

## A precious case from Middle Earth

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Tolkien's character Gollum is certainly disturbed, but is he physically or mentally ill? Gandalf the Wizard provides the history

Sméagol (Gollum) is a single, 587 year old, hobbit-like male of no fixed abode. He has presented with anti-social behaviour, increasing aggression, and preoccupation with the "one ring."

Sméagol comes from a wealthy and influential family, his grandmother being a wise woman in the river folk community. Nothing is known about Sméagol's birth or schooling. He was spiteful to others and had only one friend, Deagol, whom he later murdered after stealing the ring from him. For Sméagol this was an important life event; the ring enabled him to disappear and listen secretly to conversations. His family and community, appalled by his actions and believing he was a thief and murderer, banished him to a solitary life in the misty mountains. He lived for many years with the ring as his only friend and began to detest the outside world—loathing the sun, moon, and wind. He ate only live animals or raw fish. Eventually Sméagol created Gollum, the outsider, who had a more violent personality. When Gollum was 25, the ring was stolen by Bilbo Baggins.<sup>1</sup> Since then Gollum has had obsessional thoughts and has dedicated his life to reacquiring it, sometimes with violence.

His forensic history consists of Deagol's murder and the attempted murder of Samwise Gamgee. He has no history of substance misuse, although like many young hobbits he smoked "pipe weed" in adolescence. Sméagol has forgotten many memories of his childhood, and we have limited collateral history on his premorbid personality. Before obtaining the ring he was an inquisitive child with odd interests, who enjoyed causing mischief and solitary activities such as burrowing under trees to look at roots. He dislikes himself, stale raw fish, and "hobbitses."



Gollum, from the film trilogy *Lord of the Rings*

### Mental state examination

On general examination, Gollum is a pale, emaciated hobbit, with scanty hair and big eyes: "A skulking gangrel creature with an ill-favoured look."<sup>2</sup> He is unkempt and wearing only the remains of a loin cloth. He displays animal-like behaviour, including crawling and hopping. He shows no evidence of clinical depression, although he subjectively feels sad and is anxious to be reunited with his "precious"—the ring. Objectively, he is emotionally labile and becomes jittery and nervous when discussing the ring. His speech is abnormal and he repeats phrases and noises—for example, "Yes, yes, yes" and "Gollum, gollum." In *The Hobbit* Tolkien writes of the many solitary years Gollum spent in the misty mountains: "He always spoke to himself through never having anyone else to speak to."<sup>2</sup>

There is no disorder of the form of thought. He uses neologisms such as "triksy" and "hobbitses." Gollum has nihilistic thoughts, believing that he is a murderer, liar, and thief; although there is some basis in fact for this and he shows little guilt or remorse. He is preoccupied with, and deeply desires, the ring. He has obsessive thoughts but no compulsions, though he would do anything for the ring. He is hostile towards Frodo, the current owner of the ring. He has paranoid ideation about Sauron ("the eye is always watching") and about Samwise Gamgee ("the fat hobbit... he knows"). Gollum has difficulty controlling his thoughts and actions, exacerbated by prolonged contact with the ring. As Gandalf and Frodo have similar symptoms in the presence of the ring, we can attribute this somatic passivity to the ring. There are features of dissociation. Sméagol has separated his personality and is now Gollum as well.

He shows no evidence of any cognitive impairment. He has poor insight into his condition but he is aware of the Gollum-Sméagol dissociation.

### Diagnosis

Several differential diagnoses need to be considered, and we should exclude organic causes for his symptoms. A space occupying lesion such as a brain tumour is unlikely as his symptoms are long standing. Gollum's diet is extremely limited, consisting only of raw fish. Vitamin B-12 deficiency may cause irritability, delusions, and paranoia. His reduced appetite and loss of hair and weight may be associated with iron deficiency anaemia. He is hypervigilant and does not seem to need much sleep. This, accompanied by his bulging eyes and weight loss, suggests hyperthyroidism. Gollum's dislike of sunlight may be due to the photosensitivity of porphyria. Attacks may be induced by starvation and accompanied by paranoid psychosis.

An internet search found over 1300 sites discussing the nature of Gollum's "mental illness." We asked 30 randomly selected medical students if they thought Gollum

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had a mental illness. Schizophrenia was the most common diagnosis (25 students), followed by multiple personality disorder (three). On initial consideration schizophrenia seems a reasonable diagnosis. However, in the context of the culture at the time it is unlikely. Delusions are false, unshakeable beliefs, not in keeping with the patient's culture. In Middle Earth, the power of the ring is a reality. The passivity phenomena Gollum experiences are caused by the ring, and these symptoms occur in all ring bearers. Gollum does not fulfil the ICD-10 criteria for the diagnosis of schizophrenia.<sup>3</sup>

The presence of two personalities, Gollum and Sméagol, raises the possibility of multiple personality disorder. In this diagnosis one personality is suppressed by the other and the two personalities are always unaware of each other's existence.<sup>3</sup> In this case, Gollum and Sméagol occur together, have conversations simultaneously, and are aware of each other's existence.

Gollum displays pervasive maladaptive behaviour that has been present since childhood with a persistent

disease course. His odd interests and spiteful behaviour have led to difficulty in forming friendships and have caused distress to others. He fulfils seven of the nine criteria for schizoid personality disorder (ICD F60.1), and, if we must label Gollum's problems, we believe that this is the most likely diagnosis.

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Competing interests: We are all of short stature and have very large, hairy feet.

- 1 Tolkien JRR. *The lord of the rings*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954-5.
- 2 Tolkien JRR. *The hobbit*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937.
- 3 World Health Organization. *International statistical classification of disease and related health problems*. 10th revision. Geneva: WHO, 1992.

## The Decameron of poor research

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Most gracious readers, two boring researchers present a series of pitiful tales—covert and overt fraud, petty misdeeds, and misconceptions by honest and not so honest researchers, professors, industry sponsors, bureaucrats, and other legendary adventurers of modern science

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"Most gracious ladies and gentlemen, knowing that you are by nature pitiful, we know that in your judgment this work will seem to have a painful and sad origin." It was not in the company of fair and elegant young ladies and pleasant knights in the Tuscan countryside that this imitation of Boccaccio originated. Simply, dismayed at the scandals of poor research, two boring researchers exchanged emails to narrate brief stories for consolation. We tried to beat each other in narrating the worst tale possible. Stories of cheating, betrayal, unrequited love, tricks, and opportunistic adventure—in brief, any story of bad research was eligible for the project.

Let there be no mistake: we did not try to compete against the Florentine genius. Conversely, we were fully confident that we could write a very poor paper indeed. To avoid embarrassing people or institutions, heroes are named after the Decameron. After all, these tales have reached us from very different, truly international sources. For practical purposes they could have happened anywhere.

### First tale

**Federigo, a research fellow, pleads for help to defend Vancouver; yet, after a secret serious discussion on the deeper philosophical meaning of scientific authorship, he spontaneously applauds and kneels in admiration before his Master**

Aldobrandino was collaborating with Federigo, a young physician trained in world class institutions. After lots of work, tons of analyses, and several revisions, Aldo-

brandino sent the final manuscript to Federigo for his approval. In response, he got a confidential email. "Dear friend," Federigo wrote, "this has been a wonderful collaboration. However, I have bad news. There are seven authors now. Messer Guglielmo, my director, is eating my flesh, but I don't want my career to end. Monna Nonna, my wife, needs papers to get a job. Peronella is directing the lab next door—we must be kind to our neighbours and build collaborations. Tedaldo, my young fellow, also must build his curriculum vitae. Lastly, Messer Guglielmo had another co-author to add. He forgot his name, but he will let me know tomorrow." A postscript followed: "Have you seen my work at XXX? Many consider XXX the top university worldwide. In my best paper, of seven authors, three contributed nothing, and one had no clue of the project's existence until he received a reprint."

Scientifically speaking, Aldobrandino went bananas. Federigo apologised and pleaded for help to face the bloodsucking Messer Guglielmo. He promised that, with Aldobrandino at his side, he would stand firmly against his director in defence of the Vancouver authorship criteria. In this spirit, a meeting was arranged where Aldobrandino and Federigo met with Messer Guglielmo two days later. Federigo asked to talk first. Making a request to talk when your director is present is indeed a valiant act, and Aldobrandino was pleased that his young colleague seemed so determined. However, instead of praising Vancouver, Federigo started praising his worthy director. He made a deep and moving confession, asked for forgiveness,