

Lucia Opreanu

THE INESCAPABLE OTHER – IDENTITY TRANSITIONS AND MUTATIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF TOLKIEN’S GOLLUM / SMÉAGOL

Keywords: difference; division; doppelgänger; identity; opposition; other; self.

Abstract: Explorations of the complex relationship between the other and the self, a central element of identity studies, can result in new and often paradoxical revelations concerning certain fictional characters, in this particular case revealing the underlying complexity of texts and protagonists previously relegated to a limited cult following and regarded as not entirely conducive to academic research. Prompted by the renewed interest in Tolkien’s work following the release of the film trilogy, this paper aims to analyse the various identity mechanisms at work in the development of one of his less glamorous protagonists as they emerge from *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. This will involve references to the always problematic but in this case downright deranged interaction between the other and the self and to the ‘doppelgänger’ concept, applied to Gollum’s relationship with the other ring-bearers, with his almost forgotten hobbit origins and above all with his still recognizable former self (Sméagol). After focusing on the significance of binary oppositions in all Tolkien’s texts, the paper will go on to explore the devolution undergone by Sméagol’s personality once under the spell of the Ring, the role played by cultural heritage in the process of identity formation, the often volatile combination of good and evil characterising Tolkien’s protagonists, the motif of the divided self, the influence of names and labels on the recipient’s personality, the use of language for the purposes of self-reference, the balance of power between the other and the self, and finally the contribution of the protagonist’s uncontrollable possessiveness and obsessive personality to his unexpected popularity.