

Milton for Mississippi Creative Writing Award for Poetry:

“The Angel of Unstoppable Force and Immovable Object”

by

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Rationale

One of my favorite John Milton lines is from Book II of *Paradise Lost*: “rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death” (621). Though the image of the words themselves is chilling enough, it is the merger of landscape and sound that has stayed with me for so long. The mesmerizing rhythm of the monosyllables creates a strange, evocative unit of blank verse. It does not carry the expected rhythm of the lines which precede it either. Instead, the line builds from and works through the established meter. The effect undermines the monotony of a list and asserts the dreadfulness of what is shown. Of the many things to love in Milton’s work, this versatile and imaginative use of the pentameter line is what I admire the most. I strive to bring this kind of inventiveness to all of my poems. In “The Angel of Unstoppable Force and Immovable Object,” I attempted to make use of some of the harsh sounds and strong rhythms that seem right for the images of landscape present in the poem. My poem is also an Italian sonnet, a poetic form Milton made use of in many of his shorter works, such as “How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,” and “When I consider how my light is spent.” My impulse for writing the poem came from a place of thinking about the absurdity of universals when held against the inevitabilities of chance, which I like to think Milton might have appreciated.

The Angel of Unstoppable Force and Immovable Object

Lately, the margin for error is thin.
See how good trees grow crooked on purpose?
Shorelines slink from a surge. Boulders fuss
from a long-echoed step. Leviathans
now budge for any prophet's hook. Ruins
couldn't be worse. Facades are chipped with busts.
Obelisks lean. Even *Therefore* and *Thus*
hedge their words.

But worse are the awestruck winds
and mudslides that won't commit to spill.
Lean-tos might serve for both to break against.
Already moons loaf till it's nearly day.
Galaxies pull back. A pendulum stills.
Someone prays as soldiers crawl toward a fence.
I'm telling you it could go either way.