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"Dyrne Langað": Secret Longing and Homo-amory in *Beowulf*
and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

The literary hero, whether s/he be of an epic, romance, or fairy story, serves as an exemplar and participates in a mythic story that both instructs and inspires. In her essay "Frodo and Aragorn: The Concept of the Hero," Verlyn Flieger cogently speaks to the presence of Beowulfian and Arthurian resonances in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. In her lucid reading of Frodo Baggins' character, she maps out the similar patterns of movement, the rising and setting, of a fairy tale character's life placed within an epic narrative.¹

Like Beowulf (and Scyld Scefing, the king addressed at the poem's prologue), Frodo Baggins helps bring peace and prosperity to a world beset by sorrows. At times, strife and suspicion between leaders seems to fuel continuous hostilities. Yet, amidst this aggression, the hero provides a stark contrast through the motif of the monster-slayer, one who sacrifices all so that his people may live in peace. In both stories, the integrity and virtue of such an individual is recognized by those closest to him, so much so that the other males exhibit an intensity of affection for him that rivals in depth and degree the hostility pervasive throughout the text and serves as its counterweight. In what follows, the quality and function of this "homo-amory" witnessed between Beowulf and his elders is brought to bear alongside the love for Frodo bore by Samwise Gamgee, his gardener and loving friend.

¹ Verlyn Flieger, "Frodo and Aragorn: The Concept of the Hero," in *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1981), 40-62. For this pattern of rising and falling, see Tolkien, "The Monster and the Critics," in *Interpretations of Beowulf: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. R.D. Fulk. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 14-44.

Terms, of course, carry semiotic weight and are necessarily linked to the period in which they are constituted. Whether talking about social relations in the eighth century or the early twentieth, it is essential to avoid assuming the ahistorical nature of sex. Carolyn Dinshaw and Valerie Rohy remind us that the anachronistic use of contemporary terms such “heterosexuality,” “homosexuality,” “homoeroticism,” and even “friendship,” “love,” and “desire” can be simultaneously problematic and potentially productive.² Unlike homo-sexuality or homo-eroticism, the term homo-amory is not yet anchored to and burdened by signification; it implies something different, a something in the overlapping of friendship and *eros*. This something is not already understood and known as “sex” nor as “friendship.” “Love” may be the more precise term; yet “homoamory” gives space for a reader to supply the dimensions of this love.

Whatever we may desire to call it, the powerful and intimate love between two men appears in a multitude of texts as far back into the deeps of time as we can glance and often at the moment of a hero’s final departure. In the Mesopotamian epic of *Gilgamesh*, a text that Nicholas Birns argues likely had some influence on Tolkien,³ the hero struggles with living on after the death and decrepitude of his beloved Enkidu. Homer’s *The Iliad* gives us the powerful scene of Achilles grieving over Patroklos. And perhaps most influential to Tolkien’s writing, the early English epic *Beowulf* gives us the eponymous character’s departures, which possess significant and surprising emotional

² Carolyn Dinshaw. *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time*. Durham, NC: Duke University, 2012; Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009.

³ Nicholas Burns, “The Stones and the Book: Tolkien, Mesopotamia, and Mythopoeia” in *Tolkien and the Study of his Sources: Critical Essays*. Ed. Jason Fisher. (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2011): 45-68.

weight. Much can be gained by examining closely the male homosocial world of *Beowulf*'s setting, and it is to this world I will now turn.

Aggression and Affection Between Men in *Beowulf*

While extremely successful within the hostile social economy, Beowulf also points to an alternative mode of engagement. Setting out for Heorot with the intent of ending Grendel's reign of suffering, he uses his heroic might to best the monster, and in doing so, ensures a brief period of peace and prosperity for the Danes. Despite the jester-esque provocations of Unferð, Beowulf refuses to get physically hostile, instead using his words and wit to unman the ðule. However, what is most startling is the degree to which the hero inspires love. When Beowulf returns to the Geatish court, King Hygelac displays a passionate affection for his nephew. The king had been overwhelmed with concern when Beowulf left to go save the Danes: *Ic ðæs mórdceare sorhwyllum séað* (1992b-93a), "Because of that, I seethed with sorrows, with a worried heart," says the King of the Geats. Tolkien translates the line as: "On this account did care about my heart well ever up in surging sorrow."⁴ Hygelac's world of strife and struggle pauses for a moment to accommodate the love that Beowulf inspires. This scene follows that of Beowulf's earlier departure from Heorot, where Hroðgar evinces a much more passionate same-sex affection.

Critical readings of Hroðgar tend to be kind, describing him often as a thoughtful and reflective man made wise through his suffering.⁵ Hiroto Ushigaki, in "The Image of *God*

⁴ Tolkien, *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary*, Ed. by Christopher Tolkien. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 71.

⁵ Raymond P. Tripp, Jr. "The Exemplary Role of Hroðgar and Heorot" *Philological Quarterly* 56 (1977): 123-29; John Hill "Hroðgar's Noble Rule: Love and the Great Legislator," ed. Ross Samson. *Social Approached to Viking Studies*. (1991): 169-78. See also Scott DeGregorio, "Theorizing Irony in Beowulf: The Case of Hroðgar" *Exemplaria* 11.2 (1999): 309-43.

Cyning in *Beowulf*,” suggests that Hroðgar is the perfect model of kingship. Some such as Mary Dockray-Miller have seen the king as emasculated through Grendel’s “takeover” of his realm and thus figuratively castrated. Such critics read the poet’s favorable epithets as ironic.⁶ Yet others see him as remaining relevant and prudent, possessing a philosophical *gravitas*, which John Hill defines as “venerable, staid, judicious, priestly, peaceful, and productive.”⁷ Hroðgar remembers friend from foe, recalls Beowulf’s father, Ecgtheow, rewards success, provides a now well-known homily on pride, and offers tokens of love and affection at Beowulf’s departure. It is this final scene to which I wish to devote some attention.

The scene is frequently commented on; its translation affects nothing less than our accurate perception of Anglo-Saxon male same-sex relations, their depth and texture. Hroðgar is very moved by Beowulf’s earlier speech in which the warrior offered his continued friendship, support, and love to both the Danish King and his eldest son. He glimpses a new era of peace between clans ushered in through Beowulf’s successful mission:

Mé þín módsefa

lícað leng swá wél, léofa Béowulf.

Hafast þú geféred þæt þám folcum sceal

Géata léodum ond Gár-Denum

sib gemaénu ond sacu restan,

⁶ Hiroto Ushigaki, “The Image of ‘*God Cyning*’ in *Beowulf*: A Philological Study” *Studies in English Literature* 58 (1982): 63-78; Mary Dockray-Miller, “Beowulf’s Tears of Fatherhood” *Exemplaria* 10.1 (1998): 1-28.

⁷ John Hill, *Narrative Pulse of Beowulf: Arrivals and Departures* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto, 2008), 44.

inwitníþas, þé hie aér drugon. (1853b-1858)⁸

(Your character please me so well, dearest Beowulf. / You have brought it to pass that for the people -the Geats and the Spear-Danes- / there shall be peace and rest from the hostilities, which they earlier endured.)

Hroðgar recognizes that Beowulf serves as a bringer of peace. He is to some degree the male equivalent of the "peace-weaver" here, ending strife between two peoples.⁹ Not only this; it is Beowulf's attitude that pleases the king.

He is so glad to find such wisdom and strength in a man so young that he is prepared to offer tokens of his gratitude and affection:

wesan þenden ic wealde wídan ríces
 máþmas gemaéne, manig óþerne
 gódum gegrétan ofer ganotes bæð.
 sceal hringnaca ofer heáfu bringan
 lác ond luftácen. Ic þá léode wát
 gé wið féond gé wið fréond fæste geworhte
 aéghwæs untaéle ealde wísan. (1859-1865)

(As long as I rule this wide kingdom / treasures between us (shall be) / and many each other / shall greet with gifts / over the gannet's bath. The ring-knecked (ship) shall / over the seas bring / offerings and love-tokens. / I know the peoples / both toward foe and toward friend / will stand fast / blameless in everything / as in the old manner.)

⁸ *Klaeber's Beowulf*. Fourth edition. Eds. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles. Toronto, Buffalo, London: university of Toronto Press, 2008.

⁹ On the female peace-weaver trope, see Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986.

This passage tells us as much about Beowulf as it does about Hroðgar. The Danish king addresses Beowulf's immanent departure across the sea and looks forward to the establishment of peace-exchanges between the Geats and the Danes, and this glance ahead is simultaneously a look behind to the nostalgic past, the "ealde wísan." This "old manner" is ushered in by Beowulf, and Hroðgar attributes its renewal to him. In his wisdom, Hroðgar places tremendous value upon the "lác ond luftácen" (offerings and love-tokens), which will be carried across the seas. The language here is already emotional and this heightened degree of affection is sustained and crests in the next passage where homo-amory takes on a quality that reaches the homoerotic or (at the very least) allows for its presence.¹⁰

What comes next is an unparalleled display of affection from Hroðgar. The passage is cited again and again in studies of masculinity and male-male relations of this period:¹¹

Gecyste þá cyning æþelum gód
þéoden Scyldinga ðegn bet[e]stan
ond be healse genam; hruron him téaras
blondenfeaxum. Him wæs béga wén
ealdum infródum, óþres swíðor,
þæt h[í]e seoðða(n no) geséon móston
móðige on meþle. (W)æs him se man tó þon léof

¹⁰ For studies on emotion in medieval culture, see Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006 and *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

¹¹ See Allen Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 92-98; and David Clark, *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in early Medieval English Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 130-43.

þæt hé þone bréostwylm forberan ne mehte

ac him on hreþre hygebendum fæst

æfter déorum men dyrne langað

born wið blóde. (1870-80a)

(Then the good king of a noble race, / prince of Scyldings kissed the best of
thanes / and he grabbed him by the neck. Tears ran down / by his gray-streaked
hair. He was of two minds / wise in years, of one the more. / That again [never
again?] would they look on each other / proudly in meeting. The man was so dear
to him / that he could not hold back the flood of feelings; / but in his breast -
bound firmly in his heart- / a secret longing for the dear man / burned in his blood.

(Vaccaro)

If much can be made of the kiss exchange between Gawain and Lord Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, then something is surely worth a comment regarding Hroðgar's behavior at Beowulf's departure.¹² The passage and its cruces have received some critical attention, and interpretations vary widely. And it is not hyperbole to argue that in this scene, 'getting it right' is about much more than firming up Hroðgar's character and the tone of the scene. In a poem rife with same-sex hostility, the passage –if translated correctly- provides a glimpse into the world of homo-amory in pre-Conquest England.

The scene is noteworthy for its intensity as only a few scenes in the Anglo-Saxon corpus approach this magnitude of feeling. Readers certainly encounter the expression of

¹² Something should be said about the adjective "infrodum" in line 1874 used here to describe Hroðgar, a term meaning wise and potentially evoking the figure of Anglo-Saxon legend, the peaceful King Froda, whom Tom Shippey points to in his reading of Frodo. Tom Shippey, *Road to Middle Earth* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 204-09. Interestingly, *unfrodum* appears at Beowulf's final departure scene with Wiglaf.

deep emotion in the elegiac poem *The Wanderer*, where the ‘dreamer’ imagines that he “clyppe ond cysse” his lord as he lays his head upon his lord’s lap (l. 42a). Allen Frantzen’s assessment of the “nature” of the emotion in the poem is notable and, I find, accurate:

The gesture must be allowed an erotic, even sexual aura, if only for a moment; it is a kiss, after all, and a clasp. But thoughts of the lord’s embrace quickly yield to the grip of sorrow; the pillow of the lord’s embrace (so to speak) contrasts with whatever hard or cold surface the Wanderer finds for his weary head, vermin and all.¹³

Frantzen deftly underscores the potential *eros* of the *Wanderer* passage, what he would call bringing to our attention the shadow of same-sex love; yet he is also quick to point out, “that what strikes us as a gesture of erotic intimacy may indeed be intimate but not erotic.”¹⁴

No scene arrives at the intensity expressed between Hroðgar and Beowulf. Hroðgar’s kiss is conventional. Such kisses between a lord and his vassal appear elsewhere, as we see in *The Wanderer*, though this is not that type of kiss.¹⁵ Hroðgar’s tears though are unusual and numerous explanations have been presented for their

¹³ *Before the Closet* 90.

¹⁴ Frantzen (here 90) likewise points out the shadowy potential of the Old English translation of Augustine’s Soliloquys, where masculine pronouns create a fairly erotic connection to Wisdom regardless of whether they are translated as “man” or as “person.” Frantzen’s term ‘shadow’ is built around the premise that same-sex desires existed all around the perimeters of the hetero-normative social and ideological apparatus: “I see all these desires moving together, the heterosexual orders of church and state shadowed by same-sex love, sex, and eroticism, often denounced but never left behind, an ever-present reminder that love and sex are not the exclusive rights of the majority who mate with the opposite sex.” (29). Historical evidence suggests, according to Frantzen, that enquiry into same-sex sexual behaviors (I’ll avoid the term ‘sodomy’ now as it requires a tremendous amount of definition and context) left little room for a ‘closet’ in which activities would be kept secret. The culture of confession and the penitentials sought out clarification rather than avoided it. Frantzen’s evidence is compelling though I do feel ‘closet’ address the unlikelihood of an individual disclosing what he doesn’t have to in order to avoid punishments.

¹⁵ A clasp and a kiss does appear in the Old English poem *Andreas*; that too is a different kiss.

existence.¹⁶ Dockray-Miller find's Hroðgar symbolically castrated. David Clark finds the cause to be Hroðgar's desire for Beowulf to be his heir. Most are rather unconvincing.

The secret longing for Beowulf, which burned in Hroðgar's blood, would be homo-erotica in other centuries, both earlier and later. The degree to which it would have been read as such in the eighth century is perhaps as unknowable as the sexuality of the man responsible for the poem's composition. But how are we to translate this passage accurately? Unarguably, Hroðgar is unable to restrain his affection for Beowulf; it is securely planted in his heart and erupts in an intense emotional display. Complicated by the condition of the manuscript, the argument is over the nature and cause of the display; the cruces of the scene are important enough to summarize here.

One of the primary issues is that of manuscript deterioration and scribal error. Another is a matter of definition. Emendations to the text made by Frederick Klaeber and subsequent editors have greatly influenced how the departure scene has been read. They argue for the insertion of a negation (nō) in line 1875, which then makes the expectation of never seeing Beowulf again the cause of Hroðgar's tears. Some critics such as Thomas Wright ("Hroðgar's Tears") and Alfred Bammesberger ("Hroðgar Bids Farewell") argue against this negation and explain Hroðgar's emotion as joy rather than grief, emending the text to include an *á* (always) or an *eft* (again).¹⁷ Admittedly, Wright's conclusion on this point seems supported by the text, as the two men have just prior to this agreed that there will be strong bonds of friendship and exchange of gifts and love-tokens between

¹⁶ As examples, see Thomas Wright, "Hroðgar's Tears," *Modern Philology* 65.1 (1967): 39-44; Alfred Bammesberger, "Hroðgar Bids Farewell (Beowulf 1870ff)" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 109.2 (2008): 199-203; Howell Chickering, *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition*. Anchor Books, 1977; reprinted 2006.

¹⁷ A glance at the facsimile does show enough room for a monosyllabic word. See Julius Zupitza, *Beowulf: Reproduced from Facsimile from the Unique Manuscript*. Second Edition. EETS. London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1959.

the two people, and Beowulf has promised to support the king whenever need should arise. Nevertheless, most editors have accepted the logic of the negation in the passage.

The next crux for readers is the meaning of the phrase “*dyrne langað*.” “*Langað*” is most often considered to be a verb form here used nominally to mean “longing” though it could also be a preterit verb modified by an adverb. The term “*dyrne*” shouldn’t give much trouble, but it has. As an adjective, it is defined as “secret,” “furtive,” or “hidden,” as is found in both the Bosworth-Toller and Clark Hall dictionaries.¹⁸ As an adverb, it means much the same: “secretly.” The *Dictionary of Old English* gives us this and more with a majority of the definitions pertaining to “that which is concealed.”¹⁹ The word most often signifies some type of concealment and is frequently linked to “*deogol*” in the *Concordance to The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, a term Tolkien fans should find familiar.²⁰

¹⁸ See “*dyrne*” in Joseph Bosworth. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*. Ed. Thomas Northcote Toller and Others. Comp. Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichý. Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 21 Mar. 2010. Web. 5 July. 2018. <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/>.

and John R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.

¹⁹ *Dictionary of Old English*. Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, by the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986 -.

²⁰ From *Concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. J.B. Bessinger, JR. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978:

dyrne deofles boda þe wið drihten wann. (The hidden messenger of the devil, who struggles with the lord) 1 Gen 490

hæfst þe wið drihten *dyrne* (you have against the lord secret...) 1 Gen 507

ðurh *dyrne* geþanc ðe ðu drihtnes eart (...you come with secret thoughts...) 1 Gen 532

ðurh deofles cræft *dyrne* wunde. (Through the devil's craft secret wounds) 2 Hml 30

lange legere fæst leodum *dyrne* (long hidden from men) 2 Ele 722

duguðum *dyrne*, deogol bideð. (that lies hidden, secret from men) 2 Ele 1092

dyrne ond degol, þam þe deorc gewit (the fiend on earth hidden and secret...) 3 Chr 640

Ne sindon him dæda *dyrne*, ac þær bið dryhtne cuð (there are not deeds hidden from him...) 3 Chr 1049

ne beoð eowre dæda *dyrne*, þeah þe ge hy in dygle gefremme. (your deeds will not be hidden, although you practice them in secret) 3 Glc 466

demdan æfter dædum. Ne beoð þa *dyrne* swa þeah. (These acts shall not be kept secret) 3 Glc 493

dyrne drihten. A þin dom sy (hidden lord?) 3 Aza 108

degol þæt þu deopost cunne! Nelle ic þe min *dyrne* geseccan, (I will not tell you my secret) 3 Mx1 2

Deop deada wæg *dyrne* bið longest (longest kept secret?) 3 Mx1 78

þurh *dyrne* meahht duguðe beswicað (through hidden might) 3Wh1 33

þurh *dyrne* geþoht, þæt hy todælden unc (through secret thought) 3 WfL 12

Deniga frean, ne sceal þær *dyrne* sum (nor shall there secrets be) 4 Bwf 271

One could see how a term such as this would be fairly overdetermined within a context of sexual and/or emotional secrecy and disclosure. Allen Frantzen points to the vast amount of regulatory evidence that reveals very little secrecy regarding the existence and possibility of sex-sex erotic encounters.²¹ Rather than a "closet" constructed through the denial of homosexual acts, Frantzen locates their "shadow," a pervasive knowledge of their existence, a potential sub-text, "always there, always present" (Frantzen 136).

Translations of this phrase have differed greatly. Burton Raffel decides to omit *dyrne* altogether in his line, "His very blood burned with longing." E. Talbot Donaldson and Roy Liuzza both give "deep-felt longing;" Seamus Heaney offers, "His fondness for the man was so deep-founded." Howell Chickering provides "those deep tears." Williamson has "The spirit's longing, deep in his breast." Ed Ridsen goes for something fairly unusual yet accurate with "silent longing." Lucien D. Pearson provides "secret yearning." Michael Alexander shows us that we really can have it both ways with, "hidden in the heart ... a deep longing." Allen Frantzen and David Clark translate it as "secret longing."²²

þær he *dyrne* wat deorce grundas. (there he secretly passed . . .) 5 P134.6 4

Ides sceal *dyrne* cræft / fæmne hire freond gesecean (A woman should with secret craft...) 6 Mx2 43

Is seo forðgescaft / digol and *dyrne*; (Creation is secret and hidden) 6 Mx2 62

²¹ "This evidence identifies same-sex relations of many kinds and unambiguously condemns them," Frantzen 113.

²² Frantzen 94; Clark 132; also Roy Liuzza, *Beowulf* (Toronto: Broadview, 2013), 165; E. Talbot Donaldson, *Beowulf* (New York: Norton and Company, 1966), 33; E. L. Ridsen, *Beowulf* (Albany: Whitston Publishing Company, 2006), 44; Burton Raffel, *Beowulf*, (New York and Scarborough: New American Library, 1963), 81; Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf* (New York and London: Norton and Company, 2000), 129; Michael Alexander, *Beowulf* (Middlesex, Eng. And New York, 1973), 110; Lucien Pearson, *Beowulf* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1967), 90. Additionally, David Wright, *Beowulf* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1957), 71 "Deep within his heart a secret affection for the beloved hero;" Edwin Morgan, *Beowulf* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 51 "his hidden longing;" Constance B. Heatt *Beowulf* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1967), 60 "firm in his heart, affection for the hero moved him;" Kevin Crossley-Holland, *Beowulf* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1968), 83 "a deep love;" Charles W. Kennedy, *Beowulf* (Oxford, London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 61 "a yearning love ... deep in his heart;" Bernard Huppé (1984) "a deep affection" 156, Frederick Rebsamen, *Beowulf* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 60 "surged with regret."

Critics seem unable to accurately describe the scene comfortably, perhaps projecting their own concerns or anxieties over the nature of Hroðgar's display. John Hill argues that the passage gives evidence to Hroðgar's "emotional deepening of gravitas," while Klaeber summarizes it in a sweep of litotic mastery: "The next morning, friendly farewell speeches are exchanged" (xxiv).²³ With all respect to these accomplished scholars, the judicious and priestly nature of gravitas and the description "friendly farewell speeches" hardly seem to capture the scene's amorous intensity.

Tolkien's Beowulf

Tolkien's enthusiasm for early Germanic compounds and syntax characterize his translation of the poem. This makes his translation for 'dyrne langað' particularly interesting. I give here the full passage.

Then the prince of the Scyldings, that king of noble line, kissed there the best of knights, clasping him about the neck. Tears ran down his face beneath his grey-strewn hair. Two thoughts were in his heart old with the wisdom of years, but this thought more, that never might they meet again proudly in high discourse. To him the other was so dear that he might not restrain the upwelling of the heart, but twined in the heart-strings in his breast *longing profound* for that beloved one now burned within his blood (Emphasis mine).²⁴

Here Tolkien takes the direction of those who would accentuate the depth of Hroðgar's longing. His use of the term "profound" suggests he saw nothing "secret" or "hidden" in the king's affections for Beowulf (Sadly, he gives us no specific commentary on it).

²³ Hill, *Narrative Pulse* 64.

²⁴ Tolkien, *Beowulf* 67.

That Tolkien understood *dyrne* to mean "hidden" or "secret" is evident from his use of the term giving to Eowyn as she rides secretly against her uncle's wishes to Gondor's aid:

'Thank you indeed!' said Merry. 'Thank you, sir, though I do not know your name.'

'Do you not?' said the Rider softly. 'Then call me Dernhelm.' (Muster of Rohan)

In the language of Rohan, as in eighth-century Mercia, "dyrne" or "derne" can be understood as something concealed, hidden, kept secret.²⁵

From the Anglo-Norman, 'profound' is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "extending a long way down, deep, situated far below the surface, vast, difficult to understand, abstruse, intense, absorbing, in post-classical Latin also (of a person) impenetrable (Vulgate)." It comes from the Latin "profundus," which according to Lewis and Short should be defined as "deep" and "vast" and is often linked to the sea as in Cicero's phrase, "mare profundum et immensum."²⁶ This makes Tolkien's choice particularly interesting. He could most certainly have used "deep" here as other scholars have; it's a perfectly good Old English word (*dēop*). "Profound" in Tolkien's time was most often understood as "intense" and "deep" as it is for us today. The *Dictionary of Old English* gives us the rare examples when "dyrne" is translated as "profound;" interestingly, these pertain only to moments of divine mystery. It places this particular instance of "dyrne" under adverb and offers "deeply" as its suggestion.

²⁵ "The Muster of Rohan": "Thus it came to pass that when the king set out, before Dernhelm sat Meriadoc the hobbit, and the great grey steed Windfole made little of the burden; for Dernhelm was less in weight than many men, though lithe and well-knit in frame" (*RotK*, V, iii, 78).

²⁶ *A Latin Dictionary*. Charlton Lewis and Charles Short. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.

To Tolkien, Hroðgar's intense and emotional display at Beowulf's departure is due to his grief over the unlikelihood that the two will meet again. Hroðgar is still 'wise in years' (*infrodum*) and Beowulf is described as a 'beloved,' which fits the alliteration of the line and captures the love between these two men, which remains as intense as it is abstruse. Beowulf's attitude, his successful management of Grendel and his establishment of peace have smitten the king, who possesses a longing for the hero as deep and immense (and perhaps as mysterious) as the sea.

Sam's Secret/Deep Longing

Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, the affection between Frodo and Sam demands the readers' attention. While recognizing the queer masculinity of the two, Jane Chance labels Sam as, "a deeply compassionate friend, whose love transcends the ordinary."²⁷ Brenda Partridge argues that Tolkien's deep emotional investment in his own male friendships accounts for Frodo and Sam's striking intimacy. And Anna Smol points to a similar pattern of male bonding and tactile intimacy in the literature of World War I, in recent slash fiction, and in historical pairings analogous to *Beowulf* such as the lord and his thane.²⁸

²⁷ "Tough Love: Teaching the New Medievalism" in *Defining Medievalism(s) II: Some More Perspectives*. Ed. Karl Fugelso, *Studies in Medievalism* 18 (2010): 76-98 here 85.

²⁸ Anne Marie Gonzzolo sees Sam as Frodo's guardian angel. "Frodo, Sam, and the Valar" *Amon Hen* 2015. Jan; 251: 16-17. See also Brenda Partridge, 'No Sex Please. We're Hobbits: The Construction of Female Sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*,' 179-97, ed. Robert Giddings. *This Far Land*. London and Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Nobles, 1983; Craig Williams, "Queer Lodgings: Gender and Sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*," *Mallorn* 38 (2001): 11-18; Roger Kaufman, "Lord of the Rings Taps Gay Archetype" *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 10.4 (2003): 31-33; Anna Smol, "Oh ... Oh... Frodo!: Readings of Male Intimacy in *The Lord of the Rings*" *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.4 (2004): 949-79; Valerie Rohy, *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.4 (2004): 927-48; "Daniel Timmons, "Hobbit Sex and Sexuality on *The Lord of the Rings*," *Mythlore* 23 (2001): 70-79; Jane Chance, *Tolkien Self and Other*. Palgrave, 2017. For more criticism, read Yvette Kisor's "Queer Tolkien: A Bibliographical Essay on Tolkien and Alterity," *Tolkien and Alterity*, eds. Christopher Vaccaro and Yvette Kisor, 17-32. Palgrave MacMillan, 2017.

Though I'm not interested necessarily in categorizing the homoamory between Sam and Frodo, I do wish to attempt to understand its contours, informed by our understanding of Tolkien's *Beowulf* translation. Brief summaries of three significant scenes will be sufficient here before a closer examination of Frodo's departure scene. The first is set at Rivendell; Frodo is on his way to recovery following the attack by the Nazgul. Sam blushes as he holds Frodo's hand as he must have done numerous times while Frodo was asleep:

At that moment, there was a knock on the door, and Sam came in. He ran to Frodo and took his left hand, awkwardly and shyly. He stroked it gently and then he blushed and turned hastily away.²⁹

Sam blushes at his own overt tenderness because it exposes the degree to which he adores his master. His emotional attachment makes him vulnerable, and he turns quickly away. As befits his characterization, Sam pins the truth of his feelings to his sleeve for all to see. The gentle stroke of Frodo's hand is not erotic, (nor would it have been coded as such during Victorian and Edwardian England); however, Sam's tactile behavior could be seen to cross class, gender, and sexual boundaries.

Tolkien sets the next scene of intense homoamory in Ithilien, where Sam, seeing Frodo's luminosity, reflects on his intense love for Frodo:

Frodo's face was peaceful, the marks of fear and care had left it; but it looked old, old and beautiful...[Sam] shook his head...and murmured: "I love him. He's like that, and sometimes it shines through, somehow. But I love him, whether or no."³⁰

²⁹ *FR*, II, I, 237.

³⁰ *TT*, IV, iv, 260.

Affection does not seem strong enough a term for what Sam, feels toward Frodo. Readers are privy to Sam's private reflections and his softly-spoken love for his master, which Frodo never hears. Sam articulates this love only to himself. And this initiates a thematic resonance.

Such intense homoamory appears a third time when Sam holds Frodo in his arms at Cirith Ungol. Resigning himself to the idea that Frodo is dead, Sam behaves as if he has lost a part of his own soul:

Then as quickly as he could he cut away the binding cords and laid his head upon Frodo's breast and to his mouth, but no stir of life could he find, nor feel the faintest flutter of the heart. Often he chafed his master's hands and feet, and touched his brow, but all were cold. . . . He knelt and held Frodo's hand and could not release it. And time went by and still he knelt, holding his master's hand, and in his heart keeping a debate.³¹

Immediately noticeable is the physical proximity and intimacy at this most touching of moments. Sam finds himself at the brink of despair and suicide at the thought that Frodo was dead. Once again, only Sam and the readers catch this amorous moment. Had Sam been caught by others, the moment would have elicited another blush.

At Frodo's departure scene, Sam and Frodo's love must be tested and the two, separated. It is the Fourth Age and the greatest threat of the last age has been defeated. Sam and everyone else have Frodo to thank for the peace that they have inherited. As is typical of the quest hero, the world has been saved, but not for him. Frodo must take a ship across the sea. He will leave Sam behind, to his world of wife and children because

³¹ *TT*, IV, x, 339-40.

such a world cannot be his. Here he is the one too 'old' and 'wise' (*infrodum*) to play any longer a part in the story. "Sorrowful at heart," Sam is left at the edge of the world we know, knowing that he will not see Frodo again:

But to Sam the evening deepened to darkness as he stood at the Haven; and as he looked at the grey sea he saw only a shadow on the waters that was soon lost in the West. There still he stood far into the night, hearing only the sigh and murmur of the waves on the shores of Middle-earth, and the sound of them sank deep into his heart.³²

The image of Sam standing far into the night is a powerful one; the readers feel the pangs of sorrow. The "sigh and murmur" of the sea, making audible his longing for Frodo, penetrate deep into Sam's heart, which has now become a *mare profundum* of love. In the earliest draft of this scene, Tolkien had written Sam's reaction as even more intimate:

And it was night again; and Sam looked on the grey sea and saw a shadow in the waters that was lost in the West. And he stood a while hearing the sigh and murmur of the waves on the shores of Middle-earth, and the sound of it remained in his heart forever, though he never spoke of it.³³

Sam's longing in the draft version is characterized more by its duration than by its depth. From the beginning, the sea's sighing and murmuring expresses Sam's own longing. Yet here there's a greater quality of suppressed desire, of the amorous secret locked deep away as though it were something just Sam's alone, a secret sustained perhaps until his reunion with Frodo. Of course, Tolkien must remove the last clause found in the draft. For Sam would have to speak of it and to write it into the manuscript himself for us to be

³² *RK*, VI, ix, 311.

³³ *The End of the Third Age*, ed. Christopher Tolkien. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 110

reading it now. But it is clear that this is the intended nature of his longing for Frodo. It is deep, and its depth is a secret, a secret the author wishes to share with readers precisely because of its beauty.

This departure scene organizes the amorous energies between the hobbits, the two versions translating a “*dyrne longað*” much like Hroðgar’s into the form appropriate for the Christian fairy story. Like Hroðgar, Sam will see his exemplar and his beloved depart his life, not to be seen again. Fittingly, it is Gandalf who articulates the scene’s degree of emotional investment: “I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil” (310). Sam recognizes the unique quality of Frodo’s character and will harbor an intense love for him as long as he lives.

Flieger reminds us that Tolkien drew inspiration for his voyage/departure scenes from Celtic material, namely *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*.³⁴ In the *Notion Club Papers* and in *The Lord of the Rings*, traces of this symbolic departure are evident. And while there are certainly pieces of that colorful “stained-glass” material throughout Tolkien’s legendarium, it is possible that the sensual, deep and secret love between the two hobbits may have been influenced by Tolkien’s reading and translating of the epic *Beowulf*, where men keep such intense feelings bound tight in their hearts.

³⁴ Flieger, *Interrupted Music* (Kent and London: Kent State University Press, 2005), 130-31.

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