

AFTERLIFE BEYOND TRANSLATION:

JOSEPH BRODSKY

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- 370** Who are you, the author asks himself in two languages, and gets startled no less than you would upon hearing his own voice muttering something that amounts to ‘Well, I don’t know’. A mongrel, then, ladies and gentlemen, this is a mongrel speaking. Or a centaur.

(Brotsky, *On Grief and Reason* 150)

In 1984, Brodsky rendered “Kvintet”, one of his most surreal and allusion-soaked poems, into English. Having arrived at the fifth and last part, he did not stop but proceeded to compose another one, turning the quintet into a sextet. Four years later, he repeated this trick. The “Centaur” cycle morphs into a quintet in English—appropriately, in a way, for a text whose leitmotif is hybridity. The fifth poem, “Epitaph for a Centaur”, shares both formal and thematic features with the cycle and immediately follows it in all publications; it could just as well be called “Centaur V”. Both original poems based in self-translation—“Sextet VI” and “Epitaph for a Centaur”—deal with death and afterlife.¹ So does a poem with a similarly curious genesis, which is also the topic of the present article: “Tol’ko pepel...” grew out of “Letter to an Archeologist”, originally written by Brodsky in English. It is a unique phenomenon—Brodsky never openly rendered his own poems into Russian.

The fact that Brodsky translated into the other direction is also strange enough: he was, after all, not bilingual in the conventional sense. By 1984, Brodsky had lived in the States for twelve years. He had not enjoyed a trilingual Nabokovian childhood; his was a poor Soviet one. He left school at fifteen and taught himself English in the evenings after days of hard labor in the arctic Archangelsk region. He emigrated as an adult with a relatively shaky grasp of English. Nevertheless, he began co-editing other poets’ translations of his work after merely a few years in the US,

mainly because he was unhappy with their formal aspects: “Differences in meters are differences in breath and heartbeat. Differences in rhyming pattern are those of brain functions” (Brodsky, “Less Than One” 139-40). Having introduced semantic traits of his favorite Anglophone poets (such as John Donne’s juxtaposition of sexuality and philosophy) into Russian, he went on to inject formal aspects of Russian poetics into English—first in self-translations, and then in original poems. Soon he became the main translator of his own poetry and also began to write in English, trying—first unconsciously, and then deliberately—to accommodate Russian poetics within the foreign language.

For simplicity’s sake, I use the terms “original” and “translation” here, though I am aware of their limitations. The texts to be discussed go not only beyond the usual usage of “translation”, but also beyond what Roman Jakobson (24) called “creative transposition” [*tvorcheskaya transpositsiya*] or what translation agencies dub “transcreation”. They proceed long after the original has stopped; these old and new texts have a parent-child relationship of sorts: the latter derive from the former but develop further.² Such hybrid texts demonstrate the absence of a principal difference between the primary and the secondary creative process. Though composition might begin with a line or image coming unbidden into one’s mind, it is doubtful whether creating a highly structured poem can be a “spontaneous” activity. As soon as Brodsky chose a certain meter and rhyme scheme (or, as he would have it, when they chose him), the writing was governed by self-imposed rules. The process of translation is more restrictive semantically; still, it is quite close to original creation and can overflow into the latter—this is the topic of the present article. Translation and composition are parts of a continuum whose two extremes are imaginary. Entirely equivalent translation—transforming any text, much more so a poem, into an *identical* one in another language—is impossible. Entirely innovative composition—writing a poem in English without using any of the motifs, images and patterns previously employed in the native language—is hardly feasible for a poet with such a distinctive style and a large Russian oeuvre as Brodsky, even though to his mind “the most awful thing about service to the muses is precisely that it does not tolerate repetition—either of metaphor, subject, or device” (Brodsky, “Less Than One” 187).

Between the theoretical poles of one-to-one translation and entirely new creation, all Brodskian Anglophone poetic output can be placed, with “Sextet IV” and “Epitaph for a Centaur” in the middle. “Sextet IV” is somewhat closer connected to its predecessor—not only via the title, but also because it directly continues “Kvintet”, a monologue full of illusions and allusions. The final stanza of “Sextet V” flows seamlessly into “Sextet VI”, so that it needs to be quoted here alongside its original:

Eto—zapiski naturalista. Za-
piski naturalista. Kapayushchaya sleza
padayet v vakuume bez vsyakogo uskoren'ya.
Vechnozelyonoye nevrasteniye, slysha zhzhzhu
tse-tse budushchego, ya drozhu,

vtsepivshis' nogtyami v svoi korenya.

*These are the notes of a/the naturalist. The no- [for/behind]
tes [squeals] of a naturalist. A/the dropping tear
falls in a/the vacuum without any acceleration.
An evergreen *neurasthenic plant, hearing the zhzh
tsetse of future, I shiver,
grabbing my roots with my fingernails (interlinear³)*

These are the notes of a naturalist. The naughts
on nature's own list. Stained with flowerpots.
A tear falls in a vacuum without acceleration.
The last of hotbed neu-roses, hearing the
faint buzzing of time's tsetse,
I smell increasingly of isolation. (translation by Brodsky)

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In both versions, this stanza is rich in wordplay. In Russian, the word “zapiski” (notes) is transformed into “za piski” (*for/behind squeals*) in lines 1-2. In English, “notes” become “naughts”. Both squeals and “naughts” have a deprecating effect. The notion of nothingness links back to the previous stanza. In the next line of the translation, Brodsky one-ups himself, introducing—in lieu of mere repetition—a phonetic near-twin of “naturalist”—“nature’s...list”. The Russian line four gives birth to the neologism “nevrasteniye”, which differs from “nevrasteniya” (*neurasthenia*) only in the final letter while also including the word “rasteniye” (*plant*). In English, Brodsky succeeds in producing a pun similar both in its constituents and its effect—“neu-roses”. “Neu”, the German for “new”, supports the theme, German being the native language of psychoanalysis. Brodsky provides an additional twist in English by adding “hotbed”. Roses are planted in hotbeds; the word might evoke such phrases as “hotbed of sin” or “hotbed of vice”. Moreover, a frequent image in Brodsky’s poetry—and one connected to neuroses—is that of a lonely insomniac tossing and turning in his bed. Both versions stress the onomatopoeia of “tsetse”. Tsetse flies are a real source of lethal danger; besides, insects are often connected to death in Western literature, and Brodsky’s work is no exception. The phrase “smell of isolation” is not coined by Brodsky, but it gains in sensual effectiveness in the context of hotbeds and plants. “Isolation” would be a befitting final word—but it is not. In English, the poem goes on.

The quintet becomes a sextet. Its six parts consist of six-line stanzas, the micro-structure thus neatly mirroring the macrostructure. The dramatic monolog of part V flows into the new section, whose first rhyme words might well have been inspired by the preceding search for a suitable pun on “notes”—apart from “naught”, there is the possibility of “knot” and “not”. Having reached the new part, the text (quite unusually for Brodsky) explodes in exclamation marks, as if it did not have enough room in the original:

Sextet VI

And I dread my petals' joining the crowned knot
 of fire! Most resolutely not!
 Oh, but to know the place for the first, the second,
 and the umpteenth time! When everything comes to light,
 when you hear or utter the jewels like
 "When I was in the army" or "Change the record!"

Petulant is the soul begging mercy from
 an invisible or dilated frame.
 Still, if it comes to the point where the blue acrylic
 dappled with cirrus suggests the Lord,
 say, "Give me strength to sustain the hurt,"
 and learn it by heart like a decent lyric.

When you are no more, unlike the rest,
 the latter may think of themselves as blessed
 with the place so much safer thanks to the big withdrawal
 of what your conscience indeed amassed.
 And a fish that prophetically shines with rust
 will splash in a pond and repeat your oval.

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The "crowned knot of fire" is borrowed from the penultimate line of Eliot's "Little Gidding":

All manner of thing shall be well
 When the tongues of flame are in-folded
 Into the crowned knot of fire
 And the fire and the rose are one.

Givens (216) observes this allusion and concludes (220) that "part six completes Brodsky's exploration of Strand's poetics by resolving [...its] peculiar anxiety...in favor of Eliot's more optimistic Christian solution". Brodsky would disagree. He called "Kvintet" an "anti-Eliot-poem" (Rein, "Moi Ėkzemplier 'Uranii'" 144).⁴ As regards the general outlook on life, arguably the only strong conviction Brodsky shared with Eliot was his love for cats. The author might be dead (in both senses) and far from identical with the speaker—but the text itself also resists being read as a pious poem in Eliot's vein. It emphatically rejects Eliot's Christian symbolism. Every sentence in the first stanza ends in an exclamation mark, screaming out against death. This poem is much closer to "Do not go gentle into that good night" than to "Little Gidding". Though he detests repetition, the speaker is raging against the dying of the light. The unidiomatic "to know the place for the first, the second, / and the umpteenth time!" also alludes to "Little Gidding":

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

Again, the speaker disagrees with Eliot—arriving back where one started is presented not as the ultimate revelation but as tedious repetition, almost as bad as dying. In another matter, though, Givens (220-21) is quite right. He believes that Eliot is added in part VI because of “the need (as [Brodsky] puts it in his Nobel lecture) ‘to avoid tautology’...the final stanza composed in English seems purposefully to avoid Strand’s particular diction”. With “Kvintet”, Brodsky successfully “translated” Strand’s poetics into Russian; there is no need to translate them back into English. Though Eliot is not added but rather revealed in the additional part, the observation holds: a Strandesque poem is fine in Russian, but a version in Strand’s own language needs more original material and/or a fusion with another poet’s style and theme—in this case, Eliot.

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Both endings added in translation—“Epitaph for a Centaur” and “Sextet VI”—deal with the ultimate ending. Bondarenko (485) believes that Brodsky, aware of his mortal illness, “was afraid to stop the line, because with the end of a line his life, too, might end”.⁵ Losev, a close friend of Brodsky, makes a similar point—to his mind, Brodsky was “afraid of publication as of the final estrangement of the author from his text. Creating a poem is a cathartic experience that wants prolongation. Unpublished, poems are in a way unfinished; publication means a farewell forever” (Losev, *Iosif Brodskii* 131). To go on writing meant “restructur[ing] time” (Brodsky, “Less Than One” 180) and thus to some degree resisting death—the poet’s best alternative to passively listening to its “tsetse”, dreading “the crowned knot / of fire”. Brodsky’s manner of reading comes to mind, as well—he did not stress endings; the final lines remained hanging in the air, as if the poem might go on. “Sextet VI” suggests an afterlife, but (despite the image of the fish, accompanied by the word “prophetically”) not in a traditionally Christian sense. It is an afterlife in transitory traces—and in translation. “To My Daughter”, written in English two years before Brodsky’s death, offers a parallel:

Give me another life, and I’ll be singing
in Café Rafaella. Or simply sitting
there. Or standing there, as furniture in the corner,
in case that life is a bit less generous than the former.

“Epitaph for a Centaur” also deals with death:

Epitaph for a Centaur

To say that he was unhappy is either to say too much
or too little: depending on who’s the audience.
Still, the smell he’d give off was a bit too odious,
and his canter was also quite hard to match.
He said, They meant just a monument, but something went astray:
the womb? the assembly line? the economy?
Or else, the war never happened, they befriended the enemy,

and he was left as it is, presumably to portray
 Intransigence, Incompatibility—that sort of thing which proves
 not so much one’s uniqueness or virtue, but probability.
 For years, resembling a cloud, he wandered in olive groves,
 marvelling at one-leggedness, the mother of immobility.
 Learned to lie to himself, and turned it into an art
 for want of a better company, also to check his sanity.
 And he died fairly young—because his animal part
 turned out to be less durable than his humanity.

Two motifs from “Kentavry IV” fail to appear in the Anglophone “Centaur IV”, but surface in “Epitaph for a Centaur”. Firstly, there is the suggestion that peace leads to more fusion than war. The lines “Vse perekhodyat drug v druga s pomoshch’yu slova ‘vdrug’ / —rezhe vo vremya voyny, chem vo vremya mira” (*Everybody merges into each other with the help of the word “suddenly” / —more rarely in war—than in peacetime*) have no equivalent in self-translation, but are indirectly integrated into “Epitaph” whose protagonist supposes that peaceful times might be a reason for his centauric state. The second shared motif is expressed in two equivalent words equally rare in Russian and English: “odnonogost” (“Kentavry IV”) / “one-leggedness” (“Epitaph”). While in “Kentavry IV”, a veteran’s single limb is contrasted with the many arms of trees, the roles are reversed in “Epitaph”—the centaur compares trees with their single trunks to his own four legs, which make him a wanderer.⁶ “Epitaph” is also closely connected to another part of the cycle: Losev (“Primechaniia” 428) observes that “Kentavry III” is constructed like the plan of a poem on incompatibility and death which is yet to be written—“Epitaph to a Centaur” becomes exactly this poem.

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Explicitly verbalizing the centaur’s loneliness is hardly necessary—the words “wandered” and “cloud” are suggestive enough. The only company he finds is that of trees which happen to be associated with Greece and Greek mythology—olives. In his solitude, he “learn[s] to lie to himself”. This statement echoes the idea that “the real history of consciousness starts with one first lie” (Brodsky, “Less Than One” 7). Autobiographical or not, this protagonist invites compassion. The only article dedicated to “Epitaph for a Centaur” suggests that “without this image, suffused with positive characteristics of a ‘hero manqué’, Brodsky’s cycle would be incomplete, flawed, and his general concept less convincing” (Nikolaev 74). The benefit of hindsight seems to play a role here—would one really experience the cycle as incomplete without being aware of an additional poem? “Epitaph” does enrich the reading of the preceding cycle, just as its others parts enrich each other, and just like translations, comments and other paratexts can enrich any text. Still, it was written not because this was unavoidable, but because the process of translation gave rise to new images and lines, or because its rhythm didn’t let Brodsky go. As he put it in regard to another text, he “had another poem coming” (Birkerts 98).

The allusion to Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a cloud” allows imagining the centaur as a poet. “Canter” resembles two words which describe Brodsky’s way of reciting poetry—a cantor’s chant. Brodsky’s reading has been said to resemble a

“relentless chant” (Safer 191), “a kind of liturgical chant, the recitation of each line governed by strict rules of rhythm with definite places for rising and falling stresses, that are impartial to the content of the words” (Forest), an incantation (Shtern 91), a prayer (Lamont 557), and synagogal singing (Heaney 261). Once, some (anti-)Soviet admirers of Brodsky came together to listen to a tape with his poetry readings, and a neighbor informed on them—but not because he recognized a dissident poet. What he heard was “the sound of prayer” (Alloi 74). Moreover, “canter” evokes poetry in another way—the definitions of gaits, like those of meters, are based on rhythm. To sum up, “canter” might call to mind at least four relevant words—“chant”, “cantor”, “centaur” and “canto”.

The contrast between immobile one-legged trees and the restless four-legged centaur has implications for two-legged creatures. Instead of the usual space on top of the imaginary Darwinian stepladder (or else “the chain of being”) leading from plants to animals, humans appear like something between a tree with its single trunk
376 and a quadruped—less rooted than the former, not quite as restless as the latter; not as durable as an olive plant, but more long-lived than a horse:⁷

And he died fairly young—because his animal part
 turned out to be less durable than his humanity.

To some degree, “Epitaph for a Centaur” is a self-elegy, a poem of a particularly Brodskian genre, a paradox answer to his two-liner “To a Fellow Poet”: “Sir, you are tough, and I am tough. / But who will write whose epitaph?”. Brodsky’s elegies can be hopeful. Here, one needs only to reverse the emphasis to arrive at “humanity is more durable than one’s animal part”, a suggestion that something human—be it a soul, literature or memory—remains after death. Both poems growing out of self-translated cycles, “Sextet VI” and “Epitaph for a Centaur”, feature this theme. In translation, poetry lives on in at least two senses. Firstly, it will have more readers. As Brodsky put it in an essay about his parents:

I write this in English because I want to grant them a margin of freedom: the margin whose width depends on the number of those who may be willing to read this. I want Maria Volpert and Alexander Brodsky to acquire reality under ‘a foreign code of conscience,’ I want English verbs of motion to describe their movements. This won’t resurrect them, but English grammar may at least prove to be a better escape route from the chimneys of the state crematorium than the Russian. (“Less Than One” 460)

Moreover, translation prolongs the process of creation—sometimes far beyond the original. Though Brodsky was reluctant to let his poems go, he was usually shy of revisions; he altered only a few poems after they were published. He was neither Auden nor Whitman—he did not change his poems radically, and he did not spend his life editing and expanding the same collection. He largely agreed that the business of interpretation is handed over to readers once a text is finished. But when is it finished? Self-translation was his way to reclaim finished and published poems, to resurrect himself from the death of the author.

In several cases, Brodsky went beyond translation: “Epitaph for a Centaur” and “Sextet VI” have no one-to-one Russian equivalents. Another example is “At the Helmet and Sword”, one of Brodsky’s few children’s poems. Composed in English, it complements “Ssora” (*The fight*), translated as “Cabbage and Carrot”. Similarly, Brodsky translated an unnamed free verse poem describing a country rather similar to Soviet Russia (“My zhili v gorode...”) as “A Photograph” and went on to write a companion poem in English, “A Postcard”. Both are free verse poems on the topic of dictatorship; both share some elements with Brodsky’s autobiographical essays. The two poems are clearly intended as a diptych; they were published together in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1994 under complementary titles. These are examples of Anglophone texts inspired by self-translation. What about the other direction: did Brodsky ever translate his English poems into Russian?

Doing so would suggest that they mattered to their author. Brodsky could hardly reconcile this with his insistent claim that he never took the poems he wrote in English seriously. According to him, they were merely an exercise, a game. Whether heart-felt or coyly pretended, this humility was certainly convenient in disarming critics. Brodsky claimed that he wrote poetry in Russian for himself, for the language and its prosody; the audience was not his primary care. He translated into English and composed poetry in his second language partly for the same reasons (though he insisted that his modest contribution had no value for the English language or Anglophone poetry), but to a lesser degree. His main motivation, according to his own statements, was the desire to show his new fellow countrymen what his poems were like (e.g. Reĭn, “Chelovek V Peizazhe” 88). When Brodsky translated Anglophone poetry into Russian, he did so for the joy of it, but also in order to enrich the Russian poetic language—and ultimately, his own prosody. There was no need to introduce “Joseph Brodsky” into the Russian language; he was close enough to “Iosif Brodskiy” in terms of poetic diction. Translating one’s own poetry is, intellectually and emotionally, a taxing task. As Akhmatova put it, “translating is like eating your own brain” (Sergeev 432). Considering that Brodsky’s poetic oeuvre was a bilingual centaur with a Russian part already much bigger than the English one, there was arguably no need for internal translation into this direction.

Thus, understandably, no poems are designated as self-translations from the English. But one, “Tol’ko pepel...” (*Only ashes...*), is strikingly close to a predating Anglophone one. On the most superficial level, the two poems share the motif of an archeologist discovering the remains of a rather disgusting settlement:

Letter to an Archeologist (1985)

Citizen, enemy, mama’s boy, sucker, utter
garbage, panhandler, swine, *refujew*, *verruht*;
a scalp so often scalded with boiling water
that the puny brain feels completely cooked.
Yes, we have dwelt here: in this concrete, brick, wooden

rubble which you now arrive to sift.
 All our wires were crossed, barbed, tangled, or interwoven.
 Also: we didn't love our women, but they conceived.
 Sharp is the sound of pickaxe that hurts dead iron;
 still, it's gentler that what we've been told or have said ourselves.
 Stranger! move carefully through our carrion:
 what seems carrion to you is freedom to our cells.
 Leave our names alone. Don't reconstruct those vowels,
 consonants, and so forth: they won't resemble larks
 but a demented bloodhound whose maw devours
 its own traces, feces, and barks, and barks.

The Russian poem, written a year later, also consists of four cross-rhyming stanzas with alternating feminine and masculine rhymes:

*** (1986)

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Tol'ko pepel znayet, chto znachit sgoret' dotla.
 No ya tozhe skazhu, blizoruko vzglyanuv vpered:
 ne vsyo unosimo vetrom, ne vsyo metla,
 shiroko zabiraya po dvoru, podberet.
 My ostanemsya smyatym okurkom, plevkom, v teni
 pod skam'yoy, kuda ugol proniknut' luchu ne dast.
 I slezhimsya v obnimku s gryaz'yu, schitaya dni,
 v peregrnoy, v osadok, v kul'turnyy plast.
 Zamaravshi sovok, arkhelog razinet past'
 otrygnut', no ego otkrytiye progremit
 na ves' mir, kak zarytaya v zemlyu strast',
 kak obratnaya versiya piramid.
 "Padal'!" vydokhnnet on, obkhvativ zhivot,
 no okazhetsya dal'she ot nas, chem zemlya ot ptits,
 potomu chto padal'—svoboda ot kletok, svoboda ot
 tselogo: apofez chastits.

*Only ashes know what it means to have burned to the ground.
 But I'll too say, with a shortsighted look forward:
 not all can be carried away by the wind, the broom will not
 pick up everything, making wide sweeps over the yard.
 We'll remain as a creased cigarette butt, a spittle, in the shade
 under a bench, where the angle/corner won't let a/the ray through.
 We'll clump together, embracing dirt, counting days,
 into humus, dregs, a/the cultural layer.
 Having soiled his scoop, a/the archeologist will open his maw
 to regurgitate; but his discovery / its opening⁸ will resound
 through all the world like passion, buried in the ground,
 like an inverted version of the pyramids.
 "Carrion!"—he'll breathe out, clasping his stomach,
 but he'll find himself farther from us than the earth from birds,*

*because carrion is the freedom from cells, the freedom from
the whole: the apotheosis of particles.*

Apart from the overall theme and the form, the two poems share many details. One of these is the mention of birds in opposition to (under-)earthly remains. Another is the aggression towards the “archeologist”. In Russian, it is expressed descriptively, with words such as “past” (*maw*) and references to bodily functions and pain. In English, the aggression is voiced as direct abuse by the we-speaker. Curiously, the first of the nine apostrophes seems neutral—“citizen”. The effect is comparable to another list opening a poem: “sir sweetie respected darling” (“From Nowhere with Love”, translated by Weissbort and Brodsky). However, in Brodsky’s vocabulary, the word “citizen” is as abusive as can be: “It is the army that ... makes a citizen out of you; without it you still have a chance...to remain a human being” (Brodsky, “Less Than One” 24). Though the we-speaker here is very different from Brodsky, they appear to share this semantic idiosyncrasy.

In English, the speaker’s voice—or, rather, their voices—are those of a gray mass, of cheerless aggressive Soviet men (not women, who are mentioned but given no voice; unloved but forced to conceive). The speaker of the Russian poem seems similar in character but devoid of concrete localization—unless the word “sovok” (*scoop*) is read as a pun. “Sovok” became a deprecatory term for the Soviet Union while it still existed; it was popular by 1986, and Brodsky must have known it, given his contact to friends in Russia and his keen interest for slang. In this context, line nine of the Russian poem could refer to criticizing the Soviet Union, translating as “having soiled the ‘Sovok’, the archeologist will open his maw”. This would make it a reference to Brodsky himself, especially to Brodsky as the author of “Letter to an Archeologist”, his only poem in which Soviet reality is presented as unequivocally disgusting. The addressee of the “Letter”, too, can be regarded as Brodsky’s alter ego. In his youth, Brodsky participated in geological and archeological expeditions (hence such terms as “cultural layer”). More to the point, he was in the business of “reconstruct[ing...] vowels, / consonants, and so forth” (later, he was to name a collection of poetry *So Forth*); the anti-Semitic neologism “refujew” is also applicable to him. As far as puns can be translated, this is a version of “zhidopis” (*kike+painting*) from “Kvintet”. The portmanteau “refujew” was not coined by Brodsky; Oswald Mosley is reputed to have used it, it was around in the thirties. In the eighties, it could also suggest “refusenik”, apart from “refugee” and “Jew”.

In the third line of “Letter to an Archeologist”, one of Brodsky’s earliest and most horrible childhood memories surfaces—“a scalp...scalded with boiling water” closely resembles a scene described in the autobiographical essay “Less than One”, published a year after the poem. The war has just ended; Iosif, five years old, is trying to climb a train to Leningrad with his mother:

my eye caught site of an old, bald, crippled man with a wooden leg who was trying to
get into car after car, but each time was pushed away by the people who were already

hanging on the footboards. The train started to move and the old man hopped along.
 At one point he manage to grab a handle of one of the cars, and then I saw a woman in
 the doorway lift a kettle and pour boiling water straight onto the old man's bald crown.
 (Brodsky, "Less Than One" 18-19)

This parallel (which, to my knowledge, has not been observed before) is especially interesting as the attribution of "a scalp...scalded with boiling water" is not quite clear. Separated from the list of swearwords by a semicolon, it could be another apostrophe—or else a self-description by the we-speaker. For this speaker, just like for the one in "Tol'ko pepel...", death means ultimate liberty:

what seems carrion to you is freedom to our cells ("Letter to an Archeologist")

potomu chto padal'—svoboda ot kletok, svoboda ot
 tselogo: apofeoz chastits. ("Tol'ko pepel...")

380 *because carrion is the freedom from cells, the freedom from
 the whole: the apotheosis of particles. ("Only ashes...")*

The Russian "padal'" is very close to "carrion"—it denotes dead (possibly rotting) animals and can be used as a term of abuse for human corpses. Carrion equals freedom—however, in English the freedom belongs *to* cells, while the Russian poem describes freedom *from* cells. In biological terms, the later version is more exact. Otherwise, these lines are almost identical. These traces of translation (easy to smell for any literary bloodhound) can help inform another domain of Brodsky studies—his translations of other poets from English into Russian. As a rule, Brodsky translated his own poems into English and other people's work into Russian. Any exception is potentially valuable material for research on poetry translation in general and self-translation in particular—it would be fascinating to study a collection of Brodskian translations from both Russian and English, both of his own and other poets' work. This might throw light on the question of language- and prosody-specific phenomena vs. specific features of self-translation.

The image of free particles, combined with the idea of death as ultimate freedom, surfaces eight years later in a poem composed by Brodsky in English:

the place will be reclaimed by elemental particles
 free from the rigidity of a particular human shape
 or type of assembly. Some particles are still free. It's not all dust. ("At a Lecture")

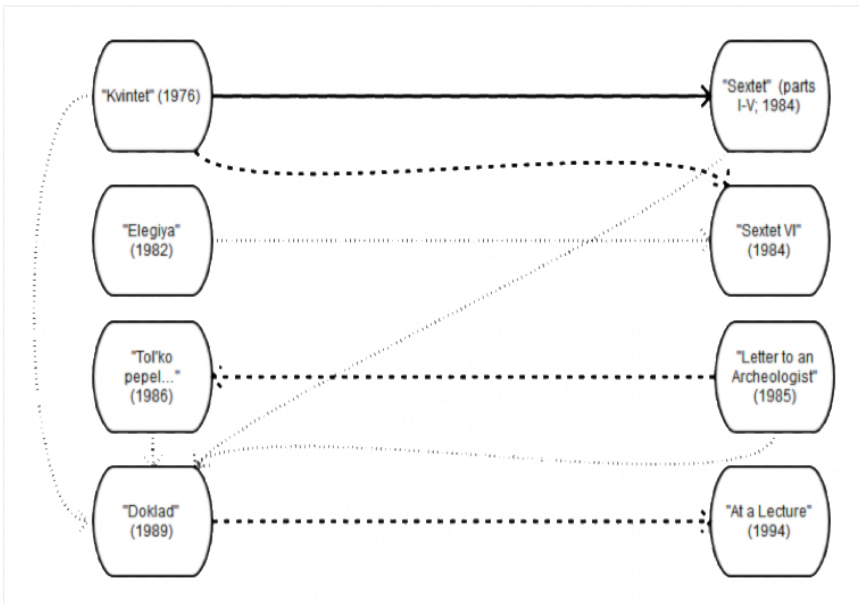
"At a Lecture", in its turn, shows some similarities to the 1989 Russian poem "Doklad dlya simpoziuma" (*A Paper for a Symposium*). The references to academia are not restricted to the title—in both poems, the speaker is a lecturer. Both are unrhymed philosophical deliberations on the liberation of certain entities from the body as a whole. In "Doklad" (*A Paper*), an eye has gained the freedom to move on its own. With this lonely eye in space, the poem forms a link not only to "At a Lecture" and "Letter to an Archeologist"/"Tol'ko pepel...", but also to "Kvintet"/"Sextet", which

features a lonely twitching eyelid:

...In this,
in that, and in the third direction—pure, simple, pallid
air. A Mecca of it: oxygen, nitrogen. In which
there's really nothing except for the rapid twitch-
ing of a lonely eyelid.

Of course, such connections also exist in the work of monolingual poets—but self-translation makes them more numerous and intricate. This is partly due to lessened fear of repetition. Not only do the poems in two languages usually have different readerships; in Brodsky's view, language itself desires innovation and does not want to be overburdened with the continuous refinement of similar motifs. More importantly, some ideas and images (and almost all sound effects) can only be born from a particular language; two languages make two sources for fruitful exchange. A relation of similarity, sometimes approaching translation, exists between many Brodskian poems. In the following attempt at a graphic representation, solid arrows stand for translation proper, dashed ones signify a “semi-translation” (different languages, a strong influence: very similar formal arrangement harboring shared images and themes), and dotted ones suggest a marked similarity in images and/or themes but not in form (the distinctions are far from clear-cut, of course):

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Only connect.

NOTES

1. See the forthcoming *Brodsky Translating Brodsky* (Berlina 2014) for a detailed analysis of these cycles. Many thanks to CRCL/RCLC for permission to publish the present article in my book with Bloomsbury.
2. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this article for suggesting the parent-child comparison.
3. Unless indicated differently, all translations are by the author of the article. Russian texts are quoted in BGN/PCGN Romanization.
4. Intriguingly, this is a comment on the original version. There might be allusions to Eliot in Russian, too; I hope that a scholar better versed in Eliot's work will find them. The staring at fire in part III, perhaps? It certainly gains meaning in the context of the crowned knot in English. In any case, Brodsky's statement makes clear that the quotations in "Sextet VI" have not landed there out of the blue but conclude a well-hidden dialogue which began in the previous parts.
5. Though "Sextet VI" offers more support for his claim than any poem in Russian, Bondarenko never mentions his self-translations or Anglophone poems in his book. Unfortunately, this is typical of Brodsky scholarship. Losev's otherwise brilliant literary biography is no exception, even though it purports to analyze the complete oeuvre. His suggestion that "after 1965, the motif of the fear of death disappears from [Brodsky's] poems" (*Opyt* 281) is not strictly true even for Russian—"Kvintet" (*Quintet*) is a case in point. However, it is the unmentioned Anglophone final part of "Sextet" that constitutes the most striking evidence to the contrary.
6. In Brodsky's "Vertumnus", the image is based on similarity instead of contrast—a naked immobile statue finds itself "in the company of one-legged, equally naked trees".
7. Due to the topos of statues, immobility is associated with longevity in Brodsky's work. Olive trees frequently grow for centuries; horses live to be 25-30 years old.
8. "Otkrytiye" is a punning reference to the opening of the maw.

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