

## Zweli's First Taste of Snow

There's a certain leaden light –  
significant for those who know.  
Heads bent over books  
only we Europeans raise an eye  
querying the sky, and each other.  
Those from nearer the equator  
lean their chairs closer to radiators.  
The gloom of the morning grows.

Zweli had whooped with delight  
yesterday, as he skidded into class:  
'Snow! Snow! Snow!'  
'No, Zweli, no' someone replied  
'It's just frost, a hoar frost, that's all.'  
Oh, today I should be teaching *Lear*  
a blasted heath, at least some howling moor.  
Instead – unseasonably – it's Keats' *Odes*.

Behind their heads, sky alights  
snuffs out the sea, then the trees,  
a sudden blizzard of white swoops past  
obliterates all that's left.  
Poetry's forgotten. The classroom throbs  
its energy pulsing outside  
into the moving silence.  
I let them go.

The landscape alters, quite –  
Breughel overdrawn by Lowry.  
Why must I intellectualise?  
Human silhouettes cavort with joy  
pink tongues catch, savour first flakes  
metallic shouts, only slightly deadened  
shimmer towards me in the freezing air.  
What – of anything – do I know?