

Thinking of America

I cannot find the words I need
in America. There I am a stranger,
destitute. No breathing in the air,
no pulsing in the ground. The look
that water wears in Africa
is absent for me. The shine
by which the sun greets not me,
but my spirit, vanished long ago.
It is buried somewhere underneath
Oakland, the place I lived in
but could never see. Even the great
cemetery was a reminder
of where I could not hope to be.
The things I might have written of,
paper birds soaring above the docks,
are nameless, escape my lines.
My lines themselves snag, dissolve,
telling me only one thing:
poetry can't travel. The man possessed
has no choice. If he leaves, he leaves
his words behind, and him they call
through all the hours of the night.

HAROLD FARMER