

1978

# The Rustle of Acacias

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## Recommended Citation

Brodsky, Joseph and Daniel Weissbort. "The Rustle of Acacias." *The Iowa Review* 9.4 (1978): 1-1. Web.  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.2372>

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## 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*