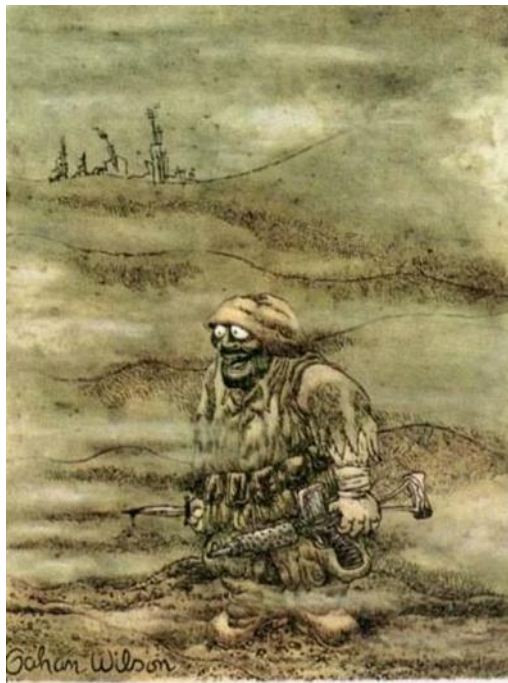


I just finished reading John C. Wright's **The Lament of Prometheus**, a brilliant, well-researched, and frankly a bit tendentious study of David Lindsay's **A Voyage to Arcturus**, one of my favorite all-time books. I've read Arcturus a number of times but haven't in a few years so I'm overdue. Wright says he's past the knock-your-socks-off stage now when he reads it, but I'm still there I think.

I also read Murray Ewing's [excellent commentary](#) in the Violet Apple web site. I can't keep up with either Wright or Ewing, but I did have a couple of brief notes.

Wright brings up right away how many murders and suicides there are in Arcturus which for me apparently the story kind of overshadowed! But Maskull does indeed leave a trail of a whole lotta dead folks behind him. Nightspore, Maskull's alter ego, is pretty much the only one standing at the end of the book (except for Krag). I think if Maskull had made it to the top of the tower his reaction would be this:



*"I think I won!"*

Wright goes into wonderful and great detail about the symbolism of the names, places, and actions in the story which I found fascinating. Some of these seem obvious for me, for example, the name "Maskull" is a mask over a skull, the mask veiling Nightspore, his spiritual self. But there are instances when even Wright mentions that he might be overreaching. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar you know.

Wright calls Arcturus ultimately disappointing. On and on Maskull travels, and each encountered philosophy is rendered false and empty, a trick of Crystalman. But Nightspore's finally reaching the "source" of Muspel is the most disappointing thing of all, since Muspel seems to be not only weak compared with Crystalman, but also possibly emanating from Nightspore himself. Nightspore is also unsatisfied in this. You can almost hear Peggy Lee singing "[Is That All There Is?](#)" up there.

Wright sees Arcturus in view of three main philosophies (well four if you wait until the last part, that being Christianity): Gnosticism, Hegelianism, and Manichaeism. Gnosticism being about secret knowledge that leads to truth and enlightenment. Hegelianism is the struggle for the Absolute. But

especially Manichaeism, which is about the falsity and deception of a world created by the demiurge Crystalman. Lindsay in the end rejects all of the hopeful aspects of these, what is left seems to be Nihilism, a lack of heroism, hope and meaning. This seems especially galling to Wright's Christian view, although he tries to understand it in the context of post-WWI Europe.

Let me ask those of you who have read **The Lament of Prometheus**, did it occur to you as it did to me that Existentialism was missing from Wright's line up of philosophies? (although I believe he did mention Stoicism a time or two). Existentialism is about being born into a world that has no meaning other than what you make out of it.

I've just recently been reading Albert Camu's **The Rebel**, and there he says that we are born into such a world of chaos without meaning, and we rebel against it to create order. And sometimes the rebellion goes wrong and murder is the result. Sounds like a familiar theme in Arcturus, doesn't it?

Even in **Perelandra**, C. S. Lewis' rebuttal to Arcturus (according to Wright), Elwin Ransom decides to murder the Satan of that world before he can corrupt its Eve.

As for Krag, I couldn't say it better than Ewing:

"What, then, of Krag? It's true Krag doesn't act like a god, but he's not interested in being worshipped or obeyed, nor even in impressing people. He knows that only one thing will redeem people from Crystalman's clutches, and that is pain."

I remember being blown away just after getting off of a commuter train coming home from my job in Chicago so long ago (late 1970s), and reading the last few pages wherein Krag announces what he is called on Earth: Pain. I'd like to keep that feeling going!