

Piranhas in the Stomach and Other Poems

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Abstract

Can you experiment by stripping things to the basics?

Björk's *Medúlla* (2004) is by far her most revolutionary release: yet, the album features vocals only. The record suggests that beat boxing, growls, and squelches resonate louder (and more viscerally) than the finest symphony orchestra. The Icelandic singer's larynx seems regressive and progressive at once. I am not Björk but I embrace her artistic vision: there is something primal about obsessive anaphora and plain diction which outweighs the sophistications of meter. After all, parallelism and catalogue verse were widely used in epic poetry and other instances of verbal lore. That said, conforming to the long tradition of anaphoric listing does not prevent the imagery from being fresher than a multi-fruit smoothie. Popular culture icons such as Donnie Darko and SpongeBob are welcomed into my poetry, where the confessional always blends with the consumerist. What is more, pop art-esque references ('Sad Meal') coexist with surreal phrasings ('sliced eyeballs'), thus raising questions like: what if *Un Chien Andalou* was shot inside a McDonald's restaurant? Or even: what if Salvador Dalí redesigned the logo of IKEA? Juxtaposition is the key to unleashing a world where piranhas swim in rivers of gastric acid. Björk's acapella tour de force taught me this – who said that a choir cannot be paired with a human trombone?

Piranhas in the Stomach

after Hera Lindsay Bird

It's like sharing a London bedsit with your high school bully.
It's like receiving an ovation after crawling over glass shards.
It's like having to take lifts that will always stop working.
It's like nicking your own wallet and reporting yourself.
It's like getting end-of-year results every day of your life.
It's like being tied to your dog's chain and gobbling kibble.

It's like having people's kind words muted.
It's like having people read your mind aloud.
It's like breathing in a human centrifuge.
It's like being superglued to the pool floor.
It's like brushing your teeth with a bradawl.
It's like getting beaten up in slow motion.

It's searching for discarded mannequins on Google Maps.
It's learning how to like your own comments on YouTube.
It's getting judged by Instagram when "you're all caught up".
It's teaching your grandmother how to forward obituaries on WhatsApp.
It's feeling like the Vine of the little girl with messed-up makeup in the car.
It's wanting to post a review on TripAdvisor: "I would not recommend Sea Life."
It's actually posting a review on Goodreads: "It was a let-down. Everyone survived."

"Mindfulness didn't help last time. Can I try mindlessness now?"

Tears to Mould

Let's dance to the Donnie Darko
soundtrack till our shoes fill
with torn confetti.
Let's water plastic cacti
while we watch a storm cloud
break in and raid the safe.
Let's go to McDonald's,
I'll get a Sad Meal,
you can keep the toy
unless it's a sliced eyeball.
Let's go to IKEA,
I'll hide my wisdom tooth
inside a smelling bottle;
you can milk carpets
in the meantime.

Let's steal hammers
from the hands of a chipmunk.
Let's spot middle fingers
in hand-me-down constellations.
Let's marry a rope
on our low-impact honeymoon.
Let's lick the dust off
urinal kissers gone broke.
Let's run out of bottled silver
linings and china blue moons.
Let's make night soil
out of our play-dough tears.

Eternal Moonshine of the Spotted Mind

He wails when
The sun shows up, the coffee brews,
BBC One wants to join him for breakfast.

He grins when
The stars burst out, the milk is warm,
Graham Norton flips a dad off his red chair.

He will be put down by dawn.

Blackout

I count the toothpaste stains
on my pajama top.
They are six - the number
of weakness, work, and your ward.
I'm drinking little water
since I'm too used to wetting
my SpongeBob sheets.
I have to change
my pillowcase every night.
I've sprained my ankle
and got groggy smelling
Devil's claw cream.

I don't know if it's a Tuesday
or a Wednesday.
I don't care if the TV screen
goes black every 10 minutes.
I wasn't paying attention to
the weatherman anyway.
I only like it
when clouds take a shower
after a grudge match with the sun.
I only liked it
when you were around
telling me to rest my eyes
and get some fresh air.
I don't read anymore.

Euphemisms

No, I won't say
you bought the farm,
you rode into the sunset,
you kicked the bucket,
you took a dirt nap,
you bit the dust.

I don't want to hear about
met makers, left worlds,
given-up ghosts, lost races,
dropped bodies, popped clogs,
pulled plugs and hopped twigs.

I don't care if they are sorry
for my loss. They are not really.
They just want to make small
talk around an open coffin.

What can I say about the dog days
when you are (*Write it!*) dead?

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