

Heroic Vocabulary and Identity in Old English

Andrei CRIȘAN
Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj

Abstract: *The present article explores several lexical items pertaining to the heroic vocabulary of Old English, and argues that the words hæle and hæleð represent the most appropriate equivalent of the word hero, a loanword from Middle French. There are over twenty-five words related to man in Old English. The legendary Beowulf and the less famous Byrhtnoth are both called eorl. St Andrew and Boethius are both called hæle, Christ and Hrothgar – hæleð. Given the variety of terms and the propensity of Old English literature for the heroic, it is surprisingly difficult to establish a definitive equivalent of hero. Through close readings of such texts as Beowulf, Andreas, Widsith and The Battle of Maldon, this article attempts to show that it is, in fact, the context that makes the hero.*

Keywords: *hero; heroism; Old English; poetry; Beowulf.*