

Incident

Odour of sulphur and honey,
larch twigs lit from within with a
pale gold flame.

Fur-white moths tremble
in clots over a body
slumped on the asphalt
in an ooze of black blood.

Houses gather their skirts about them,
squat on their haunches
like Indian squaws, waiting.

More moths and more keep arriving,
flutter up and down in circular
motion. Each has the dead man's
face on.

The hunters' moon lifts
free of the roof tops.
Sycamore seeds float screaming
to the ground. Branches snap like
gun shots. A jeep whirls into
the square and soldiers leap out.

Before they reach the man,
he is wafted high on a pillow
of moths which hovers over
the armed ones' heads, rises,
then sets off at speed for the stars.

They watch it dwindle to a swarm
of gnats, to specks of dust, to an
illusion in the mind's eye.

Behind its windows each house
consigns to memory this
palpable blank in the
pages of history.

Paddy Webb