

Wiglaf Talks to the Chicken Thanes

Translated by Ian Serraillier

But Wiglaf, close kinsman of the King, whose spirit,
Fashioned in stronger mould, cried out that his master
Should thus suffer. His hand seized the shield,
The frail linden wood; he drew his sword,
Proud heirloom of his fathers, and called to his comrades: 'Stay,
Fellow warriors! The King needs us, now
As never before. Is this the time to desert him?
Have you forgotten the gifts he gave us in the mead hall
When we feasted together—the gold rings, the shields
And flashing swords? Have you forgotten that solemnly
We swore to protect him from peril? Us alone
He chose for this venture, named us of all his spearmen
The bravest. Turn now, O my comrades, and fight!'
But they shrank from his chiding and cringed among the trees.
Then cried he in torment of soul: 'Shame upon you!
Do your coward hearts knock at your ribs so loud
You cannot hear me? Or do you not wish to hear?
Is your master no more to you than carcass meat
For monsters? I'd rather my body were burnt to a cinder
Than stand by to see him slain. For him be my hand now,
My helmet, my sword, my mailcoat—all for him!'

Wiglaf Talks to the Chicken Thanes

Translated by Seamus Heaney

His name was Wiglaf, a son of Weohstan's,
a well-regarded Shyfling warrior
related to Aelfhere. When he saw his lord
tormented by the heat of his scalding helmet,
he remembered the bountiful gifts bestowed on him,
how well he lived among the Waegmundings,
the freehold he inherited from his father before him.
He could not hold back: one hand brandished
the yellow-timbered shield, the other drew his sword—

Sad at heart, addressing his companions,
Wiglaf spoke wise and fluent words:
“I remember that time when mead was flowing,
how we pledged loyalty to our lord in the hall,
promised our ring-giver we would be worth our price,
make good the gift of the war-gear,
those swords and helmets, as and when
his need required it. He picked us out
from the army deliberately, honoured us and judged us
fit for this action, made me these lavish gifts—
and all because he considered us the best
of his arms-bearing thanes. And now, although
he wanted this challenge to be one he'd face
by himself alone—the shepherd of our land,
a man unequalled in the quest for glory
and a name for daring—now the day has come
when this lord we serve needs sound men
to give him their support. Let us go to him,
help our leader through the hot flame
and dread of the fire. As God is my witness,
I would rather my body were robed in the same
burning blaze as my gold-giver's body
than go back home bearing arms.
That is unthinkable, unless we have first
slain the foe and defended the life
of the prince of the Weather-Geats. I well know
the things he has done for us deserve better.
Should he alone be left exposed
to fall in battle? We must bond together,
shield and helmet, mail-shirt and sword.”

Wiglaf Talks to the Chicken Thanes

Translated by Charles W. Kennedy

His name was Wiglaf, Weohstan's son,
A prince of the Scylfings, a peerless thane,
AElfhre's kinsman; he saw his king
Under his helmet smitten with heat.
He thought of the gifts which his lord had given,
The wealth and the land of the Waegmunding line
And all the folk-rights his father had owned;
Nor could he hold back, but snatched up his buckler,
His linden shield and his ancient sword. . . .

Wiglaf spoke in sorrow of soul,
With bitter reproach rebuking his comrades:
"I remember the time, as we drank in the mead-hall,
When we swore to our lord who bestowed these rings
That we would repay for the war-gear and armor,
The hard swords and helmets, if need like this
Should ever befall him. He chose us out
From all the host for this high adventure.

Now is the day that our lord has need
Of the strength and courage of stalwart men.
Let us haste to succor his sore distress
In the horrible heat and the merciless flame.
God knows I had rather the fire should enfold
My body and limbs with my gold-friend and lord. . . .
One helmet and sword, one byrny and shield,
Shall serve for us both in the storm of strife."

Wiglaf Talks to the Chicken Thanes

Translated by E. T. Donaldson

He was called Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, a rare shield-warrior, a man of the Scylfings, kinsman of Aelfhere. He saw his liege lord under his war-mask suffer the heat. Then he was mindful of the honors he had given him before, the rich dwelling-place of the Waegmundings, every folk-right such as his father possessed. He might not then hold back, his hand seized his shield, the yellow linden-wood; he drew his ancient sword. Among men it was the heirloom of Eanmund, the son of Ohthere: Weohstan had become his slayer in battle with sword's edge—an exile without friends; and he bore off to his kin the bright-shining helmet, the ringed mail-armor, the old sword made by giants that Onela had given him, his kinsman's war-armor, ready battle-gear: he did not speak of the feud, though he had killed his brother's son. He held the armor many half-years, the blade and the battle-dress, until his son might do manly deeds like his old father. Then he gave him among the Geats war-armor of every kind, numberless, when, old, he went forth on the way from life. For the young warrior this was the first time that he should enter the war-storm with his dear lord. His heart's courage did not slacken, nor did the heirloom of his kinsman fail in the battle. That the worm found when they had come together.

Wiglaf spoke, said many fit words to his companions—his mind was mournful: "I remember that time we drank mead, when we promised our lord in the beer-hall—him who gave us these rings—that we would repay him for the war-arms if a need like this befell him—the helmets and the hard swords. Of his own will he chose us among the host for this venture, thought us worthy of fame—and gave me these treasures—because he counted us good war-makers, brave helm-bearers, though our lord intended to do this work of courage alone, as keeper of the folk, because among men he had performed the greatest deeds of glory, daring actions. Now the day has come that our liege lord has need of the strength of good fighters. Let us go to him, help our war-chief while the grim terrible fire persists. God knows of me that I should rather that the flame enfold my body with my gold-giver. It does not seem right to me for us to bear our shields home again unless we can first fell the foe, defend the life of the prince of the Weather-Geats. I know well that it would be no recompense for past deeds that he alone of the company of the Geats should suffer pain, fall in the fight. For us both shall there be a part in the work of sword and helmet, of battle-shirt and war-clothing."

Wiglaf Talks to the Chicken Thanes

Translated by Frederick Rebsamen

Wiglaf his name was Weohstan's son-child
Aelfhere's kin keen linden-man
young shield-warrior—he saw his manlord
with blistered battle-mask blasted by that
 heat.
He remembered the bounty from his blood-
 kin lord
wealthy homestead of the Waegmundingas
all land and folk-right his father had owned.
He could bear no shame brandished his
 shield,
yellow lindenwood, lifted on high
his old treasure-sword. That was Eanmund's
 weapon
Othere's son sorrowful fugitive
struck down in battle by brave Weohstan
who gave his armor to Onela then
shining mask-helmet steel-meshed mailcoat
ancient wondersword. Onela returned them
his nephew's war-gear to Weohstan's hands
found no fault there no feud between them
though he killed in battle his blood-brother's
 son.
He kept that armor carried it to Götland
stored it safely till his son was ready
grown up to his shield shaped for battle-fame.
Among the Geats then he gave to Wiglaf
that great weapon-prize as he went from life
forth from the earth. For the first time now
this strong hearth-soldier stepped into war-
 play
fought with his lord on that fire-black
 meadow.
His mind did not melt nor that mighty gift-
 sword
failed him at need—that fiery gold-serpent
soon discovered that when they came
 together.
Wiglaf spoke then words heart-heavy
shouted with scorn this shameful message:
"I remember the times when we took mead-
 drink
when all of us promised our proud warrior-
 king
by the high gift-throne where he gave us
 swords
that we'd pay him back for this bright armor
if ever he needed us, offer him at spear-time
our helmets and shields. So did he choose us
picked from his hall-thanes these proud
 shieldmen
graced us with gifts gave me kin-treasures
gathered us to back him good sword-warriors

eager helmet-men. Our old gift-lord
meant to manage this monster-hot battle
alone once again with his great wonder-
 strength
armed with a war-name earned through a
 lifetime
forged now with deeds. Now the day has
 come
when this heartstrong chief needs help in
 battle
good sword-wielders. Let us go quickly
fight beside him in this fiery business
grim flame-terror. God knows in me
I'm ready for fire to feed on my body
cinder me with flames beside my goldgiver.
It's a poor showing if we pack our shields
haul them back now no help to our leader—
we should fell this monster fight beside our
 lord
our flame-wounded king. I can clearly tell
 you
that it's not old custom to cringe at this
 moment
leave him now to suffer with shame to all of
 us
burning in this battle. Now both of us here
will share swordswings shields and helmets."