

Prior to reading this work I had been led to believe that it was one of great power and significance, a true classic, a book that all deep thinkers should possess and cherish. Complex, maybe, but rewarding to those readers willing to disentangle the philosophical puzzles. However, after my first, and what I trust will be my last, reading I must confess to a feeling of profound disappointment and dislike. The promised power was there in faltering flashes, the significance seemed shallow and the thinking, as opposed to the fancy, that had gone into it was small. Its complexity is of the rag-bag, rather than the woven sort - by this I mean ideas thrown together without system or theme, not knitted together. Take that sort of complexity apart and you are left with what Maskull finally faced - Nothing. The central gimmick of new senses growing overnight on the hero became progressively more strained as the tale wore on, until it became obvious that this was done purely as an exercise in strangeness and an attempt to fit the earthman into the philosophical patterns that he came across. Treated with intelligence and it would have been fascinating, but, as it is, all one gets here is a somewhat uneasy earthman with odd and assorted appendages and eyeballs growing here and there, but basically remaining an earthman for all that.

Lindsay's fancy runs a bit dry, for he finds quite soon that he can conjure up no more than variations on the optic scene for Maskull to experience. This is not the only time during the book when one wishes Lindsay had had more science, for with a little more knowledge on his part many embarrassing mistakes could have been avoided and he could have, perhaps, used all the electromagnetic spectrum and the ESP senses in his pilgrim's progress. Constantly throughout this book, one thinks that this or that piece or character could have been done better by someone who wrote regularly in SF or Fantasy, that the work could have become a masterpiece in truth in the hands of a more capable writer; but, to give Lindsay his due, few of the experienced writers in this field aim so high in their fiction, perhaps because they are so experienced. But, having aimed so high, having attempted such a major 'opus', Lindsay must be judged by equally high standards and, by these standards, I judge him to have failed. The ultimate resolution that was evidently meant to be of cosmic force seemed to me only a justification for mortification of the body, never a very profitable hobby - pain used in the way the ascetics of India and the Medieval saints used it, to curb the desires of the body and liberate the spirit.

Mr. Lindsay, about whom I know nothing, except that he died young, according

to my reading of the internal evidence scattered through this book, must have been a man with highly developed volumptuous urges and emotions, but brought up in such a way that he could not bring himself to give in to them - an iron control that constantly warred with his natural desires. If a man dares to write a novel, he lays bare, at least, a large portion of his soul to the eyes of the world, and the world can judge him as a man most easily from his works. I believe that he externalised his inner conflict in the forms of the vile, beautiful, slobbering, graceful, lustful Crystalman who starts this novel as a god and ends it as a devil; and Krag, who starts the novel as some sort of devil and ends it as more of a god, or demigod. Krag is yellow, brutish and ugly at first and almost right to the end, but the final switch, when Maskull's soul, Hightspore, is guided to the Tower where he finds the 'true' state of the cosmos and its meaning, reveals Krag to have been right all along and an emissary of the source of purity that fights constantly within us all for freedom from the vile flesh in which it is imprisoned by Crystalman. Pain and suffering are adjudged noble and an aid to freeing the fineness in man from the shackles of pleasure, which is but a shallow and passing thing that lures one into sloth, lust and vain posturing. And yet, one is told at the end that Krag & Co. are losing and that Crystalman is bound to win in time - perhaps an echo of Lindsay's own realisation that he could fight his natural urges for only so long before giving in. Perhaps I am wrong in my amateur psychoanalysis of the author and do him or his shade an injustice, but somehow I do not think so, for it would take a writer parsecs better than Lindsay to cover the tracks made by his own psyche. Lindsay's view is a very narrow one, likely to appeal only to those readers who feel guilt and shame at enjoying life and wish, consciously or unconsciously, to 'pay' for what they enjoy. Lindsay seems to see Pain and Pleasure as two universal objective forces - literally in Capital letters. I think it must be obvious that they are nothing of the sort, being completely subjective. Pain is the warning alarm of impending or actual damage to the body, an overstimulation of the nervous system designed to make us do something fast about stopping the cause from continuing. Pleasure is another sort of nerve stimuli, of perhaps a lower intensity, routed to a different part of the brain and designed to act as a reward for the body doing something creative, ie., the sex act is the ultimate creative work the human body can do.

So, one must equate Pleasure with Creativity and Pain with Destruction. In no way can we alter this equation to read Pain is Creativity and Pleasure is Destruction because our own bodies, which are our only instruments of perception, deny this by their very nature. If it were agonisingly painful to have sex, then the human race would never have got started. If it were fantastically pleasurable

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to tear ourselves limb from limb, then we would all have done so long ago! To say that pain is the noble thing and pleasure is to be denied and despised is to fall into that dismally familiar trap into which 'Saints' have fallen all down the bloodstained ages - if the medicine is nasty enough it is bound to do your soul good. In normal life restraint is clearly necessary, but repression is equally clearly not. Extremes harm! This is what I think Lindsay feared and is the real message that he waves in the face of the readers. For example, the attitude of the hero, Maskull, to women was very strange - not once during his peregrinations does he have normal relations with a female, although he had ample opportunity, and indeed, he refuses all such with something approaching fear. There is also excessive emphasis on 'manliness' and how praiseworthy it is - frequently Maskull is drawn to beings who seem feminine, but have masculine characters, or vice versa. It is significant that Maskull gains pleasure and, later, shame from absorbing another man into him. This was Digrung, the brother of a woman for whom Maskull had had desire earlier and who resembled his sister closely. It is meaningful that only in the masculine form could Maskull take the woman and it was only with a man that he found pleasure and experienced deep guilt afterwards. It would be wearisome to detail further aspects of the book and go into more pseudo-Freudian analysis of the author's evidently tortured id. For those who care to exert themselves to this end there is ample material.

I am reluctant to have to criticise so adversely a book I had looked forward so much in reading, but I had no idea how perverse its basic message would be - one of contempt for all that is human and humane in people, denigration of warm, open feelings, full of hollow laughter at love and beauty. During each stage of the pilgrim's progress philosophies are set up as shys to be knocked down one by one, each one showing its predecessor to have been merely a hollow cocanut, without the milk of truth. In their place all Mr. Lindsay offers is his Paen to Pain, a gospel of despair and of the hopelessness of all human aspirations and dreams. I have no great opinion of the human race myself, but I remain convinced that it has the seed of an aweinspiring and mighty destiny in it that, with luck, will flower at some far future time.

Reading this book was like listening to an atonal discord; I now need much sweet music to drown its cacophany. But this was so nearly a great book, or could have been, perhaps, if the author had waited ten years before writing it, instead of when he did. I can understand how it might haunt those more in tune with its inner message, but it is one spectre I do not wish to have hanging about at the back of my mind, poisoning me.

- A.R. Fallone.