Beowulf: A Translation

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HOMELANDS

being the second book of

BEOWULF
Homecoming
& then went down to sea,
ringnetted bodies, men in mailshirts, again that

costguard on hillbrow watched their return
but this time rode down to greet them: new comers then, old friends now: those Weders.

Broad seaship on sand. They loaded riches,
trappings like spoils of war,

bore steeds aboard her, & over Hrothgar’s hoard her sturdy mast towered, 

Beowulf gave the man who guarded their boat
a goldbound sword, an ancient heirloom that brought him men’s honor when he returned to his place on the meadbench,

winds from sternward
bore their ship onward & away from Denmark onto deep seas, her timbers thundered.
Wind jammed her, bellying sail’s canvas, no waveswell stayed her prow. They tossed into sight of Geats’ cliffs, hills that crew knew well, headlands along their shoreline.
The craft beached.
A man waiting then
watching for them
tied the ship up
to keep the undertow
from driving her back
onto waves’ ebb & flow.

Beowulf ordered her cargo unloaded.

Not far from there
Hrethel’s son, Hygelac,
lived in a lodge
with friends near
the edge of the sea
& with his wife, Hareth’s daughter.

A clever, generous woman,
her gifts to Geats
were great indeed
although she spent
but a few short years
under that roof.

An altogether different queen
from Offa’s wife Thryth.
Dumb Offa,
prince thought a fool
who spoke at the ripe moment
& when asked why, replied:
There was nothing to say until now.

Brave Offa
whose stroke marked
the Eider as Angles’ boundary
took Thryth to wive,
made her his queen.

She, a cousin of Charlemagne
cast to sea in a sailless craft
for wicked crimes,
came ashore off Ashland
& brought to

good Offa,
told a tale of trysts with churls,
wrapped him round her finger
with every woe
& her own great beauty til
noble Offa
named that banished woman Thryth
& married her.

None of his men
then dared to look on her,
even by day.

Such whims
become no queen
however beautiful.

Wise Offa,
they say on alebenches,
changed all that,
tamed the shrew
& won her love’s respect.
So much so,
some thought her father
sent her cross greygreen waters
to seek out
proud Offa
who ruled his homelands well,
honored by all.
His son by her,
Eomer, Hemming’s kinsman,
Garmund’s grandson,
followed in his father’s footsteps
as heroes’ comfort & skilled fighter.

But then I’ve also heard
tales of how Thryth
plotted to overthrow
Mercia & its

first Offa
& killed Aethelberht,
her third daughter’s suitor,
& died a violent death
herself soon after.

To card such a tangle
is no poet’s job.

A good story is
a good story.
wide benches,
    seameadows
glitter of sunrays,
    homelands
15 men hurried to the hall  
where word of their landing 
drew crowds around a king 
from oversea.

When they’d settled down  
& Hareth’s daughter  
had passed the alecup, 
Hygelac asked:
Well, Beowulf, what happened?
Did you calm Hrothgar’s storm?
I’ve worried about you,
the way you just up & left us,
ran off for Heorot.

I still think
the Danes’ troubles are
the Danes’ troubles,
not ours.

But I’m glad
to see you home,
safe & sound.
Beowulf then told
Hygelac & the gathered company
the tale of Hrothgar’s court,
his adventure oversea.

In passing he mentioned
the Scylding’s daughter, Freawaru,
who sometimes passed the cup
at Heorot:
Hrothgar betrothed her to Ingeld
thinking this woman would settle
the slaughter so many feuds wrought

but after a prince falls
use soon cleans rust off swords
no matter how noble the bride may be.

The flower of Danish youth
armed with what was once Bards’
warriors seated their benches

& Freawaru bearing mead
could never be more than
a lingering memory of old wars

as long as Bards
still wielded blades.
& often an old spearman
would lean over & speak
to her betrothed:

Ingeld, the vines that entwine that blade there,
don’t they mark the sword your father bore
into the war with the Danes? That iron, stolen from him
as he bled, hacked down on slaughter’s field,
now arms some Scylding’s son who treads
your enemy’s hall with tales of murder on his lips.
You drink from a cup passed by your father’s slayers.

Over & over the old man whispered bitter words
into Ingeld’s ear until murder’s blood stained
the bed of one of Freawaru’s household.

The prince fled.
His love of Hrothgar’s daughter died.
Peace between Danes & Bards faded.
When he finished his tale, Beowulf presented Hygelac with the boar standard, helmet & byrne Hrothgar gave him, as well as the 4 apple red horses.

The Bronsings’ torc went to Hygd along with 3 fine steeds.

A noble kinsman holds nothing back from his lord.

Hygelac’s nephew was a good man. Never did he slay his fellow warriors in drunken brawls. Yet his gentle heart was capable of great anger in battle.

A noble warrior now, he was once thought a fool.
The Bear’s Son

One spring night a warrior & his wife were wakened from sleep by a loud noise & fierce growls outside their window. The warrior went to investigate, thinking some wild beast was attacking his horses. When he returned his bed was empty, his wife gone.

Late the next night, after searching all that day, the warrior found his wife in a clearing near a bear den by a heap of ashes where a fire had been. She was bruised & dazed, muttering of some black beast like a bear that had carried her there. The warrior brought his wife home.

An old leech attended her, administering feverfue to ease her spasm, periwinkle to drive away the fear & beewort to discharge the poisons she felt in her womb.

She grew strong again. The dreams that troubled her soon faded although she often woke at night, saying she heard loud groans & saw the room lit by fire’s light.
Late that winter she bore a third son for her husband.

As the boy grew he became duller & duller, unable to speak. He seemed a fool. Often the child wandered into the woods to return covered with beestings, licking honey from his dumb lips. For that reason his brothers called him little Beewolf, Honey Hunter.

Years later, a neighboring king sent word that some great beast raided his lodge each night & killed his best men. Being a good man, the warrior sent his own sons to aid the king. The youngest, Beewolf, went along to help carry their weapons & watch their horses.

On Yule eve the two brothers, left alone in the great hall, waited for the monster to appear. He came. They surprised him but hard as they fought neither was a match for the beast’s strength. Yet both brothers did escape with their lives.
Beewolf waited outside in the snow with the horses & saw the beast flee the hall fight. He followed his fresh tracks into the wood where the creature disappeared down a dark hole. Beewolf entered the earthcave after it. Inside he caught sight of a cold, icy glowing blade which he took from the wall & used to slay the monster.

The next morning he returned again to the lodge dragging the beast’s bloody head. He presented the king with the ancient sword. None of the warriors could believe what they saw. The king then rewarded Beewolf with many treasures.

As the brothers rode home again laden with gifts, they spoke of Beewolf’s great deed & saw that he was no longer a boy or fool. He was now a proud & able warrior, their better by far.

From that day forth until his death, Beewolf spoke, not like a common warrior but like a king with wisdom & from a clear ripe heart.
Then Hygelac had
Hrethel’s goldtrimmed heirloom fetched.
Geats had no greater treasure.

He laid that blade
in Beowulf’s lap
& gave him 7000 hides
of land, a hall & a throne.

Both now had
bloodrights to landshares
in that country,
an inheritance to leave sons,
the greater span of which,
that broad kingdom itself,
belonged, by right,
to the man higher in rank.
Old age

 здоровье

 174
50 winters
his homelands’ guardian
seed of
his destruction,
daylight failed
in the garden of his years
& it came to pass in later days
that battle’s clash no longer rang in Hygelac’s ears.
He lay upon the field, deaf to all life’s sounds.

Not long after, his son Heardred
fell to his death beneath the shelter of his shield,
singled out by the Scyldings as targets of their hate.

& so it came about that Geats’ broad kingdom
fell into Beowulf’s hands to rule wisely & well.
Then one night
a man stumbled into
a secret tunnel that ran
beneath a rock barrow
near the sea, on Geats’
coastline.

Its narrow passage
led straight
to the heart
of a lost hoard

whose guardian slept
but not for long.
Crawling along the shaft
the man soon found
that it opened out
into a chamber piled high
with a heathen hoard.

Just as he spotted
the riches’ sleeping keeper,
his eye fastened upon something
shining within his grasp.

His hand itched
to reach & hold the thing.
He plucked it from the heap
& ran
back along the tunnel til
his nostrils filled
with night air
& seawind soothed
his sweaty brow.
The man who broke into that barrow
& sowed ruin’s seed
did so out of no design,
no need, no meadhall boast.

Pure accident, mere chance
brought him to
that long forgotten earth door.

He was some warrior or other’s
slave running away from a flogging
looking for a place to hide.

But once inside,
his blood tingled,
his bones chilled.

A confused, unhappy victim
of lust caught by the sight
of something glittering
beyond his wildest dreams.
That earth house held
a wealth of just such precious,
ancient riches cunningly
hidden there by a sole survivor
of a noble race.

That lone man,
his name now lost, knew
his days were numbered,
the time left to enjoy
what took his tribe
generations to hoard
all too brief.

With grief he built
a barrow to guard
his kinsmen’s hoard
for ages to come.
fresh dirt,
grassless rocks
On the headlands,
on flat, open ground,
by the sea,
a newly dug mound stood open,
ready to be sealed with runes
& filled with a heritage
worth hoarding, fighting for,
hiding.

Before it
a man keened:
The hard helmet emblem cracks.
The boy to shine it sleeps.

No hawk swoops to glove.
No horse stamps in garth.
The harp’s sound
faded from his hall forever,
silenced by
clash of shields,
slash of steel.

Mail crumbled.
Byrnes came to rest.

The lone man
asked earth to guard
what warriors could not,
the wealth they’d won
from it.

He closed the barrow
& wandered
til death overtook
his heart.
naked snake,  mound hunter,  ribbon of fire
night flyer,
A primeval beast,
a haunter of dawn’s halflight,
discovered the earth door
wide open, its stones
fallen away.

Inside, the dragon
grew old, wallowing
in pagan gold
300 winters.

His earth encrusted hide
remained as evil
as ever, unchanged
by dream or time or gold.
A simple cup, never missed.

Please master, don’t beat me. I’ve got a gift. I found it underground. I’ll be good.

Hoard ransacked, loss noticed.

Go. Fancy that, a fool finding this.
manstink,
    footprints
The worm woke
sniffed the air
& slithered out
along the rocks

looking for
traces of sleep’s
intruder & found
his track,

a trail that led
over wasteland.
In the web of things
God spared that fool,
let him go unharmed.

The Lord’s plan
allowed the man
time to escape &
time to rouse

a wrath that would
mark another’s death.
The dragon then discovered the theft, noticed a loss, something missing, a gold cup.

Battle thoughts swarmed his black heart. It flickered with a rage bound in joy.

300 winters’ ice melted into hot fury. All neighboring nations would rock with its flood.

The snake could hardly wait for night to trade his fire for the cup’s theft.
a dark moon

sat on

Geats’ headlands
Day faded. The rage that swelled inside the barrow keeper’s coils burst forth.

A shower of flame lit night’s black skies.

Earthdweller’s terror like lightning before thunder heralded the end of a good king’s reign.
hot coals
rained,
houses
blazed,
all air
burned.
Men shuddered. Women & children ran from their beds. Midnight flashed with a horrible noon.

Daybreak & a fire ring held Geats inside a flame cup of death & destruction.

Firstlight & the dragon fled for his hoard, mound walls’ safety & his battlestrength’s protection

not knowing the ruin he’d spun with his own as well.
Word of that disaster
spread quickly to
Geats’ distant borders
where Beowulf had gone
to inspect his broad
kingdom’s farthest reaches.

He learned how
his own home, hall
& throne was
a pile of ashes now.

The source
of all Geats’ gifts
& reward lay buried
beneath charred rubble.

Pain filled his heart,
trouble his mind.

Where had he gone wrong?
What ancient law went unheeded?
God’s revenge must have a reason.
Beowulf was not a man to cry out:
Lord, why me? He accepted his lot,
tried to change the bad, enjoy the good.

Never had a catastrophe disturbed him so.

Second thoughts invaded his mind.
A kind of doom flooded
the chambers of his heart.
He returned to find
his land’s coastline destroyed.
Dragonfire left his fortress
& stronghold ruins.

Revenge was the only answer.

Geats’ lord ordered
an iron shield forged for him.
No wood, not even linden,
could withstand the heart
of the battle looming before him.
Out of the midst of the fire,  
of the cloud & of the thick darkness

a tale of theft came to darken  
the old king’s heart.

Geat’s lord chose  
11 men to go with him  
to the worm’s lair.

But he alone would do battle there.
The thief, ruin’s instrument, 
was that party’s 13th member, 
their guide. He led them 
toward the sea.

As he neared the barrow & heard 
waves crash upon rocks, he trembled.

His pitiful mind shined 
with memories of woundgold hidden 
by rock & dirt, guarded 
by a beast that filled his weak heart 
with terror.
The sound of the band’s approach
woke the threat to the treasure
the king’s body guarded, his soul.

Soon it would shed
its flesh coat.
The snake stirred
from sleep.

Geats’ goldfriend came to the headlands,
halted, turned to bid his men
farewell.

Beneath earth
death woke.
He stared at the young warriors’ faces, 
recalled how at 7 years 
he’d been brought to Hrethel’s court, 
clothed & fed by a good lord 
who loved him 
as much as he loved his own heirs, 

Hygelac & his brothers, 
Herebald & Hothcyn. 

A shadow lurked 
back of the old king’s mind, 
a grief tipped dart.
Herebald & Hothcyn

2 young brothers stood
with bow & arrow in the yard,
sharpening their aim.

Hothcyn’s turn. He drew
the horn inlaid bow’s string,
let go. His hand slipped.

The arrow shot, found its mark
deep inside Herebald’s heart.

It is written:
Such a murder must go unrevenged,
no blood money collected
for brother killing brother.

Yet such laws can’t ease
a father’s loss.
Hrethel’s loss
echoed that of the old man
whose young son swung
from gallows as
crow’s carrion.

His grief
matched that of the old father’s song:

*Dawn brings me nothing
but memories.*

*My son’s horsemen sleep,
earth hides his warriors.*

*His house a shell.
Only wind walks there.*

*Alone I lie in my bed & keen,
my fields all too wide now.*

The same sorrow
swarmed Hrethel’s heart.
Left helpless
by lack of revenge,
that king departed men’s
earthly company
to bask in God’s
heavenly light

& left his sons
wide lands, great riches.
That rime
recalls Aesir’s grief.

Sometimes
mute fate leaves
signs upon our lips,
in our ears.
Beowulf’s sad heart
shook with rage, ready for
slaughter as he spoke,

his end drew near:
Look for no Dane, Swede or Gifthas
to lead your armies as long as Beowulf lives.

When battle calls I'll be there.

This hand & the hard blade it holds
are ready to fight for the hoard.
Let earth part & the worm come forth.

I’d cast aside my sword, helmet & byrne
& take him on barehanded like I did Grendel.

But I think this fight, marked by fate,
will be fought with fire’s hot edge.
Enough of an old man’s bragging.
I’m ready to begin this battle.

God, let its outcome be quick.
I want victory or death,

that gold or my own swift end.
He adjusted his helmet, took up his shield & walked to the foot of that rocky cliff.

His mail clanked.
A great river
ushed up from under
vast stone arches.

A fire flood
burst out of the barrow’s dark depths.

Bathed in flame,
the warrior’s breast heaved.

A stream of battlewords
roared down the cave,
rang beneath the wide skies,
echoed off rocks:
Come,
shake off sleep.

A sharp sword awaits you,
worm.
manspeech
struck dragonears,
maelstrom,
dim, smoky air
heavy with
war’s stink
Beowulf lifted his sword.

Engraved leaf’s glint.
Blade slash. Coil, uncoil, recoil.

Fate’s spiral tightened.

That ancient heirloom didn’t have the bite the old king counted on.

That warrior stood in the midst of a battle that allowed him no victory.

His good sword struck bone, stopped dead.
Fire belched.  
Farflyer’s anger.  
A warrior’s blow.  

The dragon got his breath back.  
War lit the skies. Flames licked at the man who’d once ruled his race.  

Ecgtheow’s son would soon abandon his house on earth for another elsewhere.
Geats’ flower
of manhood hurries
home to mother’s lap,
it’s king left
on hot coals.

Why did you ever
leave your hearth?
There the women
need you to blow
the ashes like girls.

What about pledges, the services
you said you’d render for shields & swords?
I, for one
won’t come home
til the worm’s dead.

Side by side,
my lord & I
will end this feud.

Weders turn coward.
The land we save’s
no longer worth it.
Nothing shakes loose
the kinship bonds
that fetter a good
man’s heart.

The whole tribe
thrives on
its king’s body.
No fear held Wiglaf back.  
He gripped his yellow linden shield,  
drew his old sword,  
heart & mind steady as a rock.

The first battle he fought  
arm to arm with his lord  
loomed before this hero.

When he looked upon  
his king circled in flame,  
pain flooded his heart with debt.

He recalled the old man’s gifts:  
the Waegmundings’ homestead &  
a rightful share of his father’s  
commonlands.
Inside that furnace,
he choked on poison smoke,
called out to Beowulf:

Fight on,
defend your honor.

I’m here
to protect a man
who risks his life
for his land’s sake.
Wiglaf’s raised shield went up in flames.

He dropped it & sought cover behind his kinsman’s.

The glow from a red hot boss on the ground lit the barrow’s thick air.
Beowulf attacked.
His sword fell
with all the glory
that burned in his brain.

Naegling
struck the worm’s head
& halfway in
split in two.

The broken blade
cast a long shadow
upon the king’s field.

No manmade weapon
could withstand
the shock of his stroke.

That warrior
put no trust in
the blades he carried
to battle, however hard.
The firedrake, Geats’ plague, 
lay stunned then regained his breath, 
charged again, the third time.

His jaw, a knife wreath, clamped 
upon Beowulf’s neck.

The warrior wore a bloody torc 
of dragontooth.

Then & there 
Wiglaf won 
his birthright.

He ignored his burning wounds 
& jabbed his bright sword 
into a spot lower down on the worm.
snakefire  
  
  flickered  
  died down,  
  faded little  
  by little
The grayhaired man’s head cleared.
He drew the deadly knife tucked inside his byrne.

With one stroke
the dragon’s soft, hot, bloated underbelly

ripped open. Live coals showered
the kinsmen’s victory.
ruin's
  rune
Beowulf’s wound,

that king’s last great deed,
earth’s last great victory,

*the land we save’s no longer worth it.*

Black poisons flooded
the chambers of the old Geat’s heart.

He stumbled as far as wall’s ledge,
sunk down there lost to pain.
The curve of those entbuilt arches,
the barrow roof held up by rock,
filled the vault of his brain

with dark memories of a great race
drowned by flood.

His eyes’ light faded slightly.
A cool breeze
from up off the sea
blew through the barrow.

Wiglaf,
blood spattered, battle weary,
 fetched fresh stream water
to wash his lord’s wounds.

Beowulf spoke,
hardly able to speak,
his limbs & mind feverish with pain,
the last day of his days on Midgarth
pressed in on him:
my wargear
my son if one outlived me
to give to

50 winters a good king un
attacked safeland open
heart the pain God takes
my unstained by kinblood

go hoard grayrock worm
dead bring me gold gems

ease pain let me die look
ing on them go
His lifebreath regained,  
Weohstan’s son ran  
to obey his dying lord.

Farther down,  
under barrow arches,  
his hard, handlinked  
byrne rang,

echoed along the ledge.  
Walls sparkled with the gem glow,  
gold glint.

A man may hide his hoard underground  
but O how greed’s itch can overtake  
the hands that reach for such riches.
In the worm’s lair,  
den of that creature that flew  
through dawn’s halflight,  

he found  
cups left unshined  
ages upon ages & emblems  
rusted off helmets.  

& atop the pile  
he caught sight  
of a goldwound blazon staff  
from which light flashed.  

Blaze filled air  
lit the cavefloor.  

Wiglaf gazed  
upon past ages’ craft  

yet saw no trace  
of its guardian,  
asleep or awake.  

Death now sealed the worm  
in God’s Helldream.
There in a thief’s shadow,  
a Waegmunding plundered the ancient  
network, loaded his arms  

with cups, rings, gems  
& that bright, emblem gleaming staff.  
He hauled all he could carry  

back to his lord quickly  
for fear he’d find him dead  
where he left him.
He dropped the riches at Beowulf’s feet, fetched another helmet full of water & washed the old man’s bloody face.

The grayhaired Geat’s grief filled mind came to, words as clear as spring water broke through his heart’s throb:
Now that I die & my days on earth end, 
I want to thank Almighty God for the gifts 
you set before me. Wiglaf, my throne 
is yours, you must answer Geats’ needs, 
this hoard has cost them their king.

Out on headlands, by the sea, build a mound 
where my pyre burned, so sailors upon the flood 
can chart their course through seamist’s cloud by 
a landmarked towering high above Whale Ness 
called Beowulf’s Barrow.

Take my torc, armband, byrne & helmet. 
They’re all worthless to me, make good use of them. 
You, last of Waegmundings’ blood, 
must protect our kin’s glory. Death, 
as fate decreed, bears me away.
Soon hot fires would destroy
the old man’s noble flesh,
his soul go unto God’s keeping.

His last words faded
as Wiglaf stared upon the pitiful,
charred body of his lord.

Near it lay the coils
of that earthsnake whose loathed shaped
would never whirr through dead of night
again. All this almost more
than he could bear.

He walked out of the dark
into light.
fresh air
    heavy with salt
10 men came
from the wood
filled with shame.

Wiglaf took up a helmet
of water, turned his back to them,
returned to his lord, the man
they’d failed to defend
in his hour of need.

He’d no words
for those weaklings, mock
warriors. There’d be
no more gifts, swords,
landshares, homesteads for
them. They & their kin
outcasts set to wander
a life not worth living.

No water
roused Beowulf now.
A rider rode
down to the barrow
from the cliff edge
where warriors camped
awaiting word of
their lord’s return or death.

He looked on
his king’s corpse
& the gashed body of
his enemy & Wiglaf
crouched beside
them both.

& sped back to the men
with this news.

That messenger
left nothing unsaid:
Geats’ lord, the man
who granted us
all our desires, lies
on slaughter’s bed
near the worm
he overcame, the hoard
he won & his own
broken blade.

Weohstan’s son
sits at his side,
the living keeping
watch over the dead:

one loved, one loathed.
We must prepare for war at once.

News of our king’s fall
will soon reach
both Frisians & Franks.
& when Swedes
hear of our sorrow
their minds will fill
with memories
of Ravenswood
& the battle fought there.
Quick now,
let’s go look on
our chief,
bear our ringgiver’s corpse
to his pyre.

More than
one man’s share
of hoard gold will melt
away in fires
that lap up that brave warrior.

An untold wealth.
A hard, grim bargain.

Beowulf paid
for those rings,
final goal of his life,
with his last breath.
All that
flame, blaze will
swallow, devour.

None of it will
gleam, a keepsake
upon some brave man’s arm,
round some bright maid’s neck

& she’ll wander
world’s end, sad hearted,
stripped of gold,
not once
but over & over
again until
her feet ache, her breasts burst

now that her leader’s
laid aside
hall’s laughter, mead’s joy.
Many a cold spear
grasped at gray dawn
will lift in morning air.

It won’t be
harp’s sweet strum
that wakes warriors from sleep.

The greedy raven will have tales
to tell the eagle of feats shared
with the wolf on slaughter’s field.
A great silence
entered the hearts
of all gathered there.

That messenger
left nothing unsaid.
They all rose, 
walked down to 
the foot of Eagle Ness, 

saw through 
their tears 
an ineffable wonder. 

Nothing troubled 
their lord & ringgiver’s dreams. 

He didn’t stir from 
his sleep on those sands.
But before they beheld
that peace, the quiet
that bound their hearts
with strength to face
forthcoming battles &
earth’s eventual ruin,
their eyes caught sight of
the hateful snake,
the fire dragon’s
coils stretched out on the ground,
a coalblack rainbow 50 feet long.
He’d tread air’s dark kingdom no more.
Earth’s eternal shelter held him fast.
Cups, plates,
gold dishes, swords

rusted, corroded
by a 1000 winters’ rest
in earth’s deep breast.

Shining heritage
of men & ents of old
bound with a spell
only a God chosen
man could break.

The Lord Himself
Glory’s King & Men’s Shelter,
grants each man the fate
that fits him best.
That treasurehall
was Beowulf’s lot,
his good life’s end.
The beast, 
guardian of the hoard hidden there, 
got nothing from that battle 
but death.

The dragon 
slew one man, 
only one, 
all the blood needed 
to work out fate’s plan.

The scene of a warrior’s 
last stand remains 
a mystery. He never knows 
if after the battle 
he’ll sit drinking mead 
with friends again.

So it was with Beowulf, 
death made that mission his last.
Charms
knitted from dark runes,

black strokes
sealed that hoard:
He who breaks this circle we weave
unleashes ruin upon Midgarth.

All Mankind will fall as sin’s
prisoners in false gods’ groves,

bound tight in Hell’s eternal chains.
Only earth’s end will lift this plague.
Wiglaf spoke:

Often many must endure
the sorrow one man works.
So it is with us.
Nothing we could have said
would have kept our lord
from this deed.

I’ve seen treasure,
saw it once death cleared the way,
brought down the mound’s rock walls.

& so has Beowulf & in his grief,
in the face of the gold of his undoing,
despite the pain, the old man
told me to bid you farewell
& ordered us to build him
a barrow high above his pyreplace.

& so we shall. In what little
time’s left mankind, it’ll become
as renowned among nations
as he was in life.

7 of you follow me,
we’ll inspect the hoard’s remains.
The rest of you
pile up a great bier by the sea
so that when we return
we can carry our king’s body
to its final home, deliver him
unto God’s arms.
Gather timbers for dark fires,  
for the blaze that will leave  
our chief embers, ashes of  
a great fighter who’d endured  
many arrows’ rain when bowstrings  
sent feathershafts over shieldwalls,  
who’d outlived many battlestorms.
Weohstan’s son
that band’s 8th man,
lifted a torch,
led his chosen men
by its light to the gold.

There they drew
no lots to share out
what gleamed before them

but carried it all
in silence to the barrow’s mouth.

Then shoved the worm’s hulk
over the cliff. Waves received
an ancient gift, rings’ & riches’
keeper.

The 8 men loaded a wagon
with woundgold & brought
that great wealth &
their grayhaired warchief
to Whale Ness.
& the Geats built there a pyre
piled high with helmets, shields,
bright byrnes & spears.

Aloft they laid their dead lord
then kindled that great blaze.

Flames & weeping rose
high above seaciffs.

Wind died down as fire broke
the king’s bone fortress, swarmed
his heart.

Grief filled all Geats.

A woman keened:
Sorrow binds my hair.
I outlive my lord.

Days of mourning,
months of slaughter,
seasons of terror
imprison my people.

Helpless we fall.
All Midgarth rots.
He set out now
in smoke upon the sea.
It took Weders
10 days to build
Beowulf’s Barrow
raising walls & roof
round & over
what the fires left.

Inside the mound
designed by wisemen
they laid armrings,
gems, trappings
taken from the long lost hoard.

They left earth
to guard the gold
where to this day
it still lies fast
underground, safe
from men’s hands & eyes.
12 brave men
rode round the mound
& spoke,
each in turn,
their praise of their lord:

It is very meet, right & our bounden duty —
gentle, gracious, kind king.

& then went on their way