

## Song of the Shepherds

We were familiar with the night.  
We knew its favourite colours,  
its sullen silence  
and its small, disturbing sounds,  
its unprovoked rages,  
its savage dreams.

We slept by turns,  
attentive to the flock.  
We said little.  
Night after night, there was little to say.  
But sometimes one of us,  
skilled in that way,  
piped a tune of how things were for us.

They say that once, almost before time,  
the stars with shining voices  
serenaded  
the new born world.  
The night could not contain their boundless praise.

We thought that just a poem —  
until the night  
a song of solar glory,  
unutterable, unearthly,  
eclipsed the luminaries of night,  
as though the world were exorcised of dark  
and, coming to itself, began again.

Later we returned to the flock.  
The night was ominously black.  
The stars were silent as the sheep.  
Nights pass, year on year.  
We draw our meagre cloaks against the cold.  
Our aging piper's fumbling fingers play,  
night after night,  
an earthly echo of the song that banished dark.  
It has stayed with us.

Richard Bauckham