



The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System

Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Lyn Hejinian, and the Persistence of Romanticism

Author(s): Stephanie Sandler

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring, 2005), pp. 18-45

Published by: [University of Wisconsin Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4489105>

Accessed: 03/11/2012 20:50

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Wisconsin Press and The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Contemporary Literature*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

STEPHANIE SANDLER

Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Lyn Hejinian,
and the Persistence of Romanticism

Which follows a dialogue made up.
Who believe they are warm if called Romantics.

Lyn Hejinian, "The Guard"

C ontemporary experimental poets, who often seek to cast off Romantic notions of identity, story, place, and mood, can never cut their ties to Romanticism entirely.¹ Nor would it be salutary for them to do so. For poets seeking to resist the norms of their culture, Romanticism offers a lasting paradigm for literary rebellion, and its preference for questions over answers, for paradox over black-and-white clarity, remains compelling. Many poets who reject poetic conventions and traditional forms have shed the feel of Romantic verse in their work, but when we look past the tone and shape of the poetry, we find the themes and values of Romanticism reimagined. I hold the view that Romanticism is uncontainable, persistent, and filled with obstinate questions that are far more interesting than any provisional answers. A cultural phenomenon that never goes away, it does not return because it has never

1. Charles Altieri describes the use of Romanticism well: "Frustrated by the indulgent lyricism of what might be called the scenic mode in contemporary poetry, these writers devote themselves to the Wordsworthian project of testing the powers of personal eloquence to mediate between the margins of cultural life, where transforming insights take place, and the social theater, where such values must be applied" ("Wordsworth" 184–85). Altieri's test cases are Ann Lauterbach and Robert Hass, but the logic of his argument extends to other poets who situate themselves between "the margins of cultural life" and "the social theater."

been fully repressed. This view of Romanticism's legacy, shared by a number of scholars writing after Paul de Man (among them L. J. Swingle, Carol Jacobs, Richard Eldridge), goes beyond the idea of Romanticism as a historical period to see it as a way of perceiving the world.² In Carol Jacobs's words, it produced "an uncontrollable moving beyond all those parameters seemingly fixed within the texts, because of the insistence in each text that it stage its own critical performance. Repeatedly rehearsed are the forces of control—representation, authority (artistic, political, theological, legal), and criticism—unbound precisely in the moment, or rather process, of their triumph, an unbinding that perpetually undoes the various gestures of teleological closure" (ix).³ I share Jacobs's view that Romanticism persists in poetry's commitment to keep open what might tend to closure, to resist authority beyond and within the text, and to unravel the threads—exposing their colors and texture rather than celebrating their patterns—that make up the fabric of poetic work.

This undoing or unbinding marks the poetry of Lyn Hejinian and Arkadii Dragomoshchenko. Hejinian, born in 1941, emerged as a major representative of the American Language poets, a direction from which she has evolved productively and impressively; Dragomoshchenko, born in 1946, is an idiosyncratic, richly metaphorical and philosophical Petersburg poet of equal stature, and he, too, has continued to play an important and never predictable role in contemporary poetry. Dragomoshchenko embodies the maximalism we associate with Romanticism, and Hejinian the resilient testing of all maxims.⁴ Both have considerable affinities

2. A more sociological and political cultural history of the persistence of Romanticism has been advanced by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, who state as their premise, "Romanticism represents a critique of modernity, that is, of modern capitalist civilization, in the name of values and ideals drawn from the past . . ." (17).

3. Jacobs's terms were brought to my mind by an excellent early essay about Dragomoshchenko by Michael Molnar. Molnar notes that Dragomoshchenko's poetry "implies a new model of the self or at least a new basis for subjectivity that does not accord with generally accepted psychological preconceptions. In this respect its role in present-day society appears to parallel that of Romanticism or Surrealism for their time, in giving voice to the desire for liberation from various ideological constraints" (78).

4. Mikhail Iampol'skii finds that Dragomoshchenko's poetry is not Romantic in a principled way ("printsipial'no neromantichna" [215]). He emphasizes the lack of international unity rooted in a lyric hero and the absence of a sense of place. This is fundamentally *homeless* poetry.

with postmodernism and avant-garde cultural work, giving a texture to their Romanticism that has brought more readers to Hejinian, but fewer to Dragomoshchenko.⁵ Perhaps surprisingly, the greater resistance to Dragomoshchenko has partly to do with form: free verse is still regarded with suspicion by many who write or champion metered and/or rhymed verse in Russia, and Dragomoshchenko has refused to placate the influential critics and poets for whom this issue retains massive symbolic importance. With all the more reason for him to seek connections to poets outside Russia, he and Hejinian have made themselves into a strong pairing. They are mutual translators who have also addressed poems to one another; 2003 marked the twentieth anniversary of their collaboration.⁶ Hejinian has written of her fascination with Russian culture, beginning with formalist theory and futurist poetry when she was younger and extending to personal connections to contemporary cultural figures. The connection has been enduring, as evidenced in *A Border Comedy* (2001). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, she spent months in Leningrad when the Soviet world was collapsing around her and wrote *Oxota* (1991) about that experience. She wryly subtitles it "a short Russian novel," and we could read *Oxota* as her quest, her hunt, for the meanings of Russian culture (the Russian word *oxota* means "quest," "hunt," and, in some contexts, "desire"). I take *Xenia* (*Ksenii*, 1990) to be Dragomoshchenko's corresponding text about time spent in the United States, although it is not in any sense a novel but a structured sequence of heterogeneous poetic and prose texts. I will concentrate on the poems of *Oxota* and *Xenia*, books that show the connections between these poets and, I believe, show the poets themselves at their best. Dragomoshchenko has said that there are moments when he considers how a line will sound in Hejinian's translation, which affects his choices as a poet. He is, in effect, writing for a multilingual audience. Or we might say, following the lead

5. The poet Aleksei Parshchikov would counter that Dragomoshchenko is not an avant-garde poet: "He's too academic. His is University verse" ("Interview" 42).

6. Hejinian and Dragomoshchenko's first meetings are documented in *Leningrad* (Davidson, et al.). The full history of their collaboration is given in Edmond, "A Meaning Alliance" 551–55.

of Walter Benjamin, he uses poetic language as if it were always already translated.

Attitudes toward language define Dragomoshchenko and Hejinian as poets and also define their use of Romanticism. As a Language poet, Hejinian stands at the forefront of a poetic movement dedicated to the interrogation of the limitations, traps, codes, and pleasures of language.⁷ She has drawn inspiration from sources quite far from poetry's conventional muses—politics, literary theory, photography, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, social theory—as well as from fellow poets. Dragomoshchenko belongs to no poetic movement, although other Russian poets have experimented with the self-referential, nearly nonnarrative lyric poetry (Ol'ga Sedakova, Aleksei Parshchikov, Ivan Zhdanov and Aleksandr Skidan, among others).⁸ Some critics (among them O. I. Severskaia) have aligned Dragomoshchenko with "Metarealism," first defined by Mikhail Epstein as the expansion of realism "into the realm of things unseen . . . Metarealism is the realism of multiple realities, connected by a continuum of internal passages and interchangeabilities" (37–38). Among the Metarealists, Dragomoshchenko has written poetry distinguished by a sterner refusal of narrative continuity and a broad absorption of postmodern theory, poetry, and philosophy.⁹ Like theirs, his work staggers under a dense mix of metaphor, linguistic layers, and emotional cross-signals, but his focus is more resolutely thought, cognition itself, which he is willing to address directly.

Is there a person in this work? The question takes us to the heart of a fairly traditional view of Romanticism, and it remains a valuable question, particularly as it has been recast in recent scholarship. Marjorie Perloff, in "Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject," urges us

7. A great deal has been written about Language poetry in general and about its many participants. For a summary of the principles and trajectory of the movement, see Perril; for an insider's account, see Perelman.

8. Of these poets, Parshchikov has the most in common with Dragomoshchenko. He could be paired with the American poet Michael Palmer to produce a comparison like the one I offer here. Again there is mutual translation: see Parshchikov, *Blue Vitriol*; Palmer, *Sun*.

9. For a discussion of these poets as Metarealists, with an emphasis on Dragomoshchenko's place among them, see Edmond, "A Meaning Alliance" 551–52.

to seek not a person in the poetry but a signature. The Language poets spoke to this question in a "symposium on the person."¹⁰ Their answers show their idiosyncracies, which is to say that their answers bear their signatures. One participant, the poet Rae Armantrout, said that in her work, "*Me* is the poor baby to whom things happen. *I* is always spokesperson for the going stratagem, somewhat mechanical. *I* and *me* have an abusive, but dependent, relationship. Nonetheless, pronouns seem like a bastion of humanism within the text" ("Person" 69). She continues with the observations, "With all the self-righteousness she can muster, *we* protests against alien forces," and "Recently we've been embarrassed by the person" ("Person" 69). Her split of the self into *I* and *me* emphasizes the dynamic self-exploration in her work. It is an enduring and widely shared dynamism that takes the Romantics' fascination with what it feels like to have a self into new territory. To be "embarrassed by the person" is to stand at some distance from the very idea of subjectivity, while still regarding that concept from the position denoted by "*I*" or "*me*."

For Armantrout, pronouns remain "a bastion of humanism within the text," but for Hejinian they also allow one to explore forms of personhood beyond hierarchies and false promises of unity. Hejinian has redefined this dynamism into a juxtaposition of East and West. She contrasts the Western idea of selfhood as an essence, or as a knowable point from which a person speaks or acts, with a Russian notion of the self caught somewhere between *sobornost'* (a religious term suggesting the feeling of community) and *lichnost'* (the closest the Russian language comes to a word for identity or personality). The Russian idea of the self is caught, in her view, in the reflexive pronoun *sebia*: "when speaking Russian a self is felt but has no proper name, or . . . the self occurs only in or as a context but is insufficiently stable to occur independently as a noun" (*Language* 202).¹¹ Her interest in the self depends on relation-

10. The symposium was based on three evenings of discussion in 1988 and later published in *Poetics Journal* under Hejinian's editorship.

11. Hejinian's contribution to the *Poetics Journal* forum was later reprinted, and it is that version I quote. Writing about this passage, Marjorie Perloff concludes, "What this means in practice is that ideas, sensations, overheard remarks, and so on, are *seen* from a particular perspective, but these perspectives never wholly cohere into anything like a fixed identity or self" (*Poetry* 228).

ships and contingency, not on essences, as is well seen in several long poems: *The Person, The Cell* (1992), which rejects an idea of personality in favor of introspection and self-interrogation, *My Life* (1980, 1987, 2002), and, I would argue, *Oxota*, where the poet says, "There's such impertinence in subjectivity" (75).¹²

Impertinent, contingent subjectivity also informs Dragomoshchenko's work, where subjectivity has the temerity itself to behave like a character, one among many abstractions who might be interrelated in a given poem. Contemplating subjectivity in his poems can be a roundabout process. In the poem that opens the fullest collection of his work, *Description* (*Opisanie*), Dragomoshchenko writes: "There is more of me in the place / where I forget my self" (my translation; "Меня больше там, / где я о себе забываю" [15]).¹³ Like Hejinian's, his subjects are pronouns, replacements for a sense of self that can be best pushed back from consciousness or, as he puts it, "forgotten." The threat represented by the first-person pronoun also emerges in *Xenia*:

I catches itself
in what, in its summation, as language augments itself,
exceeds the fissure that has ruptured
its boundaries. . . .

(*Xenia* 12)¹⁴

12. The idea of subjectivity in *The Cell* is explored briefly in Altieri, "Lyn Hejinian"; see esp. 150. *My Life* is one poem by Hejinian continuously in print and taught in university courses on contemporary poetry. See Samuels for an impressive reflection on why this poem has been chosen for study; other compelling scholarship about *My Life* includes Dworkin and Spahr.

The theme of identity is less prominent in *Oxota*, but when it appears, it resonates memorably: "Pushkin remains himself, but what self has he to remain" (19); "A loss of self with a high level of content" (43); "It is the image of personality not the mechanism that sets it in motion that's important" (138); "Whose tragedy is that whose narrating 'I' attaches itself here and there to the matters of my own fate" (161); "If language is like a river, it's like a melting one whose ice is weak / If you pause while crossing to say 'I' you'll fall in" (264).

13. This same line appears in another poem, "Footnotes" ("Primechaniia"), which Hejinian and Balashova translated. For the Russian text, see Kates 268; for the translation, see Dragomoshchenko, *Description* 79–80.

14. Here and throughout, I give Hejinian's and Balashova's fine translations of Dragomoshchenko into English. Readers who know Russian may be distracted by

"Я" ловит себя на том, что
всю сумму умножающего себя языка
превосходит трещина
раскалывающего его предела . . .

(Ksenii 7)

The point where language multiplies itself, where it exceeds its boundaries, juts out sharply enough to catch the "I" as if it were a fish to be hooked, and the overflowing river of language rushes high, as if over a summit. A few lines earlier, the sea drapes itself over cliffs, while down below, in a sandy crater, fleas swarm and speak. To speak is to be that flea, or that hooked fish, caught by words made meaningful because of the boundaries they impose. Ontologically, the speaker is trapped by utterance but set free by the capacity of language to "augment itself." The pronoun "I" enclosed by quotation marks signals both of these states at once: set off in quotation marks, "I" is seized as if to prevent escape, a fish that is hooked (hooks that visually resemble quotation marks, one might note). The word for "quotation marks" in Russian is *kavychki*; the term has historical links to expressions that mean obstacles, or barriers (Dal' 2: 71). But as a pronoun, "I" can refer to any person who uses the word; it is anything but manacled by identity.

Perloff's idea of the signature helps us notice the importance of those quotation marks from another perspective: the use of pronouns might be an element of the signature for both Hejinian and Dragomoshchenko, but in his case, there is the further refinement of the framing quotation marks, the indications that the pronoun is to be regarded with suspicion. Pronouns as a signature would themselves ironically seem to regard the idea of signature suspiciously,

apparent departures in these translations from the literal meanings of the Russian words. I choose to use them nonetheless because I am interested in how Hejinian has cast Dragomoshchenko's lines, and because I admire the way in which she and Balashova succeed in showing how words in the Russian take on meaning, without sacrificing felicity and pleasure in the English. (In a longer version of this article, I plan to look at Dragomoshchenko's translations of Hejinian as well, but here, for a largely American audience, I leave his Russian versions aside.) The poet's translations reproducing the creation of meaning bring to mind Walter Benjamin's comment: "Fidelity in the translation of individual words can almost never fully reproduce the sense they have in the original. For this sense, in its poetic significance for the original . . . wins such significance to the degree that what is meant is bound to the way of meaning of the individual word" (259–60).

for the pronoun stands in stark opposition to the identifying mark that makes a literal signature. Pronouns, after all, work as substitutes. More important, they allow identities to shift, and they can hide gender or other marks of identity (in Russian, gender markers for personal pronouns disappear in the plural and in impersonal singular usage; “ty,” Russian second-person singular, can mean “one”). Roman Jakobson classed pronouns as shifters, and it is the shiftiness that Dragomoshchenko enjoys.¹⁵ When names appear in his poems, they move around within a capacious identity. Dragomoshchenko uses the name “Xenia” in part as a substitution for “Lyn Hejinian.”¹⁶ *Xenia* echoes the “en” and “in” sounds in “Lyn Hejinian,” as well as evoking the meanings of *xenos* in Greek and later Latin—“hospitality,” “host,” “guest,” “stranger.”¹⁷

Place names similarly work with reluctant specificity. *Xenia* tells obliquely of a guest’s sojourn, specifically Dragomoshchenko’s visits to Hejinian’s California home (the first time in 1988). *Oxota* is

15. And not just Dragomoshchenko—Hejinian’s pleasure in destabilizing fixed meanings radiates from her poetry and within her practice as a translator. As she notes in the short statement introducing her excellent essay on translation, “Forms in Alterity,” “[T]ranslation is fundamentally an epistemological project; translation studies—scrutinizes—the nature of knowing and the way in which any particular ‘knowing’ is circumstantially embedded. Knowing, in this sense, is contextual and always shifting” (*Language* 296).

16. In Hejinian’s earliest translations from this poem, “Xenia” appeared as if naming a speaker, before paragraphs positioned at the bottom of the page as if they were footnotes or commentary, for example, “Kondratii Teotokopulos at the Crossroads Awaiting a Guest” (*Description* 113-35). Hejinian has indicated to me that she worked from a typescript provided by Dragomoshchenko (E-mail). Subsequent stages include her complete translation, *Xenia*, which appeared in 1994; his first Russian version, *Ksenii*, published in 1993, which was a revision of the typescript provided to Hejinian; and his later revision, published in *Opisanie* in 2000.

Dragomoshchenko’s open-ended process of revising his work remains a larger question, partly addressed in a fine review of *Opisanie* by Aleksandr Skidan, who is highly critical of the versions published in *Opisanie*, finding them briefer and clearer but without the “penetratingly intimate muttering” that had been Dragomoshchenko’s trademark (11). Skidan dismisses the redaction as cosmetic—an English equivalent that conveys Skidan’s tone would be “airbrushed.” One could counter this criticism by challenging his premise that these are final versions: Dragomoshchenko’s writing process is inherently open, and each time he reads the texts he in effect revises them. This reseeing is itself part of his creative process (as emphasized to me in the e-mail message from Hejinian).

17. Hejinian has also commented on the multiple meanings of *xenos* in her essay “Barbarism,” which was first written in 1995; her comments may have been in part

forthright in its account of a sojourn in Russia, but the poem more conspicuously engages with Russia in its format: based on the great novel in verse by Alexander Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, it has eight chapters (which it calls books), and, as in *Onegin*, its individual poems (called chapters) are fourteen lines long, although without the *Onegin* rhyme scheme. Dragomoshchenko's *Xenia*, by comparison, is more cagey in its engagement with the United States. It offers a few American place names, and epigraphs from poets Barrett Watten and Clark Coolidge gently point toward an encounter with American culture. Acts of naming in *Xenia* block any simplification of the "plot" into a visit to the United States. Occasional nouns take a reader's thoughts back to the former Soviet Union, perhaps mimicking the wandering attention of a visitor who thinks inevitably of home.¹⁸ The encounter of guest with host seems more generally an encounter with otherness; the surprises and pleasures as well as the ethical complexities of that encounter have been described by Jacques Derrida.¹⁹ That larger philosophical question prompts the nationality (neither American nor Russian, but Greek) of the one character invented in the poem—a traveler alter ego named Kondratii Teotokopulos, seen at the crossroads or writing a letter to his son. His first-person utterances occasionally flow into the poet's lines, the one substituting for the other.

The names, in fact, start to operate as pronouns in *Xenia*, and acts of substitution or replacement fill out much of the poem's extravagant mental activity. The poet gives as a reason for writing "the sweetness of replacing myself with not-me"(92) ("нежность

a response to Dragomoshchenko's *Xenia*, which she had finished translating the year before (see *Language* 326). I appreciate Jacob Edmond's drawing my attention to that essay in this context. It is interesting to add that Hejinian returns to the figure of *xenos* at the end of that essay after having mentioned the thinking of Lévinas, whose work will be pertinent to my reading below.

18. Fleeting reference to a wide variety of names is typical in Dragomoshchenko's as well as Hejinian's poetry. Hejinian has a nice riff on this in *Oxota*: "You may say the sentence, Mayakovsky is a man of the people, but you cannot free it / . . . / Dostoevsky too is a man of the people / Aretha Franklin is a man of the people" (143).

19. Derrida's *Of Hospitality* also takes up the encounter with the other as a necessary act of translation (enacted in the format of his book, with its facing pages offering up differently progressing texts), and it is of course mutual translation that became the core of the poetic encounter between Hejinian and Dragomoshchenko.

обмена меня на не-я" [*Ksenii* 61]).²⁰ The person, even as a pronoun, is inspected and comes to clearest visibility only when paired, which is to say, only when the possibility of substitution or exchange is introduced. As Michael Molnar notes, "[t]his is a poetry of relationships, not essences" (84):

"Тебя" и "меня" — в соты
полые слов, в одно предложение . . . —

в эти формы предзнания,
разъяття, терпения

(*Ksenii* 71)²¹

In Hejinian's translation: "'You' and 'I' / —in hollow honeycombs / of words, / in one sentence— / . . . / in these forms of foreseeing / parting, / patience" (*Xenia* 112). These lines have an erotic edge in context (they appear in *Xenia* in a poem entitled "Erotism"), but it is an eroticism that emerges conceptually more than as direct narrative: the self is apprehended through a desired other whose actions cannot be predicted or foreclosed.²² The web of honeycomb interlocks self with other, binding two people together with words that have the stickiness of honey and the pliability of wax.

In Hejinian's poetry, persons are more easily bound to one another, which has the linguistic effect of pronouns appearing often in the plural, more than is the case in Dragomoshchenko. Many lines are about "us," speculating on what "we" did or want or feel, although this "we" often emerges through an encounter between "I" and "you." The social commitments of Language poetry partly motivate this choice. For Hejinian, the way experiences are shared is never a given, and selfhood cannot be imagined outside the contexts in which the sharing occurs. "The 'personal' is already a plural condition," Hejinian has noted (*Language* 207). Her poems

20. This line does not appear in the revised text of *Ksenii* that Dragomoshchenko published in *Opisanie* (see page 213 for the rest of the poem, intact). One can speculate about reasons for these excisions, especially since some of the most erotically charged lines were later taken out, but part of Dragomoshchenko's poetic practice clearly involves ongoing revision and rethinking, as I noted earlier.

21. This passage is absent in the version of "Ksenii" published in *Opisanie*.

22. The poem reasserts Dragomoshchenko's absorption of Georges Bataille's work, from which Dragomoshchenko has drawn the title.

explore that condition both at length and in brief. Beautifully, the long poem *Oxota* ends with the sparse line “We are both” (290).²³ And the 2001 poem *A Border Comedy* begins:

All the clouds can feel our bodies change
If we just use some imagination
Some instigation
Is that ambition?

And later on the same page:

So we can go to bed with unity of purpose
And crave more of the temperament of life in life’s philosophy
Between
There we take on not just visibility but inspection and its proper preposition
is *between*
Where our proprieties have gone
We place or take them there nocturnally
Philosophically.

(11)

The “between” of these lines, commandingly written as a one-word line and as an italicized utterance, creates a space Hejinian loves to contemplate, in part for its creation of a zone of plurality and contrast; Dragomoshchenko’s favorite preposition, I believe, is *za* (in English, it can variously mean “for,” “behind,” “instead of,” “beyond”), prized for its doubled suggestion of substitution and hiding.²⁴

Having highlighted Hejinian’s use of first-person plural, I should quickly add that her investigation of the person takes her through all possible pronouns, and that in many poems “I” and “you” quite

23. After this line, it should be said, there is a coda, which rearranges the terms of naming, distance, hunting, finding, visibility, and timing that are the central themes of *Oxota*.

24. Examples abound, including, “Only with the passing of time within it, there began to appear behind it, without any reason, something else—the old Russian word ‘speak’ (*rtsi*)” (*Description* 90) (“[Лишь по истеченью времени в нем, за ним стало безо всякой причины угадываться иное: рци” [25 *Tverskoi bul’var* 221]); “That is not everything, but ‘that’ is always behind one’s back, or behind, / behind the preposition marking space / behind a glance” (*Description* 55) (“Все не то, а ‘то’ всегда за спиной или— ‘за’. / Предлогом, маркирующим пространство, / взглядом” [Opisanie 274]; “halves are shut / behind the shadow’s back” (*Xenia* 9) (“половины сомкнуты / за спиной тени” [Opisanie 147])).

predominate. The singular “I” and the addressee “you” give structure to several poems, including “The Guard,” and *The Cell* is densely built around sentences in the first person. Poems with narrative lines, however interrupted, use third-person pronouns but without a sense of inevitability: “she” and “he” appear in grammatical substitutions as easily as in claims about unnamed persons. In *Oxota*, the first person figures prominently but not exclusively. Hejinian extends her exploration of pronominal naming to “it,” notably in “Chapter Seventy-Nine: Death,” where “it” conveys the indefiniteness and impersonality of death:

The back of the head waits for death
 The feeling of weakness, a gentle indifference
 The tree of language sheds too much foliage
 It is death to be without shadow
 Each head is a mound—the case is empty
 What is it thinking?—but it can’t be thinking
 It had no difference
 It must be by itself—I’m slightly terrified
 Someone was embracing the air above it
 And it’s virtually invisible to me, my bulge above the nape
 It can’t speak—and yet it greets you
 It keeps no memories
 I would like to believe it, but it’s the same as waiting
 Why not have waited

(90)

Hejinian, always as fascinated by syntax as by word choice, takes advantage of the many usages of “our endless it” (*Oxota* 83). She imagines an abstract idea, death, as if it were a head, a (burial) mound, an empty case for a thought that resembles waiting. She compares this description of death to her acts of self-creation by various permutations of the head which, as a locus of thinking and creativity, signifies the work of poetry. Such metonymy is typical of her work, where metonymy plays a greater role than metaphor.²⁵

This linkage of death to memory returns us to the idea of the person familiar from the Romantics, but stripped of the Romantics’

25. For Hejinian’s thoughts on metonymy, see her essay “Strangeness” in *The Language of Inquiry*, esp. 147-49. John Shoptaw has noted that “Hejinian’s poetics of

faith in memory as a bulwark against death. Hejinian's poetry, with its emphasis on pleasure and beauty in recollection, may be compared to that of William Wordsworth, for all their differences, and a lovely reference to Dorothy Wordsworth appears in *My Life*.²⁶ A second Wordsworthian principle of Romanticism, that of location or place, also enlivens her poetry, although again not without some ambivalence. As with the presentation of subjectivity, the poetry directly confronts the process of thinking about description. In *Oxota*'s "Chapter Seventy-Two: Nature," Hejinian gives a fine account of this process in terms that grow out of her productive engagement with the Romantics:²⁷

The frost falls from a tree
We have a state of nature
Maybe I need the tree—it will acknowledge and thereby authorize me
Nature as describer—with the Russian names for things
Nature, which I regard across the table of which it's the proprietor
It is the third (inhuman) person
Waning interest, sugar rationing, a thumb before the moon without
hypocrisy
The natural part of that thought is from a dream
I in my progress passing this
A hunter is in its artlessness
Nature results in the lack of privacy (personality) that would go with it
It pursues the impersonal narrative—here, our endless it

description is governed by metonymy," and he rightly observes the relevance of Roman Jakobson's views here (Hejinian refers to Jakobson directly; the classic discussion is in his essay "Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak"). Hejinian has also commented that Dragomoshchenko's poetry is "often driven by etymological metonymy" (*Language* 313), which is true enough, although the poetry is also densely metaphorical.

26. Lisa Samuels astutely notes both the reference to Dorothy Wordsworth (115) and similarities between *My Life* and vital aspects of William Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetic practices.

27. How poets place themselves in the outside world changed irrevocably after Romanticism. Scenes of instruction, as scholars of Wordsworth have called them, replaced the simpler moments of identification or pathetic fallacy of an earlier age, but the language of description could still be disarmingly simple, especially in Wordsworth, Shelley, or Byron. See, for example, Hartman, "Romantic Poetry" and "Inscriptions"; Wimsatt; and De Man, "Intentional Structure." De Man suggests that imagination could never be unlinked from nature imagery, even in so antinaturalist a poet as Mallarmé, and the same is true for Hejinian or Dragomoshchenko, as poem titles such as "The Nasturtium as Reality" (his) or "The Cold of Poetry" and "The Green" (hers) suggest.

So I was feeling an inferior weariness, an inability to acknowledge
anything

It was snowing, and the snow was rippled by the people walking in it
while at the same time the people were reflected in it

(83)²⁸

Hejinian begins and ends here with natural descriptions of the kind we might find in Romantic poetry: frost falls from a tree, directing the gaze downward; snow gets rippled by pedestrians who are in turn reflected in the snow. But her "I" speaks midway and inconclusively in this passage, rather than emerging as a privileged voice at the end of the stanza. The sights of snow and pedestrians do not turn the poet's thoughts inward, but rather the reverse. If one questions, as Hejinian does, the premise that "the tree" will "authorize" the poet, which is one way to restate the Romantics' faith in nature, then personal motivations for natural descriptions can seem elusive to the poet. The hunt in *Oxota* includes a quest for those motives.

Dragomoshchenko shares in that search, although usually without the underlying narrative of hunting or seeking.²⁹ His terms are more abstract, as in the book title *Description (Opisanie)*. Not accidentally, among the poems from *Oxota* translated by Dragomoshchenko one finds "Chapter 144: Description" ("Iz knigi 'OXOTA'" [94-95]). Whether or not his poetry describes particular places has been offered as a measure of its Romanticism by Mikhail

28. With regard to line 8, compare "life's unquiet dream" described in Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," especially in the context of "[t]he everlasting universe of things" that "[f]lows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves" ("Mont Blanc"). Of all the Romantic poets, Shelley's representations of thinking bear the deepest affinity to those in Dragomoshchenko's and Hejinian's work.

29. A memorable exception is the poem in *Xenia* entitled "An Ode to Snaring an Imaginary Nightingale" ("Oda lov'u mnimogo solov'ia"), where the terror of being caught by love is given freedom to speak. The poem draws on Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and rhetorically recalls the overflowing granaries of his "To Autumn," as well as Boris Pasternak's poem "Margarita" (1919). The overwhelming fear of "Margarita," with its suggestion of rape, gives the poem its tone, but the terror isn't only about sex, as the references to death make clear. The presence of Keats and Pasternak, the great English Romantic and the great Russian post-Romantic, also makes this poem pertinent to my discussion of Romanticism in Dragomoshchenko, who not for nothing includes an especially ironic epigraph in English from the Language poet Barrett Watten: "The description of that bird is this window" (*Xenia* 79; *Ksenii* 52).

Iampol'skii.³⁰ To be sure, the specificity is often oblique, even metonymic (as in Hejinian's references to frost, sugar rationing, and snow, all minimalist markers of Russia in the age of glasnost and all, of course, metonymically connected by their granular whiteness). Dragomoshchenko's relationship to place feels more visionary than photographic, and in this he resembles another post-Romantic American poet, John Ashbery. Dragomoshchenko also likes to record a kind of moment described in Ashbery's "Syringa" (a poem he translated into Russian), a moment when "memories . . . / Melt into a single snapshot." He would similarly describe this process as "flowing, fleeting": for him, as well, "It is a picture of flowing, scenery, though living, mortal, / Over which an abstract action is laid out in blunt, / Harsh strokes" (70). Assessment of the mind's capacity to preserve visual memories (often images of a landscape) puts Dragomoshchenko, like Ashbery, into a recognizably Romantic context; both are skeptical of mental stasis, which means that they take on the more daunting challenge of preserving what Ashbery calls "a picture of flowing."

A Russian model for Dragomoshchenko in this context is Velimir Khlebnikov, whose experiments with language were also important to Hejinian. The presence of a modernist intermediary between these late-twentieth-century poets and their Romantic predecessors is another shared feature, and for Hejinian, other intermediaries, especially Gertrude Stein, are also significant.³¹ And other Russian modernists play a role here, including Osip Mandel'shtam, whose

30. Iampol'skii rather quickly turns away from Romanticism as a useful term for understanding Dragomoshchenko, because for him, the poet's lack of a genuine home, of a place that is deeply, fundamentally *his*, defines Dragomoshchenko's relationship to place as one of excess alienation. The work of location in this poetry could take us to a different set of conclusions, however, in which the relationship between self and place, precisely in the way it has been rendered ironic, remains enormously telling. Jacob Edmond offers a different approach in suggesting that words are part of any landscape description in Dragomoshchenko, words being in the world ("Locating Global Resistance").

31. Harold Bloom often finds this feature in poets whose antagonistic relationship he explores, as in his treatment of Ashbery's response to Wallace Stevens. Bloom contends that this intermediate stage blocks a more necessary and productive conflict with the earlier poet, but that does not seem to me the case for either of these poets. In fact, one could argue that Dragomoshchenko writes his strongest poetry when he comes into closest range with two of the great Russian modernists, Khlebnikov and Osip Mandel'shtam.

Acmeist poetics inform the descriptive feel of this poetry. (Hejinian's interest in Mandel'shtam is also palpable, for example in *A Border Comedy*, where his prose often appears as an intertext.) But Dragomoshchenko's debt to Khlebnikov emerges most clearly in "Nasturtium as Reality" ("Nasturtsiia kak real'nost'"), beginning with the epigraph. The poem includes wavelike repetitions of partial descriptions and a self-conscious tone:

Драгомощенко Аркадий Трофимович
описывает настурцию, изведенную из описания.

Хлорофилл распрямляет галактики кислорода.
Трение света о зеленую массу
расширяет путь вещи в сетке фильтрующей ливня,
(*Opisanie* 293)

Arkadii

Trofimovitch Dragomoschenko describes
a nasturtium, inserts it in his head. The chlorophyll
aligns galaxies of oxygen. The friction of light
against the green mass widens the path of the thing in the net filtering the
heavy rainfall

(*Description* 99)

The self-naming description rewrites Khlebnikov's more ecstatic invocation of his "white divine brain" ("белый божественный мозг") in an untitled poem that directly addresses Russia: "Be me, be Khlebnikov. / I have hammered the foundation stakes and axes into the mind of the *narod*" ("Будь мною, будь Хлебниковым. / Свай вбивал в ум народа и оси" [161]). The scientific language of Dragomoshchenko's poem recasts Khlebnikov's fantasies on mathematical precision, but in defiance of the physics of visual perception. The seen world touches the poet's brain, in effect, changing its chemistry in a way that enables the production of poetry.

Dragomoshchenko's poetics of touching ("poetika kasaniia") has been identified by Mikhail Iampol'skii and connected to Emmanuel Lévinas's ethics of the caress (218–20). This appreciation for the value of touch also opens up new approaches to Dragomoshchenko's relationship with Hejinian or, for that matter, with anyone else. How, for this self-styled alienated poet, are points of

contact with others imagined in the poetry? Very intimately, it turns out, although contact equally enables a disintegration of bodies into the layers that compose them. Such images create two stark extremes—either contact so intense that it penetrates the other, or else total unapproachability. Dragomoshchenko and Hejinian, in their commitment to investigating and absorbing one another's cultures, seek a middle ground, one in which the other enables a vision of the self that would otherwise be unavailable. This middle ground (and the freedom it might enable) is well described by Julia Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves*, but the deeper phenomenological commitment of these poets keeps their work closer to that of Lévinas than to the psychoanalytic methods of Kristeva. The other, as in Lévinas's work, apprehends us in our corporeality, undoes us in a way that brings subjectivity into being.³² The intensity of this conundrum defines the relationship between Dragomoshchenko and Hejinian, particularly in his work.

For both poets, writing about the other plays with the illusion of a romance, and their poems search for a language to express love. They have their different ways of ensuring that we do not read the love relationship as simply theirs. We are meant to spread the affection broadly across poetic utterances. Hejinian, in her list of features that define Language poetry, has observed that "intelligence is romantic" (*Language* 323). Dragomoshchenko, too, finds that thinking and loving go hand in hand. He calls *Xenia* "the finest mix of lust and dictionary" (60) ("тончайшая взвесь вождения и словаря" [37]), setting out to prove that "poetry is not a confession of love / to language and the beloved / but an inquiry" (*Xenia* 11) ("поэзия—не признание в любви, / 'языку и возлюбленной', / но дознание" [*Ksenii* 6]). *Xenia* includes poems that emphasize the erotic side of romance, sometimes with disarming descriptions of a body mapped onto words as onto bits of landscape: "The wind / slowly creates a colonnaded entrance to the theater of the body" (27) ("Ветер создает медленно пропилен в театр тела" [15]); "Like the first ice on water in the clear dark, such is my body in yours" (44) ("Как первый лед на воде в ясную темень, / как твое

32. Lévinas explores this conundrum more fully in an essay, "Substitution," to which he gives a telling epigraph, from the poetry of Paul Celan: "Ich bin du, wenn / ich ich bin" (89; "I am you, when I am I" [my translation]).

тело в твоём / моем" [26]); "Yes, certainly I feel the turf of your saliva with my tongue" (140) ("Да, я бесспорно ощущаю своим языком дерн слюны твоей" [89]).³³ Parts of one body enter into the other. The sexual act of penetration maps onto a linguistic act of interpenetration, the feeling of another's tongue, "iazyk," in the mouth—and the pun happily works in both languages.

For Hejinian, sex may also enter the text as a question of language. "I was asked to explain the phrase sex kitten and the term pussy," she writes in *Oxota* (36). Her cool touch here is an element of her signature, as Marjorie Perloff would say. Explaining English terms emphasizes the poet's mental activity, lets her answer the question without having to embody the sexuality of the words. Compare a comment recorded by Hejinian in *Leningrad*. Again, she carefully measures a phrase:

I remember referring—addressing my mother—to "my love affair with Russia," which she misunderstood as "my love affair with a Russian." The love object in the first case is immaterial (though real) and the emotion is, can I say?, exterior, like being in love with love, while in the latter case the love object would be material, physical, in response to an interior emotion. This exterior passion, or desire, for Russia is stirred by an insatiable identity. Being there is to be in a state of incommensurability, and hence of inseparability, as if that were the status or "human" nature of Not-me.

(Davidson et al. 98-99)

These lines transport a reader quite far from romance as a narrative event. But a key idea of romance, its quest, gets absorbed into the self in the process, and an "insatiable identity" is formed.

33. See two further examples of correspondences between eroticized bodies and the elements of language: "His hands / still can't understand how / her miraculous body transforms into combinations of consonants and vowels / branching like a series of programs" (*Xenia* 86) ("Руки его / до сих пор не могут понять, как / ее чудесное тело переходит в сочетания согласных и гласных, / ветвясь рядом программ" [*Ksenii* 56]); "the body, placing itself on the landscape's canvas" (*Xenia* 98) ("тело, распределяясь по полотну пейзажа" [*Ksenii* 65]). Note that in the Russian original the line "как твоё тело в твоём/моём" uses a slash between the last two words, emphasizing the interlocking nature of your/my body (this is not a line break). See also lines in which Dragomoshchenko reverses tenor and vehicle in descriptions of the landscape as a body: "The landscape is a somatic discourse" (*Xenia* 97) ("Пейзаж, скажем, это соматический дискурс" [*Ksenii* 64]).

In *Oxota*, the internal experience of romance resurfaces, still linked to words and still resonantly ambivalent. Romance again smooths the way to a reference to personhood or, as in these lines, to *personae*:

It's a woman's fate to forecast the future in sex
The word itself, sex, is a hole in the body of death
Patience is passion
And passion denied
A photo and floral blotches on the wall
The window was open and the blanket fluttered
I was stark as in Bergman's "Persona"
I was turned over.

(200)

The first line, about a woman's fate, rewrites the end of Osip Mandel'shtam's elegy "Tristia," where women die as they divine the future (147). But the introduction of Ingmar Bergman's film *Persona* raises the tone from the elegiac to the passionate, and the poet measures her starkness against that of the two women in *Persona*. She who is overturned mentally as well as physically by this passion shows her vulnerability to such strong feelings. Passion recurs as a topic in *Oxota*, and it figures as a chapter title in books 2 and 8 (8 recycles all the titles from 2). We read that "Passion is not a wild estimate of life without gradation but fast immeasurable will for something slow," and "Passion's structures are raptures—and time not space is the object of embrace" (285). These definitions resound as strong assertions, yet their force has a kind of tenderness, like an effect of passion felt. The poet believes that "people are not joined in passion but divulged" (86).

Hejinian's evocative language shines all the more brightly for its being mixed into passages of abstraction and philosophical musing. Dragomoshchenko's *Xenia*, by comparison, can turn to a narrative that is simply explicit. Here is one sample:

"Как называется то, что я делаю?" — спрашивает она. — "Когда я веду рукой по твоей коже. Прикасаюсь ли я к тебе с тем, чтобы ощутить свою ладонь? Или же для того, чтобы воочию, еще раз попытаться уловить постоянно ускользающее в прикосновении различие между

тобой и мной? Привлекаю ли тебя?” — спрашивает — “Отталкиваю? Только лишь предложение? Впитываю ли руками? Или же руки хотят сомкнуться там, в тебе, за тобою, где ты — до тебя; чтобы встретить твоё ещё совершенно чистое желание раньше, чем твой мозг, этот сад кортексов вне пространства, откликнется световой метелью и не скроет мой рот под накипью серебра — каждая частица зеркало, в котором собрано мое (его/ её) тело, вспыхивающее безразличием, но в стоне продолжаешь помнить, как по краю сознания добираться до его же конца. . . .

(*Ksenii* 84–85)

What is the name of what I'm doing? she asks. When I run my hand over your body, over your skin. Am I touching you to feel my own hand? Or to try to find for myself once again the distinction between you and me which constantly eludes us when we embrace? Do I draw you in? she asks. Do I push you away? Is it only a proposition? Do I absorb you into my hands? Or do my hands want to close there, in you, beyond you, where you precedes you, in order to encounter your purest wish before your brain, that garden of cortices beyond space, each particle a mirror in which my entire body is gathered, bursting with indifference, but as I moan I continue to remember how, at the edge of consciousness, you reach its end. . . .

(*Xenia* 135)³⁴

The pressure to find words for erotic acts remains (“What is the name of what I'm doing?”), but terms like “cortices” or “consciousness” barely punctuate the slow sequence of touching and moaning. One wonders if this high-style speech is not meant to be funny, especially since the linguistic speculations are uttered not by the poet but by the woman who runs her hand along the poet's skin. If there is humor, it is achieved by exposing the poet's usual weighty speech.

34. Russian and English differ here, and the English continues with a passage not included in either published version of the Russian. In part, it reads: “But now dearer to my heart is the moment when you and I are stretched together side by side as if I were calling to you or had caught you in my dream, having torn away the web of likenesses and time and here revealed to my hand is the lightness of the nipple's tension in the pulling weight of the breast opening my hand, and I press every one of my cells to your back, hearing how you spread your thighs, drawing one knee to your stomach, flinging your arm behind your head, reaching for me with your hand, leaving obedience from whose lips comes a clamor of salt, sweat, blood” (*Xenia* 135).

The intonational contrast between Hejinian's and Dragomoshchenko's poetry in these highly sexual passages is thus relatively subtle. He could not have written a book with the name *Happily* or *A Border Comedy*, to cite two of Hejinian's recent publications, and her light touch shows as well when she tempers sexual writing with absorbing moments of analysis or reflection.³⁵ There is a different twist, because of gender, when Hejinian writes of bodies and desires: feminist approaches to her work have shown the rewarding complexity of her achievements here (Simpson; Armantrout, "Feminist Poetics"), and in *A Border Comedy* she continues to foreground gender differences as a site of revelatory misunderstanding and sheer comedy. She treats these confusions with calm clarity, not with agitation or self-consciousness. Her work shows no shame about sex, whereas Dragomoshchenko's can exude an almost excessive vulnerability, even embarrassment. In this regard his work brings to mind Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Julie, ou La nouvelle Héloïse*, which is to say that we have one last resurgence of Romanticism, one associated not with the Lake poets but with the use of epistolary fictions in the Romantic period and with the confessional and also epistolary writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The poet always has a listener in Dragomoshchenko's work. His *Xenia*, in fact, were the Russian title (*Ksenii*) translated precisely, would be entitled *To Xenia*. His engagement with various forms of the epistolary is very strong. Let me describe both poets' use of epistolary structure and then comment on what it might mean. A film about them, Jacki Ochs's 1998 *Letters Not about Love*, is based on their correspondence, and Dragomoshchenko has since gone on to publish a voluminous e-mail correspondence with the Russian writer Margarita Meklina ("God na pravo perepiski").³⁶ We also find valuable examples of epistolary writing in Hejinian's work. *The Cell*, for instance, is dedicated to the American Language poet Kit

35. Hejinian's 1992 poem *The Cell* abounds in such instances, with lines such as "I thought I had said / too much about discontinuity and / the sex act" (63); "On each breast is a / vestige of this *joie de vivre*" (148); "I cannot separate lucidity from / undressing"(98); and "Where are your shoulders and / your hands, your color, face, / and, while I speak, your / . . . everything?"(98).

36. Meklina lives in the San Francisco area and like Hejinian serves as a kind of conduit for ideas and events in American avant-garde culture. Her exchange with Dragomoshchenko reads almost as an extension of his and Hejinian's.

Robinson "in correspondence." With its dated poems, that volume resembles a journal, but without the intimate privacy of a journal—in other words, it reads like a series of letters or postcards.

Another site for the direct address found in letters has been poetry dedicated to each other. Dragomoshchenko and Hejinian use dedications with variety but also restraint, sometimes leaving us wondering about the removal or editing of a dedication. The dedications strive to place the poems in a kind of envelope, to create the illusion of an exchange of poems and letters that originated in privacy. Readers are invited into that zone of privacy when reading the poems, which can create an aura of authentic utterance that resists the theoretical principles of this poetry, with its air of suspicion about language's efficacy and the possibility of human agency. The air of private communication brings the poetry closer to Romanticism, which was the great age of epistolary writing. Novels of letters helped to nourish a fascination with such matters as the rise of the individual and the search for a distinctive language to express desires and fears. In epistolary novels, the physical separation of the heroes shaped the plot and also permitted an idealization of the absent other, which, in turn, determined the self projected by each letter writer.

This epistolary structure of self and other, and of distance and idealization, shows us important tonalities of Dragomoshchenko's and Hejinian's exchange. Particularly for Dragomoshchenko, the element of self-consciousness, even embarrassment, remains marked. In his work, one senses an audience before whom transgression matters. He is among the contemporary poets for whom Lévinas's insistence on the ethical dimensions of self-creation is illuminating.³⁷ "[S]elf-judgment before an Other" yields a "triple critique of self, subjectivity, and poetry"; the poet seeks "a judgmental kind of understanding" (Cardonne-Arlyck 587, 597). Lévinas advocated using the "names of persons whose *saying* signifies a face—proper names, in the middle of all these common names and commonplaces" (4), which is at odds with

37. The connection to Lévinas has also been made for contemporary French poets in Cardonne-Arlyck; for a discussion of ethics and irony that applies well to Dragomoshchenko, see 584.

Dragomoshchenko's inclination toward pronouns. And indeed Dragomoshchenko would never go so far as Lévinas does toward advocating our responsibility for the acts of others. His gaze is turned more inward, and his impulse moves more quickly toward abstraction. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Dragomoshchenko's "Accidia," a poem that embraces error as the source of vision and thus creates an errant, even deviant poetic persona. Given the poem's title, we should ask, to what does the poet "accede"? The answer inevitably brings us back to Hejninian, to whom the poem is dedicated and who is named as the source of a memorable line heard twice in the poem: "everything begins as an error of vision." But is it a shared error, the kind of joint creative response from which poems are born? Is the shared error, in other words, the sign of a shared vision? Or is the poem itself an error? (Dragomoshchenko never reprinted it after it was published in a Moscow almanac in 1990.) It is in this poem as well that he writes, "one must break / the mirror / of language"(83) ("следует / разбить / зеркало / языка" [216]).

Shame and confession are more fully explored in *Xenia*, as in this passage that plays on the similar-sounding Russian words for *shame* and *cold* (*styd*, *stuzha*) and on pronouns: "What constitutes my living, what does shame mean—isn't it the discovery in some I of a co-existing *you*, of that overlooked locked consonance with this I, impassively cutting off the possibility of leaving the circle of shame, the cold of lamentation and ice—with you (yes) I?" (*Xenia* 95) ("Или же—из чего складывается мое житие, что значит стыд? Не обнаружение ли в некоем 'я' сосуществования 'ты,' этого, упустившего замыкающую согласную все того же 'я,' бесстрастно отсекающего возможность выйти из круга стужи, сетования, льда" [*Ksenii* 63]). This is a speaker for whom "A poem is an investigation / into the degree of aversion a person can feel toward himself" (*Xenia* 105) ("Стихотворение есть исследование степени отвращения, которое к себе может испытывать человек" [*Ksenii* 68]). Such self-loathing and exposure is at the heart of the Romantic hero's alienation, and Dragomoshchenko can strike that pose convincingly. It lets him mix his fascination with the theories of Georges Bataille, embracing transgression as liberation, with a compulsion to confess his sins and find forgiveness in the

face of the other.³⁸ Dragomoshchenko's poems in *Xenia* perform a kind of undoing of the self: he says, as if with a sigh, at the end of the poem, "And now I am unbound. . . ." (*Xenia* 161) ("И, вот, теперь развязан" [Ksenii 100]).

That unbinding of the ego and its defenses is at the heart of the poem's direct address to Hejinian. She responds by translating this poem into English and seeking verbal elements in the translation that keep the undoing in place. The poem creates what Hejinian has called forms of disappearance. "What must be preserved," she has said of her translations, "are the disappearances that are enacted as specific meanings vanish into the time and space of sentences" (*Language* 315). In their attention to one another's poetic practices, Dragomoshchenko and Hejinian have sought to preserve the vanishing acts that give their poems meaning. Each has made Romanticism itself seem to disappear, but in poems that preserve the traces of what has been banished.

The persistence of Romanticism, to conclude, has lessons of its own, although my chief concern has been to use its stubborn presence to highlight the poetry of Dragomoshchenko and Hejinian. One further lesson for all of us who read contemporary poetry is that theories like Romanticism can be useful in places where they appear to fit poorly. For reasons that have to do with aesthetic preferences as much as cultural politics, contemporary poetry often seems divided between experimental and traditional poets. In such a divide, Dragomoshchenko and Hejinian would end up in the experimental group, and intuitively we might expect Romanticism to be more important for traditionalists. The very persistence of Romanticism, however, may account for its surprising usefulness to experimental poets. Dragomoshchenko and Hejinian have translated Romanticism into their own poetics, just as they have translated each other. In their versions of Romanticism, the place of the person is more contingent and mobile, more likely a pronoun than

38. Dragomoshchenko associates himself with what he calls "monstrous obscenity" (I have in mind a line from *Oxota*: "Obscurity is cruel literary romanticism compared to the monstrous obscenity of those great Russian love songs, Arkadii said" [183]). When Hejinian shows him (to American readers) speaking these words, she creates Dragomoshchenko as a particular kind of Russian poet, one whose maximalism extends to the role of poet as bad boy, as the exemplar of a kind of poetry that cannot be contained.

a noun. The places they describe are hospitable to an uncertain subjectivity, and hospitality itself becomes a term of investigation in the poetry. The Romantics' belief in the saving powers of memory and imagination is also treated with some suspicion, although a fascination with the workings of recollection and invention persists, as does the Romantics' self-consciousness and pleasure in recording details about the creative act. Dragomoshchenko and Hejinian have learned well the Romantic and post-Romantic passion for resistance, for the resistance to closure perhaps most of all. Both poets write with an explicit orientation toward the other, most especially when they write to or about each other, so that their poetry raises ethical and psychological questions that one can associate with the Romantics but that have also been developed by subsequent theorists and poets. But that, too, has an appropriate logic for these poets and for other contemporaries: Romanticism in all its forms now makes better sense when viewed through lenses created by later thinkers. Reading poets in each other's company is as enriching a process, in the end, as reading them through layers of theorists and poets who have shaped their work. More such pairings come quickly to mind: if Russians and Americans, then Aleksei Parshchikov and Michael Palmer, or—to go beyond mutual translators—Olga Sedakova and Jorie Graham. Such pairings can yield new readings of the poets, and new ways to see how their poetic practice has been changed by the poets around them. In crisscrossing national traditions, and in matching poets to theories in ways that can be counterintuitive, we see anew the poets' affinities, and we see as well the poems that will be their legacies to generations whose innovations and resistances we cannot yet make out.

Harvard University

WORKS CITED

- Altieri, Charles. "Lyn Hejinian and the Possibilities of Postmodernism in Poetry." *Women Poets of the Americas: Toward a Pan-American Gathering*. Ed. Jacqueline Vaught Brogan and Cordelia Chávez Candelaria. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1999. 146–55.
- . "Wordsworth and the Options for Contemporary American Poetry." *The Romantics and Us: Essays on Literature and Culture*. Ed. Gene W. Ruoff. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1990. 184–212.

- Armantrout, Rae. "Feminist Poetics and the Meaning of Clarity." *Artifice and Indeterminacy: An Anthology of New Poetics*. Ed. Christopher Beach. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1998. 287–96. *Sagetrieb* 11. 3 (1992): 7–16.
- . "The Person in My Work." *Poetics Journal* 9 (1991): 69–70.
- Ashbery, John. *Houseboat Days*. New York: Penguin, 1977.
- Bataille, Georges. *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. Trans. Mary Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights, 1962.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." *Selected Writings*. Ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996. 1:253–63.
- Bloom, Harold. "John Ashbery: The Charity of the Hard Moments." *Figures of Capable Imagination*. New York: Seabury, 1976. 169–208.
- Cardonne-Arlyck, Elisabeth. "Mind Your Tongue: Autobiography and New French Lyric Poetry." *New Literary History* 33 (2002): 581–601.
- Dal', Vladimir. *Tolkovyĭ slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka*. 4 vols. Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1978.
- Davidson, Michael, Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten. *Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union*. San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991.
- De Man, Paul. "'Conclusions': Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator.'" *The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986. 73–105.
- . "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image." *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Norton, 1970. 65–76.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality/ Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000.
- Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii. "Accidia." 25 *Tverskoi bul'var: Golosa molodykh*. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990. 216–21.
- . *Description*. Trans. Lyn Hejinian and Elena Balashova. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1990.
- . *Ksenii*. St. Petersburg: Mitin zhurnal, Borei Art, 1993.
- . *Opisanie*. St. Petersburg: Izdatel'skii tsentr "Gumanitarnaia akademiia," 2000.
- . *Xenia*. Trans. Lyn Hejinian and Elena Balashova. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1994.
- , trans. "Zabytyi seks." By Dzhon Eshberi [John Ashbery]. *Mitin zhurnal* 43 (1992): 16–21.
- Dragomoshchenko, Arkadii, and Margarita Meklina. "God na pravo perepiski." 1998-1999. <www.mitin.com/books/drag&meklina/letters.shtml>.
- Dworkin, Craig Douglas. "Penelope Reworking the Twill: Patchwork, Writing, and Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*." *Contemporary Literature* 36 (1995): 58–81.
- Edmond, Jacob. "'A Meaning Alliance': Arkady Dragomoshchenko and Lyn Hejinian's Poetics of Translation." *Slavic and East European Journal* 46 (2002): 551–64.
- . "Locating Global Resistance: The Landscape Poetics of Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Lyn Hejinian, and Yang Lian." *AUMLA: The Journal of*

- the Australasian Universities' Language and Literature Association 101 (2004): 71–98.
- Eldridge, Richard. *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.
- Epstein, Mikhail. "New Currents in Russian Poetry: Conceptualism, Meta-realism, and Presentism." *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*. Trans. Anesa Miller-Pogacar. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1995. 19–50. Trans. of "Pokolenie, nashedshee sebia (o molodoi poezii 80-kh godov)." *Voprosy literatury* 5 (1986): 40–72.
- Hartman, Geoffrey. "Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry." *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987. 31–46.
- . "Romantic Poetry and the Genius Loci." *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays, 1958–1970*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1970. 311–36.
- Hejinian, Lyn. *A Border Comedy*. New York: Granary, 2001.
- . *The Cell*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1992.
- . *The Cold of Poetry*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1994.
- . E-mail to the author. 12 Nov. 2002.
- . [Khedzhinian]. "Iz knigi 'OXOTA: Kratkii russkii roman.'" Trans. Arkadii Dragomoshchenko. *Kommentarii* 3 (1994): 92–101.
- . *The Language of Inquiry*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000.
- . *My Life*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1987.
- . *Oxota: A Short Russian Novel*. Great Barrington, MA: The Figures, 1991.
- . "Strangeness." *Artifice and Indeterminacy: An Anthology of New Poetics*. Ed. Christopher Beach. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1998. 140–54.
- Iampol'skii, Mikhail. "Poeziia kasaniia (Dragomoshchenko)." *O blizkom (Ocherki nemimeticheskogo zreniia)*. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001. 210–33.
- Jacobs, Carol. *Uncontainable Romanticism: Shelley, Brontë, Kleist*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.
- Jakobson, Roman. "Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak." *Language in Literature*. Ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987. 301–17.
- . "Shifters and Verbal Categories." *On Language*. Ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990. 386–92.
- Johnson, Barbara. "The Task of the Translator." *Mother Tongues: Sexuality, Trials, Motherhood, Translation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003. 40–64.
- Kates, J., ed. *In the Grip of Strange Thoughts: Russian Poetry in a New Era*. Brookline, MA: Zephyr, 1999.
- Keats, John. *The Poems of John Keats*. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978.
- Kharms, Daniil. "Golubaia tetrad' No. 10." *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. 4 vols. St. Petersburg: Gumanitarnoe agentstvo "Akademicheskii proekt," 1997–2001. 2:330.
- Khlebnikov, Velimir. *Tvoreniia*. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1986.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.

- Letters Not about Love*. Dir. Jacki Ochs. Videocassette. Human Arts Assoc., 1998.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Proper Names*. Trans. Michael B. Smith. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996.
- Löwy, Michael, and Robert Sayre. *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2001.
- Mandel'shtam, Osip. *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*. St. Petersburg: Gumanitarnoe agentstvo "Akademicheskii proekt," 1995.
- Molnar, Michael. "The Vagaries of Description: The Poetry of Arkadii Dragomoshchenko." *Essays in Poetics* 14.1 (1989): 76-98.
- Palmer, Michael. *Sun: Stikhotvoreniiia, poema i esse*. Trans. Aleksei Parshchikov. Moscow: Kommentarii, 2000.
- Parshchikov, Aleksei. *Blue Vitriol*. Trans. John High, Michael Molnar, and Michael Palmer. Penn Grove, CA: Avec, 1994.
- . "An Interview with Aleksei Parshchikov." Conducted by John High. *Five Fingers Review* 8-9 (1990): 39-46.
- Pasternak, Boris. "Margarita." *Stikhotvoreniiia i poemy*. 2 vols. Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990. 1:163.
- Perelman, Bob. *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996.
- Perloff, Marjorie. "Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject: Ron Silliman's Albany, Susan Howe's Buffalo." *Critical Inquiry* 25 (1999): 405-34.
- . *Poetry On and Off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1998.
- Perril, Simon. "Language Poetry." *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*. Ed. Neil Roberts. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001. 220-31.
- Samuels, Lisa. "Eight Justifications for Canonizing Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*." *Modern Language Studies* 27 (1997): 103-19.
- Severskaia, O. I. "Metarealism: Iazyk poeticheskoi shkoly: sotsiolekt – idiolekt / idioshtil'." *Ocherki istorii iazyka russkoi poezii XX veka: Opyty opisaniia idioshtilei*. Ed. V. P. Grigor'iev. Moscow: Nasledie, 1995. 541-57.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Selected Poetry*. Ed. Neville Rogers. Boston: Houghton, 1968.
- Shoptaw, John. "Hejinian Meditations: Lives of *The Cell*." *Journal x* 1.1 (1996). <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/english/pubs/jx/1_1/shoptaw.html>.
- Simpson, Megan. "Language-Oriented Feminist Epistemology, and the Case of Lyn Hejinian." *Poetic Epistemologies: Gender and Knowing in Women's Language-Oriented Writing*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2000. 1-29.
- Skidan, Aleksandr. "Opisanie." *Novaia russkaia kniga* 6 (2000): 10-13.
- Spahr, Juliana. "Resignifying Autobiography: Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*." *American Literature* 68 (1996): 139-59.
- Swingle, L. J. *The Obstinate Questionings of English Romanticism*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1987.
- "Symposium on the Person." *Poetics Journal* 9 (1991): 69-105.
- Wimsatt, W. K. "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery." *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*. Ed. M. H. Abrams. 1960. New York: Oxford UP, 1970. 25-36.