

My Life Study Guide

My Life by Lyn Hejinian

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

[My Life Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Section 1: A pause, a rose, something on paper, As for we who 'love to be astonished' & It seemed that we had hardly begun and we were already there.....4](#)

[Section 2: A name trimmed with colored ribbons, What is the meaning hung from that depend & The obvious analogy is with music.....6](#)

[Section 3: Like plump birds along the shore, The inevitable sentiment is a preliminary & What memory is not a 'gripping' thought.....8](#)

[Section 4: We have come a long way from what we actually felt, It is hard to turn away from moving water & I wrote my name in every one of his books.....10](#)

[Section 5: Religion is a vague lowing, Any photographer will tell you the same & At the time the perpetual Latin of love kept things hidden.....12](#)

[Section 6: She showed the left profile, the good one, It was only a coincidence & When one travels, one might hit a storm.....14](#)

[Section 7: Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good, The coffee drinkers answered ecstatically, We are not forgetting the patience of the mad, their love of detail & Reason looks for two, then arranges it from there.....16](#)

[Section 8: I never swept the sand from where I was going to sit down, No puppy or dog will ever be capable of this, and surely no parrot, The greatest thrill was to be the one to tell & The plow makes trough enough.....18](#)

[Section 9: The years pass, years in which, I take it, events were not lacking, So upright, twilight quoted & Yet we insist that life is full of happy chances.....20](#)

[Section 10: The settling-in that we're describing is a preliminary to being blown up, I laugh as if my pots were clean, A somewhat saltier, earthier tomato grows there and is more seductive & There is not sameness of the sky.....22](#)

[Section 11: One begins as a student but becomes a friend of clouds, At a moment of trotting on only one foot in so much snow, If there's nothing out the windows look at books & The run, that if you broke it, you'd have none.....24](#)

[Section 12: Now such is the rhythm of cognition & Preliminaries consist of such eternity.....26](#)

[Section 13: My morphemes mourned events & Skies are the terrains of this myopic.....28](#)



[Section 14: And I in the middleground found & The world gives speech substance and mind \(mile\) stones.....](#) 30

[Section 15: A word to guard continents of fruits and organs & Altruism in poetry.....](#) 32

[Characters.....](#) 34

[Objects/Places.....](#) 40

[Themes.....](#) 43

[Style.....](#) 45

[Quotes.....](#) 48

[Topics for Discussion.....](#) 52



Section 1: A pause, a rose, something on paper, As for we who 'love to be astonished' & It seemed that we had hardly begun and we were already there

Section 1: A pause, a rose, something on paper, As for we who 'love to be astonished' & It seemed that we had hardly begun and we were already there Summary

"A pause, a rose, something on paper" compares a yellow moment to a purple moment four years later when her father returns home from war, though moments are no longer colored so. As a child, the narrator fears her uncle with the wart on his nose and is shy of her aunt's deafness. She dips into and recoils from the water, but a word is a bottomless pit, which becomes pregnant and splits open to give birth to a stone egg. There is a word in every country which attempts the sound of cats, but constant noise is not an omen of music to come. Anxiety is vigilant, and restlessness is conventional, establishing an incoherent border which separates events from experience. The narrator thinks of the densely shadowed overtones as she begins a paragraph about her childhood being spent in a manner of waiting.

In "As for we who 'love to be astonished,'" the narrator's father fills apothecary jars with sea glass from beaches. The narrator's mother breaks her arm when she falls while stamping down the trash in the garbage can. The pilot of the little airplane forgets to notify the airport of his approach, so the air raid sirens go off, and the entire city goes dark. Mother stands at the window, watching the visible lights. At night, the narrator's grandmother pulls down the window shades, and the narrator sits on the windowsill, singing. One can neither linger nor determine the nature of all progress until all of the relatives are assembled.

In "It seemed that we had hardly begun and we were already there," the narrator is so stubborn as a toddler that when she is crossed, she holds her breath until she loses consciousness. "Every family has its own collection of stories, but not every family has someone to tell them" (page 14). Mother stands between her children, lecturing them on the undertow as they try to jump the approaching waves. Aunt entertains the narrator and her siblings with a lie about a childhood event that never occurred, but she has come to believe the lie herself and is blameless. That which follows a strict chronology has no memory. It is hard to distinguish hunger from wanting to eat. The trees continually receive their own shadows.



Section 1: A pause, a rose, something on paper, As for we who 'love to be astonished' & It seemed that we had hardly begun and we were already there Analysis

The first section of this autobiographical collection of poetry consists of three poems and ten pages. These three titles, "A pause, a rose, something on paper," "As for we who 'love to be astonished,'" and "It seemed that we had hardly begun and we were already there," also serve as some of the most frequently repeated phrases throughout the book, appearing in nearly every chapter. The first of these poems begin by identifying moments by assigning a color to them, likely as an indication of the emotion that each moment elicits. The narrator mentions her father, uncle and aunt, effectively introducing the recurring motif of familial relationships which occurs throughout this book. She alludes to Cocteau in this poem. The narrator also mentions language and time in this poem, and these are two very important themes that appear sporadically throughout her poems. Much of her poetry uses analogies and anecdotes based on nature which can be seen in the first poem in Section 1, as well as in the second and third poems.

The second poem includes an anecdote about the narrator's father filling apothecary jars with sea glass, which is significant because the sea is a frequent image in this collection, as well as an anecdote about her mother breaking her arm. Windows and light also play a large role in this poem, as in many others in "My Life," as demonstrated by Mother watching the lights from the window and Grandmother pulling the blinds down as a means of shutting out the light. In the final poem in this section, the narrator describes some typical interactions between members of her family before stating that that which follows a strict chronology has no memory. Based on the subsequent poems, this seems to mean that her memory does not follow a strict chronology as evidenced by her tendency to recount a story from her adulthood followed by one from her infancy or adolescence.



Section 2: A name trimmed with colored ribbons, What is the meaning hung from that depend & The obvious analogy is with music

Section 2: A name trimmed with colored ribbons, What is the meaning hung from that depend & The obvious analogy is with music Summary

In "A name trimmed with colored ribbons," the leaves trick the eye, demanding to be seen and making it impossible to look past them. Each bit of Jello is shaped differently in their molded dishes, but otherwise, it is the same. The imagination is more restless than the body, and life is hopelessly frayed. In the afternoons, when the shades are pulled down for her nap, the dark yellow light coming through makes the narrator thirsty. Though the wool itches, she obeys and dresses. When they are called into their parents' sitting room, it is a message of happiness, such as a birthday present given too early because it is too large to hide like a pony with his mane trimmed in colorful ribbons.

In "What is the meaning hung from that depend," Mother's childhood is like a holy melodrama. At night, a radio broadcast tells of a child who fell into a well and died. "The synchronous, which [she has] characterized as spatial, is accurate to reality but it has been debased" (page 21). There is some disparity between Grandfather's reserve and his sense that a man's natural importance is characterized by his bulk. Walking alone after the fog burns away, the narrator gets lost between the grapevines. Grandmother comes upon a set of expressions that suits her perfectly, so she continues to use them long after they are out of fashion. When the narrator sees fishing boats, she thinks of the sky and the banks toward the West.

In "The obvious analogy is with music," every possibility waits at the mountain creek, and time is added to expanding measure in raga. Nothing interrupts birthday parties when the narrator is a child, as she wears Mary Janes and sips Shirley Temples. Grandfather is as serious as any war general, though he is too young for World War I and too old for World War II. He carries a walking stick and is silent on his walks other than to greet his neighbors. The narrator's sister is named Marie, after their aunt Murree. The narrator tries the word "moth" because she cannot get the word "butterfly." The boats seem to have stopped on the water; they had hardly begun and were already there. The narrator secretly vomits in the school bathroom because she misses her mother. Undone isn't not done, and it could be musical if one hates it.



Section 2: A name trimmed with colored ribbons, What is the meaning hung from that depend & The obvious analogy is with music Analysis

The second section is composed of ten pages and three poems. Like those from Section 1, the titles of these poems are frequently repeated throughout the poems. Additionally, many of the phrases and themes from the first section are repeated. "A name trimmed with colored ribbons" states that each bit of Jello is molded differently but is otherwise the same; this can be viewed as an analogy with man and a repetition of the adage against judging a book by its cover. Light and windows are again significant as the dark light coming through the drawn shades in the afternoon makes the narrator thirsty. In "What is the meaning hung from that depend," the narrator alludes to Dorothy Wordsworth as a comparison for her reasons for walking. She also describes Mother's childhood as a holy melodrama through the use of simile. She recognizes the disparity between Grandfather's natural reserve and his belief that a man's importance is characterized by his bulk.

Grandmother uses phrases and words like "peachy" long after they are out of fashion because they suit her perfectly. "The obvious analogy is with music," a commonly repeated phrase, begins by claiming that expanding measure in raga, a type of music, adds to time. The narrator alludes to wearing Mary Janes and sipping Shirley Temples at birthday parties as a child. She also further describes Grandfather by emphasizing his seriousness. Words play a role in this poem as the narrator tries to get the word "moth" because she is unable to get the word "butterfly." In a paradox near the end of this poem, she claims that undone does not necessarily mean not done; though this seems to be untrue, it is an accurate statement as one can undo something that has already been done.



Section 3: Like plump birds along the shore, The inevitable sentiment is a preliminary & What memory is not a 'gripping' thought

Section 3: Like plump birds along the shore, The inevitable sentiment is a preliminary & What memory is not a 'gripping' thought Summary

In "Like plump birds along the shore," summers are spent in a rainy fog, and the desert-like mirages are the narrator's souvenirs from her unstable adventures. The sky droops, and she is hypnotized by the waves. Things are so much the same day-to-day that she can generalize about the things her family "always" did. Upstairs, where the windows are kept open, she meets the astonishing figure of her younger self. The obvious analogy is with music, but the book is protection because it has a better plot. The vanishing, vernal day lays on the low horizon as it loses balance.

In "The inevitable sentiment is a preliminary," Grandmother always complains about the children breaking the boughs of the redwood trees as they go down the hill in the afternoons. She sends one of them to fetch a specific sweater before allowing them to go downtown for Eskimo Pies, to which the narrator feels she has a certain claim since Mother grew up in Alaska. The narrator watches her parents every night because she fears they will pack and leave her. The job is not done until the tools are put away. At age 9, the narrator is concerned when her boyfriend is sick and misses school, by virtue of their relationship that is love, and she takes his homework to him after school. If they go there, they will not find the village that she knew and loved.

In "What memory is not a 'gripping' thought," each day is like a boat, swept back and forth across the sea. If the narrator tells someone her intentions, she forces herself to maintain those intentions. "That was a break in [her] sentiments, resembling waves, which [she] might have longed to recover" (page 35). During the summer that she works as a hiking instructor at a girls' camp in New England, the narrator learns that descending a hill is often the most painful part of a hike. Individuality animates the universal. As she plays alone, she imagines developing into a tree and yearns to do so so strongly that it makes her shapeless, restless and disagreeable.



Section 3: Like plump birds along the shore, The inevitable sentiment is a preliminary & What memory is not a 'gripping' thought Analysis

The third section consists of three poems which total twelve pages in length. As throughout the rest of this collection of poetry, many phrases are familiar as they are repeated from the titles of previous poems. In "Like plump birds along the shore," the narrator provides a generalization of the daily activities within her family. She claims that she is able to speak about the things that they "always" did because these things remained so similar from day-to-day.

"The inevitable sentiment is a preliminary" ends with the narrator claiming that the village where she was raised has changed so much since her childhood, due to mankind's development, that one visiting it would not find the same place that she knew and loved.

In "What memory is not a 'gripping' thought," the narrator addresses the concepts of character and reputation when she claims that telling someone her intentions forces her to maintain those intentions. These poems also deal heavily with the themes of family, nature, time and language.



Section 4: We have come a long way from what we actually felt, It is hard to turn away from moving water & I wrote my name in every one of his books

Section 4: We have come a long way from what we actually felt, It is hard to turn away from moving water & I wrote my name in every one of his books Summary

In "We have come a long way from what we actually felt," the narrator says she would need to explain if it were written. When the teacher at her Christian Science Sunday School asks what she wants to be when she grows up, she says a writer or a doctor, but it is embarrassing because the words of the last to speak linger in the air. She borrows Father's typewriter and runs through the holes in her memory. The narrator does not want a tenth birthday party; she only wants her mother from whom she is separated by her friends. Objects and events are forgotten, but a place is held for them in case they reappear. Recognizing that she is different from herself when with friends, the narrator withdraws in order to protect her honesty.

In "It is hard to turn away from moving water," it is impossible to finish a thought. The narrator captures cocoons but never sees a butterfly or moth emerge. Until 1964, she views the world as a medium of recognition and prepares for it to recognize her. Her aunt holds up a letter the narrator had written as testimony of what she held to be true. The clouds appear to enter the world from one spot in the sky. Like air, it is impossible to steal ideas, and the narrator is enchanted by its grace.

In "I wrote my name in every one of his books," it takes a while for the narrator to understand how stars form constellations. Around this time, Father provides her with the right phrase about beauty and the wonder of books: "Individuality is animated by its sense of the infinite" (page 49). There is plenty to do when one is bored as boredom generates its own necessary conditions. The narrator feels the need to correct some fault in her morality or talents daily because she has such a short time to live. She creates her own reality because she refuses to have it any other way. When one is exhausted, setting, topic or tone begins a new paragraph. The vanished is romantic, and the narrator begins to learn about love from the experience of passionate generosity.



Section 4: We have come a long way from what we actually felt, It is hard to turn away from moving water & I wrote my name in every one of his books Analysis

Section 4 is ten pages long and contains three poems. These poems contain many repeated phrases and utilize the same recurring themes that have been seen thus far. "We have come a long way from what we actually felt" ends with the narrator withdrawing from people in order to protect her honesty because she realizes that people are different when they are with friends. This statement speaks to the diversity of every individual's personality as everyone presents different aspects of their personality to different people in their lives, thus diminishing their individuality at the same time that it is expanded. In "It is hard to turn away from moving water," the narrator admits that, until 1964, she viewed the world as a medium of recognition and prepared for it to recognize her; this suggests her own ego-centrism until this point in her life.

"I wrote my name in every one of his books" alludes to the FBI as an entity that the narrator feared more than murderers as a child. She also recognizes the brevity of the human lifespan and, in contradiction to the previous poem, takes a more self-debasing view of herself as someone who needs to daily improve something about her talents or morality.



Section 5: Religion is a vague lowing, Any photographer will tell you the same & At the time the perpetual Latin of love kept things hidden

Section 5: Religion is a vague lowing, Any photographer will tell you the same & At the time the perpetual Latin of love kept things hidden Summary

In "Religion is a vague lowing," the narrator learns to listen rather than talk. The song's secret is its elusiveness, and women should speak softly without mumbling. The narrator is self-sufficient but always vulnerable to her feelings in relation to someone else. She starts inexactly and begins again with the next indentation. From the bus, she sees a blind woman selling carnations on Geary Street. The narrator watches Independence Day fireworks as the winter rains fall into the bay. "It was not so much monotony as a certain obsession with thought" (page 54). Adolescence is repetitive with each moment beginning in the middle. The narrator writes her name on the first page of all of his books.

In "Any photographer will tell you the same," girls are likely to become interested in religion during the transition into womanhood due to paranoia rather than intuition. During the summer in California, the sun is bright and hot, but the shadows are dark and cool. The uncertain girl grows righteous with love. The narrator imagines the absence before one's birth as god. The weather builds character in New England. At some point, one no longer hears new ideas and must make do with new facts. The narrator waits, "with crashing consequence, wanting to have experienced many things" (page 57).

In "At the time the perpetual Latin of love kept things hidden," one would not read a book unless one already understood it. At times, the narrator finds it embarrassing to have come to California, and she only wants the facts. She wants to stand alone, but something in her nature presents a conflict. "Restlessness is a form of doubt as well as a form of curiosity" (page 59). Grandmother was a Christian Scientist, but the narrator somehow corrupts the teachings, becomes a hypochondriac, and worries about going insane. She learns that the inevitable sentiment is preliminary and seems to apply to everything. When considering the immediate, all details are needed to see. In keeping its reversible logic, the synchronous resembles psychology or a person's logic.



Section 5: Religion is a vague lowing, Any photographer will tell you the same & At the time the perpetual Latin of love kept things hidden Analysis

The fifth section consists of nine pages and three poems. Phrases from previous poems are frequently repeated, and the themes of nature, family, time and language are revisited. One such repetition is found at the end of the first poem when the narrator writes her name on the first page of all of his books, as this reiterates this phrase and hints at the theme of language in the form of literature. In "Religion is a vague lowing," the narrator's self-sufficiency is inhibited by her feelings for other people. "Any photographer will tell you the same" claims that, during the transition into womanhood, girls tend to become interested in religion as a result of paranoia rather than intuition. This suggests the acceptance of the transitory nature of the human existence as well as expresses the narrator's disdain for religion. In "At the time the perpetual Latin of love kept things hidden," something is the narrator's nature conflicts with her desire to stand alone, insinuating that human nature demands company despite an individual's desire for the opposite. This poem also alludes to the difference between the American calendar and the Mayan calendar.



Section 6: She showed the left profile, the good one, It was only a coincidence & When one travels, one might hit a storm

Section 6: She showed the left profile, the good one, It was only a coincidence & When one travels, one might hit a storm Summary

In "She showed the left profile, the good one," the narrator sees her life as a struggle against her fate and personality. Every time she enters the Metro in Paris, she reads the sign reserving the large seats nearest the door for war veterans; the writing holds it separated to see there. One form of shyness is characterized by the fear of making someone else feel embarrassed or awkward. When the narrator feels jittery, she often takes long walks to escape what she feels. She learns to be suspicious of sudden and spontaneous acts of generosity because, in such a mood, she gives away the wicker rocking chair that first belonged to Mother; she cannot ask for its return without resentment for which she feels guilty. The narrator is intrigued by the inaccessibility of the meaning since she cannot read the writing which constitutes Persian. Language breaks Faustian longings into continuous and voluminous digressions.

In "It was only a coincidence," the narrator states that Caesar's battles are his prose. Great passion elevates and frees her from the necessity of appealing and responding to the people around her. Early fragmentary writings of Egypt and Persia are lovely and intriguing; the mystery adheres to the lost lines of the ancient texts. Language is the history that gives a person shape. The narrator contextualizes a book's contents historically by its date. The narrator hopes to recreate herself, but she finds herself trapped in the very character that creates this wish. "Any work leading to questions of possibility must lead to a new work" (page 66). The sense of responsibility is merely a context of search for love or a lover. In May 1958, reading is anti-anonymous, and she disapproves of background music.

In "When one travels one might hit a storm," it is obvious that one is related to their mother in the light that flies at night. Words are inadequate to the occasion. At the circus, the elephants are more beautiful than the horses, more touching than the clowns and more graceful than the tigers. "Always infinity extends from any individual life, but eternity is limited between one's birth and one's death" (page 68). Interpreting the combination of events and mysticism on which such interpretations are based is what gives coincidence a bad name. The narrator looks for meaning when she should be satisfied with events. The lives she reads about seem more real than her own, but she still seems more real than the people who lead those lives. Doing things for gain is



selfish, while doing them for one's own pleasure is to do them generously. Systems betray or are made betrayals. The narrator is organized by addition and addiction.

Section 6: She showed the left profile, the good one, It was only a coincidence & When one travels, one might hit a storm Analysis

This section is ten pages in length and contains three poems. Phrases and themes are repeated, as in previous sections. In "She showed the left profile, the good one," the narrator sees her life as a struggle against her fate and her personality which leads the reader to conclude that there is some disparity between the two. This poem deals heavily with the theme of language through an allusion to its capability of breaking Faustian longings into continuous and voluminous digressions. "It was only a coincidence" alludes to Sappho and Segovia, as well as Caesar's battles which are his prose. Again emphasizing language, the narrator links it to history by describing the way she contextualizes a book's contents historically by its date and in the claim that language is the history that gives people shape. "When one travels one might hit a storm" seems to contradict itself in the claim that infinity extends from any individual life while eternity is limited to the time between one's birth and death. The narrator seems to be differentiating between infinity and eternity though most people think of these two words as fairly synonymous.



Section 7: Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good, The coffee drinkers answered ecstatically, We are not forgetting the patience of the mad, their love of detail & Reason looks for two, then arranges it from there

Section 7: Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good, The coffee drinkers answered ecstatically, We are not forgetting the patience of the mad, their love of detail & Reason looks for two, then arranges it from there Summary

In "Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good," the narrator signals for the birds to be as quiet as possible while they sing. When the narrator was a child, Tommy, the mailman, let the neighborhood children join him on his route until he reached the busy streets when he would send them home. The narrator flees her charges, the campers to whom she is counselor. She works as a mountain guide all summer, and a group of girls trail behind her. She worries that if she is left unmarried after college, she will be single and lonely for the remainder of her life. "We will only understand what we have already understood" (page 73). Pleasure is an independent quality, comparable to wealth, fame and beauty.

In "The coffee drinkers answered ecstatically," the cheerful pessimist suits himself in a bad world which is impossible of improvement. The personal is most likely fickle. The university is the cultural market, but she tries different churches on Sundays. At the museum, one's attention shifts, making it impossible to focus on any single work. Grandfather is forced to acknowledge his age when a younger man offers his seat on the bus. The narrator is immensely relieved to experience love.

In "We are not forgetting the patience of the mad, their love of detail," the summer countryside reminds the narrator of a yellow mongrel dog, yet this seems like the real country to her. They look at the apartment and take it. Each bit of new knowledge merely indicates wider ignorance. The narrator makes curtains from colored burlap and hangs them from the windows. She begins painting a few months after taking a creative writing class. Her parents talk in the study before dinner every evening, and Mother throws away all objects of sentiment. The narrator's mania for panorama predicts her desire for accurate representation.



In "Reason looks for two, then arranges it from there," the narrator wakes in the room fitting the wall, and she has her desk and the corner. She still responds to the academic year. She spreads her fingers as she speaks of artifice which extends beauty beyond nature. At 8 a.m., she senses the first threat of monotony because she is tired of ideas. She avoids telephone calls as a pretense of keeping her distance from anything that appears pretentious. It seems that the narrator does not want a birthday devoid of sentimentality. "The real adversary of [her] determination was determinism, regulating between things of one day and things of the next" (page 83). Language makes tracks.

Section 7: Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good, The coffee drinkers answered ecstatically, We are not forgetting the patience of the mad, their love of detail & Reason looks for two, then arranges it from there Analysis

The seventh section consists of thirteen pages and four poems. Within these poems, phrases and themes are consistently repeated and reused in varying ways. In "Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good," the narrator describes her summer job as a mountain guide at a girls' camp, as well as her desire to flee her charges. She also worries that she will be lonely for the remainder of her life if she is not married by the time she graduates college. In "The coffee drinkers answered ecstatically," the cheerful pessimist accepts the bad world around him because, due to his pessimistic nature, he does not believe it capable of improvement. The end of this poem alludes to Father's Day. "We are not forgetting the patience of the mad, their love of detail" alludes to Nietzsche, Darwin, Freud and Marx as the narrator discusses the creative writing class that she takes a few months before starting to paint. "Reason looks for two, then arranges it from there" mentions the artifice that extends beauty beyond nature, and this seems to suggest that beauty can only be beyond nature artificially as nothing is more amazing than nature in the natural order of the world.



Section 8: I never swept the sand from where I was going to sit down, No puppy or dog will ever be capable of this, and surely no parrot, The greatest thrill was to be the one to tell & The plow makes trough enough

Section 8: I never swept the sand from where I was going to sit down, No puppy or dog will ever be capable of this, and surely no parrot, The greatest thrill was to be the one to tell & The plow makes trough enough Summary

In "I never swept the sand from where I was going to sit down," the world is not small, but there are many ways to divide it into small parts. The narrator uses many ideas to become intellectually concentric. Their apartment has back stairs and a laundry line over the parking lot. "This autobiography of expansive sensations is divided horizontally" (page 85). The narrator needs a rocker because she is pregnant. She tries to precisely spell the sounds that the sea makes. Adolescence is not yet outgrown, melody requires repetition, and there is revelry in education. Those who participate in a movement must accept responsibility for its failure.

In "No puppy or dog will ever be capable of this, and surely no parrot," work is a part of life. They live on the third floor of their apartment building where the narrator can overlook the parking lot where the children play and fight. Her mistaken thought that science was hostile to the imagination keeps her from a whole body of knowledge. She thinks of him when he is not home to ruin it. She is still afraid when she refuses to rise for the national anthem. She surrenders her importance to the baby when he is born. "A word is only introduced under very tight restrictions" (page 89).

In "The greatest thrill was to be the one to tell", no one can ask another rhetorical question. Now that she is old and famed for her intellect, she wears the fashion of an earlier era when she was beautiful. She asks what other names they considered giving her when she was born and what they would have named her if she had been a boy. The narrator wants to visit Givenny and the gardens of Monet. She writes a week's worth in one night. She rebels against worlds of her own construction and withdraws into the empirical world surrounding her. In her childhood memories, others dominate, but she dominates her more recent memories.



In "The plow makes trough enough," the narrator dreams that she swims to the bottom of a lake, pushes off from the mud, and rises quickly to the surface. She cannot join the demonstration because she is pregnant, so she has the revolutionary experience without the revolutionary action. As a child, the narrator sometimes feels serene because of all the activity around her. Things that do not seem real will not happen. The word "version" is a comparative noun which implies its plural form. The inconsolable jealousy that tells her of her love declares that a good mother should have more children.

Section 8: I never swept the sand from where I was going to sit down, No puppy or dog will ever be capable of this, and surely no parrot, The greatest thrill was to be the one to tell & The plow makes trough enough Analysis

Section 8 is comprised of twelve pages and four poems. It utilizes the same themes of family, nature, time and language that recur throughout the book. Also, many phrases are used repetitively. "I never swept the sand from where I was going to sit down" alludes to Mrs. Butterworth, starving Armenians and Wittgenstein. In this poem, the narrator also personifies the sea when she tries to accurately spell the sounds that it makes. Although the world is not small, there are many ways to divide it into small parts; this statement simultaneously contradicts and emphasizes the concept of it's a small world.

In "No puppy or dog will ever be capable of this, and surely no parrot," the narrator mistakenly thinks that science is hostile to imagination, but by stating that her thought was mistaken, the narrator shows that she no longer believes that. This poem also alludes to Dante, a centaur, Gerber, Givenny, the gardens of Monet and Gregorian chants. In "The greatest thrill was to be the one to tell," the narrator dominates her recent memories though not her childhood ones, showing that she is more important than others in her mind. In "The plow makes trough enough, things that do not seem real will not happen; this seems to echo the saying "if it's too good to be true, it probably is."



Section 9: The years pass, years in which, I take it, events were not lacking, So upright, twilit quoted & Yet we insist that life is full of happy chances

Section 9: The years pass, years in which, I take it, events were not lacking, So upright, twilit quoted & Yet we insist that life is full of happy chances Summary

In "The years pass, years in which, I take it, events were not lacking," disorder is entangled in language, so the narrator reads several books at once. When his children are small, Father suggests that his family go camping, but the outdoors frighten him in the dark. The narrator's friend points out that there is no point in buying a large home since all of the rooms will be empty, except the kitchen where she will be with her children. The narrator recalls a woman who renounces a point with good reason, but then she accepts it again. They walk on Beech Street to see the three great copper beech trees that have been built around rather than built over. The narrator's mother-in-law hates the word "kids" and insists they are referred to as "children" or called by name. The birds suddenly fly away from the pines, and the light flattens the landscape without darkening it.

In "So upright, twilit quoted," this winter will never return, and no other will replicate it. The radio announcer introduces a Chopin nocturne. The young woman sits on the steps in front of the apartment building in the mornings. When she learns to read, the narrator writes her name in all of his books. She is puzzled because the future will never be revealed. "To give a proper term for an object or idea is to describe its end" (page 101). The narrator does not find Death any more or less peculiar than pre-life, though the latter is never personified. He asks how he can choose between all subjects he remembers because they all seemed beautiful to him once, now that he feels the same about them all.

In "Yet we insist that life is full of happy chances," the window is open, and the morning air is filled with birds' songs. The narrator seldom dreams of herself without her children. In school, her daughter learns to think of a poet as "a person seated on an iceberg and melting through it" (page 104). In 1969, the narrator feels the scope of collectivity, and it is hard for her to share her time. She will not recede, though she may balk. Looking at the beach, the child sees that the sun is small from a distance. The narrator is a stranger to the little girl she once was. Many facts about a life should be left out



because they are easily replaced. He looks at her and smiles without looking away; thus, the friendship becomes erotic.

Section 9: The years pass, years in which, I take it, events were not lacking, So upright, twilit quoted & Yet we insist that life is full of happy chances Analysis

The ninth section is composed of ten pages and three poems. Earlier phrases are repeated in the poems in this section, as is common throughout "My Life." The narrator also reiterates and re-investigates the themes of family, nature, time and language through varying means, some straightforward and some more ambiguous. In "The years pass, years in which, I take it, events were not lacking," the fact that the narrator's mother-in-law hates the word "kids" and insists that her grandchildren are called "children" or referred to by name shows the importance of language. This factor enters into the denotation of words; since "kids" literally means goats, the mother-in-law is opposed to the use of the word in relation to her grandchildren. This poem alludes to Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim while the next poem alludes to a Chopin nocturne and the New York Times.

In "So upright, twilit quoted," the narrator compares and contrasts Death with the pre-life, one's existence before their birth. She does not find one state more peculiar than the other. By commenting on the fact that Death is frequently personified, the narrator seems to suggest that people are more apt to consider death as less peculiar since it is a concept they are familiar enough with that they have personified it.

In "Yet we insist that life is full of happy chances," the narrator shows her love for her children through the fact that she rarely dreams about herself without them. This poem also explores perception as the narrator is a stranger to the little girl she once was and the child on the beach notices the sun's diminished size when it is viewed from a distance.



Section 10: The settling-in that we're describing is a preliminary to being blown up, I laugh as if my pots were clean, A somewhat saltier, earthier tomato grows there and is more seductive & There is not sameness of the sky

Section 10: The settling-in that we're describing is a preliminary to being blown up, I laugh as if my pots were clean, A somewhat saltier, earthier tomato grows there and is more seductive & There is not sameness of the sky Summary

In "The settling-in that we're describing is a preliminary to being blown up," the narrator occasionally transfers her restlessness to the vehicle itself. When reading a book, it makes a difference to her to know that he will read the same book, but she wonders if the difference would be altered if he was going to read a different copy. It is natural for her to confuse the romantic with the motherly. The narrator finally reaches an age where she can love her parents generously, and she comes to depend upon her children socially. An old woman on the bus tells another woman that she prays daily for God to dismiss her when she becomes too old to wait on herself. An acquaintance visits, but the narrator is distracted by the fact that time continues. The fear of losing ideas objectifies knowledge.

In "I laugh as if my pots were clean," the narrator longs to be free of him in order to do important things to impress him, and then, they will belong to each other forever. She walks her dog to the abandoned brewery which attracts her. "The general form tends to grow quite naturally under the hand that writes it, but until a thing is completed, it needs to be explained" (page 111). The children make balloon animals, and he looks her in the eye as he passes the wine. Thought balloons are not as hard as word balloons. The air breathed contains sound, dark, silence and light.

In "A somewhat saltier, earthier tomato grows there and is more seductive," they follow the Winnebago through the country. The book is so good that the narrator does not need to read it. Since the biggest thrill is to be the one to tell the story, she let's Anna describe the rattlesnake when they return home. In a sentence about "one" doing



something, the narrator is the one. The sunlight spills and can be seen plunging into the river. The overloaded trucks slow down as they follow the tracks to town. She wants to stay instead of going by. The steam from the colt's nostrils creates a coat of crystal.

In "There is no sameness of the sky," the narrator sincerely thinks about insincerity. He refuses to live in a house where every room is square. "A word is an expectation" (page 116). The narrator receives a quarterly check from Mendocino County for driving the children two miles up the road to meet the bus. When she is dead, they will have to celebrate her birthday without her. They watch the sunset while sitting on a green slope and talking about omniscience during the spring that the children are seven and nine years old. The narrator watches the woodpecker and listens to his beak hit the tree's bark. She feels ideas and loves these kids. From the hedges, they watch what is coming down, and they watch the music. The green ground is bound by the seasons. Life is a landscape, and living it is the journey for which only a limited amount of time is provided.

Section 10: The settling-in that we're describing is a preliminary to being blown up, I laugh as if my pots were clean, A somewhat saltier, earthier tomato grows there and is more seductive & There is not sameness of the sky Analysis

The tenth section is composed of thirteen pages and four poems. Earlier phrases are repeated in the poems in this section, as is common throughout "My Life." The narrator also reiterates and re-investigates the themes of family, nature, time and language through varying means, some straightforward and some more ambiguous. In "The settling-in that we're describing is a preliminary to being blown up," the narrator claims it is meaningful while reading a book to know that he will read the same one, but she questions whether it would be less so if he were going to read his own copy. Through this, she notes the objectification of the literature through the medium of books.

In "I laugh as if my pots were clean," the narrator expresses feelings of inadequacy in her longing to be free of him in order to do something important to impress him so that they can belong to each other forever. This poem alludes to George Washington, and the next makes a reference to a Winnebago, a type of automobile. In "A somewhat saltier, earthier tomato grows there and is more seductive," the narrator notes that she is referring to herself when "one" does something, demonstrating one way that language can be used to separate oneself from an action. In "There is no sameness of the sky," there is an analogy between a shooting star in the sky and a lion in the zoo. The narrator also offers a metaphor in this poem as she compares life to a landscape and living it to the journey for which only a limited amount of time is provided, which also alludes to the brevity of the human lifespan.



Section 11: One begins as a student but becomes a friend of clouds, At a moment of trotting on only one foot in so much snow, If there's nothing out the windows look at books & The run, that if you broke it, you'd have none

Section 11: One begins as a student but becomes a friend of clouds, At a moment of trotting on only one foot in so much snow, If there's nothing out the windows look at books & The run, that if you broke it, you'd have none Summary

In "One begins as a student but becomes a friend of clouds," art is inseparable from the search for reality. The narrator feels "intuitively that this which was incomprehensible was expectant, increasing, was good" (page 119). Events are not lacking as the years pass, and he insists that his life has been full of lucky chance though it is actually quite the opposite as he only gets to go home after a nine-to-five job. They are late for the movies but always early for the children. The narrator's interests are much broader than those of people who have said the same thing for eight years. A pleasant satisfaction comes from the conjunction of comprehension in a reader's mind with the content in a writer's work.

In "At a moment of trotting on only one foot in so much snow," back East stops being home when home becomes out West. The horse auctioneer has little understanding of other people. The grass ripples in the diffuse light, and their eyes cannot rest on the road, but they do not forget the patience of the mad or their love of detail. Memory separates from infinity. The children wait in the cold for the school bus. Sometimes, New York City seems continuous like a country landscape, capable of engendering the release of peaceful feelings, though not peaceful in itself.

In "If there's nothing out the windows look at books," the narrator looks down when challenged to explain herself, and her mind settles into a comfortable position so it can work. A translator must try to keep the most interesting words. As they sit at a bar, Charles recites a poem by Emily Dickinson. To feel nothing is to have nothing but fun. The narrator feeds words into a sentence that is already there. "[They] follow stars to form an authoritative constellation called Common Sense" (page 126). The self is improved by memory. The narrator patiently waits to look at the birds.



In "The run, that if you broke it, you'd have none," the city is the only good thing to see, but the rain is good to hear. A sense of definition develops as one's sense of possibility. When the narrator's family first moves in, the neighbors on the left complain about the saxophone, but they grow to enjoy the noise as they become more familiar. The narrator and her husband sit on the beach in the cold, but she is warm. There are days when busywork is satisfying. Words are heard with the eyes. The narrator feels her mind, the coldness of her thoughts and their reluctance to leave.

Section 11: One begins as a student but becomes a friend of clouds, At a moment of trotting on only one foot in so much snow, If there's nothing out the windows look at books & The run, that if you broke it, you'd have none Analysis

The eleventh section consists of twelve pages and four poems. Within these poems, phrases and themes are consistently repeated and reused in varying ways. In "One begins as a student but becomes a friend of clouds," the narrator identifies art as a search for reality and claims satisfaction in a reader understanding the author's intended meaning in a written work. "At a moment of trotting on only one foot in so much snow" mentions that New York City is capable of engendering the release of peaceful feelings, though it is not peaceful in itself, and this suggests that the narrator feels peaceful amidst the activity in the city. The first poem alludes to St. Cecelia, and the second alludes to Emily Dickinson and her poetry.

The narrator, in "If there's nothing out the windows look at books," allows her mind to settle into a comfortable working position when she is challenged to explain herself. In "The run, that if you broke it, you'd have none,, the narrator claims that words are heard with the eyes. This parallels the music being watched in "There is no sameness of the sky" as music and words are things that most people consider as being heard by the ears.



Section 12: Now such is the rhythm of cognition & Preliminaries consist of such eternity

Section 12: Now such is the rhythm of cognition & Preliminaries consist of such eternity Summary

In "Now such is the rhythm of cognition," those who believe in English speak it. One must assume a decision when they are unable to see a connection. The narrator recalls the day in October 1978 when she lost her temper. She lives a few blocks from the scenes of her childhood, yet they mean nothing. In her memories of walking home alone, she recalls herself as a burgeoning personality in the schoolyard, and she feels anew its oppression which makes her dread school retrospectively though she liked it very much in reality.

In "Preliminaries consist of such eternity," the narrator hears a commotion at the Seven-Eleven on the corner while she is coming home late from a literary event. A policeman calls for back-up for an abusive drunk in front of the store, and a few minutes later, a policewoman responds, jumping from her car and handcuffing the drunk. "Words (unlikeness and discipline)- there are no unresisted rhythms in one" (page 136). They ride horses in the mountains around the High Lakes for five days, and they reach the crest on the second day; their fate hangs at their feet.

In 1979, the narrator reads Montaigne and begins to expect someone to die. She panics compulsively when she thinks of the magnitude of poetry, just as years before when she was grasped by infinity as she lay on the grass. She holds her breath as she concentrates and tries to compress the sky's reflection in the lake into a sentence. As they watch the circles in the light beside the lake, the voices of the daughter, mother and mother's mother are heard in the background. The narrator is territorial at their nativity. Jameson writes of a "collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity" (page 138), but the narrator prefers the realm of Necessity. Father says that painters are happier than writers after he switches himself. The narrator states that there are many figures in this scene which might form different scenes.

Section 12: Now such is the rhythm of cognition & Preliminaries consist of such eternity Analysis

The twelfth section is composed of nine pages and two poems. Earlier phrases are repeated in the poems in this section, as is common throughout "My Life." The narrator also reiterates and re-investigates the themes of family, nature, time and language through varying means, some straightforward and some more ambiguous. This section



also contains many allusions. The first poem alludes to the Empire State Building, Thanatos who lacks the urge to hear and George Eliot who is quoted "I never believed more profoundly than I do now that character is based on organization." The second poem quotes Parshchikov about middle-class people expecting eternity from poetry, and it alludes to Seven-Eleven, Trotsky's "My Lives," George Sands, Montaigne, Nauru, Jameson, and Franz Kline. In "Now such is the rhythm of cognition," the narrator examines the difference in her feelings of oppression in her memories of school that makes her dread it retrospectively while, in reality, she liked school very much. In "Preliminaries consist of such eternity," she quotes Jameson about the "collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity," but she, personally, prefers the realm of Necessity, thus thwarting the realm of Freedom.



Section 13: My morphemes mourned events & Skies are the terrains of this myopic

Section 13: My morphemes mourned events & Skies are the terrains of this myopic Summary

In "My morphemes mourned events," the narrator will not despair; she hopes to rise daily before 7 a.m. and to avoid idleness. She is relieved as she writes down that thought because now she can forget it, but forgetfulness does not occur as other thoughts take its place. She never rids herself of the conscientiousness that existentialism taught. Self-pity chains her like a criminal at every act of the new Presidency, and she wishes that she could sign her ballot to obtain satisfaction from voting. Language is so objectified that it is different from what one knows or says. That afternoon, the narrator marches vigorously with the veterans that she had once marched against. She laughs while watching her spouse at work, bent over the skillet. Love perpetuates one's interest in an old-fashioned way, through the printed page. The narrator's son writes to every governor for information about their states. As a Calvinist, the narrator accumulates a conscience. She compares a line of reasoning and inquiry to a line of poetry. The public defender's client, Mr. S, wants to know the meaning of the story of the Emperor's New Clothes. "The trend of [her] theory may sometimes run utopianward in reality" (page 143).

In "Skies are the terrains of this myopic," a special way of writing requires realism, and this keeps the narrator honest and does her good. She wants things to be real. The story of the Emperor's New Clothes is about mass delusion and the power of advertising. The narrator quotes Zola, regarding experimental moralists showing how a passion behaves in a social milieu. Going to bed under the prick of economic necessity makes him a realist. The world changes with the sun and is incomplete, so a scientist's work is never done. The cheer at the baseball park is stronger than nationalism, and weekend distractions bring about mass solidarity. Within an hour of his arrival in town, the narrator's visit is fined three times, so he returns to his place in the country. Grandmother listens to Mozart piously and prefers the weather to be seventy-two degrees with no breeze. "Broadcasts exploited radio's unprecedented realism and listeners were encouraged to sit in a darkened room so their imaginations would heighten the effects of reality" (page 147). The narrator takes a walk for repose; perpetual activity is a natural thing. Idealism is reason that rages kindly, a permanent construction and repairs of the landscape. At 3,400 feet, they reach a stand of uncut redwood trees, and the narrator's ears pop. "The rejection of interruption- the only thing in its space at the time. Such is the rhythm of cognition, and the obvious analogy is with music" (page 147).



Section 13: My morphemes mourned events & Skies are the terrains of this myopic Analysis

Section 13 consists of eight pages and two poems, "My morphemes mourned events" and "Skies are the terrains of this myopic." Earlier phrases are repeated in the poems in this section, as is common throughout "My Life." The narrator also reiterates and re-investigates the themes of family, nature, time and language through varying means, some straightforward and some more ambiguous. In the first poem, a line of reasoning and inquiry is compared to a line of poetry. This poem alludes to the story of the Emperor's New Clothes. The other poem in this section personifies clouds as she compares them to cattle, saying a "herd of clouds pasture." The second poem also alludes to Zola, Freud and Mozart while offering that "the obvious analogy is with music." In this poem, the narrator claims that writing realism keeps her honest and does her good, justifying her style of writing.



Section 14: And I in the middleground found & The world gives speech substance and mind (mile) stones

Section 14: And I in the middleground found & The world gives speech substance and mind (mile) stones Summary

In "And I in the middleground found," this year is midway through the narrator's life, according to the psychic. The narrator cannot go on for the moment because her pen has run out of ink. In each age, a new realism reacts against the previous age's reality. The lingering intellect is erotic. There are too many pieces to the narrator's idea, and she likes to move them around as she becomes obsessed with patience. "Skies are the terrains of the myopic, eyes are the servants of perception" (page 149), and poems are models of inquiry. They write reminders on the blackboard in the kitchen. Reality takes the long way around by expressing itself in words. As a person on paper, the narrator is androgynous. Nursery schools teach finger-painting as an education of the senses. The narrator makes wise selections while grocery shopping. When the critic asks if the piece was written or improvised, the musician says it was written because he did not have enough time to improvise. Sometimes, people are intrigued by the breakdown and, other times, by water sports.

In "The world gives speech substance and mind (mile) stones," one can hear the Gulf by listening to the narrator's outer ear. The narrator loves to compare apples to oranges. The spouse works on the saxophone's high tones while his mate writes a book. The windows of the opposite building lights up one by one, and the narrator decides to see him as the stars dim. She returns from Russia, banal with shock value. Riding with her parents toward Cheyenne years earlier, the narrator sees a farmhouse, sheds, a barn and houses, and her disembodied spirit flies to take it on. A laser beam reads the inventory digits at the checkout counter. Mothers for Modesty march against the corner store due to the magazines sold there, so the narrator shops at the corner store. Fingers tap out rhythms of the trustworthy world on the upholstery. Women wearing Walkmen reject the notion that they are exhibiting alienation since it is the 1980s. "No one is a prophet in its own country, no one is a musician in its own city" (page 154). While walking toward the cabin, they rest on the dirt path for a moment, and Larry tells the narrator to listen to the residual noises coming from his ears. The principled citizens of the country are gauche about caution. No one keeps a diary where the founding confusion is restored. The narrator increases the stereo's volume because she types faster when she does not hear her hands. Father is able to imagine Gertrude Stein, and Mother is born ten years before Rilke dies though she never encounters him while boarding the steamers from Alaska as a child. "To goggle at the blessed place that realism requires" (page 155).



Section 14: And I in the middleground found & The world gives speech substance and mind (mile) stones Analysis

The penultimate section is comprised of eight pages and two poems. Earlier phrases are repeated in the poems in this section, as is common throughout "My Life." The narrator also reiterates and re-investigates the themes of family, nature, time and language through varying means, some straightforward and some more ambiguous. "And I in the middleground found" claims that each age creates their own version of reality while reacting against the reality of the previous age. This poem alludes to Lucretius and Lenin, while the next poem alludes to Walkmen, Gertrude Stein and Rilke. In "The world gives speech substance and mind (mile) stones," the narrator describes the separation of her mind from her body during a childhood trip toward Cheyenne with her parents.



Section 15: A word to guard continents of fruits and organs & Altruism in poetry

Section 15: A word to guard continents of fruits and organs & Altruism in poetry Summary

In "A word to guard continents of fruits and organs," the narrator walks the paths carrying Mace, whereas Grandfather carried a walking stick. The mouth never knows where to begin, but any translator will complain. Jealousy contains a rare combination of the mystic and the person of action, and the rhythm of cognition is a maudlin source of anxiety. The narrator takes a pen and paper with her, sure she will solve a problem, as she sets out for a walk. When Grandfather swings his crutch in the garden and smashes a wine jug, the old woman shrieks and sucks at the pools of spilled wine in the dirt. Instead of sentences, they speak in battlements of pleasure and necessities. The narrator finds solace in her chores. "Theory is a principle of presentation" (page 158). The narrator works as a babysitter one summer and lives with the family at the beach. That is the same summer that she reads Father's copy of "Anna Karenina," so it seems logical for her to write her name in all of his books that fall. She is attracted to the image of Susanne Langer, the grandmother of the children she is babysitting, staring at the waves from the beach while trying to complete her distinction between discursive and non-discursive symbols, though it must have been difficult for her children. The boat floats between tall meters of the canyon walls with colors so close together that they have to shrink to continue. At the very end, "the objective world will withdraw as the handblades approach" (page 160).

In "Altruism in poetry," the narrator reads theory all afternoon while eating a dish of carrots, then she lays out her papers and secures the evening. Someone dying approaches the abstract, as ideology becomes an important lyrical language. The composition grows strange as it becomes unfamiliar by repetition. "Preliminaries consist of such eternity, rewriting in an unstable text" (page 162). The narrator wants people to understand this, but she hates to "lighten up". Actuality sets new standards for proclivity. Language R and Language E are parallel, but they cannot touch so people fall into a translation. For years, the narrator has nightmares about a plane losing control and plummeting into the schoolroom. "One doesn't want to be seduced by the sheer wonder of it all, whereby everything is transformed by beauty" (page 163). There is a great fear of dissipating a single opportunity. It is not imperfect to die; it is ever a matter of remembering the right thing at the right moment. The narrator is adequately happy until someone asks if she is. People are filled with scruples about individualism. When he is quite old, Grandfather assures the narrator that happiness is worthless which is why he never sought it out for himself or Father; happiness has nothing to do with whether life is good. The fear of death is residue and absolute, and such reluctance cannot be filled.



Section 15: A word to guard continents of fruits and organs & Altruism in poetry Analysis

The fifteenth and final section of "My Life" contains two poems and is ten pages in length. Earlier phrases are repeated in the poems in this section, as is common throughout this collection of poetry. The narrator also reiterates and re-investigates the themes of family, nature, time and language through varying means, some straightforward and some more ambiguous. In "A word to guard continents of fruits and organs," the narrator begins by comparing her habit of walking with Mace to Grandfather's habit of carrying a walking stick on his walks. Her attraction to the image of Susanne Langer sitting on the beach while trying to complete her distinction between discursive and non-discursive symbols can be interpreted as the narrator's attraction to knowledge and the search for knowledge. In this poem, she alludes to "Anna Karenina" and Charles William Beebe's account of the rapture of his half mile descent. She also presents a simile concerning foreign language in which she "imagine[s] a foreign language to be like a thin stick over a creek, one must run on it with great speed so it won't have time to break and without stopping for a second so one won't lose one's balance- even to pause to blink an eye can snap the stick or topple the speaker" (page 158).

The second poem in this section and the final poem in the book, "Altruism in poetry," alludes to "Shoot Pop," a musical composition, Mechnikov Prospekt, the cathedral at Amiens, Stalin, Eskimos, and the Hammond World Atlas. In this poem, ideology is a lyrical language, combining the concepts of language and music. Also, the narrator examines happiness, admitting that she is happy until asked if so. By stating that individualism fills people with scruples directly afterward, she suggests that most people are not happy and her uncertainty stems from being different from others. She ends the poem by stating that no one can alter Death or their reluctance to die.



Characters

Lyn Hejinian appears in My Life

Lyn Hejinian is the author of "My Life", and her voice serves to narrate the poems in this collection. As a child, the narrator fears her uncle with the wart on his nose and is shy of her aunt's deafness. She dips into and recoils from the water, but a word is a bottomless pit which becomes pregnant and splits open to give birth to a stone egg. The narrator thinks of the densely shadowed overtones as she begins a paragraph about her childhood being spent in a manner of waiting. At night, the narrator sits on the windowsill, singing. The narrator is so stubborn as a toddler that when she is crossed, she holds her breath until she loses consciousness. In the afternoons, when the shades are pulled down for her nap, the dark yellow light coming through makes the narrator thirsty. When the narrator sees fishing boats, she thinks of the sky and the banks toward the West. Nothing interrupts birthday parties when the narrator is a child, as she wears Mary Janes and sips Shirley Temples. The narrator tries the word "moth" because she cannot get the word "butterfly." She secretly vomits in the school bathroom because she misses her mother. The narrator watches her parents every night because she fears they will pack and leave her.

At age 9, the narrator is concerned when her boyfriend is sick and misses school, by virtue of their relationship that is love, and she takes his homework to him after school. As she plays alone, she imagines developing into a tree and yearns to do so so strongly that it makes her shapeless, restless and disagreeable.

The narrator says she would need to explain if it were written. When the teacher at her Christian Science Sunday School asks what she wants to be when she grows up, she says a writer or a doctor, but it is embarrassing because the words of the last to speak linger in the air. She borrows Father's typewriter and runs through the holes in her memory. The narrator does not want a tenth birthday party; she only wants her mother from whom she is separated by her friends. Recognizing that she is different from herself when with friends, the narrator withdraws in order to protect her honesty. The narrator is self-sufficient but always vulnerable to her feelings in relation to someone else. From the bus, she sees a blind woman selling carnations on Geary Street. The narrator watches Independence Day fireworks as the winter rains fall into the bay.

The narrator sees her life as a struggle against her fate and personality. Every time she enters the Metro in Paris, she reads the sign reserving the large seats nearest the door for war veterans; the writing holds it separated to see there. The narrator hopes to recreate herself, but she finds herself trapped in the very character that creates this wish. She begins painting a few months after taking a creative writing class. She still responds to the academic year. She spreads her fingers as she speaks of artifice which extends beauty beyond nature. At 8 a.m., she senses the first threat of monotony because she is tired of ideas. She avoids telephone calls as a pretense of keeping her distance from anything that appears pretentious. It seems that the narrator does not



want a birthday devoid of sentimentality. The narrator uses many ideas to become intellectually concentric. The narrator wants to visit Giverny and the gardens of Monet. She writes a week's worth in one night. She rebels against worlds of her own construction and withdraws into the empirical world surrounding her. In her childhood memories, others dominate, but she dominates her more recent memories.

The narrator recalls a woman who renounces a point with good reason, but then she accepts it again. They walk on Beech Street to see the three great copper beech trees that have been built around rather than built over. The narrator does not find Death any more or less peculiar than pre-life, though the latter is never personified. The narrator occasionally transfers her restlessness to the vehicle itself. When reading a book, it makes a difference to her to know that he will read the same book, but she wonders if the difference would be altered if he was going to read a different copy. The narrator finally reaches an age where she can love her parents generously, and she comes to depend upon her children socially. The narrator's interests are much broader than those of people who have said the same thing for eight years. The narrator and her husband sit on the beach in the cold, but she is warm. There are days when busywork is satisfying. The narrator recalls the day in October 1978 when she lost her temper. She lives a few blocks from the scenes of her childhood, yet they mean nothing. In her memories of walking home alone, she recalls herself as a burgeoning personality in the schoolyard, and she feels anew its oppression which makes her dread school retrospectively though she liked it very much in reality.

The narrator will not despair; she hopes to rise daily before 7 a.m. and to avoid idleness. She is relieved as she writes down that thought because now she can forget it, but forgetfulness does not occur as other thoughts take its place. She never rids herself of the conscientiousness that existentialism taught. There are too many pieces to the narrator's idea, and she likes to move them around as she becomes obsessed with patience. As a person on paper, the narrator is androgynous. Riding with her parents toward Cheyenne years earlier, the narrator sees a farmhouse, sheds, a barn and houses, and her disembodied spirit flies to take it on. A laser beam reads the inventory digits at the checkout counter. Mothers for Modesty march against the corner store due to the magazines sold there, so the narrator shops at the corner store. The narrator walks the paths carrying Mace, whereas Grandfather carried a walking stick. The narrator takes a pen and paper with her, sure she will solve a problem, as she sets out for a walk. The narrator finds solace in her chores. She reads theory all afternoon while eating a dish of carrots, then she lays out her papers and secures the evening. The narrator wants people to understand this, but she hates to "lighten up." For years, the narrator has nightmares about a plane losing control and plummeting into the schoolroom.

We who appears in My Life

The second poem in this book is titled "We who 'love to be astonished,'" and this group of people reappears in nearly every poem hereafter; though their identities are never specified, some of the references to them suggest that they are meant to be the narrator



and her husband, and perhaps, their children. Each reference to we who "love to be astonished" begins with that phrase, followed by something that occurs or that they think or feel. For them, their heartbeats shake the bed, and they see that a weasel eats twenty times as much as a lizard of the same size. She is not the maid but the mother, and mother loves. Every Sears smells the same. She pretends to be a blacksmith. A moth has more flesh than a butterfly could lift. He would say these are its ghosts, and he is a walker.

For we who "love to be astonished", all relationships move, the ear is less active than the eye, and the night is lit. McDonald's is the world's largest producer of beef eyeballs, and fences keep cyclones. We who "love to be astonished" know that every new bit of knowledge merely indicates a wider ignorance. Life is linked to man, and Marie must thicken the eggs in a bath. Money makes money, and luck creates luck. The old-fashioned branching ice cream cones could hold twin pairs of scoops or four. It is more like muggy than wooden houses. She loves these kids and was territorial at their nativity. For we who "love to be astonished," consciousness is durable in poetry, though they lead that life because it is mulish and packed. The saxophone is a diplomat. The adult son and daughter of we who "love to be astonished" resume.

Mother appears in My Life

Mother is the narrator's matriarch who moved from Alaska as a child, and her childhood is a kind of melodrama. She falls and breaks her arm while stamping down the trash. Mother watches the visible lights from the window. At the beach, she holds her children's hands and lectures them on the undertow as they try to jump the waves. The narrator secretly vomits in the school bathroom because she misses her mother. The narrator does not want a tenth birthday party; she only wants her mother from whom she is separated by her friends. Mother throws away all objects of sentiment. Mother is born ten years before Rilke dies though she never encounters him while boarding the steamers from Alaska as a child.

Father appears in My Life

Father returns from war four years later in a purple moment. The narrator writes her name on the first page of every one of his books. Father fills apothecary jars with sea glass from beaches. The narrator borrows Father's typewriter and runs through the holes in her memory. Father provides her with the right phrase about beauty and the wonder of books: "Individuality is animated by its sense of the infinite" (page 49). When his children are small, Father suggests that his family go camping, but the outdoors frighten him in the dark. Father says that painters are happier than writers after he switches himself. Father is able to imagine Gertrude Stein.



Grandfather appears in My Life

Grandfather is as serious as any general before battle, though he was too young for World War I and too old for World War II. He carries a walking stick and is silent on his walks except to greet his neighbors. There is some disparity between Grandfather's reserve and his sense that a man's natural importance is characterized by his bulk. Grandfather is forced to acknowledge his age when a younger man offers his seat on the bus. When Grandfather swings his crutch in the garden and smashes a wine jug, the old woman shrieks and sucks at the pools of spilled wine in the dirt. When he is quite old, Grandfather assures the narrator that happiness is worthless which is why he never sought it out for himself or Father; happiness has nothing to do with whether life is good.

Grandmother appears in My Life

Grandmother is a Christian Scientist. Wearing a washdress, she stands in the kitchen with her hands on her hips and states that she is waging war now as she watches a line of ants cross behind the sink faucets. At night, the narrator's grandmother pulls down the window shades. Grandmother comes upon a set of expressions that suits her perfectly, so she continues to use them long after they are out of fashion. Grandmother always complains about the children breaking the boughs of the redwood trees as they go down the hill in the afternoons. She sends one of them to fetch a specific sweater before allowing them to go downtown for Eskimo Pies. Grandmother listens to Mozart piously and prefers the weather to be seventy-two degrees with no breeze.

Aunt appears in A pause, a rose, something on paper

The narrator is shy of her deaf aunt who falls into the habit of nodding agreeably.

Uncle appears in A pause, a rose, something on paper

Uncle has a wart on his nose, and the narrator fears him because of his jokes at her family's expense which are beyond her.

Tommy appears in Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good

Tommy is the mailman when the narrator is a child. He allows the neighborhood children to join him on his route, but he sends them home when he reaches the busy streets.



Friend appears in The years pass, years in which, I take it, events were not I

The narrator's friend claims that there is no point in purchasing a large home since her children will stay in the kitchen with her while the other rooms remain empty.

Grotesques appears in So upright, twilit quoted

The Grotesques are the narrator's downstairs neighbors when she lives in the apartment. The father is a Peruvian businessman who wears pinstripe suits, and he is married to an ancient, invalid woman who suffers epileptic seizures. Their very fat daughter also lives with them; she teaches piano lessons every afternoon and calls the narrator every evening to ask if she is disturbed by the noise. When the Grotesques invite her to tea, the narrator must accept.

Ancestor appears in I laugh as if my pots were clean

One of the narrator's early relatives becomes an ancestor after being George Washington's bodyguard.

Anna appears in A somewhat saltier, earthier tomato grows there and is more

When they get home, the narrator allows Anna to describe the rattlesnake between the big oaks because the greatest thrill is to be the one to tell.

Paull appears in There is no

Paull proposes outer space as a terminal where everything is memory in a kind of electronic water.

Larry appears in The world gives speech substance and mind (mile) stones

While resting on a quiet dirt path on the way to the cabin, Larry tells the narrator to listen to the residual noises from the city which are coming from his ears.



Susanne Langer appears in A word to guard continents of fruits and organs

Susanne Langer is the grandmother of the children that the narrator babysits at the beach one summer. Years earlier, she sits on the beach daily while working to complete her distinction between discursive and non-discursive symbols. The narrator is attracted to this image though she admits that it must have been hard on Langer's children.



Objects/Places

Melody Ranch appears in What is the meaning hung from that depend

Melody Ranch is where Grandmother has a "perfectly peachy time" on her vacation. It is daring and resourceful.

Geary Street appears in Religion is a vague lowing

From the bus, the narrator sees a blind woman selling carnations made from tissue paper on Geary Street, as her seeing eye dog sleeps on her sweater.

Rocking Chair appears in She showed the left profile, the good one

The little, wicker rocking chair belongs to Mother before it belongs to the narrator. When the narrator gives it away, she immediately regrets the gesture but is unable to request its return without a feeling of resentment for which she feels guilty.

Apartment appears in The coffee drinkers answered ecstatically

The long, three-story apartment building only has windows in the front and back, and this is where the narrator lives in a corner apartment from which she can watch her children playing in the parking lot below.

Alviso appears in Any photographer will tell you the same

Alviso is the town that the narrator and her family pass through on their long ride to the country. It is where migrant workers live, and the narrator can see rows of outhouses that line the edge of the fields.

Beech Street appears in The years pass, years in which, I take it, events were not I

The narrator walks along Beech Street to see the three great copper beech trees which have been built around rather than over.



Abandoned Brewery appears in I laugh as if my pots were clean

The narrator is attracted to the abandoned brewery in the warehouse district and frequently makes it the goal of her walks with the dog. It is massive and vandalized.

Dictionary appears in I laugh as if my pots were clean

The dictionary presents a world view while a bilingual dictionary presents two world views.

Trucks appears in A somewhat saltier, earthier tomato grows there and is more

The trucks push up the road, following the tracks, but they slow down into a louder gear because they are overloaded.

Mendocino County appears in A somewhat saltier, earthier tomato grows there and is more

Mendocino County sends the narrator a quarterly check for \$89.20 because she drives her children two miles up the road to meet the school bus at 6:45 a.m. every morning, rather than forcing the school bus to drive the additional two miles down the road.

House appears in There is no sameness of the sky

The narrator and her husband build their house but forget closets.

Common Sense appears in If there's nothing out the windows look at books

Common Sense is the authoritative constellation formed by the stars that the narrator follows.

High Lakes appears in Preliminaries consist of such eternity

The narrator and her family take horses into the mountains surrounding the High Lakes where they ride for five days.



Nursery School appears in And I in the middleground found

Nursery school teaches finger-painting as an education of the senses.



Themes

Time

In Lyn Hejinian's "My Life", time plays an important, recurring role in her poems. The very beginning of the first poem speaks of a purple moment when Father returns home from war. The narrator says that moments used to be colored, but they are no longer. "So much of childhood is spent in a manner of waiting" (page 9). Time lines trail behind every idea, object, person, pet, vehicle and event, and it seems more normative than place. According to the narrator, "what follows a strict chronology has no memory" (page 16). As such, memory also recurs throughout this collection as an addition to the theme of time, and all memories are gripping thoughts.

Time is also described as pure duration, a compound plenum in which nothing repeats. Adolescence is seen as repetitious with each moment beginning in the middle. Wanting to explain is like having a memory, and a paragraph is measured in minutes. The narrator describes time as "uneven, and internal, asymmetrical but additive" (page 25). People expect a glimpse of eternity from poetry, but eternal time is reversed. At the very end, the objective world will withdraw. A person is a bit of space that gets itself in moments. The fear of death is residue and infinite. The narrator also compares the concept of Death and the concept of pre-life, the time periods before and after the human lifespan.

Nature

In this collection of poetry, the theme of nature is nearly omnipresent as Lyn Hejinian uses aspects of nature in every poem, often comparing it to things that are not normally associated with anything natural. One such example of this is when she compares New York City to a country landscape. Many allusions to nature simply describe specific aspects, usually in unusual ways. The shadow of the redwood trees is oppressive, and the sunlight reflects on the windows. They delight in distance when daylight moves. There is an abundance of sea glass on the beaches which Father collects in apothecary jars.

The window is personified as it slams the door, as are the leaves and branches which close in around the house. The rain comes more often. On page 16, the frequently repeated phrase is expanded to state "a pause, a rose, something on paper, in a nature scrapbook." The leaves outside the window trick the mind, and the dark yellow light that seeps through the drawn blinds in the afternoons makes the narrator thirsty. The shaggy branches of the eucalyptus tree scatter buttons. Summers are spent in a fog that rains. The break in the narrator's sentiments resembles waves. Many of these poems allude to time spent in the countryside and include comments about the lake, beach, sky, woods and animals.



Language

Aptly, since the narrator is the author of this book, "My Life" contains the theme of language which is frequently mentioned throughout these poems. Better things are gathered in a pen, and paper contains an oral history. The verb "to care" can multiply to a country that did not speak another language. The front of harmless rhymes with harmony. The narrator mentions the absence of allusion and a theater full with transition. She claims that there is no laughter without comparisons and that language is restless. Grandmother stares at some definite object which is some noun. She also uses a set of expressions long after they are unfashionable.

One poem is titled "the meaning hung from that depend", and this phrase is repetitively used throughout the text. The narrator claims that she would have to explain if she were writing. She states that one should begin a new paragraph when they exhaust setting, topic and tone. "Version" is a comparative noun which implies its plural form. Language R parallels Language E, but people fall into a translation because the two languages cannot touch. The narrator observes detail as though it were botanical, "as if words could unite an ardent intellect with the external material world" (page 63). It is the nature of language to encourage and partially justify Faustian longings, breaking them into continuous and voluminous digressions.



Style

Point of View

Lyn Hejinian's "My Life" is written from a first person point of view. This point of view is limited and can be deemed reliable by virtue of the fact that, as a collection of poetry, this work presents the narrator's view on the objects and events that she addresses. Because this work is a collection of poetry, this point of view is important because it is a subjective account of the narrator's experiences and views. Moreover, this is also classified as autobiography which makes the first person point of view vital to the work. Without being written from the first person, this work would not convey the autobiographical and personal tone that is apparent in "My Life."

The story is told mostly through exposition with infrequent quotations scattered throughout. These quotations often are allusions to renowned literary figures, but occasionally, they are presented as words that someone said to the narrator, though she tends to paraphrase conversations in most instances. This work spans over Hejinian's lifetime, incorporating events from both childhood and adulthood. These poems are presented from the narrator's viewpoint, with the narrator being the author, Lyn Hejinian.

Setting

This collection of poetry is set primarily in the author's mind as she recalls events from her past; however, the events that she recalls occur in America during the second half of the twentieth century. Many of the settings within the poems are vague. For example, Hejinian frequently describes events that occurred in her home and neighborhood when she was a child, but she does not specify where this is exactly. There is a word in every country which attempts the sound of cats, but constant noise is not an omen of music to come. The narrator's father fills apothecary jars with sea glass from beaches. The narrator's mother breaks her arm when she falls while stamping down the trash in the garbage can.

The pilot of the little airplane forgets to notify the airport of his approach, so the air raid sirens go off, and the entire city goes dark. Walking alone after the fog burns away, the narrator gets lost between the grapevines. When the narrator sees fishing boats, she thinks of the sky and the banks toward the West. The narrator secretly vomits in the school bathroom because she misses her mother. Grandmother always complains about the children breaking the boughs of the redwood trees as they go down the hill in the afternoons. She sends one of them to fetch a specific sweater before allowing them to go downtown for Eskimo Pies, to which the narrator feels she has a certain claim since Mother grew up in Alaska. During the summer that she works as a hiking instructor at a girls' camp in New England, the narrator learns that descending a hill is often the most painful part of a hike. Until 1964, she views the world as a medium of



recognition and prepares for it to recognize her. From the bus, she sees a blind woman selling carnations on Geary Street. The narrator watches Independence Day fireworks as the winter rains fall into the bay.

During the summer in California, the sun is bright and hot, but the shadows are dark and cool. The weather builds character in New England. At times, the narrator finds it embarrassing to have come to California, and she only wants the facts. Every time she enters the Metro in Paris, she reads the sign reserving the large seats nearest the door for war veterans; the writing holds it separated to see there. The narrator wants to visit Giverny and the gardens of Monet. They walk on Beech Street to see the three great copper beech trees that have been built around rather than built over. An old woman on the bus tells another woman that she prays daily for God to dismiss her when she becomes too old to wait on herself. The sunlight spills and can be seen plunging into the river. The overloaded trucks slow down as they follow the tracks to town.

The narrator receives a quarterly check from Mendocino County for driving the children two miles up the road to meet the bus. Life is a landscape, and living it is the journey for which only a limited amount of time is provided. Back East stops being home when home becomes out West. Sometimes, New York City seems continuous like a country landscape, capable of engendering the release of peaceful feelings, though not peaceful in itself. As they sit at a bar, Charles recites a poem by Emily Dickinson. The narrator and her husband sit on the beach in the cold, but she is warm. She lives a few blocks from the scenes of her childhood, yet they mean nothing. The narrator hears a commotion at the Seven-Eleven on the corner while she is coming home late from a literary event. They ride horses in the mountains around the High Lakes for five days, and they reach the crest on the second day; their fate hangs at their feet. One summer while working as a babysitter for a family at the beach, the narrator is attracted to the image of Susanne Langer, the grandmother of the children she is babysitting, staring at the waves from the beach while trying to complete her distinction between discursive and nondiscursive symbols, though it must have been difficult for her children.

Language and Meaning

The language in this work tends to be casual and informal. The poems are presented through a stream-of-consciousness format in which there is no chronological adherence. Phrases are frequently repeated, and the most commonly repeated phrases tend to first appear as the title of a previous poem. The writing style can hinder reader comprehension as these poems are not written in a clearly coherent fashion. It is often difficult to determine how one thought leads into the next.

Because there is such a little amount of dialogue, the language is not useful in distinguishing between characters; however, it does provide an interesting view of the author's mind. A large amount of time passes in these poems, but this is not immediately evident as thoughts, childhood events and adulthood events are all interspersed in a non-chronological way. Although the language itself is easy to understand, the style of writing in this book can make it very confusing to read.

Regardless, the ideas Hejinian presents are fascinating and usually very apt statements about life in general.

Structure

Lyn Hejinian's "My Life" is comprised of forty-five poems. The book is one hundred, sixty-five pages long. The poems average three pages in length and are titled with a phrase that is usually repeated throughout the remainder of the poems. Though each poem is rather short, they are also very detailed, following the technique of stream-of-consciousness. Because of this technique, they can also often be difficult to understand.

The poems each focus on a different plot but are tied together through specific themes that are prevalent throughout this collection of poetry. These themes include, but are not limited to, nature, family, time and language. Repetitious phrases appear throughout this book, and they serve to connect all of the poems into one cohesive unit as well. Through stream-of-consciousness, Hejinian utilizes the style of realism to share her memories and thoughts.

This collection of poems is quick paced and easy to understand. Flashbacks are included in some of the poems, due to the stream-of-consciousness technique that Hejinian uses. Though sometimes the poems are a bit difficult to understand as a result of this technique, the collection is very entertaining overall.



Quotes

"It was hard to know this as politics, because it plays like the work of one person, but nothing is isolated in history- certain humans are situations." Section 1, "As for we who 'love to be astonished,'" page 12.

"A life no more free than the life of a lost puppy." Section 1, "It seemed that we had hardly begun and we were already there," page 15.

"This simply means that the imagination is more restless than the body." Section 2, "A name trimmed with colored ribbons," page 18.

"Solitude was the essential companion." Section 2, "What is the meaning hung from that depend." page 20.

"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." Section 2, "What is the meaning hung from that depend," page 22.

"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'." Section 3, "Like plump birds along the shore," page 28.

"The universal is animated by individuality." Section 3, "What memory is not a 'gripping' thought," page 37.

"If it were writing we would have to explain. I say that as much to comfort myself as to state something I think to be true." Section 4, "We have come a long way from what we actually felt," page 39.

"You are not different from your friend, but with your friend you are different from yourself." Section 4, "We have come a long way from what we actually felt," page 42.

"People must flatter their own eyes with their pathetic lives." Section 4, "I wrote my name in every one of his books," page 48.



"Women, I heard, should speak softly without mumbling." Section 4, "Religion is a vague lowing," page 52.

"After a certain point, one no longer hears any new ideas, must make do with new facts." Section 5, "Any photographer will tell you the same," page 56.

"One form of shyness is characterized by the fear of making someone else feel awkward or embarrassed, a kind of heightened sensitivity or extreme empathy." Section 6, "She showed the left profile, the good one," page 62.

"The experience of a great passion, a great love, would remove me, elevate me, enable me at last to be both special and ignorant of the other people around me, so that I would be free at last from the necessity of appealing to them, responding to them. That is, to be nearly useless but at rest." Section 6, "It was only a coincidence," page 64.

"I suppose I had always hoped that, through an act of will and the effort of practice, I might be someone else, might alter my personality and even my appearance, that I might in fact create myself, but instead I found myself trapped in the very character which made such a thought possible and such a wish mine." Section 6, "It was only a coincidence," page 65.

"Always infinity extends from any individual life, but eternity is limited between one's birth and one's death." Section 6, "When one travels, one might 'hit' a storm," page 68.

"In such a situation it is necessary to make a choice between contempt and an attempt at understanding, and yet it is difficult to know which is the form of retreat. We will only understand what we have already understood." Section 7, "Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good," page 73.

"Each new bit of knowledge is merely indicative of a wider ignorance." Section 7, "We are not forgetting the patience of the mad, their love of detail," pages 77-78.

"It isn't a small world, but there are many ways of dividing it into small parts." Section 8, "I never swept the sand from where I was going to sit down," page 84.

"I like to think about him when he's not at home and can't come into the room and spoil it." Section 8, "No puppy or dog will ever be capable of this, and surely no parrot," page 88.



"What you can't discover is the limit of possibility, which must always remain to be discovered." Section 8, "The plow makes trough enough," page 93.

"I want to remember more than more than that, more or less as it really happened. It seems that we hardly begin before we are already there." Section 9, "The years pass, years in which, I take it, events were not lacking," page 96.

"I am a stranger to the little girl I was, and more- more strange." Section 9, "Yet we insist that life is full of happy chance," page 105.

"It was as if adventure itself had overtaken the idea of adventure and swamped it, and I was overwhelmed by a sense of deep patience, of serenity, not because I felt detached or distant from my disrupted and peculiar life, on the contrary I was absolutely at one with it, and it is this that I realized years later in Russia: adventure amazes me with peace." Section 10, "The settling-in that we're describing is a preliminary to being blown up," page 107.

"Thought balloons are softer than word balloons. The air we breathe: the air we breathe ranging in size contains flakes of sound, dark, silence, and light." Section 10, "I laugh as if my pots were clean," page 112.

"In the metaphor, life is landscape, and living it is a journey, for which one is provided with a limited amount of time, with which it is wise to be thrifty." Section 10, "There is no 'sameness' of the sky," page 118.

"You'll laugh but sometimes New York City seems similarly continuous, like a natural, wild country landscape, not peaceful in itself but capable of engendering a release of peaceful feeling." Section 11, "At a moment of trotting on only one foot in so much snow," page 124.

"A sense of definition (different from that of description, which is a kind of storytelling or recounting, numerical, a list of colors) develops as one's sense of possibility, of the range of what one might do or experience, closes with the years. So I gave it away." Section 11, "The run, that if you broke it, you'd have none," page 128.

"'Do you know what middle-class people expect from poetry?' said Parshchikov later in Moscow, 'a glimpse of eternity.'" Section 12, "Preliminaries consist of such eternity," page 135.



"Minute discriminations release poetic rather than cerebral effects. Listen to the sweet sound/Of life death bound. Realism, if it addresses the real, is inexhaustible." Section 13, "Skies are the terrains of this myopic," page 144.

"The intellect lingers, this too is erotic- the anticipation of the pleasure of making sense." Section 14, "And I in the middleground found," page 149.

"Language R is parallel to language E, perhaps they cannot touch, so we fall into a translation (description) trance. A person is a bit of space that has gotten itself in moments." Section 15, "Altruism in poetry," page 163.

"The fear of death is residue, its infinity overness, equivalence- an absolute. Reluctance such that it can't be filled." Section 15, "Altruism in poetry," page 165.

Topics for Discussion

What is the significance of the phrase "a pause, a rose, something on paper" which is repeated throughout the book?

What affect does the stream-of-consciousness writing style in "My Life" have on the reader?

How can "My Life" be read as an autobiography?

How does the narrator describe her parents and her children?

What role does language play in "My Life?"

How does Lyn Hejinian view time?

In what way is nature incorporated into this autobiography?