

THE SHEPHERD'S TALE
by Jason Charnesky

*How rudely stabled birthed ye, babe,
With moaning cow and oxen,
That noone waited news of ye
Save lambs who leapt in frolic
And the mother's husband hard with care
Of doubt in what lay sleeping?
That miserable and storming night
Not once gave pause to thunder.
No stars ran off their frozen track
To spy upon your labor.
But all tongues wag about your birth
And each adds a new wonder.
Now talking donkeys praising God
Are claimed to have attended,
And through the course of rooms and bars
Your magic birth gets mended,
Embellished in the telling over
Spicy wine and wassails.
The Bethlem crowd enjoyed the tales
Of country bumpkin Davids
And secret saviours born in sties
By mother made a virgin.
It's all laughed off as this year's ruse,
A Nazarean rumor.*

*Tales have their season of street talk
Before they're all forgotten.
No prince would so unseemly rise
From barnyard manger cribstraw,
A king were better bred and boarded
Than lay amid such offal.
They'll kill ye, boy, in gossip ere
Ye find your sense of reason,
No saviour ever slept with kine or found a father wanting.
T'were better born a shepherd than
A riddle in a barnyard.
I'd side with them.
It makes no sense
To talk of promised comets
Or wonders of a thousand nights
Befalling all upon us
To take the punishment we mete
With God's own offered infant.
One night to wipe out all our debt.
I'd side with them, except
I saw my sheep bolt down the hill
Afraid of sudden thunder,
And heard the song the thunder sang
In a sky gone live with angels.*