

CAEDMON

A chamber opera in one act

for narrator, six singers and eight instrumentalists

by

Edward Lambert

Libretto taken by the composer from the play

One Thing More by **Christopher Fry**

Characters

The Venerable Bede	<i>spoken</i>
Novice Nun Girl in the Dream	<i>soprano</i> [S1]
The Widow Abbess Hilda	<i>mezzo-soprano</i> [S2]
Caedmon	<i>tenor</i> [T1]
Joddy The Prior	<i>tenor</i> [T2]
The Overman Person in the Dream	<i>bass-baritone</i> [B1]
Kern The Precentor	<i>bass</i> [B2]

Off-stage voices of nuns and monks - pre-recorded by members of the cast

Instrumental ensemble

flute / piccolo
oboe / cor anglais
clarinet, / bass-clarinet [in B flat] / E flat clarinet
horn [in F]

violin
viola
cello

harp

the score is notated in C

metronome marks are approximate and for guidance only

In his Ecclesiastical History the Anglo-Saxon historian Bede recounts how, in the year 664, Caedmon was inspired by a dream to compose his first piece of poetry, the famous 'Caedmon's Hymn'. In his play *One Thing More*, Christopher Fry has construed a life of Caedmon which takes this divine enlightenment as its central incident and relates it to events in Caedmon's past life. The theme of the play is that of suffering and anguish which, when redeemed by love, enable the soul to be freed of dread and guilt: previously tongue-tied, Caedmon can express his new-found love for creation in poetry and music.

The action of the opera takes place at the monastery of Whitby on the North Yorkshire coast, and is narrated by the Venerable Bede. Outside the monastery walls, the farmworkers - Joddy, Kern, the Widow, with their Overman - assemble before dawn as they prepare for work. The Widow bemoans the recent loss of her husband, a stableman, while the others remark on the appearance of a stranger in the area. No-one knows who he is, or what he is doing, save that he is regularly spotted before dawn listening to the singing of Prime from the monastery. Kern points out that the singing has become quite special since the arrival of a new novice and as Prime is heard in the distance the Overman tells of the cave he has found where the stranger sleeps. As the sun comes up Caedmon is indeed revealed listening to the music which grows, as he does, ever more animated. When the Widow tries to question him he only remarks on the beauty of the sun and the sound of the singing. Caedmon tries to limp off - he has a wound, we learn - but the Overman detains him. Painfully, Caedmon reveals that he has spent his working life as a professional soldier and gives as a reason for his being in the area an obscure reference to someone he has never known. The Overman would know more, offers him nonetheless the post of Stableman.

The scene that follows takes place in the monastery cloister. It is evening and the Abbess Hilda reflects on the turmoil caused by the Synod of Whitby which has just ended. She is more concerned with the welfare of the Novice who confesses that she is deeply troubled by thoughts of her parents - although she has never known them. Her mother died when she was born and no-one ever spoke of her father; these thoughts cause her much agony, particularly in the early morning during the singing of Prime. The Abbess comforts her.

The third scene takes place in the Great Barn, late on the day of the solar eclipse of that year. The farmworkers remark on the awesomeness of the event, and their sombre mood is only dispelled by the flowing ale and their attempts at singing: Joddy improvises badly, Kern shows off his bawdy humour and the Overman leads everyone in a rousing drinking song. They try to persuade Caedmon to sing, but withdrawn as usual, words fail him. As the Widow sings a gentle lullaby the ale takes its effect and the scene dissolves into sleep.

Caedmon dreams. A Person appears to him. He does not reveal who he is but suggests he might be part of Caedmon himself. He asks why Caedmon was so unwilling to sing: why he doesn't leave his shell of silence and join the music of life. He reminds him of his youth. A Girl now appears - she looks very like the Novice Nun, for she is her mother - the girl whom Caedmon once loved. They remember their days of bliss together before she too urges Caedmon to sing. The vision fades and with considerable new-found virtuosity, Caedmon sings of the beginning of created things. He awakes to the singing of Prime and hears above the other voices the singing of the Novice, the music of which he now feels to be part. Wondrously, he completes his verses. Overhearing him, the Overman brings this transformation to the attention of the Abbess, who with the Prior and the Precentor hail his awakening as a miracle: Caedmon's wound is healed. The Abbess hints that a monastic life awaits him, and the Precentor remembers an earlier encounter with him as they tended together the wounded on the battlefield.

An instrumental interlude leads to the last scene in the monastery where Caedmon, now an aged monk, is lying on his pallet, calmly awaiting death. He sings a short verse, *one thing more*, while the night's office of Compline is heard from the Chapel.

Caedmon was commissioned in September 1988 by the Garden Venture at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden with funds made available by the Arts Council of Great Britain and sponsored by readers of the *Independent* newspaper; it was given six performances at the Donmar Warehouse in May 1989 as part of the London International Opera Festival. The cast was as follows:

<i>Caedmon</i>	Christopher Gillett
<i>Overman/Person in the Dream</i>	Richard Lloyd Morgan
<i>Abbess/Widow</i>	Philippa Dames-Longworth
<i>Novice/Girl in the Dream</i>	Dawn Williamson
<i>Kern/Precentor</i>	Stuart Harling
<i>Joddy/Prior</i>	Gordon Wilson

Nancy Ruffer [*flute/piccolo*], Joseph Saunders [*oboe/cor anglais*], Chris Craker [*clarinets*], David Cox [*horn*], Isobel Frayling-Cork [*harp*], Roland Roberts [*violin*], Rebecca Wexler [*viola*], Nick Roberts [*cello*]

<i>Conductor</i>	Edward Lambert
<i>Director</i>	Andrew Sinclair
<i>Designer</i>	Robin Auld

Caedmon was revised in 1990; in particular the narrative role of Bede was restored (as in the original play).

Duration 65 minutes.

CAEDMON

A chamber opera by Edward Lambert
Libretto taken by the composer from the play

One Thing More by Christopher Fry

BEDE

I, Bede, the servant of Christ and priest, have gathered together all that I could find of the history of our nation. Some things have been reported to me by word of mouth, at a generation's remove, as it is with the happening to be told now. It belongs to the year of our Lord six hundred and sixty-four. The known facts are few, but there was a life in them once, and it may have been of some such kind as we shall imagine it to be. To start with certainty: the Lady Abbess Hilda founded a monastery in the place called Stroeneshalh, or Whitby, as your own time knows it. It is in that place, in the farmland by the monastery door, on a day before sunrise, that our speculation begins.

(Scene One:

outside the monastery walls before dawn. A bright moon is in the west. A cock crows. The farmworkers, Joddy, Kern and the Widow, with the Overman, are starting to go about their work.)

JODDY

The moon has waited up for us.

KERN *(doffing his hat to the sky)*

Ma'am, we take it kindly.

WIDOW

Heathen! She's got a bitter gleam in her.

Ah! There's no warm flesh to wake up to these mornings.

I never thought to be widowed before I was ready.

(she goes off to round up the cows)

JODDY

It's seven weeks since she lost him.

KERN

And the horses aren't quiet without him yet.

JODDY

All the stock's unsettled as though they smelt fox.

OVERMAN

It's the foreigner they smell.

(The monastery bell rings for Prime)

I caught sight of him again yesterday.

It's always at this time

when the bell rings for prime.

I saw his dark shape near the monastery walls

leaning his head against the music.

And there was such a turn of singing

as the sun came out of the sea,

I dared not speak to him.

JODDY

What's he after?

KERN

What has he come here for?

(the singing of Prime is heard in the distance)

OVERMAN

And what's he afraid of,

making off as soon as daylight taps his shoulder?

I'll have a word if I find him.

He'll be somewhere about,

now the Holy Office has begun.

Iam lucis orto sidere

Deum precemur supplices

ut in diurnis actibus

nos servet a nocentibus.

KERN

Have you listened, listened close these last weeks

since the Abbess fetched the new sisters here?

JODDY

Why?

KERN

You listen.

Visum fovendo contegat

ne vanitates hauriat.

sint pura cordis intima

absisstat et vecordia.

One of the novices. There was never that sound before they came.

JODDY

The foreigner's no bad spirit

if he listens to that sweet noise.

OVERMAN

He's no spirit.

I found where he has made himself

a shelter in the cliff

between the goat-walk and the shore.

JODDY

What did you see?

OVERMAN

A sack filled with leaves for sleeping on.

JODDY

And nothing else?

carnis terat superbiam

potus cibique parcitas.

OVERMAN

A drinking horn, a hunk of bread

as hard and dry as the cave floor.

A bramble branch with the berries eaten,

and some strips of rag used to bind a wound.

KERN

You can fetch me at noonday

if you mean to look for him.

Ut cum dies abcesserit,

noctemque sors reduxerit

*mundi per abstinetiam
ipsi canamus gloriam.*

JODDY

We should set our minds at rest.

OVERMAN

There's no need to hunt him,
I wouldn't say there's violence in him.
When I discover the mystery
you shall hear of it.

(they leave to go about their work. The stage is empty for a moment; the singing grows in intensity until its sound fills the auditorium.)

*Deo patri sit gloria
eiusque soli filio
cum spiritu paraclito
nunc et per omne saecula.
Amen.*

(a shaft of sunlight reveals Caedmon who stands listening to the music)

WIDOW *(entering, seeing Caedmon
and detaining him)*

Hey! What man are you?

CAEDMON *(staring at the sea as the sun rises)*

There's glory for you.
The sun coming out of the sea.

WIDOW

Never mind the glory.
What are you here for?

CAEDMON

The sea turned to fire.
There was music. I heard singing.

WIDOW

Give me patience - the sun, the sea, the music!
I can hear you're no Englishman.
Do you have a name to you?

CAEDMON

Caedmon.

WIDOW

A Briton, and a lame one, too.

CAEDMON

The ache of an old wound, that's all.

WIDOW

A quarrelsome man.

CAEDMON

They weren't my quarrels.

WIDOW

You go the best way to rouse a woman's curiosity,
with your half answers,
and hiding what you've made of life.
(to the Overman, who has entered)
Make sense of him if you can.
It's more rewarding to milk the cows.
(exit)

OVERMAN

You can't be loitering here morning after morning
without some intent.
We've a right to know what you mean by it.

CAEDMON

No harm.

OVERMAN

Where are you from?

CAEDMON

Where born, do you mean?

OVERMAN

To begin with.

CAEDMON

At Rookhope, beyond the River Wear.

OVERMAN

What else can you tell me?
What has your work been?

CAEDMON

For twenty years I've hired out my sword-arm
to wherever there was fighting.
Men's blood being hot
I found enough to do.

OVERMAN

But hearts are at peace her,
so that wasn't what brought you.

CAEDMON

No, that wasn't what brought me.

OVERMAN

And you fought for what cause?

CAEDMON

Any that would hire me.
Any that would kill thoughts.

OVERMAN

God knows what to make of you.

CAEDMON

That's my hope indeed.

OVERMAN

Are you a Christian, then?

CAEDMON

There was music,
I heard singing.
Are all your questions answered?

OVERMAN

Not even the first of them.
Why did you come here?

CAEDMON

I gave my sword to a flooded river,
and went to the place I grew up in.
After twenty years death had changed things.
People, because of the wars, had moved away.
I went looking for them, hoping I might find...

the one I asked for... one I never knew...
had never seen...
they told me that someone
had come to this monastery.
Perhaps it is so.
At any rate, I have seen the place,
heard the singing, eased the mind.
I have said everything.
(*He turns to go*)

OVERMAN

I was never worse informed.
Why don't you make yourself known?

CAEDMON (*agitated*)

Haven't I used all the words I've got?
I travelled here simply to see the place.
I know how it is now:
the colour of the stone,
the sound of the sea,
the voice of the bell.
That's all I wanted.
I can pass from your landscape altogether.

OVERMAN

Where will you go?

CAEDMON

You said God knows what to make of me.
That will do to begin with.

OVERMAN

Do you know how to handle horses?

CAEDMON

I do, yes.

OVERMAN

We have a place for you here if you want to take it.
The stableman died two months ago.
What's your answer?

CAEDMON

Is this the pattern of things, then?
Let me have time to think of the dangers.
(*limping off*)
I'll give an answer by evening.

OVERMAN (*calling after him*)

There the job is.
What is it that argues in the man?
And what holds him here?
What sorrow or sin or old nightmare
has got its claws into him?
And yet he seems to look as straight at things
as the warp of the world will let him.
Anyhow, I've opened the road,
wherever it leads.
(*exit*)

BEDE

It was the year of the Synod of Whitby. There had been
controversy over the recent years between the Roman and Celtic
Churches and it was agreed that a synod should be held at the
monastery of Stroenshalh, with the Abbess Hilda presiding, where
matters concerning the true tradition of the Church should be
decided. Now it has reached its end, the bishops and priests have
gone back to their different sees and territories, and the Lady
Abbess can find quiet in the cloister.

(*Scene Two:*

*it is the evening of a summer's day in the monastery garden.
Walking with the Abbess is a novice nun, recently come to the
monastery.*)

ABBESS

This is the first time I have heard
the silence of the cloisters
since the great debate began.
Have there ever been so many bishops
or good men together in one place,
or so many words crowded into one week?
When my afternoon-brain lost its way in the argument
I closed my eyes and measured
which of them said least in the longest way.
But you have not heard me say so, daughter.
They are all great and godly men
and deeply to be revered.
Yet, how tranquil the air is now they have gone,
the Synod over, the division closed.
Patience, justice, humility and all charitableness
give warmth enough to light this house.
But forgive me, something is troubling you.
Are you unhappy?

NOVICE

Disturbed, Reverend Mother.

ABBESS

A very human condition.
But in what way, child?

NOVICE

My thoughts play truant, I suppose that's it.
I find I'm half left out of the worship I make.
My lips pray to our Father in heaven;
I love and obey you, my spiritual mother.
This is all the daughterhood I should ever need.
And yet moving through my prayers
are another father and mother,
unremembered, unimagined.
My mother died when I was born,
she was only a girl, barely sixteen.
My grandparents brought me up at Rookhope -
when I asked them about her
they only turned away and cried.
And no-one would speak of my father
nor tell me his name
or what had become of him.
And yet these parents are strangely active in me,
stand between me and God,
cast a shadow of longing over me,
when I should be wholly and simply His.
And of late is this sin increasing,
these parents invade me.
I am afraid.
If the devil is out to distract me
he has surely found the way.

ABBESS

Let us, with very proper respect,
leave the devil aside for the present.
These thoughts are not the devil's thoughts.
They are part of yourself, and by these thoughts
you bring your curiosity,
indeed your father and mother themselves,
your division, your complexity,
to be with God.
This is your wholeness and your simplicity.

NOVICE

Thank you, Reverend Mother.

(the sun is setting)

ABBESS

How unprofitable for God
if we had nothing to give him
save our undivided attention.

(The scene fades)

BEDE

We had left Caedmon uncertain whether to leave his hiding place and the bare sub-sistence of his life, to become stableman to the monastery. He was afraid of coming too near to what was contained there, and of weakening the defenses which he had spent so many years building. And yet, as he said, he felt directed by the pattern of things. So he agreed to take charge of the horses, and this he continued to do to everyone's content, withdrawn but not unfriendly as the weeks went by. And now we have come to the day of the long-remembered solar eclipse of that year. On the evening of that day the farm-workers are celebrating a holiday feast.

*(Scene Three: In the Great Barn. Evening.
The farmworkers are making preparations for a feast.)*

KERN

As for me I'm thankful that this day is to end with some friendliness and a forgiving tide of ale to flow smooth over us.

JODDY

Ah, surely, there's nothing like nature being unnatural to make a man think of his sins, those of us who have them.

KERN

What does Stableman say?

CAEDMON

About what?

OVERMAN

The sun's eclipse, he means.

CAEDMON

I held my breath at the silence of the world.

WIDOW

He's done nothing else but hold his breath since he came here.

OVERMAN

We all came through into daylight again.

CAEDMON

And what words can be found for that?

WIDOW

When the light went out of the day
it was like the day of judgement had arrived..
when the heavens fall out with themselves
stars in the sky, even they misguide you.

KERN

Whose death or whose birth
or what great victory does it signify?
Who knows what bane or benefit
has been decided for our future?

JODDY

When that creeping night-in-day took us over
life drained from the air around you,
animals whimpering as if a ghost unseen is walking,
familiar things becoming shapes of the night.

OVERMAN

Until you feel the world being given back to us:

JODDY

The pleasure of seeing again
the glint on the pitch-fork tines,
the blush of the turnips.

WIDOW

The pleasure of feeling again
a new warmth laying its hands to your face.

OVERMAN

the pleasure of finding something lost -
- the veins on Joddy's nose plain for all to see!

JODDY

And it's waiting for the spigot
to come out of the barrel!

WIDOW *(with a fistful of straws)*

Who takes the short straw
takes the harp and makes what he can of it.

(straws are pulled...and ale is poured...)

JODDY

Ah, not me!

ALL

Let's give thanks we've got the world with us yet!

A small harp is passed around.

*JODDY begins tentatively, warming up as he goes,
accompanied by groans and laughter from the others,
which eventually drown him out.*

Who has the bad hap
to be first one to bring
harp onto lap
to strum a cold string
with finger and thumb
before the drink chases
warm fire into faces
and makes the blood spin
for good comfort within -
this man, though I says it,
who so bravely will face it,
is worthy of worship,
of lordship, of - *(thinking)* - sirship,
and so he'll continue
to woo you and win you,
to rhyme you and spin you
with muscle and sinew
to midnight and worse
until some man loses

the strings of his purse...
so who's going to be willing
to forfeit a shilling
or any to fish out a penny...

JODDY

Who's going to take the harp, then?

THE OTHERS

Kern, give us "When I was walking"

KERN

Shall I do that? (*taking the harp*)

THE OTHERS

Do that Kern! Let's hear it again!

KERN

When I was walking
in a green glade
a lady was loitering
shyly in shade.
"Take a step, a step,"
I said, "till I see
the sun touch your lip
and lie over your knee."

She stood up so straight,
a birch-tree become,
"Go back to your mate,
I've a husband at home."
"Then better walk into
the daylight," I said,
"for deeds that are darkest
are done in the shade."

When I felt for her breast
she became a gazelle,
said "If you ride me
I'll take you to hell,
and there you'll suffer
the truth of your creed:
the deeds that are darkest
are done in the shade."

(*applause*)

OVERMAN (*taking the harp*)

Refill now, refill! And a toast to the oast!

OVERMAN AND CHORUS

All true men of mirth
outpour me who durst
Alleluia!

Now you shall hear the singing of beer

*If it's brewed
as it should!*

tongue and throat will hear
how it sings deep and clear
winking sunlight in the air
Skirrilappit toldero.

No man has a fault
who turns barley to malt
Alleluia!
who ferments the wort
will come to no hurt
*If it's brewed
as it should!*

in the sweating and roasting
Be ready for boasting
The toast of our feasting.
Skirrilappit toldero.

What moper will ask
To bung up the cask?
Alleluia!
Of beer for good sake
No prisoner we'll make
*If it's brewed
as it should!*
But let it come leading
From sifting and seeping
Until the time for sleeping
Skirrilappit toldero.

Then holding our heads
We're off to our beds
Alleluia!
Deep dreams never fail
Men kissed by the ale
*If it's brewed
as it should!*
We shall float like an ark
On the deluge of dark
To the rising of the lark
Skirrilappit toldero.

*Heigh-ho, heigh-ho,
Skirrilappit toldero.*

JODDY

Who's to have the harp now?

WIDOW

Caedmon the Stableman!
Let him sing for his supper!

ALL

Give us your voice, Stableman!
Give him the instrument!
Where is he?

CAEDMON

You'll have to accept me as the dumb man I am.

THE OTHERS

Such ingratitude!
We'll help you along - give us a verse!

JODDY

There must be some old rhyming you can remember.
What rocked your cradle?

CAEDMON

Nothing that could possibly please you.

OVERMAN

That's how it is: let him be as he will,
stay the way we find him.
Here's the Widow can tell us of rocking cradles.

(*apologetically, Caedmon leaves. The Widow is given the harp as the festivities dissolve into sleep and the scene fades from view*)

WIDOW

Now, lie 'hedgehog', young to-and-fro,
 Rolled in a ball while east winds blow.
 Close your eyes; never see
 Snow bloom on the icicle tree.
 Under dreams heaped up deep
 Curl in a do-nothing, know-nothing sleep...

BEDE

So Caedmon made his way through the night, sick with himself for never finding, even for the sake of mirth, words that would make a bridge between himself and his fellow men. Caedmon slept. Distantly, the sound of singing and laughter from the barn sank down through the dark and drained away, while the voices from the monastery sang the Holy Office of night and the sea intoned its regular responses. Caedmon dreamt. Clambering back to his old shelter in the cliff, a person was in the cave-mouth, as though a time had been agreed for meeting. Or was Caedmon seeing... could it be himself he saw waiting there? If only the sunlight wouldn't flash its feathers like a bird bathing.

*(Scene Four:
 Caedmon's dream.)*

PERSON IN THE DREAM

You have been taking your time, Caedmon.

CAEDMON

I move dangerously slowly, I know.
 What am I to call you?

PERSON

Why should you want a name to make division between us? Call me by your own name if you like.
 Are you at peace within yourself?
 Why did you come away into silence
 from where the singing was?

CAEDMON

I felt unfitted.

PERSON

And yet fit for silence?

CAEDMON

There was no music in me.

PERSON

Never?

CAEDMON

I heard the singing. It was like
 the sound of evening in a garden.

PERSON

You were young.

CAEDMON

I was twenty years old.

PERSON

Each day ratified the next,
 threw out its boundaries like the rays of the sun.
 You were faith itself, you were the purpose of life - you were part
 of the music then.

CAEDMON

Let me be free of you.

PERSON

She was very young, your love,
 not long out of childhood.

CAEDMON

She was sixteen.

PERSON

Yet she loved like a woman.

CAEDMON (bitter)

I gave death to her.

PERSON

Death became two things: death and a child.

CAEDMON (angry)

I destroyed such a wonder
 earth hardly had time to value her.
 I had seen God in life and he had given me death.
 I went where the fighting was and saw him plainer in the pain and
 violence,
 and hoped his eyes were covered in shame
 for his own making.

PERSON (laughing)

You have broken the silence.
 Your wound is mine now.

GIRL IN THE DREAM (entering)

It is his now.

*(at a distance the girl who died in childbirth appears in Caedmon's
 dream. In appearance she is very like the Novice Nun)*

GIRL

Are you ready to turn towards me?
 A mist is curling off the river.
 I am at the midway of the bridge.
 The light is behind me as I look towards you,
 which is why you feel it
 fingering and tracing your face,
 as I used to do.
 I am touching you now.

CAEDMON (moved)

How is this?

PERSON

We have wrestled until the breaking of the day.

GIRL

We have gone into the cornfield.
 We have made a private harvest
 and eaten it.
 And you take a cup of leaves still holding the dew -
 so early in the morning it is -
 we drink together.
(after a pause)
 Why have you let me be lost in silence?

CAEDMON

You were taken away from me. And the child as well.
 I was never to see her.
 It was not I who made the silence.

GIRL

But it's you who keep it.

PERSON (to Caedmon)

Give in, the wrestling is over.

GIRL

The trusting place of love is where we meet,
and where our voices become one
as the sun comes up over the sea.

PERSON

Accept, Caedmon, sing.

CAEDMON

What shall I sing?

PERSON

Sing the beginning of created things.

GIRL

Sing.

BEDE

So Caedmon dreamt. Even while he slept his head was full of the sounds of life, wind blowing and the flowing water, the alarm cry and the skyward singing of birds, the lowing and whinneying and bleating and cackling of living creatures, the cries, prayers and laugh-ter of men and women. As though a harp had been put into his hand, he sought out words, trying to find, however awkwardly, the indwelling music that created us.

CAEDMON

*I am ready to praise
the measureless making
That in foreshadowing and seeking
formed place and light,
for all creation's sharing,
Those things without beginning yet begun,
By God-love given, by potency upholden,
The unimaginable shaped in substance,
In eternity made time's companion,
World and earth-kind,
by God's grace guarded.*

*Unknowable God, perfect in persuasion,
Of all wonder the awakener,
Who out of inward wanting
spun the heavens,
Gave the body of space a heart for living
And called it Earth,
And creatures warm in their ways,
the day possessing,
The secret night invading,
speed and strength and liveness
held in a marvel of muscle.*

BEDE

When Caedmon awoke from dreaming he remembered he had made words for a song in his dream, and he remembered the words that had come to him. Now the sun would soon be rising. He went about his work in the half light, chanting under his breath, startling the animals by trumpeting out a succession of words, as neck-stretched as a cock crowing.

CAEDMON (waking)

*Then the spirit of God
moved across the world*

*Like a man's breathing
and disturbed the dust.
And the dust spoke...*

As Caedmon awakes, the singing of Prime is heard in the distance.

*Lucis creator optime
Lucem dierum proferens
Primordiis lucis novae
Mundi parans originem.*

BEDE

He listened to the choir of voices, as he had listened each morning, and he heard clearly among the others a woman's voice which seemed to be a part of his life.

CAEDMON (continuing his song, to himself)

*...There was man,
there was word in the world.
And from the neighbourhood of his heart
Eve took life,
fruit and flower of the rib-stem...*

OVERMAN (entering)

What's this, Stableman? We were told to accept you as the dumb man you are.

CAEDMON

*...Scarcely foretelling
all that the winter withheld,
between two mornings
leaves came like words to the branches...*

OVERMAN

You said you had nothing to give when the harp came round.

CAEDMON

That's how it was.

OVERMAN

But now things are different?

CAEDMON

Indeed...

BEDE

The Overman conducted Caedmon to the Abbess, who asked him to tell his dream in the presence also of the Prior and the Precentor, and to recollect for her the words he had made, so that they might give their judgement on what the dream was and how it had come about. The sun came up. The sea turned to fire. Now he no longer stood outside the walls hearing the music as the sun rose; he stood within the walls, himself a part of the music. Caedmon's masters became in their turn the hearers.

(Scene Five:

in the monastery at daybreak.

*Caedmon and the Overman have come before the Abbess, the Prior
and the Precentor)*

CAEDMON

...I slept, I tell myself I dreamt,
but what reality it was,
more real than my waking life.

PRIOR

Can you describe it, this dream of yours?

CAEDMON

I was told to sing.

PRECENTOR

At whose bidding?

CAEDMON

I can't tell you everything.

I can only tell you - in that night time,
death died into love.

And the two who were with me put words into my mind.

I can find them still...

...Searching the sun's rays,

Up out of the blind soil

Flowers fetch their brilliance

Mined like gold and gem-stone...

OVERMAN

You're not limping anymore!

CAEDMON

The wound was his now, he said.

ABBESS (to herself)

A heavenly inspiration has alighted on him
like a nightingale in a thorn bush.

PRIOR (to himself)

"We hear the sound, but cannot tell
from where it comes or where it goes."

PRECENTOR (to himself)

I keep wondering where,
somewhere, at sometime,
I have seen this man before.
Where could it have been?

His voice and ways recall some event.

OVERMAN (to himself)

He's slept the silence away.
The seal which kept his lips has been broken.

(the sun comes up)

CAEDMON (with renewed inspiration)

Now the morning tide of light

Flows across the sand of night

And lifts the heart that's gone aground

To ride creation's sea of sound.

ABBESS

Good Caedmon, Stableman -

"No man lights a candle and hides it under a bowl,
but puts it into a candlestick, where it gives light to everyone in the
house."

We must think and talk more together.

(the Abbess and the Prior

lead Caedmon into the monastery).

**PRECENTOR (suddenly remembering
and bursting out)**

Caedmon - that's the name!

After the battle by the flooded river,

I saw that man return to us

to help among the wounded on the battlefield,

those he had fought beside

and those he had fought against.

What sudden voice made him turn his horse, I wonder.

OVERMAN

Every true journey starts in a storm of pain.

(the Precentor returns to the monastery;

the Overman is lost in thought for a moment

before he sets about his work and leaves)

INTERLUDE**BEDE**

In the monastery, the sins of his life, Caed-mon used to say, made him feel an interloper. And when the Abbess Hilda spoke of God's forgiveness, "I believe that", he said, "with awe and with wonder. It is self-forgiveness that is harder to come by, self-sorrow that is harder to lose." But by Hilda's persuasion he was brought into the Order; and now his voice sang in antiphon with the voice of the nun who had been born in Rookhope all those years before - but of this he never spoke; the appearance in his dream of the girl who had borne his child - this he gave no hint of. It was all that was left of his silence and all that there would be of it now, until the time came for his life to end.

For many years Caedmon lived in the peace of the monastery, making his verses, submitting to the discipline of the order, until a day when he seemed to be visited by a fore-knowledge of his death. He asked that the Eucharist should be brought to him. "What need is there of that?" his fellow monk asked him. "You talk so merrily." "In spite of that," Caedmon said, "bring it to me." So when he had received the bread and the wine he lay on the bed prepared for him, as quietly as though he lay under the apple trees of the orchard. But now it was night-time.

*(Scene Six: inside the monastery many years later. It is night.
Caedmon, now an aged monk and attended by one of the brothers,
is lying on a pallet bed.)*

CAEDMON

How many inches square

is that small window above my head?

A human hand could almost span it.

And yet, in that segment of sky

I can see distance without end.

The earth-time that's left to me

measures less than the window,

but there's eternity in it too.

I've been shown such a universe!

Before I am lost and found in God's love

I should like to make one thing more.

One thing more in thanksgiving

for having seen and known and lived and died.

(in the distance the sound of Compline can be heard)

*Te lucis ante terminum
rerum Creator poscimus
ut pro tua clementia
sis praesul et custodia.*

CAEDMON

*In the waves of the world
where despair was
And the sound of the waves
shifting their burden,
Light came,
a voice calling across the fields,
Your longing that all should be well.*

*I gave little enough praise,
though each moment
Was eternal as it died to fulfill the year:
Summer's wide-open arms,
the vineyard's blood,
Snow silence,
and the Spring
Walking a road,
away from an empty tomb.*

*Preasta, pater piissime,
Patrique compar unice,
Cum Spiritu paraclito
Regnans per omne saeculaum.*

*So, Master, forgive me for this loitering.
I am reaching towards you now.
My hands were full of dear discoveries
But earthly time can have them....*

Amen.

Listen. Where I break off, the music
is filling my place.

(the music takes over)