

## THREE POEMS BY WILLIAM BEDFORD

## The Letter

Yes, there were woods and woodlands  
inside my head,  
waiting for her postcard  
to set them free,  
or a letter to explain the silence.  
But you said she would not write,  
and winter somehow limited feeling,  
Bordering my might have been  
with a cold sense of survival,  
a wish, almost need, to be alone.  
We thought we could find alternatives.  
And at night,  
listening to the emptying darkness  
and various systems of stars,  
we figured the lessons too elementary,  
pragmatic and tired of feeling.  
Now, conversation is over,  
and sweepings and ash and understanding  
grey into a whitening daylight,  
abrupt as the sun's departure.  
Our skylines, as usual, outreach us,  
and where blackbird and thrush  
sang in a brief summer,  
a spread of deadening leaves frost  
into mould and pattern,  
identities, like the snow, unfolding.  
At dawn, we walk into the garden.  
And here, there is room for ritual:  
these snowmen we build,

unspeaking and without knowledge,  
 their eyes staring into silence,  
 their bodies gone from snow to snow  
 in a landscape of fixed horizons.  
 Like the rain, we waver in sunlight,  
 declaring our ordinary need.  
 And as winter gathers around us,  
 cold as the clouds' arrangements,  
 we remember the woods and woodlands,  
 pictures on a letter still awaited.

## Ancestors

Here, they were born:  
 had birth, marriage and death  
 written on the usual stone;  
 had life, though without noticing.

The rain  
 draws everything to their greyness.  
 And the presumption,  
 even, of burial, was not theirs:

a routine  
 that gathered its force by being,  
 a stale shot at consolation.  
 Like words, the stone means nothing.

And out of this,  
 and a winter afternoon,  
 in a graveyard, they attempt the stars,  
 like the snow, falling through silence.

## John Clare

The sky  
is whitening  
distance now,  
late afternoon  
and all  
you might have remembered,  
once,  
to fill a quiet poem,  
walking  
through the wind's  
sough.

Winter,  
and we are here,  
visiting.  
But standing  
in the cold church,  
no voice  
comes to mind,  
no solitary experience,  
illuminating  
the still  
miles.

In the trees,  
the birds call:  
autumn, autumn.  
And then,  
in a leaf, in a fall,  
summer, again,  
summer,  
the sky a whitening  
distance,  
the quiet a lost  
vow.