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"A List of Some Observations:" Joseph Brodsky and T.S. Eliot's Techniques of Depersonalization

The paper seeks to explore how the poetics of Joseph Brodsky, whose poetry has been frequently described as "non-Russian" due to being cerebral, unemotional, and impersonal, is related to the poetic agenda offered by American high modernism, T.S. Eliot in particular. While Brodsky's debt to W.H. Auden has been well explored and advertised by the poet himself, his links with the Anglo-American poet whose popularity was extremely high even behind the Iron Curtain have been hardly discussed. I will argue that the early Eliot's striving for the objective, rather than the subjective, in poetry became an important aesthetic principle for Brodsky.

The paper offers a comparative analysis of Eliot's poetics in the book "Prufrock and Other Observations" (1917) and Brodsky's poems from the cycle "A Part of Speech" (1975-1976) which he claims to be "a list of some observations" in one of the poems. I show that the poets used similar poetic devices in the poems where the lyrical "I" was eliminated: the prevalence of the objective imagery represented as a result of observations; self-objectification through writing the self as a body; a syntactic organization that relies on impersonal constructions and avoids the personal pronoun "I."

Eliot developed his approach to depersonalization, with its attention to the objective in the poetic text, as a response to the cult of expressivity in Romantic poetry. The Russian poet used Eliotesque innovations to reconceptualize the deeply rooted traditions of Romantic lyricism found in 19th-century, Silver Age, and Soviet Russian poetry.