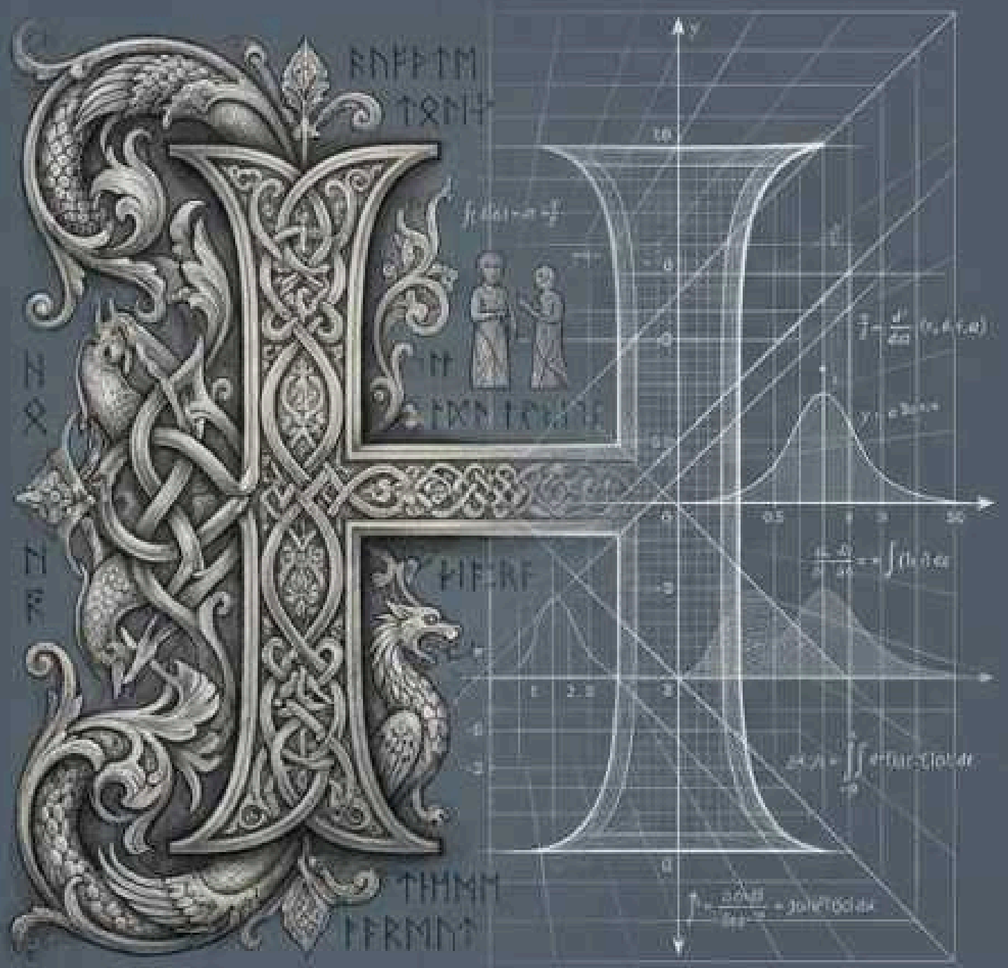
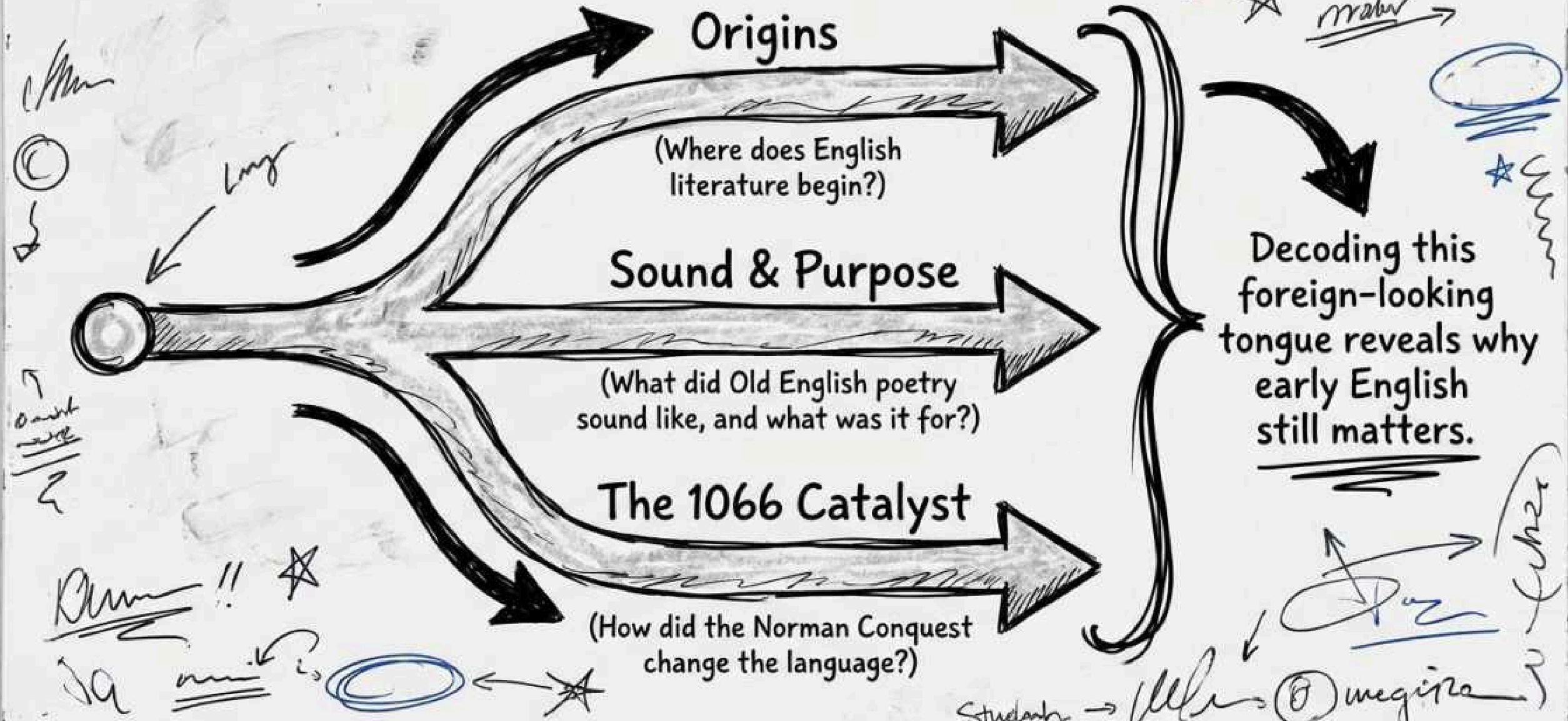


Voices from Beowulf to the Conquest

A Philological Roadmap of Old English Literature

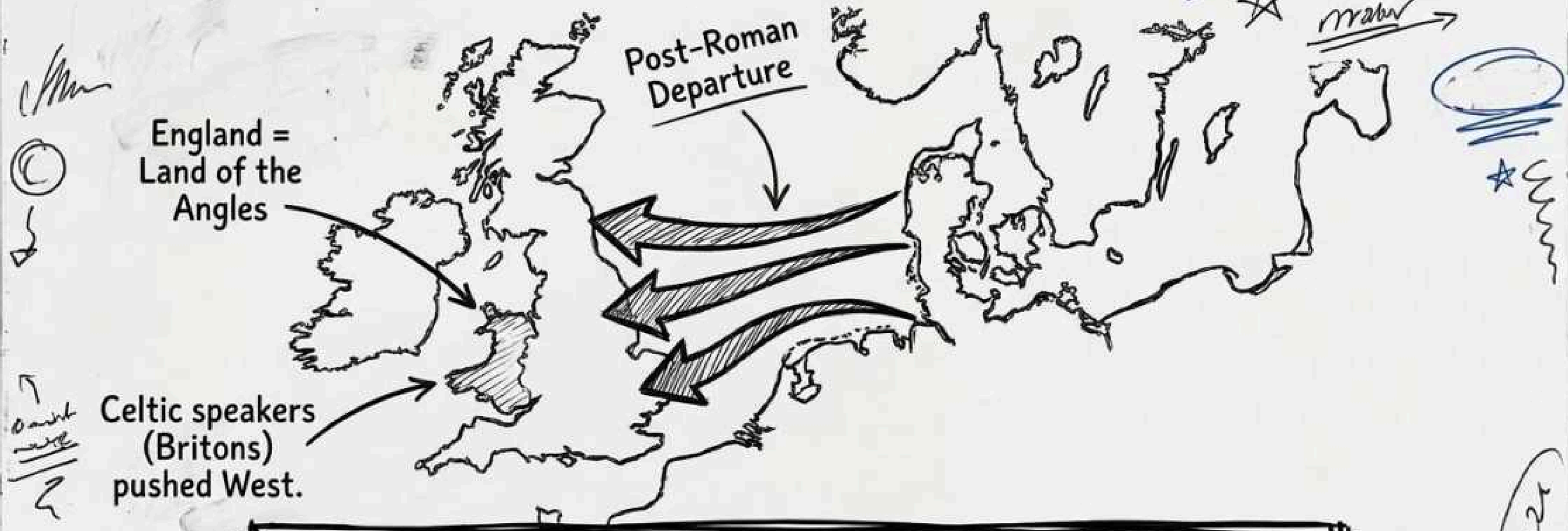
The Philologist's Roadmap

[¶ 1.1]



The Germanic Genesis (Early 5th Century)

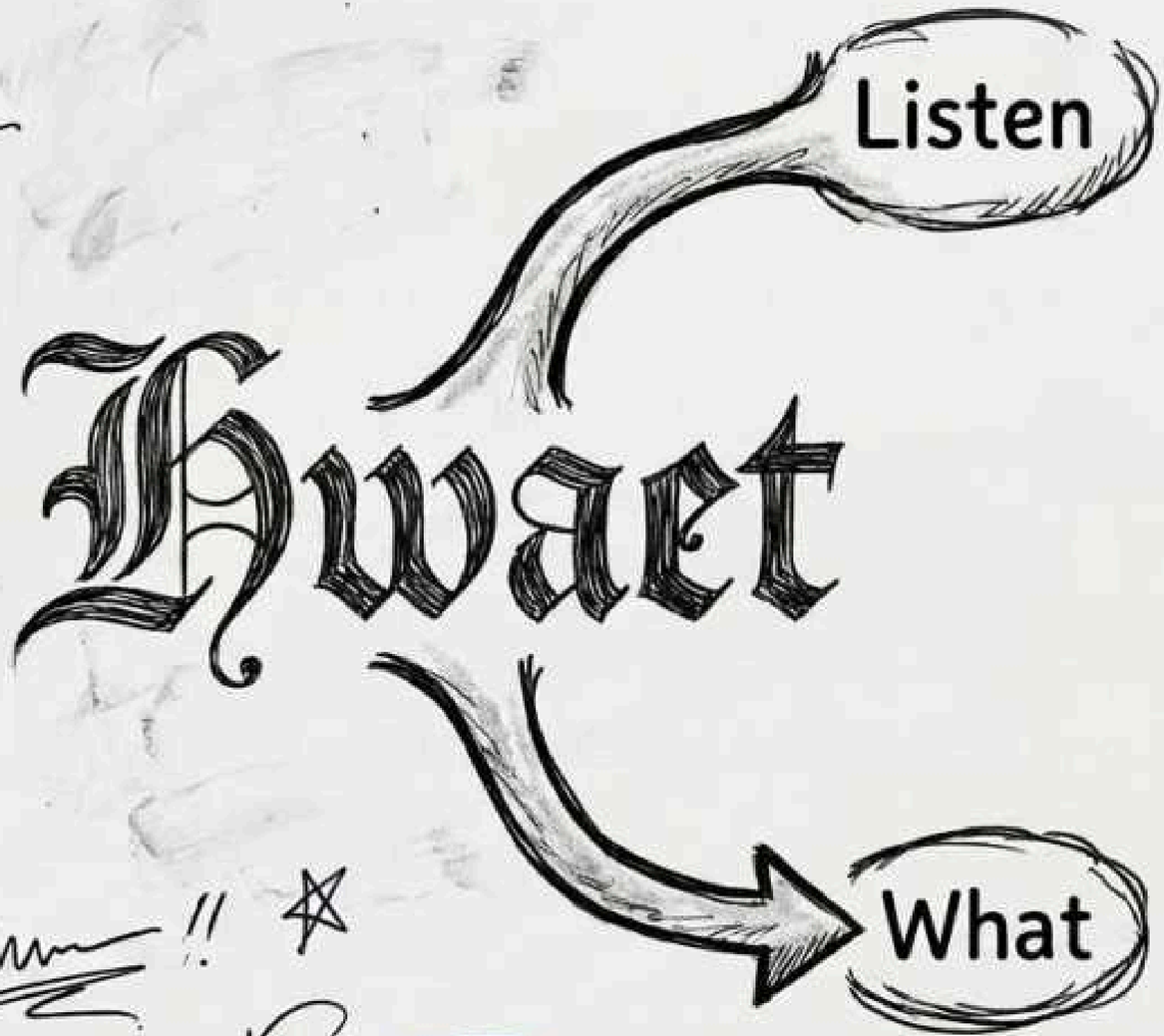
[¶ 1.2]



Angles + Saxons + Jutes = Old English

Decoding the Page

[¶ 1.3]



Survival Ledger

A foreign language to modern readers, yet the foundation of our short, common vocabulary.

Old Roots	Modern Survivals
man	Man
hus	House
drincan	Drink
etan	Eat

From Hall to Manuscript

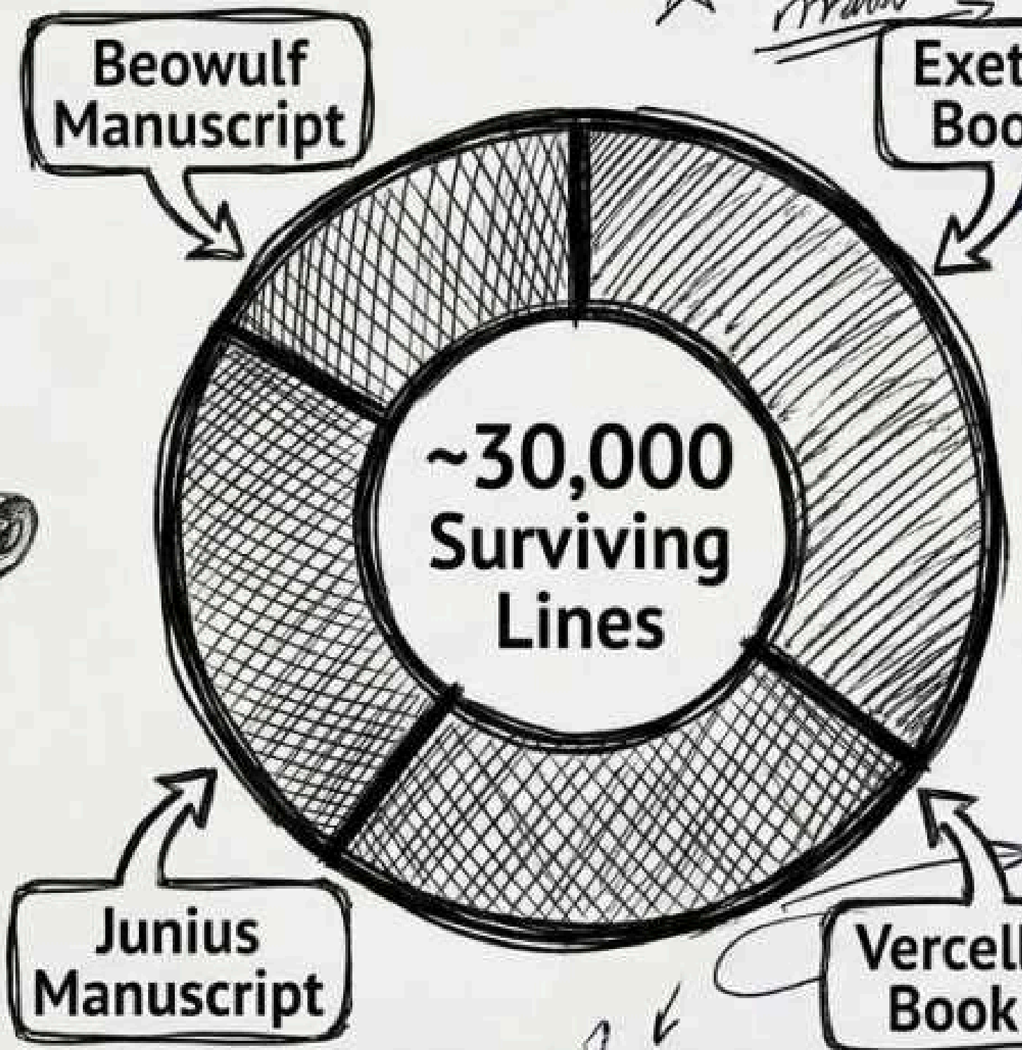
[¶1.4]



The Scop
(Oral Memory)

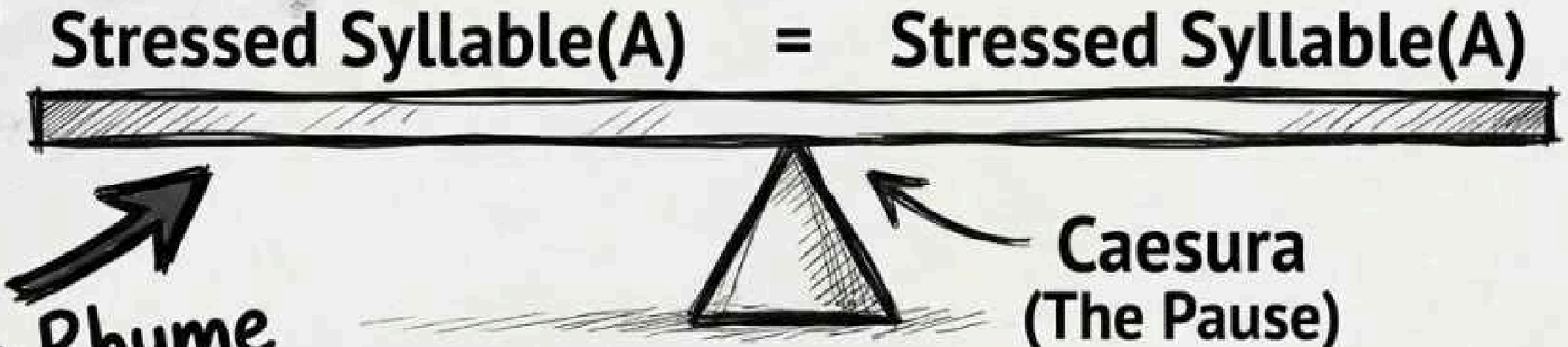


Monastic
Preservation



The Mechanics of the Meter

[¶ 1.5]



The Kenning (Compact Metaphors)

Whale → + Road → = Sea

Bone → + House → = Body

Beowulf: Structure & Stats

[¶ 1.6]

Stage 1: Grendel
At Hrothgar's Hall

→

Stage 2: Grendel's Mother

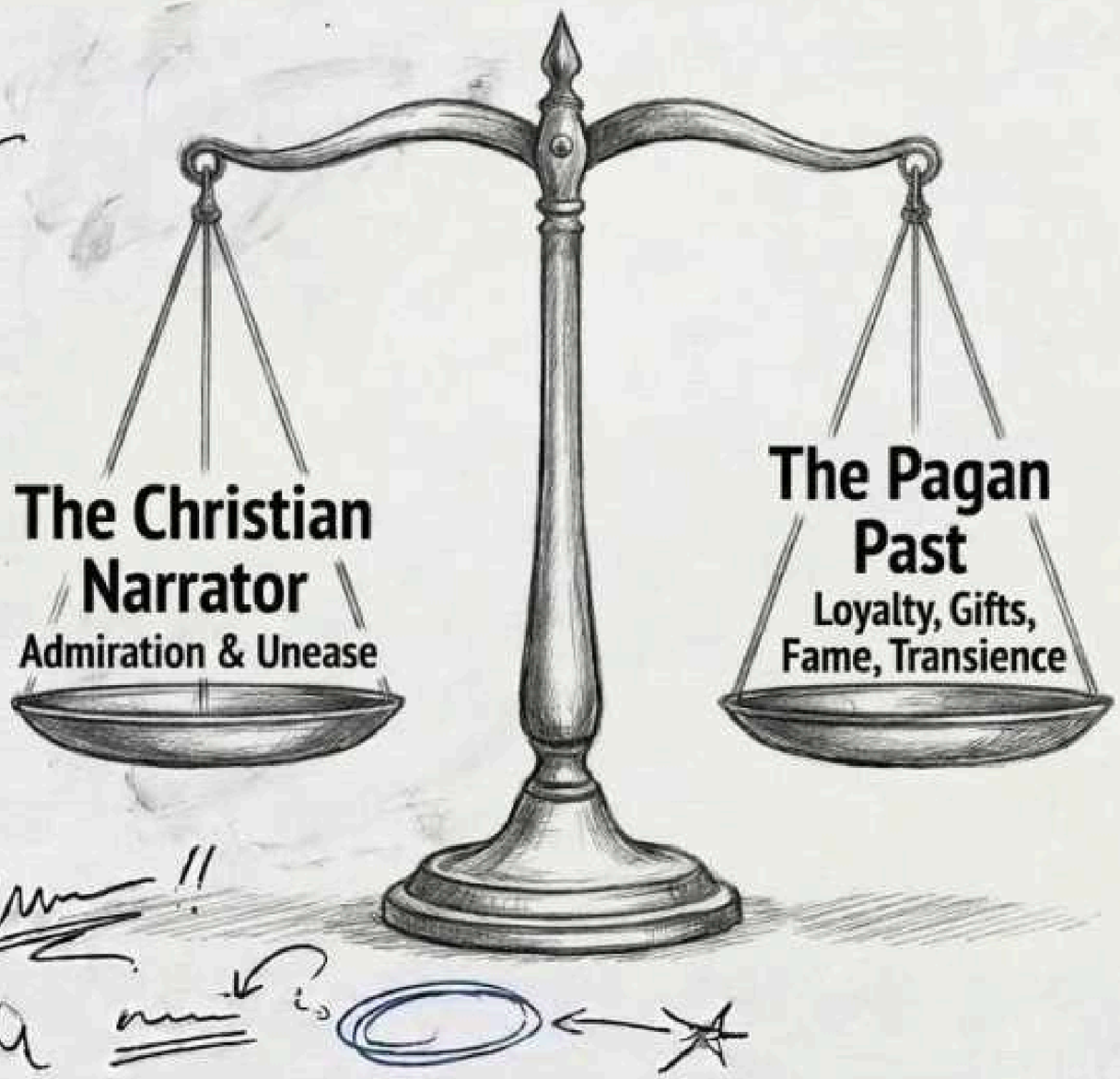
→

Stage 3: The Dragon
As an Old King

Vital Statistics

- Length: >3,000 lines
- Composition: Debated (8th to early 11th century)
- Survival: Exactly 1 manuscript (~1000 AD)

The Thematic Dualism of Beowulf [¶ 1.7]



Tolkien's Postulate (1936)

The monsters are not a flaw, but the heart of the poem. They represent the doom every hero inevitably faces.

The Elegies & The Ubi Sunt Cycle [¶ 1.8]



Ubi Sunt = Where are they?

The Exeter Riddles: Wit & Wordplay

[¶ 1.9]

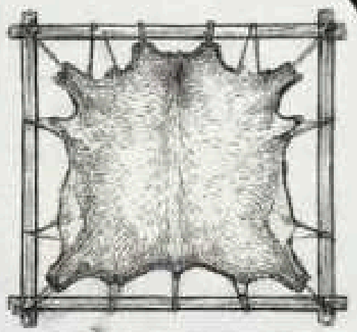
The Solemn & Everyday

Guess my name (First-Person Object)

The Second Meaning

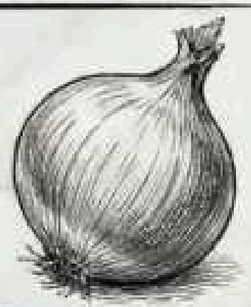
The Bawdy

Proves Anglo-Saxon wit was not always solemn.









The Elevation of Religious Verse [¶ 1.10]



Gift of Song in a Dream

Cædmon's Hymn
(9 lines of earliest English)



Given a Voice

The Dream of the Rood
(Recalling the crucifixion)

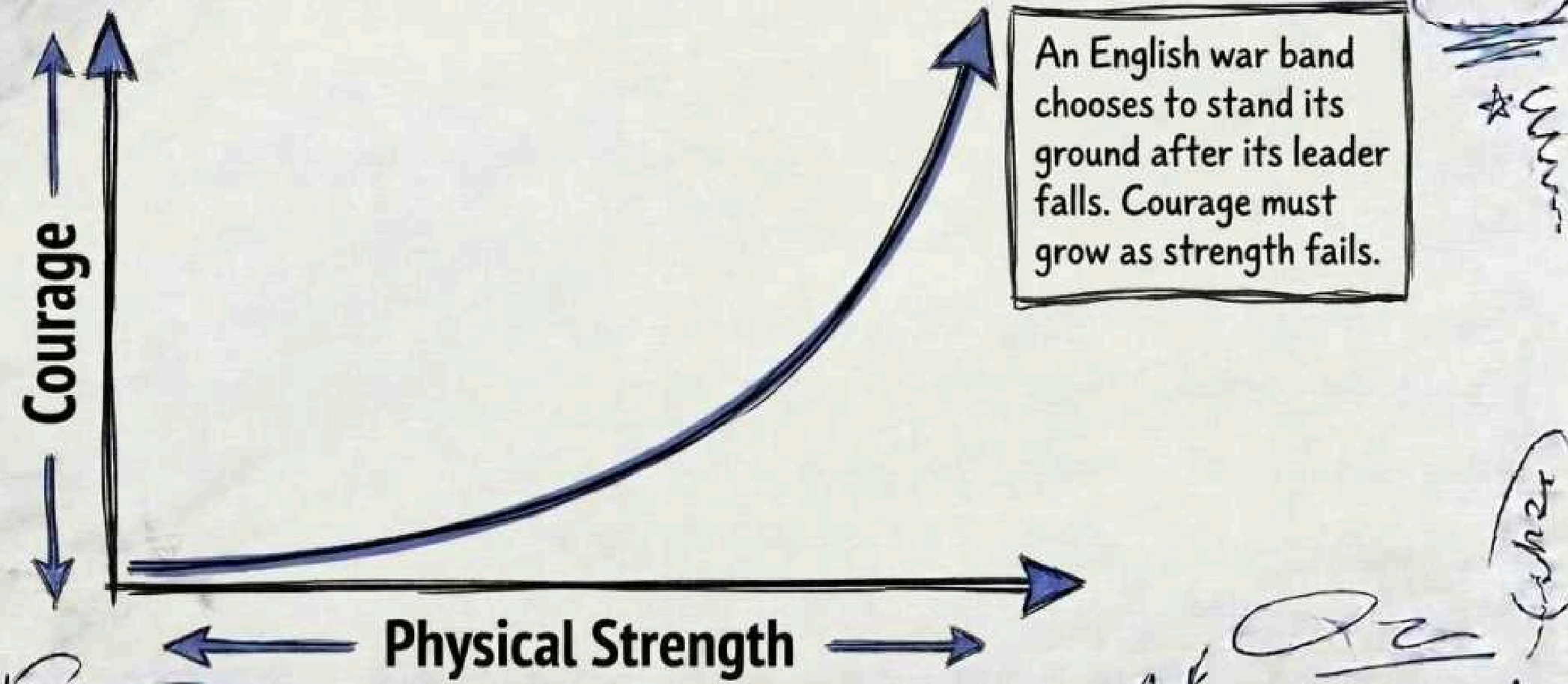
Early Prose Comparison Matrix [¶ 1.11]

The Monk (Bede)	The King (Alfred)
- Language: Latin	- Language: English
- Masterwork: Ecclesiastical History of the English People (~731)	- Masterwork: Translated texts & Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (871-1154)
- Purpose: Church History	- Purpose: Widespread Literacy

The Heroic Code Equation ⇒

[¶ 1.12]

Context: The Viking Raids (793 Lindisfarne → 991 The Battle of Maldon)



An English war band chooses to stand its ground after its leader falls. Courage must grow as strength fails.

Late Prose & The Sermon of the Wolf [¶ 1.13]



(Ælfric the teacher)

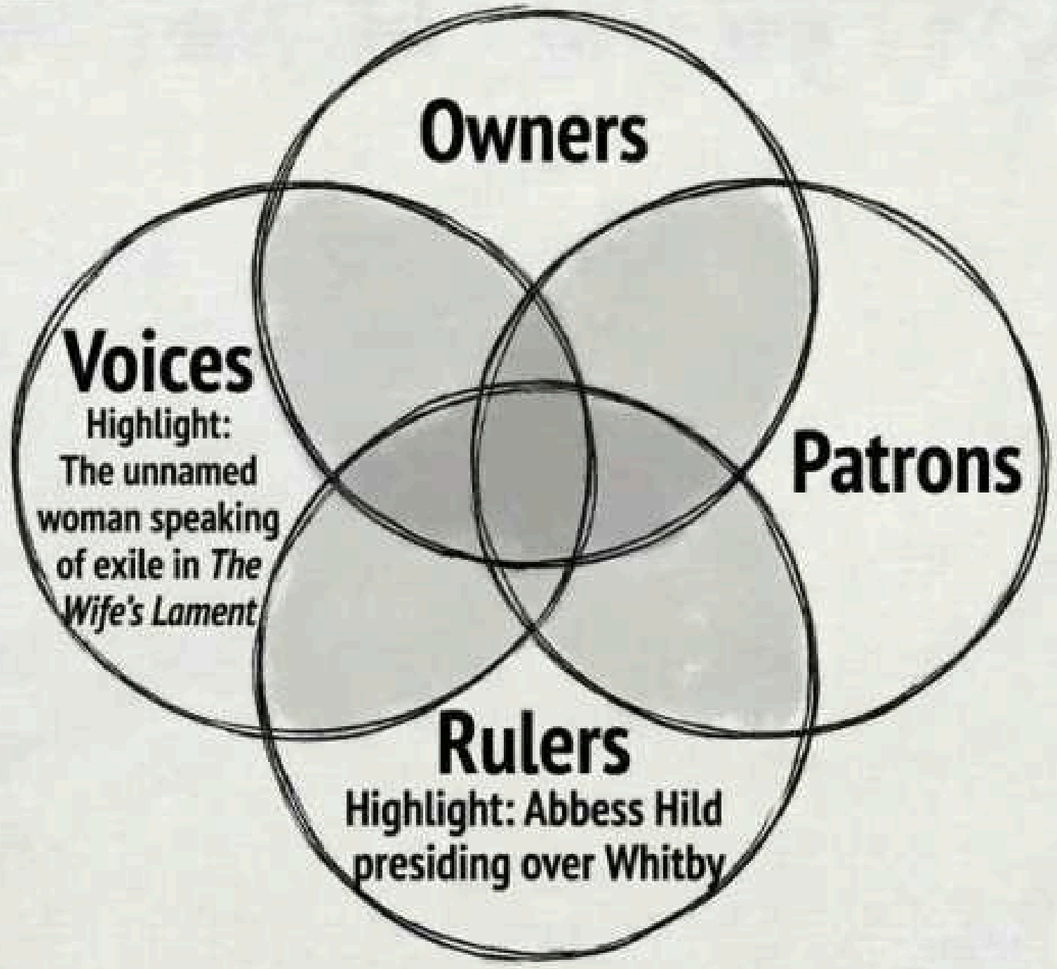
Archbishop Wulfstan (1014)

Sins of the English People

Viking Attacks

The Spheres of Women

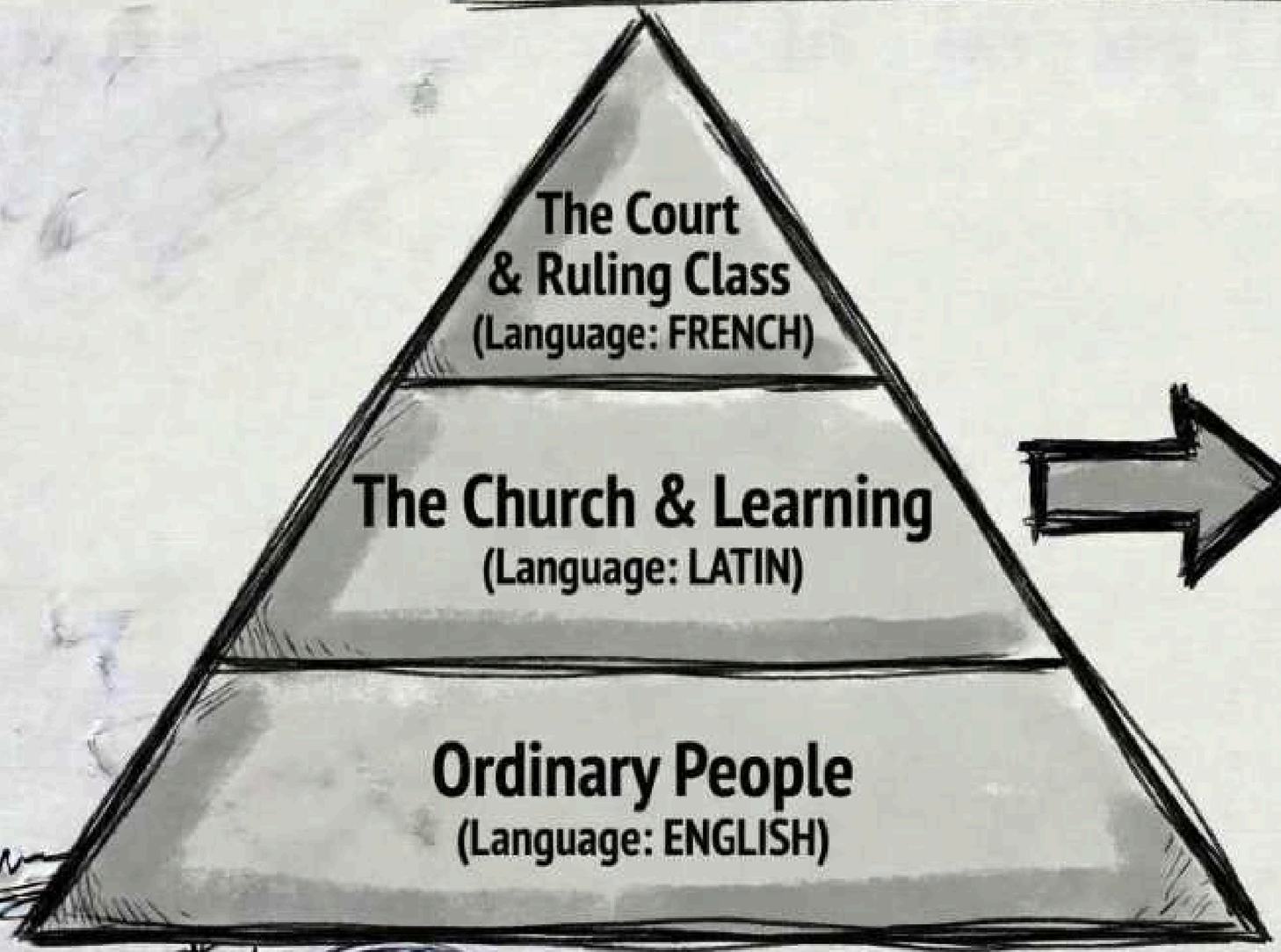
[¶ 1.14]



Much written by women is lost, but the surviving voices endure.

The 1066 Fracture

[¶ 1.15]

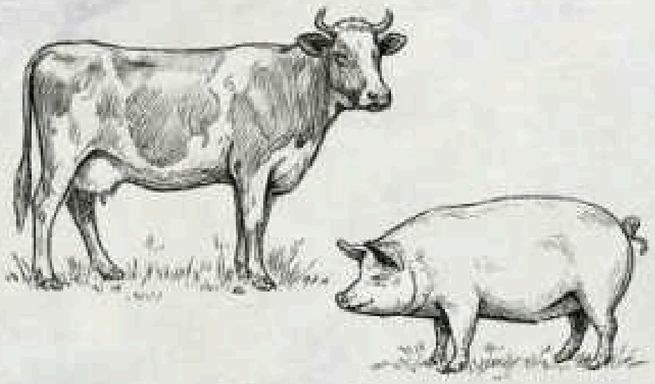


English becomes a language with no official standing.

Linguistic Input / Output

[¶ 1.16]

The Farm



English Names
(Ordinary People)

Processed for the Noble Table (French)

The Table

Beef
Pork

- English lost complicated word endings.
- Gained thousands of French administrative words (government, court, judge).

Survival and Synthesis

[¶ 1.17]

Old English Foundation
(Spoken everyvhere)
+
Monastic Preservation
(Writing continues)

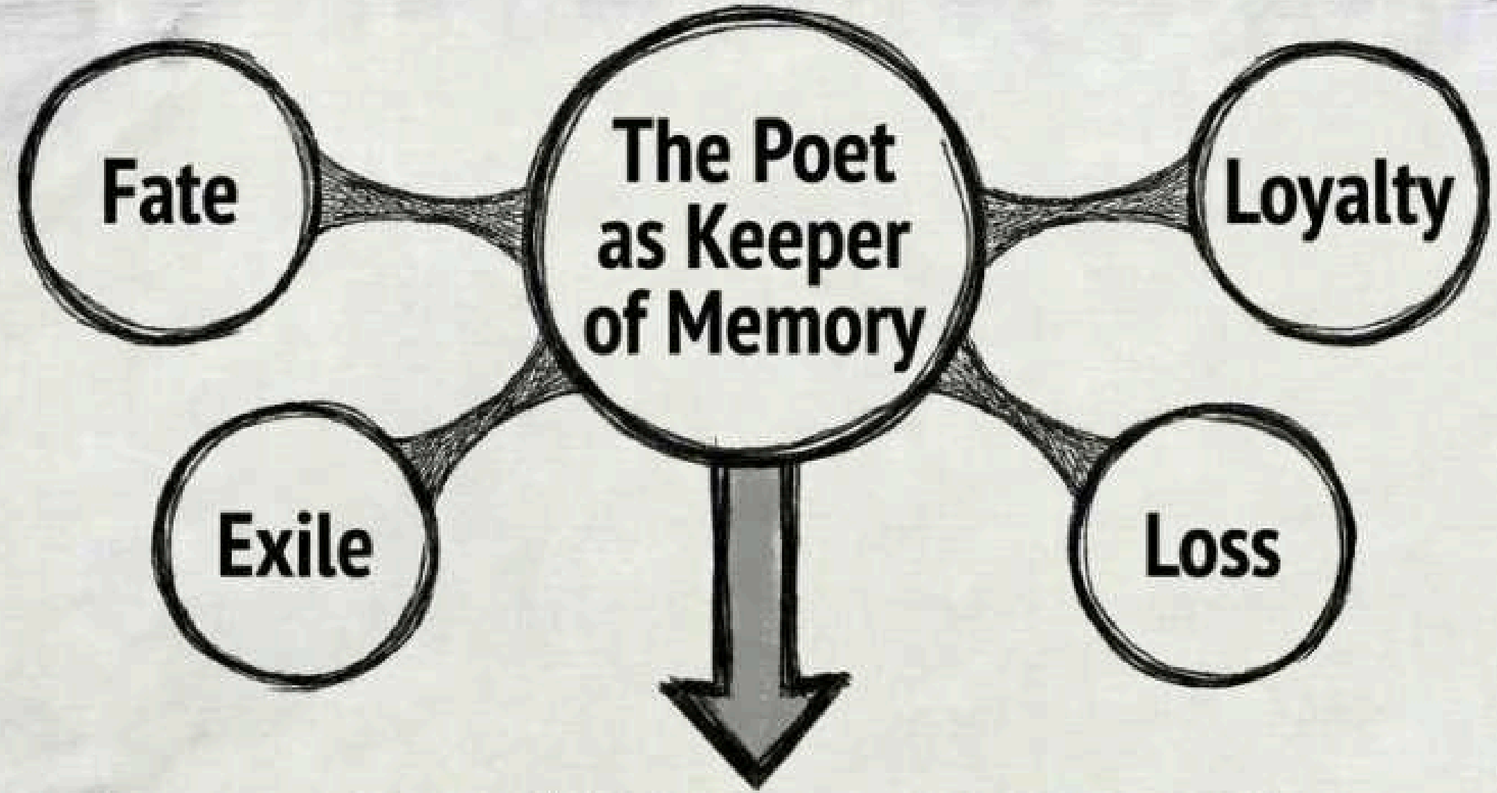
Middle English

Highlight: Layamon's Brut (~1200)

A priest retelling the King Arthur legend in English verse—the prot of a mixed tradition.

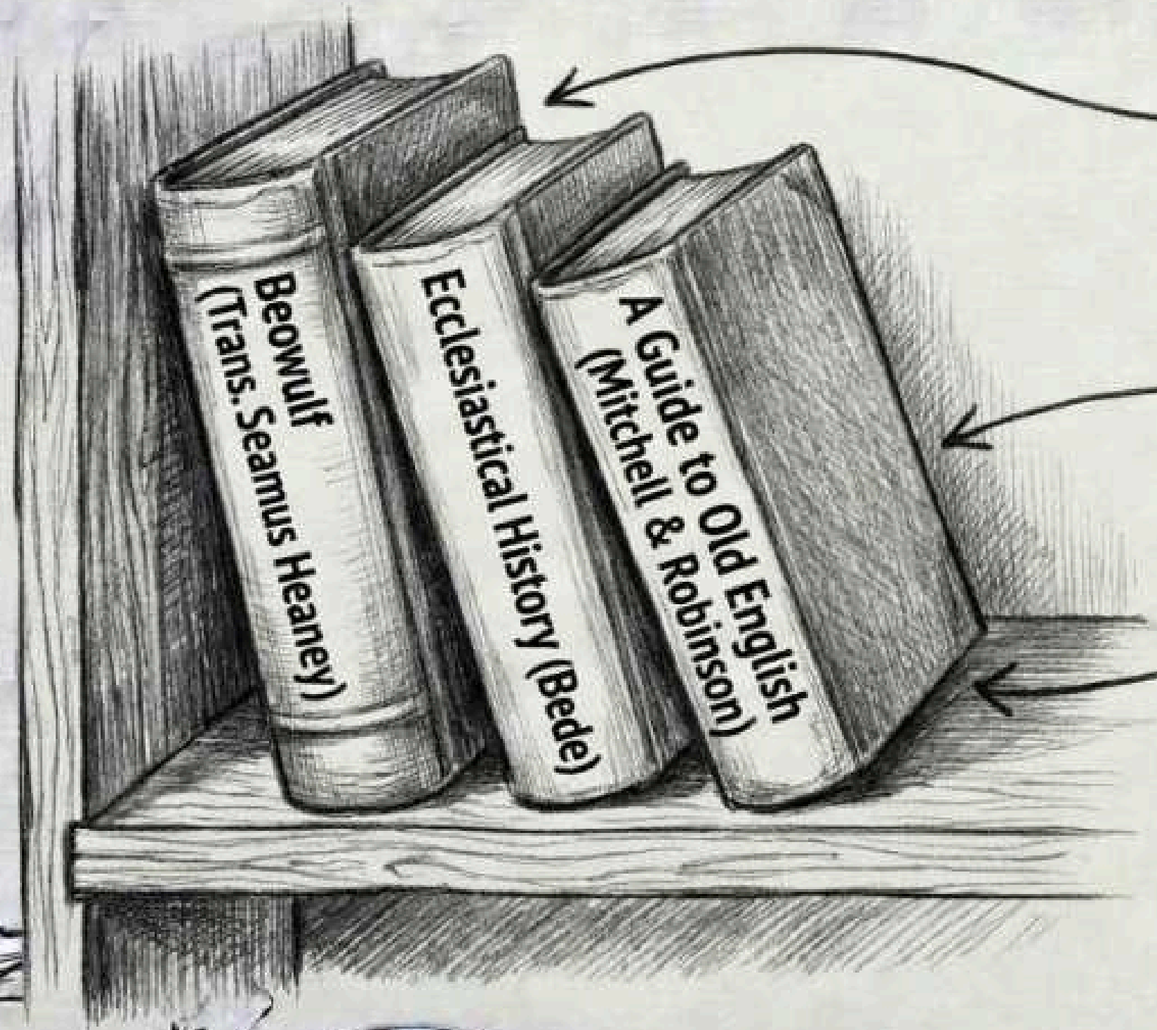
Why Old English Endures

[¶ 1.18]



Seamus Heaney's 1999 translation of Beowulf brought these oldest English stories to a large modern audience.

The Philologist's Bookshelf [¶ 1.19]



1. **Beowulf (Trans. Seamus Heaney) — A fine place to start.**
2. **Ecclesiastical History (Bede) — Available in good modern translations.**
3. **A Guide to Old English (Mitchell & Robinson) — The standard textbook for learning the language.**

Closing Exercise: Application

[¶ 1.20]

☐	**Step 1: Auditory** **Read the opening 50 lines of a Beowulf translation aloud. Listen for the heavy beats in each line.**
☐	**Step 2: Analytical** **Underline one kenning. Write a sentence on what it adds to the imagery.**
☐	**Step 3: Thematic** **Ask the ultimate question. What does the poem say about why people tell stories about the dead?**

Kenning is a lemm.