‘Post-horse of Civilisation’:

Joseph Brodsky translating Joseph Brodsky.

Towards a New Theory of Russian-English Poetry Translation

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[1] Although dealing with the subject of Brodsky's self-translations, as can be inferred from its title, *From Russian with Love: Joseph Brodsky in English* is mainly an auto-biographical work rich in personal reminiscences rather than in technical details.

between Brodsky, Auden and Spender. (This already mythical encounter took place in the very same house during Brodsky's first days in the West after his expulsion from the USSR.) She also gave me other important details of the long friendship between her husband Stephen Spender and Joseph Brodsky.

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Any emissions or errors remain of course the sole responsibility of the author.

Preface

> …to me … who was born and bred a
> British Pharisee, Russians are not quite like other folk. If their respective literatures in the nineteenth century are a guide, no two sensibilities could be more poles apart than the Russian and the British. (W.H. Auden)[2]

When many years ago as a Russian student of English I set out on a tricky quest of conquering another linguistic system and getting my grip on the Anglo-Saxon culture – apparently the extreme opposite to the one which I had naturally inherited – I chose Nabokov to be my cicerone. Later I discovered that I had considerably complicated my task – Orwell or Jane Austen would have constituted a much smoother beginning for a learner of the language – Nabokov with his opulent vocabulary, very challenging even for the most native of speakers. Yet the comfort which I derived back then from my choice of having this writer as the main course in my reading diet was of a more psychological nature: if my compatriot could make it, I thought, then the prospects of my cultural 'Polar conquest' could not be all that hopeless either.

If anything was to be learnt from Nabokov, who had very strong opinions about everything, translation included, it was the discipline of always attempting to read texts of non-Russian prose in the original.

It is therefore not surprising that when later I became deeply interested in poetry it was Brodsky, yet another countryman from my native city, who was to become my Virgil. Brodsky's brilliant essays in English opened up a whole universe for me. Mandelstam and Auden, Cavafis and Montale, Ovid and Frost, Miłosz and Dante cohabited then on equal footing: all of them being loved, quoted, internalized, and memorized by heart. Above all Brodsky taught me that poetry, usually deemed a closed area for non natives, can, or rather ought to, be accessed by them, if they subscribe to his favourite concept of world culture. Under Brodsky's guidance I have learnt to know and love the works of such different English language poets as Donne, Marvell, Herbert, Lewis Carroll, Frost, Eliot, Auden, Spender and Betjeman.

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[2] Wystan Hugh Auden,. *Forewords & Afterwords* (Random House: New York, 1973) p. 275.

Then there came a day when out of curiosity I decided to have a look at Brodsky's self-translations into English. My first reaction was one of rejection: they did not look, I thought, even remotely like the originals. Then, prompted by reflection that a perfect translation of poetry is actually *a priori* an impossible task – what it can aspire to achieve is at best a well-balanced sacrifice, as also suggested in Walter Benjamin's famous essay 'The Task of the Translator'[3] – I started to look at them closer.

I imagined the fortitude of the poet-translator, who being the author himself, was surely the first to be aware of the great gulf separating these translations from the originals, and yet had nevertheless, accepted one by one certain translations to stand for them. This vision filled me with thrill. Dealing with translations has changed my whole perception of the originals: I have since become much more aware of the net weight of the various elements which make up a single poem. Brodsky's original poems in English were the next discovery in store.

To follow a genius penetrating into the vast forbidding grounds of a foreign idiom, to watch him trespass upon territories 'where executives would never want to tamper,'[4] has since become for me a most absorbing of occupations.

The present doctoral thesis is an attempt to share with the reader my enthusiasm for this extraordinary phenomenon of poetry self-translation into English by a famous Russian poet – a phenomenon which for all its merits and drawbacks brings the Russian and English languages closer together.

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[3] ‚…das Verhältnis des Gehalts zur Sprache [ist] völlig verschieden […] in Original und Übersetzung. Bilden nämlich diese im ersten eine gewisse Einheit wie Frucht und Schale, so umgibt die Sprache der Übersetzung ihren Gehalt wie ein Königsmantel in weiten Falten.' Quoted in Walter Benjamin. ‚Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', *Gesammelte Scriften*, IV i, Tillman Rexroth (Hrg.) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981) p. 15.
[4] From Wystan Hugh Auden. 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', *Selected Poems*: new edition. E. Mendelson (ed.) (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 80.

Note

In the present thesis I use two scripts: Latin and Cyrillic. This being a thesis in English literature, it has been of primary consideration for me to fulfil the requirements of an English-language scholarly publication. Therefore I use the Latin script and the Library of Congress transliteration system for Brodsky's original poems in Russian, Russian personal and geographical names, the titles of Russian articles, journals, books, and other publications in the main body of the text, in the footnotes and in the bibliography. At the end of each chapter which analyses Brodsky's poems I reproduce his originals in Cyrillic, for those of my readers who read Russian.

Whenever the original quotations were in Russian or Italian, I have reproduced them in the footnotes in the original using either the Cyrillic or Latin script respectively. In the main body of the text I offer my own translations, except where published versions were available.

Throughout the thesis there can be found two different spellings of the names Viktor Zirmunskij (or Viktor Zhirmunsky) and Jurij Lotman (or Iuri Lotman). The first spelling corresponds to the one used in the quoted source. The latter is the Latin transliteration of the original name of the respective authors, according to the LOC transliteration system.

Throughout this work I have quoted from two similarly named books – Zirmunskij, Viktor. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*. transl. C.F. Brown. (The Hague: Mouton&Co., 1966) *and* Zhirmunsky, Viktor. *Teoria Stikha* [Verse Theory] (Leningrad: Sovetsky Pisatel', 1975). Although there is some overlap between these two books they are not identical. The English language version includes only one work of Zhirmunsky, whereas the Russian one includes three books under the same title *Teoria Stikha.*

Oft-quoted sources are given at first in full in the footnotes, but are presented later on in an abbreviated form.

Introduction

'Poetry is what gets lost in translation.'
(Robert Frost)

'Square the circle, in short.'
'An Admonition', Joseph Brodsky

The subject of the present thesis is Joseph Brodsky's self-translations of his own poetry from Russian into English. The fact that Brodsky was translating from his mother tongue into his second language already makes his a very special case. Of course, there are other cases of writers composing excellently in their second language and translating their own works into that language, writers such as Nabokov or Beckett. Such authors have familiarized us with the idea that the phenomenon of a bilingual writer is after all possible. The difference with Brodsky lies, however, in that both Beckett and Nabokov were mainly prose writers. (Despite the fact, that Beckett wrote poetry in French and that Nabokov believed till the end that he was a poet too). For a poet to breach the linguistic gap is a much more formidable achievement. When it comes to translation the choice between prose and poetry makes all the difference, for in no other art form is the unity of form and content more evident than in poetry. In the words of Auden:

> The formal structure of the poem is not something distinct from its meaning but as intimately bound up with the latter as the body is with the soul.[5]

This special unity is best manifested in the impossibility of its preservation in translation. This is, echoed in Brodsky's review of Mandelstam's translations into English:

> A poem is a result of a certain necessity: it is inevitable, so is its form. …. Form too is noble…. It is the vessel in which meaning is cast; they sanctify each other reciprocally – it is an association of soul and body. Break the vessel, and the liquid will leak out.[6]

Thus an appreciation of a poet in a different language is much rarer and more problematic than an appreciation of a prose writer. The reputation of a poet in his country of origin more than often fails to cross borders. By this token, Brodsky was disappointed when Auden told him he could not understand why Mandelstam was a great poet – "The translations I have

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[5] Wystan Hugh Auden. 'Note', *W.H. Auden reading his poetry*. [Nonmusic sound recording] (London: Harper Collins Audio Publishers, 1955).
[6] Joseph Brodsky. 'The Child of Civilization', *Less than one: essays*, (New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux: 1996) p. 141.

seen … don't convince me of it"[7]. The same idea of untranslatability of some of the greatest poetry is echoed by Hannah Arendt; here she refers to Auden's poems:

> …much of his work, in utter simplicity, arose out of the spoken word, out of idioms of everyday language – like "Lay your sleeping head, my love, Human on my Faithless arm." This kind of perfection is very rare; we find it in some of the greatest of Goethe's poems, and it must exist in most of Pushkin's works, because *their hallmark is that they are untranslatable. The moment poems of this kind are wrenched from their original abode, they disappear in the cloud of banality. ... The very untranslatability of one of Auden's poems is what, many years ago, convinced me of his greatness*. Three German translators had tried their luck and killed mercilessly one of my favourite poems, "If I Could Tell You"…[8] (Italics mine, Z.I.).

That is why the translation of poetry has produced so many skeptics, who have doubted its possibility in principle. The first of them was Dante who stated in his 'Convivio':

> …everybody has to know that no thing which has been harmonized according [to the rules of] a musical connection can be rendered from one's own language into another without breaking all of its sweetness and harmony. [9] (transl. *Z.I.*)

Despite the above quote, which might make any translation look like a prodigiously futile task, poetry has always been and still is translated from one language into another. Moreover, the translation of poetry is justly considered to be a unique and important source of cross-cultural influence, a 'vehicle of civilisation'. Pushkin called translators 'post-horses of civilisation'[10] and, once again, Brodsky observes:

> Civilization is the sum total of different cultures animated by a common spiritual numerator, and its main vehicle – speaking both metaphorically and literally – is translation. The wandering of a Greek portico into the latitude of tundra is a translation. [11]

One does not have to grope for examples to illustrate this culture-spreading aspect of poetic translation. It will suffice to recall that the history of the whole of Latin poetry began in 240 BC when Lucius Livius Andronicus produced a translation of a Greek drama, which then became the first formal play for the then comparatively uncultured Romans. The translator is to this day regarded as the father of Roman drama and epic poetry.

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[7] Ibid., p. 139.
[8] Hannah Arendt, "Remembering Wystan H. Auden, Who Died in the Night of the Twenty-Eighth of September, (Auden, W.H. 1907-1973). *The Harvard Advocate*. Vol. CVIII, Numbers 2 and 3. A special Auden double-number, (Cambridge (MA): Harvard Advocate, [1975]), p. 42.
[9] Original quote: 'E però sappia ciascuno che nulla cosa per legame musaico armonizzata si può de la sua loquela in altra transmutare sanza rompere tutta sua dolcezza e armonia.'. Quoted in Dante Allighieri. ,Il Convivio', *Le Opere di Dante*. (Firenze: Nella Sede Della Società, 1960) p. 155.
[10] Quoted in Joseph Brodsky, "On Richard Wilbur: review", *The American Poetry Review*, 2:1, (Jan/Feb 1973) p
[11] Brodsky. 'The Child of Civilization', *Less Than One*, p. 139.

By this token the translation of poetry seems to be forever encircled by a paradox, which W.H. Auden thus encapsulated it in his foreword to the English edition of translations of the Greek poet, Constantine Cavafy:

> Ever since I was first introduced to his poetry … over thirty years ago, C.P. Cavafy has remained an influence on my own writing; that is to say, I can think of poems which, if Cavafy were unknown to me, I should have written quite differently or perhaps not written at all. Yet I do not know a word of Modern Greek, so that my only access to Cavafy's poetry has been through English and French translations.
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> This perplexes and a little disturbs me. Like everybody else, I think, who writes poetry, I have always believed the essential difference between prose and poetry to be that prose can be translated into another tongue but poetry cannot. [12]

The excessive difficulty of the task in combination with the task's great importance puts a translator of poetry into the position of a quest hero. Among all such quest heroes in the long history of the translation of poetry in English, there was no other poet who dedicated himself with a greater devotion than Joseph Brodsky. He approached his translation with a fervour verging on the quixotic, squaring the circle of poetic translation, defying the spell of impossibility and bridging single-handedly the linguistic gap with great energy. It might be argued that no one's efforts seem to have produced greater controversy in the English speaking world either.

The phenomenon of the 'English Brodsky': author & self-translator

If it is true, as Brodsky believed, that the durability of the poet's afterlife is secured by the longevity of the language itself in which the poet writes, then, one might say, Joseph Brodsky secured himself twice as long an afterlife by having written both in Russian and English. For, as suggested by his former assistant and now literary executor, Ann Kjellberg, Brodsky, a distinguished poet and writer in his mother tongue of Russian, nonetheless managed to leave through his translations and original compositions in English an important trace in his adoptive language as well:

> At the time of his death in 1996 Brodsky was recognized as one of the great poets of his mother tongue; yet after twenty-four years in the United States, and decades of teaching and studying poetry in English, he had become a master of his adoptive

[12] W. H. Auden. *Forewords & Afterwords* (Random House: New York, 1973) p. 333.

> language as well. The poems collected here … are the voice of a citizen of the world, exploring the territories of language itself.[13]

These words of Kjellberg open an over five-hundred-page-long volume *Joseph Brodsky: Collected Poems in English* published in 2001 in New York by *Farrar, Straus & Giroux.* 'The title of this hefty book,' as one of Brodsky's co-translators Weissbort observes, 'is challenging, rather than … simply factual.'[14] Weissbort disputed the factual character of the title, as he was aware that his own contribution as a co-translator, and that of others, was elided by the title. Furthermore, he questioned the genuinely English nature of the poems.

Indeed, neither the place of Brodsky's birth St. Petersburg (or Leningrad as it was known in Stalinist Russia) nor its timing (1940) could have presupposed the emergence of the English poet Brodsky. And yet, the volume consists predominantly of translations from Russian made by the author himself, or in collaboration with different translators; there are also about fifty poems written by Brodsky in English directly as well as some of Brodsky's translations into English of poems by other Russian and Polish poets.

Brodsky had very idiosyncratic ideas about translation – or at least they appeared idiosyncratic in the English-speaking world, where translating formal poetry into unrhymed free verse has long been a standardized approach. Brodsky, on the other hand, insisted strongly on a mimetic translation, i.e. a translation which would retain a poem's verse structure – especially its rhymes, verse metre, rhyme patterns and stanzaic design should be preserved above all. And yet, as Walter Benjamin has suggested, such a translating strategy renders the translator's task enormously more difficult. [15]

Soon after Brodsky's expulsion in 1972 from the Soviet Union and his settling in the USA, the translation of his own verse into English became a matter of Brodsky's professional career as an American poet. Supervising the translations of his verse from Russian into English done by other translators, Brodsky set out to adjust the translations in line with his idea that above all the metrical structure of the originals should be preserved in translation. This practice of authorial revision was not received with enthusiasm by many of his co-translators and met with harsh attacks from critics, many of whom claimed that in reworking

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[13] Joseph Brodsky, *So Forth*, (New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux: 1996), dust-jacket.
[14] Daniel Weissbort. ‚Something like his own language' (review). (March 2003) URL http://www.nd.edu/~ndr/issues/ndr14/reviews/weissbort.html (accessed on 18 June 2007) p. 1.
[15] 'Wie sehr endlich Treue in der Wiedergabe der Form die des Sinnes erschwert, versteht sich von selbst.' Walter Benjamin. ‚Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 18.

translations by others Brodsky overstepped the rules of English grammar and prosody and that his self-translations did not sound idiomatically or metrically correct in English.

Brodsky's collaborative translators often found it difficult to meet his translation requirements, both because of the different trends in English and Russian poetic traditions as well as because of the wide differences between Russian and English grammatical structures – some of which Brodsky himself described in an interview:

> It's easier to translate from English into Russian than the reverse. It's just simpler. If only because grammatically Russian is much more flexible. In Russian you can always make up for what's been omitted, say just about anything you like. Its power is in its subordinate clauses, in all those participial phrases and other grammatical turns of speech that the devil himself could break his leg on. All of this simply does not exist in English. In English translation, preserving this charm is, well, if not impossible, then at least incredibly difficult. So much is lost. [16]

In the above quote Brodsky is referring to the main grammatical contrasts between English and Russian, which have repercussions for the practice of the verse of poetry between these languages. Russian is a highly inflected polysyllabic language with an abundance of subordinate clauses. English is monosyllabic with hard and fast word order and simplified inflection and a dearth of subordinate clauses. This makes the task before a translator almost impossible, if it should be reconciled with Brodsky's principle of mimetic translation. This well-nigh impossibility was admitted by Brodsky himself:

> Translation from Russian into English is one of the most horrendous mindbenders. There aren't all that many minds equal to this. Even a good, talented, brilliant poet who intuitively understands the task is incapable of restoring a Russian poem in English. The English language simply doesn't have those moves. The translator is tied grammatically, structurally.[17]

And yet despite this admission that the task of even an ideal mimetic translator was likely to be doomed by the existence of enormous hurdles on the path of Russian-English translation, Brodsky 'insisted religiously on retention of the form (rhyme and especially the metre).'[18] In fact already at the time of the preparation of *A Part of Speech* (1975-1980), the first collection of his English translations brought about under his supervision, Brodsky set out to redo the translations completed by others applying 'the dictates of his own … ear,'[19] in

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[16] Solomon Volkov. *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, (New York: The Free Press, 1998) p. 86.
[17] Ibid., p. 86.
[18] Daniel Weissbort. ‚Something like his own language' (review). (March 2003) URL http://www.nd.edu/~ndr/issues/ndr14/reviews/weissbort.html (accessed on 18 June 2007).
[19] Ann Kjellberg. 'Editor's Note' to Joseph Brodsky, *So Forth*, (New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux: 1996) p. xiv.

bringing them as he believed 'closer to the original'[20]. Brodsky admitted, however, that this was perhaps done 'at the expense of their smoothness.'[21]

Such a practice of revision by the author naturally led to conflicts with translators. As early as 1979 Brodsky was inclining more and more towards the idea of becoming his own self-translator:

> My main argument with translators is that I care for accuracy and they're very often inaccurate - which is perfectly understandable. It's awfully hard to get these people to render the accuracy as you would want them to. So rather than brooding about it, I thought perhaps I would try to do it myself.[22]

In *So Forth* (1996) – Brodsky's last collection of verse in English, published posthumously – this shift in his translation practices seemed to be definite: of the forty translations of the collection thirty-two were made by Brodsky himself and only eight in collaboration with other translators; one third of the poems were composed directly in English.

Outline of the thesis

In the present thesis I will investigate Brodsky's translation methods with the intention of assigning them a place within both English literature as well as within the practice of poetic translation into the English language. There is a relative paucity of research dedicated to Brodsky's self-translation. What little has been written on this topic, especially in the decade following Brodsky's untimely death in 1996, tends to repeat a few tired platitudes on both sides of a polarized and static debate. Clearly there is a need for a change in the critical approach to the field of Brodsky's self-translations. For the first time in the history of this field, this thesis dedicates to some of these translations a detailed textual analysis, with the aim of establishing Brodsky's exact translational procedures, and of assessing their success or otherwise within the context of practices of English poetry translation. The inquiry has been immensely enriched by the very recent availability of research materials of the Joseph Brodsky Estate at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale since 2005. These

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[20] Quoted in: Joseph Brodsky, *Collected poems in English*, 1972-1996; Ann Kjellberg (ed.). (New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux: 2000) p. 507.
[21] Idem.
[22] Birkerts, Sven. 'The Art of Poetry XXVIII: Joseph Brodsky: Interview', *Paris Review* 24, (Spring 1982) pp. 82-126. Quoted in: Joseph Brodsky. *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*. Ed. Cynthia Haven, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002) pp. 73-74.

fascinating and wide-ranging materials, previously inaccessible to researchers, constitute the principal archival base for the present PhD project.

In light of Brodsky's insistence on form in poetic translation, a thorough theoretical background in verse theory would seem to be indispensable for this investigation. Because the idea of mimetic translation has long been considered outdated in the English literary circles, the choice of a theorist naturally led back to Russia. There, in part because of the different trends in Russian poetry, metrical studies flourished in the twentieth century. Viktor Zhirmunsky's *Verse Theory*, largely due to its comparative approach, provides the necessary theoretical background in terms of both metrical theory as well as the theory of formal translation of poetry.

Relying on my detailed analysis of previously undiscovered translation materials, I will try to demonstrate that the introduction of 'un-English' elements was not the only consequence of Brodsky's reworkings of translations of his poems done by other co-translators. I will attempt to show that Brodsky based his self-translating practices on compositional principles partly alien to the context of the English poetic tradition. One example of this is his insistence on preserving feminine rhymes in English, a quite common practice in Russian, but also one which strikes the English ear as comical or unserious. Nonetheless his experiments in self-translation are by no means failures.

My hypothesis is that Brodsky achieved in his translated versions alliterations, assonances and consonance that function in their own right. Another hypothesis is that in his self-translations in English Brodsky reinvented metaphors, similes and puns, so that the translations fall into the category of authentic and independent texts in the realm of English verse. The bond between the form and content in them is as inseparable here as it is in Brodsky's Russian originals. The effect of the rhymes Brodsky finds in English is comparable to those he had created in his originals. I will try to demonstrate that these rhymes, quite possibly the main mechanism of his verse composition, were not only often more exact than those proposed by his co-translators, but also displayed metaphysical wit and often worked as independent puns in English.

As I will also try to show on the basis of a minute textual analysis of various drafts of his translations, there was another important consequence of Brodsky's reworkings of the translations: namely that they became considerably more faithful to the originals in terms of their content and conveyed more faithfully the shades of various meanings (metaphorical vs. literal), tonalities, and various registers of speech. Moreover, as an author and translator in

one person, Brodsky possessed a unique freedom to undertake changes to his own original metaphors, images, similes and puns.

All these properties of Brodsky's involvement in his self-translations contributed to the emergence of independent artefacts in English, despite the presence of some foreignising characteristics.

Breakdown of the chapters

Chapter One will offer an introduction to the critical debate which has taken place in the past decade in the field of English literary criticism on the subject of Brodsky's self-translations. I will attempt to show that during this period 'trading of opinions' – in other words the exchange of two polarised and almost formulaic standpoints and perspectives – has become the main path of scholars and critics in the field of Brodsky studies. One party charges Brodsky with 'un-Englishness'; the other tries to legitimise Brodsky's English poems by referring them back to their Russian originals. I will also describe the deadlock of critical thought into which this trading of opinions has led scholars and critics. Subsequently, I will propose a new approach to the subject: an attempt to show with reference to concrete examples the single phases of Brodsky's transmutations of translations of others as well as the experiments of his own self-translations. Such an attempt consists of revealing in detail the logic of the author-translator when prompted by a certain translational decision. I also mention the use I make in the course of this detailed investigation of the new, previously inaccessible, archival materials.

In Chapter Two I list the new materials used in the present thesis, which go well beyond the existing critical literature on the subject of Brodsky's self-translations. I will also specifically list the categories of the accessed material as well as suggest new results, which may be attained thanks to the new availability of these materials.

In Chapter Three I will endeavour to show two main trends in the theory of translation, i.e. that of literal and adaptive (or mimetic) translation. After a brief introduction to the history of poetic translation in Russia I will show that the practice of poetic translation first evolved in Russia in the XVIII c. under strong influence of French classicism and its principles of 'embellishing' translation. Already by the first decades of the XIX c., not without the influence of German Romantic theorists of translation, the practice of embellishing translation was superseded by the mimetic translation. The technique of mimetic

translation, first fully practiced and perfected by Pushkin, has been the mainstream technique of poetic translation into Russian to the present day. Mimetic translation presupposes attempts by the translator to find precise metrical and stylistic equivalents of the foreign original in the target language, both on the level of form and content. In his translations of foreign poets into Russian Brodsky was demonstrably a talented pupil of this school of poetic translation.

Further I will present the other theoretic extreme in the domain of poetry translation – namely that of literal translation with Walter Benjamin as one of its most vocal proponents. Some parts of the chapter will be dedicated to presentation of Benjamin's translation theory. Benjamin linked the project of literalness of poetry translation to the idea of foreignisation of the target language. Through translation the translator was supposed to widen the boundaries of the target language through a faithful tribute to the foreign sensibility as well as the authorial artistic intention, entailed in the foreign original. In the light of the both contrasting translation theories I will propose my hypothesis. In my view, Brodsky was clearly an apologist of a mimetic method both in his practice of translation into Russian as well as in his pronouncements on theory of Russian-English poetic translation. When it came to his self-translations into English, however, Brodsky persistently introduced foreignising elements, which were supposed to reflect the author's sensibility as well as his original artistic intention. Thus a seemingly 'mimetic' Brodsky in his English reincarnation strongly leaned towards the foreignisation of a translation, typical of literalistic translating approach.

In Chapter Four I will describe the central theoretical standpoints and hypotheses of this thesis. Brodsky, as has been said already, believed that the form should be retained in translation. In the view of this translational conception, a thorough study of Anglo-Russian metrical contrasts seems obligatory. In this chapter I will describe the theoretical contrasts between English and Russian metrical systems and usages as they were represented in the metrical theory of translation of Viktor Zhirmunsky. I will also outline the repercussions of these theoretical findings for a new assessment of Brodsky's self-translational experiments.

In order to explain Brodsky's significant place in English literature, and thus the relevance to English literature of the self-translations of a Russian poet, I present in Chapter Five an outline of Brodsky's biography. I will concentrate my attempts on reconstructing Brodsky's relationship with English: the history of his acquisition of the language in its various stages. I will further endeavour to show the growing importance of English translation of his verse with the general growth of his renown in the world of American and English

letters and how the translations of his original verse into English became vitally important for Brodsky's career in America.

Towards the end of Chapter Five I will give a short introduction to the history of *A Part of Speech*, the first collection of Brodsky's verse in English assembled with the author's active involvement. (The reconstruction of the history of *A Part of Speech* was based on research at the Farrar, Strauss and Giroux archives at the *New York Public Library*). I will attempt to demonstrate that Brodsky was virtually the curator of the collection. He found and commissioned the translators himself, provided them with interlinear versions, and oversaw their work. This managerial aspect of Brodsky in *A Part of Speech*, which has been overlooked by previous scholars, rebuts the attacks of those critics who have rebuked Brodsky for his 'interference' into the translation process of his verse into English.

At the same time I will mention some conflicts between Brodsky and his translators – conflicts which were indicative of both the difficulties on the part of the co-translators in accepting his changes to their translation drafts as well as of the struggle on the part of the poet involved in the re-embodiment of his work, to accept every single line of it in translation.

As it is not possible to deal with all the translations and related materials, I have limited myself to the analysis of the materials pertaining to the collection *A Part of Speech* – whose preparation took Brodsky roughly five years from 1975 till 1980. It is in these materials – correspondence with co-translators, translation drafts, Brodsky's corrections and commentaries – rather than in the materials related to the two later English collections of his poems *To Urania* and *So Forth*, collections in which Brodsky made a definitive passage towards self-translation as opposed to co-operative translations that Brodsky's general translation approach as well as the logic behind his specific decisions becomes most apparent.

Chapter Six will be dedicated to prosodic theory. I will also introduce some extracts from the impassioned correspondence between Brodsky and Weissbort on the translations from *A Part of Speech* and will analyse the respective arguments of the poet and his translator. Further, I place the arguments of both parties in the context of both translation theory and metrical theory.

Chapter Seven offers a detailed textual analysis of the translation materials pertaining to the translation of the poem 'A second Christmas by the shore', which Brodsky completed in collaboration with George L. Kline. I open the textual part of the thesis with the analysis of this poem for two reasons: first, it is one of the last poems Brodsky wrote in strict metre, and second, because of Kline's adherence to the principle of the mimetic translation. The analysis

of this poem reveals a startling discovery, namely, that Brodsky was far more concerned with preserving the poem's *rhythm*, than with preserving its *metre*.

The analysis will be also used as a point of departure to show the instances where it was possible to trace the interrelatedness between form and content in the original poems. This in turn serves to demonstrate the specific difficulties in translating Brodsky.

Chapter Eight will deal with Brodsky's translation (made in collaboration with Weissbort) of the poem of the poem 'From nowhere with love' from the cycle "Chast' Rechi" ('A Part of Speech'). This cycle represented a new point of departure in terms of Brodsky's formal style. In it Brodsky made a transition to composition almost exclusively in *dolniks*, or accentual verse. After 'A Part of Speech' Brodsky would resort to classical syllabo-tonic metres only occasionally. The specificity of this verse metre complicated even further Brodsky's mutual understanding with his translators. In this chapter I will attempt to illustrate the reasons why this occurred, making again a recourse to Zhirmunsky's prosodic theory. The chapter will also touch upon some new topics and semantic aspects in Brodsky's poetic production following his expulsion from Russian and the way these aspects were rendered across translation.

Chapter Nine is dedicated to the discussion of the poem 'North buckles metal' translated by Weissbort and revised by the author. The particular interest of this poem lies in the fact that it touches upon the issue of Brodsky's forced confinement to the Arctic Circle during his life in the Soviet Union. His trial and confinement largely contributed to Brodsky's fame in the West; at the same time the inevitable consequence of this political notoriety was that less attention was paid to his art. Brodsky was opposed to this situation. The analysis of the translation drafts of this poem by the British poet and translator Weissbort as well as the subsequent revisions by Brodsky showed that translating poems, whose content both had strong imprint of the author's personal experience and reflected some Soviet realities which had no equivalent in the Western world, Brodsky's involvement proved invaluable in restoring right tonalities and interplays of style and registers. Brodsky's involvement in the translation of the poem resulted yet again in achieving an unbreakable bond between the form and content: the simultaneity of assonances and strong rhymes. And this happened despite the fact that Brodsky uses metrical devices partly alien to English current usage. The chapter will also touch upon some interesting interpretational nuances of the poem, which have emerged in the course of the analysis of the translation drafts. This latter development echoes the

suggestion of Andreas Huyssen about the close connection between translation and interpretation.[23]

Chapter Ten will present my conclusions. Despite Brodsky's famous practice of mimetic translation into Russian (while still in the USSR) and his subsequent support of its use into English, it is clear that Brodsky's actual practice of self-translation into English does not entirely match these principles. This practice represented a symbiosis of the mimetic and foreignising approaches. On the one hand, instead of trying to find equivalents of his original verse metres in English, Brodsky in fact often attempts to reproduce their rhythmical structure, which is based on principles alien to English phonetics and prosody. Brodsky's continuous use of strong feminine rhymes in English translation contributes to the same effect of foreignisation. On the other hand, in his revisions of translations done by others, Brodsky constantly produced examples of euphonic-semantic unity in English, which works independently from the respective unity of his originals. Although partly based upon 'un-English' compositional principles these self-translations are comparable to the originals precisely, because of the presence in them of these authentic bonds between form and content. Brodsky's co-translating native speakers often came up with 'smoother' translations, i.e. translations which sounded as if they were written in English. Revising these translations in his determined refusal to accept 'smoothness' Brodsky succeeded in preserving in those reworked translations the presence of his unique artistic persona. His rhymes in English are infused with his metaphysical wit and often revealing of his eccentricity and wide knowledge.

Despite the fact that alongside the authentic unity between their form and meaning, the end-results of Brodsky's revisions and self-translations often possess some clearly un-English elements, it would be erroneous to consider those self-translations as mere freaks, oddities, museum curiosities. Taking advantage of hitherto undisclosed and underutilized materials, I will demonstrate that behind Brodsky's both ostentatious and laborious involvement into the translating process of his verse into English, there were considerations of some higher plane of regard than just the expediency of getting translated into English.

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[23] „Die Kunst der Interpretation hat die Kunst der Übersetzung in Theorie wie in Praxis weit überflügelt, und man hat es nie für nötig befunden, den engen Zusammenhang von Übersetzungskunst und Interpretationskunst näher zu untersuchen." Quoted from Andreas Huyssen, *Die frühromantische Konzeption von Übersetzung und Aneignung*; Studien zur frühromanischen Utopie e. deutschen Weltliteratur, Ausgabe: [Teildr.] Umfang: 24 S. **(**Schlieren: Maier, 1969), p. 8.

Brodsky's unique and genuine love of English made him consider his self-translations as a testing ground for the revival of the tradition of formal verse and to open the path of the cross-cultural influence within English poetry.

Such a phenomenon has had no precedence in the history of poetry translation and deserves a wider and more unbiased discussion in the larger context of translation theory.

Chapter 1: Critical debate over Brodsky's self-translations

Translations or originals?

Joseph Brodsky: Collected Poems in English (2001) can be justly considered 'a landmark volume in the history of poetry translation in English',[24] as suggested by one of Brodsky's co-translators and the author of several publications about Brodsky's translation activities, Daniel Weissbort. Its revolutionary effect is entailed in the author's decision, implemented by his editor in *So Forth*, to acknowledge translators and collaborators separately from the poems. This was supposed to be understood 'as an invitation to the reader to consider the poems as if they were original texts in English.'[25] Such an unconventional decision promotes translation, as it were, to the status of the original. At the same time it raises a number of questions.

What prompted a Russian born poet to take such an active part in his English translations? Was Brodsky's intervention into his own translations legitimate? Instances when a prose writer like Nabokov or Conrad achieved great prominence in his second language are quite famous: but can a poet break the linguistic barrier? Why would the author wish the poems to be read as original texts in English and not just as translations from Russian? Do these poems stand up to the challenge? Do they really correspond to the standards of original English verse? Can these translated poems after all be regarded as authentic poetry in English? What about the co-translators: did they not mind that their names cannot be found under each poem and that they are merely annotated at the back of the book?

The debate about many of these issues started to appear regularly on pages of famous journals, from *Times Literary Supplement* to *New York Review of Books*, beginning in 1980, the year of the publication of *A Part of Speech*. The debate reached its two highest points first after the award in 1987 to Brodsky of the Nobel Prize for literature and then in 1996, following his untimely death, and has not ceased ever since.

Since the mid-1990s this topic has also attracted some scholarly investigation of Brodsky's work as a translator into and from Russian and study on the phenomenon of his

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24 Daniel Weissbort. ‚Something like his own language', (review). (March 2003) URL http://www.nd.edu/~ndr/issues/ndr14/reviews/weissbort.html accessed 18 Jun. 07.
25 Ann Kjellberg. 'Editor's Note' to Joseph Brodsky, *So Forth* (New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux: 1996) p. xiii.

bilingualism. And nonetheless to this day one can say with confidence that Brodsky's self-translations have not yet been satisfactorily studied. A combination of factors such as the uniqueness of Brodsky's experiment along with his growing renown as an American writer produced an avalanche of critical opinions, without, however, resulting in genuine critical analysis of the problems and issues involved. Both the opponents and the supporters of his translation experiments seemed to have been locked in a stalemate, in which the former would press the argument of the 'non-Englishness' of these translations, whereas the latter would invariably point to Brodsky's distinction as a Russian or world poet. All the while, oddly enough, none of the participants in this debate have ever considered the possibility of answering the questions around Brodsky's self-translations by means of concrete textual analysis.

The apparent irresolvability of these questions can be partly accounted for by the specificity of the process of poetry translation itself. The constant question, which has so far seemed to remain open, is what standards should a translation be judged by after all: those of the source or those of the target language? Brodsky, as if willing to help his critics, wished his English translations to be judged exclusively by the standards of the target language, i.e. English. This brought him immediately into the firing line.

Brodsky's critics

Brodsky's critics can be divided clearly in two main categories: British and American.

The British critics were distinguished by their peremptory tone derived from their impression that Brodsky was an intruder from whose 'unsavoury' influence they had to protect the English language. Their attacks on Brodsky and their zeal to protect the purity of the language of the Great Empire can only be compared to the notorious activities of Académie française in their function as the defenders of French; their snobbery remains unchallenged. It is curious to observe that the protective fervour of the British critics grew proportionally to Brodsky's rising fame in America and in the world: in 1981 he won a MacArthur Award, in 1986 Brodsky's *Less than one* garnered a National Book Award for criticism, and in 1987 he won the Nobel Prize. In front of their eyes, a foreigner who obviously did not belong to the right club, received acclaim and prizes. This outrage ought to be stopped.

Most of these critics expressed themselves following the publication of *A Part of Speech* – Brodsky's first collection prepared under direct supervision of its author and in which Brodsky 'took the liberty of reworking some of the translations to bring them closer to the original.'[26] At first they only displayed their reservations about Brodsky's intervention into the translation process of his verse.

For instance, Peter Porter sustained in a review of *A Part of Speech,* published in 1980 by *The Observer*, that although Brodsky was fortunate in his translators and collaborators whose names 'read like a roll-call of an Academy of English-Speaking poets', and despite the circumstance that all the translation were supervised by the author with 'so much idiosyncratic labour and love', those translations still produced 'unease and lack of conviction in the reader.'[27] In another review of *A Part of Speech* Michael Schmidt, incidentally also British, called Brodsky 'his [own] worst translator.'[28]

The second wave of criticism came in the form of an authentic campaign against Brodsky initiated by the British poets – these jealous guardians of the sacred establishment. As was previously mentioned, these attacks coincided with Brodsky's rising American and international acclaim. Naturally enough, the award of Nobel Prize in 1987 stirred a new onslaught of criticism. Although this prize was awarded for his achievements in Russian poetry, it automatically boosted the popularity of his English poetry and prose: it must have seemed too much to bestow this honor on someone for whom English was just his second tongue. Brodsky also gave his critics a 'good' pretext for those attacks: in 1988 Brodsky's second collection in English *To Urania* was published under the poet's strict supervision. In this collection Brodsky made a decisive passage towards self-translation.

In 1988 there emerged two highly critical reviews, characteristically, as we said, from the British shores. The first was an outspokenly vitriolic article entitled 'Great American Disaster' written by Christopher Reid.[29] Reid maintained that at the beginning Brodsky's English poems had occupied 'a position of statelessness somewhere between Russian and English in a neutral zone called Translationese.' Brodsky, however, 'dared to dispense' (very incautiously and unwisely, according to Reid) with the privileges of this zone and set to

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[26] Quoted in: Joseph Brodsky, *Collected poems in English*, 1972-1996; Ann Kjellberg (ed.), (New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux: 2000) p. 507.
27 Peter Porter, ‚Satire with a Heart', *The Observer* (14 December 1980) p. 28.
28 Schmidt, Michael. 'Time of Cold: A Review of A Part of Speech', *New Statesman* (17 October 1980) p. 25.
29 Christopher Reid. 'Great American Disaster: review of To Urania', *London Review of Books* (8 December 1988) pp. 17-18.

making translations and to writing 'poems in English that demand to be judged purely on their own merits.'[30] So, Reid concluded, Brodsky could no longer be entitled to 'generous allowances'. Hence Reid's merciless verdict: the 'un-English' quality of Brodsky's performance, his 'grammatical unorthodoxy,' his lack of understanding of English idiom, his 'tone-deafness' and lack of ear in the language.'[31] Ironically such characteristics were attributed to a poet who just a couple of years later, in 1991, would be elected Poet Laureate of the United States of America.

In the second negative British review, Donald Davie maintained that because of Brodsky's 'strict' and 'intrusive' supervision the result was 'less than happy' and that the author-translator was 'less inward with English – especially with its rhythms and intonations – than he supposes'. Davie's conclusion, characteristically tinged with a reasonable amount of malice, draws into strong doubt the success of Brodsky's entire endeavour to bridge the gulf between English and Russian:

> … it's true that in Britain and in the United States most critics and reviewers have tin ears, and so it's necessary to re-state the obvious: history supplies hardly one instance of a poet writing to any purpose in anything but his native tongue. Given Brodsky's desolate situation away from Russian-speakers, one admires the courage and energy with which he has tried to conquer this crippling disadvantage.[32]

The most aggressive attack by Graig Raine came right after Brodsky's death, which could not simply be accidental: the dead are famous for not kicking back. Raine's main line of attack was against Brodsky's English. According to Raine, rather than demonstrating 'linguistic mastery' Brodsky was 'unable to achieve more than a basic competence in his adopted language'; what his English self-translations demonstrate instead is 'foreign ineptitude.'[33] For the drawbacks in his English translations, Raine maintains, Brodsky was alone to blame, for 'he was recklessly reworking the translations of Anglophone poets like Anthony Hecht and Richard Wilbur.'[34] Brodsky's English prose, which won him in January 1987 the most prestigious prize in the US, The National Book Critics Circle's Award,[35]

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[30] Reid. 'Great American Disaster', p. 17.
[31] Ibid, p. 17.
[32] Donald Davie. 'The saturated line: review *To Urania*', *Times Literary Supplement* (23-29 December 1988) pp. 14-15.
[33] Craig Raine, 'A Reputation Subject to Inflation', *Financial Times* (16/17 November 1996) p. xix.
[34] Idem ibid. I can with certainty affirm that this last bit of information (or rather public's disinformation) was false. As I could establish from studying the FSG archival material, the corrections Brodsky did to Wilbur's and Hecht's translations respectively were really infinitesimal, especially when compared to the reworkings of the translations made by Kline, Weissbort and Meyers and others.
[35] Lev Losev. *Iosif Brodskii: opyt literaturnoi biografii* [Joseph Brodsky: an experiment in literary biography] (Moskva: Molodaya Gvardiya, 2006) p. 385.

seemed to Raine 'fatuous and banal'. Brodsky, Raine concludes, 'was a nervous world-class mediocrity – bluffing but aware of his uncertain feel for the English language on which his international reputation was so precariously founded.'[36] There was a belated attempt in 2001 by a Scottish poet Lachlan Mackinnon to expose the bias of this second group of critics and to defend Brodsky, but his voice was soon drowned by the more potent ones in the British literary establishment. [37]

Interestingly enough, as we will see in the next section, the criticism of the first group produced more lasting and damaging effects on the reputation of 'English Brodsky' among none other than Brodsky scholars, who should seem more resistant to such barely veiled displays of gratuitous malice as one can find in the articles by Reid, Davie and especially Raine.

There followed less inimical reviews, for example, by Blake Morrisson, who while admiring Brodsky's prose, suggested that the English poems were not up to the English prose's high standards.[38] Finally in his review of the *Collected Poems in English* John Bayley still thought that Brodsky did not succeed in his 'daring task of trying to write the same book in both languages' and 'to make the two mutually convertible.' The reason was that 'Brodsky's poetic ear for English was not, could not be, as unerring as his ear for the melodies and nuances of his native tongue.' As the result, claims Bayley, Brodsky's 'poems which he either revised or wrote independently as 'English poems do not sound right at all.'[39]

Brodsky's defenders

To be sure 'English Brodsky' has had also favourable reviews and opinions coming also from native speakers of English, mostly, however, American or Trans-Atlantic, which confirms the impression of greater openness in the American literary establishment to the foreign 'intruders'. Among his defenders were such figures as Stephen Spender,[40] Peter Viereck[41], Howard Moss,[42] Richard Wilbur,[43] Mark Strand,[44] Anthony Hecht,[45] Derek

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[36] Craig Raine, 'A Reputation Subject to Inflation', p. xix.
[37] Lachlan Mackinnon. ,A break from dullness: The virtues of Brodsky's English verse', TLS, (22 June 2001) p. 11.
[38] Blake Morrison. 'The Muse and Mortals', *The Independent on Sunday* (24 November 1996) p. 35.
[39] John Bayley. ,The Brodsky Paradox', Los Angeles Times (29 October 2000) pp. 4-5.
[40] Stephen Spender. 'Letters to Brodsky,' (1972-1984), Joseph Brodsky Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, Uncat MSS 649, Box 19 Folder 18.
[41] See also: Peter Viereck. 'Letters to Brodsky,' (1973-1994), Joseph Brodsky Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, Uncat MSS 649, Box 19 Fld. 9.

Walcott,[46] Seamus Heaney,[47] Susan Sontag,[48] Michael Hofmann,[49] and the Librarian of Congress James Billington[50] –to name just a few.

Many of these reviewers such as Spender, Wilbur, Viereck, Moss, Hecht, Walcott, Heaney and Strand were poets themselves, most of whom shared with Brodsky an aesthetic affinity in their preference for the formal devices in poetry. A great number of them were either Brodsky's associates or direct translators of his poems in English. As such they were cognizant of the complexities of poetry translation and more predisposed to make greater allowances for Brodsky's translating methods. So, for instance, Richard Wilbur, the author of 'that miracle of adaptation,'[51] the translation of "Six Years Later", urged Brodsky in a letter to be 'frank intolerant and insistent' regarding Wilbur's translations.[52]

As opposed to his critics, unwavering in their disproval of Brodsky's English, some of his supporters approved of his translations in general, despite the fact that most of them recognized the existence of certain flaws in them, to which they themselves testified. So Seamus Heaney said upon hearing Brodsky's self-translations that 'the English ear comes up against a phonetic element that is both animated and skewed. Sometimes instinctively rebels at having its expectations denied in terms of both syntax and velleities of stress.'[53] At the same time Heaney mentions other instances in Brodsky's English self-translations when that selfsame 'English ear…yields with that unbounded assent that only the most triumphant art can conjure and allow.' [54] Similarly Derek Walcott, although recognizing 'knots' and 'difficulties' of Brodsky's English, marvels at the latter's 'determination to render, almost to

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[42] See also: Howard Moss. 'Letters to Brodsky,' (1982), Joseph Brodsky Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, Uncat MSS 649, Box 19 Fld. 38.
[43] Richard Wilbur. 'Letters to Brodsky,' (1977-1984), Joseph Brodsky Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, Uncat MSS 649, Box 19 Fld. 8.
[44] See also Mark Strand. 'Letters to Brodsky,' (1978-1995), Joseph Brodsky Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, Uncat MSS 649, Box 19 Fld.4. From now on to be quoted as 'Brodsky Papers, Beinecke.'
[45] See also Anthony Hecht. ‚Introduction' to Joseph Brodsky. A Part of Speech. (London-New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp. ix-xi.
[46] See also Derek Walcott. 'Magic Industry' [Review of To Urania by Joseph Brodsky]. The New York Review of Books.35:18 (November 24, 1988) pp. 1-12.
[47] See also Seamus Heaney. 'Brodsky's Nobel: What the Applause Was All About', *The New York Times Review* (8 November 1987) p. 18.
[48] See also Sontag. ‚Joseph Brodsky', in *Where the Stress Falls*, pp. 330-333.
[49] See also Michael Hofmann, 'On absenting oneself: review', *Times Literary Supplement* , London (10 January 1997) pp. 6-8.
[50] See Bibliography: 'Interviews', James Billington.
[51] Walcott. 'Magic Industry', p. 12.
[52] Wilbur, Richard. 'Letter to Brodsky from 13 May 1977', Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld. 8.
[53] Seamus Heaney. 'Brodsky's Nobel: What the Applause Was All About', *The New York Times Review* (8 November 1987) p. 1.
[54] Heaney. 'Brodsky's Nobel: What the Applause Was All About', p. 18.

deliver, the poem from its original language into the poetry of the new country.'[55] In the same manner, Michael Hofmann mentions that although some of the Brodsky's verse in English could sound like 'arrant and most provocative translationese … yet the reader continues to endow it with the status of an original, fully intended and supervised in every detail.'[56] Such tolerance on the part of the reader owes its origin to the fact that the reader 'accepts that it is only by some miracle that this writing exists in English at all.'[57] Hofmann also speaks of the reluctance of the critics to accept Brodsky in his own English – which Hofmann describes as Brodsky's 'an anarchic gift to his adopted language' – as rather 'churlish.' [58] (It might be mentioned that both Walcott and Hofmann are often regarded as foreign 'intruders' themselves).

Susan Sontag, who not knowing Russian, read Brodsky solely in English, found his translations sufficiently competent enough to appreciate the poet's genius:

> I think of Joseph Brodsky as a world poet – partly because I cannot read him in Russian; mainly because that's the range he commanded in his poems, with their extraordinary velocity and density of material notation, of cultural reference, of attitude. [59]

Lastly, the Librarian of Congress James Billington, responsible for the appointment of Brodsky as the Poet Laureate of the U.S. of America in 1991, shared his opinion in an interview conducted by me at the Library of Congress in February earlier this year. Billington suggested that Brodsky's English, with all its imported foreignising influence, was precisely a manifestation of this typically American phenomenon, which continuously helps to revive the country's poetry. [60]

Brodsky scholarship: translations as mere shades of originals

Whereas the general scholarship on Brodsky as a Nobel Prize winning Russian poet has boomed, the investigation of his self-translating patrimony has been very scarce. This relative lack of interest for the self-translating facet of Brodsky can be explained in part by the existence of the large body of negative criticism quoted in the section above devoted to

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[55] Walcott. 'Magic Industry,' p. 2.
[56] See also Michael Hofmann, 'On absenting oneself: review', pp. 6-7.
[57] Ibid, p. 7.
[58] Ibid, p. 8.
[59] Sontag. ‚Joseph Brodsky,' p. 332.
[60] See Bibliography, 'Interviews', Billington.

'Brodsky's critics': Brodsky's Russian poems must have appeared a considerably safer ground for the researchers.

Among those who eventually ventured to enter the 'shaky' field of studies dealing with Brodsky's self-translating patrimony, caution and uncertainty reigned. The general research method has so far been reduced to some not altogether convincing and half-hearted attempts at contesting the adverse criticism. It seemed as though the scholars, coming so far exclusively from Slavic and Comparative Literature departments, did not possess sufficient authority in the field and were left to rely on commonly held beliefs of others. The main strategy has been to juxtapose the set of opposite opinions on Brodsky's self-translations in the hope it seemed that with time more favourable judgements will come to outnumber the negative ones, as if the negative critique could be simply counterbalanced by the sheer force of numbers. (Thus, as late as in 2006 Volgina writes: 'Assessments of the Anglophone Brodsky are all over the map, and it is difficult to say which viewpoint will prevail in the future'.)[61]

As a matter of fact though, despite this continuous pursuit of favourable views on Brodsky in English, the scholars have been much more haunted and influenced by those negative ones. There seemed to be a sneaking suspicion among them that because Brodsky's defenders knew him personally or were his direct associates in translation (e.g. Walcott, Hecht and Viereck), they must have been enchanted by Brodsky's personal charisma and, as the consequence were more predisposed to make greater allowances for the eccentricities of his English poems.[62] To make the scholar's situation even more difficult, as the most favourable of the reviewers themselves were the first to admit, it was not without some provisos that Brodsky's self-translations might be promoted into the body of authentic English poetry.

Thus, as we will see below, no fundamental changes took place in this field of inquiry in the time span between 1998 and 2006.

In 1998 Valentina Polukhina tried to expand the field of inquiry by sending questionnaires to forty British poets with questions about Brodsky in English, as she recounts

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[61] Volgina, Arina. 'Iosif Brodskii and Joseph Brodsky', *Russian Studies in Literature: A Journal of Translations*, 42:3 (Summer 2006) p. 17.
[62] See also Volgina. 'Iosif Brodskii and Joseph Brodsky', p. 15.

in her article "Angliiskii Brodskii" (English Brodsky) (1998).[63] She does not, however, essentially change the perspective and the same views continue to be ruminated and re-discussed over and over again on the pages of dissertations and articles dedicated to the subject.

So, as late as in 2002 Natalia Rulyova in her PhD dissertation 'Joseph Brodsky: Translating Oneself', which contains interesting excursions into translation theory, finds herself under the spell of the same stock tropes and falls prey to them. In her attempt to cope with the negative criticism of 'English Brodsky' she suggests a 'proper' way in which Brodsky's poems in English are, according to her, supposed to be read. In what she herself entitled a 'Polemic Conclusion' of her dissertation, Rulyova writes: 'Brodsky's *author-translations* are products of a *secondary creative impulse* and, therefore, are individual and unique but, at the same time, tied to the Russian source text.' [64] Therefore, she concludes, 'reading Brodsky in English as if his texts originate in English can be misleading.'[65] This does not really lead one anywhere: Rulyova merely finds herself as it were defending Brodsky from his own intentions that the poems be read as originals.

In like manner Arina Volgina dedicates most of her relatively recent article 'Iosif Brodskii and Joseph Brodsky' (2006) to dealing with yet again the same set of stock tropes of negative responses to Brodsky's English self-translations. Without making any attempt at questioning the critique of English Brodsky, or even distinguishing between an organised campaign against and objectively expressed reservations (i.e. between Davie, Reid and Rain on the one hand and Peter Porter on the other) Volgina attributes all the responsibility for this critique to Brodsky's 'apparent independence from his Russian alter ego' which was reflected in his 'desire to be read in English, in the context of Anglo-American poetry, and without regard to the Russian original.' [66] This is what Volgina writes:

> Here the poet is, to all intents and purposes, hoist with his own petard, for instead of protecting his Russian alter ego from the pronouncements of the incompetent and serving as a vade mecum on that alter ego for the Anglophone reader who has to (Sic.)

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[63] Valentina Polukhina. 'Angliiskii Brodskii' [English Brodsky], *Iosif Brodskii: Tvorchestvo, lichnost', sud'ba. Itogi trekh konferentsii.* [Joseph Brodsky: art, persona, life. Summary of three conferences] (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal 'Zvezda', 1998) p. 49-59.
[64] Natalia E. Rulyova. 'Joseph Brodsky: Translating Oneself': PhD dissertation. (University of Cambridge, June 2002) p. 144.
[65] Rulyova. 'Joseph Brodsky: Translating Oneself', p. 144.
[66] Volgina. 'Iosif Brodskii and Joseph Brodsky', p. 16.

> courage to read Russian, Joseph Brodsky actually replaces Iosif Brodskii, thereby casting his international reputation into doubt. [67]

According to Volgina, Brodsky should have used his Russian 'laurels' as a shield against the adverse (but perfectly just, Volgina seems to suggest) native Anglophone criticism. Brodsky, on the other hand, chose to be read in English and 'hence', quite naturally in Volgina's opinion, deserved 'the devastating reviews by Peter Porter, Donald Davie, Christopher Reid and Graig Raine.'[68] Having mentioned yet again the self-same negative uncontested assessments of Brodsky in English, Volgina quite unexpectedly, without making any attempt to explain how she had got there, arrives at a rather flabbergasting conclusion:

> Joseph Brodsky is Iosif Brodskii's ideal translator: he precisely reproduces the poetic structure of the original and consciously rejects smoothness of line, forcing the English language to imitate the poetic intonation of Russian and motivating the reader to drill down to the source text.[69]

One might justly question: why does one need a translation in the first place, if one is afterwards expected to drill down to the source text? Does there exist such a fancy device with which to perform this odd operation? Or did Brodsky simply expect his English-speaking readers to collectively enrol in Russian classes in order to convince themselves that he was after all indeed an 'ideal translator' of himself, as Volgina suggests?

Trading in opinions, as I call it, has taken such a deep root in Brodsky criticism in recent years that Volgina does not even care to provide proofs of her conclusions or defend them with facts based on analysis of concrete translational materials. Instead she comes up with something even more fantastic:

> It is possible that the "English Brodsky" was producing his poems for just … Russian-reading Anglophone readers. It may also be that he conceived his self-translations as guide-books to his authentic – his Russian – poetry, as a kind of self-commentary that is not refined to the smoothness of an independent production and is only there to help the non-native-Russian reader make sense of the multileveled Russian text and clarify for himself its poetic structure.[70]

Volgina seems to suggest that Brodsky translated his poems into English, thereby investing so much of his energy, time and effort in this equally nerve-racking process both for him and for his co-translators, and exposing himself to the vehement criticism of the native critics – merely as an academic exercise. But it is well known that Brodsky was ever

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[67] Ibid., p. 16.
[68] Idem.
[69] Ibid., p. 18.
[70] Ibid., p. 16.

unwilling to provide any commentaries to his poems whatsoever. Needless to say such a suggestion is not only nonsensical, but also very indicative of the lamentable state of research, so far dedicated to the subject of Brodsky's self-translations.[71]

Brodsky scholarship: need for change

> 'A poet must be judged by his intention.'
> (from 'Letter to Lord Byron' W.H. Auden) [72]

What has been going on so far in the field of the critical studies on Brodsky's experiments of self-translation could be reduced to a single dialogue in which the critics would say: '– This is not English' and the scholars, having nothing better to offer in response, persistently reiterate: '– Look at the originals: in Russian he is great.' This has brought the whole debate to a deadlock. How might one escape from this deadlock?

In the meantime, as early as in 1988 Derek Walcott suggested that the allegations of 'un-Englishness', to which the Slavic scholars have so far so surrendered, might be after all not altogether sound:

> If some critic of Brodsky's work says "this isn't English," the critic is right in the wrong way. He is right in the historical, the grammatical sense, by which I do not mean grammatical errors, but a given grammatical tone. This is not "plain American, which dogs and cats can read," the barbarous, chauvinistic boast of the poet as mass thinker, as monosyllabic despot; but the same critic, in earlier epochs, might have said the same thing about Donne, Milton, Browning, Hopkins. …. There is a sound to Brodsky's English that is peculiarly his, and this sound is often one of difficulty. [73]

If one was to assume, as Walcott suggests, that Brodsky's eccentricities of English simply reflected the idiosyncrasies of his singular poetic voice (with all its Russian vibrations), then, instead of entering into a fruitless and abstract polemic with the critics, one could equally well dedicate this phenomenon a thorough and detailed textual study. Such an attempt is long overdue.

It is high time to recognize that the work of Brodsky the poet is an indivisible sum of his Russian and English verse – indivisible precisely because both their corpora lead an

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[71] Rulyova also points out the lack of thorough criticism on the subject of Brodsky's self-translations and sets herself to produce a change. Her attempt is, however, hampered by the fact that she falls in the trap of having to justify Brodsky from criticism on terms set by his critics. See also Rulyova. 'Joseph Brodsky: Translating Oneself': PhD dissertation, Cambridge University Library. p. 15.
[72] Auden, Wystan Hugh. *Collected Poems,* Ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1976) p. 89.
[73] Derek Walcott. 'Magic Industry', p. 4.

existence in their own right and display merits and flaws in their own right. Thus Derek Walcott:

> What is extraordinary, in fact phenomenal in its effort, is the determination to render, almost to deliver, the poem from its original language into the poetry of the new country. To give the one work, simultaneously, two mother tongues. … [the poems] are not so much translated as re-created, by Brodsky himself, an achievement that makes him an even greater poet than we shruggingly acknowledge him to be.[74]

This is again just another opinion, the pedants might object; in answering these pedants one could actually go even further and say that it is ultimately not relevant whether Brodsky did succeed or not in producing genuine English poems, as many critics have so far endeavored to disprove. What actually matters is that his self-translations became through his touch-ups and reworking creations radically independent of the originals.

In the same assessment Walcott tries to describe the mechanisms of the linguistic transplantation Brodsky achieved in his self-translations:

> A great modern Russian poet, an heir of Mandelstam, is plenty for one man to be in his lifetime, but to have re-created from the original Russian a poem as spacious, as botanically precise, as delightful in its rhymes as his ‚Eclogue V: Summer', and then to think of Edmund Spencer's ghost rustling behind its pages, to recall Keats and Clare in their own language, is more than a technical feat of adaptation. There is, for one reader, no yearning for the original Russian, no sense of vacancy, of something lost or not rendered. It is the industry of magic. [75]

Long before Brodsky undertook his gargantuan enterprise of self-translation, a possibility of such a transformation was hypothetically conceived of by Auden by mere force of imagination:

> It is conceivable that a genuine bilingual poet might write what, to him, was the same lyric in two languages, but if someone else were then to make a literal translation of each version into the language of the other, no reader would be able to recognize their connection. [76]

Many of Brodsky's critics might again hasten to object that he was not after all the 'genuinely bilingual poet' Auden describes. Yet what they could not deny is that Brodsky's 'phenomenal effort' highlights the essential questions of poetry's translatability: Why are there some elements in poetry that can be translated while others cannot? Are there some elements in poetry which are separable from their original verbal expressions and what are

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[74] Derek Walcott. 'Magic Industry' [Review of *To Urania* by Joseph Brodsky]. *The New York Review of Books.*35:18 (November 24, 1988) p. 2.
[75] Derek Walcott. 'Magic Industry,' p. 2.
[76] Wystan Hugh Auden. *Forewords & Afterwords,* p. 334.

they? For the purposes of shedding some new light on these questions alone Brodsky's self-translations merit a thorough and detailed study.

Rather than simply by saying point blank, 'this isn't English,' it might well be more productive to investigate with reference to concrete examples what it actually involves to translate a poem from Russian into English, by such a poet as Brodsky, written in a certain verse metre, treating a certain theme, using a certain type of rhymes, certain set of cultural references etc. etc. It is high time to venture such an attempt and it will be undertaken in the pages to follow.

English Brodsky: a new perspective

The present PhD project is the first study to deal with the subject of Brodsky's self-translations from the perspective of English literature. For the first time, the translations of Brodsky are from the outset considered to belong to the body of English literature. On the one hand, this respects the poet's repeated wish for them to be regarded as authentic English creations. On the other, this decision is dictated by Brodsky's unique and exclusive attitude towards the English language:

> Although Brodsky remained a Russian poet first, his unique relationship to his adoptive language, filled with vigor and affection, brought forth body of work resting somewhere between translation and original creation, internally coherent, rich in linguistic and prosodic invention, and quickened by the spirit that had made him a great poet in his native Russian. If, as Brodsky wrote, a writer's biography is in his twists of language, an important chapter of his own story resides in these poems, exactingly rendered into his beloved second tongue.[77]

Brodsky many times repeated in his interviews as well as letters to his translators that his main driving force in undertaking corrections to the translated versions of others was his special attitude towards the English language and poetry, his almost obsessive love of it ('…his manifest love for English verse, which amounts almost to a possessiveness…' (Heaney).[78]). So, for instance, in an interview given to Sven Birkerts in 1982 Brodsky maintained that his main motivation in reworking his translations was neither excessive worry whether a certain line of his original was not badly rendered into English; nor did he aspire to further his career in American letters with the help of these self-translations. What Brodsky

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[77] Kjellberg. 'Editor's Note' to *So Forth*, p. xiv.
[78] Heaney. 'Brodsky's Nobel: What the Applause Was All About,' p. 18.

was after, according to his own claims, was to sustain in his self-translations a certain standard of the English language:

> I have the poem in the original, that's enough. I've done it and for better or worse it stays there. My Russian laurels – or lack of them – satisfy me enough. I'm not after a good seat on the American Parnassus. The thing that bothers me about many of those translations is that they are not very good English. It may have to do with the fact that my affair with the English language is fairly fresh, fairly new, and therefore perhaps I'm subject to some extra sensitivity. So what bothers me is not so much that the line of mine is bad – what bothers me is the bad line in English. [79]

If one was to accept the accusations of Brodsky's critics about his linguistic incompetence in English at face value, his assertion that his main concern in intervening in his self-translations was to preserve the dignity of the English language would pass for pure presumption. If, on the other hand, we were to cast aside, at least for a while, the critics' accusations as mere manifestations of native speakers' chauvinistic arrogance and snobbery, then an unprejudiced investigation into what Brodsky's conceptions of a 'dignified' English language actually presupposed, could be well worth our while. It is the latter approach that I suggest.

The decision to study Brodsky from within the realm of English literature has been corroborated by many of Brodsky's associates such as Barry Rubin and George L. Kline, Brodsky's literary executor Ann Kjellberg, the Librarian of Congress James Billington as well as Brodsky's widow and the head of the Joseph Brodsky Estate, Maria Sozzani.[80]

The present study, in contrast to the most of the articles, reviews and dissertations which have been written so far about the subject, whether negative or positive, is not based upon ready-made beliefs. It proceeds rather via a minute textual analysis, trying to reveal in detail (often applying line-by-line analysis) the logic of the author-translator when he was prompted to make this or that specific decision. I will attempt to show how the re-creation of the 'same' poem in English proceeded, what stood in its way, where Brodsky the author-translator succeeded and where he failed, and try to conjecture in each case why this occurred.

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[79] Birkerts, Sven. 'The Art of Poetry XXVIII: Joseph Brodsky: Interview', *Paris Review* 24, (Spring 1982) pp. 82-126. Quoted in: Joseph Brodsky. *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*. Cynthia Haven (ed.), (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002) pp. 73-74.

[80] Personal conversations with Maria Sozzani (Milano, January 2005), Ann Kjellberg (New York, June 2005), James Billington (Washington DC, January 2007), George Kline (Anderson, South Carolina, January 2007), Barry Rubin (New York, February 2007), Derek Walcott (New Haven, October 2007), Richard Wilbur (New Haven, December, 2007).

Given that in poetry form is inseparable from the content, as was said at the beginning, I shall attempt to establish what kind of effect a combination of a certain form with a certain context produced in the original, whether there existed any tension between them and, ultimately, whether it was after all possible to preserve those elements in translation.

At the same time I shall seek to assess how these decisions fit within the English prosodic and broader poetic tradition and which contrasts with the respective Russian traditions they reveal.

Chapter 2: Archival research: gathering materials, cataloguing, interviews

Archival research, cataloguing and interviews are *the sine qua non* of the present dissertation. Meetings and correspondence with Brodsky associates have clarified many of my ideas about Brodsky's life and position in the United States of America as a person and a poet. Inestimable information obtained from persons who either knew Brodsky personally or were directly involved in his translations provided me with unique insights into Brodsky's motivation to translate his poetry into English. It would not have been possible to obtain such information from merely reading the critical literature.

This thesis draws nearly upon new evidence and new research materials gained through direct library and archival research at the St. Petersburg National Library (2004), Cambridge University Library (2004), New York Public Library (2005), Library of Congress in Washington (2007) as well as, above all, in the Brodsky Estate at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale (June-November 2005) as a researcher, and as a cataloguing archivist (September-May 2008). Their materials enormously enriched the scope of the present project. Research in these archives and libraries brought to light documentary materials not previously accessed by other researchers. The extent of these research materials goes well beyond the existing critical literature. This factor should enable this present project to produce, I hope, a change in the perspective of the subject of Brodsky's self-translations. Such a new perspective could help break the prolonged impasse which critical debate has reached in the last decade or so as the result of simply posing one set of 'contrasting views' against another, as opposed to the analysis of concrete textual materials on the subject.

Beyond the extensive archival materials upon which the thesis draws, other less tangible resources have been of inestimable importance.

A number on non-print format archival materials were of significance, especially recordings, films and videos of Brodsky reading his poetry, which afforded an idea of the concrete realisation of his prosodic theories.

Private correspondence between me and many of Brodsky's friends and collaborators filled some of the gaps in the archival material. Letters graciously provided by Alexander Sumerkin, Ann Kjellberg, George L. Kline, Peter France, Daniel Weissbort and Barry Rubin supplemented what could be learnt from the archives listed above.

I have benefited from the recollections and anecdotes of many people who knew Brodsky or worked with him. Conversations with Anne Kjellberg (Brodsky's literary executor), Alexander Sumerkin (Brodsky's friend, Russian secretary and editor of Brodsky's last Russian collection of verse *Peizazh S Navodneniyem*), Barry Rubin (Brodsky's friend, translator and associate), Derek Walcott (Brodsky's friend and Nobel Laureate), Nancy Meiselas (Brodsky's secretary at Farrar, Straus & Giroux publishing house in New York), George L. Kline (Brodsky's translator and co-translator as well as a close associate) , Valentina Polukhina (a Brodsky scholar), Daniel Weissbort (Brodsky's translator and co-translator), James Billington (the Librarian of Congress) provided a wealth of important information on Brodsky's life in the USA, his position in American letters as well as his translating and self-translating activity. Conversations with the Lady Natasha Spender (the widow of Stephen Spender) and Edward Mendelson (literary executor of W.H. Auden) shed some new light upon Brodsky's early days in the West, his historic meetings with Auden and Spender as well as some details about their subsequent friendships. My conversations with Yakov Gordin (Russian poet, Brodsky's friend and editor) and Vladimir Uflyand (close friend of Brodsky and his favourite Russian contemporary poet) elucidated for me some hitherto unknown details of Brodsky's early period in the Soviet Union. Maria Sozzani (Brodsky's widow and the head of the Brodsky Estate) shared with me in a conversation her reminiscences of Brodsky's later period in their common apartment in Brooklyn, New York. When the interlocutors gave permission, these conversations were recorded and thus exist as private audio material.

Research Results

This thesis offers new insights upon Brodsky as a self-translator precisely because it draws upon the hitherto unaccessed materials described above.

Access to the archival materials alongside discussions with Brodsky's friends and associates in America clarified many matters that had remained heretofore unclear. Namely, that right from the outset the English language was Brodsky's immediate environment in America. Hence it was of primary importance to Brodsky to establish his reputation as a poet and as a writer first and foremost in the English language. Brodsky's reputation as a poet in his newfound literary environment depended on the way his works were translated into English. This determined translation strategies not previously identified by other researchers.

Once the way the poet related to the American public and the way his highly idiosyncratic manner of reciting poetry both in Russian and English was received by that public became clear, Brodsky's audiences were enthralled by his personal charm, wit, mastery of and love for the English language and English-language poetry. Despite his accent and emphatic manner of recitation (which stood in such a contrast with the self-effacing recitations of most American poets) Brodsky attracted large audiences of admirers of his English verse.

Joseph Brodsky's personal charisma, his energy, and his respect for the English language made him an unchallenged promoter of both English and Russian poetry in America during his lifetime. Contrary to the perceptions of many a Russian researcher wishing to claim him as exclusively a Russian poet, it has become increasingly obvious that even before his untimely death in 1996 Joseph Brodsky had been recognized as a significant authority and a part of American cultural patrimony by some major figures of the American poetic and literary landscape. Moreover, Joseph Brodsky played a very prominent role in the shaping of this same landscape as, for example, when during his diligent tenure as Poet Laureate in 1991-1992, he promoted putting poetry collections in hotel rooms and selling them in American supermarkets.

Working in the English language, whether translating or writing poetry, was for Brodsky an absorbing process, one quite different from his compositional norms in Russian. It gave him a chance to explore the possibilities of another language and with it another sensibility which the use of this language implies. As an illustration of what Brodsky understood under a different sensibility, I shall quote here a passage from a draft of his unpublished essay written at his later period called 'Learning English'. In this essay Brodsky describes how he right from his youth associated the sound of the English language with certain moral values:

> I should take pity on you, the audience, since for all your colonial past, you can't have any idea as to the impact of English monosyllabics upon a psyche formed by a polysillabic language. You can never total what a Russian or, for example, an Italian experiences at hearing something like "John Keats", "John Donne", "King James", "Robert Frost" or for that matter "Andrew Marvell", "Thomas Hardy", "Wystan Hugh Auden", "W.B.Yeats", "Thomas Stearns Eliot". For an Easterner or a Southerner there is a terrific finality to these names, abruptness, a sense of arrested destiny. They sound positively Northern, and he associates with them all those virtues of the North: the proximity to an absolute, resolve, reserve, the spirit of responsibility, grey eye. The closest you may come to the sense of I am trying to convey is the trumpet movements

> in Purcell's "Music for the Funeral of Queen Mary" where the intense sentiment, grief to be precise, doesn't make a meal out of itself.[81]

In the quote above, interestingly enough, Brodsky links these 'Northern' values with certain grammatical properties of English, in particular, its monosyllabic nature. English as opposed to such languages as Italian or Russian displays a certain scarcity of sound – therein, according to Brodsky, lies also its propensity for straightforwardness and reserve. Brodsky cherished a real love for both the language and the sensibility behind it for the greater part of his life.

In his disputes with translators over his corrections of their translating versions, Brodsky's frequent argument was that his greatest concern was 'dignity of the English language' in his translations. However paradoxical in the light of the criticism accusing Brodsky of 'insufficient' English such a claim might appear, this claim alongside other previously undiscovered archival materials suggests that these experiments in self-translation should be seen within a framework of Brodsky's 'larger project'. This 'larger project' could be summarized as a demonstration, via the process of self-translation out of a highly formalized poetic context, of the possibilities and the advantages of formal verse over free verse in English.

A critical analysis of a large body of hitherto inaccessible archival material suggests, overwhelmingly, that it was precisely Brodsky's special attitude towards English that culminated in this ambition to demonstrate on the example of his self-translations the potential of the compositional devices of the formal verse for the future development of English poetry. This 'larger project' was nothing more or less than an attempt to reconfigure the trends of American poetry. It certainly helps to explain Brodsky's willingness to subject himself to the merciless critiques which his translation activity engendered.

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[81] Joseph Brodsky, 'Learning English', (unpublished essay), Brodsky Papers, Beinicke, Box 12 Fld16.

Chapter 3: Theoretical standpoints and hypotheses

> 'Translation – is like a woman: if she is pretty, she is not faithful; if she is faithful – she is plain. (A Proverb)[82]

In his study *Die frühromantische Konzeption von Uebersetzung und Aneignung* Andreas Hyussen outlined the two principal trends amongst the various theories of poetical translation in modern European literatures:

> Die moderne literarische Übersetzung hat einen doppelten Ursprung: einerseits die geheiligte biblische Übersetzung, die Gewissenhaftigkeit und hohen Respekt vor dem Originaltext, dem Wort Gottes, sowie die Selbstaufgabe des Übersetzers verlangt gegenüber dem Schriftdenkmal, das für die Ewigkeit verfasst ist und an dem etwas zu ändern einer Hybris vor Gott gleichkommt; andererseits – vor allem bei der Aneignung klassisch antiker Literatur – das ästhetische Bemühen, die sensitive Empfänglichkeit für die Vollkommenheit des sprachlichen Kunstgebildes, die Faszination des Fremden, in das sich beim Übersetzen Eigenes mischt, und das erst in dieser Mischung voll und gültig erkannt wird; in diesem Sinne ist Übersetzen nicht sklavisches Reproduzieren – ein Vorwurf, der immer wieder erhoben wurde - , sondern verdoppeltes Dichtertum.
> Aus diesem zweifachen Ursprung der Übersetzungstheorie entstanden die sich vermeintlich ausschließenden Auffassungen vom wörtlichen und vom sinngemäßen Übersetzen, deren meist unfruchtbarer Streit die Geschichte der Übersetzungstheorie prägt.[83]

The quoted passage from Huyssen's book essentially shows the two main vectors, the two extremes of theoretical approaches of the translation theory: namely the trend towards literalness, on the one hand, and towards paraphrase and adaptation ("Aneignung"), on the other. For the purposes of a summary Huyssen does not point out quite understandably all the possible hybrid trends, which exist in the vast regions between the above-delineated poles. In the present chapter I will try to show Brodsky's position on the invisible scale between these two theoretical extremes.

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[82] Quoted in: Kornei Chukovski, *Perevody Prosaicheskie* [Prosaic Translations] (Petrograd: "Vsemirnaia literatura", 1919) p. 7.
[83] Andreas Huyssen, *Die frühromantische Konzeption von Übersetzung und Aneignung*; Studien zur frühromanischen Utopie e. deutschen Weltliteratur, Ausgabe: [Teildr.] Umfang: 24 S. **(**Schlieren: Maier, 1969), p. 12.

Brodsky and the tradition of Russian poets-translators

Brodsky articulated his theory of translation in the numerous interviews he gave in America as well as in his reviews of translations of Akhmatova and Mandelstam (See a detailed discussion of it in Chapter Five). As far as translation theory was concerned, Brodsky was a traditionalist at least in Russian terms. He believed that it was just as important in translation to render the formal structure of the original such as rhymes, verse metre, rhyme patterns and stanzaic design as it was to render the content.

The Russian tradition of poetic translation has its origin in eighteenth century in the epoch of classicism, which for a while was the leading influence in Russian literature. Neither Nicolas Boileau nor Lomonosov, Trediakovsky, Sumarokov, who all derived their ideas from Boileau, distinguished between the national cultures, nor between individual talents. In poetic art, ideas occupied the principal position, while the work of art itself was anonymous. The idea of the absolute artistic value of an artistic creation was at the core of the aesthetics of eighteenth-century Russian classicism. If the author could not bring to full expression the ideas of his work, it became the task of the translator to improve and to complete the work. If the same work had already been translated by several predecessors, the translator could and even should have tried to use all their achievements in order to continue and improve on their work: [84]

> The notorious disregard of the translators for the translated text should be linked to the fact that most of the dramatic pieces' translations were regarded as approximations to the absolute [artistic] value. Because the author of the original had not achieved his goal but had merely approximated himself to it, the translator deemed necessary to use the original author's achievements as well as those of other poets who came after him and to add to them one's own achievements; one should take the original one step further from the place where the author had stopped, one should embellish and improve the original… A translation that changes and corrects the text increases the value of the original, for the real goal is to offer the reader a valuable work, if possible, close to the ideal… (Transl. Z.I.) [85]

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[84] See also Grigorii Gukovskii, „K voprosu o russkom classitsisme" (On the subject of Russian classicism), *Rannie raboty po istorii russkoi poezii XVIII veka* (Early works on the history of the XVIII c. Russian poetry. ed. V.M. Zhivov (Moskva: „Iazyki russkoi kul'tury", 2001), p. 271.

[85] Gukovskii, „K voprosu o russkom classitsisme"p. 271. Original quote runs as follows: "Именно с тем обстоятельством, что большинство переводимых пиес рассматривались как приближения к абсолютной ценности, следует связать пресловутое неуважение переводчиков к переводимому тексту. Поскольку автор оригинала не достиг цели, а лишь приблизился к ней, нужно, отправляясь от достигнутого им и воспользовавшись достижениями поэтов, пришедших после него, прибавить к его достоинствам новые; нужно сделать еще один шаг вперед по пути, на котором остановился автор подлинника, нужно украсить, улучшить оригинальный текст ... Перевод изменяющий и исправляющий текст – лишь служит

The differences between languages should not represent obstacles for an absolute translation. Achieving such a translation would only be impeded by the lack of development of the language of translation. These aesthetic principles led to practice of "collective" translations as well as widespread poetic borrowings.

In the early nineteenth century a veritable revolution took place in Russian literary language. The innovative developments in the language of prose introduced from French by Karamzin were taken up by the poets Batyushkov and Zhukovsky (a good part of works of these poems consist of translations from French, Italian and especially German and English in the case of Zhukovsky). These early nineteenth-century poets as well as the translator of *Iliad* into Russian, N.I. Gnedich, gradually abandoned the classicistic positions of an ahistoric humanism, of the absolute, ideal work of art, of the translation oriented on the contemporary "harmonious" taste as well as the classicistic principle of an embellishing translation.[86] These changes in aesthetics did not occur without strong influence of German Romantic theoreticians such as Herder, Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Novalis and others.[87] The new conception of translation of these thinkers and translators, which differed from that of their classicistic predecessors, was formulated by the most systematic of them, Schleiermacher, in his essay "Uber die verschiedenen Methoden des Ubersetzens."[88] (1813) and summed up by Andreas Hyussen:

> Die verschiedenen Stufen des Übersetzens bei Schleiermacher haben eines gemeinsam. Nachbildung, Paraphrase und eigentliche Übersetzung setzen voraus, dass sich der Übersetzer der Fremdheit des Originals bewusst ist und dieses Fremde auf jeweils verschiedenem Wege in die eigene Sprache zu übertragen oder umzusetzen strebt.[89]

And yet, as shown by Efim Etkind in his exhaustive book *Russkie poety-perevodchiki ot Trediakovskogo do Pushkina* [90] (Russian poets-translators from Trediakovsky to Pushkin), both Batyushkov and Zhukovsky were still standing on the threshold of what was to become

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на пользу достоинству этого последнего. Важно ведь дать читателю хорошее произведение, по возможности близкое идеальному..."

[86] See also Efim Etkind. *Russkie poety-perevodchiki ot Trediakovskogo do Pushkina*. (Russian poets-translators from Trediakovsky to Pushkin), (Leningrad: Izdatelstvo "Nauka", 1973), 17-27.

[87] Ibid., pp. 75-77.

[88] Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher. "Uber die verschiedenen Methoden des Ubersetzens," (1813) *Akademievorträge. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. ed. M. Rössler, Erste Abt. Schriften und Entwürfe, Band 11 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 67-93.

[89] Andreas Huyssen, *Die frühromantische Konzeption von Übersetzung und Aneignung*; Studien zur frühromanischen Utopie e. deutschen Weltliteratur, (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1969) p. 127.

[90] Efim Etkind. *Russkie poety-perevodchiki ot Trediakovskogo do Pushkina*. (Leningrad: Izdatelstvo "Nauka", 1973).

the Russian mainstream conception of translation. In fact, they still displayed, in a rudimental form, the tendencies of the classicist approach to translation mentioned earlier. Both these poets enriched Russian poetry immensely with new tropes and imagery, which they borrowed from other literatures, but some of the formal aspects of poetry were perceived both by Batyushkov and Zhukovsky as neutral and abstract. Thus Etkind writes that Zhukovsky used indiscriminately the same verse metres in Russian (e.g. iambic pentameter) as metrical equivalent in the translation of different originals written in different verse metres:

> What is hexameter from Zhukovsky's point of view? It is merely an empty vessel, in which one can pour any semantic or stylistic content; it is for him a sort of conditionally-narrative verse, which has no historic or cultural relevance. It is free from associative connections. Essentially, Zhukovsky viewed other poetic forms in the same way, for example, the blank verse pentameter, which he used in a broad and indifferent manner. [91] (Transl. Z.I.)

Batyushkov displayed a similar attitude. For example, while translating from Tibullus Batyushkov used distich to translate the alexandrine of the Ancient Greek. Here is an excerpt from Etkind's book:

> Despite all the attention that Batyushkov pays to the imagery of the original, he uses alexandrine verse metre with the same indifference as Zhukovsky used pentameter and hexameter for a narrative. […] Similarly to Zhukovsky, Batyushkov renders different poetic forms of the original with the same verse metre [in Russian]. [On one occasion, for example], he translates Tibullus by substituting the distich of the ancient Greek with alexandrine; he does the same when he translates the hendecasyllabic octaves of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata (Jerusalem Delivered).* [….]
> In this respect Batyushkov is similar to Zhukovsky.[92] (Transl. Z.I.)

Etkind suggests that it was not until Pushkin that idea of the union between form and content had entirely established itself in Russian poetry:

> Before Pushkin's time the content and form were more or less separated. There was a gap between them, which led to an autonomy of the external form: most of all this relates to the verse meter, the rhythm and the lexical composition of verse. Only in

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[91] Efim Etkind. *Russkie poety-perevodchiki ot Trediakovskogo do Pushkina*, pp. 111-112.
Original quote: „Что же такое, с точки зрения Жуковского, гекзаметр? Пустой сосуд, в который может быть налито любое смысловое (стилистическое) содержание; некий условно-повествовательный стих, лишенный историко-культурной подкрепленности, свободный от ассоциативных связей. В сущности, Жуковский так же смотрел и на другие стиховые формы, например на белый пятистопный ямб, который употреблял широко и безразлично."

[92] Ibid. etkind p. 145. Original quote: „При всем внимании к образному строю оригинала Батюшков пользовался александрийским стихом с таким же безразличием, с каким Жуковский употреблял для повествования в стихах пятистопный ямб и гекзаметр.[...] Батюшков, подобно Жуковскому, одним и тем же стихом передает различные формы подлинника, александрийский стих в переводах из Тибулла заменяет древнегреческий дистих, в переводе из «Освобожденного Иерусалима Тассо».... В этом смысле Батюшков был ненамного более разборчив, чем Жуковский."

> Pushkin's … oeuvre every singular inner and outer artistic element is enclosed in a single system, which is ruled by an overriding principle. The meaning, style and sound: all these three components of the poetic word had at last formed an unbreakable unity in Pushkin's poetry. [93] (Transl. Z.I.)

Pushkin could only arrive at this radically new poetic approach thanks to his wide experimentation with poetical forms:

> The search for Russian poetry was led in the direction of precise, stylistically definite word. Not just harmony in general, but concrete harmony for every single thought, theme or emotion. It was Pushkin who discovered this kind of concrete harmony for the Russian poetry; he also created an infinite variety of harmonic verse forms, fitting for the most variegated types of semantic and emotional content.[94]. (Transl Z.I.)

Juxtaposing Pushkin's translation method to that of his immediate predecessors, Etkind shows that Pushkin had arrived at a radically new unity between form and content precisely through his extensive activity of a translator of French, English, Italian and other poetries. Thus Etkind comments on Pushkin's translation from Prosper Mérimée:

> Pushkin treats form differently. For Pushkin the form permeates content through and through: there cannot be anything neutral, interchangeable about it. The form is the content. For Pushkin the naked semantic content, which is deprived of form,turns out to be void, empty, and ultimately valueless. Pushkin aims at a poetic form in order to reconstruct precisely the imagined original, which hides behind the original French [prose] text…[95] (Transl. Z.I.)

According to Etkind, Pushkin's new aesthetic approach, which presupposes a more unbreakable unity between form and content, cleared the way for a new concept of mimetic poetry translation. The principles of mimetic translation set by Pushkin have remained the main practice of Russian poetry translation to this day.

These principles were still in vigour when in 1919 the *Acmeist* poet Nikolai Gumilev, Akhmatova's first husband and Mandelstam's friend, formulated his nine commandments of a formal translation:

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[93] Ibid. p. 244. Original quote: «До Пушкина содержание и форма поэзии были в большей или меньшей степени разъединены, между ними образовывался некий зазор, приводивший к известной автономности элементов внешней формы; прежде всего это онтосится к метру, ритму, лексическому строю стихов. Только в ... творчестве Пушкина все без исключения внутренние и внешние элементы произведения оказались сведенными в систему, управляемую всевластными закономерностями. Смысл, стиль, звук . эти три компонента поэтического слова наконец-то, в поэзии Пушкина, образовывали нерасторжимое единство.»

[94] Ibid, p. 153. Here is the original quote: «Поиски русской поэзии шли в направлении точного, стилистически определенного слова, гармонии не вообще, а гармонии конкретной для каждой данной мысли, темы, эмоции. Такую конкретную гармонию открыл для русской поэзии Пушкин, который создал бесконечное множество разнообразнейших гармонических форм стиха применительно к разнообразнейшим вариантам смыслового и эмоционального содержания.стр.».

[95] Ibid., p. 222.

> Let us recapitulate what has to be preserved in translation: 1) the number of lines; 2) verse metre; 3) rhyme pattern; 4) types of enjambments; 5) rhyme types; 6) linguistic register; 7) types of metaphor; 8) special devices; 9) changes of tone.[96] (trans. Z.I.)

Brodsky, an heir to this school, was an ardent pupil of this concept of formal, or mimetic, translation and would wholeheartedly subscribe to Gumilev's declaration that: '…a poet deserving of this title uses form as the only means to convey the spirit'.[97]

In fact, in his numerous translations into Russian from English, Polish, Greek, Italian, Spanish and other languages (a more detailed reference to those translations can be found in Chapter Five) Brodsky faithfully abide by the rules of mimetic translation. One of the main reasons why Brodsky tried to preserve the form of the translated original was both his desire to pay homage to the foreign tradition as well as the idea of an avid cultural exploration, which had its antecedent in the early translations of Pushkin.[98] At the same time, as is also suggested by Gordin, all of Brodsky's translations into Russian display the strong imprint of his poetic persona:

> Poets who are intensely individualistic are not capable of producing translations in the strict sense of the word: […] the world of Brodsky's translations – I am speaking of the most characteristic examples – does not run parallel to the world of his poetry but rather becomes an intrinsic part of this latter world. [99] (Transl. Z.I.)

In fact when one reads Donne or Marvell translated by Brodsky into Russian one often has the impression of reading Brodsky's own poetry.

To his self-translations or reworkings of translations by others into English Brodsky, as we said before, applied the same rigors of the mimetic principle of translation he had inherited from Pushkin as well as other subsequent Russian poetry translators.. The effects of his self-translations into English were, however, different: one can perceive in these translations a very strong foreign element, for which Brodsky was frequently criticized.

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[96] Nikolai Gumilev. ‚Perevody stikhotvornye' [Poetic translations], *Printsypi khudozhestvennogo perevoda* [Principles of artistic translation] (Petersburg: 'Vsemirnaya Literatura', 1919) p. 30. Original quotation runs as follows: «Повторим же вкратце, что обязательно соблюдать: 1) число строк, 2) метр и размер, 3) чередование рифм, 4) характер enjambement, 5) характер рифм, 6) характер словаря, 7) тип сравнений, 8) особые приемы, 9) переходы тона.»

[97] Gumilev. ‚Perevody stikhotvornye', p. 25. Original quote: «...поэт, достойный этого имени, пользуется именно формой, как единственным средством выразить дух.»

[98] See also Iakov Gordin, „Nashe delo – pochti antropologicheskoe" [Our task is almost anthropological]: ‚Introductory Note' to Iosif Brodskii, *V ozhidanii varvarov*: Mirovaia poeziia v perevodakh Iosifa Brodskogo [Waiting for the Barbarians: World Poetry in translations of Joseph Brodsky], (St. Petersburg: Zvezda Magazine, 2001), p. 7.

[99] Ibid., p. 8. Here is the original quote: «Поэты такой яростно интенсивной индивидуальности не могут создавать переводы в точном смысле слова. [...] мир переводов Бродского – в главных своих образцах – не просто плотно сопределен миру его поэзии, но является его органичной частью.»

Paradoxically enough, the theoretical findings of someone who can be regarded a vociferous critic of a translation of mimesis and adaptation seem to provide if not the *raison d'être*, but at least a justification for some of the idiosyncrasies of the English Brodsky.[100] It is Walter Benjamin, who will offer a theoretical template for approaching the rationale of Brodsky's translation practice.

Walter Benjamin and his translation theory

It seems that despite his vast erudition, Brodsky was not familiar with Benjamin's theory of translation. Even if he was, it did not have any significant impact on his views. And yet, paradoxically enough, despite the differences on the level of theory between Benjamin and Brodsky, the latter's practice of translation into English overlap with some of the former's theory. In fact some of Brodsky's translation decisions – a frequent source of controversy in the English speaking world – might be considered as direct implementations of several of Benjamin's theoretical postulates and arguably might even serve as illustrations of their viability.

In her introduction to a collection of Benjamin's essays Hannah Arendt wrote that Benjamin was neither a full-fledged translator nor a poet, or even a critic in the strict sense of the word:

> … he was a born writer, but his greatest ambition was to produce a work consisting entirely of quotations; he was the first German to translate Proust … and St.-John Perse, and before he had translated Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*, but he was no translator; he reviewed books and wrote a number of essays on living and dead writers, but he was no literary critic; …
> … I shall try to show that he thought poetically, but he was neither a poet nor a philosopher.[101]

And yet, his essay "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" published in 1923 and originally devised by Walter Benjamin as a *Preface* to his German translation of *Charles Baudelaire, Tableaux parisiens* has attained a special status in the history of translation theory.

In his memoir *Walter Benjamin – die Geschichte einer Freundschaft* Gerschom

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[100] Walter Benjamin referred to mimetic translation in quite negatie terms in his "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" as „eine ungenaue Übermittlung eines unwesentlichen Inhalts". Quoted from Walter Benjamin. "Die Augabe des Übersetzers", *Sprache und Geschichte*: philosophische Essays. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1992) p. 50.
[101] Hannah Arendt. Introduction to Walter Benjamin. *Illuminations/essays and reflections*. H. Arendt (ed.), (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) p. 4.

Scholem describes how at the time of its first publication Benjamin's essay on translation met with complete silence and brought its author a reputation for unintelligibility:

> Bald nach meiner Auswanderung erschien der Band seiner Baudelaire-Übersetzungen, dessen Vorwort Über die Aufgabe des Übersetzers einen Höhepunkt seiner offen theologisch orientierten Periode in der Sprachphilosophie bildet. Er legte auf diese Seiten besonders großen Wert und sah darin etwas wie sein Credo – das freilich all die Ingredienzien enthielt, die seinem Schrifttum den Ruf der Unverständlichkeit verschafften.[102]

The situation has considerably changed since then, particularly due to the ongoing rise in Benjamin's posthumous post-WWII popularity. Several critical works dedicated both to Benjamin's theory of language as well as of translation have emerged;[103] "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" has long since become a pivotal text in the theory of poetry translation.

Valuable as these works are, none of them, however, diminishes in a decisive way the level of the original obscurity of "Über die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" – an essay, which, as it can be seen from the quote above, even Benjamin's closest friend Scholem admitted to be wonderfully unintelligible. Carol Jacobs in her famous essay on "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" even seems to suggest that the obscurity of the text was deliberate on the part of Benjamin. [104]

Interestingly enough, it seems that Benjamin's essay on the task of the translator illustrates through its form one of the main aspects of the poetry itself: its untranslatability. For, as suggested by Mandelstam, one of the hallmarks of poetry is that it defies paraphrase: "…paraphrasing, … to my mind is surely a sign of non-poetry. For where there is amenability to paraphrase, there the sheets have never been rumpled, there poetry, so to speak, has never spent the night."[105] By the same token, if Benjamin's text *says* something, as it definitely does – as a matter of fact it says things which no other text does – it is still remarkably difficult to

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[102] Gerschom Scholem. *Walter Benjamin: Geschichte einer Freundschaft*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975) p. 153.
[103] See for instance Carol Jacobs. 'The Monstrosity of Translation', *MLN*, Vol. 90, No. 6, Comparative Literature: Translation: Theory and Practice, (Dec., 1975), pp. 755-766; Paul de Man, 'Resistance to Theory,' Critical Writings, 1953-1978. (Minneapolis: University of Minnessota Press, 1985); Winfried Menninghaus, *Walter Benjamins Theorie der Sprachmagie*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980); Maria Luisa Bachis. *Walter Benjamin*: linguaggio, traduzione, tradizione. (Firenze: Atheneum, 2000).
[104] See also Carol Jacobs, 'The Monstrosity of Translation', p. 755.
[105] Quoted from Osip Mandelstam. „Conversation about Dante", *The complete critical prose and letters*. (Ann Arbor: Michigan, 1979) p. 397. Original quote: "… на мой взгляд, вернейший признак отсутствия поэзии … там, где обнаружена соизмеримость вещи с пересказом, там простыни не смяты, там поэзия, так сказать, не ночевала." Quoted from: Осип Мандельштам. «Разговор о Данте». *Сочинения в двух томах*. Том 2, проза. (Тула: «Филин», 1994) стр. 221.

summarise. As it seems unthinkable to quote it here in full or to represent all the twists of Benjamin's thought in a linear sequence, I shall try to move by the main salient points.

A good part of Benjamin's essay is dedicated to redefining the relationship between a translation and the original.

First of all, it is important to point out that it is not just *any* kind of original that Benjamin has in mind. He mainly concentrates on the translation of not only great, but an even more limited category of *famous* works of art – „die grossen Kunstwerke" – as he calls them. What is valid for such works of art is that they have to have achieved certain fame prior to their translation. In such cases translation represents a stage of their continued life:

> Die Geschichte der großen Kunstwerke kennt ihre Deszendenz aus den Quellen, ihre Gestaltung im Zeitalter des Künstlers und die Periode ihres grundsätzlich ewigen Fortlebens bei den nachfolgenden Generationen. Dieses letzte heißt, wo es zutage tritt, Ruhm.[106]

Departing from this premise, Benjamin restores the hierarchy between the original and the translation, in favour of the former. This hierarchy of subordination of translation to the original had been notoriously shattered by Benjamin's Romantik predecessors:

> Noch stärker als bei August Wilhelm Schlegel, der, über Schleiermacher hinausgehend, die poetische Übersetzung immerhin als Neuschöpfung charakterisierte und so der entsagungsvollen Aufgabe des Übersetzers selbstbewußtere Akzente verlieh, tritt die Bedeutung der Subordination unter das Original bei Novalis in den Hintergrund.[107]

In fact as suggested by Huyssen, this shift in perception of translation as a completely new creation led to the widespread belief among the Frühromantiker that: "Shakespeare sei dank Schlegels Übersetzung ein deutscher Autor geworden und werde in Deutschland besser and gründlicher verstanden als in seiner Heimat."[108] Benjamin rejects these ideas of an ideal adaptation claiming that translations far from replacing the originals, actually owe them their existence:

> Übersetzungen, die mehr als Vermittlungen sind, entstehen, wenn im Fortleben ein Werk das Zeitalter seines Ruhmes erreicht hat. Sie dienen daher nicht sowohl diesem, wie schlechte Übersetzer es für ihre Arbeit zu beanspruchen pflegen, als dass sie ihm

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[106] Ibid. pp. 52-53.
[107] Andreas Huyssen, *Die frühromantische Konzeption von Übersetzung und Aneignung*; Studien zur frühromanischen Utopie e. deutschen Weltliteratur, (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1969) p. 127.
[108] Andreas Huyssen, *Die frühromantische Konzeption von Übersetzung und Aneignung*; Studien zur frühromanischen Utopie e. deutschen Weltliteratur, Ausgabe: [Teildr.] Umfang: 24 S. **(**Schlieren: Maier, 1969), p. 9.

> ihr Dasein verdanken. In ihnen erreicht das Leben des Originals seine stets erneute späteste und umfassendste Entfaltung.[109]

As will be seen later, the idea of the priority of the original over the translation is echoed in Brodsky's concept of a translator's responsibility before the author of the original. Brodsky reiterated this concept several times in his theoretical pronouncements on the occasion of his reviews of the translations of Mandelstam and Akhmatova into English as well as in his communication with his co-translator Weissbort (see Chapter Six).

If anything is certain about Benjamin's position on translation it is that he is a sworn opponent of the practice of adaptation and hence also of a mimetic translation. (Thus also Carol Jacobs: "For Benjamin, translation does not transform a foreign language into one we may call our own, but rather renders radically foreign that language we believe to be ours."[110])

However, if merely for polemical reasons, Benjamin admits that the mimetic theory of translation might after all be right in insisting that both the form and the meaning of the original be conveyed as accurately as possible:

> … [das] innerste Verhältnis der Sprachen ist … das einer eigentümlichen Konvergenz. Es besteht darin, dass die Sprachen einander nicht fremd, sondern a priori und von allen historischen Beziehungen abgesehen einander in dem verwandt sind, was sie sagen wollen.
>
> Mit diesem Erklärungsversuch scheint allerdings die Bertrachtung auf vergeblichen Umwegen wieder in die herkoemmliche Theorie der Übersetzung einzumünden. Wenn in den Übersetzungen die Verwandtschaft der Sprachen sich zu bewähren hat, wie könnte sie das anders als indem jene Form und Sinn des Originals möglichst genau übermittelt?[111]

As is evident from the quote above, Benjamin made this admission merely for polemical reasons, only to attack the traditional theory. The first of Benjamin's critiques of the traditional theory is that it actually had not been able to provide any viable criteria to measure the accuracy of the rendition of both form and meaning: "Über den Begriff dieser Genauigkeit wüsste sich jene Theorie freilich nicht zu fassen, könnte also zuletzt doch keine Rechenschaft von dem geben, was an Übersetzungen wesentlich ist."[112] This did not surprise Benjamin, for not only did he believe it was not possible to genuinely grasp the relationship between original and translation, but even more paradoxically, he maintained, that any

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[109] Benjamin. "Die Augabe des Übersetzers", p. 53.
[110] Jacobs, 'The Monstrosity of Translation', p. 756.
[111] Benjamin. "Die Augabe des Übersetzers", pp. 53-54.
[112] Ibid. p. 54

translation would be completely impossible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness with the original: "… [es] ist … erweisbar, dass keine Uebersetzung möglich wäre, wenn sie Ähnlichkeiten mit dem Original ihrem letzten Wesen nach anstreben würde."[113] There are, according to Benjamin, essentially two reasons for this: first, translation is a phenomenon related not so much to the life, as to the afterlife of the original ("So wie die Äußerungen des Lebens innigst mit dem Lebendigen zusammenhängen, ohne ihm etwas zu bedeuten, geht die Uebersetzung aus dem Original hervor. Zwar nicht aus seinem Leben so sehr denn aus seinem "Ueberleben"[114]); and second, translation is a different form altogether and the task of a translator is distinct from the task of a poet.

What Benjamin proposes instead is literalness in translation. To illustrate the appropriateness of the demand for literalness Benjamin resorts to the metaphor of the vessel[115]:

> …jene Forderung, deren Recht auf der Hand, deren Grund sehr verborgen liegt, [muss] aus triftigeren Zusammenhängen verstanden werden. Wie nämlich Scherben eines Gefäßes, um sich zusammenfügen zu lassen, in den kleinsten Einzelheiten einander zu folgen, doch nicht so zu gleichen haben, so muss, anstatt dem Sinn des Originals sich ähnlich zu machen, die Übersetzung liebend vielmehr und bis ins Einzelne hinein dessen Art des Meinens in der eigenen Sprache sich anbilden, um so beide wie Scherben als Bruchstück eines Gefäßes, als Bruchstück einer größeren Sprache erkennbar zu machen.[116]

Benjamin, following Rudolph Pannwitz, exemplified a translation in which the translator would break through the barriers of his own language for the sake of the 'pure language.' This he stated in the concluding words of his essay:

> Wo der Text unmittelbar, ohne vermittelnden Sinn, in seiner Wörtlichkeit der wahren Sprache … angehört, ist er übersetzbar schlechthin. … Denn in irgendeinem Grade enthalten alle großen Schriften, im höchsten aber die heiligen, zwischen den Zeilen ihre virtuelle Übersetzung. Die Interlinearversion des heiligen Textes ist das Urbild oder Ideal aller Übersetzung.[117]

Benjamin's call for literalness, along with his suggestion that Bible's literal translation is the model for a perfect translation, makes him fall into the first of the two principal categories at the core of the translation theory ("vermeintlich ausschließenden Auffassungen

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[113] Ibid. p. 54.
[114] Ibid. p. 52.
[115] Compare Brodsky's vessel-metaphor for the relationship of form and content in poetry translation: "Break the vessel, and the liquid will leak out", In the Introduction to the present doctoral thesis.
[116] Benjamin. "Die Augabe des Übersetzers", p. 60.
[117] Benjamin, "Die Augabe des Übersetzers", p. 64.

vom wörtlichen und vom sinngemäßen Übersetzen", in Huyssen's words), namely that of the literal translation.

At the same time "Faszination des Fremden" is peculiar to Benjamin to the same degree as to his early Romantic predecessors. The important difference is, however, that Benjamin draws diametrically opposite conclusions regarding the adaptation of the foreignness. Benjamin quotes Rudolf Pannwitz, in whom he had found the true formulation of an ideal goal of translation:

> …unsre Übertragungen auch die besten gehn von einem falschen grundsatz aus sie wollen das indische griechische englische verdeutschen anstatt das deutsche zu verindischen vergriechischen verenglischen. sie haben eine viel bedeutendere ehrfurcht vor den eigenen sprachgebräuchen als vor dem geiste des fremden werks…[118]

Benjamin prescribes Pannwitz's motto as the model for translation: "[der Übersetzer] muss seine sprache durch die fremde erweitern and vertiefen man hat keinen begriff in welchem masze das möglich ist"[119].

Turning once again to Brodsky, we can say that his self-translations, as well as the reworkings of translations done by others, with all their foreignising elements on the level of rhythm, rhyme and *enjambments* fit perfectly the model proposed by Pannwitz and endorsed by Benjamin. The major criticism addressed to Brodsky as a translator into English by his native-speaking adversaries, was that he was seeking to expand the boundaries of the language that was not his own. And yet, arguably, his foreignness gave Brodsky a considerable advantage in breaking through these boundaries.

Heiner Weidmann has recently reminded us that "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" published in 1923 was originally devised by Walter Benjamin as a *Preface* to a concrete translation – the German translation of *Charles Baudelaire, Tableaux parisiens*:

> 1923 erschien *Charles Baudelaire, Tableaux parisiens. Deutsche Übertragung mit einem Vorwrot über die Aufgabe des Übersetzers von Walter Benjamin*. Seither ist die vorangestellte Sprach- und Übersetzungstheorie oft und genau gelesen worden, und nicht selten überzeugend als Theorie der Unübersetzbarkeit, so dass man inzwischen im vielversprechenden Tietel Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers auch die Resignation des Übersetzers, der aufgeben muß, mitliest, ohne dass man sich um die irritierende

[118] Benjamin, "Die Augabe des Übersetzers", p. 63.
[119] Rudoph Pannwitz, Quoted in Benjamin, "Die Augabe des Übersetzers", p. 63.

> Tatsache, dass auf diesen Text wirkliche, einschätzbare Übersetzungen folgen, genügend gekümmert hat.[120]

As Benjamin's own translation of Baudelaire shows, the demand for literalness was not to be taken so 'literally'[121]. Benjamin merely suggests that as the rendition of form precludes the faithful rendition of the sense – ("Wie sehr die Treue in der Wiedergabe der Form die des Sinnes erschwert, versteht sich von selbst. Demgemäß ist die Forderung der Wörtlichkeit unableitbar aus dem Interesse der Erhaltung des Sinnes"[122]) – precedence should be given to the rendition of form over the rendition of meaning. For the meaning has already been taken care of in the original:

> Eben darum muss sie von der Absicht, etwas mitzuteilen, vom Sinn in sehr hohem Masse absehen und das Original ist ihr in diesem nur insofern wesentlich, als es der Mühe und Ordnung des Mitzuteilenden den Übersetzer und sein Werk schon enthoben hat.[123]

The task of the translator should be different from that of the poet also because the relationship between the form and the content in translation is different in translation from that, which can be traced in the original. Benjamin explains yet again with the vessel-metaphor:

> … das Verhältnis des Gehalts zur Sprache [ist] völlig verschieden … in Original und Übersetzung. Bilden nämlich diese im ersten eine gewisse Einheit wie Frucht und Schale, so umgibt die Sprache der Übersetzung ihren Gehalt wie ein Königsmantel in weiten Falten.[124]

Thus the translator's program should radically differ from that of original poet. The translator should retain greater freedom from the constraints of having to reproduce the meaning and should instead strive for the intention of the original:

> …dem Sinn gegenüber [kann, ja muss] ihre Sprache sich gehen lassen, um nicht dessen intentio als Wiedergabe, sondern als Harmonie, als Ergänzung zur Sprache, in der diese sich mitteilt, ihre eigene Art der intentio ertönen zu lassen.[125]

Certainly Brodsky (who believed one had to preserve the meaning to the same extent as the form in translation) would not agree with Benjamin's idea that the demand to render the

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[120] See also Heiner Weidmann. „Wie Abgrunds Licht den Stürzenden beglücket"/ Zur Benjamins Baudelaire-Übersetzung, Christiaan L. Hart Nibbrig Ed. *Übersetzen: Walter Benjamin*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001) p. 311.
[121] See also Weidmann. „Wie Abgrunds Licht den Stürzenden beglücket", pp. 312-322.
[122] Benjamin, "Die Augabe des Übersetzers", p. 60.
[123] Ibid., p. 61.
[124] Ibid., p. 57.
[125] Ibid., p. 61.

meaning is secondary in translation. The reason for this radical diversity lies in the fact that Benjamin still operated to a large extent in the aesthetics of Symbolism, whose representatives were notoriously opposed to the ideas of plain meaning and were striving instead to find forms of expressing an ideal, pure meaning. Brodsky on the other hand, was an heir of the Acmeist school, one of whose leaders, Osip Mandelstam wrote as early as in 1912 in his Acmeist manifesto:

> … if one takes the sense as the content, everything else in the word must be regarded as a simple mechanical appendage that merely impedes the swift transmission of the thought. "The word as such" was born very slowly. Gradually, one after another, all the elements of the word were drawn into the concept of form. To this day the conscious sense, the Logos, is still taken erroneously and arbitrarily for the content. The Logos gains nothing from such an unnecessary honor. The Logos demands nothing more than to be considered on an equal footing with the other elements of the word. … The Futurists, unable to cope with the conscious sense as creative material, frivolously threw it overboard and essentially repeated the crude mistake of their predecessors. […] For the Acmeists the conscious sense of the word, the Logos, is just as magnificent a form as music is for the Symbolists.[126]

According to the Acmeist conception semantics represented a form in its own right. Hence, if the form was to be preserved across translation, the same went for the semantics. Neither for the Acmeists nor for Brodsky did there exist any rift between the two.

And yet despite this theoretical disagreement between Benjamin and Brodsky, the conclusions which Benjamin drew from his premise (that the meaning can be discarded in translation) were arguably very akin to those of Brodsky. Benjamin concludes namely that the smoothness is rather unlikely to be the main feature of a good translation: "Es ist daher, vor allem im Zeitalter ihrer Entstehung, das höchste Lob einer Übersetzung nicht, sich wie ein Original ihrer Sprache zu lesen."[127] To this Brodsky would most eagerly subscribe, for it was one of the distinctive ideas of both his translation theories and practices of translation from Russian into English that translation should not read too 'smoothly'. For instance in the preface to the first edition of *A Part of Speech* Brodsky wrote that he had taken the liberty of revising as his own translations already done by other native speakers to bring them, as he believed, 'closer to the original', which was done 'at the expense of their smoothness'. [128] "Smoothness", as many of his co-translators attest, was Brodsky's curse to brand bad translations. It stood for that disastrous levelling which occurred in some English translations

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[126] Osip Mandelstam. „Morning of Acmeism", *The complete critical prose and letters*. (Ann Arbor: Michigan, 1979) pp. 61-62.
[127] Benjamin, "Die Augabe des Übersetzers", p. 61.
[128] Quoted in: Brodsky, *Collected poems in English*, p. 507.

of Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, Pasternak and other Russian poets. Those few critics who were aware of this levelling acknowledged merits of Brodsky's translations, which, if nothing else, managed to convey the uniqueness of his poetic voice.

In his essay 'Bryusov I bukvalizm' ['Bryusov and literalness'] [129] Mikhail Gasparov showed that extreme literalness was the main characteristic of Bryusov's translation of Virgil's *Eneid* undertaken in 1910's. (Interestingly just a couple of years prior to that Bryusov had produced an adapting translation of the *Eneid*). In Gasparov's view this choice was not just a crazy whim of a translator, but reflected a general trend in the European culture of the beginning of the twentieth century. The refutation of the theory of progress brought forth a theory of self-enclosed civilizations («самозамкнутых цивилизаций»), a theory which soon after Oswald Spengler turned into a scientific doctrine.[130] Therefore in the translations of that period the task of the translator was to underscore the foreignness, the remoteness of the translated text, which is especially manifested in the uncommonness of the foreign forms. This explains the parallel calls for literalness coming from such different figures as Benjamin and Bryusov respectively.

Brodsky came from a different epoch and did not programmatically try to foreignize his translations. The foreignisation came about in Brodsky because he tried to preserve across his translation those elements, which in his own eyes, reflected his uncommon poetic voice in the originals such as verse meter, rhyme patterns and *enjambments*. It is precisely in this sense that Brodsky's self-translations manage to capture what Benjamin called the *intentio* of language of the original.

Thus we can conclude that despite the large differences in theoretical background between Benjamin and Brodsky, the latter's translation practices in English might be said to fulfil the translator's task as it was understood and formulated by Benjamin:

> Wie … die Übersetzung eine eigene Form ist, so lässt sich auch die Aufgabe des Übersetzers als eine eigene fassen und genau von der des Dichters unterscheiden. Sie besteht darin, diejenige Intention auf die Sprache, in die übersetzt wird, zu finden, von der aus in ihr das Echo des Originals erweckt wird.[131]

Having come full circle, we return to the passage from Huyssen quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Brodsky's principles of translation were originally those of the

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[129] Mikhail L. Gasparov. "Briusov i bukvalizm", *Poetika perevoda* [Poetics of translation], (essays), (Moskva: Raduga, 1988), pp. 29-62.
[130] Ibid. pp. 45-46.
[131] Benjamin. "Die Augabe des Übersetzers", p. 58.

mimetic translation pioneered by Pushkin and inherited by Brodsky via Acmeists. In his translations from other languages into Russian, one can say that Brodsky's translation is well described by the notion of adaptation (as typified by Hyussen): "die Faszination des Fremden, in das sich beim Übersetzen Eigenes mischt, und das erst in dieser Mischung voll und gültig erkannt wird." [132] Brodsky's translations of others still bore a strong imprint of his poetic personality. In Russian his translations, although mimetic, remained unmistakably Brodskian.

My hypothesis is that the position of Brodsky's self-translations into English was different from that of his translations into Russian. Although in theory his underlying principles remained those of mimetic translation, Brodsky translated into English mainly his own poems and hence there was no mingling of somebody else's foreign sensibility with that of his own. On the other hand, Brodsky was aware, as no-one else, of the *intentio*, as defined by Benjamin, of his every single line of his own verse. Hence in his self-translations into English the uniqueness of the voice came with a trend towards greater literalness, as opposed to the 'smoothness' of adapting translation, which aspires to be read as if it had been written in the target language and inevitably obfuscates the unique voice of its author. The inevitable effects of this greater literalness and greater insistence on the retention of form of the original on the part of Brodsky the self-translator had inevitable foreignising effects on the end result. Thus on the invisible scale between the two diametrically opposed approaches – the mimetic one, practiced by Russian poets-translators from Pushkin onwards, and the literalistic – most poetically defended by Benjamin – Brodsky's self-translations must have gradually at least slightly tilted towards the second.

[132] Andreas Huyssen, *Die frühromantische Konzeption von Übersetzung und Aneignung*; Studien zur frühromanischen Utopie e. deutschen Weltliteratur, Ausgabe: [Teildr.] Umfang: 24 S. **(**Schlieren: Maier, 1969), p. 12.

Chapter 4: Theoretical standpoints and hypotheses: Viktor Zhirmunsky

Brodsky, as was said earlier, insisted on the retention of form in translation. It is well known, however, that there exist sharp contrasts between Russian and English in terms of purely linguistic possibilities as well as in prosodic traditions with regard to the translation of formal verse. To understand the precise nature of these contrasts and to see how these contrasts were reflected in Brodsky's self-translating experiments is indispensable to base the analysis of Brodsky's self-translations on a solid theoretical knowledge of prosodic theories, both Russian and English. As Russia brought forth major breakthroughs in studies of metrical theory in the twentieth century, it was not incidental that a certain prominence should be given to the theoretical work of Viktor Zhirmunsky. (As Simon Karlinsky further suggests, since the beginning of the 20th century Russian meter and versification 'has been studied by generations of poets and theoreticians far more thoroughly than [it was] ever done with English verse.'[133])

A systematic analysis of real rhythm in Russian verse as distinguished from abstract metrical schemes was started in 1910 by Symbolist poet Andrei Bely and has continued in recent decades through computerized and semiotic studies of metrics in the works of V.E. Kholshevnikov, G.A. Shengeli, M.L. Gasparov, P.A. Rudnev etc. Its apex was reached, however, as early as the 1920s when Viktor Zhirmunsky[134] and Boris Tomashevsky[135] developed a theory differentiating between the concepts of rhythm and metre: i.e. between 'an empirical reality of verse stresses and an abstract scheme of idealised verse metre.'(Transl. Z.I.)[136] As Iuri Lotman suggests, the works of these two theoreticians have not to this day lost their actuality:

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[133] Simon Karlinsky. 'Introduction', *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940-1970* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 17.
[134] Viktor Zhirmunsky. *Vvedenie v metriku. Teoria stikha*. [Introduction to metrics. Verse theory] (Leningrad: Academia, 1925).
[135] Boris Tomashevsky. *Russkoye stikhoslozhenie: Metrika*. [Russian versification: metrics] (Petrograd: Academia 1923); Boris Tomashevsky. *O stikhe*. [About verse] (Leningrad: Academia, 1929).
[136] Iuri Lotman. *O poetakh i poezii: analiz poeticheskogo teksta, stat'i i issledovaniya, zametki, retsenzii, vystupleniya.* [On poets and poetry: analysis of poetical text, essays and researches, articles, reviews, lectures] (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 1996) p. 56. Original quote runs as follows: " «...В.М. Жирмунский и Б.В. Томашевский разработали в начале 1920-х гг. теорию противопоставления ритма и метра – эмпирической реальности стиховых ударений и абстрактной схемы идеализованного поэтического размера.»

> Die theoretischen, in den früheren Arbeiten von Viktor M. Zirmunskij and Boris V. Tomasevskij ausgesprochenen Thesen haben, ungeachtet der Korrekturen, welche später sowohl von ihren Urhebern selbst als auch von anderen Wissenschaftlern vorgenommen worden sind, ihre Bedeutung als leitendes wissenschaftliches Prinzip bewahrt.[137]

What distinguished Zhirmunsky's book *Introduction to Metrics: Verse Theory* from any other book by his colleagues, including that of Boris Tomashevsky, who concentrated more on the exclusive studies of the Russian versification, is its exceptional comparative approach. The editors of its English translation comment:

> …Zirmunskij's book has lost none of the exceptional qualities which made it stand out as one of the most solid contributions to the study of Russian versification a the time of its appearance….One of its chief merits is, in fact, the broad comparative framework, which reveals interesting convergences in the evolution of Russian, French, and German versification….The study of Zirmunskij shows … how intimately the structure of a poem is connected with the structure of a given language, and how inseparable is the link between poetics and linguistics.[138]

Following from the quotation above, the uniqueness of Zhirmunsky's approach lies in the fact that he studied the Russian metrical system by comparing it with versification systems of other European languages: English, German and French. A great part of Zhirmunsky's work deals with the differences and similarities between metrical systems in these languages in their application to the possibilities and strategies of formal translation from one into another. this is precisely the quality of Zhirmunsky's work which makes it particularly suitable for both the explanation of the existence of translational contrasts between English and Russian as well as the description of their precise nature with regard to Brodsky's self-translation.

My aim is to establish with the help of Zhirmunsky's theory of translation and metrics the extent, to which Brodsky succeeded in overcoming these hurdles in the practice of his mimetic self-translation, or whether and when his translations stumbled, as some critics believed, upon these contrasts so that his 'Russian' solutions did not work for English.

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[137] Jurij M. Lotman. *Die Analyse des poetischen Textes*. (Kronberg/ Ts.: Scriptor Verl., 1975) p. 67. The original quote runs as follows: «Теоретические положения, высказанные в ранних работах В.М. Жирмунского и Б.В. Томашевского, несмотря на некоторые уточнения, внесенные в дальнейшем как самими авторами, так и другими исследователями, сохранили своё значение ведущего научного принципа.» Quoted from Iuri Lotman. *O poetakh i poezii*, p. 56.

[138] Viktor Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*. transl. C.F. Brown. (The Hague: Mouton&Co., 1966) p.5.

The choice of Zhirmunsky's work as the main theoretical basis for the present dissertation is further justified by the fact that as a young poet Brodsky knew Zhirmunsky personally, lived in his house and availed himself of Zhirmunsky's library. There is therefore good reason to believe, confirmed by the evidence of Brodsky's own theoretical pronouncements, that the poet was familiar with the works of this outstanding theoretician of prosody.

Metre and rhythm

Brodsky's critics often reproved the poet for introducing elements of Russian metrics into English. This is, for example, how Donald Davie alleges the existence of this phenomenon:

> …anyone who has heard Brodsky read his poems first in Russian and then in English, [knows] that when he speaks of 'strict metres' he has failed to notice how Russian metres can be strict in a way no English metre can.[139]

Davie's description above is far from being precise – like so many before and after him, he confuses the notions of metre and rhythm. And yet Davie notices correctly the existence of the phenomena which he nonetheless fails to describe. One of Brodsky 'supporters', Seamus Heaney, comes somewhat closer in his description. In the quote below, Heaney suggests that the Russian and English ears have different expectations and that despite Brodsky's oft-proclaimed love for the English language, in his self-translations it is the prosody of Russian that 'sets the rules', i.e. introduces elements on the level of stress and of rhythm into translation which seem problematic to the English ear:

> … in spite of his [Brodsky's] manifest love for English verse, which amounts almost to a possessiveness, the dynamo of Russian supplies the energy, the metrics of the original will not be gainsaid and the English ear comes up against a phonetic element that is both animated and skewed. Sometimes instinctively rebels at having its expectations denied in terms of both syntax and velleities of stress. Or it panics and wonders if it is being taken for a ride when it had expected a rhythm. At other times, however, it yields with that unbounded assent that only the most triumphant art can conjure and allow.[140]

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[139] Davie. 'The saturated line,' pp. 14-15.
[140] Heaney. 'Brodsky's Nobel: What the Applause Was All About', p. 18.

Having described in his own words the 'Russianising' effects of Brodsky's translations, Heaney, as opposed to Davie, still maintains that by some sort of 'conjuring' Brodsky manages to make these self-translations work in English.

Basing the analysis on the prosodic theory of Zhirmunsky, it becomes possible to explain the phenomenon referred to by both Davie and Heaney in more accurate and precise technical terms. As suggested by Zhirmunsky, verse written in identical verse metre in two different languages is bound to display different rhythmical realisations. Following Zhirmunsky's theory, an analysis of Brodsky's self-translating materials reveals that their 'foreignising' effect arises from the fact that, in translating himself, the poet tried to reproduce not the poems' metre, but their rhythm. Significantly, Zhirmunsky was the first theorist of prosody to introduce an explicit distinction between the frequently confused concepts of *metre* and *rhythm*.

Zhirmunsky shows that all the modern European nations inherit the term "metrics," as most of the terminology which describes form in poetry, from the Ancient Greeks and Romans. Ancient system of versification was based on a regular alternation of long and short syllables, i.e. on the principle of *quantity*. In modern languages, the distinction of quantity in its application to verse has been lost; instead the alteration of long and short syllables of classical meters has been replaced by the distinction in *quality* – the sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables.[141] (Auden confirms that: '…quantitative unrhymed verse and qualitative rhymed verse have nothing in common except that they are both rhythmical patterns.'[142] According to Zhirmunsky, during the adoption of the classical metrical system into modern English, German, Italian and French, there occurred a ‚metrical resistance.' In consequence, the rhythm of verse written in these languages is the result of a compromise between the natural properties of each language and the alien metrical system 'imposed' on them. Zhirmunsky's crucial discovery is that every language adapts to the imposed metrical scheme differently:

> Since the syllabo-tonic system, which developed as a peculiar attempt to reproduce the classical feet, imports into a national versification system its own alien rules prescribing a strict alteration of syllables and stresses, it invariably encounters

[141] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*. pp. 27-29.
[142] Auden. *Forewords And Afterwords,* p. 5.

> resistance from the linguistic material, a resistance which will vary in accordance with the different phonetic characteristics of each language. [143]

Because all prosodic terminology in the modern European languages is borrowed from Latin, there exists a long historical confusion among prosodists between the concepts of *metre* and *rhyme*. In Latin notably there is no such distinction: the composition of verse in Latin follows a strict metrical pattern and the distribution of long and short syllables is a fixed matter. (As pointed out by Saintsbury in his famous *Historical Manual of English Prosody,* the 'majority of English poets, from at least the sixteenth century, if not earlier, until far into the nineteenth, had actually composed [verses in Latin] and even more had learnt the rules of them, long before attempting in English the work which has given them their fame.'[144]). Zhirmunsky shows by examples of verse in other European languages that each of these languages allows its own variations within the prescribed pattern due to the natural resistance of the languages, and that it depends on the skills of every individual poet how well he can use the possibilities of those variations peculiar to his language.[145]

For the first time in the history of European metrical studies Zhirmunsky introduces a clear-cut distinction between the conceptions of *metre* and *rhyme* (See more in Chapter Six). On the basis of this distinction it becomes possible to observe, among other things, the exact prosodic differences between verse written in the same verse metre in English and Russian. Taking as an example the iambic pentameter in English and Russian, Zhirmunsky shows that although the applied general principle of distribution of strong and weak syllables may be the same, there are necessarily differences in the concrete realizations which depend directly on the natural phonetic properties of the respective languages, in this particular case of English and Russian. The contrasting characteristic of the iambic verse in polysyllabic Russian with monosyllabic English is that in Russian, iambs present omissions of stress in the positions prescribed to be stressed according to the metrical pattern of the poem, whereas in English they display the opposite picture of additional accents or 'hypermetrical' stresses:

> Within metrically identical … iambic verse, Russian iambs display omissions of metrical stresses (a medium of three stresses in an iambic tetrameter) which is due to a greater word length in the Russian language. English iambs on the other hand, because of the respective shortness of the words (predominantly monosyllables), display frequent additional stresses of the metrically weak syllables. [146]

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[143] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse.* p. 80.
[144] George Saintsbury. *Historical Manual of English Prosody* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1930) p. 3.
[145] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse.* pp. 21-22.
[146] Zhirmunsky. *Teoria Stikha* [Verse Theory] p. 237

The application of the distinction between the concepts of metre and rhythm to the examination of the prosodic examples in such dissimilar languages as English and Russian enabled Zhirmunsky to trace the exact variations occurring in verse with the same metrical pattern in these languages. As the quotation above makes clear, a pentametric line in Russian will normally contain omissions of stress or 'pyrrhics'; an average English pentametric line displays, on the other hand, additional, hypermetrical stresses which are natural consequences of the monosyllabic nature of English.[147]

With the help of Zhirmunsky's metre-rhythm distinction, it becomes clear that what Brodsky was often trying to convey in translating his poems was not their metre – as the poet himself maintained in his numerous pronouncements – but their rhythm. This rhythm which Brodsky in fact attempted to preserve is to a great degree equivalent to the rhythm of his original poems, and possesses characteristics typical of Russian verse: it often contains omissions of stress, or 'Phyrric feet. As the result, a conflict with English acoustic habits is unavoidable.

This conflict is increasingly clear from the recordings of his readings of his verse first in Russian and then in the translated English available at the Sound Division of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. As becomes evident from listening to these recordings, Brodsky often omits stresses on the semantically loaded words while reading translations of his verse in English – usage which must have rendered certain parts of his verse unintelligible for listeners native to English. This discord may partly explain the accusations of the 'un-Englishness' of his self-translations expressed by both his opponents as well as some of his supporters.

'Metrical task': variety of elements of metrical organization.

'Simultaneity of assonances'

Side by side with these instances of the 'un-Englishness' [in] Brodsky's self-translations, some observed the co-existence of the opposite phenomenon. Derek Walcott, for example, speaks of 'simultaneity of assonances'[148] which Brodsky often reached in his self-

[147] See also Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*. p. 80.
[148] Walcott. 'Magic Industry', p. 2.

translations to an astonishing degree. Walcott illustrates this quality with the example of two lines from Brodsky's self-translation of the poem 'Roman Elegies':

> *The month of stalled pendulums. Only a fly in August*
> *in a dry carafe's throat is droning its busy hymn.*
>
> [As a self-translator, Brodsky] is quite unpredictably, a phenomenon. One might sneer and say 'no, a curiosity,' but if we examine the two lines above, with the detail they deserve, the curiosity surrenders to admiration for a genius that supersedes geography, that repeatedly … creates great verse in two languages. It is all there in the hiss, the sonarscopic detail. The progress, letter by letter, sound breeding the next sound, is a progress of neutrality.[149]
>
> The somnolence that is underlined by the insect's industry, the buzz contained in the sounds 'busy' and 'its', the distorted echo of 'hymn' from pendulums', the effort required from the very beginning of the line to extend 'the' into 'month', all of which, magisterially, and in an adopted language, establish torpor. And now one wonders if the original Russian is as rich in its consonantal sibilance as Brodsky's English, and not the other way around.[150]

In the quote above Walcott suggests that Brodsky's self-translations deserve a right degree of detailed attention, alluding to the wholesale accusations that Brodsky's self-translations had by that time received from critics. Upon a close analysis, Walcott believes, it is not difficult to detect Brodsky's rare ability to create in English connections between meaning and sound which would honour even a native poet.

Along the same lines, Daniel Weissbort refers to Brodsky as having perhaps 'too much ear' in English, as opposed to him having none at all, as claimed by his adversaries. Weissbort, who according to his own confession had naively wished to 'correct' some of Brodsky's self-translations, stumbled against the same phenomenon:

> This highly intellectual poet [Brodsky] was also working at a level almost of pure sound and movement. I was made more keenly aware of this when I tried, experimentally, to 'correct' one or two of his self-translations. Since his command of English grammar and idiom was not always what one would have wished, I wondered if it might not be possible discreetly to 'fix' his versions. I discovered that they couldn't be altered without seriously damaging the sound structure. It is arguable that far from not having an 'ear' in English, Brodsky, in fact, had too much ear![151]

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[149] Derek Walcott, 'Unpublished draft of the essay 'Magic Industry', Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 53 Fld 12, pp. 1-2.
[150] Idem
[151] Daniel Weissbort. ‚Something like his own language', URL http://www.nd.edu/~ndr/issues/ndr14/reviews/weissbort.html accessed 18 Jun. 07.

Trying to 'fix' the translations, Weissbort realized that their syntactic, semantic and prosodic strata were bound in a union comparable only to that which existed in the originals.

On the basis of our analysis on Zhirmunsky's explanation of the phenomenon of the metrical task, it becomes possible to account for the existence of such contrasting opinions of Brodsky as a self-translator with no 'ear' in English on the one hand, and on the other hand, with 'too much' of it. According to Zhirmunsky, at the moment of composition all the elements – semantic, acoustic and syntactic – are subject to a single metrical law:

> Word masses are material which the poet subdues to a formal task introducing regularity and proportion in the distribution of various parts. The artist confronts as it were a chaos of individual, complex and contrasting facts of meaning, of sound and of syntax; the poet introduces into this chaos an artistic symmetry, regularity and organization: all the disparate, individual facts are subjugated to the unity of the artistic task.[152]

This main metrical impulse or law – which in reality one imagines to be a sort of rhythmical hum which the poet hears in his ear at the moment of composition – carries away all the aspects of the artistic speech conveying some graciousness and structural harmony to a formless chaotic material. Here Brodsky describes the same in his own terms:

> …The poem always starts with the first line or with a line anyway. And from that you go. It is something in the line, a certain hum to which you try to fit the line. And then you proceed that way…. It is some tune which has oddly enough some sort of psychological weight or denomination. And you try to fit something into that….[153]

The same idea is echoed by Iuri Lotman in his famous book on the analysis of poetic texts:

> Der Rhytmus ist im Vers ein bedeutungsdifferenzierendes Element, wobei der bedeutungsdifferenzierende Charakter, wenn er die rhythmische Struktur erfaßt, auch diejenigen Elemente der Sprache ergreift, die ihn im normalen Sprachgebrauch nicht aufweisen.[154]

As we see, both theoreticians Zhirmunsky and Lotman as well as the poet Brodsky himself agree in their understanding of rhythm as the main compositional principle: the real

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[152] Zhirmunsky. *Teoria Stikha* [Verse Theory], p. 436. Original text: «Перед художником – как бы хаос индивидуальных, сложных и противоречивых фактов, смысловых (тематических), звуковых, синтаксических, в который вносится художественная симметрия, закономерность, организованность: все отдельные, индивидуальные факты подчиняются единству художественного задания».

[153] Joseph Brodsky. *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*. Cynthia Haven (ed.), (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002) p.149.

[154] Jurij M. Lotman. *Die Analyse des poetischen Textes*. p. 65. The original quote runs as follows: «Ритм в стихе является смыслоразличающим элементом, причём, входя в ритмическую структуру, смыслоразличительный характер приобретают и те языковые элементы, которые в обычном употреблении его не имеют.» Iuri Lotman, *O poetakh i poezii*, p. 55.

rhythm of the poem exerts its organizing influence on the ‚lexical material' of the poem at the phonetic, semantic and syntactic levels simultaneously.

In my metrical analysis of the concrete translational materials – various drafts, revisions, commentaries, interlinear translations etc. – I will depart from Zhirmunsky's theory of 'metrical task.' I will attempt to demonstrate instead that while Brodsky seemed to start revising the translations of his poems in English with the same initial 'hum' of his originals, i.e. from rhythmical patterns with distinctly Russian characteristics, this initial metrical impulse was ultimately dominated by the requirements of the linguistic material of the target language, English.

Rhymes

As has been pointed out by many critics, 'the rhymes provide one of the structural cornerstones in many of Brodsky's poems.'[155] Thus Susan Sontag remarks that, 'Poetry, he [Brodsky] said, is accelerated thinking. It was his best argument… for he considered rhyme essential to this process.'[156] In a discussion with his friend and fellow poet Derek Walcott, Brodsky, who once referred to himself with pride as a 'pretty good rhymer'[157] confirmed and expanded on Sontag's observation:

> … composing poetry is a very peculiar process. It is indeed a process of cognition. … When you rhyme two things which have not been paired before, a certain relationship develops between them. Suppose the line ends with the word "moon". So you start to shop in the language for a rhyme, or a correspondence, and sooner or later you come up with the word "spoon". And initially you think it won't do, because there is apparently no connection between the moon and the spoon. But when you begin to think. And you think: isn't there? Perhaps there is. First both are inanimate; both have that metallic shine. Etc., etc. And you connect them. And that connection accelerates tremendously. And it helps you to understand something about the nature of things, the nature of the moon, and the nature of the spoon. And perhaps the nature of the relationship of two things.[158]

Rhyme was thus for Brodsky not only a device of metrical composition, but also a means of accelerated thinking. As Sontag points out, this idea of mental acceleration is the key to Brodsky's great poetic achievement. In fact, according to Sontag, Brodsky insisted that

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[155] Barry P. Scherr. *‚To Urania'* in Lev Loseff and Valentina Polukhina. *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem*. (New York: Palgrave, 1999) p. 94.
[156] Sontag. ‚Joseph Brodsky', in *Where the Stress Falls*, p. 332.
[157] Brodsky, *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*, p. 161.
[158] 'The Power of Poetry': The two Nobel Prize winners Joseph Brodsky (1987) and Derek Walcott (1992) met at the Gothenburg Book Fair on 9 September 1993, Library of Congress, Sound Division.

'poetry's "job" (a much-used word) was to explore the capacity of language to travel farther, faster.'[159] That is why the constant search for new and more exacting rhymes was as central to Brodsky's self-translations into English as it was crucial to the composition of his original verse in Russian. As I will try to show in my analysis of the single translations, this [search] produced marvellous results: some of Brodsky's rhymes in English are authentic *tours de force*. In addition, Brodsky's rhymes display metaphysical wit and often work as independent puns in English. In this particular respect Brodsky's self-translations defy the main premise of poetry's untranslatability as it was formulated by Roman Jakobson: 'The pun, or to use a more erudite, and perhaps more precise term – paronomasia, reigns over poetic art, and whether its rule is absolute or limited, poetry by definition is untranslatable.'[160]

I will try to show that the property of Brodsky's self-translations to produce authentic euphonic-semantic bonds in English on the level of assonance and rhymes allows them to acquire a new independent status in the language: in the same way as the originals, they cannot be simply altered without destroying their connection between form and content, or using Dante's words, without 'breaking all of' their 'sweetness and harmony.'[161]

In the Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine I will try to attest to this hypothesis on the basis of concrete textual examples.

Having established the importance of the rhymes as the main compositional principle in Brodsky's poetry, one cannot, however, neglect the fact that the poet's efforts in rendering them across translation met with considerable autochthonous resistance.

First of all there is a sharp contrast with the general trends in English-language poetry: towards the end of the twentieth century Brodsky's endeavour to rhyme exactingly seemed to be, in English-speaking literary circles completely *démodé,* to say the least. To this can be added the general Anglo-Russian prosodic contrasts indicated by Zhirmunsky: the use of feminine or even dactylic rhymes, let alone the regular alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes (typical for Russian verse) is not only much less usual for English[162], but also

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[159] Sontag. 'Joseph Brodsky', p. 332.
[160] Roman Jakobson. 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', in *On Translation*, Reuben Brower (ed.) (Camridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959) p. 238.
[161] Dante,'Il Convivio', *Le Opere di Dante,* p. 155.
[162] '…[in English poetry] there never appeared anything like the French system of masculine and feminine alternation.' Quoted from George Saintsbury. *A History of English Prosody*: *from the twelfth century to the present day*. (New York: Russell & Russell, [1911], 1963) p. 538.

produces in it some quite different connotations. [163] Walcott supports the same idea when speaking of Brodsky's translations:

> The translated Russian risks, in its usually hexametrical rhyming design, a meter which English associates with the comic, the parodic, or the ironic. There is no modern English or American poet who will take such risks – being utterly serious with feminine endings, of attempting to reach the sublime and noble without the pseudo-humility of the dying fall, the retractable conceit.[164]

Anthony Hecht confirms the presence of the same phenomenon in Brodsky's poems composed directly in English:

> Two-syllable rhymes, favoured in some poems Brodsky composed in English (Persia/inertia, Noah/ spermatozoa) have struck the ears of some English readers as perilously frivolous, though such disyllabic chiming is easily available in the Russian language, and employed by Pushkin and other great poets.[165]

Basing my analysis on Zhirmunsky's verse theory and analyzing the translations of two poems Brodsky wrote in *loose dolnik*, the predominant verse metre of his later period, I found at least one reason to explain why Brodsky might have disregarded his friends' admonitions and continued to introduce feminine rhymes into his English self-translations.

Rhyme: a phenomenon of rhythm

Iuri Lotman identifies Zhirmunsky, who laid the foundations for modern rhyme theory, as the first to suggest rhyme's importance as a phenomenon of rhythm. As early as 1923 Zhirmunsky perceived rhyme as a quality pertaining to rhythm rather than a mere sound repetition.[166] Zhirmunsky wrote: '…to the phenomenon of rhyme we have to attribute every sound repetition which has an organising role in the metrical composition of a poem.'[167]

Zhirmunsky's discovery had a special repercussion when applied to the analysis of verse written in accentual verse or *dolnik.* Zhirmunsky shows that in such verse, rhymes are the main metrical device and ultimately help us 'arrive' at the rhythm of the poem . Therefore,

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[163] Zhirmunsky. *Teoria Stikha* [Verse Theory] . (Leningrad: Sovetsky Pisatel, 1975) p. 238.
[164] Walcott. "Magic Industry", p. 6.
[165] Hecht. ‚Introduction' to Joseph Brodsky. *A Part of Speech*, p. x.
[166] Iuri Lotman. *O poetakh i poezii: analiz poeticheskogo teksta, stat'i i issledovaniya, zametki, retsenzii, vystupleniya.* [On poets and poetry: analysis of poetical text, essays and researches, articles, reviews, lectures] (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 1996) p. 67. Original quote runs as follows: «Основы современной теории рифмы были заложены В.М. Жирмунским, который в 1923 г. ... увидел в рифме не просто совпадение звуков, а явление ритма.»
[167] «...должно отнести к понятию рифмы всякий звуковой повтор, несущий организующую функцию в метрической композиции стихотворения.» Quoted fromViktor Zhirmunsky. 'Rifma, yeyo istoria i teoria' [Rhyme, its history and theory] in Zhirmunsky, *Teoria Stikha*, p. 246.

in the poems written in *dolnik,* rhymes represent the last support for our rhythmical sense. Zhirmunsky maintains that if verse written in *dolnik* were deprived of the rhymes, it would loose its rhythmical equilibrium and become 'a heap of debris.'

In Chapter Eight I will try to demonstrate on the basis of concrete textual examples the hypothesis that Brodsky preferred the lesser evil to the greater one with regard to his translations, i.e. that his verse produced unconventional connotations in English for the sake of retaining the feminine rhymes in it rather than for it to lose its metrical structure altogether.

I believe that Brodsky's own translational intentions were far from introducing 'foreignising' effects deliberately: his translating principles were simply those of a formal translation. Because of the Anglo-Russian contrasts in poetic tradition and prosody, Brodsky's self-translating interventions resulted, however, in a curious phenomenon, as I will try to show on the concrete textual analysis. On the one hand, Brodsky achieved in his English translations authentic euphonic-semantic unity; on the other, he based this very unity on compositional principles partly alien to English poetic usage and tradition. Such an approximation of Russian and English linguistic systems in Brodsky's self-translations might have been unintentional, and yet, if established, it sets a unique precedent in the history of poetry translation into English and merits a wider discussion in the larger context of the theory of translation.

Chapter 5: Brodsky's biography – the 'twists of language'

Prospero:
…when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
With words that made them known.
(Shakespeare, *The Tempest*)

Dear savages, though I've never mastered your tongue, free of pronouns and gerunds,
I've learned to bake mackerel wrapped in palm leaves and favor raw turtle legs, with their flavor of slowness.
(Joseph Brodsky, 'Infinitive')

Learning English

Clarence Brown, an Oxford Professor of Russian who met Brodsky in Leningrad in 1966, described thus Brodsky's spoken English at the time before his expatriation:

> When Brodsky first shouted an English poem by George Herbert into my ear outside a café on Gorky Street 14 years ago, I thought he was speaking Lithuanian. Now his English suffices for this stately elegy on Lowell, and one looks forward to the sequel.[168]

The elegy to which Brown refers was composed in 1978. How was such a change in Brodsky's English possible? In the present chapter we will examine how such a transformation could occur within a span of just 12 years, especially considering that Brodsky spent the first six years of this period living in the Soviet Union.

According to his own account, Brodsky hated English while he was at school: 'At the age of ten I regarded this language as an unnecessary evil. So much that I was almost left for a second year in the fourth grade: on account of my poor showing in English and botany.' [169] This attitude was hardly surprising given the content of his reading programme:

> … our textbooks were stuffed with the standard propaganda garbage translated into English… A biography of Stalin, a memoir of some party faithful meeting, Lenin in his Finnish hideout… there was not a single English ditty or nursery rhyme that could

[168] Brown, Clarence. „The Best Russian Poetry Written Today", *New York Times' Book Review*, 12:1 (9 September 1980) p. 11.
[169] Brodsky, 'Learning English', Beinecke, Box 12, Fld 16.

> at least animate you to the sound of this language, because a child delights in jingle even when it's incomprehensible.[170]

At the age of 15, Brodsky left school, an act absolutely crucial to understanding his character. In Stalinist Russia it revealed in its agent an unheard-of degree of independence:

> I simply couldn't stand certain faces in my class – of some of my classmates, but mostly of teachers. Of emotions overpowering me at that moment, I remember only a general disgust with myself for being too young and for letting so many things boss me around. [171]

To fully appreciate the significance of Brodsky's action even the slightest notion of the kind of totalitarian state in which his school was situated should suffice.

This was the end of his formal education. From then on he began avidly acquiring his knowledge through autodidactic means. He began with Polish, Poland being at the time, according to Brodsky, 'a window to Europe', i.e. the main channel of information about the world and literature; a great number of books of Western and Polish literature that could not be procured in the Soviet Union were published there. Later, Brodsky would claim to have read about eighty percent of modern European literature first in Polish.[172]

English followed. It is difficult to ascertain when exactly Brodsky's post-scholastic interest in English poetry and language started. Tomas Venclova, a poet and a friend of Brodsky's, suggests that he inherited the 'Anglophone orientation' from Anna Akhmatova, a great Russian poet who was his mentor through his early poetic career, but it must remain a matter of conjecture.

Whatever the case may be, the decisive moment came when Brodsky started to discover the poetry of John Donne and others of Donne's school at the beginning of the 1960s. Much has been said on the importance and influence of John Donne on Brodsky. One passage from an altogether different source, however, seems to put the nature of this influence into a nutshell. Auden believes that artistic influences from a remoter time and culture can be accepted by an artist with fewer reservations. W.H. Auden writes:

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[170] Idem
[171] Helen Benedict, „Flight from predictability: Joseph Brodsky", *The Antioch Review*, 3:1 (Winter 1985), p. 12.
[172] Thomas Venclova. *Stat'i o Brodskom* [Essays on Brodsky]. (Moscow: Baltrus/ Novoje Izdatel'stvo, 2005.) p. 122.

> In general the further away from you in time or feeling that poets are, the more you can get out of them for your own use. Often some piece of technique thus learnt really unchains one's own Daemon quite suddenly. [173]

In Auden's case such an influence came from Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poetry; for Brodsky it came from seventeenth century English metaphysical poetry.

Brodsky discovered Donne in 1964 while serving a five-year sentence of hard labour confinement in the Arctic Circle on charges of social parasitism. Equipped with only a bilingual dictionary Brodsky notably used a very original approach to internalize Donne's poems by 'laboriously translating the opening and closing stanzas of some poem … and trying to imagine how, by the as yet undeciphered intermediate stanzas, these poles might shrewdly and surprisingly be linked.'[174]

Donne's influence unleashed something which was to remain in Brodsky's poetry until the very end. One can think of many typical traits of Brodskian poetics which point to his kinship with Donne. These are just some of them: his penchant for operating with conceits, his metaphysical wit, or fondness for finding resemblances between the most disparate phenomena; the metrical peculiarity of some of his verse reflecting the 'rhythm of the thought'[175], rather than purely musical rhythm; and his propensity for using his own metaphors as objects of further contemplation.

The fact that at such an early stage in his poetic career, English poetics left this indelible imprint on Brodsky's Russian poetry may partly explain why, when at a later period he began translating himself into English, the rift between these two languages and sensibilities appeared to him less daunting. Although other translators insisted on the existence of unbridgeable gaps between English and Russian poetic usages, entailing radically different approaches to translations, Brodsky was more sensitive to their similarities.

If in Donne Brodsky found a poetic model from a remote past, in Auden he found a contemporary not only to love and admire, but also to model his poetry and even his life after, 'a conduct whose metre and poise were modelled on Wystan's.'[176] Despite the fact that Auden was 33 years his senior, Brodsky still considered him a contemporary. He believed that 'a poet's influence … emanation or radiation lasted for a generation or two.' Thus he considered

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[173] Quoted in: Humphrey Carpenter. *W. H. Auden: A biography*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981) p. 55.
[174] Hecht, 'Introduction' to Joseph Brodsky. *A Part of Speech,* p. ix.
[175] This is T.S. Eliot's famous description of a special feature of metaphysical poetry.
[176] Derek Walcott. 'Italian Eclogue: to Joseph Brodsky' in *The New York Review of Books*, 23: 13 (8 August 1996), p. 18.

such poets as Frost, Tsvetaeva, Auden, Cavafy, Rilke, Akhmatova, Mandelstam and Pasternak his contemporaries. [177] Brodsky himself describes his discovery of Auden:

> Beginning in about 1964 I would read Auden when I came across him, deciphering him line by line. At some point in the late 1960's I was already beginning to understand things. I couldn't help but understand him – not so much his poetics as his metrics. That is, this is what poetics are. What in Russia is called a dolnik, or accentual verse – disciplined and very well organized. With a marvellous internal caesura, in a hexametrical manner. And this aftertaste of irony. … This ironical element is more the achievement of the English language than of Auden. That whole English technique of understatement. ….[178]

One of the first manifestations of Auden's influence on Brodsky was the poem in memory of T.S. Eliot ('Na smert' T.S. Eliota') in which Brodsky adopted the metre and stanzaic design of Auden's poem in memory of Yeats. Even more extraordinary than the fact of Auden's influence on a young Russian poet, were the circumstances in which Brodsky composed his elegy. Susan Sontag, the famous American writer and a friend of Brodsky, describes them in an essay:

> The young, as yet unpublished poet from Leningrad fulfilling a sentence of compulsory labor on a collective farm, in a village in the far North, near the White Sea, receives the news – it is January 1965 – that T.S. Eliot has died in London, sits at a table in his icy shack, and within the next twenty-four hours composes a long elegy to Eliot, which is also an homage to the very alive W.H. Auden (the tone and swing of whose elegy on the death of Yeats he adopts.)[179]

As Sontag justly notes, the disparity between these two places – Eliot's England where he died and Brodsky's Arctic *kolkhoz* where he was serving his term – could not have been greater. In overcoming this disparity and composing this elegy, Brodsky demonstrated, in Sontag's view, 'an exceptional development of the talent for being, mentally, in two places at once.' [180]

Czesław Miłosz points to the paradox that Brodsky in his arctic confinement writing a Russian poem in memory of Eliot, was the only poet to elegize this man who did so much for English letters in the twentieth century: "…I was fascinated by the fact that T.S. Eliot, who

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[177] See also: Solomon Volkov. *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, (New York: The Free Press, 1998) p. 41.
[178] Volkov. *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, p. 129.
[179] Sontag. ‚Joseph Brodsky', in *Where the Stress Falls*, p. 330.
[180] Idem

lives now in Limbo, as is usual after the death of a great poet, found in fact that only a Russian poet wrote a poem upon his death…."[181]

More and more frequently, Brodsky wrote poems which, by his own admission were influenced by Auden:

> I liked Auden more and more. I even composed a few poems that seemed to me to be under his influence: 'The End of a Beautiful Era', 'Song of Innocence', and…'Letter to General Z'… By the end of my existence in the Soviet Union – the late 1960s and early 1970s – I knew Auden more or less decently. That is, for a Russian, I knew him better than anyone, I think. Especially … his 'Letter to Lord Byron' , which I laboured over mightily, translating it. For me, 'Letter to Lord Byron' became an antidote for every kind of demagoguery.[182]

Brodsky's degree of internalization of poetry written in a foreign language is quite remarkable and especially unique in a Russian poet of his epoch.[183] Even the famous 'nostalgia for a world culture' cannot satisfactorily account for it.

Many years later Brodsky was – rather unusually – interviewing his friend, the Polish poet Miłosz. When Brodsky asked Miłosz whether he had been influenced by English or American poetry in his own writing, the latter, who by that time had been living in the USA for several decades and was also involved in translations of his own verse into English, responded with disarming frankness. As opposed to his interrogator, Miłosz could not appreciate poetry to a satisfactory degree unless it was written in his native Polish: 'Miłosz: I must make here a very frank and maybe shameless admission: that basically I am, when I read poetry in foreign languages, I am separated by a glass pane.'[184] Most of the Russian poets and readers among Brodsky's contemporaries would easily subscribe to the feelings expressed here by Miłosz.

What undoubtedly furthered Brodsky's interest and appreciation of English poetry was his activity as a translator. Many Soviet poets regarded poetry translation quite rightly as literary drudge work, devised, according to Nadezhda Mandelstam, in the early thirties by

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[181] Czeslaw Milosz. *Czeslaw Milosz: Conversations*/ edited by Cynthia L. Haven, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006) p. 107. See also Czeslaw Milosz, "A Struggle Against Suffocation" (review of *A Part of Speech* by Joseph Brodsky), *The New York Review of Books*, 27: 13, (August 14, 1980) p. 6. „I know of no poet in the West who mourned Eliot in a poem."
[182] Volkov. *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, p. 129.
[183] "I think that encountering a strange language is something a Russian basically can but would rather not understand. The circumstances of his life haven't prepared him for it." Brodsky in Volkov, *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, p. 126.
[184] Czeslaw Milosz. *Conversations*, p. 117.

Soviet authorities as a method of deflecting the poets' energy from writing their own poetry. This was certainly the case with Osip Mandelstam:

> When [Mandelstam's] own work was being systematically rejected by 'vigilant' editors … he was driven to translating in order to live. He had to translate under sweatshop conditions, the texts assigned him being the trash en vogue at the time with the authorities. This loathsome hackwork even crowded out his own muse. He had to endure reading here and there in official reference works … that he had given up poetry and 'gone over to translating', a legend that clung to his name for years.[185]

Stephen Spender remarked in a letter to Brodsky upon reading Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoir: 'My impression is that in Russia you were writing in a prison where the warders and prison governor were afraid that a poem might be dynamite. In 'the West' we are writing in a well-furnished vacuum corridor through which you may travel without hindrance throughout our world. Ultimately the only reality for us is to be poets writing for other poets – perhaps that will also finally be the development in Russia.' [186]

The situation was altogether different with Brodsky. All the evidence indicates that he derived a great degree of pleasure from translating, as was also suggested by Viktor Kulle: 'to determine a boundary between those translations which Brodsky did for his pleasure and those which he did simply to earn his living seems to be an impossible and risky task.' [187] (Transl. Z.I.) Brodsky must have recognized independently from his beloved Auden that: 'The attempt to translate the poetry of one language into another is an invaluable training for a poet….' [188] The esteem in which he held English literature was quite high compared to his utter lack of it towards German or French literature, which had once been historically mainstream Russian influences: '[it is] rather sad [that] Russian cultural tradition is oriented mainly towards French and German literature. Which in comparison with what was happening at the same time in English literature is pure kindergarten.'[189]

The notes taken by an American exchange student, Lynette Labinger, who visited Brodsky in Leningrad in 1970 to deliver messages between him and American poet Peter

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[185] Clarence Brown 'Introduction' to *Osip Mandelstam: Selected Poems*. (New York: Atheneum, 1974) p. xvii.
[186] Spender, Stephen. 'Letter to Brodsky from Maussane, France, 4 July 1972', Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 18.
[187] Quoted in Iakov Gordin. 'Introduction' to Joseph Brodsky, *V ozhidanii varvarov: Mirovaya poeziya v perevodakh Iosifa Brodskogo*, pp. 5-6. The original quote of Viktor Kulle runs as follows: «Установление границы между переводами, выполненными Бродским «для души», и теми, посредством которых он пытался заработать себе на жизнь, представляется занятием довольно рискованным»). See also Volkov. *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, p. 151.
[188] Auden, *Forewords & Afterwords,* p. 7.
[189] Volkov. *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, p. 152.

Viereck, give us an additional confirmation of these preferences of Brodsky's in her informal notes:

> We talked a bit about poetry. I know nothing about poetry – why not? what have I read? – very little. 'Bad. I am a patriot, but I must say that English poetry is richest in the world. English-speaking people who avoid study of their own poetry to take up ours – though it is good – are lazy.' Told me I must take it up. Gave me John Donne's 'The Ecstasy' to read while he made a phone call.
> …. Later asked him – did he want to leave the country? – Yes, probably not forever, but for a while. – Where? – … Ireland. Yes, and Venice in the winter. Not France, I hate France and the French. The only two Frenchmen I ever respected, Pascal and (can't remember), are dead.[190]

There was also an existential value to Brodsky's pursuit of the English language – it helped him 'to obliterate the local reality'. That is why we find letters written as early as in 1965 from his Northern confinement signed 'Joseph Brodsky' – the English version of his name. In some of these letters the poet also introduces into his epistolary single phrases in English and even tries – albeit half-seriously and making amends for his English – to compose a poem in English:

> My window is
> immoral kiss
> of white
> twilighte [191]

Of equal importance is also Brodsky's attempt back in 1969 to execute his first translation into English of a poem by his friend Leningrad poet Vladimir Ufliand, a translation which, whatever its merits, reveals an unrelenting desire of Brodsky to master English.[192] The same desire recurs ina letter from Nadezhda Mandelstam to Carl Proffer written in February 1973 a short time after Brodsky's expulsion from the USSR:

> Give my love to Brodsky and tell him not to be an idiot. Does he want to feed the moth once more? We have no mosquitoes for such as he because he deserves only the North of our country. So let him be happy where he is, he ought to be it. And he will learn the language which he had longued [sic] for all his life. Did he master English? If not, he is crazy. I would have mastered it even in my age which is 73.[193]

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[190] Brodsky. *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*, p. 5.
[191] Joseph Brodsky. 'Letter no. 10 from 21 May 1965, Norenskoe'. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.
[192] «В целом люди прекрасны» (In general people are beautiful) a poem that Vladimir Ufliand wrote in 1958 and which was translated by Brodsky into English. The translation is dated 22 January 1969, 'Brodsky MSS,' Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 56 Fld 6.
[193] Nadezhda Mandelstam. 'Letter to Carl Proffer from February 1973', Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 56 Fld 24.

Learning to speak a language requires practice. While he was living in Leningrad, Brodsky was obviously enough deprived of such an opportunity. It is clear that translation was his main exercise in English, which, as yet unbeknownst to him, was to become his second native language. By 4 June 1972, the day when he became an involuntary exile, or put bluntly, was expelled from his native country, Brodsky had translated into Russian John Donne, Andrew Marvell, George Herbert, Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, Robert Lowell, Richard Wilbur, Brendan Behan, Randall Jarrell, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and many other English and American poets.

Guests from the future

As we have just said, living in Leningrad, Brodsky did not have much chance to practice his spoken English; this however is not entirely the case.From time to time there came visitors from Anglophone countries, some of whom were subsequently to become his closest friends in the West. Mostly, they would speak Russian, but with some of them Brodsky could practise his English. One of such visitors was Lynette Labinger who wrote down in a diary this precious account of Brodsky's spoken performance in English back in 1970. Labinger discovered that Brodsky's English, although not fluent, was exceedingly functional:

> We spoke mostly in English – my Russian was a failure – no confidence on my part. … His English was surprisingly good for someone who taught himself. Good not in its grammatical exactness but in his ability to express so many of his ideas. He joked about how bad his English was, but I think he was proud of it and his own accomplishment nevertheless. [194]

This tension, though in other forms, between English being his second language and Brodsky's ever increasing proficiency in it, would manifest itself through all his life – it is indeed, the central subject of this thesis.

Another guest from the Anglophone dimension was one of Brodsky's closest friends Carl Ray Proffer, a professor of Russian literature at the University of Michigan and the founder of Ardis Publishers, who met Brodsky in Leningrad in the 1960s. Ardis, which Carl Proffer established together with his wife Ellendea Proffer in the beginning of the 1970's, set

[194] Brodsky, *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*, pp. 4-6.

out to publish works of Russian writers which could not be published at the time in their country:

> … Ardis was … very much a family operation, where children in their teens played not a small role. … Proffers would invariably take their kids [on the numerous trips to Russia] who confused the KGB surveillance by running in all possible directions, hiding important mail in their parkas and in general creating a great commotion. The crucial part of Ardis' operation was, of course, obtaining the manuscripts and getting them out of the country. Some of the schemes were more mind-boggling than any of Le Carre or Len Deighton's.[195]

Proffer dispatched through a diplomatic pouch an essential part of the manuscripts of *Ostanovka v pustyne*, which was the first Russian edition of Brodsky's verse published outside Russia, but over which Brodsky exercised his editorial control.[196] (All of Brodsky's subsequent Russian collections of poetry written during the time he lived in the U.S. were published by Ardis.) It was also Carl Proffer who collected Brodsky from the airport in Vienna when he was forced to emigrate and subsequently took him to Auden's summer house in Kirchstetten. Proffer seems to be responsible in the final analysis for Brodsky's eventual decision to settle in America, for it was due to his influence that Brodsky obtained the position of Poet in Residence at the University of Michigan in late 1972. [197]

Another 'foreigner' who met Brodsky in Leningrad in 1967 was his first English translator George L. Kline, a Philosophy Professor at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania.[198] When on one of his visits to the USSR in 1968, George Kline told Brodsky about Penguin's plans to put out a book of English translations of his works and asked him whom he would prefer to write a foreword to the volume, Brodsky's immediate response was, 'Auden, naturally! But that's highly unlikely.' His surprise was indeed very great when he learnt that Auden actually agreed to do the foreword. [199] According to Brodsky the moment when he learnt about it 'was one of the most thrilling moments' of his life and everything that

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[195] Joseph Brodsky. "Carl R. Proffer: In Memoriam." A lecture given on 1 April 1985 (unpublished). Beinecke Library Brodsky Estate. Box 43 Fld 12.
[196] *Ostanovka v pustyne* was published in 1970 by Chekhov Publishing Co., Columbia University. See also: George L. Kline., 'A History of Brodsky's *Ostanovka v pustyne* and his *Selected Poems*.', *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 10 (Winter 1996) p. 15.
[197] Volkov. *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, p. 130.
[198] Translations by Lord Nicholas Bethell published in a book *Elegy to John Donne and other Poems* in 1967 in London was done without Brodsky's consent and was acknowledged by many experts as "hasty, inaccurate, and awkward". See also: George L. Kline., 'A History of Brodsky's *Ostanovka v pustyne* and his *Selected Poems*,' p. 15.
[199] Volkov. *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, p. 130.

happened afterwards including the Nobel Prize for literature that he won in 1987 was in a sense 'an anticlimax'.[200]

Language of exile

When Brodsky arrived in Vienna on the 4 June 1972 and was picked up by his friend Carl Proffer, his first impulse was to see Auden as he knew that the latter was supposed to be at his summer house in Kirchstetten, Austria. Brodsky was fortunate enough to be received by Auden in front of his house:

> On the first day, when he and I sat down in Kirchstetten and began our conversation, I started to ask him questions. It was a long interview about what he thought of various English language poets. In reply, Auden gave me (somewhat reluctantly) rather precise formulations which to this day are for me – well, not exactly law, but something to bear in mind nonetheless. All this took place over several sessions. Auden was objective. He judged poets regardless his personal sympathies.[201]

In his conversations with Brodsky Auden spoke very quickly in a rare mixture of 'New York English' and 'Oxonian' and at first Brodsky took great pains to understand him as he had never heard anything of the kind. What Auden was saying happened to be, however, of great consequence to the younger poet:

> When I arrived, my English was in an embryonic state, which was natural if you consider the odds then of a Russian ever using it. I even wonder somewhat at the patience Auden exhibited toward all my grammatical eccentricities. I was capable of asking a few questions and listening to the answers, but [not] to formulate my own thought in such a way that I wasn't ashamed…[202]

Auden was also the one who helped Brodsky a great deal during his first days in the West. He procured Brodsky some start-up funds from the Academy of American Poets so as to ensure that Brodsky was not completely penniless in his first days in the West. He also organised Brodsky's participation at the Poetry International Festival in London, where they flew together two weeks after Brodsky's arrival in Austria. They stayed several days together at the house of another poet, Auden's friend from the late twenties, Stephen Spender, who subsequently became a close friend and admirer of Brodsky's.[203] Spender's manner of speaking which, according to Brodsky, had all the 'nobility, civility, grace and detachment'

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[200] Ibid., p. 203.
[201] Ibid., p. 130.
[202] Ibid., p. 135.
[203] Ibid., pp. 132-133.

the English language had to offer,[204] left a great impression upon the Russian poet and fired up his love affair with the English language:

> It was for me [a] gripping, stunning [pleasure] … to hear Oxford English. The phenomenal nobility of sound! That is what happened when Auden and I arrived in London and I heard English from the mouth of Auden's good friend, the poet Stephen Spender. I remember my reaction: I nearly fainted. I was simply staggered! Few things have ever made that kind of impression on me. … I immediately understood why English is an imperial language. All empires have existed not because of their political structures but because of the linguistic bond. Because what unifies people more than anything else is language. [205]

Such were Brodsky's approximate notions and knowledge of English at the time of his arrival in the autumn of 1972 to what was to become his second native land – America.

Early Americana

Brodsky, who had never had a chance of expressing his views in print in his homeland, received such an opportunity in his adoptive country. His very early publication was in great part dedicated to politics, apparently rather against his will, because Brodsky felt the urge to withstand the attempts of some Western journalists who were trying to exploit his expulsion from the U.S.S.R. for their own political purposes. This had to do with the prehistory of his arrival to America, with the fact that the West had come to know of Brodsky as a victim of Soviet regime long before it read any of his poems. (This prehistory will become of particular interest in Chapter Eight in connection with the translational materials pertaining to the poem 'The North buckles metal').

In January 1964 Brodsky was tried and sentenced to five years hard labour in the Arctic Circle by Soviet trial on charges of social parasitism. (By that time he had already served two times in prison and sat in mental hospitals). Evidence presented by his defenders of numerous poetry translation jobs in which Brodsky was engaged at the time were disregarded by his judges: the fact that Brodsky was not a member of the Union of the Soviet Writers counted infinitely more for the Soviet jury. The journalist Frieda Vigdorova managed to take notes of this outrageous trial and permitted their publication abroad while Brodsky

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[204] Joseph Brodsky. "In Memory of Stephen Spender" in *On Grief and Reason: essays.* (New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux: 1996), p. 461.
[205] Volkov. *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky*, p. 126.

was still serving his term. These notes appeared in *The New Leader* in English translation as early as 31 August 1964. [206]

His trial in 1964 and the confinement which followed it remained for Brodsky a controversial issue to the very end. In his first publication in the West he was apparently implicitly reacting to the constant attempts to turn *his* into a political case. Brodsky was certainly aware that it was probably in the connection with this kangaroo trial that he first became known in the West. The attention this trial aroused in the West presumably led to the shortening of Brodsky's term by the Soviet authorities (Sartre was one of the prominent intellectuals from the West to sign a letter in support of Brodsky's release). On the other hand, Brodsky was very much against the idea of his penal experience being turned into a showcase of political martyrdom. With all his vigour he tried to separate his artistic achievements from any type of political notoriety. Whenever Brodsky encountered endeavours at considering his art in the light of politics, he was afflicted beyond description.

One of the characteristic examples was the book *Brodski ou le procès d'un poète*[207] published in Paris by Efim Etkind, a prominent literary critic and one of the most devoted admirers and partisans of Brodsky back in the USSR. (Shortly after Brodsky's expulsion Etkind, who kept the manuscripts of the former's verse, lost his position at the Leningrad University, was ostracised, and later expelled from the country[208]). In his book written on the occasion of Brodsky's Nobel Prize award in 1987 Etkind introduced Brodsky to the French readership by retelling on about 150 pages the history of the latter's trial and confinement. Brodsky was simply enraged when he had read the book. In a letter written by Brodsky to Etkind in 1987 Brodsky argues that Etkind drew the reader's attention to the history of his political persecution too strongly. By so doing, according to Brodsky, Etkind drew it at the same time away from the most relevant of subjects – Brodsky's art. Etkind followed thus the path of Brodsky's persecutors, thereby degrading poetry, which possesses its own dynamics independent from politics:

> … I do not object to any philological studies connected with my works of art – they are what one might call a public property. But my life, my physical existence has always belonged with God's help and still belongs solely to myself. …. What seems to me to be the worst aspect of this enterprise is that such works serve the same purpose

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[206] More information about the trial can be derived from this publication in *The New Leader* from 31 August 1964 or in the September 1964 edition of Stephen Spender's *Encounter*.
[207] Efim G. Etkind. *Brodski ou le procès d'un poète* / présentation et commentaire d'Efim·Etkind, (Paris: Libr. Générale Française, 1988).
[208] See also Efim Etkind. 'Letter to Brodsky,' (1973-1986), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld. 49.

> as the events they describe: they reduce literature to the level of political reality. Voluntarily or not … you simplify for the reader the idea about my humble self: you – pardon me the gravity of my tone – rob the reader (as well as the author, by the way). 'Oh, I see,' a Frenchman from Bordeaux will say, 'He's a dissident. That's why the anti-Soviet Swedes have given him the Nobel [Prize].' And he won't buy the poems. (*Transl. Z.I.*)[209]

As is evident from the above quotation, Brodsky was of opinion that apart from being simply a manifestation of bad taste ('for a writer to mention his penal experiences – or for that matter, any kind of hardship – is like dropping names for normal folk,'[210]) such an approach was absolutely lethal for literature. He was convinced that art should be judged exclusively by its own criteria, especially since political martyrdom rarely, if ever, coincides with artistic vocation.

In the year 1972, notably in the middle of the Cold War, *The New York Times Magazine* published the article, 'A Writer is a lonely traveller, and no one is his helper'. Naturally some journalists in the West were tempted to seize the opportunity to make a political case out of Brodsky's expulsion from the U.S.S.R. They expected him to depict in his first publication the horrors of the persecutions he had suffered in the Soviet Union and to describe the outrageous injustice writers suffer in a despotic totalitarian regime. It did not, however, take him long to show them that this would not do and that in his case they had to deal with quite a discomforting visitor:

> … I did not leave Russia of my own free will…I doubt that anyone would be overjoyed to be thrown out of his home. … No matter under what circumstances you leave it, home does not cease to be home. … And I simply cannot understand why some people expect, and others even demand that I smear its gates with tar. … In Russia I did not allow myself to be used in any political games, all the less will I do so here. …. Russia is my home; I lived there all my life, and for everything that I have

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[209] Joseph Brodsky. Draft letter to Efim Etkind. (1988), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Folder 49. The original text by Brodksy runs as follows: «Я не возражаю против филологических штудий, свянных с моими худ. произведениями – они, что называется, достояние публики. Но моя жизнь, моё физическое существование, с Божьей помощью принадлежала и принадлежит только мне. ... Что мне представляется самым дурным в этой затее, это – то, что подобные сочинения служат той же самой цели, что и события в них описываемые: что они низводят литературу до уровня политической реальности. Вольно или невольно ... Вы упрощаете для читателя представление о моей милости: Вы – простите уж меня за резкость тона – грабите читателя (как, впрочем, и автора). „А", скажет французик из Бордо, - „всё понятно. Диссидент. За это ему Нобеля и дали эти шведы-антисоветчики." И стихотворения покупать не станет.»

[210] Joseph Brodsky. "To Please a Shadow", *Less than one: essays*, (New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux: 1996) p. 361.

> in my soul I am obliged to Russia and its people. And – this is the main thing – obliged to its language.[211]

Brodsky's position here might seem paradoxical in the light of the fact that he actually was indeed a sworn enemy of Communism in whichever form and at whichever place, as well as the enemy of the Soviet regime, of course. What Brodsky disdained, however, was the ease with which the new arriving émigrés expatiated about the evils at home from the safety of their new environment, whereas back home, as he well knew, they would not necessarily display so much courage. Not less did Brodsky disdain American mass media machine which urged and encouraged this sort of effusions in the new-arrivals. The combination of both was precisely what Brodsky later in the article referred to as the 'inflation of freedom of speech.'[212] Brodsky refused to assist journalists in making a meal of his persecutions in Russia. He also refused to 'smear the gates of his home with tar.' Brodsky maintained that despite the fact of his persecutions in his home country, the actual difference in his position and the position of poets in the West was not that different essentially:

> The difference between the position of a writer in the East and in the West, in essence, is not too great. Both there and here he tries to knock down a rather thick wall with his forehead. In the former case the wall reacts to the touch of the smallest heads in a way threatening to the writer's physical condition. In the latter case the wall maintains silence, and this threatens one's psychological condition. To tell the truth, I do not know which is more frightening. …. A writer is a lonely traveller, and no one is his helper. Society is always more or less an enemy. Both when it rejects him and when it accepts him. At any rate, it does both in rather coarse ways.[213]

An excessive control of society over his work in the East was, in Brodsky's view, as damaging for him as a poet as society's general disregard for the work of poets in the West. Further in the article Brodsky gave the American reading public a taste of his politically-non-correct (even before the coinage of "politically *in*correct") non-conformist views, which were to become the main trademark of Brodsky's public appearances and essays in the West:

> … I will rely on the good practices of the free press, although freedom of speech, like any freedom bestowed gratuitously, without struggle, has its shadowy sides. For in any second generation, freedom is an inherited rather than personal achievement. Aristocracy – but impoverished aristocracy. It is that freedom of speech which generates inflation of speech.[214]

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[211] Brodsky, Joseph. "Writer is a lonely traveller, and no one is his helper," *New York Times Magazine*, 8:5 (October 1, 1972), p. 1.
[212] Idem
[213] Idem
[214] Idem

To say that 'freedom of speech' ultimately generated 'inflation of speech' was a statement one would have least expected to come from a poet who had been denied publication in his native country and now, having come to the land of press freedom was enjoying its luxuries for the first time. But this disconcerting unpredictability, which was the result of Brodsky's rejection of rules, labels, and systems, was one of his main features and a line from a famous Frost poem 'what for the heart of man/ could be less than a treason/ to go with the drift of things' must have been particularly dear to him.[215] At the same time, as suggested by the Librarian of Congress James Billington, America has to be given credit here for still remaining the place which offers living space for such 'oddballs' as Brodsky. Czesław Miłosz echoed the same idea:

> [Brodsky] lived in … the sixties … that had a great impact in America, and people were more or less leftist. He had those experiences in Russia, and he had absolutely no illusions in this respect. Fortunately, he lived in America, where political correctness was not absolutely obligatory – so there were some zones where political incorrectness could operate. Fortunately for him, he was not in France, where he wouldn't have been able to breathe even… Because everything there was submitted to a leftist political correctness.[216]

It must be said, however, that Brodsky was not entirely on his own with his unconventional views. A lot of ideas in the article in question echo with what Stephen Spender had written Brodsky in a letter in July 1972:

> … I have been reading the memoirs of Nadezhda Mandelstam and doing so has made me think a great deal about you. It is very difficult to put down my reactions.… I cannot imagine the courage of some of the people described.…I would have been terrified. Communists always frightened me more than Fascists, because there was always the possibility that communists were sincere, and if people are sincere I am always in danger of thinking they are right. Comparing the life described in this book I certainly feel that we in England and America do as individuals have freedoms that are real. However, I think that we misuse them or accept them too lightly, because we do not live constantly in the presence of terrible realities in the way that Russian writers who are aware of truth do. I suppose that most people including the intellectuals are apathetic, drowsy as Mrs Mandelstam says. But those who are awake are probably much more awake than anyone here.[217]

In this letter Spender seems to share Brodsky's idea that individual freedoms bestowed on people in the West are an easy subject for inflation, precisely because there are so easily

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[215] See also Stephen Spender on Brodsky: "Everything nice that you would like him to think, he does not think. But he is utterly truthful, deeply religious, fearless and pure. Loving as well as hating." in Stephen Spender, "Bread of Affliction: review of *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*", *New Statesman*, (December 14, 1973), p. 11.
[216] Czeslaw Milosz. *Czeslaw Milosz: Conversations*/ edited by Cynthia L. Haven, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), p.195.
[217] Spender, Stephen. 'Letter to Brodsky from Maussane', France, 4 July 1972,' Beinecke, Box 19, Fld 18.

taken for granted. On the other hand those who had had to struggle for their freedom have more appreciation for freedom's value.

Besides the article's political aspects, Brodsky formulated in it for the first time what was to become his programme as a poet in exile. The poet declares in the article his determination to carry on writing in Russian despite all the difficulties arising from his expulsion:

> In order to write well in a language you have to hear it - in taverns, buses and grocery stores. I have not yet invented a way to fight this. But I hope that a man's language travels with him. And I hope that I will take the Russian language whenever I go. … To paraphrase a German writer who found himself in a similar situation 35 years ago, 'Die russische Dichtung ist da wo ich bin.' …. however much may be required, to write in my own language, an occupation which formerly struck me as my personal affair …. I now consider my personal duty.[218]

Time showed that Brodsky proved able to continue writing verse in Russian until virtually the very last day of his life. The period immediately following his expulsion from the U.S.S.R. was a particularly prolific one. Nevertheless, he could not but help noticing from the very first days in America that his situation as a poet was quite different from what it had been in Russia.

The importance of being translated

Despite the fact that Brodsky was denied publication in the Soviet press, or rather by virtue of that fact, his impact on the reader was more immediate. The manuscripts of his poems circulated in the *samizdat*, unofficial practice of reproduction and secret distribution of unpublished manuscripts. Thus his poems were appreciated by the small circle of elected readers, most of whom were writers themselves and whose opinion he valued highly. Brodsky also read his poems in private gatherings and could see for himself the great effect his recitations had on the listeners. Direct contact with his audience was extremely valuable for the poet and secured him in Russia, all the persecutions notwithstanding, his self-respect as a writer. This was also why before his expulsion Brodsky had not considered leaving Russia forever of his own volition, since he wrote poetry in Russian and thought he was writing this poetry for Russians.[219] The same state of mind was reflected in an open letter to Brezhnev which Brodsky wrote after his expulsion and in which he pleaded with the leader of his

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[218] Brodsky, 'Writer is a lonely traveller, and no one is his helper,' p.1.
[219] See also notes by Lynette Labinger in Brodsky, *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations,* p. 5.

country to allow him to return to his home and to contribute with his writings to the benefit of the society.[220] Auden, who read this letter in a German translation, particularly admired it.[221]

In America his situation as a poet was different. His Russian poems were published in European and émigré magazines and were sometimes smuggled into the Soviet Union to eventually reach his regular readers. Now, however, between them and the poet there was the Atlantic Ocean and the Iron Curtain, and all that was now happening in Russia could not but feel more and more remote to Brodsky. In fact, he perceived his situation of being separated from his Russian readers as being locked 'in a tête-à-tête with a Russian language' and what he was writing he wrote 'for a kind of angel' of the Russian language.[222] That situation was to remain thus for Brodsky up until the beginning of perestroika. A good illustration of this situation is the following citation from *The Room and a Half*, Brodsky's memoir of his parents written in 1985:

> I write this in English because I want to grant them [his parents] a margin of freedom: the margin whose width depends on the number of those who may be willing to read this. …[E]ven if I had written all this in Russian, these words wouldn't see the light of day under the Russian sky. Who would read them then? A handful of émigrés…? [223]

Not that Brodsky didn't find admirers of his Russian verse in America; here he also had a small circle of perfect readers among the émigrés and exiles right from the start. (One might mention Alexandr Sumerkin, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Gennadiy Shmakov among others) But to be confined to places 'where exiles have established a malicious village,'[224] in other words the idea of being limited to the society of expatriates, however dear some of them might have been to him, could not have appealed to Brodsky. He was much too possessed by the idea of 'a world culture' and too anglophile in his orientation. As opposed to the most of the émigré writers in America, Brodsky's main environment was English-speaking right from the very beginning and he immediately plunged into the world of American letters. Very soon he made friends among the American poets and writers whose writings he had esteemed, such as Robert Lowell, Richard Wilbur, Anthony Hecht, Mark Strand, Derek Walcott, Susan Sontag. His strong personality, sharp intelligence and wit alongside with his thorough knowledge of poetry in English (hundreds of lines of which he knew by heart and would

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[220] Joseph Brodsky, 'Exiled Poet Makes Plea to Brezhnev,' *Washington Post* (7 Aug 1972).
[221] W.H. Auden. 'Letter to Brodsky' (1972), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 2.
[222] Benedict. „Flight from predictability: Joseph Brodsky", p. 17.
[223] Joseph Brodsky, *Less Than One: essays.* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 460.
[224] Quoted from the poem 'The Capital' in W.H. Auden. *Collected Poems.* Mendelson (ed.) (London: Faber&Faber, 1976) p. 145.

invariably recite in a conversation) obviously impressed others and won him much of esteem and affection. But what chance did Brodsky have to show his new English speaking friends what kind of a poet *he* himself was? This was bound to be done through translations.

'Joseph Brodsky: Selected poems'

The first book of translations by which Brodsky was introduced into the English speaking world was *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems* which was first published by the Penguin Books, London.[225] All the translations were made by George L. Kline. It was the first book over which Brodsky exercised his editorial control, even if this was done from a distance and across the iron curtain; in the years from 1968 till 1972 the communication between Brodsky and Kline about texts and their translations was limited to hand-carried messages delivered by visitors. This is how Kline described it:

> These exchanges took three related forms: I sometimes sent a list of questions which Brodsky would answer orally or in a separate note. In other cases he jotted down his answers (often in red ink) on the typed sheet with my questions and gave this to the visitor to bring back to London or Paris or New York.[226]

Clearly, Brodsky's control over the translations of his poems was limited at the beginning to mere linguistic consultancy relating to the content of the Russian poems.

In the year 1969 Kline was introduced by Arkadi Nebolsine, a professor of Russian at Pittsburg University, to Auden and managed to obtain from him an agreement to write a foreword for *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*. By the end of April 1970 Auden completed the Foreword and it was delivered to Brodsky early in May 1970.[227] This is what Auden wrote:

> One demands two things of a poem. Firstly, it must be a well-made verbal object that does honor to the language in which it is written. Secondly, it must say something significant about a reality common to us all, put perceived from a unique perspective.
> ….
> A really accurate judgment upon a poem as a verbal object can, of course, only be made by persons who are masters of the same mother tongue as its maker. Knowing

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[225] The first book of Brodsky's translations in English by Lord Bethell, *Elegy to John Donne and Other Poems* was done without Brodsky's permission and by common consent was considered to be "hasty, inaccurate and awkward". See also: George L. Kline, 'A History of Brodsky's *Ostanovka v pustyne* and his *Selected Poems*,' pp. 15-16.

[226] Idem

[227] The document was delivered to Brodsky by Michael Curran, a friend of Kline's and professor of Russian history at Ohio State University, who travelled at the time to Russia and succeeded not without difficulties to smuggle the document into the country. See also: George L. Kline, 'A History of Brodsky's Ostanovka v pustyne and his Selected Poems.,' pp. 17-18.

> no Russian and therefore forced to base my judgment on English translations, I can do little more than guess about the poems of Joseph Brodsky. My chief reason for believing that Professor Kline's translations do justice to their originals is that they convince me that Brodsky is an excellent craftsman. … it is clear from the translations that Mr. Brodsky commands many tones of voice, from the lyric … to the elegiac … to the comic-grotesque …, and can handle with equal ease a wide variety of rhymes, meters, short lines, long lines, iambics, anapaestics, masculine rhymes and feminine….[228]

As we said in the introduction, Auden believed that form in poetry is as intimately bound up with the meaning 'as the body is with the soul.'[229] His first criterion of judgement about any poet especially in translation was the technical felicity of the poems, for, as Auden believed, the 'technical conventions and devices of verse can be grasped in abstraction from the verse itself'.[230] In Brodsky Auden recognised above all an accomplished craftsman. There is no doubt that Auden was sincere in believing Brodsky was an excellent craftsman in Russian, but it is doubtful, however, that Auden could have achieved this sort of impression on the basis of the translations alone. The translator himself, George L. Kline, had to point out to Auden quite a few things about the formal aspects of Brodsky's poems. In the time preceding the composition of this *Foreword* Auden had been visited several times in New York and once in his summer house in Kirchstetten by Kline. The latter gave Auden a number of his translations introductory notes and essays on Brodsky.[231] This is for instance what Kline wrote in the 'Note on the Translation' to the *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems* on behalf of his translations:

> Like most Russian poets, Brodsky makes systematic use of rhyme. But … he adds to the store of perfect 'Pushkinian' rhymes numerous imperfect or slant rhymes … and … compound slant rhymes… Some of Brodsky's rhyme schemes are tours de force. ….
> All of these translations preserve Brosky's meters, but they use rhymes and slant-rhymes sparingly, and only in those cases where the rhymes can be introduced without 'padding'. Brodsky himself, in his brilliant translations of John Donne and Andrew Marvell, scrupulously reproduces both the metric pattern and the rhyme scheme of his originals. I wish that I could have done as much in putting Brodsky into English.[232]

In the passage above Kline refers to Brodsky's equimetrical translations of English metaphysical poets. With characteristic modesty Kline was the first to admit his limitations in

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[228] W.H. Auden, *Foreword* to *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*. (London: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 9-11.
[229] W.H. Auden. 'Note', *W.H. Auden reading his poetry*. [Nonmusic sound recording] (London: Harper Collins Audio Publishers, 1955).
[230] Auden, *Forewords & Afterwords,* p. 334.
[231] George L. Kline, 'A History of Brodsky's *Ostanovka v pustyne* and his *Selected Poems*,' p. 16.
[232] George L. Kline. 'Note on the Translation' in Joseph Brodsky, *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*. (London: Penguin Books, 1973) p. 25.

preserving the rhymes in his translations. The word 'sparingly' with regard to the retention of the original rhymes very much reflects the state of affairs:

> In my translations of Brodsky (and, earlier, of Pasternak and Tsvetayeva) I have tried to preserve the meter, but in some cases have used blank verse where Brodsky uses rhyme; in other cases I have used fewer exact rhymes, and more slant-rhymes, than he does. In still others I have substituted masculine for feminine rhymes of – in blank verse – masculine for feminine endings.[233]

And yet one might say that Kline's modesty in admitting his difficulties to achieve equimetrical translations of Brodsky's verse in English seems here somewhat excessive. For, as I mentioned in the introduction to the present thesis, for purely linguistic reasons alone an equimetrical translation from English into Russian is a considerably easier task than the other way around. Furthermore, as we are going to discuss at some length in the following chapter, the entire question of rhyme in translations of Brodsky's verse is rather controversial, as the use of feminine rhymes in English is quite problematic.

The originals translated in *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems* came predominantly from *Ostanovka v pustyne* (1970), Brodsky's first collection of verse published abroad under supervision of the author. Out of 51 of Brodsky's original Russian verse translated in *Selected Poems* most was 4 or 5-foot iambics – (27); plus 4-foot-trochae – (1), anapaests – (4), amphibrach –(1) and a (5) poems written in accentual verse *dolnik*. The poem *New Stanzas to Augusta* (1) was written in iambic lines of irregular length. All of these 39 poems had alternating masculine and feminine rhymes; the rhyme pattern of several of them was quite complicated; the 12 remaining poems were either unrhymed sonnets or poems based on Greek themes written in unrhymed pentameters.

Out of 39 of Kline's translations of the rhymed poems from *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems* only 3 reproduce the rhyme pattern of the original. The closest where Kline's translation gets to doing so is in the three of the following poems: 'To a Certain Poetess', '1 January 1965', 'A Letter in a Bottle'.[234]

Apart from these purely prosodic aspects Mr.Kline's translations tend to be very literalistic: they reproduce the syntactic units and stick to the original in preserving the same metaphors and not inventing new ones. The latter, as we will see, was very often a practice of

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[233] George L. Kline. 'Translating Brodsky', *Bryn Mawr Now*, (Spring 1974) p. 33.
[234] See some examples in Appendix to Chapter Five.

Brodsky as author-translator. As for Brodsky himself, he seemed to be very delighted with these translations at the time, as he wrote to Kline in a letter of 1969:

> Dear George, I am greatly delighted: it came out wonderfully. To hell with the rhymes, if it works out this way. The only thing that makes me sad is the impossibility of paying you back, for I can't do anything adequate for you. Forever yours, Joseph. I think that I am terribly lucky.[235] Excuse me, please, my terrible English. But I should like to say you the following: remember I respect and love you. … From my point of view you are a big man.[236]

This letter is very remarkable especially because of its argument: 'never mind the rhymes, if it works out this way'. We will see that with time Brodsky became less and less enthusiastic about the 'job' (one of Brodsky's favourite words) done by his translators and at the same time more and more adamant about the preservation, above all, of the rhymes.

A great merit of those translations was that they managed to convince Auden of the uniqueness of Brodsky's poetic talent. Auden believed that despite the intrinsic impossibility of the translation of poetry, reading poetry in translation could also bring its advantages. According to Auden, 'when reading a poem in one's native, tongue, one can find the sensibility personally antipathetic and yet be compelled to admire its verbal manifestation,' whereas while reading a translation 'all one gets is the sensibility.'[237] Thus, Auden maintains, it is paradoxically easier for a foreigner to judge the 'universal relevance of a poet's vision.'[238] In the Brodsky translated by Kline Auden could recognize an akin sensibility endowed with capacity to envision 'sacred objects,'[239] lyric's reserve as opposed to the public 'roaring' of Mayakovsky's 'trumpets', love for his native land as well as appreciation for the tradition:

> Mr. Brodsky is not an easy poet, but even a cursory reading will reveal that, like Van Gogh and Virginia Woolf, he has an extraordinary capacity to envision material objects as sacramental signs, messengers from the unseen. ….
> Unlike the work of some of his contemporaries, Mr. Brodsky's seems to stand outside what might be called the Mayakovsky tradition of 'public' poetry. It never uses a fortissimo. Indeed, original as he is, I would be inclined to classify Mr. Brodsky as a

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[235] The letter was written half in Russian half in English. The Russian part in original went: "Дорогой Джордж, Я просто потрясён: получилось замечательно. Чёрт с ними, с рифмами, если получается так. Огорчает меня только одно: невозможность благодарности, ибо ничего адекватного я сделать Вам не в состоянии. Forever yours Joseph. По-моему, мне невероятно повезло."

[236] Joseph Brodsky, ‚Letter to George Kline' (Easter 1969), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld. 50. This letter was written on Easter 1969 on margins of a manuscript of the English publication: 'Joseph Brodsky, Six New Poems, translated by George L. Kline.'

[237] Auden, *Forewords & Afterwords,* p. 344.

[238] Auden. *Foreword* to *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*, pp. 9-11.

[239] See also Auden's theory on 'sacred objects' in W.H. Auden, 'Making, Knowing and Judging', *The Dyer's Hand and other essays.* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963) pp. 55-56.

> traditionalist. To begin with, he shows a deep respect and love for the past of his native land.
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> …. After reading Professor Kline's translations, I have no hesitation in declaring that, in Russian, Joseph Brodsky must be a poet of the first order, a man of whom his country should be proud. I am most grateful to them both.[240]

Brodsky received such praise with 'a mixture of astonishment, delight and gratitude' and wrote Auden a letter expressing his thanks.[241] As was mentioned previously Brodsky deemed this *Foreword* written by Auden as the highest expression of recognition of him as a poet he was ever to obtain.

Auden, however, as he himself mentioned in the *Foreword*, didn't speak Russian and even if his judgement of Brodsky as poet was very high, he still could not compare the translations with the originals. So when, in 1972, shortly after his arrival in the West, Brodsky received the proofs of the *Selected Poems,* he sent a copy of them to Alan Myers, to ask his opinion about Mr. Kline's translations. This is what Alan Myers, a London based translator from Russian married to Diana Myers, a Russian and a friend an admirer of Brodsky herself, wrote in response:

> I read Mr. Kline's translations as you requested. Leaving the question of rhyme aside, I would say that these translations are of a very high standard. Compared with your translations in other countries (as I hear) I think you're lucky in Mr. Kline. If I didn't know your poems in the original at all I would feel, like Auden, that a very powerful talent, complex and subtle, was before me. The translations read very well, sometimes the effects are almost magical (John Donne), sometimes splendidly witty (2 chasa) and always reflect the spirit of the original. Of course, one may object to some lines where the rhythm jerks, others where English words have been added to preserve the rhythm – even to some lines as failing to reflect the right tone. BUT this volume will do you enormous credit and in the interest of speedy publication, I would be inclined to accept these translations as a whole.[242]

Myer's letter above must have reassured Brodsky at least for the time being that he was lucky in having Kline as translator, that the translations read very well and on the whole did its author a great credit in the 'ears' of English language readership. This letter must have eventually convinced Brodsky to agree with a prospect of an expeditious publication of Kline's translations and to abstain from making any attempts at revising them before. In the late July 1972 both Kline and Brodsky went through the proofs of the book. This is how Kline recalled the occasion some years later, in 1977:

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[240] Auden. *Foreword* to *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*, pp. 9-11.
[241] George L. Kline. *Note on the Translation* in Joseph Brodsky, *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*, p. 18.
[242] Alan Myers. 'Letter to Brodsky' (15 July 1972). Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 20 Fld 7.

> His [Brodsky's] sense of literary English is now so keen and subtle that his criticisms and suggestions directed at my draft translations are invariably penetrating and helpful. When, in July 1972, shortly after Brodsky reached this country, we spent a week in the Berkshires going over every line of my typescript of Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems (London, 1973; New York, 1974), he missed very few of my errors and misreadings of his tone (e.g., my failures to detect the irony of given lines). Now he misses absolutely nothing.[243]

In late April 1973, upon seeing the ultimate set of proofs, Brodsky told Kline he was delighted with the end result adding: 'George, no one could have done a better job'[244].

On 14 December 1973 *New Statesman* published *Bread of Affliction*, Stephen Spender's review of *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*. Spender's review was much more open and direct as compared to the sustained tone of Auden's *Foreword* and understandably so. When Auden wrote it Brodsky was still living in the Soviet Union and a lot of what he said or rather did not say was dictated by the considerations of security. When Auden said that Brodsky had 'a deep respect and love for the past of his native land' and was 'a poet of the first order, a man of whom his country should be proud' it reflected the level of persecution to which Brodsky was subjected as well as the level of denial of any official recognition whatsoever in his native country. At the time when Spender wrote Brodsky was safe and no such considerations were needed. Spender is here quite outspoken about Brodsky's independence from authorities as well as about the situation a poet had to endure at the time in Soviet society, i.e. that this independence resulted in Brodsky's persecutions, trial and ultimately his forced emigration, and hence also the bitter existential character of Brodsky's early poetry:

> If a Russian poet laments his situation as a poet in Soviet society, we all know what that situation is: the society oppresses him for the independence of his views and for not singing its praises. … Society provides the drama which in turn makes possible the ironic poetry ….
> Brodsky is someone who has tasted extremely bitter bread and his poetry has the air of being ground out between his teeth. He sees things from a point of view which is ultimately that of Christians who have devoured bread and gall as the sacraments of the Mass: it should not be supposed that he is liberal, or even a socialist. He deals in unpleasing, hostile truths and is a realist of the least comforting and comfortable kind. Everything nice that you would like him to think, he does not think. But he is utterly truthful, deeply religious, fearless and pure. Loving as well hating. … Above this, there is a great deal else. Firstly, a respect for tradition … whenever he finds it – in

[243] George L. Kline., 'Working With Brodsky', The Paintbrush, 4:7/8 (Spring & Autumn 1977), p. 25.
[244] George L. Kline., 'A History of Brodsky's Ostanovka v pustyne and his Selected Poems,' p. 19.

> Greek mythology, in Russian classics, and especially in English poetry ranging from Donne to Byron, T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden.[245]

Spender also mentions in his review above what Auden had not been able to mention in the one he wrote about Brodsky, because of the political considerations: namely that the tradition that was important for Brodsky was not only that of his native country, but maybe to a greater degree that of the poetry written in English. Besides Spender is trying here to justify in a very touching way what he himself was later to describe in one of his *Journals* as Brodsky's 'outrageous quips.' [246]

What Spender says about Kline's translations is also of a much more critical and direct nature:

> These poems are impressive in English, though one is left having to imagine the technical virtuosity of brilliant rhyming which Mr. Kline describes in his preface. The virtue of this accurate rendering is that it conveys the concreteness, density, literalness of the lines of observation out of which Brodsky constructs his poems whose note, even in its irony, is pre-eminently that of the Old Testament ….Unfortunately with Mr. Kline one is never quite allowed to forget that one is reading a second-hand version rather than original poetry. Some lines are jaw-breakers: 'The road's as stubborn as/ the river. / The ash-tree's shadow is/ a fishnet'. But on the other hand the translation has an honesty which enables one to imagine the poetry that always lies just beyond it.[247]

No matter whichcritics of *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems* did more justice to it and to its translator George L. Kline one thing is certain: alongside the various publications in the *New Yorker* and other prestigious magazines this book was to represent Brodsky in the English language for several years to come.

On 28 September 1973 Auden suddenly died. Brodsky was devastated. He sent the editor of Penguin Books a telegram to insert on the half-title of *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems* 'To the Memory of Wystan Hugh Auden 1907-1973', which the editor was able to do in time. [248]

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[245] Spender, "Bread of Affliction,' p. 11.
[246] Stephen Spender. *Journals 1939-1983*. (London-Boston: Faber&Faber, 1985) p. 473. Entry from 24 April 1983, New York reads: 'We asked about modernism in Russia, Joseph was not very forthcoming because he wanted to discuss his theories about modern English poetry. He produced a few quips of the outrageous kind.'
[247] Spender, "Bread of Affliction,' p. 11.
[248] George L. Kline. *Note on the Translation* in Joseph Brodsky, *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*, pp. 18-19.

Teaching English and 'On Richard Wilbur'

> Blessed be all metrical rules, that forbid automatic responses, force us to have second thoughts, free from the fetters of Self. (W.H. Auden)

As early as in 1972 Brodsky started teaching a course in Modern English Literature at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor where he was the Poet in Residence. Brodsky described his English seminars in a letter to an acquaintance in Russia in his typical witty way as 'a mixture of tolerance and insolence.' At the beginning his students showed their tolerance for his poor English, and he showed insolence in presuming to teach them in it. Later, when his English had improved, it was the other way round: Brodsky showed tolerance to the poor quality of their thoughts and they showed insolence in displaying it.[249] In an interview Brodsky gave some years later he expatiated more on the first days of his teaching activity in the U.S.:

> When I came to the States, at first I suffered a severe loss of nerve. … How am I going to talk to Americans about their own literature? I felt like I was usurping someone else's place. I arrived with the notion that everyone here knew everything. …
> … It became clear [though] that I knew not one whit less about American literature, and American poetry in particular, than most American professors. … [M]y knowledge of this subject is qualitatively different. It is an active knowledge, the knowledge of someone for whom all these texts are precious. More precious, if you like, than for most of them, because my life … was changed by these texts, and American students, as a rule, never come across that kind of approach to literature.[250]

As it is clear from the above quote, Brodsky was in the beginning uncertain about the appropriateness of him, a foreigner, teaching American students about their own native literature, in particularly poetry. Very soon, however, Brodsky discovered that he was not only better familiar with their poetry, but had internalised it much deeper than any of his colleagues, let alone his students. It was probably due to this newly acquired awareness of his unique and almost existential attitude towards American poetry – the poet maintained that his whole life had been changed by it – that gave Brodsky enough confidence to express his views about it publicly.[251] In January 1973 *The American Poetry Review* published Brodsky's article 'On Richard Wilbur' translated from Russian by Carl Proffer.[252] This article is of

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[249] Joseph Brodsky. 'Letter to Efim Etkind' (14 March 1973), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 49.
[250] Volkov. *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky.* pp. 147-148.
[251] Milosz, "A Struggle Against Suffocation,' p. 6.
[252] Joseph Brodsky, "On Richard Wilbur: review", pp. 12-18.

special interest for us, for in it Brodsky declared his priorities regarding poetry written in English, even before writing his famous essays on translations from Russian into English. A lot of subsequent criticism of his theories and practice of translation into English coming from American and English quarters tried to discard, in their native smugness one is tempted to add, Brodsky's theories on the grounds of his insufficient knowledge of English, or similarly by arguing that he applied his Russian tastes in his pronouncements on English poetry. Yet as we will see, it was quite the other way round: it was precisely by virtue of his profound knowledge of English language poetry – and not because of his ignorance of it – that Brodsky was aware of its great spectre of possibilities; and it was due to this kind of awareness that he remained so adamant and insistent about certain aspects of translation into English.

The subdued tone of the article still partly revealed Brodsky's insecurity about the appropriateness of his pronouncements in the American press on an American poet. He wrote: 'the things which I can discuss are rather the impressions of a reader than the opinions of a specialist' – adding though that to his credit as opposed to an ordinary reader he also had been the translator of several of Wilbur's poems into Russian; and then again Brodsky admits humbly that his considerations on Wilbur might be wrong and Wilbur might be offended upon reading them. Still he writes, 'the quality which attracted my attention to Wilbur is his dramatism, camouflaged by excellence of form.' But this excellence and beauty of form, as Brodsky goes on, are 'never goals in themselves'; for Wilbur 'beauty is not the ultimate aim of his feelings and thoughts', but just 'an opportunity to journey into higher spheres. At very best it is a secondary result of such a journey'.

From what looked like a mere defence of formal verse, Brodsky launches into offensive attacking free verse as a poetic device:

> … the laws of Ars poetica, when they are observed, render a greater gain in quality than any breaking of these laws in the name of freedom of self-expression. And what kind of freedom can we speak of once we have experienced fear? ….
> …. In my opinion a regular meter and exact rhymes shaping an uncomfortable thought are far more functional than any form of free verse. Because in the former case the reader gets a sense of chaos being organized, while in the latter a sense of dependence on and being determined by chaos.[253]

Hardly could there be indeed a more unpopular thing to state before the American literati in 1973 than the idea of superiority of a formal verse over free verse. America was a

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[253] Brodsky, 'On Richard Wilbur,' p. 12.

country where free verse had long gained the upper hand and Robert Frost himself represented an unfashionable minority as early as in the teens of the twentieth century. This is how Robert Lowell described Frost's situation:

> Robert Frost came at unfortunate time. When he arrived in America it was just about time. Modernism began Eliot and Pound, Williams and so forth. None of them would have anything to do with Frost and they took him as a very secondary figure who wrote in old-fashioned style; and unfortunately people who did like Frost were mostly nonentities and he had no choice really. [254]

So in fact at the time of the article Brodsky's views were quite extraordinary and came completely out of the blue for Richard Wilbur who, upon reading the piece, wrote to Rhoda Schwartz to express via her mediation his amazement and gratitude to Brodsky:

> I am of course most honoured that he would care to write the piece in the first place, and (more importantly) I am gratified to have been the point of departure for such interesting and tonic remarks about form and finish in poetry: it matters greatly to me that he should see and say that in my work – as in the work of others I might name – technical felicity is a means and a by-product rather than an end. This is an unpopular thing which needs saying nowadays, and I admire the concision and clarity with which he puts it.[255]

Brodsky, however, didn't limit himself to saying that free verse is aesthetically inferior to verse displaying 'a regular meter and exact rhymes.' He went further, maintaining free verse's *ethical* inferiority. According to Brodsky, writing formal verse requires not only more skills in a poet offering in return greater aesthetical possibilities; being one of the forms of resistance to chaos, formal verse ultimately demands more courage from a poet:

> From what one could call a moral point of view, the former is more important than the latter. Even in the event that it is not organization, but nothing more than a form of resistance to chaos. For in the physical world only resistance is possible.[256]

The idea of resistance to all the possible forms of determinism was, as one could see from his biography, one of Brodsky's leading ideas and, more importantly, practices. When, concluding the essay, Brodsky says that from his point of view 'in the twentieth century America has been very lucky with poetry – more than any other country in the world, including Russia' – it must have been clear that his praise was addressed mainly to the few formal poets who like Richard Wilbur represented an absolute minority in contemporary American letters. Brodsky's friend, Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz confirms, 'It's interesting that

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[254] Robert Lowell, A Reading, recorded on Dec 8, 1976 at the Poetry Centre of the 92nd St., (Caedmon, 1978).
[255] Richard Wilbur, 'Letter to Rhoda Schwartz' (9 September 1972) Brodsky Papers, Beinicke, Box 19 Fld 8.
[256] Joseph Brodsky, "On Richard Wilbur: review", *The American Poetry Review*, 2:1, (Jan/Feb 1973) p. 18.

Joseph Brodsky was immune to the whole Whitman tradition of poetry. For him, Frost was the greatest American poet.'[257] Accordingly, Brodsky's ambition, slightly presumptuous in a non-native speaker as many of his critics held, was to show American poets in the first place that the potential of formal poetic devices for the development of verse in English, despite the prevalent and ubiquitous presence of the free verse as a poetical tool 'of our times,' persists. Brodsky was certainly in the minority in his preferences and tastes, but he believed neither in majority, nor in various forms of '-isms', schools of poetry and current fashions; he believed much rather in single individuals and in their ability to redress the balance especially in art. Here is Milosz again to confirm this:

> Brodsky and myself stand together and choose to differ from certain Modernist poets …. [G]iven the state of Western poetry at present, Brodsky and I may well be considered to be lingering in the rear guard, but really we may be the avant-garde. That's something you just never know, because if we poets work hard at it then we can change the direction in which poetry is headed.[258]

Art vs. politics: the American Left and Free Verse

> When Speech was mannerly, an Art,
> Like learning not to belch or fart:
> I cannot settle, which is worse
> The Anti-Novel or Free Verse.
> (From a 'Doggerel by a Senior Citizen'
> by W.H. Auden)

In the article 'A writer is a lonely traveller', discussed previously, Brodsky wrote about his coming to America: 'I have seen a new land, but the sky is the same.'[259] He was not an optimistic person and generally had little illusions concerning life and people; neither did he imagine for himself a rosy future in America. Levertov's open letter to the editors of *The American Poetry Review* must have left Brodsky with even less illusions about anything or anybody. Having been persecuted at home and eventually thrown out of his country, Brodsky soon noticed that not everyone in his new democratic homeland was willing to give him a warm welcome: his oppressors turned out to have their sympathisers also in the 'land of opportunities'. This is what Levertov wrote:

> I am troubled that the second issue of APR, a publication with which I've associated myself as a contributing editor …. should have devoted so much attention to Joseph

[257] Milosz. *Conversations*, p. 190.
[258] Ibid., p. 189.
[259] Brodsky, 'Writer is a lonely traveller, and no one is his helper,' p. 2.

> Brodsky.
> …. Brodsky's choosing to come to this country, rather than any other …is an act of tacit approval of a country that is committing gross atrocities in Asia. … there were other parts of the world in which he could have settled (though he wouldn't have received, in, say, Norway or New Zealand, the fine house and the adulation he receives in the USA)….
> …. at a time when all Europe, all the world, is nauseated by Nixon and the war … [Brodsky] is for Nixon, he defends the Viet Nam war…. And shall we see any demur on Brodsky's part, any change in his sententious and ignorant 'pro-Nixon, pro-Vietnam war' opinions?[260]

This is just a small exhibit of Levertov's style. Characteristically most of her article is dedicated to political issues – which must have seemed to her an adequate response to Brodsky's strictly literary observations on Wilbur. As we saw in section 4 of this chapter, Brodsky was strongly opposed to the tendency to confuse art and politics, notwithstanding the fact that he himself had strong and well articulated political opinions. Many years later in a letter to a Swedish publisher Brodsky criticised the politicised approach to art of which Levertov's letter is a characteristic example:

> What constantly gets me … is how quickly any discourse on culture degenerates in these parts into a moralistic prattle. Whether it is a piece of music or poetry, in five minutes one finds oneself talking about Holocaust, nuclear threat or waste, Vietnam, contra and so forth. This could be attributed, of course, to Protestant sensibility; I think, however, it is the lack of cultural expertise and uncertainty of aesthetical values that makes one eager to switch to ethics because ethics provide one with a more tangible hierarchy, because in ethics it is easier to attain a firm ground, a commendable posture. For in ethics, the notion of good is stratified in a far more banal, finite and therefore palpable fashion that in aesthetics. Hence the high utilitarian value of moralising: it provides an individual with an ultimate comfort – that of his mind, i.e., it turns one into a mental bourgeois. In ethics, it is rather easy to find yourself far better off than the other. [261]

In the letter above Brodsky argues that in art with its rigid aesthetic hierarchy the only legitimate judgement should be based upon aesthetics, i.e. artistic taste. It is precisely the lack of such taste that results in a substitution of this hierarchy with 'moralistic prattle' particularly popular in America as Brodsky believes. Returning to Levertov's letter, one can observe, however, that it did not get more pleasant when she touched upon the matters of art:

> A literary objection: what is APR doing, allowing Brodsky – quite apart from any political considerations, simply as someone obviously ill-equipped to comprehend poetry written in English – to pontificate about Richard Wilbur (or any other

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[260] Denise Levertov, "Letter to the Editors", *The American Poetry Review*, 2:2, (Mar/Apr 1973) p. 22.
[261] Joseph Brodsky. 'Draft of a letter to Askold, a Swedish publisher' (undated), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 7.

> American poet)?.... I … find Brodsky's ignorant praise of him insulting to Wilbur. Like most Russian poets, Brodsky's preference for 'regular meter and exacting rhymes' stems from the nature of the Russian language which provides generous numbers of rhymes and is altogether a language of abundance, in vocabulary and in syntactic variations. Moreover, I have a theory that the emotive quality, the affect, of certain rhythms which are either outworn or have rather ridiculous associations in one language, is quite different in another. Therefore Brodsky's opinions about the qualities of Wilbur's structures are quite valueless…
> ... like most Russians, again, Brodsky is really only familiar with Frost among the American master poets of the 20th century, and with his ignorance of the 'functional' capacities of 'free verse' …. his praise of Wilbur is without context, without any placing in the spectrum of American poetry or of modern poetry anywhere.[262]

The article is of particular interest for us as it was written at the time when Brodsky had not yet 'intervened' in any of English translations of his verse or done any of them himself. Yet, as we will see, most of the subsequent criticisms of 'English Brodsky' oddly enough uses the same arguments against him, a fact which cannot but make us more alert to the possible lack of soundness in similar argumentation. Let me just recapitulate its main points:

a) Brodsky is not a native speaker and hence is by definition 'ill-equipped' and devoid of authority to pass judgements on poetry written in English; both his praise and blame are ignorant.

b) Brodsky's tastes in English are determined by his own medium – Russian – which is 'a language of abundance' (inflected language with great possibilities for rhyming); accordingly, his tastes are of no relevance in English.

c) Regular meters are improper in English because of their 'outworn or rather ridiculous associations'; in re-proposing them for English Brodsky shows again his ignorance of the '*functional capacities* of *free verse*'.

In any case Levertov's article wasn't meant to make Brodsky feel too comfortable in his new country. Yet accustomed to worse in the U.S.S.R. and, being more agile and brilliant than most when it came to words, Brodsky with his wit and biting sarcasm knew how to defend himself. In the same edition of *The American Poetry Review* Brodsky's response to Levertov was published. He wrote:

> I came to America because I am used to living in a great country, and because I know some English – enough in any case to be able to distinguish Sylvia Plath's free verse from Denise Levertov's, and human speech from commonplace liberal demagogy; the

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[262] Levertov, "Letter to the Editors", p. 22.

> elite here … is infected with same demagogy to the same degree as those 'cultured Europeans' who hate the United States even though precisely this country crossed the ocean twice in this century to save their culture from doom …. It would be more natural to expect from Ms. Levertov – an American poet – compassion for America rather than hate, all the more so … because she is at an age when a person should know that it is too late if you have to choose your friends during a war.[263]

As to the debate about the pros and cons of the *vers libre* it was not new for the Anglo-American letters. Brodsky's main 'fault', it seemed, was that not being a native speaker of English himself he dared to participate in it on equal footing. To make things worse he endorsed the 'wrong' and 'old-fashioned' cause: he was advocating the use of metre and rhyme in English language poetry not in the teens of the century, but in 1970's where the battle seemed to have been long lost.

And yet it is curious to observe that just 60 years prior to that, England's greatest prosodist George Saintsbury pointed out how enormously the importance of rhyme in English poetry had increased in the years between 1600 and 1900:

> There can be, on the whole, no question that, during these three centuries, the importance of rhyme has been largely, immensely, increased in English. The great position assumed by rhymeless verse in the case of "blanks" does not at all militate against this… Recent attempts at more varied dispersing with rhyme have, to speak frankly, been either utter failures or more or less interesting *tours de force*.[264]

Beyond Consolation: Brodsky's expectations of translation

Before dealing with Brodsky's translation practices and the influence he exerted on translation practices of others, let us first see what his expectations of translations were, for chronologically they came first.

The gist of Brodsky's translation demands was laid down in his first two reviews of English translations of Akhmatova and Mandelstam respectively and many of the things he said subsequently were just variations on the ideas he expressed in these two reviews.

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[263] Joseph Brodsky, "Reply to Denise Levertov's Letter to the Editors", *The American Poetry Review*, 2:2, (Mar/Apr 1973) p. 22.
[264] Saintsbury. *A History of English Prosody*, p. 539.

The point of departure for the first review called *Translating Anna Akhmatova* which first appeared in print on 9 August 1973 in *The New York Review*[265] was the publication of *Poems by Akhmatova* translated by famous American poet Stanley Kunitz.

Brodsky begins his review with a rather disconcerting statement: 'Russian poetry has not been lucky with its translations into English.'[266] Brodsky begins the article by stating that such bad luck could be ascribed to the properties of 'the Russian language itself – a synthetic, too flexible language which cannot be reproduced adequately in analytic English with its 'iron word-order'.'[267] But this statement is a staged excuse. The article in its entirety struggles to deprive translators of cosy excuses for insufficient translations and to proclaim the theoretical possibility of good poetic translation from Russian into English.

Brodsky's review both comments on Kunitz's translation and lingers on the points of divergence with Kunitz's theory of translation which the latter unfolded in his 'A Note on The Translations'.[268] Kunitz had written:

> The poet as a translator lives with a paradox. His work must not read like a translation; conversely, it is not an exercise of the free imagination. One voice enjoins him 'Respect the text!' The other simultaneously pleads with him: 'Make it new!' …. Translation is a sum of approximations, but not all approximations are equal. …. The rendering is conscientious, but the lines are only a shadow of the original text, incapable of producing its singular pleasures.
>
> The object is to produce an analogous poem in English out of available signs and sounds, a new poem sprung from the matrix of the old, drenched in memories of its former existence … what it said, how it breathed, the inflections of its voice. The Russian poet Nikolai Zabolotski had another figure for the process. He said it was like rebuilding a city out of the evidence of its ruins.[269]

However poetic Kunitz's remark may sound what it boils down to upon closer analysis is a relativistic approach towards translation. The translator advertises his resignation right from the start by acknowledging his inevitable defeat at producing something more than a memory of a destroyed building or city. The demands upon him are thus reasonably lowered. The translator's objective, according to Kunitz, is 'to produce an analogous poem in English.' The key word here is 'analogous' - i.e. a new poem which is a substitute of the one which

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[265] Joseph Brodsky. "Translating Akhmatova". *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 20, Number 13 (August 9, 1973), http://www.nybooks.com/articles/9770
[266] Idem
[267] Idem
[268] Stanley Kunitz. ' A Note on the Translations', Anna Akhmatova. *Poems of Akhmatova/* selected, translated and introduced by Stanley Kunitz with Max Hayward. (Boston-Toronto: Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1973) pp. 29-33.
[269] Kunitz, 'A Note on the Translations', pp. 29-33.

exists as the original. Kunitz's relativism as applied to the problem of rendition of the form of Akhmatova's poems leads him to the following conclusions:

> Akhmatova is usually described as a formal poet, but in her later years she wrote more and more freely. Some of her poems … cannot be translated effectively without a considerable reconstruction of their architecture; others are much more fluid in their making. To insist on a universally rigid duplication of metrical or rhyming patterns is arbitrary and pointless, since the effects in any case are not mechanically transferable to another language. Instead of rhyme, our ear is often better pleased by an instrumentation of off-rhyme, assonance, consonance, and other linkages. Prosody is a manifold texture, embodying the expressive range and variety of the human voice.[270]

According to Kunitz, the choice of the formal equivalent for the translation is thus quite flexible and entirely depends on the degree of the translator's subjugation or resistance to the aesthetic trends at hand in the target language.

Brodsky on the other hand, while admitting that Kunitz's translation is on the whole a success,[271] at the same time completely disagrees with the idea of this arbitrariness and does not comprehend 'why in one case the translator attempts to preserve the structure of the original, while in another he totally ignores it'. The main difference in Brodsky's approach is that he shifts the focus from the translator to the author and points out that there is a hierarchy between the original and its translation and that the translator has before all else a number of responsibilities towards the poet he is translating. 'Translation is not original creation – this is what one must remember.' Brodsky insists, it has to deserve the right to bear the author's name on it. He carries on:

> To translate poetry, one has to possess some art, at the very least the art of stylistic re-embodiment. This is possible when your reserve of technical skills is varied. A good example is W. H. Auden, who is capable of translating Icelandic sagas … using equivalents from the languages in which they were written.[272]

But in order to find metrical equivalents for a translation a poet has to be 'capable of using the techniques created in the original' which, according to Brodsky, most American poets simply no longer possess, because of their extensive use of *free verse*:

> … the poet is simply incapable of operating within traditional metrical verse. It makes absolutely no difference what heights he has achieved with his free verse technique. What matters is that he does not possess the technique of the original; therefore his use

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[270] Ibid, p. 33.
[271] 'In a clear sense Akhamatova was lucky with her translator here. Stanley Kunitz turns out to be a person who is spiritually and technically qualified for the task', Brodsky, Brodsky. Translating Akhmatova', http://www.nybooks.com/articles/9770
[272] Idem

> of his own technique in translating is not a chosen, new, manifestation of his own individuality – it is something over which he has no control.[273]

If the poet-translator fails to find such a formal equivalent the results, Brodsky argues, will be 'amateurish and jerry-built, no matter what argument in their justification'. Accordingly analysing one of Akhmatova's poems in Kunitz's translation 'Imitation from the Armenian' Brodsky shows that the translator had rejected metrical structure and rhymes of the original in the hope of achieving a certain degree of freedom. What happened instead, according to Brodsky, was a change of the meaning and that:

> … the freedom turned out to be a burden and led to a certain heaviness of style: instead of the eight Russian lines we have ten English lines. And this happens despite the fact that the English words are two or three times shorter – in number of syllables – than the Russian ones. In English a line of iambic pentameter can contain up to nine words, while in Russian not more than six will fit.[274]

Brodsky then shows that the tendency to avoid rhymes in translations from Russian poetry, apart from making translator's task much easier, reflects the contemporary trends in American poetry:

> …. contemporary Russian poets use a technique which seems archaic to their American colleagues. It is not just shameful for a contemporary American poet to use rhymes, it is unthinkable. It seems banal to him; he fears banality worse than anything, and therefore he uses free-verse – though free verse is no guarantee against banality.[275]

The real worries and fears of a translator who is aware of his responsibilities before the author should be of a quite different nature, says Brodsky. As any translation is always a sacrifice his attention should be concentrated on estimating what elements of the original must be preserved above all:

> … in order to translate, one must … have some conception of not only the author's complex of ideas, his education, and the details of his personal biography, but also his etiquette, or better the etiquette of the poetry in which the poet worked…
> …Then there will be no temptation to omit some things, emphasize others, use free verse where the original is in sestets, etc. That is, the translator must have not only the technical but also the spiritual experience of the original.[276]

In the case of Akhmatova to preserve rhyme and metre is a far more important task for a translator, Brodsky argues, than trying to avoid 'banality' in the translation (in the guise of

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[273] Idem
[274] Idem
[275] Idem
[276] Idem

rhymes): 'Akhmatova achieved wisdom. Therefore her verse is extremely simple, restrained, and at times, like all real wisdom, it sounds banal.'

In response to the relativism of Kunitz's 'Note'[277] Brodsky defiantly proclaims that a translation which not merely aspires to be a 'memory' or a 'shadow' of an original poem, but wants to deserve the full right to have author's name on it can indeed be attained if certain imperatives are fulfilled:

> In translation, some loss is inevitable. But a great deal can be preserved too. One can preserve the meter, one can preserve the rhymes (no matter how difficult this may seem each time), one can and must preserve the meaning. Not one of these things, but all together. Images exist, and one must follow them – and not propound fashionable theories in the introductions.[278]

In order to justify his remarks Brodsky adds that he had allowed himself to make them because he considers translation 'to be a quite serious matter.' He also quotes Pushkin who called translators 'the post-horses of enlightenment.' Brodsky takes up the metaphor of his great predecessor and develops it further, adding with his wild brand of wit that 'horses run as hard as they can only when whip is whistling over them.' The review ends with Brodsky expressing his ambitious desire to change the insufficient state of affairs in the field of Russian-English translations: '… good translations are an exception now. It is desirable – and the sooner the better – to collect a sufficient number of exceptions to make a new rule. Russian poetry in any case deserves this, and has a right to expect it'.

The first response to the review *Translating Akhmatova* came most importantly and encouragingly for Brodsky from Stephen Spender. On the same day of the review's publication he wrote Brodsky a letter:

> Dear Joseph, Aug, 9 1973
>
> I am just about to start my morning's work but before doing so I read your piece on the Kunitz-Hayward translation of Akhmatova. I really like what you say very much, also I like the whole tone of your review which is at once friendly and comprehending and severe. You have the authority to say what you say and you don't take advantage of this authority but simply speak out of the centre of it. Your review should make people think very hard about translation. In fact I think it will have this effect and will perhaps be historic, a turning point.[279]

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[277] Kunitz, 'A Note on the Translations', pp. 29-33.
[278] Brodsky. 'Translating Akhmatova,' http://www.nybooks.com/articles/9770.
[279] Spender, 'Letters to Brodsky,' (Aug, 9 1973), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Folder 18.

This letter of approval must have been undoubtedly very important for Brodsky, for there were no poetical authorities higher for him in the contemporary English letters than that of Auden and Spender.[280]

Reading Brodsky's next review 'Beyond Consolation' one cannot but notice the irony in the context of Spender's delicate remark, quoted above, that Brodsky didn't take advantage of his authority in 'Translating Akhmatova'; for the tone of this second review, even by its author's own estimation, was very 'sharp'. At the same time in 'Beyond Consolation' Brodsky is even more outspoken about his ideas of translation and there they crystallized into what one might call the main postulates of how he thought a translation from Russian into English ought to be made.

'Beyond Consolation' was a review of the translations of Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoirs as well as of three books of translations of Mandelstam's verse. For two of them, *Complete Poetry of Osip Mandelstam* translated by Burton Raffel in collaboration with Sidney Monas[281] and *Osip Mandelstam: Selected Poems* translated by W.S. Merwin in collaboration with Clarence Brown,[282] Brodsky went into greater detail. Both books were a result of collaboration between American poets who knew no Russian and Slavic scholars. In his review of these translator-academic tandems Brodsky criticizes the poets and praises the academics, at the same time chiding them for ceding the upper hand to the translators:

> Saddest of all is that both Merwin and Raffel worked in collaboration with such specialists as Clarence Brown and Sidney Monas. Brown himself is the superb translator of Mandelstam's prose (which, by the way, is the best Russian prose of this century) and the author of a monograph on Mandelstam unique in its quality. … Both Brown and Monas, however yielded the 'right of way' to the poets, the apparent effect of an academic inferiority complex in relation to 'the poet'. This is especially sad in the case of Merwin, from whom more should have been expected than a translation of 'Mandelstam into Merwin'.[283]

Needless to say, that to prompt such a severe attack on the part of Brodsky, all the translations were done in *free verse*. The translator of the second book *Complete Poetry of Osip Mandelstam,* Raffel attempted, however, to justify himself in *Translator's Preface* with the disarming confession of his limited ability: 'Not much of the form and structure of the

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[280] Ann Kjellberg confirmed this impression in a conversation in the summer 2005, New York.
[281] Osip Mandelstam. *Complete Poetry of Osip Emilevich Mandelstam* translated by Burton Raffel with introduction and notes by Sidney Monas (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973).
[282] Osip Mandelstam. *Osip Mandelstam: Selected Poems* translated by W.S. Merwin in collaboration with Clarence Brown (NY: Atheneum, 1974).
[283] Joseph Brodsky. 'Beyond Consolation' (review), transl. Barry Rubin, *The New York Review of Books*, 21:1 (February 7, 1974) Accessed on May 28, 2008 http://www.nybooks.com/articles/9613.

original is preserved, though I have sneaked in as much rhyme (often internal rhyme) as I could manage.'[284] But obviously it was not enough to 'disarm' Brodsky who brought down on him the entire force of his wrath:

> As for Raffel's translations … nothing could have saved Raffel. His book of translations is scandalous and even outrageous, and Monas made a mistake when he prefaced it with his quite sound essay – which only underscores the lack of talent and sloppiness of the translations.[285]

The reason why Brodsky found it 'especially sad' in the case of Merwin was that paradoxically enough in his youth Merwin used to write 'immensely formal verse, neoclassical in style.'[286] None less than Auden remarked back in 1952 in his *Foreword* to then 24-year-old Merwin's first collection of verse *A Mask for Janus* on the latter's technical virtuosity:

> With his concern for the traditional conceptions of Western culture … Merwin combines an admirable respect for its traditions of poetic craftsmanship. His carols show how carefully he has studied Spanish versification …and …he has not been ashamed to write what are frankly technical exercises. Apart from the fact that works which set out to be exercises in technique often end by being works of art as well … the mastery of his medium through diligent practice is of incalculable value to any artist. Technique in itself cannot make a good poem, but the lack of it can spoil one. The final stanza of 'Dictum' shows the reward that Mr. Merwin has earned by his studies. … No one who had not previously trained himself thoroughly in the mechanics of verse could have varied so skilfully the position of the caesura from line to line, a variation on which so much of the poetic effect depends.[287]

But that was back in 1952. In the 1960's Merwin had already switched to the more fashionable free verse and explained his choice in an essay called 'On Open Form' (1969). In 1970 Merwin's efforts won him a Pulitzer Prize.[288] So it is quite comprehensible why Professor Brown 'yielded the right of way' to the famous poet. This is what Clarence Brown wrote in *An Afterthought on the Translation*:

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[284] Mandelstam. *Complete Poetry of Osip Emilevich Mandelstam,* transl. Raffel, p. vii.
[285] Brodsky. 'Beyond Consolation', Accessed on May 28, 2008 http://www.nybooks.com/articles/9613.
[286] Parini, Jay. *About W.S. Merwin*. Internet series Modern American Poetry: http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/merwin/life.htm
[287] W. H. Auden. 'Foreword' to W.S. Merwin. *A Mask For Janus*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. ix-x.
[288] Parini. *About W.S. Merwin*. Internet series Modern American Poetry: http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/merwin/life.htm

> We have tried to translate Mandelstam into the English that works as an instrument of poetry in our own time, and we have accepted the responsibility entailed in the fact that to translate is to change.[289]

Despite his wholehearted compliance with the fashionable view that free verse is 'the instrument of poetry in our own time,' Brown, an Oxford professor of Russian, shows at the same time his awareness of the complexity of Mandelstam's original verse:

> I can imagine, if only just, an English poem that might reproduce what one critic has called the cello sound' of this or that poem by Mandelstam or some other of its effects – its rhymes, its plastic sculpture of rhythm, its tenuously resonating change-ringing on some syllabic bell, its abrupt syntactic somersaults, and all the rest. What is more, I can imagine the only audience that might, or should, appreciate this English poem: a roomful of native Russians who, with the original itself unfolding in their mind's ear, have just enough English to collate the two, and approve the result. They would approve it, happily unaware of the exorbitant price that had been paid, and consequently as happily unable to assess its merit as an English poem of our own time. [290]

It is interesting that Clarence Brown admits in the above quote the hypothetical possibility ('if only just') of a 'replica' translation of Mandelstam's verse into English. But this kind of hypothetical English, according to Brown, for all its imagined musicality would be of little value, not being written in 'instrument of poetry of our time,' i.e. free verse.[291] Such a wholehearted compliance with the fashions of 'our time' accompanied by what Brodsky considered the very scarce results of such a compliance, provoked what was probably his most vehement attack on free verse as an instrument for the translation of the formal verse:

> Translation is a search for an equivalent, not for a substitute. Mandelstam is a formal poet in the highest sense of the word. For him a poem began with a sound, with a 'sonorous molded shape of form', as he himself called it. Logically, a translator should begin his work with a search for at least a metrical equivalent to the original form. … Meters in verse are kinds of spiritual magnitudes for which nothing can be substituted. They cannot even be replaced by each other, and especially not by free verse. I don't mean that by rejecting meter in translation the translator commits sacrilege, but he is certainly deceiving the reader. … A poem is the result of a certain necessity: it is inevitable, and so is its form. [292]

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[289] Osip Mandelstam. *Osip Mandelstam: Selected Poems* translated by W.S. Merwin in collaboration with Clarence Brown (NY: Atheneum, 1974) p. xviii.
[290] Mandelstam. *Osip Mandelstam: Selected Poems,* p. xviii.
[291] In response to 'Beyond Consolation' an American translator Paul Schmidt maintained, for instance, that in the contemporary American poetry 'lack of 'form' is now a rigorous formal principle'. Paul Schmidt. 'Tongue-Tied'. *The New York Review of Books*, 21: 8 (May 16, 1974) p. 10.
[292] Joseph Brodsky. 'Beyond Consolation' (review) translated by Barry Rubin, *The New York Review of Books*, 21:1 (February 7, 1974) Accessed on May 28, 2008 http://www.nybooks.com/articles/9613.

Form in poetry, Brodsky argues, is a result of a certain historical artistic development ('it is hallowed and illumined by time'). With certain poets, at certain periods and in certain countries – as for example with Mandelstam at the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia – form played an extremely important structural role. Far from being a decoration, in verse of such poets form is intimately connected with content; through form poem's pronouncements acquire an air of inevitability. That is why an English language translator, when translating such a poet, should look for equivalents of these original forms in his own poetic tradition, instead of substituting it with free verse (the latter being by definition a lack of form). If a translator fails to recognize these as imperatives, in Brodsky's view, he shows disregard for the source culture and ultimately kills the poet he is trying to translate:

> … Form too is noble, for it is hallowed and illumined by time. It is the vessel in which meaning is cast; they need each other and sanctify each other reciprocally – it is an association of soul and body. Break the vessel, and the liquid will leak out. What was done to Mandelstam by Merwin, and to an even greater extent by Raffel, is the product of profound moral and cultural ignorance. [293]

That it was after all possible to find such formal equivalents within English poetic tradition was for Brodsky, who was so well familiar with it, a matter beyond any doubt. Brodsky's advice to the translators was quite straightforward: 'Translators of Mandelstam should use the technique of the late Yeats'[294] with whom Mandelstam also had much in common thematically Brodsky suggests.

Brodsky also makes allusions to the particular position of moral arbiter which poetry occupied in Russia, especially in the twentieth century. The resistance of Russian poetry to new forms and its adherence to the classical ones was a result of its 'moral purity and firmness' and ultimately helped it as well as its readers survive the period of historical turmoil. Accordingly, Brodsky said, form had to be preserved in the translation, at least, as a historical testimony to this firmness and resistance:

> …Apart from her metaphors, Russian poetry has set an example of moral purity and firmness, which to no small degree has been reflected in the preservation of so-called classical form without any damage to content. Herein lies her distinction from her Western sisters, though in no way do I presume to judge whom this distinction favours most. However, it is a distinction, and if only for purely ethnographic considerations that quality ought to be preserved in translation and not forced into a common mould ….

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[293] Idem
[294] Idem

> Carolyn Kizer once said in jest that international legislation should be introduced to prohibit the translation of classical verse into free verse. The joke is rather bitter… But something really should be done. Russian poetry does not deserve being treated like a poor relation. The technique used to translate from Russian ought to differ, at least visually, from the technique used to translate from Swahili and Urdu. [295]

In this last passage transpires Brodsky's enormous pride in the poetical achievements of his countrymen. Brodsky had a theory that prose was on the whole secondary to poetry: the world-famous Russian literature of the nineteenth century owed its existence, according to him, to the poetry which had preceded it.[296] The inadequacy of the existent translations into English prevented Russian poetry from occupying the place it deserved within the world poetry.

Thus on the basis of these first two articles Brodsky's demands upon a translation from Russian into English might be summed up as follows: translation must deserve the right to bear the name of the author. In order to do so:

1. Translation has to convey the formal structure of the original to the extent that it offers equivalents of the compositional principles which had been involved in the creation of the original poem such as:

- rhymes and rhyme patterns;
- *STANZAIC DESIGN;*
- metre;

2. Translation has to convey the meaning of the original.

3. Translation is a compromise, but there are strict hierarchy of priorities as to which elements of it can be sacrificed and which preserved. (For instance, it is illicit to sacrifice form while translating poems of such Acmeists as Mandelstam and Akhmatova.) This unwritten balance has to be maintained by the translator, otherwise in the process of translating the poem, he will destroy the original poem.

In the following chapters we will see whether at all and to what degree these translation postulates were implemented in practice, which compromises were met and tolerated and which were not by different translators and what reaction this produced.

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[295] Brodsky. 'Beyond Consolation' Accessed on May 28, 2008 http://www.nybooks.com/articles/9613.
[296] See also Brodsky, 'A Poet and Prose', *Less Than One*, p. 176. 'The concept of equality is extrinsic to the nature of art and the thinking of any man of letters is hierarchical. Within this hierarchy poetry occupies a higher position than prose, and the poet, in principle, is higher than the prose writer.'

Farrar, Straus, and Giroux : 'A Part of Speech'

Meet Roger W. Straus
He runs a publishing house.
He's so gentle at that
that were he a cat
I'd gladly serve as a mouse.
A poem from a postcard from Venice
(Joseph Brodsky)

It was sometime in 1975 that Nancy Meiselas, a Farrar, Straus, and Giroux employee, introduced Brodsky to Roger Straus, the head of this famous publishing house.[297] The importance of this encounter for the phenomenon of the 'English Brodsky' can hardly be overestimated.

At first Straus's reaction was rather luke-warm (by that time FSG had already published books by several Nobel Prize laureates). Nonetheless Straus eventually agreed to publish a collection of verse by Brodsky. The year 1977 was marked by an important event, which was registered in a letter from Roger Straus to Brodsky from 25 February 1977. Straus expressed in it his pleasure that the formalities of their relationship went in order. According to the contract, FSG agreed to publish Brodsky's new collection *A Part of Speech* as well as to arrange 'with enthusiasm' for the foreign editions. Since then FSG has become the sole proprietor of the English language translations of Brodsky's verse.[298]

The prelude to this event was Brodsky's very rapid rise to relative fame in America. As early as 1973 many prominent American magazines and newspapers, most importantly *The New Yorker* (whose chief editor Howard Moss was a great supporter of Brodsky's and a poet of distinction himself), published several English translations of Brodsky's verse (which were done at this stage mostly by George Kline). Alongside the translations Brodsky gave numerous interviews on television and to widely circulated magazines such as *Vogue*. In addition to that in the first year alone in the U.S. Brodsky gave more than 30 poetry readings, travelling to over 20 American states. At universities and colleges he would read in Russian accompanied by an English native speaker (in the first years it was invariably again his first translator George Kline). In order to sustain this rising popularity in American letters Brodsky

[297] See also letter from Nancy Meiselas to George L. Kline from 19 September 1978: 'Joseph is presently drawing up the final table of contents for A PART OF SPEECH , which, as you can imagine, has changed quite a bit since we first discussed the book three years ago.' FSG archives, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, Box 41.
[298] See also FSG archives, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, Box 41.

badly needed a book of his translations in English – his whole reputation as a poet in what was his immediate linguistic environment depended on it.

At the time FSG was an informal publishing house where the writers would occasionally pop by. On one such occasion Brodsky met Susan Sontag. This turned out to be a beginning of a life-long friendship. In fact it was under Susan Sontag's influence that Roger Straus eventually recognized the real scope of Brodsky as a poet. From that time on Straus became Brodsky's ally for life and treated him with an unlimited display of his proverbial generosity, not only organizing the publication of Brodsky's work in English and safeguarding Brodsky's interests in contracts with publishing houses abroad (in Italy, Germany, France etc.), but also sending letters of support and recommendation to various universities and applying to various grants for Brodsky.

So at some point in 1975, shortly after Roger Straus had given his approval, the preparations for publication of *A Part of Speech* started. It would be no exaggeration to call Brodsky the father of the collection. He himself had to find and commission translators for every single poem in it. He had to provide interlinear translations and commentaries on the content and the prosodic structure of his verse for the translators who were not familiar with Russian (translators like Richard Wilbur, Anthony Hecht, Derek Walcott etc.). Due to Brodsky's role and involvement in the process of translating his verse into English right from the start and the vital importance for him of the quality of these translations the arguments of his critics, which came recently particularly from the British quarter, who chide him for his 'interference', seem completely absurd. Certainly the position of Brodsky's translators was quite uncommon in that they were translating a living poet.

The advantages were a kind of feed-back which they could never have dreamed of when translating a 'dead' poet – including explanations of unclear passages, commentaries on the tonality of this or that passage which the author deemed important to preserve. On the other hand their difficulty lay in the fact that the author, who spoke English and had been a translator of poetry from Russian into English himself, held strong idiosyncratic views about how a translation had to be done. Accordingly they had to put up with his often very high demands, caused by the impatience of an artist involved in the process of re-emboding his oeuvre. It was a painstaking process for the author to accept the translated version of every single line of his verses into English. It resulted in a series of conflicts, sometimes unnecessary, with translators and their offended egos and significantly postponed the collections publication – its preparation took five long years from 1975 until 1980.

In the chapters to follow it will be possible to see what the creation of *A Part of Speech* amounted to for its author, as well as to many of his English translators, in particular Kline and Weissbort.

In Chapter Six I will introduce some extracts from the impassioned correspondence between Brodsky and Weissbort on the translations from *A Part of Speech* and will analyse the arguments of both parties. Later, I place these respective arguments in the context of translation theory and the theory of prosody.

Appendix

Translations by George L. Kline from *Joseph Brodsky: Selected poems*.

I have a touch of normal **classicism**	a
and you, my dear, a bad case of **sarcasm**.	a
A woman whose career involves sales taxes	B
is apt to let caprice govern her *life*.	c
You've seen an 'iron age' in our present **epoch**.	D
But I had never dreamed (to change the **topic**)	D
that I, whose soberness of style was classic,	B
would balance on the thin edge of a *knife*.	c
(from *To a Certain Poetess)*	

here is Brodsky's original:

Ia zarazhon normalnym klassits**í**zmom.	A
A vy, moi drug, zarazheny sark**á**zmom.	B
Konechno, prosto sdelatsia kapr**í**znym,	A
po vedomstvu aktsiznomu sluzh**á**.	c
K tomu zh, vy zvali etot vek zhel**é**znym.	D
No ia ne dumal, govoria o r**á**znom,	B
chto, zarazhonnyi classitsizmom tr**é**zvym,	D
ya sam gulal po ostriiu nozh**á**.	C

(5-foot-iambic)

1 January 1965

The Wise Men will unlearn your name.	a
Above your head no star will flame.	a
One weary sound will be the same –	a
The hoarse roar of the **gale**.	b
The shadows fall from your tired ***eyes***	c

as your lone beside candle ***dies***, c
for here the calendar breeds ***nights***[299] c
till stores of candles **fail**. b

1 Yanvarya 1965 goda

Volkhvy zabudut adres t**vói**. a
Ne budet zvyozd nad golo**vói**. a
I tol'ko vetra siplyi **vói** a
rasslyshish ty, kak v**stár'**. b
Ty sbrosish ten' s ustalykh p**léch**, c
Zaduv svechu pred tem, kak l**éch**, c
poskolku bolshe dney, chem sv**éch**, c
sulit nam kalen**dar'**. B

(4-foot-iambic with occasional 3-foot-line)

From *A letter in a Bottle*:

Forward, it seems, is where mouth and nose a
point, or where any façade is **turned**. b
Backward would be the reverse of those. a
'Forward' and "backward" are shifting **terms**. b
But since the bow of my ship points *North*, c
the gaze of the passenger seeks the *West* d
(and thus he is staring straight over*board*); c
switching his place makes it more *complex*. d
Physicists have devised vectors **which** e
plot a ship's course when it's under full sail. f
Ships strung on vectors may roll and **pitch**. e
Vectors are bodyless, like the soul. F

From *Pismo v butylke*:

To, kuda vytyanut nos i r**ót**, a
prochii kuda obrashchon fas**ád** b
to, veroiatno, i iest' "vpery**ód**", a
vsio ostal'noe schitai "naz**ád**". b
No tak kak nos korabla na N**órd**, c
a vzor passazhir ustremil na V**ést** d
(inymi slovami, gliadit za b**órt**), c
slozhnost' rastiot s peremenoi m**ést**. d
I tak kak chasto plyvut kora**blí**, e
na vsekh parusakh po volnam spe**shá**, f

[299] The rhyme *eyes-dies-nights* seems to be slightly problematic.

fiziki „vektor" izo**br**e**lí**. e
Nechto besplotnoye, kak du**shá**. F

(4-foot-dactyl)

16 of translations display only vague hints at rhymes through assonance like in *Almost an Elegy*:

In days gone by I too have waited out
cold rains near columns of the Stock Exchange.
And I assumed that it was God's own gift.
It may be that I was not wrong in this.
I too was happy once. I lived in b**on**d
of angels. And I fought against a fierce m**on**sters.
At the main entranceway I lay in wait,
like Jacob at his ladder, for a lovely
girl running down the stairs but all of th**i**s
has gone, vanished forever – wholly h**i**dden.

Pochti elegiia

V bylye dni i ia perezhi**dá**l a
kholodnyi dozhd' pod kolonnadoy **Bírzh**i. B
I polagal, chto eto – Bozhii **dá**r. a
I, mozhet byt', ne oshibalsia. **Býl zhe** B
i ia kogda-to schastliv. Zhil v ple**nú** c
u angelov. Khodil na vurda**lákov**. D
Sbegavshuiu po lestnitse od**nú** c
krasavitsu v paradnom, kak **Iákov**, D
podsteregal.

About 20 of Mr. Kline's translations try to preserve the metre of the original completely sacrificing the rhymes (unrhymed pentameter). Here is one example:

You're coming home again. What does that mean?
Can there be anyone, here who still needs you,
who would still want to count you as his friend?
You're home, you've bought sweet wine to drink with supper,

and, staring out the window, bit by bit
you come to see that you're the one who's guilty:
the only one. That's fine. Thank God for that.
Or maybe one should say, 'Thanks for small favors.'

here is the original:

Vorotish'sia na rodinu. Nu cht**ó** zh. a

Gliadi vokrug, komu eshcho ty n**úzhen**,	B
komu teper’ v druzia ty popadi**ó**sh?	a
Vorotishsia, kupi sebe na **úzhin**	B
kakogo-nibud’ sladkogo **viná**,	c
smotri v okno i dumai ponemn**ógu**:	D
vo vsiom tvoia, odna tvoia **viná**,	c
i khorosho. Spasibo. Slava B**ógu**.	D

(5-foot-iambics)

Chapter 6: 'A Translation: Whatever Must Be Done'

Weissbort-Brodsky: ranging practices of translation

> To translate means to serve two masters – something nobody can do.
> Hence, as is true of all things that in theory no one can do –
> it becomes in practice everybody's job. Everyone must translate and
> everyone does translate…. The theoretical impossibility of translating can
> mean to us only … that in the course of the "impossible" and necessary
> compromises which in their sequence make the stuff of life, this theoretical
> impossibility will give us the courage of a modesty which will then demand
> of the translation not anything impossible but simply whatever must be done.
> FRANZ ROSENZWEIG

Another translator who was commissioned by Brodsky to do translations for *A Part of Speech* was the British poet and translator Daniel Weissbort. Being also the editor of the London based magazine *Modern Poetry in Translation,* Weissbort had his own strong ideas about translation and accordingly showed a greater resistance than other translators to Brodsky's ideas on the subject as well as to the changes the author was apt to make to translated versions of his work. This resulted in a rather heated correspondence between the poet and his translator.

The earliest of Weissbort's letters dates back to 3 May 1974. As one can infer from its content, Weissbort had sent Brodsky the first draft of his translation of the poem *Lagoon*[300] and the author sent his translator a revised copy with his comments and suggestions. Weissbort's response to Brodsky's comments brings into focus the most contentious issue between the author and his various. Here is an extract from it:

> To return to the translation. As I say, I'll try to absorb your notes and to revise the version. However, I'm a little concerned that you apparently did not perceive my attempt to reproduce both metre and rhymes, which you contend have totally disappeared.[301]

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[300] Unfortunately the original letter by Brodsky could not be found, but from the rhymes mentioned in Weissbort's response it was possible to establish that the poem in question was indeed *Lagoon.*
[301] Daniel Weissbort. 'Letter to Brodsky' (3 May 1974), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 1 Fld 23.

According to Brodsky, the rhymes and the metre had completely disappeared from Weisbort's translation. On the contrary Weissbort claimed to have preserved the metre. As for the rhyme scheme, he had replaced the precise, or 'strong', rhymes of the Russian original with rhymes in English 'based on sound or vowel equivalence' and occasionally consonantal rhymes which, though not having the force, by his own admission, of their Russian counterparts, were, he argued, 'more appropriate in English':

> I had thought I'd done rather better than visual rhymes. It's a pity I couldn't have been there to read you the translation. The type of rhyme I have been using more and more in translating Russian poetry is the one based on sound, or vowel equivalence. Occasionally I use consonantal rhymes. These do not have the force of the Russian strong rhymes of course, but in my view are more appropriate in English. The aa bccb scheme does not make it more difficult, though I suppose with my kind of oblique or half and quarter rhyming, it does render it more difficult to perceive the rhyme. Let me give you a few instances of this rhyming. Stanza III: chime (a)/ lives (a) / chandelier (b) / duckweed (c) / with (c) / tears (b); Stanza IV: wind (a)/ brim (a) / is (b) / guard (c) / star (c) / rays (b). I don't invariably rhyme, but usually do – in this way. Also I have kept to the rhythm broadly. Does this totally fail to come across?[302]

One realises that from the point of view of Brodsky, as it can be inferred from his theoretical pronouncements in 'Translating Akhmatova' and 'Beyond Consolation' quoted in Chapter Four, there was at least one flaw in Weissbort's argumentation in the letter above. Weissbort affirmed that he had devised and had been using a special metrical equivalent for translating poetry from Russian. In the meantime, Russian has all sorts of metres – a metrical equivalent utilized for a poem in iambic pentameter is not automatically bound to meet the requirements for a translation of a poem written in, let us say, dactyl or anapaest, not to mention a *loose dolnik.* One can say, that in terms of the Russian tradition of poetic translation, Brodsky shares Pushkin's position, whereas Weissbort that of Batyushkov and Zhukovsky (See Chapter Three), for whom the relation between the form of the original and that of the translation had not yet became so absolute.

These differences in the respective conceptions of translations entertained by Brodsky and Weissbort were exacerbated when it came to the translation of the cycle 'A Part of Speech' – the cycle from which the collection as a whole took its name. This 'battle over translation' found its form in an epistolary dispute. This dispute represents for us a vivid example of Brodsky's occasional 'diplomatic' difficulties in dealing with the translators he commissioned for *A Part of Speech*. More importantly, however, while defending the changes

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[302] Idem

he had made to the translations, Brodsky's responses may also eventually provide us with greater insight into the real, artistic motives behind those changes.

Weissbort-Brodsky: 'chinwag' over translation

In the course of the preparations of the collection *A Part of Speech* Brodsky several times commissioned different 'hands' for the translation of a single poem. With the benefit of hindsight this practice might seem slightly unscrupulous. Back then, however, it was dictated by the publishing expediency rather than by any ill-will on the part of the author. After all Brodsky was the one who had signed the contract with Farrar, Strauss and Giroux and accordingly was fulfilling the contractual deadlines.[303] In fact George Kline confirms that all of the translation revisions were always done under considerable time constraints with the idea of meeting the deadlines. Besides asking a translator did not always translate into a successful final result. Often the translators did not find enough time or skill to cope with a particular translation.

And yet whatever Brodsky's reasons might be behind this practice of encouraging several co-translators at the time to do the same translation led on many occasions to many unnecessary conflicts, as is readily understandable.

Indeed, in case of the cycle 'A Part of Speech', despite the fact that Weissbort's translation had already been published in the magazine 'Poetry' in March 1978, Brodsky asked Alan Myers, another of his translators and a friend, to do the 'job' as well. In the end, however, Myers' translations did not manage to convince Brodsky entirely. Thus at some point around November 1979 while reading the galley proofs of the collection *A Part of Speech,* Brodsky decided to stick with Weissbort's translations despite his initial misgivings. This was, however, not done before first having substantially revised them. Presented with the results of the *fait accompli* Daniel Weissbort was quite outraged, which found its outlet in a series of emotional letters. In the letter below Weissbort raises the whole issue of authorship of a translation. While recognizing Brodsky as the indisputable proprietor of the original poem, Weissbort still accuses him of using Weissbort's translation as material for his own English version. At the same time Weissbort himself admits that the result was after all 'rather good'. Here are some extracts from the first letter:

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[303] George L. Kline suggested to me, for example, in our private correspondence in August 2007 that 'ALL of … [Brodsky's] revisions were undertaken in a rush to meet impending publishing deadlines.'

26 November 1979 (Letterhead: University of Iowa)

Dear Joseph,

> First, on reflection, it was utterly within your rights to do what you did about the translation. …. My objection to the whole affair has to do with "friendship". In my view you acted with a high-handed disregard of pretty basic rules, at least as I see them…. … you have not really re-done the translation; you have strung it together – quite effectively – using lines and hints from my versions and … from that of other people, who unbeknown to me, you had evidently; (contrary to the quite clear understanding I had from you that I was "commissioned" to translate this poem) engaged in trying their hands too. The result of your efforts strikes me as a rather good finally (with some criticisms which I could but will not, at this stage, make) but there is a simple morality involved here. I feel that you ought to make it clear in your introduction or whatever exactly how you arrived at a version, which though the original poem, the Russian, is obviously yours, does not wholly belong to you. None of this would matter much, of course, except that I feel it shows a cavalier disregard for others' feelings on your part and I do have some trouble with that.[304]

The most contentious issue of the letter above is the question of ownership. Translation theory must have played a much more prominent role for Weissbort, an editor of the magazine on translation, than for Brodsky. And yet Walter Benjamin seems to resolve this issue of ownership in favour of the author. As was shown in the Chapter Three, translations of the works that have reached their fame do not so much serve the original as owe their existence to them. A quote from Benjamin would be quite apropos:

> Übersetzungen, die mehr als Vermittlungen sind, entstehen, wenn im Fortleben ein Werk das Zeitalter seines Ruhmes erreicht hat. *Sie dienen daher nicht sowohl diesem, wie schlechte Übersetzer es für ihre Arbeit zu beanspruchen pflegen, als dass sie ihm ihr Dasein verdanken*.[305] (Italics mine, Z.I.)

Benjamin seems to highlight the question of who is actually the beneficiary of a translation of a famous work of art. Thus one might observe that at the time of *A Part of Speech* Brodsky's fame in America was already considerable. Thus Weissbort by translating Brodsky already at the time in question was furthering his own personal career, at least to the same degree, as he was contributing to the promotion of the poet. The fame of the original preceded the act of translation. On the other hand, Brodsky, a living poet participating in a complicated process of the re-embodiment of his works had the full right to interfere, for the translated poem had to present nothing less than his own poetic physiognomy before the English speaking readers.

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[304] Weissbort. 'Letter to Brodsky' (26 November 1979), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 54.
[305] Walter Benjamin. ‚Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', *Gesammelte Scriften*, IV/ i, Herausg. Tillman Rexroth (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981) p. 11.

In his second letter, which followed three days later and was not less passionate than the first one, Weissbort no longer remained as positive about the fact that what Brodsky had done to the translations had actually been an improvement:

> Dear Joseph, 29 November 1979
>
> …. I'm afraid I cannot even look at these versions … I'm tired of commenting – apart from saying that it is my humble opinion that though you have done a lot of it yourself, you do not really understand translations and that you are certainly not plugged into what I try to do when I aim at a translation to stand for a certain original. I realize Derek Walcott is currently in your pantheon and as for my humble self, well even at the best I will never I think, produce the kind of poetry which will really do much for you and, being a Russian, you tend to look at things absolutely – i.e. if I am not your kind of poet, nor can I be your kind of translator.
>
> It is my work, subtly (or unsubtly) depending on your point of view, changed. They are *only* translations but still had a certain dynamic working for them in their pristine state, which has now been distorted.[306]

In this second letter the enraged translator claimed that Brodsky, despite his wide experience in translation, actually did not 'really understand translations', i.e. did not understand Weissbort's translating conception oriented as it was on the norms and trends of the target language. (Some years later, in 1982 the wounded translator repeated this opinion in a public discussion of Tsvetayeva's translations on the pages of *NYRB*: '…Joseph Brodsky …often fails to 'hear' part or half rhymes in English translations of his work, though there is no disputing his mastery of Russian prosody.')[307]

Weissbort also refers to certain Russian maximalism of Brodsky in sticking so unrelentingly to the formal elements in the translation just because, Weissbort thinks, they played an important part in his original verse. Weissbort also accuses Brodsky of bias against him as a translator, because as a poet Weissbort writes wrote free verse.

Finally Weissbort reiterates the issue of the translation's ownership: Weissbort believed that *his* translations for what they were *were* after all works of art, i.e. displayed 'a certain dynamic working for them'.

To this Brodsky answered with a rather longish letter in which he presented his counter-arguments. The tone of the letter is not less emotional than of the one by Weissbort. Brodsky explains Weissbort that he did not mean to hurt him and that he himself is now hurt

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[306] Weissbort. 'Letter to Brodsky,' Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 54.
[307] Daniel Weissbort, ‚Battle Over Translation' [Reply by David McDuff], *The New York Review of Books,* 29:14 (September 23, 1982) p. 12.

by Weissbort's misinterpretation of his intentions. Brodsky ascribes Weissbort's reaction to the latter's excessive degree of identification with the translation. Brodsky, on the other hand believes that a translation can be eternally altered:

Dec. 3, 1979, New York

Dear Danny,

> …. Your letters hurt, and they hurt unjustly. To say the least, more unjustly than what prompted them did hurt you, if only because that I didn't mean to offend you with my redoing those poems. I simply didn't expect you to react with such a gravity to the things which I regarded as simple alterations; and this is where your questioning of our friendship comes from, I presume: I failed to comprehend the degree of your commitment to and identification with the work you've done. It's merely because I used to treat any translation, including those done by me as something utterly provisional. I.e., to say the least, as something that can always be improved. Or worsened, you may say. To detect something personal, therefore, a cavalier attitude, reshuffling my poetic pantheon with no room for you in it, etc. is to misinterpret my motives in a too elaborate way, for they are really simple.[308]

What is of particular interest in this apology of Brodsky is the assertion that a translation is something provisional which can always be improved upon. Later in the same letter Brodsky repeats this idea: 'More than a poem, to paraphrase Valery, a translation is never finished: it's simply abandoned.'[309]

In fact it must be mentioned here that Brodsky generally believed in editing. For instance, we know that he went over the translations of Cavafy into Russian in order to string them together: '*ustervit'*[310]', as he put it in Russian.

Similar editing took place not only of translations, but also of original poems by others. As reported by Barry Rubin, who was present at the meeting between Brodsky and Vladimir Vyssotsky, Russia's then most famous songwriter, Brodsky went over the original poems of Vysotsky cancelling lines which in Brodsky's view did not sound right. This editing took place in Vysotsky's presence during his stay at famous Russian ballet dancer Baryshnikov's house in New York in 1978. According to the first hand testimony of Sumerkin and Rubin respectively, neither Shmakov nor Vysotsky visibly protested against Brodsky's revisions. Both of them were grateful to Brodsky for the changes he made to their respective versions, recognizing the latter's superiority as the poet in their mutual mother

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[308]. Joseph Brodsky 'Letter to Daniel Weissbort' (3 December 1979), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 33.
[309] Idem
[310] Quoted from "O skorbi i razume" ('On grief and reason') the unpublished version of Brodsky's obituary by Alexandr Sumerkin, February 1996.

tongue, Russian. On the other hand, Weissbort's English native-speaker ego understandably enough refused to accept the superiority of someone for whom English was his second language – even if this someone was a great poet in his native Russian.

(Incidentally, it seems curious that Brodsky's idea of editing had some typically Russian roots; Brodsky showed a strong affinity with the Russian XVIII century poets and may have had in mind their practice of continuous "improvements" of translations of others, which were mentioned in the Chapter Three. As shown by a famous Pushkin scholar Vatsuro, Similar practice was also in vigour among the members of the poetic society 'Arzamas', which counted Gnedich, Zhukovsky, Batyushkov, Pushkin, and Vyazemskii among its members. Commenting on the changes Pushkin and Vyazemskii allegedly made to the initial draft of Batyushkov's translation of the stanza CLXXVIII from the Fourth Canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* by Lord Byron, Vatsuro writes:

> It [this translation] represents a monument of „Arzamassian" collective creation, a cultural phenomenon peculiar of a certain epoch of literary consciousness – an epoch which we define as 'Pushkin's epoch.' [311])

In the next part of his response Brodsky gives his reasons for having recast Weissbort's translations. Brodsky at first alludes to the fact that prior to that moment his insufficient English had prevented him from coming up with alternative translation versions. Now that his English has improved, as can also be seen from the letter, and he had found time enough to go through the galleys, Brodsky discovered not so much the defects of the translation done by the others, as the possibility to easily improve upon these defects:

> I didn't bother ever to read translations of my stuff closely. Neither at the time of George Kline's "Selected", nor when they were appearing later in the magazines. Partly, because I can't take seriously the old poems (either in Russian or in English), partly because whenever I'd look at a translation I always found enough reasons to climb walls, mostly however because I never had time or English for coming up with alternatives. If one can't improve things, he better quit brooding, and I never did. Besides, the standards in today's American letters are lowered enough to be applauded for mere semblances. Why should one mind sounding like some pentametered Bill Merwin or meek Ted Hughes. I didn't, and on the whole I don't even now, for I have my originals. If I got to rework some translation in this forthcoming collection (not yours only, but also Rigsbee's, Kline's, Myer's and others, although I imagine that for you it's of no consequence, and rightly so), it's not because that I got to aspire for a higher spot on the local Parnassus, but because I've been given the galleys and found

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[311] V. E. Vatsuro. *Zapiski kommentatora* [Commentator's notes] (Sankt-Peterburg: 'Akademicheskii proekt', 1994), p. 165. Here is the original quote: « Он [перевод] остается памятником «арзамасского» сотворчества, культурным феноменом, характерным для совершенно определенной эпохи литературного сознания, который мы определяем как «пушкинскую эпоху».

> enough time to read them.
> What I've found was often disagreeable and objectionable. That, in itself, wasn't a big surprise. What has surprised me really is that some of them could be easily remedied (or worsened, as you may say again).[312]

In the quotation above Brodsky mentions the names of Bill Merwin and Ted Hughes. Brodsky associated with these poets the trend among English language poets to translate poetry from other languages in English using 'loose' verse metres and 'weak' rhymes, i.e. practically into unrhymed free verse. The fact that *verse libre* constituted a poetical norm in America was for Brodsky tantamount to the declaration of its decay, as also pointed out by Czesław Miłosz:

> … Joseph Brodsky was immune to the whole Whitman tradition of poetry. For him, Frost was the greatest American poet.[313]

Once again we have the proof that rhymes and verse metre were for Brodsky the essential and the most important elements of his originals to be preserved in translation. His ability to find in English more precise rhymes than those proposed by his translators must have given him the impression that the translations after all 'could be easily remedied'.

In the next passage from the letter above Brodsky names the main motives behind his constant search for rhymes. Brodsky refers to the effect of inevitability of poetic statement which he associated with the use of precise rhymes both in Russian and in English. The poet maintains that as none of his co-translators shared his belief in the importance of this 'inevitability effect', it was solely his duty to rework the translations so as to achieve it:

> And here we are getting to the hub of the whole problem. It's not that I believe meters and rhymes being sacred, but I'd rather look trite than slack. Given that (which has more to do, I suppose, with psychology than with aesthetics), it's small wonder that one decides to redress things, for better or worse. I think that the cited above principle holds equally well with writing in English as it does with things done in Russian. And I felt that by now, once I was capable to acknowledge the pitfalls, I have an additional responsibility – that to the English language. Pathetic as it may sound, I feel that way; and besides, where or to whom could I turn for help. You've said that yourself on a number of occasions that you'd rather not try this or that poem again. So did Alan [*Myers*], and as for Rigsbee, I'd hardly talk to him at all. In other words, it took me these seven years to realise that I am on my own not only in terms of accuracy of those translations, but also in the sense of their linguistic dignity.[314]

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[312] Brodsky 'Letter to Daniel Weissbort,' Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 33.
[313] Milosz. *Conversations*,. 190.
[314] Brodsky 'Letter to Daniel Weissbort' (3 December 1979), Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 33.

Brodsky is making above a very surprising point in the light of the criticism that accused him of 'un-Englishness'. According to Brodsky, what prompted his recastings of the translations done by others was his sense of responsibility towards the English language. What Brodsky is referring here to by talking of the rhymes being 'slack' is the quality of Weissbort's 'kind of oblique or half and quarter rhyming'. [315] Because of the alleged imprecision of Weissbort's rhymes, his translations lack, in Brodsky's view, the effect of inevitability of the poetic message.

If Brodsky only asserted the existence of such an effect in poetry and its connection to the use of formal prosodic devices, Auden gives us a greater insight into the precise mechanisms which bring it about in poetry. Auden maintains that one of the consequences of the formal devices in serious poetry is that it creates the impression that the content itself is to dictate the form in which they are embodied. It is in fact exactly this practice of conveying the sensation that the statements cast in a poetic form are not coincidental:

> In the process of composition, as every poet knows, the relation between experience and language is always dialectical, but in the finished product it must always appear to the reader to be a one-way relationship. In serious poetry thought, emotion, event, must always appear to dictate the diction, meter and rhyme in which they are embodied; vice versa, in comic poetry it is the words, meter, rhyme which must appear to create the thoughts, emotions and events they require.[316]

In this quality of the poetic statements to seem 'inevitable' when they appear in a shape of a perfect form also lies some danger. The poet might choose to abuse his art and to pass as 'inevitable' statements which are false as in cases of Yeats, Brecht or Mayakovsky. On the other hand, as Auden suggests in another passage in which he described the role of rhyme and other metrical devices in poetry, in order to achieve the desired effect the poet has to be a master of these devices and not their servant:

> Rhymes, meters, stanza-forms, etc., are like servants. If the master is just enough to win their affection and firm enough to command their respect, the result is an orderly happy household. If he is too tyrannical, they give notice; if he lacks authority, they become slovenly, impertinent, drunken and dishonest.[317]

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[315] Weissbort. 'Letter to Brodsky' (3 May 1974), Beinecke, Box 1 Fld 23.
[316] W.H. Auden. 'Introduction' to *Selected Poetry and Prose of Byron*. Quoted in Anthony Hecht. *The Hidden Law: the poetry of W.H. Auden* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) p. 174.
[317] W.H. Auden. 'Squares and Oblongs', *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden: Prose*, Vol. II, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002) p. 344.

Paraphrasing Auden's metaphor we can say that Brodsky accused Weissbort of having failed to show his 'mannerly'[318] authority (in purely intellectual terms, of course) by taking recourse to the imprecise rhymes.

In the passage of the letter to follow Brodsky suggests further implications of this effect of inevitability of poetic statements. According to Brodsky, the whole use of metre and rhyme was not so much an aesthetic issue, as an ethical one:

> You may laugh at the latter; but if you will laugh too loud, I'll show you enough lines that held together by the power of ink only. Please, Danny, understand me properly: I don't dispute your notions of poetic technique. As far as I am concerned, it's extremely strong (your means, that is as they are manifested in these translations), but often it lacks that element (or device) which creates the sense of the inevitability of the statement. Sometimes, to me there is too much of this "take-it-or-leave-it". And it's not that I am afraid of being "left": I simply believe that this attitude on the whole is cowardly. I understand that this is what the poetic idiom in English has come to, but it's simply not my cup of Earl Grey. Nor do I think that today is the last day of writing in English.[319]

As follows from the last sentence of the above quote, Brodsky believed in a return to using formal poetic devices in English poetry. Brodsky seems to suggest that in his reworkings of Weissbort's translations he was no more than anticipating such an aesthetic 'restoration'. The whole passage above reiterates the same point that Brodsky had made in his review on Richard Wilbur about the 'moral inferiority' of the *verse libre*. As opposed to free verse, writing formal verse, according to Brodsky, requires not only more skills of the poet and offers in return greater aesthetic possibilities; it also represents a form of resistance to chaos. As such it demands more courage from the poet:

> In my opinion a regular meter and exact rhymes shaping an uncomfortable thought are far more functional than any form of free verse. Because in the former case the reader gets a sense of chaos being organized. From what one could call a moral point of view, the former is more important than the latter. Even in the event that it is not organization, but nothing more than a form of resistance to chaos. For in the physical world only resistance is possible.[320]

Brodsky believed that Russian poetry had shown such resistance and demonstrated courage precisely through its fidelity to the classical forms – having probably in mind Akhmatova and Mandelstam. This confirms also Brodsky's friend German writer Hans Christoph Buch:

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[318] 'When Speech was mannerly, an Art,/ Like learning not to belch or fart:/ I cannot settle, which is worse/ The Anti-Novel or Free Verse.' Quoted from a poem 'Doggerel by a Senior Citizen' by W.H. Auden.
[319] Brodsky 'Letter to Daniel Weissbort' (3 December 1979), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 33.
[320] Brodsky, "On Richard Wilbur,' p. 18.

> Brodskys Ziel war von Anfang an nicht die Zertrümmerung der Form wie in der westlichen Avantgarde, sondern die Wiederherstellung des Reichtums der überlieferten Kunst und Literatur in einem durchaus klassizistischen Sinn. Das bedeutete zugleich eine Kampfansage gegen den totalitären Staat, dessen lähmendem Zugriff sich die russischen Dichter seiner Generation zu entziehen versuchten – nicht durch politischen Protest, sondern durch ästhetische Verweigerung.[321]

Hence, according to Brodsky, there would also be a 'moral' reason for retaining form in translation from Russian:

> …Apart from her metaphors, Russian poetry has set an example of moral purity and firmness, which to no small degree has been reflected in the preservation of so-called classical form without any damage to content. Herein lies her distinction from her Western sisters… ….it is a distinction, and if only for purely ethnographic considerations that quality ought to be preserved in translation and not forced into a common mould …. Russian poetry does not deserve being treated like a poor relation. The technique used to translate from Russian ought to differ, at least visually, from the technique used to translate from Swahili and Urdu. [322]

Thus, this slightly outmoded idea so dear to Brodsky, according to which it is necessary to resist the modern, seems to me to be crucial for the understanding of one of the driving motives behind his active involvement in self-translation. Derek Walcott recognized this resistance against the modern:

> This is why he [Brodsky] has made himself such an ample poet; one feels that he has written these many poems, most of them very long, because they serve as a bulwark, a fortress against the modern.[323]

Finally, Brodsky himself articulated this idea in a letter he wrote to his long-standing friend and editor of the magazine *Zvezda* Yakov Gordin in the summer of 1988. The letter concerned Brodsky's first official publications in Russia during the period of *perestroika*:

> Our current task is the task of our entire generation. [Once we go] no one else is going to take it up for us, for the concept of "civilisation" exists just for us. As the things seem to stand, the next generation is not going to care about such issues. They will care only about themselves, and only in terms of their self-interests and not in terms of their individuality. It is this latter that we have to give them the means to preserve. Only we can give them that – we who until recently used to be so ignorant ourselves….
> Poetry is possibly the only spanner which one can throw in this ever-accelerating

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[321] Hans Christop Buch. 'Nachmittag eines Nobelpreisträgers: Begegnung mit Joseph Brodsky' , *Übung mit Meistern*. (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1996) pp. 90-91.
[322] Brodsky. 'Beyond Consolation' Accessed on May 28, 2008 http://www.nybooks.com/articles/9613.
[323] Walcott. 'Magic Industry', p. 6.

> wheel; therefore our task is of almost anthropological importance: if not to stop, then at least to slow down the advancement of the chart…[324] (Transl. Z.I.)

That Brodsky should feel similarly towards what was going on in English poetry only reflects his special love for the language and its literature. That is why in the last sentence of the passage from the letter to Weissbort quoted above Brodsky defiantly proclaimed that it was not as yet the 'last day of writing in English.'

It is evident that the poet and his translator had quite different plains of regard. While Weissbort seemed to be simply translating from Russian as he thought was best possible at his age; Brodskyattempted to influence the future developments of the poetic trends in the English language itself. In this respect as well Brodsky seems to reflect the heritage of the XIX century Russian poetry, thus Etkind:

> During the epoch of Pushkin – i.e., the first third of the XIX century – poets translated a lot. They did so, however, only in accordance with their proper artistic tastes and necessities. In translating Voltaire, Parny, Chegnier Pushkin and Baratynsky did not intend to enlighten anyone. The visitors of St. Petersburg and Moscow salons read in French more willingly and with greater ease than they did in Russian. Translations were supposed to highlight the possibilities of the Russian poetic language, widen the range of their own poetics as well as expand the general cultural context for the Russian literature. (Transl. Z.I.) [325]

Just as Pushkin and Baratynsky among others tried to widen the horizons of Russian poetry in terms of both the cultural reference as well as by introducing into Russian poetry new poetic devices, Brodsky strove to accomplish a similar service for his adoptive English language poetry.

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[324] Quoted in Iakov Gordin, „Nashe delo – pochti antropologicheskoe": Preface to Iosif Brodskii, *V ozhidanii varvarov*: Mirovaya poeziya v perevodakh Iosifa Brodskogo [Waiting for the Barbarians: World Poetry in translations of Joseph Brodsky], (St. Petersburg: Zvezda Magazine, 2001), p. 5. The original quote runs as follows:
«Нынешнее дело – дело нашего поколения; никто его больше делать не станет, понятие «цивилизация» существует только для нас. Следующему поколению, судя по всему, не до этого: только до себя, и именно в смысле шкуры, а не индивидуальности. Вот это-то последнее и надо дать им какие-то средства сохранить; и дать их можем только мы, вчера еще такие невежественные... Изящная словесность, возможно, единственная палка в этом набирающем скорость колесе, так что наше дело – почти антропологическое: если не остановить, то хоть притормозить подводу...».

[325] Efim G. Etkind (Ed.), "Introductory essay" to *Mastera poeticheskogo perevoda: XX vek* (Masters of poetic translation: XXth century), (Sankt-Peterburg: Gumanitarnoe agenstvo "Akademicheskii proekt", 1997) p. 6. Here is the original quote:
«В пушкинское время – первую треть XIX века – поэты переводили много, но только то, что отвечало вкусу и творческим надобностям каждого из них. ... Переводя Вольтера, Парни и Шенье, Пушкин и Баратынский не собирались никого просвещать: посетители петербургских и московских салонов и театров по-французски читали охотнее и лучше, нежели по-русски. Переводы были призваны высветить возможности русского поэтического языка, расширить диапозон собственного творчества поэтов и общекультурный контекст русской литературы. »

This kind of unheard of audacity could not possibly be taken well by his critics. Not only did Brodsky 'dare' undertake changes in the translations in his second language, but he also ventured to think he could influence the literary development of the English language through the practice of his translations in it. This explains much of the animosity that was later directed at him. What his critics failed to appreciate, however, was that Brodsky's motifs were quite selfless. Far from willing to compete with them aspiring for 'a higher spot on the local Parnassus', whatever Brodsky did, he did it for the sake of poetry.

Paradoxically enough such presumption on the part of Brodsky was not altogether unreasonable, as suggested by Miłosz:

> Brodsky and myself stand together and choose to differ from certain Modernist poets …. [G]iven the state of Western poetry at present, Brodsky and I may well be considered to be lingering in the rear guard, but really we may be the avant-garde. That's something you just never know, because if we poets work hard at it then we can change the direction in which poetry is headed.[326]

Towards the end of the long letter to Weissbort Brodsky reiterates that the main reason behind his reworkings was not so much his love of his Russian texts, but rather his love for the English language:

> I think that the main problem between us is not so much the aesthetics but that you never dealt with an author who has this kind of attitude to the language, who was so opinionated. I am not a Swede or a Hungarian who, for all their knowledge of the language into which they are translated, would wave the whole thing up believing that the lads know better and that the modernism means looseness of form, etc. [327]

In the passage above Brodsky identified his own attitude towards English-language literature – unique in a foreigner– as the main reason for his disagreements with Weissbort over translation. His love of the English language and his profound knowledge of its literature convinced Brodsky that 'being modern' was not tantamount to writing in unrhymed free verse. In that respect Brodsky seemed to be defiantly willing to continue in the vein of Auden, as we can find from a description by Edward Mendelson:

> In the …year, 1939, Eliot looked sadly back at the triumphs of modernism, and saw in them "rather the last efforts of an old world, than the first struggles of the new." In the midst of these triumphs, before modernism began its manifest decline, Auden was exuberantly at work writing in ways that modernism insisted were impossible.
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> …The poets of modernism felt they could bring tradition into the present only as battered ironic fragments, or by heroic efforts to make it new. For Auden it had never

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[326] Milosz.*: Conversations*, p. 189.
[327] Brodsky 'Letter to Daniel Weissbort' (3 December 1979), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 33.

> grown old…. Where modernism had used innovative forms to speak of historical necessity, Auden … adopted traditional forms to speak of freedom and choice …[328]

It is precisely in the relation to this Audenesque, and not only Pushkinian as was said above, tradition that Brodsky sees himself as a guardian of the English language, as he further explained to Weissbort:

> If anything really upsets me, it is not the distortion of this or that passage but a really cavalier disrespect for the English language. I repeat: I don't care for mistakes so much, I don't care that my line doesn't scan well; but the point is that it's not my line: it's the line in English.[329]

To Weissbort, for whom Brodsky's revisions represented nothing but the application of 'foreign standards' to English translation, this argumentation above must have seemed rather paradoxical.

Concluding the letter Brodsky turns the whole issue of 'ownership' upside down in reassuring his translator that after the author's revisions Weissbort will not have to be ashamed of his name being attached to them: 'the only thing I can assure you of regarding this book is that the things in it to which your name is going to be attached, won't make you feeling (*Sic*.) ashamed.'[330]

Brodsky's main arguments

At this stage I propose a summary of the main arguments of Brodsky on the subject of his translations as they were presented in the course of his dispute with Weissbort:

- Translation is something that can always be altered;
- Translating standards in English language poetry have been lowered to attempt mere *semblances*; Brodsky, on the other hand, strives for *equivalents*;
- Slack rhymes and loose metre are cowardly, because they make poetical statements appear easily retractable and do not convey the sense of inevitability which goes with the rhymes;
- What Brodsky does in translation is dictated by his love of the English language and its poetic tradition. Modernism does not mean 'looseness of form'. To think this is to show disrespect for the English language and its future.

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[328] Edward Mendelson. „Introduction", Early Auden, (New York: The Viking Press, 1981) pp. xiv-xx.
[329] Brodsky 'Letter to Daniel Weissbort' (3 December 1979), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 33.
[330] Idem

Despite Brodsky's efforts to argue his position, he failed to entirely convince Weissbort of the necessity or legitimacy of the changes he had undertaken to the latter's translation versions. Weissbort thought that Brodsky in presenting his arguments did not take enough heed of the historical trends and theories of poetic translations:

> In general, he [Brodsky] asserted rather than argued and had little inclination to put the assertions into a historical or translational perspective, let alone give due considerations to the counter-arguments.[331]

In order to adjudicate the dispute between Brodsky and Weissbort we should first turn our attention to the work of the famous Russian metrician Victor Zhirmunsky *Teoria Stikha* (A Verse Theory) – a cornerstone in the prosodic studies in the twentieth century. In his book Zhirmunsky arrived at a comparative-historic theory of both metre and rhyme. Zhirmunsky's theory should help us to place both Brodsky's and Weissbort's arguments in some theoretical perspective.

The Theory of Metre and Rhyme: Anglo-Russian similarities and contrasts

Russian-English similarities: verse metre as compositional principle

> '…whatever else it may be, a poem is a verbal artefact which must be as skilfully and solidly constructed as a table or a motorcycle.'(Wystan Hugh Auden) [332]

In 1986 in his 'Foreword' to *An Age Ago: a Selection of Nineteenth-Century Russian Poetry,* translated by his friend and co-translator Alan Myers, Brodsky wrote the following:

> …young though Russian poetry was a century ago, metrically, to say the least, it was as mature as her Western sisters. If the music of some of these poems sounds familiar, it is not because Mr. Alan Myers did not know better but because meters are meters no matter the language in which they are employed. That is what they are meters for.[333]

For anyone who has even the slightest notion of the existing metrical contrasts between Russian and English, Brodsky's affirmation above that 'meters are meters no matter

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[331] Daniel Weissbort. ‚Something like his own language' (review), URL http://www.nd.edu/~ndr/issues/ndr14/reviews/weissbort.html accessed 18 Jun. 07.
[332] W. H. Auden, 'Foreword' to Andrei Voznesenky. *Antiworlds:* bilingual edition of verse. (New York: Bacic Books, INC., 1967) p. vi.
[333] Joseph Brodsky. 'Foreword' to Alan Myers (ed. & trans.). *An Age Ago: A Selection of Nineteenth-Century Russian Poetry*. (London: Penguin, 1989) p. xviii.

the language they are employed' will sound slightly mind-boggling. What was, however, evident to Brodsky from his first hand practice of writing poetry and doing translations, was the underlying similarity of metrical devices in both English and Russian in their function as compositional principles.

Viktor Zhirmunsky and his theory

In the 1920s, when comparing similar metrical phenomena in Russian, English, German, Italian and French languages, Victor Zhirmunsky discovered that the main significance of both metre and rhyme in poetry is their 'function as compositional principles.'[334]

Any speech is organized, argues Zhirmunsky, according to a certain pattern of distribution in certain sequences. The manner of this distribution varies depending on the task which this distribution is trying to fulfil. In poetry, an art form working with words, the rhythmical law is realized in a kind of uniform distribution of weak and strong syllables organized in phonetic sequences which repeat themselves. The law of alternation of these syllables is expressed in a certain metrical scheme:

> What we call composition is an artistically regular distribution of certain material in space and time. For the art forms which work with static material in space the main principle of spatial composition are in a broader sense of the word the laws of symmetry. For the art forms for which the change in time serves as their material the main principle of artistic regularity in time is the rhythm. In fact, the distribution of strong and weak syllables in a certain sequence within poetic speech is the foundation of the compositional structure of any poem; these, in a narrow sense, metrical elements represent, so to speak, a compositional framework of the poetical speech. (Translation *Z.I.*)[335]

A metrical scheme is an ideal scheme, for the real rhythm of a poem deviates from it; as elsewhere in art regularity never becomes a mathematically correct law. But we perceive the main task expressed in a metrical scheme as a main movement or 'impulse' in a number of

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[334] Victor Zhirmunsky. *Teoria Stikha* [Verse Theory] p. 240.
[335] Ibid., p. 426.
Original quote: ‚Композицией называется художественно закономерное распределение какого бы то ни было материала в пространстве или во времени. Для искусств, работающих с неподвижным в пространстве материалом, основным принципом пространственной композиции являются законы симметрии в широком смысле слова. Для искусств, материалом которых служит изменение во времени, основным принципом художественной закономерности во времени является ритм. Распределение сильных и слабых звуков стихотворной речи в определённой ритмической последовательности есть основа композиционного строения всякого стихотворения; эти в узком смысле слова метрические элементы образуют как бы композиционный остов поэтической речи'.

verse lines seen as an entire body, despite the deviations from it which invariably occur in some disparate lines:

> The presence of a metrical scheme in verse is perceived by the reader as the inertia of rhythm […]. …. The presence of a metrical law in our consciousness is proved by the fact that every metrically strong syllable, even though it bears no stress in actuality, is for us stressed in principle. … Only the presence of the metrical law converts the neutral alternation of prose stresses into poetic rhythm […]. And so, without metre there is no rhythm …[336]

The same idea of the existence of tension between the inertia of the given metrical scheme and the real rhythm of a poem was also pointed out by Frost:

> I puzzled over it many years and tried to make people see what I meant. They use the word "rhythm" about a lot of free verse; and gee, what's the good of the rhythm unless it is on something that trips it – that it ruffles? … it's got to ruffle the meter.[337]

The rhythm in poetry is not given in notation as in music, but the underlying metrical scheme is perceived by a reader as a recurring regular pattern against the background of which emerges the real rhythm with many possibilities of its concrete realisations. The poet, on the other hand, does not have in mind an abstract scheme, but 'hears' already at the moment of composition some sort of its rhythmical realisation. Brodsky, for instance, suggests that this main metrical impulse towards composition is a sort of rhythmical *hum* which the poet hears while composing a poem. This *hum* carries away, as it were, all the aspects of the artistic speech conveying structure and harmony to a formless chaotic material:

> …The poem always starts with the first line or with a line anyway. And from that you go. It is something in the line, a certain hum to which you try to fit the line. And then you proceed that way…. It is some tune which has oddly enough some sort of psychological weight or denomination. And you try to fit something into that….[338]

The poet might as well hear this rhythmic 'hum' from the very first line of the poem or even prior to its composition; it might take, however, some to time for the reader to begin to perceive it. This 'inertia of the rhythm, that general rhythmic impulse, those regularities of rhythmic movement which we call meter'[339] can only be perceived, argues Zhirmunsky, if we read the entire poem – no line taken in isolation out of the context of the entire poem, can reveal the metrical pattern.

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[336] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*, p. 71.
[337] Robert Frost. 'Conversation on the Craft of Poetry' in Robert Frost. *Collected Poems, Prose & Plays* (New York: The Library of America) p. 854.
[338] Brodsky. *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*, p.149.
[339] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*. p. 66.

As is shown by Zhirmunsky, the real rhythm of the poem exerts its organizing influence on the lexical material of the poem as well as an on its content.[340] Moreover, surprisingly enough, the seemingly restrictive dictates of the metrical principles often help the poet organize his own thoughts and bring the very content about, as suggested by Auden in his review of poems by Hardy:

> Anyone who imitates his style will learn at least one thing, how to make words fit into a complicated structure and also, if he is sensitive to such things, much about the influence of form upon content… Such unusual verse forms help the imitator to find out what he has to say.[341]

Speaking of the aspect of poetry writing he himself most enjoyed Auden named the metrical restrictions because they help the poet to say 'something which you haven't thought of saying, and you wouldn't have thought of if it hadn't been for these kinds of restrictions.' [342]

Thus it becomes evident that for such formal poets of the English language as Hardy, Frost, Auden and Wilbur etc. the general function of metrical restrictions in their quality of compositional principles was approximately the same as for their Russian counterparts. It is precisely in that sense that Brodsky's assertion that 'meters are meters no matter the language in which they are employed. That is what they are meters for'[343] – is supposed to be understood. And yet the existence of these universal principles of metrical composition valid both for English and Russian does not rule out the existence of the metrical contrasts between English and Russian, on which Weissbort laid so much emphasis in his argumentation. These contrast become particularly important when it comes to translation of poetry between these languages. Let us now see what they are, according to Zhirmunsky.

Metres: Russian-English contrasts

As shown by Zhirmunsky on the example of verse written in the same verse metres in English and in Russian, although the overriding general principle of distribution of strong and weak syllables may be the same in both these languages, there are bound to be differences in

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[340] See also: Victor Zhirmunsky. *Teoria Stikha* [Verse Theory], p. 438-441.
[341] Armin Rathe. *Zum Vers-, Strophen- und Gedichtbau im Werk von W.H. Auden* (Bamberg: Schmacht, 1969), p. 1.
[342] W.H. Auden, *An Unpublished Interview (1953)* conducted by Walter Kerr published in *The Harvard Advocate*, W.H. Auden 1907-1973 special issue, 1973, p. 32.
[343] Joseph Brodsky. 'Foreword' to Alan Myers (ed. & trans.). *An Age Ago: A Selection of Nineteenth-Century Russian Poetry*. (London: Penguin, 1989) p. xviii.

their concrete realizations which will depend directly from the natural phonetic properties of the respective languages:

> Within metrically identical … iambic verse Russian iambs display omissions of metrically stressed accents (a medium of three stresses in an iambic tetrameter) which is due to a greater word length in the Russian language. English iambs on the other hand, because of the respective shortness of the words (predominantly monosyllables), display frequent additional stresses of the metrically weak syllables. [344]

RUSSIAN: In Russian poetry in the iamb and trochee, for example, stresses presupposed by the metrical scheme could often be omitted in actual practice. To illustrate this Zhirmunsky quoted the famous opening lines of *Evgenii Onegin* by Pushkin:

> Moi di**á**dia s**á**mykh ch**é**stnykh pr**á**vil,
> Kogd**á** ne v sh**ú**tku zanem**ó**g,
> On uvazh**á**t' sebi**á** zast**á**vil
> I l**ú**chshe v**ý**dumat' ne m**ó**g...[345]

> My uncle has most honest principles:
> when he was taken gravely ill,
> he forced one to respect him
> and nothing better could invent.[346]

Out of four opening lines it is only the first one that fulfils the requirements of the metrical scheme of iambic tetrameter, i.e. displays stresses on all four even-numbered syllables:

> In the second line a stress is omitted on the sixth syllable (ZAnem**ó**g); in the third line the required stress is missing on the second syllable (on UVazh**á**t); and in the fourth line it is again the sixth syllable which departs from the metrical pattern (v**ý**dumAT'). [347]

The explanation of this phenomenon lies in the fact that the average length of a Russian word is slightly less than three syllables (about 2.7 according to the precise calculations of the theoreticians of verse). A Russian average word is thus easily accommodated in a ternary metre (dactyl, anapaest, amphibrach); on the other hand, in the binary metres (iambs and trochees), if the metrically strong syllables were all stressed, longer

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[344] Zhirmunsky. *Teoria Stikha* [Verse Theory], p. 237
[345] Quoted in Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse,* p. 37.
[346] Quoted from: Aleksandr Pushkin. *Eugene Onegin*/ Transl. Vladimir Nabokov (New York: Bollingen Series, 1964) p. 95.
[347] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics.* p.37.

words could not be used.[348] Thus, the existence of such deviations from the metrical scheme as omission of stresses, or 'Pyrrhic feet', represent an example of the resistance of the Russian linguistic material to the imposed metrical scheme: 'In such cases of conflict between the metrical scheme and the natural phonetic characteristics of the language the *actual rhythm* results as a sort of compromise.'[349]

ENGLISH: The main contrast of the same binary metres in English and Russian is that 'the omission of stresses ('pyrrhics') is not characteristic of English meters'.[350] On the other hand, the most widespread phenomenon of the English binary metres is the hypermetrical stressing of syllables in significant monosyllabic words[351]:

> The l**o**wing h**e**rd *winds* sl**o**wly **o**'er the l**ea** (Gray)
> A st**a**r *shot*: 'L**o**!' said G**a**reth, a *foe* f**a**lls! (Tennyson)
> *Rocks*, c**a**ves, *lakes*, f**e**ns, *bogs*, d**e**ns and sh**a**des of d**ea**th! (Milton)[352]

In the last of the examples, a famous line of Milton which is in fact a list of nouns, we can find three hypermetrical stresses in the first three feet.

Another marked characteristic of English iambs is the extensive use they make of displacement of stress:

> *G**i**ving* more light, than heat, extinct in both… (Shakespeare)
> And from the w**a**ves *sound* like del**i**ght broke forth (Shelley)
> Which, tasted, w**o**rks *kn**o**wledge* of Good and Evil (Milton)[353]

Despite the fact that Zhirmunsky's *Teoria Stikha* was first published as early as in 1925 many of his discoveries continued to be overlooked. Characteristic is the example of Vladimir Nabokov who specifically dedicated several articles and a book to Anglo-Russian prosodic contrasts. As late as in 1950s and 1960s Nabokov continued to apply mechanically the same prosodic principles to iambs in Russian and in English. For instance, in his article 'Problems of Translation: "*Onegin"* in English' (1955) Nabokov, who using his own terminology spoke of omissions of stress as of 'modulated line' or of 'scuds'[354], not only saw in their use 'virtue per se' following the aesthetesizing tendency of Belyi, but also proposed their use for the translation of Russian verse into English:

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[348] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics.* p.60.
[349] Idem
[350] Ibid., p. 82.
[351] Ibid., p. 82.
[352] Quoted in Ibid., p. 82.
[353] Quoted in Ibid., p. 83.
[354] Vladimir Nabokov. *Notes on Prosody*. (New York: Bollingen Series, 1964) pp. 9-14.

> There is … one English poet whose modulations, if not as rich in quantity and variety as Pushkin's, are at least an approach to that richness. I refer to Andrew Marvell. It is instructive to compare Byron's snip-snap monotonies … with any of the lines addressed by Marvell 'To His Coy Mistress'. … It is among such melodies that one should seek one's model when translating Pushkin in verse.[355]

Nabokov completely disregards in his suggestion the intrinsic differences in the rhythmic realisations of iambic metre in English and Russian. Nabokov represents the typical characteristic of the Russian iambs – the 'omissions of metrically stressed accents' as an aesthetic virtue, as a kind of euphonic richness, which English poets and translators from Russian should emulate. English verse, which displays few such omissions, as for example, some of Byron's verse Nabokov dubs as 'snip-snap monotonies.' Nabokov seems to be perfectly unaware of the fact that such omissions are highly atypical for the English iambs, which display a completely opposite tendency of additional stresses, as demonstrated by Zhirmunsky. Oddly enough it was Nabokov who formulated a strategy for Russian-English translation which Brodsky would later perhaps unwittingly put into practice. Namely, as has been alluded in the previous chapter, while translating his poems into English, Brodsky was often trying to convey not their *metre* as he himself claimed, but their *rhythm*, which contained the aforementioned Russian characteristics, i.e. the omission of stresses, or 'Pyrrhic feet'. Similarly, as is clear from Brodsky's readings, he often omits stresses on semantically charged words while reciting his poetry in English – a practice which stands in sharp contrast with English prosodic rules. Because of its monosyllabic nature as well as the habit of the English speech to always stress the semantic words led in English to the practice diametrically opposite to the Russian omission of metrical stresses – the existence in English of hypermetrical stresses.

Rhymes: Russian-English similarities: rhyme as compositional principle

Der Reim ist nur der Sprache Gunst,
nicht nebenher noch eine Kunst.
…
Er ist der Ufer, wo sie landen,
sind zwei Gedanken einverstanden.
…
Hier nimmt er teil am ganzen Muß,
die Fesseln eines Genius,

Gebundnes tiefer noch zu binden.
Was sich nicht suchen lässt, nur finden,

[355] Vladimir Nabokov. 'Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English,' *Partisan Review* XXII (1955), p. 500.

was in des Wortglücks Augenblick,
nicht aus Geschick, nur durch Geschick

da ist was von selbst gelingt,
aus Mutterschaft der Sprache springt:
das ist der Reim….

(Karl Kraus, 'Der Reim'[356])

Brodsky once referred to himself with pride as a 'pretty good rhymer.'[357] As has been pointed out by many critics, 'the rhymes provide one of the structural cornerstones in many of Brodsky's poems'.[358] In an interview Brodsky himself thus explained the mechanisms of rhymes as compositional principles:

> There are three methods of cognition: analysis, intuition or synthesis, and revelation. Synthesis is a process absorbing analysis and revelation, and in poetry, in the process of composition you employ all three in one way or another. And that's what is interesting of (Sic.) poetry as a discipline. It is a tremendous mental accelerator. Once you hook up one word, one concept to another, through a rhyme, once you've uncovered that these two things are connected, you get addicted to that linkage, to that ability to create that linkage, to not only the facility of the linkage but the certainty of that linkage. That's what you do on paper; you uncover the dependencies, the relationships which are built into the language. The general manner in which your mind starts to operate is coupling.[359]

Brodsky's friend Susan Sontag also confirms this conception of 'accelerated thinking' which was embedded for Brodsky in the process of rhyming:

> Poetry, he [Brodsky] said, is accelerated thinking. It was his best argument, and he made many, on behalf of the superiority of poetry to prose, for he considered rhyme essential to this process.[360]

In order to understand better this connection Brodsky made between rhyming and acceleration of thinking one should bear in mind that one of Brodsky's crucial conceptions about poetry was that of a poet being an instrument of language. Language contains in itself certain dependencies between seemingly unrelated phenomena and the poet's task is then to merely unravel them. In the process the poet serves the language as the language serves him – it enables the poet to travel mentally to such territories and at a speed which would have not been possible had it not been for this compositional device.

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[356] Karl Kraus. ‚Der Reim', in *Poesiealbum 78: Karl Kraus* (Berlin: Neues Leben Verlag, 1974) pp. 12-14.
[357] Brodsky. *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*, p. 161.
[358] Scherr. *‚To Urania'* in *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem*, p. 94.
[359] Brodsky. *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*., p. 184.
[360] Sontag. ‚Joseph Brodsky', in *Where the Stress Falls: Essays,* p. 332.

The same function of rhyme as both a compositional principle as well as a 'mental accelerator' was pointed out by W.H. Auden:

> The enormous fun of poetry for me, as compared with prose, is that suddenly you're faced with a problem of, 'Now I've got to have a word here', what shall we say, 'three syllables long, with an accent on the second syllable, rhyming with another word, and meaning dry.' And all right I have 'waterless', and suddenly, you find that you say something which you haven't thought of saying, and you wouldn't have thought of if it hadn't been for these kinds of restrictions. [361]

What we might conclude from the quotations above that for both Brodsky as well as Auden rhyme represented the same kind of a universal organizing device of poetical speech, regardless of the fact that the former wrote his original verse in Russian and the latter in English. It would be then logical for a translator translating such a poet to try to find the analogous dependences between form and meaning in the target language. And yet such a hypothetical translator would find himself considerably impaired in his undertaking by the existence of the contrastive tendencies between Russian and English in regard to the use of poetic rhyme, as I will try to show in the next section.

Rhymes: Russian-English contrasts, feminine rhymes

The Russian language, due to its polysyllabic nature and its freedom of stress, allows maximum diversity of verse and rhyme forms, says Zhirmunsky.[362] In particular, Russian verse permits the free usage of masculine, feminine, and dactylic rhymes: in classical Russian poetry regular alternation of feminine and masculine rhyme is considered to be a norm.[363] In English, on the other hand, there is a clear prevalence of continuous masculine rhymes:

> Despite the fact that feminine, or even dactylic, rhymes are still possible in English (although they are much less widespread than in Russian), a regular alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes (as in Byron's poem *Fare thee well*) is a rare occurrence encountered mostly in translations (e.g. from Russian) which are reproached for appearing 'monotonous' to an English ear. (Translation *Z.I.*)[364]

Such differences in the rhyme forms constitute one of the greatest problems of the linguistic theory of translation, says Zhirmunsky. The task of a translator then, he argues, is to produce a metrically identical or similar (equimetrical) translation, which at the same time would lie within the limits of the given linguistic possibilities. For example, masculine

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[361] Auden, 'An Unpublished Interview' (1953) by Walter Kerrp. 32.
[362] Zhirmunsky. *Teoria Stikha* [Verse Theory] p. 237.
[363] Idem.
[364] Ibid., p. 238.

rhymes, which are characteristic of English to all genres are traditionally substituted in their translation into Russian by the alternation of feminine and masculine rhymes more natural for this language.

Of course, it is possible, maintains Zhirmunsky, to render English continuous masculine rhymes into Russian without any great difficulties, i.e. to translate them equimetrically, but such translations despite their apparent precision confer an exotic flare to the foreign poetical work which were not present in the original and lead to unexpected distortions of the artistic effect.[365] As one example of such involuntary distortions in the history of English-Russian translation, Zhirmunsky cites a brilliant translation done in 1822 by the great Russian poet Vasilii Zhukovskii of Byron's *The Prisoner of Chillon*. At the time many Russian contemporary critics enthusiastically received this translation (which preserved the continuous masculine rhyme of the original) as evidence of a special poetic device which had been adopted by the translator in order to convey a sombre and melancholy mood of the poem. As a matter of fact, however, Zhirmunsky argues, what Byron had used in the original was nothing but a neutral and absolutely common form of English rhyming.[366] (Professor Venclova has recently made me aware that Lermontov used this device in his poem "Mtsyri" precisely with idea of conveying with it a special mood – device, which had been unconsciously introduced by Zhukovsky).

Conversely, Zhirmunsky speaks of the comic effects which dactylic rhymes, normal for Russian poetry, produce in English. Here, he says, the 'metrical clumsiness' of hypermetrical three-syllabic endings in English and their lack of an organizing compositional principle there is supplemented by the fact that as a result of the particular historical development of English phonetics such endings can only occur in words of foreign – Latin or French – descent. As an example of such a deliberately used comic effect in English poetry Zhirmunsky quotes Lord Byron:

> Some women use their tongues – she looked a lecture,
> Each eye a sermon, and her brow a homily,
> An all-in-all sufficient self director,
> Like the lamented late Sir Samuel Romilly,
> The law's expander, and the States corrector,
> Whose suicide was almost an anomaly –

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[365] Ibid., pp. 240-241.
[366] Ibid., p. 241.

> One sad example more, that "All is vanity".
> The jury brought their verdict on "Insanity" (*Don Juan*) [367]

This observation is also confirmed by a 'native' metrician, Alfred Corn, in his manual of English prosody, who incidentally also gives an example from *Don Juan*:

> Triple rhyme … has been reserved since the Romantic era almost exlusively for comic effects. This is particularly true with "mosaic" or "wrenched" rhymes, where the extra syllables are provided by more than one word, as in Byron's notorious couplet from *Don Juan*:
>
> But, oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,
> Inform us truly, - have they not henpeck'd you all?[368]

In his relatively recent book on Russian prosody, *The Development of Russian Verse: Meter and its Meanings* (1988) Michael Wachtel showed that the established associations of a particular verse form with a particular mood and register are often quite arbitrary. They are often determined by historical developments in each single literature. Wachtel illustrates his hypothesis on example of a serious love poem written in verse metre of a limerick:

> Whether intended or not, the effect is comic, because a single poem – with rare exceptions – is not sufficiently powerful to offset a century of firm associations. For this reason, we can say that a heartfelt love limerick is doomed to failure. The poet may be sincere, but his form is not. On perhaps subconscious level, the reader's response to the new poem is largely determined by a set of metrical expectations.
>
> An important question arises from these considerations: are the comic associations inherent in the meter of a limerick, or are they essentially arbitrary, the results of historical coincidence? Numerous poets and philosophers have insisted on the former, yet modern comparative poetics suggests the latter. There is nothing intrinsically comic about amphibrachs, truncated lines, or five-line stanzas. Were our love limerick to be translated into Russian, maintaining the semantics, serious tone, and formal features, most readers would be untroubled by inappropriate associations. *In short, metrical associations are not psychological invariants or a part of mankind's "collective unconscious." Often, they are specific to a national literature and do not cross geographical boundaries*[369]. (Italics mine, Z.I.)

At the same time Wachtel, of course, admits the existence of the similarities in the register and associations of the same verse forms in different languages. This, Wachtel argues, is not a matter of coincidence, but rather a proof of the common genealogy of the respective poetics:

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[367] Ibid., p. 302.
[368] Alfred Corn. *The Poem's Heartbeat*: a manual of prosody. (New York: Story Line Press, 1997) p. 67.
[369] Michael Wachtel. "Introduction" to *The Development of Russian Verse: Meter and its Meanings*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 2.

> At times, of course, a poetic form occurs with the same semantic associations in any number of national literatures. This does not mean that these literatures developed the identical form independently. On the contrary, it generally indicates that one has influenced the other or that both originate from a common ancestor. [370]

At the same time, Wachtel points out other examples, apart from that of Brodsky, of poets who tried to single-handedly change the inherent metric associations extant in their native poetries. In the Russian tradition such a poet was Nekrasov who 'revised the metrical-generic system of his predecessors, leading puzzled contemporaries to concluded that he had made "mistakes"'[371]. Mikhail Gasparov suggested even an earlier example of metrical reinterpretation: Latin poet Catullus consciously reinterpreted verse metres, which he had inherited from the Greeks.[372]

Some observations on Brodsky's translating theory in the view of English-Russian metrical contrasts

Looking at the theoretical pronouncements of Brodsky through the prism of the Anglo-Russian prosodic contrasts and similarities as identified in theory by Zhirmunsky we can make following observations:

1) Rhymes and verse metre were for Brodsky just as important as compositional principles as for his English language counterparts writing formal verse. The existence of a formal tradition in English, of which he was so well aware, emboldened Brodsky in his search for metrical equivalents in English of his Russian verse. His believe in the 'moral' superiority of formal verse in comparison with free verse, as well as his conviction that the modern trends in English poetry have to be resisted confirmed the self-translator Brodsky in his decision to translate as equimetrically as possible.

2) On the other hand, the implementation of this Brodsky's decision was at least in theory hampered by the existence of a number of metrical contrasts between Russian and English:

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[370] Wachtel. 'Introduction,' to *The Development of Russian Verse,* p. 2.
[371] Wachtel. 'Notes', *The Development*, p. 260. See also Eikhenbaum, *O poezii* (On poetry), (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1969).
[372] Mikhail L. Gasparov. *Izbrannye stat'i* (Selected essays), (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1995), p. 382.

Firstly, on the level of tradition: formal writing and formal translation no longer belonged to mainstream practices in English poetry and thus Brodsky's practices of mimetic translation could not but clash with the reigning tastes in English-language literature.

Secondly, Brodsky's adjustment of the poems metre 'by the ear' were likely to lead to the emergence of contrasts with the different rhythmical realisations of the same verse metres in English: monosyllabic English displays frequent additional stresses where Russian tends to omit them.

Lastly, Brodsky's insistence on the retention not only of rhymes, but of rhymes patterns resulted in his practice of feminine rhyming in English – a type of rhyming not only much less frequently used in English than in Russian, but which produces quite different connotations in the verse written in the respective languages. Nabokov describes their contrastive usage in English and in Russian: 'Feminine rhymes are [in English] scarce, insipid, or burlesque.'; 'Feminine rhymes [in Russian] are as frequent as masculine ones and add extrametrical music to the verse.'[373]

Brodsky was repeatedly reminded of the existence of this last Anglo-Russian contrast not only by his critics, but also by some of his closest friends and allies among native speakers. One example would be Derek Walcott who suggested in his review of *To Urania*, Brodsky's second collection of translations published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, that no Anglophone poet would make recourse to the feminine rhymes because of their comic associations:

> The translated Russian risks, in its usually hexametrical rhyming design, a meter which English associates with the comic, the parodic, or the ironic. There is no modern English or American poet who will take such risks – being utterly serious with feminine endings, of attempting to reach the sublime and noble without the pseudo-humility of the dying fall, the retractable conceit.[374]

Walcott seems, however, to justify above Brodsky's introduction of feminine rhymes: their introduction, he seems to suggest, makes the poetic statements less retractable, i.e. more inevitable.

Another Brodsky associate who commented upon his use of feminine rhymes in English was Anthony Hecht, famous American poet, friend and translator of Brodsky. In the 'Introduction' to the posthumous edition of *A Part of Speech* Hecht felt it necessary to justify

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[373] Nabokov. *Notes on Prosody*. pp. 50-51.
[374] Walcott, 'Magic Industry,' p. 6.

Brodsky's frequent recourse to the feminine rhymes in front of the English readers by making them aware of the existence of a different metrical tradition in Russian:

> Two-syllable rhymes, favoured in some poems Brodsky composed in English (Persia/inertia, Noah/ spermatozoa) have struck the ears of some English readers as perilously frivolous, though such disyllabic chiming is easily available in the Russian language, and employed by Pushkin and other great poets.[375]

And yet neither Hecht nor Walcott, despite the attempts they made to justify Brodsky's use of feminine rhymes, whether by mentioning some artistic necessity behind such a use or just writing it off to the existence of a different tradition, questioned for a second the fact that such a practice would be perceived as unacceptable by the most of English language readers.

Brodsky, however, chose to disregard their urges. He insisted all through his self-translating career on the importance of conveying the complexities of the formal structure of the original. At the time when Brodsky had become the chief translator of his own work Ann Kjellberg thus described his translation practice:

> Usually Joseph gets a fairly literal translation from one of his students and then transmogrifies it himself into some kind of rendering in English of the formal qualities of the Russian original. Form is extremely important to him – part of the legacy of the "Acmeist" school as it came down to him through Akhmatova – though in ways that are apparently uniquely Russian and difficult for me, at least, to hear and understand. … Because it is highly inflected, many words have "feminine" endings (with one of more weakly stressed syllables at the end), so Joseph makes frequent use of feminine rhymes, which are almost unheard of in English. Nuances of stress are carried through the inflected endings of words to an extent that a Russian line is much more flexible than its English equivalent metrically; whereas almost all "serious" English verse is iambic (with the important exceptions of Hardy and Frost, part of the reason why these two have been so important to him) – with other rhythms usually used only to suggest dance-folk idioms – Russian seems to be capable of much more metrical variety…
>
> Also, the Russian lyric tradition is only about a hundred and fifty years old – four or five generations – making formal, rhymed verse in it a much more original and inventive enterprise, unlike English, whose verse forms have passed through so many centuries of use that they cannot be invoked with recalling, each one, an entire tradition. [376]

In the above quoted letter Ann Kjellberg tried to prepare the translators who chose to collaborate with Brodsky at his later self-translating period to what they were 'up to'. It is

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[375] Hecht. ‚Introduction' to Joseph Brodsky. *A Part of Speech*, p. x.
[376] Ann Kjellberg, 'Letter to translators', (undated, 1990's), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 28 Fld 32.

interesting that she refers to Brodsky's recastings with a magical word 'transmogrify' and his ways of adjusting the translations to the requirements of the form as 'uniquely Russian'.

In the Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine we will examine the concrete translational co-operation of Brodsky with other translators as well as his translations of his own work. We will try to examine how exactly Brodsky implemented his translational principles, where he succeeded and where he was less successful and to conjecture why this happened. We should also try to see whether and to what extent the 'theoretical impossibilities' of a mimetic translation from Russian into English hampered or were overcome in Brodsky's recasting of translations done by others.

The parameters according to which I chose examples were defined by the amount of material at the disposal: first drafts, letters with comments which provided insights into the actual process of translation, revisions. Whereas every translation is an interpretation, author's commentary represents an even more detailed version of it. For this reason I pay particular attention to the translation drafts which were accompanied by respective commentaries of the author, as well as to those which seemed to exemplify Brodsky's approach in editing translations by the others as well as well as doing translations himself.

Chapter 7: A Second Christmas by the Shore

Introduction: Real poets and mere translators

'George, no one could have done a better job', wrote Brodsky to his translator George L. Kline in April 1973 upon the publication of the *Selected Poems*.[377] *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*, was the first collection of Brodsky's translations in English over which the author exercised his editorial control; it was also the book with which Brodsky was introduced into the English speaking world and which represented him in it during the first years following his expulsion from Russia.

It was an auspicious introduction: Auden wrote the foreword for it (the forward to it or a forward for it). (George L. Kline, who had got in touch with Auden prior to Brodsky's expulsion, persuaded Auden to write it).

On reading these words of praise, one can easily assume that the author would commission the same person to do most of the translations for the next collection as well. This, however, proved not to be the case as is evident from the following letter written on 12 April 1976 by Brodsky's secretary at Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Nancy Meiselas, to Barry Rubin, a professor of Russian at Queens College and Brodsky's closest associate in the preparation of *A Part of Speech*:

> Dear Barry,
>
> George [Kline] was in for lunch today, and I have to admit that seeing him was far from a delight. He did bring the re-typed version of the 'Cape Cod' poem; a copy is enclosed for you. It's clear to me that he is perplexed and a little hurt that everyone but George L. Kline has been asked to work on translations. He said he'd already begun on a few of the recent short poems, but he'll stop until he hears more from us. Apparently, Joseph has told him to go ahead with 'Mary Stuart' as well as 'Cape Cod', both of which he is trying to peddle. I explained all the details and problems to him, and I think they've all registered, but there are bound to be conflicts, as we've already imagined. We'll see.
>
> Nancy[378]

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[377] Kline., 'A History of Brodsky's *Ostanovka v pustyne* and his *Selected Poems*,' p. 19.
[378] Nancy Meiselas. 'Letter to Barry Rubin,' (12 April 1976), 'Brodsky General,' FSG archives, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, Box 41.

As follows from the letter above, Kline, to his great disappointment, was commissioned to do fewer translations for *A Part of Speech* than he had expected.[379] Beside this, in the tone of Meiselas' letter – which undoubtedly reflected, in the first place, the altered attitudes of Brodsky himself – one can detect a certain irreverence towards Kline as translator, indicating that he had by this time to some degree fallen out of favour with his favourite poet. This must have hurt the translator, and yet, with the benefit of hindsight, it is hard to reproach Brodsky, bearing in mind that his was indeed a very difficult predicament: that of having to choose between artistic and personal considerations.

One of the possible reasons that may account for Brodsky's new attitude towards Kline can be traced back to the dramatic change in Brodsky's own situation. At the time of the preparation of *Selected Poems* Brodsky was a beleaguered, persecuted poet whose manuscripts could not be smuggled out of the country without very high risk to all involved. So, while it is true that *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems* was the first English edition of Brodsky's verse over which Brodsky exercised editorial control, , it is also true that while he remained in the Soviet Union he had very little influence over the choice of his translators. At that stage of his career, Brodsky was obliged to rely on a few devoted persons such as Kline and Proffer. Now, thanks to his newly acquired fame and respect in the world of American letters, in his new 'reincarnation' Brodsky could count on participation in the translation of his verse of such prominent figures of the local Parnassus as Richard Wilbur, Anthony Hecht, Howard Moss and Derek Walcott – a list of names, as one reviewer observed, which 'read like a roll-call of an Academy of English-Speaking poets'[380]. (Eventually, each of them translated at least one poem each for *A Part of Speech*). Understandably, Brodsky was tempted to give precedence to the translators who were poets themselves, hoping at the time for a more 'poetic' outcome from *their* translations, as opposed to those done by 'mere' translators of poetry such as Kline.

Another reason for Brodsky's increasingly critical attitude was his own growing expertise and confidence in English, which exponentially raised his demands on his translators. This is what Brodsky wrote in 1980 in the author's note to the original edition of *A Part of Speech*:

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[379] Eventually Kline, who was one of the ten translators working on *A Part of Speech,* translated eleven out of fifty five poems for the collection. (*Z.I.*)
[380] Peter Porter, ‚Satire with a Heart', *The Observer* (14 December 1980) p. 28.

> I would like to thank each of my translators for his long hours of work in rendering my poems into English. I have taken the liberty of reworking some of the translations to bring them closer to the original, though perhaps at the expense of their smoothness. I am doubly grateful to the translators for their indulgence.[381]

In fact, not all the translators showed 'indulgence' in the force of Brodsky's reworking; nor did he rework all translators to the same degree: 'real' poets got away with a lot more than the 'mortal' translators.[382]

And yet, arguably, translations done by the "real" poets – with perhaps one exception of 'that miracle of adaptation'[383], the translation of "Six Years Later" by Richard Wilbur – proved to be less fruitful for Brodsky in the long run. As result, *A Part of Speech* acquired the traits of what Derek Walcott described as a 'not necessarily desirable variety of an anthology of Brodsky seen through the eyes of contemporary American poets'.[384] Despite the brilliance of some of these translations, in them the authentic voice of the poet came across arguably less than in his own self-translations.

However, it was precisely Brodsky's practice of reworking the translations of 'mere' translators[385], i.e. translators, whose versions Brodsky would often treat as rough drafts (meeting with various degrees of resistance on the part of these translators) that eventually contributed to the emergence of that extraordinary phenomenon at the centre of my discussion – Brodsky as a self-translating English-language poet.

In order to approach the core of the present thesis – the detailed study of Brodsky's reworkings of the translations of others – I have decided to open with an analysis of the materials pertaining to the translation of the poem 'A Second Christmas by the Shore,' done by George Kline and subsequently revised by the author. This poem and its translation are particularly interesting for the following reasons:

1. Perhaps due to the previous record of harmonious collaboration with Kline on *Selected Poems,* Brodsky seems to be more outspoken with him in his commentaries about the tonalities and meanings of single lines of his original poem than with any other translator. These commentaries shed an exclusive light on some of the aspects of the

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[381] Quoted in: Brodsky, *Collected poems in English,* p. 507.
[382] See also Correspondence between Anthony Hecht and Nancy Meiselas (1977-1978), 'Brodsky General,' FSG archives, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, Box 41.
[383] Walcott. 'Magic Industry,' p. 12.
[384] Idem
[385] For example, such translators as Kline, Myers, and, at the later period of To Urania, of Jamey Gambrell, Jane Ann Miller and Peter France. Daniel Weissbort falls into the same category, despite being also a poet.

originals; they also reveal why it was absolutely crucial to the author to preserve those elements in translation. The commentaries will, I hope, make it possible to judge what was at stake for the author in any given segment of translation in terms of prosody, tone, metre, content and emotion.

2. Kline was one of the few translators who, according to his own claims, adhered to Brodsky's ideas about the necessity of preserving the form in Russian-English poetic translation. This is what Kline himself wrote to this effect in the two articles dedicated to his collaboration with Brodsky:

> … From the beginning, Brodsky and I have resisted the fashionable trend in translating Russian poetry: the flattening of a highly formal poetry into the informality of free verse. While recognizing that unsuccessful metric and rhymed translations may sound like doggerel, we insist that the opposite extreme – vigorous and 'uncluttered' but non-metrical and unrhymed strings of dictionary meanings – is equally disastrous.[386]

> … Brodsky and I are in full agreement on the principle that translations of formal poetry, such as the Russian, must convey as much as possible of its form – its meter, assonance, alliteration etc. – and, where this is possible without recourse to padding or other artificialities, its rhymes and slant-rhymes as well.[387]

As I shall attempt to demonstrate with reference to concrete examples below, many of Brodsky's corrections concern precisely Kline's rendition of rhymes and metre, despite the stated theoretical unanimity between the author and the translator on the rendition of these formal elements in translation.

If borne out this observation will not only show that there was a certain disparity between

Brodsky's own theoretical demands of a translation and his concrete practices in that field; such a discovery will also require some sort of hypothesis as to what might have prompted this disparity in the first place.

3. Kline was one of the translators who, whether due to personal humility or out of strong devotion to Brodsky, was prepared to accept a large number of changes to his translations. Such a high degree of indulgence on the part of Kline gave Brodsky a greater degree of freedom in bringing those changes about. As the result, some of the decisions he ventured while redoing Kline's translations paved the way for what

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[386] George L. Kline., 'Working With Brodsky', *The Paintbrush*, 4:7/8 (Spring & Autumn 1977), p. 25.
[387] George L. Kline., "Revising Brodsky" in Weissbort, Daniel (ed.), *Translating Poetry: The Double Labyrinth*. [Collection of Essays on Translation]. (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 95.

subsequently became Brodsky's main techniques as a self-translator. For these reasons the materials below appear to provide a unique opportunity to register first glimpses of the emergence of the self-translator Brodsky.

In his article 'Working With Brodsky' Kline recalled thus his collaboration with Brodsky on translating 'A Second Christmas by the Shore':

> The present translation has gone through three distinct versions. In response to the first draft, which I mailed to him in Ann Arbor in May 1976, he [Brodsky] sent me a four-page handwritten letter – uncharacteristically, in English – which began disarmingly: "This is so lovely a poem in English that it's hard for me to be hard on you. Still…". There followed a detailed list of objections and suggested improvements. We discussed my revised version for several hours when we were both in New York in June. He had reworked a number of lines and … proposed some new rhymes and slant rhymes….[388]

From this description one gains a sense of the bare bones of the collaboration. As to the essence of the Kline-Brodsky symbiosis and of their *modus operandi* Derek Walcott's description from his review of Brodsky's next collection *To Urania* is much more revealing. Walcott comments:

> George L. Kline is the co-translator of "Eclogue V: Summer", but anyone who has worked with Brodsky translating Brodsky knows that what the original goes through is a chaos of transformation. So the labour proceeds in three stages with which the fellow translator must keep pace: the first is the interlinear translation, the second a transformation, and the third, with luck and with Brodsky's tireless discipline, transfiguration.[389]

In the following sectors we will take a close look at 'A Second Christmas by the Shore' as it passed through each of these three stages.

"A Second Christmas by the Shore"[390]

A Second Christmas is a lyrical poem of amorous nostalgia and languor; its tone is both lyrical and elegiac. It is lyrical in as far as its subject matter is love; it is elegiac because this love is a matter of the past. This genre of a lyrical love poem being that of 'a lady with a very rich and colourful past' one should among other things attempt to understand where its originality lies and with whom it might echo.

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[388] Kline., 'Working With Brodsky,' p. 25.
[389] Walcott. 'Magic Industry,' p. 3.
[390] The English version of the poem in its entirety can be found at the end of this chapter.

Brodsky often quoted Montale to the effect that 'poetry is incurably semantic'[391] – form in poetry is indivisible from content, from the sense of the words it employs and the visual and sensuous images these words are supposed to evoke in the reader. Therein also lies poetry's essential difference from music. This view was also confirmed by Auden in an answer he gave to an interviewer asking him whether poetry contained music, 'Auden: One can speak of verbal "music" so long as one remembers that *the sound of words is inseparable from their meaning*. The notes in music do not denote anything'. [392] (Italics mine, Z.I.) That is why, for instance, the 'musicality' in verse is not a virtue *per se*, nor, for that matter, is a jarring rhythm always a defect in poetry. Only from the interplay of form and content can one truly say whether or not the form is effective.

In the light of the above quote, an attempt to separate sound from meaning in poetry seems to be doomed to failure. And yet for illustrative purposes alone, the form and content will have to be presented here in dissociation from one another. Looking at the interlinear translation, at the body, or rather, the skeleton of the poem let us now try to place ourselves in the position of the translator whose task was both to recreate and to animate it. Surely one should attempt to understand how the poem worked, how it breathed when it was a living original.

In my analysis of the translational materials I will start from a prosodic analysis of the poem, proceeding to the interlinear translations of the respective single stanzas and the discussions of the separate aspects of meaning, interpretation and form. I will try to outline difficulties and intricacies of certain elements of the poem which seem to me relevant in the context of their translation. From then I will move to the various translation drafts by Kline corrected and annotated by Brodsky. I will then proceed to comment on these drafts and identify new levels of form and meaning on which they shed a new light; at the same time my commentaries will also refer to the particular translational strategies of Brodsky which can be inferred from these materials. Next I will examine the third stage in Walcott's description, namely transfiguration: Brodsky's own definitive version with comments regarding both his decisions in terms of prosody as well as in terms of meaning. Finally I will reach some conclusions as to the nature and extent of Brodsky's interventions into the translations done

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[391] See also: Joseph Brodsky. 'In the Shadow of Dante' in *Less Than One*, p. 110 : '… the art of the word, an incurably semantic art…'
[392] Michael Newman. 'The Art of Poetry Nr.17: Interview with Auden' (1972), The Paris Review, Issue 57, Spring 1974: URL http://www.theparisreview.com/viewinterview.php/prmMID/3970, accessed on 27 June 08.

by Kline. I will also indicate how this translation epitomizes work done by Brodsky with other translators.

'A second Christmas': prosodic scheme

In an interview given in 1991 during his time as Poet Brodsky was asked by Grace Cavalieri how much English speakers were missing out in his translations. This is what he had to say:

> Brodsky: You can't say you are missing much. You can't say you are missing the prosody of another language. You can't miss the acoustics of another language. That of course you can't have and you're not missing it. You can't miss something that you don't know.[393]

Brodsky is making here certainly a very pertinent point, to a degree that it makes one feel uneasy about endeavouring in, what might seem right from the start, a futile and frivolous attempt – i.e. trying to describe to English language speakers the prosodic qualities of a Russian poem. And yet, despite this uneasiness, I can not abstain from undertaking this attempt. The hypothetical translator of the poem could not have dispensed with a notion of the poem's prosodic structure, before approaching a translation. By this token, anyone who would like to understand what Brodsky was after when he was trying to fashion the English drafts in the way he felt was closer to the source text, should get at least some basic prosodic awareness. After all, Brodsky's own insistence on the necessity of a mimetic translation makes such an introduction indispensable.

In the next section I will outline the aspects of metre of the poem in question.

Brodsky wrote *Vtoroe Rozhdestvo* ('A Second Christmas') before his emigration at a time when his predominant metres were still syllabo-tonic, mostly iambics with alternating masculine and feminine rhymes. It was only later in the beginning of the 1970's that he started experimenting with and eventually made the passage towards the accentual verse known as *dolnik*. This fact makes the poem *Vtoroe Rozhdestvo* particularly fitting for our scrutiny: the fact that iambic pentameter has its direct equivalent in English in combination with Kline's whole-hearted adherence to Brodsky's concept of mimetic translation should not have resulted in any metrical disparities between the author and his translator. And yet, as we will see below, many of Brodsky's corrections are done with regard to precisely rendering

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[393] Brodsky, *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*, p. 143.

rhymes and metre. Starting from the concrete examples an attempt will be made to explain this phenomenon on the basis of Zhirmunsky's distinction between metre and rhythm and its repercussions on the concrete phonetic realisations of the poems written in the same verse metre, but in two different languages.

The second interesting aspect is the rhymes. According to the traditional order of alternation of feminine and masculine endings in Russian classical verse, the ending in the first line is supposed to be feminine and that of the second masculine. Brodsky, on the other hand, often uses the opposite, 'unorthodox' order, thus putting masculine ending in the first line and feminine in the second, as has been also observed by Barry Scherr[394] Both Kline and Brodsky stuck to the original in reproducing this scheme, despite the fact that the use of the feminine rhymes in English strike 'the ears of some English readers as perilously frivolous, though such disyllabic chiming is easily available in the Russian language, and employed by Pushkin and other great poets.'[395]

The next aspect of scrutiny is stanzaic design. Another important characteristic of Brodsky's poetry which distinguishes it from the nineteenth century Russian poetry tradition was that, instead of writing in 'classical' quatrains, Brodsky tried to invent his own stanzas – a usage which he allegedly imported from English poetry and particularly from the 16th century metaphysical poets.[396] The poem in question consists of 4 stanzas with 8 lines each; the first 7 lines of each stanza are written in iambic pentameter, with a final dimeter (two-foot-iambic) line in each stanza. This type of a stanza with the shortened final line was used by Brodsky in other poems of that period.[397]

As will be demonstrated, while Kline tried to stick to the stanzaic design as closely as possible, Brodsky on the other hand, introduced a lot of changes into the English version.

The rhythmical felicity of *Vtoroe Rozhdestvo* is achieved through the interplay between the caesuras on the 2nd and the 3rd foot, omission of stress typical of the Russian iambics (the famous 'pyrrhic' feet), as well as an organized pattern of *enjambments* (which

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[394] There are certainly exceptions to this trend. For example, such poems as "Novye stansy k Avguste", in which we have the reversed order.
[395] Anthony Hecht. ‚Introduction' to Joseph Brodsky. *A Part of Speech* (London-New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. x; See also Chapter Six for a more detailed description of the Russian-English contrasts concerning the use of the feminine rhymes.
[396] Cfr. also Barry P. Scherr, 'Strofika Brodskogo: novyi vzglyad' [Brodsky's stanzaic design: new assessment] in Loseff, Lev and Polukhina, Valentina (eds.). Kak rabotayet stikhotvoreniye Brodskogo [How works a poem by Brodsky] (Moskva: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 2002) pp. 267-299.
[397] 'Rozhdestvenskiy Romans' (Christmas Song) written in iambic tetrameter, 'Pis'mo Generalu' (A letter to a general) and 'Konets Prekrasnoi Epokhi' (The End of the Beautiful Era).

can be considered on the whole Brodsky's trademark) and the 2-foot-iambic line with the regular beat (no omission of stress) at the end of each stanza.

Omission of stress in the Russian pentameter was commented upon as early as in the 18th century by the Russian poets and prosodic theoreticians Trediakovski, Sumarokov and Lomonosov.[398] A medium Russian word is two and a half syllables long whereas each word in the Russian language has only one stressed syllable. So it would be near impossible to compose verse in Russian without recurring to the use of omissions of stress or the 'pyrrhics'.

The function of the 'pyrrhic foot' was first theoretically formulated by Andrei Belyi in the early 20th century using the example of Pushkin's classical pentameters.[399] This important aspect of Russian prosody, which is not at all self-evident even for the native speakers of Russian, let alone to native speakers of other languages, seems, however, to be crucial for the understanding of some of Brodsky's translational decisions. Because of this property of the Russian iamb and because of the particular usage of this property that Brodsky makes in the *Vtoroye Rozhdestvo*, the poem displays on average 3 stresses per line in the pentametrical scheme, which, as suggested by its name, would theoretically presuppose the presence of at least 5 metrical stresses per each line.

Chapter One discussed in some detail Brodsky's insistence that translators preserve the metre in translation from Russian into English. However, as it is possible to discover from the detailed analysis to follow of various translational materials, deviations from the given prosodic scheme can almost be called the trademark of his self-translations or corrections of translations by others. In the next section I will propose a possible reason as to why that happened: rather than trying to find equivalents of the *metrical* scheme of his originals, Brodsky seems to be trying to reconstruct in translation nothing less than their 'living' rhythm.

Stanza I: interlinear translation

A second Christmas on the shore
of the unfreezing Pontus
The star of kings [is hanging] over the port's fence
And I can't say I can't
live without you – because I am living
as results from the paper. I exist,

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[398] See also Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*, p. 35.
[399] See also Ibid., pp. 35-43.

gulp my beer, soil the leaves,
tread on the grass.

*Vtor**o**ye Rozhdestv**o** na bereg**u***	*enj.*	a	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*nezamerz**a**yushchego P**o**nta.*		B	(2)	4-foot-iambic
*Zvezd**a** Tsar**e**y nad **i**zgorod'yu p**o**rta.*		B	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*I ne mog**u** skaz**a**t',/ chto ne mog**u***	*enj.*	a	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*zh**i**t' bez teby**a**/ – posk**o**lku ya zhiv**u**.*		c	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*Kak v**i**dno iz bum**a**gi./ Sushchestv**u**yu;*		D	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*glot**a**yu p**i**vo,/ p**a**chkayu listv**u** i*	*enj.*	D	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*topch**u** trav**u**.*		c	(2)	2-foot-iambic

The addressee of the poem is the speaker's beloved. The author, or the lyrical 'I', which in Brodsky's poetry of this kind are practically identical, revisits a Southern province of the country (or of the empire, as Brodsky would have put it) at Christmas time. Sitting in a café he recalls the happy days spent with his beloved in the same setting. The opening of the poem resembles the beginning of a Christmas postcard which tells of the speaker's circumstances and his general mood. The very notion of Christmas introduces in the poem a whole range of associations and mythologies linked to Christianity.

Since the time of Martial, one of the *leitmotivs* of love poems of separation has been the lamentations on the part of the lover about the impossibility of carrying on without the beloved.[400] Taking up this motif Brodsky resists what would have been an inevitable slip into sentimentality. To do that the speaker resorts here to an analytical device: the mere fact that he is still alive defies the suggestion that he cannot live without his beloved. (Brodsky wrote, in his essay 'Footnote to a Poem' on Tsvetaeva's elegy to Rilke: 'The tragedy lies not in that existence without … is unthinkable but precisely in that such an existence *is* thinkable.'[401]) The author takes up the classical formula 'I can't live without you' and turns it upside down saying: '*I can't say I can't live without you'*. This in Russian original sounds certainly anti-climatic, almost overly logical. With sardonic and self-deprecating attitude of the next lines (*I exist,/ gulp my beer,/ soil the leaves,/ trample the grass*) the poet paradoxically enough manages to convey the pain of separation with all its immediacy, at the same time avoiding melodrama.

[400] Martial (Marcus Valerius Martialis), Epigramme XII, 46: 'Nec tecum possum vivere nec sine te.' (I can neither live with you, nor without you'). URL: http://www.hse.k12.in.us/staff/RBUSH/quotes_by_author.htm, last accessed on 28 Jun. 08.
[401] Brodsky. *Less Than One,* p. 205.

Stanza I: Brodsky's commentaries.

Let us move now to the translation starting with the Brodsky's letter to Kline:

May 20, 1976 New York

Dear George,

This is so lovely a poem in English that it's hard for me to be hard on you. Still, there are some things which are sheer misunderstandings; also there are certain substitutions which hamper the meaning. So I'll try to point out both, but care should be taken, first of all about the latter.

A Second Christmas

A second Christmas ~~spent~~ beside the shore	*by the shore*	a
of that great Sea which winter does not stiffen.		B
The Star of Kings above a harbor cliff. And		B
I cannot claim that I cannot endure		a
your absence – since, quite clearly, I exist.		c
~~This paper is the witness~~. I am living;		D
I gulp my beer and soil the bushes, leaving		D
crushed clumps of grass.		xc

I 1st line: 'spent' I think, could be omitted.
2nd line: it is 'Pontus' ('Euxinus'); 'that great Sea' doesn't produce necessary implications – slight paganistic touch
3rd line: I understand the rhyme, but the presence of 'cliff' carries on the image of 'crib', don't you think?
6th: it's much more beurocratic (Sic.) I don't think that 'exist' and 'grass' are rhymes either. [402]

The author's criticisms, as we can see from the above, are of semantic, prosodic (rhymes) and stylistic (tonality) nature.

Semantics

Let us first deal with semantics. In the second line Brodsky suggests that 'that great Sea' in Kline's version does not convey the intended 'slight paganistic touch'. This should remind us that *Vtoroe Rozhdestvo*, as suggested by its title, is a Christmas poem. Christmas poems occupy a special position in Brodsky's oeuvre: what is common to all of them is that in one or another way they all deal with the theme of time. In his book on Venice, Brodsky

[402] Joseph Brodsky, 'Letter to George Kline,' (May 20, 1976), Brodsky Papers, Beinicke Library, Yale University, UNCAT MSS 649, Box 42 Fld 14. The reproduced version contains the annotations made by Brodsky. (Z.I.)

writes that for an agnostic[403], which he considered himself to be, Christmas and New Year represented a combined holiday, whose main symbolic significance was that of being a vivid reminder of the passage of time:

> I always adhered to the idea that God is time, or at least that His spirit is…. I always thought that if the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water, the water was bound to reflect it. Hence my sentiment for water, for its folds, wrinkles, and ripples, and – as I am a Northerner – for its grayness. I simply think that water is the image of time, and every New Year's Eve, in somewhat pagan fashion, I try to find myself near water, preferably near a sea or an ocean, to watch the emergence of a new helping, a new cupful of time from it. I am not looking for a naked maiden riding on a shell; I am looking for either a cloud or the crest of a wave hitting the shore at midnight. That, to me, is time coming out of water, and I stare at the lace-like pattern it puts on the shore … with tenderness and with gratitude.[404]

Apparently, according to the author's intentions, the theme of time was supposed to flow into the poem through the name of 'Pontus', producing classical Latin allusions with Ovid's *Tristia*.[405] Brodsky wanted to get across this allusion, so the word 'Pontus' had to be preserved.

Prosody (Rhymes)

Now to the rhymes: rhymes in poetry are the strongest instruments of both euphonic and semantic emphasis, but they are also the bane of the translator. The same two words which rhyme in one language almost never do so in another, hence attempts to find rhymes in translation inevitably lead to twisting of meaning (not to mention the problem of rendering feminine rhymes in English) (See also the section "Metres: Russian-English contrasts" in Chapter Six). Hence the greatest losses in translation are to be expected from the rhymes. Brodsky, however, insisted, as we know, that translators maintain rhymes. Kline was one of the translators who attempted to abide by this rule, and yet, apparently some of the rhymes

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[403] There exists also a tendency to regard Brodsky as a religious poet because of the extensive use by him of Biblical and religious motives, but all the evidence supports that he himself always opposed any concrete religious identification and never embraced any official creed. See also Tomas Venclova. *Stat'i o Brodskom* [Essays on Brodsky], p. 126. 'Brodsky, a Jew by his origin, never belonged to any religion of any concrete denomination, although theological motifs occupy an important role in his art. To achieve his personal inner relationship with God was an issue of primary necessity for him.' (trans. Z.I.) Original quote: «Бродский, еврей по происхождению, формально не принадлежал ни к одной религии и конкретной деноминации, хотя теологические мотивы занимают важное место в его творчестве, и выработка внутреннего отношения к Богу была для него живой потребностью».

[404] Joseph Brodsky. *Watermark*, pp. 42-43.

[405] Ovid, Publius Ovidius Naso, (43 BC – AD 18), Roman poet, famous among other for his elegies of nostalgic complaint – *Tristia, Epistulae ex Ponto* – which he wrote, when Augustus had exiled him in AD 8 to the Black Sea for some mysterious indiscretion. URL: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ovid, last accessed on 28 Jun. 08.

Kline came up with were still not good enough for Brodsky. Let us have a precise look at what those rhymes were.

In the 3rd line Kline undertakes a rather acrobatic attempt at producing a feminine rhyme in English - *stiffen/ cliff. And*. In doing this the literal meaning of the original had to be sacrificed ('*The Star of kings* [is hanging] *over the port's fence'*) and a new image of a 'cliff' introduced. Brodsky appreciated the invention of a new English feminine rhyme, but could not accept the price which had been paid for it. The image of some concrete 'fence' the poet had seen in Yalta was substituted in Kline's rendition with an abstract one of a 'cliff.' For a poet as committed to realism and topophilia as Brodsky, especially as far as the precision of visual and geographical images were concerned, the loss of this concrete image was obviously unacceptable. Moreover, the fence, as we will see, was supposed to re-appear in the poem's most crucial scene in the fourth stanza.

Interpretations of meaning: literal vs. metaphorical – I

> To read is to translate, for no two persons' experiences are the same. A bad reader is like a bad translator: he interprets literally when he ought to paraphrase and paraphrases when he ought to interpret literally. (W.H. Auden)[406]

In his essay on Tsvetaeva 'Footnote to a Poem' Brodsky wrote the following:

> Tsvetaeva was a poet very much of this world, concrete, surpassing the Acmeists in precision of detail ….[407]
> …because of her … proclivity for the concrete, for realism…Tsvetaeva should always be taken first of all not figuratively but literally – just as Acmeists should be... .[408]

I would suggest that this realistic property applies with the same degree to Brodsky himself: the first meaning with Brodsky is always literal. Stanislaw Baranczak, Brodsky's translator into Polish has expressed a similar opinion:

> The best poems of Brodsky grow out of *concrete experience*, an experience linked to a certain place and time – and it is only on this basis that metaphysical and historiosophic visions are being created.[409] (*Transl. and italics mine Z.I.*).

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[406] Auden. 'Making, Knowing and Judging', pp. 3-4.
[407] Brodsky, 'Footnote to a Poem', *Less Than One*, p. 211.
[408] Ibid., pp. 221-224.
[409] Stanislaw Baranczak, 'Perevodia Brodskogo' [Translating Brodsky] in Lev Loseff (ed.).*Poetika Brodskogo: Sbornik statei* [The poetics of Brodsky: Collection of essays], (Tenafly N.J.: Hermitage, 1986) p. 244. The

It should be added that as to the details of geographical places Brodsky always described them with particular realistic precision: his poetry can be justly characterized as 'topophilic'.[410]

Arguably, in his efforts to remain tactful Brodsky invents, however, a different justification for his refusal to accept the 'cliff', telling his translator that it won't do here because of its unnecessary euphonic association with the 'crib' which would emerge from the proximity of the 'Star of the Kings' in the same line. But this pretext created greater confusion – Kline misinterpreted this criticism and in his second take on the translation introduced the 'crib', which lies even further away from the literal meaning of the original.

Style (Tonality)

Brodsky's remark regarding the 6th line in Kline's rendition is rather characteristic. Brodsky suggests that Kline's 'I exist. /This paper is the witness' is not 'bureaucratic' enough, in other words, it's too 'poetic'. We have already seen that in the first stanza Brodsky's main concern was to avoid sentimentality and that his resorting to bureaucratic syntax with complicated subordinate clauses as well as the roughness of some expressions at the end of the first stanza served exactly this purpose. (In his essays on Tsvetaeva, Frost and Auden respectively, Brodsky demonstrates how each of these three poets made an important use of different registers of speech alternating 'downward' and 'upward' metaphors (in Frost's terminology)[411]. In order to strike a spiritually or emotionally a very high note without it sounding too solemn or even pompous poet plays it down by preceding it or by following it by expressions from lower registers.

This propensity to integrate in the poetic idiom of the highest order expressions of everyday life, bureaucratese, archaic, slang or downright vulgar expressions is one of the trade-marks of Brodsky's own poetry. This property of his verse represents an additional and quite a significant difficulty for the translation into English.

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original quotation: «Лучшие стихи Бродского вырастают из конкретного, привязанного к месту и времени опыта – и только на этой основе выстраивают метафизическое и историософское видение. »

[410] For the definition of *topophilia* see W. H. Auden, 'Introduction' to *Slick but Not Streamlined*, by John Betjeman', *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden:Prose*, Vol. II (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002) pp. 302-303.

[411] See also Brodsky, *Less than one* and *On grief and reason*.

Stanza I – Kline's 1st revision

In response to Brodsky's criticisms a couple of days later Kline produces a revised version of the translation. Here is the revised first stanza which incorporates the subsequent corrections by the author:

A second Christmas by the Euxine's shore –	5-foot-iamb	a
a sea ~~whose mirror winter does not~~ harden.	5-foot-iamb	B
The Star of Kings above the harbor's ~~crib~~. And	5-foot-iamb	B
I cannot claim that I cannot ~~endure~~	5-foot-iamb	a
~~your absence~~ ^ live without you ^ since, quite clearly, I am here. ^,as^	5-foot-iamb	c
~~Indeed~~ this paper proves it. ~~I am living~~; ^I do live^	5-foot-iamb	D
I ~~trample grass~~ ^gulp my beer^and soil the ~~bushes, heaving~~ ^leaf^	5-foot-iamb	D
~~sown steins of beer~~. ^and trample grass. ^[412]	2-foot-iamb	c

Two of the expressions above crossed out by Brodsky from this second revision deserve an additional comment: The first one is '[a sea] *whose mirror winter does not harden*'. On the first glance it seems to be, what one may call a "poetic" rendition of the original, which goes more or less like 'unfreezing Pontus'. So why would then Brodsky want to change it?

Interpretations of meaning: literal vs. metaphorical – II

As mentioned above, time resides, according to Brodsky's cosmology, in the sea. What Marvell's speaker in 'To His Coy Mistress' hears 'at his back', Brodsky's lyrical 'I' sees in front of him right at the beginning of the poem. [413] Thus the sea that never freezes stands for time which likewise never stops flowing. With Brodsky, however, as has been already mentioned, words and figures very often retain their concrete, literal and visual meanings. The meaning of 'unfreezing Pontus' is not only the literal one, that of the Black Sea in winter, but also a metaphorical one – that of time which never stops flowing, never freezes.

Kline's translation, while preserving the literal meaning of the "sea" – '[a sea] *whose mirror winter does not harden*' – neglects (because of the word 'winter') the metaphorical component that of time, which is more crucial in the context of the entire poem. As in

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[412] Brodsky, 'Letter to George Kline,' (May 20, 1976), Brodsky Papers, Beinicke, Box 42 Fld 14.
[413] The Horatian theme of time is famously introduced into Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' in the following lines: 'But at my back I alwaies hear// Times winged Charriot hurrying near:// And yonder all before us lye// Desarts of vast Eternity'. Quoted in Helen Gardner (Ed.). *The Metaphysical Poets* (London: Penguin, 1985) p. 251.

Collodi's *Pinocchio,* where the continuous transformations from the wooden puppet into a boy take place back and forth throughout the entire body of the novel – both of them are fused in one person and co-exist contemporaneously – so also in Brodsky's poetry, the switches from literal to metaphorical meanings of the same word or figure, co-exist contemporaneously and take place continuously. This property of any poetry and of Brodsky's in particular, inevitably increased the already great challenge in front of his translators.

Double meanings

Another expression crossed out by Brodsky and deserving of commentary is '[soil] *the bushes'*. '[I] *soil the leaves'* (*'pachkayu listvu'*) has a 'straight forward' double meaning in the original: alongside with the direct meaning of trampling upon the leaves, it also means 'I am covering these sheets with ink' – i.e. 'I am writing these very lines' (*'list*' standing in Russian, as in many languages, for both a leaf and a sheet of paper)[414]. Needless to say, that 'soiled bushes' in the context of the 'beer' being mentioned in the same line was bound to produce in English associations of quite less sublime a register.

Stanza I – definitive version by Brodsky

Here is the definitive version of this first stanza revised by the author:

A second Christmas by the shore	a	4-foot-iamb
of Pontus, which remains unfrozen.	B	4-foot-iamb
The Star of Kings above the sharp horizon	B	5-foot-iamb
of harbor walls. And I can't say for sure	a	5-foot-iamb
that I can't live without you. As	c	4-foot-iamb
this paper proves, I do exist: I'm living	D	5-foot-iamb
enough to gulp my beer, to soil the leaves, and	D	5-foot-iamb
trample the grass.[415]	c	2-foot-trochaic

Metre vs. Rhythm

As it is easy to observe, Kline's version is more consistently faithful to the original: it has seven pentametric lines followed by an iambic two-liner (dimeter). Brodsky changes the metrical structure of the stanza, thus challenging his own translational demands as expressed in 'Translating Akhmatova' and 'Beyond Consolation.' In three of the first seven lines Brodsky uses tetrameter instead of pentameter (For the sake of the correctness, it should be

[414] The plural forms 'list'ia' and 'listva' stand for two meanings respectively.
[415] Joseph Brodsky. 'A Second Christmas by the Shore,' (draft), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 42 Fld 14.

mentioned that already in the original Brodsky violated his own metrical scheme by using a trimeter in the second line of the first stanza). In the last line Brodsky uses a trochaic dimeter instead of iambic one – a new metrical device, a truncation reinforced truncation of the expected metrical pattern.

And yet, phonetically speaking, one might argue that Brodsky's English version approximates more closely the sound of the Russian original: because of omissions of stress present in the Russian poem, its rhythm is more rapid and the actual stresses vary from 3 to 4 per line.

It has not yet been noticed by commentators on Brodsky that often when he spoke of 'metre' what he actually meant was the 'rhythm'; in this particular case the rhythm of Russian pentameters with their characteristic omissions of stress. The rhythm, which Brodsky in fact attempted to preserve, was an equivalent of the rhythm of his original poems and as such possessed typical characteristics of the Russian verse: it often contained omissions of stress or 'Pyrrhic feet'. (The contrasting characteristic of the iambic verse in monosyllabic English is the presence of additional accents or 'hypermetrical stress').[416] As a consequence, a conflict between this rhythm of Brodsky's self-translations with English rhythmical expectations was foreseeable.

Rhymes

Almost all of rhymes from Kline's second revision were subsequently changed by Brodsky:

	1	2	3	4
Kline:	**shore** – endure	harden – crib and	***I am living*** – heaving	Here – beer
Brodsky:	**shore** – sure	unfrozen – horizon	***I'm living* – leaves and**	as – **grass**
Brodsky's original Russian rhymes	*beregu-ne mogu* **shore** – can not	*Ponta – porta* of Pontus – port's	*Sushchestvuyu – listvu i* I exist – **leaves and**	*zhivu - travu* ***I'm living*** – **grass**

Looking at the chart above it also becomes evident that, remarkably, Brodsky tries to rhyme semantically analogous words, if possible, in English, as he had done in Russian. Most amazingly he often succeeds – half of the rhymes in his last revision of the first stanza are semantically the same words as in the original poem: 'leaves and', 'grass', 'I'm living' and 'shore'.

[416] Zhirmunsky. *Teoria Stikha*, p. 237.

Some of the rhymes Brodsky comes up with are authentic *trouvailles*. For the rhyme 'unfrozen/horizon' which in addition to enriching the comparatively scarce stock of English feminine rhymes also enables him both to preserve the realistic concreteness of the port's fence (translated as 'harbor walls') as well as to maintain the metaphorical meaning of the 'Pontus' of the original, both of which had been lost in Kline's translation.

Changing slightly the last set of rhymes (from '*lining-heaving*' to '*living-leaves and*') Brodsky gets rid of the grammatical rhymes displaying the same poetic principle applied in his Russian poems. (As Barry Scherr comments, "Thanks in no small part to the approximate rhyming, Brodsky generally manages to avoid 'easy' grammatical rhymes").[417]

It is curious to observe that Efim Etkind discovered the same translating phenomenon of rhyming semantically identical words also in one of Pushkin's translations from Parny's French into Russian:

> Terrible, il frappe, et la tremblante Elveige
> Tombe à ses pieds comme un flocon de neige
> Qu'un tourbillon détache du rocher.
>
> Он поднял меч... и с трепетом Эвлега
> Падет как дерн, как клок летучий снега,
> Метелицей отторженный от скал!
>
> (On podnial mech… i s trepetom Evlega
> Padet kak dern, kak klok letuchii snega,
> Metelitsei ottorzhennyi ot skal!)
>
> In these lines Pushkin gave the first specimen of that brilliant art [of translation], which he will master somewhat later. Without sacrificing the naturalness of expression, he precisely reproduced the syntactical movements of the both phrases and put in the rhyming position the same words as in the original (Elveige-neige-rocher: Evlega-snega-skal [Elveige-snow-rocks])... [418] (Transl. Z.I.)

In the course of the line-by-line analysis of the translating interventions of both Kline and Brodsky it becomes evident that using the benefit of his authorship Brodsky managed to render in his recasting several aspects of style, tonality, double as well as literal and metaphoric meanings of certain lines with greater fidelity to the original than his translator.

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[417] Scherr. ‚To Urania' in *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem,* p. 95.
[418] Etkind Efim G., *Russkie poety-perevodchiki ot Trediakovskogo do Pushkina*, pp. 204-205
The original quote runs as follows: «В этих трех стихах Пушкин дал первый образец того изумительного искусства, которым овладеет лишь несколько позднее. Не жертвуя естественностью речи, он в точности повторил синтаксическое движение обеих фраз, он поставил на рифму те же слова, что в оригинале (Elveige-neige-rocher: Эвлега-снега-скал)...»

On the rhyme front Brodsky's intervention contributed to the presence of more exact and sometimes more felicitous rhymes. It has also become possible to identify a tendency in Brodsky to rhyme, as far as possible, semantically identical words in English, as he had done in Russian.

At the same time, a second tendency becomes apparent: in his recastings Brodsky tends to render the Russian rhythm – or, rhythmical realisation of the metrical scheme – as opposed to the recreation of an equivalent rhythm in English. Brodsky's intervention would thus contribute to a considerable foreignisation of the English text; this foreignising effect is checked by the fact that in his reworkings the poet departed from the already existing drafts by Kline, who had translated the first stanza in regular English pentameters. Due to this metrical orthodoxy on the part of Kline the deviations from the standard metrical scheme of a typical English pentametric line in Brodsky's version still might re-enter into the category of variations, which English allows within the prescribed pattern of the pentameter, when it is handled by each individual artist.

Let's now move to the second stanza – here is its interlinear translation:

Stanza II

Now [sitting] *in the café, from which we,*
as it should happen to the temporary happy ones,
have been thrown out by a soundless explosion
into the future, under the assault of winter
having fled to the South, I'm with my fingers drawing
your face on marble for the poor;
In distance nymphs are making leaps, on their hips
lifting brocade.

*Tep**é**r' v kof**é**ine,/ iz kot**ó**roi m**ý**,*		e	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*kak i prist**á**lo vr**é**menno schastl**í**vym,*		F	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*bezzv**ú**chnym b**ý**li v**ý**brosheny vzr**ý**vom*	*enj.*	F	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*v gryad**ú**shchee,/ pod n**á**tiskom zim**ý***	*enj.*	e	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*bezh**á**v na Y**ú**g,/ ya p**á**ltsami cherch**ú***		g	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*tvoi**ó** lits**ó**/ na mr**á**more dlya b**é**dnykh;*		H	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*po**ó**dal n**í**mfy pr**ý**gaiut, na b**é**drakh*	*enj.*	H	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*zadr**á**v parch**ú**.*		g	(2)	2-foot-iambic

The stanza in Russian is just one single sentence. It is a long construction with several subordinate clauses. Metrically speaking it displays three enjambments and four caesuras.

Brodsky's poetry is rich in literary echoes, as has been pointed out by several critics.[419] In the stanza in question the metaphysical conceit of time's soundless explosion has its repercussions for the rhythmical structure of the verse. As I will attempt to show below, in Brodsky's case as well as in Donne's the peculiarities of the rhythm are intrinsically linked in each case with the artistic intentions of the respective authors. Donne was often criticized for rhythmical eccentricity. Brodsky himself often encountered a similar charge with regard to both his Russian poems and their later English translations.

Literary echoes, metaphysical conceits

Tracing influences in poetry is a risky business. 'I tend to think as a poet one tries to write his own poetry', Stephen Spender once shrewdly retorted to a young man from an auditorium who had asked him what his 'influences' were.[420] Brodsky also often repeated that "as a poet one is influenced by everything one reads." For this reason T.S. Eliot urged literature critics to talk of similarities instead of influences.[421] And yet the second stanza of Brodsky's *A Second Christmas* cannot help but suggest possible parallels with Donne. The parallels are to be seen in Brodsky's employment of complex rhetorical structures which encompass several lines. This phenomenon has been first identified in Donne by Mario Praz:

> … the poetic unit in Donne is not a line, but a stanza and … the rules that reign in it are not those of a song, but those of a discourse. Given the prevalence in this poetry of the intellectual element it was also natural that the resulting music should resemble that of ingeniously woven speech and that of passionate development of thoughts… (Translation *Z.I.*)[422]

Like Praz Herbert Grierson noticed in Donne:

> He [Donne] is one of the first masters, perhaps the first, of the elaborate stanza or paragraph in which the discords of individual lines or phrases are resolved in complex and rhetorically effective harmony of the whole group of lines.[…] Donne plays with rhythmical effects as with conceits and words and often in much the same way. .[…] [B*y using several devices,*] Donne secures two effects, the troubling of the regular fall of the verse stresses by the intrusion of rhetorical stresses on syllables which the

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[419] See also Walcott. 'Magic Industry' and Lachlan Mackinnon. ‚A break from dullness: The virtues of Brodsky's English verse', *TLS*, June 22, 2001, pp. 9-11.
[420] Weissbort, Daniel. From Russian with Love: Joseph Brodsky in English. (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2004) p. 199.
[421]. See also T.S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*/ Ronald Schuchard (ed.) (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), p. 91. '…we must always be on guard to avoid confusing resemblances with influences.'
[422] Mario Praz. *John Donne*. (Torino: Edizioni S.A.I.E., 1958) p. 268. Original quotation: 'l'unità nella poesia del Donne non è il verso, ma la strofa e … le leggi che la regolano sono non tanto quelle del canto, quanto quelle dell'eloquenza. Data in questa poesia la prevalenza dell'elemento raziocinativo, era naturale che la musica risultante dovesse assomigliare più a quella di un congegnato e appassionato sviluppo dei pensieri...'.

> metrical pattern leaves unstressed, and , secondly, an echoing and re-echoing of similar sounds parallel to his fondness for resemblances in thoughts and things apparently the most remote from one another. [423]

This property of Donne's verse in which the individual lines follow all the eccentric developments of thought and adhere to the rules of a complex rhetorical harmony, rather than complying with the straightforward principles of euphony, was characteristic of many a 'metaphysical variety' of Brodsky's verse. In Brodsky this effect of 'troubling of the regular fall of the verse stresses', in Grierson's expression, is often achieved through an extensive use of *enjambments*.

Brodsky's British critics frequently chided him for this overuse of *enjambments* as well as for his excessive use of images in his self-translated verse. Their main argument was that English makes different use of such devices than Russian, which Brodsky as a non-native speaker failed to fathom. A characteristic example of this sort of criticism came from Donald Davie in his review of *To Urania*. Its title 'The Saturated line' is quite revealing of Davie's main line of critique:

> This peculiarity of Brodsky's verse-English – its heaping of trope on trope, a hyperactivity of metaphors – seems to have come into being not by design, but somewhere in the gulf between Russian and English….the Russian line can master and carry along with itself a clutter of exuberant tropes and 'physical detail', under the weight of which the lighter English line stumbles and hesitates and is snarled. [424]

According to Davie, Brodsky does not let his English self-translations 'breath.' Instead he overloads them with metaphors and tropes. Such a 'style' might be permissible in Russian, Davie maintains, but does not work in English. The English line 'stumbles' under the weight of such figures. By the same token, Brodsky's excessive use of enjambment only underlines the gulf between Russian and English, Davie asserts:

> … enjambment ... is a more delicate instrument in English than in Russian precisely because it is potentially more disruptive. If the integrity of the verse-line is less emphatic in English than in Russian, an enjambment sets that integrity at risk in English far more than Brodsky recognizes.[425]

With the smugness of a native speaker, Davie attributes the presence of such characteristic peculiarities of some of Brodsky's verse, such as the piling up of metaphors and the extensive use of enjambments, to the fact that English was not Brodsky's mother tongue.

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[423] Sir Herbert Grierson. 'Introduction', *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: The Claredon Press, 1959) p.xxv.
[424] Davie. 'The saturated line,' p. 14.
[425] Idem.

Davie assumes that such characteristics are admissible in Russian poetry, but believes that they make the English line overloaded. Brodsky as a non-native speaker simply failed to notice.

At the same time, what Davie and many critics before and after him completely forget is the fact that Brodsky had first smuggled these verse peculiarities into Russian poetry from nowhere else than from English seventeenth century metaphysical poetry, , which John Donne pioneered. As was suggested in the Chapter Five, that 'piece of technique'[426] which Brodsky learnt from Donne, namely thinking in conceits, 'troubling of the regular fall of the verse stresses by the intrusion of rhetorical stresses'[427] as well as proclivity for finding 'resemblances in thoughts and things apparently the most remote from one another'[428] – unchained his 'own Daemon',[429] i.e. helped develop Brodsky's own deeply-rooted predisposition for what is sometimes referred to as 'intellectual verse.' In Brodsky's self-translations these features were restored – as a kind of poetic customs tax – back home into the domain of English literature. Derek Walcott, who translated several poems by Brodsky with the help of the interlinear translations and with assistance of the author himself, acknowledged this too. Although Walcott did not know Russian, his translating experience of Brodsky made him aware that Brodsky's verse produces difficulty in translation to the same degree as it must do in his originals:

> This is not "plain American, which dogs and cats can read," the barbarous, chauvinistic boast of the poet as mass thinker, as monosyllabic despot; but the same critic, in earlier epochs, might have said the same thing about Donne, Milton, Browning, Hopkins. …. There is a sound to Brodsky's English that is peculiarly his, and this sound is often one of difficulty.[430]

What Walcott refers to in the quote above as the 'sound of difficulty', according to Mario Praz, can just as well apply to most so-called intellectual poetry:

> Donne carefully endeavoured that the sound not only followed the rhetoric of his thoughts, but also highlighted his metaphors and conceits through the interplay of echoes. In one way or another, *all the cerebral poets have used – or abused, according to another point of view – verse, twisting it in such a manner as to create uncommon rhythms in order to reflect the uncommonness of their thoughts. Browning and Mallarmé teach us*. In these poets there is always an element of irregularity which has to be taken into consideration in order to appreciate their prosody: in Mallarmé there is

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[426] Quoted in: Carpenter. *W. H. Auden: A biography,* p. 55.
[427] Grierson. 'Introduction,' *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, p.xxv.
[428] Ibid, p.xxv.
[429] Carpenter. *W. H. Auden: A biography*, p. 55.
[430] Walcott. 'Magic Industry', p. 4.

> the interplay of caesuras, in Donne the eccentricity of accent.[431] (Transl. Z.I.) (Italics mine, Z.I.)

I would suggest that the second stanza of the poem 'A second Christmas by the shore' represents precisely such an example of the 'troubling' of the rhythm of the poem by special metrical devices. In this case, the interplay of enjambments and caesuras echoes each twist of the poet's reasoning.

To confirm here the appropriateness of the associations with Donne the stanza incorporates what is known under the name of a 'metaphysical conceit'. The metaphysical conceit came notably into fashion in Italy, Spain and England in the 17th century and it became a common trope of poetry in that epoch. The main characteristic of the metaphysical poetry according to Eliot is that '… it elevates sense for a moment to regions ordinarily attainable only by abstract thought or on the other hand clothes the abstract, for a moment, with all the painful delight of flesh….'[432] In a different passage Eliot clarifies this poetically formulated definition of his own in somewhat more prosaic terms. According to Eliot, metaphysical poetry manages to 'realize the inapprehensible in visual images'[433] and *conceit* happens to be its most natural form of expression. Eliot explains further the mechanisms of a conceit:

> A conceit is the extreme limit of the simile and metaphor which is used for its own sake, and not to make clearer an idea or more definite an emotion… The figure does not make intelligible an idea, for there is properly no idea until you have the figure. The figure creates the idea….[434]

To illustrate this let us turn to the conceit used by Brodsky in the second stanza: the two lovers being thrown out by the soundless explosion from the past into the future.

It is easy to imagine the visual picture of two people who are suddenly thrown from one another by a bomb explosion. But to imagine that this is a soundless, invisible and slow explosion, demands an enhanced effort of imagination on the part of the reader. Therein lies the intellectual nature of a conceit – in order to grasp it the reader has to stop the natural flow

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[431] Praz. *John Donne*, p. 269. Original quote runs as follows: '…il Donne si studiava che il suono non solo aderisse alla retorica del suo pensiero, ma anche sottolineasse col gioco degli echi le analogie e i concetti. Tutti i poeti cerebrali hanno del resto trattato – o maltrattato, secondo l'altro punto di vista – il verso, distorcendolo a modellarsi su ritmi non familiari, per rispecchiare la non familiarità dei pensieri. ... Browning e Mallarmé insegnino. In codesti poeti v'è sempre un elemento imponderabile di cui va tenuto conto per apprezzarne la metrica: in Mallarmé è il gioco delle cesure, in Donne l'eccentricità dell'accento'.
[432] Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p. 55.
[433] Ibid., Note on p. 57
[434] Ibid., p. 138.

of reading and dedicate it a special attention. (For this reason Eliot said that when you read Donne 'your mind is continuously exercised.'[435] The benefit of the conceit is its capacity to tell us a number of things in a brief expression. For instance from the 'time-bomb' conceit one learns about the main qualities of time, its invisible (or soundless) passage, its destructive character and the precipitous nature of its passage, quite contrary to the general perception of its gradualness. As a 'mental accelerator' the conceit is particularly effective; the similarity between such apparently disparate phenomena as an explosion and the effects of the passage of time is grasped instantly as the 'odour of a rose.'[436]

In his Nobel lecture Brodsky named poetry's propensity to accelerate mental processes as one of the main reasons behind poetry writing: 'The one who writes a poem writes it above all because verse writing is an extraordinary accelerator of consciousness, of thinking, of comprehending the universe.' [437] In fact as maintained by Derek Walcott, one of the greatest achievements of Brodsky was restoring intellectual ambition in English verse:

> Joseph's poetry has enriched English twentieth-century poetry because most poets in the twentieth century that I can think of don't see intelligence as being a quality of poetry. I think one of the things I learned from Joseph is that thinking was part of poetry.[438]

That is why it is not surprising that Brodsky did not so easily agree with the critique of some of his British critics who blamed him for overloading his verse in English with thought (!). In the unpublished draft of a response to Davie's article Brodsky shrewdly and wittily retorted:

> I genuinely regret Mr Davie's finding my poems „oversaturated". Next time around I'll try to water them down to his liking – to the consistency of tea, I suppose. … It is beyond my ken to counter his potent fantasies about my literary goals and affinities so well matched by the patent nonsense about properties of Russian meters.[439]

As we have seen on the examples of Davie in the present chapter as well as on the example of Denise Levertov's article cited in the Chapter Five, Brodsky's English language critics often made recourse to the easiest form of attacks, criticising Brodsky's English self-translations for their 'Russianness' where in fact they were dealing with universal features of his poetics.

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[435] Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p. 175.
[436] Ibid., p. 51.
[437] Joseph Brodsky. 'Uncommon Visage' (Nobel lecture), *On Grief and Reason,* p. 58.
[438] Valentina Polukhina. Quoted in *Iosif Brodksii glazami sovremennikov* [Brodsky through the eyes of his contemporaries] (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal 'Zvezda', 1997) p. 45.
[439] Joseph Brodsky, 'Draft of a response to Davie's article,' Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19, Folder 17.

Stanza II: Kline's first draft

Here again is Kline's first draft of the translation of the second stanza with comments and annotations by Brodsky:

II

Having fled south ~~punched~~ ^~~forced~~^ down by winter's fist,
~~I'm~~ in that ~~coffee-house~~ ^café^ from which we two were
exploded soundlessly into the future,
~~our temporary happiness now past~~;
my fingers trace, ~~in~~ ^on^ poor-man's marble, lines
that form your face. Nymphs leap ~~by the far roadstead~~; *in a distance*
their stiff brocaded skirts are hoisted
up to their thighs.

II 4th: I'd do something like: 'according to the happiness of past' or 'according to the temporary law of happiness': THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.
5th: «Ундины» ['undines'] in this case sound and imply something much more pejorative – a bit nastier than 'nymphs'.[440] What's more, there is NO "roadstead": the whole scene takes place inside the coffee-house: those nymphs leap in the bowels of this room, on stage, in semi-dark room.[441]

The difference between '*our temporary happiness now past*' in Kline's rendition and what Brodsky expected this line to convey is clear: what happened to the lovers in the poem is not just their single case, but exemplifies a general phenomenon, or a law: happiness is always temporary when it is seen against the background of time. A similar idea is reflected in the title of the famous poem by Robert Frost so much admired by Brodsky: "The Happiness Makes Up in Strength For What It Lacks in Length".

Interpretations of meaning: literal vs. metaphorical – III

The comment on the 5th line is on the other hand interesting as a testimony of a special brand of typically Brodskian realism. He often incorporates in his verse certain realistic details, which sometimes have strictly personal, significance or are shared by few persons beyond the author himself. For instance, in the poem in question it is not at all evident to a Russian reader reading the original poem what kind of nymphs Brodsky is here referring to. Instead of imagining a rather squalid dancing show in the bowels of a semi-dark provincial coffee-house (which it apparently was, after all) a Russian reader might start interpreting the

[440] This reference to 'undines' is an apparent mistake of Brodsky, for they occur neither in the original, nor in Kline's translation drafts.
[441] Quoted from Brodsky, 'Letter to George Kline,' (May 20, 1976), Brodsky Papers, Beinicke, Box 42 Fld 14.

line metaphorically. The metaphorical meaning is also there – otherwise Brodsky wouldn't have called those female dancers 'nymphs'; but it is there as a part of a description of a concrete visual scene and the epithet 'nymphs', apart from restoring in retrospect those dancers some of their dignity, is also in line with the elegiac register of the poem. Here we have an additional proof of our hypothesis expressed earlier that the first meaning with Brodsky is always literal.

Using the examples we came up with in the course of the detailed scrutiny of the first two stanzas of the poem 'A second Christmas', we have encountered several cases of Brodsky correcting his translator who had mistaken the literal meaning of that or other line for a metaphorical one. Often, as in the example just quoted above, it would not have been possible even in the original to tell one meaning from the other without the author's commentary. Similarly Brodsky's interventions restored the balance between the meanings of single passages – a balance essential for the sake of the basic intelligibility of the translations.

Stanza II – Kline's first revision

Once more first the revision of the second stanza done by Kline:

Having fled south, pressed here by winter's fist,	a	5-foot-iamb
I'm in that coffee-house from which we two were	B	5-foot-iamb
exploded, soundlessly, into the future,	xB	5-foot-iamb
by the impermanence of happiness;	xa	5-foot-iamb
my fingers trace, on poor-man's marble, lines	c	5-foot-iamb
that form your face. Plump nymphs cavort in clusters	D	5-foot-iamb
far off; their stiff brocaded skirts are hoisted	x	5-foot-iamb
up to their thighs.	c	2-foot-iamb

Stanza II: Brodsky

And here for comparison is the definite version of the second stanza revised by the author:

Retreating south before winter's assault,	a	5-foot-iamb
I sit in that café from which we two were	B	5-foot-iamb
exploded soundlessly into the future	xB	5-foot-iamb
according to the unrelenting law	xa	5-foot-iamb
that happiness can't last. My finger tries	c	5-foot-iamb
your face on poor man's marble. In the distance,	D	5-foot-iamb
brocaded nymphs leap through their jerky dances,	D	5-foot-iamb
flaunting their thighs.	c	2-foot-iamb

Metrically speaking the changes Brodsky made here to Kline's translations are not substantial – his intervention was limited to 'tightening up' the rhymes ('tries/thighs'); the slant rhyme 'distance/dances' is an original solution for a feminine rhyme.

On the other hand the 'assault/law' Brodsky comes up with is a less precise slant rhyme. As is evident from his own comment above, what mattered for him with regard to this line was to make the idea of the 'law' come across in the first place.

Here are the changes to the Kline's rhymes in the second stanza made by Brodsky:

	1	2	3	4
Kline	winter's fist-happiness	two were-future	clustered-hoisted	lines-thighs
Brodsky	assault-law	two were-future	dances-distance	tries-thighs
Brodsky's original Russian rhymes	*Kotoroy my – zimy* from which we – winter's	*schastlivym-vzryvom* happy-explosion	*bednykh-bedrakh* poor-thighs	*cherchu-parchu* I'm drawing- brocade

In the translation of this stanza the author manages to preserve only one word in a rhyming position in correspondence with the original poem, namely '*thighs'*.

Stanza III

Here is the interlinear translation of the third stanza:

What, gods! If the brownish spot in the window is to symbolize you, gods,
were you trying to convey us after all?
The future has arrived and it is
bearable; an object falls down,
the violinist leaves, the music has stopped
and the sea and the faces get more and more creased,
but there is no wind.

*Chto, b**o**gi,/ - yesli b**u**roye pyatn**o***	*enj.*	i	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*v okn**e** simvoliz**i**ruyet vas, b**o**gi –*		J	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*strem**i**lis vy nam v**y**skazat v it**o**ge?*		J	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*Gryad**u**shchee nast**a**lo,/ i on**o***	*enj.*	i	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*perenos**i**mo;/ p**a**dayet predm**e**t,*		k	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*skrip**a**ch vykh**o**dit,/ m**u**zyka ne dl**i**tsia,*		L	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*i m**o**re vsio morshch**i**nestey, i l**i**tsa.*		L	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*A v**e**tra n**e**t.*		k	(2)	2-foot-iambic

The third stanza opens with a rhetorical question addressed to the gods which might just be a veiled nod to Horace. [442] The author takes a stoical stance in the face of what apparently is a vision of eternity, i.e. a place where no wind blows.

Once again Brodsky resorts to a conceit to convey his vision. The sea needs the help of the wind to become creased, but with the sea of time it is a different story. It does not even need the wind's help to produce creases either on human faces or on its own fabric, for its flow is perfectly effortless.

Stanza III – Kline's 1st draft:

Let us now take a look again at Brodsky's corrections and comments on Kline's translation of the third stanza:

III

What is it, gods – if this ~~small~~ grey-brown spot,	a	5-foot-iamb
glimpsed through a window, symbolizes	B	4-foot-iamb
yourselves – that you would have us realize? Is	B	5-foot-iamb
it, ~~gods~~, that future days are here, ~~and not~~	a	5-foot-iamb
~~unbearable~~? Things fall apart, the fid-	c	5-foot-iamb
dler leaves, the music dies, and deepening creases	D	5-foot-iamb
spread over the sea's surface, and ~~our~~ faces.	D	5-foot-iamb
But there's no wind.	c	2-foot-iamb

III 1st: the 'spot' is not 'small' – it is essential (Sic.) sun through dirtied, dimmed window.
3rd: 'that you would have us realise' afterall. (Sic.)

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[442] The motif of futility of trying to maintain good fortune in the future through augury is a recurrent theme with Horace. See for example 'Ode to Leuconoë' in English translation by David Ferry:

> Don't be too eager to ask
> What the gods have in mind for us,
> What will become of me,
> What you can read in the cards,
> Or spell out on the Ouija board.
> It's better not to know.
>
> Quid sit futurum cras fuge quaerere, et
> quem fors dierum cumque dabit lucro
> adpone, nec dulcis amores
> sperne puer neque tu choreas,

Quoted from: Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus), *The Odes Of Horace: Trans. David Ferry* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997), p.33.

4th: there is no questioning any longer. "It (the future) arrived, and it **is** bearable. It's much more abrupt, George, and sort of firm – THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.

5th: not that important but: a thing falls down (on the floor) and not "things fall apart" – it's too much [of] a judgement.

6-7th: I am not that sure about 'deepening creases' – although it's quite beautiful; there are mere wrinkles – and not 'our' faces but 'faces/the faces'.

In the comment to the first line of the stanza Brodsky provides an explanation which was bound to remain 'obscure' in the original: i.e. that of the sun described as a 'brownish spot'.

From the comment to the fourth line it becomes clear that the author wanted to strike here a stoical note in a Horatian manner.[443]

In the comment to the fifth line, Brodsky explains that Kline's 'poetic' rendition 'things fall apart' does not suit the requirements of the source text. 'Things fall apart' proposed by Kline, which contains a clear reference to Yeats in English, [444] is certainly much more dramatic than the 'falling object' of Brodsky's original poem.

Stanza III: Brodsky

Here is the definitive version of the 3rd stanza, as revised by Brodsky. It is both metrically faithful to the original and incorporates the author's own comments as far as the meaning of the stanza was concerned:

III

Just what, you gods – if this dilating blot,	a	5-foot-iamb
glimpsed through a murky window, symbolizes	b	5-foot-iamb
your selves now – were you trying to advise us?	B	5-foot-iamb
The future has arrived and it is not	a	5-foot-iamb
unbearable. Things fall, the fiddler goes,	c	5-foot-iamb
the music ebbs, and deepening creases	D	4-foot-iamb
spread over the sea's surface and men's faces.	D	5-foot-iamb
But no wind blows.	c	2-foot-iamb

[443] 'In Horace's view of things the unexpected is expected too, and the dire, and his stoical acceptance that this is so gives strength to a style which is unshakable in its clarity and force…' Quoted from Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus), 'Introduction' by David Ferry, *The Odes Of, A Translation by David Ferry*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997, p. xiii.

[444] W.B. Yeats. 'The Second Coming': 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.' Quoted from W.B. Yeats. *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*/ ed. Peter Allt. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957) p. 402.

The changes to Kline's version here are minor: the only one big substitution which attempts to restore the meaning, i.e. to render with greater clarity the lyrical heroe's stoic resolve to endure his dire state, is undertaken in the fourth line. For the rest it looks as though Brodsky's main preoccupations here were those of achieving greater euphony in the English translation of this stanza. Obviously enough, being the author and in charge of the translation he could afford more independence from his own Russian text than a translator.

Here are some rhyme substitutions by Brodsky:

	1	2	3	4
Kline:	spot – not	symbolizes – realise? is	creases – faces	fid – wind
Brodsky:	**blot** – not	symbolize – advise us	creases – **faces**	goes – blows
Brodsky's original Russian rhymes	*piatno – i ono* **blot** – and it	*bogi – v itoge* Gods – after all	*ne dlitsia – i litsa* has stopped – and **faces**	*predmet – a vetra net* object – but no wind

Assonances, alliterations: richness of sound

We see that here Brodsky appreciated quite few of the rhymes found by his translator, especially the feminine ones, but he got rid of unnecessary cacophonic truncated-rhyme 'fid-/wind' in the fifth line and rendered the sixth line with one syllable less than the metrical scheme would demand. As a result the sound that was beginning to emerge in the English version done by his translator received more resonance; the lines which described music started sounding like the subject of their description. ('*…Things fall, the fiddler goes,/ the music ebbs, and deepening creases/ spread over the sea's surface and men's faces./ But no wind blows.*'). This music had its continuation and led to startling consequences in the next stanza, which we will see in due course.

Stanza IV

The next stanza is by far the most essential of the poem, as it contains both images of utmost beauty and terror. It is no coincidence therefore, that Brodsky's contribution to its translation is greater, as we will see, than to any other part of the poem.

Here again first my interlinear translation of the fourth stanza:

One day it [sea]*, but not, alas,*
we will flow over the seashore's fence
and will advance under the exclamations '[Please]*, don't',*
raising its crests over one's head,
towards the place where you sipped your wine,
slept in the garden, dried your blouse, -

and crashing tables will prepare for the future
mollusc the bottom.

*Kogd**a**-nibud' on**o**,/ a ne – uv**y** –*	*enj.*	m	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*m**y**, zakhlestny**o**t resh**yo**tku promen**a**da*		N	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*i dv**i**netsia pod v**o**zglasy "ne n**a**do",*		N	(3)	5-foot-iambic
*vzdym**a**ya gr**e**bni v**y**she golov**y**,*	*enj.*	m	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*tud**a**, gde ty pil**a** svoy**o** vin**o**,*		o	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*spal**a** v sad**u**,/ pros**u**shivala bl**u**zku,*		P	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*- krush**a** stol**y**,/ gryad**u**shchemu moll**u**sku*	*enj.*	P	(4)	5-foot-iambic
*got**o**vya dn**o**.*[445]		o	(2)	2-foot-iambic

Brodsky mentioned on several occasions how important nouns are in poetry. In one of his assignments to his students at Mount Holyoke with the topic 'Choice of inanimate object' Brodsky wrote: „Go heavy on nouns and easy on adjectives (the general rule in poetry any way)."[446] Pronouns are arguably just as important in this, one of the most condensed and economic of arts. If we give them a closer look some of the developments and shifts in the subject matter of the poem become clearer:

I stanza:	Pontus (sea/time)	vs.	I & you
II stanza:	future (present)	vs.	we & I
III stanza:	future (present)	vs.	we & I
IV stanza:	sea (future-time)	vs.	you

'Onò' (it) can refer to three things in the Russian version of the poem since it is the neuter pronoun: the future ('gryadùshchee'), the sea ('mòre') and time ('vrèmia'). The importance of the pronoun 'onò' is strengthened, because it echoes the rhyme 'vinò' (wine) and 'dnò' (bottom) the last and an important rhyme in the poem.

The metaphor in which time was compressed to an explosion in the first stanza is repeated in the forth one with the difference that this time around the compression – of centuries ahead – produces not an explosion, but an eschatological flood. Its effects are even more destructive and the devastation it causes is all the more global. It has been noticed by Lev Loseff that there exists a similarity between the way the metaphors become the objects of new metaphors with Brodsky and the way they did with metaphysical poets, as was pointed out by Barry Scherr:

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[445] Capital letters stand for a feminine ending and the small letters for the masculine (e.g. aBaB). The ictuses in each line are written in bold letters and their number per line is given in brackets.
[446] Joseph Brodsky, 'Write a poem about inanimate object' (Student Assignment), Brodsky Papers, Beinicke Library, Yale University, UNCAT MSS 649, Box 48, Fld 10.

> Lev Loseff caught this feature of Brodsky's poetry precisely when he compared him to the English metaphysical poets, noting that "the metaphysician seeks only the initial metaphor, expands it and then the metaphor leads him to results which in all probability stun the poet himself.'[447]

According to T.S. Eliot, however, of all the so called 'metaphysical poets', this quality of playing constantly with his own metaphors was most vividly peculiar only to Donne.[448] Eliot speaks of the way Donne's thoughts become the objects of his own observation: 'It is in the direction of his attention and interest, the direction in which Donne made his real observations, that I seek for his mind; in the examination of his own sensations and ideas and emotions.'[449] For this reason Eliot calls Donne a 'voluptuary of thought.'[450]

Be that as it may, one piece of evidence that has emerged in the course of our present discussion of the poem 'A second Christmas by the shore' is that Brodsky uses his own metaphors as points of departure for other new metaphors.

'Enchaféd flood'

For a Russian reader the 'time-flood' from the last stanza bears a clear allusion to the famous opening of the ode which the Russian 18th century poet Gavriil Romanovich Derzhavin wrote on his death bed:

> The river of times in its stream
> carries away all the human deeds
> And drowns in the precipice of oblivion
> Peoples, kingdoms, and kings.
> And if something remains [preserved]
> Through the sounds of lyre and trumpet
> This too will be devoured by eternity's maw
> And won't escape the common fate.
> (Interlinear translation, *Z.I.*)[451]

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[447] Quoted in Scherr. ‚To Urania' in *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem,* p. 100.
[448] See also Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, pp. 84-87.
[449] Ibid., p. 84.
[450] Ibid., p. 168. 'Donne might be called a voluptuary of thought…'
[451] The original text runs as follows:

Reka vremion v svoiom stremlenyi	*Река времен в своем стремленьи*
Unosit vse dela lyudei	*Уносит все дела людей*
I topit v propasti zabvenya	*И топит в пропасти забвенья*
Narody, tsarstva i tsarei.	*Народы, царства и царей.*
A yesli chto i ostayotsia	*А если что и остается*
Chrez zvuki liry i truby,	*Чрез звуки лиры и трубы,*
To vechnosti zherlom pozhriotsia	*То вечности жерлом пожрется*
I obschei ne minet sud'by.	*И общей не минет судьбы.*

Derzhavin's 'river of times' is, of course the Lethe, the infernal river of forgetting. However, in contrast to Derzhavin's apocalyptic flood, whose victims bore more public features (kingdoms and kings among others), the sea in the Brodsky's poem takes its toll on his beloved. One might even think of the entire scene in terms of time's revenge on the beloved in the manner reminiscent of some *carpe diem* poems. Let us compare for example Horace:

> You're going to have your turn out there alone,
> …
> Out there in the night you'll moan that all the young men
> Prefer the lustrous ivy and lustrous myrtle
>
> To the withered leaves that winter's companion the cold
> Wind causes to scatter and scrape along the alley.[452]

Or alternatively, Marvell, displaying the slightly more morbid tastes of the 17th century:

> Thy Beauty shall no more be found;
> Nor, in thy marble Vault, shall sound
> My ecchoing Song; then Worms shall try
> That long preserv'd Virginity… [453]

It seems to me, however, that the main sentiment in Brodsky's poem is not that of revenge. The image of the beloved is metonymically portrayed through its relation to the places which her mere presence had rendered into sacred objects. The fact that these sacred objects are depicted at the moment right before they fall into ultimate oblivion, strikes here a particularly shrill note. It seems as if the despair which the author has so far held at bay – hiding it at the beginning behind the mask of cynicism or later resolving to endure it stoically in the face of time – eventually found a violent outlet in this last scene.

Here is the first draft of Kline's translation with Brodsky's markings and subsequent comment:

> IV
>
> Someday the sea, and not – alas – ourselves,

Quoted from: Gavriil R. Derzhavin, *Stikhotvoreniya (Poems).* (Moskva, Leningrad: Sovetskiy Pistatel, 1963) p. 374.

[452] English translation quoted from: Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus), *The Odes Of Horace*, p. 67.

[453] Quoted from: Gardner. *The Metaphysical Poets*, p. 251.

will sweep across the railings of the boardwalk,
advancing to sharp screams of "Don't!" and "~~Stop it~~!"
to tower its breakers high above men's heads
and flood the place where you once sipped your ~~pale champagne~~, cat-napped, or dried a flimsy cotton
white blouse – and crush the chairs to silt a new sea-bottom
~~for future snails~~.

Yalta 1971 (translated by George L. Kline)

IV 3rd: advancing 'under accompaniment of exclamation(s) 'don't'. Either 'don't' or 'Stop it' BUT NOT BOTH. «Не надо» sounds quite absurd, helpless, idiotic – that's the point.
5th: no 'pale champagne' (although cherish your memory of Crimean champagne, please)

The ending is lovely but – wrong. What makes the impact is the word 'bottom' in the very end. The whole business of 'evolution' is stressed – and more (I think) than 'evolution' alone. 'Snails' are just charming – or just unpleasant. «Моллюск» is terrifying, and the whole notion of 'future' – changes. "For future-days mollusc (or whatever) fixing the/a bed".[454]

Vision of future

In order to understand correctly the paragraph above of Brodsky's commentary to Kline's translation of the first draft we will have to look at Brodsky's highly idiosyncratic version of the future – a theme which remained of interest for him till very late in his career. This importance of the future was also evident from the following assignment he gave his students at Mount Holyoke University many years after the composition of the poem in question:

> Whatever treatment of this theme you may choose, try to stay cool: try to keep enthusiasm out of it. Remember that you are writing about an aspect of time, and that you know nothing about it save that it will surely come. In other words, terror is more in place here than enthusiasm, yet this terror, too, must be controlled…. You have to sound dry, resolute, clear-eyed: you have to give your reader an impression that you know what you are talking about…. Imagine too that your parents and in general the people who seem to you being older than yourselves will not, most likely, be around. Figure out now how you will feel about it.
>
> Avoid sounding either apocalyptic or sardonic; try to come off sober or even severe.[455]

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[454] Brodsky, 'Letter to George Kline,' (May 20, 1976), Brodsky Papers, Beinicke, Box 42 Fld 14.
[455] Joseph Brodsky, 'Write a poem about the future' (Student Assignment), Brodsky Papers, Beinicke, Box 48, Fld 15.

As is evident from the above, Brodsky associated the future with the prospect of non-being. The theme of non-being in general and of his own non-being in particular, i.e. of contemplating life after death, started to interest Brodsky very early in his career.[456] One characteristic example of this interest is a paraphrase Brodsky used of the famous sentence by Marx, whom Brodsky particularly despised: 'Many things determine consciousness besides *being* (the prospect of *nonbeing*, in particular).' [457]

One can only conjecture where exactly Brodsky's interest in non-being came from. Brodsky himself, however, seemed to consider this notion of a terrifying future to be a peculiarly American idea, specifically manifested in the poetry of Robert Frost. Brodsky explained this idea in a conversation with his friend Czesław Miłosz while discussing the differences between American and European poetries:

> The reason I like Frost so much … is [because of] … his distinctly own, distinctly American notion of terror. He is indeed a terrifying poet. … European poetry is – if one can make such sweeping statements – and I guess I can, being a defrocked European – is a tragic poetry. Whereas Frost is not tragic, if only because tragedy is always *fait accompli*, something that has already happened, right? Tragedy, in a sense, is basically a retrospective genre. And Frost is its opposite; he deals in terror, in negative projections, for terror is always an anticipation, a projection of your own negative potential. In that respect, in that future-oriented sense, he is indeed very American, as well as every bit a catastrophist… It is for this reason that I am so keen on him – because, after all, he tells me, a European, or, well, Eurasian – something qualitatively new about the species or at least something the literature of the continent failed to reveal …[458]

In fact, if we turn to some of the Frost's poems, we might discover that the 'terrifying' and slightly Darwinian 'molluscs' from Brodsky's 'A Second Christmas' are close relatives of the not less terrifying and Darwinian 'jellyfish' we find in Frost:

> Sarcastic science, she would like to know
> In her complacent ministry of fear
> How we're proposed to get away from here
> When she's made so we have to go
> Or be wiped out…
> ….
> The way to go away should be the same
> As fifty million years ago we came
> If anyone remembers how it was…[459]

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[456] See also Brodsky's early poems such as for instance *Nature Mort* and *1972.*
[457] Joseph Brodsky, 'A Poet and Prose', *Less Than One,* p. 189.
[458] Milosz. *Conversations*, pp. 116-117.
[459] Robert Frost, 'Why wait for science'. Quoted in Robert Frost, *Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays*, (New York: The Library of America, 1995), p. 358.

and

There once we lay as blobs of jellyfish
At evolutions opposite extreme
Now as the blobs of brain we lie and dream
With only one vestigial creature wish…[460]

(from 'Why Wait For Science' and 'Etherealizing' by Robert Frost).

Stanza IV: Kline's 2nd draft

Having considered Brodsky's comments Mr. Kline made some minor amendments and produced this second version of the fourth stanza:

Some day the sea, and not, alas, ourselves,
will sweep across the railings of the boardwalk,
advancing to thin screams of "Stop it!" –
to tower its breakers high above men's heads
~~and flood~~ the park where you drank wine, ~~ate bread~~,
took cat naps, ~~and~~ dried out your ~~cotton~~
~~white~~ blouse – to crush tables ~~and~~ ^to^ lay a new sea-bottom
for mollusc beds.

As we can see, Brodsky suggested some minor changes that the patient translator tried once again to incorporate in the next revision. Instead something else happened: Brodsky rewrote the whole stanza altogether. Let us now contemplate the end result:

Someday the slowly rising breakers but,	a	5-foot-iamb
alas, not we, will sweep across this railing,	B	5-foot-iamb
crest overhead, crush helpless screams, and roll in	B	5-foot-iamb
to find the spot where you drank wine, took cat-	a	5-foot-iamb
naps, spreading to the sun your wet	c	4-foot-iamb
thin blouse – to batter benches, splinter boardwalks,	D	5-foot-iamb
and build for future molluscs	D	3-foot-iamb
a silted bed.	c	2-foot-iamb

Brodsky's rewritten version almost succeeds in matching the Russian original in richness of music, or speaking technically, of assonances, consonances and alliterations. While the assonances in English build themselves around different vowels than in Russian (in Russian they were built around four vowels: «а», «о», «ы», «у» ['a', 'o', 'y', 'u']); among alliterations and internal consonants there happen to be surprisingly enough some overlappings. In Russian they were: 'v', 'vzd', 'vzgl', 'gl'; 'gr', 'kr'; 'gd', 'gt', 'nd', 'dn';

[460] Frost, 'Etherealizing', Ibid., p. 359.

'stl', 'spl', 'pl'. In English we have a lot of liquid (*r, w, and l*) and plosive sounds (*b, p, t and d*), their combinations with each other and a sibilant:

1) "r's" in combination with plosive sounds "b", "br" ('*rising', 'breakers', 'but', 'railing'*);

2) "cr's" ('*across', 'crest', 'crush', 'screams*');

3) "w's" ('*we', 'will', 'sweep', 'where', 'wine', 'wet*');

4) "b's" ('*blouse', 'batter', 'benches', 'boardwalks', 'build', 'bed*');

5) "s's" alone and in combination with other consonants (*'slowly', 'sweep', 'screams', 'spot', '-naps', 'spreading', 'splinter', 'sun', 'silted'*);

6) "l's" alone and in combinations ('**s**lo**w**l**y**', 'a**l**a**s**', 'wi**ll**', '**r**ai**l**ing', 'he**lpl**ess', '**bl**ouse', 's**pl**inter', 'bui**ld**', 'mo**ll**uscs', '**s**i**lt**ed');

7) "f's" ('**f**or', '**f**uture').

The combination of these elements produces in English an effect of music. Some of these words, as one might observe, had already appeared in the Kline's version, but they had not constituted so consistent a pattern.

To achieve such a euphonically felicitous results Brodsky had to make changes only an author had the authority to make. For instance, no one but him could decide that in the main metaphysical conceit of the stanza, a century-long-destruction by time compressed to an instantaneous flood, the waves should be advancing slowly ('*the slowly rising breakers'*). In the original no such information is given.

Just another example is the treatment of a rare semantically-euphonic parallelism between a Russian word and its English translation – the expression '*krusha stoly*' meaning 'crashing tables'. Kline had rendered it as 'to crush tables'. Brodsky being led more by his ear than by anything else, although preserving the actual word 'crush', moved it to the third line: 'a**cr**o**ss** this **r**ailing,/ **cr**e**s**t overhead, **cr**ush helple**ss scr**eams, and **r**oll'. (In the meantime, having spotted another parallel between the sound and meaning of the same word in Russian and English, Brodsky successfully introduced it here: '**gre**bni' – '**cre**st'). The result was the emergence in both cases of a new image: the sea became more active, almost eerie. On the other hand the screams, which in the original had been articulated with words ('[Please], *don't!*') were here simply paraphrased; at the same time yet another new image that of the 'crushed screams' emerged.

The ‘tables’ were easily sacrificed and turned into ‘benches’ for the sake of the alliteration, making the total of six ‘b’s’ in the last three lines. The drying of the blouse was turned into: ‘spreading to the sun your wet/thin blouse’. In addition Brodsky added a new element of devastation not present in the original: ‘splinter boardwalks’.

Let us now look at last at what happened here in terms of the rhyme :

	1	2	3	4
Kline	ourselves – heads	stop it – boardwalk	cotton – bottom	bread – beds
Brodsky	but – cat-	railing – roll in	**boardwalks – molluscs**	wet – **bed**
Brodsky’s original Russian rhymes	*uvy – golovy* alas – head	*promenada – ne nado* **boardwalk** – don’t	*bluzku – mollusku* bluse – **mollusc**	*vino – dno* wine - **bottom**

On the rhyme front we see the same tendencies in Brodsky which have been already observed earlier: he tries to get rid of what for him must have sounded like banal rhymes (such as ‘cotton-bottom’ here) and attempts to have certain words which rhyme in the original, in the rhyming position in English as well.

* * *

Let us now contemplate the end result, the definite version by Brodsky and try to see it in the light of the preceding commentary:

A second Christmas by the shore
of Pontus, which remains unfrozen.
The Star of Kings above the sharp horizon
of harbor walls. And I can’t say for sure
that I can’t live without you. As
this paper proves, I do exist: I’m living
enough to gulp my beer, to soil the leaves, and
trample the grass.

Retreating south before winter’s assault,
I sit in that café from which we two were
exploded soundlessly into the future
according to the unrelenting law
that happiness can’t last. My finger tries
your face on poor man’s marble. In the distance,
brocaded nymphs leap through their jerky dances,
flaunting their thighs.

Just what, you gods – if this dilating blot,
glimpsed through a murky window, symbolizes
your selves now – were you trying to advise us?
The future has arrived and it is not
unbearable. Things fall, the fiddler goes,

the music ebbs, and deepening creases
spread over the sea's surface and men's faces.
But no wind blows.

Someday the slowly rising breakers but,
alas, not we, will sweep across this railing,
crest overhead, crush helpless screams, and roll in
to find the spot where you drank wine, took cat-
naps, spreading to the sun your wet
thin blouse – to batter benches, splinter boardwalks,
and build for future molluscs
a silted bed.

1971 Yalta

Conclusions

The present chapter undertook the analysis of the various translation drafts of the poem 'A second Christmas by the shore', Brodsky's corrections and commentaries on the corrections, as well as the subsequent reworkings by the author. Considering this translation to be representative in many respects, one can come to the following conclusions as to the nature and extent of Brodsky's so called 'interventions' into the translations done by other translators.

1. Translator's freedom: content, semantics, tonality

The first and most evident conclusion which can be made with regard to the rendition of the content of the original is the following: one of the undeniable consequences of Brodsky's reworking was that the translation of his poem became to a considerable degree more faithful to the original as far as its content was concerned. Under content we understand here a complex interplay of various metaphorical and literal meanings, tonalities and emotions, special shades of meanings and different registers of speech of the original. A faithful rendition of many of these elements, was evident from the analysis above, only became possible through the immediate and active involvement of the living author in the process of translation.

Brodsky's liberty in making changes to his original poems in translation turned out to be particularly beneficial, as we could see with regard to the translation of the forth stanza of the poem in question. As shown by Efim Etkind in his famous book *Poezia i Perevod* [Poetry and Translation] – a classic on theory of poetical translation – constraints on a translator of

poetry, 'his incapacity to travel beyond the main structure set by the author – beyond the metaphors and similes, puns and images' proves to be even more disastrous than 'the straightforward mistakes' as it often 'leads to the appearance of many still-born translations.' (*transl. Z.I.*) [461] For one thing Brodsky's self-translations avoid this vice of 'literalness' referred to above by Etkind. Brodsky's liberty in introducing new elements and changing those of the originals seems ultimately to have been one of the principal factors to promote these self-translations into the realm of independent texts in English. In these respects Brodsky's strategies seem to be those of a mimetic translator, an heir of Pushkinian translating school.

2. Rhymes

The second important conclusion concerns the rendition of rhymes by Brodsky. As opposed to the Modernists' conception of rhyme as a decorative device[462], in Brodsky's poetical composition rhymes constituted a central mechanism. According to Brodsky, rhyme is not merely coincidental connections between seemingly unrelated objects or phenomena created by rhyme (See Brodsky's own definition of the mechanism of rhyme in Chapter Four).

Quite to the contrary rhymes unravel secret connections already present in the language. Rhymes in Brodsky are always designed to connect meanings. Thus it becomes important that in the translation not only certain sounds are rhymed (e.g. masculine or feminine rhymes found), but also that certain meanings rhyme as well. This position explains also an interesting tendency which has become evident only in the course of our analysis: a tendency on the part of Brodsky to try to rhyme semantically identical words in English translation to those which had rhymed in the original. (Similar translating tendency had been before identified by Etkind with regard to Pushkin's translations from French).

The search for rhymes was for Brodsky indeed a very serious matter. It was with pride that he described himself in an interview as a 'pretty good rhymer' in Russian[463]. His friend

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[461] Efim Etkind, *Poezia i Perevod* [Poetry and Translation] (Leningrad: Sovetskiy Pisatel, 1963), p. 87. Original quotation runs as follows: «...когда нет явных ошибок, есть иное, не менее гибельное – есть скованность переводчика, его неспособность выйти за пределы того, что задано автором, - за пределы авторских метафор и метонимий, каламбуров и образов. Так возникают бесчисленные мёртворождённые переводы.»

[462] See also H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), 'Introductory Note', Hayyim Nahman Bialik. *Knight of Onions and Knight of Garlic,* trans. Herbert Danby. (New York: Jordan Publishing Company, 1939) p. 5.

[463] Brodsky. *Joseph Brodsky: Conversations*, p. 161.

and fellow Nobel winner Czesław Miłosz even attributed Brodsky's rhyming skills in Russian to some supernatural power:

> I envy the inventiveness of Brodsky in this aspect of poetry. Nobody used before him such rhymes in Russian as he did. That's why I say that he was a shaman, because he was under an influence of poetic inspiration. Those things were not contrived, not done in accord with reflection. I'm sure it's received as a gift of a daemon.[464]

The same could also be said about his ability to find rhymes in English. Our scrutiny of rhymes Brodsky came up with in his definite translation version revealed his uncanny dexterity in finding authentic rhyming trouvailles in English. Often Brodsky's rhymes are arguably more interesting than those proposed by his translators; he avoids banal grammatical rhymes: Brodsky rarely rhymes two words of the same part of speech, e.g. 'shore - sure', 'unfrozen - horizon', 'I'm living - leaves and', 'as - grass', 'tries - thighs', 'blot - not', 'railing - roll in', 'wet - bed'.

3. Verse metre

In his reviews Brodsky insisted absolutely upon retaining verse metre in translation from Russian to English. (Note: Chapter Five). And yet the verse metre seems to be the most problematic and controversial aspect of Brodsky's own revampings of the work of his translators.

In our example reading of 'A second Christmas by the shore' it became clear that Brodsky tends to render the 'rhythm' of the Russian original in his translations into English, instead of finding an English equivalent of its 'metre' as he suggested to other translators reviewing translations of Akhmatova and Mandelstam. (See Chapter Five).

To shed some light on this seeming inconsistency between Brodsky's demands upon others and his own translational practices here is an interview he gave to Grace Cavalieri at the Library of Congress in Washington DC on the occasion of his Poet Laureateship. In it Brodsky thus described the process of his own poetry composition:

> …The poem always starts with the first line or with a line anyway. And from that you go. It is something in the line, a certain hum to which you try to fit the line. And then you proceed that way…. It is some tune which has oddly enough some sort of psychological weight or denomination. And you try to fit something into that….[465]

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[464] Milosz. *Conversations*, p. 198.
[465] Brodsky. *Conversations*, p.149.

The 'hum' possessing 'psychological denominations' which Brodsky mentions in the interview above, is supplying the rhythm, which usually corresponds to a certain metrical scheme iambic, trochaic, dactylic etc. Yet, as shown by Zhirmunsky, even if in the literary traditions of two different languages there existed identical metrical schemes – as there exist, for instance, iambic pentameters in both Russian and English – their national rhythmical realisations of these schemes differ, because of the inherent natural differences between the. So, for instance, a pentametric line in Russian will normally contain omissions of stress or 'pyrrhics'; an average English pentametric line, on the contrary, will display additional, hypermetrical stresses – a natural result of the monosyllabic nature of English.[466] (See also Chapter Six).

In his remakes of the translations Brodsky tried to adjust the metre to that 'hum' that he heard in the original. This becomes increasingly evident in the detailed prosodic analysis of his corrections. It is also evident in his own very idiosyncratic manner of reciting his self-translations. It is even clearer from the evidence given by his collaborative translators. Most of them remembered that Brodsky talked them out of syllable counting. For example, Alan Myers remembered that Brodsky 'would also snigger derisively if he caught me counting syllables'.[467]

This phenomenon of Brodsky adjusting the verse metre of the translation by the Russian ear became especially evident on the example of the poem 'A Second Christmas by the shore'. The poem belongs to an earlier period, when Brodsky still used predominantly regular syllabo-tonic metres – an iambic pentameter in this particular case. Kline, faithful to Brodsky's own theoretical demands from a Russian-English translation, had rendered all the stanzas of the poem into regular English iambic pentameters. Brodsky, on the other hand, introduces into his version tetra-metric and even trimetric lines, trying, in my view, to reproduce the omissions of stress characteristic of the original iambs. In this respect Brodsky as a self-translator seems to come closer, albeit, unwittingly to Benjamin's ideal of a foreignising translator.

In the chapters to come I will try to further expatiate on how Russian-English metrical contrasts are reflected in Brodsky's translations.

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[466] See also Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*, p. 80.
[467] Valentina Polukhina, unpublished interview with Alan Myers September 2003 – November 2004.

4. Stanzaic design

As to the stanzaic design of the original – Brodsky tried to preserve it as much as possible. This led to the problematic introduction of many feminine rhymes into the English version of the poem, which in English have quite different connotations than in Russian (See also Chapter Six):

> There is no modern English or American poet who will take such risks – being utterly serious with feminine endings, of attempting to reach the sublime and noble without the pseudo-humility of the dying fall, the retractable conceit.[468]

I shall further trace this tendency in Brodsky's translation on the examples to follow to make an accurate and unbiased assessment of his recastings.

5. 'Simultaneity of assonances'

The revisions of the first drafts, which reflected the suggestions and corrections by the author, alongside with the adjustments to the rhymes introduced by him, would alone have resulted in what one might call a more faithful translation. But for Brodsky as a living author this was obviously not enough. He must have felt that such a translation would not give the full idea of the sound of the original. There must have been a grain of irresponsibility about his attempt to rewrite entirely the whole of the stanza himself – Brodsky was after all aware that English after all was not his native language; but this irresponsibility was also a blessing, as he proved to be able to produce assonances in English – assonances which make the Anglophone reader 'wonder whether Russian was as rich in consonance and alliteration as the translation' (Derek Walcott).[469]

This demonstrable ability of Brodsky to achieve a 'simultaneity of assonances'[470] suffices to refute those of his critics who claimed that he had 'a wooden ear' in English.

Brodsky would be the first to admit that a translation is always a sacrifice and a compromise. It would have been impossible to try to achieve the musical richness of assonance, consonance and alliterations throughout the entirety of a poem, without entering in

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[468] Walcott, 'Magic Industry,' p. 6.
[469] Ibid, p. 2.
[470] Idem.

conflict with its other elements. Thus, similarly to Tsvetaeva in her translations [471], Brodsky tried to concentrate on those parts of the poem which he as the author knew to be the most crucial ones, in order to re-invent in the translation English equivalents of their original euphony. Being both the author and the translator in one person gave Brodsky an enormous advantage over other co-translators by referring directly to the *intentio*, in Benjamin's definition, of the original work that he, as the original author, knew better than anyone. The degree of freedom Brodsky enjoyed in rewriting certain parts of the translated poem was incomparably higher than that of his translators.

6. Literary allusions

One further perception that we have gained in the course of the present analysis is that Brodsky's originals are littered with references and allusions to poetry by his predecessors –in Russian, English and Latin (Derzhavin, Donne, Horace etc.). This observation is also supported by the authoritative opinion of Derek Walcott: 'The intellectual vigor of Brodsky's poetry is too alarming even for his poet-readers, because it contains the history of the craft, because it openly reveres its inheritance…'[472]

Brodsky, however, does not attempt to suggest or to push any of these allusions in his commentaries neither to his translator, nor to his English readers. Hence the question of whether they can be detected in his English translations is bound to remain open.

In the following chapters I will endeavour to track further the already identified tendencies of Brodsky's rewritings of the translations done by his co-translators.

Appendix

Original poem in Russian:

E.R.

Второе Рождество на берегу
незамерзающего Понта.
Звезда Царей над изгородью порта.

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[471] See also Vyacheslav Ivanov, "O yazykovykh prichinakh trudnostey perevoda khudozhestvennogo teksta" (On the linguistic reasons causing difficulties for the translation of poetic texts), *Poetika Perevoda: sbornik statei* (Poetics of Translation: Collection of Essays). (Moskva: Raduga, 1988) p.79.
[472] Idem, ibid., p. 6.

И не могу сказать, что не могу
жить без тебя – поскольку я живу.
Как видно из бумаги. Существую;
глотаю пиво, пачкаю листву и
топчу траву.

Теперь в кофейне, из которой мы,
Как и пристало временно счастливым,
беззвучным были выброшены взрывом
в грядущее, под натиском зимы
бежав на Юг, я пальцами черчу
твое лицо на мраморе для бедных;
поодаль нимфы прыгают, на бедрах
задрав парчу.

Что, боги, - если бурое пятно
в окне символизирует вас, боги, –
стремились вы нам высказать в итоге?
Грядущее настало, и оно
переносимо; падает предмет,
скрипач выходит, музыка не длится,
и море все морщинистей, и лица.
А ветра нет.

Когда-нибудь оно, а не – увы –
мы, захлестнет решетку променада
и двинется под возгласы «не надо»,
вздымая гребни выше головы,
туда, где ты – пила свое вино,
спала в саду, просушивала блузку,
– круша столы, грядущему моллюску
готовя дно.

январь 1971. Ялта [473]

[473] Iosif Brodskii. *Stikhotvorenia. Poemy*. [Short Poems. Long Poems.] (Moskva: Slovo, 2001), pp. 333-334.

Chapter 8: 'From nowhere with love'

'A Part of Speech': prosodic experiments

Although Brodsky tried to avoid interpreting his exile from the USSR as the radical hiatus (with this purpose he included into the collection, *Konets prekrasnoi epokhi*, which was published after his exile, poems he had written while still living at home) – in terms of formal innovations the cycle 'Chast' Rechi' ('A Part of Speech'), written in the USA in 1975-1976, represents a point of departure.

One of the peculiarities of *A Part of Speech* lies in the fact that the cycle consists of 20 very short poems: nineteen 12-line-long ones and one 16-line-long – a phenomenon rather unusual for Brodsky who is known for writing poems of longer length. Longer forms, as it has been pointed out, give the author the opportunity to warm up to his theme, chance to consider the various ramifications of his thought, and time to express these thoughts in a fuller way; shorter forms, on the other hand, allow greater focus on the material at hand, and consequently the attention paid to the formal elements is more extensive. Here is how Brodsky illustrates this point with the help of a metaphor:

> … because a poem sits in the very middle of a page surrounded by the enormity of white margins, each word of it, each comma carries an enormous – i.e., proportionate to the abundance of unused space – burden of allusions and significances. Its words are simply overloaded, especially those at the beginning and at the end of the line. It ain't prose. It's like a plane in the white sky, and each bolt and rivet matter greatly.[474]

Paying greater attention to the form of the poems from 'A Part of Speech,' one might say that the focus of the cycle is on the verse metre in which it is written. With the exception of only one poem, written in iambic pentameter, all the poems in 'A Part of Speech' are written in *loose dolnik* (or accentual verse). This makes the cycle stand apart from Brodsky's other poems of that period.

Not that the poet had not written poems in accentual verse before – his first collection *Ostanovka v pustyne* (1970) contained already five poems written in *dolnik*; such long poems as 'Lagoon' and 'Thames in Chelsea' and others had been written in the similar metre as early as in 1973-1974; but in the cycle 'A Part of Speech' we are dealing with a much more consistent experiment with and development of it: *dolnik* is represented here by a wider range

[474] Brodsky, *Less than one*, p. 316.

of its 'looser' or 'tighter' varieties, i.e. varieties whose rhythmical structure deviates to a greater or lesser degree from the classical syllabo-tonic meters. Accordingly it would be quite tempting for us to try to trace some sort of artistic justification behind such an experiment. Such an attempt will be undertaken in the course of the analysis of the poem 'Niotkuda s liubov'iu' translated by Weissbort and subsequently revised by Brodsky.

The translation of the poem 'Niotkuda s liubov'iu' seemed to me particularly fitting for analysis within the context of our present inquiry based on the following reasons:

1. As I have tried to show in the Chapter Six, the main disagreement between Brodsky and Weissbort over translation concerned the retention of metre and rhymes on which Brodsky so much insisted in translation. According to Brodsky, Weissbort, his translator, did not succeed in preserving these elements of Brodsky's verse; however, according to Weissbort, he did preserve the metre and used the solutions for rhyming based on sound and vowel equivalence more appropriate for a translation in English. In my analysis of the poem, 'Niotkuda s liubov'iu' ('From nowhere with love') – representative of the new verse by Brodsky, which subsequently became his dominant verse form – I will show that the poems written in this metre set new difficulties for the translator. Basing my analysis on Zhirmunsky's verse theory, I will endeavour to demonstrate that with regard to the *dolnik,* rhyme plays a particularly important role as a structural device: with the disappearance of rhyme the poems written in *dolnik* lose the last support of their rhythmical structure and start to resemble plain prose. This should explain to us in part the logic of Brodsky for whom the disappearance of strong rhymes in Weissbort's rendition was automatically linked with the disappearance of the poem's metre, i.e. the disappearance of its rhythmical structure.
2. 'From nowhere with love' is one of the first among the many love lyrics of separation and amorous nostalgia written by Brodsky in exile. Thematically it is related to the poem 'A second Christmas by the shore' discussed earlier, but since the treatment of the same theme and form of the poems is quite different from the poem, 'From nowhere with love', it seemed to me particularly tempting to draw some comparisons between these two poems and to single out their differences.

'From nowhere with love': interlinear translation

From nowhere with love, nteenth Marchember,
dear respected darling, but it doesn't matter
who, for, speaking frankly, it's hard to recall
the facial features, nor yours, but neither anyone
else's sincere friend is greeting you from one of the
five continents supported by cowboys;
I have loved you more than the angels and Him Himself
and that is why I am now more remote from you than from both[475] of them;
late at night, in the valley which has fallen asleep, on its very bottom,
in the little township covered with snow to the doorknob,
wriggling on my bed sheet at night –
as it isn't at least mentioned below,
fluffing up my pillow with the moaning'you'
beyond the seas for which there is no limit,
in the darkness I am repeating your features with all my body
like a berserked looking-glass. (*Transl*. Z.I.)[476]

Here is the Russian version:

Niotkùda s lyubòv'iu,/ nàdtsatogo martobrià,//		(4)	a
dorogòi uvazhàyemyi mìlaya,/ no ne vàzhno	enj.	(4)	B
dazhe ktò,/ ibo chèrt litsà,/ govorià	enj.	(4)	a
otkrovènno,/ ne vspòmnit' uzhè,/ ne vàsh,/ nò	enj.	(5)	B
i nichèi vèrnyi drùg vas privètstvuyet s odnogò	enj.	(5)	c
is piatì kontinèntov,/ derzhàshchegosia na kovbòyakh;//		(4)	D
ya liubìl tebia bòlshe,/ chem àngelov i samogò,//		(4)	c
i poètomu dàl'she teper ot tebià,/ chem ot nìkh obòikh;//		(6)	D
pòzdno nòchyu, v usnùvshei dolìne, na sàmom dnè,//		(6)	e
v gorodkè,/ zanesiònnom snègom po rùchku dvèri,//		(5)	F
izvivàias' nòchyiu na prostynè –//		(3)	e
kak ne skàzano nìzhe po kràinei mère –//		(4)	F
ya vsbivàiu podùshku mychàshchim „tý"	enj.	(4)	g
za moriàmi, kotòrym kontsà i kràia,//		(4)	H
v temnotè vsem tèlom tvoì chertý,//		(4)	g
kak bezùmnoe zèrkalo povtoriàya.//		(3)	H

Content

Let us first discuss briefly the content of the poem in question. As we have said before in the Chapter Seven, resembling a Christmas postcard, 'A second Christmas' opens with the

[475] Professor Venclova suggests that in the original version of the poem we have to make do with a rare mistake on Brodsky's part, namely the *anacoluthon*. Here the pronoun 'both' refers to a multitude plus a single entity: 'both' = 'the angels' + '[the Lord] Himself' instead of two single entities. Yet in the original this mistake does not seem to be so apparent.
[476] Underlined are the words which rhyme in the original.

lyrical hero informing his addressee of his whereabouts, his general mood, etc. In the poem, 'From nowhere with love,' this is no longer a matter of resemblances: the poem overtly begins like a letter complete with a sequence of words and constructions that are typically used in written communication: 'From nowhere with love, nteenth Marchember[477], dear respected darling.' Aside from the fact that we are made to understand that in the new circumstances of the lyrical hero these attributes of epistolary correspondence have become utterly meaningless: they no longer fulfil their primary function, that is, they do not communicate anything. These bulky expressions placed at the beginning encumber the poem making the detection of its rhythm particularly difficult for the reader. The lyrical hero makes a mockery of them, or perhaps himself and the futility of his own enterprise as he endeavours to write 'with love' from 'nowhere.'[478]

The word 'niotkuda' (nowhere) is the first in the poem and bears the strongest emphasis, thus producing also the strongest impact. Let us dwell on it for a while. In English 'nowhere' among other connotations also has colloquial one being a part of the widely used idiomatic expression 'in the middle of nowhere'. The word 'nowhere' in English describes the geographical position of the author, seen from the perspective of his beloved, at the moment of the poem's composition. For the addressee of the poem, who was expected to contemplate the setting of the lyrical 'I' from the other side of the iron curtain, his location – a university campus hidden in the depth of 'one of the continents' – must have appeared as one abstract and huge 'nowhere.' This English expression has, however, no literal equivalent in Russian, but there is a strong suspicion that Brodsky might have it in mind when he used the word to open the Russian poem. This is an instance of a bilingual play on words which abounds in Brodsky's verse and which are rather characteristic of some exiled writers. [479]

More importantly, both the Russian 'niotkuda' and the English 'nowhere' reveal a new perspective of the author's current residence when it is seen in relation to his former home (the latter is also the actual whereabouts of his addressee). In this case, 'nowhere' has yet another meaning – it stands for a place of non-being, a zone of Brodsky's constant metaphysical explorations. In the following unpublished letter to his friend Carl Proffer, written shortly after his emigration from the USSR, Brodsky recognizes that this concept of

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[477] In Russian the neologism '*martobria'* is a straightforward reference to Gogol's short story, 'The notes of a madman.'
[478] The opening phrase 'From nowhere with love' produces also an ironic allusion with the famous American novel by Ian Flemming *From Russia with Love*.
[479] One example of such a writer that comes to mind is, of course, Nabokov.

'non-being' is particularly crucial for his work. In this letter Brodsky also provides us with new insights into the nature of this concept:

> Dear Carl,
>
> Find on the map of Ireland the island Inisbofin (Island of White Cow) and you'll understand where I am. But I reassure you that you won't find it. And this is probably for the better, for if judged by the level of deprivation reigning here there has to be no place for it on the map of our flourishing world.
>
> It is indeed something remarkable. In its poverty it is superior (if one can speak of superiority in that sense) even to my village.[480] There is no food here apart from mackerel and shellfish. Money plays here no role. Nothing is sold or bought here. There is no electricity and no warm water. The connection to the main land is irregular … There are no news-papers. There are four telephones and I think only two TV sets and they only work when there are batteries.
>
> Terrible wind is blowing all the time. The dark clouds are rushing in front of one's nose as sporting cars. There are 250 inhabitants on the island. I am the 251st and the 1st Russian who has stepped on this part of the dry land (which is a downright euphemism because of the daily rains).
>
> ….
>
> And yet I am glad that I am precisely here and not in London, Paris, Rome, Stockholm, New-York, Leningrad. For it is here that the civilisation ends and the H_2O begins. In other words Inisbofin equals Nothing and this is exactly my eparchy/ sphere of influence/ element. (Transl. Z.I.) [481]

So, as we see from the letter above, 'nowhere', or 'non-being, or 'nothing' represents for Brodsky a point where the dry land ceases its territory to water, which, as we have seen previously, was according to Brodsky, the main depository of time (see the passage from *Watermark* in the previous chapter). [482] In other words, from a metaphysical point of view, 'nowhere' is the point where the space cedes its demesne to time. We have seen that in 'A second Christmas' the author was striving to achieve precisely this standpoint of time to take a more detached look at the sad developments in his love story; now in exile he does not have to resort to all those ingenious conceits to achieve it. In exile the detachment is achieved almost without the interference of a lyrical hero. Brodsky himself elucidates this point in his essay *The Condition We Call Exile*:

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[480] Brodsky is referring here to the village of Norenskaya close to the Arctic Circle where he served his term for parasitism in the Soviet Union in 1964-1965.
[481] Joseph Brodsky. 'Letter to Carl Proffer,' (June 22, 1972), Brodsky Papers, Box 43 Fld 7.
[482] Brodsky, *Watermark*, pp. 42-43.

> … one more truth about the condition we call exile is that it accelerates tremendously one's otherwise professional flight – or drift – into isolation, into an absolute perspective: into the condition at which all one is left with is oneself and one's language, with nobody or nothing in between. Exile brings you overnight where it would normally take a lifetime to go.[483]

The physical distance between the lyrical hero and his beloved has become by now so incommensurable that the quantity has turned into quality – the separation has now become absolute, almost sepulchral in dimensions. In 'A second Christmas,' we saw that the lyrical hero constantly used several means of playing down his sentiments lest he should slip into melodrama. Here the utter despair of ever seeing his beloved again is so definite, the tragedy so real, that the lyrical hero manages to articulate his suffering without risking the danger of slipping into melodrama. ('writhing upon the stale/ sheets for the whole matter's skin/ deep I'm howling 'youuuu,'' in Brodsky's own translation).

And it is the rhythm of the poem that informs the addressee about the radical change which had taken place in the author's perspective. If we said that 'A second Christmas' resembled a postcard, 'From nowhere with love' with its rugged, broken rhythm resembles a cable wire sent into the ether which struggles to win the enormous space, or much rather, vacuum separating the recipient from the sender.

'From nowhere with love': metrical structure

As is seen from above, the poem is made up of a single 16-line-long stanza and is written in a 'purely tonic', 'accentual verse,' or 'loose *dolnik'* depending on the terminology we choose to adopt.[484] This metre, as has been said, is based on the counting of accented syllables whereas the number of unaccented is variable. Sometimes, as suggested by Zhirmunsky, this causes a slackening of the rhythm and approximation of the verse to the prose or colloquial rhythms:

> The stronger are the variations in the syllabic structure of the inter-accentual spaces… the greater is the number of unaccented syllables between the ictuses, the more difficult it becomes for the main accent to maintain the unity with the unstressed syllables; as the result the verse becomes less ordered rhythmically approximating the

[483] Brodsky, 'The Condition We Call Exile', *On Grief And Reason*, p. 32.
[484] See also: Zhirmunsky, *Teoria Stikha*, pp. 163-168.

> colloquial speech or literary prose whose main characteristic is the natural freedom in the distribution of accents.[485]

In fact at a glance at the original of the poem, its metrical structure does not immediately transpire and consequently the detection of its real rhythm might represent some difficulty for a reader: not only the number of unstressed syllables between the stresses is variable here, but also the number of stresses themselves per line is also irregular. Among poem's 16 lines there are:

- 9 lines containing 4 stresses: lines 1,2,3,6,7,12,13,14,15
- 6 lines containing 5 stresses: lines 4,5,8,9,10,11
- 1 line containing 3 stresses: line 16

At the same time we have here some important secondary elements of metrical organisation – sound vowel and consonant instrumentation, *enjambments*, caesuras and most importantly the rhymes. Iuri Lotman points out that those elements that usually do not play a structural role in the everyday speech contribute to the creation of poetic rhythm in verse:

> Der Rhytmus ist im Vers ein bedeutungsdifferenzierendes Element, wobei der bedeutungsdifferenzierende Charakter, wenn er die rhythmische Struktur erfaßt, auch diejenigen Elemente der Sprache ergreift, die ihn im normalen Sprachgebrauch nicht aufweisen.[486]

Arguably the poem in question is as rhythmic and well-organized as any of Brodsky's poems written in classical syllabo-tonic metres. To illustrate let us turn again to the theory of verse composition.

Verse theory: a poem in dolnik

Iuri Lotman states that Zhirmunsky laid down the foundations for modern rhyme theory. As early as 1923 Zhirmunsky saw in rhyme not merely an overlapping of sounds, but

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[485] Zhirmunsky, *Teoria Stikha*, pp. 163-164. Original text: «Чем более резкие колебания возможны в слоговом составе межударных промежутков, вообще – чем больше число неударных между ударениями, тем труднее объединяется неударная группа главенствующим ударением, вследствие чего стих оказывается как бы менее упорядоченным в ритмическом отношении, приближаясь к естественной свободе в расстановке ударений разговорного языка или литературной прозы...»

[486] Jurij M. Lotman. *Die Analyse des poetischen Textes*. p. 65. The following is the original quote: «Ритм в стихе является смыслоразличающим элементом, причём, входя в ритмическую структуру, смыслоразличительный характер приобретают и те языковые элементы, которые в обычном употреблении его не имеют.» Iuri Lotman, *O poetakh i poezii*, p. 55.

a phenomenon pertaining to rhythm.[487] In fact Zhirmunsky wrote: 'To the phenomenon of rhyme we have to attribute every sound repetition which has an organising role in the metrical composition of a poem'[488] (Transl. Z.I.)

As we have mentioned earlier, Zhirmunsky suggests that we begin to discern 'those regularities called meter'[489] only if we regard the poem in its entirety: no isolated line taken outside of its context can disclose the metrical pattern. In practice this, however, does not mean that one necessarily *ought* to read the entire poem before detecting its metrical structure, for Zhirmunsky suggests that:

> Within an established literary tradition we always have sufficient experience to recognise the meter at once, that is, to interpret correctly a given alternation of stresses by relating it to a known metrical type.[490]

The quotation above shows that experience as a poetry reader makes one familiar with certain types of traditional verse structures and helps one to detect the correct metrical structure of any given poem. The reader's easy recognition of a poem's metre presupposes a certain familiarity with verse tradition of his country. For Viktor Zhirmunsky who wrote the quotation above during the 1920's in Russia, such a familiarity with the established literary tradition among poetry readers was to be taken for granted. However, on the other side of the globe just two decades later, such a familiarity was no longer a self-evident phenomenon. As early as 1947, Auden, who had by then taught at several universities in the USA lamented this lack in his American students: 'It's amazing how little students know about prosody. When you teach a college class, you find they read either as straight prose or as deadly monotonous beat as in *Gorboduc'*.[491]

What happens then, when we are not familiar with the given literary tradition? Can we then work out the metrical structure of a given poem and perceive its rhythm? And what

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[487] Iuri Lotman. *O poetakh i poezii: analiz poeticheskogo teksta, stat'i i issledovaniya, zametki, retsenzii, vystupleniya.* [On poets and poetry: analysis of poetical text, essays and researches, articles, reviews, lectures] (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 1996) p. 67. The following is the original quote: «Основы современной теории рифмы были заложены В.М. Жирмунским, который в 1923 г. ... увидел в рифме не просто совпадение звуков, а явление ритма.»

[488] «...должно отнести к понятию рифмы всякий звуковой повтор, несущий организующую функцию в метрической композиции стихотворения.» Quoted fromViktor Zhirmunsky. 'Rifma, ee istoria i teoria' [Rhyme, its history and theory] in Zhirmunsky, *Teoria Stikha*, p. 246.

[489] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse.* p. 66.

[490] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse.* p. 70.

[491] Alan Ansen, *The table talk of W.H. Auden*, ed. Nicholas Jenkins, (London : Boston : Faber and Faber, 1991), p. 28.

happens in the case of verse representing an innovation in respect to the established tradition? Can one learn how to scan it? Zhirmunsky claims:

> If, however, we were to put ourselves in the place of a reader who has never heard Russian iambs (for instance, of a reader unaccustomed to the frequent omissions of stress) we would understand the metrical nature of a given poem, (and consequently the rhythmical significance of separate lines) only after gaining an impression of the whole, an impression which would be gained with considerable hesitation and difficulty on our first being confronted with the differing rhythms of separate lines. It is in such a position as this that we approach new and original rhythmic cadences which deform sharply the traditional system: in order to grasp their rhythmical peculiarities we must think of them as variations of a definite metrical pattern.[492]

Zhirmunsky describes those difficulties which the readers will always encounter when detecting a new experimental verse metre. Turning to Brodsky, we can say that the passage above might just as well refer to the 'difficulty and hesitation' in understanding the metrical nature of a given poem on the part of an English reader reading for the first time Brodsky's self-translations, because of the deviation from the traditional pattern of English verse, as mentioned in the previous chapters. At the same time Brodsky's *loose dolniks* embody that kind of experimental verse metre, described above by Zhirmunsky. Such experimental verse metre is bound to cause initial difficulties also amongst Russian readers reading Brodsky in original.

Brodsky's metrical innovations: loose *dolnik*

As we already know, Brodsky started his poetic career writing in traditional Russian XIX and XX century metres: iambs, trochees, anapaests, dactyls, amphibrachs. However, over the years, as Barry Scherr observes, Brodsky developed a verse metre of his own. Already in 'Chast' Rechi' we encounter a number of poems written in the metre called the 'loose dolnik':[493]

> Unlike the so-called classical metres, such as iambic or anapaestic verse, where there is a fixed number of metrically weak syllables between the ictuses (the positions in the line that potentially carry stress in accordance with the metre) the *dolnik* allows for either one- or two-syllable intervals between stresses.[494]

Moreover in some of the poems written in *dolnik* the 'number of stresses per line may vary, and some of the intervals between stresses fall outside the usual one or two-syllable

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[492] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*. pp. 70-71.
[493] Scherr. ‚To Urania' in *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem,* p. 97.
[494] Idem

norm'.[495] Sometimes it may contain lines of various lengths in which both the number of unaccented syllables between the stresses and the number of accents per line are variable. In that case it is more appropriate to speak of *accentual* or *tonic verse* or precisely of ***loose dolnik***.

This unique verse metre of Brodsky had, however, some precursors in the history of Russian verse. In fact, as Zhirmunsky points out, we encounter this metre as early as in Pushkin's fairytale 'Skazka o Balde' and later in a number of verse written by Blok, Mayakovsky and Tsvetaeva. Zhirmunsky speaks of the difficulty such metre represents for our sense of rhythm and of the danger for this type of verse to be perceived as resembling the disordered rhythm of spoken speech:

> … the *dolniki* of Blok and, in particular, the purely tonic verse of Mayakovsky was and are considered by many people brought up on traditional syllabo-tonic metrics as non-rhythmical creations. Those readers who regard the poems of Mayakovsky as formless prose have difficulty in finding a metrical common denominator in lines varying so widely in their syllabic structure; not sensing the meter, i.e., the inertia of the rhythmical movement, they lose the feeling for the rhythm itself, as the organized arrangement of syllabic sequences within a specific metrical pattern.[496]

Zhirmunsky argues, that our rhythmical conscience can overcome this obstacle and, once we become accustomed to it, we can learn to perceive even very complicated and contradictory kinds of verse as rhythmically unified; moreover 'we can even take special pleasure in the difficulty and internal complexity of such a new form.'[497] As Zhirmunsky further suggests:

> Our feeling that such verse is rhythmical is based on our lengthy acquaintance with poetic form, which has gradually taught us to get along without a great many of the most elementary features of rhythmical equilibrium – syllable counting, equal number of stresses in adjacent lines, and so on. As a result of such training we can learn to accept as rhythmical a form of speech that has been systematically deprived of all those signs which originally served as the basis of our rhythmical perception.[498]

However, in order to acquire this rhythmical perception, Zhirmunsky argues, at least some of the important secondary factors of metrical organisation have to remain intact. Under the secondary factors of rhythmical organisation Zhirmunsky understands the following: 'the precise coordination of lines and syntactic units, the type of metrical clausula, and *especially rhyme as a means of uniting the rhythmical lines into a structural unit of a higher order* (the

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[495] Scherr. ‚To Urania' in *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem,* p. 97.
[496] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*. p. 71.
[497] Ibid., p. 239.
[498] Ibid., p. 240.

stanza)'. [499] (*italics mine, Z.I.*). For example, if the rhymes were also destroyed in tonic verse or *loose dolnik* poems written by Mayakovsky, then, according to Zhirmunsky, our rhythmical sense would loose its last pillar:

> In many poems of Mayakovsky, if we were to throw out the rhymes without changing the syllable structure, and shift the syntactic boundaries around by the use of enjambment, we would lose the last support for any perception of rhythm, and the whole edifice, thus deprived of its equilibrium, would turn into a heap of debris.[500] (*Translation corrected by Z.I.*)

Thus, as is shown by Zhirmunsky, in this new kind of tonic verse the presence of rhymes substitutes the 'primary element of metrical organisation' – the metre.[501] That this was also true of the poems written in *loose dolnik* by Brodsky will be shown in an example of the translation of the poem, 'Niotkuda s liubov'iu'. The fact that Brodsky wrote his tonic verse many decades later than Mayakovsky and others, who experimented with new types of verse in the meantime, is irrelevant as the Russian trends have remained largely very conservative and have based themselves on classical syllabo-tonic tradition up until very recent times. As one characteristic example of it one might mention a letter which Solzhenitsyn wrote to Brodsky on 14 May 1977 accusing the latter of 'destroying the rhythm of the Russian verse' with his poems written in *loose dolnik*.[502]

'From nowhere with love': in search of its verse metre (alias rhythm)

In the Chapter Six I discussed the principle of metrical task as it was formulated by Zhirmunsky. In the process of poetry composition the metrical impulse exhibits its organising influence in all strata of the lexical material. Let us now consider the poem, 'Niotkuda s liubov'iu' and try to register the various levels, on which this organisation of lexical material occurs.

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[499] Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*. p. 239.
[500]. Zirmunskij. *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*. p. 240. The Russian text is as follows: «Во многих стихах Маяковского, если уничтожить рифмы, не изменяя слогового состава, переместить границу синтаксических групп с помощью переноса, мы утратим последнюю опору для ритмического чувства, и здание, потерявшее равновесие, превратится в груду развалин.» *Quoted from* Victor Zhirmunsky. *Teoria Stikha* [Verse Theory]. (Leningrad: Sovetsky Pisatel, 1975) p. 231.
[501] Zhirmunsky, *Teoria Stikha* [Verse Theory]. p. 248.
[502] Alexander Solzhenitsyn. 'Letter to Brodsky,' (17 May 1977), Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 25.

Distribution of vowels and consonants

The first elements to undergo rhythmical distribution are the vowels and consonants.[503] Whenever we encounter organized distribution of stressed vowels – we speak of harmony of vowels. To relate the aforesaid to the poem in question let us turn to the examples:

- ‘n**à**dtsatogo martobri**à’** (harmony with *a*),
- ‘i po**è**tomu d**à**l’she tep**è**r ot tebi**à**’ (e-a-e-a),
- ‘p**ò**zdno n**ò**chyu’ (harmony with o)
- ‘ch**è**rt lits**à**, govori**à** otkrov**è**nno’ (e-a-a-e) etc.

A rhythmically ordered distribution of consonants is known under the name of alliteration or consonance; again here are some examples from the poem:

— ‘u*vazh*àyemyi – *vàzh*no – d*azhe – uzhe – vash* – der*zhàvsh*egosia – b*òlshe* – dàl’*she* – usn*ùvsh*ei’;

— ‘*v* ***tem***no*tè* *vsem* *tè*lom’.

Caesuras and *enjambments*

Other elements of metrical composition are caesuras and *enjambments*. Caesura is a division of a single line which is repeated line after line and designed to facilitate the perception of its rhythm.[504]

Enjambment – the continuation from one line into the next – usually serves an opposite purpose from a caesura as it creates tension by placing, at the beginning or at the end of a line, a word which is not syntactically connected to it, but instead to the line preceding or following it.[505] Brodsky, as we know, extensively used *enjambments*.[506] Alongside their ‘normal’ role of creating tension and introducing syncopating effects in verse, in the present poem, *enjambments* assume yet another more prominent role. In combination with both the caesuras and the rhymes, the *enjambments* trouble the ‘normal’ rhythm of the poem so consistently that it becomes its main structural device, actually creating the poem’s rhythm.

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[503] See also: Osip Brik. *Two Essays on Poetic Language* (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1964) pp. 23-25.
[504] See also: Mikhail L. Gasparov, *Russkii Stikh nachala XX veka v kommentariyakh* [Russian Poem of the beginning of the XX century in commentaries] (Moskva: “Fortuna Limited”, 2001) p. 82.
[505] See also: Ibid., p. 34.
[506] See also: Scherr. ‚To Urania’ in *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem,* pp. 94-95.

Rhymes as metrical device

Rhymes, as has been pointed out in the earlier, play the most prominent role in the metrical organisation of the poem. The role of rhymes becomes particularly relevant for the metrical organisation of the poem when we are dealing with verse written in tonic verse, or *loose dolniks*:

> The greater the freedom of the metrical construction of the poem the more important is the presence of rhyme as a device of metrical composition.[507] […]
> In the absence of the customary regularity and system in the distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables within a separate sequence, the rhyme turns into a particularly important property of metrical composition: without the rhyme such verse could pass for prose.[508]

Having established the fact of the irregularity in the distribution of accents as well as of the inter-accentual spaces between them peculiar to the poem under discussion, we might conclude, especially in the light of the aforesaid, that the main certainty our rhythmical sense gets, is that from the presence of rhymes. Alongside the recurring pattern of *enjambments*, the eight pairs of alternating masculine and feminine rhymes – aBaBcDcDeFeFgHgH – appear to be the only pillars supporting our rhythmical sense in the poem *Niotkùda s lyubòv'yu*.

Eventually with the help of secondary elements of metrical composition described above as well as thanks to the fact that 'our rhythmical sense is very tensile and gets used to relate to a single metrical law some very diverse and free types of rhythmical variations'[509] the Russian reader should be able to detect the poems' rhythm. One is also helped by the fact that 'in poetry there is an additional typographical division into separate lines as opposed to prose where the text is divided into bits only by syntax'.[510] In verse, however, as opposed to music we do not have notation. As a consequence, this rhythm will always be the result of tension between these structural elements of metrical composition and the real rhythm of human speech. This tension might also be responsible for important artistic effects. Arguably Brodsky did not resort to any special graphical representation of the poem which would 'facilitate' the apperception of the poem's rhythm, as for example *lesenka* (stairs) or *stolbik*

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[507] Zhirmunsky, *Teoria Stikha*, p. 248. Original text: «Чем свободнее метрическая конструкция стихотворения, тем важнее присутствие рифмы как приёма метрической композиции».
[508] Ibid., p. 376. Original text: «При отсутствии привычной закономерности и системы в расположении ударных и неударных слогов внутри отдельного ряда, рифма становится особенно важным признаком метрической композиции: без рифмы такие стихи могли бы показаться прозой».
[509] Ibid., p. 168.
[510] See also: Gasparov, *Russky Stikh nachala XX veka v kommentariyakh*, p. 33.

(column) – methods often used by Mayakovsky – precisely because he wanted to preserve this tension.[511]

If I have permitted myself to give here a different graphical representation of the poem, it was done firstly for illustrative purposes as an attempt to approximate one of the ways of reading of its rhythm, under the consideration of some of the elements of its metrical organisation described above. I have based my reading of the poem's rhythm on the recordings of Brodsky's own reading of it. At the same time I wanted to draw attention to some additional strata of euphonic organisation of the poem, i.e. to demonstrate the role of secondary elements of metrical organisation in the creation of the rhythm of the poem:

Niotkùda s lyubòv'yu,/		u	o	
nàdtsatogo martobrià,//		a	a	
dorogòi uvazhàyemyi mìlaya,/	o		a	i
no ne vàzhno enj. dazhe ktò,/		a	o	
ibo chèrt litsà,/ govorià enj. otkrovènno,/	e	a	a	e
ne vspòmnit' uzhè,/		o	e	
ne vàsh,/ nò enj. i nichèi	a		o	e
vèrnyi drùg		e	u	
vas privètstvuyet s odnogò enj. is piatì kontinèntov,/	e	o	i	e
derzhàshchegosia na kovbòyakh;//		a	o	
ya liubìl tebia bòlshe,/		i	o	
chem àngelov i samogò,//		a	o	
i poètomu dàl'she tepèr ot tebià,/	e	a	e	a
chem ot nìkh obòikh;//		i	o	
pòzdno nòchyu,/		o	o	
v usnùvshei dolìne,/		u	i	
na sàmom dnè,//		a	e	
v gorodkè,/		e		
zanesiònnom snègom		o	e	
po rùchku dvèri,//		u	e	
izvivàias' nòchyiu na prostynè –//	a		o	e
kak ne skàzano nìzhe		a	i	
po kràinei mère –//		a	e	
ya vsbivàiu podùshku		a	u	
mychàshchim „tý"		a	y	
za moriàmi, kotòrym		a	o	
kontsà i kràia,//		a	a	
v temnotè vsem tèlom		e	e	
tvoì chertý,//		i	y	
kak bezùmnoe zèrkalo povtoriàya.//	u	e		a

[511] Brodsky often expressed his scepticism about these famous devices of Mayakovsky discarding them as cheap tricks which would become apparent if one was to re-write Mayakovsky's verse in normal lines: in fact many of Mayakovsky's verse which are traditionally recited with a special rhythm because they were written in *lesenka* under a closer scrutiny turn out to be written in classical syllabo-tonic metres. See also Zhirmunsky, *Teoria Stikha*, p. 559.

The main phonetic mechanism at work here is the reduction of unstressed vowels, a process of which is probably the most distinctive feature of Russian phonetics. This feature is, however, not so easily grasped by English native speakers, even those who are familiar with Russian. A good example of this difficulty can be found in Wilson-Nabokov epistolary disputes on prosody. Gleaning from the quotation below, we find that it took seven years for Wilson, who was well-versed in Russian, to discover, with outside assistance, this important feature of the Russian phonetics:

> Gleb Struve came up here to see us in the summer …. I had a long conversation with him about Russian and English versification, which cleared up for me the misunderstandings of our correspondence on this subject several years ago, and I propose to give you the benefit of my enlightenment. The point is, I found out from Struve, that Russian words, however long, have actually only one stress. I had never noticed that Russian dictionaries indicate only one accented syllable, whereas English ones give secondary accents. Thus the emphasis in Russian is different from that of English. … The sophistication of English verse, in the hands of the great poets from Shakespeare to Yeats, consists partly of displacing these accents. There is nothing that corresponds to this in Russian – … there are many fewer stresses and you juggle with these.[512]

The rule of vowel reduction, which Wilson was trying to describe, consists of the following: every Russian word, 'however long', has one strong accent – all other vowels become weak or undergoes 'reduction'. Several years later Nabokov himself stated this rule in his essay on problems of translation of Pushkin: 'No matter the length of a word in Russian it has but one stress; there is never a secondary accent or two accents as occurs in English….'[513] In fact, if we look above at my graphic representation of the poem's rhythmical structure, as understood from Brodsky's own reading, we will notice that some of the lines consist of up to five words and of as many as nine syllables per line and yet carry in actuality just two stresses (**'**no ne v**à**zhno enj. dazhe kt**ò'; '**derzh**à**shchegosia na kovb**ò**yakh'**)**. As a result the basic rhythmical line turns out to consist of two beats with some variations of four and three beats per line. And this happens despite the general irregularity of the stressed and unstressed syllables per graphic line, which has been pointed out earlier, i.e. four stresses or more per graphic line.

One stress falls not only on one word, 'however long', but unites whole groups of words. Indeed, as suggested by Zhirmunsky, when it comes to accentual verse in Russian the counting of stresses is not of such a great help for us, for: '... in … accentual verse … one

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[512] Edmund Wilson. 'Letter to Nabokov from 28 September 1949'. Quoted in: Karlinsky, Simon. *Dear Bunny. Dear Volodya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940-1971* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005) p. 255.
[513] Vladimir Nabokov. 'Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English,' *Partisan Review* XXII (1955), p. 500.

strong stress can unite ... extensive accentual groupings of various length; not only words, but quite often whole phrasal groups...'[514] This causes a certain ambiguity of metrical interpretations of accentual verse –interpretations of what should be ascribed to as accentual grouping can vary widely, a fact which 'compromises the whole principle of syllable counting'.[515] In the light of the statements made earlier, my 'graphic' representation of the poem 'From nowhere with love' is no more than a timid attempt to convey the poem's metrical (alias rhythmical) structure. Ascribing a group of unstressed syllables to one stress is often a matter of individual reading.

The interplay of the strong rhymes with the succession of four *enjambments* at the beginning of the poem destroys the temptation to read the poem as prose. A combination of secondary elements of metrical composition produces here an organised pattern not inferior to the one in any poem written in the most traditional of the syllabo-tonic metres and we must admit that the task of the translator, who endeavours to produce an equimetrical translation of the poem must have been quite formidable.

'From nowhere with love': Weissbort's translation

Let us now, after this long theoretical digression, finally turn to the translation and have a look at Weissbort's version:

From nowhere with love, Marchember the enth,		x (asson.)
my dear respected darling, but it doesn't	enj.	y
matter who, since to be frank, the features aren't	enj.	x (asson.)
distinct anymore, neither your nor anyone	enj.	y
else's everloving friend, salutations	enj.	(asson.)
from one (on the backs of cowboys) of the five continents,		(asson. o – e)
I loved you more than himself or his angels,		(asson.)
and so now am further from you than from both of them,		(asson. o – e)
late at night, in the sleeping valley, deep,		(asson.)
in a small town up to its doorknobs in snow,		a
writhing on top of the sheets,		(asson.)
which to say the least, isn't stated below,		a
I pummel the pillow, mumbling "you",		b
across the seas which have no bounds or limits,		(asson.)
in the dark, my whole body repeating anew	enj.	b
your features, as in some crazy mirror.		(asson.)

[514] Zhirmunsky, *Teoria Stikha,* pp. 550. Zhirmunsky is in particularly referring here to the poetry of Mayakovsky.
[515] Ibid., pp. 558.

As we see Weissbort preserved both the syntactic caesuras as well as the enjambments of the original recognizing them obviously as a device pertaining to the metrical structure of the poem. It must be said, however, that in Russian most of the caesuras were syntactic and overlapped with the regular orthographic divisions of a prose sentence; whereas in English the presence of such a great number of commas can hardly seem natural.

As far as the rhyme scheme is concerned, it can be observed that it was not preserved through the entirety of the poem – there are only two pairs of strong rhymes in the Weissbort's translation; at the same time one cannot speak of rhyme's 'absence' either. The poem is rich in assonance, consonance and alliterations:

- Marchember – enth – respected
- darling – doesn't – aren't
- *e*lse *e*verloving fr*ie*nd – *fran*k
- ***b***ac***k****s* of ***c***ow***b***oy***s***
- *c**ó**ntin**e**nts – **b**oth of th**e**m* – (which can almost pass as an attempt of a dactylic rhyme in English.)
- *pummel – pillow – mumbling*

Thus many of the structural divisions of the original happen to be preserved in the translation and are even supported to a certain degree by the rhymes, in particular towards the end of the poem. Lastly one must acknowledge that Weissbort did grasp the general tone of the original and that the contrasts of diction which is a constant tool used with Brodsky are preserved in a good balance in the translation.

And yet the cumulative effect of these 'secondary elements of metrical organisation' (Zhirmunsky) in the absence of strong rhymes – even though the internal ones, as we have seen, are present in Weissbort's version – produced in Weissbort's English translation a rhythm which was quite different from the one which we have seen in the original Russian. Although the translation we have before us may be a fine poem in English, I do not wish to insinuate any judgment here. I would merely like to point out the similarity between Weissbort's translating technique with the one used by Zhukovskii and Batyushkov on Russian literary soil.[516] The indifference to the choice of form for a translated poem in these Pushkin's predecessors did not suggest, as we said in the Chapter Three, the unity of the bond

[516] See also Etkind. *Russkie poety-perevodchiki ot Trediakovskogo do Pushkina*, p. 145.

between a particular form and particular content. Whether such translating approach should ultimately be considered problematic is too much of a controversial question for us to answer. One thing is for sure: it represented a problem for Brodsky.

Brodsky's self-translation based on Weissbort's translation

Let us now examine the changes Brodsky made in the first draft of his translation of the poem 'From nowhere with love':

From nowhere with love the nth of marchember sir		a
sweetie respected dear frankly it doesn't matter	*enj*.	B
who for memory won't restore	*enj*	a
features not yours and no one's an utter	*enj*	B
friend greets you from this resting swell		(assonance)
on the backs of cowboys fifth part of earth		(assonance)
I loved you better than angels and Him Himself		(assonance)
and am further from you than from both	*enj*	(assonance)
of them now late at night in the sleeping vale		e
in the little township up to its doorknobs in	*enj*	f
snow writhing upon the stale	*enj*	e
sheets for the whole matter's skin		f
deep I'm howling "youuuu" through my pillow dike		g
many waters away that are milling near		(assonance)
with my limbs in the dark playing your double like	*enj*	g
the insanity-stricken mirror.		(assonance)

The first and most striking difference with the translation made by Weissbort is, of course, the presence of stronger rhymes as well as the fact that the rhyme scheme of the original is largely preserved. Even though there is some assonance, they are 'stronger' than those used by Weissbort. Another striking change introduced by Brodsky was to remove all the syntactic caesuras – the poem in translation is a one 16-line-long sentence undivided by any punctuation. Thus the main source from which the reader derives the rhythmical structure is now the rhyme (the strong caesuras that they produce), the *enjambments* and ultimately the semantic divisions which quite clearly indicate where exactly there must be a caesura:

> 'From nowhere with love/ the nth of marchember sir// sweetie respected dear/ frankly it doesn't matter// enj. who/ for memory won't restore// enj. features/ not yours and no one's' an utter// enj. friend…'

Whether an English reader can 'with considerable hesitation and difficulty' eventually 'understand the metrical nature […] (and consequently the rhythmical significance of separate

lines)' [517] of the poem and whether as a result the poem will become scannable for him belongs to the sphere of those rhetorical questions which no one in theory can answer, but everyone must find an answer for himself in practice. One thing is, however, for sure: Brodsky's translation when confronted with the one done by Weissbort displays a much more uneven rhythm. This circumstance did not, however, seem to worry Brodsky much, as we have seen in the previous chapter, for he considered 'smoothness' to be one of the worst vices of translations of his verse.

Moreover, as we have seen above in the example of 'Niotkuda s liubov'iu,' rugged rhythm was an authentic quality of this poem and, as well as of the other *loose dolniks* of the original poems of the cycle. Brodsky naturally enough was aware of this circumstance and consequently, the prospect of bringing the translations closer to the original must have presupposed for him a loss of some of their smoothness. This observation paves the way for potentially the most interesting part of our analysis – the question about the relation between form and content in the poem, 'Niotkuda s liubov'iu'. My conjecture is that the main function of the poem's rhythm is to inform its addressee of the drastic change, which had taken place in the lyrical hero's position in space and time. Accordingly what Brodsky perceived as certain 'smoothness' in the translation was for him unacceptable, for it would have betrayed the artistic intention of the original.

Semantics of rhymes

> „[rhyme] may yield, perhaps, more
> than the poet himself had in mind to reveal while using it". (Brodsky)[518]

In Brodsky's poetry, rhymes play a particularly important role as was often stressed by the author himself and as has also been pointed out by some of the critics (Stanislaw Baranczak, Natal'ia Galatskaia, Barry Scherr) [519]:

…a search for the central ideas in a poem often begins with Brodsky's rhymes. … the rhymes provide one of the structural cornerstones in many of Brodsky's poems. Not only do

[517] Zirmunskij, *Introduction to Metrics. The Theory of Verse*, pp. 70-71.
[518] Brodsky, *Less than one*, p. 346.
[519] Baranczak, 'Perevodia Brodskogo,' p. 249.

many of the semantic features of the poem become emphasized through the rhyme words, but the ordering of lines by rhyme may create natural thematic groupings… [520]

Despite having discussed the rhymes of the poem 'Niotkuda s lyubov'iu' and its various translations, we have not yet touched upon an important issue: their semantics. Later I would like to take a closer look at the rhymes in the poem, recoursing to the method suggested by Brodsky himself in his analysis of Auden's "September 1, 1939"[521], which was subsequently adopted successfully by Natal'ia Galatskaia in her remarkable analysis of the poem, 'Nochnoi polet'[522].

From nowhere with love the enth of Marchember sir	a
sweetie respected darling but in the end	b
it's irrelevant who for memory won't restore	a
features not yours and no one's devoted friend	b
greets you from this fifth last part of earth	x (assonance)
resting on whalelike backs of cowherding boys	d
I loved you better than angels and Him Himself	x (assonance)
and am farther off due to that from you than I am from both	d
of them now late at night in the sleeping vale	e
in the little township up to its doorknobs in	f
snow writhing upon the stale	e
sheets for the whole matter's skin-	f
deep I'm howling "youuu" through my pillow dike	g
many seas away that are milling nearer	H
with my limbs in the dark playing your double like	g
an insanity-stricken mirror.	H

[520] Scherr. ‚To Urania' in *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem*, pp. 94-95.
[521] Brodsky. 'On „September 1, 1939" by W.H. Auden' (essay), *Less Than One*, pp. 346-347.
[522] Natal'ia Galatskaia. 'Nochnoi polet', In *Scando-Slavica*, Tomus 36, 1990, pp. 84-85

	Weissbort's translation	Original Russian poem	Brodsky's 1st revised translation	Final version[523]
A	the enth – aren't	Marchember – speaking *(martobrià – govorià)*	Marchember sir – won't restore	***Marchember*** *sir – won't restore*
B	doesn't (matter) – anyone	doesn't matter – not yours (*ne vàzhno – ne vàsh, no*)	matter – utter (friend)	in the end (is irrelevant) – (no one's) friend
C	salutations – angels	from one (of the 5 continents) – Himself (*s odnogò – samogò*)	swell - Himself	(fifth last part of) earth – **Himself**
D	Continents – both of them	cow**boys** – from **both** (*kovbòyakh – obòikh*)	Earth – both	**boys – both**
E	Deep – sheets	bottom – sheet (*dnè – prostynè*)	(sleeping) vale – stale (sheets)	(sleeping) *vale – stale* (sheets)
F	snow – below	up to its doorknobs – at least (*dvèri – po krainei mère*)	its doorknobs in/ snow – skin/ (deep)	*its doorknobs in/snow – skin/-(deep)*
G	You – anew	howling "you" – features *(mychashchim"t`y"– chert`y)*	pillow dike – double like	*Pillow dike – double like*
H	limits – mirror	limits – reflecting as a mirror (*kràia – kak … zerkalo povtor'àia*)	Milling – mirror	Milling nearer – mirror

As we have mentioned, strong rhymes were not a part of Weissbort's translation technique which did not mean, however, that Weissbort did not achieve in his translation a sort of poetic harmony. However, looking at the chart above, one can observe that Weissbort's main criterion in creating rhymes and assonances was their acoustics rather than their semantics; Brodsky's endeavour, on the other hand, as is evident from the same chart, was, among others, to preserve certain words in the rhyming position. For example in the final translation by Brodsky, we find the expression 'Him Himself' (rhyme cluster C) in the rhyming position just as it was in the original. Brodsky once quoted Akhmatova saying that one should rhyme the word 'Lord' only with certain types of words. He himself, though not being conventionally religious, however, still kept to this rule. As was already observed in the Chapter Seven in the course of analysis of the poem 'A Second Christmas,' the search for the same rhyming words in the translation as in the original, is a characteristic feature of Pushkin's mimetic translating school.

Another aspect with regard to the semantics of the rhymes in Brodsky has been pointed out by Brodsky's Polish translator Stanislaw Baranczak; he argues that the rhymes in Brodsky's verse often function as independent puns, as additional displays of his linguistic wit. [524] Here are some of the plays on the polysemic nature of words, which Brodsky introduced into his final English version:

[523] In the final version I have written in bold letters the rhymes that corresponded directly to the rhymes in Russian and in italics the rhymes that Brodsky preserved from the first draft of his translation.
[524] Baranczak, 'Perevodia Brodskogo', p. 249.

- ‘Marchermber sir – won’t restore’ – a figure which can be found in the tradition of *carpe diem* poetry and which suggests that the mere recurrence of the nature’s seasons cannot restore love because it restores the leaves to the trees and the grass to the earth every year. (See for instance *La Gerusalemme Liberata* of Torquato Tasso: ‘Ne perchè faccia indietro l’april ritorno/ Si rinfiora ella mai ne si rinverde’ ‘Not because April will come back / will [the rose] ever bloom again’ transl. Z.I.);
- ‘in the end – no one’s friend’;
- ‘its doorknobs in snow – skin-deep’.

The absence of these additional layers of meaning in Weissbort’s version, for all its other merits, could have prompted Brodsky to make his own revisions, for, as Baranczak points out, the disappearance of such semantic layers would cause the poem to sound banal.[525]

Conclusion

In the Chapter Eight, I have been trying to deal with the metrical specificity of the poems from Brodsky’s cycle, ‘A Part of Speech’. On the example of the poem ‘Niotkuda s liubov’u’ (‘From nowhere with love’) I have shown that in this cycle Brodsky made a consistent passage from the use of syllabo-tonic verse metres to tonic verse, or *loose dolniks*. *Loose dolnik* is a verse metre, in which the number of weak syllables between the ictus and the number of ictuses themselves are not fixed as opposed to syllabo-tonic metres. (In iambic metrical scheme, for example, each ictus is preceded by just one weak syllable). I have tried to show the connection between Brodsky’s passage to this metrical form and the content of the poems of the cycle: the emergence of the theme of exile. Following his involuntary emigration from Russia this theme becomes a true *leitmotif* in Brodsky’s poetry, which, in my view, is directly connected to Brodsky’s experiments with new verse metres.

In Chapter Eight, using Zhirmunsky’s verse theory, I tried to show that in verse written in *dolniks*, rhyme has a particularly important role as a device of metrical organisation. The chapter also shows that Weissbort translated the poem introducing weak or slant rhymes which he believed to be ‘more appropriate in English.’ In his epistolary polemic with Weissbort, Brodsky argued that rhyme and metre had completely disappeared in Weissbort’s translations of the poems from the cycle (see Chapter Six). If we consider the

[525] Baranczak. ‘Perevodia Brodskogo’, p. 249.

correspondence between Weissbort and Brodsky in light of Zhirmunsky's theoretical findings, the logic behind Brodsky's assertions becomes evident. As shown by Zhirmunsky, in *dolniks* with the disappearance of strong rhymes, the metrical structure of verse disassembles entirely as to appear to the reader as plain prose. Thus far from having 'insufficient ear' for the slant rhymes of Weissbort, as was claimed by the latter in their epistolary dispute, Brodsky pursued the logic of his original poem, trying to recreate it in English in the same form, according to the principles of mimetic translation set by Pushkin.

By stating this, I am not trying to deny the theoretical possibility of slant rhymes having occasionally the same function in English poems as strong ones have in Russian. My principal goal has been to elucidate the logic behind the self-translating decisions of Brodsky, which had so far either puzzled the critics and co-translators or had been erroneously ascribed to Brodsky's limited ability in English.

As I have pointed out in the Chapter Eight, the verse metre Brodsky used in the poems of the cycle, 'Chast' Rechi,' ('A Part of Speech') seemed innovative to many Russian readers. As shown by Zhirmunsky, an easy apperception of poetry's metrical structure presupposes a certain familiarity on the part of the reader with his native metrical tradition. As a result, when confronted with new and experimental verse metre, readers approach it with 'difficulty and hesitation' as they are accustomed to the traditional patterns of their native metrical system. Brodsky was aware that many of his Russian readers experienced such difficulties when dealing with his metrical innovations. That a similar difficulty was experienced by his English readers who read his self-translations must have reassured Brodsky that his translations were "faithful" to their originals.

Appendix

, Ниоткуда с любовью,' Russian original from 'Часть Речи':

Ниоткуда с любовью, надцатого мартобря,
дорогой, уважаемый, милая, но не важно
даже кто, ибо черт лица, говоря
откровенно, не вспомнить уже, не ваш, но
и ничей верный друг вас приветствует с одного
из пяти континентов, держащегося на ковбоях;
я любил тебя больше, чем ангелов и самого,
и поэтому дальше теперь от тебя, чем от них обоих;
поздно ночью, в уснувшей долине, на самом дне,
в городке, занесенном снегом по ручку двери,

извиваясь ночью на простыне –
как не сказано ниже по крайней мере –
я взбиваю подушку мычащим «ты»
за морями, которым конца и края,
в темноте всем телом твои черты,
как безумное зеркало повторяя.[526]

[526] Brodskii. *Stikhotvorenia. Poemy*, p. 425.

Chapter 9: The North buckles metal

Verse metre

> '…he deserves only the North of our country.'
> (from a letter by Nadezhda Mandelstam)

The poem 'The North buckles metal' brings us back to our initial discussion (See Chapter Three) of Benjamin's notion of original's *intentio*. To preserve it, according to Benjamin, is an essential part of the translator's task. In the case of Baudelaire it was appropriate for Benjamin to speak of the *intentio* as pure language. In translating Baudelaire this *intentio* was supposed to be freed, in Benjamin's view, from the fetters of concrete meanings – meanings which spring from some kind of given reality. As opposed to Baudelaire, in Brodsky's *post-Acmeist* poetry the meaning, as we have already established, is inseparable from the *intentio*. (See Chapter Three).

By this token the problem with rendering the *intentio* of some of Brodsky poems lies precisely in the specificity of that given reality, which the translator should endeavour to convey in translation. In this respect 'The North buckles metal' is a rather exemplary case of a poem whose referential background is constituted by realities having no equivalent in the historical arsenal of anglophone populations. Brodsky, who always tended to diminish the contrasts between English and Russian poetical traditions, was the first to point out in an interview this, albeit quite negative, peculiarity of Russian cultural reality in the XXth century:

> … Russian culture is part of Christendom; that is, we are just one aspect of it and our set of values, not to mention many of our practices, are quite similar. Therefore, I don't believe the language creates […] a barrier. What creates this barrier is some historical reality, which for most of the century was politically different from the reality of the realms of Romance and Germanic languages. […] In the twentieth century, a completely new society emerged. So translating a sentence from Russian prose depicting life in the communal apartment into English is practically impossible. In the first place, what is a communal apartment? So practically every sentence will require a footnote. (Transl. Z.I.) [527]

The realities of Soviet life referred to above, exotic to the Western reader who has no knowledge of them, are often responsible for creating even greater translation barriers than those arising from the 'simple' prosodic contrasts between the two languages. The absence of

[527] Volkov, Solomon. *Dialogi s Iosifom Brodskim* [Conversations with Joseph Brodsky]. (Moskva: Izd. "Nezavisimaya Gazeta", 1998), p. 183.

the semantic equivalent in the target language sets as it were both the author-translator as well as the co-translator into the same pioneering position. They both are obliged to invent something in the target language, which has not been there before.

In the course of the discussion of the translations of the poem 'North buckles metal' I will try to show how both the translator as well as the author-translator tried to bridge these hurdles of translation. I will endeavour to investigate whether my hypothesis is true that in dealing with this category of the original poems, Brodsky being both the author as well as the translator played a crucially helpful role. His first hand experience of the realities described must have given Brodsky clear advantage over his co-translators, for he knew exactly what was the initial *intentio* of the original as well as what the exact effect was he wanted to produce on the reader.

Using the interlinear translation as the point of departure, I will first discuss some general aspects of the poem's meaning, which were likely to represent major difficulties for the translator. Later, I will pass to stanza-by-stanza comparison of Weissbort's version of the translation with the ultimate recasting of it by Brodsky.

'The North buckles metal': meaning

First the interlinear translation followed by the original:

Interlinear by Stephen White (from the Beinecke library):

The North crushes metal, but it spares glass.	a
It teaches the throat to pronounce "let (me) in."	b
The cold brought me up and put a pen into	a
(my) fingers in order to warm them, cupped.	b
Freezing, I see that beyond the seas	c
the sun is setting, and no one's around.	d
Either the heel slips on ice, or the earth itself	c
is becoming round under the heel.	d
And in my throat where there's supposed to be laughter	e
or speech or hot tea	f
ever more clearly resounds the snow	e
and, like a kind of Sedov, looms the black "farewell."	f
Sever kroshit metall, no shchadit steklo.	a
Uchit gortan' progovorit' "vpusti".	b
Kholod menia vospital i vlozhil pero enj.	a

v pal'tsy, chtob ikh sogret' v gorst**í**.		b
Zamerzaya, ya vizhu, kak za moriá	enj.	c
solntse saditsia, i nikogo krug**ó**m.		d
To li po l'du kabluk skol'zit, to li sama zemly**á**	enj.	c
zakrugliayetsia pod kablukóm.		d
I v gortani moyei, gde polozhen sm**é**kh		e
ili rech', ili goryachiy ch**á**i,		f
vsio otchotlivei razdayotsia sn**é**g		e
i cherneet, chto tvoi Sedov, "proshch**á**i".		f

In the last poem to be discussed, 'The North buckles metal', the poem's metre seems to have been less of a problem for a translator than was the case with the poem 'From nowhere with love'. Here the translator had before him a Russian poem written in a relatively regular form of tonic verse (*dolnik* or rather *taktovik*[528] with a tendency towards dactyl – a poetic metre for which it does not seem altogether impossible to find an equivalent among the traditional forms of English folk versification). As mentioned before, the poem had other and by that not necessarily less prominent obstacles on the way of a translator.

When Pushkin wrote in the opening stanzas of *Eugene Onegin* "but harmful is the North to me"[529] this was an ironic semi-veiled reference to his exile from Saint Petersburg ('the North') to Bessarabia. Similarly the word 'North' at the opening of the Brodsky poem under discussion brings up an immediate association with the exile of its author. In contradistinction to his great predecessor, Brodsky's exile was not from the North to the South, but from a relative North (Leningrad) to the farthermost one: in 1964 Brodsky had to leave his native Leningrad to serve his sentence of five years of hard labour on a collective farm near the White Sea 'in the small village [Norenskaya] lost among swamps and forests, near the polar circle'.[530]

In the poem Brodsky makes, as we said, allusions to his Northern confinement, but it is clear that he does so neither in order to emphasize its penitentiary character, nor to make a meal of the degree of injustice he had suffered there. Such an approach, as I mentioned in Chapter Five, Brodsky considered to be lethal for literature. On the contrary, his assertion that

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[528] *Dolnik* is a variety of tonic verse wherein the number of unaccented syllables between ictuses varies from 1 to 2 syllables; *taktovik* allows for a greater variety of unstressed intervals between the ictuses: from 1 to 3 or from 0 to 2. See also Georgi A. Shengeli. *Tekhnika stikha* [Verse technique] (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatelstvo Khudozhestvennoi Literatury, 1960).
[529] Pushkin, Aleksandr. *Eugene Onegin*, Translated from the Russian with a commentary, by Vladimir Nabokov, (NY: Bollingen, 1964), p. 96.
[530] Brodsky, "To Please a Shadow", *Less than one*, p. 361.

the North had raised him and that the emergence of his artistic vocation itself is attributed to it contains more than a grain of gratitude ('The cold educated me and put a pen/ into my fingers'). This can be, of course, interpreted as a kind of variation on the Nietzsche's famous, "what does not kill me makes me stronger."[531] Such an interpretation, however, cannot be made without great reservation, for Brodsky was the first to maintain scepticism about any theories implying beneficial effects of suffering upon an artist:

> It's an abominable fallacy that suffering makes for greater art. Suffering blinds, deafens, ruins, and often kills. Osip Mandelstam was a great poet *before* the revolution. So was Anna Akhmatova, so was Marina Tsvetaeva. They would have become what they became even if none of the historical events that befell Russia in this century had taken place: because they were *gifted*. Basically, talent doesn't need history.[532]

How should we then account for this association between the harsh experiences of cold with the emergence of poetical vocation? A hint towards a possible explication comes from Auden, namely from his sonnet 'Rimbaud':

> The nights, the railway-arches, the bad sky,
> His horrible companions did not know it;
> But in that child the rhetorician's lie
> Burst like a pipe: the cold had made a poet.[533]

Looking first at the quatrain above we discover a sophisticated metaphysical conceit which extends, quite in the manner of Donne a parallel between an abstract idea and a visual image of a physical phenomenon. In this metaphysical conceit of Auden the abstract idea that the existential experience of cold and deprivation which young Rimbaud had suffered during his flights from home to Paris had rendered him immune to the false rhetoric of the Parisian symbolist salons is conveyed with the help of the visual image of a radiator which goes bust in the winter when the water freezes inside.

Oddly enough many Russian readers might find themselves to be particularly well equipped to appreciate what might otherwise seem a slightly mind-boggling metaphysical conceit due to their unfortunate familiarity with radiators bursting in the dead of winter. (Hot water in the country used to be, and still is in the most parts, produced in central locations and

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[531] "Was mich nicht umbringt, macht mich stärker." (Götzendämmerung. Aus der Kriegsschule des Lebens).
[532] Brodsky, Nadezhda Mandelstam's obituary, *Less Than One*, p. 153.
[533] W.H., Auden, *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957*. (London: Faber&Faber, 1969), p. 126.

then pumped into apartment blocks through miles of leaky, unlagged metal pipes). Because of this slightly 'nostalgic' imagery alone this poem must have been particularly dear to Brodsky and it is quite possible that he had Auden's 'Rimbaud' in mind as he was writing the poem of his own.

As direct influences are very difficult to trace in literature – one is influenced by everything one reads, as has been mentioned earlier in the Chapter Seven – we will refrain from trying to prove here this barely provable point. Still one cannot help noticing the underlying similarity between Auden's 'the cold had made a poet' and Brodsky's 'The cold raised me and put a pen/ into my fingers' – a similarity which lies in the association both the figures establish between cold, as a form of a harsh existential experience, on the one hand, and truth, on the other. And truth in poetic language means by extension poetry – poetry being truth's main repository.[534]

This connection between truth and any kind of extreme suffering had been stated again by Auden in the final speech of Alonso to Ferdinand in "The Sea and the Mirror" (a poem which left Brodsky in raptures)[535]:

> But should you fail to keep your kingdom
> And, like your father before you, come
> Where thought accuses and feeling mocks,
> Believe your pain . . . [536]

By this token, as suggested in the poem above, the actual meeting ground between suffering and truth is based upon the property of suffering to speak to us in the most authentic of languages: suffering as it were tunes poet's ear in to truth like a tuning-fork.

Whatever might be the exact origins of this, let us call it for want of a less inflated epithet, a 'metaphysical' connection between cold and truth, alias poetry, which became one of the authentic *leitmotivs* in Brodsky's poetry. Here are a couple of the most characteristic examples:

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[534] 'One of the last modernists, Vladimir Nabokov, wrote that art is "a game of intricate enchantment and deception." Auden wrote that "In so far as poetry, or any of the arts, can be said to have an ulterior purpose, it is, by telling the truth, to disenchant and disintoxicate.' Quoted in Edward Mendelson. *Later Auden*. (London: Faber & Faber, 1999) p. XVII.
[535] See also Brodsky, 'To Please a Shadow,' *Less Than One*, p. 372.
[536] W.H. Auden, 'Alonso' from 'The Sea and The Mirror,' *Selected poems* (new edition), E. Mendelson (ed.) (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 143.

For me, other latitudes have no usage.
I am skewered by cold like a grilled-goose portion.
….
The North is the honest thing. For it keeps repeating
all your life the same stuff …
(*"Eclogue IV: Winter")* (Italics mine, Z.I.)

and
… prefer blue eyes to brown eyes[537] …

…For at your last instant it's
better to stare at that which, though *cold, permits seeing through*: *ice may crack, yet wallowing in an ice hole is far better than in honey-like, viscous lies*.
("An Admonition") (Italics mine, Z.I.)

Returning to the poem 'The North buckles…' one might also mention here a long tradition of romanticization of the North by the Russian intelligentsia which goes back to the poems from Finland by Baratynsky as well as to the banishments of the *Decembrists* in the early nineteenth century. The North, which Brodsky encountered in his confinement and which he had besides already known from the geological expeditions of his early years, was less romantic, but not less true for that matter:

> … it was not exactly the type of the North which is usually described in literature and art and which is so much adored by the Russian intelligentsia. In return it was an authentic one.[538] (*Translated by Z.I.*)

The opening line of the poem contains a metaphysical conceit ('The North crumbles metal but spares glass') which draws a parallel between a scientific phenomenon (different molecular structures of two materials: a well structured metal vs. relatively amorphous glass) and a popular belief about the North, actually a common place. According to this belief, people, who can conform with the rules of society and with the help of their assertive qualities gain success in it, often break down in the North; vice versa, people seemingly too fragile to succeed in everyday life – especially due to their honesty and transparency ('glass') – are believed to prove fitter to withstand its challenges.

It seems to me that by recurring to a common place – which by definition always verges on bad taste – as an opening for the poem Brodsky killed two birds with one stone. On the one hand, he introduced the theme of the North without directly mentioning its

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[537] 'Blue' or 'grey' eyes was Brodsky's recurrent metaphor of the virtues of the North: 'virtues of the North: the proximity to an absolute, resolve, reserve, the spirit of responsibility, grey eye.' Quoted from Brodsky, 'Learning English', Box 12 Fld16.
[538] Volkov, *Dialogi*, p. 81.

penitentiary associations for himself; on the other, he managed to play down, what he would have called himself, the 'upward gravity' of the main statement of the poem: 'The cold educated me and put a pen/ into my fingers'.

The next line '[The North] Teaches the throat how to utter "let me in"'– brings us back to the title of the collection the throat being 'a part of speech', or better said, its main organ.

Having to survive in harsh conditions means a greater dependence on others; this in its turn means swallowing one's pride. In the case of a poet, his 'organ of speech' is notably the lyre, which is why the sentence might otherwise read: 'the North has imposed humility on my lyre'. ('Humility', said Brodsky 'is never chosen.'[539]).

Stanza I: Weissbort's translation

Now let us have a look at Weissbort's rendition of the first stanza of the poem:

The North crushes metal but leaves glass intact,
teaches the throat to utter: Let me in!
The cold raised me and placed in my hand
a pen to warm my clenched fist.

The rhyming pattern of the original was the alternating strong masculine rhymes *abab cdcd efef*; Weissbort used in his translation what he had himself described as a 'kind of oblique or half and quarter rhyming': *intact – hand; in – fist*. As we have seen before, such a poetic technique did not seem sufficient for Brodsky – it lacked, as he argued in a letter to Weissbort, 'that element (or device) which creates the sense of inevitability of the statement'[540]. Therefore we can imagine that Brodsky would try to improve the rhyme situation there. Leaving, however, the rhymes aside for the time being, let us address a more serious semantic problem existing in the Weissbort's translation of the first stanza – namely, the image of the last too lines 'placed in my hand/ a pen to warm my clenched fist.'

Poetry writing has been sometimes associated with 'warmth emissions'. The most famous example in Russian poetry with particularly hot emissions is from the poem 'Prorok' ('Prophet') by Pushkin, whose last line runs: 'You should scorch with a word the hearts of men' (*Z.I.*) ('Glagolom zhgi serdtsa l'udei'). Brodsky's metaphor for poetry writing ('put a pen/ into my fingers, to warm them in the cup of the hand' (*Z.I.*)) is of a quite different order

[539] Brodsky, 'To Please a Shadow', *Less than one*, p. 364.
[540] Brodsky, 'Letter to Weissbort,' (Dec. 3, 1979), Beinecke.

than the one by Pushkin. Brodsky's metaphor is completely anti-heroic. Far from stressing any effects poetry might produce on others, it shows, very much in line with Auden's famous statement that 'poetry makes nothing happen,' the existential character of poetry writing for the poet. He needs it to obtain some warmth in an existentially very cold environment; he ultimately needs it to survive.

Indeed there is a huge historical gap between the times of Pushkin when poetry still belonged, at least partly, to the public domain and the twentieth century with all its horrors of mass murder. Preservation of warmth is the task of a person in the North; preservation of one's soul is the task of a human being in a totalitarian state. Poetry remaining one of the few means which could help to cope with this Herculean task assumed an existential role. Preservation of one's own soul is a far less ambitious plan as compared to Pushkin's 'to scorch the hearts of men.' This also explains why Brodsky time and again protested against politicized interpretations of his poetry and stressed his private position (in his Nobel Lecture Brodsky described himself as "… someone rather private … someone who all his life has preferred his private condition to any role of social significance")[541]. Remarkably enough Auden identified this quality in Brodsky even after a cursory reading of the *Selected Poems* for he wrote in the introduction: 'Unlike the work of some of his contemporaries, Mr. Brodsky's seems to stand outside what might be called the Mayakovsky tradition of "public" poetry. It never uses a fortissimo.' [542]

These seemed to me to be the reasons why it would have been impossible for Brodsky to accept the heroically 'clenched fist' in the Weissbort's translation and the stanza had to be revised even independently from the question of the rhymes.

And yet it is also clear why Weissbort came up with this image: the Russian word 'gorst´', which means 'a handful', but also 'a cup of hand', has no direct equivalent in English – so a 'clenched fist' seemed to come in handy. Brodsky found a different solution.

Stanza I: Brodsky's version

The North buckles metal, glass it won't harm;
teaches the throat to say, "Let me in."
I was raised by the cold that, to warm my palm,

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[541] Joseph Brodsky. 'Uncommon Visage' (The Nobel Lecture), *On Grief and Reason*, p. 44: "… someone rather private, for someone who all his life has preferred his private condition to any role of social significance
[542] W.H. Auden, *Foreword* to *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*., pp. 9-11.

gathered my fingers around a pen.

As can been seen from above, Brodsky used here the paraphrases of the figure concisely rendered by the Russian word 'gorst´' and at the same time came up with a precise rhyming couple 'harm – palm'.

	Brodsky's Russian version	Weissbort:	Brodsky definite English version:
a	**Let me in** – cup of hand (**palm)** *vpustí – gorstí*	**(Let me) in** – fist	**(Let me) in – pen**
b	glass – **pen** *stekló – peró*	intact – hand	harm – **palm**

Here as elsewhere we see that Brodsky managed to rhyme in his English version three out of four words which rhyme in the original, even if some words in the English translation make part of a different rhyming couple: 'let me **in** – **pen'**, 'harm – **palm'**.

Stanza II: Weissbort

Let us move now to the next stanza – first the Weissbort's version:

Freezing, I see the sun going down
over the sea, and no one about.
Either the heel slips on ice, or the earth itself
arches underneath the foot.

In this translation of the second stanza by Weissbort the rhymes are even 'weaker' than they were in his translation of the first one: *down – itself, about – foot*. On the other hand, it must be said that euphonically speaking Weissbort succeeds in creating some assonance which reflects to quite a degree the sound repetitions which were characteristic of the original poem:

> Fr*ee***z**ing – **s***ee* – **s**un – **s***ea* - h*ee*l – ***s*lip*s*** – i**c**e – it**sel**f – vowel harmony with long 'e' and consonantal harmony with combinations of voiced and voiceless 's' and the liquid 'l'.

If we consider again the original we will find and interesting pattern of consonantal repetitions there:

Za**mer**zaya, ya vizhu, kak **z**a **mor**iá (z m r-z m r)
soln**ts**e **s**adi**ts**ia, i ni**k**o**g**o **k**ru**gó**m. (s-ts; s-ts); (kg-kg)
To **l**i **p**o **l'd**u **k**a**bl**u**k** s**k**o**l'**zi**t**, **t**o **l**i **s**a*m*a **ze***m***ly**á (tl-tl;lk-lk-kl;**pdk**;blk;lzt-tlz;lz-zl;*lm*–ml)
za**kr**ugl**i**aye**ts**ia **p**o**d** **k**a**bl**u**kó***m*. (zl; kl-lk; **pdk**; *lm*; blk)

As we see the second stanza of the poem is particularly rich in consonantal repetitions.

It has been shown already by Osip Brik, one of the most influential Russian investigators into the theory of poetic language of the second and third decades of the twentieth century,[543] who had successfully devised a method of terming, defining and classifying the repetitions of consonantal groups, that the principles of distribution of sound repetitions typical of the poetic speech are very closely linked with the problematic of 'the relation of the sound structure of the verse to its rhythm and imagery.' [544] This Brik's discovery that the phonic and semantic levels of language intersect in these poetic devices laid the basis among others for Zhirmunsky's theory of 'metrical task.'

Stanza II: Brodsky

Let us now see how Brodsky in his revision of Weissbort's translation of the second stanza took up and further elaborated the sound repetitions which had been introduced into the English version by the translator:

Fr**ee**z**i**ng, I **s**ee the **r**ed **s**un tha**t** **s**e**ts**	(rz – rs; ts – ts)
behind ocean**s**, and there i**s** no **s**oul enj.	([z] **-** [z]; s – enj. – s)
in **s**ight. Either my hee**l** s**l**i**p**s on ice, or the g**l**o**b**e it**s**e**l**f	**(lp-lb** sl – sl**)**
arches shar**pl**y under my **s**o**l**e.	(**pl**; sl)

First of all we find here two sets of rhymes which are more precise than we saw in Weissbort's translation: c. an assonance 'sets' – 'itself' and d. 'soul' – 'sole' – an homonymic rhyme. The expression '***s***un tha***t*** ***se*****t*****s***', which contains a rhyming word 'sets' comes directly from the original (**'s**oln**ts**e **s**adi**ts**ia'). An English grammar book would suggest here a progressive tense – 'setting'; luckily poetry has its own devices and 'sets' seems to work here just as well as 'sit' worked in the famous opening line of the poem 'September, 1, 1939' by Auden: 'I sit in one of the dives on fifty second street'.

	Brodsky's Russian version	Weissbort:	Brodsky definite English version:
c	behind the seas – earth *za moriá – zemliá*	(going) down – itself	sets – itself
d	(no one) around – (under my) heel *krugóm – kablukóm*	(no one) about – foot	(no) soul – (under my) sole

Differing from the translation of the first stanza there are no words in the rhyming position here which would be semantically the same words in English as they were in the

[543] See also Jakobson, Roman. 'Postscript to *Two Essays on Poetic Language* by Osip Maksimovic Brik' (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1964) pp. 77-81.
[544] Osip Maksimovic Brik, *Two Essays on Poetic Language*, (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1964) p. 25. Original quote runs as follows: «...принципы ритмического и логического расположения затрагивают вопросы об отношении звуковой структуры стиха к ритму и к образу...».

original poem in Russian. What we have here instead are three words which were not present in the original and whose main role here is to recreate the same interplay of meaning and sound as it existed in the original. For instance, the epithet 'red' seems to have been introduced into the English version of the poem exclusively out of euphonic reasons: 'F***r***ee***z***ing – ***r***ed ***s***un' was meant to produce, in my view, a sonic equivalent of: '***Z***ame***rz***aya – ***z***a **m**o***r***iá'. The same goes for '*g**l**o**b**e', 'shar*p**l**y*' and '**s***l**i**p***s**'* which are meant to reproduce on an English palate the same slippery-stumbling effect which '**p**o **l'd**u **k**a**bl**u**k'** and **'z**a**kr**ug**l**iaye**ts**ia **p**o**d k**a**bl**u**kó**m' produce on a Russian one.

Here as elsewhere we encounter Brodsky's ability astonishing as a non-native speaker to come up with assonance, consonance and alliterations in his English self-translations, which if not surpass, at least match his originals in the quality of euphonic-semantic connections. The presence of an 'ear for English' can hardly be denied Brodsky, if one only considering the example above.

Interesting from the semantic point of view is the plural form in the original "za moryami" ('beyond the seas'), which Weissbort rendered as singular ('over the sea') and Brodsky restored as plural ('behind oceans'). These 'seas' in plural convey in the original the sense of an insurmountable distance which separated the author from the rest of the world. As the result the rest of the world seemed to have shrunk to a slippery ball underneath the main protagonist thus completing the image of absolute loneliness.

Stanza III: Weissbort

Let us move to the next stanza first in Weissbort's rendition:

> And in my throat, where laughter, or speech,
> or hot tea is the norm,
> the falling snow rings clear and your "farewell"
> is dark as Scott wrapped in a polar storm.

In the version above we have one set of precise rhymes ('norm' – 'storm') which, as we will see, withstood the author's correcting pen; in return the words of the second rhyming couple did not rhyme at all ('speech' – "farwell") (yet one can still detect here an intended internal vowel assonance between 'speech' and 'tea' as well as between 'snow' and the rhyming couple 'norm' – 'storm').

As far as the Russian version of this stanza is concerned, the word 'magical' seems to me to be the most appropriate epithet to describe the first rhyming couple 'smekh' – 'sneg'

(laughter – snow). First of all it is completely unexpected by the reader that the verb 'razdayi**ó**tsia' (resounds) should be followed by the word 'snow', even though each Northerner is, of course, familiar with the crunching sound of the fresh snow under one's feet. Because of the rhyme with 'smekh' (laughter) one is tempted to pronounce the hard sound 'g' in the word 'sneg' (snow) as 'kh' (which corresponds to a more colloquial pronouncing variety of this word). Thus the rhyme manages to evoke quite realistically the double surprise of a foot treading upon the snow: the physical surprise of the foot sinking deep in what looks from outside as an even and solid surface (conveyed through the passage from hard 'g' to soft 'kh' in 'sneg'); and an acoustic surprise (achieved by the verb 'resounds') from the unexpectedly loud screeching sound with which this deepening is accompanied. Needless to say that there was no 'falling snow' in the original, which emerged in Weissbort's version.

Stanza III: Brodsky

Let us now confront the version of the last stanza revised by the author:

And in my throat, where a boring tale	enj.	(asson.)
or tea, or laughter should be the norm,		b
snow grows all the louder and "Farwell!"		(asson.)
darkens like Scott wrapped in a polar storm.		b

	Brodsky's Russian version	Weissbort:	Brodsky definite English version:
e	laughter – snow *smekh – sneg*	speech – **farwell**	Tale – **farwell**
f	tea – **farwell** *chai – proshchai*	norm – storm	Norm – storm

The translation of the last stanza, as can be seen, suffered the least amount of changes by the hand of the author. The translator had the right insight attributing to the word 'farwell' – the last word and the last rhyme in the Russian poem– an appropriate degree of respect (most probably the author would have wished to have it as a rhyming word in English also). Brodsky also seemed to be satisfied with the second of the rhyme clusters Weissbort had come up with ('norm' – 'storm'); the same went for the substitution of 'Scott' for 'Sedov'. As opposed to the adherents of certain translating schools which tend to preserve exotic details as a part of 'local colour', Brodsky tried instead to avoid any additional complications of his English language readers' task. For, what is supposed to transpire in the translation after all

was said and done, as indicated by Auden, is not the exotics, but rather 'the uniqueness and, at the same time, universal relevance of a poet's vision.'[545]

In that respect, Weissbort seemed to have caught the drift here: what mattered in the stanza above was the image of a Polar explorer trapped in a snowy and icy wasteland and not whether he was a Russian hero or an English one; or whether it was the North or the South Pole that he explored.

It seems important to note that as far as the hero-worship was concerned, even the Polar explorers had not remained untarnished by Soviet ideology, which just like its Nazi German totalitarian counterpart, exulted all sorts of self-sacrifice and expected heroic deeds from its citizens. One might also recall here the famous phrase by Venedikt Erofeev: 'I'd agree to live on earth eternally, if first I was shown a corner where there is not always a place for an heroic deed.'[546] (*Trans. Z.I.*) The same idea is also echoed by Brodsky himself: "anti-heroic posture was the *idée fixe* of our generation."[547] It must be said, however, that Sedov was a less compromised figure than let us say, Puganin or Chkalov.

In the first line Brodsky introduces the expression 'a boring tale' not only for the sake of a euphonically better assonance with 'Farwell!' ('tale' – 'farwell'); 'speech' in English has a more public connotation, whereas what the lyrical hero was recalling in his northern exile was an extremely private 'podium' for the Russian intelligentsia: the famous 'kitchen' at somebody's place in the lyrical hero's hometown.

'North buckles metal': lost in translation

Loss in translation is inevitable – much remains left out after the interventions of the translators whether left on their own, or checked by the guiding hand of the author ever anxious to diminish the damage as much as possible. The figure from the last line of the original version of the poem in question – literally meaning '"farwell" blackens in the manner of Sedov' – is the proof of inevitability of such 'collateral damage' or loss, which is why I thought it worth a short discussion below.

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[545] Auden. 'Foreword' to *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*, pp. 9-11.
[546] Venidikt Erofeev, *Moskva Petushki*, p. 21: «Я согласился бы жить на земле целую вечность, если бы прежде мне показали уголок, где не всегда есть место подвигу».
[547] Brodsky, 'To Please a Shadow,' p. 367.

Brodsky had not only a special attitude towards words (which will, of course, be true of any poet), but also towards letters of the alphabet (not only Cyrillic) as well as sounds which they stand for. Before giving here any examples from his poems I would like to quote from Brodsky's unpublished letter to a Swedish publisher in which he put into a nutshell his conception of letters: "…no matter how much the species might mutate, in the end it is bound to revert to a letter, and not to an image, because a letter in itself is an ideogram of an image."[548] As it follows from the quotation above, a letter for Brodsky was itself more than anything else originally a figure. That this was really so can be seen on the scores of examples from his poetry. Here just some of them:

> often, in some common word, the unwitting pen
> strays into drawing – while tackling an
> "M" – some eyebrows
> ...
> A traffic policeman briskly
> throws his hand in the air like a letter X.
> ("December in Florence")

> Of six-legged letters,
> your printed betters,
>
> your splayed Cyrillic echoes, often
> spotted by you in days gone by on open
> book pages
> ("Fly")

In the poem *Fly* above we are dealing with as many as two 'ideograms' at once: that of a fly as well as the one of a Cyrillic letter "ж" ("six-legged-letter") which corresponds to the sound „zh" in English.

Another example of the sort can be found in Brodsky's late poem written directly in English called *Ab Ovo* in which the author creates his play on sounds and images based this time on some particularities of Italian phonetics – 'O' the main vowel of the word 'eggs' in Italian has the shape of the object it describes :[549]

> Ultimately, there should be a language
> in which the word "egg" is reduced to O
> entirely. The Italian comes the closest,
> naturally, with its *uova*.

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[548] Brodsky. 'Draft of a letter to Askold, a Swedish publisher,' Beinecke, Box 19 Fld 7.
[549] At the time of the poem's composition Brodsky was learning Italian. This information was obtained from Brodsky's widow Maria Sozzani on January 5, 2005 in Milano, Italy.

As we see Brodsky takes the same approach to the sounds letters stand for. An example most pertinent to our discussion can be found in the poem "Laguna" ("Lagoon") in which the bright sound of a Russian vowel 'a' in the word 'proshch*à*i' (Farwell) is compared to a broad Venetian piazza; whereas the short, dark and closed sound of Russian 'u' in the word 'li*u*bli*ú*' (I love) is associated with Venice's famously narrow streets. This phonetic metaphor was thus rendered into English by Anthony Hecht in his translation of *Lagoon*:

> … a broad "So long!" like the wide piazza's space,
> … a cramped "I love," like the narrow alleyways
> (*Lagoon*)

Turning back to the last line of the poem 'The North buckles metal', we will discover in the Russian version, "'Farwell' blackens in the manner of Sedov," (*Z.I.*) yet another, albeit different, metaphor for the vowel 'a' in the word 'proshch*à*i' (Farwell). Uttering of this stressed vowel in Russian presupposes a maximum opening of the oral cavity. Thus the figure one is supposed to imagine is that of the opened mouth of the main protagonist which blackens against the background of the 'snow-white' desert behind him. This is the ultimate illustration in the poem of the fact that the North radically challenges our habitual perceptions about the world – it might seem paradoxical, but the snow 'resounds' there, whereas a sound 'blackens'.

Conclusions

On the basis of the undertaken analysis of the translational materials of the poem 'The North buckles metal' one can make the following conclusions:

1. Content, semantics, tonality

Because of the specificity of the poem on the semantic level – its dealing with realities very remote to the one's habitually described in the target language – the author's intervention proved to be crucial. In the course of the translation of the poem in question one can observe how the translator Weissbort, lacking the experience of the realities described in the poem, often fails to convey the delicate shades of meaning. Brodsky, on the other hand, restored the correct tonality of several lines of the translation in English. As the author he knew that the poem's *intentio* was not only a reference to specific realities, which get lost in translation, but also a display of poet's position towards them: his intentional reserve and understatement, his refusal to use 'fortissimo'.

In the course of the translation of the poem in question one can observe how the translator Weissbort often misses to convey the delicate shades of meaning and the tonality and how the author-translator restores them in English. In some parts of the poem the author revising the poem performs masterpieces of re-embodiment finding in English alliterations and consonance which are intimately interwoven with the semantics of the poem and which produce effects similar to their equivalents in the original.

2. Rhymes

As we saw in Chapter Six in his epistolary discussion over translation with Weissbort, Brodsky argued that the former's slant rhymes did not produce the desired effect of 'inevitability' of the poetical statement. Indeed Brodsky's own tactics in his reworkings of Weissbort's translation was to find more precise or 'strong' rhymes. We could also notice the same tendency of Brodsky to try to rhyme occasionally semantically identical words in English to those which rhymed in the original, as was pointed out in Chapter Seven.

3. Assonance, consonance, alliterations

As with the example of the translation of the poem 'A second Christmas by the shore' we can again observe that Brodsky chooses certain parts of his translations, in which to try to achieve the maximum effect of what Derek Walcott referred to as 'simultaneity of assonances.'[550] In the case of the poem 'The North buckles metal' that was the second stanza. The poem 'The North buckles metal' represents an example of how Brodsky sometimes managed to 'deliver' the poem's music from Russian into English. Such instances alone, in which Brodsky demonstrated an amazing dexterity to produce in English onomatopoeic effects equivalent to his originals are enough to discredit the claims of his critics according to which Brodsky lacked an 'ear' for English.

4. Verse metre

Brodsky's translation of the poem 'The North buckles metal' represents a case of a rhythmically felicitous translation. Its rhythm can no more stand the accusation of Russianness, than the translation version done by Weissbort. This proves that in some rare cases the metrical contrasts between Russian and English did not stand on the way of the author-translator and did not markedly influence the rhythmical outcome of the

[550] Walcott. 'Magic Industry,' p. 2.

translations. Arguably such almost impeccably English sounding translational experiments paved the way to the composition by Brodsky of original verse in the language. These merit additional discussion, which is bound to remain beyond the scope of the present thesis.

Appendix

Translated by Weissbort:

The North crushes metal but leaves glass intact,
teaches the throat to utter: Let me in!
The cold raised me and placed in my hand
a pen to warm my clenched fist.

Freezing, I see the sun going down
over the sea, and no one about.
Either the hell slips on ice, or the earth itself
arches underneath the foot.

And in my throat, where laughter, or speech,
or hot tea is the norm,
the falling snow rings clear and your "farewell"
is dark as Scott wrapped in a polar storm.

Brodsky 1st revision:

The North crushes metal, spares glass; its calm
plea "Let me in" smoothes the throats of men.
The cold brought me up, and to warm my palm
gathered my fingers around a pen.

Freezing, I see the red sun that sets
beyond the seas, and there is no soul
in sight. Either my heel slips on ice, or the globe itself
arches sharply under my sole.

And in my throat where a boring tale
or tea, or laughter should be the norm,
snow sounds out ever clearer, and "farewell"
darkens like Scott wrapped in a polar storm.

Brodsky's Final version:

The North buckles metal, glass it won't harm;
teaches the throat to say, "Let me in."

I was raised by the cold that, to warm my palm,
gathered my fingers around a pen.

Freezing, I see the red sun that sets
behind oceans, and there is no soul
in sight. Either my heel slips on ice, or the globe itself
arches sharply under my sole.

And in my throat, where a boring tale
or tea, or laughter should be the norm,
snow grows all the louder and "Farwell!"
darkens like Scott wrapped in a polar storm.

Original poem in Russian from «Часть Речи»:

Север крошит металл, но щадит стекло.
Учит гортань проговорить «впусти».
Холод меня воспитал и вложил перо
В пальцы, чтоб их согреть в горсти.

Замерзая, я вижу, как за моря
солнце садится, и никого кругом.
То ли по льду каблук скользит, то ли сама земля
закругляется под каблуком.

И в гортани моей, где положен смех,
или речь, или горячий чай,
все отчетливей раздается снег
и чернеет, что твой Седов, «прощай».[551]

[551] Brodskii. *Stikhotvorenia. Poemy*, pp. 425-426.

Conclusions

> No great artist ever sees things as they really are;
> if he did, he would cease to be an artist. (Oscar Wilde).

Brodsky believed in formal translation. It was the legacy of the Russian tradition of mimetic translation, which has become the main practice of poetry translation in the country since it was first successfully applied by Pushkin in the first third of the nineteenth century. Brodsky, an heir of the St. Petersburg *Acmeist* school, believed that form plays as vital a role in poetry as content, especially when it comes to the verse of certain poets for whom poetic form served as an essential compositional principle. In translation of such poets, he believed that the formal structure of the original, such as rhyme verse metre and stanzaic design should be preserved above all. While still living in the USSR, Brodsky stuck to these translation principles in his practices of translating from English and other languages into Russian. His task of achieving these mimetic translations into Russian was facilitated not only by his talent as a poetry translator, but also, more importantly, by the properties of the language itself. As a highly inflected polysyllabic language with great possibilities for rhyme forms, and with the tradition of formal verse writing still in vigour, Russian lent itself particularly well to the endeavor of mimetic translation.

After his expulsion from the USSR in 1972 Brodsky found himself suddenly at the centre of American literary life. In his new role as unacknowledged ambassador of Russian poetry in America, Brodsky naturally enough expressed himself on the existent English translations of his Russian poetic predecessors Akhmatova and Mandelstam. Brodsky maintained that English translations of these poets should convey as many of the formal qualities of the original verse as possible**.** He made this assertion in spite of existing Russian-English contrasts in terms of purely linguistic possibilities, as well as in terms of prosodic traditions with regard to the formal verse. (The gist of these contrasts is that whereas in Russian the so called ‘classical’ syllabo-tonic verse metres were still relevant even in the second half of the twentieth century, *verse libre* had long become in English ‘an instrument of our time’; the rhyme stock of English is considerably scarcer than that of the inflected Russian and the use of the feminine rhymes is rare in English and bears comic connotations.)

Soon, translation of his own verse into English became a matter of Brodsky’s professional career as an American poet. Supervising the translations of his verse from Russian into English by other translators, Brodsky set to adjust them in line with his idea that

the metrical structure of the original should be preserved above all in translation. This practice of revisions was not well received by many of his co-translators and met with harsh attacks by his critics, many of whom claimed that in reworking the translations done by others, Brodsky infringed upon the rules of English grammar and prosody, and that his self-translations did not sound at all right in English. Despite these criticisms Brodsky persisted in applying his own methods of translation, relying gradually less and less on collaboration with other co-translators. Eventually Brodsky became his own self-translator.

In the present thesis I set out to investigate Brodsky's translating methods with the idea of trying to assign them a place within both English literature as well as within the practice of poetical translation into the language. I began my detailed textual analysis of Brodsky's exact translational procedures by investigating the translational materials pertaining to the poem 'A second Christmas by the shore' – materials exemplary in more than one respect.

Brodsky started out as a 'classicist' and ended his career as a great prosodic innovator in his mother tongue. The poem in question is one of the last poems he wrote in a traditional syllabo-tonic verse metre, iambic pentameter. George L. Kline was one of the few co-translators who shared Brodsky's idea of mimetic translation. In his first translation drafts of the poem, Kline rendered it in iambic pentameter, which both reproduced the verse metre of the original poem and, notably, represented the most 'classical' of the verse metres of English poetic tradition. And yet my analysis revealed that in his revisions of Kline's translating drafts Brodsky 'adjusted' the poem's metre, introducing into it tetrametric and even trimetric lines.

Basing my inquiry on the prosodic and translational theory of Zhirmunsky, and in particular, on his theoretical distinction between the concepts of *metre* and *rhyme*, it became possible to explain the mechanisms behind Brodsky's reworkings of the poem. Far from looking for *metrical* equivalents for his originals – something which Brodsky had postulated in his theoretical pronouncements on translation of Russian formal verse – the poet tended to deliver into English their *rhythmical* structure. This can be illuminated by Zhirmunsky's assertion that poems with the same metrical structure in two different languages will inevitably have different rhythmical realisations, depending on the concrete phonetic properties of the respective living languages. In case of iambic pentameter, typical deviation from this metre in Russian is manifested in the omissions of stresses in the positions which are prescribed to be stressed according to the metrical structure of a poem; in English the

tendency is the opposite – English pentameters display the presence of additional, or 'hypermetrical' stresses.

My hypothesis that Brodsky in his English translations was ultimately seeking the rhythm (with all its Russian peculiarities) and not the English equivalent of the verse's metrical structure is confirmed by Brodsky's poetry readings. Reading translations of his poems in English, Brodsky tended to omit stresses on semantically loaded words – a practice which comes into conflict with English phonetic habits. Moreover, Brodsky's tendency to preserve the rhyme pattern caused him to introduce many feminine rhymes into his English self-translations. While use of feminine rhymes is natural in serious poetry in Russian, they 'are almost unheard of in English,'[552] where they are generally associated with comic verse.

Thus I could conclude that as the result of recasting of the translation versions by his co-translators, Brodsky was introducing into English foreignising elements on the level of both rhythm and rhyme.

At the same time, however, what has not been mentioned before by any other researcher became evident on the basis of Zhirmunsky's theory of 'metrical task. As it turned out, for Brodsky both the metrical scheme with the Russianising rhythmical elements and the feminine rhyme he applied in his recastings of the translations functioned as authentic compositional principles in English. The poet subjugated to their dictates all other aspects of the lexical material. The textual analysis showed that in his translations, Brodsky achieved what Walcott describes as 'simultaneity of assonances'[553] – Brodsky created in his English translations harmonies working as authentically euphonic mechanisms in English.

Through the application of textual analysis, it became clear that Brodsky's reworkings of the translations brought them closer to the originals in terms of content. Many shades of meanings (metaphorical vs. literal), tonalities, various registers of speech became more palatable. This faithfulness to the original content is akin to the mimetic principles of the Russian translating school established Pushkin. Another trait of his translations that links him to this tradition is his freedom in changing his own original metaphors, images, similies and puns. Arguably, this seems to be one of the principle factors in promoting his translations to the status of independent texts in English.

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[552] Kjellberg, 'Letter to translators,' Beinecke, Box 28 Fld 32.
[553] Walcott, Derek. 'Magic Industry', p. 2.

In addition, Brodsky's rhymes, which demonstrably represented the main mechanism of his verse composition, were more exact than those proposed by his co-translators: they displayed metaphysical wit and often worked as independent puns in English. According to Brodsky's conception of rhyme as compositional principle, rhyme unravels secrete connections already existing in the language between disparate phenomena. Thus it becomes important that in the translation not only certain sounds are rhymed (e.g. masculine or feminine) but also that certain meanings rhyme as well. This position also sheds light on an interesting tendency of Brodsky's to rhyme semantically identical words in English with those which rhymed in the original. This would seem an impossible task, for the words with the same meaning rarely also sound similar in two languages as different as English and Russian. Brodsky, however, repeatedly succeeded in finding such rhymes.

The combination of these phenomena produced a unique and curious effect. Seen from one angle, the presence of alliteration, assonance and consonance, as well as original metaphors, similes and puns in his English translations, partnered with the intelligence of Brodsky's rhymes in English place his self-translations into the category of authentic and independent texts of English verse. The bond between their form and content is as inseparable as it is in Brodsky's original Russian verse. These translations could not be easily 'fixed' or changed without breaking their harmony and music. On the other hand, this very harmony is based on compositional principles which are to considerable extent alien to English poetic tradition.

It is therefore not surprising that there has been no critical consensus about Brodsky's self-translations. Their 'un-English' quality lying on the surface has so far been the favourite and the easiest target for most of the critics.

Only a few have acknowledged the enormity of Brodsky's self-translating undertaking in view of the linguistic differences and divergent poetic traditions of two languages so dissimilar as Russian and English. These differences alone are bound to result in inevitable losses in translation between the two languages.

Derek Walcott:

> The agonies of transference from one language to another are incalculable…. A Russian poem cannot be transformed into the same poem in English as its clone

> replica. The page of the mirror held up to the original will only show deformities, those of the translator. [554]

Arguably the observation made by Auden about translation from Greek into English is just as valid for Russian:

> The aesthetic loss in translation from one language into another is always immense; in the case of languages and cultures as far apart as Greek and English, it becomes practically fatal; one can almost say that the better a translation is as English poetry, the less like Greek poetry it is (e.g., Pope's *Iliad*) and vice versa.[555]

As Brodsky showed in his review of translations of Akhmatova and Mandelstam, the more closely the translations sounded like contemporary verse in English, the less there remained in them of the original voice of the Russian poets. The loss of the formal qualities caused these formal poets to 'perish' in such translations. As we saw in Chapter Three, the preservation of the formal qualities of the original is a central element in Benjamin's theory of translation, echoes of which we perceive, albeit indirectly, in Brodsky's own practice of self-translation.

Brodsky as a living and self-translating author was first to be aware of the sacrifices one must face while translating poetry between such languages. In the Introduction to *A Part of Speech* Brodsky writes that he had revised the translations at the expense of their 'smoothness.' 'Smoothness' in his vocabulary has the worst of connotations when applied to a translation – it stands for that disastrous levelling which occurred in the translations of Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Tvetayeva, Pasternak and other Russians. Those few who were aware of this levelling acknowledged the merits of Brodsky's translations, which, at the least, managed to convey the uniqueness of his poetic voice. Derek Walcott understood Brodsky's position:

> Brodsky wishes the book to be read as English verse, not as translated Russian. This has its difficulties, its knots, but one is grateful that the knots are there, that the rough nap of the lines is not smoothed over by flatiron of an even English diction, that kind of fatal levelling that has so often made his compatriots, Pasternak and Tsvetayeva, and even as tough a poet as Mandelstam, acquire in translation the sheen and gloss of greeting cards. The kind of translation that turns Doctor Zhivago into Omar Sharif. [556]

It was only natural that Brodsky with his deep knowledge of English poetry would try to oppose this 'Omar Sharif-effect' in his own translations and thus opt for a lack of

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[554] Walcott, 'Unpublished draft of the essay 'Magic Industry', Brodsky Papers, Beinecke, Box 53 Fld 12, p. 3.
[555] Auden. *Forewords & Afterwords,* p. 5.
[556] Walcott, Derek. 'Magic Industry,' pp. 1-2.

'smoothness' in them. As to the 'knots' and 'difficulties' of his English self-translations mentioned by Walcott, there were other reasons besides just the existence of the Anglo-Russian poetic contrasts which made Brodsky less worried about them than some of his critics would have wished him to be.

One of these reasons was the intrinsic difficulty of Brodsky's original poetry, sometimes defined as philosophical or 'metaphysical.' As a young Russian poet Brodsky was very much influenced by the poetry of John Donne. In Brodsky's verse, as in that of Donne and of other (for lack of a better term) ,intellectual' poets, the peculiarities of rhythm are intrinsically linked with the artistic intentions and often reflect the complexities of the poet's thought. The reproaches of rhythmical eccentricity directed at Donne, Browning, Hopkins, etc. were leveled against Brodsky's originals to the same degree as against his English self-translations. It was this circumstance and not his 'deafness' in English which made Brodsky disregard the criticism of his English self-translation.

Another defense of Brodsky's against the discouragement of his English language critics was that he was known as one of the boldest innovators of the Russian verse. In the period following his emigration he abandoned the 'classical' syllabo-tonic verse forms and made an almost complete passage to 'tonic' or accentual verse *dolnik*. Mayakovsky and Tsvetayeva experimented extensively with this verse form at the beginning of the twentieth century. Brodsky took up their experiments and developed his own variety of the metre, *loose dolnik*. Some of his conservatively minded Russian readers found Brodsky's unconventional rhythms difficult. When similar accusations were levelled by his English language critics, Brodsky paradoxically enough must have been even more assured of the faithfulness of his self-translations to his originals

In Chapters Eight and Nine of the present thesis I have analysed the translations of two of Brodsky's poems written in *loose dolnik,* initially completed by Weissbort and subsequently changed by the author. Making recourse again to Zhirmunsky's prosodic theory, I can establish yet another reason why Brodsky disregarded the admonitions of English native speakers, some of his friends among them, about the inappropriateness of feminine rhymes in English with regard to his self-translations.

In his verse theory, Zhirmunsky demonstrates that for poems written in *dolnik,* rhyme represents the main structural device. and it is the rhymes that ultimately enable us to arrive at the rhythm. Rhymes are consequently the last pillar for our rhythmical sense when it comes to *dolnik*. As further shown by Zhirmunsky, such verse, if deprived of the rhymes, would loose

its equilibrium and turn, rhythmically speaking, into 'a heap of debris.' Brodsky, aiming at a mimetic translation in English, evidently preferred that his self-translations have unconventional connotations in English due to the presence of feminine rhymes in them, rather than that the slack rhymes proposed by his co-translator Weissbort cause them to lose their rhythmical structure altogether.

One of the questions which has puzzled many of Brodsky's scholars and critics is to understand the actual motivation behind Brodsky's active participation in his self-translations. In an epistolary row which ensued between Brodsky and his translator Weissbort over the translation of the cycle of poems 'A Part of Speech.' Brodsky repeatedly claimed that his main driving force in undertaking corrections to others' translation versions was his special attitude towards the English language and poetry – his almost obsessive love of it ('…his manifest love for English verse, which amounts almost to a possessiveness…' (Heaney).[557]) Such claims might sound paradoxical in light of the accusation of the 'un-Englishness' of Brodsky's self-translations, yet alongside with other previously undiscovered archival materials, they led me to conclude that these experiments of self-translation should be seen within a framework of what one might call Brodsky's much 'bigger plan'. This 'bigger plan' of Brodsky's was to exemplify, through his self-translations the possibilities and the advantages of formal verse as a compositional principle over free verse**.**

As early as in his first publication in the West, Brodsky expressed his idiosyncratic views on American poetry: his predilection for such poets as Wilbur, Auden, Frost, Viereck etc., – the remnants of a formal tradition in English language poetry, as opposed to the majority of more *en vogue* poets using *verse libre*. According to Brodsky's view, highly unpopular among Anglo-American literary circles, metre and rhyme were far better means to express the modern sensibility than free verse: '…a regular meter and exact rhymes shaping an uncomfortable thought are far more functional than any form of free verse.'[558] Brodsky thought it important to resist the urges of modernism, which in poetry manifested itself in a general deference to free verse as the means of poetical expression. His special attitude towards English culminated in his ambition to prove the still extant potential of formal poetic devices for the development of English language verse.

Behind Brodsky's great project there appears the example of the sudden and unexpected fruition which took place in Russian poetry between second half of the XVIII and

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[557] Heaney. 'Brodsky's Nobel: What the Applause Was All About', p. 18.
[558] Brodsky, 'On Richard Wilbur,' p. 12.

in the first decades of the XIX centuries. Chiefly through the practice of poetic translation carried out by Karamzin, Zhukovskii, Batyushkov and ultimately Pushkin, Russian literature was able to absorb the achievements of her elder German, French, English and Italian sisters and make an enormous jump forward, emerging for the first time in history as a world literature. Brodsky's love of English poetry, unprecedented in a non-native-speaking poet, enabled him to envision similar benefits from cross-cultural influence for the future of poetry in English. Translations of his poems into English served, among other purposes, also as a testing-ground for such influence.

The existence of this 'bigger plan,' his ambition to redress the balance on the American poetic scene, explains why Brodsky, who was certainly aware of the imperfections of his self-translations, exposed himself to the merciless attacks of his critics. What has escaped the attention of many of those critics is the peculiar contradiction of his self-translations: the fact that, through his revisions, Brodsky succeeded in achieving in his English translations authentic euphonic-semantic unity, despite founding this very harmony on compositional principles partly alien to English poetic usage and tradition. Such a phenomenon sets a unique precedent in the history of poetry translation into English, and once established, merits a wider discussion in the larger context of the theory of language and translation.

The discussion of Brodsky's authentic verse in English is beyond the scope of the present thesis. And yet arguably, the practice of Brodsky's self-translation was just a further means for Brodsky of internalising English language and English poetry in the way that the translation into Russian of English and American authors served at the beginning of his poetic career.[559]

As has been pointed out by some critics, Brodsky's authentic English verse displays less Russianness than his self-translations. This is not surprising, if we take into account what has been mentioned previously of Zhirmunsky's metrical theory. While writing authentic verse in English Brodsky was no longer under the influence of the initial metrical task of his original Russian poems – a metrical task with well defined elements of Russian verse rhythm.

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[559] 'During his period of 'internal exile' he [Brodsky] would advance his knowledge of English with a bilingual dictionary and an anthology of English and American poetry, laboriously translating the opening and closing stanzas of some poem…' Quoted from Anthony Hecht. ‚Introduction' to Joseph Brodsky. *A Part of Speech*. (London-New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. ix.

These poems – about fifty of them alongside the 'History of the Twentieth century' – published in Brodsky's *Collected Poems in English*, as well as dozens of unpublished poems kept at Brodsky Estate at Yale are certainly the part of the same 'bigger plan.' They display wit and intelligence, which are the more convincing for being cast in traditional forms of the English poetry. I hope one day they will become a subject for a wider study within the field of English literature. They certainly deserve it.

PostScript

To put into a nutshell the main ideas of a large project is never an easy task. Leo Tostoi, when asked by someone to sum up the contents of *Anna Karenina,* famously replied that to answer the question he should have to write the novel anew. And yet if somebody asked the author of the present dissertation to define its main vector or idea, I would probably say that the main polemic impulse at its core has been to contest a common-place opinion that one can be a poet only in one's native language. This opinion is responsible for a great deal of bias against Brodsky's English verse and it causes his pedantic critics to scour his verse for grammatical mistakes and overlook the treasures which the poet illegally smuggled into English. Donald Davie, one of Brodsky's more ungenerous critics, most characteristically summed it up: '…history supplies hardly one instance of a poet writing to any purpose in anything but his native tongue.' [560] Using concrete textual examples on the pages above I have tried to demonstrate, to the best of my ability, that the opposite is true – namely, that a real poet can sometimes transcend native boundaries. Whether I have succeeded is certainly not for me to judge.

More than eighty years ago Marina Tsvetaeva formulated this idea in her letter to Rilke more succinctly than myself. I would like to conclude this thesis with a quotation from this letter. The quality of the lines below written in her non-native German speaks, it seems, for itself:

St. Gilles-sur-Vie, den 6. Juli 1926

Lieber Rainer,

Goethe sagt irgendwo, daß man nichts Bedeutendes in einer fremden Sprache leisten kann – das klang mir immer falsch…
Dichten ist schon übertragen, aus der Muttersprache – in eine andere, ob französisch

[560] Davie. 'The saturated line,' p. 15.

oder deutsch, wird wohl gleich sein. Keine Sprache ist Muttersprache. Dichten ist nachdichten. Darum versteh ich nicht, wenn man von französischen oder russischen etc. Dichtern redet. Ein Dichter kann französisch schreiben, er kann nicht ein französischer Dichter sein. Das ist lächerlich.
Ich bin kein russischer Dichter und staune immer, wenn man mich für einen solchen hält und als solchen betrachtet. Darum wird man Dichter (wenn man es überhaupt *werden* könnte, wenn man es schon nicht allem voraus *seie*!), um nicht Franzose, Russe etc. zu sein, um alles zu sein. Oder: man ist Dichter, weil man kein Franzose ist. Nationalität – Ab- und Eingeschlossenheit.[561]

[561] Marina I. Zwetajewa, Brief Nr. 163: an Rilke. Quoted in Azadowski, Konstantin (Hrg.) *Rilke und Rußland: Briefe, Erinnerungen, Gedichte*. (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1986), pp. 409-410.

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Archival Research Materials

I. Joseph Brodsky Archives at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, New Haven:

- Various manuscripts and drafts of Brodsky's poems in Russian and English, various versions of the respective translations of the Russian poems and their revisions, commentaries made by the author and his associates, galley proofs and master copies entailing subsequent revisions and markings by the author;
- Correspondence of Brodsky with his translators and with his fellow-poets such as W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Isaiah Berlin, Richard Wilbur, Robert Lowell, Anthony Hecht, Peter Viereck, Howard Moss etc.;
- Recordings of Brodsky's lectures at The University of Michigan;
- Films of Brodsky giving readings of his poetry; both in Russian as well as in English translation.
- Brodsky's diaries available on microfilm.

II. Farrar, Strauss & Giroux Archives at the Manuscript and Archival Division of the New York Public Library:

- Correspondence of *FSG* employees with Brodsky and his co-translators regarding the translation of the poems from Brodsky's collection *A Part of Speech* in the years 1975 to 1980. Letters of: Joseph Brodsky, Anthony Hecht, George Kline, Richard Wilbur, Howard Moss, Alan Myers, Carl Proffer, Roger Strauss, Barry Rubin, Nancy Meiselas etc.

III. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.: Manuscript and Sound Recordings Divisions:

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Appendix

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

In der vorliegenden Dissertation untersuche ich Brodskys Übersetzungsmethoden und verfolge dabei das Ziel, ihnen sowohl einen Platz innerhalb der englischen Literatur als auch auf dem Gebiet der Übersetzung von Poesie ins Englische zuzuweisen.

Weil Brodskys Eigenübersetzungen bis jetzt insgesamt sehr wenig erforscht wurden, und aufgrund der vorherrschenden Tendenz, die sich seit Brodskys frühem Tod 1996 schon über ein Jahrzehnt lang in den wenigen Artikeln und Aufsätzen zu dem Thema zeigt, bloße Meinungen zum Besten zu geben, hielt ich einen Umschwung in der kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit Brodskys Eigenübersetzungen für angebracht.

Ich unterziehe zum ersten Mal in der Geschichte dieses Fachgebietes einige dieser Übersetzungen einer detaillierten Textanalyse mit dem Ziel, anhand konkreter Beispiele eine Theorie von Brodskys Übersetzungsverfahren aufzustellen und ihnen einen angemessenen Platz in der englischen Übersetzung von Poesie zuzuweisen.

Meine Arbeit wurden durch die Tatsache erleichtert und bereichert, dass ich mich 2005 zu Studienzwecken in Yale aufhielt, als die Materialien des Brodsky-Nachlasses in der dortigen *Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library* Forschern zugänglich gemacht wurden.

Angesichts Brodskys Betonung der Form in der Übersetzung von Dichtung schien mir eine gut fundierte Theorie des Verses für meine Forschungsarbeit unverzichtbar.

Da die Idee einer nachahmenden Übersetzung in englischen Literaturkreisen seit langem als überholt galt, führte mich die Wahl eines Theoretikers selbstverständlich zurück nach Russland.

Dort gediehen, zum Teil wegen der verschiedenen Entwicklung in der russischen Dichtkunst, im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert die metrischen Studien des Formalismus.

Victor Zhirmunskys „Teoria Sticha“ (*Theorie des Verses*) schien mir wegen seiner komparatistischen Eigenschaft der geeignete theoretische Hintergrund zu sein, sowohl hinsichtlich einer metrischen Theorie als auch hinsichtlich einer Theorie formaler Übersetzung von Poesie.

Indem ich meine ausführliche Analyse auf bisher unentdecktes Übersetzungsmaterial begründe, zeige ich, dass die Einführung von 'un-englischen' Elementen nicht, wie bisher von seinen Kritikern behauptet, die einzige Folge davon ist, dass Brodsky die von Ko-Übersetzern vorgenommenen Übersetzungen seiner Gedichte überarbeitet hat.

Ich zeige, dass Brodskys Eigenübersetzungen weit davon entfernt sind, misslungen zu sein, obwohl Brodskys Übersetzungspraxis auf kompositorischen Prinzipien basiert, die im Kontext der englischen Poetik teilweise fremd erscheinen – Brodsky führte in seinen Eigenübersetzungen Elemente russischer Rhythmik und weibliche Reime ein, was mit ernster englischer Poesie beinahe unvereinbar ist.

Aufgrund der Tatsache, dass Brodsky in seinen Übersetzungen Assonanzen und Alliterationen zustande bringt, die im Englischen aus eigenem Recht funktionieren, und durch seine Wiederentdeckung von Metaphern, Vergleichen und Wortspielen fallen seine Eigenübersetzungen in die Kategorie authentischer und eigenständiger Texte englischer Dichtkunst. Form und Inhalt sind bei ihnen so unzertrennbar miteinander verbunden wie in seinen russischen Originalen. Die Reime, die Brodsky in seinen Eigenübersetzungen präsentiert, tragen ebenfalls dazu bei. Diese Reime, die erwiesenermaßen die Hauptmechanismen seiner Verskompositionen sind, sind oftmals genauer als die von seinen Ko-Übersetzern vorgeschlagenen, weisen *‚metaphysical wit'* auf und funktionieren als eigenständige Wortspiele im Englischen.

Wie ich auf der Basis sorgfältiger Textanalysen verschiedener Übersetzungsversionen zeige, hatte Brodskys Überarbeitung der Übersetzungen weiterhin zur Folge, dass sie den Originalen hinsichtlich ihres Inhalts beträchtlich getreuer sind, indem sie Schattierungen von Mehrdeutigkeit (metaphorisch und wörtlich), Abstufungen und Sprachregistern vermitteln

Überdies verfügt Brodsky als Autor und Übersetzer in einer Person über die einzigartige Freiheit, Veränderungen an seinen ursprünglichen Metaphern, Vergleichen und Wortspielen vorzunehmen.

All diese Merkmale der Brodsky'schen Beteiligung an seinen Übersetzungen trugen dazu bei, dass sie im Englischen zu eigenständigen Kunstwerken wurden, ungeachtet einiger innewohnenden fremdsprachlicher Eigenschaften.

Dieses Phänomen macht, wenn es nachgewiesen ist, eine Neubewertung hinsichtlich seiner Position innerhalb der Nationalliteratur erforderlich.

Ich weise nach, dass Brodsky mit seinen Eigenübersetzungen eine größere Zielsetzung verfolgte.

Brodskys besondere Haltung gegenüber der englischen Sprache gipfelte in seiner Bestrebung, das noch vorhandene Potential formaler poetischer Muster, wie z. B. Metrum und Reim aufzuzeigen.

Somit wählte Brodsky, statt zuzulassen, dass englische Muttersprachler sein Werk in etwas übersetzten, was sich wie übertünchte englische Dichtung anhören würde, den mühseligen Weg, sein Werk selbst zu übersetzen, wodurch er sich den strengen Angriffen muttersprachlicher Kritiker aussetzte.