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Summer Reading 2: Joseph Brodsky, "Flight from Byzantium"

Due Date: Sunday, 5 July, 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time

Committed Reading

- Job number one: to discern the writer's **purpose** and put it into words. Use a **verb of action**, in the infinitive form: The purpose is (for example) *to narrate, to recount, to describe, to explain, to challenge, to question, to examine, to reflect on, to define, to establish, to enumerate, to classify, to compare, to liken, to appraise, to discredit, to dismiss, to debunk, to posit, to honor, to praise, to shame, to exhort, to inspire, to show us . . . something or someone; or perhaps to call us to action, to rouse us to do something, or to persuade us* (or some particular person or audience) of something.
- If the paragraph above contains words you don't know, **look them up**, and **hand-write their meanings in a notebook** that you'll bring to school with you in September.
- In reading, note all large **assertions**—claims about the world, about life, about human nature, about *how things are*.
- Look up **every word** and **every name** (of a person, place, political or social or academic or artistic movement or style, or historical event) that's new to you, and **write it down** in the notebook already mentioned.

You are expected to look up every unfamiliar thing and person mentioned in everything we read. That's our duty. It's how we educate ourselves.

That means finding out

- **what it was or is**
- **what it did or does**
- **when it happened or lived**

You are NOT ALLOWED to read, listen to, or in any other way take in anything *about the text you're reading*, no matter from where or from whom it comes. Not from AI, not from any book or magazine or podcast or website, not from Mom, Grandpa, or any classmate, friend, or enemy. Confront the text on your own and *deal with it as best you can*.

How to Submit Your Work

- **Hand-write on lined white paper.**
- **Scan your work with a document-scanning app** or on an **office scanner**. Your cell phone should have a scanning app. (In iPhone, open "Notes," poke around till you see an eyeball icon. Click on that; it should open a menu that includes "Scan documents.") **Scan in strong, even light, with no shadows falling on the paper. Hold the lens right over the center of the page, so we see a proper rectangle.**
- **Send your scanned page(s) to me via Teams chat** or as an **e-mail attachment**.

Joseph Brodsky,

a poet, translator, critic, and essayist, was born in Leningrad, Soviet Russia (now Saint Petersburg), in 1940. With his parents, he survived Hitler's siege of Leningrad, but they all would suffer long-term health problems arising from wartime starvation. Brodsky's Jewish heritage and his tireless reading and translating of foreign writers—many of them regarded as hostile by the Soviet regime—led to his sentencing to five years at hard labor. A group of favored artists and writers, agitating for his release, got his sentence shortened to 18 months, but eventually he was expelled from the Soviet Union. Invited to Israel but not wishing to settle there, he came to the United States, taught literature at Mount Holyoke College and a series of universities, and continued to write and publish. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1987, and was named Poet Laureate of the United States in 1991. He died in 1996.

—from the Poetry Foundation's unattributed biographical essay on Brodsky.

Instructions

Read "Flight from Byzantium." While reading, observe the points listed above, under "When We Read for This Course." **Read and think on your own. Seek no commentary on the piece,** anywhere; seek no classmate's, relative's, friend's, enemy's, or stranger's opinion about any aspect of it. **If asked for help** by a classmate, friend, enemy, or stranger, **refuse**, politely, to help. Just confront the text, look things up as necessary, and then **hand-write, on lined paper,** your best brief account of:

1. Brodsky's purpose in this text,
2. whatever rhetorical or poetic devices—figurative language, parallel structure, repetition, direct address to the reader, etc.—you've noticed in use (cite an example of each), and
3. the way, or ways, in which the title may explain the piece's purpose or Brodsky's message.

Then:

4. Still hand-writing, set down, in no more than two sentences per item, the meaning or identity of each of the following. Numerals identify the sections of the essay in which the items appear.

2	
Constantine Cavafy	3
Constantine's move to Byzantium	"my [Brodsky's] famous namesake"
the battle of Milvian Bridge	
the Second Rome	4
the Third Rome	philology
parallel of latitude (<i>define</i>)	Astrakhan
meridian of longitude (<i>define</i>)	Samarkand
the Pulkovo meridian	
<i>effendi</i>	5
<i>bêtise</i>	Julian the Apostate

5 cont.	19
apostasy	<i>tabula rasa</i>
7	19, 35
Virgil	the Sassanids
the Aeneid ("a- nee -id")	
Queen Dido	21
	John Damascene
9	
le Corbusier	39
Mondrian	Tamerlane's encounter with Bajazet
Gropius	the walls of Vienna, and a dramatic historical event involving them
10, 24	41
Diocletian	Lord Byron "splashing across the Dardanelles"
10, 19, 39	44
Neoplatonism	Atatürk

5. The Rumpus Room

If you've noticed anything in this piece that seems to you important, and that the questions above haven't invited you to write about, share it here—what it is (or what those things are), and where you see it (or them).