

Cædmon's Hymn

anonymous

s.vii?

This poem is found added by scribes to the margins of various manuscripts of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Book 4, chapter 24. Bede's text is in Latin, but the scribes have added the poem in Old English.

1	Nu sculon herigean	heofonrices weard	West Saxon version.
2	meotodes meahte	and his modgeþanc,	
3	weorc wuldorfæder,	swa he wundra gehwæs,	
4	ece drihten,	or onstealde.	
5	He ærest sceop	eorðan bearnum	
6	heofon to hrofe,	halig scyppend;	

1 sculon herigean] modal plus infinitive; understood subject, **we**

2 meahte] object of *herigean*

3 wundra gehwæs] partitive genitive; *gehwæs* is a gen. prn.

4 ece] adj.

5 bearnum] dat pl. is always -um

6 heofon] object of *sceop*

6 to] idiomatic, translate "as"

1 weard] Cædmon employs many names for God. Try to respect his distinctions in your own translation. Why use so many names for one thing? What might this imply?

2 modgeþanc] Parallel syntax: genitive plus accusative; the parallel breaks down in the next line. What stylistic effect does this syntactic change have?

4 drihten] Originally denoted a *truhtin* (OHG), the leader of a Germanic warband. Corresponds to Lat *principes*.

5 ærest] Metrical parallel to *or* of the previous line; what is a distinction between these two words? Repeated in *eorðan*.

7 þa middangeard moncynnes weard,
8 ece drihten, æfter teode
9 firum foldan, frea ælmihtig.

7 þa] conj. often trans as “then”

7 middangeard] Norse? lit. Middle-earth

8 teode] main verb

7 moncynnes weard] Variant of line 1a. Why has the *heofonrices weard* become the *weard* of *moncynn*?

8 ece drihten] Repetition of line 4a. What aesthetic effect does this have? Does the formula in a new context give it new meaning? If so, what?

8 æfter] We’ve experienced *swa*(3b), *or*(4a), *ærest*(5a), and *þa*(7a); now we have another temporal indicator. How does time work in this poem?

9 firum] Cædmon not only has many names for God, but many names for human beings: *bearnum*(5b), *moncynn*(7b), and *firum*(9a). Why? And what implication arises from shifting humanity to the a-verse?

9 frea] Refers to the OE head of a household, which included slaves and other dependents. Sometimes translated Lat *principes*, as in Tacitus, or *dominus*. Also alludes to a Norse god, Frey. Fertility god of the Vanir. Snorri Sturluson says Frey “governs rain and sunshine . . . and it is good to pray to him for prosperity and peace; he also looks after the wealth of men.” There is also the Vanir goddess, Freyja, sister of Frey, trollope and scamp.