

# proof that most etymologies are only fairy-tales

---

*Source:* <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2008-08/msg00064.html>

---

- *From:* [analyst41@xxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:analyst41@xxxxxxxxxxx)
  - *Date:* Sat, 2 Aug 2008 10:28:54 -0700 (PDT)
- 

From our own Chris Culver's review of Don Ringe's book:

start quote:

Ringe has maintained correspondence with today's other eminent Indo-Europeanists, and his book includes a number of ideas which, though hitherto unavailable in print, have been floating around in e-mails for some time. Also, though Ringe generally sticks to the consensus view in his reconstructions, he occasionally expresses his own opinions on matters, and these are often thought-provoking. For example, for the ancestor of English "bear (animal)", Ringe would posit PIE \*gwer "wild animal" (cf. Gr. ther, Latin ferus) instead of the usual conjecture that it is from a tabooistic circumlocution meaning "the brown one".

end quote.

there are any number of fanciful etymologies for "bear" , "wolf" etc. ("the brown one", "the tearer", "honey eater" etc.)

So one must bear in mind that erroneous etymologies are another source of noise in reconstructions and I was surprised to find that even something so written about as "bear" is subject to scholarly disagreement.

.