Opponent’s Report on B.A. thesis by

Ms. Elena Tkacheva

NOT QUITE A JUGGLER OF IDENTITIES: JOSEPH BRODSKY’S TRANSLATIONS WITHIN THE AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION

In her thesis, Ms. Elena Tkacheva evaluates the emigrant American writer Joseph Brodsky and the translational treatment of his works into English from Russian and of their role in the aesthetic heritage of American literature. The study is both well researched and well written and contains work to be commended.

The thesis contains forty-two pages across an Introduction, four chapters one of which is a Conclusion and a rich Bibliography. The chapter titles for the body of the thesis include the following: “2. The Difficulties of Bringing Brodsky’s Poetry into English 3. Weird English or Just Weird 4. It is All About One’s Connections 5. Conclusion”. All in all, the thesis is well structured and organized and clear in the exposition of its presentation strategy as the titles of the individual units of composition suggest. Stylistically the thesis is well written although there is the odd error e.g., “an declaration” should be “a declaration” (9), “result” should be “results” (13) and there are other such errors from time to time in the text.

The first really crucial point for this reader comes on page 26 in which we read that “Brodsky’s weird English is manifested on two levels: the lexical level and the formal one” and also writes, “one may conclude that Brodsky does not develop significant deviations from his Russian style in relation to his neologisms; but he possesses weird English traits in lexical, syntactic and phonetic senses […]” (26). First question: is this foregoing aesthetic fact a good or a bad thing and why?

In the conclusion the candidate makes the claim of Brodsky’s dedicated efforts properly to “present his Russian work. Ultimately, he fails to do so, since his Russian syntax and prosody do not accommodate an Anglophone reader. But the path he chooses to achieve this goal gains him a right to a new weird English identity within the Anglophone literary tradition” (38). So in this light this brings me to my second and last question, namely, how is Brodsky’s weird English a feat of achievement for a positive understanding? The candidate would do well to clarify this point.

In light of the foregoing mentions, I hereby recommend the pre thesis defense mark of 2 (velmi dobře) for this thesis work.

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