Studies in Scottish Literature

Volume 47 | Issue 1 Article 10

10-2021

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Recommended Citation
Wills, Eric (2021) "David Lindsay and the Shape of Inner Being," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 47: Iss. 1, 122–135.
Available at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol47/iss1/10

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DAVID LINDSAY AND THE SHAPE OF INNER BEING

Eric Wills

David Lindsay's literary reputation survives largely on the basis of his first novel, *A Voyage to Arcturus*. First published in 1920, this ostensibly science fiction adventure sold poorly in Lindsay's lifetime but has attracted many more readers since and remains in print. By contrast, his later stories have been overlooked and have been difficult to obtain. This may change, as there are now readily available editions of, for example, *Sphinx*, first published in 1923, and *Devil's Tor*, first published in 1932. In total, Lindsay produced seven novels, including one unfinished at his death, not published till 1976, and an unpublished collection of aphorisms, first published in 1972.

The similarities and resonances throughout the stories suggest a unity of vision, and in this respect, Lindsay's work warrants closer scrutiny and critical evaluation. It is sometimes said of the later stories that they are marred by defects in literary style. In an early critical survey, J. B. Pick suggested Lindsay's disappointment at the reception of his earlier work had led him to write for his own satisfaction, anticipating he would be ignored and so neglecting the demands of readers.[1] Nevertheless, his books can sustain a reader's interest in the intellectual puzzles they deal in, and while a writer's philosophical ambitions do not excuse deficiencies in presentation and structure, Lindsay's work is interesting in this respect: that it is drawn on issues around ideas and the shape they take in art.

Among the aphorisms which make up his *Sketch Notes for a New System of Philosophy*, Lindsay indicates his primary concern in note (192), in which he declares the attainment and communication of the Sublime is

[1] J.B. Pick, "The Work of David Lindsay," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 1.3 (1963): 171-182 (176-177); and cf. Pick's essay in Colin Wilson, J.B. Pick, and E.H. Visiak, *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay* (London: John Baker, 1970).

the "grandest of all ambitions."[2] The opening chapter of *A Voyage to Arcturus* certainly challenges readers' expectations. A number of characters attend a séance, but only the late arrivals will carry the story forward in the next chapter. The others have no further role and are simply dropped. With the reader seemingly in mind, Lindsay allows the spirit medium, Mr. Backhouse, to advance a hope that his audience will stay for the whole performance, assuring them a manifestation will take place. Asked how he is certain, Backhouse only answers that he dreams with eyes open and that others see his dreams. His questioner takes little interest in this reply and only compliments him on a "beautiful" remark.[3] All of this, of course, is Lindsay's own stage-setting, like the stage props and orchestra Mrs. Trent has organised for the séance, and for which she has imitated an Egyptian-themed staging of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. But the direction of the story changes abruptly as a terrific sound outside of crashing masonry announces the arrival of Maskull and Nightspore, and the conventional fiction of the séance is left behind.

It is telling that Lindsay indicates Mr. Backhouse is not to be taken for a charlatan. The third late arrival to the séance, Krag, calls him a "spirit usher," and Lindsay carefully expands on what he does, explaining it in terms of making the invisible momentarily solid and coloured. This as easily describes Lindsay's own ambition, to give shape and form to the Sublime. If this can have a destructive, Dionysian aspect in the creation of new forms, then it is fitting that the sound of crashing masonry signals the entrance of Maskull and Nightspore. The story proceeds with their journey to Arcturus, to arrive on its planet, Tormance, where Maskull will go in search of its god, Surtur, also variously known as Crystalman and Shaping. Again, the parallel here is with the shape Lindsay gives to his particular vision.

In this essay, I seek to identify that aesthetic on the basis of his sources and some major influences on his thinking. While this may not settle questions around the merit of Lindsay's work in solely literary terms, it

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[2] Bernard Sellin, *The Life and Works of David Lindsay*, transl. Kenneth Gunnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 175, 245 n. 1. Quotations below from Lindsay's *Sketch Notes for a New System of Philosophy* are from the selection included in Sellin's study, referenced there and in my text by Lindsay's own numbering. The full typescript, ca. 1920, of Lindsay's *Sketch Notes*, with 545 aphorisms, is in the National Library of Scotland, MS.27247. The first selection was published in *Lines Review*, no. 40 (March 1972), followed by Sellin's selection; the 1972 text was republished with an additional "Twenty Philosophical Notes," in *Abraxas*, no. 6 (1996); and collected in *A Voyage to Arcturus* (London: Savoy Books, 2002).

[3] David Lindsay, *A Voyage to Arcturus* (London: Methuen, 1920; London: Gollancz, 1948, reissued St. Ives: Gollancz, 2003), referenced below in the text.

does provide a framework for judging whether he succeeds or falls short in his ambition. I propose that a way into making this judgement is through the use Lindsay makes of the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel, including some of Hegel's own imagery. In Hegel's philosophy, the universal Spirit (*Geist*), or the Absolute, is realised in mankind's own self-development, including a progression in artistic and religious forms and expression. This has a basis in the central tenet of Jacob Boehme's theology, in which the divine is dependent on creation for its own self-realisation. I propose this underpins the sense in which David Lindsay intends the invisible is made visible, in the shaping of his characters' own self-realisations, and through the reader's own engagement with the texts.

In his study of Lindsay's life and works, Bernard Sellin arrives at a broadly Platonic account of his appeal to the Sublime, citing number (337) of the *Sketch Notes*, in which Lindsay writes: "The Sublime world is not a metaphysical theory but a terrible fact, which stands above and behind the world, and governs all its manifestations."[4] Similarly, he points to the character Peter Copping's talk in *Devil's Tor*, of experiencing the Sublime in privileged moments like "a violent rent in the noisome fogs of life," and he treats this in terms of insight into a transcendent reality.[5] This supports a sense of an imprisoned soul and its redemption in escape from the confines of egoistic individuality and our "common" attachments to the everyday world. At stake is some notion of a "higher" self, as something obscured in conventional dealings in the world, or drawn as a conflict between man in nature and a sense of the divine. But Lindsay himself, in note (204), in which he says the Sublime world is far more real, still insists on its vivacity and substantiality being "a key to the understanding of world-life."[6] That is to say, in relation to the actual world we live in, not a world behind it.

The issue here is important in deciding a broadly framed approach to Lindsay's work as a whole. Particularly open to question are claims made for its gnostic character. The memorable line from the *Voyage*, that "Crystalman's Empire is but a shadow on the face of Muspel" can suggest a gnostic vision of a "false" creator god, presiding over an illusory world, obscuring what is real (*Voyage*, 280). But a recognition of the influence of Hegel's philosophy will serve to revise and clarify what has been too easily labelled Lindsay's gnosticism. Repeatedly, throughout his stories, Lindsay speaks in terms of how the invisible is made visible. This draws attention to what is "visible" in the texts themselves, which is only to say that the

[4] Sellin, *Life and Works*, 177.
[5] Sellin, 179, citing David Lindsay, *Devil's Tor* (orig. London: G.P. Putnam, 1932; repr. n.p.: Bookship, 2018), 476; subsequent references in the text.
[6] Sellin, 245, n.5.

Sublime is tied to matters around the choice of imagery or to the symbolic character generally of the stories. And with the Hegelian sense of self-realisation in human creativity as a basis for addressing Lindsay's intentions in putting his ideas into fiction, his characters are not merely juxtapositions of ideas. Rather, the stories have an initiatory aspect, similarly to what has been claimed for Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which the self-realisation of Spirit is expressed in Hegel's philosophy through the very form this text takes in communicating it.[7]

In *Sphinx* and *Devil's Tor*, published in 1923 and 1932 respectively, Lindsay draws on chapter VII of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, with the key image in each book, the black stone in Devil's Tor and the Egyptian sphinx, tied to their symbolic character in the use that Hegel makes of them.[8] Sellin has pointed out Lindsay's immersion in German philosophy, in Hegel and Boehme, and more importantly, he says, in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, but he does not go into detail. For example, he only notes that the character Saltfleet in *Devil's Tor* "has something of the aura of Nietzsche's grandeur about him," without addressing Nietzsche's influence as such.[9] I shall argue that Lindsay's philosophical stance is closely modelled on that of Hegel and Jacob Boehme. I shall also challenge the view that Lindsay dismisses the world as wholly illusory. Rather, what is "real" is delivered in mankind's own intellectual development, as its own self-realisation, and so made "visible." The scare quotes here are only to indicate that as a philosophical position, and so briefly outlined, this requires much further exposition and scrutiny, but I am concerned primarily in this essay with the sense of it in Lindsay's own artistry.

Sphinx

Lindsay's *Sphinx* begins with Nicholas Cabot taking up lodgings with the Sturt family. He has invented a machine for recording unconscious dreaming and sets about constructing it, with the paid help of Maurice Ferreira. The central character in the book is Lore Jensen, a musical composer who latterly has lost her inspiration. In Cabot's trials with the machine she appears in dream scenarios and the book ends with one of the Sturt daughters, Evelyn, recording her own father's dreaming as he lies unconscious, having collapsed on hearing that Lore Jensen has drowned. There is a relation between these visionary scenes and the events played out by the characters in the actual world. One or other is seemingly a

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[7] See Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[8] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. A. V. Miller, with with analysis of the text and foreword by J.N. Findlay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 410-478.

[9] Sellin, 52-53, 190.

shadow world, and there is a demonic aspect to the character of Maurice Ferreira, with whom Lore Jensen is in a destructive relationship.

The title of the book is from her piano composition. This enigmatic piece is described as starting drowsily, building like a rising storm, then quietening in the end to take shape as an "indubitable *question*."[10] In the characters' discussion which follows Evelyn's playing, Lore is said never to explain what was in her mind when writing it. The enigma, then, is to say what its riddle is. Reflecting on the title, and taking the Egyptian sphinx as a personification of Nature, Evelyn suggests it signifies a question, why we are living in the world, which the inability to answer requires that we must die. In section (71) of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer remarks that humans, unlike other animals close to "mother nature," are alone in having a metaphysical need to find meaning in the world.[11] Boasting in a letter that his own philosophy had answered the riddle of existence, he declared he would like to have a signet ring made with an image of the sphinx falling into the abyss.[12]

Approaches to Lindsay's work have emphasised the influence of Schopenhauer, and not least in terms of a pessimistic judgement that life is characterised by pain and suffering. But Schopenhauer also writes in section (71) that a saintly denial of life cannot aspire to its complete negation without incoherence. Our lives are a painful litany of disappointment consequent on the frustration of our will, but to try to envisage a release into nothing at all is only a kind of mysticism, even if we give it a name, such as *Nirvana*. As such, the ascetic's negation is, he says, inexorably tied to what is negated.[13] Nicholas Cabot declares a recognisably Schopenhauerian asceticism in relation to the company of women, but, nevertheless, he is quickly caught up in the various intrigues forming the body of the narrative. There is also more at stake in Lindsay's *Sphinx*, and in his other works, than just an allegory of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of Will.

It is significant that Nicholas Cabot disagrees with Evelyn in their discussion around Lore Jensen's composition. In contrast to Evelyn's suggestion, he characterises the sphinx as a goddess of *dreams*, as standing for the way in which a deep unconscious activity can attain visible form. Importantly, this is a precise allusion to the place Hegel accords Egyptian religion in the self-realisation of Spirit, or the Absolute. The starting point

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[10] David Lindsay, *Sphinx* (orig. London: John Long, 1923; [n.p.]: Bookship, 2019), 30; subsequent references in the text.
[11] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, transl. E.F.J Payne (New York: Dover, 1969).
[12] Margrieta Beer, *Schopenhauer* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1914), 27.
[13] Schopenhauer, 408-412.

of Hegel's thinking is traceable to Boehme's account of God coming to know Himself only through the Creation. In Hegel's philosophy, this informs the general sense in which self-awareness depends upon reflection in an "other". The self-realisation of the Absolute in religion is addressed in chaper VII. There, Hegel begins with natural religion and its progression to a subsequent form, in art. On the cusp of this transition is the shape it takes in the Egyptians' religious iconography.

The relevant paragraph in the *Phenomenology* is (697), where Hegel identifies a tension in the human spirit seeking its self-conscious separation from animalistic Nature, which is expressed in such half-animal, half-human forms as the Egyptian sphinx.[14] Hegel expands on this in his *Lectures on Fine Art*, where he notes the Egyptians set up hundreds of sculpted sphinxes in rows and on a huge scale, and explains the import of this visually symbolic form, having the hybrid character of a woman's head on the body of a lion. At issue is the limited form of this representation:

> Out of the dull strength and power of the animal the human spirit tries to push itself forward, without coming to a perfect portrayal of its own freedom and animated shape, because it must still remain confused and associated with what is other than itself.[15]

The key point Hegel goes on to make here is that, as a monster asking a riddle, the sculpted sphinx is itself symbolic of the Absolute's struggle for self-awareness. I suggest that Lindsay, through Cabot, indicates Hegel's view of self-realisation emerging out of what is strange or "other" to it. This characterises Lore Jensen's own inspiration, and it underpins the characters' interactions with each other. It can also be Lindsay's intention for his own texts, in regard to their visionary episodes and in being structured to encourage a similar tension in the reader.

Devil's Tor

The theme of self-realisation is picked up again in *Devil's Tor*. Here, the narrative is centred on the bringing together of two halves of a mysterious black stone. It begins with Hugh Drapier visiting his cousin Ingrid Fleming, who lives with her mother, Helga, and uncle Magnus, on the edge of Dartmoor. Drapier has returned from abroad with the stone, which was entrusted to him by an archaeologist, Stephen Arsinal, and his companion, Henry Saltfleet. They have stolen it from a remote temple in Tibet, and do not want to be caught in possession of it while making their escape back to Britain. A fated sequence of events is seemingly at work as Drapier

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[14] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 423.

[15] G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art,* transl. T. M. Knox, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), vol. I, part II, sect. I, cap. I (c3).

subsequently discovers the other half in an ancient tomb on Dartmoor, beneath Devil's Tor. The characters are all affected by the presence of these stones, some having visions of an ancient goddess figure associated with it. Ingrid Fleming is fated to re-embody this goddess figure. Her fiancé, Peter Copping, had seen in her a "glimpse of the Unseen" (*Devil's Tor*, 477), and painted her as the youthful Madonna. But she breaks her engagement to him in favour of Saltfleet, and with the stone halves joined again, the story ends with an anticipation of some kind of human renewal or revaluation.

Having played his part in bringing back the other half of the stone, Drapier dies when a loosened boulder on Devil's Tor rolls towards him. He is a kind of gloomy ascetic, and in chapter VI he dwells on three "strains" on his life. First and second, these are his anticipation of death and his resignation in respect of seemingly fated circumstances. The other is simply his amazement in staring into the black stone in his possession, which he describes as:

> the most amazing vision of natural beauty, reduced to the dimensions of art, that could at any time possibly have existed on earth. It amazed, because it was as living as a mirror reflecting real things, and yet the real things in its case were nowhere present (*Devil's Tor*, 86)

His thoughts repeat Lindsay's theme of the invisible made visible. Drapier also reflects on his own experiences taken as an intimation of the Sublime, as reminders of "some grander world not present," and offers his "formula" that:

> the merely beautiful might suffice a soul, but that the sublime (which was the shadow of the beauty of another world) could never suffice, since with it came gropings that must amount to pain (82).

Sellin cites note (79) of the *Sketch Notes*, where Lindsay distinguishes the Sublime from beauty.[16] This is taken by Sellin in the context of Schopenhauer's philosophy but treated as departing from it. Whatever may be said of this, he continues in his supposition that Schopenhauer stands as Lindsay's mentor, primarily emphasising Lindsay's pessimism.

It is the case that in his brooding on the futility of life, Drapier is implicitly Schopenhauerian. But attention can as easily be focused on the character of Saltfleet, who, by contrast, exemplifies a more Nietzschean aesthetic, in which his affirmation of life is coupled to a distance on it, and on himself. This would make room for a Sublime drawn on the "rarer pathos" Nietzsche talks of in aphorism (257) of *Beyond Good and Evil* as

[16] Sellin, 176.

"an ever new widening of distance in the soul itself."[17] For Nietzsche, it remains that this distancing is tied to the way the world is, with his emphasis on hierarchies and rank. Philosophical positions are divided in this way among Lindsay's characters and narrative lines. In which case, the nature of Lindsay's attitude to the Sublime, and to its communication, must be looked for in the stories taken as a whole, through the choices he makes in seeking to express it. Again, I argue that he draws primarily on Hegel.

Another example here is the claim Sellin makes for Schopenhauer's influence being reflected in the character of Magnus Colborne in *Devil's Tor*.[18] Lindsay describes Colborne as physically resembling Schopenhauer. But Colborne's contribution to the discussion around art, in chapter XI of the book, is actually marked by Helga as an uncharacteristic departure from his usual attitude, showing "an altogether new aspect" (*Devil's Tor*, 176). The characters in the story all, in various ways, fulfil a set of fated occurrences. And it seems Colborne, too, is affected by the proximity of the stone in speaking so uncharacteristically. He turns to encouraging Peter to paint images of the Madonna and goes on to declare the source of the universe in a feminine principle, which he expands upon as having been symbolised through the ages in a variety of goddess cults, as worship of the Great Mother, with the Virgin Mary its most recent iteration. With the significance Hegel attaches to this imagery, which I turn to next, Colborne's change of view is marking that Lindsay draws on Hegel over Schopenhauer.

But first, it is the stone itself which points to Hegel's philosophy providing the broader framework of Lindsay's approach. In *Phenomenology of Spirit,* in paragraph (696), Hegel writes of an *inner being* which is "in the first instance, still simple darkness, the unmoved, the black, formless stone," and he refers to the stone in the Kaaba at Mecca. Hegel is talking of Spirit, or the Absolute, as an artificer not yet aware of itself in what it shapes, which, as J.N. Findlay puts it, "lingers darkly in the background; when he does represent himself it is in the shapelessness of a black stone."[19] Hegel says in (696) that the shape produced by the artificer is the *covering* for this *inner being*. As such, it is an "unessential husk" (*Phenomenology*, 423).

In the *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel writes that if Spirit is realised in art, then it is so only in the form of a profound feeling, in its essential nature identified as *love*. It is a *spiritual* existence at stake here, and Hegel affirms

[17] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, transl. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 151.
[18] Sellin, 175.
[19] Findlay, in Hegel, 1977, 580.

its sublimity in distinguishing it from the appearance of beauty grounded in the sensuous. The essence of love is given as:

> forgetting oneself in another self, yet in this surrender and oblivion having and possessing oneself alone.[20]

This is Spirit encountering itself in human form, and, as Stern explains, it succeeds the kinds of natural religion like that of the Egyptians, because it is a revelation of the divine's self-realisation in man.[21] Away from the complexities of Hegel's account of revealed religion, the progression here is also a transition in art itself, from what has been said already about the nature of the Egyptian sculpted sphinx, to the paintings of Madonnas which Colborne is encouraging Peter Copping to paint. Lindsay is drawing on Hegel's account of this transition in art. In the *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel says that even if an Egyptian sculpture of Isis holding Horus on her knees might be said to have the same subject as Christian paintings of Madonna and child, the essential character of Spirit, as *love*, is absent from it:

> What has Raphael or indeed any other of the great Italian masters not made of the Madonna and the Christ-child! What depth of feeling, what spiritual life, what inner wealth of profound emotion, what sublimity and charm, what a human heart, though one wholly penetrated by the divine Spirit, does not speak to us out of every line of these pictures! … But above all it is not the visible beauty of the figures but the spiritual animation (*Fine Art*, 3.III, ch.1 (1)).

I suggest that Lindsay's narratives concern just this kind of progression in the self-realisation of Spirit, as a revelation of the Sublime, or of the essence of *love*.

It is the pre-conceptual response to such images, in their symbolic character, which underpins their use, not least in the visionary scenes which occur in Lindsay's stories. Again, the theme is visualising the invisible, not in delivering a meaning, but as communicating the Sublime. It is in this respect that Helga questions Peter Copping on how an artist can succeed in seeking to express "the invisible by the visible," present the "true soul", the deepest part of personality (*Devil's Tor*, 165). Again, the discussion begins with a recognisably Schopenhauerian position. Peter Copping declares the serenity of a painted scene is illusory, and that beneath a painting's quietness there should be visible "the mighty workings of the spirit." Painting is inferior, he says, to the way in which a cathedral vault or Beethoven symphony produce a terrific emotion in us, and he appeals to the same example of Dutch masters which Schopenhauer

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[20] Hegel, *Fine Art*, I.2.III.ch. 1 (2a).

[21] Robert Stern, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Routledge, 2002), 190-191.

himself employs. Their serenity is conducive to an illusion, and covers a violent agitation which is, as it were, the reality. In this respect, Copping is acknowledging Schopenhauer's regard for the greater profundity of music, as expressing the "inner being, the in-itself of the world," which, he says, we conceptually mark as will. [22]

Copping also dismisses allegorical painting as "wall decoration with a label attached" (*Devil's Tor*, 167), which is a point Schopenhauer makes in precisely those terms, that such art achieves no more than an inscription. "Allegory in plastic and pictorial art is a mistaken effort, serving a purpose entirely foreign to art," and this is worse, he says, when the meaning is founded on conventional associations of ideas, such as the image of a rose indicating secrecy.[23] This is what Schopenhauer marks as merely *symbolical*, or emblematic, as a degenerate kind of allegory. But the issue here is complicated by terminology. I shall distinguish symbol from allegory as a kind of picture-thinking, in contrast to its conceptual "de-coding." The difference is between, say, an eagle's gaze as symbol of its regal bearing, just because it expresses that nobility, and something like the analyses of dream imagery in which the images are treated as standing for other things, as in Schopenhauer's example of the rose standing for secrecy. I adhere to this in my approach to Lindsay's texts.

The distinction is important in approaching Lindsay's own use of imagery. Allegory says something in some other terms which are more familiar, or perhaps more amenable, or which may, after all, be cryptic and baffling, but where the challenge is to look beyond their literal meaning. The particular discussion in *Devil's Tor* has not been adequately addressed in the critical literature. J.B. Pick referred to it only briefly before moving on, while Kathryn Hume's analysis of *A Voyage to Arcturus* treated the story as fundamentally allegorical.[24] But the distinction is integral to the role Lindsay accords the visionary scenes in his books, in the replayed "dreams" recorded by Cabot's machine in *Sphinx*, or the goddess imagery in *Devil's Tor*. Peter Copping's Schopenhauerian remarks are not the final word on what is at stake here. Symbolic imagery, in the sense I have indicated, is tied to what Hegel marks as "picture-thinking" and its role in the self-realisation of Spirit. In section (776) of *Phenomenology of Spirit*,

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[22] Schopenhauer, 264.
[23] *Ibid.*, 237-239.
[24] Pick, as in n. 1 above, 172; Kathryn Hume, "Visionary Allegory in David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 77 (1978): 72 -91.

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Hegel addresses how mankind's self-consciousness arises as the recognition of his separation from animal nature, which is seen as "other," and as an evil. In its picture form, it is the Bible story of the "fall" of man, eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It has a positive aspect because it sets in motion a return to the pre-fallen state. As such, it is the ascent of Spirit, in coming to self-knowledge through the creation. But crucially, at the level of picture-thinking, Spirit is identical with the diverse forms and shapes in Creation. Under this aspect, in Lindsay's *Voyage*, it is the god sought by Maskull, under the name Shaping.

It was seen above how Lindsay draws on Hegel's appeal to the image of the sphinx, as symbolising the self-realisation of human spirit out of what is "other" to it. In this role, such an image is identical with what it purports to sign. This characterisation of symbolic imagery is traceable to the work of Georg Friedrich Creuzer, with which Hegel was familiar, having known him personally as well. In Creuzer's *Symbolik und Mythologie der Alten Völker* (1819), the distinction between symbol and allegory was key to his argument that a religious symbolism originated with a priestly caste in ancient India and was subsequently received into other cultures.[25] It is integral to this transmission that the symbol carries its own significance, independently of language. Creuzer points to images of a slaughtered bull, for example, which are widely distributed across different cultures, highlighting their use on coins and other artefacts. In its symbolic character, it is of a piece with an image like that of an eagle's stare, which effectively *is* what it signs, because the image already gives the sense of the bird's regal bearing. Creuzer treats this symbolic character as complemented by a symbol's openness to further interpretation, where this tension then provides it is suited to religious ceremony and a priest's activity in turning people away from everyday concerns.

There are accounts of Creuzer's theory of symbolism in Gadamer and Todorov, and the wider context and implications of his theory of cultural transmission have been set out by Williamson.[26] In section (30) of the first volume of *Symbolik und Mythologie der Alten Völker*, an image of sunlight fractured into a rainbow spectrum by obscuring clouds is Creuzer's own metaphor for the complexity in a symbol's meaning, in which symbolic character and a plurality of interpretations are joined.[27] A symbol has force

[25] Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der Alten Völker* (Leipzig und Darmstadt: Beiheyer und Leske, 1819).

[26] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1993); Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, transl. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982); George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2004).

[27] Creuzer, 58-59.

in pointing "beyond" conventional associations. And in the context of religious practices, this fractured meaning allows a sense in which the symbol reconciles two realms, human and divine, to recover an "original connection" between gods and men. Williamson explains, as well, how work by the brothers Grimm, and by Franz Josef Mone, who was a student of Creuzer, was instrumental in establishing a Germanic mythology drawn from the Nordic *Eddas* and from German folklore; Jacob Grimm, in *Deutsche Mythologie*, added the supposition of an Earth Mother cult, drawing on Tacitus' description in *Germania* of the worship of a goddess, Hertha.[28]

Lindsay's interest in these aspects of German culture is evident in *Devil's Tor*, when Magnus Colborne expounds on motherhood and a female Nature, and on what he takes to be the fact of worship of the Great Mother "under many names, in many lands" (*Devil's Tor*, 174-179). And the influence of Creuzer's work on Hegel has been argued by Magee, who points to it as underpinning the sense of a "pre-reflective wisdom" and its partial but developing expression in the progress of art, religion and philosophy.[29] This is the activity of the Absolute, seeking its self-conscious realisation in mankind, as an "unconsciously busy" activity of thought in all our purposes and interests (*ibid.*, 84-85).

Specifically, Creuzer regarded the symbolism of the Virgin Mary as continuing that of Demeter and Cybele. The same can be said of the ancient goddess in *Devil's Tor*, and which is tied to Ingrid Fleming's fated role. As an image, it is, in Lindsay's story, simply that of a goddess or regal woman, very tall, and clothed in "antique draperies, of no recognisable fashion" (*Devil's Tor*, 39). It is also personified in Ingrid Fleming herself. These are, as it were, its covering shapes. This is indicated in Helga's reflections on how her daughter has been affected by what has happened:

> She was ceasing to be her girl, and changing to some more ancient ancestral self, such as she, her mother, might never understand; but its externals – this new alien nature's – could scarcely be more than hard shell for a seed infinitely rich and tender, unable as yet to face the world's mocks, sneers and violations … she meant, such hints beneath Ingrid's apathy as these faint stirrings, like the half seen, half imagined troubling from below the surface of a drowsing lake: of haughtiness, sibylline vision, foreignness, power … they were not new, however, but very old, very intrinsic in her opening, wondering soul (*Devil's Tor*, 404-405).

[28] Williamson, 107.
[29] Magee, as in n.7 above, 85.

Helga goes on to remark this could be the vestige of a prehistoric type, from before the founding of the great religions. As such, it is a pre-conceptual expression of Spirit.

Hermeticism

This is the point at which to question claims of a gnostic vision in Lindsay's work. In addressing what he argues is the hermetic character of Hegel's thinking, Magee points to a crucial difference between hermetic and gnostic perspectives. The difference is a clear one. In hermeticism, God's own knowledge of himself depends upon His creative activity, through the realisation of that knowledge in mankind. By contrast, the gnostic entirely separates God and creation, and refuses to allow God is in any way dependent on mankind.[30] This is important to assessing what has been claimed for the gnostic character of David Lindsay's stories. In adherence to Hegel's philosophy, Lindsay's position is similarly hermetic. Hegel talks in terms of Spirit's own return to itself, through its activity in the world. This requires turning away from the everyday interests which comprise our egoistic selves. But, crucially, this is not a simple intuition of something "beyond" or higher than us, or of our dissolution in some original unity. Rather, it depends upon a particular sense of negating, through which what is real must know itself as subject:

> the life of God and divine cognition may well be spoken of as a disporting of Love with itself; but this idea sinks into mere edification, and even insipidity, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative.[31]

The negative is a process of formation of a Subject through its alienation from what is "other" to it, together with reflection in this otherness. This dynamic sense of the "labour of the negative" opposes any supposition that existence is unriddled in some mystic intuition, or that we might start from some immediate knowledge of the Absolute, starting, in Hegel's metaphor, like a "shot from a pistol" (*ibid*., 16). It is telling in *Sphinx*, that Maurice Ferreira makes his demands on Lore Jensen at gunpoint, and is found, in the end, to be really soulless.

Finally, it is implicit as well, that in this labour of the negative, the self-realisation of Spirit is delivered in following Hegel's own exposition of the course it takes. This is the sense in which Hegel's philosophy is *initiatory*, enabling the reader's own transcendence in a higher self, as a kind of purification in anticipation of Wisdom.[32] At the level of Lindsay's artistry, the same may be claimed for his stories, in ambition at least. His

[30] Magee, 8-11.
[31] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 10.
[32] Magee, 129.

characters' self-realisations are frustrated or partial, and, as with Lore Jensen's musical composition, there remains the artistic limitations of the stories themselves. But it need not be supposed that Lindsay is seeking to answer a riddle, as such. Rather, the stories are his own sculpted sphinx, a hybrid of the mundane egoism of the characters' everyday concerns and interests, and their reflection in a supernatural "other." The visionary character of the disturbances they suffer emphasises a symbolic imagery over mere allegory. As such, Lindsay indicates the pre-rational, partial self-realisation of *Geist* in art and in its labour of the negative. But it is mankind as symbol of the divine which constitutes Hegel's hermeticism, and Lindsay's, too.

Conclusion

The visionary scenes in *Sphinx* and *Devil's Tor* are coupled to narratives which play out in the stories through the characters' interrelations with each other in the everyday world of egoistic concerns and conventional attitudes. The affective power of these scenes generally is drawn by Lindsay on their visually symbolic character, distinct from the conceptual associations which would sustain an allegorical interpretation. The latter kind of interpretation would itself only reflect our "common" language and cultural conventions. For Peter Copping in *Devil's Tor*, the question how to express "the invisible by the visible" is raised in terms of whether an artist must dismiss these conventional "outsides" as false, and be determined only to paint "insides." He answers that outsides are not false, as such, but frequently "disagree with what they cover" (*Devil's Tor*, 166-167). The same may be said of much of what goes on in Lindsay's later stories, in which characters puzzle over their relations with each other, while unsettled by supernatural disturbances. In *Sphinx*, for example, the insides are made visible by Cabot's dream-recording machine and experienced on playback. I have argued Lindsay takes this inside-outside relation in the way that Hegel talks of *inner being* and its "unessential husk."[33] The "inner" is visible in the way that Peter Copping remarks that "a symbol is a mystic sign of the Creator" (*Devil's Tor*, 167).

How far Lindsay succeeds in his ambition to communicate the sublime is a matter of his own capabilities as writer. There is an initiatory aspect if the text is intended as conjuring an awareness in the reader, however opaque, of something, as it were, behind the story. This is perhaps more successful in *Sphinx*, where we might suppose the dark, unconscious dreamworld is struggling for self-realisation in Lindsay's own artistry, as much as it would be in Lore Jensen's musical composition. Lindsay's text

[33] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 423.

would be like Cabot's recording machine in this respect. If it succeeds in unsettling the reader, then it is initiatory in the way that is claimed for Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where his exposition of the vicissitudes of Spirit is itself a means to its self-realisation, in the reader's consciousness.[34] In Lindsay's literary form, its partial realisation is the limitations of a visual symbolism. It is, in any case, the obstacles to realising the sublime which make up the bulk of Lindsay's narratives. At issue is whether the visual character of his visionary scenes is, as it were, a way of shortcutting these tribulations. It is more likely they are complementary. Lindsay defended, for example, the characters' laborious deliberations in *Devil's Tor* as integral to his concerns in the story. Further call may be made on details of Hegel's philosophy here, but I have sought to emphasise that aspect of Lindsay's texts which relies on a particular use of symbolism and its implications for the hermeticism that I have argued is the basis of his world-vision.

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[34] Magee, 127-149.