



Brodsky Translating Brodsky: Poetry in Self-Translation

By Alexandra Berlina

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Is poetry lost in translation, or is it perhaps the other way around? Is it found? Gained? Won?

What happens when a poet decides to give his favorite Russian poems a new life in English? Are the new texts shadows, twins or doppelgangers of their originals—or are they something completely different? Does the poet resurrect himself from the death of the author by reinterpreting his own work in another language, or does he turn into a monster: a bilingual, bicultural centaur?

Alexandra Berlina, herself a poetry translator and a 2012 Barnstone Translation Prize laureate, addresses these questions in this new study of Joseph Brodsky, whose Nobel-prize-winning work has never yet been discussed from this perspective.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Written in a lively style and replete with astute observations and provocative insights, Berlina’s book is a joy to read. It is highly recommended.” -Adrian Wanner, The Pennsylvania State University, USA, *Comparative Literature Studies*

“... An important contribution to international Brodsky studies, Berlina’s book uses the poet’s self-translations to arrive at detailed reinterpretations of his work ... In this way Berlina redefines the concept of translation, looking at Brodsky’s poems rendered into English by the poet himself as if they were variants of his original poems, comparable in status to Beckett’s self-translations ... Berlina’s illuminating and often provocative study is worth a careful reading, if only to see how she manages to integrate Brodsky’s self-translations with the poet’s oeuvre and link them with his dislocated biography.” ?Jerzy Jarniewicz, University of Lodz, *Translation Studies*

“Alexandra Berlina’s fascinating and intriguing book presents a selection of poems which Brodsky translated on his own, along with the original Russian and a line-for-line literal. What she then offers is a close reading of the end-product in both languages, showing a fine sensitivity not just to semantic correspondences (or failures of correspondence), but also to phonetic patterning and nuances. ... All in all, the book presents a persuasive case for translation, as well as the reading of a translation, as a way to get to closer grips with a poetic text.” -Christopher Whyte, *Translation and Literature*

“Alexandra Berlina makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of one of the major poets of the late twentieth century ... her book is a model for critical engagement with translation, and a corrective to the dominance of theory over practice in the burgeoning discipline of Translation Studies ... if we hope to understand and appreciate Brodsky’s accomplishment as a poet and thinker, we must confront the full corpus of his work in a dynamic, comparative fashion. Berlina does this brilliantly, and with a degree of wit that would have made her subject proud.” -Boris Dralyuk, University of St. Andrews, *Slavic and East European Journal*

About the Author

Alexandra Berlina is Assistant Professor for American Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. Her translations of Brodsky’s poems “Dido and Aeneas” and “You can’t tell a gnat...” have won awards from the ‘Willis Barnstone Translation Prize’ and the ‘The Joseph Brodsky/Stephen Spender Prize’.

Robert Chandler is an award-winning poet and translator from Russian, French, and Greek. Among the writers he has translated from Russian are Alexander Pushkin, Nikolay Leskov, Vasily Grossman and Andrey Platonov. He is the co-editor of the Penguin Classics anthology *Russian Poetry from Pushkin to Brodsky* (2014). Penguin have also published his anthologies of Russian short stories and of Russian magic tales.

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Lillie Corley:

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