

Heroic style in beowulf and the battle of maldon

Literature



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Supervisor's Heroic Style in Beowulf and The Battle of Maldon The two heroic poems, Beowulf and The battle of Maldon are considered to be among the most important literary texts in the English language, both written in Old English. They both document the struggles of their main protagonists, Beowulf and Earl Byrhtnorth respectively during their major battles.

Beowulf is widely credited as being the earliest surviving piece of English literature. Its authorship is undetermined and it is believed to have been written somewhere between the 5th and the 8th century. It is a largely fictional account (although some elements in the story are believed to be based on historical events) that is centered on its main protagonist, Beowulf, who rides to aid the Danish King, Hroogon, whose kingdom is being terrorized by a monster known as Grendel. After defeating the monster, and the monster's mother, Beowulf is rewarded by being made the King of Denmark after Hroogon's death. Fifty years after Grendel's defeat, the kingdom is again attacked by another monster, this time a dragon, and Beowulf sets out to slay it. Although successful in slaying the dragon, Beowulf sadly succumbs to his injuries later on and dies (Bruce & Robinson 5-24).

The Battle of Maldon, on the other hand is a heroic poem that is based on an actual battle of the same name between the English, led by the main protagonist Earl Byrhtnorth against an invading Viking army led by the Norwegian Olaf Tryggvasson, that occurred in 991 D. In the poem, the Viking army (numbering up to 4000 soldiers) propose that they be paid to call off the attack to which Earl Byrhtnorth answers by telling them they will be paid 'in spear tips and sword blades'. Byrhtnorth proves honorable by allowing the Vikings to land before the fighting ensues, which proves a costly mistake <https://assignbuster.com/heroic-style-in-beowulf-and-the-battle-of-maldon/>

as the Vikings overpower the English, resulting in the death of Byrhtnorth (Scragg 3-11).

While the two heroic poems differ significantly in that in *Beowulf* the subject matter is mythological and fictional while *The battle of Maldon* is largely based on historical events (albeit with some elements of exaggeration), the heroic language is largely similar with the virtues of honor, bravery and loyalty being exalted. In particular, the warrior's code of honor features prominently in the heroic style of both poems. The concept of an honorable death is also glorified in both texts, as both heroes die heroically facing a considerably stronger opponent.

To use some of the more famous quotes from both texts to illustrate this; in *Beowulf*, just after Grendel's mother kills one of Beowulf's men, he says, "Wise sirs, do not grieve. It is always better to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning", (Bjork 55). In this speech, it can be seen that Beowulf ranks avenging his fallen colleagues death higher than mourning him, further cementing his belief in honor and loyalty. In *The battle of Maldon*, Byrhtnorth rallies his men in the face of defeat by saying "Mind must be firmer, heart the more fierce, Courage the greater, as our strength diminishes" (Irving 459-460) This exemplifies his courage.

It can be thus concluded that the heroic language in both texts is markedly similar, with honor, loyalty and courage being the virtues that are glorified, as is evidenced in both the behavior and speeches of the protagonists in the heroic poems.

Works Cited

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