Conductor

Lon R. Young

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Conductor

I am Moses with this baton, dividing seas and urging fountains from stone.
Legions march and charge and halt at my command
and I have bruised the night with battle blast.

It is a slight thing to claim as scepter, this ash wood loosely held,
yet at its merest tapping the hosts fall silent.
A straight branch, staff of power, to stave off insurrection, to beat into submission
the proud, the lofty, the stiff-necked.

Power, too, is in my grasp to soothe, to coax, to quell the flames.
Sweet salve of milk and honey, manna for our ears.
It is true I’ve lashed with hot rebuke, though I would weep.
One must hold to strict conformity these children to their parts,
no countenance for the least rebellion. Eternity hangs on the point of this baton.

I lead my people through a score of trials, through cloud and fire.
I trace in air the raging flight of locusts, the thrash and flail of sea-pitched limbs,
the meanderings of Israel’s erring sons.

A single step and I have climbed the mount, a vision before me,
I perceive the stretch of time, anticipate its changes.
One eternal round, past, present, future, da capo, al fine and back again.

Hear me. You have each his part, but through me flows part and whole, immutable:
Children, let yourselves be mastered.
Our fugue is not the flight of feet across a wilderness,
nor our hymn the idle thrumming through two scores.

Canaan is a pleasing sound, a concord of will and desire.

—Lon R. Young

This poem won third place in the BYU Studies 2011 poetry contest.