

Old English & Early English Poetry



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Old English Language

- English developed from the dialects (closely related but not uniform) of the Germanic tribes , Angles , Saxons and Jutes.
- English, belongs to the Germanic family, a sub-group of the Indo-European family.

Old English has four major dialects

- Northumbrian
- Mercian
- West Saxon
- Kentish



pronunciation and spelling

- Long vowels
- Different from today's

Vocabulary and Grammar

Purely Germanic words

Absence of French and Latin
influence



Early English Literature: An Overview

- Period from 7th century to the battle of Hastings(Nokan conquest) of 1066
- The period was characterised by the imposing scholarship of the Christian missionaries.
- Major Genres : Epic poetry, Hagiography , Sermons, Bible translations, Chronicles.
- Greatest work: **Beowulf**
- **Major** authors: Caedmon, Cynewulf, Venerable Bede

Cædmon's Hymn

*The Hymn Normalized in West-Saxon Spelling
Based on the Northumbrian Version of MSS M and L.*

Nū sculon herian heofon-riċes Weard,
Metodes meahta and his mōd-geþanc,
weorc Wuldor-Fæder, swā hē wundra gehwæs,
ēce Dryhten, ōr astealde.
5 Hē ærest scōp ielda bearnum
heofon to hrōfe, hālig Scieppend;
þā middan-geard mann-cynnes Weard,
ēce Dryhten, æfter tēode-
firum foldan Frēa ælmihtig.

Substantive variants in MS T (Bodleian Library, Tanner 10, f. 100), the best of the West-Saxon texts, included in the Old English version of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*:
4 onstealde. 5 eorðan for ielda.

Spelling variants in T compared with the normalized text:
1 herigean. 2 meotodes. meahite. 4 drihten. 5 scroop.
6 scyppend. 7 moncynnes. 8 drihten.

Among variants in some of the later copies are: 1 we before sculon. 4 ord for or. 5 gescroop for scop.



Old English poetry : Features

- Bold and strong
- Mournful and elegiac
- Sings of sorrow
- Portraits of helplessness of man before the power of fate
- Two types : Heroic and Christian
- Alliteration
- Elaborate descriptive phrases
- Anonymous writers



Other poems

- Juliana
- The dream of the Rood
- The Phoenix
- Judith
- The wife's Lament
- The Ruin
- The wanderer
- The seafarer