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Joseph Brodsky was a great contrarian and believed, against the received wisdom of our day, that good writing could survive translation. He was right, I think, though you had to wonder when you saw how badly his own work fared in English. But then perhaps the Russians hadn't expelled a great poet so much as exposed us to one of their virulent personality cults. Yet Brodsky's essays are interesting. Composed in a rather heroically determined English, clumsily phrased and idiomatically challenged, they are still inventive and alive. There are suggestive analyses of favorite poems by Hardy, Rilke, and Frost in this book, and a moving meditation on the figure of Marcus Aurelius. Though too often Brodsky goes on at self-indulgent length, he usually recaptures our attention with a characteristic aside: "The fact that we are living does not mean we are not sick."