



Collected Poems in English

Joseph Brodsky

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One of the greatest and grandest advocates of the literary vocation, Joseph Brodsky truly lived his life as a poet, and for it earned eighteen months of internal exile at hard labor, expulsion from his native country, and the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Here, collected for the first time, are all the poems he published in English, from his earliest collaborations with Derek Walcott, Richard Wilbur, Howard Moss, and Anthony Hecht to the moving farewell poems he wrote near the end of his life. With nearly two hundred poems, several of them never before published in book form, this is the essential volume of Brodsky's work.

Collected Poems in English Details

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James says

Joseph Brodsky was born on May 24th in Leningrad in 1940. He was arrested at age twenty-three and sentenced to five years on a prison farm for “having a worldview damaging to the state, decadence and modernism, failure to finish school, and social parasitism ... except for the writing of awful poems.” He then was expelled ("strongly advised" to emigrate) from the Soviet Union in 1972, settling in the United States with the help of W. H. Auden and other supporters. Brodsky was awarded the 1987 Nobel Prize in Literature "for an all-embracing authorship, imbued with clarity of thought and poetic intensity". He was appointed United States Poet Laureate in 1991.

The lines below are from “May 24, 1980,” Brodsky’s poem looking back from exile in America on his fortieth birthday:

...I have waded the steppes that saw yelling Huns in saddles,
worn the clothes nowadays back in fashion in every quarter,
planted rye, tarred the roofs of pigsties and stables,
guzzled everything save dry water.
I've admitted the sentries' third eye into my wet and foul
dreams. Munched the bread of exile; it's stale and warty.
Granted my lungs all sounds except the howl;
switched to a whisper. Now I am forty.
What should I say about my life? That it's long and abhors transience.
Broken eggs make me grieve; the omelette, though, makes me vomit.
Yet until brown clay has been rammed down my larynx,
only gratitude will be gushing from it.

Elisabeth says

I don't know what to make of you, Brodsky. I like knowing that you lived in Ann Arbor.

Julie says

I only read selections but my oh my. Poetry that makes you think.

tallulla says

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28 יולי 1962 יולי

Auguste says

"Here's Venus; no one between us."

I can't get this couplet out of my head; it's one of the most beautiful things I've ever read.

What a dark genius Brodsky was.

Sara says

Lyrical, elegiac, and stunning.

Liam Guilar says

Whatever his ability in Russian, whatever his justifiable status in world letters, in English these poems just don't live up to the claims that have been made for them. Stripped of Brodsky's name a lot of these poems would struggle to find readers or publishers.

Miriam Oster says

I read Brodsky in English and in Russian. I even know his best friend. His language is absolutely fantastik.

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Armando says

Brodsky was a versatile writer and as you read this collection, think of the many styles that he was versed in!

Alex says

any chance to download it from the web? a link would be very much appreciated!

Kristin says

Brodsky is a masterful poet--I only give this collection four stars because I do not like the translation. Brodsky, however, is the translator, so...there you have it.

Petya Tsekova says

It's like reading magic that has a limitless influence over all the senses. What e genius, what a beautiful poetry.

Ci says

I have had this book for several years now. Up till recently, I feel inadequately prepared to read Brodsky. Now I am making an attempt. The following are reading notes, full summary till finishing the first read. Even with persistence, this is going to be a long haul across nearly 600 pages. (8/12)

8/12 "Homage to Yalta", written in 1969. A sequences of one-sided conversations around a murder. The voices are several people without much demarcation from which-to-which. People have been analyzing this poem through the lens of political oppression or its linguistic feats, however, even to an amateur, one can read through the under-current of consciousness of each speaker -- what is the meaning of what we have seen, what we have done, and what is the meaning of our relationship to the event, and ourselves

Agent X says

Don't usually read poems as I find novels and other text types more interesting but these were really good. Felt modern although the book isn't new and the poems were beautifully simple in their form, making them quite easy to understand but not dumbfounded in any way. Will perhaps read more of him in the future, if I feel a need for poems again.

Jacqueline says

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*I wrote: The bulb looks at the flower in fear,
and love, as an act, lacks a verb; the zer-
o Euclid thought the vanishing point became
wasn't math--it was the nothingness of Time.
I sit by the window. And while I sit
my youth comes back. Sometimes I'd smile. Or spit.*

("I sit by the window")

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*A loyal subject of these second-rate years,
I proudly admit that my finest ideas
are second-rate, and may the future take them
as trophies of my struggle against suffocation.
I sit in the dark. And it would be hard to figure out
which is worse; the dark inside, or the darkness out.*

("I sit by the window")

*Watch your New Year come in a blue
Seawave across the town terrain
In such an inexplicable blue,
As if your life can start again,
As if there can be bread and light --
A lucky day -- and something's left,
As if your life can sway aright,
Once swayed aleft.*

("Moscow Carol")

*And the endless sky over the tiles
grows bluer as swelling birdsong fills.
And the clearer the song is heard,
the smaller the bird*

("Stone villages")

*And the endless sky over the tiles
grows bluer as swelling birdsong fills.
And the clearer the song is heard,
the smaller the bird*

("Stone villages")

*Everything has its limit, including sorrow.
Loneliness cubes a man at random.
a perspective cuts emptiness deep and even.
And what is space anyway if not the
body's absence at every given
point?*

("To Urania")

*Quit the country the bore and nursed me.
Those who forgot me would make a city.*

("24/05/1980")

*We are parting for good, my friend, that's that.
Draw an empty circle on your yellow pad.*

*This will be me: no insides in thrall.
Stare at it a while, then erase the scrawl.*

("Folk tune")

*To a wanderer the faces of all islands
resemble one another. And the mind
trips, numbering waves; eyes, sore from sea horizons,
run; and the flesh of water stuffs the ears.*

("Odysseus To Telemachus")

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Phillip says

Fantastic poems - full of life, insight, and remarkable observations.

Sammy says

One of my few true poetic ideals. Astounding, inimitable, hilarious, gutting.

Brandon says

I need quite a bit of time with this collection. This was my first exposure to Brodsky. I completely enjoyed it. But I wonder what his Russian poems are like. I wonder how much better he is in Russian.

Diann Blakely says

The seeds of National Poetry Month began to germinate when the former executive director of the Academy of American Poets, William Wadsworth, studied at Columbia University with the late Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky, whose *COLLECTED POEMS IN ENGLISH* has been on many shelves since its 2000 publication; now a biography has appeared. While Brodsky defected from his native Russia and became a fan of many things American, our native suspicion—and even dislike—of poetry stunned him. Russia regularly fills soccer stadiums with fans eager to hear Yevgeny Yevtushenko, just as Irish citizens do the same to hear Seamus Heaney; in most American cities, poets are lucky to read to a dozen folks, not including relatives and bookstore staff. Yet Brodsky became convinced that the American avoidance of poetry resulted from the art's elitist and academic associations, not the general reader's inability to understand and enjoy verse. For in Brodsky's totalitarian Russia, where the average citizen's level of education fell considerably short of the American standard, poetry was customarily available in village and town shops and read by a large number of the customers, who browsed through newly published volumes at checkout counters the same way Americans do with *PEOPLE* and *TV GUIDE*.

Is this because even well-educated Americans lack a particular verbal skill possessed by Russians? Not according to Eliot, who, unlike Brodsky, wasn't exactly known for his democratic politics. Genuine poetry, as the St. Louis native said many times, "can communicate before it is understood," meaning that the art's more obviously complex elements are rarely as important as its simplest—imagery, rhythm, and emotional urgency. Thus mass interest in poetry, both for the author of *OLD POSSUM'S BOOK OF PRACTICAL CATS* and for the Russian émigré, finally depends on availability and the reader's willingness to participate actively in the poetic experience.

Eliot's and Brodsky's ideal readers are willing not to understand immediately. They are willing to engage deeply with otherness without judgment, and to submit their own egos, sometimes over the course of many years and many rereadings, to a poet's work. A man without so much as a cynical corpuscle when it came to his art, Brodsky never doubted that if we had the same kind of access to poetry as we have to junky magazines and to the increasingly dumbed-down Bibles to which politicians give lip service, our souls would change in ways that even religion doesn't make possible. What would happen if a lonely traveler opened a Hampton Inn's drawer and found not pizza flyers or the Gideon's logo but the colorful cover of the *PUSHCART PRIZE ANTHOLOGY* or *BEST AMERICAN POETRY*, both of which have reached a new apogee this year?

(originally published in the *NASHVILLE SCENE*)

Meen says

OK, to be fair, I probably would've have given any smaller collection of Brodsky at least three stars. This

was a lesson learned: don't EVER try to read someone's entire collected poems all at once. UGH. This was like 500 pages, and anybody's voice after 500 pages starts to grate. OK, maybe not anybody. Maybe it was just Brodsky. Maybe, for one's emotional wellbeing, he just needs to be ingested in small doses like meds... I haven't been reading poetry (outside of what may have been assigned here and there in lit classes along the way) for very long and this was part of an effort at experiencing some different types of poetry, so another thing I learned about myself is that I much prefer unrhymed (and free verse) poetry. After about halfway through, anytime a poem started with rhymes (which didn't always work well b/c of translation issues), I would just sigh.

:(
