

Joe

"Some Friday night this, boy," he said,
but did not qualify the statement.

That would come later,
perhaps five minutes; I knew him of old,
this was his way.

He bowed his head and fixed with vacant stare
the patient amber liquid in his glass,
his blue-scarred face like an ancient map,
each coastline a long-past stint
of grunted labour,
exposing the primeval forest
that clawed and snagged
and etched his facial grimace.

In his helmet's light did the oozing blood seem black?
Black as the dancing beams of coaldust
he'd eaten all his life.

I watched him gasp his way toward the bar and back,
spine creaking like a heading prop
as he sat down,

heart and spirit shovelled out ages past,
carted away on the endless drams,
loaded with sunlit dreams, running from his mind.

"Retired, bach, this morning, no more for me.
Let the pinstriped bastards dig it out themselves."

The next Thursday, I followed the hearse,
saw him buried:

in a reclaimed slagheap cemetery.