

Black Moroni

Paul Swenson

Painted on the wall behind the seats where choir sings
See the shining figure in a steep green wood
Angel wears a shirtwaist robe, fabric wing as thin as filament
He looks downslope where Joseph kneels, treasure spread in dirt
Moroni's hair descends his neck in alabaster rolls
His bare feet tread the air above the forest floor
Light he sheds not only notches bark of pine and birch
It breaks the frame, transcends the painting
Falls on pews below where angel is

Made flesh: Curly-headed black child
Named Moroni for a prophet in his folks' new church
He's comfortable in cocoa-colored skin
Sensual curl of hip and thigh, framed to mother's breast
And like another baby, born in the meridian
Of Mormon time, his laugh is whole and unashamed
Lucid eyes obsidian, lashes thick, brows arched high
Something in this black Moroni prophesies
Of truce between the body and the soul