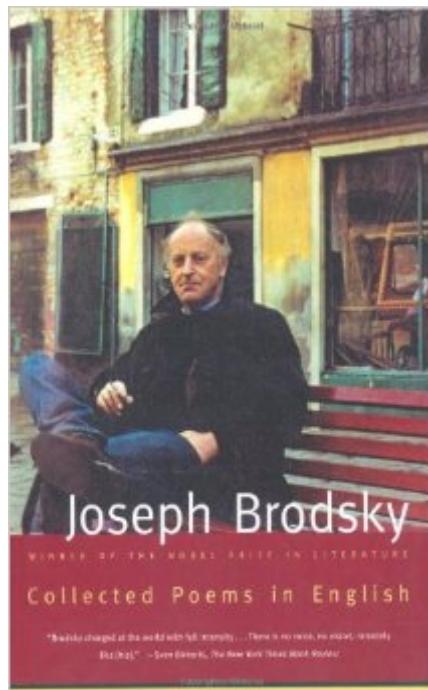


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Collected Poems In English



Synopsis

The poems of the legendary Nobel Laureate, in one volume at last. One of the greatest and grandest advocates of the literary vocation, Joseph Brodsky truly lived his life as a poet, and for it earned eighteen months in an Arctic labor camp, expulsion from his native country, and the Nobel Prize in Literature. Such were one man's wages. Here, collected for the first time, are all the poems he published in English, from his earliest collaborations with Derek Walcott, Richard Wilbur, Howard Moss, and Anthony Hecht to the moving farewell poems he wrote near the end of his life. With nearly two hundred poems, several of them never before published in book form, this will be the essential volume of Brodsky's work.

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Customer Reviews

I had immersed myself in the Russian poets who were Brodsky's precursors (Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva, Blok), then started reading him, since Akhmatova referred to him at the end of her life. (Brodsky's attendance at Akhmatova's funeral was one of the reasons the Soviet authorities went after him.) At the beginning I found Brodsky's complexity, and the oddness of his figures of speech, disappointing. But I kept coming back to him. Some of it still seems odd, stilted, but I suspect that some of this is due to translation difficulties. And some of the oddness disappears as I read more and learn his utterly original mode of thinking. His poems are really growing on me. I would have said a month ago that my favorite is "The Butterfly"; but I find myself coming back again and again to "Lullaby of Cape Cod" and "Nunc Dimittis". "The New Jules Verne"

is one of the funniest poems I've ever read. "Fin de Siecle"--about growing old (or, more accurately, growing unhealthy)--has just about the most meaningful ending, for me, of anything I've ever read. I read "Lullaby of Cape Cod" twice today. I can't get its images out of my head: the loss of his home in Russia, what a hot Massachusetts summer night is like, all that can be learned from time and night, the fantasy of Atlantic codfish coming to the door--this is a poem about Cape COD, after all! The man does have a sense of humor-- with which he finally manages to lull himself to sleep. This is the best book of his poetry. The translations are fairly consistent in tone, especially since he usually either translated them himself or advised those who did. If you buy it, be patient with it. Brodsky rewards patience.

Don't believe the petty, narrow-minded balderdash about supposed poor translations. Duh, he wrote in another language that most English speakers don't know and aren't about to learn, and it has to be translated so we can read it in English. Wow. The author, who is one of the greatest poets of the century, either translated it himself or had help from other giants of poetry, so it's how he wanted it - and it's brilliant. So it isn't exactly how it was in Russian...Ok, but it's still better than most of the poetry published in the last 50 years. Don't listen to the whining nit-pickers, and enjoy this wonderful collection. If it was up to them [those who are against translation in general] and their grotesque elitism, we wouldn't have anything translated into or out of English, or into or out of any other language, and that would be a disaster. Plus translations aren't anyway near as problematic as they think, but there's no space to go into that here.

This is a large and lovely book. It collects the most significant and important verse of J. Brodsky, winner of the Nobel prize. I highly recommend it. Brodsky speaks of history's fortune and fate as he attempts a clarification of the poet's role in a world gone amuck. There are some gems here: "On Love," "I Sit By the Window," "Odysseus to Telemachus," "The Butterfly," "Torso," "Elegy: For Robert Lowell," and "Cafe Trieste: SF," to name a few. Brodsky's poetic voice is imaginative and celestial. His words are as light and time-transcendent as the cloud-walk of heavenly angels. I also recommend: Z. Herbert, C. Milosz, R. Hass, W. Szymborska, A. Zagajewski, and R. Jeffers.

This collection brings together Brodsky's work in English, much of which he has been intimately involved in translating. This becomes important in that, for those of us who do not speak Russian, these poems can be considered direct from Brodsky's hand, as opposed to coming through the often suspect medium of independent translator. (This seems to have been discussed in many of

these reviews and is well examined in the Forward to this book.) Moreover, Brodsky's attention to meter and rhyme schemes are unerringly original and his ability with the English language is astonishing, surprising, taking the world apart in language and puts it back together in image. The edition is very appealing. Thick but easy to read.

Brodsky's content is excellent; the formats are sometimes confusing. Brodsky wrote first in Russian and then learned English. Some of the poems are translations from Russian made by Brodsky, some of the poems are translations from Russian made by others, and some of the poems are written in English. Thus, sometimes I'm not sure whose poems I'm reading, and of course one considers a translation differently. I wish very much the editor had made clear at the beginning of each poem who did what to what (that sounds almost like a naughty limerick!).

Brodsky's Russian poems have driven crazy millions of Russian speaking readers. I am one of them. He is a god of poetry and of the language. Unfortunately, his English poems pale in comparison. But then again, you guys have W.H. Auden!

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