

The Altered States of David Lindsay: Three Psychedelic Novels of the 1920s

‘He drank copiously. It affected his palate in a new way – with the purity and cleanness of water was combined the exhilaration of sparkling wine, raising his spirits – but somehow the intoxication brought out his better nature, and not his lower...

Maskull now realised his environment as it were for the first time. All his sense organs started to show him beauties and wonders he had not hitherto suspected.’

David Lindsay, *A Voyage to Arcturus*, 1920.

‘A dark, cosmic and elegant meditation on life and death, *A Voyage to Arcturus* might well be the most psychedelic novel ever written.’

Mark Pilkington, *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 124, June-August 2009.

David Lindsay (1876–1945), whose novels were originally published in the nineteen twenties and thirties, was a forgotten figure in literature until one of his novels, an extraordinary and elaborate fantasy, *A Voyage to Arcturus*¹, was republished by Gollancz.² It went on to be published in numerous popular paperback editions, as something of an underground classic during the psychedelic sixties and seventies, along with the work of other rediscovered fantasy authors such as Mervyn Peak, Lord Dunsany and J R Tolkien.³ Notwithstanding Fordean author and fringe culture pundit Mark Pilkington’s observation, that *Arcturus* might well be ‘the most psychedelic novel ever written’⁴ and the fact that Rick Doblin the founder and executive director of the psychedelic campaigning organisation MAPS named the home he built *Arcturus* in honour of Lindsay’s book⁵, the role of the consumption of psychoactive substances in the narrative of *Arcturus* seems to have gone almost entirely unremarked by commentators.

The failure to incorporate psychedelic aspects of *Arcturus* in critical evaluations of Lindsay’s work is probably for three reasons. Firstly, the references in *Arcturus* to eating and drinking followed by altered states of consciousness are easily read over unnoticed within the overall fantastic context. Secondly, the one novel of Lindsay’s that explicitly involves the ingestion of a psychoactive drug, *The Violet Apple* was written in 1924 but remained unpublished until 1976⁶ and even once published has remained hard to find and expensive to purchase second-hand.⁷ Thirdly, there is the ignorance, and perhaps prudery, of literary commentators concerning matters relating to the use psychoactive

¹ David Lindsay, *A Voyage to Arcturus*, Methuen & Co, 1920. Hereafter shortened to *Arcturus* for brevity when referring to the novel.

² David Lindsay, *A Voyage to Arcturus*, Gollancz, 1963.

³ See entry BALLANTINE ADULT FANTASY SERIES in Brian Stableford, *Historical Dictionary of Fantasy Literature*, Scarecrow Press, 2005.

⁴ See: <https://frieze.com/issues/frieze-magazine/issue-124>

⁵ *Bulletin of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies*, Volume 9 Number 2, Summer 1999.

⁶ David Lindsay, *The Violet Apple & the Witch*, Chicago Review Press, 1976.

⁷ Online prices, second-hand, frequently run into hundreds of pounds.

drugs, when their focus on the work is otherwise. The one exception is David Sellin's book length study of Lindsay in which he observes that the 'gnawl water' that flows on the planet Tormance in *Arcturus* 'transforms sometimes insidiously, and sometimes brutally, the entire personality, like a powerful drug'.⁸ The water produces a curious effect on the principal character named Maskull. 'Sometimes the water acts upon his senses to intoxicate him, as if Tormance did not signify a land of torments but delights. Sometimes in contact with the water, he receives an electric charge which stimulates him'. According to Sellin, the water flows from Crystalman, a demiurgic figure, and 'intoxicates the better to deceive... It appears to be a source of life, but the life it offers is that of Arcturus which means in Lindsay's eyes a certain form of death.' In Sellin's understanding, for Lindsay the seductive powers of beauty, art, love, and the will to live, are all illusions to be overcome. The means of overcoming them is the pursuit of pain and 'gnawl water' merely serves to enhance the illusory glamour of the material world.

As an authorial debut, *Arcturus* was not a success, as of 1430 copies that were printed no more than 596 were sold.⁹ However, it was amongst the first works of the early twentieth century writers of fantastic fiction to be rediscovered during the science fiction and fantasy boom of the 1960s and 70s and a fine collector's edition has been published by Savoy Books, with an introductory essay by the acclaimed writer of graphic novels Alan Moore.¹⁰ Lindsay's own title for his novel was the fungally suggestive *Nightspore on Tormance*, but it was retitled 'A Voyage to Arcturus' on the advice of the original publishers. Tormance, carrying a combined sense both torment and romance, is one of many curious portmanteau words used by Lindsay in *Arcturus* for the names of characters and places. Following the failure of *Arcturus* to sell, Lindsay turned to expressing his interest in altered mind-states in novels of domestic drama in country houses set among the 'anyone for tennis' upper middle classes of the nineteen twenties and thirties.

Arcturus is perhaps best described as a science fiction picaresque in which a human visitor, named Maskull to a distant planet, encounters several of its inhabitants. Each of these varied inhabitants lives in a different realm and represents a different philosophy, which in turn Maskull rejects, murdering two of these alien persons by his own hand. It should be emphasised that *Arcturus* is not a pleasant read, containing many violent scenes. There are nine deaths in total, four of which are killings and the other five in one way or another consequential upon the actions of others and progression of the story. Eventually Maskull achieves an apotheosis in which the illusory nature of the material world becomes clear. In his apotheosis it is revealed how the loathsome glamour of the physical world is animated by the spirit trapped within it. This spiritual energy is 'Muspel fire', envisioned as green atomic corpuscles whose 'fire had been abstracted, its cement was withdrawn, and, after being fouled and sweetened by the horrible sweetness of its host, broke into individuals which were the whirls of living will.' The green atoms of this spiritual fire are forever striving to return to the point of their emanation, Muspel. In some individuals 'the green imprisoned life' was meagre while in others it was 'a hundred times greater'. Muspel fire is in eternal conflict with the evil master of the material world material Crystalman or Shaping, who feeds on it for his own purposes. However:

⁸ Bernard Sellin, *The Life and Works of David Lindsay*, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁹ Gary K. Wolfe, *David Lindsay* (Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute Sources and Documents), Borgo Press, 2007.

¹⁰ David Lindsay, *Voyage to Arcturus*, Savoy Books, 2002.

Muspel was no all-powerful universe, tolerating from pure indifference the existence side by side with it of another false world which had no right to be. Muspel was fighting for its life – against all that is most shameful and frightful – against sin masquerading as eternal beauty, against baseness masquerading as nature, against the Devil masquerading as God...

Maskull dies in the process of his apotheosis, but lives in the person of an earlier originally separate character Nightspore. At the conclusion of the story he joins with the personification of Muspel, Surtur, also embodied in the human character Krag, in the eternal combat between spiritual and material realms. It is this struggle against Crystalman/Shaping, a Demiurge responsible for the material world that earns *Arcturus* its reputation as a Gnostic novel.

The extraordinary inventiveness Lindsay's *Arcturus*, which has made it justly famous, overcame the generally leaden prose of his writing that makes the tortuous tales of romantic and domestic intrigues of his later novels *The Haunted Woman* (1922), *Sphinx* (1923), and *The Violet Apple* (1924/1976) hard going, although they are not without a certain charm. Despite the clumsiness of his writing *Arcturus* has gained the admiration of a number of other important authors, including C S Lewis (1898 –1963), the literary critic and Yale Professor of Humanities Harold Bloom (b. 1930) and the well-known author on the occult and paranormal Colin Wilson (1931 –2013) . While rejecting its philosophy C S Lewis, author of the *Narnia* books, found in Lindsay's *Arcturus* a method of writing the Christian 'theological science fiction' of his Space Trilogy commencing with *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938)¹¹ and described Lindsay as 'the real father of my planet books'.¹² According to Bloom 'Lindsay's uncanny nightmare of a book survives its dreadful writing'¹³ and Bloom found what he considered the Gnostic vision of *Arcturus* so compelling that he attempted his own explicitly Gnostic version on the same themes in the shape of *The Flight to Lucifer*.¹⁴ The late writer on the occult and paranormal Colin Wilson also developed something of an obsession with Lindsay and *Arcturus*, penning more than half-a-dozen pieces on Lindsay in the form of essays, introductions and as editor and contributor to compendiums of works about Lindsay and in particular *Arcturus*.¹⁵

Lindsay's later attempt at authorship *The Violet Apple*, written in 1924 but unpublished in his lifetime, provides a clear message concerning the underlying significance of psychoactive drugs in *Arcturus*. *The Violet Apple* is a tale of a psychoactive plant said to be a descendant of the Tree of Knowledge, brought back by a crusader knight from the Holy Land and the effect of the psychoactive drug on the lives of those that experience it, of which more, later. Stories featuring secret knowledge learned in the Holy Land brought to Europe by crusader knights have been popularised by the novels of Dan Brown, who relied heavily on the now classic *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*¹⁶ for the notion of a secret stream of Gnostic heresy carried through the ages. However, these authors were themselves were drawing on conspiracy theories that originated in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth

¹¹ C S Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, The Bodley Head, 1938.

¹² David C. Downing, *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.

¹³ Harold Bloom, *Novelists and Novels*, Checkmark Publishing, 2007.

¹⁴ Harold Bloom, *The Flight to Lucifer: a Gnostic fantasy*, New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979.

¹⁵ These are listed in the Secondary Bibliography of the website dedicated to Lindsay and his works. See: <http://www.violetapple.org.uk/works/articles.php>

¹⁶ Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, Henry Lincoln, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*. Jonathan Cape, 1982.

century anti-masonic literature that identified freemasonry as the continuation of a centuries old stream of heretical gnosis which included the Templars.¹⁷

In *Arcturus* altered states are induced by eating or drinking various substances, found on a planet revolving around the star Arcturus, by Maskull, a human visitor. Here are two examples from *Arcturus* of the induction of altered states, the first by something drunk, the second by something eaten.

From Chapter 14, 'Polecrab':

When his own turn came to drink, he found the juice of the tree somewhat like coconut milk, but intoxicating. It was a new sort of intoxication, however, for neither his will nor his emotions were excited but only his intellect – and that only in a certain way. His thoughts and images were not freed and loosened, but on the contrary kept labouring and swelling painfully, until they reached the full beauty of an apercu, which would then flame up in his consciousness, burst and vanish. After that, the whole process started again.

From Chapter 17, 'Corpang':

Maskull bit into the root. It was white and hard; its white sap was bleeding. It had no taste, but after eating it, he experienced a change of perception. The landscape, without alteration of light or outline, became several degrees more stern and sacred. When he looked at Corpang he was impressed by his look of Gothic awfulness, but the perplexed expression was still in his eyes.

It must surely be difficult to believe that anyone who has a familiarity with the experience of psychedelic drugs would read these passages without identifying them as typical of experiences under the influence of such drugs. The detail is such that they appear likely authored by someone who has had the benefit of such experiences himself. They could be derived from written descriptions available to Lindsay, though their subtlety belies this. Either way the process of the character's spiritual journey on the planet of Tormance proceeds partly by virtue of these experiences of altered consciousness. No doubt the Hippie readers of the battered cheap paperback reprints of *Arcturus* that lay around Sixties crash-pads, read these passages with an appreciative murmur. The quotation at this beginning of this paper in which Maskull's 'sense organs started to show him beauties and wonders he had not hitherto suspected', comes from Chapter 6 of *Arcturus*, in which the being Joiwind introduces to Maskull to the effects of 'gnawl water', through which 'Maskull now realised his environment as it were the first time'. However it must be understood that the chapters and persons that Maskull meets on his journey represent various philosophies, each of which Maskull in turn rejects, and Joiwind turns out to be an innocent worshipper of 'Shaping' another name for Crystalman the evil Demiurge of material creation.

Regardless of the specific role played by psychoactive substances in *Arcturus*, it is curious that the extensive published commentary on the varied philosophical ideas contained in *Arcturus* largely fails to highlight the altered states induced by psychoactive substances found on Tormance or relate them to the explicit role played by psychoactive drug in Lindsay's *The Violet Apple*. Even though Alan Moore observes in his Introduction to the Savoy Books edition (2002) that 'Commencing with a séance, a conventional enough device in the fantastic stories of that period, the tale then turns into

¹⁷ See, for example, Peter Partner, *The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and their Myth*, Oxford University Press, 1982.

a kind of mescaline-fuelled picaresque', he fails to comment of the clear references the consumption of mind-altering substances in the text.

In Lindsay's second published work, *The Haunted Woman*, a drama of romantic intrigue and misunderstanding typical of Lindsay's later work, a set of secret rooms in an ancient house provide a view into an alternative medieval world through an upstairs window, but the stairs to the rooms are only visible to those with a natural psychic perception. Intriguingly, visits to the room are entirely forgotten afterwards, leaving a sense of lost time. "What kind of rooms could they be which had the effect of drugging the brain to permanent forgetfulness?" says Isbel the central character. "It was something in that house... It was like the call of a drug; she was a drug-maniac..." Isbel has a number of romantic liaisons with the owner of the house conducted in the secret rooms, of which they both have only vague intimations afterwards and devise a plan to see if they really are meeting each other in this alternative reality.

In the case of Lindsay's next published novel *Sphinx* (Lindsay 1923) an altered-state is produced by playing back, in the mind of a waking person, recordings of other person's dreams, made by a sensitive device with something like a photographic emulsion, constructed by the main character. However, the experience of reliving another person's dream, as described in the novel, has a distinctly psychedelic feel and this excerpt is a chapter suggestively entitled 'Evelyn is Initiated'.

Suddenly Evelyn was in the middle of a nightmare! The room streaming with sunlight, the open window with its blind only half lowered, the glorious green, blue, and golden world outside, the sweltering heat – all, without warning, had given place to a mad fantastic dream, into which she had not even time to wonder how she had fallen. She was not frightened, but it seemed to her as if nature had parted from its moorings and that she had somehow become transported into chaos!

The world in which she now was bore much the same resemblance to the ordered world of reality as a cubist painting to an actual scene or group of persons. It was a kaleidoscope of colours and sounds, odours and skin sensations. Everything was accompanied in her by such a variety and rapidity of emotion that she had scarcely the ability to realise her internal feelings at all. She was just one big *nerve!* . . . all was hopelessly mixed together – darkness and brightness, heat and coolness, one landscape and another, triumph, gloom, laughter, exaltation, grief. . . the things only came in vivid hints and momentary splashes, immediately to be lost again. It was no dream, but the dream of a dream. Supposing reality to be solid and dreaming fluid, this was gaseous. The elements of life were in a condition of disintegration. They still existed, but in combinations so impossible that she could not even understand their meaning...

If, as appears uncannily likely, David Lindsay had personal experience of psychoactive drugs. It looks as though he drew on such for this dream sequence. The use of psychoactive drugs in a fictional setting was hardly unique to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; consider for example the drug stories of H G Wells.¹⁸ So, incorporating the effects of a psychoactive drug into fiction would not make Lindsay unique in terms of his era. I have, however, found nothing though in the commentary on Lindsay's works or his biographical details that indicates his personal use of psychoactive drugs. Between 1913 and 1917 Aleister Crowley was holding regular Anhalonium parties, at which he dispensed an extract of peyote to figures from the occult and literary circles of

¹⁸ See for example his short stories "The Purple Pileus" (1896): Transformative effect of a psychoactive mushroom experience; "Under the Knife" (1896): Out of Body experience under anaesthesia; "The New Accelerator" (1901): A drug which massively slows the perception of time.

the day,¹⁹ though I have not been able to find any point of social contact between Lindsay and that milieu. Anhalonium as a recreational drug in the nineteen-twenties was well enough known for Cecil Gray writing about contemporary classical music to reference its use:

As a kind of drug, no doubt Scriabin's music has certain significance, but it is wholly superfluous. We already have cocaine, morphine, hashish, heroin, anhalonium, and innumerable similar productions, to say nothing of alcohol. Surely that is enough.²⁰

In 1919 Lindsay moved to Cornwall, a move made by a number of writers and occultists during and after the First World War, such as D H Lawrence, the composer and occultist Peter Warlock, as well as individuals from Crowley's circle such as Mary Butts²¹ and the aforementioned Cecil Gray, biographer of Peter Warlock.²² They were attracted by a sense of lingering paganisms, the wildness of the country and the presence there of mysterious megaliths.²³

All of the psychedelic passages that I have quoted from Lindsay's novels could of course have been the product of Lindsay's imagination or culled from accounts by other persons. However, there is one further prompt to seriously consider whether, with the absence of evidence put aside, Lindsay did have personal experience of psychoactive drugs. This is Lindsay's description of the experience of the explicitly psychoactive plant drug that plays a key role in his posthumously published novel *The Violet Apple* (Lindsay 1924/1976).²⁴

In *The Violet Apple* the principal character receives an heirloom, which is a seed claimed to be a seed from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil of the Garden of Eden, held inside a glass ornament in the shape of a serpent. This heirloom is said to have been brought back from the Middle East by a crusader knight in the Middle-Ages. The glass container is accidentally broken and the seed gets to be planted and grows into a stunted little tree that produces two tiny violet apples, hence the title of the book. One of the apples is eaten is by an impetuous female character, who then insists that the main male character eats the remaining apple and reports back to her on what he experiences, insisting that he eats it before she reveals the nature of her own experience of the drug. On eating the second apple the protagonist has a transformative experience during which he

¹⁹ See Patrick Everitt's MA Thesis for a detailed examination of Crowley's relationship with Anhalonium. https://www.academia.edu/23482043/The_Cactus_and_the_Beast_Investigating_the_role_of_pegote_mescaline_in_the_Magick_of_Aleister_Crowley_M.A._Thesis_

²⁰ Cecil Gray, *A Survey of Contemporary Music* London, Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1924.

²¹ The author Mary Butts, a regular user of various drugs and a sometime student of Aleister Crowley, settled in 1932 at Sennen on the Penwith peninsula on the western tip of Cornwall.

²² In the early nineteen twenties Peter Warlock himself experimented with drugs. His biographer Barry Smith in 'Peter Warlock: The Life of Philip Heseltine' refers to his use of cannabis and in a letter to Cecil Gray, his friend and an earlier biographer, Warlock says that he had tracked down a certain 'Crowleyian compound' at a certain 'pharmaceutician' (sic) which he would bring to Gray on his next visit. That Crowleyian compound might well have been Anhalonium, the peyote extract available at that time, to which Cecil Gray refers, (see Note 20).

²³ See Paul Newman, *The Unknown Guest*, an article written to coincide with exhibition concerning the influence of the occult on the arts, 'The Dark Monarch' at Tate St Ives. See: http://www.artcornwall.org/features/Paul_Newman_Unknown_Guest.htm

²⁴ David Lindsay started writing *The Violet Apple* in February 1924, and finished it in July. John Long rejected it, so Lindsay revised it between March 1925 and February 1926. However, it remained unpublished throughout his life. It was not until 1976 that it was collected with the unfinished *The Witch* and published by the Chicago Review Press. See <http://www.violetapple.org.uk/tva/index.php>

has a vision of the woman who ate the first violet apple, Haidee, as a spiritual embodiment of the female aspect of humanity and falls deeply in love with her.

A number of points of particularly accurate description of psychedelic experience in *The Violet Apple* form a compelling argument for Lindsay's actual experience of a psychedelic drug. Lindsay describes the delayed onset and uncanny physical 'coming on' sensation after taking a psychedelic drug; the instinctive sense of the need to be left to oneself undisturbed for the duration; the shiver of fear that maybe you have taken a dangerous step and a need for something strong in reserve to take the edge off the experience if things get too rough. The protagonist has chewed and swallowed his violet apple:

The tang which still persisted in his mouth was rough, sharp, exquisite, bringing tears to his eyes by reason of its sweet acidity. Simultaneously, a long wave of voluptuous freshness continued to explore the passages and recesses of his interior like a summer breeze, and so far his exotic guest was retorting no movement of unfriendliness. But he was by no means reassured as yet; in fact, he could not be, for he was well aware that his experience was only just starting. And it was not so much his apprehension that made him uneasy, as some sort of actual voiceless, menacing physical response to his deed, creeping mysteriously upwards and outwards, hardly yet evident, but merely sensed by his instinct....

He was glad he had not eaten that fruit at Croom, with his journey in front of him. He had the feeling of a wild beast which recognises the approach of sickness, and slinks away from its fellows into the remotest thicket it can find. He congratulated himself he had not advertised his return beforehand; his friends knew that he was away, and no-one would be likely to call. Anyway, he would see nobody. There was brandy in the in the cupboard, in case of need.

However, having initially ingested the fruit, having made every provision to be undisturbed, Anthony is interrupted by the arrival of his estranged fiancée Grace, who is convinced that he is having an affair with the other consumer of the forbidden fruit, Haidee. The pain of having to entertain an unexpected and unwelcome visitor while high on a psychedelic, to whom you can't reveal your altered-state, is depicted with an accuracy that is unerring to anyone who has had the same unfortunate experience. Grace arrives seeking a reconciliation following their estrangement due to her jealous suspicions concerning Anthony's relationship with his best friend's fiancée Haidee. However, now under the influence of the 'violet apple', it is only Haidee, Eve to his Adam and confederate in transgression, that Anthony can think about.

He wished he had not asked her up. It would have been better for her to find out *slowly* how that old life was ended for him – had no longer any meaning for him. He did not want her to be unhappy. She could not possibly understand his apotheosis.

'By God! That's a queer word.' He said, stopping short in his reflections, for it sounded to him as clear as if he had spoken it aloud. 'What apotheosis have I undergone? – and what am I talking about? What has changed within me the last half-dozen hours, that I should now be regarding it as quite settled that I am to part from Grace?...'

And then, as the door opened, and Grace herself entered the room alone and unannounced, the name HAIDEE appeared suddenly to traverse the whole sky-arch of his thoughts from end to end... Yet it was not as a beautiful woman that she was present with him. It was as if she represented for him unthinkable lofty, maternal protecting spiritual influence, so that he stood, not face to face with her as one person with another, but in a sort of atmosphere compounded of her being; an atmosphere as necessary to his new existence as air to mammals and water to fishes...And he recognised that that was

the great and single idea which for several minutes back had been inhabiting his soul, and which he did not wish Grace to discover there, and profane by discovering...

When Grace confronts the tripping Anthony over his supposed affair with Haidee it is unbearable 'Oh, ye gods! Oh, go! go! go! go!' groaned the playwright mentally – and when he clasped his forehead with his hand, there were beads of perspiration there . . . "This is unendurable". Unsurprisingly the engagement is over and Anthony finally accepts his soul kinship with Haidee.

The two initiates, Anthony and Haidee, despite being promised in marriage to mutual friends, accept that they are destined to be together and, once shared, reflect on their psychedelic experience in an interesting fashion. Anthony considers the experience thus:

A drug falsely stimulates my brain for a few hours and I am deceived into imagining that this artificial exaltation corresponds to something real. Therefore the cessation of so pathological a deception, far from being a matter for lament, is a matter for self-congratulation; and I am well out of it.

They feel that the intensity of the experience has actually robbed the real world of some of its magic, but that they will have to strive to recover a permanent sensibility of the world's natural magic by dint of their own endeavour.

I have brought nothing away except a deteriorated intellect and an awakening to the disagreeable consequences of my conduct during those few hours; which would also precisely be the effect of whiskey, or opium, or cocaine. So what I now have to do is to forget all that, in order to build up my life anew from a fresh start.

However, the full picture is much more ambiguous, as Lindsay was almost certainly compromised by the negative perception that a positive outcome to a drug experience would have had in an era that included the publication of Aleister Crowley's *Diary of a Drug Fiend* in 1922 and pulp drug tales such as David Garnett's *Dope Darling* (1919).²⁵ Although he designates the drug experience of the violet apple as 'artificial', the outcome is positive and when Anthony and Haidee meet to share their experience it is described in much more positive terms

A silence followed, not of embarrassment, but simply because neither had anything further to say immediately. And if the marvellous experiences from which all these changes had arisen remained unreferred to, that also was not on account of any delicate reluctance on the part of either to introduce an awkward topic. It merely meant that both felt that there was nothing to be said about it. The high sacred hour was past, and to analyse it, even between themselves, would be a profanation. It was always in their hearts.

The narrative of *The Violet Apple* takes place in the few days leading up to Easter Sunday and Anthony and Haidee's psychedelic experience is finally framed, somewhat clumsily, within a Christian context. This is in strange contrast to the frequent understanding of Lindsay's religious or metaphysical outlook in *Arcturus* as being Gnostic. In addition a possible key to understanding *Arcturus* is Lindsay's interest in the Norse mythology that found clear expression in his final novel

²⁵ David "Bunny" Garnett (1892–1981) was a British writer who published a sensational novel titled *Dope-Darling: A Story of Cocaine* as Leda Burke, whose central character was loosely based on Betty May, born Betty Marlow Golding, (1893-1955?) was a British singer, dancer, and model, who was associated with occultist Aleister Crowley. Garnett is better known as the author of the short novel *Lady into Fox* in which a young woman, with tragic results, suddenly turns into a fox while she and her husband are out walking in the woods.

Devil's Tor (Lindsay 1932). Lindsay derived Muspel, the source of spiritual energy in *Arcturus* from *Múspellsheimr* (the world of fire) in Norse mythology and the name 'Surtur' from Surtr, the lord of *Múspellsheimr*. Alan Moore considered the metaphysics of *Arcturus* a personal Kabbalah of Lindsay's own contrivance, without obvious sources, though Nietzsche and Schopenhauer are regularly named as influences. Little biographical information is available suggesting what contacts Lindsay may have had with occult or literary circles. Though biographies states he met his wife at a literary club in 1916, according to Sellin 'Myers and Visiak seem to be the only two writers with whom Lindsay maintained any relationship'²⁶. However, something caused him to abandon a career working for a Lloyd's Insurance Underwriter in the City at the age of about 40, and dedicate himself to writing and publishing *Arcturus*, following his demobilisation in 1919, never having seen active service.

The sensitivity of Lindsay's descriptions of psychedelic type experiences stands in distinct contrast to the clumsy prose of the turgid dramas of the romantic entanglements of the 'anyone for tennis?' set, in which he contrived to set the fantastic elements of his stories following the initial financial and critical failure of *Arcturus*. However, these domestic comedies of errors composed of petty misunderstandings and deceptions do evidence Lindsay's believe in the near impossibility of effective human communication, especially where material issues such as wealth, status or conformity to social values are the determining factor. It is also possible that *The Violet Apple* contained significant biographical elements. The protagonist, a writer of light entertainments for the stage, dissatisfied with the vanity of his profession, determines to abandon it and move to the countryside as Lindsay actually did. In *The Violet Apple*, after his transformative experience, Anthony Kerr declares to his sister that he's giving up writing for the stage and that instead he has 'thought of buying a small property in Devon or Cornwall, and developing it, as a recreation to keep the devils away'.

Lindsay's novels, *Arcturus*, with its character's experiences through psychoactive substances; *The Violet Apple* with its psychoactive drug derived from the Tree of Knowledge of the Garden of Eden; and *Sphinx* with its psychedelic type experiences induced by a dream machine, all point to an early twentieth century and nineteenth century literary culture of altered states that remains relatively unexplored. During his journey across Tormance, Maskull's body grows a variety of bizarre new external sense organs with names such as the Poign, the Magn and the Sorb. The function of one pair of which is explained to him as 'probes', which 'are the gates opening into a new world' but in effect they 'had no independent function of their own, but only intensified and altered his other senses' and whose purpose may thus be likened to the effects of psychoactive drugs. *Arcturus* then should perhaps be reassessed, on the basis of its descriptions of altered states induced by eating or drinking, its additional organs of perception and in the light of the explicitly psychedelic content of *The Violet Apple*, as an essentially psychedelic text.

"Don't you understand, Maskull, that you are only an instrument, to be used and then broken? Nightspore is asleep now, but when he wakes you must die. You will go, but he will return."

Maskull hastily lit another match, with trembling fingers. No one was in sight, and all was quiet as the tomb.

²⁶ L H Myers (1881 – 1944), son of F W H Myers (1843 – 1901) a founder of the Society for Psychical Research, and E H Visiak (1878 – 1972).

Bibliography: For what is often described as a neglected author, there a large number of secondary sources on Lindsay and his works. A very extensive bibliography and secondary bibliography of Lindsay's works can be found on the website dedicated to Lindsay at www.violeapple.org.uk, together with other information about Lindsay and his books.