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## Only Good Guys Tell Stories: Storytelling and Tradition in Middle Earth

### INTRODUCTION

Some of Tolkien's characters honour tradition and pay great heed to old and half-forgotten stories. These seem to be the protagonists. Others are ignorant of them, but not by choice. They may not be blind to them, or wilfully ignorant, but have for various reasons stopped attending to such things. These characters are seen as good, but often secondary to the protagonists. Others yet are wilfully blind to tradition or choose to heed the parts of the traditions that suit their own ends. Saruman cares not at all for stories and tradition, Denethor clings to the one that sat his forebears as stewards on the throne of Gondor but ignores the one that would see him supplanted by the return of the rightful king. Can we judge the morality of Tolkien's characters by their stance on tradition and stories? I think we can and wonder whether we in fact *should*. I argue that characters' adherence to tradition and attendance on stories may allow others to gauge their morality. My aim is to further explore just how certain characters in Middle Earth can be perceived by their peers or the reader, and to see if I can relate this perception to how the characters treat storytelling and tradition.

### STORYTELLING

In "Tolkien's Sub-Creation and Secondary Worlds: Implications for a Robust Moral Psychology", Nathan S. Lefler argues that by reading fiction, we may grow morally. Further, the art of storytelling is inherently human, a conviction Lefler says Tolkien got from his

Catholic faith. Because God tells stories and we are made in his image, so do we, and they may inspire us to right moral action, according to Lefler (Lefler 1).

To Tolkien, imagination is defined in the context of what he names sub-creation. He wrote that “The incarnate mind, the tongue and the tale are in our world coeval.” (Lefler 5). This means, Lefler argues, that if a man names a thing and thinks up words to describe them, he invents stories. “New form is made, ... Faërie [in the context of fairy-stories] begins; Man becomes a sub-creator.” (Lefler 5). This matters because in other words, simply *being part* of the world makes participants *human*. What implications might this have for the use of stories, or for the nature of people who do not tell or care for stories? Are they then less human?

One who might lend a hand in connecting storytelling with morality as seen through Tolkien’s Catholicism is Aristotle. According to Aristotle, all modes of poetry and narrative are basically imitative, only differing from each other in means, object, or manner of imitation (Lefler 2). According to Lefler, the way Tolkien saw things, the only object of imitation is God. This is because God tells stories, and we are made in his image (Lefler 2). If stories are all ultimately imitating God, the ideal they portray is of course highly moral and inspirational. This is not to say that by imitating God through storytelling that we may transcend humanity and become gods. Rather, it suggests that Tolkien’s Catholic imagination, in which the act of creation was an ongoing process (Smith 75), allowed for potential sparks of divinity, of *good*, in everyone and everything. This would mean that anyone and anything might be a source of wisdom. Ignoring stories of one’s ancestors or contemporaries may then be unwise. Paying attention to stories is moral, because they may allow for moral growth through that spark of divinity that may be found there.

Lefler, and indeed Tolkien himself, discuss the question of what function storytelling serves. The way I see it, if all storytelling is imitative, as Lefler claims, and the object of imitation can only be God, as Tolkien claims, all stories may allow the reader to explore

moral conundrums in battles, whatever form they may take, between good and bad. Or even good and lesser good. Stories may then show us hypothetical characters and situations, or past ones, and let us figure out right from wrong in situations removed from our immediate reality. This way we may be prepared if we one day find ourselves in such a situation. As stated above, according to Tolkien, man becomes a sub-creator through naming and describing things. This means he brings things into being simply by telling stories about them, and in these stories, as I have discussed above, may be found wisdom. This brings us to the heart of a lecture Tolkien held, and an essay that sprung from it, wherein he tried to answer a natural question related to this: “What, if any, are the values and functions of fairy-stories *now*?” (Lefler 5). This question connects well with the potential for moral growth to be found in fantasy.

Connection with our fellow humans, past and present, must then be paramount if we are to benefit from and take part in these stories. Empathy such as this is important to Lefler, as it was to Tolkien and other Catholics. Empathy is useful in understanding the stories of others, but it goes deeper than that: To Lefler empathy is more of a moral obligation. He says that if we enter our neighbour’s story, and accept it as reality, we partake in God’s grand narrative. Through the co-redemptive action of empathetic engagement with others’ stories, we help play out God’s plans for all (Lefler 13). It appears that partaking in stories is not just a way of obtaining wisdom and morality then, but also a moral obligation that we, potentially divine beings, have. Tolkien himself held with the idea, if indeed his fiction stems from his religious view of the primary world, evidenced by the genesis of his own Middle Earth, *Ainulindalë*, from *Silmarillion*. In this story of Tolkienian sub-creation, parallels may easily be drawn to Christian creation. Melkor is comparable to our Lucifer, an angelic being fallen from grace. “And thou, Melkor, wilt discover all the secret thoughts of thy mind, and wilt perceive that they are but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory.” (Lefler 15). To Lefler,

and to me, the role of Melkor demonstrates how Tolkien himself saw the roles of all as part of the great story told by the Great Storyteller himself.

If it's not quite clear yet, fantasy, make-believe, and fairy-tales are not entirely fictional, they have some reality and truth to them. A Tolkienian outlook would insist on the importance of such stories precisely because of the reality present in them. Lefler ties in the moral value of empathy with Tolkien's work by pointing to the idea that everyone is telling their own story, or their sub-creation, and everyone is imploring the readers or listeners of their stories to see them as true (Lefler 11-13). So stories all have some truth to them, and to Tolkien, fantasy always has elements of the primary world also:

Faërie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, *when we are enchanted.*" (Lefler 4)

To put it simply, our sub-creations, or secondary worlds are, according to Tolkien, possessed of "the inner consistency of reality" (Lefler 7). In other words, fairy-tales contain as much reality as they do make-believe. So, fiction can implore us to take the perspectives of others and discover truths hitherto unknown, to foster empathy. To me, the very human values shared by the inhabitants of secondary worlds as well as the primary world make the genre a medium suitable for exploring moral conundrums without the risk of too closely resembling real events of the day, or of appearing to be lecturing or judgmental. It is precisely this reality within Tolkien's fiction that makes fiction itself useful as a pedagogy for right behaviour. To answer Tolkien's question, I suggest that if a story, known and accepted throughout your family, community, or society can teach you how to behave, that's definitely a "value and function of fairy-stories now."

If being human is to tell stories, and these stories spring from the imagination in a lesser or greater extent, and if our imagination, as Lefler further argues, disposes us to right moral action through imitating the God in whose image we were created, then all stories may indeed be seen as tools toward a “robust moral psychology.”

Lefler then claims that to Tolkien, man tells stories because God does. However, scientific research suggests that the act of telling stories goes back roughly 70,000 years, some time before Christianity (Harari 33-36). The Cognitive Revolution is the term for a process that started around 70,000 years ago and lasted approximately 40,000 years. This process began with the forming of cultures within our species, and the following undertakings of these cultures are known as history. Prior to this revolution, there is no evidence of any human history (Harari 17-18). I will not investigate millennia of human existence here, but this Cognitive Revolution merits at least a paragraph or two. Mainly because it too seems to say exactly what Lefler and Tolkien do: storytelling *is* human. Many things changed for humans in this period, but most pertinent to my current undertaking is the emergence of religion, trade, and societal divides (Harari 34). The Cognitive Revolution appears to have brought a change in Homo sapiens’ brain that allowed for much more complex communications than Homo erectus or other primates were capable of (Harari 33-38).

This change gave Homo sapiens the ability to warn of dangers and discuss the dealings of their tribe and its members in a hitherto unrivalled manner. Harari suggests that the most unique aspect of human language is the ability to discuss make-believe. While many species were able to say, “Look out, lion!”, during The Cognitive Revolution humans became able to say things such as “The lion is the guardian spirit of our tribe.” (Harari 37). This is evident from the archaeological finding of the “lion-man” in a cave in Germany, carbon-dated at approximately 32,000 years old (Harari 36). This matters not only because the individual could believe such a thing, but because a whole community could. Hundreds, even thousands

of people could identify with one another on some spiritual level, making a great number of humans gathered together less dangerous. In a tribe of fifty people, there are 1225 unique one-to-one relationships. Those relationships may be less volatile if they all have this one thing in common. You might imagine that fifty chimps gathered together would end in bloodshed. You couldn't get a chimp to give up a banana for the greater good, based on the promise of a mountain of bananas in chimp heaven, either (Harari 37). How abstract ideas which emerged during the Cognitive Revolution allowed for communication of values across peoples and generations would seem to open up a way of passing on ideas of right and wrong. I wonder if morality may have originated here.

Tolkien, then, is quite right in his claim that being human *is* to tell stories, as the claim seems well supported by science. He would probably not have shared the opinion that this storytelling was a result of a genetic mutation some 70,000 years ago, which allowed for greater intelligence. To Tolkien, man tells stories because they are made in the image of the Great Storyteller. Lefler shows how Tolkien's fiction, greatly inspired by his faith, can teach us moral lessons.

Storytelling is not simply human because it is something we do. We do tell stories, and Harari thinks this ability separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom, and Lefler argues that Tolkien saw storytelling as imitating God. My contention is that this ability to tell fantastical, or actual stories, *is* human in the deepest sense. How else would we navigate life? We see ourselves and those around us in the light of what we have heard and read. Our consciousness is in part collective, our being not merely the sum of our individual lived experience, but those of countless others, contemporary and long deceased. In short, stories are vital to the way we see the world.

## TRADITION

In “Tolkien’s Catholic Imagination: Mediation and Tradition”, Thomas W. Smith aims to show how tradition mediates between the sacred and the secular, the past and present, and between fiction and reality. He dispels the notion that tradition to Tolkien could mean hiding in the past and supporting European imperialist ideals, and aims rather to prove how tradition allows us to retrieve values from the past that modernity would leave behind.

Similar to Lefler, Smith is also concerned with how Tolkien’s faith affected his writing. Smith argues against other critics who have posited that Tolkien can be read as imperialist. In short, according to Smith, contemporary readers of Tolkien found similarities between Christians and the good peoples of Middle Earth, and between Muslims and the evil peoples of Middle Earth. Geographically, the Shire may be seen as England, Gondor as Rome, and Mordor and its allies as Islamic and North African nations (Smith 77).

The worth of Tolkien’s work as far as this article is concerned, is found in the individuals from Middle Earth, and particularly in their relationship with ancestry and tradition. Smith links the veneration of tradition and one’s ancestors, which is of high importance in Catholicism, with *The Lord of The Rings*, and shows how tradition in different ways is seen by different characters in Tolkien’s universe.

Smith explores tradition in Middle Earth in an attempt to discover how the Catholic imagination of Tolkien is manifested in his work. A sense of mediation, Smith says, is part and parcel of the Catholic imagination (Smith 75). This mediation speaks to how Catholics view the world, and God’s interplay with it and its people. To Catholics, creation did not just happen a long time ago and then cease. God is still around and interacts with the world and its inhabitants (Smith 75). As such, divinity is all around us, in everything with which God still interacts. This is important to keep in mind when thinking about what Smith labels the Catholic imagination. Simply put, Tolkien’s faith allows him to see potential for divinity,

traces of God, everywhere (Smith 75), and this view of the world also permeates his fictional one.

Smith makes the case that many things mediate meaning in Tolkien's art: characters, nature, sacrifice, justice, and suffering, to name but a few. He narrows the scope of his undertaking by focusing on the mediating role of tradition, and has a closer look at five roles tradition might play in mediating between the real world and Middle Earth, and between the past and the present in either of the worlds:

1. Tradition and Eurocentric Imperialism
2. Tradition and Recovery
3. Tradition and Gift
4. Mortality, Contingency, and Tradition
5. Tradition and Sclerosis

Out of these five, tradition and Eurocentric imperialism is obviously the most controversial. Tolkien fought in the Great War, and in it, he lost four of his five best friends. He also lost both parents before coming of age (Smith 79). Some have read Tolkien's fiction as an allegory to his regrets of real-life suffering and argued that he wants a return to the way the world was before the war (Smith 76-78). As shown above, situations in Tolkien's 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe are comparable in some ways with the situation unfolding in Middle Earth (Smith 77). Tradition and Eurocentric Imperialism is the only negative point out of the five, and Smith happily argues against the idea that Tolkien somehow sought to 'defend' western tradition by means of renewed imperialism. He does this firstly by pointing out that Europe's 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts were primarily fought within Europe, and outside threats such as Islam were hardly an issue. Secondly, Tolkien may have been inspired by a wider timeframe than



the century in which he lived: with a historian's leniencies, he may have regretted the fall of the Roman Empire, the disappearance of Scandinavian colonies in Greenland, or the threat of the Ottoman Turks in the 1500s (Smith 77-78).

With tradition and recovery, Smith suggests that Tolkien is salvaging past traditions that others seem to be disregarding, or in his own words: "imaginatively imparting a vision of renewal through the creation of an alternative reality that functions to give us a new view now that modern constructions of reality have been shattered." (Smith 83). This is again in response to the havoc modernity seems to have wrought, if, like many others, Tolkien saw the Great War as the end product of modernity and industrial 'comfort'. To Tolkien, Smith writes, the modern West had not kept enough of older views that were wise enough "to insist on the limits and proper containment of various kinds of power." (Smith 84). By this, Tolkien thinks, according to Smith, that through power we seek to obtain comforts, control, and luxuries, and in acquiring what we desire, these things are instantly less desirable. As we lock these things in our hoards, we stop looking at them: "... it fosters in certain ways a diminished life, asleep to the wonder of being." (Smith 83). So, Smith argues that Tolkien through his fantasy sought to recover pre-modern traditions which cautioned against excessive power and control, and in so doing again open our eyes to the wonder of being.

On the relation between tradition and gift, Smith takes inspiration from Rémi Brague, who wrote on what he termed Romanity. The Romans did not just influence the modern west through culture and heritage that was entirely their own. They also brought with them older traditions that weren't originally theirs: Judaism and Greek culture. In bringing these traditions into the future, Brague says, the Romans brought something which for them was ancient, as something new (Smith 85). A Modernist perspective will often lead us to see ourselves as the pinnacle of human endeavour, that we have somehow peaked. As such, tradition is easily cast aside as inferior. If we choose to see the value in tradition and receive it

as a gift, much may be gained, Smith says. "... when we accept a gift with gratitude, paradoxically it may render us less selfish, for it is recognition that we need gifts to exist. ... Moreover, gifts are something we often feel called to grow into and live up to." (Smith 86). The realisation that we need gifts (of tradition) to exist, as we shall see, is a reality that some of Tolkien's fictional characters have not come to terms with.

The connection between tradition, mortality, and contingency is an interesting one. Basically, realising one's dependence on others and accepting how life may be unpredictable and frail, is the ideal. The opposite to this would be not to accept any such thing and try to cling to wealth and comfort as buffers against whatever discomfort might come. In other words, greed and comfort are manifestations of the fear of contingency. Smith argues that "One of the most obvious signs of our contingency is our dependence on those who came before us for language, culture, socialization, and indeed, life." (Smith 86). In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo is transformed from a greedy, death-fearing hobbit to an honourable one held in high regard by all, by changing his self-centred self into someone very much in acceptance of his own mortality. By facing the gold-hoarding dragon Smaug, and thus his own mortality, at a wizard's behest, he also defeats the same draconic greed within himself. And, in the process, learns something about foreign languages and cultures (Smith 86-87). In this theme also lies a counterargument to those who would paint Tolkien in imperialist colours, as discussed above: Another people of Middle Earth, the Númenoreans, got greedy and contemptuous, having been gifted longer lives than other men, but living alongside immortal elves. As a result, they colonise Middle Earth and exploit its people: their fear of contingency leads them to imperialism (Smith 87). Both Bilbo and Aragorn are examples of how accepting tradition, mortality and contingency seems the right thing to do: In shedding his parochial view and becoming selfless, Bilbo is redeemed. In opposition to his Númenorean ancestors, Aragorn lives his life in service of his people (and indeed the entire peoples of Middle Earth), and

when his days are finally numbered, accepts death willingly (Smith 86-89). It seems that for Tolkien, “the more we seek to possess securely the evanescent goods of life, the more life slips through our fingers. The notion of tradition he defends refuses power, accepts mortality, and seeks wisdom in humility.” (Smith 90).

Finally, Smith discusses tradition and the risk of sclerosis. In this context, sclerosis is seen as a resistance to change: tradition gone stagnant. Smith shows how many Catholics are all too familiar with rigid hierarchies that indeed have dug their heels in and have stopped actually mediating between men and God: “Clericalism is a refusal to live the mediating character of priesthood, claiming for priests a special sanctity (and thus a special ability to exercise power) not available to everyone else.” (Smith 90). In Tolkien’s fiction, one example of this sclerosis is found with the elves. For all their virtues, they have grown set in their ways. Elves, ‘blessed’ with immortality, grieve over the fading of the world, and cling to their traditions of old. As Smith says, “... they live in the past precisely so that they do not have to deal with change in the present.” (Smith 92). This quote encapsulates the situation in Gondor as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy unfolds: Denethor, the steward of Gondor has grown sclerotic, and claims the tradition of stewardship of the land which his house has long held, as a right, rather than a gift. When the rightful king returns to take his place, Denethor denies and shuns him. The rightful king, on the other hand, Aragorn, treats the tradition with respect and sees this calling as a gift and a responsibility, not a right. In fact, Denethor would rather kill himself and his last living son than face a future of potential loss of rule. As Smith says, the symbolism here is clear: “Those who would reject the mediating power of the past also implicitly “kill” their offspring.” (Smith 92). The point to this is that you shouldn’t deny tradition, nor should you necessarily keep tradition for tradition’s sake. If tradition serves as an escape from the present but does not aid it, or if it serves to empower the individual at the cost of others, proper mediation should allow for alteration of the tradition.

Eurocentric imperialism as Tolkien's intended message of tradition has by now been debunked. Recovering pre-modern traditions as a way of taming our lust for power and opening our eyes to the wonders of the world, has been suggested. Receiving tradition as a gift may leave us less selfish and allow us to grow into that which is bestowed upon us. Acceptance of our tradition, contingency, and mortality may give us better lives, not accepting these may cause our lives to be somewhat diminished. Finally, the risk of sclerosis in mediating traditions has been cautioned against: tradition needs to serve a good purpose.

#### CLOSE READING

Tradition and storytelling are in many ways similar, and storytelling is a tradition in and of itself, but it also mediates tradition between different peoples and the past and the present. In Tolkien's work, the concepts of storytelling and tradition both originate from his Catholic faith, according to Lefler and Smith, respectively. Lefler has shown how stories may all contain moral inspiration. Smith has argued how the mediating role of tradition may brighten our present-day and future. The common ground on which both concepts stand firmly is that they may both serve as tools for a better, more harmonious coexistence within humanity. In my analyses of the characters that follow, the manner in which these characters attend to either, or both of the concepts, will prove suggestive to say the least of their morality and by extension their humanity.

Saruman the White, with whom my analysis begins, a wizard of Gandalf's order, and for a long time considered the greatest of that order, was once eager to listen to stories. As Treebeard escorts Merry and Pippin through Fangorn Forest, he recollects the Saruman of old:

'... He was polite in those days. Always asking my leave (at least when he met me); and always eager to listen. I told him many things that he would never have found out

by himself; but he never repaid me in like kind. I cannot remember that he ever told me anything.' (*Towers* 616)

Treebeard does not detail the nature of the stories he told Saruman in those days, but one might wonder whether the wizard was merely gathering whatever information might aid him in his pursuit of power. Treebeard realises Saruman's lust for power (*Towers* 616), as does Gandalf, albeit a little too late. As Gandalf reaches Isengard, hoping for Saruman's council, he finds his old, trusted friend turned against tradition and eager to empower himself:

'The Elder Days are gone. The Middle Days are passing. The Younger Days are beginning. The time of the Elves is over, but our time is at hand: the world of Men, which we must rule. But we must have power, power to order all things as we will, for that good which only the Wise can see.' (*Fellowship* 337)

Leaving aside the 'good which only the Wise can see', in this excerpt is a clear disregard for days past, and the old order of things. It is also clear that Saruman is lusting for power, which, as we have seen, Tolkien warns against, according to Smith. This disregard for traditional values and grasping for power shows just how Saruman is morally corrupt. One might also consider his past gathering of information towards his own malevolent designs, as an immoral way of attending to stories. The condemnation of Saruman's will to dominate evident in the citation above (and below), is also a clear indicator of how against imperialism Tolkien was, as discussed by Smith. This is to say that a renewal of imperialism is decidedly not one of the uses tradition had in Tolkien's view.

As I have briefly mentioned Denethor when discussing the mediating role of tradition in Smith's perspective, I wish to elaborate on this character. Where Smith shows how Denethor clings to the tradition that sat him on the throne, he ignores the 'ad interim clause', and denies the old prophecy of the return of the king. In keeping with this, and following evidence, I posit that Denethor is wilfully ignorant when it comes to stories and traditions

other than those that presently empower him. When confronted by Gandalf about his intended suicide and indeed also filicide, Denethor is clearly stuck in the past, or is, as Smith terms it: sclerotic:

‘I would have things as they were in all the days of my life,’ answered Denethor, ‘and in the days of the longfathers before me: to be the Lord of the City in peace, and leave my chair to a son after me, who would be his own master and no wizard’s pupil. But if doom denies this to me, then I will have *naught*: neither life diminished, nor love halved, nor honour abated.’ (*Return* 1118)

It seems that rather than facing the enemy at the gate, and risking his life and loss of rule, Denethor would rather kill himself and his son, Faramir. In other words, Denethor’s fear of contingency, that is to say, the fear of what may yet come, a prophecy fulfilled, and the rule of Gondor passed over to the blood of the old kings, leads him to kill himself, and attempting to kill his son. The immorality and inhumanity of this need hardly be stressed.

The morality of the King of Rohan, Théoden, son of Thengel, shames that of Saruman and Denethor. His relationship with tradition is admirable, but in this context, he is interesting because he is ignorant of some stories, perhaps through no fault of his own. His long reign and respectable age have to some degree closed his mind to the wonders of the world. Upon seeing live, moving trees, shepherds of trees in fact, for the first time, Théoden is at a loss: “Where are their flocks? What are they, Gandalf? For it is plain that to you, at any rate, they are not strange.” (*Towers* 717). To this Gandalf answers:

‘Is it so long since you listened to tales by the fireside? There are children in your land who, out of the twisted threads of story, could pick up the answer to your question. You have seen Ents, O King, Ents out of Fangorn Forest, which in your tongue you call the Entwood. Did you think the name was given in idle fancy? Nay, Théoden, it is otherwise: to them you are but the passing tale; all the years from Eorl the Young to

Théoden the Old are of little count to them; and all the deeds of your house but a small matter.’ (*Towers* 717)

With this, Théoden’s mind seems open again to things which his customs, labour, and responsibilities had made him ignorant of:

... ‘We cared little for what lay beyond the borders of our land. Songs we have that tell of these things, but we are forgetting them, teaching them only to children, as a careless custom. And now the songs have come down among us out of strange places, and walk visible under the sun.’ (*Towers* 717)

To those who have read *The Lord of the Rings*, or watched the films, it is quite clear where on the morality spectrum Théoden belongs. Once helped back to his old self, he fought successfully for his people and contributed in no small part to the victory of the fellowship. His example above serves merely as an illustration of an individual you might find halfway up the ‘belief in stories’ scale, but as we have seen he redeemed himself also here. By so doing he is reawakened to the wonder of being that Smith suggests we may revel in by recovering past traditions. While he is definitely good in all regards, he is not among the main protagonists, most of whose morality or fantastic beliefs can’t be faulted in the slightest. One such will serve the purpose of my final analysis.

You would be forgiven for thinking Aragorn or Gandalf, one of the obvious heroes of the story would be my final object. While either of them would serve me well, another, often overlooked, and sometimes even looked down upon, both literally and figuratively, by ‘greater’ men, is Peregrin ‘Pippin’ Took. If attention to stories and tradition are the markers of moral prowess, this hobbit is certainly worthy of praise. Portrayed as a careless nuisance from the start of the story, he matures as it unfolds. Fleeing with Gandalf towards Minas Tirith, Pippin seizes the opportunity to wrench from the wizard many stories on a variety of topics: The speed of their mount, Shadowfax, old rhymes of lore, and the origin and uses of the

*palantírs* (*Towers* 779-781). A palantír is a seeing-stone, or crystal ball, allowing magical communication with others in possession of one such stone, at the time in question thought a great danger, as the enemy could use this to follow your movements (*Towers*, 780-781).

Before Pippin's thirst for knowledge is wholly quenched, he is interrupted by Gandalf:

“'Mercy!' cried Gandalf. 'If the giving of information is to be the cure of your inquisitiveness, I shall spend the rest of my days in answering you. What more do you want to know?'"

(*Towers* 781). To this Pippin replies:

'The names of all the stars, and of all living things, and the whole history of Middle-earth and Over-heaven and of the Sundering Seas,' ... 'Of course! What less? But I am in no hurry tonight. At the moment I was just wondering about the black shadow. I heard you shout "messenger of Mordor". What was it? What could it do at Isengard?'

(*Towers* 781-782)

To me, this clearly demonstrates a keen interest in things ancient and forgotten, as well as things pertinent to their current danger. So, Pippin is very interested in history and the way of the world. He is also wise in honouring deeds done and people departed, a tradition shared by many moral inhabitants of Middle Earth:

'The mightiest man may be slain by one arrow,' he said; 'and Boromir was pierced by many. When last I saw him he sank beside a tree and plucked a black-feathered shaft from his side. Then I swooned and was made captive. I saw him no more, and know no more. But I honour his memory, for he was very valiant. He died to save us, my kinsman Meriadoc and myself; waylaid in the woods by the soldiery of the Dark Lord; and though he fell and failed, my gratitude is none the less.' (*Return* 988)

This attitude resonates well with a few points Smith makes in his exploration of tradition: Not only does Pippin seem to have accepted his own contingency, that is to say his mortality and dependence upon others. He also seems to have accepted this gift of life and has indeed taken



strides towards living up to the gift. He also grows into it, as Smith further suggests one might feel obliged to do: The same valour which Boromir displayed in defending his companions, Pippin showed in retaking the Shire from Saruman and his ruffians. In fact, he wrote himself into the history books of the Shire by being instrumental in its defence:

So ended the Battle of Bywater, 1419, the last battle fought in the Shire, ... and the names of all those who took part were made into a Roll, and learned by heart by Shire-historians. ... at the top of the Roll in all accounts stand the names of Captains Meriadoc and Peregrin. (*Return*, 1329)

With this then, Pippin has also taken part in the grand narrative by empathising with the inhabitants of the Shire and all of Middle Earth, as Lefler claims is a moral obligation.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Lefler's argument of how storytelling can positively influence our morality, can be applied to Tolkien's characters, and allow for a deeper perspective of his work, and an appreciation for how his work has been influenced by his religion. The same is true of Smith's argument on the mediating role of tradition: much may be kept or saved from the past, for the betterment of the present and future. Those who ignore these things, do so at their peril. And in Tolkien's fiction, to their downfall. Hopefully, my analysis of these characters Tolkien created has shown how their veneration of tradition and their attentiveness to stories allow the reader to gauge their morality, and although this is fiction, morality is the same in fictional and actual realms. This allows the reader to gain wisdom applicable to life from Tolkien's work.

What significance this attendance to stories and tradition may have beyond individual morality, whether Tolkien judged actual people by the same standards I have now judged some of his fictional ones, and if so, whether *we* should also pay attention to stories and tradition, *and* be wary of those who do not, I will leave for the reader to ponder.

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