

The Exile is the Body
Two Poems After W.B. Yeats
Eli Tadmor

On the Word

*Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing
—W.B. Yeats, Sailing to Byzantium*

Be it my homeland or abroad—
It's all the same.
The exile is the body, there is
No refuge from the flesh.
Its rivers run with bloody gore,
Its ground composed of fat.
If only there were refuge
From the Word.

I said within my heart: I will flee Eastward,
And be like songbirds of Byzantium,
Who are all made of truth and wrought of wisdom,
And are exempt from skin and blood and semen
And are excused from all of lust's dead weight.

And with their song of what is passed or passing or to come,
And with their song which is all nought but Word,
Put all the disappointments of the flesh
To shame.

Words of Salt and Honey

*A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon;
I hail the superhuman;
I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.*

—W.B. Yeats, *Byzantium*

No harm can come to me among the dead—

Clay tablets are inscribed with words of salt and honey
Eclipsing all somatic ecstasy;
I stride serene on mounds of desolation,
With corpses of dead gods strewn all around me,
And radiance bursting from their broken mouths.

The living are more dangerous by far—

Their nimble tongues let loose flesh-sundering speech
Whose onslaught falls upon me unforeseen;
In arms of love I was but a cadaver,
My senses stifled by the deafening dread,
And tender limbs turned instruments of terror.