

The Venerable Bede: Facts

- taken into a Benedictine monastery around the age of seven; only knew the life of monks
- would have followed the philosophy that only academic material should be preserved in Latin
- Latin was sanctioned by God; the language of religion
- Bede is considered the first historian of English
- During his lifetime the epic of *Beowulf* was probably first recorded
- lived in the kingdom of Northumbria—England was not a unified country at this time in history
- his book outlines how Christianity developed across the English pagan landscape

Cædmon: Facts

- lower class, worker class, shepherd; found his calling as an old man
- his birth and death dates were never recorded: it is maintained he lived before *Beowulf* was recorded
- Bede suggests Cædmon fell asleep one night in a barn and had a divinely inspired dream compelling him to create poetry
- illiterate; would not know how to write/read Latin
- considered the first English poet who composed his lyrics in the vernacular of the common people
- none of his other works survived due to the fact they were intended to be memorized and performed in traditional scop fashion

English Language / English Poetry

- Old English was not intended to be written down; only Latin was used as an archiving text or history
- poetry likewise was not intended to be written down
- for centuries creative work of the commoners was conveyed as an oral art form

“Cædom’s Hymn”

- poem represents the time period where oral-based poetry was in transition into print
- it is rare therefore for any early English work to have a name attributed to the poem
- expresses theme of creation
- archived accidentally; paraphrased by Bede in Latin
- 17 variations were recorded by various monks in Old English in the margins of text transcribing the works of Bede

“The Wife’s Lament”

- anonymous work; the wording is purposely ambivalent
- follows traditional expectations of Anglo-Saxon poetry
- theme of isolation and exile
- promotes the typical cultural treatment of women during this period
- multiple interpretations exist: abandoned wife to ghost of adulterous wife—or allegory of the Church
- gender and title may be misinterpreted over time; see “The Wanderer”
- husband himself may be dead or departed
- last ten lines can be read as a curse on her husband or as a wish he’d feel sorrow and return to her

Riddle Poems

- creative work containing a secret answer or lesson, often in a specific cultural mindset
- reader is left to guess correct answer

Know these terms:

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|---------------------|---------------|
| • caesura | • hagiography |
| • alliteration | • epithet |
| • blank verse | • epiphany |
| • iambic pentameter | • elegy |
| • hemistich | • wrack |
| • kenning | • wyrd |