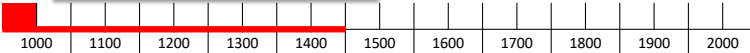


Bede (ca. 673-735)



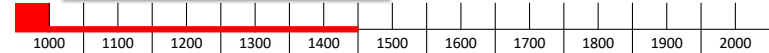
- became a novice at age seven and spent his life in a monastery
- writing in Latin, became known as one of the greatest scholars of his age (“The Venerable Bede”)
- his most famous work is the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731) about the spread of Christianity and the growth of the English Church
- contains the earliest extant English poem, Cædmon’s “Hymn” (NAEL A30-31)



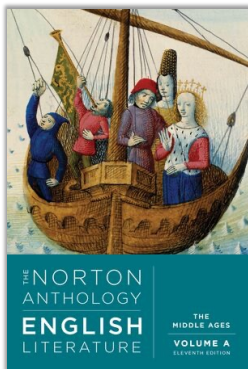
Cædmon (ca. 657-684)



- an illiterate cowherd employed by the monastery at Whitby
- miraculously received the gift of song via a dream, entered the monastery, and founded a school of Christian poetry
- the earliest Old English poet whose name and some biography is known, thanks to Bede
- composed the earliest extant English poem, Cædmon’s “Hymn” (NAEL A30-31)



oral-formulaic poetry



- poetry created through combining and varying formulas—units of verses transmitted orally from one generation to another
- often employs devices such as *kenning* and *variation* as mnemonic devices
 - **mnemonic device:** a technique aiding in the retention of information in the memory (NAEL A30-31)

Cædmon, “Hymn” (ca. 658-680)

Original Old English

Nu sculon herigean | heofonrices
 Weard
 Meotodes meakte | and his modgeþanc
 weorc Wuldor-Fæder | swa he wundra
 gehwæs
 gec Drihten | ƿr ƿnstealde
 He ƿrest sceop | ielða bearnum
 heofon to hrofe | halig Scyppend
 ða middangeard | ƿoncynnes Weard
 gec Drihten | ƿfter teode
 firum ƿoldan | Frea ælmihtig

Modern Translation

Now we must praise heaven-kingdom’s
 guardian,
 the Measurer’s might and his mind-plans,
 the work of the Glory-Father, when he of
 wonders every one,
 eternal Lord, the beginning established.
 He first created for men’s sons
 heaven as a roof, holy Creator;
 then middle-earth mankind’s Guardian,
 eternal Lord, afterwards made—
 for men earth, Master almighty.

alliterative metre

Original Old English

Nu sculon **h**erigean | **h**eofonrices
Weard
Meotodes **m**eahte | and his **m**odgepanc
weorc **w**uldor-Fæder | swa he **w**undra
geh**w**æs
gce Drihten | **g**ronstealde
He **a**rest sceop | **a**elda bearnum
heofon to **h**rofe | **h**alig Scyppend
ða **m**iddangeard | **m**oncynnes Weard
gce Drihten | **a**fter teode
firum **f**oldan | **f**rea ælmihtig

- the distinctive verse form of Old Germanic poetry, including Old English, until the 11th Century
- consists of a long line divided by a caesura (or pause) into two balanced half-lines, each with a given number of stressed and unstressed syllables
- the half-lines are linked by alliteration, typically between both of the stressed syllables of the first half-line and the first stressed syllable of the second half-line (Baldick 9, 49-50)

kenning

Original Old English

Nu sculon **h**erigean | **h**eofonrices
Weard
Meotodes **m**eahte | and his **m**odgepanc
weorc **w**uldor-Fæder | swa he **w**undra
geh**w**æs
gce Drihten | **g**ronstealde
He **a**rest sceop | **a**elda bearnum
heofon to **h**rofe | **h**alig Scyppend
ða **m**iddangeard | **m**oncynnes Weard
gce Drihten | **a**fter teode
firum **f**oldan | **f**rea ælmihtig

- in Old English verse, a stock phrase used as a poetic circumlocution in place of a more familiar noun
 - **circumlocution**: a roundabout manner of referring to something rather than naming it briefly
- a metonymic compound
 - **metonymy**: replacing the name of one thing with the name of something else closely associated with it (Baldick 61, 193-94, 222)

variation

Original Old English

Nu sculon **h**erigean | **h**eofonrices
Weard
Meotodes **m**eahte | and his **m**odgepanc
weorc **w**uldor-Fæder | swa he **w**undra
geh**w**æs
gce Drihten | **g**ronstealde
He **a**rest sceop | **a**elda bearnum
heofon to **h**rofe | **h**alig Scyppend
ða **m**iddangeard | **m**oncynnes Weard
gce Drihten | **a**fter teode
firum **f**oldan | **f**rea ælmihtig

- the use in poetry of a series of similar terms in parallel or apposition
- a way of showcasing or calling attention to special vocabulary or compounds in a poem
- gives the poem a highly structured and musical quality
- formalizes and elevates the tone of the poem by making it seem to move at a slow and stately pace (NAEL A11-12)



Earle Birney, “Anglosaxon Street” (1942)

Dawndrizzle ended | dampness steams from
hlotching brick and | blank plasterwaste
Faded housepatterns | hoary and finicky
unfold guttering | stick like a phonograph
...
Imperial hearts | heave in this haven
Cracks across windows | are welded with
slogans
There'll Always Be An England | enhances
geraniums
and V's for Victory | vanquish the housefly

Ho! with climbing sun | march the bleached
heldames
festooned with shopping bags | farded
flatarched
bigthewed Saxonwives | stepping over
buttrivers
waddling back wienerlanden | to suckle
small fry
...
What! after whistleblow! | spewed from
wheelboat
after daylong doughtiness | dire handplay
in gewertrench or sandpit | come
Saxonthe gns
Junebrown Jutekings | jawslack for meat (1-
4, 9-16, 21-24)

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