

Isolation in Frodo and Sam's Relationship

ENGL 283: The Tolkien Legendarium

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Book IV of *The Lord of the Rings* stands in stark contrast to Book III, the other half of *The Two Towers*. While Book III follows various sets of characters and their dramatic encounters with Rohan and Saruman, Book IV is focused exclusively on the slow and stealthy journey of Frodo and Sam along with Gollum. The contrast to Book III, where six of the company are joyously reunited along with new trustworthy allies, emphasizes the isolation of Frodo and Sam. Alone with a dubious guide in a land that is hostile to them, they are each other's only reminder of home and of hope, and as a result they grow increasingly dependent upon each other. As Frodo assumes full leadership for the first time on the journey, he does his best to emulate the choices of previous leaders like Gandalf and Aragorn. As a result, Sam places the entirety of his faith in Frodo as a mentor and leader; having no one else in which to place it, Sam becomes a disciple of Frodo. Conversely, in Frodo's exhaustion and weakness due to the Ring, he places a heavy weight of reliance upon Sam. While Sam supports Frodo's needs in previous books, this becomes much more the case here, with Sam genuinely saving Frodo's life on numerous occasions. Throughout Book IV, Tolkien uses structural and narrative parallels to Book III to emphasize Frodo and Sam's isolation, which is a significant driver of the deep bond between them.

There are various techniques used throughout *The Two Towers* to emphasize how alone Frodo and Sam are. Structurally, it is significant that Frodo and Sam's story is told completely separately from the story of the rest of the company. In Book III, the narrator jumps between Merry and Pippin and Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas in different chapters, and it may have felt natural to intersperse chapters with Frodo and Sam as well (this choice is made in the movie adaptation of the book, for instance). Instead, there is one abrupt switch in perspective between books, and the two stories are told completely separately from each other. This emphasizes the

disconnect between the two narratives in pace and visibility and the fact that neither set of characters has any idea what the other is doing. It is also significant that Frodo and Sam's story is told after the rest of the company's: since the reader has the context of what is happening in the rest of the world, the differences in pace and mood stand out and further highlight the state of isolation Frodo and Sam are in.

Along with these structural techniques, there are various narrative parallels that draw the contrast between the two groups. While it may not be obvious to the reader throughout Book IV what is happening to the rest of the company, Appendix B lays out the timeline clearly. Throughout the book, some of Frodo and Sam's darkest moments happen at some of the most hopeful for the rest of the company. On February 29th, Merry and Pippin escape the Orcs, go into Fangorn forest, and meet Treebeard, while Sam and Frodo descend from the Emyr Muil and meet Gollum. Both sets of characters change geography at the same time and acquire a new guide. However, whereas Merry and Pippin are glad for the protection of the forest from the Orcs and take a liking to Treebeard, Frodo and Sam "huddle mournfully together in the cold stony night" (Tolkien 598) once they get down the cliff and Sam is "filled with anger and disgust" (599) as Gollum approaches them for the first time. Merry and Pippin begin a hopeful journey toward Isengard with a capable and trustworthy guide, whereas Frodo and Sam continue their seemingly hopeless journey toward Mordor with a treacherous guide. On March 5th, Saruman is defeated and Gandalf, Merry, Pippin, Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas are together in the same place for the first time after Gandalf's fall in Moria. Meanwhile, Frodo and Sam spend the day on "the slag-mounds on the edge of the Desolation of the Morannon" (1067). The joyous moment for the rest of the Company occurs in parallel with one of Frodo and Sam's most hopeless as "for a while they stood there, like men on the edge of a sleep where nightmare lurks, holding it off,

though they know that they can only come to morning through the shadows” (617). Later that night, Gandalf and Pippin leave for Minas Tirith at the same time Frodo and Sam leave for Minas Morgul: the former are going toward aid and allies, while the latter are going toward a place that has been corrupted and is searching to destroy them. All of these parallels and contrasts serve to underscore the isolation of Frodo and Sam and the fact that all they have in their desperate journey is each other.

In the absence of anyone else to do so, Frodo fully steps into leadership for the first time. Before Book IV, he followed Merry, Aragorn, Elrond, and Gandalf at various times, but now there is no one left to lead except him (Gollum hardly counts as a leader—his role is much different than those of these other guides). Frodo does this by echoing the decisions and thoughts of previous leaders. For example, he often cites what Gandalf would have done as justification for the way he treats Gollum, and he tells Faramir that “Gandalf, your Mithrandir, he would have bidden you not to slay [Gollum]” as reason for sparing his life (671). He also sometimes acts like Aragorn, such as when he tells Faramir to “blindfold us all three, and cover up my eyes first, and then perhaps [Gollum] will see that no harm is meant” (680), a clear callback to Aragorn choosing to have the whole company blindfolded in Lothlórien rather than only Gimli. Because Frodo is now Sam’s only leader, Sam places his whole faith in Frodo. He hates Gollum, but trusts Frodo enough to not insist they get rid of him. This trust in Frodo grows at the Black Gate when Frodo threatens Gollum, and Sam realizes Frodo is less naive than he had thought:

Sam looked at his master with approval, but also with surprise: there was a look in his face and a tone in his voice that he had not known before. It has always been a notion of his that the kindness of dear Mr. Frodo was of such a high degree that it must imply a fair measure of blindness. Of course, he also firmly held the incompatible belief that Mr. Frodo was the wisest person in the world. (626)

By the end of the book, Sam has taken on the role of a disciple of Frodo, and in one of the most emotionally moving scenes in the narrative to this point, Sam's grief at Frodo's apparent death is reminiscent of the followers of Christ grieving over his crucifixion: he is deeply conflicted about what to do moving forward, and "black despair [comes] down on him" (714). Frodo is his last vestige of home and hope, and he is unmoored without him.

The same is also true for Frodo: he would be utterly lost without Sam. One of the few moments of joy in the book is when Sam is hypothesizing what stories will be told about them, and Frodo laughs "a long clear laugh from his heart. Such a sound had not been heard in those places since Sauron came to Middle-earth" (697). Sam is Frodo's only companion and anchor to their shared home of the Shire, and he leans heavily on Sam for comfort and hope. Additionally, Frodo relies on Sam much more in Book IV than before this point for genuine protection: Sam prevents Gollum from strangling Frodo (620), prevents Frodo from walking like a zombie toward Minas Morgul (689), and wounds Shelob in Frodo's defense (712). In this way, Sam becomes more than simply a servant to Frodo. Overall, Frodo and Sam cling desperately to each other in this time, and the deep isolation they experience in Book IV is a significant reason for it.

Works Cited

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Two Towers*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2007.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Return of the King*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2007.

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