

THREE POEMS



Jemal Sharah

TO MY FATHER

Pointless, I think, to seek you
in the deserts of the north,
the terraced slopes of your forebears,
through air you never breathed.

And yet, in your mother's homeland
by the bleak links of the Rhine,
though her name had been wiped away
I felt a marginal closeness.

It is to seek that again
that I fly after the fallen sun.
To the place where your father's name, too,
was lost in an exodus.

And I know I'll continue to search
for those moments of sharp recollection.
In the dark lashes of your people.
In the sudden glow of a cigarette.

UNFORGOTTEN

(On the twenty-eighth anniversary of my brother's birth)

The black chill rising from autumn—
crusts of ice on the sky
and only the recollection, now,
of the day's end in conflagration.

Guided only by the moon's
weak, reflected light,
I found my way out of the caverns.
Sometimes the vaults were so low
I had to drag myself across scree.

Then a gap in the dark filled with stars
and I arrived on this windswept plain.

Since the earth broke open beneath us
twenty years have fallen to dust.
I have searched and searched in the mines, but couldn't find you.
And now, having emerged, you are further and further away.

PICTURE FROM BOSNIA

Winter has come.
Fleece trails from every thorn
and long after first light
hangs the cold breath of dawn.

These are the cruellest days.
The earth's white flesh appals
the unprotected gaze.
At dusk galaxies fall

in drifts among bare boughs
and forests choke with snow.
Yet the still day allows
a child to go

to seek food from the troops.
He picks his way through briars
the barbed stems of which are loops,
half-sunk in snow, of wire.

A scene from a fairy tale.
Obstacles fill his path,
and yet by ancient rule
innocence should win at last.

If we were to take, and roll
thrice on a silver dish
an apple of gleaming gold,
to be shown whatever we wished,

we'd find, from this child's fate,
these are the cruellest days.
The earth spins on through space.
The moon averts its gaze.