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Finding Courage in Unlikely Places: Processing War in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

Christopher D. Reigstad
Saint Cloud State University

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**Finding Courage in Unlikely Places: Processing War in J.R.R. Tolkien's
The Lord of the Rings**

by

Christopher Reigstad

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Thesis Committee:
Glenn Davis, Chairperson
Monica Pelaez
Maureen O'Brien

Abstract

This thesis analyzes perceptions of abilities in J.R.R. Tolkien's 1954 novel, *The Lord of the Rings* and how his novel is written to comment on cultural ideas common in mid-twentieth century England. Tolkien focuses on challenging negative attitudes towards wounded soldiers returning from war and showing that injured individuals have abilities that might not initially be seen and their injuries should not be seen as inabilities. Through *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien also comments on small-minded attitudes, such as provincialism and isolation. This thesis argues that Tolkien uses provincial characters to demonstrate the dangers of small-mindedness and serve as an example to his readers, encouraging them realize the world is larger than they might assume and to explore the world so that they can grow as individuals. By challenging these cultural norms, Tolkien comments on cultural norms and negative attitudes common in the aftermath of the World Wars.

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Introduction

J.R.R. Tolkien composed *Lord of the Rings* between 1937 and 1949, during a time of great social, political, and cultural change in England and around the world, and this thesis argues that Tolkien uses his novel as a critique to reveal and comment on British culture in the 1930s and '40s. In particular, Tolkien is focused on challenging negative attitudes towards wounded soldiers after they returned from war, showing that injured individuals have abilities that people might not initially perceive. The novel also comments on small-minded attitudes, such as isolationism and provincialism; this thesis argues that Tolkien included small-minded characters as a way to encourage his readers to realize the world is larger than they might assume and that exploring the world and challenging their own attitudes is a good way to become more beneficial members of society. By challenging these cultural norms, Tolkien is able to comment on cultural norms and negative societal attitudes that were common during and after the World Wars.

Much of this emphasis on perceived ability can be seen in Tolkien's portrayal of hobbits, who are physically smaller than the other races in Middle Earth and come from a seemingly insignificant place, causing other characters to perceive them as unimportant. Tolkien uses hobbits to challenge the negative cultural notions that "insignificant" people cannot do great things. Tolkien began writing his novel during World War Two¹ and his personal experiences undoubtedly played a role in his creating process. Additionally, Tolkien fought in World War One, where he lost most of his friends, and his sons fought in World War Two, where one son was invalidated out in 1944 because of "severe shock to the nervous

¹ Janet Brennan Croft, John Garth, Humphrey Carpenter, Brian Rosebury and other scholars have shown the wars' influence on Tolkien in their respective works.

system due to prolonged exposure to enemy action,” (Drout 699) so he was well acquainted to loss and injury resulting from war. Charles Mosely writes “The Great War marked millions of men who survived. They saw their comrades die, often horribly” (11). Six million died from injury or disease during 1914-1918 (Cohen 1). World War Two, which Tolkien lived through, was equally horrible. The official records of World War Two left about three-quarters of a million British servicemen and over one and a half million German soldiers with permanent disabilities, which included blindness, loss of limb, and chronic diseases. In *The War Come Home*, Deborah Cohen writes about treatment of British veterans of World War Two and explains that veterans with disabilities were marginalized and discrimination was common (3). Many disabled veterans felt “forsaken” and could not get jobs (Cohen 102). Even those who were lucky enough to get a job were given “monotonous” tasks and still had trouble providing for their families (Cohen 114-116). In his biography on Tolkien, John Garth explains how wars drastically changed the lives of the people involved: “[t]he war imposed urgency and gravity, took [Tolkien] through terror, sorrow, and unexpected joy, and reinvented the real world in a strange, extreme force” (309), suggesting that the destruction of the World Wars affected Tolkien in way that inspired him to comment on the destruction it caused. Nancy Marie Ott adds that the World Wars took many of Tolkien’s best friends and gave him a reason to write: “Despite the action he had seen, Tolkien was not wounded. His friends from the TCBS [tea club] were not so fortunate. One was killed on July 1; another was killed in December. The deaths of his friends affected him greatly, paradoxically inspiring him to continue with his own work so that the legacy of their friendship would not be lost” (para 12). Tolkien’s close, personal experience with the World Wars allowed him to make

observations that others might not; one of those observations was the perceptions of disabled veterans.

With his experience in the World Wars, Tolkien would have been aware of negative perceptions towards soldiers with disabilities and it is highly likely that his novel reflects his attitudes on war and its destructive nature. Cohen describes the negative treatment wounded veterans received upon returning home. She writes that “Each disabled veteran appeared to bring the war’s horrors home with him” (2). These disabilities prevented the veterans from doing simple tasks such as “hold[ing] an umbrella,” sleeping, and climbing stairs (2). Worse yet, disabled veterans were perceived as “endangered the peace” (2). Disabled veterans could not find much work and they knew their conditions would not drastically improve. Tom Shippey writes that Tolkien and other noted fantasy writers at the time were “combat veterans, present or at least deeply involved in the most traumatically significant events of the century, such as the Battle of the Somme...Nor can anyone says that [authors like Tolkien] turned their backs on these events. Rather, they had to find some way of communicating and commenting on them” (viii). Because Tolkien was at the great battle, he saw at first hand the bravery of his fellow comrades, but he also saw negative treatment towards the brave soldiers’ injuries. People often demonstrated small-minded attitudes and did not realize the depth of sacrifice made by the soldiers of the World Wars. Through his novel, he could show his readers the bravery of soldiers and show that the injuries are more than disabilities, but rather marks of courage. In so doing, he is able to challenge negative perceptions and attitudes, and encourage people to give disabled veterans the respect and kindness they deserve.

Much of the nineteenth and twentieth century included discrimination against people with disabilities and Tolkien uses his novel to bring awareness to people struggling with mental and physical ailments. There were some improvements in America, Britain, and Western Europe during the 1930's, but public perspectives on disabilities were still overwhelmingly negative (Jeffereys 415). Most people with disabilities were reduced from a "whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman 3). The generations after the World Wars expressed their prejudices freely, did not hesitate to generalize, and "[N]o one talked of 'racial stereotypes'" (Shepard 9). These generations spoke of their disabilities freely. Tolkien was writing his novel in the 1930s and 40s and undoubtedly saw these common injustices towards people with disabilities, including treatment towards his fellow soldiers.

Another attitude that Tolkien was interested in challenging was the small-mindedness common in mid-twentieth century Britain. One facet of small-mindedness was isolationism. Much of Britain, and the rest of the world, was content with staying out of the affairs of others. However, this was not always constructive because it encouraged apathy. By challenging isolationism, Tolkien is able to show the problems of isolation by showing that the small-mindedness of isolation leads to corruption, misjudgments, and stagnation.

Tolkien directly addresses his concern about isolation in his letters. When asked what the purpose of life is, part of his answer was "we are individuals (as in some degree are all living things) but do not, cannot, live in isolation, and have a bond with all other things, ever closer up to the absolute bond with our own human kind" (Carpenter "Letter 310" 399). The idea the people are bonded, connected in some way, seems to have been on his mind as he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. As an example, Tolkien explains that the elves have adopted

isolationist tendencies that led to stagnation. He describes the isolation of elves as a device of Sauron: Elves “regret the past” and “become unwilling to face change...as if a [person] were to hate a very long book still going on, and wished to settle down in a favorite chapter” (Carpenter, “Letter 181” 236). Tolkien extends this metaphor throughout the entire novel, showing that isolation as a whole leads to stagnation.

Studying isolationism offers a useful lens to look at how countries interacted during the twentieth century and sheds light on why Tolkien was interested in challenging small-minded viewpoints and the apathy that often attended them. During the twentieth century, many countries were content with staying out of the affairs of other countries. This isolation is most obvious in the years during Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Germany. Few countries were willing to stop Germany as it invaded other neighboring countries. Germany was violently gathering territory for several years before World War Two even began. Many countries, including England, did not realize the danger Hitler posed and tried to stay out of the fray, hoping a war would not come; Ellison notes there was a sense of “unreality,” leading to the war being thought of as “the Phoney War” (17). Much of this disbelief came “from indications apparent to everybody of general unpreparedness, incompetence in high places, and military bungling of this and that kind” (Ellison 17). For these reasons, England specifically was not ready to join a war, so they hoped it would pass without incident, yet “Many felt that the war that came in 1939 could have been avoided had the Western allies acted resolutely earlier” (Mosely 12). History shows that most world countries did not want to intervene. Scholars cite a possible reason for isolationism is that countries wanted to keep the current balance of power. By intervening, they feared the balance would be lost (Baum 313-38, Fordham 163-82, Urbatsch

472). Another reason is the fear of uncertainty; few knew what would happen if they engaged in war (Urbatsch 472). People were unwilling to do something that could potentially backfire. As a result, Germany marched over most of Europe before the other world powers began to resist. This is very likely a reason why Tolkien was interested in challenging isolationist ideas in his novel: he wanted to prevent another Nazi Germany from emerging.

Provincialism is another form of small-mindedness and also contributes negatively to characters' perceptions. Though similar to isolationism, provincialism leads to its own distinct set of problems. An aspect of provincialism is the idea that provincial people have no mind of their own (Kavanagh 237). Provincial people follow the small-minded habits of others. Unlike isolationism, which can be an active act of removing one's self from the world, provincialism tends to be a semi-subconscious habit of thinking one is better than others. However, the two are not mutually exclusive (Roy 234). Much like any time period, people in the 1940s did not usually realize they were small-minded. In 1944 Benjamin Kizer wrote about isolationism and how it often comes under the guise of nationalism and patriotism (155). People often believed that having soldiers overseas was proof that their country was not isolationist, because, naturally, an isolationist country would not send soldiers outside its borders. However, Kizer explains that strong isolation still existed. Simply because soldiers were overseas did not mean they were free of isolationism; they brought their isolationist attitudes with them. The greatest problem of provincialism is that people do not realize they are provincial. It is possible Tolkien saw this carried-over small-mindedness in France. He did not like war and likely used his novel to challenge the small-minded attitudes he encountered while fighting.

In order to make the claim that Tolkien is challenging negative attitudes of twentieth-century England, this thesis must establish that Tolkien, at least on some level, viewed Middle-Earth as an analogue of his own world. Tolkien describes Middle-Earth as “like our own, as mythical, but not more so” (Tolkien, *Reader x*), showing that Middle-Earth is similar to the world we are familiar with. It is important that he notes it is not “more so,” suggesting that Tolkien did not intend to have a completely fantastical setting, but was more concerned with a realistic, applicable world that would allow him to challenge real world problems through a fantastical setting. For Tolkien, his world and our world need to be similar for him to make his arguments. Garth draws comparisons with Tolkien’s world and ours when he states that “Middle-earth, I suspect, looks so engagingly familiar to us, and speaks to us so eloquently, because it was born with the modern world and marked by the same terrible birth pangs” (309). Tolkien’s world also includes “the forces that form the lives of the dwellers in Middle-Earth are the same that make our lives—history, chance, and desire. It is a world bubbling with possibility, subject to natural law, and never more than a skin away from the howling primal chaos that waits outside every world” (Tolkien, *Reader x*). Middle Earth, in other worlds, is not the safest place for Tolkien’s characters. However, Middle Earth is a safe place for Tolkien to comment on society without making direct challenges to his own culture. He can comment on negative attitudes of Middle Earth and his readers can make connections to the real world, but they would not feel insulted that Tolkien is commenting directly about them. In this world, Tolkien is able to challenge real world problems.

While Middle Earth is an analogue of our world, some people have made the argument that Tolkien’s novel was an allegory. Tolkien, however, did not intend his novel to be read as

an allegory, and, in a famous letter, clearly refutes that claim: “I dislike Allegory—the conscious and intentional allegory—yet any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language” (Carpenter, “Letter 131” 145). Peter Kreeft explains that “Tolkien’s myth of the Ring is not an allegory, but it is utterly ‘applicable.’” (166). Tolkien also explains this difference; he goes on to offer a distinction between ‘applicability’ and ‘allegory,’ explaining that one resides in the freedom of the reader, the other in the purposed domination of the author (Carpenter, “Letter 109” 119-123). Tolkien, then, opens a “portal” between his world and ours. Though *The Lord of the Rings* is fictional, it is still closely connected with the real world and allows Tolkien to comment on real world problems through his work. By making Middle-Earth familiar, including familiar challenges, readers will likely understand the struggles of characters, and the analogous nature of the world helps Tolkien engage with real social issues.

Chapter I of this thesis focuses on wounds, which was an important topic during the 1940s because many soldiers were returning from the war with grievous wounds. It was common for society to discriminate against them because they presumed that the presence of wounds indicated a lack of ability. Tolkien was interested in challenging negative attitudes and showing that the presence of wounds was a poor indicator of one’s potential. Chapter II focuses on small-mindedness and the dangers it poses. Tolkien uses characters like Boromir the warrior to represent cultural negativity in the 1930s and ‘40s, showing the dangers of small-mindedness, that power can easily corrupt people who are isolated and provincial. Tolkien also uses hobbits in the Shire and the citizens of Breeland to demonstrate that small-mindedness can lead to stagnation.

Chapter I: Frodo's Wounds

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, Tolkien was writing in the 1940s and was highly influenced by World War Two. World War Two left about three-quarters of a million British servicemen and over one and a half million German soldiers with permanent disabilities, which included blindness, loss of limb, and chronic diseases. Tolkien's son, Michael, was badly wounded in World War Two and struggled to reintegrate into society. Tolkien experienced much of the horror of war in his own life as well. In the First World War, Tolkien lost many of his friends: "men he had grown up from boyhood at school, and he had known in the spring of their days at Oxford" (Moseley 4). Tolkien himself was forced off the battlefield by "pyrexia of unknown origin" (Carpenter *Biography* 93). Also, known as trench fever, it affected thousands of men (Carpenter *Biography* 93). Tolkien was eventually forced to return to England where he made a slow recovery (Carpenter *Biography* 93). Moseley writes "Such loss leaves permanent scars, which sometimes never heal" (4). He also writes that "the War was one of the defining things" for Tolkien's generation (Moseley 4-5). It is nearly certain that Tolkien's work was influenced by the wars. Based on Tolkien's experience with war, losing his friends to combat, and seeing people struggle to reintegrate into society, Tolkien wanted to show his readers that people's potential is not necessarily connected to or defined by disabilities or perceived weaknesses.

This chapter looks at discrimination based mainly on physical wounds, as well as discrimination based on perceptions that physically small people cannot do what physically larger people typically can. People with wounds and small statures frequently incur more discrimination because other people often perceive these traits as signs of weakness. While a

physically small character may receive doubt at their abilities, a small character who incurs wounds will almost always receive doubt. Wounds only magnify the perceived weakness. The way that wounded hobbits face negative attitudes is similar to how people with disabilities are regarded: they are assumed to be weak based on their wounds or handicaps. Frodo the hobbit is wounded several times—first by a Morgul Blade at Weathertop, secondly by a spear in the mines of Moria, thirdly by the sting of the giant spider Shelob, and lastly by the bite of Gollum—and few think he is strong enough to complete his mission, yet he does. In this way, Tolkien uses Frodo to challenge negative perceptions of people with wounds.

Disability studies will be the primary lens of this chapter because it raises a discussion about the struggles of people with disabilities and will act as a useful lens for analyzing Frodo and his wounds. People with disabilities are generally treated in four distinct ways: 1) They are relegated to a separate place in society and encouraged to interact with their own kind; 2) They are considered by the majority to be inferior; 3) Their segregation is rationalized as being “better for them;” 4) They are evaluated on the basis of the categorical membership, rather than their individual characteristics (Darling 15). Some of Tolkien’s characters are commonly brushed aside in a similar manner. Few characters treat hobbits as individuals and, instead, perceive them as a collective unit that can be discarded and discriminated against because of their “weakness.” Smart writes of people with disabilities that “normalcy is defined solely as the absence of deviance, illness, or disability, so that the definition becomes a definition of exclusion. In other words, if deviance, illness, or disability are not present, the person is judged to be normal” (Smart 3). Lennard Davis further notices that “people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others” (3). There will always be differences

between people, but one should be careful not to judge one characteristic as better or worse than another, because even perceived disabilities can, in actuality, be beneficial. Disabilities, then, become little more than an arbitrary opinion of a group that feels superior to people with abilities perceived as worse. In other words, “disabled” is often the wrong term: “differently abled” is far more accurate.

It is also important that Tolkien published his novel, because, as Cohen explains, improvements for people with disabilities are best made in public. She writes “The peace this book will describe...was forged not in back rooms and ministerial chambers but in arenas of broad public participation, in soup kitchens and makeshift local pension offices, homes for orphaned children and villas turned lazarets” (4). Change happens in public places. Tolkien does far more than simply think about injuries and their ramifications. He writes a novel and puts it in the hands of many readers, giving them the opportunity to critically think about war injuries. The way Tolkien does this is important. He does not show the reader what to do; he simply reveals the problems and allows the reader to think about the best way to engage that particular issue.

Frodo: The Wounded Halfling

Frodo faces a great deal of doubt and discrimination during his journey because of his disabilities. He is both physically small and incurs several severe wounds. The doubts of his physical abilities are based nearly entirely on his appearance. Hobbits are small, short and cannot swim, climb, ride, or run very well (*LOTR* 7). The size is obvious—they are three feet tall in a world where humans are six feet tall. So, when the small characters is wounded, other people perceive that he has less chance of success than a larger, stronger character might.

Though few characters openly admit that they perceive hobbits as weak because they are small, several places allude to and encourage the assumption that their small size is evidence of perceived weakness.

Tolkien's readers would likely be aware of *The Hobbit* in which Gandalf tells Bilbo ““You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!”” (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 276), reminding the audience that, despite going through a great adventure, hobbits are still small people and the world is large and dangerous. Hobbits are not meant to be warriors. Hobbits have less noticeable, but still valuable, strengths as seen throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. It would be natural for readers to fear for hobbits because they appear ill-equipped for dangerous adventures. When Frodo is wounded several times throughout the story, the doubt compounds and many characters do not think he is strong enough to overcome his wounds to complete his mission. His hobbit companions worry he will be maimed for life (*LOTR* 199) and do not think Frodo would survive because he appears weak, based on what they can see. However, Tolkien shows that Frodo has strength deep within where it cannot be seen initially.

An important episode involves Frodo being stabbed on Weathertop by the Witch King, a Black Rider of Mordor. This episode is early in the novel and is set up by the idea that Frodo initially was going to make the journey by himself. However, his friends, Sam, Merry and Pippin, would not let him go by himself, which, while demonstrating loyalty, also suggests that they did not think he could do it alone. The idea that Frodo cannot do it alone seems to be on Tolkien's mind as he writes. Readers probably realize that Frodo is a small hobbit and not necessarily made for dangerous journeys, and that bringing the Ring to

Rivendell might be beyond his strength. When he is stabbed on Weathertop, the hope that Frodo can deliver the Ring to Rivendell diminishes. He is a small creature with a deep wound and it appears that he will not survive. It is important to note that, even prior to Weathertop, characters doubt Frodo's ability: they think he is too small and too weak. Initially, the mission was simply to get the Ring to Rivendell and that did not seem too difficult. However, the companions realize Ring-wraiths are tracking them and Frodo is beginning to fade. Even Glorfindel who happens upon the travelers grows quiet and his face "grew grave" (*LOTR* 211) when he saw Frodo's wound. The characters understand the danger of Frodo's wounds and their doubts cannot be easily hidden.

The pain of the Nazgul's wound is intense. It is described as "pain like a dart of poisoned ice pierced his left shoulder" (*LOTR* 196). The Black Riders stop their persistent attacks on the Fellowship after delivering it because they believe Frodo will succumb to the wound. Ever mindful, Aragorn says "your master has a deadly wound that will subdue him to their will" (*LOTR* 197). And indeed, the wound grows worse: "Frodo dozed, through pain of his wound was slowly growing, and a deadly chill was spreading from his shoulder to his arm and side" (*LOTR* 198).

The weapon that delivers Frodo's wound is described in great detail. Aragorn held the Morgul blade:

It was a "long thin knife. There was a cold gleam in it. As Strider raised it they saw that near the end of its edge was notched and the point was broken off. But even as he held it up in the growing light, they gazed in astonishment, for the blade seemed to melt, and vanished like a smoke in the air, leaving only the hilt in Strider's hand". (*LOTR* 198)

Glorfindel the elf later sees the blade and says “There are evil things written on the hilt...thought maybe your eyes cannot see them,” suggesting an otherworldly evil (*LOTR* 210). He continues “be wary, and handle it as little as you may!” (*LOTR* 210). Glorfindel, a weapon expert, also treats the Morgul blade with great care because he knows the danger it holds. The weapon is no ordinary blade, showing the severity of Frodo’s wound. From such a vicious weapon, his wound would never fully heal.

There is a mythical plant, Athelas, that has great healing powers, but even this herb cannot treat such a severe wound. Aragorn says “over such a wound as this its healing powers may be small” (*LOTR* 198). Again, Frodo’s wound is terrible and he is in dire need of aid. Even with athelas, “the life did not return to his arm, and he could not raise or use his hand. Frodo would need medical help that only Elrond the famous elf could provide” (*LOTR* 199). No traditional methods could cure Frodo.

Frodo “wondered if he would remain maimed for life” (*LOTR* 199). This fear makes him doubt himself and wonder “how they would now manage to continue their journey” (*LOTR* 199), showing that his wound affects more than just his body; the blade wounded his entire being and even the morale of the travelers seems wounded. Aragorn and the other hobbits “trudged along” with “their heads down, and their backs bowed under their burdens. Even Strider seemed tired and heavy-hearted” (*LOTR* 199-200), showing how destructive Frodo’s actions and the wound itself were. Though Tolkien does not explicitly write about his characters’ wounds as symbols of suffering in the real world, Frodo’s wounds are likely a comment on wartime injuries all the same.

It is important to note that Frodo feels shame because of his wound and this is something that many soldiers felt after becoming injured in war. Helms writes that “Frodo bears his wounds and scars well [comparatively speaking], not trying to burden any with his ailments and always thinking of how his affairs affect those for whom he cares” (2). However, he does burden his companions. As Frodo’s wound grows worse, his strength leaves him: “He felt too weak to stand...It was impossible for Frodo to walk” (*LOTR* 199) and he is unable to speak (*LOTR* 200). For a long part of the journey to Rivendell, Frodo does little; he rides the pony and rarely interacts with the others. In his particular case, Frodo must ride a horse because he cannot walk, effectively slowing the party and causing doubt towards his ability. A key element to note is that Frodo is silent. A reason for his silence is shame: “He bitterly regretted his foolishness, and reproached himself of weakness of will” (*LOTR* 199). Frodo knew he should not slip on the Ring, yet he failed, realizing that he had obeyed not his own desire but the wishes of the enemy. This in turn, makes Frodo feel ashamed and causes his companions to have doubts about his abilities. With a wounded party member, they must plan their course very carefully because they did not feel like they could face the “greater danger” again (*LOTR* 199).

Many soldiers felt shame because of their injuries and the inability to do actions they once could, much like Tolkien portrays in Frodo. Though Frodo’s companions treat him with respect, people with disabilities are often subjugated to normative expectations by people without disabilities (Davis 131). When they cannot perform at a level that most people can, they, naturally, feel ashamed. The problem is worsened when the expectations are presented as “righteous presented demands” (Davis 131). People with disabilities are treated as though

they should be able to do what others can and are treated poorly if they cannot. Often people without disabilities do not realize they are doing this until they are shown otherwise.

Despite the wounds and doubts, Frodo, with the help of his companions, outruns the wraiths and is healed in Rivendell, showing the toughness of a creature not often considered overly tough. In Rivendell, Frodo is reunited with Gandalf. Gandalf makes the important observation “it seems that Hobbits fade reluctantly. I have known strong warriors of Big People who would quickly have been overcome by that splinter, which you bore for seventeen days” (*LOTR* 222). Though Frodo was tended to by Elrond “who is a master of healing,” Gandalf tells Frodo he was tended to for “four days and three nights,” showing the medical treatment for his wound was a long affair (*LOTR* 221). Gandalf and company were “terribly anxious,” because they knew the wound was severe and he admits “I had very little hope; for I suspected that there was some fragment of the blade still in the closed wound. But it could not be found until last night. Then Elrond removed the splinter. It was deeply buried, and it was working inwards” (*LOTR* 221). This wound effectively would render Frodo a slave to the Nazgul. Gandalf also notes the black riders “tried to pierce your heart with Morgul-knife which remains in the wound. If they had succeeded, you would have become like they are, only weaker and under their command. You would have become a wraith under the dominion of the Dark Lord; and he would have tormented you for trying to keep his Ring, if any greater torment were possible than being robbed of it and seeing it on his hand” (*LOTR* 222). Frodo was about to suffer a fate worse than death: he would be an undead slave and watch Sauron come back to power, knowing that it was because of his own weakness. Gandalf even says “it was a terribly narrow shave.” Frodo, however, resisted the wound and avoid great catastrophe.

Gandalf mentions Frodo's courage saved him: "For your heart was not touched, and only your shoulder was pierced; and that was because you resisted to the last" (*LOTR* 222). Because he resisted, Frodo survives and reveals his inner toughness. Frodo is biologically able to bear terrible burdens longer than many humans, showing hobbits have far more potential than many other (usually human) characters give them credit for. So, despite being perceived as weak, Tolkien shows that Frodo is far tougher than he appears. The quote is also important because of the rhetoric. Frodo, essentially, is being praised for his heroism, much like soldiers are during wars. Though Tolkien emphasizes that his story is not an allegory of World War Two, we see that he is not immune to cultural influences. Like other writers of wars, Tolkien's narrator is glorifying Frodo's behavior, which would be similar to how soldiers of the World Wars would have been praised.

Another episode which suggests that Tolkien was interested in challenging superficial impressions comes when the Fellowship reaches Moria, an underground realm abandoned by the dwarves and now overrun by orcs, trolls, and more fearsome creatures. Just as Frodo was able to reject the incursion of the Morgul blade through an innate strength, so is he able to hold his own on the battlefield. This episode shows how weak his companions believe him to be, but also further establishes his almost preternatural resolve.

One could call Frodo's decision to charge into battle foolish, but the situation is dangerous and one must fight. Aragorn is actually impressed with Frodo's bravery: "One for the Shire!...The hobbit's bite is deep! You have a good blade, Frodo son of Drogo!" (*LOTR* 325). Aragorn has seen many good fighters, so his words are a high compliment. Aragorn's words also suggests that Frodo's move was not foolish. His coming wound was because of

bravery, not because of a mistake, like at Weathertop. The wound Frodo incurs in Moria is deadly, but because of the randomness of battle.

While Frodo is brave and possesses latent strength, he is still physically smaller than the other physically stronger fighters such as Aragorn, Gimli, Legolas, or Boromir. During the battle an Uruk engages him: the foe was “a huge, orc-chieftain, almost man-high, clad in black mail from head to foot” (*LOTR* 325). This a formidable foe and grotesque as well “His broad flat face was swart, his eyes were like coals, and his tongue was red” (*LOTR* 325). In addition to being strong, he was scary, making an even more intimidating enemy. The orc was well armed with a great spear and hide shield (*LOTR* 325). His prowess is evident when he turns Boromir away and evades Aragorn’s attack. The orc was also quite intelligent and knows to attack Frodo. His attack catches Frodo in the side and hurls him against the wall, pinning him (*LOTR* 325). Frodo falls and Aragorn picks him up in their retreat.

Moments later Frodo says “I am all right...I can walk. Put me down!” (*LOTR* 326) and “Aragorn nearly dropped him in amazement. ‘I thought you were dead’” (*LOTR* 326). The spear blow could have, and should have, been fatal. Aragorn can hardly believe Frodo survived and incredulously says “I can only say that hobbits are made of stuff so tough that I have never met the like of it...That spear-thrust would have skewered a wild boar” (*LOTR* 327). His skepticism hints at the idea that he did not think that Frodo was capable of surviving. Frodo replies that he was injured by the blow: “I feel as if I had been caught between a hammer and an anvil” and “He found breathing painful,” showing that the blow was powerful and capable of great damage (*LOTR* 328). Most other people would have been

killed by such a blow, yet Frodo seems to have a strength that people cannot easily see, but it drives him forward.

It should also be noted that Frodo was wearing Bilbo's mithril armor. Because of the mithril, an extremely strong fabric, the blade does not pierce him, but, like chain mail, does not stop the weapon's force—the spear blow, then, would be like a hammer—and Frodo's wounds reflect this:

There was a dark and blackened bruise on Frodo's right side and breast. Under the mail there was a shirt of soft leather, but at one point the rings had been driven through it into the flesh. Frodo's left side was also scored and bruised where he had been hurled against the wall. (*LOTR* 336)

The mithril armor only protected Frodo from the jagged edge of the spear; his wound is still quite serious.

Another serious wound comes from Gollum. At Mount Doom, Frodo decided to keep the Ring but Gollum, who is desperate to take back his "precious," takes it back by biting off Frodo's finger that wore the Ring. The description of the wound is not overly graphic, but effectively shows Gollum's heinous act: "Sam saw Gollum's long hands draw upwards to his mouth; his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees at the chasm's edge" (*LOTR* 946). There was little heroism in this wound because Frodo had failed to cast the Ring into the flames. The Ring was only destroyed because Gollum took it from Frodo. Frodo's failure would likely cause him embarrassment and shame because of his failure.

This episode highlights Frodo's limitations. Through the first part of Frodo's journey, Tolkien is intent on showing that a seemingly insignificant person can do great things, even when few others see strength in them. By the time Frodo arrives in Mordor, it is clear that a

physically small character can do more than is initially supposed. However, Tolkien takes the opportunity to show that characters—even ones that he has purposefully shown to be stronger than they appear—and show that the characters have limits. These limits are important because Frodo is permanently wounded from his journey.

As Frodo travels back to the Shire with Gandalf, his wounds pain him. Gandalf asks “Are you in pain, Frodo?” and Frodo answers “Well, yes I am...It is my shoulder. The wound aches, and the memory of darkness is heavy on me. It was a year ago today” (*LOTR* 989). He cites four major wounds as the brunt of the pain: “I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden” (*LOTR* 989). Gandalf understands that wounds carry lingering pain: “Alas! There are some wounds that cannot be wholly cured” (*LOTR* 989). Frodo also is aware of this and later tells Sam “I am wounded...it will never really heal” (*LOTR* 1025). For Tolkien’s readers, this would serve as a reminder that wars bring long-lasting injuries that cannot be healed even with time.

Frodo’s particular wounds also do not heal mentally or emotionally. His trauma associated with the Ring continues far beyond the moment it was destroyed. Though post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) had not yet been classified, the term shell shock was commonly used to describe soldiers who struggled with horrifying memories of war. Frodo exemplifies the recurring, and real, struggles of soldiers as he continues his life after the war. Years later Frodo could be found “clutching a white gem that hung on a chain about his neck and he seemed half in a dream” (*LOTR* 1024). In this dream-like state, he says “It is gone forever...and now all is dark and empty” (*LOTR* 1024). The image demonstrates the difficulty Frodo had of moving past the suffering he endured along the journey. He is

clutching a gem—a token similar to the Ring—and he seemed to be at least partially incapacitated, much like an individual with severe grief.

Like soldiers returning from war, Frodo realizes his life will never be like it was. He says ““There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?”” (989). Even Gandalf has no answer. Sebastian Jobs writes of soldiers returning from the World War Two and the struggles they faced trying to get back into society. He writes “Part of the crisis [of returning home] involved the soldiers’ need to adapt to their old environment in light of the physical and mental transformation they had undergone in their war service” (115). Soldiers did not often find old surroundings to be familiar and they struggled to transition back into civilian life (Cohen 102). Many soldiers were badly wounded, like Frodo, or mentally disabled. Soldiers’ perspectives change during the war. Frodo has grown as a character to such a degree that he realizes the Shire will never seem like it was. It was not the Shire that changed, it was him; he had gained experience and grew as a character to the point where he became, as Waito says, “cognizant of problems that exist in the Shire,” and he could no longer let the Shire stagnate (Drout 224, Waito para 2). In the context of *The Lord of the Rings*, Waito describes the hobbits’ change as beneficial: “The Ring Quest, then, serves as the means by which Merry, Pippin, and especially Frodo and Sam acquire the ability to identify the Shire's problematic tendencies; their experiential learning from the Ring Quest equips them with the necessary skills to purge the Shire of its intolerances” (para 9). Without the mission, the hobbits would have been prepared to protect the Shire; the hobbits need to go on the mission in order to be stronger individuals.

While Tolkien is showing the horrors of war, he also shows Frodo's reaction to the violence. When Frodo gains the experience of seeing war's horror, he becomes what people could call a pacifist. Many soldiers after the World Wars returned home, often with horrible memories, and they vowed they would not fight again. Frodo is exemplifying the horror many soldiers experienced and shows that he wants nothing to do with continuing the violence and destruction. Essentially, the war has taken away any aggressiveness and taught him that he can use his experiences to help others peacefully. Tolkien writes:

One point: Frodo's attitude to weapons was personal. He was not in modern terms a 'pacifist'. Of course, he was mainly horrified at the prospect of civil war among Hobbits; but he had (I suppose) also reached the conclusion that physical fighting is actually less ultimately effective than most (good) men think it! (Carpenter, "Letter 195" 256)

This is a place where Tolkien's experience with war can be seen; he understood that a large number of men fight another large number of men actually does not serve much purpose. He revealed distaste at the violent weapons used in the war, being stunned by the prospect of nuclear weapons (Carpenter, "Letter 120" 116). He even writes "Wars are always lost, and The War always goes on" (Carpenter, "Letter 101" 116). Tolkien does not necessarily mean this in a pessimistic sense; he is suggesting that war rarely fixes bad situations. He has even written victors cannot enjoy their success, at least not in the terms they envisioned (Carpenter, "Letter 181" 235). After losing friends, killing people, and suffering wounds, victory becomes tainted. This would explain why Frodo turns to a form of pacifism after experiencing the horrors of war.

Frodo's pacifism begins in Mordor when he clearly grows tired of the war. He casts off his orcish disguise and cries "I'll be an orc no more...and I'll bear no weapon, fair or

foul. Let them take me if they will!” (*LOTR* 937). Fair or foul, Frodo does not want to fight. It is also important to note that Frodo is still ready for a challenge as he dares orcs to take him. His pacifism is not an act of cowardice or caution. He is actively challenging the enemy. The only thing that has changed is that he does not want to use weapons or sneak around.

Frodo’s pacifism can also be seen when he returns to the Shire and finds Saruman and his henchmen have tried to take over his homeland. Frodo does not want to hurt Saruman and his men. At the prospect of killing treacherous hobbits, Frodo says “‘Fight?...Well, I suppose it may come to that. But remember: there is to be no slaying of hobbits, not even if they have gone over to the other side. Really gone over, I mean; not just obeying ruffians’ orders because they are frightened” (*LOTR* 1006). He adds “‘nobody is to be killed at all, if it can be helped. Keep your tempers and hold your hands to the last possible moment!’” (*LOTR* 1006). In the battle, Frodo does not use his weapon. His main mission was to “prevent the hobbits in their wrath at their losses, from slaying those enemies who threw down their weapons” (*LOTR* 1016). Frodo acts as moderator, cheering the hobbits to victory but also preventing unnecessary destruction.

Even when Saruman is captured and nearly executed, Frodo lets him go. He says “‘I will not have him slain. It is useless to meet revenge with revenge: it will heal nothing” (*LOTR* 1019). As Saruman leaves, he tries to stab Frodo but fails and the hobbits try to kill him. Even then, Frodo says “‘Do no kill him even now” (*LOTR* 1019). Most people would have killed Saruman, but Frodo has learned that violence is not an effective way to gain success.

One must wonder why Frodo of all the hobbits develops pacifism. Ott suggests that Frodo's change happens mainly because of the severity of his suffering. She writes:

Merry and Pippin did not experience the terror and the sheer physical ordeal of bearing the One Ring to Mount Doom. Although they fought and were wounded in battle, they were not subjected to the constant and unending stress that Sam and Frodo were. It is as if they were members of an armed service that did not spend time in the trenches. ("Hobbits are Returning Veterans" para 2)

In order for Tolkien to effectively show the horrors of war and reveal negative perceptions towards people with disabilities, he needed to show that Frodo was wounded far beyond most soldiers and/or hobbits. The severity is important because Tolkien shows it haunts Frodo the rest of his life. Ott adds:

After the war, [the hobbits, excluding Frodo] resume life as well-connected, upper-class Hobbits. Their experiences have matured them and trained them to take on leadership roles – as can be seen in their military planning to remove intruders from the Shire and in their direction (with Sam Gamgee) of restoration efforts after the Scouring of the Shire. ("Hobbits are Returning Veterans" para 2)

Frodo, and Sam to a lesser extent, faced a far more hellish side of the war, much like soldiers who had long tours of duty in the trenches (Ott, para 3). Like many veterans, however, Frodo found difficulty in putting aside the terror of his wartime experiences and successfully coped with the trauma of his journey to Mordor.

Ott comments that Sam's experience is similar to Tolkien's. Sam's experiences broadened his parochial viewpoint and taught him wisdom. On his return to the Shire, he is hailed as a hero. Like Merry and Pippin, Sam takes on a leadership role in the restoration of the Shire. He marries his girlfriend, starts a family, and is elected mayor. When Tolkien returned from the war, he was reunited with his wife, started a family, and embarked on a successful academic and literary career (Ott, para 3).

Unlike his hobbit companions, Frodo's wounds eventually overcome him, and he willingly goes into the West. In Middle Earth, elves do not die but sail west on white ships. This is similar to what people could call dying and going to heaven. Frodo's wounds still pain him and he must leave Middle Earth, essentially succumbing to his wounds. The reason his "end" is important is that it shows that people are not invincible. Ott writes the following about Frodo's end:

Frodo could not put the War of the Ring behind him and had a difficult time coping with the trauma he suffered. In many ways, he is like the shell-shocked veteran of the trenches whose minds and spirits never recovered from the horrors they witnessed. The stress of his journey to Mordor was multiplied by the trauma he suffered from bearing the One Ring. Frodo had intrusive memories of being wounded by the Witch King's knife, Shelob's stinger, and Gollum's teeth. He was often ill and eventually dropped out of the social life of the Shire. His spirit was broken by the evil effect of the Ring, to which he finally succumbed. Frodo cannot find peace or rest in the Shire, and must leave it to seek healing in the Blessed Real. (Ott, para. 4)

Even in victory, Frodo must die. His sacrifice brings with it "never-ending wounds to nurse along with the knowledge of what their sacrifices have purchased" (Helms 2). Frodo realizes that his sacrifice was not really for himself either. He says "I have tried to heal the Shire, and it has been healed, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them" (*LOTR* 1029). In this passage one can see the World Wars' influence on Tolkien. He understands the necessity but also the destruction and realizes that war is less effective than many suppose (Carpenter "Letter 195" 256). Tolkien, again, is putting forth the idea that even the heroes cannot enjoy the victory (Carpenter, "Letter 181" 235).

Tolkien uses heroes in his story but is careful to show that they are not all powerful. As mentioned earlier, he is concerned with showing the fallibility of people, explaining that a

story in which the hero is defeated by evil is more significant than a simple fairy tale ending (Carpenter, "Letter 192" 252). Frodo's eventual death serves as a reminder to the readers that war negatively affects the heroes, that no one is invincible, and that war is not something to be played with.

Through Frodo and his wounds, Tolkien is commenting on the World Wars and the general attitudes towards war and those who returned from it with disabilities that were prevalent in the mid twentieth century. Frodo seems small and insignificant, but he goes on to do great things. By including wounds and disabilities in his novel, Tolkien is able to use his experience with war to comment on both war's severity and how negative perceptions towards people with disabilities is often unwarranted. People with disabilities, including wounded soldiers, often face discrimination and Tolkien likely was trying to shift positive attention to their struggles to show that they need help but also that they have much more potential than people often assume.

Because Tolkien fought in several bloody battles, he understood the horrors of war and carefully portrayed his novel's wars to show his readers that war is not all glorious and victorious. Several main characters die in the novel's battles and Frodo incurs deep wounds that he would never overcome. Even in victory, Frodo would die because of war's destruction. Frodo is moved by war and becomes a pacifist, refusing to fight unless absolutely necessary and sparing the lives of his enemies.

Chapter II: Tolkien's Response to Isolationism and Provincialism

This chapter explores perceptions that are based on isolationist and provincial attitudes. Poor perceptions are often rooted in the small-mindedness of characters. The small-mindedness common in Tolkien's characters is modeled after attitudes common in the mid-twentieth century England and *The Lord of the Rings* is Tolkien's effort to challenge the small-mindedness. In doing so, Tolkien is able to challenge his readers to think outside their personal world and realize the world is much larger and more complex than it initially appears. Tolkien is commonly labeled as anti-modern and was intent on challenging attitudes he considered negative: he was "hostile to and repelled by the new mood of irony, cynicism, and rejection of authority common in British intellectual circles after the trauma of the war" (Drout 356). Tolkien's novel challenges many of these small-minded, negative attitudes.

During the twentieth century, isolationism was common and many countries were content with staying out of the affairs of other countries. This isolation is most obvious in the years during Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany, years in which Tolkien was writing *The Lord of the Rings*. As the introduction of this thesis explained, most countries did not realize the danger Hitler posed, or they tried to stay out of the affair, hoping a war would not come. Isolation was strong in England during the 1930s. Wevill writes that isolationism had "shifted from the political front...and moved to the economic fields where it can operate in a more disguised if even more destructive fashion" (62). Tolkien saw isolation as a problem; *The Lord of the Rings* is his reaction to this problem. England specifically was not ready to join a war, so they hoped it would pass without incident, yet the war possibly could have been avoided if the West had acted earlier (Mosely 12). A possible reason for isolationism is that

countries wanted to keep the current balance of power. By intervening, they feared the balance would be lost. Economists also cite the fear of uncertainty as another factor (Baum 313-38, Fordham 163-82, Urbatsch 472). People were unwilling to do something that could potentially backfire. As a result, Germany marched over most of Europe even before the other world powers began to resist.

As mentioned earlier, Tolkien addresses isolation in his letters. He writes that people cannot live in isolation: “we are individuals (as in some degree are all living things) but do not, cannot, live in isolation, and have a bond with all other things, ever closer up to the absolute bond with our own human kind” (Carpenter, “Letter 310” 399). To Tolkien, isolation was a bad thing because people are not meant to live apart from one another. Tolkien considered himself similar to hobbits:

I am in fact a Hobbit (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humour (which even my appreciative critics find tiresome); I go to bed late and get up late (when possible). (Carpenter “Letter 213” 288-289)

Despite feeling similar to a hobbit, Tolkien displays several non-hobbit-like abilities. While hobbits are known to not travel much, Tolkien spent a fair amount of time outside of England. There was the War in France, of course, but he visited Ireland in 1951, and went across Europe to Italy in 1955 (Tolkien Society). It appears that exploring is important to Tolkien and this can be seen in his novel in which the characters must leave their homeland to face challenges elsewhere.

His novel repeatedly shows that people should make efforts to work together. The war itself is a prime example: the human, hobbits, elves, dwarves, and Gandalf the wizard all work

together to stop a destructive force. Tolkien did not like war either, calling World War One the “late regrettable war” (Carpenter “Letter 30” 37), and wrote to his son the following: “One War is enough for any man. I hope you will be spared a second” (Carpenter, “Letter 45” 54).

However, Tolkien also understood that there are evil people in the world and they must be fought. He labeled Hitler as a “ruddy little ignoramus” who was “inspired by a mad, whirlwind, devil” (Carpenter, “Letter 45” 55). Tolkien also understood that Hitler was going unchecked: “People in this land seem not even yet to realize that in the Germans we have enemies whose virtues (and they are virtues) of obedience and patriotism are greater than ours in the mass” (Letter 45). Tolkien suggests that isolation only gives the enemy a chance to advance. His novel reflects this; even seemingly insignificant hobbits are drawn into the war, showing that wars permeate into the most isolated of regions, and no one can hide from war. Thus, people must fight the enemy.

During World War Two, while Tolkien was writing *The Lord of the Rings* and when American and British troops were in Europe fighting Germany, strong isolationism still existed. In his 1944 article, Benjamin Kizer analyzes the isolationism occurring among the soldiers fighting in Europe. While many people thought that having soldiers on distant lands was proof against isolationism, Kizer writes that isolationism comes under the guise of nationalism and patriotism (155). Though soldiers were overseas helping other countries, they still had small-minded attitudes and still did not understand that they were part of a larger world.

Provincialism is another strong contributor to characters’ perceptions. While similar to isolationism, which is the active process of not getting involved in an affair, provincialism is a

passive, subconscious process of not realizing the world is larger and more complex than one believes. The Shire is a place where provincialism is common. Waito calls it an “unhealthy community” (para 1). Hobbits are content with their lives and do little more than puff their pipes. Waito explains further:

By undertaking the Ring Quest, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin gain experience that enables them to become cognizant of problems that exist in the Shire, and equip themselves with the necessary skills to cleanse the Shire of its destructive tendencies. I argue that the Ring Quest serves merely as a means for the four hobbits to acquire what is necessary to complete the Shire Quest, and that the main conflict of Tolkien's novel is not to destroy the Ring, but to ‘scour’ or save the Shire. (para 6)

The hobbits must leave the Shire to become the strong people they were meant to be. For Waito, the climax is the Scouring of the Shire, which takes place after the battle with Sauron is concluded. Waito shows that the hobbits had to leave the Shire to grow in character. Had Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin stayed at the Shire—assuming the War of the Ring would have been won without them—they would not have been ready to push Saruman out. They would have stagnated inside the Shire’s provincial influence. Leaving the Shire was very beneficial because the hobbits learned to rethink their previous assumptions and challenge their previous provincialism.

Jane Chance goes so far as to compare the Shire to Mordor, because both are isolated and suspicious of outsiders. Hobbits do not trust anything unfamiliar: “Marks of distinction—wealth, education, even leadership—can set a Hobbit apart, make him different” (Chance, *Mythology of Power* 27). She asks “How can individuals (and nations) so different from one another coexist in harmony?” (Chance, *Mythology of Power* 34). Tolkien created a world with many different races and peoples, and his focus on difference “polarizes the forces of good and evil, social class, and political group” (Chance, *Mythology of Power* 37). As another note

on Bilbo, he returns to the Shire wealthy, educated and independent, but is consequently marginalized by other hobbits and labeled “queer.” Hobbits need to leave the Shire’s negative influence in order to see that their society can be better; this allows the well-traveled hobbit to return to the Shire and make it a better place because of the broader perspective gained through travelling.

This chapter will explore small-mindedness in Boromir of Gondor, Bree, and the Shire. Boromir is a warrior from Minas Tirith who displays acute provincialism when he gloats about his kingdom’s accomplishments and the role his own valor played in them. He values physical power and judges people by their appearances. He does not realize that physically weaker characters have different kinds of strengths and can be every bit as capable as purely physically strong characters can be. The residents of Bree demonstrate provincialism because they do not realize the world is larger than what they can observe. Breelanders do not have Boromir’s arrogance, but they share the same small-mindedness. Like Bree, the Shire is home to many provincial characters. While staying in the Shire, the hobbits (more specifically Frodo, Sam, Merry, Pippin, and Bilbo) are negatively influenced by the Shire’s stagnation. When they leave, however, they are able to grow as characters.

Boromir

Boromir’s inability to accept the fact that Frodo has the courage required to carry out his mission is located in his own small-mindedness. This small-mindedness in turn is a symptom of Boromir’s lack of understanding of the larger world. He has an inflated belief in the role that Gondor has played in keeping Middle-earth safe. Both provincialism and isolationism were on Tolkien’s mind as he wrote *The Lord of the Rings* because of his own

experiences with Europe during the middle part of the twentieth century. As mentioned, Britain and many other countries were steeped in isolationist behavior; few were willing to oppose Nazi Germany's military campaigns over Europe. Tolkien, however, did not approve of isolationism and argued that people are and should be linked in many ways. Through Boromir, Tolkien reveals the dangers of provincialism and isolation and encourages people to broaden their world views and avoid segregating themselves from the rest of the world.

A wide range of scholarly opinions exist on Boromir, but most consider him proud and destructive. Michael Drouot has few kind words for Boromir, calling him "reckless, arrogant, and reliant on power" (75). He also notes that "Boromir's arrogance not only mars his heroism, it foreshadows his role as breaker of the Fellowship," suggesting that Boromir did not actually bring anything useful to the Fellowship (75). Tom Shippey describes Boromir as "prejudiced" (*The Road to Middle Earth* 59). He even notes that the audience could compare him to a Ringwraith because they both have greedy, obsessive patterns (138). He writes that, though it is not stated in the novel, Boromir's motto could be "The means justify the ends" because he does not necessarily care how something is done as long as it is beneficial in the end.

Boromir comes from Minas Tirith, a large city in the land of Gondor, and believes his home is the most important and influential place in Middle Earth in the war to come. Gondor is a powerful kingdom, to be sure, which many believe Tolkien based the ancient Roman culture (Drouot 248-249). But this power is attended by an arrogance that prompts Straubhaar to describe the court as "haughty" (Chance, *Tolkien and the Invention of a Myth* 115). As will

be expanded upon shortly, pride leads to the destructions of many characters in Tolkien's world (Drout 543).

At the Council of Elrond in Rivendell, humans, dwarves, elves, hobbits, and Gandalf come together to decide what should be done with the Ring. Boromir, a human, wants to show the council the might of Gondor:

Believe not that in the land of Gondor the blood of Numenor is spent, nor all its pride and dignity forgotten. By our valour the wild folk of the East are still restrained, and the terror of Morgul kept at bay; and thus alone are peace and freedom maintained in the lands behind us. (*LOTR* 245)

His language demonstrates nationalism and provincialism as he believes that his people alone are holding the world together. It is admirable that Boromir is willing to travel to Rivendell to help his city, and he shows great courage when he tries to persuade the leaders to take the fight to Sauron: "The Men of Gondor are valiant, and they will never submit... Valour needs first strength, and then a weapon. Let the Ring be your weapon, if it has such power as you say. Take it and go forth to victory" (*LOTR* 267). However, Boromir does not see the importance in other peoples and places. His zealotry comes with isolationist/provincial tendencies. He believes he is better than other characters and considers himself superior to most.

Yet Tolkien is interested in challenging the idea that strength alone equals greatness. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Frodo is able to achieve feats that few thought were possible. By showing Boromir's bias, Tolkien can challenge the attitudes he encountered in the mid-twentieth century England and show his readers the problems with this small-minded way of thought, and, in doing so, can encourage his readers to look deeper at people and not simply judge by external appearances alone.

Boromir's perceptions towards hobbits is first seen in Rivendell. As Frodo lays the Ring before the attendees, Boromir takes notice. He speaks of the ancient warrior Isildur and his "bright ring" and "the Wise" and the time when the world began (*LOTR* 249). As he speaks of the Ring passing through time, from the hands of great warriors, he says "until it is brought by so strange a messenger." Boromir perceives Frodo as someone that does not belong. He does not technically point out Frodo's small size (until later) but, based on the context of his speech, he is suggesting that Frodo is not worthy of the Ring, that Frodo is not worthy of being part of the Ring's story.

His small-mindedness is further revealed when he takes sight of the Ring. Boromir is consumed with a desire to bring it home and use it against Sauron. He likes the power of the Ring. Even when the other council members explain that it cannot be used against Sauron, Boromir continues his provincial attitudes and desires the Ring's power: "I do not understand all this...Saruman is a traitor but did he not have a glimpse of wisdom? Why do you speak ever of hiding and destroying? Why should we not think that the Great Ring has come into our hands to serve us in the very hour of need? Wielding it the Free Lords of the Free may surely defeat the Enemy. That is what he fears, I deem" (*LOTR* 267). Boromir is fairly loyal to the humans and sees that Saruman was wrong, but puts value in the power of the Ring. That, of course, is his first mistake, allowing his small-mindedness to affect his judgment. Boromir is passionate in his antipathy for Sauron and wants to meet him head-on, but this is foolish. In his mind, the Ring would give him power to take on Sauron, but this is only a fantasy. A wise individual without provincial attitudes would know this kind of attack is

foolish, but, through this display of foolishness, Tolkien is able to show his readers the dangers of small-mindedness and provincialism.

Tolkien reveals that Boromir places great importance on power. The warrior values physical and political strength and judges people solely on the presence of these powers. Hobbits have little of either and Tolkien shows Boromir's isolationist and provincial attitudes when he makes several negative assumptions towards hobbits. Tolkien does this to make the argument that strength alone is not enough for any kind of success; people must be more balanced. Boromir is not balanced; his stance on strength is very clear: "The strongest of us must seek a way" (*LOTR* 291). He speaks also of bravery: "The fearless, the ruthless, these alone will achieve victory" (*LOTR* 398). Both statements reveal that physical size is particularly valuable to him. This belief causes Boromir to judge people by the wrong criteria and assume that physically smaller characters are also weak physically and mentally. Though hobbits appear small and timid, Tolkien is showing that there is more bravery and latent strength than people would expect.

Boromir's most obvious assumption, as mentioned before, is that Frodo needs help, which he does, but the mistake is in the assumption. Boromir also believes that, if Frodo needs help, he, Boromir, is the one who can best provide it: "You need counsel in your hard choice. Will you not take mine?" (*LOTR* 397). By doing so, he makes several less-than-effective moves. Rosalyn Darling writes about the common perceptions that people demonstrate towards groups perceived as less superior. Boromir tries to relegate hobbits to a separate place in society and encourages them to interact with their own kind. He considers them to be inferior and considers their segregation as better for them. He also judges hobbits

as a whole, rather than as individuals (Darling 15). Additionally, Boromir makes the mistake of making contrasts between himself and hobbits. Lennard Davis notes that people have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others (3), and this leads Boromir to consider himself more powerful because he does not lack what he perceives to be proper or “normal.” Julie Smart writes that “normalcy” is defined as the lack of deviance, illness, or disability (3). Boromir is tall and hobbits are not, making him think he is superior based on what he can see, but Tolkien is using this opportunity to show that the actual worth of a character is on the inside and it cannot be judged by height or physical strength.

Tolkien shows that because of his assumptions, Boromir believes Minas Tirith has protected the hobbits, which may or may not be true, and that the hobbits are only safe because of the strength of humans. In his mind, only men from a strong kingdom can do great things. His bias comes out in his next statement: the strength of Gondor “has long protected you far away in your little country, though you knew it not” (*LOTR* 397). By using the term “little country,” he clearly shows that he thinks little of the Shire and the ability of the hobbits, that a small country and small people can only do small things, which includes both small ways of thinking and small ways of physical feats. In reality, hobbits have taken care of themselves very well over many years with only limited help from the outside, like Aragorn and the striders, and others. Boromir believes Minas Tirith has protected the hobbits, which may or may not be true, and that the hobbits are only safe because of the physical strength and bravery of humans. When he sees Frodo suffering, he asks “Are you sure that you do not suffer needlessly?...I wish to help you. You need counsel in your hard choice. Will you not take mine?” (*LOTR* 397). Here Boromir makes a common mistake; he assumes he knows best

and that Frodo does not, as though his counsel is the best for Frodo. The phrase “Will you not take mine?” suggests that Boromir expects Frodo to listen to him, as though Frodo would be a fool to ignore him. Boromir’s negative attitudes are unfounded, further showing Boromir’s provincial core beliefs.

Thus far, this thesis has shown that Boromir’s small-minded attitudes are aimed at groups, but he also extends his prejudice to individuals. Because of his small-minded attitude, he does not think Frodo can manage by himself. He says no one should wander alone “you least of all; so much depends on you” (*LOTR* 397). Boromir is referring to the hobbit’s small size and dangerous burden. Obviously, Frodo is small and carrying a dangerous object, but Boromir’s tone reflects his prejudice mainly against Frodo’s small size as he does not think Frodo is capable of taking care of himself based on his small size. This belief, of course, is rooted in his provincial mindset and is not entirely accurate. He asks Frodo if he can stay and talk because “It would comfort” him (*LOTR* 397). Here, Boromir reveals his provincialism because he thinks Frodo needs help. Frodo probably does and it is a dangerous mission, but Boromir perceives Frodo as weak and assumes he needs help. He simply does not see the potential of hobbits. In his mind, because the Ring-bearer appears weak, he is weak both physically and, more importantly, weak in character, and the mission will fail. He thinks a small person will be their undoing.

Even when Frodo is suffering most, Boromir does not offer Frodo patience, but instead thinks he knows best. After losing Gandalf, Frodo goes into the forest to ponder the best course of action. As Frodo leaves, he tells Aragorn “I know that haste is needed, yet I cannot choose [the course of action]. The burden is heavy. Give me an hour longer, and I will

speak. Let me be alone!” Aragorn, an astute character, lets Frodo go: “Aragorn looked at him with kindly pity. ‘Very well, Frodo son of Drogo... You shall have an hour, and you shall be left alone’” (*LOTR* 396). It is clear that Frodo is burdened by the Ring and choices. Unlike Aragorn, however, Boromir does not respect Frodo’s wishes and he seeks Frodo in the forest. After Frodo wanders for a time, Boromir appears behind him and Frodo “to his surprise” saw that the human was smiling and looking kind (*LOTR* 397). After asking to be left alone, one can understand Frodo’s surprise and confusion when Boromir’s suddenly appears. Frodo knew something was afool. Boromir says “I was afraid for you, Frodo,” taking a step closer, “If Aragorn is right and Orcs are near, then none of us should wander alone” (*LOTR* 397). Boromir rarely supports Aragorn; they had argued much of the journey, but now Boromir appears to agree with the ranger. Also, Boromir “laid his hand on the hobbit’s shoulder in friendly fashion; but Frodo left the hand trembling with suppressed excitement. He stepped quickly away and eyed with alarm the tall Man” (*LOTR* 399). Boromir is offended that Frodo does not trust him: “Why are you so unfriendly?...I am true man, neither thief nor tracker” (*LOTR* 399). It is clear that Boromir is building his ethos by supporting a character that Frodo trusts and being making himself appear friendly, thereby hoping to gain Frodo’s compliance. It is coercive language.

Because he does not believe Frodo can manage, Boromir tries to convince Frodo to abandon the mission because it is too much for him. Boromir, of course, wants the Ring for himself and encourages Frodo’s doubt so that the hobbit will peacefully surrender the Ring. He says “You say you are afraid. If it is so, the boldest should pardon you. But is it not your good sense that revolts?” (398). By saying “the boldest,” Boromir is suggesting that Frodo is

in over his head, that even the bravest would understand why Frodo would falter; this line of thought is a perfect example of how Boromir does not see the potential of hobbits; he sees them as weak beings in a dangerous situation. Granted, the situation is dire and hobbits are not suited to war, but Boromir's mistake is in not giving hobbits a chance to succeed. Frodo has shown tremendous willpower thus far and Boromir does not respect his prior accomplishments.

Because Boromir thinks the hobbits are weak and not suited for war, he believes that hobbits would be better off if they were not in the war; he thinks they would be happier back in the Shire: ““Come, come, my friend!’ Boromir said in a softer voice. ‘Why not get rid of it [the Ring]? Why not be free of your doubt and fear?’” (*LOTR* 399). Frodo is carrying the Ring because he feels bound to it, and Boromir has a point: perhaps Frodo does not need to feel responsible for it. However, Boromir's fault lies in not respecting the hobbit's wish. Instead of helping Frodo with the dangerous journey, he wants to take the glory and danger (both good and bad aspects) from him. Boromir would be protecting the hobbits from harm—that is a good thing—but the problem is that Boromir does not believe hobbits have a place in the war.

When Boromir decides that Frodo cannot handle the mission, he tries to take the Ring by force. As Tolkien writes, Boromir was “nearly twice his height and many times his match in strength” (*LOTR* 399). Boromir says ““You could say that I was too strong and took it by force. For I am too strong for you, halfling’” (*LOTR* 399). Obviously, he is correct that a hobbit could not overcome his strength, but using his strength against Frodo is assault; this might be a good place to wonder what Minas Tirith would think if it discovered the brave

Boromir hurt a person half his size. To Boromir, size is success; he knows Frodo is not physically strong, but his greatest mistake is in misjudging Frodo's inner strength as also weak. Frodo might be small, but his physical size says nothing about his bravery or intelligence. Boromir assumes Frodo is mentally weak and would crumble in the presence of danger, which is interesting because they just came out of Moria and Frodo survived a troll, showing he had great strength and bravery. Still, Boromir does not see the hidden strength of the hobbit, demonstrating his inaccurate provincial assumptions.

When Boromir finally tries to take the Ring from Frodo, he reveals his deepest provincialism. Frodo puts on the Ring and evades him. Boromir nearly goes into a frenzy and cries "Miserable trickster!...Let me get my hands on you! Now I see your mind. You will take the Ring to Sauron and sell us all. You have only waited your chance to leave us in this lurch. Curse you and all halflings to death and darkness!" (*LOTR* 399). Apart from the obvious hatred and lack of understanding, Boromir equates his encounter with Frodo to all hobbits. Because Frodo did not do as he wanted, Boromir assumes all hobbits must be similar and should all be punished for the actions of one; he automatically thinks all hobbits are evil, judging them as a whole, much like Darling writes (15).

Along with value in physical strength, Tolkien seems to be intent on challenging the stubbornness that is common with provincialism. Tolkien portrays Boromir as completely unwilling to consider other beliefs. The warrior stubbornly holds to his small-minded opinions, which ultimately causes him to abandon reason and try to take the Ring from Frodo. Though Tolkien does not directly address stubbornness in his letters or other commentary on his fiction, it is clear that he believes it is a negative in the way he constructed the provincial

beliefs of Boromir. Challenging negative perceptions is important but it is only useful if one is willing to rethink their assumptions. By showing Boromir's stubbornness, Tolkien is able to show how negative perceptions and provincialism can be perpetuated and Boromir serves as a reminder to encourage people to be willing to rethink their ideology.

Tolkien shows that Boromir has trouble following the advice of others. As Boromir speaks with Frodo, trying to convince Frodo to give him the Ring, he speaks of the Council of Elrond, criticizing its wisdom and believing himself to be unquestionably right, clearly displaying provincial attitudes. At the Council, it was made clear that the Ring cannot be used against Sauron, yet Boromir stubbornly holds to the idea of taking the Ring into battle and defeating Sauron. He is unwilling to agree with the Council's decision to destroy the Ring, and angrily laments: "And they tell us to throw it away!" as though the council's decision was a slight against him (*LOTR* 398). And still while he should know better, he says: "I do not say destroy it. That might be well, if reason could show any hope of doing so. It does not. The only plan that is proposed to us is that a halfling should walk blindly into Mordor and offer the Enemy every chance of recapturing it for himself. Folly!" (*LOTR* 398). Not only does Boromir call the Counsel's plan "folly," but he specifically points out that the plan hinges on a "halfling," someone he considers far less physical able than himself. Boromir's provincialism is best seen when he holds firm to the idea that a physically strong character should be the one who carries the Ring and refuses to consider alternatives.

Boromir's value in physical strength and stubbornness lead to an important Tolkienian theme: pride. Because of his small-minded way of thinking, Boromir does not always see the bigger picture or realize that other people might have valid ideas. It is highly likely that

Tolkien was using Boromir's pride to show his readers how not to behave. Tolkien critics cite pride as one of Tolkien's main themes. Many of Tolkien's tragic characters are destroyed by pride and possessiveness (Drout 543), and Boromir has both. Drout writes "pride takes the form of excessive desire for power in Boromir" (544). His very first words at the Council of Elrond are words extolling the valor, dignity, and pride of the House of Stewards. He uses language including "The Men of Gondor are valiant, and they will never submit" (*LOTR* 267). However, Boromir's pride prevents him from understanding other's viewpoints because he thinks he is right and only one person can be right.

Additionally, Boromir demonstrates a lack of understanding towards people who disagree with him. When Frodo expresses a different opinion than Boromir, the Gondorian suggests that Frodo is only repeating what he was told to say: "all these folk have taught you to say so," (*LOTR* 398). By questioning Frodo's ability to think for himself, Boromir shows his prejudice against people who think differently than him.

Boromir does not like when his people are treated in a way he perceives as poor. When Boromir tries to convince Frodo to give him the Ring, Frodo warns "Against the way that seems easier. Against refusal of the burden that is laid on me. Against—well, if it must be said, against trust in the strength and truth of Men" (*LOTR* 397). Frodo's statements hurts Boromir's pride. The warrior says, "Yet that strength has long protected you far away in your little country, though you knew it not" (*LOTR* 397). Boromir believes his people have guarded the world against great foes and do not get the credit they deserve. Frodo says "I do not doubt the valour of your people. But the world is changing. The walls of Minas Tirith may be strong, but they are not strong enough. If they fail, what then?" (397). Frodo believes that

humans honestly try hard to help, but are unable to help as much they believe they can. Like Boromir, many humans think they know what hobbits need, when, in reality, their “knowledge” is a collection of ignorance. Even if their motives are honest, Gondorians do not seem to understand the larger world.

When Frodo will not give the Ring to Boromir, he becomes enraged and thinks Frodo will be their undoing: “It is by our own folly that the Enemy will defeat us...How it angers me! Fool! Obstinate fool! Running wilfully to death and ruining our cause!” (*LOTR* 399). Boromir says “our” rather than “your,” suggesting that he believes they are on the same side and that he does in fact mean to help; his manner of helping, however, is not overly useful. He seems to believe that he is the most important member of the Fellowship and that the Ring *should* belong to him. The word “fool” is obviously an insult directed at Frodo. Boromir’s prejudice turns to hatred and he sees the perceived weakness as something that needs to be dealt with. His inflated sense of self comes out strongly in the following passage: “If any mortals have claim to the Ring, it is the men of Numenor, and not Halflings. It is not yours save by unhappy chance. It might have been mine. It should be mine. Give it to me!” (*LOTR* 399). Here, Boromir believes that the Ring came to Frodo by mere chance and, naturally, he has no place in the War of the Ring. The only reason Frodo is even in the Fellowship is because the Ring happened to come to him; if it had not, Frodo would not be needed. Boromir, for one, would never have asked a hobbit to join the Fellowship; to Boromir, hobbits are little more than nuisances. He sees that they are small and assumes they are physically weak and timid, but his opinions are not based on any solid evidence.

As noted earlier, Boromir was not a completely evil character; he was simply provincial. Much of the West respected him and Boromir came to regret his actions against Frodo. His rage passes: “catching his foot on a stone, he fell sprawling and lay upon his face. For a while he was as still as if his own curse had struck him down; then suddenly he wept” (*LOTR* 399). Boromir’s rage appears to be brought on by the Ring and his prejudices were magnified. So, while Boromir did not think much of the hobbits, his provincial beliefs were made more negative with the presence of the Ring. As soon as Frodo and the Ring leave, Boromir comes to his senses: “He rose and passed his hand over his eyes, dashing away the tears. ‘What have I said?’ he cried. ‘What have I done? Frodo, Frodo!’ he called. ‘Come back! A madness took me, but it has passed. Come back!’” (*LOTR* 400). Boromir shows remorse and seems to want to make amends. He uses the word “madness,” and that seems to be the best description; Boromir experienced a momentary, but destructive, rage. His rage breaks the Fellowship, ironic, because he was the very weakness he feared in hobbits.

As further evidence that Boromir had a good heart, he becomes less selfish by the end of his part in the novel and saves the lives of Merry and Pippin. He has great regret at trying to take the Ring from Frodo (*LOTR* 404) and says “I have failed” (*LOTR* 414). He readily goes to help Merry and Pippin find Frodo and, in so doing, gives his life to save them. Dying for people one hates is not the action of a bigot. In this way, Tolkien shows that even violent bigots can change their ways and that provincial characters can expand their perspectives. At the Council of Elrond and all the way through Lorien, Boromir spewed negativity towards the hobbits, but at his death, he showed that even he could learn a life lesson through the creatures he perceived as weak and useless.

By using Boromir's downfall, Tolkien also gives his readers evidence of the dangers of isolationism and provincialism. People often become rooted in bad, destructive habits and *The Lord of the Rings* offers a perspective on why these attitudes are destructive.

Boromir's small-mindedness led to his destruction, but his provincial mindset was not unique to Middle-earth. It is important to note that practically all of Tolkien's races demonstrate small-mindedness, despite being distinct from each other. Patrick Curry writes "Gondorians, the Riddermark and the Bree-folk are not interchangeable" (14). Though they did not fit the scope of this thesis, it is worthy of noting that the elves and dwarves, despite being different, all demonstrate small-minded, short-sighted attitudes. The elves have stagnated and dwarves commonly isolate themselves. Rohan also demonstrates strong isolationist and discriminatory behavior, especially from Eomer. The Ents do not want to get involved in the war and only join when Saruman destroys their forest.

Bree: Perceptions of Hobbits

The episodes involving Bree highlight many interactions between hobbits and humans, and clearly displays the presence of isolationism and provincialism and their negative effects on perceptions and assumptions. Bree is described as a place where beings of multiple races interact and get along. Tolkien writes that men of Bree were "more friendly and familiar with Hobbits, Dwarves, Elves, and other inhabitants of the world about them that was (or is) usual with Big People," (*LOTR* 149), and further writes:

The Big Folk and the Little Folk (as they called one another) were on friendly terms, minding their own affairs in their own ways, but both rightly regarding themselves as necessary parts of the Bree-folk. Nowhere else in the world was this peculiar (but excellent) arrangement to be found. (*LOTR* 149-150)

“Nowhere” is a strong modifier, showing that Bree is the only place that hobbits have been incorporated into society. While the humans of Bree are more accepting of hobbits than is typically expected of humans, there are some shadows to this seemingly ideal town. This paper argues that the underlying discrimination against hobbits in Bree further allows Tolkien to comment on the dangers of small-mindedness. The discourse used in this section of the novel subtly mirrors that found in the language used by Boromir. Bree-landers’ attitudes were based almost entirely on ignorance; few if any had travelled outside Bree, so they had little chance to understand the larger world. Much of Bree’s provincial attitudes come from unawareness, rather than lust for power like in Boromir. As will be seen in a moment, Breelanders do not seem to understand that they are ignorant, suggesting provincial–innocent, but still potentially injurious!–mindsets. Through Bree, Tolkien, again, shows dangers of such assumptions and encourages his readers to think before speaking and to realize the world is larger than it might seem.

Even before they enter Bree proper, the hobbits face the subtle discrimination. At the gate, the keeper, says “Hobbits! Four hobbits! And what’s more, out of the Shire by their talk” (*LOTR* 151). Here, the gatekeeper notices that Frodo and company are different—they are outsiders. The gatekeeper, does not criticize the hobbits by any means; he simply points out that they are different. He perceives them by their appearance rather than other characteristics, suggesting a subtle form of discrimination.

Subconscious discrimination can be seen, for example, in the way Barliman Butterbur interacts with the four hobbits. Butterbur, the innkeeper, was “an important person. His house was the meeting place for the idle, talkative, and inquisitive among the inhabitants, large and

small” (*LOTR* 151). Because Butterbur is one of the notable citizens, his behavior towards outsiders could play a large part setting the tone of the entire city. Additionally, Butterbur likely represents many of Bree’s feelings toward outsiders; because he is constantly around Bree Folk, he likely picks up many of their beliefs. Essentially, Butterbur is Bree.

Butterbur is at the inn when the hobbits arrive. Though he is welcoming, he displays provincialism when he does not particularly understand how to interact with the visitors. His words and body language demonstrate a lack of communication as though he has trouble knowing how to communicate with the hobbits. His speaking is much more similar to how one would speak to a person with a disability; it is not mean, but rather awkward and clumsy. He greets the hobbit with “‘Good evening, little masters!’ he said, bending down,” (*LOTR* 153). It is not necessarily bad to notice their size, but calling out their size could be seen as careless or even hurtful. Butterbur bends down to the hobbits’ level; this could be positive or negative, much like bending to speak with a child or person in a wheelchair. On the one hand, Butterbur is trying to accommodate to the hobbits but he is treating them as different, accommodating to them before they ask for help. The evidence suggests that Butterbur does not know how to properly interact with people that are different from him.

Butterbur does not seem to try to offend hobbits, but rather his skill at communicating is poor. He tries to be accommodating: “I should be sorry not to make you welcome” (*LOTR* 153). It does appear that Butterbur wants to help the hobbits, but he is just clumsy with his execution. After greeting the travelers, Butterbur’s clumsy conversation becomes even more present as he calls for Nob, another hobbit. He does not treat Nob overly well, calling him a “woolly-footed slow coach,” which is a derogatory racial-based term (*LOTR* 153). It is

difficult to call Butterbur a mean person because he tries to make the hobbits welcome, but it appears clear that Butterbur treats Nob subserviently, revealing rather negative perceptions of hobbits.

Butterbur draws more attention to the hobbits' size when he talks about the many travelers at the inn: "If you weren't hobbits, I doubt if we could house you" (*LOTR* 153). He takes this further when he suggests special hobbit-sized rooms: "we've got a room or two in the north wing that were made special for hobbits...On the ground floor as they usually prefer; round windows and all as they like it" (*LOTR* 153). His kindness strays into presumption; he thinks he knows what hobbits like or do not like based on what most prefer. This is often a staple of provincialism. Perhaps these hobbits do want hobbit-like rooms, especially when they are on the run from dangerous riders looking for hobbits. The hobbit rooms would be the worst thing they could stay in. Again, Butterbur means well, but he lacks the ability to communicate properly. He presumes what the hobbits want or need and treats them more as children than adults.

The hobbit-sized rooms reveal the similar attitudes of Bree. The inn builders purposely included rooms for hobbits; that was thoughtful, but presumptuous. As Butterbur mentions, most hobbits want hobbit-like rooms, but probably not all. In fact in Crickhollow, hobbits did not live in hobbit holes, but rather lived in houses similar to humans. A house Frodo bought in Crickhollow "was an old-fashioned countrified house, as much like a hobbit-hole as possible," (*LOTR* 100). The house bears little resemblance to a hobbit hole and, unlike hobbit holes with grass and earth for roofs, this house actually had a roof (*LOTR* 100). In the episode where the hobbits enjoy themselves in the house while taking a break from the early part of

the journey, it is clear that the hobbits are comfortable in this house; Frodo even “found himself wishing that he was really coming here to settle down in quiet retirement” (*LOTR* 100). In Bree, however, the folk assume hobbits want hobbit holes. The rooms show that the provincial humans of Bree lack the understanding to realize that hobbits are more complex, and may desire different things, than Bree-folk might assume.

Butterbur even recognizes his lack of etiquette. He says “I don’t know whether you would care to join the company when you have supped...Perhaps you would rather go to your beds” (*LOTR* 154). Butterbur acknowledges his lack of understanding and tries to help the hobbits in any way he can: “Ring the bell if you need anything!” (*LOTR* 154), showing that he is a decent, helpful person. He does not openly discriminate against hobbits; he just does not know how to interact with them properly.

His lack of etiquette is interesting because he has quite a bit of experience dealing with “outsiders” and non-humans. Though he says “We don’t get Outsiders—travelers from the Shire, I should say, begging your pardon—often” (154), later, the travelers come to the big common-room where there were “various folk: men of Bree, a collection of local hobbits (sitting chattering together), a few more dwarves, and other vague figures” (*LOTR* 154). Despite being surrounded by a diverse range of people, Butterbur lacks the ability to properly communicate with people. One must wonder if he is simply unable or unwilling to learn the best way to interact with other people. Either way, Butterbur displays provincial attitudes in his interactions with the hobbits travelers.

There seems to be little open discrimination in Bree. Butterbur invites the hobbits to mingle: “the company would be very pleased to welcome you, if you had a mind” (*LOTR*

154), showing that Bree was not adverse to hobbits, especially Shire hobbits, just unfamiliar. Tolkien writes “The Bree-folk were sympathetic, but plainly not very ready to take large number of strangers into their little land” (*LOTR* 155). At the prospect of gaining more travelers, “the local inhabitants did not look pleased” (*LOTR* 155). Though Bree-folk do not openly discriminate against the hobbit travelers, they are fairly quick to brush them off and ignore them.

Butterbur may not understand that provincialism exists, but he understands that there is something discriminatory about Bree. He describes the locals as mistrustful of strange things: ““We’re a bit suspicious round here of anything out of the way—uncanny, if you understand me; and we don’t take to it all of a sudden”” (*LOTR* 162). Here, it is clear the Bree does not like change or anything different. The hobbits are perceived as a bit different. Though, the Shire hobbits are similar to the Bree hobbits, they are different enough and new enough that their appearance is seen as suspicious.

Tolkien makes an interesting turn at the end of the novel: he shows that Butterbur (which hints at all of Bree) can become less ignorant. Michaela Baltasar notes Butterbur learns that the rangers, such as Aragorn, who were once considered with suspicion because of their goings were actually the protectors of Bree and the Shire (Chance, *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth* 30). Butterbur says “You see, we’re not used to such troubles; and the Ranger have all gone away, folk tell me. I don’t think we’ve rightly understood but till now what they did for us” (*LOTR* 993). That statement, of course, confirms the ignorance of Butterbur, but also reveals that characters can learn about the larger world and serves as

evidence that Tolkien was intent on convincing his reader that thinking outside themselves is beneficial. Much like Butterbur, Tolkien wanted his readers to grow as individuals.

Small-mindedness is not simply relegated to human characters. Tolkien is intent on showing that his hobbit characters are also provincial and isolated. Much like the human characters, hobbits need to engage with the outside world and challenge existing perceptions to grow as characters.

Hobbits' Perceptions of Themselves

Overall, hobbits have negative perceptions of themselves and each other, which comes from deeply-rooted small-minded attitudes, as well as self-inflicted doubts about their own abilities. This thesis argues that Tolkien is challenging the small-mindedness he observed after the World Wars by showing the problems of provincial and isolationist attitudes. He challenges the attitudes by challenging the hobbits, putting the characters in difficult situations to force them to grow. In this way, Tolkien shows the power of personal growth and shows that provincial characters can grow out of small-mindedness. By forcing the hobbits to grow in character, Tolkien effectively shows the benefits and necessity to improve one's personal character and the importance of breaking away from stagnation. During the mid-twentieth century, as noted earlier, isolationism and provincialism were common in England and Tolkien wanted to challenge them. Tolkien did not want to outright tell his readers they were ignorant, nor is a novel the place for that kind of discourse, so he created a world that, instead, gave his readers something to think about.

In order to show the problems of stagnation, Tolkien had to create a stagnating place for hobbits to exist. David Waito mentioned that hobbit communities, such as the Shire, were

isolated and “unhealthy” (para 1). There is apathy, stagnation, and general laziness. Drout writes hobbits are “Relatively isolated and content to be so” (607). Waito and others argue that Tolkien makes hobbits leave the Shire for the main purpose that they will have the opportunity to grow in character and prepare themselves to cure the Shire of its stagnating culture. Leaving the Shire and growing in character helped the hobbits get away from their own provincialism. The hobbit travelers were once part of the Shire and demonstrated unnecessary habits associated with the Shire, such as needing six meals a day. A quote that seems to be Tolkien’s mind is spoken by Aragorn: “If simple folk are free from care and fear, simple folk they will be” (*LOTR* 248). During the course of the journey, in which they are challenged by cares and fears, the hobbits realize the world is larger than it once appeared. With an increase in experience and perspective, characters break free from most provincial habits, becoming more beneficial members of the greater world.

By showing that hobbits often demonstrate provincialism and self-doubt in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien is able to challenge the negative perceptions his characters have about themselves. This also allows Tolkien to encourage his reader to challenge their own doubts and small-mindedness. As mentioned in Chapter I, Deborah Cohen and other scholars write of the many injured veterans returning from World War Two with grievous physical, emotional, and moral wounds and these wounds often put the soldier into depression at their lack of ability. Tolkien’s novel serves as encouragement to despairing veterans by showing that even seemingly insignificant characters (injured veterans would fit into this category) can benefit society and they should not despair.

Because of their doubt, most hobbits perceive themselves as weak and not made for adventures. Throughout the novel, the adventurous hobbits (Frodo, Sam, Pippin, and Merry in this case) carry with them ideas that they are not made for adventures and often doubt their abilities. Frequently the hobbits' doubts come from within; often no one needed to suggest they are weak. It is understandable; the journey is perilous, but they do not realize they possess strength beyond when they can perceive.

Hobbits, especially those who remain in the Shire, clearly demonstrate the inability to see outside their small world. This was not always the case, however. In the far past, hobbits had to fight: "In the olden days [hobbits] had, of course, been often obliged to fight to maintain themselves in a hard world" (*LOTR* 5) and this hard work allowed them to develop the Shire into a beautiful country. However, after centuries of comfortable living, hobbits have since grown soft. Frodo says "[I] have felt that an earthquake or an invasion of dragons might be good for them" (Tolkien *LOTR* 62). He clearly feels hobbits have grown passive and could use a challenge. The isolation is clear in Shire maps, which show "[M]ostly white spaces beyond its borders" (*LOTR* 43). As Drout mentions, this demonstrates contentedness with isolation (607). While staying in the Shire, the hobbits have acquired little knowledge and much of their intellectual growth has stagnated; most hobbits have a limited ability to accurately perceive the world around them because of isolation.

Because of their small-mindedness, most hobbits had poor opinions of Frodo and Bilbo. The narrator reflects that "the general opinion in the neighborhood was that Bilbo, who had always been rather cracked, had at last gone quite mad, and had run off into the Blue. There he had undoubtedly fallen into a pool or a river and come to a tragic, but hardly

untimely, end” (*LOTR* 42). The word “cracked” evidently suggests that many hobbits think Bilbo and his adventures were foolhardy and that Bilbo’s wits had “broken.” Cracked appears later as well when a hobbit says: “Oh, they’re both cracked...Leastways old Bilbo was cracked, and Frodo’s cracking,” showing that being different is seen as broken (*LOTR* 45). Many hobbits would also consider Bilbo’s death as fitting, as though his foolhardiness would inevitably lead to death, so it should not come as a surprise. The general provincial opinion of the Shire is that thinking outside the box is dangerous and should be avoided.

Much of the foolhardy behavior is blamed on outside influences. They are especially bitter towards Gandalf, who they perceive as corrupting: ““If only that dratted wizard will leave young Frodo alone, perhaps he’ll settle down and grown some hobbit-sense”” (42). “Hobbit-sense” is an interesting word because it shows the cautious mindsets of other less adventurous hobbits. To them, doing nothing adventurous is wise. Essentially, they embrace stagnation; they do not want to grow in character or improve their lives.

The Shire is so isolated from the rest of the world that its inhabitants do not realize important events are happening around them. There was Smaug and the Battle of Five Armies, which was in the recent past, yet the hobbits had not heard much of these events: “Little of all of this, of course, reached the ears of the ordinary hobbits” (*LOTR* 44). This serves as evidence of the hobbits’ isolation; even large battles deciding the fate of Middle-Earth go unnoticed. In his brief appearance, Gildor says the Shire once belonged to another and will belong to another eventually: “The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence it out” (*LOTR* 83). Hobbits will only achieve success if they break free from complacency and explore a larger world.

When Frodo leaves the Shire and realizes he must destroy the Ring, he realizes he has complacent instincts. He says ““I do really wish to destroy it...Or, well, to have it destroyed. I am not made for perilous quests”” (*LOTR* 61). The last statement is most important: Frodo does not believe he is capable of the task. He also says:

“I have sometimes thought of going away, but I imagined that as a kind of holiday, a series of adventures like Bilbo’s or better, ending in peace. But this would mean exile, a flight from danger into danger, drawing it after me. And I suppose I must go alone, if I am to do that and save the Shire. But I feel very small, and very uprooted, and well–desperate. The Enemy is so strong and terrible.” (*LOTR* 62)

Again, Frodo wants to journey, but does not feel capable of such travels. He, like most people, would gladly go on a pleasant adventure to somewhere safe. However, when faced with potential (and certain) danger, Frodo feels weak and insignificant. These feelings of weakness and insignificance come from his small-mindedness. Though he does not realize it, he is not as weak as he thinks he is.

In actuality, hobbits are biologically suited for this particular quest. Despite his doubt, Frodo is one of the few people who could resist the power of the Ring for as long as he did. Through Frodo nearly fails the quest because the Ring finally breaks his resistance, he resists long enough to bring the Ring to Mount Doom where it can be destroyed. Despite his doubt, Frodo proves he was the perfect person for the mission.

Frodo asks a crucial question. He asks “I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?” (*LOTR* 61). Gandalf wisely answers, “Such questions cannot be answered...You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have” (*LOTR* 61). Tolkien uses this passage to remind

the reader that perceptions are not always accurate and not even necessary. It is as though he is telling the reader to do the best they can—results and perceptions are irrelevant. This is applicable to injured veterans as well as Tolkien's readers. Often people have talents they do not realize and it is better to try one's best than to worry and despair.

When the hobbits comes to the dangerous Barrow-wights, Tolkien, through the narrator, underscores the hobbits' underlying courage. He writes:

There is a seed of courage hidden (often deeply, it is true) in the heart of the fattest and most timid hobbit, waiting for some final and desperate danger to make it grow. Frodo was neither very fat nor very timid; indeed, though he did not know it, Bilbo (and Gandalf) had thought him the best hobbit in the Shire. He thought he had come to the end of his adventure, and a terrible end, but the thought hardened him. He found himself stiffening, as if for a final spring; he no longer felt limp like a helpless prey. (*LOTR* 140)

Danger woke Frodo's toughness: "The courage that he had been awakened in him was now too strong: he could not leave his friends so easily" (*LOTR* 141). In times of need, Frodo becomes a brave warrior. He pushes aside small-minded doubts and does the best he can. This bravery is not because of physical strength but rather because of his heart—he wants to help his friends. He quickly abandons his small-minded doubts and acts. He saves his friends and shows that his doubt is unfounded. The quote also shows more war time rhetoric. Tolkien is glorifying the heroism of the soldiers. Though Tolkien is against war in itself, it appears to be important to him to give praise to the soldiers who must suffer and sacrifice through the engagement.

For much of the story, there is a common contrast between the effort of the hobbits and their fear and feelings of weakness. The hobbits are aware of their physical weakness but try to show that they are stronger than they appear. In Bree, Aragorn asks the hobbits how

much they can carry and Pippin replies “‘As much as we must’ said Pippin with a sinking heart, but trying to show that he was tougher than he looked (or felt)” (*LOTR* 178). Sam “defiantly” adds “‘I can carry enough for two’” (*LOTR* 178). The hobbits often understand their smallness is a weakness (perceiving it similarly to how larger humans also do), but also try to prove they can be strong when needed.

Tolkien shows that hobbits are just as discriminatory towards other people as humans are, but he takes care to underscore the dangers of their provincialism. The narrator describes the Shire-hobbits’ discrimination and writes: “The Shire-hobbits referred to those of Bree, and to any others that lived beyond the borders, as Outsiders, and took very little interest in them, considering them dull and uncouth” and that “Some, doubtless, were no better than tramps, ready to dig a hole in any band and stay only as long as it suited them” (*LOTR* 150). When Frodo speaks with Gandalf at Rivendell, he reveals his own biases towards humans: “I thought, well, that [humans] were just big, and rather stupid: kind and stupid like Butterbur; or stupid and wicked like Bill Ferny” (*LOTR* 221). He acknowledges “But then we don’t know much about Men in the Shire, except perhaps the Bree-landers” (*LOTR* 221). Frodo’s thoughts on humans are common among hobbits, but Tolkien constructively shows the attitudes are unwise. Through Gandalf, Tolkien writes:

“You don’t know much even about them [Bree-landers], if you think old Barliman is stupid...He is wise enough on his own ground. He thinks less than he talks, and slower; yet he can see through a brick wall in time (as they say in Bree). But there are few left in Middle-earth like Aragorn son of Arathorn”. (*LOTR* 221)

Hobbits, like humans, have biases and prejudices and their perceptions of others can be just as inaccurate as people like Boromir.

Though hobbits have small-minded tendencies, Tolkien takes great care to show that hobbits like his other races, can grow with experience. The small-minded hobbits grow greatly through their struggles and adventures and serves as an example to Tolkien's readers. Though provincialism and isolationism were common during the mid-twentieth century, Tolkien is challenging the cultural norm and encouraging his readers to think outside their small-minded beliefs.

Conclusion

The mid-twentieth century saw an increase in people with disabilities from the World Wars. This revealed negative perceptions towards people with disabilities and discrimination based on injuries. Tolkien's experience in the World Wars gave him the perspective to see beyond injuries and look at an individual's potential. In his novel, Tolkien attempts to show his readers that injured people can still do great things and can often perform at the level of a person without disabilities. In fact, at times it appears he argues that people with disabilities are often better suited to tasks than those without them. *The Lord of the Rings* encourages readers to challenge negative perceptions of injuries and realize that there is more to a person than can be seen simply by appearance.

Small-minded attitudes were also common during the mid-twentieth century. Many people were embracing isolation and did not want to get involved in other countries' affairs. Ultimately, isolation allowed Hitler to operate with little resistance; too late did the allies realize he was a danger to the entire world. Tolkien was interested in showing his readers that isolation is not helpful and people should explore the world around them. He was also interested in challenging the ignorance and stagnation of provincialism. Often provincial people try to interact with the world but think they know more than they really do, such as with Boromir. Other provincial habits causes people to not care about learning about the world, such as with many hobbits. However, Tolkien did not like these attitudes and used his novel to challenge the small-mindedness that he commonly saw. He used his hobbit characters to demonstrate the positives of personal growth, making the argument that people should attempt to grow out of their small-minded habits.

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