

The Fall From Enchantment.

by

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Many people have already voiced opinions that Tolkien's Middle-earth represents our own world - or north-western Europe to be more precise - as it was millenia ago, and since altered by geological upheavals and thousands of years of weathering from rain and sun,¹ sea and wind. Paul Kocher, (among others) mentions this in his book,² so no more needs to be said of that here, but what I would like to do is express the opinion that Faërie is not a "separate" world by which one must enter by magic rings, secret doors, or perilous roads, but that Middle-earth is Faërie, and so therefore our own world, too, is Faërie.

Tolkien has said: "Faërie contains many things besides Elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all that is in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted."² (My underlining)

Faërie embraces everything in the world from the noblest to the meanest, the highest to the lowest, the greatest and the smallest; for Faërie is the world. And here lies the basis for this little article; that The Lord of the Rings reflects what has been happening over the last few hundred years, and what has so suddenly accelerated during the last fifty, and that is the demise of Man, or his steady fall from Enchantment.

I think the example of the Norsemen is interesting in this context as a model of sorts for what is happening to 20th century Man almost everywhere. For the Norse dwelt in a world of elves, dwarfs, wizards, dragons and Gods; as well as with all the creatures and plants that live in Europe today: and that had the same sun, moon, stars, seasons and winds. Were they enchanted? I would say yes indeed, very much more so than we are, and yet their enchantment was broken by the cultural shock of Christianity. This was almost a catastrophe but, (luckily for us all) far-sighted men such as Snorri Sturlusson, worried by the demise of their colourful, vibrant culture, wished to save at least some of it: and so we are blessed with the Prose Edda, and many other such works.

Man faces a similar situation today, only the cultural shock we face is not from Christianity, but Technology, that is expanding at such an enormous rate and bringing in its wake pollution and what Alvin Toffler calls "Future Shock", that is the inability of many people to cope with a technologically oriented society that is ushering in such swift and constant change. It is a "disease" that is already with us. But luckily for us some more far sighted people have realised the danger whilst many of us have become partially blinded. Tolkien, Mirrlees, Huxley, and others, have, in their own ways, tried to open our eyes before it is too late. As Professor Randal Helms states,³ this kind of fantasy, the fantasy of Tolkien, Mirrlees and others, is not for those who wish to desert, but for the escapist who wishes to free himself from the "prison" Man has made for himself.

So I see one aspect of The Lord of the Rings, as depicting this fall from enchantment, for once, in the earlier ages of Middle-earth, Men and Elves, Dwarves and other races had more trust in each other. There was friendship between the Dwarves of Erebor and the Men of Dale, and also between the kingdom of Moria and the Elves of Eregion. Gil-galad and Elendil allied Elves and Men to overcome the common foe in the Second Age. But in the Third Age we see a growing distrust and suspicion amongst the Free Peoples, and there can be no great alliances as there was of old. The predicament that faces all is best

expressed by Haldir " ... in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divide all those who still oppose him."⁴

We can also see that the old wisdom and lore has slipped into decay causing yet more estrangement. Few remember Bombadil, (he has even slipped Elrond's mind) or the Ents, and what tales there are among the Rohirrim and the men of Gondor concerning such matters are scorned as old wives' tales and deemed fit only for children. (The irony here! Tolkien bitterly regretted the debasement of Fairy Tales and their relegation to the Nursery.) We also recall the misgivings Boromir and Eomer have of Lothlorien and Galadriel:

' "Then there is a Lady in the Golden Wood, as the old tales tell!" he said. "Few escape her nets, they say ... But if you have her favour then you also are net weavers and sorcerers, maybe." He turned a cold glance suddenly upon Legolas and Gimli ...'⁵ (Eomer)

This misguided belief that Galadriel is a malevolent sorceress, is an epitome of the type of attitude the Men of Middle-earth generally have, not only of Elves but other races as well. Even in The Hobbit we can see a similar vision, where many of the young men of Laketown begin to disbelieve in the old stories about Smaug: that is until he comes and burns their town down:

The fellowship of the Nine Walkers is an attempt to rekindle trust amongst the divided peoples, and in a way it works, for Legolas and Gimli become fast friends, and all of the company, no matter of what race, come to love and respect Aragorn; and the hobbits Merry and Pippin through their friendship with Treebeard, and later Merry's love for Theoden, tie closer links between long sundered races, and helps to win the day for the West. After the War of the Ring, there is goodwill between the peoples, and Dwarves and Elves help to rebuild Minas Tirith. But it is only a brief respite. The Elves are departing, for the Fourth Age is Man's; the Rings have passed and all other races must dwindle until Man is dominant; and as for hobbits:

"Even in ancient days they were, as a rule, shy of 'the Big Folk', as they call us, and now they avoid us with dismay and are becoming hard to find."⁶

Apart from this decline in Man's ability to see as once he could, I believe he has also come to misunderstand what Faërie is. I do not believe Faërie is a separate realm, (that is separate in the context of being totally sundered from our own, and existing in its own space and time), but that it co-exists around us even now, in the "fields we know", it is just that Man has fallen so far from Enchantment.

At the start of this article I said the way to recapture Faërie was not by "perilous roads", but perhaps I was wrong. We live in perilous times and the way back to light must surely be a perilous, an arduous one. This is why, or one of the reasons, I think, why The Lord of the Rings, is so great and so popular, for it enables us to recover lost enchantment, and see again clearly what this "Fourth Age of Man" has for so long blinded us to.

As Friedrich Nietzsche said:

" ... now let us awaken.

We wandered by night, now let us walk by day."

- Notes: 1. see "Master of Middle-earth" by Paul Kocher, chap. 1 Penguin, '74.
2. "Tree and Leaf/Smith of Wootton Major etc", J.R.R. Tolkien, p.16
3. see "Tolkien's World", Randall Helms, Thames & Hudson, '74; Panther '76
4. LotR, p. 367. 5. LotR, p. 453. 6. LotR, Prologue p. 13

All references to The Lord of the Rings refer to the one volume paperback edition.