

Although not a hippy myself and bearing not the slightest resemblance to one in clothes, habits, or desires, I think I am able to see their point of view, something Belladonna seems bent on refusing to do. Now, to take it piece by piece, first of all the statement she quotes, that LotR is the hippies' Bible. I am not at all sure that this isn't a load of rubbish - many books have been said to be the hippies' Bible, from the volumes of Timothy Leary to "Stranger in a Strange Land" by Robert Heinlein (Sharon Tate's alleged killer Charles Manson formed his commune on lines set out in the latter book). Once upon a time it was said that flowerpeople used to read LotR just before taking a trip on LSD so that the tale would reveal itself in supernal colours across the backs of their eyeballs. But this was many years ago and our American cousins have gone on to gaudier stimuli. In Britain there was - or may still be - a group of 'clean' hippies who used to produce a magazine called "Gandalf's Garden" which tried to put over the idea of a back to nature movement, macrobiotics, communes, peace ect. uncontaminated by drugs or dirt or overemphasis on sex, the opposite of "OZ" in other words. So far as I know these are the only hippies to embrace LotR more than casually. When was the last time any of us saw "Frodo Lives" scrawled on the wall of our local Tube station? No, LotR was a passing fad with students and hippies, mostly on the other side of the water. But, just for the arguments sake, let us assume that Belladonna is right in her primary assumption about hippies and LotR. We must first examine her definition of the creature. A true hippy is a long haired, red eyed, drooping, debauched doss coated drop out shambling aimlessly from one pot party to the next with occasional excursions to the Social Security. He is most likely to be found under a bush at a pop concert doing his own thing. Now just how many of these bug eyed monsters have you or I seen recently? I mean full time, all out wierdos, not weekend freakers. Very few I'd imagine, and of those few how many possess the brains or powers of concentration needed to plough through 1500-odd pages of Tolkien when they would probably much rather dig their latest copy of "Screw"? Sorry, I forgot, we were granting Belladonna her premise. O.K. Drugs, then. Belladonna says "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." Well, these arguments are not specious in regard of pot. Heroin, cocaine, all the hard drugs are to be shunned, slow death every one. LSD? mescaline, psylocibin and all other hallucinogens affect the mind and one's philosophical balance (all that disgraceful scare propaganda about damage to the chromosomes should be ignored, or at least taken as 'not proven') and not the body. It is true that takers of LSD etc. tend to be more agreeable citizens afterwards and lose most of their agressiveness. This, of course, is a dreadful change for the worse. On no account must any of us cats lose our claws... Pot is about as addictive as tobacco and probably not as much as alcohol. To speak of pot smokers as red eyed and drooping, en masse, is a little sweeping. You could say the same of a weekend drinker on the morning after the night before or a furious chain smoker lighting his fiftieth of the day. I would much rather be sitting next to someone stoned out of his mind, quietly enjoying his high, than a roaring drunk out for a good punch-up. The only argument that holds water against maryjane is that it adds another mild addictive to the list of those already available. A lot of people of my age group that I know have had a drag at a joint at one time or another, some liked it, for others it did nothing. It is just another forbidden fruit to be plucked on the quiet.

Middle Earth is not this world and it does have magic, there are supernatural realms within it, Mordor, Lothlorien, where the landscape is transformed into something rich and strange, full of hair-bristling horrors like the Nine and the Balrog and mind

bursting glories like Galadriel and Gandalf uncloaked and Elves floating in their own radiance under the stars. These are suspensions of the natural order, they occur often in LotR and it would be a very much poorer book if they did not. There is a serious point here -- once a writer punctures the fabric of his sane and normal background with a supernatural event then all that he has built up prior to that point is automatically suspect. There is no such thing as being 'slightly supernatural', you either are or you are not, like being pregnant. Like it or not, Belladonna, one must classify Tolkien's works with all those wierd and wonder-ful books you so heartily abhor. To say that Gandalf knows that the wiser a man is the more he avoids such wonders is to have him arguing against his own profession as a wonder worker par excellence. As for palantirs, it is straining to equate them with a freak out on LSD -- palantirs were meant to be objective, showing things afar as they were in the past, are in the present, and, maybe, will be in the future. Time scanners. Hallucinogens are subjective -- my visions are mine alone and no other soul can share them... It could be said that now there are no more voyages and quests left to us, the ordinary people who are not astronauts or jungle explorers, than those into the uncharted regions of our own dark minds. Hallucinogens do not create these visions of heaven and hell, they merely bring them out from where they hide, deep in the white spaces of the map of the mind. Perhaps books like Tolkien's only serve to bring up to the surface a pale, rationalised literary reflection of the visions below, the wonders in check, marvels rationed out sparingly, colours bled down to bearable levels, the consecutive logic of a storyline woven in. When we read these tales the tingle of pleasure we feel is that of recognition, hearing, however faintly, the crystalline chimes of the bells of wonderland buried far within us all. Not everyone has the same wonderland, some are Mordors, some Lothlorien, some niether. With some people it is so heavily overlaid by the dull, ordinary world outside that only cowboy stories and detective novels and sex sagas please them - or Coronation Streets. With others, and I would include all members of the Tolkien Society in this category, their wonderlands are much closer to the surface. This can be dangerous. There are those who do not live in this world at all, alone they inhabit their private visions - these we lock away. I think that most of us would prefer to be more of a brilliant nut than a clod, however... Now, sex... I agree with much of what Belladonna says concerning this but one should always bear in mind that sex is in the eye of the beholder. I dare say that someone with sufficiently twisted outlook could raise a snigger over the most innocent and sexless passages in LotR if he or she wished. One could even, with a bit of imagination, get erotically aroused over the destination board at Waterloo Station... The only true drop out, obviously, would have to be a hermit -- no group of human beings ever existed that didn't form some sort of organisation within itself. Those who call themselves 'drop outs' now are merely people who feel irked by the present established organisation and wish to exchange it for a freer one, a sentiment with which I heartily agree but am too chicken to do anything about. Belladonna says that the Hobbits come from a beloved and cherished home -- yes, and the home is the only unit of any size in the Shire. Lets face it, there was no Establishment to speak of in the Shire from which to escape. Not quite the hippies' paradise, it must be admitted, but a lot nearer their ideal than present day Britain or America.

ARTISTIC originality through whatever medium has to be controlled by the originator or it descends into unintelligibility and art has to be a form of communication or it is nothing. Anarchy, 'Do what thou wilt' never produced good art and of course Chaos was always a synonym for Evil. But Chaos is needed. The very theme of LotR is the fight of Order against Chaos, and Order wins but only just, and only temporarily. You say, Belladonna, that the Elves and Dwarves were artists; I would disagree and say they were something less, decrators of environment, craftsmen, muzak maker s poetic historians. There is no evidence in LotR that the Elves or Dwarves ever had their Michaelangelos or Leonardos or Shakes-peares or Blakes or even their equivalent of Tolkien - the only

artists named great in the book are Celebrimbor and Feanor and both were, it appears, only supreme craftsmen. Tolkien's world does not admit of genius, which partakes uncomfortably much of the Chaos which his heroes are fighting. Few of the hippies could be labelled geniuses, even by the most charitable standards, some may be, most certainly act as if they were. Like it or not, Tolkien appeals to the eccentric in people, and if he attracts the hippies he does so for that reason, there being rather more eccentricity in them, real or assumed, than the rest of society. Also, like it or not, we are brothers and sitters under the skin to the hippies in our eccentricity, being members of a literary society existing far out on the periphery of the 'normal' world of books. We are as much Outsiders as they are, with that whiff of chaos about us that so unsettles ordinary folk. If this point seems hard to take think back to the last time any of us tried to explain the trilogy and our enthusiasm for it to one of the mentally moribund. Remember the glazed gaze, the restless movements, the attempts to change the subject? We are beyond most people's pale. Belladonna's points are as follows: it is not a psychedelic book- I say it most certainly is, she says it is not a sex book- I say any book that has a man and a woman in it is a book about sex, she says it gives no encouragement to dropping out- I say it paints a picture of a world much closer to the drop out's ideal than our own, she says it does not encourage anyone to do their own thing. I say that Tolkien did his own thing for many years and through many difficulties to produce the book and is an object lesson in the practice himself. Another point - how many times have books been used for a purpose completely opposite to that for which they were written? The Bible is number one on that long list... Human beings are rotten animals, mosly, their only saving grace being an inner spark that drives them toward perfection, some sort of ideal state. Even the lowest of the low still has this dim vision, glinting like a diamond at the bottom of a cess pit. Middle Earth is applace where one's ideals stand realised and manifest and also where the grim, foul elements in everyone are embodied, clothed in scale and hide, gibbering at one in clear daylight. One's evils, usually so elusive and hard to get to grips with, are there to be whacked. and whacked they are, to the delight of all. That, unfortunately, is not how it is in real life, as we know. Indeed Tolkien has made some attempt to temper our delight with the realization that the defeat of evil is at some serious cost to the forces of good. Primarily, as he says, he was telling a story, telling it supremely well, but not totally realistically - there are no halts for natural functions, the act of sex is not mentioned, we do not even know if Aragorn had a beard, if not, whether he kept a clean cut image by having a quick scrape round with his dirk at quiet points in the story. Yes, these are ideal figures on a clean landscape fighting the foulest of evils and winning. It is what we are all striving for, hippies and 'normals', knowingly or unknowingly, the triumph of what every human must consider right over what every human must consider abhorrent, or betray his own humanity. So, Belladonna, leave the poor old hippy alone, if he wants to read the book, it only shows that under all that hair and pot he has the same aspirations as anybody. He may express them in a fashion of which you disapprove, but surely evryone has the right to go to hell or Heaven in his own way? What you object to is us being tarred with the same brush as the hippies by 'normal' society because we read a book they also reda. Apart from the possibility that reading a book so strongly moral and correct might effect some change of ways in our benighted hippy friends, placing their feet on the path of righteousness, as it were, all it is is just one minority group disdaining another for something which I am not at all sure is true, anyway. I think they have left us behind long ago, these extreme hippies you tak about, Belladonna, and those that still wave Tolkien like a banner are just eddies in the backwaters of hippiedom, apeing their leaders' abandoned fashions. We need not feel besmirched by being associated in other people's minds with these plastic hippies. The real variety have gone on and got violent at demos and David Frost Shows, turned into yippies. Good riddance, the phony breed are much more pleasant. Polyvinyl daisy, anyone? Love, Love, Love, Gandalf for Queen..... ARF.