Los Penitentes hermanos

Hermanos de sangre. Out of a New Mexican night a memory that has haunted me all my life

penitentes, marching
singing, their torches
high arc against
the crest of the Hill

Sensing my mother, her fear
I holding her hand, 4, knowing
nothing of the needs of men—

backs raw from cactus whips
yet singing of light, they were
truly Brothers of the Light, brown men

chanting

—little Christs, singing
to the agonies, o of the wounds
of the dying Cristo who led them
bearing their sins with his own

it is His blood dripping
from that sky 64 years ago
that calls them forth singing now

they, climbing the high Hill
with Him, His neck bowed under
His cross, they light His way

torches, smoking and flaming
above the tall grass, after all
these years it is the
darkness they left behind.