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Potterworld vs the Spiritual World or how to see parallels between JK Rowling and Swedenborg

Revd Brian Talbot writes:

The world of Harry Potter masterfully created by J.K. Rowling is a time when malice and unkindness is simmering in the background and then takes control. Voldemort, also known as Tom Riddle, has regained his human form, and is wreaking havoc across the country. His henchmen are rounding up kind and generous wizards and witches, interrogating them,

torturing them and imprisoning them. He and his followers are particularly fond of attacking half-bloods – half-magical and half-non-magical people, or muggles, despite the fact that his own father was a non-magical person. (How ironic!)

Swedenborg talks about some newcomers to the spiritual world encountering an “abomination of desolation”, a terrifying, “great, grim cloud and darkness”, in which were deceitful, malicious spirits intent on removing angels from heaven. They are “sycophants and hypocrites” who stifle the light from heaven, and pervert it. Then comes hail, fire and locusts representing times when we’re cold and callous, yet having the fire of anger and selfishness burning inside us, devouring whoever and whatever stands in our way. Yet the LORD’s presence is still within this. When our hearts are overwhelmed by hurt or fear or despondency, and our minds are twisted and controlled by doubts and delusions, “abominable things predominate”, and we cease being compassionate and insightful. “Falsity clouds truth, exactly as a dark cloud obscures sunlight.” The light of heaven or “spiritual light, which uncovers all things.” One can see a similarity with Death-eaters! There also is a parallel with the Dementers, who suck the life out of people. The Patronus Charm, a spell which defends against the Dementers, reminds me a lot of those unconscious and conscious moments of closeness to the LORD, in which we’re inspired and moved, which remain in our memories and exert confidence and belief, years after the initial experience. Swedenborg would call these “remains” or “remnants” states.

But the Order of the Phoenix and Dumbledore’s Army are inside the darkness, and are to some extent protected. For three first years to defeat a mountain troll, was “sheer dumb luck” according to Professor Minerva McGonagall. ““You will find that help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it”, as Albus Dumbledore would say. There is a deeper wisdom that comes through friendship, compassion, self-sacrifice and heroism, that the likes of Voldemort cannot appreciate. I always find it moving when Harry asks his mother to not leave him, when he is about to face Voldemort in the cemetery or in the Forbidden Forest, that she says, she’s never left him. Our deceased angelic friends and relatives are always nearby. In Psalm 23 we are fed despite our enemies being all around us. In times of crisis, despair and uncertainty we are to persevere or “endure to the end.”

One of the problems with the darkness and the obscurity is that the good guys can’t determine the exact cause of the disappearances and the deaths. It all comes down to the horcruxes. It reminds me of our need to be as specific as possible regarding that which is causing our discontent or despondency.

Usually in the Spiritual World, evil, or unkindness, or cruelty, or manipulation, have only temporary control over others. A single, feeble-looking angel can control tens or hundreds or thousands of demons. “This shows that a single little child, or a single angel, is able to drive away myriads of spirits, in fact the whole world of spirits, for they cannot bear the aura of mutual love”. Somehow Harry survived the attack by Voldemort, through his mother’s protective love, or being turned into a horcrux by Voldemort. To some extent, he is the Chosen One. Our hero stumbles and falters, almost aimlessly, supported by his

friends, Hermione and Ron, to face the challenges of the adult wizarding world. He undergoes heart-wrenching loss of his parents, his godfather and others. The odds seem to be stacked against him. It's never explained why Voldemort is more powerful than others, apart from Dumbledore. It's never explained why Molly Weasley can dispatch Bellatrix Lestrange, or why Bellatrix was able to kill Sirius Black and Nymphadora Tonks. In Swedenborg's experience infernal spirits are so deluded to believe they're more powerful than kind and compassionate spirits. Malicious spirits think more quickly than us mere mortals.

However, in times of temptation or crises, the influence of the LORD and his angels seems to be minimised, and the heartless exploitation of others takes over. Usually demons are seen in the light of heaven for what they are: grotesque, barely human, monsters. "Some are as dark and pitch-black as devils. Some have faces as livid as corpses. Some have almost no face but something hairy instead. Some look like a set of teeth; some like a skeleton. Even more strangely, some actually look like monsters, deceivers look like snakes, the worst liars look like vipers, and so on." Angels usually anticipate the plans and intrigues of demons.

There are evil sorcerers in the world of spirits, who do have wands or rods or staffs like Gandulf's or Aaron's. There are commandments to avoid wizards or sorcerers and yet Swedenborg tells us that the genuine prophets used enchantments. This might suggest that the commandments in Leviticus were meant for superficial, materialistic, hedonistic Israelites. Angels can have almost magical powers and don't need to use wands. Their 'powers' are all God-given. They can blind violent demons. They can open and close the superficial levels of demons' minds.

Travel in Potterworld fascinates me. Yes, we have "floo powder" to transport us from chimney to chimney, or portkey or apparition to travel from place to place. In the spiritual world all we have to do is think of someone and they appear to us. It doesn't work if we're not of a similar mind or heart.

Professor Sybill Trelawny, the divination teacher, would be impressed with the amount of divination in the spiritual world. There are 'magical' places which can help determine the truth. Some spirits have swords which gleam depending on how truthful and angelic they are. Angels can dispel or shake away the ignorance or lack of awareness of newly arrived spirits, to help them realise that they are no longer in the world of spirits. Angels can pierce and penetrate the clouds of ignorance.

For fans of Platform 9¾ at Kings Cross Station, they might like to ponder the behaviour of spirits, who walk through walls into their homes rather than using the door. For fans of Buckbeak, the hippogriff, there are animals that appear that are made up of two or more animals. I don't know of any invisible animals like Thestrals, who can only be seen by people who've experienced death. In the spiritual world animals can be turned into corresponding plants and vice versa. Fluffy the three-headed dog reminds me of Cerberus

of Greek legend, which Swedenborg saw in the spiritual world, as protecting love in marriage from promiscuity and salaciousness.

There are witches, or sorceresses, or sirens in the other life, who can change what is said, or alter what is flowing in from heaven, or appear to many people separately, or speak to many simultaneously, or impersonate other spirits. There are evil shape-shifters, who can become little children, or change their faces and appearance so that they can be anybody they want, or impersonate people, and yet they cannot escape their punishers. St Genevieve changes in her face and clothes if people want to worship her. Clothes and furnishings can change instantaneously. There are little people or dwarves, or even giants from other planets. Some proud spirits appear like giants and there are giants who guard the ancient western heaven of the Copper Age. There are robbers who appear as giants. We have promiscuous, lecherous spirits who in the light of heaven look like half-human, half-horse or donkeys, or priapi or satyrs.

I find it fascinating what you can read into Harry Potter. Voldemort has two incarnations, wreaks havoc and dies. If Harry and his friends had not destroyed the horcruxes, he would have had other incarnations. His demise when he disintegrates gradually reminds me of a spirit “grew darker and darker”, appearing to burst into flames before casting himself in hell.

It is amazing that the wonderful imagination of Joanne Rowling has parallels with the spiritual world that Swedenborg experienced for twenty-seven years of his life!

Revd Brian Talbot