

Again and again it crops up: the statement that "THE LORD OF THE RINGS is the hippies' bible". And when one thinks of the author of the trilogy and his traditional background, one's first reaction is to nail the lie, as the saying is, to the counter. However, the issue may not be so simple, and needs examining. First, to be strictly fair, - we throw the term "hippy" about to freely - obviously not all young people who have romantic ideals and adopt a sentimental style of dress are to be classed as hippies. We want to know, first of all, what a hippy is, and why the word should be a term of reproach; and then let us see whether there is any warrant for "hippydom" in the actual pages of LotR.

The question is not to be dismissed as one of dress. Those who are sensitive to the visions of "Otherwhere" will naturally enjoy dressing themselves up like more romantic characters; but there is a world of difference between, on the one hand, long but "kempt" hair and beards, feet sandalled or bare but clean, silks and ponchos well chosen and well worn; and on the otherhand, deliberate and cultivated ragbag squalor. And observation will show that there are differences and grades - ranging all the way from "Beautiful People" and "flower children" to Hell's Angels and skinheads. We must not by any means lump them all together.

What then is the extreme Hippy - the Hippy in the abstract, as it were? The character which we hope is not setting its smear on LotR?

First of course is the matter of drugs. An extreme Hippy is a devotee of "pot", "acid", and all the rest. It should need no words of mine to show the evils of the drug cult, in spite of all attempts to justify or palliate it - such specious arguments as "It's no worse than alcohol or tobacco," etc. The thing is self-evident. You see them around Notting Hill Gate, red-eyed and drooping, with posters demanding the legalisation of "pot". The graphic arts which stem from this cult we know of as the "psychedelic" style - pale translucent colours deliquescing into swirling patterns, outlines of letters swollen 'till they are hardly distinguishable, a world of monsters palpitating with an aura of strangeness... now what in the world is there in LotR that partakes of this? "Middle Earth" is, of course, strange and out of this world - but it is not crazy. It is "Middle Earth" - in the Anglo-Saxon sense - that is the region of "here and now", neither heaven nor hell, but midway between them. Many Anglo-Saxon poets use the term, and Professor Tolkien of course knows it well. The scenery of Middle Earth is convincingly realistic, and belongs in every detail to this world, even though it may smoulder into the terrors of Mordor or blossom into the vision of Lothlorien. There are no suspensions of the natural order, neither are we on any other planet; where marvels and monsters do occur, they are used sparingly, and therefore are more effective; for the terror and wonder break in upon a world of sober and serious reality, a perfectly sane world, where the scale is the measure of man.

Notice too the attitude of the book towards such things as "taking trips", and the use of palantirs and other magic. The heightening of consciousness and the breaking through into other mental regions by the use of drugs, hypnotism etc., must I am sure be classed under the misuse of palantirs. Pippin looked in the Palantir of Orthanc and narrowly escaped disaster; Denethor gave himself up to his palantir and so placed himself in the power of the enemy, to his own ruin. Only Aragorn might, for a sufficient reason, expose himself to the enemy through use of the Palantir of Orthanc, and he alone, and barely, had the strength to survive the ordeal. The Ring itself is another illustration of the power of a dangerous means of breakthrough. These things are fraught with peril, and even Gandalf knows that the wiser a man is, the more he avoids them. There are no "trips" in this book, - only voyages and quests, made on man's two feet, and with his eyes wide open.

Another thing that characterises the extreme hippy is his obsession with sex. When he demands freedom, most of the time it is sexual freedom that he means; and having quite justifiably thrown off the heavy hand of the last century, he is now not content 'till he can abandon the last elements of elementary decency. With this attitude, our book has nothing to do. It does not deal with sex at all, because it is just not that kind of book; on the other hand there is a great deal in it about love and friendship - written from a time, and by a mind, in which it was possible to believe in love and not lust, and friendship that was not homosexuality. This book, let it not be forgotten, began as a story told by a father to his children - ("...and if his son ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? or an egg, will he give him a scorpion?"). That is simply the kind of a book that it is. It is to be admitted that our author does not write easily about women; but what of that? The story is a good story without sex - who wants it? There are plenty of other books, if that is what you want...

The extreme Hippy, again, is a "drop out" - that is, he is so opposed to conventional values ("The Establishment") that he will repudiate them by escaping from them, and fleeing to some kind of wilderness of his own. (It is worth noting, in passing, that the only "drop-out" or "commune" movements that have ever succeeded, are those which sooner or later evolved a still more rigid discipline, as the Mormons and the Franciscan Order.) There is nothing in the book to encourage "dropping-out" in any way. Although we must all from time to time feel a longing to step outside of our humdrum door and suddenly be in the Wonderful country - yet if we were there, we would find hardly anybody engaged in "dropping-out", except, certainly, Gollum. It is not a book of escape (though there are some very good and ethical books of escape, e.g. "Pilgrims Progress"). The characters in it are not conscious of the heavy hand of the "Establishment" (as for example in the Gormenghast trilogy). The Dark Power is not "The Establishment", but an alien tyranny from without. The environment from which the hobbits come is a beloved and cherished home, to which they long to return when their task is done - Frodo is even willing to give up his hope of ever returning there, for the sake of preserving it unchanged for others. There is no "dropping-out" there, nor even breaking-out. The Rangers are wild, detached and lonely, but not because of any rebellion - they wander because it is a duty laid upon them. If a charter for the drop-outs is sought, it must be sought elsewhere - again, this is just not that kind of book.

A further point is the Hippy's insistence on "Doing Your Own Thing". Every Hippy sees himself as an artist, and insists on the divine right of originality. True enough originality is a valuable thing, and without it there is no life - but when it is blown up into "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law", then it runs amok. (What Rabelais, that much misunderstood man, said, "Do what you wish, and love God.") I do not think that there is much in the book about "doing your own thing", still less of "doing what thou wilt". Most of the protagonists were doing things they did not want to do, for the sake of a higher good - even the Elves were willing to work against their own advantages, so that all good should not perish. Many characters had, of course, remote and inscrutable interests, such as Tom Bombadil and Fangorn, but they did not put those interests first. Only Gollum, Saruman and S_____ did, - Those we can see trying to follow "Do what thou wilt" and falling into disaster. As to the worship of creative art - the Elves, of course, lived in an atmosphere of poetry and music, yet this was the climate of their life rather than its objective - they would not abandon their true values to "do their own thing". The Dwarves were serious artists, and (as we see in "The Hobbit") by no means free from the selfishness and avarice of the artist and the lover of beauty; but I do not feel that their art was motivated by any desire for originality. As good craftsmen, I think they would be more anxious to make a good Thing than to do their own thing. Both they and the elves, one feels, were artists on fairly traditional lines, indeed somewhat

conservative. No doubt their art developed, but they would feel no great sympathy for the individual's frantic search for novelty and self-expression.

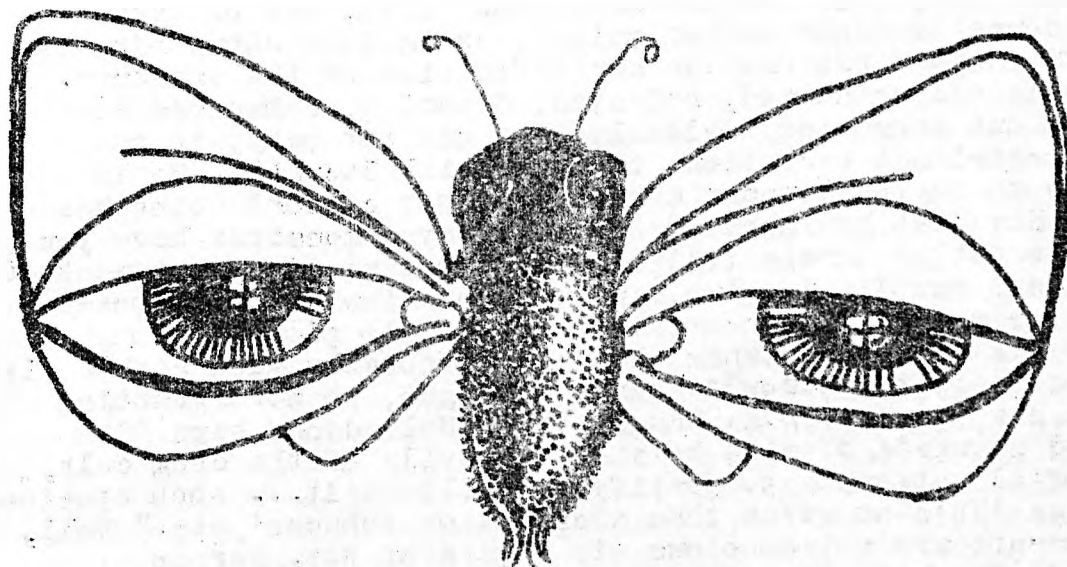
So - it is not a psychedelic book; it is not a book about sex; It gives no encouragement to "dropping-out" nor to "doing one's own thing". Why should our extreme Hippy bother with it? It is a moral, ethical book, full of the old-fashioned virtues, and the ethical bones beneath the structure of it are totally opposed to all that the Hippy believes in.

But as I stated at first, not every wild and free young modern is like that. There are all kinds and grades. And if there are those whose eccentricities are the expression of their desire for a world more like Middle Earth, that is all to the good - so long as Middle Earth is clearly seen as a sane background from which the wildest adventures start, where love and friendship exist clean and uncompromised, and where "service is perfect freedom", why then, their feet are on the Road That Goes Ever On. And perhaps it will lead them There and Back Again, to the peace of the Shire.

B.T.

Before the next article, a reply to the above, there will be a short interval on behalf of the Editor/Typist, entitled:-

BUTTERFLEYE



A.R. Fallone

The interval is completed by one of many little ditties received by the editors from Keith (Beorn) Bridges.

Good Boromir
Come blow up your horn
Theres Orcs in the meadow
And Ents in the corn
Where is the man who looks after the keep?
He's gone with a Balrog down into Helms Deep.