

Martin in Me

Paul Swenson

Three times I take his words into my mouth
and make them thunder from my tongue.
His final speech will not remain unsung in me.

My students' faces leak a trace of anomie.
A few have questions in their eyes;
confusion clouds the skies of history.

No longer young that April night—Memphis
1968—he saw the Promised Land, but knew
he couldn't enter through hate's veil that cloaked the city.

*I know somehow that only when it's dark enough,
you see the stars, he said. Something is happening
in our world—masses of people rising up.*

He asked those Memphis ministers to risk
their lives for garbage men. *The issue is injustice.
We're going to march again; we've got to march again.*

We don't need bricks or bottles. He spoke of Lincoln,
Christ, and Aristotle, but said we could not stop there.
In this world, *it's nonviolence or nonexistence.*

Within the week, a bigot's bullet laid him down.
His cry remains the same: *We will be free.* I speak
his words and feel the Martin in me.

PAUL SWENSON's debut poetry collection, *Iced at the Ward, Burned at the Stake and Other Poems*, was published by Signature Books in 2003. His second collection, *In Sleep and Other Poems*, is seeking a publisher.