



Beowulf's funeral

According to Beowulf's wishes, his people burn his body on a huge funeral pyre and then bury him with a great treasure in a barrow overlooking the sea.

Anonymous
Beowulf
(ca 11th century)
Lines 3137-3172

The Geat people built a **pyre** for Beowulf,
stacked and decked¹ it until it stood foursquare²,
hung with helmets, heavy war-shields
and **shining** armour, just as he had ordered.
5 Then his warriors laid him in the middle of it,
mourning³ a lord far-famed and beloved.
On a height they kindled⁴ the hugest of all
funeral fires; fumes of woodsmoke
billowed⁵ darkly up, the blaze roared⁶
10 and drowned out⁷ their weeping, wind died down
and flames wrought havoc⁸ in the hot bone-house⁹,
burning it to the **core**. They were disconsolate
and wailed aloud¹⁰ for their lord's decease.
A Geat woman too sang out in grief;
15 with hair bound up¹¹, she unburdened herself¹²
of her worst fears, a wild litany
of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,
enemies on the rampage¹³, bodies in piles,
slavery and abasement¹⁴. Heaven swallowed¹⁵ the smoke.
20 Then the Geat people began to construct
a mound¹⁶ on a headland¹⁷, high and imposing,
a marker that sailors could see from far away,
and in ten days they had done the work.
It was their hero's memorial; what remained from the fire
25 they housed inside it, behind a wall
as **worthy** of him as their workmanship¹⁸ could make it.
And they buried torques¹⁹ in the **barrow**, and jewels
and a trove²⁰ of such things as trespassing men²¹
had once dared to drag from the hoard²².
30 They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure,
gold under gravel²³, gone to earth,
as useless to men now as it ever was.
Then twelve warriors rode around the tomb,
chieftains²⁴' sons, champions in battle,
35 all of them distraught²⁵, chanting in dirges²⁶,
mourning his loss as a man and a king.

- 1 **stacked and decked.** Ammassarono e ricoprirono.
2 **foursquare.** Quattro metri quadrati.
3 **mourning.** Piangendo.
4 **kindled.** Appiccarono.
5 **billowed.** Fluttuavano in grandi volute.
6 **the blaze roared.** La fiamma ruggì.
7 **drowned out.** Soffocò.
8 **wrought havoc.** Generarono devastazione.
9 **bone-house.** Corpo.
10 **wailed aloud.** Piangevano forte.
11 **bound up.** Raccolti, legati.
12 **unburdened herself.** Si liberò.
13 **on the rampage.** Scatenati.
14 **abasement.** Umiliazione.
15 **swallowed.** Inghiotti.
16 **mound.** Tumulo.
17 **headland.** Promontorio.
18 **workmanship.** Abilità.
19 **torques.** Collane.
20 **trove.** (Arc.) *Treasure*. Tesoro.
21 **trespassing men.** Trasgressori.
22 **to drag ... hoard.** Tirare fuori dal tesoro.
23 **gravel.** Sabbia.
24 **chieftains.** Capitribù.
25 **distraught.** Sconvolti dal dolore.
26 **dirges.** Canti funebri.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

➤ VOCABULARY

1 READ the text and match the highlighted words and phrases with their Italian translation.

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 di valore | 4 tumulo |
| 2 di grande fama | 5 cuore, centro |
| 3 pira funeraria | 6 brillante, scintillante |



› COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ the text again and find out:

- 1 what the Geats built for Beowulf;
 - 2 how wide it was;
 - 3 what the soldiers hung on it;
 - 4 where Beowulf's corpse was laid;
 - 5 what the warriors kindled;
 - 6 what their mood was like;
 - 7 where the barrow the Geats built was and how long they took to build it;
 - 8 what its function was;
 - 9 what was buried in the barrow;
 - 10 how the twelve warriors expressed sorrow for their loss.

➤ COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

3 ALLITERATION is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in consecutive words or words which are close together. In Old English poetry, it linked the two halves of a line. Highlight examples of alliterative lines. What is their function?

- A They help to memorise the poem.
 - B They underline particular concepts.
 - C They increase the musicality of the poem.

4 A **KENNING** is a compound metaphorical name for something. Find the kenning used in line 11. What does it refer to?

5 **HIGHLIGHT** the images that create a tragic atmosphere and a sad mood.

6 **THREE** different kinds of characters are presented in this text: Beowulf, his thanes and a mournful Geat woman. For each of them point out:

- 1 their role in the text;
 - 2 the value(s) they embody.

► COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE AGE

7 IDENTIFY the main features of the epic poem in the text.

› COMPETENCE: USING THE VISUAL TOOLS OF COMMUNICATION

8 **LOOK** at the pictures below and explain the connection between this text and contemporary reality.



1. A funeral in the small village of Galufu. **Malawi**.

2. Women praying at a funeral in Hue, **Vietnam**.

- ### 3. A funeral procession in Quetzaltenango, **Guatemala**.

