



Shadow of death - Hope of life

Here in the western world many of us are content with our affluent and busy lives and give little concern to reality beyond our comfortable horizons. I admit that I was no different in my former life. I was a happy-go-lucky sort of chap, busy with work, raising a family and living a bliss-full - but ignorant life.

It was only some ten years ago that I awoke to the realization of the destructive effects of our way of living upon the Earth. I have since worked to change my own lifestyle and been active in promoting environmental issues through writing and talks. With these essays I act as witness to the perilous state of life upon this Earth - and hopefully inspire change to counter the trend.

In the concrete maze of the "Unreal City"¹ we are confined by artificial constructs, both physical and mental. We each have "a mind of metal and wheels."² It is this dominant mechanistic paradigm that has led to us to become alienated from the Earth. As a consequence humanity over consumes resources, pollutes and destroys life.

It often takes the poet or artist to perceive the essential and have the creative skills to give it expression. In his novel "The Lord of the Rings" JRR Tolkien imagines a place called "Ithilien" It was once "a fair country of climbing woods and swift-falling steams"³. However' after invasion by the Orcs the idyllic land came under the dominion of the Shadow. Ithilien became "desolate" with life "hewn down wantonly and left to die."³



After the victory of the War of the Ring the region was granted to Faramir and Eowyn who vow to renounce their former lives and work to restore the ruined land:

"I will be a healer
and love all things that grow."

"Let us dwell in fair Ithilien
and there make a garden"⁴

But Ithilien represents far more than a fictional country. It is a metaphor that works on many levels. The Shadow, which represents the darkest aspects of industrial civilization, dwells within each of us and among humanity as a whole. It is this which is destroying life on Earth.

In "The Lord of the Rings" Tolkien gives us hope that the Shadow can ultimately be overcome and presents us with the promise that once free mankind can work to resurrect the damaged Earth - "*Paradise Regained*"⁵

The symbol of Ithilien, and specifically the vow of the royal couple, demands that we as individuals redefine our own lives. We should each learn to live simply and close to nature. Each seek to live in a sustainable way in harmony with the Earth.

Tolkien's insight also encompasses all humanity. After half a century of rampant global industrial development the Earth now lays desolate and its vital ecosystems denuded. As a society we need to set aside centuries of materialistic thought to rediscover that we are part of the interconnected whole that is the living Earth.

Thus, Ithilien tells us that as both individuals, and as society, we need to abandon the destructive habits of industrial civilization and seek to emotionally reconnect with life on Earth - to "*love all things that grow*"⁴. We would then work to restore life and make the Earth once again a "*green and pleasant land*".⁶

The "*Earth lies bleeding*"⁷ and I am greatly saddened. It breaks my heart to witness humanity "*killing and maiming*"⁷...to see mankind sleepwalking towards self-inflicted doom:

**"Walk no more in the shadows
but awake!"⁸**



Living in the industrialised west with our televisions, cars and supermarkets it's easy to just ignore the devastating implications of our daily life and actions. We need to wake up! "Now's the time to look, and look again at what you see" and ask ourselves "is that the way it ought to be?"⁹ We need to recognize that as individuals we can change and acting together we can create a better world. Or in the words of George Harrison:

"With our love
we could save the world"¹⁰

We all need to awaken and recognise the reality of the destruction of life on Earth that is happening around us - here and now! We need to find the courage to act, to cast-off our former lives and strive to "dwell in fair Ithilien."⁴

Can there be anything more important?



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