

Wetterling Gallery

The Lost Predator

Maria Lönn

The idea of nature's unbridled essence is a fundamental narrative for what it means to be a human being. Like a mirror, nature stands for all that lacks control contrasting with humans who represent whatever is controlled. In the wildness of nature dwells all that we have abandoned, everything that is dirty, uncontrolled, animalistic. As early as the 16th century philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon insisted that nature had to be "bound into service" and "made a slave".

In an anthropomorphic version of nature it still represents all that is wild and irrational; something that needs to be held in check and to be tamed for us if we are to be able to deal with it. What we see as nature may include images and elements of wild animals, but the fundamental aim is an ideological fiction created by human beings for human beings, something that they share with the narrative.

In Linda Bäckström's *The World's End* the idea of nature and the narrative can be claimed to meet in a monitoring of the boundaries between nature and human beings. At the centre is the temptation in the form of the *Sugar Candy Mountain* candy store surrounded by confusing candy sculptures and other sweets that activate a desire to eat and to touch. There are hairy gorilla paws and, who knows, they may have an impulse to attack the candy like a predator with no limits to its desires; embodying in this way the animal overindulgence? The overindulgence that marks a forbidden zone, that shows an inability to curb its drives: all that is understood by unbridled corporeal enjoyment and that can be assumed to be proof of a lack of self-control. People who are defined by a weakness in the face of temptation have abdicated from control of themselves and of their world. Such a loss of self-control involves a return to nature and to animalistic expressions and thus to a lost humanity.

Like the concept of nature, the narrative deals with boundaries for authority and for self-control. In the world of the story, being a maid in the face of this temptation is connected with punishment. Snow White is struck by temporary, though eternal death by an apple. Hansel and Gretel fall into the hands of a witch after eating from the gingerbread house. Are they locks from Goldilocks herself that Linda Bäckström has fastened and that are pulled off as a punishment while she is running home to her mother after eating the bears' porridge? Like an animal hide it hangs there as testimony to what is most shameful – that human beings, in spite of the fact that we have spent centuries trying to liberate ourselves – are merely animals governed by their impulses.

In the story the predator's killing instinct is a way of defining good and evil. The predatory animal is bad, the lamb is good. This is a notion that Friedrich Nietzsche criticizes in his *On the Genealogy of Morality* in which people mix nature's order with notions about good and evil (ideas that can be useful in other mixtures of structures filled with ideas about "good and evil" – in which subordinate people are good while privileged people are bad).

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When predatory animals are good in stories the form of their bodies seems to be changed. Suddenly these animals become soft, lopsided, made of cloth like the kind bear Baloo or Winnie the Pooh; domesticated and more like humans than animals as they support a graspable, and thereby a “manageable” animalism. One that makes an animal more disposed to being dealt with by people. Linda Bäckström’s predators are lazy and sleepy lumps of dough, panthers or eagle’s talons in the form of cocktail sausages. They are predatory animals with feathers borrowed from various species with exaggerated or mistaken dimensions. They are predators that can be said to be defined by shifts, a world of different signs and radical contrasts. This all takes place in the interspace between hard and soft, dangerous and harmless, tamed and untamed, neither domesticated nor wild and no longer belonging to a specific category, avoiding comprehensibility.

In the view of the Russian philosopher Michail Bachtin, the immeasurable predators of this sort define themselves as grotesques in which the ordering or form that we recognize is now broken, unnatural and irrational. Not quite as broken that we do not recognize it; or shifted so far that we have doubts as to whether it is a predatory animal. Rather, the predator is enfeebled, no longer potent and now deprived of its characteristics as a predatory animal.

In this way it is a familiar but transformed predator’s body that points us to psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud when we confront things beyond what we can comprehend. The frightening and strange emotional condition of uncertainty, terror and affright that stems from a condition of not being entirely certain. Is the predator still a threat? What is hiding or is masked within the damaged predator? Has it been tamed or not? To Freud, that which was uncanny did not represent something we were unfamiliar with but was, rather, something known to us but that was secret or suppressed, hidden and no longer in view. Everything is a matter of known or unknown. And in the end, the significance of the predatory animal and its function has collapsed. Just as the boundaries between human beings and animals are broken and, therewith, the basis of a rational world is questioned. In this way Linda Bäckström’s redefined world of story tale animals questions the suitability of organizing both us and nature.