

The Grammar of Erasure

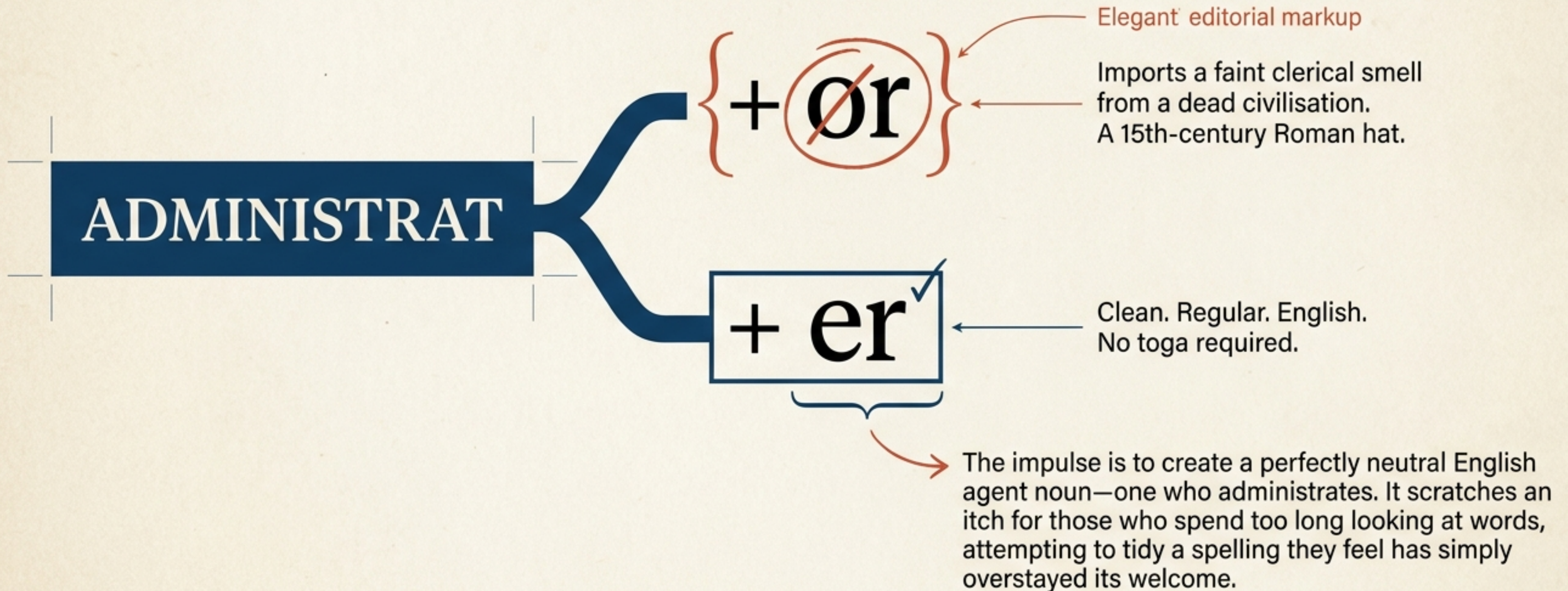
Uncovering the Latin Ghost and
the illusion of neutral language.

Administrator

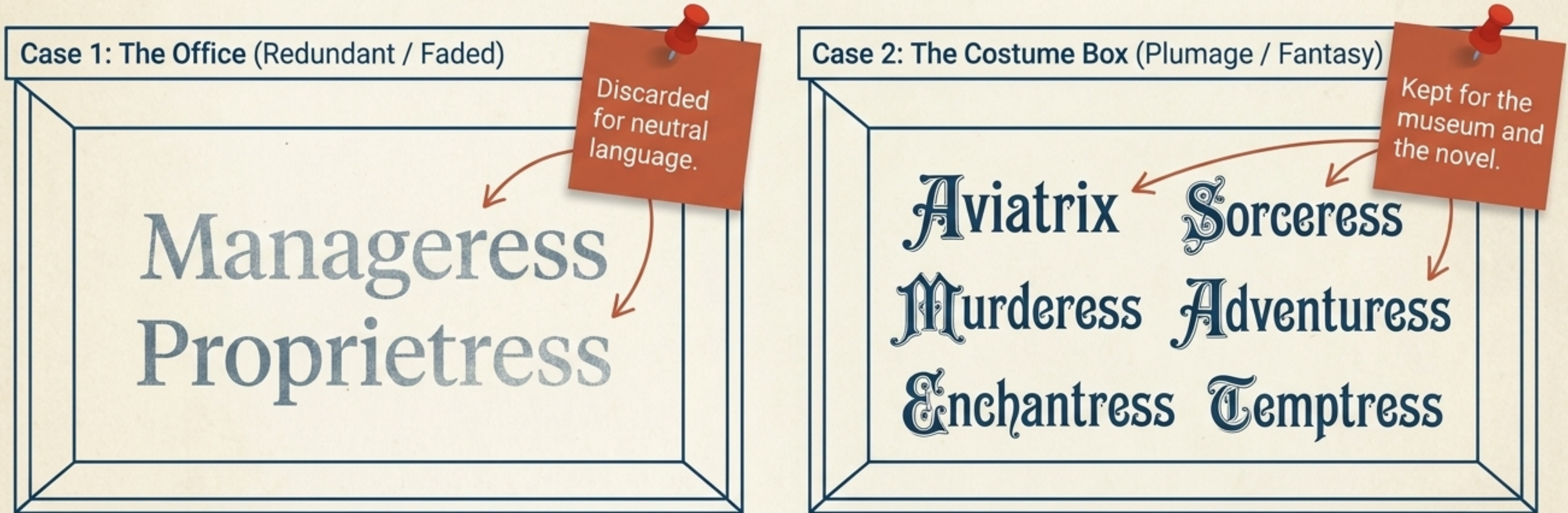
The word "Administrator" is written in a dark blue, serif font. Over the final part of the word, "trator", there are several thick, red, chalk-like strokes that appear to be erasing the letters. Below the word, the suffix "-er" is written in a red, cursive script, with a red caret (^) pointing upwards towards the 'o' in "trator".

A typographic exploration of linguistic
erasure, the laundering of the feminine,
and the trap of grammatical reform.
By Bry Willis.

A seemingly elegant linguistic reform proposes shedding a 15th-century Latin corpse.



Tidying up language divides the feminine marker into two discarded categories.



When we declare language neutral for neutral situations, we concede an abolitionist premise: that the feminine form never does live, present-tense, non-decorative work. It is either an office redundancy or a vintage costume. Nowhere is she allowed to be facts.

The illusion of degendering rests on an assumed masctlinity that vanished centuries ago.

The fatal
flaw in the
Administrater
reform:
nobody has
heard
reform
nomilission
administrator
exclusively as a
man since the
Diet of Worms.

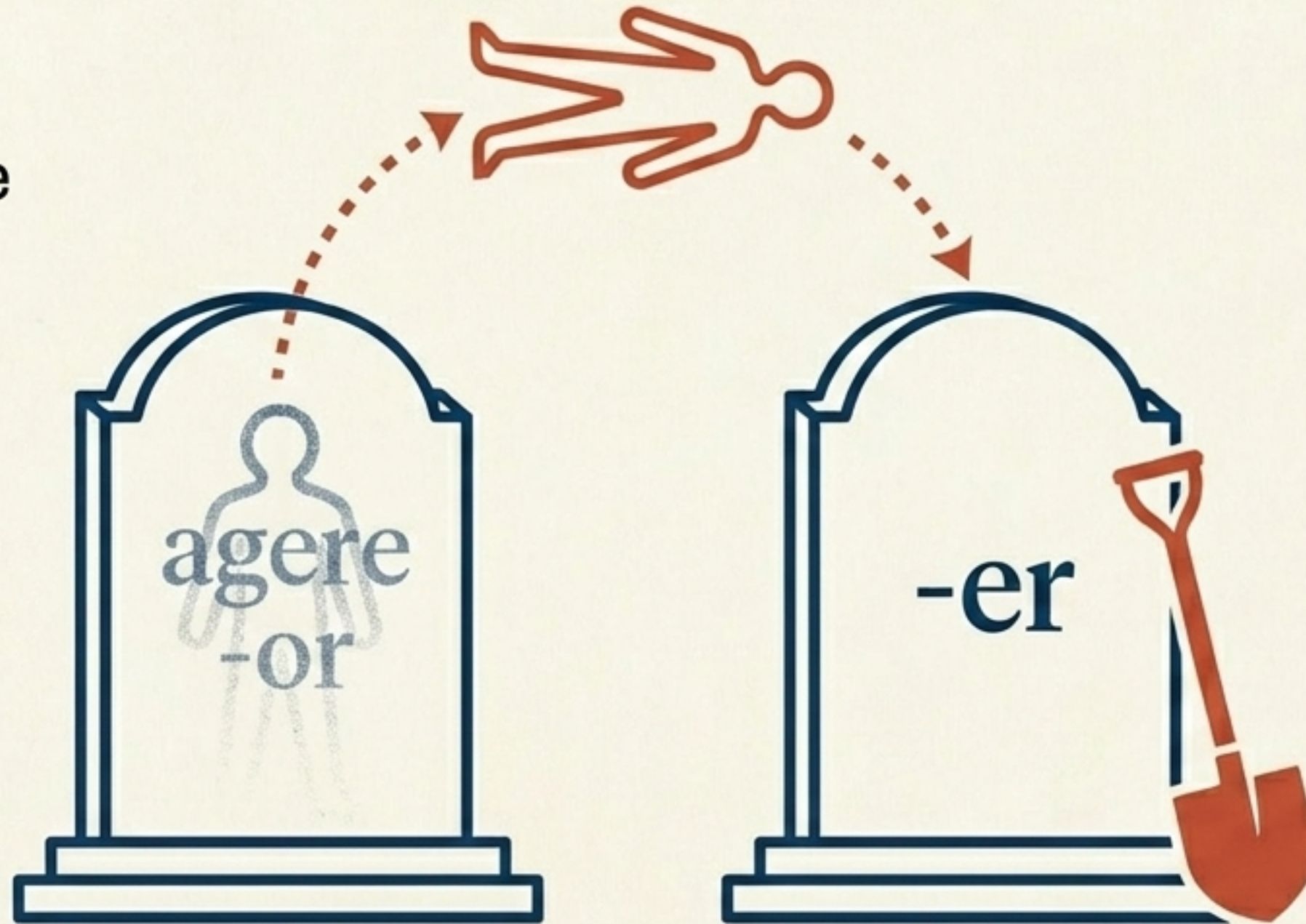


ADMINISTRATOR

It corrects no in-
injustice and in-
cludes no one pre-
viously excluded.
What it does is
register a private
grudge against
Latin and pin an
inclusion badge
to it. An aesthetic
fidget wearing a
moral coat.

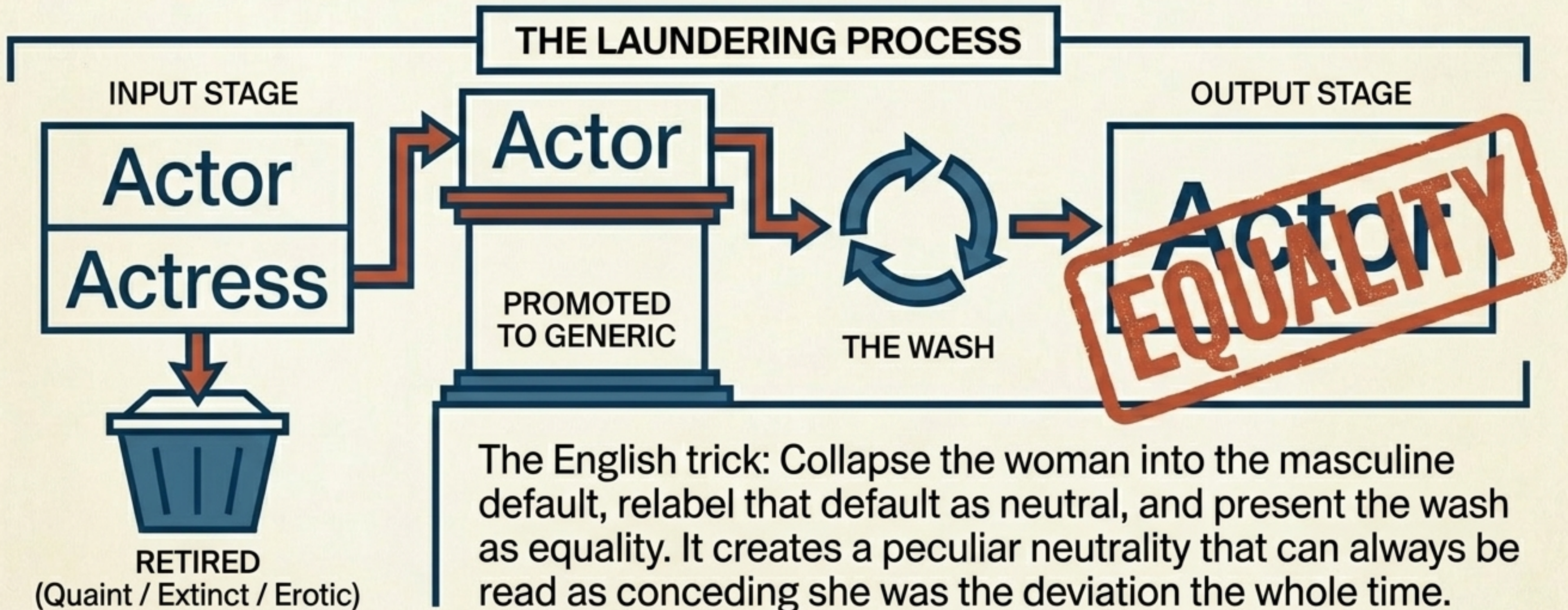
A dead metaphor is not an absence, but a body requiring burial rites.

The Latin agent—the little servant—is a metaphor mourned by no one. Yet, English constantly carries its corpses about, respelt and mispronounced, performing rites without noticing.

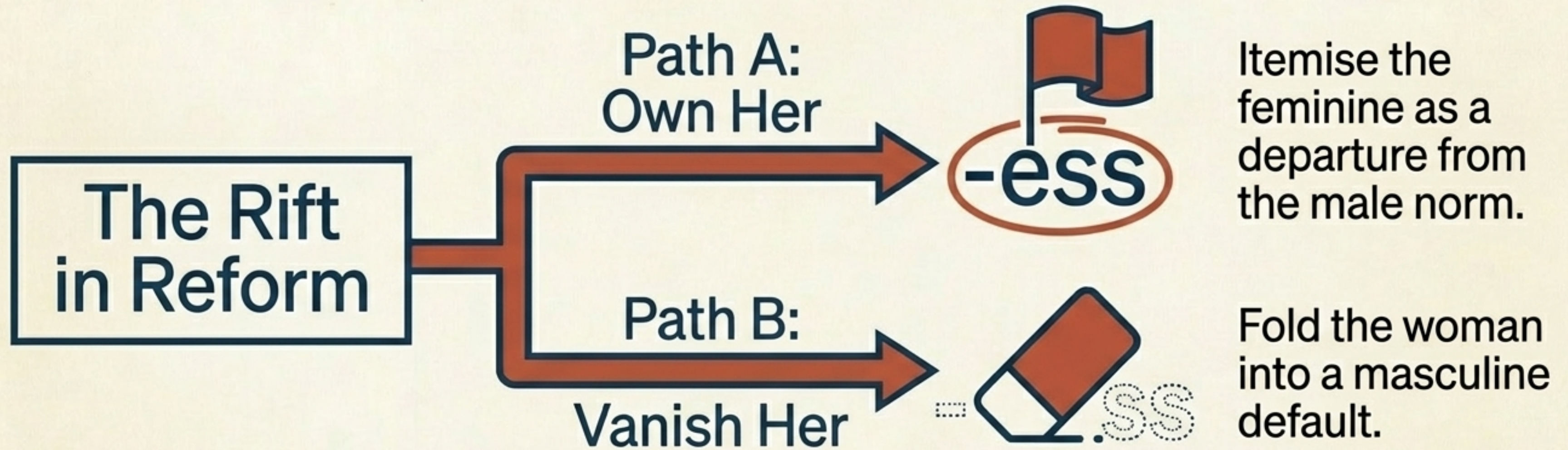


“To change
-or to -er is not
liberation.
That is a man
with a shovel
at midnight,
insisting a
long-accepted
grave is spelt
wrong.”

The language does not abolish gendered professional forms; it launders them.



The abolitionist premise forces a choice between itemising the feminine or vanishing her entirely.

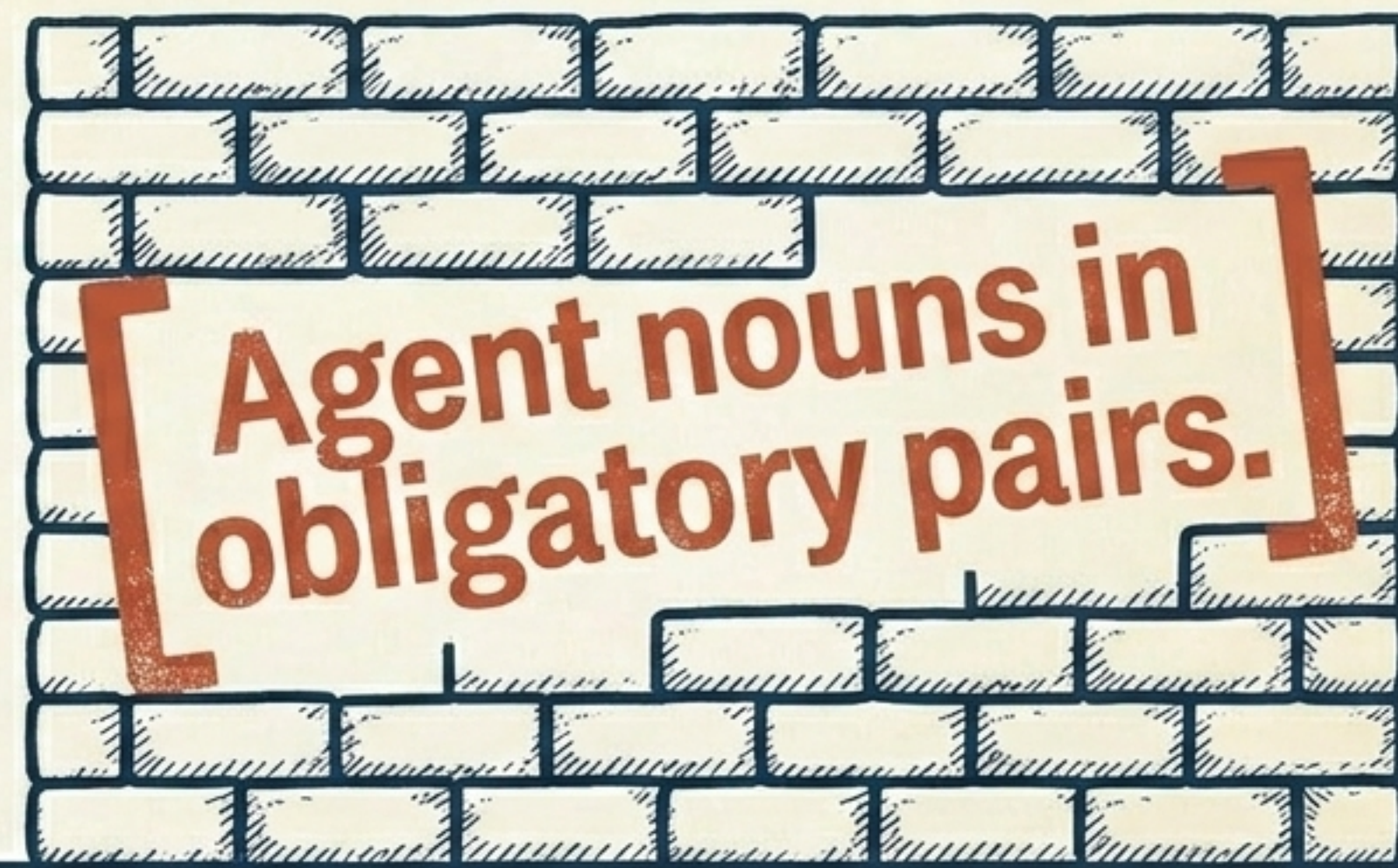


The neutral for the office, costume for the fairy tale approach is not a truce between these two impulses. It is simply the second impulse—erasure—wearing work boots, while keeping a decorative reservation out back.

Translating this neutralisation across the Channel reveals its structural fragility.



The plain, sane repair:
The just-say-server shrug.

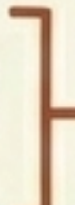


Try the neutralisation trick in French, and it simply ~~falls over~~. French grammar cannot ~~launder~~. Gender is everywhere and load-bearing; there is no discreet server to reach for when waiter embarrasses you.

/nju:trəlaɪ'zeɪʃən/

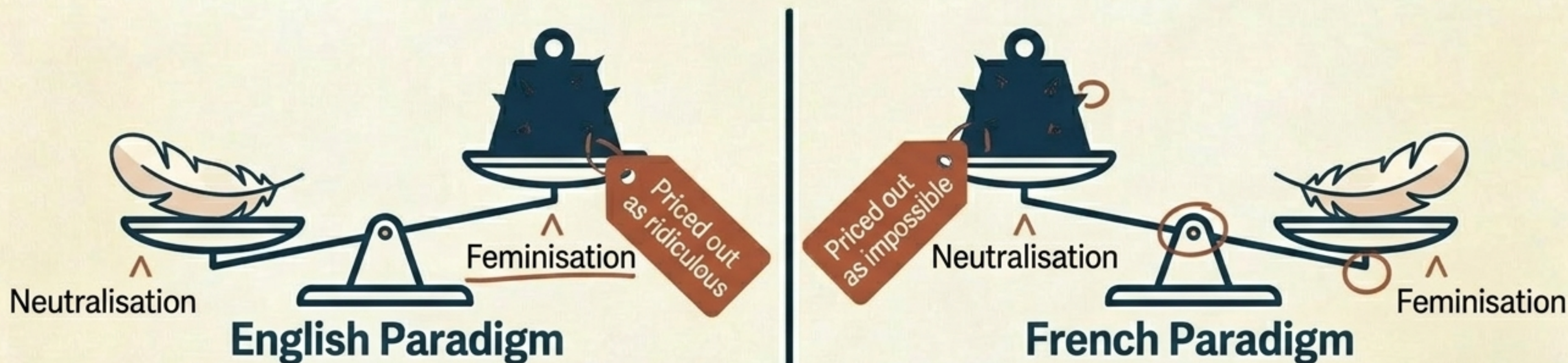
/fɔ̃sɛ/

The same wish for equality produces entirely opposite grammars.

	English Equality	French Equality
The Strategy	Neutralise (Server, Writer, Pilot)  	Feminise (<u>la</u> ministre, <u>la</u> maire, professeure)   
The Grammar	Fluid defaults, easily laundered 	Rigid pairs, <u>écriture inclusive</u> , [doublets, <u>median points</u>]
Historical Revisions	Promotes male to generic 	Digs up buried words (e.g., <u>autrice</u>)  to make feminine visible on the page
Institutional Reaction	Treated as social hygiene 	Académie française unanimously  declared it a <u>péril mortel</u> (2017), though Québec adopted it decades earlier

Reformers often mistake the discount of their grammar for a universal discovery.

The Scales of Linguistic Convenience



Neither side is reasoning from an objective principle about women. We are each reasoning from what our grammar makes cheap. Taking the shape of one's own linguistic convenience for the shape of justice is the oldest mistake there is.

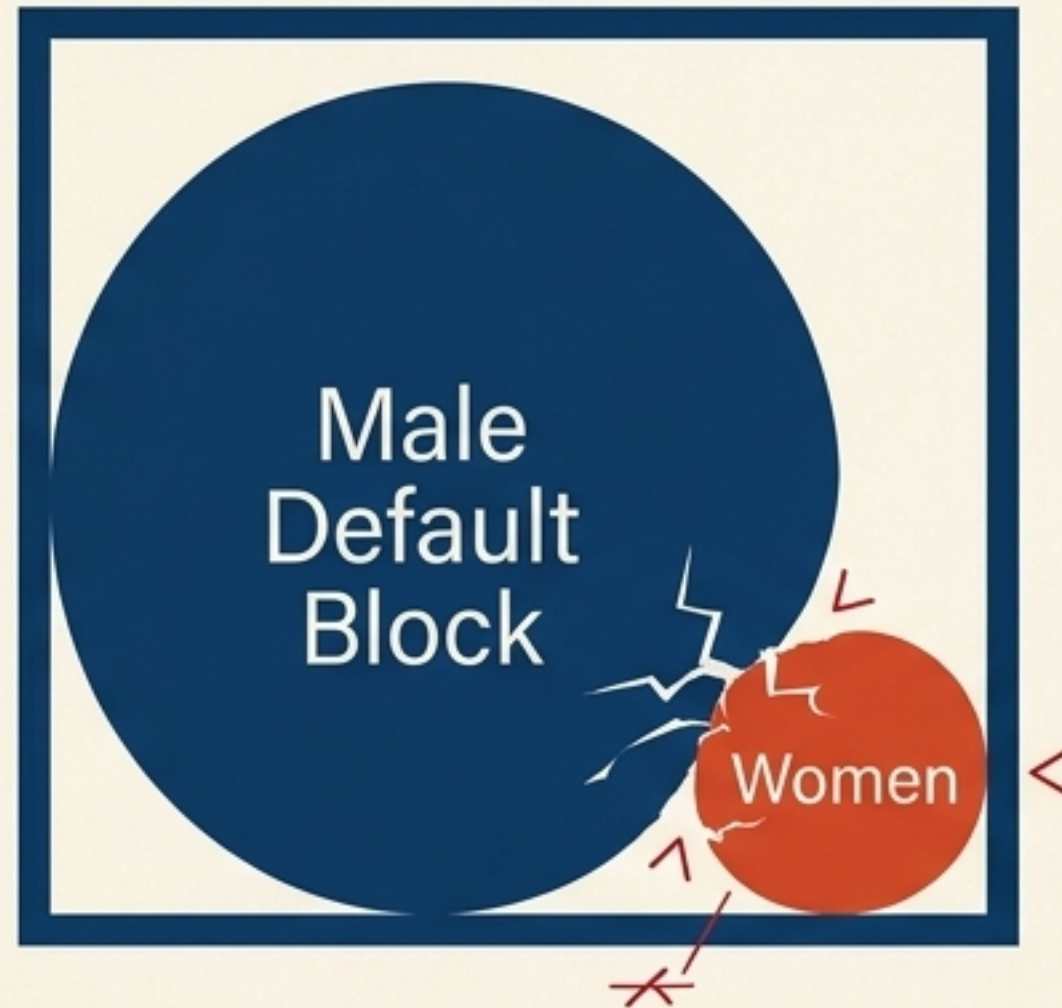
A live, present-tense marking disrupts
the abolitionist premise.



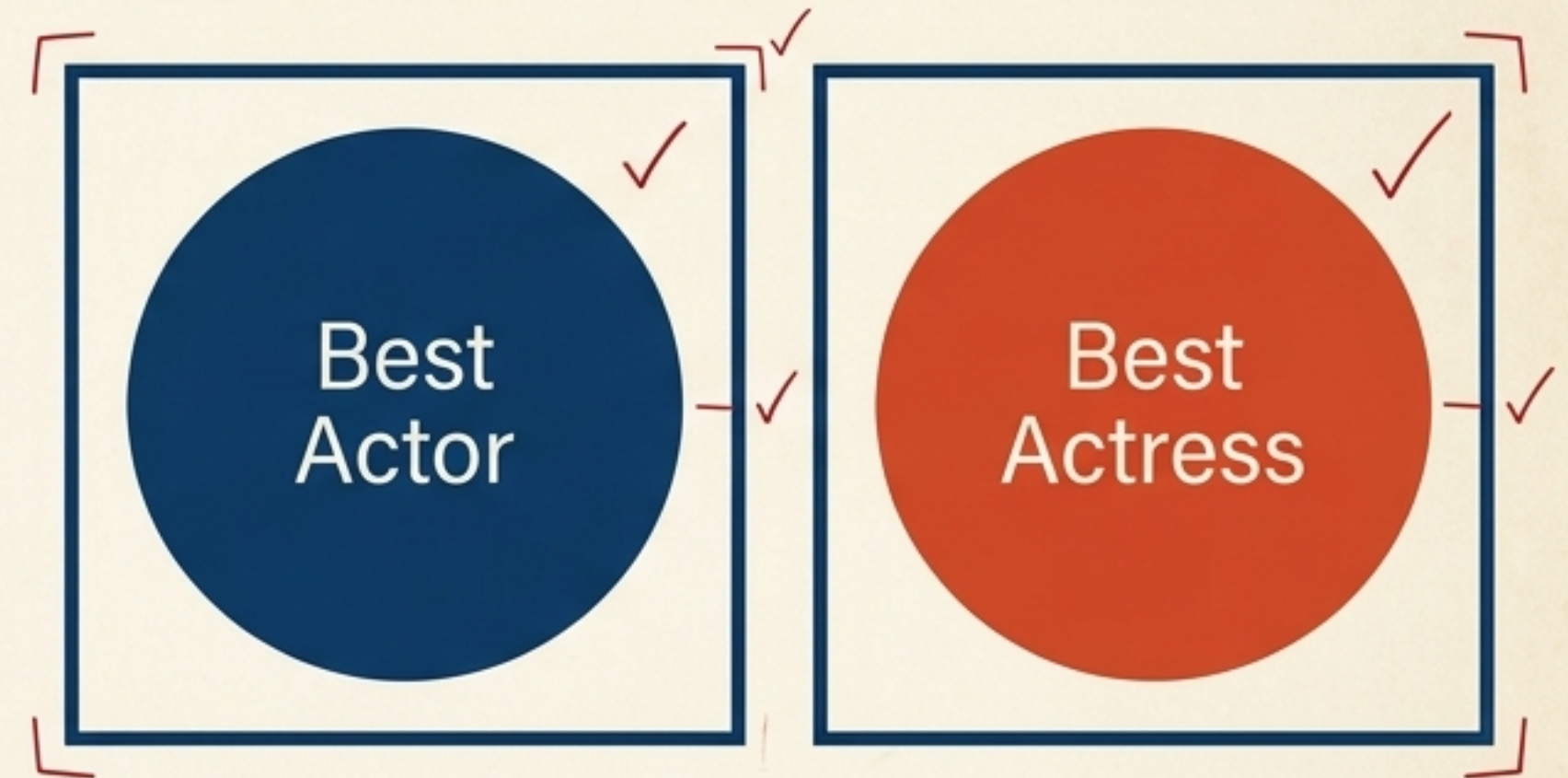
The exception that breaks the neat little rule. Best Actress is not
nostalgia, costume, or redundancy. It is a category kept deliberately
separate, performing real, distributive, here-and-now work.

Preserving the functional feminine prevents absorption into a historically male default.

Scenario A:
The Abolitionist
Reality
(One Pool)



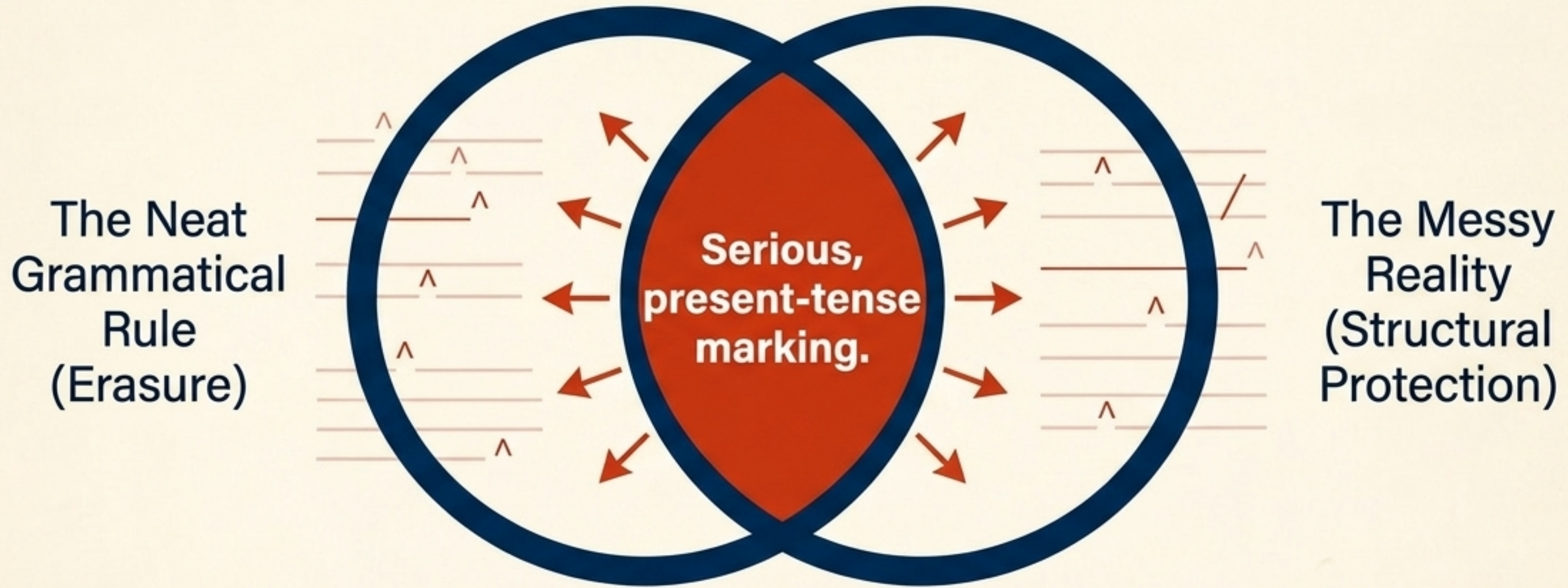
Scenario B: The Distributive Reality (Two Pools)

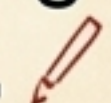


To abolish the distinction requires saying the protection should go. That is a very much larger moral claim than simply deciding that ~~administrater~~ is a tidier spelling.

/əd'mɪnɪ'streɪtər/

Honouring a neat grammatical rule demands stripping away necessary protections.



The pedant is expected to produce a clean rule to resolve the tension. But forcing the rule requires inventing a new category for functional marking—swinging the door straight back open on the impulse we thought we had shut out. 

We officiate at funerals we never chose to attend,
in an accent we were raised to mourn in.

Administrater

Administrater. One who administrates. I still rather like it. I simply no longer mistake liking it for being right. The proper rites for buried language are never anything grander than our own aesthetic convenience.