun, just behind one. Waffle man everywhere. She had come upon a set of expressions ("peachy" being one of them and

"nuts to you" another) which exactly suited her, and so, though the expressions went out of everyone else's vocabulary, even years later, when everyone else was saying "far out" or "that's nowhere," she continued to have a "perfectly peachy time" on her vacations. This was Melody Ranch, daring and resourceful. As for we who "love to be astonished," we might go to the zoo and see the famous hippo named "Bubbles." The sidesaddle was impossible, and yet I've seen it used successfully, even stunningly, the woman's full skirts spread like a wing as the horse jumped a hurdle and they galloped on. Lasting, ferries, later, trolleys from Berkeley to the Bridge. This is one of those things which continues, and hence seems important, and so ever what one says over and over again. Soggy sky, which then dries out, lifting slightly turning white—and then banks toward the West. If I see fishing boats that's the first thing I think. Insane, in common parlance.

The obvious analogy is with music

ing of artichoke hearts, and resembling the sleepiness of childhood. At every birthday party that year, the mother of the birthday child served ice cream and "surprise cake," into whose slices the "favors" were baked. But nothing could interrupt those given days. I was sipping Shirley Temples wearing my Mary Janes. My grandfather was as serious as any general before any battle, though he had been too young for the First War and too old for the Second. He carried not a cane but a walking stick and was silent on his walks except when he passed a neighbor, and then he tipped his hat and said, "Morning," if it were before noon, or, "Evening," if it were after noon, without pausing his walk, just as nowadays joggers will come to a stoplight and continue to jog in place so as not to break their stride. Then

It was a mountain creek, running over little pebbles of white quartz and mica. Let's say that every possibility waits. In raga time is added to measure, which expands. A deep thirst, faintly smell-

the tantrum broke out, blue, without a breath of air. I was an object of time, filled with dread. I lifted the ice cream to make certain no spider was webbed in the cone. Sculpture is the worst possible craft for them to attempt. You could increase the height by making lateral additions and building over them a sequence of steps, leaving tunnels, or windows, between the blocks, and I did. The shape of who's to come. For example, the funny pre-family was constant in its all-purpose itinerant ovals. It should be completed only in the act of being used. While my mother shopped, I stood in *Produce* and ate raw peas. The lovely music of the German violin. Most little children like beer but they outgrow it. Unseen, just heard, hard to remember. My sister was named "after" my aunt, the name not Murree but, like marriage, French, Marie. The first grade teacher, Miss Sly, was young and she might have been kind but all the years that she had been named Sly so had made her. A man mitt. I had "hit upon" an idea. Penny, buster. Uneven, and internal, asymmetrical but additive time. A child, meanwhile, had turned her tricycle upside down and was turning the pedal with her hand to make the front wheel spin. The

solemn, flickering effects, not knowing what you're doing. In your country do most of the girls do this. A cold but exhibiting hypothesis. I couldn't get the word butterfly so I tried to get the word moth. The man with the pinto pony had come through the neighborhood selling rides for a quarter, or as he said, "two bits," and it was that "two bits" even more than the pony that led the children to believe he was a real cowboy and therefore heroic. He was a trainer of falcons, scornful of hunting dogs. The body is a farmer. From the beginning, they had to drive the plow through stone eggs. She pretends she is making popcorn. The boats appeared to have stopped on the water, moving only as if to breathe. It seemed that they had hardly begun and they were already there. We were sticky in the back seat of the car. In the school bathroom I vomited secretly, not because I was ill but because I so longed for my mother. Now, bid chaos welcome. It requires a committee, all translators. Undone is not not done. And could it be musical if I hate it.

*Like plump birds
along the shore*

Summers were spent in a fog that rains. They were mirages, no different from those that camel-back riders approach in the factual accounts of voyages in which I persistently imagined myself,

and those mirages on the highway were for me both impalpable souvenirs and unstable evidence of my own adventures, now slightly less vicarious than before. The person too has flared ears, like an infant's reddened with batting. I had claimed the radio nights for my own. There were more storytellers than there were stories, so that everyone in the family had a version of history and it was impossible to get close to the original, or to know "what really happened." The pair of ancient, stunted apricot trees yielded ancient, stunted apricots. What was the meaning hung from that depend. The sweet aftertaste of artichokes. The lobes of autobiography. Even a minor misadventure, a bumped fender or a newsstand without newspapers, can "ruin the entire day," but a child cries and laughs without rift.

The sky droops straight down. I lapse, hypnotized by the flux and reflux of the waves. They had ruined the Danish pastry by frosting it with whipped butter. It was simply a tunnel, a very short one. Now I remember worrying about lockjaw. The cattle were beginning to move across the field pulled by the sun, which proved them to be milk cows. There is so little public beauty. I found myself dependent on a pause, a rose, something on paper. It is a way of saying, I want you, too, to have this experience, so that we are more alike, so that we are closer, bound together, sharing a point of view—so that we are “coming from the same place.” It is possible to be homesick in one’s own neighborhood. Afraid of the bears. A string of eucalyptus pods was hung by the window to discourage flies. So much of “the way things were” was the same from one day to the next, or from one occasion (Christmas, for example, or July 4th) to the next, that I can speak now of how we “always” had dinner, all of us sitting at our usual places in front of the placemats of woven straw, eating the salad first, with cottage cheese, which my father always referred to as “cottage fromage,” that being one of many little jokes with which he

expressed his happiness at home. Twice he broke his baby toe, stubbing it at night. As for we who “love to be astonished,” my heartbeats shook the bed. In any case, I wanted to be both the farmer and his horse when I was a child, and I tossed my head and stamped with one foot as if I were pawing the ground before a long gallop. Across the school playground, an outing, a field trip, passes in ragged order over the lines which mark the hopscotch patch. It made for a sort of family mythology. The heroes kept clean, chasing dusty rustlers, tonguing the air. They spent the afternoon building a dam across the gutter. There was too much carpeting in the house, but the windows upstairs were left open except on the very coldest or wettest of days. It was there that she met the astonishing figure of herself when young. Are we likely to find ourselves later pondering such suchness amid all the bourgeois memorabilia. Wherever I might find them, however unsuitable, I made them useful by a simple shift. The obvious analogy is with music. Did you mean gutter or guitar. Like cabbage or collage. The book was a sort of protection because it had a better plot. If any can be spared from the

garden. They hoped it would rain before somebody parked beside that section of the curb. The fuchsia is a plant much like a person, happy in the out-of-doors in the same sun and breeze that is most comfortable to a person sitting nearby. We had to wash the windows in order to see them. Supper was a different meal from dinner. Small fork-stemmed boats propelled by wooden spoons wound in rubber bands cruised the trough. Losing its balance on the low horizon lay the vanishing vernal day.

*The inevitable
sentiment is
a preliminary*

Water cannot be a mirror, nor any more like a mirror than the skin of the forehead. The day will twinkle, sparkle, shoot forth its single bits. Breathless through tunnels, breathless past

graves. We went down the hill in the afternoons around 4 when the day had begun to cool under a breeze springing out of the West, which began always at the tops of the poplars and then bent the boughs of the redwood trees, and of which my grandmother always complained, sending one of the grandchildren indoors to her bureau to find her a particular sweater, whose color she would describe, before letting us go downtown for Eskimo Pies, to which I felt we had a special claim, unknown to the man who sold them, because our mother had grown up in Alaska. Still, I had lost the little cluster in which I first saw that yellow spot resembling a blossom or a bee. It's Tubby the Tuba's little melody. A troublemaker who walked in the front door. The catsup that no one tastes because of the shape of

the bottle. I was thinking of the slippery love-seat, upholstered in a pattern of roses. Vision determines the view. They are supposed to be offering you a good time, too. She would, if she could. As for we who "love to be astonished," a weasel eats twenty times as much as a lizard of the same size. One is growing up repeatedly. But every night I was afraid that my parents were packing to leave us, so I kept an eye on them. The fenceposts were long lozenges covered with moss—ink is darker and wetter than moss—and sunk into gray soil patchy with acrid powdery grass among which grew poison oak and rattlesnake weed. On my mother's side, a matriarchy. I wanted to be a brave child, a girl with guts. And how one goes about educating that would-be audience may very likely determine the history of that moment, its direction, the qualities that become emphatic and characteristic of its later influence. As if by scratching at the paper one could dig out the names. Things bound in their cases plunge and erupt. Now when I build something, for example, the job does not seem beautifully done until all the tools have been properly put away. Sadness and thirst, and hence sadness and water, have ever since

been associated in my imagination. She lay in bed pretending to be a baby or a wounded soldier. The fellow in the dark would be the good guy with a harmonica. He was talking about oil paints, the body of the pigments, and the ground, with its distortions as they're actual, really seen. This is my portrait-bowl. But of any material, the first thing to make is an ashtray. When I wake up in the morning and it's raining, I feel like rolling in the mud. I was eventually to become one person, gathered up maybe, during a pause, at a comma. Roller skating, I could jump lines, hop cracks. What was the meaning hung from that depend but lupine in the pastures, mustard in the vineyards. How was Yosemite. I missed the flavor that chilling had stolen from the peach and the apricot, and the cold of the apple hurt my teeth. The pedal was squeaking on the piano. Can one "feel" that it is an instrument of discontinuity, of consciousness. When the child in my class whom I thought of as my "boyfriend," though we were then only nine years old, was sick and absent from school, I felt concerned, protective, both vulnerable and responsible by virtue of that relationship which was not friendship but love, and I

gathered up the homework assignments and his books each day and took them to his house after school. Something is similar. There are various means burrs carry. Others appear to know what they're doing. Tiny explicit pieces of information come out about them that wouldn't have if we'd asked questions. The horse, too, is a farmer. The spasm of a restricted smile, a reflected smile. Like a penalty, the simile. Should they go there they would not find the little village that I knew and loved.

*What memory is
not a "gripping"
thought*

From here each day seems like a little boat and all the days are swept and tilted back and forth across an immense and distant bay of blue, gray, green. We were like plump birds along the shore, caught by the mortal breaks. Dimension, longevity, color, and pleasure. So that if I tell you my intentions, I force myself to maintain those intentions. I wanted to see a mountain lion but had to content myself with a raccoon. The dog was jealous and pretended to limp. The fog was so fine that it was more like an odor than a texture in the air, an odor of seaweed and roses growing so remarkably red and pink and yellow in that sandy soil. There was something almost religious about it, something idolatrous, something insufficient. That was the break in my sentiments, resembling waves, which I might have longed to recover. I think they were cicadas, though off the trees. Behind the freeway we passed a shop selling "antiques" and "collectables." The child gawks, the child is gawky.