

# Martín Espada

## YOU GOT A SONG, MAN

*For Robert Creeley (1926-2005)*

You told me the son of Acton's town nurse  
would never cross the border  
into Concord, where the Revolution  
left great houses standing on Main Street.  
Yet we crossed into Concord, walking  
through Sleepy Hollow Cemetery  
to greet Thoreau, his stone  
stamped with the word *Henry*  
jutting like a gray thumbnail  
down the path from Emerson  
and his boulder of granite.

We remembered Henry's night in jail,  
refusing tax for the Mexican War,  
and I could see you hunched with him,  
loaning Henry a cigarette, explaining  
the perpetual wink of your eye  
lost after the windshield  
burst in your boyhood face.

When Emerson arrived,  
to ask what you and Henry  
were doing in there, you would say:

*You got a song, man, sing it.*

*You got a bell, man, ring it.*

You hurried off to Henry in his cell  
before the trees could bring their flowers  
back to Sleepy Hollow.

You sent your last letter months ago  
about the poems you could not write,  
no words to sing when the president swears

that God breathes the psalms of armies in his ear,  
and flags twirl by the millions  
to fascinate us like dogs at the dinner table.  
You apologized for what you could not say,  
as if the words were missing teeth  
you searched for with your tongue,  
and then a poem flashed across the page,  
breaking news of music interrupting news of war:  
*You got a song, man, sing it.*  
*You got a bell, man, ring it.*

Today you died two thousand miles from Sleepy Hollow,  
somewhere near the border with Mexico, the territory  
Thoreau wandered only in jailhouse sleep.  
Your lungs folded their wings in a land of drought  
and barbed wire, boxcars swaying like drunks at 3 A.M.  
and unexplained lights hovering in the desert.  
You said: *There's a lot of places out there, friend,*  
so you would go, smuggling a suitcase of words  
across every border carved by the heel  
of mapmakers or conquerors, because  
you had an all-night conversation with the world,  
hearing the beat of unsung poems in every voice,  
visiting the haunted rooms in every face.  
*Drive,* you said, because poets must  
bring the news to the next town:  
*You got a song, man, sing it.*  
*You got a bell, man, ring it.*