



FACULTY OF ARTS
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report on B. A. Thesis
NOT QUITE A JUGGLER OF IDENTITIES: JOSEPH BRODSKY'S TRANSLATIONS
WITH THE AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION
by Elena Tkacheva

This is an extremely interesting and ambitious thesis that follows the political, linguistic and geographical journey of the Russian poet, Joseph Brodsky, into English. In sophisticated fashion, the student applies the insights of theorists such as Evelyn N Ch'ien and Bharati Mukherjee to bring nuance to her detailed discussions of issues of translation and context, as Brodsky became one of the most celebrated poets in the United States from the mid-1970s to his death in 1996. There are close readings of poems, and careful analysis of the conditions in which the English versions were created, as well as a consideration of some passages of Brodsky's poetry in English. Perhaps the most mordant moment of the thesis is when the student remarks "that while Nabokov created [a] Pnin, Brodsky becomes one" (p. 31).

I have two reservations. Although the student aims to assess Brodsky's place within the American tradition, this demarcation is not adhered to throughout. This is striking especially when she considers the comments of two of Brodsky's staunchest defenders, and closest friends, Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott. Neither of these poets is American, even though they were both renowned in the US. Brodsky's reputation in the UK was also significant. Perhaps behind this blurring of borders stands W. H. Auden, who was both a British and an American poet. One can understand the desire to emphasize the American context, given that the US faced off with the USSR during this period. Yet there are many dynamics in anglophone poetry that exceed the Cold War binary. I note this here in order to suggest the complexity of the issue for any consideration of Brodsky's English reputation.

Second, as perhaps befits the theme of the thesis, there was a breakdown in communication between the student and myself in the months before submission. Thus, I was unable to comment on the complete text, as well as offer copy-editing. Although the standard of the student's English is high, there is nevertheless fair amount of "weird English" throughout.

Given these reservations I recommend the grade of **2 (velmi dobře)**.

doc. Justin Quinn Ph.D.

5 June 2015