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Abstract

Compares Tolkien's Beorn and Tom Bombadil, assessing their functions in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, their characters, and their importance, although they are tangential in their stories, to Tolkien's themes.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Beorn; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Tom Bombadil

BEORN AND TOM BOMBADIL: A TALE OF TWO HEROES

PAUL W. LEWIS

IN *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, two characters appear to be purposefully designed to be literary complements of each other: Beorn and Tom Bombadil. In *The Hobbit*, Beorn helps Bilbo and his company on their way to the Lonely Mountain, and later joins in the Battle of Five Armies. Tom Bombadil appears near the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, and he saves the Hobbits twice, first from Old Man Willow and later from a Barrow-wight. Several have written on the contrasts between the 'good' figures of Tom Bombadil, the Rangers, and the Ents as opposed to the 'evil' figures of Shelob, Gollum, the Nazgûl, and the Balrog among others.¹ Yet there is a different kind of literary kinship between Beorn, the skin changing man in *The Hobbit*, and Tom Bombadil, the eccentric being in *The Lord of the Rings*. As Peter Beagle notes, "in a literary sense [Beorn] is the forerunner of the more deeply realized Tom Bombadil" (xii).² In this article I will discuss the main characteristics of Beorn and Bombadil, their differences, and what makes them so connected. I will start with the questions of their identities, then look at some general comparisons and contrasts of their positions in their respective stories, and discuss the relationship of Beorn to Tom Bombadil in Tolkien's work.

Who is Beorn?

The question of Beorn's background is actually more complicated than might be imagined. Tolkien never mentions him in his many histories, such as *The Silmarillion*, *The Lost Tales I or II*, or *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, and in the narrative of *The Hobbit*, even Gandalf is uncertain about his origins (*Hobbit* [H] 117-9). Beorn is introduced in the seventh chapter in *The Hobbit*, where Bilbo Baggins, Gandalf and the thirteen dwarves stay with him in his house until their departure into Mirkwood Forest *en route* to the Lonely Mountain. He is also mentioned in the eighteenth chapter of the same book,

¹ Specifically focused on by Gasque, while Jeffs, Keenan, Scheps, and several others note this within their larger works.

² See also Helms 22. A similar correspondence has been made between the trolls in *The Hobbit* and the barrow-wights in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Purtill 53.

where he participates in the Battle of Five Armies and accompanies Bilbo and Gandalf to his home after the battle.

Beorn and his relations, the Beornings (*Fellowship of the Rings* [FR] 30), are descendants of one of the three houses of the Edain (or at least a close kin), whose language relates to both the Adûnaic of the Dúnedain of Númenor and the Rohirric of the Rohirrim (*Return of the King* [RK] 506-8). Originally, all humans were called 'the Edain' in Sindarin and 'the Atani' in Quenya, which meant 'the second people,'³ but later 'the Edain' was the name given to the three houses of elf-friends, who were noble in spirit, and who with the elves opposed the evil of Morgoth. In the Third Age (TA), the Edain's descendants were the Dúnedain, the Rohirrim, the Beornings, the men of Dale, and some others who likewise opposed evil in Middle-earth as represented by the orcs, dragons, and Sauron (*Two Towers* [TT] 40; RK 388, 404, 429, 506-8; *Silmarillion* [S] 143, 259-60). The nearest kin to Beorn and his clan were the Rohirrim (in Sindarin the 'horse-lord people') who originally dwelt in the area around the Carrock and the Gladden Fields. Their territory was called 'The Éothéod,' which in Rohirric means the 'horse-folk.'⁴ Upon the fall of Angmar in TA 1977, they drove away the remnants of Angmar's people who resided east of the mountains. In TA 2510, Cirion the Steward of Gondor sent a cry for help to the men of Anduin's vale, and Eorl, the Lord of the Éothéod, lead a great host of riders to their assistance. They arrived at the battle of the Field of Celebrant, and turned certain defeat into victory for Gondor. As a reward, Cirion granted to Eorl and his people the region of the Calevardhon from the Anduin to the Isen. Thereupon, they called themselves the Eorlings or the men of the Riddermark, and they called the new land the 'Mark of the Riders,' but in Gondor they became known as the Rohirrim from the land of Rohan (RK 428-30, 459, 508).

The immediate clan of Beorn is called the Beornings, and they guarded the trade routes from the Misty Mountains' passes on the east edge of Eriador to Mirkwood Forest, especially the High pass through the Misty Mountains and the Ford of Carrock. After the Battle of Five Armies in TA 2941, the orcs and wargs (large wild wolves) feared to go into this region. The Beornings were a very valiant group of men, but were not overly fond of strangers, including, and perhaps especially, the dwarves (*H* 117-26; *FR* 301; *RK* 461, 468). Their language

³ On the history of the Edain see *RK* 388-93, 506-8, and *S* 103-5, 140-9, 156-9, 195-7, 259-82; for a good general discussion on the Edain in Tolkien see Tyler.

⁴ Éothéod in Old English meant 'horse-folk' (Foster 164; Shippey *Road* 123; Tinkler 165); see on the usage of Old English in Rohan, Tinkler 164-9; also the Elves seem to use Welsh, and the Dwarves Norse, due to Tolkien's philological bent; his desire was to show a readable 'translation.' Note the comparison of northwest Middle-earth with the modern world (i.e. British Isles), Lobdell, *England* 29-36, and *RK*, Appendix F II, "On Translation," 513-20; see also on geographical features of the Lord of the Rings, Scheps 44-5.

was related to Rohirric and Adûnaic, which all were related to the common speech (RK 508). They were famous for their honey-cakes, which they baked from a secret recipe. These cakes were beneficial while on a journey, but were not easily obtained from the suspicious Beornings (FR 478).

It must be noted that, purposely, I have not ascribed to the Beornings those characteristics which are only mentioned about Beorn. Since Tolkien did not ascribe these features to the whole clan, I will only discuss these as part of the personal eccentricities or special talents of Beorn and not necessarily as clan-wide traits. The narrator of *The Hobbit* seems to make clear that not all of the Beornings were like Beorn (278). However, Robert Foster, for one, has ascribed some of Beorn's traits to the Beornings, such as not eating meat and being friendly to animals (57). This is interesting, since he also states that the Beornings did not shape-change like Beorn, yet the narrator in *The Hobbit* notes that it was rumored that the men of his clan, or at least of his lineage, had this shape-changing ability.⁵

The use of the name *Beorn* was purposeful by Tolkien. The term '*Beorn*' was an Anglo-Saxon poetic word meaning both man and warrior/chieftain, which could be seen as a foreshadowing of Beorn's role as the chieftain of the Beornings.⁶ It was originally used for a 'bear' or in Old Norse, *björn*. So a "*beorn* was a man with attributes of a bear" (Green 114). Further, there seems to be an analogy to the hero of the *Saga of Hrolf Kraki* who is called Bóthvarr Bjarki ('Little bear'), or to the hero Beowulf ('bees'-wolf' = honey eater = bear) (Shippey, *Century* 31-2; *Road*, 80). So as Green has noted, "*Beorn* springs not only from the word *beorn* but from the bear-boy myth [as well]" (115).

In the narrative, Beorn is described as a very strong, black-haired man with huge arms, legs with knotted muscles, and a great beard. In fact, he was so large that his brown tunic which hung to his knees would not touch Bilbo's head if Bilbo walked between his legs (H 118, 120-1). With these physical characteristics, he cut a very imposing figure. Gandalf believed that Beorn was of an ancient race of men in that part of the world. He must have had a long life if he lived in the Misty Mountains prior to dragons and orcs coming into that part of Middle-earth. Smaug descended on Erebor, the Lonely Mountain, in TA 2770, and other dragons harassed the dwarves and the Éothéod from as early as TA 2570. Further, the orcs expanded again into the Misty Mountains and attacked Rohan from TA 2800 to 2864 after the Dwarf-Goblin Wars of TA 2793-9. Beorn fought in the Battle of Five Armies of TA 2941. If he did predate the dragons and orcs in that part of the world, he would have been old indeed.

⁵ H 278; Fuller calls the Beornings were-bears, 23.

⁶ On the Anglo-Saxon word, see Bosworth and Toller, 86; Green notes that Tolkien saw this connection, 114.

Perhaps this longevity shows his kinship to the Dúnedain.⁷ Yet, in spite of his exceptional talents, he was definitely a man. Tolkien emphatically states in his April 25, 1954 letter to Naomi Mitchison that he had died by the time of the War of the Ring for “Beorn was a Man” (*Letters* 178).

Beorn’s temperament tended toward suspicion, probably spawned and honed by his life on the edge of Mirkwood Forest. Beyond his normal suspicion of all unknown peoples, like the rest of the Beornings, he had a fierce hatred of the orcs, demonstrated by his reaction to the death of the Great Goblin, his acceptance of the dwarves, Bilbo and Gandalf after Gandalf delivered the tale about the death of the Great Goblin, and his treatment of the orc and warg he caught to verify Gandalf’s story. It might have been due to his suspicion that he rarely invited people to his house (*H* 126-7; c.f. *H* 278). Beorn was amicable enough when humored—in fact, he could even be jolly—but if he was angered, he was truly appalling. He was essentially a berserker in battle, and with his size and temperament, he was an extremely formidable foe. This was abundantly demonstrated in his involvement in the Battle of Five Armies, and his slaying of the leader of the orcs, Bolg, the son of Azog (*H* 274).

Another reason that he was so formidable was because he was a skin-changer. Green notes that Tolkien used this term as a direct translation of the Old Norse term *hamrammr*, which in English is *berserkr*. The term *berserk* is derived from the compound roots of ‘bear-shirt.’⁸ Beorn could change his appearance from the form of a big man to the form of a large bear. In this latter form he was truly powerful, but it appears to be deeper than just a form, since he participated in some bear meetings at his house the nights the dwarves were staying with him (*H* 127-31). Further, Gandalf had heard him speaking in the bear language (*H* 119). There seemed to be two main opinions as to why he had this skin-changing ability. Some said that Beorn was a descendent of the ancient bears of the Misty Mountains who lived there before the giants. Others said that he was a descendent of an ancient race of men that predated the dragons and the orcs in that part of the world, which only happened in the last two centuries. Gandalf preferred the latter suggestion, believing that Beorn once lived in the mountains himself and was probably forced to leave due to the numerous Orcs who moved in, for Beorn was overheard as saying by Gandalf while he was in his bear form on the Carrock, “The day will come when they will perish and I shall go back” (*H* 119). Furthermore, the narrator lets the reader know that when Gandalf was relating the story of their adventures in the mountains with the orcs,

⁷ It should also be noted that it is possible that Tolkien might not have consciously worked out the implications of Beorn’s chronology.

⁸ Green, 115; Duriez among others not only calls Beorn a ‘skin-changer,’ but also a ‘shape-changer,’ 38.

and, in particular, with the Great Goblin, Beorn knew these areas personally and was keenly interested in this part of the story (*H* 125).

Likewise, Beorn seems to be able to speak with animals (*H* 126). He has cattle, horses, dogs, great bees, and possibly other animals. He is very kind to his animals, and dotes on them as if they were his children (*H* 136). He is not a meat eater, and his guests eat bread, honey and various milk products. Furthermore, these animals are his watchdogs, help set and clear his table, and have a variety of other duties. The animals are very important to him both as friends and in his daily work. Gandalf overcame Beorn's initial suspicion of him at their first meeting by mentioning his fellow wizard and 'cousin,' Radagast the Brown, who was noted for his beast-lore and herb-lore, and especially his friendship with birds. Beorn's suspicion was overcome by his love of animals and nature and his recognition of a kindred spirit in Radagast and thus, this respect extended to Gandalf and his entourage (*H* 121; *FR* 336-7; *S* 300).

It appears that Beorn also had some manual skills, for he hewed the stairs on the Carrock and probably built the great wooden house and the various buildings where he dwelt. It also seems possible that the land which he managed demanded his horticultural labor, and just plain, hard work in its construction and maintenance (*H* 116-22, 126-7). However, when the dwarves told stories of gold, silver and smith craft, he did not seem to care, and he kept very few metal implements in his house (*H* 127). He does seem to be an accomplished baker, baking honey-cakes with a secret recipe for which the Beornings were, likewise, to become famous (*H* 133; *FR* 478).

Beorn was essentially a very talented man, who through his dominant role in the Battle of Five Armies becomes the chieftain of the men of the Gladden Fields/Carrock region (*H* 278). With his strong temperament, his great size and physical strength, and his skin-changing ability, he was a "very great person" (*H* 118). This is a designation that extends beyond his mere appearance. These characteristics of Beorn made him a person who was a good friend, but a terrible enemy. Thus, although he was dead by the time of the War of the Ring, he made a lasting impact during his lifetime.

Who is Tom Bombadil?

The question of Tom Bombadil's background, even more so than Beorn's, can not really be distinguished from his life. 'What is he?' is intimately tied to 'who is he?' It is inseparable. Unlike Beorn, the character of Tom Bombadil has drawn much attention.⁹ His introduction into the story is similar to

⁹ See Arvidsson, both versions of Hargrove's article, Jeffs, Jensen, Loos, Thompson, and several various discussions within larger works. This section will draw heavily from

that of Beorn. He rescues the Hobbits from Old Man Willow in chapter 6, the Hobbits visit his and his wife Goldberry's house in chapter 7, and he rescues the Hobbits from the Barrow-wight in Chapter 8 of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Bombadil is also the subject of two poems in another work, and is mentioned in various places in the trilogy.

The character of Tom Bombadil is based upon a Dutch doll that belonged to one of the Tolkien children, apparently Michael.¹⁰ In 1934, Bombadil became the main character of the poem, "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil," which was published in *The Oxford Magazine*. Later, this and another poem entitled "Bombadil Goes Boating" were published in a 1962 anthology called *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*. The main difference between the 1934 version and the later versions found in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* was that Bombadil switched from wearing a peacock feather in his hat to a swan feather, since peacocks do not live in Middle-earth (*Letters* 318-9).

From the late 1950's to as recent as the mid-1980's, the most common perspective about Tom Bombadil was that he was a "merry, singing ageless little nature sprite" (Carter *Look Behind* 195; Kaufman 151), or some sort of a "primal nature spirit" (Fuller 23; see also Duriez 52; Scheps 50; Stanton 29-30), who has the "most intimate communion with natural forces" (Spacks 84); a "kind of archetypal 'vegetation god'" (Reilly 131; Keenan 70); and that his magic is perceived as "part of the very fabric of Nature" (Jeffer 27). Critics apparently have believed that he must be a nature god due to his ability with animals (*Adventures of Tom Bombadil* [ATB], 11-23), his ability with plants like Old Man Willow (ATB 12; FR 165-9, 180-1), and the statement at the Council of Elrond by Galdor the Elf from the Grey Havens that the "[p]ower to defy our Enemy is not in him, unless such power is in the earth itself" (FR 348). As has been noted previously by Gene Hargrove, this statement does not necessarily imply that Tom Bombadil is a nature spirit or a nature god. Tom Bombadil's power does not have to be related to the Earth; it is only compared with the earth's power (Hargrove 1986, 21). Nor are the limitations of Bombadil to the environs of the Old Forest and the Barrow-downs indicative of his nature (FR 203); rather they can be seen as self-imposed limits, for he does visit Farmer Maggot and other areas outside his restricted domain, and had abundant knowledge of contemporary events beyond his locale. However, there were limits to his knowledge; for example, he did not know the current whereabouts and range of the Black Riders (ATB 18-21; FR 184, 203, 209, 242).

Hargrove's 1986 article. The two versions of Hargrove's article will be distinguished by year.

¹⁰ Carpenter, *Tolkien*, 162, Duriez 52, and Rogers and Rogers, 62. Note that Grotta-Kurska states it was Priscilla's doll (101). Carter notes the similarity between Bombadil's name and that of *Boabdil*, a popular figure in Islamic legend, *Look Behind* 195.

Tom Bombadil demonstrated his magical powers against the Barrow-wight and Old Man Willow.¹¹ The barrow-wights were evil spirits from Angmar who infected the Great Barrows in about TA 1636. Bombadil banishes the Wight with a stronger song of life, which counteracts the Barrow-wight's song of death (*FR* 194-7).¹² Old Man Willow was an evil-hearted willow tree who had power over a large part of the Old Forest. Bombadil sang into the cracks of the tree to free Merry and Pippin (*FR* 169),¹³ echoing the magic of singing used in the Creation by Ilúvatar.¹⁴

When the Hobbits ask Goldberry, Bombadil's wife, about his identity, she says "He is" (*FR* 173-4). Tolkien stated that this is related to the mystery of naming, inasmuch as to say that Bombadil is who he is (*Letters* 190-1). Due to this mystery some believe that Bombadil is an "unfallen Adam" (Rogers and Rogers 91), while for others he is somewhat analogous to Adam and/or Christ.¹⁵ However, others suggest a divine connection, since the name for God given to Moses in Hebrew was Yahweh, which means 'I am that I am' (Hargrove 1986, 22). In any case, Bombadil demonstrates aspects of life beyond both humanity and the Elves. Further, when asked who he is, Tom calls himself 'the eldest,' having seen the beginning of Middle-earth (*FR* 182). Drawing on these pieces of evidence, Hargrove suggests that Bombadil is a Vala (20-24), while Foster believes him to be a Maia who has 'gone native' (496; Duriez 52; c.f. Stanton 30). This could be one reason why Gandalf, after his mission is completed (i.e. the demise of Sauron), looks forward to a long talk with Bombadil (*RK* 340)—almost as if it was to be a talk between peers who had not seen each other for a long time.

From an in-depth analysis of the evidence, Hargrove has persuasively argued that Tom Bombadil and his wife, Goldberry, are actually the Valar, Aulë and Yavanna. This would explain Bombadil's interest in the Hobbits, since Aulë was the Vala most interested in the children of Ilúvatar, and Goldberry's botanical interests, since Yavanna was responsible for plant life (*S* 27). This also explains their powers and their restraints. Probably like the Istari (i.e. the wizards; *RK* 455), they were morally obligated not to directly interfere, but were permitted to assist in a small way. They are not amoral,¹⁶ but moral in a very

¹¹ *ATB* 13-5, *FR* 196-8, 347; and *ATB* 12, 17, *FR* 167-9, respectively.

¹² See also Kocher 67-8, and Kelley 82-3.

¹³ See also *FR* 164-9, 180-1; *ATB* 12, 17.

¹⁴ On the usage of song in the creation of the world and its continued influence, see *S*, "Ainulindalë" 13-22, and *S* 41, 45-6; see also Tolkien's earlier form in *The Book of Lost Tales: Part One*, "The Music of the Ainur" 45-63.

¹⁵ Rogers 75; some note similarities to Melchizedek, Kaufman 151, and Ellwood 104-8.

¹⁶ Some have suggested that Tom Bombadil was amoral, such as Zimbaro, since he lacked individuation and time, 107-8; and Jeffs, since Bombadil is too objective to be good in the

deep sense in sharp contrast to Melkor, Sauron and Saruman, who directly interfered within the operations of Middle-earth (Hargrove 1986, 24).

Bombadil was extraordinarily comic in his appearance and Goldberry was as “a fair young elf-queen clad in living flowers” (*FR* 172; Foster 216). These appearances were unthreatening to the smaller, more child-like Hobbits. Only when their magic was used did the Hobbits fear, not their hosts themselves, but their obvious power. Tolkien himself observes that they did not comprehend this magic, in the same way that they did not comprehend Gandalf’s magic as anything more than fireworks and the like (*ATB* 9). The poems “The Adventures of Tom Bombadil” and “Bombadil Goes Boating” clearly demonstrate that these representations of Aulë and Yavanna were contextualized for the Hobbits as a comic figure and the river’s daughter, respectively, and were delineated from the Hobbits’ child-like perspective. This contextualizing ability was common among the Istari/Maiar and the Valar.¹⁷

If Hargrove is correct and Bombadil is Aulë, which I tend to agree with, some of his characteristics are pertinent to this discussion. Interestingly, Aulë is the creator of the dwarves, but he submitted them to Ilúvatar. Bombadil has several noted contacts with the Hobbits and the Elves, and he lived near an important intersection at Bree and the Greenway road (*ATB* 18-21; *FR*, 184-5, 203-23). However, he is not mentioned as having any direct contact with the dwarves apart from the name that the dwarves use for him; perhaps this reflects his interest in all peoples and his submission of the dwarves to Ilúvatar. He was known by many names: Forn by the dwarves, Iarwain Ben-adar (which means “Eldest and fatherless” and “the First”) to the Elves, Orald (‘old man’) by the Northern men, Tom Bombadil by the Hobbits of Buckland, and many other names (*FR* 397). Yet, despite this broad area of interaction, he seems to have stayed within the narrow expanse of his self-imposed limitation (Perkins and Hill 61-2).

As for some of his talents aside from his above-mentioned magic, he had the ability to talk to and relate with flora and fauna. His cuisine was honeycomb, butter, cream, cheeses, and bread (*ATB* 15; *FR*, 167, 174). He appears to be able to commune with nature, is greatly tied to nature, and seems to work within the natural. He is noted for his work in the light of day, notably the way he works in the light and brings light into the Barrow. Light is important for both

accepted sense, 26; see also Helms 86-88; They do not accept the possibility that Bombadil took a kind of ‘vow of poverty’ and renounced control, Hargrove 2004; see also *Letters* 178-9.

¹⁷ Hargrove 1986, 23; and *ATB* 11-23. This is noted about Saruman, *TT* 232, and Gandalf, Lobdell, *England and Always* 33, as well as other Maiar, *S* 30 and the Valar like Yavanna, *S* 27-8.

moral and natural reasons, and is tied to goodness (Sale, "Tolkien and Frodo Baggins" 210-11).

Comparisons and Contrasts

Initially, when looking at Beorn and Tom Bombadil, it is easy to see their differences. Beorn is a man, while Bombadil is not. Beorn is physically a very imposing figure, whereas Bombadil is comical in his appearance. Bombadil is married to Goldberry, and this marriage is a very important aspect of his existence. Beorn was, apparently, not married during the time of *The Hobbit*, although he later had a son, Grimbeorn the Old, who became a chieftain of the Beornings during the War of the Ring (*FR* 301). Beorn's magic consists of skin-changing, and in his bear form he is capable of strong violence; Bombadil's magic is through song and lacks apparent violence (i.e. Old Man Willow was not destroyed). In fact, Bombadil's magic may be seen as the magic of fulfilling one's essence rather than the magic of confrontation or control; Bombadil's magic causes Old Man Willow to act like a willow, not like an oversized Venus-Flytrap, and the Barrow-wight to become truly deceased rather than a wraith. In the midst of battle, Beorn is a berserker, while Bombadil in conflict just gets serious; and, in temperament, where Beorn is suspicious, Bombadil is jovial and friendly.

However, it is the similarities that remain intriguing. Both Beorn and Tom Bombadil live on an edge of a fierce and dangerous forest, Mirkwood Forest and the Old Forest, respectively, yet both are unafraid. Further, their residences offer peace and safety in the midst of a wild region. Additionally, both houses are sites of important dreams for major characters: Bilbo has a dream of dancing bears on his second night in Beorn's house (*H* 131), and Frodo's "most vivid and significant dreams come to him in Tom's house" (Flieger 203). These dreams were significant windows into the world—for Bilbo into what was happening, and to Frodo into what has happened and will happen. Further, both Beorn and Tom Bombadil are imposing figures in their own ways: Bombadil has magical power and self-assurance; Beorn has physical power, intensity, and confidence. Both can be dreadful enemies, as the great orc, Bolg, and his escort found out at the Battle of Five Armies about Beorn, and Old Man Willow and the Barrow-wight learned about Bombadil.

There are some characteristics that pinpoint the literary connection between these two figures. Their ambiguous natures, for one example; Bombadil and Beorn are not essentially good incarnate, but they are representatives of what is good.¹⁸ Although they both live in isolation, they still operate in

¹⁸ On Bombadil being good: Carter *Look Behind* 47; Hargrove 2004; c.f. see note 20; on Beorn being good-hearted: Foster 57; c.f. Jeffs who sees Bombadil as not being good in the accepted sense, 26; see also Scheps 50.

communities (not necessarily communities of humans). Both emphasize the necessity of communing with nature; both are friends with the animals, calling them by name and communicating with them daily, and their food consists of a pro-nature, vegetarian cuisine of vegetables, honey, and milk products.¹⁹ Being tied to nature is a characteristic of goodness in Tolkien's work. Spacks notes that the Rangers, Ents, Elves, and Bombadil are considered good in part because of their relationship with nature, since "[g]oodness is partly equated with understanding of nature, closeness to the natural world" (84). Further, the representatives of evil, Sauron and Saruman, desolated forests and polluted the air with their machinations (*TT* 76,161; see also Scheps 44, 46-8). Additionally, both Beorn and Bombadil obviously opposed the evil forces in the world: Beorn opposing the orcs and wargs; Bombadil opposing the Barrow-wight and Old Man Willow. Though both live an independent and autonomous life-style, they cannot be described as selfish, arrogant or prideful. At best, they are eccentric, self-sufficient, and strong in a time and place where strength is needed.

Bombadil and Beorn provided safe havens in very wild areas for the questers, mounts for part of the journey, and provisions, good advice, and guidance for the next leg of the journey. Ethically both lived within their own set of moral imperatives. Beorn made a good friend and seemingly a good leader (leading by example), but a dreaded and feared enemy for those evil beings coming into his domain. Tom Bombadil apparently followed a moral code, and as a Vala, he, like the Istari (Wizards/Maiar), was probably not allowed to exchange power with power against Sauron (*RK* 455). Instead, both must act indirectly against him. Bombadil and Beorn both fulfilled these moral mandates; thus, even if they can not be perceived as goodness incarnate, they are 'good' within human and moral limitations.

Beagle notes that Tom Bombadil and Beorn "are their own masters, under no enchantment but their own" (Beagle xii). Beorn and Bombadil both represent a certain type of heroic figure who is autonomous, living in isolation but not isolated.²⁰ Providing peace and comfort in a hostile environment, both are vastly aware of their surroundings. Both venture outside their respective domains—Bombadil visiting Farmer Maggot's farm, and Beorn catching the warg and the orc and joining in the Battle of Five Armies. Both also have sufficient knowledge of neighboring lands to provide information about the next leg of the respective quests. Their heroic nature is dependent upon their strength and will in the face of overwhelming forces.

¹⁹ Spacks 84-5; see also Kaufmann 151-2, Keenan 62-80, esp. 70, 75, and Reilly 139; and within the poems, Kelley 179-83.

²⁰ On the heroic element in Tolkien, see Sale, *Modern Heroism*, 193-240.

Though both are immensely powerful and seemingly indestructible, each has a major weakness or flaw. Beorn is mortal and can be overwhelmed; thus, the reason for his move from the Misty Mountains when massive numbers of orcs took residence there (*H* 119). Tom Bombadil is apparently undefeatable, but he has two weaknesses. First, he would eventually be overcome by Sauron, if Sauron recaptured the Ring and continued to grow, overcoming Middle-earth; and second, he would not understand the need for his keeping of the Ring, and would eventually mislay it for Sauron and his minions to find. The Ring has no power over Bombadil; even its power of invisibility does not deceive him. Bombadil, that is Aulë, may have been like Melkor in his ability to build anything, but for Aulë the enjoyment was in the building, not in the power or control (*S* 19). Bombadil, in his use of magic, can be compared to the pure scientist who prefers research, as opposed to the applied scientist or engineer.²¹ Control and power were the main features of the One Ring, so for someone who does not care for power or control, the Ring is useless. Further, since he does not seek control or power himself, he apparently does not see or recognize this need in others. Hence, he would likely lose interest in it and misplace it.

It is precisely these weaknesses which make Beorn and Bombadil more real. What unites the heroic characters in Tolkien's work is not deeds done out of strength by those with nothing to lose, but rather deeds done out of weakness with the potential for personal loss, as Frodo's actions at Mt. Doom, Éowyn's opposition to the Captain of the Nazgûl, and Aragorn's leadership of his men through the Paths of the Dead and later to the Tower of the Teeth, demonstrate. Their heroic deeds are done when their frailty becomes abundantly apparent, and they could lose themselves or at least cease to be who they were. For Beorn and Bombadil, their freedom and their very existence are in jeopardy. Beorn could have been killed at the Battle of Five Armies. He would not have become the leader, and possibly the organizer, of the Beornings with the resulting later benefits of their presence. Bombadil took his confrontation with the Barrow-wight very seriously. In light of Goldberry's statement, "No one has ever caught old Tom walking in the forest" (*FR* 174), Goldberry meant to reassure the Hobbits that Tom was the master; however, it could also be taken to mean that he has not been caught yet, or that a strong enough power had not yet opposed him (i.e. a Maia like Sauron, or a Vala like Melkor), but there is that possibility in the future. More than this, if he is Aulë then he is forbidden to directly oppose the evil powers of Sauron and others of his ilk. If Bombadil as Aulë directly opposes Sauron or his powerful minions, Bombadil's defeat would first be a moral defeat, which would lead to other disastrous consequences. Aulë and the creation of the

²¹ Hargrove 1986, 22; *Letters* 179, 192; see also Perkins and Hill 61-2; c.f. Shippey states that Tom dominates, *Road*, 106.

dwarves is an example of submission to Ilúvatar, while the activities of Melkor and Sauron are examples of disobedience and discord. If Bombadil were brought into a contest of powers, it would break the moral law of submission to Ilúvatar's command of non-interference and thus, by losing himself, he would be, essentially, overcome by Sauron.

Another feature that stands out is that both Beorn and Tom Bombadil provided the means by which a major victory was won. Beorn came to the Battle of Five Armies, and although Eagles greatly aided the beleaguered allies in the battle against the orcs, there is little doubt as to the importance of Beorn's presence, especially after carrying Thorin off the battlefield (a person whom he knew and was his house guest), and his subsequent personal slaying of the bodyguard of Bolg son of Azog, whom the Dwarves had greatly despised (*RK* 441-4), and Bolg himself. He bereft the orcs of their leadership, thus granting certain victory and causing the decline of orcs in that part of the world for many years to come. Tom Bombadil saved the hobbits from the Barrow-wight (which could have ended their quest right there), waking Merry, Pippin, and Samwise from the Barrow-wight's spell and giving them swords from the barrow to take with them. It was one of these swords which Merry used to strike the Captain of the Nazgûl, breaking the spell on him, so that Éowyn could dismiss his spirit from Middle-earth (*RK* 146). Hence, Bombadil not only saved the questers from Old Man Willow and the Barrow-wight, he also provided Merry with the one weapon that could help dispatch the Nazgûl.

Another feature of both Tom Bombadil and Beorn is their power of naming. In both cases, they do not just name an object a literary or rhetorical handle; rather their naming reflects the object itself, what Shippey calls "true language" (*Road*, 106). Bombadil with the horses (*FR* 199), and Beorn with the Carrock (*H* 117) name these things by the truth and reality of the objects. This ability shows two things. First, that Bombadil and Beorn see things as they really are. In other words, they have insight into reality. This is a parallel with Adam's naming of all the animals in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:19) before his fall into sin and the resulting distortion of reality. True names are important to Tolkien; the Wizards did not readily give their true names (*TT* 353; *RK* 455), nor did Treebeard believe that the Hobbits should give away their names so easily (*TT* 85). Second, the concern of naming is a distinguishing factor of Tolkien's perspective as a philologist. Tolkien recognized the power of names and naming, and within a 'magical' world, those who could truly name were indeed powerful (*Lobdell* 27-48; *Scheps* 48-9; *Shippey Road*, 106-7).

Beorn and Tom Bombadil are also essentially tangential figures to the story line. Beorn is omitted in the Rankin-Bass television production of *The Hobbit* (1977), nor is he found in Carter's synopsis of *The Hobbit* in his book

Tolkien: A Look Behind the Lord of the Rings (35-42).²² Likewise, Tom Bombadil is omitted in the Ralph Bakshi (1978) and Peter Jackson (2001) film versions of *The Lord of the Rings* as well as the BBC serialization of the trilogy (mentioned by Jeffs 26). Several other versions have omitted these two figures because they thought that they did not fit the story line. In fact, Thomas Gasque calls the Bombadil section a “failure” and it “never really comes alive” (Gasque 155-6), and Roger Sale states that Bombadil is one of “some slow places” in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (261).²³ Tolkien himself states that Tom Bombadil “is not an important person—to the narrative” (*Letters* 178). The basic problem with Beorn and Bombadil is that they are not essential to the story. In fact, Jared Lobdell even called Bombadil “an anomalous creation” (63). Hargrove, in both versions of his article, has made an accurate distinction between an anomaly and an enigma. An anomaly is ‘against the law’ or discordant or out of place, whereas an enigma is something mysterious, or something that does not seem to fit. The distinction is that the anomaly by its nature does not fit, but the enigma does not *appear* to fit (Hargrove 1986, 20). Tolkien brought Beorn and Bombadil into the stories not as anomalies but enigmas. As Tolkien stated in the April 25, 1954 letter to Norma Mitchison that “even in a mythical Age there must be some enigmas, as there always are. Tom Bombadil is one (intentionally)” (*Letters* 174). In other words, enigmas are essential to a story, since they are naturally a part of life. Bombadil “represents certain things otherwise left out” (*Letters* 192). Bombadil and Beorn represent those aspects of tangents that always happen. They have an important impact on the final outcome, so in one sense, they are not necessarily acting enigmatically. Yet for Tolkien, it is the very nature of their enigmatic existence which makes them so important, so connected, and so essential. Further, Beorn and Tom Bombadil highlight a significant theme in *LotR*, that is that there is both evil in the world independent of Sauron (e.g. Shelob [*Letters* 228]), and good independent of the Fellowship of the Ring. Not only are Beorn and Bombadil elements of good, they are *not* essential to the plot of the story, but they *are* essential to Middle-earth. Their importance is partially due precisely to their being tangential figures. As in life, there are tangential figures that have an immediate, and perhaps long-term, effect on a person, but ultimately are not fundamental to the flow of that person’s life. In this way, these two heroes are not significant to the plot, but their inclusion “represents certain things otherwise left out” (*Letters* 192) or “something [...] important” (*Letters* 178). These quotes indicate that Tolkien felt including tangential figures independent of the main

²² For the sake of completeness, I must admit that in contrast to Bombadil’s case, there have not been any public statements from either Rankin-Bass or Carter suggesting anything less than an omission for the shortening of the tale, and adapting it for other purposes (e.g. making a movie).

²³Gasque 155-6; Sale, “Tolkien and Frodo Baggins” 261; and Shippey *Road*, 105.

narrative, who help the cause of good incidentally along the way of their quest of life, is like reality, where not everything neatly fits into the 'plot' of life. Thus, this demonstrates once again the richness of Tolkien's narrative about Middle-earth.

Tom Bombadil and Beorn are interesting characters within Tolkien's works. Although they are not the same, they are literary peers to each other. Beorn fits the 'level' of *The Hobbit*, whereas Tom Bombadil with his greater powers fits the 'grander' *Lord of the Rings*. Yet both represent certain types of heroes, who are morally good and help in the demise of evil in Middle-earth. Both are powerful not only physically or magically, but also because they see and name things as they really are. Yet at the core they are enigmas and therefore, for Tolkien, are essential.

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