

# ICY PANDEMONIUM



*Harry Clifton*

*What the soul needs is silence and warmth. What it gets is an icy pandemonium.*

—SIMONE WEIL

Snow on the Dublin mountains. Takeoff time—  
Through the wide glaze  
Of departure lounges, runways rimed with ice,  
Wings and tailfins spinning on a dime  
For England, France. And it's goodbye, once again,  
To the high stool at the counter, cigarette-haze,  
To love made quietly, in a sacred room  
Away from the family circle, the need to explain,

To the brief and glittering frenzy of Christmastide  
And the notion of home,  
The ones who had children, the ones who were suicided,  
The ones who made their distances in poems,  
The silent siblings, still with something to prove  
To me or to themselves, the retroactive bore  
Divided in himself since the Civil War,  
The longplaying records, needles stuck in grooves,

The soul of discretion, the soul who can only scream,  
In short, to the weight of years  
Come crashing silently down around my ears,  
Though the city hang there, seemingly always the same,  
Weaving, unweaving itself, in skeins of light  
On the Liffey docklands, the cranes of the North Wall,  
Carbides or magnesiums, day-for-night,  
Brilliances, on a depth of total recall . . .

An hour and fifteen minutes flying time

To Charles de Gaulle—

Who were the innocent? Who were the ones to blame?

Airborne, through the clouds, I hear it still,

The dialogue of the deaf, outshouting each other

In Nesbitt's or the Palace, rounds of drink

And souls come in from the cold, foregatherings,

The still, small voice, unable to hear itself think,

Salvaging, here and there, a living word

From the drift of happenstance,

A soundbite or an anecdote, somebody met by chance,

The key to an inner mystery. Safe, *à bord*,

Between two worlds, suspended at terrible height,

I dream of a bare table, the warmth to come,

A silence at the heart of Paris, a room,

Detached, anonymous, nothing to do but write.