

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING GOLLUM

by "JD" Collins

I have been thinking for some time now that Smeagol/Gollum is much maligned. Not only this; their whole characters are misunderstood. I say their characters because Smeagol/Gollum is an interesting example of dual personality (NOT schizophrenia). At least, that's how I see them, and it allows me much opportunity for entertaining fantasy. First; how did their duality come about? Ordinarily The Ring slowly perverts its wearer, gradually changes the personality. Yet in Smeagol's case it had a curious side effect: it created a sub-personality, which was at first basically "good".

Probably the emotional trauma of murdering his brother and coming under the control of the Ring's influence jolted Smeagol's mind into producing, not exactly an opposite reaction, but a sort of safe place for his 'good nature'. So now we have Smeagol who was from the start greedy, cruel and selfish, but a stronger personality than Gollum. And Gollum, poor Gollum, born of an emotional trauma, a naturally inferior personality to the Ring dominated Smeagol, and of course subtly perverted by The Ring every time he gained ascendance over Smeagol. He never really had a chance!

Gradually Smeagol and Gollum became incompletely aware of each other, and after The Ring was lost to Bilbo (actually I think Gollum had a hand in that!), the characters of Smeagol and Gollum seem to have taken turns in rapidly popping in and out of consciousness. I'm convinced that it was Gollum that Gandalf interrogated on the origin of The Ring; surely Smeagol would never have revealed anything about his 'precious' to anyone.

Towards the end of the Quest, when ⁱⁿ Frodo's company, Gollum/Smeagol must surely have suffered terribly. Smeagol by seeing the Ring in other hands yet being forced to obey Frodo by virtue of The Ring's power. And think of Gollum's torment, knowing the fiendish plottings of Smeagol, fearing the approach to the Source of the Ring's power and fighting all the time to keep alive his own disintegrating personality.

Now comes the final scene. Frodo has at last succumbed to the pull of the Ring and is obsessed with claiming it as his own, Sam is plainly exhausted and incapable of anything much at all. Gollum has temporarily lost his hold over Smeagol who is now utterly bent on the Ring. It is my belief that here Gollum finally realises the hopelessness of his position and in a last despairing effort attempts to overwhelm Smeagol. Unfortunately Smeagol is ecstatically battling for the Ring and is not open to Gollum's efforts -- until Smeagol bites the Ring Finger and, in his triumph, relaxes his awareness. The resulting loss of co-ordination as Gollum renews his attempt to gain control causes Smeagol/Gollum to fall to his death, still clutching BUT NOT WEARING The Ring. I think that Gollum's last intent was to stop Smeagol putting The Ring on. Despite all his faults Gollum at least deserves the respect due to a Ring Bearer, which after all he was for many years.



"J.R.R. TOLKIEN" BY CATHERINE R. STIMPSON (Columbia Essays on
Modern Writers, Columbia University Press)

Reviewed by Belladonna Took

One thing this book can do for all Hobbit friends is to help them through the winter-- for, read it on a cold day, and it's guaranteed to make your blood boil.

Why the Columbia University Press should have chosen Miss Stimpson (Asst Professor of English at Barnard College) to deal with Tolkien must remain a mystery, seeing that she does not like him at all. Fair comment is always allowable, even if unfavourable, but a writer who actively dislikes his subject, and that subject's background, is unlikely to produce a good literary appraisal. Likening Tolkien's reputation to a soaring balloon, she says "Some return to earth to join those who have never flown. If you wish join me among the groundlings".

Painstakingly and conscientiously Miss Stimpson surveys all of Tolkien's work, even the most minor, as if in the hope of finding, say, in "Furner Gales of Ham" or "Beorhtmoth" some clue to what eludes her. After indicating the sources, Anglo-Saxon, Icelandic etc, of many of his words, names, ideas, in the manner of one explaining a conjuring trick, or still more exposing a fraudulent medium, she comes to the conclusion that Tolkien is "bogus, sentimental and morally disquieting."

Bogus? But to be bogus there must be intent to deceive. Real as Tolkien's 'secondary creation' may be, he is nowhere attempting to deceive anyone-- he is not doing a Chatterton or a Macpherson. If he wanted to, I am quite sure he could very successfully. But nothing could be further from his mind. He created for the best of all reasons - for his own pleasure and that of his children and friends. His friends 'the Inklings' get summary treatment from Miss S: "a brilliant but condescending and oddly silly group." It is strange how often Miss S uses the word "condescending" when she herself condescends so often: to C.S. Lewis and to Charles Williams, whom she has to explain as if they had never been heard of before --- perhaps in America they haven't. Incidentally she labels George MacDonald "a sweet Scots minister". Obviously she dislikes the Christian background of the 'Inklings', and the Oxford atmosphere, particularly that of the 1930's, is quite foreign to her, as is also the English environment of the hobbits and such things as the acceptance of monarchy as a safeguard both to law and to liberty.

Her rather shrill feminism comes out when she deals with Tolkien's avoidance on the whole of female characters and love interests. She regards with a certain horror the episode of Shelob, seeing in it evidence of a "subtle contempt and hostility towards women", and is greatly troubled by the fact that he does not attempt to write much about women at all. "When Tolkien does sidle up to genuine romantic love, sensuality and sexuality his style becomes coy and infantile. Unlike many very good modern writers he is no homosexual" (oh, thank you, Miss S) "Rather he simply seems a little childish, a little nasty and evasive." I may be dense, but whereas I admit that Tolkien does