

And human hands have made

I am just to keep
my mind off the coffin watching
the undertaker's hands folded
as in bible-story books
the wings of ancient angels were, as now
my father's hands, his breath, his blood.

The undertaker's hands moving
more a plough, they cut
my breath open, turn my blood
in slow slices over, supplicant, dry,
after shade and wanting tears

the shade this camphor laurel gives
ploughing
you would leave frozen water here
to thaw, while you yourself
entered the line of argument earth
was testing heaven with, shadow making possible
your cool return.

So easy here to lean
against this tree and touch
its wrinkled fingers, playing with the smug soil,
the wandering worm, the blade of grass
tapping quietly on the vein.

The undertaker's hands
are making death
ceremonial. He lifts

the air as I have lifted bread,
"which earth has given
and human hands have made..."
offering.

My brothers' hands are taking you,
fingers gripping just the hem of wood,
their knuckles white and shocked

The Sydney Society of Literature and Aesthetics

by their own amount of blood.

All the while, the undertaker's hands.

No bible-stories now, even so

I am just to keep
my mind off the coffin watching
the wings of ancient angels fold
the earth open.

Widow of Beijing

Widow of Nain,
you had it easy, lady,
all you had to suffer,
after Christ convinced your son
his grave was only joking,
was the fear that if you grabbed his hand too hard
you might interrupt his bones
before they got their second wind.

But here the soldiers fired as they came,
real bullets, while the young had made their hopes
of styrofoam. Some students got away,
but the rest, the dead and wounded, waited
while bayonets were making sure
their sentence was correct
down to the last punctuation mark.
After that, only blood escaped,
crawling by its elbows, not looking back
to see the tanks begin to turn the bodies over, over,
mashing them to baby food, the dozers start
feeding the fire with big, awkward spoonfuls,
so little bone
by now the flames wouldn't even feel a scratch, to see,
along the Avenue of Eternal Peace, those well-fed flames
playing leap-frog on the trees,
playing not unlike children.

Widow of Nain,
you had it easy, lady,
I cannot find his body, let alone
your Christ to raise him up, I cannot wrap
my son against the long-winded cold, I cannot say, "He is buried
here."

Noel Rowe