

## Once in a Lifetime, Snow

Paul Kelly

Winters at home brought wind, black frost and raw  
Grey rain in barbed-wire fields, but never more

Until the day my uncle rose at dawn  
And stepped outside to find his paddocks gone

His cattle to their hocks in ghostly ground  
And unaccustomed light for miles around

And he stopped short, and gazed lit from below  
And half his wrinkles vanished murmuring, "Snow"

A man of farm and fact, he stared to see  
The facts of weather raised to a mystery

White on the world he knew and all he owned  
"Snow? Here?" I see  
High time I learned

Here, guessing what he meant had much to do  
With that black earth dread old men are given to

He stooped to break the sheer crust with delight  
At finding the cold unknown so deeply bright

At feeling his prints so softly deep  
As if it thought he knew enough to sleep

Or else so little he might seek to shift  
Its weight of wintry light by a single drift

Perceiving this much, he scuffed his slippered feet  
And scooped a handful up to taste, and eat

In memory of the fact that even he  
Might not have seen the end of reality

Then, turning, he tiptoed in to a bedroom, smiled  
And wakened a murmuring child and another child