Justin McCutcheon

Essay 2

The world of Middle-Earth is full of interesting ideas and metaphors Tolkien uses to explore ideas in the real world. One of the major concepts that Tolkien is interested in exploring while writing The Lord of the Rings is the idea of the gradual decline of the world and all the characters in it. Among the many things that do decline over the course of the history are; the four Ages decline from the ages of immortals and gods to the ages of mortal men, the evil presence of Morgoth from the Silmarillion dwindles to the much weaker Sauron during the time of the Fellowship, the disappearance of races like the Ents and Elves towards the end of The Lord of the Rings, and the fall of the great wizard Saruman. As a reader of The Lord of the Rings, the fall of Saruman is one that is actively shown and can be followed easily throughout the book. The decline of Saruman, once the most powerful wizard sent by Iluvatar, would eventually succumb to pride and jealousy and begin a downward spiral that mirrors the decline of Middle Earth and acts as a counterpoint to the rise of our heroes and the mortal races of Middle-Earth.

At the start of the third age, five wizards were sent to Middle-Earth to combat the evils of Sauron. Of these five, only three actually appear in The Lord of the Rings; Saruman the White, Gandalf the Grey and Radagast the Brown. The strongest of the five, and the de-facto leader of the order of Wizards is Saruman, who would head the White Council during the resurgence of Sauron. This position as leader of the White Council is contentious, as Galadriel wishes that Gandalf should lead the council, but Saruman is too proud to step down and will continue to lead the council. This is one of the first steps on his downfall, as Saruman will start to become jealous of Gandalf. Gandalf was considered to lead this important council over himself, but more importantly, Gandalf is gifted one of the three Elven Rings, Narya. This jealousy will seep deep into the character of Saruman and will color his actions for the rest of the book.

Over the years of the Third Age, the wizards would scatter across Middle-Earth, with Radagast residing in the woods, Saruman walling himself up in Isengard, and Gandalf wandering all across the lands, making frequent trips to many far off corners of Middle-Earth, most important of which would be the land of the Hobbits in The Shire. A key difference here that underlines Saruman’s fall and Gandalf’s rise is Saruman becoming somehow more of a hermit than Radagast as he hides away in his tower, not directly involving himself with the people outside Isengard, while Gandalf had been mingling with the lesser races such as the Men and Hobbits. During this time Saruman will start to converse with Sauron though the Pallantir, and he is being shown visions of the demise of Middle-Earth, and he starts to believe that the world outside is doomed, and his reclusive nature plays into Sauron’s hand as he has not been outside Isengard and is only taking the word of Sauron as gospel.

During the time that Saruman is speaking with Sauron, Saruman’s deep seated jealousy of Gandalf starts to flare up to the forefront and he formulates two plans for himself. The first is a plan to boost himself to a higher seat of power than his rival Gandalf, and a second plan to undermine the Hobbits that Gandalf cares so deeply about. Both of these plans show Saruman abandoning the things that he was sent to protect and are his first real steps on his downward spiral. This is a culmination of all things that had happened before starting simply with his jealousy of having Gandalf gifted a Ring of Power and the suggestion that he would be a lesser leader than a lower classed wizard than himself.

This first plan is his allegiance with Sauron. In joining forces with the Dark Lord, he throws away his post as the White Wizard and becomes Saruman of Many Colors. This shows Saruman denying a gift bestowed on him by Iluvatar himself for something that actually meant nothing, but appeared to be a greater honor. Claiming himself to be many different colors is in incredibly prideful assumption, and what he would assume is a better place to be than simply “white”. This is an oddly oxymoronic statement, as white is the absence of color, but in this context is full of much more distinction than a gaudy title of “many colors” which means nothing. He also forges himself a ring as well, to reflect the rings of the other great beings, but again is nothing but mere mimicry of the actual powers at work in the world. When Gandalf is present to witness these things, he is shocked and attempts to turn Saruman back to the side of good, but this only leads to Gandalf’s imprisonment at the top of Orthanc. Which will eventually lead to Gandalf’s escape and the reveal to the world that the White Wizard has fallen to the clutches of the Dark Lord.

His second, more subtle plan is planting himself at the heart of an industrial revolution in the Hobbit’s home of The Shire. Here he would transform a town centered on community into a barren wasteland focused solely on the production and distribution of pipe-weed. Here is a fantastic example of Saruman lowering his status and moving backwards in the world as he has done all of this out of spite and jealousy. He did not need anything from The Shire, in fact he never travelled outside of his precious tower in Isengard, but here he focused his efforts and was able to corrupt an entire political ecosystem, and alter an entire race’s way of life simply because he wanted to. This is an incredible waste of potential, as one could wonder what kind of effect Saruman could have had on the war against Sauron had he not wasted his time and energy on this bizarre scheme to transform something Gandalf loved into ruins.

Both of these plans would be the final blow to Saruman as a Wizard, once Gandalf falls facing the Balrog and is reborn as Gandalf the White. Iluvatar has seen the things that Saruman has been doing in Middle-Earth and he decides to rectify the situation by recasting Gandalf in the position that was originally ordained for Saruman. By the time that Gandalf and the rest of the party arrive in Isengard, Saruman is on his last vestiges of what power he has left and he knows that the end is coming for him. This is why he refuses to leave his tower and instead decides to shout down from his balcony to the people below. Here is an interesting contrast, as Saruman is currently at his lowest point so far, and he is literally looking down on people that have obtained a greater prestige than himself through their own rise to greatness. Here he is driven further downwards as Gandalf breaks his staff, and sends him to his final station as a mere mortal known as Sharkey.

After the destruction of the Ring and the defeat of Sauron, Sharkey would venture outside of Isengard for the first time in many years to try an spring his final trap on the Hobbits in his remastered Shire. At this point, Saruman is nothing but a husk with no powers, no prestige and no honor. Upon the return of the Hobbits, who are now honored heroes, clad in the armor of the races and countries that they had protected, the reader is subjected to this sharp contrast where the heroes are at the pinnacle of what they could be, and one who was once a great and powerful wizard is nothing but an old man in rags. Sharkey’s rock bottom finale would occur when he lunges at Frodo with a dagger, but the Mithril coat effortlessly breaks the dagger and as he tries to flee, he would have his throat slit by that very same dagger.

As one of the most complete declines from greatness that the readers witness over the course of The Lord of the Rings, Saruman is the most obvious to track. His jealousy of his peer, Gandalf led him down a path that would strip him of everything that made him great and transformed him into a nobody. Tolkien has placed this sequence of events in it’s entirety in front of the readers in order to underscore the rise of the Good and the eventual fall of the Evil. The emotions of pride and jealousy are present in all “evil” beings, from Melchor wanting to sing his own song to Sauron seeking to grasp a taste of the power that Morgoth would have and Saruman is here in the story to show how these two emotions can conspire together and bring down great beings in an incredibly short period of time.