

The Rustle of Acacias · *Joseph Brodsky*

Summertime, the cities empty. Saturdays, holidays
drive people out of town. The evenings weigh
you down. Troops could be marched in at even pace.
And only when you call a girlfriend on the phone,
who's not yet headed South and is still at home,
do you prick up your ears—laughter, an international drone—

and softly lay the phone down again: the city's fallen, the regime
has changed, more and more stop lights gleam.
You pick up a newspaper and start to read
from where "What's On" has spilt its microscopic type.
Ibsen is leaden. A. P. Chekhov is trite.
Better go for a stroll, to work up an appetite.

The sun always sets behind the TV tower. The West's
there too, where they rescue damsels in distress,
fire their six-shooters and say "get lost!"
when you ask for money. They sing, "who gives a damn!"
the silver flute held in grimy, trembling hands.
The bar is a window which looks out upon that land.

A row of bottles with a New York chic:
it's the only thing affords you kicks.
What gives the East away's the bleak, oblique
cuneiform of your thoughts, a blind alley each—
and the banknotes with neither Mahomet nor his mountain peak
but a rustling in your ear of a hot "do you speak . . ."

And when, after, you weave homewards, it's the pincer device,
a new Cannae where, voiding his great insides
in the bathroom, at 4:00 a.m., with his eyes
goggling out at you from the oval mirror
above the wash-basin, and gripping the hilt
of his sword, "cha-cha-cha—" grunts the conqueror.

*Translated by Daniel Weissbort
with the author*