

# Hands

*Philip White*

In the chapel,  
In the straightbacked  
Ache of the pew,  
We held them — lap toys  
Tendered at arm's length  
To keep us quiet,  
To weigh in our hands  
Like stones and turn  
Over, to conjure up  
Hornblende and pyrite,  
The inscrutable surface,  
Dark bloodvein, fissure . . .  
And again in sickness  
We held them, in the fever  
Of bedsheets, the drugged  
Nightmare. These  
Were the only times.

Whispered out of sleep  
Early, we stood there.  
Between the poised finger and thumb  
We could imagine  
The mechanical pencil,  
In our heads the world's last wonder,  
And over the slack wrist,  
The watch with the seven hands . . .

Lost treasurer of flasks and lozenge tins,  
We find you in the jarred pencil drawer,  
In hung shirts, breastpockets filled with nails,  
In axe-helve and trowel, the curled glove,  
In bedsheets each night, the hand  
We give back to wristbone, stilled blood . . .