

Paradoxia: A Predator's Diary. - book reviews

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The artist/musician Lydia Lunch has always obsessively searched for the love that's never lost and the pain that's always found. From the music of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, Eight-Eyed Spy, and Queen of Siam, to her fiery anticorporate polemics, to her textual, filmic, and musical collaborations with Richard Kern, Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth, Exene Cervenkova of X, and Auntie Christ, her work has been about the relentlessness of that quest. Lunch is into transgression big time, but with the understanding that the T word is not only a threat, but a lifestyle, a fashion statement, and a time killer. A time killer because sometimes everydayness just seems so, oh I don't know, tiring. So why not shake things up with a mess of setups, crises, and entrapments rife with enough complicated choreographies to spell trouble for even the most hyperactive drama queen?

This operatic constancy of searching and destroying, this perpetual libidinal tension, suggests the state defined by Krafft-Ebing as paradoxia. So it seems appropriate that Lunch has chosen this diagnosis as the title of her new book, *Paradoxia: A Predator's Diary*, which is a sexcapade, a position paper, a rant, and a travelogue, all dressed-up in melodramatically diaristic form. Beginning by declaring "No names have been changed to protect the innocent. They're all fucking guilty," *Paradoxia* is bursting with the wellworn dualisms of guilt, innocence, good and evil: the same binary setups that mark almost all of culture's conventional scenarios. If Lunch's story never quite breaks with those categories, she's certainly hell-bent on embodying the stereotypes of rebellion from convention.

The book's picaresque adventures sample with a vengeance any desire or taboo that fits its never lovesick but always sex-crazed agenda. Boomeranging between ironic asides and head-on confrontations with the demons who fucked with her as a girl and now channel through her as a woman, *Paradoxia* incessantly morphs from elegant passages into raw, expository descriptions of the desperation, cruelty, narcissism, and lust that make for just another day.

But the various cities, bodies, drugs and hairdos are merely backdrops for the central figure of Lunch as impresario: the embellisher of her own dreams of way badness. All the threat, fear, and intimidation seem to handily coalesce into a well turned-out challenge which dances perilously close to the unbecoming bummer of bitterness. Instead, what emerges is a kind of righteous, almost critical reading of just how fucked-up this world really is.

Paradoxia reveals that Lunch is at her best when she's at her worst. She tells us "I'd stalk bars, clubs, bookstores, public parks and the Emergency Room. Seeking in lost men a place to lose myself. Searching for a pocket of weakness. Looking for the 'sweet spot,' a small tear in the psychic fabric to fest upon. To hide inside. A place to disappear in, manifesting myself in a multiplicity of personalities which all shared the same goal. To trick the next john into relinquishing his moral, financial, spiritual or physical guard, so that no matter what the outcome, I won. I got what I wanted. Whether it was money, conversation, drama or sex."

So *Paradoxia* is about winning. Because that means that someone else is losing. Both man-hating and male-defined, Lunch is powered by a kind of brutally articulate vanity that saves her from the demons she's drawn to and gives voice to her sometimes scary, frequently funny, always canny, never sentimental siren song.

Barbara Kruger is an artist who divides her time between Los Angeles and New York.

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