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Abstract

Building on his paper in Mythlore #117/118, calls for a change in critical attitudes towards E.R. Eddison, revealing a deep philosophical and spiritual foundation at the base of the lush, glittering surface of the Zimiamvia trilogy. A careful unraveling of mythological references and evidence from previously unpublished Eddison letters at the Bodleian back up his conclusion.

Additional Keywords

Eddison, E.R.—Characters—Antiope; Eddison, E.R.—Philosophy; Eddison, E.R. Zimiamvian Trilogy; Ragnarok in literature; Artemis (goddess) in literature

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Artemis at Ragnarok: E.R. Eddison's Queen Antiope

Joseph Young

The compositional pageantry of E.R. Eddison's novels has tended to obscure the intense thought that went into his books. Eddison wrote in a dense, invented, mock-archaic patois full of literary allusions, poetic archaisms, and imaginative neologisms. He was fond of quipping that he would rather have a hundred people read his books a hundred times each than have a million people read them once, and in adopting his distinctive style he may have overbid his hand slightly. Few readers, it seems, have the patience to hack all the way through Eddison's forest of words, and people tend to put his works aside, impressed by their flowery diction but little else. Even those who approach these books as the critiques of moral philosophy that they are tend to lose sight of Eddison's arguments amid the language, dismissing him, sometimes harshly, as a cold Nietzschean reactionary with no sense of humanity or feel for the complications of reality.

People who criticize Eddison in such terms have, in a sense, lost sight of the wood for the trees. Eddison's ornate prose medium is very much a part of his message. His apparently riotous plundering of world mythology was actually highly selective, and served to demonstrate his broader philosophical points in very clever ways. A test case of an Eddisonian character, and the allusions used to characterize her, will go some way to rectifying this problem. The character chosen for this exercise is Queen Antiope, from *Mistress of Mistresses*, the first volume of Eddison's incomplete Zimiamvia Cycle.

Mistress of Mistresses tells of the Three Kingdoms of Zimiamvia, a tripartite empire thrown into turmoil by the assassination of its king, Mezentius. His son has quickly gone the same way, leaving only one legitimate heir, the seventeen-year-old Princess Antiope. She is duly crowned, but her regent, the scheming Horius Parry, is using her minority to consolidate his power. Her half-brother, Duke Barganax, is moving against Parry, and the novel tells of the power struggle between these two men and the efforts of the adventurer Lessingham to protect the young Queen from their machinations.

The Three Kingdoms are fabulously wealthy, and their teenage monarch naturally attracts suitors. One of the more persistent of these is Derxis, the king of the neighboring realm of Akkama. Antiope is obliged to hear his suit, but she already knows that he is a sinister, repellent individual whom she has no intention of marrying, so she keeps him waiting in her palace garden. When she finally appears for this appointment, she learns how he has been whiling away the time:

> "You did offer me a boar-hunt, madam. Praise my simple tastes, I am content with throwing [stones] at a toad."
>
> "At a toad?" said she, without smiling. "Why?"
>
> "For diversion, awaiting of you. It is a toad. I would kill it."
>
> He met in her eye an Artemisian coldness and displeasure. Then, with a sudden little lovely grace picking up the toad, she made sure it was unhurt, made as if to kiss it, then put it back in a safe place on the flower-bed. (170)

This charming gesture, worthy of a Disney princess, has some striking downstream ramifications for the characterization of Antiope and her place in the novel. The description of Antiope as "Artemisian"—comparable with or relating to the goddess Artemis—will not have been idle. Eddison belonged to a generation of men whose education included instruction in Latin and Ancient Greek as a matter of course. The classical literature he read to learn those languages left a deep impression on him and would be instrumental in the formulation of his fantasies. Thomas (xxi-xxiv) notes especially the influence of the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* on the Zimiamvia Cycle, arguing, cogently enough, that this work is the key to understanding Eddison's novels. Aphrodite herself appears in *Mistress of Mistresses*, which begins with a curious "Overture" set on twentieth-century Earth, where the deceased Edward Lessingham lies in his private fortress on the Lofoten Islands off the northern coast of Norway. Lessingham—a larger-than-life figure with a history of superhumanly audacious exploits—is introduced to the reader in a reverie by an attendant. There is one other person present, a beautiful lady who is heard to voice a peculiar comment at his bedside:

> Then I heard her say, in a voice that was gentler than the glow-worm's light among rose-trees in a forgotten garden between dewfall and moonrise: *Be content. I have promised and I will perform.* (20)

This is Aphrodite, reaffirming a promise she made to Lessingham in life—that he will receive an afterlife patterned along the lines that a worshipper of this goddess would regard as heavenly (*Mezentian Gate* 594-595). The rest of the narrative of *Mistress of Mistresses* takes place in Zimiamvia and chronicles Lessingham's adventures in the world Aphrodite has promised him. The entire story, therefore, is happening at her sufferance, or perhaps her insistence.

Allusions to Aphrodite abound in the Zimiamvia Cycle. Antiope, however, has instead been likened to Artemis, Aphrodite's adolescent half-sister. Comparisons between Antiope and Artemis show that this pattern is too perfect to have been accidental. Artemis is a famously complicated figure, the Greek expression of numerous ideas, many of them only loosely related to her most famous capacity as goddess of the hunt. Antiope, upon examination, is linked to most these ideas, coming across as a wholly Artemisian figure. Given that Artemis's divine portfolio ultimately makes her a goddess of emerging female power, this places Antiope in an interesting position in Eddison's invented mythology. To illustrate why this is so, it is necessary to examine the parallels between her and Artemis.

Artemis is, in the first instance, the goddess of the hunt. Her divine scepter, the physical object by which she is identified in classical iconography, is her bow, and unlike the other armed Greek goddess, Athena, Artemis is frequently depicted using her weapon (Vikela figs. 37-39). In ancient Greece, bows were the tools of hunters rather than soldiers. In Eddison's work, therefore, it is important to note that Antiope is a keen hunter, and not just because she has offered Derxis a boar-hunt. Later in the novel the reader is informed that "Queen Antiope proclaimed for Michaelmas day a day's delight and pleasure, to ride a-hawking" (193). There is then considerable discussion of an interdisciplinary hunting party that includes hawking, hunting with dogs, and an impromptu horse race (194-196). So like Artemis, Antiope is clearly a huntress.

The shared hobby has some far-reaching connotations. Hunting is a fairly animalistic undertaking. To hunt one must move away from civilization into wild areas frequented by animals, and then pursue them with weapons, just as a predatory animal might. In doing so, a hunter rehearses and re-establishes primal links and kinships between humanity and the animal kingdom. These links constitute a very old and persistent theme in world mythology, and Artemis continues that tradition in Greek mythology. This is, in part, why a goddess of an activity of marginal importance to an agrarian culture such as Greece ranks so highly among the Olympians.

Artemis is, in fact, a late, sophisticated version of a truly ancient mythical archetype, the Mistress of Animals (Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults* [*Ancient*] 102). Early depictions of this figure depict her variously dismembering wild animals, giving birth to them, or holding them in place. She has an ambiguous relationship with animals, destroying, controlling and protecting them by turns, but the point is that she can touch and affect them with an impunity denied to others, standing athwart the human and animal kingdoms. Artemis continues the tradition. She is the goddess of the hunt, killing animals with impunity, and mass sacrifices of game, notably deer, were central to her public worship (Larson, *Ancient* 102-103). Conversely, she often protects animals and is frequently depicted touching or holding a deer, a gesture that can be protective as often as it is possessive (Vikela figs. 40-41). Some cults of Artemis maintained herds, symbolically under Artemis's protection, to be hunted by nobody else (Larson, *Ancient* 102). Animals belong to Artemis; she may consume or protect them as the mood strikes her, but she has a kinship with, a delight in, and a power over the bestial kingdom that is denied to others.

So too does Eddison's Queen Antiope, whose love of hunting animals does not preclude her from a careful act of kindness towards a gratuitously imperiled toad. She also dotes on her horse, Tessa, and sleeps with a white cat on her pillow. When she good-naturedly teases this cat, it responds by "[making] pretence to bite her" (168) and batting her with its soft paws rather than scratching her. Caterpillars, her lady-in-waiting notes, are drawn to her, hoping to spin their cocoons in her hair and therefore partake of her protection during their transformation. The idea amuses her (178). During a pause in her hunt, furthermore, Antiope is described in these terms:

> Antiope seemed to have settled with this talk to a yet sweeter companionship with the green earth where she sat; and not now in her eyes only but most subtly in all her frame and pose as she rested there, was a footing it as of little mocking faunish things, round and round, in a gaiety too smooth and too swift for the eye to follow. (*Mistress* 195)

Antiope clearly has an affinity for animals; in mid-hunt she even brings to mind one of the adolescent deer that Artemis guarded from harm by others (while demanding their sacrifice for her own edification.) She is not just a huntress like Artemis—she is, like the goddess, a Mistress of Animals.

The parallels continue. Artemis is very pointedly a virgin goddess, invariably depicted as a pubescent female dressed with an eye to modesty, if not convention; as an archer she has bare arms but never goes nude like Aphrodite (Vikela fig. 35; 38). This is interesting given her additional capacity as the patron of young girls. Artemis is associated with female puberty, and therefore with the incipient fertility of girls, a concern central to any society. Ritual dances and observances by pubescent girls were a noted feature of her worship, and depictions of such rites have been found in her holy sanctuaries (Vikela figs. 47-48). Girls appear to have made votive offerings of their dolls to Artemis upon entering adulthood (Larson, *Greek Nymphs* 107). Women prayed to Artemis (rather than Hera, the goddess of marriage) for guidance and protection in matters of childbirth, child-rearing, and gynecology (Larson, *Ancient* 107). On these grounds Artemis is also associated with the moon, a natural phenomenon whose monthly cycle parallels that of the human female. Artemis is therefore the patron and protector of girls during the emergence of their biological potential.

For this reason, Eddison's first depiction of Antiope and her accoutrements is interesting:

> Through the wide-flung casements of the Queen's bed-chamber in the Teremnene palace in Rialmar came the fifteenth day of August, new born. Over a bowl of white roses it stepped, that stood on the windowsill with dew-drops on their petals, and so into the room, touching with pale fingers the roof-beams; the milk-white figured hangings; the bottles on the white onyx table: angelica water, attar of roses, Brentheian unguent made from the honey of Hyperborean flowers; the jewels laid out beside them; the mirrors framed in filigree work of silver and white coral; gowns and farthingales of rich taffety and chamblet and cloth of silver that lay tumbled on chairs and on the deep white soft velvet carpet; all these it touched, so that they took form, but as yet no colour. (*Mistress* 165-166)

The link between the color white and the concept of virginity hardly needs to be labored; if a teenage girl in a novel picks such a color scheme for her bedroom, the reader is surely entitled to draw certain inferences about her. As Antiope wakes to this sunrise, she is revealed to be a delightfully cheerful, wholesomely mischievous young lady who fusses with her hair, yanks her cousin Zenianthe playfully out of bed, and is more interested in pleasures such as hunting and dancing than statecraft. When she dances, she does so under great windows through which the new moon shines, "a reaping-hook of silver fire" (180) symbolic of the beginnings of female reproductive power. For her first audience with Lessingham, she and Zenianthe swap places in the royal entourage, leading to a moment of light comedy as he catches on and works out who is who (172-173). The readiness with which Lessingham humors this prank endears him to the young queen, who is already tired of being "gazed on like a sweetmeat or a dish of caviare" (167). "[W]hy might we not stay children?" she asks Zenianthe, voicing a concern surely present in the minds of those Artemis protected. This is a carefree young girl depicted at the moment of emergence into womanhood, aware of but not yet wholly comfortable with her adult responsibilities, biological and otherwise. For that reason it is ominous that Derxis, frustrated by her evasiveness, smacks the head off a white lily with his cane (168).

This brings us back to Derxis and his act of cruelty towards the toad, which prompts Antiope's "Artemisian coldness and displeasure." He might have done well to note this. Although a childlike goddess, Artemis is also a ferocious figure, hypervigilantly protective of her privacy, modesty, and chastity, and Greek mythology abounds with stories of vicious punishments meted out to those who would compromise these qualities. When the nymph Callisto becomes pregnant, she is summarily ejected from Artemis's entourage, turned into a bear and pursued by hunters (Ovid 2.408-495). Actaeon the hunter chances upon Artemis bathing, and as punishment for seeing her unclad is turned into a stag and torn to pieces by his own hounds (3.173-255). Such punishments recall Artemis's status as a hunter, one who crosses boundaries between civilization and wilderness, and also between civilized and animalistic behavior. Might Antiope evince the same savagery? It is surely this possibility that Eddison was alluding to when describing the look she gives Derxis.

So Antiope is very like Artemis, and Artemis is, fundamentally, a goddess of potential. Specifically she is the goddess of the potential to continue the human race, a potential for procreation and new beginnings that links humanity to the world. The Greeks, like many societies, saw this potential as being most obviously embodied in the incipient fertility of adolescent girls. Artemis is therefore a magical girl, one emerging into her power to link humanity with the rhythms of the natural world, and the broader universe as a whole.

This makes her an interesting point of comparison for Eddison to evoke, since he had some definite and highly individual ideas about the nature of female power. This philosophical emphasis on the feminine has been missed by many readers. Since his books are heavily stocked with superhuman warriors engaged in seemingly amoral battle for battle's sake, many assume he was mounting an apology for the Nietzschean superman and disengaging from notions of good and evil. Nothing, in fact, could be further from the truth. Eddison's philosophy draws much more on Plato, and constitutes not a disengagement from notions of good and evil so much as a creative critique of them. Allusions to this critique are subtle enough to be all but invisible on a first reading, however. Commentators have all too frequently overlooked them, unfairly eliding Eddison's ideas into naïve, reactionary nostalgia (De Camp 132-134; Sawyer 101-104).

Eddison's philosophical ideas are complicated,[1] but in short, his argument runs something like this. Ethical good is a mere means to an end, varying with circumstance, and is not fit for purpose as a philosophical principle. To define good and evil, Eddison argued, any philosophy or religion worthy of the name had to propose some point of ultimate value, something to be desired not as a means to an end but for its own sake; to pursue this or work to its purpose was good, to deny or spurn it evil (*A Fish Dinner in Memison* 316-317). Eddison interrogates the nature of absolute value in an eccentric way. Value, he said, was not plural; of the traditional trinity of truth, goodness and beauty, truth is only valuable if it serves some good, and good is only valuable if it is valuable in and of itself (317). Consequently Beauty—not mere pulchritude, but Beauty with an upper-case B, an abstract quality of being loved for one's own sake—is the only thing of true value. Beauty is the only true power, Eddison says; it connects us to the universe, and provides a single overarching yardstick by which to judge our actions. To work for or towards Beauty was good; to oppose, deny or spurn it was evil. Furthermore, he claimed that

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[1] A fuller explanation of these ideas can be found in my article "On This I Stake My Salvation: E.R. Eddison's Easter Manifesto."

> [I]n the last analysis, Beauty is the one thing that can be loved for its own sake, as end, not as means: that Beauty must [therefore] be a Person, since anything lower than a person can only be loved as a means or as an attribute or aspect of something. (letter to Gerald Hayes, 14th April 1944, Bodleian Library [Bod.] MS Eng. lett. c. 230/1, 74)[2]

So Beauty had to take anthropomorphic form. How may a disciple of this tradition recognize those in whom Beauty is incarnated? *Ipso facto*, Eddison argued—those who possess Beauty are loved. Writing in the hetero-normative 1930s, he therefore argued that ultimate goodness rested in "Masculine-Feminine dualism" (*Fish Dinner* 318); the male principle loves and serves the female, who appreciates and returns the sentiment. He referred to the male half of this equation as "Zeus" and the female half as "Aphrodite"; as an interdependent pair the two create Beauty, and philosophically relevant good is accomplished.

So Eddison was not creating a society of Nietzschean supermen. Rather, he was attempting to create a society of Platonic super-women who could serve as inarguable philosophical justifications for the actions of his heroes. For Beauty to be created, after all, Zeus needs an Aphrodite to love. Zimiamvia therefore abounds with fabulously beautiful women who, gorgeous as they certainly are, are not there to fulfill male wishes. Rather they have wishes of their own that the men desire to fulfill. By doing so the men celebrate Beauty, and therefore do good. Zimiamvia differs from Earth in that it is a culture in which this standard of value is taken as read, which has interesting effects; it is a society without neurosis. People motivated by love can lay audacious schemes, attempt grand deeds, and enter into on-going, possibly unending intrigues without concern over whether what they are doing is right, productive, or indeed even sensible. Service to Aphrodite, in any of her numerous manifestations, is obviously the right thing to do. Even if they fail, Zimiamvians can be sure of that. They are therefore free to act in ways that would not be possible on Earth, where (Eddison argued) the lack of consensus on the value of Beauty lead to a queasy reluctance to attempt greatness. No such hobble on human potential exists in Zimiamvia, which is a society where, in a very practical sense, all you need is love.

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Eddison insisted that "infinite value […] cannot be cribbed or frozen in a single manifestation" (*Fish Dinner* 318). Although all women partake of the love-inspiring divinity of Aphrodite, they do so in different ways. The most famous Zimiamvian woman is Fiorinda, the haughty, raven-haired mistress of Duke Barganax. Fiorinda and Barganax have a long-standing relationship of intense, seething, unambiguously physical affection. Their trysts typically end in Barganax, a painter, being inspired to produce a portrait of his beloved; but invariably becoming violently dissatisfied with the result, destroying the canvas before he finishes it. So Barganax's love for Fiorinda prompts service in the form of an artistic endeavor that, because of the impossibility of reproducing her beauty in oils, can never end. On Earth this would be futile; in Zimiamvia it represents a consummation of a Zeus/Aphrodite partnership, in which each half completes the other, he offering her service and she proffering him inspiration in an eternal cycle. So Barganax is Zeus and Fiorinda is Aphrodite; the relationship is productive, long-standing and effectively infinite (Young 87-90).

Aphrodite is the perfect archetypical reference-point for a figure like Fiorinda. Aphrodite is often depicted nude or bare-breasted (Delivorrias fig. 6; cf. fig. 55) and takes many lovers as well as inspiring love in others. As Eddison himself noted, this gives her the power to overthrow everything; love is, in its way, the greatest power in the universe. Fiorinda, who appears in states of undress at several points in the novel (53-54; 100-101, 228-235; 304), is a knowing, experienced woman, fully aware of the power she has over Barganax and not averse to acting on it. Nor is Barganax's eagerly, willingly masochistic pursuit of the perfect portrait the only suffering she inflicts on men. She has two irksome husbands quietly assassinated, the second for no greater crime than demanding marital fidelity. Defending her from accusations of haughtiness, Eddison pointed out her central position in his invented mythology:

> Fiorinda […] is, and very well knows she is, and enjoys and exploits that knowledge to the full, the very Goddess herself, Beauty's self in visible and tangible and loveable flesh and blood, perfect and immortal. (letter to JM Howard, 4th June 1942, Bod. MS Eng. lett. e. 231, 131)

Fiorinda knows she is Aphrodite, appreciates her importance, and acts accordingly.

In characterizing Antiope, by contrast, Eddison evokes the qualities, powers, and indeed the name of Artemis. This is because Artemis is symbolic of emerging female power, and Antiope is herself just emerging into her power as a rational moral compass to the actions of the hero of the novel, Lessingham. Lessingham is a soldier, spymaster, statesman, and restless, indefatigable man of action. In the first half of the novel he matches wits with rival spymasters, wins staredowns with terrifying warlords, and emerges victorious from battles both martial and oral. His adventures are marvelous fun, but also somewhat directionless, leaving the reader wondering where this is all going. All that changes when his diplomatic duties take him to Antiope's palace at Rialmar. He and the Queen strike up an affectionate rapport, and he immediately begins working to strengthen her defenses against her foes, laboring ceaselessly on her behalf for the remainder of the novel. Thus another Zeus/Aphrodite partnership is formed, and Lessingham's fabulous adventures begin to serve ends that Eddison held to be philosophically and morally tenable. Antiope therefore begins to fulfill her role in the creation of Beauty, and therefore of good in the world.

Antiope and Fiorinda therefore comprise a set of "before-and-after" shots, so to speak, that illustrate Eddison's philosophical ideas. Fiorinda—Aphrodite, clearly fully conversant and comfortable with her power—is the "after" shot. Eddison created this character very deliberately as an example of his perception of Beauty at its most unabashed, fully-realized and unapologetic, arguing his own points via a sort of *reductio ad absurdam*. Antiope came to serve as the illustrative "before" shot, depicted at the beginning of her Beauty. Aphrodite—nude, knowing, sensual, eternally powerful—would not do as an archetype for such a character. The established pattern of Greek gods did, however, suggest a perfect alternative in the form of her adolescent half-sister Artemis, a goddess concerned with the emergence of feminine potential. Eddison, a man who luxuriated in his classical education, must surely have been struck by the perfection of this parallel. It seems that he began painting Antiope as an Artemisian figure in a very deliberate act of literary sleight of hand, guiding the reader subtly towards his broader philosophical points.

Might Antiope grow up to become another Fiorinda? The "coldness and displeasure" with which she regards Derxis certainly hints at this potential. But we will never know. For when duty calls Lessingham to a distant part of Antiope's realm, Derxis strikes again; by treachery he slips into Rialmar, murders those delegated to protect Antiope, and tries to force her to marry him. In a choice between marriage and death, she picks the latter, at which Derxis scoffs—"If not to be my Queen, then you shall at least be no longer the strumpet of a soldier of fortune" (277).

That Antiope dies rather than fights could be seen as detracting from her Artemesian identity. As has been noted, Artemis is an armed, vengeful goddess noted for taking savage revenge on those who cross her. Conversely, however, Greek mythology contains several stories connecting Artemis to girls who died before achieving the conventional end result of female puberty; motherhood (Larson, *Greek Heroine Cults* [*Heroine*] 116). Iphigenia, daughter of King Agamemnon, is sacrificed to placate the antagonistic Artemis, but in some versions of the story she is spirited away by Artemis at the last minute and adopted as part of Artemis's retinue, immortal now, but never to grow up and become a wife and mother (Larson, *Heroine* 105-106). The Spartans traced their enmity with Messenia to a supposed historical incident in which the Messenians abducted, raped and murdered several Spartan girls while they performed a ritual in honor of Artemis (Larson, *Ancient* 106). The Cretan nymph Britomartis leaps from a cliff to escape the lustful King Minos; accounts differ as to whether or not she was saved, but her cult was closely allied with that of Artemis (Larson, *Ancient* 177). All of this plays, once again, to Artemis's role as the patron of girls about to enter adulthood and be married off—and therefore to begin their run through the gauntlet of Bronze-Age obstetrics. The embracing of defining female potential was a dangerous time for Greek girls, and there will have been a significant attrition rate, hence the existence of several stories connecting Artemis to premature female death. That Antiope similarly died before her time actually serves as another powerful point of contact with Artemis. That her fate, like those of Iphigenia and Britomartis, is prompted by an unthinkingly possessive man strengthens the connection.

But this is not why Antiope dies. Rather, her death fulfills her second function in *Mistress of Mistresses*—to illustrate Eddison's ideas about evil. To have her do this Eddison evokes an event from an entirely different mythological tradition. An accomplished amateur medievalist (he published an English translation of *Egil's Saga* in 1930), Eddison was at least as dedicated to the study of Nordic mythology as Greek, and he drew upon his resulting expertise to underline his points. For the remainder of the novel Lessingham devotes his energies to engineering a peace between the various factions of the Three Kingdoms, preparatory to a vengeful strike against Derxis. As he does so he makes a quotation in Old Norse that is later emphasised as the title of a chapter—"Enn Freki Renna." This is a quotation from the *Völuspá*, one of the components of the Poetic Edda, a central plank in Scandinavian mythopoeia. The *Völuspá* is a recounting of the creation of the universe, followed by a prophecy of how it will end. "Enn freki renna" is a refrain in the second part of the poem, and translates from Icelandic as "the wolf runs free" (44). This refers to Fenrir, a gigantic, ravenous wolf representative of the powers of darkness, evil, and chaos. The gods confined Fenrir with a magical chain, but the *Völuspá* foretells *Ragnarok*, the "Twilight of the Gods," when the monster would break free and join the other evil creatures in the destruction of the universe; at this battle he will kill Odin, chief of the gods (53). Like Artemis, Odin is a complicated figure, the end result of a long process of cultural digestion and mythopoeia (Dumézil 34-35). Above all, however, he is a tireless seeker of wisdom, invoked as a symbol of rationality, learning and order. The *Völuspá*, indicatively, finds him raising a sorceress from the dead to learn her wisdom. The poem therefore foretells the destruction of the rational, sensible, anthropomorphic gods, at the hands of monstrous, ravening, impersonal, chaotic evil. Eddison has evoked this story, not one from the classical tradition, at the conclusion of *Mistress of Mistresses*.

Lessingham quotes the *Völuspá* in order to compare himself to Fenrir—"I am in these days become a wild beast, first made fierce with tying, and then let loose" (277). The self-criticism makes sense. The death of Antiope, his incipient Aphrodite, reveals her importance to him—how can he now do good? His actions are now doomed to be, like those of Fenrir, random. This is, as far as he is concerned, the end of the world, and he is more than willing to participate in the attendant destruction. He must be restrained from killing the messenger who brings him the news (272) and claims he will sacrifice the life of anyone who needs to die in pursuit of his vengeance (277). To compare himself to Fenrir while in such an emotional and moral state is a fair suggestion.

Yet the comparison is not quite perfect. His fatalistic rage cools; the concluding chapters of the novel find him in a variety of moods. When Barganax suggests resolving internal differences within the Three Kingdoms by executing Horius Parry, Lessingham steadfastly and successfully opposes the idea (278-279). This is less about mercy than about Lessingham's plans for Parry, but Fenrir does not plan; the wolf is by definition a ravening, unthinking destroyer, heedless of the rational reference points that Lessingham still enjoys in the form of his memories of Antiope. Lessingham has, for example, a moment of profound peace and empathy with Barganax in which he notices the strong family resemblance between the Duke and the Queen (288). That particular episode has various purposes, but it illustrates the immediately relevant point that Lessingham's comparison of himself to Fenrir is not entirely justified. Notably, the chapter entitled "Enn Freki Renna" chronicles no act of destruction by Lessingham, but his assassination by agents of Parry, who has vilely thrown his lot in with Derxis. That alliance serves as a reminder that it was Derxis, not Lessingham, who aped Fenrir in the wolf's defining act—the destruction of the anthropomorphic basis of rational goodness. Lessingham is suffering *Ragnarok*, not causing it himself. Bearing in mind Eddison's philosophical system, furthermore, there are other interesting parallels between Derxis and Fenrir. Shifting the focus of the allusion away from Lessingham and towards his foe is a worthwhile exercise for those who wish to understand the ideas that moved Eddison's pen.

Just as Eddison characterized Antiope as Artemisian to dramatize his ideas about good, he appears to have alluded to *Ragnarok* in order to point to his ideas about evil. Those ideas proceed from those about good, which emerges as a consequence of a partnership between Beauty and action; action undertaken in the cause of Beauty, and appreciated as such by Beauty, equals good. Beauty ought to be able to inspire endless action, as in the case of Fiorinda, whose likeness defies reproduction in art, but who has inspired such devotion from

Barganax that he never tires of attempting to paint her. For all her knowing arrogance, Fiorinda appreciates the effort; the two form a unit, and something of philosophical value is achieved. Antiope and Lessingham unknowingly form the beginnings of another such partnership. The foes they face are not in themselves evil. Horius Parry is the nominal villain of the novel; he is a brutal, colorfully pugnacious figure who decorates his banquet hall with effigies of demons (113) and is given to outbursts of sadistic violence (142; 292). He certainly causes conflict and difficulty for the lovers, requiring vigilance on Lessingham's part, but this is exactly what they want; Parry provides Lessingham with an endless source of excuses to do Antiope service. Parry is, therefore, dangerous, unpredictable and violent, but evil only when, after Antiope's death, he attempts an alliance with Derxis. For most of the novel he is a cog in a machine; he may think his schemes are self-interested, but he is actually furthering a Zeus/Aphrodite partnership.

Derxis initially seems to be another such figure, and a less significant one, a tragicomic fool whose ill-tempered avarice is easily brushed aside by a giggling teenager. His subsequent attempts to have Lessingham assassinated are embarrassingly public failures (178-179). Like Parry, he provides more grist for Lessingham's mill. It will be remembered, however, that Derxis's reaction to Antiope's tardiness for their appointment is to break the head off a white lily with his cane. Given Antiope's heavily-implied virginity, something could be made of the unpleasant Freudian significance of this gesture. Of more direct relevance is the fact that he is clearly prepared to do violence to beautiful things to satiate his aggression.

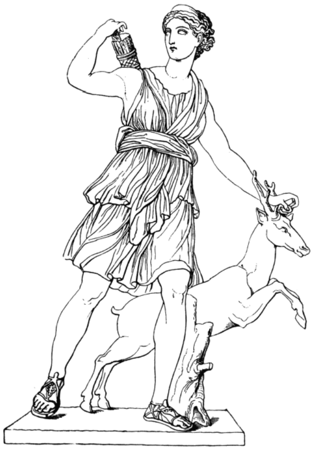
Satiety is a key point here. If one is satisfied, one stops trying; the service to Beauty upon which Eddisonian good relies is halted. Lessingham is never satisfied that Antiope is safe. Barganax is never satisfied with any of his portraits of Fiorinda. They do not *want* to be satisfied; on-going service to Beauty is its own reward, and the truly utopian character of Zimiamvia is that it is a world where this point is accepted. Derxis, uniquely, was not interested in this reward. He was motivated by a finite end, an advantageous political marriage. He wanted to be satisfied, to have his desires cease. Where Lessingham is robbed of the opportunity to do ongoing service to Beauty—that is, to do good—Derxis spurns the very idea of such service. He is therefore evil, but it is Zimiamvian, Eddisonian evil, a fundamentally different matter from the machinations of Horius Parry. Heedless of Beauty, Derxis was in fact always emblematic of undirected power; his actions serve no human purpose and, in his random, flailing, philosophically untenable attempts to be satiated, he brings about the destruction of the basis of human goodness in the universe.

In this he mirrors Fenrir precisely. No such demonic figure exists in classical mythology, or at least none that goes undefeated. Eddison needed to appeal to non-classical mythology for a reference point for Derxis's behaviour, and he had the antiquarian knowledge to do so. The Icelandic *freki*, meaning "wolf," can also be translated as "greedy one" (*Grimnismol* 19). In her translation of the *Völuspá*, Dronke prefers "ravener" (43)—that is, one who seeks to slake his desires, and does not care how he does so. Eddison was fluent in Old Norse and doubtlessly appreciated this shade of meaning. Just as Aphrodite is the perfect archetype to represent Eddison's perception of Beauty, and Artemis the perfect symbol for the emergence of that power, the Nordic monster Fenrir, symbolic of the destructive potential of undirected, pointless, self-regarding greed, serves as the perfect symbol for Derxis, Eddison's demonstration of his perception of evil. It is for this reason that he includes the refrain "Enn Freki Renna" in the chapters of *Mistress of Mistresses* where Derxis influences the plot.

From this a rebuttal can be presented to those who dismiss Eddison as ignorant of the complications of reality. Eddison has certainly been criticized for the apparent naïve optimism of Zimiamvia, a world where the sun always shines, the girls are all pretty, and the complications of existence have been conveniently ignored. It must be assumed that those who form such impressions have overlooked the tragic conclusion of *Mistress of Mistresses*, which depicts both a ghastly personal tragedy—the death of Antiope—and a philosophical explanation that makes it even worse. Eddison has not, as the argument runs, avoided "the harsh facts of pain, loss, ugliness and evil" (Manlove 154). Rather he has utilized certain of those imperfections in order to demonstrate that evil had to exist to show good its role. For Lessingham truly to understand his role in the universe, it was necessary for Antiope to be put in genuine danger, and indeed to die. Good will always triumph over evil, Eddison argued, but evil must exist for good to know its purpose. This is not an admission of defeat by someone realizing he could not write a truly utopian novel so much as a harnessing of the facts of reality to prove his point.

So Eddison's elaborate prose style is not the result of unfocussed gushing or showing off. Rather it is the work of a highly disciplined and well-educated imagination shrewdly choosing mythopoeic allusions to best illustrate an audacious reworking of moral philosophy. Within Eddison's invented mythology, it is through interdependent emotional congress with the feminine principle that the male principle discovers, pursues, and celebrates his connection with the universe. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, is the obvious symbol for this enabling capacity. But this mature, brazen goddess is not appropriate for the innocent teenager Antiope. In characterizing Antiope, therefore, Eddison has repeatedly invoked Artemis, Aphrodite's baby half-sister. Artemis is a huntress, intimately connected with animals in both a predatory and protective role. She is a virgin, fiercely protective of her modesty and enraged by those who would compromise it. But above all she is emblematic of female potential, a young girl emerging into the defining and socially crucial role mandated by her gender, and a patron and protector of those who must do the same. She is, therefore, the perfect figure to invoke in characterizing Antiope, a young girl emerging into herself via her relationship with the hero of a novel that accords ontological significance to heterosexual love. Her death is another link to Artemesian mythology; many young girls associated with this goddess do not make it to full womanhood. Her loss is, for Lessingham, the loss of any rational means of measuring his own strength and morality; it is, in a very real sense, the end of the world. To ram home that point, Eddison turns northward and alludes to the dark tale of the time when the Nordic gods would fall to impersonal, bestial chaos and disorder. This story mirrors Lessingham's situation, but he is suffering *Ragnarok*, not causing it. Derxis brought this situation about through his evil motivations and actions, and in those matters he precisely mirrors Fenrir, the all-consuming demon of Nordic mythology. For a polyglot like Eddison, these parallels were irresistible. By placing Artemis at *Ragnarok*, he dramatizes the seldom-appreciated relationship between good and evil in his works.

Eddison was not only educated in the great stories of the past but clearly mindful of the deeper human concerns that gave rise to them, and he harnessed that understanding very carefully in his writing. There are hundreds more of these references in his work. On the basis of the evidence presented here, it would be fair to speculate that his web of mythological and literary allusions is not so much tangled as intricately woven. The time may have come for scholars to stop remarking on the colors of this tapestry, and begin examining the ways in which it was woven, the better to understand the workings of this remarkable imagination.



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