

A vast shadow house:

Critical and creative responses to

David Lindsay's vision

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Abstract

David Lindsay (1876-1945) wrote the metaphysical fantasy novel, *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), six further novels, and a typescript of philosophical notes (National Library of Scotland). Lindsay had a lifelong preoccupation with what he called the Sublime, drawing on Schopenhauer and German romanticism. Using the medium of experimental documentary film, I investigate Lindsay's ideas and imagery and their analogue with filmmaking, such as his use of non-diegetic sound to indicate the sublime in his novels, and an unpublished 1928 notebook in which he started to adapt his novel *The Haunted Woman* (1922) for cinema.

My film *A Vast Shadow House: David Lindsay's Vision* sets extracts from Lindsay's writing with new experimental landscape footage, together with interviews with contemporary Lindsay experts and admirers to investigate Lindsay's vision. The film and this thesis situate Lindsay in the cultural context of romanticism, symbolism, occultism, and modernism.

Drawing on aspects of cinematic theory (Schrader 2018 [1972]), I reframe Lindsay's concern with the ineffable using narrative withholding techniques, ironic narration, and extended duration. I invoke Chion on sound in film, particularly the oneiric power of non-diegetic voices. The project examines Lindsay's potential for cinematic meaning in the 21st century, finding analogues with filmmakers such as Tarkovsky, Herzog, Gröning, Kiarostami, and Gee.

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INTRODUCTION

I.1 David Lindsay's Sublime World

The Anglo-Scottish novelist David Lindsay (1876-1945) wrote seven novels, six of which are metaphysical fantasies: *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), *The Haunted Woman* (1922), *Sphinx* (1923), *The Violet Apple* (written 1924-6, published 1976), *Devil's Tor* (1932), and *The Witch* (written 1932-c.1939, published 1976). In these six books, Lindsay posits the existence of a hidden, higher reality which he dubbed 'the sublime'. As Lindsay comments in a letter to his friend, the writer E. H. Visiak (1878-1972),

I think most of our [Lindsay's and Visiak's] conflicts spring from our possessing different vocabularies. The fault is mine, and this is its explanation. Long since (for my own use) I have postulated the existence of a 'sublime' world, the word being employed for want of a better. But this 'sublime' is not identical with the 'sublime' in common use, and so confusion arises (Lindsay 1971: 45).

What is David Lindsay's 'sublime world', and how could it be explored through the medium of my creative practice, documentary film? How can one develop a critical lexicon for discussing it? These are the questions I address in this thesis.

Lindsay presents the sublime differently in each of his six metaphysical fantasies. In *Arcturus*, it is the world of Muspel, glimpsed after the protagonist, Nightspore, has journeyed to another planet. Muspel is described by the sorcerer Slofork as "“Not Nothing, but Something”" (Lindsay 1992: 69); the ascetic Catice describes it as "“our *home*”" (Lindsay 1992: 151; emphasis in original).

In *The Haunted Woman*, Lindsay makes the sublime the ghostly dimension accessed by means of a mysterious staircase in a country house, leading to three rooms, in which one can learn one's true nature, and that of other people. The rooms also give the characters a view of

an ancient landscape, inhabited by a mysterious musician, where spring and autumn exist simultaneously (Lindsay 1987: 175).

In *Sphinx*, Lindsay constructs the sublime by means of a machine that can record dreams. The dreams appear like a film loop, repeatedly showing one character, the composer Lore Jensen, lost in a wood, and apparently in danger (Lindsay 2018: 106-107; 136-137; 157-158; 205-214). As the novel progresses, Lore is indeed in danger, so the dreams are also precognitive.

The Violet Apple depicts the sublime as a transcendental state caused by eating apples said to be descended from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Eden. In the final chapter, Lindsay's characters cannot express exactly what it is they have experienced (Lindsay 1978: 246-250).

In *Devil's Tor*, the sublime occurs in visions experienced on, near, or relating to, Devil's Tor on Dartmoor: a transfigured landscape, a prehistoric goddess figure (Lindsay 2008: 148-151; 379-380).

Finally, in *The Witch*, a series of dreams and visions affect the protagonist, a writer, and his circle, as he attempts to meet a young woman said to be a witch.

Arcturus is an interplanetary fantasy, a strict dualist vision (Lindsay 1992: 292-302). *The Haunted Woman* is a haunted house story; Lindsay introduces the ghostly element by inventing an episode of Anglo-Saxon mythology (Lindsay 1987: 39-40). *Sphinx* is science fiction, concerning dreams, and the sphinx of ancient Egypt (Lindsay 2018: 20-21). *The Violet Apple* employs Christian symbolism, and the action is set over Easter. The themes of the Easter story are reflected in the spiritual 'resurrection' that Anthony Kerr and Haidee Croyland experience after eating the apples (Lindsay 1978: 189). *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch* present mythological concepts related to paganism: a goddess, the Great Mother, in *Devil's Tor*; female hierophants and an avatar of a non-Christian deity in *The Witch*.

Lindsay moves from a strict, almost Manichaeian dualism in *Arcturus*, *The Haunted Woman* and *Sphinx*, to an idiosyncratic mystical pagan proto-feminism in *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*. The issue of sublime experience links all these. Lindsay's most striking and memorable scenes involve landscapes – and views of landscapes – and he often ties moments of epiphany to music. This was something I wanted to explore through filmmaking.

In addition to the six novels, Lindsay left a long philosophical manuscript, written over many years, *Sketch Notes for a New System of Philosophy* (National Library of Scotland MS. 27247).¹ This typescript contains 545 aphorisms, 471 of which remain unpublished.² The *Sketch Notes* are arranged in random order, and deal with music, dreams, art, women, landscape, writing, and solitude, amongst others. Many notes discuss the sublime: the word appears fifty-nine times; 'sublimity', fourteen times. It is the single most-discussed topic in the manuscript. He treats the sublime in the *Sketch Notes* much more directly than in his novels, in the form of aphorisms:

The Sublime world must not be imagined as thin, incorporeal and grey - a land of ghosts and phantoms; but as far more real and solid than this coloured cubic and heavy world of ours (SN 287; Lindsay 1972: 25).

The Sublime is not a mood, but a state of soul, which is reached beyond a certain level of feeling, like the boiling-point in liquids (SN 163; Lindsay 2002: 392).

¹ The *Sketch Notes* were 'compiled from this... 10 years of his notebooks, right after he published *Arcturus*. It seems to have been done around 1921 or '22, though it's actually undated' (Anderson, filmed interview 2016). Lindsay refers the *Sketch Notes* (also known as the *Philosophical Notes*) in a letter to E. H. Visiak of 29 November 1921 (1971: 45), where he writes: 'By all means take the copy of my 'Notes' for your friend and yourself [...] I merely sent them along to you to save myself the trouble of repeating some of my views in other words [...] One day I hope to put them to some literary use [...] I am at present keeping them strictly *private* [emphasis in original].' It is not clear what Lindsay meant by 'some literary use', nor exactly who Visiak's friend was. Bernard Sellin states that Visiak knew Walter de la Mare (1873-1956) 'sufficiently well to get him to read Lindsay's *Philosophical Notes*' (Sellin 1981: 42). In a letter of 12 January 1922, Lindsay writes: 'De la Mare, of course, I know the name, but I have read nothing of his' (Lindsay 1971: 46), which seems to confirm that Visiak had shown De la Mare a copy of the *Sketch Notes*. Another feature of the *Notes* that suggests an early date of composition is the absence in the TS. to a divine feminine archetype: Lindsay uses this only later, in *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*. He does create a prototype redemptive feminine figure in the character of Isabelle Barbesson in *Adventures of M. de Mailly* (written 1923, published 1926), and on that basis, the *Sketch Notes* may predate 1923.

² Fifty-four *Sketch Notes* were published in *Lines Review*, no. 40, March 1972, edited by Robin Fulton. These were later republished in *Abraxas* no. 6 (1996), together with a further selection under the title 'Twenty Philosophical Notes'. The Savoy edition of *A Voyage to Arcturus* (Manchester, 2002) includes all but one of the previously published notes as an appendix (Lindsay 2002: 386-398). The note missing from the Savoy edition is number 52, which can be found in *Lines Review* (Lindsay 1972: 22).

This interested me: what does he mean by something ‘far more real and solid’ than our everyday world, yet at the same time, ‘not a mood, but a state of soul’? Inspired by the amazing images and innovative references to music in Lindsay’s novels, and intrigued by his commitment to represent the sublime, I decided to investigate David Lindsay’s novels, the philosophical fragments, and their cultural background, using the medium of experimental documentary; I called my film *A Vast Shadow House: David Lindsay’s Vision*. The title comes from a phrase in *The Witch*, ‘the vast shadow-house of earth and sky’ (Lindsay 1976: 367); it suggests a link between landscape, metaphysics and cinema.³

Issues of how to represent the unrepresentable in film were not lost on David Lindsay himself. Two years into my research, I was extremely excited to find a previously unknown notebook from 1928, in Lindsay’s own hand, in which he wrote a screen treatment for *The Haunted Woman*. The treatment is incomplete (it breaks off just after Isbel and Judge have met in the upper rooms, equivalent to chapter 10 of the novel); it almost certainly remained private; it remains unpublished.⁴ In it, Lindsay directly grapples with the problem of how to represent on screen what he saw as the core aspects of his novel: that the everyday world is false; that his protagonists are fundamentally challenged by their glimpses of the sublime; and that this is a form of gnosis. (I discuss the 1928 notebook in Chapter 3, along with my own strategies for adapting Lindsay’s work for the screen.) These original primary sources, and my immersion in Lindsay and his works, led me to this meditation on how to represent the unrepresentable.

³ J. B. Pick also adapted the phrase for the title of his book, *The Great Shadow House: Essays on the Metaphysical Tradition in Scottish Fiction* (1993).

⁴ Formerly in the possession of J. B. Pick, it came into the possession of one of my informants, Dr. Steven Sutcliffe. Sutcliffe plans to donate the notebook to the National Library of Scotland, along with other unpublished Lindsay material, in due course.

L2 David Lindsay: An Introduction

David Lindsay was born in Lewisham, South London, in 1876, to a Scottish father and an English mother. Lindsay was brought up in Lewisham and Jedburgh. Lindsay had hopes of going to university – he won a scholarship – but his father deserted the family in 1888, and Lindsay went out to work to support his mother, sister, and aunt. He worked for Price Forbes, a firm of Lloyds underwriters, until 1916, when he was conscripted. Lindsay enlisted in the Grenadier Guards and performed his war service in London. The same year, Lindsay married eighteen-year-old Jacqueline Silver (1898-1966), whom he met at a literary discussion club. On demobilisation in 1919, Lindsay refused a directorship of Price Forbes and moved to Cornwall with his wife to become a writer, his long-held ambition. Two daughters were born, in 1919 and 1921.

What is known of Lindsay's personality and tastes comes from his surviving letters, the *Sketch Notes*, and Bernard Sellin's *Life and Works of David Lindsay* (1981: 8-59). Sellin's book – the only biography to date – is an important source because Sellin corresponded with people who actually knew Lindsay – his daughter, Diana Moon; his friend, Robert Barnes – and could provide first-hand information (Sellin 1981: xx).

So I learned that Lindsay was a keen concert-goer, that he revered Beethoven and loved German literature and philosophy. Lindsay discusses Beethoven's symphonies in letters to Robert Barnes (14 and 31 October 1930), and Blake (17 March c. 1932-4) (NLS Acc. 9956). According to an undated note by Barnes, Lindsay thought that Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) was 'the greatest English novel'.⁵ In letters to Visiak, Lindsay mentions a fondness for Goethe (Lindsay 1971: 44, 46), Tieck (1971: 48) and 'the early German romanticists' (1971: 49); he remarks that his knowledge of contemporary literature is

⁵ Robert Barnes, undated note, possibly intended for Bernard Sellin, c. 1973-1975 (Robert Barnes Notes).

‘shamefully deficient’ (1971: 46; Lindsay’s emphasis), and that – in the winter of 1921-1922 – he was reading mainly Roman history (1971: 46). Lindsay writes in the same letter that contemporary literature is dominated by what he calls ‘the sentimental school’ of which he has ‘a natural horror’; he prefers ‘ignorance to infection’ (1971: 46). Elsewhere, Lindsay comments that facetiousness is ‘the spirit of the age’ in ‘nine out of ten books’, which ‘introduces the poison of superficiality wherever it appears’ (1971: 49). Visiak himself says that the author who had influenced Lindsay the most was George MacDonald (1824-1905) (Visiak 1970b: 98).

Lindsay finished *Arcturus* in March 1920 (Pick 1970a: 14). He sent it to Methuen, who accepted it. *Arcturus* is an interplanetary fantasy with strong metaphysical themes, depicting a world in which everyday reality is false, full of delusions, with a true, higher world hidden beyond it. This higher world is the sublime, called Muspel in the novel, and Lindsay uses the *leitmotif* of drumbeats to hint at its existence. *A Voyage to Arcturus* was published in September 1920 to largely uncomprehending reviews. The *Times Literary Supplement* review (30 September 1920), for instance, does not describe the book as a fantasy. The anonymous reviewer (identified by Douglas A. Anderson as A. M. Champneys) references Poe and Baudelaire, and describes the book as ‘the worst kind of nightmare’ (Champneys 1920).⁶ The book had some admirers: *The Dundee Courier* described *Arcturus* as a ‘striking romance’ and ‘a considerable *succès d’estime*’ (Anon. 1924: 7). This did not translate into sales, as Lindsay admitted in a letter to Visiak (1971: 40).

Lindsay’s second novel, *The Haunted Woman* (1922), is a kind of ghost story, although Isbel Loment, the female protagonist, is not haunted in any conventional sense. The plot centres around Runhill Court, an old manor house in the South Downs, in which there is a staircase

⁶ The review is at: <http://ashiverinthearchives.blogspot.com/2017/08/a-voyage-to-arcturus-review-to-make.html>. Accessed 27 December 2019.

that only appears to certain people. On climbing it, Isbel finds rooms wherein she attains knowledge of her own true nature. These rooms look out onto a landscape that appears to be Anglo-Saxon England, and in the landscape, an enigmatic musician. Like its predecessor, *The Haunted Woman* sold poorly.

Trying to find an audience, Lindsay changed tack again with *Sphinx* (1923), to science fiction. Nicholas Cabot, a young engineer, has invented a machine that can record dreams. The dreams in *Sphinx* are the equivalent of Muspel in *A Voyage to Arcturus*, and the upper rooms at Runhill Court in *The Haunted Woman*. Nicholas sees a neighbour, a composer called Lore Jensen, in danger. Their two fates eventually cross, and they enter the world of dreams together. Despite some good reviews, *Sphinx* also sold in small quantities (Sellin 1981: 29).

Lindsay and his family moved to a smaller house in 1923. Here Lindsay wrote *The Violet Apple*, a novel about a man and a woman who eat apples said to be descended from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis. Lindsay could not place the novel with a publisher (Pick 1978: 10). It finally appeared in 1976.

Lindsay changed tack yet again with *Adventures of Monsieur de Mailly* (1926), set in France in 1700. The novel follows the fortunes of Gaston de Mailly, a former soldier who lives by his wits. Here, Lindsay dramatises his theme of a false everyday world in the guise of the court of Louis XIV and the chicanery of its Machiavellian courtiers. The novel again did not sell well in Britain; it found a publisher in New York, appearing in 1927 as *A Blade for Sale* (Sellin 1981: 249).

Lindsay and his family left Cornwall for Sussex in 1929, settling in the village of Ferring. Here Lindsay completed *Devil's Tor* (1932). Set on Dartmoor, the novel tells of a man and a woman brought together by the workings of fate to produce a child who will become a messiah figure.⁷ Lindsay changes the philosophical framework here. Instead of the dualist worldview

⁷ *Devil's Tor* shares the theme of a magical, messianic child with Aleister Crowley's novel *Moonchild* (1929).

of *Arcturus*, he creates reverence for a Great Mother figure, an avatar of ‘the Ancient’, the creator deity. The book has lengthy digressions into art, history, psychology, and mythology.

It had some good reviews. Rebecca West, in *The Daily Telegraph*, wrote:

The book is an excellent specimen of its kind, and the mystical portions have the virtue of sincerity, as if Mr Lindsay had scorned to use anything to play the part of truth in his story that he did not believe might be the truth (West 1932).

West added that the contemporary novel, ‘so inveterately kind in its demands on the human attention’ has ‘incapacitated the novel reader from making [the] effort which is necessary if the novelist is to make his legitimate effect’ (West 1932). The implication here is that an effort is required on the part of the reader if Lindsay’s ‘legitimate effect’ is to succeed. This perceptive comment has ramifications for some ideas relating to cinema, proposed by Andrei Tarkovsky and Paul Schrader, which call for active viewing of a film. (See Chapters 2 and 3.)

Hugh l’Anson Fausset in *The Manchester Guardian* wrote that *Devil’s Tor* is a ‘vast, formidable and overpowering book [...] its scope is colossal [...] astonishing force and a rare visionary penetration’ (Fausset, 1932). L. P. Hartley echoed this in *Weekend Review*:

What is of value in him is a complete originality of mind and great intensity of feeling. He is so different from other writers without in the least wishing to be different. He has an extraordinary sense of spiritual forces; they are perfectly real to him, and enable him to present the supernatural without self-consciousness (Hartley 1932).

Still, the book only sold 650 copies (Wolfe 1982: 10).

Lindsay bought the rights back to *A Voyage to Arcturus*; by the early 1930s, it was out of print, and remained so. He embarked on his next novel, *The Witch*, in which he intended to reconcile the philosophies of *A Voyage to Arcturus* and *Devil’s Tor*. Again, he changed approach. Ragnar Pole, a failed writer, hears of Urda Noett, a young woman said to be a witch. Ragnar sets out to find her house in the South Downs, where Urda tells Ragnar of the true nature of reality.

Lindsay spent at least seven years writing and rewriting *The Witch* (1932-39). The final chapter grew from an early 17-page draft (NLS MS 27252)⁸ to the version left incomplete at his death, running to 252 pages. The novel is stylistically radical, successfully blending dreaming and waking states, as Virginia Woolf had done in novels of the same period (*The Voyage Out* (1915), *The Waves* (1931)). *The Witch* may also owe something to Walter Evans-Wentz's edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927); and to Wyndham Lewis's *The Childermass* (1928), set entirely in the afterlife.

Money problems continued. The Lindsays moved to Hove in 1938; Jacqueline Lindsay opened a boarding house. When war broke out the following year, the Lindsays had service personnel billeted on them. Lindsay was depressed by the war, and seems to have abandoned *The Witch*. He died in July 1945.⁹

In the immediate post-war period, several key figures took an interest in his work. Gollancz republished *A Voyage to Arcturus* in 1946, and *The Haunted Woman* in 1947. In the same year, C. S. Lewis published an article praising *Arcturus* for its originality:

There is no recipe for this kind of writing. But part of the secret is that the author (like Kafka) is recording a lived dialectic. His Tormance [the planet on which much of the novel's action is set] is a region of the spirit. He is the first writer to discover what I "other planets" are really good for in fiction. [...] To construct plausible and moving "other worlds" you must draw on the only real "other world" we know, that of the spirit (Lewis 1947: 98).

The author and critic J. B. Pick (1921-2015) discovered Lindsay's works in 1946, when the recently-republished *A Voyage to Arcturus* was discussed on BBC radio's *Books and Writers* programme.¹⁰ Pick contacted Lindsay's widow, Jacqueline, who gave him the manuscripts of Lindsay's unpublished works, including *The Violet Apple* and *The Witch*. Pick became one of Lindsay's earliest champions, writing critical essays about him (Pick 1951, 1964), and

⁸ Apparently the earliest extant TS.

⁹ Lindsay died of an untreated dental abscess that had become gangrenous.

¹⁰ Broadcast on the Light Programme, 29 November 1946. Author Gerald Bullett (1893-1958) chaired a discussion on recent books with Sheila Shannon (Sellin 1981: 237, fn. 54).

collaborating with Lindsay's friend, E. H. Visiak, and the writer Colin Wilson (1931-2013) to produce the first book on Lindsay, *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay* (1970). Pick eventually succeeded in getting *The Violet Apple* and *The Witch* published (Lindsay 1976, both novels in one volume; 1978, *The Violet Apple* standalone U. K. edition). Pick continued to write on Lindsay for more than forty years (1951-1993).

Lindsay's work found its widest audience in the 1960s. In 1963, Macmillan published the first U.S. edition of *A Voyage to Arcturus*, and Gollancz brought out a new edition in the U.K.; this is the edition Colin Wilson read. Wilson included a chapter on Lindsay in his book *Eagle and Earwig: Essays on Books and Writers* (1965), describing *A Voyage to Arcturus* as 'one of the strangest, and most certainly one of the greatest, books of the twentieth century' (Wilson 1965: 128). Wilson went on to collaborate with Pick and Visiak, and contributed introductions to *The Violet Apple and The Witch* (1976), *Sphinx* (1988), and to Bernard Sellin's *Life and Works of David Lindsay* (1981).

The huge commercial success of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5) in paperback (Ace, Ballantine, 1965), led Ballantine to seek further titles that could be marketed as fantasy. On the recommendation of Colin Wilson (Ewing 2011), they issued *A Voyage to Arcturus* for the first time in paperback in 1968, and incorporated it into the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series shortly afterwards. A new readership – largely young, countercultural – provided *Arcturus* with a new readership (Williamson 2011), and Lindsay's novel enjoyed a similar niche alongside Huxley, Hesse and Tolkien.¹¹

A Voyage to Arcturus remained in print. The other novels followed: *The Haunted Woman* (Van Nuys, CA, 1975; Edinburgh, 1987); *The Violet Apple and The Witch* (Chicago, 1976); *The Violet Apple* (London, 1978); *Devil's Tor* (New York, 1978); *Sphinx* (New York/London,

¹¹ For Huxley and countercultural trends, see Poller (2019); for Hesse, see Gray (2018); for Tolkien, see Liptak (2013), Ciabattari 2014).

1988). The five novels published in Lindsay's lifetime entered the public domain in the U.K. in 2016, and *Sphinx*, *Adventures of M. de Mailly*, and *Devil's Tor* were republished in e-book and paperback editions.

I.3 Critical Literature on Lindsay

The earliest critical writing on Lindsay dates from his lifetime (Visiak 1940), and shortly after his death (Pick 1951). Visiak, a Milton scholar, reads *A Voyage to Arcturus* in Miltonic terms, comparing Lindsay's antagonist, Crystalman, with the Satan of *Paradise Lost* (Lindsay 1971: 8). Visiak draws further parallels – with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, with Buddhist philosophy, and with Blake – noting that the novel is 'disturbing' and contains 'peculiar subconscious energy' (Lindsay 1971: 7). Most astutely for me is the comment that *Arcturus* is not 'magical in the imaginative sense', but 'in some more integral way that is indescribable', whose effect 'upon the mind, or the nerves' is dependent upon 'the temperament of the reader' (Lindsay 1971: 7). Visiak implies that the novel touches on things not commonly expressed, in a way that makes unusual demands on the reader. Pick similarly describes *Arcturus* as 'a strange Scottish novel', dwelling on what he takes as Lindsay's uncompromising style and philosophy. Between them, these two early papers introduce many themes – perceived idiosyncrasies of style and form, unusual philosophical outlook – that were taken up by later scholars.

Academic scholarship on Lindsay begins from the late 1960s onwards, following the paperback publication of *A Voyage to Arcturus*. Lindsay's name remains associated with *Arcturus*; about half the critical literature on Lindsay focusses on this one book. This focus is unfortunate; characterising Lindsay as an austere, absolute dualist. Lindsay's oeuvre as a whole, though, shows that he evolved and changed tack, ending by *The Witch* in a much more

nuanced, moderate dualism with pronounced pagan and feminist overtones. I wanted to address this in my film, especially the hypnotic way Lindsay uses landscape as a conduit for the sublime.

The main critics on Lindsay present him as drawing on George MacDonald, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer (Visiak 1970: 98; Mensing 1977; Wolfe 1982: 11); as a tragic failure (Pick 1951: 171; Wolfe 1985: 547); as an allegorist (Schofield 1972c; Hume 1978; Lawler 1979; Westmacott 1988; Wheat 2008; Duncan 2012); as hard to classify: Rabkin (1977) sees *Arcturus* as fantasy with science fiction elements, Bleiler (1990) describes *Sphinx* as science fiction. Lindsay has been hailed as a recognisably Scottish writer, dealing with Scottish themes (Pick 1993; Manlove 1994b; McClure 2012); whose work explores Platonic and Neoplatonic themes (Kegler 1993), or *via negativa* theology (Wheat 2008); or as an author who only wrote one good book (*Arcturus*) (Wilson 2010; Bloom, filmed interview 2016).

Peter Burke speaks of ‘the twin paradoxes of tradition’: that innovation may hide the persistence of tradition; and that outward signs of tradition may hide the presence of innovation (Burke 2004: 26). The same, I think, is true of David Lindsay’s fiction, and its strange afterlife in popular culture. Recognisable traditions can be detected in Lindsay’s work, and yet he remains outside them. Colin Wilson argued that Lindsay was ‘expressing the spirit of the age as much as [T. S.] Eliot, [T. E.] Hulme, Lawrence (both D. H. and T. E. - the latter had much in common with Lindsay), Wyndham Lewis, and the European existentialists’ (Wilson 1970: 90).

I have come now to see Lindsay in wider contexts, adjacent to, and in dialogue with, the major aesthetic movements of his time (Modernism, Symbolism, Neo-romanticism, Expressionism). His concerns with other worlds was shared in many manifestations of the occult revival (spiritualism and séances, magic and psychological experimentation); his interest

in dreams with psychoanalysis. These cultural contexts explain and enrich aspects of his work both for the researcher and for the twenty-first-century filmmaker.

Consider, for example, Lindsay in comparison with the much more famous Scottish author George MacDonald (1824-1905), who enjoyed commercial success with his fantasies for adults and children. These include *Phantastes* (1858), 'The Golden Key' (1867), *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), and *Lilith* (1895). Lindsay acknowledged a debt to MacDonald (Visiak 1970b: 98). Gary K. Wolfe describes Lindsay as 'MacDonald's most genuine direct heir' (1974: 132), commenting that 'more than any other writer he picked up and developed the form of fantasy that MacDonald had pioneered' (1974: 135). Wolfe points out also that *Phantastes*, *Lilith* and *Arcturus* employ the same basic story (and even similar imagery), in 'three different ideological guises' (1974: 135); another parallel for Lindsay's oeuvre.

For Wolfe, the chief difference between the two writers is in their treatment of nature. MacDonald's characters seek unity with it (and the benevolent deity behind it). Lindsay's characters, on the contrary, learn that all of nature is false, masking a 'stern, Schopenhauerian notion of the essential "nothingness" of reality' (1974: 139).¹²

This is important when I try to pin down what is so original in Lindsay's imagery and narratives, and what draws me to him as a filmmaker. Lindsay deviates from his antecedents, especially in the ways in which he develops symbolic/allegorical form (McClure (1974b), Hume (1978), Lawler (1979), Pick (1980b), and Moore (2002)). Lindsay uses the symbolic mode for quite different purposes, and with dramatically different effects, to MacDonald (Wolfe (1974), Pick (1993)). MacDonald was a Christian apologist, Lindsay was a Calvinist-influenced opponent of Christian orthodoxy, seeking inspiration in Nietzsche and Norse myth.

¹² Wolfe quotes Lindsay's *Sketch Note* (no. 545): 'Schopenhauer's "Nothing"... is identical with my Muspel; that is the *real* [i.e. Sublime] world' (1974: 139). Wolfe suggests that the chief development in the Symbolic form that Lindsay makes with *Arcturus* is that 'its ideational basis is largely *sui generis*, while MacDonald's [books] have clear fictional antecedents' (Wolfe 1974: 139).

His books have a ‘profoundly different’ atmosphere to MacDonald’s work (Pick 1993: 73). It is this atmosphere – when Lindsay successfully imbues his philosophical preoccupations into marvellous, striking visual situations – that interests me.

A good account of this ‘profoundly different’ atmosphere is Van Mensing’s (1977) reading of the landscapes of *A Voyage to Arcturus*:

A Voyage to Arcturus is a visualization, a reification of the abstract concepts of Nietzsche, an attempt to demonstrate visually and by example what is only baldly stated in the works of the philosopher (Mensing 1977: vi).

Among the Nietzschean elements in the book, Mensing points to the two suns, Alppain and Branchspell, ‘emblems of the moralities of pleasure and of pain’ (Mensing 1977: viii). This echoes a comment in Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, wherein the symbol of two suns illuminating the same planet enables its denizens to observe ‘different moralities’;¹³ this is precisely what Lindsay’s characters on Tormance do.

The suns have differing effects on Maskull. Branchspell is linked with pleasure, when Maskull finds he can hear the sound that the sun’s rays make, ‘a kind of faint Aeolian harp’ (Lindsay 1992: 56). All Maskull’s sense organs start to show him beauties and wonders which he had hitherto not suspected (Lindsay 1992: 55). Lindsay describes this heightened awareness in terms of music, a ‘mighty sense symphony’ (Lindsay 1992: 56). When Maskull finally sees the other sun, Alppain, rise, ‘it agitated and tormented him, like the opening bars of a supernatural symphony’ (Lindsay 1992: 288). Alppain in fact proves fatal, as Maskull dies as the sun rises (Lindsay 1992: 291).

Lindsay’s underground region of Threal echoes Nietzsche’s Kingdom of God as ‘a kingdom of the underworld, a *souterrain* kingdom, a ghetto kingdom.... (*The Antichrist* 17)’¹⁴ (Mensing

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1966), 145-6, #215. Mensing notes that Gary K. Wolfe argues for a George MacDonald influence for this image. See Wolfe 1982: 136.

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. H. L. Mencken. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1918. E-text: <https://ia802609.us.archive.org/31/items/theantichrist19322gut/19322-8.txt> Accessed 13 September 2017.

1977: xiii). The Threal chapter is the ‘most explicitly Christian episode of the novel’ (Mensing 1977: xiii), complete with a trinitarian religion whose deities are Faceny (face, existence), Amfuse (fuse or relation), and Thire (feeling). Maskull’s travelling companion at this stage of the novel, Haunte, remarks with a yawn, ‘There are marvellous philosophers in your underground hole’ (Lindsay 1992: 249).

So Nietzsche is evidently a source for Lindsay’s imaginary, whom we know he read and admired (Pick 1970a: 7-8; Sellin 1981: 53-4). Nietzsche (along with Schopenhauer) ‘did not provide his [Lindsay’s] perceptions, they confirmed them’ (Pick 1970a: 8). The principal difference between Lindsay and Nietzsche is that, for Lindsay, there was another world – the sublime – but for the German, there was only this world.¹⁵

Novalis (Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772 –1801), was another important source for Lindsay. Adelheid Kegler argues for parallels between *Arcturus* and Novalis’s *Klingsohr-Märchen*, specifically the idea of two realities, a higher and a lower (Kegler 1993: 28-29). In Lindsay’s novel, the Earth and Tormance represent the lower world, Muspel the higher. But what of the novel’s other landscapes? How do they function? Could we read them as embodying ideas other than those of Nietzsche or Novalis?

Consider the scene on Shaping’s Causeway in *A Voyage to Arcturus*. Lindsay describes the causeway as a natural embankment, twenty miles long, running in a straight line from south to north. Its steep sides plunge away to the valley floor, ten thousand feet below, one side lost in shadow, while the other basks in sunlight. The path that runs along its top edge is wide enough to admit one person. When Panawe encounters the sage Slofork on the pathway, the scene ends with the philosopher committing suicide by jumping into the abyss. While Murray Ewing (filmed interview, 2013) sees this scene as echoing the prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where a buffoon jumps over a man on a tightrope, I feel that such dramatic terrain – sunlight,

¹⁵ For Nietzsche and the sublime, see Ansell-Pearson (2013: 226-252).

shadow, a narrow way between them – suggests a worldview informed by dualist thinking. The narrow pathway along the top of the causeway calls to mind Bunyan’s ‘narrow way’ (Bunyan 1965: 59). What is also striking about this scene is how cinematic it is, as if Lindsay wants the reader to *see* it, rather than to dwell on its philosophical ramifications.

Other landscapes in *Arcturus* are the Ifdawn Mareest, a mountainous region where new peaks are created in a matter of moments due to violent seismic activity; likewise, they can collapse into the abyss without warning just as suddenly. This region is inhabited by people who live by and for willpower, recalling Nietzsche again; but Maskull’s comment that the landfalls remind him of ‘the last destruction of the world’ (Lindsay 1992: 115) could perhaps be a reference to the Great War.

Should we therefore read Lindsay as a member of the ‘shell-shocked generation’ (Stableford, filmed interview, 2018)? T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) is a product of the same milieu. Eliot published his poem in the same year as Lindsay’s *The Haunted Woman*: both cast a critical eye across the superficialities of 1920s polite society; both employ occult trappings (Eliot’s ‘wicked pack of cards’, Lindsay’s haunted staircase and upper rooms); both evoke a mythic past (Arthurian for Eliot; Anglo-Saxon for Lindsay); music in both functions as code and structuring device (for music in Eliot, see Hughes 1992 and Mullin 2016; music in Lindsay will be a subject I examine in Chapter 1).

There are broader thematic similarities between the Modernist Eliot and the ‘strange and obscure “Scotsman”’ (Wolfe 1985: 541). Eliot’s line, ‘I had not thought death had undone so many’, resonates with Lindsay’s constant theme of the revival of the ‘dead’ – spiritually, philosophically, and artistically – throughout his oeuvre. Krag tells Nightspore at the end of *Arcturus* that he has to undergo the ordeal of climbing the stairs in the tower on the island of Muspel, ‘To have [his] wounds healed’ (Lindsay 1992: 294); Lindsay describes Anthony Kerr as ‘a man risen from the dead’ after he eats one of the apples in *The Violet Apple* (Lindsay

1978: 189); Ragnar Pole in *The Witch* realises he has been waiting his whole life for ‘someone [to] knock upon the door of [his] heart [...] and cry: “Cast off your chains!”’ (Lindsay 1976: 262).¹⁶

I.4 Research Origins

I discovered Lindsay in the late 1980s by way of the mediaevalist, theologian, and author C. S. Lewis (1898-1963). In his lecture, ‘On Science Fiction’ (Cambridge University English Club, 24 November 1955; Lewis 1966), Lewis wrote,

If good novels are comments on life, good stories of this sort (which are very much rarer) are actual additions to life; they give, like certain rare dreams, sensations we never had before, and enlarge our conception of the range of possible experience (Lewis 1966: 70-71).

Lewis listed works that, for him, fell into, or near, this rare category: Homer’s *Odyssey*, Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786), Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (c. 1799-1800), George MacDonald’s *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895), E. R. Eddison’s *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922), Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), William Hope Hodgson’s *The Night Land* (1912) and ‘that shattering, intolerable, and irresistible work, David Lindsay’s *Voyage to Arcturus*’ (Lewis 1966: 70-71). This drew my attention, as I had read and admired Hodgson’s novel. I decided that, if David Lindsay was being compared to William Hope Hodgson, I really ought to read his work.¹⁷

What unites my interest in Hodgson, and Lindsay, is my appreciation for what can best be described as a visionary sense, an attempt to capture ‘certain rare dreams’ and render them in

¹⁶ John Herdman notes another parallel between Lindsay and Eliot: the figure of the mysterious musician in *The Haunted Woman* ‘may lie behind the almost identical figure described by T. S. Eliot in Part III of *Ash Wednesday*’. Herdman thanks Dr. John Harvey of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, for making the initial observation (Herdman 1977: 17).

¹⁷ I originally became interested in Hodgson by way of H. P. Lovecraft’s enthusiasm for his work, in particular *The House on the Borderland* (1908). And my interest in Lovecraft had originally been sparked by a comparison of Lovecraft’s work to the paintings of Bosch, the epitome of late mediaeval/early Renaissance ‘certain rare dreams’.

prose. Since childhood I have had an interest in the weird and uncanny; this developed as an adult into an interest in visionary or altered states of consciousness. It seemed to me that there was a side of human experience that seemed more intense or in some way more ‘real’ than what might be termed ‘normal everyday experience’. What was this mysterious, elusive state? I wanted to find out. I read weird and gothic fiction, I read Aldous Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception* and other accounts of mystical experience, I studied the paintings of Bosch and Brueghel, I watched surrealist films. In all these instances, there was a sense of the writer or artist struggling to express something that might be beyond the limits of representation. As Lindsay’s contemporary, the Welsh writer Arthur Machen (1863-1947) put it, ‘One dreams in fire and works in clay’ (Machen 1988: 150). This tension became an important factor in my interest in the subject. Writers like Lindsay seem to be straining against the limits of their medium.

My interest in the sublime or inexpressible filtered through to my interest in film. By the time I first read *Arcturus*, in the late 1980s, I was already aware of the German filmmaker Werner Herzog (b. 1942), in particular *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974). Herzog uses landscape in this film to represent Kaspar’s inner condition; imagery that I found quite startling in its originality. Herzog maintained that landscapes in his films were always meant to represent an inner landscape (Ames 2014: 117). I was intrigued by this cinematic play between outer and inner experience, between what is seen and what has to be imagined. Herzog’s work seemed to exemplify Lewis’s concept of a ‘certain rare dream’.

In 1987, I saw the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky’s (1932-1986) *The Sacrifice* (1986), an even more important film for me. The entire plot, taking place during one Swedish white night, blends dreaming and waking so successfully that it is difficult to tell one apart from the other; Lindsay treated liminal states similarly in *The Witch*. Both Tarkovsky’s film and Lindsay’s novel also feature a powerful female character, said to have supernatural powers, to

whom the respective protagonists go in order to achieve resolution. In a further parallel, Tarkovsky's film was a reworking of his earlier unfilmed script *The Witch*. Aside from a lifelong interest in the supernatural, Tarkovsky was fascinated with etymologies of the word *ведьма* (ved'ma, 'witch'), and discovered that it is derived from the Russian verb meaning 'to know' (Martin 2011: 171). David Lindsay may well have known the etymology of the word in English, from the Indo-European root *wid*, 'to know, to be wise'.

This is an entirely appropriate connection, because I recognised Lindsay as a gnostic writer. He emphasises in his books the gaining of knowledge, experientially rather than intellectually. Everyday reality is false, with the true reality – the sublime – somehow removed from this. (See Chapter 1.) 'Gnostic' scenes in Lindsay include Nightspore's ascent of the tower on the island of Muspel (*Arcturus*); Isbel Loment's visits to the phantom upstairs rooms in Runhill Court (*The Haunted Woman*); Ragnar Pole's walk to Morion House in *The Witch*. I discussed this aspect of Lindsay's works in the second edition of my book *The Gnostics: The First Christian Heretics* (Martin 2010: 135-138). I also published a paper on the experiential role of walking in Lindsay (Martin 2015). This paper discussed the experiential nature of Lindsay's philosophy, and the way in which the Lindsayan gnosis is frequently tied to solitary journeys on foot through wild, desolate, or empty landscapes. This paper was the beginning of the ruminations on Lindsay's landscapes, which find further expression in my experimental documentary on Lindsay.

Landscape is as important for Tarkovsky as it is for Herzog. And there was one additional aspect of *The Sacrifice* that fascinated me: the use of sound. Throughout the film, we hear, but never see, a shepherdess calling to her flock using the traditional Swedish form of herding call, known as *kulning*. The sound appears to be relatively 'normal' at first; what Michel Chion has termed acousmatic sound, meaning sound from,

the overall environment that envelops a scene and inhabits its space without raising questions about the location of its source (Chion 2019: 202).

Tarkovsky encourages the audience to imagine that the shepherdess might appear at some point, because he does show the sheep. But then, even in the middle of the night, when strange things are starting to happen, Tarkovsky adds her *kulning* again. Tarkovsky is ‘raising questions about the location of the source’ – even the nature of the source – because he makes the herding call a leitmotif for the supernatural. It is almost as if the shepherdess is party to knowledge that the characters are not. As with Herzog’s concept of landscape as an inner state (Ames 2014: 117), Tarkovsky uses sound to complicate a sense of ‘out there’ and ‘in here;’ to make the boundaries between the self and the world porous.

Lindsay uses non-diegetic sound, music and voice in a very similar way in his novels, and it struck me that this could form a central thread in my approach to exploring Lindsay’s sublime in an experimental documentary. It also became clear that there had been no substantial discussion of the use of sound, music and voice in Lindsay’s work, although several scholars – see below – have discussed Lindsay’s sublime, and the role of music. A brief consideration of Lindsay’s metaphysics and concept of the sublime demonstrates a wider context in which to situate his work – away from debates about *Arcturus* as allegory, or the value of the rest of Lindsay’s oeuvre – and also provides a basis for my thinking on how to film Lindsay’s ideas. One must come to terms with Lindsay’s philosophy in order to express and allude to his ideas on screen.

L.5 An Inexpressible Sublime

According to E. H. Visiak, Lindsay's sublime is 'inexpressible', 'an absolute negation of mundane conditions', that 'correspond[s] to the Buddhistic *Nirvana*, with the great paradox, "It is not this, and it is not that" (Visiak 1970b: 101).

J. B. Pick,¹⁸ like Visiak, sees parallels with Buddhist philosophy, stating that Lindsay's sublime is similar to the Chan master Po Shan's (1575-1630) 'entirely different realm' (Pick 1993: 93).¹⁹ The philosophies of *A Voyage to Arcturus* and *The Witch* appear 'self-contradictory' (Pick 1993: 91). Lindsay 'do[es] not [...] give[...] a full and satisfactory answer' (Pick 1993: 92) to the problem of what the sublime is, although he 'makes many attempts to characterise the sublime' (Pick 1993: 94). In the *Sketch Notes*, the sublime is defined as having 'variety, freedom and grandeur' (SN 387), that is not 'a place of rest and happiness, but a place of action and grandeur' (SN 246), and that is 'not a land of ghosts and phantoms; but as far more real and solid' than our everyday world (SN 287) (Pick 1993: 94).

Pick contends that these varying definitions – as I have already noted, above – are not necessarily a sign of poor conceptual ability on Lindsay's part, arguing that Lindsay – like religious mystics – is 'concerned with an experience of reality [...] not with a system of theology' (Pick 1993: 91). Lindsay's sublime is attained through a process of stripping away of illusions, but we are then 'faced with the paradox of an emptiness which is also fullness' (Pick 1993: 93):

Muspel is beyond both One and Many, above unity and individuality. It can only be described in terms of symbols and approximations (Pick 1993: 91).

¹⁸ Pick's paper, 'David Lindsay and the Sublime' (Pick 1980a) was slightly revised for inclusion as a chapter in Pick's book *The Great Shadow House: Essays on the Metaphysical Tradition in Scottish Fiction* (1993), and this is the version I refer to here.

¹⁹ Pick cites as his source for the Po Shan term *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy* by Fung Yu-Lan (London: Routledge, 1947). However, I have not been able to find it in this book. The translation Pick uses, by however, can be found in Chang Chen-Chi, *The Practice of Zen* (London: Rider & Co, 1960), p. 80.

Lindsay's best evocations of the sublime come in *The Witch*, where Lindsay attempts to define it 'in terms of music' (Pick 1993: 95). Music (and sound) in Lindsay is something that has become central to my interest in Lindsay's sublime, and I return to it shortly; it provides a direct correlative with the medium of film, and supplies me with an extremely useful approach for me in interpreting Lindsay's works for the screen.

The sublime has long been associated with music (Hibberd and Stanyon 2020: 1). From antiquity onwards, the power of sound to move us has been acknowledged. As the aesthetics and philosophy of the sublime developed during the eighteenth century, music came to be seen as sublime also. Sublime music took the form of ambitious pieces written for large forces, often for ceremonial occasions, such as court compositions by Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687) and George Frederick Handel (1685-1759). Critics were referring to Handel's music as 'sublime' as early as 1740, and by the 1770s, such a term of reference for his work was common (Johnson 1986: 517). A performance of Handel's music in 1784 at Westminster Abbey 'elevated [the audience] into a species of delirium', according to one contemporary account (Johnson 1986: 516), while Haydn's *The Creation* (1798) took sublimity – the Biblical account of the creation of the world – as its subject matter, and the sublime quality of the music was acknowledged by contemporaries (Webster 2005: 152).

Musical theorists began to publish on the new topic of the musical sublime, among them Christian Friedrich Michaelis (1770-1834), who applied Kant's aesthetics to music, in works such as the essay 'On the Sublime in Music' ('Ueber das Erhabene in der Musik', 1801). As the symphony began to supersede large-scale choral works as the primary site of the musical sublime, so symphonies by Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven were hailed as embodying sublimity. This nineteenth-century trend to equate music with the sublime arguably reached its apogee in the large-scale operas of Richard Wagner (1813-1883). Also a musical theorist,

Wagner hailed Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (1824) as 'far beyond the region of the aesthetically Beautiful, into the sphere of the absolutely Sublime' (Downes 2014: 91).

For Bernard Sellin, Lindsay is 'an ideologist rather than a philosopher', whose ideas 'take [...] the form of intuition of a vivid intensity' (Sellin 1981: 174). This follows Pick's view that Lindsay is concerned with conveying an experience of reality, rather than making a logically consistent system. Sellin argues the concept is central to Lindsay's work (1981: 175). He summarises Lindsay's basic position as being one of 'the experience of duality', in which daily life, although 'scarcely enriching, contains elements which testify to a possible grandeur' (1981: 174).

Lindsay was familiar with definitions of the sublime proposed by Burke, Kant and Schopenhauer, but his sublime is not theirs. In the *Sketch Notes*, Lindsay writes, 'The Sublime is not beauty but something else, which is related to beauty, yet transcends it' (SN 79; Sellin 1981: 176). This suggests negativity ontology, where Lindsay defines his sublime by what it is not. Lindsay does on occasion represent the sublime more 'traditionally' through using wild, dramatic landscapes, as in the Dartmoor of *Devil's Tor* (Sellin 1981: 176). I discuss landscape further in later chapters; an important way of evoking the sublime on screen.

Elsewhere, Lindsay calls the sublime a realm of 'energy and activity' (Sellin 1981: 176-177, citing SN 444). To apprehend this, one must become detached from the world (Sellin 1981: 179); one way of achieving this is through solitude (Sellin 1981: 180). The experience creates anguish, because Lindsay and his characters recognise that the world is not their home; the sublime realm is (Sellin 1981: 180).²⁰

Lindsay 'discovered the Sublime through his own personal experience, and especially through music' (Sellin 1981: 203). Music is important to Lindsay because it is 'far from being

²⁰ There is much in much in Sellin's treatment of Lindsay's sublime that need not concern us here: the roles of sacrifice, suffering and self-abnegation (1981: 182-190); cosmogony and the nature of reality (1981: 190-196); Lindsay's relationship to spiritualism and fantasy writing (1981: 196-203); and parallels with Plato, Gnosticism, Buddhism, and Jakob Boehme (1981: 192).

a mere prop, [but] is the very pillar upon which rests Lindsay's writing' (Sellin 1981: 205). Lindsay goes beyond merely writing about characters who are musicians (Lore Jensen in *Sphinx*), or who possess refined musical taste (Isbel and Mrs Moor in *The Haunted Woman*, Ingrid Fleming in *Devil's Tor*). In each novel Lindsay uses a piece of music that 'sets the style', that acts a *leitmotif*; locations and characters are also described in terms of music (Sellin 1981: 205-207).

It became clear as I read and reread Lindsay, that his use of music provides me as a filmmaker with a parallel medium. Music became a guiding entry point into the areas I wished to explore: my responses to, and interpretations of, Lindsay's sublime. The use of music in film is one area where German filmmaker Werner Herzog (b. 1942) excels as both practitioner and theorist. Speaking of music in his film *Fata Morgana* (1971), Herzog declared,

Some images become clearer and more understandable when a particular piece of music is playing behind them. They don't physically change, but their inner qualities are exposed (Herzog 2014: 67).

This resonates with me: I wanted to, in my film on Lindsay, to 'expose inner qualities', 'open up new perspectives', and 'shift perception' in ways that echoes Lindsay's work. In doing this, I create my own filmic responses to Lindsay's sublime, as I discuss in chapter 3.

Adelheid Kegler suggests that the world is an inscrutable riddle for Lindsay's characters (Kegler 1993: 24). Lindsay presents this vision in works that reflect this inscrutability through their construction and use of language (Kegler 1993: 25). If the reader finds a key to the riddles in Lindsay's works, this key does not solve the mysteries, rather opens up new ways into Lindsay's 'maze of reflections of symbolical fragments' (Kegler 1993: 25).

How then does Lindsay conceive of this world, and higher states of existence? Each novel presents two layers of reality – the everyday world, and the sublime. Kegler identifies three techniques that, she argues, are 'fundamental principle of structure in Lindsay's literary and philosophical *oeuvre*'. These are:

[...] concepts and images are used that are contrary to the expectations of the reader, and by blending layers of reality in a labyrinthine manner.

[...] 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’, and which, consequently, claims to be a unified interpretation of reality as a whole.

(Kegler 1993: 25)

For example, Lindsay introduces a strange creature in *Arcturus* ‘the size of a new-born lamb’ (Lindsay 1992: 54). He undercuts traditional associations of innocence, and Christian connotations, by giving the creature three legs that seem to rotate about its body, and colouring it yellow and blue. The creature is described as ‘waltzing along’ (Lindsay 1992: 54); foreshadowing the novel’s demiurge, Crystalman, with whom the waltz rhythm is associated; but this is not a point the reader can understand until the end of the book (Kegler 1993: 25).

This is akin to Tarkovsky’s practice regarding plot: ‘in which often important narrative information is imparted obliquely [and] belatedly’ (Johnson and Petrie 1994: 76). This forces the viewer to recall scenes they have already watched in order to interpret the scene they are watching presently. This mode of retrospective understanding became one of my creative tools for the film on Lindsay, as I discuss in chapter 3.

Lindsay repurposes mythical motifs in *Arcturus*: he refers to Prometheus in the scene between Maskull and Dreamsinter in the Wombflash Forest (Lindsay 1992: 156). In a normal version of the Prometheus story, it should be Crystalman who steals Muspel-fire, not Maskull (Kegler 1993: 28). Lindsay has his protagonist, Maskull, ‘steal’ the Muspel-fire from a demiurge, not the true gods themselves.²¹

²¹ For Kegler, this ‘most peculiar shifting of a mythical tradition [...] is highly important for the understanding of his thought’ (Kegler 1993: 28).

Kegler further illustrates Lindsay's repurposing of earlier material by noting the novel's debt to the work of the German writer, poet and philosopher, Novalis (1772-1801). Novalis's *Arcturus*, in his *Klingsohr-Märchen*, is

a myth which contains the origins of time, the resulting unfathomable quality of appearances to the understanding and, finally, the power of restoring the world which hides in darkness (Kegler 1993: 28).

Lindsay, though, is not interested in a cosmogony in *A Voyage to Arcturus*; rather than Night as a time of incubation before the Dawn and Day of Novalis's mythology, it is 'a catastrophe of deep disintegration' (Kegler 1993: 28). It is Lindsay's depiction of the attempts by his characters to exit from this catastrophe that interests me as a filmmaker, because this is linked to their encounters with the sublime.

What I feel is important is how Lindsay repurposes material from his reading throughout his work. If *Arcturus* is Lindsay's version of the Prometheus narrative, then *The Haunted Woman* is his haunted house story. In *The Violet Apple* he takes up the myth of Paradise; in *Devil's Tor* an 'evolutionist myth'; and *The Witch* reframes the concept of the soul guide (Kegler 1993: 27). Lindsay articulates in all these a sort of 'negative ontology' (Kegler 1993: 29). His position is comparable to the *via negativa* of the mediaeval mystics: God described in terms of what God is not. It is as if Lindsay does not want to describe his sublime; he rather tries to construct his fictions to point beyond representation, language, and images.²²

Therefore Lindsay often employs paradox. He makes it clear, for example, that Morion House, the home of Urda Noett in *The Witch*, is a mystic place which appears in different forms to different characters. Bluewright sees it as an 'awful multiplicity [of] rooms, passageways, lobbies, short flights up and down, every nightmare of twist and turn.' In his last dream of the house, he finds himself in a 'lofty empty haunted room' in which '[he] saw nothing' (Lindsay

²² Kegler notes that the Sublime, for Lindsay, is beyond any sense of moral goodness, feeling, or beatific tranquillity (Kegler 1993: 30). It is beyond language, and images. Indeed, for Lindsay, images are illusory (Kegler 1993: 29).

1976: 284). Faustine Gaspary see the house in her dream as a boarded-up semi-ruin, abandoned for generations, to which she can never gain access (Lindsay 1976: 301-302). For Flint, the house is simply an abandoned, overgrown quarry, ‘where someone, at some time, saw, felt, dreamt, or imagined a house [...] It’s no use looking for remains’ (Lindsay 1976: 317-318).

It is possible that Lindsay intended his novels as anagogical works of art, spiritually uplifting or enlightening. Unlike the Pythagoreans and Platonists, masters of such anagogical traditions in the west, Lindsay wants the reader to suffer along with the characters. They might reach a high vantage point, but they still see nothing (Kegler 1993: 24).

In fact, Lindsay is a Gnostic, as already noted. Knowledge of the sublime in his work is experiential, as I recognised immediately through my own research on Gnosticism (Martin 2011). This gave me a clue as to how to work with Lindsay’s unrepresentable Sublime: I could play in my film with an experiential dimension intrinsic to cinema (and indeed to the time-based medium of the novel – Lindsay’s preferred form). I thought at once of duration. (See also Chapter 3.)

If Lindsay’s work is anagogical for Kegler, for Andrew R. Wheat, it is apophatic, or describing something by what it is not. Wheat cites Visiak’s observation that Lindsay’s sublime ‘correspond[s] to the Buddhistic *Nirvana* [...] “It is not this, and it is not that” (Visiak 1970b: 101) (Wheat 2008: 113). For Lindsay, in this account, Lindsay’s sublime is ‘a profound absence, a “negativity” [...] at the very centre of Lindsay’s allegorical *cosmographia*’ (Wheat 2008: 106). What is relevant to me as a filmmaker are Wheat’s observations on Lindsay’s use of imagery. The ‘profound absence’ at the heart of the novel – the Lindsayan sublime – creates an ‘allegorical impasse’: ‘we can ask “what will it imply?”’ (Wheat 2008: 117).

Such paradoxes understandably present problems for the filmmaker wishing to represent Lindsay’s sublime on screen, which is the core of my film on Lindsay. However, Colin Manlove identified a tendency among Scottish fantasy authors to ‘deny images even as they

push them forward' (Manlove 1994: 5)'. Wheat observes that with Lindsay, this tendency has 'been pursued [in *A Voyage to Arcturus*], unflinchingly, to its logical endpoint.' (Wheat 2008: 117-8). Wheat argues that *Arcturus* is

utterly at war with the image-craving mind. Insofar as this world is enemy-occupied territory [...] we have no choice but to utilise the figural weapons of the enemy's own making (Wheat 2008: 118).

The world might be false, a 'home of illusions' (SN 534), that is part of 'enemy-occupied territory', but 'figural weapons' – which I take to include the filmic image – can be used to illustrate the very illusory nature that reality.

To summarise the working principles I gleaned from this scholarship on Lindsay's sublime, I note the ways in which Lindsay uses non-diegetic sound, music and voice in his work. This can be directly applied to a film, as discussed in chapter 3. Similarly, duration stands in for the experiential nature of gnosticism. Landscapes, often remote and depopulated, stand in for the sublime, as Lindsay cites them in the *Sketch Notes* as being important ways in which the sublime might be experienced.

I.6 Cinematic Elements in Lindsay

When I first read *A Voyage to Arcturus*, I was struck by its extraordinarily visual quality. It is as if Lindsay is recording images he has *seen*.²³

The scene set on Shaping's Causeway is a case in point, as already noted above. The characters Slofork, an old sorcerer, and Panawe, a young man, meet on 'a natural embankment, twenty miles long' between eight to ten thousand feet in height. Along the top is a narrow path

²³ One of my interviewees, David Bialock, admitted to having a similar experience when first reading the book. (Bialock interview). J. B. Pick and Colin Wilson also talk about the sense that Lindsay has seen what he is writing about (Pick 1970a: 4; Wilson 1965: 129). That Lindsay himself might have been aware of this is suggested by a letter to E. H. Visiak, in which Lindsay asked Visiak whether he thought John Milton actually saw the images he put into his poetry (Lindsay 1971: 51).

only wide enough for one person to traverse, with ‘a terrible precipice on either side’ (Lindsay 1992: 67). The valley on one side is ‘plunged in shadow’, the other ‘sparkling with sunlight and dew’ (Lindsay 1992: 67-68). Here, the landscape itself seems to represent a dualist philosophy – sunlight versus shadow – with the path along its top a ‘narrow way [...] straight as a rule’ worthy of Bunyan (Bunyan 1965: 59) to guide the spiritual seeker through the world. However, a simple light versus dark interpretation of the scene is complicated by the fact that, although Slofork engages Panawe in philosophical conversation about the nature of reality, he inexplicably commits suicide by jumping off the path into the abyss (Lindsay 1992: 69). I was fascinated by the scene I could see in my mind’s eye, and perplexed by what, on a first reading, appeared to be the philosophical equivalent of a gordian knot. I didn’t know how to interpret the scene, but the image of the vast, terrifying causeway stayed with me.

A Voyage to Arcturus constantly presents devices that are analogous to cinema. The novel uses sound in a way similar to a film’s use of sound: Lindsay’s protagonist Maskull hears mysterious drumtaps throughout the novel, that function as a *leitmotif* (Lindsay 1992: 28; 62; 129; 154; 157; 160; 230; 232; 233; 271; 272; 273; 290; 292; 293). Voices speak out of thin air, or darkness (Lindsay 1992: 30; 229-230). Maskull hears what sounds like a single note played on a trumpet (Lindsay 1992: 75; 77). Lindsay introduces piercing wails and cries as if on a soundtrack (Lindsay 1992: 37; 301). A bottle disappears into thin air at one point; an effect similar to that of a jump cut (Lindsay 1992: 25). Early in the novel, Krag gives Maskull a small folding pocket lens, through which Maskull can see the twin stars of the Arcturus system (Lindsay 1992: 18-19). At Starkness Observatory in Scotland, Maskull looks through a window and realises it is acting as a lens, giving him a view of the binary star (Lindsay 1992: 30). In the final chapter, as Nightspore climbs the tower on the island of Muspel, the windows again act as lenses; here the scale is ambiguous, as if the windows are telescopes and microscopes at the same time (Lindsay 1992: 296-300).

As I read more of Lindsay's work, I encountered other, oddly cinematic moments. In *The Haunted Woman*, the upstairs rooms of Runhill Court are haunted by low hums, scrapes and musical tones, 'like an orchestra heard through a thick wall' (Lindsay 1987: 30). In *Sphinx*, Lindsay depicts the first dream as if it is something akin to a piece of surrealist filmmaking, 'a kaleidoscope of colours and sounds' (Lindsay 2018: 36) changing so quickly as to suggest a rapid montage of filmic edits. The repetitive nature of the subsequent dreams (Lindsay 2018: 106-107; 136-137; 157-158; 205-214), have the feel of a looping piece of film. The dream machine built by Nicholas Cabot even looks like a film cannister (Lindsay 2018: 35-36; 151). The final dream features music, as if it were on the soundtrack to a film (Lindsay 2018: 207; 212, 213).

In *The Violet Apple*, Anthony Kerr enters a wood that he realises is the location for a painting which has hung on the wall of his London flat for years. The sensation this conveys is that of entering another state; rather like, for instance, the transitions through mirrors into the other world in Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950). The world of the wood Anthony experiences is like an other world, different, more meaningful. Lindsay develops this theme in the conversation Anthony has with Haidee Croyland in the wood. Haidee talks of her altered perception after eating one of the apples; Lindsay describes how her attention is held for a long time by a 'piece of gleaming polished copper' (Lindsay 1978: 247). This suggests the slowing down of time, or slow motion, even.

Lindsay uses similar 'slow motion' effects at greater length in *Devil's Tor*. The plot 'slows down' for three chapters, set in the artist Peter Copping's cottage (Lindsay 2008: 418-491). In the middle of this long sequence, Lindsay stops to examine in great detail the state of mind of each character (Lindsay 2008: 456-479). In the final, unpublished chapter of *The Witch* (NLS MS 27251), Ragnar Pole spends 252 pages inside the gloom of Morion House, apparently standing in a kind of suspended animation, as Urda Noett, the witch of the title, slowly

manifests the house's secrets to him, in a monologue occupying the final 113 pages of the manuscript.

Lindsay deploys further tropes in *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch* that are reminiscent of cinematic devices. In *Devil's Tor*, characters experience abrupt changes of landscape, suggesting cuts; Ingrid Fleming and Peter Copping witness a momentary change from day to night, the landscape switching from sunlight to mist; open land to thick forest (Lindsay 2008: 184). Henry Saltfleet suddenly sees 'the vaporous shape of a woman of astonishing height' while talking to Stephen Arsinal (Lindsay 2008: 379). When Ragnar Pole and Faustine Gaspary walk over the South Downs to Morion House in *The Witch*, the landscape slowly dissolves away completely, to be replaced by the ghostly image of the witch's house, suggesting a series of lap dissolves (Lindsay 1976: 364-373).

I.7 Filmmaking Practice

Given the challenges that Lindsay's work presents, why make a film about his novels and his concept of the sublime? The answer has several dimensions to it. Lindsay's work is under-represented on screen; the sole film adaptation to date is a very low budget version of *A Voyage to Arcturus* (William Holloway, 1970) that arguably fails to address much of the philosophy. (I return to this film in Chapter 3.)

Furthermore, no film about Lindsay as a whole has been made before. My first thought was to shoot a standard documentary, structured around interviews with Lindsay scholars and enthusiasts, many of whom had never been interviewed on camera before about Lindsay's work. I wanted in the early stages of my research to cover all of Lindsay's work; reminding the viewer that there was more to Lindsay's oeuvre than just *A Voyage to Arcturus*.

The more research I did into the theory and practice of film adaptation, the more I realised I needed to experiment with form rather than produce a standard documentary. I sought experimental solutions to reflect something of Lindsay's stylistic and philosophical radicalism; Lindsay as a writer of negativity – in its philosophical or theological sense; a writer of suggestion, of paradox; a writer who frequently employs startling, enigmatic images; and a writer in whose work music plays a substantial role, as metaphor and structuring device. These insights formed the building blocks of my filmmaking practice.

I view filmmaking as a method of enquiry, a way of posing questions and demonstrating problems and tensions. I have been experimenting in this area for a number of years. My first films to concern themselves with philosophical issues were *Quiet Work* (1997/2007) and *Koan* (1997/2012). The former is a five-minute documentary about gardening, showing my mother in the family garden in Somerset. On one channel of the stereo, she talks about her experiences as a gardener; on the other, she talks about gardening history and mythology. My intention here was to bring together the particular and the universal, to suggest that an object depicted on screen is never – or rarely – the thing-in-itself, or *self symbol*, as the American experimental filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky (b. 1943) calls it.²⁴ Context is always present, even if not immediately apparent.

A similar principle operates in *Koan*: the film begins with an onscreen quotation – the last statement in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: 'What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence' (Wittgenstein 1961: 89). The film opens with a shot of a copse, followed by close-ups of grass blowing in a breeze, the copse visible in the distance. There is no sound. The film ends with another title, revealing the date and place of filming, Knockmany, Co. Tyrone, 8 July 1996. The film lasts in total for just under a minute.

²⁴ Dorsky 2014: 41-48.

In both cases, the films can be read as addressing issues of representation. Can a garden ever be just a garden? Or does it contain a multiplicity of cultural assumptions? If so, how? And if Wittgenstein's statement is taken literally, then can the following shots be considered to be 'speaking about' what they show? Or are they merely showing them?²⁵ Or is there some nameless other, tangentially present, but not directly referred to, in either the quotation or the footage? The date and place suggest that a political reading of the film might be possible; it was shot during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, during Marching Season.²⁶ In both films, I aimed not to arrive at answers, but to pose questions.

Similarly, with David Lindsay, I want to explore the question: how can his concept of the sublime be represented cinematically? The kind of film that, in my view, is most likely to do this is a film which, like Lindsay, takes a broadly *via negativa* approach to the problem: so the sublime itself cannot be directly shown on screen, it must somehow be implied. Any film addressing Lindsay's particular sublime must therefore suggest a world beyond the frame; should not explicate beyond what is shown on screen; should condense and omit.

To develop an approach to Lindsay along these lines, I found theoretical and practical support in the films and writings of Dorsky, and of filmmakers such as Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986) and Abbas Kiarostami (1940-2016). The latter two independently arrived at key principles: that a film needs to omit information; that the viewer must become active in interpreting, or even 'completing', the film. Tarkovsky and Kiarostami wrote about these issues (Tarkovsky 1994; Kiarostami 2015); I refer to their ideas later in this thesis. Of particular importance to me as a filmmaker is Tarkovsky's strategy for making filmed images comparable to literature:

²⁵ This greatly simplifies an issue Wittgenstein himself dealt with. See Monk 2005: 19-29, for a brief summary.

²⁶ Indeed, my journey back to Belfast that day was considerably lengthened by various roadblocks that had been set up by sectarian forces. When I finally reached the city at about 8:00pm, riots were in progress and several large fires raging. See <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch96.htm> for more information on the day's events.

The basic principle—as it were, the mainspring—is, I think, that as little as possible has actually to be shown, and from that little the audience has to build up an idea of the rest, of the whole [...] it isn't a question of details, but of what is hidden.

(Tarkovsky 1994: 65)

In addition to these, I have found Paul Schrader's concept of 'transcendental style' very useful. Schrader (b.1946) argues that a film itself cannot be 'transcendental' – or, in Lindsay terms, sublime – but can be expressive of it (Schrader 2018: 38). One of the central ways a filmmaker can do this, Schrader argues, is to withhold. Again, we are in the realms of negativity.

As J. B. Pick observed, Lindsay articulates the sublime through analogy to music. We can borrow a term from cinema to describe how Lindsay uses music, sound and voice, to signal the existence of the sublime: the concept of non-diegetic sound. I draw on the work of the French composer and sound theorist Michel Chion (b. 1947), to situate Lindsay's use of sound in these terms, and to see it as a binding thread running throughout his work, from the austere dualism of *Arcturus* to the pagan mysteries of *The Witch*.

My research began with an interview with J. B. Pick, one of the few times he has ever been interviewed on camera about Lindsay. This was followed by interviews with Murray Ewing (b. 1971), an independent scholar who runs a well-researched Lindsay fansite and who brought *Sphinx*, *Adventures of M. de Mailly* and *Devil's Tor* back into print after Lindsay's work entered the public domain in the UK in 2016; David Power (b. 1962), a composer who has written music inspired by Lindsay's work²⁷, and is the author of a short book, *David Lindsay's Vision* (1991); Stuart Kelly (b. 1972), writer, critic and former Booker Prize judge; Lindsay's biographer, Bernard Sellin (b. 1946), whose biography is one of the texts that helped establish a 'canonical Lindsay'; independent scholar Douglas A. Anderson (b. 1959), a freelance scholar, who published Lindsay's *Christmas Play* in his anthology *Tales Before Tolkien* (Lindsay

²⁷ For example, 'Bluewright' (1990-1991), for clarinet and piano, and 'Matterplay' (2002), an electronic piece.

2003), and has undertaken considerable research into Lindsay's life and publishing history; scholar and critic Gary K. Wolfe (b. 1946), author of an excellent introductory guide, *David Lindsay* (1982), that provides much useful information on Lindsay's literary and philosophical sources; the eminent literary critic Harold Bloom (1930-2019), who provided insights into gnostic themes in Lindsay; Gary Lachman (b. 1955), author of popular books on the occult and literature, who provided reflections on Lindsay's treatment of landscape, and the role of pain in his philosophy; science fiction author, translator and critic Brian Stableford (b. 1948), who has written perceptively on *The Violet Apple*, *The Witch* and *Devil's Tor* (1978, 1983, 1996), and who provided many insights into Lindsay's intellectual and artistic context; the comics writer, author and occultist Alan Moore (b. 1953), who contributed an insightful introduction to the Savoy Books edition of *A Voyage to Arcturus* (2002), which I found valuable in my own thinking about Lindsay, in particular Moore's idea that Lindsay's novel is a form of 'private kabbalah' (Moore 2002: xvi); Dr Steven J. Sutcliffe, Lecturer in Religion at the University of Edinburgh, who reads Lindsay in the context of early-twentieth-century esotericism, and neo-romanticism; eminent Scottish scholar J. Derrick McClure (b. 1944), who has published papers on Lindsay throughout the course of his long career (McClure 1974a & b, 1980, 2012);²⁸ former professor of mathematics at the University of Sussex, Gavin Wraith (b. 1939), who knew Lindsay's friend E. H. Visiak;²⁹ and author and critic Dr John Herdman (b. 1941), who published a perceptive article on *The Violet Apple and The Witch* (1977). I was keen to interview Herdman due to the high regard in which he holds Lindsay's last novel.

I had three potential female informants scheduled also, but they were not able to take part in filming, through unforeseen circumstances.³⁰ This is unfortunate, given the prominence

²⁸ Another paper, McClure 1974a, argues for the canonicity of *Adventures of M. de Mailly* (often dismissed as a potboiler - e.g. Power refers to it as a 'potboiler' (1991: 34); Wolfe as a 'swashbuckler' (1982: 9); and Wilson as an 'entertainment' (1970: 41).

²⁹ Via a fortuitous piece of Googling, I came across a reminiscence of meeting Visiak that Wraith had put on his website.

³⁰ I hope to shoot at least one of these interviews at some point in the future.

Lindsay accords feminine archetypes in his later work. In addition, although the majority of scholars on Lindsay have, to date, been male, several important papers have been written by female scholars (e.g. Hume 1978, Kegler 1993).

Furthermore, fantasy or metaphysical fiction was not an exclusively male preserve, even in Lindsay's time. Certainly there were fewer women then publishing in these fields, compared with today (Davin 2006; Reid 2009; Edmundson 2019), but among Lindsay's contemporaries, we can number Marion Fox's *Ape's-Face* (1914); Stella Benson's *Living Alone* (1919); Mary Butts's *Ashe of Rings* (1925) and *Armed with Madness* (1928); Margaret Irwin's *Still She Wished for Company* (1924) and *These Mortals* (1925); Hope Mirrlees's *Lud-in-the-Mist* (1926); Dion Fortune's *The Secrets of Dr Taverner* (1926); and Helen Simpson's *Cups, Wands and Swords* (1927).

L.8 Interview Practice and Research Integrity

The interviews were shot in collaboration with Dr Louise Milne, with whom I run a production company specialising in documentaries and experimental films.³¹ I devised a list of questions for the interviews (see Appendix 1). Each interviewee was asked the same questions, so that in editing, I would have the option of cutting between different informants to create dialogue between them. Louise acted as interviewer, while I filmed and recorded sound, and asked follow-up questions if any were needed.

All interviews were conducted in accordance with the University's research integrity policy, which stresses that research be undertaken with honesty, rigour, transparent and open

³¹ Our films include *Lanterna Magicka: Bill Douglas and the Secret History of Cinema* (2009); *The Druids: Travels in Deep England* (2011); *A Boat Retold* (2013); *Tarkovsky's Andrei Rublev: A Journey* (2018); *Charlie Chaplin Lived Here* (2019); and *The Dream in the Mirror* (2021).

communication, care and respect, and accountability.³² Each interviewee was contacted by email, in which I introduced myself, explained what my research was, what it would be used for, where the film would be shown, and why I was contacting them. The interviewee was given the choice of the time and place of the interview, with most of them choosing to be interviewed either at their homes, or that their place of work. I stressed that the interview would be conducted at their comfort and convenience.

On the day of each interview, we arrived at the location in good time, and stressed that the interviewee should be comfortable and happy with all arrangements before proceeding. If the interviewee had any prior commitments on the day, those would take priority over the interview.³³ After each interview, the interviewee was asked to sign a GDPR-compliant consent form, the import of which was fully explained to them. We agreed to keep the informants updated on the progress of the film, and any eventual public screenings.

1.9 Methodologies

If Lindsay's approach to representing the sublime is broadly one of *via negativa*, what methodology or methodologies can I apply in order to research this, and to represent it on screen?

Thick description was the first methodology I used here, as a researcher and a filmmaker. The term first used in the late 1940s by the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle,³⁴ was further defined by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006). Geertz argues that

³² The Code of Practice on Research Integrity can be found here: <https://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/research-innovation-office/Pages/Research-Integrity.aspx>.

³³ For instance, Harold Bloom, interviewed at his home in New Haven, CT, had a prior commitment on the afternoon of the interview, meaning that we had to stop shooting after 15 minutes, resuming later in the afternoon once Harold was free again. (He was adamant that he complete the interview.)

³⁴ Ryle gives the example of a man hitting small white balls with a stick: if one is familiar with the game of golf, one can understand that the man might be practicing for a match. Without knowledge of golf's rules, one is left probably mystified by the man's actions (Ryle 1971: 474).

understanding is aided by detailed description of all the contexts in which an event takes place (Geertz 1973). Thick description enables me, as a researcher, to situate Lindsay's work in wider contexts, adjacent to, and in dialogue with, the major aesthetic movements of his time (Modernism, Symbolism, Neo-romanticism, Expressionism). Also, Lindsay's concern with other worlds was shared in many manifestations of the early-20th century occult revival (spiritualism and séances, magic and psychological experimentation). Lindsay's interest in dreams parallels the rise of psychoanalysis in the same period. I used this strategy to situate all of Lindsay's work – not just *Arcturus* – in its wider cultural sphere.

Thick description also proved highly useful for me as a filmmaker, because the photographic image can contain – or imply – the contexts referenced above. As the anthropological documentary filmmaker Robert Lemelson wrote in 2013, the filmmaker,

tries to pack as many multi layered meanings, imagery, symbolism, frameworks, in a scene as possible. One of the joys of being a scholar is to craft meaning and understanding from material where this is not immediately apparent. In filmmaking, you have to do this within a much more restricted space and time than in writing, and being able to layer and pack these meanings in a visual sense, is really one of its pleasures as a scholar. It is also akin to creating a puzzle, and only those “who have eyes to see,” who are knowledgeable or experts in the subject matter you are dealing with, will understand the meaning you are creating (Lemelson 2013).

The notion of a film akin to a puzzle is apposite for my project. I sought cinematic methods for representing a numinous something that resists direct representation. My filmmaking, as in Lemelson's version of thick description, became a practice with parallels to Lindsay's own *via negativa*: the sublime represented by showing what it is not.

These two strategic philosophical approaches – thick description/*via negativa* – guides my adaptation methodology, loosely analogic, in the sense of Geoffrey Wagner (1975). (See Chapter 3.)

L.10 Conclusion

I became fascinated by the concept of David Lindsay's sublime as 'an entirely different realm' that cannot be directly filmed, yet given different visual and musical guises in each of his major novels. His whole oeuvre is worthy of study in this respect, not just *A Voyage to Arcturus*. Lindsay changes emphasis over his career – from the dualism of *Arcturus*, *The Haunted Woman*, and *Sphinx* – to the pagan proto-feminism of *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*. But in all of these, Lindsay expresses the sublime consistently through nondiegetic sound, music and voice. Using the work of Schrader, Tarkovsky, Chion and others, I made a film that attends to and around Lindsay's sublime.

In the following chapters I discuss the relationships of documentary and the sublime (chapter 2), and my filmmaking practice (chapter 3). First, I explore the issue of the sublime more generally: the discourse – the 'common use' as Lindsay has it – as it appears in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy, visual arts and popular culture, followed by an examination of Lindsay's 'own use' of it.

CHAPTER ONE: THE SUBLIME

1.1 The Sublime: A Brief History

The sublime has a history stretching back to late antiquity (Costelloe 2011; Shaw 2017), as a term of rhetoric, and an experience (Doran 2015: 1). Why did Lindsay pick this word? I think his choice makes sense if we consider how meanings attached to the word developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Among the definitions the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) gives for the sublime are:

Set or raised aloft. Of ideas, truths, subjects, etc: Belonging to the highest regions of thought, reality or human activity. Also occasionally said of the thinker. Of things in nature and art: Affecting the mind with a sense of overwhelming grandeur or irresistible power; calculated to inspire awe, deep reverence, or lofty emotion, by reason of its beauty, vastness or grandeur.

The sublime as an aesthetic category appears first in a Latin treatise attributed to Longinus, *Peri Hypsous* (first or third century CE; Doran 2015: 30-31; Heath 1999); Latinised as *sublimis* (cf. Costelloe 2011: xx). Longinus's tract is a rhetorical guide for orators; his sublime is, at its simplest, an elevated or powerful style of speaking or writing. In 1674, the poet and critic Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711) translated *Peri hypsous* into French as *On the Sublime*.³⁵ In his preface, Boileau effectively inaugurated the modern discourse of the sublime.³⁶ Crucially, Boileau insisted on distinguishing between Longinus's sublime style of rhetoric, and what he calls

something extraordinary and marvellous that strikes us in a discourse and makes it elevate, ravish and transport us. The sublime style requires always great Words, but the sublime may be found in a Thought only, or in a Figure or Turn of Expression. A thing

³⁵ Earlier versions had been made by Niccolò Pinelli in 1639, *Dell'altezza del dire* (*On the Height of Speech*), and John Hall, *Of the Height of Eloquence*, the first English translation (1652). Pinelli and Hall both interpreted Longinus as concerned only with rhetorical power.

³⁶ Critics, such as Monk (1935) and Cronk (2002), speculate on whether Boileau remodelled Longinus's ideas for his own purposes, or merely read Longinus perceptively (Doran 2015: 87).

may be in the Sublime Style and yet not be Sublime, that is, have nothing extraordinary or surprising in it (cited in Doran 2015: 111).

At nearly the same time as Boileau was writing about the sublime, the English writer and critic John Dennis (1657-1734) was experiencing it. Of crossing the Alps in 1688, Dennis wrote in 1693:

In the very same place Nature was seen Severe and Wanton. In the mean time we walk'd upon the very brink, in a literal sense, of Destruction; one Stumble, and both Life and Carcass had been at once destroy'd. The sense of all this produc'd different motions in me, viz. a delightful Horror, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, I was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled (Dennis 1943 I: 380).

The habit of identifying grand aspects of nature with sublime subjective experience caught on in the eighteenth century. Writing in 1735, the poet Hildebrand Jacob (1692/3-1739) defined the sublime as,

...unbounded prospects, particularly that of the ocean, in its different situations of agitation or repose; the rising or setting sun; the solemnity of moonlight; all the phaenomena in the heavens, and objects of astronomy [...] the view of dreadful precipices; great ruins; subterraneous caverns, and the operations of nature in those dark recesses [...] the whispering of winds; the fall of waters in cataracts, or heavy showers; the roaring of the sea; the noise of tempests among lofty trees; thunder; the clash of arms, and voice of war (Jacob 1996 [1735]: 53).

By the mid-eighteenth century, the sublime was no longer just a mode of rhetoric, or even an experience linked to principally to nature (Jacob's 'clash of arms, and voice of war'). So what is it?

Enter Edmund Burke (1729-1797), whose *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Feelings of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; second ed., 1759) is a milestone for the discourse of the sublime in England. Burke saw the sublime and the beautiful as not just different, but *opposing* forces. Burke, following John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume (1711-1776),³⁷ wanted a psychological basis for feelings about sublimity and beauty. For Burke, the beautiful is what is aesthetically pleasing, associated with lightness, smoothness, clarity (Ashfield and

³⁷ For Locke, see Doran 2015: 147-8; for Hume, 154, 272-273.

de Bolla 1996: 140). But the sublime is altogether a darker phenomenon, akin to relief from terror or pain; still Burke names this feeling 'delight'; and saw intimations of mortality in such feelings. The sublime is 'an emissary of the king of terrors' (Burke 1990: 86); the strongest emotion, superior to the beautiful. This sublime is still not quite a religious or mystical experience, rather a heightening of sensation.

Burke, like Jacob before him, produced his own list of things that were sublime: terror, obscurity, vastness, storms, supernatural fears, the infinity of space, God, the vast or formless, war, conflagration, and the ruins of civilisation. To this, he added public executions, the theatre, fireworks, and architecture. This foreshadows the Gothic; seven years after the publication of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* came Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). And Burke foreshadowed Lindsay: in section XXII of the *Enquiry*, he identifies pain as sublime (Burke 1990: 71).

The year before *Otranto*, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) published his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764). Kant too lists sublime things, including a number of qualities pertinent to Lindsay:

The sight of a mountain whose snow-covered peak rises above the clouds, the description of a raging storm, or Milton's portrayal of the infernal kingdom, arouse enjoyment but with horror (Kant 2003: 46-7).

Kant sees sublime and beautiful as binary opposites; things can only be one or the other:

Tall oaks and lonely shadows in a sacred grove are sublime; flower beds, low hedges and trees trimmed in hedges are beautiful. Night is sublime, day is beautiful; the sea is sublime, the land is beautiful; man is sublime, woman is beautiful (Kant 2003: 46-7).³⁸

³⁸ Kant here makes explicit what is implicit in Burke: that the sublime is male, the beautiful, female. Barbara Freeman suggests that a gender bias is evident as early as Longinus, when he is discussing Sappho. For Freeman, Sappho 'articulates a version of sublimity that differs radically from the Longinian sublime of power and rivalry' (Freeman 1997: 19). What is radical in Sappho is the implication that the sublime and the body experiencing fundamentally cannot be separated, that there is an almost cyclic movement between dissipation and loss, and subsequent re-empowerment. Freeman concludes, 'Sappho's poem refuses any binary formulation of life and death [whereas] Longinus' commentary, like Homer's lyric, reinforces their separation' (Freeman 1997: 19). Lindsay, while rejecting Kant's male/female, sublime/beautiful, would emphasise bodily experience of the sublime, which for him remains remote.

Kant's later ideas on the topic can be found in 'Analytic of the Sublime' (*Critique of Judgment*, 1790). There, he made it part of his case against the empiricism of Locke and Hume (and, by extension, Burke); and against Rationalism and Idealism. Essentially a Platonic view, idealism holds that we know things not through our senses only, but because we recognize divine ideas. Kant argued that we have such knowledge, since we are spiritual, rather than merely corporeal, beings. Kant argued that experience is not wholly derived from either sensory experience, or divine truths; we see always through a glass darkly, as it were. He proposes that there are certain categories innate to humans, which we can use to understand the world – time, justice, infinity, the absolute, etc. These, Kant argues, cannot be derived from empiricism. This aspect of this thought, I suggest, sets the foundations for the kind of metaphysical enquiry central for David Lindsay.

No short summary of Kant, of course, does his ideas justice: my point here is to see the shift his formulation makes as something that becomes a normative view by the end of the nineteenth century. Burke's sublime is immanent. Kant's is transcendent. Lindsay's seems to be both: it is 'above and behind the world' (SN 337) and yet 'far more real and solid than this coloured cubic and heavy world of ours' (SN 204).

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was the most important, for Lindsay, among post-Kantian theorists of the sublime. Lindsay acknowledges his philosophy draws on Schopenhauer:

Schopenhauer's "Nothing", which is the least understood part of his system, is identical to my Muspel; that is, the *real* world (SN 545).

Schopenhauer underwent a revival in late nineteenth-century Britain (Villa 2004: 117). His major work, *The World as Will and Idea*, was first published in English between 1883 and 1886;³⁹ there were two biographies (in 1876 and 1890⁴⁰). Schopenhauer's sublime is 'a distinct

³⁹ Translated by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp in 3 vols. (London, 1883-1886).

⁴⁰ Helen Zimmern's *Schopenhauer: His Life and Philosophy* (London, 1876), and William Wallace's (1890) *Life of Arthur Schopenhauer* (London, 1890).

kind of aesthetic experience, necessarily fused with sensory elements’, an experience that ‘involves struggle and is both humiliating and uplifting’ (Vandenabeele 2015: 2). This recalls Lindsay’s stress on the importance of pain:

If one were set the problem of causing men to acquire their original sublime nature, no other means could be found than by making them *suffer*. Thus, pain is justified (SN 144; emphasis in original).

But Lindsay distinguishes himself from Schopenhauer when discussing the concept of will:

To understand the true nature of the World, it is necessary to realise that it is the direct creation of the Will, and that everything in it (including love, self-sacrifice, etc.) is either the assertion or the denial of the Will (Schopenhauer); but that the Muspel-World does not possess this inner core of Will but *something else*, of which Will is a corrupted version (SN 501).

Lindsay writes that the sublime is in fact distinct from pleasure and pain:

Opposites are either mutually exclusive or else *polar*. The test of the latter is that a third alternative is logically impossible, but actually possible; e.g. pain and pleasure are polar opposites, yet there is the third state, the sublime, which is raised above both pain and pleasure (SN 189).

He makes then a deliberate paradox – a ‘third state’ that is ‘something else’ – to describe the sublime world.

This interests me as a filmmaker, because Lindsay here seems to be straining against the limits of what can be expressed through language. Lindsay’s sublime is a set of paradoxes in tension and so have a kind of inherent dynamic; this is where visual art forms come into their own: a film’s remit is not to tell, but to *show*. And paradox can be implied through the use of counterpoint devices, such as non-diegetic sound, or ironic narration.

Because he is ultimately an artist, not a professional philosopher, Lindsay devises various images and concepts to deal with this ‘something else’. Several times in the *Sketch Notes*, for example, he uses the image of a prism: ‘The Individual is a prism, which splits up the Sublime into joy and pain’ (SN 197).⁴¹

⁴¹ The prism metaphor recurs in *Sketch Notes* 177 (Lindsay 2002: 392), and 202.

He wants his sublime not just to split pleasure and pain, but to lead to greater insight:

In moments of poetic ‘raptus’ [i.e. the experience of the sublime], one realises the existence of a second personality, external to the conscious ego, but more real than the latter (SN 231).

He refers to this dual nature several times, e.g. in note 145:

The bright, wholesome, cheerful sunshine: the world of mysterious dreams, so full of intense and changing emotions: these are the opposite poles of our double nature. Both seem the sole reality, when being experienced (SN 145).

This interest in doubleness also links Lindsay to his contemporary makers of the Gothic (Tigges 1995: 246), who were also taking up and popularising the sublime. Like Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) (‘The Fall of the House of Usher’, ‘William Wilson’ (both 1839) and Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) (*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* (1886)), Lindsay used doubles constantly to dramatise his ideas of the self. He creates the paired figures of Maskull and Nightspore, and Krag and Crystalman, in *Arcturus*; Isbel and the higher self she encounters in *The Haunted Woman*; Saltfleet and Arsinal in *Devil’s Tor*; Urda and Faustine in *The Witch*.

Lindsay also doubled landscapes and objects, such as the two towers of Starkness and Muspel (*Arcturus*); Brighton and Anglo-Saxon England (*The Haunted Woman*); present-day and prehistoric Dartmoor, and the two halves of the flint (*Devil’s Tor*). In each case, the doubles link a lower world – everyday reality – with a barely glimpsed or understood higher world: the Lindsayan sublime.

1.2 Visual Representations of the Sublime

As writers and philosophers evolved the discourse of the sublime over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, artists also began to create visual representations of it. Figures such as Jonathan Richardson (1667-1745) – whose *Essay on the Theory of Painting*

(1715, 2nd ed. 1725) is one of the earliest theoretical texts to explore this area – posited links between the sublime and painting. Extolling the necessity of learning from the greats – Cimabue, Giotto, Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo – Richardson looks forward to the time when a ‘new Columbus’ will ‘unite the airs of the best antique’ with ‘the best colourings of the moderns’; ‘he that would rise to the sublime must form an idea of something beyond all we have yet seen’ (cited in Ashfield and De Bolla 1996: 47).

In eighteenth-century England, ruins became visual representations of the sublime, because they connoted a distant, possibly mythical, past. Michel Le Bris comments that,

In a world that was now without either God or transcendence or eternity, ruins were perhaps the only remaining witness to the immeasurable (Le Bris 1981: 22).

Wealthy northern Europeans on the Grand Tour visited ruins – classical and mediaeval – and commissioned new ones for landscaped gardens back home. As the landscape gardener Thomas Whately (1726-1772) wrote in his *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770):

Ruins [...] carry the imagination to something greater than is seen [...] and the representation, though it does not present facts to the memory, yet suggests subjects to the imagination (quoted in Le Bris 1981: 21).

What is important for visual representations of the sublime, and for my own filmic practice, is this idea of ‘carry[ing] the imagination to something greater than is seen’. This neatly also summarises Romantic currents in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting. Painters increasingly took up as subjects items that appeared on the lists of sublime subjects created by Jacob, Kant, Burke and others (see above, pp.41-42).

In Britain, artists such as Richard Wilson (1714-82) were celebrated for landscape paintings which were understood as expressing a contemplative love of nature, according to the eminent Victorian critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) (Le Bris 1981: 25). The key word here is *contemplative*. In works such as ‘Cader Idris’ (1774) (fig. 13), Wilson shows tiny human figures armed with telescopes and maps, apparently exploring – maybe even trying to

understand – the landscape. At the same time, others depicted nature as more powerful and unpredictable, such as Joseph Wright of Derby's (1734-1797) 'The Eruption of Vesuvius' (1774), and William Hodges' (1744-1797) 'A View of Cape Stephens in Cook's Straits, New Zealand, with Waterspout' (1776).

Philip James de Loutherbourg's (1740-1812) 'Coalbrookdale by Night' (1801) painted the iron foundries of the new Industrial Revolution; a sight the agricultural writer Arthur Young (1741-1820) described as 'horribly sublime' (Le Bris 1981: 26).⁴² The sublime could even be evoked in depictions that were entirely imaginary, such as Giovanni Battista Piranesi's (1720-1778) 'Imaginary Prisons' series of etchings (1760s), Henry Fuseli's (1741-1825) 'The Nightmare' (1781), or William Blake's (1757-1827) novel mythical beings, such as 'The Great Red Dragon and the Beast from the Sea' (1805).

Two of the nineteenth century's most notable painters of the sublime were Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), and John Martin (1789-1854). Friedrich often depicts vast landscapes, populated by one or two small human figures: *Monk by the Sea* (1809-10) (fig.14), *The Chalk Cliffs on Rügen* (1818) (fig. 15), and *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*.⁴³ As with Wilson's *Cader Idris*, Friedrich creates figures to appear lost in contemplation of their mise-en-scène. Sometimes, Friedrich made uninhabited landscapes, as in *Rocky Landscape in the Elbe*

⁴² Colebrooke Dale proved to be, and still is, a popular tourist attraction. The most significant visitors were those whose early observations shaped later responses. For example, Arthur Young (1741-1820) on his travels around Shropshire in the West Midlands gave this impression in 1776 in which he employs eighteenth-century aesthetic terminology to contrast between natural beauty and man-made *horrible* sublimity:

Viewed the furnaces, forges, etc., with the vast bellows that gave those roaring blasts, which make the whole edifice *horribly sublime*. These works are supposed to be the greatest in England. The whole process is gone through here from digging the iron stone to making it into cannons, pipes, cylinders These iron works are in a very flourishing situation.... Coalbrook Dale itself is a *very romantic* spot, it is a winding glen between two immense hills which break into vaporous forms, and all thickly covered with wood, forming the most beautiful sheets of hanging wood. Indeed *too beautiful to be much in unison with that variety of horrors art has spread to the bottom*. The noise of the forges, mills, etc., with all their vast machinery, the flames bursting from the furnaces with the burning of the coal and the smok of the lime kilns, are altogether sublime (Dugan and Dugan, 2000: 47, my emphases). <http://www.victorianweb.org/technology/ir/responses/3.html> 14.02.21.

⁴³ Friedrich had attempted this theme before: *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, 1819, Galerie Neue Meister, 1819–20. 35 x 44.5 cm; and *Man and a Woman Contemplating the Moon*, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin, c. 1824. 34 x 44 cm.

Sandstone Mountains (1822-1823) (fig. 23), *The Sea of Ice* (1823) (fig. 24), and *The Giant Mountains* (fig. 25). Indeed, Lindsay's work seems highly redolent of these latter three: *Arcturus* echoes the *Rocky Landscape* and the *Sea of Ice*, while *Devil's Tor* channels the *Giant Mountains*. Friedrich, though a devout Catholic, suggests God as immanent in landscapes, vast, almost out of reach, and possibly unknowable.

Friedrich often includes characters in his work, as in *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen*, or *Monk by the Sea*. What is being depicted here is an *experience* of sublimity. Yet he also painted works that depict no figures at all: *The Giant Mountains*, the *Rocky Landscape*. Lindsay is similar to Friedrich's first group of paintings mentioned here, in that he always has a point of view character who is experiencing the landscape. As I discuss in chapter 3, I did not include characters in my film; the camera itself is the point of view (POV) character. This puts the experience of the landscape directly on the viewer; they are thus in the metaphorical shoes of Maskull as he walks north toward Muspel, or Ragnar as he walks to the witch's house.

John Martin took Old Testament scenes as pretexts to create dramatic and spectacular *mise-en-scènes*. In *Joshua Commanding the Sun to Stand Still upon Gibeon* (1816) (fig. 26), and *The Great Day of His Wrath* (1851) (fig. 27), people are subordinated in huge, cosmic events. The violent geological upheavals of the Ifdawn Marest in *Arcturus* suggest the panoramic collapsing landscape of the *Great Day*, while the caverns of Threal in the same novel build on popular consciousness of Martin imagery such as *The Bridge over Chaos* (Illustration for *Paradise Lost*), 1827 (fig. 28).⁴⁴

David Lindsay would certainly have been aware of the work of some the painters I have been discussing; he would certainly have been in agreement with Schiller, who wrote in 1794 that landscape painting should work on the viewer like music (Rosen and Zerner 1984: 52). But the

⁴⁴ Parallels between Lindsay and Milton were drawn in the very first piece of criticism ever published on Lindsay's work, Visiak 1940.

links between Lindsay and visual representations of the sublime became more apparent the more I researched, as I now explain.

1.3 Lindsay and Painting

Landscape was one of the great nineteenth-century art forms, with an impact on the imagination comparable to cinema today. It superseded historical painting during the eighteenth century to become ‘the vehicle of the sublime’ (Rosen and Zerner 1984: 51). When Lindsay constructs the landscapes of his novels – the collapsing mountains or vast forests of *Arcturus*; the desolate moors and downs of *Devil’s Tor* or *The Witch* – he has behind him these earlier landscape traditions. The paintings I have discussed have proto-cinematic, sublime and oneiric qualities; the work of Wilson, Friedrich, Fuseli and Martin, and others, all embody these elements. David Lindsay is channelling, consciously or unconsciously, all of this work to create his own landscapes that embody his notions of the sublime, and at the same time are also frequently visually arresting. Landscape, for me, is a central part of the connection between Lindsay and cinema.

Depictions of landscape have long fascinated me, whether as a painting, film, or literature. My interest in this area began before I discovered Lindsay’s work, with H. P. Lovecraft, who depicts lonely New England hills and woods that hide unimaginable horrors. In one of his most celebrated stories, ‘The Colour Out of Space’ (1927), a Massachusetts farm becomes blighted with a strange condition that slowly turns the landscape, and the farming family, into something resembling ash. The story is so effective because the landscape itself becomes animate, obeying its own laws, oblivious (seemingly) to human affairs. Because Lovecraft withholds so much information about the cause of the changes in the landscape – all he tells the reader is that a

‘strange meteorite’ has fallen near a well on the farm (Lovecraft 1999: 173) – the main focus for me is what the landscape is actually doing and what this might represent.

The landscapes of the Russian painter Arkhip Kuindzhi (1842-1910) evoke for me the proto-cinematic transcendental style of the later century (cf. Schrader, discussed below, Chapter 3). Kuindzhi’s *The North* and *After the Rain* (both 1879) utilise odd atmospheric effects I find echoed in the landscapes of *Devil’s Tor* and *The Witch* (figs. 9 & 10).⁴⁵ *On the Island of Valaam* (fig. 21) and *Red Sunset on the Dnepr* (fig. 20) call to mind *Arcturus*, with their suggestive uses of light and shadow. Kuindzhi is one of several painters whose work struck me as being ‘Lindsayan’, in this case, the odd light and composition.

My visual research found also Charlotta Piepenhagenová (1821-1902), whose *Lake in the Mountains* (1870s) (fig. 16) has an extraordinarily vivid sense of depth, as if what Piepenhagenová is trying to depict is not two figures pausing while out walking, but something else that can only be accessed by going *through* the painting. I thought of Maskull’s habit of looking down in *Arcturus*, as if he were trying to see through solid matter to something beyond it (Lindsay 1992: 28, 62, 128, 290).

John Singer Sargent’s (1856-1925) double portrait of the artists François Flameng and Paul Helleu (c.1880) (fig. 19) struck me as being redolent of Lindsay because of the unusual placement of the figures. Flameng (1856–1923) casts an enigmatic gaze toward the viewer, while behind him, Paul Helleu (1859–1927), peers off, somewhat morosely. Sargent conveys a slightly discomfiting sense that the two men are engaged upon work whose nature remains occluded. When I first saw the painting, it immediately struck me as a possible ‘portrait’ of Maskull (Helleu) and Nightspore (Flameng), because the two men occupy the same space, as if they were two aspects of the same person.

⁴⁵ For Kuindzhi’s use of light and colour, see Bowlt 1975: 126-126; 128-129.

The Belgian Symbolist painter Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921), who had close links with Britain,⁴⁶ explored similar ground to Lindsay, in works such as *The Offering* (1891) (fig. 3), *The Abandoned City* (1904) (fig. 1), and *Mask with Black Curtain* (1909) (fig. 2). These works depict statues, abandoned buildings or faces that seem to emerge from solid objects. The poet and critic Émile Verhaeren (1855-1916) described the experience of looking at Knopff's work as akin to 'peering through "disconcerting veils"' (Stammers 2018). I find equivalents in Lindsay: the statues of Threal in *Arcturus* (Lindsay 1992: 227); a deserted city, abandoned houses, mysterious figures in *The Witch* (Lindsay 1976: 283-285).

Another Belgian Symbolist, Jean Delville (1867-1953), also produced works whose aesthetic evokes Lindsay's. *Moonlit Landscape* (1890) (fig. 7) suggests the landscapes and visions of *The Haunted Woman*, *Sphinx*, *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*. His *Portrait of Mrs Stuart Merrill* (1892), (fig. 8) – the woman's trance-like expression, a book resembling a grimoire – calls to mind Urda Noett of *The Witch*. *The God-Man* (1900) and *The Treasures of Satan* (1895) (figs. 5 & 6), respectively depict Christ and Satan over writhing, struggling bodies; suggestive of the themes of *Arcturus*.

Two different editions of *Arcturus* use this Satan painting as cover artwork (Savoy Books, 2002; Gollancz, 2003). John Coulthart (b. 1962), who designed the Savoy edition, said in an interview that, 'something by one of the Symbolists immediately suggested itself', and chose Delville because,

Delville's pictures are fuelled by his mystical and philosophical interests – he was a disciple of the Rosicrucian Sar Peladan in Paris, later became a Theosophist and follower of Krishnamurti – which makes him an ideal companion for Lindsay. His figure of Satan rearing over prostrated, ecstatic figures lying among jewels equates perfectly with the character of Crystalman, the Satan figure in the book, ensnaring the universe's creatures with the trappings of pleasure. There's also the bizarre details in the picture, the way it appears to be set beneath the sea and that Satan's wings are also

⁴⁶ Khnopff, a staunch Anglophile, visited England annually between 1891 and 1914, exhibited frequently in London during those years, and also wrote for the English art journal *The Studio*. See 'Fernand Khnopff', (Anon., n. d.) <https://www.stephenongpin.com/object/790243/18203/etude-anglaise-portrait-of-a-young>. Accessed 7 August 2019.

suckered tentacles, something that corresponds obliquely to the bodily transmutations in the book (VanderMeer 2002).⁴⁷

Some of Konrad Mägi's (1878-1925) work suggests the otherworldly landscapes of Tormance (fig. 17), while František Kupka's (1871-1957) 'The Way of Silence II (Way to Infinity)' (1903) is emblematic of *Sphinx* (fig. 18). James Ensor's (1860-1949) skeletal figures that mix with 'normal' humans, suggests the stifling pre-1914 European culture that Lindsay was in opposition to, while the work of fellow Belgian René Magritte (1898-1967) employed a mixture of jarring symbols and philosophical enquiry to provoke reflection.⁴⁸

Lindsay's biographer Bernard Sellin remarked on the landscapes of *Arcturus*:

I don't easily connect the landscapes of *Arcturus* with what we call landscapes around us. The landscapes of *Arcturus* make me think of a French painter called Yves Tanguy... he produced paintings that look like nothing else. That is, landscapes of void, void landscapes, peopled by signs (Sellin, filmed interview, 2014).

Both Stuart Kelly (filmed interview, 2013) and Alan Moore (filmed interview, 2018), feel that Lindsay shared common ground with the Surrealists. Gary K. Wolfe argues for with Cubism also, suggesting that Lindsay wants to 'unfold reality to see what is behind it and beneath it' (Wolfe, filmed interview, 2016). This comment is perceptive. Lindsay does just this 'unfolding' in his novels; the final dream in *Sphinx* is a vivid example, where he depicts reality in as a series of nested layers, as in Magritte's painting *Popular Panorama* (1926) (fig. 12). And, more importantly for me as a filmmaker, similar to the technique of superimposition in films.

The principal thing Lindsay owes to painting is landscape as a medium for depicting states of mind and experience. Steven J. Sutcliffe thinks that Lindsay's approach to landscape has an

⁴⁷ Coulthart continues: 'There's a curious Scottish connection that seems appropriate as well: Lindsay's family were from Scotland, the characters in the book [...] travel to Scotland before making their journey into space and Delville taught for a few years [1900-1906] at the Glasgow School of Art.' (VanderMeer 2002). Delville knew Scriabin, and also lived in London during the First World War. Between 1916-1919, Lindsay lived at 662 Finchley Road, while, according to Brendan Cole, Delville was one street away, in Corringham Avenue (Cole (n.d.: 7)).

⁴⁸ Sellin notes a further connection with Belgium: in the years before the First World War, Lindsay and his family regularly holidayed in the Belgian seaside resort of Blankenberge, 'which came to be a favourite place' (1981: 16).

affinity with British Neo-romantic painters such as Paul Nash (1889-1946) (Sutcliffe 2016). Nash, in his ironically titled *We are Making a New World* (1918) (fig. 29), constructs a semi-alien landscape, clearly battle-damaged and reminiscent of the Western Front. For Sutcliffe, ‘that experience of death and destruction of the Western Front [...] comes through obliquely in Lindsay’s writing’ (Sutcliffe 2016). A good example of this is Maskull’s playing of the musical lake Irontick in *Arcturus*. His ‘performance’ has catastrophic effects on the surrounding landscape: Irontick is reduced to an apparently bottomless crater, and ‘the hills encircling it were torn, as if by heavy gunfire’ (Lindsay 1992: 193).

In 1932, the year *Devil’s Tor* was published, Nash made *Pillar and Moon* (fig. 30). As Sutcliffe says, the painting shows

a mysterious, empty, mystical landscape... It tells you something, particularly for anyone who’s read *Devil’s Tor* or *The Haunted Woman*... about [...] the unsettling power of landscape. A landscape with visions encoded in it [...] hovering just out of touch, just out of reach (Sutcliffe 2016).

Sutcliffe describes *Pillar and Moon* as a ‘neo-romantic, almost Symbolist’ work. Lindsay’s novels bear comparison with this kind of Symbolist painting: both hint at things that are not visible, suggesting lost narratives through ambiguous visual devices. Adelheid Kegler agrees that Lindsay should be seen as a ‘belated symbolist’ (1993: 24).

Lindsay himself clearly knew modern paintings, and his friends and acquaintances related his work to Blake. In a letter (inscribed 17 March, but with no year; probably early 1930s) to his painter friend, Robert Barnes (1899-1989), Lindsay thanks Barnes for sending him some illustrations, including Blake’s *Christ Descending to the Grave* (c.1805-7) (fig. 31). He writes, ‘I suppose there must be some likeness between Blake and myself since so many people insist on it’, but,

I always have a sort of uneasiness with [Blake’s] work, it never approaches me as if from my own very self, like Beethoven’s, for example, & this reason, I think, is that his real sense of sublimity is of death (Gothic), while any I have is essentially of life (NLS Acc. 9656).

What is important here is that Lindsay prefers seeing himself as a Beethovenian, not a Blakean.

This return to the relationship with music will be discussed further below.

Characters discuss painting in *Devil's Tor*. Lindsay places Peter Copping as a symbolist of sorts (Lindsay 2008: 165); but has Copping claim to have moved beyond

These barbaric personifications of chaotic and cosmic nature, these nondescript shapes and half-meanings, these male and female gods, demi-gods, eponyms, heroes and monsters, of the ancient twilight world [...] those antique allegories and reachings-out of the human heart (Lindsay 2008: 111).

Copping wants to make ‘paintwork [that] could forsake the likeness of real things in order to show their soul’ (Lindsay 2008: 112); but Lindsay never describes precisely *what* Copping is painting. Copping’s statements – rather like Lindsay’s remarks in the *Sketch Notes* – try to straddle the dichotomy between stillness and movement. In conversation with Helga Fleming, Copping argues that the apparent tranquillity of seventeenth-century Dutch painting is an illusion, because they fail to convey ‘the mighty workings of the spirit’ (Lindsay 2008: 165). This passage raises explicitly issues of representation, and viewing. Copping’s words about how to correctly view a painting apply equally to film:

“an illusion is presented, because [...] Nature doesn’t know tranquillity. Shall I illustrate? Imagine, then, a ruined classical temple of white limestone, standing up on the crest of a bare grass hill, against a sky of faultless blue. Here is apparent serenity in perfection [...] [but] The structure, in short, will be in violent action. All its constituents are straining towards the mass of the earth, towards each other, and towards their own interiors. And so with pictures. A picture’s subject must be one of rest, because the representation of a movement never ending and never developing must be ridiculous. But if such rest is made absolute and self-sufficient, as in the Dutch paintings, then you get your illusion. To counteract the rest and so avoid the illusion, one needs the deeper internal movement. To discover what that movement shall be, is the business of symbolism” (Lindsay 2008: 166).

To this, Helga asks, “Doesn’t our imagination supply the movement?” (2008: 166), and Copping concedes that,

“A symbolic picture is not to be less, but more important than the beholder. It is to grip him roughly, and not send him to sleep or set him dreaming of happier days, but transform his life for him. The contemplation of a right symbolic picture should be like a visit to church in a spirit of piety” (Lindsay 2008: 167).

Helga, perhaps understandably, asks Copping if he plans to confine himself to religious subjects. He says no, but adds that, ““Behind the representation of a tree even, one might present the everlasting Spirit.”” (Lindsay 2008: 167). The conversation continues:

“You would say that God is the soul of everything?”
“I have that faith.”
“And this is the aspect of the individual you would wish to bring to your pictures?”
“Yes. We are all, not self-existing, but symbols of the divine. Hence the name, Symbolism.”
“But how to start painting the divine, you don’t as yet know?”
“Anyway, it is the problem I am hammering at.”

(Lindsay 2008: 167)

Magnus Colborne suggests a solution for Copping’s ‘problem’: the greatest symbol in art is that of the Madonna and Child, the Christian manifestation of the Great Mother (Lindsay 2008: 171-181). The Madonna is as a powerful symbol because, unlike the clearly defined Apostles, ““Mary remains an unknown person for us – as it were, a blank shape in a picture otherwise coloured and finished”” (Lindsay: 2008: 174). Here we have *via negativa* and thick description in one statement: the characters around the Virgin are described (thick description), but she herself is not (*via negativa*).

1.4 The Psychological Sublime

When we interviewed Alan Moore, himself an occultist of note, he argued that Lindsay links the Sublime with a ‘second personality’:

Tormance is what the interior of a human being looks like when it’s unfolded and given symbolic representation as another planet (Moore, filmed interview, 2018).

For Moore, *Arcturus* is a symbolic, psychological novel; he added that ‘we all have our Tormances’ (filmed interview). This echoes George Hay’s comment, that Lindsay was

not an entertainer: he is a reporter, bringing you an in-depth account of the interior existence [...] the landscape described is actually that of one's own soul, and the characters are ourselves, seen in a distorting mirror (Hay 1988: 110).

By 2020, then, Lindsay's sublime was almost universally understood in psychological terms, as an attempt to gain wholeness and balance.

This current reading of the sublime makes consensual sense of the final chapter of *Arcturus*. Nightspore asks Krag why he has to climb the tower on the island of Muspel, and Krag replies "To have your wounds healed" (Lindsay 1992: 294). Earlier in the novel, Maskull experiences a catastrophic landslide in the region of Tormance known as the Ifdawn Marest. He tries to describe his feelings to Tydomin, a woman native to Tormance:

"Listen to me, while I try to describe what I'm feeling. When I saw that landslip, everything I have heard about the last destruction of the world came into my mind. It seemed to me as if I were actually witnessing it, and that the world were really falling to pieces. Then, where the land was, we now have this empty, awful gulf – that's to say, nothing – and it seems to me as if our life will come to the same condition, where there was something there will be nothing. But that terrible blue glare [of the sunset] on the opposite side is exactly like the eye of fate. It accuses us, and demands what we have made of our life, which is no more" (Lindsay 1992: 115).

Alan Moore contends that *Arcturus* at its core is an exploration of the human psyche, given vivid and urgent expression. Such psychological interpretations of *Arcturus* read early-twentieth-century society in crisis. But descriptions of the Ifdawn Marest suggest the horrors of the Western Front. When Lindsay refers to 'the last destruction of the world' and 'this empty, awful gulf' in the passage just quoted, we may also read this historically, as a comment on the Lost Generation of the 1920s; Eliot's 'so many', all undone by death (Eliot 1969: 62). Lindsay's concern with what he and many others thought of as the healing of humanity's wounds is to the fore in his two later novels, *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*. In both books, a feminine archetype – Lindsay calls her the Great Mother – plays a central role; Lindsay figures her as his final articulation of the sublime.

Lindsay has Magnus Colborne actually use the term 'female archetype', then very new, in *Devil's Tor*, during a long monologue on the Madonna and Child motif in art (Lindsay 2008:

175). Lindsay takes this term from contemporary culture – the psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961) and the classicist Jane Harrison (1850-1928) both use it; and both stress, for different reasons, the importance of the feminine principle. Lindsay is among the first novelists to do so.

When I asked them about the sublime, all my informants tended to reply like Alan Moore, in their own ways. J. B. Pick interpreted it along psychological or spiritual lines, when he said that Lindsay believed there are two people in everyone, and that we only understand things when the second self comes alive. For Derrick McClure, the sublime is an inner state of understanding, not a physical place. For Murray Ewing, the sublime is a state wherein one can be one's true self, unconstrained by social mores. Gavin Wraith, while cautious about mystical experience and metaphysics generally, told me that he himself had experienced something akin to Lindsay's sublime as a teenager, an experience which had stayed with him his whole life.

1.5 Lindsay and the Sublime

E. H. Visiak recalled an evening walk with Lindsay, while Lindsay was living at Ferring in Sussex (1929-1938). Visiak writes that they stopped to look at a 'very strange aspect of the moon' (Visiak's emphasis). It had a 'full, bright, white [...] vacuous appearance, as if it itself was an orifice in space'. As Lindsay stared at the moon,

“White”, he murmured. “White, *empty*.” His face looked wild and tragic, and he cried with startling emphasis, “I ought *never* to have been born in this world!”

Startled, Visiak asked Lindsay what world he should have been born in, and Lindsay replied, ““In *no* world!””

He went on urgently as if he were under a stress, a great urgent desire to express himself, to make me understand. I cannot recall his actual words, but they were very spasmodic, disjointed, intensely passionate endeavours to express a yearning, an ideal, an antithesis, the unearthly, unimaginable contrast to normal experience, sense, sensation; the absolute negation of mundane conditions: an unthinkable and, to me, appalling state

of arctic or extra-arctic abstraction. To himself, it was something pure, essential, ineffable – the Muspel, or ‘Divine Light’ of his *Arcturus* in its positive aspect, as inexpressible. I suppose, it would correspond to the Buddhistic Nirvana, with the great paradox, ‘It is not this, and it is not that’ (Visiak 1970b: 100-101).

When my interviewee Gavin Wraith met Visiak in 1964, Visiak repeated that story to him. Lindsay’s monologue had clearly impressed Visiak deeply. Evidently, Lindsay was speaking of his obsession with the sublime. Lindsay created different forms of sublime worlds or states for each of his metaphysical fantasy novels. In *Arcturus*, it is the world of Muspel, distinct from the world of illusion created by Crystalman; in *The Haunted Woman*, the dimension accessed by means of the mysterious staircase in Runhill Court, leading to three rooms in which a person’s true self is revealed; in *Devil’s Tor*, it is in visions of a prehistoric goddess figure around the Tor. Finally, in *The Witch*, Lindsay presents the Three Musics, spiritual planes attained through self-sacrifice and love.

Lindsay wrote in a letter to Visiak,

I think most of our conflicts [about the sublime] spring from our possessing different vocabularies. The fault is mine, and this is its explanation. Long since (for my own use) I have postulated the existence of a ‘sublime’ world, the word being employed for want of a better. But this ‘sublime’ is not identical with the ‘sublime’ in common use, and so confusion arises (Lindsay 1971: 45).

In the *Sketch Notes*, Lindsay wrote some three dozen aphorisms on the sublime, sometimes taking issue with current usages of the word. For example,

Schopenhauer's definition of the Sublime is the contemplation of Beauty under threatening circumstances. But one may gaze at a beautiful girl in a thunderstorm, and that would not be the Sublime... [ellipsis in original] The Sublime is not Beauty, but something else, which is related to Beauty, yet transcends it (SN 79).

Capitalising the first letter of ‘beauty’ could be a reference to Platonism, or simply shaped by Romantic assumptions and archaicisms.

This aphorism reveals an idiosyncratic reading of Schopenhauer. As we have seen, Burke separated the sublime from the beautiful, and Kant maintained this dichotomy. In *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), Schopenhauer argued that the opposite of the sublime was

not beauty, but *das Reizende*; rendered as ‘charming or attractive’ in the first English translation (Schopenhauer 1883: 268). So here (probably written before 1923), Lindsay rather misinterprets Schopenhauer.⁴⁹ In *Sketch Note 79*, though, Lindsay was confident enough in his own ideas to take issue with a figure who was already a kind of philosophical mentor.

Throughout the *Sketch Notes*, Lindsay tries to define the sublime to his own satisfaction:

The Sublime world must not be imagined as thin, incorporeal and grey - a land of ghosts and phantoms; but as far more real and solid than this coloured cubic and heavy world of ours (SN 287; Lindsay 1972: 25).

The Sublime is not a theory, but a terrible fact, which stands above and behind the world, and governs all its manifestations (SN 337; Lindsay 1972: 25).

The Sublime is not a mood, but a state of soul, which is reached beyond a certain level of feeling, like the boiling-point in liquids (SN 163; Lindsay 2002: 392).

As these three notes suggest, Lindsay was most interested in developing striking imagery and metaphors around his concept: it can be ‘far more real and solid than this coloured cubic and heavy world of ours’ and yet also ‘a state of soul’. What he called the sublime was Lindsay’s equivalent of gnosis.

Gnosticism was a dualist form of early Christianity that flourished in the early centuries of the Common Era. Gnosticism held that the material world was fundamentally flawed, with the true world remaining hidden. Salvation came in the form of gnosis, or salvific knowledge. Gnosticism was eventually driven underground as the early church centralised its dogma, especially after the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). Gnostic ideas remained largely underground until they began to resurface in early modern philosophers like Jakob Boehme (1574-1625). Gnostic texts from antiquity began to be rediscovered in the late eighteenth century (Martin 2010: 123).

⁴⁹ Lindsay was interested enough in Schopenhauer’s work to learn German so that he could read him in the original. Pick concluded that Schopenhauer ‘did not provide [Lindsay’s] perceptions [but] confirmed them’ (Pick 1970a: 7-8).

Bernard Sellin was among the first to recognise the affinity between Lindsay and Gnosticism (Sellin 1981: 166-167). Stephan Hoeller defines a gnostic as ‘a person who seeks salvation by knowledge’ (Hoeller 2002: 2); ‘not [by] rational knowledge; even less is it an accumulation of information [but by] knowledge gained through direct experience’ (Hoeller 2002: 2).

Literary critic and theorist Harold Bloom (1930-2019), explained that,

The experience of gnosis is a varied phenomenon: your knowing may be prompted by a moment of utter solitude, or by the presence of another person. You may be reading or writing, watching an image of a tree, or gazing only inward [...] Gnosis grants you acquaintance with a God unknown to, and remote from, this world, a God in exile from a false creation (Bloom 1996: 183).

Among the *Sketch Notes*, Lindsay wrote that ‘the Sublime demands solitude’ (SN 113), and,

Man must unite himself to something. In solitude, to the unseen world, resulting in the Sublime (SN 138; Lindsay 2002: 392).

Lindsay stressed the non-human qualities of his sublime; like Bloom’s ‘God unknown’: ‘The Sublime is an alien, and the children of the Sublime come to grief’ (SN 131).

As with gnosis, the sublime is knowledge (the state of soul, SN 163) situated in the body, achieved through experience (the real and solid, SN 287).

And of course, there were aspects of similar ambiguity in the earlier writers on the sublime, too. According to Edmund Burke,

Hardly any thing can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach towards infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its bounds, is one and the same thing. A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea (Burke 1990: 38).

Lindsay wanted to communicate in his fiction the complex experience of the sublime:

To attain the Sublime oneself, and to bring it within the grasp of others; this is the grandest of all ambitions (SN 192).

Consider how Lindsay dramatises the experience in his novels. He constructs versions of his sublime world for each of his major novels. What interests me in the examples that follow are how visual they are, how each embodies the potential for cinematic representation. In *Arcturus*

(1920), the sublime is called Muspel, and Lindsay represents it during the vision experienced by his protagonist Nightspore in the tower in the final chapter. In the approach to the tower, Nightspore and Krag are confronted with what at first appears to be night; but then Nightspore realises it is a gigantic black wall with a tiny lighted aperture – the doorway through which he must enter (Lindsay 1992: 293). As Nightspore climbs the staircase within the tower, he sees through the windows a ‘gigantic self-luminous sphere’ filling the sky (Lindsay 1992: 296). The sphere appears to contain two kinds of sentient life: tiny green corpuscles, and larger swirls of white light. The impression Lindsay conveys here is one of looking through a microscope. When Nightspore looks through the next window, the sphere has changed: now he can see ‘a world of rocks, minerals, water, plants, animals, and men’ (Lindsay 1992: 297). This view is ‘so magnified that he could distinguish the smallest details of life’. The magnification is such that Nightspore can see the green corpuscles inside every figure (Lindsay 1992: 297). At the next window, the sphere appears different again, as if the view is split ‘as by a prism’ (Lindsay 1992: 298), and Nightspore can see that a ‘dim, vast shadow’ (Lindsay 1992: 298) has fallen across the luminous sphere. This shadow is Crystalman, the novel’s antagonist. Again, Lindsay has used a visual device to suggest a metaphysical concept.

The Haunted Woman is perhaps Lindsay’s take on a theme popular since *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), and Poe’s ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ (1839). The book is close kin to William Hope Hodgson’s *The House on the Borderland* (1908), which also manipulates time and journeys to other dimensions (Kelly, filmed interview 2013; Moore, filmed interview, 2018). The notion that time was no longer the straight, unwavering line of Newtonian mechanics had been challenged by the work of Albert Einstein (1879-1955) in his General Theory of Relativity (1916); anomalies in time were also present in popular fiction and non-fiction, such as Charles Howard Hinton’s ‘What is the Fourth Dimension?’ (1886), H. G.

Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), Charlotte Anne Moberly's & Eleanor Jourdain's *An Adventure* (1911), and J. W. Dunne's *Experiment with Time* (1927).

In *The Haunted Woman*, Lindsay has his characters interface with the sublime by the mysterious staircase at Runhill Court, an ancient manor house in the South Downs. The stairs lead to three rooms; there, Isbel Loment and Henry Judge experience their true selves, first individually, and then together. The first room is empty of furniture, except for a mirror hanging on the wall. What happens to Isbel in that room, Lindsay describes as follows:

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 [...] 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...

(Lindsay 1987: 49; emphases in original)

The window in the final room opens on to a view of the countryside as it was in Anglo-Saxon times, in which stands a musician playing 'a fiddle-shaped instrument [...] somewhat larger than a modern viola' (Lindsay 1987: 143). He is 'the centre around which everything in the landscape was moving' (Lindsay 1987: 182). The 'strange, archaic' music has 'a peculiarly disturbing effect' on Isbel, to whom the music is 'the voice of the landscape', and a 'delicate and passionate *thought*' (Lindsay 1987: 143; emphasis in the original). Lindsay hints that she has experienced revelations about herself in the phantom upper rooms at Runhill Court, but makes the Anglo-Saxon landscape represent a final mystery outside her understanding. The image of the musician in the centre of the landscape remains one of Lindsay's most intriguingly enigmatic creations.

In *Sphinx*, Lindsay situates the sublime in dreams recorded by the central character Nicholas Cabot's machine. Evelyn Sturt experiences this dream using the machine:

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. [...] 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. . . .

It was as if she were in the dark-bright bowels of the sun, where nothing yet exists, but where everything already begins to fight desperately to realise itself, even down to men and passions! . . . Every emotion was plastered over by others, while all the outward semblances of individual life were inextricably confounded. . . .

She seemed to herself to be passing through a weird and awful tunnel. The end must surely come, but she had no idea of time. . . .

(Lindsay 2018: 36)

Lindsay repeats another dream throughout the novel (Lindsay 2018: 106-107; 136-137; 157-158; 205-214). In it, Lore Jensen, a composer, is in danger while walking in a wood. Lindsay reveals the source of the danger as her one-time lover, Maurice Ferreira, depicted first as a man, ‘at another time [as] a *fear*’ (Lindsay 2018: 210; emphasis in original). Lindsay makes the recurring dream precognitive, suggesting that the sublime world is outside, yet includes, all human time and space. For the final dream, Lindsay depicts Lore trapped in a cave. She manages to break free and emerges onto a beach; there, she and Nicholas Cabot ride off over the sea on flying horses, accompanied by ‘atmospheric’ and ‘stern’ music (Lindsay 2018: 212-213). What is strikingly cinematic about this dream is that it resembles a film loop; and the final scene on the beach contains both ‘soundtrack’ music and, as we have seen, the device of superimposition.

In *The Violet Apple*, Lindsay presents sublime experience as the consequence of eating apples grown from pips apparently descended from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis. The novel’s protagonist, a successful playwright named Anthony Kerr, eats the fruit, hears voices (Lindsay 1978: 193), and receives insights into the human nature: in the deepened perspective of the sublime, people are spirits in the clay of the body (Lindsay 1978: 193-194).

Haidee Croyland, the other principal character, speaks of heightened perception after eating her apple. She can no longer appreciate colours in relation to one another – a neighbour's garden planted with polyanthuses and jonquils seems to possess no beauty at all – but Lindsay has her now mesmerized by simple coloured objects on their own. A 'piece of gleaming polished copper' holds her attention 'for a long time', and its beauty 'seemed to burn itself into [her]' (Lindsay 1978: 247-248), while a bowl of primroses 'delighted [her] exquisitely' (Lindsay 1978: 248).⁵⁰ This kind of intensive focus recalls avant-garde painting of the period: like Cézanne's apples or Van Gogh's still lives.

In *Devil's Tor*, almost every character encounters the sublime in visions, often experienced in the tor's immediate vicinity. Magnus Colborne sees Devil's Tor 'in glory', and understands the site to be holy (Lindsay 2008: 133-134). On a walk near the tor, Peter Copping experiences an inexplicable darkening, rendering the day 'somewhat more than the brightness of full moonlight' (Lindsay 2008: 148). In this liminal state, Copping has a vision of a prehistoric community conducting a funeral. He senses great antiquity in this sight and comes to apprehend the entire landscape to be haunted by the deep past (Lindsay 2008: 148-149). Later in the novel, Henry Saltfleet is overcome with 'an unaccountable lethargy' while out walking near the tor, and finds that he is now 'seeing differently' (Lindsay 2008: 336). The day changes into a night full of stars. A burning light descends to earth, vanishing before it impacts the moor. Saltfleet takes it at first for a meteor. He is mesmerized by the sight: 'anything half so weird and

⁵⁰ It is possible that Lindsay drew for this detail on the German mystic Jakob Boehme (1575-1624). Lindsay was aware of Boehme's work, mentioning him in a letter to E. H. Visiak of 9 November 1921 (Lindsay 1971: 43): 'Sitting one day in his room [Boehme's] eyes fell upon a burnished pewter dish, which reflected the sunshine with such marvellous splendour that he fell into an inward ecstasy, and it seemed to him as if he could now look into the principles and deepest foundations of things. He believed that it was only a fancy, and in order to banish it from his mind he went out upon the green. But here he remarked that he gazed into the very heart of things, the very herbs and grass, and that actual nature harmonized with what he had inwardly seen. He said nothing of this to anyone, but praised and thanked God in silence' (Bucke 1901: 180).

wonderful he had never known. Its blue was no blue of earth; its sheer brilliance was as incomparable' (Lindsay 2008: 337).

In the final chapter, when the archaeologist Stephen Arsinal joins the two halves of the sacred flint together, it causes an explosion which at first appears to be little more than a firework in Arsinal's hand. But then,

his right hand dropped to his side, and seemed to be shut over a dazzling blue light. The blue was shining through the cracks between the fingers: less brightly, it was gleaming through the substance of the hand itself.

It changed to silver, and almost simultaneously appeared to burst within the hand, a flying hail of sparks, that were luminous white particles, escaping through the air towards all the cardinal points. They never went out, but became bigger, and, universally travelling upwards, at last were turned to fixed stars . . . in a sky that was pure night, and cloudless. . . .

Those stars grew to be magnificent gems, till the whole heaven before them was filled with great stabbing diamonds, rubies, emeralds, amethysts and sapphires, that were so much larger and fiercer than the stars of the common sky that they seemed as if alive. . . . And next, there were clouds again—huge separated masses, moving monstrosly in endless procession across that lower vault of vision, alternately burying and restoring each field in turn of blazing orbs. . . . Thus they upgazing were in another world. Arsinal had disappeared.

(Lindsay 2008: 527; ellipses in original)

In *The Witch* (1932-c.1939, pub. 1976), Lindsay again situates the sublime in dreams, visions, and in liminal times and places while characters are out walking. Lindsay gives the sublime a much greater presence than in his previous work; many scenes have an oneiric quality. Again, Lindsay accentuates the visual, as in this account of a dream one of the characters experiences:

A deserted city street in the dead of night. Round the corner moves a procession of little girls, dressed in white, with flowing hair; bearing wands, that are torches. It is a funeral. A little afterwards, still at night, I am in the nick of time to see (and I am trying to make a friend see) a group of stars in the act of slipping downwards through the sky, out of place. It is the Pleiades. But while I am pointing out the spectacle, other stars slip down in the sky; and *all* are slipping down (Lindsay 1976: 283).

Morion House, the home of Urda Noett, the witch, appears differently to each person who visits it. Faustine dreams of the house, which appears as an old, boarded up manor surrounded by an overgrown arbour and a walled-in orchard (Lindsay 1976: 301). To Flint, the house merely appears as an overgrown chalk quarry, with 'nothing to suggest the site of a house. it's no use

looking for remains' (Lindsay 1976: 318). And when Ragnar and Faustine approach the house, it is described as 'condensing' before them, as if it is solidifying out of gas (Lindsay 1976: 365).

When Waldo Pole attempts to visit Urda at Mrs Toller's house, he finds the house locked. Waldo walks around the outside, peering in through windows to see if the mysterious and elusive Urda is at home. He can see reflected in the glass of the window the outline of a man standing against a dead tree in the garden behind him. Waldo does not turn round at first, but studies the man's reflection:

His elbow rested lightly on a remaining low dead branch of the tree, the feet were crossed, the face, thought it was towards me, I couldn't distinguish, because it was in rather heavy shade and some way off. His shape was abnormally thin and exaggeratedly tall. He was in dark, tight clothes... If he was no more than a stray wanderer, why should his odd garments, odder attitude and fantastic proportions be seeming to invest him with an eeriness - almost a figurativeness - to include him in the whole prodigy of this ambiguous house? (Lindsay 1976: 333).

The man evokes various comparisons for Waldo: 'The emblem-Ghost of the Crucifixion of the painters... Mephistopheles - for instance, in Auerbach's cellar... symbolic Don Quixote, lank and worn by mad nobility, dismounted from his Rosinante... a Chicot, resting from the death of an enemy' (Lindsay 1976: 333). Convinced that the thin man is a portent, Waldo looks again and finds that the man is no longer there:

"With no difficulty, my eyes always found the dead tree again, but not any longer was there a man beside it; yet where he had been remained. A black gap, fissure of darkness, occupied exactly his remembered outline" (Lindsay 1976: 334-5).

When Ragnar visits Mrs Toller's house, also hoping to meet Urda, he follows Mrs Toller down into what he assumes is the basement level of the house, but finds himself outside on a dark hillside, though he knows that somehow he is still inside the house (Lindsay 1976: 343-344).

Lindsay hints at the sublime throughout the novel: letters received from strangers (Lindsay 1976: 282-285), conversations in country pubs (Lindsay 1976: 312-322), even parked cars (Lindsay 1976: 292), are used as portents of the other world. When Ragnar reaches Morion

House, Lindsay has the landscape of the South Downs entirely dissolve away. He places Ragnar alone in a liminal realm, as ambiguous as it is abstract: Ragnar stands on the threshold of a darkened house, and at the same time, has entered the afterlife (Lindsay 1976: 372-373).

The effect Lindsay achieves here is best described as that of visual stasis: Ragnar is alone in the vestibule of Morion House, with a strange green light illuminating the darkness. Out of this darkness slowly appears a succession of images that signify ‘the coming of heaven’ (Lindsay 1976: 381): Urda herself, ‘like the reflected light from a glass’ (Lindsay 1976: 377); ‘as from the strangeness of a dark looking glass’ (NLS MS. 27251: 1); ‘she showed, as from an obscure mirror’ (NLS MS. 27251: 2); ‘as the cold image of a mirror’ (NLS MS. 27251: 6); while ‘the feelings men called happenings were the reflections from a supernatural glass’ (NLS MS 27251: 106).

Lindsay repeatedly employs images of incoming waves, a prisoner trapped in a cell, saints, flowers, roads. At one point, all Ragnar is conscious of is a gigantic rose, that grows out of the darkness until it fills his field of vision, before fading (NLS MS 27251: 80-91), an image that recalls Magritte’s painting *The Tomb of the Wrestlers* (1960) (fig. 32). But, standing inside the doorway of Urda’s house, Lindsay paradoxically makes it clear that Ragnar can see very little: he occupies some kind of dark void, tinged green. Thus Lindsay succeeds in alluding to the nature of the afterlife (i.e. the sublime), while stressing the impossibility of describing it (NLS MS. 27251).

As I read Lindsay’s novels, I became aware that the visions he presents in *Arcturus*, *The Haunted Woman* and *Sphinx* are bleak, the sublime effectively beyond reach: glimpsed from the windows of towers or ghostly rooms, seen in dreams that hint of danger and loss. Lindsay returns his protagonists to this world to live with the consequences of what they have seen.

The Violet Apple signifies a turning point: it is precisely about how to live in this world once the visions are ended, but is perhaps Lindsay’s most positive novel. Lindsay suggests that his

two protagonists will work to regain the vision (Lindsay 1978: 250-251). In *Devil's Tor*, Lindsay introduces pagan goddess worship into the philosophical mix. He chooses a wild and stormy Dartmoor to reflect an apocalyptic mood; and concludes with a glimmer of hope that humanity can be saved from itself, a theme hinted at in *Arcturus*. Lindsay wrote *The Witch* to address a 'chasm of contradiction' (Pick 1970: 30) between the worlds he previously constructed for *Arcturus* and *Devil's Tor*.

The Witch and *Arcturus* both begin at society gatherings (a Hampstead séance in *Arcturus*, a Kensington party with concert pianists in *The Witch*); both novels construct highly illusory, fluid realities; both involve journeys on foot to a building in which the protagonist experiences revelation. *Arcturus* culminates in a vision of overwhelming cosmic bleakness; but the message of *The Witch* is positive: this world is 'shot with heaven' (Lindsay 1976: 305). Lindsay incorporates devices he used before from the repertoire of the Gothic and popular novel: mysterious houses, haunted mansions (*The Haunted Woman*); recurring dreams (*Sphinx*, *Devil's Tor*); happiness after revelation (*The Violet Apple*).

The Witch dwells on the visionary in much greater depth and at much greater length than the earlier books. Lindsay of course could not have been aware that *The Witch* would be his last novel, but even in its unfinished state, it does seem to represent a final iteration of his imaginative focus.

I became fascinated by these changes of emphasis, changes of imagery, and by the way that imagery is sequenced, from the absolute dualism of *A Voyage to Arcturus* to the paganism of *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*. Lindsay evokes his sublime as a paranormal dimension through sound, voice, and, most importantly, music. Recognising this, I realised also that this is what interests me as a filmmaker.

David Lindsay's metaphysical fantasy novels all propose the existence of a sublime world, a true reality, not to be confused with the world of appearances. He calls this our home. Lindsay

evokes and explores the existence of this sublime world for his reader especially through the use of landscape, music, sound and voice. These were the starting points for my film.

As with my discovery of the possibilities of acousmatic sound by way of Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*, I understood how sound in film has properties that affect the image. Sound destabilises the image, questions it, and offers challenges to the viewer. The spectator's aesthetic experience, when sound and image are working off each other in this way, can be deepened.

1.6 Lindsay and Music

Lindsay constantly refers to music. As he writes in the *Sketch Notes*, for him, 'Music is the experience of the supernatural [i.e. sublime] world' (SN 490; Lindsay 1972: 26). Music, both heard and performed, is a primary signifier of the sublime. He creates his uncanny atmospheres through acousmatic sound, music and voice; in Chion's sense: a 'listening situation in which we hear a sound without seeing its source' (Chion 2019: 201). The first supernatural occurrence in *Arcturus* is the sound of falling masonry (Lindsay 1992: 8). Lindsay makes this an omen, for the séance about to take place, and for the whole narrative. The upstairs rooms of Runhill Court in *The Haunted Woman* are haunted by low hums, scrapes and musical tones, 'like an orchestra heard through a thick wall' (Lindsay 1987: 30). Characters in *Devil's Tor* frequently hear running water. When Ingrid Fleming hides the talismanic flint among her clothes in a drawer in her bedroom, her hearing is 'stunned' by 'a furious uproar, as of violently rushing waters' (Lindsay 2008: 230-231). In the last chapter of Lindsay's final, unfinished novel *The Witch*, Urda Noett gives a long speech in the darkness of Morion House; her voice reveals secrets of the sublime world to Ragnar Pole, the protagonist (NLS MS 27251: 135-252).

Lindsay uses the sound of drum taps in *Arcturus* persistently as a leitmotif. When Maskull first hears them, in a scene that takes place on a sea cliff in the northeast of Scotland, Maskull – the novel’s apparent protagonist – comments that they seem ‘somehow to belong to a different world’ (Lindsay 1992: 28).

The leitmotif was a relatively new concept when Lindsay was constructing *Arcturus*. The term is associated with the music of Richard Wagner (1813-1883); the writer and publisher Hans von Wolzogen (1848-1938) was the first to use it, in his guides to Wagner’s music, the first of which appeared in 1878.⁵¹ Since then, a leitmotif is a recurring theme accompanying a recurrent place or character. By extension, leitmotifs in film can be visual as well as aural. In *Arcturus*, Lindsay makes the drumming ever more clearly a sign of Muspel, the sublime world. In my film, I use aural leitmotifs (such as metallic droning) and visual leitmotifs (standing stones) partially to refer to Lindsay’s own practice, but also to unify the chapters of my film.

In *The Haunted Woman*, the opening of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, played on the piano, suggests to Isbel Loment ‘a new marvellous world’. This is the ‘different world’ of *Arcturus* – the Lindsayan sublime (Lindsay 1987: 23). The player tells Isbel that he was “‘working something out [...] some ideas came to me in this house which seemed to require music to illustrate them – that particular music, I mean” (Lindsay 1987: 25). For Lindsay music is both an emotional experience, and an intellectual challenge: ‘First-class music [...] possesses intellectual form, and thus always compels attention’ (SN 161).

In *Sphinx*, a main character is a composer; the novel takes its title from a fictitious piece she has written. Here Lindsay links music to the riddles of the Egyptian Sphinx, and also to dreams,

⁵¹ Wolzogen’s guides started to appear in English translation soon after, e.g., *A Guide to the Music of Richard Wagner’s Tetralogy The Ring Of The Nibelung. A Thematic Key* (New York, 1895). Despite his use of leitmotifs, Lindsay was not enthused by Wagner, as he makes clear in the *Sketch Notes*: ‘Wagner’s music is like a story of adventure; everything is not for itself, but to an end. It interests, but does not move the feelings. The soul is not to be aroused by musical stories and histories, but by present-time emotions. Wagner’s music is theatrical and does not speak of the real world’ (SN 134).

which in this novel represent the sublime (Lindsay 2018: 20-1). *The Violet Apple*'s leitmotif is Beethoven's *Andante Favori*, played by a Russian refugee while Anthony Kerr experiences a drug vision, to calm him down (Lindsay 1978: 200). Beethoven occurs twice in *Devil's Tor*: Hugh Drapier comments that the Waldstein Sonata has put Ingrid Fleming 'under an enchantment', and 'seriously disturbed' her (Lindsay 2008: 32). Later in the novel, Peter Copping refers to the 'beginning movement' of the Ninth Symphony (2008: 165) during a long conversation about the power of art.

Lindsay discussed how he saw music explicitly in a short piece written in 1932 for his publisher, Putnam's:

Devil's Tor was conceived in a spirit of music. A previous book of mine, *A Voyage to Arcturus*, was similarly generated, and the greatest compliment it has ever received was from the mouth of an artist and musician, who found its whole construction and composition essentially, quote unquote, musical. To the curious in such matters, I should have to refer *Devil's Tor* as to its primary origins, not to any master of prose, living or dead, but to the tremendous creator of the Ninth Symphony. The first movement of that work has generally been more or less in my head during the book's writing (Lindsay 1932b, quoted in Pick 1970: 28).

In this reverence for Beethoven, Lindsay was a man of his time. It is important to remember that Lindsay's views were formed in the late Victorian period; he turned 24 in 1900. By then as Matthew Guerrieri comments, 'Beethoven's music [had] become a repository for inchoate Victorian emotions' (Guerrieri 2012: 167). Sir George Grove's (1820-1900) comments on Beethoven are typical of this Victorian attitude:

Such men cannot be judged by the standard of ordinary men [...] They are free from the conventions which bind us [...] [their] gestures and looks and words are the absolute expression of their inmost feeling (Graves 1903: 337).

Lindsay regarded Beethoven in this way. He wrote that the characteristic of 'kingliness',

...consists essentially in *solitariness* [Lindsay's emphasis]; pride, magnanimity, etc. only follow thereon. "My relations, my companions, my contemporaries, are little-minded, and deeply interested in trifles; I understand them, but how can they understand me?" That is the feeling which animates Catherine [the Great], Goethe, and Beethoven (SN 209).

Elsewhere, Lindsay writes that, ‘Up to the present there is no Beethoven of literature’ (SN 357; Lindsay 2002: 396). To represent ‘inchoate Victorian emotions’, the figure of Beethoven was an apt focal point. Lindsay would have agreed with Walter Pater (1839-1894), that ‘All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music’ (Pater 2010 [1873]: 124).

Critics such as Colin Wilson reached for analogy with music when assessing Lindsay. Wilson writes of returning to reread *The Haunted Woman* and *Sphinx*,

as one returns to a favourite piece of music. There is undoubtedly a sense in which Lindsay’s works are symphonies rather than novels (Wilson 1988: 11).

For Sellin, Lindsay ‘contemplated the world in philosophical terms,’ and expressed ‘his intuitions and reflections in the way a musician would [...] do’ (Sellin 1981: 209). Gary K. Wolfe thought that: ‘It is not outside the realm of possibility that [Lindsay] entertained the notion of musical structures for his fictions’ (Wolfe 1982: 18). Robert Waugh argued that the structure of *Arcturus* is based on the ‘drumbeat underlying the novel’ (1985: 143), which he likens to ‘Schopenhauer’s music’ (Waugh 1985: 143). Waugh’s exegesis of the novel considers *Arcturus* as having four ‘movements’, like a symphony, and links these movements to developments in Maskull’s realisations about the nature of the journey he is undertaking.⁵²

Waugh also argues for triad patterns within *Arcturus*: the characters of Maskull, Nightspore and Krag; the first three ‘movements’ of the novel, each with its three episodes.⁵³ Waugh claims that:

this [triad] pattern is not an allegory in which one character stands for one quality [...]

⁵² The scenes set on Earth (chapters 1-5), a ‘rudimentary, thematic prologue’ (Waugh 1985: 145); a first movement, which begins with the journey from Earth to Tormance in the crystal torpedo-shaped vessel (Lindsay 1992: 38-39). The theme of chapters 6-8 is innocence, embodied in the characters of Joiwind & Panawe; chapters 8-11 deal with sexuality, in the form of the seductive and powerful women, Oceaxe & Tydomin; chapters 11-12 depict forms of spirituality, in the ascetics Spadevil & Catice. The movement ends with chapter 13, set in the Wombflash Forest, which represents a ‘rebirth’ (Waugh 1985: 145). Waugh argues that this structure is repeated for the rest of the novel. Waugh’s second ‘movement’ starts with Maskull taking the ferry to Swaylone’s Island. The three counterpointed episodes are Swaylone’s island: innocence (chapter 15); Matterplay: generation (chapter 16); Threal: Spirituality/rebirth (chapter 17). The third ‘movement’: Maskull rides with Haunte in his aerial ferry to Lichstorm. The three episodes: Haunte - innocence (chapter 18); Sullenbode: sexuality (chapter 19); Barey: Rebirth (Maskull dies) (chapter 20). The Fourth movement: Nightspore and Krag take the ‘ferry’ (in this case, a floating island) to Muspel (chapter 21), where the final - and most important - rebirth takes place.

⁵³ Waugh suggests that the three-fold pattern is also echoed by the Three Musics of *The Witch* (1985: 148).

but a generator of symbols, a music, in which each figure ambivalently reverberates [...] The book refuses to bear one clear, decisive reading (Waugh 1985: 148-149).⁵⁴

Waugh ends with this important point: ‘until we have begun to grapple with the counterpoint the book will continue to seem baffling’ (Waugh 1985: 150-151). As I was working on my film, I came to understand that counterpoint – between sound and image – was one of the strongest tools in my filmmaker’s toolkit. Counterpoint implies two things working at the same time; possibly together, but possibly in opposition. For me, counterpointed sound came to suggest an otherness to what was seen on screen, as if the image were papering over some kind of metaphysical crack in the world.

Bernard Sellin discusses Lindsay’s use of music at length, which I can only summarise here. He quotes *Sketch Note* 490, one of the simplest, and most important, entries in the entire typescript: ‘Music is the experience of the supernatural world’. For Sellin, this one sentence sums up Lindsay’s thinking. ‘Music constitutes a world apart, far removed from the imperfections and falsities of our present lives. [...] music is the proof, and the product, of a parallel world’ (Sellin 1981: 204).⁵⁵

Sellin argues that *Arcturus* ‘rests upon the alternation of two rhythms [...] the march in two-four cadence, and [...] the waltz in three-four time’ (Sellin 1981: 208). For Lindsay, walking

⁵⁴ Waugh omits one detail about the drumbeats: Lindsay stresses that the third beat is slightly accented (Lindsay 1992: 28). This emphasis does not make sense in Waugh’s tripartite structure, as it would either place undue emphasis on the third scene in each movement (the episodes he identifies as representing spirituality); the third character in the central trinity - presumably Krag; or the novel’s third movement - the scenes set in Lichstorm and Barey (chapters 19 and 20). The various vehicular journeys in the novel are turning points, like the ‘rebirth’ scenes of realization: the Wombflash Forest chapter, and Maskull’s subsequent conversation with Polecrab, where he realises that “‘reality and falseness are two words for the same thing’” (Lindsay 1992: 169); the conversation in the caverns of Threal, where Maskull and Corpang conclude that “‘life is wrong, and the creator of life too, whether he is one person or three’” (Lindsay 1992: 231). And there is another, not noted by Waugh: Maskull travels from Swaylone’s Island to Matterplay by means of a floating, airborne tree (Lindsay 1992: 195-196).

⁵⁵ The ‘imperfections and falsities’ Sellin cites include Isbel and Judge in *The Haunted Woman* failing to sustain a relationship away from Runhill Court; the stifling atmosphere of the village of Newleigh in *Sphinx*, that can only be escaped through death; or the realization Anthony Kerr has in *The Violet Apple* that a marriage to Grace Lytham would be to share ‘a common coffin’ (Lindsay 1978: 189). This doesn’t appear to be a condemnation of marriage. Lindsay seems to be implying that a marriage to Grace would force Anthony to share her level of perception. As Anthony is experiencing the effects of eating one of the two psychotropic apples at this point in the book, he cannot do that. He is ‘as a man risen from the dead’ (Lindsay 1978: 189), and the only person he can share that level of perception with is Haidee Croyland, who has eaten the other apple.

straight ahead – or ‘north-south’ (SN 96) – was one of the ‘great processes of nature’, like the motion of a pendulum (SN 514). Conversely, the waltz he saw as a spiral, condemned on the grounds that ‘the dancers make a complete revolution upon themselves’ (SN 514). They are not heading anywhere, merely turning on the same spot.⁵⁶

Lindsay makes music part of the characters’ lives: Lore Jensen in *Sphinx* is a composer, Nicholas Cabot is the son of a violinist; Ingrid Fleming loves Beethoven’s ‘Waldstein’ Sonata in *Devil’s Tor*; *The Haunted Woman*’s Isbel Loment and her aunt, Mrs Moor, admire Brahms and Beethoven (Sellin 1981: 205).

Lindsay gives each novel a specific soundtrack. *A Voyage to Arcturus* has Mozart’s ‘Temple’ Music from *The Magic Flute* (Lindsay 1992: 7)⁵⁷, and the fictitious music of Earthrid, described by its composer/performer as “‘founded on painful tones [...], its symmetry is wild [...] its emotion is bitter and terrible”” (Lindsay 1992: 187). The soundtrack for *The Haunted Woman* is Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony (Lindsay 1987: 22-23). *Sphinx* has Lore Jensen’s fictitious piano piece ‘Sphinx’ (Lindsay 2018: 20); while *Devil’s Tor* has Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony as a structuring principle (Sellin 1981: 205-206). For *The Violet Apple*, Beethoven’s *Andante Favori* (WoO 57) (Lindsay 1978: 200-201); his Piano Sonata No. 18, op. 31 no. 3, for *The Witch* (Lindsay 1976: 256-257).

Lindsay described in musical terms voices, landscapes, and bodies in *Arcturus*. Panawe’s voice is compared to ‘a bewitching adagio from a low-toned string instrument’ (Lindsay 1992:

⁵⁶ Maskull, Nightspore and Krag – a ‘symbolic representation of the hero’s quest’ – and the green corpuscles of light Nightspore sees in the final chapter – ‘beings trying to regain their divine origins’ – represent the march rhythm (Sellin 1981: 208). The final chapter’s white corpuscles of light, however, and some of Tormance’s animal life – such as the ‘fantastic little creature, the size of a newborn lamb, waltzing along on three legs’ (Lindsay 1992: 54) – do not make any significant progress in any direction, but symbolise ‘the corrupted life of Arcturus’, and therefore represent the waltz (Sellin 1981: 208).

⁵⁷ In *Arcturus* the reference is vague – it is simply referred to as ‘Mozart’s “Temple” music’ (Lindsay 1992: 6) and ‘Mozart’s “Hymn”’ (Lindsay 1992: 8) – the music can be identified from the *Sketch Notes*. Lindsay refers to the ‘Temple’ scene in *Sketch Note* 362, where he describes the temple setting, and the music as a hymn, ‘contrasted with the declamation of the High-Priest, and the double-row of white-robed priests’. The only scene where the high priest, Sarastro, is on stage with his priests is Act II.i. Sarastro’s aria implores the gods Isis and Osiris to grant protection and wisdom to the characters Tamino and Pamina, one of the themes of *Arcturus*.

74); the mountains of the Ildawn Marest seem like ‘a simple musical theme, the notes of which are widely separated in the scale’ (Lindsay 1992: 72); Oceaxe’s body is a ‘lovely harp’ (Lindsay 1992: 93).⁵⁸

In *Devil’s Tor*, the thunder that Ingrid Fleming and Hugh Drapier witness on the moor is ‘the grandest music’ (Lindsay 2008: 320); the magic stone Hugh holds to his ear one day in the Himalayas ‘seems to emit music’ (Lindsay 2008: 87); Hugh’s fears of his own impending death are linked with ‘solemn music’ (Lindsay 2008: 85); the female deity in the tomb beneath Devil’s Tor is posed like ‘a lovely fall of music’ (Lindsay 2008: 103); while Ingrid and Saltfleet unite to “‘mystical music”” (Lindsay 2008: 527-528).

Lindsay defines locales in *The Haunted Woman* by music that can be heard in them. The pier is where Isbel and Marshall go to hear music (Lindsay 1987: 33). The music of the pavilion band, and the piano-organ heard in a Brighton back street (Lindsay 1987: 14), are clearly trite, on a par with the ‘Argentine dance’ and ‘one of the new American dances’ in *Sphinx* (Lindsay 2018: 162, 177). These, for Lindsay, are the lowest forms of music. Locations so blighted are mired in this illusory world.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Sellin lists (1981: 247, n. 39) other musical comparisons in *A Voyage to Arcturus*. He gives a page reference of p. 46 (he is using the 1968 Gollancz edition), but this might be a misprint, as that page has Joiwind’s voice being compared with ‘an April day’, but on the previous page, Lindsay describes her movements as being ‘as graceful as music.’ (Lindsay 1992: 41-42). Sellin’s other references in his footnote are, however, correct: Crystalman’s voice has ‘a double tone. The primary one sounded far away; the second was an undertone, like a sympathetic tanging string (Lindsay 1992: 76); Oceaxe speaks in ‘a rich, lingering, musical voice, which delighted [Maskull] to listen to’ (Lindsay 1992: 79); Maskull tells Oceaxe her voice is “‘inappropriate”” but that it is also “‘the loveliest and strangest instrument I have ever listened to”” (Lindsay 1992: 96); Gangnet speaks in a ‘vibrating baritone’ that is ‘womanish in its modulations and variety of tone’ (Lindsay 1992: 279). Sellin notes that Joiwind’s voice resembles a violin. In fact, this voice belongs to Oceaxe, and her voice is compared to a viola (Lindsay 1992: 84), and later, to a flute (Lindsay 1992: 93) (Sellin 1981: 207). Sellin also claims that the rising of Tormance’s second sun, Alppain, is compared to the opening bars of a Beethoven symphony (Sellin 1981: 207), when in fact Lindsay writes it is a ‘supernatural symphony’ (Lindsay 1992: 288). Sellin may have been thinking of Lindsay’s reference to the Seventh Symphony from *Sketch Note* 261, where it is described as having the ‘true name’ of “‘the Supernatural Symphony””. Lindsay adds, ‘Its character is peculiar, weird, and mysterious:- a long *dream* [Lindsay’s emphasis]. One can hear it for ever, and yet not understand it.’ However, Beethoven is not mentioned in *Arcturus*. The reference to a ‘supernatural’ symphony as Alppain rises cannot refer to his Seventh Symphony, but should be read as a metaphor.

⁵⁹ Sellin’s other references contain slight inaccuracies: he refers to a hurdy-gurdy heard in an alleyway, but this would appear to be a reference to ‘a piano-organ up some back street [that] was rattling out a popular tune’ (Lindsay 1987: 14), while his reference to an orchestra on the pier is erroneous: Lindsay simply refers to ‘the band’ (Lindsay 1987: 33).

Central to *The Witch* is Lindsay's concept of the 'Three Musics'. The first frees the soul from Earthly passions; the second allows a person to discover their soul; while the third allows the soul to join the universal soul. Faustine Gaspary explains these as the stages the soul must go through after death (Lindsay 1976: 353).

The First Music is associated with Cecilie Toller and her house in the South Downs, Ragnar Pole's first port of call on his way to meet the witch (Ch. 12).⁶⁰ The Second Music comes in with Marya Klangst, a German musician visiting Cecilie Toller (Ch. 13). The Third Music is tied to Urda Noett, who waits for Ragnar at Morion House (Chs. 18-19) (Sellin 1981: 224).

Reading the novels, I am immediately reminded of music in films. From my perspective as a filmmaker, Lindsay's narratives have soundtracks.⁶¹

Sound, and music of course, in the linguistic medium of Lindsay's novels, are in a literal sense acousmatic, but they are also acousmatic in Chion's more specific, cinematic sense. The most fitting analogy for this in cinema is non-diegetic sound. According to Chion, acousmatic sound is 'A listening situation in which we hear a sound without seeing its cause' (Chion 2019: 201); non-diegetic sound is

sound whose source is not only not visible on screen but [...] supposedly belongs to another time and space (real or otherwise) than the scene shown on screen. The most common cases of nondiegetic sound are voiceover narrators [or] musical accompaniment (Chion 2019: 208).

Lindsay does indeed use sound that precisely is supposed to emanate from 'another time and space'; for instance, in *Sphinx*, Lindsay gives this title to a short fictitious piano piece, written by Lindsay's character, Lore Jensen. Here is Lindsay's description of Lore's work, as Evelyn Sturt plays it on the piano:

It was quite short [...] The opening was calm, measured and drowsy. One could almost see the burning sand of the desert and feel the enervating sunshine. By degrees the theme became more troubled and passionate, quietly in the beginning, but with a gradually rising storm—not physical, but of emotion—until everything was like an

⁶⁰ Cecilie Toller inaugurates the process of the liberation of Ragnar's soul when he hears her play the Beethoven sonata at the beginning of the novel (Lindsay 1976: 256-257).

⁶¹ An idea echoed by my informant, the composer David Power (filmed interview, 2013: 36.02-36.09).

unsteady sea of menace and terror. Towards the end, crashing dissonances appeared, but just when he was expecting the conventional climax to come, all the theme-threads united in a sudden quietening, which almost at once took shape as an indubitable question. It could then be seen that all that had gone before had been leading the way to this question, and that what had appeared simple and understandable had been really nothing of the sort, but, on the contrary, something very mysterious and profound. . . . Half a dozen tranquil and beautiful bars brought the little piece to a conclusion. . . .

(Lindsay 2018: 20)⁶²

Lindsay introduces acousmatic music in the middle of his story: when Nicholas Cabot and Evelyn Sturt call at Lore Jensen's house, Lore's servant sits and sews in the open window of the drawing-room, and a Bach fugue comes from the unseen piano. They wait in the hallway; the Bach fugue continues. The servant tells them that Lore is not at home, though they can hear her playing the piano.

As they leave, the servant woman is still in the window, with

the same sickly bitterness on her waxen features – except that now it seemed to the two that there was the shadow of a smile on her lips which had not been there before (Lindsay 2018: 109).

This ghost of a smile recalls the Crystalman grin that recurs in *A Voyage to Arcturus*, when a character dies and the philosophy they followed is shown to be false. The element of the music here gives the woman an odd power, as if she is party to a secret. It is a strikingly cinematic moment.

At the end of the novel, acousmatic music linked to feeling, moves from within the body to without, as Evelyn Sturt experiences her father's dream by means of Nicholas's dream machine. In the dream body (or consciousness) of her father, she is alone on a beach where,

⁶² Murray Ewing (2017) has drawn attention to Cyril Scott's (1879-1970) piano work 'Sphinx' (op. 63, 1908), and suggests the evocation of Lore's piece in the novel could equally describe the Scott; one wonders whether Lindsay had heard it. There is no reference to Scott anywhere in Lindsay, and Novello, Scott's publishers, do not have performance details for the piece prior to 1990 (email, 27 April 2017). However, the piece was known to have been very popular, and Scott was initially known as the composer of short piano works like 'Sphinx' and 'Lotus Land'. There are two recordings of Scott's 'Sphinx' that I know of, by Michael Schäfer and Leslie De'Ath. Scott was also a man of similar occult and philosophical interests to Lindsay. His dates (1879-1970) make him a contemporary of Lindsay's. And, as Ewing points out, one of Scott's closest colleagues was the pianist Evelyn Stuart (1881-1950), who was interested in metaphysical and spiritual issues, and whose name is close to that of Evelyn Sturt in Lindsay's novel.

She was seeing all things through her heart. It was the music. It was a peculiar music, for it did not come from without, it did not sing into her ears, but it existed as an *atmosphere*, which she breathed with her lungs. It had a stern, noble rhythm, in the time of a slow waltz (Lindsay 2018: 207; emphasis in original).

This rhythm, of course, recalls Nightspore's vision at the end of *Arcturus* (Lindsay 1992: 296); Evelyn experiences a 'mental vision' of 'great white pillars supporting a Doric temple' (Lindsay 2018: 207), like the 'time-mirage' Maskull experiences on Tormance, when a circle of 'dazzlingly white pillars' appear suddenly in the scarlet desert (Lindsay 1992: 51-52). The pillars in *Arcturus* 'flickered to and fro between distinctness and indistinctness, like an object being focussed' (Lindsay 1992: 51-52); Evelyn's vision 'repeats'. One has the sense here of a cinematic image, jumping in the projector.

The disjuncture between the music and the lonely beach,

so uplifted her sensations that she kept pulling at the chains of her body. Strange beauty, inward and outward, flowed together in a higher, still stranger beauty [...] [But] She had other feelings. She was alone and bereaved (Lindsay 2018: 207).

Evelyn feels grief for Lore, who has just died. But in the dream, Lore is alive, trapped in an underground cavern. She manages to escape, and emerges from a rock pool onto the beach.

Lindsay then reveals through (diegetic) dialogue that Lore is Evelyn's step-sister. As Lore and her father embrace, Evelyn is conscious that her father does not know that Lore has just killed herself in the 'real' world. Against this emotionally complicated moment, 'the sea continued to thunder in and the atmospheric pillar-music to sound' (Lindsay 2018: 212).

When Lore and her father part, 'the music became sterner and more pathetic' (Lindsay 2018: 212). As Lore and Nicholas – who has appeared in the dream⁶³ – are about to ride off across the ocean on two flying horses, which fly without wings:

The rhythm of the music became so pronounced that it seemed like the throb of a mighty engine, yet the theme was sad and majestic beyond description (Lindsay 2018: 213).

⁶³ Nicholas is 'lightly clad in antique-looking garments' (Lindsay 2018: 213), recalling the garb of the Musician in *The Haunted Woman*: 'The man was tall and stout, and, in his bright-coloured, archaic garments, cut an extraordinary figure' (Lindsay 1987: 182).

The music resembling ‘a mighty engine’ recalls the ‘rhythmical vibration of the air’ in the tower in *Arcturus*, likened to the ‘continuous throbbing of some mighty engine’ (Lindsay 1992: 295). These examples show that Lindsay’s novels can be read as having ‘soundtracks’ in the cinematic sense. Lindsay orchestrates his ‘sound design’ to imply the existence of his sublime world.

Another element of Lindsay’s ‘sound design’ is repetition. *Arcturus* takes the form of a series of encounters with characters whose philosophies are exposed as false, like musical repetitions, or variations on a theme. Nightspore climbs the tower at Muspel; earlier, Maskull climbs the tower at Starkness (Ch.4). Lindsay describes both as feeling they are carrying the weight other men on their shoulders (Lindsay 1992: 29, 295). Lest we not forget the point, Lindsay adds ‘It struck a familiar chord in his mind’ (Lindsay 1992: 295).⁶⁴

These repetitions and echoes call to mind Novalis, who wrote of

Narratives [...] without connection, but with association, such as dreams; [...] This true poetry can at most have an allegorical meaning on a large scale and an indirect effect like music (Quoted in MacDonald 1971: 14).⁶⁵

Of course, repetition is not unique to Novalis: all time-based art forms – the novel, music, cinema – are structured through repetitions and echoes. Repetition structures *The Haunted Woman*, *Sphinx*, and *Devil’s Tor*.⁶⁶ *The Haunted Woman* depicts repeated visits to the upper rooms at Runhill Court (Lindsay 1987: 46-50; 82-89; 127-153); a central element in *Sphinx* is the recurrence of the dream sequences (Lindsay 2018: 36; 106-107; 136-137; 157-158; 205-214); in *Devil’s Tor*, the predominant repeated trope is the vision, which almost every character

⁶⁴ Nightspore was not shown as present in the earlier scene; how could he have known of the increased gravitation Maskull felt when climbing the tower’s stairs?

⁶⁵ We should note also the name ‘Nightspore’, which sounds as if it is a tacit acknowledgement by Lindsay of Novalis’s importance as a possible source for the novel. Novalis used the concept of ‘night’ as representing the time before spiritual awakening; Lindsay’s use of the suffix ‘spore’ in his character’s name suggests the potential for awakening.

⁶⁶ Lindsay’s historical romance, *Adventures of M. de Mailly* (1926), also has a musical structure: in this case, like a mensuration canon. Each of the four narratives reprises themes from the last, each new narrative longer than the last. The final narrative is as long as the first three combined.

experiences: Ingrid Fleming (Lindsay 2008: 39-40; 497-505; 527-545); Dick Fleming (2008: 75); Hugh Drapier (2008: 102-103); Uncle Magnus (2008: 133-134); Peter Copping (2008: 147-151; 505-514); Henry Saltfleet (2008: 288-289; 338-340; 379-381; 527-545); and Stephen Arsinal (2008: 382-386).

Devil's Tor, like a symphony, has a long, dramatic introduction, setting out the main themes (chapters 1-12); a 'minuet' (the backstory of Saltfleet and Arsinal, an increase in visionary manifestations) (chapters 13-24); a slow movement, examining the characters' psychologies (chapters 25-29); and an explosive (literally) finale at Devil's Tor (chapters 30-33).

The Witch is rather an oratorio,⁶⁷ blending waking and dreaming, earth and heaven. *The Witch* comes close to Novalis's concept of a story that works through 'association, such as dreams', with 'an indirect effect like music' (MacDonald 1971: 14).

Always, Lindsay uses music to point towards the sublime.

1.7 The Sublime & Music

Lindsay uses all kinds of sonic cues. The clearest evidence of how he mobilises nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideas about the supernatural – soon to be incorporated into cinema – is the way he sees music both as an intrinsically transformative art form, and as latent in nature and the cosmos.

My interviewees had interesting comments on music in Lindsay. The composer David Power told me that Lindsay 'uses music in code' (David Power, filmed interview). Such codes may refer to the sublime, or comment on character. When Lindsay refers to someone as having been

⁶⁷ 'A large-scale, usually narrative musical work for orchestra and voices, typically on a sacred theme and performed with little or no costume, scenery, or action' (OED).

‘overcome’ by Scriabin (Lindsay 1992: 2), or ‘adoring’ Chopin (Lindsay 2018: 19), Lindsay makes it clear that he does not share their tastes; this music does not speak of sublimity.

According to Brian Stableford, ‘once you’ve got past orgasm and music, there’s not a lot left’ to express the sublime (Stableford, filmed interview, 2018). John Herdman said that music, in its highest form, ‘*is* the sublime’ (Herdman, filmed interview, 2019; his emphasis).

For Lindsay, Beethoven’s music especially creates intimations of a higher world. In *The Haunted Woman*, a character playing Beethoven on the piano

was not so much attempting to render this fragment from giant-land, as experimenting with it. His touch was heavy and positive, but he picked out the notes so tardily, he took such liberties with the tempo, there were such long silences, that the impression given was that he must be reflecting profoundly upon what he played... [...]

[Isbel] knew the composition well, but had never heard it played like that before. The disturbing excitement of its preparations, as if a curtain were about to be drawn up, revealing a new marvellous world... It was wonderful... most beautiful, really... Then, after a few minutes came the famous passage of the gigantic ascending scales, and she immediately had a vision of huge stairs going up... And, after that, suddenly dead silence (Lindsay 1987: 22-23).

The pianist is Sherrup, an American painter. Isbel questions him:

“But why were you playing Beethoven in an empty house?”

The singular, softly-metallic character of her voice seemed to attract his attention, for he shot a questioning glance at her.

“I was working something out,” he replied curtly, after a brief hesitation.

“Is it permissible to inquire what?”

He looked still more surprised. “You wish to know that?... Some ideas came to me in this house which seemed to require music to illustrate them – that particular music, I mean” (Lindsay 1987: 25).

In *Devil’s Tor*, after a storm on Dartmoor, ‘a prolonged bass growl of thunder filled the silence like a supernatural voice’. Ingrid remarks that this is “‘the grandest music’”; Drapier comments that it “‘speaks straight to the soul.’” The conversation turns to music: Drapier says that he watched Ingrid as her mother played Beethoven’s Waldstein sonata on the piano, and that she “‘seemed under an enchantment’”. Ingrid agrees she was ‘in a strange sphere’; and turns back to the landscape around them, which she says is “‘the beginning of the sublime’”

(Lindsay 2008: 32). Thus Lindsay links landscape, music and the notion of a higher world as succinctly as the piano scene in *The Haunted Woman*.

In *The Violet Apple*, the Russian exile Igor Pavlovitch Ilyitch plays Beethoven's *Andante Favori* in F to calm Anthony Kerr, during his drug trip:

Under the poetic touch of the Russian's fingers, the celestial first melody opened with all the quietude and purity of a still Sabbath morning. Tears started soon to Ilyitch's eyes, even as he played on. More than a just individual portion of human distress had there been in his life, but if he now silently wept, it was not for himself – it was the universal man in him understanding through this music the immense gulf lying between the actual and the unattainable states (Lindsay 1978: 200).

The Witch opens with a Beethoven performance; a harbinger of revelations to come:

The piece [Ragnar] had recognised from its first heard notes. It was Beethoven's sonata, Opus 31, No. 3; the movement in it that put a question.⁶⁸ Under such music he had no power or will to stay calm. But how queer was fate! - how could he have dreamt, in his reluctance to come to-night, that sacredness was prepared for him? Truly she [Cecilie Toller, who is playing] was a translator. All his wisdom, beneath the spell of these deep-moving, significant tones, was if welling up to overflow into his emotional apprehension of a stir of new life, until almost he could have sworn that something of importance was round the corner for him, the first faint roots already acted.

(Lindsay 1976: 256-257)

Later, Adrienne Pole speaks of the Kreutzer sonata, heard the previous Monday, as hugely moving. The piece made her conscious of “the torture of heaven, not hell, in Beethoven's spirit” (1976: 261).

For Lindsay, Beethoven was *the* artistic titan, whose achievements dwarfed those of all other art forms: ‘Up to the present there is no Beethoven of literature’ (SN 357).⁶⁹

⁶⁸ This might be the third movement. See this performance by the Latvian pianist Aurelia Shimkus, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0FipZP3O4w>, and note the theme that enters at 0.41. This might be Lindsay's ‘question’. Alternatively, 1.16 could be the entry of the ‘question’.

⁶⁹ The nearest Lindsay gets to describing anyone as a ‘Beethoven of literature’ comes in the *Sketch Notes*:

Of all the writers, Dostoevsky is perhaps the greatest. Not one of his characters is real and life-like; they are simply carriers of emotions. This makes his books dull and boring. But after yawning through a hundred pages, suddenly a passage arrives which is not only pure gold itself, but which makes one realise that the previous hundred pages have also been of pure gold. One has not seen the mountain, because one has been on it. No parallel with this occurs to me except Brahms, whose longer works have the same peculiarity; the beauties are scarce, but when they occur, they beautify all the rest (SN 352; Lindsay 2002: 395-396).

Lindsay seems to perceive the effect of Beethoven and dreaming as one continuous state – as close as anyone could get to expressing the sublime in art form:

Beethoven's 7th Symphony 'the Romantic Grove Symphony': its true name is 'the Supernatural Symphony'. Its character is peculiar, weird, and mysterious:- a long *dream*. One can hear it for ever, and yet not understand it (SN 261; emphasis in original).

So the 'Romantic Grove' gives way to, is eclipsed or superseded by, the 'supernatural'; the key figurative transformation in Lindsay's own landscapes.

Lindsay was not alone in regarding the Seventh Symphony in this way. The writer and journalist Warner Allen (1881-1968) described his reaction to a performance at the Queen's Hall in London:

lightning-wise [...] the mysterious event [...] occurred in an infinitesimal fraction of a split second; [...] a *wordless* stream of complex feelings in which the experience of Union combined with the rhythmic emotion of the music like a sunbeam striking with iridescence the spray above a waterfall (Allen 1946: 30-31; emphasis in original).

In an attempt to express this kind of reverence for music in my film, in an early edit I included a reproduction of Khnopff's *Listening to Schumann* (fig. 11). It shows a woman in rapt concentration as another figure, just visible on the left, plays the piano. I can easily imagine Lindsay listening to Beethoven with similar intensity (as is suggested in the *Sketch Notes*, and his discussions about Beethoven in letters to Robert Barnes). We can imagine that this is how Ingrid Fleming might have looked as she was put under an enchantment by the Waldstein sonata, or Adrienne Pole, indescribably moved by the Kreutzer.

This is a rare example of Lindsay admitting admiration for another writer; secondly, Lindsay's descriptions of Dostoyevsky's work could apply equally to Lindsay's own, especially *Devil's Tor*, whose long digressions, for me, recall, the work of the Russian.

1.8 Non-Diegetic Sounds and Voices

In addition to music, Lindsay threaded sound and voice into his novels, using them to introduce rhythm and periodicity into his narrative structures. Lindsay's disembodied voices are oracles, mantic signs.

Non-diegetic sound is present in Lindsay's work from the very beginning. In *Arcturus*, the first strange event in the novel is a sound:

Before any words were spoken, a loud and terrible crash of falling masonry caused the assembled party to start up from their chairs in consternation. It sounded as if the entire upper part of the building had collapsed. Faull sprang to the door, and called to the servant to say what was happening. [...] He said he had heard nothing. [...] he went upstairs. Nothing, however, was amiss there, neither had the maids heard anything.

In the meantime Backhouse, who almost alone of those assembled had preserved his sangfroid, went straight up to Nightspore, who stood gnawing his nails.

"Perhaps you can explain it, sir?"

"It was supernatural," said Nightspore, in a harsh, muffled voice, turning away from his questioner.

"I guessed so. It is a familiar phenomenon, but I have never heard it so loud."

(Lindsay 1992: 8)

Such paranormal sound occurs again in *The Violet Apple*:

The half-perception of the existence of these forces [Anthony] believed, was supplied by such authentic supernatural phenomena as knockings, the sound of falling masonry, appearances at the moment of death, and so forth. We are separated from a whole active universe by an opaque wall of senselessness (Lindsay 1978: 14).

Lindsay confided to Visiak⁷⁰ an experience of this kind in a letter (9 November 1921):

A few weeks before the death of my only brother, some years back⁷¹ I was awakened in the middle of the night by a tremendous crash, as though a chimney-stack had crashed through the roof overhead. That it was not my imagination in my case is proved by the fact that my aunt, who slept in the room above, came flying downstairs for help - she also had heard the noise, and was frightened out of her senses. The other two inmates of the house heard nothing, and in the morning no damage could be detected either to our house or to any other in the road (Lindsay 1971: 43).

⁷⁰ Visiak also describes a mystical experience in which sound plays an important part (Visiak 1968: 211).

⁷¹ Alexander Lindsay (b. 1869), died on 4 September 1915 at the family home, 17 Blackheath Rise, Lewisham. Lindsay's aunt lived with them. (Indeed, it was her house.) Alexander was also a novelist, writing under the name Alexander Crawford (Anderson 2008).

The same letter asserts that ‘We are surrounded by a terribly queer unseen universe’; the experience of supernatural sounds belongs ‘in the same class of phenomena as Socrates’s “Daemon”, and Jacob Boehme’s shining light’ (Lindsay 1971: 43).⁷²

When Maskull is in the tower at Starkness Observatory (whose windows act telescopically, giving him a view of the planet Tormance), he hears a disembodied voice:

A low, sighing whisper sounded in his ear, from not more than a yard away. “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 struck another match, with trembling fingers. No one was in sight, and all was quiet as the tomb (Lindsay 1992: 30).

At the other end of the book, in the caverns of Threal:

... a man’s voice sounded, not a yard from his ear. It hardly raised above a whisper [...] As he listened, he was unable to prevent himself from physically trembling.

“Maskull, you are to die,” said the unseen speaker.

“Who is speaking?”

“You have only a few hours of life left. Don’t trifle your time away.”

Maskull could bring nothing out.

“You have despised life,” went on the low-toned voice. “Do you really imagine that this mighty world has no meaning, and that life is a joke?”

“What must I do?”

“Repent your murders, commit no fresh ones, pay honour to...”

The voice died away.

(Lindsay 229-230)

Here again Lindsay draws on contemporary views and experience of sound: the early 1920s saw the start of widespread radio broadcasting. Sound suddenly could represent *the far away*.

The drumming in *Arcturus* is explicitly acousmatic, emanating from behind the visual, in precisely defined and framed *mise-en-scène*. This is cinematic – it produces an effect analogous to what Schrader calls transcendental style:

The sound appeared to him to belong to a different world from that in which he was travelling. The latter was mystical, dreamlike, and unbelievable—the drumming was

⁷² The reference to Boehme (1575-1624) is obscure: his philosophy, heavily flavoured with Gnosticism and Hermeticism, anticipates ideas to be found in Blake and German Romanticism, which in turn, both anticipate Lindsay’s ideas.

like a very dim undertone of reality. It resembled the ticking of a clock in a room full of voices, only occasionally possible to be picked up by the ear (Lindsay 1992: 62-63).

The drumming recurs throughout the novel, as Maskull gets ever closer to the island of Muspel. Lindsay further stresses the link between the drumming and revelation in the Wombflash Forest scene (Lindsay 1992: 154). Here it makes Maskull aware that ‘all his other sense impressions [...] appear[ed] false (Lindsay 1992: 155). Others hear the drumming also. Corpang calls it ““more real than reality”” (Lindsay 1992: 231).

Maskull reaches the wooded, sloping land of Barey, where the true nature of the drumbeats is hinted at. Maskull tries see through the world as if it were a pool of water:

His heart was thumping heavily and queerly; its beating reminded him of the drum taps. He gazed languidly at the rippling water, and it seemed to him as if he could see right through it... away, away down... to a strange fire....

The water disappeared. The two suns were extinguished. The island was transformed into a cloud, and Maskull—alone on it—was floating through the atmosphere.... Down below, it was all fire—the fire of Muspel. The light mounted higher and higher, until it filled the whole world.... (Lindsay 1992: 290; ellipses in original).

This fusion of change of scale and state was in my mind when I filmed the rock pools on Arran (see chapter 3). For this shot, I grasped immediately that a drone would be an ideal way to achieve the effect I needed. Drone footage has immense value as a means of generating a cinematic sublime: the high POV it affords establishes links with those in romantic paintings, panoramas, God’s-eye views; but it can also suggest the POV of a dreamers and visionaries, or out-of-body experiences.

Lindsay continues:

[Maskull] floated toward an immense perpendicular cliff of black rock, without top or bottom. Halfway up it Krag, suspended in midair, was dealing terrific blows at a blood-red spot with a huge hammer. The rhythmical, clanging sounds were hideous.

Presently Maskull made out that these sounds were the familiar drum beats. “What are you doing, Krag?” he asked.

Krag suspended his work, and turned around.

“Beating on your heart, Maskull,” was his grinning response.

(Lindsay 1992: 290)

If the drum-beats are Maskull's heartbeat, then he has spent the entire novel walking towards himself. Or perhaps, walking inside himself, towards his own realisation. But the reader cannot be sure. 'Beating on your heart' could be a lie, or a figure of speech, translated, Freud-like, into an image. It is almost as if Lindsay is suggesting that the way out of this world is *through* it. Consider these passages in the *Sketch Notes*:

[In] the middle section of the second movement of Tchaikovsky's Pathetic Symphony [...] The persistent drum-beats are disagreeable and even painful to listen to, and yet, as being full of significance, may give us intellectual and emotional pleasure (SN 251).⁷³

and

The drum-beat in tragic music is the equivalent of the 'knockings' which are a well-known kind of supernatural phenomena. Examples:- Beethoven's Violin Concerto, 1st Movement; the Scherzo of his Choral Symphony; the 2nd Movement of Tchaikowsky's 6th Symphony (SN 529).

The supernatural 'knockings' Lindsay refers to here had been recorded at séances since the 1860s (Pearsall 2004: 81) The drum-taps in *Arcturus* are there as a supernatural code, like the acousmatic voice; and they are time-based, a quasi-cinematic device.

For the right persons – the 'elect' in Stuart Kelly's phrase – the rooms of Runhill Court in *The Haunted Woman* are alive with sound:

...before plunging into the next section of night-like corridor [...] a look of perplexity appeared on Isbel's face, as she seemed to listen to something.

"What's that?" [Isbel] whispered.

"What?" asked her aunt.

"Can't you hear a sound?"

They all listened.

"What's it like, Isbel?" inquired Marshall.

"Surely you can hear it!... a kind of low, vibrating hum... like a telephone wire while you're waiting for a connection..."

But no one else could catch the noise. "Judge spoke of some sound in a corridor", said Marshall. "He told me everyone couldn't hear it. Kind of a thunder, is it?"

"Yes... yes, perhaps... It keeps coming and going... A low buzz..."

"That must be it, then--unless, of course, it's a ringing in your ears."

⁷³ To take the example of the Tchaikovsky, in this performance by the Wiener Philharmoniker conducted by Herbert von Karajan, the timpani can clearly be seen, and comes in around 2.46: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLlo3i7qZME>. The sequence Lindsay refers to lasts until about 5.24. The entire performance of the symphony can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHafvUFtCIY>.

Isbel uttered a short laugh of annoyance. “Oh, surely I can tell a sound when I hear one? It's exactly as if I were listening on the telephone for an answer to a call. A voice might speak at any moment” (Lindsay 1987: 29-30).

In *Devil's Tor*, the recurring non-musical sound motif is rushing water. In Copping's vision of a prehistoric religious ceremony, there is a cortège, whose

six leading creatures were blowing into conches, that sounded across the valley like far-off French horns – most thin and weird; above a perpetual thunder of invisible waters (Lindsay 2008: 151).

As Ingrid removes the mysterious flint from Hugh Drapier's room for safe keeping:

With the final contact of her relinquishing fingers with the flint, a furious uproar, as of violently rushing waters, stunned her hearing. She expected to swoon, so shocking, crashing and present was the volume of noise. Then it gave place again to the silence of the house, and was no more than a stupefying and inexplicable memory... (Lindsay 2008: 230).

Such waters are heard on over a dozen subsequent occasions in the novel. In Chapter XXII, lost in a vision, Saltfleet hears the sound of drumming, and a ‘constant thunder of waters’ (Lindsay 2008: 338). When the noise ends, it is like the ‘return from music to reality’ (Lindsay 2008: 339). After Ingrid later touches the mysterious shard of flint in Saltfleet's room at the inn, she is

stunned by the same terrifying roar of waters [...] It annihilated her for the instant it lasted like the sudden thunderous passage past a quiet country station platform of a heavily-loaded high-speed express's (Lindsay 2008: 282).

Saltfleet, on Devil's Tor at night, hears ‘a perpetual noise of rushing waters [coming] up from below’ (Lindsay 2018: 337). It becomes clear that this is of supernatural origin when the sound of the waters is succeeded by a mysterious hubbub of voices and the sounding of a drum (Lindsay 2008: 338), then the sounds of horns blowing – presumably the conch-horns Copping witnessed earlier. Finally, the sound of the waters returns. Next, Saltfleet finds that he is on prehistoric Dartmoor, ‘a monstrous beast in silhouette, massive yet low like a rhinoceros’ (Lindsay 2008: 339).

Ingrid, Saltfleet, and Copping are all suspicious of the sound of rushing waters. Stuart Kelly argues that there are characters in Lindsay's work who are preterite, in the Calvinist sense, meaning people who are not predestined to be saved. In the context of Lindsay's work, there are characters who never become aware of the sublime (Kelly, filmed interview 2013). Arsinah, the archaeologist, for example, does not recognise the sublime origins of acousmatic sound. And finally, when Helga sees her daughter Ingrid suddenly graced with a supernatural countenance,

The features [...] were unchanged – youthful, fair, known, as before... but how came they to be so ancient, and far-off? It was a fearful phantom, displacing her daughter. Her beauty, as well, was shining and lamp-like... the gleaming surely stood for the overflowing of mighty springs; from no waters of the world. It was inward, yet symbolic too, like the posthumous token of a martyred saint... (Lindsay 2008: 413).

The rushing waters signify in *Devil's Tor* Lindsay's sublime as a psychological state, subterranean forces in the collective unconscious.

The voice is the principal non-diegetic device in *The Witch*. When Ragnar finds himself downstairs in Mrs Toller's house, he unexpectedly finds himself in a darkened space that seems to be a hillside at night, although he is sure he is still in the house. Voices call to him out of the darkness (Lindsay 1976: 343-348). This is the inverse of Maskull ascending the tower at Starkness Observatory, when a nondiegetic voice speaks out of the darkness, warning him that he will die (Lindsay 1992: 30). Here, Ragnar is being prepared for life, in a deeper, gnostic sense.

When Ragnar reaches the home of the witch, he once again finds himself in a darkened space that seems to be the building's doorway or hall. A voice addresses him, preparing him for his encounter with Urda (Lindsay 1976: 384-387). When Urda 'appears', she seems barely present, almost as if she is a cinematic image superimposed over Ragnar's reality: 'Her face showed as from the strangeness of a dark looking-glass, or as out of a dream' (NLS MS 27251: 1). By the time Urda begins her long speech to Ragnar, she has faded away, leaving only 'her voice [that]

filled all silence' (MS 27251: 127). Urda has now become an *acousmêtre*, and it is in this form that she speaks for the final 107 pages of the typescript (NLS MS 27251: 135-252).

This unpublished chapter is Lindsay's most radical piece of writing, and yet I can't help wondering if, in his attempt to describe heaven in words, he was dooming himself to writing a book that could not be completed. John Herdman suggested that the novel should have ended much earlier, at the end of chapter 17 of the published text (Lindsay 1976: 373) (Herdman, filmed interview, 2019). Gary Lachman felt Lindsay was trying to do something in *The Witch* that you can't do, but adds, 'you could do it in music' (Lachman, filmed interview, 2018). In a sense, this is what Lindsay is trying to do in this chapter: not only to render Urda as an *acousmêtre* when she delivers her long speech, but also to write in a highly stylised prose that is musical in its cadences.

CHAPTER TWO: DOCUMENTARY AND THE SUBLIME

2.1 Introduction

I discovered, then, that David Lindsay uses music, sound and voice to organise his narratives, much as a filmmaker does. In my film about Lindsay and his imagery, I devised non-diegetic sound, music, voice, visual abstraction, and long takes as aural and visual analogues to Lindsay's sublime. This part of my project has an aspect of exploration, of tentative articulation or suggestion.

Building on the foundations of nineteenth-century landscape painting, other filmmakers have developed cinematic codes for representing the sublime or its equivalent. I drew on particular films that I think successfully do this.

'Sublime' effects in cinema are created by sequences or shots conveying a sense of something larger than the frame, something that exceeds the limits of representation. The films I now discuss, like Lindsay's novels, invoke and allude to this wider definition of the sublime. They include documentaries, feature-length dramas, essay films, installations, and art films, including Werner Herzog, *Fata Morgana* (1971) and *Lessons of Darkness* (1992); Philip Gröning, *Into Great Silence* (2005); Abbas Kiarostami, *Five* (2003); Patrick Keiller, *Robinson in Space* (1997), and Grant Gee, *Patience (After Sebald)* (2012).

The film scholar Jeffrey Pence sets the cinematic sublime against the seminal theories of Béla Balász (1884-1949), André Bazin (1918-1958), and Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966), all of whom saw cinema as 'essentially realist' (Pence 2004: 31). There was a general mid-to-late-twentieth-century cultural and critical antipathy towards anything overtly 'religious', 'spiritual' or, (Pence's term) 'auratic'. Still, filmmakers have,

evidenced a committed pursuit of the auratic—an investment in representations of reality that seem phenomenologically if not materially singular, redolent of ontological associations directly linked to traditions of spiritual aspiration (Pence 2004: 38).

Dennis Taylor, in literary criticism, says representations of the ineffable are intimations of something ‘that perplexes and confounds’, and interrupt normal experience: ‘What interrupts is not another system but something that challenges all systems’ (Taylor 1996: 126).⁷⁴

The ‘cinematic sublime’ may be shorthand then for two concerns: how to represent the unrepresentable, and how to develop an adequate critical lexicon for discussing it.

2.2 Paul Schrader and Transcendental Style

Paul Schrader’s concept of ‘transcendental style’ is useful here. Schrader initially published *Transcendental Style in Film* in 1972, in which he discussed films by Yasujiro Ozu (1903-1963), Robert Bresson (1901-1999), and Carl Theodor Dreyer (1889-1968). In the much later second edition of the book (2018), Schrader widened the scope of his discussion to include avant-garde filmmakers such as Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Michael Snow and Jordan Belson; Andrei Tarkovsky, Béla Tarr and Chantal Akerman; experimental moving image works intended for gallery exhibition or installation, such as Douglas Gordon’s *24 Hour Psycho* and Martha Fiennes’s *Nativity*; and documentaries such as Wang Bing’s *Crude Oil* (2008), Zhang Yang’s *Paths of the Soul* (2016), and Philip Gröning’s *Into Great Silence* (2005) (Schrader 2018: 1-33).

According to Schrader, transcendental style involves: de-dramatization, flattening of the image, stasis, repetition, and withholding of information. Schrader is well aware of the problems that the ‘ineffable’ poses for the filmmaker:

style is not intrinsically transcendental or religious. But it represents a way [...] to approach the Transcendent (Schrader 2018: 35).

⁷⁴ Pence writes that ‘such disruptive events render referentiality problematic’, since they gesture precisely towards things that seem to be ‘unnameable’ (Pence 2004: 39) or unseeable.

Films that use what Schrader calls transcendental style ‘cannot inform one about the Transcendent’, Schrader argues. They can ‘only be *expressive* of the Transcendent’ (Schrader 2018: 38; emphasis in original). Schrader’s ideas go against the monoform (to be discussed below), because they require the viewer to do more work that is normally required in mainstream fare.

Although developed to discuss drama, I wanted to find out if Schrader’s ideas might also be applicable to experimental documentary as well. It is for this reason that I interpret Schrader’s ‘transcendent’ as a close analogue to Lindsay’s sublime; what the two terms point to is outside direct representation.

Schrader sees transcendental style as standing in opposition to mainstream, commercial cinema; the latter defined by action, and the need to create empathy for the on-screen characters. Transcendental style works against this. Through withholding techniques, action is slowed or delayed; there are passages of ‘dead time’ – non-dramatic moments film where ‘the spectator is left alone to think or reflect’ (Schrader 2018: 18). Transcendental style seeks to minimise the empathy the viewer feels for what is happening on screen. Dialogue is delivered in a flat, expressionless manner; performances (in drama) are emotionless. Takes are long, cuts few. Music is not used in a conventional manner (e.g. to instruct the viewer in how to react): in transcendental films, there is no music at all; or, instead, innovative sound.

2.3 My filmmaking practice

Though the films Schrader discussed in the original edition of his book were dramas, I apply his basic set of elements to my experimental documentary practice for my film on David

Lindsay. This was not a solution I found immediately, as I had previously explored other approaches in my practice.

As mentioned in the Introduction, I have long seen filmmaking as a tool of enquiry. My first documentary was about H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937), *The Last Disciple* (1990), whose stories used landscape in a way not dissimilar to David Lindsay. Whereas Lindsay's landscapes are a vehicle to express elements of his gnostic philosophy, Lovecraft's landscapes are a means of conveying his cosmic horror and mechanistic materialism. *The Last Disciple* was not a conventional documentary: it was in essence a road movie, inspired by Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* (1986),⁷⁵ in which the filmmakers were depicted as going in search of Lovecraftian landscapes. In addition to my curiosity about the locations that inspired Lovecraft, and whether those locations resembled his fictional treatments of them, I also wanted to show the process of filmmaking, to suggest that any attempt at biographical reconstruction was itself a fiction.

My next documentary, *In the Silent Wood* (1995), depicted a painter at work. I was keen here to capture someone else's creative process, but I was also attracted to the idea of trying to find the ineffable in the everyday, inspired by Víctor Erice's *The Quince Tree Sun* (1992).⁷⁶ The film marked the beginning of my interest in duration.

I then made the two short films referred to in the Introduction, *Koan* and *Quiet Work*. *Koan* was the first in a series of short films that were variations on a theme or format: an opening epigraph, followed by landscape footage; the tension in each film being the extent to which the epigraph and the location shots either supported or contradicted each other. *The Hidden Castle* (1997/2016) was a short meditation on place, a ruined Cistercian monastery in the Quantock

⁷⁵ A film in which McElwee attempts to retrace the march undertaken by Union general William Sherman and his forces during the American Civil War, but becomes increasingly preoccupied by his own personal life, attempts to get a date, and fears of nuclear war.

⁷⁶ Erice's documentary records the attempts of the Spanish painter Antonio López García (b.1936) to paint the quince tree in the back yard of his Madrid home.

Hills in Somerset. As with *The Last Disciple* and the *Koan* series, the film explores latent or immanent qualities in the location; and uses an ironic voiceover from the Gospel of Matthew. (To add a further element of metatextuality, the voiceover is read by one of Tarkovsky's assistants).

My interest in the occult surfaced in two dramas, *Mystery Play* (2000) and *The Notebooks of Cornelius Crow* (2004). The first film explored the concept of pronoiā, again seeking the ineffable in the everyday. A central inspiration for this film was the work of Philip K. Dick (1928-1982), a self-confessed gnostic.⁷⁷ *Cornelius Crow* was a darker companion piece, in which it is suggested that the past still exists, with figures entering the present from past eras. This was my first film to use found footage – newsreels of Edwardian and Blitz London – which functions as intrusions into the narrative, in the sense coined by Pence and Taylor (cited earlier).

My interest in exploring artistic careers, or the artistic process, continued in two films about filmmakers: *Lanterna Magicka: Bill Douglas & the Secret History of Cinema* (2009, co-directed with Louise Milne), and an ongoing documentary about Andrei Tarkovsky, of which two episodes have been completed to date: *Tarkovsky's Andrei Rublev: A Journey* (2018), and *The Dream in the Mirror* (2021, both co-directed with Louise Milne). In each film, we were concerned not to make conventional biographical documentaries, and employed various strategies to achieve this, such as use of pre-cinema optical devices in the film on Douglas, multiple narrators in the films on Tarkovsky.

Another film, *Charlie Chaplin Lived Here* (2019) reconstructed an unfinished 8mm short documentary shot by Bill Douglas in 1969, and used not only Douglas's original footage, but

⁷⁷ There is no evidence that Dick ever read Lindsay, but his novel *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965) features a character – Palmer Eldritch – who becomes the embodiment of evil while on an interplanetary journey. People tainted by Eldritch develop 'three stigmata': a robotic right arm, artificial eyes, and metal teeth, suggesting that they have become inhuman. The metal teeth have always been reminiscent for me of the Crystalman grin in *Arcturus*. Lindsay's novel was published in the US in 1963; Dick wrote *The Three Stigmata* in 1964.

also newsreel of Chaplin visiting London in the 1920s, 30s and 50s. Although the interplay between the found footage, or the pre-cinema devices, in these three films can sometimes result in startling juxtapositions that are redolent of the uncanny, these films are clearly not concerned with other states of reality. It became necessary to seek a fresh approach to tackle the challenge of David Lindsay's sublime.

Having long admired the films and theoretical writings of Bresson, I was well aware of Schrader's ideas, but did not know if they could be applied to documentary. It was an intriguing possibility: Lindsay's books pre-empt Schrader's ideas in that he slows action considerably in *Sphinx*, and especially in *Devil's Tor*; and almost dispenses with it entirely in *The Witch*. His characters are hard to empathise with. And of course, he uses sound unconventionally – to point to the existence of something beyond the page. I started to think about how I could build on my own aesthetic – my practice – to make a film that would allude to Lindsay's sublime, rather as he himself did; principally using defamiliarized landscape, and acousmatic sound.

2.4 Documentary Form

Now, I move to discuss the sources, theoretical writings by critics and filmmakers, and films which served as springboards for my own thinking and practice. I discuss how and why I used specific strategies of sound and duration, my choice of informants and locations; and relationships in my film to Lindsay texts.

Why did I choose to make a documentary, rather than a fiction film, and why an 'experimental' documentary rather than a 'conventional' one? I have been always interested in Lindsay's philosophy, and how it develops over the course of his career. A documentary would allow me to do that. A fictional film, in the sense of an adaptation of one of his novels, would have been impractical from a budgetary point of view (although is something I may consider

as a future project). Fiction could, of course, include a dramatised documentary; Ken Russell's portrait of the composer Frederick Delius, *Song of Summer* (1968), or Peter Watkins's *Edvard Munch* (1974) are consummate examples of this form. As much as I admire these two films, I was wary of trying the same approach, because the presentation of Lindsay's novels and ideas, it seemed to me, required something more experimental to do them justice. Lindsay does not comfortably fit within genre; a number of critics have commented on his work's *sui generis* nature. The more I researched, the more this feeling grew. I needed a film form that reflected something of Lindsay's hybridity (for want of a better word), a hybridity of landscape and ideas, music and metaphysics.

The documentary form currently is highly experimental. Decades ago, in his classic study, Bill Nichols (b. 1942) classified documentary into six categories: poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, and performative (Nichols 1991). Since then, however, documentary has hybridised across these categories, especially in films by Herzog, Gröning, Kiarostami and Keiller, produced between 1992-2005.

As a filmmaker, I have been deeply impressed by experimental documentaries which use sound, music, voice and duration in ways that do not follow the conventions of what the British filmmaker and theoretician Peter Watkins (b. 1935) has termed the 'mass-audio visual media monoform': 'a repetitive, standardized structure, and abbreviated time and space, to control the audience' (Watkins 2018).

The monoform like a single, standardized language 'means, for example, that a documentary film can basically have much the same form and narrative structure as a Netflix drama series' (Watkins 2018). Watkins sees this as a latter-day extension of the military-industrial complex – a consumerist interface designed to exclude complexity and dissent:

The Monoform is like a time-and-space grid clamped down over all the various elements of any film or TV programme. [It] promotes a rapid flow of changing images or scenes, constant camera movement, and dense layers of sound. A principal characteristic [is] rapid, agitated editing [...] In the 1970s, the Average Shot Length

[ASL] for a cinema film (or documentary, or TV news broadcast) was approximately 6-7 seconds, today the commercial ASL [is] circa 3-4 seconds, and decreasing. (Watkins 2018).

The deleterious effects of this, Watkins argues, include decline in attention span, and emotional disconnect from the matter on screen, e.g. images of war in Syria.⁷⁸

In documentary, the monoform can most clearly be seen in the techniques familiar through television documentaries: interviewees, presenters, ‘voice of god’ narration, re-enactments, reductively boiling down their subject matter into easily digestible programmes.

Nigel Williams’s five-part *Arena* documentary *George Orwell* (1983) is a classic example of this method of documentary practice. The film starts with a photograph of Orwell as a baby; his words, spoken by an actor in voiceover, muse on memories of the past. The film cuts shots of the house where Orwell grew up, identified as such by a narrator. Then come photographs of archival material, an interview with Orwell’s biographer, a childhood location, and reminiscences from one of Orwell’s friends. Eminent men of letters (Cyril Connolly and Malcolm Muggeridge) discuss Orwell, and Orwell’s words return on the soundtrack, acting as autobiographical narration.

There are parallels between Watkins’s attitude to this ‘age of the monoform’ and Lindsay’s view of his own time: Nightspore must have his wounds healed to be reborn (Lindsay 1992: 293-294); Krag intends to ‘return to the struggle’ as there are ‘terrible and tragic affairs to attend to’ (Lindsay 1992: 294). Lindsay was part of a ‘shell-shocked generation’ (Stableford, filmed interview, 2018); he wrote, at least in part, to ‘give deeper life’ to his readers (Lindsay 1992: 156). A theme in *Devil’s Tor* is the need to ‘uplift’ humanity (Lindsay 1932b). *The Witch* has a similar purpose. Lindsay wanted in writing to impart a vision; in that sense, his fiction is also didactic (McClure 2012).

⁷⁸ Watkins also detects a link between the monoform and a rise in global authoritarianism and populism.

The ‘terrible and tragic affairs’ of our own era are clear enough. As a film practitioner, the monoform needs to be opposed. Such resistance is in tune with Lindsay’s vision.

2.5 Filmic Sources

Certain documentaries, feature-length dramas, and essay films create a sense of something larger than the frame, evoke a dimension beyond sight. What cinematic means do they use to do this? Here, Chion, Tarkovsky and Schrader are all helpful: the key strategies are to do with duration, sound, music, and voice. Let me provide a selection of brief case-histories of non-monoform films – all of which have some concern with matters of the spirit.

***Fata Morgana* (Werner Herzog, 1971)**

Cinema inherits traditions of landscape from the Romantic and Symbolist nineteenth-century painting (Melbye 2010: 42). Deep in the DNA of ‘symphonic’ landscape shots is the older pictorial sublime of J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851), Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796-1875). In documentary, Werner Herzog deploys landscape this way in *Fata Morgana* (1971).

Herzog creates ironic distance through disjuncture of sound and image. For the first half an hour, Herzog’s camera presents Saharan landscapes, while a voiceover (by film historian Lotte Eisner) reads from the Mayan creation myth, the *Popol Vuh*. In this voiceover, mountains and plains are created, the courses of rivers set. Animals appear on earth, and the gods give them their habitations by rivers and in trees. They are commanded to live and multiply. And yet the images during this sequence (21.51-27.18) are in direct contrast: a cemetery, a construction site, abandoned vehicles, a distant oil refinery, and a number of animal carcasses. The narration

speaks of creation, fertility and promise; the camera shows images of death, pollution, broken machines, rotting animals.

Another strategy Herzog uses here – and throughout *Fata Morgana* – is duration. During pauses in the narration, the camera continues to dwell or to track, inviting the viewer to examine and question. He adds classical music to enhance the sense of disjuncture. Of the music in the film, Herzog said,

Some images become clearer and more understandable when a particular piece of music is playing behind them. They don't physically change, but their inner qualities are exposed and new perspectives opened up. Music is able to make visible what is latent; it reveals new things to us, helps us shift our perception and enables us to see deeper into things. We perceive what we would otherwise be oblivious to.

(Herzog 2014: 67)

Herzog's narration, music and duration combine to undermine any certainty about what is shown, enabling what Stella Bruzzi has called 'dialectical distance' to become apparent. In her survey of forms of documentary practice, Bruzzi argued that voiceover can undermine images, by casting doubt on what they depict (Bruzzi 2000: 52). Used creatively, narration can become,

A truly subversive tool [...] a component capable of engendering such a dialectical distance, one that both draws the audience into sympathising for the image, and sets them critically back from it.

(Bruzzi 2000: 52)

As with Schrader's transcendental style, ironic narration can encourage active contemplation in the viewer, rather than passive consumption.

According to Chion, the voice unanchored in a screened body as a source is credited with virtually supernatural powers (Chion 1999: 27). Though Chion is thinking about cinematic drama, this analysis, of course, works for documentary also.

Fata Morgana's importance for my practice lies in this combination of strategies Herzog uses. The use of landscape and ironic narration proved very helpful when thinking of ways in which I could suggest David Lindsay's sublime in my film. What I am showing in *A Vast Shadow House* are clearly actual, physical landscapes, but I have tried to defamiliarize them

through the use of ironic voiceover, either from my interviewees, or from texts by Lindsay. The length of some of the shots – such as the tracking shot in Jedburgh Abbey (41.52-43.50), or the drone shot of the Pentlands in mist (01.06.57-01.08.15) – invites the viewer to question what they are seeing; to, in effect, contribute their own ‘dialectical distance’.

And Then Come the Morning and the Evening (Dorian Supin, 1990).

Brian Kane (2014: 61) discusses the term ‘acousmatic’, tracing its origins to the philosopher Pythagoras (c. 570-c. 490 BC), who was said to teach from behind a curtain. Some of these sayings have survived, and Kane notes their riddle-like nature.

These riddles are not dissimilar to some of Lindsay’s more cryptic *Sketch Notes*. It is perhaps fitting that acousmatic voices have such a long tradition of being linked with gnomic utterances. Lindsay’s novels also contain examples of this, from the unexplained voices speaking to Maskull in *A Voyage to Arcturus*, to Urda’s speech in *The Witch*.

We find an acousmatic voiceover – less ironic than Herzog’s in *Fata Morgana*, more tentative in its genuine attempts to express the inexpressible – in Dorian Supin’s film about the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, *And Then Come the Morning and the Evening* (1990). The speech Pärt gives appears unmotivated. His organ piece ‘Pari Intervallo’ – a Bach-like fugue – plays on the soundtrack as we see shots of torches flaming across a lake at dusk. The composer is then shown in a woodland hut, speaking to an offscreen interviewer. While he speaks, Supin cuts to the lake in daylight, Pärt in a rowing boat, sunlight shining through trees on the shore; and then walking in the woods, looking for a place to sit and eat:

...there’s always an end. It doesn’t matter when. The end is now, there’ll be an end in five minutes. The end may come tomorrow. The end may have been yesterday. It’s kind of a cosmic end. When the quality is high, it exceeds the limits of the form. There’s always a beginning - always, and there’s always an end. “I am the beginning and the end.” That’s quality. Not everybody can say, “I am the beginning and the end.” Jesus said, “I’m the beginning and the end.” “Alpha and Omega...” So. If we start thinking about the form, then, we’ll never be able to attain eternal life, will we? It’s just the same

as our fear of death, or, it's like a gate. If you don't go through the gate, then you can't enter. I mean, this is what form is. ... I mean you should start seeing the light in darkness: in the beginning it's dark, the darkness must be there. A new light must come. And you won't know it, it must be your own fruit, the fruit of your flesh. For otherwise you can't make contact with it. It's a sense of awe, even fear... of losing it, of making a false step. See? ... and then you prepare for this one step, you pull yourself together and you make it. It's you who've made it. Perhaps you're not satisfied with the step, but after all it is one you've made yourself. For you, it's the purest form of real quality. I mean, this is what counts... [the camera cuts back to Pärt] I don't know... I don't know... It sometimes happens... almost always, in fact... that you can't find an answer to any question. This too, is form... In music, too, it happens... that there's no answer, no end. And... it would be very good if... into it... I don't know... So. [makes fingers going walking, arms waving as if conducting motions] ...or you may be a human being. Perhaps it's even better. I don't know, it depends on the person, and time... But it would be best if... if it remained a secret, for ever. For yourself, above all... a secret. Now, what gesture am I making? I myself may know. And perhaps I'd very much like to express it. ... but I'm holding myself back. And I have the feeling that there may be something in it... a treasure. It may be small, very small. But I'm holding it back. But it won't disappear. I know the feeling will return, maybe in half an hour, maybe in five minutes, maybe tomorrow. [Cut back to the rowing boat] You know, this is like the fruit of abstention. The biggest treasures, they're all... hidden. And the greatest miracles... happen in secret, I think. [cut back to Pärt] Did you understand?

(45.57-52.58)

Read on the page, Pärt's words appear almost non-sensical, or like a stream of Zen koans. But what makes the sequence effective on screen is the halting way in which Pärt speaks, as if he is trying to make a genuine attempt to speak about something that cannot be spoken of.

Lessons of Darkness (*Lektionen in Finsternis*, Werner Herzog, 1992)

Werner Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness* (1992) shows the aftermath of the first Gulf War (1990-1991). Herzog uses classical music to accompany aerial footage of burning Kuwaiti oil fields. In one of its most startling episodes (Chapter 7, 'Es stieg ein Rauch auf, wie ein Rauch vom Ofen'), Herzog brings in 'Siegfried's Death and Funeral March' from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* (WWV 86D) on the soundtrack, while Herzog's voiceover recites from the

Book of Revelation (9:1-2, 6).⁷⁹ The Wagner plays, and the camera – mounted in a helicopter – slowly reveals scenes of unbelievable devastation. The horror and sheer scale of the landscape clashes head-on with the beauty of the graceful aerial photography and Wagner’s music, conveying an almost Burkean sense of the sublime.

When the film premiered in Berlin (February 1992),⁸⁰ Herzog recalled,

I was shouted down and spat at, and the audience was unanimously against me. I heard outraged accusations that I was applying aesthetics to horror. My only response was that Goya and Hieronymus Bosch did the same thing.⁸¹

The way Herzog applies ‘aesthetics to horror’ is precisely what makes the film so powerful. *Lessons of Darkness* would not have the same effect if it had been shot, for instance, by handheld cameras on the ground with live sound. The beauty casts the horror into the domain of the sublime, and the choice of music plays a crucial role in this. Herzog said he decided to use music in many sequences, in part because diegetic sound was impractical: the deafening sounds of the oil wells burning was ‘as loud as five jumbo jets taking off at the same time’ (Ames 2014: 111). He adds that ‘we didn’t want to do *cinéma vérité*. We understood that there is a deeper layer of truth’ (Ames 2014: 111). Another aspect of Herzog’s use of music in *Lessons of Darkness* is that, as in *Fata Morgana*, it serves to open up ‘new perspectives’ and ‘make visible what is latent’, shifting our perception in the process to ‘see deeper into things’ (Herzog 2014: 67).

Herzog also used his own voiceover, frequently to cast an ironic light on the images. The film opens with shots of industrial structures in Kuwait. The voiceover announces the location

⁷⁹ Revelation 9 (KJV): And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. 2. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke [...] 6. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

⁸⁰ At the Berlin Film Festival. A BBC Television broadcast took place later the same month. The film was co-produced by the BBC for their documentary strand *Storyville*.

⁸¹ Quoted in Lars-Olav Beier, ‘Werner Herzog’s German Comeback: Cinema Legend Heads Berlinale Jury’. *Der Spiegel* (International Edition), February 11, 2010. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/werner-herzog-s-german-comeback-cinema-legend-heads-berlinale-jury-a-677080.html>. Accessed 24 February 2019.

as ‘a planet in our solar system’, as if what is shown is actually *another* planet. Herzog sets up this distance to show what is known – our own planet – in a new way. He also plays with scale. Early in the film, he refers in voiceover to ‘white mountain ranges, clouds, the land shrouded in mist’; the film is not showing mountains at this point. As Herzog said in 1996,

What I actually filmed were little heaps of dust and soil created by the tires of trucks; the mountain ranges weren’t more than one foot high. It’s an invented landscape, yet it builds something beyond these little accountants’ truths. It immerses you in the cosmic (Ames 2014: 131).⁸²

Lessons of Darkness is a very important film for me when I was developing my artistic strategies for *A Vast Shadow House*. From this film I took the idea of using aerial shots to defamiliarise and dramatise landscapes. Also, the high vantage point that a drone affords calls to mind Friedrich’s paintings, and the notion that a high point of view suggests not only distance, but universality.⁸³

My use of rockpools, in which I make scale ambiguous, was directly inspired by Herzog’s film. I searched for landscapes that evoked the alienness to Tormance, and eventually settled on a fossilised sand dune on Arran, that I had first seen in the work of the Yorkshire-based photographer Anne M. Holmes.⁸⁴ I found that framing the rocks to exclude the sky rendered their scale ambiguous; the resulting footage looked sufficiently strange to warrant inclusion in the film. Encouraged by this experiment, I found another rock pool on the other side of Arran at Imachar, and again obtained useable footage through framing out the sky.

Herzog’s voiceover in *Lessons* is often ironic, and I use ironic voiceover over the Arran fossilised dune footage. Alan Moore talks about how the landscapes in *Arcturus* are ‘what a human being looks like if realised as a place’ (16.54-16.58) as the drone flies low over this ‘alien’ terrain, revealing crags its shallow pools.

⁸² Other good examples of narration and a decidedly non-cosmic sublimity can be found in the early short films of Peter Greenaway, in particular *Windows* (1973) and *H is for House* (1975), in which voiceovers composed of taxonomies take on an ironic function.

⁸³ Herzog is well acquainted with German romantic painters. See Herzog 2014: 141-143.

⁸⁴ See <https://www.annmholmes.co.uk/arran> for an example of Holmes’s work.

Herzog's idea of an 'aesthetics of horror' resonates with me, and calls to mind scenes in *Arcturus*, such as the aftermath of Maskull's playing of Irontick, the musical lake, when the landscape appears 'torn, as if by heavy gunfire' (Lindsay 1992: 193). The central Wagner episode is so effective *precisely because* it is beautiful. Herzog's film is, for me, is about as close as a film can come to the Burkean sublime.

Robinson in Space (Patrick Keiller, 1997)

The films of Patrick Keiller employ a modified form of ironic voiceover. Keiller shoots English landscapes, augmented by voiceovers that recount the fictitious exploits of his various narrators. In the Robinson trilogy (*London*, 1994; *Robinson in Space*, 1997; *Robinson in Ruins*, 2010), the narration describes the research of the character Robinson, an independent scholar and occasional academic, historian, and psychogeographer. *Robinson in Space* follows Robinson and his sidekick, the unnamed narrator, around England as they research 'the problem of England'. This problem is never described by the narrator. The film shows Eton College, Oxford and Cambridge Universities, a Rover car plant, and various supermarkets and shopping malls, inviting the viewer to make up their own minds as to the origins and nature of this 'problem.'⁸⁵

What interests me about the film, and Keiller's work in general, is its curiously hypnotic effect. Although Robinson and his companion are never shown, the narration vividly conjures them and their deeply ambivalent relationship with England. The fiction of the research project allows Keiller to suggest what might be termed a 'secular sublimity' that at once encompasses large themes, such as the English class system and economic stagnation, but also delights in detail, such as noting the quality of the coffee to be found in Halifax. Finally, another theme

⁸⁵ Keiller wrote on the themes of *Robinson in Space* (Keiller 2013: 35-49), going so far as to invoke Burke's sublime 'whatever is in any sort terrible... is a source of the *sublime*' when discussing the 'problem of England'.

emerges: Robinson's quest for utopia. The narrator withholds information about where Robinson's paradise is to be found.

With its emphasis on large 'problems' and a personal quest for a better world, *Robinson in Space* provided me with much to process. Keiller's camera – almost always on a tripod, locked-off – remains resolutely modest, in a manner that recalls Bresson, Ozu, and Schrader's transcendental style. And the quest for utopia in the unlikely setting of industrial England reflects my practice, as I visited various locations in England and Scotland on my own quest for Lindsay's sublime.

Five (Abbas Kiarostami, 2003)

Five is an experimental documentary made up of five sequences. The first shows a small log on a beach, rolling in the tide. The second shows a sea front promenade, with passers-by, joggers and cyclists going about their daily business. The third shows a group of dogs at the water's edge. The fourth, a brace of ducks walking along the beach. The final sequence shows a pond at night; the film ends there when dawn breaks. There is no audible dialogue, and no music. All the sound is diegetic. The film is subtitled 'Five Long Takes Dedicated to Ozu', but this is disingenuous: the film only *appears* to be comprised of five long takes. Although the first four sequences are one take, the final sequence of the pond comprises many shots, filmed over several nights, seamlessly edited together (Romney 2003).

Each of the five 'long takes' can be regarded as micronarratives, detailing the activities of logs, dogs, and passers-by – both human and duck. The overall lack of story provides a liberation from narrative. Kiarostami invites a search for meaning. There is a feeling of purpose to the simplicity and duration of each scene; the final scene, 'Moon', lasts for 27 minutes. As Mathew Abbott suggests, Kiarostami 'draw[s] our attention to the kinds of quotidian detail that, perhaps due to the deadening effects of habit, we tend to fail to register' (Abbott 2017:

81). Kiarostami said that *Five* was a film that could be retitled ‘*Watch Again, or Look Well*’: ‘I think we should extract the values that are hidden in objects and expose them by looking at objects, plants, animals and humans, everything’ (Abbott 2017: 81).⁸⁶ The desire to ‘watch again’, ‘look well’, ‘extract hidden values’ recalls Magritte’s observation,

Everything we see hides another thing, we always want to see what is hidden by what we see. There is an interest in that which is hidden and which the visible does not show us. This interest can take the form of quite an intense feeling, a sort of conflict one might say, between the visible that is hidden and the visible world that is apparent.

(Short 1996: 102)

Five provided me with a reminder of the powers of the extended take. Because the footage is presented as if it were simply ‘five long takes’, with a seeming minimum of directorial intervention, it allows the material to open up, giving a sense of liberation from the confines of narrative. The sheer (apparent) simplicity of the film also suggested liberation to me: a liberation from formal complexity. And yet by dwelling at such length on the apparently quotidian, Kiarostami’s footage suggests the numinous within or behind it.

***The Wild Blue Yonder* (Werner Herzog, 2005)**

Werner Herzog’s *The Wild Blue Yonder* is subtitled ‘A Science Fiction Fantasy’, and is a hybrid of documentary and drama, telling the story of an alien (played by Brad Dourif) trapped on Earth, after his home planet becomes uninhabitable. Herzog uses Dourif’s character to link together found footage shot under the Ross Ice Shelf in Antarctica in 2001 by one of Herzog’s collaborators, the composer and musician Henry Kaiser, and NASA footage of a space shuttle

⁸⁶ Nikolaus Geyrhalter’s *Homo Sapiens* (2016) examines abandoned buildings across the world: shopping malls, scientific and military installations, offices, apartment blocks, all in the process of being reclaimed by nature. The camera is locked off; location sound is used throughout. The viewer must actively seek a narrative (or imagine one), much as in *Five*. But with its concentration on decaying architecture, and its suggestive title, Geyrhalter’s film clearly addresses itself to other issues. This is the darker side of sublimity: Geyrhalter’s film meditates on the end of industrial civilisation, and the power of natural processes.

mission from 1989. The Antarctic footage is used to represent the alien's home planet, while the NASA material is presented as a mission from Earth trying to find an inhabitable exoplanet.

The Wild Blue Yonder can be seen as the third in a loose trilogy of 'science fiction' films, the first two parts of which are *Fata Morgana* and *Lessons of Darkness* (Herzog 2014: 375).⁸⁷ Unlike the two earlier films, ironic narration is replaced by Dourif's character, and some of his speeches become ironic narration when Herzog cuts to the repurposed footage. But for much of the time, the recontextualised footage is not accompanied by narration, but by Ernst Reijseger's music. Herzog's earlier comments, quoted above, on music, apply equally to *The Wild Blue Yonder* as they do to *Fata Morgana* and *Lessons of Darkness*.

What is interesting for me as a filmmaker is that in *The Wild Blue Yonder*, the music and repurposed footage work together to 'make visible what is latent' and to 'reveal [...] new things to us [shifting] our perception' (Herzog 2014: 67). Of the reuse of the Henry Kaiser and NASA material, Herzog said that it was an attempt to 'wrest something good' from it (Ames 2014: 162). To borrow an idea from Kiarostami (also quoted above), Herzog is encouraging us to 'look again' and 'look better'.

When I came to use NASA footage for *A Vast Shadow House*, this idea of 'wresting something' from the footage was on my mind.

***Into Great Silence* (Die große Stille, Philip Gröning, 2005)**

Gröning's film interests me because of its use of duration, sound, intertitles, and the way in which he uses different kinds of film stock to problematise the notion of point of view. Shot over a 6-month period, this film is about the daily lives of monks in the Carthusian Order's mother house in the French Alps. Gröning conveys the monastery's routines through measured

⁸⁷ For Herzog's intention to make *Fata Morgana* as a science fiction film, see Herzog 2014: 59; for *Lessons of Darkness* as science fiction, Herzog 2014: 297.

pace. He includes short sequences shot on Super-8 to suggest the experience of contemplation and time-lapse photography to imply a sense of the eternal. The film, running at 165 minutes, is a meditative, immersive experience.

Gröning shoots the monastery's daily life largely in high definition (HD) – the offices, the labours in workshops, cooking, laundry, visits to the woodshed, etc. This material is observational, in the sense of Nichols's observational mode of documentary.

Gröning opens with a Super-8 sequence showing a monk praying in his cell. This initially seems to be also observational. But then, throughout the film, Gröning chooses Super-8 for close-ups of candle flames, sunlight on flagstones, cows in the meadows, snow falling, icicles, etc. These sequences recall the work of the American experimental filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky (b.1943) and his concept of 'devotional cinema':

The word "devotion", as I am using it, need not refer to the embodiment of a specific religious form. Rather, it is the opening or the interruption that allows us to experience what is hidden, and to accept with our hearts our given situation. When film does this, when it subverts our absorption in the temporal and reveals the depths of our own reality, it opens us to a fuller sense of ourselves and our world. It is alive as a devotional form (Dorsky 2014: 18).

Gröning's Super-8 shots create 'opening or interruption' in the main narrative of the film. His Super-8 footage scrutinises and transfigures small details in the monastic environment. These shots retain a degree of ambiguity in that they are not anchored to the POV of any one monk. They stand for an intensification of vision, and experience. And Gröning problematizes this further by employing HD footage to the same apparent end: shots of the wash bowl outside the refectory, the towel beside it billowing in a gentle breeze, still life shots in the monastery's workshops. What these shots have in common also is that they are not always traditional POV shots. They represent, or are symbolic of, the monastic experience. Gröning moves between the two, as if to suggest 'the wind bloweth where it listeth' (John 3: 8, KJV).

Gröning does also use HD for other kinds of cutaways: of the forests and mountains that surround the monastery; the cloisters; curtains billowing in breezes.

There seems to be an interchangeability to the two different kinds of stock. This is represented in the scene (starting at 1 hour 19 minutes) where a group of monks chat on a tree-shaded terrace. They joke about whether they should abandon their practice of ritual hand-washing before entering the refectory for meals. Alternating between these exchanges, Gröning cuts in another thread of conversation. The subtitles quoted here represent the voices of several monks:

Subtitle 1: Our entire life, the whole liturgy, and everything ceremonial are symbols.

Subtitle 2: If you abolish the symbols, then you tear down the walls of your own house.

Subtitle 3: When we abolish the signs, we lose our orientation.

Subtitle 4: Instead, we should search for their meaning.

Subtitle 5: But one should unfold the core of the symbols.

Subtitle 6: The signs are not to be questioned, we are.

Subtitle 7: The error is not to be found in hand-washing, the error is in our mind.

Dialogue in this scene is non-synchronous, and for most of it, the subtitles do not identify the speakers, but that does not matter as much as the way Gröning skilfully intersperses the gentle humour with evidence of the monks' acuity regarding their own practice (through the subtitled interwoven conversations).

During the entire scene, Gröning switches between HD and Super-8. The Super-8 sequences (all short) represent an intensity of attention, while his HD footage achieves this intensity through duration. This emphasises the non-synchronous quality in the subtitled dialogue, brings off a fresh variation on the *acousmêtre*, which, as Chion writes, 'haunt[s] the borderlands' of the image, 'a place that has no name, but which cinema forever brings into play' (Chion 1999: 24). This effect is intensified by what the monks are talking about. If, to bring in a phrase from the monks' dialogue, the 'error is in our mind', Gröning suggests that what is required is a new approach to seeing, doing, reacting, thinking. Perhaps the sublime –

which Lindsay always linked with sounds that ‘haunt the borders’ of normal experience – is also to be experienced this way.

We could extend Chion’s concept of ‘haunting the borders’ to cover Gröning’s use of POV shots, whether HD or Super-8. Such shots represent day-to-day elements of the monastic experience that might be either mundane or sublime, depending on whether we or the monks have worked on the ‘errors in our minds’. In this sense, these shots ‘haunt’ – or project an effect of being haunted – into the parameters of reality that Gröning has established in the film through the more ‘everyday’ shots: welcoming novices into the order, work in the kitchens, vegetable gardens, mending clothing. Who, then, is looking, in these POV shots, and why? I propose that, as this material does not fulfil the role of traditional POV or cutaway shots, the effect of having such shots in Gröning’s sequences is to produce a kind of visual equivalent of the *acousmêtre*. In my film, I used drone shots to produce this effect of ‘haunting the borders’. The first occurs in the prologue at 0.18. The drone ascends over a misty landscape, while voiceover quotes from C. S. Lewis’s contention that

If good novels are comments on life, good stories of this sort (which are very much rarer) are actual additions to life; they give, like certain rare dreams, sensations we never had before, and enlarge our conception of the range of possible experience.⁸⁸
(Lewis 1966b: 70)

At all times Gröning is using sound, frequently acousmatically. These devices, together with the intertitles, convey the presence of silence as a character in the film. Of course, silence is never truly silent: it is the sound of wind, of footsteps in the cloister, of meltwater coursing down drains. The silence, of course, does not ‘do’ anything. It is simply there, ‘stand[ing] above and behind the world, and governs all its manifestations’ (SN 337; Lindsay 2002: 395). In this

⁸⁸ *Vibration* (Jane Arden & Jack Bond, 1975), like *Into Great Silence*, attempts to convey something that is outside conventional representation, in this case the experience of Sufi meditation. Both filmmakers studied with a Sufi master in North Africa in the early 1970s, and the film represents their response to the challenge of attempting to convey the states achieved through their meditation practice. Non-diegetic sound is frequently used, such as the opening shot of two figures (the Sufi teacher and Jack Bond) walking in the desert. On the soundtrack we hear the teacher’s words about the benefits of meditation. Later in the film, we hear an abstract text spoken by Arden, in which she repeats the words ‘rabbit, rabbit’.

way, Gröning's film points toward the sublime, where silence, if it does not govern all the manifestations of the world, at least fills the monks lives with experiential meaning.

Gröning uses intertitles throughout the film. The opening scene shows a monk praying in his cell; snow falling; and close-ups of candles (all shot on Super-8). This is followed by a verse from the Bible:

The Lord is about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

(1 Kings 11-13, KJV)

This is the only intertitle in the film to be specifically identified as Biblical. The others, which recur frequently throughout the film's 165-minute running time, are not attributed.⁸⁹

On occasion, the intertitles appear to comment on the events in the film: the intertitle 'Anyone who does not give up all he has cannot be my disciple' (20.21) (Luke 14.33) is followed by a scene showing the reception into the order of two novices. Other intertitles convey something of the monastic worldview:

I will put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36.26).

You shall seek me, and you shall find me. Because you seek me with all your heart, I will let myself be found (Jeremiah 29.13).

Only one intertitle refers to silence: 'Behold the silence: Allow the Lord to speak one word in us – that he is'.⁹⁰

Often, the intertitles appear unmotivated by the events of the film. The effect is similar to that of the Super-8 sequences, in that the intertitles also form interruptions in the narrative of the monks' day-to-day lives, to allow the viewer further space for contemplation. The opening quotation, from 1 Kings, is perhaps a hint from Gröning that his film does not contain God

⁸⁹ All but two are Biblical. The two that are not are from the writings of the German mystic Meister Eckhart (c.1260-c.1328) and an anonymous Carthusian monk.

⁹⁰ Unattributed, written by anonymous Carthusian monk.

(however God is conceptualised), and is therefore a suggestion for how to watch the film. This, the contemplative, experiential nature of the film, and Gröning's eye for detail, are what I took from *Into Great Silence*. It remains, for me, a prime example of how to film the unfilmable.

***Patience (After Sebald)* (Grant Gee, 2012)**

Grant Gee's (b. 1964) *Patience (After Sebald)* (2012) is a film about *The Rings of Saturn* (1995; English translation, 1998) by W. G. Sebald (1944-2001). The book follows an unnamed narrator on a walking holiday in Suffolk. The narrator ruminates on history, mortality, conflict; the spectre of the Holocaust a background presence throughout. Sebald includes photographs in the book that appear to illustrate the text, but none are given captions or attributions, so the reader can never be entirely sure. The photographs combine with the detached tone of the narration to create a quietly destabilising feel.

The film reflects the style of the book, by having the narrator's words spoken in voiceover (by the actor Jonathan Pryce). The film, shot in black and white, shows the largely rural Suffolk locations, narration mixing with contributions from informants such as authors Robert McFarlane and Iain Sinclair, publisher Christopher MacLehose, and the visual artist, researcher and writer Lise Patt. As with Patrick Keiller's work, Gee uses images of the English countryside as if they were screens, shielding larger themes.

This methodology reflects Sebald's own writing practice. In a radio interview, used in the film, Sebald explains:

The reader needs to be prompted that the narrator has a conscience, and that he is and has been perhaps for a long time engaged with these questions. And this is why you know the main scenes of horror are never directly addressed. I think it is sufficient to remind people because we've all seen images, but these images militate against our capacity for discursive thinking, for reflecting upon these things, and also paralyses as it were our moral capacity. So the only way in which one can approach these things in my view is obliquely, tangentially, by reference rather than by direct confrontation.⁹¹

(23.30-24.14)

⁹¹ W. G. Sebald, interviewed on *Bookworm*, by Michael Silverblatt, KCRW-Santa Monica, 6 December 2001.

Over this audio, Gee shows images of the sea, a street in the small Suffolk town of Southwold, and a pub interior. Nothing, in other words, redolent of horror. The horror must be imagined.

Patience (After Sebald) showed me how well largely acousmatic voices can be when speaking over footage of landscape. Departing from conventional documentary practice, the informants are usually shown the first time they speak. They look directly at the viewer as they speak,⁹² but are rarely shown thereafter: the informants become *acousmètres*.

Gee explained that this technique aimed at ‘trying to find a way keep viewer’s attention in just the right suspended state’. This ‘suspended state’ invites the ‘viewers to be in the dream-world of the landscape imagery’. The brief use of the informant’s faces was to satisfy simple curiosity about the identity of the speaker, so that ‘viewers feel that they know the person who’s speaking, but then being able to forget about it.’⁹³

What Gee’s ‘suspended state’ also does is maintain the film’s liminality, between the present (the walk around Suffolk) and history (the Holocaust); between what is seen and what has to be imagined. This provided me with a model for how to impart information in *A Vast Shadow House*: we would briefly see my informants on screen to satisfy natural curiosity about the identity of the speaker, but then the speakers would become *acousmètres*, haunting the borders of the film (to borrow Chion’s phrase), so that what can only be imagined – Lindsay’s sublime – can become apparent.

⁹² Shot using ‘a bargain basement derivation of Errol Morris’s ‘Interrotron’ set up, so that when we did see interviewees, they were looking and speaking straight down the barrel of the lens.’ Grant Gee, email, 5 March 2021. For more on the Interrotron, see <https://telepromptermirror.com/errol-morris-interrotron/>. Accessed 5 March 2021.

⁹³ Grant Gee, email, 5 March 2021.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FILM

3.1 David Lindsay's 1928 Notebook

After researching how other filmmakers had addressed the issue of representing sublimity on screen, I turned to Lindsay's own attempts to address the problem. Lindsay attempted to adapt *The Haunted Woman* for the screen, in a previously unknown notebook from 1928. I was fascinated to see how Lindsay tackled the problem.

Perhaps aware that his story was going to be necessarily different in another medium, Lindsay took liberties with his own plot. For instance, the novel opens with Isbel's fiancé, Marshall Stokes, returning from New York. Marshall returns to London, learns that Isbel has departed for Brighton, then drives down to meet her that weekend. All of this takes place in two paragraphs on the first page of the novel (Lindsay 1987: 1). The treatment, on the other hand, begins quite differently:

Scene 1: On board Atlantic liner. Marshall Stokes sitting on deck with outstretched legs. Judge, coming along, stumbles over Marshall and they talk.

Scene 2: S[an] Francisco. Death of Judge's wife.

Scene 3: Same as 1 [on board deck of Atlantic liner]. Judge talks of plans.

Scene 4: Runhill Court.

Scene 5: Same in Saxon times.

Scene 6: Same as 1 [on board deck of Atlantic liner]. Talk ends.

(Lindsay 1928)

What Lindsay labels as 'scene numbers' are often actually shots (e.g. Scenes 4 and 5, scene 16, below). And he reshapes the narrative of the novel, where Marshall's meeting with Judge is told on page 7; and we learn of the death of Judge's wife is revealed later still (Lindsay 1987: 7); as is the fact that of Runhill Court's Saxon foundation (Lindsay 1987: 8). In the treatment, Lindsay clearly wants to get the story moving at once, and uses flashbacks (Scenes 2 and 5) to fill in backstory.

Here is how Lindsay treats the second meeting of the two men, sometime later in the liner's smoking room:

Scene 7: Smoke-room on liner. Judge & Marshall. Judge speaks of his hallucinations in former years.

Scene 8: East Room of Runhill. The wall without staircase.

Scene 9: The wall with staircase. Judge (8 years younger) mounts them.

Scene 10: The wall without staircase. Judge clasps his brow, in vain attempt to remember.

Scene 11: Same as 1 [on board deck of Atlantic liner]. Judge asks Marshall to investigate. Talk ends.

Here, Lindsay introduces the novel's most important *mise-en-scène*: the mysterious staircase that leads to the three knowledge-granting upper rooms at Runhill Court. In the novel, Judge's 'hallucinations' are referred to more ambiguously as 'marvellous experiences', revealed when Marshall speaks of them to Isbel (Lindsay 1987: 11). When Judge and Isbel discuss the experience of ascending the secret stairs to the rooms (Lindsay 1987: 85-89), the conversation actually takes place in the second of the three phantom rooms. Judge tells Isbel that 'in ten minutes' time neither of us will remember [...] this meeting' (Lindsay 1987: 86).

In the treatment, the issue of forgetting what took place in the upper rooms is conveyed by Judge 'clasp[ing] his brow, in [a] vain attempt to remember' (Lindsay 1928: Scene 10). Lindsay reaches for this image as a conventional device – on stage and screen – to convey a character struggling with memory.

Consider how Lindsay describes in the novel Isbel and Judge meeting in the second room: both Isbel and Judge look 'always *younger*' (Lindsay 1987: 85; emphasis in original). In the treatment, this scene becomes:

Scene 129: They stare at each other, as Judge comes to the couch. Their faces express, as well as bewilderment, the vision of *something different* [emphasis in original] in the other.

Scene 130: Close-up of Isobel's⁹⁴ own passionate, deep & beautiful face.

Scene 131: Close-up of Judge's younger & nobler face.

⁹⁴ Isbel is renamed Isobel in the treatment.

Lindsay evidently hopes that, by altering the appearance of his characters, a cinema audience will understand that some kind of inner change is taking place. In treatment, when Isobel enters the room for the first time, she ‘walks slowly & fearfully to the mirror & gazes in.’ She sees her ‘reflection in the mirror. A changed expression – deeper, sterner, more beautiful’ (Lindsay 1928: Scenes 92-93).

Lindsay in his treatment does not ‘transpose’ Isbel’s dialogue with Judge, that entering the room has given her a “*spiritual lesson*” (Lindsay 1987: 85; emphasis in original); that ““The air here [is] nobler, and there’s a sort of music in it”” (Lindsay 1987: 87). In the novel, Lindsay can express metaphysical concepts through dialogue of this kind, directly; but clearly he felt that that – in the era of silent cinema – was problematic. Dialogue could only be used in the form of intertitles – and Lindsay does this elsewhere in the treatment (references to on-screen titles – in Scene 32 – leave us in no doubt that it was written as a silent film). But evidently, he felt uncertain about this aspect of screen adaptation.

How did Lindsay think these liminal, mysterious states when characters experience the sublime, could be successfully represented on screen? He reached for conventional depictions, such as the clasped brow, or altering characters’ appearances, to represent these inner experiences in his treatment; the conventions of silent cinema.

I was not sure the conventions of silent cinema would suit the film I wanted to make (see *Call of Cthulhu* discussion, below). I thought it best to avoid any attempt at conventional dramatisation, and to seek instead ways I could use the documentary form.

3.2 The Evolution of the Film

My first idea was simply to preserve testimony with interviews from various Lindsay scholars, to make a film that was a simple appreciation of Lindsay’s work. I thought these interviews

might work well in the format of a standard TV-style documentary (cf. the BBC Arena *George Orwell*, discussed in the previous chapter). The interviews could be intercut with simple dramatised scenes from Lindsay's novels (e.g. Isbel in the upstairs rooms at Runhill Court, Ragnar walking to Morion House, Nightspore climbing the tower, Saltfleet and Ingrid on Dartmoor, Lindsay at his typewriter). To add further visual elements, I thought that each novel could also be represented on screen by an object – e.g. a folding pocket lens for *Arcturus*,⁹⁵ a piece of flint for *Devil's Tor*, an apple for *The Violet Apple*; while for *Sphinx* I considered commissioning a replica of the dream machine to be built. However, I felt that a conventional film might not be able to capture the idiosyncrasies of Lindsay's work, so began to explore alternative solutions.

I considered radically differing ideas. One was to make a film that would be entirely comprised of interview footage, requiring the viewer to do a *lot* of work to imagine Lindsay's sublime. I reasoned that, as the sublime cannot be shown directly, I would take this principle to its logical conclusion and make the entire idea a visual absence. This approach was inspired by watching Paul Cronin's interviews with British filmmaker Peter Whitehead (1937-2019), in which Whitehead is seen talking at considerable length, at home or in the editing room. I abandoned this idea when I realised that what I had seen was actually Cronin's rushes, not the finished film.⁹⁶

I also contemplated the possibility of making an installation, inspired by *The Witch*. The work would comprise a hologram of a woman's head, projected into the middle of a gallery space; the head would 'recite' Urda's speech. The sound would be ambisonic, coming at the viewer from all corners of the gallery. This would convey something of the immersive nature of the

⁹⁵ Of the kind Maskull uses to view Tormance from the street outside Faull's house in Hampstead (Lindsay 1992: 18-19).

⁹⁶ The finished film, *In the Beginning was the Image: Conversations with Peter Whitehead* (2006), can be seen on Paul Cronin's Vimeo page: <https://vimeo.com/user3954622>. Cronin has also uploaded to Vimeo the interview footage as two further films, *Once out of Nature* (2007) and *Fool That I Am* (2015). For some time I used for my film the working title *Conversations about David Lindsay*.

novel. The problem with this idea is that it would only convey some of *The Witch*, rather than the whole of Lindsay's philosophy. I went back to the drawing board.

I considered making the film in the style of films of the 1920s, inspired by *The Call of Cthulhu* (Paul Leman, 2005) an adaptation of H. P. Lovecraft's novella, made as if it had been filmed in the year of publication (1928). I refamiliarised myself with Expressionist films such as Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), Benjamin Christensen's *Häxan* (1922), Arthur Robison's *Shadows* (1923), and F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Faust* (1926). I watched avant-garde experimental shorts such as *Ballet Mécanique* (Fernand Léger, 1924), *Entr'acte* (René Clair, 1924), and in particular, the work of Hans Richter, *Filmstudie* (1926), *Inflation* (1927), *Vormittagsspuk* (1928) and *Zweigroschenzauber* (1929). I decided against this stylised 'retro-1920s' approach, on the grounds that the issues Lindsay deals with in his work are still relevant, and shouldn't be seen as being exclusively a concern of the 'Lost Generation' of the 1920s.

A further problem with making an experimental short, à la Richter, is one of context. The example of the two versions of *The Cabinet of Jan Švankmajer* (Keith Griffiths, Brothers Quay, 1984) illustrates this problem. The film was originally conceived by Keith Griffiths and the Brothers Quay as an hour-long TV documentary for Channel 4 (Brooke, n.d.). Extracts from Švankmajer's work was interspersed with interviews with 'critics, art historians and Surrealists'. Running throughout the film are nine animated sequences by the Quays, which serve to illustrate themes in Švankmajer's life and work. Although Švankmajer was almost entirely unknown to UK audiences at that time, Griffiths and the Quays opted not to make a simple introductory film, but 'an intricate, multi-layered exploration of the aesthetic and philosophical aspects of Švankmajer's films' (Brooke, 2007: 43). After the film's broadcast (20 June 1984), the Quays' nine sequences were edited together to form a separate, 14-minute short. While this version of *The Cabinet of Jan Švankmajer* remains by far the better known of

the two, the film gives the viewer almost no information about the history or context or Švankmajer's work.

Because Lindsay is also little-known outside of specialist circles, I thought it important to provide the viewer of my film with some context to his life and works; I wanted to make a film that retained something of my original idea, that of doing an appreciation of his work, to help bring it to a wider audience. I seemed to be stuck between convention and experiment.

The answer to my problem came in the form of landscape and acousmatic sound, as exemplified by Grant Gee's *Patience (After Sebald)* (2012), discussed in the previous chapter. This approach would allow me to convey information about Lindsay's work and context, but at the same time would be experimental enough to reflect something of Lindsay's stylistic and philosophical radicalism.

This 'landscape and acousmatic voice' idea evolved into an 'in search of Lindsay' idea, taking a few cues from Patrick Keiller's work (also discussed in the last chapter). This required a lot of location research, which I describe in the section on locations, below. This film would have been a psychogeographic quest, in which I would be a character going in search not just of traces of Lindsay's life and times, but also traces of his sublime. It also seemed to be a good fit for one of my longest-standing interests in Lindsay's work, his use of landscape; and also for my discovery that Lindsay represented the sublime in each of his metaphysical novels through acousmatic sound. Although I shied away from this psychogeographic approach because I became uncomfortable with the essentially fictional element of the quest, the idea to base the film around landscape and disembodied voice remained.

3.3 Interviews

While the idea for the film was undergoing these various evolutions, I was shooting the interviews. Filming interviews was a key part of my fieldwork, and changed or deepened my thinking about Lindsay in various key ways. This was not just because I was gleaning new information from my informants, but is also related to the sense in which the psychologist Marie Louise von Franz wrote about face-to-face teaching. She argued that meeting a teacher or therapist in person was important, as the student or patient learns without necessarily being conscious of the fact; a form of osmosis occurs.

My interviews began with J. B. Pick, at his home in Dumfries and Galloway, in May 2012. Pick was a literary critic and author who played a key role in building Lindsay's posthumous reputation. He discovered Lindsay's works in 1946, when the then recently-republished *A Voyage to Arcturus* was discussed on BBC radio's *Books and Writers* programme.⁹⁷ Pick contacted Lindsay's widow, Jacqueline (1898-1966), who gave him the manuscripts of Lindsay's unpublished works. Pick wrote early critical essays (Pick 1951, 1964), and collaborated with Lindsay's friend, the Milton scholar E. H. Visiak (1878-1972) and the writer Colin Wilson (1931-2013) to produce the first book on Lindsay, *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay* (1970). Pick eventually succeeded in getting *The Violet Apple* and *The Witch* published (Lindsay 1976, 1978). Pick situates Lindsay within a tradition of metaphysical writing in Scotland that he traces back to James Hogg (1770-1835) (Pick 1993).

Pick discussed his role in championing Lindsay's work, and his friendship with Lindsay's widow. He stressed Lindsay's philosophical ideas, and Lindsay's belief that each person is made up of two selves; we only understand when the second self comes alive. Pick also showed

⁹⁷ Broadcast on the Light Programme, 29 November 1946. Author Gerald Bullett (1893-1958) chaired a discussion on recent books with Sheila Shannon (Sellin 1981: 237, fn. 54).

me a painting by Lindsay's friend Robert Barnes (1899-1989) of Maskull, Nightspore and Krag walking through the Wombflash Forest (Lindsay 1992: 157-158). Pick also singled out some of Lindsay's writing as eloquent examples of his ability to express the sublime (he read a passage from *The Witch*). Although the interview was a very pleasant experience, it proved to be frustrating to edit; Pick's memory was clearly failing, and he was unable to provide concise answers. I knew that editing it would require a lot of work. Nevertheless, my interview with J. B. Pick was an important step – my footage represents, I believe, the only time Pick was ever filmed talking about Lindsay – but I remained unsure how exactly to approach Lindsay as a filmmaker, from a biographical or a more experimental perspective.

I was still largely in 'fact-finding mode' when I conducted the next group of interviews, which took place relatively quickly. I interviewed Murray Ewing at his home in East Grinstead, Surrey, in November 2013. Ewing's excellent Lindsay website, violetapple.org.uk, contains much original research by Ewing, on aspects of Lindsay's family history,⁹⁸ and Lindsay's childhood in the Scottish Borders. I therefore asked Ewing about Lindsay's biography, and the state of his research. Ewing told me that, while it would be nice to know more about Lindsay's life, it wouldn't answer all the questions Lindsay researchers have about his work. I asked Ewing to summarise each of Lindsay's novels, which he did very well. I thought this might come in useful in the editing stage of the film, when introducing Lindsay's novels, as it would give me the option of dispensing with a 'voice of God'-style narration and let the interviewees speak, if I felt that that was the way the film should develop. Ewing also described his experiences of reading Lindsay for the first time, of feeling that there were two parts of him reading *Arcturus*, a conscious self, and a deeper self that seemed to understand the book. We

⁹⁸ One of the most interesting facts Ewing has uncovered since the interview is his discovery of the date Lindsay's father disappeared on – 17 April 1888. Ewing found a 'missing person' notice about Alexander Lindsay in *The Kentish Mercury* for 4 May 1888, stating that he had not been seen since 17 April (Ewing, Email 26 September 2017). Bernard Sellin states that Lindsay's father never returned to the family, but started a new life in Canada (Sellin 1981: 8).

also discussed William Holloway's film adaptation of *Arcturus*, and Murray very kindly lent me a DVD of the film.

The interview with David Power took place at York St. John University in December 2013. Power is a composer and the author of a short book on Lindsay, *David Lindsay's Vision* (1991). I came across Power's work on Lindsay through Ewing's website. Power has composed three pieces inspired by Lindsay's work.⁹⁹ My interview with him focussed on the role of music. Power contends that Lindsay used music as a form of code, and I began to think after the interview that my film could be centred around music, voice and ideas.

Stuart Kelly was interviewed at my home in Edinburgh shortly before Christmas 2013. The interview was not a great success from a technical standpoint: it became clear that the chip in my camera was failing, resulting in visual distortion to the righthand half of the image. (As there was no time to source another camera, I decided to go ahead with the interview, and mask off the distorted area in the edit.) Kelly was aware of my interest in gnosticism in Lindsay's work, and while he acknowledged that that is indeed an element in the work, Lindsay's Calvinism is arguably more important. Kelly also suggested a link between the use of time in *The Haunted Woman*, and various popular theories about the nature of time prevalent in the 1920s (best exemplified by J. W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (1927)). Kelly also pointed out that the Jedburgh area, where Lindsay spent part of his childhood, is rife with folklore: stories about journeys to other worlds (such as Thomas the Rhymer), and hauntings abound.

I spent months trying to arrange an interview with Bernard Sellin. He is Lindsay's only biographer. Originally written in French as a PhD thesis, Sellin's *The Life and Works of David Lindsay* was published in English (translated by Lindsay's friend Kenneth Gunnell) in 1981. Along with Pick's, Wilson's and Visiak's *Strange Genius of David Lindsay*, and Gary K.

⁹⁹ 'Bluewright' (1990-1991), for clarinet and piano, 'Matterplay' (2002), an electronic piece, and 'Mosaic' (2002-3), for piano.

Wolfe's book on Lindsay, Sellin's biography is one of the texts that helped establish a 'canonical Lindsay'. I initially thought the interview would take place at the University of Nantes, where Sellin is Emeritus Professor of English (in fact, his field is modern and contemporary Scottish literature), but eventually Sellin was invited to give a talk in Edinburgh, and we arranged to film the next day. Sellin provided a wealth of detail about Lindsay's biography, and also about the various aspects of Lindsay's philosophy. Sellin described Lindsay as an intellectual challenge, which was becoming my own experience, as I continued to read Lindsay's work and explore various possibilities for the film. As Sellin revealed in the interview, Lindsay's biography is relatively undramatic. A new approach, non-biographical, was called for. As I was able to gather a lot of information from Sellin about Lindsay's philosophical ideas, the idea of making a film based around Lindsay's philosophical notes, and the metaphysical concepts embedded in the novels, offered itself as a possibility.

Shortly after the Sellin interview, the research evolved into the present PhD by practice in filmmaking, and with support from the university, I was able to visit the U. S. in the summer of 2016, to conduct interviews with Douglas A. Anderson, Gary K. Wolfe, and Harold Bloom.

Douglas A. Anderson, a freelance scholar based in Michigan, has undertaken considerable research into Lindsay's life and publishing history, such as debunking various oft-repeated 'facts' about Lindsay – such as that *Arcturus* sold 'only' 596 copies when it was first published (Anderson, filmed interview).¹⁰⁰ Anderson's position is therefore in contrast to much earlier Lindsay scholarship, which focusses almost exclusively on *Arcturus*.¹⁰¹ He said in the interview that Lindsay wrote four masterpieces: *A Voyage to Arcturus*, *The Haunted Woman*, *Devil's Tor*, and *The Witch*. Anderson also provided an extraordinary amount of detail about

¹⁰⁰ The first published reference to the 596 copies comes in Wilson 1965: 128, and has been repeated by Pick 1970: 14; Wolfe 1982: 7. Douglas A. Anderson pointed out that this is not correct: only 596 of the first impression sold, but eventually, the entire first edition of some 1500 copies did sell out (Anderson, filmed interview).

¹⁰¹ For example, Branham (1983), Duncan (2012), Elflandsson (1984), Hume (1978), Kegler (2003), McClure (1974b), Manlove (1994a), Mensing (1977), Merivale (1984), Pohl (1981), Rabkin (1977), Raff (1980), Russ (1969), Schofield (1972c), Tigges (1995), Watson (1988), Waugh (1985, 2019b, 2019c), Wheat (2008).

Lindsay's life and publishing history. I found all of this fascinating, but began to wonder whether I now had too much material. Nevertheless, the interview with Anderson was one of the highlights of the entire project.

The interview with Gary K. Wolfe took place at his office at Roosevelt University in Chicago. Wolfe talked about how he had first heard about Lindsay – by way of the 1963 U.S. edition of *Arcturus* – and his initial forays into research. He discussed Lindsay with various science fiction authors – such as Harlan Ellison, Philip José Farmer, and Gordon R. Dickson – all of whom were familiar with Lindsay's novel. Wolfe also corresponded with E. H. Visiak. I asked Wolfe to reiterate some of the literary contexts he discussed in his book on Lindsay (Wolfe 1982): Lindsay's debt to the work of George MacDonald (1824-1905),¹⁰² German Romantic literature (Goethe, Novalis, Tieck), and German philosophers and scientists (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Reil). Wolfe also spoke of the difference between the allegoric and symbolic modes: the former looks for symbols to represent the real, whereas the latter tries to find ways of presenting something that does not have a direct anchor in the real. Wolfe also felt that Lindsay was dismantling reality to see what was behind it. The interview suggested to me that Lindsay's work could possibly be represented through visual and aural abstraction.

The interview with the eminent literary critic Harold Bloom (1930-2019) took place at his home in New Haven, Connecticut. Bloom was not in good health on the day of the interview (for which he apologised), and I had to consider whether the interview should go ahead. Bloom had a medical appointment the same afternoon, and it suddenly became apparent that the interview might not go ahead at all. However, Bloom was adamant that the interview should be completed, and in the end he was able to speak for 40 minutes. He is alone among my interviewees in thinking that Lindsay was effectively a one-book author, feeling that the rest

¹⁰² First mentioned by Visiak 1970b: 98. Gary K. Wolfe was in touch with Visiak around this time, and got the reference to MacDonald's influence on Lindsay from Visiak directly.

of Lindsay's output did not match up to *A Voyage to Arcturus*. It was therefore on this one book that the interview concentrated. Bloom revealed what virtually amounted to an obsession with *Arcturus*. He said that he had been 'hit very hard' by the book, having first read it in 1963, when it was first published in the U. S., and his reflections on camera represent a lifetime of rereading the novel. He confessed to still being stunned by the book at the age of 86. He told us that he thought the character of Nightspore was a truly original creation, so much so that he found it difficult to put it into words. Bloom, who himself has a strong interest in Gnosticism, reads the book in Gnostic terms, and offered the most succinct definition of Gnosticism I have ever heard: that the creation and the fall are the same event. He compared the book to Blake's mythical system, and suggested that the strongest influences on *Arcturus* are Thomas Carlyle and Novalis. Crystalman, for him, is an amalgamation of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Although Bloom said he found Lindsay's prose style wanting, the sheer power of Lindsay's myth-making swept him away.

I was unsure how much of this interview I would be able to use. Although Bloom's contention that Carlyle, Novalis and Wilde were an influence on the novel (none of my interviewees stressed Carlyle as much as Bloom did, and none mentioned Wilde), I felt it might take too much time in the film to explain who these figures were. Nevertheless, Bloom's thoughtfulness was a reminder that he has taken Lindsay's work very seriously indeed.

The next group of interviews did not take place until February 2018, and were all done in and around London.

David Lindsay worked at the firm of Lloyds underwriters Price Forbes 1894-1916,¹⁰³ and I contacted them to see if there was any record of Lindsay's time with the company. I interviewed

¹⁰³ Price Forbes was not, in fact, Lindsay's first job. The 1891 census lists Lindsay, then aged 15, as a 'clerk newspaper office'. Sellin notes that Lindsay got the job at Price Forbes through a friend of his father's (Sellin 1981: 11).

Chris Brown, the company's then historian. He shared information about the history of the company, but sadly there was no surviving information on Lindsay. However, I was shown a memorial album of photographs of Lindsay's colleagues who died in the Great War, which was the highlight of the interview. (Lindsay's own war service took place entirely in London, at the regimental headquarters of the Grenadier Guards; he saw no overseas action.) This piece of previously unknown primary evidence was tangential to Lindsay's own biography, but was nevertheless an affecting source to examine.

I was interested in interviewing the author and former musician¹⁰⁴ Gary Lachman (b. 1955), because he is one of the few writers to note similarities between Lindsay and John Cowper Powys (1872-1963) (Lachman 2003: 262-263). Lindsay and Powys share some affinities, such as a mystical treatment of landscape, and stress the positive role of pain in human experience. In the interview, Lachman reiterated this connection between the two writers, and was able to furnish me with additional contexts: he mentioned the similarity between Lindsay's stress on pain and the Armenian mystic George Gurdjieff's (c.1866/1877-1949) concept of 'intentional suffering'. Lachman described this process as 'inward growing pains', which I found very helpful. The interview touched on this theme also during our discussion of *The Haunted Woman*, which Lachman reads in psychological terms, as a novel about self-actualisation.

I took away from this interview a strong sense that Lindsay's novels can be read as interior dramas: as much as they might be concerned with the post-1918 world, they are also narratives of inner struggle. It seemed logical to link this idea with acousmatic sounds and voices; the entire film could be thought of as an inner journey, where the narrator is never seen, only existing as a voice. This was an evolved version of the plan to make a psychogeographic film. I was becoming increasingly convinced that a biographical film should be ditched in favour of one stressing the inner experiences Lindsay is describing in his novels.

¹⁰⁴ Lachman played bass for Blondie, 1975-1977, under the name Gary Valentine.

The day after interviewing Gary Lachman, we travelled out to Hadleigh in Essex to interview the science fiction author, translator, and critic Brian Stableford (b. 1948) at his home. Stableford, who has written for science fiction and fantasy encyclopaedias, proved a mine of insights on Lindsay's intellectual, artistic and cultural contexts. Stableford concisely placed Lindsay within a broader philosophical context that included the early-twentieth-century British reception of Nietzsche, the influence of Schopenhauer, and the formation of Lindsay's ideas about the sublime. Stableford sees Lindsay as belonging to the 'shell-shocked generation', working in the decade or so after the end of the Great War. Stableford pointed out that Lindsay's transition from insurance underwriter to fantasy novelist was not so unusual: J. K. Huysmans (1848-1907) wrote *À Rebours* (1884) while working for the French civil service. Stableford said that Lindsay may have been aware of *The Testament of John Davidson* (1908). Davidson (1857-1909) was a Scots-born poet who translated selected works by Nietzsche into English as early as 1891.¹⁰⁵ *The Testament* is a work in which Davidson elucidates his personal philosophy. Moreover, Stableford pointed out that Lindsay was less alone in writing fantasy in the 1920s than I had previously thought: he referred me to *Living Alone* (1919) by Stella Benson (1892-1933); Gerald Bullett's (1893-1958) *Mr Godly Beside Himself* (1924); Margaret Irwin's (1889-1967) *Still She Wished for Company* (1924) and *These Mortals* (1925); and *Fantastica: Being The Smile of the Sphinx and Other Tales of Imagination* (1923) by Robert Nichols (1893-1944).

After the interview with Brian Stableford, I saw Lindsay in a much richer, nuanced context. When I watched the footage back in Edinburgh, I found that much of it was useable: Stableford spoke well, never stumbled, and provided information I had not previously been aware of. It was one of the best interviews of the entire project.

¹⁰⁵ Humble 1971: 331-332. For the possible influence of Nietzsche on Davidson, see Lester 1957; for the early reception of Nietzsche in England, see Thatcher 1970.

I met David Bialock, a professor at the University of Southern California Dornsife, at a conference in Sendai, Japan, when I was presented a paper on themes of apocalypse and rebirth in Lindsay's work. Bialock first read *A Voyage to Arcturus* in the early 1970s. The novel struck him as intensely visual, which mirrored my own experience of the book.

The interview with the comics writer, author and occultist Alan Moore (b. 1953) took place at a recording studio in Northampton (Moore's regular venue for interviews). We arrived 20 minutes late due to appalling traffic (we had driven from Cambridge), but Moore was entirely understanding. My nerves allayed, we proceeded to shoot a two-hour interview in which we discussed *Arcturus* in some detail. This turned out to be the only Lindsay novel Moore had read, but he provided many insights into the book. Moore places Lindsay in what he terms a visionary school of British writing, that he traces back to John Wycliffe (c.1328-1384), and includes John Bunyan (1628-1688) and Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673). Moore stressed that these seventeenth-century writers should not be seen just as allegorists; they were visionary writers who were also politically radical; the implication here is that Lindsay is a radical also. The visionary tradition includes later writers such as Arthur Machen (1863-1947) and William Hope Hodgson (1877-1918), who were exploring similar themes to Lindsay – use of landscape, other dimensions, spiritual awakening. Moore suggested that the struggle between pleasure and pain depicted in *Arcturus* might in fact reflect Lindsay's own psyche. Moore also gave me a radical insight into the nature of Lindsay's landscapes: for Moore, the landscapes of Tormance are projections of the psychological state of a human being. I think this insight could be applied to Lindsay's other landscapes as well.

Alan Moore's stress on psychology, stylistic radicalism (he admires Lindsay for his bravery in writing a book as extreme as *Arcturus*), and a personal, idiosyncratic mythology confirmed my growing feeling that my film should take an 'inner direction'. Biography now seemed

unimportant compared to the perspectives Moore had suggested. I knew that, with this interview in the can, I now had a film.

The final interviews were all undertaken to provide missing context, or additional data for certain themes, in particular Lindsay's concept of the sublime, the role of music, and the later novels (*Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*).

Dr Steven Sutcliffe of the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, was the only interviewee who initiated contact with me, rather than other way round. Sutcliffe had read my paper on Lindsay (Martin 2015), and suggested we meet. As Sutcliffe's field is contemporary religious belief, he reads Lindsay in the context of early-twentieth-century esotericism, and also neo-romanticism. The interview, which was conducted at Sutcliffe's office in New College, Edinburgh, in February 2019, covered these areas. Sutcliffe also provided insights into this period, suggesting thematic parallels between Lindsay and neo-romanticism, and also to early-twentieth-century occultism; like Gary Lachman, he sees temperamental similarities between Lindsay and Gurdjieff.

Sutcliffe also had in his possession a cache of Lindsay primary sources that had previously been in the possession of J. B. Pick. After Pick's death in 2015, this box of material passed to Sutcliffe for cataloguing, with the intention of it being deposited at the National Library of Scotland, to augment the Lindsay archive there. This box contained the 1928 notebook containing Lindsay's partial screen treatment for *The Haunted Woman*, which I discuss elsewhere, in addition to notes by Robert Barnes, letters, a fragment of what appears to be a short story, and a collection of reviews for *Devil's Tor* sent by the book's publishers, Putnam's, to Lindsay. Many of these reviews, culled from an international selection of newspapers and magazines, are positive. It was agreed that I would help catalogue these items, and that we would co-author a paper on the material.

J. Derrick McClure (b. 1944) has published papers on Lindsay over the course of his career (McClure 1974a & b, 1980, 2012), which discuss the use of language and structure in *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1974b); *Devil's Tor* (1980); and *Arcturus* in relation to notions of an Otherworld within the context of Scottish literature (2012).¹⁰⁶ McClure spoke about Lindsay's sublime as a psychological state, and to support this, told me a fascinating story about a trip he once undertook to a Redwood forest in California. He said that when it was time to leave, he felt an unexpected sadness at having to leave. He wasn't sure what he was leaving or, indeed, returning to, although the latter was clearly a lesser reality than the majesty of the forest. This insight provided me with further support for the idea that the sublime is an inner state, and that landscapes in Lindsay's work can be seen as being outward projections of inner, psychological conditions.

My interview with Gavin Wraith (b. 1939), a former professor of mathematics at the University of Sussex, was an unexpected addition to the schedule. Via a fortuitous piece of Googling, I came across a reminiscence by Wraith of meeting E. H. Visiak in the 1960s, that Wraith had put on his website. Intrigued, I contacted Wraith and he readily agreed to an interview. I was keen to get testimony from Wraith, simply because the number of people who knew figures directly associated with Lindsay are now numbering very few indeed. Wraith recalled the meeting with Visiak clearly (see p. 58). We discussed Lindsay's sublime, which Wraith regarded as a form of mystical experience, and dreams. Wraith was baffled by Lindsay's theories about the positive role of pain, and wondered if Lindsay might in fact be mentally ill.¹⁰⁷ Wraith also discussed how *Arcturus* could be visually represented, and showed

¹⁰⁶ Another paper, McClure 1974a, argues for the canonicity of *Adventures of M. de Mailly*, often dismissed as a potboiler - e.g. Power refers to it as a 'potboiler' (1991: 34); Wolfe as a 'swashbuckler' (1982: 9); and Wilson as an 'entertainment' (1970: 41). McClure contends that the novel is in keeping with Lindsay's metaphysical novels because one of the novel's themes is that of an illusory reality, here presented not in metaphysical terms, but as the chicanery of Louis XIV's courtiers.

¹⁰⁷ This stands in stark contrast to Stuart Kelly's reading of Lindsay. Discussing the revelation at the end of *Arcturus* that Krag's name on Earth is pain (Lindsay 1992: 302), Kelly exclaimed that only a Scottish Calvinist could have written a line like that (Kelly, filmed interview).

us some computer animations created using fractals, that he had found on YouTube. While Wraith expressed caution in regard to mysticism and dreams, he recounted experiences of his own. As with McClure's experiences in California, this reconfirmed my feeling that Lindsay's sublime was in some respects 'real', in the sense that it is possible for people living in a secular, Western culture in the twenty-first century to have odd, but deeply meaningful experiences.

The final interview took place in August 2019, in Edinburgh, with the author and critic John Herdman (b. 1941). Herdman published a perceptive article on *The Violet Apple and The Witch* (1977), in which he is sympathetic to Lindsay, and critical of J. B. Pick's editing, in particular Pick's handling of *The Witch*. As I read and reread Lindsay's work, *The Witch* has grown in importance for me. John Herdman regards *The Witch* as Lindsay's greatest book, as it successfully marries the sublime and mundane worlds through meticulous stylisation in a language that is almost musical. For Herdman, *The Witch* represents a fusion of Lindsay's late philosophy and the flowering of the divine feminine, while maintaining strong parallels with Gnostic ideas, nuanced language, and music that is the crowning achievement of Lindsay's literary career.

3.4 Approaching Transcendental Style: Landscape

Towards the end of the interview process, in September 2018, I began the shooting the bulk of the landscape footage. I had already shot footage of Lindsay's grave, his final home, and a number of locations I had identified from *The Haunted Woman*, but had not decided on how best to use this footage. Now that I had decided to concentrate on sound, music and voice as indicators of the sublime in Lindsay's work, my relationship to location changed. The location footage I had, and the location footage I still wanted to shoot, now became less tied to

biography, and became closer to what David Melbye has characterised as ‘landscapes of the mind’, where landscapes ‘reflect inner subjective states’ (Melbye 2010: 1).

I began to research potential locations that might function as ‘Lindsayan inner landscapes’, in that they matched the images which Lindsay’s writing had created in my mind: mountains for *Arcturus*; downland for *The Haunted Woman* and *The Witch*; woodland for *Sphinx*; moors for *Devil’s Tor*. These could then be used to refer to Lindsay’s descriptions in the novels and the *Sketch Notes*. For example, in the *Sketch Notes*, Lindsay writes,

31. The landscape from the top of Cader Idris is poetic, wild, and beautiful inland; but where it includes the sea, vulgar.

32. Viewing mountains from below, gives a sense of sublimity; but on gaining the mountains themselves, this feeling is lost....

244. Old crumbling walls and ancient courtyards create an ‘atmosphere’ but this is false: vital nature alone is real (Lindsay 2002: 393)

444. Real sublimity consists always in active energy. Thus the sea and music are sublime, but mountains and architecture are pseudo-sublime

(Lindsay 1972: 26)

Lindsay thus narrows and focusses the inherited Romantic view of nature. For him, only a particular kind of landscape could be sublime, that of ‘vital nature’ (SN 244), a landscape where huge natural forces can be seen to be at work. He repeats the point:

440. The real Sublime consists only in action. Therefore the ocean is sublime, mountains are not, except in so far as they cause atmospheric disturbance. Mountains are masses of decaying rock; thus huge graveyards.

But my aesthetic preference is for stillness wherever possible. (As Bresson advised, ‘Build you film on white, on silence, on stillness’ (Bresson 1977: 71).) I chose landscapes which communicate my sense of Lindsay’s sublime, not the ones he might have chosen. Some are motionless, or nearly so; I use these to draw attention to the voice.

I felt justified in this approach because Lindsay always fictionalises his locations. In *Arcturus*, scenes on Earth are tagged minimally as ‘Hampstead’ and ‘the north-east coast of

Scotland' (Lindsay 1992: 1, 14). In *Devil's Tor*, the tor itself is a real place, amplified greatly.¹⁰⁸ For *The Witch*, Lindsay invents the entire locale (the village of Swayning is fictitious, although it is evidently somewhere in Sussex, while Morion House is simply described as being near a chalk pit).¹⁰⁹ *The Haunted Woman* is the only one of Lindsay's novels where there are a number of locations that can be identified with a reasonable amount of certainty.¹¹⁰

I opted to film in the general areas where Lindsay lived and worked: the Scottish Borders and Highlands, the South Downs and Dartmoor. This does not depend on a biographical tie; rather I propose that such landscapes formed the source materials for Lindsay's imaginary worlds.

Lindsay and landscape does not always indicate the sublime, of course. Often, landscape hides something: the alien terrains of *A Voyage to Arcturus*, chthonic presences on Dartmoor in *Devil's Tor*, the suffocating woodland in *Sphinx*. Landscape in Lindsay can stand for a number of things: ideas or feelings (as in *Arcturus*); a veil over the sublime (*Arcturus*, *The Haunted Woman*, *Devil's Tor*); the false world, the real world (the sublime). In *The Witch*, the landscape dissolves away entirely; Lindsay's characters transcend the false world by walking through it as if it were a veil, to reach the sublime behind it. In short, landscape for Lindsay is protean; it can represent the true or the false.

¹⁰⁸ The Flemings' house, Whitestone, is described as 'standing alone on a high-up part of the southern moor'. Whitestone is several miles to the east of Devil's Tor, and half a mile north-west of the fictitious village of Belhill (Lindsay 2008: 49-50). Lindsay possibly may have based Belhill on the village of Postbridge, which lies several miles to the east of the real Devil's Tor.

¹⁰⁹ The South Downs had a chalk quarrying industry that began in the mid-C19th, still active in Lindsay's time. The Downs are riddled with chalk pits.

¹¹⁰ Isbel's hotel in Regency Square; Preston Street; the bath house in Hove where Isbel meets Mrs. Richborough in chapter 12; the promenades of Brighton and Worthing; Brighton's West Pier; Hove railway station. The journey Isbel takes from Brighton, through Steyning, to Runhill Court, appears to follow the modern A283. Brighton-based Lindsay researcher Alan J. Cannon suggested that Runhill Court was modelled on Wiston House, which stands about a mile up Mouse Lane from Steyning, near Chanctonbury Ring (Murray Ewing, email, 6 November 2013). Gavin Wraith suggested Buncton Manor Farm as a possible alternative model for Runhill Court (email, 23 May 2019). Both houses are situated off the A283, Wiston House to the south, Buncton Manor to the north. Perhaps Lindsay used elements of both as models for Runhill Court.

In preparing for these shoots, and while editing, I thought about how cinematic images can be framed, or revealed, as having paradoxical qualities. They can suggest what is not seen; and so intimate that the unseen – like Lindsay’s sublime – is forever outside the realm of discourse. Schrader’s transcendental style parallels Lindsay’s sublime also.

3.5 Location Shooting

I began then with location scouting and shooting. I visited and filmed every site I could trace that had an association with Lindsay: Lewisham, London (birthplace and family homes); Jedburgh and Ulston, Scottish Borders (childhood and holiday homes); Golders Green, London (first marital home); Price Forbes, London (workplace); Grenadier Guards’ headquarters, London (war service); Hove (final home); Shoreham-by-Sea (grave). I was looking for cinematic possibilities and potential; for *mise-en-scène* that could evoke Lindsay’s fictional visions, and, at the same time, make possible links to the settings of his life. I was already also looking for footage to stand for the mundane, as well as for – and in contrast to – the sublime.

These locations proved to be a mixed bag. Some places were dull, no matter how I tried to frame them (e.g. Lindsay’s birthplace). Others were interesting in detail only (e.g. the Grenadier Guards’ HQ). The most interesting of the biographical locations was Jedburgh, especially its ruined abbey. I filmed a gimbal shot walking down the nave, with the camera pointing straight up. The resulting footage was far stranger than I had anticipated: after a few moments of viewing the rushes, I could no longer tell whether the camera was looking up, or down. Two *Haunted Woman* locations appealed to me: Isbel’s hotel, and the remains of the West Pier, in Brighton, seemed suitable to include in the film, to stand for both the mundane world and to signify the passage of time from Lindsay’s era to the present day.

My footage started to work better when I filmed in locations that I felt were ‘in the spirit of Lindsay’ rather than being tied too directly either to his biography, or to the few identifiable locations his fiction contains. Colin Wilson suggested that the inspiration for the Gap of Sorgie in *Arcturus* might be Deil’s Brig, on Holborn Head in Caithness (Wilson 1970: 48, fn. 3). This appears to be speculation on Wilson’s part, but if so, it is an inspired guess. When I visited the site in September 2018, I found that Deil’s Brig does indeed contain a ledge upon which it is possible to lie at full length and gaze over the cliff edge down to the waters below, as Maskull and Nightspore do in the novel (which are only approximately 80 feet below, rather than the 400 mentioned by Lindsay (1992: 28)).¹¹¹

While in on the north coast, I also filmed at the Stacks of Duncansby, Dunnet Head, and Cape Wrath. The Stacks are suitably odd to enough to be described as looking slightly ‘Arcturian’; while Dunnet Head and Cape Wrath both feature wild, rugged coast lines than seemed to me more existentially bleak than Romantic. I tried to capture something of their harshness, which I felt to be in keeping with Lindsay’s philosophy. I experimented with the drone, also. I filmed the landscape with the drone’s camera facing directly down, which rendered the landscape alien and abstract. The most successful of these shots was taken at Murkle Bay as the tide was coming in. The water there is so clear that at first I didn’t actually see the water when I watched the footage back; but the line of the tide becomes visible during the take, the only slight visual clue as to scale, and, indeed what one is looking at.

A month after that trip, I spent a week on Dartmoor. Devil’s Tor itself is remarkably uninteresting, and it is clear that Lindsay embellished the real location to give it a far more dramatic presence. I sought out tors that better resembled Lindsay’s fictional tor, and found

¹¹¹ An observation made by the artist Dan Cardle, who visited the site in March 1993 (*A Voyage to Arcturus* opens in March), may support Wilson’s conjecture. Cardle told me that the star Arcturus was visible low in the eastern sky from Deil’s Brig; and, interestingly, across the bay, Thurso Tower East was clearly visible. Like Starkness Observatory, this is a square stone structure of six storeys, and could possibly have provided the basis for Lindsay’s description of the tower at Starkness (Lindsay 1992: 21, 22) (Dan Cardle, email, 15 May 2019.)

Hound Tor and Haytor Rocks, both of which have sufficiently imposing bulk. But the very difference between the actual Devil's Tor and the fictitious one is instructive: as I was filming there, Lindsay's sublime struck me as a profound absence. I filmed the emptiness of the moors, and this somehow felt appropriate.

I also filmed at Wistman's Wood, as a stand-in for the woodland in *Sphinx*. This was less successful, but I think part of my problem there was the weather: it was far too bright. Although *Sphinx* takes place during a summer heatwave, I wanted to shoot Wistman's Wood in overcast or foggy weather. Fog has always seemed to me to be inherently cinematic, and I was keen to include a foggy landscape in the film.

I had further location problems on Arran the following February. I had decided to visit the island because I had seen some of the photographer Anne M. Holmes's work (already discussed, above), and I wanted to film the locations she had photographed. As I studied the map of Arran, I realised that the island's topography was varied enough for me to do most of my remaining landscape work there. (It has an appropriate nickname: 'Scotland in miniature.') In addition to the rock formations I had seen in Holmes's work, the island boasted craggy mountains that could stand in for the Ildawn Marest and the Mornstab Pass in *Arcturus*; a group of stone circles at Machrie Moor that could represent both *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*, as well as moors, waterfalls, and forests that I decided could be used as 'generic Lindsay country'. Although I got most of the footage I needed, inclement weather made climbing to the top of Goatfell impractical. With still a few hours of daylight left, I discovered Glen Sannox quite by accident, and got some good drone footage there. The smooth flying conditions, and the length of the glen, meant that I was able to get some long, smooth aerial shots whose duration would be a good way to illustrate my durational aesthetic (see below).

Wanting to film a country house to stand in for Runhill Court in *The Haunted Woman*, I discovered Hospitalfield near Arbroath on a day-long workshop organised by the Scottish

Graduate School for the Arts and Humanities. The house was suitable because its interior was an amalgam of styles that, to my eye, don't work in harmony, recalling Lindsay's description on Runhill Court's interior as 'discordant' (Lindsay 1987: 19). It also had a grand piano. I used the gimbal for much of this, and I shot long tracking shots in its many corridors.

Some of the best location footage happened by accident. While in Sussex in June 2019 to interview Gavin Wraith (see above), we asked our hosts in Brighton for suggestions for suitably 'Lindsayan' locations, and they recommended Devil's Dyke. I filmed this one sunny evening with the drone, realising it would make a good counterpoint to Glen Sannox (filmed in the winter).

Another serendipity was the discovery of bleak moorland in the Lammermuir Hills. I wanted to film a stand of trees near Whiteadder Reservoir (I had spotted them while *en route* to a conference in 2016), and after shooting, decided to fly the drone over nearby moorland. The landscape was odd: it looked as if it had been patched back together after bearing the brunt of some sort of chemical damage. I also found a fence that ran for miles before disappearing off into the distance. Flying the drone over this recalled Shaping's Causeway in *Arcturus*. The footage – shot in the fading light of an autumn afternoon – was extraordinarily bleak, the landscape an abstraction of lines and vague, shaded areas.

My final day of landscape work also came about my accident. Towards the end of November 2019, we had a very foggy day in Edinburgh, and I went straight out with the drone and filmed at two locations I knew well, Blackford Hill, and the Pentlands. I discovered that the drone was not happy in fog: it was not equipped with infrared sensors, was not able to tell if I was getting too close to treetops or the ground. It was a mildly alarming discovery, as the drone was off in the mists at the time, and I feared I might lose it. I did manage to get the foggy landscapes I had been wanting though, and knew that that footage would be in the film. I knew at my final location that it would be an ideal shot to use with Alan Moore's statement from the interview

that everyone has an Arcturus inside them, ‘some ultimate landscape of the soul’ (Moore, filmed interview).

3.6 Theoretical Frameworks

I draw on my reading of Michel Chion, Paul Schrader, Nathaniel Dorsky, Robert Bresson and Andrei Tarkovsky. These theorists and filmmakers are complementary; each contributes to my working aesthetic.

The first element is (cf. chapter 2) non-diegetic sound. According to Michel Chion, this is:

sound whose source not only is not visible on screen but that supposedly belongs to another time and space (real or otherwise) than the scene shown on screen. The most common cases of nondiegetic sound are voiceover narrators (speaking after the events shown) or musical accompaniment (Chion 2019: 208).

Lindsay, as we have seen, sometimes codes sound as non-diegetic in this sense; the drumming in *Arcturus* is clearly intended to read as emanating from another time and space. Chion defines a second term, acousmatic sound:¹¹² ‘The listening situation in which we hear a sound without seeing its cause’ (Chion 2019: 201). Sherrup playing the piano in *The Haunted Woman* is an example of acousmatic sound.

Then there is a third term, the *acousmêtre*, Chion’s own coinage:

an ‘acousmatic being’ (*acousmatique* + *être*, also playing on *maître* or master, because this figure is often powerful). Designates the invisible character created in cinema by hearing an *acousmatic* voice, whether inside or outside the frame but in either case whose source cannot be seen, when this voice has enough coherence and continuity to constitute a full-blown character. This can happen even if this character is known only acoustically provided that the bearer of the voice is presented as capable of appearing in frame at any time (Chion 2019: 201-202).

For Chion, the *acousmêtre* has effectively supernatural power:

¹¹² The term ‘acousmatic’ was first proposed by the composer, writer and broadcaster Pierre Schaeffer (1910-1995) and the writer Jérôme Peignot (b. 1926) in the 1950s.

[the voice] must haunt the borderlands that are neither the interior of the filmic stage nor the proscenium – a place that has no name, but which cinema forever brings into play (Chion 1999: 24).

The *acousmêtre* brings aesthetic dimensions: it is ubiquitous, panoptical, omniscient, and omnipotent (Chion 1999: 24). Acousmatic voices in *Arcturus* have these properties too, as we have seen (the voices speaking out of darkness to warn Maskull). The voices' knowledge of Maskull's past and future suggests Chion's category of omniscience, and possibly omnipotence also.

The most significant use of an *acousmêtre* occurs in *The Witch*. Urda Noett, the witch of the title, is only briefly seen by Ragnar Pole when they both attend the party that opens the novel (Lindsay 1976: 273-276). Urda does not speak in this short scene. Later, though, when Ragnar reaches Morion House, he can hear Urda, but does not see her when she speaks. Conversely, when he can see her, she never speaks (e.g. Lindsay 1976: 391).

I used Lindsay's own 'voice' in my film to act as an *acousmêtre*, when summarising his own life (the voiceover reads the short piece he wrote for Putnam's (Lindsay 1932c)). The voices of my interviewees frequently become acousmatic: when Alan Moore talks about the landscapes of Tormance as the camera tracks over the rock formations of Arran; as Bernard Sellin discusses the role of pain in Lindsay's work, the camera tracking over the bleak Lammermuir moors. In sequences like these, the voices are 'haunting the borderlands of the image' in order to suggest that what we are hearing has a sense of generality about it; that it might apply to what we are seeing (although there is no direct connection between voice and image in these scenes); that it might be about ourselves.

3.7 Duration and Omission

Tarkovsky wanted cinema to be philosophical – to deal with the ‘tragic affairs’ of his time – and also visually philosophical. He wrote in his diary in 1974 that

There was a time when I thought that film, unlike other art forms, (being the most democratic of them all) had a total effect, identical for every audience. That is was first and foremost a series of record images; that the images are photographic and unequivocal. That being so, because it appears unambiguous, it is going to be perceived in one and the same way by everyone who sees it. (Up to a certain point, obviously.)

But I was wrong. One has to work out a principle which allows for film to affect people individually. The ‘total’ image must become something private. (Comparable with the images of literature, painting, poetry, music.)

The basic principle – as it were, the mainspring – is, I think, that as little as possible has actually to be shown, and from that little the audience has to build up an idea of the rest, of the whole. In my view that has to be the basis for constructing the cinematographic image. And if one looks at it from the point of view of symbols, then the symbol in cinema is a symbol of nature, of reality. Of course it isn’t a question of details, but of what is hidden.

(Tarkovsky 1994: 65)

Tarkovsky argues here that the less explanation a film gives – the more ‘gaps’ it left – the more the viewer has to work with. Tarkovsky hoped that, in this way, film could emulate the experience of reading – that each viewer would fill in the gaps in their own way, much the same as two people reading the same novel might ‘create’ two different (or dissimilar) books. Each of Tarkovsky’s films use the principle of showing as little as possible, of omitting important information. *The Mirror* (1975) perhaps best exemplifies this principle, where an unseen narrator reflects on his life, his relationship with his parents and wife. The film mixes dreams, memories and newsreel footage, without ever offering a direct explanation for anything one sees on screen. The only context Tarkovsky’s provides is that of his narrator’s memory and personality; the film has an intensely interiorised narrative voice.

Central to Tarkovsky’s film theory was the importance of time as a presence; best achieved, he argued, through the use of long takes. According to his colleague, Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky (b. 1937), Tarkovsky once said about the long take:

...if the regular length of a shot is increased, one becomes bored, but if you keep on making it longer, it piques your interest, and if you can make it even longer, a new quality emerges, a special intensity of attention (Golstein 2008: 188).¹¹³

I will single out just two examples from Tarkovsky's work. Towards the end of *Stalker* (1979), when the three characters have reached their destination – the room that makes wishes come true – they argue heatedly. Sinking into an unhappy huddle on the ground, Tarkovsky's camera slowly tracks away from them, revealing that the camera is actually in the room. It is waterlogged. At one point, it begins to rain inside the room. Still the men sit. The rain stops, the water in the room returns to stillness. The take lasts over four and a half minutes.

The conclusion of *Nostalgia* (1983) follows Gorchakov (Oleg Yankovsky), the protagonist, as he attempts to carry a lighted candle across a drained spa pool. The actor's footsteps and breathing are high in the mix, creating a sense of interiority. When the wind blows the candle out, Gorchakov walks back to the end of the pool and begins again; this happens twice. Finally, on the third attempt, he is able to cross the pool and place the candle on the ledge at the far side. All of this is captured in a single tracking shot, lasting nearly nine minutes. Tarkovsky's 'special quality of attention' makes the entire sequence far more nerve-wracking than it appears on paper, and its conclusion – like the rain in the example from *Stalker* – has a quietly symbolic quality. (While at the same time, also remaining just a candle, and just rain.)

Tarkovsky's ideas about duration in cinema, have always been important for my practice. In my film *Folie à Deux* (2012), for instance, I extended shot lengths to encourage the viewer meditate on the images, as a kind of *memento mori* (death is a prominent theme in the film); in *Koan IV* (2020), I end the film on a three-minute shot of mist rolling in to obscure the view of a mountain, with a similar contemplative aim in mind (the film being a play on the theme of perception). These films use duration for contemplative effect which, when allied to a purposeful lack of exposition, open up their potential meanings. I decided to apply this aesthetic

¹¹³ Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky, quoted in Boldyrev 2004: 455.

to the challenge of dealing with Lindsay's philosophy, because Lindsay often compels his reader to keep several interpretations in mind when attempting to seek a deeper meaning for a particular scene, image or narrative.

Schrader, of course, when revising his theory of transcendental style, thought of Tarkovsky. Transcendental style, according to Schrader, is often achieved through long takes. Schrader cites Tarkovsky, and the Hungarian filmmaker Béla Tarr (b. 1955), whose *Sátántangó* (1994) opens with an eight-minute tracking shot of a herd of cows (Schrader 2018: 5). Entire films themselves can exceed durational expectation, such as Wang Bing's fourteen-hour *Crude Oil* (2008) (Schrader 2018: 26). Whether through the long take, or the sheer duration of the film, or both, the effect is to foster the 'special intensity of attention' that Tarkovsky speaks of. As Schrader comments,

One viewer watching the fog drift from the mountains might find it an exercise in contemplative boredom; another might experience it as transcendental meditation (Schrader 2018: 31).

Schrader's comments raise an important point: in order to watch a film that is using duration in this way, the viewer must learn to watch differently. I remember my discovery of Tarkovsky's films required me to adopt this strategy. I realised that, to get the most out of the experience of watching Tarkovsky was to see the film on the big screen.¹¹⁴ It also meant to sit upright but comfortably, to watch and – this is perhaps the most important thing I learned – to *not expect anything to happen*. In this way, I could free myself from the demands of Hollywood-style plotting and dramatic expectation. It left me open and receptive to the film.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Which meant in those days, the late 1980s, to catch a repertory screening; this was several years before Tarkovsky's films were released on home video in the UK.

¹¹⁵ I once attended a Buddhist retreat led by the writer and biographer of Iris Murdoch, Peter Conradi. In one of his talks that weekend – it was May, 1999, in London – he quoted from Eliot's *Four Quartets*. The effect this had on me was profound, but I can't say why. My mind was as open and receptive as I had learned to be when watching Tarkovsky, and Eliot's words seemed apt and wise. I could feel them reaching me in a way that felt 'true' without going through a process of intellectual comprehension. The effect was emotional. Lindsay's philosophy arguably operates on a similar level – emotional, rather than intellectual or logical. He stresses emotional states in his novels: when Nightspore is about to climb the tower in *Arcturus*; the various times when Isbel hears music in *The Haunted Woman*; or when Anthony listens to Beethoven in *The Violet Apple*.

I wanted to use long takes in *A Vast Shadow House*, to experiment with and to try to produce a transcendental effect. My longest shot in the film is the drone shot at 43.52-47.46; other long takes occur at 41.52-43.51; and 27.48-30.16. I found that these shots had the effect of binding my various *acousmètres* together. The different voices and opinions of my informants do not make a completely unified whole. Cutting each time a different informant's voice was heard created a mosaic-like effect in my early edits, which I feared would dissipate Lindsay's ideas and weaken the film. The way out of the problem was to use long takes and unify sound through the extended duration of the take.

Two sequences that exemplify this approach are the Jedburgh Abbey sequence (41.52-43.51), and the very long drone shot in Glen Sannox (43.52-47.45). In the first shot, we hear Douglas Anderson talking about Lindsay's belief that the everyday world is a sham, behind which is the sublime; Lindsay then explored this idea in his novels, which were not completely planned in advance, but which evolved during the writing process.¹¹⁶ In the Glen Sannox shot, we hear a number of informants discuss Lindsay's sublime. Duration here functions as a foundation for the voices. If the foundation is 'solid' – as in a long take – then the voice is freed to engage in speculation not necessarily linked to what is depicted on screen.

An additional factor in these two sequences is the camera angle. When I watched the Jedburgh material, the duration, and the fixed angle of the camera (excluding any frames of reference other than the sky), created a hypnotic effect. I felt as though one loses bearings watching the footage, and one can no longer tell if one is looking up, or down. This latter feeling then triggered the thought that if that was the case, then the abbey ruins must be floating in space. Suddenly, I was mentally in a non-realistic space. Anderson's words about true and false realities seemed like a very good fit for this material.

¹¹⁶ A contention supported by Lindsay's letter to Visiak, 26 July 1931, in which he admits to working 'quite in the dark' on *Devil's Tor* (Lindsay 1971: 58); and writing to Robert Barnes, 25 February 1936, Lindsay states that *The Witch* 'has taken very much longer than I thought', and was still not finished (NLS Acc. 9956).

The discussions I wanted to include about the sublime were made possible through duration. I knew that cutting whenever a new informant contributed to the ‘conversation’ might detract from the ideas under discussion. I had a drone shot of a highland glen left over from a discarded sequence in which I had tried to use the shot to ironically represent Matterplay, a valley in *Arcturus* so teeming with life it is stifling (Lindsay 1992: 197-204). The main problem here was the length of Lindsay’s text, that, even with judicious editing, still seemed too long. Using the drone shot over my assembly of shorter voice clips about the sublime proved a satisfactory solution. The voices also had the unexpected effect of making the shot seem shorter in duration.

3.8 Developing an *Acousmètre(s)*

I use the voices of informants as instances of Chion’s *acousmètre*, the character known only – or largely – through voice (Chion 2019: 201-202). As Chion says, an *acousmètre* is ‘capable of appearing in the frame at any time’ (Chion 2019: 202). Each informant appears on screen only when they first speak in the film. When I use them again, they are not seen, but become acousmatic. This ability to cross boundaries between the seen and the unseen is central to the power of voice (and sound and music) in cinema (Chion 1999: 18). As Lindsay wrote in the *Sketch Notes*, ‘To experience Reality, one must stand with a foot in two worlds’ (SN 495).

Chion’s ideas about the *acousmètre* and acousmatic sound call attention to a dichotomy between sound and image that, he argues, is where cinema comes into its own (Chion 1999: 18). Because sound film can imply two places, a here (the image), and an elsewhere (the sound), I used this dichotomy as a basic structuring principle in my film and avoid literal illustration wherever possible.

I experimented in earlier edits with the camera remaining on the interviewees, in the manner of Paul Cronin’s Peter Whitehead footage. I thought cutting together a conversation about the

sublime would evoke its presence. However, this threatened to make the film too didactic. I even considered writing a narration in verse (I am a published poet). My models for this approach were Tony Harrison's television films, such as *v.* (1987), *The Blasphemers' Banquet* (1989), and *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992). What interested me about these films was that Harrison's poetry (recited by the poet himself in voiceover) addresses various issues – memory, community, censorship, politics, war – and that they take the form of the film-poem, rather than conventional documentary. Harrison's work put me in mind of Lucretius, whose poem *De Rerum Natura* is one of the great philosophical poems of antiquity. I wondered if I could approach Lindsay's philosophy in the same spirit. This didn't work for various reasons: I felt uncomfortable writing what essentially started to become a 'life and works' of Lindsay in verse. As I had abandoned the biographical approach by this stage of my research, I dropped the narration-in-verse idea.

I decided instead that a better approach might be to use the differing voices of my informants to their fullest effect. My informants are all male (in this current version of the film), and all but one are native English speakers. I discovered in editing that their voices are all very different, in pitch and timbre, accent and speed. I took advantage of this quality to create a mosaic-like aural effect, a sonic montage that alludes to the range and variety of embodiments through which Lindsay frames the sublime.

3.9 Adapting Lindsay

First, I assembled a script from Lindsay's six metaphysical novels, the *Sketch Notes*, letters, and non-fiction. The novels were the most important source, in particular passages that had long impressed me, either through their 'visual' quality, or their philosophical content. The first category contained scenes such as Shaping's Causeway (*Arcturus*) (Lindsay 1992: 67-69);

Nightspore's ascent of the tower (*Arcturus*) (Lindsay 1992: 295-300); Ingrid Fleming and Hugh Drapier caught in the storm (*Devil's Tor*) (Lindsay 2008: 30-32); and Bluewright's letter describing his dreams (*The Witch*) (Lindsay 1976: 282-285). The 'philosophical scenes' included Maskull's conversation with Polecrab about the nature of reality (*Arcturus*) (Lindsay 1992: 169); Isbel Loment and Sherrup discussing Beethoven (*The Haunted Woman*) (Lindsay 1987: 25; 37-41); Hugh Drapier's realisation that this world is merely an imperfect copy of another (*Devil's Tor*) (Lindsay 2008: 80-81); Peter Copping's statements on the superiority of symbols over allegories (*Devil's Tor*) (Lindsay 2008: 164-165); and extracts from Ragnar Pole's realisations about the nature of reality as he and Faustine Gasparly walk to Morion House (*The Witch*) (Lindsay 1976: 356-394).

The *Sketch Notes*, I realised, might work better as intertitles – a reference to both silent cinema, and to Gröning's *Into Great Silence* – so I selected key aphorisms that dealt with the sublime (337, 339, 534), music (261), landscape (113), literature (285), and pain (119). I also added a dictionary definition of the German word 'sorge', to suggest that it might be the source of Lindsay's noun 'Sorgie'. The intertitles interrupt the film's narrative, both to stress topics that have been discussed by the informants, and to suggest a world beyond the frame.

Though my script was in no sense an adaptation, the theoretical literature on that provided me with some useful vocabulary to describe what I was doing.

Following Geoffrey Wagner (1975: 222-226), Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (1999) distinguish three categories of adaptation: transposition, commentary, and analogue. Transposition is, as Julie Sanders writes, the taking of a text 'from one genre [to] deliver it into a new modality' (2016: 25).¹¹⁷ One function of transposition is to bring the adapted work into

¹¹⁷ Sanders cites a number of Shakespeare adaptations that belong to this category: Baz Lurhmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), in which the action of the play is transposed to contemporary North America, and Kenneth Branagh's *Love's Labour's Lost* (1999), which moves the action to 'a faux-Oxbridge setting' on the cusp of the Second World War (Sanders 2016: 25). To this we could add Richard Loncraine's version of *Richard III*, set in an alternative 1930s Britain, with Richard (Ian McKellen) depicted as a fascist usurper; and Ralph Fiennes' *Coriolanus* (2011), given a contemporary war-torn Balkan setting.

a new frame of reference, into the field of present-day concerns and understanding (Sanders 2016: 26).

In ‘commentary’, adaptation is a means to ‘comment on the politics of the source text’, often from a political, critical stance (Sanders 2016: 27). Examples of this are *Mansfield Park* (Rozema, 2000), which draws out themes of slavery and British colonialism only ‘minimally articulated’ (Sanders 2016: 27) in Jane Austen’s novel; and *A Christmas Carol* (Murphy 2019), in which Dicken’s ghost story is reinvented as a dark fantasy with an anti-capitalist, anti-austerity tone (Lobb 2019; Mangan 2019). Adaptations of this type generate new aspects of the original stories, and have ‘an explicit relationship’ to the source text (Sanders 2016: 27). A commentary adaptation can be thought of as a conversation between the source text and the new version.¹¹⁸

Analogue, Cartmell and Whelan’s third category, is a form of adaptation in which knowledge of the original text is not necessary. Examples of this include Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979), a re-imagining of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as a Vietnam War story (Sanders 2016: 29); or Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* (1979), in which the Strugatsky Brothers’ science fiction novel *Roadside Picnic* is recast as a dystopian parable about faith.¹¹⁹

These theorists focus on commercial cinema, not avant-garde film practice, but their categories helped me to see that my cinematic work on Lindsay has aspects of all three. My film uses transposition as its adaptation principle in the scene where Sherrup plays the piano from *The Haunted Woman* (30.17-34.14). This is a straightforward ‘adaptation’ (minus actors). Commentary is my adaptation principle in the Shaping’s Causeway scene (13.58-16.33), where

¹¹⁸ Or, in some cases, as a commentary between the new version and an earlier adaptation regarded as canonical. Sanders writes that reviews for *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Thomas Vinterberg, 2015), often drew comparisons with *Far from the Madding Crowd* (John Schlesinger, 1967), rather than with Hardy’s novel (Sanders 2016: 27-28).

¹¹⁹ Sanders also cites *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 1995), which reconfigures Jane Austen’s *Emma* in the culture of the San Fernando Valley. Aki Kaurismäki’s *Hamlet Goes Business* (*Hamlet liikemaaailmassa*, 1987) is a contemporary update of Shakespeare, in which the Prince of Elsinore is a Finnish tycoon hoping to make his fortune in the rubber duck business.

what is shown on screen is not Tormance, but the Alps. I use Lindsay's words about his fictional world to comment on this one. Finally, I use analogy in the two sequences using NASA footage: the Muspel tower sequence from *Arcturus* (23.12-26.28), and the sequence using texts from *The Witch* (01.09.54-01.15.49). As the voiceover speaks, images of Jupiter are shown on screen. In neither case do I attempt a transposition. The NASA footage is an analogy for Lindsay's metaphysical concerns.

However, I remained uncomfortable with these three categories. Cartmell and Whelehan admit that there remain problems with adaptation categories (2010: 1), and debate continues (2010: 1-27). Given this, and Lindsay's love of music, a more appropriate term for my adaptation practice might be 'setting', in the sense in which a composer sets a text to music. I was setting Lindsay's words to images. These combinations of words and images may indeed be approached through the categories suggested above – and of the three, I feel analogy is the one I am closest to – but I was also conscious that the film would work best when the images were not transposing Lindsay, commenting on his work, or finding analogies for it, but trying to act as catalysts for further reflection and engagement on the part of the viewer.

These debates aside, I was keen to find out how well could conventional adaptation devices convey Lindsay's sublime. I examined the existing (very few) adaptations of Lindsay's work that were ever made (both of *Arcturus*). The first was solely audio, a BBC radio adaptation (1956);¹²⁰ another was theatrical, Ron Sossi's 1985 stage version.¹²¹ Presumably these tackled in various ways the issues of adapting Lindsay, but no recordings survive. My interviewee Gavin Wraith told me he remembered hearing the radio adaptation when he was a schoolboy. Wraith was bowled over by the production, partially because, as he says, radio does not 'hijack

¹²⁰ Murray Ewing (n.d.), 'The BBC Third Programme Radio Adaptation of *A Voyage to Arcturus*', <http://www.violetapple.org.uk/vta/thirdprogramme.php>. Accessed 14 January 2020.

¹²¹ <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-10-02-ca-16253-story.html>

your visual imagination' (Wraith, filmed interview 2019). As with reading, the listener is free to imagine.

The only extant adaptation of *Arcturus* is in fact a film – William Holloway's (1950-2014) version (1970).¹²² This micro-budget black-and-white 35mm feature was made while Holloway was a student at Antioch College in Ohio. Holloway's budget meant he shot on short ends and outdated stock; the resultant technical limitations – such as light flares and variable grain – in fact give the film an additional oneiric quality. There are few visual effects. The shrowk (a kind of dragon) that Maskull and Oceaxe ride is a puppet filmed in stop-motion; rather than a glass torpedo, the three men journey to Tormance by ingesting what Krag refers to as 'Arcturian back light in crystal form'.¹²³ The novel's various landscapes – deserts, mountains, islands, forests – are largely dispensed with; Holloway shoots most of the action in woodland and sandy, dune-like hills. Visually, Tormance is differentiated from Earth through filters (Earth is black and white, Tormance frequently coloured), recalling the use of tinting in silent cinema. Intertitles identify characters or locations, furthering links to silent cinema practices; this, too, adds an interesting quality, evoking Lindsay's own time.

Holloway does use acousmatic sound on more than one occasion. While Maskull and Nightspore wait for Krag at Starkness Observatory, Holloway adds the sound of the sea, as Maskull examines the bottles containing Arcturian back-rays. During Maskull's attempt to climb the observatory's tower, the disembodied voice is there to warn him, 'You will go, but Nightspore will return'. When Krag arrives at Starkness, what sound like fog horns boom, as the characters discuss their impending journey to Tormance. Many scenes set on Tormance are accompanied by a howling wind. Maskull's encounter with Sullenbode occurs against the

¹²² A stage musical of *A Voyage to Arcturus* was produced by the Australian writer and actor Phil Moore in 2019. To date, this has only had a limited run in September and October 2019, at the Peninsula Theatre, Woy Woy, NSW. Further information can be found at <https://www.arcturusmusical.com>. Accessed 14 January 2020.

¹²³ Krag advises Maskull and Nightspore that their journey will begin once the crystals have dissolved on their tongues; the similarity to LSD would not have been lost on contemporary audiences.

sound of thunder breaking. The drum taps are heard occasionally (though never revealed as Maskull's heartbeat).

Lindsay's ideas take second place to Maskull's wanderings on Tormance. Some of the main characters from the novel appear, but Holloway rarely attempts to link Lindsay's philosophy with what we see and hear. Indeed, it could be argued that, in order to enjoy Holloway's film, one needs to have read Lindsay's novel (in terms of Wagner's three categories, it would probably fall into 'commentary').

So: taking into account Lindsay's notebook treatment – and Holloway's references to silent cinema (deliberate or accidental) – I concluded that straight adaptation was not the best course for me. I considered doing dramatised scenes – e.g. Isabel's visit to the first room in *The Haunted Woman* (Lindsay 1987: 46-50); the dreams from *Sphinx* (Lindsay 2018: 36; 106-107; 136-137; 157-158; 205-214) – drawing on my experience as a fiction film director (e.g. *Folie à Deux* (2012); *The Notebooks of Cornelius Crow* (2004)). I kept this possibility in mind as I investigated potential Lindsay-related locations: his birthplace and family homes in Lewisham; Jedburgh and Ulston in the Scottish Borders, where he spent part of his childhood; his first marital home, in Golders Green; his place of work prior to 1916, Price Forbes;¹²⁴ the conjectured locations of the Gap of Sorgie¹²⁵ and Starkness Observatory¹²⁶ in Scotland from *A Voyage to Arcturus*; the named locations in *The Haunted Woman*; Dartmoor for *Devil's Tor*; and the South Downs for *The Witch*.

In the end, I decided that dramatised scenes with actors would be too conventional. Lindsay's sublime, I realised, could be construed as an absence; purely landscape scenes could better

¹²⁴ Now occupying a modern building, at a different site.

¹²⁵ Deil's Brig, on Holborn Head in Caithness. See p.138.

¹²⁶ Starkness Observatory may have been partially inspired by Dun Echt observatory near Aberdeen, in operation 1871-1888. At that time it was the only astronomical observatory in Scotland. Photographs of Dun Echt show buildings similar to those Lindsay describes at Starkness (Lindsay 1992: 21). The observatory was built by James Lindsay, the 26th Earl of Crawford, the family from whom Lindsay's brother Alexander took his pen name. Lindsay claimed family connections with the Crawfords (Lindsay 1932c).

express my interpretation of Lindsay, and my practice-based focus of investigating Lindsay through transcendental style.

3.10 A Vast Shadow House: David Lindsay's Vision

I open my film with a vintage postcard of the National Library of Scotland, where the David Lindsay archive is housed. I then appear on screen examining Lindsay's papers; this dramatises the first act of my research: to study the *Sketch Notes*. I introduce in voiceover the passage from C. S. Lewis's lecture 'On Science Fiction', in which Lewis praises *Arcturus* (1955; Lewis 1966); this, as I explained earlier, alluding to my own first encounter with Lindsay.

This sets up several contexts: it identifies Lindsay as a writer admired by (the much more famous) C. S. Lewis; it establishes Lindsay's period; the kind of books he wrote, and a connection to dreams and visions (cf. Lewis's phrase 'certain rare dreams'). I use postcard shots as a visual code, announcing each sequence. These postcards date from Lindsay's lifetime, or close in time; they convey the period. I liked also their visual oddness; they stand apart from the rest of the footage and introduce the temporal dimension of the lost past.

My idea to use vintage postcards in the film owes something to the artist Susan Hiller's (1940-2019) piece *On the Edge* (2015), a work comprising 482 old postcards depicting the coastline of Britain during storms.¹²⁷ I discovered this work at an early stage of my visual research, and was struck by the way in which Hiller uses the images to evoke something nameless – the British fascination with the oceanic – whose total effect seems larger than the fifteen panels on which the work is presented. The Hiller work evokes the landscape paintings

¹²⁷ See http://www.susanhiller.org/otherworks/on_the_edge.html. Accessed 15 January 2020.

of Romanticism; the fact that the images are recognisably postcards generates a sense of forgotten messages and, again, the lost past.

I end the sequence with another visual code, by introducing a shot of a standing stone. I loosely structured the film as if it were a three-movement symphony: main theme (*A Voyage to Arcturus*), slow movement (the sublime, music), and finale (*Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*). The menhirs represent movement breaks in the film; they stand for deep time, mysteries in the landscape, and set up the direction in which the film is heading.

I chose the Gap of Sörgie to open my first movement because it enables me to bring in at once some key concerns: landscape, music, and the other world. The voiceover relates the section in *Arcturus* discussed earlier, where Maskull hears the drum taps for the first time. I use a repeated alpenhorn motif in this sequence: both a fanfare and slightly ominous at the same time, as if Lindsay's words in the narration announce something that requires caution, or discernment. The sequence introduces the first drone shot; a filmic analogue for the position adopted by Maskull as he lies spread out on the cliff ledge, gazing straight down at the waves below.

When the drone looks directly down at the ground in my film, it mimics this repeated posture in *Arcturus*: the Gap of Sörgie (Lindsay 1992: 28); the mountain lake (Lindsay 1992: 62); the lake of fire (Lindsay 1992: 129); Barey (Lindsay 1992: 290). The abstraction of my drone imagery responds to this aspect; Maskull tries to see through towards something he hasn't yet realised is the sublime world; my camera transforms rocks, shorelines, and moors into gigantic, enigmatic patterns.

Following my Gap of Sörgie sequence, I use a standard documentary-style footage to introduce the first of my informants Alan Moore, Harold Bloom, Brian Stableford, Murray Ewing, David Power, and Bernard Sellin. In *andante* fashion, I cut them together to describe the originality of *A Voyage to Arcturus*, and its challenges.

I next evoke philosophy more directly in the brief ‘March Evening’ sequence (7.55-8.14). The voiceover here comes from the opening paragraph of *Arcturus*; a man sitting in a room, lit only by a fire: it is Plato’s Cave. In this single moment, Lindsay sets out what became the main theme of his entire opus: this is a false world; the true world can only be accessed by turning away from the shadows cast by the fire, and leaving the cave (in Plato’s analogy). My camera here moves over a seventeenth-century engraving of Plato’s Cave.¹²⁸ I show this image in its entirety once (8.09-8.14), only later on when Lindsay’s biographer Bernard Sellin cites Plato as the originator of the ‘two worlds’ model of reality, do I suggest any link between the engraving and Plato’s ideas (19.44-20.12).

I was guided here by Tarkovsky’s practice regarding plot: ‘in which often important narrative information is imparted obliquely [and] belatedly’ (Johnson and Petrie 1994: 76). This forces the viewer to recall scenes they have already watched in order to interpret the scene they are watching presently. This mode of retrospective understanding could be described as ‘doubling’, recalling Gilles Deleuze’s description of arthouse cinema (Deleuze 1989: 23). The technique demands creative participation from the viewer. And as a withholding strategy, it can also be considered an element of Paul Schrader’s transcendental style.

To return to the March Evening sequence: I next introduce the science fiction and fantasy critic Gary K. Wolfe, whose comments in this edit take on a double-edged nature. Wolfe interprets the opening séance in *Arcturus* as Lindsay’s way of telling his readers that ‘this is not that kind of novel, this is not a spiritualist novel’ (8.14-8.30). In the same way, I want the viewer to understand that *A Vast Shadow House* is ‘not that kind of film’; it is not employing the standard tropes of documentaries about literary figures.

I have tried wherever possible to resist these strategies; for instance, in the way in which I depict my informants, and in my use of landscape footage. The informants are all seen when

¹²⁸ By Jan Saenredam (1565-1607), 1604, Albertina, Vienna.

first introduced, but then, in their subsequent ‘appearances’, they become non-diegetic voices. They cross the boundaries of traditional forms of documentary representation to become *acousmêtres*, and in doing so, are made to perform a double sleight of hand.

The *acousmêtre*, for me, evokes Lindsay’s sublime, as I have explained. But when we hear an informant’s voice only, we may also sense their absence. This can be read as a description or suggestion of Lindsay’s sublime, according to the basic principles of *via negativa* theology. At 27.48 a long tracking shot of tangled trees and branches begins, and the voice of Gary Lachman explains this as, ‘where you come to know or experience the divine by realising everything that it’s not’ (29.25-29.51). Lachman himself has become an *acousmêtre* by this point in the film; he is an absence talking about an absence. For Bruzzi, we recall, this mode of narration functions to create a ‘dialectical distance’ that ‘sets [the audience] critically back from [the image]’ (Bruzzi 2000: 52) (cf. p 101, above).

I use extended takes to create similar effects. The first is when Alan Moore’s voice compares *A Voyage to Arcturus* to Bunyan’s *A Pilgrim’s Progress* (10.34-11.30). The camera tracks over an apparently huge rocky landscape, revealed at the end of the shot to be a mere rock pool. Elsewhere, I use long tracking or drone shots of a wood, a Highland glen, a ruined abbey, a moor, a large natural embankment, and a landscape almost completely obscured by mist. Overlapping these shots, and sometimes breaking into them, I arrange audio of my informants discussing my main topics: Lindsay’s sublime and mundane worlds, his use of music and landscape, his writing style. Duration acts as a focus for these concepts, as if the extended take offers an experiential route to immerse the viewer in Lindsay’s ideas.

This is not didactic, expository narration, because numerous voices speak during these shots, and they do not always agree with one another. For instance, the voices of Douglas A. Anderson (42.09) and Gary K. Wolfe (56.51) draw attention to Gnostic themes in Lindsay’s work, but then Stuart Kelly downplays this, stressing instead Lindsay’s Calvinism (01.04.03). This

silently challenges my own sense of Lindsay's thinking. In the process of making the film I could dramatise these contradictory or polysemic understandings of Lindsay, so the film becomes a 'lived dialectic', to return to C. S. Lewis's idea again (see above, p.9).

I put the voice of Alan Moore discussing Lindsay's use of landscape in a sequence that, like the earlier rock pool shot, is visually ambiguous (16.34-18.13). The camera tracks low over unusual rock formations, while Moore asserts that the landscapes of *A Voyage to Arcturus* are representations of elements of Lindsay's psychology, this this is 'what a human being looks like if realised as a place'. This parallel between our inner world and the outer world automatically creates a tension, or dialectical distance, in Bruzzi's phrase.

The Shaping's Causeway sequence directly engages the notion of the other world as "not nothing, but something" (Lindsay 1992: 69). This presented problems of representation. Just as the principle of analogy in adaptation guides my editing strategy, in terms of my choice of scenes from Lindsay, so does analogy guide my choice of what footage actually stands for – or stands beside – in those scenes. The Shaping's Causeway episode is a case in point. Slofork and Panawe converse on 'a natural embankment, twenty miles long' between eight to ten thousand feet in height. Along the top is a narrow path, with 'a terrible precipice on either side' (Lindsay 1992: 67). The valley on one side is 'plunged in shadow', the other 'sparkling with sunlight and dew' (Lindsay 1992: 67-68).

Here, the landscape itself seems to represent a dualist philosophy – sunlight versus shadow – with a 'narrow way [...] straight as a rule' worthy of Bunyan (Bunyan 1965: 59) to guide the spiritual seeker through this world. Lindsay is not interested in simple light versus dark here (Slofork gives wise advice to Panawe, then inexplicably jumps off the path into the abyss (Lindsay 1992: 69)). The real interest lies in the 'not nothing, but something' paradox: something not of this world, but which can be glimpsed in this world.

As an analogue for this, I use footage of a mountain ridge distorted by atmospheric haze. I was interested in this haze, because it undermines the solidity of the image, to suggest that what we see ‘hides another thing’ (cf. Magritte, quoted in Short 1996). This ‘other thing’ is analogous to the function of the desert mirages in Werner Herzog’s *Fata Morgana* (1971), which Herzog described as a ‘probing for new insights into ourselves [and an] attempt to make inner conditions transparent’ (Ames 2014: 44).

There is a variation on this idea in *Arcturus*: the conversation between Maskull and the fisherman Polecrab, by a creek at the edge of the vast Wombflash Forest (Lindsay 1992: 164-172). Polecrab tells Maskull that Surtur’s world (the sublime) ‘does not lie on this side of [this world]’ but ‘on the other side; and to get to it we must repossess through [this world]’, through renunciation and self-denial (Lindsay 1992: 171).

I adapt a section of their conversation at 20.14-21.38. Aware of issues with length in Lindsay passages, I edited carefully to convey points succinctly, and retain the quality of the prose. I use Maskull’s slightly earlier realisation that “‘Reality and falseness are two words for the same thing’” (Lindsay 1992: 169).

For this sequence, I experimented with time perceptions. Maskull says he sees things differently *since* he came out of the forest (Lindsay 1992: 169), but my camera is *still* in the forest during the voiceover. The voiceover therefore occupies a space that is both ironic (we are not in fact ‘seeing things differently’ on screen), yet the tense of the narration is also literal, in that Maskull is reminiscing. My voiceover in this sequence, therefore, is a paradox. My long tracking shots also function paradoxically, leading the viewer’s eye not to ‘something’ (in the sense of something visual), but to ‘nothing’ – the featureless expanse of the sky. The possibility that paradox might become apparent is facilitated through duration, informed by Tarkovsky’s notion – referred to earlier – about the ‘special intensity of attention’ that a long take triggers (Tarkovsky, quoted in Golstein 2008: 188).

I fold in here a further use of paradox. Just as the Maskull and Polecrab scene equates a blank screen to the concept of true reality, so the blank screen reappears when the idea recurs: when Slofork describes the sublime as ‘Not nothing, but something’ (16.32); when Isbel and Mrs Moor hear ‘dead silence’ in Runhill Court (31.51); when Douglas A. Anderson describes Lindsay’s ‘real reality’ (43.49); and in *The Witch* sequence, when the ‘last reality’ is described as being ‘God’ (1.12.13). These blank screens allude also to observations by several critics (Kegler 1993; Pick 1993; Wheat 2008), and by my informants (Gary Lachman and Brian Stableford) that, in not explicitly describing the sublime world, Lindsay is effectively practising a form of negative theology.

The first movement of the film concludes with an adaptation of part of the final chapter of *Arcturus*, an ending that critic Stuart Kelly described as a ‘symbolic Götterdämmerung’ (22.59-23.12). Here I unite visually a Manichaean division between light and darkness, and a true world just visible, beyond the everyday world. I repurpose NASA footage for this sequence, to convey the cosmic scale of Lindsay’s concepts. The material, shot by NASA’s Solar Dynamics Observatory,¹²⁹ also functions as an analogue to the ‘green corpuscles’ and ‘whirls of white light’ (Lindsay 1992: 296) that Nightspore sees en route to the final revelation. Solar flares echo the struggles of the green sparks to evade the white light, to reach the sublime world of Muspel.¹³⁰

Herzog spoke about repurposing NASA footage in his film *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005), as an attempt to ‘wrest something good’ from it (Ames 2014: 162). Repurposing in my film is more than just as an analogue for Lindsay’s metaphysics; the act of repurposing itself has metaphysical aspects, as Judit Pieldner observed (Pieldner 2014: 64). Stephen Mumford summarises the metaphysical understanding of physical objects, arguing that all objects are

¹²⁹ ‘Thermonuclear Art: The Sun in UHD’, <https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/13057>. Accessed 16 May 2017.

¹³⁰ There is a brief echo of Plato’s Cave in this final chapter. Lindsay tells us that the white swirls ‘never saw beyond the Shadow’ (Lindsay 1992: 299). The shadow is Crystalman (Lindsay 1991: 298), in other words, the false world.

particulars (individual things), with *properties* (colour, shape, texture, and so on) (Mumford 2012: 3).

Using Mumford's definition, we could say that the object filmed is a *particular*, and the footage of it is a *property* (how it appears to the camera at the time of filming). And then, there is a second contingent property and context, the circumstances of production. In the case of NASA material, the stated purpose was scientific and educational. In repurposing such footage, I set it in a new context, changing one of its properties, 'wresting something' new from it, to use Herzog's term. My repurposed footage creates a fresh metaphysical property; its new context connotes Lindsay's sublime.

The first movement of the film thus establishes Lindsay as a writer of metaphysical fantasy fiction, and explores his contention that, behind the world of appearances, lies a hidden, true reality: the sublime.

In the film's second movement I explore these concepts further, now taking as starting points Lindsay's other novels. I introduce discussion of music from the informants, and another kind of filmic analogue from Lindsay's work.

My referent was the scene from *The Haunted Woman*, where a character plays the opening of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony on the piano. Questioned as to why he plays Beethoven in an empty house, he replies,

"Some ideas came to me in this house which seemed to require music to illustrate them – that particular music, I mean" (Lindsay 1987: 25).

So awareness of the sublime comes with attempts to understand and articulate it; the sublime, music and philosophy are unified in a single action – the playing of music. In keeping with my strategy of analogy, I did not want the soundtrack to be literally the experimental way this character plays Beethoven: taking liberties with tempo and 'long silences' (Lindsay 1987: 22). I used here rather a recording of the symphony that suggests a double disjuncture: an orchestral recording, rather than solo piano, and one dating from 1943, i.e. within Lindsay's lifetime.

I suggest how *The Haunted Woman* represents the mundane world, by shots of a derelict yard (part of the old bath house where Isbel meets Mrs Richborough (Lindsay 1987: 109)); and Brighton's West Pier, now a skeletal ruin, where Isbel meets the pianist (Lindsay 1987: 33-37).

Having linked music and philosophy in the Beethoven scene, I use my informants to discuss the role of music in Lindsay over close-ups of a gramophone. The machine is never shown in full, but abstracted into component parts: horn, turntable, spindle, stylus (35.02-37.04).

The key statement for me in this sequence is David Power's comment that Lindsay used music as if it were a form of code (36.42). When Power says that Lindsay believed 'up to now, there has been no Beethoven of literature', I immediately follow this with an intertitle from the *Sketch Notes* (no. 357), stating exactly the same thing (36.26-36.33). My practice with intertitles – almost all from the *Sketch Notes* – is to try and make them function as additional forms of narration. As Bruzzi notes, intertitles can also function as ironic narration, used in this way as far back as Esfir Shub's *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1928). The exception in my intertitles is no. 357, which is an instance of what Schrader calls 'doubling' (2018: 16). Schrader contends that, having received the same information twice over, the viewer has to then reassess what has been seen in order to detect if there is still further information that has deliberately not been given. Such doubling is a form of cinematic red herring, deployed to evoke and destabilise at once possible layers of meaning.

My third movement opens with music, to consolidate my themes up to this point. I introduce another vintage recording from Lindsay's lifetime, a 1935 recording of the opening of Beethoven's Ninth. My final movement deals with *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*. I create the 'allegory and the symbol' sequence from *Devil's Tor* to echo the earlier Gap of Sorgie sequence. Here, I film at an actual Lindsay location: Devil's Tor itself.

This site would have presented problems, had my film been guided by transposition rather than analogy. Devil's Tor in Lindsay's novel (Lindsay 2008: 25-26) is considerably larger and more dramatic than it is in actuality. Lindsay gives his tor:

an upright granite mass that had become strangely weathered into the rude form of a human or inhuman, head (Lindsay 2008: 26).

The 'real' Devil's Tor has no such head (though anthropomorphic stones can be found on other tors¹³¹).

But for my transcendental strategy, the difference between the real and fictional Devil's Tors doesn't matter. In fact, they share only one visible feature: the real Tor has a fissure on its north side, into which one can walk; in the novel, the Tor is struck by lightning, a passageway opens, and Hugh Drapier enters it, where he finds the tomb and the sacred flint (Lindsay 2008: 39-42; 96-106). Over my footage of the real Devil's Tor, I use as voiceover a dialogue from the novel in which characters discuss the relationship between the real and the symbolic.

This leads to voiceover from Alan Moore, Gary K. Wolfe and Brian Stableford (55.27-57.53), discussing Lindsay's use of the symbolic mode.

Sellin and Lachman discuss the role of pain as redemptive in Lindsay's work (57.53-1.03.56). My images here further explore duration: a reversed clip of cars on Dartmoor at night stands as a paradoxical visual analogue to the subject matter (anguish); a long drone shot of bleak moorland is a visual analogue to pain; a ploughed field in late summer is slowly obscured by cloud shadow. Voiceover and image again create irony: as the informant speaks of 'effort', and the shadow falls across the field with apparently no effort at all.

A Vast Shadow House ends with a series of quotations from *The Witch*, Lindsay's most difficult text. I had originally planned to use Urda Noett's speech from the unpublished final chapter. Writing about this chapter, Pick wrote:

¹³¹ For instance, Bowerman's Nose is vaguely humanoid in shape; nearby Hound Tor has at least one stone that resembles a human face in profile.

Writing of this kind has an effect like music, as if we heard an echo on the edge of sound [...] In *The Witch*, David Lindsay is not so much writing a novel as living a theology by a sort of dreaming through psychological states in a deliberately heightened prose of sonorous cadences (Pick 1980: 42-3).

This chapter, as remarkable a piece of writing as it is, did not lend itself easily to editing down to a length that was suitable for the film. What the film needed was a sequence to ‘answer’ the Muspel scene (from the final chapter of *A Voyage to Arcturus*) (1.09.51-1.15.46).

The solution was to use not parts of the scene taking place inside Morion House (Urda’s speech), but Ragnar’s and Faustine’s walk to the house. This basic action of approaching and entering a building echoes Nightspore’s entry and ascent of the tower on the island of Muspel. I selected sections from chapters 17-19 which I felt conveyed something of the flavour of the novel’s language, and also Lindsay’s ideas (with its stress on love, sacrifice, and a divine feminine principle). These seemed disparate and abstract; the complete lack of action did not help, either.

As with the Jedburgh Abbey and Glen Sannox sequences – discussed earlier – what made the *Witch* sequence work was a selection of long takes, appropriated from NASA’s Juno missions around Jupiter. As I had used NASA footage in the Muspel sequence – largely shot from the International Space Station, of Earth – it made sense to use footage that did not show Earth. This, I hope, conveys something of the ‘otherworldly’ feeling of *The Witch*, and the sense of the cosmic scale of Lindsay’s vision in the final chapters. As with the combination of long drone shots and informants’ voices elsewhere in *A Vast Shadow House*, Lindsay’s prose and the – at times, quite abstract¹³² – images of Jupiter are forged together by duration.

¹³² Some of Jupiter’s clouds are highly redolent of work by painters such as Van Gogh, Odilon Redon and Gustav Moreau.

CONCLUSION

My research by practice on David Lindsay began by considering Lindsay's gnostic view of the world (Martin 2010), and the role of walking in his work (Martin 2015). I explored Lindsay's locations: the places where he lived, places described in the novels. This early stage of the project was a form of psychogeographic exploration and immersion. Lindsay was a keen walker (Lindsay 1932c); I imagined the author and his characters seeking the sublime through long, solitary walks in strange, uninhabited landscapes. Making a film about Lindsay's work and ideas proved to be a similar trek. What have I learned? And how has my practice evolved?

I read all the novels, the *Sketch Notes*, all the letters, and all the critical literature on David Lindsay in English. I located and spoke in person or through email to everyone still alive who contributed to this corpus. Following documentary research practice, I filmed interviews with many of these people. I secured permission from the David Lindsay estate to film the archive at the National Library of Scotland; and remain in touch with Lindsay's granddaughter, who oversees the estate. I studied Lindsay's unpublished writings. I visited and filmed every location that I could identify with an association to Lindsay. I explored how other filmmakers sought to represent the unrepresentable in their films. I distilled my research on David Lindsay and his writing into the script for my film, *A Vast Shadow House: David Lindsay's Vision*, the first documentary on Lindsay's work.

I sought ways to represent Lindsay's sublime on screen, and ways I could develop a critical lexicon for discussing it. I now reflect on how my aims were achieved, and how they changed over the course of the project.

My starting point was how Lindsay went about representing the sublime. The way he uses sound in his novels prefigures experiments in cinema with soundtrack and voiceover, I discovered through reading Chion. This was my way in as a filmmaker.

Secondly, I explored ways in which filmmakers have used experimental documentary to represent transcendental states. Following models developed by Schrader, Tarkovsky, Bresson, and Dorsky, I decided to respond to Lindsay's sublime through a combination of voiceover, interview footage, audio recordings, non-diegetic sound, duration, and unconventional structure.

Thirdly, my research places Lindsay in wider cultural and artistic contexts than most writers on him have realised – my interviewees were a great help here. While Lindsay can certainly be seen as an indirect heir to German romanticism, symbolism, and Gnosticism, I obtained fresh readings of his works by considering them in constructive dialogue with contemporary movements in art and literature (neo-romanticism, expressionism, surrealism, cubism); science (notions of time); psychology (consciousness expansion, personal mythologies, archetypes); the occult revival (spiritualism, use of drugs); and alternative spiritual traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, paganism, goddess worship). This recontextualisation opens future avenues for my research.

Many of my interviewees had not spoken on camera before about David Lindsay. My filmed interviews also form an archive for future Lindsay research.

The discovery of the 1928 notebook is an important addition to Lindsay scholarship. Similarly, the cache of material that accompanied the notebook includes previously unknown data, such as a folder of reviews for *Devil's Tor* that Putnam's sent to Lindsay. This indicates that the book was far more widely – and more positively – reviewed than previous scholars have known.

Along the way, I discovered also many new details about Lindsay's life – to do with his birthplace, his first marital home, work colleagues killed in the Great War, his house in Ferring, the location of his unmarked grave in Shoreham. Though incidental to my main areas of

research, these nonetheless help build a fuller picture of Lindsay: his life, his work, his cultural contexts.

Not all of these details made it into my film, for various reasons. The photograph album of Lindsay's dead colleagues is a case in point. While it represented new data, the footage would have needed a small 'Great War' section around it to make it work from an artistic perspective. Similarly, I cut many biographical locations after deciding not to engage with the topic of Lindsay's biography; these omitted locations include Lindsay's birthplace and later homes, the headquarters of the Grenadier Guards, and his grave.

Filmmaking is often the art of adapting to changed circumstances. I considered, for instance, trying to allude to each novel by an object – a folding pocket lens for *Arcturus*, a mirror for *The Haunted Woman*, an apple for *The Violet Apple*. But I felt it was not clear enough that filmed objects represented Lindsay novels (only the piece of flint for *Devil's Tor* remained). I thought of building a replica dream machine from *Sphinx*, and tried using close-ups of the turntable of a vintage gramophone player instead. In the edit, when I removed the voiceover from *Sphinx* describing the dream machine, the connection was lost, and it simply became a gramophone again. I repurposed the shot for a passage in the film discussing Lindsay's use of music (36.02-37.04).

Having decided against dramatisation as being too representative of the kinds of documentary convention I wished to avoid, I wrote a script constructed from passages from Lindsay to use as voiceover. I reviewed passages from *A Voyage to Arcturus*, *The Haunted Woman*, *Sphinx*, *The Violet Apple*, *Devil's Tor* and *The Witch*. These presented aspects of Lindsay's philosophy (*Arcturus*, *Devil's Tor*, *The Witch*), his use of music (*The Haunted Woman*, *Sphinx*), his use of landscape (*Arcturus*, *Devil's Tor*), his use of symbolism (*The Violet Apple*, *Devil's Tor*), or thinly-veiled autobiographical references (*The Violet Apple*, *The Witch*). *Devil's Tor* presented an abundance of riches for my themes: passages on landscape, time, music, art, the Great

Mother, pain, dreams, visions. I now wish I had included a passage directly relating to the Great Mother – something I can correct in my planned film festival version of the film. In *The Witch*, I was faced with the long cadences of Lindsay's prose; especially of the final chapter, whose effect is cumulative. In the end, I opted to use an edited version of the penultimate chapters because these scenes, being shorter, proved easier to edit.

I was aware throughout my research of the lack of female voices, especially among the interviewees. As mentioned above, I did find potential women informants, but none could give me an interview (two lived outside the UK). I still intend to arrange interviews with them at a later date, and I am still looking for new informants to balance the disparity of voices in my film.

Finally, I have come to a deeper understanding of the potential inherent in experimental documentary, and its capacity to address issues and generate meanings beyond the scope of literary or philosophical scholarship. I sometimes wondered during the course of this project why I was making a film about the metaphysical system of a relatively unknown writer. I now have some answers.

The documentary form can engage with important aspects of experience that go beyond language. Erik Knudsen (2008) argues that mainstream films – both documentary and drama – use drama, conflict, explicable cause and effect, to shape narratives. Such films play on notions of self-assertiveness, and ideas of the primacy of the individualistic self, which have deep links with patriarchy and capitalism. Commitment to alternative filmic structures, Knudsen suggests, is a form of resistance. This resonates with Peter Watkins' analysis, that filmmakers should oppose the mass audio-visual media monoform. I realised that, in making a film about Lindsay's work, I too participated in this wider dialogue about resistance to dominant cultural narrative, and at the same time, that the experimental essay form – combining transcendental landscapes, experiments in duration and POV, meditations on the experience of Lindsay

through a montage of voices (living and dead), and experiments with music and sound as counterpoint – all this, in the end, enabled me to address my original theme: Lindsay's sublime and his haunting, enigmatic images for seeking it.

It is fitting to end with a reflection on a possible reason why Lindsay became a writer. At the end of *Arcturus*, Nightspore confesses that he 'can't face rebirth'; Krag tells him that he must ascend the tower in order 'to have [his] wounds healed' (Lindsay 1992: 293-294). Lindsay wrote these words in a world emerging from the collapse of the *Belle Époque*, the horrors of the Great War, and the ebb tide of the Spanish Flu. For Lindsay then, the way to heal wounds, personal or cultural, is to change the way we see. Near the end of *The Violet Apple*, Anthony Kerr feels he is like 'a man risen from the dead' (Lindsay 1978: 189); his perception is altered, he sees the world in a new way.

As Lindsay wrote in the *Sketch Notes*:

To attain the Sublime oneself, and to bring it within the grasp of others; this is the grandest of all ambitions (SN 192).

If my documentary research can bring the sublime within the grasp of others, even in part, it will have gone some way to serving David Lindsay's vision.

Appendix 1: List of Questions

1. Can you introduce yourself, “My name is.... and I am....”
2. When did you first hear about Lindsay’s work?
3. What is the story of Lindsay’s life and career?
4. What is your involvement with Lindsay’s work? (e.g., have you published anything on Lindsay’s work? If so, what?)
5. What does David Lindsay mean to you? Which book did you read first?
6. Can you briefly describe each (or any) of Lindsay’s books?
7. What are the main ideas in Lindsay’s writing?
8. Where do you think he got his ideas from (e.g. Norse myth, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Gnosticism, metaphysics, Calvinism, dreams, etc.)?
9. How did Lindsay’s philosophical position shift, from *Arcturus*, to *Devil’s Tor* and *The Witch*?
10. Can we place Lindsay’s work and thinking in any one tradition (e.g. Gnosticism, Calvinism, Romanticism, Modernism, Neo-romanticism, occult revival)?
11. Can you say something about Lindsay’s concept of the Sublime? How does he use it in his novels?
12. How does Lindsay use music (e.g. the drumming, and Swaylone’s music, in *A Voyage to Arcturus*; Sherrup playing Beethoven’s Seventh in *The Haunted Woman*; Lore Jensen’s music in *Sphinx*; the *Andante Favorsi* in *The Violet Apple*, etc.)?
13. And what of Lindsay’s conceptions of art? (In a wider sense, to encompass not only music, but writing as well.) Is he a modernist or a romantic? Or another position entirely?

14. Tell us something about landscape and nature as a presence in Lindsay's novels.
(Dartmoor is a memorable presence in *Devil's Tor*, while Tormance in *Voyage to Arcturus* seems to reflect the characters, almost as if it were a character in its own right.)
15. Lindsay has been criticised for being a 'clumsy writer'. Others see him as a consummate stylist. What are your thoughts on the matter?
16. Where does Lindsay fit in, in relation to Scottish and British imaginative literature (for want of a better phrase)? Or even in terms of an international 'scene' - including North America?
17. Do you think a Scot writing 'imaginative' literature is doing something different to an English or Welsh writer doing the same? (e.g. his contemporaries, M. R. James, Algernon Blackwood, Arthur Machen, John Cowper Powys, even Aldous Huxley.) Or does the form have the same value (or perceived lack of) in both countries/cultures?
18. Has 'imaginative'/weird/metaphysical fiction changed over time? And the perceptions of/critical reactions to? Is Lindsay more 'accepted'/'acceptable' now?
19. What is your favourite Lindsay book, and why?
20. Why should people still be reading David Lindsay?
21. What is your involvement now with Lindsay? (If any.)
22. Any Other Business – do you have a favourite Lindsay quote, passage, anecdote you'd like to share?

Thank you.

Appendix 2: List of Supporting Materials

On enclosed pen drive:

The Film:

A Vast Shadow House: David Lindsay's Vision (79 mins)

Supplementary Material:

Additional context for Lindsay is contained in these further selections from interviews with:

Harold Bloom

John Herdman

Stuart Kelly

J. Derrick McClure

Alan Moore

J. B. Pick

David Power

Brian Stableford

Gavin Wraith

Filmography

All interviews conducted by Louise Milne, filmed or recorded by Seán Martin, unless otherwise indicated.

Filmed Interviews

Anderson, Douglas A. Marcellus, Michigan, 10 July 2016

Bloom, Harold New Haven, Connecticut, 17 July 2016

Brown, Chris Price Forbes, London, 22 February 2018

Ewing, Murray East Grinstead, Sussex, 6 November 2013 (SM only)

Herdman, John Edinburgh, 29 August 2019

Kelly, Stuart Edinburgh, 20 December 2013

Lachman, Gary London, 21 February 2018

McClure, J. Derrick University of Aberdeen, 20 June 2019 (SM only)

Moore, Alan Northampton, 21 September 2018

Pick, J. B. Balmaclellan, Dumfries & Galloway, 20 May 2012

Power, David York St John University, 11 December 2013

Sellin, Bernard Edinburgh College of Art, 27 November 2014

Stableford, Brian Hadleigh, Essex, 22 February 2018

Sutcliffe, Steven J. School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, 14 February 2019

Wolfe, Gary K. Roosevelt University, Chicago, 13 July 2016

Wraith, Gavin Kingston, East Sussex, 27 June 2019

Audio Interviews

Bialock, David Sapporo, Japan, 8 June 2018

Pick, J. B., interviewed and recorded by Steven J. Sutcliffe. Balmaclellan, Dumfries & Galloway, July 1995

Audio Recording

Sutcliffe, Steven J., (2016) 'Dreams, Spirits and Witches in the strange interwar fiction of David Lindsay.' Recording of paper presented at *The Occult in Popular Fiction and Entertainments*, University College Dublin, 25th November 2016
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W16eTCwHINo>

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Fiennes, Ralph (2011) *Coriolanus*
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Greenaway, Peter (1973) *Windows*
Griffiths, Keith (1984) *The Cabinet of Jan Švankmajer*

Gröning, Philip (2005) *Into Great Silence (Die große Stille)*

Heckerling, Amy (1995) *Clueless*

Herzog, Werner (2005) *The Wild Blue Yonder*

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Herzog, Werner (1992) *Lessons of Darkness (Lektionen in Finsternis)*

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Herzog, Werner (1971) *Fata Morgana*

Hiller, Susan (2007) *The Last Silent Movie*

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Kaurismäki, Aki (1987) *Hamlet Goes Business (Hamlet liikemaailmassa)*

Keiller, Patrick (2010) *Robinson in Ruins*

Keiller, Patrick (1997) *Robinson in Space*

Keiller, Patrick (1994) *London*

Kiarostami, Abbas (2003) *Five*

Léger, Fernand (1924) *Ballet Mécanique*

Loncraine, Richard (1995) *Richard III*

Lurhmann, Baz (1996) *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*

Martin, Seán (2020) *Koan IV*

Martin, Seán (2017) *A Priest from a Different Land*

Martin, Seán (2012) *Folie à Deux*

Martin, Seán (2004) *The Notebooks of Cornelius Crow*

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Richter, Hans (1927) *Inflation*

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