UDC 821.161.1-4.09 Brodski J.
https://doi.org/10.18485/ms_zmss.2024.106.7

Jens Herlth
University of Fribourg, Switzerland
jens.herlth@unifr.ch

A HALT IN VIENNA: RECONSIDERING JOSEPH BRODSKY'S SELF-FASHIONING AS A POET IN EXILE

The article analyzes Brodsky's essay "To Please a Shadow," which refers to the poet's brief stopover in Vienna after his expulsion from the Soviet Union in early June 1972. Brodsky's memories of his encounter with W. H. Auden in the latter's house in Kirchstetten in Lower Austria must be seen in the context of the Russian-American poet's self-fashioning strategies. Brodsky drew on the implicitly political semantics that Auden had attributed to his Astrian summer-residence in various Kirchstetten poems. Auden's distanced and ironic approach to the cultural and political problems of his time served Brodsky as a model: In Auden's poems, he found a lyrical tone and a style that allowed him to transcend the political constraints with which he saw himself confronted as an exiled poet and to adopt a purely poetic, distanced, but nevertheless philosophically and poetically committed position.

Key words: Russian émigré literature, transit, Joseph Brodsky, W. H. Auden, Cold War.

Introduction

Among the many Soviet citizens who emigrated from the Soviet Union in the 1970s, Joseph Brodsky is certainly one of the most prominent. Since the infamous trial against the alleged "social parasite" (*тунеядец*) in 1964 and the publication of his first volume of poetry in English (Brodsky 1967), the young poet was also known to an international audience. On his arrival in the U.S., he was inundated with invitations and interview requests and was immediately offered a teaching position (Loseff 2011: 172). The fact that Brodsky's travel trajectory was no different from that of other emigrants from the Soviet Union in those years, i. e., that he first had to stop off in Vienna, would hardly have been of interest in this context if Brodsky himself had not turned the stopover in Austria into a biographical fact of the utmost relevance: from Brodsky's own perspective, the stay in Vienna was important since it gave him the opportunity to meet the much-admired British-American poet Wystan Hugh Auden. At least this is the impression we get when we read Brodsky's essay "To Please a Shad-

ow," first published in the magazine *Vanity Fair* in 1983 (Brodsky 1983).[1] The title refers to Brodsky's decision to write in English, i. e., to effectuate a change of language, typical for biographies of exiled authors. Of course, we can assume that Brodsky got paid for his essays and that his decision to publish texts in English might have had (among others) a financial background, but he would typically spare us this kind of detail. For Brodsky the only reason why, as he recounts, in the summer of 1977 he bought a typewriter with roman letters, was his wish "to please a shadow," i. e., to pay a reference to his "friend" Wystan H. Auden (Brodsky 1986: 357):

> <...> writing in English was the best way to get near him, to work on his terms, to be judged, if not by his code of conscience, then by whatever it is in the English language that made this code of conscience possible.[2]

"To be judged by whatever it is" — this is of course Brodsky's somewhat nebulous logocentric pseudo-metaphysics. It is in the same vein as his favorite quote from Auden's poem "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" — "Time <...> worships language."[3] The essay "To Please a Shadow" is about exile, it is about a language barrier — and it is about *Kirchstetten*, the lower Austrian village where Auden owned a house and where Brodsky was lucky to meet him, "some forty-eight hours after," "[o]n June 6, 1972," he "had left Russia on very short notice" (Brodsky 1986: 374).

This means that Brodsky links his own existence as an English-speaking writer *not* so much to his living in an English-speaking country or to his being a university teacher in the U.S. — but to his encounter with a famous British-American Poet in a village in Lower Austria. Auden, who had moved from England to New York in 1939, had bought a house in Kirchstetten, some forty kilometers from Vienna, in 1957. Since 1958 he spent all his summers there, until his death in Vienna in 1973 (Mendelson 2017: 715–802).

From Akhmatova to Auden

Charles Osborne, the author of the first biography of Auden (originally published in 1979) — a book that Brodsky most probably had read before he wrote his essay — remembered:

> A few days before the 1972 Festival, I received a phone call from Wystan in Austria. The young Russian-Jewish poet, Joseph Brodsky, who had been forced to live

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[1] In the following, I will refer to the version published in Brodsky's collection of essays *Less Than One* (Brodsky 1986: 357–383).

[2] "Code of conscience" is a quotation from Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats", cf.: "Now he is scattered among a hundred cities / And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections, / To find his happiness in another kind of wood / And be punished *under a foreign code of conscience.* / The words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living" (Auden 1979: 81; italics mine — *J. H.*).

[3] Curiously, precisely the two stanzas from which this quote is taken, were later changed by Auden, as David Bethea and others have pointed out (Bethea 2009: 369; Martyris 2014).

> an underground life in his own country for years, and had spent some time in a prison camp, had now been expelled from the Soviet Union and given a visa to Israel. But he did not want to go to Israel, so he managed somehow to get to Vienna and telephone Wystan who swung into action on his behalf immediately. Well, I could try *[Osborne was the organizer of the Poetry International Festival].* Brodsky's eventual destination was America, and the British immigration authorities wanted to be sure the Americans were going to let him in before they issued him with a British visa. In other words, we were apparently only prepared to accept him in transit. (Osborne 1995: 332)

This is what happened — or at least, this is more or less what we know about Brodsky's transit stations in Vienna, Kirchstetten, and London, before he moved on to his final destinations: Michigan, New York, Venice, Rome, Stockholm, San Michele.

What is important for me here is what Brodsky made of it. It is well known that he was very conscious about 'shaping' his own public biography. At the same time, he was highly concerned about letting this look effortless and accidental. It is hard to tell since when Brodsky possibly knew about Anna Akhmatova's famous dictum "What a biography they are making for our redhead. As if he hired someone on purpose." The first published occurrence is probably found in Anatolii Naiman's *Рассказы об Анне Ахматовой* (*Remembering Anna Akhmatova*) from 1989 (Найман 1989: 162). In numerous interviews, Brodsky however, systematically downplayed the importance of the trial for his own status as a poet and for his work (see, e.g., Volkov 1998: 70; Maksudov 2000: 207). He could not let anybody *make* his biography, he wanted to be in charge of the process himself, wanted to be seen as "a lonely traveler" without a "helper" — as he put it in a piece for the *New York Times Magazine* in October 1972.

The visible and public side of this self-shaping consisted mainly in establishing elective affinities with famous literary figures: first through dedications, intertextual borrowings, or competitive 'writing in the style of... only better'[4] and later by mentioning other writers in interviews or analyzing their works in essays — Brodsky was a great name-dropper. But even though he tried not to let it look like he was capitalizing on this status as a "persecuted poet," he nevertheless carefully set signals that linked the symbolically charged milestones of his biography with specific literary figures.

The sentence "I had left Russia on very short notice" (Brodsky 1986: 374) is typical for Brodsky's heroic understatement when it comes to his biography. His readers knew, of course, that this was a euphemism for his expulsion from the Soviet Union — but Brodsky had made it his trademark to turn everything that happened to him or was done to him into an intentional act.[5] It was him

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[4] Cf.: "Joseph [Brodsky] said that when he began writing he consciously competed with other poets. Now I'll write a poem that will be better (more profound) than [Boris] Pasternak (or [Anna] Akhmatova — or Frost — or Yeats — or Lowell, etc.) <...>" (Sontag 2012: 426).

[5] See, of course, the incipit of his famous poem "Я входил вместо дикого зверя в клетку..." (Instead of a wild beast, I entered the cage...).

leaving Russia; the machinations of the KGB are hidden somewhere in the "short notice." True, in his first publication after his arrival in the U.S., a piece in the *New York Times Magazine* entitled "A writer is a lonely traveler and no one is his helper," Brodsky put it more openly, admitting that "I did not leave Russia of my own will," but at the same time he declined to go into details, since all this did not matter too much to him — and should not matter to his readers: "They invited me to leave, and I accepted the invitation" (Brodsky 1972: 78).[6]

Lev Loseff, in his biography of Brodsky, in the chapter on the latter's departure from Leningrad (entitled: "Arrival in the West: Auden") describes the encounter with Auden as an "almost chance encounter" that "would have an enormous effect on the rest of Brodsky's life" (Loseff 2011: 169). The conversations with Auden lasted for four weeks. "During those weeks in Austria [Auden] looked after my affairs with the diligence of a good mother hen," Brodsky remembered in "To Please a Shadow" (Brodsky 1986: 377) — a metaphor most probably taken from Charles Osborne's biography of Auden, as Loseff pointed out (2011: 287).[7]

Even before their encounter in Kirchstetten, the issue of exile in Brodsky's literary biography had been linked to Auden. At least, this is what Brodsky tells us in one of his interviews where he recalls his time in a kolkhoz in the village of Norinskaia in the Arkhangel′sk Oblast. In a letter, a friend from Moscow (translator Andrei Sergeev) had pointed out to him the resemblance between his poems and Auden's (Volkov 1998: 128). Brodsky recalls having read "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" while still in Norinskaia (Бродский 2000: 80). At least, this is what he says in one of his interviews. In another interview he remembers having read this poem for the first time already after his release (Volkov 1998: 128).[8]

Auden's influence on Brodsky's poetry is quite obvious on various levels; it reaches from topics to prosody, from style to philosophical habitus — not to forget the countless intertextual connections, explicit or implicit references to Auden in Brodsky's poems and essays. As Czesław Miłosz pointed out in a review of Brodsky's English-language collection *A Part of Speech* (1980): "In his experiments with poetic genres — ode, lyrical poem, elegy, descriptive poem, the story in verse — he [Brodsky] resembles Auden" (Milosz 1980).

After the weeks they spent in Kirchstetten (Brodsky 1986: 376), Brodsky and Auden flew to London together to participate in the annual poetry meeting

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[6] This is how the same event is described in Lev Loseff's biography of Brodsky (it is not so much the event, but the *context* of the event, so deliberately cut off in Brodsky's own version, that is important here): "In the 1970s, leaving the Soviet Union was always tinged with tragedy for both those leaving and those left behind. Both sides assumed that they were saying good-bye forever, and farewell gatherings felt like wakes. Those leaving, especially those who had never set foot outside the USSR, had a painful sense that they were about to step past some point of no return; their native land policed them ferociously as they approached that point. Customs agents at Pulkovo Airport, in search of who knows what, mercilessly combed through Brodsky's meager baggage and even took apart his little manual typewriter" (Loseff 2011: 168).

[7] Brodsky reiterated this in his conversations with Solomon Volkov (Volkov 1998: 133).

[8] Cf. Könönen 2003: 202. Brodsky writes that he first read Auden in Russian translation in an anthology published in 1937 (1986: 360).

"Poetry International," where Auden was a regular guest. Usually, in his interviews or essays Brodsky carefully conceals economic realities. He does not say anything about his income, about the material hardships of being a poet, about salaries, fees, etc. Against this background the information, given in "To Please a Shadow," that Auden helped him to get his "first American money" — $1,000 from the "Academy of American Poets" — strikes us as an exception. As I mentioned above, the essay begins with the purchase of a typewriter — the reason why he bought it "and set out to write (essays, translations, occasionally a poem) in English," was however neither "necessity", nor "burning ambition" but purely immaterial and altruistic: it was only about paying reverence to Auden. In his essay, Brodsky does everything to make Auden his mentor, his "Virgil," as his faithful reader David Bethea would put it later (2009: 379). Brodsky was very much concerned to let intellectual America (and the world) know that it was none other than Auden who put him on the tracks of literary life in the West: "He'd recommend me to his agent, instruct me on whom to meet and whom to avoid, introduce me to friends, shield me from journalists <...>" (Brodsky 1986: 377–78).

Maybe Auden's programmatic detachment, his "neutrality" (as Brodsky had it; Volkov 1998: 142), his dealing with the issues of history and civilization, maybe also his way of playing the part of the "great international poet" *did* serve Brodsky as a kind of role model. Especially if one considers the combination of traditional lyrical devices and forms and philosophical or pseudo-philosophical operations and the often somewhat bulky poetic syntax that became Brodsky's trademark since the late 1960s, especially in his long poems, it is hard not to think of Auden's example. Perhaps for this very reason, Brodsky insisted that he felt "an ethical rather than a stylistic dependence" towards Auden (Volkov 1998: 133).

The fact that Brodsky paid tribute to his elder colleague in his essays (and occasionally in interviews) may have been part of his self-fashioning as a poet. It may as well have been his way of transposing the Russian dynastical order of "great poets" who pass the baton to each other or symbolically bless their younger successors (as Derzhavin "blessed" Pushkin in Tsarskoe Selo in 1815). If so, this would be indeed significant, since Brodsky, in his pre-Nobel-Prize years, did everything to establish his own genealogy as a decidedly international poet, purposefully incorporating references to the Anglo-American poetic tradition in his texts. According to a common "myth" in Russian intelligentsia circles, Brodsky was often considered as one of "Akhmatova's orphans" (Shrayer 1993: 59–60); however he himself was rather reserved when asked about Akhmatova's influence on his writing, at least during his first years in the West — as with Auden, he stressed the ethical rather than the poetical influence.[9] Probably Brodsky found it more attractive to be seen as Auden's *protégé* than as Akhmatova's. The alleged lineage with Akhmatova did not express what

[9] "Oh, she's a great poet and a very dear friend. But I don't think there was any influence from her. I would say, she's a great human being" (Brumm 1974: 245).

he thought he had to offer to the history of Russian poetry — the link with the Anglo-American tradition and, concomitantly, to the international currents of modernist and late-modernist poetry. Brodsky's own project was unique in this regard. It is not by accident that he took up the *Russian* genealogical line publicly (and recognizably for a Western public) only in his Nobel Lecture and in poems that followed this decisive triumph of his career, most prominently in his "On the Centenary of Anna Akhmatova" (Бродский 2001c: 58). The title of his Nobel Lecture is a quote from Baratynskii and in the lecture itself he mentions Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, Frost, Akhmatova, and Auden — in this order (Brodsky 1995: 44).

Language, Landscape, and Barbarism

For a poet of late modernism, as Brodsky was, it was to a certain extent part of the code of conduct to minimize the significance of biography — with the psychological, sociological, and economic factors at work here — and to place the work in the foreground: "For aesthetics is the mother of ethics," Brodsky famously stated in his Nobel Lecture (1995: 49). However, the question remains whether Brodsky's personal encounter with Auden in June 1972 had a determining impact on his development as a poet. The issue of *language* — of losing one's own language, at least as a means of everyday communication, of being confronted with a foreign language — is as old as the literature of exile. The paradigmatic model is of course Ovid who, after his banishment from Rome, found himself on the coast of the Black Sea, at the outskirts of the Empire, "in the midst of the barbarian world" (Ovid 1939: 137) — where nature was inhospitable and untamed, people were unshaven, wore skins, and nobody spoke Latin. Brodsky's situation was remotely similar but at the same time directly opposed to Ovid's. He was coming from the "North," from an area that was considered to be inhabited by barbarians in Roman times. Proficiency in his language was a rather rare phenomenon among the representatives of the cultural elite in the Anglo-Saxon world in which he had chosen to settle after he had left Leningrad. He himself was barely familiar with English, the language of the new "Empire" (= civilization, = the West) he found himself in and the language his so admired colleague Auden wrote in.[10] In his Essay "In Memory of Stephen Spender," Brodsky recalls his arrival in London and the car ride to Spender's house in 1972:

> The London suburbs were flashing by in the car window and I tried to read signs. The most frequent was BED AND BREAKFAST; I understood the words, but luckily couldn't grasp — due to the absence of a verb — their meaning. (Brodsky 1995: 460)

But it is not only the issue of language that the literature of exile and the discourse of barbarism have in common. In Ovid's *Epistulae ex Ponto* and *Tris-*

[10] "He could hardly speak English," Karen Kennerly remembered her meeting with Brodsky in the early 1970s (Moser 2019: 388).

tia, the very landscape of the Black Sea coast becomes an integral part of the semantics of exile — and of the barbaric. The depiction of landscape in Brodsky's essay on Auden is directly opposed to Ovid's lamentations about the hostile environment in Tomis: In "To Please a Shadow," Brodsky remembers the "green grass at Kirchstetten" (Brodsky 1986: 358). The generic background evoked by this remark ties in with Auden's own depiction of the rural landscape in Kirchstetten. From the 1950s onward, Auden's landscapes tend to be cultivated, "transformed into garden, vineyard, fountain, temple, palace, city" (Marchetti 208–9). Since his arrival in the lower Austrian countryside, Auden had written about Kirchstetten in a decidedly bucolic key. One of the poems in his 1965 collection *About the House* was even entitled "Et in Arcadia Ego" (Auden 1979: 250–51).

From the point of view of the classic European literary imaginary, *language* and *landscape* are often markers of civilization in its confrontation with non-civilization. Auden was of course aware of this. A highly telling example in this regard is his Poem "August 1968," written as a reaction to the Invasion of Warsaw Pact troops to Czechoslovakia:

August 1968

The Ogre does what ogres can,
Deeds quite impossible for Man,
But one prize is beyond his reach,
The Ogre cannot master Speech:
About a subjugated plain,
Among its desperate and slain,
The Ogre stalks with hands on hips,
While drivel gushes from his lips.

(Auden 1979: 291)

According to Brodsky, this poem had been the reason why his own translation of "several [of Auden's] poems into Russian" in 1968 had not been published by a certain "magazine in Moscow" (Brodsky 1986: 376). "August 1968" offers a succinct combination of a barbarian landscape (a "plain," open to invasion and subjugation)[11] with a non-human "Ogre" in its center: traditionally, the key feature of the "barbarian" is "unintelligible language," the very word "barbarian" in the European languages goes back to an onomatopoetic rendering of what was perceived of as incomprehensible babble by speakers of Greek (Winkler 2018: 2–3).

The figure of the "barbarian" evokes the concept of civilization, so fundamental to Auden — and to Brodsky. In "To Please a Shadow," Brodsky wrote about Auden that the latter was "keeping an eye on civilization" (1986: 364).

[11] The word evokes the scenery on the "Shield of Achilles" in the eponymous poem: "A plain without a feature, bare and brown, / No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood, / Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down, / Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood / An unintelligible multitude, / A million eyes, a million boots in line, / Without expression, waiting for a sign" (Auden 1979: 198).

In Kirchstetten, Auden is remembered for having "spoken English whenever he could" (Arnold 2014: xii). Brodsky recalls that Auden liked to address the local priest by his surname, which was "Schicklgruber" (1986: 375). So, there is a distinct *barbarous background* to the harmless bucolic landscape of Kirchstetten. The idyll is not untainted; it is still symbolically and linguistically linked to Hitler and the Third Reich: "this locale had cradled Fascism" (Quinn 2013: 63). The context of Austro-German *barbarism* is implicitly present in Auden's poetry.[12] Auden was of course aware of the fact that Kirchstetten had been the place of residence of one of the most celebrated poets of the Nazi regime, Josef Weinheber (1892–1945).[13] And we should also not forget that he was able to buy his Kirchstetten house at a very low price (for $10,000): "soon after the Russians had left, when everything was cheap and very run down and hardly anybody here had cash. I had dollars, so I was able to beat out a theater director who was after the same property" (Levy 1983: 2). Auden had always had a connection to German culture, his Kirchstetten poems are full of German words. It is also worth mentioning in this regard that he was officially the husband of Thomas Mann's daughter Erika until her death in 1969 (Arnold 2014: 79–81).

According to one of his biographers, the reason why Auden returned to England at the end of his life was the rising crime rate in New York (Osborne 1995: 299). As Brodsky remembers in "To Please a Shadow," during their conversations in June 1972, Auden advised him about where to live in New York, recommending that he look for a flat on St. Mark's Place: "It would be good for you. If only because there is an Armenian church nearby, and the Mass is better when you don't understand the words. You don't know Armenian, do you?" (Brodsky 1986: 378).

As I mentioned earlier, Auden had emigrated to the U.S. on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War (at the age of 32 — Brodsky's age in 1972); his great poem "September 1, 1939" deals with this date and the impression it made on the speaker, situated in New York. In his works, Brodsky repeatedly referred to this poem and even devoted an essay to it; it directly precedes "To Please a Shadow" in his first collection of essays *Less Than One* (1986: 304–56). Auden became a U.S. citizen — as Brodsky did later. And Brodsky met Auden shortly after the latter had decided to put an end to his exile and come 'home' to England in 1972. Brodsky's exile was only just beginning and as his future

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[12] See: "I well might think myself / A humanist, / Could I manage not to see // How the autobahn / Thwarts the landscape / In godless Roman arrogance, // The farmer's children / Tiptoe past the shed / Where the gelding knife is kept" (Auden 1979: 250–52). See also the poem "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten": "<...> When Mass is over, / although obedient to Canterbury, / I shall be well gruss-gotted, asked to contribute / to *Caritas*, though a metic come home / to lunch on my own land: no doubt, if the Allies had not / conquered the Ost-Mark, if the dollar fell, / the *Gemütlichkeit* would be less, but when was peace / or its concomitant smile the worse / for being undeserved?" (Auden 1966: 92).

[13] See his poem "Josef Weinheber" (07.04.1964): "<...> we might / have become good friends, / sharing a common ambit / and love of the Word, / over a golden *Kremser* / had many a long / language on syntax, commas, / versification" (Auden 1969: 17).

place of residence he chose precisely the place Auden was about to leave. For a poet like Brodsky, who was so sensitive to questions of composition and who above all deliberately downplayed his own biography only to charge it with cultural and historical significance in his poems and essays in a poetically transfigured form, it must have been obvious that his encounter with Auden could be seen as the hinge point of a biographical and historical chiasm.

In "To Please a Shadow," Brodsky calls Auden "our transatlantic Horace" (1986: 382). This dictum has often been quoted (see, e.g., Bethea 2009: 384), but so far no one has pointed out that this is not exactly a "paraphrase" of "one of" Auden's lines, as Brodsky states (1986: 382). In one of Auden's Kirchstetten poems, "The Cave of Making" from 1962, we find the following lines:

> <...> I should like to become, if possible,
> a minor atlantic Goethe,
> with his passion for weather and stones but without his silliness
>
> (Auden 1979: 258)[14]

Indeed, Goethe and Horace were important for Auden from the 1950s onward. Goethe with his "colloquial and relaxed attitude" and Horace as a "pastoral poet," with a preference for "domesticity" (Marchetti 2006: 208). However, replacing one (Goethe) by the other (Horace), as Brodsky did, changes a lot. The reference is now no longer classic German literature and the German cultural tradition — including the barbarism to which it had led in the fourth and fifth decades of the twentieth century. Brodsky de-Germanizes and thus debarbarizes Auden's reference. It is now about the European literary tradition, about "Empire"; it is more 'Brodskian' in a way.

Neutrality

Auden's emigration to New York in 1939 has been described by his biographer Edward Mendelson in the context of the poet's "conscious revolt from political causes." According to him, it was Auden's intention to break free "from false and constraining loyalties" (Mendelson 2017: 343). We can describe this as a quest for the high-modernist autonomy of the poetic word, a word that is free precisely because it "makes nothing happen" (a line that Auden *didn't* change in his "In Memory of W. B. Yeats"). Brodsky, who, whether he wanted it or not, had been a symbolical figure on the cultural battlefield of the Cold War (cf.: Iakubovich 1993) since the time of his lawsuit in 1964, was confronted with journalist interest in his person and with attempts to exploit his story right after his expulsion. But — partly thanks to his connections with the American academia and with Auden — he did not succumb to these temptations. Brodsky

[14] Auden called himself (according to Oliver Sacks) "a trans-Atlantic Goethe" (Osborne 1995: 300).

consistently wanted to be seen as a "private person," who refused to be involved in any "political games" — be it in Russia or the West.[15]

In his poems, Brodsky developed a distanced view of the experience of exile, framing it in mythopoetic formulas. It appears as a "change of empires" and is accompanied by motives of *sharpness, knives* (or even castration). It is as if there was no *in-between* and as if the only space dividing his former "Empire" and the new one was a "horizon," a "sharp line," or at best an "ocean."[16] Yet there *was* something — there was Austria, Vienna, Kirchstetten, Auden. And this space — together with its linguistic, geographical, and historical background — evokes the past, the Second World War.

In his foreword to Brodsky's volume of *Selected Poems*, published in 1973 — a volume that became a sort of entrance ticket to the international literary scene for the young poet[17] — Auden called "Mr Brodsky" a "traditionalist," who "shows a deep respect and love for the past of his native land" (Auden 1973: 11). As a proof, he quoted from Brodsky's 1966 poem "A Halt in the Desert" ("Остановка в пустыне"). The poem reads the Soviet secularization and modernization project against the background of the encounter of Slavdom and the Hellenic world, of Soviet ideology and religion, and of course against that of the confrontation between Christendom and the Tartars — the speaker is visiting a Tartar family on the day of the demolition of the last Greek Church in Leningrad in 1962:

Все началось с татарских разговоров;
а после в разговор вмешались звуки,
сливавшиеся с речью поначалу,
но вскоре — заглушившие ее.
<...>
Когда-нибудь, когда не станет нас,
точнее — после нас, на нашем месте
возникнет тоже что-нибудь такое,
чему любой, кто знал нас, ужаснется.
Но знавших нас не будет слишком много.

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[15] Cf.: "In any event, I am rather a private person than a political figure. In Russia I did not allow myself to be used in any political games, all the less will I do so here. I have no intention of explaining *urbi et orbi* what Russia is, or 'opening the eyes' of anyone. I am not representative, and I am not a journalist or newspaperman" (Brodsky 1972: 82).

[16] "чаши лишившись в пиру Отечества, / нынче стою в незнакомой местности"; "Во избежанье роковой черты, / я пересек другую — горизонта, / чье лезвие, Мари, острей ножа"; "я сменил империю // <...> // я прошел сквозь строй янычар в зеленом, / чуя яйцами холод их злых секир, / как при входе в воду. И вот, с соленым / вкусом этой воды во рту, / я пересек черту" (Бродский 2001b: 18, 64, 82). Trans.: "denied a chalice at the feast of the fatherland, / now I stand in a strange place. The name hardly matters" (trans. Alan Myers with the author), "I cut across another line — whose edge / is sharper than a knife blade: the horizon" (Peter France with the author), "I have switched Empires // <...> // playing my flute I passed the green janissaries, / my testes sensing their poleaxe's sinister cold, / as when one wades into water. And then with the brine of sea-water sharpness filling, flooding the mouth, / I crossed the line" (Anthony Hecht); (Brodsky 2000b: 69, 227, 117).

[17] It was dedicated "To the Memory of Wystan Hugh Auden, 1907–1973" (Brodsky 1973: 2).

Вот так, по старой памяти, собаки
на прежнем месте задирают лапу.

(Бродский 2001a: 167–68)

It started in the midst of Tartar talk,
but soon the racket forced its rumbling way
into our conversation, mingling with,
then drowning out, our steady human speech.
<...>
Someday, when we who now live are no more,
or rather after we have been, there will
spring up in what was once our space
a thing of such a kind as will bring fear,
a panic fear, to those who knew us best.
But those who knew us will be very few.
The dogs, moved by old memory, still lift
their hindlegs at a once familiar spot.

(Brodsky 1973: 131–32)

In his poem on the demolition of a church in Leningrad, Brodsky creates an allegory for the presence of the absent, for the latent continuity of former cultural eras despite manifest ruptures. We can liken the barbaric undercurrents in the cultural landscape of Kirchstetten — present in Auden's poems about the place as well as in Brodsky's homage to Auden — to the situation in Leningrad, where dogs still smell the scent of something that was there but isn't anymore. Curiously, Auden, in one of his Kirchstetten poems, directly referred to the geopolitical situation of the middle of the twentieth century. The idyll is not only tainted by the remnants of the past, but also by the presence of contemporary "barbarians" — the scenery is a church visit on Whitsunday:

<...> As crows fly,
ninety kilometers from here our habits end,
where minefield and watchtower say no exit
from peace-loving Crimtartary <...>

(Auden 1966: 93)

In this poem that despite its jocular tone deals with the current state of civilization, we find a similar, somewhat distanced view on religion (here the Pentecost liturgy). As in Brodsky's "A Halt in the Desert," the Brodskian allusions to multiculturality ("Tartar talk") are mirrored by a constant switching between English and German, finally "Crimtartary" evokes the political reality of the Soviet Union as a sinister threat to the peaceful setting in Kirchstetten.

Brodsky describes the demolition of the byzantine-style Greek church in Leningrad (which, by the way, was only 100 years old) as a "Halt in the Desert," a *stopover*. Something is changing and we are the witnesses of a strange situation, somewhere in between languages, traditions. It is here that the confronta-

tion between faith and paganism, between civilization and barbarism that informs the whole work of Joseph Brodsky, becomes most visible.

In "To Please a Shadow," Brodsky presents his indebtedness to Auden rather as an affinity, and not as an influence. Of course, it would presumably be an exaggeration to say that his stay in Kirchstetten and his encounter with Auden was a decisive turning point in his writing, that he would have become a different poet were it not for these three weeks in lower Austria. After all, he could have met Auden elsewhere — and he was reading him anyway, most probably since 1965. But things happened as they happened, and Brodsky's trajectory was as it was. And we can say that Brodsky, who had been concerned about the issues of tradition and civilization well before he arrived in Vienna, later made of the confrontation between civilization and barbarism one of the key issues of his poetic work. What is interesting is that he insisted on the strict irreconcilability of these two historic principles (or forces, camps) — there was no in-between for him, no third way.

But there was a superior level, a level of detachment, of neutrality — not neutrality in the sense of negotiating or maneuvering between civilization and barbarism or between two hostile great powers (as the official politics in Austria at the time), but neutrality as something higher, as detachment from terrestrial issues — as illustrated or rather *incarnated* by the figure of the exiled poet at the end of the tenth of the "Roman Elegies":

> <...> Так на льду Танаиса
> пропадая из виду, дрожа всем телом,
> высохшим лавром прикрывши темя,
> бредут в лежащее за пределом
> всякой великой державы время.
>
> (Бродский 2001b: 231)

> <...> thus, still others shuffle across the frozen
> Tanaïs, dropping from the picture, limping,
> occiputs covered with wilted laurels and blizzards' powder —
> toward Time, lying beyond the limits
> of every spraddling superpower.
>
> (Brodsky 2000b: 279)

In these lines, Brodsky connects the Russian sacrificial myth of the poet with the world-literary myth of Ovid in exile — and he transfers both to a metaphysical level.

In "A Halt in the Desert," Brodsky used a spatial metaphor to conceptualize a pause that allowed for a reflection on the course of history and the current state of civilization. The "halt" is a kind of detachment, an attempt to scrutinize what is going on from a neutral standpoint, but the framework is still a temporal one. Brodsky is still arguing with concepts of "history" and "progress," he is still referring, albeit in an ironic manner, to the official discourse of the Hegelian philosophy of history that was binding in the Soviet context. In his "Roman Ele-

gies," the constraints of space, geography and geopolitics are suspended by a mythologized notion of time — absolute time that is no longer connected to human history.

Conclusion

Brodsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union — whether he wanted it or not — was an event in the history of the Cold War, the confrontation of two superpowers, or, as he liked to put it, Empires. The first three weeks in the West, the "Halt in Vienna," offered Brodsky the possibility of a different perspective. He found himself in a situation that made detachment possible, also because it was only temporary. Curiously, what Auden's speaker liked about his house in Kirchstetten was that it was "a place / I may go both in and out of" (1979: 255). His laconic understatement did not hinder Auden from seeing his own fate in the framework of world-history. It was maybe first and foremost in this respect that he exerted an influence on Brodsky. In a poetic homage to his virtual neighbor in Kirchstetten, "Josef Weinheber (1892–1945)," he wrote:

> Unmarked by me, unmourned for,
> the hour of your death,
> unhailed by you the moment
> when, providence-led,
> I first beheld Kirchstetten
> on a pouring wet
> October day in a year
> that changed our cosmos,
> the *annus mirabilis*
> when Parity fell.
>
> (Auden 1969: 18)

This poem paradigmatically shows how "self-restraint" is compatible with a claim to "universal significance" — two characteristic traits of Auden's poetry Brodsky stressed in "To Please a Shadow" (1986: 360). Auden's frame of reference is not the philosophy of history, not religion but physics: The line "when Parity fell" refers to the discovery of "parity nonconservation"[18] by a group of Chinese physicists in 1957. As Auden explained in a conversation with Alan Levy: "That was 1957, <...> a rather important year in the history of physics — when it was discovered that all physical reactions are not symmetrical" (Levy 1983: 2).

The conceptual function of the "Halt in Vienna" for Brodsky was that his encounter with Auden offered him an escape from the factual constraints of biography, history, ideology. The "abyss" at the end of Auden's poem to Josef Weinheber ("*den Abgrund zu nennen*", 1969: 20 — "to name the abyss") is cosmic and hence purely existential, it has nothing to do with politics and history.

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[18] See: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/physics-experiment/app1.html (14.02.2024).

Brodsky was primarily concerned with the *potential* of transcending political and historical circumstances, he was not neglecting their importance. His essay on Auden and his other work show all too clearly that, like the dogs in "A Halt in the Desert," he felt the presence of tradition and human affairs but without making them absolute. In the following decades, he would regularly come to Europe for places he could "go both in and out of" and he would dedicate some of his most significant poetry to such places.

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Јенс Херлтх

ЗАУСТАВЉАЊЕ У БЕЧУ: ПРЕИСПИТИВАЊЕ ЈОСИФА БРОДСКОГ КАО ПЕСНИКА У ИЗГНАНСТВУ

У чланку се анализира есеј Бродског „Удовољити сенци“, који говори о песниковом кратком заустављању у Бечу након прогонства из Совјетског Савеза почетком јуна 1972. године. Сећања Бродског на његов сусрет са В. Х. Одном у његовој кући у Кирхштетену у Доњој Аустрији се морају посматрати у контексту саморепрезентативних стратегија руско-америчког песника. Бродски се у својим разним стиховима ослањао на имплицитно политичку семантику, коју је Одн приписао његовом летњем боравку у Кирхштетену. Однов дистанцирани и иронични приступ културним и политичким проблемима тог времена послужио је Бродском као узор: он је управо овде пронашао лирски тон и стил, који му је омогућио да превазиђе политичка ограничења са којима се сучељавао као прогнани песник и да усвоји чисто поетски, дистанцирани, али ипак филозофски и поетски посвећен став.

Кључне речи: руска емигрантска књижевност, транзит, Јосиф Бродски, В. Х. Одн, Хладни рат.