

NATURE

by Edith Lyre

“But Nature, though we mark her not,
Will take away — may cease to give.”

Dorothy Wordsworth, Floating Island

In the last decade of his life, Hegel presented a series of lectures which, posthumously, would be published as *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1832). In it, he ranks religions according to their relationship to the sublime. The basest of belief systems, in his conception not worthy of being called religion, is sorcery and magic, a system which in his view characterises the cultures of

Native North Americans, Mongolia, and much of Africa, et al. He speaks in the triumphant latter decades of the Romance era, when the dominant artistic project in Europe was the depiction of the sublime and the use of nature – or environment – to gesture theretoward. To recognise, be invigorated, and in all freed by the sublime requires that one conceive of nature as sympathetic, as having given freedom as a gift, personally, to you. Only Christianity, in his thought, achieves this relation, and so it is the final, revelatory religion. Magic's great flaw is that it assigns to the human agent alone the responsibility, and the assumed ability, to control and manage nature, where in truth only God can do that, and in truth when you are sick, when black spots foul the red of your gums, when bones contort upon themselves, and migraines sing so bright there is no good darkness to seal oneself in except death, then what better prescription than a walk among the reaves and the full, fresh air of God's universe? All pain will be consoled in the sublime. As an experiment, for whatever reason, though, this poem tells a story about travelling or perhaps falling from the great, great heights of proximity-to-the-sublime, down the rungs of Hegel's religious hierarchy, to the depths of magic. The journey is a lot of work, but perhaps it does something useful.

i.

Cleave to, child of mine, lest the turning
And rattling of the mountain loose us each
From what small cuts we, unpapered tourists –
Though these mountains are paperless, evil
As the living reek to them – could tear into
Rock, ice, and carve our way along the empty.

Think not of unkindness, but of death, oh
Holy death, how bright and near, His silver
Knight come to guide, to light, our dire way.
In the white, white shadow of His sublime,
Child, what can we but exult, and dare no
Other motion, within His radiant sightlessness?

Listen to me, child, now what can you see?
There's nought for it but waiting. The glare
Above shall pass if you but listen as I speak.

What fortune it is (be grateful) how clear are
Such threats to our shining, excellent minds.
Glance, if you can, down the gully we've cut.
See the city in its copse, the ruby throbbing
Of its canopy's enclosure, dark to all divines.
Nary a stray bacterium escapes its wicked
Nest of mazy halls, bloodied all, yet throneless.

ii.

Ware you who tread these latticed vents,
Who soak unfathomed in their light,
Hair, skin, all, the same gay colour
As the city's tombs and rentals
(Blue immortelle / lesser violet).
Tremors tone the mass of the law,
That scraping accent, judicial gong,
The – eyes shut, child, let go desire –
Cleft claws of their crocodile god.
Fix your ears on the grey inside.

Lower and lower rolls the crash,

But if, say, you would imagine

Cliffs as temple-walls, a crying

Out from origins unmapped in

Either those realms – bitter, acrid –

Past the temple's outer motelands

Or the dreamstepped, hazed and censored

Mistlands of the empire in here—

Placeless cries as calls to silence,

As summons to grace, an inward,

Roadless Damascus, silvered lance

Of the cruel, blind many-in-one—

If you would, my child,

Would you deign to look once more

What wastelands remain?

iii.

Whistle close

And note me well, dear

Mother high – and far

This low'st coast

(You too, cold

Animal) – let fear

Gild ev'ry echo's edges

And guide us to the many's nests.

May rivers walk our spines' long battlements

And alight upon our brains' farthest stems,

Then the arts of the malicious,

The forgotten elements

As eld as firelight,

Crash forth, called

On lost cloth,

Sick-wet with fellest

Viruses at feast,

Magic's wrath

—flits all colourless loose aflight takes a shape the tenor of
ankylosis, eyes discs muddle split glisten the blind shine pop now
everything the same, the many's sinew-mesh that is yes imaginary
yet is the shapeless gel bonding reality, you not in it, and only all of
what is is it hurts, death won't fix it, the flying nerverlight, the
shadeless spilling colour bright like well you know, you know what
colour