

EDITOR'S NOTE: This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the trial of Joseph Brodsky (1940–96), who was tried in Leningrad in 1964 for crimes against the state.

Joseph Brodsky was a Russian poet and translator who lived in the U.S. after being expelled from the Soviet Union in 1972. His publications include numerous books of poems and essays, among them *A Part of Speech* (1977) and *To Urania* (1988) and the essay collection *Less Than One* (1986), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award. He wrote in both Russian and English, self-translating and working with poet-translators including W. H. Auden, Derek Walcott, and Anthony Hecht. In 1991, he was named Poet Laureate of the United States. Brodsky was at the beginning of his career when the Soviet authorities found him guilty of "social parasitism" and sentenced him to five years of exile and hard labor. The transcript of his hearings, bravely recorded by the journalist Frida Abramovna Vigdorova (1915–65), was first circulated in samizdat and then published in numerous periodicals in France, Germany, England, the U.S., and Poland.

Throughout much of her life, Vigdorova actively aided victims of oppression, and she dedicated her final years to seeking justice for Brodsky. A journalist and writer who graduated from Moscow Pedagogic Institute, she was the author of a number of books on

issues in education, including *Diary of a Russian Schoolteacher*. At the time of Brodsky's trial she was a correspondent for *Literaturnaya gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*], but the chief editor forbade her to attend; under the circumstances, she was determined to witness the trial independently and kept a record of the proceedings, despite admonishments from the judge and harassment from the volunteer militia in the courtroom.

After Brodsky was sentenced, Vigdorova continued petitioning for his release. His sentence was commuted in 1965 after protests by prominent Soviet and international cultural figures, including Anna Akhmatova, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Vigdorova herself had died of cancer on August 7, 1965, before her efforts had any measurable effect. Lev Loseff reports in his biography of Brodsky that the poet kept a photograph of her on the wall over his desk for many years, first in Russia, then in America.

Books in English that provide valuable context and background for the trial are Lev Loseff's *Joseph Brodsky: A Literary Life* and Efim Etkind's *Notes of a Non-Conspirator*, part of which was published in *NER* in 1997 in a translation by Roberta Reeder.

What appears here is a new translation of the full trial transcript, with annotations provided by the translator, Michael R. Katz.

Frida Vigdorova

The Trial of Joseph Brodsky

FIRST HEARING OF THE CASE OF JOSEPH BRODSKY

Session of the Dzerzhinsky District Court

City of Leningrad, 36 Vostanie Street

February 18, 1964

Presiding Judge: Mme. Saveleva

Defense Counsel: Mme. Z. N. Toporova

JUDGE: What do you do for a living?

BRODSKY: I write poetry. I translate. I suppose. . .

JUDGE: Never mind what you “suppose.” Stand up properly. Don’t lean against the wall. Look at the court. Answer the court properly. (*To me*) Stop taking notes immediately! Or else—I’ll have you thrown out of the courtroom. (*To Brodsky*) Do you have a regular job?

BRODSKY: I thought this was a regular job.

JUDGE: Answer correctly!

BRODSKY: I was writing poems. I thought they’d be published. I suppose. . .

JUDGE: We’re not interested in what you “suppose.” Tell us why you weren’t working.

BRODSKY: I had contracts with a publisher.

JUDGE: Did you have enough contracts to earn a living? List them: with whom, what dates, and for what sums of money?

BRODSKY: I don’t remember exactly. My lawyer has all the contracts.

JUDGE: I’m asking you.

BRODSKY: Two books with my translations were published in Moscow. (*He lists them.*)

JUDGE: How long have you worked?

BRODSKY: Approximately. . .

JUDGE: We’re not interested in “approximately.”

BRODSKY: Five years.

JUDGE: Where did you work?

BRODSKY: At a factory. With geological groups . . .

JUDGE: How long did you work at the factory?

BRODSKY: A year.

JUDGE: As what?

BRODSKY: A milling-machine operator.

JUDGE: And, in general, what is your specific occupation?

BRODSKY: Poet. Poet-translator.

JUDGE: And who said you're a poet? Who ranked you among poets?

BRODSKY: No one. (*Unsolicited*) Who ranked me as a member of the human race?

JUDGE: Did you study for this?

BRODSKY: Study for what?

JUDGE: To become a poet. Did you attend some university where people are trained . . . where they're taught . . .

BRODSKY: I didn't think it was a matter of education.

JUDGE: How, then?

BRODSKY: I think that . . . (*perplexed*) it comes from God . . .

JUDGE: Do you have any petitions for the court?

BRODSKY: I'd like to know why I was arrested.

JUDGE: That's a question, not a petition.

BRODSKY: Then I have no petitions.

JUDGE: Does the defense have any questions?

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Yes. Citizen Brodsky, do your earnings support your family?

BRODSKY: Yes.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Do your parents also work for a living?

BRODSKY: They receive pensions.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Do you live together as a family?

BRODSKY: Yes.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Consequently, your earnings contribute to the family budget?

JUDGE: You're not posing questions, but making general statements. You're helping him answer. Don't make statements: ask questions.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Are you registered at a psychiatric clinic?

BRODSKY: Yes.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Have you undergone treatment in a hospital?

BRODSKY: Kashchenko Hospital in Moscow.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Don't you think that your illness prevented you from working at one place for a long time?

BRODSKY: Perhaps. Probably. However, I don't know. No, I don't know.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Did you translate poems for a collection of writings by Cuban poets?

BRODSKY: Yes.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Have you translated Spanish *romances*?¹

BRODSKY: Yes.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Were you affiliated with the Translators' Division of the Union of Writers?²

BRODSKY: Yes.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: I ask the court to add to the file a reference from the office of the Translators' Division . . . A list of published poems . . . Copies of contracts . . . A telegram: "We request that you sign this contract as soon as possible." (*She specifies these in order.*) I ask that Citizen Brodsky be sent for medical examination to determine the state of his health and whether it has interfered with his ability to do regular work. In addition, I ask that Citizen Brodsky be released immediately from custody. I think that he has committed no crimes and that it is illegal to keep him in custody. He has a permanent place of residence and could appear before the court at any time.

The court withdraws for consultation. Then it returns and the judge announces its decision.

JUDGE: Brodsky is to be sent for a court-ordered psychiatric examination to resolve the question: does he suffer from some psychiatric illness and will this illness prevent him from being sent to a remote location for forced labor? Taking into consideration the fact that from the history of his illness it is clear that Brodsky has evaded hospitalization, it is ordered that Division No. 18

1 A collection of Spanish romances, a type of folk ballad (sung narrative).

2 The only officially approved organization of professional writers and literary critics in the Soviet Union, established in 1932 to strengthen political control over literature.

of the militia take charge of conveying him to the court-ordered psychiatric examination.

JUDGE: Do you have any questions?

BRODSKY: I have a request—that I be provided with paper and pen in my cell.

JUDGE: You will ask the head of the militia for that.

BRODSKY: I did ask and he refused. I request paper and a pen.

JUDGE: (*Relenting*) All right, I will convey your request.

BRODSKY: Thank you.

As everyone left the courtroom, there was an enormous crowd, especially young people, in the corridors and on the staircases.

JUDGE: What a lot of people! I didn't think so many would gather here.

FROM THE CROWD: It isn't every day a poet's on trial.

JUDGE: It makes no difference—whether he's a poet or not.

According to the opinion of the Defense Counsel, Z. N. Toporova, Judge Saveleva should have released Brodsky from custody so that the following day he could go to the court-ordered psychiatric hospital for examination on his own, but Saveleva left him in custody; thus he was sent to the hospital under guard.

SECOND HEARING OF THE CASE OF JOSEPH BRODSKY

22 Fontanka, Hall of the Builders' Club

March 13, 1964

Conclusion of the psychiatric examination: the presence of psychopathic traits is noted, but he is capable of working; consequently administrative measures may be implemented.

Those arriving at the courtroom are met with a sign: TRIAL OF THE PARASITE BRODSKY.³ The great hall of the Builders' Club is filled with people.

All rise! Court is in session.

Judge Saveleva asks Brodsky if he has any petitions for the court. It turns out that he was not informed of the charges either before the first hearing or the

3 In the Soviet Union every adult able-bodied person was expected to work until official retirement. Those who refused to work, study, or serve in some other way risked being criminally charged with social parasitism.

second. The judge adjourns the hearing. Brodsky is led away so that he can read the indictment. Some time later he is brought back in; he says that the poems on pages 141, 143, 155, 200, and 234 (*he enumerates them*) are not his work. In addition, he requests that the diary he kept in 1956 when he was sixteen years old not be included in this case. The woman Defense Counsel concurs in this request.

JUDGE: As far as his so-called poems are concerned, we will take his petition into consideration; as for his personal notebook, there is no need to withdraw this. Citizen Brodsky, you changed your place of work thirteen times since 1956. You worked at a factory for one year, and then didn't work for half a year. During the summer, you participated in a geological expedition, then you didn't work for four months . . . (*She lists the places where he worked and the intervals between jobs.*) Explain to the court why you didn't work during these intervals and why you led a parasitical way of life.

BRODSKY: I did work during the intervals. I did just what I am doing now. I wrote poems.

JUDGE: That is, you wrote your so-called poems? What was the purpose of your changing your place of work so often?

BRODSKY: I began working when I was fifteen. I found it all interesting. I changed work because I wanted to learn as much as possible about life and about people.

JUDGE: How were you useful to the motherland?

BRODSKY: I wrote poems. That's my work. I'm convinced . . . I believe that what I've written will be of use to people not only now, but also to future generations.

A VOICE FROM THE PUBLIC: Listen to that! What an imagination!

ANOTHER VOICE: He's a poet. He has to think like that.

JUDGE: That is, you think that your so-called poems are of use to people?

BRODSKY: Why do you say my poems are "so-called" poems?

JUDGE: We refer to your poems as "so-called" because we have no other impression of them.

[PUBLIC PROSECUTOR] SOROKIN: You say that you possess a high degree of curiosity. Why didn't you wish to serve in the Soviet Army?⁴

BRODSKY: I won't reply to such questions.

JUDGE: Answer!

4 Soviet Armed Forces were staffed by mandatory draft (with some exceptions) for all able-bodied males, who were required to serve for two years.

BRODSKY: I was deferred from military service. It wasn't that "I didn't wish to serve": I was deferred. These are different things. I was deferred twice. The first time it was because my father was ill; the second was a result of my own illness.

SOROKIN: Is it possible to live on the money you earn?

BRODSKY: Yes. When I was in prison I signed a paper stating that forty kopecks were spent on my upkeep every day. I used to earn more than forty kopecks a day.

SOROKIN: But you have to buy shoes and clothes.

BRODSKY: I have one suit—an old one, but it's a suit. I don't need another.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Have your poems been evaluated by specialists?

BRODSKY: Yes. Chukovsky and Marshak have spoken very highly of my translations.⁵ Better than I deserve.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Did you have any connections with the Translator's Division of the Union of Writers?

BRODSKY: Yes. I contributed to an anthology called *For the First Time in Russian* and I read translations from the Polish.

JUDGE: (*to the Defense Counsel*) You're supposed to ask him about his useful work, but you're asking him about his public appearances.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: His translations are his useful work.

JUDGE: It would be better, Brodsky, if you explained to the court why you didn't work during the intervals between jobs.

BRODSKY: I did work. I was writing poems.

JUDGE: But that didn't prevent you from working.

BRODSKY: But I was working. I was writing poems.

JUDGE: But there are some people who work at factories and who write poems. What prevented you from doing so?

BRODSKY: Not all people are the same. Even their hair color and facial expressions differ.

JUDGE: That's not your discovery. Everyone knows that. It would be better to explain how to evaluate your role in our great forward march toward Communism.

BRODSKY: The building of Communism involves not only standing at a workbench or plowing the earth. It's also intellectual work, which . . .

⁵ Kornei Chukovsky (1882–1969) was a popular children's poet, a literary scholar, translator, and editor. Samuil Marshak (1887–1964) was also a well-respected writer, children's author, and translator.

JUDGE: Stop your lofty phrases! It would be better to explain how you plan to organize your working life in the future.

BRODSKY: I want to write poems and translate. But if this contradicts some generally accepted norm, I'll find some permanent job and will still continue to write poems.

PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE TYAGLYI: In our country every person works. How did you manage to remain idle for so long?

BRODSKY: You don't consider my work as work. I wrote poems; I consider that work.

JUDGE: Have you drawn any conclusions from what's been written about you in the press?

BRODSKY: Lerner's article was false.⁶ That's the only conclusion I drew.

JUDGE: That is, you drew no other conclusions.

BRODSKY: No. I don't consider myself a person who's leading a parasitic way of life.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: You said that an article entitled "The Pseudo-Literary Drone," published in *Vechnii Leningrad*, is inaccurate.⁷ How?

BRODSKY: Only my first name and surname are correct. Even my age is wrong. The poems aren't even mine. People are said to be my friends whom I hardly know or don't know at all. How can I consider the article accurate and draw any conclusions from it?

DEFENSE COUNSEL: You consider your work useful. Will the witnesses I've called be able to confirm this?

JUDGE: (*to the Defense Counsel, ironically*) Is that the only reason you've called witnesses?

SOROKIN: (*Public Prosecutor, to Brodsky*) How were you able to complete a translation from Serbian all by yourself, without using someone else's work?

BRODSKY: You're asking an ignorant question. A contract with a publisher sometimes comes together with a literal translation. I know Polish; I know Serbian less well, but they're related languages; with the aid of a literal version I was able to produce my translation.

JUDGE: Witness Grudnina [sic]!⁸

6 A reference to an article in the newspaper *Vechnii Leningrad* [*Evening Leningrad*] entitled "A Literary Parasite."

7 The article charged Brodsky with being a "literary drone," a writer of pointless doggerel, and therefore useless to society unless he was made to do "real" work.

8 In the transcript her name is consistently misspelled. Natalya Grudinina (1918–99) was a Soviet poet and translator who worked with young writers. After the trial she was

GRUDININA: I've been supervising the work of young poets for more than eleven years. For seven years I was a member of a commission assigned to working with young authors. Now I supervise poets in the upper grades in the Palace of Pioneers and a circle of young writers at the "Svetlana" factory. At the request of publishers, I've compiled and edited four anthologies of works by young poets, including more than two hundred new names. Thus I have practical knowledge of the work of almost all young poets in the city.

I knew Brodsky's work as a beginning poet through his poems of 1959 and 1960. They were not completed poems, but they contained brilliant images and devices. I didn't include them in the anthologies; however, I considered the author talented. Up until the autumn of 1963 I was not personally acquainted with Brodsky. After the publication of "The Pseudo-Literary Drone" in *Vechemii Leningrad* I summoned Brodsky for a conversation, since young people were besieging me with requests to intervene in the matter of this slandered man. In response to my question, "What was he doing now?" he said that he'd been studying languages and working on literary translations for nearly a year and a half. I took some of his translated manuscripts to familiarize myself with them.

As a professional poet and scholar of literature by training, I can affirm that Brodsky's translations were done on a high professional level. He possesses a specific talent, not often encountered, for translating poems artistically. He presented me with his work consisting of 368 lines of verse, in addition to which I read 120 lines of his translated poems published in various Moscow editions.

I know from my own personal experience as a literary translator that such a volume of work demands no less than a year and a half of concentrated effort by an author, not to mention the difficulty of getting the works published and consulting with specialists. The total time required for such activities, as is well known, is impossible to calculate. If one were to value these translations that I have seen with my own eyes even at the lowest publisher's rates, then Brodsky would have earned 350 new rubles,⁹ and the only remaining question is when the remainder of everything else he's done will be published.

In addition to the contracts for translations, Brodsky has also shown me contracts for work on radio and television, which work had already been completed, but for which he has not yet been paid in full.

From conversations with Brodsky and others who are acquainted with him, I know that he lives very modestly, denies himself new clothes and entertainment, and spends the major part of his time sitting at his work desk. He contributes all the money he earns from his work to his family.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Does one need to be knowledgeable about the works of an author to produce artistic translations of the author's poetry?

GRUDININA: Yes, to produce good translations, similar to those Brodsky does,

removed from her position.

⁹ The Soviet government implemented a confiscatory redenomination of the currency in 1947 and again in 1961 to reduce the amount of money in circulation.

one must know an author's works and delve into his style.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Is the payment for a translation reduced if one is translating from literal versions?

GRUDININA: Yes, it is. When relying on literal versions of Hungarian poets, I received one ruble less (*in old money*).

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Is it usual for translators to work with literal translations?

GRUDININA: Yes, everywhere. One of the most prominent Leningrad translators, A. Gitovich, translates from classical Chinese using literal versions.¹⁰

PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE LEBEDEVA: Can one learn a foreign language on one's own?

GRUDININA: I've learned two languages on my own in addition to those I studied at the university.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: If Brodsky doesn't know Serbian, can he, in spite of that fact, produce artistic translations of high quality?

GRUDININA: Yes, of course.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Don't you consider the use of a literal translation as a reprehensible misappropriation of someone else's work?

GRUDININA: God forbid.

PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE LEBEDEVA: Here's a book I'm looking at. It contains only two short poems by Brodsky.

GRUDININA: I'd like to provide some explanation regarding the specific features of literary work. The point is . . .

JUDGE: No, that's unnecessary. So then, what is your opinion of Brodsky's poems?

GRUDININA: In my opinion he's a very talented poet who stands head and shoulders above many who are considered professional translators.

JUDGE: Why does he work alone and not visit any literary organizations?

GRUDININA: In 1958 he asked to be accepted in my literary group. But I'd heard that he was a frenetic young man and didn't accept him; I rejected him myself. That was a mistake and I very much regret it. I'd welcome him into my group now and would work with him, if he wishes it.

PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE TYAGLYI: Have you ever observed how he works on his poems, or how he makes use of other people's work?

GRUDININA: No, I haven't seen how Brodsky sits and writes his poems. Nor

¹⁰ Aleksandr Gitovich (1909–66) was a respected Soviet poet and prolific translator of Chinese and Korean poetry.

have I seen how Sholokhov sits at his desk and writes.¹¹ That doesn't mean, however, that . . .

JUDGE: It's problematic to compare Sholokhov and Brodsky. Have you really never explained to young people that the state demands that they study? Brodsky completed only seven years of school.

GRUDININA: He has a very wide range of knowledge. I became convinced of this by reading his translations.

SOROKIN: Have you read his awful pornographic poems?

GRUDININA: No, never.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Here's what I want to ask you, witness Grudinina. Brodsky's work for the year 1963 consists of the following: poems in the book *Dawn over Cuba*, translations of Gałczyński's work (true, not yet published),¹² poems in the collection *Yugoslav Poets*, and some gaucho songs and publications in *Kostyor* [*The Bonfire*].¹³ Can this be considered serious work?

GRUDININA: Yes, undoubtedly. That is a full year's work. But he might not receive all the money for this work today, only several years from now. It's incorrect to define the work of a young author by the amount of money he receives at any given moment. A young writer may encounter failure; that might necessitate new and extensive work. There's a joke to this effect: the difference between a parasite and a young poet is that a parasite doesn't work, but gets to eat, while a young poet works, but doesn't always get to eat.

JUDGE: We're not pleased by this statement of yours. In our country every person is compensated for his work and therefore it simply can't be true that he's worked a great deal but received little for it. In our country where such a large share is allotted to young poets, you say that they're starving. Why did you say that young poets don't get to eat?

GRUDININA: I didn't say that. I explained that there was a joke to that effect in which there is a grain of truth. Young poets receive very irregular earnings.

JUDGE: Well, that really depends on them. One doesn't have to explain that. All right, you said you were relating a joke. We accept your explanation.

*A new witness is called: Efim Grigorevich Etkind.*¹⁴

11 Mikhail Sholokhov (1905–84) was a well-respected Soviet writer best known for his novel *And Quiet Flows the Don* (1928–1940). He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1965.

12 Konstanty Gałczyński (1905–53) a Polish poet best known for his “paradramatic” humorous sketches of the Green Goose Theatre.

13 A monthly literary journal for schoolchildren.

14 Efim Grigorievich Etkind (1918–99) was a Soviet philologist and translation theorist. In the 1960s and 1970s he was also a well-known dissident.

JUDGE: Show the court your passport, since the pronunciation of your last name is somewhat unclear. (*Takes the passport*) Etkind . . . Efim Gershevich [sic] . . . We're listening.

ETKIND: (*He's a member of the Union of Writers, a teacher at the Herzen Pedagogical Institute.*) As part of my social and literary work, which is connected with the training of beginning translators, I often get to read and hear translations by young writers. About a year ago I had occasion to become acquainted with the works of J. Brodsky. They were translations of poems by the marvelous Polish poet Gałczyński, very little of whose work had been translated. The clarity of the poetic phrases, the musicality, passion, and energy of the verse made a strong impression on me. I was also struck by the fact that Brodsky had learned Polish on his own, without any outside help. He recited Gałczyński's poems in Polish with the same enthusiasm as he read his own Russian translations. I realized that I was dealing with an exceptionally gifted man—and what's no less important, he had perseverance and a capacity for hard work. His translations, which I had the chance to read subsequently, strengthened the opinion of him that I'd formed. For example, his translations of the Cuban poet Fernández¹⁵ published in the book *Dawn over Cuba*; and his translations of contemporary Yugoslav poets published in an anthology by Goslitizdat. I have had many conversations with Brodsky and have been surprised by his knowledge of American, English, and Polish literature.

The translation of poetry is very difficult work, demanding effort, knowledge, and talent. On this path countless failures can beset the writer, and material reward is a matter for the distant future. One can translate poems for several years and not earn a single ruble. Such work demands unselfish love for poetry and for the work itself. The study of languages, the history and culture of working people—all that is not accomplished swiftly. Everything I know about Brodsky's work convinces me that a great future awaits him as a poet-translator. That's not only my own opinion. The office of the Translators' Division [of the Union of Writers], having learned that the publishing house had broken signed contracts with Brodsky, took the unanimous decision to petition the director of the press to assign Brodsky some work and have the contracts with him reinstated.

I know for a fact that major authorities in the field of poetic translation, Marshak and Chukovsky, share this same opinion of his work that . . .

JUDGE: Confine your remarks to yourself!

ETKIND: Brodsky must be afforded the opportunity to work as a poet-translator. That would prove very difficult, almost impossible, far from the city, where he would lack both the necessary books and literary surroundings; it is my deeply held conviction that a great future awaits him on this path. I must say that I was very surprised when I saw the announcement of "The Trial of the Parasite Brodsky."

15 Pablo Armando Fernández (1930–) is a Cuban poet, novelist, essayist, and playwright.

JUDGE: Were you familiar with that collocation?

ETKIND: I was. But I never thought that the court would use such a collocation. With his poetic technique, nothing would have prevented him from turning out hackwork; he could translate hundreds of lines, if he worked casually and without effort. The fact that he's earned so little money doesn't indicate that he's not hardworking.

JUDGE: Why doesn't he belong to any collective?

ETKIND: He's attended our translation seminars . . .

JUDGE: Well, seminars . . .

ETKIND: He is part of the seminar in the sense that . . .

JUDGE: And what if there is no sense? (*Laughter in the courtroom.*) That is, I want to ask: why wasn't he a member of any group?

ETKIND: We don't have membership; therefore I can't say that he "joined." But he attended and read his translations.

JUDGE: (*to Etkind*) Have you had any misunderstandings regarding your own work or in your private life?

ETKIND: (*surprised*) No. But I haven't been to the Institute in the last two days. Perhaps something's happened there.

(*This question was unintelligible to the spectators, and, apparently, to the witness.*)

JUDGE: Why, when speaking about Brodsky's knowledge, did you emphasize foreign literature? Why don't you mention our national literature?

ETKIND: I have spoken with him as a translator and therefore was interested in his knowledge of American, English, and Polish literature. His knowledge is broad, varied, and not superficial.

SMIRNOV: (*a witness for the prosecution, head of the House of Defense*) I'm not personally acquainted with Brodsky, but I want to say that if all Soviet citizens related to the accumulation of material wealth the way he does, it would take a very long time to build Communism. Reason is a dangerous weapon for those who possess it. Everyone's said that he's a clever man, practically a genius. But no one's said what sort of man he is. Having grown up in an intellectual family, he's had only seven years of education. Let those present here say whether they'd like to have a son with only seven years of schooling. He didn't serve in the army because he was the sole provider for his family.¹⁶ But what sort of provider is he? It's been said here that he's a talented translator, but why doesn't anyone say that his head's all mixed up? And what about his anti-Soviet poems?

BRODSKY: That's not true.

¹⁶ That was one of the official reasons for which one could be released from serving in the Soviet armed forces.

SMIRNOV: He has to change many of his ideas. I'm suspicious of the medical report concerning his illness that was given to Brodsky in the mental clinic. It was his prominent friends who began pulling strings and demanding, "Ah, save this young man!" He should be treated with forced labor, and no one should help him, none of his prominent friends. I don't know him personally. I know him only from the press. And I've seen his certificates. I have serious doubts about the medical certificate that deferred him from military service. I'm not a doctor, but I have my suspicions.

BRODSKY: When I was deferred as the sole provider, my father was ill, recovering from a heart attack; I was working and earning a living. Then I became ill. Do you know me well enough to be able to talk like this about me?

SMIRNOV: I've become acquainted with your personal diary.

BRODSKY: On what grounds?

JUDGE: That question is withdrawn.

SMIRNOV: I've read his poems.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: There were some poems in the file not written by Brodsky. How do you know that the poems read to you were actually his work? You're talking about unpublished poems.

SMIRNOV: I do know, and that's all there is to it.

JUDGE: Witness Logunov.

LOGUNOV: (*Deputy Director of the Economic Section of the Hermitage*) I'm not personally acquainted with Brodsky. The first time I met him was here at the trial. To live as Brodsky has been living is no longer permissible. I don't envy the parents of such a son. I've worked with writers and mingled with them. I can compare Brodsky with Oleg Shestinsky¹⁷—Oleg has traveled with a propaganda team, he graduated from Leningrad State University and a university in Sofia. And he also worked in a mine. I wanted to speak to the fact that one must work, and give up all former cultural habits. Then the poems Brodsky composes would be real poems. Brodsky should begin his life all over again.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: The witnesses should stick to the facts. But they. . .

JUDGE: You can provide your evaluation of the witnesses' testimony afterwards. Witness Denisov!

DENISOV: (*Pipefitter from UNR-20*) I don't know Brodsky personally. I'm acquainted with him through statements published in the press. I am speaking as a citizen and as a representative of the public. After reading these statements I grew indignant about Brodsky's work. I wanted to have a look at his books. I visited libraries—they didn't have his works. I asked my friends if they knew such

17 Oleg Shestinsky (1929–2009) was a Russian poet, writer, translator, and commentator.

a person. No, they didn't. I'm a worker. I've changed jobs only twice during my entire life. And Brodsky? I'm not satisfied with his statements that he was getting to know many specialties. You can't learn even one special trade in so short a time. It's said that Brodsky passes himself off as some kind of poet. Why was he never a member of any organization? Does he disagree with dialectical materialism? After all, Engels considers that labor creates man. But this formulation doesn't satisfy Brodsky. He thinks differently. It may be that he's very talented, but why doesn't he find his way into our literature? Why doesn't he work? I'd like to venture the opinion that his activity as a worker doesn't satisfy me.

JUDGE: Witness Nikolaev!

NIKOLAEV: (*pensioner*) I'm not personally acquainted with Brodsky. I want to say that I've known about him for three years from the pernicious influence he exerts on his peers. I'm a father. I've become convinced from my own experience how difficult it is to have the sort of son who doesn't work. I've seen Brodsky's poems in my son's hands more than once. A poem in forty-three chapters and several other poems. I know about Brodsky from the Umansky affair.¹⁸ There's a proverb: "Tell me who your friends are." I knew Umansky personally. He's blatantly anti-Soviet. Listening to Brodsky, I learned about my own son. My son also told me that he considers himself a genius. Like Brodsky, he doesn't want to work. People like Brodsky and Umansky exert a pernicious influence on their peers. I'm surprised at Brodsky's parents. Apparently, they've encouraged him. They sang in unison along with him. From the forms of his verse it's clear that Brodsky can compose poetry, but these poems have produced nothing but harm. Brodsky's not merely a parasite. He's a militant parasite! People like him must be dealt with without mercy. (*Applause.*)

PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE TYAGLYI: Do you think Brodsky's poems had an influence on your son?

NIKOLAEV: Yes.

JUDGE: A negative influence?

NIKOLAEV: Yes.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: How do you know it was Brodsky's poems?

NIKOLAEV: There was a folder and on it was written "Joseph Brodsky."

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Was your son acquainted with Umansky?

¹⁸ Aleksandr Umansky was a dilettante, musician, writer, and philosopher who became the center of a circle of disaffected Russians. During a visit to Samarkand in December 1960, Brodsky and his friend Oleg Shakhmatov apparently tried to recruit an American attorney to take one of Umansky's manuscripts out of the country. They also allegedly concocted a plan to hijack an airplane to escape from the USSR. Neither scheme came to fruition, but Brodsky was detained by the KGB, interrogated, and soon released. From then on he was under surveillance.

NIKOLAEV: Yes.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Why do you think that it was Brodsky, and not Umansky, who exerted a pernicious influence on your son?

NIKOLAEV: It was Brodsky together with him. Brodsky's poems are disgraceful and anti-Soviet.

BRODSKY: Name my anti-Soviet poems. Quote even one line from them.

JUDGE: I won't allow any quotations!

BRODSKY: But I want to know which poems he's talking about! Perhaps they're not mine.

NIKOLAEV: If I'd known that I was going to testify in court, I'd have photocopied them and brought them with me.

JUDGE: Witness Romashova!

ROMASHOVA: (*teacher of Marxism-Leninism in the Mukhina School*) I'm not personally acquainted with Brodsky, but I'm aware of his so-called activity. Pushkin said that talent is first of all hard work.¹⁹ And Brodsky? Does he work? Does he attempt to make his poems intelligible to the people? I'm surprised that my colleagues have built such a halo around his head. Perhaps it's only in the Soviet Union that the court would speak so generously to a poet and advise him in such comradely fashion to go and study. As the secretary of the party organization at the Mukhina School, I can say that he's having a bad impact on young people.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Have you ever seen Brodsky?

ROMASHOVA: Never. But Brodsky's so-called activity allows me to form judgments about him.

JUDGE: Can you cite any facts?

ROMASHOVA: As a teacher of young people, I hear what they say about Brodsky's poems.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Do you yourself know any of Brodsky's poems?

ROMASHOVA: I do. They're awful! I don't think it's possible to recite them. They're awful!

JUDGE: Witness Admoni! If possible, show the court your passport, since your last name is unusual.

ADMONI: (*Professor at the Herzen Institute, a linguist, literary scholar, translator*) When I learned that Joseph Brodsky was being brought to trial on charges of parasitism, I felt it was my duty to state my opinion to the court. I

19 No such quotation has been located in Pushkin's works.

consider that I have a right to do so inasmuch as I've worked with young people for thirty years as a teacher in higher education; and I've also been a translator for a long time.

I hardly know Brodsky at all. We greet each other, but it seems that we've never exchanged even two words. However, in the course of the last year or a little longer, I've been following his translation work closely—from his appearances at translation evenings and from his publications. These translations are talented, accomplished. On the basis of these translations from Gałczyński, Fernández, and others, I can say with complete confidence that they required tremendous effort on the part of their author. They testify to the translator's great mastery and culture. But miracles don't just happen. Mastery and culture don't simply come on their own. They require constant and persistent work. Even if a translator works from a literal translation, in order for his translation to be worthwhile, he must form some conception of the language from which he's translating, acquire a feeling for the structure of that language, he must know the life and culture of the people, and so forth. In addition, Joseph Brodsky studied these other languages. Therefore it's clear to me that he's working—working intensively and persistently. And when I learned today, only today, that he finished only seven years of school, it became clear that he must have made a really gigantic effort to acquire such mastery and culture as he commands. What Mayakovsky said about the work of a poet is also applicable to the work of a poet-translator: “You mine a thousand tons of verbal ore to find one necessary word.”²⁰

The decree under which Brodsky has been called to account is directed against those who work too little,²¹ not against those who earn too little. Parasites are those people who work too little. Therefore the accusation that Brodsky is a parasite is absurd. It's impossible to accuse a man of parasitism who works the way Brodsky does—that is, who works persistently and a great deal—without taking into consideration large payments—one who's prepared to restrict himself to what's most necessary in order to perfect his craft and create worthwhile artistic works.

JUDGE: What did you say about not judging those who earn too little?

ADMONI: I said: the point of the decree was to judge those who work too little, and not those who earn too little.

JUDGE: What do you mean by this? Have you read the decree dated 4 May?²²

20 Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930) was a Soviet poet, playwright, artist, and film actor. He was among the foremost representatives of early twentieth-century Russian Futurism. This line is from his “Conversation with a Tax-Collector About Poetry” (1926).

21 See above, footnote 3.

22 The Supreme Soviet issued a decree on May 4, 1961, entitled “On Strengthening the Struggle with Persons Avoiding Socially Useful Work and Leading an Anti-Social, Parasitic Way of Life.” It called for banishment of such individuals “to specially designated places for a term of from two to five years.”

Communism can be created only through the work of millions of people.

ADMONI: All work that is useful to society should be respected.

PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE TYAGLYI: Where did Brodsky recite his translations and in which foreign languages?

ADMONI: (*smiling*) He read in Russian. He translates from foreign languages into Russian.

JUDGE: If a simple person asks you a question, you should explain it to him and not laugh at him.

ADMONI: I'm explaining that he translates from Polish and Serbian into Russian.

JUDGE: Address the court, not the public.

ADMONI: Please forgive me. It's a professional habit to address the auditorium when speaking.

JUDGE: Witness Voevodin! Are you personally acquainted with Brodsky?

VOEVODIN: (*member of the Union of Writers*) No. I've been working in the Union for only half a year. I've never been personally acquainted with him. He visits the Union infrequently, only for translators' evenings. Apparently, he realized how his own verse was being received, and therefore doesn't attend other groups. I've read his epigrams. You'd blush, comrade judges, if you read them. People here have spoken about Brodsky's talent. But talent is measured only by the appreciation of the people. In his case, this appreciation doesn't exist and it can't.

A folder of Brodsky's poems was handed over to the Union of Writers. They concerned three themes: the first was estrangement from the world; the second was pornographic; and the third was dislike for his homeland, for his people, where Brodsky talks about another homeland. Wait, I can recall a line . . . "The Russian crowd is monotonous." May these disgraceful words remain on his conscience. Brodsky the poet doesn't really exist. He may be a translator, but he's not a poet! I absolutely support the statement by the comrade who spoke about his own son on whom Brodsky's writing had a pernicious influence. Brodsky tears young people away from work, away from the world and from life. Therein lies his great antisocial role.

JUDGE: Have you discussed Brodsky's talent with the commission?

VOEVODIN: There was one short meeting at which Brodsky was mentioned. But the conversation didn't lead to a broader discussion. I repeat that Brodsky is limited to semi-indecent epigrams and he rarely comes to the Union. My friend, the poet Kuklin, once loudly proclaimed from the stage his own indignation at Brodsky's poems.²³

23 Lev Kuklin (1931–2004) was a Soviet poet who wrote numerous books and popular

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Does the entire commission share the opinion you stated in the report you wrote about Brodsky?

VOEVODIN: We didn't coordinate our report with Etkind, who holds a different opinion.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Is the content of your report known to other members of the commission?

VOEVODIN: No, it's not known to all members of the commission.

BRODSKY: How did you get to see my poems and my diary?

JUDGE: That question is withdrawn. Citizen Brodsky, you worked only occasionally. Why is that?

BRODSKY: I've already said that I was working all the time. First in a regular job, and then writing poetry. (*In desperation.*) It's work to write poems!

JUDGE: But your earnings were very small. You said that you received 250 rubles for one year, but according to police reports it was only 100 rubles.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: At the previous hearing it was decided that the police would verify reports of his earnings, but this wasn't done.

JUDGE: Here in the file is a contract sent you by a publisher. But it's simply a piece of paper, unsigned.

(*A note from someone in the audience is passed to the judge stating that contracts are first signed by the author, and then by the head of the publishing house.*)

JUDGE: I ask that no further notes be sent to me.

SOROKIN: (*Public Prosecutor*) The great Soviet nation is building Communism. A remarkable quality is developing in the Soviet man—enjoyment of socially productive work. The only society that can flourish is one in which there is no idleness. Brodsky is far removed from patriotism. He's forgotten the most important principle: "He who doesn't work, doesn't eat."²⁴ But for many years Brodsky's been leading the life of a parasite. In 1956 he left school and went to work at a factory. He was fifteen years old. In that same year he was fired. (*He repeats the list of Brodsky's workplaces and the intervals in official labor and once again calls them idleness. It was as if he hadn't heard all the explanations of the defense witnesses testifying to the fact that literary work also constituted labor.*)

We verified that Brodsky received only thirty-seven rubles at one job, while he says it was 150 rubles.

BRODSKY: That was an advance! It was only an advance! A part of what I'd receive later.

songs glorifying the Soviet way of life.

24 A Biblical aphorism derived from II Thessalonians 3:10 that became popular with socialists.

JUDGE: Brodsky, silence!

SOROKIN: Wherever Brodsky worked he infuriated everyone by his lack of discipline and his unwillingness to work. The article in *Vechernii Leningrad* elicited a great response. An especially large number of letters was received from young people. They criticized Brodsky's conduct harshly. (*He reads some letters.*) Young people consider that there's no place for him in Leningrad. That he should be severely punished. That he has absolutely no idea of conscience and duty. Every person considers it a pleasure to serve in the army. But he evaded it. Brodsky's father sent him for consultation to a clinic, and he brought back a certificate that was accepted by the credulous military commission. Even before he was summoned to the commission, Brodsky wrote to his friend Shakhmatov, who is now serving a sentence:²⁵ "I have a meeting with the defense committee. Your desk will become a reliable refuge for my iambs."

He belonged to a group of people who greeted the word "work" with satanic laughter and listened to the words of their Führer Umansky with respect.²⁶ Brodsky is united with him in their contempt for work and for Soviet literature. A collection of pornographic words and ideas enjoyed particular success. Brodsky referred to Shakhmatov as "Sir." No less than that! Shakhmatov was sentenced. That's the sort of foul smelling little hole from which Brodsky appeared. People talk about Brodsky's talent. But who's saying that? People who resemble Brodsky and Shakhmatov.

A SHOUT FROM THE HALL: Who? Chukovsky and Marshak are like Shakhmatov?

(*Members of the voluntary militia eject the person who shouted from the hall.*)

SOROKIN: Brodsky is defended by rogues, parasites, lice, and beetles. He's not a poet, but just a man trying to write verse. He's forgotten that in our society man must work, must create something of value: machine tools, bread, or poems. Brodsky must be compelled to work. He must be sent away from this "Hero City."²⁷ He's a parasite, a lout, a rogue, and an ideologically filthy man. His admirers merely spatter their saliva. But Nekrasov said: "You may choose not to be a poet/But you cannot choose not to be a citizen."²⁸

Today we're judging not a poet, but a parasite. Why has a man who hates his homeland been defended here? We must investigate the moral character of those who've defended him. He wrote in his poems, "I love another homeland."

25 Oleg Shakhmatov (1933–2006) was a former military pilot, an accomplished musician, a poet, and a friend of Brodsky's youth.

26 German title meaning leader or guide, now most often associated with Adolf Hitler.

27 "Hero City" is a Soviet honorary title awarded for outstanding heroism during World War II. Leningrad was the first city to receive that designation in 1945, having survived its horrendous nine-hundred-day siege.

28 Nikolai Nekrasov (1821–77) was a Russian poet, writer, critic, and publisher, known for his deeply compassionate poems about peasant Russia. This is a quotation from his famous poem in the form of a debate, "Poet and Citizen" (1856).

In his diaries there's one entry: "I've been thinking for a long time about going beyond the red line.²⁹ Constructive thoughts are developing in my head under my red hair." Further, he wrote: "The Stockholm City Hall inspires in me more respect than the Prague Kremlin."³⁰ He refers to Marx as "an old glutton framed by a crown of pinecones." In one letter he writes: "I wanted to spit on Moscow."

That's what Brodsky's worth, as well as all those who defend him!

(Then he quotes the letter of one young woman who writes about Lenin with respect. It's totally unclear what relation her letter has to the Brodsky affair. It's neither written by him nor addressed to him.)

At that moment the judge turns to me [Vigdorova]: Stop taking notes!

VIGDOROVA: Comrade Judge, I ask your permission to take notes.

JUDGE: Denied.

VIGDOROVA: I'm a journalist, a member of the Union of Writers, and I'm writing about the education of young people. I ask your permission to take notes.

JUDGE: I don't know what you're writing! Stop it!

FROM THE PUBLIC: Take her notes away!

Sorokin continues his testimony, then the defense counsel speaks, a speech which I [Vigdorova] can only summarize, since I'd been forbidden to take any further notes.

MAIN POINTS OF THE DEFENSE COUNSEL:

The Public Prosecutor has made use of materials that weren't in the file, which were introduced into the trial for the first time and about which Brodsky was not questioned and could provide no explanation.

We were unable to confirm the authenticity of the materials relating to the special hearing of 1961, nor can we confirm what the public prosecutor quoted. With respect to Brodsky's diary dating from the year 1956: it's the writing of an adolescent. The public prosecutor introduced as evidence of public opinion letters to the editor at the newspaper *Vechernii Leningrad*. The authors of these letters don't know Brodsky, nor have they read his poems; they are basing their judgments on a tendentious and largely inaccurate article in the newspaper. The public prosecutor insults not only Brodsky, calling him "a lout," "a parasite," and "an anti-Soviet element," but also those people who've intervened on his behalf: Marshak, Chukovsky, and other respected witnesses. The conclusion:

29 Presumably, the "iron curtain," the dividing line between Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe and the West.

30 Stockholm City Hall is the building of the Municipal Council for the City. It is also the venue of the Nobel Prize banquet. The Prague Kremlin (or Castle) is where the kings of Bohemia, Holy Roman emperors, and presidents of Czechoslovakia had their offices.

in the absence of any objective evidence, the public prosecutor has employed inadmissible methods.

What does the prosecution have at its disposal?

a) A certificate of work history from 1956 to 1962. In 1956 Brodsky was sixteen years old; in general he could have continued his studies and by law continued on his parents' support until he was eighteen. His frequent change of workplace was the result of psychopathic traits of character and an inability to find his place in life immediately. The intervals, in part, are explained by his seasonal work on expeditions. There is no reason to talk about his evading work up to 1962.

(The lawyer indicates her respect for the jurors, but regrets that among them there isn't one person competent to deal with matters of literary work. When a minor is being tried, there's always a juror who's a teacher of young people; if the accused is a doctor, then a doctor is necessarily included among the jurors. Why has fair and reasonable custom been ignored when the subject under consideration is literature?)

b) Brodsky has not held a regular job since 1962. However, the contracts presented here from publishers dating from November 1962 and October 1963, the document from a television studio, the statement from the journal *Kostyor*, and the published anthology of works by Yugoslav poets all bear witness to the fact of his creative work. As for the *quality* of his work: there is a statement signed by Ye. Voevodin, which is sharply negative, containing inadmissible accusations of anti-Soviet activity, a statement reminiscent of documents from the worst period of the cult of personality.³¹ As it turns out, that statement was not discussed by the commission, it remains unknown to its members, and it represents the personal opinion of the prose writer Voevodin. There is the testimony of other people including Marshak and Chukovsky, outstanding specialists and masters of translation; the witness V. Admoni—a prominent literary scholar, linguist, and translator; Ye. Etkind—an expert in literature in translation, a member of the bureau of the Translators' Section, and a member of the commission for work with young poets. They all value Brodsky's work highly and speak of the great expenditure of effort required by the publication of works produced by him in 1963. *Conclusion*: the statement by Voevodin cannot refute the testimony of these people.

c) Not one of the witnesses for the prosecution knows Brodsky personally or has read his poems; the witnesses for the prosecution present testimony based on documents received through some unspecified means and which are unverified and express their opinions in accusatory speeches.

The prosecution has no other materials.

³¹ Joseph Stalin's cult of personality became a prominent part of Soviet culture in December 1929, after a lavish celebration of his fiftieth birthday. For the remainder of his rule, the Soviet press presented Stalin as an all-powerful leader, and his name and image became omnipresent.

The court must exclude the following from consideration:

1) Materials from the special hearing in 1961 in which it was decided that the Brodsky case should be dropped.

If Brodsky had, at that time or subsequently, committed an anti-Soviet crime or written anti-Soviet poems, it would be a matter for investigation by the security agencies.

Brodsky actually was acquainted with both Shakhmatov and Umansky, and came under their influence. But, fortunately, he freed himself from their influence long ago. However, the public prosecutor read us notes from those years, presenting them out of the context of time and space, thus, naturally, eliciting the wrath of the public against Brodsky. The public prosecutor created the impression that Brodsky still holds these former views, which is absolutely untrue. Many young people who joined Umansky's circle were later returned to normal life thanks to the intervention of reasonable, mature people. The same thing happened to Brodsky during the last two years. He'd begun to work a great deal and to produce results. But then he was arrested.

2) The question of the quality of Brodsky's poetry.

We still don't know which of the poems entered into evidence at this trial belong to Brodsky, since from his testimony it is clear that there are a number of poems that were not written by him.

In order to judge whether his poems are decadent, pessimistic, or lyrical, there must be authoritative scholarly expert examination; neither the court nor the two sides in this case can decide this matter.

Our task is to establish whether Brodsky is a parasite living off unearned income, leading a parasitical way of life.

Brodsky is a poet-translator, contributing his work in the struggle for peace by translating the poets of fraternal republics, countries with people's democracies.³² He's not a drunkard, not an amoral man, not a money-grubber. He's being accused of having received too little payment: consequently, of not working. (*The lawyer presents evidence of the nature of literary work and the manner of payment. She speaks about the enormous expenditure of labor on translations, the necessity of studying foreign languages, and the works of the poets being translated. Also, about the fact that not all one's work submitted is accepted and paid for.*)

The system of advances. The sums that figure in this case are not exact. According to Brodsky's statement, he received more. It is necessary to verify them. The amounts are so insignificant. What did Brodsky manage to live on? He lived with his parents who supported him during the time he was becoming a poet.

He had no sources of unearned income. He lived frugally so that he could spend his time working on his chosen pursuit.

³² That is, other socialist countries.

CONCLUSIONS

Brodsky's guilt has not been established. He is not a parasite; thus administrative measures may not be taken against him.

The significance of the decree dated February 4, 1961, is very great. It is a tool for ridding the city of genuine parasites and freeloaders. Any unwarranted application will discredit the idea of the decree.

The decision of the Plenum of the Supreme Soviet Court of the USSR dated March 3, 1963, requires the court to treat critically all materials presented to it, and not permit the condemnation of those who actually do work; and to observe the rights of those brought before it, acquaint them with the case, and present evidence of their innocence.

Brodsky was detained without grounds on February 13, 1964, and was *deprived* of the possibility of presenting evidence of his innocence.

However, even the evidence presented to the court is sufficient to reach the conclusion that Brodsky is not a parasite.

(The court withdraws for consultation. A recess is called.)

CONVERSATION IN THE COURTROOM:

Writers! They should get rid of them all!

Intellectuals! They're millstones around our necks!

What's with the intelligentsia? Why don't they work? They have to work, too.

What's wrong with you? Don't you see how they work? They exploit other people's labor!

I'm going to get a literal translation and begin translating verse!

Do you even know what a literal translation is? Do you know how a poet works with a one?

Just think—big deal!

I know Brodsky! He's a good lad and a fine poet.

He's anti-Soviet. Did you hear what the prosecutor said?

And did you hear what the defense lawyer said?

The defense lawyer's paid, but the prosecutor's not. That means he must be right.

Of course, defense lawyers are out to get as much money as possible. They don't care what they say, as long as they get paid for it.

You're talking nonsense.

Go on, swear! I'll call the guard over! Didn't you hear the passages they quoted?

He wrote those a long time ago.

So what if he did?

I'm a teacher. If I didn't believe in education, what sort of teacher would I be?

We don't need teachers like you!

We send our students to school—and what do they teach them there?

They didn't even give Brodsky a chance to justify himself!

Enough! We've heard enough of your Brodsky!

And you, you, the one who wrote it all down! Why were you taking notes?

I'm a journalist. I write about education and I want to write about this.

What's there to write about it? It's all clear. You're all the same. They ought to take your notes away!

Just try it.

What'll happen then?

Just try it. You'll see.

Aha! You're threatening me! Hey, guard! They're threatening me!

He's in the militia, not a policeman, so he doesn't jump at every word.

Hey, guard! They're calling you a policeman! They ought to send all of you away from Leningrad—then you'd learn what real trouble is!

Comrades, what are you talking about? They'll acquit him! You heard what the defense lawyer said.

The court returns and the judge reads the sentence:

Brodsky has systematically failed to fulfill the obligations of a Soviet citizen with regard to producing material value and personal well-being, which is apparent from his changing jobs frequently. He was warned by the organs of the MGB [Ministry of National Security] and in 1962, also by the police. He promised to find permanent work, but didn't follow through; he continued without work; he kept writing and he recited his decadent verse at evening poetry readings. From the report of the commission of work with young writers it is clear that Brodsky is not a poet. Readers of the newspaper *Vechernii Leningrad* have condemned him. Therefore the court has decided to apply the decree dated 4 February 1961: Brodsky will be sent to remote locations for a period of five years of forced labor.

GUARDS: (*passing the defense counsel*) So? You lost the case, comrade lawyer!

—translated from the Russian by Michael R. Katz