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Seth D. Naslund
St. Cloud State University

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Seth D. Naslund

Starred Papers

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

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Glenn Davis, Chairperson
Matthew Barton
Bradley Chisholm

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Table of Contents

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The Marvel comic book *Chaos War,* by authors Greg Pak and Fred Van Lente and illustrator Choi Pham, tells an apocalyptic narrative in which the world and indeed the universe are in danger of being destroyed by the seemingly unstoppable Chaos King. However, the earth is not without defenders. Into this apocalyptic crisis comes Hercules, from Greek myth, amongst other superheroes that exist in the Marvel Universe. These brave heroes endeavor to thwart the Chaos King's cataclysmic designs, but after several failed attempts it seems as though he cannot be stopped. Yet, when hope seems gone and the world and all of its inhabitants doomed, Hercules, through power granted him by the gods, is able to defeat the Chaos King and send him into another world that is sealed off from the rest of the universe. After the confrontation has come to an end and the apocalypse has been avoided, Hercules uses all of his power as a god-like being to restore the Earth to what it was before the Chaos King had started his assault. The power Hercules uses is even able to restore life to all those that died in the conflict. This feature of the narrative transforms an apocalypse into an event that had little or no lasting effect on the fictional world portrayed in the comic. The defeat of the Chaos King is the only element of the story that has any lasting effect on the world of the narrative. Even the destruction and death that had been caused by the Chaos King is erased by Hercules leaving behind no evidence of the cataclysmic confrontation and creating an apocalypse narrative in which the characters have little at stake. This type of no-stakes apocalypse is not limited only to the *Chaos War,* but can be found in many comic book narratives. It is a theme that occurs with some frequency with narratives that build up the stakes for a cataclysmic end of the world scenario only to have the apocalypse prevented by

the heroes and the world to return to a similar status quo that was shown at the beginning of the narrative.

To better understand this notion of a no-stakes apocalypse that can be frequently found within comic books it can be helpful to read them through the lens of American exceptionalism—a world view that holds the United States as a country that is different and separated from all of the other countries in the world. Comic books and superheroes, in general, are by many considered to be primarily an American art form.[1] Many cultures have their own mythologies and legends of characters with superhuman abilities; however, America is the place where these types of characters first wore bright-colored tights and capes, fought criminals in the streets and appeared and became symbols of popular culture.[2] Thus superheroes and comics in general are an inherently American art form, but over the years the community of comic creators has become far more global. Even though respected comic creators Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, the creators of *Watchmen*, are from England, and Grant Morrison, the author of DC's *Final Crisis* is Scottish, they still work with characters and locations that are primarily American and deal with American issues. That said, even though comic books and those who work on them has become an increasingly global market the influence that America has had on comic books is impossible to calculate. Many of the characters who are in comics are inherently American or reside in obviously American locations like New York, as in the cases of the Fantastic Four, Spiderman, and Daredevil. Therefore, within many comic books written by authors who are (and are not) from

[1] Sean Howe's *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*, Laurence Maslon and Michael Kantor's *Superheroes Capes, Cowls, and the Creation of Comic Book Culture* and Peter Coogan's *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* were all helpful resources in constructing the history of comics in American culture.

[2] The work of Marco Arnaudo's *The Myth of the Superhero,* and Don LoCicero's *Superheroes and Gods* helped establish the role that comics and superheroes have played in creating an American mythology.

the United States, there is still a tone of American exceptionalism that seems to almost naturally belong within the pages of comics. The concept of American exceptionalism is examined by Seymour Martin Lipset, who discusses the role of this theory as a reflection of American society. Throughout his text Lipset discusses the exceptionalism that seems to pervade American society from the aspects of history, sociology, economics and several other topics in which America is distinct from other nations of the world. While exceptionalism is in general held to be a positive term, Lipset does caution that the term can be used in a negative sense as well. That is to say that America, while exceptionally good at some aspects of life, is also exceptionally bad at others. He cites the crime rates in America which are some of the highest in the world stating that these statistics show America in an exceptionally bad light, but it still portrays the country as exceptional even if that means something bad for the country (13). This could also potentially feed into a negative worldview for the residents of the United States as well. While there is nothing wrong with appreciating one's country and enjoying the benefits that the U.S. can provide for its citizens, this outlook could have a lasting negative impact not only on individual citizens, but also on a nation as a whole. This concept of exceptionalism can be used as defense of and even support for a view that might makes right and anything America does is for the good of all of humanity. This view point is most definitely one that could lead to potentially dangerous and disastrous ends not only for the U.S. but the world as a whole should it be used in a corrupted fashion. Nevertheless, even though the term can have a negative connotation in referring to society in the United States on the whole Lipset sees American exceptionalism as a positive aspect and highlights these beliefs throughout his book.

William V. Spanos complicates Lipset's understanding of American exceptionalism by examining it in a post-9/11 context. Spanos claims that the international and military policy that the U.S. adopted after that event was just an extension of an American exceptionalistic worldview that had pervaded the country since its very beginnings (175). However, Spanos does not limit his discussion of exceptionalism to the history of the United States, but also looks at literature that has been produced throughout U.S. history and interprets it through an America exceptionalistic lens. He also chooses texts that illustrate the apocalyptic nature of American literature.[3]

Spanos discusses how the United States from the earliest years of its settlement has portrayed itself as a nation different from other nations of the world, and one that seem to have a destiny of superiority to all other countries (176). It is this idea of superiority found within American exceptionalism that has created an undefeatable image of the United States as a world power in an attempt to reinforce the belief that it will overcome any obstacle however grand in scale, such as an apocalypse.[4] The apocalypse has taken on different forms and threatened America in different ways throughout the years, and the exceptionalism of the country as well as its autonomy has been threatened many times in the history of American literature. However, the characters in the literary works Spanos examines are able to live up to

[3] Douglas Robinson's work *American Apocalypses: The Image of the End of the World in American Literature* was extremely beneficial in establishing the history of the apocalypse in American literature throughout the country's history. Also the work of Rodica Mihaila in "Strategies of Endurance: The Myth of American Exceptionalism" and Thomas B. Byers in "A City Upon a Hill: American Literature and the Ideology of Exceptionalism" were both extremely helpful in establish the place exceptionalism has played in the American mythos.

[4] The essays collected in Lois P. Zamora's book *The Apocalyptic Vision in America: Interdisciplinary Essays on Myth and Culture*, particularly the essays by Ernest Cassara, Dawn Glanz, John Wiley Nelson, and Zamora herself worked to establish how the apocalyptic vision in America is one with a long history and something that has affected all different aspects of American history.

the exceptionalistic world view that dominates much of America (183). Through the use of these literary works Spanos illustrates that a belief in American exceptionalism is not something new, but has been a part of this country for many years and has pervaded the pages of literature for just as long. Spanos seems to suggest that American exceptionalism and the role that it plays in endeavoring to thwart the potential apocalypse is a re-imagining of Manifest Destiny which was long believed to be the reason behind America's successful expansion. Thus it is this exceptionalism in the national mindset that allows for the portrayal of an apocalypse that is preventable by the American people. This perception of American exceptionalism is an ethnocentric worldview, yet one that gains merit through the reading of what I have termed as no-stakes apocalypse narratives in comic books.

These no-stakes apocalypses are created when the world appears in danger of being destroyed by a villain or a group of villains. However, a superhero whether it be Superman, Spider-man, or any hero or teams of heroes like Hercules and his comrades in the *Chaos War,* endeavor to thwart the villain and save the world from utter destruction. While the threat of apocalypse in these narratives may seem real, in actuality it allows for the reader to follow the characters to the precipice of disaster with the full knowledge that the hero will save the day and everything will return back to normal by the end of the comic book. Nevertheless, the apocalypse that the villain intends for the world is avoided by either the successful defense of the planet by the hero or through an inexcusable blunder on the part of the villain. The reader can feel confident in this reading of the comic for several reasons. This confidence is in part due to the fact that the character is portrayed as a protector of America and that no threat from any villain from earth or space is any real threat to the safety and autonomy of the United

States. Thus the heroes themselves are working in situations where the danger may seem real and the threat to the character may even be real, but in the end the character will save those he or she is protecting.[5] Exceptionalism is shown here through the very actions and existence of the superhero in that the hero will keep America safe at all costs from any who would seek to do her harm.

The most obvious reasoning behind the confidence the reader has in the hero is the fact that the hero is no doubt a part of a series in which the character will appear the following month. Thus the potential apocalypse offers no threat to either the reader or the hero since the character is expected to face another dire situation in the next issue. Another reason as to why the apocalypse truly holds no stakes for the reader or the characters in the comic is due to the fact that any given hero may appear in several different independent titles in which the events of one do not affect necessarily affect the events of the others. Thus even should the hero meet his or her demise in one comic there is the possibility that she or he will still appear in the other comic titles. Nevertheless, should the death of the hero be one that crosses all titles, this death is rarely permanent and almost inevitably the character returns. When DC decided to kill off Superman in 1993, for example, they never intended the death to be one that was lasting and permanent. Nevertheless fans believed it to be the end of the Man of Steel and *The Death of Superman* proved to be one of the highest selling comics of all time.[6] Similarly, even though he recently met his demise, Marvel fan favorite Wolverine, will no doubt not stay

[5] Greg Garrett's *Holy Superheroes* was useful in looking at several aspects of superheroes particularly the analysis of the apocalypse in chapter 9. For further reading into superheroes and their psychology *Superhero Origins: What Makes Them Tick and Why We Care* by Robin S. Rosenberg as well as *Superheroes and Superegos: Analyzing the Minds Behind the Masks* by Sharon Packer were both helpful resources in looking at why various heroes act in the manner that they do and what their motivations truly are.

[6] For more see Larry Tye's book on the history of Superman particularly Chapter 10 'Til Death Do us Part' for more on Superman's death in the comics.

dead. It is hard to imagine that the nearly invulnerable mutant will remain dead for long and it most likely will not be long before the feisty Canadian is back fighting his enemies once again. Even if the death does appear to have lasting consequences upon the character, there are always the various universes within the comic book world that exist making it possible for a character to be dead in one universe or dimension of time while still alive and fighting crime in another. Grant Morrison's comic *Final Crisis* is a good example of this when several different incarnations of the Flash, from different times, are able to join powers through time travel and change the events occurring within the world. It is also within Morrison's comic that one can see Superman meeting several versions of himself from several different dimensions. Thus both deaths and apocalyptic events within the comic book world often times hold little threat to the publishable life of a character.[7]

As stated previously, American exceptionalism is the belief that America is different from all of the other nations of the world. This belief holds the United States to a different standard and creates a feeling of superiority over the other countries of the world. This idea is perfectly clear in comics from the fact that the majority of the characters are clearly American. Captain America displays his patriotism in his uniform and morals, teenager, Peter Parker (Spider-man) defends one of America's greatest cities (New York) from all evil doers who would seek to cause harm, and Batman whose war on crime involves threats from enemies both internal and external. Granted, not all heroes are born in the United States, but the majority of those who are born outside of the country take it as their home and will fight to the death for the safety and ideals of their adopted country. Wonder Woman, and Hercules

[7] See Jose Alaniz's work in *Death and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond* for more on death in comic books.

come from the world of ancient Greek mythology and yet they choose America as their twenty-first century home. Wolverine, one of the most popular Marvel characters, comes from Canada, but frequently fights for right on American soil. And the most famous of all superheroes, Superman, is also an immigrant, not from another country, but from an entirely different planet. Superman is fundamentally associated with America more than any other character in comic book lore except, perhaps, Captain America. Often pictured with the American flag, he is portrayed as exemplifying the values of America of "Truth, Justice, and the American Way" through his actions and exceptional moral standards. Superman was not born in the United States, but rather is of alien ancestry and his space shuttle merely crashed into a Kansas field, by accident, when he was just a baby.[8] He was taken in by a couple, that owned a farm, and as a result America became Superman's adopted home. Thus the values and morals that he learned while growing up on a farm in Smallville, Kansas are indicative of the actions that he takes throughout the course of his comic book existence are generally in alignment with the prevailing morality of America. Through the centrality of superheroes residing within the bounds of the United States and the villains that oppose these heroes generally attacking targets on U. S. soil contributes to the belief that there is something different and perhaps special about America. Thus America becomes the location of the apocalyptic battles that heroes must prevent as a means of keeping safe their home and the people that rely upon the heroes to save the world from all dangers. However, if the heroes should fail in their self-assigned duty to save both America and even the world from the

[8] For an interesting alternate depiction of Superman's beginnings on Earth, see Mark Millar's *Red Son* which imagines what would have happened if Superman's space shuttle had crashed into the Soviet Union rather than Kansas.

apocalypse they should reveal that perhaps America, and through it the heroes themselves, is not nearly as exceptional as many believe.

One of the most critically acclaimed comic books of recent years is the DC comic *Kingdom Come*. Written by Mark Waid and Alex Ross, and illustrated by Ross, *Kingdom Come* deals with both the concept of an apocalypse and has subtle undertones that display American exceptionalism throughout the comic book. From the opening panel of the first chapter the reader is confronted with words from the Biblical book of Revelation, and an image of an eagle with outspread wings that are pictured in such fashion as to be reminiscent of the stars and stripes of the American flag. The eschatological nature of the narrative does not end here, but continues to build throughout the text to a final apocalyptic battle amongst Earth's greatest heroes. The apocalyptic language that pervades much of the text is a constant reminder to the reader that the plot of the narrative is moving towards a battle that could destroy the entire world.

The main character of the narrative, Norman McCay, is a minister, which is fitting considering that much of the text deals with an apocalypse of near Biblical proportions and a considerable amount of Biblical language. Words such as Ragnarok (the Norse name for the end of the world), Armageddon, Magog, and Wormwood (spelled Wyrmwood in the comic and used as the name of the Secretary General of the U. N.) are only a few instances of religious or mythological language that carries the significance of the end of days. Both Ragnarok and Armageddon are referred to by the individual who is showing Norman McCay these things and are in reference to the upcoming battle between Superman and his allies and the rebellious metahumans (individuals who have superpowers, but who are not necessarily

heroes or villains) in a conflict that could very well represent the end of the world or at the very least the end of the United States as it has always been known. Magog in this context is the metahuman who avenged the death of Superman's wife by killing the Joker and also was one of the metahumans responsible for the destruction of Kansas. Thus the name in the narrative is not used as it is in the eschatological fashion as an ancient reference to Russia. Some scholars suggest that Magog, which is referenced in the Bible, is a geographical reference for the land that today is known as Russia. Thus the character of Magog acts in such a manner as to seem as an ally of Superman in avenging the death of Lois Lane, but instead acts in a ruthless fashion that opposes what the Man of Steel stands for. While in this instance, of the story, Magog is used as the name of an American hero; his actions are foreign to the superhero community around him, therefore causing him to be an enemy of Superman. This core conflict between these two characters seems to hint at more going on than just two characters with a different modus operandi when it comes to dealing with criminals, but rather seems to signify a bigger battle between world powers as represented in Magog as Russia and Superman in the form of United States. Hence the connection between the name of Magog within the text and its potential interpretation as one of the United States' long-time rivals is an interesting dichotomy and one that plays into the concept of American exceptionalism showing that Magog's method of thwarting crime is through ruthless violence whereas Superman would rather seek to achieve peace and only use force as a last resort. Thus as these names imply much of the comic book will have dealings with end of the world scenarios so it should not come as a surprise that language from various cultures that allude to the eschatological events would come into play in a text that foretells of the end of days.

In continuing the apocalyptic theme, each chapter of the comic begins with more quotations from the book of Revelation, which helps to solidify the discourse of eschatology that occurs throughout the text. Thus the reader is consistently bombarded throughout the text with apocalyptic language that evokes thoughts of the end of the world. The language is not the only aspect of the comic that hints at an apocalypse, but the overarching narrative of the comic have clear connections to the apocalypse while the narrative and the imagery are used in such a fashion to solidify the fact that the narrative takes place on American soil and is primarily concerned with the welfare of America and its citizens.

McCay, through the power of an angel-like being, is allowed to see the catastrophes that will be visited upon the Earth by uncontrolled superheroes if nothing is done to change the current trajectory of events. Superman, who retired from his superhero duties due to the death of his wife, returns from a life of seclusion at the request of Wonder Woman, who hopes that he can set things right in the world that he had abandoned. After much of the state of Kansas is destroyed in a confrontation between several metahumans Superman returns to once more mete out justice to the citizens of America and reign in the actions of the unlawful super beings. The destruction of Kansas serves a two-fold purpose within the narrative of the text. While it is the incident that eventually gets Superman to return to saving the world as he had once done it also shows that without his protection and guidance America is not safe from any threats be they foreign or domestic. If the state that Superman was raised in is vulnerable to destruction then the rest of the United States is also in danger of by both reckless metahumans as well as foreign powers. Hence if Superman is no longer exceptional what does that mean for the masses of humanity that live within the United States? Superman's failure

seems to imply that the country and all of its citizens are condemned by his inability to save his wife and native state from danger, a further reflection on the state of exceptionalism within the country. Also, by destroying much of Kansas as opposed to destroying some metropolitan center it signifies the destruction of the heartland of America. In comics, generally, the threat that is posed against humanity is to some great city with millions of inhabitants, such as in the fictional cities of the DC Universe (Gotham, Metropolis, Starling City, etc.) or the real ones of the Marvel Universe (New York, Washington, DC, etc.), however, if the threat has spread to the heartland of America then the whole country becomes vulnerable to destruction both from within and without. Thus when Superman finally returns from his self-imposed exile he knows that his battle will not be one that is fought merely in metropolitan centers, but in more rural environments around the globe as well.

Initially Superman's justice takes the form of peaceful negotiations with the unlawful metahumans, and he is shown repairing the torch-bearing arm of the Statue of Liberty as an almost symbolic representation of his need to repair the United States and return it to the way it was before his self-imposed exile. Nevertheless, his justice becomes less peaceful as the metahumans refuse to recant their reckless and violent ways and Superman's war soon extends beyond the confines of the United States and includes all of the nations of the world.

As a result of the conflicts the unrepentant metahumans are imprisoned in a gulag built in Kansas created for the sole purpose of holding them prisoner and as a means of reconditioning them to be better able to serve humanity. This choice of location for the gulag is curious considering it was the sight of a cataclysmic event that cost the lives of the thousands of people, but now holds those who were partly responsible. The choice of placing

it at the heart of American soil could be read as a means that only in America can right be found and those committed to doing wrong could only be reconditioned by one of America's greatest heroes. The use of Kansas is also fitting since in a way it shows Superman forcing the metahumans to return to the site of one of their greatest acts of destruction. It was here where they destroyed the lives of millions of people and as a result Superman builds his gulag on the ashes of the destruction as a reminder of the destruction these metahumans have caused as well as a means of covering up the disaster that had occurred due to his own absence from the world of society. It also places all of the pressure on the superheroes that have joined with Superman (Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, Flash, etc.) to protect both the United States and the rest of the world by ensuring that these dangerous metahumans do not escape from their prison and once again wreak havoc on the defenseless members of humanity. Superman's arrogance at believing that only his prison and method would be capable of rehabilitating the rebellious metahumans carries with it an undertone of American exceptionalism that insinuates that only America is capable of both saving the world and saving those who are dangerous from both harming others and harming themselves.

As the narrative progresses it becomes more and more clear, through the eyes of Norman McCay, that the events in the comic are working towards a boiling point in which an apocalyptic confrontation will occur where not only America but the world itself might be in danger of destruction brought about by the hands of reckless metahumans. As Superman continues to gain control of the metahuman population, McCay also is made aware of the events transpiring around Superman's one time ally Batman. Superman seeks to gain the Dark Knight's allegiance to the cause of rounding up the metahumans, but he is repulsed since

Batman knows that deep down what is being done is against everything both of the iconic heroes have always stood for. While Superman and Batman have not always seen eye-to-eye on the best means of achieving justice through their long and complicated history, Batman can see that his friend has changed his means of seeking justice. Rather than living by the code that has become synonymous with his name—"Truth, Justice and the American Way" — Superman now seeks to control the actions of others (both humans and metahumans) by forcing them into following what he sees as the best means of achieving these ends. Rather than giving humanity and the metahumans the option of freedom of choice, Superman instead has forced them to follow his own personal definition of truth, justice and a new American way based upon his own personal definition of the terms. Batman, on the other hand, while known for using fear as a technique to enforce justice, never uses his power and technological resources to subject the world to his own form of justice. He follows a strict code of justice and he will not bend these rules; however, to Batman it seems as though his one-time ally has become something that both of them have always stood against—a dictator who enforces his own beliefs upon everyone else. This manner of achieving justice on the part of Superman displays the negative side that exceptionalism can hold for those that would adhere too closely to its precepts. A belief in the exceptionalism of a country is not bad in itself, but it can be used as a dangerous weapon when in the hands of someone in a position of power. While Superman can justify his actions according to his new self-prescribed code of conduct, in reality he is attempting to make everyone like him despite the fact that the new Superman is one that is ruling by the belief that might makes right and that those in power dictate how those with less power should live. Thus in a world in which Superman decides what is right

and wrong, exceptionalism becomes an arbitrary concept and one that only Superman can define by his decisions and actions. It is in stark contrast to the means by which he has meted out justice in the past which causes a rift amongst the superhero community. It is due to this new modus operandi by Superman that causes Batman to make what seems to be a most unlikely of alliances.

By all appearances it seems as though Batman, and his own heroic allies, join forces with Superman's longtime nemesis Lex Luthor in an attempt to stop Superman and Wonder Woman from what seems to be the beginning of a potential reign of terror by the two heroes. Luthor once again is an example of American exceptionalism gone wrong. Often lauding himself as the most brilliant mind in the world, Luthor uses his vast intelligence for the purposes of evil such as murder and theft rather than as a means of helping the world. Thus if America is the home of some of the greatest heroes of the comic book world (Superman and Batman) it should come as no surprise that it also is the home of some of the most evil villains in the world as well. Even though this alliance between Batman and Luthor seems to be improbable, Batman merely seeks the alliance as a means by which to prevent Luthor from turning the precarious situation to his own advantage and also as a means of keeping tabs on the actions of Superman and Wonder Woman.

Near the climax of the narrative the imprisoned metahumans begin to rebel and endeavor to break out from the gulag. They are aided in their escape by Billy Batson/Captain Marvel (occasionally referred to as SHAZAM), a superhero and one-time ally of Superman and Batman who had been brainwashed by Luthor. This once again shows the potential arbitrary nature of exceptionalism in that it can change due to the influences of others. Due to

his brainwashing and his resulting actions of freeing the metahumans, Captain Marvel brings about what Lex Luthor had planned—an Armageddon-like conflict between all of the super beings on the Earth. Seeing the destruction and devastation being caused by the warring metahumans, and fully aware that the battle could soon envelop the entirety of the United States, the Secretary General of the United Nations ordered for specially made nuclear bombs to be dropped on all the metahumans warring outside the prison complex in Kansas. With nothing to distinguish between human or super humans the dropping of the nuclear devices would result in a cataclysmic death toll certain to reach into the millions. Nevertheless, the loss of life does not deter those at the UN since there is the fear that if the battle between metahumans is not eliminated in this rural arena, it might soon spill into more urban environments and eventually across the globe as well. Fully aware that these nuclear warheads will kill both good superheroes and dangerous metahumans is a sacrifice that the UN is willing to take under the circumstances. This shows a potential willingness within the U.S. to start things over when a situation becomes out of hand and uncontrollable. Rather than wasting time and energy trying to fix the existing situation perhaps it is best to merely start over. Even with the destruction of much of Kansas and all of the metahumans on Earth, America will still be exceptional and the most powerful nation in the world because nothing could ever change that from an American perspective. America is in control of its own destiny even if that entails destroying part of its own heartland. Thus at the insistence of UN Secretary General Wyrmwood, an executive order is given to drop the warheads on the unsuspecting combatants surrounding the Kansas battlefield, creating a self-imposed apocalypse on American soil that will affect both the innocent humans and the warring super humans.

In the end, Superman, locked in a struggle with Captain Marvel, convinces his brainwashed former friend to allow him to take care of the warhead that will spell the doom of millions of lives, including the majority of the existing metahumans. Captain Marvel, however, understanding Superman's willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of his country and for all of humanity to bring this apocalyptic battle to an end, takes the Man of Steel's place and dies in the process. While Captain Marvel and many others do die in the battle, as a result of the nuclear explosion the apocalypse that would have resulted in the end of metahuman life on earth was averted. Thus an apocalypse that seemed to be a certainty in the end was avoided and it had little chance of actually destroying the world, thus fitting into the category of a no-stakes apocalypse. Due to the loss of Captain Marvel and many others during the battle, Superman realizes that such destruction can never again be visited upon the Earth again and that the remaining metahumans must serve as healers to the world rather than merely protectors. They must use their powers as a means of guiding humanity down the right path and showing them what is right since without the guidance of heroes the world would be lost. This recalls an exceptionalistic tendency that can be seen in America's own interactions with the world since all too often America takes on the role of guiding other nations in what is right and wrong whether or not these nations ask or even require the help. By the end of the narrative Superman and Wonder Woman reveal that they will have a child and that he or she will be raised in such fashion as to represent and enforce the new ideals of America in the world after the metahuman apocalyptic event.

Another important narrative that contains an apocalyptic scenario is the DC graphic novel *Watchmen*. Written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* has

become one of the most critically acclaimed graphic novels ever. However, unlike many other comic books or graphic novels that portray apocalyptic events, *Watchmen* is a stand-alone narrative that could conceivably allow for the destruction of the entire world since the author and artist were under no obligation to write a sequel. (There have been, however, prequel books written at a later date as a means of filling in character back story but these were written by different authors and illustrators.) Another element that separates *Watchmen* from other apocalyptic narratives found within comics is that it deals with real persons and events (such as Richard Nixon and the Cold War) in an alternate timeline which helps to illustrate the gravity of the events that are occurring in the story. However, even though *Watchmen* deals with an alternate timeline that is presented to the reader as actual history, it still delves into the concept of a no-stakes apocalypse in which the world is taken to the brink of nuclear destruction to be saved from being destroyed by the heroes that are in place to protect it.

The primary narrative of *Watchmen* is not solely concerned with an apocalyptic scenario. Though one does occur towards the end of the text, but it is not what the graphic novel is primarily concerned with. The non-linear narrative of this literary work is vast and expansive and deals with several main characters delving into each of the main characters' past lives painting deep psychological portraits of each of the individuals and showing them to be more than just a one dimensional superhero that only seeks to fight crime for the good of humanity. On a more global scale part of the narrative deals with the underlying Cold War tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States and the threat of nuclear war between the two superpowers. Other aspects of the story seem as though they have nothing to do with the other main events occurring in the narrative, (they eventually do show their

significance) but the overarching story revolves around the main characters focused upon finding out who is responsible for targeting and killing retired superheroes.

Watchmen opens with the brutal murder of a superhero. From the opening panel the reader can perceive that this is not an average superhero story. Rather it is dealing with a far more dystopic side of the world and the U.S. Throughout the text everything seems to point towards a deterioration of the world, in particular the United States. However, even though the U.S. is portrayed in a less than flattering light, in parts of the text, by the end it is the superheroes that dwell within the country who take upon themselves the task of changing the U.S. and even the world for the betterment of mankind. Whether or not they are truly successful in this attempt to change the world for the better is up to each individual reader to decide, but this shows that *Watchmen* is not the typical superhero narrative. I have included it in this study in part because of the threat of a nuclear apocalypse that occurs in the text is foreshadowed not only by the scientists who move the ominous Doomsday Clock ever closer to midnight throughout the text, which is an intrinsic part of much of the narrative, but also because of the manner in which the 'heroes' go about influencing the apocalypse. The Doomsday Clock and time as an entity are important themes and with each successive chapter in *Watchmen* the clock moves ever closer to midnight at which point the world will be destroyed by a nuclear apocalypse. *Watchmen* is also worthy of study both due to the high acclaim given to the graphic novel itself as well as the less clear picture that it paints of America as concerning the concept of American exceptionalism.

The superhero that was shown being beaten and killed in the opening panels of the narrative went by the moniker of the Comedian. The Comedian was considered by many to be

an American hero due to his long service for his country both as a masked vigilante as well as for his service in the Vietnam War. With the help of the nearly omniscient and incredibly powerful superhuman Dr. Manhattan, the Comedian was able to help the United States win the Vietnam War. Although many of the actions in the text that the Comedian takes are far from humorous and are morally suspect, he nevertheless was a man dedicated to serving his country, and even though he was not the nicest of individuals, in the eyes of his country, he was a great man because of his service. It was, however, this dedication which eventually led to his death. He had discovered a plot that would create an apocalypse on American soil and could result in the deaths of millions of his fellow citizens. Due to this discovery of such a plan he was silenced before any counter-action could be taken against those who sought to bring about this apocalyptic scenario.

In contrast to the patriotic Comedian is the character of Dr. Manhattan. Although an American, Dr. Manhattan shows less and less desire over the course of the narrative to be affiliated with his native country. This is not necessarily due to any shame felt for his country, but rather due to his super powers. Because of this he is able to remove himself from the confines of patriotism even though his power is used as the most successful weapon by the U.S. as a means of deterring Soviet aggression during a nuclear standoff. Dr. Manhattan had originally been born Jonathan Osterman, a normal human being who had no intentions of becoming a superhero. However, like so many other individuals in the pages of comics, he is the victim of science gone wrong and it is through science that he gains supernatural abilities. His powers are many, including telekinesis, the ability to teleport himself or others, and perhaps more than anything else he is able to exist outside of time and therefore is living

simultaneously in his past, present, and future and is cognizant of the events that will occur on the Earth that involve him.

It is because of these amazing powers that the U.S. government uses him as a not-so-secret weapon against the Soviet Union during the time of the Cold War. While the Soviet Union continues to stockpile nuclear arms, the United States rests comfortably in the knowledge that one of its own citizens (Dr. Manhattan) will save them from all threats both domestic and foreign, creating a sense of false superiority and even security amongst those in Washington. Through the use of Dr. Manhattan the government and America as a whole sees itself as invulnerable to attack from other countries reinforcing an exceptionalist American ideology. Yet when it is suggested to Dr. Manhattan that those closest to him since the scientific accident that made him super have died of cancer or other diseases he can no longer continue his life in the spotlight as America's contingency plan against the Soviet Union's nuclear threats. He then leaves Earth and begins living on Mars. The expected catastrophe that occurs when Dr. Manhattan leaves the United States is that his country (particularly coastal cities) and many of its European allies will be destroyed by Soviet nuclear attacks. Thus, with the loss of Dr. Manhattan the U.S. has lost one of the aspects that has made it both powerful and exceptional. When that advantage is taken away the results portend to be catastrophic and America is no longer different from other countries. America is no longer exceptional. With the collapse of exceptionalism in the American mindset, the world is thrown into turmoil as enemies that have feared the power of the U.S. now seek retribution and prepare for what looks to be a nuclear holocaust. In turn, the U.S. intends to call for a pre-emptive strike on the Soviets and hopefully save part of the U.S. and Europe. Thus without an all-powerful super

being to protect the U.S. and discourage nuclear confrontation the country is left vulnerable like all of the other countries of the world to the potential effects of an apocalypse. It has lost part of what it was that had made it exceptional in the first place. This lack of a protector leaves the United States vulnerable and New York falls under attack from an alien-like invader resulting in the deaths of millions of citizens. Nevertheless the attack is not instigated by the Russians but rather is caused by an inside source.

By the end of the narrative it is revealed to the reader that the individual who is responsible, for not only the death of the Comedian, but for many of the problems the costumed heroes face and even the apocalyptic alien invasion is one of their own number. The character of Adrian Veidt, otherwise known by his superhero persona Ozymandias, was responsible for the death of millions of people in New York. His role as the so-called smartest man in the world is one of the reasons by which he is able to justify his actions that bring about the death of millions of individuals as a means of gaining peace amongst the nations during Cold War hostilities. Through the deaths of many of the citizens of New York, Veidt was able to prevent a far more devastating nuclear holocaust from occurring on a world-wide scale. Thus he sacrifices the lives of millions in an effort to save billions of lives. While the morality of the decision comes into question one cannot help but question what role American exceptionalism might have played in Veidt's final decision to bring this devastation upon one of the greatest cities of his own country. Veidt may have targeted the United States as opposed to another city in another country simply due to the fact that he was aware that the U.S. would be able to recover from such a disaster. It would also be a sign that if something as incredibly devastating as this could happen to New York, with Dr. Manhattan to defend it,

then other countries would be even more vulnerable to such an attack and the only means by which peace could be achieved is through the destruction of a metropolis of humanity. However, this is the picture that the outside world would see and how they would react to the tragedy.

From the interior perspective of the heroes witnessing the devastation brought upon New York by one of their own it shows American exceptionalism used at to is absolute worst end. In the case of Veidt, he willingly allows millions of his fellow citizens to die in what is basically a massive con-job in which the entire world has been fooled into believing that the United States has been the victim of an alien attack. In this, the U.S. would gain pity from the other countries of the world and much needed aid through the crises from both allies and enemies. With the destruction of New York one of the greatest cities in the world all of the world leaders begin to understand that no one is safe from these potential invaders. Thus tearing down one of America's greatest cities serves to reinforce it as a world power since all other nations would be far more vulnerable to a similar attack. Veidt believes that this is the only means to secure peace among all of the nations of the world and he has offered citizens of his own country up as a sacrificial offering for the cause of world peace. While his plan proves to succeed it merely shows his own arrogance and his belief that only America would be able to take such civilian losses and still be able to remain a world power. His sacrifice of his fellow citizens is in complete opposition to what most heroes in other comics would do for the sake of humanity which is once again something that sets *Watchmen* apart from most graphic novels and comics. While most heroes would willingly die to save one life from danger, Veidt allowed millions to die to push for essentially was his own peace plan. This

manner and attitude shows Veidt's belief that America also would be the only country worthy of making such a sacrifice for peace and subsequently only an American would attempt such a bold strategy to ensure the world's peace. This illustrates the concept discussed by Lipset which suggests that American exceptionalism is a double-edged sword: exceptionalism can represent something great for Americans, as characters like Superman or Dr. Manhattan, but can result in the actions of some like Viedt who believes that only he has the capability of solving all of the world's problems, even if that means destroying the lives of millions in one of his country's greatest centers of human life. Thus it shows a more dystopic side to American exceptionalism in that the country or even its individual citizens are willing to do whatever it takes to secure their desires. It also shows that often times under the guise of an idea like American exceptionalism or Manifest Destiny that great atrocities can be committed in acts that may have good intentions, but the means by which an end is reached proves to be insupportable and abhorrent to anyone with an objective point of view. While the narrative ends before the reader can be entirely certain as to whether or not Veidt's plan for peace worked or not, one cannot help but assume that in a dystopic world like the one portrayed in *Watchmen* that the next apocalypse (whatever that might be) to disturb world peace would not be long in coming. One can also see from the reading how a no-stakes apocalypse plays a role in the narrative of this story. While it seems likely that the entire world will be enveloped in a nuclear holocaust when Dr. Manhattan leaves for Mars, this is avoided by the plan of Veidt in which one city is destroyed in exchange for peace around the entire world. Thus the apocalypse never occurs largely in part due to Veidt's pre-emptive strike against his own country.

Since the first issue of *Superman* in 1938, comic books have frequently delved into the world of the apocalypse. From the time that the baby Kal El was sent by his father from the doomed planet of Krypton to planet Earth in Action Comics #1, the world of comics has consistently returned to esoteric material in which heroes face impossible odds to prevent the end of the world. Superman, as a baby, was unable to save his own planet from destruction, but since he donned his cape he has saved this world and others and even the galaxy on numerous occasions. This trend towards the apocalyptic has continued throughout the history of comics and with each cataclysmic battle the spectacle has become larger and more grand often times requiring a host of superheroes to save the day from the machinations of the various villains of the comic book universes. It is this cyclical nature of the comics and the narratives that they tell that has resulted in what has become a no-stakes apocalypse. Throughout the years the conflicts have grown larger and the stakes continue to grow higher with each passing comic event. From the devastation of Kansas in *Kingdom Come* and New York City in *Watchmen,* and other comics such as Marvel's *Civil War* one can see the devastation that occurs within these comics. In other comics the devastation is on a global scale such as the danger that the entire world is placed in in comics like *Chaos War*, and Marvel's *Age of Ultron*. Some comics even take it a step further and the fate of the universe is at stake as in Marvel's *Infinity Gauntlet* and DC's *Final Crisis* where not only the universe that the characters are living in is at stake, but also the multiple universes that the various heroes of the fictional DC world inhabit. Nevertheless utter destruction and annihilation is avoided in some manner and the world and the universe is saved by the heroes. In reality there

was no real threat of the apocalypse coming to pass and one merely needs to look to the concept of American exceptionalism to answer why.

By reading comic books through the lens of American exceptionalism one can get an insightful take on an art form in which similar stories occur each month and yet readership remains strong. Comics are a primarily American form of art and the worldview of American exceptionalism is an inherently American outlook. By understanding the history of the ethnocentric view that America, as a nation, is different from all other nations of the world and that as a country, it will be able to withstand all threats, both foreign and domestic, that come against it one can see that American exceptionalism has become an integral part of comics. Filled with many characters that are highly representative of America or are portrayed as defending America's biggest cities, comics cannot be separated from the culture that has been so influential in their creation. In reading comics through the lens of exceptionalism one can begin to see that in the world of comics it is the characters and the heroes that make America exceptional. Without Superman, or Spider-man or Mr. Manhattan one can only imagine the devastation that would be brought upon American soil were it not for these superheroes. In reading these narratives with American exceptionalism in mind one can begin to gain a better understanding of how these heroes are able to remain so popular. These heroes represent what is best about America from their good old-fashioned morals found in characters such as Captain America and Superman to their willingness to achieve justice at any cost like Batman, Wolverine, or the Punisher. It is this constant reminder of the exceptional nature of America in comics that comes up over and over again and keeps readers coming back for more. Although the battles have become larger and the heroes more

numerous as the years have passed comic books and the superheroes portrayed have remained for the most part the same. They are not merely men and women that are dressed in bright-colored tights and have supernatural powers, but they stand for something far more.

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Growing Perspectives: A Close Reading of Provincialism in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

by

Seth D. Naslund

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Table of Contents

Growing Perspectives: A Close Reading of Provincialism in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

In "The Council of Elrond," a chapter from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Boromir displays an arrogance and smallness of mind that exemplifies a worldview pervading many of the cultures of Middle Earth. Boromir's small-mindedness can be seen in nearly every line of dialogue he speaks during the council, where he lauds the role of his own land, Gondor—and for that matter his own role—in the battle against Sauron. Yet, Boromir, because of his provincialism, is unable to comprehend the magnitude of the events that are building outside of the borders of his land. In *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien creates other characters like Boromir, such as Saruman and Denethor, whose prevailing world view is similarly narrow. Within the text, Boromir is unable to look beyond the immediate needs of the land in which he dwells and this provincialism is a great source of conflict between him and other characters in the novel. The characters who exemplify provincialism in their own world view, like Boromir, Saruman, and Denethor, show themselves as either incapable or unwilling to adapt to a broader world view, and ultimately each of them meets their demise due to a failing in their character brought about by their smallness of mind.

Many of the characters within *The Lord of the Rings*, however, do not share in the provincialism that is so prominent in the character of Boromir. While some of the characters may begin as small-minded, over the course of the text they grow into characters that have a larger appreciation of the world around them and the various peoples that inhabit the world of Middle Earth. Two such characters that show this transformation during the novel are the hobbits Merry and Pippin. These two hobbits are often looked upon as little more than characters who serve in the role of comic relief. Yet in reality they are vital to the

understanding of the concept of provincialism in the novel and are instrumental in bringing a larger worldview to the inhabitants of their own land—the Shire. In my exploration of this idea, I build on the work of David M. Waito and Devin Brown, both of whom recognize Tolkien's focus on provincialism—and its opposite—in *The Lord of the Rings.* Both of these authors realize the unhealthy nature of the Shire, and those that dwell therein at the beginning of the narrative, and the need for hobbits to move beyond their provincial ways. I will also endeavor to assess the reasons why Tolkien may have felt that the theme of provincialism was an important one to include within his text, and why he makes such a noticeable change in the worldview of his main protagonists.

David Waito argues that the scouring of the Shire that occurs at the end of the novel overshadows the importance of the more prominent Ring quest. The Ring quest is incredibly important to the arc of the narrative, since it is the means by which the hobbits are prepared to be better able to save the Shire; however, Waito feels that there is far more occurring in the text than a quest to destroy a magical ring. He believes that it is only after the destruction of the Ring that the reader can begin to see that there is another quest that needs to be accomplished by the four hobbits (155). When they finally return to their homeland after all of their grand and dangerous adventures, the hobbits find that their homeland has changed for the worse and they know that they are the only ones capable of setting things right.

Waito explains that it is the quest of the Ring that leads to the training that each of the hobbits needs to be able to correct things in the Shire upon their return. If the four hobbits had never left the Shire on the Ring quest they would not have been capable of saving their homeland from both the outside threats that invade the Shire, such as Saruman and his band of

ruffians, as well as the inner problems that pervade much of the land including the inherent provincialism that was held by many of the hobbits (158-59). Gandalf explains this to the hobbits when they reach the borders of their home saying, "that is what you have been trained for" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1242[9]). It is not until this statement that the hobbits become fully aware of how important their travels really were and how much each of them has changed as a result. The destruction of the Ring was an event of enormous consequence, to be sure, but even the other experiences, such as those that occurred to Merry and Pippin, served as training for saving the Shire from its invaders. Finally, they begin to understand that their new-found worldview will help them to not only return the Shire to the beautiful place that it once was, prior to the invasion, but it will also allow them bridge the gap between the Shire and the outside world. Waito primarily concentrates on the journey of Frodo and Sam and the training that they receive over the course of their journey, and although he does make occasional reference to the narrative surrounding Merry and Pippin after the breaking of the Fellowship, their part of the narrative is neglected throughout his analysis.

Devin Brown also deals primarily with hobbits in his analysis of the text, though his focus is mainly on Frodo. Brown argues that Frodo, much like his uncle Bilbo, is a lover of isolation (164). He is not known for being very social among other inhabitants of the Shire and is not one who seeks companionship. In fact, throughout the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo constantly tries to seek a means of accomplishing the quest of the Ring on his own. From his attempt to leave the Shire secretly to his attempt to escape the companionship

[9] The edition of *The Lord of the Rings* used for this project is a three-volume work from Houghton Mifflin that has continuing page numbers from volume to volume. When there is a change in volumes used during the analysis the first citation will reflect this change with the inclusion of the volume title along with the author name.

of the Fellowship at Amon Hen, according to Brown, Frodo is always seeking a means of escaping companionship and a chance to return to isolation. He does eventually make strides towards accepting companionship and the help of others, but it is only after he sees how isolation can negatively affect an individual, in the character of Gollum, that Frodo truly begins to see the benefit of companionship and the drawbacks of remaining isolated (170). While Brown is definitely right in his discussion of the character of Frodo and his desire for isolation, I think that the discussion can be pushed further than his claim that just Frodo and Bilbo are exceptional incidents in the Shire by preferring isolation. Rather, this isolation is a culturally based one and an unhealthy provincialism pervades much of the Shire. Many of the inhabitants of the Shire enjoy and even encourage this type of existence, when it comes to dealing with people from outside of the bounds of the Shire, and see no need to have dealings with the other races of Middle Earth. Frodo in some ways can stand as a representative of the Shire's isolationist tendencies and the desire of the culture of hobbits as a whole to remain isolated from the other people in the world. While Brown does suggest that towards the end of the text that Frodo has made strides in improving on his isolationist tendencies, he also admits that Frodo has not entirely changed and still has a considerable ways to go before he would become an active and contributing member of a community (172-73). The same can be said of the Shire, as well, in that it has, by the end of the text, taken strides towards improving its provincial and isolationist tendencies, but there is still much change that must be brought about to give the hobbits a wider and more comprehensive worldview. In this the characters of Merry and Pippin play an influential role and show a much healthier change from the

isolation that they had grown up with in the Shire and a natural willingness to become a part of a larger world and learn about other cultures throughout Middle Earth.

Much of the scholarship that has been done on Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* concerns the main narrative of the novel, the quest to destroy the Ring by the hobbits Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee. Yet there is far more occurring within Tolkien's narrative than merely the journey to destroy the One Ring. While the main thrust of the novel deals with the journey of Frodo and Sam and how they are changed as a result, the journey and transformation that Merry and Pippin undergo is nearly as drastic. Thus it is my intention to examine how Waito and Brown discuss the original text and appropriate the themes in their articles and further the work they have done on the text. To do this I will be examining the theme of provincialism in the text and how the hobbits Merry and Pippin fit into this discussion. Compared to the other characters in the text Merry and Pippin are neglected in much of the criticism surrounding *The Lord of the Rings* since they are young hobbits who often times get into mischief of various sorts resulting in them not always being taken seriously. While this view of the characters is accurate, it does not do justice to the transformation that both experience over the course of the novel.

Through the course of their journey, Merry and Pippin interact with nearly all of the races of Middle Earth. From dwarves, wizards, and the different kingdoms of men and elves to even orcs and the mysterious tree-like creatures the Ents, these two young hobbits have exchanges with more of the diverse creatures of Middle Earth than any other character within the novel. It is the knowledge gained by these diverse interactions that Merry and Pippin are able to put to use once their travels are over and they return to their home in the Shire. Once

there, these two hobbits play an influential role in returning the Shire to the way it once was, but with a broader worldview. In fact these two take a commanding role in the military actions of the hobbits which shows how they have gone from being followers who rely upon others to give the orders to those who command respect and give orders to those around them.

Before we begin a deeper analysis of Merry and Pippin and the physical and ideological journey that they undergo, it is useful to see how Tolkien sets the hobbits up in a provincial society and how it should come as no surprise that they are closed minded when it comes to dealings with the other peoples of Middle Earth. At the beginning of his novel Tolkien, in a prologue, gives his readers a brief history of information about the race of the hobbits who play a large role in the narrative. Delving deep into their background Tolkien, describes what the hobbits like and dislike and from the beginning he sets them up to have a provincial outlook on the world. Tolkien explains that "A love of learning (other than genealogical lore) was far from general among them," (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 3) which implies that hobbits do not care to learn any information that goes beyond their immediate family. While initially they were part of a larger kingdom and had been given to live in the lands that they dwelt in by the King of Gondor, as time passed and the line of kings in Gondor failed the hobbits began to isolate themselves even more and they, "meddled not at all with events in the world outside" (Tolkien 6). Thus from the opening prologue of his narrative, Tolkien is creating a simple people who care little for the wider events of the world surrounding them and even should the events concern them in some way, it is unlikely that they would even care to learn about them.

This isolation went on for so long that many hobbits (except Bilbo and Frodo, who both had dealings with dwarves and elves) had no real knowledge of what the world beyond the borders of the Shire was like. Rather they lived their lives in willing ignorance: "And there in that pleasant corner of the world they plied their well-ordered business of living and they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved, until they came to think that peace and plenty were the rule in Middle Earth and the right of all sensible folk" (Tolkien 6). Brown suggests that Frodo suffers from an inclination for isolation over community (165), yet it seems as though this view can be pushed beyond the individual to the entire community. While Frodo to a certain degree desires privacy from the other hobbits, that decision may have been influenced by the closed-minded worldview that he sees in the other inhabitants of the Shire. Thus the theme of provincialism becomes apparent over and over in the first few pages of the text, suggesting that Tolkien felt it was an important one to understand, but not necessarily a positive attribute for a society to emulate.

The hobbits also try to stop the outside world from affecting them within their own borders, as well: "And as the days of the Shire lengthened they spoke less and less with the Elves, and grew afraid of them, and distrustful of those that had dealings with them; and the Sea became a word of fear among them, and a token of death, and they turned their faces away from the hills in the west" (Tolkien 9). Jane Chance discusses the hobbits' attempts to remain isolated from the rest of the world and how this desire has led to some unhealthy effects throughout much of the Shire. For one thing, she mentions the use of the word "queer" and how hobbits have a general tendency of using this word to mean something outside of their day-to-day experiences and expectations (27). In general this word is used in reference to

things outside of the Shire, but in the early parts of the text one can see that hobbits will often use the term as well in reference to their fellow hobbits that do not fit the traditional expectations of a hobbit. For instance Bilbo was held to be queer by the other hobbits if only for the reason that he has dealings with other races and likewise Frodo is looked at in a similar light due to his familial ties. As Sandyman the miller states to the other patrons of *The Ivy Bush* an inn in the Shire, "Bag End's a queer place, and its folk are queerer" (Tolkien 29). Thus even amongst themselves the hobbits are unwilling to trust anything that is new and different.

This distrust of anything that is not hobbit-like or that goes beyond the norms of hobbit society shows the complete closed-mindedness that became the rule in the Shire, so much so that the hobbits "were, in fact, sheltered, but they had ceased to remember it" (Tolkien 7). This willing ignorance amongst the hobbits displays that they had isolated themselves for so long from society that anything that was from the outside world was viewed with suspicion and fear. In reality one of the only official offices that had been created in the Shire was the office of the bounders which comprised "A large body, varying at need, was employed to 'beat the bounds', and to see that Outsiders of any kind, great or small, did not make themselves a nuisance" (Tolkien 13). Hence even in this small statement, the hobbits show their utter provincialism in that they look at 'Outsiders' as a mere nuisance rather than any real danger. It shows how sheltered they truly were from the greater events occurring beyond their borders and how out of touch they were with the world around them. Yet even the hobbits in their innocent ignorance, could know that something in the world must be wrong for the simple fact that "the Bounders, as they were called, had been greatly increased.

There were many reports and complaints of strange persons and creatures prowling about the borders, or over them: the first sign that all was not quite as it should be, and always had been except in tales and legends of long ago" (Tolkien 13). Once again the fact that none of this proves to be a cause for concern amongst any of the hobbits, shows the obliviousness that had taken over the Shire at the mere possibility that things in the wider world were not going as well as they should be. However, once the reader gets deeper into the narrative, it becomes apparent that, while the vast majority of hobbits are provincial in their world outlook, there are others who are willing to gain a wider experience of the world around them.

Like Waito, I will focus primarily on the chapter "The Scouring of the Shire," and specifically how Merry and Pippin react once they return home from their long journey and how they have changed from the innocent and provincial hobbits that left the Shire. However, rather than immediately jumping into an analysis of how they act in "The Scouring of the Shire," it would perhaps be beneficial to look at how they change over the course of their journey and instances in which the characters are portrayed as showing some growth and gaining a larger view of the world. This growth happens at several points throughout the text and at times their immaturity and ignorance is still evident, but both Merry and Pippin make considerable changes throughout the text. The first step on their path to escaping the provincialism that pervades the Shire happens when they learn of Frodo's intentions of leaving his home.

Merry and Pippin, unlike most hobbits, prove to be different in that they show a willingness to experience things outside of the Shire even though they are unsure the dangers that their travels will entail. For much of the text they are portrayed as young and immature

hobbits who have become enculturated into the prevailing ideology that many residents of the Shire accept. Thus when Frodo leaves the Shire on his initial quest to take the Ring to the safety of Rivendell there are only four of his friends that are aware of what he is about to undertake. Even in this small group there is a distinction, separating those who are willing to join him upon this quest and those who want to stay behind. While Merry, Pippin, and Sam insist on joining Frodo on this dangerous quest, Fredegar (Fatty) Bolger remains behind in part to keep of the appearance that Frodo is still around, but also out of fear of leaving the safety of his home: "Fond as he was of Frodo, Fatty Bolger had no desire to leave the Shire, nor to see what lay outside it" (Tolkien 134). This proclivity is not an isolated incident but shows the complacency of most hobbits in the Shire and unwillingness to leave the comforts of home even for the sake of a good friend.

Merry and Pippin are an interesting study in the world of hobbits in part due to their willingness to leave the Shire for the sake of a friend. Unlike Sam, who is ordered by Gandalf to join Frodo upon his quest (Tolkien 80), though he may have still gone anyway, Merry and Pippin voluntarily join Frodo out of friendship and concern over the safety of their friend: "You do not understand!" said Pippin. "You must go—and therefore we must, too. Merry and I are coming with you" (Tolkien 129). Merry goes on even further than Pippin when insisting that Frodo can trust his friends:

> "It all depends on what you want," put in Merry. "You can trust us to stick to you through thick and thin—to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours—closer than you keep it yourself. But you cannot trust us to let

> you face trouble alone, and go off without a word…We are horribly afraid—but we are coming with you; or following you like hounds." (Tolkien 132)

Thus one can see that even the provincialism that the hobbits may have felt was not enough to deter them from leaving the comforts of home for the sake of Frodo even though none of the hobbits were truly aware of the dangers that they were likely to meet on the road.

Pippin is a member of one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the Shire. The Shire was governed by an individual referred to as a Thain, and it was this position of authority to which Pippin would eventually ascend. However, when the reader at first meets Pippin he seems more akin to a child than a leader of hobbits or a potential contributor to the momentous events that were transpiring in the wider world around him. Rather than being any true source of assistance to Frodo in the initial stages of his journey, Pippin instead insists on frequents rests and meals (Tolkien 89, 97, 110). He does not seem to be a hobbit that was made of the same stock as his ancestor Bullroarer Took who was revered for winning the Battle of Greenfields by knocking king Golfimbul's head off of his shoulders (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 17). Yet as is so often the case with hobbits there is far more to them than what initially meets the eye.

Merry, like Pippin, hails from an illustrious family and is one of Frodo's few close friends in the Shire. For much of the early part of the narrative Frodo relies heavily upon Merry to be his closest helper. From the time that Frodo's uncle Bilbo leaves the Shire, Merry plays an important role in Frodo's life. Whether it be escorting unwanted guests out of Bag End (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 48) or procuring a new home from Frodo at Crickhollow in Buckland (83), Merry does many things for Frodo. This take charge attitude continues when

Merry, Pippin, and Sam join Frodo on his quest to take the Ring to Rivendell. Perhaps his willingness to take the lead in certain situations can be connected to his role as a Brandybuck. Hobbits viewed Bucklanders as queer folk and even though they were hobbits as much as any Baggins or Boffin, they lived near strange places like the Old Forest and the Brandywine River. Both of these locations were a cause for fear and suspicion for the majority of hobbits and any that would willingly live in such a location must be queer in some way or another.

Even though initially on the surface Merry and Pippin do not seem much like heroes, even by hobbit standards, Tolkien sets up their potential for heroism early on and suggests that like all hobbits there is more to them than what one might expect: "Even in Bilbo's time the strong Fallohidish strain could still be noted among the greater families such as the Tooks and Masters of Buckland" (Tolkien 4). Tolkien suggests that the Fallohides were hobbits who, unlike their fellow halflings, were willing to act in a heroic manner uncommon to most hobbits. For the most part the narrative of Merry and Pippin is connected; however, the two hobbits eventually do become separated and are forced to rely upon themselves rather than a fellow hobbit to help them through difficult situations. This separation that the two hobbits are forced to undergo does eventually show their true heroism in that they both commit great acts of courage that have a lasting impact on the shape of Middle Earth and show how they have come from viewing things through the eyes of a hobbit and being concerned only for themselves, to gaining a better understanding of the needs of others and playing an active role in world shaping events. These changes that affect them are not instantaneous, but rather are the product of long travels and after dealings with many of the diverse races that dwell in Middle Earth. With each subsequent adventure that the two young hobbits undergo, one can

see the gradual change of shedding their enculturated provincial worldview and gaining a more worldly perspective of the events that were transpiring around them. At first when the two hobbits join Frodo on his quest, it is out of loyalty to a friend and a need for hobbits to stick together when entering into the unknown. Yet as the story progresses and Merry and Pippin continue to grow as characters one can see that, while they still are accomplishing their various deeds for the purposes of helping out their fellow hobbits, in reality they are also doing it to help out their new friends that they have made in their trek across Middle Earth.

The provincialism that Merry and Pippin suffer from, unlike the provincialism seen in characters like Boromir, Saruman and Denethor, is not one of open hostility towards other races and cultures, but is more founded in ignorance and the enculturation that occurs from living an entire life in the sheltered Shire. One of the first instances that slowly begins to reveal the larger world to these two hobbits is their night in Bree. While Bree is not a location that is that far from the Shire, like many things outside of the Shire it is considered to be queer. It is an instance of the Big Folk (humans) living in the same village as hobbits which is immediately a new experience for Merry and Pippin. It is while they are in Bree that their actions reveal their ignorance of the danger of the situation.

Pippin is the first of the two hobbits who allows his ignorance to potentially endanger the mission while in the common room of the Prancing Pony. Although he has been with Frodo for the entirety of the quest and has experienced the fear of the Black Riders, been trapped by Old Man Willow, and the Barrow-Wights, these experiences have not served to dampen his youthful exuberance or taught him to use caution. Rather Pippin shows his smallness of mind in the common room by believing that all those around him are friends, and

he begins to speak freely with them as though he and his fellow companions are in no danger. Merry, who did not join them in the room, being perhaps a bit wiser than the others: "don't forget that you are supposed to be escaping in secret, and are still on the high road and not very far from the Shire!" (Tolkien 195). Once they are in the common room even though there are men, dwarves, and hobbits all gathered together there is still a division both in the races themselves as well as the subject matter discussed. The men in the inn are concerned events on a more global scale "The Men and Dwarves were mostly talking of distance events and telling news of a kind that was becoming only too familiar" (Tolkien 194). However the hobbits, "did not pay much attention to all this, as it did not at the moment seem to concern hobbits" (194) and rather are more interested in stories of the Shire.

Although he had been warned about possible dangers, Pippin does not take the advice to heart but rather begins telling tales of the Shire. What might to some be considered to be no more than an innocent tale of happenings in the Shire could soon lead to suspicion being cast upon these hobbits by figures that are looking for them. Pippin, ever the showman, earns laughter through a tale about the Mayor of the Shire which leads him to relate the narrative of Bilbo's birthday party and his mysterious disappearance from the Shire. It is Strider, a Ranger, who alerts Frodo's attention to the danger of letting Pippin continue on telling tales unchecked: "if I were you, I should stop your young friends from talking too much. Drink, fire, and chance-meeting are pleasant enough, but, well—this isn't the Shire" (Tolkien 196). Thus Frodo intervenes to prevent from Pippin from going too far with his story and potentially reminding the people of Bree of the mysterious disappearance of Bilbo many years before. In the end, Frodo causes an even bigger scene than Pippin by disappearing, which

emphasizes even more that these characters are out of their depth when dealing in the wider world and need to gain more experience if they are going to survive in the wild.

Despite his wise advice about not causing a scene while in the common room, Merry also manages to get himself into his own predicament, which once again shows how unprepared he is for the dangers of the wider world. When Frodo, Sam, and Pippin return to their rooms, with Strider, they discover that Merry is gone. Initially nothing is made of his absence, since he had previously stated that he might go out "for a sniff of the air" (Tolkien 195), but the longer he remains gone from their company the more concerned the hobbits and Strider become. When he does eventually return it becomes apparent that he, like Pippin, has suffered from becoming too comfortable in potentially dangerous surroundings and not being careful of the threats that have been pursuing the hobbits since they left the Shire. During his evening stroll, outside of the inn, Merry sees a Black Rider. Up until this point Merry had only caught a short glimpse of one of these nefarious Riders, but in Bree he has a much closer encounter. When he sees the Rider, Merry attempts to follow it rather than returning to the safety of the inn. Eventually he loses sight of the being and becomes overwhelmed by the Black Breath, a weapon of the Black Riders. He is saved by a fellow hobbit from the Prancing Pony and returns to tell his harrowing tale to his friends and Strider. Strider comments: "You have a stout heart," he said; "but it was foolish" (Tolkien 217). Merry admits that he was unable to control his impulse to follow the Rider, but it shows his ignorance of the real danger that he was in and that he very possibly could have been killed by these creatures. While Merry and Pippin during their time in Bree show a lack of maturity and awareness of the potential dangers of the wider world around them, they are spared more potential mishaps on

the road to Rivendell by the presence of Strider who guides them along the path and ensures that they reach the house of Elrond.

For much of the remainder of the text, Merry and Pippin take on a secondary role behind Frodo and Sam as well as Strider (Aragorn), Gandalf, and Boromir. Once the quest of the Ring, in which it is laid upon Frodo and his companions to enter Mordor and find the Crack of Doom, is begun Merry and Pippin are given fewer things to do within the text. With other characters to rely on to make the decisions like Aragorn and Gandalf it becomes easier and easier for the two hobbits to continue to slip into the background and seem as though they have become unimportant. They do help the company in some ways, but on the whole they serve merely as friends to Frodo so as to fulfill the remaining two positions that made up the Fellowship of the Ring (Tolkien 342-43). This time does allow Merry and Pippin the opportunity to see how other cultures live and also a chance to see how various cultures are able to work with one another in a positive manner. It is also an opportunity for them to learn from more worldly-wise characters like Gandalf and Aragorn and how they are able to adapt to certain situations. Thus, though Merry and Pippin are relegated to the background for much of Book II, a large part of their education of the wider world happens during this time. Not only are they able to experience the different cultures in Middle Earth like Rivendell and Lothlorien they also see the negative interactions between elves and dwarves in the relations of Legolas and Gimli and how eventually these one-time enemies are able to outgrow their provincial worldviews and see the value in one another's society and company. They are also witnesses to the negative side of provincialism in Boromir who becomes a protector of sorts for the two younger hobbits. While Merry and Pippin during the journey often seem to be in

the company of Boromir, they are also able to see how he is unable to successfully integrate himself into the company as a result of his provincialism. Although they may not notice his provincial outlook, it is fairly clear that Boromir has different motives from the company as the journey continues. Both of these young hobbits are, therefore, able to experience the loss of provincialism and the potential danger of provincialism in their travels with the other members of the Fellowship. However, once the Fellowship is broken at Amon Hen and Merry and Pippin are captured by orcs, who are looking for hobbits, they once again are on their own without help from the Big People and are forced to survive by their own means. It is during this time that Merry and Pippin mature both physically and ideologically through surviving hardships, and thus their perspectives and expectations widen as a result, creating a pivotal moment in each character's growth that shapes many of their actions for the remainder of the text.

While the two hobbits are in the clutches of Saruman's dreaded Uruk-hai, they learn to rely solely upon their wits to facilitate their own escape. Pippin begins to think for himself and shows a sense of maturing in that he makes decisions that are both potentially dangerous and foolish. He makes what looks to be an attempt at an escape from the Uruks when in reality it was only an attempt to leave a trail for Aragorn or any of the members of the company who might have survived the Uruk attack and attempt a rescue of the captured hobbits. Although he is re-captured and put back into line with the running Uruks, he leaves behind a trail, as well as the brooch that he received in Lothlorien, that will allow for Aragorn or anyone else to know that the hobbits are still alive. He also has the wits to both cut his hands free when the opportunity presents itself which later helps to facilitate his and Merry's

escape. However, both Pippin and Merry's ignorance prevents them from potentially seeking aid from the men of Rohan who slaughter the orcs that hold Merry and Pippin captive. Pippin begins to realize that his provincial worldview could potentially harm his ability to survive since he does not know if the riders of Rohan are friend or foe: "He wished now that he had learned more in Rivendell, and looked more at maps and things; but in those days the plans for the journey seemed to be in more competent hands, and he had never reckoned with being cut off from Gandalf, or from Strider, and even from Frodo" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 561). Although both hobbits show a certain amount of ignorance about the lands that they are traveling through, they do show some wisdom when it comes to the reason why they were captured by the orcs and not killed by them as had happened to Boromir. When one of the orcs attempts to escape with the hobbits because it is believed that one of them has the Ring, both Merry and Pippin show exceptional awareness of the situation and endeavor to trick the orc into untying them: "The thought came suddenly into Pippin's mind … 'Grishnakh knows about the Ring! …' Cold fear was in Pippin's heart, yet at the same time he was wondering what use he could make of Grishnakh's desire" (Tolkien 564). Merry quickly gleans both Pippin's plan and Grishnakh's desire and also tries to use it against the orc. Their ploy buys them time and Grishnakh is killed by the riders of Rohan, which allows Merry and Pippin to escape. Although Pippin has taken the leading role up until this point, Merry now takes charge as he is aware of where they are: "I don't suppose you have much notion where we are; but I spent my time at Rivendell rather better. We are walking west along the Entwash. The butt end of the Misty Mountains is in front, and Fangorn Forest" (Tolkien 569). Thus Merry shows more awareness of the world around them than Pippin, which shows that perhaps he is

slightly further on the path of escaping the provincialism of the Shire. However, both hobbits during their time in Fangorn have experiences that help to expand the worldview beyond the one that they have long held.

The time that the two hobbits spend with Treebeard is perhaps the most important section of the text as far as Merry and Pippin's maturation is concerned. For it is here that they grow both in their worldview and learn about one of the oldest races to inhabit Middle Earth, the Ents. Through Treebeard they discover that even though there may be differences between the cultures and races across Middle Earth, they can learn from one another and also that just because something is unknown does not make it bad or even 'queer'. Rather, it can be an opportunity for expanding one's worldview. Treebeard, as the eldest of all the Ents, has seen many things during his time in Middle Earth. However, nothing of the many things that he has seen in his many years of life has looked like Merry and Pippin. When he first meets them, it seems as Treebeard himself might have some provincial feelings towards the young hobbits, however, he does not jump to hasty conclusions: "Turn round and let me have a look at your faces. I almost feel that I dislike you both, but do not let us be hasty" (Tolkien 574). He even goes further to say that he has never seen anything like them before: "What are *you*, I wonder? I cannot place you. You do not seem to come in the old lists that I learned when I was young" (Tolkien 575). Initially the old Ent is suspicious of the two young hobbits, believing them to be orcs. However, once Merry and Pippin establish that they are hobbits, they tell him of the events that have led them to be ensnared in his forest. With his suspicions alleviated, Treebeard not only trusts the two hobbits, but completely accepts them into his world. This in itself is an important lesson for Merry and Pippin to learn since they share

several commonalities with Treebeard. First, both the hobbits and the Ents live in relative isolation from outside communities. They also can be suspicious of outsiders and think new things as odd or strange. However, Treebeard does not let the difference that is between hobbits and Ents prevent him from making a strong friendship with Merry and Pippin. He does many things with the hobbits while they are together such as educating them in the ways of Ents, taking the hobbits to his home, feeding them, and protecting them from the dangers of the forest. In seeing one of the most ancient species of Middle Earth, Merry and Pippin are able to experience another culture, while old, is still willing to learn about others. This shows the hobbits that the travels they have been on since leaving the Shire are one massive learning experience where they are able to learn of other cultures and bring some of this learning back to their fellow hobbits in the Shire.

The ideological growth that the hobbits undergo during their time with Treebeard attends a physical change, as well. Drinking from Treebeard's Ent draught, the two hobbits grow taller than they had once been. While they are still shorter than a man or even a dwarf they have exceeded standard hobbit height, and the change does not go unnoticed by either their friends or their fellow hobbits (Tolkien, *Return* 1151-52,). In this it seems as though Tolkien is attempting to show an ideological growth as well as a physical one in Merry and Pippin. The two characters are seeing a broader picture of the world due to their time with Treebeard and as a result they are growing in their worldview which fits in nicely with the physical growth that they undergo as well.

Merry and Pippin also play a helpful role in informing Treebeard of the dangers that his neighbor Saruman could pose to the trees of Fangorn. Knowing of Saruman's treachery

and hearing the other news related by the hobbits Treebeard understands that they Ents must act if they are to survive and cannot expect others to fight all the battles for them. This is one important lesson that Merry and Pippin learn during their time under the care of Treebeard, since all too often in the Shire if an individual was not directly affected by a problem they would avoid any sort of involvement. However, in the case of Treebeard he confirms that he will not let Saruman continue to act in an unchecked manner: "I will stop it!' he boomed. 'And you shall come with me. You may be able to help me. You will be helping your own friends that way too; for if Saruman is not checked Rohan and Gondor will have an enemy behind as well as in front" (Tolkien, *Two* 587). Thus even though Treebeard is not directly affected by the wars of Gondor and Rohan, he understands that if nothing is done to help them then they will be overrun by their enemies. This lesson of thinking of the needs of those beyond ones border is a new thought for both Merry and Pippin, and one which they are able to bring with them when they eventually are able to return to the Shire where they find that everything is not as it was when they left.

Merry and Pippin face many other adventures and have dealings with several other characters before they have the opportunity to return to their homeland with Frodo and Sam. They accomplish several feats of heroism during this time and play a large role in the manner in which the events transpire. Pippin becomes a knight of Gondor and saves Faramir the son of the Steward from death and similarly Merry becomes a knight of the Mark (Rohan) and not only saves Eowyn, but helps her kill the Witch-King of Angmar. Thus these two hobbits much like Frodo and Sam play a very important role in the momentous events that shape the landscape of Middle Earth in the Fourth Age. They change greatly from the hobbits who left

the Shire in secret and are returning as courageous heroes that have accomplished remarkable deeds that no one in the Shire is aware of having taken place.

When the four hobbits near the Shire in the chapter 'Homeward Bound,' they know that something has changed in their homeland. Gandalf is aware that things at home will not be the same upon the hobbits arrival. However, he insinuates that the hobbits have been trained for just such an instance as this and that it is their duty to put things to right "I am not coming to the Shire. You must settle its affairs yourselves; that is what you have been trained for… And as for you, my dearest friend you will need no help. You are grown up now. Grown indeed very high; among the great you are, and I have no longer any fear at all for any of you" (Tolkien, *Return* 1242). Thus even though Gandalf is aware that things will need changing, he has complete trust in the four hobbits to be able to handle the situations due to the wider view of the world that they have gained. It is in the following chapter 'The Scouring of the Shire' where all of the hobbits, but Merry and Pippin in particular, have the opportunity to display the manner in which they have grown over the course of their journey and how they are capable of implementing that growth in both their defense of the Shire and also by educating the other hobbits to be able to accept differences and embrace a broader worldview as opposed to viewing everything that is different as being queer.

When the four hobbits reach the borders of their homeland, they find that the way is barred to outsiders. While this is a result of Saruman's orders, in effect it is the physical manifestation of what the Shire had long tried to do by keeping out those on the outside. Now, however, the hobbits provincialism has been coupled with the militaristic provincialism of Saruman resulting in a Shire completely isolated from all other races and cultures. This

isolation has gotten to the point that even hobbits from the Shire such as Merry, Pippin, Sam, and Frodo are no longer allowed entrance into their homeland. Due to their long absence, one might almost consider all of these hobbits as outsiders in their native land, but they are quick to bring about change. Merry and Pippin climb the gate that is meant to keep outsiders from entering the Shire and tear down the orders for no one to enter the Shire after dark (Tolkien 1245). They also force the hobbits that are either under the sway or Saruman or too frightened to disobey, into giving them lodgings for the night. Here Pippin breaks several of the rules that have been imposed upon the hobbits and shows that his training in the outside world has been of some value in that he will not live under such oppression. When the hobbits are arrested by the hobbit Shirrifs they inevitably break their arrest and as Pippin proclaims "We shall break a good many things yet" (Tolkien 1251) making reference to the many rules that have been imposed upon the hobbits and also the rule of the Chief that has created all of these new laws for the Shire. What can be seen here is that Merry and Pippin during their time in Rohan and Gondor have received a considerable amount of military training and they are able to put it to good use on their return to the Shire. It was easy for the hobbits of the Shire to be controlled by an individual with a manipulative personality; however, for Merry and Pippin, they have seen the negative effects of this sort of provincialism. These two hobbits are bound and determined not only break the provincialism that was imposed by the Chief over all of the hobbits, but also as a means of breaking the hobbits out of the provincialism that they have existed in for far too long. Thus, with their experience in military affairs, Merry and Pippin are the perfect candidates for leading this adventure and also showing their fellow hobbits what they are capable of they will but fight for their freedoms.

Both Merry and Pippin show their worldly knowledge by proclaiming their deeds before the ruffians that have taken up residence in the Shire. Pippin even uses his connections in Gondor as proof of the newfound worldliness that his journey has given him: "I am a messenger of the King,' he said. 'You are speaking to the King's friend and one of the most renowned in all the lands of the West. You are a ruffian and a fool. Down on your knees in the road and ask pardon, or I will set this troll's bane in you!" (Tolkien 1253). They also are able to show their military strategy that they would never have been able to conceive of without the benefit of their travels. Merry understands the provincialism and the comfort that the hobbits are under and realizes the need for a change to come over these hobbits. This change comes in the form of the changed and worldly-wise Merry and Pippin: "Raise the Shire!' said Merry, 'Now wake all the people! They hate all this, you can see: all of them... But Shire-folk have been so comfortable so long they don't know what to do. They just want a match, though, and they'll go up in fire" (Tolkien 1255). Thus seeing the need for the hobbits to be roused from their lethargy, Merry and Pippin go about pursuing this goal and raising the Shire and putting an end to the provincialism that the Shire has dwelt under for far too long and has made them an easy prey for outsiders seeking to exploit the innocent Shire-folk. In rousing the Shire and helping their fellow hobbits break out of their provincial mindset which would have only allowed things to continue getting worse in the Shire, Merry and Pippin help the other hobbits see what life is like beyond their borders and that they will need to fight if they wish to once again attain the life of freedom that they once had but with a wider picture of the world around them. They also are able to facilitate this change by having the hobbits take an active role in achieving their own freedom. Similar to Gandalf's being

unwilling to enter the Shire to fix everything for the hobbits, Merry and Pippin understand that the hobbits who have remained in the Shire need to break out of their comfortable ways and must be forced to act to regain their freedom. Pippin raises the Tooks and Merry raises the Brandybucks and both play a vital role in freeing the hobbits from the rule of Saruman and his ruffians. However, none of this would have been accomplished had it not been for the journey that Merry and Pippin had gone on across Middle Earth. It is the experiences that they gained in their travels and dealings with other cultures that prepared them to help the Shire hobbits escape their cultural lethargy and act in a manner that at one time would have seemed foreign to them. Prior to their return few of the hobbits had even attempted to stand up to the ruffians, but once Merry and Pippin arrive with their military expertise and knowledge of other cultures the hobbits are able to assert themselves against their oppressors and fight for their freedom.

After the ruffians are expelled and Saruman has been dealt with, the hobbits go about trying to set things to right as they once had been. However, once the Shire has gained a larger picture of the outside world, there is no going back, and it is impossible for them to be as provincial as they once had been. Although they may remain provincial in some of their ways that does not mean there has been no change. In reality changes of small-mindedness are things that take time and the reader is given little information in the long term effects that occur to the Shire. However, one can assume that with hobbits like Merry and Pippin being a part of leading two of the most influential families in the Shire that they will help guide the Shire and its inhabitants into a much healthier relationship with the outside world where things that are new and different won't be relegated to the realm of queer, but rather will

present opportunities for them to be able to experience the wider world and learn about cultures that are beyond their own borders.

The story does not continue long after the Shire has once again been set to rights by the four seasoned hobbits. In fact it is little more than two years after the destruction of the Ring that Frodo sets sail across the Sea and the narrative comes to a close. After this there is little more to learn of the events that transpired after Frodo's departure unless one returns to the beginning of the text and looks at the prologue in which Tolkien goes into great detail on Hobbits and their culture. It is here that we learn that both Merry and Pippin upon their return from their adventures became the leaders of their respective families. Merry becomes the Master of Buckland and Pippin has become the Thain of the Shire. Although their grand adventure has come to a close, Merry and Pippin do not return to a life of quiet and seclusion, but continue the work of helping the Shire and hobbits as a whole to become part of a larger community of races. Tolkien points out that one of the important things that occurs once Merry and Pippin ascend to leadership roles in their families is to increase the knowledge of those in the Shire by creating libraries "The largest of these collections were probably at Undertowers at Great Smials, and at Brandy Hall" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 18). They were able to facilitate this growth in knowledge by continuing relations with the outside world and the peoples that they had met on their travels "Since Meriadoc and Peregrin became the heads of their great families and at the same time kept up their connexions with Rohan and Gondor, the libraries at Buckleberry and Tuckborough contained much that did not appear in the Red Book" (Tolkien 19). Thus these two hobbits allowed their worldview to become larger, and through the acquisition of books on other lands they encouraged a wider and more global

perspective amongst their fellow hobbits helping the Shire to become more knowledgeable about the events of the outside world and gaining an appreciation for other cultures beyond their own.

The theme of provincialism is an important one throughout the text of *The Lord of the Rings* from representations of the negative acts of provincialism in the cases of Boromir and Saruman to evidence of characters being willing to learn about other cultures and move beyond their own small-mindedness such as characters like Legolas, Gimli and Treebeard. Merry and Pippin also show a willingness to interact and learn from other races which is in stark contrast to the manner in which the majority of their culture acts when presented with opportunity to interact with the world outside of the Shire. In this we can look to J.R.R. Tolkien as to why he may have emphasized this theme throughout his text. Tolkien himself stated that: "I am in fact a *Hobbit* (in all but size)" (Tolkien, Carpenter, and Tolkien 213). He also stated that hobbits themselves are English. In a radio interview with Dennis Gerroult, Tolkien claims that hobbits are: "just a rustic English people. Made small in size because it reflects the generally small reach of their imagination…" (Chamber). Tolkien seems to be perfectly aware of the nature of the hobbits provincialism and throughout the text he does not seem to be implying that pride in one's culture is necessarily a negative thing. However, when this pride leads one to look disdainfully upon other cultures and believe one's own culture to be superior that is when things become dangerous.

Rather, Tolkien believes that it is important to experience or at least have knowledge of the wider world so as to be able to gain a larger perspective and even be capable of changing other provincial minds. Tolkien himself was not a world traveler by any means, but

he did understand that the world was getting smaller, both with the advancements of technology brought about by WWII as well as the end of colonialism in many parts of the world. He was also aware of the dangers of provincialism in the real world in the form of Nazi Germany and the potential threat that such a small-minded worldview could hold for the world. Thus he was completely aware that there would be more interaction between different cultures, and therefore a larger worldview would be necessary to be able to adequately contribute to the future of the world. This is the role that Tolkien gives to Merry and Pippin and they learn a great deal about the wider world to be better able to escape their own potentially harmful provincial mindset. They are also able to succeed in showing the change that has happened to them to the other hobbits and it shows that they are able to help others in the Shire to attain a more appreciative and open view of the world around them and understand that there are many things to be learned of value beyond the borders of the Shire.

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