

I. *Tom Bombadil: A Prose Fragment*

Among the Tolkien papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and partly printed in Humphrey Carpenter's *Biography*, is a fragment of a prose tale, entitled *Tom Bombadil*, written probably in the 1920s. Unfortunately, Tolkien ceased to write, or the surviving manuscript fails, after only three paragraphs:

It happened in the days of King Bonhedig, before the wild men came hither out of Ond, or the dark men out of Euskadi, or the fair haired warriors with long iron swords across the narrow water; in fact before any one ever mentioned in fantastic history or sober legend had yet arrived in Britain (as it was called in those days), a long time ago, and before the most far-reaching prophecies, of which there was a multitude, had even glimpsed Arthur in the distant and incredible future.

Nonetheless things already happened here and the island was full enough of peoples and other inhabitants, and had already suffered many invasions and

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changed (as since) everything but its name several times over. King Bonhedig sat upon the throne of the Kingdom of Bon [*added: & Barroc*] which stretched for many miles on either side of the Tames as they called the chief river of the South. There we will leave him, for he concerns us only as a convenient method of dating. He reigned for fifty years only, so you will not be far out in whatever part of his reign you place these events.

Tombombadil [*sic*] was the name of one [of] the oldest inhabitants of the kingdom; but he was a hale and hearty fellow. Four foot high in his boots he was, and three foot broad; his beard went below his knees; his eyes were keen and bright, and his voice deep and melodious. He wore a tall hat with a blue feather[;] his jacket was blue, and his boots were yellow.

Bonhedig (*Bonheddig*) is Welsh for 'noble'. *Ond* is an ancient word for 'stone', almost the lone survivor of the language that preceded the Celts and the Germanic invaders of Britain; Tolkien incorporated it in 'Elvish' words such as *Gondor* 'stone-land'. *Euskadi* is the Basque country in northern Spain. The 'narrow water' is presumably the English Channel. The name *Barroc* – if this is the correct reading; in the manuscript the word

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is smudged – may be meant to refer to the forest (or possibly hill), variously spelled, thought to be a source element for *Berkshire*, the name of a county which borders on the river Thames (here ‘Tames’).