

Nobel Prize in Literature 1987



Joseph Brodsky

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1987 was awarded to Joseph Brodsky *"for an all-embracing authorship, imbued with clarity of thought and poetic intensity"*.

This year's Nobel Prize winner in Literature was born in Leningrad and lives in New York. Aged only 47 he is one of the youngest ever to have been awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature. A sign of the luminous intensity of his writing is that he has already been translated into more than a dozen languages.

Brodsky is chiefly a poet and essayist. He belongs to the classical Russian tradition with predecessors such as Pushkin and the Nobel Prizewinner [Pasternak](#). At the same time he is a masterly renewer of poetical language and poetical forms of expression, inspired by Osip Mandelstam and Anna Achmatova among others.

Another of Brodsky's sources of inspiration is English poetry from the metaphysicist John Donne to W.H. Auden, he who wanted to be a lesser, atlantic Goethe. That language is the stuff that empires are made of is a vital thought with Brodsky as well.

For Brodsky, poetry is a divine gift. The religious dimension that one meets in his work is of a nature that adheres to no creed. Metaphysical and ethical questions are paramount.

The east-west background - literary, geographical, linguistic - has greatly influenced Brodsky's writing. It has given it an unusual wealth of themes and manifold perspectives. Together with the writer's profound insight into the literature of earlier epochs it has also conjured up a grand historical vision.

The change of environment and language after Brodsky had left the Soviet in 1972 naturally involved a severe nervous strain for the poet. In the poem 1972 (in the collection *A Part of Speech* 1980) he depicts how he will gradually lose hair, teeth, consonants, verbs, and endings. Nevertheless he is now engaged on a prolific poetical work in Russian. Parallel with that he takes an active part in the translation of his works into English and sometimes writes directly in this language to great effect *History of the Twentieth Century* (1986) is a series of poems in a tone of raillery and parody, written with a quite amazing mastery of the English idiom.

All literature really is about what time does to people, Brodsky has said, thus indicating a main theme in his writing. Parting, becoming deformed, growing old, dying are the work of time. Poetry helps us, gives us basically the only possibility of withstanding the pressure of existence.

Poetry's role in the world is another central theme. It may apply to totalitarian societies, in which the poet can become the mouthpiece for those who apparently are silent, or to open societies in which his voice threatens to be drowned in the flood of information. In the brilliant collection of essays *Less Than One* (1980) Brodsky feels his way in towards the core of the problem from various directions. The poet is a word craftsman, a master of language. Poetry is the highest form of language. Brodsky sees it also as the highest form of life. The poet becomes an instrument with a questioning sound.

The Swedish Academy's citation aims at the great breadth in time and space which characterizes Joseph Brodsky's writing and at both the intellectual and sensitive side of this rich and intensely vital work.

For more details please visit:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1987/press.html

Call for research and Review articles publication: ijsidonlineinfo@gmail.com