A list of some observation...

A list of some observation. In a corner, it's warm.
    A glance leaves an imprint on anything it's dwelt on.
Water is glass's most public form.
Man is more frightening than its skeleton.
A nowhere winter evening with wine. A black
porch resists an osier's stiff assaults.
Fixed on an elbow, the body bulks
like a glacier's debris, a moraine of sorts.
A millennium hence, they'll no doubt expose
a fossil bivalve propped behind this gauze
cloth, with the print of lips under the print of fringe,
mumbling "Good night" to a window hinge.

Joseph Brodsky
A Polar Explorer

All the huskies are eaten. There is no space left in the diary, And the beads of quick words scatter over his spouse's sepia-shaded face adding the date in question like a mole to her lovely cheek. Next, the snapshot of his sister. He doesn't spare his kin: what's been reached is the highest possible latitude! And, like the silk stocking of a burlesque half-nude queen, it climbs up his thigh: gangrene.

Joseph Brodsky
A Song

I wish you were here, dear,
I wish you were here.
I wish you sat on the sofa
and I sat near.
the handkerchief could be yours,
the tear could be mine, chin-bound.
Though it could be, of course,
the other way around.

I wish you were here, dear,
I wish you were here.
I wish we were in my car,
and you'd shift the gear.
we'd find ourselves elsewhere,
on an unknown shore.
Or else we'd repair
To where we've been before.

I wish you were here, dear,
I wish you were here.
I wish I knew no astronomy
when stars appear,
when the moon skims the water
that sighs and shifts in its slumber.
I wish it were still a quarter
to dial your number.

I wish you were here, dear,
in this hemisphere,
as I sit on the porch
sipping a beer.
It's evening, the sun is setting;
boys shout and gulls are crying.
What's the point of forgetting
If it's followed by dying?

Joseph Brodsky
Belfast Tune

Here's a girl from a dangerous town
She crops her dark hair short
so that less of her has to frown
when someone gets hurt.

She folds her memories like a parachute.
Dropped, she collects the peat
and cooks her veggies at home: they shoot
here where they eat.

Ah, there's more sky in these parts than, say,
ground. Hence her voice's pitch,
and her stare stains your retina like a gray
bulb when you switch

hemispheres, and her knee-length quilt
skirt's cut to catch the squall,
I dream of her either loved or killed
because the town's too small.

Joseph Brodsky
Dutch Mistress

A hotel in whose ledgers departures are more prominent than arrivals. With wet Koh-i-noors the October rain strokes what's left of the naked brain. In this country laid flat for the sake of rivers, beer smells of Germany and the seagulls are in the air like a page's soiled corners. Morning enters the premises with a coroner's punctuality, puts its ear to the ribs of a cold radiator, detects sub-zero: the afterlife has to start somewhere. Correspondingly, the angelic curls grow more blond, the skin gains its distant, lordly white, while the bedding already coils desperately in the basement laundry.

Joseph Brodsky
Elegy

About a year has passed. I've returned to the place of the battle, to its birds that have learned their unfolding of wings from a subtle lift of a surprised eyebrow, or perhaps from a razor blade - wings, now the shade of early twilight, now of state bad blood.

Now the place is abuzz with trading in your ankles's remnants, bronzes of sunburnt breastplates, dying laughter, bruises, rumors of fresh reserves, memories of high treason, laundered banners with imprints of the many who since have risen.

All's overgrown with people. A ruin's a rather stubborn architectural style. And the hearts's distinction from a pitch-black cavern isn't that great; not great enough to fear that we may collide again like blind eggs somewhere.

At sunrise, when nobody stares at one's face, I often, set out on foot to a monument cast in molten lengthy bad dreams. And it says on the plinth "commander in chief." But it reads "in grief," or "in brief," or "in going under."

Joseph Brodsky
Folk Tune

It's not that the Muse feels like clamming up,  
It's more like high time for the lad's last nap.  
And the scarf-waving lass who wished him the best  
drives a steamroller across his chest.

And the words won't rise either like that rod  
or like logs to rejoin their old grove's sweet rot,  
and, like eggs in the frying pan, the face  
spills its eyes all over the pillowcase.

Are you warm tonight under those six veils  
in that basin of yours whose strung bottom wails;  
where like fish that gasp at the foreign blue  
my raw lip was catching what then was you?

I would have hare's ears sewn to my bald head,  
in thick woods for your sake I'd gulp drops of lead,  
and from black gnarled snags in the oil-smooth pond  
I'd bob up to your face as some Tirpitz won't.

But it's not on the cards or the waiter's tray,  
and it pains to say where one's hair turns gray.  
There are more blue veins than the blood to swell  
their dried web, let alone some remote brain cell.

We are parting for good, my friend, that's that.  
Draw an empty circle on your yellow pad.  
This will be me: no insides in thrall.  
Stare at it a while, then erase the scrawl.

Joseph Brodsky
Galatea Encore

As though the mercury's under its tongue, it won't talk. As though with the mercury in its sphincter, immobile, by a leaf-coated pond a statue stands white like a blight of winter. After such snow, there is nothing indeed: the ins and outs of centuries, pestered heather. That's what coming full circle means - when your countenance starts to resemble weather, when Pygmalion's vanished. And you are free to cloud your folds, to bare the navel. Future at last! That is, bleached debris of a glacier amid the five-lettered "never." Hence the routine of a goddess, nee alabaster, that lets roving pupils gorge on the heart of color and the temperature of the knee. That's what it looks like inside a virgin.

Joseph Brodsky
I Sit By The Window

I said fate plays a game without a score,
and who needs fish if you've got caviar?
The triumph of the Gothic style would come to pass
and turn you on--no need for coke, or grass.
I sit by the window. Outside, an aspen.
When I loved, I loved deeply. It wasn't often.

I said the forest's only part of a tree.
Who needs the whole girl if you've got her knee?
Sick of the dust raised by the modern era,
the Russian eye would rest on an Estonian spire.
I sit by the window. The dishes are done.
I was happy here. But I won't be again.

I wrote: The bulb looks at the flower in fear,
and love, as an act, lacks a verb; the zero
Euclid thought the vanishing point became
wasn't math--it was the nothingness of Time.
I sit by the window. And while I sit
my youth comes back. Sometimes I'd smile. Or spit.

I said that the leaf may destroy the bud;
what's fertile falls in fallow soil--a dud;
that on the flat field, the unshadowed plain
nature spills the seeds of trees in vain.
I sit by the window. Hands lock my knees.
My heavy shadow's my squat company.

My song was out of tune, my voice was cracked,
but at least no chorus can ever sing it back.
That talk like this reaps no reward bewilders
no one--no one's legs rest on my shoulders.
I sit by the window in the dark. Like an express,
the waves behind the wavelike curtain crash.

A loyal subject of these second-rate years,
I proudly admit that my finest ideas
are second-rate, and may the future take them
as trophies of my struggle against suffocation.
I sit in the dark. And it would be hard to figure out
which is worse; the dark inside, or the darkness out.

Anonymous Submission

Joseph Brodsky
I threw my arms about those shoulders

M.B.

I threw my arms about those shoulders, glancing at what emerged behind that back, and saw a chair pushed slightly forward, merging now with the lighted wall. The lamp glared too bright to show the shabby furniture to some advantage, and that is why sofa of brown leather shone a sort of yellow in a corner. The table looked bare, the parquet glossy, the stove quite dark, and in a dusty frame a landscape did not stir. Only the sideboard seemed to me to have some animation. But a moth flitted round the room, causing my arrested glance to shift; and if at any time a ghost had lived here, he now was gone, abandoning this house.

Joseph Brodsky
Letter to an Archaeologist

Citizen, enemy, mama's boy, sucker, utter
garbage, panhandler, swine, refujew, verrucht;
a scalp so often scalded with boiling water
that the puny brain feels completely cooked.
Yes, we have dwelt here: in this concrete, brick, wooden
rubble which you now arrive to sift.
All our wires were crossed, barbed, tangled, or interwoven.
Also: we didn't love our women, but they conceived.
Sharp is the sound of pickax that hurts dead iron;
still, it's gentler than what we've been told or have said ourselves.
Stranger! move carefully through our carrion:
what seems carrion to you is freedom to our cells.
Leave our names alone. Don't reconstruct those vowels,
consonants, and so forth: they won't resemble larks
but a demented bloodhound whose maw devours
its own traces, feces, and barks, and barks.

Joseph Brodsky
May 24, 1980

I have braved, for want of wild beasts, steel cages,  
carved my term and nickname on bunks and rafters,  
lived by the sea, flashed aces in an oasis,  
dined with the-devil-knows-whom, in tails, on truffles.  
From the height of a glacier I beheld half a world, the earthly  
width. Twice have drowned, thrice let knives rake my nitty-gritty.  
Quit the country the bore and nursed me.  
Those who forgot me would make a city.  
I have waded the steppes that saw yelling Huns in saddles,  
worn the clothes nowadays back in fashion in every quarter,  
planted rye, tarred the roofs of pigsties and stables,  
guzzled everything save dry water.  
I've admitted the sentries' third eye into my wet and foul  
dreams. Munched the bread of exile; it's stale and warty.  
Granted my lungs all sounds except the howl;  
switched to a whisper. Now I am forty.  
What should I say about my life? That it's long and abhors transparence.  
Broken eggs make me grieve; the omelet, though, makes me vomit.  
Yet until brown clay has been rammed down my larynx,  
only gratitude will be gushing from it.

Joseph Brodsky
Odysseus to Telemachus

My dear Telemachus,
The Trojan War
is over now; I don't recall who won it.
The Greeks, no doubt, for only they would leave
so many dead so far from their own homeland.
But still, my homeward way has proved too long.
While we were wasting time there, old Poseidon,
it almost seems, stretched and extended space.

I don't know where I am or what this place
can be. It would appear some filthy island,
with bushes, buildings, and great grunting pigs.
A garden choked with weeds; some queen or other.
Grass and huge stones . . . Telemachus, my son!
To a wanderer the faces of all islands
resemble one another. And the mind
trips, numbering waves; eyes, sore from sea horizons,
run; and the flesh of water stuffs the ears.
I can't remember how the war came out;
even how old you are--I can't remember.

Grow up, then, my Telemachus, grow strong.
Only the gods know if we'll see each other
again. You've long since ceased to be that babe
before whom I reined in the plowing bullocks.
Had it not been for Palamedes' trick
we two would still be living in one household.
But maybe he was right; away from me
you are quite safe from all Oedipal passions,
and your dreams, my Telemachus, are blameless.

Joseph Brodsky
Part Of Speech

...and when "the future" is uttered, swarms of mice rush out of the Russian language and gnaw a piece of ripened memory which is twice as hole-ridden as real cheese. After all these years it hardly matters who or what stands in the corner, hidden by heavy drapes, and your mind resounds not with a seraphic "doh", only their rustle. Life, that no one dares to appraise, like that gift horse's mouth, bares its teeth in a grin at each encounter. What gets left of a man amounts to a part. To his spoken part. To a part of speech.

Translated by Author
Anonymous submission.

Joseph Brodsky
Seaward

Darling, you think it's love, it's just a midnight journey.
Best are the dales and rivers removed by force,
as from the next compartment throttles "Oh, stop it, Bernie,
yet the rhythm of those paroxysms is exactly yours.
Hook to the meat! Brush to the red-brick dentures,
alias cigars, smokeless like a driven nail!
Here the works are fewer than monkey wrenches,
and the phones are whining, dwarfed by to-no-avail.
Bark, then, with joy at Clancy, Fitzgibbon, Miller.
Dogs and block letters care how misfortune spells.
Still, you can tell yourself in the john by the spat-at mirror,
slamming the flush and emerging with clean lapels.
Only the liquid furniture cradles the dwindling figure.
Man shouldn't grow in size once he's been portrayed.
Look: what's been left behind is about as meager
as what remains ahead. Hence the horizon's blade.

Joseph Brodsky
Seven Strophes

I was but what you'd brush
with your palm, what your leaning
brow would hunch to in evening's
raven-black hush.

I was but what your gaze
in that dark could distinguish:
a dim shape to begin with,
later - features, a face.

It was you, on my right,
on my left, with your heated
sighs, who molded my helix
whispering at my side.

It was you by that black
window's trembling tulle pattern
who laid in my raw cavern
a voice calling you back.

I was practically blind.
You, appearing, then hiding,
gave me my sight and heightened
it. Thus some leave behind

a trace. Thus they make worlds.
Thus, having done so, at random
wastefully they abandon
their work to its whirls.

Thus, prey to speeds
of light, heat, cold, or darkness,
a sphere in space without markers
spins and spins.

Joseph Brodsky
Stone Villages

The stone-built villages of England.
A cathedral bottled in a pub window.
Cows dispersed across fields.
Monuments to kings.

A man in a moth-eaten suit
sees a train off, heading, like everything here, for the sea,
smiles at his daughter, leaving for the East.
A whistle blows.

And the endless sky over the tiles
grows bluer as swelling birdsong fills.
And the clearer the song is heard,
the smaller the bird.

Joseph Brodsky
Törnfallet

There is a meadow in Sweden
where I lie smitten,
eyes stained with clouds'
white ins and outs.

And about that meadow
roams my widow
plaiting a clover
wreath for her lover.

I took her in marriage
in a granite parish.
The snow lent her whiteness,
a pine was a witness.

She'd swim in the oval
lake whose opal
mirror, framed by bracken,
felt happy broken.

And at night the stubborn
sun of her auburn
hair shone from my pillow
at post and pillar.

Now in the distance
I hear her descant. She sings "Blue Swallow," but I can't follow.

The evening shadow
robs the meadow
of width and color.
It's getting colder.

As I lie dying
here, I'm eyeing
stars. Here's Venus;
no one between us.

Joseph Brodsky
To Urania

Everything has its limit, including sorrow.
A windowpane stalls a stare. Nor does a grill abandon
a leaf. One may rattle the keys, gurgle down a swallow.
Loneliness cubes a man at random.
A camel sniffs at the rail with a resentful nostril;
a perspective cuts emptiness deep and even.
And what is space anyway if not the
body's absence at every given
point? That's why Urania's older than sister Clio!
In daylight or with the soot-rich lantern,
you see the globe's pate free of any bio,
you see she hides nothing, unlike the latter.
There they are, blueberry-laden forests,
rivers where the folk with bare hands catch sturgeon
or the towns in whose soggy phone books
you are starring no longer; farther eastward surge on
brown mountain ranges; wild mares carousing
in tall sedge; the cheekbones get yellower
as they turn numerous. And still farther east, steam
dreadnoughts or cruisers,
and the expanse grows blue like lace underwear.

Joseph Brodsky
Tornfallet

There is a meadow in Sweden
where I lie smitten,
eyes stained with clouds'
white ins and outs.

And about that meadow
roams my widow
plaiting a clover
wreath for her lover.

I took her in marriage
in a granite parish.
The snow lent her whiteness,
a pine was a witness.

She'd swim in the oval
lake whose opal
mirror, framed by bracken,
felt happy, broken.

And at night the stubborn
sun of her auburn
hair shone from my pillow
at post and pillar.

Now in the distance
I hear her descant.
She sings "Blue Swallow,"
but I can't follow.
The evening shadow
robs the meadow
of width and color.
It's getting colder.

As I lie dying
here, I'm eyeing
stars. Here's Venus;
no one between us.
Joseph Brodsky
Tsushima Screen

The perilous yellow sun follows with its slant eyes
masts of the shuddered grove steaming up to capsize
in the frozen straits of Epiphany. February has fewer
days than the other months; therefore, it’s more cruel
than the rest. Dearest, it’s more sound
to wrap up our sailing round
the globe with habitual naval grace,
moving your cot to the fireplace
where our dreadnought is going under
in great smoke. Only fire can grasp a winter!
Golder unharnessed stallions in the chimney
dye their manes to more corvine shades as they near the finish,
and the dark room fills with the plaintive, incessant chirring
of a naked, lounging grasshopper one cannot cup in fingers.

Joseph Brodsky