Joseph Brodsky and the Visual Arts: Consumer, Practitioner, Interpreter

Submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval and Modern Languages

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Short Abstract

Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996) was a highly visual writer. This thesis looks at his poems and essays, and a range of unpublished archival documentation to argue that he was an individual sensitive to visual stimuli in his environments, whose texts are in dialogue with non-literary worlds as much as they are with literary ones. More generally, I foreground the importance of looking at literary texts from non-literary points of view.

My study is comprised of four main chapters, each dedicated to a different visual form: cinema, postcards, photography, and drawing. All were integral parts of Brodsky's daily life and helped him express his personal experiences. These forms have been chosen as he worked directly with them all. He approached each form in a different manner and gave distinct values to each. For Brodsky, all four are united by the interdependent themes of imagination and memory.

I show how he associates cinema with imagination (Chapter One), postcards with documentation (Chapter Two), photography with perception (Chapter Three), and drawing with private dialogue (Chapter Four). As I move from Chapter One to Chapter Four, I also chart a move from forms Brodsky associates more with imagination than memory to those where memory is more prevalent. This move from imagination to memory proceeds in tandem with another development, namely one from forms that are more manufactured, and more resistant to personalisation, to those where the opposite is true. In my conclusion, I show how judgments about his treatment of visual forms, and visual experiences, more generally, can be articulated when medium-specific observations are seen comparatively.

Brodsky's work about, and in, each of these forms gives us fresh insights into his biography and writings. The interplay between his biography, writings, and work in these visual forms, is central to each chapter. Archival documentation allows one to analyse anew each of these three components as well as the relationships between them.

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Long Abstract

This thesis looks at the relationship between Joseph Brodsky and four visual media: cinema, postcards, photography, drawing. Brodsky actively engaged with all four forms in a productive capacity throughout his life: he wrote screenplays, was an active sender of postcards, a keen photographer, and produced hundreds of sketches. I show his tremendous interest in the visual arts, and look at his writings, and his personal experiences, from such a standpoint. This stance allows an analysis of the works he produced in each of these forms and facilitates a reconsideration of certain opinions about the type of person, and writer, Joseph Brodsky was.

I focus on Brodsky's attitudes towards the four forms in question. My study of each of them separately reveals a range of commonalities that illuminate his approach to visual forms and landscapes more generally. Brodsky's archives are full of unpublished material documenting his engagement with these specific forms. I make use of such documents in what is to follow: one piece of film criticism, two screenplays, three hundred postcards, a selection of photographs, and three hundred drawings. I also make use of much archival, written material: draft manuscripts, private correspondence, notebooks.

Brodsky used each form differently. I show that Brodsky links cinema with imagination, postcards with documentation, photography with perception, and drawing with private dialogue. These media were interfaces between himself and the world around him. Furthermore, they were intertwined, in various ways, with the writing process. Appearances of these forms in his written texts can be detected more easily once archival

material is brought to the fore. Even though Brodsky portrayed himself first and foremost as an artist of the written word, a portrait of an individual engaged with non-literary media, highly sensitive to his environments, emerges when one looks at his work in visual realms.

Brodsky was prolific in a wide array of written forms ranging from poetry, literary criticism, and drama, to autobiographical essays, and translations. These various interests have been studied in great depth, but his work in, and related to, cinema, postcards, photography, and drawing, has received barely any critical attention. This has resulted in a somewhat incomplete picture of Brodsky's life and writings. In my study I show how he did not need to express his thoughts solely through his writing as he had other forms of expression he could turn to.

Each chapter of this thesis focuses on one of these media. Although Brodsky professed a great interest in many spheres of the visual arts, including painting, sculpture, and architecture, I concentrate on the four chosen forms as he created works in, and made active use of, each of them. Using extensive archival research, I highlight how these practices were an integral part of his daily life and aided him in his creative process. Brodsky's written texts are not only in dialogue with other literary texts but emerge from, and are in communication with, the four forms under discussion. In each chapter, I concentrate on the interplay between Brodsky's daily life, his poetry and essays, and the material he produced in the visual media under discussion. I explain these points in detail in my Introduction, where I also underline associated methodological issues.

My first chapter focuses on cinema, and I show how film allows Brodsky to imagine alternate realities to the ones he finds himself in; the cinema is a medium that is intertwined with personal imagination. I begin by looking at three features of the cinema Brodsky foregrounds in his essays. To begin, I consider the importance Brodsky assigns to

foreign films shown in the Soviet Union of the 1950s and 1960s. These films allowed him and his generation to mentally transport themselves to other places and times. Consequently, Brodsky sees the cinema as a driver of social and ethical change as it portrayed alternative forms of human interactions and behaviours to those that Soviet citizens were accustomed to. Elsewhere in his essays, Brodsky uses the cinema to help an imaginative exploration of Latin poetry. His favoured Roman poets are seen in relation to actors of his day and Brodsky uses this technique of similarity to bridge the near two-thousand-year gap between his time and antiquity. Somewhat paradoxically, the more distant the past encountered, the more cinematic its treatment in Brodsky's essays and poetry. Finally, I underscore how cinematic techniques are deployed in his essays to comment directly upon poetry and poetic imagination, namely in his writings on Hardy, Frost, and Rilke. Cinematographic vocabulary — terms such as close-ups, zoom, panning — is used to emphasize the visual make-up of poems he admires and to show the director-like roles beloved poets adopt. I then concentrate on a piece of previously unknown film criticism Brodsky wrote in the late 1970s, and look at two unpublished screenplays he drafted in the 1980s (both about Joseph Stalin) to show how these show up similar approaches to the form expressed in his essays. Finally, I bring together the three approaches in the essays to analyse one of his poems, 'Post aetatem nostram,' written in 1970. In this poem, the distant past is brought to life via the cinematic treatment of a set of imagined, pseudo-historical scenes.

My second chapter focuses on postcards. Brodsky uses postcards to play with the cliché and mass image, adapting and individualising it. Most importantly, this form gives him the opportunity to document his experiences. Thus, the poet's personal memories interact with imaginative practices since the recipient of the poet's postcards is implicitly asked to imagine how he (Brodsky) is living at a given moment. In the chapter, I look at

the images Brodsky chooses and sends on his postcards and their accompanying texts; nearly all the postcards I look at in this chapter are unpublished. The first set of images Brodsky sends are related to cities. These images are usually of the main sights of a city, and they document visits to the places depicted; these postcards are sent to individuals who are unable to visit the locations shown. Brodsky sends such postcards to his parents and the accompanying text complements the image by giving further detail on the place shown. The second set of images are those of paintings and other works of visual art. These images are sent following visits to museums and are dispatched to individuals who have some knowledge of either the work depicted, the artist, or the period to which the work of art belongs. In the final section of the chapter, I concentrate on the poetry Brodsky writes on the back of his postcards. Throughout this chapter, I show how Brodsky's poems that are set up as postcards — for example, the unpublished poem 'Postcard from Iceland' and 'Otkrytka iz Lissabona' — share the central, documentary tendencies associated with his use of actual postcards. For Brodsky, postcards are items that can be used to document personal experience as well as the creative process.

In the third chapter, I argue that photographs and photography allow Brodsky to make sense of the world around him; they are intimately connected with his views on human perception. Photography helps him better perceive what he is like as a person and poet, perceive what other people and people are like even if he has not seen them at close quarters, and contemplate how time and the past are structured. Memory outweighs imagination vis-à-vis the form here since memory and perception are always linked for the poet. Brodsky was a photographic subject, a photograph taker, and an individual who observed and reflected upon individual photographs and the medium of photography over the course of his life. In his texts and his everyday life, he considers both the photograph and photography on both literal and metaphorical levels. I split up his engagement with

photography into three, roughly delineated periods: his youth (1940–1960), his early- to mid-adult years (1960–1980), and the final years of his life (1980–1996). In the first period, the poet is predominantly a photographic subject; an abundance of loving snapshots taken by his father have been left behind. His father, a professional photographer, is always associated with this form, and photography is a continual, real, and active presence in the poet's home environments. He is also fascinated by photographs of individuals — predominantly poets and actors — from the West at this time. In the second period, when his travels across the Soviet Union and internationally allow him to see countries, cities, and sights for the first time in person, one notes an increase in the number of photographs he takes; at this point, I look at some unpublished photographs Brodsky took. Furthermore, his role as photographer outweighs his role as a photographic subject and observer of photographs during this time. Brodsky sends many of his photographs back to Soviet Russia and communicates his impressions of the world to those close to him, acting as their eyes on a world that they have not seen. Additionally, Brodsky's photographs correspond to stylistic and thematic preoccupations one finds in the poetry he wrote during this period. In the final years of his life, Brodsky becomes increasingly interested in how photography can be used to express ideas about visual perception, memory, and death. Here, he is predominantly a photographic observer, and photography is seen through a more metaphorical lens. I look at 'In Praise of Gray,' an unstudied essay from 1990, when examining this point. The personal memories of his youth are associated with his photographer-father, and a reflection upon them in his adult years leads to the contemplation of human memory in photographic terms. As time goes by, the treatment of photography and photographs in his poetry, essays, and day-to-day life, moves from a literal to a metaphorical plane: perception of others and himself via actual photographs is gradually replaced by the idea of photography as metaphor in

discussions of perceptions of the past and personal identity.

Chapter Four focuses on Brodsky's sketches and drawings. In these images, the poet explores thoughts, in private, about himself that he does not explore, or downplays, in public and in his writing. Though an imaginative exploration of who he is, and wants to be, as a person and poet is prevalent in this instance, Brodsky's thoughts about how he will be remembered following his passing — how he will be remembered by those in the future — take precedent. Following a review of these materials — there are approximately three hundred separate drawings I have found that can be attributed to Brodsky — I focus on three main thematic clusters: drawings of and about Pushkin; drawings of cats; and self-portraits and self-caricatures. In his Pushkin-related drawings, Brodsky enters into a dialogue with the national bard and projects an image of himself as a benighted poet writing alone in difficult times. This self-perception as Pushkin has several different overlapping layers: Brodsky sees himself as a future, national poet; he sees himself as someone going through similar experiences to those Pushkin went through (internal exile, relationships with people in power); he sets up a form of self-canonisation since he carries out a task — drawing — the nineteenth-century poet practiced. In his drawings of cats, in which he presents a close kinship with these animals, Brodsky foregrounds a more playful side of his character. Additionally, since he discusses the links between cats and lions in his essays, the projection of a regal and Italianate side to his personality may be detected in his cat drawings: the lion he discusses above all in his essays is the lion of St Mark in Venice. In the final group of images, Brodsky, at times, is fond of drawing realistic images of his face that reflect his ageing. At other times, he sees himself as a classical poet surrounded by stock poetic symbols of lyres and candles. These various ways of perceiving himself are relatively absent from his poetry, and drawing offers a way for him to express a different side of his self-image.

In my conclusion, I think about how one can make some general judgements about Brodsky's approach to visual forms and visual experiences more broadly. I see some cross-form motifs that appear in Brodsky's treatment of these visual forms. I also give some ideas about how my discussion could be extended, and highlight some further, possible routes in Brodsky studies.

Each chapter is founded upon the relationships between biography, written works, and works produced in visual media. These relationships are analysed and connected to each other in slightly different ways depending on the media form under discussion. The different relationships that surface are in dialogue with one another, and all go towards showing the important role that visual media and visuality plays in Brodsky's life, poetry, and essays.

Table of Contents

Short Abstract....ii
Long Abstract.... iii
List of figures....3
Acknowledgements....4
List of abbreviations....5
Note on transliteration, references, and formatting....7
Introduction....8
Brodsky and the four visual forms....8
Triangulation and methodology....14
The Brodsky Archive....20
Critical studies....27
1. Cinema....34
Cinema in daily life....36
A driver of change in the USSR....38
The physiognomies of actors....54
Cinematic techniques in poetry....57
Film criticism and two screenplays....63
A case study of Post aetatem nostram....73
Conclusion....81
2. Postcards....83
Overview of the documents: Brodsky's postcards and postcard poems....88
Postcards of cities: actual postcards....93
Postcards of cities for his readers: an unpublished poem....98
Postcards of cities for his readers: two published poems....105
Postcards of artworks: actual postcards and Brodsky's aesthetic tastes....112
Brodsky in the museum....116
Postcards of artworks: poems from postcards....120
Poetry on postcards: introductory remarks....123
Poems on postcards: an analysis....125
Conclusion....135
3. Photography....136
Aleksandr and Joseph Brodsky: photography at home....139
Photographs: from judgment to rejection and imitation....146
The poet as thinking mirror....155
Dialogue through photographs....159

Brodsky the Photographer and Poet 162
Metaphors: thinking about time and memory through photographs 169
Combining the metaphorical with the literal: colours and photographs 174
Metaphors: verse writing and photograph taking 178
Conclusion 180
4. Drawings 183
Brodsky the Draughtsman 189
Brodsky as Pushkin 195
Brodsky's cats 209
Brodsky's self-portraits 220
Conclusion 228
Conclusion 230
Bibliography 237

List of figures

Figure 1. Opening page of film review of Olmi and Fellini……....66
Figure 2. Opening page of *The Steel Man*…….....69
Figure 3. Opening page of *The Man With Six Toes on his Right Foot*……72
Figure 4. Joseph Brodsky in front of a door with postcards……84
Figure 5. Two postcards from Iceland……...102
Figure 6. Front of postcard sent to Stephen Spender…….129
Figure 7. Back of postcard sent to Stephen Spender……129
Figure 8. Page from one of Brodsky's notebooks……134
Figure 9. Photograph of W. H. Auden…… .151
Figure 10. Joseph Brodsky standing next to a photograph of W. H. Auden……..…153
Figure 11. Photograph of Joseph Brodsky…… 153
Figure 12. Photographs taken by Joseph Brodsky of the Faroe Islands……164
Figure 13. Photographs of a statue of Mary, Queen of Scots……167
Figure 14. Photograph of a bust…… 167
Figure 15. Photograph of a bust…… 167
Figure 16. Last page of a letter sent by Joseph Brodsky to Carl Proffer……...…184
Figure 17. Page from Joseph Brodsky's notepad…… ..192
Figure 18. Last page of a letter sent by Joseph Brodsky to Zoya Tomashevskaya…...……196
Figure 19. A drawing made by Joseph Brodsky for Anastasiya Tomashevskaya…….199
Figure 20. Drawings for the poem 'V neizvyestnyi port Gurzuf'……200
Figure 21. Drawing by Joseph Brodsky…… 203
Figure 22. Drawing by Joseph Brodsky……... 203
Figure 23. Drawing by Joseph Brodsky……... 204
Figure 24. Drawing of Lev Losev by Joseph Brodsky……..206
Figure 25. Drawing of a cat by Joseph Brodsky……...…… 214
Figure 26. Drawing of a cat by Joseph Brodsky……... 216
Figure 27. Self-portrait by Joseph Brodsky……..…….222
Figure 28. Self-portrait by Joseph Brodsky……...…222
Figure 29. Self-portrait by Joseph Brodsky…...……224
Figure 30. Drawing of a figure with a lyre by Joseph Brodsky…… 225
Figure 31. Drawing of a man with a lyre……...227

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviations used in references to archival holdings at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA:

JBP	Joseph Brodsky Papers, GEN MSS 613
ZHP	Zbigniew Herbert Papers, GEN MSS 527
GLKP	George Louis Kline Papers, GEN MSS 650
CMP	Czesław Miłosz Papers, GEN MSS 661
TVP	Tomas Venclova Papers, GEN MSS 714

Abbreviations used in references to archival holdings at the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, California, USA:

JBSP	Joseph Brodsky Papers, 88072
IHP	Irwin T. and Shirley Holtzman collection, 98074
BJP	Bengt Jangfeldt Papers, 2018C38

Abbreviations used in references to archival holdings at the Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University, California, USA:

KP	Joseph Brodsky papers from the archives of the Katilius family, M1960

Abbreviations used in references to archival holdings at the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York City, New York USA:

JBCP Joseph Brodsky collection of letters manuscripts and notes from his library, 1972-1995, MS#1921

LLP Lev Loseff papers, 1970-2000, BA#0552

ASP Alexander Sumerkin Papers, 1977-2006, BA#0602

PVP Peter Viereck papers, 1815-2006, MS#1412

Abbreviations used in references to archival holdings at the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, Oxford, UK:

IBP Papers of Sir Isaiah Berlin, 1998, with some family papers, 1903-1972, MSS. Berlin 1-826

SSP Papers of Stephen Spender, MSS. Spender 1-370

Note on transliteration, references, and formatting

The transcription system used from Cyrillic is British Standard (BS 2979: 1958, as modified in Oxford Slavonic Papers). Exceptions have been made for proper names, such as Joseph Brodsky, which are given in the form most familiar to English-speaking readers. For ease of reading, apostrophes representing soft signs have been omitted from well-known names such as Osip Mandelshtam (instead of 'Mandel'shtam').

Unless otherwise stated, dates given next to texts refer to when they were, to the best of my knowledge, written.

On all points related to style, I have used the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Guide, Third Edition (2013). I provide full references to each work at its first mention and, in subsequent references, I generally cite author and page number only. In cases where more than one work by an author has been referred to, both author and title are given.

When quoting from written archival materials, I preserve the grammar, spelling, and layout of the original texts as much as possible; any spelling or punctuation mistakes have been kept as they are found in the documents. Due to Covid-related restrictions, I have not been able to access physical copies of all journals referenced and have given hyperlinks of the electronic versions of such journals where necessary.

Introduction

Brodsky and the four visual forms

In August 2018, I spent two weeks at Stanford University, USA, where I looked at various archival holdings related to Joseph Brodsky. At the time, I was still in the early stages of my work on the poet.

When there, I looked at material in the recently acquired collection of papers belonging to Diana Myers (archive abbreviated to *JBSP*),[1] an academic and friend of the poet from his time in Leningrad;[2] Diana's husband, Alan Myers, worked with the poet to translate some of his texts into English.[3] While carrying out a cursory glance at the documents in front of me, I was struck by the amount of visual material I encountered: postcards sent between the Myers family and Brodsky, photographs of the poet, drawings he made. I made the same observation when looking through other related archival collections at Stanford. As further research trips to archival holdings at other American universities in 2019 showed, the mass of visual material was not unique to the archives of a select few of the poet's friends and correspondents. In addition to large amounts of postcards, photographs, and drawings during these subsequent trips, I also came across cinematic screenplays centring on Joseph Stalin. Moreover, while reading the poet's private correspondence with friends and family, and unpublished poems, essays, and notebooks, I found regular references to the cinema, postcards, photography, and drawings.

It was during research trips in 2018 and 2019 that I began to consider a set of questions that form the crux of this thesis: how and why did Brodsky work in and with

[1] This archival collection was purchased by Stanford University in 2016.
[2] I use 'Leningrad' when referring to the city of St Petersburg for dates in the period 1924–1991. I use 'St Petersburg' to refer to the same city from 1991 to the present day.
[3] Brodsky dedicated his poetic cycle 'V Anglii' (1977) to Diana and Alan Myers. Alan Myers and Brodsky collaborated on *An Age Ago: A Selection of Nineteenth-Century Russian Poetry*, ed. by Alan Myers and Joseph Brodsky (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988).

these four media? What is the relationship between his daily experiences with visual forms of communication, the material he produced within these forms, and his writings? Following studies of these questions, would it be possible to come up with some all-encompassing remarks about his visual aesthetics? How and why did Brodsky see the world around him? These questions have rarely been asked in relation to the poet.

Throughout his life, Joseph Brodsky was an avid consumer of visual material. He enjoyed going to the cinema, adored Western films,[4] especially pre-war, Hollywood productions, and, in his adolescence, idolised many Anglo-American actors. He loved to pore over postcards and photographs, all the while imagining what life and people were like beyond the two-dimensional depictions in his hands. He surrounded himself with postcards, photographs, and drawings in his homes. Brodsky was sensitive to the visual stimuli around him and his interests in visual forms and arts were varied and vibrant.

Aside from being a consumer, he was also a producer of work within these forms, as unpublished archival material I make use of shows. He collaborated on several screenplays. He loved to send postcards from wherever he was in the world to friends and family, and accompanied the images sent with witty texts and poems. Brodsky was a keen photographer and was taught how to develop film by his father, a photographer by profession. He constantly doodled and sketched, adorning his correspondence and notebooks with often humorous images of himself and others in different guises.

This double role as consumer and producer within the realms of film, postcards,

[4] I use the words 'West' and 'Western' to refer to both European and American culture and civilisation. Brodsky and the generation of writers to which he belonged often discussed the binary opposition between Russia and the West in these broad, general terms, as has recently been shown in Eleonory Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018).

photography, and drawing, over the course of his life, left many indelible marks on his writings. At times, Brodsky uses films, postcards, and photographs as means to create ekphrastic imagery in his poetry. At other times, readers find explicit references to films, actors, and actresses in his essays and poems; for example, in several of his autobiographical essays he tells us about what and who he liked watching when he went to the cinema. Elsewhere, the formal structures of these four media are played upon and toyed with: Brodsky organises some of his texts as if they were films, with individual parts of texts acting like individual scenes, and cinematic shots seeming to lie behind narratorial perspectives depicted, and writes several poems featuring the word 'postcard' in their titles.

A detailed investigation of each of these observations — his encounters with the four visual forms in his daily life, his work within the forms, and the ways he uses the forms in his writing — and a study of the relationship between them constitutes the basis of this thesis. I concentrate solely on visual forms he worked within, and I exclude an analysis of other arts related to the visual that fascinated him: sculpture, opera, architecture. When highlighting the ways in which cinema, postcards, photography, and drawings played important roles in his life and writings, I come to several conclusions. Firstly, I show how Brodsky was constantly engaging with visual forms in his day-to-day life, from his youth to adulthood: he was highly sensitive to, and interested in, visual aspects of his surroundings. Secondly, I emphasise how he was constantly creating within these forms: I look at unstudied documents relating to film, hundreds of postcards he sent, photographs he took, and drawings he made. His creative output was not just word-related, but also visual. Thirdly, I underline that the ways in which these forms appear in his poetry and essays is varied and, at times, rather unusual. Thus, certain texts that have not hitherto been read as having visual subtexts, can be read anew.

Brodsky treats each of the forms under discussion in a different way and assigns

different values to them. Moreover, the relationship between his daily experiences with each of these media, his work within them, and references to them in his writings, are all slightly different depending on which is investigated. They are all, however, united by a preoccupation with two themes: imagination and memory.[5]

The cinema (Chapter One) was forever associated with imaginative practices and helped the poet travel mentally. It was an art form that transported him to imagined spaces and times, away from his somewhat suffocating life in post-war Soviet Russia. Following his exile from the Soviet Union in 1972, the imaginative abilities of the form remained, but changed in their make-up, with Brodsky using the cinema to think about places that were impossible to experience first-hand — namely Ancient Rome — and analyse texts from, and write poems about, those faraway spaces.

Postcards (Chapter Two) were also tied up with imagination for Brodsky — when in the Soviet Union, the flat, two-dimensional image on the postcard helped him think about non-Soviet lands and people — but predominantly held a documentary value: he used this common, tourist item to tell his friends and family about places he had visited. This banal and common use of the form is made personal by Brodsky's attention to detail when choosing the images to send, and the texts to write on their flipsides. The poet was highly sensitive to the perspectives and biographies of the addressees of his postcards, and he catered for them by entering into specific dialogues with each; for example, the postcards

[5] In this thesis, I do not employ set definitions for the words 'imagination' and 'memory' and instead use them to encapsulate multiple meanings at the same time. For an interdisciplinary overview of different types of imagination see *The Cambridge Handbook of the Imagination*, ed. by Anna Abraham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). On literary imagination, see Bo Pettersson, *How Literary Worlds Are Shaped*, Narratologia (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), LIV. For an anthology of how writers and thinkers from antiquity up until the present have written about memory, see *Memory: An Anthology*, ed. by Harriet Harvey Wood and A. S. Byatt (London: Vintage, 2009). For a historical and analytical overview of different types of memory, see *Memory: A History*, ed. by Dmitri Nikulin (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). When definitions of memory, Nikulin notes: 'classification is only *a* classification that serves a particular purpose and addresses a particular problem. Classifications of memory can thus be rethought, changed, or presented otherwise, once new problems and answers arise,' Dmitri Nikulin, 'Introduction: Memory in Recollection of Itself', in *Memory: A History*, ed. by Dmitri Nikulin (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 3–34 (p. 6). I agree with this statement and the same stance can be taken as regards imagination.

to his parents living in the Soviet Union were very different to those sent to friends who had left the USSR around the same time he did.[6] This detailed personalisation is also visible in the ditties and short poems that would often feature on his postcards. A variety of memories of places were thus shared by the poet and his recipients through the documentary handling of the form.

In his treatment and use of photography (Chapter Three), his emphasis is on a perception of environments surrounding him, and a perception of his own self. While in Soviet Russia, Brodsky would use photographs to apprehend and reflect upon the society he was a part of. Photographs of his favourite poets (for example, W. H. Auden and Thomas Hardy) and movie stars (Errol Flynn) allowed him to better think about who he wanted to be as a person and as a poet; photographic images prompted self-reflection and a desire for self-betterment. Photography was an art form he knew intimately: the poet's father, Aleksandr Brodsky, made his living as a photographer, had a dark room in the family's communal apartment, and taught the poet how to take and develop photographs. As he grew older, the poet began to use the form in more metaphorical ways, deploying it to explore the functioning of personal memory. Memories of his childhood, his father, and his family home, lead the poet to think more about the make-up of human memory more generally, a line of investigation linked with photography.

Finally, drawing (Chapter Four) was used as a way of carrying out a private dialogue with himself and with close friends. Within this sphere, Brodsky discusses themes and

[6] A detailed study of forms of address in Brodsky's poetry is outside the scope of this dissertation. For analyses of this topic see S. Yu. Artemova, 'O zhanre pis'ma v poezii I. Brodskogo', in *Poetika Iosifa Brodskogo: sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina, I. V. Fomenko, and A. G. Stepanov (Tver': Tverskoi gosudarstvennoi universitet, 2003), pp. 128–39; Svetlana Artemova, 'O spetsifike adresata v poslaniyakh I. Brodskogo', in *Iosif Brodskii: strategii chteniya. Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi Konferentsii 2-4 Sentyabrya 2004 Goda v Moskve*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina, A. Korchinskii, and Ya Troitskii (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ippolitova, 2005), pp. 39–43; Timur Radbil', '"Rech' ot vtorogo litsa": obraz adresata v lirike I. Brodskogo', in *Iosif Brodskii: strategii chteniya. Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii 2-4 sentyabrya 2004 goda v Moskve*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina, A. Korchinskii, and Ya Troitskii (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ippolitova, 2005), pp. 44–48.

views that are hardly ever present in his poetry and essays; drawing is a form used for private conversations. There are about three hundred drawings I have found to date, the majority of which are unpublished. In these drawings the poet explores, and projects, the similarities between himself and Alexander Pushkin via the practice of being a poet-draughtsman and via the depiction of Pushkin's face (as well as himself in the guise of Pushkin) in the images themselves. Drawing allows him to think about what the life of a canonical, Russian poet entails, whilst also giving him the opportunity to gently mock such self-aggrandisement. In his many drawings of cats, Brodsky develops, and exposes, a more playful side to his character, one which is often difficult to detect in his writings. In the vast array of self-portraits that show a reflection upon his external appearance and the process of aging, Brodsky uses his sketches as immediate mirrors. In self-portraits where he places himself in classical landscapes, drawing is used a metaphorical mirror to reflect upon his vocation. All in all, these imaginative glances at his own self, betray a desire to think about how he will be memorialised, and remembered, by friends and family, and future generations, after his death.

In my study I show how the approach to each form is uniform across the poet's public pronouncements, private correspondence, and writings: to take one example, the imaginative treatment of the cinema can be detected in the poet's letters, postcards, screenplays, poems, and essays. The one slight exception to this observation is drawing: there is often a slight disconnect between the way that drawing appears in his writings and the way he uses it in private.

My Conclusion thinks about how these different forms and perspectives can be brought together, and emphasises the multi-faceted, vibrant approach Brodsky takes towards visual experiences, and their expression in writing, throughout his life.

In my thesis, I move from discussions of forms Brodsky associates more with imagination than memory to those where memory is more prevalent. This trajectory moves

in tandem with another development: from forms that are more manufactured to those where the opposite is the case i.e. one cannot make a film without any technological input, whereas as one only needs a pencil and some paper to jot down a sketch. Connected with this, is the issue of control over production: Brodsky cannot make a feature-length film on his own and must deal with the formal restrictions imposed by postcards, whereas he has more freedom over his end-product when taking a photograph and when sketching. Joseph Brodsky was fascinated with thinking about how his present-day experiences could be expressed and with analysing how they were the result of past events he could remember or imagine, as well as how they could have been different had he lived in a different place or time. This constant desire to think about what was, and what could have been (or could be), is evident in his interactions with the four forms, with the balance between imagination and memory featuring in different ways depending on the form.

Triangulation and methodology

I see a triangular relationship between the writer, his written works, and the four media under discussion.[7] In broad terms, the majority of Brodsky scholarship has, up until now, focused on the poet's biography, his writings (poetry, essays, plays, translations), or the relationship between the two. The relationship between biography and writings varies from one study to the next and can be seen on a spectrum, with works focusing more on

[7] I use the word 'medium' to refer to the separation of art forms that Brodsky adhered to; I use Brodsky's explicit and implicit ways of defining media and not impose a separate definition of 'medium' or 'media.' Brodsky — an individual with a highly rigid approach to borders between art forms — believed that literature, film, photography, painting, sculpture, and architecture were distinctly differentiated from one another. I use the words 'form' and 'media' interchangeably and do not focus on theoretical discussions surrounding these terms. In a recent comprehensive study of Intermediality, Gabriele Rippl notes that, 'the meaning of the term 'medium' is notoriously shifting and ambiguous; what constitutes a medium depends very much on the scholarly background and purpose of the investigator,' 'Introduction', in *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*, by Gabriele Rippl, ed. by Gabriele Rippl (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 1–31 (p. 9). It is for this reason that I adhere to Brodsky's understanding of cinema, postcards, photography, and drawing, and do not impose an external set of definitions for 'form' and 'medium.'

either of these two poles. At one end of this scale one can place the numerous memoirs and remembrances of the poet by friends, family, and acquaintances.[8] At the other end, one finds highly intertextual[9] and formal studies[10] of the poet's oeuvre. In my study, I add a third element, namely Brodsky's work in visual media. By triangulating the relationship between the poet and his writings, one can gain new insights into Brodsky's work in visual forms, whilst at the same time enriching one's understanding about the poet's life, and his poems and essays. This can be achieved since his work in visual forms enters into separate dialogues with, and provides new information about, each of the two ends of the existing critical spectrum. Consequently, the relationship between Brodsky's biography and writings is also enriched when the four visual forms are placed under the microscope. In one of the first book-length studies in English dealing with the poet, *Joseph Brodsky and*

[8] A wide selection of recollections from friends and family can be found in Valentina Polukhina, *Brodsky through the Eyes of His Contemporaries*, 2nd edn, revised and supplemented, 2 vols (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008), I; Valentina Polukhina, *Brodsky through the Eyes of His Contemporaries*, 2 vols (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008), II. Some examples of book-length recollections by individuals include Rada Alloi, *Veselyi sputnik: vospominaniya ob Iosife Brodskom* (St Petersburg: Zhurnal «Zvezda», 2008); Lyudmila Shtern, *Poet bez p'edestala: vospominaniya ob Iosife Brodskom* (Moscow: Vremya, 2010); Bengt Jangfeldt, *Yazyk est' Bog: zametki ob Iosife Brodskom*, trans. by Anton Nesterov (Moscow: AST: Corpus, 2011); Ellendea Proffer Teasley, *Brodskii sredi nas*, trans. by Viktor Golyshev (Moscow: AST: Corpus, 2015). A large section of Lev Losev's *Meandr* also deals with recollections of Brodsky (Lev Losev, *Meandr: memuarnaya proza* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2010), pp. 11–136). Recollections about poet appear in numerous journal and newspaper articles. There was a spike in such publications immediately after the poet's death, and they have not diminished to this day. A recent example in English is Peter Filkins, 'Words Preserved Against a Day of Fear: Remembering Joseph Brodsky', *The American Scholar*, 89.3 (2020), 108–14.

[9] A book-length example of such an approach is Andrei Ranchin, *Na piru Mnemoziny: interteksty Iosifa Brodskogo* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001). For two other studies that focus nearly exclusively on Brodsky's texts, see Mikhail Kreps, *O poezii Iosifa Brodskogo* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1984); David Earl Rigsbee, 'Styles of Ruin: Joseph Brodsky and the Postmodernist Elegy' (University of Virginia, 1996).

[10] Gerald Smith's work on the metrical innovations in Brodsky's post-1972 has greatly helped us understand the formal novelties the poet brought into Russian poetry, see G. S. Smith, 'The Versification of Joseph Brodsky's "Kellomiaki"', in *Russian Verse Theory: Proceedings of the 1987 Conference at UCLA*, ed. by Barry P. Scherr and Dean S. Worth (Columbus, OH, 1989), pp. 377–93; G. S. Smith, 'The Development of Joseph Brodsky's Dol'nik Verse, 1972–1976', *Russian Literature*, 52.4 (2002), 471–92; Gerald S. Smith, 'The Development of Joseph Brodsky's Versification 1977-1986', *Die Welt Der Slaven*, 48 (2003), 149–68; G. S. Smith, 'The Versification of Joseph Brodsky, 1988-89', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 80.3 (2002), 417–38; G. S. Smith, 'The Versification of Joseph Brodsky, 1990-1992', *The Modern Language Review*, 97.3 (2002), 653–68; G. S. Smith, 'The Versification of Joseph Brodskii, 1993', *Slavonica*, 8.1 (2002), 68–85. To this group we can also add Nila Friedberg, 'Rule-Makers and Rule-Breakers: Joseph Brodsky and Boris Slutsky as Reformers of Russian Rhythm', *The Russian Review*, 68.4 (2009), 641–61; Nila Friedberg, *English Rhythms in Russian Verse: On the Experiment of Joseph Brodsky*, Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs, 232 (Berlin ; Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011).

the Creation of Exile (published in 1994), David Bethea remarks that Brodsky's 'vision can be called triangular in that a Russian source […] is subtly implanted within a Western source […] so that each source comments on the other, but as they do so they also implicate a third source—Brodsky himself.'[11] One could apply a modified version of this idea. Bethea's triangulation involves the two initial positions set out earlier: the poet and his writings. The present study creates a new type of triangle by adding a third point: Brodsky's works in visual forms.

This approach helps to supplement scholarship on Brodsky as it shines a fresh light on the poet and his writings, and opens another, hitherto underexplored avenue in his world. In an essay on Elena Shvarts, Joseph Brodsky, and Andrei Tarkovsky, Stephanie Sandler rightly states that, 'Particularly with regard to Russian poetry, a powerful aesthetic hierarchy and a great tradition of philological and formal criticism have pushed us to read poems as if their crucial context were other poems. We will benefit greatly as readers if we also allow ourselves the luxury of other contexts.'[12] In this essay, Sandler discusses the ability of poetry and film to investigate and articulate grief and mourning, and examines the limits of both forms in these endeavours. In this study I am interested in seeing how the four forms — cinema, postcards, photography, drawing — interact with one another, and with Brodsky's writings, and hence show that the 'crucial context' of his writings is not always other literary works. In what follows, I explore how his poems and essays are created, and exist, in an interplay with visual forms, and underline that Brodsky is more than just an artist receptive solely to verbal media. Each of my chapters considers and engages with all three of the positions in the triangle, and the relationships between them, to bring forth this point.

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[11] David M. Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 49. Leon Burnett invokes a similar approach when discussing Brodsky's work on Rainer Maria Rilke in Leon Burnett, 'Triangles: Brodsky on Rilke', *Russian Literature*, 47.3–4 (2000), 273–87.
[12] Stephanie Sandler, 'On Grief and Reason, on Poetry and Film: Elena Shvarts, Joseph Brodsky, Andrei Tarkovsky', *The Russian Review*, 66.4 (2007), 647–70 (p. 649).

My biographically informed approach follows the reasoning of previous Brodsky scholars. This approach is visible in Lev Losev's introduction and lengthy textual commentaries in his two-volume edition of Brodsky's poetry;[13] Losev was a dear friend to Brodsky, both in Leningrad and abroad. In his commentaries, Losev brings together clarifications of intertextual and cultural references in the poetic lines, and elucidations of individuals referenced in the poetry together with their relationship to the poet. Hence, Brodsky's texts speak to other literary works of the past, but also connect with biographical details and personal reflections on a wide array of contemporary issues. Even though Brodsky himself told a previous editor, in private correspondence, that he did not wish there to be any commentaries (during his lifetime, in any case) published alongside his poems — 'Всё, что я могу и хочу сказать читателю, он найдёт в моих стихах'[14] — the explanations of elements of the texts by Losev help to expand possible meanings behind metaphors and images. I extend Losev's analyses of Brodsky's texts by adding a study of material in, and about, visual forms.

As Losev shows, Brodsky's imagery is very often drawn from his literal and everyday interactions with the environments he found himself in.[15] Another close friend, fellow poet, and academic, Tomas Venclova, also follows this line of thinking in several of his

[13] Iosif Brodskii, *Stikhotvoreniya i poemy*, ed. by Lev Losev, 2 vols (St Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2017). This edition of Brodsky's poems appeared in 2017, several years after Losev's death in 2009. The introduction, commentaries, and supplementary materials in this edition were all written by Losev. Another useful book of commentaries on Brodsky's poetry, which discusses poems written in Russian in the post-1972 period, is Denis Akhapkin, *Iosif Brodskii posle Rossii: kommentarii k stikham 1972-1995* (St Petersburg: Zhurnal «Zvezda», 2009). Though Akhapkin's commentaries lack much of the biographical material Losev makes use of, they are still very useful in showing literary subtexts in the poems.

[14] *JBP*, Box 2, Folder 57. This phrase is found in a letter dated 20 February 1989, sent by Brodsky, regarding a collection of his poems Eduard Beznosov was editing.

[15] There has been much excellent work carried out on the poet's metaphors. The most comprehensive study is Valentina Polukhina, *Joseph Brodsky: A Poet for Our Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). This study, however, does not fully cover how the poet's metaphors connect with his daily experiences. A similar point can made about another notable investigation of Brodsky's metaphors: Svetlana Boym, 'Estrangement as a Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky', *Poetics Today*, 17.4 (1996), 511–30.

pieces on Brodsky.[16] As well as the people and places surrounding his poetry — as elucidated by Losev and Venclova — I show that Brodsky's writings come into being through a dialogue with non-literary media too.

Additionally, by analysing documents related to the visual, one can also elucidate Brodsky's creative process. Using such material, one begins to think in more detail not only about his poems, but also about how Brodsky reached the final versions of the poems. Brodsky is a complex and, at times, difficult writer and thinker, and a focus on his published poetic and prose texts only serves to propagate certain views on his writings. I demonstrate that Brodsky's poems and essays are the result of much notetaking, drafting, and editing, processes that are further evidenced through his work in the four forms to be looked at.

By focusing on all four media, one can juxtapose the various approaches Brodsky takes towards each. This comparative view allows a better understanding of Brodsky's treatment of the visual in general.[17] My approach thus allows one to view Brodsky's output diachronically, across national boundaries, seeing changes over time in his writings and his work in the chosen media. As a result, I support the view of Boris Dralyuk who has recently noted that 'if we hope to understand and appreciate Brodsky's

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[16] See in particular, Tomas Venclova, 'Brodskii o Mandel'shtame', *Russian Literature*, 47.3–4 (2000), 357–67; Tomas Venclova, *Stat'i o Brodskom* (Moscow: Baltrus; Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2005). In the Introduction to the latter item, Venclova states that in his book 'филологический анализ порой сочетается с эссе и даже с воспоминаниями,' Venclova, *Stat'i o Brodskom*, p. 7.

[17] In my work, I do not look at the way Brodsky's texts appear on the page. An analysis of this topic would prove very fruitful as Brodsky was always very conscious of how his lines appeared in print. In a reading of 'Litovskii noktyurn' (1984), Tomas Venclova correctly points out that 'в графической форме «Литовского ноктюрна» — так же, как в графической форме «Фонтана» и «Бабочки» — можно усмотреть определенную иконичность. «Фонтан» несколько напоминает изображение бьющих и расширяющихся кверху водяных струй; строфы «Бабочки» сходны с развернувшими крылья мотыльками; подобным же образом параграфы «Литовского ноктюрна» отдаленно похожи на человеческое тело, видимое en face — например, отраженное в зеркале,' Tomas Venclova, '«Litovskii Noktyurn: Tomasu Ventslova»', in *Stat'i o Brodskom* (Moscow: Baltrus; Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2005), pp. 44–81 (p. 53). The only article, to my knowledge, which has made significant inroads into the issue of the presentation of Brodsky's poems on the page is A. G. Stepanov, 'Tipologiya figurnykh stikhov i poetika Brodskogo', in *Poetika Iosifa Brodskogo: sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina, I. V. Fomenko, and A. G. Stepanov (Tver': Tverskoi gosudarstvennoi universitet, 2003), pp. 242–64. In this piece, Stepanov discusses iconicity and indexicality in Brodsky's poems.

accomplishment as a poet and thinker, we must confront the full corpus of his work in a dynamic, comparative fashion.'[18]

Since 2010 there has been a very slight move towards seeing Brodsky and his poems and essays alongside some visual material. As part of this trend, one finds some books released by the Russian publishing house Perlov Design Center.[19] These publications feature a few hitherto unpublished postcards, photographs, drawings related to the poet;[20] these works, however, do not delve into how and why Brodsky treats his visual experiences and specific visual forms, a central component of my study. Furthermore, each looks at the poet in geographically specific contexts. In my work, I cut across geographical boundaries and show how his treatment of the form in question, and the forms seen together, underwent slight changes regardless of where he lived. In a letter to Lev Losev in 1976, soon after his departure from the USSR in June 1972, Brodsky articulates a philosophy he would repeat in several iterations over the course of his life:

> в конце концов, любая страна, любое место есть всего лишь продолжение пространства, и перемены, как таковой, на самом деле не происходит. Ощущение перемены, качественной разницы и т.д., я думаю, есть результат отечественной пропаганды, плюс чисто физиологическая реакция на отсутсвие знакомых очертаний/физий и проч.[21]

[18] Boris Dralyuk, 'Review of Alexandra Berlina, Brodsky Translating Brodsky: Poetry in Self-Translation. Introduction by Robert Chandler. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 59.3 (2015), 457–58 (p. 458).
[19] So far five books have been published in this collection, and it is likely more will follow: Mikhail Mil'chik, *Venetsiya Iosifa Brodskogo* (St Petersburg: Perlov Design Center, 2010); Yasha Klots, *Iosif Brodskii v Litve* (St Petersburg: Perlov Design Center, 2010); Mikhail Mil'chik, *Iosif Brodskii v ssylke* (St Petersburg: Perlov Design Center, 2013); Mikhail Mil'chik, *«Poltory komnaty» Iosifa Brodskogo v fotografiyakh* (St Petersburg: Perlov Design Center, 2020); Yuri Leving, *Iosif Brodskii v Rime*, 3 vols (St Petersburg: Perlov Design Center, 2020).
[20] These items are scattered at various points in these publications. Yuri Leving notably gives some context to several of these items and shows how they relate to Brodsky's stays in Rome. For a selection of some of Brodsky's drawings sketched in Rome, and a discussion of them, for example, see Yuri Leving, *Iosif Brodskii v Rime: poeziya, proza, grafika*, Iosif Brodskii v Rime, 3 vols (St Petersburg: Perlov Design Center, 2020), II, pp. 228–43.
[21] *LLP*, Box 1, Folder 7.

According to Brodsky, the person who travels across borders and lives in different countries takes with him the same character traits and preoccupations he had in former abodes. This is consistent with the material I present.

A final point concerning my approach to Brodsky's writings: I look at both Brodsky's Russian and English texts. By avoiding a focus on one sole aspect of his writings — for example, his poetry, or his essays — in one language only, and by avoiding a narrow temporal perspective, one sees diachronic shifts in his interactions with the selected media alongside a fuller, more multi-dimensional view of his writings. These interactions fed into his poetry and prose, and his literary interests can be seen in his work within these visual forms. Thus, I shift discussion away from thematic studies of Brodsky's writings — ones that focus upon loss, exile, nostalgia — and think about how his poems and essays differ over time. These changes are seen with respect to the changing relationship he had with different visual forms.

The binary oppositions of the Russian poet and the American poet, the pre-exile and post-exile periods, the poet in America and the poet in Italy, are not too important for the present thesis. In my study I ask questions such as: what changes can be detected in his approaches to visual media over time? Do references to these forms in his poems and essays change over the course of his life? How do these changes relate to his biography? Gerald Smith has carried out pioneering work in showing how Brodsky's metrical decisions change over time. In a similar vein, I show how Brodsky's relationships towards visual worlds and forms contain certain shifts. To see these shifts and analyse the documents Brodsky produced in these four forms, I examine large amounts of predominantly unpublished, archival material.

The Brodsky Archive

Since I make use of many previously unpublished documents from various archival collections, it is important to give a brief survey of papers relating to the poet and foreground the methodological issues that arise from such a landscape.[22]

Brodsky's papers have only recently been made available to researchers. The main part of these papers was purchased by Yale University in 2004 and 2005 and catalogued in 2008 (*JBP*).[23] The documents in this collection were diligently gathered together and preserved over a number of years by Ann Kjellberg, Brodsky's literary executor and long-time assistant.[24] (Yale University is also home to four other archival collections with documents by, and pertaining to, Brodsky: the archives of Tomas Venclova (*TVP*), George Kline (*GLKP*), Czesław Miłosz (*CMP*), and Zbigniew Herbert (*ZHP*).) The main archive of the poet's documents in Russia — the second largest collection of documents related to the poet after the material at Yale — is housed at the Russian National Library in St Petersburg: it was collated, and donated, by Yakov Gordin to the library in 1991, and catalogued in 1992.[25] Each location houses material from different periods of the poet's life. The central Russian archives house items predominantly from the pre-1972 period, as well as correspondence sent back to the USSR following his departure on 4 June 1972. Even though the Yale archives do hold some documents from the first thirty-two years of Brodsky's life, they mainly house materials from 1972–1996. It should be mentioned that there are documents in these central archives which are currently inaccessible due to embargoes; several boxes of documents are currently sealed.[26]

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[22] To the best of my knowledge, an overview of archives relating to Brodsky does not currently exist.
[23] For a description of how archival material arrived at Yale University and a general summary of Brodsky-related material at the university, see Lisa Conathan, *Guide to the Joseph Brodsky Papers: GEN MSS 613* (New Haven, Connecticut, 2008), pp. 4–7 <https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/11/resources/784> [accessed 25 August 2021].
[24] The letter sent out by Kjellberg on 19 April 1996 to those who knew Brodsky, informing them that she was gathering as much material by the poet as possible, can be found in *JBP*, Box 34, Folder 724. Kjellberg began to collect and preserve materials belonging to the poet in 1991, see Conathan, pp. 4–5.
[25] For a description of the collection see V. F. Petrova, *F. 1333, BRODSKII, Iosif Aleksandrovich: opis' fonda* (St Petersburg, 1994) <http://nlr.ru/manuscripts/RA1615/poisk-fondov> [accessed 25 August 2021].
[26] *JBP*, Boxes 21–22, 127–131, 214–217, are unavailable to researchers until 2071 and *JBP*, Box 40 is only partially available for research until 2071.

The Brodsky Archive — a term I use to refer to all the materials the poet produced, received, kept, and sent, excluding published writings — is not only based at the two aforementioned institutions. The Anna Akhmatova Museum at Fontannyi Dom, St Petersburg holds photographs and documents that belonged to the poet and his father.[27] Lev Losev's archives are at Columbia University, New York (*LLP*).[28] At Columbia University one also finds a collection of Brodsky's papers (*JBCP*), the papers of his long-time assistant, Alexander Sumerkin (*ASP*), and those of his friend of many years, Peter Viereck (*PVP*). The archives of his close friend Carl Proffer and the publishing house Ardis, where much of Brodsky's poetry was published, are housed at the University of Michigan.[29] Other documents can be found in the archives of friends such as Isaiah Berlin (*IBP*) and Stephen Spender (*SSP*), whose papers are held at the University of Oxford. A related complication is that there are certain private collections not easily accessible to researchers; in Era Korobova's private archive, to give one example, there are many drawings and sketches that Brodsky made before 1972,[30] and there are also drawings in the personal archives of Mikhail Meilakh.[31]

The Brodsky Archive is fluid and constantly changing, increasing in size over time:

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[27] According to the introduction to a two-volume collection of photographs and postcards it holds, the museum states that they possess items given to them by Yakov Gordin in December 1990, and others given to them by Mikhail Viktorovich Rutkis, Brodsky's first cousin, among others. See *Iosif Brodskii. Fotoletopis'. Chast' I. 1940-1972: Katalog*, ed. by I. G. Ivanova and N. O. Gromova (St Petersburg, 2012). Some of these documents have appeared online on the museum's Facebook page ('Muzei Anny Akhmatovoi v Fontannom dome. The Anna Akhmatova Museum' <https://www.facebook.com/Akhmatova.Museum> [accessed 25 August 2021]) and Instagram page ('Muzei Anny Akhmatovoi' <https://www.instagram.com/akhmatova.museum/> [accessed 25 August 2021]).

[28] Losev's archives are, at the time of writing, unavailable to researchers; the documents have not yet been fully processed and catalogued. I have, however, manged to access items in the collection due to the kind assistance of Tanya Chebotarev and other archivists at Columbia University. All references to Losev's papers use the preliminary labels they have been given by the university.

[29] These are housed at the University of Michigan Library (Special Collections Research Center).

[30] Korobova was the first wife of the poet Anatoly Naiman. In a letter to Brodsky dated 11 September 1992, Korobova asked whether she could publish '50 факсимильно воспроизведенныкх на отдельных листах рисунков,' see *JBP*, Box 8, Folder 214. The project in question never came to fruition. *JBP*, Box 8, Folder 214 houses some photocopies of drawings in Korobova's possession.

[31] A couple of drawings from this collection have been recently published in Gleb Morev, *Poet i Tsar'. iz istorii russkoi kul'turnoii mifologii: Mandel'shtam, Pasternak, Brodskii* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2020), p. 79.

the two, main, archival collections at Yale and the Russian National Library are not comprehensive as there are documents relating to the poet that are still being found and purchased by various institutions. While such materials are continually being acquired by both Yale University and the Russian National Library, there have also been recent acquisitions by Stanford University in the form of documents relating to the poet held by his friends Diana Myers (*JBSP*) and Romas Katilius (*KP*). These items supplement other collections held at Stanford: the university houses the papers of Brodsky's friend Bengt Jangfeldt (*BJP*), and those of lifelong fans of the poet's work, Irwin and Shirley Holtzman (*IHP*). The Brodsky Museum in St Petersburg is also in the process of acquiring new materials.[32] Furthermore, items pertaining to Brodsky have started to sell at auction to individual buyers.[33] The internet has facilitated the publication and dissemination of new materials: audio recordings, photos,[34] videos of the poet at readings, and videos of interviews.[35] The Archive is thus splintered/splintering and scattered/being scattered across the globe.[36]

These processes of fragmentation, dispersion, and augmentation of the Archive are predominantly due to Brodsky's numerous trips abroad. One of the most well-travelled

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[32] The history of the museum (the 'room and a half' where Brodsky and his parents lived for many years) and the future of the premises are complicated. For more information, see 'Poltory komnaty muzei Iosifa Brodskogo' <https://brodsky.online/about/> [accessed 25 August 2021]. For a more recent article on the conflicts around the space see Ivan Nechepurenko, 'Joseph Brodsky Slept Here. The Great Poet's Cranky Neighbor Couldn't Care Less.', *The New York Times*, 12 September 2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/12/world/europe/joseph-brodsky-museum-russia.html> [accessed 29 September 2021].

[33] A recent instance of such an event was the sale of a short, handwritten note by Brodsky which sold for 550,000 roubles at auction on 22nd April 2020, see 'Konvert ot pis'ma Brodskogo pisatelyu Gordinu prodali za 550 tys. rublei', *TASS* <https://tass.ru/kultura/8309983> [accessed 25 August 2021].

[34] One such example is a VKontakte page dedicated to Lev Losev. Here one finds personal photographs of Losev with Brodsky, see 'LevLosev ne poet ne kifared' <https://vk.com/albums-13672045> [accessed 25 August 2021].

[35] Video-sharing platforms, such as YouTube and Vimeo, feature many such recordings.

[36] Another issue relates to documents that may exist but whose existence is unknown. Brodsky sent and received postcards and letters to and from the Soviet Union throughout his life. Some of these items may not have reached their destination. The American poet Peter Viereck visited the USSR in the very early 1960s and made the acquaintance of Brodsky. Following meetings between the pair, Viereck recalls that, 'we sent each other letters and poems. We never got them. The secret police confiscated everything – from him and to him. So we never got those. He sent me photos, with very witty inscriptions' (Polukhina, I, p. 374).

Russian writers of the twentieth century, Brodsky visited many countries as a tourist, and carried out readings and lectured internationally following his departure to the West in 1972. It is difficult to think of many twentieth-century Russian writers who achieved the level of worldwide acclaim, praise, and media coverage that Brodsky did during his life.[37] The poet left traces of his stays abroad in the form of recordings of his speeches and talks, photographs taken of him or by him, letters, postcards he sent,[38] and drawings he scribbled down on his travels. Thus, a wide array of documents pertaining to the poet were treasured and preserved by friends and family across the globe. Those who collected and kept such materials also helped in the canonisation of the poet: one example is Mikhail Mil'chik who, in a recent book, stated that he photographed Brodsky's room immediately after the latter's departure from the USSR in June 1972, and the room of his parents immediately after both of their deaths in 1984, as he wanted to help future scholars and admirers of the poet.[39]

One final point to mention: most of the items in the Brodsky Archive are unpublished and will likely remain so for some time. This restriction is related to the poet's explicit request prior to his death: he did not want to allow masses of unpublished materials to be circulated; this wish is still adhered to by the Estate of Joseph Brodsky. That being said, there are signs of this situation changing: with the kind assistance of the Estate, an

[37] The two writers who came closest to having the huge international reputation that Brodsky had during their lifetimes were Maxim Gorky and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. However, their international renown was held back by the fact that neither spoke nor wrote in English to the level that Brodsky managed. Furthermore, neither received the international awards and accolades that Brodsky ded. Boris Pasternak is another name one could add to this list, a writer who received significant amounts of international press coverage following the publication of *Doktor Zhivago* a few years before his death. Gerald Smith notes that by the end of his life, Brodsky 'had attained a level of international celebrity that has come to no other Russian poet even posthumously, let alone during his lifetime,' G. S. Smith, 'Joseph Brodsky: Summing Up', *Literary Imagination*, 7.3 (2005), 399–410 (p. 402).

[38] Many documents are also alluded to in correspondence, but have not, to the best of my knowledge, been archived. Strobe Talbott, the notable American politician who was on very friendly terms with the poet, begins a letter dated 7 February 1976 with the words, 'Dear Iosif: Many thanks for the postcard,' see *JBP*, Box 14, Folder 394. I was unable to locate the postcard mentioned.

[39] Mil'chik, *«Poltory komnaty» Iosifa Brodskogo v fotografiyakh*, p. 14. In 2002, Mil'chik provided the Brodsky Estate with a catalogue of photographs of the poet located in Russia in various private and public holdings. The catalogue can be found in *JBP*, Box 193, Folder 4242.

increasing number of scholars are finding ways to publish some archival documents in academic studies on the poet; the majority of these documents relate to manuscripts of Brodsky's poetry and feature in studies of his translation practices.[40] There have been some documents published elsewhere — mainly in memoirs from friends — but these publications have been few and far between and feature only a few of the documents pertaining to his work in visual media. Some unpublished documents have, however, been displayed in public, temporary exhibitions. In December 2010, an exhibition of Brodsky's drawings took place in the Russian National Library.[41] In May 2012, and in May 2015, a further set of drawings and documents was shown at the library in two further exhibitions.[42] In May 2017, an exhibition of drawings (as well as books and papers) opened at the Anna Akhmatova Museum in St Petersburg.[43]

Two main issues arise from this landscape. Firstly, the dispersed and restricted Brodsky Archive, in tandem with certain difficulties related to the publication of documents from it, has resulted in a lack of critical engagement with many materials related to the poet. This has led to a lack of academic debate on major aspects of the poet's life and works, as wide-ranging conclusions are being made using published, and widely available, materials alone. Secondly, any scholar who does engage with the material in a critical manner, and is able to publish items from them, is left with a series of questions: should his/her emphasis be on a detailed cataloguing of these documents, possibly in

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[40] Two examples are Alexandra Berlina, *Brodsky Translating Brodsky: Poetry in Self-Translation* (New York; London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Natasha Rulyova, *Joseph Brodsky and Collaborative Self-Translation* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

[41] 'Vystavka risunkov Iosifa Brodskogo', *Vesti.Ru*, 2010 <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2147071> [accessed 29 September 2021].

[42] 'Natsional'naya biblioteka pokazala "leningradskii arkhiv" Brodskogo', *Lenta.Ru*, 2012 <https://lenta.ru/news/2012/05/30/brodskij/> [accessed 14 September 2021]; 'Otkrytie vystavki «I uvizhu dve zhizni...», posvyashchennoi I. Brodskomu', *RNB* <http://nlr.ru/manuscripts/RA1228/vistavka-Brodskiy> [accessed 14 September 2021] respectively.

[43] The exhibition was open from 24 May to 2 July 2017 and was called 'Iosif Brodskii. Metafora, kotoraya blizka…' see '«Iosif Brodskii. Metafora, kotoraya blizka...»' <https://akhmatova.spb.ru/events/exhibition/iosif-brodskij-stroit-dom-ili-kletku/> [accessed 14 September 2021].

relation to both the poet's writings and his biography? Should he/she concentrate on finding more general trends in the documents and develop an argument with them without a detailed description of the documents themselves?

In my thesis, I both survey and summarize, and argue for the usefulness of such materials when studying Brodsky's biography and published writings. Because of the shifting Archive, a solely cataloguing approach to the unpublished materials would be incomplete as new materials are still being discovered; any claim to a definitive catalogue of materials related to the poet at the current moment would be false.[44] Though an effort will be made to show unpublished documents and discuss the literary and biographical circumstances surrounding them, I concentrate equally on the conclusions one can draw from such materials.

I make use of archival materials I have encountered during two research trips to the USA. In August 2018, I spent two weeks at Stanford University, USA, where I looked at items in the Hoover Institution Archives, and the Special Collections and University Archives. In June–August 2019, I spent seven weeks at Yale University and Columbia University, USA. I managed to look through most of the available materials in the main Brodsky archives at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale (call number GEN MSS 613). At the Beinecke Library, I also looked at items in the archives of Brodsky's friends and/or fellow poets: George Kline, Tomas Venclova, Czesław Miłosz, and Zbigniew Herbert. At Columbia University, I looked at archival holdings belonging to Alexander Sumerkin, and Peter Viereck; I was also kindly given access to the archives of

[44] The full cataloguing of a writer's documents can take time. Thus, an academic study of such documentation that is reliant on the appearance of such catalogues also takes time. One example relates to a writer I briefly return to later in the thesis: Fyodor Dostoevsky. In 1921, forty years after the writer's death, fifteen of his notebooks were discovered. A full cataloguing of the drawings in these notebooks only took place in 2016, see Wolf Schmid, 'Dostoevsky's Drawings: A New Perspective on His Literary Creation (Presentation of Konstantin Barsht's Book The Drawings and Calligraphy of Fyodor Dostoevsky)', *The Dostoevsky Journal*, 21.1, 46–63 (pp. 46–47). The catalogue in question is Konstantin Barsht, *Risunki i kalligrafiya F. M. Dostoevskogo: ot izobrazheniya k slovu* (Bergamo: Lemma Press, 2016).

Lev Losev. Additionally, in 2019, I carried out research in the archives of Sir Isaiah Berlin, and Sir Stephen Spender, housed at the University of Oxford, UK. In 2020 and 2021, I had been planning to spend time in St Petersburg in order to look at material related to Brodsky at the Russian National Library and in other archival collections but was unable to do so due to Covid-related travel restrictions.

Each of my four chapters uses differing amounts of unpublished material. My chapters on postcards (Chapter Two) and drawings (Chapter Four) are based nearly wholly on archival findings, and the chapter on photography (Chapter Three) looks, in part, at the images Brodsky himself took. The chapter on cinema (Chapter One) is the lightest as regards archival material due to the inability to access certain documents during the research stage of my work, though I do look at several unpublished screenplays housed at Yale University.[45]

Critical studies that make extensive use of archival materials — manuscripts, drafts, notebooks, correspondence, as well as the visual material to be referred to — in analyses of Brodsky and his works are still few and far between. My study aims to go some way in showing what archival work in relation to the poet can show. Qualitative judgments about Brodsky's works in the visual forms in question are absent: I am interested in the role Brodsky's works within these forms played in his life and writings as opposed to evaluating their quality.

Critical studies

Joseph Brodsky was prolific in a wide array of written forms: poetry, literary criticism,[46]

[45] Many documents relating to Brodsky's time at the Lenfilm studio are located at the Russian National Library, St Petersburg. For details of potentially pertinent documents, see Petrova.
[46] For a list of his essays and other prose writings, see 'Bibliography of Joseph Brodsky's Essays, Introductions, Reviews, Letters (in English and Russian)', *Russian Literature*, 41.2 (1997), 241–54.

plays,[47] autobiographical prose, and translations.[48] In a discussion about the poet, it has been stated that 'Поэтическая вселенная Бродского настолько многожанрова, что проще назвать жанры, оставшиеся за пределом интересов Бродского, чем перечислить хотя бы те, что им самим помечены в названии.'[49] In this light, the observation that his poetic world plays with multiple media is a logical follow-on.

Though his various literary pursuits have been studied in incredible detail from the late 1960s to the present day,[50] his work and interest in the cinema, postcards, photography, and drawing have been somewhat overlooked. Furthermore, there is little critical scholarship on Brodsky's relationship with visuality and visual experiences. In cases where studies have been carried out, these forms are described independently from one another, without wider questions being systematically posed about Brodsky's visual worlds.

As regards the cinema, two types of study exist: one type points out how poetic

[47] Brodsky wrote the plays *Mramor* (1984) and *Demokratiya!* (1990/1992). Brodsky also wrote a (currently unpublished) play called *Derevo*, which Losev dates to approximately 1965, see Lev Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, 5th edn (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 2011), p. 261. The manuscript of *Derevo* is located in the Russian National Library.

[48] A posthumous collection of Brodsky's self-translations into English, as well as the poetry of other writers he translated into English, is Joseph Brodsky, *Collected Poems in English*, ed. by Ann Kjellberg (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001). Brodsky edited a large selection of his translations into Russian for Joseph Brodsky, *Bog sokhranyaet vse*, ed. by Viktor Kulle (Moscow: MIF, 1992). This publication features poems translated into Russian from the early 1960s onwards. For an overview of his translations into Russian see Yasha Klots, 'The Poetics and Politics of Joseph Brodsky as a Russian Poet-Translator', in *Contexts, Subtexts and Pretexts: Literary Translation in Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. by Brian James Baer (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), pp. 187–204. When in Russia, Brodsky translated Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *The Quare Fellow* by Brendan Behan. In terms of short prose, he translated George Orwell's 'Shooting the Elephant' and Spike Milligan's 'The Bald Twit Lion.' There is a growing body of critical literature on Brodsky's translation practices. Two of the most revealing analyses can be found in Berlina; Rulyova.

[49] Valentina Polukhina, 'Zhanrovaya klaviatura Brodskogo', *Russian Literature*, 37.2–3 (1995), 145–56 (p. 147).

[50] Two early critical works in English on Brodsky, which set the tone for future studies of the poet, focused on individual texts. In *Brodsky's Poetics and Aesthetics* (1990) and *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem* (1999), both edited by Lev Losev and Valentina Polukhina, one finds a set of chapters focusing on 'the autonomy of the individual poem within Brodsky's *oeuvre*' through a variety of different theoretical lenses, with the editors not striving for 'methodological uniformity,' *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem*, ed. by Lev Losev and Valentina Polukhina (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave, 1999), p. vi.

images may find their roots in individual films seen by Brodsky,[51] and another type focuses on oral history and interviews in order to provide additional biographical materials related to his cinematic tastes. In the first group, one finds Lev Losev's commentaries in his two-volume collection of Brodsky's poetry. Here, Losev highlights paraphrases and parodies of Soviet films in the poetry and illuminates Brodsky's memories of films that one can read into his texts; Roman Timenchik's analysis of Brodsky's poetry about Mexico also falls into this first category.[52] Losev helps to place the poetry on a social and biographical backdrop and connects the texts with the poet's daily experiences. This publication, however, much like Losev's biography of the poet, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii* (first published in 2006), does not discuss, in much detail, the works he created in the four media that are of interest to me. In the second group one finds studies carried out by Yuri Leving where he investigates films Brodsky watched and the relationships he had with both film directors and actors.[53] In the detailed work of all three of these critics the focus is on just two of the three components outlined already: they concentrate on the relationship between the poetry and essays, and biography, and do not analyse Brodsky's screenplays or film criticism. Additionally, none analyse the poet's wide-ranging comments on the medium made in his essays; my chapter on film brings together Brodsky's various comments on this subject.

There is only one article that explicitly discusses Brodsky's postcard poems. In this piece by Anna Maimeskulov, which focuses predominantly on 'Otkrytka iz goroda K' and

[51] An early example of this approach is Peter France, 'Notes on the Sonnets to Mary Queen of Scots', in *Brodsky's Poetics and Aesthetics*, ed. by Lev Losev and Valentina Polukhina (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 98–123.
[52] Roman Timenchik, '"1867"', in *Joseph Brodsky: The Art of a Poem*, ed. by Lev Losev and Valentina Polukhina (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 1999), pp. 59–67.
[53] Yuri Leving, 'Iosif Brodskii i Andrei Tarkovskii', *NLO*, 6, 2011 <https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2011/6/iosif-brodskij-i-andrej-tarkovskij.html> [accessed 23 July 2021]; Yuri Leving, *Revolyutsiya zrimogo: obrazy na setchatke* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2018), pp. 309–44.

'Otkrytka iz Lissabona,'[54] the analysis is literary and does not consider the actual postcards Brodsky sent or received. Though there have been articles published on these two poems in discussions of the role of ruins in Brodsky's poetry,[55] and specific locations in his oeuvre,[56] real postcards are omitted from these studies and a discussion of the materiality of the form in question is currently unstudied.[57] Thus far, the copious research on Brodsky's travel poetry and travel writing has also overlooked the potential value of looking at his actual postcards and his metaphorical use of the concept of postcard writing and postcards.[58]

Of the four forms under discussion, photography has received the most attention. In these critical studies, discussions most often look at Brodsky's metaphorical use of the image of a photograph and the photographic process. Joanna Madloch has written extensively on the ways individual poems show up Brodsky's preoccupations with time and loss.[59] Molly Blasing has focused on similar issues and looked at how, for Brodsky, a photograph encapsulates different temporalities at the same time, an idea that recurs in his

[54] A. Maimeskulov, 'Poeticheskaya "otkrytka" (k negativnoi intersemiotichnosti Brodskogo)', *Izvestiya Smolenskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, 1 (2008), 35–41.
[55] Andreas Schönle, *Architecture of Oblivion: Ruins and Historical Consciousness in Modern Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011); Uilleam Blacker, 'Writing from the Ruins of Europe: Representing Kaliningrad in Russian Literature from Brodsky to Buida', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 93.4 (2015), 601–25.
[56] Tomas Venclova, '«Keningsbergskii tekst» russkoi literatury i keningsbergskie stikhi Iosifa Brodskogo', in *Stat'i o Brodskom* (Moscow: Baltrus; Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2005), pp. 96–120.
[57] Andrei Sergeev discusses a few postcards he received from the poet in his memoirs but these are not studied next to the poetry, see Andrei Sergeev, *Omnibus* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1997), pp. 426–64.
[58] There are very fleeting mentions of postcards (though not a sustained analysis of them) in Sanna Turoma, 'Joseph Brodsky's Watermark: Preserving the Venetophile Discourse', *Russian Literature*, 53.4 (2003), 485–502; Maija Könönen, *'Four Ways of Writing the City': St. Petersburg-Leningrad as a Metaphor in the Poetry of Joseph Brodsky*, Slavica Helsingiensia, 23 (Helsinki: Department of Slavonic and Baltic Languages and Literatures, 2003); Sanna Turoma, *Brodsky Abroad: Empire, Tourism, Nostalgia* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).
[59] Joanna Madloch, 'Joseph Brodsky's Predstavlenie: At the Crossroads of Poetry and Photography', *Przegląd Rusycystyczny*, 113.1 (2006), 36–49; Joanna Madloch, 'Kak prochitat' fotografiyu — analiz stikhotvoreniya My zhili v gorode (A Photograph) Iosifa Brodskogo', *Przegląd Rusycystyczny*, 117.1 (2007), 58–70; Joanna Madloch, 'Kak prochitat' fotografiyu. Analiz stikhotvoreniya «My zhili v gorode tsveta okamenevshei vodki...»', in *Iosif Brodskii: problemy poetiki. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov i materialov*, ed. by A. G. Stepanov, I. V. Fomenko, and S. Yu. Artemova (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), pp. 244–54.

poetry.[60] Svetlana Boym and Stephanie Sandler have both written about the relationship between photography, exile, and loss in the poet's writings. However, no studies, to my knowledge, have looked at photographs taken by, or of, Brodsky. Additionally, the fact that Brodsky was constantly surrounded by photographs in his personal and work spaces has been understated. In my study, I go some way in showing how the predominance of photographs in his daily life opens up new avenues in analyses of his poetry.

Brodsky's drawings have only been discussed in passing, and the most detailed overview of the poet's images to date is found in a short article by Era Korobova.[61] Korobova makes comparisons between Brodsky's drawings and those by Pushkin, all the while praising their artistry. Korobova focuses on the images in her possession and does not show the links between the drawings made before his exile and those after, and between drawings in and outside of her possession. In 2019, Yuri Leving mentioned that he had a plan 'to present Brodsky's graphic art, which is virtually unknown and unpublished, in accordance with the established scholarly practice following the model study of Alexander Pushkin's drawings (Efros),'[62] though this publication has yet to see the light of day.[63] It should be mentioned that Brodsky did allow about twenty of his black-and-white sketches to be published in a collection of his translations of a selection of poets into Russian in 1992.[64] The drawings that appear in this collection are seen next to

[60] Molly Thomasy Blasing, 'Writing with Light: Photo-Poetic Encounters in Tsvetaeva, Pasternak and Brodsky' (unpublished Doctor of Philosophy (Slavic Languages and Literatures), University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2014); Molly Thomasy Blasing, *Snapshots of the Soul: Photo-Poetic Encounters in Modern Russian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2021).
[61] Era Korobova, 'Tozhdestvo dvukh variantov: zametki po povodu grafiki Iosifa Brodskogo', *Russian Literature*, 37.2–3 (1995), 247–56. An earlier, shorter version of this article, with some of Brodsky's drawings as illustrations, appeared in *Russkaya mysl'* in December 1991.
[62] Yuri Leving, 'The Pleasures of Philology', *Slavic and East European Journal*, 63.2 (2019), 159–78 (p. 159).
[63] A recent publication that has helped a reassessment of a canonical twentieth-century Russian artist is Naum Kleiman, *Eisenstein on Paper: Graphic Works by the Master of Film* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017). In this book, one finds hundreds of Sergei Eisenstein's illustrations organised chronologically and interspersed with essays showing the links between Eisenstein's films and his daily life. This publication offers a template of how a catalogue and study of Brodsky's drawings could look.
[64] Brodsky, *Bog sokhranyaet vse*. The editor, Viktor Kulle, tells us that the drawings were taken from the personal archives of Evgeny Rein, Mikhail Meilakh, and Mikhail Mil'chik.

his translations, are mostly classical in terms of content — they feature lyres and other stock images from antiquity — and are not given any captions i.e. no context to the drawings is provided. A few of Brodsky's sketches featuring predominantly caricatures — Lenin and Stalin feature in a couple of images — also appear in various places in Yakov Gordin's *Pereklichka vo mrake* where there is also no study of them.[65] In my chapter on Brodsky's drawings, I look at a wide range of sketches, located in various archives, made throughout his life on a variety of themes.

In terms of visuality and the visual arts, there have been some studies written about Brodsky's approaches to painting,[66] sculpture, and visual poetics more generally.[67] In terms of visual poetics, most scholars concentrate on symbolism and imagery related to eyes[68] but do not delve into the daily relationships the poet had with visual media. On the whole, visual aspects of Brodsky's writings have been understudied in comparison to ideas pertaining to other senses; the musical qualities of his verse, for example, have received much criticism by critics such as Elena Petrushanskaya and David MacFadyen, who try to bridge analyses of both classical and jazz pieces, and the poet's texts.[69] Passing comments aside,[70] little time has been spent on looking at visual motifs in the poet's works.

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[65] Yakov Gordin, *Pereklichka vo mrake: Iosif Brodskii i ego sobesedniki* (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo «Pushkinskogo fonda», 2000).
[66] Yuri Leving, 'Iosif Brodskii i zhivopis': pyat' etyudov', *Zvezda*, 5, 2015 <https://magazines.gorky.media/zvezda/2015/5/iosif-brodskij-i-zhivopis.html> [accessed 23 July 2021]. Painterly ekphrasis in Brodsky's poetry is discussed in Tat'yana Apukhtovich, *«Shag v storonu ot sobstvennogo tela...» Ekfrasisy Iosifa Brodskogo* (Siedlce: Inst. kultury regionalnej i badań lit. im. Franciszka Karpińskiego, Stowarzyszenie, 2016).
[67] Yuri Leving, 'Na podstupkakh k vizual'noi estetike Iosifa Brodskogo', *NLO*, 3, 2015 <https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2015/3/na-podstupah-k-vizualnoj-estetike-iosifa-brodskogo.html> [accessed 23 July 2021].
[68] Bożena Shallcross and others, *Through the Poet's Eye: The Travels of Zagajewski, Herbert, and Brodsky* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009), pp. 101–39.
[69] David MacFadyen, *Joseph Brodsky and the Soviet Muse* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), pp. 10–29; Elena Petrushanskaya, '"Uslyshu i Otzovus"': O "muzykal'nykh tsitatakh" u Brodskogo', *Russian Literature*, 46.1 (1999), 103–19; Elena Petrushanskaya, '"Muzykal'nye" kriterii v literaturnoi kritike Iosifa Brodskogo', *Russian Literature*, 47.3–4 (2000), 417–33; Elena Petrushanskaya and Joseph Brodsky, 'O muzyke. Interv'yu, dannoe Elene Petrushanskoi 21 Marta 1995 goda, Florentsiya', *Zvezda*, 5, 2003 <https://magazines.gorky.media/zvezda/2003/5/o-muzyke.html> [accessed 22 October 2021]; Elena Petrushanskaya, *Muzykal'nyi mir Iosifa Brodskogo* (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo zhurnala «Zvezda», 2004).
[70] Michael Wachtel, 'Kabul in Perspective', *The Russian Review*, 61.2 (2002), 194–96.

There has been a relatively recent move in scholarship on Russian literature to think about its knotted, complex relationship with other media. Two notable books in this category are Il'ya Kukulin's *Mashiny zashumevshego vremeni* (2015) and Katherine Reischl's *Photographic Literacy: Cameras in the Hands of Russian Authors* (2018). Both Kukulin and Reischl show the wide-ranging dialogues between writers and the cinema and photography, respectively, and look at the ways twentieth-century Russian writers communicated regularly with practitioners of other visual forms, while at the same time creating works within those forms and interacting with them in their daily lives. My study thus adds to, and extends, existing scholarship on Brodsky, whilst also asking wider questions about how one can analyse literary and visual works in a comparative framework.

Chapter One

Cinema

For Brodsky, cinema was always associated with highly imaginative practices. When living in the USSR, he interpreted films as windows into other times and spaces and used them to imagine what life was like in other countries and historical periods. However, this process of imagining was not a one-way affair whereby the poet simply wished he were somewhere else: watching films allowed him to re-imagine his own life in the USSR and better reflect upon it. When he left the Soviet Union in 1972, the role of cinema changed since the West was now seen with his own eyes, and no longer seen, and imagined, through the images in the films viewed in his hometown of Leningrad. This change of location however did not diminish the imaginative power of films, it simply changed the way they functioned for him. After 1972, the world of the cinema was used to further imagine places he could not see due to their inaccessibility through time — namely Ancient Rome — and to help imagine how and why certain poets wrote their texts in the ways they did. Of the four forms under discussion, cinema was the one in which the poet had the smallest ability to create: he did not attempt to make a film or to get a screenplay into production. This limited input as regards the creation of works within the form led him to associate it with imagination. Though the cinema was also associated with memory — Brodsky lingers on his recollections of visits to the cinema in several of his autobiographical essays — it is the role of imagination that is at the fore.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the poet's interactions with the cinematic world in Leningrad and abroad: Brodsky worked at the film studio Lenfilm and had contact with actors and directors throughout his life. This is followed by a thorough overview of Brodsky's approach to film in his essays. In these texts, Brodsky references the cinema in three different ways. Firstly, he highlights the significance of Western

cinema as a driver of social and cultural change in post-war Leningrad and the Soviet Union at large. For the poet, non-Russian films allowed Soviet viewers living in the immediate post-war era to imaginatively transport themselves to different places and times. He portrays his subjective preferences whilst at the same time acting as a chronicler of how these films were shown to Soviet audiences in the 1950s and 1960s. Brodsky relates how male heroes and actors, such as Tarzan and Errol Flynn, were counterculture idols, and female leads, such as Zarah Leander, were images of divine, subversive beauty. Secondly, he likens the physiognomies of writers — especially those from Ancient Rome — to film actors; his view of Roman literature is often seen through the lens of cinema. Finally, Brodsky emphasizes the cinematic qualities of poems by certain poets, namely Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost, and Rainer Maria Rilke. In all these arguments, he deals with the form in an imaginative way: film is a medium that helps open potential worlds, so different from the one in which he lives; film can shorten time and space and bring individuals from antiquity into the present; film can help imaginatively articulate the poetic text and show up the director-like role of the poet who creates, stages, and controls his poems.

Following on from my discussion of the cinema in Brodsky's essays, I show how his interest in the form prompted him to write film criticism and screenplays following his move to the West, none of which, to the best of my knowledge, have been published. The screenplays help bring to light several features of Brodsky's creative output which are otherwise less evident, for example his desire to write a long, imaginative piece of prose, or make a highly critical film, about Joseph Stalin.[71]

[71] In 1978, Brodsky penned an essay in English about Joseph Stalin which begins with the line: 'Now that he is dead for so long, everyone can indulge himself in theories about this man' (see *JBP*, Box 92, Folder 2213). Lev Losev notes that this essay was never published, Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, p. 369. In this piece, Brodsky gives many biographical statements about Stalin but always accompanies them with ironic quips such as 'Morally, he was a degenerate, intellectually a moron. None of these, however, are drawbacks for a politician.' This statement is reused in the screenplay penned with Vladimir Rif, which I return to later on in this chapter.

In the final section of the chapter, I analyse the poem 'Post aetatem nostram' (1970) and show how it brings together the three main approaches to the cinema that Brodsky would go on to articulate in later life; the essays that mention the cinema were written in the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. In this case study, I take the 'cinematic' readings of poetic texts that Brodsky develops in his essays on the poetry of Hardy, Frost, and Rilke and use them to assist with an analysis of Brodsky's own text from a slightly earlier period. Writings that link imagination and the screen are, therefore, seen to appear at a much earlier period than his essays suggest.

Cinema in daily life

At various points in the 1960s, Brodsky worked at the Lenfilm studio in Leningrad as a translator of screenplays and a dubber of films into Russian. Unfortunately, much information related to his tasks there has not yet come to light, though several items related to his work in the film industry may be found in his archives at the Russian National Library, St Petersburg.[72] Something widely known is that Brodsky was a cinephile from his very early to his later years. Efim Slavinskii, a friend who first met Brodsky in 1960 and kept in touch with him over the course of his life, remembers that 'У нас [in the 1960s] были общие хобби — русская поэзия, американский джаз, Польша.

[72] In the description of the archival holdings at the library, one finds several materials that may be relevant to this topic. Firstly, the library holds a contract Brodsky signed with a film studio in 1966, with the entry reading: 'Договор с киностудией Научно-популярных фильмов на написание сценария для кинофильма «Ленинградское мореходное»,' (Petrova, p. 7). Secondly, one finds various written documents related to his work as a translator for the cinema. Brodsky's translation duties, according to the archival overview, related to several different languages. He translated a film in 1971 from Hungarian ('«Красная венгерская комедия. Синхронный текст к кинофильму. Дублирован на Ленфильме». Пер. И.А.Бродского. (1971)' (Petrova, p. 34)), Armenian ('«Легенда озера Парвана. Синхронный текст к мультфильму по поэме О.Туманяна. ублирован на Ленфильме». Пер. И.А.Бродского. (1971)' (Petrova, p. 37)), an Estonian cartoon, and a Polish film. Research in the Lenfilm archives would help bring to light information related to the poet's work in the film industry prior to 1972.

Нам нравились два фильма Вайды — «Канал» и «Пепел и алмаз».'[73] Lev Losev points out that 'Он любил крепко сделанные в строгих рамках жанра голливудские вестерны и военные фильмы. Одним из его любимых актеров был Стив Маккуин, в особенности в роли Вина из «Великолепной семерки» (1960).'[74]

References to film often filled his conversations with friends. In a letter to Stephen Spender dated 2 December 1988, Brodsky writes that 'The Stockholm affair [the prize-giving ceremony for the Nobel Prize for Literature] was straight out of Darryl Zanuk's [*sic*] movies, in black-and-white, with a great deal of fanfare (literally), mass scenes, saluting soldiers and dancing extras.'[75] During a poetry reading at the Russian House bookstore in New York on 21 April 1992, Brodsky recalls a humorous scene involving a poet from *Ils étaient cinq* (1952), a French comedy directed by Jack Pinoteau; he tells the audience that he remembers watching this film in Leningrad.[76]

Brodsky also had numerous interactions with film actors and directors.[77] The Georgian filmmaker Otar Iosseliani remembers encounters with him fondly,[78] and recalls how he first met him at a showing of his film *Falling Leaves* (1967).[79] In his memoirs, Mikhail Belomlinsky, an illustrator and caricaturist, remembers how one night the actor Vasilii Livanov — famous in the 1970s and 1980s for his role as Sherlock Holmes in a

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[73] Efim Slavinsky and Yuri Leving, '"Brodskii nas sovershenno zaduril svoimi stikhami": beseda Yuriya Levinga s perevodchikom i radiozhurnalistom Efimon Slavinskim', *Gorky.Media*, 19 September 2020 <https://gorky.media/context/brodskij-nas-sovershenno-zaduril-svoimi-stihami/> [accessed 23 July 2021].
[74] Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, p. 175. For a list of some other films friends remember Brodsky watching, see Footnote 15 of Leving, 'Iosif Brodskii i Andrei Tarkovskii'.
[75] *SSP*, Box 42, Folder 8
[76] *Iosif Brodskii Chitaet Stikhi. Video. N'yu-Iork, 1992. Joseph Brodsky Recites Poetry. Video. NY, 1992.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UEKK2kBr74&list=PLP1p_CiPYyRSn3wrXXTbyoWH06lsAeeo3&index=4&t>, (54:16–55:14) [accessed 25 August 2021].
[77] Lyudmila Shtern notes that Brodsky was friends with the film director Ilya Averbakh. Shtern says that Averbakh was in attendance at Brodsky's trial in early 1964, see Shtern, p. 131. More recently, Yuri Leving has brought to light not only films that Brodsky saw and reacted to, but also the fact that he had meetings with directors such as Andrzej Wajda, Otar Iosseliani, and Andrei Tarkovskii, see Leving, *Revolyutsiya zrimogo*, pp. 309–44.
[78] *Otar Iosseliani: pokhorony Tarkovskogo, tost za Brodskogo i Gruziya odna* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og39cXXsVZ4&list=PLP1p_CiPYyRSn3wrXXTbyoWH06lsAeeo3&index=73> [accessed 25 August 2021].
[79] Yurii Leving, *Iosif Brodskii v Rime: Trudy i dni*, Iosif Brodskii v Rime, 3 vols (St Petersburg: Perlov Design Center, 2020), III, pp. 438–46.

number of Soviet television films — tried to openly flirt with a girl with whom Brodsky was with.[80] Before 1972, Brodsky's social circles included individuals from the Leningrad cinematic world and Brodsky was finding his fame as a poet at the same time he was earning money at Lenfilm. The poet's intense, final years in the Soviet Union were lived near the world of the cinema, and the films seen in Leningrad in the 1960s remained with the poet for some time.

A driver of change in the USSR

In the essay 'Spoils of War' (1986), Brodsky gives specific details about the films and actors shown on screen, and the experience of going to the cinema, in Soviet Russia. He also shows how Western cinema impacted his world-view and played a vital, transformative role in a wider social sense.

The predominant feature of these comments about the films and actors seen on screen is the abundance of non-Soviet actors and films they reference:

> But the greatest spoils of war [the Second World War] were, of course, films! There were lots of them, and they were mostly of Hollywood prewar production, with (as we were able to determine two decades later) Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, Tyrone Power, Johnny Weissmuller, and others. They were mostly about pirates, Elizabeth I, Cardinal Richelieu, et cetera – nothing to do with reality. The closest they approached to our time was in *Waterloo Bridge* with Robert Taylor and Vivien Leigh.[81]

and

> Among those trophies one could occasionally bump into a real masterpiece. I remember, for instance, *That Hamilton Woman* with Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier. Also, I seem to recall *Gaslight* with the then very young Ingrid Bergman.[82]

[80] Mikhail Belomlinsky, *Mne povezlo: ya vsyu zhizn' risuyu! Vospominaniya* (Izdatel'skie resheniya, 2019), p. 14.
[81] Joseph Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 3–19 (p. 7).
[82] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 9.

The actors and actresses mentioned are predominantly from Hollywood or British productions, with some markers of non-British, European cinema also present. Elsewhere in the essay one reads about French actors: 'we would hotly argue about Jeanne Moreau's address in this film or Jean Marais's in another.'[83] Sometimes the stars are from German cinema: 'something that I have in common with Adolf Hitler: the great love of my youth, whose name was Zarah Leander [the German actress].'[84] There are also passing mentions to Italian actors; Brodsky also mentions a song by Leander that he remembers was composed by the Italian composer Nino Rota, best known for his film scores for Luchino Visconti and Federico Fellini.[85] Brodsky rarely mentions Soviet films in his writings.[86]

The films Brodsky gives centre stage to in his recollections are popular productions, and he avoids references to highbrow, arthouse pictures.[87] He was unashamedly unpretentious and mainstream in his cinematic predilections, his tastes were non-elitist in nature, and he preferred Hollywood blockbusters to pieces by Antonioni and Tarkovsky.[88]

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[83] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 11.
[84] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 9.
[85] His interest in Italian cinema can also be gleaned from the fact that, in 1992, he discussed the possibility of working with the composer Ennio Morricone on an opera. In a letter sent from Italy on 7 November 1992 by Francesca Zannese, who was employed at the Milan-based publishing house Adelphi Edizioni, one reads that, 'He [Fiorenzo Mulos, who worked for International Music Management] met Joseph last year in Naples and they talked about a libretto for the opera "Marco Polo" with music by Leonard Bernstein, who died soon afterwards. Mr. Mulos would like now to contact Ennio Morricone for the music and he wishes to have Joseph's confirmation he intends to write the libretto' (*JBP*, Box 29, Folder 672). This work never came to fruition. As an aside, and on the topic of collaborating with musicians: Brodsky also discussed working on an operatic adaptation of Dostoevsky's short story 'Bobok' with Nicolas Nabokov (1903–1978). Nabokov reveals this information in a letter to Isaiah Berlin dated 13 January 1977, see *IBP*, MS. Berlin 271, Folders 127-130.
[86] Josephine Woll has stated that in 'the frightening and culturally repressive post-war years, resolutely bland and optimistic movies apotheosized leaders both historical and contemporary, all bearing an uncanny resemblance to Stalin,' Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. xiii. Taking this into account, it is clear why Brodsky would have felt an aversion towards Soviet-made films he may have seen in the 1940s and early 1950s.
[87] This does not mean that Brodsky watched such films exclusively. In a letter written from Rome to Lev Losev from the early 1980s, for example, Brodsky tells his friend that he is about to go to watch Rainer Fassbinder's *Lili Marleen*, see *LLP*, Box 1, Folder 8.
[88] Brodsky and Tarkovsky did once meet, though the meet-up was brief, see Leving, 'The Pleasures of Philology', p. 160. For a study of potential links between the works of the poet and the filmmaker, see Sandler, 'On Grief and Reason, on Poetry and Film: Elena Shvarts, Joseph Brodsky, Andrei Tarkovsky'; Leving, 'Iosif Brodskii i Andrei Tarkovskii'.

His favoured films often feature swashbuckling male heroes and sultry female leads. These heroes are often placed in historical settings from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (films mentioned include figures such as Elizabeth I, Mary, Queen of Scots, and Richelieu) or the early- to mid-twentieth century (usually at times of war).[89] The films are plot-driven and fast-paced with little recourse to flashbacks, long takes, or other cinematic techniques that slow down the story being told. Though these tastes seem out of character — Brodsky is often considered a somewhat 'difficult' poet with highbrow tastes in culture — they do emphasise a trait he regularly underlines in his writings on literature: escapism through art.

In the essays, Brodsky also acts as a chronicler of historical detail and a commentator on the origins of how these 'trophy films' reached him and his generation:

> Since our government wasn't keen on paying for the rights, no credits were given and, as a rule, no names of characters or actors either. The show would start in the following fashion. The light dimmed, and on the screen, in white letters against a black background, this message would appear: THIS FILM WAS CAPTURED AS A MILITARY TROPHY IN THE COURSE OF THE GREAT WAR FOR OUR MOTHERLAND. It would flicker there for a minute or so; the film started. A hand with a candle in it lit up a piece of parchment with THE ROYAL PIRATES [Brodsky is referencing the film *The Sea Hawk* here], CAPTAIN BLOOD, or ROBIN HOOD in Cyrillic on it. That might be followed by an explanatory note indicating time and place of action, also in Cyrillic but often fashioned after Gothic script. Surely this was theft, but we in the audience couldn't care less. For that, we were too absorbed in reading subtitles and following the action.[90]

In his role as chronicler, Brodsky gives us visual details about the way these films would begin, he describes the lettering used on screen, and the movements of light in the cinema

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[89] Lev Losev also tells us that Brodsky admired war films: 'Ему уже взрослому нравились фильмы про войну. Он сам мне рассказывал, что на просмотре американского патриотического боевика «Самый длинный день» [*The Longest Day* (1962)] о высадке в Нормандии, когда в конце зазвучал американский гимн, он вскочил и слушал стоя. Не сомневаюсь, что это было отмечено всеми стукачами московского Дома кино,' Losev, *Meandr: memuarnaya proza*, p. 63.
[90] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 7.

hall.[91] These comments are historically accurate, as recent scholarship on this topic has shown.[92] These 'trophy films,' which were captured by Soviet soldiers returning from Europe following the end of the Second World War, were taken from the Reichsfilmarchiv, a collection compiled by and for the cinema lover Joseph Goebbels. Films in this collection were mainly German or American productions and hailed predominantly from the 1930s.

Brodsky thus attempts to educate his Western audience on a specific moment in Soviet history via his immense attention to detail, whilst at the same time asserting his own personal cinematic preferences.[93] This double role as both writer of autobiography and cultural historian is dictated by his choice of English to express his cinematic memories. In 'Spoils of War,' Brodsky is writing in English for an Anglophone audience and he underscores the content of the memories for a readership that may already be familiar with the actors and films he discusses.[94] In this way, he attempts to transport the reader into the Soviet past and help him/her understand the imaginative power of Western cinema for Soviet citizens, whilst also emphasising the importance of these early cinemagoing experiences for himself personally. In his essays, films mentioned and the act of going to the cinema are defamiliarized for the reader, through a detailed focus on the atmosphere of the cinema hall, and made to seem exotic, since these were also the impressions made at the time on the young poet. Indeed, Brodsky's writings about cinema

[91] In an interview with Solomon Volkov, Brodsky similarly recalls the details of a Leningrad screening of Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice* and discusses the type of film used in the showing, see Solomon Volkov, *Dialogi s Iosifom Brodskim: Literaturnye Biografii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nezavisimaya gazeta, 1998), p. 205.
[92] Claire Knight, 'Stalin's Trophy Films, 1947-52: A Resource (Revised and Updated)', *KinoKultura*, 56, 2017 <http://www.kinokultura.com/2017/56-knight_updated.shtml> [accessed 23 July 2021].
[93] The essay 'Spoils of War' was originally written in English in 1986 and then translated into French and Russian.
[94] A similar point is made in Kristina Tanis, 'Vozvrashchenie trofeinogo kino: aktualizatsiya poslevoennogo opyta v memuarnykh diskursakh 1980—2000-x godov', *NLO*, 5, 2020 <https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2020/5/vozvrashhenie-trofejnogo-kino-aktualizacziya-poslevoennogo-opyta-v-memuarnyh-diskursah-1980-2000-h-godov.html> [accessed 22 October 2021].

memory — 'people's memories of the essentially social activity of going to the cinema'[95] — may seem slightly idiosyncratic.[96] Recent research on this topic in the field of Memory Studies has found that, generally speaking, individuals 'tend not to recollect details, or even titles, of the films they saw – rather, memories of 'going to the pictures' – when, where and with whom – are most prominent in memory accounts.'[97] Thus, his observations about the specifics of cinemagoing show up two characteristics: the poet's highly attuned memory, and the importance of this medium that made these specific memories stay with him for so long.

By emphasising the strangeness experienced when watching these popular, Western films, and giving so much detail about them, Brodsky sets the scene for the crux of his argument: Western cinema changed the mindsets of certain parts of the Soviet population as 'films were the only opportunity to see the West.'[98] In cinema halls, Soviet audiences could glimpse images from a different reality to the one they saw daily:

> Quite oblivious of the action itself, in every frame we tried to discern the contents of the street or of an apartment, the dashboard of the hero's car, the types of clothes worn by heroines, the sense of space, the layout of the place they were operating in.[99]

The emphasis made in this extract is on the visual signs picked up from the screen and assigned to an idea of what Western society was like. The verb used is 'to see' and the micro details seized by the audience are visual in nature; the poet does not underline the sounds in the cinema hall. The lack of emphasis on the sense of hearing is partly because many of these trophy films were dubbed into Russian — you could not hear the English used by the actors — but principally because many of the objects shown on the cinema

[95] Annette Kuhn, Daniel Biltereyst, and Philippe Meers, 'Memories of Cinemagoing and Film Experience: An Introduction', *Memory Studies*, 10.1 (2017), 3–16 (p. 5).
[96] Kuhn, Biltereyst, and Meers, p. 5.
[97] Kuhn, Biltereyst, and Meers, p. 7.
[98] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 10.
[99] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', pp. 10–11.

screen were more unfamiliar and peculiar than the sounds of the English language, which could have been accessed by Brodsky and his peers through music records of the time. Such imagery from the West could sometimes be found in tangible artefacts that had unlawfully crossed the borders of the USSR: 'Among flags we preferred the Union Jack; among cigarette brands, Camel; Beefeater among liquors. Clearly our choice was dictated by sense of form, not substance.'[100] According to the poet, these brands left indelible marks on Soviet citizens. Brodsky's love of non-Russian drinks, for example, continued when he was in the USA: as one observer has noted, 'Любимый напиток днем — «маргарита» или «дайкири» (ром с лимонным соком). Вечером — ирландский виски, обычно «Бушмилс». Больше же всего любил элитарный ирландский виски класса single malt.'[101] Western objects on screen, therefore, worked in collaboration with illegally acquired Western objects to create a window into new, imaginative, and fantastical realms so different from those encountered in the humdrum — in Brodsky's eyes — Soviet Union.

Brodsky could only mentally travel to these realms since, at this time, travel to Europe and the USA was a pipe dream for him.[102] This attitude is reflected in the poem 'Pis'mo v butylke' (1965), where the speaker, a passenger on a ship, is sending his last words into the world before he dies. During this trip, the eyes of the speaker are not concentrating on where the ship is going and it is the 'contours of a great Western civilisation towards which the passenger directs his gaze.'[103] Near the end of the text, in an address to his beloved, the narrator says:

Мадам! Чтоб рассеять случайный сплин,

[100] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 18.
[101] Konstantin Pleshakov, 'Brodskii v Maunt-Kholioke', *Druzhba narodov*, 3, 2001 <https://magazines.gorky.media/druzhba/2001/3/brodskij-v-maunt-holioke.html> [accessed 23 July 2021].
[102] One could make the claim that Brodsky's mania for travelling across the globe, from 1972 onwards, was linked to his obsessive mental travelling via film when he was living in the Soviet Union.
[103] Lev Losev, 'Politics/Poetics', ed. by Lev Losev and Valentina Polukhina (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 34–55 (p. 38).

> Bottoms up! – как сказал бы Флинн.
> Тем паче, что мир, как в «Пиратах», здесь
> в зеленом стекле отразился весь.[104]

As he heads towards death, his speech is imbued with references to cultural artefacts from the West — here, in the references to Errol Flynn and the film *The Sea Hawk* — and his life ends with a dream of escape from his current location. Therefore, the poem hints at the relationship Brodsky had with the cinema at the time, as reflected in his essays about his life in Leningrad in the 1960s.

Moreover, the cinema provided another type of window: a window onto an aesthetic and moral code to abide by, that of ferocious individualism.[105] Robin Hood, Zorro, and Geoffrey Thorpe (Flynn's character in *The Sea Hawk*), figures the poet tells us he admired, are individuals who stand up defiantly, and alone, against a fierce army or a malevolent establishment, and fight against stacked odds for what they believe to be right.[106] As opposed to the Soviet archetypes of Vasilii Chapaev and Pavel Korchagin who were forced upon the 'Generation of the Sixties' in their youth in both their literary[107] and cinematic forms,[108] these heroes are examples of an 'individual who chooses his own fate,

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[104] Iosif Brodskii, *Stikhotvoreniya i poemy*, ed. by Lev Losev, 2 vols (St Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2017), I, pp. 220–21.

[105] Carl Proffer remembers a discussion with the poet on his favourite films, and recalls something else that attracted Brodsky in Western cinema. Proffer writes, 'He said [circa 1970] *The Longest Day* was the greatest movie he had ever seen (a closed Soviet showing, of course). The idea of Resistance was important for him and his generation—the concept of Resistance to evil is so rare in the Soviet Union that it was cherished in the movies of other nations. He and many others loved Westerns for the same reason, for what I called "*mgnovennaia spravedlivost"* (instant justice),' Proffer, Carl R., *The Widows of Russia. Notes for a Memoir of Joseph Brodsky and Literary Journalism*, ed. by Christine Rydel (Dana Point, CA: Casa Dana Books, 2017). Please note: I accessed this book in e-copy, hence the absence of page numbers; the page numbers of the e-copy do not tally up with those of the physical copy that I could not make use of. The text of the e-copy is the same as that of the physical version of the book.

[106] This does not mean Brodsky only looked to the screen for role models. One example of a role model from the world of literature was Osip Mandelshtam. As Tomas Venclova remarks, 'Мандельштам особенно притягивал его внутренней независимостью, которую Бродский полагал законом и идеалом для себя,' Venclova, 'Brodskii o Mandel'shtame', p. 360.

[107] Socialist Realist texts were part of the school curriculum Brodsky followed, see Mikhail Pavlovets, 'Chto chitali sovetskie shkol'niki', *Arzamas*, 2017 <https://arzamas.academy/mag/412-school> [accessed 24 January 2021].

[108] Dmitrii Furmanov's novel *Chapaev* was released in 1923, and the film *Chapaev* was released in 1934. Nikolai Ostrovskii's novel *Kak zakalyalas' stal'* was first published in full in 1934, and the film *Kak zakalyalas' stal'* was released in 1942.

not willing to have his life scripted by the authorities of anyone else.'[109] Other characters from the screen provided models of behaviour that appealed to the anti-establishment Brodsky and his like-minded contemporaries:

> There was, of course, something more crucial to these trophy movies; it was their 'one-against-all' spirit, totally alien to the communal, collective-oriented sensibility of the society we grew up in. Perhaps precisely because all these Sea Hawks and Zorros were so removed from our reality, they influenced us in a way contrary to that intended. Offered to us as entertaining fairy tales, they were received rather as parables of individualism. What would be regarded by a normal viewer as a costume drama with some Renaissance props was regarded by us as historical proof of individualism's precedence.[110]

In this regard, Western — especially Anglo-American — cinema was one of the drivers of social and political change in the USSR, according to Brodsky. Instead of the 'I' sacrificing his life for the 'we' and the collective good, as Socialist Realist iconography so vividly portrayed, here there is a reversal of this formula: the 'I' fights against the 'we.'

In a rather hyperbolic set of comments, Brodsky gives special emphasis to the social and political power of the Tarzan films featuring Johnny Weissmuller in the lead role,[111] films which vividly portrayed this moral standpoint. The poet suggests that by fighting and defeating Nazi Germany, and subsequently bringing back Goebbels's film reels (several Tarzan films were part of the Reichsfilmarchiv), the Soviet state inadvertently led to its own downfall:

> The absence of who was who on the screen imparted to these films the anonymity of folklore and the air of universality. They held us in greater sway and thrall than all the subsequent output of the neorealists or the *nouvelle vague*. The absence of credits made them openly archetypal at the time – the early fifties: the last years of Stalin's rule. The Tarzan series alone, I daresay, did more for de-Stalinization than all Khrushchev's speeches at the Twentieth Party Congress and after.[112]

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[109] Angela Brintlinger, *Chapaev and His Comrades: War and the Russian Literary Hero across the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), p. 203.
[110] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', pp. 8–9.
[111] Weissmuller was also a well-known sportsman; he won gold medals in swimming at both the 1924 and 1928 Olympics in Paris and Amsterdam respectively.
[112] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', pp. 7–8.

Furthermore, Tarzan sometimes even came up in Brodsky's conversations with friends. Carl Proffer, his close friend and American publisher,[113] remembers the discussion of these films in intellectual circles at the time where, 'At this soirée [in 1969] Joseph […] gave a seriocomic lecture on the influence of Tarzan movies in Russian in 1951. He said (and others agreed) that they were the first step in a move toward individualism among young people.'[114] The strong impression made by the Weissmuller-featuring movies was also felt in Moscow, as Alexander Zholkovsky has pointed out,[115] and elsewhere in the Soviet Union.[116]

It is easy to see why the Tarzan films appealed to the poet when he first saw them in his adolescent years, and why they stayed with him. In one picture in particular, *Tarzan's New York Adventure* (1942), a film Brodsky saw in Leningrad,[117] Tarzan goes to New York to rescue Boy, his adopted son who has been kidnapped by a group of Americans. Tarzan makes his way to New York, trades in his loincloth for a snappy suit, gets by in the city with his broken English, escapes numerous policemen by jumping off the side of the Brooklyn Bridge, rescues Boy, and finally returns to his jungle with Jane. As seen in this

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[113] Carl Proffer met Brodsky several times in Russia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As well as being the main publisher of his Russian poetry through *Ardis*, the publishing house he set up with his wife Ellendea Proffer, Proffer supported Brodsky in the immediate post-departure period from the USSR by accompanying him to see W. H. Auden in the summer of 1972 and organising a teaching position for him at the University of Michigan.

[114] Proffer, Carl R.

[115] 'После войны показывали множество трофейных фильмов, в том числе бесконечного «Тарзана», и московские дворы несколько лет оглашались подражаниями его сигнатурному зову с додекафонными переливами. Все помнят стремительные перелеты Тарзана на лианах и его спринтерскую погоню за косулей, но меня больше всего поразили его подводные пируэты в одной из серий, тронувшие своей, как бы это сказать, немужественностью,' Alexander Zholkovsky, 'Novye vin'etki', *Zvezda*, 1, 2002 <https://magazines.gorky.media/zvezda/2002/1/novye-vinetki.html> [accessed 23 July 2021].

[116] See Frederick H. White, 'British Lord, American Movie Idol and Soviet Counterculture Figure', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 42.1 (2015), 64–85.

[117] 'One should take into account our latitudes, our buttoned-up, rigid, inhibited, winter-minded standards of public and private conduct, in order to appreciate the impact of a long-haired naked loner pursuing a blonde through the thick of a tropical rain forest with his chimpanzee version of Sancho Panza and lianas as means of transportation. Add to that the view of New York (in the last bit of the series that was played in Russia), with Tarzan jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge – and almost an entire generation's opting out will become understandable,' Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 8.

brief plot summary, the film portrays not only a story of fierce individualism in the face of social rules and law and order, but also one depicting the outsider figure who cannot — and does not want to — fit into organised society. Coming to the USA in 1972, Brodsky may have seen himself as a 'savage,' like Tarzan, with his somewhat broken English, trying to understand New York and American society. This is evidenced in some instances from his personal correspondence. In one letter from 5 April 1978, sent from New York, the poet updates Alan Myers on certain aspects of his professional life and his various travels to universities across the country. At the end of the text, he signs off in the following manner: 'Truly and thoroughly yours, Tarzan.'[118] Through the figure of Tarzan, Brodsky was able to imagine himself as socially estranged both in Russia and abroad: in Russia, Tarzan helped him imagine himself as a carefree individualist, and in the USA as a wild outsider. The same hero from the screen was thus imaginatively reread, and reinterpreted, depending on where the poet lived.

Aside from strong, male, hot-blooded, heterosexual leads, Brodsky also discusses sultry and sexy actresses; desire shines through in his early memories of the screen. Brodsky recalls the attraction he felt towards Zarah Leander in her portrayal of Mary, Queen of Scots in a 1940 film, a work that acted as a springboard of sorts for his later poetic cycle '20 sonetov k Marii Styuart' (1974):

> I saw her [Zarah Leander] only once, in what was called, then and there, *Road to the Scaffold* (*Das Herz einer Königin*) [*the correct German should read Das Herz der Königin*], a story about Mary, Queen of Scots. I remember nothing about this picture save a scene where her young page rests his head on the stupendous lap of his condemned queen. In my view, she was the most beautiful woman who ever appeared on the screen, and my subsequent tastes and preferences, valid though they were in themselves, were but deviations from her standard.[119]

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[118] *JBP*, Box 10, Folder 272. Such a statement, though made in passing, is instructive for it points to a reaction to the cinema noted elsewhere: mimicry. The sign-off in this particular letter could also be a reference to the fact that his teaching load was a sort of acrobatic exercise; he was swinging from tree to tree like Tarzan in his daily life.

[119] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', pp. 9–10.

This ekphrastic description of a moment in the film, where the male viewer uses his imagination in tandem with a visual stimulus to create an object of desire, is similar in nature to Brodsky's description of a Socialist Realist painting he remembers from his schooldays; both cases show how sexual desire felt subversive for him. When looking back on his childhood, Brodsky tells us that he saw this painting, Sergei Grigor'ev's *Admission to the Komsomol* (1949),[120] in one of its many reproductions, on a classroom wall. In the image, Brodsky remembers seeing 'a young blond woman sitting on a chair with her legs crossed in such a way that two or three inches of her thigh were visible.'[121] He subsequently tells us that this image stayed with him and repeated itself in his dreams. In both the image of Leander and the woman in Grigor'ev's painting, Brodsky shows a stance of illicit, private rebellion: in the film in question, Brodsky focuses on a scene of sexual innuendo and not on the plot; in the painting, he shows a willed subversion of the goals of Socialist Realist art by privatising official iconography. In both, it is the imaginative gaze of the viewer — who can deform and explore the surface implications of the images seen — which is given prominence.

If male leads provided Brodsky with the ideal embodiments of individual freedom, then female leads allowed his mind to establish archetypes of feminine beauty and desire in a free and imaginative way. In Brodsky's view, the men and women who surrounded him in Soviet society were distant from the ideals of the screen, and the imagined ideals he had mentally conjured up via the screen. His adoration of famous, alluring, female leads continued when he moved to the USA; he would pin up posters of Marilyn Monroe in his homes.[122] Elsewhere in his personal belongings, kept in his archives, there is a postcard of

[120] Brodsky calls the painting by its English name in his recollections. The Russian title is *Priem v Komsomol*.
[121] Joseph Brodsky, 'Less Than One', in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 3–33 (pp. 20–21).
[122] The images in question can be found in *JBP*, Box 141, Folder 3109 and Folder 3116.

a scene from *Gone with the Wind* where Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh are shown in a moment of passion.[123] Images of heroes admired and loved in Soviet Russia thus accompanied him to the West.

Given the above, it is unsurprising to see a binary opposition between the positive cinema hall and the negative, antagonistic outside world, between cold and warmth, in Brodsky's poetry. The poet often tells us that the Soviet night is cold and inhospitable in comparison to the warm, movie theatre, 'По вечерам мы ломимся в кино, | но выходя — мы снова в лапах вьюг' ('Shestvie' (1961[124])). Elsewhere, the cinema is seen as a mother, 'Мы вышли все на свет из кинозала, | но нечто нас в час сумерек зовет | назад, в "Спартак", в чьей плюшевой утробе | приятнее, чем вечером в Европе' (20 sonetov k Marii Styuart').[125] The image of the womb reflects the idea that it was in the cinema where Brodsky and his friends metaphorically grew up, where they were formed as individuals. It was a place where the rich ideas and imaginations of cinemagoers were given life and where individuals felt protected and nurtured.

In other texts, Brodsky expresses how the Spartak cinema[126] — located close to his flat on Liteinyi Prospekt, where he lived for a significant part of his life (from 1955-1972),[127] and the secondary school where he studied[128] — and film in general, were bright

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[123] *JBP*, Box 141, Folder 3116.
[124] Joseph Brodsky, *Sochineniya Iosifa Brodskogo*, ed. by Yakov Gordin, 7 vols (St Petersburg: Pushkinskii fond, 2001), I, p. 126.
[125] Brodskii, I, p. 401.
[126] The cinema was also attractive to Brodsky as it was an easily accessible form of culture and entertainment. There, as Catriona Kelly states, 'One did not necessarily need an entrée to an exclusive club to watch foreign films. The Spartak cinema was an 'oasis of culture' back in the pre-perestroika days, where you could watch Fellini, Zeffirelli, or Godard,' Catriona Kelly, *St Petersburg: Shadows of the Past* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 238.
[127] The flat was in Dom Muruzi, a well-known eighteenth-century building at the intersection of Liteinyi Prospekt and Ulitsa Pestelya. Brodsky sometimes says that the flat was on Liteinyi Prospekt, at other times that it was on Ulitsa Pestelya; he uses the addresses interchangeably to designate the same, communal apartment. In this thesis, I say that the flat was on Liteinyi Prospekt. More precisely, the Brodsky family lived in Flat 28, 24 Liteinyi Prospekt. Prior to moving to this property, the family lived close by in a flat just behind the Transfiguration Cathedral (Spaso-Preobrazhenskii sobor).
[128] In an interview with Evgenii Rein, Brodsky recalls, 'Да, я учился в Петер–шулле, рядом со "Спартаком" — первые три года, потом нас перевели на Моховую,' Evgenii Rein and Iosif Brodskii, 'Iosif Brodskii. Chelovek v peizazhe', *Arion*, 3 (1996) <https://magazines.gorky.media/arion/1996/3/iosif-brodskij-chelovek-v-pejzazhe.html> [accessed 23 July 2021].

spots in his childhood: ‘навек на острове остаться | среди заводов и кино’ (‘Peterburgskii roman’ (1961)).[129] In the poem ‘Teper’, znaya mnogoe o moei…’ (1984), the cinema is a place of fond childhood games, ‘В те годы, когда мы играли в чха | на панели возле кинотеатра, | кто мог подумать о расстояньи | больше зябнущей пятерни.’[130] The cinema was a safe space where the individual could escape harsh, external reality for a short period of mental flight: ‘Мы с приятной работы вернемся рано. | Мы глаза не спустим в кино с экрана’ (‘Pesnya nevinnosti, ona zhe — opyta’ (1972)).[131] Youthful, joyful memories are tied up with the symbol of the cinema hall which points to other, non-Soviet realities, and the cinema encapsulates the happier moments of life in post-war Leningrad. Much like in his essays, Brodsky’s speakers escape the cruel, outside world when they enter the enclosed space of the Soviet cinema, where they glimpse a bigger, more colourful universe located in faraway lands.

Despite the important role played by the cinema in helping Brodsky imagine the West, it does not act alone in this endeavour: when moviegoing declines in importance for the poet from the late-1960s onwards, other sources of Western culture enter the fray. The multimedia, multi-sensual sensation Brodsky would have felt at the cinema, and following visits to it, at this time is described by Andrei Sergeev:

> Помню, мы с ним ходили на «Нюрнбергский процесс» [*Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961)] в кинотеатр «Украина» на «Багратионовской». Как он реагировал на большого американца Спенсера Трейси, на обожаемую немку Марлен Дитрих! Вернувшись на Малую Филевскую, мы крутили немецкие пластиночки — чехословацкие, лицензионные, с ходкими немецкими певцами. Иосифу страшно нравились тогдашние звезды — Петер Александер, Удо Юргенс. Была такая песня «Was ich nicht sagen kann, sagt mein Klavier», медлительная, и в ней было некое походное движение, так что эту лирическую могли бы петь солдаты. И мы слушали по нескольку раз и фантазировали, что вот немецкие танки идут из Парижа на Балканы, брать Югославию. И сидят на броне этакие рыцари

[129] Brodsky, I, p. 51.
[130] Iosif Brodskii, *Stikhotvoreniya i poemy*, ed. by Lev Losev, 2 vols (St Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2017), II, p. 313.
[131] Brodskii, I, p. 376.

> вермахта, в пыли, поют эту песню. «Компарсита» (тогда на этикетках писали еще не «Кумпарсита») тоже была немецкого происхождения — мы с Иосифом слушали ее по многу раз и вспоминали бездарный геббельсовский фильм «Восстание в пустыне» [*Das Lied der Wüste* (1939), titled *The Desert Song* in English] — там она впервые предстала нашим детским ушам.[132]

As presented in this extract, the cinema interacted with other arts — in this case, music — to create the image Brodsky possessed of the West.[133] As Brodsky himself also recalls, music, in particular American jazz, helped in the imagining of Anglo-American cultural spaces: 'When we were twelve, the German names on our lips gradually began to be replaced by those of Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Clifford Brown, Sidney Bechet, Django Reinhardt, and Charlie Parker.'[134]

Western cinema was therefore a vital, but not the sole, medium used to imagine life abroad, and the tools for this imagining constantly changed: German singers were replaced by American jazz stars, Western cinema was replaced by Western literature. The act of going to the cinema declined in importance for Brodsky by the time he reached the beginning of his adult life:

> our interest in films began to fade away, as we realized that film directors were increasingly of our own age and had less and less to tell us. By that time, we were already accomplished book readers, subscribers to *Foreign Literature* monthly, and we would stroll to the cinema less and less willingly, having realized that there is no point in knowing a place you are not going to inhabit. That, I repeat, was to happen much later, when we were in our thirties.[135]

The escapism of cinema loses its potency, and, over time, the escapism of literature takes precedent. Moral and aesthetic principles are now borrowed from the world of the written word as opposed to that of the moving image. Since the world of the cinema — a

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[132] Sergeev, pp. 433–34.
[133] Sergeev mentions that Brodsky took a liking to gin and whiskey when he lived in the USSR as he saw them as Western, non-Soviet drinks, Sergeev, p. 445. Brodsky's love for whiskey, especially, continued when he left the Soviet Union.
[134] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 6.
[135] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 11.

metonym for Western Europe and the USA — could never be reached, Brodsky tells us in this extract, it would have been delusional to wish to enter it for it would have always remained a dead end. This move from cinematic to literary escapism may have also been imposed from the outside and have been reflective of a wider trend at the time; Josephine Woll indicates that if the period from 1956 to 1967 was a relative Golden Age for cinemagoing and in 'the 1950s and 1960s, the average Soviet citizen visited cinemas at least twice a month; regular viewers attended about thirty-five times a year,' but 'by 1967, the thaw for Soviet cinema was over.'[136]

On the contrary, the world of literature could be entered and 'lived in' more easily regardless of external circumstances. Much of the literature Brodsky was drawn to at the time came from the West and was published in the journal *Inostrannaya literatura*, a publication he read avidly.[137] This journal, which had a print of about 250,000–300,000 from its inception in 1955 until the 1960s,[138] was involved in a wider discussion about the relationship between Russia and the West taking place at the time, not only on the political level, but also on the level of writers, publishers, and editors.[139] As Eleonory Gilburd notes, 'In the quantity of Western images and artifacts, in their enduring presence, the Thaw-era [from about the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s] opening to the West can only be compared to that initiated by Peter the Great.'[140] Due to this, the 'culture of the 1960s […] generated alternative discourses and institutions that compensated for some limitations in

[136] Woll, p. xii.
[137] Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, pp. 44–45.
[138] Samantha Sherry, 'Better Something Than Nothing: The Editors and Translators of Inostrannaia Literatura as Censorial Agents', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 91.4 (2013), 731–58 (p. 739).
[139] 'The editors and translators attached to *Inostrannaya literatura* were able to combine censorial and inclusive practices, working around state-mandated norms to include heterodox material at the same time as they ensured the exclusion of the most politically sensitive or inappropriate content' (Samantha Sherry, p. 757). For more on *Inostrannaya literatura* and the complex relationships between editors, translators, and the texts to be translated and published, see Samantha Sherry, *Discourses of Regulation and Resistance: Censoring Translation in the Stalin and Khrushchev Era Soviet Union* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 102–40.
[140] Gilburd, p. 1.

official culture.'[141] One could say that for Brodsky, the alternative discourses of Western cinema were replaced by those of Western literature as the 1960s progressed.

Before proceeding, let us reassert our main points. In his writings, Brodsky emphasizes the tremendous, transformational effects of Western cinema on himself and his generation.[142] These effects were felt in his youth and early adulthood but declined in importance in the late 1960s when the activity of viewing and watching the West was replaced by a more focused and intensive reading of the West. The cinema was a joyful space for Brodsky in the 1950s and 1960s, one where he could see, and imaginatively create, alternative places: it is through watching Western film that he came of age, as the Bildungsroman-like qualities of his reflections on his cinema visits in his youth attest. In the USSR, via the imaginative space of the cinema, Brodsky was able to better articulate and understand his personal aesthetic and moral stances. The imaginative realm of films provided him with glimpses into other worlds, glimpses which helped him think about escape from his society, even if it was a physical impossibility at the time. In response to the question 'Когда ты решился на выезд из России?' posed to him in an interview with Adam Michnik in 1995, Brodsky declares: 'Я понял, что хочу уехать после просмотра первого западного фильма.'[143] As I show in the next section, when he did move to the West, the imaginative potentials of film were harnessed in a different way and for different ends: cinema was used to help him understand distant places he could not physically go to,

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[141] Andrew Kahn and others, *A History of Russian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 551.

[142] Trophy films 'заложили основу нового типа сознания, идущего вразрез с парадигмойсоветских ценностей,' Mariya Markovna Gel'fond, 'Fenomen trofeinogo kinematografa v tvorchestve I. Brodskogo i B. Okudzhavy', in *Proizvodstvo smysla: sbornik statei i materialov pamyati Igorya Vladimirovicha Fomenko*, ed. by S. Yu. Artemova, N. A. Veselova, and A. G. Stepanov (Tver': Tverskoi gosudarstvennoi universitet, 2018), pp. 603–16 (p. 607).

[143] Joseph Brodsky, *Bol'shaya kniga interv'yu*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina (Moskva: Zakharov, 2000), p. 657. In a letter from 1976 to Lev Losev, quoted in my Introduction, he tells his friend that he had an offer to teach and work in London and Oxford after leaving the Soviet Union but that he turned down both offers for a chance to go to the USA: 'я подумал, что уж если происходит "ченж," то пусть это будет настоящая [*sic*] ченж ,' see *LLP*, Box 1, Folder 7. One could say that his decision to settle in the USA was dictated, to a certain extent, by his infatuation and experiences with Hollywood films in his youth.

no matter how hard he tried.

The physiognomies of actors

Brodsky's personal reflections on cinemagoing centre around his life in Leningrad in the late 1950s and 1960s, and in his essays he never writes about his impressions of going to the cinema in non-Soviet spaces. That which attracted the poet, as already seen, was the ability of a film to transport the viewer away from one, seen reality — the Soviet reality — to another, unseen reality — the West. Since the West was viewed in close quarters following his move away from the USSR in 1972, film could no longer fulfil this function following his exile: there was no need to imagine the West since he resided in the West. Despite this, the underlying structure of his approach to the cinema was retained after his move abroad, just in different terms: film facilitated a move from a seen reality — the West — to an unseen reality — Ancient Rome. Post-1972, the world of cinema provides a plethora of examples through which he can relate his literary experiences: it becomes a space he can enter for metaphors and similes, and a form that allows him to bring distant times and individuals into the present.

One instance of the metaphorical use of film is found in Brodsky's 1995 essay 'Letter to Horace,' where he playfully imagines what writers from a pre-cinematic, pre-Hollywood era would have looked like:

> If what Suetonius tells us about your [Horace's] appearance is indeed true – at least something in his account must be true! – and you were short and portly, then you most likely looked like Eugenio Montale or Charlie Chaplin in the *King in New York* period. The one I can't picture for the life of me is Ovid. Even Propertius is easier: skinny, sickly, obsessed with his equally skinny and sickly redhead, he is imaginable. Say, a cross between William Powell and Zbigniew Cybulski. But not Ovid, though he lasted longer than all of you.[144]

[144] Joseph Brodsky, 'Letter to Horace', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 373–99 (pp. 376–77).

and

> No, I never could conjure Naso's [i.e. Ovid, whose full name was Publius Ovidius Naso] face. Sometimes I see him played by James Mason – a hazel eye soggy with grief and mischief; at other times, though, it's Paul Newman's winter-gray stare. But, then, Naso was a very protean fellow, with Janus no doubt presiding over his lares. […] And to you [i.e. Ovid to Horace] he was just a punk, an aristo, privileged from the cradle, etc. Not like you and Anthony Perkins's Virgil, practically working-class boys, only five years' difference.[145]

For Brodsky, 'Naso was a womanizer. Among other things, that's what makes it so difficult to picture his appearance, that's why I oscillate between Paul Newman and James Mason.'[146] By bringing cool, sophisticated actors from Anglo-American and European cinema of the 1950s–1960s into direct dialogue with writers of the Roman Empire, antiquity is domesticated, made to feel tangible and relatable, and brought into the present; in addition, Brodsky also elevates film actors since they are compared to canonical, Latin poets. The whole of 'Letter to Horace' is an attempt at bringing various cultural spaces and times into a dialogue with one another,[147] and the dialogue between popular actors of the twentieth century with poets from Ancient Rome is one important strand in this endeavour.

The closing up of time and space in a synthetic manner is evident elsewhere in Brodsky's work and, as Susan Sontag mentions that 'The great Latin poets and Dante were as present in his mind as the classics of 19th and 20th century literature.'[148] William Wadsworth, one of Brodsky's former university students, also picks up on this trait: 'for

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[145] Brodsky, 'Letter to Horace', pp. 377–78.
[146] Brodsky, 'Letter to Horace', p. 387.
[147] As Timothy P. Hofmeister has noted, 'The erotic [in the essay] is not the salient feature, or not the only one, but rather the mixing of high and low, a free-ranging attitude that conveys a certain tone and a certain Euro-American intellectual style, a kind of Sontag-strut,' Timothy P. Hofmeister, 'Joseph Brodsky's Roman Body', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 12.1 (2005), 81–93 (p. 86).
[148] Susan Sontag and others, 'A Tribute to Joseph Brodsky 1940-1996', *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 28, 1997, 175–86 (p. 177).

Joseph, language subsumed time, and all poets were therefore contemporaries, not fathers and sons. The young poet's task is not to commit patricide, but to seek his or her most congenial company among the shades.'[149] Brodsky's favourite poets are not organised hierarchically in a vertical fashion, but horizontally, and they communicate with each other, across time, via the medium of poetry.[150] Even though Brodsky was notoriously opinionated and believed fervently in his categorisation of 'good' and 'bad' poets, he never makes the 'good' poets compete against each other for supremacy. In 'Letter to Horace,' the cinema helps brings these good poets together in the same space via the written word.

Whereas photographs of writers such as W. H. Auden and Samuel Beckett, seen when he lived in the Soviet Union, allowed Brodsky to imagine what they were like as people and provided a visual base from which his imagination could work, as I show in Chapter Three, the writings of Roman poets force him to find visual correlatives for the people behind Latin texts elsewhere since photographic evidence of their appearances does not exist. As regards photographs of twentieth-century writers, one notes an extrapolation from the photograph to the man: from a photo, Brodsky imagines what a writer is like as a person. Here, one sees an extrapolation from the man to an image of the man found in the world of actors and films. With Auden and Beckett, Brodsky could combine textual and visual information to create a new image of them when he was in the USSR. In the case of the Roman poets, he had to work from the text to find a visual equivalent of them in other

[149] Valentina Polukhina, *Brodsky through the Eyes of His Contemporaries*, Studies in Russian and Slavic Literatures, Cultures and History, 2nd ed., rev.supplemented, 2 vols (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008), II, pp. 467–68.

[150] This is an opinion that Czesław Miłosz also expressed about him: '[in Brodsky's eyes] one cannot speak of equality among poets, with the exception of the few who are the very best, to whom it is inappropriate to apply the labels "greater" or "lesser",' Czeslaw Milosz, 'Notes About Brodsky', in *To Begin Where I Am: Selected Essays*, ed. by Bogdana Carpenter and Madeleine G. Levine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 421–30 (p. 430).

images he had in his memory.[151] In this way, when discussing Roman writers, Brodsky's processes of imagination are utilised in a different manner. Using the jargon of metaphors, it can be stated that if the tenors are his favourite Latin writers, then the vehicles are taken from the cinema. The cinema is used to imagine what he cannot see, in other words, the faces of Latin poets. Pre-1972, cinema showed Brodsky the world into which he desired to escape but could not physically reach. After his emigration, it works in a similar way. 'Poetry was for him [Brodsky] a dialogue across centuries,'[152] as Czesław Miłosz recalled about his friend in 1996, and cinema helped in this conversation. The various observations in this section help us understand Brodsky's approach to antiquity more widely and will be pertinent to my discussion of 'Post aetatem nostram.'

Cinematic techniques in poetry

Finally, Brodsky makes use of the cinematic in his essays when carrying out close readings of individual poetic texts. When exploring works by Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost, and Rainer Maria Rilke, in individual, laudatory essays dedicated to each of them, Brodsky often resorts to cinematographic vocabulary to aid him in his arguments. If elsewhere the cinema allowed Brodsky an imaginative escape from his daily environment, and gave him the visual stimuli to be used to bring the past into the present, in this instance the cinema provides jargon to be harnessed when imaginatively bringing poetry, and the thought processes of the poet, to life. In these discussions, Brodsky does not claim that the poets in question were influenced by the cinema, rather that they thought 'cinematically' before cinema i.e. he declares that cinematic techniques originated in poetry. In this way, the poet, in Brodsky's eyes, is a visionary artist who can do things

[151] It should be pointed out that Brodsky chooses to use the cinema as the source of his comparisons even though there are images of Latin poets in paintings and sculpture.
[152] Czeslaw Milosz, 'Notes on Joseph Brodsky', *Partisan Review*, 63.2 (1996), 184–87 (p. 187).

with words that film directors only understood much later. The use of cinematic terms when reading poetry is thus deployed to reassert one of Brodsky's lifelong beliefs: that poetry is the highest art form.

The use of cinematic techniques in Brodsky's analyses is significant as the poets and poetic texts used were close to his heart; cinema was used to describe poets and texts he greatly admired. These essays have two common characteristics. Firstly, they were all written at about the same time in the early- to mid-1990s, and feature in Brodsky's 1995 essay collection, *On Grief and Reason*: in the collection, 'On Grief and Reason' (the essay on Frost) is dated 1994, 'Wooing the Inanimate' (the essay on Hardy) is undated but was completed in 1995,[153] 'Ninety Years Later' (the essay on Rilke) is dated 1994. This was also the time when Brodsky was working on 'Letter to Horace.' Moreover, the collection begins with the film-heavy piece already looked at: 'Spoils of War.' *On Grief and Reason* features twenty-one essays: 'Spoils of War' is the first essay in the collection, 'On Grief and Reason' is the fifteenth, 'Wooing the Inanimate' is the eighteenth, 'Ninety Years Later' is the nineteenth, 'Letter to Horace' is the twentieth. Given the great control and input Brodsky had over the editing process of his collections of poetry and essays, one could affirm that *Less Than One* (first published in 1986) is bookended by pieces on photography,[154] and *On Grief and Reason* is bookended by pieces related to cinema. As a result, *On Grief and Reason* references the cinema more regularly than *Less Than One* and points to a sustained effort on the part of the poet to think about cinema towards the end of his life.

Secondly, Hardy's 'The Convergence of the Twain,' Frost's 'Home Burial' and Rilke's 'Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes,' poems which are central to the three essays in

[153] Notes in *JBP*, Box 91, Folders 2198-2201 suggest this.
[154] The first essay, 'Less Than One,' and the last, 'In a Room and a Half,' both explicitly deal with photography and memories of his father. I look at both of these texts in Chapter Three.

question, were dear to Brodsky.[155] He would regularly include them in university lectures and classes on poetry when teaching in the USA, as evidenced by reading lists handed out to his students.[156] Indeed, the lengthy ruminations on these poets and their texts in the classroom can be ascertained in the style utilised in the essays: 'Brodsky's writings on poets he admired or revered are sometimes not so much essays, in the usual sense of the word, as reconstructions of classroom performances.'[157] The works on all three poets had long gestation periods: they were thought about and discussed with others in academic settings over long periods of time. Finally, all three of these texts were named by Brodsky when he was asked for a list of twelve to fifteen of the most important poems of the twentieth century.[158]

The first way Brodsky uses cinematic vocabulary when looking at poetry is through discussions of framing and montage. The reader sees this in the poet's reading of Hardy's 'The Convergence of the Twain' (1912), a poem about the Titanic and its wreckage. Brodsky notes the following:

> Perhaps this [when beginning a discussion of the fourth stanza of Hardy's poem] is as good a time as any to point to the cinematic, frame-by-frame procedure our poet resorts to here, and the fact that he is doing this in 1912, long before film became a daily – well, nightly – reality. I believe I've said someplace that it was poetry that invented the technique of montage, not Eisenstein. A vertical arrangement of identical stanzas on the page *is* a film. A couple of years ago a salvaging company trying to

[155] Brodsky would often read the poetry of Hardy and Frost in public. In January 1995, for example, at a talk given in Zermatt, Switzerland, Brodsky read Hardy's 'The Convergence of the Twain' and Frost's 'Come In,' see *JBP*, Box 123, Folder 2758 for a transcript of the question-and-answer session where these texts were read. The session followed Brodsky's reading of a lecture that was included in *On Grief and Reason* in essay form: 'A Cat's Meow.'

[156] See items in *JBP*, Box 125.

[157] Daniel Weissbort, 'Staying Afloat: Thomas Hardy and Joseph Brodsky', *Russian Literature*, 47.3–4 (2000), 251–60 (p. 251).

[158] *JBP*, Box 126, Folder 2820. The list is undated though seems to have been compiled in Spring 1994, according to a handwritten note by Ann Kjellberg. It is unclear who requested this list. The poems on this list, with Brodsky's spellings preserved, are: Anna Akhmatova, I Like a River; Guillaume Apollinaire, Zone; W. H. Auden, In Praise of Limestone; C. P. Cavafy, Ionian; T. S. Eliot, Ash Wednesday; Robert Frost, Home Burial; Thomas Hardy, The Convergence of the Twain; Zbigniew Herbert, Study of the Object; James Joyce, The Ballad of Persee O'Reilly; Antonio Machado, La Terra de Alvar Gonzales; Osip Mandelstam, The Stream of Golden Honey; Eugenio Montale, The Customs House; Czeslaw Milosz, Elegy for N. N.; Rainer Maria Rilke, Orpheus, Euridice, Hermes; Wallace Stevens, Peter Quince at the Clavier.

> raise the *Titanic* showed its footage of the ship on TV; it was remarkably close to the matter at hand. Their emphasis was obviously on the contents of the ship's vault, which among other things might have contained a manuscript of Joseph Conrad's most recent novel, which was sent by the author to his American publisher with the ship, since it was to be the speediest mail carrier, among other virtues. The camera circled in the vault area incessantly, attracted by the smell of its riches, but to no avail. Thomas Hardy does a far better job.[159]

In Brodsky's eyes, poetic images act as cinematic scenes or frames. By placing them in order, the poet is a director who employs montage sequences in his poem. Poetry, Brodsky is telling us, is a higher form of art than film or television when describing the Titanic because a poem can concentrate on both 'the contents of the ship's vault' and other aspects of the tragedy at the same time. It is this control of the visual in the poem that Brodsky praises: 'His [Hardy's] strongest faculty […] was not the ear but the eye, and the poems existed for him, I believe, more as a printed than as spoken matter.'[160] Hardy is a highly controlling organiser of poetic matter and creates a work of art that is cinematic before the invention of cinema: poetry 'invented the technique of montage, not Eisenstein.'[161]

Mentions of cinematic framing are also prevalent in a discussion of Frost's 'Home Burial,' though in this instance Brodsky also incorporates ideas relating to types of cinematic shots. Frost's poem is melancholic and tense, and centres around a dialogue-heavy scene between a husband and wife whose child has died. When looking at lines two to five of the poem, where the husband looks up from the bottom of a staircase at his wife who is standing at the top, Brodsky states:

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[159] Joseph Brodsky, 'Wooing the Inanimate', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 270–325 (pp. 297–98).
[160] Brodsky, 'Wooing the Inanimate', p. 278.
[161] In an English draft for a Preface to a French edition of Anatoly Mariengof's short novel *Tsiniki*, Brodsky underlines the poetic/cinematic attributes of the work. In the draft, Brodsky says that the text 'doesn't aspire to an epic design, mainly because the technique of montage is the invention of poetry, not of cinema (stanzas are frames, and Dante preceeds [*sic*] Eisenstein),' *JBP*, Box 94, Folder 2262. Brodsky makes a similar comment in an undated discussion with Czesław Miłosz: 'Don't you [i.e. Miłosz] think that […] in them we sort of recognized, almost unwittingly or subconsciously, if you like, the principle of montage, which is the key principle of poetry,' *CMP*, Box 153, Folder 2416.

> Each piece of information in this narrative comes to you in an isolated manner, within a pentameter line. The isolation job is done by white margins framing, as it were, the whole scene, like the silence of the house; and the lines themselves are the staircase. Basically, what you get here is a succession of frames. 'She was starting down' is one frame. 'Looking back over her shoulder at some fear' is another; in fact, it is a close-up, a profile – you see her facial expression. 'She took a doubtful step and then undid it' is a third: again a close-up – the feet. 'To raise herself and look again' is a fourth – full figure.[162]

In a separate description of an image from 'Home Burial,' Brodsky asks the reader, in the tone of a university professor to his class: 'So what do you think she sees with her own eyes, and what does that sight prove? What does the frame contain this time? What does she have a close-up of?'[163] Brodsky thus visualises the poem — white margins frame, lines are like a staircase — and helps the reader do the same, via a series of rhetorical questions. In a discussion of Virgil in the essay 'Letter to Horace,' Brodsky asserts that, 'Whether he [Virgil] talks of plants or planets, soils or souls, the deeds and/or destinies of the men of Rome, his close-ups are both blinding and binding.'[164] If Hardy was an excellent director-producer, Brodsky suggests, then Frost, and Virgil, as expressed in these extracts, were great cameramen.

In addition, Brodsky underlines the way the omnipotent Frost organises his characters in this scene. It is as if Frost is carrying out multiple roles at the same time: 'It [one of Frost's 'dark pastoral(s)' poems] is a kind of theatre in which the author plays all the roles, including those of stage designer, director, ballet master, etc. […] In [Frost's] 'Home Burial' we have an arena reduced to a staircase, with its Hitchcockian banister.'[165] Thus, the poet is more able, and more powerful, than the film director:

> If this poem ['Home Burial'] is dark, darker still is the mind of its maker, who plays all three roles: the man, the woman, and the narrator. Their equal reality, taken separately or together, is still inferior to that of the poem's author, since 'Home

[162] Joseph Brodsky, 'On Grief and Reason', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 193–230 (p. 206).
[163] Brodsky, 'On Grief and Reason', p. 222.
[164] Brodsky, 'Letter to Horace', p. 389.
[165] Brodsky, 'On Grief and Reason', p. 204.

> Burial' is but one poem among many. The price of his autonomy is, of course, in its coloration, and perhaps what you ultimately get out of this poem is not its story but the vision of its ultimately autonomous maker.[166]

For Brodsky, a brilliant poet is not only a creator of the small worlds of individual poems, but also an individual who can take on multiple roles within the same poem, and have full control, on a broader scale, over his worlds and characters. Rilke also possesses this trait. During an analysis of Rilke's 1904 poem 'Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes,' Brodsky points out that 'Landscapes […] are to be inhabited; the ones sporting a road, in any case, are. In other words, now the poem ceases to be a painting and becomes a story: now he can start moving his figures.'[167] Like a film director, Rilke is able to move his actors around and tell them how to act out the scenes he envisions.

Finally, the cinema is referenced in discussions of light and colour. While thinking about the opening lines of Hardy's 'Your Last Drive,' a poem Hardy wrote about his wife shortly after her passing, Brodsky says that 'We first see the features of the cycle's heroine [Hardy's wife] lit – most likely dimly – by 'the borough lights ahead'. The lighting here is more cinematic than poetic.'[168] Similarly, in 'Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes,' Brodsky observes that Rilke chooses a 'silver ore' instead of a 'gold ore' as an image at a moment in the text. Brodsky mentions that this is because Rilke is 'aspiring evidently to a somewhat more monochromatic rendition of Persephone's domain.'[169] '[In Frost's 'Home Burial'] He's at the bottom of the stairs; she's at the top. […] Also, you've got to remember that it's in black and white.'[170] Brodsky is sensitive to the use of colour in the poetic text and this sensitivity is interrelated with thinking about the relationship between

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[166] Brodsky, 'On Grief and Reason', p. 230.
[167] Joseph Brodsky, 'Ninety Years Later', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 326–72 (p. 341).
[168] Brodsky, 'Wooing the Inanimate', p. 308.
[169] Brodsky, 'Ninety Years Later', p. 330.
[170] Brodsky, 'On Grief and Reason', p. 205.

poetry and cinema.

Cinema allows Brodsky to better draw out several visual aspects of the poets and poems he most admires. Though he believed that poetry is the highest art form and can never be trumped by the cinema or indeed any other relatively new media — 'Все, что творил я, творил не ради я | славы в эпоху кино и радио, | но ради речи родной, словесности' ('1972 god')[171] — this does not mean that the cinema cannot help articulate poems and their structures, the thought processes of poets, and aid in the visualisation of the imagery of the text in the mind of the reader. Brodsky is not an expert in cinematographic techniques — though he would have encountered many cinematic terms when working at Lenfilm — but rather borrows cinematographic terminology to show how a poet is a controller and organiser of poetic imagery. For Brodsky, the poet is a superior artist to the filmmaker and the cinema can provide the tools to imaginatively express this opinion; Brodsky never makes the claim that Hardy, Frost, or Rilke were influenced by the cinema when writing their verse.

Film criticism and two screenplays

Before seeing these three uses of the cinema — cinema as imaginative escape, cinema as bridge between the past and present, cinema as a way of highlighting the visual qualities of poems — at play in one of Brodsky's poems, it bears remembering that Brodsky carried out some attempts at a more sustained and immediate interaction with the form following his departure from the USSR in 1972: he drafted a piece of film criticism and two screenplays. These documents are tied up with imaginative practices: in the film review, Brodsky thinks about film directors as if they were writers, and in the screenplays he imaginatively recreates the figure of Joseph Stalin.

[171] Brodskii, I, p. 384.

Though Brodsky never published any essays dealing with his impressions and assessments of films made from the 1970s onwards, he did write a film review that was, to the best of my knowledge, not published.[172] This piece shows the literary roots of cinema, and hence acts as a predecessor, of sorts, to many of his comments on Hardy, Frost, and Rilke. In this undated work, most likely written in 1979 or 1980, Brodsky drafted a comparative review of the films *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (*L'Albero degli zoccoli*) directed by Ermanno Olmi, and *Orchestra Rehearsal* (*Prova d'orchestra*) directed by Federico Fellini, both of which were released internationally in 1978/1979. *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* focuses on an estate in the Bergamo region of Italy at the end of the nineteenth century, where several families live and work for a local landowner. Very much in the Italian neo-realist tradition, the film features a series of daily scenes from the lives of the workers, from children being born, to land being tended to; the actors used in the film were principally non-professional. Fellini's feature is a faux-documentary picture about members of an orchestra gathered in a disused room of a former church. It centres around disputes between different orchestra members who attempt to convince the others as to why their instrument is the best; disputes between the authoritarian conductor and the orchestra; and fights between the trade union representing the orchestra, and the conductor. The film ends with a *deus ex machina* when a massive wrecking ball rips through one of the walls of the auditorium, killing the harp player and resulting in the orchestra starting up their rehearsal amongst the rubble. This tragicomic scene is punctuated by the conductor directing the musicians in his stern Italian accent, one which veers off into a German accent at various points: Fellini makes explicit links between the conductor and Fascist dictators of the 1930s and 1940s. Olmi's film won the Palme d'Or

[172] The draft is found in *JBP*, Box 92, Folder 2221. Throughout this section, quotes are taken from the draft review found here. In a list of Brodsky's essays compiled in 1995 by Ann Kjellberg, there is mention of a 'Piece on Olmi & Fellini' published in the Italian weekly *L'Espresso*, see *JBP*, Box 35, Folder 750. I have tried, and failed, to track down a version of this text which may have been published in Italian.

at the Cannes Film Festival in 1978, and *Orchestra Rehearsal* was screened, out of competition, at Cannes in 1979.

In his draft review, written in English, Brodsky takes aim at the political messages in Fellini's film, and projects his own political preferences and standpoints onto the picture (Figure 1 shows the first page of this document). In the short essay, the reader is told that this is the first film by Olmi that Brodsky has seen; he tells us he has seen several by Fellini, namely *8 ½*, *La Dolce Vita, Satyricon, Amarcord* and *Roma*. Brodsky writes that he very much admires other films by Fellini, as they leave the viewer 'with the sense of powerful vagueness.' However, Brodsky dislikes *Orchestra Rehearsal* and he scolds Fellini for producing such a didactically political work, one which is out of touch with the realities of daily life. In contrast to Fellini's feature — Brodsky hated any authority that tried to impose grand ideologies on a people — 'Olmi makes a great effort to see things as they are, not through any prism. In fact, this is where the bulk of his energies is gone: into the impartiality, into the avoidance of the preconceived notions.' Brodsky heaps praise upon this 'work of genius' that does not judge or side with any one party, political viewpoint, or individual. For him, it is an excellent example of non-judgmental art, a refreshing piece that goes against much cinema he has in mind, where the 'working class and especially peasantry, the traditional subjects of the liberal intellectuals concern, become their real safari.' A final aspect that Brodsky analyses is the relationship between the writer and the film director. He remarks that Olmi's film has the qualities of an essay whereas Fellini acts as a novelist: he says that *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* is a cross between a short story and a novel without making a clear-cut pronouncement on its subject matter, and that Fellini explains and proselytizes too much for his liking.

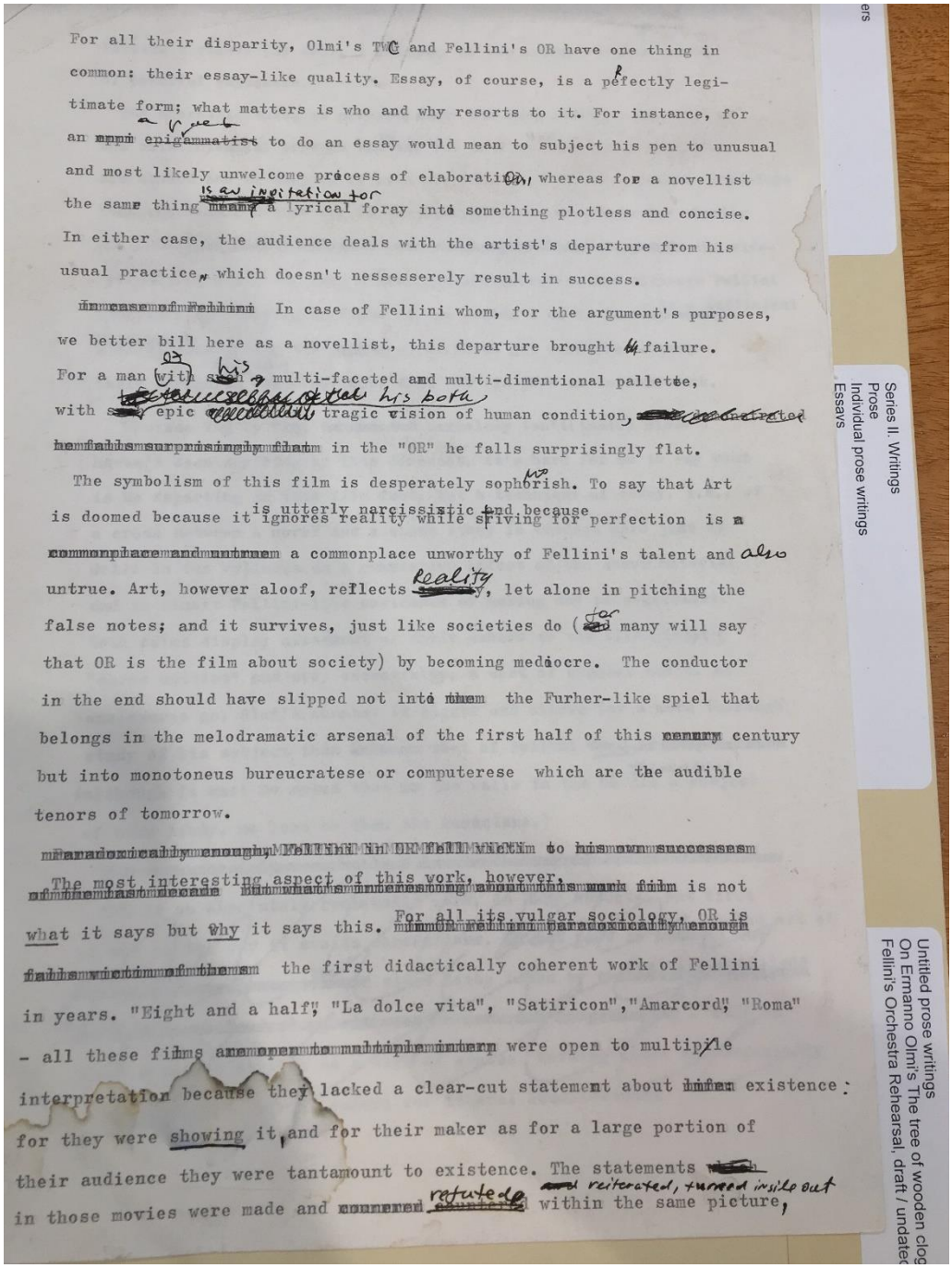


Figure 1. Opening page of film review of Olmi and Fellini.

This essay is revealing for several reasons. To begin with, it predates all the essays mentioned thus far and has much in common with the approaches to the cinema he would deploy in those very essays: the main link relates to the similarity between writers and filmmakers that Brodsky underlines. By talking about the cinema in this text, one can also ascertain several of Brodsky's views on poetry; by writing about what makes a good film,

Brodsky is also writing about what makes a good work of art and how he believes a great artist thinks. This is an idea that returns some ten–fifteen years later when he writes about the three poets discussed. Furthermore, Olmi's objective stance in his film is like the objective, God-like stance that Hardy, Frost and Rilke take vis-à-vis their texts. In addition, the review highlights Brodsky's preoccupation with the cinema throughout his life: by reading the published essays only, one gains the impression that Brodsky was interested in watching films in the USSR in his youth and early adulthood and then took up thinking about the medium again towards the end of his life in his essays on antiquity and his beloved poets. This pieces highlights that his interest in cinema never stopped and that he was attempting to find a way to put himself into a dialogue with it in writing in the 1970s. In this piece, cinema is used as a medium through which he could imaginatively think about literature from a different perspective.

A further bridge between the viewing of films in Soviet Russia and thinking about them through the essay form post-1972 is evident in two unpublished screenplays. In these texts, Brodsky attempts to analyse, or at least better comprehend, the figure of Joseph Stalin. These screenplays, located at Yale University, are *The Steel Man*, an undated text written in English and signed off by Brodsky and the film director Vladimir Rif,[173] and *Koroleva Kremlya ili Stalin v Gollivude*, a Russian-language text from 1989 which was also translated into English and signed off by Brodsky and Yuz Aleshkovsky.[174] Both texts

[173] All quotes from this screenplay in this section are taken from *JBP*, Box 97, Folder 2338. Rif directed the film *Very Close Quarters* (1986). I have been unable to cast any light on the relationship between Brodsky and Rif.

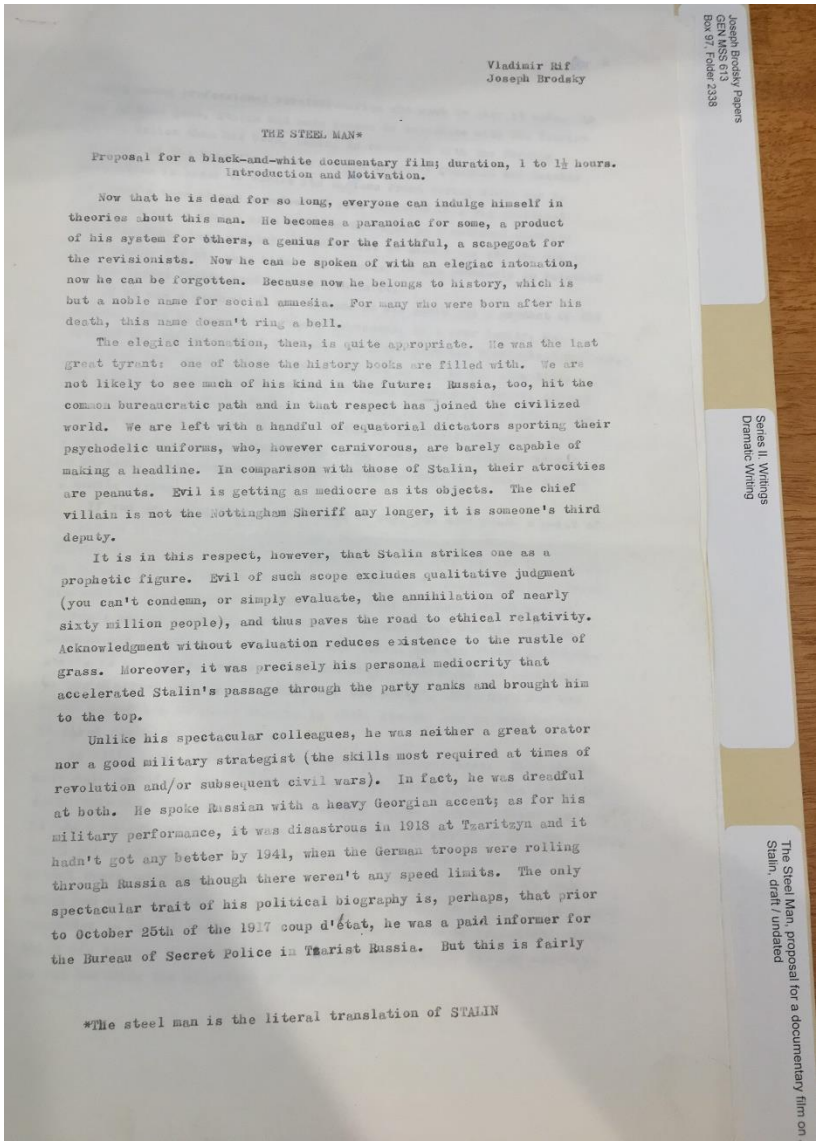
[174] All quotes from this screenplay in this section are taken from *JBP*, Box 96, Folders 2321 and 2322. Folder 2321 houses the original text in Russian, and Folder 2322 houses Brodsky's translation of it. Aleshkovsky's often parodic and satirical texts were liked by Brodsky and the two became friends when they both resided in the USA. In 1989, Brodsky wrote the Introduction to Aleshkovsky's novel, *Ruka*, translated into English as *The Hand Or, The Confession of an Executioner*; the text was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

centre on Stalin, and neither screenplay was turned into a film.[175]

Written after 1972, *The Steel Man* is described by its authors as 'a black-and-white documentary film; duration, 1 to 1 ½ hours' and centres on Joseph Stalin, his rise to power in the Russian Empire, and his leadership of Socialist Russia (Figure 2 shows the first page of this document). The 'Introduction and Motivation,' as the document is labelled, is written chronologically and gives a biographical framework for Stalin's life; I label the document a screenplay, but it reads more like an essay at times. The vocabulary and diction used throughout show the recognisable hallmarks of Brodsky's pen, as revealed by statements such as 'now he belongs to history, which is but a noble name for social amnesia' and 'If you are going this outcast kind of way, you soon reach a point of no return to normal life, education, career-making, et cetera, and for Stalin it came at the age of 23.' These snappy, subjective judgments abound and underline that the writer(s) of the text is/are preoccupied with the structures of evil and the behaviour of the tyrant, and slightly less interested in making a work that concentrates solely upon the facts of Stalin's life. Subjective, derogatory statements are strewn across this document: 'He was a man of routine – like some Don Juan whose heart may bleed for his first or second victim but after that falls short of emotion – he couldn't care less for the hundreds of thousands of those he executed.' At the end of the fifth and final page, the authors give a list of archives they wish to consult in the USA, UK, Germany, and Italy, and four possible individuals they hope to interview for the documentary: 'Svetlana Alliluieva, Stalin's daughter residing in [*sic*] USA,' 'I. Bazanov, Stalin's personal secretary (1922–1926)' [the reference seems to relate not to 'I. Bazanov' but to Boris Georgievich Bazanov here, a party official who fled the Soviet Union on 1 January 1928], 'Milovan Djilas' and 'Alexandr Soljenitzyn.' Even

[175] Mention is made of these two items in a list of unpublished or unedited works collated by Kjellberg shortly after Brodsky's death, see *JBP*, Box 35, Folder 746. Unfortunately, many questions related to these screenplays are difficult to answer: why were the films not made? How far did Brodsky get in making these pictures?

though it is labelled a proposal for a documentary film, and there are mentions of archives and interviews, the text is an imaginative exercise in attempting to understand the mind of the authoritarian leader.



Vladimir Rif
Joseph Brodsky

THE STEEL MAN*

Proposal for a black-and-white documentary film; duration, 1 to 1½ hours.
Introduction and Motivation.

Now that he is dead for so long, everyone can indulge himself in theories about this man. He becomes a paranoiac for some, a product of his system for others, a genius for the faithful, a scapegoat for the revisionists. Now he can be spoken of with an elegiac intonation, now he can be forgotten. Because now he belongs to history, which is but a noble name for social amnesia. For many who were born after his death, this name doesn't ring a bell.

The elegiac intonation, then, is quite appropriate. He was the last great tyrant: one of those the history books are filled with. We are not likely to see much of his kind in the future: Russia, too, hit the common bureaucratic path and in that respect has joined the civilized world. We are left with a handful of equatorial dictators sporting their psychodelic uniforms, who, however carnivorous, are barely capable of making a headline. In comparison with those of Stalin, their atrocities are peanuts. Evil is getting as mediocre as its objects. The chief villain is not the Nottingham Sheriff any longer, it is someone's third deputy.

It is in this respect, however, that Stalin strikes one as a prophetic figure. Evil of such scope excludes qualitative judgment (you can't condemn, or simply evaluate, the annihilation of nearly sixty million people), and thus paves the road to ethical relativity. Acknowledgment without evaluation reduces existence to the rustle of grass. Moreover, it was precisely his personal mediocrity that accelerated Stalin's passage through the party ranks and brought him to the top.

Unlike his spectacular colleagues, he was neither a great orator nor a good military strategist (the skills most required at times of revolution and/or subsequent civil wars). In fact, he was dreadful at both. He spoke Russian with a heavy Georgian accent; as for his military performance, it was disastrous in 1918 at Tzaritzyn and it hadn't got any better by 1941, when the German troops were rolling through Russia as though there weren't any speed limits. The only spectacular trait of his political biography is, perhaps, that prior to October 25th of the 1917 coup d'état, he was a paid informer for the Bureau of Secret Police in Tsarist Russia. But this is fairly

*The steel man is the literal translation of STALIN

Joseph Brodsky Papers
GEN MSS 613
Box 97, Folder 2338

Series II. Writings
Dramatic Writing

The Steel Man, proposal for a documentary film on Stalin, draft / undated

Figure 2. Opening page of *The Steel Man*.

The preoccupation with Joseph Stalin continues in the second item under consideration: *Koroleva Kremlya ili Stalin v Gollivude*. The genesis of the Russian version of the screenplay seems quite straightforward: one night in first half of 1989, Brodsky was

discussing Stalin's love for American movies with Yuz Aleshkovsky.[176] Following this conversation, Aleshkovsky went away and wrote a synopsis for a potential film on this topic in Russian. Aleshkovsky sent a copy of the film's synopsis/brief screenplay to Brodsky's assistant at the time, Ann Kjellberg, on 28 July 1989. Brodsky translated the Russian text into English and added some introductory and closing comments; as well as these comments, Brodsky adds the words 'Proposal for a Screenplay' on the title page. I have found no evidence to suggest the film was pushed into production by either author.

In the eight-page synopsis for their film, titled *The Man With Six Toes on his Right Foot* — Brodsky's English translation of the Russian version given the title *Koroleva Kremlya ili Stalin v Gollivude* — the authors give a more comprehensive introduction to their projected feature than in the Russian version (Figure 3 shows the opening page of the English translation). The reader is told that 'the film is a phantasmagoric comedy based on an historical theme' and that the writers of the screenplay 'hope that a film about Stalin will be not an ordinary Hollywood gangster movie, but a satiric and phantasmagoric story about the essence of a tyrannic and sadistic personality as well as about the Kafkaesque atmosphere of the Stalinist period.'[177] As well as the slippery genre of the film, the screenplay itself seems unlike a traditional screenplay. The first lines of the text read: 'In all candor, Dear Reader, it is easier to imagine a juicy and tender fillet mignon steak, looking at the hoof or the ear of a steer, than it is to form an impression of the film we have in mind, reading this so-called proposal.' Elsewhere, the exposition continues with the words: 'A few broadly sketched moments will spare both you and us the necessity of a

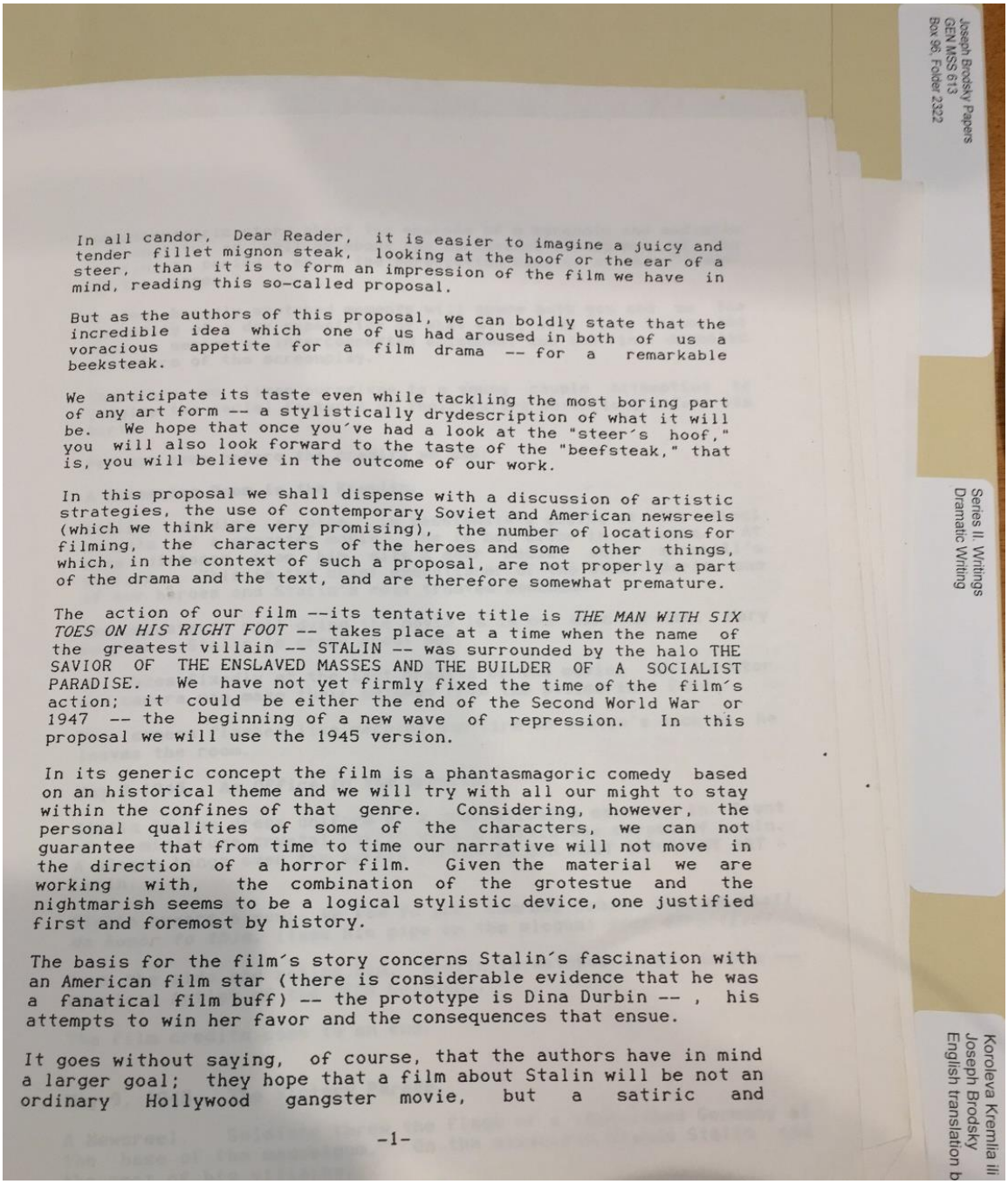
[176] Some details clarifying the origins of the Russian and English versions of the text were provided to me by Yuz Aleshkovsky and his wife Irina Aleshkovsky. On e-mail, Irina told me that 'Joseph and Yuz came up with an idea one night just talking about Stalin's love for American movies. Yuz wrote up the synopsis in Russian, Joseph wrote the intro letter in English and translated Yuz's synopsis with his own additions and that was it. Whether it was ever send [*sic*] to anyone neither Yuz nor me have no idea. We also do not remember why it sort of died, maybe Yuz or Joseph had health issues at the time....' (email to me, 15 August 2019).

[177] *JBP*, Box 96, Folder 2322.

dry exposition of what will, with time, become the text, a series of interconnected episodes, and the final dramatic structure of the screenplay.' The scenario that ensues is as chaotic and variegated as its description, and the plot of the film has more in common with Aleshkovsky's satirical, skaz-infused writings — Aleshkovsky also wrote several screenplays that were made into films in the 1970s[178] — than with Brodsky's works, though Brodsky's additions can be seen when the original Russian screenplay is placed next to Brodsky's English version; as with the Stalin documentary, his subjective comments can be detected in the English translation. The story line involves Stalin's unhealthy infatuation with Mary Bourbon, an actress based upon the American star Deanna Durbin, during the end of the Second World War, an infatuation which leads to him travelling to California in search of sex.

Brodsky's fascination with the figure of Joseph Stalin is evident in his personal correspondence. In a letter dated 8 April 1980 from Sir Isaiah Berlin to the poet, for example, one indirectly finds out about Brodsky's comments about the dictator: 'You think that I shall be attacked [for my comments] about Pasternak: I imagine you mean the telephone conversation [between Pasternak and Stalin in 1934 regarding Osip Mandelshtam] – I cannot help that, it is as he told it to me – at least, I do not go into the matter of the famous published letter which he wrote Stalin on the death of Stalin's wife.'[179] This is just one instance of where the dictator's name cropped up in conversation with friends and family.

[178] Two examples of his film screenplays are *Vot moya derevnya*, dir. by Boris Durov (Ekran, 1972) and *Chto s toboi proiskhodit?*, dir. by Vladimir Sarukhanov (Kinostudiya im. M. Gor'kogo, 1975).
[179] *JBP*, Box 2, Folder 56. For a discussion of the relationship between poets and leaders in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russia, see Morev. This text features a section on Brodsky's relationship to Soviet leaders.



In all candor, Dear Reader, it is easier to imagine a juicy and tender fillet mignon steak, looking at the hoof or the ear of a steer, than it is to form an impression of the film we have in mind, reading this so-called proposal.

But as the authors of this proposal, we can boldly state that the incredible idea which one of us had aroused in both of us a voracious appetite for a film drama -- for a remarkable beeksteak.

We anticipate its taste even while tackling the most boring part of any art form -- a stylistically drydescription of what it will be. We hope that once you´ve had a look at the "steer´s hoof," you will also look forward to the taste of the "beefsteak," that is, you will believe in the outcome of our work.

In this proposal we shall dispense with a discussion of artistic strategies, the use of contemporary Soviet and American newsreels (which we think are very promising), the number of locations for filming, the characters of the heroes and some other things, which, in the context of such a proposal, are not properly a part of the drama and the text, and are therefore somewhat premature.

The action of our film --its tentative title is *THE MAN WITH SIX TOES ON HIS RIGHT FOOT* -- takes place at a time when the name of the greatest villain -- STALIN -- was surrounded by the halo THE SAVIOR OF THE ENSLAVED MASSES AND THE BUILDER OF A SOCIALIST PARADISE. We have not yet firmly fixed the time of the film´s action; it could be either the end of the Second World War or 1947 -- the beginning of a new wave of repression. In this proposal we will use the 1945 version.

In its generic concept the film is a phantasmagoric comedy based on an historical theme and we will try with all our might to stay within the confines of that genre. Considering, however, the personal qualities of some of the characters, we can not guarantee that from time to time our narrative will not move in the direction of a horror film. Given the material we are working with, the combination of the grotestue and the nightmarish seems to be a logical stylistic device, one justified first and foremost by history.

The basis for the film´s story concerns Stalin´s fascination with an American film star (there is considerable evidence that he was a fanatical film buff) -- the prototype is Dina Durbin -- , his attempts to win her favor and the consequences that ensue.

It goes without saying, of course, that the authors have in mind a larger goal; they hope that a film about Stalin will be not an ordinary Hollywood gangster movie, but a satiric and

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Figure 3. Opening page of *The Man With Six Toes on his Right Foot*.

These two cinema-related texts highlight a strong desire on Brodsky's part to imaginatively bring Stalin to the big screen. Even if the reasons behind the non-publication of the screenplays/synopses are not fully known, the pieces show an attempt at interacting with the cinema in a more direct way than the way in which this was carried out in the published essays. Both texts involve an imaginative reading and telling of

history via the screen and highlight the way Brodsky may have wished to think about empire, evil, and power in a non-literary, yet still artistic, manner. Whatever the case, Brodsky's association of cinema with imaginative, escapist practices, features evident from his regular cinemagoing days in the 1960s, was still evidently present well after his departure from the Soviet Union not only in his essays, but also in other non-literary practices.

A case study of Post aetatem nostram

Considering Brodsky's extensive interactions with the cinema outlined already, the final section of the chapter shows how he thought about the creation of much of his own poetry in cinematic terms. The poet himself hints at this in an interview from 1995. In this conversation, the interviewer asks Brodsky whether it was the image or the poetry of John Donne which influenced him more when he wrote his poem 'Bol'shaya elegiya Dzhonu Donnu' (1963). The poet responds:

> Главным обстоятельством, подвигшим меня приняться за ето стикхотворение, была, как мне казалось об ту пору, возможность центробежного движения стихотворения... ну, не столько центробежного... как камень падает в пруд, и постепенное расширение... прием скорее кинематографический — да, когда камера отдаляется от центра.[180]

Some critics have made inroads into analyses of cinematic subtexts and cinematographic features in Brodsky's poetry. Lev Losev sees camera techniques in the movement from one poetic image to the next in 'Stikhi na smert' T. S. Eliota.' Losev comments that 'Картина замерзшего после зимних праздников мира дана в

[180] Igor' Pomerantsev and Iosif Brodskii, 'Khleb poezii v vek razbroda', in *Iosif Brodskii. Bol'shaya kniga interv'yu*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina (Moscow: Zakharov, 2000), pp. 154–55.

кинематографической смене планов — от наезда на выметаемые «за порог осколки» до взгляда из стратосферы на океан и континент.'[181] Elsewhere, Roman Timenchik has found parallels between the poem '1867' (1975) and William Dieterle's 1939 film *Juarez*, and has shown how several of the film's scenes are mirrored, in an ekphrastic manner, in Brodsky's poem.[182] Peter France sees a similar phenomenon in '20 sonetov k Marii Styuart,' a poem that is in dialogue with *Road to the Scaffold*, a film mentioned earlier on in this chapter.[183] However, my chapter has highlighted other interactions that are also worth considering: the way antiquity and the present can be brought together via the screen, and how empire and powerful political leaders can be analysed and represented through film.

To show Brodsky's debt to the cinematic world in both the cinematic organisation of this imagery in a text and the imagery chosen, I look at 'Post aetatem nostram'[184] and use Brodsky's cinematic analyses of other poems (those by Hardy, Frost, Rilke) to read his text. 'Post aetatem nostram' involves all three approaches to the cinema already shown: the cinematic world as imaginative escape, the use of the cinema to domesticate antiquity, and the use of cinematographic vocabulary — shots, framing techniques, and montage — when thinking about poems.[185] In many ways, 'Post aetatem nostram' is a distillation of ideas expressed in the essays more than a decade before they were written. Mentions have been made about the text's discussions of Empire, and the tension between the individual and the position of the leader.[186] I focus on the visuality of the text and its possible

[181] Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, pp. 121–22.
[182] Timenchik.
[183] France.
[184] The text I quote from in this section is in Brodskii, I, pp. 345–54.
[185] Piotr Fast has said that 'Стихотворение строится по образцу небольшой новеллы. Согласно эпической конвенции в нем ясно излагается каузально построенный сюжет с помощью типичного для этого жанра аукториального повествования от третьего лица,' P. Fast, '«Elovyi greben' vmesto gorizonta»: o motivakh dvenadtsatoi chasti «Post Aetatem Nostram»', in *Poetika Iosifa Brodskogo: sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina, I. V. Fomenko, and A. G. Stepanov (Tver': Tverskoi gosudarstvennoi universitet, 2003), pp. 267–74 (p. 269). I argue here that the cinema is a more pertinent medium to think about when reading the text due to the various 'shots' Brodsky deploys.
[186] See Polukhina, *Joseph Brodsky: A Poet for Our Time*, pp. 198–99.

cinematic qualities.[187]

In and around 1970, when 'Post aetatem nostram' was written, one finds numerous dialogues between Brodsky and the cinema. His poem 'Posvyashchyaetsya Yalte' (1969) is structurally similar to Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), where the same events are told, and retold, by different individuals using their own, unique perspectives. In 1971, Brodsky wrote the poem 'Rembrandt. Oforty' to accompany a documentary film about the Dutch painter.[188] Additionally, he acted in the film *Poezd v Dalekii Avgust* (released in 1971) alongside Vladimir Vysotsky; Brodsky's scenes did not make it into the final cut. At the time, he was also working on dubbing, and writing for, films at Lenfilm. Even if going to the cinema hall itself became less important for him by the end of the 1960s, film was nonetheless an important source of income and interest for the poet.

'Post aetatem nostram' takes place in an imperial setting from antiquity, in an undefined place, at an undefined time. In this amalgamated Greco-Roman landscape, the reader encounters a panoply of Greeks and Romans belonging to various social classes; the reader meets the very well-off and the very poor, and encounters men in various positions of power. However, the text is also forward-looking and features futuristic elements — the metallic, prison tower of the seventh section— that confuse the temporal setting in which it is set.

Cinematic montage may be ascertained in the overall structure of the text. The poem is split up into twelve sections of varying lengths, with stanzas within these parts also differing in size. Each section features a tableau, or a set of tableaux, taken from different places in the town or city, and each presents snapshots of different, relatively underexplained plotlines taking place in the unnamed metropolis. If one were to speak of a

[187] For a discussion of how the text functions as a precursor to Brodsky's play *Mramor*, see Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, 'Ot mira — k Rimu', in *Poetika Brodskogo*, ed. by Lev Losev (Tenafly, NJ, 1986), pp. 198–206.
[188] For some mentions of Brodsky's work on this documentary film, see Leving, 'Iosif Brodskii i zhivopis': pyat' etyudov'.

central story in the text, it would be the following: the main character/hero — a wandering, and seemingly homeless, Greek — witnesses various events around him and decides to cross the border between the city/Empire and the world around it in. It may be read as a story of escape though the purposefully underdeveloped nature of all characters in the piece foregrounds its montage-like qualities; the reader is forced to connect the dots between the scenes and characters given. The reader never enters the minds of any of the characters for sustained periods of time and is made to judge them, and what he/she sees, solely by their appearances and actions.

A walkthrough of the poem shows Brodsky's potential usage of cinematic shots and cinematic editing on the level of individual sections, parts of sections, and images. The first section of the poem juxtaposes three scenes — with one stanza dedicated to each — shot in three different ways: one sees a crowd awaiting an unnamed Emperor in a long shot; there is a close-up shot of a wandering Greek (called a 'brodyaga-grek' throughout the text) playing dominoes with a disabled man in a coffee house; the reader enters a bedroom where he/she sees a 'старый откупщик' telling a hetaira about the Emperor. The narrator is omnipresent, moving with us through these scenes, and Brodsky leaves the connections between them unsaid.

The second section transports the reader to a palace and describes a governor (Brodsky uses the noun 'Namestnik') violently assaulting a local state representative (Brodsky calls this second person a 'mestnyi tsar'') for a mistake made at a banquet: the governor blames the local official for having killed the doves which were supposed to fly gloriously out of a pie at the feast. One witnesses this scene in close quarters but is then told that, slightly further away, the wandering Greek from the previous section is observing the happenings from the roof of the palace. The Greek witnesses the body of the chef, who is presumably responsible for the fiasco with the birds, being removed from the palace grounds: there is a double perspective on the same event, and the reader views both

the violence inflicted inside the palace and the consequences of this violence from an outside position.

The reader returns to an indoor space in section three and sees a sleeping Greek (presumably the same individual from the first two sections) being shaved in a barbershop, with a fly sitting on his foamy cheek. Each character in this scene is thinking his own thoughts: the barber is thinking about a potentially bad haircut he has just given a boy who he fears may not return to his shop; the client is dreaming homoerotic scenes ('видит чисто греческие сны: | с богами, с кифаредами, с борьбой | в гимнасиях'[189]); the fly is thinking about how to best navigate the landscape of the Greek's cheek. The foam on the cheek is seen in an incredibly close-up shot and is compared to snow on a mountain side; the fly is then likened to a Greek solider going through this treacherous snow in the fateful expedition to Persia as described by Xenophon in his *Anabasis*.[190] In the final lines, the Greek opens his eye and the fly dramatically howls from terror and flies away.

The next section, the second shortest after section nine, describes the night after the celebrations hinted at in section two. We are now in a setting some distance from the palace: 'Чем дальше от дворца, тем меньше статуй | и луж. С фасадов исчезает лепка.'[191] The scene is empty of people and is a meditation, by the narrator, on the positives of living and existing on the edges of imperial space, a recurrent theme in Brodsky's writing of the time (see 'Pis'ma rimskomu drugu' (1972)).[192] The section also features the anachronistic appearance of a felucca which emphasises the amalgamation of temporal locations in the text.

Section five may be taking place at the same time of day as the previous section, though this is somewhat unclear. Like the first section, three separate events are

[189] Brodskii, I, p. 347.
[190] For a more detailed analysis of the links between Xenophon's text and the poem, see Losev's notes in Brodskii, I, pp. 620–23.
[191] Brodskii, II, p. 347.
[192] Brodskii, I, p. 374.

juxtaposed: a citharode is speaking in public; a crowd listens to his words and utters various opinions on them; and a few people including a Greek — most likely the wandering Greek — are swimming and sunbathing by the sea. Section six probably takes place on the following day in a stadium where gladiators are fighting. The governor from section two returns and has a sinister smile on his face — the reader sees it in an extreme close-up — as he watches this violent spectacle: 'Наместник, чье лицо подобно | гноящемуся вымени, смеется.'[193] As in the previous section, words from unnamed individuals interact as others observe these speakers and the scene. Even though there are few verbs relating to sight in the poem, it is very much centred around movements of people's eyes, whether they be those of the narrator and reader, or those of the individuals depicted.

Section seven is labelled 'Bashnya' and describes, in a manner more befitting a science fiction novel, a huge, metal tower ('Теряющийся где-то в облаках | железный шпиль'[194]) that houses a prison. Once more, the reader is unsure as to whether the situation described is taking place in a fictionalised past or future; according to the title of the section the reader is in the future though this is seen as very similar to the past. The focus of attention throughout this section is the tower itself with its shining exterior ('Слепящий блеск хромированной стали'[195]), and the reader also catches a glimpse of a prisoner on the forty-third floor. From a dizzying height, one moves to ground level in section eight and encounters a dried-up fountain,[196] likely positioned by the palace of section two. The disgraced 'tsar'' from section two also reappears, and he is welcomed by his minions: 'Царь появляется. Вожди встают | и потрясают копьями. Улыбки, |

[193] Brodskii, I, p. 349.
[194] Brodskii, I, p. 350.
[195] Brodskii, I, p. 350.
[196] The image echoes one found in the poem 'Fontan' (1967), where the reader is shown a disused, lion-shaped fountain.

объятья, поцелуи.'[197] The 'tsar'' is lucky though as his dark skin hides the beatings he received earlier on in the poem; Brodsky gives a painterly, cinematic contrast between the image of brown, tanned skin and blood-red/purple bruises. Again, the wandering Greek is looking at the scene from a distance and is unable to understand the body language and the interactions he is looking upon. The wandering Greek, an outsider figure, needs a local boy to help translate the visual information into a language he can comprehend.

Extended metaphors make up the next two sections. In section nine, labelled 'Zverinets,' one sees a lion in a cage, and the narrator goes on to tell us that life on Earth is like living in a prison. Part ten is called 'Imperator' and features another set of metaphors that allow him to muse upon Empires and the problems they have built into them. The very visual images in these two sections — the reader sees triremes, water, giant lettering, a legionary — are used as springboards for metaphorical, aphoristic outbursts on civilisations and their decline: 'проточная вода | ничуть не хуже скульпторов' and 'Движенье есть, движенье происходит. | Мы все-таки плывем.'[198] This section also features a somewhat ridiculous, cinematic close-up of the Emperor, who is shown to us from behind, trying to defecate.

The two concluding sections of the poem describe the wandering Greek. Section eleven is set indoors, and the narrator focuses on the dying flame in a lantern and the smoke patterns it creates in the room. The inside, homely space is contrasted to the wet and ominous space outside into which the Greek enters in section twelve. The reader finds out towards the end of the final part of the poem that the Greek is moving away from the imperial centre/space, having decided to cross its border. Despite his love for the sea and the natural world he is leaving behind, one is led to believe that the character needs a change of environment for his own well-being. The reader witnesses him in the final lines

[197] Brodskii, I, p. 351.
[198] Brodskii, I, p. 352.

from a distance as he ascends, and then descends, a small hillock, all the time moving towards a new home. Consequently, this highly optimistic poem shows the realisation of the dream of escape by a male hero and could be read biographically: Brodsky dreamed about escaping the Soviet Empire when he was watching Western cinema in the 1960s and enacted this imaginary departure in a highly cinematic text featuring an outsider figure much like himself.

As shown, this poem is cinematic according to Brodsky's understanding of the term. Brodsky gives the reader various scenes and characters placed next to each other, in a montage-like manner — poets, not Eisenstein, 'invented' montage, according to Brodsky, — with little obvious links created between them: sections and characters are shown to the reader and it is up to him/her to connect the frames. Like his versions of Hardy and Frost, Brodsky deploys a wide array of camera shots: he gives us ultra-close glimpses of flies, the faces of individuals, and thin puffs of smoke, next to panoramic shots of gladiatorial arenas and the main protagonist moving across a wide space. These cinematic qualities of both the text as a whole and individual images on the structural level are used in a poem that brings an imagined Greco-Roman world into the present or future; as shown already, Brodsky playfully liked to compare actors of his time with poets of the Roman Empire. Valentina Polukhina rightly observes that in the poem, 'Empire is not a geographical idea behind which some concrete country lurks, a country we could locate on a map, but a concept.'[199] It is this concept Brodsky explores via an imaginative use of cinematic devices.

In the essays discussed, Brodsky shows how the cinema helped him mentally escape his surroundings and how it could bring the world of antiquity into the present. In his screenplays, he is very much interested in exploring how empire and imperial leaders

[199] Polukhina, *Joseph Brodsky: A Poet for Our Time*, p. 199.

function, key themes of ‘Post aetatem nostram.’ As a result, Brodsky’s use of cinema to express aesthetic credos and investigate central philosophical and moral concerns, all of which can be seen in various essays from the 1980s and 1990s, may be detected in his poetry from a much earlier time.

Conclusion

For Brodsky, the cinema is intimately connected with imaginative practices, and the cinema hall is one of the happiest spaces that he and his characters visit. It is a topos that is predominantly portrayed in his essays comprised of reminiscences of life in the USSR. Following the poet’s departure to the USA in 1972, the role of cinema shifts. During his life in Leningrad, images of life in the West were seen, to a great extent, through black-and-white films. When the poet moved to the West, there was no need to imagine or dream about Western civilisation through the screen since it could be seen with his own eyes. Over time, Brodsky focuses more on using methods from the cinema in his commentaries on the works of other poets, and tries his hand at writing film criticism and screenplays. Pre-1972, visual imagery seen at the cinema is exotic and desired, post-1972 cinemagoing loses this charm and pushes the poet into working with cinematic vocabulary as opposed to being an ardent filmgoer.

With time, as regards the cinema, Brodsky moves from being a spectator of the visual to, metaphorically speaking, being a director of the visual. This being said, in an analysis of ‘Post aetatem nostram’ one senses that the cinematic may have appeared much earlier in his poetry than in his essays. The poem serves as a sort of transition: having imagined the West through cinema, he writes the story of an escape in a cinematic poem that anticipates his future thinking about the relationship between poetry and film. In the following chapter on postcards, the role of memory, which was a relatively minor

component of his interaction with the cinema, becomes more prevalent.

Chapter Two

Postcards

In Lev Losev's poem 'Dver','[200] one reads about the postcards the speaker sees pinned on a door. This ekphrastic text is based on a photograph taken of Brodsky (Figure 4) in his office by Marianna Volkova.[201] The opening stanza begins:

> Открытки: «Прибой бьется о скалы»,
> «Хребет Гиндукуш», «Гильгамеш и Энкиду»,
> «Пирамиды в Гизе» (нет, все же Данте),
> «Понте Веккьо» (или это Риальто?)

Following this collage of places and spaces — there is travel to Asia, Africa, and Europe — the reader is told that the visual aspect of the postcards is always accompanied by the textual:

> Но настанет день — он повыдернет кнопки,
> торопливо заполнит все открытки,
> надпишет на каждой: «К Николе Морскому»,
> подпишется размашисто: «Твой Гильгамеш»,
> рванет на себя дверную ручку,
> а за дверью — Вожатый в белом бурнусе,
> а за ним — каналы, мосты, пирамиды,
> и бьется, и бьется прибой о скалы,
> оседает, шипя, на снега Гиндукуша.[202]

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[200] For a short commentary on Losev's poem, see Solomon Volkov, 'Lev Losev i Iosif Brodskii (na fotografiyakh): Kommentarii k dvum tekstam L. L.', in *Lifshits / Losev / Loseff*, ed. by Mikhail Gronas and Barry P. Scherr (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), pp. 57–68.

[201] The photograph was taken in 1980 by Marianna Volkova, a photographer, and the wife of Solomon Volkov. She took many photographs of the poet, and published them in Marianna Volkova, *Iosif Brodskii v N'yu-Iorke*, 1990; Marianna Volkova, Aleksandr Genis, and Lev Loseff, *Portrait of the Poet: Joseph Brodsky* (New York: Russian Publishing House, 1998).

[202] Lev Losev, *Stikhi* (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Ivana Limbakha, 2012), p. 485.



Figure 4. Joseph Brodsky in front of a door with postcards.

In this short poem, Losev captures the three main ways Brodsky interacted with postcards; two relate to their images, and one relates to their texts.[203] Firstly, Brodsky tended to buy postcards portraying famous landmarks or cities he had visited: 'Понте Веккьо.' Secondly, Brodsky purchased postcards depicting paintings or other works of visual art: the mention of a sculpture/vase of Gilgamesh and Enkidu.[204] Thirdly, on his postcards, Brodsky often used to write short poems, or witty texts, that were self-deprecating in tone and light-hearted in content: '«К Николе Морскому»,' '«Твой Гильгамеш».' In this

[203] Over the years, Losev and Brodsky exchanged many postcards. Furthermore, Losev wrote several poems referencing postcards in their titles: 'Otkrytka iz Novoi Anglii. 1' (this poem is dedicated to Brodsky), 'Otkrytka iz Novoi Anglii. 2,' and 'Otkrytka iz Novoi Anglii. 3.' Also, Losev wrote several poems on postcards, much like Brodsky. Some of these poems feature in Losev, *Stikhi*, pp. 473–80.
[204] It is difficult to ascertain from Volkova's photograph the exact artwork depicted in the postcard.

chapter, I dedicate one section to each of these observations and consider the poet's method of selecting, writing, and sending real postcards in connection with appearances of metaphorical postcards in his poetry and essays.

In this chapter, I chart a move away from imagination, the principal theme associated with Brodsky's interactions with the cinema, to focus on the poet's personal memories. Through postcards, Brodsky disseminates his immediate impressions of a place, and hence shares his memories of that place, with his addressees. Though postcards do help fire up the imagination of the poet when he looks at them in Soviet Russia, it is their memory-creating ability that takes precedent. Thus, they are intimately tied in with the documentation of daily experiences.

A postcard allows an individual to add a personal touch to a pre-formed item.[205] Brodsky manipulates and plays with the medium's various functions to create unique documents from a product of mass culture; in his hands, they are versatile and personal forms of communication. The interplay between a desire to document his experiences from a certain place, to personalize, and to assert the uniqueness of his postcards, lies behind Brodsky's relationship with this medium, and these features interact in different ways in each of the sections of this chapter.

Brodsky's postcards that depict cities and their sights (analysed in the first section of the chapter) are predominantly sent back home to his parents from 1972 onwards. The fact that all parties knew that Aleksandr and Maria Brodsky would not be able to see the foreign places depicted in their lifetimes due to travel restrictions, endows these documents with a bittersweet set of emotions: both parents and child were able to share

[205] For a general overview of the variety of images and texts sent on postcards, see Tom Phillips, *The Postcard Century: 2000 Cards and Their Messages* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000). For more theoretical discussions about the medium, see Jan-Ola Östman, 'The Postcard as Media', *Text & Talk*, 24.3 (2004), 423–42; Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Monica Cure, *Picturing the Postcard: A New Media Crisis at the Turn of the Century* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

their viewing experiences of the West solely through the medium of the mass-produced artefact. When postcards from cities are mentioned in the poetry — as in the poems 'Otrkrytka iz goroda K' (1968) and 'Otkrytka iz Lissabona' (1988) — a different strategy is employed: the poet sets up the poem as if it were a postcard from a city but makes it difficult for the reader to recognise the location depicted. To aid me in making this point, I examine the unpublished poem 'Postcard from Iceland' (1978) and Brodsky's notes made prior to its creation. There is much in common between the postcards to his parents and these seemingly anti-postcard poems: they both document personal memories of travel, though do so using different strategies and sets of tools.[206]

When one looks at the postcards that depict paintings, sculptures, and busts, one sees that they also function as forms of documentation — they tell the recipient that the poet has seen the works of art reproduced in the images sent — and reveal Brodsky's non-literary artistic tastes. Since he purchased these postcards directly from museums and art galleries visited, as my archival research shows, they record experiences within internal spaces — as opposed to the external spaces of cities at large — where the individual meets a work of art at close quarters. One can use the images on these postcards as elucidatory information to clarify imagery in Brodsky's poems that engage with paintings, galleries, and museums. In this instance, the postcard becomes a meditation on, and expression of, the poet's personal artistic tastes. The poetry related to these images carries out a similar function.

In the final section, I focus on poems Brodsky wrote on his postcards. These short, and often witty, texts rarely make it into published poems, and can therefore be read as individualized, personal writings for their recipients. Poems in this section will be referred

[206] It has been observed that these two texts, and the poem 'Niotkuda s lyubov'yu' (1975–76) are 'anti-postcards' as they are postcards sent to nobody, featuring views of nothing, portraying non-existent monuments, see Maimeskulov. My argument emphasizes a different view, namely that these texts are firmly rooted in biographical experiences and realities.

to as ‘poems on postcards’ so as to differentiate them from ‘postcard poems’ — poems written as if they were postcards, for example, ‘Otrkrytka iz goroda K.’[207] The tone and style of the poems on postcards are reflected in several of the postcard poems Brodsky published in English. The tourist postcard, in this instance, becomes a work of art as it contains the occasional poetry of an esteemed writer; the postcard moves from being reproducible to being unique due to its text.

By combining an analysis of actual and literary postcards, one comes to see how the poet used a somewhat kitsch and cliché form of communication to document a wide range of thoughts on both aesthetic and personal themes. In most critical works on Brodsky’s travel poetry and prose, there is a tendency to see his writing on foreign places — I use the word ‘foreign’ here to refer to non-Russian and non-American spaces — as one which is predominantly concerned with philosophical, spiritual, and historical issues. One critic has stated that:

> Travel writing offered for Brodsky a discursive space for negotiating his own transculturation, while it also offered him a discursive space for making powerful statements about displacement, culture, history and geography, time and space—all major themes of his poetry.[208]

Though this statement rings true, it overlooks the more immediate sensory reactions Brodsky experienced when travelling, and portrays his travels as cerebral affairs thought of solely in terms of metaphysical and existential categories. In this chapter, a different image of the travelling poet emerges: Brodsky was a highly receptive and humorous correspondent — shown by his choice of both postcard images and texts — who was not only a poet of highly complex philosophical verse, but also an expert at light, jocular and

[207] Aside from appearances in the titles of poems, the word ‘otkrytka’ rarely crops up in Brodsky’s poetry.
[208] Turoma, *Brodsky Abroad*, p. 5.

humorous texts. A study of postcards Brodsky sent sheds light on the poet's behaviour in private and helps us question certain ideas about his literary works and world-view.

Overview of the documents: Brodsky's postcards and postcard poems

Since no investigation has thus far been made of Brodsky's postcards, an overview of these documents is in order before I show how he uses the form in the three ways stated.[209] From the materials I have been able to access,[210] there are about two hundred and forty postcards relevant for our present discussion. Approximately one hundred and eighty items from this total are made up of those that Brodsky sent: about one hundred and ten of these postcards feature either famous city landmarks or cityscapes (61% of the total sent), about fifty depict paintings or works of art (28% of the total sent), and about twenty images fit into neither of these two categories (11% of the total sent). There are around sixty that make up the remainder of the documents to be looked at: these were postcards Brodsky purchased but never sent.[211] I have found about three hundred postcards received by the poet.

Brodsky would often pin up and keep many received and unsent postcards in his homes and studies.[212] Brodsky sent and received postcards both before and after his

[209] It should be noted that in his study of Brodsky's relationship with Rome, Yuri Leving has published a few of the poet's postcards sent from the city and provided some contextual information about them, see Yuri Leving, *Iosif Brodskii v Rime: putevoditel'*, Iosif Brodskii v Rime, 3 vols (St Petersburg: Perlov Design Center, 2020), I, pp. 39–44; Leving, II, pp. 390–95.
[210] There are some postcards that I have not been able to access from the Russian National Library and the Anna Akhmatova Museum in St Petersburg due to international travel restrictions over the past eighteen months.
[211] A collection of postcards brought but never sent can be found in *JBP*, Box 19. Folder 513.
[212] Photographs of the interiors of the poet's homes in South Hadley, Massachusetts, and New York attest to this observation.

departure from the USSR in 1972[213] and he never published any of them.[214] In my present chapter, I concentrate on those Brodsky sent and leave to one side those he was sent.[215] A general observation to make regarding the postcards received: they often feature art-related dialogues between sender and receiver via the image.[216] A final point to raise here: Brodsky sent many birthday and Christmas cards to friends and family, many of which feature similar images, and hold similar functions, to the ones I investigate in this chapter.[217]

The number of postcards Brodsky sent throughout his life is much higher than the amount listed above. This can be assumed as the postcards mentioned in many memoirs have not yet been found or catalogued; the recipients have not made these documents available to researchers. One example is the set of postcards that Marianna Kuznetsova, the mother of Brodsky's second child, received from the poet. In an interview with Valentina Polukhina, Brodsky's daughter Anastasiya Kuznetsova, born on 31 March 1972, recalls talking to her mother about her father: 'I learnt about some nuances [of the relationship between her parents] literally a year and half before Joseph's death. I didn't

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[213] The earliest postcard I have found that the poet received was in 1950. It was sent to him by his father, Aleksandr, who was away from Leningrad at the time. Aleksandr wished him success for the upcoming academic year. See *Iosif Brodskii. Fotoletopis'. Chast' I. 1940–1972: Katalog*. Please note: this book does not have page numbers hence my omission of page references when using this work.

[214] Since the approach in this chapter is historical-biographical, I do not make use of Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), a text which focuses on issues surrounding senders and recipients of postcards through a predominantly psychoanalytical lens.

[215] Though not within the scope of this study, there is much work to be done on Brodsky's epistolary networks. The letters and postcards he sent and received could be organised and mapped to help us better answer questions such as: when was Brodsky most active in his personal correspondence? From where and to where did he send and receive mail? There were lengthy postcard and letter exchanges between Brodsky and his friends both pre-1972 and post-1972, and the poet also received many letters from admirers of his poetry.

[216] Tomas Venclova used to send Brodsky postcards depicting famous, historical sights and artworks. In Venclova's archive one finds postcards sent to Brodsky from Herculaneum and Delphi in the 1970s (*TVP*, Box 4). Likewise, Susan Sontag sent Brodsky postcards featuring works by Carpaccio (sent in 1978) and Giulio Romano (sent in 1987), see *JBP*, Box 14, Folder 374.

[217] To give an example, Brodsky sent the poet Zbigniew Herbert a birthday card (dated 10 April 1988) featuring an image of a schooner. Brodsky sends the card from Texas to Herbert in Paris, and in the text Brodsky discusses his desire to visit to see the Polish writer. Elsewhere in the text, Brodsky notes: 'I don't know anyone whose well-being matters to me as much as yours,' (*ZHP*, Box 1, Folder 10). See also.

have much time to ask her the details. But I found postcards he sent her from Yalta and other places with amusing and semi-explicit poems. When I sort out her archive I [will] show you these poems.'[218] These documents have not yet come to light.

Brodsky predominantly sent postcards to Russian, American, Italian, and British friends, both new and old. His postcards are written in Russian and English and often involve code-switching between the two languages. Each of the recipients received personalised messages, with news specific to them and in-jokes conveyed. Brodsky rarely repeated the same or similar text to different people. These tendencies are tied into the fact that Brodsky had different friendship groups, many of which were independent from one another; as Andrei Sergeev notes, 'Он принципиально не стремился перезнакомить своих друзей.'[219] His Leningrad friends rarely communicated with his Moscow friends, his New York friends were infrequently known to his friends from California. This self-conscious distancing between social circles allowed Brodsky to sustain different points of contact when communicating with individuals from each group and when sending out postcards and letters from the same point and place in time.

The postcards Brodsky bought were purchased from places he had visited, and they were sent from these locations soon after purchase.[220] By looking at Brodsky's postcards, one is thus able to read his immediate impressions and memories of a place, city, or country through both images and texts. If one were to put the postcards together in chronological order one would have a diary of sorts; Brodsky nearly always dates the

[218] Polukhina, *Brodsky through the Eyes of His Contemporaries*, II, p. 411.
[219] Sergeev, p. 443. Losev makes a similar point: 'У Иосифа смолоду было много друзей, в том числе близких, таких, кого он любил и кому полностью доверял. Но у него не было желания всех их между собой перезнакомить и подружить. Получались группы друзей, между собой разделенные почти непроницаемыми перегородками, вроде отсеков подлодки,' Losev, *Meandr: memuarnaya proza*, p. 66.
[220] This can be ascertained by looking at both the stamps affixed on the cards and the date-stamps placed on them by local postal authorities.

postcards he sends.[221] They therefore document the place visited via the image and the postage stamp, they document the time they are written, and they document the poet's impressions of the place or thoughts at a particular moment. Indeed, here one may observe a link to his poetry: Brodsky has a strong predilection for leaving temporal and spatial traces in and below his texts, information which allows us to locate the poems in geographical and historical planes. Indicators of positionality are usually given in the titles of poems or after the final line where the poet tells us either the specific place, town or city, or country where he was in when he wrote the poems.[222] In both his postcards and poems, he wants to tell the reader when he found himself in a certain place.

There are several peculiarities in Brodsky's use of postcards. To begin with, one sometimes sees texts written over two–three postcards that are then placed together and sent in a single envelope.[223] This violation of the formal restrictions of the medium — postcards are individual documents meant to be sent in singular form — results in an imbalance between image and text: sometimes Brodsky needs to express something important in words, and thus the written message takes precedent over what he is communicating via the images,[224] and at other times he writes over many postcards as an excuse to send multiple images he cherishes. The use of the envelope is also a subversion of the medium since the cards are hidden from sight until the receiver opens the envelope; postcards sent in this way act more like letters. In addition, the position and direction of the text on the postcard is not always standard i.e. not always written from top to bottom and from left to right. This is due to Brodsky needing to finish writing down his thoughts,

[221] To the best of my knowledge, Brodsky never kept any diaries. In his notebooks, there are thoughts and poems jotted down, but these are never dated, and the locations where these writings were made are not explicitly stated, see *JBP*, Boxes 36–40.
[222] The titles, dates, and the text after the final lines of a poem are nearly always reliable in telling us about the poet's position in the world when writing his text. Losev's commentaries in his two-volume edition of Brodsky's poetry back up these observations.
[223] One sees this, for example, in a set of three postcards to Carl and Ellendea Proffer from Leningrad, see *JBP*, Box 11, Folder 315.
[224] The images on postcards sent together in envelopes have no relationship to one another.

and a desire to be playful with his text; at times there is text written upside down that reflects upon the text written the standard way round. Furthermore, his postcards rarely feature photographs of local people, except when they are portrayed in works of art.[225] Finally, Brodsky is uninterested in questioning the potential cultural politics surrounding the postcard: he does not seem concerned that the medium was keenly associated with mass tourism in the post-war era.

Brodsky wrote several published and unpublished postcard poems.[226] In terms of published texts in Russian, these are 'Otkrytka iz goroda K.' (1968) and 'Otkrytka iz Lissabona' (1988). 'Otkrytka s tostom' (1970) is a poem that features in Vladimir Maramzin's collection of Brodsky's poetry, but was not included by Brodsky in the poetry collections he published while living abroad.[227] The unpublished texts in Russian are 'Otkrytka iz Bukhary' (undated), 'Otkrytka iz neboskreba' (1981 — found in a notebook, hand written), and 'Otkrytka iz leprozoriya' (undated) and 'Otkrytka iz Pirity' (1962); the two final texts which are housed at the Russian National Library in St Petersburg.[228] Moreover, Brodsky also published his translation of a poem by Jerzy Harasymowicz into Russian, which he titled 'Otkrytka Metsenatu.'

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[225] There is thus little discussion to be had on issues of Orientalist or colonialist gazes as regards Brodsky's use of postcards. Malek Alloula has written on the use of the postcard in the construction and affirmation of colonialist and voyeuristic gazes on Algerian woman at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, ed. by Barbara Harlow, trans. by Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Such discussions are not relevant to my study.

[226] Though not directly relevant for our present discussion, it bears remembering that Brodsky sets up many of his poems as if they were letters. Some notable examples include 'Pis'mo v butylke (1964),' 'Pis'mo generalu Z. (1968),' 'Pis'ma rimskomu drugu (1972),' 'Pis'ma dinastii Min' (1977),' 'Pis'mo v oasis (1991)' and 'Pis'mo v Akademiyu (1993).' To this list one could add poems that act like letters but are not explicitly labelled as such in their titles, such as 'Odissei Telemaku (1972).'

[227] For a description of how Vladimir Maramzin went about collecting and organising Brodsky's pre-1972 poetry, see Vladimir Maramzin, 'K istorii 5-tomnogo sobraniya sochinenii Brodskogo, v Leningradskom «samizdate» v 1972–1974 godakh', in *Iosif Brodskii: problemy poetiki. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov i materialov*, ed. by A. G. Stepanov, I. V. Fomenko, and S. Yu. Artemova (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), pp. 418–24. A full version of this article can be found in Vladimir Maramzin, 'K istorii 5-tomnogo sobraniya sochinenii Brodskogo, v Leningradskom «samizdate» v 1972–1974 Godakh', in *Istoriya odnogo politicheskogo prestupleniya (Sbornik materialov i publikatsii)*, ed. by E. E. Zakharov (Khar'kov: Prava lyudini, 2006), pp. 3–16 <http://library.khpg.org/files/docs/Hefec-1.pdf> [accessed 19 November 2021].

[228] For reference to their existence, see Petrova.

The published poems in English are ‘Postcard from the U.S.’ (1984), ‘Postcard from Lisbon’ (1991 — a slightly modified translation of ‘Otkrytka iz Lissabona’), ‘A Postcard from France’ (1992), and ‘A Postcard’ (1994), a text Brodsky wrote to accompany his self-translated poem, ‘A Photograph’ (1994) (the English translation of ‘My zhili v gorode…’). The unpublished poems in English are ‘Postcard from Iceland’ (1978), ‘A French Postcard’ (undated) and ‘The postcard’s sky is always blue.’ These are supplemented by some unpublished postcard ‘shorts’ one finds in Brodsky’s personal notebooks.[229] There are approximately fifty poems written on postcards that I have found; I refer to a selection of them in the final section of this chapter.[230] As evidenced, actual postcards, postcard poems, and poems on postcards were all extensively used and written by Brodsky.

Postcards of cities: actual postcards

The first group of images Brodsky sent feature city landmarks and cityscapes and their documentary quality is closely tied in with personal memory and imagination. These postcards, which were mainly sent back home to his parents, allow the recipient to both see and visualize unseen places, whilst at the same time experiencing the sender’s memories of a place. Brodsky directly encountered such items early on in his life, as he recounts in his essays. The poet tells us that city images pointed to a different reality to the one he found himself in. These two-dimensional shots set off a series of imaginative leaps in his mind and create windows into the West. In ‘Spoils of War,’ Brodsky recalls receiving a collection of postcards for his birthday one year:

[229] To this one should also add a short poem jotted down in a portable calendar/diary from 1981. On 14 March 1981, one finds the following note: ‘Postcard with the Panteon | Isn’t this a lovely view? | Isn’t this a splendid sight? | Yes, but only for you: | not for the guys inside,’ in *JBP*, Box 134, Folder 2989.
[230] The actual figure of poems on postcards is probably much higher, for reasons already given.

> an accordionlike set of postcards depicting Venice. […] There were twelve postcards, in sepia, on poor quality yellowish paper. […] Because the pictures were brownish and badly printed, and because of Venice's latitude and its very few trees, one couldn't tell for sure what season was depicted. […] The absence of color and the general gloom of the texture suggested what I wanted them to suggest: winter, the true time of year.
>
> In other words, the texture and the melancholy it conveyed, because so familiar to me in my own hometown, made these pictures more comprehensible, more real. It was almost like reading relatives' letters. And I read them and reread them. And the more I read them, the more apparent it became that this was what the word 'West' meant for me.[231]

These items are also recalled in *Watermark*: 'a girl whom I was courting at the time made me a birthday present of an accordion set of sepia postcards her grandmother had brought from a pre-revolutionary honeymoon in Venice, and I pored over it with my magnifying glass.'[232]

There is a parallel here with the way in which Western cinema helped him mentally move himself to a different place and time: the postcards act as conduits in helping Brodsky move from a present-day Soviet reality to a western, Italianate setting. The images are literally seen, metaphorically read, and reread, and are suggestive of other spaces he dreams of inhabiting. His imagination is spurred on not by colourful and vibrant landscapes but by dreary, monochrome tones — many of the films mentioned in the previous chapter were, like these postcards, shot in black and white — and he creates a link between his home city and Venice. Brodsky is also aware of the materiality of the cards: 'poor quality yellowish paper.' Through this reading of postcards, images of the West — and hence the East, which stands as its antipode — are developed,[233] though it is the power of the visual to transform an individual's perceptions of geography that Brodsky

[231] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 13.
[232] Joseph Brodsky, *Watermark: An Essay on Venice* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), pp. 38–39.
[233] In a short discussion on these very same postcards, Sanna Turoma says that 'Brodsky's "West" cannot be understood without its conceptual counterpart, the "East," Sanna Turoma, 'Joseph Brodsky and Orientalism: A Russian Moor in Venice?', *Ulbandus Review*, 7 (2003), 143–54 (p. 144).

emphasizes in these extracts.

These examples also point to a prominent tendency in Brodsky's poetry: a movement from very small objects and individual people to grand panoramas and philosophical concerns as the text develops. An instance of such a move may be found in 'Bol'shaya elegiya Dzhonu Donnu,' where the speaker advances from describing a person sleeping and his surrounding objects, to a wide view on his location in space from a high-up position. Similarly, in the poems 'Babochka' (1972) and 'Mukha' (1985) the speaker's vision shifts from micro images of insects to a consideration of the meaning of life and death. Finally, in 'Collector's Item' (1991), an essay on the notorious double agent Kim Philby, a stamp with the spy's face on it — 'the most recent issue of the *LRB* sat there on the counter in full splendor, its cover depicting a blown-up postal stamp: unmistakably of Soviet origin. This sort of thing has been enough to catch my eye since I was twelve'[234] — leads to a discussion of spying and Anglo-Soviet relations.

Having directly experienced multiple literal and metaphorical aspects of postcards inside and outside of the USSR, it is no surprise to find that, following his departure in 1972, the poet sends most of the images of city landmarks and cityscapes back to his parents. Among the postcards sent to his parents, one finds, in 1972, postcards depicting the skyline of Philadelphia, one showing the Brooklyn Bridge, another the port in Vancouver. A few years later we find a postcard showing Nathan Philips Square in Toronto (sent in 1974), one of a canal in Amsterdam (1974), bouquinistes near the Pont Neuf in Paris (1974), a central square in Rouen (1976), one of a cable car, San Francisco hill and Alcatraz Island (1976), one featuring shots of 'Vieux Luxembourg' (1976), Big Ben and Westminster Bridge (1976), a square in Stockholm (1978), one of Christ the Redeemer and Rio de Janeiro (1978), Central Palermo (1979), Scaligero Bridge in Verona

[234] Joseph Brodsky, 'Collector's Item', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 128–70 (p. 130).

(1981), one of the centre of Florence with the Duomo in the middle of the image (1981).[235]

Postcards sent to his parents from 1972 until their deaths in the mid-1980s — his mother died on 17 March 1983 and his father on 29 April 1984 — are used to express how and where their only child was living abroad, and they function in a documentary way primarily via their images. Despite their hopes, all three family members understood that the last time they would all see each other was in 1972.[236] As a result of this inability to meet in person, Brodsky would communicate with them regularly via telephone, telegrams, and Western Union mailgrams,[237] in addition to letters and postcards. Each medium allowed the poet to express a different part of his experience, and through the postcard he was able to show them colour images of places he had seen.

Brodsky made a conscious effort to document his travels for his parents, and in his postcards to them Brodsky is proving that the USA and the West do indeed correspond to images they had glimpsed (and that he has seen it with his own eyes). The postcard also acts as a physical 'piece' of the place he visited in the western world: Brodsky bought and sent the postcards from the city visited. The materiality of the paper that he notes in his essays would have been felt by his family. What would seem cliché to a well-travelled individual — the most obvious landmarks and sights of a city or country — held a different function for the poet's parents living in Soviet Russia of the 1970s and early 1980s due to the geographical barriers that prevented them from seeing these places with their own eyes. Brodsky knew from personal experience that a mass-produced image of a notable sight held greater value to those who had had travel restrictions imposed on them

[235] All these examples are taken from *Iosif Brodskii. Fotoletopis'. Chast' II. 1972–1984: Katalog*, 2012.
[236] Though Brodsky carried out his requests to allow his parents to visit him through diplomatic and legal routes, he never succeeded in obtaining visas for them.
[237] See *JBP*, Box 3, Folder 71 for several Western Union Telegrams that Brodsky and his parents exchanged. There is also a RCA Global Telegram sent from his parents in this folder. The messages on these telegrams were short. A typical example of a message sent by the poet reads, 'WILL CALL NEXT SUNDAY | JOSEPH.'

than those from countries where cross-border travel was easier.[238]

Texts accompanying these images of cities reflect similar documentary tendencies and serve to personalize the impersonal item — the postcard. On the back of a postcard depicting the Brooklyn Bridge, written during one of the poet's first trips to New York in 1972, he writes:

> по-моему, это — фотография Петропавловской крепости. Мост — Бруклинский, он же — Троицкий.[239]

On a postcard, sent from Iceland in 1978, showing a desolate landscape with geysers, Brodsky writes:

> По-моему, это севернее Мур(муррр)манска. Похоже на поверхность Луны (и американцы здесь свой луноход испытали). В общем — засохшая лава, изредка подернутая травкой. Лесу — решительно никакого и никогда не было, кроме того, что к берегу прибьет... Сейчас тут белые ночи — и они действительно белые, в десятки раз светлее наших...[240]

In a 1981 postcard from Florence he writes:

> Остановился на один день здесь, на родине Алигьеры, к-рый жил в двух кварталах от местного горисполкома... Ничего красивей собора [the reference here is to the Duomo, which features on the front of the card] этого в Италии — и, стало быть, во всем мире не существует...[241]

These texts are representative of those found on postcards to his parents. In all, one discerns a tendency to compare places seen abroad with those his parents would recognise: Brooklyn Bridge looks like the Troitskii Bridge, Iceland is discussed in relation to Murmansk, and Dante lived close to the local executive committee of the city council!

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[238] From the documents I have been able to access, Brodsky never sent his parents postcards that showed images of paintings or other works of art.
[239] *Iosif Brodskii. Fotoletopis'. Chast' II. 1972–1984: Katalog*.
[240] *Iosif Brodskii. Fotoletopis'. Chast' II. 1972–1984: Katalog*.
[241] *Iosif Brodskii. Fotoletopis'. Chast' II. 1972–1984: Katalog*.

Hence, the poet creates a set of mental linkages for his family to aid them in imagining what foreign lands look like, whilst at the same time entertaining them with humorous quips. In the second text, the poet attempts to educate — the reference to the Moon landings — and create a connection to their homes in the image of the 'white nights.' In addition, the mention of the 'мyppp' in this postcard reflects intimate dialogues between himself and his parents that I explore in my chapter on drawings; cat names and cat sounds were affectionately used in the Brodsky household between all three family members. Thus, in this grouping of postcards, one sees a union between image and text, both of which work to document and inform in a light-hearted manner, as well as help his addressees imagine unseen places. The poet's experience of touching, receiving, and seeing postcards in his youth in post-war Leningrad allows him to put himself in the place of his parents and understand what type of correspondence they would like to receive from their son.[242]

Postcards of cities for his readers: an unpublished poem

Before looking at two published postcard poems that also exhibit documentary characteristics, I look at the genesis and context of the unpublished poem 'Postcard from Iceland,' drafted in 1978. This text suggests one way Brodsky's visual experiences were filtered and communicated through the form, possibly leading to the final draft of a poem. Though not explicitly about a city, 'Postcard from Iceland' highlights how Brodsky used the documentary elements of postcards to his parents for literary ends.

In June 1978, Brodsky visited Iceland.[243] The trip was organised through the

[242] The texts of the postcards sent to his parents immediately following his departure from the USSR are more upbeat in tone than those sent in the early 1980s. As the novelty of foreign travel wore off, the texts become slightly more restrained in tone.
[243] A letter from David McDuff suggests the trip began on 20 June 1978. See *JBP*, Box 10, Folder 255.

translator David McDuff,[244] though Brodsky had been thinking about travelling to the country for some time. The visit was carried out in the footsteps of W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, who went to the country together in the summer of 1936 to write a commissioned travel book, *Letters from Iceland*, published in 1937. Auden and McNeice's book includes poems written individually and in collaboration by the pair, letters sent back home, and prose descriptions of the key features of Reykjavik and the rest of the country.

In the work, one finds a poem in five parts called 'Letter to Lord Byron.' Written by Auden, in seven-line stanzas, in iambic pentameter, with an ababbcc rhyme scheme,[245] the poem documents Auden and MacNeice's trip through a dialogue with the Romantic poet. The tone is conversational from the very first stanza of the first part — 'Excuse, my lord, the liberty I take | In thus addressing you'[246] — to the final stanza of the last part — 'I hope this reaches you in your abode, | This letter that's already far too long.'[247] Byron is the chosen interlocutor and the reason, the poet tells us, he is writing this text; Auden needs him as his addressee in order to write.

Letters from Iceland was a book close to Brodsky's heart,[248] he took the book with him when he travelled to Iceland, and he held its poetry in the highest regard. He expands on this last point in an interview with Solomon Volkov:

> К концу моего существования в Советском Союзе — поздние шестидесятые, начало семидесятых — я Одена знал более или менее прилично. То есть для русского человека я знал его, полагаю, лучше всех. Особенно одно из сочинений Одена, его «Письмо лорду Байрону», над которым я изрядно потрудился, переводя. «Письмо лорду Байрону» для меня стало противоядием

[244] The writer Ólafur Gunnarsson describes how he also helped organise the trip for Brodsky. See Ólafur Gunnarsson, 'Joseph Brodsky in Iceland', *Nordic Voices in Translation*, 2009 <http://nordicvoices.blogspot.com/2009/09/joseph-brodsky-in-iceland.html> [accessed 16 September 2021].. McDuff also knew Margo Picken, one of the poet's friends.
[245] This stanzaic structure and rhyme scheme is used by Shakespeare in his *Rape of Lucrece*.
[246] W. H Auden and Louis MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937), p. 3.
[247] Auden and MacNeice, p. 259.
[248] The poet may have also used the book as a basis for his poem 'Dekabr' vo Florentsii' (1976), see Zakhar Ishov, 'Joseph Brodsky's 'December in Florence': Re-Interpreting Exile with the Shadow of Dante,' *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies Journal*, 1–2 (2017), 129–72 (pp. 144–45).

> от всякого рода демагогии. Когда меня доводили или доводило, я читал эти стихи Одена.[249]

Additionally, during a poetry seminar at the University of Michigan in March 1980, Brodsky tells the audience that he was happiest only twice in his life: when he first read Laurence Sterne's *Tristram* Shandy, and the first time he read Auden's 'Letter to Lord Byron.'[250]

During and/or immediately following his trip to Iceland, Brodsky wrote two postcards back to friends in New York: one features a poem, the other a piece of prose. This use of poetry and prose in his correspondence from the trip is a conscious reflection of the make-up of Auden and MacNeice's book.[251] It is not known whether these postcards (Figure 5) were sent or whether they remained unposted.[252] On the back of the first, one reads:

> Dear Masha, Margo, Edith, Andrew, Barry etc,[253]
>
> In general the place is rather bleak
> The locals never learned to make a brick:
> they build with corrugated iron
> Their talk is either morbid or oblique
> (Here goes my letter to Lord Byron)
>
> Sun's never setting. all night long
> the natives and their guests are able
> to read small letters on the label
> of something pure distilled and strong
> that sends you straight under the table
>
> They import everything. I wish
> I had no reason to report it:
> Potato's Polish. Every dish
> has this potato. as for fish,
> it's also, in a sense, imported

[249] Volkov, *Dialogi s Iosifom Brodskim*, p. 140.
[250] *JBP*, Box 220, Folder 4599 (1.16.00–1.17.00).
[251] In addition to these postcards, Brodsky also used photography to document his trip. See *JBP*, Box 156, Folders 3536–3540 for photographs taken when he was in the Faroe Islands.
[252] A paperclip holding the two postcards hints that if they were sent, they were dispatched in the same envelope.
[253] These are references to his friends Masha Vorobiov, Margo Picken, Edith Gross, Andrew Blane, and Barry Rubin.

But what is known as countryside
— about which I'll tell you later —
it's real grand and can excite
a humble tourist and Creator
Himself, though he is out of sight[254]

On the back of the second, one reads the following:

Prose: I had to move and thus failed to i) finish b) mail this masterpiece. Flew to the East Coast, boarded a boat and after 18 hours among both crew and passangers [*sic*] turned inside out because of extremely rough sea landed here, at Faroe Islands, on my way to Scotland. More later. I've realised however that I circled the globe along this latitude.

From cod and herring-ridden North
receive my love
for what its [*sic*] worth

Joseph

P.S. Tonight I sail for Orkneys. J.B.[255]

[254] *JBP*, Box 64, Folder 1522.
[255] *JBP*, Box 64, Folder 1522.

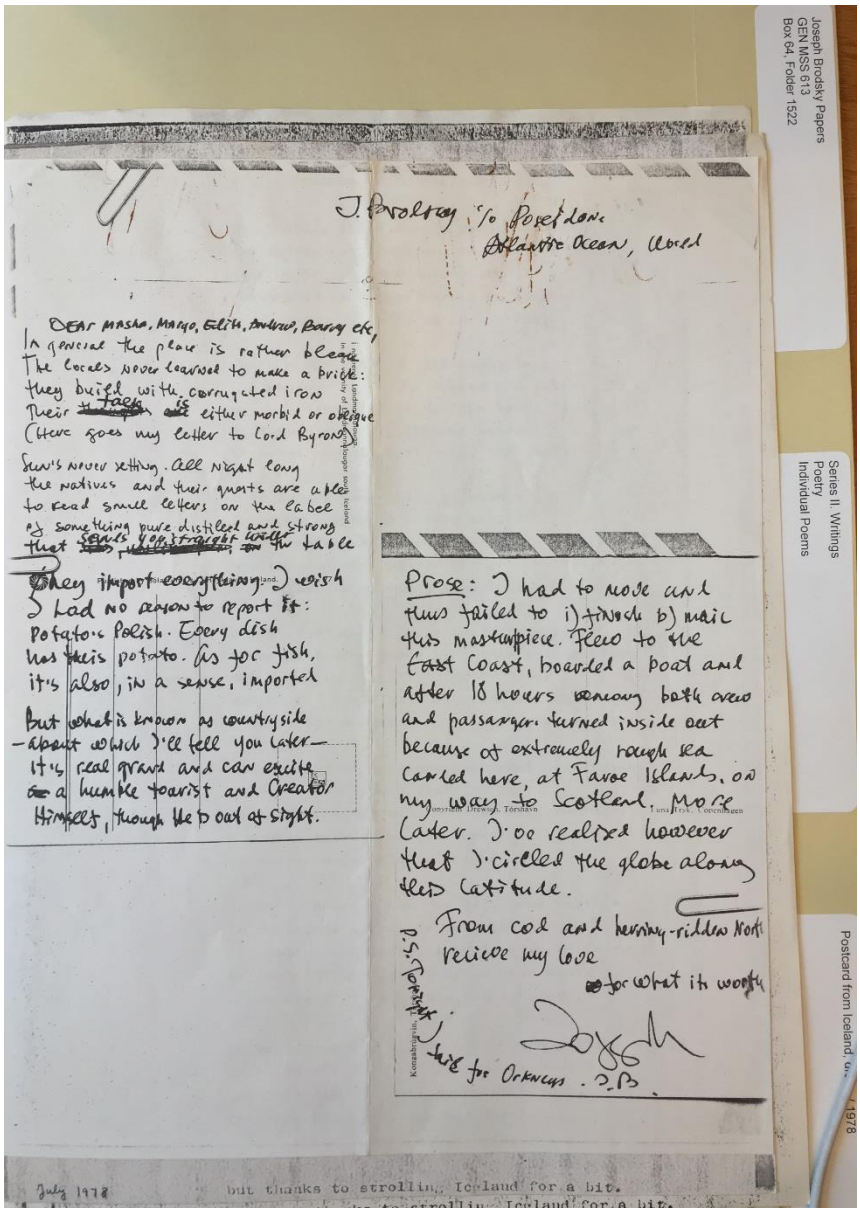


Figure 5. Two postcards from Iceland.

In the Beinecke Library, one finds a typed draft of a poem entitled 'Postcard from Iceland,' dated 'July 1978.' It is likely that the poet wrote up this text following his return from his travels. This poem was never published, nor, to the best of my knowledge, used as the basis for another poem in either English or Russian.[256] This draft poem is an extended version of the ditty jotted down on one of the postcards to his American friends.

[256] At the time Brodsky wrote this draft, he wrote and/or finished a poem that I discuss in my chapter on photography: 'Polyarnyi issledovatel'.' The publication of this text, which is based in a similar locale, may explain his non-publication of 'Postcard from Iceland.'

The draft text, in full, reads:

Postcard from Iceland

In general, the place is rather bleak.
The locals never learned to make a brick:
they build with corrugated iron.
Their talk is either morbid or oblique.
(Here goes my letter to Lord Byron).

Sun's never setting. All night long
the natives and their guests are able
to read small letters on the label
of liquid so distilled and strong
it sends you straight under the table.

They import everything (I wish
I had no reason to report it).
Potato's Polish. Every dish
has this potato. As for fish,
it's also, in a sense, imported.

Still, I appreciate its summer's cold,
these hills for being like this author bald;
now I can take on lover after lover
and blame it all on the volcanic lava
(Beware the crater though it's grey and old!)

And then, those geysers! glaciers! countyside! [*sic*]
I hardly ever saw a vista greater!
They stretch the mind and can excite
a humble tourist and the Creator
Himself, who's briefly out of sight.

So is my boat to take me off, down South –
to guilt, to worry, to memento mori,
to rubbing shoulders, loosely uttered "sorry,"
to politicians with their big bad mouth
well matching, as a rule, their story.

To you, my reader. Though you hardly fit
this title – in this life and hereafter.
And if I dare to call mysel [*sic*] an author,
it's not because I can display my wit
in order to extract a bit of laughter

but thanks to strolling Iceland for a bit.[257]

[257] *JBP*, Box 64, Folder 1522.

The poem ‘Postcard from Iceland’ shows a dialogue with Auden and MacNeice and links to the postcards he used to send his parents. There are several similarities between the draft poem and Auden’s ‘Letter to Lord Byron’: Brodsky emulates Auden by using Byron as his addressee (‘Here goes my letter to Lord Byron’); Auden and MacNeice’s book title *Letters from Iceland* becomes a ‘Postcard from Iceland’; both Auden and Brodsky’s poems are written in iambs.

The impressions Brodsky retained from the trip are depicted in both the texts and images on the two postcards from Iceland that he wrote: the first shows the Highlands of Iceland, the second, Kongabrúgvin in the Faroe Islands, a place Brodsky visited immediately after his trip to Iceland. The text of the poem in both its postcard, and typed, form — in the draft poem, one sees the fourth stanza of the poem Brodsky wrote on the postcard adapted, with additional stanzas added — is like that of the postcards Brodsky used to send home to his parents: they all show his desire to document places visited with light-hearted, impressionistic detail.

If one joins the dots, one could state that Brodsky documented his immediate experiences of Iceland on the postcards he wrote to his friends in both the choice of images and texts chosen, and that the postcards planted the seeds for a further, more sustained poetic treatment of his experiences in the draft poem. In this light, the two postcards to his friends fulfil a mediating function between his thoughts on a specific place he travelled to, and ‘Postcard from Iceland.’ Here, the postcard is not a piece of kitsch travel paraphernalia, but a vital part of the poetic process both literally — Brodsky initially wrote parts of his poem ‘Postcard from Iceland’ on a postcard — and metaphorically — the draft poem has the word ‘postcard’ in its title.

Finally, the move from the texts written on the postcards to the draft poem highlights

a process I look at in the next section: erasure of personal information when moving from immediate impressions of place to a poem about that place. In 'Postcard from Iceland,' Brodsky does not give the names of his friends and does not give some of the specific details of his trip that we find on the actual postcards written i.e. the text does not include details such as the time it took him to get from one place to another, or the specific places he visited.

Postcards of cities for his readers: two published poems

In two published postcard poems written in Russian, 'Otkrytka iz goroda K.' (1968) and 'Otkrytka iz Lissabona' (1988), Brodsky seems to subvert the functions of the postcards he used to send his parents: these are poems given to the reader as if they were real postcards, from cities, that do not appear to document very much of the environment the speaker finds himself in. However, when one places these two texts next to the case study of Brodsky's 'Postcard from Iceland,' their documentary qualities and similarities are evident. What emerges is that both published postcard poems document, in the same way as his postcards to his parents, Brodsky's personal experiences. This documentation is hard to detect in the poems, however, due to the erasure of personal details related to these trips. To put this another way: Brodsky's postcards from cities, and postcard poems about cities, document the poet's trips to the places depicted. The sole difference is that this documentation is pushed to the background in the postcard poems whereas it is very much in the foreground in actual postcards sent.

'Otkrytka iz goroda K.' was written following the second trip Brodsky made to Kaliningrad, in the spring of 1968.[258] In the text, the speaker muses upon time,

[258] Following his first trip in 1963, he wrote the Kaliningrad-based poem 'Einem alten Architekten in Rom' (1964) (Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, p. 333), and these poems have often been seen as a pair.

civilisations, and history while briefly and obliquely referencing the Königsberg Castle in line seven. The thirteenth-century castle was severely damaged in Allied bombings of the city in 1944 and its ruins were ordered to be destroyed in 1967 by Nikolai Konovalov, the First Secretary of the Kaliningrad Regional Committee. In an analysis of the text, Andreas Schönle observes that 'Brodsky's precocious sensitivity to ruins predetermined his life-long infatuation with the elegy, the literary genre best equipped to give voice to the feeling of loss and to enable an intimate, if vicarious dialogue with the past.'[259] A separate argument put forward by Uilleam Blacker sees the poem in a political light, for in it, Blacker remarks, the poet openly juxtaposes the German past of the city with its Soviet present. In this regard, 'Brodsky was rare among Soviet writers of the post-war decades in broaching the subject of the fragmented memories and landscapes of Kaliningrad. […] [T]he topic was taboo in the Soviet Union, and the work of writers, local or otherwise, steered clear of the German past.'[260] Brodsky's indeterminate description of 'goroda K' thus allows him to blur the boundary between German Königsberg and Soviet-era Kaliningrad, and to destabilize the location from which the postcard poem is being sent.

Though these readings of 'Otkrytka iz goroda K' are fruitful, they overlook both the banality of the poem's title and the biographical circumstances of Brodsky's visit to Kaliningrad. Like the postcards Brodsky sent to his parents, and like the unpublished text 'Postcard from Iceland' which would follow some ten years later, Brodsky needs to have visited cities to be able to send his actual postcards and write his postcard poems about them. As shown in the movement from the early draft of 'Postcard from Iceland' (written on a postcard), to the later draft of the poem, the act of erasure serves to wipe out certain biographical details of his visit: there is no way of the reader knowing that Brodsky visited

[259] Schönle, p. 183.
[260] Uilleam Blacker, 'Writing from the Ruins of Europe: Representing Kaliningrad in Russian Literature from Brodsky to Buida', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 93.4 (2015), 601–25 (p. 613).

the city when reading the text. Despite this, however much the poet tries to bring his impressions of the visit to Kaliningrad to a metaphysical and philosophical plane, he also does not wish to remove all the documentary evidence of his trip for the reader: he tells us it is a postcard in the title, the main sight in the town is called out by name, there really were castle ruins visible when he visited the town.

A more elaborate exercise in erasing and portraying personal experiences is visible in 'Otkrytka iz Lissabona.'[261] On the surface, the poem seems to be even further away from the postcards that Brodsky sent to his parents than 'Otkrytka iz goroda K.' A closer look at the circumstances surrounding the text, however, reveals that the documentary elements of the poet's trip to the city are detectable.

In the middle of May 1988, Brodsky spent several days in Lisbon, Portugal,[262] where he spoke at a conference on the theme of identity amongst Russian and Central European writers. Aside from Brodsky, participants at the conference included Lev Anninsky, Sergei Dovlatov, Tatyana Tolstaya, Czesław Miłosz, Danilo Kiš, Adam Zagajewski,[263] Susan Sontag, Salman Rushdie, and Derek Walcott. The transcript of the conference was published in English a couple of years later[264] and in Russian in 2006.[265] The conference was memorable enough for it to have been remembered by Miłosz in his book *A Year of*

[261] There is little critical writing on this text. Losev's commentary on the poem in his edition of Brodsky's poetry is short and it only appears fleetingly in other criticism (for example, Maimeskulov). For a study of the rhythmical structure of the text see Oleg Fedotov, 'Metamorfozy pri pomoshchi slova «vrdug». Opyt sravnitel'nogo analiza ritmiki dvukh antivoennykh stikhotvorenii I. Brodskogo — «Otkrytka Iz Lissabona» i «Kentavry IV».', *NLO*, 3, 2021 <https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2021/3/metamorfozy-pri-pomoshhi-slova-vdrug-opyt-sravnitelnogo-analiza-ritmiki-dvuh-antivoennyh-stihotvorenij-i-brodskogo-otkrytka-iz-lissabona-i-kentavry-iv.html> [accessed 22 October 2021].

[262] The conference ran from 16–17 May 1988 and was organised by the Wheatland Foundation, see Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, p. 390.

[263] Zagajewski called Brodsky's stance at the conference an example of 'аристократический шовинизм русской культуры,' Adam Zagajewski, 'O Iosife Brodskom, vrazbros', *Zvezda*, 5, 2020 <https://magazines.gorky.media/zvezda/2020/5/o-iosife-brodskom-vrazbros.html> [accessed 23 July 2021].

[264] 'The Lisbon Conference on Literature: Central Europe and Russian Writers', *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture*, 9 (1990), 75–124.

[265] 'Lissabonskaya konferentsiya po literature. Russkie pisateli i pisateli tsentral'noi Evropy za kruglym stolom', *Zvezda*, 5 (2006) <https://magazines.gorky.media/zvezda/2006/5/lissabonskaya-konferencziya-po-literature-russkie-pisateli-i-pisateli-czentralnoj-evropy-za-kruglym-stolom.html> [accessed 16 September 2021].

the Hunter (first published in Polish as *Rok myśliwego* in 1990), and Rushdie in *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*, his autobiographical text from 2012.[266] Both of these writers express their annoyance at the stance taken by Brodsky, and shared by the majority of Russian writers at the conference, who denied that the idea of Central Europe existed. The Russians claimed that you could only speak of the countries these writers came from individually as opposed to as a bloc — i.e. a Polish writer belongs to Poland alone and cannot be labelled Central European — a claim the non-Russian writers did not agree with.[267] The conference took place at a critical moment in the collapse and restructuring of the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence. External commentators saw the conference as an important event in the formation of post-Soviet identities for both sets of writers and thinkers, and their respective, nascent nation states.

The impassioned, critical debates surrounding issues of empire, nation states, and colonialism, which took place at the event are not recalled by Brodsky when he recalled his trip to Lisbon and his poem 'Otkrytka iz Lissabona' in a discussion with Petr Vail' several years later:

> Я туда [to Lisbon] ездил на конференцию в 88-м году. Это опять-таки strictly authentic. Дело в том, что Лиссабон — город с самой большой, быть может, плотностью городской скульптуры на квадратный метр. Стихотворение начинается с подлинной детали. Я помню, что шел по улице и вдруг увидел памятник неучастию Португалии в какой-то войне, то ли 14-го года, то ли в последней. Ну, и отсюда все началось.
>
> Но вообще Лиссабон — ужасно красивый город. Похож, по какому-то ощущению, на Красную Пресню, но есть места — чистый кинематограф. Ну, а рядом районы с диким уровнем преступности, где у вас что-то выдирают, срезают и так далее. Там даже как-то легче заблудиться и стать жертвой, потому что язык непохожий и трудоемкий, хотя все, как выясняется на шестой или

[266] Rushdie notes that at the conference, 'Brodsky averred, in an almost comically cultural-imperialist formulation, that Russia was in the process of solving its own problems, and once it had done so all the central Europeans' problems would also be solved. (This was the same Brodsky who, after the fatwa, would join the he-knew-what-he-was-doing, he-did-it-on-purpose party),' Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), p. 109.

[267] For a summary of the various debates at the conference, see Irena Grudzinska Gross, *Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky: Fellowship of Poets* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 132–38; 213–14.

> седьмой день, говорят прилично по-английски.
>
> Там я познакомился с президентом — Суарес, то есть Соареш. Все довольно смешно: тебя встречает у входа морской офицер и ведет по великолепному дворцу, в котором все совершенно пусто. Только огромные зеркала и грандиозные одинокие люстры. Тоже кинематограф — вот-вот, именно помесь Бунюэля с Бергманом.[268]

Like 'Otkrytka iz Lissabona,' Brodsky's commentary on it has no detailed references to the conference, though this is not surprising for it parallels his treatment of personal biography seen elsewhere at the time. In 1987, Brodsky was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and his poetry was published in Russia for the first time since 1967.[269] Despite this, as Gerald Smith recognises, 'There is little in them [the poems from 1988–9] […] that reflects any sense even of modest personal satisfaction, let alone what would be an entirely understandable sense of triumph at the hard-won vindication that the public accolades represented.'[270] The avoidance of mentions of a heated debate on politically sensitive issues in his poetry is therefore in keeping with Brodsky's approach to the experiences he went through at the time.

Upon a first reading, 'Otkrytka iz Lissabona' is a poem that seems to be about a set of monuments and sculptures dedicated to imagined and non-existent events; over the course of thirty-two lines, Brodsky seems to be describing a list of fantastical statues. However, the description of the poem he gives in the interview is revealing for it suggests that the text is one that refers to real statues and monuments he saw with his own eyes.

Given this, the meaning behind the opening line of the poem, 'Монументы событиям, никогда не имевшим места,'[271] is not oxymoronic but rather a fact, as is the

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[268] Iosif Brodskii and Petr Vail', *Peresechennaya Mestnost': Puteshestviya s Kommentariyami* (Moscow: Nezavisimaya gazeta, 1995), pp. 167–68.
[269] Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, p. 386.
[270] G. S. Smith, 'The Versification of Joseph Brodsky, 1988–89', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 80.3 (2002), 417–38 (p. 418). The excitement at receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature was however expressed in personal correspondence to friends.
[271] The text I quote from is in Brodskii, II, pp. 155–56.

second line of the poem: ‘Несостоявшимся кровопролитным войнам.’ Taken together with the poet’s comments in the interview with Vail’ about a monument to the non-participation of Portugal in one of the world wars, one can assume that in the second line Brodsky has in mind the Sanctuary of Christ the King (Santuário de Cristo Rei), a towering shrine modelled on the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro. This monument was sanctioned in 1940 by the Portuguese Episcopate in the hope that it would prevent any potential deaths of Portuguese citizens in the Second World War; the monument was inaugurated in 1959. Thus, Brodsky’s line about this monument reflects something that really does exist in the city and hence carries a documentary function.

Following this logic, one can point out further real-life monuments in the city centre behind phrases such as ‘Обнаженным Конституциям,’ ‘Полногрудым Независимостям’ and ‘Землетрясенью […] народом встреченному с восторгом:’ These three images can be explained by the fact that Lisbon is home to numerous monuments referring to the overthrow of the monarchy on 5 October 1910[272] and the earthquake of 1755. Additionally, the reference to Infarctica in the image ‘Открытью Инфарктики’ (‘discovery | of Infarctica’ in Brodsky’s translation)[273] could refer to the famous Monument to the Discoveries (Padrão dos Descobrimentos, in Portuguese) on the edge of the Tagus River, which celebrates the Portuguese Age of Discovery of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The reference to the land of ‘Infarctica’ is clarified by a postcard Brodsky sent to Andrei Sergeev. The postcard is dated 30 January 1986 and reads:

> ... есть такая часть (того) света — Инфарктика. Был там трижды (13 дек[абря] прошлого года во второй и 27 дек[абря], уже под ножом и ничего посему не соображая, в третий раз) — что Вам сказать за пейзаж? Много, конечно, белого;

[272] In his own English translation of the poem, Brodsky emphasises this point when he says ‘to voluptuous Justice awaiting suitors | and to carnal Respublica,’ Brodsky, *Collected Poems in English*, p. 384.
[273] Brodsky, *Collected Poems in English*, p. 384.

> но еще больше красного и черного — совершенно, однако, вне-стендалевского пошиба.[274]

The references at the very beginning of the postcard relate to a set of very real events in the poet's life: Brodsky had his second and third heart attacks on 13 December 1985 and 27 December 1985 respectively; the third heart attack was followed by a second operation on his heart.[275] The Monument to the Discoveries thus becomes imaginatively perceived in deeply personal terms.

In his poetry Brodsky presents a 'hyper-tourist's guide that catalogues things we had seemingly failed to notice in places the rest of us have been, like Italy, Mexico, and England (old and New).'[276] This text neatly highlights this observation even though, on the surface, it seems to be solely a description of a fantastical, imaginary space. The coming together of the poet's imagination with real-life monuments skews a realistic image of the city, as suggested by the final lines of the poem, 'Снам, навязавшим яви | за счет населенья свою бессвязность.' The real city has merged with the city of the mind and the documentary nature of the visit leaves distorted traces in the poetic text. The text is an instance of Brodsky describing real places in a deceptive way to the reader. The documentary aspects of his visit are cloaked, and a recognition of Lisbon is almost impossible for the reader unless he/she can decode the speaker's highly metaphorical and oblique references to the city; it is only the title that positions us directly there.

When seen alone, the two published postcard poems seem to be starkly detached from the cities they are based in. Though, on the one hand, they both function in the opposite way to the travel postcards he would send his parents — it is difficult to recognise famous

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[274] Sergeev, p. 456.
[275] Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, p. 383.
[276] G. S. Smith, '"Long Growing Dark": Joseph Brodsky's "August"', in *Rereading Russian Poetry*, ed. by Stephanie Sandler, Russian Literature and Thought (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 248–55 (p. 250).

landmarks, and the reader gains no textual clarity on the speaker's direct impressions of them — a closer look at the poems reveals palpable remnants of Brodsky's trips there. The process of erasure from texts on actual postcards from Iceland to the draft poem 'Postcard from Iceland' is at work in these two Russian-language texts but to a higher degree.[277] When one sees the actual postcards of cities that he sent back home to his parents, with their desire to document all that he has seen, they emphasize this erasure of the documentary in the poems even more strongly. My discussion — of three postcard poems written exactly ten years from one another — shows that Brodsky documents his personal experiences in these texts, but that they manifest themselves in different ways.

Postcards of artworks: actual postcards and Brodsky's aesthetic tastes

The second set of postcard images Brodsky sent depict paintings and other works of visual art. This group of postcards functions in a documentary manner in two main ways: the images bear witness to the places the poet visited, and document, to the recipient, his artistic preferences. When these postcards are seen next to Brodsky's comments in his essays and interviews, a clearer idea of his personal tastes in the visual arts can be ascertained. These postcards point to Brodsky's relationship to museums and the surroundings in which he views artworks, both of which are recurring, yet understudied, themes in his poetry. If in the first set of postcards one sees Brodsky contemplating cities

[277] A more extreme form of erasure can be seen in an unpublished poem from September 1981. This typed-up poem, entitled 'Otkrytka iz neboskreba,' is found in a notebook used in 1981. In the text, the reader looks out of the window of an unnamed skyscraper in an unnamed city and there is no mention of any local realia at all. The poem reads:
Если есть бумага и есть нули,
почему от отчизны не жить в дали,
если мера отчаянья твоего
выражается цифрою 000.
Вечер. Светило над головой.
Счет твой банковский – волчий вой.
Вид, открывающийся из окна:
9.8I. (*JBP*, Box 37. Folder 767).

and outdoor, urban expanses, in this set of documents he moves around in the internal spaces of museums and art galleries.

These postcards can be classified by the art depicted in their images. A first grouping shows Italian art from the fifteenth–seventeenth centuries: there are images of Masolino da Panicale's fresco at the Basilica of St Clement,[278] Andrea Del Castagno's *Portrait of Dante*,[279] Jacobello del Fiore's *Lion of St Mark*,[280] a relief from the Camposanto Monumentale at Pisa (this is by Spinello Aretino and dated 1390),[281] and Lorenzo Ghiberti's 'Porta del Paradiso.'[282] A second grouping shows nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings, most of which show some form of abstraction in the scenes depicted: Paul Nash's *Landscape from a Dream*,[283] J. M. W. Turner's *Peace: Burial at Sea*,[284] Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire*,[285] Fedor Tolstoy's *Buket tsvetov, babochka i ptichka*,[286] Kazimir Malevich's *Anglichanin v Moskve*[287] and *Uborka rzhi*,[288] Marko Virius's *Newlyweds*,[289] Boris Kustodiev's *Maslenitsa*,[290] and Petrov-Vodkin's *Seledka*.[291] The final grouping shows sculptures, and busts, from antiquity, or with Greco-Roman motifs. In a postcard sent from Leningrad one finds sculptures by Pietro Baratta from the Summer Gardens,[292] and in postcards from abroad one finds a bust of the Roman Emperor Caracalla,[293] and Aristide Maillol's *The River*.[294] To this grouping one could also add an image of a page from Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola's book *The Five Orders of*

[278] *KP*, Box 5, Folder 7.
[279] *JBP*, Box 14, Folder 363.
[280] *GLKP*, Box 1, Folder 2.
[281] *JBP*, Box 16, Folder 428.
[282] *JBP*, Box 16, Folder 428.
[283] *KP*, Box 5, Folder 7.
[284] *KP*, Box 5, Folder 7.
[285] *KP*, Box 5, Folder 7.
[286] *JBP*, Box 15, Folder 416.
[287] *JBP*, Box 11, Folder 319.
[288] *JBP*, Box 15, Folder 416.
[289] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 3.
[290] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[291] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[292] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folders 3–4.
[293] *JBP*, Box 15, Folder 416.
[294] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 5.

Architecture depicting the Ionic Order,[295] a photograph of the Picasso Sculpture outside the Chicago Civic Center,[296] and a photograph of the Lion on the Clocktower of St Mark's Cathedral in Venice.[297]

These three sets of images reveal, in condensed form, Brodsky's preferences in the world of painting and sculpture, predilections corroborated by several of the poet's public pronouncements.[298] In a 1974 interview with Anne-Marie Brumm, there is the following exchange:

> Brumm: Has art played an influential role in your writing? Again, are there any specific painters or sculptors which you find especially worthwhile?
>
> Brodsky: Yes, yes, painting, yes, a lot. Well I would say so, yes. Painters—I like a couple of people very much. I like Georges Braque most of all and I like Raoul Dufy—both of them Frenchmen as a matter of fact. I'm talking about this century but most of all, I like early Italian art.
>
> Brumm: The Renaissance?
>
> Brodsky: Oh no, before the Renaissance—people like Sasseta, for instance. By the way, he has something in common with Dufy. It's a kind of light art, but at the same time it's very deep; it's very profound. The same similarity exists with Mozart. Not many people know about Dufy but I like him for a number of reasons. I remember I liked Umberto Bocconi when I was something like 19 or 20. I even wrote a poem which was trying to describe the same feeling of movement which he tried to. Well, it doesn't matter. I can talk endlessly about all that.[299]

In a discussion with Vitaly Amursky from 1990, Brodsky discusses the visual artists he has been influenced by:

> В живописи это всегда был (думаю, уже на протяжении лет двадцати) самый замечательный, на мой взгляд, художник — опять-таки мы говорим о старых

[295] *JBP*, Box 11, Folder 313.
[296] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[297] *JBP*, Box 5, Folder 135.
[298] For more detail on Brodsky's preferences from the world of painting, see Leving, 'Iosif Brodskii i zhivopis': pyat' etyudov'.
[299] Anne-Marie Brumm, 'The Muse in Exile: Conversations with the Russian Poet, Joseph Brodsky', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 8.1 (1974), 229–46 (p. 232).

> добрых временах, о Ренессансе в данном случае, — Пьеро делла Франческа. Одно из сильнейших впечатлений — то, что для него задник, архитектура, на фоне которой происходит решающее событие, которое он живописует, важнее, чем само событие или, по крайней мере, столь же интересно. Скажем, фасад, на фоне которого распинают Христа, ничуть не менее интересен, чем сам Христос или процесс распятия.
>
> Если говорить о двадцатом веке, то у меня довольно много привязанностей. Наиболее интересные явления для меня — это Брак и несколько французских художников (в общем, наиболее интересная живопись в этом веке была именно французская): Дюфи, Боннар. И Вюйяр, конечно. Но это — другое дело. Там скорее литографии…
>
> Это, конечно, чисто субъективно. Но это перекликается более или менее с эстетикой той изящной словесности, которая мне интереснее всего на сегодняшний день. То есть совмещение определенной старомодности, общего пространства, фигур и т. д, как, например, у Боннара, с эффектом моментального прозрения, который мы находим у Дюфи — такое нечто буддийское, типа сатори, — и совершенно замечательной реконструкции мира, драматического, но без какого бы то ни было перегиба, нажима, как у Брака.
>
> Вот эти три элемента, которые мне чрезвычайно дороги, и это то, в чем я себя узнаю.[300]

Finally, in a 1993 interview with Jadwiga Shimak-Reifer, and Lyudmila Bolotova,

Brodsky brings up similar painters once more:

> — Я обожаю живопись. Мне больше других всю жизнь, то есть не всю жизнь, а в разные периоды, дороже всех итальянцы; я думаю, Джованни Беллини и Пьеро делла Франческа. В двадцатом веке мне ужасно нравится, может быть больше других, французский художник Вюйяр. Боннар тоже, но Вюйяр гораздо больше. Из русских — никто из русских мне в голову не приходит: как раз нравится масса, но что мне дороже прежде всего, чтобы я от кого- то внутренне как-то зависел, кто вызывал бы инстинктивную реакцию, этого нет.
>
> — Было такое предположение некоторых критиков о влиянии Рембрандта.
>
> — Но это неизбежно, конечно. Вот в «Сретенье», например, там даже такой рембрандтовский ход с этим лучом и т. д. Но это в общем происходит бессознательно.[301]

[300] Joseph Brodsky and Vitaly Amursky, ‘Nikakoi melodramy: beseda s Iosifom Brodskim’, in *Bol'shaya kniga interv'yu*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina (Moskva: Zakharov, 2000), pp. 479–92 (p. 491).
[301] Joseph Brodsky, Jadwiga Shimak-Reifer, and Lyudmila Bolotova, ‘Polozhitel’nye santimenty – samoe tyazheloe delo na svete’, in *Bol'shaya kniga interv'yu*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina (Moskva: Zakharov, 2000), pp. 626–29 (p. 628).

Although interviews with Brodsky are problematic — interviewers do not always follow up on questions asked, and sometimes fail to push the poet to explain his comments in more detail[302] — the poet's answers here work in tandem with the postcards to show us his aesthetic landscape in the domain of painting. These comments also point to ways in which the poet moved between painters and their paintings, and his poetic texts. One way in which Brodsky discusses the movement from medium to medium in the interviews is through style: Brodsky says he 'wrote a poem which was trying to describe the same feeling of movement' that Bocconi had depicted in his Futurist art and that in one of his poems there is a 'рембрандтовский ход с этим лучом.' He also tells us that he admires works that combine space, insight, and the dramatic. The phrases Brodsky uses are not made up of terminology from the world of painting and they suggest his immediacy of impression as a spectator as opposed to a professional art critic or painter, much like one sees in his comments on film.[303]

Brodsky in the museum

One way one could broach the relationship between Brodsky's poems and the work of

[302] Gerry Smith raises the following concerns reading Brodsky's interviews: 'Between 1973 and Brodsky's death in 1996, several hundred interviews with him were published. This body of information is of vital interest to Brodsky scholars, but it has one substantial and inevitable drawback: because of the demands of the genre, the poet was usually asked general questions, and therefore hardly ever gave any detailed commentary on specific aspects of his own poetry. Even more seriously, it led to a situation in which Brodsky was able, on the whole, to determine the terms of his own evaluation; the interviews and essays have subsequently been used largely as tools of interpretation rather than as part of the material to be interpreted,' G. S. Smith, 'Joseph Brodsky: Summing Up', p. 402. For further analysis of Brodsky's self-presentation in interviews, see Valentina Polukhina, 'The Self in Brodsky's Interviews', *Russian Literature*, 37.2–3 (1995), 351–63.

[303] Yuri Leving has highlighted some ways in which techniques from the medium of painting may have entered Brodsky's poetry, see Leving, 'Na podstupkakh k vizual'noi estetike Iosifa Brodskogo'.

visual art via the postcard is through the topos of the museum.[304] In the postcards and interviews mentioned thus far, one picks up that Brodsky was an avid museumgoer. Since Brodsky purchased postcards directly from the places he visited, they bear witness — through the images depicted, and the description of the images on the back of them — to the fact that he spent time in the Tate and National Galleries in London, the Guggenheim and MOMA in New York, the Capitoline Museum in Rome, and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Though a couple of these museums are explicitly mentioned in the poetry and prose — the Tate is mentioned in 'Temza v Chelsi' (1974)[305] and the Capitoline Museum in the essay 'Homage to Marcus Aurelius' (1994) — the others are not; the postcards thus hint at other works the poet may have seen in galleries shown in the postcard images and could be used by researchers to tease out his potential encounters with paintings and sculptures.

One museum mentioned by Brodsky in both his prose and poetry is the Hermitage. In 'Homage to Marcus Aurelius,' Brodsky reflects upon several formative experiences from his youth:

> And there are ways of turning viewing into reading. When I was a boy I used to frequent a big museum in my hometown. It had a vast collection of Greek and Roman marbles, not to mention those by Canova and Thorvaldsen. I'd noticed that, depending on the time of day as well as the season, those carved features would wear different expressions.[306]

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[304] Brodsky also attended art festivals and temporary exhibitions when abroad. One such example is the Venice Biennale, an event he sharply criticised in an undated letter to Lev Losev, see *LLP*, Box 1, Folder 15. In 1992, the poet was left aghast by a review in *The New York Times* of the Guggenheim Museum's exhibition of Russian avant garde art and wrote a letter to the Editors (dated 29 September 1992) defending the pieces he saw. In the letter Brodsky states: 'I, for one, find the show tremendously absorbing and revealing. In particular the works of so many women artists--Udal'tsova, Ekster, Popova, and Stepanova above all--practically overshadow those of their male counterparts. And certainly Rodchenko and Filonov emerge as the movement's greatest figures. To my eye, five black compositions by the former put the supremacy of Malevich's position in the Russian avant garde into question,' *LLP*, Box 1, Folder 16.

[305] 'Человек, способный взглянуть на сто | лет вперед, узрит побуревший портик, | который вывеска «бар» не портит, | вереницу барж, ансамбль водосточных флейт, | автобус у галереи Тэйт,' Brodskii, I, p. 399.

[306] Joseph Brodsky, 'Homage to Marcus Aurelius', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 231–57 (p. 238).

In this passage, Brodsky emphasizes the ability to 'read' sculptures and the (metaphorical) story told by these sculptures is dictated by the light that falls onto them. When Brodsky tells us that he was looking at a bust of young girl, he describes what occurs when the light falling on this sculpture changes:

> I lifted my hand, presumably to smooth my hair, and thus obstructed the single source of light coming to her from the ceiling. At once her facial expression changed. I moved my hand a bit to the side: it changed again. I began moving both my arms rather frantically, casting each time a different shadow upon her features: the face came to life.[307]

The museum pieces become animated by the participation of both the poet and the external light, and the inert materials are brought to life. The actual visit to this space concurrently acts as an imaginative journey.[308]

This movement from the literal museum to the metaphorical museum is evident in Brodsky's poetry, where one witnesses what Gerald Smith has called 'Brodsky's fundamental poetic trope: […] "reverse personification," whereby the animate is de-animated and the inanimate is made animate.'[309] One example is in 'Pyataya godovshchina' (1977): 'Теперь меня там нет. Означенной пропаже | дивятся, может

[307] Brodsky, 'Homage to Marcus Aurelius', p. 238.
[308] This tendency was shared with Aleksandr Brodsky, the poet's father. Annelisa Alleva, one of Brodsky's Italian friends, who developed a close bond with the poet's parents following trips to Leningrad, remembers receiving a postcard from Aleksandr sometime after 1972. The postcard depicted the painting 'Hercules at the Crossroads' by the eighteenth-century painter Pompeo Girolamo Batoni; the painting is located in the Hermitage. Alleva gives us the text of the postcard: 'А теперь совершим экскурсию по Эрмитажу, первую в этом году. Остановимся. Какое изумительное полотно! Какой реализм! Какое глубокое психологическое проникновение! Что же решит молодой Геркулес? Я думаю, что предпочтет Афродиту, тем более что она более современна и активна. Целомудренность и строгость Афины вряд ли будут поняты юношей. Об этом всегда дискутируют зрители. А как думаете Вы?' Annelisa Alleva, 'Abstraktnye otkrytki: perepiska s Iosifom Brodskim i s ego otsom', *Zvezda*, 5, 2015 <https://magazines.gorky.media/zvezda/2015/5/abstraktnye-otkrytki.html> [accessed 20 July 2021].
[309] G. S. Smith, 'Joseph Brodsky: Summing Up', p. 409.

быть, лишь вазы в Эрмитаже.'[310] In this instance, vases come to life and are endowed with memory and a sense of vision. Similarly, in a poem written in 1994 for the ninety-fifth birthday of Lyudmila Shtern's mother, one reads:

> Для Вас мы — зеленые овощи,
> и наш незначителен стаж.
> Но Вы для нас — наше сокровище,
> и мы — Ваш живой Эрмитаж.
>
> При мысли о Вас достижения
> Веласкеса чудятся мне,
> Учелло картина «Сражение»
> и «Завтрак на травке» Мане.[311]

In this extract, the metaphorical function of the museum is on show: the friends of the woman are acting as a museum and they protect the old lady, the treasure. Comparably, in the poem 'Mikhailu Baryshnikovu' (1992), an unnamed museum is mentioned:

> Помнишь скромный музей, где не раз видали
> одного реалиста шедевр «Не дали».
> Был ли это музей? Отчего не назвать музеем
> то, на что мы теперь глазеем?[312]

Here, visits to museums help the individual articulate ideas about his past and its meaning.[313]

Seen in this context, Brodsky's postcards from museums are intertwined with his

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[310] Brodskii, II, p. 51.
[311] Shtern, p. 21.
[312] Brodskii, II, p. 200. Losev explains that the substitution of 'ne dali' for *Ne zhdali* (a famous painting by Repin located in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow) was a sexual joke that Brodsky used to make often, Brodskii, II, p. 548.
[313] A similar set of concerns is central to 'Byust Tiberiya.' For a detailed discussion of this text see Andrew Kahn, 'Joseph Brodsky's "Biust Tiberiia": Poetry, History, Ethics', *Stanford Slavic Papers*, 2008, 243–60.

visual aesthetics, and memory, and deal with knotted issues surrounding the relationship between original works of art and their copies; Brodsky does not see museum postcards as throwaway, tourist paraphernalia. A somewhat different view of reproductions of works of art has been presented by Walter Benjamin in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936). In this text, which features in *Illuminations*, a book Brodsky recommended to his students on his university reading lists,[314] Benjamin discusses the role that technologies of reproduction such as photography and the cinema play in our understanding of works of art. Benjamin claims that reproductions lack the original's 'presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be;'[315] this presence is also called the 'aura' of a work of art by Benjamin. Reproductions allow a mass popularisation of artworks whilst also diminishing the uniqueness of the originals that can now be in multiple places — through their reproduced images — at the same time.

The images of artworks that Brodsky selects to keep or send on though through his postcards portray works he saw in the locations where they are found; he has experienced the aura of the pieces personally. Postcards that feature works of art launch a dialogue between the artworks and the addressee of the postcard, a dialogue initiated by Brodsky, one which is documentary and personal in nature, in contrast to what Benjamin's thoughts would suggest.

Postcards of artworks: poems from postcards

In two poems from the 1980s — 'P'yatstsa Mattei' (1981) and 'Na vystavke Karla Veilinka' (1985) — the postcard featuring an artwork carries out a different function: it

[314] *JBP*, Box 126, Folder 2820.
[315] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211–44 (p. 214).

stands between the poet and his poetry and is used to create a written text out of the reproduced image.

In the first poem, Brodsky may have made use of a postcard as a reminder of a previous trip to Rome. In his homes, Brodsky held several copies of a postcard depicting a colour photograph of the Fontana delle Tartarughe.[316] The sixteenth-century fountain is in Piazza Mattei, a small square, close to the Teatro Marcello, which gives its name to Brodsky's poem. The fountain is the point of departure for the speaker in the poem, much like the postcard may have been the aide-memoire that allowed the poet to mentally revisit the scene of his emotions following his departure. The opening lines of the text reference the fountain directly and place the reader in the square itself as the speaker articulates his present-day thoughts and tells us that he really was in the place depicted (the 'I was here' aspect of postcards is brought to the fore): 'Я пил из этого фонтана | в ущелье Рима. | Теперь, не замочив кафтана, | канаю мимо.'[317] The rest of the poem highlights a love triangle taking place in the environs of the fountain and the Via dei Funari. Following a second appearance of the fountain in the eighth stanza of the poem — 'Зима. Звенит хрусталь фонтана. | Цвет неба — синий' — the tempo of the poem reaches dizzying heights as the speaker emphasizes his gratitude to the place where he experienced loss, as well as to the city as a whole. Through an array of possible references to Mandelshtam ('в центре мирозданья | и циферблата!'),[318] Tasso, Michelangelo, and Borromini, as well as Auden ('сорвись все звезды с небосвода, | исчезни местность),[319] the speaker finds himself at a geographical height ('С холма, где говорил октавой | порой иною | Тасс,

[316] Brodsky also received two postcards from Petr Vail' (*JBP*, Box 15, Folder 411) and Masha Vorobiov (*JBP*, Box 16, Folder 426) in 1992 and 1993, respectively, depicting the fountain.
[317] The text can be found in Brodskii, II, pp. 66–70.
[318] A poem from 1912 by Mandelshtam begins with the line, 'Нет, не луна, а светлый циферблат,' *O. Mandel'shtam: sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*, ed. by P. Nerler and A. Nikitaev, 4 vols (Moscow: Art-biznes-tsentr, 1993), I, p. 74.
[319] A reference to Auden's poem 'Funeral Blues': 'The stars are not wanted now; put out every one, | Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,' W. H Auden, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 49.

созерцаю величавый | вид') where he expresses his immense gratitude for having attained personal freedom and had the ability to see Rome at close quarters. Brodsky rarely kept or sent multiple copies of the same image, a fact which suggests that this image in question held some special significance for him.[320]

In 'Na vystavke Karla Veilinka,' the postcard is a point of imaginative departure only. If in 'Otkrytka iz goroda K' and 'Otkrytka iz Lissabona' one sees poems set up as postcards that subvert the idea of what a travel postcard should depict, then 'Na vystavke Karla Veilinka' is a poem set up as a walk around a real exhibition that Brodsky never actually visited; Brodsky never, it seems, went to an actual exhibition of Carel Willink.[321] The poem is based around ekphrasis from a set of postcards the poet was sent by his friend Ade Struve, to whom the poem is dedicated;[322] as he tells his friend Kees Verheul in a letter of 1985, 'Милый Кейс, посылаю стишок про Вейлинка. Открыточки мне купила Ада, отсюда — инициалы.'[323] The poem gives an imagined and not a real walk around a gallery, in direct contrast to 'Otkrytka iz Lissabona' where one witnesses a walk around an imagined city that is actually a real city. In 'Na vystavke Karl Veilinka,' the reproductions of the paintings in the postcards are the only ways to communicate with the original that the poet has at his disposal and they bring him into contact with the artworks — and their aura — across space. In the poem, the original works of art — the paintings — are recreated via the postcards. The postcard here is an essential link between the two artists and their works, though Brodsky hides the very existence of these postcards from the final text. One can even say that he is mocking the creative process behind the poem in

[320] The other postcard image of which there are multiple copies in the Brodsky Archive is the image of the Lion of St Mark in Venice. I will discuss the poet's thoughts on lions in Chapter Four.
[321] Kees Verheul recalls that Brodsky picked up a pack of sixteen postcards of works by Willink at a museum gift store when he visited Amsterdam in June 1985. This seems to have been the initial impulse for the poem. For further contextual details about the poem, and an analysis of it, see Kees Verheul, *Tanets Vokrug Mira: Vstrechi s Iosifom Brodskim*, trans. by Irina Mikhailova (St Petersburg: Zvezda, 2002), pp. 153–71.
[322] Three of the postcards can be found in *JBCP*, Box 1 Folder 24.
[323] Verheul, p. 155.

lines which direct reference postcards, ‘Равнина. Часто именно она, | принять другую форму не умея, | становится добычей полотна, | открытки, оправданьем Птоломея.’[324] In this way, the poem ‘Na vystavke Karla Veilinka’ shows how from the postcard, an individual’s imagination can develop and understand the world of the museum and the artwork. The movement from the postcard of a place that was not seen to a mental image of that place, which Brodsky experienced while living in Soviet Russia and which was shown at the beginning of this chapter, is still at play many years after he left the country.

For Brodsky, postcards of paintings and sculptures are complex intermediaries between people and artworks and between works of visual art and Brodsky’s poetic texts. Reproductions of artworks are treated with respect by the poet, and they are involved in intricate dialogues between museums, the individual, and the literary text. Postcards purchased from museums document Brodsky’s sincere, positive aesthetic experiences — Brodsky never sends postcards of artworks that he mocks in the texts of the cards — and he utilizes certain images from the postcards as he constructs his poetic texts.

Poetry on postcards: introductory remarks

A final way Brodsky uses postcards is by adding literary allusions and poems to their texts, hence making the mechanically produced document into a unique reflection of artistic creativity. Through this group of postcards, Brodsky projects certain elements of his poetic identity whilst at the same time documenting his experiences and personalising the dialogue with his interlocutors. The poems on these documents reveal Brodsky’s virtuosity as a poet, the ease with which he can write verse of all forms, and his sharp, wry humour.

[324] The text can be found in Brodskii, II, pp. 125–27.

Thematically and stylistically, his poems written on postcards bear a striking similarity to the short ditties and occasional poems he used to write as dedications in books and editions of poems he would gift to his friends.[325] In his two-volume edition of Brodsky's poetry, Lev Losev includes ten examples of such light verse, though he does inform the reader that there are many such poems in existence.[326] Losev says that these occasional poems are at times parodies and pastiches, and at other times stylistic experiments that can illuminate biographical facts in the poet's life. The author also notes likenesses between these texts and similar ones written by Alexander Pushkin: many of Brodsky's texts are written in iambic tetrameter and make use of quotes and stylistic borrowings from Pushkin's works. Losev concludes that:

> Все эти «пушкинизмы» указывают на основное сходство с пушкинскими посланиями – гетерогенный стиль, в котором философская максима соседствует со скабрезной шуткой и ностальгическим пассажем, а речь пестрит варваризмами и вульгаризмами. Подобно тому как стилистически раскрепощенные дружеские послания помогли Пушкину найти стиль «свободного романа» («Евгения Онегина»), лирика Бродского с конца 1960-х гг. начинает стилистически сближаться с его легкой поэзией.[327]

These statements are true for Brodsky's light verse more generally, though they overlook many specific features belonging to the poems on postcards alone. Firstly, all the poems Losev refers to are written in Russian, whereas an equal amount — if not more — of the poems on postcards are written in English. Secondly, the poems I discuss differ in their functions as they are written on a postcard, a medium which has its own set of restrictions

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[325] Several examples of these texts collected by Losev, some of which did not make it into his two-volume edition of Brodsky's poetry, can be found in *LLP*, Box 2, Folders 16–18. Other examples are numerous. One particularly heartfelt poem/message was written in the first pages of a book of his poetry given to Sir Isaiah Berlin. The message is dated 2 September 1991and reads 'Не ёжик я, и не лиса я. | Я просто Вас люблю, | Исайя,' see *JBP*, Box 2, Folder 56.
[326] Brodskii, II, pp. 626–27.
[327] Brodskii, II, p. 627.

and quirks. Thirdly, the dialogue with Pushkin is not as prevalent in the poems on postcards as in his other light verse: their field of literary references is international and eclectic. Finally, a key element in these poems is how each text is intimate and individualized for each recipient, reflected in the literary and biographical references they contain. It is predominantly the various aspects of the poems on postcards which are unique to them that I explore in this final section of the chapter. I also look at the ways they are linked to documentation, the prevalent approach to the form which I have described in this chapter.

Poems on postcards: an analysis

Before looking at the poems on postcards, it bears noting that in general the texts of Brodsky's postcards are peppered with quotes and quips from canonical Western literature. In a 1988 interview with Missy Daniel, there is the following exchange:

> Daniel: The importance of Auden and Frost and Donne for you is well known. But what about Shakespeare? Has he also been an influence?
>
> Brodsky: Well, this is just — [*Brodsky picks up a postcard he's written to someone and reads:*] "King Lear: How old art thou? Kent: Not so young, sir, to love a woman for singing. Not so old to dote on her for anything. I have years on my back 48." That's what I am.[328]

Aside from literary quotations, direct references to writers are also found. In a postcard to Alan Myers written from Rio de Janeiro, Brodsky writes: 'The poverty level is truly exceptional but nobody seems to mind anything against the astonishing background provided by the atlantic [*sic*] ocean and mountains. I feel like a former Nazi or arthur [*sic*]

[328] Joseph Brodsky and Missy Daniel, 'Interview with Joseph Brodsky', *The Threepenny Review*, 43, 1990, 23–24 (p. 24).

Rimbaud.'[329] There was also often a literary touch to the titles or sign-offs on postcards. The poems on postcards thus fit into a wider literariness evident in Brodsky's postcard texts.

To bring out the points already raised about the poems on postcards, some examples are necessary. On a postcard written from Venice to the poet and academic Peter Viereck, dated 26 December 1974, one reads:

> Nel mezzo del camin da nostra vita
> I found myself in Venice, dear Peter.
> (Say this with British accent, not with Russian)
>
> To write in terza rima's out of fashion.
> My grammar's bad; I cannot handle a coma… [*sic*]
> What's worse than terza rima? Terza Roma!
>
> I'd rather switch for proze [*sic*]. In proze [*sic*] it's better
> To state that Venice's great and — donnerwetter! —
> I hate to think of going back to College,
> for all its cash and all autumnial [*sic*] foliage.
>
> It's easier in proze [*sic*] to say: I wish you
> Happy New Year and stuff in every issue
> of every magazine, with or without rhymes
>
> Have fun three hundred sixty plus five times![330]

On the back of another postcard sent during the same trip, to his friend and translator George Kline, a card featuring a photograph of a gondola on St Mark's Square during high tide, one finds the text:

> Dear George

[329] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[330] *PVP*, Box 91, Folder 3.

Merry Christmas and Happy
New Year from these canals
and waters which merely double
The man and his trouble.
and because of this trick
you are kissed here twice
by Joseph and Veronique[331]
who are longing for vice-
versa
under grand Orsa[332]

Viereck, a friend and professor at Mount Holyoke, where Brodsky was teaching at this time, is given a poem about college and grammar, as well as wordplay and jokes about Dante's poetry. This fourteen-line text is written in rhyming couplets and not in terza rima, the verse form mentioned: Dante and the Italian sonnet are gently mocked in a poem written in Italy. The playfulness of the tone of the poem is typical of the correspondence between Brodsky and Viereck.[333] With George Kline, Brodsky had a more professional relationship: Kline was one of the first to help him translate his poetry into English.[334] The tone of the poem to Kline is playful but more restrained, with talk of celestial constellations and greetings from mutual friends taking the place of the humorous puns and code-switching (the 'better' | 'donnerwetter' rhyme) in the postcard to Viereck. These variations in tone and register are also typical of Brodsky's letters: there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to what Brodsky says and how he says it.

Due to the space constraints of the postcard, these two slightly longer poems are rare

[331] Veronique is Veronique Schiltz, a close friend throughout his life in the West. The pair first met in Leningrad.
[332] *GLKP*, Box 1, Folder 1.
[333] On a postcard Brodsky sent to Viereck in 1987, the image depicts a nude photograph of Lisa Lyon taken by Robert Mapplethorpe. The text reads, 'Dear Peter, I can't quit put my finger on it, but for some reason this picture makes me think about you. Since|early|years | Marcher in the Narrow | JB' (*PVP*, Box 91, Folder 1). The 'Marcher in the Narrow' sign-off is a pun on Viereck's collection of poetry called *Archer in the Marrow*.
[334] For a detailed study of the relationship between Kline and Brodsky, see Cynthia L. Haven and George L. Kline, *The Man Who Brought Brodsky into English: Conversations with George L. Kline* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020).

and shorter poems are more common. These short texts engage with the images depicted on the postcards, and document Brodsky's personal experiences whilst at the same time commenting on the place he finds himself in through references to the images.[335] On a postcard showing the Lion of St Mark, sent in late December 1974 to Sir Stephen Spender (Figures 6, and 7), one reads:

> Isn't it stupid for a lion
> with such a [*sic*] muscles to rely on
> — for five obscure and pointless ages —
> these yellow pages?[336]

On the back of another postcard dispatched to Spender in January 1976, which features a photograph of the Spanish Steps in Rome (Figures 6 and 7), Brodsky writes:

> a red-haired wolf
> of Russian steppes
> Sends you his love
> from Spanish steps[337]

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[335] At the Beinecke Library archives, one finds a dinner menu for an unnamed restaurant in the USA on which Brodsky scribbled. Next to individual food items, Brodsky makes some silly rhymes: 'Vinegret [item typed on the menu] : you won't regret [written by Brodsky in black pen next to it]', 'Pelmeni [item typed on the menu] For many [written by Brodsky in black pen next to it]', and 'Shashlik Gruzia [item typed on the menu] it should amuse ya' [written by Brodsky in black pen next to it],' see *JBP*, Box 186, Folder 4042. Brodsky was spontaneous, and ad hoc, in his rhyme-making, and often wrote on any materials he found in front of him.

[336] *SSP*, Box 42, Folder 8.

[337] *SSP*, Box 42, Folder 8. Brodsky wrote the exact same message, on the back of an identical postcard, to Peter Viereck at the same time, see *PVP*, Box 91, Folder 3. This tendency of buying the same postcard and sending it off with the same message to different people recalls an anecdote that Sergei Dovlatov tells. In this tale, Dovlatov recalls how he came across a copy of Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński's poetry which had been translated from Polish into Russian. Four of these poems had been translated by Brodsky. Dovlatov asked the poet to sign his book and he duly agreed, writing the two-line ditty, 'Двести восемь польских строчек | Дарит Сержу переводчик.' Dovlatov is ecstatic and pleased at the speed with which Brodsky wrote these lines, 'Я был польщен. На моих глазах было создано короткое изящное стихотворение.' He is somewhat deflated, however, when he finds out that in separate editions of this volume he wrote the same message (bar one word) to Anatoly Naiman ('Двести восемь польских строчек | Дарит Толе переводчик') and Evgenii Rein ('Двести восемь польских строчек | Дарит Жене переводчик'), Marianna Volkova and Sergei Dovlatov, *Tam zhili poety...* (St Petersburg: Zvezda, 1998), p. 80. Even if Dovlatov's story is embellished, it does seem to point to Brodsky's very self-conscious, humorous playing on the concepts of artistic uniqueness and reproductions when communicating with friends.



Figure 6. Front of postcard sent to Stephen Spender.



Figure 7. Back of postcard sent to Stephen Spender.

On a postcard from June 1978 to Carl Proffer, mailed from Mykines, Faroe Islands, one reads a poem that is nearly the same as the one seen earlier in our discussion of Iceland:

> Guess who
> from the herring-ridden
> North
> Sends you his love
> for what it's worth[338]

[338] *JBP*, Box 11, Folder 318.

Finally, on a postcard posted from Lucca, Italy, dated 6 October 1993, and sent to his friend Lev Losev, one finds the couplet:

> Мы дожили:
> Мы наблюдаем шашни
> Грузовика и Телебашни[339]

These two- and four-line texts transport the reader to a direct thought documented by the poet. In the poems to Spender, one finds Brodsky making short, snappy statements about Venice and Rome via references to the images of two extremely famous sights shown on the postcards. The cliché of the obvious tourist sight is made personal and unique through Brodsky's quirky observations (why is the lion putting his paws on a book?) and ironic self-mockery ('a red-haired wolf'). The personal is also seen in the third and fourth poems where intimacy is reflected in both the form of address — in the third text Brodsky sends his love, in the fourth text he converses with Losev in the first-person plural — and the colloquial vocabulary deployed. These qualities are dictated by the recipients of the postcards: Losev and Proffer were close friends Brodsky knew from the 1960s, whereas he befriended Spender somewhat later on; it should also be added that Spender was thirty-one years older than Brodsky.[340] In all four texts the poet is informing the addressee that he has been to these places and seen that which is depicted in the postcard's image; there is a reciprocity between the images and the texts.

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[339] *LLP*, Box 1, Folder 12.

[340] This age difference was the same as the one that existed between Brodsky and another British intellectual whom Brodsky held in high esteem: Sir Isaiah Berlin. In a 1974 postcard that Brodsky sent to Berlin for his birthday, the image depicted — Carpaccio's painting of Saint Gerolamo with a Lion — is mentioned in the greeting sent: 'Дорогй Исайя, Поздравляю Вас с новым годом и желаю Вам того здоровья и равновесия, в котором находятся данной зверь и данной старец. Ваш И. Бродский' (*IBP*, Box 208, Folder 113). The texts to Spender and Berlin are similar, a reflection of the poet's similar relationship to each of them.

The poem to Losev is documentary in another sense: the poem is in direct response to the constitutional crisis that was unfolding in Russia at the time. On 3 October 1993, certain political groups tried to storm the Ostankino television tower, and on 4 October 1993 Boris Yeltsin ordered a military assault on the White House, events which are referred to in the poem to Losev, who would have been watching the same incidents unfold on television from the USA, the country where he (Losev) was living at the time.[341] At that moment, Brodsky was in Italy with his wife — Maria Sozzani — and his infant daughter — Anna Maria Alexandra — who was born on 9 June 1993. Whereas the first three short poems document Brodsky's presence in the place depicted in the image of the postcard, the fourth postcard documents the place where Brodsky is located when he finds out about events in Russia; both Brodsky and Losev, two Russians, are watching the same events from different places but they are united in thought — Brodsky refers to himself and Losev as 'we.' Therefore, when these various texts and addressees are viewed next to one another, one sees not only the adaptation of content to each person, a feature seen in the poems to Viereck and Kline, but also the conscious selection of literary styles and images — both on the front of the postcard and in the texts of the poems — chosen for each recipient.[342]

A final interlocutor to mention is Masha Vorobiov.[343] Vorobiov was both close friend and colleague; she helped Brodsky with many of his translations into English when he moved to New York in the 1970s. Vorobiov lived in a separate apartment at 44 Morton

[341] Gerald Smith has observed that Brodsky never explicitly mentions the political events of 1993 in his poetry, see G. S. Smith, 'The Versification of Joseph Brodskii, 1993', p. 69. Poems on postcards can be seen to engage in alternative discussions to those found in the poetry.

[342] In his memoirs, Losev recalls objecting to an observation by Brodsky that there are few good Russian poets whose names begin with the letter 'K.' Losev sent Brodsky a short poem explaining why he was wrong, and Brodsky replied with a couplet, written on a postcard, with the following words: 'Из названных тобой на К | все, кроме Кузмина, кака,' Losev, *Meandr: memuarnaya proza*, p. 39. This shows how Brodsky was relatively stable in the tone used for each interlocutor; in other words, the tone deployed is the same across postcards and letters sent to the same individual.

[343] Short biographies of Vorobiov as well as several of Brodsky's friends mentioned in my study — George Kline, Alan Myers, David McDuff, Peter Viereck, Stephen White — can be found in Rulyova, pp. 131–75.

Street, the poet's residence for sixteen years (1977–1993). She was fluent in both English and Russian which explains why, in a postcard written in October 1993 from the island of Procida, Italy, he writes two poems to Masha in both of these languages; one sees sustained examples of code-switching and deeply personal sentiments in the texts she received:

> Над морем — ночь; Дуршлаг ковша
> Какая-то кусает вша.
> Как жаль, что Вы не здесь, а в США.
>
> My daughter cries; Her mother cooks
> or else decries her current looks.
> I learn the art of Tender Hooks[344]

In these texts, Brodsky takes the reader into a specific, and somewhat tense, environment. If in the postcard to Losev, sent at the same time, Brodsky documents an event he observes from a distance, here he seems to be expressing a distinctly personal set of emotions regarding relationships he finds himself in at that individual moment. In another postcard dated 6 October 1993, there is the exact same two-line poem to Losev as well as lines that take us inside the home again:

> as I write this, they cook our meal:
> Some mixture of pork, duck and veal.
> I hope these lines have some appeal.
> to you who contemplates raw deal.[345]

This mix of seriousness and light-hearted, personal commentary is a trait found elsewhere in poems to, and correspondence with, Vorobiov. Thus, Brodsky's poems on postcards

[344] *JBP*, Box 16, Folder 428.
[345] *JBP*, Box 16, Folder 428.

portray a wide range of documentary detail and personal dialogue on cultural, political, and intimate issues that preoccupied him. They also show the extra characteristics that Losev overlooks in his discussion of Brodsky's light verse.

Most of the poems written on the back of postcards, both in Russian and English, share similarities with the short, postcard poems Brodsky wrote in English. In the published two-line poem 'A Postcard from France,' Brodsky writes: 'Now that I am in Paris | I wish I were where my car is.'[346] An earlier, unpublished version of the poem, entitled 'A French Postcard,' reads, 'Now that I am in Paris | I wish I were where my car is | Now that I am in Paris | I sure miss the land of the free. | Now that I've mastere [*sic*] the lang [*sic*] | I'm watching my tongue.'[347] In the published poem, 'Postcard from the U.S.' one reads: 'I've seen the Atlantic | pretty but frantic. | I've faced the Pacific: | nothing specific. | As for the continent, | I'm not yet on to it.'[348] In a page of one of Brodsky's notebooks from the 1980s (Figure 8), one finds several 'shorts:' a set of unpublished two-line poems. Aside from the 'Postcard from France' (the text in the notebook is the same as the published version), one encounters the following:

(The NY lullaby)

Buenas noches
Don't mind the roaches.

(Toronto)
I went to museum
Saw art ad nauseum

A postcard from Santa Monica

Here's the Pacific
Nothing specific.

A Postcard from Germany

[346] Brodsky, *Collected Poems in English*, p. 464.
[347] *JBP*, Box 58, Folder 1146.
[348] 'The Sophisticated Traveller', *New York Times*, 18 March 1984.

Come to Dahau [*sic*]
To learn a know-how[349]

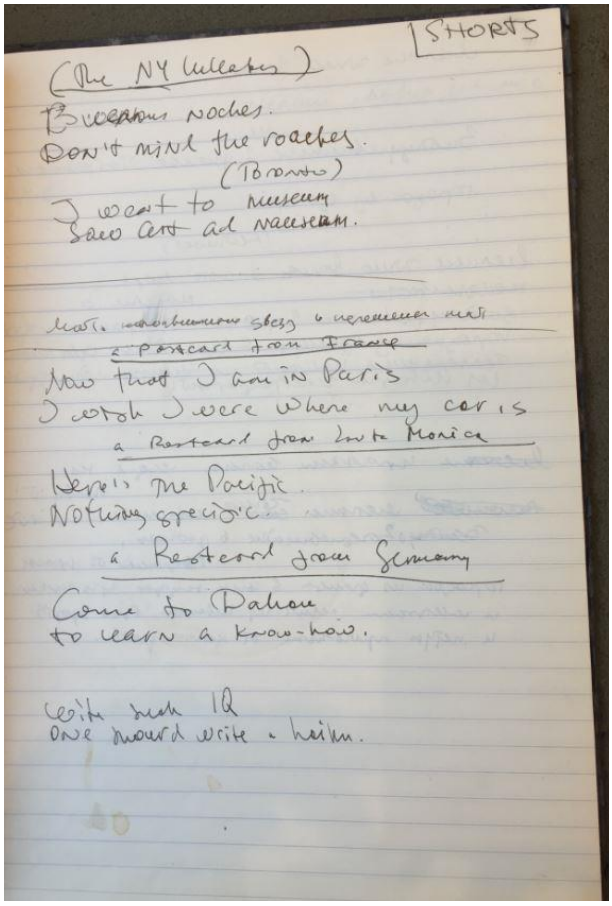


Figure 8. Page from one of Brodsky's notebooks.

A poet, Brodsky is telling us in both the actual and metaphorical postcards he sends from this group, is always writing verse, whether he is at home or abroad. When he is travelling, he sets himself apart from the crowd as he is constantly writing and creating couplets, ditties, and short poems; there is a virtuosic element to his character. In this way, the poems written on the back of postcards, and the English postcard poems that closely match them, document the fact that being a poet is a full-time profession both in public and behind closed doors,[350] yet another documentary act one can observe in Brodsky's use of

[349] *JBP*, Box 37, Folder 768.
[350] At the same time, Brodsky may also be mocking the Romantic image of the poet.

the postcard.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how literal and metaphorical postcards played an important role in Brodsky's life. Through postcards, the poet documents his own experiences and aesthetic tastes. Moreover, he personalizes the impersonal item, and gives artistic value to these mass-produced documents via his choice of image and text. Brodsky's treatment of this medium shows that to view him solely as an austere, restrained poet with metaphysical concerns, is misplaced. Brodsky emerges as a writer who does not interact exclusively with high culture, but someone who is happy to give a common tourist object — the postcard — a central position in his personal correspondence, creative process, and literary output. Research into his postcards allows us to see Brodsky as a light-hearted, cheeky individual who was fascinated with the cliché object as much as he was by masterpieces of Western art.

Brodsky's postcards, his postcard poems, and his poems on postcards, all document his various experiences and memories. In the next chapter, I look at how Brodsky explores the structures of these experiences and memories in his writing, and thinking, about photographs and photography.

Chapter Three

Photography

In a television interview filmed on 12 February 1989,[351] Brodsky shows the camera photographs displayed by his desk at his home at 44 Morton Street, New York. He begins from the wall and gives a guided tour of the images: he points out a photograph of W. H. Auden; one, taken just after his departure from the USSR in 1972, showing him with the poets Stephen Spender, John Ashbery, and Auden; one of himself with the poets Derek Walcott, Adam Zagajewski, and Mark Strand; one of a marble bust of the Emperor Hadrian's wife; another photo of Auden; one of his son (at a young age) with his son's mother; one of Anna Akhmatova; one of his friend, the translator Andrei Sergeev with his wife; one of another friend and translator, Viktor Golyshev, and his wife; one of the poet, Marianne Moore; and one of Anna Akhmatova, a photograph located just above his desk — Brodsky tells the camera that he took this final image himself. On his desk, Brodsky shows us photographs of another variegated array of individuals: there is a photo of his mother (the photo sits next to a small bust of Pushkin made by Ilya Slonim, as Brodsky remarks to the camera); his friend and academic, Carl Proffer; his father with a cat; his parents' balcony in Leningrad; a photo of himself; another of his parents; two photos of his mother; one showing himself standing with Derek Walcott; one of the Pope with the Lithuanian poet, Tomas Venclova; a photograph of the Greek poet, Constantine Cavafy; a 'портрет адресата многих моих стихотворений;'[352] and a photograph of himself, in his youth, with a dog. Brodsky comments on each image in detail — he tells us where, when, and how the photos were taken, and who the individuals in them are — and he overlooks

[351] The interview was filmed by Evgenii Porotov and the fragment in question can be found at Evgenii Porotov, *Iosif Brodskii. Interv'yu v N'yu Iorke (1996)* (YouTube, 1989) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhTT8pqNAMg> [accessed 26 July 2021].

[352] This is the only comment Brodsky makes about this photograph of Marina Basmanova, his lover of many years, the mother of his son, Andrei. Brodsky does not name Basmanova directly to the camera at any point during this sequence.

only a few of the images in the room.[353]

This sequence highlights several ever-present features of Brodsky's interactions with photography and photographs. Firstly, it emphasizes that, in his living and working areas, the poet used to surround himself with images of writers, friends, and family. These images appear in a collage-like manner, without hierarchy, next to each other. Secondly, the individuals in the images are all mentioned in his poetry and prose, either by having works dedicated to them, or via explicit or implicit references within his texts; visual reminders of these individuals reflect the literary allusions to them. Thirdly, the pictures show Brodsky taking up different roles in the photographic process: he is a photographic subject (he shows us pictures of himself), a photographer (he shows pictures he took), and an observer of photographs via the survey he conducts. Finally, in his role as observer of photographs, Brodsky's exceptional powers of recall, and his ability to articulate specific memories associated with each of these snapshots, are on show. When observing the images, Brodsky tells us various stories and narratives, all of which make up his personal and literary identities.[354] Without photographs and the visual stimuli they provide, these narratives would be stunted. As a result, without photographs Brodsky would lose his memories, and hence aspects of his various identities as a poet, father, son, lover, and friend.

In his treatment of photographs, the role of imagination is present in his youthful interactions with the form, but it is memory that takes a more central position than the one observed in his interactions with cinema and postcards. In Brodsky's work, the abundant images associated with photography are rooted in the poet's actual interactions with the

[353] Sanna Turoma begins her book *Brodsky Abroad: Empire, Tourism, Nostalgia* by fleetingly referencing the same scenes, see Turoma, *Brodsky Abroad*, pp. 3–4. Turoma says that these images help Brodsky reflect on exile, his past in the USSR, and on his lost relationships with friends and family.

[354] One is reminded of the beginning of Sergei Dovlatov's *Chemodan* where the narrator tells the reader a narrative about the various images that were affixed to his suitcase when he left the USSR. Coincidentally, one of these images is of Brodsky.

medium in his daily life; photographic prints and the process of taking, viewing, and being the subject of photographs, are vital for the poet. Brodsky uses actual photographs to orientate himself in time and space: they help him organise, and reflect upon, his personal experiences and memories; photographs stand between Brodsky and his environment.

One can ascertain three, roughly delineated periods in the poet's interactions with the medium and, over time, a move from a literal to a more metaphorical treatment of the form may be noted; these periods overlap somewhat. Firstly, in his early years, Brodsky is mainly a subject and a viewer of photographs, though one also notes his interest in the taking of photographs, an interest passed on to him by his father. During this time, and well into the late-1960s, the poet also uses photographs to reflect upon the aesthetics and ethics surrounding snapshots: what makes a good photograph? How can you tell if the person shown in an image is morally good or bad? Once Brodsky decides on the ingredients of a positive photograph, he goes to great lengths to try and replicate, and mimic, individuals in such images, something he continues doing throughout his life. This emulation is a serious task for Brodsky, for if he can look and act like individuals he admires, then he can also be a better person, as evidenced in his treatment of images of his favourite poet, W. H. Auden. The second period is the twenty-year interval from about 1960 to 1980, when Brodsky had a portable camera with him when travelling across the USSR and abroad. During this time, he would send and receive many snapshots. His role as photographer takes prominence as he travels extensively, seeing new locations for the first time. In this second period, his treatment of photographs changes slightly as they begin to act as metaphors for time as well as impetuses, and means, for ekphrastic poetry. The final period — from 1980 right up until his death in 1996 — is one where he is increasingly reflective upon his position as a photographic subject. In this period, one where the poet's photographic output is minimal, reflections on his past life, human memory, and time, more generally, are interwoven with references to photography. Here, a

metaphorical, as opposed to a literal, treatment of images predominates in his discussions of self-perception and self-reflection.

Whichever lens one uses to analyse the relationship between Brodsky and photography — whether one sees it in terms of roles vis-à-vis the form, or one splits it up into phases — Brodsky's attitude to photography can be summarized in the following way: photography is essential for helping him perceive and understand himself and the world around him. In this chapter, I follow a chronological trajectory and show how his various positions in relation to the form change over time.

Aleksandr and Joseph Brodsky: photography at home

Photography was an immutable part of the poet's childhood and youth, and the links between memory and perception, which persist throughout his treatment of the form, find their roots in the years he spent in Leningrad from 1940–1972. Photography was the first art form he came into intimate contact with: Aleksandr Brodsky, his father, was a photographer by trade. In an interview with his friend, the poet Evgeny Rein, Brodsky tells us that his father 'окончил институт Красной журналистики и работал фотографом — закавказским корреспондентом ТАСС, "Известий."'[355] Aleksandr worked abroad between 1941–48 as a photojournalist for the Soviet state,[356] and, upon his return,[357] worked in the faculty of Photocorrespondents of the Union of Journalists.[358] He also worked as a photographer for various newspapers in the city. Aleksandr was adept at developing film and fluent in the technical aspects of the form.

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[355] Rein and Brodskii.
[356] Valentina Polukhina, *Evterpa i Klio Iosifa Brodskogo: Khronologiya Zhizni i Tvorchestva* (Tomsk: ID SK-S, 2012), p. 25.
[357] When asked to recall some details about his father in conversation with Rein, Brodsky notes, 'Я впервые помню отца уже в самом конце войны, когда он приехал с Дальнего Востока. Пожалуй, даже не столько помню его, сколько фотографии того времени' (Rein and Brodskii).
[358] Al'bert Izmailov, 'Brodskii Aleksandr Ivanovich', 2013 <http://www.spbsj.ru/knigha-pamiati/brodskii-alieksandr-ivanovi> [accessed 26 July 2021].

As a result of his father's occupation, photography was a prominent component of the poet's early life both inside and outside the confines of the home. One sees this in the poet's remembrances of the family apartment at 24 Liteinyi Prospekt, a communal apartment, to where the poet moved with his family in 1955. It was here the poet lived until his departure from Soviet Russia in 1972, and the place where his parents resided until their deaths. In his 1985 essay 'In a Room and a Half,' the last text in *Less Than One*, Brodsky highlights the tangible presence of photographic apparatus inside the apartment: 'My father's various cameras, developing and printing paraphernalia, prints themselves […], all that was stored in the cavernous depths of these chests [of drawers].'[359] Furthermore, the 'half room,' referred to in the title of the piece, is his bedroom, a space comprised of an area where his father would develop film: 'at the farthest end of my half he had built himself a darkroom where he was doing his developing and printing, i.e., where the large part of our livelihood came from.'[360] This description of the setup of the rooms is faithful to reality, as photographs of the space show.[361] This home environment is reflected in lines from 'Zof'ya,' a long, autobiographical poem from 1962. Here the reader senses the hustle and bustle of the poet's home where the speaker's parents are busy with their daily chores, 'Мать штопала багровые носки, | отец чинил свой фотоаппарат' and 'отец схватил свой фотоаппарат, | из-под стола сверкнул кошачий взгляд.'[362] Moreover, Aleksandr's photographer friends would often visit the family home.[363]

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[359] Joseph Brodsky, 'In a Room and a Half', in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 447–501 (p. 459).
[360] Brodsky, 'In a Room and a Half', p. 475.
[361] Mil'chik, *«Poltory komnaty» Iosifa Brodskogo v fotografiyakh*, pp. 89–131.
[362] Joseph Brodsky, *Sochineniya Iosifa Brodskogo*, ed. by Yakov Gordin, 7 vols (St Petersburg: Pushkinskii fond, 2001), II, pp. 151; 153.
[363] Brodsky relates a humorous story regarding one of his father's friends: 'У отца была масса приятелей среди фотографов, и был такой приятель Андрей Макарович Петров, по-моему, правительственный фотограф. Он снимал постоянно членов Политбюро и т. д. И у нас на стене висел подаренный им отцу портрет Сталина — очень хорошая фотография, без ретуши. Она у меня над кроватью висела. И помню, я как-то пролил чернила на эту фотографию. Это преисполнило всех нас страхом, ужасом. Понятно, коммунальная квартира… соседи заходят, выходят… они знают, что чернила пролиты, ну и т. д. И лишь отец был каким-то достаточно отрезвляющим элементом в этой истории…' (Rein and Brodskii).

Personal life, family life, and the family's income via the father's work are all intermingled with photography within the four walls of the apartment in 'In a Room and a Half,' much as they were in several of the poet's early writings.

This internal world also spills out to the world outside and helps give the poet a different view of his hometown. When describing early family walks in Leningrad in the piece, Brodsky recalls that:

> On the way home, my father and I would drop into stores, buy food or photographic materials (film, chemicals, paper), stop by shop windows. As we made our way through the center of town, he would tell me about this or that façade's history, about what was here or there before the war or before 1917.[364]

A day out in the city is tightly connected with photography through both the purchasing of photographic supplies and the somewhat photographic memory of the father who remembers how the city looked in the first decades of the twentieth century. Aleksandr acts as a guide, a Virgilian figure to the young poet, and brings to the surface the history he knows is hiding in the surrounding world. The image of the father as an artist-guide is further built upon when the poet lauds the photographs his father used to take, and elevates them to the level of artistic artefact: '[he] took the best pictures I've seen in print of the city [Leningrad] under siege.'[365] As well as a love for the cityscape, Aleksandr also provides the young poet with an affection for water and the sea, important topoi in Brodsky's poetry: 'He [Brodsky's father] liked to be near the water, he adored the sea. In that country, this is the closest one gets to freedom. Even looking at it is sometimes enough, and he looked at it, and photographed it, for most of his life.'[366] The intertwined images of water, the city, and mirrors, found in *Watermark* (1992), Brodsky's homage in

[364] Brodsky, 'In a Room and a Half', p. 467.
[365] Brodsky, 'In a Room and a Half', p. 462.
[366] Brodsky, 'In a Room and a Half', p. 471.

prose to Venice, are first encountered in descriptions of his father. The poet merges the image of his father explicitly with photography throughout 'In a Room and a Half,' a view that reflects his portrayal of his own relationship with poetry: in both cases the medium and the individual are one. In the essay, the father is painted as the first artist in the family, the son as the second, and both artists are firmly rooted in the city of St Petersburg.

Joseph's father was the first to take professional photographs of him.[367] In Aleksandr Brodsky's archive there is an abundance of prints of the poet from all points in his childhood and youth.[368] Indeed, when Aleksandr catalogued his collection of photographs of his son prior to handing them over to Joseph's friends for safekeeping, he placed them into named folders, some of which have the Tolstoyan labels of 'Detstvo,' 'Otrochestvo,' 'Yunost',' while others are given more mundane titles such as 'Portrety,' 'Poeticheskie budni,' and 'Druz'ya.'[369] Many of his father's photographs were kept by the poet throughout his life and were used by him in various publications and for diverse occasions. These photographs are mainly in black and white and are doting photographs of a son growing up. The centre of attention in all these images is the family's only child, Joseph, though photos of his mother by his side are also present. In these shots, there are two predominant poses the poet deploys: he either looks face on, directly into the camera, or he looks to his left or right into an unseen distance — Joseph's focus of attention is cropped by the frame. The poet would pose in these same two ways later in life when he was

[367] Though outside the scope of this thesis, a study of photographs taken of Brodsky, especially those taken when he was abroad, would show the ways the poet wanted to present himself to his public and posterity, and pose pertinent questions related to self-fashioning.
[368] This archive is housed at the Anna Akhmatova Museum at Fontannyi Dom, St Petersburg.
[369] Introduction to Ivanova and Gromova, *Iosif Brodskii. Fotoletopis'. Chast' I. 1940-1972: Katalog*.

photographed for media purposes.[370] The pictures of him taken in Leningrad feature well-known sights of the city in the background, from the Alexander Column on Palace Square to the Peter and Paul Fortress. There are also images taken inside the apartment on Liteinyi Prospekt, and some taken on the apartment's balcony; the family's balcony looked out onto the eighteenth-century Transfiguration Cathedral; the poet and the city were in a constant visual dialogue in the photographs. Many of these photographs were kept by the poet as ways of remembering how his home, his city, and his parents, looked when he lived away from them.[371]

The seeds of the poet's interest in taking photographs were planted from an early age. In his biography of the author, Lev Losev states that Brodsky's father taught him how to take a well-framed image.[372] Even though most of the photographs taken by the poet found in the Archive date from the beginning of the 1960s to the end of the 1970s, he did engage with the form in his late teens. Furthermore, Brodsky took many photos when he lived in exile in Norinskaya from 1964–65.[373] His father's lessons helped him earn some money in his early adulthood, when he would put together photo reports for Leningrad children's

[370] Brodsky was a highly photographed writer, and his picture was taken by some of the leading photographers of his time. There are three main spikes in the dissemination of photographs of the poet in the international press: when he was found guilty of parasitism by the Soviet state in 1964; just after his departure from the USSR in June 1972; when he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1987. Predominantly American newspapers and magazines, both local and national, covered these events in great detail: in 1964, the poet's biography fitted perfectly into anti-Soviet, Cold War rhetoric. A large collection of newspaper clippings, mainly in English, and mainly covering his life post-1972, can be found in *IHP*, Box, Folders 7–9. These attest to the fact that photographs of the poet appeared regularly alongside stories about him.

[371] Brodsky tried many times, to no avail, to obtain visas for both his parents to visit him in the USA. From 1972–84, the poet reached out to US Senators and Congressmen, and individuals at the Department of State, via his lawyers and direct addresses to them, in order to get his parents to leave Russia to visit him. See *JBP*, Box 140, Folders 3070, 3072-75, 3078-79. Brodsky also persuaded various members of Congress to write a letter to Leonid Brezhnev regarding this matter. The letter, dated 15 June 1979, concludes with the words, 'We wish respectfully to bring Mr. Brodsky's case to your attention. We are confident that you will share our concern for prompt, humanitarian consideration which will allow Mrs. Volpert to visit her son,' *JBP*, Box 140, Folder 3073. Various phone calls were also made by American diplomats and politicians to their Soviet counterparts on this matter. In a pre-internet, pre-smartphone age, and due to these travel restrictions, photographs were the only way for the poet to see his parents from 1972 onwards.

[372] Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, p. 21.

[373] Some mentions of this work are given by Mikhail Mil'chik in 'Iosif Brodskii. Mikhail Mil'chik - Nikolai Yakimchuk' <https://youtu.be/fNnqgRJDQqI> [accessed 27 July 2021]. In particular, see the section from 15:40–16:25.

magazines.[374] In an undated interview with Mikhail Meilakh, Brodsky recalls the following regarding his early adult years: 'Я был фотографом в газете, фотографом в Ортопедическом институте, который располагался в совершенно замечательном месте — около Петропавловской крепости…'[375]

A camera was by the poet's side in a non-professional capacity too.[376] Brodsky's long-time friend Garrik Voskov associates his first memories of him from 1957 with photography: 'Это был необыкновенно рыжий парень с огромным ящиком на груди, который оказался фотоаппаратом в кожаном футляре.'[377] In terms of equipment, most of the images he would take were with portable cameras — such as his FED[378] — and he would most often use Kodak film; there are also some Polaroid shots he took in the 1970s, though these are less common. In the early love poem, 'Pskovskii reestr' (1964), the FED makes a fleeting appearance and helps to preserve a tender moment between a couple, 'припомни синеву | снегов Изборска [a small, extremely old town just outside Pskov], | где разум мой парил, | как некий облак, | и времени дарил | мой Фэд наш облик.'[379] It was most likely with his FED that he took the photograph of Anna Akhmatova he shows the camera in the filmed interview from 1989.[380]

A final point to underline at this stage: photographs filled up the poet's homes from

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[374] Losev was a long-time editor of the children's magazine *Koster*, where Brodsky worked as a photographer for a short period of time. Hints about this work are given when Brodsky states that, 'начал ездить [after he left school at the age of fifteen] в геологические экспедиции, чтобы попутешествовать. Несколько лет так прошло, а после этого, я уже не помню, работал фотографом, кочегаром, матросом…' (Rein and Brodskii).

[375] Joseph Brodsky and Mikhail Meilakh, '"Poet sam uznaet po temperamentu svoego predshestvennika..." (iz razgovorov s Iosifom Brodskim)', *NLO*, 3, 2006 <https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2006/3/poet-sam-uznaet-po-temperamentu-svoego-predshestvennika.html> [accessed 27 July 2021].

[376] This is evidenced by his photographs that can be predominantly found in *JBP*, Boxes 156–158. Photography is also mentioned in his correspondence. In a letter about his trip to Brazil, which took place in April 1978, Brodsky tells Lev Losev that 'Есть нечто отвратительное в этом скольжении по поверхности с фотоаппаратом в руках без особенной цели,' *LLP*, Box 1, Folder 10. For a selection of Brodsky's photographs from his trip to Brazil, see *JBP*, Box 126, Folder 3533.

[377] Ol'ga Seifetdinova, '"Starshii brat" Brodskogo. Ko dnyu rozhdeniya Garrika Ginzburga-Voskova', *Brodsky.Online* <https://brodsky.online/post/starshiy-brat/> [accessed 15 April 2021].

[378] The acronym for the brand derives from Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinksy.

[379] Brodskii, I, p. 454.

[380] More photographs taken by Brodsky of Akhmatova can be found in Amanda Haight, *Anna Akhmatova: A Poetic Pilgrimage* (New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

his early years onwards. Scenes of the poet surrounded by photographs viewed in the 1989 documentary were typical; photograph-heavy, homely spaces from Soviet Russia were replicated in similar spaces in the USA, much of the time with the same images; photographs act as a thread between both countries.[381] Photographs taken by Mikhail Mil'chik of the poet's Leningrad apartment in 1972 show snapshots in and around Brodsky's writing desk in his 'half room' and an abundance of shots in his parents' adjoining room. In the images of his Leningrad bedroom, one finds photographs of Akhmatova, Auden, his son Andrei Basmanov, as well as family photos.[382] This propensity to pack his living and working environments with photographs is also visible in shots taken at his home on Morton Street, New York, his property at 22 Pierrepont Street, New York, and his house in South Hadley, Massachusetts.[383] Photographs of Marina Tsvetaeva, Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelshtam, and W. H. Auden are visible in these homes, as are those of other admired poets such as Constantine Cavafy and Mikhail Kuzmin. In notes taken about the items found in his study at Pierrepont Street following his death,[384] it is stated that Brodsky had photos of friends — Barry Rubin, Masha Vorobiov, Margo Picken, Vladimir Lunis, Andrew Blane, Carl Proffer — and family — his parents — sitting side by side. The images within his line of sight were always incredibly eclectic; in South Hadley, as well as photographs on postcards of various art works, one comes across photos and posters of Marilyn Monroe.[385]

The photographs kept by Brodsky, in addition to other visual material, were usually in spaces where disarray reigned, another observation evident from accounts of the poet's home in Leningrad. The tendency towards chaos continued following 1972. This is

[381] This can be ascertained by comparing various images found in the Brodsky Archive.
[382] Mil'chik, *«Poltory komnaty» Iosifa Brodskogo v fotografiyakh*, pp. 100–122.
[383] Brodsky lived at Pierrepont Street from 1993–96. His home at South Hadley was used during the years spent teaching at the Five Colleges in Massachusetts.
[384] *JBP*, Box 141, Folder 3120.
[385] The images in question can be found at *JBP*, Box 141, Folder 3109 and Folder 3116.

something Sven Birkerts noticed when he visited the poet in New York in 1979:

> The walls and free surfaces of his apartment were almost entirely obscured by books, postcards, and photographs. There were a number of pictures of a younger Brodsky, with Auden and Spender, with Octavio Paz, with various friends. Over the fireplace were two framed photographs, one of Anna Akhmatova, another of Brodsky with his son, who remains in Russia.[386]

David Bethea, when recalling a visit to see the poet in South Hadley in 1991, recalls something similar: 'I don't recall much about the furnishings except that reigned a kind of casual chaos.'[387] Aside from the photographic images on display, Brodsky also kept hundreds of photographic negatives and prints.[388] The images on display on his walls or on his desk, were put into albums, drawers, or strewn around his home.[389] Brodsky's home and work environments were vibrant spaces where the literary — in the form of books and manuscripts — always co-existed with the visual — in the form of photographs, as well as postcards, posters, and prints — in a vibrant manner. Thus, the intricate, constant interplay between memories and perception in his writing were firmly rooted in daily interactions with photographs and photographic apparatus.

Photographs: from judgment to rejection and imitation

Surrounded as he was by the tangible presence of photography in and around the home, and given his long history with the medium through his father, the poet was sensitive to the multitudinous uses and power of the form. In his essays about his time in Soviet Russia, he often reflects upon photographs, and creates a binary opposition between good

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[386] Sven Birkerts and Joseph Brodsky, 'Joseph Brodsky, The Art of Poetry No. 28', *The Paris Review*, 83, 1982 <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3184/the-art-of-poetry-no-28-joseph-brodsky> [accessed 23 July 2021].
[387] Valentina Polukhina and David Bethea, 'Brodsky: The Last Poet in the Russian Heroic Tradition', *Cardinal Points*, 1.12, 140–48 (p. 141).
[388] The majority of his photograph collection is held at the Beinecke Library, Yale University.
[389] This observation rings true for the postcards he kept too.

and bad images that one could find in the Soviet landscape at large. He explains how he used to 'read' — and extrapolate from — photographs, form an opinion about them, reject the shots he disliked, and treasure the images he liked. Consequently, the world of photography was used by him to perceive, and then develop, moral and aesthetic ideals and principles.

In his essays, Brodsky tells us he rejected images manufactured and propagated by the political and cultural bodies of the Soviet state, and that he would find, accept, and digest more obscure, predominantly Western, photographs in private settings. For the poet, non-state-sanctioned photographs were preferred to state-approved images: Brodsky 'and his Petersburg friends […] did not want to be either Soviets or anti-Soviets; they wanted to be a-Soviet.'[390] Accordingly, aesthetic choices are intimately connected with political beliefs, an idea discerned in my discussion of cinema. Brodsky used the Soviet state's tools in the sphere of visual imagery for utterly different ends: he aimed to reproduce images that he liked (using his body, clothing), much like the Soviet state reproduced images they liked.

In 'Less Than One' (1976), the first essay in the collection of the same name, several, widely replicated, state-created photographs are seen in overtly negative tones:

> The eternal photographs of steel foundries in every morning paper and the continuous Tchaikovsky on the radio—these things would drive you crazy unless you learned to switch yourself off. There are no commercials on Soviet TV; there are pictures of Lenin, or so-called photo-études of "spring," "autumn," etc., in the intervals between the programs.[391]

The repetitive images of steel foundries and Lenin, in conjunction with other approved artefacts such as musical pieces by Tchaikovsky, are used as metonyms for the tired, stale Soviet polity, one which churns out copies of permitted individuals and ideologies that

[390] Milosz, 'Notes About Brodsky', p. 424.
[391] Brodsky, 'Less Than One', p. 26.

invade all spheres of an individual's life.[392] Furthermore, Brodsky equates Lenin with Orwell's Big Brother when he recalls images of him: 'I began to despise [Lenin] even when I was in the first grade […] because of his omnipresent images which plagued almost every textbook, every class wall, postage stamps, money, and what not, depicting the man at various ages and stages of his life.'[393] Elsewhere in the essay, when discussing images he remembers of Soviet leaders standing on top of Lenin's Mausoleum in Red Square in endlessly copied public displays, Brodsky notes that 'Like the ancient Romans who related themselves to the center of the Empire by making the main street in their settlements always run north-south, so the Russians check the stability and predictability of their existence by those pictures.'[394] For Brodsky, state-produced images are a source of social cohesion and belonging, since they help masses of citizens orientate themselves in their environments. Brodsky does not like the roles they play, however, as he does not like the individuals depicted, nor the ideology these individuals represent — socialism.

The main way Brodsky tells us that he fought against these images and their negative, as he saw it, associations was to find photographs that he could cherish and copy.[395] Such images allowed him to shift his positionality in respect to the perceived social decay of his age. At one point in 'Spoils of War,' Brodsky mentions that he used to buy photographic prints of Western film stars when in the Soviet Union. He reminisces that in his youth, '[a postcard-sized print of] Errol Flynn in his Sea Hawk outfit was my most sacred possession, and for years I tried to imitate the forward thrust of his chin and the

[392] When asked in an interview from 1995 about his feelings towards Tchaikovsky, Brodsky stated: 'К сожалению, он [Tchaikovsky] для меня "отравлен" отечественным радио и государством. Несколько раз я предпринимал попытки прорваться сквозь это предубеждение, которое вошло уже в подсознание, — увы, не могу. Аллергия, — и думаю, навсегда,' Petrushanskaya and Brodsky.
[393] Brodsky, 'Less Than One', p. 5.
[394] Brodsky, 'Less Than One', p. 25.
[395] Apart from actively searching for other more desirable images, Brodsky also tells us that he learned to ignore state-sanctioned images: 'I think that coming to ignore those pictures [of Lenin and Stalin] was my first lesson in switching off, my first attempt at estrangement,' Brodsky, 'Less Than One', p. 6.

autonomous motion of his left eyebrow.'[396] By mirroring the facial expressions in the image, the young poet became, via impersonation, non-Soviet: by appearing Western he felt as if he really was Western, and hence was able to reflect the reality he wanted to be a part of as opposed to the one that he was a part of.[397] Brodsky was able to counter the mass Soviet reproductions of images and thus escape, if only for a brief moment, the social and political realities he encountered in his everyday life.[398]

This mirroring was also carried out using images of writers, though in this instance processes of personal self-reflection were also involved: when literary idols were viewed, and replicated, he was not only becoming Western, but also becoming a better poet. The face of a writer in a photograph, as observed in the 1989 film (through the images of Anglophone poets, Akhmatova, and Constantine Cavafy), was of constant interest to Brodsky. In 'Wooing the Inanimate,' his essay on Thomas Hardy, one reads the following: 'Famous for his [Hardy] aquiline profile, with a tuft of hair hovering above his bald pate, he had indeed a birdlike appearance – in his old age especially, judging by the available photographs.'[399] Through such snapshots, Brodsky could imagine more than that which was depicted: 'I liked the process of extrapolating from that stamp-size picture [in this case, of W. H. Auden] very much. One always gropes for a face, one always wants an ideal to materialize.'[400] Brodsky highlights the mirror-like qualities of photographs that mimetically reproduce the object photographed, makes subjective judgments — 'he had indeed a birdlike appearance' — and adds imaginative description to the flat image. By

[396] Brodsky, 'Spoils of War', p. 9.
[397] Imagery related to mirrors and reflections is prevalent in Brodsky's works. For a discussion of these motifs in his writing on Venice, see Lev Losev, 'Real'nost' zazerkal'ya: Venetsiya Iosifa Brodskogo', *Inostrannaya Literatura*, 5, 1996 <https://magazines.gorky.media/inostran/1996/5/realnost-zazerkalya-venecziya-iosifa-brodskogo.html> [accessed 23 July 2021].
[398] In the archives at Yale University, one finds two photographs Brodsky took of his reflection in the mirror (a 'selfie,' to use terms from today), see *JBP*, Box 148, Folder 3272, and *JBP*, Box 158, Folder 3589. These images point to an interest in how his facial expressions, and appearance more generally, appeared to others.
[399] Brodsky, 'Wooing the Inanimate', p. 286.
[400] Joseph Brodsky, 'To Please a Shadow', in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 357–83 (p. 370).

musing on the face of a writer, through the photographic image, Brodsky better contemplates the type of artists that exist and reflects upon the type of writer he himself wants to be.[401]

The ways in which photographs can aid in self-reflection and self-betterment[402] are most keenly observed when Brodsky discusses his most treasured poet, W. H. Auden.[403] Brodsky recalls seeing a photograph of Auden in the late 1960s during a visit to Nadezhda Mandelshtam's home; this is related in his 1983 essay, 'To Please a Shadow,' one of his most notable pronouncements on the Englishman. This photograph viewed was a black-and-white shot that featured in a poetry anthology.[404] Brodsky says that this image stayed in his mind for a long time: 'somebody borrowed that book [the poetry anthology in question] from me and I never saw the photograph again; still, I remember it rather clearly.'[405] The photograph in question was taken in 1952 (Figure 9) and shows Auden looking at the camera straight on, his body at a slight angle to the lens. Like the mimetic

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[401] 'Бродский любил повторять слова Ахматовой о том, что каждый отвечает за черты своего лица. Он придавал внешности значение куда большее, чем она того заслуживает, если верить тому, что ее не выбирают. Бродского последнее обстоятельство огорчало. […] Бродский сравнивал со шрамами строчки, оставленные пером. Объединение двух метафор дает третью — лицо как страница, на которой расписывается опыт. Лицо — это всегда готовое к ревизии сальдо прожитой жизни. Морщины — иероглифы природы. Мы обречены их носить, не умея прочесть. […] В этом смысле банальный ответ Бродского на стандартный вопрос («Над чем работаете?» — «Над собой».) оборачивается выгодным для фотографии признанием. В отличие от картины, снимок как реликвия. Он не передает реальность, он — след, который реальность оставляет в нем. Фотография — посмертная маска мгновения. «Жизнь — кино, фотография — смерть», — цитируя Сьюзен Сонтаг, говорил Бродский.' Alexander Genis, 'Brodskii v N'yu-Iorke', *Inostrannaya Literatura*, 5, 1997 <https://magazines.gorky.media/inostran/1997/5/brodskij-v-nyu-jorke.html> [accessed 23 July 2021].

[402] In 'The Power of the Elements' (1980), his essay on Dostoevsky, Brodsky states that 'Every writing career starts as a personal quest for sainthood, for self-betterment,' Joseph Brodsky, 'The Power of the Elements', in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 157–63 (p. 161).

[403] Brodsky's love of Auden, documented by the poet and literary scholars alike, is also visible in archival documentation. In a letter to Lev Losev, dated 2 August 1972, he gives his friend precise details about Auden's daily routine as he witnessed it when he visited him immediately after his departure from the USSR. He tells Losev that Auden drinks his first Martini at 7.30am, then opens his post and reads a newspaper. Brodsky proceeds to give more specific information, in his role as fanboy, on what he witnessed, see *LLP*, Box 1, Folder 6.

[404] 'Then one day—I think it was in the winter of 1968 or 1969—in Moscow, Nadezhda Mandelstam, whom I was visiting there, handed me yet another anthology of modern poetry, a very handsome book generously illustrated with large black-and-white photographs done by, if I remember correctly, Rollie McKenna. I found what I was looking for,' Brodsky, 'To Please a Shadow', p. 370. The book Brodsky mentions was most likely *The Modern Poets: An American-British Anthology*. Auden's photograph can be found in *The Modern Poets: An American-British Anthology*, ed. by John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read (New York; San Francisco; Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963), p. 15.

[405] Brodsky, 'To Please a Shadow', p. 370.

reaction to the photograph of Errol Flynn, Brodsky recalls trying to emulate the poet through mimicry:

> As I looked at Rollie McKenna's picture [McKenna was the photographer who took Auden's photo], I felt pleased that the face there revealed neither neurotic nor any other sort of strain; that it was pale, ordinary, not expressing but instead absorbing whatever it was that was going on in front of his eyes. How marvelous it would be, I thought, to have those features, and I tried to ape the grimace in the mirror. I obviously failed, but I knew that I would fail, because such a face was bound to be one of a kind.[406]

Auden's image, which, for Brodsky, metonymically stands in for any great writer's image, is unique and is located at the opposite end of the spectrum to images of Lenin. Through a contemplation of Auden's photograph, Brodsky becomes a better person as he sees the ways in which he is inferior to the greater individual.[407] Auden's image gives Brodsky a set of character traits and values he can aspire towards, traits he tries to mimic and assimilate.

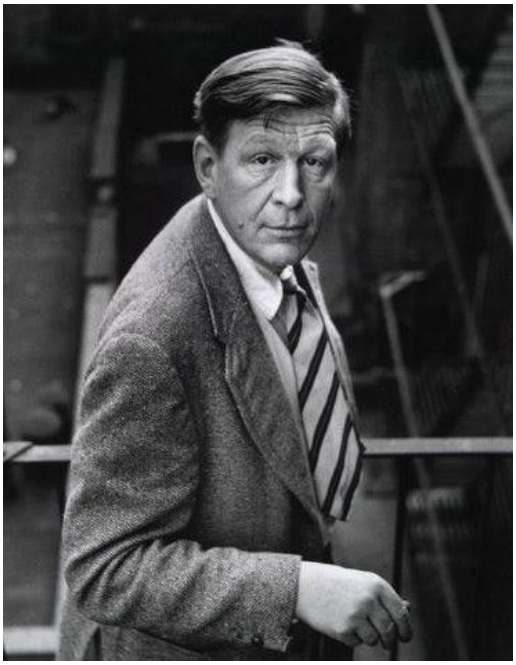


Figure 9. Photograph of W. H. Auden.

[406] Brodsky, 'To Please a Shadow', p. 373.
[407] In the collection *Less Than One*, Brodsky repeatedly shows how he is inferior to — 'less than' — the writers he admires. His treatment of photographs of Auden in 'To Please a Shadow' evidences this stance.

The story of this specific photograph, and the path to self-improvement it suggests, does not end here. In a shot taken by Kelly Wise — an academic, and keen photographer — in the 1980s (Figure 10), one sees Brodsky leaning against a wall, holding up the very same photograph of Auden mentioned in the aforementioned essay.[408] This is also the photograph of Auden which hung on his wall at Morton Street, the one Brodsky describes in the filmed interview from 1989; at Morton Street, the image was located next to a photograph of his mother.[409] A further detail to mention: a few years later, Rollie McKenna herself[410] took Brodsky's photograph (Figure 11), a request one assumes was expressly made by the poet.[411] This black-and-white image was sent to him with a cover note reading:

> May 6, 1996
>
> With compliments from Rollie McKenna[412]

[408] *JBP*, Box 142, Folder 3152.
[409] It is difficult to see the exact position of Auden's photograph in the 1989 interview, but an image in *JBP*, Box 146, Folder 3241 helps us confirm this observation.
[410] Rosalie Thorne "Rollie" McKenna was born in 1918 and died in 2003. McKenna contributed photographs to *Time*, *People*, and *Vogue* magazines. For an obituary of the photographer, see John Summers, 'Obituary: Rollie McKenna', *The Guardian*, 21 July 2003 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/jul/21/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries1> [accessed 23 July 2021].
[411] In addition, Gerald Smith recalls seeing an image of Brodsky and Maria Sozzani in 1991 in a photo taken by Rollie McKenna in an airline magazine, see G. S. Smith, 'Joseph Brodsky: Recent Studies and Materials', *The Harriman Review*, 8.2 (1995), 12–20 (p. 13).
[412] *JBP*, Box 142, Folder 3142.



Figure 10. Joseph Brodsky standing next to a photograph of W. H. Auden.

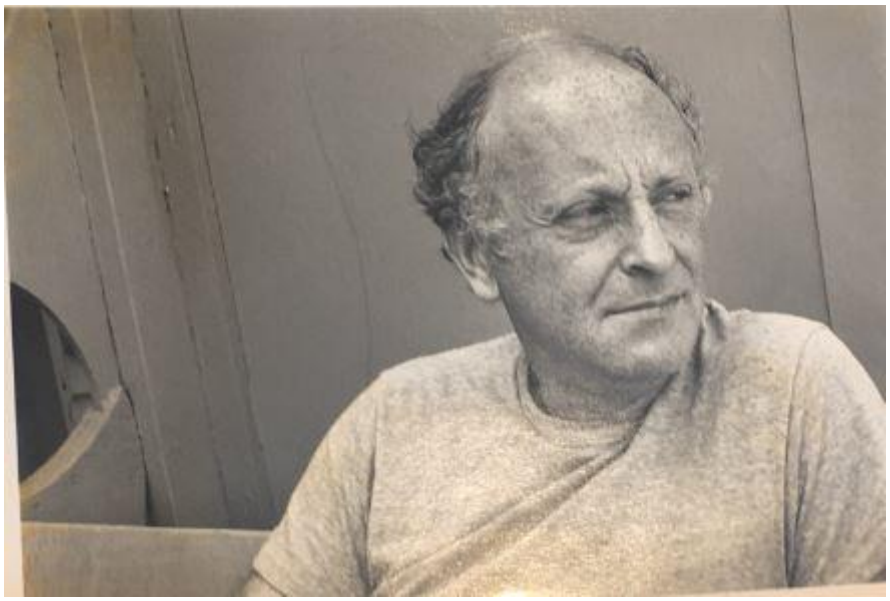


Figure 11. Photograph of Joseph Brodsky

In other words, Brodsky was able to have his picture taken in black and white by the same photographer Auden had used many years earlier.[413] In so doing, Brodsky tried to

[413] Among Brodsky's personal belongings held at the Beinecke Library, one finds a different, signed, undated, black-and-white photograph of Auden, taken in the final years of his life. The photograph was given to Brodsky by Auden and is signed: 'To Joseph Brodsky, with admiration and best wishes from Wystan Auden' (*JBP*, Box 154, Folder 3464). The fascination with Auden's image, which he expresses in his essays, is seen in the private sphere.

emulate Auden, his poetic idol, and become a second Auden through a visual dialogue, just like he tried to do through a written one. Even though Brodsky may have never seen a print of his photograph taken by McKenna — Brodsky died on 27/28 January 1996, three months earlier than the date on McKenna's cover note — this incident highlights the way he believed photography could aid him in building up his own self-image and self-projection as Auden's poetic heir.[414] In the USSR, Brodsky practiced repeating the facial gestures of the Western idols he saw through photographs. It was only when he was in the USA, in the West, that he was able to fully carry out this transformation into a 'second Auden' by becoming a photographic subject of the same photographer Auden had used. Therefore, in this instance, his mimicking became fixed in time through the photograph taken by Rollie McKenna.[415]

Mimicry of the English poet is evident in other ways in Brodsky's daily life: he often dressed and carried himself like Auden; he liked to smoke L&Ms, the same cigarettes Auden used to smoke;[416] over time, he would visit Iceland,[417] Ischia, and Venice, and search out the places Auden inhabited in each of these locations. In an interview with David Bethea, when asked which poems by Auden he preferred, he answers, 'Оден вообще нравится мне весь, целиком. Не знаю почему, но мне иногда кажется, что Уистан… что я иногда — это он.'[418] It is this belief that can be observed in his treatment of photographs of Auden.

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[414] It could also be true that the photograph was taken some years earlier and a copy was sent to those gathering material for the main Brodsky archive in the USA. I have been unable to fully clarify this point.
[415] McKenna was famous for her photographic portraits of poets such as Dylan Thomas, T. S. Eliot, Ted Hughes, and Sylvia Plath. It is likely Brodsky would have been aware of this fact. So, when he chose to be photographed by McKenna, he also became a mirror for, and an esteemed colleague of, these various poets.
[416] 'God, how people smoked in 1981—Joseph with his L&M's ("Wystan smoked these"),' Sven Birkerts, 'Long Tables, Open Bottles, and Smoke: Hanging Out with Derek Walcott', *Lit Hub*, 2017 <https://lithub.com/long-tables-open-bottles-and-smoke-hanging-out-with-derek-walcott/> [accessed 23 July 2021].
[417] See Chapter Two on postcards.
[418] David Bethea and Joseph Brodsky, 'Naglaya propoved' idealizma', in *Iosif Brodskii. Bol'shaya kniga interv'yu*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina, trans. by Gleb Shul'pyakov (Moscow: Zakharov, 2000), pp. 505–52 (p. 551).

Finally, beloved authors such as Auden, Hardy, and Beckett — 'I fell in love with a photograph of Samuel Beckett long before I'd read a line of his'[419] — together with actors such as Errol Flynn, had one central, biographical fact in common: they were all indelible parts of the Anglophone cultural landscape of their time.[420] By analysing and emulating the images of such individuals through the intermediary of the photograph, Brodsky was able to mentally transport himself to a different reality and become Western, and an Anglo-American writer, while living in Soviet Russia.

The poet as thinking mirror

Mimicry of a different sort may be seen when looking at Brodsky's approaches to translation and the writing of poetry. In the previous section, I showed how Brodsky copied photographs using his body in order to change the way he appeared and felt. Here, a different approach may be noted: there are many similarities between the way Brodsky translated, and wrote, poetry, and the way someone takes a photograph, an object often seen as a mimetic representation of a person or environment. Over time, for Brodsky, actual, bodily mimicry gives way, or is transformed, into a set of metaphorical types of mimicry.

To begin, let us take translation. As has been widely documented, for a long time Brodsky advocated a form of self-translation from one language to another where meters, rhythms, stanzaic forms, and rhymes were preserved when moved from the original to the

[419] Brodsky, 'Less Than One', p. 22.
[420] One friend, whose picture he did not see when residing in the Soviet Union, was Sir Isaiah Berlin. The pair first met in June 1972 in London. When he saw Berlin for the first time, Brodsky says: 'Now I was staring at a face I saw for the first time. The paperback edition of *The Hedgehog and the Fox* that Akhmatova had once given to me to pass onto Nadezhda Mandelstam lacked a picture of its author; as for a copy of *Four Essays on Liberty* it came to me from a book shark with its cover torn off – out of caution, given the book's subject. It was a wonderful face, a cross, I thought, between a wood grouse and a spaniel, with large brown eyes ready at once for flight and for hunting,' see *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, ed. by Edna Ullmann-Margalit and Avishai Margalit (London: Hogarth Press, 1991), p. 210. Even though Brodsky could not 'read' the face of Berlin when in Leningrad, he carries out his reading when he finds himself opposite him.

translated text, even if it meant that certain aspects of content and poetic imagery were not transferred.[421] Brodsky took his role as a translator seriously — it has been shown elsewhere how his early translations into Russian acted as a form of 'poetic apprenticeship'[422] — from his very first translations in the early 1960s right up until those completed towards the end of his life. This drive to mirror in translation caused much friction between himself and individuals who helped him translate his poetry from Russian into English. One conflict was between the poet and Daniel Weissbort,[423] an academic, translator, and co-founder, with Ted Hughes, of the literary magazine *Modern Poetry in Translation.* In this case, emblematic of those with other translators, Brodsky vehemently stood his ground and defended his approach when Weissbort suggested he should be more sensitive to the differences between Russian and English versification systems. For Brodsky, mirroring in the field of translation was a way of maintaining a link between the text of the past (the original) with the text of the present (the translated version of the original). If a translated poem significantly deviates from the formal structures of the original, then it disregards the meaning behind these structures, Brodsky claims. A mimetic reflection of the original text in its translated version preserves and passes the original across from one language, and one literary culture, to another. As a result, the translator is a medium (or a type of cultural diplomat) between the original and translated poem.

This view may even be seen when Brodsky writes his own poetry and mimics pre-existing stanzaic forms, something observable especially clearly in many of his texts from

[421] Zakhar Ishov, '"Post-Horse of Civilisation": Joseph Brodsky Translating Joseph Brodsky. Towards a New Theory of Russian–English Poetry Translation' (unpublished Erlangung der Doktorwürde am Fachbereich Philosophie und Geisteswissenschaften, Freie Universität Berlin, 2008) <https://d-nb.info/1023579340/34> [accessed 16 September 2021].
[422] Klots, 'The Poetics and Politics of Joseph Brodsky as a Russian Poet-Translator', p. 192.
[423] Daniel Weissbort, *From Russian with Love: Joseph Brodsky in English: Pages from a Journal, 1996–97*, Poetica, 35 (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2004); Zakhar Ishov, 'The Battlefield of Translation: Joseph Brodsky and Daniel Weissbort', *Wiener Slavistisches Jahrbuch*, 6 (2018), 122–42. For an analysis of Brodsky's collaborative work with translators, see Rulyova.

the 1960s. One notable example is the poem 'Stikhi na smert' T. S. Eliota' where Brodsky borrows the exact same stanza and metre as the one Auden used in his poem 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats.' Like in his mimicry through photography, one could see these acts of mimicry as assertions of the personal in the face of the monolithic state discourse since Western poetic models are brought into the Russian language in order to counter those used by poets of the 'establishment.'

To mimic successfully, and hence become a good translator, and poet, in Brodsky's view, one needs a good memory. Brodsky, as the American poet Mark Strand witnessed on his first meeting with him in 1972, was gifted in this respect: 'I was astonished, both by his generosity and his marvelous [*sic*] memory.'[424] Building up memory through mimicry, and mimicry through memory is behind the memorization of poetry that Brodsky enforced upon himself and his students.[425] When speaking at Queens College, New York in 1973, Brodsky notes that:

> Reading poetry is hearing yourself, listening to yourself. This is also why I asked you to memorize some poetry. If you want to understand a poem, the best thing is not to analyse it but to commit it to memory and recite it. Since the poet follows a phonetic trail, even what we might call a phonetic image, when you memorize his poem you repeat the whole process of his own creation from the beginning.[426]

Translation, as he goes on to tell his audience, is also a form of mimicry and 'the best way

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[424] Susan Sontag and others, 'A Tribute to Joseph Brodsky 1940–1996', *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 28, 1997, 175–86 (p. 179).

[425] Jules Chametsky, 'Joseph Brodsky', *The Massachusetts Review*, 51.4 (2010), 634–35. It should be added that Brodsky's students warmly remembered his classes, and often sent him thank you letters months, even years, after attending them. Some of his students became literature scholars in the USA and abroad, others became poets and writers. His generous input in class was also noted by his colleagues: in a letter to Brodsky dated 2 January 1980, regarding some classes taught at Columbia University, the biographer and academic Frank MacShane writes: 'What you are bringing to the students is absolutely essential to their development. I want to thank you for that, and also for taking the extra time each week in order to cover the material that you offered to the students,' see *JBP*, Box 3, Folder 95. For a broader discussion on the importance on individual memory in the creation and transmission of Russian poetry see Mikhail Gronas, *Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory: Russian Literary Mnemonics* (New York; Oxford: Routledge, 2011).

[426] Rosette C. Lamont, 'Joseph Brodsky: A Poet's Classroom', *The Massachusetts Review*, 15.4 (1974), 553–77 (p. 557).

to study a language you do not know is by translating a poem in that language.'[427]

Mimicry is also a cornerstone of Brodsky's thinking about literary language in general. In his Nobel Lecture, Brodsky tells us that a poet experiences 'the sensation of immediately falling into dependence on it [i.e. language], on everything that has already been uttered, written, and accomplished in it' and that someone 'who writes a poem writes it because the language prompts, or simply dictates, the next line.'[428] In these statements, and indeed throughout this speech that sets down his key aesthetic credos, a writer of verse is a slave to language and has to be humble in its presence. The poet is a broker between both language and his own text, and between poets he admires; the speech begins with a self-deprecating set of comments about how he would not have won the Nobel Prize for Literature were it not for poets of the past. The poet is a vessel: 'Language is not the tool of the poet, it's the other way around.'[429] Discussions of Brodsky's views on language and its relationship with an individual's ethics, have been had elsewhere.[430] However, the role of the poet as a mimic in this relationship has not, to my knowledge, been raised.

But what of the relationship between the forms of mimicry just described and photography? Repetition and mimicry, activities Brodsky makes use of in relation to photographs in private and public spheres, in the classroom, and in his poetic texts, are processes inherent in the creation of a photographic image: firstly, a photograph is often seen as a mimetic copy of that which is observed, and secondly, once you have a negative, you can reproduce the same photographic image as many times as you wish. Seen in this light, the photographic mirroring that he enacted in the ways discussed (in translation, the writing of poetry, in thinking about the position of the poet vis-à-vis poetic language) was

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[427] Lamont, p. 558.
[428] Joseph Brodsky, 'Uncommon Visage', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 38–50 (p. 49).
[429] This quotation derives from a set of lecture notes Maddy Hewitt, an attendee of one of Brodsky's university seminars in 1982, sent to Peter Viereck. See *PVP*, Box 91, Folder 1.
[430] See David-Antoine Williams, *Defending Poetry: Art and Ethics in Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, and Geoffrey Hill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

itself a mirroring of the photographic process of taking and developing a photograph, activities that Brodsky was keenly aware of from an early age.

The one difference between the camera and the poet or translator, however, is the ability to judge and bring together elements from cultural histories of different civilisations. In a short Preface to a book of prose writings by Russian poets published in 1976, Brodsky forcefully expresses this point:

> Poetic thinking, which is called metaphorical, is in fact synthetic thinking. As such it contains analysis, but cannot be reduced to analysis. [Brodsky then claims that poets experience cognition through intuitive synthesis] when the poet—according to the poet—steals left and right and does not even experience a sense of guilt as he does so.
>
> Synthesis, as such, is not a parallel stage (degree) of relations with reality: it is the *following* stage. Intuitive synthesis, in its turn, is the next level up, if not the highest, a level whereon, in his relations to reality (in this case the poet) is guided by considerations not so much defined by it as dictated—sometimes literally—from without.[431]

The poet or translator is the person who brings together the various mimetic techniques he has learnt in the writing of his texts, and his ability to synthesise and have a cultural awareness of past pronouncements is that which prevents him from being simply a mirror, a camera.

Dialogue through photographs

The uses of, and meanings behind, photographs changed for Brodsky following his departure from the USSR in 1972. Prior to 1972, he comprehended and imagined the West through photographic images and the cinema. After 1972, the West was perceived in person. Thus, the opposition between the imagined and the real was reversed: the USSR and his hometown, as well as all the individuals living there, were now viewed, heard, and

[431] *Modern Russian Poets on Poetry*, ed. by Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1976), p. 7.

remembered through technological means such as the television, telephone, and photographs. By constantly sending and receiving photographs, a dialogue was continued between Brodsky and his friends and family, one which supplemented conversation through these other ways.[432]

The photographs Brodsky received from Leningrad following his departure complicate the current view one has of the poet. Reading Brodsky's poetry following his move to the West, one gets the impression that the images of Leningrad and his parents were taken solely from his personal memories.[433] Even though the poet never returned to his home country after 1972, he was sent photographs of his parents right up until their deaths in the 1980s, and of his hometown up until his own passing.[434] In Brodsky's archives at Yale University, one finds photographs his parents sent of themselves and their home on Liteinyi Prospekt, smiling with friends and family, often accompanied by the poet's favourite animals — cats. Many of these images show the interior of the family apartment, including Joseph's own room, and show other photographs of the poet in the background, on walls and in frames.[435] There is a desire on the side of the parents to keep the poet informed about what his former home looked like.

Additionally, in these photographs, the poet's father would sometimes pose on the balcony of their apartment with the Transfiguration Cathedral in the background, the same

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[432] In an undated letter sent to Brodsky by Nancy Meiselas, an editor at Farrar, Straus & Giroux who worked closely with Brodsky for several years, she tells the poet about a visit she made to Leningrad and the meeting she had with his parents. The poet had given Meiselas several items to take to them and she notes that the family flat was full of photographs of the poet. In addition, 'They [Joseph's parents] looked at the photographs of you that I had brought with me with immense care--each picture took at least five minutes for all the details to be seen and savored. We were alternately laughing and crying when looking at them, especially as each picture seemed to bring up memories and stories that each had to be told and shared,' see *JBP*, Box 10, Folder 258.

[433] As was the case with postcards, Brodsky would often send photographs of his travels abroad back to his parents. There are over one hundred and twenty of such photographs in the collection at the Anna Akhmatova Museum in St Petersburg, see Irina Murav′eva, 'Avtografy i biblioteka Iosifa Brodskogo v sobranii muzeya Anny Akhmatovoi (Fontannyi Dom)', in *Iosif Brodskii: tvorchestvo, lichnost', sud'ba*, ed. by Yakov Gordin (St Petersburg: Zhurnal «Zvezda», 1998), pp. 252–56.

[434] Friends in Russia, and those visiting from abroad, would also write to Brodsky telling him about how his parents were.

[435] *JBP*, Box 154, Folder 3447–3454.

position the poet was often photographed in by his father. When Brodsky's parents died the poet was sent photographs of their gravestones; his parents were buried on the same plot of land.[436] As regards his hometown, on the back of two, colour photographs of St Petersburg that Brodsky received from an unknown source,[437] one reads the phrases (seemingly written by the poet): 'The Cathedral of Her Imperial Majesty […] view from our balcony' and 'the view of the cathedral from our balcony, 96 [1996].' These photos, in conjunction with others held by the poet,[438] testify to the fact that a steady flow of photographs from Russia continually reached him.

In a pre-internet, pre-smartphone age, physical photographs were valuable objects in helping Brodsky keep in (visual) touch with family and friends. When in the USA, friends tell Brodsky about places they have been to, with the photograph acting as a postcard of sorts.[439] On the back of a colour photograph of a single-storey house taken in the 1980s, sent to Brodsky by Sergei Dovlatov, one reads:

> 18 дек.
>
> Дорогой Иосиф!
>
> Это не открытка, а портрет нашего дома, которым я почему-то весьма горжусь.
>
> Обнимаем Вас, не хворайте.
>
> С новым годом и рождеством!
>
> Ваш С. Довлатов[440]

[436] *JBP*, Box 154, Folder 3454.
[437] *JBP*, Box 158, Folder 3574.
[438] *JBP*, Box 158, Folders 3574–3588.
[439] This phenomenon began when the poet was in Leningrad. On the back of a photograph of himself, sent to Peter Viereck on 14 July 1970, Brodsky writes, 'Dear Peter, Here is the Best couple which I know, Your Joseph Brodsky,' *PVP*, Box 91, Folder 9.
[440] *JBP*, Box 4, Folder 112. For further details of the correspondence between Brodsky and Dovlatov see A. Yu. Ar'ev and A. B. Ustinov, 'Iz perepiski Sergeya Dovlatova s Iosifom Brodskim', *Zvezda*, 9, 2019 <https://magazines.gorky.media/zvezda/2019/9/iz-perepiski-sergeya-dovlatova-s-iosifom-brodskim.html>.

In this instance, the function of the photograph is documentary: in conjunction with the caption on the reverse, Dovlatov is showing his friend a new environment; there are many photographs such as these that Brodsky received and sent to friends and family around the world. His communication through, and using, photographs never stopped at any point in his life, though it is most prevalent in the second period of his interactions with photographs, lasting from the 1960s to the late 1970s.

Brodsky the Photographer and Poet

The final role regarding the form is that of the poet as photographer, a role most prominent in the second phase of his interaction with the form. Photographs Brodsky took over the course of his life share several thematic and stylistic preoccupations with his poetry.[441] Though it is difficult to claim a teleological relationship between his poetry and his photographs — i.e. that the way he took photographs influenced his poetry or vice versa — the closeness between Brodsky's treatment of the two forms suggests a more multi-dimensional picture of his visual perception of his environments than the one currently possessed. As well as looking at links between his photographic technique and his writings, this section also looks the prevalence of photographers in his poems, and at how photographs helped Brodsky in the creation of his texts.

Brodsky's photographs from about 1960 to 1980 — images that could be interpreted as the photographs of a tourist making a visual diary of places visited[442] — portray strikingly few people. In most photographs of natural landscapes, and many of his city shots, there is a similar framing device used: the top half of the photo is made up of the

[441] At times it is difficult to ascertain which photographs in the Brodsky Archive were taken by Brodsky and which were taken by others. In this section, I concentrate only on those images I am confident Brodsky took.
[442] Brodsky's letters to friends and family could be seen to carry out a similar function. In his letters, Brodsky is conscious to tell his interlocutor what he has been doing at that moment in time and what he has seen. The idea of a 'visual diary' was touched upon in Chapter Two.

sky, the bottom half is made up of the natural phenomenon, or city, observed. This is noticeable in his photographs from his 1978 trip to Rio de Janeiro where photographs are taken from a high vantage point looking down on the city.[443] One also sees this in undated photos taken from a boat trip on the River Thames, where the river and the sky are nearly exactly cut in half by the bridges in the frames,[444] and in many of his photos of Venice, taken from the water.[445] Photos from the Faroe Islands in 1978 (Figure 12) feature the sky in the top half of the frame and snowy mountains or hills in the lower half.[446] This separation of the top of the picture from the bottom acts like a horizon, a recurring trope in Brodsky's travel poetry from this time especially. In lines such as 'линия горизонта | с облаком напоминает веревку с выстиранной рубашкой' ('Braiton Rok' (1976))[447] and 'Горизонт себя выворачивает, как пальто, | наизнанку с помощью рыхлых волн ('Priliv' (1981)),[448] one witnesses the way the horizon cuts and separates out space much like the similar cutting of the frame in two parts observed in the photographs.

[443] *JBP*, Box 156, Folder 3533.
[444] *JBP*, Box 156, Folder 3535.
[445] *JBP*, Box 156, Folders 3548 and 3549 and *JBP*, Box 157, Folder 3558.
[446] *JBP*, Box 156, Folders 3536–3540. Figure 12 is found in Folder 3537.
[447] Brodskii, II, p. 52.
[448] Brodskii, II, p. 100. The image of the horizon is used by Brodsky in many poems to discuss the depth and segmentation of space. It also often represents the end of space and the end of distances visible to the naked eye.



Figure 12. Photographs taken by Joseph Brodsky of the Faroe Islands.

Given the biographical details outlined, mentions of cameras, photographers, and photographs in Brodsky's poetry are not striking. One way these appear is through speakers spotting elements of their external world as if they were photographers: 'Маяк, чья башня привлекает взор | скорей фотографа, чем морехода' ('Odnazhdy etot yuzhnyi gorodok (1968)');[449] 'Горный пик, доступный снам, | фотопленке, свалке туч' ('V gorakh' (1984)); 'И вообще, ибрагимы, горы – от Арарата | до Эвереста – есть пища фотоаппарата' ('K peregovoram v Kabule' (1992)).[450] The speakers in these lines that refer to natural landscapes see the world through the photographer's eye, and are aware of photographic framing and the content that makes a successful photograph.

Elsewhere in Brodsky's poetry, people are shown in the act of taking photographs: 'В

[449] Brodskii, II, p. 305.
[450] Brodskii, II, p. 276.

ночной столице фотоснимок | печально сделал иностранец' ('Rozhdestvenskii romans' (1961));[451] 'и другого, со вспышкой, чтоб озарить не нас, | но обмякшее тело и лужу крови' ('Itak, prigrevaet…' (1975–6));[452] 'За щелчком аппарата следует вспышка – род | выстрела (все, что нас отбрасывает вперед, | на стену будущего, есть как бы выстрел)' ('Tri rytsarya' (1976)).[453] Here, the narrators and speakers are aware of the ability of the camera to perceive and record external reality faithfully; in the examples given, photographs are realistic images of the perceptible world.

Finally, Brodsky portrays photographs as valuable and precious objects: 'Лейтенант отличается от капитана | нашивками, выраженьем глаз, | фотокарточкой Бланш или Франсуаз' and 'Чудо, что письменные принадлежности и твоя фотокарточка уцелели' ('Novyi Zhul' Vern' (1976)).[454] Photographs are often treasured by his characters and they also feature in their homes, even if they are moved around like furniture: 'Что? Эта фотография? Ее | я убирал перед его приходом' ('Posvyashchaetsya Yalte' (1969)).[455]

In addition to photographers and photographs appearing in texts, photography also helps in the literary, creative process. One way this occurs is by using photographs as impetuses for individual poems, as evidenced in two texts about statues and busts: 'Dvadsat' sonetov k Marii Styuart' (1974) and 'Byust Tiberii' (1981). In these poems, the reader has the impression that the speaker finds himself in front of the sculptures: 'Сюды | забрел я как-то после ресторана | взглянуть глазами старого барана | на новые ворота и пруды' (''Dvadsat' sonetov k Marii Styuart'),[456] and 'Я, заурядный странник, | приветствую твой пыльный бюст | в безлюдной галерее' ('Byust Tiberii').[457] These

[451] Brodskii, I, p. 113.
[452] Brodskii, I, p. 426.
[453] Brodskii, II, p. 55.
[454] Brodskii, II, p. 28.
[455] Brodskii, I, p. 312.
[456] Brodskii, I, p. 400.
[457] Brodskii, II, p. 103.

expressions of location by the speakers occur at the beginning of both poems and inform us that the first-person narrator really did observe the artefacts there. The speakers give details about the sculptures in front of them and tell us about the ways they were crafted and how they look: 'я трачу, что осталось в русской речи | на Ваш анфас и матовые плечи' ('Dvadsat' sonetov k Marii Styuart'), and 'Ах, Тиберий, | тебе здесь нет и тридцати. В лице | уверенность скорей в послушных мышцах, | чем в будущем их суммы' ('Byust Tiberii'). Minute impressions of that which is scrutinized are immediately transferred to the reader. Though Brodsky did visit both the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, and the Capitoline Galleries in Rome, where the respective sculptures of Mary Stuart and Tiberius are found, at approximately the same time he wrote these poems, there is reason to believe that the texts were written after the visits had taken place: in other words, the poet revisited the statues when he was away from them, through the medium of photography. Photographs can thus be seen to be essential for Brodsky in their roles as springboards for imagination and jogs for personal memories.

In the Beinecke Library archives, in a note accompanying a set of five photos of the statue of Mary Stuart in the Luxembourg Gardens (Figure 13), Ann Kjellberg tells us that Veronique Schiltz 'took these [photos] for JB before/during composition of the 20 sonnets [to Mary Stuart].'[458] Likewise, one finds several photos of busts taken in profile and face on at the Capitoline Galleries, in Brodsky's papers (Figures 14, and 15);[459] these photographs do not depict busts of Tiberius, but are of other Emperors from his time. In one of these photos from the Capitoline Galleries, one sees a dusty-looking bust in an empty room, something which closely mirror Brodsky's lines in the text: 'пыльный бюст | в безлюдной галерее'. Andrew Kahn notes that in the poem 'The gallery [where the bust

[458] *JBP*, Box 160, Folder 3631.
[459] *JBP*, Box 156, Folder 3547. Additionally, at his home at Morton Street, Brodsky kept a photo depicting the busts of ancient philosophers from inside the Capitoline Galleries, see *JBP*, Box 141, Folder 3117.

is located] is only barely cloistered from the chaos of the modern world.'[460] This observation, when seen in tandem with the photographs from the gallery, is true not only on a metaphorical plane — Tiberius is close to his city even after his death — but also on a literal level — the bust in the poem is literally next to a window. These photographs hint at the fact that they were used as prompts for the poems about the two sculptures; when the poet was away from their physical locations, he could revisit them through images. In the poems, the sculptures are used as starting points for discussions of history, empire, and time. In the same way, one can see how Brodsky possibly used the photographs as jumping-off points for the writing of his poems.



Figure 13. Photographs of a statue of Mary, Queen of Scots.





[460] Kahn, 'Joseph Brodsky's "Biust Tiberiia": Poetry, History, Ethics', p. 245.

Figure 14. Photograph of a bust. **Figure 15.** Photograph of a bust.

A more focused form of photographic ekphrasis can be seen in Brodsky's later poem, 'At the city dump in Nantucket' (1995), a text originally written in English.[461] This poem refers directly to a photograph taken by his friend Stephen White.[462] The image in question appears on the front cover of Brodsky's English-language poetry collection, *So Forth*. In this black-and-white picture, one sees a refuse dump, with a chaotic rabble of seagulls sitting on a pile of waste.[463] As regards the poem, the images it describes are based directly on the items seen in the photograph. The reader is told that seagulls attack the dump 'in broad daylight' with a 'darkening overcast,' images which are noticeable in the monochrome front of the collection. Additionally, there are no colours mentioned explicitly in the text though greys and whites are hinted at through the objects in focus: snow, seagulls, daylight. Where the text does diverge from the image is in the heightened sense of motion and commotion it highlights. In terms of sound, the reader hears 'screeching W's' and the seagulls 'bill themselves Parker's nephews,' a reference to the jazz musician Charlie Parker. In combination with these jazz-like squawks, the birds devour, attack and scream. The images of the birds, the dump with its refuse and cardboard boxes and the sky, are taken and explicitly referenced by Brodsky who then enlivens them and endows them with mobility.[464]

In the three poems discussed, there is a difference in the amount of information the

[461] The text I quote from is in Brodsky, *Collected Poems in English*, p. 443.
[462] White provided several interlinear translations into English of works for Brodsky over the years, including the cycle 'Chast' rechi' and 'Kolybel'naya treskogo mysa.'
[463] An analysis of the dialogue between Brodsky, Robert Lowell, and Wallace Stevens in the poem can be found in K. S. Sokolov, 'Dve svalki i odno kladbishche: o Loulle, Stivense i transformatsii elegicheskoi traditsii v "At the City Dump in Nantucket"', in *Iosif Brodskii: problemy poetiki. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov i materialov*, ed. by A. G. Stepanov, I. V. Fomenko, and S. Yu. Artemova (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), pp. 266–76. This article describes how the poem is partly based on White's photograph, but is mainly focused on its literary intertexts.
[464] The opposite tendency is also true: photographs taken, and organised, according to Brodsky's poetry, see Oleg Smirnov, *Iosif Brodskii: Predstavlenie* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999). Here, Smirnov intersperses Brodsky's poem 'Predstavlenie' with his own (Smirnov's) black-and-white photographs.

poet gives the reader about the relationship between the text and a possible photographic or visual referent. In the first two poems, there is a potential example of 'suppressed ekphrasis:' 'verbal descriptions that are based on photographs but that do not acknowledge these photographs as their sources.'[465] In 'At the city dump in Nantucket,' the dialogue with the photograph is made explicit through the book jacket. Whichever interpretation one gives to Brodsky's use of specific photographs in the process of writing his poetry — whether one sees them as aide-memoires employed during the writing process, or as images from which the poet ekphrastically brings the two-dimensional image to life — these case studies show how Brodsky made use of actual photographs in the creation of his written works. This use is closely tied in with Brodsky's predilection for walking around natural landscapes and cities with his camera in hand.

Metaphors: thinking about time and memory through photographs

From about 1980 to 1996, photographs and photography are used in an increasingly metaphorical way. These metaphors come to the fore as Brodsky begins to utilise them to think about the past, his place in it, as well as the dialogue they have with arguably the two most important themes in his work: memory and time.[466] During these years one can make out a thought progression based upon the interplay between photography, perception, and memory. The logic is as follows for Brodsky: the perception of the present by an individual is fragmentary; an individual does not perceive external reality in a continuum

[465] Andrew D. Miller, *Poetry, Photography, Ekphrasis: Lyrical Representations of Photographs from the 19th Century to the Present* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 107.
[466] The metaphor of a photograph as memory is not new and had been explored by Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag before Brodsky developed the biographically rooted metaphor in his own works. In Russian verse, the theme was expressed in Vladislav Khodasevich's poem 'Sorrentiskie fotografii': 'Воспоминанье прихотливо. | Как сновидение — оно | Как будто вещей правдой живо, | Но так же дико и темно | И так же, вероятно, лживо... | Среди каких утрат, забот, | И после скольких эпитафий. | Теперь, воздушная, всплывет | И что закроет в свой черед | Тень соррентинских фотографий?' Vladislav Khodasevich, *Vladislav Khodasevich: sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*, 4 vols (Moscow: Soglasie, 1996), I, p. 275.

but rather in a broken-up way. This results in events being stored in one's mind in a fragmentary manner. As a result of this process of observation and storing of personal experiences, recall of the past is fragmentary: fragments are stored as fragments, and hence are always remembered as such.[467] This logic is expressed through photographic imagery: the human eye is like a camera taking snapshots (i.e. fragmentary views) of its environments, experiences are stored as photographs in the human mind, and recalling the past is like looking through a set of photographs.[468] It is these sets of associations and this logic which are explored in this section.

An early use of the photographic process as metaphor can be found in Brodsky's poem 'Zimnim vecherom v Yalte' (1969).[469] In this text, the speaker is sitting in a café when he is suddenly struck by a bright light from a gentleman sitting nearby: 'когда он ищет сигарету в пачке, | на безымянном тусклое кольцо | внезапно преломляет двести ватт, | и мой хрусталик вспышки не выносит.' The flash of reflected light from the man's ring is likened to the flash of a camera and the metaphorical lens of the speaker's eye is caught unawares. In this case, there are two cameras: the man's ring is a camera with a flash, the narrator's eye is made up of a lens. This photographic imagery is developed in a series of other scenes viewed by the speaker's eye: 'улыбка, сумерки, графин. | Вдали буфетчик, стискивая руки.' The speaker's eye is taking shots of his surrounding area, and the poem ends with the lines, 'Остановись, мгновенье! Ты не столь | прекрасно, сколько ты неповторимо.' The eye of the individual can take

[467] These themes are raised fleetingly in the short film *Poltora kota*, dir. by Andrei Khrzhanovsky (DAGO, 2002) and *Poltory komnaty, ili Sentimental'noe puteshestvie na rodinu*, dir. by Andrei Khrzhanovsky (Shkola-studiya «ShAR», 2009). In the first film, which concentrates on the time immediately before the poet's exile from the USSR, and the second, which uses Brodsky's autobiographical and reflective essay 'In a Room and a Half' as its basis, photographs of the poet at varying points of his life are combined with animated sequences, documentary, and faux-documentary footage, and clips from other films. This juxtaposition of various media is used to show how the recollecting individual sees his past life.
[468] For an overview of various ways thinkers have written about the links between eyes, human memory, and photography, see Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*, trans. by Paul Vincent (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 103–37.
[469] The text I quote from is in Brodskii, I, pp. 203–4.

metaphorical shots of his environment and these various, metaphorical photographs are praised for their unrepeatability and uniqueness.[470]

A 'stopped moment' is also found in one of the final poems Brodsky wrote, 'Osen' — khoroshee vremya' (1995).[471] In this piece, the poet sees mid- to late-autumn as a positive time of the year: 'Нам станет лучше, когда мелкий дождь зарядит.'[472] This Pushkinian season is mentioned many times in Brodsky's oeuvre,[473] and here it is seen in a highly detached and metaphorical manner, as the final quatrain attests:

> Остановись, мгновенье, когда замирает рыба
> в озерах, когда достает природа из гардероба
> со вздохом мятую вещь и обводит оком
> место, побитое молью, со штопкой окон.

Instead of the poem being a snapshot of a visit to a specific place in time, as in 'Zimnim vecherom…,' in this poem the individual speaker stops to witness that which he has lived through and experienced in his life. Brodsky has now moved from the image of stopping time to the individual who is frozen in time and can reflect on his past and present. Photographic imagery is, by this time, no longer a tool with which one can speak about external reality in the present, but one which can be used to analyse time and its passing.

The links between perceptions of present and past time, and photography is built upon more explicitly in Brodsky's essays. In 'In a Room and a Half,' the poet openly connects photographs with individual memories when he discusses his recently deceased parents:

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[470] An additional point here regarding photographic metaphors: in 'Zimnim vecherom v Yalte,' metaphorical photographs are held together by the poet who binds them in his poem. One could note that the text is made up of a series of snapshots and acts like a photo-montage, or a photo album: the poem is a snapshot of a moment in time (the evening in Yalta), made up of smaller snapshots (the images contained in the poem that are seen by the eye-lens).

[471] Lev Losev also points out that 'Остановись, мгновенье!' is also a quote from Act 5 of *Faust, Part Two*, Brodskii, I, p. 564.

[472] The text I quote from is in Brodskii, II, p. 270.

[473] See, for example, 'Osen' v Norinskoi,' 'Osennii vecher v skromnom gorodke' (1972), and 'Osennii krik yastreba' (1975).

> I see their faces, his and hers, with great clarity, in the variety of their expressions—but these are fragments also: moments, instances. These are better than photographs with their unbearable laughter, and yet they are as scattered. At times, I begin to suspect my mind of trying to produce a cumulative, generalized image of my parents: a sign, a formula, a recognizable sketch; of trying to make me settle for these. I suppose I could, and I fully realize how absurd the grounds of my resistance are: these fragments' lack of continuum. One shouldn't expect so much from memory; one shouldn't expect a film shot in the dark to develop new images. Of course not. Still, one can reproach a film shot in the daylight of one's life for missing frames.[474]

Visual perception in the present, as shown in 'Zimnim vecherom…,' is made up of snapshots. In this extract, he expresses how personal memory is fragmentary as a result of these individual snapshot perceptions; since present perceptions make up the memories of tomorrow, a fragmentary, photographic perception of the present will result in fragmentary memories. Individual memories are individual fragments, and these individual fragments are like photographs. As observed earlier, photographs were regularly sent between the poet and his parents when he left to go abroad. The poet, however, shines a negative light on these images — and on the mechanisms of human perception more generally — for they can only go so far in helping one recall people from the past. The image of memory fragments returns in 'In Memory of Stephen Spender' (1995), written ten years after the essay on his parents. Here, Brodsky tells us that:

> People are what we remember about them. What we call life is in the end a patchwork of someone else's recollections. With death, it gets unstitched, and one ends up with random, disjointed fragments. With shards or, if you will, with snapshots. Filled with their unbearable laughter are equally unbearable smiles. Which are unbearable because they are one-dimensional. I should know; after all, I am a photographer's son.[475]

As in the previous essay, the poet attempts, and fails, to remember and honour a deceased individual when using the written word in tandem with his memory via photographic

[474] Brodsky, 'In a Room and a Half', p. 492.
[475] Joseph Brodsky, 'In Memory of Stephen Spender', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 400–422 (p. 419).

metaphors.

In the poem ‘Razgovor s nebozhitelem’ (1970), the past is described using the same terms as in the extract just mentioned: ‘Все откололось... | И время. И судьба. И о судьбе... | Осталась только память о себе, | негромкий голос. | Она одна. | И то – как шлак перегоревший, гравий, | за счет каких-то писем, фотографий, | зеркал, окна.’[476] Elsewhere it is said that ‘жизнь была прожита ради апофеоза | фирмы Кодак, поверившей в отпечатки | и выбрасывающей негативы’ (‘My zhili v gorode tsveta okamenevshei vodki...’(1994)).[477] Since fragmentation is at the heart of visual perception and the storing of such perceptions, a remembrance of past time is fragmentary and the past cannot be found whole, ‘Куда-то навсегда | ушло все это. Спряталось’ (‘Pochti elegiya’ (1968)).[478] The past is concealed and can never be fully redeemed though the speaker does wish that memory did not function in this incomplete manner, and that there existed some deity he could turn to in order to capture the past: ‘Как жаль, что нету в христианстве бога – | пускай божка – | воспоминаний, с пригоршней ключей | от старых комнат – идолища с ликом | старьевщика — для коротанья слишком | глухих ночей’ (‘Razgovor s nebozhitelem’).[479] This matter-of-fact view of personal memories and the functioning of human memory is regularly expressed in relation to photography and the poet himself acknowledges that this may be due to his biography:

> Or maybe it’s because you are a son of a photographer and your memory simply develops a film. Shot with your own two eyes, almost forty years ago. That’s why you couldn’t wink back then [to a Soviet Army captain that Brodsky remembers winking at him at a moment in the past].[480]

Here there is not only an emphasis on the inability to resurrect the past in full but also a

[476] Brodskii, I, p. 332.
[477] Brodskii, II, p. 265.
[478] Brodskii, I, p. 203.
[479] Brodskii, I, p. 333.
[480] Brodsky, ‘In a Room and a Half’, p. 465.

metaphor in the time–memory–photography relationship already encountered: that of the human eye as lens.

In Brodsky's later works, individual, visual perception is expressed through the metaphor of the eye as camera lens. A camera takes snapshots — still frames of time and space — and human perception is built upon this model. Unfortunately, though these snapshots are precise and clear, they are nonetheless seen as unconnected fragments. Since personal memory is founded upon a recall of past, visual perceptions, then the past will always be fragmentary and lack a continuum. It is these sets of conclusions that Brodsky reaches regarding time and human memory, and it is through the language and imagery of photographs and photography that they are expressed.

Combining the metaphorical with the literal: colours and photographs

So far, I have analysed the various ways photographs appear in Brodsky's works in both a literal sense — photography in his personal biography, the use of photographs as the basis for poetic texts — and a metaphorical sense — time, memory and visual perception seen through photographic metaphors. There are instances, though, where the literal and the metaphorical are brought together. Towards the end of his life, Brodsky published an essay dedicated solely to photography, something which he did not do for any other non-literary medium.[481] 'In Praise of Gray,' completed in 1990, was written as the Introduction to *Russia: A Portrait*, a book of collected black-and-white photos taken by his friend, the

[481] There are extensive mentions of painting, music, ballet, and opera in his essays, but none of them have an essay solely dedicated to them.

photographer Lev Poliakov.[482] Up until now Brodsky's essay has, to the best of my knowledge, received no critical attention. The work is instructive for in it Brodsky focuses on the difference between black-and-white and colour photography, a juxtaposition that illuminates several strains in his poetry of the time.

In the five-page piece, there is a recalibrating of the dialogue between mimesis and art. Brodsky begins by asserting that black-and-white film is ideal for photographing the Russian landscape:

> The visual idiom of any country is determined by its soil and the tint of people's dwellings. For that reason, the photograph's black-and-white is highly congenial to Russia, since the realm is predominantly threadbare gray.[483]

Monochrome images of Russia are true to the reality of Russia, a grey-coloured place. According to Brodsky, the use of colour when depicting the country would lead to a portrayal of an unreal land; colour photographs would not reflect the colourless environment.[484] In this way, a camera shooting in black and white is a truth-teller: 'A camera in these parts is a greater realist, so much so the wonder is that it wasn't invented locally. By the same token, it is the greater metaphysician.'[485]

A lack of colour, in both the land and in the black-and-white photographs take of it, is associated with time, 'For gray is the color of time; and time's wardrobe here knows very few changes. Water is gray; so, for months on end, is the northern sky.' [486] So, Russia is a

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[482] Brodsky was on friendly terms with many professional photographers throughout his life, of whom Lev Poliakov is one example. Poliakov was born in St Petersburg in 1934 and emigrated to the USA in 1973. The photographer had his images published in *Vogue*, *The New York Times* and *Time*, and *Russia: A Portrait* was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Brodsky's long-time publisher in the USA. In addition, Poliakov took several photographs of Brodsky before 1972; some of the more iconic, pre-exile portraits of the poet, including many taken on the day of his departure from the USSR, can be attributed to Poliakov. Other examples of photographer-friends are Mikhail Lemkhin and Alexander Liberman, an important member of the Russian émigré community in New York in the latter part of the twentieth century. A large collection of photographs by photographer-friends can be found at *JBP*, Box 142.
[483] Lev Poliakov, *Russia: A Portrait* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), p. 6.
[484] 'A painter doing his landscape here in vivid colors would be obliging his métier rather than reality—unless, of course, he resolves to challenge it,' Poliakov, p. 6.
[485] Poliakov, p. 6.
[486] Poliakov, p. 6.

grey, timeless realm that moves in tandem with the twists and turns of time. Colour photography would therefore not be suitable for Russia: 'For a camera's lens, this place is a real safari. A great mistake for a photographer is to bring his color film here.'[487]

In addition to the metaphysical nature of the photograph taken in Russia,[488] Brodsky also highlights the documentary nature of Poliakov's images. These images depict a specific moment in time, 'A picture aids memory. By the type of bicycle, car fender, policeman's uniform, or women's shoes a Russian perusing this album will immediately recognize the late sixties, the beginning of the seventies.' [489]

At the end of the essay, Brodsky reverts back to the idea of greyness as a feature of the passage of time and its movements: 'We may never know what happened to these characters [the Russians photographed in the book]. As one of them, I am pretty sure we won't: once black and white, always black and white.'[490] For the poet, Russia is literally a grey country, which links into his metaphorical idea of time as grey.

'In Praise of Gray' possesses several parallels with his later poetry and may be read as a commentary on his poems that deal with the interrelationship between personal memory, aging, and death. In a pair of poems about the passing of his parents, colourless images from a distant past abound. In 'Mysl' o tebe udalyaetsya…' (1987), there is an inability by the speaker to fully remember his mother. The fragmentary scenes centre around black, grey, and white objects and phenomena; there are mentions of cooking pots, snow, lime, marble, dishes. Likewise, in 'Pamyati otsa: Avstraliya' (1989), the speaker thinks about the cremation of his father, and shades of grey appear in the ash and smoke highlighted,

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[487] Reference forthcoming.
[488] 'The virtue of the collection at hand is that it is pre-Kodak as much as it is post-Kodak, for the country is old, vast, and obstinate enough to succumb to the flattery of chemicals. On the other hand, of course, its author had no choice. A quarter of a century ago this photographer himself was part of the landscape he was depicting, and the material he had at his disposal was manufactured by this country's equally gray extension: Agfa, in the DDR.' Poliakov, pp. 6–7.
[489] Poliakov, p. 7.
[490] Poliakov, p. 9.

‘мягкий пепел | крематория в банке’ and ‘ты обернулся дымом.’[491] The images of his past home, associated as they are with his parents, play into the wider discussions on colour and time found in his essay on Poliakov’s photographs. Russia is grey, the past is grey, and time is grey. His parents, and his memories of them, stuck in this grey world, become timeless through the poetic text that adds no colour to them.

Moreover, the city of his birth is often depicted in grey tones, as evidenced by the poem ‘My zhili v gorode tsveta okamenevshei vodki’ (1994),[492] where the viewer sees a decoloured interior scene, ‘Эмалированные кастрюли кухни | внушали уверенность в завтрашнем дне.’ The viewer also sees the external environment where there are mosquitoes, muddy swamps, and cars: ‘Автомобили тоже | катились в сторону будущего и были | черными, серыми, а иногда (такси) | даже светло-коричневыми.’ Speakers who recall their time in Leningrad/St Petersburg in grey tones take this form of perception with them into the present and understand, in the later texts, that they too will meet the same fate as that which they recollect. In ‘Pamyati Klifforda Brauna’ (1993) this is clear from the opening line — ‘Это – не синий цвет, это – холодный цвет’ — and is drawn out throughout the poem in a series of images of snowflakes, mercury, and darkness.[493] The closing lines bring these shades of black and white together, ‘Льдина не тает, словно пятно луча, | дрейфуя к черной кулисе, где спрятан полюс.’

Photographs of Leningrad and his parents glimpsed in his youth, ones which he took with him to the USA, and others which were sent to him from the USSR post-1972, were predominantly in black and white. The sets of associations between home and the father, and black-and-white images, never leave the poetry.[494] Different shades of grey represent

[491] Brodskii, II, p. 160.
[492] The text I quote from is in Brodskii, II, p. 265.
[493] The text I quote from is in Brodskii, II, p. 230.
[494] The link between photography and the predominance of black and white in the poetry is also mentioned in Valentina Polukhina, *Slovar' tsveta poezii Iosifa Brodskogo* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2016), p. 11.

a manifestation of ascetic dignity and honesty diametrically opposed to the official red of the Soviet state. To these associations, Brodsky also adds the idea of time as grey and in this way reconciles himself, to a certain degree, with his past. In *Camera Lucida*, his book on photography and memory, Roland Barthes says that 'It is said that mourning, by its gradual labour, slowly erases pain; I could not, I cannot believe this; because for me, Time eliminates the emotion of loss (I do not weep), that is all. For the rest, everything has remained motionless.'[495] Brodsky would agree with this point and add that everything has remained, and remains, grey.

Metaphors: verse writing and photograph taking

Despite the often-negative connotations of the various photographic metaphors Brodsky turns to in his writings — memories are photographic fragments, death and mourning is shrouded in black and white — there is one element of hope: the ability to imagine and create in decoloured, monochrome settings. In 'Homage to Marcus Aurelius,' Brodsky discusses the lack of colour found in statues and sculptures from Ancient Rome:

> In any case, to them a bust or a statue was indeed what a photograph is to us, and the most 'photographed' person would obviously be a Caesar. […] The longer one stayed on the job, the more numerous would be one's 'photographs'. […] In a sense, what it [marble] also has in common with photography – or, more accurately, with what photographs used to be – is that it is literally monochrome. For one thing, it renders everyone blond. […] Yet one is almost grateful to marble for its lack of pigmentation, the way one is grateful to a black-and-white photograph, for it unleashes one's fantasy, one's intuition, so that viewing becomes an act of complicity: like reading.[496]

Brodsky lived through a significant change in the representation and perception of reality via the portable camera: the move from black-and-white to colour photography. The films

[495] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 75.
[496] Brodsky, 'Homage to Marcus Aurelius', p. 237.

of the poet's youth mentioned in his autobiographical essays, and the photographs his father took of him, are ones shot in black and white.[497] Even though monochrome photographs often point to death and the passing of time, black-and-white statues of the past allow the poet to create and imagine a different world in which he did not live. In his early years, photographs helped the poet imagine a present-day reality located abroad. Here, they allow an imaginative flight into the past.

This line of reasoning leads on to a final metaphor associated with photography: poems as photographs. In an interview towards the end of his life, Brodsky observes:

> У меня семь или восемь рождественских стихотворений. Что-то вроде дисциплины… Как человек, который каждый год фотографируется, чтобы знать, как он выгладит. По этому можно, как мне казалось, более или менее проследить стилистическое развитие — развитие души в некотором роде, то есть эти рождественские стихотворения — как фотографии души, что ли. К сожалению, масса негативов потеряна. [*Смеется*][498]

Following this logic, the poems dedicated to Marina Basmanova, and written over a twenty-five-year period, would also fall under this definition of poems as 'photographs of the soul.' Furthermore, one could add various texts where the same topic is discussed to this group, those such as '1972 god,' 'Ya vkhodil vmesto dikogo zverya v kletku' and 'Fin de siècle,' texts where a reflective first-person narrator looks back on his life at different points. In the Foreword to *An Age Ago*, a selection of nineteenth-century Russian poetry by Alan Myers, Brodsky writes:

> A good poem, in a sense, is like a photograph that puts its subjects' metaphysical features into sharp focus. Accordingly, a good poet is one who does this sort of thing in a camera-like fashion: quite unwittingly, almost in spite of himself. A poem, of

[497] In an interview from 1993, Brodsky was asked what his favourite season was. His response was: 'Я думаю, что все-таки зима. Если хотите знать, то за этим стоит нечто замечательное: на самом деле за этим стоит профессионализм. Зима — это черно-белое время года. То есть страница с буквами. Поэтому мне черно-белое кино так нравится, знаете,' Brodsky, Shimak-Reifer, and Bolotova, p. 628.
[498] Bengt Jangfeldt and Joseph Brodsky, 'Stikhotvorenie — eto fotografiya dushi', in *Iosif Brodskii. Bol'shaya kniga interv'yu*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina, trans. by Gleb Shul'pyakov (Moscow: Zakharov, 2000), pp. 293–304 (p. 298).

> course, should be memorable, yet what commits it to memory is not its linguistic texture alone. The push is given by the metaphysics, by the semblance of universal value in the statement.[499]

Elsewhere, Brodsky sees the link between photographs and poems on the level of colour:

> And I may even go as far as suggesting a link between picture taking and verse writing – well, insofar as the fragments are black-and-white. Or insofar as writing means retention. Yet one can't pretend that what one beholds goes beyond its blank reverse side. Also, once one realizes how much somebody's life is a hostage of one's own memory, one balks at the jaws of the past tense.[500]

Also, Brodsky shows how a poem can express ideas related to a remembrance of a moment in the individual's past and hence act like a photograph. In one of the first essays he wrote in English, a piece about the Greek-language poet Constantine Cavafy, Brodsky writes that:

> Cavafy's poems, in dealing with that Hellenic "special love," and touching *en passant* upon conventional broodings and longings, are attempts—or rather recognized failures—to resurrect once-loved shadows. Or: photographs.[501]

In these extracts, Brodsky is showing that even if the past cannot be relived or restored, and even if memory is flawed, photographs still play a crucial, literal, and metaphorical role in facilitating the writing, and reading, of poetry.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how photographs help Brodsky and his speakers perceive and understand various environments. They also act as tools for reflecting and trying to

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[499] Myers and Brodsky, p. xvi.
[500] Brodsky, 'In Memory of Stephen Spender', p. 419.
[501] Joseph Brodsky, 'Pendulum's Song', in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 53–68 (p. 62).

comprehend his own life and his various personal identities. Though the photograph is harnessed as a metaphor for both human perception and memory towards the end of his life, it also plays an important literal role in his poetry, essays, and in his daily life before and during this time. Brodsky was a photographic subject, a photographer, and a viewer of photographs, and these various roles are seen together and separately at various points in his life and work.

Despite the huge importance of photography to Brodsky, it never displaced poetry at the top of his ladder of aesthetic importance. This is neatly expressed in the short poem 'Polyarnyi issledovatel'' (1978):

> Все собаки съедены. В дневнике
> не осталось чистой страницы. И бисер слов
> покрывает фото супруги, к ее щеке
> мушку даты сомнительной приколов.
> Дальше – снимок сестры. Он не щадит сестру:
> речь идет о достигнутой широте!
> И гангрена, чернея, взбирается по бедру,
> как чулок девицы из варьете.[502]

In this instance, the photograph serves a specific purpose — that of helping the individual to remember his loved ones in freezing conditions — and it seems as if the speaker has a binary choice to make: to leave the photographs where they are and write around them, or to remove them and write in the spaces they used to occupy. The speaker, however, chooses a third option: he overlays the photographs with his texts, and the written and the visual thus co-exist on the same page.[503] Brodsky shares the explorer's sentiments, as viewed in the filmed interview from 1989, where he focuses in on the photographs and

[502] Brodskii, II, p. 48.
[503] In her analysis of the poem, Molly Thomasy Blasing reaches a similar conclusion, and sees the poem as a reflection on time: 'the poem destabilizes time in creating its visual-textual palimpsest. […] Thus, we understand word and image in this poem to be occupying multiple distinct temporal planes: the photo is a fragmented and static slice of the past, while the words of the diary represent a present time frame that, in the wake of the explorer's death, will send a message to the future,' Blasing, *Snapshots of the Soul: Photo-Poetic Encounters in Modern Russian Culture*, p. 156.

narrates them in his own manner. The narratives, the stories, the texts related to the images, are involved in a complex interplay and dialogue with the images themselves and are left as memories of, and to, his friends and family.[504] This future-oriented view of memory — a meditation on how the individual will be remembered in the future by others looking back on his life — is integral to my final chapter.

[504] In a discussion of 'In a Room and a Half,' Svetlana Boym makes a comparable point. When reading the final image of the essay, the image of the father and son walking around Leningrad, Boym says that 'Brodsky disrupts the photographic art. Instead of worshipping the existing image of his father, he produces a series of imaginary pictures, turning a photograph into a film about a photographer. Instead of a static memento mori, Brodsky searches for the alternative route to freedom for his parents, through his own texts in the foreign language,' Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001), p. 296.

Chapter Four

Drawings

At the end of a three-page letter, dated 18 December 1971, that Brodsky sent from Leningrad to Carl Proffer, one reads the short poem:

> There is pretty Lady named Bianca
> Who always prefers vino blanco.
> The Time which she spends
> Among decadents
> Is calling in Russian "the пьянка"[505]

Below the text,[506] one sees a drawing of a balding, stubbled, pot-bellied Brodsky (Figure 16). The poet has evidently weary eyes, his hand is in his pocket, a cigarette hangs from the side of his mouth, and his right hand is raised to his temple in the form of a salute. Just above his head, to the left, is a small star, to the right is an angel blowing a trumpet with the words 'salut to United States' coming out of it; just below is a rain cloud. On the bottom right of the drawing, there is a small writing table with a candle, an inkwell, an upright scroll, and a chair; the cloud is raining on the table. At the bottom, by the poet's feet, one sees a black-and-white cat with the words 'pussy cat named also Joseph.' At the far-left side of the page, the words 'Happy New Year' are written, with the text going upwards.[507]

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[505] The English used in the poem and the drawing reflects the level of written English Brodsky had at the time of writing at the end of 1971. Upon his departure from the USSR, his level of English was not fully fluent and often displayed grammatical and spelling errors. When he began teaching at Ann Arbor, Sven Birkerts remembers sitting in on one of his classes: 'Sometimes his English failed him. Talking about one poem he kept calling a woodpecker a "woodkipper"' Sven Birkerts, 'Joseph Brodsky', *Agni*, 43, 1996 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45119628> [accessed 23 July 2021].

[506] Brodsky may have confused Spanish for Italian here: if he is talking about an Italian lady named Bianca, then he should have used the Italian — 'vino bianco' — and not the Spanish — 'vino blanco.'

[507] The letter can be found in *JBP*, Box 11, Folder 315.

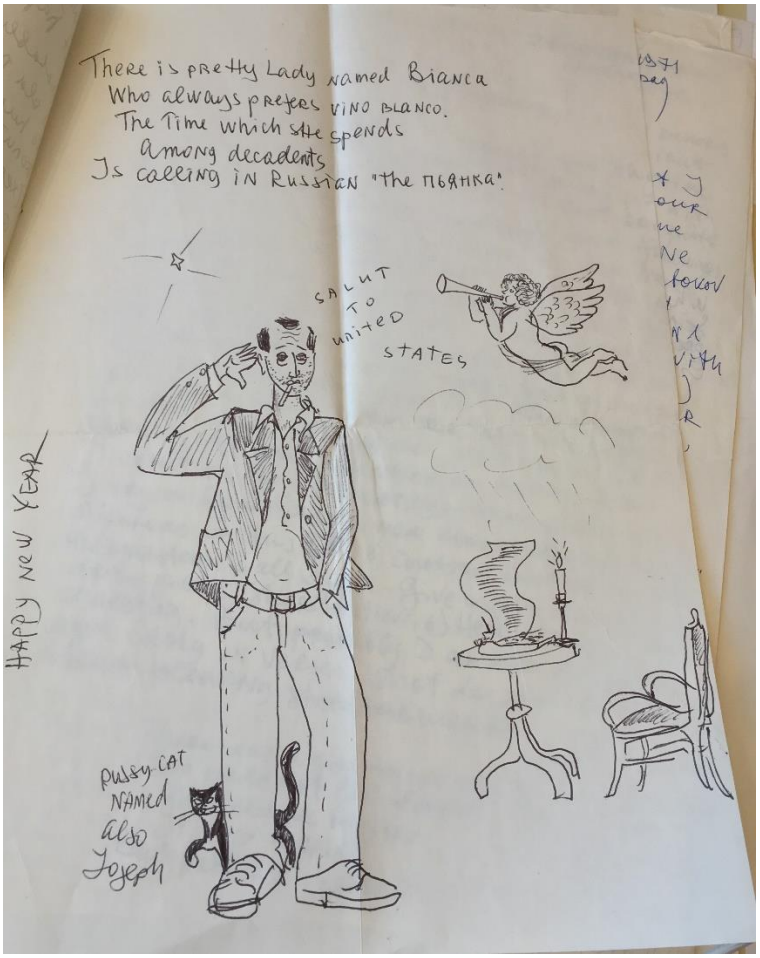


Figure 16. Last page of a letter sent by Joseph Brodsky to Carl Proffer.

The image is reflective of reality and highlights features of Brodsky's self-perception at the time.[508] When one looks at the photographs of Brodsky in late 1971, a strong resemblance between what Brodsky looked like and how he depicted his looks in his drawing may be observed: the poet's facial features and the shape of his frame are realistic and not exaggerated in the image, something Proffer would have picked up on. The cat at the poet's feet is also a realistic feature as Brodsky did, at the time, have a tuxedo cat named Joseph. In addition to the caricatured realism, the image features Biblical imagery in the form of the angel with a trumpet, and a shining star reflecting the coming of

[508] For a study of the self-perceptions of Brodsky's speakers in his poetry, see Valentina Polukhina, 'Poeticheskii avtoportret Brodskogo', in *Iosif Brodskii: tvorchestvo, lichnost', sud'ba*, ed. by Yakov Gordin (St Petersburg: Zhurnal «Zvezda», 1998), pp. 145–53.

Christmas and the New Year; Proffer would have received the letter at Christmas time as attested by the date. The candle, the scroll, and the writing implements are stock symbols of poetry and the literary process, with the rain emphasising the benighted nature of the writer who writes in difficult times.

The image, and the poem, are also a continuation of the text of the letter, and both are written and drawn with the same black pen.[509] In the first two pages of the text, Brodsky tells Proffer about his health: 'Don't worry about my health, please. This long fight with anemia is more or less won. By medicine men. They cut my gut, transfused my blood, and now I am coming back to my previous state — the state of 'creative writer.'' This description of his illness — Brodsky had an operation in November 1971, in the small town of Sestroretsk, located some thirty kilometres north-west of St Petersburg[510] — explains the dishevelled look on his face as portrayed in the sketch. As well as using the writing table to symbolize his status as a poet, Brodsky also tells Proffer, in the text of the letter, that he needs to return to his profession. As regards Bianca, the 'Lady' of the poem, Brodsky writes the following at the bottom of the second page: 'Poor star and lusty Bianca. This is the best state of body: to be a decadent.' Seen together, the text and drawing create a composite impression as to his present feelings when he was writing to his friend. These thoughts and self-perceptions are layered on top of each other — classical and benighted poet, pet-lover, cigarette smoker, sufferer of various illnesses — in a serious and ironic manner; the self-deprecating tone undermines the seriousness of the life-threatening events that had just taken place in his life. The tone of the drawing shows the poet as self-conscious and whimsical though the image also carries an element of distress in the bedraggled-looking individual depicted.

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[509] John Updike has stated that 'The itch to make dark marks on white paper is shared by writers and artists. Before the advent of the type writer and now the word processor, pen and ink were what one drew picture and word-pictures with,' John Updike, 'Writers and Artists', in *Just Looking: Essays on Art* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), pp. 191–200 (p. 191). Brodsky felt this 'itch' throughout his life.
[510] Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, p. 352.

In this chapter, I focus on the differing self-perceptions that Brodsky portrays in his drawings. For Brodsky, drawing is an activity that helps him express and explore thoughts in private that he downplays in his writing and public appearances. There are approximately three hundred images that are known to me to have been drawn by the poet, and nearly all of them feature depictions of himself in various guises.[511] By placing these images next to the various self-projections and presentations of the speakers in his poetry and essays, one notes that there is often a disconnect between the way that Brodsky saw himself — and wanted to be seen — in private, and the way that he and his speakers see themselves in his writings. Most of the drawings found, even the ones that do not depict images of the poet, are concerned with differing perceptions of self-identity and foreground Brodsky's private attempts at self-reflection.

Since nearly all the images to be analysed are unpublished, I begin by giving an overview of their general features: I outline where, how, when, and why the images were drawn. Following this, I discuss three central ways that Brodsky sees himself in his drawings. The first group to be analysed is his drawings related to Pushkin. The very act of drawing on texts, manuscripts, scraps of paper, allows Brodsky to fashion himself as a successor to Pushkin — Pushkin carried out all these activities — and to place himself in the poetic lineage initiated by the nineteenth-century poet. In this set of drawings, Brodsky explicitly sees himself as, and toys with the idea of being, a canonical, national, Russian poet. In the second group of images, I look at the animal pictures the poet drew, and I focus on his drawings of cats. These drawings express a lighter, humorous, playful side to him, and surprise the reader acquainted solely with his literary works. The final group of images is made up of Brodsky's self-portraits. When one compares photographs taken at the same time as these drawings, one observes similarities between the drawn and

[511] This figure is an estimate and the true number of drawings made by Brodsky is likely somewhat higher.

photographic images. In this section, I also look at self-portraits that feature classical symbols such as lyres and laurels.

As seen in the drawing to Proffer, these various self-representations and perceptions are often present at the same time in a collage-like manner: Pushkin in the form of the benighted poet writing alone in difficult times by candlelight, the cat as a way of imagining himself as non-human creature, and the caricatured self-portrait with elements taken from clichéd neo-classical symbols. Even though I look at each of these groups separately, one should bear in mind that they do appear, at times, in a palimpsestic manner, layered on top of one another.

A final point to raise relates to definition: what should one call the drawings? Despite the variety of materials Brodsky used, there are some that he did not use, and this can help us in our search for definitions. Given this, the word 'drawing' will be used interchangeably with the word 'sketch' and I concentrate on images that depict an object, person, landscape, or animal. Small doodles of circles, arrows, squares, for example, will be dealt with more fleetingly for they do not speak of his self-perception or self-projection as much as the other sets of images mentioned. These doodles give us an idea of the writer's habits when writing but are less suitable for the current chapter. The word 'grafika,' often used in discussions of Pushkin's drawings, will not be used as this term also includes calligraphy, and often foregrounds the artistic qualities of the images over their thematic preoccupations. A hagiographic presentation of these documents can blind one to the thematic and communicatory functions the images hold. Thus, I avoid the word 'grafika' and opt for the more democratic words 'drawings' and 'sketches.'

In my discussion, I focus on the question of what Brodsky draws and depicts in his images, on the one hand, and the relationships between these thematic preoccupations and

his literary works, and the writing process that lies behind them, on the other.[512] This approach differs slightly from the one taken by scholars of Pushkin's drawings. In her book *Portretnye risunki Pushkina* in which she gathers the various self-portraits and portraits of others that Pushkin drew, Zhuikova opts for an alphabetical approach to the images.[513] The various individuals seen in the drawings are placed in alphabetical order, the book itself is called a 'katalog,' and Zhuikova concentrates on giving as much detail about those depicted in the images. In the eighteenth volume of the 1996 edition of Pushkin's collected works, the editors opt for a thematic approach,[514] one which also found in a slightly different form in Sergei Fomichev's book on the topic.[515] These two approaches, however, focus on a micro-analysis of the drawings in each thematic grouping. Such an analysis overlooks more general issues surrounding the drawings and the reasons why the poet drew in the first place. A chronological approach is also to be avoided as the majority of Brodsky's drawings are, at times, difficult to accurately date. Furthermore, Brodsky's drawings vary in style from the very start, and it is hard to speak of the drawings in terms of stylistic periods.[516] In his studies of Dostoevsky's graphic output, Konstantin Barsht divides up the nineteenth-century writer's drawings into three categories: calligraphy, portraits, and gothic architecture.[517] In my discussion, I carry out readings of specific images, discuss thematic preoccupations in groups of images, and ask more global questions about the functions of the drawing process for Brodsky. This multi-layered approach will allow us to see the complex issues of self-perception and self-projection in a more dynamic manner.

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[512] It is likely that in the future there will be articles, and possibly books, about Brodsky's drawings in a similar vein to those about Pushkin and Dostoevsky.
[513] R. G. Zhuikova, *Portretnye risunki Pushkina. Katalog Atributsii* (St Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1996).
[514] *Pushkin. Risunki.*, ed. by S. A. Fomichev, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 17 t., 18 vols (Voskresen′e, 1996), XVIII.
[515] S. A. Fomichev, *Grafika Pushkina* (St Petersburg: Pushkinskii Dom, 1993).
[516] New archival findings could alter this methodological position.
[517] Barsht.

The thematic preoccupations that exist in these three sets of drawings are very often absent in the poetry. Brodsky's drawings are a way for him to express, analyse, and project certain self-perceptions that he censors — or decides not to explicitly focus on — in his literary works. His drawings are a way for him to visually express his memories, lived-through experiences, thoughts, and desires, in private, in ways he could not, and did not want to, convey in his poetry and essays. Drawing was a form of aesthetic expression he could resort to whenever he so wished; he was an incredibly proficient draughtsman. It is also a future-directed form: through his drawings, he was potentially thinking about how future generations would remember him, the memories and images they would have of him.

Brodsky the Draughtsman

Brodsky drew from an early age until the very end of his life. Though he never had any professional instruction in painting or drawing — unlike several, canonical, Russian,[518] and non-Russian writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries[519] — he was nonetheless an accomplished draughtsman.[520] The images he produced are spread out relatively evenly over the forty-year period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1990s, though there is a slight increase in drawings during his eighteen-month exile from 1964–65.[521]

[518] To mention two examples: Lermontov had drawing lessons from a young age, and Dostoevsky learnt to draw professionally when he studied engineering in St Petersburg.
[519] For further examples of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers who drew or painted, see Donald Friedman, *The Writer's Brush: Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture by Writers* (Minneapolis: Mid-List Press, 2007). Though outside the boundaries of this thesis, a comparative study of other writers who were keen draughtsmen would be a useful addition to Brodsky studies.
[520] In an e-mail to Lev Losev, dated 18 October 2000, Alexander Wolpert says that he thought, though was not fully sure about this information, that the poet's maternal grandfather was a draughtsman and involved in the printing press. In this e-mail Wolpert notes: 'My understanding is that Yosif's [Iosif's] maternal grandfather was not a tailor but a draftsman. I still have in my apartment in SPb his reschina and printing press,' *LLP*, Box 2, Folder 9.
[521] Several drawings from his time in Norinskaya may be found in Mil'chik, *Iosif Brodskii v ssylke*. The twenty-two drawings that are in the archive of the Russian National Library, drawings I have been unable to access, are also likely from Norinskaya, see Petrova, p. 72.

Brodsky's drawings are found in a variety of places, and are drawn using a variety of different materials. One finds sketches in notebooks, in letters, on postcards, and at the front of books accompanying dedications to friends and family. They appear on scraps of lined and squared paper, on the back of envelopes, on drawing paper and in sketch books as well as on more unconventional items such as cigarette packets,[522] napkins,[523] and white paper plates.[524] His sketches are drawn using pencil, ballpoint pens of different colours, charcoal, felt-tip pens, ink, colouring pencils.[525] This variegated nature of presentation of the sketches, in addition to the abundance of drawings materials one encounters, means that grouping the images in a non-thematic manner would be relatively non-revelatory. Be that as it may, there is a very slight preference for ink or pen drawings made in notebooks or on scraps of paper.

Unlike Pushkin's, or Dostoevsky's drawings, one rarely finds Brodsky's sketches on manuscripts or between lines on typescripts; there are more coffee and coffee cup stains on such documents than drawings.[526] This observation could give us some information as to when Brodsky drew: he sketched on whatever he had in front of him when he had

[522] *LLP*, Box 8, Folder 50.
[523] *KP*, Box 7, Folder 8.
[524] On a paper plate in Tomas Venclova's archive, one finds Brodsky's drawing of fish and vegetables. Around the plate there are the words: 'I'll do what I can. To have Jaruzelsky [Wojciech Jaruzelski, the last leader of the Polish People's Republic and ruler of Poland from 1981–1989] shot. Give me a gun. And a parachute [*sic*]. Poetry has no right to exist,' (*TVP*, Box 10).
[525] Despite this variety, it should be underlined that I have not found any paintings or watercolour drawings on canvas made by him. There are however a set of eight charcoal drawings (seven self-portraits, one drawing depicting plates by a sink) that seem to have been done by Brodsky. These are found in *JBSP*, Box 4.
[526] This statement should be slightly qualified: Brodsky may have drawn on early drafts of texts he threw away during the writing process. This is hinted at, for example, in a drawing of a saluting soldier, drawn in profile, at the top of a rough draft of a letter to *The Times Literary Supplement*, see *JBP*, Box 94, Folder 2291. Furthermore, Sven Birkerts shows the reader a doodled page from a manuscript for 'Dvadsat' sonetov k Marii Styuart' in Birkerts and Brodsky.

varying amounts of time to while away.[527] Indeed the poet himself makes a similar point: when asked, in a 1993 interview with Bożena Shallcross, if he draws around the rough drafts of his poems, Brodsky replies, 'Иногда рисую, иногда нет. Это зависит от того, насколько я задумываюсь.'[528] Following this argumentation, the many amorphous and swift doodles found can be said to have been quickly jotted down mid-thought. The slightly more defined images of people's heads, hearts, lyres (to name but a few objects drawn) and other images with defined outlines, as well as more detailed drawings, could have been made when he was taking a sustained break from writing. To rephrase: drawing seems to have acted as a distraction, or break, from his latest literary creation (an example can be seen in Figure 17).[529] His more detailed drawings would also have been drawn when the poet was away from his writing desk, perhaps on a visit to a friend. When the pen was in Brodsky's hand, he would keep it there and finish his sketch; there are very few instances where Brodsky uses more than one material, and more than one colour, to draw with.[530] The writer and editor Paul Keegan supports these conclusions in a story he tells about a meal with the poet: 'Our second meeting was when we had dinner one evening, around that time, in an empty restaurant in Hampstead. He doodled with a biro on the linen tablecloth; and by the end of the meal – several hours – the white was black with

[527] There are some rare instances of sets of drawings made at the same time on the same topic. One example is a sketch book dating from the 1960s, and another is a small hand drawn book to Anastasia Tomashevskaya, to be discussed in due course. The sketch book from the 1960s has sketches of a book sitting on a shelf or another book, a group of houses, three people in a room with one in profile and the other two facing the viewer face on, a sketch of a man looking at the viewer with the title 'St Joseph,' two men standing in the foreground with a group of houses behind them, a canal with a single boat on it and a car. All the images are made in pencil in this Soviet children's exercise book 'dlya risovaniya' (*JBP*, Box 133, Folder 2977).

[528] Bożena Shallcross and Joseph Brodsky, 'Morton-Strit, 44', in *Iosif Brodskii. Bol'shaya kniga interv'yu*, ed. by Valentina Polukhina, trans. by Irina Adel'geim (Moscow: Zakharov, 2000), pp. 600–612 (p. 611). Elsewhere in this interview, Brodsky says that the more a writer writes, the more drawings he will produce as writing itself is a graphic process.

[529] In his book *Risunki Pushkina*, the first and most detailed book on Pushkin's graphic art, Abram Efros mentions that Pushkin's sketches on his manuscripts can be grouped together according to the type of break that the poet took in the writing process, see Abram Efros, *Risunki poeta* (Moscow: Academia, 1933), pp. 19–22. Figure 17 is found in *JBP*, Box 37, Folder 769.

[530] When describing a trip to Tian Shan with Brodsky, Garrik Voskov gives one exception: 'Была холодная ночь и красивейшая долина! Здесь Иосиф цветными карандашами нарисовал склон горы, покрытый тянь-шаньскими елями,' Seifetdinova.

ink, and the management complained, so we had to buy the tablecloth.'[531]

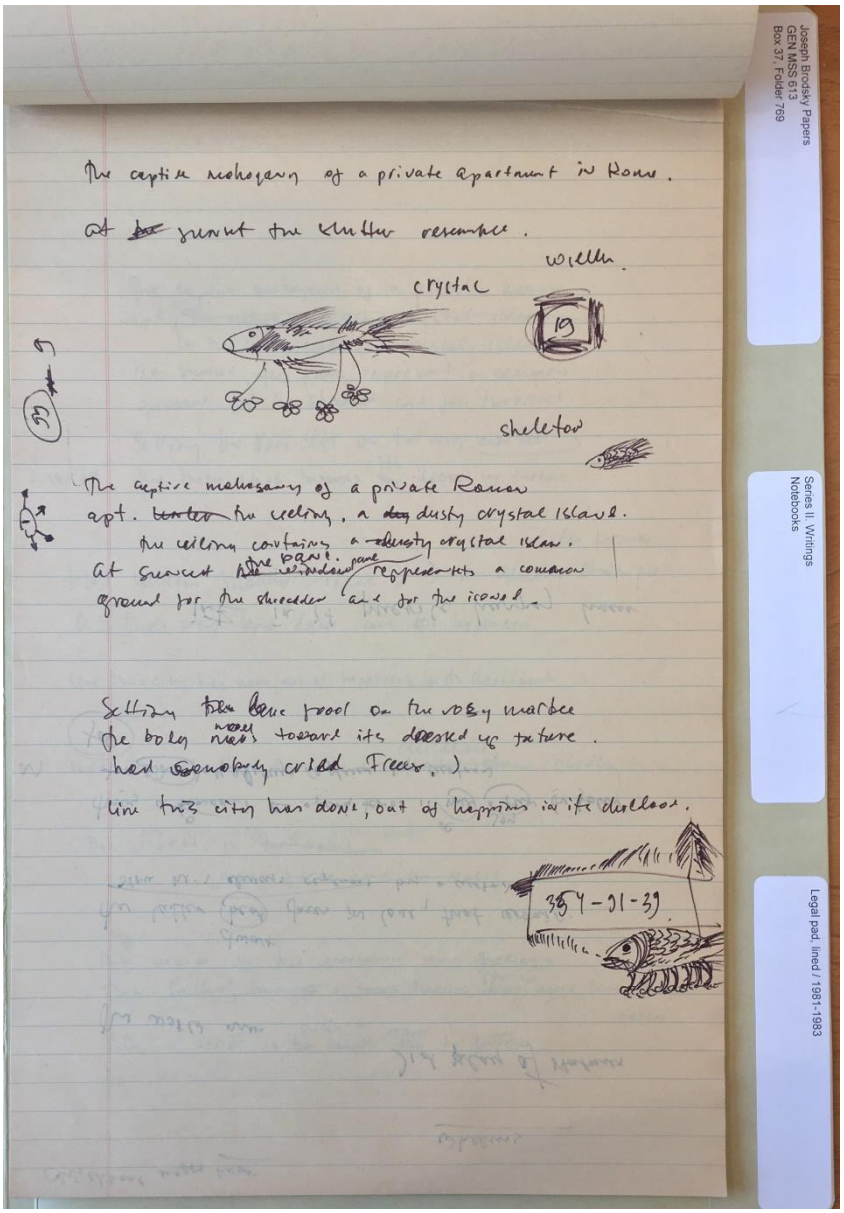


Figure 17. Page from Joseph Brodsky's notepad.

The observation that there is no single place or material that predominates in the drawings also suggests that the majority were not made for publication. Indeed, concerns about the dissemination of these drawings were raised immediately after the poet's death

[531] Polukhina, *Brodsky through the Eyes of His Contemporaries*, II, pp. 577–78.

by Ann Kjellberg.[532] Brodsky did use some of his drawings in his poetic collections and to accompany some of his prose, though these examples are few and far between; one example is a drawing, in profile, of Sergei Dovlatov which accompanied Brodsky's essay 'About Sergei Dovlatov,' published in 1990. The inclusion of such drawings shows Brodsky's regard for his drawing skill, as well as his confidence in showing his sketches to a wider audience, even if he did so rarely. It also attests to the fact that he wanted the poetic text to take precedent over all other forms of artistic endeavour he tried his hand at, a topic I have already raised.

Brodsky was on friendly terms with individuals working with professional draughtsmen in Leningrad. One informative relationship was the one between Brodsky and Mikhail Belomlinsky.[533] In a conversation with Solomon Volkov, Brodsky remembers his closeness to two visual artists when he was living in Leningrad: 'у меня были два знакомых художника, у которых была мастерская в совершенно замечательном месте, около Академии художеств. Художники были посредственные, хотя талантливые по-своему, прикладники. Довольно забавные собеседники, ужасно остроумные.'[534] Belomlinsky tells us that the two artists in question were himself and Georgii Kovenchuk.[535] Both illustrators would subsequently work at the magazine *Koster*, where Brodsky was briefly employed as a photographer, as mentioned in Chapter Three. Belomlinsky says the following about Brodsky:

> Иосиф бывал у нас [at Belominsky and Kovenchuk's shared studio] часто. Пил кофе, названивал по телефону, листал монографии и альбомы с репродукциями, восхищался любимым им художником Дюфи, но в основном рисовал. С большим удовольствием. Особенно ему нравилось рисовать цанговым карандашом с толстым грифелем – он давал широкую «бархатную» линию. Я привез несколько таких карандашей из Чехословакии и один подарил ему. Он

[532] See *ASP*, Box 6, Folder 7.
[533] Brodsky's drawing of Belomlinsky from 1995 features in Belomlinsky, p. 10.
[534] Volkov, *Dialogi s Iosifom Brodskim*, p. 37.
[535] Kovenchuk was born in 1933 in Leningrad and was, like Belomlinsky, a book illustrator and caricaturist. Kovenchuk died in 2015.

был счастлив. Сохранилось много его рисунков, сделанных этим карандашом.[536]

The evenings with Belomlinsky and Kovenchuk at the very beginning of the 1960s were often bohemian affairs involving copious amounts of alcohol, conversation of a playful and sexual nature, and playacting. In his reminiscences, Belomlinsky remembers the poet's sketches:

> Надо сказать, что его рисунки отличаются на редкость пластичной линией, остротой композиции, умением передать настроение – он никогда не учился рисовать, но, безусловно, был наделен большим художественным даром.[537]

Aside from these connections, another link to the world of drawing was through his relationship with Marina Basmanova, whose parents were professional artists.[538] As Eduard Kochergin, theatre designer and writer,[539] recalls, 'Родители Марины — замечательные художники: отец, Павел Иванович, был графиком и живописцем, а мама, Наталья Басманова, очень хорошим книжным графиком. Они оба музейные художники, их работы находились в разных музеях страны, в том числе и в Русском музее.'[540] As with the poet's relationship to photography, Brodsky's practice with the form had biographical roots closely tied in with close encounters with professional practitioners in his youth and early adult years in Leningrad.

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[536] Belomlinsky, p. 13.
[537] Belomlinsky, p. 13.
[538] One could say that Brodsky's early desire to pick up drawing was tied up with his relationship with Basmanova, whom he first met on 2nd January 1962. Brodsky's drawing style however is very different from that of Marina Basmanova's parents.
[539] For a detailed biography of Kochergin, see 'Kochergin Eduard Stepanovich. Glavnyi khudozhnik BDT imeni G. A. Tovstonogova' <https://bdt.spb.ru/люди-театра/художественное-руководство/кочергин-эдуард-степанович/> [accessed 23 October 2021].
[540] Eduard Kochergin and Yuri Leving, '«Brodskii voobshche ni pod kakoe vliyanie ne popadal»: interv'yu s khudozhnikom i pisatelem Eduardom Kocherginym', *Gorky.Media*, 24 May 2020 <https://gorky.media/context/brodskij-voobshhe-ni-pod-kakoe-vliyanie-ne-popadal/?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=pochemu-brodskiy-predpochital-tsirk-teatru&utm_content=40037087&fbclid=IwAR1vPTRDW6spyBPd4XXukuOc-KUN-m25QbN4Y0JaRz6Mx5LY4dEm0Ugd9NE> [accessed 23 July 2021]. When prompted to comment upon Brodsky's early drawings in the same interview, Kochergin says that the poet's drawing styling was 'Очень такая самодельная с точки зрения профессионала. Но очень изысканная, со вкусом хорошим и упругим рисованием. Ему нравилась классика, суперклассика.'

Brodsky as Pushkin

The first relationship observable in Brodsky's drawings is that between himself and Pushkin, one evident on two levels: Brodsky enters into a dialogue with Pushkin in the drawings themselves, and Brodsky aligns himself with Pushkin by being a poet-draughtsman. In both instances, one can discern Brodsky's conscious self-fashioning as a national poet, a topic that has been somewhat overlooked in Brodsky scholarship.[541] The relationship between Brodsky and Pushkin, in Brodsky's drawings, is fraught, however, and some tension and anxiety between the two writers may be felt in the images. The open, often ironic, dialogue initiated by Brodsky with Pushkin in his drawings is very different the one explored in his poetry.

Brodsky expressed an admiration for Pushkin's drawings. In an aforementioned interview with Bożena Shallcross from 1993, he notes: 'Пушкин был прекрасным рисовальщиком. Думаю, что в этом разрисовывании страницы поэтом выражается также его отношение к форме, а точнее — принятие свободы и открытой формы.'[542] Though Brodsky expresses his appreciation, in this interview, in terms of poetic form, his understanding of Pushkin's images can be seen on other levels too.

The complex interconnection between Brodsky and Pushkin in the drawings is visible in compressed form when one looks at several images made in the 1960s. In a drawing sent to Zoya Tomashevskaya (1922–2010), the daughter of Boris Tomashevsky, in the mid-1960s, a drawing found at the end of a letter most likely sent from Norinskaya, one finds a writer, who bears a resemblance to Brodsky, sitting at his desk (Figure 18). He has

[541] In a review of Lev Losev's biography of Brodsky Stephanie Sandler notes an important omission in the book, namely that 'A notion of literary biography that would stress acts of self-fashioning or self-invention is not here [i.e. in the biography], Stephanie Sandler, 'Joseph Brodsky: A Literary Life by Loseff, Lev. Review', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 90.3 (2012), 515–16 (p. 516).
[542] Shallcross and Brodsky, p. 612.

a pen or quill in his right hand and a death mask in his left. The death mask bears a resemblance to Pushkin and the writer is looking at this object; the writer's head is in profile. There is a sole candle on his table, the writer is crying, and the image is labelled 'Poúvre [*sic*] Joseph.'[543] If one assumes that the writer pictured is Brodsky, then the sketch could be read in the following way: Brodsky is looking face on at Pushkin's face which helps him write poetry more easily; Pushkin is his inspiration and muse. Another reading could be that Brodsky is in the process of writing a poem about, or with references to, Pushkin. The tears could be caused by a feeling of sadness at not being able to write poetry alone, at not living at the same time as the deceased poet, or due to external circumstances in his life, namely his exile. The sadness of being alone in northern, Soviet Russia could be connected with the sadness he imagines Pushkin would have felt when he too was living in exile. One should not also discount the possible humour in the scene: O, woe is me, the poor writer, Brodsky could be saying.



Figure 18. Last page of a letter sent by Joseph Brodsky to Zoya Tomashevskaya.

[543] *JBP*, Box 15, Folder 399

That which complicates the relationship between the two poets in the image is the quotation from *Hamlet*.[544] In Shakespeare's play, the titular character recognises his friend Yorick, a scene which precedes his own death, 'Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is!'[545] In this sequence, Hamlet (first person) is looking at a skull and exclaiming his despair about a second person (Yorick) to a third person (Horatio). In the drawing, Brodsky is looking at the death mask of a second person (Pushkin) and reflecting on his own plight ('Poúvre Joseph'),[546] to a third person (Zoya Tomashevskaya). Though there is a layer of self-referentiality in the scene from *Hamlet*, the direct address to the first-person speaker by the first-person speaker, which is found in the drawing, is absent. In his drawing, Brodsky is making himself other, making himself another poet (Pushkin), and reflecting on his own self whilst at the same time contemplating an image of Pushkin.

One of the reasons for Brodsky's references to Pushkin in this image is biographical: Zoya Tomashevskaya had a connection with Pushkin through her father, Boris Tomashevsky (1890–1957), the famous Pushkin scholar. Losev tells us that Brodsky frequently made use of Boris's library in Leningrad, a library packed full of books and documents related to Pushkin.[547] This library would have had a copy of Abram Efros's notable book on Pushkin's drawings, *Risunki Pushkina* (1933), as well as other studies of

[544] One should not also discount the fact that Brodsky may have had *Tristram Shandy* in mind when noting this comment down. For links between *Tristram Shandy* and *Evgenii Onegin*, see Peter Budrin, 'Pushkin Reads Sterne: About One Note in Pushkin's Novel Eugene Onegin', *The Shandean*, 24 (2013), 93–103.
[545] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Cedric Watts (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), p. 136.
[546] The self-mocking depiction of himself as 'poor' is also observed on an undated piece of paper from about the same time sent to the Tomashevsky family, where one reads the words: 'Aid, poor Joseph' (*JBP*, Box 15, Folder 397). On a note dated 26 January 1977 to Diana Myers there are two angels with lyres with the composite word 'GRACiMERCYTHANKYOUСПАСИБО' written between them. Following a short text discussing travel plans, Brodsky signs off as 'VOTRE POOR Joseph' (*JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 8).
[547] Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, pp. 30–31.

these images. A further link between Brodsky and the Tomashevskys was created through Anna Akhmatova, who was friendly with Irina Tomashevskaya (1903–1973), Boris's wife. Akhmatova stayed with the Tomashevskys for some time following the Second World War; Brodsky met Akhmatova for the first time on 7 August 1961, and the pair would often speak about Pushkin.

These biographical details go some way towards explaining similar Pushkinian references in a series of colour, pencil drawings to Anastasiya Tomashevskaya, Zoya's daughter and Boris's granddaughter. In this sequence of sketches, there is a man with his lyre and a bluebird, and four people in a boat with one of them holding a lyre at the front and the bastardized Pushkinian quote 'их было много на челне …' The rowers are shown rowing in the boat but their reflection in the water shows them dancing for joy, with one of them holding up a lyre (Figure 19). One sees a girl on the shore waving to the same sailors in the boat while the cox, who is holding a lyre, waves back at her. The cox with a lyre is relaxing on the shore, the girl with a flower is looking into the distance and the man with the lyre is with the girl who is holding flowers on the shore.[548] In another volume made for Anastasiya Tomashevskaya, Brodsky illustrates his unpublished poem 'V neizvyestnyi port Gurzuf' (Figure 20). Gurzuf, a location Pushkin visited in 1821, and the place where Boris Tomashevsky helped fund a museum to him, was also where Boris passed away in 1957. This book, and the cycle of images to Anastasiya, were written and drawn in the mid-1960s.[549] In terms of style, the colours and contours of the people and places visualized are reminiscent of those by Raoul Dufy (1877–1953), a painter Brodsky greatly admired as I showed in my section on Brodsky's relationship to art galleries in Chapter Two.

[548] *JBP*, Box 133, Folder 2978
[549] *JBP*, Box 67, Folder 1735

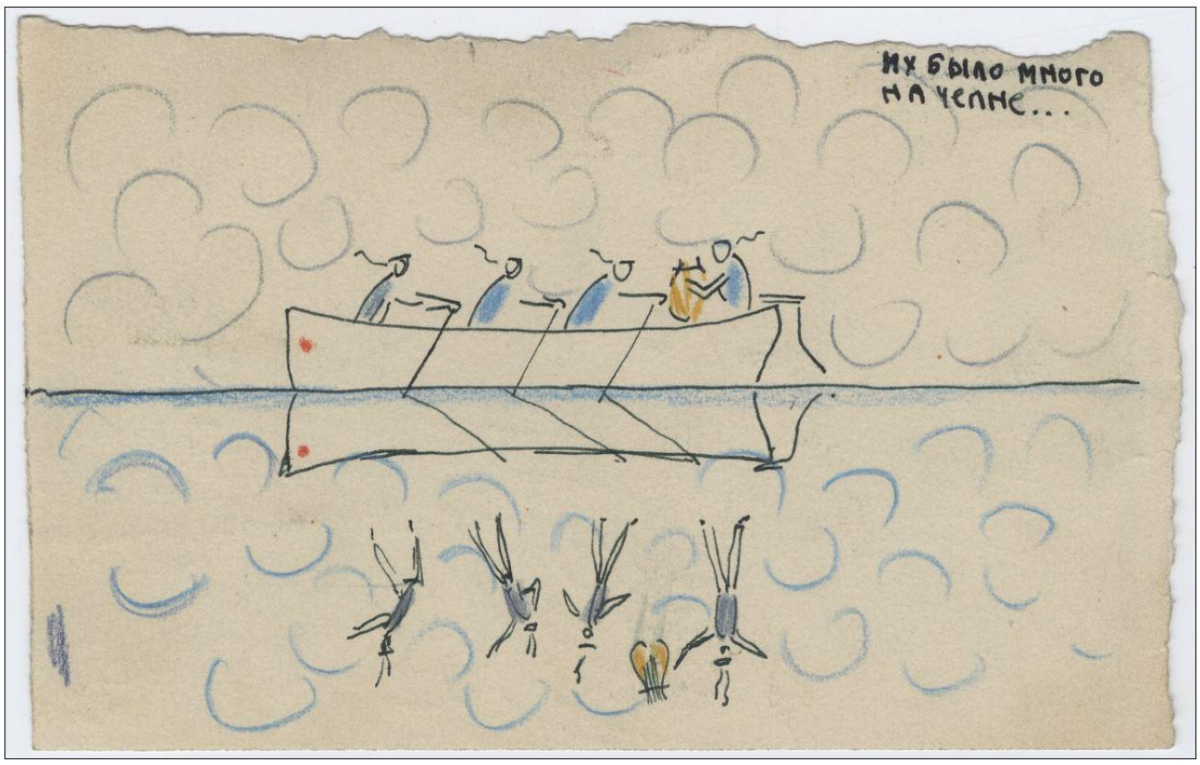


Figure 19. A drawing made by Joseph Brodsky for Anastasiya Tomashevskaya.

Taken together, the drawings to the Tomashevsky family engage with Pushkin as this allows Brodsky to enter into a dialogue with the poet via the biography of the recipients of his images — Pushkin via Boris Tomashevsky. At the same time, Brodsky is projecting an image of himself as Pushkin — as shown in the first image, and in the quote from 'Arion,' a poem centring on the saviour-like quality of the poet/crew member — and as national poet. Brodsky was able to engage in this dialogue in the safe space of this friendship circle, one which Brodsky knew would not mock him for his presumptuous, likely ironic, self-projections so early on in his writing career.



Figure 20. Drawings for the poem ‘V neizvyestnyi port Gurzuf’.

References to Pushkin in drawings are not only found in documents to the Tomashevsky family. In a sketch held in the archives of Romas Katilius, one sees a boat

on the sea, a small town to the right, and, in the front left part of the drawing, a figure who looks like Pushkin and is facing the viewer. There is also a woman in prayer to his right, potentially a reference to Pushkin's wife.[550] The image of facing up to the poet and looking at him in the face, as was also seen in the image sent to Proffer, is one which is reflected in a poem written during, or following, a visit to Odessa in 1971, 'U pamyatnika A. S. Pyshkinu v Odesse.' In the poem, the individual describes his climb up a set of stairs to reach the monument to the poet and gives various references to Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. All of this takes place at dawn in depopulated, dark surroundings. Once he reaches his goal, he is alone and faces the statue of the poet:

> Один как перст,
> как в ступе зимнего пространства пест,
> там стыл апостол перемены мест
> спиной к отчизне и лицом к тому,
> в чью так и не случилось бахрому
> шагнуть ему.[551]

On one level, one sees a man below looking up at the statue of the spiritual preacher and artist; the little man looking up at the greater man in an image redolent of Evgenii finding his enemy and saviour at the feet of Falconet's statue in *Mednyii vsadnik*. On a more literal level, the statue has its back to the fatherland since it is sea-facing: the statue is looking across the Black Sea. In this setting, much like in the drawings, the individual is standing face to face with Pushkin, looking at him in the eyes. He can never fully communicate with him or speak to him though as shown by the impossibility of crossing the metaphorical curtain in the last two lines of the stanza. Much like in *Mednyii vsadnik*, the individual in the poem, who is looking at the statue, is distressed and anxious about the relationship he should, and indeed can, have with the person whose sculpted image he sees

[550] *KKP*, Box 7, Folder 8
[551] Brodskii, II, p. 218.

in front of him.

This anxiety as regards Pushkin is also suggested in a set of three undated drawings from the 1960s entitled ‘My past, my present, my future,’ (Figures 21, 22, and 23).[552] In the first, two characters named ‘Adam’ and ‘Eva’ stand next to each other (the man has the number ‘8’ on his chest, the woman the number ‘25’) and are somewhat confused. There is a building with the word ‘fabrik’ [*sic*] in the background, and a busty woman looking out of a horse carriage window in a disgruntled manner on the right side of the picture. In the next picture, labelled ‘my present,’ Pushkin, with his trademark sideburns, is in the coach driver’s position in the same carriage from the previous image, and he is riding a horse with Brodsky’s face on it. Pushkin is shown in profile and is very happy with the reins in his hands whilst Brodsky is gloomy with a cigarette hanging off his lip. There is also a policeman to the right with the word ‘ment’ written under him and half a sun that is crying just above him. In the final picture, ‘my future,’ one sees the other half of the crying sun, a sad daisy on the ground, and a big building with the word ‘the jail’ written on it. To the right, there is barbed wire and a soldier with a gun in the background looking out of his watch tower while a sole bird flies under a sole cloud in the distance.

[552] These drawings, which are now split up from each other, were originally connected edge-to-edge. The drawings are found in *JBP*, Box 133, Folder 2979.



Figure 21. Drawing by Joseph Brodsky.



Figure 22. Drawing by Joseph Brodsky.

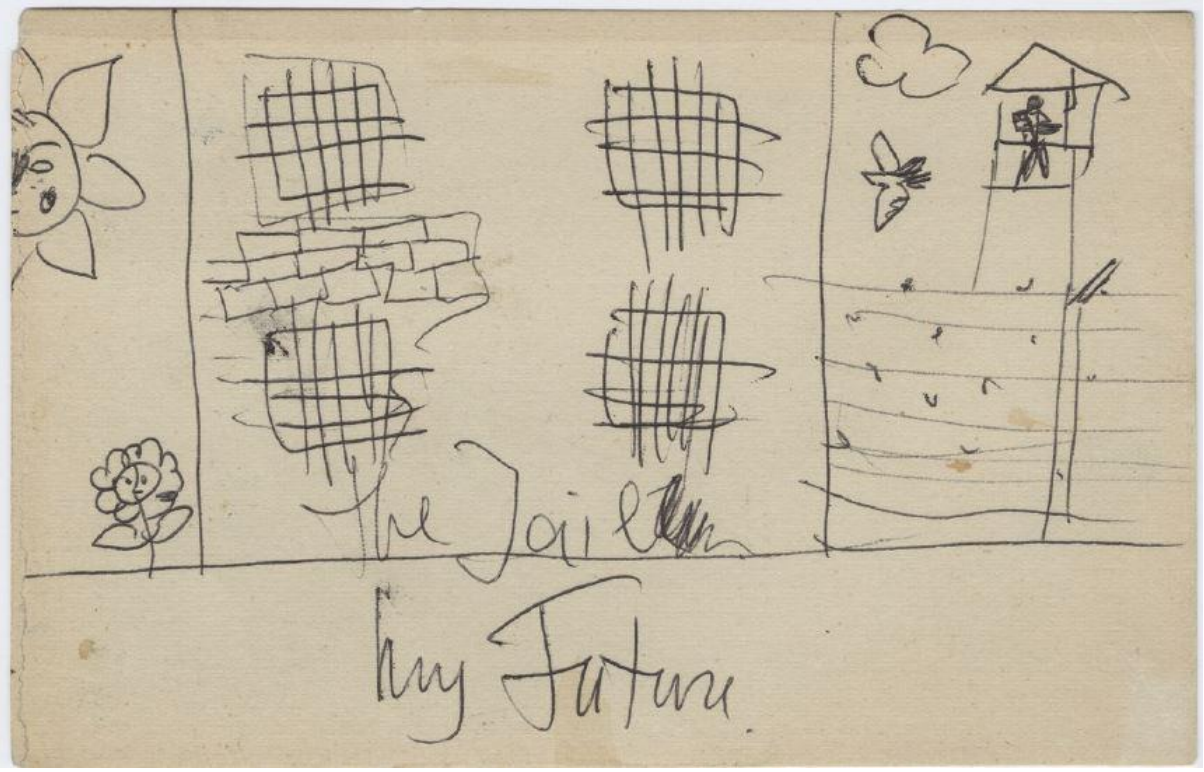


Figure 23. Drawing by Joseph Brodsky.

This image seems to express Brodsky's feelings of impossibility of escape from the grasps of the greater poet. The horse is a slave to the wishes of the coachman and has no free volition. Brodsky would likely have been aware of Pushkin's self-portraits of himself as a horse, and, if so, this could be another reference to the fact that Brodsky is seeing himself as a second Pushkin, being ordered about by the original Pushkin. Additionally, one sees the idea that poetry, symbolized by Pushkin, ss the cause of Brodsky's future banishment, an ominously prescient sentiment that Brodsky never shied away from. In this interpretation, there is nothing Brodsky can do for he has no way of escaping the shackles he is bound by. Here again though, the dark undertones are undercut by a playfulness in code-switching, a transliteration of Russian day-to-day words, and the caricature nature of the images depicted.

On a broader level, there is an affinity between the two poets since both of them liked to draw; this is the second dialogue entered into with Pushkin by Brodsky. Much like

Pushkin, Brodsky constantly drew his friends, though these drawings are not drawn in profile, as Pushkin's often were. Brodsky's drawings of his friends were realistic, an observation one can make following a comparison of these images with photographs of the individuals in question: drawings of poets and writers such as Derek Walcott,[553] Lev Losev,[554] Sergei Dovlatov,[555] and Kees Verheul[556] bear strong likenesses to them. The same may be observed in a sketch of Tomas Venclova next to a female figure, with a ship in the background and the caption, 'СУПРУГИ ВЕНЦЛОВА НА ФОНЕ КРЕЙСЕРА 'АВРОРА.''[557] These images were gifts given by Brodsky to the friends depicted in them and testify to an implicit desire to be remembered by them in the future. Though there are instances where Brodsky sees himself as Pushkin explicitly in the drawings sent or gifted to friends — this is visible in a detailed charcoal portrait of Lev Losev (Figure 24) labelled with the words 'МИХАЙЛОВ-СКОЕ 1971 год РИСОВАЛ А. ПУШКИН'[558] — it is more so the act of drawing his friends that brings him into closer proximity with the national poet.

[553] *JBP*, Box 203, Folder 4337
[554] *LLP*, Box 8 Folder 50, 'MISHENK с нежностью от Иосифа' and dated 2nd April 1995, New York, is a detailed charcoal sketch, which bears a resemblance to Lev Losev without his glasses.
[555] In Joseph Brodsky, 'About Sergei Dovlatov', *Slovo/Word*, 9, 1990, 8–14. there is a sketch of Sergei Dovlatov in profile by Brodsky with the words 'Seryozha Dovlatov v Lissabone risoval Iosif Brodskii' around it. The drawing was made during the visit to Lisbon that both Brodsky and Dovlatov made in 1988, discussed in my chapter on postcards.
[556] *JBP*, Box 193, Folder 4245.
[557] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[558] *LLP*, Box 8, Folder 49.

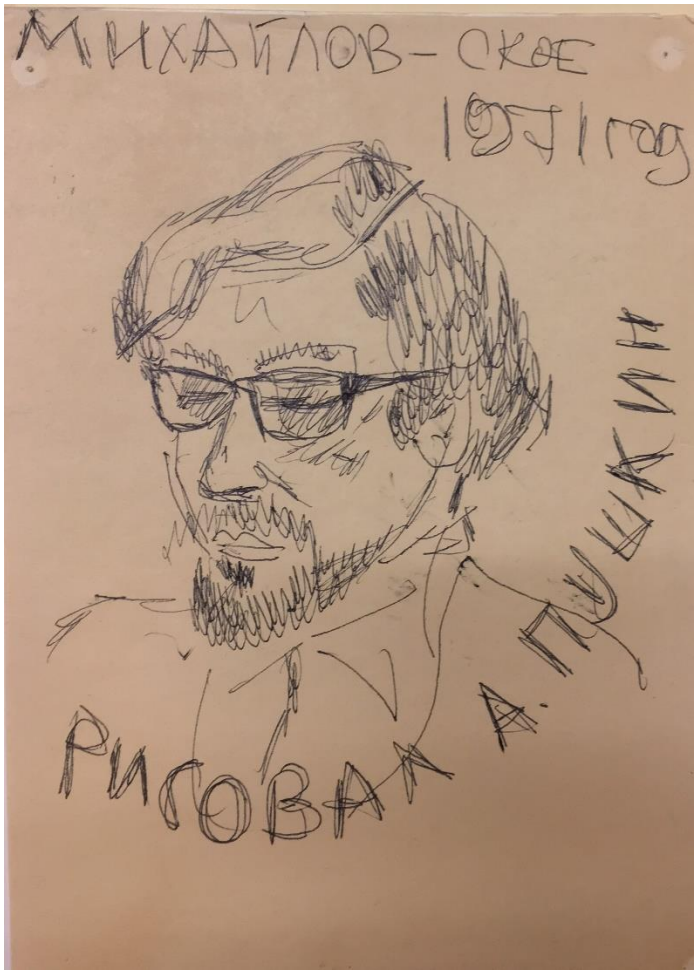


Figure 24. Drawing of Lev Losev by Joseph Brodsky.

Brodsky's drawings of Pushkin and the functions they carry out can be seen as a way of creating and projecting an image of himself to friends and family as a second Pushkin or as a continuation of the Pushkinian line in the history of Russian poetry.[559] If Pushkin drew many images, then Brodsky would also have to do the same to follow in his

[559] Indeed, there are other instances of self-promotion, even self-canonisation, that one can observe from early on. One such example is technology-related: Brodsky allowed friends who visited him in Leningrad — especially those from abroad — to record him reciting poetry. In the Beinecke Archive one finds an audio recording from 1970 made by Margo Picken of Brodsky reciting some of his poems, no doubt in the hope of getting his voice out of the USSR to a wider readership abroad, see *JBP*, Box 220, Folder 4587. Another example are the meetings he had in Leningrad from the late 1960s to 1972 with Western academics. In July 1970, for example, an American graduate student called Lynnette Labinger visited the poet on the recommendation of Peter Viereck and wrote down detailed notes of the encounter for Viereck. In the notes, Brodsky discusses poetry and literature and Labinger says that 'He talked about his poetry--jokingly--but at the same time he said it was good,' *PVP*, Box 90, Folder 37. Labinger also points out that Brodsky gave her a photograph of himself to give to Viereck and jotted a note to him on the back of it. Aside from these two instances, Brodsky would also send poems abroad with personalised sign-offs.

footsteps.[560] By mimicking Pushkin's activities, Brodsky may be betraying a desire to become Pushkin's heir, in a similar vein to his emulation of W. H. Auden analysed in my chapter on photography. By drawing Pushkin and by mirroring the reasons why Pushkin himself drew, Brodsky speaks about, and assesses, his relationship with the deceased poet in a way he did not wish to engage with in public.

References to Pushkin in Brodsky's texts have been covered in detail elsewhere.[561] The issue in our case is why Brodsky tries to deny, or play down, the relationship he has with the poet in public pronouncements.[562] In interviews and talks, Brodsky would often offer an anti-Pushkinian view of poetry of the Golden Age, preferring to sing the praises of Yevgeny Baratynsky and other more 'marginal' poets writing at the same time.[563] This disavowal may have been a reaction to the lauding of the poet by the Soviet state which accelerated following the centennial celebrations, in 1937, of the poet's death and continued apace until the 1950s and 1960s Soviet Russia. This is also partly due to Brodsky's anti-establishment tendencies: he never openly professed a love for figures who were part of the school programme in Soviet Russia, authors he was obliged to read as part of his studies. A rebellion against these authors was the result of a rebellion against state

[560] For a discussion of how Brodsky was mythologised during his lifetime by fellow Russian poets see Valentina Polukhina, 'The Myth of the Poet and the Poet of the Myth', in *Russian Writers on Russian Writers*, ed. by Faith Wigzell (Oxford ; Providence, RI: Berg, 1994), pp. 139–59.
[561] Some works on this much-discussed topic include D. S., 'Pushkin i Brodskii', in *Poetika Brodskogo*, ed. by Lev Losev (Tenafly, NJ, 1986), pp. 207–18; Alexander Zholkovsky, *Text Counter Text: Rereadings in Russian Literary History* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 117–46; *Iosif Brodskii: trudy i dni*, ed. by Petr Vail' and Lev Losev (Izdatel'stvo Nezavisimaya gazeta, 1998), pp. 13–39; Ekaterina Semenova, 'Eshche o Pushkine i Brodskom', in *Iosif Brodskii i mir: metafizika, antichnost', sovremennost'*, ed. by Yakov Gordin and I. A. Murav′eva (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo zhurnala «Zvezda», 2000), pp. 131–38; Ranchin, pp. 200–284; Rebecca Pyatkevich, 'Erecting Monuments, Real and Imagined: Brodsky's Monuments to Pushkin Within the Context of Soviet Culture', *Ulbandus Review*, 12 (2009), 161–82; Andrew Kahn, 'Ovid and Russia's Poets of Exile', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, ed. by John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands (Chichester, West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), pp. 401–15; Yakov Gordin, *Pushkin. Brodskii. Imperiya i sud'ba*, 2 vols (Moscow: Vremya, 2016).
[562] One of (if not) the last letters Brodsky ever wrote, dated 3 January 1996, was to his friend Jim Rice, and concerned, nearly exclusively, Pushkin. In the letter Brodsky tells Rice that he has recently reread Pushkin's *Istoriya sela Goryukhino* and that 'Reading him [Pushkin] makes one realise how much the Russian prose has disgraced itself in this century,' *JBP*, Box 12, Folder 337. A Russian translation of this letter can be found at Joseph Brodsky, 'Iosif Brodskii: pis'mo Dzheimsu Raisu', in *Iosif Brodskii: trudy i dni*, ed. by Petr Vail' and Lev Losev, trans. by Lev Losev (Izdatel'stvo Nezavisimaya gazeta, 1998), pp. 21–23.
[563] Brodsky always spoke highly of Baratynsky, most notably in his Nobel Lecture.

authorities.[564] The preference for mainstream, Western films that Brodsky professed could be seen in the same light: he admired these works as they went contra to state-funded cinema. One potential reason for Brodsky's downplaying of his relationship with Pushkin should be dismissed outright though: that he was not an admirer of Pushkin.

As David Bethea has observed, there is a disconnect between what Brodsky says about Pushkin in public and what he gives voice to in private, 'JB [Brodsky] was very aware of the Pushkinian "fatidic" element in his life and work: the birthdays, […] their exiles, their focus on empire, their intense but haphazard ways of educating themselves, their early and numerous unhappy love affairs and then December marriages, etc.'[565] This has also been noted by Evgeny Dobrenko who links Pushkin's identity creation with Brodsky's approach to the same issue: 'the way in which he [Brodsky] shaped his own image to escape the bounds of the 'national tradition', narrowly understood, and his literary independence were also part of Pushkin's legacy. […] Brodsky was the first of the great poets to begin playing with the Pushkin myth.'[566] On a purely biographical level, one can see Brodsky highlighting, or copying, certain aspects common to both his biography and that of the Russian national poet. Some examples include: his Don Juan list, his recall of Akhmatova's reaction to her reading of his 'Bol'shaya elegiya Dzhonu Donnu,' which was reminiscent of Derzhavin heaping praises on the young Pushkin at the Lycée, and his superstitious belief in dates and numbers. To this, one can also now add Brodsky's love of drawing.

Brodsky's sketches show how behind his poems, essays, and public pronouncements, there was a more intimate dialogue taking place between himself and Pushkin: the dialogue in drawings with Pushkin allowed him to imaginatively communicate with the

[564] Losev, *Iosif Brodskii: Opyt literaturnoi biografii*, p. 43.
[565] Polukhina and Bethea, p. 147.
[566] Evgeny Dobrenko, 'Pushkin in Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Pushkin*, ed. by Andrew Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 202–20 (p. 215).

dead poet in a private and intimate manner. What one does not find in his writings — an ironic mocking of himself as a second Pushkin and a vision of himself as national poet — one sees in the drawings.

Brodsky's cats

Aside from the dialogues with Pushkin in the drawings, the most striking feature about Brodsky's images is the abundance of cats depicted; Brodsky was a 'cat person' throughout his life. The large number of felines found — Brodsky never draws dogs — forces one to ask why he draws so many of them and how this act plays into his various self-perceptions? On the surface, this activity is somewhat out of character for a poet who is often preoccupied by metaphysical and philosophical debates in his written works. In what follows I suggest that these drawings allow him to act out a more playful part of his character which would have been out of place in his writing.

There is much biographical context to the cat imagery: Brodsky had cats as pets throughout his life. Though Brodsky adored these animals,[567] the choice of a cat as a pet was also socially conditioned; cats were suited to life in Soviet, communal flats and more at home in small, enclosed spaces than dogs. In 'Zof'ya,' one sees them strewn around an internal spaces, 'кот на калорифере урчал,'[568] playfully moving around, 'Я пятился, и пятилось окно. | Кот прыгнул в освещенное пятно,' [569] and lying around in a carefree manner, 'Кот сумрачно под лампою лежал.'[570] This cat imagery would have been taken from that which he saw around him. One of the cats the Brodsky family had was called Joseph, and this cat is visible in several photographs the poet used for publicity purposes

[567] Lyudmila Shtern dedicates a chapter to her memoirs about Brodsky to Pasik, the name he gave to a cat belonging to Lyudmila Shtern's mother, see Shtern, pp. 87–95.
[568] Brodsky, II, p. 151.
[569] Brodsky, II, p. 154.
[570] Brodsky, II, p. 155.

when abroad. When he moved to the USA, Brodsky continued to look after cats: he had a ginger cat called Smudge, a potential link to the poet, since Brodsky was often called 'ginger-haired' in his youth.[571] He also had a grey-and-white called Mississippi.[572] Both cats often feature in the background of photographs or in photograph portraits of the poet.[573] Images of cats, and lions, abound in photographs and postcards found amongst Brodsky's possessions. In items from South Hadley, one finds a postcard showing a photograph of the tomb sculpture of a lion from Ancient Greece,[574] and among items from Morton Street there is a postcard of a winged lion,[575] and a postcard depicting Joseph Stalin with a cat superimposed next to him.[576]

Brodsky would often identify himself as a cat in communications with close friends.[577] In an interview with the *Financial Times*, Mikhail Baryshnikov, someone Brodsky mentored when he defected from the USSR in June 1974, discusses an image of Brodsky he has in his possession:

> A portrait of Brodsky hangs in Baryshnikov's pied-à-terre a few blocks away. He had asked the poet to caption it on his 40th birthday: "Our native land is wide, it's vast. Though neither Mouse nor Cat felt like living there to see their 40th." "It's very witty in Russian," Baryshnikov says. It is also deeply personal. Brodsky called the diminutive Baryshnikov "Mouse", which in Russian sounds like Misha, Baryshnikov's nickname. The older, larger Brodsky was "Cat".[578]

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[571] A famous, damning newspaper article about Brodsky, where he was accused of living a parasitic way of life, begins with a description of him as ginger-haired: 'Несколько лет назад в окололитературных кругах Ленинграда появился молодой человек, именовавший себя стихотворцем. […] Зимой он ходил без головного убора, и снежок беспрепятственно припудривал его рыжеватые волосы' A. Ionin, Ya. Lerner, and M. Medvedev, 'Okololiteraturnyi truten'', *Vechernii Leningrad* (Leningrad, 29 November 1963).

[572] A recent book uses a sketch Brodsky made of this cat as a springboard for a fantastical trip around the world meeting the poet's friends and family, see Mark Yakovlev, *Odisseya kota Brodskogo* (Moscow: AST, 2019).

[573] *JBP*, Box 160, Folders 3640–3642.

[574] *JBP*, Box 141, Folder 3115.

[575] *JBP*, Box 141, Folder 3117.

[576] *JBP*, Box 141, Folder 3117.

[577] Cats were often the subject of conversation between Brodsky and his friends. In a letter sent to Brodsky, dated 24 July 1984, Carl Proffer tells Brodsky about how his daughter, Arabella, named a neighbour's cat 'Sasha.' Proffer goes on to give Brodsky other cat-related details and news (*JBP*, Box 1, Folder 27).

[578] Neil Munshi, 'Poetry and Motion: Mikhail Baryshnikov on Joseph Brodsky', *Financial Times*, 17 March 2017 <https://www.ft.com/content/61e68bd4-0906-11e7-97d1-5e720a26771b> [accessed 16 April 2021].

‘We miss you terribly, too bad you chose the Caribbean… kisses kitty Joseph, The cat was fussy today (Fussy pussy!)’ is written to Masha Vorobiov on the back of a postcard, dated 26 December 1992, which features a drawing of cat with its paws on an open book.[579] The self-identification with cats was prevalent with more professional contacts too: ‘Ann, could you possibly reschedule my departure for June 18th Joseph’ is written above a drawing of an outstretched cat in a note to his personal secretary Ann Kjellberg from 1989.[580]

The self-comparison to a cat is continually associated with wordplay and word games as seen in correspondence with Diana Myers. In several letters to Myers, Brodsky plays on the interlingual pun between the English word ‘kiss’ and the Russian words ‘kisa’ (‘kitty’/’pussy cat’) and ‘kis-kis’ (a transliteration into Russian of ‘kiss kiss’); he also often refers to Myers herself as ‘kisa.’[581] The poet Paul Muldoon ends his poem ‘The Hug,’ written immediately after Brodsky’s death in 1996, with the lines ‘I guess, the Caucasus | threw its arms around me in the Ursulaplatz | with what was surely your ‘Kisses, kisses, kisses.’’[582] The ‘kisses’ reference in the poem reflects the private cat-related puns used with Myers.

Brodsky’s cat-like turns of phrase can be traced back to childhood and life in Leningrad where the poet would use such language within the home. In ‘In a Room and a Half’ he remembers that:

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[579] *JBP*, Box 16, 428.
[580] *JBP*, Box 24, 623.
[581] See, for example, *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 8. Additionally, Brodsky used such turns of phrase with lovers. As Masha Slonim recalls, ‘Я помню его кису в Питере, потом в Нью-Йорке… И всех своих любимых женщин он тоже «кисами» называл,’ Masha Slonim and Yuri Leving, ‘“Brodskii s prelestyami, slabostyami i genial’nost’yu”: K 80-letiyu Iosifa Brodskogo: interv’yu s Mashei Slonim’, *Colta.Ru*, 25 May 2020 <https://www.colta.ru/articles/literature/24505-iosif-brodskiy-80-let-masha-slonim-intervyu> [accessed 23 July 2021].
[582] Paul Muldoon, ‘The Hug’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 9 February 1996, p. 31.

> We called her [his mother] "Marusya," "Manya," "Maneczka" (my father's and her sisters' diminutives for her), and "Masya" or "Keesa," which were my inventions. With the years, the last two acquired a greater currency, and even my father began to address her in this way. […] "Keesa" is a slightly endearing form for a female cat, and she resisted being addressed in this way for quite some time. "Don't you dare call me that!" she would exclaim angrily. "And in general, stop using these feline pet words of yours! Else you'll end up having cat brains!" […] "Keesa," however, stuck to her, especially when she got really old. Rotund, wrapped in a couple of brown shawls, with her terribly kind, soft face, she looked very cuddly and very much self-contained.[583]

Brodsky then tells us that when he was young, he would 'enunciate in a catlike fashion certain words' and that by the time he was fifteen 'there was a great deal of meowing' in the home. He and his father would address themselves and each other as 'Big Cat' and 'Little Cat' and various variations of meow sounds would be used between them to express different emotions and feelings.

The playful nature the poet associates with cats in comments in his autobiographical recollections, alongside the biographical points established, is fully reflected in his drawings. His caricatures of cats are impish and affectionate, and are nearly always shown with a smile on their faces. In the archives of Diana Myers, there are sketches of a cat with its eyes inside the eyes of two bicycle wheels,[584] one lying next to a telephone,[585] the phrase 'Ночью мы пили с одной девицей' written down on a separate piece of paper with two small cat heads drawn near it,[586] and a sketch of two cats looking straight at the viewer, drawn in red.[587] In a diary from the early 1980s, we find a slightly moodier cat sketched with black ink on the side of a page.[588]

Brodsky's cats are nearly always depicted in the same way: the cats are plump, curled up, with their tails swooping around them and drawn with a simple outline, at times with a

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[583] Brodsky, 'In a Room and a Half', pp. 486–87.
[584] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[585] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[586] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[587] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[588] *JBP*, Box 134, Folder 2989.

striped or tabby pattern. When Brodsky wants to emphasize his association with them, he gives them rounded glasses, a cigarette, and or a book to hold or write in. To say that when Brodsky draws or refers to these animals he is referring to himself is no overstatement; Valentina Polukhina even remembers being told by Count Girolamo Marcello, one of Brodsky's Venetian friends at whose home he often stayed, that Brodsky once said that when he died, he would visit him as a ginger cat.[589]

The cat images one finds lead one to see them also as visual signatures of the poet: they are found in inscriptions in his own books gifted to friends, or on copied-out poetic manuscripts or letters. Around a drawing of a cat sent to Anna Priddy, one reads the words 'TENDER REGARDS TO ANNA Priddy from Missisippi [*sic*] THE CAT FEB 14TH 1992.'[590] In two further book dedications one finds 'For my dear Sylvia with great tenderness and devotion Joseph Brodsky' written underneath a cat with his paws on an open book and 'September 27th 1993, Amsterdam' written around the cat,[591] and 'For my dear Helen with Tenderness and devotion' written above a cat with his paws on an open book and the words 'Joseph Brodsky, Oct. 22nd 1992' around him and 'New York' written above. [592] In these instances, the image and the accompanying words act together like an insignia.[593]

In terms of cat drawings received by friends, mentions should be made of those received by Brodsky's friend and academic Bengt Jangfeldt. In documents received from Brodsky one observes an image of a reclining cat with a quill in its paw dominating a picture with a seascape behind.[594] The sea is labelled 'БАЛТИСКОЕ МОРЕ' and

[589] Valentina Polukhina, 'The Poet's Meow', ed. by Alexander Deriev, *Ars Interpres: An International Journal of Poetry, Translation & Art*, 3, 2004, 111–13 (p. 112).
[590] *JBP*, Box 11, Folder 313.
[591] *JBP*, Box 193, Folder 4245.
[592] *JBP*, Box 141, Folder 3094.
[593] A large collection of book inscriptions written by Brodsky can be found at *JBP*, Box 141, Folders 3093–99. These can also be found in various places in *IHP*, Box 1.
[594] *BJP*, Box 4.

‘СТОКГОЛЬМ’ and across the cat the words one reads the words ‘ВНУТРЕНЯЯ СУЩНОСТЬ ИОСИФА БРОДСКОГО.’ In the book, the cat is writing out some lines from a 1962 poem by Brodsky ‘Я ОБНЯЛ ЭТИ ПЛЕЧИ И ВЗГЛЯНУЛ НА ТО, ЧТО ОКАЗАЛОСЬ ЗА СПИНОЙ’ and one also reads the words ‘8-Е СЕНТЯБРЯ 1994 ГОД.’ On a separate page to Jangfeldt (Figure 25), there is a cat with a cigarette in its mouth, and rounded glasses, holding an envelope titled ‘FOR SARA JANGFELDT.[595] If to more distant friends the cat image is effectively copied and pasted onto book inscriptions or dedications, to individuals dearer to his heart, such as Myers and Jangfeldt, the poet sends more personalized and intimate variations of himself as a cat.

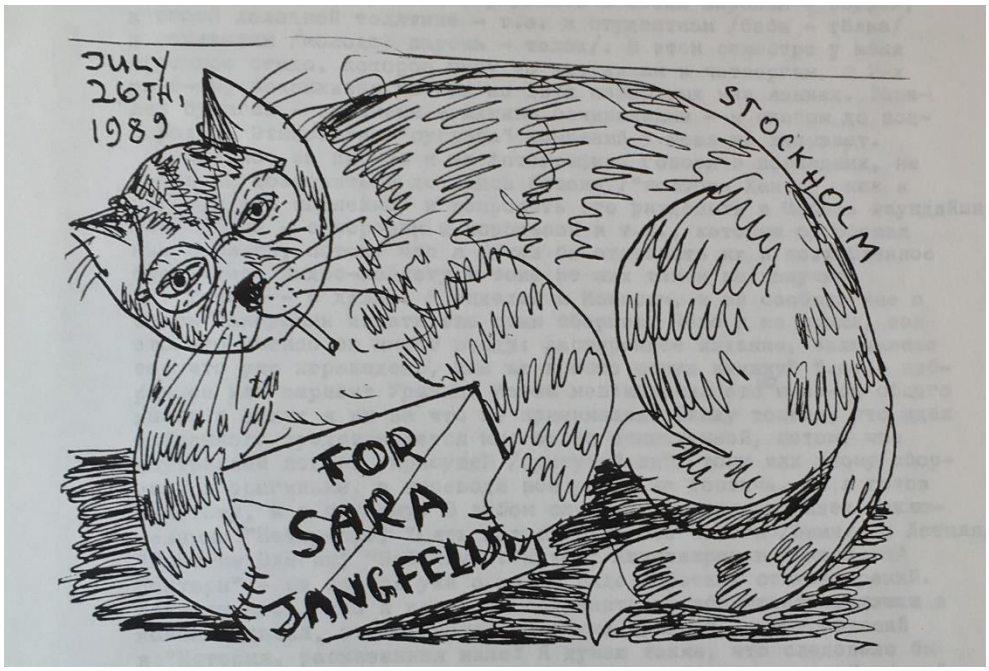


Figure 25. Drawing of a cat by Joseph Brodsky.

A cat is also a relative of another animal for Brodsky: the lion. In one sketch there is an upright lion, in glasses, smoking a cigarette and reading a book with the words ‘Joseph Brodsky’ written on his tail; this image is given the title ‘THE NON CZECHOSLOVAC

[595] *BJP*, Box 4.

[*sic*] LION' and the cat appears with an angel with a trumpet flying above its head.[596] A smiling lion in the sun with a sword by his paws is seen elsewhere in one of many drawings of lions held by Romas Katilius, one of the poet's Lithuanian friends.[597] In four other sketches to Katilius, one sees a lion undressing a woman with the progression of the scene documented in each image. One image is entitled 'СТАРЫЙ ДАГЕРРОТИП' and another 'ЕЩЕ БОЛЕЕ СТАРЫЙ ДАГЕРРОТИП.'[598] In the final image, the lion has fully undressed the reluctant woman, he is wearing her underwear, and she is sitting by a palm tree looking into the distance. To the set of adjectives already associated with the cat and lion for Brodsky, one can also add the words 'mischievous' and 'frisky'.

The playful cat is interchangeable with the playful lion, though there is also a bookish nature that connects the characters of both animals, and Brodsky, with them.[599] At one point during *Progulki s Brodskim*, a documentary made about him, filmed in Venice in November 1993, the poet makes the following remark: 'Что такое кот на самом деле в Италии и в Риме? Особенно в Риме это очевидно. Это такой, как бы сказать, сокращенный лев, да. Так же как мы — сокращенные христиане, да?'[600] At the end of a manuscript of the essay 'Homage to Marcus Aurelius,' one finds a cat lying down with his paws on a book.[601] At the top of a copy of the poem 'Ekloga 5-ya' (1981) (Figure 26), sent as a gift to his friend Kees Verheul, there is a cat with its right paw on an open book. There is a cathedral in the background which resembles St Peter's Cathedral (this may be a sketch of Kazan Cathedral in St Petersburg instead), and a sun with a cat's face. The book

[596] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[597] *KP*, Box 7, Folder 8.
[598] *KP*, Box 7, Folder 8.
[599] Pushkin's storyteller, 'кот учёный,' may also have been in Brodsky's mind when developing these associations.
[600] *Progulki s Brodskim i tak dalee: Iosif Brodskii v fil'me Alekseya Shishova i Eleny Yakovich*, ed. by Elena Yakovich (Moscow: AST: Corpus, 2017), p. 87. This book is predominantly made up of a transcript of conversations with Brodsky in the documentary film.
[601] *JBP*, Box 80, Folders 1964–68.

reads ‘PAX TIBI KEES’[602] and serves to reinforce the set of connections between cats, lions, Ancient and Modern Rome, St Petersburg, imperial might, and the written word. To this one should add Venice, for the image of a lion with a paw resting on an open book with the words ‘PAX TIBI MARCE EVANGELISTA MEVS’ is the symbol and signature of the city and St Mark, its city’s protector and guardian. This set of allusions and meanings grew over time in the drawings and is not particularly prevalent in documents found prior to his departure to the West in 1972. Following initial visits to Italy in 1973, these sets of images increase in number.

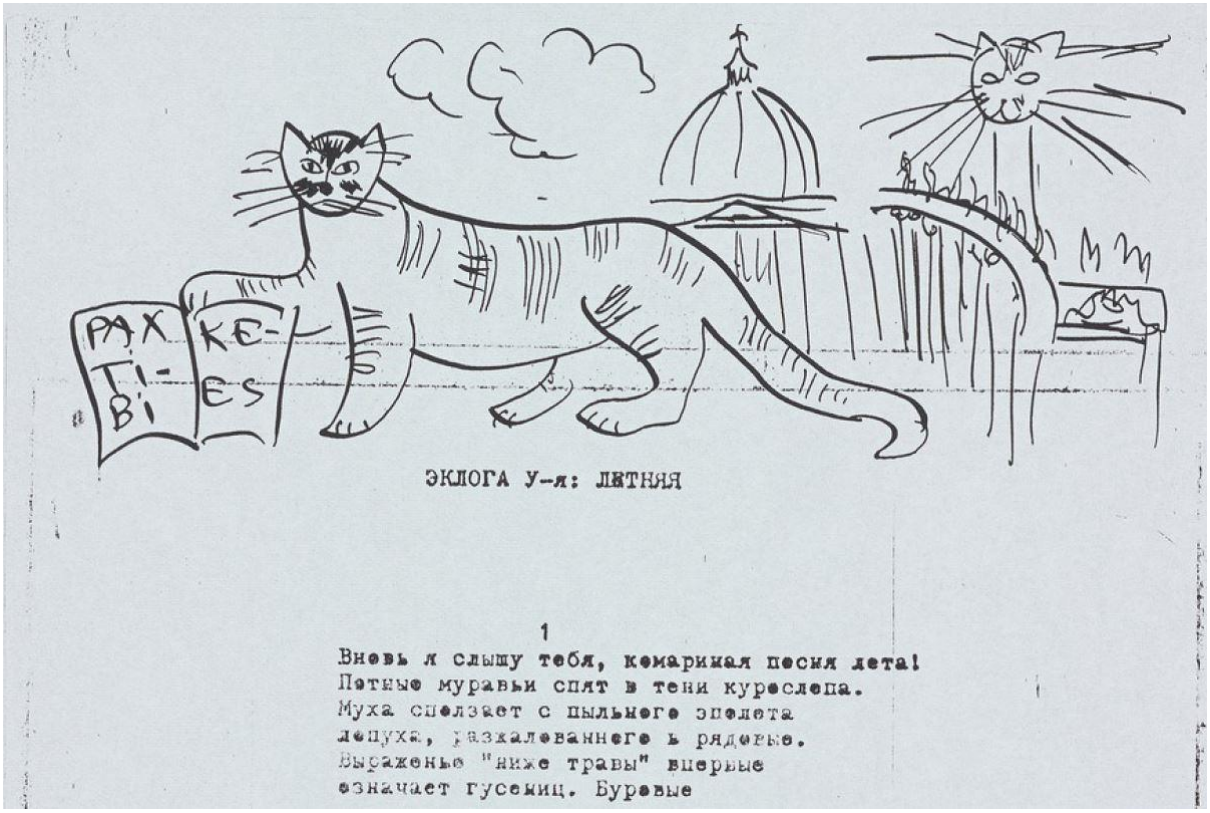


Figure 26. Drawing of a cat by Joseph Brodsky.

This interpretation of the thematic and visual connections that the poet may have in mind is reinforced by the images he chose to use on the book sleeves of his work. As well

[602] *JBP*, Box 193, Folder 4245.

as offering to his publishers detailed feedback on manuscript copies of his collections, on the position of his texts on the page, the size of the margins, and the spacing between the lines, the poet was intimately involved with the designs of his book jackets. On the front of *Less Than One*, first published in 1986 with Farrar, Straus and Giroux, one sees a black-and-white photograph of a lion on a metal gate with fire coming out of its mouth.[603] A colour photograph of the same lion was also found in Brodsky's house in South Hadley.[604] In a previous book design he rejected — the poet was very much in charge of all aspects of the publication of his works[605] — there was also a lion, except that this image was a silhouette of the animal with its paw on a globe.[606] The use of animals on book covers was repeated by Brodsky for his 1995 prose collection *On Grief and Reason*, also originally published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux; the back cover of this book features a black-and-white photograph of Brodsky holding a cat in his arms.

As shown, over time, cats are associated progressively with lions for Brodsky and bring with them their own cultural, religious, and aesthetic associations. The changing of cats into lions, and the morphing of the poet into these animals, underlines what Gerald Smith has called 'one of Brodsky's most obsessive concepts'[607] — metamorphosis. Even though the attentive reader would have noted photographs of Brodsky with cats, and understood that he had a liking for these animals and the symbolism associated with them and lions, it is nonetheless surprising to see how widespread his representation of these animals is in his drawings are. By making the cat, and the lion, stand in for him, Brodsky

[603] Brodsky sent a postcard to Nancy Meiselas which featured the Lion of St Mark. On the postcard Brodsky writes, 'Dear Nancy, Here's the beast. However don't consider him for the cover [the reference is most likely a reference to the sleeve of *Less than One*]: the nose is a bit too Jewish,' see *JBP*, Box 5, Folder 135.
[604] *JBP*, Box 141, Folder 3116
[605] The poet's desire to control not only the ordering of the poems in his books of poetry but also the look of the poems on the page and the images on the front and back covers is emphasised by George Kline in *The Man Who Brought Brodsky into English*.
[606] *JBP*, Box 70, Folder 1836
[607] G. S. Smith, 'The Versification of Joseph Brodsky, 1988–89', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 80.3 (2002), 417–38 (p. 420).

is giving a self-portrait through symbols, and allowing a joyous and playful side of his character to come to the fore in private communications predominantly with friends and family, external to the poetic text.

Brodsky's preference for cats could also reflect a more philosophical character trait: he may have liked cats for he sympathized with their presumed 'world-view.' In his book *Feline Philosophy: Cats and the Meaning of Life*, the philosopher John Gray says that 'Cats have no need of philosophy. Obeying their nature, they are content with the life it gives them. In humans, on the other hand, discontent with their nature seems to be natural.'[608] It is this idea Brodsky seems to espouse as regards the issue of exile, a topic he was frequently questioned about. In his essay 'The Condition We Call Exile, or Acorns Aweigh' (1987) he states that 'if there is anything good about exile, it is that it teaches one humility.'[609] This was an attitude the poet would always remind his readers about, and one which is reflected in his private correspondence through his self-associations with felines.

Surprisingly, given the above, cats appear only fleetingly in Brodsky's poetry and are often relegated to the background when mentioned.[610] They are shown to be asleep, 'В подвалах кошки спят, торчат их уши. | Спят мыши, люди ('Bol'shaya elegiya Dzhonu Donnu'),[611] or lounging, 'Что говорит с печалью в лице | кошке, усевшейся на крыльце, | снегирь, не спуская с последней глаз?' ('Pis'mo v butylke' (1964)).[612] They are curious animals, 'В полдень кошки заглядывают под скамейки, проверяя, черны ли | тени' ('Dekabr' vo Florentsii'),[613] though remain relatively silent 'Так ходики,

[608] John Gray, *Feline Philosophy: Cats and the Meaning of Life* (UK: Allen Lane, 2020), p. 2.
[609] Joseph Brodsky, 'The Condition We Call Exile, or Acorns Aweigh', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 20–30 (p. 22).
[610] Lev Losev observes that that which often lacks in his poetry, is that which he loves the most, an idea I suggested lies behind his lack of open dialogue with Pushkin in his writings: 'Будучи большим кошколюбом, Иосиф серьезных стихов о кошках не писал (так же, как в его зрелом творчестве нет стихов, посвященных любимому городу),' Losev, *Meandr: memuarnaya proza*, p. 26.
[611] Brodskii, I, p. 115.
[612] Brodskii, I, p. 221.
[613] Brodskii, I, p. 438.

оставив в стороне | от жизни два кошачьих изумруда, | молчат' ('Severnaya pochta' (1964)).[614]

Instead, it is often dogs who are placed at centre stage in the poetry: 'Псы сторожевые | конечно, заливали все ущелье | тоскливым лаем: кошки перестали | в мешке скандалить и почти притихли' ('Post aetatem nostram').[615] These animals are endowed with the ability to sense historical continuity, as in 'Ostanovka v pustyne' (1966):

> Вот так, по старой памяти, собаки
> на прежнем месте задирают лапу.
> Ограда снесена давным-давно,
> но им, должно быть, грезится ограда.
> Их грезы перечеркивают явь.
> А может быть, земля хранит тот запах:
> асфальту не осилить запах псины.[616]

Though lions are more prominent in Brodsky's poetry than cats — one can see their central presence in poems such as 'Fontan,' 'Laguna' (1973) as well as mentions in 'Post aetatem nostram' and 'Rezidentsiya' (1983) — in no place do these lions have the playful, joyful qualities they are endowed with in the drawings. In fact, of all the types of images of cats and lions seen in Brodsky's drawings, Brodsky keeps the more serious and austere ones associated with concerns of empire, Rome, and St Petersburg, and rejects all other possible iterations in his published works.[617] When looking at his depictions of these animals, there is thus a separation between the public Brodsky — the renowned poet dealing with existential issues in his literary works — and the private Brodsky — a

[614] Brodsky, II, p. 87.
[615] Brodskii, I, p. 353.
[616] Brodskii, I, p. 231.
[617] A notable set of exceptions to this conclusion are Brodsky's poems for children and occasional poems where one finds 'Samson, domashnii kot' and the Eliot-like poem 'Aria koshek.' Losev tells us that prior to emigration, Brodsky was readying a book of his children's poems for publication but gave up on this project when he left the USSR, see Brodskii, II, p. 623.

mischievous, cheeky individual who was happy to show himself as a humorous cat, or mock himself as a serious writer in the form of the bookish lion.

Brodsky's self-portraits

The final group of images are self-portraits. These images may be split into two separate subgroups: self-portraits that recognisably depict Brodsky, and less obvious self-portraits where the poet sees himself as part of the classical world. In these images the poet faces up to and reflects on his appearance and also projects an ironic view of himself as a poet from antiquity.

If the various recognisable self-portraits are taken and placed in chronological order, the viewer sees the poet getting gradually older with time; these images act as photographs. They are snapshots of how Brodsky looked at a given moment in time, though one should temper this impression by mentioning their sometimes caricature-like qualities. This group of images emphasizes the sensitive self-reflexivity of Brodsky as a viewer, consciously aware, and wanting to make himself and others aware, of the way he looked over time. In this set of images, one often encounters aspects of his environment reflected or noted in the drawings. This is especially common in his drawings made during his stay in Norinskaya, where one finds depictions of wooden, village houses, meadows, birds, and rural wildlife. In these settings, Brodsky draws himself with a scruffy beard, and he is usually seen writing by candlelight under windows overlooking natural landscapes. When comparing drawings from Norinskaya with photos taken of the poet at the time, one sees the resemblance between both sets of images.

Such an impression does not fade with time, and the realistic reflection of facial traits, in particular, becomes more detailed in the drawings. In an image drawn on an envelope, an image that is undated and seems to depict the poet in the late 1960s, Brodsky is seen

reading. It is the face which is given the most detail and the body is drawn with a more general outline (Figure 27).[618] On the reverse of the envelope, there is a zoomed in section of the face drawn: an eye with the bridge of the nose, an eyebrow, and wrinkles on the forehead. In a sketch at the bottom of a letter to Lev Losev from 1974, one finds Brodsky sitting in profile with a pen in his hand, and a window looking out on the New York skyline (Figure 28).[619] In a different sketch with the subtitle 'Self-portrait in Villa Borghese. Suspicious like Hell,' Brodsky faces the viewer with some trees in the background.[620] He has a somewhat stern look and depicts detail in his receding hairline, wrinkles on his face and slight stubble on his chin. Apart from the trees, there is nothing else visible in the background and if one were not told about his location, one would not know where he was; the focus on the face over the locale takes precedent. In an image of himself in profile, drawn in notes for his translation of sections of Euripides's *Medea* into Russian,[621] one witnesses the same phenomenon. Brodsky's attention to detail of his own face is striking in his drawings, something also seen in drawings of the faces of friends.

[618] *JBP*, Box 133, Folder 2985.
[619] *LLP*, Box 1 Folder 6.
[620] *JBP*, Box 133, Folder 2983.
[621] *JBP*, Box 61, Folder 1287.



Figure 27. Self-portrait by Joseph Brodsky.

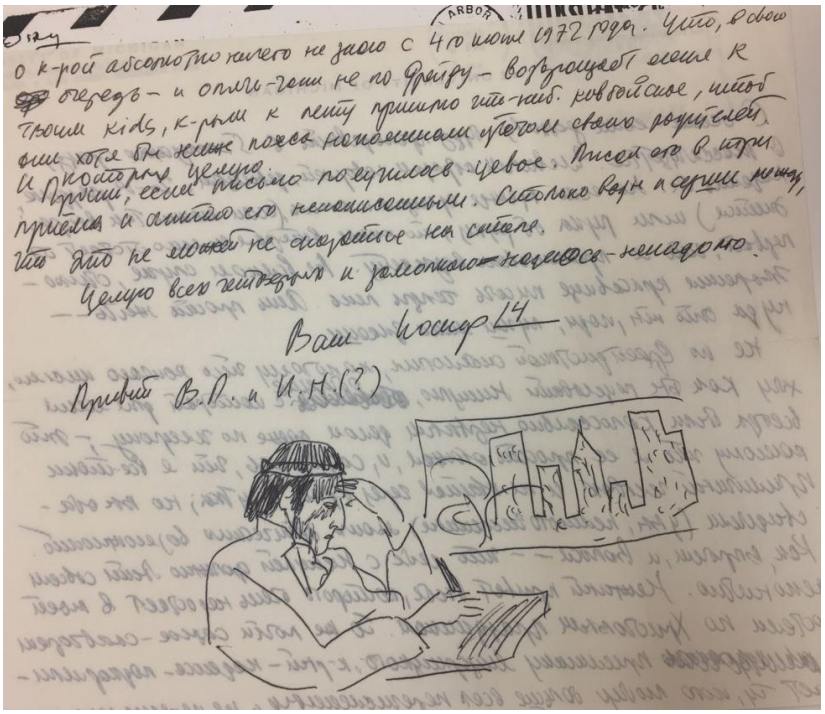


Figure 28. Self-portrait by Joseph Brodsky.

As seen in the image sent to Carl Proffer, an image with which I began this chapter, images of the self can be less serious, self-deprecating, and humorous, even when they are drawn in a realistic way. In a note to Andrew Blane (Figure 29), his neighbour at Morton Street, a self-portrait in profile is drawn in red pen accompanied by the words 'NOV 11 1979 Dear Andrew, THANK you very much P.S. New (dark red) blanket is fine' and 'WHAT ESTATE J SO EVER BE | TIMOR MORTIS CONTURBAT ME (XVth cent. anonym).'[622] The first set of words are in a speech bubble, and the second set is written at the bottom of the sketch; the poet's name is written on the bridge of the nose. As with the drawing to Proffer, the image is involved in various dialogues at the same time. The first set of words are addressed to Andrew Blane as New York cohabitant. The second set are talking to Andrew Blane as academic; Blane taught Russian history at the City University of New York, had degrees from Cambridge University and Duke University, and was part of the Amnesty International team that won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. The phrase 'TIMOR MORTIS CONTURBAT ME' ('the fear of death disturbs me') is most likely a reference to William Dunbar's fifteenth-century poem 'Lament for the Makaris' which features the Latin phrase as a poetic refrain. Finally, one can see how Brodsky is also showing off his drawing skills to his friend in the realistic image he gives him of himself.

[622] *JBP*, Box 3, Folder 64.

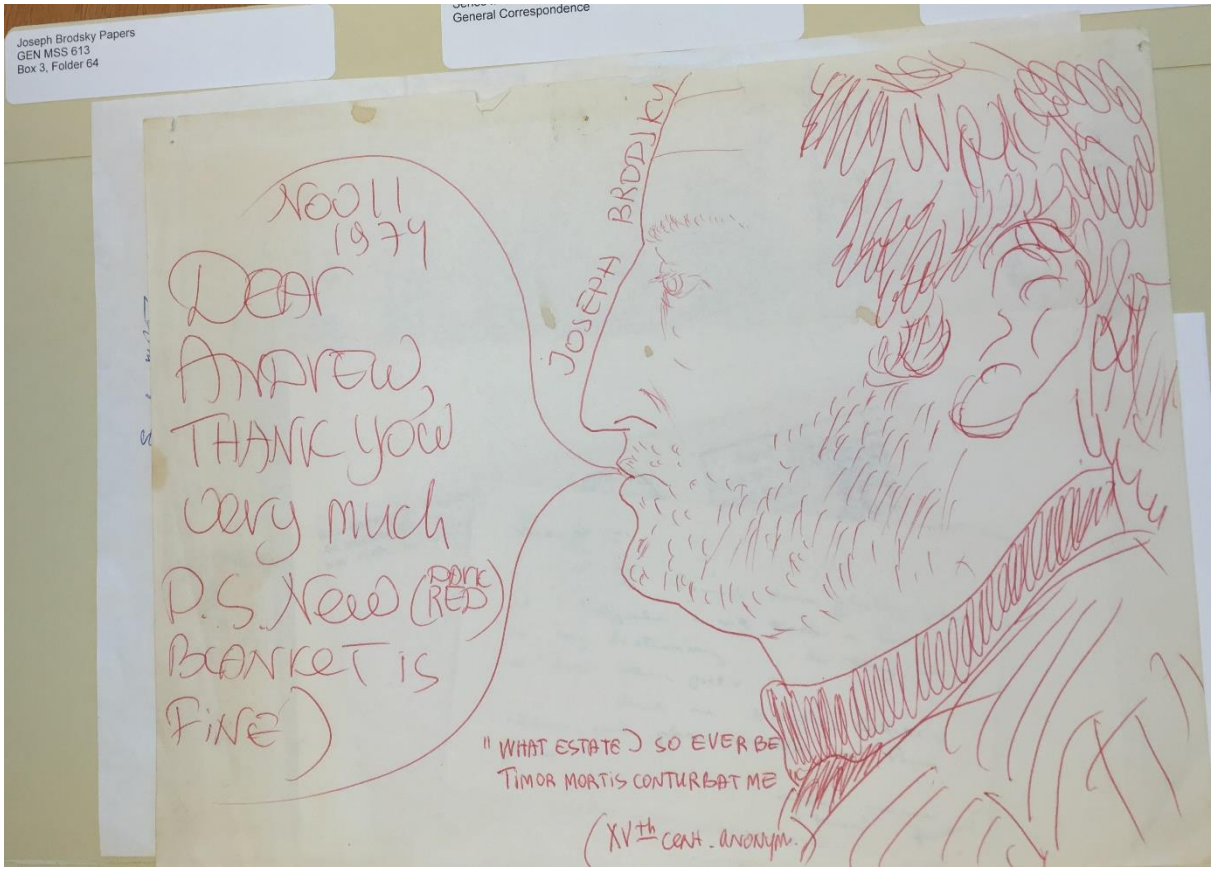


Figure 29. Self-portrait by Joseph Brodsky.

To see these images solely as mirrors of specific moments would be erroneous as sometimes Brodsky sees himself as a part of the classical world. One sees instances of individuals, mainly males, with laurels on their heads and lyres by their sides; these individuals are often shown in a style redolent of Picasso's line drawings. Like several of the Spanish artist's pencil sketches, there is little detail shown on the images apart from their outlines.[623] These characters are Apollonian figures playing songs in the world with their lyres. This is perceivable in an image of a man playing a lyre with his back turned to the viewer but his head facing him. In the distance there is some water and a small house (Figure 30).[624] In a drawing to Anastasia Tomashevskaya from Norinskaya, an individual

[623] Brodsky's potential debt to Picasso has been shown by Yuri Leving, see Leving, *Revolyutsiya zrimogo*, pp. 345–75.
[624] *JBP*, Box 133, Folder 2980.

is reading in a rural scape and there is a lyre hanging on a tree.[625] In another sketch, there is a man with a lyre and a flower in his hand, standing on a low column top, looking towards a woman who has her back turned to him, with the following message below, 'To Thomas Venclova From grateful humanity.'[626]



Figure 30. Drawing of a figure with a lyre by Joseph Brodsky.

There are also instances where the lyre and the classical world, and hence his own self as he is a part of this world, is mocked. One finds an image of a man playing a lyre with a somewhat shocked look on his face and an Ionic column behind him.[627] A lyre with

[625] *JBP*, Box 15, Folder 397.
[626] *KP*, Box 7, Folder 8.
[627] *JBP*, Box 133, Folder 2981.

crossbones above it[628] and a couple with their backs turned to each other are seen underneath an acrostic poem to Vladimir Uflyand, with the Apollonian figure also bearing a resemblance to Pushkin.[629] A lyre is also available for sale, according to one sketch depicting a man with a lyre in his right hand is shouting from his speech bubble, 'А вот кому нужна подержаная лира — в хорошем состоянии!!' (Figure 31).[630] Linked to the lyre, one often sees the more biblical, but nevertheless stock, recurring image of the angel with a trumpet. In one, there is an angel in the clouds with the words 'Merry Christmas Happy New Year' coming out of its trumpet.[631] Around a poem called 'To Mr, Kees Verheul upon his Birthday,' there are two angels with trumpets, a sun, and a moon.[632]

In the self-portraits, there are two conflicting tendencies at play. In the realistic images, the poet is seeing himself as he is, and showing the recipients of these images what he looks like at a particular moment in time, as well as what he is surrounded by in his immediate environment. In the images where he sees himself as an Apollonian, Orphic figure, there is a flight from reality to a different spatial and temporal realm where he would like to see himself. As with the images of Pushkin and cats, one finds a combination of self-aggrandizement and self-mockery in these sketches.

[628] *LLP*, Box 1, Folder 2.
[629] *JBP*, Box 55, Folder 997.
[630] *LLP*, Box 8, Folder 50.
[631] *JBSP*, Box 1, Folder 4.
[632] *JBP*, Box 193, Folder 4245.

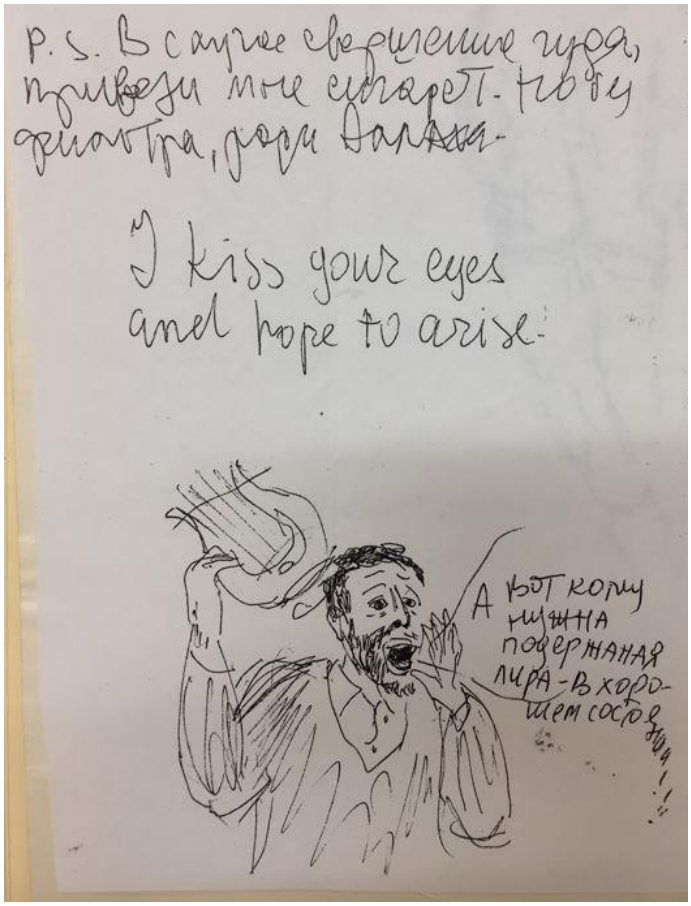


Figure 31. Drawing of a man with a lyre.

These self-portraits go somewhat contra to the impressions Brodsky's poetic personas give of themselves. In Brodsky's poetry, the reader is not faced with a bardic, Apollonian figure but an abundance of self-deprecating speakers; the number of first-person narrators who see themselves as nobodies, without a past and therefore a present self-identity, are numerous. The reader finds a 'совершенный никто, человек в плаще' ('Laguna' (1973)),[633] memoryless wanderers, 'Троянская война | окончена. Кто победил — не помню' ('Odissei Telemaku' (1972)),[634] characters who assert themselves through terms of negation. Though self-perception, reflection on one's life, and seeing oneself from a third-person perspective are common to both the drawings and the poetry, it is the image

[633] Brodskii, I, p. 394.
[634] Brodskii, I, p. 381.

of the self that is presented, reflected upon, and projected, that differs between the two forms of expression.

Finally, the drawings point to a certain vulnerability in the poet's character, one which is often overlooked when his life and works are considered. Take, for example, the beginning of a reading at the Library of Congress in Washington on 14 May 1992. Before Brodsky starts reciting two poems by Robert Frost, he tells the audience: 'I am not a terribly good reader in English.'[635] This sentiment is echoed in comments made at a poetry reading at Queens College, New York, on 28 February 1994.[636] Much like these fleeting expressions of self-doubt, the self-portraits are often personal, heartfelt reflections upon the state of his body,[637] and point to other issues about which he was highly conscious in the private domain.

Conclusion

The act of drawing for Brodsky was one tied in with personal dialogues with friends, and was used to reflect upon issues of self-perception and self-projection. This process was enacted away from public and literary gazes. For him, drawing was not an extension of the literary process but rather an alternative form of expression that offered a different set of discourses he could engage with.

Brodsky's drawings show an alternative side to his character and can help us look at certain images in his literary works afresh. The final stanza of one of the later poems dedicated to Marina Basmanova, 'To ne muza vody nabiraet v rot…' (1980), evidences this point. In the text, after an outpouring of emotion by the speaker regarding the lengths

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[635] Joseph Brodsky, *Joseph Brodsky Reads His Poetry at the Library of Congress, 1992* (Montpelier Room, Library of Congress, 1992), pt. 2:18-2:23 <https://blogs.loc.gov/catbird/2019/07/literary-treasures-joseph-brodsky-reads-his-poetry-at-the-library-of-congress-1992/> [accessed 25 August 2021].
[636] *JBP*, Box 223, Folder 4642 (53:00-1.03:00).
[637] Though the theme of old age recurs in Brodsky's poems from the 1970s onwards, the poet never gives detailed descriptions of the way he looks, something he does do in the self-portraits.

he would have gone to to be with his lover, he decides to attempt to break off every form of imagined and real communication with her, and says:

> Навсегда расстаемся с тобой, дружок.
> Нарисуй на бумаге простой кружок.
> Это буду я: ничего внутри.
> Посмотри на него – и потом сотри.[638]

Basmanova, the daughter of two visual artists, was a keen artist herself. Consequently, when the patronised lover ('druzhok') is told to draw a circle, these are words spoken by a keen sketch artist to another, if one assumes that it is Brodsky speaking to Basmanova. The circle that is drawn, and then rubbed out, is a metaphorical and symbolic self-portrait of the first-person speaker and the art of drawing carries heavy, philosophical connotations related to being and non-being. As shown in this chapter, the incredibly serious tone and set of associations given in the final stanza of the poem does not reflect the associations Brodsky had with drawing throughout his life. Issues surrounding self-perception and self-projection explored in his verse are very different from those played with in his sketches. Drawings help show that the image of Brodsky so often presented in memoirs and reminiscences is so different to the image one gets of him from his writings and public pronouncements alone.

[638] Brodskii, I, p. 483.

Conclusion

Of all the senses, one could make the claim that it is the sense of sight which takes precedent in Brodsky's writing. Brodsky's speakers are constantly 'watching, waiting, looking out a window, gazing at stars or at a landscape,'[639] observing other people and events unfolding in front of them. Their first, and often most lasting, interactions with the world around them are visual. Let us take 'Ya obnyal eti plechi (1962),' an early poem Brodsky was particularly fond of. What begins as a love poem in the opening line turns immediately into a text about viewing and vision from line two onwards: 'Я обнял эти плечи и взглянул | на то, что оказалось за спиною.'[640] The first-person narrator focuses his attention on what is seen, and the haptic is left behind in favour of descriptions of the types and effects of light on objects in the room, the interaction between objects, and the framing of these objects. In many ways, the poem encapsulates preoccupations Brodsky takes with him throughout his life, and the subsequent appearances of eyes and viewing in his writings are numerous.

Eyes feature prominently in Brodsky's poetry in a variety of different guises.[641] They can be active, autonomous organs ('самое себя глаз никогда не видит. | Сузившись, глаз уплывает за | кораблем, вспархивает вместе с птичкой с ветки' ('Doklad dlya simpoziuma' (1989)))[642] or passive receivers of information ('Плывет в глазах холодный вечер, | дрожат снежинки на вагоне' ('Rozhdestvenskii romans' (1961))).[643] They appear in literal form, moving around and helping the speaker assess his environment.

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[639] Sidney Monas and Joseph Brodsky, 'Words Devouring Things: The Poetry of Joseph Brodsky', *World Literature Today*, 57.2 (1983), 214–18 (p. 216) <https://doi.org/10.2307/40137818>.
[640] Brodskii, I, p. 160.
[641] In what follows I highlight some appearances of nouns related to viewing in Brodsky's poetry. An analysis of verbs and adverbs related to visuality in the poetry would be useful but lies outside of the scope of my concluding remarks due to space constraints. Furthermore, and for the same reasons, in what follows I do not look at vocabulary pertaining to the visual in Brodsky's essays.
[642] Brodskii, II, p. 167.
[643] Brodskii, I, p. 114.

They appear in different colours and shades (‘Теперь в твоих глазах амбарного кота, | хранившего зерно от порчи и урона, | читается печаль’ (‘Pis’mo v oazis’ (1991))).[644] They are used metaphorically to look both backwards and forwards in time (‘Карий | глаз смотрит в будущее, где | ни ваз, ни разговоров о воде’ (‘Ritratto di donna’ (1992))).[645]

Brodsky is a writer who focuses greatly on the eye, its individual parts, and the relationship between them and their possessor. He often presents pupils as the first place human perceptions take place (‘Мицкевич лег, в оранжевый волчок | уставив свой невидящий зрачок. | (А может — там судьба ему видна)’ (‘S grust’yu i nezhnost’yu’ (1964))).[646] As such, pupils can get tired easily due to their exposure to so many different scenes (‘Плещет лагуна, сотней | мелких бликов тусклый зрачок казня | за стремленье запомнить пейзаж, способный | обойтись без меня’ (‘Venetsianskie strofy (2)’ (1982))).[647] Retinas are usually presented as passive screens onto which images can be projected (‘капля, сверкая, плывет в зенит, | чтобы взглянуть на мир с той стороны сетчатки. | Это — не просто сетчатка, это — с искрой парча, | новая нотная грамота звезд и полос’ (‘Pamyati Klifforda Brauna’ (1993))).[648] Eye sockets are likewise passive receptors (‘И Колизей — точно череп Аргуса, в чьих глазницах | облака проплывают, как память о бывшем стаде’ (‘Rimskie elegii’ (1981))).[649]

Eyelids, eyelashes, and eyebrows are also common in Brodsky’s poetry. Eyelids are commonly depicted as opaque screens to the eye and barriers that hold back tears (‘Два глаза источают крик. | Лишь веки, издавая шорох, | во мраке защищают их | собою наподобье створок’ (‘Zagadka angelu’ (1962))[650] and ‘дабы не зажмуривать ей век, | я прикрывал ладонью их, и веки, | не веря, что их пробуют спасти, | метались там, как

[644] Brodskii, II, p. 226.
[645] Brodskii, II, p. 211.
[646] Brodskii, I, p. 179.
[647] Brodskii, II, p. 79.
[648] Brodskii, II, p. 230.
[649] Brodskii, II, p. 83.
[650] Brodskii, I, p. 162.

бабочки в горсти' ('Shest' let spustya' (1968))).[651] Closed eyelids may allow an individual's imagination and dreams to take flight ('Опуская веки, я вижу край | ткани и локоть в момент изгиба' ('Kolybel'naya treskovogo mysa' (1975))).[652] Eyelashes are flexible and can act as obstacles ('Лучше, видно, остаться. Лечь, постелив на сене, | чтобы плававший при свечах в теплом, как суп, бассейне, | чью каплю еще хранит ресница, | знал, где найти нас, решив присниться' ('Mikhailu Baryshnikovu' (1992))),[653] as well as features that let things pass through them ('Жертва легких, но друг ресниц, | воздух прозрачен, зане исколот | клювами плохо сносящих холод, | видимых только в профил птиц' ('V okrestnostyakh Aleksandrii' (1982))).[654] Eyebrows are of interest due to their shape for the poet ('удивленно поднятая бровь, как со стекла автомобиля — дворник, | с лица сгоняла смутную печаль' ('Shest' let spustya' (1968))[655] and 'И золотистая бровь, как закат на карнизе дома, | поднимается вверх, и темнеют глаза подруги' ('Rimskie elegii' (1981))).[656]

Acts of seeing, watching, and looking are prominent in Brodsky's poetry. There are mentions of points of view ('С точки зрения воздуха, край земли | всюду' ('S tochki zreniya vozdukha…' (1975–6))[657] and 'но с точки зренья ландшафта, движенье необходимо' ('Konchitsya leto. Nachnetsya sentyabr'' (1987))).[658] In his poems people move in and out of perspective ('Человек, дожив до того момента, когда нельзя | его больше любить, брезгуя плыть противу | бешеного теченья, прячется в перспективу' ('V Italii' (1985)))[659] or are located at various points within them ('Где там матери и ее кастрюлям | уцелеть в перспективе, удлиняемой жизнью сына!' ('Mysl' o tebe

[651] Brodskii, I, p. 177.
[652] Brodskii, I, p. 435.
[653] Brodskii, II, pp. 200–201.
[654] Brodskii, II, p. 106.
[655] Brodskii, I, pp. 176–77.
[656] Brodskii, I, p. 86.
[657] Brodskii, I, p. 424.
[658] Brodskii, II, p. 142.
[659] Brodskii, II, p. 131.

udalyaetsya…' (1985))).[660] Brodsky's speakers tend to note when they see people's faces in profile ('и профил аэроплана, | растерявший все нимбы, выглядит в вышних странно' ('Konchitsya leto. Nachnetsya sentyabr'' (1987)))[661] and see people's profiles of faces in the surrounding scenery ('Холм или храм, | профил Толстого, | Рим, холостого | логова хлам ('Oblaka' (1989))).[662]

In his texts, Brodsky gives us various types of frames, all of which help focus the viewer's attention onto an object ('А так — меняются комнаты, кресла, стулья. | И всюду по стенам то в рамке, то так — цветы ('O esli by ptitsy peli…' (1994)))[663] or scene ('Она вздохнула и перевела | взгляд на гравюру в деревянной рамке, | где человек в соломенной панамке | сопровождал угрюмого вола' ('Chaepitie' (1970))).[664] Windows also crop up as frames and fulfil similar functions ('ты увидишь, опричь своего неприкрытого срама — | полумесяц плывет в запыленном оконном стекле | над крестами Москвы, как лихая победа Ислама' ('Vremya goda — zima' (1967–1970))).[665] To this one could add the numerous references to mirrors. As well as being used as ways of thinking about the relationship between beauty and the perceiver of beauty — a prominent theme in *Watermark* — they are also used in discussions of old age and in the facing up to one's own mortality ('Так отражаются к старости в зеркале бровь и лысина' ('Peizazh s navodneniem' (1993))[666] and 'И разница между зеркалом, в которое вы глядитесь, | и теми, кто вас не помнит, тоже невелика' ('Avgust' (1996))).[667] Before placing these observations in the context of this thesis, a brief summary of my arguments thus far is in order.

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[660] Brodskii, II, p. 136.
[661] Brodskii, II, p. 142.
[662] Brodskii, II, p. 173.
[663] Brodskii, II, p. 263.
[664] Brodskii, I, p. 355.
[665] Brodskii, I, p. 357.
[666] Brodskii, II, p. 231.
[667] Brodskii, II, p. 283.

Brodsky was a writer who was interested in, and engaged with, visual media — cinema, postcards, photography, and drawings — in various ways and for different reasons. In my study, I have shown how his written texts are in dialogue with material he produced in each of these forms, and his biographical relationships with them. To overlook his relationships to the visual forms in question is to miss out on a whole part of his artistic output when analysing his life and works. Gerald Smith has stated that Brodsky's poems 'present the genuine, heartfelt testimony of a quite extraordinarily intelligent and perceptive individual whose responses to the world were rich and vivid, who was acutely alive in all five senses, and who possessed a surpassing verbal facility in Russian that enabled him to notate and evaluate the resulting sensations.'[668] I have focused on his relationship with one of these senses and shown how media associated with the sense of sight were vitally important to him.

My study helps to triangulate the relationship between the writer and his written texts and offers fresh perspectives on all three of these topics: Brodsky's biography, his writings, and his output in visual forms. By decentring and shifting perspective away from a direct analysis of his biography, and poems and essays, one finds a more multi-dimensional, less logocentric, more nuanced man and set of writings. The individual that emerges from my discussion is one who is less serious, more inquisitive, and more firmly rooted in the reality that surrounds him than some of his texts, and some literary criticism about him, suggest. Consequently, his writings open out into, and are in strong dialogue with, non-literary realms.

As regards the visual forms under question, one can ascertain an approach to each which is relatively consistent across his poetry and essays, his attitude to them in his private and daily life, and his work with and within them. Cinema was mostly associated

[668] G. S. Smith, 'Joseph Brodsky: Summing Up', p. 403.

with imagination, postcards with documentation, photography with perception, and drawings with private dialogue. I have highlighted how all four media can be seen to fit onto a spectrum with imagination at one end, and memory at the other. Cinema allows him to imagine the reality of Western and, later, ancient worlds inaccessible to him in real life. Postcards combine a recording of memories (where he was, what he was doing) with a desire for the addressee to imagine how the poet was living and what he was seeing at a certain moment in time. Photography is more weighted towards memory as it records perceptions of reality and acts as a tool to look back upon them in a metaphorical manner. Drawing deals with the construction of memory by defining the ways the poet wants to be remembered in the future as well as being tied up with the issues of self-perception and self-projection. Additionally, I have shown how, somewhat paradoxically, the more manufactured and ready-made the form (cinema, postcards), the more Brodsky associated it with imagination. Where the individual has more control over what he can produce in the form (photography, drawing), he tends to use it in his investigations of memory.

One of the intriguing features of Brodsky's attitude to visual worlds in his life and writings is his consistent interest in different forms of mimicry. Brodsky copied the looks of Western actors and writers via an analysis of their photographs, their images on postcards, and the way they looked on film. He copied the same activity — drawing — that Pushkin was well known for. Brodsky mimics pre-existing stanzaic forms in homage to his favourite poets. This feature is observable when one considers Brodsky's approach to all four media in a comparative framework.

One could say that the active eye, an image referred to earlier on in the Conclusion, is linked to photography for an individual with a camera seeks out the shot he wants, and that the passive eye is associated with cinema for the individual has images sent to him/her from the projections on the cinema screen. Appearances of frames, perspectives, and profiles in Brodsky's writings, examples of which were also given at the start of my

Conclusion, are all concepts associated with cinema, photography, and drawing. Further studies on this topic could further investigate these links between Brodsky's daily interest in these visual media and the reflections of these preoccupations in his writings.

As already highlighted in my Introduction, there are masses of documents and materials related to Joseph Brodsky which have yet to be published. Material from the Brodsky Archive is worthy of critical attention when viewed both on its own and in conjunction with his biography and writings. In addition to the visual material analysed, the collection of items in the Brodsky Archive is made up of alternative copies of published and unpublished poems and essays, personal notebooks, letters to friends, family, and publishers, notes and other materials related to his university teaching and public lectures. Further work on such documents will undoubtedly shed light on unseen and unknown aspects of the writer and his oeuvre. I have therefore not only sought to draw conclusions about the relationships between Brodsky, his writings, and the four visual forms in question: I have pointed out how fresh archival documentation can be used to further question entrenched ideas about Brodsky and his texts.

To conclude, it is clear that a Formalist or Structuralist reading of Brodsky's writings is limiting. Brodsky's constant references in his writings to the sense of sight, eyes, and images related to the visual (frames, windows, perspectives) can be seen in parallel with his keen interest in film, postcards, photography, and drawing. Visual images and metaphors in his works are not solely metaphorical, but the result of daily interactions with visual media in his private life. When Brodsky considers and/or references films, postcards, photographs, drawings, he is discussing both their literal forms, and their ability to help him speak, metaphorically, about personal, social, philosophical or existential problems.

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