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A Life by Wadih Saadeh

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He was, more or less, wasting time
he drew a vase
he drew a flower in the vase
and fragrance emanated from the paper.
He drew a cup of water
took a sip
and watered the flower.
He drew a room
placed a bed in the room
and fell asleep
...and when he woke up
he drew a sea
a deep sea
and drowned.

Commentary

Wadih Saadeh (1948–) is a Lebanese poet who left his native country during the Civil War to reside in Australia with his family. His poetry is marked by a sense of loss and exile. His poem, “A Life,” articulates the condition of exile in which the poet (and as a matter of fact, any human being) suffers. The art (and the world) a poet creates serves as a dwelling that ultimately doubles his alienation from the outside world. “A Life” conveys beautifully the doubling of the artist’s exilic condition. Its sound devices in Arabic conveying the depth of the artist’s exile through the deep sound of the letter *ق* recurring in the words *عميق*, *غرق*, *ورقة* are reincarnated in English as the consonance in “deep” and “asleep” on one hand, and the “w” and “d” sounds in “deep,” “drew,” and “drowned” on the other hand, highlighting the fact that the artist is both victim and agent of his exile.