

Signs and Wonders
by Corey Kendrick

I. The Bard

They met at noon below the earth,
not pit not tomb not sewer
nor cellar nor mine, the three,
where no light east no shadow,
to gnash and wail and savor
the taste of a tired old bone.
Their names were not
Tartarus, Tantalus, and Tiersias,
but we must call them something.

Dear, sweet friend,
you look like you've been out
all morning in the mountain air
doing something gratifying,
important. Blood-pricked cheeks, eager
eyes half-focused on a distant peak.
Last night you slept swaddled
in the eiderdown of your oldest lover-
a cold night with dainty rabbit-footed snow.

Maybe once- way back- the push cart
you laid your life in rolled off
down the hill of the sloping drive to some house
not your own and you were quick enough to catch it
or down it went and into traffic.
But it danced and weaved between the wheels
and across the yellow lines
to bounce over the curb and come,
soft, to rest in the yard of a neighbor
where his life was up on blocks.
You look so good you must be lucky.

Read what you will.
But if you cry 'Muse! Muse!'
I will have to cut your tongue out.

II. Tartarus

I was out all night inhaling people.
I suppered on orphans fried up like smelt,
spines and pin bones in a bowl of milk.
Bone china. Naturally. Light fare.
I will eat a man, rustic shank in hollow valley,
marrow dipped from ringed little finger penknife
which warms one so in the wide
winter garden of a night. I can bolt
an unwashed child in a single gulp.
I have tasted ghost- corpses too.
In sterile rooms, theatres of law,
frozen in their rags and clutching
shopping carts, sunken, beached,
bleached, blooming, gaping, in repose.
Propelled by appetite which is madness,
which is justification, I have run through my guts
the stomach of God; whiskers, eyes, tooth,
womb and long grubby fingers.
The Mouth most whole, Mouth holy, holy
Hole. But hunger and appetite are not the same beast.
None ought to starve in this most toothsome,
this insatiable world. I have found nothing dying
that could not be consumed.

III. Tantalus

I used to devour women by the fistful
But now I have been ruined by good taste.
What is a man but gristle and fat?
String calves, rope arms, knotted muscle back and chest
that can't be boiled loose. Too gamey.
I would rather keep my fast.

And why eat a child when the world is full of pigs,
ready and fat to fit greased jaws,
veal or lamb had straight from the hammer?
A child is a meager, a pitiful repast.
Besides, to eat a child not your own
is a mark of the worst sort of manners.

I chewed up my youth in a delicious dream
of dissipation. Broiled breasts, buttocks
Milanese, maiden stews. Tender chops,
brains like blancmange whipped with yolks
and fried in butter, memory locked in ridges and coils,
unlocking in a copper pan.
Lady fingers with my coffee.

Curse the maggoty, mawkish gods
who do not eat what they fuck for fear
for then I met the bull leaper
who planted her palms between the perfect surgical horns
and swung up into the sun
to flip and turn and hang,
close cropped hair the color of bronze,
calm eyes of bronze across the bull's back below her
then ground where feet would press and perch
like a hawk on a proud body broken by brazen war
before the next bronze-winged ascent.

Her stampeding blood was warm mercury in my mouth,
sweeter than ambrosia. Her mouth in mine,
a second soul. I burst an eye between tongue and roof of
mouth, the world was honeyed wine and clotted cream.
Her scars and tears, even the trimmings, the sixth quarter,
were more than mortal flesh or food. I curse the gods,
roar them down from the attic
that they did not make her more.
It is hard and necessary, I know.
Once is all and never again.
Once savored, never to return.

IV. Tiresias

I have lived too long now and seen too much of time.
I used to look, rapt, into time,
searching front and back,
searching for a point so taut,
so shot through with solid light it could hold up all the rest.
Now I am an old man,
old as man
and man is very old.

It is all a single point now,
tossed and looped and braided
back over itself. I have lost,
lost the first thread tied overhand
to all the winding rest,
a snake and another snake,
two snakes the same, locked together at the head,
the tail, the spur of a hip.
I caught two snakes between a vault of stone.
I caught a man by his manhood and struck it off.

A circle is not a circle until it's closed, however round.
Where nothing closes, nothing ends.
I have seen a snake swallow a snake and live,
a woman swallow a man swallow a woman and live.
I have seen the end and I have effaced it.
Obliterated the echo, the shadow of memory.
I have swallowed the sun and nothing ends.

Now should be the time for the blindfold,
the pockmarked wall. But this is the place where nothing ends.
This is the place. I am very old. I will swallow myself.