

Music for a New England Daughter... *First Canticle: The Artisan*

This is the memory:

Three dark men on a pointy hill
A half-grown child being placed in a hole in the midnight
Three witnesses soft in the Autumn grass.

The Tall Man speaks:

Whatever this child was, no one must know
He lived, but did not live, buried beyond the word
Everyone and me must be silent music.

He had no time but a tilting of the barn-light
He made no sense between his food-bowls, his light blindness
We had no choice. I say we had no choice.

He was an embarrassment, yes:
His shrieking and shuffling, all that runting about in the shed
But you must understand, I was his keeper.

For all we know, he could have been happy:-
A boy in a barn, though I doubt he would've put it that way had he spoke.
You two must know, I had no choice.

We must understand. We all can hurt
I have found it possible: to hate, to deny my shame
And speak lovely words from the same throat.

Then the Minister, in a black coat, begs to his God
And begins, chanting the old, Scots' canticles, the old regrets
Singing the large child down:

My Laird!, you did not show your face
Where were you? We have waited long on your absent islands
Touch my lips and *wake so I may comfort*.

Then words denied the boy, are scratched in ground
The secret epitaph a rock; flesh bleeding into grass
The doubtful pine-trees striping to a distant edge.

The long guilt falls, still born, to a trinity of men
The Artisan grunts and scrapes his spade
And does his duty, knowing the earth.

A single light is seen descending
The vivid child begins to speak
And all the witnesses are dead.