

## Tourists

Visits of condolence is all we get from them.  
They squat at the Holocaust Memorial,<sup>1</sup>  
They put on grave faces at the Wailing Wall  
And they laugh behind heavy curtains  
In their hotels.<sup>2</sup>  
They have their pictures taken  
Together with our famous dead  
At Rachel's Tomb and Herzl's Tomb  
And on the top of Ammunition Hill.  
They weep over our sweet boys  
And lust over our tough girls  
And hang up their underwear  
To dry quickly  
In cool, blue bathrooms.<sup>3</sup>

Once I sat on the steps by a gate at David's Tower, I placed my two heavy baskets at my side.<sup>4</sup> A group of tourists was standing around their guide and I became their target marker. "You see that man with the baskets? Just right of his head there's an arch from the Roman period. Just right of his head." "But he's moving, he's moving!" I said to myself: redemption<sup>5</sup> will come only if their guide tells them, "You see that arch from the Roman period? It's not important: but next to it, left and down a bit, there sits a man who's bought fruit and vegetables for his family."

*Translated by Glenda Abramson & Tudor Parfitt*



[1] The word *yosheim* here translated as "squatting," literally means "sitting," which suggests the practice of "sitting *shiva*"—the seven-day mourning period.

[2] The luxurious hotels where tourists stay in Jerusalem.

[3] The trappings of modern travel.

[4] The linguistic style, spacing, and printing of the poem changes from poetry in the first section to prose in the second section.

[5] *Geula* refers to the eventual salvation of the world by God.

## תִּירִים

בְּקוֹרֵי אֲבָלִים הֵם עוֹרְכִים אֲצִלְנוּ,  
יוֹשְׁבִים בְּיַד וְשֵׁם, מְרַצִּינִים לֵיד הַכֶּתֶל הַמַּעֲרָבִי  
וְצוֹחֲקִים מְאַחֲרֵי וִילוֹנוֹת כְּבָדִים בְּחֲדָרֵי מְלוֹן,  
מְצַטְלָמִים עִם מֵתִים חֲשׂוּבִים בְּקֶבֶר רַחֵל  
וּבְקֶבֶר הַרְצֵל וּבְגִבְעַת הַתְּחַמֶּשֶׁת,  
בוֹכִים עַל יְפֵי גְבוּרַת נְעָרֵינוּ  
וְחוֹשְׁקִים בְּקִשְׁיוֹת נְעוּרֹתֵינוּ  
וְתוֹלִים אֶת תְּחַתּוֹנֵיהֶם  
לִיבוֹשׁ מְהִיר  
בְּאִמְבִּטְיָה כְּחֻלָּה וְצוֹנְנָת.

פֶּעַם יִשְׁבְּתִי עַל מְדַרְגוֹת לֵיד שַׁעַר בְּמַצוֹדֵת דָּוִד, אֶת שְׁנֵי הַסְּלִים הַכְּבָדִים  
שְׁמִתִּי לֵידִי. עֲמָדָה שָׁם קְבוּצַת תִּירִים סְבִיב הַמְּדָרֵיךְ וְשִׁמְשִׁתִּי לָהֶם נִקְדַּת צִיּוֹן.  
"אַתֶּם רוֹאִים אֶת הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה עִם הַסְּלִים? קִצַּת יְמִינָה מְרֹאֲשׁוֹ נִמְצְאָת קִשְׁת  
מִן הַתְּקוּפָה הָרוֹמִית. קִצַּת יְמִינָה מְרֹאֲשׁוֹ". אֲבָל הוּא זֶה, הוּא זֶה! אֲמַרְתִּי בְּלִבִּי:  
הַגָּאֵלָה תָּבוֹא רַק אִם יִגִּידוּ לָהֶם: אַתֶּם רוֹאִים שָׁם אֶת הַקִּשְׁת מִן הַתְּקוּפָה  
הָרוֹמִית? לֹא חֲשׂוּב: אֲבָל לֵידָהּ, קִצַּת שְׁמֵאלָהּ וְלִמְטָה מִמֶּנָּה, יוֹשֵׁב אָדָם שֶׁקֶנָּה  
פְּרוֹת וִירְקוֹת לְבֵיתוֹ.

## A Purchase on Dizengov

I purchased a store on Dizengov  
to strike roots  
to purchase roots  
to find me a perch in Roval  
but  
the people in Roval<sup>1</sup>  
I ask myself  
who are these people in Roval  
what's so special about these people in Roval  
what make them tick these people in Roval  
I don't address the people in Roval  
and when the people in Roval address me  
I pull out the language,<sup>2</sup>  
clean words,  
a most up-to-date Hebrew,



Dizengoff Street, named after Tel Aviv's first mayor, Meir Dizengoff (1861–1936), is a major thoroughfare in Tel Aviv. In the street's heyday, it was described as the "Champs-Élysées of Tel Aviv." Biton consciously misspells the name of the street in Hebrew to hint at prevalent Ashkenazi prejudices regarding the literacy and language of immigrants from North Africa.

[1] Roval, a European-style café, opened in 1948 on Dizengoff Street and became renowned for its pastries. It was a popular meeting place for the political, bohemian, and bourgeois society of Tel Aviv until it closed in 1980.

[2] The word used by Biton is *sholef* (i.e., I "draw" out the language, I make it sound classy and Western).

## שיר קנייה בדיזנגוב

קנייתי חנות בדיזנגוב  
כדי להכות שרש  
כדי לקנות שרש  
כדי למצא מקום ברוןל  
אבל  
האנשים ברוןל  
אני שואל את עצמי  
מי הם האנשים ברוןל,  
מה יש באנשים ברוןל,  
מה הולך באנשים ברוןל,  
אני לא פונה לאנשים ברוןל  
כשהאנשים ברוןל פונים אלי  
אני שולף את השפה  
מלים נקיות,