

Title: Joseph Brodsky and Jewishness: Looking at Brodsky's World through the "Jewish Telescope"

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An exploration of how Brodsky portrays Jews in his poetry, what he expresses in his essays regarding his Jewish identity, and critical responses to Brodsky's work reveal a dimension of his work curiously not analyzed in Brodsky scholarship. What appears through such an exercise is a tension arising out of a clash between self-representation and identity, and imposition and projection by others. Additionally, Brodsky's universal values are in some cases distorted by others' exclusive and narrow-minded conceptualizations of what it means to be Jewish. As a result, critical commentaries addressing Brodsky's Jewishness seem in too many cases to obfuscate the very tension they seek to elucidate. Moreover, a number of comments by Brodsky's contemporaries are colored by anti-Semitic notions – a feature to which I believe it is imperative to draw attention.

The intention of this paper is twofold: (1) to turn attention to the subject of Jewishness in Brodsky's oeuvre, a subject which has been generally misunderstood and misconstrued by scholars, and (2) to show how this feature as it appears in Brodsky's work and interpretations of it reflect a tension between self and other. Through a discussion of poems including "*Gorbunov i Gorchakov*" and "*Litovskii divertiment*," the essay "Less than One," and various works by Brodsky scholars and contemporaries, I hope to demonstrate that this type of analysis may enrich our understanding of Brodsky's relationship with Jewishness while it simultaneously illuminates some of the problematic ways in which others have treated this relationship.