

“Hey dol, merry dol”: Tom Bombadil’s Nonsense, or Tolkien’s Creative Uncertainty? A Response to Thomas Kullmann*

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Studies of Tolkien’s poetry always have been rare. The recent collection of essays entitled *Tolkien’s Poetry*, edited by Julian Eilmann and Allan Turner, is one of the few of book-length that address the diversity and significance of the topic. Furthermore, as Thomas Kullmann has recently pointed out in “Poetic Insertions in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*,” there is “little input from contemporary English scholarship, linguistics, as well as literary and cultural studies” (304n37) in existing critiques of Tolkien’s poetry. This is a sadly correct assessment, and in part is a reflection of the nature and function of that poetry. Although the poetic content in Tolkien’s prose works constantly adds new dimensions to characters, positioning them within the aesthetic of their race, and in relation to the history of Middle-earth, his poetry remains predominantly situational and occasional, belonging within the mythology and the aesthetic that governs and defines his creative work. Therefore, because of the nature of his poetry, there has been an involuted quality to Tolkien criticism which keeps it circulating around a limited range of approaches.¹

In this essay I set out to respond to Kullmann’s observations by examining one example of Tolkien’s poetry in order to show that, when approached from those theories of poetry that were contemporary with Tolkien’s work as well as from the perspectives of later

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literary theory, the apparent strangeness and whimsicality of the verses that are characteristic of Tom Bombadil in *The Lord of the Rings* reveal new dimensions to Tolkien's own theories of creativity.

Strangeness and Nonsense

The significance of "strangeness" as an essential quality in poetry had been a matter for scholarly investigation from the second decade of the twentieth century and continued throughout the years when Tolkien was most active as a writer and scholar. Early twentieth-century Russian Formalism, together with the theories of poetry advanced by Tolkien's friend and colleague at Pembroke College, the polymath philosopher Robin G. Collingwood, and by his fellow-Inkling Owen Barfield, offer new ways of approaching his embedded poetry, even though the application of these theories to the lively simplicity and unsophisticated lexis characteristic of Tom's songs and speech may initially seem incongruous.

Barfield, in his 1927 book *Poetic Diction*, cited Aristotle's appreciation of the aesthetic value of "unfamiliar words" and included in this archaism and incongruity (169). During the 1930s Collingwood engaged in research into fairy tales and the magic that characterises them, as well as in lecturing on aesthetics and art. In both areas, his theories illuminate the functionality of (what appears to be) strangeness in comparison to familiarity and empirical science. He notes in "Fairy Tales" that "the peculiar effect which [...] magical themes produce in us is due to the fact that in hearing such stories we are liberated, by a temporary make-believe, from our normal scientific conception of nature" (126). In his essay "Aesthetic Theory and Artistic Practice," he contrasts this liberation to the making of meaning in art, complaining that this "became atrophied in the naturalistic artists of the nineteenth century" (95; see also 97). The perceived importance of various techniques of "defamiliarising" in order to alert the reader or spectator to meanings beyond those that had become

conventional had already been set out by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky in 1914. In his article “The Resurrection of the Word” he had proposed the importance of poetry in defamiliarising or making strange “the habitual by presenting it in a novel light, by placing it in an unexpected context” (Shklovsky 41).² Shklovsky’s comment may have been unknown to Tolkien, but it illuminates for us the significance of an aesthetic dependent on strangeness that was part of the cultural environment in which Tolkien lived and wrote. Later developments of the theory of making strange usefully illuminate the circumstances, the style, and the effect of Tom Bombadil’s first song in *The Lord of the Rings* (*LotR*):

Hey dol! merry dol! ring a ding dillo!
 Ring a dong! hop along! fa la the willow!
 Tom Bom, jolly Tom, Tom Bombadillo! (*LotR* “The Old Forest” 116)

This song, which the hobbits first hear an unseen Tom singing, initially seems to echo the informal “decorations” and repetitions familiar in folksong and might also be compared to the sounds used in Celtic “mouth music” or “lilting” in which meaning is subordinated to rhythm.³ The song has a childish whimsicality in the nonce words and the rhyming and chiming vocabulary that is ostensibly humorously entertaining and becomes part of Tom’s characteristic lexis. Tolkien, through the voice of the narrator, teases the reader with comments on the song, referring to it as “nonsense” and then as “a long string of nonsense-words (or so they seemed)” (*LotR*, “The Old Forest” 116). The parenthetical qualification immediately questions any hasty assumption that the song is indeed mere “nonsense.” It is, in fact, no more “nonsense” than Sam’s later “Troll Song”—which is also described in this way—as both judgements are revealed, in different ways, to be self-deprecating remarks referring to the humility or creative insecurity of those who utter them.⁴

When considered more closely, the “Hey dol, merry dol!” song, its singer, and the rhetorical remark referring to it may be understood as important signposts to Tolkien’s engagement with literary theory. His

most famous statements of his own theories are usually derived from his poem "Mythopeia," from his essay "On Fairy Stories," and from his *Letters*, together with some parts of his lecture and essay *Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics*. Further expressions of his theory appear to be embedded within his longer works, as for example when he seems to deplore the process of criticism in Gandalf's pithy observation to Saruman that "he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom" (*LotR*, "The Council of Elrond" 252). Narratorial remarks such as that associated with Tom's song are, then, worthy of closer attention.

The philosopher and literary theorist Herbert Grabes in *Making Strange* has recently written of the aesthetic of Modernism which replaced the older ideas of "the beautiful." Grabes defines the new form as an "apparently lawless freedom of the imagination" but he asserts that

[...] this does not create "nonsense," but is, rather, a challenge to the recipient's ability to synthesize. In contrast to beautiful art, with Modernist [...] art the harmony of the imagination and understanding is not immediately apparent or "given," but is put at first in question and assigned to the recipient. (140)

Grabes's remarks illuminate the use of whatever seems strange or incongruous to provoke the reader's engagement with the text. They thus offer an effective tool for exposing the potential role of "nonsense" in Tolkien's work, where it contributes to conveying the mood and the characterisation of Tom while at the same time questioning the apparent free play of language, rhythm, and rhyme at two levels: Are they simple expressions of Tom Bombadil's freedom from constraint? And are they also an expression of Tolkien's own assertion of the freedom of his imagination to subvert traditional connections between language, meaning, and authority?

When Tom comes to the aid of Merry and Pippin, who are trapped inside Old Man Willow, his lively and apparently unsophisticated vocalising, by its very strangeness, might alert the reader to the

subversive power of playful simplicity that underpins his language—songs and speech. We are not told what he initially sings to the malicious tree as he makes it release the hobbits. But Tom then speaks aloud rhythmically expressed (or chanted) commands to the tree to return to its strictly arboreal state. Hushed or aloud, his language clearly takes effect. We are later given the song he sings to the Barrow Wight in full and are again told its effect. The simple but commanding vernacular of “Get out, you old Wight! Vanish in the sunlight! / Shrivel in the cold mist, like the winds go wailing,” controls events as well as actions: “At these words there was a cry and part of the inner end of the chamber fell in with a crash. Then there was a long trailing shriek, fading away into an unguessable distance” (*LotR*, “Fog on the Barrow Downs” 139). The simple vocabulary of the six-line stanza creates rhythm through stress and is unrhymed, but its effect may be compared to a later episode when another chamber is destroyed. In the Mines of Moria, Gandalf confronts the unseen Balrog behind the door of the Chamber of Mazarbul and is forced to pronounce a “shutting-spell” followed by a “word of Command” to prevent the Balrog from pursuing the Company, at which point: “The door burst in pieces [...]. All the wall gave way, and the roof of the chamber as well” (*LotR*, “The Bridge of Khazad Dûm” 319). Tom’s song to the Wight, like his song to the Willow, might be understood simply as a “spell,” although it is not named as such, implying a conscious differentiation by Tolkien.

In modern terms, Tom’s songs to the Willow and the Wight are unquestionably examples of performative utterances of the kind described by Pierre Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power* as “a particular class of symbolic expressions, of which the discourse of authority is the only paradigmatic form, and whose specific efficacy stems from the fact that they seem to possess *in themselves* the source of the power which in reality resides in the institutional conditions of their production and reception” (111). While it is easy to see how the wizard’s “word of Command” can be understood, within the framework of Tolkien’s entire *legendarium*, to be legitimated and empow-

ered by the Valar whom he serves, Bourdieu's careful definition of the circumstances in which the "magic of performative utterances" becomes effective (75) helps to illuminate Goldberry's enigmatic answer to Frodo's question: "who is Tom Bombadil?" Goldberry replies: "He is, as you have seen him" (*LotR*, "The House of Tom Bombadil" 122).

Within the compass of the fiction, Tom's language has nothing apparently in common with the arcane, high-status language of the Elves, nor with Gandalf's command of language; it suggests, therefore, that power resides in the person, not in the form of language used nor its historical status. However, although Tom is not apparently contextualised in relation to, nor empowered or legitimated by, anything external to himself, a possible reason for the effect of his language, but one that requires knowledge of the background to *The Lord of the Rings*, is that, *pace* Verlyn Flieger, his songs are fragments of the Orinary Song of creation sung by the Valar.⁵ Flieger develops Tolkien's own statement in his early poem "Mythopoeia" that all temporal creativity is "refracted light [...] splintered from a single White" and that "[w]e still make by the law by which we're made" (87). Tolkien argued that all acts of artistic endeavour in the temporal realm are necessarily acts of "sub-creation" devolved from, and crucially, permitted by the Creator God.⁶ This notion is fundamental to his own creative work and informs the cosmology he created in his *legendarium*; so the Music of the Valar, by which the cosmos including Middle-earth was made, *might* be understood as providing the ultimate power by which Tom's songs take effect. However, these songs do not in themselves bring anything into existence; rather, as Tom uses them they are songs which exert power and control over many aspects of what has already been created and the strangeness and simplicity of their form—language and rhythm—seem to be part of their effectiveness.

If the "magic" of Tom's performative utterances is not institutionally legitimated but does indeed possess in itself its effective power, the form and function of those utterances depend upon a simple lexis,

frequently including his name, combined with a distinctive rhythm. Even when someone else sings Tom's words they are effective. In the Barrow, when Frodo remembers and sings the song Tom had taught the hobbits, he finds that with singing just Tom's name "his voice seemed to grow strong: it had a full and lively sound" (*LotR*, "Fog on the Barrow Downs" 138), and it brings Tom to their rescue. In contrast to the malign stasis of the Willow, and the marginal presence of the undead Wights and Black Riders, his ability to control his surroundings through apparently meaningless sounds and trivial rhyming signals the subversive challenge that the irrational, characteristic of the carnivalesque, poses to these representatives of the negative power of the past (see Bakhtin 50). Furthermore, Tom's power is such that his song enables the hobbits to emerge from the Barrow as if reborn. He is therefore clearly a carnivalesque presence in the story, a celebratory, uncontrolled counterbalance to the fear that surrounds and follows the hobbits and might be capable of penetrating the boundaries of Tom's authority—hence his warning to "heed no nightly noise!" (*LotR*, "In the House of Tom Bombadil" 125).⁷ His songs are "stronger songs" (*LotR*, "Fog on the Barrow Downs" 139) in so far as their power lies precisely in his carnivalesque identity, which is a denial of death consistently expressed in his ebullient use of simple vernacular language accompanied by his characteristic entertaining, illogical, rhythmic lexis, as this combination, evident in both his speech and his songs, asserts and defines his identity.

In the initial "Hey dol! merry dol!" song, the shaping force of the vocabulary on the metre is deceptively entertaining but this is nevertheless a song of power in its own right, perhaps *because* it lacks meaning, or because we are to understand that it signifies beyond our expectation and comprehension. "Hey dol," and its subsequent echoes, express Tom's presence as he moves around the Forest and the Downs—like a herald's trumpet or a bird's song. It is loud enough and distinctive enough to announce the presence of a different life form, one not tied to the earth, nor under the pernicious influence of the static malice of Old Man Willow or the ancient evil of the Black

Riders. It furthermore defines that difference as belonging to “Tom Bombadillo”—a form of his name demanded by the song’s rhyming, but this (apparently) playful adaptation does not change the identity of the singer any more than changing his clothes alters who he is in essence. When he is on his own passing through the Forest or over the Downs, he expresses the unrepressed joy that continually identifies him as well as his authority. It is only in direct communication with other sentient beings that he organises his speech—more or less—to suit their different ontological states. We may conclude, then, that Tom himself at all times defines the meaning and function of the language he uses, in whatever form it is presented, either as poetry or prose, in the specific environment which he inhabits and controls.

Poetry or Prose

It is a feature of Tom Bombadil’s characterisation that his speech is differentiated from his songs only by the form in which Tolkien sets them out on the page, following the convention in which prose denotes speech while songs are organised into the lineation recognisable as verse. In Tom’s case the same rhythm and occasional rhymes are common to both. Tolkien’s inclusion of poetry throughout *The Lord of the Rings* may, for some critics, have echoes of the construction of texts as disparate as Icelandic sagas and nineteenth-century fantasy, but as Tom Shippey has briefly noted in *The Road to Middle-earth* (81), Tolkien differentiates the relationship between Tom Bombadil’s songs and his speech from all other instances of poetic insertions into the prose narrative and dialogues of *The Lord of the Rings*.

In the early twentieth century the Russian Formalists investigated what they perceived as the dichotomy between poetry and prose, but Collingwood challenged the concept of a dichotomy and in the process provided a possible theoretical foundation for the distinctive

relationship between Tom's speech and songs when he wrote in "Words and Tune" (c. 1918):

Song could not have grown out of speech unless it was always *in* speech. [...] All speech contains those elements, intonation, pitch and stress, out of which music is composed: all speech *is* already song, more or less highly organised. (16)

In 1927 Barfield too was considering the relationship between poetry and prose, asserting that while the earliest verse-rhythms were "'given' by Nature" because "Nature herself is perpetually rhythmic,"

[i]t is only at a later stage that prose (=not-verse) comes naturally into being out of the growth of that rational principle which, with its sense-bound, abstract thoughts, divorces man's consciousness from the life of Nature. (144)

With Tom's speech, which so closely resembles his songs in its perceptible rhythms and occasional rhymes,⁸ Tolkien appears to associate the musicality of both with an undivided, and thus earlier, form of language and a mode of life that was ancient and once close to Nature, and anachronistically continues to be so.

Barfield in his statement of 1927 proposed an evolutionary model in which prose developed out of poetry. That poetry, he asserts, had been expressed in "the old single, living meanings" (100) which were experiential and in no way metaphorical (see 97). Nor was this poetry necessarily perceived as such by its makers (cf. 41). It is a feature of Tom's songs that they are devoid of poetic imagery and metaphorical constructions. They may be strings of sounds at times, or simple words logically arranged according to recognisable syntax, but whether they are playful, narrative, commanding, or calls for aid, those *words* of which they are constructed are closer to what Barfield referred to as "symbols of consciousness" (180), having "older single meanings" (108). These Barfield opposed to poetic metaphors which he defined as "logically disconnected but poetically connected ideas" (84) that accrue complex meanings through the passage of time and social interactions.⁹ By 1924, however, Collingwood had already

challenged what was then the familiar evolutionary theory of the development of poetry. He noted in various essays, including "The Philosophy of Art" that before the earliest human beings developed religion or science they already "had an art of extraordinary richness and power" and were "by nature sublime poets" (75). Barfield does not challenge this notion of ancient excellence, even when he refers to the "infancy of society" (16), and Collingwood's observations shed additional light on Tom's songs when read in the context of his assertion that he was "Eldest, that's what I am" (*LotR*, "In the House of Tom Bombadil" 129). His songs should not, therefore, be dismissed on account of being unsophisticated, but may be considered from Shklovsky's perspective when he declares that "[p]eople [...] all too flippantly contrast the old with the new without thinking whether the old is alive or has vanished [...] as everything familiar, too well known, disappears from our consciousness" (43). Through the performative nature of Tom's songs, which contrasts sharply with their simple, often familiar lexis and rhythms, Tolkien exposes the potential value of older, apparently unsophisticated forms of language, and as he sets up the relationship between Tom's speech and songs and their effect, he defamiliarises and problematises both the forms and the functions of poetry.

Through his careful choice of the language and versification that Tom uses so effectively when confronting danger on his own behalf, or on behalf of the hobbits, Tolkien interrogates theories of his own time such as those of Barfield, who reconsidered the idea that language evolved from simple to complex by means of poetic metaphors when he asked: "How is it then that we find this almost universal consciousness that the golden age of poetry is in the infancy of society?" (69). Tolkien might be seen to take the notion of "infancy" in relation to the individual and to push this to challenging extremes in Tom's first song, where, in this as in others, his frequent use of nonce words and repetitions *appears* to replicate a childlike delight in playing with sound. Tom's strange yet familiar lexis implies a characterisation that is belied by his effectiveness against both occult and natural

forces—as his waving away of the rain demonstrates (see *LotR*, “In the House of Tom Bombadil” 127).

In this way, Tolkien seems to question how readers judge the value of language, the “meaning” of metre, and of form on the page; and the way sounds accrue meaning through use in specific contexts.¹⁰ The distinctive “dancing” rhythm of Tom’s songs and speech may seem light-hearted to our ears and may well influence their reception. Nevertheless, his vocalising in its simple and rhythmic form is revealed to be consistently a species of “performative utterance,” questioning the connection between power, seriousness, and both poetic form and rhythm, and contesting the convention in poetry that some forms are to be equated with what is serious and important while other forms are equated with light-heartedness and nonsense. What Tom’s songs show is that form is not an *essential* conveyor of meaning. Their association with meaning may have altered in significance over time, or they may be mistaken by those who encounter them for the first time, as the narrator’s “nonsense” comments seem to imply. Tom’s linguistic style, complete with nonce words, and particularly in association with his characteristic poetic mode, at times takes readers beyond the limits of intelligibility to a place where meaning and form are *apparently* in conflict but only from the reader’s, or the hobbits’, initially limited perspective. In the way he makes language “strange” through the tension between the forms and the effects of Tom’s language, Tolkien questions assumptions made about language, and particularly about poetry and its relationship to prose.

Narrator and Author

At this point it is useful to distinguish between Tom Bombadil’s first and his subsequent songs. The difference lies in the relative semantic intelligibility of words and syntagmatic forms in all his songs after the first, features they share with his speech. This important difference implies that the narrator’s “nonsense” comment only creates tension

once Tom's strange lexis can be seen to take effect. However, echoes of that lexis are also used in songs with a logical narrative function, such as "Hey! Come merry dol! derry dol! My darling!" (*LotR*, "The Old Forest" 117), where they contribute sound and rhythm without *apparent* meaning. Here we must observe the obscure onomastics of *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien the author is acting out a fiction of being merely the translator of a work, *The Red Book of Westmarch*, originally written by Bilbo. When the narrator questions whether the first song is nonsense, Tolkien punctures the convention of the omniscient narrator, drawing attention to the limitations of the translator's craft. As he draws in the reader by posing the question about "nonsense," he opens up the possibility that not knowing what—or how—the song signifies may lead to hasty conclusions about it and its singer. The "nonsense" comment may equally reveal an apparent mismatch between perceptions of language and its ability to convey meaning, and thus may assert the limitations of the translator's knowledge or the reader's perception.

In Tom Bombadil, Tolkien develops a character whose vocalisations, strange and simple though they seem, are matched to the contexts of their use. When he communicates with Old Man Willow, we do not hear Tom's initial communication with the tree, only a subsequent series of short declarations and commands, rhythmic though not in verse form, but resonant with the stasis of the tree, as opposed to the fluency of independent movement. But when addressing the Barrow Wight—formerly an adult male mortal—Tom uses more syntactically developed commands in unrhymed verse, deploying the delightfully colloquial disrespect of "Get out, you old Wight!" to subvert the awe and fear potential in the encounter. Although Tolkien as narrator refers to Tom's initial song as "nonsense" twice, emphasising this possible interpretation, Tom's particular formulaic style, which is often repetitive and reliant on rhythm rather than meaning, defines his control over the natural threats of the Forest and the unnatural threats of the Barrow. His songs are performative utterances expressed in a rhythmical form, which, like his cavorting, celebrate his

freedom to move in contrast to the trees, in contrast to the spectral existence of the Barrow Wight, and in contrast to the socially-acquired restraint of hobbits and readers alike. As his cavorting expresses freedom of movement, so Tom's "nonsense" is a lively demonstration of his unrestrained ability to vocalise his presence for all to hear. It does not need at all times to take recognisable syntagmatic form because it does not need at all times to convey the kinds of complex logical meaning that Barfield associated with the development of the rational in society at the expense of Nature. What to the rational, acculturated hearer or reader appears to be childish nonsense, in fact identifies Tom for who he is, and, through its oppositional liveliness, declares his power whenever it is uttered.

Tolkien's characterisation of Tom's lexis reflects Barfield's theory of the primacy of poetry and Collingwood's theory of the original musicality of speech. This lends consistency to Tom's claim to be "Eldest" and defines his simple vocalising as the primal form of language.¹¹ As the narrator's "nonsense" comment challenges the ability of that primal form to signify and is subverted by the effectiveness of the lexis, Tolkien appears to suggest that meaning coalesces around what seems to be meaningless vocalising when that vocalising has an effect, even though this may be initially only the declaration of identity. When such a declaration has an effect, both identity and vocalisation accrue power as well as meaning. *Pace* Barfield, the logic of syntactical organisation follows this stage, hence Tom's ontological sensitivity.

However, Tom's lexis is specific to him and the environment in which he exists, prompting consideration of Tolkien's relationship to his more developed created languages. Because the power and effect of Tom's language appear to be geographically limited when he refuses to cross the borders of the lands he controls, Tolkien seems to imply that his created languages, including both forms of Elvish, can only signify and function within the limits *he* controls—Middle-earth and its cosmology. The subsequent conclusion must be that he acknowledged the possibility that they would be regarded as "non-

sense," having little effect, and thus scant meaning outside the limits of the world for which they were made.¹²

Unfortunately, the *apparently* childish, unsophisticated, or folksong familiarity of Tom's use of language and its delightfully entertaining simplicity together with the fascination of his mythic resonance are apt to divert attention from Tolkien's metalinguistic questioning of its significance. Moreover, when prompted by readers, Tolkien gave various opinions concerning Tom Bombadil, none of which entirely explain the forms or origins of his rhythmic language, and Tolkien stated in a letter: "I do not think Tom needs philosophising about, and is not improved by it" (*Letters* 192). But this disguises and even subverts the importance of the character by ignoring the strange playfulness of his use of language in which poetry and prose are barely distinguished and meaning is put into question. However, Tolkien had a long and profound interest in "play" of various kinds,¹³ and his twice-repeated assertion that Tom's initial "Hey dol" song was "nonsense" cannot be anything other than a cue to the reader to interrogate the characterisation of this intentional "enigma" and his command of language for yet deeper insights into Tolkien's own theories of creativity, identity, and meaning.¹⁴

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NOTES

¹For examples of comparisons made between the inclusion of poetry in the works of William Morris and Tolkien, see Burns, and Perry. For comparisons between Icelandic saga style and Tolkien's use of poetry see Phelpstead. Frequently cited paradigms of poetic form are those associated with Old English, Middle English, and the Romantics. On Old English, see for example Cunningham, and Shippey, *Author of the Century* 97. On Middle English, see for example Pridmore 219. On the Romantics, see Honegger 124.

²See also Erlich 1101.

³See "Puirt à beul."

⁴After the attack on Weathertop, Sam offers the jolly but highly complex "Troll" song to cheer his companions saying "It ain't what I call proper poetry [...] just a bit of nonsense" (*LotR*, "The Flight to the Ford" 201). It is Frodo who explains admiringly, "It's out of his own head, of course" (203).

⁵Although Flieger focuses on the splintering of language in Tolkien's *legendarium*, the same principle applies to song because it precedes both light and language as the creative power by which the entire cosmology of Middle-earth is brought into being, and thus in effect gives rise to them, but like them is gradually diminished in power; see Flieger.

⁶On the topic of sub-creation Tolkien was following Coleridge's theory of the relationship between imagination and the "infinite I AM." See Jackson 313. See also Weinreich.

⁷This warning takes on significance when read against Tolkien's 1934 poem "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil," and Tom's obvious prior knowledge of the Willow and the Wight, but remains allusive for the novice reader.

⁸On rhyme in Tom's prose see Milbank 134.

⁹Illustrating single meanings, Barfield quotes Spenser's *Faerie Queene* where in "The ruin of proud Marinell" ruin refers metaphorically to Marinell's defeat in battle. Barfield traces the origin of the metaphor back to verbs such as Latin *ruo* "rush" or "fall," and Greek *ρέω* "to flow," to show that all the original meanings refer to natural processes, having no *logical* connection with human activity (see 107-12). Barfield provides a clearer example of logically disconnected but poetically connected ideas, without etymological analysis, when he quotes Shelley's line from *Prometheus Unbound*: "My soul is an enchanted boat" (Act II.v.72; Barfield 57).

¹⁰On language and aesthetic, see also Smith.

¹¹On the basis of poetic style Tom may indeed be older than Treebeard.

¹²Dimitra Fimi does not address the possibility that Tom's characteristic lexis had special significance for Tolkien in her book on his interest in the creation of languages and "linguistic aesthetic."

¹³See for example his story *The Cottage of Lost Play*, as well as the poems "You and Me and the Cottage of Lost Play," and "The Little House of Lost Play" in *The Book of Lost Tales, Part 1* 13-32.

¹⁴Tolkien describes Tom as an intentional enigma in *Letters* 174.

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