

York Street Furniture, 1981

Colin says he's got to have a break:
he's gasping, and the bog's the only place
they let them smoke. He takes the Players pack
out of the pocket of his long, buff jacket.
I don't, but then he doesn't even ask.
We talk, but say nothing. The fifty quid
a week is college beer money for me –
for him, it's life-long beer money, perhaps.
And when the tab's half-done, the foreman slams
in, takes one look, says, "What the fuck?" and kicks
me out, for wagging off when I don't smoke.
I'm back to loading king-sized mattresses
myself. I try just one. Can't even span
my arms across, so I stand and sniff
the reasty, hot machine-oil air, sweetened
by seasoned timber, as it turns to sawdust.