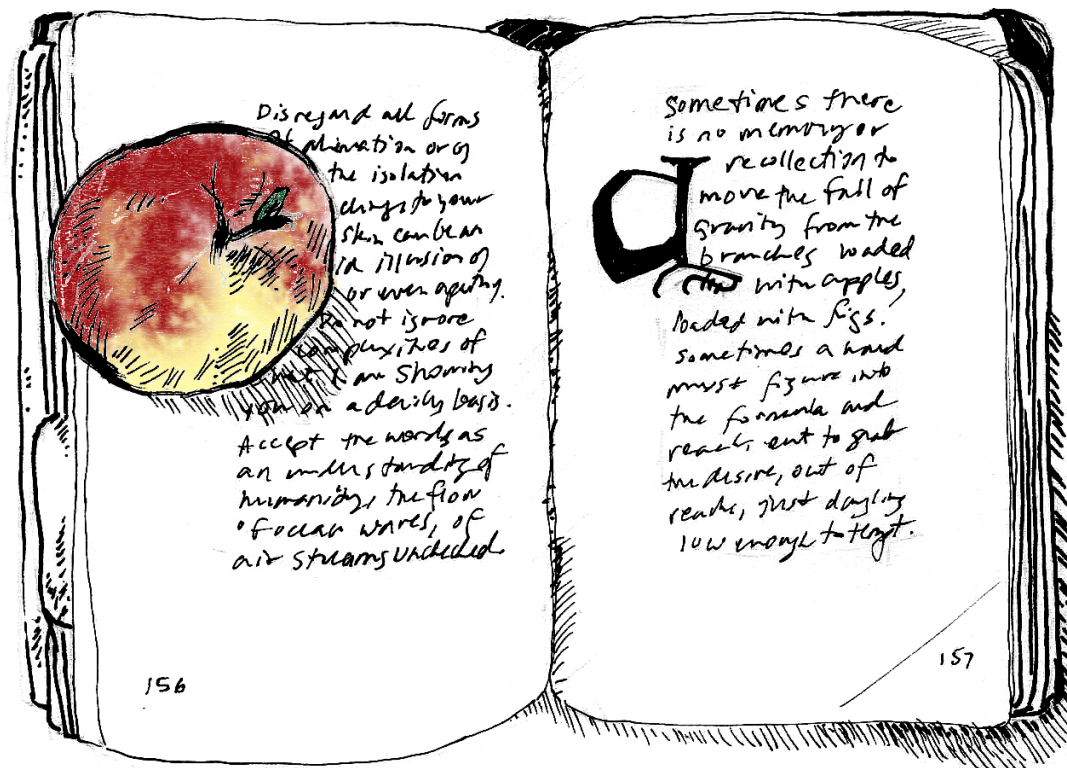


Anglo-Saxon Literature



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Even after converting to Christianity and later developing the concepts of a basic civilization, the Anglo-Saxon culture followed traditions brought down through their Norse and Germanic roots.

- **atheling:** a prince eligible to be king through hereditary bloodlines
- **mead:** a honey beer, featured in many epic poems and early writings
- **mead halls:** buildings used for communal eating and celebrations of battles
- **scop:** based off the Old Norse word *skald*, a scop refers to a poet, a shaper of verse and song; before writing was developed, literature was performed before nobles in court or for general crowds; mnemonic devices placed in the text, such as alliteration and strategic rhythms, aided memorization of the long poems

Anglo-Saxon Literature

- **peace-weaver:** an Anglo-Saxon tradition where women are used to establish peace between warring clans and tribes; often women were married to enemy forces as an offering to end feuds and greater larger family units
- **thane:** warrior-companion, military follower; the existence of these characters show a key development of one of the themes in the full poem: strength through militaristic force; a king is defended by his group of loyal thanes, and in return, the king will provide rewards, weapons, shelter, mead
- **Weird** (*more commonly shown as Wyrð so as not to be confused with the modern meaning of the word*): destiny, fate; this plays a vital role in many Anglo-Saxon verses; tied close to the image of the Nordic Goddesses called the Norns, a trio of women who represent the full fate of the known Universe

Anglo-Saxon Literature

Random Poetic Conventions (*we'll talk more about these in a few days*)

- **accented syllables:** based on a count of four, every line contains beats for a sense of musical rhythm in the poem; nursery rhymes are good examples
- **alliteration:** repetition of key sounds at the beginnings of words:
the **w**est **w**ind blows tonight **w**ildly
- **blank verse:** Unrhymed verse set in iambic pentameter; often used in plays and long narrative poems; suitable for chanting
- **cæsura:** a visual space in a line of poetry to represent a slight pause; these are strategic memory devices which enable retention of the full poem for the poet-performer; usually placed in the third or fourth foot of a line—the are rare in modern poetry
- **epic:** a long narrative poem usually containing elaborate details of a hero in battle establishing a sense of nationalism and pride in the audience
- **kenning:** elaborate, decorative epithets or metaphors characterizing a specific person, place, object, or historical event.

Conventions of an Epic

1. The poem opens *in medias res*, in the middle of things, middle of the action; epics often begin in midst of a great conflict, then through **flashbacks** allows the audience to catch up with formal details of events; events usually occur in a **series of three**; secondary stories or **diversions** are common
2. Often the Poet invokes a **muse**, referred to as an **epic invocation**, calling up a deity to help create a wonderful retelling of a hero's exploits; a prayer
3. The **Hero** symbolizes the glories of a country, the values and ideologies which should be followed by others; his **quest** becomes a symbol likewise of something greater, a showcase of a country's progression through History; he follows a strong **heroic code**, he is obligated to go through trials and tribulations for the greater good; the story shows an universal message

Conventions of an Epic

4. A divine being intervenes on behalf of the Hero as an aid to his journey; again, this shows how a nation is successful due to outside help from a source of higher power, through **divine intervention**; the Hero will likewise contend with **supernatural forces** throughout the story

5. The Poet is expected to provide long lists, enumerations, **epic catalogs** of important people or warriors involved with the Hero's journey; often a hero's genealogical background is revealed, sometimes showing a mythic mother-figure or great grandfather in the hero's bloodline

6. The Hero will have a **tragic flaw** which will factor into a moment of weakness
 - Achilles for instance has a weak heel, his one vulnerable spot on his body,
 - MacBeth is overly ambitious

Conventions of an Epic

7. The Hero's quest is often shown as a **cyclical journey**, returning him to the point of origin; through this device, he learns a major lesson about himself, or about humanity; in order to learn his lesson he must travel across many other countries, other cultures, discover new lands, or even venture into Hell itself; in some cases the audience learns of the mechanics of the known Universe

8. The Poet will use multiple **epithets**, also know as **kennings**: these are poetic stock phrases to describe the central figure or an important deity of a culture. Often made up of compound words. For example, in *Beowulf*, the poet uses an elaborate statement to describe the Christian concept of 'God': "the life-bestowing / Wielder of Glory granted them this blessing" (ll 16-17).

Conventions of an Epic

9. Likewise, characters will use long, formal speeches with much repetition; the Poet will also use many **epic similes** and elaborate metaphors to create analogies of a character's strengths and values

10. Finally, the poem begins with a **statement of the theme**, providing details of the full work's major point and intentions