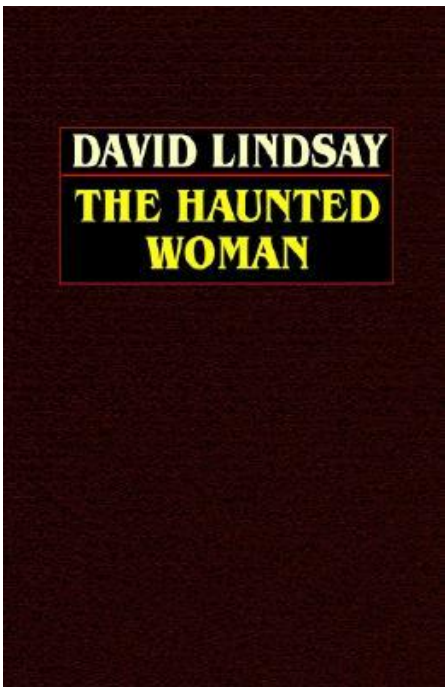

The Haunted Woman

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David Lindsay is best known for his science fiction novel *A Voyage to Arcturus*; however, his allegorical fantasy, *The Haunted Woman*, is an equally impressive work.

The Haunted Woman Details

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From Reader Review The Haunted Woman for online ebook

Jean-marcel says

"The Haunted Woman" is a much more worldly novel than "A Voyage to Arcturus" in every sense, and definitely caters very much to its contemporary early 1920s audience. I don't think this automatically makes it a lesser work, but it's clear that Lindsay probably wanted to sell more copies of this one, and for all I know he might have succeeded in doing so at the time, even though if he's remembered at all today it's for "Arcturus" only. The novel revolves around Isbel Loment, a woman in her early twenties who seems to live a comfortable, but perhaps rather empty, life with her aunt as they trek around Europe setting up quarters in prestigious hotels. At the outset we are told that she has recently been betrothed to the banker Marshal Stokes, a solid man with a good reputation and business backbone. She seems happy enough with the arrangement, and Marshall and the other boons in her life all endeavour to spoil her more than a little, which Lindsay observes with some subtlety, all the while making Isbel quite a likeable character. Marshal is acting as the aunt's agent in procuring a property, and there happens to be a rambling, country estate called Runhill Court that is about to be sold by its recently widowed owner. The master of Runhill Court is Mr. Judge, a middle-aged gentleman who seems to have a way with younger women, given his marriage propensities (there's a hint, I think, that his now-deceased wife was not his first marriage) and who tells Marshal that the house has a secret: a room that only certain people can see and which only manifests some of the time. Of course, Marshal thinks he's crazy, but when isbel first sees the house, she immediately becomes receptive to its strange emanations. Headaches, premonitions, and a staircase that seems to climb to an invisible tower which she can see when she is alone. It transpires that the old servant knows more about the house's history than its owner, and there is a legend surrounding the stout Saxon who built the original structure and how he was "made off with" by trolls after building a tower and carving certain powerful runes upon its walls. Isbel finds the secret chambers (there are actually three), and over a period of many days keeps finding reasons to visit the house, until she encounters Judge in the second room and something unexpectedly passionate kindles between the two. There's something else strange, though: Those who go up into the hermetic rooms cannot remember anything that happened there once they descend.

This really is Isbel's tale, and though she has her faults and hang-ups, which are in many ways typical of her time and class, I would think, Lindsay makes her into one of his "special" creations, possessing of a certain longing and passion for things that exist beyond the known and expected. All through the book there's so much tantalising suggestion that this electric, indefinable something that goes beyond the pleasures of the everyday and mundane is lurking so near, just beneath the surface, perhaps in a mirror, for Isbel (and by extension, the reader) to grasp and hold if they could but strive a little. The tale seems to ultimately tell of Isbel's downfall as she is swept into something that is literally a passion of the moment which will be forgotten as a foot treads on a stair, yet though the memory of events may be erased by time or supernatural means, their sense will always remain; the "damage" is done whether the mind records the events or loses them, leaving two almost-lovers in a state of confused bewilderment. There are physical sides to this as well, events which compromise Isbel to a degree that she clearly sees will destroy her in the eyes of not only her fiancé, but her friends and relations as well. I found myself occasionally irritated because Isbel seemed so concerned with reputation, with place and position, almost to the point of paranoia at times, but really, it's 1921 or so and what's a well-to-do English lady supposed to do? Let herself gain the notoriety of being a tramp and be ostracised by everyone in her "circle"?

And, even though I mentioned "downfall" earlier, this is a David Lindsay novel, and while in the end Isbel seems to lose everything that mattered, there's more than a hint of some of the threads that I think ran through "A Voyage to Arcturus": That a person grows "real" by their experience of suffering and pain, and

that Isbel blossomed by the finding of this secret passion: The severing of her loved one, the impossibility of what she would have given Judge and pledged to give him in the secret room created the sense of spiritual longing and aching, terrible beauty and loss that isn't so far removed from the hunger shown by Nightspore as he searches for Muspelfire, or the brief flairing of love Maskull experiences with the woman of Ifdawn, a woman who only exists for six hours and only exists because of him, a woman that is so perfect for him and yet he cannot have her, because he has a greater quest. "The Haunted Woman" ends rather suddenly and there's no telling really whether Isbel is stronger or "better" for having found and lost something wonderful, but the feeling that she receives upon her first visit to the hidden chambers, when she gazes into a mirror in the first room, seems realised:

"Abstractedly she walked over to the mirror to adjust her hat...Either the glass was flattering her, or something had happened to make her look different;
she was quite startled by her image. It was not so much that she appeared more beautiful as that her face had acquired another character. Its expression
was deep, stern, lowering, yet everything was softened and made alluring by the pervading presence of sexual sweetness. The face struck a note of deep,
underlying passion, but a passion which was still asleep...It thrilled and excited her, it was even a little awful to think that this was herself, and
still she knew that it was true. She really possessed this tragic nature. She was not like other girls--other English girls. Her soul did not swim on the
surface, but groped its way blindly miles underneath the water...But how did the glass come to reflect this secret? And what was the meaning of this look
of enchanting sexuality, which nearly tormented herself?...

She spent a long time gazing at the image, but without either changing the position of her head, or moving a muscle of her countenance. Petty, womanish
vanity had no share in her scrutiny. She did not wish to admire, she wished to understand herself. It seemed to her that no woman possessing such a strong,
terrible sweetness and intensity of character could avoid accepting an uncommon, and possibly fearful, destiny. A flood of the strangest emotions slowly
rose to her head..."

A much quieter and less-layered novel than "A Voyage to Arcturus", perhaps, something to be read and absorbed like a piece of music (and music figures prominently in this book), and not endlessly discussed and interpreted as can be done with his debut. I found quite a few haunting passages here like the one I quoted above, and some of Lindsay's startling observations about personality and sexuality are definitely here, often hinted at rather than thrown at the reader's face. There's no mad throbbing sex scene carried on in the confines of the hidden part of the house; there are only gestures, tremblings, words and the faintest of touchings .. and while modern weaders might find this cute and sweet or some such thing, the reality is that it's painful and "drawing", and this is exactly what Lindsay was going for, so while it wouldn't have upset many of his readers' sensibilities (well, she does cast her engagement ring out a window, and figuratively throws herself at Judge's feet) there's definitely a sort of double-entendre to the sexual tension that's suggested. And no, none of the other characters are really important at all .. even Mr. Judge is mostly an accessory to Isbel's tale, and though he has a noble baring and grave charm he ultimately seems a little soft and inconsequential, and, just possibly, up to something seedy. I admit that I don't quite understand what happened at the end (or rather, why it happened), but the ambiguous nature makes conjecture most pleasing.

Erik Graff says

The Haunted Woman, like Lindsay's previous Voyage to Arcturus, is a haunting novel which, like its predecessor, has to read more than once.

I have included a plot summary in the book's description field. It sounds rather pedestrian and boring and, indeed, the characters in the book are both pedestrian and boring--as, sadly, is Lindsay's writing style when describing the quotidian world.

But, but there is nothing ordinary or boring about what Lindsay is trying to write about here and elsewhere, even though the matter is allusive, his approach only capable of being suggestive.

Several commentators have called Lindsay a gnostic. He is in the sense of conveying the conviction that this, the world of our daily affairs and conventional relationships that we think of as real and the commonsense behind such beliefs is fundamentally flawed, radically false.

Having been to other worlds which certainly seem much more real, much more substantial and much more meaningful than this, I cannot, in my heart, but agree. Whether there is some deep ontological gulf between the true, rarely glimpsed by most, and the false worlds or whether (as Abraham Maslow or Colin Wilson would argue) it is rather a matter of states of mind, of relatively true and of relatively false consciousness, is arguable. My head says the latter, but I know this does not do full justice to the existential difference.

Lindsay writes to the heart, not the head. It is most unfortunate that this, his essential insight into the gnostic truth was so caught up with some of the occultist nonsense of his generation, with Aryan race theories and the like as are evinced in his The Devil's Tor.

Daniel says

A wonderful, amazing, book. That in many ways reminded me in tone of House of Leaves. I wonder if this book was read by Mark Z. Danielewski. Still it was an enjoyable romp, that was beautifully written and was haunting and melancholy at the same time. This is a book worth checking out.

Eric Tanafon says

If David Lindsay uses his pen clumsily at times (and he does) it's because he would have rather been carving runes on stone, or incising characters of some more esoteric alphabet in a stranger medium. He's not really out to produce an entertaining novel, in other words, but to give the reader a window (at times, 'a magic casement, opening on the foam Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn') into his tortured spiritual philosophy.

Unlike his Voyage to Arcturus, where Lindsay serves up allegory on steroids, the vision in A Haunted Woman is relatively unforced and straightforward. An old English house with a tower from pre-Christian times called 'The Elf's Tower' hides a mysterious staircase that appears to some people but not others. Those who see it can climb to another level, outside of time, where they become the people they might have been if their real natures held sway. But when they descend the staircase again, they forget everything they experienced in the upper story.

It's a pleasing and apt metaphor for the interaction of the spiritual world with everyday life. Lindsay's characters, when they are 'downstairs', are not very interesting--but that's part of the point. Anyone who knows Lindsay will not be surprised to find those same people, 'upstairs', falling prey to unfulfillable longings, passion, and spiritual torment. I really don't share Lindsay's ultimate vision of the universe, which seems Gnostic or even Manichean--but his own passion is enough to make the reader suspend both disbelief and disagreement, and enjoy the ride.

D-day says

Not quite as 'out there' as the other Lindsay novel I have read, **Voyage To Arcturus**, then again I don't think anything is :). **Voyage to Arcturus** blazed a trail that no one followed. **The Haunted Woman** is much more restrained and straightforward, but still quite good in its own way. The scenes outside the House can drag a little bit, especially at the beginning, but the scenes inside the House and especially up the staircase are wonderfully eerie and uncanny.
Although it is not without its faults, I did enjoy it.

LGandT says

Everything was great if you like chit chat about men and women being different.
The ending was great, I just didn't like the very ending, it left too many unanswered questions

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Commandrea says

Henry Judge- Widower
Isbel Lamont- Fiancee of Marshall Stokes
Isbel's aunt- in search of a new home, Stokes wants to get her settled so he can marry Isbel
Mrs. Moor- resident at hotel, retiree, nosy, medium interested in the manor for it's history/supernatural rumors, possibly interested in Mr. Judge.

Mr. Judge's home is an old manor with several periods of architectural work piecing it together. Marshall met him overseas and inquires to see if he might think of selling the home, since his wife passed away, though Judge seems uncertain. He also confides in Marshall that he has seen a staircase appear in the East Tower, the oldest section of the home, and wants him to have a look.

Marshall, Isbel, and her aunt pay a visit to the manor while Judge is still out of town. Isbel sees a staircase appear and follows it up, finds a mirror that shows her sexual beauty- she forgets everything when she comes back down.

When she and Judge finally meet, there's a strange connection that they try to figure out, venturing up a staircase to meet each other knowing they'll forget everything when they descend. Isbel gives him her scarf, but forgetting why, is surprised later to hear her friend has seen it in Judge's pocket. Blanche seems suspicious of where Isbel and Judge disappeared to and how she had no clue of the appearance of her scarf in his pocket.

Later they meet in a room up an appearing staircase and looking out the window, they see and hear an ancient man, possibly the original owner of the tower- Ulf- playing a type of stringed instrument like a bass fiddle. Outside the season is spring instead of winter. The landscape shows none of the current buildings and roads- only unbroken land. Isbel throws her engagement ring out the window and it appears in the room of the tower below.

Tensions build and eventually Isbel gives in to her feelings--- but Judge leaves town, writing her a letter hoping for nothing more than friendship- for the best. Mrs. Moor passes away, but someone that looks just like her catches a cab to the manor from the hotel and Isbel follows, sure it's Mrs. Moor, and surer that she's headed to go see Judge, who lied when he said he'd left the country.

It is Mrs. Moor and she is dead. Isbel questions her ghost and it smiles, confirms she's dead, then disappears. Isbel is scared and runs towards the house, while hearing a sound similar to what she'd hear in the corridor of the tower, which in turn was the ancient man's fiddle. She runs into Judge and confronts him about being there. He asks her if she'd her him playing, if she knew where they were. She looks around and realizes she's in the countryside they looked over out of the window together- that somehow they were together in that other world and she didn't know it. It's reality and the real reality kept overlapping, seasons changing in moments, and in the end she forgot everything.

Judge died, Marshall found him in the tower after he'd found a note from Mrs. Moor not so gently insinuating an affair between Isbel and Judge. Isbel confesses that she had been coming to see him, because she wanted to see him. Marshall takes care of Judge's body and inquiry, but he and Isbel break it off. In the end, Blanche- Marshall's sister in law- seems to be hinting that there's a chance he and Isbel will reunite.

Bruce says

This novel, like Lindsay's first, *The Voyage to Arcturis*, is essentially allegorical, though set in modern-day England (circa 1920s), with more fleshed-out, interesting characters, who are forced to explore the question: how is one to take the sense that life is filled with significance? Is the sometimes overpowering beauty of nature, art and human relationships simply a subjective phenomenon produced automatically by our sensory interactions? Or does it betoken a transcendent reality which we could, or will be someday, more a part of? The realism makes it a bit dull at the beginning, but when the subject matter -- the dual nature of reality -- kicks in, it becomes fascinating.

Angela Mortimer says

Another old house, a staircase that is not there, a view that is long gone, and lingering ghosts play havoc with the characters and the readers mind. Even the manners of a time not so long gone intrigue us as the house and stairs beckon us to what? What a shame David Lindsay didn't' write more books....

Szplug says

Victorian-era romance—stiff-mannerisms and lacquered morality and formalized discourse—curiously carried through to Home County life in post-Great War England; yet, this being a book by Lindsay, endowed with an intriguing blend of supernatural-cum-psychological excavation, spiritual mining, and fugal gnosticism, all overlain with a spectral creepiness and otherworldly texture. It's hardly going to keep me lying awake at night lost in thought or nervously eying the shadows—but it proved enjoyable throughout, at times exquisitely so, while measuredly heightening the suspense and deepening the mystery with every page moved closer to the denouement.

Eddie Watkins says

The Haunted Woman is in essence a classic haunted house tale. An engaged couple, along with an aunt, hear of a house to let and so visit it to test its suitability. The house has a strange, locked room; a strange music is heard; a stairway appears in a wall, and a room at the top leads into three other rooms, each of which has an uncanny atmosphere; a marvelous landscape is seen out the window of one of these rooms; one's true nature blossoms while in the rooms at the top of the stairs, but all memory of visiting the room vanishes upon descending the stairs. The handling of the marvelous, and especially the nature of this forgetting could not have been handled any better by Lindsay, and is the reason for plodding through accounts of picnics and social dynamics; which in this case is actually minimal compared to his later book (which I am now rereading), *The Violet Apple*.

Given that one variety or another of spiritual torture - where characters slip into higher realms from difficult mundanity, only to discover that further even more difficult tortures await them there - is at the root of David Lindsay's metaphysical vision, it is entirely appropriate that reading his books can be torturous. His writing his stiff and awkward. Clunky sums it up. But within this clunkiness is an intensely passionate striving to express what perhaps cannot be expressed. It is as if his writing itself embodies this tortured striving, almost against its own best interests, but continues undeterred, pushing on into realms beyond words, attempting to make them intelligible, while seeming to be trying to transport *himself* into these realms. This cannot help but intensify the impact of his books on the receptive reader. And only receptive readers can have a full appreciation of Lindsay, as his vision, like so many visions that extend far beyond the pale, can only begin to be understood by readers who have within them some corresponding vision of their own. The reader must be a ready receptacle willing to receive. It is this correspondence, this incipient resonance, that encourages the reader to work through not only Lindsay's clunky language, but his clunky characters too. All of these surface faults, however, can also - again to the receptive reader - add a further level of significance, as the act of reading itself becomes this difficult striving toward other meanings we are sure must be hidden within the tortured surface of our reading experience.

This is not meant to be an apology for Lindsay's style, as just as in the painter Henri Rousseau, say, the "amateurism" of the execution only validates the vision, making it that much more authentic and affecting. I would not want Lindsay to write any other way.

The Haunted Woman is one of his attempts to straitjacket his cosmic vision into a conventional novel, and of course he fails in the common regard, as his characters are like pasteboard Victorians walking with unbent knees and talking with wooden lips through an anachronistic story of manners. But miraculously his vision shines through, which I attribute to this *pushing* toward realization I mentioned above, and also to the

writing's unexpected felicity when the realization comes. Lindsay was a man divided, just as his world was. When writing of social dynamics, which is vital to his ultimate design, he is awkward and constrained; but when writing of the "other world" his writing can become graceful, as if some inner shackles fell from his writing mind. This shuttling back and forth between these two realms is the source of his power; imprisonment/freedom running not only through the themes but through the text itself.

But while this freedom brings exhilaration, it also brings with it psychic torture as hand in hand with the realization of a larger, freer world comes the realization of the impossibility of reconciling it with the cramped limitations of the mundane world his characters *must* continue to live in. To actually move completely into freedom is to die, though what comes then is left as a mystery...

Stevedutch says

Isbel Loment is a spoiled rather bored woman, in her early twenties, who lives with her relatively elderly widowed and wealthy aunt and who is is engaged to the ‘right’ man. She lives the slightly cloistered middle class life of a well brought up girl between the wars and superficially appears to have a ‘perfect’ middle class life planned out for her. And yet, she feels vaguely dissatisfied, moving as she does, with her aunt, from one hotel to another in search of the right house. Marshall, Isbel’s fiancé, is a somewhat staid stockbroker recently returned from America on business during which journey he meets a recently widowed middle-aged English industrialist, Henry Judge, with a house that might ‘fit the bill’ for Isbel and her aunt. The house, Runhill Court, is in West Sussex, quite close to where the women are staying in Brighton, and is ancient, having first been built by a Saxon nobleman named Ulf.

Marshall agrees to contact the owner and arrange for them to visit. In advance of the visit Marshall relates a story about the house told to him by Judge regarding a strange room on one of the upper floors of the house that can only accessed by a phantom staircase that appears abruptly now and again and vanishes just as quickly. Her interest piqued Isbel is keen to visit. When she does she hears music playing: someone is playing a piano and she recognizes the music as an ascending scale in the first movement of Beethoven’s 7th symphony. Suddenly she has an awareness of ‘other times’; a feeling that ‘this is not all there is’ as if lifted above the trivia of her everyday existence into a new realm of greater intensity. Separated from her fiancé, who has wandered off during her reverie, she ascends to an upper floor and enters a room. There she meets a man who turns out to be Judge the owner. Immediately they experience a strong mutual attraction but realize they must leave and return to normality.

Isbel is shaken by her experience and though she remembers little of her encounter in the upper room is left with echoes of the feeling experienced there and intuitively feels that it has something to do with Judge who appears to be just another middle-aged man to her outside the seemingly mystical room. It is as if the room has enabled her to ‘connect’ with life as it should be lived.

The book is beautifully written and although some have remarked that the style is a bit awkward and stilted in places that was not my experience. I will certainly re-read it after a suitable time period: it reminds me of another book written about ten years previously by another shamefully and long neglected English writer, Claude Houghton, who also wrote similar meta-physical fantasies such as the exquisite, I am Jonathan Scrivener. Lyndsey is far better remembered for his science fiction fantasy, Voyage to Arcturus, but The Haunted Woman certainly deserves to be equally well regarded.

The only modern writer I have experienced who comes close to evoking the same sense of other-worldliness

is, somewhat bizarrely, given the differences in period and cultural background, Haruki Murakami.

But on reflection, perhaps this isn’t as strange as it may at first seem!

Darren says

Very disappointing. I was gobsmacked by the originality of A Voyage to Arcturus and had high hopes for this being a quirky take on the supernatural, but was surprised at how conventional it was. Flat, slow, boring, predictable. 1.5 Stars at most, but can't even get excited enough about not liking it to downgrade it to 1, so 2.

Chase Insteadman Mountbatten says

The book fully deserves four stars, despite a chapter called "the picnic", whose meaning in the economy of the plot I haven't really understood. Given the nature of the story it could well be a kind of ghost chapter.

"They told me at the hotel that something happened to you."
"Oh yes I am dead", came the whispering voice. "I died last night."

Randolph says

Wow, what a great novel; totally different in all ways from Voyage to Arcturus, which I have to admit I under appreciate. A romance hidden in a haunted house, hidden in a science fiction-parallel world, philosophical novel. This Tartarus edition has an afterword, that is properly an afterword and not an introduction, that explicates the novel so succinctly that it is a wonder in itself.

Lindsay's breadth is truly remarkable. I will have to go back and reread Arcturus. I think I was put off by it's rather dated plotting and style and did not appreciate its philosophical aspects as well as I should have.
