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Adelheid Kegler

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Encounter Darkness: The Black Platonism of David Lindsay

Abstract

Characterizes Lindsay as a “belated symbolist” whose characters are “personifications of ontological values.” Uses Neoplatonic “references to transcendence” but his imagery and technique do not suggest a positive view of transcendence.

Additional Keywords

Lindsay, David—Neoplatonism; Lindsay, David—Philosophy; Lindsay, David. A Voyage to Arcturus; Neoplatonism in David Lindsay

ENCOUNTER DARKNESS

The Black Platonism of David Lindsay

ADELHEID KEGLER

I: The Essential Experience of Existence in Lindsay's *Ceuvre*.

All visible objects, man, are but pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the living act, the undoubted deed - there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? (*Moby Dick*, 262)

Captain Ahab's words could have been spoken by one of Lindsay's characters: his characters, too, are overcome by the experience of the impenetrability, the very riddle of existence; by the feeling of being in a prison, by the agonizing desire to break through its walls, to meet the challenge of the unknown in which there is a foreboding — in spite of the denseness, the inscrutability of the world.

The pictures of the American painter Edward Hopper, Lindsay's contemporary, seem to be inspired by a similar experience of life. The apocalyptic light shining on his everyday objects, does not come from the context of this world. The actual drama of which it is the participant, is taking place in some other world; its events, whose meanings are heralded by the reflection of that light on earthly houses and earthly landscapes, are — as the on-looker feels — in an enigmatic connection with our own lives.

The Belgian painter James Sidney Ensor should here be mentioned, too; his contrasting of two worlds, the world of the masks which hide skeletons only, and the world of the pure, unstained ideal at which the painter stretches out his hands; in vain, for — as he is forced to see by the eyes of this world — he is only able to perceive the ideal world as an illusion.¹ Once the reader or on-looker has familiarized himself with this situation, with this atmosphere, he will recognize it as characteristic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, represented in many varieties: in the late novels of Dickens, e.g. *Edwin Drood* or *Great Expectations*; in the sinister novels of the German author Wilhelm Raabe (*Stopfkuchen*); in both the theories and the lyrics of the Russian symbolists; and in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire.

Lindsay's *œuvre* is connected with this state of consciousness. The gravitation into the metaphysical which is the *genus proprium* of his works, the over-sharp outline of his figures, his enigmatic dimensionality and temporality, his ambiguous relation to both, the Romantic period, the Platonic tradition, as well as to modern mechanism and pessimism, and finally his cryptic style suggest that he should be classified as a symbolist.

He is a belated symbolist, though, for the main body of his *œuvre* has been written in the Twenties and early Thirties of this century. The social atmosphere of his novels reflects the atmosphere of this period most lively and intensively. But, far away from merely representing the people of that period (as is the case in the early novels of Evelyn Waugh), Lindsay's characters are stressed by a sort of "maximalism" which results from their being personifications of ontological values. Their talks and actions hardly hide the brooding monologues of their author standing behind them. Lindsay's last work, *The Witch*, is — with its transformation of an actual plot into mystic vision — mythical representation of philosophical perceptions, and a transformation of those perceptions into philosophical theory — an impressive example of such a technique. *The Voyage to Arcturus*, Lindsay's first work, shows in principle the same traits.

A further feature of Lindsay's works lies in the fact that they can be categorized as "analogical works of art."² Though Lindsay, as a philosopher, is a pessimist, though his conception of the world is stigmatized by an oppressive dualism, his works are marked by the intention to be "elevating" (*Sketch Notes for a New System of Philosophy*, hereafter *NNSP*, 192.) But unlike the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition which carries the idea of the analogical work of art in the western tradition, Lindsay does not elevate his reader, who follows him confused, stupefied and reluctantly into the labyrinth of his images and thoughts, to the "regions of the eternal, whole, pure and divine,"³ but he modifies that experience by leading him to suffering. The suffering consists in reaching a very high vantage point, and to see, nevertheless, nothing. The reader has to live through the same situation as the protagonist of *A Voyage to Arcturus*: to be "Nightspore in Torments."⁴ "Is not the love of wisdom a practice of death?" asks Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo*. (64a)

This question is answered by Socrates in the following sense: to die is a liberation from the world of the body into the world of the soul, a transformation of human being into divine being; that is, the philosopher — while still alive — becomes like the ever-being, the undying realm. Thus the seemingly negative meaning of the question is changed to the positive by the exposure of the structure of reality; the weight of death, though not losing the aspects of pain and daring, is modified, along with the material world. Both are endowed with a deeper sense.

Lindsay, as will be shown, does not understand the

highest level of reality as "good," nor as "one," nor as "true." But he stresses, instead, its transcendent character in such a radical manner that the unifying elements of the Platonic tradition either vanish or lose their intermediating faculties. An extremely tragical-aristocratic *weltanschauung* un-masks the reality of the material world as an illusion, the structure of being as incoherent and the highest dimension of reality as comprehensible only by the terms of non-being (NNSP 545). In contrast to Plato and especially to the Neoplatonic tradition, whose references to transcendence Lindsay takes over, he shifts to the negative when reality as a whole is perceived. It is the understanding of the whole of being as a distortion in its origin, and of the impossibility to identify the origin of being with the one and the good, that appears as the fundamental principle of structure in Lindsay's literary and philosophical *œuvre*:

- At the surface that principle shows itself both by the technique of using concepts and images which run contrary to the expectations of the reader and by blending the layers of reality in a labyrinthine manner.
- What is more complex is the use of mythical motifs which are not to be interpreted in the traditional sense or meaning, but as "new myths."
- Lindsay's world of thought is theoretically founded and explicitly clarified in his "negative ontology" which he himself calls "a new system of philosophy" (NNSP, Title), and which, consequently, claims to be a unified interpretation of reality as a whole.

These three elements distinguish Lindsay's art as the expression of a modern gnosticism. Moreover one can see in it a striking precursor to the contemporary interest in the gnosticism of late antiquity and the publishing of its fragmentary sources.⁵ The fateful background of the gnostic *heimarmene*, though, is replaced by the "steel scaffolding" of modern and post-modern mechanism.

II: The Artistic and Philosophical Representation of Lindsay's Interpretation of Existence

Imagery and Blending of Several Layers of Reality

The characteristic fascination issuing from Lindsay's works is connected with the expectation of the reader to be at the very fringe of solving a riddle. This expectation is suggested by the typical evaluation of the observations, talks, and experiences of the protagonists, which manifest themselves in nearly aphoristical forms. The reader who endeavors to interpret the aphorisms with the help of associations and connotations obvious to himself, is, however not able to do so. The key to the system of crisscrossing references is not easily found out; but if such a key is found, it will give a clue, but that clue is not necessarily the deciding one. It may open up a new, unexpected entrance into the maze of reflections of the symbolical fragments. The shifting of meaning and the reinterpretations of tradi-

tional connotations, concepts, and contents concern as well aesthetic phenomena as conceptions of values and ontological dimensions. One of the first phenomena Maskull is confronted with in *Tormance* is

a fantastic little creature, the size of a new-born lamb, waltzing along on three legs. Each leg in turn moved to the front, and so the little monstrosity proceeded by means of a series of complete rotations. It was vividly coloured, as though it had been dipped into pots of bright blue and yellow paint. It looked up with small, shining eyes, as they passed (VA 55).

The phrasing "new-born lamb" evokes in the reader a whole complex of positive connotations, chiefly concerning the Christian tradition and its echoing in William Blake's poems. But the passage suggests a vague horror, originally by both the lack of purpose concerning the movement and the extreme coloring. The very root of that horror lies in the meaning of the waltz-time which, as a symbol of falsification of the sublime by Crystalman, can be fully realized not before the very end of the novel. Connected with the blue-yellow coloring which corresponds to the suns of *Tormance*, and, according to Lindsay, to two of the aspects of (earthly) existence,⁶ the waltzing animal represents reality disfigured into vexation by Crystalman; it has, compared with the reader's expectations, a significant weight.

In a comparable manner traditional ethics are shifted:

"Well, I understand all that," replied Maskull, after listening attentively. 'But what I don't grasp is this — if living creatures here sport so energetically, how does it come about that human beings wear much the same shape in my world?'

"I'll explain that too," said Panawe. "All creatures which resemble Shaping must of necessity resemble one another."

"Then sporting is the blind will to become like Shaping?" "Exactly."

"It is most wonderful," said Maskull. "...Then the brotherhood of man is not a fable invented by idealists, but a solid fact." (VA, 61)

The impression is formed that the traditionally highly placed value of the brotherhood of man is also supported ontologically, but what really is done here, is its ontological desubstantiation. Panawe's remark is, from Lindsay's point of view, in agreement with reality, but his remark doesn't relate to a resemblance of all human beings with their good creator. Shaping-Crystalman is a symbol of the splitting of the origin: the "blind will" is the expression of a desperate, misled force of life. The "solid fact," therefore, does not relate to a harmonious, happy-making structure of being, as the reader may expect, but to its opposite. Again, the reader does not come to this insight before he has put together numerous further fragments of reflection every one of which reflects another aspect of the ontological structure of Lindsay's system.

Furthermore, Lindsay destroys the picture of a sensible

hierarchy of being. The episode of the remodelling of a man to a tree during a "natural experiment" by Crimpython leads to Maskull's reproach:

"And this is lfdawn morality!"

Oceaxe began to grow angry. "It's you who have peculiar ideas. You rave about the beauty of flowers and trees — you think them divine. But when it's a question of taking on this divine, fresh, pure, enchanting loveliness yourself, in your own person, it immediately becomes a cruel and wicked degradation...." (VA,94)

At the same level the pity an animal which is hunted by a tree "exactly as an imprisoned mouse is thrown by a cat from paw to paw" (VA,116) is refused.

If the reader is lead to the conclusion that a positivist, fact-oriented interpretation of being is the conceptual background of the *Voyage to Arcturus*, or perhaps its transformation into the "physical metaphysics" of Nietzsche, that conclusion is rejected as well: that whole world — as well as the traditional concepts of value and meaning and the aspect of modern factuality and its (not outspoken) metaphysics — is "wrong": "And so it occurs to me that reality and falseness are two words for the same thing." (VA, 145; cf. NNSP 534)

In a fragmentary world of appearances which, as a whole, has not got any relation to the real dimensions of being, there are to be found — along with signposts leading astray — seemingly equally fragmentary traces of a transcendent world. That point of view has got its expression in a multiple blending of the layers of reality, denoting all the works of Lindsay. The technique of blending brings about the experience of a very complex reality. "To experience Reality, one must stand with one foot in two worlds. Examples: the 'daylight vision'; very high clouds at night still illuminated by the sun." (NNSP 495)

The observatory of Starkness (VA,30) is a very intense example of such a reciprocal elucidation of phenomena. Situated in a rough and wild landscape, it seems to suggest a heroic motif, but the state of incredible neglect and forgetfulness also evoke disgust. Corresponding to Phil. Notes 282 the "voice of the real world" is speaking in the very forms of darkness, illness, madness, sordidness, "calling us out of our dreams of sweetness and sunshine." The observatory, therefore, is not only a symbol of heroic astronomic activity, belonging to Science Fiction imagery, but it also suggests elements of estrangement which — characteristically for Lindsay — point to metaphysical interrelations. In the context mentioned above, the enormous dimensions of time are pointed to which the ever-repeated incorporation of souls into the material world has taken up:

... the tumbled, discoloured bed-linen actually preserved the impressions of the sleepers. There was no doubt that these impressions were ancient, for all sorts of floating dirt had accumulated on the sheets and coverlets.

"Who could have slept here, do you think?" interro-

gated Maskull. "The observatory staff?"

"More likely travellers like ourselves. They left suddenly." (VA,31)

As Starkness is an earthly appearance of "Muspel" (as is shown in the final chapter of *A Voyage to Arcturus*), it is the starting point of a new incorporation of "Nightspore," the story and the meaning of which are told in the novel. The Starkness-theme blends the motifs of earthly heroic landscape with those of Science Fiction and with the mythical representation of metaphysical speculation. Structural elements of that sort are to be found in Lindsay's other novels, too. *The Haunted Woman* thus connects a love-story of the early Twenties (which contains typical elements of Erté-fashion and of the feeling of life), by the motif of a haunted house, with a tradition from the Dark Ages. But that connection is the immediate cause only to elucidate Lindsay's metaphysics of a labyrinthine reality. For conspicuously the novel mainly deals with the "three musics" and the way to which they lead to a motif Lindsay has fully developed in his last work, *The Witch*.⁸

The Violet Apple conflates the paradise myth, which is shifted from a myth of the Fall to a myth of an Ascent, and the plot of a broken-off engagement. Again, Lindsay's philosophy amalgamates heterogeneous elements. The meaning of having eaten the forbidden fruit which leads to a new Adam and a new Eve as human beings of new spiritual essence, is the approach towards "nothingness."

Devil's Tor seems to have as its topic an evolutionary myth. Phases of prehistory showing an archaic, primitive type of man are inserted into the plot, which shows the leading together of an ideal couple of the northern type. The central axis around which that spiral of historicism rotates, is the fall of an aeon - like female essence, to whom the original title *The Ancient Tragedy* relates. (Perhaps there is thought of an allusion to the fall of the gnostic Sophia-Aeon?) That novel blends additionally to its connection of the modern evolutionist motif and the gnostic elements an extensive philosophical discussion within the plot. In Lindsay's late unfinished work *The Witch*, the art of blending reaches its climax. The gradual alteration of a realistic starting point to mythical and symbolic dimensions of narration — and the leading of these into imaginative and philosophical trains of thought corresponds to the outlining of a symbol of being, as it is thought of in Lindsay's philosophy: "Morian House." It is a house without roof and walls; it is described as an ancient quarry grown over by the old spectral trees, being in relation to the oldest traditions concerning the mysteries of night and its magic knowledge (W,916-320). It manifests itself in the experience of loneliness in the empty room (W,266,272), in dreams (W,368), in art not understood (W,283), especially in music as far as it is moving towards "the blackness of the invisible" (W,387). Thus, the whole being is comparable to a buried path, to the aim of which the blurred inscription of an old sign-post points:

"I saw a board," said Waldo. "It was against the high

right-hand wall of the garden before the house, and a hand drawn rudely on it pointed *through the grounds of the house to the back* (my italics). Perhaps there was a right of way prior to the building of the house; and now the path cuts through its grounds."

"What place does it go to?"

"The name of the sign is almost obliterated," his brother replied, "but it seems to read, Morion House..." (W,303)

It is not the house itself, though, whose structure represents the meaning of reality, but the emptiness, which is embraced by it:

what is a house? It is an enclosure, it shuts off something from the world. There is all the world outside the house, and there is the small void, or not-world, inside it. ...But conceive a house that is a true void, everything inside its solid bounds belonging not to the outer world, but to another altogether. (W,303)

Lindsay's technique of blending points, consequently, to the paradoxical relation of "Nothing" and the seeming "Something." It makes being defeated by non-being.

The New Myth

Lindsay's works are run through with hints of myths which appear familiar to the reader. In *A Voyage to Arcturus* the Prometheus myth is repeatedly pointed to (VA, 58, 135, 219); in *The Violet Apple* it is the Paradise-myth; in *Devil's Tor*, the evolutionist myth. These, as well as the myths of the haunted house (*Haunted Woman*) and of the tutelary spirit of the soul (*The Witch*), are basically familiar to the reader. Lindsay doesn't employ those myths in the sense of their traditional meanings though, but he uses them, as it were, as empty shells which he fills with the contents of his own new philosophy. In *A Voyage to Arcturus* Maskull embodies the role of Prometheus, according to Lindsay "the only one truly heroic role" (NNSP 306). But in which sense is Maskull a Promethean character? He is neither the rebel, nor the sufferer in the classical sense, nor the premature and consequently guilty usurper of technology in the archaic sense of the myth. The Promethean character of Maskull is comprehensible to the reader only after he has won insight into the concept of metempsychosis which Lindsay wants to reveal. In the course of his travellings in Tormance the figure of Prometheus is first connected with Maskull intuitively and in the way of a presentiment.

"What is your name?" asked the husband.

"Maskull."

"That name must have a meaning... Has there been a man in your world who stole something from the maker of the universe, in order to enoble his fellow-creatures?"

"There is such a myth. The hero's name was Prometheus." (VA, 58)

It is defined explicitly in the crucial chapter "The Wombflash Forest":

"What am I doing in Tormance, then?" he asked. "You

came to steal Muspel-fire, to give a deeper life to men — never doubting if your soul could endure that burning." (VA, 135)

The oracle-words are spoken to Maskull by Dreamsinger, after he has been informed that not he, Maskull, "but Nightspore" has been brought to Tormance, following the mysterious call of Surtur (VA, 134). The exchange of words is followed by the vision of the "Arcturus-Project" as a symbolically condensed image-in-image:

Maskull saw, marching through the trees and heading towards them, three men in a single file, separated from one another by only a yard or so. They were travelling downhill at a swift pace, and looked neither to left nor to right... The first man was himself — Maskull. The second was Krag. The third man was Nightspore. Their faces were grim and set. (VA, 135)

The vision ends with the assassination of Maskull by Krag; Nightspore "marched on alone, stern and unmoved" (VA, 136). The novel, which has started with the three protagonists "taking-off in a crystal space-ship (as a symbol of the incorporation of the soul into matter)", ends with Nightspore's renewed consent to "rebirth" (VA, 241-248). The decision "to descend" (VA, 248) has the meaning of a "downward motion" towards "Crystalman's Country" (VA, 26), for Muspel, "Surtur's World,"

does not lie on this side of the *one*, which was the beginning of life, but on the other side; and to get to it we must re-pass through the *one*. But this can only be by renouncing our self-life, and reuniting ourselves to the whole of Crystalman's world. (VA, 176)

The Arcturian back-rays which, on the level of Science Fiction, make possible the take-off of the crystal space-ship, are "rays" which draw back to the Muspel-world (cf. VA, 246). It is the very movement or direction which exposes the soul, just liberated by looking at the Muspel-fire, again to the "double-ness" of the Arcturian life, torn by pleasure and pain. But it is only that soul which moves — in spite of the seeming retardation by the repeated incarnation — straight towards Muspel: "...and one was advancing in the direction it wished to go." (VA, 244) By the sacrificial deed of Prometheus-Nightspore-Maskull, the right way is shown to the sparks of spirit-light which are agonizingly imprisoned by the "white whirls" of individuation; that deed "gives a deeper life to men" (see above; cf. W, 354); Muspelfire is stolen from Crystalman, "the creator of the universe," who has usurped it. In the timeless moment after Maskull's death Nightspore has seen (in a sense) Muspel. His renewed return will give evidence for its total otherness in a deeper and more emphatic sense. Such evidence is given by Maskull, for example, who in spite of the aberrations so characteristic of human life (the stations of his travel in Tormance),¹⁰ ever again takes up the pursuit of the Muspel-light.

The original meaning of the Prometheus-myth consists in the realization of the outrageousness of stealing the divine fire. That aspect lingers on in Blake's line: "What the hand dare seize the fire?" The hero (or culprit) is placed

very highly in the hierarchy of being, for the fire would consume the hand of a mortal. Under these premises it should have been Crystalman, the devourer of Muspel-light, who is to be equated with Prometheus. But Lindsay shifts the meaning of the myth according to the theories of the enlightenment (of antiquity as well as of modernity) from the crime of a demigod to the sacrificial deed of a fellow creature.

Lindsay carries out the most peculiar shifting of a mythical tradition in his retelling of the Arcturus-myth. This is highly important for the understanding of his thought.

Lindsay who was interested in German Romanticism, encountered the Arcturus-myth in the *Klingsohr-Märchen* of Novalis. It is the core and symbolic epitome of the *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Novalis has conflated the elements of the Arcturus-tradition into a many layered myth, reflecting the chiliastic conception of the world and history as seen by early Romanticism.

Defined by the relation of two layers of reality, a primary source and a secondary created or emanated dimension, reality as a whole unfolds dialectically into the symbolical ages of Night, Dawn, and Day. For in contrast to the cyclic conception of time as seen by the Neoplatonism of antiquity, the romantic Neoplatonism is convinced of a linear conception of time moving towards a transcendent aim.¹¹

In relation to the secondary reality, *Night* is the merely three dimensional reality with its successive sequel of events. As far as there are "breaks" in its darkness by which the light of the ever-being is to be seen, that three dimensional reality may be understood as *Dawn*. It may be *Day*, too, if it is understood that it, in itself, has no duration, that when compared to the everlasting, it has already gone by.

The primary reality may be interpreted, too, by these symbols, namely: as *Night*, when it is unfolded into the secondary world; as *Dawn*, because by this unfolding deliverance is coming to the world; as *Eternal Day*, because it is essentially eternal and a revelation of itself.

The *Klingsohr Märchen* of Novalis represents the rising of the Eternal Day as a new dimension of being in the secondary world; its preparing under the cover and reign of the "long Night"; its being hoped for and expected; and finally, its appearing. That Night has a negative meaning only, if it is seen exclusively from the perspective of the primary reality. Seen from the perspective of the primary reality, it is an expression of the mystery of the restoration of the world and another form of the remaking of the Eternal Day: the promise.

Nicht mehr war das Licht der Götter Aufenthalt und himmlisches Zeichen — den Schleier der Nacht waren sie über sich. Die Nacht war der Offenbarungen mächtiger Scho — in ihn kehrten die Götter zurück, schlummerten ein, um in neuen, herrlicheren Gestalten auszugehen über die Welt. (Novalis, *Werke*, S.47)

Novalis symbolizes this structure of thought in the sovereign couple of the nightly Aeon, Arcturus and Sophia; Arcturus representing the aspect of Night, Sophia the aspect of Dawn. Novalis gave to Schlegel a hint how to interpret Arcturus, namely "as accident... the spirit of life," which may be understood by the contextual remarks of the poet as "not to be explained, mysterious."¹² A further hint by Novalis relates to the equation of Arcturus with Saturn, to which a most complex tradition is related, Saturn is the "star of melancholia," the cause of the sinister mind of the melancholic (the children of Saturn).¹³ By the flowing together of the Saturn-concept with that of Kronos (the son of Uranos, thrown over and gelded by Zeus) and of Chronos (the god of time, equated by both) the mythic figure of Kronos-Saturn has got dualistic traits: he is not only the kind god of agriculture, but also the sad, lonely god; not only the father of gods and men but also the glutton of his own children and the all-devourer.¹⁴

The Mythology of the North which was related to the Arcturus as the brightest star in the constellation of the Bootes (Arcturophylax).¹⁵ Novalis discovered this relation in the works of Jakob Böhme. Böhme's *North* prefigures the Romantic *Night* and possesses like it an eschatological quality:

Sieh ich sage dir ein Geheimnis. Es ist schon die Zeit /
/ das der Breutigam Seine Braut krönt. Raht Fritz wo
liegt die Kron. Kegen Mitternacht. Den mitten in der
Herben qualität / wird das licht Helle.¹⁶

Novalis has unified these elements into a myth which contains the origin of time, the resulting unfathomable quality of the appearances to the understanding and, finally, the power of restoring the world which hides in darkness. That power may be seen in the blue dome vaulting of Arcturus and Sophia; in the Pythagorean sphere-music; it is the Night of the universe, wealthy with miracles, god in the image of Darkness.

Lindsay's Arcturus-myth, however, represents something which — spoken by the words of Schopenhauer — "should not be." For the Arcturus is the embodiment of the "hideous ghostly splitting" (W, 388) which is the effect of the origin of the psychic and material worlds; it is the expression of the "tragedy of disintegration" (W, 388). The object of Novalis' praising as the mystery of the Arcturian Night, the realizing of the One as the world of the Many, Lindsay sees as a catastrophe of deep disintegration:

The fragments — numberless beyond the power of number — of a living entity whose mystic extension was unbearable, had found themselves in the desolation the agony of which compelled the phantom loves, the insane ceaseless wild hungerings for reincorporation, in all the worlds. (W, 388)

The Arcturus, a twin star, whose one sun is gyrate by the planet of vexation, Tormance, symbolizes the structure of being, destroyed by Crystalman. Crystalman is the name, invented by a superficial age (VA, 174), for a shapening power which brings its contemplation of the highest

essence (which cannot be spoken of by a positive name, i.e. Nothingness) into a shape or form (VA, 177). The association of ideas leads to the myth of Plato's *Timaeus*, giving an imaginal account of the origin of the world led astray. But according to Plato the universe exists because of an act of goodness without any envy (*Timaeus*, 31 b3), whereas Lindsay's demiurge is defined by resentment which manifests itself by the vulgar grin of Crystalman on the faces of the dead. As a chord in root position, as the "soul" of the appearances, it is "a low mocking vulgar laugh, travelling from the ends of the earth" (VA, 243). As the "body" of the appearances it is the "double" (VA, 243) rhythm of bitter vexation and dreadful, mean pleasure (VA, 243). That "doubleness" or "splitting" (VA, 245) is the result of the transformation of the spirit-stream of the Muspel-world which is devoured by Crystalman:

A flood of fierce light — but it was not light, but passion — was streaming all the time from Muspel to the Shadow, and *through* it. When, however, it emerged on the other side... the light was altered in character. It became split, as by a prism, into the two forms of life ... What had been fiery spirit but a moment ago, was now a disgusting mass of crawling, wriggling individuals, each whirl of pleasure-seeking will having, as nucleus, a fragmentary spark of living green fire.... (VA, 245)

The "doubling" affects the whole of reality, from the lifeless crystal, the plants and animals, to the rational beings. (VA, 244). One part of the Muspel-stream remains unaltered in its essence, but is shattered to tiny fragments, the striving of which is to flee from their isolation and to get back to their origin. But that very desire is prevented by the essential alteration the other element of the Muspel-stream has experienced as it has been de-shaped from an original force into a pleasure-seeking blind activity of the will (in the sense of Schopenhauer). The desperate striving to get back to the origin, directed against the mocking energy of life of the wills, is illuminated in the literal sense of the word, by the two suns of Tormance: the yellow sun, meaning the aesthetically-enjoying force of the blind will, i.e. pleasure; the blue sun for the heroic aestheticism of a desperate battle to get back to the origin, i.e. bitterness and tragedy. As forms of enjoying existence both are lies.

By a sort of zooming technique Lindsay presents to the reader the doubleness which characterizes reality: first the weird twin-star, seen through Krag's magnifying glass, then the constellation enlarged by the Starkness observatory window, after that by the eyes of a person living in Tormance, and finally by the sixfold look from the Muspel-tower which shows the very source of the "doubling."

Lindsay has taken over Novalis' technique of the conflation of myths to express, as did Novalis, his philosophy.

In his Arcturus-myth a radical and dark Platonism connects itself with Schopenhauerian pessimism. The royal couple of the Night, Arcturus and Sophia, have degenerated into the double monstrosity of Alppain and

Branchspell, expressions of mere innerworldliness. The elements of the "star of melancholy," however, Kronos-Saturn (devouring, gelding) are more strongly accentuated. The Mythology of the North has been retained in the sense that a freely-chosen living-through of the Arcturian existence under the guidance of the black Eros, Krag-Surtur, may effect an approach to Muspel. But Eros, Novalis' "beautiful stranger," the child of mankind, has been changed into pain, the mocking destroyer of illusions. (cf. W, 371). Muspel is situated, like the Platonic Good, "beyond existence," but there is no ladder of Eros, connecting both layers of being.

The Negative Ontology

The most audacious of all features is to attempt to discover the meaning of life; and the key to the labyrinth is the realization that everything is illusion. (NNSP 544/23)

This aphorism of Lindsay, formulated in his "Principles of bookwriting" contains the *leitmotif* of his art, his metaphysics of Nothingness. The dimension of reality which he calls according to Schopenhauer's category "the sublime" does not belong to the aesthetic dimensions, but to the ontological. It is a "horrible fact which stands above and behind the world" (NNSP 337). Lindsay does not desist from pointing out the incommensurability of this dimension compared to the rest of existence. For him, "an appropriate symbol for the Sublime" is the "Muspel-world of the Norse mythology, the primeval world of fire, existing before heaven and earth and which will eventually destroy them." (NNSP 471) Plato points to the consuming effect of the transcendent realities in relation to us in the *Phaedrus* (250b), but he stresses that a dreadful Eros would be kindled, if a mortal man looked at the undisguised world of Ideas. Such a relation of love between the secondary and the primary reality Lindsay declines: "Love is not valid for Muspel" (NNSP 498). All the other phenomena, too, which the tradition has conceived of as images of the most high, as representations of or guides to it, are, according to Lindsay, illusions.

Wild Nature, however fresh, pure, and beautiful, should not be taken as a granted value.... For it is opposed to Muspel, as it is necessarily corrupt and unsatisfying. (NNSP 471, cf. 474)

It reveals itself, however, in darkness, illness, madness, and sordidness (NNSP 282). But such words are not statements on the Sublime; they are the result of the relation of the secondary reality (which is seen as a reality shaped by individuality) to the Sublime: "... for an individual is only a branch, lopped off from the Eternal and is already dying." (NNSP 338) Because of that separation there is no phenomenon belonging to the secondary world which is able to point beyond its borders, neither of the aesthetic, nor of the moral, nor of the religious spheres. The beautiful is as an object of pleasure "foul": "So lovely above and around us, so foul underfoot" (VA, 223; cf. NNSPs 79, 93, 471, 474, 494); the deciding aspect of morality is, according

to Lindsay, selflessness (NNSP 409). He supports the rigoristic concept of duty in the sense of the Enlightenment, which is not willing nor daring to assume the idea of the good as regards content nor objective value. To connect moral action with an elevation of the soul is therefore wrong: "Plato... was therefore right in recommending temperance and virtue, but wrong in giving happiness as the reward." (NNSP 141). Morality has no connection at all to the other world, neither as realized good nor as recognized, rejected evil. Egoism is "not right... wrong, and base.... But in that other world these words have no meaning." (VA, 154; NNSP 232) The traditional religions are rejected by the argument that they simply kill all the strivings and feelings: "Christianity and Buddhism etc. at the same time that they kill all the disease, kill the patient. In other words their effect is to destroy all personal joy, pain and willing = life" (NNSP 485). Religiousness is said to have a crippling debasing effect, because the only positive aspect of individuality, i.e. freedom, is abolished by its tendency towards the law (NNSP, 414). Christianity, "fantastically false," produces caricatures accordingly. (NNSP, 404)

The conclusion could be drawn here that Lindsay tends to define the Sublime as "Nothing" in the sense of the buddhistic Nirvana or of the cabballistic En-Soph. The first possibility of interpretation is touched upon in some traits Lindsay may have taken from Buddhism indirectly via Schopenhauer (cf. NNSP 534, which says that the Sublime is neither will, nor unity, nor individual; and NNSP 546, which calls the Sublime "Schopenhauer's Nothingness"). But a closer scrutiny shows that the Sublime is not to be defined in the sense of Zen-Buddhism as reality in its absolute non-determination,¹⁷ as Lindsay in fact does give elements of qualification. The cabballistic En-Soph however has in common with the One of Plotinus the free limitation of the good as the merciful cause of the genesis of the world, that is, the En-Soph is the highest form of the good; a predication Lindsay cannot accept, because it would presuppose a universal good in the whole reality. Plotinus' statement that without true virtue every speaking of god is mere empty chaff is not comprehensible for Lindsay.

In which way — except by the negation of the tradition — does Lindsay define the Sublime? According to NNSP 163 the Sublime reveals itself in a state of the soul beyond feeling. It can only be reached by suffering (cf. NNSP 66, 73, 76). As an "alien" (NNSP 131) it is more "lively," more "dense," more "substantial" than the real world. (NNSP 204, 287, 413, 500). The higher degree of substantiality is given by the Sublime being "the Variety of the eternal world," "the All, Different, and Everchanging; from which earthly variety is derived" (NNSP 361); further predications ascribed to it are "action" (NNSP 246) and "freedom and grandeur" (NNSP 387). *Sketch Notes for a New System of Philosophy*, comes next to a definition as regards contents: "The Muspel-World does not possess this inner core of Will, but something else, of which the Will is a corrupted version."

It becomes clear that the highest form of being, as Lindsay sees it, agrees in essential traits with Nietzsche's "will to power": in rejecting the interpretation of the most high as the good and the one; in stressing aspects like "everchanging," "action," "vanity," "freedom," "grandeur," which relate to becoming instead of being or consolidation. But in contrast to Nietzsche to whom the world is "will to power and nothing more" (which means "the senseless eternally"), Lindsay's Muspel-world contains — by the strictly transcendental character of the other-world — elements of the Neoplatonic tradition, as well. By the very connection of the totally heterogeneous elements of the Platonic Tradition with those of the running-out modernity, Lindsay's conception of the world loses logical consistency and ontological transparency. To Plotinus, the being beyond existence is the inseparable unity of all positive qualities, at once the one and the perfectly good. Consequently it is identical with itself and — as the overflowing source of the qualitative being — the principle of identity for each individual. Thus, there is an essential correlation of being and appearance, both with regard to the relation of the primary and the appearing world, and with regard to the being and the appearances of the individuals, as the post-critical Neoplatonism of Coleridge, MacDonald or Solov'yev has grasped. "Nothing but truth can appear; and whatever is, must seem," Raven remarks in George MacDonald's *Lilith* (272).

As "everchanging-ness" and "variety" are stated concerning it, the Sublime of Lindsay's philosophy is not identical with itself. Lindsay characteristically not only rejects quiet and stillness as features of the most high, which Plotinus stresses so much, (NNSP 474: "A state of repose is death... apparent repose is illusion"; cf. NNSP's 478, 511), but he also rejects the aspect of unity, being the misled attempt of the individual to interpret reality. (NNSP 429, 430)

That reality cannot be interpreted by the concept of unity may be shown by the phenomenon of resistance, that is, a trinity not further traceable: seen scientifically that trinity consists in "length," i.e. "the relation of one object to nothingness," "breadth," i.e. "the relation of one another," and "depth," i.e. "the relation of one object to the subject" (NNSP 515; cf. VA, 186ff). The plot of the action of the *Voyage to Arcturus* proves the misleading character of the trinity concept for the essentially real.

Consequently there is no concept of truth for Lindsay except in the sense of formal correctness (NNSP 533) and artistic creation. (NNSP 539)

Thus Lindsay's "negative ontology" partly consists in the rejection of earthly concepts concerning the most high, partly in its interpretation as a Nirvana, but most of all in the nontransparency of his conception of the world, his surrendering the concept of truth. The word *darkness* is said to have been a mystic word to Lindsay.¹⁸ A *Voyage to Arcturus* literally ends with the word "darkness"; Lindsay's last work, *The Witch*, factually ends with the phe-

nomenon of an impenetrable labyrinth of thought. In the last, unfinished, part of the novel the thoughts of the author circle round the problem of a dualistic structure of existence: "...in that pale hour before the frame of time, spirit had been shattered. A mystic *avatar*, a Breath...had departed from spirit, so that suddenly it had become a living dust" (W, 388).

Now, in the aeons of the three dimensional world a contrary process takes place, "the slow dreadful refilling of spirit by that whose departure had shattered into fragments past number" (W,388). Dreadful is that process by the annihilation of the "self in spirit" (W, 389); by the unavoidable destruction of the worlds, the will of the self has created as illusionary false construction of shelter, when fleeing from the restoration of the spirit into its original "self-less" form (W,387). The fear of the self of the pain of loneliness has created these worlds, for it is loneliness which will finally destroy the degenerated part of the spirit, the willing self (W, 389).¹⁹ As — after that aim has been reached — any new enriched, elevated state of being does not occur, neither matter nor soul became imbued by spirit; the dialectics of the first beginning, of time and apocalyptic ending are not the expression of a coming new form of existence,²⁰ the question about the mystery of being remains unanswered by Lindsay:

Why anciently had That within withdrawn itself from spirit, which now throughout the worlds returned in pain to its fragments? Why had his spirit been broken off and set in loneliness through the evil aeons of the worlds, merely in order recover its original at last? (W, 389)

Lindsay has embodied the ontological phenomenon, which, in the first beginning has departed from spirit, in a mythical figure, the witch Urda. Urda has got several traits of a Sophia-figure, but she remains — as the title, too, suggests, ambivalent. For she has, like the Sophia-Aeon of several gnostic doctrines, caused the fall of the spirit-sparks. Without any discernible reason she has hurled the spirit into the illusion of a possible flight (W, 387), to force it, by the embodiment of illusion, "by the interminable dreadful road of the worlds" (W, 387) into loneliness, pain, destruction, and death, that is, the Voyage to Arcturus.

Urda cast spirits into the illusions of escape. Endlessly, also in the guise of time and fate, she made escape impossible. ...Each spirit must directly support loneliness, and indirectly, pain. To the feeling of loneliness and pain a personal identity was indispensable..." (W, 387)

Is it, therefore, the "fearful significance" (W, 387) of individuation to bring into existence pain and loneliness? (Lindsay's remark, "where pain was absent the splendours were less. Even to earthly sight the painless act of simple kindness was sligher than the painful sacrifice" (W, 387) makes such a conjecture more probable. The origin of Lindsay's point of view may be seen in the not-critically-analyzed rigoristic morals of enlightenment.)

The *Witch* deals with the visionary encounter of the

poet Ragnar Pole and of Urda. Three forms of music prefigure the essential theme, the three stages of death, by which the willing self is extinguished in the spirit:

The musings of passion, of calm, and of nothingness (W, 356). They each in their turn point to the death of earthly existence, of the body and of pleasure; the death of heavenly existence, of the soul and its illusions of lonely grandeur; and the death of the "nothing-like" existence of the spirit and its illusions of selfhood (W 390). The three illusionary worlds Lindsay represents by three archetypal houses which manifest themselves in dreams or day-dreams of three essential key figures of the novel. The dream-house of Bluewright, seen as an interior, is a night-marish labyrinth with a "lofty empty haunted room" (W, 284) where "nothing" is seen. Faustine's house, seen from outside only, suggests by the choice of words and by the imagery most conspicuously the "moated grange of the dejected Mariana" in Tennyson's poem of the same name. But it is in a much more advanced state of decay. The reference to nothingness is here given by the "dead pear-tree...crucified against the wall".²¹ The house of Flint, Morion House, is seen from outside as well as from inside; it is the blending of a geographic formation and a mythical *axis mundi* place. As the place where Urda manifests herself and opens up the outlook on the region "beyond heaven" (W, 310), it is the greatest possible approximation of Nothingness a human being can get while still alive.

Possibly the conspicuous stressing of trinity (22) points to the fact that the three houses should be seen as representations of the trinity of length-existence ("visible, tangible nature," — VA, 186), breadth-relation ("world of love" VA, 186) and depth- feeling ("the line between the afterworld and men" — VA, 186). Depth-feeling then should be compared to the "shadows" whose effect is felt only if one is actually in it (W, 304). It is the "mysterious power forcing us towards eternity" (W, 304). Even here, Lindsay does not allow any conception of a holistic connection of way and aim:

Semele was consumed like a leaf of paper in a furnace because she must see Zeus in his proper shape... The sight of the face of Medusa's cut-off head changed people to stone... Think how it would be for us if we saw the naked face of Medusa - if heaven could reach us unhindered... No one understands heaven. (W, 305)

Conclusion: Gnosticism

Lindsay's *oeuvre* gives evidence for a feeling of life, the background of which is the consciousness of a growing impenetrability of the world.

In the course of the nineteenth century reality is more and more experienced as a mere surface and not as a picture any more, that is, as the dimension of something standing behind the surface, the depth of being, the bearer of meaning.

The interpretation (and experience) of reality as a mere surface isolates man among these "idols" of factuality, for it cannot give him any symbolical information about his

essence, about his "that is I."²³ Man is like a stranger, indifferent towards the world, like a "guest in a bad hotel" (as says Valentinus the Gnostic). He knows that he will have to leave it soon. Therefore, the situation of modern man is to be compared with that of Second century gnosticism²⁴ to which the world was the "unsuccessful construction of an incompetent architect or demiurge" (Koslowski, p. 390). Beyond the construction of the world, though, the "alien god," the *Pleroma*, exists, to whom the imprisoned sparks of light finally can flee, whereas the world itself remains impoverished and more wretched than before. The modern world, however, is a prison, comparable to the gnostic *heimarmene* of necessary rule, but without any *Pleroma* (Koslowski, p. 390).

It seems to be no accident that just at the time when the idolizing of a superficial reality took place, an important scientific interest in gnosticism was aroused and several fragmentary sources of gnosticism were published for the first time.²⁵

Lindsay's *œuvre* shows many traces of his occupation with the ideas of gnosticism. Here I will only mention the sparks and the whirls of the *The Voyage to Arcturus*, the three classes of the souls (Lindsay's protagonistic couples always recognize themselves as pneumatics — "spirits" — as Isabel and Judge, Maskull and Sullenbode, Anthony and Haidee, Ingrid and Saltfleet), the modifying of morals, the doctrine of reincarnation, the cosmic process understood as suffering, and, finally, the symbol of the serpent (both, Haidee Croyland and Ragnar Pole are explicitly characterized by their resemblance to serpents).

The actual point of contact though consists in the parallelism of the experience of reality. Lindsay's art is the expression of suffering from the modern prison of the world. The foundation of its structure by Descartes and Kant, its voluntaristic revision by Schopenhauer and radicalization by Nietzsche apparently have not been critically analyzed by Lindsay. To the modern idolization of the world, however, Lindsay does not consent. The basic questions of his philosophy: "Why does the world exist? Whence is the world derived? What am I?" (NNSP 515) could be understood as a variant on the Gnostic chain of questions: who have we been; what has become of us; where have we been; where have we been placed; where are we hurrying to; from which position are we redeemed; what is birth, what rebirth?

In fact, Lindsay's *œuvre* answers every one of these questions.

His perception of the suffering god is based upon the German idealistic philosophy. "Muspel" does not suffer as the Christian god does, because the latter voluntarily stands in and abandons himself lovingly, "emphatically," but Muspel is struggling for survival against the resistant lie of existence, a struggle that can be won only by a process. ("Muspel was fighting for its life... against all that is most shameful and frightful...." VA, 247) The parallel

with Gnosticism can be seen in the seeming character of suffering, because, where, there is no personality, there is no true suffering. The shifting of the suffering into the secondary world (VA, p. 36) takes the element of transcendence from Muspel. That contradiction in Lindsay's philosophy cannot be resolved, as well as the problem of defining the Sublime.

Though a platonist and a Romantic according to his yearning fundamental philosophy, Lindsay believes in the theories of the German idealistic philosophy. Thus, he is not able to comprehend Coleridge's and Novalis' overcoming of the modern dualism of "world" and "mind" by their homogeneity in the foundation of being. Joy "that strong Voice... that luminous cloud" does not exist for him. To him, the aim of Romantic desire shows itself as the unrecognizable behind a mask, the soul as a prisoner who cannot reach it, neither by nor through the earthly images. In Tennyson's words:

She could not look on the sweet heaven
Neither at noon nor eventide.

Notes

1. James Sidney Ensor, *Self-portrait with the Beautiful Virgin*, 1892.
2. Cf. Ernst Topitsch, *Das analogische Kunstwerk*, 211.
3. Ernst Topitsch, 211.
4. Cf. Eric S. Rabin, "Conflation of Genres and Myths in David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*," 154.
5. Cf. G.R.S. Mead, *Fragmente eines verschollenen Glaubens*, 119 ff.
6. That is, existence and relation.
7. Compare below, the section on "The Negative Ontology."
8. See the chapters "The Music of Spring," and "The Musician Departs". There is not the least hint that the musician "is none other than Crystalman," as Bernard Sellin in *The Life and Works of David Lindsay*, 26, suggests.
9. See Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 222 ff.
10. VA, 19 "Oh it has been a bloody journey!"
11. The concept follows the ideas of Joachim of Fiore, Paracelsus, and Jakob Böhm.
12. Novalis, *Werke*, 714, and Novalis, *Paralipomena of Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, 203
13. Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn und Melancholie*, 203f
14. Ibid., 210-12
15. Perhaps with the conception of the hyperborean Apollon. See E.R. Dodds, *Die Griechen und das Irrationale*, 221(n)
16. Look, I'll tell you a mystery. The time has come already / that the Bridegroom coronates His Bride. Now guess where the Crown may be. Towards midnight. For in the middle of the bitter quality / the light is getting bright. Jakob Böhm, *Urschriften*, Bd1 (Aurora), 108.
17. The reality at this stage is completely undetermined. Bodhidharma's Face is beardless: Toshikiko Izutsu, *The Beardless Face of Bodhidharma*, 104.
18. See J.B. Pick, Colin Wilson, and E.H. Visiak, *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay*.
19. In the creating of the worlds Coleridge's primary imagination is touched at. But it is seen by Schopenhauer's "evil eye."
20. Böhm's *Aurora*, Novalis' *Klingsor Märchen* and MacDonald's *Lilith* interpret on the foundation of Christian Neoplatonism.
21. Cf. *The Violet Apple* ch.1 (26) and ch.12 (246).

22. As the name "Blue-wright" suggests ("Blue is existence," VA, 207).
23. Cf. Owen Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age*, 30.
24. Peter Koslowski, *Gnosis und Gnostizismus in der Philosophie*, 390-394, discerns between Gnosis (which, as a theory of the whole reality is not defined by dualism) and gnosticism (a dualistic teaching which interprets the world as fallen "Non-Wisdom.")
25. Cf. G.R.S. Mead, *Fragmente...*, Bibliographie, 493-511.

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