Hall, Alaric T.P. (2004) *The meanings of elf and elves in medieval England.* PhD thesis.

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The Meanings of *Elf* and Elves in Medieval England

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Submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

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October, 2004

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates the character and role of non-Christian belief in medieval societies, and how we can reconstruct it using written sources. It focuses on Anglo-Saxon culture, contextualising Anglo-Saxon material with analyses of Middle English, Older Scots, Scandinavian and Irish texts. We lack Anglo-Saxon narratives about elves (*ælfe*, singular *ælf*), but the word *ælf* itself is well-attested in Old English texts. By analysing these attestations, it is possible to discover much about the meanings of the word *ælf*—from which, I argue, it is possible to infer what *ælfe* were believed to be and to do, and how these beliefs changed over time. Using methodologies inspired by linguistic anthropology (discussed in Chapter 1), I develop these analyses to reconstruct the changing significances of non-Christian beliefs in medieval English-speaking societies, affording new perspectives on Christianisation, health and healing, and group identity, particularly gendering.

The body of the thesis, chapters 2–9, is in three parts. Because of its historiographical prominence in discussions of Anglo-Saxon non-Christian beliefs, I begin in Chapter 2 by reassessing Scandinavian comparative evidence for elf-beliefs. I also show that it is possible to correlate the meanings of Old Norse words for supernatural beings with other Scandinavian mythological sources for world-views, providing a case-study supporting similar approaches to Anglo-Saxon evidence.

Chapters 3–6 reassess Anglo-Saxon linguistic and textual evidence, tackling in turn prehistoric naming patterns and morphological developments, poetry, glosses, and medical texts. The long-standing assumption that *ælfe* were incorporeal, small and arrow-shooting proves to be both unfounded and implausible. Traditionally, *ælfe* were conceptually similar both to gods and to human ethnic others, all of whom were opposed to monsters in Anglo-Saxon world-views. They were probably only male. In textual evidence, *ælfe* are paradigmatic examples of dangerously seductive beauty and they are possible causes of prophetic speech and certain kinds of ailments. They inflicted ailments at least at times by a variety of magic called *siden*, cognate with the much-discussed medieval Scandinavian magic *seiðr*. Both of these points associate *ælfe* with feminine-gendered traits, and I show that by the eleventh century, *ælf* could also denote otherworldly, nymph-like females. These otherworldly females seem to have been new arrivals in Anglo-Saxon belief-systems. Demonisation is clearly attested from around

800, but *ælfe* were not conflated with demons in all or even most discourses, even after the Old English period.

Chapters 7–9 develop this core evidence to argue for the cultural significance of the beliefs it reveals. By adducing comparative texts from medieval Ireland and Scandinavia and from the early modern Scottish witchcraft trials, Chapter 7 shows how the characteristics of *ælf* in Old English could occur together in coherent, ideologically significant narratives. Chapter 8 considers the Old English charm *Wið færstice* in a similar comparative context, focusing on the trial of Issobel Gowdie for witchcraft in 1662, and considering the importance of elf-beliefs in Anglo-Saxon healing. These chapters emphasise cultural continuity in North West European beliefs, questioning inherited scholarly constructions of fairy-beliefs as distinctively 'Celtic', and showing striking continuities between Anglo-Saxon and early modern Scottish beliefs.

Chapter 9 concludes by combining earlier findings to make new assessments of Anglo-Saxon Christianisation and constructions of group identity, danger and power, and gendering. I examine gender in particular, combining evidence from throughout the thesis with comparative textual and archaeological material to argue that mythological gender transgressions were important to early Anglo-Saxon gendering. Beliefs in effeminate *ælfe* helped to demarcate gender norms, but also provided a paradigm whereby men could in real life gain supernatural power through gender transgression. I link the subsequent rise of female *ælfe* to changes in Anglo-Saxon gendering, whereby gender roles were enforced with increasing strictness.

By combining detailed linguistic and textual analyses in a suitable comparative context, I reconstruct aspects of non-Christian belief which are marginalized in our early medieval sources, and detect how they changed over time. Such beliefs illuminate various aspects of medieval culture, including social identity, health and healing, the sources and use of supernatural power, and Christianisation. My methods, meanwhile, provide paradigms for taking similar approaches to studying belief and ideology in other areas of medieval Europe.

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Abbreviations

AHDWB	*Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch*
BL	British Library
DMLBS	*Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*
DOE	*Dictionary of Old English*
DONP	*A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose/Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*
DOST	*Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*
L.	Linnaean name
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
S	Precedes reference-numbers in Kelly 1999

Acknowledgements

Each time I have begun studying at another university, I have realised how much the last shaped my thought. This thesis is a product of three. 2001–2003 saw me frequently returning to my *alma mater*, the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at Cambridge University, where my thesis and I profited considerably from acquaintances old and new, and of course from the wealth of books there. Sandra Cromey is a pearl among librarians. I had the privilege to spend 2003–2004 in the Department of English at the University of Helsinki, where I was supervised by Matti Kilpiö and Leena Kahlas-Tarkka. I am much indebted to both; both they and my other friends there, I hope, have some idea of how much they gave me, and of my gratitude. My students taught me more than I taught them, as I wish I had said at the time. The beneficence and patience which I met at Helsinki is perhaps best summed up by the willingness of its librarians to keep speaking to me in Finnish.

   Above all my research has been in and of the University of Glasgow. Enumerating the contributions of my supervisors there, Graham Caie and Katie Lowe, would inevitably leave too much unsaid; I am fortunate to have worked with them. The Department of English Language was a blessedly pleasant environment to work in; listing the assistance I enjoyed from its other members would be too long a task, but my progress owes much to Alison Bennett and Pauline Maridor. I have benefited too from teaching and otherwise lurking in the departments of History and Celtic, whose contributions to this thesis have been considerable. I took my M.Phil. in the Glasgow Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, which has remained my intellectual home; my convivual home has remained the Hetherington Research Club; and my enjoyment of the last three years owes much to the friends I have made in each.

   The attenders of the Late Antique and Medieval Postgraduate Seminars at the University of Edinburgh have listened about elves more often than could reasonably have been hoped, as have the members of Glossa in Helsinki. Besides benefiting from the attentions of my supervisors, drafts of the thesis have been read in whole or in part by Paul Bibire, Dimitra Fimi, Bethany Fox, Carole Hough, Alistair McLennan, Ben Snook and Harriet Thomsett. Ben and Beth along with Dave Cochran, Rory Naismith and Charles West have assisted with research materials. Richard Burian, Simon Horobin, Katie Lowe, Rod McConchie and Mark Zumbuhl have proved assiduous elf-spotters. The original idea for the project was Alex Woolf's. The research was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board, with an additional contribution in 2002–2003 from the SOCRATES programme. I thank individuals and organisations alike; further specific

debts are noted in the thesis itself. Needless to say, however, its defects and errors are my own. Tell me about them via <http://www.alarichall.org.uk>.

The longer I spend in education, the more I observe that academic achievement is directly proportional to parental support. Depressing though the point is in general, I am grateful and glad to acknowledge that in my case it is certainly true. Bethany Fox has been mentioned in another context above. I don't know how differently the thesis would turned out without her; but the time spent writing it wouldn't have been half as fun. Thanks, one and all.

Chapter 1

Introduction

One assumes that when, around the first decade of the eleventh century, somewhere in the south-west of England, the scribe began what was probably the last stint on his manuscript of medical recipes, he did not guess that it would remain in use for over six centuries—more or less until it came into the hands of Reverend Robert Burscough, who, passing it on to his friend Humphrey Wanley, transformed it from a practical text into an object of scholarship.[1] But he knew that he was making a book to be used: his parchment was stiff, his script functional and the finished codex portable: a practical reference work for day-to-day use, in treating and protecting both people and animals. Having already copied the Old English translations of the *Herbarium* and the *Medicina de quadrupedibus*, the scribe was making or copying a large, miscellaneous collection of medical texts, known since Cockayne's edition as *Lacnunga* ('remedies'; 1864–68, III 2–80). Some parts of the collection were already old. One case in point may be the remedy which he copied onto folios 175–76v, which is dominated by a charm which alliterates the palatal and velar realisations of Old English /ɣ/, a practice which apparently declined during the tenth century, ceasing by the end.[2] One wonders where the scribe registered any surpise as he copied this entry; it has, at any rate, intrigued and challenged scholars since the nineteenth century (ed. Doane 1994b, no. 265; collated with Grattan–Singer 1952, 173–76):

Wið færstice feferfuige �7 seo reade netele ðe þurh ærn inwyxð �7 wegbrade wyll in buteran.

Hlude wæran hy la hlude   ða hy ofer þone hlæw ridan
wæran anmode   ða hy ofer land ridan
scyld ðu ðe nu   þu ðysne nið genesan mote
ut lytel spere   gif her inne sie
stod under linde   under leohtum scylde
þær ða mihtigan wif   hyra mægen beræddon
�7 hy gyllende   garas sændan
ic him oðerne   eft wille sændan

For a ?violent, stabbing pain:[3] feverfew and the 'red nettle' [L. *Lamium purpureum*][4] that grows through the ?corn, and plantain. Boil in butter. Loud, they were, yes, loud, when they rode over the (burial) mound; they were fierce when they rode across the land. Shield yourself now, you can survive this strife. Out, little spear, if there is one here within. It[5] stood under lime-wood (i.e. a shield), under a light shield, where those mighty women marshalled their powers, and ?they sent shrieking spears.[6] I will send another back,

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[1] See Doane 1994b, 26–36 [no. 265]; cf. Grattan–Singer 1952, 206–9; Ker 1957, 305–6 [no. 231].
[2] In *gyllende* and *garas*. Amos 1980, 100–2; cf. Fulk 1992, 258–59; Minkova 2003, 113–21; the instance may admittedly reflect the repetition of an older formula: see n. 6.
[3] This is usually translated 'sudden stitch' (e.g. Grattan–Singer 1952, 173). However, *stitch* in

fleogende flane   forane togeanes

ut lytel spere   gif hit her inne sy ·

sæt smið   sloh seax

lytel iserna   wund swiðe

ut lytel spere   gif her inne sy

syx smiðas sætan   wælspera worhtan

ut spere   næs in spere

gif her inne sy   isenes dæl

hægtessan geweorc   hit sceal gemyltan

gif ðu wære on fell scoten   oððe wære on flæsc scoten

oððe wære on blod scoten

oððe wære on lið scoten   næfre ne sy ðin lif atæsed

gif hit wære esa gescot   oððe hit wære ylfa gescot

oððe hit wære hægtessan gescot   nu ic wille ðin helpan

þis ðe to bote esa gescotes   ðis ðe to bote ylfa gescotes

ðis ðe to bote hægtessan gescotes   ic ðin wille helpan

fleo [?MS *fled*] þær   on fyrgenhæfde

hal westu   helpe ðin drihten

nim þonne þæt seax ado on wætan ·

a flying arrow ahead in opposition.

Out, little spear, if it is here within.

A smith sat, forged a dagger; ?a small [one] of swords, violent thewound.[7] Out, little spear, if it should be here within. Six smiths sat, wrought slaughter-spears. Be out, spear, not in, spear. If there is here within a bit of iron, the work/deed of *hægtessan*,[8] it must melt. If you were *scoten*[9] in the skin or were *scoten* in the flesh, or were *scoten* in the blood, or were *scoten* in the limb (?joint), may your life never be injured (i.e. 'may your life not be threatened'?). If it was the *gescot*[10] of *ese* or it was the *gescot* of *ælfe* or it was the *gescot* of *hægtessan*, now I want to (?will) help you. This for you as a remedy for the *gescot* of *ese*; this for you as a remedy for the *gescot* of *ælfe*, this for you as a remedy for the *gescot* of *hægtessan*; I will help you. Fly around there on the mountain top.[11] Be healthy, may the Lord help you. Then take the knife; put it in the liquid.[12]

Modern English, when denoting a pain, denotes a 'sharp spasmodic pain in the side resulting from running or exercising' (*Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v.). But the connotations of *fær-* are suggested by the translations suggested by Bosworth and Toller: 'Sudden, intense, terrible, horrid' (1898, s.v.; cf. *DOE*, s.v. *fǣr*). As for *stice*, Bosworth and Toller gave the primary meanings 'a prick, puncture, stab, thrust with a pointed implement' (1898, s.v.), though the only Middle English descendant of these meanings seems to have been 'A sharp, localized pain' (*MED*, s.v. *stiche*). These considerations suggest that *færstice* denoted something more serious than a stitch.

[4] Cameron 1993, 142–43.

[5] Hitherto, commentators have assumed an unstated pronoun *ic* ('I') as the subject of *stod* (e.g. Grendon 1909, 165; Kennedy 1943, 9; Storms 1948, 141; Meaney 1989, 33 n. 34). This is an odd assumption, however—probably an uncritically repeated misinterpretation of Grendon's. The obvious subject is that of the preceding sentence, *spere*. The three other occurrences of *Ut, lytel spere* are all followed by lines which seem to concern the *spere*. This reading also removes an ill-motivated switch in person.

[6] This reading is supported by the half-line 'giellende gar' in *Widsith* (line 128; ed. Chambers 1912, 223) and by the half-line formula *af/með geiri gjallanda* ('from/with a yelling spear') in stanzas 5 and 14 of the Eddaic *Atlakviða* (ed. Neckel 1962, 241, 242); it has the attraction of producing a parallelism with the *fleogende flane* returned by the speaker of the charm. However, the phrasing inferred by Doane from the manuscript spacing—'and.hy.gyllende | garas sændan' (ed. 1994a, 139; cf. 143)—suggests 'and they, shrieking, sent spears'. This is no less plausible syntactically.

[7] *Lytel* was taken by Dobbie to describe *seax* ('sæt smið, | sloh seax lytel, / * * * iserna, | wundrum swiðe'; ed. 1942, 122); this has been the basis for aspects of interpretation since (e.g. Doskow 1976, 325; Weston 1985, 179). But Dobbie's reading needlessly posits textual corruption. My analysis is closer to Doane's (1994a, 143).

[8] Witches, female supernatural beings: see §8:2. I take *-an* here and elsewhere in the charm as a genitive plural, to provide parallelism with *ylfa* and *esa* (cf. Grendon 1909, 165; Jente 1921, 295; Kennedy 1943, 9). Although the manuscript includes no other example of genitive plural *-an*, similar inflexional levellings are not uncommon there (see Grattan–Singer 1952, 224–27; Vriend 1984, lxviii–lxxii) and there is a good number of examples elsewhere (Hoad 1994; Lapidge–Baker 1995, xcviii).

This text—known now as *Wið færstice*—is among the most remarkable of its kind in medieval Europe. Prominent among the threats which it seeks to counter are *ælfe*, the beings whose name has come into Modern English as *elves*. The seriousness with which *Wið færstice*, and presumably its eleventh-century copyist, treats these beings challenges our conceptions of rationality and reality, of health, healing and Christianity. What were *ælfe*? What were *gescotu*, and why did *ælfe* cause them? What were the *ese* and *hægtessan* with which they are associated and why were they grouped in this way? Moreover, although unique in many respects, *Wið færstice* is only one of a range of Anglo-Saxon texts using the word *ælf*, and these too bring both answers and questions.

In the preface to his 1850 edition of *The Fairy Mythology*, Thomas Keightley admitted that 'writing and reading about Fairies some may deem to be the mark of a trifling turn of mind' (1850, vii); over a hundred and fifty years later, one shares his concerns. But one notes with pleasure (and relief) that 'beings neither angelic, human, nor animal' now merit a section even in so established a series as the New Oxford History of England (Bartlett 2000, 686–92): without taking medieval non-Christian beliefs seriously and developing methodologies to reconstruct them from our patchy and unbalanced records, we can hope only for the most partial understanding of how our ancestors thought and lived. This thesis is the first attempt to consider the references to *ælfe* in the detail which they require, through suitably rigorous linguistic and textual analyses. By integrating linguistic and textual approaches into an anthropologically-derived theoretical framework, I provide a history both of the word *ælf* and of the concepts it denoted—the *ælfe*—throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, from pre-conversion times to the eleventh century. Insofar as space and relevance permit, I also consider English-language evidence from the rest of the Middle Ages, and the early modern Scottish witchcraft trials. It proves possible to delineate important features of pre-conversion world-views; besides bringing new evidence to bear on early Anglo-Saxon societies, this early evidence makes it possible to trace reliably some of the changes, continuities and tensions in belief experienced in English-speaking cultures in the

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[9] As I argue below (§6:1), *scoten* is probably polysemic, meaning both 'shot', and 'badly pained, afflicted with a sharp pain'. The same goes for the noun *gescot*, which could probably denote both projectiles and sharp, localised pains (§6:2.2).

[10] See preceding note.

[11] The text is unsatisfactory here and the translation merely a conjecture; see Doane's discussion (1994a, 144–45).

[12] Read literally, and taking 'þæt seax' to be the one forged by a *smiþ* in the charm, the implication of this is that the charmer is to take the *seax* from the patient, presumably in the manner of healers observed anthropologically to draw magical weapons from their patients, and put it in the liquid. For this conception of supernatural illness in Anglo-Saxon culture see Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* v.13 (ed. Colgrave–Mynors 1991, 498–502 esp. 500 n. 2). Other readings are possible.

centuries following conversion. Such beliefs do not bear witness to processes of Christianisation alone: they tell us about Anglo-Saxon constructions of mental health, illness and healing; of group identity and space; and even of gender and sexual relationships.

The rest of this introduction discusses my methodologies, and what I think they can and cannot reveal. Hereafter, the study falls into three parts. Historiographically, Old Norse evidence has dominated reconstructions of the beliefs of Germanic-speaking peoples, and has made its mark on interpretations of *ælf*. It is important, therefore, to assess what use can really be made of this material at the outset, and this comprises my first part. This does not merely clear the way for reassessing the Anglo-Saxon evidence, however: the reanalysed Norse material also provides a proximate and reasonably well-documented body of comparative material, relating both to the semantics of *ælf* and to the Anglo-Saxon world-views in which *ælfe* had meaning. The second part focuses on detailed reanalyses of all our primary Old English evidence for the meanings of *ælf*. For methodological transparency, these analyses are grouped by kind of source material— non-textual evidence, poetry, glosses and medical texts (excluding, on account of its unique importance, *Wið færstice*)—though at times this arrangement admittedly produces semantically rather heterogeneous groupings. The third part develops the wider significance of this data so as to move from the semantic meanings of *ælf* to the social and cultural meanings of *ælfe*. First, comparative narrative material is discussed. This provides models for understanding what kinds of narratives and beliefs the semantics of *ælf* are likely to reflect. Next, *Wið færstice* is reassessed in detail, in the light both of the preceding analyses and of comparative evidence from the early modern Scottish witchcraft trials, providing further important perspectives on *ælfe*. Finally, my conclusions are drawn together, and some of their further implications for the character of *ælfe* and their roles explored.

Two appendices present relevant material excluded from the main study. As several of my arguments involve detailed reference to linguistic variation which will not always be familiar to readers and has at times been poorly reported, Appendix 1 describes the grammatical history of *ælf*. In principle, the occurrence of *ælf* in place-names could be a valuable source of evidence for *ælf*'s semantics. In practice, however, the likelihood that examples represent a personal name *Ælf* is too great for the data to be useful; I demonstrate this in detail in Appendix 2. *Ælf*-words where *ælf* is a hypercorrect form of *æl*-, excluded from the main study in consequence, are assessed in Appendix 3.

As my usage above will suggest, the Anglian form *ælf* is the usual citation form for the *elf*-word in Old English (*DOE*, s.v. *ælf*; Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.vv. *ælf, ilf*), but for the plural, commentators often use the West Saxon form *ylfe*. This is reasonable insofar

as the singular *ylf and the plural *ælfe are probably only attested in later reflexes, but the inconsistency has caused confusion.[13] Therefore, I use *ælfe* here as my plural citation form. Two compounds, *ælfisc and *ælfig, are never attested in Anglian forms, but these normalised alternatives have been used by the *Dictionary of Old English*. I adopt *ælfisc*, as its existence in Old English is shown by Middle English reflexes, but since *ylfig* appears only in this West Saxon form, it seems excessive, and potentially misleading, to abandon it. The usual citation form for Middle and Modern English is *elf*, plural *elves* (*MED*, *OED*, s.v.), and for Scots *elf*, *elvis* (*DOST*, s.v.). However, where the texts under discussion demand it, I also use other Middle English citation forms.

As for cognate languages, Old Icelandic dictionaries may use *alfr* (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.v.; *DONP*, s.v.) or *álfr* (Cleasby–Vigfusson 1957, s.v.; Finnur Jónsson 1926–28, s.v.). *Alfr* was the normal form until perhaps the twelfth century, when lengthening to *álfr* took place (Noreen 1923, §124.3). Being otherwise unable to be consistent, I have preferred the more familiar *álfr*, despite the incongruity of using it regarding early texts. Medieval German dialects may have the citation forms *alp* (Lexer 1869–76, s.v.) or *alb* (*AHDWB*, s.v.; Lloyd–Springer 1988–, s.v.)—*alp* is preferred here; medieval Frisian has *alf* (Verwijs–Verdam–Stoett 1885–1941, s.v.) or *elf* (de Vries 1971, s.v.); I prefer *alf*.

I represent phonetic and phonemic reconstructions using the International Phonetic Alphabet. Translations are my own unless otherwise stated, and are not intended to have any literary merit. Occasionally, in texts not requiring a translation, I gloss unfamiliar terms and forms, and false friends, in curly brackets { } to distinguish my interventions from the parentheses and square brackets of authors and editors. Finally, some conventions of capitalisation, mainly for Old Icelandic, can be prejudicial to my investigations: most importantly, one normally reads of *Æsir* and *Vanir*, terms for pagan gods marked by capitalisation as ethnonyms, but of *álfar*, implicitly a race. To maintain these conventions in the present thesis is untenable. Although it would be most consistent with my arguments to capitalise all terms, it seems less prejudicial and more consistent with the conventions of the primary sources to abandon capitalisation in all cases: thus *æsir*, *vanir*, *álfar*.

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[13] The *MED* says that 'OE had a masc. *ælf*, pl. *ylfe*' (s.v. *elf*), as though it showed a systematic vowel alternation, as is genuinely the case in the etymological note for *fọ̄t* 'OE *fōt*; pl. *fēt*'. Perhaps in consequence, Kitson (2002, 105 and n. 25) seems to have inferred a West Saxon singular *ealf alongside the plural *ylfe*, and alongside the Anglian singular *ælf* a plural *elfe.

1. Historiography

The range of sources handled here is too disparate for a single historiographical survey to be appropriate, each of the following chapters considering past scholarship as required. But it is worth glancing at the consensus on Anglo-Saxon *ælfe*, for which *Wið færstice* has provided the inspiration. *Wið færstice*—and, despite his protestations, it alone—was the basis for Singer's statement in his British Academy lecture on 'Early English Magic and Medicine' (1919–20, 357; cf. Grattan–Singer 1952, esp. 52–62),

> a large amount of disease was attributed … to the action of supernatural beings, elves, Æsir, smiths or witches whose shafts fired at the sufferer produced his torments. Anglo-Saxon and even Middle English literature is replete with the notion of disease caused by the arrows of mischievous supernatural beings. This theory of disease we shall, for brevity, speak of as the *doctrine of the elf-shot*. The Anglo-Saxon tribes placed these malicious elves everywhere, but especially in the wild uncultivated wastes where they loved to shoot at the passer-by.

Singer's comments are the fount of a long tradition. 'In Anglo-Saxon times', Bonser reported, 'diseases were erroneously attributed to many causes which were usually of a supernatural nature … The evil was most usually attributed to the elves (who attacked with their arrows) or to "flying venom" ' (1963, 158; cf. 1926; 1939). Introduced into Middle English in 1929 by Müller's emendation of *vluekecche* ('*elf*-cake', apparently denoting an enlargement of the spleen) to *vlueschotte*, 'elf-shot' made a late debut in the Old English lexicon in the nineteen-eighties as *ælfscot*.[14] Most recently, according to Jolly's study of Anglo-Saxon 'elf-charms' (1996, 134; cf. 1998, 20, 26),

> elves were thought to be invisible or hard-to-see creatures who shot their victims with some kind of arrow or spear, thus inflicting a wound or inducing a disease with no other apparent cause (elfshot). They appear to be lesser spirits than the Æsir deities, but with similar armaments in spears and arrows. … This attack by elves was eventually linked with Christian ideas of demons penetrating or possessing animals and people, who then needed exorcism.

These interpretations have become a staple of histories of medieval European popular religion, witchcraft and medicine.[15] Moreover, Singer's 'doctrine of the elf-shot', not merely contagious between scholars, has spread to editions and translations of primary texts which do not mention *ælfe*, taking the 'malicious elves' with it.[16] Jolly has shown that the illustration to psalm 37 in the *Eadwine Psalter*, long imagined to depict 'elf-

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[14] Müller 1929, 89; Lecouteux 1987, 17–19; Swanton 1988, 297. The genuine first attestation of *elf-shot* is in Scots in the last quarter of the sixteenth century (Hall forthcoming [d]).

[15] e.g. Thomas 1971, 725; Kieckhefer 1989, 65; Mayr-Harting 1991, 28–29; Flint 1991, 87, 115, 165; Cameron 1993, 10, 141–42.

[16] See below, §6:1; more fully Hall forthcoming [c]. The earliest Scottish evidence for traditions of elf-shot has long been supposed to correlate with the English material, but here too, many cases which offer no evidence for such traditions have mistakenly been accepted, while the evidence of others has been misunderstood (Hall forthcoming [d]).

shot', is really a conventional depiction of demons, straightforwardly illustrating the psalm: 'the later iconography of elves as delightfully mischievous little figures playing tricks on people has caused scholars such as Grattan and Singer to read an Anglo-Saxon elf into this picture of demonic affliction' (1998, at 20, citing Grattan–Singer 1952, frontispiece). The reassessment of our other evidence is one of my principle tasks here.

As my quotations show, current assessments of *ælfe*'s roles in Anglo-Saxon medicine derive directly from the early twentieth century. Reflecting on that period in her anthropological classic *Purity and Danger*, Douglas observed (1966, 30) that

> comparative religion has always been bedevilled by medical materialism. Some argue that even the most exotic of ancient rites have a sound hygienic basis. Others, though agreeing that primitive ritual has hygiene for its object, take the opposite view of its soundness. For them a great gulf divides our sound ideas of hygiene from the primitive's erroneous fancies.

Douglas's objection to derogation and demythologisation alike was that, adopting these approaches, we fail consciously to orientate own cultural perspectives in relation to the cultures being studied (1966, esp. 30–36, 74–78). In both of the approaches which she outlined, the world-view of the student is imposed on the source material, which is, probably inevitably, found wanting; and both occur in the historiography of Anglo-Saxon medicine. Falling into the second of Douglas's camps, Singer and others considered Anglo-Saxon medicine 'a mass of folly and credulity' (Grattan–Singer 1952, 92; cf. Cameron 1993, 2–3). However, since the nineteen-sixties scholars have increasingly revealed the deep Latin learning underlying many Anglo-Saxon medical texts (see Jolly 1996, 99–102). Cameron in particular has argued that many remedies contained clinically effective ingredients, and that from the perspective of clinical medicine, Anglo-Saxons' 'prescriptions were about as good as anything prescribed before the mid-twentieth century' (1993, 117). For all its merits, however, Cameron's work is a case-study in Douglas's other bug-bear, medical materialism (cf. Glosecki 2000, 92–93). Cameron argued that 'we should … put ourselves as far as possible in the Anglo-Saxons' place, and … arrive at our assessments through the medical and physiological background of their time, not of ours' (1993, 3–4, at 4). But for historians to try to abandon their own belief-systems is a hopeless endeavour, leaving them and their audiences to impose their preconceptions unconsciously on the material studied (cf. Gurevich 1992 [1988], 6–9). Thus Cameron divided Anglo-Saxon medical practices into 'rational' and 'magical' categories, but found that 'it is sometimes difficult to decide whether a remedy is amuletic or rational in intent' (1993, 134)—presumably because he sought to impose an anachronistic distinction on his sources. Moreover, the quotation implies that much Anglo-Saxon behaviour was irrational—but *a priori* this seems no more likely to be true of Anglo-Saxons than of us (cf. Sjöblom 2000, 61). Douglas accepted that 'there is no

objection' to medical materialism 'unless it excludes other interpretations' (1966, 33)—a point amply supported by Cameron's insights. But his lip-service to the psychological importance of ritual (esp. 1993, 157–58) is insufficient for comprehending the elements of Anglo-Saxon culture which do not fit into its limited framework.

Facing the approaches to healing which differ between our societies and Anglo-Saxons'—of which *ælfe* are symptomatic—offers a different way into producing a more comprehensive and plausible assessment of Anglo-Saxon healing. *Ælfe* are neither to be explained away or ignored; nor are they to be reconstructed by imposing unwarranted assumptions upon the evidence, or by repeating those of earlier scholarship. The rigorous collection and reassessment of our evidence for *ælfe*—for what *ælfe* were thought to be and for what uses or effects those concepts had in Anglo-Saxon culture—is the subject of the following chapters. But it must be done in the context of an explicit theoretical framework.

2. Fundamental assumptions

Douglas's observations on the anthropology of medicine apply, *mutatis mutandis*, generally in the study of past societies: to avoid either dismissing past societies 'as irrational or as unworthy of serious historical consideration', or dismissing evidence contradicting the assumption that their members 'must "really" have thought in the same ways as we do', we need to invoke the concept of world-views (Burke 1997a, 169). By *world-view* I mean the sum of the conceptual categories which members of a society impose on the physical reality in which they exist. Change in the structuring of these categories is change in world-views; reconstructing these categories and their developments might conveniently be labelled *historical anthropology* (for a programmatic statement see Gurevich 1992 [1988]). A major methodology in this thesis is the integration of linguistic analyses into the reconstruction of Anglo-Saxons' world-views. Much of my work is founded on historical linguistic or literary critical methods, but my ultimate aims are neither linguistic, in the sense of documenting and explaining linguistic change, nor literary, in the sense of exploring the means by which texts affect their audiences. Literary and linguistic methods are means towards a wider understanding of belief in Anglo-Saxon societies—a combination of approaches and goals well-established in anthropology (see Durantil 1997).

Within this framework of historical anthropology, my guiding assumption is that *ælfe* were a 'social reality'.[17] They were not an objective reality, like houses and trees, which

[17] For the seminal discussion see Berger–Luckmann 1967; also Searle 1995.

can be readily perceived in the physical world and, insofar as anything can be, objectively proven to exist. But, as I and my society believe that coins have monetary value or that I am English, a critical mass of Anglo-Saxons accepted the reality of *ælfe*, and this collective belief made *ælfe* a social reality. Social realities are not mere fantasies: we cannot, as individuals, wish them away, any more than Beowulf could the dragon; *ælfe*, no less than the Christian God, could have played a significant role both in societies' constructions of the world and individuals' constructions of experience. Indeed, what looks like a social reality from an outsider's perspective may become an objective reality when the insider's perspective is adopted (cf. Turner 2003 [1992]). But the insider's perspective on *ælfe* can no longer be experienced, only reconstructed, and I have no choice but to admit my disbelief in *ælfe*'s objective reality, while accepting that objective experiences of Anglo-Saxons could have been construed as experience of *ælfe*. In this perspective, since there was no objective reality forcing societies to recognise the existence of *ælfe*—only cultural and social impulses—the study of *ælfe* is potentially especially illuminating for Anglo-Saxon culture and society: *ælfe* were, amongst other things, reflections and abstractions of Anglo-Saxons' changing ideals, concerns, and survival strategies.

3. Methodologies

The methodologies employed in this thesis are guided by the varying demands of the evidence, and are discussed at the appropriate junctures. However, some general themes should be discussed here. Crucially, this thesis not structured around a pre-defined category—'superstitions', 'monsters', 'pagan gods' or the like—but around a word, *ælf*. This involves two premises: that to reconstruct early medieval concepts and conceptual categories, we should build our reconstructions up from our primary evidence, rather than positing categories and then seeking evidence for them; and that one way of doing this is to examine the meanings of words in the vernacular languages of the cultures in question.

3.1 Categorising from the bottom up

The theoretical importance of reconstructing medieval conceptual categories rigorously on the basis of primary evidence—from the bottom up, as it were—is neatly illustrated by the recent *Thesaurus of Old English*. While an important achievement, this work proceeds from the top down, positing lexical categories based on Roget's *Thesaurus*, and using Bosworth and Toller's dictionary definitions to situate Old English words within

them (Roberts–Kay–Grundy 2000, I xvi–xx). This is the main *Thesaurus* entry concerning
ælf (Roberts–Kay–Grundy 2000, I §16.01.03.04):

> **16. The extrasensorial world**
> **16.01 A divine being**
> **16.01.03 A spectre, ghost, demon, goblin**
> **16.01.03.04 Elfin race:** Ælfcynn[o]
> **.Elf, goblin, etc.:** ælf(en), pūca[g], pūcel[og]
> **..Of elves:** ælfisc[og]
> **..Mountain elf:** beorgælfen[q], dūnælf(en), muntælfen[og]
> **..Field elf:** feldælfen[g], landælf[og]
> **..Wood elf:** wuduælfen[g], wudumær[g], wuduwāsa[g]
> **..Water elf:** sæælfen[g], wæterælfen[g]
> **..Nightmare caused by elf:** ælfādl[o], ælfsiden
> **.An incubus:** ælf, mera
> **.A succubus:** lēof

Notwithstanding a few points of fact,[18] my main concern is with the entry's assumptions
about categorisation. One wonders first what an 'Elfin race' is. The term is presumably
intended concisely to render something like 'the races of *ælfe* and like beings', but its
members are a motley collection. The ghost-word *mera* is presumably included because
Bosworth and Toller defined both it and *ælf* with *incubus* (1898, s.vv. *mæra*, *ælf*);
wudumær, attested only to gloss the name of the nymph Echo, perhaps appears because
ælfen, derived from *ælf*, likewise glosses only words for nymphs. One imagines that *leof*
('beloved') is included because it once glosses *succuba* (ed. Meritt 1959, 41 [no. 395]),
being taken therefore as a feminine counterpart to words for *incubus*, and so also to
denote an 'Elfin' being. One wonders why *mære* was excluded, being categorised instead
under *02.05.04.02 A dream*, since *mære* denotes beings like *succubae*, and its strong
variant *wudumær* and putative masculine counterpart *mera* are included in the entry.
Mære's categorisation as 'a dream' is predicated on its modern survival in *nightmare*
rather than its Old English usage, correctly reported by Bosworth and Toller, which
permits no doubt about *maran*'s corporeality (cf. Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *mære*;
§§6.3.4, 7.1.1). The inclusion of *wuduwasa* and *puca* is mysterious. In short, the *Elfin
race* of the *Thesaurus of Old English* is a modern and not an Anglo-Saxon construct.

   Still, these objections might merely reflect the *Thesaurus*'s implementation rather
than its premises. More telling, then, are the assumptions built into the *Thesaurus*'s

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[18] Principally, *feldælfen* and *landælf* are considered to attest to the 'field elf', but in the period
when the words were coined (see §§5:2.2, 5:3.2), *feld* probably still meant 'open, unobstructed
land'—though the translation 'field elf' may hold for *landælf* (see Gelling–Cole 2000, 269–74,
279–81). The interpretation of *ælfadl* and *ælfsiden* requires revision (see below, §§6:2.1, 6:3).
Ylfig, defined by Bosworth and Toller as 'affected by elves [?], mad, frantic' (1898, s.v. *ilfig*),
seems to have been omitted by mistake. *Mera* is a ghost-word: it occurs only in the Épinal
Glossary, as a scribal error (or Germanising) of the early weak feminine *merae* most clearly
attested in the Erfurt Glossary (ed. Pheifer 1974, 30 [no. 558]; Bischoff and others 1988, Épinal f.
99v, Erfurt f. 7v; for the ending see Campbell 1957, §§616–17); a masculine form should show the
retraction of */æ/* giving **mara* (see Hogg 1992a, §5.37.4).

structure. *Ælfe* are located in an 'extrasensorial world'. However, while we might infer an extrasensorial world in Christian Anglo-Saxon world-views (though see Mearns 2002, 97–100), it is not evident that *ælfe* belonged there; on the contrary, there is good evidence that they were to be found in the tangible world. The use of *divine being* may be justifiable, but divinity is an ideologically charged concept whose applicability to non-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture I doubt (cf. esp. §§2:4, 8:2.1). Some texts might justify the inclusion of *ælf* under 'spectre, ghost, demon, goblin', but others attest to quite different meanings, while we might question whether spectres, ghosts, demons and goblins, insofar as these words are applicable to Anglo-Saxon concepts at all, would have been grouped in this way: even if the *Thesaurus*'s categories are justifiable, they are not necessarily the most appropriate.

The *Thesaurus* shows the problems inherent in defining conceptual categories first and asking questions later. My focus in this thesis on one word proceeds from this position: we must try to judge with what words *ælf* overlapped semantically, and with what words it was systematically contrasted, by tracing these overlaps and contrasts in the primary evidence. That said, I do employ an analytical category of the 'supernatural', using *supernatural* in what seems to me its usual modern English usage: to denote phenomena viewed as transcending (or transgressing) normal (or natural) existence, as defined by the subject's observation of everyday life, and of what is possible in it. This must be briefly discussed here, not least because Neville has recently argued that 'on a basic level the Anglo-Saxons did not have a word or expression for the modern conception of the natural world because they did not conceive of an entity defined by the exclusion of the supernatural' (1999, 2–3). She had the Anglo-Saxons distinguishing only between the human world and the natural world, aligning beings such as monsters with the latter (1999, esp. 2–3, 31–35, 70–74). This interpretation can be questioned in various ways, but the crucial criticism is that it does not work: in practice, Neville did use the term *supernatural*, particulary in discussing *Beowulf* (e.g. 1999, 73, 118; cf. 107–9).[19] Anglo-Saxon culture could not have been Christianised as it was without adopting or adapting some conception of the supernatural: concepts of miracles, supernatural by definition, were fundamental to medieval Christianity, while Neville herself rightly

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[19] Implicit in Neville's argumentation (e.g. 1999, 71–73) is the etymologising objection also voiced by Tolkien (1983 [1963], 110), Lewis (1967, 64–68) and Ármann Jakobsson (1998, 54–55) that *supernatural* is paradoxical, as by definition everything is included in nature, such that nothing can be 'above' it. This argument is insubstantial, as it is precisely the paradox which it seeks to deny (and which Lewis accepted of miracles) that gives *supernatural* its significance. At a lexical level, Old English had the prefix *el-* 'foreign, strange; from elsewhere', and compounds using it form a substantial lexicon of otherness (*DOE*, s.v. *el-*); Mearns has argued from semantic evidence that although there are important differences between early medieval and modern English conceptions of the supernatural, the conception itself remains important to understanding Anglo-Saxon culture (2002, 101, 108–37, esp. 123–27).

placed God outside nature in Anglo-Saxon theology (1999 170–77). Her exclusion of these features from her conception of the supernatural world resulted in a strict focus on monsters (esp. 1999, 107–9), producing a reading in which Anglo-Saxons viewed nature and the supernatural solely as threats to humanity. But this overlooks the mediating role of Christian supernatural forces in Anglo-Saxon literature, as in nature-miracles. I argue for subtler reconstructions of the relationship between Anglo-Saxons and their world, in which the concept of the supernatural remains valid and necessary.

3.2 Language and Belief

The principle of taking care over establishing the meanings of the words which comprise our source-texts will meet no objection. I make use of all available evidence for semantics, including comparative philology and literary and manuscript contexts, and this too is probably accepted as the best approach to the semantics of less well-attested medieval words (cf. Mearns 2002, 1–39). Although we must often speak tentatively of *ælf*'s semantic 'associations', without always being able to specify whether these are denotations, connotations or patterns of collocation, such associations are illuminating nevertheless. What is less straightforward is my use of lexical semantics as a basis for mapping Anglo-Saxon beliefs. The potential of words to attest to beliefs was of course realised long ago, underpinning Grimm's seminal, and largely unsurpassed, *Deutsche Mythologie* (1882–88 [1875–78]). But since the heady days of Grimm's linguistic nationalism, or the seminal propositions of semantic field theory and linguistic determinism in the 1920s and '30s (surveyed by Lyons 1977, I 245–61; cf. Trier 1973; the articles in Whorf 1956), the theoretical validity of this approach has been questioned. A prelinguistic child can have a concept of a house; people perceive the difference between red and pink when their language uses one word of both; I may say that I am angry, while acknowledging that no word precisely denotes my experience.

Thus the medievalist who would, for want of alternative data, use the lexis as evidence for past world-views is in an uncomfortable position. In the cognitive sciences, debate over the extent of linguistic determinism is ongoing, and experiment has focused on issues which are not usually relevant here: categorisation and encoding of spatial relationships in grammar; closed lexical sets such as colours; or the role of language in learning to perform tasks.[20] In the face of these problems, linguistically-minded medievalists have either simply ignored the theoretical difficulties (e.g. Green 1998), or avoided making any assertions about the relevance of their linguistic studies to past societies (cf. Frantzen 1990; Gretsch 1999, 131, 159 n. 66, 425–26). Thus, surveying

[20] For recent surveys see the articles in Gentner–Goldin-Meadow 2003 and Banich–Mack 2003.

approaches to medieval popular religion, Lees commented that 'these studies do not conform to one methodological or theoretical school. They are instead feminist, historical, materialist, psychoanalytic, cultural, theological, and literary' (1999, 11). Lees's list is catholic, but linguistics is absent. Bloch, rightly observing of that in anthropological research informants' descriptions and explanations of their behaviour may not reflect the subconscious processes which can be observed through the study of behaviour itself, not only warned against using linguistically-articulated evidence in anthropology, but also against using language itself (1991).

Fortunately, linguistic determinism is not a theoretical prerequisite for the integration of lexical semantics into a social context. There is instead a well-established and theoretically-justified supposition that language reflects culture. This, as a generalisation, can hardly be denied—if language did not reflect culture then it would be an absurdly ineffectual tool for communication (cf. Berger–Luckman 1967, esp. 49–61). People can of course conceive of things for which they lack words, and the absence of a word does not prove the absence of corresponding concepts. However, it is reasonable to suppose *a priori* that the distribution of words in a lexicon attests to the relative cultural salience of the concepts which they denote, with absences at least suggesting low salience (Lyons 1977, I 246–50). Moreover, as Berger and Luckmann emphasised, language influences how people communicate their thoughts and so how communities construct their shared realities (1967, 51–52):

> the common objectivations of everyday life are maintained primarily by linguistic signification. Everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life.

Language not only reflects societies' world-views, therefore, but affects their form at a social level. However idiosyncratic an individual's experience, it will tend to be communicated and constructed within the community through the linguistic resources at the community's disposal. These premises provide basic theoretical underpinnings for the use of *ælf* as evidence for Anglo-Saxon culture.

That said, pending conclusive evidence on the subject, I accept Searle's argument that by definition, social realities cannot exist without symbols (1995, esp. 59–78, at 75):

> symbols do not create cats and dogs and evening stars; they create only the possibility of referring to cats, dogs, and evening stars in a publicly accessible way. But symbolization creates the very ontological categories of money, property, points scored in games and political offices, as well as the categories of words, and speech acts.

And as Searle argued, the symbol-system *par excellence* is that of language. As social realities, *ælfe* existed because the word *ælf* existed; it follows that, barring relationships

with objective realities or with innovative concepts not otherwise reflected in language, an *ælf* was what the word *ælf* meant.

An additional advantage to using language as evidence for belief is its structured character. Lévi-Strauss's pioneering structuralism in anthropology was, appropriately enough, inspired by the linguistic structuralism pioneered by Saussure,[21] and though no longer in vogue as such, structuralism has provided insights fundamental to both disciplines. 'No particular set of classifying symbols can be understood in isolation, but there can be hope of making sense of them in relation to the total structure of classifications in the culture in question' (Douglas 1966, vii). Structures in language, whether reflecting or encoding wider cultural classifications, offer important insights into classifications. The correlation of linguistic structures with wider belief has been demonstrated, for example, in the traditional grammatical structuring of Dyirbal, an aboriginal Australian language (Lakoff 1987, 92–104), and can be argued for in the correlation of grammatical gender and cultural gender in Indo-European and other languages (e.g. Curzan 2003, esp. 19–30). Such categorial structuring also extends to lexical semantics, in the overlaps of and contrasts between words' semantic fields. Though we lack, for example, Anglo-Saxon non-Christian mythological narratives—a point to which I return below—Old English texts containing *ælf* are relatively rich in evidence for linguistic systems. As I show below, these linguistic systems can be correlated with similar evidence in medieval Scandinavia which can itself be correlated with the rich Scandinavian mythological corpus, emphasising the validity of using linguistic categories to reconstruct Anglo-Saxon beliefs. As Schmitt wrote, 'it is not so much the documents that are lacking as the conceptual instruments necessary to understand them' (1983 [1973], 171).

3.3 The dynamic nature of belief

I also suppose that our texts are not merely articulations or reflections of belief: they were and remain active participants in a dialogue of belief between the members of textual communities, and between the communities and their tools of communication. The better to appreciate this perspective, we may consider some of the opening comments in Henderson and Cowan's recent, and significant, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History* (2001, 5–6):

> Researching Scottish fairy belief is rather like confronting a huge obscure painting which has been badly damaged and worn through time, great chunks totally obliterated and now completely irrecoverable, portions repainted by poorly skilled craftsmen, and other parts touched up by those

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[21] Seminal works are Lévi-Strauss 1968–77 [1945]; 1968–77 [1953]; see further Caws 2000.

> who should have known better … In assembling this material, we have not worked toward some deconstructionist end, but rather have tried to synthesise the individual components, to reconstruct the whole essence of fairy belief as a distinct phenomenon.

This evocative statement undeniably strikes a chord. It is in the tradition of folkloristics which abandoned the early nineteenth-century model for the production of folk literature —in which ancient traditions were inherited and bequeathed almost unconsciously by some undifferentiated 'folk'—to invoke instead the 'tradition bearer' (see Holbek 1987, esp. 23–45; Burke 1994, 3–22; Tangherlini 1994, 29–53). In this model, folk-traditions were seen to interact with society and to be transmitted by its individual members, bringing a new degree of plausibility to approaches to folk narrative. But, as Henderson and Cowan's comments show, it also introduced a new note of doubt: with the introduction of the humanly fallible 'tradition bearer', the quality of the transmission of folklore seemed less assured.

As Tangherlini pointed out, however, a superior model again is that of 'tradition participants' (1994, 29–33; cf. Burke 1997b, 188–89, 195–97). Scottish fairy belief may never have looked much more coherent than it does now: our 'obscure painting' need not represent degradation by faulty tradition bearers, but the dynamic and variable nature of tradition itself. It is human nature, and so it is scholars', to try to synthesise disparate evidence to create a coherent interpretation; but to assume that a society's beliefs have an 'essence' is risky. This theoretical development has not been restricted to folklorists, of course: 'man is not a cog in the wheel of history but an active participant in the historical process' (Gurevich 1992 [1988], 12); 'it is *speakers*, not *languages*, that innovate' (Milroy 1992, 169). Although Anglo-Saxons encountered more, and more varied, resources for constructing their *ælf*-lore than now remain to us, the processes of construction were fundamentally similar: they encountered the word *ælf* and surmised its significance, primarily, from the linguistic and discursive contexts in which it appeared. These were not merely expressions of belief, but became in turn part of the material from which tradition participants constructed and transmitted their own conceptions of the beliefs involved. Moreover, unlike our traditional starting-points for reconstructing beliefs concerning supernatural beings—(archi)episcopal denunciations like Wulfstan of York's, collections of legends from disparate times and places like Gervase of Tilbury's, or mythographies like Snorri Sturluson's—most of the sources I use here here were probably not intended to be formative. Glossators trying to elucidate Latin texts had little incentive to deploy Old English glosses in wilfully unusual ways and compilers of medical texts included remedies for what they perceived to be real threats. Our texts are not windows into past beliefs, but paths.

With dynamic belief, of course, comes the prospect of diachronic change. But although changes in the meanings of Old English words have been studied, it is more usual in studies of English semantic change to take Old English as one, effectively synchronic, stage in the history of English. Large projects like the *Thesaurus of Old English* or the *Dictionary of Old English* are, of course, ill-placed to assess diachronic aspects of Old English semantic variation, and our options are in any case limited by the fact that most surviving Old English manuscripts were written in conservative literary registers over just two centuries. However, this habit disengages linguistic evidence from historical change. The present study, therefore, pays careful attention to our evidence, slight though it is, for variation over time.

3.4 Comparison

It would be unwise to interpret the evidence for *ælfe* without reference to a broader cultural context. Not only is a context necessary for the wider significance of linguistic evidence to be assessed, but the sparse nature of our Old English evidence means that appropriate comparative material must provide important controls over its interpretation. Here I use comparative material of two main types, linguistic and narrative—the former primarily as a direct source of semantic evidence, the latter primarily as a source of models. Both of these uses go back to the pioneering linguistic and folkloric research of the nineteenth century; my approaches here differ mainly in the degree of caution exercised about what is suitable for comparison and what we can infer from it.

My comparative linguistic material comprises medieval Germanic cognates of *ælf* and other pertinent Old English words. No interpretation of the Old English evidence should make cognate evidence unduly difficult to explain, and in this way cognates exert a direct control over the interpretation of the Old English material. Additionally, however, correspondences between cognate evidence and Old English evidence can be used to suggest positively what interpretation of the Old English material is most plausible. Comparative narrative material, on the other hand, is rarely useful as direct evidence, as our lack of relevant Anglo-Saxon narratives precludes the comparison of like material with like. But narratives in which *ælf* appeared must not only have helped to determine the word's meanings, but also the wider meanings of *ælfe*. Narratives in medieval Norse, Irish, French and later English and Scots, then, can show what kinds of narratives *ælf*'s semantics are likely to have related to, providing models for the interpretation of semantic data. Although in theory narratives from any culture could provide models for interpreting the Old English material, I have focused on those from medieval North-Western Europe. This reflects my specialisms, but also provides a proximate reading

context for the Old English evidence. With due care to avoid circularity of argument, we can use these narratives not only to help to reconstruct Anglo-Saxon beliefs, but to see what is distinctive about them in their historical and cultural context.

One kind of comparison is excluded here, however: art history. Visual art might in theory have been important in shaping Anglo-Saxon beliefs—Buxton could argue of Ancient Greece, for example, that 'for the development of the mythological tradition artistic representations were not merely *as* important as verbal narratives, but *more* important' (1994, 15 n. 24). One thinks also early medieval Scandinavia, with its picture-stones (see Pulsiano 1993, s.v. *Viking Art: Pictorial art*) and poetic responses, such as *Haustlǫng*, to visual portrayals of myths (see North 1997b, esp. xiv, xxiii–xxiv), and of the functions of pictures in Anglo-Saxon Christianity (see Raw 2004). But it is not, at present, possible to identify any images or motifs as *ælfe*: as I have said above, the one traditional candidate proves to be a conventional depiction of demons (§1:1; Jolly 1998). Pre-conversion Anglo-Saxon art, where non-Christian belief might most clearly appear, tends to be very abstract, and its significances fiendishly hard to deduce (Hawkes 1997). The Franks Casket and its Scandinavian analogues show that early Anglo-Saxons probably did depict mythical and heroic figures naturalistically on perishable materials,[22] while strange beasts and monsters are prominent in early Anglo-Saxon art and demand to be understood within a wider literary and linguistic context (cf. Clemoes 1995, 3–67; Hall 2002, 2–3). We also have Anglo-Scandinavian mythological images, including several of Vǫlundr, described as one of the *álfar* in the Old Norse *Vǫlundarkviða* (see Lang 1976; §2:3.2). But to equate depictions of this sort with *álfar* or *ælfe* would be tenuous.

4. Popular belief?

As Cubitt has recently pointed out (2000a, 57), English historiography exhibits

> a curious state of affairs where it is respectable for a historian to discuss popular practices in any period from about 1100 onwards but not for earlier centuries. Anglo-Saxon religion tends therefore to be seen from the top down, in terms of the church's teaching and regulations. The

[22] I am not aware that these analogues have been noted before. Foremost are the almost identical portrayals of Weland on the Franks Casket; of a smith on a fragmentary tenth- or eleventh-century cross-shaft from Iona (*Argyll* 1971–92, IV 212 [no. 95]); and of Reginn on the porch of Hylestad stave-church in Norway, from the thirteenth century (see e.g. Turville-Petre 1964, pl. 34; Pulsiano 1993, s.v. *Wood Carving* §1 fig. 178). Although the Franks Casket is the earliest of these, its image is almost certainly innovative: whereas in the other pictures, the smith holds a hammer in his right hand, Weland holds a cup, the hammer floating above his hand as a blind motif. The casket's right-hand panel resembles the third scene down on a picture stone in Gotland, Stora Hammars I (ed. Lindqvist 1941–42, II fig.440); it also repeats the motif of the *genii cucullati*, found on carved stones both in Britain and the Rhineland (see Green 1992, s.v. *Genius Cucullatus*).

resulting picture is dominated by the institutional and by the learned. Thus the religious beliefs of the seventh to eleventh centuries look extraordinarily educated and orthodox. But it seems most unlikely that the Christian beliefs of the ordinary lay person in the pre-Conquest period simply consisted of those derived from orthodox teaching.

Providing a new perspective on Anglo-Saxons' beliefs is a central aim of the present thesis, and it is a tendency, if not a tenet, of the historical anthropology with which I have aligned my work (§1:2) that the lower and larger echelons of society are the focus of study. However, I do not claim to have written a study of Cubitt's 'popular practices', or, to take other likely labels, 'popular belief' or 'folklore'; and one quails in the present context at the terminological difficulties of 'popular religion'. The usefulness of the concept of popular belief regarding Anglo-Saxon culture is questionable—because it is either inapplicable or untraceable (cf. Cubitt 2000a, 55–57). While it is evident that learned clergymen had access to different systems of belief, and lay aristocrats more access to clergymen, than the rest of the population, it is not clear that we should hypothesise a division between 'popular' and 'elite' cultures even for early modern Europe (Burke 1994, esp. 3–64), let alone for Anglo-Saxon England with its far slighter social stratification. Conversely, however, most of our evidence for *ælfe* derives from texts produced by a small, learned, clerical, male, Southumbrian and probably noble section of Anglo-Saxon society. Even personal names containing *ælf* are those of the nobility. If we do posit a division between Anglo-Saxon popular and elite culture, then, there is no question that our evidence is entirely of the elite. If the beliefs of this group are reflected among the peasantry in later times, it may be because of an earlier trickle-down process rather than a once-homogeneous belief-system. So although Jolly saw the study of 'popular religion in late Saxon England' as a way of putting 'elf-charms in context' (1996), the evidence concerning *ælfe* is 'popular' only insofar as we habitually abuse this term to refer to beliefs which do not fit post-Reformation expectations of orthodox Christian belief.

One is entitled to wonder whether linguistic evidence might, despite its provenance from a limited section of society, attest better to wider beliefs. As a given language is often a medium of communication across all sections of society, the meanings of words might be more consistent across social divisions than other features of culture. This possibility rests on questions concerning the effects of social divisions in Anglo-Saxon society on language, and on the nature of the interplay between language and belief. But historical sociolinguistics is a nascent discipline, whose major advances relate to later periods (see Machan 2003; Nevalainen–Raumolin-Brunberg 2003, esp. 1–25, 133–35). While evidence is growing for the differences between the lexica of the learned and unlearned in the Anglo-Saxon historical period (e.g. Biggam 1995), we have next to no idea about the effects of other sorts of social division on Old English (cf. Derolez 1989;

1992). It is tantamount to an admission of ignorance that our best evidence is presently

Bede's statement concerning the thegn Imma in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* of about 731

that 'animaduerterunt, qui eum diligentius considerabant, ex uultu et habitu et

sermonibus eius, quia non erat de paupere uulgo, ut dixerat, sed de nobilibus' ('those

who considered him more carefully noticed, from his features, his bearing and his

speech, that he was not from among the poor people, as he had said, but from the noble'

iv.22; ed. Colgrave–Mynors 1991, 402). Even disregarding the possibility of social

register prior to the Anglo-Saxon migrations and the later complications of Scandinavian

settlement and the Norman Conquest, we could posit the swift growth of Old English

registers following the Anglo-Saxon migrations as society grew more stratified (on which

process see Härke 1997, esp. 141–47), dialects gained and lost prestige as kingdoms

competed for influence over one another,[23] and arguably as varieties of Old English

characterised by substrate influence from earlier languages developed.[24] Accordingly,

hints have begun to be identified to this effect in our evidence for late Old English

phonology.[25]

Extreme though this scenario might be, it would be unwise at the present stage of

research to make assumptions about the value of our Old English evidence for the beliefs

of social groups other than the elite producers and consumers of that evidence. This

thesis is a study of elite beliefs, elucidating something of their changing meanings and

functions, and emphasising the extent to which Christian Anglo-Saxon culture included

or incorporated traditional ideologies.

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[23] Toon argued for Mercian influence on Kentish speech (1983), but his findings have not generally been accepted (see Lowe 2001). Smith, positing Anglian influence on West Saxon, may fare better (2002). See also Gretsch 2000, esp. 89–106.

[24] This prospect long foundered on the dearth of lexical borrowings into Old English. But new approaches to the subject suggest the possibility of grammatical influence (see the studies in Filppula–Klemola–Pitkänen 2002).

[25] Hall 2001b, esp. 84. Gretsch has argued in addition that the gloss *burhspæce* for *urbanitatis* presupposes differences in speech between (certain) inhabitants of a *burh* and others (1999, 164). I am not confident, however, that that *burhspæce* has not merely calqued its first element (*burh*, 'stronghold, city') on the *urbs* ('city') implicit in *urbanitas*.

Part 1

An Old Norse Context

Chapter 2

An Old Norse Context

Primarily because of Icelanders' late conversion, linguistic conservatism and readiness to transmit literature rooted in pre-conversion culture, Scandinavia has long provided the basis for research into all traditional Germanic-speaking cultures. Accordingly, reconstructions of *ælfe* have often been shaped by evidence for the medieval Scandinavian *álfar*. However, it would be unwise to impose Scandinavian evidence incautiously on other cultures. For all its conservatism, our Scandinavian evidence mostly post-dates the conversion to Christianity, exhibiting profound changes in consequence. If only for historiographical reasons, then, any reassessment of Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* must begin with the reassessment of their Scandinavian cousins. I begin here by showing how the traditional point of departure for reconstructing pre-Christian Scandinavian beliefs, Snorri Sturluson's writings, is unreliable regarding *álfar* and certain other pertinent issues. Although later medieval Icelandic texts also afford evidence for the meanings of *álfr*,[26] these are even trickier as evidence for pre-conversion beliefs and as comparisons for Anglo-Saxon material, so I include them here only on a few specific points, focusing instead on poetry which seems likely to be old or culturally conservative, and which afforded Snorri's own main primary source material. I turn first to skaldic verse, the distinctively Scandinavian praise-poetry first attested from the ninth century. The association of skaldic verses with named poets and subjects, combined with appropriately critical analyses of these connections, permits the dating of poems, the reliability of the dates being somewhat assured by the poems' intricate metre and diction, which inhibited recomposition in oral transmission. Next I consider Eddaic verse, whose mythological subject matter makes it in some ways more useful than skaldic verse, but whose more flexible structures permitted greater variability in transmission, so precluding precise dating. In addition to providing this primary evidence, however, Old Norse material, combined with the prominence of anthropological approaches in recent Scandinavian scholarship, affords evidence and approaches for assessing the wider significance of beliefs in *álfar* in early medieval Scandinavian world-views. This provides models for interpreting the Old English evidence considered in the subsequent chapters. I should mention at the outset—since they will be prominent later in the thesis

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[26] See *DONP*, s.vv. *alfr* and its compounds; Finnur Jónsson 1926–28, s.vv. *álfkona*, *álfr*; Boberg 1966, 104–107 [F200–399]; Motz 1973–74, 97–98, 100–101; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2003, 170–75; cf. the corpus of *huldufólkssögur* maintained by the Orðabók Háskólans at <http://www.lexis.hi.is/ordlyklar/alfar/alfar.htm>.

—that I do not extensively discuss Norse words for supernatural females. Females are less well-represented in our Norse mythological sources, partly defined in any case through their husbands, and partly functioning as units of inter-group exchange rather than as paradigmatic representatives of groups themselves.[27]

1. Snorri's writings

Snorri Sturluson (born in the late 1170s, dying in 1241) seems to have composed and edited the texts comprising *Snorra Edda*, his treatise on Norse poetry and mythology, between perhaps 1220 and 1241—more than two centuries after Iceland's official conversion—while much of what we think of as *Snorra Edda* may derive from later editors (Faulkes 1982, xv, xxix–xxxiii; 1998, I xxxix–l). *Snorra Edda* comprises four texts: a prologue, *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal*, probably composed in reverse order. It is complemented (and sometimes contradicted) by the partly mythological *Ynglinga saga*, the opening part of *Heimskringla*—the magisterial history of the kings of Norway accepted probably to have been composed by Snorri in the same period as his *Edda* (see Whaley 1991, 13–19). Both texts are founded on quotations of older verse. Thus *Ynglinga saga* is built around the poem *Ynglingatal*, a poem cataloguing how each king in the dynasty founded by Yngvi died, composed by Þjóðólfr ór Hvini around the end of the ninth century (see further §§2:2, 7:1.1). Snorri's work is, therefore, a complex blend of old and new, involving preservation, re-interpretation, neatening and misunderstanding of inherited traditions by both Snorri himself and his redactors.[28]

1.1 *Snorra Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*

Álfr occurs in *Snorra Edda* most often in quotations of Eddaic verse, and in Snorri's prose paraphrases of them. But this reveals more about Snorri's sources, which are usually attested more completely elsewhere, than his own views. Snorri's most influential deployment of *álfr*, however, occurs in his own enumeration in *Gylfaginning* of the *hǫfuðstaðir* ('chief places') of the cosmos (ed. Faulkes 1982, 19):

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[27] See especially Jochens 1996, 51–56; Clunies Ross 1994–98, I 64–66; 85–186; cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 1989 [1977]; more generally Clover 1993; Whitney 1999.
[28] The seminal analysis is Holtsmark 1964; see also Clunies Ross 1994–98, esp. I 32–33, with references; O'Donoghue 2003.

Margir staðir eru þar gǫfugligr. Sá er einn staðr þar er kallaðr er Álfheimr. Þar byggvir fólk þat er ljósálfar heita, en døkkálfar búa niðri í jǫrðu, ok eru þeir ólíkr þeim sýnum en myklu ólíkari reyndum. Ljósálfar eru fegri en sól sýnum, en døkkálfar eru svartari en bik.

There are many places there which are magnificent. There is one place which is called *Álfheimr*. A people lives there which is called *ljósálfar*, but *døkkálfar* live below in the earth, and they are different from them in appearance and very different in practice. *Ljósálfar* are more handsome than the sun in appearance, but *døkkálfar* are blacker than pitch.

Ljósálfr ('light-*álfr*') is repeated shortly after, in a detail appended to the description of *Víðbláinn*, the highest of Snorri's three *himnar* ('skies'): 'En ljósálfar einir hyggjum vér at nú byggvi þá staði' ('But we think that the *ljósálfar* alone currently inhabit those places'; ed. Faulkes 1982, 20). Snorri also mentions *Svartálfaheimr* ('black/dark-*álfar*'s-world'): seeking a way to bind Fenrisúlfr, 'sendi Alfǫðr þann er Skírnir er nefndr, sendimaðr Freys, ofan í Svartálfaheim til dverga nokkura' ('All-father sent him who is called Skírnir, Freyr's messenger, down into Svartálfaheimr to some *dvergar*'; ed. Faulkes 1982, 28).

   Ljósálfr and *døkkálfr* are unique in Old Norse. *Svartálfr* does occur in *Ektors saga ok kappa hans*, from around 1300 (*DONP*, s.v. *alfs·sonr*), but almost certainly by borrowing from *Snorra Edda*. It has been observed before that the *døkkálfar* and *svartálfar* seem to be *dvergar* under new names: their characteristics are identical with *dvergar*'s, and *dvergar* do not otherwise occur in the cosmology of *Gylfaginning* (see Holtsmark 1964, 37–38; Motz 1973–74, 96–97 *et passim*; cf. Grimm 1882–88 [1875–78], II 444–49). When in *Skáldskaparmál* Þórr demands that Loki have *svartálfar* make gold hair for his wife, Loki goes to beings otherwise denoted by *dvergr*; Andvari the *dvergr* is found in *Svartálfaheimr* (ed. Faulkes 1998, I 41–43, 45); and Mitchell has argued that the narrative function of the *svartálfar* is best paralleled by the *jǫtnar* of whom Skírnir seeks Gerðr for Freyr in *Skírnismál* (2000b, 67–69), and with whom I align the *dvergar* below (§§2:2, 2:3.1). Despite long-standing scepticism, however (e.g. Vries 1956–57, I 259), the *ljósálfar* have maintained a reputation as a race of ethereal, celestial '(light-)elves' (e.g. Peters 1963, 253; Motz 1973–74, 96, 98–100, *et passim*; Simek 1993 [1984], s.v. *light elves*).

   However, as Holtsmark showed in 1964, Snorri's description of *Víðbláinn* was almost certainly influenced by (and possibly based on) the account of the angels in the *Elucidarius*, an early twelfth-century digest of Christian theology translated into Icelandic by about 1200 (Firchow–Grimstad 1989, xvii, xxvi), certainly used elsewhere

in *Snorra Edda*.[29] The oldest manuscript of the *Elucidarius*, AM 674a 4to, includes the dialogue (ed. Firchow and Grimstad 1989, 12–14, with slight normalisation)[30]

> D(iscipulus). Huar byggver G(oþ). Magister. Hvorvetna es velde hans en þo es oþle hans iscilningar himne. D(iscipulus). Huat es scilningar himinn Magister Þrir ero himnar. Einn licamlegr sa es ver megom sia. Annarr andlegr. þar es andlegar scepnor bvggua þat ero englar. Enn þriþe es scilningar himinn þar es heilog þrenning bvggver. oc helger englar mego þar sia G (oþ).

> Pupil: Where does God live? Master: Wherever his power extends; however, his native region is in the sky of intellect. Pupil: What is the sky of intellect? Master: There are three skies. One is bodily, that which we can see. The second is spiritual (*andlegr*), where the spiritual beings live who are angels. But the third is the sky of intellect, where the Holy Trinity lives; and there can holy angels see God.

From this, Snorri derived his three *himnar*; his use of the *Elucidarius* in creating the *ljósálfar*, who 'eru fegri en sól' ('are more beautiful than the sun') is suggested by the *Elucidarius*'s 'englar es .vii. hlutu*m* ero fegre an sol' ('angels, which are seven times more beautiful than the sun'; ed. Firchow and Grimstad 1989, 8; cf. 'angeli, qui solem septuplo sua vincunt pulchritudine' in the original, ed. Lefèvre 1954, 361). Admittedly, the *Elucidarius* situates its *englar* in the second tier of heaven, *andlegr*, rather than the third, which is where the *ljósálfar* appear in *Snorra Edda*. Nor is the phrase *fegri en sól* particularly distinctive (cf. *Vǫluspá* stanza 64; ed. Neckel 1962, 15). Even so, a verbal connection between the *Elucidarius* and Snorri's description of the *ljósálfar* seems probable, *ljósálfar* being a paganisation of Christian angels. It is sufficiently likely, at any rate, that Snorri's description cannot in itself be relied upon as evidence for pre-conversion beliefs.

Snorri presumably renamed the *dvergar*, therefore, to suggest that they were to *ljósálfar* as fallen angels were to heavenly ones—a characteristic accommodation of traditional cosmology to Christian. That Snorri chose *álfr* as a counterpart for the Christian *engill* ('angel') is not without interest; if nothing else it suggests that *álfr* had positive connotations. However, Snorri had few options at this point (for partial surveys of possible words, see Cahen 1921, 9–28; Kuhn 1969–78, IV 258–65). Of the other native Norse words denoting male supernatural beings which had positive connotations, Snorri had already employed *ás* and *vanr*, while the plurals *regin* and *tívar* were both archaic and well-entrenched as synonyms for the *æsir*. Snorri's only likely alternatives were the

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[29] Holtsmark 1964, 35–38; cf. Simek 1993 [1984], s.vv. *andlangr*, *víðbláinn*; Clunies Ross 1986, 55–58.
[30] Cf. the Latin original (ed. Lefèvre 1954, 362):

> D. – Ubi habitat Deus? M. – Quamvis ubique potentialiter, tamen in intellectuali caelo substantialiter. D. – Quid est hoc? M. – Tres caeli dicuntur: unum corporale, quod a nobis videtur; aliud spirituale, quod spirituales substantiae, scilicet angeli, inhabitare creduntur; tertium intellectuale, in quo Trinitas sancta a beatis facie ad faciem contemplatur.

rather colourless *vættr* ('(supernatural) being') and *andi* ('spirit'). The fact that he chose *álfr* over these can be adequately explained from other evidence: Snorri knew the kenning *alfrǫðull* (denoting the sun and discussed below, §2:2; ed. Faulkes 1998, I 85, 133), which could be taken to associate *álfar* with light, and may have felt a need to fit *álfar* into his mythography which did not extend to the more generic terms *vættr* and *andi*.

Interestingly, Snorri's usage of *álfr* in *Skáldskaparmál*—probably composed before *Gylfaginning* (Faulkes 1982, xx)—is much closer to that of his poetic sources. For example, Snorri states that 'Mann er ok rétt at kenna til allra Ása heita. Kent er ok við jǫtna heiti, ok er þat flest háð eða lastmæli. Vel þykkir kent til álfa' ('It is also proper to call a person by the names of all the *æsir*. They are also known by the names of *jǫtnar*, and that is mostly as satire or criticism. It is thought good to name after (the) *álfar*'; ed. Faulkes 1998, I 40, cf. 5). This matches attested skaldic usage (discussed below, §2:2), but does not fit well with Snorri's own mythography. It is curious that the *vanir*, who are so prominent in *Gylfaginning* as the companions of the *æsir*, are absent. I argue below on other grounds that *vanr* and *álfr* were (partial) synonyms, and it seems likely that when Snorri wrote of *álfar* in *Skáldskaparmál*, he was thinking of the figures whom in *Gylfaginning* he would call *vanir*; but whatever the case, the problem emphasises how the innovative mythography of *Gylfaginning* fails to account fully for traditions even as Snorri himself reported them.

Álfr does occur in *Ynglinga saga*, in the epithet of Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr ('*Álfr* of Geirstaðir', ch. 48–49; ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 4, 79–82), for whose son, Snorri claims in the saga's preface, Þjóðólfr ór Hvini composed *Ynglingatal*. But *Ynglingatal* itself does not contain the epithet. Although no explicit explanation for the name is ever given, it has excited speculation linking *álfar* with the dead, because in other accounts, which Heinrichs has argued to have originated in a twelfth-century *Óláfs þáttr Geirstaðaálfs* (1993, 57), people sacrifice to Óláfr after his death.[31] But, besides Heinrichs's point that the ideology of the *þáttr* is very much of the later twelfth century, its account of Óláfr's cult perhaps reflecting saints' cults (1993, 44–50; cf. Baetke 1964, 40–47; Sundqvist 2002, 291), this is not clearly the reason for Óláfr's name. Various other factors might be relevant: his mother comes from Álfheimar; as I discuss below, *álfr* is common in poetic epithets for men and may be also be an epithet of Freyr, from whom Óláfr is descended in the sagas (§§2:2–3); and in the *þáttr*, Óláfr is especially handsome, a characteristic shared by *álfar* in the *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum*, from around

[31] e.g. Ellis 1968 [1943], 111–16; Chadwick 1953–57, 182–4; 1946, 58–59; Vries 1956–57, I 258–60; Turville-Petre 1964, 231; Schjødt 1991, 305–7.

1300 (ed. af Petersens–Olson 1919–25, 25). Óláfr's epithet is not, therefore, useful evidence for the early meanings of *álfr*.

1.2 Snorri and the *vanir*

Before proceeding to the poetic evicence, it is worth turning briefly to Snorri's accounts of the *vanir*, whose principal representatives are Njǫrðr, Freyr and Freyja. As I have observed, Snorri sometimes uses *álfr* where, according to *Gylfaginning*, we would expect *vanr*, while some of Snorri's evidence for the *vanir* is relevant to the meanings of *álfr* and *ælf*. Aspects of Snorri's *vanir* must be ancient (Vries 1956–57, ɪ 467–72, ɪɪ 173–77; Näsström 1995, 47–60). But our evidence for *vanir* as such is problematic. While *ás* and *álfr* are attested in all branches of Germanic, and *álfr* at least has a clear Indo-European origin, *vanr* occurs only in North Germanic—mainly in Snorri's prose, disappearing early from the Scandinavian languages—and is etymologically obscure (Vries 1961, svv. *áss 1*, *vanr 1*, *vaningi*; §3:1).[32] The simplex *álfr* occurs in ten different Eddaic poems and *vanr* in only six; excluding *Alvíssmál*, which repeats both words so often, *álfr* occurs eighteen times in the Eddaic corpus, and *vanr* only five (Kellogg 1988, s.vv. *alfr*, *1. vanr*). Whereas *álfr* is common in the skaldic corpus and a productive base for kennings (see §2:2), *vanr* occurs only thrice, once as a simplex and twice in the kenning *vanabrúðr* ('bride of the *vanir* [=Freyja]'; Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.v. *Vanr* 1.; cf. Kuhn 1969–78, ɪᴠ 272–73). Quite what this means is uncertain. The distribution may partly reflect the poetic convenience of *álfr*, whose range of potential alliterative partners was much wider than *vanr*'s, but this does not account for the absence of cognates and later reflexes for *vanr*. Moreover, whereas *ás*, *álfr*, *jǫtunn* and *mann* are all attested as the first element of place-names in their nominative stem form (e.g. *Ásgarðr*; *Álfheimr*, *Jǫtunheimr*, *Mannheimr*), *vanr* is only compounded in the genitive plural, in *Vanaheimr*, suggesting later formation (Kuhn 1969–78, ɪᴠ 274).

Kuhn inferred that 'der Wanen-name in den westnordischen Ländern mindestens bis gegen 1000 noch kaum bekannt war' ('the name *vanir* was, at least until around 1000, still barely known in the West-Norse[-speaking] regions'; 1969–78, ɪᴠ 276). In a variant

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[32] North suggested that the prototheme of OE *wanseoce*, occurring among interlinear glosses on *comitiales* ('epileptics') in Aldhelm's *Prosa de virginitate* (quoted below, §6:4.1), is cognate with *vanr* (1997, 52, 177–78). However, *vanr* is an *i*-stem and as such should appear in OE as **wene —unless we assume declension-change, adding another hypothesis to the argument. (Alternatively, if *wan-* is considered a borrowing of *vanr*, it is not evidence for a Common Germanic etymon.) I suspect that this is simply the common if semantically problematic Old English adjective *wann* (on whose semantics see Breeze 1997; putatively 'dark'), *wann* denoting a symptom of illness in Old English (e.g. Wright 1955, f. 124v; cf. Hall forthcoming [c], §3) and in Old Frisian *wanfelle*, *wanfellic* ('with bruised skin, black and blue'; see Bremmer 1988, 11).

on an old theme (on which see Näsström 1995, 61–62), he posited that the cult of the *vanir* came from Sweden. However, new words do not necessarily imply new concepts—Njǫrðr at least was by no means a newcomer—and numerous other models could explain the rise of *vanr* in our sources, particularly if we posit that it was a partial synonym of a commoner word. *Vanr* might be an archaic Germanic word surviving only in Norse, its brief prominence perhaps reflecting the decaying of an earlier taboo-status followed by eradication by Christianisation, and *álfr* a euphemism ('white one', see §§3:1, 7:3) coined for it in Germanic. Alternatively, *álfr* might be the older word, *vanr* perhaps being borrowed into North Germanic, conceivably as a now-lost ethnonym. Either term could originally have denoted a single deity, subsequently being generalised to associated beings (cf. §2:3.1; Kuhn 1969–78, IV 272). Without establishing a conclusive argument for *vanr*'s etymology, I doubt that we will be able to resolve this question. But it is clear that while *ás* and *álfr* are well-attested, *vanr* is much less prominent than Snorri's mythography would suggest.

Snorri's evidence for *vanir* cannot be reassessed here in full. Much has been made of what has become known as the '*æsir-vanir* war',[33] but such evidence as we have for this—even Snorri's own—is contradictory and problematic (cf. McKinnell's reassessment of the poetic evidence, 2001). Likewise, the *vanir* are conventionally associated with 'fertility' (or *Fruchtbarkeit*, *fruktbarhet*, etc.), a supposition which has underlain various interpretations,[34] but this originates in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century passion for 'fertility cults' and needs to be reassessed (cf. Sundqvist 2002, esp. 18–38, on its historiographical partner in crime, 'sacral kingship'). Snorri's evidence for the association is slight, and one might emphasise instead Adam of Bremen's unequivocal association of health and agricultural prosperity with Thor, Freyr's probable counterpart Fricco instead being explicitly associated with peace and marriages, which could be interpreted as patronage of conflict-resolution.[35]

One point in *Ynglinga saga*, however (ch. 4; ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 13), demands closer attention because it may have an Anglo-Saxon analogue:

> Njǫrð ok Frey setti Óðinn blótgoða, ok váru þeir díar með Ásum. Dóttir Njarðar var Freyja. Hon var blótgyðja. Hon kenndi fyrst með Ásum seið, sem Vǫnum var títt. Þá er Njǫrðr var með Vǫnum, þá hafði hann átta systur sína, því at þat váru þar lǫg. Váru þeira bǫrn Freyr ok Freyja. En þat var bannat með Ásum at byggva svá náit at frændsemi.

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[33] Turville-Petre 1964, 156–62; Dumézil 1973a, 2–25; 1973b, 93–105; Dronke 1988; 1997, 41–44; North 1997a, esp. 33–38; cf. Vries 1956–57, II 208–14.

[34] e.g. Vries 1956–57, II 163; Turville-Petre 1964, 156; Dumézil 1973a [1959], 2–25; Schjødt 1991, 304–5.

[35] *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes 1982, 24; cf. *Ynglinga saga* chapters 9–10, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 22–25; *Historia Hammaburgenisis Ecclesiae*, ed. Schmeidler 1917, 257–60; cf. Mitchell 1983 on *Skírnismál*.

Óðinn established Njǫrðr and Freyr as sacrifice-chieftains, and they were gods[36] along with the *æsir*. Njǫrðr's daughter was Freyja. She was a sacrifice-goddess. It was she who acquainted first the *æsir* with *seiðr*,[37] which was customary among the Vanir. When Njǫrðr was among the *vanir*, he was married to his sister, because that was the custom there. Their children were Freyr and Freyja. But that was forbidden among the *æsir*, for people so closely related to live together.

The family relationships here are well-paralleled in Eddaic and skaldic verse (Vries 1956–57, ɪɪ 173–75). Njǫrðr's incest is paralleled in *Lokasenna*;[38] it has caused some consternation among scholars (e.g. Näsström 1995, 66–67), but it is neither uncommon nor surprising for gods' sexual behaviour to contravene the norms of believers' societies (for Classical parallels see Lefkowitz 1993). Conversely, Snorri's association of Freyja with *seiðr* is poorly-paralleled (Näsström 1995, 82–85), especially now that McKinnell has cast doubt on the traditional identification of Heiðr and Gullveig with Freyja in *Vǫluspá* stanzas 21–22 (ed. Neckel 1962, 5–6; McKinnell 2001). But Snorri's explicit association of *seiðr* with the *vanir* is noteworthy because the second element of the Old English compound *ælfsiden* is cognate with *seiðr*, possibly associating *ælfe* with *siden* as Snorri associates *vanir* with *seiðr* (see §6:3.1).

2. *Álfr* in skaldic verse

We may turn from Snorri, then, to our early poetic evidence for *álfr*. *Álfr* appears in skaldic verse almost invariably in kennings for human warriors (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.v. *alfr*; cf. Meissner 1921, 264), where it is fairly common, and is attested already in the work of the earliest skald, Bragi inn gamli Boddason. Around the earlier part of the ninth century, Bragi called Jǫrmunrekr *sóknar alfr* ('*álfr* of attack') in stanza 4 of his *Ragnarsdrápa* (ed. Finnur Jónsson 1912, Bɪ 1; for dating see Turville-Petre 1976, xxi–xxiii). Around the end of the ninth century, Þjóðólfr ór Hvini called Hálfdan hvítbeinn Óláfsson *brynjalfr* ('armour-*álfr*') in stanza 30 of his *Ynglingatal*, and numerous other examples followed.[39] Perhaps because *álfr* never actually denotes an *álfr* in skaldic verse, this corpus has been little used as evidence for *álfr*'s early meanings. But the kennings offer important insights.

[36] *Díar* occurs only here and in *Skáldskaparmál* in prose, probably borrowed from stanza 3 of Kormakr Qgmundarson's *Sigurðardrápa*, where Snorri took it to mean 'gods' (ed. Faulkes 1998, ɪ 85). This is consistent with its Old Irish etymon, *dí* ('God, god'): the common translation 'priests' is *ad hoc*.

[37] On which see below, §§6:3, 7:1.1, 7:2.

[38] Stanza 36; cf. stanza 32, where Freyja is accused of sex with Freyr; on the corroboration of Loki's sexual accusations here by other sources see McKinnell 1986–89.

[39] Ed. Finnur Jónsson 1912, Bɪ 12. My dating is conventional; Krag surveyed part of the debate about the poem's date and himself supported a late one (1991, 13–80), but his arguments serve best to show the value of the traditional dating (Sundqvist 2002, 43–52).

The usage of *álfr* in kennings suggests that it was not only grammatically masculine, but only denoted males. This may not, admittedly, have applied to the plural: thus *ás* denoted a male god, but *æsir* could include the female *ásynjur*. By the high Middle Ages, Icelandic had the compound *álfkona* ('*álfr*-woman'; *DONP*, s.v. *alfkona*; Finnur Jónsson 1926–28, s.v. *álfkona*), there is no early evidence for whether *álfar* could denote females. Wolff extracted a second point from the kennings, however: whereas Snorri proscribes the mention of *jǫtnar* in kennings for people, he accepts *álfar*, who, Wolff inferred, 'dem Menschen freundlich sind' ('are friendly towards humans'; 1952, 101). This observation has not been developed, but an examination of words for supernatural beings in kennings both confirms and elaborates it.

Strikingly, *álfr* shares its distribution in skaldic verse distinctively, among words denoting kinds of supernatural beings, with kennings containing *ás*.[40] *Ás* occurs often as a simplex, and in kennings for poetry and gods. But its most common use in kennings is, like *álfr*, as the headword in kennings denoting human warriors, such as *ǫ́ss Fróða hríðar* ('*ás* of Fróði's storm (=battle)') in stanza 32 of *Vellekla*, composed by the pagan Icelander Einarr skálaglamm in the late tenth century (ed. Finnur Jónsson 1912, Bı 123; Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.v. *ǫ́ss*; cf. Meissner 1921, 264). By contrast, few other words denoting types of supernatural beings occur in kennings for humans. *Goð* and *regin* occur, but only rarely, and are partially if not wholly synonymous with *ás* (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.vv.; cf. Meissner 1921, 264). Words for *dísir*—better-known by the kenning which supplanted that name, *valkyrjur*—are common as modifiers in kennings for warriors (e.g. *valmeyjar álfr*, '*álfr* of the slaughter-maid'), but not as headwords (Meissner 1921, 273–74).[41] In kennings for women, *ásynja* occurs, which we may take as an extension of the data for *ás*; and possibly *band*, another synonym for *ás*. *Dís* and *norn* occur fairly often (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.vv.; cf. Meissner 1921, 408–9, 411–12), and again seem on external evidence to have been at least partially synonymous (Ström 1954, 80–95). Taking *draugr* in kennings for humans to be the

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[40] Kennings are being catalogued in the *Lexicon of Kennings and Similar Poetic Circumlocutions*, at <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/>, which so far reproduces and supplements Meissner 1921. I suggest below that *álfr* could have been a *heiti* for Freyr, so *álfr*-kennings might actually allude to him; they are used in much the same way as kennings mentioning Freyr. But there is little reason to assume this generally.

[41] *Valkyrja* is the more prominent term in secondary literature because it is usual in *Snorra Edda* and the prose sections of the Poetic Edda, but this is historically surely an inversion: *valkyrja* is most likely a kenning ('chooser of the slain') for *dís* ('(supernatural) lady'), as *dís* is used in, for example, *Grímnismál* st. 53, *Reginsmál* st. 24 and *Hamðismál* st. 28 (ed. Neckel 1962, 68, 179, 273; see Ström 1954, esp. 70–79; Näsström 1995, 125). To Ström's points I would add that *dís* is extensively attested in Old Icelandic verse and is the basis for many kennings, whereas *valkyrja* occurs rather rarely, and is the basis for none (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.vv.; Kellogg 1988). Even Brynhildr, the archetypal *Walküre* of Wagnerian mythology, is referred to as *dís skjǫldunga* ('*dís* of the *Skjǫldungar*') in stanza 14 of *Sigurðarkviða in meiri*, and never in Eddaic verse as a *valkyrja*.

homonym denoting living warriors rather than dead ones (Lindow 1975, 84–96), none of the numerous other Norse words for types of supernatural beings, such as *dvergr*, *jǫtunn*, *mara* or *þurs*, appears in kennings for humans. Nor, as I have noted above, does *vanr*.

This distribution suggests that to the formative skaldic poets, *álfr* denoted something mythologically close enough to human males to be used as the generic element in kennings for them, and something close enough to *ás* to share this usage with it distinctively among words for male supernatural beings. The words for supernatural beings used in kennings for humans can thus be reckoned in three groups: *ás*, *ásynja* and their (partial) synonyms *goð* and *regin*; *álfr*; and *dís* and *norn*. Assuming that this system exhibited symmetry of gender, this analysis suggests that *dís* and *norn*, being used for women as *álfr* was for men, denoted beings which were to the *ásynjur* as the *álfar* were to the *œsir*. Finally, words denoting monstrous beings were evidently excluded from this system—except, if we accept Snorri's claim in *Skáldskaparmál*, in mockery—suggesting that *álfar* joined *œsir* and humans in a systematic opposition to monstrous beings.

The distribution of words for supernatural beings in kennings for men is paralleled by other sorts of early Old Norse lexical evidence.[42] Meanwhile, the theophoric associations of *álfr* are emphasised by two Norse dithematic names. As Müller pointed out, the Old Norse deuterotheme *-arinn*, probably cognate with Old Icelandic *arinn* ('hearth'), Old High German *arin* ('altar'), appears only in the names *Þórarinn* and *Álfarinn* (Müller 1970, 40–41, 131–32). The fact that *álfr* occurs here uniquely beside the deity-name *Þórr* suggests again that *álfr* had theophoric connotations in its lexical usage. Likewise, in Denmark, probably in the eleventh century, the sons of one Eykil were named Alfkil and Þorkil (where the second element, a contracted form of *ketill* 'cauldron, pot', may, like *-arinn*, have ritual associations; Hald 1971–74, I 15; ed. Jacobsen–Moltke 1942, I cols 432–33 [no. 376]). Hald found that 'Áskell og Þórkell er de mest udbredte navne på

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[42] For dithematic personal name elements see §3:2. Compounds ending in *-kunnr* and *-kunnigr* (variant forms of the same word, not to be confused with the homophonous *kunnigr* 'knowledgeable') and their cognates were used in Germanic languages either to denote descent from or origin in the determiner (e.g. Old Norse *reginkunnr*, Old English *godcund*, 'originating with god(s)'), or similarity in nature to it (e.g. Old High German *manchunt* 'male'). The determiner usually denoted a being (Hofstetter 1992, 340–42). Of determiners denoting supernatural beings, only *goð-* and its cognates are well-attested; Old English also innovated *engelcund* and *deofolcund*; but Old Norse exhibits compounds with the determiners *ás-*, *álf-*, *regin-* and *goð-* (see Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.vv. *áskunnigr*, *áskunnr*, *alfkunnigr*, *alfkunnr*, *godkynningr*, *reginkunnigr*, *reginkunnr*; cf. Fritzner 1886–1972, IV s.v. *alfkyndr*; Hofstetter 1992). These are, of course, precisely the words for supernatural beings used in kennings for men. The dataset is very small: *regin-* compounds occur in two verses and two runic inscriptions; *áskunnigr* and *álfkunnigr* only in *Fáfnismál* stanza 13 (ed. Neckel 1962, 182), and *álfkunnr* only in Snorri's discussion of it (ed. Faulkes 1982, 18); *guðkunnigr* occurs in verse only by emendation (from *-konungr* in *Ynglingatal* st. 27). There is also an exception, *trollkunnr*, in *Ynglingatal* stanza 3 (quoted §7:1.1). The difficulty of *trollkunnr* notwithstanding, then, the correlation of the *-kunnr*, *-kunnigr* compounds with the kennings for men using words for supernatural beings is impressive in all respects: they include the same words as inital elements, excluding other words for supernatural beings; and they show a semantic association both with divinity and with the denotation of types of human being.

ketill' in early medieval Denmark, reflecting a general pattern of alternation between *Ás*- and *Þór* in personal names ('*Áskell* and *Þórkell* are the most widespread names in -*ketill*'; 1971–74, ɪ 48–50, at 49). Once more, we find *álfr* distinctively associated with a theophoric name.

Álfr appears in one other kenning, less useful here: *álfrǫðull* (denoting the sun), which occurs occasionally in both skaldic and Eddaic verse (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.v. *alfrǫðull*). Unfortunately, its precise significance is unclear: since in verse *rǫðull* itself denotes the sun, *álfrǫðull* was no doubt used for metrical convenience as a formulaic variant, but the association of *álfr* with a word denoting the sun must have been semantically congruent, presumably adding connotations which could be employed to literary effect. However, we must proceed from our knowledge of *álfar* to the explication of the kenning, rather than the other way, so *álfrǫðull* may be excluded from consideration for now (see further below, §2:3.1).

Likewise stanza 5 of Sigvatr Þórðarson's skaldic *Austrfaravísur*, recounting the Christian Sigvatr's travels in the pagan lands east of Norway around 1020, describes a heathen *ekkja* ('widow') refusing Sigvatr board for the night for fear of 'Óðins … reiði' ('Óðinn's wrath'), because an *alfa blót* ('*álfar*'s sacrifice') is taking place in the house (ed. Finnur Jónsson 1912–1915, Bɪ 221). This text implies that *álfar* might be worshipped in late Swedish paganism, and it is of interest, in view of the association of *álfar* with Freyr elsewhere (see §2:3.1), that there is strong evidence for the prominence of Freyr in Swedish paganism (Vries 1956–57, ɪɪ 194–203; Turville-Petre 1964, 168–70). But it gives no other concrete information. Sigvatr's association of the *álfa blót* with Óðinn could be mere stereotyping of pagan practice. It has been supposed that the *ekkja* must have been running the *álfablót* (see de Vries 1932–33, 170–71; Jochens 1996, 46, 48), but all Sigvatr really tells us is that she answered the door. The stanza does recall our scattered evidence for sacrifices to *dísir* and may reflect the pairing of *álfr* and *dís* suggested by their respective use in kennings for men and women.[43] This conclusion is supported by a lexical connection between *álfar* and *dísir* in addition to those perceived by Ström, being the word *dísablót* ('*dísir*'s sacrifice'), which occurs, for example, in *Ynglinga saga* chapter 29 and *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* chapter 44 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, ɪ 58; Nordal 1933, 107): *dís*- and *álfr*-, besides the more general *(skurð)goða*- ('(carved-)gods'-') and the borrowed *djǫfla*- ('devils'-'), are the only words for types of supernatural being to be compounded with -*blót* (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.v.; *DONP*, s.v.).

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[43] See Ström 1954, esp. 12–31; Näsström 1995, 127–29; Sundqvist 2002, 225–32, and 99–105, 285–89 for a broader contextualisation.

Skaldic verse suggests the basic associations of *álfr* and *álfar* in pre-conversion Scandinavian traditions: with gods and, metaphorically, with men. *Álfar*, along with these groups, were systematically contrasted with monsters. Taking the evidence for words denoting males alone, my inferences so far can be presented as a componential analysis in terms of the two features ±MONSTROUS and ±SUPERNATURAL:

	karlmaðr	ás	álfr	jǫtunn
SUPERNATURAL	−	+	+	+
MONSTROUS	−	−	−	+

Figure 1: *componential analysis of Norse words for beings*

Needless to say, this analysis is crude; introducing distinctions of gender to it, for example, would produce the familiar problems of binary componential analyses (see Lyons 1977, esp. I 322–25). While it would be possible to speak hereafter of *álfar* as 'non-monstrous supernatural beings', I suggest instead 'otherworldly beings' as an appropriate alternative; its mixed connotations of wonder and fear will emerge below to be fitting to members of this category. Likewise, it is possible to reconstruct a semantic field diagram:
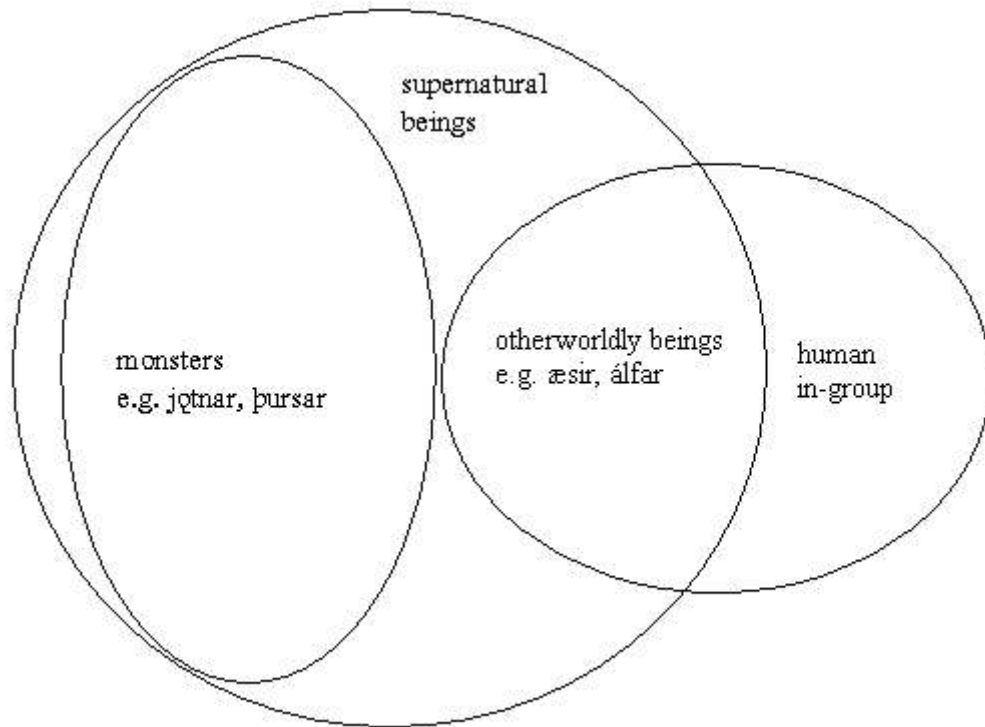
Figure 2: *semantic field diagram of Norse words for beings*

This intepretation differs from a predominantly German tradition linking *álfar*, like Snorri, with *dvergar*, in aligning *álfar* primarily with *æsir* and *dísir*, and *dvergar* with the

monstrous *jǫtnar*.[44] Although the alternative alignment would help to explain German folklore, mine is the one suggested by the kennings, the earliest Norse evidence. Basic though it is, it provides important information about the early meanings of *álfr*. Moreover, it hints at a major mythological pattern in early-medieval Scandinavian world-views, delineating a fundamental binary opposition between beings which are human or otherworldly on the one hand, and those which are monstrous on the other. These themes are elucidated by reference to the next body of evidence, Eddaic verse.

3. *Álfr* in Eddaic verse

As I have mentioned, *álfr* is frequent in the Eddaic corpus, whose usage is largely consistent with the skaldic verse, and which presents mythological traditions more fully. Tempting though it is to try to order the Eddaic poems by date or place of origin, the uncertainties and complexities of transmission in the corpus make this too problematic to be attempted here (see Fidjestøl 1999). Nor do I analyse every occurrence of *álfr*. This is not because they are not of interest: rather because my primary concern here is to develop a reliable and pertinent context for interpreting our Anglo-Saxon evidence. In particular I avoid *Alvíssmál*, despite the fact that *álfr* and certain other words for supernatural beings occur here more than in any other Eddaic poem. *Alvíssmál* is essentially a catalogue of poetic diction structured as a wisdom-contest. Most stanzas catalogue the names given to parts of the world by *menn*, *goð*, *vanir*, *jǫtnar*, *álfar* and *dvergar*, in that order. This may be of interest, in that it seems broadly to move from the centre to the periphery of the Scandinavian world-view, while the juxtaposition of *jǫtnar* and *álfar* is paralleled in *Beowulf*'s half-line 'eotenas ond ylfe' (§4:1 esp. n. 104). But the exigencies of metre as the poem marshals alliterating diction from limited pools lead to variations in the order or vocabulary in most stanzas, including certain apparent duplications (such that *æsir* and *upregin* appear in st. 10, *menn* and *halir* in 28, and *jǫtnar* and *Suttungs synir* in 34): *Alvíssmál*'s subject matter is primarily poetic diction, not mythography; its portrayals both of Þórr and of the *dvergr* Alvíss are inconsistent with other sources (Acker 2002).

On the other hand, one poem is in various respects unusual, but particularly important to the present study because it not only contains *álfr* by seems also to have English

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[44] Associating *dvergar* with *álfar*, e.g. Grimm 1882–88 [1875–78], ɪɪ 443–72; Vries 1956–57, 252–64; Motz 1973–74; Lecouteux 1997; and on Old English Jente 1921, 167–91; Philippson 1929, 69–78. Associating *dvergar* with *jǫtnar*, cf. Boor 1924, 550–57; Holtsmark 1970, 75–80; Clunies Ross 1994–98, ɪ 50–51, 54–56; Acker 2002.

connections: *Alvíssmál*'s neighbour in the Codex Regius, *Vǫlundarkviða*. Accordingly, I consider *Vǫlundarkviða* separately from the other texts (§2:3.2).

3.1 Formulae, and Freyr

As commentators have often noted, *álfr* mainly occurs in Eddaic poetry in the formulaic collocation *æsir ok álfar*, which we have met already in Old English form in the pairing of *ese* and *ælfe* in *Wið færstice*. The formula and its variants occur fourteen times in verses, as in *Hávamál* stanzas 159–60, particularly noteworthy because *æsir* and *álfar* both seem to be denoted there by *tívar* ('gods'; ed. Neckel 1962, 43–44):

Þat kann ec iþ fiórtánda, ef ec scal fyrða liði telia tíva fyrir: ása oc álfa ec kann allra scil, fár kann ósnotr svá.	I know it, the fourteenth, if I must reckon up *tívar* in front of a company of people: I know how to distinguish all the *æsir* and *álfar*; few who are not wise can do so.
Þat kann ec iþ fimtánda, er gól Þióðrørir, dvergr, fyr Dellings durom: afl gól hann ásom, enn álfom frama, hyggio Hroptatý.	I know it, the fifteenth, which Þjóðrørir the *dvergr* chanted in front of Dellingr's doors: he chanted strength for the *æsir*, but success for the *álfar*, intelligence for Hroptr-Týr [=Óðinn]

Ás always comes first in the pair except in *Skírnismál* stanzas 17–18. The collocation is doubtless sometimes merely formulaic, and besides showing that *æsir* were associated with *álfar* is not in itself very informative.[45] Rather it is contexts like the one just quoted that give us evidence that *álfar* here denoted something very like *æsir*.

Uncertainty as to the precise significance of *álfr* in *æsir ok álfar* does not usually much trouble modern readers, and need not have troubled medieval ones, but it does present a serious inconvenience in *Lokasenna*. *Lokasenna*'s prose introduction gives a list of gods, explaining that at Ægir's feast, 'Mart var þar ása oc álfa' ('Many of the *æsir* and *álfar* were there'). In the poem itself, Loki says *ása oc álfa, er hér inno ero* ('of the *æsir* and *álfar* who are here within'; st. 2, 13, 30, ed. Neckel 1962, 97, 99, 102) three times. However, despite the presence in *Lokasenna* of most of the Scandinavian pantheon, conventional accounts of Norse mythology list no *álfar* among them, following Snorri in labelling the named gods *æsir* or *vanir*. But *Lokasenna* is a tightly-constructed poem and mythologically well-informed (see McKinnell 1986–89). It would be uncharacteristic, then, for it to repeat a formula which within its mythological frame of reference is partly otiose. Stanza 30 is rhetorically a fine insult:

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[45] Gurevič's exhaustive classification of Eddaic formulae (1986 [1982]) makes some ostensibly interesting observations, but the classifications are subjective and insufficiently sensitive to the meaning of each formula in the different contexts where they occur. Acker has since invoked a subtler classificatory system, but has not investigated its implications or underpinnings (1998, 4).

Þegi þú, Freyja! þic kann ec fullgerva,
   era þér vamma vant;
ása oc álfa, er hér inni ero,
   hverr hefir þinn hór verið.
	Shut up, Freyja! I know you completely,
	there is no lack of vices in you;
	of the *æsir* and the *álfar* who are in here,
	each has been your lover.

But it is somewhat deflated if we envisage Freyja being accused of sex with some anonymous and shadowy collection of *álfar*.

   The obvious explanation for the mysterious *álfar* of *Lokasenna* is to identify them with Snorri's *vanir* (cf. Vries 1956–57, ɪɪ 203; Holtsmark 1970, 78; Näsström 1995, 61). This prospect is particularly supported by *Grímnismál* stanza 5, where Óðinn declares that (ed. Neckel 1962, 58)

Álfheim Frey gáfo í árdaga tívar at tannfé.	The gods gave Freyr Álfheimr in ancient days as tooth-money [i.e. a gift at a child's first tooth]

Freyr is here portrayed, then, as the lord of the world of the *álfar*. In *Snorra Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*, Freyr is, of course, a prince of the *vanir* rather than the *álfar*. However, *vanr* occurs neither in *Lokasenna* nor *Grímnismál*, despite the extensive mythological lore in these poems. The simplest interpretation of these texts is to take Snorri's pairing of *æsir* and *vanir* to be a variant of a pairing of *æsir* and *álfar*, with *vanr* and *álfr*, in at least some times and places, denoting the same mythological construct. This reading would explain why Freyr would rule Álfheimr; why *ás* and *álfr* are used in the same way in kennings for men with *vanr* never being used, alongside the related question of why Snorri would suggest using names of *æsir* and *álfar*, but not *vanir*, in kennings for gods and men; and why Freyja stands accused of having sex with all the *æsir* and *álfar* at Ægir's feast. Indeed, if Freyja, Freyr and Njǫrðr are to be interpreted in *Lokasenna* as a kin-group of *álfar* as they are normally interpreted as a kin-group of *vanir*, then Loki's use of the *æsir ok álfar* formula in indicting Freyja would imply that she had not simply slept with all the *æsir*, but with her own family—neatly foreshadowing that very accusation, in stanza 32. Admittedly, some Eddaic poems do present *álfar* and *vanir* as different races, as in *Sigrdrífumál* stanza 18 (ed. Neckel 1962, 73; cf. *Skírnismál* st.17–18; ed. Neckel 1962, 72–73), which says of runes that

Allar vóro af scafnar, þær er vóro á ristnar,
   oc hverfðar við inn helga mjǫð,
   oc sendar á víða vega.
Þær ro með ásom, þær ro með álfom,
   sumar með vísom vǫnom,
   sumar hafa menzcir menn.
	All were shaved off, those which were carved on, and mixed with the sacred mead, and sent on wide ways. They are among the *æsir*; they are among the *álfar*, some with the wise *vanir*; human people have some.

This list of peoples is attractively consonant with the association of men, *álfar* and *æsir* in skaldic poetry, though it aims equally to indicate the diversity of the runes'

destinations. This distinction between *álfar* and *vanir* I take as a variant tradition, probably exhibiting a tendency to reanalyse synonyms as words denoting different things, perhaps partly through syncretic processes which brought together variant mythologies and terminologies without integrating them fully.

One wonders further if *álfr* might have been used as a cognomen of Freyr, since this could explain the kenning *álfrǫðull*: if we may adduce Snorri's statement in *Gylfaginning* that Freyr 'ræðr fyrir regni ok skini sólar' ('rules over the rain and the shining of the sun'; ed. Faulkes 1982, 24), then perhaps *álfr* in *álfrǫðull* denotes Freyr himself. Snorri's claim gains some slight support from the name of Skírnir, whom Freyr sends to woo Gerðr in *Skírnismál*: Skírnir's name is transparently derived from *skírr* ('clear, bright'), and links Freyr indirectly with this characteristic. Reading *álfr* in *álfrǫðull* as a *heiti* for Freyr brings an arguably appropriate mythological connotation to the kenning, suggesting 'the *rǫðull* (denoting the sun) of the *Álfr* (=Freyr)', and such developments of names for supernatural beings into gods' names are well-attested.[46] The names *Álfarinn* and *Þórarinn* would correspond the better if *álf-* here is taken to denote an individual god. But little can be made of these hints.

Again, the association of *álfar* and *dvergar* which has often been assumed is ill-supported. I have quoted stanza 160 of *Hávamál*, in which the *dvergr* Þjóðrørir 'afl gól … ásom, enn álfom frama' ('sang strength for the *æsir*, and for the *álfar* success'; ed. Neckel 1962, 41), but whatever is afoot here, it associates *dvergar* with *álfar* no more than with *æsir*. More striking is stanza 143 of *Hávamál* (ed. Neckel 1962, 41), which, describing the carvers of runes, recalls the binary division between *æsir* and *álfar* on the one hand and *jǫtnar* and *dvergar* on the other:

Óðinn með ásom, enn fyr álfom Dáinn,	Óðinn among the *æsir*, and for the *álfar*,
Dvalinn dvergom fyrir,	Dáinn, Dvalinn for the *dvergar*,
Ásviðr iǫtnom fyrir,	Ásviðr for the *jǫtnar*,
ec reist siálfr sumar.	I myself carved some.

Dáinn is the name of a *dvergr* in *Vǫluspá* 11 and (possibly derivatively) *Hyndluljóð* stanza 7 (ed. Neckel 1962, 3, 289); meanwhile, the names *Vindálfr* and *Gandálfr* also appear in *Vǫluspá*'s list of *dvergar*, in stanzas 12 and 16 (ed. Neckel 1962, 3, 4). However, the list in *Vǫluspá* is a gallimaufrey, and the recurrence of the transparently meaningful name Dáinn ('the dead one') no cause for surprise—it is, after all, the name

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[46] Cf. **tīwaz* 'god' > Old Norse *Týr* 'the god Týr' but *tívar* 'gods'; Stroh 1999 for the argument, inverting previous assumptions, that Faunus may owe his name to the *fauni*. Likewise, Freyja, seen as the pre-eminent, divine *dís*, is usually assumed to be the *dís* of the *Dísarsalr* ('*dís*'s hall') mentioned in *Heiðreks saga* and *Ynglinga saga* (ed. Jón Helgason 1924, 44; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 58; cf. see Ström 1954, 32–69; Näsström 1995, esp. 133–35).

of a hart in *Grímnismál* (st. 33; ed. Neckel 1962, 64). I maintain, then, my binary division between *æsir* and *álfar* on the one hand and *dvergar* and *jǫtnar* on the other.

3.2 *Vǫlundarkviða*

Vǫlundarkviða (ed. Neckel 1962, 116–23) demands special attention because it is the only Old Norse poem where a character is clearly identified lexically as one of the *álfar*: Vǫlundr is described as 'álfa lióði' (probably 'member of the *álfar*', st. 10) and 'vísi álfa' (probably 'wise one of the *álfar*', st. 13, 32). This identification presents the alluring prospect of associating *álfr* with narrative motifs as well as lexical contexts. Moreover, the poem probably exhibits Old English linguistic influence, so, problematic though the connection is, it may offer evidence which is especially relevant to Anglo-Saxon culture. Consequently, it is discussed more fully below (§7:3). Here, I simply introduce the poem and establish Vǫlundr's association with *álfr*.

   Vǫlundarkviða begins with the flight of three women identified in stanza 1 as *meyjar*, *drósir*, *alvitr* and *suðrœnar* ('young women, stately women, foreign beings, southerners') and in the prose introduction as *valkyrjur*, to a 'sævar strǫnd' ('lake/sea-shore') where they take for themselves the three brothers Egill, Slagfiðr and Vǫlundr. However, nine winters later, they leave the brothers; Slagfiðr and Egill go in search of their women, but Vǫlundr remains at home instead, forging *baugar* ('arm-rings') for his woman (stanzas 1–6). This part of the story is not present in our other main version (*Þiðreks saga af Bern*, chs 57–79, commonly known as *Velents þáttr*; ed. Bertelsen 1905–11, I 73–133), though it is an essential part of the *Vǫlundarkviða* that we have (cf. Burson 1983, 3–5). However, chapter 23 of *Þiðreks saga* does contain a narrative like this concerning the birth of the father of Velent (its counterpart to Vǫlundr), and some process of transference may have taken place (ed. Bertelsen 1905–11, I 46; II 63–65). Discovering that Vǫlundr is living alone, Níðuðr, 'Niára dróttin' ('lord of the Njárar'), has him taken in his sleep (stanzas 7–12). Níðuðr takes Vǫlundr's sword and gives one of the rings which Vǫlundr made for his missing bride to his daughter Bǫðvildr, and, at his wife's instigation, he has Vǫlundr's hamstrings cut, imprisoning him on an island (stanzas 13–19). Vǫlundr takes his revenge on Níðuðr first by enticing his two sons to visit with promises of treasure, killing them, and making jewels of their eyes and teeth (stanzas 20–26); and then by enticing Bǫðvildr by promising to mend the ring which she was given, getting her drunk, and implicitly having sex with her (stanzas 27–29). *Vǫlundarkviða* culminates in Vǫlundr taking to the air by some means which is not clearly described and

telling Níðuðr what he has done (stanzas 30–39), focusing finally on the plight of

Bǫðvildr (stanzas 40–41).

McKinnell has recently consolidated the long-standing idea that *Vǫlundarkviða*

contains a number of Old English loan-words, and perhaps influence from Old English

poetic metre (1990, 1–13). This fits with the fact that Vǫlundr is otherwise rather poorly-

attested in Scandinavia (see Dronke 1997, 271–76): *Velents þáttr*, the other main

Scandinavian source for Vǫlundr, is based mainly on German sources (see Davidson

1995), while there is a plethora of medieval references to Vǫlundr's southern

counterparts, including several from Anglo-Saxon England showing that his story there

was similar to *Vǫlundarkviða*'s (Maurus 1902, 7–57; Lang 1976, 90–93; Nedoma 1990;

Dronke 1997, 258–86). Precisely what *Vǫlundarkviða*'s English connections were is

harder to guess—there are various cultural and perhaps linguistic layers to the text and

there were many points of Anglo-Scandinavian interaction (cf. Dronke 1997, 287–90)—

but their existence is not in doubt.

However, the two terms by which Vǫlundr is linked with *álfar* are obscure. Both are

formulaic half-lines, appearing in the following stanzas:

Sat á berfialli,   bauga talði,
álfa lióði,   eins sacnaði;
hugði hann,   at hefði Hlǫðvés dóttir,
alvitr unga,   væri hon aptr komin.
(Stanza 10)

He sat on a bearskin, counted (arm-)rings,
lióði of *álfar*, he noticed one was missing;
he thought that Hlǫðvér's daughter,
the young otherworldly being, had come back.

Kallaði nú Níðuðr,   Niára dróttinn:
'Hvar gaztu, Vǫlundr,   vísi álfa,
vára aura   í Úlfdǫlom?'
(Stanza 13)

Níðuðr cried now, the lord of the Njárar,
'Where did you get, Vǫlundr, *vísi* of *álfar*,
your wealth in Úlfdalar?'

'Seg þú mér þat, Vǫlundr,   vísi álfa:
af heilom hvat varð   húnom [MS: *sonom*]
                                    mínom?'
(Stanza 32)

'Tell it to me, Vǫlundr, *vísi* of *álfar*:
what came of my healthy cubs?'

The phrase *vísi álfa* occurs only in Níðuðr's speeches, one preceding and one following

Vǫlundr's vengeance. The repetition is significant, since in the first instance it helps to

express Níðuðr's gloating, emphasising that he has captured an otherworldly being, but

in the second, it emphasises his humbling by that being's revenge (cf. Grimstad 1983,

198–99; Dronke 1997, 257). Evidently, *vísi álfa*, whatever it means, is a status to be

vaunted. The phrase could equally be undertood as 'leader of the *álfar*' or 'wise one of

the *álfar*', and there is little to choose between these on internal evidence (see See and

others 1997–, ɪɪ 182–83, where the former interpretation is preferred). If the formula is

related to Alfred the Great's repeated alliteration of *Weland* with *wis* in the tenth of his

Metres of Boethius (lines 33, 35, 42; ed. Sedgefield 1899, 165) and chapter 19 of his earlier prose *Consolation of Philosophy* (ed. Sedgefield 1899, 46), both times in an addition to his source (ed. Moreschini 2000, 1–162), then *vísi* would be 'wise one' (this is unambiguous only in the prose, but surely holds also for the verse). But the alliteration of these words was so obvious a device, even in prose, that the two formulae are likely to be independent.[47]

The *ljóði* of 'álfa lióði', on the other hand, is unique, with no certain meaning (see See and others 1997–, II 170–73; Dronke 1997, 310–11). *Ljóði* must be related to the rare and poetic Norse *ljóðr* ('a people') and the common Old English *leod* (when masculine, 'man, warrior'; when feminine, 'people'), amongst other cognates. The usual assumption is that it is a native Norse noun, guessed to mean 'leader', in which case Vǫlundr, 'leader of *álfar*', need not have been an *álfr* himself. However, borrowing from Old English is a more tempting explanation. That Old English *leod* could be borrowed as *ljóði* is shown by the borrowing of Old English *hreoðan* as Old Norse *hrjóða* (showing *eo~jó*); *hired*, *hird* as *hirð* (showing *d~ð*; de Vries 1961, s.vv. *hrjóða* 2, *hirð*); and *kastali* ('castle' < *castel*), *munki* ('monk' < *munuc*), *postoli* ('apostle' < *postol*) and *prófasti* ('provost' < *prafost*, showing weak masculine for strong; see Vries 1961, s.vv.).[48] As Dronke pointed out, *álfa ljóði* is most closely paralleled in poetry surviving in the Germanic languages by the Old English poetic formula *genitive plural ethnonym + leod*, as in *Ebrea leod*, *Geata leod* and *Secgena leod* ('male member of the Hebrews/Geats/Secgan'; for my translation of *leod*, *contra* Dronke's 'leader', see Brady 1983, 205–6). Dronke was concerned that 'elves' are not 'associated with the term "people" (*ljóðr*, *lēod*) in ON or OE' (1997, 311), but I demonstrate otherwise for Old English below (§§3:2–4), emphasising the validity of the reading. *Álfa ljóði*, then, could be Norse in origin, but it is more likely a sign of the

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[47] My interpretation here is diametrically opposite to McKinnell's (1990, 3): McKinnell considered that *wisan* in poetic lines like 'hwær sint nu þæs wisan Welandes ban' is ambiguous between Old English *wis* ('wise') and *wisa* ('leader'); but in fact it is disambiguated by Alfred's earlier prose, 'Hwæt synt nu þæs foremeran ⁊ þæs wisan goldsmiðes ban Welondes?' ('What now are the bones of that renowned and wise goldsmith Weland?'). Whereas McKinnell thought the parallel significant, however, I do not.

[48] This argument is similar to McKinnell's, which linked *ljóði* with Old English *leoda*, putatively a weak derivative of *leod* attested only in the plural, defined by Bosworth and Toller as 'a man, one of a people or country' (1898, s.v.; cf. Toller 1921, s.v.; McKinnell 1990, 3; 2001, 331; de Vries 1961, s.v. *ljóði*). But, as I have shown, there is no need to posit a weak Old English etymon, and *leoda* is almost certainly simply a weak variant of *leod*: morphologically, *leod* was complex, having both masculine forms with *i*-stem inflections and feminine forms with *ō*-stem inflections (cf. Campbell 1959, §610.7 n. 3). Weak variants of the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension plurals appear already in early West Saxon (Campbell 1959, §610.7); moreover, in non-West Saxon dialects, the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension inflected in the same way in the plural as the feminine *ō*-stems, which was also liable to collapse with the weak declension, especially in Northumbrian with its loss of the final nasals which helped to distinguish weak inflections (see Campbell 1959, §§379 n. 3, 472, 587, 617; cf. Appendix 1). The conditions were therefore ripe for the creation of a weak plural *leodan*.

English influence on *Vǫlundarkviða*. Either way, however, the balance of probability suggests that *álfa ljóði* indicates that Vǫlundr is one of the *álfar*.

Vǫlundr's association with *álfar* has caused some discomfort among critics who see him as a human hero, particularly since *Vǫlundarkviða*'s prose introduction states him and his brothers to be 'synir Finnakonungs' ('sons of the King of the *Finnar*').[49] In its manuscripts, it unarguably keeps mythological company, as does the depiction of Vǫlundr on the Viking-age Swedish picture-stone Ardre VIII (Lindqvist 1941–42, ɪ 95–96, 99, 107; ɪɪ 22–24 and fig. 311). I take this debate as the first of various pieces of evidence to be considered here that our culture's categorial distinction between human-like supernatural beings and ethnic others is anachronistic; we might think more usefully in terms of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'. Individuals from the out-group are liable to be associated with the supernatural; supernatural beings are liable to be associated with out-groups. As Grimstad observed, Vǫlundr's revenge is reminiscent of Óðinn's in *Grímnismál*. Here Óðinn visits the hall of the human king Geirrøðr, testing his hospitality. Tortured between two fires by Geirrøðr, he imparts wisdom to Geirrøðr's son Agnarr, reveals his identity, and escapes, indirectly causing Geirrøðr's death as he does so (ed. Neckel 1962, 56–68). Here, then, an otherworldly being 'triumphs over his human opponent and then vanishes', effectively acting as an arbiter of appropriate behaviour (Grimstad 1983, 193, 200–202; cf. McKinnell 1991, 24–25). This reading also seems the best way to explain Vǫlundr's flight (cf. Grimstad 1983, 189–90), itself reminiscent of Óðinn's escapes in eagle-form in prose texts.[50] The interpretation also fits nicely with the consequence of Vǫlundr's seduction or rape of Bǫðvildr, the birth of Viðga/Widia, which in *Þiðreks saga*, and implicitly the Old English *Waldere* and *Deor*, is presented as the real culmination of the story (Grimstad 1983, 199–200). A potentially unenviable preganancy out of wedlock serves here in part, then, to provide a supernatural lineage for a hero.

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[49] Cf. See and others 1997–, ɪɪ 120–21; Grimstad 1983, 190–91; McKinnell 1990, 24–25; though note Dronke's cheerful juxtaposition of the two readings, 1997, 261–62, 287–89.

[50] *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 1 (ed. Faulkes 1998, 4–5); *Heiðreks saga* ch. 11 (ed. Guðni Jónsson–Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44, 225)—though this may be cognisant of *Snorra Edda* (Hall forthcoming [a], §2). Grimstad also thought it necessary to explain Vǫlundr's revenge, which is 'carried out secretly, and, although Vǫlundr does at least confront his adversary and reveal what he has done, there is no final man-to-man battle or heroic last stand, but rather a most unheroic escape' (1983, 190). However, Grimstad's expectations are high, both in view of Níðuðr's own ignominious behaviour, Vǫlundr's crippling, and 'heroic' behaviour elsewhere in Eddaic texts (cf. Steblin-Kamenskij 1982, 87–89 on Sigurðr Fáfnisbani).

4. Interpretations

We can now see *álfr* to have have denoted something conceptually similar to *ás*, and both *ás* and *álfr* to have been metaphorically associated with humans. *Grímnismál* declares that Freyr was given Álfheimr to rule, consolidating the circumstantial evidence that in a number of Eddaic poems, the *álfar* relate to the *æsir* as do the *vanir* in Snorri's mythography, and some partial synonymy between *álfr* and *vanr* seems likely. The group *æsir-álfar-menn* was in turn systematically opposed to another group, at least sometimes anthropormorphic, which I have termed *monstrous*, including *jǫtnar*, *þursar* and *dvergar*. *Vǫlundarkviða*, whose story seems certainly to be about one of the *álfar*, also suggests narrative motifs associated with *álfar*, which I discuss further below (§7:3). To conclude this analysis of Norse evidence, I argue that my more basic observations concerning *álfr*'s semantics correlate with wider (albeit later) evidence for early-medieval Norse-speakers' cosmologies, and that we can correlate the semantics of key terms in Old Norse mythologies, including *álfr*, with wider world-views. Essentially, the semantic field diagram presented above (§2:2 fig. 2) can also be taken as a schematic map of early medieval Norse-speakers' cosmologies. This correlation provides support for taking similar approaches to Old English semantic evidence.

I have argued from skaldic evidence in particular that *álfar*, *æsir* and *menn* were semantically aligned with one another in contradistinction to monsters. This binary opposition corresponds well with a horizontal cosmology which scholars have deduced primarily from conservative-looking elements of Snorri Sturluson's mythography.[51] To quote Hastrup (1985, 147),

> There was a fundamental distinction between a horizontal and a vertical axis. Horizontally, the cosmos was divided into Miðgarðr and Útgarðr. Miðgarðr was the central space, as implied by the name {'middle-enclosure'}, inhabited by men (and gods), while Útgarðr was found 'outside the fence', beyond the borders of Miðgarðr, and inhabited by giants and non-humans. We note here the close parallel to the conceptualization of the farmstead (*innangarðs* {literally 'within the enclosure'}) and the surrounding uncontrolled space (*útangarðs* {literally 'outside the enclosure'}). According to the myths of creation, this initial division of cosmos into two separate spaces was brought about by the gods (*æsir*), who subsequently built their own abode, Ásgarðr, somewhere inside Miðgarðr. There was no opposition between heaven and earth in this model, and topologically Ásgarðr was inseparable from Miðgarðr. Consequently there was no absolute distinction between men and gods. In opposition to the men and the (controlled) gods stood the uncontrolled, often hostile, *jötnar* ('giants') and other kinds of supernatural beings.

Inferring this binary system involves a number of simplifications. In particular, Kuhn warned that the terms *Miðgarðr*, *Ásgarðr* and *Útgarðr* used by Hastrup may be

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[51] Vries 1956–57, 372–92; Gurevich 1969, 42–47; Meletinskij 1973ab; Hastrup 1985, 136–54. Cf. Schjødt 1990; Clunies Ross 1994–98, esp. ɪ 48–56.

comparatively late innovations in Norse; the proper noun *Útgarðr* is attested only in one passage in *Gylfaginning* (ed. Faulkes 1982, 38–39), the opposition of the terms *Útgarðr* and *Miðgarðr* being a scholarly construct. However, our earliest Norse evidence does suggest a similar division into Mannheimar, Goðheimar and Jǫtunheimar ('Human-, *goð*- and *jǫtunn*-world(s)'; Kuhn 1969–78, IV 295–302), which, if we can assume that Goðheimar was within Mannheimar, is consistent with the system which Hastrup posited. These three *heimar* correlate neatly with the three groups of beings which I have identified on semantic grounds, *æsir* and *álfar*, *menn*, and monsters. Although this kind of simple, binary cosmological paradigm is internationally widespread, it is by no means universal, differing—to give an important counterpoint—from the world-views implied by Biblical Judaic writings (see White 1972; for further examples Helms 1988, 22–30). The boundaries between the worlds were not rigid, varying according to contexts social (e.g. subsistence farming vs. trading), temporal (e.g. day vs. night), literary (e.g. *historia* vs. *fabula*), and so forth. While the model might be applied on a macrocosmic (or mythological) scale, it had a microcosmic dimension, with the farm a *miðgarðr* surrounded by a chaotic outer world (cf. Gurevich 1969, 43–45).

Within this broad binary paradigm, gods and monsters related to men in two main ways. As recent commentators have emphasised, mythological narratives of relationships between *æsir* and *jǫtnar*—which involve violence but also intermarriage—probably reflected, or provided models for, relations between Norse-speaking in-groups and their ethnically different neighbours, principally the *Finnar* ('Sámi').[52] But in another kind of relationship, more useful for interpreting the Anglo-Saxon evidence for *ælfe*, gods and monsters were not mythological parallels to men, but corporeal beings walking in men's world, whom men might in theory encounter. Gods and monsters were conceptually similar to, and might even be identified with, ethnic others, while members of the human in-group could, actually or metaphorically, become monstrous, particularly if they remained in contact with the in-group after the severances of outlawry or death.[53] This is the situation in *Vǫlundarkviða* and the canonically mythological *Grímnismál*, as well as various later sagas, among them the *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum*, from around 1300, which says that 'er kunikt i ollum fornum frassognvm um þat folk, er Alfar hetv, at þat var miklu friðara en engi onnur mankind a Norðrlondum' ('it is made known in all the

[52] Mundal 2000; cf. 1996, 110–12; Hermann Pálsson 1997, esp. 16–23, 154–56; cf. Koht 1923; Meulengracht Sørensen 1989 [1977]; Clunies Ross 1994–98, I 60–66; more generally Cohen 1996, 7–12; Uebel 1996. For recent archaeological evidence for Norse-Sámi interactions which emphasises the validity of these parallels see also Götherström 2001a, 25–26; 2001b, 11–12; cf. Zachrisson and others 1997; Price 2000, 18–22.
[53] DuBois 1999, 69–91; Sayers 1996; for outlawry cf. Orchard 2003a, 140–68; more generally Olsen 2001. For the partial synonymy of *Finnr* with monster-words, see Hermann Pálsson 1997, 18–20.

old histories of the people which is called the *Álfar*, that it was much more beautiful/handsome than any other human race in the North-lands'; ed. af Petersens– Olson 1919–25, 25, with slight normalisation; see also Lassen 2003; Lindow 2003, 105). It is often assumed that Christian Scandinavians' depictions of the pagan gods as powerful humans with magical powers, as in the prologue to *Snorra Edda* or the first book of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, necessarily shows Christian euhemerisation of pagan divinities (notably Krag 1991, 58–59; Johnson 1995, 42–44). But this view assumes that pagan gods had the incorporeal character of the Christian God. I suspect instead that the 'euhemerisations' in our Norse sources involved no paradigm shift from traditional culture; indeed, the euhemerised gods of Snorri Sturluson and Alfred the Great, unlike those of other early medieval euhemerists, deliberately use their magical powers to establish divine reputations, rather than simply being apotheosised after their deaths, perhaps suggesting that Alfred and Snorri altered their inherited conceptions of pagan gods to a minimal extent (see Johnson 1995, 43–44; ch. 38 of Alfred's translation of the *De consolatio philosophiae*; ed. Sedgefield 1899, 115–16, 194–95). Gods and men were not essentially different, an argument well-established for medieval Ireland which also enjoys Classical parallels.[54]

A more subtle supplement to the binary model is required to interpret how men of the in-group related to gods and to monsters. A convincing one is suggested by the relationships between the Hellenic citizens of the city-states, wild beings such as satyrs and nymphs (*Σάτυροι, Νύμφαι*), and barbarians and monsters such as the centaurs or cyclopses (*Κένταυροι, Κύκλωπες*), in ancient Hellenic world-views.[55] As Bartra put it (1994, 14, citing White 1972), the mythology implies

> the existence of a mythological space inhabited by wild men that are clearly distinguishable from barbarians. In contrast with barbarians, who constituted a threat to society in general and to Greek society as a whole, the wild man represented a threat to the individual… White clearly demonstrates that, conventionally, barbarian lands were geographically remote, and the moment of their incursion upon the frontiers of the Greek world would signal an apocalypse: the appearance of hordes of barbarians implied the fracturing of the foundation of the world and the death of an epoch. In contrast the wild man is omnipresent, inhabiting the immediate confines of the community. He is found in the neighbouring forests, mountains and islands.

This is undeniably a grand tidying up of the evidence; a full investigation would develop Buxton's self-consciously pluralistic approaches to Hellenic mythological landscapes (1994, 80–113, cf. 197, 205–7). But the model is convincing and ethnographically

[54] See Hamel 1934, esp. 207–27; Sjoestedt 1949 [1940], esp. 92–93; Ó Riain 1986, esp. 245–51; cf. Carey 1995, 53–54; *pace* Mackey 1992, whose objections, where relevant, strike me as insubstantial. For Classical material note in addition to the discussion below the identification of *fauni* as Italy's *aborigines*, the primeval ancestors of the Romans (Stroh 1999, 565–66). Though long ridiculed, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century demythologisations of fairies as past races (on which see Spence 1946, 53–64, 115–31; cf. Purkiss 2000, 5–7) were not so far off the mark.
[55] White 1972; Bartra 1994, 9–41; Dowden 1992, 123–36, 158–61. Cf. Brink 2001, 83–85.

paralleled (see Helms 1988, 23–24). In it, the role of the barbarians is identical to that of the *jǫtnar* in Old Norse material concerning the Ragnarǫk (on which see Vries 1956–57, II 392–405; Turville-Petre 1964, 280–85), recalling the binary division between humans and monsters and the alignment of monsters with ethnic others. The wild men, however, falling between Hellenic citizens and barbarians afford a neat parallel for the *álfar*. Like the wild men and in contradistinction to monsters, Óðinn in *Grímnismál* and Vǫlundr in *Vǫlundarkviða* are not threats to humanity itself, but to individuals within humanity. Whereas the threat of the monsters is chaotic and final, the threats posed by Óðinn and Vǫlundr serve to punish transgressions of acceptable behaviour, and to warn those who hear of them against similar transgressions.

Ethnic others in early medieval Scandinavian world-views need not only have been identified with monsters. As Lindow has emphasised, *Finnar* can also be associated with otherworldly beings; the *Írar* ('Irish') likewise are associated in the sagas with positive supernatural powers and worlds.[56] Both *Finnar* and *Írar* may threaten members of the in-group, but, at least at times, in ordered threats to transgressing individuals, affording close parallels to *Vǫlundarkviða* and *Grímnismál*. Non-monstrous but supernaturally-empowered ethnic others, gods, wild men and so forth can be seen in some ways as one conceptual group, conveniently labelled *otherworldly*. Lindow considered that readings of this sort are 'incompatible' with the association of *jǫtnar* with the Sámi (2003, 103 n. 2), but I think rather that we have variation. It might be attributed to chronological, social or regional factors, but also to the slippery nature of the concepts involved. As Cohen argued, 'representing an anterior culture as monstrous justifies its displacement or extermination by rendering the act heroic' (1996, 7–8), and in contexts of conflict, one might expect the monstrous potentialities of *Finnar* to gain prominence. The same point stands, *mutatis mutandis*, for pagan gods faced with Christianisation. On the other hand, mediated social contact in a stable, if uneasy, co-existence might promote instead the otherworldly potentialities of neighbouring peoples. It should also be admitted that the monstrosity of the *jǫtnar* can be overstated (see Clunies Ross 1994–98, esp. I 56–79; cf. Motz 1984; Acker 2002); there is probably a case that the connotations of *þurs*, for example, were nastier than those of its partial synonym *jǫtunn*. We should, then, view our second model as a cline between two poles, the extremes marked by men of the human in-group on the one hand and beings like *þursar* on the other:

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[56] On *Finnar*, Lindow 1995; cf. 2003 and the inclusion of *Vǫlundarkviða* in Mundal 1996; on *Írar* Hermann Pálsson 1996, 139–49; cf. Jónas Kristjánsson 1998, 268–74. Cf. generally Ó Giolláin 1987.

−MONSTROUS   +MONSTROUS
   human in-group   gods etc.   ethnic others   *jǫtnar*   *þursar*
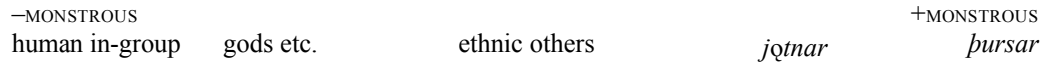
Figure 3: *monstrosity in medieval Scandinavia*

This cline puts ethnic others in a suitably ambiguous position, from which they might be associated either with gods and the like or with monsters.

This handling of the Norse evidence does not incorporate all of the complicating detail which could be adduced, such as vertical cosmological elements, other words for supernatural beings in Norse, or the place of gender. I advance these models, therefore, only tentatively as a reconstruction of world views in any given variety of medieval Scandinavian culture. However, I do think that they suggest an acceptable range of likelihoods for the ways in which concepts of *álfar* related to those of *æsir*, *menn* and *jǫtnar*, and to discourses of group identity. They also show how semantic evidence for the meanings of these words indeed reflects Scandinavian world-views as attested by other kinds of evidence, providing a framework for exploring the earliest Old English evidence for the meanings of *ælf* and *ælfe*.

Part 2

The Old English Textual Evidence for *Ælfe*

Chapter 3

The Earliest Anglo-Saxon Evidence: Etymology, Onomastics and Morphology

My investigation of the Norse evidence for *álfr* has facilitated the reconstruction of *álfr*'s earliest meanings and of at least some of the main semantic fields which it bordered or overlapped. We may turn now to *álfr*'s Old English cognate. Reconstructing its pre-conversion meanings is difficult, and attempts hitherto have been either too tentative or too speculative to be useful. But I show that there is evidence for *ælf*'s early meanings in its roles in the Old English system of dithematic personal names and in the Old English morphological reorganisation of etymological long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems around the seventh century. These sources correlate almost exactly with the early Scandinavian evidence for the meanings of *álfr* discussed above, the correlation in turn providing a basis for inferring the place of *ælfe* in early Anglo-Saxon cosmologies. Thus, this chapter not only provides a basic picture of the early meanings of *ælf* against which to seek evidence for subsequent continuity and change, but considers a key aspect of the place of *ælfe* in Anglo-Saxon world-views.

1. Etymology

Both cognate and internal Old English evidence demand a masculine Common Germanic nominative singular */ɑlβi-z/ denoting some kind of supernatural being (cf. Appendix 1). Norse *álfr* and some medieval German plurals do not show the expected *i*-mutation, demanding either an early *a*-stem variant */ɑlβɑ-z/ or later analogical transference to the *a*-stem declension.[57] Grimm observed that its obvious Indo-European cognates, deriving from a root */ɑlbh-/, are connected semantically by whiteness (1882–88 [1875–88], II 444), and it must originally have meant 'white one'.[58] Examples are Latin *albus*

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[57] */ɑlβaz/ is not an etymon of the Old English word, however, and its citation in the *MED* (s.v. *elf*) is misleading: perhaps in consequence, Edwards cited this etymon (2002, 79) and Colman identified *ielf* as an *a*-stem (1988, 119).

[58] An alternative etymology derives *ælf* from a variant of Indo-European *°lbhu, presumably with an *a*-colouring laryngeal, an etymon supposedly evidenced by Sanskrit ̥*rbhu* ('clever, skilful, inventive, prudent', but also the name of a deity and by extension a class of deities, Kazanas 2001, 274), since Sanskrit *r* can derive not only from Indo-European */̥r/, but also Indo-European */̥l/. Bizarrely, this is the only etymology for *ælf* in the *OED* (s.v. *elf*), which perhaps helps to explain the occasional support still voiced for the idea (e.g. Dronke 1997, 261–62; Kazanas 2001, 276). But ̥*rbhu* affords slender evidence for a possible etymon of *ælf* (cf. Peters 1963, 252–53); it is admittedly short of likely cognates (Mayrhofer 1956–80, s.v. ̥*rbhú̥h*), but *ælf* will not solve this

('white'); Old Irish *ailbhín* ('flock'); the ancient Greek ῎αλφι τον ('barley-flour'); Albanian *elb* ('barley'); and Germanic words for 'swan' such as Old English *ylfetu* (Mann 1984–87, s.vv. *albhedis*, *albhis*, cf. *albhos*; Pokorny 1959–69, ɪ s.vv. *albhi-*, cf. *albho-*). However, the etymology is not in itself very revealing: innumerable explanations could be hypothesised for the association of supernatural beings with whiteness. Grimm took the whiteness to imply positive moral connotations and noted the congruence with Old Norse *ljósálfr* (1888–82 [1875–88], ɪɪ 444), and we might still invoke *álfrǫðull*, denoting the sun, as evidence for an ancient association of *álfar* with light. However, although *ælf*'s Indo-European cognates are connected by whiteness, they do not generally suggest lucidity. As I discuss below, however, both the *vanr* Heimdallr and the *álfr* Vǫlundr are described as *hvítr* ('white') in contexts where it seems to connote their lack of masculinity (§7:3)—a characteristic which seems reasonably well-attested in our textual Old English evidence for *ælfe*. One wonders, then, if this is how *alβīz* got their name. Either way, however, the Indo-European etymology of *ælf* must be explained by our medieval data, and not *vice versa*.

2. Personal names

The early Germanic languages had a rich tradition of dithematic personal names, formed according to a shared naming-system comprising name-elements drawn from the common lexicon.[59] Since its reflexes occur in names throughout the Germanic languages, we may number *alβiz* among these,[60] and such names may afford evidence for the semantics of *ælf*. Name-formation was controlled in three main ways: dynastic relations might be expressed through repetition or alliteration of name-elements between generations (Woolf 1939, 246–59; Keil 1936, esp. 6–26, 109–26); some elements usually only occurred finally (as generics), while others, including *alβi-*, usually only occurred initially (as modifiers); and, according to conventional wisdom, there was a strong preference for second elements whose grammatical gender corresponded with the sex of the name-bearer.[61] This naming-system was maintained in Old English, albeit with a

problem (cf. Lloyd–Springer 1988–, s.v. *alb*).

  Menn has suggested that the root **/ɑlbh/* is itself a loan from Sindarin *alph* ('swan'; 1978, 143). This raises some intriguing possibilities. However, her argument that Old English *ylfetu* preserves the original meaning is hard to sustain in view of the full range of Indo-European evidence and *ylfetu*'s obviously secondary character (for its suffix see Voyles 1992, §§7.2.8, 7.2.32).

[59] For surveys of Anglo-Saxon naming practises, see Clark 1992; Kitson 2002; cf. Colman 1992, 12–69.

[60] See Searle 1897, 6–30; summarised by Jente 1921, 170–71; Förstemann 1900–16, ɪ s.v. *alfi*, supplemented by Kaufmann 1968, sv.; Lind 1905–15, cols 11–14, 16; 1931, cols 1, 18.

[61] For Old English see Searle 1897, xiii; Clark 1992, 457. Colman 1996, 13–17 argues for a tendency for elements' genders to be changed to fit the gender of the bearer, however; cf. Kitson

growing preference for certain fixed combinations which meant that by the eleventh century, dithematic names were generally of fixed form and often opaque as lexically meaningful compounds (Colman 1992, 55–67; cf. Clark 1992, 461; Kitson 2002, 105–6).

The Old English dithematic personal names afford extensive and early attestations of *ælf*-compounds, but scholars have generally shied from using this material to reconstruct *ælf*'s lexical meanings because of the complex relationship between name-elements and their lexical counterparts. Names primarily denoted their bearers rather than being lexically meaningful compounds (Colman 1992, 12–16; cf. Barley 1974, 1–13), and Germanic names probably always included elements which were not transparently meaningful, either because they had been borrowed from other languages or because linguistic changes had rendered once-transparent elements obscure. Thus although it is clear from puns and literal translations that Old English dithematic personal names were potentially meaningful (see Robinson 1968, 35–57; 1993 [1970]; Harris 1982), it is considered unlikely that patterns in the pairings of elements in Old English names reflect the elements' lexical meanings.[62] Likewise, it is possibly of interest that elements such as *ælf* and *os*, like for example *æðel* ('noble') occur only as modifiers, and never as generics: taking names as lexically meaningful compounds, this implies that a name-bearer might be like an *ælf*, but never be an *ælf* himself. That it is hard to demonstrate the significance of these observations does not necessarily mean that the principle that names reflect lexical semantics is at fault—merely that it is hard to test it systematically (cf. the observations of Müller and Hald discussed above, §2:2). Even without undertaking syntagmatic analyses, however, it is possible plausibly to derive some semantic information from Anglo-Saxon personal names.

The range of elements available for Anglo-Saxon dithematic name-formation was limited, and it is generally assumed that these name-elements lexically denoted things or attributes with positive cultural associations (Clark 1992, 457–58; cf. Kitson 2002, 97). To some extent, therefore, we are dealing with a semantically-defined system, and its inclusion of *ælf* can be analysed from this perspective. The fact that *ælf* is a common initial element in Old English dithematic personal names such as *Ælfred* and *Ælfric* has long been understood to suggest a benign aspect for *ælfe*.[63] This hypothesis can be tested

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2002, 97, 99, 100.

[62] Woolf 1939, 263–4; Ström 1939, 44; Barley 1974, esp. 13; Kitson 2002, 99–100. *Contra*, e.g., Schramm, who compared *Ælfflæd*, etymologically '*ælf*-beautiful', with the poetic compound *ælfscyne*, literally '*ælf*-beautiful', as if the correlation were significant evidence for the semantics of *ælf* (1957, 135; cf. Jente 1921, 172; Stuart 1976, 316). It has also been suggested that *engel* ('angel') was introduced to Old High German names as a replacement for *alp*, perhaps suggesting some semantic correspondence (and distinctions) between the two (Keightley 1850, 66 first note; Mitterauer 1993, 224–30); but the necessary systematic analysis is beyond my present scope.

[63] e.g. Dickins 1933, 156–57; Storms 1948, 51; Thun 1969, 392; Stuart 1976, 314; Lecouteux 1997, 153.

with a systematic survey. The basis for Old English name-studies is still Searle's *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum* (1897), which is greatly flawed (Insley 2002). But, supplemented with later works and used with due circumspection, it still gives a good idea of the range of name-elements available in Anglo-Saxon dithematic naming-practises.[64] I survey only initial elements, since *ælf* does not occur finally,[65] establishing an inclusive list of Old English words which could denote animate beings and which occur as protothemes in Anglo-Saxon personal names. I divide it for convenience into five semantic groups, marking words which occur as protothemes in Anglo-Saxon names less than ten times in Searle's *Onomasticon* with an asterisk (*) as a crude indicator of rarity (most are either substantially more or less common than this). Words which may not belong in the category in which they are placed, or in the survey at all, are marked with a question mark (?) and where necessary discussed in the footnotes:

Person:	?ar* ('messenger'),[66] beorn ('man'), bregu ('lord'), cwen ('woman'), ?cyn(e),[67] ?frea* ('lord'),[68] ?freo ('lady'),[69] gisl ('hostage'), ?gyst* ('guest'), gum ('man' < *guma*), hæl* ('man' < *hæle*), ?helm ('protector'),[70] hyse* (young man'), leod ('man'), mæg ('kinsman'), mann ('person'), ?rinc* ('man'),[71] scealc* ('man'), þegn* ('thegn'), weard* ('guard'), wine ('friend').
People(s):	Angel,[72] ?Cent* (< *Cantici*),[73] cynn ('family'), Dene, dryht

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[64] I also use Birch 1899, Ström's analysis of Old English personal names in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (1939, itself supplemented particularly by Anderson 1941, 67–74; Els 1972, 115–77), Colman's study and catalogue of moneyers' names in the reign of Edward the Confessor (1992), Keats-Rohan and Thornton's index of personal names in the Domesday surveys (1997), and comparison with naming in cognate languages (by reference to Förstemann 1900–16, ɪ; Kaufmann 1968; Lind 1905–15; 1931).

[65] *Contra* Searle (1897, s.vv. *Beorelf*, *Heorælf*). Searle's forms occur in place-names in S1536, now Barlaston (Staffs) or Barlestone (Leics) and Harlaston (Staffs), too unusual to be useful. Cognates of *ælf* seem not to occur as second elements in medieval German personal-names: 'das in Vollnamen als Zweitglied erscheinende "-alp, -alf" kann unmöglich zu Alβi- gehören. Denn die Regel, daß vokalisch anlautende Zweitglieder gemieden werden, duldet nackweislich keine Ausnahme' ('the element "-alp, -alf" which appears in dithematic names as a second element cannot possibly be related to *Alβi-*. For the rule that second elements beginning in vowels are avoided demonstrably permits no exceptions'; Kaufmann 1968, 29).

[66] If a genuine element, this seems more likely, however, to be the word meaning 'honour' (Ström 1939, 6–7).

[67] *Cyne-* in Old English usually means 'royal', but possibly in early personal names shared the meaning of its Old Icelandic cognate *konr* ('man (of noble birth)'; Ström 1939, 11–12).

[68] Unless denoting the Old English counterpart of Freyr.

[69] More likely, however, is the meaning 'noble, free', which seems to be required by cognates (Ström 1939, 16); some occurrences could be variants of *frea*.

[70] This can denote armour as well as people (see Ström 1939, 21).

[71] Attestations may be forms of *hring*.

[72] Possibly an eponymous ancestor. Sometimes perhaps 'angel', in which case it belongs under 'Supernatural being' if it is not excluded as a loan-word.

[73] More probably to be understood as the name of the kingdom, names in *Cent-* being understood as nicknames (Clark 1992, 460).

	('warband, people'), folc ('army, people'), ?folþ* ('retinue' < *folgoþ*),[74] Geat*,[75] ?had* ('rank; tribe'),[76] here ('army'), hloþ* ('company'),[77] noþ* ('warband'),[78] Peoht, Seax,[79] Swæf, þeod ('people'), ?Wealh,[80] Wendel*.[81]
Animal:	?deor ('wild animal'),[82] earn ('eagle'), eofor* ('boar'),[83] eoh ('horse'),[84] fisc* ('fish'), gos* ('goose'), ?hun ('cub'),[85] hund* ('dog'), seolh* ('seal'),[86] ?stut* ('gnat'), wulf ('wolf').
Supernatural being:	ælf, god ('god'),[87] os, ?regen ('gods'),[88] ?run* ('otherworldly female').[89]
Unclassified:	wiht ('being'),[90] wyrm ('worm, snake, maggot, dragon').[91]

Many details of this selection are problematic. Nevertheless, some useful points emerge, and are not blurred by my inclusion of dubious elements. Of the words denoting

[74] This relies both on the etymology being correct, and the exclusion of the equally obvious sense 'service'.

[75] Possibly an eponymous ancestor (cf. Colman 1992, 76).

[76] Or possibly 'personality', in which case it belongs here, if at all, under 'Person'.

[77] This etymology is open to question (Ström 1939, 23–24), but not seriously to doubt (Anderson 1941, 68).

[78] This is a rare meaning and 'daring; plunder' more likely, in which case the word should be excluded.

[79] Unless an eponymous ancestor or 'dagger' (see Ström 1939, 33).

[80] Unless 'foreigner; slave', in which case it belongs under 'Person' (see Ström 1939, 38).

[81] Unless an eponymous ancestor.

[82] Unless 'beloved; precious' or 'brave, fierce', in which case it should be excluded.

[83] As Kitson noted (2002, 116), although Searle gave numerous references to *Eofor*-names, most come from Continental sources, in accordance with his exasperating inclusion of Continental names in (sometimes incorrectly) Anglicised form (cf. Insley 2002, 158–59). Colman (1992) and Birch (1899) record no example of *Eofor*- or its variants.

[84] This is probable but not certain (see Ström 1939, 14–15).

[85] Unless this is the cognate of the ethnonym *Hun* (see Ström 1939, 24–25; Colman 1992, 103).

[86] See Colman 1992, 112.

[87] This may at times represent the etymon of *good*; comparative evidence, however, puts it beyond doubt that at least some examples represent the etymon of *god* (Förstemann 1900–16, I s.vv. *goda*, *guda*; Kaufmann 1968, s.vv. *gōda*, *gŭda*; Mitterauer 1993, 222–23; cf. Colman 1992, 98).

[88] Unless in the meaning 'advice' or as an intensifier (Ström 1939, 32).

[89] Unless 'rune; counsel'. *Run* is common finally and is usually taken in this position to reflect a usage of *run* and its cognates as the second element in words denoting otherworldly females, attested in all the branches of Germanic (cf. Schramm 1957, 135–36, 166). However, it is rare initially and might have been taken in this position to denote runes, advice, or mysterious knowledge (see Fell 1991; Page 1995a).

[90] While transparent enough in synchronic terms, this name-element is rare on the Continent and absent from Scandinavia (where, however, the cognates are etymologically problematic, Vries 1964, s.vv. *vættr* and the words there cited), and other etymologies have been suggested (Ström 1939, 39). It seems hard to believe, however, that it was not understood as the word *wiht* in synchronic use (cf. Kitson 2002, 118).

[91] The place of *wyrm* is problematic because it may have been taken to denote an animal ('maggot, worm, snake'), a supernatural being ('dragon'), or possibly even a one-time man (assuming, through comparison with Norse evidence, that the *wyrm* in *Beowulf* was once the 'last survivor' who speaks in lines 2208–93. The argument was make by Tripp 1983 but has since regained a degree of favour: see Rauer 2000, 39–40 and references there). On *wyrm* and its cognates in personal names more generally, see Müller 1970, 64–67, 147–48.

beings used as protothemes in Old English dithematic names, most lexically denote people or peoples and so are self-evidently semantically appropriate to anthroponyms, while the commoner animal-names seem to reflect their cultural prestige in early Germanic-speaking cultures (see Müller 1970, esp. 195–212). Besides these words, we find *ælf*, *os*, *god*, and, if understood in Old English to denote gods, *regen*. This distribution is identical, cognate for cognate, to that of words for supernatural beings in kennings for men in skaldic verse and related evidence: *ás*, *álfr*, *goð* and *regin* (see above, §§2:2–3). Likewise, the numerous other Old English words for monsters such as *þyrs*, *eoten*, *puca*, *dweorg* or *mære* are absent from the Anglo-Saxon name-stock, as are their cognates from the kennings. So precise a correlation is impressive, presumably reflecting both similarities in belief and the systematic overlap between dithematic kennings denoting men and lexically meaningful dithematic names denoting people (on which see Barley 1974, 18–24; cf. Schramm 1957, 106–19 *et passim*). The parallel extends, naturally enough, to Old Norse dithematic personal names, in which *ás*, *guð* and *regin* are common initial elements (e.g. *Ásmundr*, *Guðrún*, *Rǫgnvaldr*), and *álfr* respectably well-attested (e.g. *Álfhildr*), and from which monster-words are generally excluded (see Lind 1905–15, *passim*; 1931, *passim*).

These considerations suggest the existence of a Germanic naming-system whose protothemes included the etyma of *ælf*, *os*, *regen* and *god*, their mythologically significant collocation in Old Norse poetry thereby being attested for the culture of Common Germanic-speakers. The exclusion of words for monsters from Old English and Norse personal names might not be so old: the German and East Germanic material attests to a scattering of names whose first elements are thought to be cognates of Old Norse *þurs* and maybe *risi* ('giant') and *gýgr* ('ogress, witch'; Förstemann 1900–16, I s.vv. *gug*, *risi*, *thursja*; Kaufmann 1968, s.vv. *gug*, *rĭsi*, *thursja*). The sparse attestation of these elements hints that this was a dying tradition or the product of sporadic innovation, but they also imply that the exclusion of monster-word from the Old English and Old Norse dithematic name-systems was not inevitable. This encourages the supposition that the other name-elements reflect the synchronic meanings of their lexical counterparts. Even so, the value of the onomastic evidence for Anglo-Saxon culture is open to question. The fact that *ælf* and *os* remained in the naming-system after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons may simply reflect conservatism, as with the retention of *Wealh*- after *wealh* ('foreigner', later 'Welshman, slave') had become pejorative (see Clark 1992, 463–64; Faull 1975, esp. 31–32): the social significance of repeating name-elements within a family apparently outweighed the importance of reacting to gradual changes in

their lexical meanings.[92] Although new elements were added to the system, such as *Peoht-* ('Pict') and *Trum-* ('strong', a Brittonic loan: Breeze 1993), while some seem to have been dropped, such as *-ides* ('lady'), several elements which had been lost from the common lexicon survived throughout the Old English period (e.g. *-flæd*, *Tond-*, Ström 1939, 15, 37), presenting a real possibility that the presence of *ælf* in the personal name system merely reflects the semantics of a long-distant time. A further correlative is required.

3. Old English morphology

Ælf was an *i*-stem, while the fact that its root vowel */ɑ-/ was followed by two consonants, */-lβ/, defined its stem as long. In prehistoric Old English, most long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems, including the monster-words *þyrs*, *wyrm* and *ent*, were transferred to the *a*-stem declension (Hogg 1992b, 131–32; Campbell 1959, §600), so taking the nominative/accusative plural inflexion *-as*, producing the attested Old English plurals *þyrsas*, *wyrmas* and *entas*.[93] The only long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems to retain the old nominative/accusative plural *-e* were plural names of peoples (e.g. *Myrce*, 'Mercians', *Seaxe*, 'Saxons'); the plural denoting 'people', *ylde*; the suffixes denoting 'dwellers', *-sæte*, *-ware*; and *ælf* (plural *ælfe*; Campbell 1959, §610.7; Wright–Wright 1925, §385). They were joined by loans such as *Beornice* ('Bernicians') and *Egypte* ('Egyptians'). In short, the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension became a productive declension for words denoting people or peoples.

The presence of *ælf* in this declension of ethnonyms militates for a semantic association of *ælfe* with humankind. This detail not only parallels the use of *ælf* in anthroponymy, but also my argument that *álfar* and ethnic others were potentially members of the same early medieval Scandinavian conceptual category, which I labelled 'otherworldly beings'. This is not the only possible inference: *ælf* may be a member of this declension by metaphorical linking (possibly on the basis of mythology) rather than because it is a prototypical example of a human group (cf. Lakoff 1987, esp. 91–114).

[92] North has suggested that *ælf* occurs in names to ward off the threat of demonic *ælfe* (1997, 54). The distinction between seeking a deity's support and seeking to avert his or her displeasure is admittedly blurry, but North's idea does not account for the absence from names of words for monsters which certainly denoted threats, and conflicts with the inclusion of *Þórr*, *álfr*, *ás*, etc. in pagan Scandinavian personal names, where these denote primarily beneficent forces. For the lack of change in Norse personal names, and the argument that Christianisers were not interested in this aspect of culture, see Kousgård Sørensen (1990, 394–97). In any case, this thesis shows that *ælf* and its reflexes retained positive connotations in many speech-communities throughout medieval English, so its retention in names need have involved no serious semantic conflict

[93] On the etymologies of these words, see Jente 1921, 187–89, 134–35, 181–84; cf. Holthausen 1934, s.vv. *ent*, *ðyrs*, *wyrm*.

Even so, the possibility even of metaphorical association with words for people and peoples, contrasting with the exclusion of words for monsters from the declension, is strong evidence for *ælf*'s semantics. This evidence would relate to the period when the morphology of the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems was re-organised—after Old English separated from the Continental West Germanic dialect continuum (since these dialects preserved the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declesion, Braune 1987, §§214–16; Gallée 1910, §§319–20) and after the onset of *i*-mutation (since *i*-stems moved to the *a*-stem declension, such as *þyrs*, show *i*-mutation). The situation before the morphological change is barely represented in our texts if at all (Campbell 1959, §601), so it must have ended by the time Old English was first being written, in the second half of the seventh century (Pheifer's dating of the original of the Épinal-Erfurt glosses, 1987). The development seems to have taken place in all dialects of Old English, and presumably stands as evidence, therefore, for all parts of English-speaking Britain before or around that time.

It is also of interest that *ælf* seems to have had a familiar partner in the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension: *os*. *Os* is attested only in the nominative singular (as a name-element and once as a rune-name which, however, is interpreted as though it were the Latin word meaning *mouth*) and in the genitive plural form *esa* in *Wið færstice*. Old Icelandic *ás* is etymologically a *u*-stem; if *os* was too, then it should not have exibited the *i*-mutation apparent in the genitive plural form *esa* in *Wið færstice*.[94] This form would most obviously be explained by assuming that, in the plural, *os* had been moved to the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension. Possibly an *i*-stem variant of *os* existed in North-West Germanic (as argued by Holmberg 1992a from certain Norse personal names); otherwise it is plausible enough that Old English-speakers transferred *os* in the plural to the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension because of its assocation with *ælfe* and ethnonyms. If this inference is correct then Old English morphology as well as Anglo-Saxon names shows an association of *ælf* with *os*. There is a textual correlative for this argument, first noted by Grimm, in the fact that *os* occurs in *Wið færstice* in alliterative collocation with *ælf* (1882–88 [1875–78], ɪ 25; cf. ɪɪ 460). However, although Harley 585 shows no obvious Scandinavian influence,[95] the case for the influence of Norse vernacular poetry on Old English has enough support that we must take seriously the idea that the formulaic collocation of *os* and *ælf* in *Wið færstice* might be borrowed (e.g. Watson 2002, see 498 n. 2 for further references). But the collocation of *ese* and

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[94] *Contra* Campbell (1959, §620), who took it as an athematic stem.
[95] The word *fled* at the end of the charm, if we do not emend, would seem least unlikely to be from Norse, but this is hardly a reliable point (Doane 1994a, 144).

ælfe in *Wið færstice* at least shows the longevity of an association attested in naming-practices inherited from Common Germanic.

The Old English reformation of the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension affords secure evidence that the lexical associations and semantics attested for *ælf* in early Norse poetry and Old English personal names were current in early Old English, and we may be reasonably confident that *ælf* had at this time no less positive connotations than *álfr* did when the relevant skaldic and Eddaic poetry was being composed.

4. Contexts and interpretations

Combining the evidence of Old English morphology and personal names, and the earliest Old Norse evidence, we find a fundamentally consistent set of associations for *ælf* and *álfr*: a lexical collocation with *os*/*ás* (and to a lesser extent *god*/*goð* and *regen*/*regin*), suggesting that the words denoted significantly similar beings; a more general association with the denotation of people and peoples, which suggests that *ælfe*/*álfar* and *ese*/*æsir* were like humans in some crucial respect(s); and a semantic contradistinction to the words denoting monsters which aligns *ælfe*/*álfar*, *ese*/*æsir* and humans in a systematic opposition to monsters. This system seems likely to have existed in the common ancestors of Old English and Norse, so we must infer that Anglo-Saxons brought it with them when they migrated to Britain. At any rate, it was certainly current in Scandinavia in a formative period of poetic language around the ninth and tenth centuries, and in Anglo-Saxon England in a morphologically formative period around the seventh. The Old English material adduced so far is neatly susceptible to the same componential analysis as I have applied to the Norse material, though the validity of the precise features used is so far justified largely by comparison with the Norse material:

	ælde	ese	ælfe	þyrsas, entas
SUPERNATURAL	−	+	+	+
MONSTROUS	−	−	−	+

Figure 4: *componential analysis of Old English words for beings*

Likewise, a similar semantic field diagram can be posited:
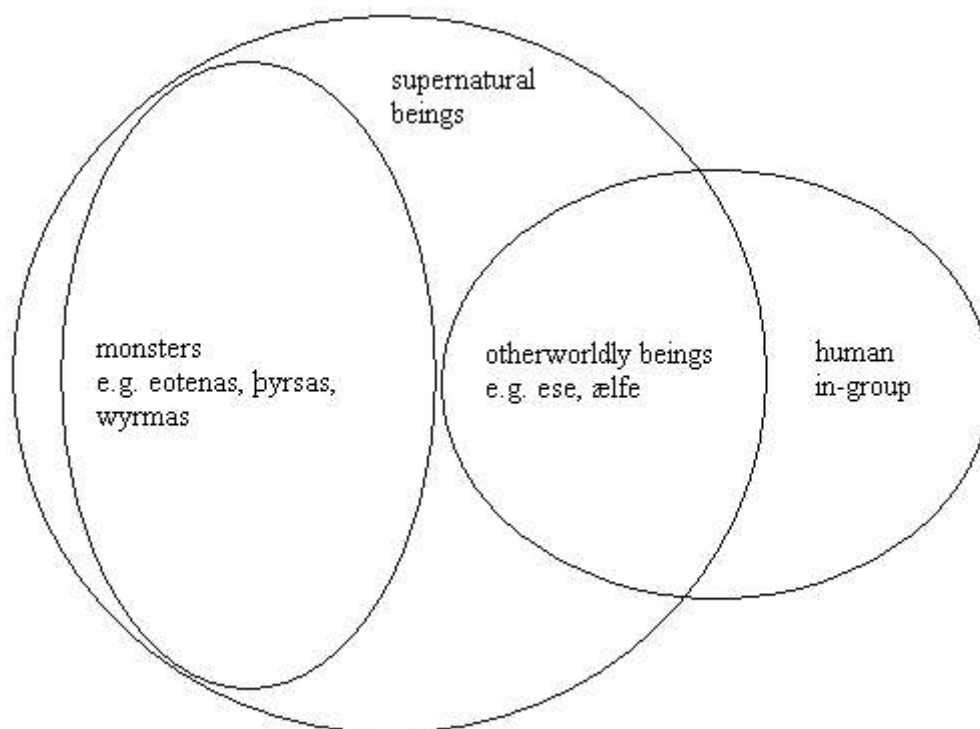
Figure 5: *semantic field diagram of Old English words for beings*

One corollary of this, consolidated by textual evidence considered below, is that it is unlikely that *ælfe* in early Old English were considered particularly small (an idea current already with Grimm 1882–88 [1875–78], II 449–51, and maintained since, e.g. Jolly 1998, 19–26; Henderson–Cowan 2001, 47), invisible (e.g. Jolly 1996, 134; 1998, 20) or incorporeal (e.g. Stuart 1972, 22). Although it is not conclusive, the early Old English evidence suggests corporeal anthropomorphic beings mirroring the human in-groups which believed in them. As I discuss at length below, this prospect is eminently well-paralleled: by the evidence for *álfar*; by the medieval Irish *aes síde*; the inhabitants of the medieval Welsh *Annwfn*; medieval Latin *fatae* and Old French *fées*, and their Middle English counterparts, *elves*; and the Older Scots *elvis*.[96]

Another corollary is that *ælfe* should probably be seen as components in early Anglo-Saxon discourses of group identity. That beliefs concerning supernatural beings helped to shape group identity in early Anglo-Saxon culture is established in our earliest Anglo-Saxon saints' lives. Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, composed around 730×49 (Colgrave 1956, 18–19), describes how Guthlac, living as a hermit on a fenland island, was tormented by demons. One night, Guthlac finds himself beset by what he initially takes to be *Brittannica agmina* ('British bands') but what proves later to be 'daemoniorum

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[96] On Scandinavia see in addition to chs 2 and 7 Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1990, 120–22; 1993; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2003, 170–83; cf. Feilberg 1910; on French Harf-Lancner 1984; Gallais 1992; Ferlampin-Acher 2002, 121–69; otherwise §§7.1.2, 8.3.

turmae' ('hosts of demons'). Guthlac's misapprehension is because the demons speak with the 'strimulentas loquelas' ('strident utterances') or, in variants, the 'barbaras loquelas' ('barbaric utterances') of the *Brittones* (ed. Colgrave 1956, 108–10). This episode could be demythologised to reflect a dream or hallucination inspired by Guthlac's time fighting Brittonic-speakers (cf. Cameron 1992; Meaney 2001, 39–41)— but if so, the 'mythologised' version which we now have strikes me as more important.

Demons and *Brittones* are implicitly aligned here in much the same way as *jǫtnar* and *Finnar*—and not for the last time (see §2:4; *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*; ed. Hathaway and others 1975, 4–7; Jones 1994). Though profoundly Christian, the *Vita Guthlaci* also arguably fits into traditional Anglo-Saxon discourses of group identity associating certain ethnic others with monsters. By this argument, Felix's account has its logical counterpart in chapter 9 of the anonymous *Liber beatae Gregorii papae* and book II.i of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, which relate Gregory the Great's punning association of *Anguli* ('Angles') with *angeli* ('angels'; ed. Colgrave 1968, 90, cf. 94; Colgrave–Mynors 1991, 132–34).[97] One may infer that in some early Christian Anglo-Saxon discourses, *Anguli* were to *Brittones* as *angeli* were to *daemones*—a reading well-paralleled in Anglo-Saxon constructions of themselves as holy and the Britons as heretical (on which see Higham 2002, 35–41). The equivalence implied here emphasises the plausibility of understanding the Anglo-Saxon morphological evidence to the same effect: that in traditional discourses, *Anguli* were in some sense mythologically paralleled by *ælfe* and *ese*. Possibly, indeed, *ælfe* were to *Anguli* what monsters were to *Brittones*.

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[97] Felix himself may or may not have known the story: he knew Bede's prose *Vita Cuthberti* intimately, and the *terminus post quem* for the *Vita Guthlaci* is itself based on Bede's failure to mention Guthlac in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, but there is no evidence that Felix knew this work; it is unlikely that he knew the Whitby *Vita Gregorii* (Colgrave 1956, 16, 19; cf. 1968, 56–60).

Chapter 4

The Poetic Evidence

1. *Beowulf*

Beowulf's one (certain) attestation of *ælf* is of particular interest because it situates *ælfe* within a wider discourse on the relationships between men and monsters in Anglo-Saxon culture, picking up the themes of the semantic evidence considered in Chapter 3.[98] It probably dates from the eighth or ninth centuries.[99] As Neville has emphasised regarding Old English poetry (1999, 144–63), Anglo-Saxon literature offers little in the way of explicit cosmography; what there is is directly based on Christian theology. *Beowulf*, however, is rich in implicit cosmology, which corroborates, elaborates and complicates my lexically-based reconstruction for sixth-century Anglo-Saxon culture of the relations between men and monsters.

To contextualise the ideological significance of the conflict between in-groups and monsters which appears both in *Beowulf* and widely in the earliest Anglo-Saxon art and literature (Clemoes 1995, 3–67; cf. Arent 1969, esp. 132–45), it is worth glancing at other literary evidence for traditional Anglo-Saxon cosmologies. Although Old English inherited a cognate of *Miðgarðr*, *middangeard*, this seems to have been losing favour to *Middaneard* ('middle-dominion, realm').[100] However, there is evidence other than this old prominence of *-geard* for settlement as a controlling metaphor in Anglo-Saxon cosmologies. The Anglo-Saxon Hell was sometimes localised to the North, rather than

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[98] Taylor and Salus noted that in the manuscript line 1314 reads 'hwæþre him alfwalda' and that although this has always been emended to *(e)alwalda* ('all-ruler'; cf. Kelly 1983, 245), it might be an *ælf*-compound (1982). The emendation is not unreasonable in terms of tendencies in scribal errors (it is unlikely to represent the hypercorrection discussed in Appendix 3 since in this case we would expect *ælf-* rather than *alf-*) and the argument of Taylor and Salus is unacceptable as it stands (and improved neither by Tripp 1986 nor Taylor 1998, 99–106). But *alfwalda* could be an old compound showing the failure of *i*-mutation (see Hogg 1992a, §5.85.11), and the reading has its merits in the poetic context. Hrothgar waits to see whether the *al(f)walda* will assist him at a point in the poem where he is conspicuously short of hope, his earlier invocations of the *alwalda* drying up (see Irving 1984, esp. 14–15; for further and incisive criticisms of Hrothgar see Gregorio 1999). The Danes have already shown a propensity to turn to the Devil in times of distress (cf. lines 175–88): in line 1314, too, Hrothgar may be turning to the *alfwalda*, understood by *Beowulf*'s audience as a synonym for the Devil. But this argument remains too speculative for confident deployment in this study.

[99] Fulk 1992, esp. 153–68, 381–92. Although Fulk underrated the possibility of linguistically conservative registers of Old English, his linguistic evidence makes later dating unlikely. For the dating debate see further Bjork–Obermeier 1997; Lapidge 2000 and Stanley's response (2002); Kiernan 1996 and Fulk's partial response (2004).

[100] Bosworth–Toller 1898; Toller 1921, s.vv. *middan-eard*, *middan-geard*; *MED*, s.v. *midden-ērd*; *OED*, s.vv. *middenerd*, *middle-erd*, *middle earth*; *DOST*, s.v. *Middil-erde*.

simply below the Earth, which strongly suggests the availability of a horizontal cosmology.[101] The diction used of the Creation in *Genesis A* (probably one of our earliest Old English poems, see §4:2) and in *Cædmon's Hymn* (allegedly dating from 680, and attested in Bede's Latin translation around 731) envisages the world in terms of the hall. The hall is famously deployed as a metaphor for human life by Edwin's thegn at the conversion of Northumbria in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (again, around 731; Neville 1999, 62–64; cf. Lee 1972, esp. 24–26), and frequently as a metaphor for Heaven (Kabir 2001, 147–50). Accordingly, the *dryht*—the lord and his retainers, the inhabitants of a lordly hall—provides a major metaphor for society in Old English poetry (Lee 1972, esp. 12–14; cf. Hume 1974). Meanwhile, in *Beowulf*, Hrothgar's hall Heorot is a microcosm. Heorot is coterminous with law and society, threatened from outside by monsters who explicitly do not share its social life.[102] Perceiving this kind of ideology in other kinds of Anglo-Saxon evidence is as yet difficult. Anglo-Saxon settlement archaeology is still young, though Old English literary evidence has been integrated into discussions of Scandinavian archaeology and place-names.[103] Thus our evidence, albeit sparse, suggests fairly clearly that at least in the earlier periods of Christian Anglo-Saxon culture, a cosmology was available which constructed the in-group as the inhabitants of a settlement (epitomised by a hall, its community and its *geard*), opposed to a monstrous and lawless outside, at both macrocosmic and microcosmic levels.

We may turn now to *Beowulf* lines 102–14, the end of fitt I, whose explanation of the origins of Grendel mentions *ælfe* (ed. Klaeber 1950, 5; Malone 1963, f. 132):

wæs se grimma gæst grendel haten mære mearcstapa se þe moras heold fen ond fæsten fifelcynnes eard wonsæli wer weardode hwile siþðan him scyppend forscrifen hæfde in caines cynne þone cwealm gewræc ece drihten þæs þe he abel slog · Ne gefeah he þære fæhðe ac he hine feorwræc metod for þy mane mancynne fram þanon untydras ealle onwocon eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas swylce gigantas þa wið gode wunnon lange þrage he him ðæs lean forgeald ·	That fierce spirit/guest was called Grendel, the famed border-walker, he who occupied waste-lands, the fen and the fastness, the homeland of the giant-race—the ill-blessed man inhabited them for a time, after the Creator had condemned him; on the kin of Cain he avenged the killing, the eternal Lord, because he [Cain] slew Abel. He did not profit from that feud, but the Measurer banished him for that crime, from humankind. Thence all misbegotten beings spang forth, *eotenas* and *ælfe* and *orcneas*, likewise *gigantas*, which struggled against God for a long while. He gave them repayment for that.

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[101] e.g.: Rogationtide Homily 3 (ed. Bazire–Cross 1989, 50); *Vita Guthlaci* ch. 31 (ed. Colgrave 1956, 104); cf. Blickling Homily 7 (ed. Morris 1874–80, 93); *Genesis A* lines 28–34 (ed. Doane 1978, 109–10); *Genesis B* lines 274–76 (ed. Doane 1991, 209); Wright 1993, 129.

[102] Neville 1999, 62–69, 146–47; cf. Lee 1972, 178–81; Hume 1974; Magennis 1996, 128–32; Taylor 1998, 107–22.

[103] See in ascending order of success Herschend 1997, 1998, 2001; Brink 1996; Hedeager 2001; cf. Enright 1996; Herschend 2003; the material cited above in §2:4.

This passage presents a binary opposition between men and monsters like that between Mannheimar and Jǫtunheimar in early medieval Scandinavia. Grendel is emphatically from beyond the in-group of the Danes (and human society generally): he has kin but no lineage (cf. Stanley 2001, 79–82); he is associated with Cain's transgression of core social customs of reparation (cf. lines 134–37, 154–58); and is from a place apart from the in-group's (cf. esp. lines 1345–79). Grendel's depredations, unlike Óðinn's in *Grímnismál* or Vǫlundr's in *Vǫlundarkviða*, seem not to be provoked by a misdeed on the part of his victims (unless indirectly as a divine response to the Danes' pride: see e.g. Goldsmith 1970, 83–96), and they are directed at the hall and so the whole society associated with it. Because Old English *ham* did not undergo *heimr*'s semantic extension from the older meaning 'settlement (?and hinterland)' (cf. Brink 1995), Norse compounds like *Jǫtunheimar* and *Álfheimar* have no Old English cognates. But the closest Old English counterpart to *heimr* seems to be *eard* ('habitation, habitat, region, land, etc.'; cf. Roberts–Kay–Grundy 2000, §01.01.02), so it is fitting that Grendel's territory is in *fifelcynnes eard* ('the homeland of the (water-)monster-race') and that his *mere* is later described as *ælwihta eard* ('the homeland of ?alien beings', line 1500; ed. Klaeber 1950, 56)—terms which seem likely to have contrasted with Old English *middaneard* in the same way as Jǫtunheimar contrasted with Mannheimar. Appropriately enough in view of these correlations, *Beowulf*'s list of the *untydras* ('misbegotten beings') of *Caines cynn* ('the kin of Cain') with which Grendel is aligned also includes the Old English cognate of *jǫtnar*, *eotenas*. This much, then, fits with the binary model posited above, and supports its validity regarding Anglo-Saxon culture.

However, *Beowulf* includes *ælfe* among the *untydras*, and its usage here is diametrically contrary to the early Old Norse and Old English alignment of *álfar~ælfe* with the human in-group against the monsters.[104] Despite *Beowulf*'s many traditional

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[104] Admittedly, of their eleven appearances in the Eddaic *Alvíssmál*, *álfar* are mentioned ten times in the same line as *jǫtnar*, in stanzas such as 12—where, incidentally, there may be an unusual hint of characterisation through the preferred diction of the *álfar* and *dvergar* (ed. Neckel 1962, 125–26):

> Himinn heitir með mǫnnom,   enn hlýrnir með goðom,
> 　　　kalla vindofni vanir,
> uppheim iǫtnar,   álfar fagraræfr,
> 　　　dvergar driúpan sal.

> It is called *himinn* ('sky') among people, but *hlýrnir* (lit. 'warm/mild one') among the *goð*;
> the *vanir* call it *vindofni* ('wind-weaver'),
> the *jǫtnar uppheim* ('world above'), the *álfar fagraræfr* ('beautiful roof'),
> the *dvergar drjúpan sal* ('dripping hall').

This pairing is reminiscent of *Beowulf* line 112. But there is no reason to suppose that it reflects any common formulaic heritage. I have commented on *Alvíssmál*'s unusual features above (§2:3.0),

traits, however, I do not think that this suggests the oft-posited Germanic tradition of 'ambiguous' or 'amoral' *ælfe*.[105] *Beowulf* lines 102–14 present a subtle conflation of Biblical, apocryphal and patristic explanations for the origins of monsters (see Orchard 2003a, 58–85); at a lexical level, they connect words of vernacular origin (*eotenas* and *ælfe*) with words which are, and probably were, obviously loans: *orcneas* (< Latin *Orcus* '(god of the) underworld') and, if the reading is correct—we owe the word to the Thorkelin transcripts—*gigantas* (< Latin *gigas* 'giant'; cf. Holthausen 1934, s.vv. *orc*, *gigant*). While *Beowulf* line 112 may, then, attest to an established tradition of monstrous *ælfe*, there is no constraint upon us to assume so. In Middle Dutch, a diabolised meaning became well-established for *ælf*'s cognate *alf* (see Verwijs–Verdam–Stoett 1885–1941, s.v.), rather as another vernacular term, *scinna*, became a common synonym for *deofol* in Old English; but *ælf*, as I show below, never underwent such successful pejoration. *Beowulf*'s situation of *ælfe* in alliterative and semantic collocation with *eotenas* can be read rather as a self-conscious (and perhaps ostentatious) realignment of the *ælfe*, demonising them by association with monsters traditional (*eotenas*), Classical (*orcneas*) and Biblical (*gigantas*). As so often, *Beowulf* finds a neat parallel in *Grettis saga*, in Hallmundr's inclusion of 'álfa kind' in his poetic list of the monsters he has slain (ch. 62; ed. Guðni Jónsson 1936, 204), and is paralleled elsewhere in Old English by the prayer in the Royal Prayerbook considered below (§5:1). Nor was it done on a whim: *Beowulf* is, as Tolkien argued, predicated on a vision of the heathen past as a hopeless struggle against a diabolically-dominated world (1983 [1936]). For this portrayal to work, it was necessary to rule out the traditional idea that humans might have had non-Christian supernatural support in their struggle.[106]

Reliably reconstructing the earliest conceptual associations between humans, *ælfe* and monsters provides us with a rare opportunity to check on *Beowulf*'s conservatism, and to investigate how the meanings of *ælf* could develop under the pressures of Christianisation. *Beowulf* incorporates Romano-Christian materials into an existing

and its pairing of *álfar* and *jǫtnar*—if not merely stemming from the convenience of their alliteration in Eddaic metres—could be a pairing based as much on contrast as on similarity.

[105] e.g. Turville-Petre 1964, 231; Motz 1973–74, esp. 101–2; Stuart 1976, 316; Simek 1993 [1984], s.vv. *elves*, *dark elves*, *light elves*; cf. Schjødt 1991, 306 for a more sophisticated variation on the theme which, however, I find no more convincing.

[106] Cf. Dyas's illuminating contrast with *Guthlac A*—a poem which shows what can be done by monster-fighters in possession of the Christian faith (1997, 21–26). Similar implications arise from Rauer's demonstration that the *Beowulf*-poet knew stories of dragon-fighting saints (2000).

Donahue (1950) and Carney (1955, 102–14) have both suggested that *Beowulf* lines 111–13 were based on two related passages from the Irish tract *Sex aetates mundi*, apparently a translation from a Latin text, first attested in the eleventh-century manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B. 502 (ed. Meyer 1909). If this were correct, then Irish counterparts for the *untydras* in *Beowulf* could be identified (the likely counterpart to *ylfe* being *luchorpain*). However, Carney saw the inspiration for the Irish passage in Isidore's *Etymologiae* (XI.iii, *De portentis*; Carney 1955, 106–14) and, as Orchard implied, this could be taken as the direct inspiration for both *Sex aetates mundi* and *Beowulf* (2003a, 71). No secure conclusions can be drawn from these comparisons.

binary paradigm dividing humans and monsters, but is innovative in situating the *ælfe* on the monsters' side of the arrangement.

2. *Ælfscyne*

Ælf appears otherwise in Old English poetry only in the compound *ælfscyne*, twice in the poem *Genesis A*, and once in *Judith*. This affords valuable evidence for the connotations of *ælf*. Various interpretations of *ælfscyne* have been proposed; most notably, for devoting an article to the word, Stuart (1972) has argued that compound meant 'inspired by God'. Although the *Dictionary of Old English* took Stuart's reading seriously (s.v. *ælfscȳne*), a detailed dissection of her study would be undue. The most important objection is that the meaning 'inspired by God' bears no plausible resemblance either to *ælfscyne*'s literal meanings or, despite Stuart's protestations (1972, 25), to its attested usage (discussed below). We may also dispense with Häcker's argument that, taking *ælf* to have become semantically associated with *engel* ('angel') on the basis of medieval German personal names and the similarity of Snorri Sturluson's *ljósálfar* to angels (discussed above, §§2:1.1, 3:2 n. 62), '*Ælfscinu* may then describe Judith as angelic, i.e. "Beautiful and holy", rather than "beautiful as an elf", which would be more consistent with the character assigned to her by the Old English poet' (1996, 9). The proposed semantic association of *ælf* with *engel* is neither inherently implausible nor unique to Häcker, and is indeed suggested by the high medieval *The Wars of Alexander* quoted below. But it is insufficiently supported for Old English: the only angels with which *ælfe* are clearly associated are fallen ones. Less convincing handlings do exist (e.g. Williams 1991, 465–66).

Let us return to the primary evidence. Interpreting it depends on how the word *ælfscyne* related to the common Old English lexicon. The earlier of the two attesting poems seems certainly to be *Genesis A*, which on linguistic grounds seems to be of a date roughly similar to *Beowulf* (Fulk 1992, 348–51, 391–92). *Judith*, for its part, is generally thought to be a late-ninth- or tenth-century composition (Griffith 1997, 44–47; cf. Fulk 1992, 197). Were *ælf*- a common element in Old English poetic compounds, it would be possible that *Judith*'s instance was coined independently of *Genesis A*'s, but since *ælfscyne* is the only *ælf*-compound certainly attested in Old English poetry, this seems unlikely: there must be some link between the poems. Although this scenario would not preclude the idea that *ælfscyne* was a common word, we might rather have a compound coined by the *Genesis A*-poet, relying for its effect on the audience's understandings of the meanings *ælf* and *scyne*—the understanding of one particular reader, the *Judith*-poet, being reflected in his borrowing and re-use of the word. However, literary contact

between *Genesis A* and *Judith* is not to be ruled out, and it may be noteworthy that *ælfscyne* is one of four compounds appearing only in these poems.[107] In this case, *ælfscyne* might still have been a common word, but we might rather have a compound coined by the *Genesis A*-poet, relying for its effect on the audience's understandings of the meanings *ælf* and *scyne*—the understanding of one particular reader, the *Judith*-poet, being reflected in his borrowing and re-use of the word. Without further work on the textual interrelatedness of our Old English poems, it is impossible to determine which of these scenarios is the more likely. Either way, however, we must both return to the literary contexts in which *ælfscyne* appears, and take account of the meanings of its constituent elements in order to establish both what we can about its meanings, and about the meanings of *ælf*.

Both attestations of *ælfscyne* in *Genesis A* describe the seductiveness of Abraham's wife Sarah (on whom see further Anlezark 2000, 191–92). The first occurrence is in lines 1822–29, when Abraham travels to Egypt because of famine in Canaan, and fears that the Egyptians will kill him for his wife (ed. Doane 1978, 167; Gollancz 1927, 86):

ongan þa his bryd frea .	Then the lord, wise-minded
wishydig wer . wordum læran .	man, began to instruct his wife with words:
siððan egypte . eagum moton .	'After the Egyptians, many and proud,
on þinne wlite wlitan . wlance . monige .	can look with their eyes upon your beauty,
þonne æðelinga eorlas wenað .	then the nobles of princes will expect,
mæg ælfscieno . þæt þu min sie .	*ælfscyne* girl, that you are my
beorht gebedda . þe wile beorna sum .	bright consort, whom one of those warriors
him geagnian .	will want to take for himself.'

This is based on the Vulgate's 'dixit Sarai uxori suae novi quod pulchra sis mulier et quod cum viderint te Aegyptii dicturi sunt uxor ipsius est' ('he said to Sarah his wife "I know that you are a beautiful woman and that when the Egyptians see you, they will say 'she is his wife' " ', GEN. 12.11–12; ed. Weber 1975, I 18). The closest parallel for *ælfscyne* here is *pulcher* ('beautiful'), though the correspondence is not necessarily direct. Abraham's prediction proves correct, the Pharaoh being seized with lust, taking Sarah, and being punished in due course by God (lines 1844–72). This process is repeated by Abimelech the king of Gerar, who also marries Sarah. However, being informed by God of his error, he rectifies the situation and in lines 2729–35 (ed. Doane 1978, 211–13; Gollancz 1927, 130) says to Sarah,

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[107] The others are *blachleor* (*Judith* line 128, *Genesis A* line 1970), *ealdorduguþ* (*Judith* line 309, *Genesis A* line 2081), *torhtmod* (*Judith* lines 6, 93; *Genesis A* line 1502); cf. the similarity of *Judith* 229–31 and *Genesis A* lines 1991–93 noted by Griffith (who, however, saw these to reflect shared oral-formulaic diction; 1997, 63).

ne þearf ðe on edwit . abraham settan . ðin freadrihten . þæt þu flettpaðas . mæg ælfscieno . mine træde . ac him hygeteonan . hwitan seolfre . deope bete . ne ceara incit duguða . of ðisse eðyltyrf . ellor secan . winas uncuðe . ac wuniað her .	'Abraham, your lord and master, does not need to put you in reproach because you, *ælfscyne* lady, have trod the paths of my dais; rather, rectify profoundly the insults to him with white silver. Do not choose, the two of you, to seek other companies, unfamiliar friends, elsewhere, outside this homeland, but dwell here.'

This renders Genesis 20.15–16, 'et ait terra coram vobis est ubicumque tibi placuerit habita. Sarrae autem dixit ecce mille argenteos dedi fratri tuo hoc erit tibi in velamen oculorum ad omnes qui tecum sunt et quocumque perrexeris mementoque te deprehensam' ('and he said, "wherever it suits you to settle, the land about you is yours". And to Sarah he said "behold, I have given a thousand pieces of silver to your brother. This will be for you as a veil of the eyes to all who are with you and wherever you go about; and remember that you were seized" '; ed. Weber 1975, ɪ 28). Here, then, *ælfscyne* has no direct parallel.

Judith's opening is lost, but *ælfscyne* is used, in lines 12–14, at the surviving text's first description of Judith, as she proceeds to a feast held by Holofernes king of the Assyrians. Holofernes is attacking the holy city of Bethulia, and Judith is on a divine mission to seduce and kill him (ed. Dobbie 1953, 99; Malone 1963, f. 202r):

gefrægen ic ða holofernus
winhatan wyrcean georne   ond eallum wundrum
              þrymlic
girwan up swæsendo   to ðam het se gumena baldor
ealle ða yldestan ðegnas   hie ðæt ofstum miclum
ræfndon rondwiggende   comon to ðam rican
              þeodne
feran folces ræswan   þæt wæs þy feorðan dogore
þæs ðe iudith hyne   gleaw on geðonce
ides ælfscinu   ærest gesohte ·
	Then Holofernes, I have heard, eagerly
	extended feast-invitations, and provided
	dishes with all sorts of wonders, and to
	this the leader of men invited all the
	most senior of his lords. Those shield-
	warriors accepted with great alacrity,
	they came travelling to that mighty king,
	to the ruler of the people. It was the
	fourth day when, clever in her planning,
	Judith, the *ælfscyne* lady, first sought
	him.

The Old English *Judith* sticks less closely to its scriptural bases than *Genesis A*, and parallels are less straightforwardly identified; they are discussed below.

In interpreting *ælfscyne* we may begin with its generic element. The principle meaning of *scyne* both etymologically and throughout medieval English is 'beautiful' (Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *scine*; *MED* s.v. *shēne*; *OED* s.v. *sheen*; *DOST*, s.v. *S(c) hene*). Like *beautiful* it has a wide variety of applications, but is almost invariably used of women rather than men—except that it is often used of angels, which may afford a parallel to its association with *ælf*. There is also a strong association of feminine beauty with lightness and brightness throughout the Germanic languages, attested for Old English by the adjectives listed under *Beauty, fairness* in the *Thesaurus of Old English*, and accordingly *scyne* connoted and sometimes denoted brightness in medieval English

—connotations which have been emphasised because of the Norse *ljósálfar*.[108] But were brightness the most important meaning of *ælfscyne*, one would have expected a generic primarily denoting brightness (e.g. *torht*, *beorht*). Beauty, rather than brightness, is unambiguously the significance of *ælfscyne* in context: Sara is a liability because she is *pulchra* ('beautiful'); Judith is called *ælfscyne* when she steps forward to seduce Holofernes. *Ælfscyne*, then, denotes a quality of feminine or perhaps angelic beauty modified by *ælf*. Of the attested semantic relationships within noun + adjective compounds (on which see Carr 1939, 340–41; Marchand 1969, §2.17; Kastovsky 1992, 372–73), *ælfscyne* no doubt exhibits comparison (cf. *gærsgrene* 'green as grass'; *hrimceald* 'cold as frost'). This strongly implies not only that *ælfe* were characterised by beauty, as frost is characterised by coldness, but that they were a paradigmatic example of beauty, as frost is a paradigmatic example of coldness.

However, commentators' surprise at Sara and Judith's comparison with *ælfe* in fundamentally Christian poems is not unjustified. Thun suggested that 'a certain lack of reflection over the exact meaning of words belonging to poetical vocabulary may in the last resort account for the word' (1969, 392), but this should indeed be a last resort. In no case is *ælfscyne* necessary to the alliteration of the lines where it appears and alternative formulae were easy enough to come by. If *ælfscyne* was part of the common lexicon and not a coining by the *Genesis A*-poet, it might have been a bahuvrihi compound, its meanings detached from those of its constituent elements (just as *bodice-ripper* denotes a kind of novel, not a ripper of bodices). But in either case, it is too rare for this to seem likely. Perhaps, then, *ælfscyne* had some connotations missed by my analysis so far. *Hrimceald* may tell us that frost is cold, but its function within the lexicon is to denote a specific severity of coldness. A plausible possibility has been suggested by several commentators. Swanton observed that 'the primary sense of Old English *ælf* has sinister connotations' (2002, 172; cf. 1988, 297)—a claim which the present study substantiates below. North, apparently independently, took *ælfscyne* to mean 'bewitchingly bright' (1997a, 53). Tolkien seems to have had the same idea already by the nineteen-twenties, when he composed an Old English poem *Ides Ælfscýne*, inspired by later ballads, in which the poem's protagonist is seduced and abducted by a supernatural *ides ælfscýne* (ed. Shippey 1982, 306–7). These readings suggest that someone who was *ælfscyne* was beautiful in a dangerously seductive, perhaps magical, way.

The women who are *ælfscyne* are not simply beautiful, but perilously so. In *Genesis A*, Sara's beauty attracts lust which puts her desirers and her husband at risk. Abraham

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[108] e.g. Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *ælfscínu*, a curious doublet of the superior entry s.v. *ælfsciene*; Grimm 1882–88 [1875–78], II 449; North 1997a, 53. Roberts–Kay–Grundy 2000, §07.10; cf. §03.01.12, *Brightness, light*; for Eddaic poetry, see below §7:3 n. 197.

uses *ælfscyne* when describing the threat posed by Sara's beauty; Abimelech calls Sara a 'mæg ælfscieno' after discovering the dangers of divine retribution to which her beauty led him. Judith uses her beauty to seduce Holofernes and so assassinate him. The only other physical description of Judith before she decapitates Holofernes is that she is 'beagum gehlæste hringum gehrodene' ('loaded with circlets, adorned with rings'; lines 36–37, ed. Dobbie 1953, 100; Malone 1963, f. 203r), which parallels the much more detailed description of Judith's beautifying in Judith 10.3 (ed. Weber 1975, I 702). This being so, *ælfscyne* is, in the surviving part of *Judith*, the only word certainly to parallel the Vulgate's various mentions of Judith's beauty, increased by God 'non ex libidine sed ex virtute' ('not out of lust, but out of virtue', JUD. 10.4; ed. Weber 1975, I 702): 'cum vidissent eam stupentes mirati sunt nimis pulchritudinam eius'; 'erat in oculis eorum stupor quoniam mirabantur pulchritudinem eius nimis'; 'cumque intrasset ante faciem eius statim captus est in suis oculis Holofernis' ('when they had seen her they, wondering, were enchanted beyond measure by her beauty'; 'stupefaction was upon their eyes, since they were marvelling so much at her beauty'; 'and when she had entered before his person, suddenly Holofernes was captivated, through his own eyes', JUD. 10.7, 10.14, 10.17; ed. Weber 1975, I 702–3). In the Vulgate, then, Judith is jaw-droppingly beautiful through divine intervention; but the purpose of her beauty is not to reflect God's glory: it is to provoke Holofernes's sexual desire. It is hard to tell how much of this material finds representation in *ælfscyne*. The Old English poem downplays Judith's seductiveness, and to some extent indeed her femininity (e.g. Chance 1986, 38–40; cf. Clayton 1994 on Ælfric's similar response). However, the idea that *ælfscyne* might connote entrancing beauty, perhaps also implying supernatural assistance, would fit the context admirably. The application to Judith of a word with such pejorative connotations is not an obstacle to this reading: as the Vulgate explicitly recognises, such entrancing beauty would in ordinary circumstances be condemned.

This reading of *ælfscyne* is consistent with later comparative evidence and with *ælf*'s associations with delusion and magic in texts considered below, suggesting that the reading is reliable. The *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum* states that the people of the *Álfar* 'var miklu friðara en engi onnur mankind a Norðrlondum' ('was much more beautiful/handsome than any other human race in the North-lands'; ed. af Petersens–Olson 1919–25, 25) and Heinrich von Morungen's observed that 'Von den elben wirt entsehen vil manic man' ('Many a man indeed is enchanted by the *elben*'; ed. Moser–Tervooren 1977, I 243; cf. Edwards 1994). A particularly close comparison is the intimate association of the Old French *fée* with dangerous beauty. The word's first attestation—conveniently an Anglo-Norman one, on an Anglo-Saxon subject (cf. Stafford 1999, 3–5, 22–32), with Old Testament resonances (this time to David and

Bathsheba, II SАМ. 11–12)—will suffice as an example (cf. Harf-Lancner 1984, esp. 34–42). It appears in the story of King Edgar, in Geofrei Gaimar's *Estoire des Englais*, composed around 1135×40 (lines 3561–4088; ed. Bell 1960, 113–30). King Edgar sends his counsellor Edelwold to verify the famous beauty of Elftroed, whom he intends to marry; Edelwold finds her beauty so remarkable that it 'quidat [bien] que [ço] fust fee / E qu'ele ne fust de femme nee' ('shows well that she was a *fée*; / and that she was not born of a woman', lines 3657–58). Thus enchanted, Edelwold tells the king that she is 'mesfaite e laide e neire' ('deformed and ugly and black', line 3682), marrying her himself. When Edgar discovers the deception, he sends Edelwold to York, and he is suspiciously murdered on the way. Edgar marries Elftroed, who outlives him and murders his first son Edward to put her own son Edelred on the throne. In Geofrei's assessment, Edward 'Par femmes empeirat sa vie' ('spoiled his life through women', line 3594); Elftroed's *fée*-like beauty is thus an excellent parallel for the *ælfscyne* Sarah and Judith.

Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman traditions probably both underlie the one explicit Middle English association of *elf* with beauty: lines 5381–84 of *The Wars of Alexander*, an alliterative translation of the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni* composed in the North-West Midlands between about 1350 and 1450 (ed. Duggan–Turville-Petre 1989, 167). The text describes Alexander's first meeting with Candace, the queen of Prasiaca:

Sire Alexsandire hire avises & all his hert liȝtis,	Sir Alexander looks at her and his whole
Him þoȝt hire like at a loke his lady his modire.	heart leaps; she seemed to him alike in
Scho was so faire & so fresche, as faucon hire semed,	appearance to his lady his mother. She was so beautiful and so vivacious, she seemed like a
An elfe out of anothire erde or ellis an aungell.	falcon, an *elfe* out of another world or else an angel.

The last two lines render 'Erat autem ipsa regina pulchra, formosa plurimum et decora' ('but that queen was beautiful, exceedingly shapely and decorous'; cited by Duggan–Turville-Petre 1989, 292 n. to ll. 5383–84), so *elf* was added by the English poet and its usage is presumably not influenced by Latin. But although the poem makes it clear that Alexander has been drawn by Candace's beauty into a potentially risky situation, no risk materialises, so there is no evidence that *elf* here is associated with dangerous seductiveness specifically. It is not clear whether the *elf* or the angel are considered masculine or feminine. All the same, *The Wars of Alexander* show that *ælf*'s early connotations of feminine beauty had a long life.

Chapter 5

Glosses

Some of the most powerful, but also complex, evidence for the meanings of *ælf* derives from its use in glossing Latin words, since the implicit equivalence between an Old English gloss and its lemma facilitates inferences about the gloss's meanings. Although most core research on Old English glosses remains available only in unpublished doctoral dissertations, these afford a firm foundation for the glosses' analysis and interpretation. This is only useful, however, if certain methodological desiderata are met.

1. Although glosses were intended as equivalents to their lemmata, this does not mean that the reverse is true: statements like 'Latin equivalents for the term *wælcyrge* … found in Anglo-Saxon glosses' are misguided.[109] Nor do glosses generally attempt to 'define' their lemmata (Kiessling 1967–68, 194; Neville 1999, 105, 106): they gloss them.

2. The meaning of a gloss is not the only variable, since the glossator's interpretation of the lemma cannot be taken for granted. A lemma's source must be discovered, so that its contextual meaning when the gloss originated can be inferred. Fortunately, most sources have now been traced; but glossators and their copyists also mis- or reinterpreted lemmata.

3. The provenance of glosses must be established—their textual history and time and place of origin. This is especially difficult with glosses and glossaries, which redactors could freely excerpt, conflate or re-order, but no less important than usual: copies of a text must not be mistaken for independent evidence. Such information is rarely considered; thus, for example, numerous words in the *Thesaurus of Old English* flagged with *g*, indicating that they occur only as glosses, ought also to be marked with *o*, indicating that 'the word form is very infrequent' (Roberts–Kay–Grundy 2000, xxi), since the attestations are merely different copies of the same text. Of course, where a redactor maintained a gloss while revising his exemplar(s), he may affirm its continued validity, but corrupt and meaningless glosses were repeated too often for us to assume this as a rule.

4. The occurrences of *ælf* in the glossaries are often in nonce-compounds, coined specifically as gloss-words, and may relate only indirectly to *ælf*'s everyday use. Such gloss-words afford quite different evidence from those reflecting everyday usage, and must as far as possible be identified. Odenstedt argued that, in Anglo-Saxon England, 'a woman could be a musician (*glīwmǣden*), such as a fiddler (*fiðelestre*) or a harp player

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[109] Damico 1984, 44; cf. Kiessling 1967–68, 194; 1977, 17; Morris 1991, 25; Neville 1999, 106.

(*hearpestre*); she could be a singer (*sangestre*), an actress (*scernicge*), a dancer (*hlēapestre*, *hoppestre*, *sealticge*) or even an athlete (*plegestre*)' (1995, 134–35). His dataset then led Norberg to infer that between the Old English period and the late fourteenth century, the number of jobs available to women in English society diminished (1996). But most of Odenstedt's Old English words are gloss-words.

5. Finally, one must also ask which Old English words glossators chose *not* to use to gloss a given lemma, and why. A gloss chosen out of desperation for an even vaguely appropriate vernacular term offers very different evidence from one selected as the ideal choice from a range of possibilities. Addressing this issue also affords leverage on questions of how male *ælfe* related other supernatural beings, particularly females: the two main textual traditions of *ælf*-glosses use feminised forms of *ælf* to gloss lemmata denoting nymphs, not only suggesting an important lexical gap concerning otherworldly females in Old English, but providing our earliest evidence for a semantic development of *ælf* which was to manifest itself prominently in Middle English.

The major concern of the present chapter, then, is to fulfil these desiderata to gain new insights into the meanings of *ælf*. *Ælf* appears in five textual traditions, whose evidence is heterogeneous. We have a unique simplex, 'aelfae' in its manuscript form, not actually a gloss but included here because it appears as an equivalent to the Latin name *Satanas*, which attests to demonisation of *ælf*. There are the compounds *landælfe* and *dunælfa*, glosses on words for nymphs and Muses, which pick up *ælf*'s positive connotations. Likewise, there is a group using the compound *ælfen* also to gloss words for nymphs: this provides an important counterpoint to *landælfe* and *dunælfa*, its similarities and differences in approach providing important insights into the changing gendering of *ælfe*. Proceeding to adjectives, *ylfig* attests to the power of *ælfe* to cause prophetic speech, providing a perspective on their mind-altering powers quite different from those of the medical texts. *Ylfig* is itelf illuminated, albeit equivocally, by the plant-name *ælfþone*, and as our main evidence for the meaning of this word is also from a gloss-like context and is thematically relevant to *ylfig*, it is considered here. Finally, the adjective *ælfisc* attests in different ways to *ælfe*'s associations with delusions. Each group but the last is studied in three stages: *texts*, presenting the sources of the lemmata and the texts of the glosses; *origins*; and *evidence for the semantics of 'ælf'*. This structure is not appropriate for *ælfisc*, because although first attested as an Old English gloss, it is better-attested in Middle English texts.

1. Demonisation: *ælf* and *Satanas*

1.1 Texts

Ælf occurs as a simplex in the texts studied here only once, in BL Royal 2 A. XX (the Royal Prayerbook), folio 45v, in an 'oratio' ('prayer'). The Royal Prayerbook is one of four early Anglo-Saxon prayerbooks, each with some textual interrelationships, containing mainly Latin prayers; its general theme 'would appear to be Christ as the healer of mankind', and its concern with physical healing is sufficient to suggest that it 'might have functioned as a devotional, and practical, tool for a physician'.[110] The place of *ælf* in the text may, then, reflect both spiritual and bodily concerns. The manuscript seems to have been made in the last quarter of the eighth century or perhaps the first quarter of the ninth in West Mercia, probably in or near Worcester.[111]

The prayer primarily invokes the power of the rood to guard the body 'ab omnibus insidiis inimici' ('against all the wiles of the Enemy'), proceeding to a Greek liturgical passage, and concluding with an exorcism including the statement 'adiuro te satanae diabulus aelfae . per d*eu*m uiuum ac uerum · et per trementem diem iudicii ut refugiatur ab homine illo…' ('I conjure you, devil of Satan, of (an) *ælf*/*Ælf*, through the living and true God and through the quaking day of judgement, that he is put to flight from that person…'; ed. Kuypers 1902, 221; collated with Doane 1994b, no. 283). The ending of *aelfae* cannot plausibly derive from Old English, so it must represent a Latinisation inspired by the genitive singular ending of *Satanae*, with which *aelfae* must be in apposition. This being so, *-ae* need not be considered a feminisation, despite its feminine association in Latin. As written, *aelfae* here is integral to the text and unrelated to the tenth-century Old English glosses in the manuscript (on which see Crowley 2000, esp. 148–51). The prayer includes no other vernacular words, and Satan's name was surely too well-known in Anglo-Saxon culture to require glossing. *Aelfae* is not a gloss, therefore, but the evidence for its meaning is its equivalence with *Satanae*.

1.2 Origins

The prayer is not known elsewhere. The Greek transliteration seems to show knowledge of the contemporary values of Greek letters (Howlett 1998, 60, cf. 65), which it shares

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[110] Brown 2001, 56, 57; cf. Sims-Williams 1990, 275–327; see Doane 1994b, 52–59 [no. 283] for contents.
[111] On date see Crowley 2000, 123 n. 2; cf. Ker 1957, 317–18 [no. 248]; on place Sims-Williams 1990, 279–80; cf. Brown 2001, 51–53.

with the Canterbury biblical commentaries deriving from the teaching of Theodore and Hadrian in the seventh century (Lapidge 1996 [1988], 130–33), and Lapidge seems to have considered some connection with Archbishop Theodore reasonably likely (1996 [1986], 145 n. 29; cf. Atkinson 1981, 15–17). But the prayer as a whole could have been composed as late as the manuscript itself. The spelling <ae> for later <æ> in *aelf-* is unusual for the late eighth century but not impossibly so (Hogg 1992a, §2.12 n. 1).

1.3 Evidence for the semantics of *ælf*

It is not immediately clear whether *aelfae* is intended as a vernacular synonym for *Satanae* ('I conjure you, devil of Satan, of Ælf/the *ælf*') or whether it is a common noun in apposition ('I conjure you, devil of Satan, of an *ælf*'). If the latter translation is best, it implies that not only Satan, but *ælfe*, were conceived to rule over *diaboli*, and correlative evidence could be argued to exist in the Old English medical texts (see ch. 6). However, *ælf*, denoting one of a class of beings, would be an incongruous counterpart to the personal name *Satanas* if so. This could in turn be a consequence of the fact that the Devil had no direct counterpart in traditional Anglo-Saxon culture, so that there was no really appropriate Old English word available to the composer of the prayer. But it seems more likely that *aelfae* was intended as a synonym for *Satanae*, which affords another piece of evidence suggesting that *ælf* (despite its feminine inflection in the prayer) denoted male beings. As Howlett pointed out, the sentence in question contains words from each of the *tres linguae sacrae*, *adiuro te* being Latin, *Satanae* being Hebrew, and *diabulus* Greek (1998, 60). The presence of the vernacular *aelfae* here would be a fitting complement to these, helping to ensure that the exorcism covered all possible threats. More speculatively, its use in the Royal Prayerbook would fit well with the hypothesis that Old Norse *álfr* could be an epithet for Freyr, as I have argued above (§2:3.1). It is possible to argue both that the Anglo-Saxon figure Ing was both a counterpart of Freyr and pre-eminent in Anglo-Saxon paganism (see §9:2.1). In this case we would see in the injunction 'Adiuro te satanae diabulus aelfae' the equation of the pre-eminent demonic foe of the Christian with the pre-eminent deity of Anglo-Saxon paganism.

   It is also interesting that *os* was not used in the prayer. *Os* would, if the semantics of Old English *os* and *ælf* were the same as those of *ás* and *álfr* in the Eddas, have been the more obvious vernacular counterpart for *Satanas* because it tended to denote more prominent, individualised deities. Conceivably, *os* still retained enough of its positive associations around 800 to resist demonisation, but this seems unlikely in the present context; moreover, its absence from the Royal Prayerbook is consistent with its rare

occurrence in Old English generally and combines with this dearth to suggest that *ælf* was, at least by this date, the more prominent term in Anglo-Saxon usage.

2. *Ælfe* and nymphs: *dunælfa* and *landælfe*

2.1 Texts

Dunælfa ('mountain-*ælfa*') and *landælfe* ('land-*ælfe*') are compounds attested only in glossaries of the tenth century and later, respectively glossing *Castalidas nymphas* ('nymphs who dwell at Castalia', Castalia being a spring at Delphi) and *ruricolas musas* ('muses of the countryside'). The lemmata derive from the invocation at the beginning of Aldhelm's *Carmen de virginitate*, composed by Aldhelm's death in 709/10 (lines 23–30; ed. Ehwald 1919, 353):

Non rogo ruricolas versus et commata Musas
Nec peto Castalidas metrorum cantica nimphas,
Quas dicunt Elicona iugum servare supernum,
Nec precor, ut Phoebus linguam sermone
                      loquacem
Dedat, quem Delo peperit Latona creatrix;
Versibus infandis non umquam dicere dignor,
Ut quondam argutus fertur dixisse poeta:
'Pandite nunc Elicona, deae, cantusque
                      monete!'
	I do not ask country-dwelling Muses for verses and parts of lines, nor do I seek songs in metre from the Castalian nymphs, who, they say, guard Helicon's celestial brow; nor do I beg that Phoebus, whom Latona his mother brought forth on Delos, grant my tongue loquacity of speech. I never deign to speak with vile verses, as once the clear-sounding poet is supposed to have spoken —'Throw open Helicon, goddesses, and bring song to mind!'

The earliest manuscript to contain these glosses is BL Cotton Cleopatra A.iii, probably compiled and written at St Augustine's, Canterbury; it has generally been dated to the mid-tenth century, but Rusche has recently argued specifically for the 930s (Rusche 1996, 2–6, 33–38; cf. Ker 1957, 180–82 [no. 143]; Dumville 1994, 137–39). It has recently been re-edited and re-analysed by Rusche (1996), with further information on its sources being provided by Kittlick's linguistic investigation (1998). The manuscript contains three different glossaries, the first and third of which contain *dunælfa*. The Third Cleopatra Glossary (folios 92–117), despite its name, may have been a source for the First; if not, then its exemplar surely was (Lendinara 1999, 22–23; on this putative exemplar see Gretsch 1999, 139–41). The Third Cleopatra Glossary contains *glossae collectae*—interlinear glosses, in this case to Aldhelm's *Prosa de virginitate* and *Carmen de virginitate*, extracted in sequence to form a glossary (Rusche 1996, 95, 156; Kittlick 1998, §2; cf. Ker 1957, 182). Among them, we find 'Ruricolas musas : landælfe; Castalidas ny*m*phas : dunælfa; Elicona : swa hatte sio dun' (ed. Rusche 1996, 51 [nos 1100–2])'. Note that despite the arrangement of the lemmata, the *dun* of *dunælfa* refers to Mount Helicon, not to the spring Castalia.

The First Cleopatra Glossary (an A-order glossary, in which the material of *glossae collectae* and other sources has been alphabeticised by the first letter of each lemma, on ff. 5–75 of the same manuscript) repeats the Third with the entry 'Castalidas nymphas : dúnælfa' (ed. Rusche 1996, 225 [C460]). However, it and the other related texts omit *Ruricolas musas: landælfe*. This gloss could equally well have been dropped from the rest of the textual tradition, or added to the Third Cleopatra Glossary. But there is a good chance that *dunælfa* at least is as old as the Third Cleopatra Glossary's oldest stratum.

The other texts attesting to *dunælfa* are likewise close relatives of the Third Cleopatra Glossary. The *Enchiridion* of Byrhtferth of Ramsey, probably composed around 1010–12 (Lapidge–Baker 1995, xxvi–xxviii), includes an invocation including the declaration 'Ic hate gewitan fram me þa m<e>remen, þe synt si<ren>e geciged, & eac þa Castalidas nymphas (þæt synt dunylfa), þa þe wunedon on Elicona þære dune' ('I command to go from me the sea-people who are called Sirens, and also the *Castalidae nymphae* (which are, *dunælfa*), those who dwelt on the mountain Helicon'; ed. Lapidge–Baker 1995, 134). Byrhtferth probably modeled this invocation on the same text of the *Carmen de virginitate* as the Third Cleopatra Glossary used for its *glossae collectae* (Lapidge–Baker 1995, lxxxiii-lxxxiv, 319; Rusche 1996, 99–104; Gretsch 1999, 139–41).

BL Harley 3376, the now-fragmentary 'Harley Glossary', is more advanced than Cleopatra, being alphabeticised by the first three letters of each word. Although, as Cooke has emphasised, the glossary needs re-editing (1994, 22–23, 231–34), her own analysis has established a new foundation for its study (1994, summarised in 1997). It is from Western England, and specifically, Cooke argued, from Worcester Cathedral. Earlier commentators dated the manuscript to the early eleventh century, but Cooke has made a convincing, though not conclusive, case for composition in the second half of that century (1994, 27–34; Ker 1957, 312–13 [no. 240]). The lemmata and many glosses in the Harley Glossary—particularly Latin ones—were written in continuous lines, but other glosses—particularly Old English ones—were included in smaller letters interlinearly (Cooke 1994, 24–25, 27, 34–38). Harley shows alterations to and careful conflation of various sources, including texts related to the Cleopatra Glossaries (Cooke 1994, 134–35, 144–45, 151). It seems likely enough that this editing was undertaken by the scribe of Harley 3376 itself, and for convenience of expression I assume this throughout the present study. With a characteristic development of his source material, the Harley Glossator gave 'þa manfullan gydena . ł dunelfa .' ('those sinful godesses, or mountain-*ælfa*'; ed. Oliphant 1966, 59 [C475]; collated with MS) for *Castalidas nymphas*, the whole gloss written above the lemma on folio 17r.

Finally, the Antwerp-London Glossary (Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum M 16.2 and its *disiectum membrum* BL Additional 32,246), containing various glossaries written

in two hands in the margins of the manuscript's main Latin texts, gives 'Castalidas .
dunelfen' on folio 21r of the London portion (ed. Kindschi 1955, 246; collated with MS).
This entry is part of the large Latin-English class glossary (organised by subject), based
either on Ælfric's class-glossary or on some shared source, written by the second hand
and called *article 6* by Porter and *d* by Ker (see Porter 1999, esp. 181–88; Lazzari 2003;
Ker 1957, 1–3 [no. 2]). The glossaries seem to have been written in at Abingdon in the
earlier part of the eleventh century (Porter 1996, 163–64). Porter did not note Aldhelm
glosses in particular as a source for the manuscript, but as the same scribe seems to have
worked on the extraordinary collection of Aldhelm glosses found in Brussels, Royal
Library 1650 (on which see below, §5:4.1), their presence is no surprise (though that
manuscript does not itself include the gloss on *castalidas nymphas*). The entries on the
nymphae occur in a miscellany at the end of the glossary, in a group of words for
prophets, workers of magic and otherworldly beings. The dropping of *nymphas* from
'Castalidas . dunelfen' is presumably because it concludes a list of other types of
nymphae derived from Isidore glosses (see §5:3.1), making the inclusion of the word
nymphae itself superfluous. The innovative ending of *-elfen* is discussed below regarding
this other tradition (§5:3.2–3).

The influential character of this Aldhelm-gloss in Anglo-Latin is suggested by a
remedy in a text in the mid-tenth-century medical manuscript BL. Royal 12 D.xvii known
as Leechbook III (see further §6:2.2). In a series of remedies for diseases mostly denoted
by *ælf*-compounds, one remedy advertising itself to be against 'ælfsogoða' (probably
internal pains caused by *ælfe*) contains a Latin exorcism against 'Omnem Impetuum
castalidum' ('all of the attacks of *castalides*'; ed. Wright 1955, f. 124v). *Castalides*
seems here to denote the supernatural forces which the remedy seeks to counteract and
which it denotes primarily with *ælfsogoða*. This usage surely shows that the adjective
castalis, which was partly glossed by a compound in *-ælf*, was turned into a noun and
used inversely as a Latin translation of *ælf*. The tradition of glosses first attested in
Cotton Cleopatra A.iii was itself a shaping force in Anglo-Latin usage by, at the latest,
the mid-tenth century. The fact that the adjective *Castalidae* was chosen as the basis for
the Latinisation of *ælfe* and not the noun *nymphae* may be evidence that *nympha* was
considered an inappropriate equivalent for *ælf*, presumably because it denoted females.

2.2 Origins

As Herren has argued, 'the last quarter of the seventh century and, perhaps, the opening
decades of the eighth might be looked upon as a sort of mini-renaissance of classical
scholarship in Anglo-Saxon England'(1998, at 102), and both Aldhelm and his glossators

doubtless understood the Classical meanings of *nympha* and *musa*: that they denoted youthful, female, non-monstrous minor goddesses whose beauty was liable to attract the sexual attentions of gods and men. Isidore's *Etymologiae*, of which they made extensive use, covered *nymphae*;[112] Aldhelm's invocation is ostentatiously modeled on classical ones, particularly the one in Virgil's *Georgics* (I.1–42; ed. Fairclough 1999–2000, I 98–100); he was familiar with the *Aeneid*, at least parts of Ovid's nymph-packed *Metamorphoses*, and other pertinent texts (see Orchard 1994, esp. 130–35, 200–202, 225–28). Admittedly, the most prominent *nympha* known to the Anglo-Saxons must have been Circe, the witch-nymph who turned Ulysses's men into animal forms, but her exceptional status will have been clear.[113] The recognition of *nymphae*'s non-monstrous character is suggested by their pointed omission from the *Liber monstrorum*, produced in an intellectual milieu associated with Aldhelm's (Lapidge 1982, 165–76).[114] Aldhelm inverted Classical conventions by refusing the aid of *musae* and *nymphae* in composing his poetry; and the Harley Glossary explicitly calls the *Castalidae nymphae* 'manfullan' ('sinful'). But for the pointed inversions of Aldhelm's invocation to be conveyed effectively, the vernacular glosses needed to represent the Classical semantics of the lemmata, so it is reasonable to take the glosses, in origin, to represent these meanings.

The compounds *landælfe* and *dunælfa* were doubtless coined specifically to translate Aldhelm's Latin phrases (cf. Thun 1969, 380), a conclusion reinforced by the different strategies adopted towards the same problems by the *ælfen* glosses studied below (§5:3). The compounds must have been coined between the composition of the *Carmen de virginitate* (sometime before 709/10), and the earlier part of the tenth century, when the Third Cleopatra Glossary was written. Kittlick identified the source of this stratum,

[112] Quoted §5:3.1. For Aldhelm's use see Howe 1985; Marenbon 1979, 86–88; for glossators' Gretsch 1999, 160–63, 165–71; on Isidore's informative structuring of mythological hierarchy and divinity Chance 1994–2000, I 141–45.

[113] e.g. *Aeneid* 7.1–24 (ed. Fairclough 1999–2000, II 2); *Metamorphoses* 14.223–434 (ed. Miller 1984, 316–30); *De consolatione philosophiae* 4, metre 3 (ed. Moreschini 2000, 111–12). These stories were well-known, as to Alfred the Great (Irvine 1996, 387–93; Grinda 2000 [1990]), Aldhelm (*enigma* 95; ed. Ehwald 191, I 142), and the composer of the late tenth- or early eleventh-century gloss to his *enigma* in BL MS Royal 12 C xxiii (Page 1982, 160–63). It is unfortunate that Circe's name is nowhere glossed, and that Alfred the Great, in chapter 38 of his translation of the *De consolatione philosophiae*, called her by the generic term *gyden* (ed. Sedgefield 1899, 116, 195).

[114] Despite the inclusion of mythological figures such as the *Eumenides*, *fauni* and *satyri*, *nymphae* do not occur in this extensive catalogue of *monstra*. *Nympha* itself occurs once, in entry I.34 (ed. Orchard 2003a, 276): 'Et dicunt monstra esse in paludibus cum tribus humanis capitibus et subprofundissimis stagnis sicut nimphas habitare fabulantur. Quod credere profanum est: ut non illuc fluant gurgites quo inmane monstrum ingreditur' ('and they say that prodigies exist in swamps with three human heads and they are rumoured to inhabit the lowest of the depths of pools like *nymphae* [springs]—which it is a profanity to believe, because floods do not flow to a place into which a huge monster enters'). This puns on the mythological meaning of *nympha*, which the reader initially assumes—such sniping at Classical paganism being characteristic of the *Liber monstrorum* (Orchard 2003a, 87–91, 98–101; cf. 1997)—but does not detract from the striking absence of *nymphae* from the work.

which he numbered S11 (1998, §2.2), 'als eindeutig anglisch aus' ('as unequivocally from Anglian'), with features conventionally identified both as Mercian and Northumbrian, and strong later influence from West Saxon and Kentish, probably in that order (1998, §14.3.2). The glossary also contains a scattering of features suggesting origins in the eighth century. Not all the glosses attested in the Third Cleopatra Glossary, of course, need go back to this eighth-century original, but if they are later additions, they were made with impressive care for maintaining the order of the lemmata of Aldhelm's texts. It is likely, then, that we owe *dunælfa* and *landælfe* to an eighth-century Anglian monastery.

2.3 Evidence for the Semantics of *Ælf*

Ælf was felt by a glossator or glossators to be an appropriate basis for creating a gloss for *nympha* and *musa*. The essential correlation between the characteristics of *nymphae* and early Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* is obvious—both were otherworldly, rather than monstrous, supernatural beings; the glosses show that these characteristics not only survived conversion but continued among Anglo-Saxon monks at least into the eighth century, and probably the eleventh. Old English poetry composed around the ninth and tenth centuries attests to the beauty of *ælfe* in the compound *ælfscyne* and that too correlates with characteristics of the *nymphae*. But there is a striking problem of gender. Old English *ælf* is grammatically masculine, and in the early Old Icelandic and Old High German evidence its cognates seem consistently to denote male beings (ch. 2; *AHDWB*, s.v. *alb*). There is no serious doubt that the glossator knew that *nymphae* were females. Possibly, *ælf* could have been used in the plural to denote—in a way consonant with the patriarchal view of humanity which dominated Anglo-Saxon discourses—males and females together, like *ælde* or Old Icelandic *æsir*, a process perhaps encouraged in non-West Saxon dialects by the morphological collapse of long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem and strong feminine plurals. But it is of interest that although the sole attestation of *landælfe* uses the -*e* plural proper to the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension, ****dunælfe** does not appear: rather the form in all cases but one is *dunælfa*, with the West Saxon strong feminine -*a* plural. The exception, *dunelfen* in the Antwerp-London Glossary, witnesses another development again, discussed below (§5:3.2–3). If *dunælfa* does derive from an Anglian original, this West Saxon plural must be a later introduction by a Southern redactor. Even so, given its suitability and consistency, it is surely a deliberate declension-change. Although it is sometimes said that Old English grammatical gender was not natural, this observation is misleading regarding words denoting beings. There is a small group of neuter words denoting women (e.g. *wif* 'woman'), and another of

masculine words denoting men and women (e.g. *mann* 'person'); but feminine words for humans invariably denoted females, while feminine words for animals were almost as consistent (Curzan 2003, esp. 45, 60–66, 91 n. 7; cf. Lindheim 1958, 490–91). The innovation of *-ælfa* looks, then, to be a deliberate feminisation of the denotation of *ælfe*, a conclusion bolstered by the parallel deployment of the feminising suffix *-en* in the other set of Old English glosses for nymphs (see §5:3). Where *landælfe* fits into this is not clear: it could represent an original Anglian form (potentially feminine) which, by some slip, was not altered along with *dunælfa*—if so, the consequent disjunction between gloss and lemma might explain its removal from the textual tradition—or a later addition to the tradition by a redactor who chose not to use the *-ælfa* form, perhaps because it was a neologism.

This analysis suggests two important points: that in the period when the glosses were coined, probably the eighth or ninth centuries, the simplex *ælf* was indeed unsuitable for denoting females, implying that it denoted only males; and that Old English lacked words appropriate for glossing *nympha*. The evidence for the meanings of *ælf* afforded by this qualified equation with *nympha* and *musa* is considered more fully in the next section (esp. §5:3.3).

3. Nymphs again: from *ælfe* to *ælfenne* to *ælfen*

3.1 Texts

Three Anglo-Saxon manuscripts contain glosses which use the basic root *ælfen*, compounded, like *dunælfa* and *landælfe*, with various topographical elements, to gloss lemmata denoting nymphs.[115] The lemmata derive from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (ed. Lindsay 1911, I 8.11.96–97):

> Nymphas deas aquarum putant, dictas a nubibus. Nam ex nubibus aquae, unde derivatum est. Nymphas deas aquarum, quasi numina lympharum. Ipsas autem dicunt et Musas quas et nymphas, nec inmerito. Nam atque motus musicen efficit. Nympharum apud gentiles varia sunt vocabula. Nymphas quippe montium Oreades dicunt, silvarum Dryades, fontium Hamadryades, camporum Naides, maris Nereides [naides *BCT*].

> They reckon *nymphae* to be goddesses of waters, so called from clouds [*nubes*, but cf. *nimbus* 'storm(cloud)']. For waters [come] from clouds, whence [*nympha*] is derived. [They reckon] *nymphae* goddesses of waters, just like the spirits of water. But they also call these *Musae* who

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[115] Additionally, Laurence Nowell's *Vocabularium Saxonicum* of 1565 contains the entry 'bergælfen' ('hill-*ælfen*'; cited by Peters 1963, 255; cf. Somner 1970 [1659], 'Berg-ælfenne. Oreades. *Elves or Fairies of the mountains*'). This is unattested in known Anglo-Saxon manuscripts but it is a plausible formation (cf. the attested gloss *Oreades . muntælfen*). Nowell presumably either took *bergælfen* from a manuscript now lost or mis-remembered *muntælfen*. Without an Anglo-Saxon context, it can add little to the present discussion.

are also *nymphae*, not without cause. For, in addition, [their] movements create music. There are varied terms for *nymphs* among pagans: for they call *nymphae* of mountains *Oreades*, of woods *Dryades*, of springs *Hamadryades*, of plains *Naides* and of the sea *Nereids* [*naides BCT*].

These glosses must have been composed after the arrival of Isidore's *Etymologiae* in Britain, by the late seventh century (Herren 1998, 90–91), glossing of which was underway by the time of our earliest evidence for vernacular glossing, in the later seventh century (Pheifer 1987; cf. Lapidge 1996 [1988–89], 183–85, 188–93).[116]

The earliest and most conservative manuscript of the glosses is in Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit Voccius Lat. 4° 106, being a manuscript of twenty-five leaves whose two main hands (in one of which the glosses are written) are agreed to be 'not later than the first half of the ninth century' (Parkes 1972, 215; cf. Ker 1957, 479 [appendix, no. 19]). The manuscript seems certainly to have been at Fleury in the tenth century (Parkes 1972, 212–13), and was likely enough produced there. The *ælfen* glosses occur together in a blank space on folio 10r which follows a text of the Latin riddles attributed to Symphosius (ff. 2v–8v) and the contents list of Aldhelm's enigmata (themselves covering ff. 10v–25v; ed. Meritt 1945, 61):

Nimphae aelfinni eadem & muse	*Nymphae*: *ælfenne*, and at the same time *musae*;
Oreades duun . aelfinni	*Oreades*: mountain-*ælfenne*;
Driades uudu . aelfinni	*Dryades*: wood-*ælfenne*;
Amadriades ua&er . aelfinn̄	*Hamadryades*: water-*ælfenne*;
Maides feld . aelfinne	*Maides*: open-land-*ælfenne*;
Naides sáe . aelfinne	*Naiades*: sea-*ælfenne*

This faithfully glosses the *BCT*-texts of the *Etymologiae* (for their affiliations—which are diverse—see Lindsay 1911, ɪ vi–xii), with the sole divergence (perhaps by some scribal dissimilation) of *Maides* for *Naides*. The glosses were perhaps added to elucidate Aldhelm's ensuing mention of *Castalidas nymphas* in the preface to the *Enigmata* (ed. Ehwald 1919, 98).

The second text containing *ælfen* glosses is the alphabeticised First Cleopatra Glossary, discussed above (§5:2.1), which contains a stratum of glosses derived from Isidore's *Etymologiae*: 'Amadriades : feldælbinne ł elfenne' ('*Hamadryades*: open-land-*ælbinne* or *elfenne*'), with the archaic form -*ælbinne* itself being glossed with the updated, Kentish form -*elfenne*; 'Maides : sæælfenne' ('Maides : sea-*ælfenne*'); 'Nymfæ : wæterælfenne', 'Naides : sæælfenne' ('*Nymphae*: water-*ælfenne*', '*Naiades*: sea-*ælfenne*'); and 'Oreades : wuduælfenne' ('*Oreades*: wood-ælfenne'; ed. Rusche

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[116] Rusche, perhaps tempted by the fact that in Cleopatra, the Isidore glosses were copied alongside Épinal-Erfurt-type glosses, suggested that the Isidore glosses in Cleopatra come from the same glossed *Etymologiae* which furnished Épinal-Erfurt with their Isidore glosses (1996, 132–33). However, the glosses in the epitome of the *Etymologiae* which match Épinal-Erfurt do not occur either in Cleopatra or in the related Isidore material in the Antwerp-London Glossary, so this is unlikely.

1996, 184 [A463]; 373 [M356]; 384 [N200, N201]; 396 [O215]). As comparison with the Leiden text suggests, however, not only were the lemmata re-ordered in Cleopatra, but subjected to the redactor's habitual revision, so that the Old English glosses not only diverge from those in Leiden, but also from Isidore's own definitions (cf. Kittlick 1998, §2.1; Lendinara 1999, 22–26; Rusche 1996, 35–36). It is not necessary to explain these divergences fully here; sound knowledge of Classical mythology may underlie some (cf. Stryker 1951, 69 n. 463), but this is not assured.

The last text is the Antwerp-London Glossary, also discussed above (§5:2.1), where the *ælfen*-glosses are combined with 'Castalidas . dunelfen' within a class-list dealing with supernatural beings, prophets and magic-workers, preseeved in the London portion. The Antwerp-London Glossary drew extensively on the same glossed text of Isidore's *Etymologiae* as the First Cleopatra Glossary (Porter 1999, 183–86), giving 'Oriades . muntælfen . Driades . wuduelfen . Moides . feldelfen . Amadriades . wylde elfen . Naides . sæelfen . Castalidas . dunelfen' (ed. Kindschi 1955, 246; collated with MS, f. 21r). This text is more conservative than Cleopatra's, but diverges from Leiden in different ways. It seems likely that the scribe's exemplar had *ælf*-forms, while he altered to the *elf*-forms of his own dialect only from the second word onwards. The alterations in both Cleopatra and Antwerp-London show that different redactors of the *ælfen* glosses were independently altering them, probably in the tenth and perhaps eleventh centuries, while maintaining the element *ælf*. This implies that both redactors, on consideration, still found *ælf* a satisfactory gloss, allowing us to draw conclusions about the semantics of *ælf* not only for the eighth century, when they probably originated, but probably also the tenth and eleventh.

3.2 Origins

Despite the Continental origin of Leiden Voss. Q 106, the glosses are Old English. As with the language of the *Leiden Riddle*, a later addition to the same manuscript (Parkes 1972, esp. 211–16), their orthography is archaic, showing <uu> for /w, uː/, <ae> for later <æ>, and <i> in unstressed syllables. Likewise, the form *feldælbinne* in the First Cleopatra Glossary shows <i> in an unstressed syllable and the retention of <b> for etymological /β/, features found elsewhere in this stratum of the glossary and once more associated with the seventh and eighth centuries (Kittlick 1998, §§4.2, 6.1.1, 14.2.5). The nominative plural inflection *-e* is non-West Saxon (Campbell 1959, §590). Accordingly, Kittlick considered the *ælfen* glosses in the First Cleopatra Glossary to be part of a tranche of around 200 *Etymologiae*-glosses, which source he numbered S21 (1998, §§2.2, 14.2.5; cf. 14.1.5), concluding that 'dieses Glossar … nicht nur sehr alt, sondern

auch anglischer, evtl. merzischer Provenienz ist' ('the provenance of this glossary is not only very old, but also Anglian, evidently Mercian'; 1998, §14.2.5; cf. Rusche 1996, 129–34).

   As with *landælfe* and *dunælfa*, *ælfen* must have been compounded with words for topographic features specifically to gloss Isidore's terms, a point emphasised by the punctuation in Leiden, which puts a point between the two elements of each compound. The status of the compound *ælfen*, however, is less clear-cut. *Ælfen* is a transparent compound of the root *ælf* with the suffix *-en* (earlier *-inn* < *-injō*), used to form feminine derivatives from masculine nouns.[117] Other Old English examples are *gyden* ('goddess', < *god* 'god'), *mennen* ('handmaid, female slave' < *mann* 'person') and *mynecenu* ('nun' < *munuc* 'monk', with irregular transference to the feminine *ō*-stem declension; cf. Campbell 1959, §592c). The last example seems to have been coined in the tenth century, emphasising the productivity of the suffix;[118] likewise the unique *mettena*, which Alfred used to gloss *Parcae* in chapter 35 of his translation of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*, seems likely to be a nonce-word (ed. Sedgefield 1899, 102; the other manuscript gives *gydena* 'goddesses'). Contrary to earlier beliefs, *ælfen* has no Middle English reflexes (see Appendix 1.1); it also has no Norse cognate, Scandinavians coining *álfkona* ('*álfr*-woman') to render terms such as Marie de France's *fée* (*Guigemar* line 704; ed. Cook–Tveitane 1979, 34; Ewert 1995, 21). But it has parallel formations elsewhere in medieval West Germanic languages, also used, amongst other things, to translate *nympha*. If these are cognates rather than shared innovations, they would demand the reconstruction of a West Germanic *$al\beta(i)inj\bar{o}$ (Verwijs–Verdam–Stoett 1885–1941, s.v. *elvinne*; Grimm–Grimm 1965–, s.v. *ELBE*). However, the *-injō* suffix has remained the normal suffix for forming nouns denoting females from nouns denoting males throughout the history of continental West Germanic and so would have been the obvious means of feminising *alp* and *alf*. More significant is the fact that that (-)*ælfenne* uses a different strategy for feminising *ælf* from that deployed in the gloss *dunælfa*, which, as I have discussed, simply changes *ælf*'s declension. These factors strongly suggest that there was no morphologically or semantically feminine form of *ælf* available in Old English: otherwise both traditions of Old English glosses would surely have used it.

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[117] See especially Lindheim 1958, 480–83; also Campbell 1959, §592c; Kluge 1926, §§39–42; Voyles 1992, §7.2.26.
[118] Foot 2000, ɪ 29–30, cf. 97–107; cf. Stafford 1999, 10. Foot did not address the *i*-mutation in *mynecenu*, which must be analogical.

3.3 Evidence for the Semantics of *Ælf*

Of the batches of Isidore glosses in the First Cleopatra and Antwerp-London glossaries deriving from S21, the *ælfen* glosses are almost alone in glossing lemmata which denote Classical mythological beings, so we have little other evidence for how the glossator who composed S21 tended to handle words for Classical mythological figures.[119] But the glossator's original intention was presumably the same as Isidore's: to explain Classical mythology to a Christian audience. As with *dunælfa* and *landælfe*, then, we may infer that the *ælfen*-glosses understand their lemmata in their Classical senses. Although it is possible that one set of glosses inspired the other, the different approaches to feminising *ælf* suggest that we owe the glosses to different and, if not independent, then independent-minded scholars. It is striking, then, that both chose *ælf* as the basis for their glosses. This consolidates the evidence for the semantics of *ælf* deduced from the *dunælfa* and *landælfe* glosses, that *ælf* continued to denote anthropomorphic otherworldly beings after the conversion. It also emphasises the inapplicability, on the grounds of gender, of *ælf* in its unmodified form as a gloss for words for *nymphae*.

These facts suggest that *ælf* was co-opted to gloss words for *nymphae* because no appropriate feminine counterpart to *nympha* existed in eighth- to ninth-century Old English—at least in the registers used by glossators—and because *ælf* was in some way the most suitable option. This is striking and rare evidence for a lexical gap among Old English words for supernatural beings, which I discuss further below. Moreover, the Antwerp-London Glossary suggests a *terminus ad quem* for this situation. There is no doubt that by the time when Laȝamon wrote his *Brut* around the early thirteenth century, *ælf* had become able to denote females: Arthur is taken 'to Argante þere quene; aluen swiðe sceone' ('To Argante the queen, a very beautiful *alue*'); Laȝamon adds a few lines later that Argante is 'fairest alre aluen' ('the most beautiful of all *aluen*', lines 14277, 14291; ed. Brook–Leslie 1963–78, ɪɪ 750). Laȝamon presents us concomitantly with the analogical transference of *ælf* to the weak declension and its semantic extension to the denotation of females. This suggests an important development not only in the semantics of *ælf~elf*, but in the history of English folklore: it seems to represent the rise of beliefs in female otherworldly beings similar in character to the *nymphae* of the Classics and to the *fées* of high medieval francophone romance.

The form of *ælfen* in Leiden and Cleopatra is the plural *ælfenne*, but the form used in the Antwerp-London Glossary is *elfen*. If this word was understood to be in the same

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[119] The certain exception is 'Furiæ : burgrunan'; ed. Rusche 1996, 300 [F440]; 'Parce . hægtesse' in Antwerp-London appears to be another example; ed. Kindschi 1955, 247; collated with MS, f. 21v.

declension as *ælfenne*, it would, as the *Dictonary of Old English* concluded, be a nominative singular, despite the plural forms of its lemmata (s.v. *ælfen*). But Antwerp-London does not normally gloss plurals with singulars, and the adjective *wylde* in 'wylde elfen' would, if a feminine nominative singular, have been *wyld*. *Elfen* must, therefore, have been intended as a plural form. Nor is it likely to reflect some miscomprehension of the exemplar's *ælfenne* forms, since the *-en* ending was extended to the inherited gloss *Castalidas nymphas: dunælfa*, giving the form 'castalidas dunelfen'. Rather, the only likely explanation for Antwerp-London's *elfen* plurals is that *ælfenne* was deliberately altered to become a weak plural, and that concurrently with, though not necessarily consequently on, this alteration, it became able to denote females. The emendation would have been facilitated by the phonological leveling of unstressed vowels and shortening of unstressed long consonants widespread in eleventh-century English (Hogg 1992a, §§6.62, 7.80), which not only encouraged the identification of <-enne> with <-an>, but permitted their replacement with <-en>. This <-en>-spelling is surprising, as although it is consistent with early Middle English spellings of weak inflections and probably more representative of eleventh-century phonology, it does not occur for etymological *-an* elsewhere in the glossary. Presumably, the redactor of the Antwerp-London Glossary, rather like the later Tremulous Worcester Scribe, copied *-an* inflections in his exemplar conservatively, but when formulating his own weak plurals opted for a spelling more representative of his own speech (see Franzen 2003), perhaps being encouraged in this by his exemplar's spelling <-en->. The levelling of the endings of both *ælfenne* and *dunælfa* to *-en* would, by this reading, show the transference of words to the weak declension evident in Southern and West-Midland Middle English. That the *n*-stem declension was growing already in spoken (Southern) Old English despite the conservatism of the written language is suggested by its popularity as a declension for loan-words, second only to that of the *a*-stem declension (Gneuss 1996, ch. 6). As I have mentioned, moreover, this process began early for the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems: weak variant plurals of long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem words such as *Seaxe*, *-sæte* and *-ware* appear already in early West Saxon, suggesting that the nominative plural **/ælf ə n /* might have emerged in some varieties of Old English already by the tenth century.

   The rise of a female denotation of *ælf* appears concurrently, then, with the transference of *ælf* to the weak declension—at least in the South. However, although this morphological change could have been a factor in creating the conditions for semantic change, but is not a sufficient explanation for it: other innovative early Middle English weak plurals like *cnihten*, *kingen* or *brethren* continued to denote males alone. The arrival of female *elven* in English culture must have involved extra-linguistic factors. Just such an extralinguistc factor has long been posited. The origin of the *fées* of medieval

romances has long been attributed to 'Celtic' influence, directly on Old French and Anglo-Norman literature and, indirectly through this, on English, where they were denoted either by the French loan-word *fairy*, or by *elf* (e.g. Philippson 1929, 78; Larrington 1999, esp. 35–36). By this theory, the meaning of *elf* was basically extended by semantic borrowing from French. However, the Antwerp-London Glossary, from the earlier eleventh century, suggests a pre-Conquest *terminus ad quem* for this semantic extension. Antwerp-London is from well before either the Norman Conquest or the twelfth-century blossoming of French vernacular literature. This earlier date does not preclude influence from Celtic- or French-speaking communities, but it does suggest one more development in English gender relations which can no longer be pinned on the Norman Conquest (cf. Stafford 1994; 1995; Crick 1999). It points instead to developments in Anglo-Saxons' non-Christian beliefs—which were evidently living and growing beyond the conversion—and in Anglo-Saxon gendering. I return to these prospects at the end of this thesis, when the full range of pertinent evidence has been assembled (§9:2.2).

4. *Ælfe* and prophecy? *Ylfig*

4.1 Texts

The first of my two adjectival glosses is the compound *ylfig*, again unique to glosses. Four of the five occurrences are textually related glosses on the word *comitiales* ('epileptics'), three of them interlinear, in chapter 52 of Aldhelm's *Prosa de virginitate*, composed sometime before Aldhelm's death in 709, in a passage describing the miracles of Saint Anatolia. I quote from the *Prosa de virginitate* as edited by Gwara, but including the extensive glosses from Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS. 1650, since these have the most direct bearing on interpreting *ylfig*:[120]

> Anatolia uero in exilium *[Hand A: on wræcsiþ]* trusa signorum *[Hand C: uel]* miraculis crebrescente *[Hand CD: wide springende]* praefatam sociam in uirtutibus aequiperauit; execrata etenim filium consulis inerguminum *[Hand C: deouelseocne]* rigidis catenarum nexibus *[Hand CD: bendum]* asstrictum *[i. ligatum]* expulso habitatore dicto citius curaut. Quo rumore *[fama]* clarescente *[l crescente]* et laruatos *[Hand A: æfærede; Hand C: inerguminos infirmos; Hand CD deofelseoce]* et comitiales *[Hand A: i. garritores, ylfie; Hand C: lunaticos, wanseoce]* ac ceteros ualitudinarios *[Hand A: adlie]* pristinae sanitati restituit…

> Anatolia, however, forced into exile and becoming famous for her miraculous signs, equalled her aforementioned associate in virtue; for, having cursed the son of a consul who was bound tightly by the rigid links of demoniacal chains, she cured him (again) in the twinkling of an eye by

[120] Ed. Gwara 2001, II 696–97; Langenhove 1941, f. 48r; cf. Goossens 1974, 456–57 [nos 4815–21]; trans. Lapidge–Herren 1979, 121. Gwara did not assign a hand to one stratum of the glosses in his edition, which do not appear in Goossens's edition, hence the lack of attribution here.

> expelling the demon who inhabited him. As her renown became more illustrious, she restored to their former health those possessed (with devils), epileptics and other diseased persons…

Brussels 1650 dates from the beginning of the eleventh century, but Hand A, which added to it the gloss *ylfie*, is later, of the first half of that century (Ker 1957, 6 [no. 8]; Goossens 1974, 51). Although Brussels 1650 has long been associated with Abingdon (Ker 1957, 6–7 [no. 8], cf. 3)—indeed Ker even thought that it was originally part of the same codex as the London-Antwerp glossary (1957, 7, cf. 3)—Gwara has recently argued for a Canterbury provenance (2001, I 94*–101*). Brussels 1650 seems to have been an exemplar of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Digby 146, the manuscript probably from late tenth-century Canterbury and the Old English glosses probably from the mid-eleventh, contributing its gloss *ylfige* (Gwara 2001, I 147*–56* 191*, 197*–99*). However, British Library Royal MS. B.vii, whose text and glosses were both written at Exeter in the late eleventh century (Gwara 2001, I 113*–22*), must with regard to *ylfig* derive independently from an ancestor of the other two manuscripts (Gwara 2001, I 191*, 199*–216*).

The remaining two instances of *ylfig* occur in the eleventh-century Harley Glossary, discussed above (§5:2.1). Folio 31r includes the gloss 'Comitiales .i. garritores', adding above it and into the right margin 'ł dies me*n*si . ł ylfie . ł monaþseoce . ł dagas .' ('or a day of the month, or *ylfige*, or lunatics, or days'; ed. Oliphant 1966, 85 [C1211]; collated with MS). Here, *ylfig* must derive from the Aldhelm-glosses just quoted (cf. Cooke 1994, 79–81, 158–59; 1997, 459–61), the glossary exhibiting its characteristic conflation of different definitions for the same lemma (using Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* and other glosses found in Brussels 1650; cf. Cooke 1994, 157–58, 77–79, 144–45). However, folio 76r also includes the entry 'Fanaticus .i. minister templi' ('*Fanaticus*: i.e. the priest of a temple') with 'fut*ur*a p*rae*cinens . ł ylfig' ('one foretelling things to come, or *ylfig*'; ed. Oliphant 1966, 178 [F151]; collated with MS) written above. Here, only *futura praecinens* and *ylfig* gloss *fanaticus* as adjectives, and the lineation further allies them, so *ylfig* presumably means something like 'foretelling the future' rather than 'priest of a temple'. *Ylfig* is clearly an innovation here: the Harley Glossary entry must be based on entries like those in the Corpus Glossary, 'the glossary closest to Harley in content', which lack *ylfig*.[121] Corpus gives 'fanatici . futura . precinentes .' ('*Fanatici*: those foretelling things to come'; ed. Lindsay 1921a, 74 [F38]; Bischoff and others 1988, f. 28r)[122] and 'Fanaticus . te*m*pli minist*er* . ' ('*Fanaticus*: the priest of a temple'; ed.

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[121] Cooke 1994, 133–34, at 133; cf. 1997, 456–57; the entries there probably derive from the seventh-century Continental Abstrusa Glossary, Lindsay 1921a, 74–75.

[122] Although 'the scribe … used the *punctus* after each lemma, after each different interpretation of the same lemma, and at the end of each gloss' and 'errors in punctuation are rare', the glosses here demand to be understood together in a syntactic relationship (Bischoff–Parkes 1988, 24, cf. n.

Lindsay 1921a, 75 [F78]; Bischoff and others 1988, f. 28v). *Fanaticus* in the latter sense seems still to have been associated with prophecy since a different but apparently contemporary hand (Bischoff–Parkes 1988, 24) annotated the entry with 'qui ıntе*m*plo . arguitur' ('he who prates in a temple').[123] Whatever the textual history of the Corpus Glossary here, it seems clear that two glosses like these have been conflated to produce the Harley Glossary's one. What is not known is whether the Harley Glossator added *ylfig* because it was part of the common lexicon, or simply because he knew it from the Aldhelm glosses.

4.2 Origins

Gwara has recently argued convincingly for the existence of a corpus of glosses to the *Prosa de virginitate*, early enough to have contributed to the early ninth-century Corpus Glossary and preserved as a stratum in surviving glosses to the poem, which he termed the Common Recension (2001, ɪ 235*–308*). If the strata of Brussels 1650 and Royal 6 B.vii containing the gloss *ylfige* derive, as Gwara thought, independently from the Common Recension (2001, esp. ɪ 191*, 209*–11*, 266*–72*), the glossing of *comitiales* with *ylfig* must derive from this eighth-century text, probably compiled in Canterbury or Malmesbury.[124] That said, the poor attestation of this particular entry leaves open the possibility of some later origin, with a transmission outside the lines of Gwara's stemma. As I have said, the instance of *ylfig* in the Harley Glossary which is not in this textual tradition was either borrowed from it or introduced from the everyday Old English lexicon on the glossator's own initiative.

  Ylfig has no Germanic cognates and is transparently composed of the late West Saxon form of *ælf* and the denominative adjectival ending *-ig*; as this suffix has been productive from Common Germanic (Kluge 1926, §§202–6) to present day English, *ylfig* could have been coined at any time. Parallel Old English formations are *werig* ('weary, tired, exhausted' < *wor* 'ooze, bog'); *sælig* ('happy, prosperous' < *sæl* 'prosperity, happiness'); and *gydig* ('possessed (by a god)' < **γuðaz* 'god'). All these suggest '(like) one engaged with noun X': 'like one in a bog', 'one in good fortune', 'one engaged with a god', and so forth. The etymological meaning of *ylfig* seems therefore to be '(like) one engaged

145).

[123] Corpus also has a third *fanaticus* gloss, 'fanaticus . q*ui* templu*m* . diu . deseruit [MS *deserit*]' (ed. Lindsay 1921a, 75 [F76]; Bischoff and others 1988, f. 28v; omitted from the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*). This need not concern us here, but its presence emphasises Corpus's complexity regarding *fanaticus* glosses.

[124] These are guesses, but the only likely candidates (2001, ɪ 294*–308*); a detailed linguistic analysis is desirable. Place of origin might be significant, insofar as if the *ylfig* glosses derive not only from the same time but also the same place as other glosses containing *ælf* then we must reckon with the possibility of the inspiration of one gloss by another.

with an *ælf* or *ælfe*'. As Jente pointed out, *gydig* may provide a particularly important parallel, since it involves a semantically similar root, which must on phonetic grounds go back to Common Germanic.[125] It is attested only in textually related glosses on *lymphaticus* ('diabolically possessed'), again in the *Prosa de virginitate* (ch.53; ed. Gwara 2001, II 704–5; cf. Goossens 1974, 461 [no. 4892]). However, it is fairly common in Middle English, with the primary meanings 'insane, crazy; possessed by a devil', which correlate precisely with the Old English and etymological evidence (*MED*, s.v. *gidī*; cf. *OED*, s.v. *giddy*). It is salutary that, unattested in other Germanic languages and so poorly attested in Old English, *gydig* might have been taken as a gloss-word were it not for its etymology and later popularity, so it is plausible that *ylfig*, despite its sparse attestation, was in general use in Old English. Its early loss from the lexicon might be explicable by the ascent of the adjective *elvish* (see below, §5:5), alongside the arrival of new medical terminology from Latin and French.

4.3 Evidence for the Semantics of *Ælf*

Comitialis was an obscure word. Although it occurs both as a lemma and a gloss in early medieval Insular Latin, only Aldhelm seems to have used it in connected prose (*DMLBS*, s.v. *comitialis*). Although *comitialis* is usually translated 'epileptic', the connotations of this word today are probably thoroughly anachronistic (cf. Temkin 1971, 86–102). The probable source of *comitialis* for Aldhelm and his glossators is the entry in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* for 'Epilemsia' (ed. Lindsay 1911, 4.7.5–7). This, according to Isidore,

> Fit … ex melancholico humore, quotiens exuberaverit et ad cerebrum conversus fuerit. Haec passio et caduca vocatur, eo quod cadens aeger spasmos patiatur. Hos etiam vulgus lunaticos vocant, quod per lunae cursum comitetur eos insidia daemonum. Item et larvatici. Ipse est et morbus comitialis, id est maior et divinus, quo caduci tenentur. Cui tanta vis est ut homo valens concidat spumetque. Comitialis autem dictus, quod apud gentiles cum comitiorum die cuiquam accidisset, comitia dimittebantur. Erat autem apud Romanos comitiorum dies sollennis in kalendis Ianuarii.

> is caused by the melancholic humour—how often it may have overflowed and been redirected to the brain. This is called *passio* [suffering] and *caduca* [(epileptic) falling], because the epileptic [*cadens aeger*] suffers [*patiatur*] convulsions. These indeed the common people call *lunaticos* [those made mad by the moon], because the attack of demons follows them according to the course of the moon. So also *larvatici*. That too is the comitialian sickness [*morbus comitialis*], which is more significant and of divine origin, by which those who fall are gripped. It has such power that a healthy person collapses and froths. However, *comitialis* is so used because among the pagans, when it had happened to anyone on the day of the *comitium* [assembly for electing

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[125] 1921, 127; cf. *OED*, s.v. *giddy*. An Old English root-vowel *y* is demonstrated by Middle English reflexes and the lack of palatalisation in *giddy* (the manuscript form *gidig* showing unrounding: see Goossens 1974, 78–79); this must derive from the *i*-mutation of */ɣuðiɣ -/, predating the Germanic lowering of /u…ɑ/ > /o…ɑ/ in *god* (< */ɣuðaz/; see Campbell 1959, §§115, 572–73).

Roman magistrates], the *comitia* was broken up. But the usual day of the *comitia* among the Romans was during the Calends of January.

Isidore's discussion is consistent with Aldhelm's association of *comitiales* with *laruati* ('the demonically possessed') and provides an origin for the gloss *lunaticos* ('those made mad by the moon'; on the obscure gloss *wanseoce*, see §2:1.230). *Ylfig* must, then, denote some altered state of mind—possibly one which was 'maior et divinus'. We may set this alongside its pairing with the Latin gloss *garritor*. This word is even more unusual than *comitialis* (though see *DMLBS*, s.v.), but is a transparent deverbative formation from *garrio* ('I chatter, babble, prate'), meaning 'babbler'. It seems unlikely, however, that *comitiales*, at least in the *Prosa de virginitate*, was taken simply to denote people who talked (*contra DMLBS*, s.v. *comitialis* §1c; *DOE*, s.v. *ælfig*). Chapter 44 of the *Prosa de virginitate* mentions 'a pithonibus et aruspicibus uana falsitatis deleramenta garrientibus' ('empty gibberish of falsity from *garrientes* prophetesses and soothsayers'; ed. Gwara 2001, II 625), suggesting connotations of prophetic speech (viewed pejoratively) for the root of *garritor*—which matches the usage of *ylfig* in the innovative gloss in the Harley Glossary. This correlation may not be independent: if the Harley Glossator took *ylfig* from the *comitialis* gloss he may have inferred an association with prophetic speech in the same way as I have.

   This evidence—the parallel with *gydig*, the meanings of *comitialis* and *garritor*, and the Harley Glossator's usage of *ylfig*—all militates in favour of understanding *ylfig* to mean 'one speaking prophetically through divine/demonic possession'. Admittedly, the Common Recension glossator may not have had too many options for glossing *comitialis*. By the tenth century, scholarly Old English had a well-developed lexicon for altered states of mind: attested to gloss at least one of Isidore's terms relating to epilepsy (besides *gydig*), we have *bræccoþu* ('phlegm-sickness'), *(ge)bræcseoc* ('phlegm-ill'), *deofolseoc* ('devil-sick'), *fylleseoc(nes)* and possibly *fyllewærc* (both 'falling sick (ness)'), *monaþseoc* ('month-sick'), and *woda* ('madman').[126] But most of these were probably originally coined in response to Mediterranean and Christian medical traditions: early glossators like the Common Recension glossator probably had only *gydig*—which they were apparently unwilling to use—and variants on *wod* ('frenzied, enraged, mad').[127] This makes the usage of the Harley Glossator crucial: he had access to the full

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[126] Cf. Roberts–Kay–Grundy 2000, §§02.08.09.02 Epilepsy, 02.08.11.02.01 Insanity, madness; *DOE* s.vv. where available; Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *monaþseoc, monaþseoc-ness*; Toller 1921, s.v. *monaþ-seoc*.

[127] *Fylleseoc* and *fyllewærc* are probably calques on *morbus caducus* ('falling sickness'), while *bræccoþu* and *(ge)bræcseoc* probably reflect Isidore's association of *epilepsia* with *melancholia*, an excess of phlegm; *monaþseoc* is probably a calque on *lunaticos*. Cf. Erfurt 'ephilenticus uuoda' ('epileptic: madman') and Épinal-Erfurt 'lymphatico uuoedendi' ('possessed man (dative singular): raging one (dative singular)'; ed. Pheifer 1974, 21 [383], 31 [575]; collated with Bischoff and others 1988, Erfurt ff. 5v, 7v, Épinal f. 100r); Corpus adds 'inergumenos . wodan' (ed. Lindsay

late Old English lexicon of altered states of mind, and could have chosen any of its other members to gloss *fanaticus: futura praecinens*, but chose *ylfig*. This suggests that *ylfig* was precisely the right word for the job. Moreover, the Harley Glossator tended to prefer Latin glosses (Cooke 1994, 24–25; 1997, 455); while fanatical completism was not beyond him, it seems unlikely that he would have added *ylfig* here if he only knew it as a gloss to *comitialis*: *ylfig* was surely a member of the common lexicon, like *gydig*.

It follows from these arguments that *ælf* was once sufficiently intimately associated with people predicting the future, and possibly with possession, that a derived adjective meant something like 'predicting the future'. Although the evidence is ambivalent, it is worth showing that a striking correlation for this argument may exist, in our evidence for the significance of the plant known in Old English as *ælfþone*. Although this word is attested only in medical texts, mainly in remedies for fever, madness, or ailments caused by *ælfe*, its attestations there are not very revealing about *ælfe*.[128] More useful evidence for its meanings comes from a gloss-like context, and is more pertinent to *ylfig*. I turn to it here, therefore.[129]

4.4 *Ælfþone*

The medical texts provide no evidence for what plant(s) *ælfþone* denoted; its second element is unique in Old English, but cognate with Old High German *thona*, 'vine, creeper' (*AHDWB*, s.v.; Thun 1969, 391–92), suggesting that *ælfþone* is archaic. Thun observed that German plant-names in cognates of *ælf-* most consistently denote the vine woody nightshade (L. *Solanum dulcamara*), which is consistent with the meaning of *þone* (1969, 391–92). Bierbaumer reached the same conclusion, apparently independently (1975–79, I 9–10). *Ælfþone* is presumably to be equated with Middle English *elf-thung* (*MED*, s.v.), its obsolete second element being replaced there with a productive element meaning 'poisonous plant', and this supports Thun's inference. The most useful attestation of *elf-thung* is an annotation made by the renowned Tremulous Worcester Scribe to an Old English text of the *Herbarium* in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Hatton 76 around the first half of the thirteenth century (see Franzen 1991, 66–69). The annotation, on folio 112r, adds 'elueþunge tunsingwurt' (ed. Crawford 1928, 21) as the title for the Old English entry 'Đeos wyrt þe man elleborum album ꓶ oðrum naman

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1921a, 92 [I 74]; Bischoff and others 1988, f. 34r).
[128] Bierbaumer 1975–79, I 9–10 and *DOE*, s.v. *ælf-þone*, list the references, though they do not show textual interrelationships.
[129] A full analysis is unnecessary here; I have undertaken one for the *Anglo-Saxon Plant-Name Survey* (<http://www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESLL/EngLang/ihsl/projects/plants.htm>), expected to be published in the *Survey*'s second volume of papers.

tunsincgwyrt nemneð ꝺ eac sume men wedeberge hata� byð cenned on dunum, ꝺ heo hafað leaf leace gelice' ('This plant, which is called *helleborus albus*, and by another name *tunsingwyrt* ('*tunsing*-plant'), and [which] some people also call *wedeberge* ('madness-berry') grows on mountains, and it has leaves like a leek/onion'; ed. Vriend 1984, 180).[130] It should be admitted that the *Herbarium* description does not match woody nightshade; my assumption is that English terms here were adopted because of linguistic correspondences rather than formal ones, based perhaps on glosses like Erfurt's 'elleborus poedibergæ' ('helleborus: madness-berry [reading *woedibergæ*]'; ed. Pheifer 1974, 21 [388]; Bischoff and others 1988, f. 5v). After all, the gloss *wedeberge* itself mentions berries, but L. *helleborus* or *veratrum*—the genera denoted by *helleborus* in ancient and medieval mediterranean usage—are not berry-bearing (Cameron 1985, 131). When the Tremulous Worcester Scribe came to the passage in the Old English *herbarium*, it seems that he recognised a plant denoted by words for woody nightshade, and inserted another term for that plant—*elf-thung*. If *elf-thung* is indeed *ælfþone*, then, this is another piece of evidence that that too was woody nightshade.

If *ælfþone* denoted woody nightshade, then Aldhelm's riddle *Helleborus*, composed sometime before he died in 709/10, affords remarkable evidence for its cultural associations, since Cameron has shown that it describes woody nightshade:[131]

Ostriger en arvo vernabam frondibus hirtis Conquilio similis: sic cocci murice rubro Purpureus stillat sanguis de palmite guttis. Exuvias vitae mandenti tollere nolo Mitia nec penitus spoliabunt mente venena; Sed tamen insanum vexat dementia cordis, Dum rotat in giro vecors vertigine membra.	A purple flower, I grow in the fields with shaggy foliage. I am very similar to an oyster: thus with reddened dye of scarlet a purplish blood oozes by drops from my branches. I do not wish to snatch away the spoils of life from him who eats me, nor do my gentle poisons deprive him utterly of reason. Nevertheless a certain touch of insanity torments him as, mad with dizziness, he whirls his limbs in a circle.

The possible effects of ingesting parts of woody nightshade plants are little known, and clinical research has focused on their toxic properties; but if we accept agitation for arm-whirling, Aldhelm's symptoms are among those observed of eating all parts of the plant (e.g. Cooper–Johnson 1984, 217–18; Bruneton 1999 [1996], 479–83). For the riddle to be meaningful, Aldhelm must have expected his audience to recognise the symptoms which he described, so they presumably reflect reasonably widespread cultural knowledge rather than some unique observation, which further implies deliberate ingestion. Whether the consumption of woody nightshade can be controlled to produce

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[130] Vriend himself did not read *elueþunge*, but *clucþunge*; I have not been able to consult the manuscript. *Clucþunge* is not a word, however, and though it could be an error for *clufþunge*, *elueþunge* seems likelier to underlie the readings of Crawford and Vriend.

[131] 1985, 131–33; cf. 1993, 110–12; ed. Ehwald 1919, I 144; trans. Lapidge–Rosier 1985, 93; for Aldhelm's paronomasia here see Cameron 1985, 131–32.

the effects described by Aldhelm is not clear from the clinical evidence, but it is not implausible—in which case my inference that *ylfig* associates *ælfe* with causing prophetic states may be set alongside the implication that Anglo-Saxons deliberately consumed parts of a plant called *ælfþone* in search of mind-altering experiences.

However, it must be admitted that *ælfþone* poses a riddle of its own, since it is prescribed in the Old English medical texts to help cure states of fever or madness. Indeed, among the other ailments for which *ælfþone* is prescribed, one of three interrelated remedies, in section 68 of Leechbook III (ed. Wright 1955, ff. 126v–27r), prescribes *ælfþone* 'wiþ wedenheorte' ('against a frenzied-heart/mind'), a term to which Aldhelm's *dementia cordis* surely alludes. This state could be understood as possession: another remedy 'Wiþ wedenheorte' occurs in Bald's Leechbook I, section 63, in a sequence of remedies prescribed 'Wiþ feondseocum men . þonne deofol þone monnan fede oððe hine innan gewealde mid adle' ('For a fiend-sick person: when the/a devil nourishes a man or controls him from within with illness'; f. 51v).[132] In the same way that *dweorgedwostle* ('pennyroyal') was used to alleviate symptoms denoted by *dweorg* (denoting both some sort of monstrous being but probably also fever, see Cameron 1993, 151–53), *ælfþone* may have been employed to alleviate symptoms caused by *ælfe*—a function also prominent for *helleborus*, which, according to Isidore, 'Romani alio nomine veratrum dicunt pro eo quod sumptum motam mentem insanitatem reducit' ('the Romans call by the alternative name *veratrum*, because when consumed it leads back the mind withdrawn into insanity [cf. *verus*, 'true, real']'; ed. Lindsay 1911, II 17.9.24). *Ælfþone* might be named for its powers of curing the influence of *ælfe* rather than for its powers of inducing states associated with the influence of *ælfe*. Both understandings of the name may have existed at once, or we may see the effects of diachronic change in the construction of *ælf*-lore and healing.

Equivocal though the evidence of *ælfþone* is, it at least suggests some of the possible cultural constructs which may have surrounded the association of *ælfe* with causing prophetic speech attested by *ylfig*. Though not necessarily viewed positively by the Anglo-Saxon scholars who recorded it, it seems reasonably likely that *ylfig* shows that *ælfe*'s influence might be viewed positively. Similarly ambigious cultural reactions to such ailments are well-attested in constructs of nympholepsy in the Classical Hellenic world and of possession in more recent cultures (Connor 1988, esp. 156–58, 165, 174–79; cf. Temkin 1971, 3–27).

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[132] This text is itself related to another in Leechbook III, in section 64, which also prescribes *ælfþone*, this time, however, simply 'Wiþ deofle' according to the main text, f. 125v.

5. *Ælfe* and delusion: *ælfisc*

Unlike the other glosses considered here, *ælfisc* has well-attested reflexes in Middle English and is paralleled by the Middle High German *elbisch*, but only one Old English attestation. Chaucer's use of *elvish* of himself in the prologue to *The Tale of Sir Thopas* (line 703; ed. Benson 1987, 213) has garnered a fair amount of commentary (recently Burrow 1995; Green 2003), but the Old English and medieval German evidence has not been much considered. *Elbisch* hints at a West Germanic origin for *ælfisc*, and although the words could be independent formations, their extensive albeit relatively late attestation and similar semantics suggests a common origin. The parameters for the semantics of *ælfisc* are suggested by its suffix *-isc*, which 'forms denominal adjectives … with the meaning "being like, having the character of", e.g. *ceorlisc* "of a churl, common", *cildisc* "childish", *mennisc* "human". The suffix is also frequently used for the derivation of ethnic adjectives, e.g. *denisc* "Danish" ' (Kastovsky 1992, 390). However, not all of *elves*' characteristics need have been reflected in *elvish*, more specific meanings perhaps developing as they did for *ceorlisc*. This prospect is complicated by the transparent etymology of *elvish* and its consequent potential to be interpreted literally, and Green has recently shown adeptly how many of *elves*' characteristics could be active at once in the word's semantics. But it also emphasises that Green's scorn at the glossing of *elvish* as 'mysterious' or 'strange' instead of 'elvish, having the character of elves' might be misplaced (2003, at 28–29). How far *elvish* had an ethnic sense is hard to determine: some examples definitely do not exhibit an ethnic sense, and ambiguous instances could all be interpreted to mean 'otherworldly'.[133] These issues present a pretty problem for the lexicographer: fortunately, lexicography is not my concern here. Instead I examine the Old English attestation and its more proximate comparisons to determine what *ælfisc* tells us about *ælfe*.

Direct evidence for Old English *ælfisc* comes only from a late-twelfth-century section of a German manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 83 (Madan and others 1895–

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[133] The earliest likely example of *elvish* in an ethnic sense is from Laȝamon's *Brut*, in which Arthur's mailcoat ia made by 'on aluisc smið' in Caligula, 'an haluis smiþ' in Otho (ed. Brook–Leslie 1963–78, II 550–51). But the syntax of the passage in question is full of ambiguities and its meanings have been much debated (see Le Saux 1989, 196–400; Edwards 2002, 85–87). Another possible example occurs in the early fifteenth-century Middle English translation of *Gui de Warewic* in Caius College, Cambridge, MS 107. The text says that Guy 'girde him with his bronde, / That was made in eluyssh londe' (ed. Zupitza 1883–91, 223; cf. the independent Auchinleck version, lines 3861–62 of which have the sword 'y-made *in* eluene lond'; ed. Zupitza 1883–91, 222). But the French original has 'Puis ad ceinte un espee / Ke faite fu en un isle faee' ('Then on his waist a sword / Which was made on an otherworldly island', lines 3869–70; ed. Ewert 1932–33, I 118), suggesting the sense 'otherworldly'. See also the later fifteenth-century translation, in Cambridge University Library, MS Ff 2.38, lines 11315–19; ed. Zupitza 1875–76, 325–26; cf. lines 12223–32 in the French; ed. Ewert 1932–33, II 167.

1953, II 981–82 [no. 5194]). The word occurs on folio 397v in a note to chapter 52 of Fulgentius's *Expositio Sermonum Antiquorum ad Grammaticum Calcidium*, an explanation of the verb *alucinare*. Helm's critical edition (1970, 124–25) gives Fulgentius's text as

> Alucinare dicitur uana somniari tractum ab alucitas quos nos conopes dicimus, sicut Petronius Arbiter ait: 'Nam centum uernali me alucitae molestabant'.

> *Alucinare* ['to wander in mind, speak while in such a state'][134] is said [when] foolish things are (day)dreamt. Derived from *alucitae* [attested only in this passage, and assumed to have the meaning 'gnats, mosquitos' implied here], which we call *conopes* [i.e. κώνωπες, gnats]. Thus Petronius Arbiter affirms: 'for a hundred *alucitae* would bother me in the spring'.

However, Junius 83's text is rather different, and the quotation from Petronius seriously corrupt (ed. Steinmeyer–Sievers 1879–1922, II 162):

> alucinare dicitur uana somniare. tractum ab alucitis quos cenopos dicimus. sicut petronius arbiter vernalia mā inquid mā lucite molestabant. Hos Galli Eluesce wehte uocant.

> *Alucinare* is said [meaning] 'to (day)dream foolish things'. Derived from *alucitae*, which we call *cenopos* [not a real word]. Thus Petronius Arbiter said 'vernal things ... would bother'. The *Galli* call these [the *cenopos*] *Eluesce wehte* [*ælfisc* beings].

Despite the provenance of the manuscript, there is no doubt that the term 'Eluesce wehte' is Old English—apparently a late Kentish form.[135] The provenance of the gloss is unknown, but it surely reflects textual transmission from Anglo-Saxon England, presumably of a glossed copy of the *Expositio*—though we admittedly have no such manuscript (see Gneuss 2001). The attribution of the term to *Galli* has caused puzzlement, since its most obvious meaning, 'Gauls', makes little sense, as Gauls ought not to be speaking Old English. Schlutter rather desperately suggested corruption of *<āgli> 'Angles' (1907, 300). Presumably, however, we should understand *Galli* as the homophone meaning 'emasculated priests of Cybele'.[136] An association of *eluesce wehte* with ecstatic pagan priests is semantically appropriate, and can plausibly be understood as a distancing strategy, whereby the glossator attributed the term *eluesce wehte* to pagan priests because he himself was cautious of being seen to endorse it. In view of the association of *ylfig* with people *futura praecinentes* demonstrated above (not to mention *ælfe*'s feminine associations), the attribution is intriguing; but concluding that this gloss refers to the terminology of some close equivalent of the *Galli* in Anglo-Saxon society would be risky.

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[134] An apparently unique variant on *alucinor*, but doubtless of the same meaning.
[135] The development of *wehte* would be *wihti- > *wiohti- > *weoht- > weht- (Hogg 1992a, §§5.24, 5.160, 5.210–11).
[136] *OLD*, s.v. *Gallus⁴*. Cf. 'gallus .i. spado belisnud' ('*Gallus: i.e. a eunuch,* castrated'), glossing a reference to the prototypical *gallus*, Attis, in line 398 of Prudentius's *Peristephanon*, book X (ed. Meritt 1959, 42). This attestation can be added to *DMLBS*, s.v. *4 Gallus*.

Our text, then, declares *conopes* to be called *Eluesce wehte*. Accordingly, Schlutter took it 'als altenglische benennnung [sic] für schnaken (*κώνωπες*)' ('as an Old English term for gnats (*κώνωπες*)'; 1907, 300; tacitly followed by the *DOE*, s.v. *ælfisc*). This assumes, however, that the glossator who wrote *Eluesce wehte* understood *cenopos* as 'gnat'—which, even disregarding the corruption in Junius 83, is optimistic. Since *alucita* is unique to this passage a glossator would have had no help from that; he may have known material like the Corpus Glossary entry 'Conopeum . rete muscarum' ('mosquito net: flies' net'; ed. Lindsay 1921a, 42 [C531]; Bischoff and others 1988, f. 17v), but it is unlikely that this would have led him to divine the meaning of *conops*. The Harley Glossary's response to Fulgentius's text is instructive: 'Conopes .i. alucinaria' ('*conopes*, i.e. hallucinations'), with 'uana somniaria' interlinearly above ('foolish (day)dreams'; ed. Oliphant 1966, 109 [C1979]; collated with MS, f. 45r).[137] This identifies *conops*, not *alucita*, as the word requiring a gloss, and takes it to denote delusions and dreams rather than mosquitos. The gloss *Eluesce wehte* probably interprets *conops* in the same way, thus meaning something like 'delusory beings; delusions'. That these products of the mind are denoted by *wihte* ('beings') is no cause for surprise: Anglo-Saxons did not share our distinctions between visions and corporeal beings, as numerous medieval demonic and angelic visions suggest. So too does a remedy *Wið dweorg* ('against a *dweorg*/fever'), which includes a charm describing a 'wiht' treating the sufferer as its 'hæncgest' (ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 160–62; see further below, §6:3.4 n. 173).

Although the denotation of *eluesce wehte*, then, is now clear, the precise meaning of its constituent words is more problematic: are *eluesce wehte* 'beings like *ælfe* (i.e. delusory beings)' or 'beings who are *ælfe*'? This cannot be answered conclusively, but some comparative evidence shows that the Old English usage is at any rate well-paralleled. The collocation *eluesce wehte* is well-paralleled by Robert Semphill's late sixteenth-century invective against Patrick Adamson, the bishop of St Andrews, which characterises him as 'Ane elphe, ane elvasche incubus' (line 7; ed. Cranstoun 1891–93, I 352); but this still not very informative. The closest parallels are Middle High German (cf. Grimm–Grimm 1965–, s.v. *ELBE*; Lexer 1869–76, s.v. *elbisch*); they occur most fully in Rüdiger von Munre's *Irregang und Girregar*, a fabliau probably of about 1300 (ed. Hagen 1850, III 43–82), in which a woman, her daughter and their respective lovers convince the woman's husband that his discovery of their adulterous antics is merely the product of delusion by the evil spirits Irregang and Girregar, in a discourse characterised by its use of *elbisch* (in lines 648, 934, 1206, 1310). At her husband's first protestation, the wife says 'dich hât geriten der mar, / Ein elbischeȝ âs' ('the *mar* [nocturnal assailant,

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[137] *Alucinaria* and *somniaria* seem to be neologisms, but are transparent secondary formations on *alucinare* and *somniare*.

normally female and feminine but here masculine; see further §§6:3.4, 7:1.1] has ridden you, an *elbisch* spirit', lines 646–47). The husband responds (lines 650–53)

[Sêt,] daʒ hât man von iu wîben, Swenne uns mannen iht geschiht, daʒ ir immer des jeht, Uns (be)triege der alp…	You see! Men always get that from you women, whenever anything happens to us men, you always say that the *alp* is deluding us…

at which his wife insists, 'dich zoumete / ein alp, dâ von dir troumete' ('an *alp* put a bridle on you, therefore you dreamt it', lines 675–76). Whether we should consider *der mar* to be ethnically *elbisch* or merely like an *alp* is unclear, but the husband interprets the phrase to imply that *der alp* has deceived him—a conception of *alpe* earlier attested in an eleventh- or twelfth-century remedy 'Ad feminam quam alb illudit' ('for a woman whom an *alp* deludes'; ed. Steinmeyer 1916, 385). The other attestations in *Irregang und Girregar* conform to these. They imply that while *elbisch* indeed meant 'having the character of an *alp*', the characteristic which was to the fore was one of deluding people with dreams.

The meaning 'delusory' is likewise demanded by some Middle English attestations. I have only one citation which has not been considered hitherto,[138] but it is quite important. It occurs in a macaronic sermon of 1421, which declares that 'mundi honor est a sliper þinge and an elvich' ('worldly glory is *a treacherous and 'elvish' thing*'; ed. Haines 1976, 92). The meanings of *elvish* here must reflect sermonisers' views of *mundi honor*, themselves also expressed by *sliper* ('deceitful, false, treacherous': *MED*, s.v. §b): 'delusory' is an obvious candidate, correlating nicely with the Old English and German evidence. Current dictionary definitions of *elvish* do not clearly accommodate this. The *Middle English Dictionary* offers '(a) Belonging or pertaining to the elves; possessing supernatural skill or powers; (b) mysterious, strange; (c) elf-like, otherworldly' (cf. *DOE*, s.v. *ælfisc*; *OED*, s.v. *elvish*). But *delusory* also makes particularly good sense as a translation of *elvish* in lines 751 and 842 of Chaucer's *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, whose protagonist's long and lamenting description of the deceptions which he and other alchemists perpetrate mentions 'Oure eluysshe craft' and 'this eluysshe nyce loore' ('our *elvish* art', 'this *elvish*, foolish learning'; ed. Benson 1987, 272, 274; this is also the essence of Green's reading: 2003, esp. 51–52). In Old English, *ælfe*'s association with ailments involving fever and hallucination is clear, but there are no clear-cut attestations of *ælf* or *elf* with a sense like 'one who deludes' to the fore,[139] so although 'elf-like'

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[138] By the *MED*, s.v. *elvish*; *OED*, s.v.; *DOST*, s.v. *Elvasche* (also cited s.v. *Elriche*, presumably by mistake); and Green, who added 'any elvish godlinge', used by Herod of Jesus in the Chester mystery cycle (play 8, line 326; ed. Lumiansky–Mills 1974–86, ɪ 170; Green 2003, 44).

might comprehend the usage of *elvish* in the sermon, it is probably better to accept that *elvish* had a developed meaning, as *ceorlisc* did.[140]

It is clear from the Middle English evidence that *ælfisc* had been part of the everyday lexicon. Moreover, the extensive attestation and similar semantics of Middle High German *elbisch* suggest that it was coined before the Anglo-Saxon migrations. Despite the challenges in reconstructing its precise connotations, *ælfisc* attests clearly to an association of *ælfe* with causing hallucinations or delusions. Its relationship with *ylfig* is also of interest. In theory, the two adjectives might have existed in complementary distribution, as *ylfig* is West Saxon/South-Western in form, whereas our attestations of *ælfisc* and *elvish* are from other dialects. However, their different meanings suggest that the two words existed side by side in Old English, one denoting those affected by *ælfe* (such as to gain prophetic speech), the other denoting the delusory character of *ælfe* in bringing about such states of mind. The later extension of *elvish* to denote those affected as well as those affecting might partly reflect its replacement of a putative Middle English reflex of *ylfig*.

6. Conclusions

The evidence of the glosses consolidates and elaborates the evidence considered in chapters 2–3, and presents new questions. The use of forms of *ælf* to gloss words for *nymphae* in two distinct textual traditions is consistent with my arguments for the anthropomorphism of *ælfe* in early Anglo-Saxon traditions, and also recalls *ælf*'s association with (feminine) beauty in the word *ælfscyne*. The grammatical feminisation

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[139] Two possible examples come from Capgrave's mid-fifteenth-century *Life of St Katharine of Alexandria*; Book 3, chapter 5, line 327 and 5.28.1629 in the Rawlinson MS (ed. Horstmann 1893, 190, 392; cf. 191 for Arundel).

[140] Another meaning again is attested in 1530, when Palsgrave's *Lesclarcissement de la langue francoyse* (ed. Génin 1852, 774) gives the phrases

I waxe elvysshe, nat easye to be dealed with. *Ie deuiens mal traictable* … He waxeth so elvysshe nowe a dayes that I dare nat medell with hym: *il deuient si mal traictable tous les jours que je ne me ose pas mesler auec luy*.

The earliest attestation of this meaning seems to be Chaucer's other use of *elvish*, where Harry Bailey claims in line 13 of the *Prologue to Sir Thopas* that Chaucer himself 'semeth eluyssh by his contenaunce' ('seems from his expression to be *elvish*'; ed. Benson 1987, 213): Chaucer portrays himself as reserved, to the point of being withdrawn (Burrow 1995). This usage seems to show *elvish*'s extension from a meaning like 'delusory, distracting' to a meaning like 'deluded, distracted'. This may relate to the simplex *elf*: it is attested as a term of abuse and seems to be the etymon of *oaf*, so it could mean 'elf-like' in these senses. These meanings of *elf* and a similar meaning of *elbisch* occur in Middle High German. But both usages look like later developments.

of *ælf* as a gloss for *nympha* in the earlier glosses consolidates the arguments that *ælf* specifically connoted males at this time; by the eleventh century, however, *ælf* could indeed denote females. Explaining these patterns and developments will, as I have said, have to wait for the assembly of other pertinent evidence later in this thesis. Alongside this evidence for change with continuity, *Beowulf*'s demonisation of *ælfe* is also paralleled, in the use of *ælf* around 800 to gloss *Satanas*. This is the continuation of an innovative strand which, as I discuss below, we can also see in the Old English medical texts, and was to continue an uneasy co-existence with *ælf*'s traditional, positive meanings, for many centuries.

The other evidence provided by glosses, being adjectival formations based on *ælf*, helps us to establish other aspects of *ælf*'s meanings. *Ylfig* shows that *ælfe*, or their predecessors, were at some point associated with causing prophetic speech. Its evidence provides a suggestive context for interpreting the hints that a plant called *ælfþone* was deliberately eaten for its mind-altering effects, though the evidence here is equivocal. *Ælfisc* also shows associations for *ælf* with causing hallucination. These words not only foreshadow the evidence of the Old English medical texts, but show that these associations for *ælfe* could be assumed and utilised in quite different kinds of discourse, and so that they were well-established. It is the medical texts which I examine next.

Chapter 6

Medical Texts

Medical texts comprise the Old English genre which attests most often to *ælf*. As I
indicated in my introduction, the presence of *ælf* in these texts has been commented on
extensively, and even been the focus of a book (Jolly 1996)—but a complete
reassessment is required (§1:1). The present chapter marshals the wide range of evidence
provided by the medical texts: lexical, textual, codicological and cultural. Presenting the
outcomes of these disparate approaches coherently is a serious challenge. A remedy may
be linked to one other lexically, to another by the history of its transmission, and another
again by its manuscript context; and each of these may be under study in its own right.
Compromising between these approaches, I have grouped together the most important
cluster of texts lexically—those containing the word *ælfsiden*—along with textual
relatives and a text containing the cognate word *sidsa*, as the final section of the chapter.
The other remedies are less entangled, and generally attest to *ælf* in unique compound
words. These I discuss in an order based on their manuscript attestations. I have accorded
Wið færstice a chapter of its own (ch. 8): because of the complexity and importance of
this text, it demands separate treatment, the other, more prosaic, remedies providing it
with one of several reading contexts.

   I only touch, for lack of space, on the association with illness of *ælf*'s cognates and
reflexes. Most of the known high medieval English evidence is referred to here, but by
no means fully discussed; medieval German evidence appears only occasionally; and
post-medieval evidence less again. However, it is important to appreciate that the
associations of *ælfe* with illness seem to be part of a wider and presumably older
tradition. The evidence is mainly West Germanic: medieval Scandinavian counterparts—
despite the wealth of Icelandic saga-evidence—are rare and may have German origins,
the extensive attestations in later folklore (on which see for example Lid 1921; cf. Honko
1959) reflecting the spread of German culture through the Hanseatic league.[141]

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[141] For German see Schulz's recent analyses of the *Corpus der deutschen Segen und
Beschwörungsformaln* (2000); also Höfler 1899, s.vv. *Alp, Elbe*, cf. s.v. *Mar*; Holzmann 2003, 27–
30; cf. Edwards 1994. The two certain Scandinavian references which I know are to *álfavolkun*
('illness inflicted by *alfar*'; *DONP*, s.v. *alfa·vǫlkun*) in an Icelandic text and the last remedy in a
sixteenth-century Swedish medical text 'For elffwer' (ed. Klemming 1883–86, 394–95). See also,
however, ch. 7. Boyer claimed, without giving a reference, that 'une … croix de plomb porte une
conjuration sans équivoque: *contra elphos hec in plumbo scrive* [sic]' ('one … lead cross bears an
unequivocal charm: *inscribe this in lead against "elphi"*'; 1986, 113–14; cf. Lecouteux 1997,
125). But he seems to have meant a lead plate from Odense, bearing a text which has a German
manuscript version. Of these, only the manuscript says 'contra elphos hec in plumbo scribe'
(*Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, s.v. *Blykors*); whether this was the intended

Excluding the Royal Prayerbook, considered above (§5:1), two Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts attest to *ælf*. I have discussed BL Harley 585 above regarding *Wið færstice*; *ælf* occurs there once otherwise. BL Royal 12 D. xvii contains the collections known as *Bald's Leechbook* (in two books) and *Leechbook III*. The manuscript is handsome if plain, written by the scribe who (amongst other things) wrote the batch of annals for 925–55 in the Parker Chronicle.[142] This suggests that the manuscript was produced at Winchester in the mid-tenth century, the political bias of the Chronicle entries consolidating the obvious assumption of affiliations to King Edmund's court (cf. Downham 2003, 31). Some of the contents of Bald's Leechbook, however, show associations with the court of Alfred the Great, and Meaney argued that 'almost certainly, too, the original fair copy … would have been produced in a Winchester scriptorium, during Alfred's reign' (1984, 236; cf. 1978; Wright 1955, 17–18; Pratt 2001, 69–71). Bald's Leechbook is impressively well-organised, much of its content translated from Latin, putting it at the cutting edge of early medieval Western medicine (see Cameron 1993, 42–45, 77–99). The other text, Leechbook III, exhibits less Latin influence, and so may reflect traditional Anglo-Saxon medicine better, though this does not mean—as Cameron thought—that it is an earlier collection (Cameron 1993, 35–42). There is no modern published edition of Royal 12 D.xvii, and since facsimiles are as accessible as Cockayne's edition (1864–66), where folio references are easily found, I cite from Wright's facsimile of Royal 12 D.xvii (1955; cf. Doane 1994b, no. 298). I have taken the usual editorial liberties of expanding abbreviations and normalising word-separation. All of these medical collections drew on earlier material, and all share material to a certain extent;[143] some of this is attested in manuscript as early as the second half of the ninth century (Meaney 1984, 243–45; Cameron 1993, 31), and much may in origin be older.

1. The elf-shot conspiracy: Bald's Leechbook II, f. 106r., *Gif ho rs o f s coten   sie*

Ælf occurs in Bald's Leechbook in three remedies. One, from Book I, uses *ælfsiden* and is accordingly considered below (§6:3.4). The others both occur in section 65, occurring towards the end of the text on folios 106a–108a. One of these is our unique attestation of *sidsa* and is, again, considered with *ælfsiden* (§6:3.6). Section 65 is marginal to Bald's

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function of the Odense inscription is not clear.

[142] See Wright 1955, 12–27; cf. Ker 1957, 332–33 [no. 264]; Meaney 1984, 250–51; Cameron 1993, 30–31.

[143] See especially Meaney 1984, though, understandably for a pioneering study, she missed several textual interrelationships which are identified here.

Leechbook, and I think was probably added after Bald's original compilation: at least one of the remedies seems to be oral in origin, the oft-noted 'læcedom dun tæhte' ('remedy which Dun taught'; f. 106v), while the first remedy of the section, *Gif hors ofscoten sie*, seems to be for the same ailment as *Gif hors sie ofscoten oþþe oþer neat* in the last section of Book I of Bald's Leechbook, section 89 (f. 58rv)—but it was characteristic of the compiler of Bald's Leechbook to include such related remedies together (cf. Meaney 1984, esp. 250–51; Cameron 1993, 82–83). Two more sections follow before the end of the book, but these are not remedies: 66 lists the properties of agate, and 67 information about measurements. The remedies of section 65 are listed in the contents list to Book II on folio 64v:

> Læcedom gif hors sie ofscoten ⁊ wiþ utwærce . ⁊ gif utgang forseten sie . ⁊ wiþ lenctenadle . eft wiþ utwærce ⁊ wiþ unlybbum ⁊ wiþ þære geolwan adle ⁊ gif men sie færlice yfele ⁊ to gehealdanne lichoman hælo ⁊ wiþ gicþan ⁊ ælue ⁊ wiþ londadle ⁊ gongelwæfran bite . ⁊ wið utsihte ⁊ heafodsealfa .

> Remedy for if a horse is *ofscoten*; and one for ?dysentery; and one if excrement is obstructed; and one for *lenctenadl*; another for ?dysentery; and one for *unlybban*; and one for the yellow ailment; and one if the sudden evil be upon a person; and one to keep the body healthy; and one for scabs [perhaps an ailment such as psoriasis]; and [against an] *ælf*; and one for *londadl*; and one [for] spider's bite; and for ?dysentery [at any rate, some bowel disorder]; and head-salves.[144]

Jolly considered these ailments an 'odd collection' (1996, 151–54 at 154), though, as so often with other cultures' miscellaneous-looking categorisations, the ailments in this one may be more coherent than at first they seem.[145]

It is the first remedy in section 65, *Gif hors ofscoten sie*, on folio 106r, that concerns us here:

> Gif hors ofscoten sie. Nim þonne þæt seax þe þæt hæfte sie fealo hryþeres horn & sien .III. ærene næglas on. Writ þonne þam horse on þam heafde foran cristes mæl þæt hit blede . Writ þonne on þam hricge cristes mæl & on leoþa gehwilcum þe þu ætfeolan mæge. Nim þonne þæt winestre eare þurh sting swigende. Þis þu scealt don. genim ane girde sleah on þæt bæc þonne biþ þæt hors

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[144] The fact that *wiþ* is absent before *ælf* might indicate that that remedy was viewed to be for a more specific form of *gicða*, an interpretation also invited by the fact that the beginning of the remedy *wið gicþan* on folio 107v is set into the margin and the beginning of the following remedies are not. However, these might respectively result from stylistic variation and the fact that the remedy *wið gicþan* happened to start on a new line, whereupon the scribe of Royal 12 D. xvii set the first into the margin as a matter of course.

[145] *Ælf* may, indeed, be a connecting feature. Of the fifteen remedies listed, three concern bowel problems and one jaundice—itself associated with internal pains (see §6:2.2)—while *gif hors ofscoten sie*, which mentions *ælfe*, also concerns internal pains (§6:1). Another is against an *ælf* (see §6:3.6), while cutaneous ailments (cf. *gicðan*) are associated with *ælfe* (§6:2.3). Remedies against a spider's bite closely follow a series on fevers, madness and demonic and magical afflictions including *ælfsiden* in Book I of Bald's Leechbook (ff. 50v–54r, nos 57–68; see further below, §6:3.4). Although *lungenadl* is not elsewhere associated with *ælf*, it is incorrectly listed in the contents as *lenctenadl*, which is (§6:3.4, cf. §5:5). These latter issues relate fairly closely to the beneficial properties of jet as described in the following section, while, as Kitson pointed out, the only remedy in the Old English medical texts to prescribe jet occurs in section 65, in the remedy *Wið ælfe* (1989, 60–61).

hal. & awrit on þæs seaxes horne þas word. Benedicite omnia opera domini dominum. Sy þæt ylfa þe him sie þis him mæg to bote.

If a horse is badly pained [*ofscoten*]. Take then a dagger whose haft is of fallow-ox's horn and in which there are three brass nails. Write/inscribe on the horse, on the forehead, Christ's mark, so it bleeds. Write/inscribe then Christ's mark on the spine and on each of the limbs which you can grasp.[146] Then take the left ear, pierce it in silence. This shall you do: take a staff; strike on the back; then the horse will be well. And write/inscribe on the dagger's handle these words: *bless all the works of the Lord of lords*. Should it be *ælfe*'s, which is on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it [the horse].

Historiographically, this remedy is crucial, as it had prompted most of the identifications of 'elf-shot' in our Old English corpus. Despite its obvious title, *Gif hors ofscoten sie*, given here and in the contents list, this remedy was entitled *Wið ylfa gescot* by Grendon (1909, 208–9) and *Wiþ ylfa gescotum* by Storms (1948, 248–49). Moreover, the first clause, for which I suggest the literal translation 'if a horse is badly pained', was translated by Grendon as 'if a horse is elf-struck', by Storms as 'if a horse is elf-shot', and, circumspectly but in accordance with this tradition, by Jolly as 'if a horse is [elf] shot [*ofscoten*]' (1996, 152). This translation has entered the dictionaries (Bosworth–Toller 1898; Clark Hall 1960, s.v. *ofsceotan*). As I have discussed elsewhere, however, these readings derive from a misunderstanding of Cockayne's translation 'if a horse is elf shot' (1864–66, II 291): Cockayne's glossary entry for *ofscoten* shows he meant this as an idiomatic rendering meaning 'dangerously distended by greedy devouring of green food' (1864–66, II 401, cf. 291 n. 1; Hall forthcoming [c], §2).

Thun, stating what other scholars imply, deduced that 'the mention of *ylfa* makes it seem likely that the elves were thought to be those who were shooting' (1969, 385). This inference is predicated on the idea that *ofsceotan* connotes the shooting of missiles, for which we must posit a source. However, although *sceotan* literally denotes thrusting or shooting, later in English it had specific medical meanings along the lines of 'to afflict, cause pain; have darting pains' (*MED*, s.v. *shēten* §6b; *OED*, s.v. *shoot, v.* §I.5, *shooting* §3; cf. Höfler 1899, s.v. *schiessen* on German parallels); the prefix *of-* would simply have an intensifying force. This putative meaning is not otherwise clearly paralleled in the Old English medical texts, though Leechbook III and Harley 585 share a remedy 'wið sceotendum wenne' ('against a *sceotend* growth'; ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 148; cf. Leechbook III, section 30; ed. Wright 1955, f. 117r), which seems likely to attest to *sceotan* in a similar sense, unless it is a very early attestation of the sense 'to sprout, to spring forth' (*MED*, s.v. *sheten* §2b; *DOST*, s.v. *schute* §I.6). As Cockayne realised, *Gif hors ofscoten sie* almost certainly concerns internal pains rather than a projectile wound, actual or metaphorical.

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[146] On this translation see Hall forthcoming [c], n. 6 (*contra DOE*, s.v. *æt-fēolan* §3a, following instead §1).

It is the last sentence of the remedy, of course, which actually mentions *ælfe*, providing the only support for reading 'elf-shot' into the text. 'Sy þæt ylfa þe him sie þis him mæg to bote' is a rather convoluted sentence, which has hitherto been mistranslated. Cockayne offered 'Be the elf what it may, this is mighty for him to amends' (1864–66, II 291). This implies that an *ælf*, which might be one of various sorts, is somehow assailing the horse. Subsequent commentators have basically followed Cockayne. Grendon translated 'Be the elf who he may, this will suffice as a cure for him' (1909, 209) and Singer 'Be the elf who he may, this has power as a remedy' (1919–20, 358). Storms went further, offering 'Whatever elf has taken possession of it, this will cure him' (1948, 249). Most recently, Jolly improved on Cockayne's handling of 'þe him sie' with the more conservative translation 'Whatever elf is on him, this can be a remedy for him' (1996, 152). However, these translations mishandle the first part of the sentence. The main clause of the sentence ('þis him mæg to bote') is hard to render idiomatically in English because of the usage of *magan*, but its meaning is not in doubt: 'this will do for it [the horse] as a remedy'. But the subordinate clause ('Sie þæt ylfa þe him sie') confused Cockayne, and a complete reanalysis is necessary.[147]

Him would naturally be taken to refer to the indirect object of the sentence, as it does in the main clause (as in 'this is mighty *for him* to amends'), while clause-initial subjunctives like *sy* (the third person singular present subjunctive of *wesan* 'to be') were used in inverted conditional clauses to express uncertainty (cf. 'be he alive or dead…'; Mitchell 1985, II §§3678–80). This suggests the reading 'be *þæt ylfa*, which may be on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it [the horse]'. Similar constructions found by searching the electronic *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* are 'gif hyt þonne sy þæt sio wamb sy aþundeno, scearfa ðonne þa wyrte ⁊ lege on þa wambe' ('If it should then be that the stomach is swollen, scrape those plants and lay [them] on the stomach'; ed. Vriend 1984, 38) and 'sy þæt sar þær hit sy, smite mon ða sealfe ærest on þæt heafod' ('Be the pain where it may, one should smear the salve first on the head'; ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 112) from the medical texts, and from the laws V Æthelstan, '& gif hit sy ðegen ðe hit do, sy þæt ilce' ('and if it be a thegn who does it, be that [punishment] likewise'; ed. Liebermann 1903–16, I 168).

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[147] Cockayne justified his reading with the rather obscure note, 'the construction as in Ic hit eom, *I am he*; combined with the partitive, as Hwilc hæleða, *what hero*' (1864–66, II 291 n. 2). This evidently aims to elucidate *Sie þæt ylfa*, but the biggest problem with Cockayne's reading is his rendering of 'þe him sie' as 'what it may'. It might be possible to take *him* in *Sy þæt ylfa þe him sie* reflexively to refer to the subject (see Mitchell 1985, I §§271–74), producing a literal rendering along the lines of 'Be that [creature] of *ælfe*, which he may in himself be', but extracting such a sense is tortuous, and the parallels available dubious.

The subject of the conditional clause must be *þæt*.[148] Cockayne tried to explain *þæt ylfa* as a partitive genitive (a construction along the lines of 'one of the *ælfe*'), but *ælf* is masculine and *þæt* is neuter (we would have expected ****sie he ylfa; 1864–66, II 291 n. 2). He therefore sought a parallel for reading the neuter pronoun to refer to the masculine *ylfa* in the construction 'ic hit eom'. This example seems of dubious relevance, but Cockayne's interpretation might be viable insofar as neuter demonstratives are occasionally used of grammatically masculine nouns with asexual denotees (Mitchell 1985, I §68), in which case *ælfe* were viewed as asexual in this text. But it is more plausible to take *þæt* to refer to the illness with which the horse is afflicted (as is unambiguously the case in *sy þæt sar þær hit sy*, where the antecedent *sar* is restated), with *ylfa* as a straightforward possessive genitive: 'If that [ailment] be *ælfe*'s, which is on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it [the horse]'.

Therefore, the last sentence, that which mentions *ælfe*, opens with a conditional clause, showing that *ælfe* are not necessarily involved in the illness at all. The remedy implies only that the ailment might in some way belong to *ælfe*, and advocates an extra measure for use if this is the case. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the final part of the remedy, '& awrit on þæs seaxes horne þas word. Benedicite omnia opera domini dominum. Sy þæt ylfa þe him sie þis him mæg to bote' is not integral to it. The remedy is completed with the striking of the horse, after which we are told 'þonne biþ þæt hors hal' ('Then the horse will be well'), a closing-formula in the texts (see Cameron 1993, 40). The following note, mentioning *ælfe*, is an addition. This is supported by the existence of three remedies for *gescoten* horses which do not mention *ælfe*.[149] Several previous commentators, however, drew the opposite conclusion, Thun again making his inferences explicit:[150] having concluded that the *ofscoten* horse had been shot by 'elves' in the text which mentions them, he deduced that

> the term *gescoten* in *Lacnunga* is a synonym of *ofscoten* in *Læceboc*. If we accept elves as being the shooting spirits in the two passages in *Læceboc* … it will seem highly probable that they were thought of as shooting also in *Lacnunga*.

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[148] *Ylfa* can, if declining regularly, only be a genitive plural. Even if it shows the same transference to the feminine *ō*-stem declension as the form *dunælfa* (see above, §5.2.3), a plural could not be the subject of the singular verb, which is, in any case, intransitive, leaving no function for *þæt* if *ylfa* were to be taken as the subject. Transference to the weak declension, attested by the eleventh century, taking *þæt* to be in concord with *ylfa* cannot plausibly be supposed in literary early West Saxon.

[149] Bald's Leechbook I no. 88 (ed. Wright 1955, f. 58), textually related to *Lacnunga* no. 118, f. 171r (ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 168); and *Lacnunga* no. 164, ff. 182v–183r (ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 184–86). See further Hall forthcoming [c], §2.

[150] 1969, 383; cf. Storms 1948, 250; Grendon 1909, 164; Grattan–Singer 1952, 185; Jolly 1996, 1, 143; cf. Hall forthcoming [c], §2.

Subsequently, various other texts including neither *ælf* nor *sceotan* have, at times, been identified as remedies for 'elves', helping the idea of 'elf-shot' and other malicious actions by 'elves' to spread through the corpus (e.g. Storms 1948, 254–55; Bonser 1963, 160–61, 63). But this reasoning is inverted: the absence of *ælf* in all these texts militates against *ælfe*'s general presence, not for it.

What, then, can we infer from *Gif hors ofscoten sie* about the meanings of *ælf*? A redactor of the remedy thought that one possible cause of a horse being *ofscoten* might be *ælfe*. How the *ælfe* might have caused this is not attested. But *ælf* is associated with past participles with similar senses to those which I have argued for *ofscoten* later in English, in Older Scots and in Martin Luther's German. Between them, Middle English and Older Scots have the compounds *elf-schot*, *elf-taken*, *elue-inome* and *elf-grippit*.[151] This type of compound was not very common in Old English but became common from the Middle English period onwards (Carr 1939, 205–7; Marchand 1969, §2.23.2). Of the attested possibilities, the force of the determiner *elf-* here is almost certainly the usual one, suggesting the subject of the verb from which the generic is formed: *an elf shot a man → an elf-shot man* (see Marchand 1969, §2.23; cf. Carr 1939, 340). The second elements all seem broadly to mean 'seized with pain', each compound thus meaning something like 'afflicted with a seizure or internal pain caused by *elves*'.[152] The past participle *elf-schot* is first attested in English in two groups of Scottish witchcraft trials, from 1650 and 1716, once more concerning livestock. Here, projectiles of some description do seem to have been envisaged as the vector of the illness, but these may show a secondary development (Hall forthcoming [d]). Meanwhile, according to Luther's *Tischreden* (ed. Kroker 1912–21, III 131 [no. 2982b]),

> Multa saepe dixit Lutherus de fascinatione, *von herzgespan und elbe*, et quomodo mater sua vexata esset a vicina fascinatrice, ita ut coacta esset eam reverendissime tractare et conciliare, *den sie schoß ihre kinder, daß sich zu tode schrien.*

> Luther spoke very often about witchcraft, *about pains in the diaphragm and 'elbe'*, and how his mother had been troubled by a neighbouring witch, so that she had been forced to treat her very respectfully and to conciliate her, *because she 'schoβ' her children, so that they screamed themselves half to death.*

In addition to its collocation with *schiessen* here, *alp* appears alongside another word denoting an ailment sensed in the torso and literally called 'heart-strain'. Though this could be a common innovation or a loan, this text suggests that the collocation of *ælf* with *sceotan* and internal pain derives from the shared culture of West Germanic-

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[151] *MED*, s.vv. *elf*, *tāken* §2b; *DOST*, s.v. *elf*; *elf-grippit* is ed. Pitcairn 1833, I 53; cf. Thomas 1973, 725 for *fairy-taken*.
[152] Hall forthcoming [d]; *MED*, s.v. *tāken* §2b; *OED*, s.v. *take, v.* §I.7; *DOST*, s.v. *Grip* §1b.

speakers. It also raises the prospect that although *ælfe* might make a horse *ofscoten*, they might themselves have been acting for another party.

Whatever the case, *Gif hors ofscoten sie* seems to be an early attestation of a linguistic tradition which was to have a long life in English, associating *ælfe* with causing internal pains. The association is also, as I discuss below regarding the compound *ælfsogoða* (§6:2.2), attested elsewhere in the Old English medical texts. But precisely how *ælfe* were involved in making a horse *ofscoten* is neither indicated by the remedy, nor, reliably, by its later analogues.

2. Other *ælf*-ailments: Leechbook III, ff. 123a–25v

Leechbook III is markedly more concerned with diabolical threats, ailments whose names contain *ælf*, and what Jolly termed 'mind-altering afflictions', than Bald's Leechbook. These matters dominate sections 54–68 (ff. 122v–127r). *Ælf* also occurs in Leechbook III in the compound *ælfsiden* in section 41, but I consider this separately below (§6:2.2). Within this sequence are three contiguous sections, 61–63, respectively concerning *ælfcynn*, *ælfadl* (apparently comprehending *ælfsogoða*) and *wæterælfadl*, as the contents list on folio 110v describes:

> .LXI. Wiþ ælfcynne sealf & wiþ nihtgengan . ⁊ þam monnum þe deofol mid hæmð. LXII. Wiþ ælfadle læcedom & eft hu mon sceal on þa wyrte singan ær hi mon nime & eft hu mon sceal þa wyrta don under weofod & ofer singan . ⁊ eft tacnu be þam hwæþer hit sie ælfsogoþa ⁊ tacn hu þu ongitan meaht hwæþer hine mon mæg gelacnian & drencas & gebedu wiþ ælcre feondes costunge. LXIII . Tacnu hu þu meaht ongitan hwæþer mon sie on wæterælfadle . ⁊ læcedom wiþ þam & gealdor on to singanne & þæt ilce mon mæg singan on wunda.

> 61. A salve against *ælfcynn* and against a *nihtgenga*, and for people whom the devil has sex with. 62. A remedy against *ælfadl*; and also how one must sing over the plants before one picks them; and also how one must put those plants under an altar and sing over them; and also signs whereby [one can tell] if it is (an) *ælfsogoða*; and signs by which you can tell whether one can remedy it, and drinks and prayers against every tribulation of the Enemy.[153] 63. Signs by which you can tell if a person is suffering *wæterælfadl*, and a remedy against it and a charm to sing over it; and one can sing the same over wounds.

The first remedy, *Wiþ ælfcynne*, does not mention *ælfsiden*, but is textually related to remedies which do, so this too I consider below (§6:3.5). The contents list associates the

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[153] The *Dictionary of Old English* gives 'temptations of the Devil' for *feondes costunga* in the medical texts (s.v. *feond* §3.a.iv; cf. s.v. *costung* §2.b.ii). Certainly 'temptation' fits the meaning of *feondes costung* in most of its occurrences, which are from homiletic and other primarily didactic literature, but, as Meaney has argued (1992, 17–18), this translation seems out of place in the medical texts, since there is no suggestion that the remedies seek to cure temptation to sin. It seems more appropriate in this context to adopt the translation 'test, trial, tribulation' which the *Dictionary of Old English* also offers for *costung* (§1). *Feondes costung*, then, is for our purposes the 'tribulation of the Enemy/Fiend/Devil'. It occurs in three *ælf*-remedies, and in three besides where, however, its associations tend to be too general to be illuminating.

ælf-ailments here with diabolical harm, and specifically *feondes costunga*, but the distinctions drawn in the passage also imply that the two things were viewed as at least potentially different. The phenomena which seem to be associated particularly with *ælf* in these sections are nocturnal assaults by supernatural beings, internal pains and cutaneous ailments or wounds.

2.1 *Ælfadl*

From the remedy *Wiþ ælfcynne*, Leechbook III proceeds to describe three complex procedures 'Vvið ælfadle'. As Jolly emphasised, these include liturgical elements, and their complexity attests to the potential seriousness of *ælfadl* (1996, 159–65); but they contain no further evidence for the nature of *ælfe*. Cameron claimed that '*ælfadl* ... for reasons already given, appears to have designated cutaneous eruptions of various kinds' (1993, 155), but I have not found those 'reasons given' in any of his works: rather, the remedies offer no hints as to what clinical conditions *ælfadl* might denote. Linguistic perspectives are more enlightening. *Adl* was a generic term for illness (*DOE*, s.v.; Roberts–Kay–Grundy 2000, I 02.08.02); of the possible semantic relationships between the elements of *ælfadl* (see Marchand 1969, §§2.2.9–14, 2.3–15; Carr 1939, 321–39), much the likeliest is the common English pattern whereby the generic results from the determiner (see Marchand 1969, §2.2.14.3.1–2; Carr 1939, 323–24): thus *ælfadl* is probably simply a generic term, denoting any *adl* caused by an *ælf* or *ælfe*. There is no evidence that the word was a bahuvrihi compound, its overall meaning divorced from that suggested by its constituent elements (as in *bodice-ripper* 'a romantic historical novel').

2.2 *Ælfsogoða*

Among the remedies for *ælfadl*, however, are 'tacnu be þam hwæþer hit sie ælfsogoþa' ('signs by which [to know] whether it is *ælfsogoða*'). This suggests that *ælfsogoða* was a type of *ælfadl*; it must also have been a type of *sogoða*. *Ælfsogoða* has puzzled lexicographers; the *Dictionary of Old English* (s.v. *ælfsogeða*) offers 'disease thought to have been caused by supernatural agency, perhaps anaemia', repeating an inference in Geldner's *Untersuchungen zu ae. Krankheitsnamen* of 1908.[154] But, as I have discussed elsewhere, *sogoða* itself denoted internal pains.[155] Moreover, the unusually specific

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[154] Cf. Thun 1969, 388 n. 1. Clark Hall 1960, s.v. *ælfsogoða*, did considerably better, giving 'hiccough (thought to have been caused by elves)'.
[155] Hall forthcoming [c], §3; cf. Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *sogoþa*; *MED*, s.v.; Clark Hall 1960, s.v. *sogeða*.

description of symptoms by which an *ælfsogoða* can be identified almost certainly include jaundice, and since the causal association of jaundice with liver, pancreas and bile duct problems tends to associate it with internal pain and digestive distress (Schiff 1946, 219–21, cf. 124–27, 177), the symptoms of *ælfsogoða* are consistent with these semantics (Hall forthcoming [c], §3; cf. Meaney 1992, 20). *Ælfsogoða*, then, surely denoted internal pains (possibly of some specific sort) caused by *ælfe*. As such, it compares eminently well with later English *elf*-compounds. I have mentioned *elf-schot*, *elf-taken*, *elue-inome* and *elf-grippit* above (§6:1); we may add the Middle English noun *elf-cake* and the Older Scots noun *elf-schot*. *Elf-cake*, a textual variant of *elf-taken*, seems to denote pains within the torso (*MED*, s.vv. *elf*, *cake* §3b; *OED*, s.v. *elf*, n.[1]). The noun *elf-schot*, first attested in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, has long been taken to imply supernatural projectiles, but I have shown elsewhere that it probably also meant 'sudden sharp pain caused by *elvis*', reflecting a widely-attested meaning of *schot*.[156]

That *ælfsogoða* did connote the involvement of *ælfe*, as its literal meaning would suggest, is shown by a Latin charm in one of the remedies, which begins 'Deus omnipotens pater domini nostri jesu cristi. per Inpositjonem huius scriptura expelle a famulo tuo . NOMEN . Omnem Impetuum castalidum' ('God almighty, father of our lord Jesus Christ, through the application of this writing expel from your servant, NAME, every attack of *castalides*'). As I have discussed above (§5:2.1), *castalides* here seems certainly to denote *ælfe* through an adaptation of the use of *dunælfa* to gloss *castalidas nymphas*, and it is stiking that the exorcism shows such care to specify *ælfe* in Latin rather than simply demonising them with *daemones* or *diaboli*. This charm has also been taken as evidence that *ælfe* might possess the afflicted person, the charm being seen as an exorcism (e.g. Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *ælf-sogoða*; Jolly 1996, 163–64). This reading is possible but not required: 'Impetuum castalidum' could here mean any sort of attack (including magical ones). It seems to have been inferred from a second charm, following shortly after (Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *ælf-sogoða*): 'Deus omnipotens pater domini nostri jesu cristi per Inpositionem huius scriptura et per gustum huius expelle diabolum a famulo tuo .N.' ('God almighty, father of our lord Jesus Christ, through the application of this writing and through its tasting, expel the Devil from your servant, N[AME]'). This presupposes diabolical possession. But the *impetus castalidum* and diabolical possession could have been accorded separate charms precisely because they were distinct.

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[156] Hall forthcoming [d]; *DOST*, s.v. *schot* §2; cf. *MED*, s.v., §4e, cf. §4d; *OED*, s.v. *shot*, n.[1] §I.1.b; Lexer 1869–76, s.vv. *geschôz*, *schuz*; Höfler 1899, s.v. *Schoss*; Söderwall 1884–1918, s.v. *skut* §3; cf. Schulz 2000, 72–82.

2.3 *Wæterælfadl*

The last in Leechbook III's sequence of *ælf*-remedies, section 63, declares itself to be
'Gif mon biþ on wæterælfadl' ('if a person is suffering from *wæterælfadl* (literally fluid-
ælf-ailment)'; f. 125rv). No semantic information is afforded for *wæterælfadl* by way of
synonyms. It, like *ælfsogoða*, was probably a hyponym of *ælfadl*, being accorded a
separate section simply because the section on *ælfadl* had grown so long. But we do have
some idea about what ailment(s) *wæterælfadl* denoted. As Cameron emphasised,
wæterælfadl might be understood in two ways: as *wæterælf-adl* or as *wæter-ælfadl*
(1993, 155). The first interpretation would imply an ailment caused by a particular
species of *ælf* ('water-*ælfe*'); the second a specific variety of *ælfadl* (presumably
involving symptoms associated with fluids). Both interpretations can be supported by
reference to other compounds: *wæterælfen* occurs in the *ælfen* glosses (§5:3.1); *ælfadl*
has just been discussed, while the use of *wæter-* as a modifier in Old English words for
illnesses is well-attested (cf. Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.vv. *wæteradl*, *wæterbolla*,
wætergeblæd, *wæterseocnes*). Most commentators have read *wæterælf-adl*.[157] But the
available evidence suggests that *wæter-ælfadl*, supported by Bonser (1963, 162–63) and
apparently Cameron (1993, 41), is much the more plausible alternative.

I have shown that the various compounds combining *ælfen* with topographical terms
are almost certainly *ad hoc* formations, and that this is probably the case for *ælfen* itself
(§5:3.2). Admittedly, the mention of *castalides* in the Latin charm against *ælfsogoða*
emphasises the potential for glosses to influence Anglo-Saxon physicians, but supposing
that the gloss *wæterælfen* influenced the word *wæterælfadl* is rather far-fetched in view
of other compounds of *wæter-* with words denoting ailments. There is also some rather
tangential early Middle English evidence for associating *ælfe* with bodies of water (see
Edwards 2002), but *wæter-ælfadl* remains much better paralleled, and it is most unlikely
that we should envisage an Anglo-Saxon tradition of *wæterælfe*. *Wæterælfadl* must be
considered another hyponym of *ælfadl*.

The remedy seems to cater for some cutaneous disorder, since it seems to prescribe a
poultice for application to what in a charm it calls *benne*, *dolh* and *wund* ('wounds', 'cut,
wound, tumour' and 'a wound, sore, ulcer'); it may be possible to associate these
specifically with chicken-pox or measles (Cameron 1993, 154–55). If so, this could
provide a basis for arguing that *wæterælfadl* is a bahuvrihi compound, any associations
with *ælfe* being forgotten; but, as with *ælfsogoða*, certain symptoms may simply have

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[157] e.g. Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *wæterælf-adl*, amended in Campbell 1972 to *wæterælfadl*, s.v.;
Dobbie 1942, cxxxvi; Jente 1921, 168; Jolly 1996, 134, 157; Schneider 1969, 295, 300–1; Storms
1948, 160–61.

been taken as diagnostic of ailments caused by *ælfe*. Moreover, there is later and comparative evidence which associates *ælfe* with cutaneous ailments—albeit less than there is for internal pains. The *Life of Adame and Eve*, attested uniquely in Bodleian Library MS Eng. poet.a.1 (the Vernon Manuscript), compiled around the 1390s, describing the fallen angels, comments that 'If eny mon is elve-inome othur elve-iblowe, he hit hath of the angelus that fellen out of hevene' ('If anyone is *elue-inome* or *elue-iblowe*, he has it from the angels that fell from heaven'; ed. Blake 1972, 106–7). There is too little context here to be certain what *elue i-nome* and *elue i-blowe* meant, but *elue i-nome* is presumably to be understood in the same way as *elf-taken* 'seized with pain by an *elf/elves*' (see §6:1), while the *Middle English Dictionary* links *elue i-blowe* with the sense 'to blow (infectious breath, poison) upon (sb.)' (s.v. *blouen* (v. (1)) §2c). If so, it may also have had a sense like *blisted*, as in the citation 'ʒef a man be blowyn with a foul spiritus or a false blast þat he loke lyk a mesel in his face' ('if a man be *blowyn* by a foul wind/breath or an evil so that his face looks like a leper's').[158] A similar collocation occurs in the Middle High German *Münchener Nachtsegen* (lines 33–36; ed. Grienberger 1897, 337–38), the hand dating from the second quarter of the fourteenth century (Edwards 2004, 120):

Alb mit diner crummen nasen	*Alb* with your crooked nose,
Ich vorbithe dir aneblasen	I forbid you to blow on [people],
Ich vorbite dir alb ruche	I forbid you, *alb*, to give off smoke,
cruchen v͞n anehuccen	to creep and to cough on [people].

The compound *alvskot(t)* could in continental Scandinavia in the nineteenth century denote cutaneous ailments as well as internal ones (Thun 1969, 387; Lid 1921, 38–46 *passim*), *elveblest* remaining the Norwegian term for hay fever rashes, while German traditions also associate *alpe* with cutaneous ailments (Höfler 1899, s.v. *Alp, Elbe*). This material suggests that *wæterælfadl* may have been part of a reasonably well-defined association of *ælfe* with cutaneous ailments.

3. *Ælfsiden*

Ælfsiden occurs in three different remedies, each in different collections, though of these two must be textually related: one of the two remedies in *Lacnunga* which contain *ælf* (section 29, ff. 137r–138r); section 41 of Leechbook III (ff. 120v–121r); and a related a remedy in Book I of Bald's Leechbook (section 64, ff. 52v–53r). Unfortunately, the

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[158] Cf. the collocation of the remedy 'For a man or womman that is blisted {blown upon malevolently} with wikkede spiritis to do away the ache and abate the swellyng', immediately preceding a remedy for *elf-cake* in a fourteenth-century manuscript (ed. Henslow 1899, 89).

textual contexts of *ælfsiden* provide little unequivocal evidence for its meaning. I begin, then, with a consideration of comparative linguistic evidence. Next I analyse the attesting texts, in ascending order of complexity, and then the textually related remedy *Wið ælfcynne*. Finally, I consider the remedy which attests to the cognate noun *sidsa*.

3.1 Comparative linguistic evidence

Siden occurs in Old English only in *ælfsiden*. There is a consensus that *siden* is cognate with the Old Norse strong verb *síða* (to give a broad and advised translation, 'work magic'), and its derivatives *seiðr* (the magic worked) and *síði* (the magic-worker). *Siden* would derive from the infinitive stem of *síða*'s Germanic ancestor, with deverbative *-en* (on whose etymology see Kluge 1926, §150; Voyles 1992, §7.2.26). The range of potential connotations of deverbative *-en* (on which see Kastovsky 1985, 237–38) is too wide for the suffix itself to be informative. *Sidsa*, also attested in an *ælf*-remedy (in Bald's Leechbook II, section 65, f. 106r), seems to be another cognate, with the deverbative suffix *-sa* (on which see Kluge 1926, §146), and is accordingly considered here too. As I discuss below, a meaning for *ælfsiden* along the lines of 'magic' is eminently appropriate in its synchronic contexts, so we may accept reasonably confidently the implication of the Norse cognate that this was roughly its meaning. As with *ælfadl* (see §6:2.1), the determiner *ælf*- probably denotes the source of the *siden*; if so, *ælfsiden* probably meant something like 'the magic of *ælfe*'.

 This association of *ælfe* with magic has Middle English correlates. The best is a Latin narrative from a fifteenth-century treatise on the Ten Commandments, opening with *Non habebis deos alienos*, which tells of the 'filius cuiusdam viri qui infirmabatur, quem pater duxit ad quemdam clericum in patria, qui habeant librum qui vocabatur *an heluenbok*, ut per eius benediccionem recuperat sanitatem' ('son of a certain man who became infirm, whom the father led to a certain cleric in that country, who had a book which was called *an heluenbok* ('an *elven*-book'), so that he [the son] might regain his health through through his [the cleric's] blessing'; ed. Wenzel 1992, 472, n. 29). The story explains that although the son was cured, the father went mad. As Wenzel suggested, the *heluenbok* seems surely to be a grimoire (1992, 473), and the implication is that *elven*- seemed an appropriate way of denoting the magical aspect of this book. We might add Chaucer's reference to an *elf* in the *Man of Law's Tale*. In an effort to convince her son King Alla that his wife and their new-born son should be abandoned, Donegild claims in lines 750–56 (ed. Benson 1987, 98) that

> … the queene delivered was
> Of so horrible a feendly creature

> That in the castel noon so hardy was
> That any while dorste {dared} ther endure {remain}.
> The mooder was an elf, by aventure {strange event}
> Ycomen, by charmes or by sorcerie,
> And every wight {person} hateth hir compaignye.

The *elf*'s use of *charmes* and *sorcerie* here neatly parallel *ælfsiden*.

The translation of *siden* simply as 'magic', however, may miss important connotations. For this reason, and because it will be relevant later in the thesis, it is worth discussing the meanings of *seiðr* here in more detail. *Seiðr* was the subject of Strömbäck's masterly dissertation of 1935 and has been discussed extensively in recent years,[159] but some points which are important in the present context have yet to be made. The main intentions behind conducting *seiðr* seem to have been divination and the manipulation of targets' states of mind to cause them harm or to facilitate their seduction (Strömbäck 1935, 142–59; cf. DuBois 1996, 44–50). It has pejorative connotations throughout our evidence,[160] and it seems clear in our texts that for males to practise *seiðr* was for them to transgress gender boundaries, specifically in a way which was denoted by the adjective *argr*, a legally proscribed term of abuse suggesting gender transgression.[161] The clearest statement to this effect is in chapter 7 of *Ynglinga saga*, which says of *seiðr* that 'þessi fjǫlkynngi, er framið er, fylgir svá mikil ergi, at eigi þótti karlmǫnnum skammlaust við at fara, ok var gyðjunum kennd sú íþrótt' ('this sorcery, when it is performed, brings with it such great *ergi* that engaging in that did not seem to men to be without shame, and that accomplishment was taught to priestesses'; ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 19). Snorri's reliability here can be questioned (DuBois 1996, 45), but his statement is supported both by eddaic poetry (see §7:2) and the evidence of a post-conversion Danish runestone, Skern stone 2, dating from around 1000, which curses

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[159] Strömbäck 1935 is supplemented by Almqvist 2000 and Mebius's historigiographical survey (2000), with a recent critique by Mitchell (2000a). See also Solli 2002 (but also Mundal's comments, 2003). A more general account in English is also offered by Raudvere (2002, 109–50). *Seiðr* and variants have also been appropriated as technical terms among neo-pagans, also attracting scholarly attention (Blain 2002), but this is not my concern here.

[160] Strömbäck considered divination 'såsom motsats till den förgörande "svarta" sejden, vit sejd' ('by contrast with destructive "black" *seiðr*, white *seiðr*'; 1935, 142; cf. Raudvere 2002, 110–12; Solli 2002, 129–30), but his later emphasis that divination by *seiðr* too surely has negative connotations in our evidence (1935, 192) is worth reiterating. Thus the prophecy of the *seiðkona* for Qrvar-Oddr in Qrvar-Odds saga (cited by Strömbäck 1935, 96–98) is a curse, prompted by opposition to the *seiðkona* which marks Qrvar-Oddr as a 'noble heathen' (cf. Mitchell 1991, 61–62). To conclude from the centrality of this episode to the saga's plot that 'witchcraft in Iceland was tolerated more than on the continent' (Morris 1991, 18) is unwise. Likewise, in chapter 4 of *Eiriks saga rauða*, a key text for Strömbäck (1935, 49–60), Guðríðr initially refuses to help in divinatory *seiðr* 'því at ek em kristin kona' ('because I am a Christian woman'; ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson–Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 208; cf. DuBois 1996, 47–48). The fact that some texts suggest that pagans might have thought *seiðr* a good thing, when the texts themselves circumscribe and undercut this analysis, is not convincing evidence that *seiðr* once had positive connotations.

[161] See Meulengracht Sørensen 1983 [1980], 18–20 *et passim*; regarding the link with *seiðr*, Strömbäck 1935, esp. 194–96; Almqvist 2000, 264.

as a *síði* ('*seiðr*-worker') anyone who breaks the stone (ed. Jacobsen–Moltke 1941–42, cols 116–17 [no. 81]). Although *síði* is not attested earlier, the Danish curse is in a tradition of cursing *argskapr* upon desecrators going back at least to the eighth century, being attested already in Sweden on the probably sixth-century Björketorp and Stentoften stones.[162] Solli's recent survey of likely reasons for *seiðr*'s associations with *ergi* (2002, 148–59) include a putative association of *seiðr* with sexual perversion and bodily transformation, the tendency for shamanic practices to involve systematic gender-transgression, and the likelihood that, to co-opt DuBois's phrasing (1996, 52),

> in a culture in which keeping control of one's wits and dealing in a forthright manner were both counted as prime features of masculinity, a complex ritual that entails public trance and possible underhanded manipulation of another's will could only be seen as compromising of the masculine ideal.

Several of these factors can be inferred in the Anglo-Saxon evidence connected with *ælfe*, as I discuss below (§9:2).

Although we cannot simply assume that any given connotation of *seiðr*, or any given reason for those connotations, were represented in *siden*, this material is suggestive in the context of *ælf*. *Seiðr* is in the Norse material associated with seduction and prophecy; when performed by males, it is associated with gender transgression. I have argued above that *ælfe* were associated with seduction by *ælfscyne*, and with causing prophetic speech by the word *ylfig*. That *ælfe* exhibited traits associated with femininity is suggested both by *ælfscyne* and by *ælf*'s use in denoting otherworldly females, first in glosses and later in English generally. Moreover, the distinctive association of *ælf* with *siden* and *sidsa* fits with Snorri's statement, again quoted more fully above (§2:1.2), that Freyja 'kenndi fyrst með Ásum seið, sem Vǫnum var títt' ('first acquainted the *æsir* with *seiðr*, which was customary among the *vanir*'; ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 13). Snorri made *seiðr* a distinctive feature of the *vanir*, and I have argued above for taking *álfr* as a (partial) synonym of *vanr*. Finally, the process *at síða* seems, at least in some of the prose evidence, to have been envisaged to involve a dissociation of the soul from the body, either in flight or shape-changing, attested much more widely in Old Norse literature (Strömbäck 1935, 160–90; Almqvist 2000, 265–66). That this kind of concept circulated in Anglo-Saxon culture is suggested by King Alfred's interpretation of Boethius's comment that 'in somno spiritum ducimus nescientes' ('in sleep, we draw breath unconsciously', but potentially 'in sleep, we lead our spirits unconsciously', 3.11.30; ed. Moreschini 2000, 89). Alfred rendered this as 'ure gast bið swiðe wide farende urum unwillum ⁊ ures ungewealdes for his gecynde, nalles for his willan; þæt

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[162] Almqvist 2000, 252; Moltke 1985, 140–41, 232–37; Solli 2002, 212–16.

bið þonne we slapað' ('our spirit tends to be wandering widely without our intent and outside our power—from its innate nature, in no way from its intention; that is when we sleep'; ed. Sedgefield 1899, 93). As Godden argued (1985, 277),

> Alfred seems to be reflecting the common folk-belief that in dreams and trances an inner spirit or soul … leaves the body and wanders about in the world. The remark is prompted by a misunderstanding of Boethius's Latin text, but Alfred would hardly have interpreted the text in this way if he had not been thoroughly familiar with the idea and given it some credence.

My assumption here that *ælfsiden* shares important features with *seiðr* is made more significant by *seiðr*'s historiography. Because aspects of *seiðr* are similar to those found in the shamanic practices of the arctic regions, it has often been argued that its practice was borrowed into North Germanic-speaking cultures from the Sámi, whose shamanic traditions are attested for the Middle Ages and remained strong until recent times.[163] If *seiðr*-practices were a specifically North-Germantic cultural loan, this would compromise the value of the word *seiðr* as comparative evidence for Old English *ælfsiden*. The association of *seiðr* with male gender transgression is of especial interest regarding *ælfe*, but this has sometimes been associated with the borrowing of Sámi magical practices, which associated shamanism with males, into Norse-speaking culture, which, in this hypothesis, traditionally associated magic-working with females.[164]

However, studies of the origins of *seiðr* have largely ignored etymology.[165] As a strong verb, *síða* is likely to have an Indo-European origin, and phonologically and semantically convincing cognates are Welsh *hud* ('magic'), *hudo* ('work magic, work by magic') and Lithuanian *saĩsti* ('intepret a sign, prophesy'; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymry*, s.vv. *hud*[1], *hydaf*; Wüst 1954, 136). The word *síða* and probably its basic meaning originate, then, in a pre-Germanic ancestor found in other Western Indo-European languages. Wüst argued for a Finno-Ugric origin for *síða* and its cognates from words such as Finnish *soida* 'to ring, jingle, make a sound' (1954). Though phonologically viable, this is less convincing, principally for want of other examples of Finno-Ugric loans into both Germanic and Celtic, than a Indo-European root concerning binding

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[163] See Solli 2002, 169–97; cf. Price 2000, 18–22; Mebius 2000, 280; Lindow 2003. It is worth noting that the early twentieth-century assumption was that the influence had gone the other way (Hultkrantz 2001; Rydving 1990, 364–65), and that if this view was largely determined by the politics of the time, this is no less the case for the development of its antithesis (cf. Solli 2002, 183).

[164] e.g. Grambo 1989, 107–9; cf. Strömbäck 1935, esp. 196–206.

[165] Among published work, Strömbäck 1935, 120 n. 2 need be supplemented only by Wüst 1954; cf. Vries 1961, s.v. *seið*; Ásgeirr Blöndal Magnússon 1989, s.v. *seiður*. Glosecki emphasised the importance of an Indo-European etymology, but for unstated reasons assumed *seiðr* to be cognate with *sit*, which is phonologically unlikely (1989, 97); Solli cited an unpublished 1993 Oslo University dissertation *Sjamanistiske trekk i nordisk førkristen religion?* by Roger Kolstad proposing a cognate in an 'indo-europeisk (sanskrit) ord for "sang" ' ('Indo-European (Sanskrit) word for "song" '; 2002, 135).

which has also been proposed.[166] From a linguistic point of view, then, we cannot usefully talk about a Sámi origin for *seiðr*. Moreover, there is evidence for a long history of shamanic-like practices among the Germanic-speaking peoples, so there is no *a priori* necessity to derive *seiðr*-practices from Sámi culture.[167] The senses of *seiðr* may still have been influenced by contact with Sámi culture later; but if we find correlations between the meanings of *seiðr* and *ælfsiden*, there is no reason not to accept them as reflecting the words' shared etymology. We may turn now to the textual evidence.

3.2 Harley 585, f. 137r–38r

This remedy opens with 'Þis is se halga drænc wið ælfsidene ⁊ wið eallum feondes costungum' ('This is the holy/blessed drink against *ælfsiden* and against all the tribulations of the Enemy'; ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 108). *Ælfsiden* is associated here, like most of the *ælf*-ailments, with *feondes costunga*, but both may have been mentioned in the remedy because, although the remedy was applicable to both, they were potentially distinct threats. The remedy almost entirely comprises liturgical ritual (Jolly 1996, 140–42), which is consistent with other *ælf*-remedies, but there is no further indication of what *ælfsiden* might denote. The organisation of *Lacnunga* is too irregular for any secure inferences to be made from the manuscript context.

3.3 Leechbook III, ff. 120v–21r and *lenctenadl*

Leechbook III's remedy mentioning *ælfsiden* falls in section 41, which advertises itself in the contents list on folio 110r to be 'Wiþ ealle feondes costunga drenc ⁊ sealf' ('A drink and salve against all the tribulations of the Devil'); likewise the section opens with 'Vvrc godne drenc wiþ eallum feondes costungum' ('Make a good drink against all the tribulations of the Devil'). The second remedy of those included in this section is slightly more limited in its application:

> Wyrc gode sealfe wiþ feondes costunga . bisceop wyrt . elehtre . harasprecel . streawberian wise. sio clufihte wenwyrt eorðrima. brembel æppel . polleian . wermod . gecnua þa wyrta ealle awylle on godre buteran wring þurh clað sete under weofod singe .VIIII. mæssan ofer smire þone man mid on þa þunwonge. ⁊ bufan þam eagum ⁊ ufan þæt heafod . ⁊ þa breost ⁊ under þam earmum þa sidan . Þeos sealf is god wiþ ælcre feondes costunga ⁊ ælfsidenne ⁊ lenctenadle.

> Make a good salve against the tribulations of the Enemy: ?hibiscus, ?lupin, viper's bugloss, strawberry-stalk, the cloved lesser celendine, *eorðrima*, blackberry, pennyroyal, wormwood,

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[166] Vries 1961, s.v. *seið*; on the medieval association of binding with magic in the Germanic-speaking world see Flint 1991, 226–31 *et passim*.
[167] For Anglo-Saxon culture see Glosecki 1989 and §9:2.1; more widely the summary in Mebius 2000, 298–99; and the provocative investigations of Ginzburg 1983 [1966]; 1992 [1989].

pound all those plants; boil in good butter; strain through a cloth; place under the altar; sing 9 masses over them; then smear the person with it generously on the temples, and above the eyes and on the top of the head and the breast and under the arms. This salve is good against each tribulation of the Enemy and *ælfsiden* and lent-illness.

As I discuss below, this must be textually related to *Wið ælfcynne* which occurs later in Leechbook III, and more distantly to one remedy *Wiþ ælcre leodrunan* in Bald's Leechbook examined next. The final sentence is most illuminating, associating *ælfsiden* not only with the familiar *feondes costung* (on which see §6:2.0 n. 153; 6:3.2) but with *lenctenadl* ('Lent-illness'). *Lenctenadl* seems certainly to denote fevers, inferred by Cameron, mainly from the association with spring, to be forms of tertian malaria (1993, 10–11). The collocation of *ælfsiden* with fever is reminiscent of *ælfisc* and the arguable hallucinogenic uses of *ælfþone* (§§5:4.4, 5:5). The association is bolstered by the preceding section, a short remedy 'Wiþ þon þe mon sie monaþseoc nim mereswines fel wyrc to swipan swing mid þone man sona bið sel . amen' ('For when a person is epileptic/made mad by the moon [cf. §5:4.3]: take dolphin's skin, make it into a whip, beat the person with it; he will be well immediately, amen'; f. 120r), while the next remedy in section 41 is 'Gif þu wilt lacnian gewitseocne man' ('If you want to minister to a mentally ill person'). These contexts amplify *Wyrc gode sealf*'s implication that *ælfsiden* might produce symptoms. However, *feondes costunga*, *ælfsiden* and *lenctenadl* seem more probably to be complementary than synonymous, as 'ælcre feondes costunga' ('each of the tributations of the devil') ought to include all properly diabolical threats, and *lenctenadl* occurs elsewhere without being associated with the Devil. Thus, *ælfsiden* is associated both with diabolical malice and fevers, but is not necessarily identical with either.

3.4 Bald's Leechbook I, section 64, f. 52v: the semantics of *leodrune* and the association of *ælfe* with *maran*

Section 64 of Book I of Bald's Leechbook contains, in the words of the contents list on folio 5r, 'Læcedomas wiþ ælcre leodrunan & ælfsidenne þæt is fefercynnes gealdor & dust & drencas & sealf & gif sio adl netnum sie. & gif sio adl wyrde mannan oððe mare ride & wyrde seofon ealles cræfta' ('Prescriptions against every *leodrune* and *ælfsiden*, being a charm, powder, drinks and a salve, for fevers; and if the illness should be upon livestock; and if the illness should happen to a person or a *mære* should ride and happen; in all, seven remedies'). Amongst other things, this shows that *ælfsiden* might afflict people and livestock. It also affords a relatively large and complex combination of themes, several of which require detailed consideration.

The remedies themselves begin on folio 52v with 'Wiþ ælcre yfelre leodrunan ꝛ wið ælfsidenne þis gewrit' ('Against each evil *leodrune* and against *ælfsiden*, this writing'). The third remedy is, as Meaney pointed out (1984, 239), almost identical to a salve 'wið nihtgengan' which comprises section 54 of Leechbook III (f. 122v), and these are themselves reminiscent enough of *Wið ælfcynne* and *Wiþ feondes costunga* in Leechbook III to suggest further textual interrelationships (see §6:3.5). *Wiþ ælcre leodrunan* occurs in a sequence of remedies concerned with fever and mental illness: section 62 is 'wiþ feferadle' ('against fever-illness'); 63 'wið feond seocum men' (presumably 'for a diabolically-possessed person', though conceivably 'against a diabolically-possessed person'); 65 'wið lenctenadl' ('against *lenctenadl*'); and 66 'ungemynde' ('for one out of his mind'). This provides a context of interrelated symptoms in which to understand *ælfsiden*, several of which we have already met in this connection.

Leodrune occurs in this form only here in Old English. Recently reassessing the evidence, Fell argued that it is a variant of the poetic Old English *leoðurun* ('sung mystery'; 1991, 206–8); her case has gaps, but these can be filled.[168] *Leoðurun* denotes holy mysteries and the Middle English *leodrune* prophecies; the potency of an *yfel leodrune* perhaps lay in the cursing power of ill-boding prophecies in comparable cultures.[169] Taking *ælfsiden* to denote a broadly similar threat would be attractively consistent with the meanings suggested for *siden* by *seiðr*. As I have discussed above (§6:2.1), the generic in compounds of this sort is usually the result of the determiner— the *siden* would be caused by *ælfe*—though in theory the ultimate source could be human maleficence directed through *ælfe*.

Section 64 concludes with a remedy 'Gif mon mare ride . genim elehtran ꝛ garleac . ꝛ betonican . ꝛ recels bind on næsce hæbbe him mon ꝛ he gange inon þas wyrte' ('If a *mære* should ride a person: take ?lupin and garlic and betony and incense; bind in fawn-skin; a person should have this on him and he should walk ?in among these plants'). As I have discussed elsewhere, the clearest evidence for the meanings of *mære* is afforded by the seventh-century gloss *incuba: mære*, whose lemma is almost unique and must originate in a gloss on a copy of Isidore's *Etymologiae* related to the Anglo-Saxon epitome of Isidore's *Etymologiae* edited by Lapidge: this epitome gives *incuba* for Isidore's *incubus*, and contains Old English glosses also contained in the same

[168] The first element is, on phonological grounds, most obviously the intensifying prefix derived from *leod* ('man'; see Kastovsky 1992, 356–57). But Fell's reading, foreshadowed by Cockayne's translations 'rune lay' and 'pagan charm' (1864–66, ɪɪ 15, 139), is attractive because of *leoðurun*. For the variable loss of unstressed high vowels in relevant positions see Hogg 1992, §§6.21; *-run~-rune* variation is common; cf. Campbell 1959, §§592e, 619.4. There is some evidence for */ (VV)θr/ > /(VV)dr/ in West Saxon, accounting for the *d* of *leodrune* (Campbell 1959, §422; Hogg 1992, §7.11).
[169] For early Ireland see Sjöblom 2000, 111–44; for medieval Iceland Raudvere 2002, 90–97; cf. for Anglo-Saxon England Jolly 1996, 98–99; Niles 2003a, 1112–40.

manuscripts as *incuba: mære*.[170] Here, *incuba* denotes a supernatural being, implicitly female, which presses down on or rapes people. This is consistent with the cognate, later and etymological evidence for *mære* and presumably underlies the riding *mære* in Bald's Leechbook.[171]

   Precisely why *mære* is mentioned in this section is not clear. I examine some illuminating Norse and Irish analogues in the next chapter (§7:1), which suggest that *maran* might be part of an attack through *ælfsiden*. Here, however, I wish to emphasise that West Germanic evidence associates cognates and reflexes of *mære* with *ælf-* widely, associations no doubt underlying the modern counterparts *nightmare* and *alptraum* ('nightmare', lit. '*alp*-dream'). To quote further from the most impressive example, the fourteenth-century *Münchener Nachtsegen* (lines 23–38; ed. Grienberger 1897, 337–38),[172]

alb vnde ł elbelin	*alb*, or also *elbelin* [little *alb*],
Ir sult nich beng' bliben hin	you shall remain no longer (reading *lenger*)
albes svestir vn̄ vatir	*alb*'s sister and father,
Ir sult uz varen obir dē gatir	you shall go out over the gate;
albes mutir trute vn̄ mar	*alb*'s mother, *trute* [female monster] and *mar*,
Ir sult uz zu dē virste varē	you shall not go to the roof-ridge!
Noc mich dy mare druche	Let the *mare* not oppress me,
Noc mich dy trute zciche	let the *trute* not ?pinch me (reading *zücke*),
Noc mich dy mare rite	let the *mare* not ride me,
Noc mich dy mare bescrite	let the *mare* not mount me!
Alb mit diner crummen nasen	*Alb* with your crooked nose,
Ich vorbithe dir aneblasen...	I forbid you to blow on [people]…

What beliefs these collocations reflect is less clear, but they show that the collocation of *ælf-* with *mære* in Bald's Leechbook is part of a widespread tradition among West Germanic-speakers. This collocation of *ælf* with *mære* is also interesting insofar as *maran* seem to have been female, which recalls once more the associations of both *ælfe* and *seiðr* with male gender transgression, but there is not much that can be made of such slight evidence. As in the *Münchener Nachtsegen*, the German material also associates

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[170] Hall forthcoming [b], §3; Lapidge 1996 [1988–89], 200; cf. Lindsay 1911, I 8.11.103–4. The glosses are ed. Lindsay 1921a, 96 [I225]; Hessels 1906, 49 [XLVII.81]; Pheifer 1974, 30 [no. 558]; Steinmeyer–Sievers 1879–1922, IV 187, 204; cf. Bischoff and others 1988, Épinal f. 99v, Erfurt f. 7v, Corpus f. 35r.

[171] Raudvere 1993, esp. 71–95; Pokorny 1959–69, s.v. *5. mer-*; de Vries 1961, s.v. *mara, mǫrn*; *MED*, s.v. *māre*, n.2, *night* §6b; *OED*, s.vv. *mare* n.², *nightmare*; *DOST*, s.v. *mare*; §7:1.1.

[172] Otherwise, see for English the *Southern English Legendary* account of the fallen angels in its section on the Archangel Michael (lines 223–60; ed. d'Evelyn–Mill 1956–59, II 409–10 at 409; cf. Horstmann 1887, 306–7; §7:1.3:) and lines 65–69 of Rowll's *Cursing* as it appears in the Maitland Folio MS (ed. Craigie 1919–27, I 163); for the Continent see the citations in the *Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek* (Verwijs–Verdam–Stoett 1885–1941, s.vv. *ALF, (III) MARE*); Edwards 1994, 17–21. The words are associated in Norse only in the Swedish *Sjælinna thrøst* (ed. Henning 1954, 23), which is from the Low German *Der Grossen Seelentrost* (ed. Schmitt 1959, 17).

mare with the verb *riten*, showing the traditionality of this collocation in *Gif mon mare ride*.[173]

While this section of Bald's Leechbook, then, tells us little that is concrete, it consolidates and extends the associations of *ælfsiden* in ways which are well-contextualised, providing an important basis for comparison with fuller narratives from other medieval cultures below.

3.5 *Wið ælfcynne*

Ælfcynn occurs only in section 61 of Leechbook III, on folio 123, at the head of the (-) *ælfadl* remedies already analysed (§6:2):

> Wyrc sealfe wið ælfcynne and nihtgengan and þam mannum þe deofol mid hæmð . genim eowohumelan . wermod bisceopwyrt . elehtre . æscþrote . beolone . harewyrt. haransprecel. hæþbergean wisan . cropleac . garleac . hegerifan corn . gyþrife . finul . Do þas wyrta on an fæt sete under weofod sing ofer .viiii. mæssan awyl on buteran ꞇ on sceapes smerwe do haliges sealtes fela on aseoh þurh claㆁ. weorp þa wyrta on yrnende wæter . Gif men hwilc yfel costung weorþe oþþe ælf oþþe nihtgengan. smire his andwlitan mid þisse sealfe ꞇ on his eagan do and þær him se lichoma sar sie . ꞇ recelsa hine ꞇ sena gelome his þing biþ sona selre.

> Make a salve against *ælfcynn* and a *nihtgenga* and for those people whom the/a devil has sex with/and against those people whom the/a devil has sex with': take ?hops, wormwood, ? hibiscus, ?lupin, vervain, henbane, *harewyrt*, viper's bugloss, stalk of whortleberry, ?crow garlic, garlic, seed of goose-grass, cockle and fennel. Put these plants in a vessel, place under an altar, sing 9 masses over them; boil in butter and in sheep's fat; put in plenty of holy salt; strain through a cloth. Throw the plants into running water. If any evil tribulation or an *ælf* or *nihtgengan* happen to a person, smear his face with this salve and put it on his eyes and where his body is sore/in pain, and burn incense about him and sign [with the cross] often; his problem will soon be better.

The unique compound *ælfcynn* offers no evidence in itself. Old English -*cynn* was productive and compounded with a wide range of words—words for people, peoples, monsters, animals, plants and diseases (*DOE*, s.v. *cynn*)—and the Norse *álfkunnr*, *álfkunnigr* and *álfakyn* (see §2:2 n. 42) could be independent formations. However, it is at least clear that *ælfcynn* implies *ælfe* themselves, since the end of the remedy mentions the prospect of an *ælf* specifically. Jolly, apparently inspired to some extent by Storms's handling of the text, asserted that 'the salve works with incense and the sign of the cross

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[173] The only other Anglo-Saxon evidence for this sort of concept known to me is a charm in a remedy 'Wið dweorg', which comprises section 93 of the *Lacnunga* (f. 167; ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 160–62). The difficulties of this charm are legion, and some, particularly ambiguities of its syntax and its heavy emendation in the manuscript, have been glossed over hitherto (but see esp. Cameron 1993, 151–53; Stuart 1977; Meaney 1981, 15–17). But the charm definitely conceives of the ailment(s) in terms of a being (*wiht*) treating the sufferer as its horse (*hæncgest*). How fully it develops this concept is open to question, but it certainly shows that a vivid conceptualisation of a supernatural being riding a sick person like a horse may underlie *gif mon mare ride*.

to drive or smoke the elf out' (1996, 159), but while this inference of possession is possible, it is not to be assumed.

Ælf and *ælfcynn* are here collocated with *nihtgenga*. Beyond its literal sense 'night-walker' the meanings of this word are largely unknown; it is not even clear whether the remedy implies one or more. I examine other attestations below. *Þa menn þe deofol mid hæmð* is also ambiguous: it could denote the victims of diabolical rapes (recalling the association of *ælfe* with *maran*) or people who, by willingly having sex with devils or the Devil, gain magical powers to do harm.[174] If the latter, it is a singularly early attestation of a concept which became common only in the early modern period, but as I suggest below, it could reflect popular ideas to some degree and the possibility should not be ignored (ch. 7). The syntax would be the smoother if we take *wiþ* in the same sense, 'against', throughout the sentence, in which case 'wið … þam monnum þe deofol mad hæmð' ('against … those people whom the Devil/a devil beds') implies that it is the *menn* who are a threat. But if any function of the remedy from the list at the end corresponds to the function stated at the beginning, it would be the *yfel costung*, suggesting that the *deofol* in the first sentence is assaulting victims—in which case the remedy is for and not against the *menn*. Whatever *þa menn þe deofol mid hæmð* means, however, its collocation with *ælfcynne* recalls *ælfe*'s association with seduction.

The value of *Wið ælfcynne* is increased, however, by its relationship with three other texts, already mentioned. I give each; words shared between *Wið ælfcynne* and *Wiþ feondes costunga* are **emboldened**, those shared between *Wið ælfcynne* and the other two underlined.

1. Leechbook III, section 61, f. 123r:
Wyrc sealfe wið ælfcynne and <u>nihtgengan</u> and þam mannum þe deofol mid hæmð . genim eowohumelan . **wermod** <u>**bisceopwyrt**</u> . **elehtre** . æscþrote . beolone. harewyrt. **haransprecel**. hæþbergean wisan . <u>cropleac</u> . garleac . <u>hegerifan</u> corn. gyþrife. finul. Do þas wyrta on an fæt **sete under weofod sing ofer .viiii. mæssan** <u>awyl on buteran</u> ⁊ on sceapes smerwe do haliges <u>sealtes</u> fela on aseoh **þurh clað**. weorp þa wyrta on yrnende wæter . Gif men hwilc yfel **costung** weorþe oþþe **ælf** oþþe nihtgengan. **smire** his andwlitan mid þisse sealfe ⁊ on his **eagan** do and þær him se lichoma sar sie. ⁊ recelsa hine ⁊ sena gelome his þing <u>biþ sona selre</u>.

2. Leechbook III, section 41, f. 120rv (§6:3.3):

Wyrc gode **sealfe wiþ** feondes **costunga** . **bisceopwyrt** . **elehtre** . **harasprecel** . streaw**berian wise** . sio clufihte wenwyrt eorðrima . brembelæppel . polleian . **wermod** . gecnua þa wyrta ealle a**wylle on** godre **buteran** wring **þurh clað sete under weofod singe . viiii . mæssan** ofer **smire** þone man mid on þa þunwonge . ⁊ bufan þam **eagum** ⁊ ufan þæt heafod . ⁊ þa breost ⁊ under þam earmum þa sidan . þeos sealf is god wiþ ælcre feondes **costunga** ⁊ **ælf**sidenne ⁊ lenctenadle .

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[174] *Hæmð* must be singular (the expected plural being *hæmmaþ*), precluding Crawford's 'elves and evil spirits of the night and women who lie with the devil' (1963, 110).

3a. Leechbook III, section 54, f. 122v:

Wyrc sealfe wið nihtgengan . wyl on buteran elehtran . hegerifan . bisceopwyrt . reademagþan . cropleac . sealt smire mid him bið sona sel .

3b. Bald's Leechbook I, section 64, f. 52v (from *Wiþ ælcre leodrunan*, §6:3.4)

Sealf elehtre hegerife bisceopwyrt þa readan magoþan . armelu . cropleac . sealt wyl on buteran to sealfe smire on þæt heafod ꝸ þa breost

Although some of the correlations noted are more striking than others, there is little in 3a which is not represented in 1. 3b's greater divergence is consistent with its appearance in another collection; although it does not mention *nihtgengan*, it does parallel *Wið ælfcynne* insofar as all the remedies in the section from which it comes are 'wiþ ælcre leodrunan & ælfsidenne'. Both of these remedies are, then, for ailments associated with *ælf*. The comparison of 3b with the other texts is also strengthened by its description in the contents list, 'Læcedomas wiþ ælcre leodrunan ꝸ ælfsidenne þæt is fefercynnes gealdor ꝸ dust ꝸ drencas ꝸ sealf ꝸ gif sio adl netnum sie' ('remedies against every *leodrune* and *ælfsiden*, being a charm for fevers, and powder and drinks and a salve; and [one] if the ailment be on cattle'; ed. Wright 1955, f. 5). Although it is not certain, it is syntactically likely here that *fefercynnes* refers not only to the noun immediately following it, but to all four of *gealdor*, *dust*, *drencas* and *sealf*. If so, then 3b's function is also associated with 2's, which serves amongst other things against *lenctenadl*. Although the verbal similarities between texts 1 and 2 are less extensive, the two remedies also share content without verbal similarity, in being concerned both with the Devil/devils, and both recommending the application of the salve to the face (respectively referred to with *andwlita* and *þunwong*).

It is impossible to establish a traditional text-critical stemma for texts like these, because the variation between them is due to free recomposition rather than mechanical errors. This makes it hard to assign priority to one text. While it is possible to imagine two different redactors excerpting material from a text like 1, it is simpler to suppose that 1 is a conflation of 2 and 3a; but we cannot be confident as to whether one redactor replaced *ælfsiden* with *ælfcynn*, or *vice versa*, or whether there was some more complex process. But their association does suggest that one man's *ælfsiden* implied another man's *ælf*, consolidating my argument that *ælfsiden* was not a bahuvrihi compound, but did indeed denote magic effected by *ælfe*. Moreover, the texts afford a nexus of interrelationships associating not only *ælfsiden*, *feondes costunga* and *lenctenadl*, but also *ælfcynn*, *ælf*, *nihtgenga* and *þa menn þe deofol mid hæmþ*, and, by implication, *fefercynn*, *leodrune* and *mære* too. This list is itself consolidated by another remedy against *nihtgengan*/a *nihtgenga* from section 1 of Leechbook III (f. 111). Following a

remedy 'Wiþ swiþe ealdum heafod ece' ('For a very old headache') derived from the *De medicamentis* of Marcellus Empiricus (Grattan–Singer 1952, 37–38), the text adds that the amulets which the remedy involves 'beoþ gode wiþ heafodece & wiþ eagwærce & wiþ feondes costunga & nihtgengan & lenctenadle & maran & wyrtforbore & malscra & yflum gealdorcræftum' ('are good against headache and against eye-pain and against the tribulations of the Devil and *nihtgengan*/a *nihtgenga* and *lenctenadl* and *maran*/a *mære* and plant-restraint[175] and enchantments and evil incantational techniques'). Whatever *nihtgengan* are, they keep familiar company: magic, *feondes costunga*, *lenctenadl* and *maran*. Even the *eagwærc* has some noteworthy parallels.[176]

3.6 *Wið ælfe �7 wiþ uncuþum sidsan*

This remedy occurs in section 65 of Bald's Leechbook II, a few remedies after *Gif hors ofscoten sie*: 'Wið ælfe & wiþ uncuþum sidsan gnid myrran on win & hwites recelses emmicel & sceaf gagates dæl þæs stanes on þæt win, drince .ɪɪɪ. morgenas neaht nestig oþþe .ᴠɪɪɪɪ. oþþe .xɪɪ.' ('Against (an) *ælf* [or 'against *ælfe*'[177]] and against unknown/strange/unusual *sidsa*, crumble myrrh into wine and the same amount of white frankincense and shave a piece of the stone *jet* into that wine, drink [on] 3 mornings, fasting [at] night, or 9 or 12'; ff. 107v–108r). The main evidence here for the meanings of *ælf* is its collocation with *uncuþ sidsa*. We have no more information for the meanings of *sidsa* than we have for *siden*; presumably it meant something like 'magic'. What is interesting is that the text includes *uncuþ sidsa* without referring to some more ordinary *sidsa*. While this may imply that a *cuþ sidsa* would require a different remedy, a more elegant explanation would be to assume that this was implicit in *ælf*, the text to be interpreted as 'against an *ælf* (no doubt using *sidsa*) but also against *sidsa* of an unknown source'. If so, then *sidsa* was connoted by *ælf*, but this inference is not secure enough to be relied upon. Kitson suggested that 'the wine, myrrh and frankincense surely bespeak ultimate foreign origin for all that the "elf" may imply assimilation to native tradition'

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[175] Perhaps 'binding through magical use of plants'; cf. Meaney 1992, 22–24; Jente 1921, 310.
[176] *Wið ælfcynne* has its salve applied to the eyes, and *elfae* seem to be associated with eye-pain in a fifteenth-century English medical manuscript, British Library Sloane 963. On folio 14v a remedy 'ffor akynge of eyen' concludes a short collection of remedies. On the next folio (still within the same gathering), a different hand presents a series of *orationes* entitled 'Aliud carmen p*ro* eodem' ('another charm against the same'), which, fragmentary, cover folios 15r–16v (cf. Kieckhefer 1989, 70). *Elfae* are prominent, alongside *demones*, throughout these prayers; it appears that the remedy 'ffor akynge of eyen' prompted someone to include these as remedies for that ailment, and the prospect that eye-pains were associated with attacks by *elves* would provide a neat explanation. They would perhaps relate to Lassen's argument for the association of good sight with power and masculinity in medieval Scandinavian culture (2000; cf. Larrington 1992, 8–12).
[177] Although *uncuþum sidsan* is in the dative, the case taken by *wið* in Royal 12 D. xvii varies so much that *ælfe* could still be an accusative plural.

(1989, 61): we have here cultural elements drawn from ecclesiastical contexts being deployed here to meet problems denoted by older, vernacular words (cf. Jolly 1996, esp. 153–54).

4. Interpretations

Elliptical though our medical texts are, they provide some reasonably clear evidence for the meanings of *ælf* and *ælfe*. Our best-attested compound is *ælfsiden*, which is consolidated by the collocation of *ælf* with *sidsa*. Although it is not possible to link it with one clinical condition, a range of assciations are attested which allow us to reconstruct its likely meanings. *Ælfsiden* involved *ælfe*; *-siden* was almost certainly magic of some description; and the prospect of *ælfe* working magic called *siden* or *sidsa* is well-paralleled by Snorri's association of the *vanir* with *seiðr*. It might afflict people or livestock. Whether *ælfe*'s use of *siden* carried with it the pejorative connotations of gender transgression which the use of *seiðr* would have in Norse is not clear, however. Previous assumptions that *ælfsiden* might involve possession by *ælfe* or some physical assault by them are by no means ruled out, but should probably be imagined if they are to be imagined at all as consequences of *ælfsiden* rather than *ælfsiden* itself. Like other assaults on the health by *ælfe*, *ælfsiden* is also associated with diabolical tribulations, attesting again to the uneasy alignment of *ælfe* with demons in ninth- to tenth-century Anglo-Saxon culture, but also to the continuing distinctness of *ælfe* from diabolical threats. The association, through the related text *Wið ælfcynne*, of *ælfsiden* with devils or the Devil having sex with people is a rare and intriguing one, but too ambiguous to develop. *Ælfsiden* is also associated with *nihtgengan* and *maran*, the latter collocation being well-paralleled, and one which I examine more fully in the next chapter. The ailments with which *ælfsiden* is particularly associated are varieties of fever, particularly *lenctenadl*. This is consistent with the meanings of the word *ælfisc* in its Old English attestation.

Other texts attest to other associations for *ælfe*, supported this time mainly by later medieval English and Scottish evidence. Even when spurious identifications are discarded, *ælfe* were associated with causing internal pains, denoted in the texts studied here with *ofscoten* concerning horses and *ælfsogoða* concerning people. The association is also apparent, as I discuss below, in *Wið færstice*. The old idea that these pains might be caused by *ælfe* shooting arrows or other missiles at their victims is not attested here, and should not be assumed. There were other *ælfalda* besides, including cutaneous disorders, denoted in the texts studied here by *wæter-ælfadl*. The ambivalent relationship between *ælfe* and demons pervades these texts as it pervades the texts concerning

ælfsiden, the suggestion once more being that the two were associated but not identical. The ambivalence recalls the enthusiasm of Anglo-Saxon clerics to use prognostic texts to try to tell the future despite the objections of sermonisers (Liuzza 2001). It is also reflected in the placement of *ælfe* in manuscripts: in Leechbook III, the *ælf*-remedies occur towards the end, but within its main body. But in Bald's Leechbook, they tend to occur at the ends of books, recalling Sims-Williams's observation of the similar placement of the more magical prayers in the early English prayer-books (1990, 301–2).

In themselves, these conclusions leave many questions unanswered, not least about how *ælfe*'s causing of ailments related to their other characteristics, discussed above. However, they afford a basis for using fuller accounts of otherworldly beings—both from other medieval cultures and *Wið færstice*—to try to arrive at a convincing interpretation of Anglo-Saxon *ælfe*.

Part 3

North-West European Contexts;
Interpretations; and Conclusions

Chapter 7

Narratives and Contexts

The analyses above have established a new corpus of evidence for reconstructing and interpreting the meanings of *ælf*. The aim of this part of the thesis is to interpret the wider meanings of this linguistic evidence, the present chapter providing a framework for this by establishing a reading context of closely comparable medieval narratives. However, the structuring of Part 2 of this thesis according to classes of evidence rather than their significance for my argument means that a summary of my main arguments and conclusions so far will be convenient here.

The evidence of prehistoric Old English morphological developments, and personal names, corroborated by identical patterns in early Norse poetry and in Scandinavian mythographical texts, shows that *ælfe* were closely associated with gods (particularly *ese*, Old Norse *æsir*), but that both *ælfe* and *ese* were fundamentally similar to human ethnic groups. Most strikingly, *ælf* originally belonged to the same declension (the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems) as a wide variety of words; but during the prehistoric Old English period, this declension was reorganised as a productive declension for words denoting people and peoples. *Ælfe* remained in the declension, and seem to have been joined by *ese*, but words for monsters originally included there were transferred elsewhere. Evidence of this sort demands that we accept different categorisations of divinity and ethnicity in early Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultures from in our own: groups of gods were fundamentally like peoples. Moreover, it suggests that in this early period, *ælfe* were fundamentally aligned with the Anglo-Saxon in-group in contradistinction to the monsters which also existed in Anglo-Saxon world-views (§§2–3; cf. §4:1).

The human-like characteristics suggested for *ælfe* by the earliest evidence are further corroborated by the use of *ælf* as the basis for glossing Latin words for nymphs, which were known by Anglo-Saxons to be non-monstrous otherworldly females. This usage occurs in two textual traditions, one probably from the eighth century and the other from the eighth or ninth, but it was maintained by revising redactors into the eleventh century, showing its continued appropriateness from the beginnings of written Old English to the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. Moreover, each tradition feminised the word *ælf* morphologically, one by using the suffix *-en*, the other by changing the word to the feminine *ō*-stem declension. The different strategies of these texts suggest there was no feminine form of *ælf* already available in Old English, but that *ælf* was seen as the best basis for glossing words for nymphs by two different scholars. They extend the

morphological and onomastic evidence that *ælfe* were human like and non-monstrous, while corroborating other evidence that *ælfe* were traditionally only male (§§5:2–3). However, by the end of the Old English period, *ælf* had itself become able to denote females as well as males, in a development well-attested in Middle English (§5:3.3): this is a rare glimpse of change in non-Christian beliefs during the Old English period, relating particularly to gendering.

Moreover, the apparent ease with which *ælf* came to be adapted to include females in its denotation (first, it would appear, by scholars, and later by English-speakers at large) need not merely reflect the power of necessity as scholars sought some vaguely appropriate equivalent to the Classical nymphs. *Ælf* appears in Old English poetry in the compound *ælfscyne*. *Scyne* denotes female or angelic beauty and *ælfscyne* is indeed used to denote dangerously seductive female beauty. Comparison with other substantival compounds suggests indeed that the *ælfe* in *ælfscyne* are to be understood as a paradigmatic example of this beauty—which is consistent with the use of *ælf* as the basis for denoting nymphs, and with cognate evidence (§4:2). Depending on how old *Genesis A* is, and on whether the word *ælfscyne* is older than that poem, the coining of *ælfscyne* might post-date the arrival of female denotations of *ælf*. If so, however, the fact that *ælf*'s older male denotation could be extended in this way hints that even the traditional male *ælfe* were not without traits normally associated with seductive feminine beauty.

Although the earliest evidence strongly suggests that *ælfe* were fundamentally aligned with the human in-group by contrast with the external threat of monsters, other evidence complicates this. One strand clearly aligns *ælfe* with monsters and demons. Most prominent here is *Beowulf*, with its 'eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas / swylce gigantas' (lines 112–13; ed. Klaeber 1950, 5; Malone 1963, f. 132); alongside it is the inclusion of *aelfae* as a synonym for Satan in a prayer whose manuscript dates from around 800. I have taken these texts to show deliberate efforts to demonise *ælfe*, in *Beowulf*'s case by radically realigning them with traditional, Biblical and Classical monsters (§§4:1, 5:1). Such efforts, as I discuss below, had still not prevailed even centuries later.

Another strand of evidence, however, is more ambiguous—the evidence for *ælfe* affecting people's mental states, in at least some cases harmfully, and otherwise damaging their health or that of their livestock. Such evidence mainly occurs in the Old English medical texts surviving from the tenth and early eleventh centuries. My complete reanalysis has culled a number of long-standing assumptions and misconceptions about these (esp. §6:1; Hall forthcoming [c]), leaving a corpus which is particularly useful because it offers clear insights into the supernatural forces which Anglo-Saxons actually feared, as opposed to what they thought they should fear. The medical texts are also supported, however, by later English evidence, other traditions from West Germanic-

speaking cultures concerning cognates of *ælf*, and within the Old English corpus by the words *ylfig* and *ælfisc*, attested as glosses but, I have argued, probably derived from the common lexicon (§5:4–5). From these sources we know that *ælfe* were liable to cause sharp pains (denoted in the evidence by *gescot* and *sogoða*) and cutaneous ailments (denoted by *wæterælfadl*), as well perhaps as other illnesses (as the general term *ælfadl* suggests; §§6:1–2); they are at times associated with diabolical assaults, but in ways which show that Anglo-Saxons were not confident about conflating these two kinds of threats. The most extensive cluster of texts concerning *ælfe*, however, relates to the word *ælfsiden*—either by containing this word, by being textually related to texts which do, or by containing the cognate *sidsa* in association with *ælf*. *Siden* occurs only in this compound and is cognate with the Old Norse *seiðr*; like it, seems to denote a kind of magic. *Seiðr* is well-represented in our sources; moreover, it is associated with the Norse gods called the *vanir*, whom I have argued to have been more or less identical with *álfar* —which chimes with the distinctive association of *siden* with *ælfe*. *Seiðr* is also associated with humiliating gender-transgression when performed by males, which chimes with the evidence for *ælfe*'s femininity (§§2:1.2, 6:3.1). *Ælfsiden*, like other kinds of *ælf*-illnesses, is also associated with diabolical assaults, but also with fever, assaults by a mysterious class of beings called *nihtgengan*, and, in one text, attacks by a kind of magic called *leodrune* and by female supernatural beings called *maran* (§§6:3.2–5). The association with fever in particular recalls the evidence of the word *ælfisc*, which seems to have meant something like 'delusory (?as *ælfe* are delusory)'. Less negative connotations for *ælfe*'s evident ability to cause altered states of mind, however, are hinted at by *ylfig*: a close analysis of the difficult evidence for this word shows that it probably meant 'speaking prophetically (?through the influence of *ælfe*)' (§§5:4–5).

This is a diverse range of evidence, of varying kinds and dates, and a diverse range of implied associations for *ælfe*. Were Anglo-Saxons' understandings of *ælfe*, then, simply diverse? This is surely the case to some extent, and I have argued for diachronic variation, with the rise of female *ælfe*, and for competition between traditional and demonised conceptions of *ælfe*. Likewise, the evidence for *ælfe*'s positive characteristics, anthropomorphism and beauty have previously been thought to be at odds with their associations with causing illness, the *ælfe* of the medical texts being envisaged like Judaeo-Christian-Mediterranean demons.[178] However, it is worth asking if there may not have been some more coherent ideologies linking these disparate-looking characteristics. As I have discussed in my introduction, one attempts to systematise disparate evidence into a coherent interpretation with trepidation, but also as an intellectual necessity (1:2–

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[178] See esp. Thun 1969; Stuart 1976, esp. 313; cf. Jolly 1998, 24–27; Edwards 2004, 126, which calls the latter group 'disease-causing organisms'; §§1:1, 6:1.

4, esp. 1:3.3). In this chapter, I show that characteristics like those which I have demonstrated for *ælfe* were associated with one another in coherent and culturally meaningful narratives widely in medieval North-West European traditions of otherworldly beings. Generally speaking, medieval evidence for the role of supernatural beings in medieval European constructions of illness is dominated by stories of saints and demons, and it is usually hard to guess whether these narratives owe anything to non-learned cultures. However, there are narratives concerning non-Christian beliefs in the vernacular literatures of Scandinavia and Ireland, and later in the records of the Scottish witchcraft trials, and these provide a suitable—though not exhaustive—range of comparanda for the Old English material. This being so, it is reasonable to interpret the Anglo-Saxon evidence to reflect coherent and meaningful belief-systems, from which we can extrapolate information both about Anglo-Saxon beliefs and about the roles of those beliefs among the Anglo-Saxon elites which produced and consumed the evidence. Such extrapolation is the theme of the ensuing chapters, Chapter 8 being my reanalysis of *Wið færstice*, and chapter 9 a concluding assessment of the evidence in a wider social context.

1. Sex, sickness, *seiðr* and *mǫrur*, and their analogues

My first group of comparisons is the most closely keyed to the *ælfsiden* texts. The otherworldly protagonist in each, however, is female.

1.1 *Ynglinga saga*

Chapter 13 of Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga* is built around stanza 3 of Þjóðólfr ór Hvini's *Ynglingatal* (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, ɪ 28–29):

> Vanlandi hét sonr Sveigðis, er ríki tók eptir hann ok réð fyrir Uppsalaauð. Hann var hermaðr mikill, ok hann fór víða um lǫnd. Hann þá vetrvist á Finnlandi með Snjá inum gamla ok fekk þar dóttur hans, Drífu. En at vári fór hann á brót, en Drífa var eptir, ok hét hann at koma aptr á þriggja vetra fresti, en hann kom eigi á tíu vetrum. Þá sendi Drífa eptir Hulð seiðkonu, en sendi Vísbur, son þeira Vanlanda, til Svíþjóðar. Drífa keypti at Hulð seiðkonu, at hon skyldi síða Vanlanda til Finnlands eða deyða hann at ǫðrum kosti. En er seiðr var framiðr, var Vanlandi at Uppsǫlum. Þá gerði hann fúsan at fara til Finnlands, en vinir hans ok ráðamenn bǫnnuðu honum ok sǫgðu, at vera myndi fjǫlkynngi Finna í fýsi hans. Þá gerðisk honum svefnhǫfugt, ok lagðisk hann til svefns. En er hann hafði lítt sofnat, kallaði hann ok sagði, at mara trað hann. Menn hans fóru til ok vildu hjálpa honum. En er þeir tóku uppi til hǫfuðsins, þá trað hon fótleggina, svá at nær brotnuðu. Þá tóku þeir til fótanna, þá kafði hon hǫfuðit, svá at þar dó hann. Svíar tóku lík hans, ok var hann brenndr við á þá, er Skúta heitir. Þar váru settir bautasteinar hans. Svá segir Þjóðólfr:

> The son of Sveigðir was called Vanlandi, who received the kingdom after him and ruled over Uppsalaauðr [=the wealth of Uppsala]. He was a great warrior, and he travelled widely about the land. He accepted winter accommodation in Finland with Snjá [=Snow] the Old, and there took his daughter, Drífa [=Sleet]. But in the spring he went away, while Drífa was left behind, and he

promised to come back after three winters' wait, but he did not come in ten years. Then Drífa sent for Hulð the witch [*seiðr*-woman], and sent Vísburr, her and Vanlandi's son, to Sweden. Drífa struck a bargain with the witch Hulð, that she should enchant (*síða*) Vanlandi to Finland, or otherwise kill him. Now, when the magic (*seiðr*) was done, Vanlandi was at Uppsala. Then he eagerly made to travel to Finland, but his friends and counsellors forbade him and said that there would be an enchantment (*fjǫlkynngi*) of the Finns' behind his desire. Then he became drowsy, and laid himself down to sleep. But when he had slept a short while, he cried and said that a *mara* trampled him. His men went there and wanted to help him. But when they went to the head, then it (or: she) trampled the legs, so that they nearly broke. When they went to the feet, she smothered the head, so that he died there. The Swedes took his body, and he was burnt by the river which is called Skúta. His monument-stone was set there. Thus, Þjóðólfr says:

En á vit	But to a meeting
Vilja bróður	with Vili's brother [=Óðinn]
vitta véttr	the ?demon of magic
Vanlanda kom,	brought Vanlandi,
þás trollkund	when the ?witch-born
of troða skyldi	Grímhildr ?of ale [?=*valkyrja*][179]
líðs grímhildr	had to trample upon
ljóna bága,	the enemy of men [=warrior],
ok sá brann	and he burned
á beði Skútu	on the bank of the Skúta,
menglǫtuðr,	necklace-generous,
es mara kvalði.	whom the *mara* killed.

Since it is not certain that Snorri was any wiser than we are about the story to which this verse originally alluded, we can rely only on the verse itelf as evidence for ninth-century beliefs. It is problematic, but seems clearly to portray Vanlandi to have been trodden to death by a *trollkund* being, a *mara*. This affords an early and respectably close analogue to the Anglo-Saxon conception of *maran* riding the sick (§6:3.4). What is really useful here, however, is Snorri's thirteenth-century prose.

Characteristically of Old Icelandic saga-writing, Snorri's account of Vanlandi's death is ambiguous: a bargain is struck with a *seiðkona* for Vanlandi's seduction or, failing that, his murder; subsequently, a *mara* attacks him. But it is also characteristic of Old Icelandic saga-writing that the narrator's juxtaposition of events and the speculations of his characters is sufficient to imply that Vanlandi's death was not only the *seiðkona*'s doing but that she herself was, in some sense, the *mara* which attacked him (cf. Raudvere 1993, 90; cf. 78–82). Snorri attests, then, to the idea that the trampling and suffocating *mara* might be a *seiðkona* who had changed her form through *seiðr*. This lexical collocation parallels that of *-siden* and *mære* in Bald's Leechbook (§6:3.4). The identity of the *mara~mære* with a shape-changing witch is not clearly paralleled in medieval English, but is suggested by the synonymy of *mare* with *wyche* ('witch') attested by the *Promptorium parvulorum*, an English-Latin dictionary of about 1440: 'Mare, or wyche. *Magus*, *maga*, *sagana'* (ed. Way 1843–65, II 326). Besides later analogues (see Davies

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[179] Krag read *liðs* and translated 'folkets' ('the warband's'). But both this reading and the traditions *líðs* suggest a valkyrie-kenning.

1997), in Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV*, composed in the late 1590s, the Hostess threatens Falstaff by warning that 'I will ride thee o' nights like the mare' (II. i. 85–86; ed. Craig 1905, 445). Although the Hostess does not threaten to become a *mare* as such, the collocation is similar to that of Hulð with the *mara*: it is likely, then, that this kind of shape-changing was known in England by the late sixteenth century; and although it cannot be proved, it is not implausible that it was known earlier too.

Snorri's narrative does not mention *álfar*. However, the English parallel to Snorri's collocation of *seiðr* and *mara*, *ælfsiden* and *mære*, contains *ælf* integrally, and I have already emphasised the widespread and close association of the cognates of *ælf* and *mære* in English and German traditions (§6:3.4). Moreover, as I have discussed above, *Finnar* such as Drífa could occupy much the same space in medieval Scandinavian world-views as *álfar* (§2:4); the point is emphasised by the fact that the story of Vanlandi and Drífa shares much with that of Helgi Hálfdanarson and an *álfkona* in Chapter 15 of *Hrólfs saga kraka*.[180] Snorri's story of the *fjǫlkynngi Finna* may represent the kind of narrative which might have been attached to *ælfe*, leading to the Old English collocation of *ælfsiden* with *mære*.

1.2 *Serglige Con Culainn*

That Snorri's account of Vanlandi's death might indeed be relevant to *ælfe* is further suggested by a close Old Irish parallel. This is closer in date and space to the Anglo-Saxon material, and features the otherworldly beings *par excellence*, the *áes síde*. The narrative in question occurs as section 8 of *Serglige Con Culainn*, conventionally translated as 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn', though *serglige* might perhaps be rendered—less literally but more idiomatically—as 'love-sickness' here. Its primary manuscript, Lebor na hUidre, is a complex compilation written and altered during the eleventh and possibly the twelfth centuries. Lebor na hUidre seems originally to have contained one version, known now as A, but the pages containing the first half of this were subsequently replaced with new ones by a revising scribe. Onto these he copied another version—a conflation of an A-text with a different recension known as B—and also erased and rewrote passages in the second half of the original Lebor na hUidre text.

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[180] Helgi has sex with a woman who proves to be an *álfkona*; before she leaves, Helgi agrees to collect the child which he has just begotten the next year. He does not, and three years later, the girl is instead delivered to his door. This is similar to the story of Vanlandi and Drífa, though admittedly in *Hrólfs saga kraka* it is the otherworldly woman who visits the king, not the other way round. Helgi is not killed, but the girl is later instrumental in the death of Helgi's son Hrólfr kraki (cf. Vǫlundr's revenge). This story is innovative in the Hrólfr kraki tradition and possibly as late as the seventeenth century, the date of our earliest manuscript (Slay 1960, 4–15; for other versions see Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir 2003, 142–44), but it still shows the transferablility of the concepts of *Finnr* and *álfkona*.

The material judged to derive from B exhibits linguistic features pointing, amongst later ones, to the ninth century, while the language of A seems to be eleventh-century.[181] A has long been considered the earlier version of the story nevertheless, but Carey has recently argued that B is the earlier version (1994, 81).

The following text is thought to derive from B. Cú Chulainn is by a lake at the autumn festival of *samuin*, when two birds land there, linked by a gold chain. They sing, and almost everyone present falls asleep. Cú Chulainn, having recently captured enough birds to give two to each woman present apart from his wife, ill-advisedly shoots stones and a spear at the birds, but for the first time in his life, his projectiles miss (ed. Dillon 1953, 1–3). The text continues (ed. Dillon 1953, 3; trans. Dillon 1947–49, 50):

> Dotháet Cú Chulaind iar sin co tard a druim frisin liic, ⁊ ba holc a menma leis, ⁊ dofuit cotlud fair. Co n-accai in dá mnaí cucai. Indala n-aí brat úaine imbe. Alaili brat corcra cóicdíabail im ṡude. Dolluid in ben cosin brot úane chucai, ⁊ tibid gen friṡ, ⁊ dobert béim dind echḟleisc dó. Dotháet alaili cucai dano, ⁊ tibid fris, ⁊ nod slaid fón alt chétna. Ocus bátar fri cíana móir oca sin .i. cechtar dé imma sech cucai béus dia búalad combo marb acht bec. Lotir úad íarom. Arigsitar Ulaid uli aní sin, ⁊ asbertatár ara ndúscide. 'Acc!' ol Fergus. 'Náchi nglúasid res atchí.'

> Cú Chulainn went then and put his back against a pillar stone, and he was downcast, and a sleep fell upon him. He saw two women come towards him. One wore a green mantle; the other a purple mantle in five folds. The woman in the green mantle came to him and laughed at him, and struck him with her horse-whip. The other came to him, too, and laughed at him, and struck him in the same way. And they continued for a long time, each of them in turn coming still to beat him, so that he was almost dead. Then they went from him. The Ulaid observed that, and they said that he should be wakened. 'No', said Fergus. 'Do not disturb him. It is a vision that he sees.'

These two women are doubtless identical with the two swans which appeared earlier.[182] Cú Chulainn subsequently awakens, but is mute and too weak to move. A year later, after a visit by Oengus, the son of Áed Abrat, the king of the *áes síde*, Cú Chulainn regains some of his strength and returns to the stone. There he meets the woman in green who explains that Fann, the daughter of Áed Abrat, has fallen in love with him (ed. Dillon 1953, 3–5). The rest of the story concerns Fann's wooing of Cú Chulainn and the subsequent struggle for Cú Chulainn between Fann and Cú Chulainn's wife.

Various aspects of Cú Chulainn's *serglige* are paralleled in early Irish and perhaps Welsh sources (Carey 1999), but what interests me here are the similarities with Snorri's account of the death of Vanlandi. An otherworldly woman (Drífa in *Ynglinga saga*, Fann in *Serglige Con Culainn*) seeks to woo a man of the in-group (Vanlandi, Cú Chulainn) through female otherworldly emissaries, who exhibit magical powers of shape-changing (the *seiðkona* Hulð, the bird-women). The emissaries' first wooings are effectively

[181] On texts and language see Dillon 1941–42; 1953, xi–xvi; Salberg 1992, esp. 161–62; cf. Carey 1994, 81–83; Findon 1997, 145–46.
[182] Findon 1997, 117–18; cf. Cross 1952, 247 [F234.1.15] and the wooing swan-maidens in *Vǫlundarkviða* st. 1–2.

rejected: Vanlandi resists his urge to go to Lappland, while Cú Chulainn shoots at the birds. Punishment follows, in which the men unexpectedly fall asleep and are assailed by the wooing women. In the Norse text, Hulð turns herself into a *mara* and tramples Vanlandi; in the Irish text, the women beat Cú Chulainn with *echĺecsa* ('horse-whips'). Although early medieval visions involved saints and angels whipping the visionary reasonably often, the horse-whips in *Serglige Con Culainn* are particularly reminiscent of the medieval English and German texts in which the *mære/mara* rides its victim, and of the Old English charm *Wið dweorg*.[183] The possibility that these reflect some sort of cultural continuum seems strong. Admittedly, a special Hiberno-Scandinavian literary connection has often been posited (e.g. Chadwick 1953–57; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1957; Almqvist 1978–81; cf. Chesnutt 1968; Lukman 1977), but the dearth of evidence for Anglo-Saxon involvements in these currents may better reflect the nature of our evidence than the reality of the situation. I have emphasised similarities between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian beliefs already, while Old Irish elements appear in Anglo-Saxon charms (Meroney 1945), proving pertinent cultural contact. In *Ynglinga saga*, Vanlandi's punishment is death, whereas Cú Chulainn's illness eventually speeds Fann's wooing; even so, the perils of Cú Chulainn's liaison are emphasised by the fact that when Fann leaves him, he falls into madness until his uncle Conchobor sends druids to give him a drink of forgetfulness.

Naturally, *Serglige Con Culainn* does not contain cognates of *ælfsiden* or *mære*, but it involves several motifs correlating with the semantics of *ælf*: *ælfe* seem to have been associated with seductive beauty and with inflicting illnesses, including illnesses associated with madness, these latter occurring in connection with cognates of the words *seiðr* and *mara* which appear in the Norse text. We may plausibly—though tentatively— imagine that remedies 'wið ælfcynne and nihtgengan and þam mannum þe deofol mid hæmð' or 'wiþ ælcre leodrunan & ælfsidenne' were conceived in a culture in which illness might not only be caused by *ælfe*, but might represent attempts at seduction or revenge at rejection, effected through magic and perhaps including assaults in the form of *maran*.

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[183] §6:3.4., esp. n. 173. Cf. Colgrave 1968, 102–4, 151 n. 74. Another parallel is chapter 12 of the probably fifteenth-century *Ála flekks saga*, in which Áli 'lætr … illa í svefni, ok eru svefnfarir hans bæði harðar ok langar' ('lies … restless in his sleep, and his sleep-journeys are both hard and long'): a *trǫllkona* besets Áli with an iron whip (*járnsvipa*), cursing him so that the injuries can only be healed by her brother (ed. Lagerholm 1927, 105–6). Lagerholm noted the comparison with both *Serglige Con Culainn* and *Ynglinga saga* (1927, lxvi, 106 n. to §§3–4), but *Ála flekks saga* does not share the other details.

1.3 The *Southern English Legendary*

That it would not be far-fetched to imagine themes like this in tenth-century England is emphasised by the *Southern English Legendary*, composed in the South-West Midlands in the late thirteenth century (Pickering–Görlach 1982, 111; cf. Görlach 1974, esp. 51–62). The passage in question comes from a cosmography included in the account of the Archangel Michael. After describing how some evil spirits oppress sleepers as *maren*, it declares[184]

Þe ssrewen wolleþ ek oþerwile ·
     mankunne to bi-traie
	The evil creatures desire also at other times
	     to betray mankind,

A-liȝte a-doun in monnes forme ·
     biniȝte & bidaie
	alight down in human form
	     by night and by day,

And liggeþ ofte bi wymmen ·
     ase hi were of fleiss & blode
	and lie often with women
	     as though they were of flesh and blood;

Ac þe engendrure þat hi makeþ ·
     ne comþ neuere to gode
	but the offspring that they beget
	     come never to good.

And ofte in forme of womman ·
     aday and eke nyȝt
	And often in woman's form,
	     in the day and also night

Hi leteþ men hom ligge bi ·
     and bitraieþ hom outriȝt
	they let men lie with them
	     and betray them outright:

For hi weteþ wuch beoþ men ·
     þat to folie habbeþ wille
	for they know which are the men
	     who have desire of folly:

Al one in som deorne stude ·
     hi stondeþ þanne wel stille
	Alone in some hidden place
	     they stand then very quiet/still,

And mani fol hom liþ so by ·
     in wode and eke in mede
	and many a fool lies with them thus,
	     in the wood and in the meadow.

Ac þer nis non þat so deþ ·
     þat ne acoreþ þe dede
	But there is none who does so
	     that does not suffer from the deed:

Hore membres toswelleþ somme ·
     & somme ofscapeþ vnneþe
	their penises swell-up ?somewhat,
	     and some [?men] survive with difficulty,

And somme fordwineþ al awei ·
     forte huy be[o] ibroȝt to deþe
	and some dwindle completely away,
	     whereby they are brought to death.

More wonder it is iwis ·
     hou eni ofscapeþ of liue
	A greater wonder it is, for sure,
	     how any escapes alive,

for an attri þing it is ·
     to lemman oþer to wiue
	for a poisonous thing it is,
	     to a [male] lover or a woman.

And ofte in forme of womman ·
     in mony deorne weie
	And often in the form of woman
	     on many a hidden path

Me sicþ of hom gret companie ·
     boþe hoppe & pleie
	men see a great company of them
	     both dance and play,

Þat eleuene beoþ icluped ·
     þat ofte comeþ to toune
	that are called *eluene* [following other MSS],
	     who/which often come to town,

And bi daie muche in wode beoþ ·
     & biniȝte upe heie doune
	and by day they are often in the wood,
	     and by night upon high hills;

Þat beoþ of þe wrecche gostes ·
     þat of heuene were inome
	that are from among the wretched spirits
	     who/which were taken out of heaven.

And mony of hom a Domesday ·
     ssolleþ ȝute to reste come
	And many of them yet
	     will come to rest on Doomsday;

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[184] Ed. d'Evelyn–Mill 1956–59, II 409–10 at 409; cf. Horstmann 1887, 306–7, whose variant text provided some guidance on interpreting ambiguities.

Ac þe ssrewen þat beoþ biniȝte ·   but the evil spirits which exist at night,
    and eke bidaie   and also by day,
Fondieþ wiþ wuch felonie ·   tempt [us] with every wile:
    hi mouweþ men mest bitraie   they can betray people most.

Though different in important respects, this shares much with *Serglige Con Culainn* in particular: *schrewene* in the form of women—who are identified with the dancing cavalcades of *eluene* mentioned at the end of the passage—wait in hidden places and seduce men; the consequence for the men is a wasting illness (possibly specifically of the penis, the text is ambigious). Although this illness is not identified with the *mare*, it is juxtaposed with it in a way which suggests that in thirteenth-century English mentalities, the one idea led to the other.

    Moreover, each of these texts is a cautionary tale. The main implication of the *Southern English Legendary*, of course, is that malicious demons may come among humans and disrupt society with illusions and by inflicting illness upon those deceived by their sexual temptations. But its condemnation of fallen angels is equivocal—some of the *eluene*, it seems, are not damned—and the text implies that a man who would have sex with the demons is a *fol* ('fool'), putting responsibility on the deluded as well as on the demons. *Serglige Con Culainn* explicitly takes a similar line, concluding with the comment (ed. Dillon 1953, 29; trans. Dillon 1947–49, 75),

> Conid taibsiu aidmillti do Choin Chulaind la háes sídi sin. Ar ba mór in chumachta demnach ria cretim, ⁊ ba hé a méit co cathaigtis co corptha na demna frisna doínib ⁊ co taisféntais aíbniusa ⁊ díamairi dóib, amal no betis co marthanach. Is amlaid no creteá dóib. Conid frisna taidbsib sin atberat na hanéolaig síde ⁊ áes síde.

> That is the disastrous vision shown to Cú Chulainn by the fairies. For the diabolical power was great before the faith, and it was so great that devils used to fight with men in bodily form, and used to show delights and mysteries to them, as though they really existed. So they were believed to be; and ignorant men used to call those visions *síde* and *áes síde*.

These words, like the Anglo-Saxon medical texts, come from a world in which traditional beliefs in otherworldly beings such as the *áes síde* could neither be condoned nor abandoned (cf. Carey 1994, 78–79). However, 'this "rewriting" of the text's meaning only barely contains its tensions and ambiguities' (Findon 1997, 133): both *Serglige Con Culainn* and *Ynglinga saga* afford nuanced investigations of the causes and consequences of sexual liaisons which transgress accepted social boundaries. Findon stressed the efforts of Church reformers in medieval Ireland to end traditional practices of polygamy (1997, 107–34, esp. 111–13), though *Serglige Con Culainn* may, like the *Southern English Legendary*, target sexual promiscuity generally. The principal threat to social order comes from the otherworldly being, Fann (who is herself transgressing the bounds of her own society, in seeking a lover other than her husband, Mannanán mac Lir), and Carey has laid the foundations for positive readings of Cú Chulainn's sickness

(1999). But Findon has argued persuasively that the text as we have it shows the disorder beginning within the in-group, principally in Cú Chulainn's continual failure to act wisely (1997, 107–34). He is not unreminiscent, then, of the *Southern English Legendary*'s *fol*. Cú Chulainn loses the power proper to his aristocratic male status by mishandling Fann's suit and so allowing himself to be subjected to an otherworldly female. In the words of his charioteer, Lóeg (ed. Dillon 1953, 11; cf. Dillon's translation, 1947–49, 59),

Mór espa do láech	Great is the idleness/folly for a warrior
laigi fri súan serglige,	to lie in the sleep of a wasting-sickness,
ar donadbat genaiti	because it belies demons,
áesa a Tenmag Trogaigi,	peoples of Tenmag Trogaige,
condot rodbsat,	and [that] they have injured(?) you,
condot chachtsat,	and bound you,
condot ellat,	and afflicted(?) you,
eter bríga banespa.	in the power of woman-wantonness.

Unlike the other texts, *Ynglinga saga* does not orientate itself to Christian demonology,[185] but it parallels Findon's reading of *Serglige Con Culainn* nevertheless. Lönnroth remarked of female *Finnar* that 'Several Yngling kings are bewitched by the wealth and beauty of such women … but a marriage with them will always turn out to be disastrous, since they are evil and practiced in the art of *seiðr*' (1986, 81–82). This is more or less correct (cf. Hermann Pálsson 1997, 141–56), but in Vanlandi's case, the disaster surely begins with Vanlandi's own actions. Stepping outside the controlled space of his society, he rashly follows his erotic desires—the text does not imply that Drífa was the wooer—without respecting the consequences. Unlike the *Southern English Legendary* and *Serglige Con Culainn*, the death of Vanlandi does not seem to warn against extramarital liaisons *per se* (though see *Ynglinga saga* ch. 14; ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 30–31): Vanlandi's transgression is in breaking a promise. The consequence is that Vanlandi is ignominiously murdered in his sleep by a woman using magic. The implication is certainly that places and peoples from beyond the in-group are dangerous, but also that their threat is manifested in response to individuals' impropriety. Nor is this reading at odds with the general tone of *Ynglingatal*, which frequently accords its subjects ignoble deaths (Lönnroth 1986, 91). Moreover, Clunies Ross has recently argued that Old Norse mythology foregrounds issues of procreation, marriage, and women as tokens in inter-group exchange (1994–98, esp. I 85–186), while the similar narrative of Helgi Hálfdanarson and the *álfkona* has recently been read as a criticism of Helgi's lust (Ármann Jakobsson 2003, 178–84; Kalinke 2003, 161–63;

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[185] Contrast the *Historia Norwegiae*, also based on *Ynglingatal*: 'Swegthir ... genuit Wanlanda, qui in somno a dæmone suffocatus interiit, quod genus dæmoniorum norwegico sermone mara vocatur' ('Sveigðir ... begat Vanlandi, who died in his sleep, suffocated by a demon; that kind of demon is called *mara* in the Norwegian language'; ed. Storm 1880, 97–98, cf. 213).

Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir 2003, 142–44). Likewise, Bredsdorff has demonstrated the prominence of men's improper exercise of erotic desires as a cause of social disorder in the *Íslendingasögur* (2001 [1971], esp. 13–35)—not least in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, also likely to be by Snorri (Hallberg 1962; cf. Berman 1982).

These narratives suggest a paradigm in which seduction by *ælfe* could be integral to narratives in which *ælfe* inflicted ailments upon (transgressing) individuals, possibly by magical nocturnal assaults associated with *maran*. A similar critical attitude to men seduced by otherworldly magic-working females among Anglo-Saxons is suggested by Alfred's renderings of Boethius's account, in the third metre of Book 4 of the *De consolatione philosophiae*, of Ulysses and Circe (respectively ed. Sedgefield 1899, 115–116, 193–97; ed. Moreschini 2000, 111–12). As Alfred tells this story, 'Ulysses is a king who abuses his royal responsibilities: he abandons his kingdom to remain with Circe' (Irvine 1996, 393–96 at 395; cf. Pratt 2001, 79–80). Although the only punishment he suffers in this narrative is Alfred's opprobrium, Alfred's attitude to Ulysses is not unlike the attitudes which have been perceived towards Cú Chulainn, Vanlandi and Helgi Hálfdanarson. Otherworldly females are a force for disorder, violating and even inverting the patriarchal power-structures of the societies in question—but they do so by provoking men's own destablising passions.

2. Males and magic

A limitation with the texts just considered is that they concern female otherworldly beings, whereas I have argued above that *ælf* originally denoted males—and indeed that early Anglo-Saxon belief systems lacked close female equivalents to *ælfe*, which surely suggests that they had no close equivalent to female *síde* like Fann. Medieval Irish, Welsh and French literatures are replete with seductive otherworldly females, but males are much rarer.[186] When otherworldly males do appear, they generally either win the consent of their prospective partners without difficulty, or rape them with equal ease, and so without using magic or inflicting illness. This pattern could undermine the validity of comparison between *ælfe* and other supernatural beings exhibiting similar characteristics. However, medieval Scandinavia does exhibit narratives similar to Drífa's or Fann's concerning males. None, admittedly, links males with *mǫrur*, but they do link them with seduction, inflicting madness or fever, and with magic—arguably *seiðr*. These texts,

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[186] See Guerreau-Jalabert 1992, 64–65 [F234.2.5, F252.5(B), F301, F302]; Cross 1952, 255–58 [F300–304]; Paton 1960; Harf-Lancner 1984, esp. 59–77; Gallais 1992; Wood 1992. Of the 'fairy lovers' cited by Cross [F301], Art mac Coin surely does not qualify, as he is a member of the in-group who must win a maiden from Tir Thairngaire ('the Land of Wonders'; ed. Best 1907).

then, help to establish models for male *ælfe*, and for *ælfsiden* conducted by them. Most prominent is the Eddaic poem *Skírnismál*, our sole major text concerning Freyr, who, I have argued, was himself associated with *álfar* (§2:3.1). *Skírnismál*'s evidence is consolidated by a fourteenth-century rune-stave from Bergen bearing a love-charm. These texts are themselves consolidated by another mythological story, Othinus's wooing of Rinda in book three of Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*.

2.1 *Skírnismál* and the Bergen rune-stave

In *Skírnismál* (ed. Neckel 1962, 69–77), Freyr (referred to as *vaningi*, 'one of the *vanir*', st. 37) espies Gerðr, daughter of the *jǫtunn* Gymir, and is struck with what the introductory prose calls *hugsóttir* ('heartsickness'). His wooing is again done through an intermediary, this time Skírnir. Skírnir does not change shape, but, as in the other narratives, his initial wooing fails—in *Skírnismál* in a threefold process involving the offer of wealth and then the threat of violence (st. 19–24). Skírnir finally succeeds by threatening Gerðr with a vividly described curse (st. 25–36). The description of the curse, of course, in some respects amounts to its invocation, and the poem is ambiguous about its status here. The curse is many-layered, beginning with Skírnir striking Gerðr with a *tamsvǫndr* ('taming-wand', st. 26; cf. 32). It has increasingly been found to have Anglo-Saxon analogues, suggesting its comparative value for Anglo-Saxon culture, though the point cannot be developed here.[187] The first half (st. 26–30) concentrates on Gerðr's banishment to 'hrímþursa hallar' ('the halls of frost-*þursar*', st. 30), the second on her sexual frustration and how she will suffer the attentions of monsters: 'með þursi þríhǫfðoðom | þú scalt æ nara, / eða verlauss vera' ('You (will) have to linger forever with a three-headed *þurs*, or be without a man', st. 30–36 at 31). Skírnir concludes with a declaration partly paralleled by the Bergen rune-stave (st. 36):

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[187] On similarities to the Old English poem *The Wife's Lament* see Orton 1989; Luyster 1998; Hall 2002, 10–11; Skírnir's imagery of a thistle also seems to have an Old English analogue (Harris 2002); and I would argue that the Old English *Wen Charm* (ed. Dobbie 1942, 128) reflects a similar tradition. For Skírnir's rune-carved *tamsvǫndr* see Orton's argument that one text of the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* assumes the use of a rune-carved stave for magical purposes (2003) and the suggestion that the runes in *The Husband's Message* may also allude to love-magic (recently Niles 2003b, 221). Orton (1999, 227–28) has also emphasised similarities between the narrative patterns of *Skírnismál* and *Þrymskviða*, so it is of interest that McKinnell has suggested that the story of *Þrymskviða* may be related to the same traditions as nineteenth-century 'wooing plays' in Northern England (2001, 334–38), while Orton has noted a shared motif between *Þrymskviða* and *The Husband's Message* (1999, 228; Taylor 1994 also emphasised similarities between *Þrymskviða* and *Vǫlundarkviða*, though these are less striking).

Þurs ríst ec þér   oc þriá stafi,
        ergi oc œði   oc óþola;
svá ec þat af ríst,   sem ec þat á reist,
        ef goraz þarfar þess.

I carve *þurs* [rune-name]/a *þurs*, and three letters/runes: *ergi*/lust and *œði*/frenzy and *óþola*/restlessness; thus I can carve it off just as I carved it on—if required.

All this prompts Gerðr to a change of heart and she extends her hospitality to Skírnir. Skírnir employs magic to threaten Gerðr with sexual frustration (which is like Hulð's opening gambit), but also with the implicitly sexual attentions of monsters, which is reminiscent of the *mara* which besets Vanlandi. Identifying the in-group and the out-group in this poem is more complex than usual, since although Gerðr is one of the *jǫtnar*, her position—the lone maiden threatened by her brother's slayer—invites sympathy (cf. Larrington 1992).

That the curse in *Skírnismál* is not merely a literary device is shown by a similar text, carved on a fourteenth-century rune-stave found in Bergen. It concludes with letters without linguistic meaning, but the bulk of the text is a charm in Eddaic metre (ed. Liestøl 1964, 41):

Ríst ek bótrúnar,
ríst ek bjargrúnar,
einfalt við alfum,
tvífalt við trollum,
þrífalt við þursum
----
við inni skœðu
'skag'-valkyrju
svát ei megi
þótt æ vili
lævis kona
lífi þínu
----
ek sendi þér,
ek síða þér
ylgjar ergi ok úþola.
Á þér renni úþóli
ok 'ioluns' móð.
Sittu aldri,
sof þu aldri
----
ant mér sem sjalfri þér.

I carve remedy-runes,
I carve protection runes,
once over by *álfar*,
twice over by *trǫll* ('?magic-workers, trolls')
thrice over by *þursar* ('?magic-workers, giants')
----
by the harmful
'?skag'-*valkyrja*,
so that you may have no power of action
though you always want,
?crafty woman,
in your life

I send to you,
I *síða* to you
a she-wolf's lust and restlessness.
May restlessness come over you
and a *jǫtunn*'s fury (reading *iotuns*).
Never sit,
never sleep.
----
love me as you love yourself.

Whether this and *Skírnismál* show life imitating art or art imitating life (or both), it appears that someone really did carve runes, using the formula *ríst ek*, to curse a woman with *ergi* and *úþola*—presumably, as in *Skírnismál*, to win her sexual favours.[188] Moreover, the rune-stave explicitly denotes the love-magic with the verb *síða*, linking the magic of the stave and through it *Skírnismál* both to the seduction of Vanlandi and to the word *ælfsiden*. The translation of *við* in the phrase *við alfum* is problematic: it would

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[188] Cf. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* chs 73, 72, in which a youth's botched attempt to use a stick carved with runes to win a girl's love cause her illness (ed. Nordal 1933, 229–30, 238).

normally be expected to mean 'against', but this seems not to make much sense here since the charm does not seek to protect its object from supernatural threats, but to coerce her. Presumably, then, the *álfar*—and *trǫll*, *þursar* and perhaps the *valkyrja*—are being invoked, which is possible if we infer a more unusual instrumental usage (better attested in prose) or the sense 'together with' (Cleasby–Vigfusson 1957, A.III.2; Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, s.v. *við* 1 §§B.1, B.7).

It is also of interest, of course, that the rune-stave mentions *álfar*. Nor is its invocation unique: in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, from around the second half of the fourteenth century, the eponymous hero Bósi is rescued from a death-sentence by the *töfrar* ('sorcery, charms') of his friend Busla; her spells offer various parallels to *Skírnismál* and the Bergen stave, among them the one stanza quoted from her second spell (ed. Guðni Jónsson–Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44, ɪɪ 474):

Tröll ok álfar ok töfrnornir, búar, bergrisar brenni þínar hallir, hati þik hrímþursar, hestar streði þik, stráin strangi þik, en stormar æri þik, ok vei verði þér, nema þú vilja minn gerir.	May trolls and *álfar* and magic-*nornir*, dwellers (cf. *haugbúar*, 'burial mound- dwellers'?), mountain-giants, burn your halls, frost-*þursar* despise you, horses bugger you, the straws sting you, and gales drive you mad, and woe befall you, unless you do my will.

Unfortunately, little can be deduced from these occurrences. The fact that *álfar* appear alongside *trǫll* and *þursar* might suggest demonisation. But in some modern Norwegian dialects, the reflexes of *þurs* have undergone some amelioration, moving towards the reflexes of *álfr* in meaning (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2003, 176). Equally, their association in the charm may simply reflect a common association with (love-)magic.

2.2 The *Gesta Danorum*

Dronke has observed that *Skírnismál* shares much with Saxo Grammaticus's story of Othinus's efforts to woo Rinda in Book 3.4 of his *Gesta Danorum* (1962, 251, 267–68; ed. Olrik–Ræder 1931–57, ɪ 70–72). Saxo had Icelandic sources (Bjarni Guðnason 1981), but similarities between the two could reflect more general cultural similarities or contacts. The *Gesta*, composed around 1216×23, is a relatively early source, but Saxo at times adapted his material substantially, and of course was writing in Latin (*Othinus* is a Latinisation of *Óðinn*, *Rinda* of *Rindr*). Even so, his narrative provides some convincing comparisons to *Skírnismál*; it can also be argued that it implies the existence of a yet more similar predecessor. In Saxo's narrative, there is no intermediary between the wooer and his object. Othinus is told by 'Rostiophus Phinnicus' ('Hrossþjófr the Finn') that his dead son Balderus will be avenged by a son begotten by Othinus on Rinda, daughter of the king of the Ruteni. Like Hulð, Fann's emissaries and Skírnir, he defeats

the king's enemies, but Rinda spurns him even so. Next he disguises himself as a smith, trying, like Skírnir, to woo with offers of rings, but is rejected again. Then he takes a warrior's form once more, and this time, Rinda shoves him, so hard that he falls to the floor; in revenge, he 'Quam protinus cortice carminibus adnotato contingens lymphanti similem reddidit' ('touching her straight away with bark on which charms were written, gave in return the appearance of being possessed'). The *cortex carminibus adnotatus*, as a carved piece of tree with which one can touch a person to cause them harm, is similar to Skírnir's rune-carved *tamsvǫndr*, and its effect generally similar to the violent vision visited upon Cú Chulainn. Finally Othinus disguises himself as a woman called Wecha and joins the princess's household. When Rinda falls ill with a fever, Othinus offers to cure her but explains that Rinda must be tied down because the bitterness of the cure would otherwise overcome her. When Rinda has been tied down, Othinus rapes her. This stage of the narrative associates fever with rape by an otherworldly being, and is consequently reminiscent of the *ælfsiden* cluster of texts. It also recalls Huld's *mara*: the *mara* seems to be a witch who transforms herself to assault someone in his bed; Othinus for his part also transforms himself, this time into a woman, and rapes someone in her bed.

Saxo, then, affords another parallel for an otherworldly male using magic to inflict illness in the context of seduction. His account is paralleled by a story which Óðinn tells while disguised as Hárbarðr in stanzas 20–22 of *Hárbarðsljóð* (ed. Neckel 1962, 81–82):

Hárbarðr qvað:	Hárbarðr said:
'Miclar manvélar ec hafða við myrcriðor,	'I had great love-thefts among dark-riders,
þá er ec vélta þær frá verom;	when I stole them from their men;
harðan iǫtun ec hugða Hlébarð vera,	I thought that Hlébarð was a tough *jǫtunn*,
gaf hann mér gambantein,	he gave me a *gambanteinn*
enn ec vélta hann ór viti.'	and I stole him from his wits.'
Þórr qvað:	Þórr said:
'Illom huga launaðir þú þá góðar giafar.'	'You repaid good gifts with an evil mind.'
Hárbarðr qvað:	Hárbarðr said:
'Þat hefir eic, er af annarri scefr,	'The oak has what it carves from another—
um sic er hverr í slíco.'	each man for himself in such things.'

Here Óðinn implicitly claims to have seduced a woman or women of Hlébarðr's, to have received a *gambanteinn* ('?magic twig')—an implement which Skírnir also uses, and which may be identical with his *tamsvǫndr*—and to have inflicted madness (implicitly by using the *gambanteinn*). *Hárbarðsljóð* seems to suggest that Óðinn used the wand on the *jǫtunn* Hlébarðr rather than on the women he was seducing, but even so, the cluster of motifs recalls Saxo's story. However, both the parallels between Saxo's narrative and *Skírnismál*, and its internal coherence, would be neater if Othinus's wooing comprised

only three stages, the last two stages of his wooing arguably originating as only one component in the story. The European predilection for triads in story-telling encourages one to expect a three-stage narrative (see Olrik 1965 [1909], 132–34), and suspiciously, Othinus takes for his third wooing a guise which he has already used, that of the warrior, while the madness with which he afflicts Rinda at this point serves no narrative purpose. It is unclear why at the fourth stage, in the guise of the handmaid Wecha, he has to wait for fever to befall Rinda when he is evidently capable of inflicting similar maladies. Moreover, *Wecha* seems to be a Latinisation of *vitka, putatively a feminine form of *vitki* ('magician'; Ellis Davidson–Fisher 1979–80, II 57 n. 44; cf. the Old English cognates *wicca~wicce*), and it is in this guise that we might obviously expect to find Othinus using magic. These observations all suggest that Saxo or his sources divided the last episode of an earlier version in which Óðinn offered Rinda jewellery and perhaps (by inference from his appearance as a warrior and from Skírnir's actions in *Skírnismál*) threatened her with violence; but for his third attempt, resorted to magic. He took the guise of a woman called *Vitka* (or perhaps the guise of a *vitka) and struck Rindr with a piece of inscribed bark to inflict madness and/or fever on her, after which he was able to rape her. The narrative was perhaps changed to dilute its dense clustering of magic and male cross-dressing—each deeply improper in Saxo's morality.

    Saxo's narrative has another analogue, moreover, which suggests that Othinus's love-magic was identified specifically as *seiðr*. Óðinn's seduction of Rindr is described once outside the *Gesta Danorum*, in a line of stanza 3 of Kormakr Ǫgmundarson's *Sigurðarkviða*, praising Sigurðr jarl, who ruled around Trondheim in the mid-tenth century; like other such praise-poems, it is assumed to be genuine. Kormakr's verse mentions that 'Óðinn seið til Rindar' ('Óðinn ?enchanted Rindr'; ed. Finnur Jónsson 1912, BI 69), denoting Óðinn's magical seduction of Rindr with *síða*.[189] In itself, this suggests that Kormakr thought *seiðr* to have been integral to Óðinn's wooing of Rindr. Moreover, Óðinn is associated with *seiðr* once elsewhere in the poetic corpus (admittedly by emendation from *síga*, but this does not seem to be doubted), in stanza 24 of *Lokasenna*, where Loki indicts him with the accusation:

'Enn þic síða [MS *síga*] kóðo   Sámseyo í,
    oc draptu á vétt sem vǫlor;
vitca líki   fórtu verþióð yfir,
    oc hugða ec þat args aðal.'
	'But they said that you performed *seiðr* on Sámsey, and beat on a ?lid like a *vǫlva* [female magic-worker]; in a *vitku*'s [prohetess's] body you traversed humanity, and I consider that the nature of an *argr* man.'

[189] Cf. Finnur's 'Odin fik Rind ved sejd' ('Óðinn took Rindr by *seiðr*'). The precise force of *til* is not clear: concievably Óðinn *seið* towards Rindr; but *síða til* may simply by an otherwise unattested prepositional verb, with a specific meaning which is irrecoverable.

Much has been made of this stanza and much has been debated (see See and others 1997–, II 430–35). It has long been noted that Loki might be alluding here to Óðinn's wooing of Rindr, and the consequent implication that Óðinn was not only *argr* here, but being so in order to win a woman, fits with McKinnell's observation that the stanza comes in a sequence of accusations of morally dubious sexual exploits, and that the entry of Óðinn into the fray, which prompts stanza 24, is itself prompted by an allusion of Loki's in stanza 20 to Óðinn's prostitution of himself for the mead of poetry (1986–89, esp. 241–46). Moreover, if Loki does refer in *Lokasenna* stanza 24 to Óðinn's seduction of Rindr, it would be an action for which he himself had set Óðinn up in causing the slaying of Baldr and, if Saxo's Rostiophus is to be identified with Loki, as Ellis-Davidson argued (Ellis Davidson–Fisher 1979–80, II 56 n. 37), in causing Óðinn to try to seduce Rindr—an irony characteristic of his invective in *Lokasenna* (see McKinnell 1986–89, 253–55).[190] The argument that in Saxo's sources, Othinus employed cross-dressing and *seiðr* to woo Rindr, is, then, well-paralleled.

2.3 Evidence for *ælfe*

These texts, then, show that male otherworldly beings might be associated with the cluster of seduction, *seiðr*, and inflicting madness or fever with which we find *ælfe* associated in Anglo-Saxon material. They also suggest, however, that this transgressed proper masculine behaviour (cf. §6:3.1): however we label Skírnir's magical activities, it seems clear that men's lust causes the loss of self-control to desire, and the loss of the power and independence which characterised masculine gendering in medieval Scandinavia (cf. Clover 1993). Even worse than the lovestruck Cú Chulainn or Vanlandi, they are reduced to underhand ploys to gain their desires. In *Skírnismál*, Freyr is reduced to sitting alone indoors (stanza 3; cf. Heinrichs 1997). Action to remedy his situation is instigated only by Skaði, his stepmother. Freyr agrees to give his sword to Skírnir in payment for Skírnir's services (stanzas 8–9)—a powerful symbol of Freyr's loss of masculinity (albeit one developed more by *Lokasenna* and Snorri than by *Skírnismál*: see Bibire 1986, 35–38). Skírnir for his part finds that the usual sources of male power—wealth and violence—will not avail him in the face of Gerðr's intransigence, and is reduced instead to using magic. Skírnir's problems are repeated for Othinus, whose responses—magic and disguise as a woman—are similar to Skírnir's. If we are to see Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* to have been associated with seduction, magic and illness through

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[190] Though for reasons which he did not make clear, McKinnell himself did not believe that stanza 24 could relate to the theme of sexual immorality (1986–89, 243–44).

narratives similar to Freyr's and Othinus's, then, we are invited also to see their masculinity compromised, at least as it was usually defined by the in-group.

Unfortunately, there are no close early Irish comparisons this time to help show that narratives of this sort were in circulation before the twelfth century or in the British Isles. Learned love-magic certainly existed in Wales by the early tenth century: folio 60r of Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, MS Voss. Lat. Q. 2, a Welsh manuscript of the late ninth century or the early tenth, contains a long Latin love-charm (discussed by Dronke 1988), and Middle Welsh and early Irish texts do afford some more general analogues for the association of males with seduction, magic and illness.[191] However, Marie de France's Anglo-Norman *Yonec*, from around the 1150s or 1160s, suggests that the themes in *Skírnismál* and the *Gesta Danorum* need not have been uniquely Scandinavian. *Yonec* is set around Caerwent in Wales and is, then, a relatively early text with British connections. Admittedly, Muldumarec, the seducing otherworldly *chevaler* ('knight'), does not face the degree of resistance offered by Gerðr and Rinda, and employs neither violence, bribery or magic. However, the lady whom he seduces does impose the proviso that she will accept his love only 'S'en Deu creïst' ('if he believed in God', line 139; ed. Ewert 1995, 85). To prove this, Muldumarec takes on her form and pretends to be suffering from *mal* ('pain, disease, affliction', line 157; ed. Ewert 1995, 86), thus having an excuse to take the sacrament (presumably for its healing properties, rather as the *viaticum*), so proving his Christianity. This narrative includes an initial rejection of the suit prompting the seducer to change his guise to a woman's; meanwhile, the illness assumed by Muldumarec while in the lady's form is reminiscent of the infliction of fever and related ailments imposed on the seduced in the course particularly of Fann's and Othinus's wooings. If nothing else, *Yonec* shows that there was a wider North-West European context for narratives of male otherworldly beings using magical methods in their seductions.[192]

Although the seductions by Drífa and Fann provide the densest cluster of parallels for the Old English medical texts containing *ælf*, then, several Scandinavian texts attesting to otherworldly males' magical seduction and infliction of illness (arguably using *seiðr*) also provide good parallels for both Drífa and Fann and for the Old English material, and *Yonec* in particular suggests that these were not uniquely Scandinavian. At the same time, they also suggest that these actions involved male gender transgression. This both emphasises the widespread character of core ideas identified in §6:3 and, crucially for

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[191] e.g. *Math uab Mathonwy* (ed. Williams 1930, 67–92, esp. 67–74; cf. Higley 1994; Valente 1988); the account of Codal in the Old Irish metrical *Dindsenchas* (ed. Gwynn 1903–24, IV 268–71).
[192] The first half of the twentieth century saw much discussion of how far the origins of Old French *lais* like *Yonec* are to be understood as 'Celtic' (see Illingworth 1960–61, with refs), but I prefer to emphasise wider cultural continuities.

present purposes, shows that the preponderance of female otherworldly beings in our early Irish and high medieval European narratives does not mean that male otherworldly beings were not associated with similar motifs.

3. *Vǫlundarkviða* again

As I have discussed (§2:3.2), *Vǫlundarkviða* is relevant to *ælfe* in having a protagonist who is an *álfr* and in having some connections to Anglo-Saxon culture; it also involves the seduction or rape of a member of the in-group by an otherworldly being—implicitly in the poem itself, but more clearly in its analogues. Without mentions of *mǫrur* or *seiðr*, or illness or madness as a means of seduction, *Vǫlundarkviða*'s narrative is linked only tendentiously to the evidence of the Old English medical texts: Vǫlundr instead utilises violence (stanza 41) and tacit female compliance (cf. McKinnell 1990, 21–22; Dronke 1997, 319–20). Moreover, concepts of in-group and out-group in the poem are complex: in *Vǫlundarkviða*'s opening stanzas, our perspective is with Vǫlundr as he faces a group of otherworldly females. But after the dissolution of Vǫlundr's own in-group, the audience's perspective is partially re-orientated to that of the Njárar, Bǫðvildr's people. Even so, *Vǫlundarkviða* consolidates some themes concerning otherworldly beings, seduction, gendering, and perhaps magic, and features otherworldly females prominently. Their relations with Vǫlundr provide useful contexts for understanding the gendering of *ælfe*.

Everything that happens in *Vǫlundarkviða* can arguably be traced back to the arrival, in its opening stanzas, of three *meyjar* (ed. Neckel 1962, 117):

Meyiar flugo sunnan,   myrcvið í gognum, alvitur ungar [MS *alvitr unga*],   ørlǫg drýgia; þær á sævar strǫnd   settuz at hvílaz, drósir suðrœnar,   dýrt lín spunno.

Maidens flew from the south, through Myrkviðr young *alvitur*, to follow/determine fate there on the shore of the sea/lake they paused to rest, southern ladies, they spun expensive linen.

Ein nam þeira   Egil at veria, fǫgr mær fira,   faðmi liósom; ǫnnor var Svanhvít,   svanfiaðrar dró; enn in þriðia,   þeira systir, varði hvítan   háls Vǫlundar.

One of them took Egill, to embrace/protect him, the fair maiden of men, to her bright breast; the second was Svanhvít (Swan-white), she cast off her swan-cloak; and the third, their sister, guarded the white neck of Vǫlundr.

Hines (2003, 35) has argued that in Norse mythological literature,

the power of the female, to captivate and outwit the male as well as in her special craft—spinning and weaving yarn and fate—is taken as one of the givens of the dramatic scene: the *ørlǫg seggia*,

'declaring of fate', that the *meyiar margs vitandi*, 'maidens knowing about many things', lay down for men.

This certainly applies well to *Vǫlundarkviða*; nor is the association of women with shaping the future without Anglo-Saxon comparisons.[193] This female power to determine Vǫlundr's life is symbolised by a ring: Vǫlundr makes it for his *mey*, arguably to bring her home (see below); Níðuðr takes it, its absence making Vǫlundr imagine her to have returned, which leads to Vǫlundr being captured and hamstrung; Níðuðr gives it to Bǫðvildr, whose desire to have it mended leads her into Vǫlundr's power and to the culmination of Vǫlundr's revenge (cf. McKinnell 1990, 16–19). The first two stanzas, then, provide the necessary narrative conditions for the story as *Vǫlundarkviða* tells it; and they situate the beginnings of events with seductive otherworldly females. As McKinnell commented, 'it seems clear that the poet stresses the role of women in the story largely because his attitude to them is consistently suspicious; he portrays them as selfish [and] insincere' (1990, 22).

The opening of *Vǫlundarkviða* has received curiously little attention in the study of medieval Scandinavian supernatural females.[194] Studies of the poem have instead emphasised comparison with folk-tales of swan-maidens, while McKinnell pointed to parallels with the Old French *fées*.[195] These comparisons are helpful, but should not, I think, exclude *Vǫlundarkviða*'s *meyjar* from the mainstream traditions of Norse supernatural females: they are examples of a continuum of otherworldly females whom we might generally label *dísir* (see also §§2:2, 8:2). As the applicability to *Vǫlundarkviða* of Hines's quotation above suggests, we are surely dealing here with a well-established Norse mythological theme; *Vǫlundarkviða*'s *meyjar* are similar to the three canonically mythological 'meyjar, margs vitandi ('maidens, knowing much') coming from a *sær* ('large body of water') and shaping the fate of men in *Vǫluspá* stanza 20.[196] Like Cú Chulainn, faced with Fann's seduction, or Freyr, seeing Gerðr for the first

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[193] On spinning and weaving as means of shaping the future in early medieval European culture see generally Enright 1996, 109–21; cf. 1990; Moltke 1985, 358–60; Flint 1991, 226–28. On prophetic women in Anglo-Saxon culture, Robinson 1993 [1988].

[194] It is, for example, omitted from the mythological surveys of Vries (1956–57) and Turville-Petre (1964), and the specialist studies of Ström (1954) and Jochens (1996); and it was summarily dismissed by Kroesen (1997, 137). Dronke stated likewise that 'it is important to note that the swan maidens of *Vkv* are not valkyries, although the prose prologue calls them so with great confidence' (1997, 301–302, at 301), but her reading is ill-justified; cf. the circular argumentation in her note to stanza 15, lines 5–8 (1997, 313).

[195] Holmström 1919; Hatto 1961; Burson 1983; Motz 1986–89, 52–58; McKinnell 1990, 16–17.

[196] This trio is identified in scholarship as 'the Norns', but only because Snorri says (presumably on the basis of this stanza), 'Þar stendr salr einn fagr undir askinum við brunninn, ok ór þeim sal koma þrjár meyjar þær er svá heita: Urðr, Verðandi, Skuld. Þessar meyjar skapa mǫnnum aldr. Þær kǫllum vér nornir' ('A beautiful hall stands there under the ash beside a spring/pool, and from that

time, Vǫlundr and his brothers are disempowered by the swan-maidens, implicitly partly by their spinning. They take the men into their protection, with the verbs *verja* ('cover, clothe, embrace') and *varða* ('guard, protect'), a motif well-paralleled by other otherworldly females in the Poetic Edda (cf. §8:2). Without this protection, Vǫlundr is left vulnerable.

This reading relates to a long-standing crux: why Vǫlundr's neck, as the *mey* puts her protective arms about it, is described as *hvítr*, when whiteness and brightness are almost invariably associated in Eddaic poetry with female beauty.[197] Motz saw the adjective to associate Vǫlundr with the swan-maidens (1986–89, 57), which it does, but her point does not distract from its connotations of femininity. McKinnell argued that 'fair skin is probably an indication of noble birth here' (1990, 9–10), on the basis of the description of the noble woman Móðir ('Mother') in stanza 29 of *Rígsþula* (ed. Neckel 1962, 284), declaring her

brún biartari, brióst liósara,	brow brighter, breast lighter,
háls hvítari hreinni miǫllo.	neck whiter than new-fallen snow.

But this associates Móðir's white neck inextricably with feminine beauty. The only other serious exceptions to the rule that only women are *hvítr* pertain to Heimdallr, one of the *vanir*.[198] Heimdallr is called 'sveinn inn hvíti' ('the white boy'; st. 20) by Loki in *Lokasenna* and 'hvítastr ása' ('whitest of *æsir*'; st. 15) in *Þrymskviða*. In the first instance, Heimdallr is being insulted (albeit indirectly, as at this point Loki is reminding Gefjon that she prostituted herself to Heimdallr; ed. Neckel 1962, 100). Meanwhile, *Þrymskviða* (ed. Neckel 1962, 113) says

hall come three maidens who are named thus: Urðr ['become'], Verðandi ['becoming'], Skuld ['will be']. These maidens shape the lives of people. We call them *nornir*'; ed. Faulkes 1982, 18). Even this is not evidence for the existence in Norse mythology of 'the Norns', three female shapers of fate—merely that these three *meyjar* are *nornir*. Statements like 'poets use the word *dísir* as if it meant "norns" ' (Turville-Petre 1964, 222) invert our evidence (cf. Ström 1954, esp. 80–95). Moreover, it is not unlikely that Snorri's naming of his three *nornir* derives from the Classical *Parcae* and their governance of past, present and future (Vries 1956–57, 272 n. 6; for the similarity of the *parcae* and Snorri's *nornir* see Bauschatz 1975, 55, 59–63; for possible Classical influence on *Vǫluspá* see Dronke 1997, 93–104).

[197] To offer only a few examples, *Vǫlundarkviða*'s *meyjar* are *ljóss* ('light, bright'), as are women in *Hávamál* 92 and *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 53; in *Hávamál*, Óðinn describes his desire for 'Billings mey … sólhvíta' (Billingr's sun-white maid', st. 97), while Þórr's daughter is in *Alvíssmál* called 'miallhvíta man' ('the snow-white maid'; st. 7); *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* calls Sigrún 'sólbjǫrt' ('sun-bright'; st. 45) and 'hvít' ('white'; st. 48), the latter word being used also of Erna in *Rígsþula* (st. 39) and Svanhildr in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* (st. 55). Cf. §4:2.

[198] Helgi Hundingsbani is, while a boy, characterised in stanza 9 of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* as 'álmr ítrborinn, ynðis lióma' ('a high-born elm, a ray of delight'; ed. Neckel 1962, 131), and *Rígsþula* stanza 34 says of the child Jarl that 'bleict var hár, biartir vangar' ('pale was the hair, bright the cheeks'; ed. Neckel 1962, 285). But, prodigious though Helgi was, boys were not considered yet to be masculine (Clover 1993), so these descriptions are in a different category from similar descriptions of grown men.

Þá qvað þat Heimdallr, hvítastr ása— vissi hann vel fram, sem vanir aðrir—: 'Bindo vér Þór þá brúðar líni, hafi hann iþ micla men Brísinga!'	Then Heimdallr, the *hvítastr* of the *æsir*— he knew well what was to come, like the other *vanir*—said this: 'Then let's dress Þórr in a bridal veil, let him wear the necklace of the great *Brísingar*!'

Here, Heimdallr proposes that Þórr wear women's clothing to disguise himself as Freyja. As Þórr points out, doing so would prompt the accusation that he is *argr* (stanza 17, ed. Neckel 1962, 113), so it is surely appropriate that the suggestion comes from the *hvítastr ása*, arguably 'the most effeminate of the *æsir*'. Vǫlundr is described as *hvítr*, then, in an allusion to his disempowerment at the hands of a seductive women. It is interesting, of course, that Heimdallr is a *vanr* here, as I have argued above that the *vanir* were identical with the *álfar*. Some have argued that associations of *álfar* and *ælfe* with beauty explain Vǫlundr's white neck, or that the whiteness is an echo of *álfr*'s etymological association with whiteness (see See and others 1997–, III 140). Both of these points may be true. They do not detract from the pejorative character of *hvítr* in its poetic context: rather, they might be taken to suggest that associations of *álfar* with feminine beauty and gender transgression were old, and reflected in their Germanic nomenclature.

It is surely not a surprise, then, that Vǫlundr is absent from the action when his brothers discover the absence of the swan-maidens, and that unlike them he does not set off in search of his partner but remains at home. This critical reading of Vǫlundr seems hitherto to have been avoided, but it is well-paralleled by the Freyr in *Skírnismál* and Cú Chulainn in *Serglige Con Culainn*. Moreover, Vǫlundr arguably does respond actively to his abandonment, in a way which is consonant with his emasculated status and with the reactions to failed seduction of Skírnir and Othinus: in making (arm-)rings upon losing his swan-maiden (stanza 5), Vǫlundr is arguably effecting some kind of love-magic in an attempt to bring his swan-maiden back to him (Motz 1983–86, 60–61; McKinnell 1990, 17–18; cf. Dronke 1997, 269). McKinnell argued further that subsequent events in the poem are an unintended consequence of this action—the ring brings Vǫlundr into a sexual relationship with a woman, but neither in the way, nor with the woman, that Vǫlundr intended. These readings are undeniably speculative; nor would it be wise to be dogmatic about them. Rather, I suppose that they were probably part of the potential meaning of the poem in its cultural context, and available but not inevitable; the manufacture of rings creates at one and the same time the kind of gift which a wooer might offer a woman, and potentially the binding of her will by magical means. The reading would provide a neat counterpart to my reading of the swan-maidens' spinning to shape the fate of Vǫlundr and his brothers. The use of the quintessential form of

woman's manufacture as a means of shaping the future is matched by an appropriate male equivalent, metalworking (cf. §8:3).

Turning to the perspective of Bǫðvildr and the group to which she belongs, *Vǫlundarkviða* associates its *álfr* amongst other things with sexual threats. This is consistent with the other narratives of otherworldly beings considered here. Like some of these as well, *Vǫlundarkviða*, as I have argued above (§2:3.2, 2:4), also suggests that otherworldly beings caused harm in revenge for transgressions—in Vǫlundr's case, avenging his maltreatment by Níðuðr—and emphasises the risk taken by Níðuðr's children in leaving the safety of their immediate community. Finally, however, it provides an unusually clear context for supposing that stories of *ælfe* could provide a discourse through which individuals and communities could discuss unsanctioned sexual relationships.

For Bǫðvildr, sex with Vǫlundr has a silver lining, however: it leads in other versions of the story to the birth of a hero, Vitki in *Þiðreks saga* and Widia in English tradition (see *Waldere II* lines 4, 9; ed. Zettersten 1979, 19; cf. *Deor* lines 1–12; ed. Malone 1949, 23–24). In another layer of meaning, then, shame is counterbalanced with pride, and an explanation of a hero's prowess provided by his lineage. This narrative is not dissimilar to that of Othinus and Rinda—though the comparisons can be overstated (e.g. Ellis Davidson 1969, 218–19)—and is well-paralleled by Classical accounts of gods seducing mortal maidens (see Lefkowitz 1993). But comparisons in our evidence for *ælfe* are not available.

Vǫlundarkviða, then, does not offer a clear and close parallel to the Old English medical texts in the way that narratives like Drífa's do. However, it contextualises the other evidence considered above in useful ways, by repeating a number of themes and linking them lexically with *álfr* and more generally with Anglo-Scandinavian culture. Viewed from Vǫlundr's perspective, as a male seduced by an otherworldly female, *Vǫlundarkviða* provides a case-study in the idea that desire for a woman might disempower males, even supernatural ones, leading them to degrading ends. Vǫlundr is made *hvítr* by his love, and arguably led by it to use love-magic; either way, he is captured in his sleep because of it; he is hamstrung by a queen; his sword stolen; and his escape effected by transformation, not, as in stories of Óðinn, to an eagle, but, to judge by his webbed feet (*fitjar*, stanza 29), to some sort of waterfowl, more than anything like the *mey* who first seduced him (cf. Burson 1983, 6–8, 11–12). While the seductive powers of women are clearly construed as threats to men in these texts, criticism falls also upon the men in each case, for surrending their independence of mind. Moreover, Vǫlundr's revenge is commensurate with his disempowerment, involving the murder of

boys and the seduction/rape of a girl. These points show clearly that male supernatural beings might be associated with characteristics and activities which were normally deemed improper to men, and will be important in establishing the relationship of *ælfe* to Anglo-Saxon gendering.

4. The Scottish witchcraft trials

I hardly need mention the chronological distance between Anglo-Saxon England and my last comparison, but the early modern Scottish witchcraft trials cannot be ignored.[199] They contain our earliest clearly traceable articulations of beliefs relating to elves (Scots *elvis*) from people other than members of the literate elites—in particular poor, illiterate women, the group least-represented in Anglo-Saxon sources.[200] In addition, there is reason to suppose that beliefs among such social groups had been less affected by Christianisation and other social, political and cultural change than among the groups which produced our medieval sources, affording special evidence for cultural strata which may reflect and illuminate Anglo-Saxon beliefs.[201] Moreover, Scotland seems in some important respects to have been culturally more conservative than England— particularly regarding healers' strategies for claiming special sources of power.[202] The large number of Scottish trials and the predilection of Scottish prosecutors for viewing all folk-healing as witchcraft has produced a not insubstantial corpus of trials in which the accused mentions *elvis* or *fareis*.[203] A full survey of the material is not possible here.[204] Here, I focus on just two trials which particularly illuminate the Anglo-Saxon material, Andro Man's and Elspeth Reoch's, followed by another, Issobel Gowdie's, in Chapter 8.

[199] Now conveniently martialled using the *Survey of Scottish Witchcraft* (Goodare–Martin–Miller–Yeoman 2003), conceived as 'an extensive database of all people known to have been accused of witchcraft in Scotland between 1563 and 1736', the quotation being from the 'Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database Documentation and Description' to be downloaded with the database itself, p. 55.
[200] Larner 1981, 89–102; see also Goodare 1998; Yeoman 2002.
[201] For the classic example of continuity compare the *Our Lord forth raide* charm (ed. Chambers 1861, II 153; cf. Catherine Caray, Orkney, 1616) with the Second Merseburg Charm (ed. Steinmeyer 1916, 365; cf. Grendon 1909, 148–49; Branston 1957, 38–39; Larner 1981, 140; for later, English examples see Davies 1996, 26–27). See also Niles 1980.
[202] See Davies, forthcoming; cf. 2003, 70, 182–84; Purkiss 2000, 85–193; Wilby 2000.
[203] For some of the debate underlying these inferences see, in addition to Davies and Purkiss, Macdonald (2002, esp. 45–46). The *Survey of Scottish Witchcraft* counted 3,837 individual Scottish cases, and overlooked some besides; it gave 113 cases with a 'fairies' characterisation (though this figure requires modification—Hall forthcoming [d]—and of course most trials offer too little evidence to be useful). Of these 113, 40—or 35%—also have either or both of the characterisations 'Folk Healing' and 'White Magic' ('Folk Healing' and/or 'White Magic' occur themselves in 181 cases).
[204] See Henderson–Cowan 2001; Purkiss 2000, especially 85–157; 2001; Wilby 2000; Hall forthcoming [d]; cf. Maxwell-Stuart 2001; Hutton 2002, especially 27–32.

The trials provide narrative evidence, but unlike the texts considered above, these narratives are not literary. They make it possible to glimpse how narratives concerning *elvis* could be part of their tellers' day-to-day construction of reality. Unfortunately, the trials tend to be no more informative than the Old English medical texts about the role of *elvis* in causing illness, for the obvious reason that they focus instead on witches as sources of supernatural harm (cf. Hall forthcoming [d]), but their perspectives remain valuable. Moreover, unlike the Irish and Norse narratives considered above, much of the Scottish evidence represents a direct continuation of the history of *elf*'s medieval semantics, since most of the trials, and all those cited here, come from English-speaking areas. Of our various sixteenth- and seventeenth-century attestations of north-west European fairy-lore, then, Scotland's is pertinent here in special ways. This is particularly noteworthy because the Scottish trials are a case-study in the historiographical assumption that fairy-lore is in origin 'Celtic', the trials in lowland, English-speaking areas showing influence from the fairy-lore of Highland Gaelic-speakers (e.g. Maxwell-Stuart 2001, 10–17, esp. 15–16, *et passim*; Hutton 2002, 31–32). There is no question that English-speakers' culture underwent different kinds and degrees of cultural contact with Celtic- and Norse-speaking communities in Scotland from in England. But Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* prove to have been at least broadly similar to the Scottish *elvis* (cf. §3), and in some respects startlingly so (see also §8:3).

Of course, using the witchcraft trials as evidence for traditional beliefs is predicated on identifying features which represent the beliefs of the accused rather than those of their educated prosecutors—who could shape the narratives produced throughout proceedings, from before the point of arrest to the later transcription of primary records. However, recent approaches to the subject[205] tend to agree with Larner's insight (1981, 136) that

> witch confessions represent an agreed story between witch and inquisitor in which the witch drew, through hallucination or imagination, on a common store of myth, fantasy, and nightmare, to respond to the inquisitor's questions. As a source for this common store the confessions are invaluable.

In the absence of original depositions (used by Kieckhefer 1976), or even records of the questions which prosecutors asked (cf. Sullivan 1999, esp. 1–20), it is hard to be sure what elements in a confession derived from elite ideas about witchcraft and demonology. But, as Ginzburg showed in his seminal study *I Benandanti* (1983 [1966]), it is relatively easy to judge when we have elements which do *not* derive from these ideologies. The literacy of the elites means that their interests and preconceptions are reasonably well-

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[205] See prominently Larner 1981, 134–74; Henderson–Cowan 2001, esp. 118–36; Macdonald 2002; and more generally Broedel 2003; Ginzburg 1983 [1966]; Kieckhefer 1976, esp. 1–9, 73–102; cf. Burke 1994, 65–87; Sullivan 1999, esp. 1–20.

attested; we can be reasonably confident that elements in statements by the accused which differ from these substantially, especially when the records themselves suggest that they conflicted with prosecutors' ideologies, are reliable evidence for some stratum in the beliefs of the accused. This evidence can afford models for interpreting the Anglo-Saxon material. It may even evince continuity of belief, more directly illuminating the early medieval situation, and potentially underpinning some long-standing assumptions in scholarship on the trials about continuity in belief between pre-conversion and early modern Europe.

4.1 Andro Man

The recoverability of these interplays between the beliefs of the accused in the Scottish witchcraft trials and those of their prosecutors can be shown most neatly by the famous trial of Andro Man (Aberdeen), which took place on the twentieth of January 1598 (see also Purkiss 2000, 133–39).[206] As with the majority of our medieval accounts, Andro's focuses on the encounter of a man of the in-group with a female otherworldly being, but it provides an important context for proceeding to look at other narratives, better represented in the witchcraft trials than in medieval literature, in which women meet male otherworldly beings. 'Being bot a young boy' sixty years before, Andro was an old man, born perhaps only ten or fifteen years after Martin Luther nailed up his ninety-five theses in 1517, and perhaps thirty before Scotland's official reformation in 1560. Some of his ideas may reach back deep into pre-Reformation culture. Andro avoided prosecution in Aberdeen's dramatic witch-panic early in 1597 (on which see Goodare 2001; cf. Maxwell-Stuart 1998), but was prosecuted later in a smaller witch-hunt (accusing Gilbert Fidlar and Jonat Leisk, Aberdeen 1597; ed. Stuart 1841–52, I 134–40; cf. Goodare 2001, 26).

Andro's indictment was based on his confession, itself based on an unrecorded indictment, of October 21 1597 (ed. Stuart 1841–52, I 123–24); the confession which we have recorded is similar to the final indictment in many points, but differs enough that we can be sure that the first, lost indictment differed from the one which survives. Andro's surviving indictment (ed. Stuart 1841–52, I 119–22) begins

> In the first, thow art accusit as ane manifest and notorious witche and sorcerar, in sa far as thow confessis and affermis thy selff, that be the space of thriescoir yeris sensyne or thairby, the Devill, thy maister, com to thy motheris hous, in the liknes and scheap of a woman, quhom thow callis the Quene of Elphen, and was delyverit of a barne, as apperit to the their, at quhilk tyme thow being bot a young boy, bringand in watter that devilische spreit, the Quene of Elphen, promesit to the, that thow suld knaw all thingis, and suld help and cuir all sort of seikness, except

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[206] I refer to Scottish trials by the names of the accused, the county in which they lived, and the end-date of their trial, in the forms used by the *Survey of Scottish Witchcraft*.

> stand deid, and that thow suld be weill interteneit, but wald seik {forsake} thy meat {food} or thow deit, as Thomas Rymour did.
>
> ITEM, Thow confessis that be the space of threttie twa yeris sensyn or thairby, thow begud to have carnall deall with that devilische spreit, the Quene of Elphen, on quhom thow begat dyveris bairnis, quhom thow hes sene sensyn; and that at hir first cumming, scho causit ane of thy cattell die vpone any hillok callit the Elphillok, bot promeist to do him gude theireftir.

The word *Elphen* ('fairyland'), contains *elf*, establishing a lexical connection between its queen and *elvis*, confirmed by another part of the confession quoted below.[207] The fundamental relevance of this material to the history of *elf* is, then, established. Moreover, it is possible to see some of the ideological tensions and layerings in Andro's trial. The switch from second to third person in the last sentence of the indictment shows that parts at least are simply a rephrasing of a third-person report of Andro's own confession. The indictment mentions 'the Devill … quhom thow callis the Quene of Elphen': Andro had spoken of *the Quene of Elphen*, but she had been interpreted as the Devil, and later as 'that devilische spreit'. We must, then, owe mention of the Quene of Elphen to Andro and not to his prosecutors—nor is it the only such example in the trial,[208] while the motifs which Andro associated with *elvis* are mostly paralleled in later folk-lore (Henderson–Cowan 2001, 46, 58, 62, 84; cf. Christiansen 1958, no. 5070, on the migratory legend "Midwife to the Fairies", which Andro's indictment recalls). The point also emphasises that the debate about the theological status of *ælfe* which was underway by the early ninth century was still unresolved perhaps eight centuries later, with competing ideas existing in parallel and in contact throughout the intervening period. Most of the other accusations against Andro concern the expected activities of a healer and cunning-man, and there is no reason to doubt that this is because Andro was well-established in this profession, his own actions and claims furnishing his prosecutors with the material for charges of witchcraft. In short, certain features of the indictment certainly reflect Andro's own statements and probably his own beliefs or personal narratives.

Moreover, Andro's indictment suggests the dynamic interplay between fairy-belief, personal narrative and a community's shared stock of common lore, in his comparison of his experience with Thomas the Rhymer's. Andro alluded here to a narrative well-attested in the modern Scottish oral ballad-tradition and first attested in full in the

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[207] The etymology of *Elphen* is obscure: although this form seems to show the adjectival suffix *-en*, the form *elfame* is also attested, suggesting etymological *-hame* ('a person's dwelling-place, or native country'; Bessie Dunlop, Ayr, 1576, e.g. 'the gude wychtis that wynnit [dwell] in the Court of Elfame'; ed. Pitcairn 1833, I pt. 2 53). But whether we have *elf* + *en*, perhaps as a calque on *fary* ('fairy-land', analysed as *fée* + adjectival *y*), with folk-etymologisation as *elf* + *hame*, or the opposite process, or something else, is unclear.

[208] Cf. the later account of Andro's encountering the Queen and her husband Christsonday (item 8), and the differences between the later indictment and the earlier confession, where processes of negotiation are evident.

romance *Thomas of Erceldoune* (in mid-fifteenth-century manuscripts, itself perhaps originating in the fourteenth century; Nixon 1980–83, I 3–16, II 44–48; see generally Boklund-Lagopoulou 2002, 129–58). Here, Thomas meets a certain *louely lady*; being seduced by her beauty, he convinces her to have sex with him, after which she takes him out of *mydul erth* to her own *cuntre*, and, on his departure, gives him prophetic information (ed. Nixon 1980–83). The record also mentions Thomas Rymour again among the 'sundrie deid men' in the company of the Queen of Elphen (item 7). It is possible that the references to Thomas owe something to Andro's prosecutors, seeking to gloss Andro's story with a fairy-narrative known to them. But if so, it is unique in the trials: prosecutors were inclined rather to gloss such narratives—as Andro's certainly did —in terms of diabolism. Andro was not short of material about *elvis* to relate to his prosectors: rather, the references to Thomas seem to serve as validation of his accounts, showing their consistency with a widely known fairy-narrative. Thus it seems likely that stories of Thomas the Rhymer influenced Andro's accounts of his personal fairy-encounters, showing that narratives not unlike *Serglige Con Culainn*, *Vǫlundarkviða* or *Yonec* could have direct roles in individuals' construction of personal narratives and belief.

   Among Andro's various confessions, another of particular interest occurs as item 9:

> Thow affermis that the elphis hes shapes and claythis lyk men, and that thay will have fair coverit taiblis, and that they ar bot schaddowis, bot are starker {stronger} nor men, and that thay have playing and dansing quhen thay pleas; and als that the quene is verray plesand, and wilbe auld and young quhen scho pleissis; scho mackis any kyng quhom scho pleisis, and lyis with any scho lykis.

These comments, again, are unlikely to have been put into Andro's mouth: in that case, a more conventional description of a sabbat would be expected. They are valuable partly for confirming the lexical association of *Elphen* with *elf*, but also because they give us a clear indication of what *elf* denoted in Andro's speech. Although he said that *elvis* 'ar bot schaddowis', the implication is otherwise that they were human-like; and both their strength and Andro's other encounters with them suggests that they were corporeal. Despite the predominance of female otherworldly beings in our literary sources, it is clear that *elvis* could be male.

   As regards the Anglo-Saxon association of *ælfe* with sex and illness, Andro's record is less enlightening. The indictment's emphasis on Andro's sexual relations with the Queen of Elphen may reflect the concern of prosecutors to identify sex with the devil, as this was seen as a central trait of witchcraft (Larner 1981, esp. 146–50). This does not mean that the indictment does not reflect popular beliefs (cf. Macdonald 2002, 45–50), but it cannot be used confidently as evidence for them. The Queen of Elphen clearly

might cause illness, in this case to livestock rather as in *Gif hors ofscoten sie*, this illness being associated with spatial transgression, in this case of the cow onto the *Elphillok*. Precisely how this relates to her subsequent relationship with Andro is not clear—perhaps it is a *quid pro quo*, whereby the Queen gets the cow and Andro gets the Queen's assistance.

4.2 Elspeth Reoch

Andro's trial provides a context for understanding other material, sometimes briefer, later or less archaic in its language, as part of the same cluster of beliefs relating to *elvis* and illuminating the Old English material. What I wish to do here is to focus on evidence that *elvis* could be male, but still be associated with narratives like those of the female otherworldly beings Fann and Drífa. One of the trials involving male *elvis*, Issobell Gowdie's, I consider in relation to *Wið færstice* below (§8:3). Otherwise, one of the clearest attestations of male *elvis* is the indictment of 'Isobell Strauthaquhin, alias Scudder, and hir dochter' (Aberdeen), who were tried during the 1597 witch-panic which preceded Andro Man's conviction. Isobell was a cunning-woman; according to the indictment, she and her daughter 'depone that hir self confessis, that quhat skill so ever scho hes, scho hed it of hir mother; and hir mother; and hir mother learnit at ane elf man quha lay with hir' (ed. Stuart 1841–52, I 177). Precisely whose mother(s) we are dealing with here is not certain,[209] but it is clear that the healing and magical skills were claimed to have entered Isobell's family by a female member having sex with an *elf man* and passing the skills down the female line thereafter. No other details of the encounter are given. One might seek to take an intransigently sceptical stance on this source and others like it, seeing them as narratives of diabolism successfully imposed on the accused by their prosecutors, with some chance failure to substitute *devil* for *elf*. But it seems far more likely that we have a traditional *elf*-narrative either drawn desperately by an accused woman from her memory of popular legends, or actively pedaled by her as part of her self-promotion as a cunning woman and picked up on by her prosecutors. Such encounters seem likely to have been a recurrent feature in cunning-women's personal narratives as a means of claiming extraordinary skills (cf. Davies forthcoming).

The closest analogue to the Old English medical texts and to the Norse and Irish narratives considered above was related by Elspeth Reoch (Orkney 1616). Unlike Isobell, Elspeth used the increasingly dominant loan-word *fary* rather than *elf* (her prosecutors

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[209] Assuming that there is no dittography in the text, I think that the most likely interpretation is that Isobell had her skill from her mother and from her grandmother; and that her great-grandmother learned the skill from an 'elf man'. However, Henderson and Cowan took the source to be Isobell herself (2001, 84), while the *Survey of Scottish Witchcraft* chose Isobell's mother.

for their part preferring 'Illusiounes of the Devell'; ed. *Miscelleny of the Maitland Club* 1833–43, II pt. I 187–91). But Elspeth's narrative is nonetheless worth examining, since it still emphasises the existence and importance of male otherworldly beings in seventeenth-century Scottish belief, providing a valuable counterweight to the biases of medieval literary texts. At the age of twelve Elspeth went from her home in Caithness to stay at her aunt's house on an island in Lochaber. She was waiting at the lochside for the boat home one day, when 'thair cam tua men to her ane cled in blak and the uther with ane grein tartane plaid about him And … the man with the plaid said to her she wes ane prettie And he wald lerne her to ken and sie ony thing she wald desyre'—which he does. Two years later, she met the other again:

> And being delyverit {of a baby} in hir sisteris hous the blak man cam to her that first came to hir at Lochquhaber And callit him selff ane farie man quha wes sumtyme her kinsman callit Johne Stewart quha wes slane be McKy at the doun going of the soone And therfor nather deid nor leiving bot wald ever go betuix the heaven and the earth quha delt {had dealings} with you tua nychtis and wald never let her sleip peruading hir to let him ly with hir wald give yow a guidly fe And to be dum for having teachit hir to sie and ken ony thing she desyrit He said that gif she spak gentlemen wold trouble hir and gar hir give reassounes for hir doings Quhairupon she mycht be challengeit and hurt And upoun the thrid nycht that he com to hir she being asleip and laid his hand upoun hir breist and walknit her And thairefter semeit to ly with her And upoun the morrow she haid na power of hir toung nor could nocht speik quhairthrow hir brother dang hir with ane branks {bridle} quhill she bled because she wald nocht speik and pat ane bow string about hir head to gar her speik And thairefter tuik her three severall tymes Sondayis to the kirk and prayit for hir.

Elspeth's narrative is impressively reminiscent, in various ways, of the supernatural seductions in the medieval texts described above. We can again be sure that stories of otherworldly males seducing females and subsequently giving them supernatural knowledge were nothing new in Scotland: book 6, chapter 18 of Andrew of Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle*, finished around 1420×24 (ed. Amours 1903–14, IV 276–79), describes how Makbeth-Fynlayk (Mac Bethad mac Findláig, the eponymous hero of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*) was 'gottyne … on ferly wys' ('begotten in a marvellous way'), by 'a fayr man'.[210] Andrew stated unequivocally that this figure was 'the Dewill', but it is reasonable to suppose that, as in Elspeth's narrative, it relates closely to narratives of *elvis* or *fareis*. The man thereafter prophesies about the son he has just begotten and, to quote the Cotton text,

Eftyr þat oft oyssyt he	after that, he often used
Til cum til hyr in prewate,	to come to her in private,
And tauld hir mony thyngis to fal,	and told her many things to come,
Set trowyt noucht þai sulde be al.	though not all should be believed.

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[210] Cf. the Middle English *Sir Degaré* (ed. Laskaya–Salisbury 1995, 101–29). Note also Stewart 1973 on the circulation of the Orpheus story in medieval Scotland.

Not only does Makbeth-Fynlayk's mother receive information from the Devil in person, but Makbeth-Fynlayk's own supernatural encounters (ed. Amours 1903–14, ɪv 272–75) implicitly occur because of his ancestry. This text affords evidence for beliefs concerning the imparting of prophetic information to people by otherworldly beings already in medieval Scottish culture. It is paralleled in medieval England particularly by the trial, in 1438, of Agnes Hancok by John Stafford, the bishop of Bath and Wells. The last of the four accusations against her—all concerning her healing practises—was 'quod ipsa profitetur se sanare pueros tactos vel lesos a spiritibus aeris, quos vulgus "feyry" appellant; et quod habet communicacionem cum hiis spiritibus immundis et ab eis petit respona et consilia quando placet' ('that she professes herself to heal boys touched or injured by incorporeal spirits, which the people call *feyry*; and that she has converse [or 'holy communion'] with these foul spirits and seeks from them oracles and counsels whenever she pleases'; ed. Holmes 1915–16, ɪɪ 227).[211]

However, *Serglige Con Culainn* probably provides the closest parallel to Elspeth's account. It has a preliminary encounter with two fairies by a loch, albeit in the form of swans; when Cú Chulainn does encounter two fairies as such, they are, like those met by Elspeth, dressed in different colours, one being dressed in green. Both Elspeth and Cú Chulainn are subsequently harassed for sex. Although Cú Chulainn's year of disability precedes sex with Fann rather than following it, his *Serglige* is nonetheless reminiscent of the dumbness imposed on Elspeth following sex with the 'farie man'; likewise, although no explicit connection is drawn, Cú Chulainn's first action upon arising from his sickness is to expound a poetic *bríathar-thecosc* ('preceptual instruction'), which recalls the association of Elspeth's illness with learning 'to sie and ken ony thing she desyrit' (cf. Carey 1999, esp. 195–98). It is also worth noting that, like Elspeth, Andro Man associated his meeting with the Quene of Elphen with sex with an otherworldly being, illness (in Andro's case of one of his animals), and the acquisition of supernatural powers.

This summary of resemblances to earlier narratives is not to diminish the complexities of Elspeth's account—which are legion. Besides the fact that Orkney was a hub of cultural exchange for the British Isles and Scandinavia, a complex interweaving of personal experience, popular belief, and response to interrogation must underlie Espeth's confession. Thus Purkiss read Elspeth's narrative—speculatively but not unattractively— as a response to an incest experience (2001; cf. 2000, 90–96). If Purkiss is right, then we have in Elpseth's account a good example of the direct employment of fairy-lore in individuals' construction and handling of their personal experiences. This kind of

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[211] For other and later examples see Thomas 1973, 727–28; Purkiss 2000, 116–41, cf. 152–56; Wilby 2000.

interaction between life and story has also been argued by Spearing and Pearsall to have been among the potential meanings of the Middle English poem *Sir Orfeo*, in which 'the terrifying experience that he [the poet] coded as being abducted by the fairies and then being brought back is one that we might code as going mad and being cured' (Spearing 2000, at 265–66; Pearsall 1996). Likewise, the Middle English *Sir Degarré* makes the potential of fairy-encounters to reflect or encode incest narratives clear (esp. lines 168–69; ed. Laskaya–Salisbury 1995, 105). As in the other narratives mentioned here, Elspeth's fairy encounters begin in what seems to have been liminal space, helping to construct the danger (to women) of certain areas of their environment. This trangression of the boundaries of safe space and the fairy assaults consequent on it provides a means of constructing Elspeth's experiences, but as with Andro Man's first encounter with the Quene of Elphen, when she killed his cow, or with Cú Chulainn's sudden demonstration of profound wisdom following his *serglige*, the harm dealt to Elspeth comes with supernatural powers. This provides another means of constructing her suffering as in some ways a positive experience, and seems indeed to have become a factor in her successful selling of her services as a cunning woman.

If nothing else, the Scottish witchcraft trials emphasise the complexity of the negotiations of belief—between individuals, communities, classes, experiences and narratives—that must also have been taking place in Anglo-Saxon society with regard to *ælfe*. However, the trials also consolidate various of the arguments above. They show that *elvis* were male and anthropomorphic in at least some strands of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century popular belief, contrasting with the earlier literary evidence. Although the trials tend to be no more informative than the Old English medical texts about the roles of *elvis* in causing ailments, Elspeth Reoch's attests to the combination of a nocturnal sexual assault by an otherworldly being with subsequent detrimental effects on health as a *quid pro quo* for the acquisition of supernatural power. This repeats certain associations found for *ælf* in the Old English material, but also motifs attested in the *Southern English Legendary*, *Serglige Con Culainn* and the medieval Norse narratives. The Scottish witchcraft trials show that narratives of otherworldly beings found in medieval literature could—and by the seventeenth century did—have close counterparts in popular belief. They seem likely in some respects to reflect the direct continuation of Anglo-Saxons' usage of *ælf* and conceptions of *ælfe*.

5. Conclusions

It emerges, then, that Irish and Scandinavian narratives from up to the early thirteenth century tell of anthropomorphic otherworldly beings seducing or trying to seduce

members of the in-group by magically inflicting altered states of mind, or otherwise inflicting ailments in the context of sexual contact. These are well-paralleled by the late thirteenth-century *Southern English Legendary*, emphasising their potential relevance to English culture. These texts parallel many prominent features of our evidence for the semantics of *ælf*: anthropomorphicity, seductive beauty, *siden*, and fever and hallucination. Although a threat to members of the in-group, these otherworldly beings seem to threaten only individuals, mainly in response to those individuals' transgressions. In this way, they do not threaten society as a whole and, moreover, help to uphold its values and structures by punishing those who transgress them. This observation is consistent with the models proposed above to explain the early semantic evidence for *álfr* and *ælf*, associating them with human in-groups by contrast with society-threatening monsters. It reflects a world-view whose useful life in Europe was long. Working to interpret nineteenth-century Norwegian folk-medicine within wider cognitive frameworks, Alver and Selberg examined beliefs in witches and *huldrer*— etymologically the *huldufólk* ('hidden people'), a euphemism for *álfar*—as sources of illness (1987). They opposed earlier assumptions that the the propensity of *huldrer* to inflict harm meant that *huldrer* were fundamentally destructive (1987, 25):

> basically, hulders are a *superior* power in relation to humans, not a destructive power. According to tradition, there are rules about how humans should deal with hulders. If these rules are broken, the hulders punish. But if rules are observed, or a favor is done for the hulders, then they reward.

'This belief in supranormal beings', they concluded, 'can function as social control' (1987, 40). By contrast, witches 'represent the powers of chaos on the offensive' (1987, 26). Not only does this model apply well to the earlier Scottish witchcraft trials, but the relationship between the witches and the *huldrer* is fundamentally similar to that of *ælfe* with monsters in early Anglo-Saxon beliefs.

The idea that *ælfe* in the medical texts were like Judaeo-Christian-Mediterranean demons, incompatible with beautiful anthropomorphic beings, is not disproved by the comparative material which I have adduced, and could indeed have held for some members of society. But I have shown that it is unnecessary: causing illness or altered mental states is a core part of the narratives of the otherworldly beings Drífa, Fann, Skírnir and Othinus. These texts also emphasise the extent to which such traditions could be maintained among the Latin-literate, clerical elite in Christianised medieval societies. *Serglige Con Culainn*'s effort to incorporate its *síde* into Christian constructions of the supernatural world conspicuously fails to convince; the unresolved tensions between Christian and non-Christian belief which it shows for medieval Ireland offers a paradigm for the uneasy pairings of *ælf* and *deofol* or *feond* in the Old English medical texts. Admittedly, most available medieval comparisons concern female otherworldly beings,

but I have identified enough similar narratives of males to show that a coherent interpretation of the Old English evidence for *ælf* need not be compromised by problems of gendering. But the prominence of females contextualises the rise of a female denotation of *ælf* during the Old English period, as I discuss more fully below (§9:2.2).

The evidence of the Scottish witchcraft trials consolidates the medieval comparisons. It shows the existence of narratives like those recorded in medieval texts widely in society, and how they could be part of dynamic interactions with people's constructions of reality. The trials also suggest continuity in English-speaking culture of beliefs concerning *ælfe*. Despite the prominence of female *elves* and *fairies* in Middle English literature and its high medieval comparanda, and although a *Queen of Elphen* or a similar otherworldly female is prominent in the trial-evidence, the trials show clearly that male *elvis* existed in Scottish belief. I develop these themes further in my analysis of Issobel Gowdie's trial in the next chapter (§8:3). The Scottish witchcraft trials also attest to the use of stories of *elvis* and *fareis* in cunning-folks' constructions and presentations of their powers and processes of healing. These provide a context for understanding aspects of the meanings of *ylfig*—for seeing *ælfe* not only as sources of harm in Anglo-Saxon culture, but also as sources of power. This is a point which I develop in my final chapter (§9:1).

Chapter 8

Wið færstice

The reanalysis of our Old English *ælf*-corpus provides a new context for interpreting the text with which I opened this thesis, *Wið færstice*. Although we cannot be sure that its alliterative collocation of *ese* and *ælfe* is a traditional Old English formula, we now know that the conceptual collocation of *ese* and *ælfe* is traditional; moreover, the charm was at least partly composed before the phonemic split of earlier Old English /ɣ-/ into /g-/ and /j-/, and so probably before the end of the tenth century (§§1:0, 3:2–3). I have shown that *ælfe* were probably only male in earlier Anglo-Saxon beliefs (esp. §5:3.3), which brings the charm's collocation of *ælfe* with the female *hægtessan* a new significance. Finally, I have argued that Old English *gescoten* and *gescot* could, as well as denoting shooting and projectiles, also mean '(pained with a) sharp localised pain'; my reanalysis of *ælfsogoða* found that *ælfe* were associated with causing such pains elsewhere in Old English, as, I have noted, did their counterparts in later medieval England, early modern Scotland and Germany (§§6:1, 6:2.2 esp. n. 156). Here I extend these observations and adduce others in a new reading of *Wið færstice* as a medical text and as evidence for beliefs in *ælfe*.

A new reading must also contextualise *Wið færstice* within wider medieval European traditions. It is generally and plausibly supposed that the beings referred to in the first ten metrical lines—successively by *hy* ('they') and *ða mihtigan wif* ('the powerful women')—comprise one group of supernatural females, and that this group is in turn identical with (or at least includes) the *hægtessan* mentioned later in the charm.[212] They ride loudly over a burial mound or hill and inflict 'isenes dæl | hægtessan geweorc' ('a piece of iron, | the work/deed of *hægtessan*').[213] This motif surely relates to other motifs of supernatural females riding out in groups and causing harm attested widely across later medieval and early modern Europe. The earliest attestation, often quoted, though not in this context, is

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[212] Hauer, seeking to link the second half of *Wið færstice*'s charm intimately with the first, suggested that 'the wild riders of lines 3–6 reappear as the *esa* of lines 23 and 25; the mighty women of lines 7–12 are represented by the *hægtessan* of lines 24 and 26; and the smiths of line 16 occur as the *ylfa* in lines 23 and 25' (1977–78, 52). The identification of the smiths with *ælfe* I discuss below. But the figures denoted by *hy* at the beginning of the charm are probably not to be distinguished from the *mihtigan wif* which are mentioned shortly after: 'þær ða mihtigan wif / hyra mægen beræddon' uses the demonstrative pronoun *þa*, implying that they are figures which we should already know—most obviously the figures who *hlude wæran*.

[213] This interpretation maintains the tradition of taking *hægtessan* as a late genitive plural (see §1 n. 8); even if *hægtessan* here is singular, it may still be read most easily to denote one of the larger group of *mihtigan wif*. The charm thus moves from the circumspect use of a pronoun to the more descriptive but still euphemistic *mihtigan wif*, finally defining the female threat by labelling it *hægtessan*.

in Burchard of Worms's *Corrector*, the nineteenth book of his *Decretum* (ch. 5, §170; ed. Hansen 1901, 40):

> Credidisti quod multae mulieres retro Satanam conversae credunt et affirmant verum esse, ut credas in quietae noctis silentio, cum te collocaveris in lecto tuo et marito tuo in sinu tuo iacente, te dum corporea sis ianuis clausis exire posse, et terrarum spatia cum aliis simili errore deceptis pertransire valere, et homines baptizatos et Christi sanguine redemptos sine armis visibilibus et interficere et decoctis carnibus eorum vos comedere, et in loco cordis eorum stramen aut lignum, aut aliquod huiusmodi ponere, et commestis, iterum vivos facere et inducias vivendi dare?

> Have you believed what many women, turned back to Satan, believe and declare to be true, such that you believe that in the peaceful silence of the night, when you should have been lying in your bed, and with your husband lying on your bosom, that you may be able to depart, in body, through closed doors, and that you can pass through lands' open spaces with others deceived by the same mistake, and also to kill people both baptised and redeemed by the blood of Christ, without visible weapons and that you eat their boiled flesh, and put in place of their hearts straw or kindling, or some other such thing; and that after you have consumed them, you make them alive again and grant truces for staying alive?

The *Decretum* and derivative texts were distributed widely, raising the problem that later attestations of similar beliefs may reflect Burchard's influence. But although the *Decretum* must have been published by 1023, and swiftly came to England, Burchard put the date of 1012 to one of its texts, so it cannot have been available before then.[214] This means that the manuscript of *Wið færstice* is likely to pre-date its publication, and the charm itself almost certainly does. It is admittedly not impossible that *Wið færstice* and the *Corrector* both drew on some lost penitential, but if so, *Wið færstice* represents the astonishing translation of a proscribed belief from the genre of Latin penitential-writing to that of Old English charm-composition. Rather, we may conclude that *Wið færstice* is a vital, early and independent attestation of beliefs similar to those alluded to by Burchard. It is also consistent with two hints of relevant beliefs earlier in Anglo-Saxon texts. I have discussed above how King Alfred exhibited an Anglo-Saxon idea that people's *gastas* ('spirits') might wander as they slept (§6:3.1). Additionally, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Old English word *þunorrad* ('peal of thunder' but literally 'thunder/Thunor-ride') presupposes a tradition of Thunor riding, suggesting another tradition of a supernatural riding. Burchard's text compares well, then, with earlier, independent Anglo-Saxon evidence. Processions of the dead and supernatural hunts are prominent elsewhere in medieval and early modern sources—one of the earliest being another vernacular English account, this time of the black huntsmen whose cavalcade on black horses and goats riding portended the installment of Henri of Peitowe as abbot of Peterborough in 1127.[215] We have several accounts by later medieval writers who, contrary to the prescription of Burchard's canon, did believe in violent, riding

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[214] On dating see Austin 2004, 931 n. 15; the earliest Anglo-Saxon copy is in part 1 of BL. Cotton Claudius C.VI, s. XI² (Kéry 1999, 133–48, at 137).
[215] Ed. Clark 1970, 49–50. See further Lecouteux 1998; Schmitt 1998 [1994], 93–121.

supernatural women, suggesting that at least some of these extensive attestations reflect sincerely held beliefs—problematic though Burchard's later influence undoubtedly is (see Cohn 1993, 162–80; Broedel 2003, 91–121). Other traditions of nocturanl riding women are also attested; the earliest is a ninth-century Carolingian capitulary surviving in a penitential by Regino of Prüm admonishing bishops to preach against the belief that women might ride out in the night on animals (Russell 1972, 75–82), a belief which must relate to later traditions of rides to consume food and drink either left out for the riders or stolen from storerooms (Ginzburg 1983 [1966], esp. 40–50; Cohn 1993, 166–75; Broedel 2003, 101–7). This is not the place for a full examination of these traditions; nor would I wish to posit one point of origin for them (cf. Schmitt 1998 [1994], 3). But it is surely profitable to contextualise *Wið færstice* among such similar and probably interrelated beliefs.

The benefits of this contextualisation do not only extend to understanding *Wið færstice*. The construction by Institoris and Sprenger in their *Malleus Maleficarum* of an intellectually acceptable framework for incorporating traditions of supernatural cavalcades into witchcraft prosecutions led to their extensive representation in the early modern witchcraft trials, and it is largely this which has given the beliefs historiographical prominence.[216] The search for their antecedents has focused on Latin material, but our medieval vernacular evidence has vital perspectives to contribute. The manuscript of *Wið færstice* is as old as Burchard's text, and it contains not episcopal proscriptions, but vernacular medical texts seriously presenting the possible causes of ailments. Indeed, *Wið færstice* has a close analogue in the Scottish witchcraft trials, the connection illuminating both early medieval and early modern traditions. Reading *Wið færstice* in a wider context of medieval European non-Christian belief has a range of implications, then, and makes it possible to orientate Anglo-Saxon *ælf*-traditions in this wider context.

1. What is *ylfa g es co t*? And the coherence of the charm

There is no doubt that *Wið færstice* conceives of a violent, stabbing pain in terms of a projectile—albeit magical or metaphorical. Its concept of an 'isernes dæl' ('piece of iron') lodged inside the patient is well-paralleled anthropologically (Honko 1959), and even seems to have an Anglo-Saxon analogue in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, where a similar infliction is caused by demons from Hell (Colgrave–Mynors 1991, 500 n. 2). There is good reason, then, to suppose *ylfa gescot* to denote a projectile.

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[216] See Ginzburg 1983 [1966]; 1992 [1989], 89–102; Cohn 1993, 162–80; Broedel 2003, 91–121; Purkiss 2000, 142–51.

However, I have argued above that Old English *(ge)scoten* could mean 'pained' and *gescot* 'sharp pain' (§§6:1; 6:2.2 esp. n. 156)—so *esa gescot*, *ylfa gescot* and *hægtessan gescot* could also denote in literal and technical language an ailment which I have shown to be characteristic of *ælfe*.

These observations suggest that in important respects, *Wið færstice* may be an elaborate play on words. Commentators once considered the charm incoherent and fragmentary, a perspective abetted by their insistence on dissecting it into 'pagan' and 'Christian' parts (see Abernethy 1983, 94–98). However, critics of the 1970s and 1980s developed the early revisionism of Skemp to argue for *Wið færstice*'s coherence of composition.[217] We may now add to their observations that when the charm moves into the passage saying 'gif ðu wære … scoten', it may not merely be saying 'if you were … shot', but also 'if you were … pained'. This deployment of the polysemous *scoten* brilliantly removes, at a linguistic level, the distinction between metaphor and reality: the individual who is *scoten* with an internal pain is at one and the same time *scoten* with a (magical) projectile. *Stice*, of course, is itself polysemic in this context, being equally able to denote internal pains and wounds. We are dealing in *Wið færstice* with an approach to healing which not only deploys metaphor at a discursive level, but underpins it with polysemy at a lexical one. This analysis suggests that the remedy's use of vocabulary helps to bind it into a coherent composition: the terms *færstice*, *scoten* and *gescot* are all polysemic, denoting not only projectile wounds but also internal pains, and are used to facilitate the text's construction of an ailment as the product of a conflict with supernatural beings.

2. The *hægtessan*

2.1 What is a *hægtesse*?

Hægtesse is one of the best attested Old English words for supernatural females. It and its variants appear not only in a range of glosses—where one most often finds Old English words for supernatural beings—but in a few other contexts besides.[218] Despite a dearth of Middle English attestations, it emerged into early modern English as *hag*, denoting witches and evil spirits (*MED*, s.v. *hagge*; *OED*, s.v. *hag*). As the irregular contracted form *hag* might lead us to expect, its etymology resists confident

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[217] Skemp 1911, 289–93; Doskow 1976; Hauer 1977–78; Weston 1985, 177–80; cf. Chickering 1971.

[218] There is the strong variant *hægtes(s)* and the irregular contracted form *hætse* (for which see Campbell 1959, §393; Hogg 1992a, §6.71; cf. *witch*, OE *wicce*, *wicca* < *witege*, *witega*).

reconstruction, but it has well-attested cognates in the other medieval West Germanic languages (Polomé 1987), and *Hægtesse* was evidently widely used.

In Old English glosses, *hægtesse* not only glosses words for immortals of Classical mythology—principally *Parcae* and *Furiae*—but *phinotissa*, denoting mortal prophetesses, and the more ambiguous *striga*.[219] Additionally, these glosses suggest that *hægtesse* was partially synonymous with *wælcyrige* (which glosses the personal names of *Furiae*), *burgrune* (which glosses *Furiae* and *Parcae*) and perhaps *hellerune* (which glosses *phinotissa*), a trend reminiscent of the partial synonymy of Old Norse *dís*, *valkyrja* and *norn* (cf. §2:2). This is not the place to discuss the intricate problems produced by these texts, but they seem to involve several independent textual traditions and are surely reliable evidence that *hægtesse*'s semantics were similar to those of *Parca*, *Furia*, *striga* and *phinotissa* on the one hand, and overlapping with those of *wælcyrige*, *burgrune* and *hellerune* on the other. Outside the glosses, around 1000, it is of interest that Ælfric, in his homiletic rendering of 2 Kings 9:34, used *hætse* to translate 'maledictam illam' ('that accursed woman'), as Jehu calls Jezebel after her death (ed. Weber 1975, I 518; ed. Skeat 1881–1900, I 404). Since *hægtesse* does not obviously mean 'cursed one' (unlike the synonym *sceand* which Ælfric also offers), its deployment here may reflect some other aspect of Jezebel's character; since her efforts to seduce Jehu (2 Kings 9:30; ed. Weber 1975, I 517) drew special censure, Ælfric's use of *hætse* here may imply that *hægtesse*, at least to highly Christianised authors, have connoted sexual promiscuity (cf. the similar deployment of Old Irish *morrigu* to translate *Jocasta*; Herbert 1996, 148).

Hægtesse's glossing of words denoting both mortal and immortal females has troubled various commentators.[220] Meaney (1989, 17–18) argued of *hægtesse* (and *wælcyrige* and *burgrune*) that the words originally denoted 'minor goddesses', but that

the coming of Christianity would have affected these words in more than one way, all more or less to their detriment. The *burgrune* and the *hægtesse* would have been interpreted as basically bad, and their protective characteristics forgotten. All three words would have declined in use,

[219] In our earliest glosses, *hægtes* glosses *striga* (e.g. Pheifer 1974, 48 [no.913]; Lindsay 1921a, 168 [S528]; Bischoff and others 1988, Épinal f. 105r; Erfurt f. 12r; Corpus f. 58r), and *hægtesse* *Eumenides* (e.g. Lindsay 1921a, 68 [E354]). Herren's recent explanation of *hægtes* here as a corruption of a genitive singular *Hecates* (1998, 99) is unnecessary. Later, the Antwerp-London glossary offers 'Phinotissa . hellerune . ł hægtesse' and 'Parce . hægtesse' (ed. Kindschi 1955, 247; collated with MS, f. 21). The former is surely a development of the widely-attested use of *helrunan* to gloss *phitonissam* in chapter 24 of Aldhelm's *Prosa de virginitate* (ed. Gwara 2001, II 286–87; on the accreting practices of Antwerp-London see Porter 1999, 185), probably reflecting eleventh-century usage. The latter is unparalleled, though it may derive from the lost seventh- or eighth-century Isidore-glosses which also included the *ælfen* glosses.

[220] e.g. Lecouteux 1983; cf. Fell 1984, 29–31; Chickering 1971, 85. Although Bosworth and Toller gave 'a witch, hag, fury' (1898, s.v. *hægtesse*; cf. Toller 1921, s.v.), the *Thesaurus of Old English* lists *hægtesse* under 'a witch, sorceress', but not under 'a fury' or 'the Fates' (Roberts–Kay–Grundy 2000, I §§16.01.04, 16.01.06.02, 05.04.01).

and the meanings partly forgotten, so that they could be applied to mortal women, at first metaphorically, then exclusively.

This is a viable hypothesis, its thrust consistent with recent studies of otherworldly females in Old Norse which have tried to distinguish between human 'shield-maidens' and supernatural 'valkyries'.[221] These interpretations, however, are unconvincing.[222] Jochens found that *skjǫldmær* and *valkyrja* are used 'interchangeably' in the sources (1996, 90), which does not encourage the differentiation of 'shield-maidens' from 'valkyries'. *Dís*, indeed, can denote women of the in-group like its West Germanic counterpart *ides*, and our Norse sources are at times explicit that *valkyrjur* and *dísir* are human females in special circumstances, not unlike the cavalcades of supernatural women described by Burchard. This also has clear parallels in the Latin tradition, in which *strigae* at least were in an ambiguous position between mortal and immortal, natural and supernatural beings (Cohn 1993, 162–66; Rampton 2002, 15–18). *Hægtesse*'s Old High German cognates gloss much the same range of Latin lemmata as the Old English word (*AHDWB*, s.vv. *hagazussa*, *hâzussa*, *hâzus*; cf. Lecouteux 1983). I have discussed already how it is hard to distinguish meaningfully between supernatural beings and ethnic others in early Norse and English traditions (§§2:4, 3:2–4), so a similar conceptual continuity between supernatural females and other exceptional females is no cause for surprise. Abandoning the separate categories of 'witch' and 'supernatural female' also removes a perceived crux in Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, which deploys *wiccan* and *wælcyrian* as a formulaic and implicitly partially synonymous pair (ed. Bethurum 1957, 273)—a formula which, given its recurrence in Middle English (see *MED*, s.v. *wal-kirie*), probably either was or became traditional. Bethurum considered that *wælcyrige* 'is not before this passage used for anything except a supernatural being' (1957, 363; cf. Fell 1984, 29–30; Meaney 1989, 17). But a high degree of synonymy between *wælcyrige* and both *wicce* (as in Wulfstan) and *Furia* (as in the glosses) is actually what our other evidence should lead us to expect. It is surely preferable to accept the Old English and Old High German evidence to reflect the usual semantics of *hægtesse*, rather than trying to explain it away: the distinctions which we would posit between ordinary and supernatural women do not work for early medieval Germanic-speaking cultures.

[221] e.g. Heinrichs 1986, 115–16; Jochens 1996, esp. 89–96 and note the book's division into 'divine images' and 'human images'; Kroesen 1997, 129–31, 137–38; cf. Damico's 'two distinct, antagonistic perceptions of valkyries' (1990, 176); Jesch 1991, 179–80. Jochens also argued that 'shield maidens' alone ride through the air, 'valkyries' riding on the ground (1996, 95). But this claim has no basis in our sources (cf. the prose between stanzas 9 and 10 of *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar*, and between 4 and 5, 13 and 14, and 18 and 19 of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*; ed. Neckel 1962, 143, 153, 154).

[222] Cf. Steblin-Kamenskij's readings, 1982; Holmqvist Larsen 1983, 42; Eilola 2002, 9–16 on *troll* and Finnish *noita*.

Hægtesse seems likely to have been the main word for a class of females in Anglo-Saxon beliefs for which there was a range of other words bearing different connotations —much as I have argued for the relationships between *dís* and words such as *valkyrja* and *norn* in Old Icelandic (§2:2; 7:3). The supernatural powers of *hægtessan* set them apart from ordinary women, but, just as I have shown that we cannot usefully draw firm distinctions between groups of gods and ethnic others in traditional Anglo-Saxon ideologies, we should not seek to label *hægtessan* exclusively as supernatural females or as females with supernatural powers. To consolidate and extend this reading of the lexical evidence, I turn now to comparative material.

2.2 Medieval analogues for the *hægtessan* in *Wið færstice*

I have already emphasised the likelihood that *Wið færstice* should be understood as part of a group of traditions attested in Continental Latin sources. These have been reasonably well discussed in histories of European witch-beliefs, albeit not in relation to *Wið færstice*; so I focus here on vernacular evidence, which has tended to be overlooked.

The closest parallel to *Wið færstice* in the Eddaic corpus is *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* (ed. Neckel 1962, 130–39). Stanzas 15–17 describe the first appearance of Sigrún to Helgi:

Þá brá lióma af Logafiǫllom,	Then a flash broke from Logafjallar ['Flame-mountains'], and from those flashes came lightning; then [people] were under helmets on Sky-plains.
enn af þeim liómom leiptrir qvómo;	
þá var und hiálmom á Himinvanga.	
Brynior vóro þeira blóði stocnar.	Their mail-coats were spattered with blood, and from the spears sprang rays.
Enn af geirom geislar stóðo.	
Frá árliga ór úlfiði	From early on, from the wolf's lair [=wood], the descendant of Dagr [was] at the question, whether the southern *dísir* wanted to go home with the warrior that night; there was the noise of elms [=bows].
dǫglingr at því dísir suðrœnar,	
ef þær vildi heim með hildingom	
þá nótt fara; þrymr var álma.	
Enn af hesti Hǫgna dóttir	And from her horse the daughter of Hǫgni— the din of shields ceased—said to the prince […]
—líddi randa rym— ræsi sagði:	
[…]	

Stanza 54 tells for its part how

Kómo þar ór himni hiálmvitr ofan	From the sky there came down the helmet-beings—the din of spears grew—the women who protected the prince … the wound-beings flew, [there was] eating for the witch's horse [=wolf] from the barley of Huginn [=corpses].
—óx geira gnýr—, þær er grami hlífðo;	
… sárvitr flugo,	
át hálo scær af Hugins barri.	

Sigrún is a mortal woman, the daughter of Hǫgni, and illustrates the problems with trying to distinguish human from supernatural women. Her ride neatly parallels *Wið færstice*'s

armed supernatural women riding out in a group and causing harm, in the one case from *fjallar* ('mountains') and in the other over a *hlæw* ('(burial) mound, hill'). Commentators have perhaps shied from linking Sigrún with *Wið færstice* or Burchard's *Corrector* because she is not seen as harmful as the women in the other texts are. But while Sigrún and her *dísir* here protect Helgi in the battle (see also st. 30), protection to one side is harm to the other. The ambiguity is emphasised in the poem itself, in stanza 38, Sinfjǫtli's taunt at Guðmundr that

Þú var in scœða, scass, valkyria,	You were the harmful one, witch, *valkyrja*,
ǫtul, ámátlig, at Alfǫður;	cruel, ?violent, at the All-father's;
mundo einheriar allir beriaz,	all the *einherjar* [slain chosen to fight in
svévís kona, um sacar þínar.	Valhǫll] had to battle, you hard-headed
	woman, for your sake.

Admittedly, Sigrún's seduction of Helgi is not paralleled in *Wið færstice*, but our evidence for the semantics of *hægtesse* may accommodate sexual forwardness.

   Helgakviða Hundingsbana I cannot be confidently dated earlier than the thirteenth century, but there is good evidence for the antiquity of traditions of armed supernatural women in Scandinavia and the British Isles. For example, stanzas 10–11 of Eyvindr skáldaspillir's skaldic poem *Hákonarmál*, thought to have been composed in 961, attest them clearly, calling them *valkyrjur* (ed. Finnur Jónsson 1912, Bɪ 58); more dramatic again is the tenth- or eleventh-century *Darraðarljóð*, whose images of *valkyrjur* weaving form a gory extended metaphor for their fighting in battle (ed. Finur Jónsson 1912, Bɪ 389–91; see further Poole 1991, 116–54). Carved and cast figures wearing women's clothes and bearing weapons, presumably to be associated with these literary figures, are found in Viking Age contexts, and include two found in England (see Leahy–Paterson 2000, 192; Margeson 1997, 12). Although they may not depict armed women, the inscriptions and carvings left at Housesteads on Hadrian's wall between 222 and 235 by a *cuneus* of *Frisii* ('Frisians') in the Roman army suggest deep roots for these beliefs among West Germanic-speaking cultures (see Collingwood–Wright 1965, 501, 507–8 [nos 1576, 1593–94]; Clayton and others 1885). The most revealing is an altar 'Deo Marti Thincso et duabus Alaisiagis Bede et Fimmilene' ('to the god Mars *Thingsus* and the two *Alaisiagae*, Beda and Fimmilena'; ed. Collingwood–Wright 1965, 507 [no. 1593]) and was found associated with a carved stone depicting a figure holding a spear and shield, with what seems to be a goose by his right leg, and a naked female on either side holding a wreath and sword or baton—presumably the *alaisiagae* (ed. Clayton and others 1885, plate I). Though their name is etymologically obscure (see Simek 1993 [1984], s.v. *Alaisiage*), the *alaisiagae* are reminiscent of the *dísir* in their association with a war-god and through his appelation *thingsus*, cognate with Old Norse *þing*

('public meeting'): *dísir* are associated with the *þing* by the *Dísaþing* ('*Dísir*'s *þing*') attested at Uppsala at the end of the thirteenth century (see Sundqvist 2002, 100). The associations elsewhere of *dísir* with helping warriors on the battlefield and hindering others, implicit in the term *valkyrja*, also have West Germanic and Irish parallels, but are less clearly relevant to *Wið færstice*.[223]

That concepts of supernatural armed women were not limited to the Scandinavians is also suggested by chapters 26–27 of the *Vita I Sancti Samsonis*, from between the early seventh century and the early ninth (Flobert 1997, 102–111)—well before Burchard's *Corrector*. This is almost certainly a Breton composition, but the episode is set in Wales, where Samson grew up, and where the author claims to have heard oral accounts. Hagiographically unconventional, with close analogues in later Welsh literature, the episode in question must have roots in non-Christian insular belief.[224] Samson and a deacon, 'dum irent orantes per uastissimam siluam, dirissimam audierunt uocem a quadam horribili ualde ad dexteram partem iuxta illos terribiliter strepitantem' ('as they went, praying, through a vast forest, heard a fearsome voice, assuredly from a kind of terrible [being], on the right-hand side alongside them, terrifyingly making a great noise'); as the deacon fled, Samson 'uidit theomacham hyrsutam canutamque, iam uetulam anum suis uestimentis birrhatam trisulcatamque uenalem in manu tenentem, ac siluas uastas ueloci cursu uolucritantem fugientemque recta linea insequentem' ('saw an unkempt grey-haired sorceress, already an old woman, with her garments ragged[225] and holding in her hand a bloody[226] three-pronged [weapon], and in a swift course traversing the vast woods and rushing past, following after [him] in a straight line'; ed. Flobert 1997, 184). She proves to be one of a family of nine sisters, the remnant of a once larger

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[223] See the *idisi* in the Old High German First Merseburg Charm (ed. Steinmeyer 1916, 365); the Old English *Solomon and Saturn*, which depicts demons but still shows that a similar concept existed in Anglo-Saxon culture; the same motifs also attached to the Irish *Mórrígna*, showing that related beliefs circulated in the British Isles already around the eighth century (see Hennessy 1870–72; Donahue 1941; Herbert 1996, esp. 146–49; cf. Lysaght 1996, 191–218). Hindering and helping are perhaps reflected lexically in Old English by the probable semantic overlap of *wælcyrige* and *burgrune*, both partial synonyms of *hægtesse*, the first of which hints that *hægtessan* might have been choosers of the slain and the latter of which, whose first element probably means 'protection', suggests that they might have had protective functions. However, the meaning of first element of *burgrune* is a matter for debate, which cannot be entered into here (for other interpretations see *DOE*, s.v. *burh-rūne*; Meaney 1989, 14–15).

[224] See Sims-Williams 1991, 44–45; Goetinck 1975, 226–27; cf. Lovecy 1991, 176. Cf. the *Gallizenae* mentioned in the first century AD by Pomponius Mela, nine virgin priestesses with magical powers living on an island off Brittany (Dillon–Chadwick 1972, 129); the magic-working women who inscribed the Tablet of Larzac (ed. Koch 2003, 3–4); and the nine sisters living on the *Insula pomorum* in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (among them Morgen, who herself can change her shape and fly; ed. Clarke 1973, 100). There is a case to be made that the *Vita I Samsonis* or its successor, the *Vita II Samsonis*, were known in Anglo-Saxon England (Rauer 2000, 90–116), but direct influence on *Wið færstice* is unlikely.

[225] Reading *birratis* for which see *DMLBS*, s.v.

[226] *Venalis*, of course, means 'for sale', but we presumably have here a meaning influenced by a false etymology of *vena* ('vein').

community. The other details of the encounter need not concern us here: what is crucial is its convincing evidence that beliefs in armed, dangerous magic-working females circulated in Wales already by the ninth century. The woman's screaming is also of interest, since the women of *Wið færstice* may themselves be described as *gyllende* ('shouting'); however, *gyllende* there is at least as likely to describe their spears (see §1:0 n. 6).

This material establishes a convincing context for supposing that the supernatural, weapon-bearing women in *Wið færstice* are part of a pre-Viking Age Anglo-Saxon tradition, though other English evidence is hard to come by and equivocal.[227] However, the lexical evidence, albeit limited, does encourage the supposition that supernatural women like those in *Wið færstice* had a longer history. Seventh- and eighth-century Anglo-Saxons seem to have had no difficulty assigning native words to Classical concepts of the powerful, violent *furiae* and *strigae*, among them *wælcyrige*, the literal meaning of whose name suggests an early concept of supernatural women affecting the course of battle. This lexical approach is supported by the evidence for the meanings of *hægtesse* in the thirteenth-century Middle Dutch poem known as *De natuurkunde van het geheelal*.[228] Lines 707–30, in a section on stars and other 'fires in the sky', run

Vanden nacht ridde*re*n, en*de* van anderen duuelen, die in die lucht maken vier.	About the night-riders, and about other devils, which make fire in the sky.
Dvuelen, die sijn in die lucht, En*de* den mensche dicke doen vrucht. Die con*n*en oec wel maken vier, Dat ons walme duncket hier	Devils, which are in the air, and which often cause fright— They also know well how to make fire which seems here to us like torches,

[227] *Beowulf*'s Modþryþo is reminiscent of shield maidens (lines 1931–62; ed. Klaeber 1950, 72–73; cf. Damico 1984, 46–49), and it is interesting that line 1935 emphasises her gaze: this may be understood generally in terms of an alignment of sight and power (cf. Lassen 2000) but may also correlate with the note in chapter 9 of the Old English *Wonders of the East* concerning the place-name *Gorgoneus*, 'þæt is, Wælcyrginc' ('i.e. *wælcyrige*-place'; ed. Orchard 2003a, 190). This may associate *wælcyrgan* with the Gorgons' power to petrify people with their gaze, in which case we have an Anglo-Saxon correlative for *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* stanzas 2–4, where such women's eyes are *hvass* and *atall* ('piercing', 'fierce'; ed. Neckel 1962, 151). The perceived monstrosity of Grendel's mother has often been played down, her violent avenging of Grendel being argued to owe something to older traditions permitting women to take vengeance in the absence of eligible males (on Norse see Clover 1986; cf. 1993; on *Beowulf* Kiernan 1986; Alfano 1992; Taylor 1994; cf. Chance 1986, 99–107; Temple 1985–86; Damico 1984, 46); the subject matter of the Old English poems *Judith* and *Elene* and the aplomb with which the heroines take on martial masculine identities has also been attributed to the same origins (Damico 1984, esp. 26–27, 34–40; Olsen 1990). But one hesitates to build an argument on such disputable ground (cf. Lionarons's reading of *Elene*, 1998); nor do Ellis Davidson's arguments for 'valkyries' on the Franks Casket convince (1969). Some early Anglo-Saxon (and possibly Anglo-Scandinavian) biological women were buried with weapons (Stoodley 1999, 29–30; Lucy 1997, 158–59; 2001, 89; Jesch 1991, 21; cf. Shepherd 1999); in the historical period, some were rulers who oversaw if they did not lead military actions (e.g. Stafford 1983, 117–20). But both categories are too rare to be useful here.

[228] I am indebted to Paul Sander Langeslag, Theo van Heijnsbergen, Femke Kramer and Griet Coupé for assistance with interpreting this passage.

Dat si scieten onderlinghe.	which they shoot among themselves.
Men seyter of vele dinghen.	Many things are said thereof.
Nacht ridders, so heten si,	Night riders, they are called
En*de* sijn duuele, dat segghe ic di,	and they are devils, that I tell you,
Haghetissen, en*de* varende vrouwen,	*haghetissen*, and wandering women,
Godelinge^wichte^ oec, en trouwen,	'goodlings' [protective spirits] ^-beings^ also,
Cobboude, nickers, aluen, maren,^nacht merien^	indeed, cobalds, water-monsters, *aluen*,
Die hem tsmorghe*n*s openbaren,	*maren*,^night-*maren*^ who make themselves known in
En*de* con*n*en wel halen vier.	the morning, and know well how to get fire.
Nacht merien heten wise hier.	We call them night-*maren* here,
Minne, dit sien duuelen alle,	indeed, these are devils all,
Die ons gherne brochte*n* te valle.	who brought us eagerly to the Fall.
Die duuel peynst nacht en*de* dach,	The Devil ponders night and day,
Hoe hi ons verlistighen mach,	how they can lead us astray,
En*de* vten gheloue bringhen,	and bring us from faith,
En*de* proeft ons met menighe*n* dinghen.	and tests us with many things.

This attests to traditions of supernatural beings riding, apparently in the air, and shooting fire between themselves. The similarity of this motif to the association of the *dísir* in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* with a light from Logafjallar and with flying sparks suggests that we should imagine a network of overlapping traditions regarding supernatural, riding women among medieval North Sea cultures. The Dutch term *nacht ridders* also compares well with Norse terms—not, admittedly, applied to Sigrún—such as *kveldriða* and *myrkriða*, also used of supernatural females riding, sometimes in companies, in the night (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931; Cleasby–Vigusson 1957, s.vv.; cf. Mitchell 1997, esp. 87–88). However, the Dutch tradition is also connected to *Wið færstice*, this time lexically, since it calls the riding bands of devils *haghetissen*, the Middle Dutch cognate of *hægtessan*. *Haghetisse* and *hægtesse* must have been close in meaning as well as form.[229] The euphemistic *varende vrouwen* is also similar to *mihtigan wif*. Of course, the text emphasises primarily that the *nacht ridderen* are *duuelen*, and takes the opportunity to make the same identification for a range of other supernatural beings, including *aluen*. The inclusiveness of this list of supernatural beings means that its mention of both *aluen* and *haghetissen* cannot be considered a convincing parallel to the similar collocation in *Wið færstice*. However, it is reasonable to infer that the first synonyms given for *nacht ridderen*—*haghetissen* and *varende vrouwen*—are closer in meaning. The parallels between these terms and *Wið færstice* connect the Dutch text with its riding women shooting fire among themselves to *Wið færstice*'s spear-throwing *hægtessan*. *Wið færstice*, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* and *De natuurkunde van het geheelal* form a group, whose various similarities in motifs and language situate *Wið færstice* convincingly among traditions of cavalcades of supernatural females.

   Wið færstice's cavalcade of martial women, then, can be taken plausibly to attest to

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[229] Some consternation has been caused in Dutch scholarship by the meaning of the modern Dutch reflex *hagedis* ('lizard'), but this meaning is a secondary development owing to the association of salamanders with magic (Jansen-Sieben 1968, II 647–48).

deep-rooted Anglo-Saxon traditions. The comparative material also provides various models for hypothesising the relationship of *hægtessan* to Anglo-Saxon in-groups and out-groups. The penitential tradition suggests that the *hægtessan* might include women from the in-group—married women who ought to be sleeping. On the other hand, the *hægtessan* may come partly or entirely from an out-group, in a model like that developed above for male supernatural beings (§§2:4, 3:2–4). They might be demons, as in *De natuurkunde van het geheelal*, or ethnic others, as in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* which identifies its *dísir* with the formula *dísir suðrœnar* ('southern ladies'; cf. *Vǫlundarkviða* st. 1, quoted §7:3). Within this paradigm, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* identifies its leading *dís* as an unmarried maiden, empowered by her liminal status between girlhood and wifehood, which affords another, overlapping model (cf. Clover 1986).

3. Issobel Gowdie: the smiths, the elves and the witches

Wið færstice proceeds from portraying the *mihtigan wif* to describing the actions first of a 'smið' ('craftsman') and then of 'syx smiðas' ('six craftsmen'), who forge weapons. These figures were long seen as forces aiding the patient against the *hægtessan*, mainly because of an assumed connection with Weland and a further assumption—contrary to all our major sources—that Weland was not the sort of person who might harm someone else (e.g. Glosecki 1989, 134; see also Chickering 1971, 100–1; Abernethy 1983, 105–7). However, as Doskow pointed out (1976, 324), identifying the smiths as a beneficial force

> raises many more questions than it answers. Why should the description in the first section of the attacking forces be interrupted by the introduction of an allied force? Why should the pattern of identification of the sources of evil be suddenly broken to identify an ally, the single smith, only to return to naming evil powers after introducing the ally?

In addition, the *smiðas* of *Wið færstice* are portrayed as forging 'wælspera' ('slaughter-spears'): the simplex *spere* is, on the four occasions when it occurs in the charm, exclusively and formulaically identified as the cause of the ailment. Nor should we be surprised to find smiths causing harm in (Christian) Anglo-Saxon culture. The common assertion that smiths and smithing were associated with magical power in early medieval Europe is rather ill-supported, especially if Vǫlundr is removed from consideration.[230] But Judaeo-Christian traditions reproduced in Anglo-Saxon England sometimes criticised smiths (see Coatsworth–Pinder 2002, 178–203, esp. 198–203; Wright 1993, 189–90),

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[230] The fact that magically-empowered figures are smiths does not mean that smiths are necessarily magically-empowered (cf. Wicker 1994, esp. 145–47): one rarely hears of weavers as inherently magical, despite the fact that magic and weaving are much more strongly associated than magic and smithing in our medieval sources (see 7:3 n. 193).

while lines 47–55 of the eighth-century Irish *lorica* known as *Patrick's Hymn* explicitly invoke protection 'fri brichtu ban ⁊ gobann ⁊ druad' ('against the incantations of women and smiths and druids'; ed. Stokes–Strachan 1901–3, ɪɪ 357).

Hægtessan are explicitly mentioned in both halves of *Wið færstice*. The question arises, then, whether the *ese* and/or the *ælfe* of the second part also have any correspondents in the first. This idea was long precluded by critics' insistence on the fundamental unrelatedness of the two sections, but a connection between the *ælfe* and the *smiðas* has more recently been proposed (see §8 n. 212). Medieval evidence to support this is thin on the ground: *Vǫlundarkviða*'s association of the flying *meyjar* with Vǫlundr, smith and *álfr*, bears only a distant resemblance, and Laȝamon's 'aluisc smið' (for whom see n. 133) takes us no further. However, there was a widespread association of otherworldly males in medieval North-West Europe with the manufacture of remarkable or magical weapons (cf. Cross 1952, 254 [F.217.3]; Guerreau-Jalabert 1992, 64, 67 [F271.3, F343.3]); and although Boberg did not identify the motif F271.3 *Fairies skilful as smiths* in Old Norse literature, the *æsir* and their civilisation are intimately associated with smithing in *Vǫluspá* and elsewhere (stanzas 7 and 61; cf. Boberg 1966, 23 [A140]). There was, then, a general connection between otherworldly males and smithing in North-West European traditions, providing a context for linking *ælfe*, *ese* and *smiðas*. The fact that the *smiðas* are not explicitly called *ælfe* or *ese* could reflect the charm's use of allusion and euphemism: the supernatural beings of *Wið færstice* are for twenty lines denoted only by pronouns, *wif*, and *smið*. This use of allusion in the first half of the text creates tension, emphasising the threat posed by the mysterious supernatural forces, which go unnamed and therefore outside human control; this is climactically resolved by their naming as *hægtessan*, *ælfe* and *ese*. This movement parallels the progression from allusion to the ailment, to a description of a 'wund swiðe' ('great injury', line 12), to a concluding focus on the patient's own body, the patient and his assailants being embodied precisely when they are exorcised. Linking *ese* and *ælfe* with the *smiðas*, then, increases the coherence of the charm and is consistent both with its rhetorical techniques and with wider North-West European traditions.

However, a remarkable parallel is also available for this reading, in the confessions to witchcraft of Issobel Gowdie.[231] Tried in 1662, Issobel was from Auldearn, near Inverness, in the county of Nairn. We know that she was married, but little else about her. Issobel's confessions are complex: we have four separate confessions, each recorded by the same notary, Johne Innes. Issobel made them at the peak of Scotland's largest witch-hunt, at a time when intellectual ideas of witchcraft had been widely disseminated

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[231] On comparing Scottish witchcraft trials with Old English evidence see §7:4.

and fairy-beliefs relatively well-assimilated to these (Henderson–Cowan 2001, 106–41; cf. Hall forthcoming [d]; on the hunt generally see Levack 1980). Issobel 'interspersed fairy and diabolical beliefs in her confessions … to a degree that is unrivalled in any other known witch trial' (Henderson–Cowan 2001, 134): large parts of her confessions are—perhaps literally—text-book examples of elite conceptions of witchcraft. Yet alongside these, she recounted material about *Fearrie*. Desirable though it would be, I cannot consider the full range of European analogues to Issobel's confessions here. But we can identify impressive parallels to *Wið færstice*'s juxtaposition of smiths, *ælfe*, and riding witches, and it is on these that I focus here.

On April 13th 1662, Issobel 'appeiring penetent for hir haynows sinnes of Witchcraft, and that sho haid bein ower lang in that service; without ony compulsitouris {judicial compulsions}, proceidit in hir Confessione' (ed. Pitcairn 1833, III 602–3), confessing again on May 3rd, 15th and 27th. It is not clear what processes of coercion, social, judicial or otherwise, the term 'without ony compulsitouris' might mask; if she had been imprisoned for the whole period, as Cohn assumed, then that alone was no small compulsion.[232] No questions are recorded in the confession records, which instead give the impression of being transcriptions of monologues by Issobel, but this does not mean that questions were not asked. Even so, parts of Issobel's confessions are too unusual among the witchcraft trials to doubt that they derived from her rather than from her prosecutors. Moreover, the records twice cut off her accounts of fairies with '*&c.*', which they do not do on other occasions, implying that these accounts were neither of interest to her prosecutors, nor words put into her mouth (cf. Henderson–Cowan 2001, 4).

Issobel's first confession begins by describing her meeting with the Devil, renunciation of her baptism, and her 'carnall cowpulation and dealing' with him; and how she and her coven spoiled crops. The confession closes with other conventional, albeit unusually detailed, accounts of stealing cows' milk, inflicting harm using images, and the coven's membership. In between, however, is a passage (ed. Pitcairn 1833, III 603–4) which is worth quoting in full:

> When we goe to any hous, we tak meat {food} and drink; and we fill wp the barrellis with owr oven {own} pish again; and we put boosomes {brooms} in our beds with our husbandis, till ve return again to them. We wer in *the Earle of Murreyes* hous in *Dernvey* and ve gott anewgh {enough} ther, and did eat and drink of the best, and browght pairt with ws. We went in at the windowes. I haid a little horse, and wold say 'Horse and Hattock {little hat}, in the Divellis name!' And than ve vold flie {move at great speed/fly} away, quhair ve veold, be ewin as strawes wold flie wpon an hie-way. We will flie lyk strawes quhan we pleas; wild-strawes and corne-strawes wilbe horses to ws, an {if} ve put thaim betwixt our foot, and say 'Horse and Hattock, in the Divellis nam!' An quhan any sies thes strawes in a whirlewind, and doe not sanctifie them selues, we may shoot them dead at owr pleasour. Any that ar shot be vs, their sowell will goe to Hevin, bot ther bodies remains with ws, and will flie as horsis to ws, als small as strawes.

[232] 1993, 159; on torture, judicial and otherwise, in Scottish trials see Levack 2002, 173–77; MacDonald 2002, 123–42.

> I was in *the Downie-hillis*, and got meat ther from THE QWEIN OF FEARRIE, mor than I could eat. *The Qwein of Fearrie* is brawlie {finely} clothed in whyt linens, and in whyt and browne cloathes, &c.; and THE KING OF FEARRIE is a braw man, weill favoured, and broad faced, &c. Ther wes elf-bullis rowtting and skoylling wp and downe thair, and affrighted me.

It is not certain that Issobel's use of *fle*, which is well-attested in the sense 'to move with the speed of flying' (*DOST*, s.v. *Fle*, v.[1]), attests to flight, though that does seem likely. The consistency of her confession with the early medieval admonitions of Burchard and Regino is, as often in the trials, impressive, and at least some elements here are certainly traditional.[233] But the similarities to *Wið færstice*, in which the cavalcade of riding women also shoots its victims, are unexpected and striking. Just as *Wið færstice* proceeds from depicting the cavalcade of women causing ailments using projectiles to mention *ælfe*, Issobel proceeds to talk about the queen and king of *Fearrie*, in one of the passages where Johne Innes broke off. The lexical collocation of this royal couple with *elf-bullis* emphasises the relevance of *Fearrie* to *elvis*, while their association with hills is reminiscent both of Andro Man's *Elphillok* and of the *hlæw* in *Wið færstice*.

Thus, Issobel's first confession contains some suggestive thematic collocations; but her second parallels *Wið færstice* more closely (ed. Pitcairn 1833, III 606–10). This confession generally complements the first: she explains that 'ilk on of vs has an SPRIT {spirit, sprite} to wait wpon ws', listing the sprites; Johne breaks off when she mentions 'THOMAS A FEARIE'. Next Issobel describes a rhyme used to raise and quieten the wind, proceeding later to describe the rhymes which she used to change into and out of animals' forms, and those for healing and for harming. Between the wind-spells and the shape-changing spells, however, comes another passage (ed. Pitcairn 1833, III 607; the ellipses are Pitcairn's, reflecting manuscript lacunae, words in square brackets being his conjectural additions):

> As for Elf-arrow-heidis, THE DIVELL shapes them with his awin hand, [and syne deliueris thame] to Elf-boyes, who whyttis {shapes} and dightis {finishes off} them with a sharp thing lyk a paking neidle {needle for binding bundles}; bot [quhan I wes in Elf-land ?] I saw them whytting and dighting them. Quhan I wes in the Elfes howssis, they will haw werie . . . . them whytting and dighting; and THE DIVELL giwes them to ws, each of ws so many, quhen . . . . Thes that dightis thaim ar little ones, hollow, and boss-baked {probably 'concave-backed', connoting good posture}![234] They speak gowstie lyk {gruesomely}. Quhen THE DIVELL gives them to ws, he sayes,

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[233] Issobel's phrase *horse and hattock* is paralleled elsewhere in seventeenth-century Scottish folklore (Pitcairn 1833, III 604 n. 3; cf. Henderson–Cowan 2001, 37–38) and *hattock* was probably already archaic by Issobel's time, appearing otherwise in the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* only for 1501 (s.v. *Huttok*).

[234] *Boss-baked* has been translated as 'hunch-backed' (e.g. Cohn 1993, 159; Henderson–Cowan 2001, 55). But the noun *bos* seems to denote forms which were at once convex and concave (*DOST*, s.v., *n*[2]) and as an adjective it means 'hollow, concave', *DOST* giving 'hollow-backed' (s.v. *boss-ba(c)ked*; cf. *bos*, *a*). Either way, *DOST*'s reading is supported by the citation 'Ther faces seimed whyt and as lane {like fine linen}, but ther backis wer bos lyk fidles', used of the dead men by whom Cristan Nauchty, of the presbytery of Elgin, about twenty miles West of Nairn, confessed in 1629 to have been 'taine away with a wind'. In contrasting *bos backis* with white faces it suggests positive connotations for *bos backis* and so *boss-baked* (ed. Cramond 1903–8, II 211)—

> 'Sнoот thes in my name,
> And they sall not goe heall hame!'
And quhan ve shoot these arrowes (we say)—
> 'I sноот yon man in тне Divellis name,
> He sall not win heall hame!
> And this salbe alswa trw;
> Thair sall not be an bitt of him on lieiw! {alive}'
We haw no bow to shoot with, but spang them from the naillis of our thowmbes. Som tymes we will misse; bot if thay twitch {touch}, be it beast, or man, or woman, it will kill, tho' they haid an jack wpon them.

Here, then, Issobel describes the manufacture of the weapons with which she and her accomplices shot people and animals: *elf-arrow-heidis* (apparently denoting neolithic flint arrow-heads: *DOST*, s.v. *Elf-arrow*; *OED*, s.vv. *arrow* §1c, *arrow-head* §1b; there is no Scots evidence for the verb *schute* to mean 'afflict with pain' or the like). The description focuses on one manufacturer in particular, and then mentions his helpers, identified as *elf-boyes*. As I have interpreted it, *Wið færstice* also describes how the projectiles of the *hægtessan* are made, mentioning, like Issobel, a single smith first and then focusing on a larger number. I have inferred that *Wið færstice*'s *smiðas* are *ælfe*, but their counterparts in Issobel's confession are certainly *elvis*. The appearance of the Devil may reflect pressure from Issobel's prosecutors (cf. Cohn 1993, 159), but the smiths are most unlikely to have been their invention.

   It appears that Issobel saw the manufacture of the weapons 'in the Elfes howssis'. Whether these should be identified with *Fearrie* in the *Downie-hillis* is uncertain, but this would be consistent with some other early modern Scottish evidence for witches' sources of *elf-arrow-heidis*.[235] The identification would also help to explain why in her first confession Issobel proceeded directly from an account of how she and her coven could ride out and shoot people to an account of *Fearrie*. Conceivably, indeed, she went on then to describe the manufacture of the weapons in the part of her confession summarised by John Innes's *&c.*, forestalling this loss of interest during her second confession by introducing the Devil. Certainly, a direct connection between the rides, shooting, and the Devil's provision of ammunition is suggested later in the second confession (ed. Pitcairn 1833, III 609), when Issobel says

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though the motif is admittedly also reminiscent of the modern Scandinavian motif whereby the backs of otherworldly beings are hollow, like a rotten log (e.g. Erixon 1961, 34). This note supercedes Hall forthcoming [d], n. 7.

[235] Katherene Ross (Ross and Cromarty, 1590) would allegedly 'gang in Hillis to speik the elf folk' (ed. Pitcairn 1833, I 196). Neither the purpose nor the consequence of this advice is recorded, but *elf* occurs otherwise in Katherene's trial only in the *elf-arrow-heidis* which she shot at images of her victims. Reading Katherene's visits to the hills as quests for *elf-arrow-heidis* would be broadly consistent with the statement of James VI in his *Daemonologie* that 'sundrie Witches haue gone to death with that confession, that they haue ben transported with the *Phairie* to such a hill, which opening, they went in, and there saw a faire Queen, who being now lighter {i.e. having given birth}, gaue them a stone that had sundrie vertues' (ed. Craigie 1982, 51). On the use of *elf-arrow-heidis* by witches see further Hall forthcoming [d].

The first woyage that ewer I went with the rest of owr Covens wes [to] Plewghlandis; and thair we shot an man betuixt the plewgh-stiltis {plough-handles}, and he presentlie fell to the ground, wpon his neise {nose} and his mowth; and than THE DIVELL gaw me an arrow, and cawsed me shoot an voman in that feildis; quhilk I did, and she fell down dead.

Meaney's point that 'there is no real evidence … that the Anglo-Saxons believed that the malignant disease-bringing forces employed prehistoric arrowheads in their nefarious task' is important (1981, 212): I do not propose that *Wið færtice*'s *(wæl)speru* are neolithic arrow-heads. All the same, the collocation of women riding and shooting projectiles to harm members of the in-group with images of the supply of these projectiles by otherworldly smiths denoted partly by *elf* is striking.

Issobel's subsequent confessions mainly repeat the material in the first two. In the third confession she proceeds from describing the inside of the 'Downie-hillis' to 'the killing of severall persones, with the arrowes quhich I gott from THE DIVELL', and thereafter to a description of how 'we wold goe to seuerall howssis, in the night tym' (ed. Pitcairn 1833, III 611–12). This chain of association again resembles the sequence of similar motifs in *Wið færstice*: the *hlæw* over which the *mihtigan wif* ride, their shooting of projectiles to harm people, and the description of the *syx smiðas* who arguably supplied the weapons, Issobel then returning to describing her cavalcades. The fourth confession repeats the description in the second of the manufacture of the 'Elf-arrowes' (ed. Pitcairn 1833, III 615).

Issobel went on rides with her coven, on which she shot *elf-arrows* or *elf-arrow-heidis* at people to cause their deaths. These were supplied by the Devil and his *elf-boyes*, who made them in the *Elfes howssis*. The rulers of *Fearrie*, lexically associated with *elvis*, lived in hills. This combination of motifs is a patchwork from two confessions, supported by the others, and the connections little more explicit than *Wið færstice*'s own juxtaposition of similar motifs. But taken together, Issobel's confessions show a set of connected motifs which are strikingly similar to those of *Wið færstice*. Moreover, Issobel's claims are similar to *Wið færstice* despite major countervailing trends in our intervening attestations of fairy-lore. In other English and Scottish evidence, *elves*, the word exhibiting the female denotation first attested in the eleventh century, were themselves being assimilated to the bands of riding women first attested by Regino of Prüm. Dancing groups of supernatural females are first attested in medieval European literature in the later twelfth century, in Walter Map's *De nugis curialium* (ii.11–12, iv.10, cf. iv.8; ed. James 1983, 148, 154, 349, cf. 345), followed by Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* (3.3.6; ed. Olrik–Ræder 1931–57, I 69). By around 1300 we find the cavalcade of dancing *eluene* in the *Southern English Legendary* (see §7.1.3) and the earliest attestation of *elf-ring*, 'a ring of daisies caused by elves' dancing'.[236] Shortly after, the

[236] Missed from the *MED*, this is attested in three textually related lists of plant-names, the earliest

Fasciculus morum developed the penitential tradition mentioning 'reginas pulcherrimas et alias puellas tripudiantes cum domina Dyana, choreas ducentes dea paganorum, que in nostro vulgari dicitur *elves*' ('beautiful queens and other girls dancing with their mistress Dyana, leading dances with the goddess of the pagans, who in our vernacular are called *elves*'; ed. Wenzel 1989, 578). Before the century was out, the Wife of Bath's 'elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye' was declared to have 'daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede' (lines 857–61, cf. 989–96; ed. Benson 1987, 116, 118). Similar ideas are attested in Scotland around 1580 in the second invective of Montgomerie's *Flyting against Polwart*, though this, like *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, also alludes to male *elves* and their sexual aggression (lines 1–26; ed. Parkinson 2000, I 143–44; cf. Simpson 1995, esp. 10). At the same time as Issobel's trial, John Milton (*Paradise Lost* I.781–87; ed. Ricks 1989, 27) was describing

> … Faery Elves,
> Whose midnight Revels, by a Forest side
> Or Fountain some belated Peasant sees,
> Or dreams he sees, while overhead the Moon
> Sits Arbitress, and nearer to the Earth
> Wheels her pale course, they on their mirth and dance
> Intent, with jocund Music charm his ear…

Issobel's distinction between riding witches and weapon-making *elf-boyis* compares far better with *Wið færstice* than with these elite literary conventions. In her confession, then, we undboutedly have remarkable glimpses into non-elite and possibly archaic Scottish beliefs.

Issobel Gowdie's confessions, then, parallel *Wið færstice* in a number of ways, and while some of the parallels represent motifs prominent in the elite ideologies of witchcraft of the time, some we owe to Issobel and, it seems, to ancient traditions. Prominent in Issobel's confessions, albeit by abstraction from partial accounts, is a conception of witchcraft involving groups of witches riding in flight, gaining magical projectiles from the *elvis* who manufacture them, possibly in hills, and using them to shoot people. Like *Wið færstice*, Issobel portrayed one smith (in her account the Devil) in a group of smiths. The relevance of these parallels to the whole of the Old English charm consolidates literary arguments for its coherence, and their existence shows that *Wið færstice* is not a unique imaginative blooming. Issobel's use of *elf*—albeit only in the compounds *elf-bull*, *elf-boy* and *elf-arrow-heid*—links her narratives lexically to the history of *ælf*, and supports the inference on internal evidence that *Wið færstice*'s *ælfe* are identical with its *smiðas*.

being in British Library, Add. 15236, from about 1300, in the word *elferingewort* (lit. '*elf*-ring-plant'; ed. Hunt 1989, 87). This glosses 'la meine consoude', itself apparently denoting daisies.

4. Healing and the supernatural in Anglo-Saxon culture

I have argued above that the Old English medical texts relating to *ælfsiden* can be convincingly linked with a wider world of medieval narratives in which otherworldly beings interact with members of the in-group through love and magic, and which afforded a discourse through which people could construct mind-altering illnesses and other debilitating ailments, and even socially proscribed sexual encounters. The narratives, intimately linked to concepts of supernatural threat and personal transgression, could give these events meanings, causes, appropriate responses and ameliorating benefits. However, this comparative material illuminates the other Old English medical texts, which do not suggest mind-altering illnesses, only indirectly. *Wið færstice*, on the other hand, provides a paradigm for understanding how the attribution of other ailments to *ælfe* could have been significant in Anglo-Saxon culture. Cameron has shown that the plants prescribed in *Wið færstice*, if applied as a salve, would be likely to have been chemically effective 'for muscular and joint pains' (1993, 142–44). Why, then, the addition of an elaborate charm, which dominates the remedy to the extent that we cannot even be sure that the plants were used as a salve? Although other factors will have been involved, it is reasonable to look for a functional interpretation, to see how the charm helped the patient and the healer.

We are hampered, of course, by not knowing what range of symptoms *færstice* connoted—anything on Glosecki's range from a stitch to a ruptured appendix is possible (1989, 112–13). But we may assume that the sufferer was sufficiently debilitated that his or her usual contribution to the community was diminished. *Wið færstice* had a potential role not only in healing the body, then, but also the sufferer's position in the community. Its impressively developed metaphor of pain as a (metaphysical) projectile wound concretises the pain both for the sufferer and the community, making it possible to bring it into a narrative of interaction and healing, and into human comprehension and control. Specifically, it renarrates the sufferer's experience in martial and heroic terms. If recited only victims of the illness, the charm had the potential to help them renegotiate their self-perception, but if intended for public performance, it could extend that renegotiation to the whole community. The technique is reminiscent of the conceptualisation of temptation to sin as arrows and prayers as armour, which take their scriptural precedent primarily from Ephesians 6:16, but were developed with especial vigour in Anglo-Saxon Christianity (Atherton 1993; Dendle 2001, 33–35; Orchard 2003a, 51–52). Whether the use of this metaphor in Christian texts and *Wið færstice* owe anything to one another is hard to guess, but the power of the technique is evident.

Moreover, just as it proved useful in early medieval Christianity to posit Satan as the ultimate source of the arrows of temptation, positing supernatural beings as the source of the *færstice* opened up a world of meaning. Introducing other players into the narrative of patient and healer gave the ailment an ultimate as well as a proximate source, and created a narrative in which the healer tackled the disease at its root, not merely through defence or cure, but through counter-offensive. The latter element may run deeper in the charm than has been realised. Chickering (1971, 96) noted that

> the nettle and the black heads of the ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) resemble spears or arrows in shape. If the feverfew in the charm were centaury, it too might have had magical value because its seeds are in the shape of small spindles.

Cameron has reidentified the referent of *seo reade netele* as *Lamium purpureum*, which is not a true nettle, but as it is like them in form, Chickering's point stands (1993, 108). The remedy contains ingredients reminiscent of the *speru* directed against the sufferer. In addition, however, *Wið færstice*'s portrayal of the *smiðas* forging weapons may be more than an aside on the origins of *hægtessan*'s weapons. I have noted that smiths could be associated with harmful magic in early medieval North-West Europe, and mentioned the arguments that in *Vǫlundarkviða*, Vǫlundr works magic by smithing, much as women could work magic by spinning and weaving (§§7:3, 8:3). This concept suggests that the smithing depicted in *Wið færstice* itself implies a magical attack, potentially causing the *færstice*, paralleling the assault by the *mihtigan wif* in lines 3–11. If so, then we can also imagine the manufacture of the salve prescribed in *Wið færstice* to have been a creative act with magical potential. The charm says that the speaker will return the projectiles of the *mihtigan wif*: arguably, the act of making the salve could have been understood to effect just this; if the act of creating weapons could cause harm, then the act of creating a salve could effect healing.

It is possible, then, to read the recitation of the charm and the manufacture of the concoction in *Wið færstice* as a symbolically integrated process, in which the healer fights fire with fire at a number of levels. That such rituals could also help to effect the healing of individuals is well-attested anthropologically (e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1968–77 [1949]). Lastly, *Wið færstice* apparently situates the origins of the ailment outside the sphere of the community, associating the hostile, supernatural protagonists with the liminal space of the natural world (and possibly of the burial mound).[237] We do have one case of a wife, abetted by her son, murdering her husband by sticking pins in an image (S1377), which serves to emphasise how different the construction of supernatural harm in *Wið færstice* is. By establishing a contrast between in-group and out-group, the charm

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[237] On which see Semple 1998–99; 2003; Williams 1998–99; Reynolds 2002, esp. 175–79.

firmly aligns the sufferer with his or her community, and implicitly the community with the sufferer. The suffer becomes, indeed, the community's representative in a wider struggle. This implicitly also creates a powerful position for the healer: the charm suggests that the healer has special knowledge of supernatural forces and special access to their world, privileging him; his own potentially liminal situation is, like the patient's, ameliorated by the binary division between friend and foe in the charm, since this aligns him unquestionably with the in-group.

Some of these readings are undeniably speculative. But even the more straightforward inferences from *Wið færstice* suggest the power which beliefs in *ælfe* and similar beings could have in Anglo-Saxon healing, and help us to understand the meanings of their association with ailments other than mind-altering ones in the Old English medical texts.

5. Conclusions

Wið færstice furthers our understanding of the meanings of *ælfe* in Anglo-Saxon culture in several important ways, and it situates *ælfe* in a comparatively fully-portrayed mythological context, which has ramifications for how we read *ælfe*'s roles in the construction of sickness and healing. In it, *ælfe* are linked with *ese*, recalling other evidence for the same collocation, but also *hægtessan*. The meanings of *hægtesse* and *hægtessan* are comparatively well-evidenced, both by Old English evidence and wider sources, showing that traditions of cavalcades of supernatural, armed women causing harm to members of the in-group are widely-paralleled. That their collocation with *ælfe* may reflect more than a chance combination is suggested by the early Norse hints that *dísir* and *álfar* were mythological counterparts, and *Vǫlundarkviða*'s collocation of *alvitr* and *álfr*, but most clearly by the strikingly similar and otherwise distinctive combination of motifs in Issobel Gowdie's confessions during the early modern Scottish witchcraft trials. This affords a basis, better-established than any hitherto, for interpreting the evidence for early *ælfe*'s male gender and lack of a nymph-like counterpart, and for the change in that situation, which I consider in the concluding analyses of my next chapter. *Wið færstice* also shows how beliefs of this sort could be developed as explanations for harm, and I have presented a reading of the text emphasising its potential power to ameliorate the suffering of individuals beset by *færsticas* by re-narrating their situations as heroic struggles in which they represent the in-group in opposition to external forces. This could certainly renegotiate a sufferer's position in his or her community, and potentially also facilitate the work of his or her own immune system by concretising the disease, symbolically identifying and negating its root cause, and improving his or her self-perception. Although we lack such vivid evidence for other *ælf*-ailments, *Wið*

færstice suggests the significance which identifying ailments' sources as *ælfe* could have had in our other Old English medical texts—and so more widely in Anglo-Saxon culture.

Chapter 9

The Meanings of *Ælfe*

A close analysis of our Old English texts, with due reference to analogous material from medieval North-West Europe, has enabled me to reconstruct a fairly full image of *ælfe* in the elite cultures of Anglo-Saxon England. Beliefs in *ælfe* were not, of course, monolithic: limited though our evidence is, it is possible to trace the rise of a demonised conception of *ælfe*, and its competition with traditional concepts of *ælfe*—which continued for over eight centuries. It also is possible to see the arrival of female *ælfe* in Anglo-Saxon beliefs, once more attesting to variation and change. I have summarised these conclusions above (§7:0). But comparative evidence also shows the likelihood that most of *ælfe*'s various associations were part of a coherent and significant construct (§§7, 8). The associations of *ælfe* with dangerous seductiveness and causing ailments, which I have reanalysed, need not compromise earlier evidence aligning them with the interests of the in-group: rather, comparable medieval narratives suggest that these threats can be understood to have been ordered, generally threatening only those members of the in-group who transgressed certain boundaries (spatial or social). Wider and later evidence consolidates the lexical associations of *ælfe* with seduction, illness and the magic denoted by *siden*, suggesting that these features could occur together in coherent narratives, of seduction or of revenge for failed seduction. The associations of *ælfe* with femininity which are also apparent in the Old English material are well-paralleled by these narratives, since the best comparisons for the lexical evidence involve female otherworldly beings, while similar Scandinavian narratives concerning male otherworldly beings involve their transgression of masculine gender boundaries in ways which we may take to have provided paradigmatic examples of socially abnormal behaviour.

It is gratifying to have been able to reconstruct these beliefs for a period where their attestation is so marginal. Several themes, however, demand further development now that all of the evidence, primary and comparative, has been assembled. Narrowing my approach to meaning to a broadly functionalist one, I conclude by examining the relationship between the beliefs I have identified and the society which maintained them, interpreting their change and survival in terms of responses to changing social and cultural structures. This is by no means the only valid approach to these issues; moreover, beliefs may be productively functional for a group smaller than that which holds the beliefs, and may exist in ways in which 'functions' seem more like rationalisations of beliefs which owe more to other social forces. But functionalism nonetheless affords one powerful way of using the new data assembled above.

Most pertain to Anglo-Saxon group identity—which has enjoyed considerable interest in the context of the recent scholarly debates concerning ethnicity in the post-Roman world.[238] A free man was liable to have a large number of complementary, overlapping and sometimes conflicting group identities, based on his household, settlement and kin; lords and clients; status, gender, dialect, language, and so forth (see Kleinschmidt 2000, 89–119). Although the study of monsters in medieval thought, and their relationships with identity, is now well-established,[239] this research has been largely limited to intellectual traditions whose significance for the less learned sections of early medieval society, and especially for the migration period, is questionable.[240] The present study, however, provides a viable set of evidence. Additionally, models of early medieval constructions of group identities have generally been based on processes of inclusion: groups, in these models, are formed through individuals' shared characteristics. In earlier scholarship, ancestry and language were emphasised; more recently, material culture and shared origin-myths have gained prominence. But my evidence suggests a model of identity based on exclusivity: individuals were members of a given group because they were not from outside it, in specific and historically traceable ways.

Members of a given Anglo-Saxon in-group belonged because they were not monsters: monsters were fundamentally opposed to the in-group in a fairly straightforward binary division. Combining the Anglo-Saxon data with models based on Scandinavian comparative evidence (§§2–4.1) suggests that, traditionally, *ælfe* were mythologically allied with humans in the cosmological struggle of men against monsters attested particularly by *Beowulf*. I have examined these themes already in detail. They could be developed further in various ways. One possibility would be the use of untapped place-name evidence to facilitate their mapping directly onto Anglo-Saxon conceptual landscapes (cf. Appendix 2). What I will focus on here, however, is how our Old English textual evidence as well as the Norse material also suggests that *ælfe* had associations with behaviour which was normally considered transgressive of proper behaviour—once more helping to define the in-group by what it was not.

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[238] For prominent examples see the articles in Hines 1997; in Frazer–Tyrrel 2000; in Gillet 2002; Smyth 1998; Higham 2002; Howe 1989; cf. more generally Kleinschmidt 2000, 89–119; the articles in other volumes in the series *Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology* and *The Transformation of the Roman World* published respectively by Brewer in Cambridge and Brill in Leiden.

[239] e.g. Williams 1996; Cohen 1999; Friedman 2000; cf. §2:4. On Anglo-Saxon England see especially Austin 2002; Lionarons 2002; Orchard 2003a.

[240] Excepting Scandinavia and Ireland, on which see the essays in Olsen–Houwen 2001; Borsje 1996; Carey 2002; and above §2:4.

1. *Ælfe* as sources of danger and power

The evidence that *ælfe* had roles in Anglo-Saxon cultures as sources of danger is extensive. I have studied the significance of this construct in detail in chapters 6–8, arguing that beliefs in *ælfe* encoded supernatural threats to those who would cross important social boundaries—whether spatial or behavioural. In our evidence at least, *ælfe*'s main sanction against transgression seems to have been to inflict ailments, in particular mind-altering ones and sharp internal pains. Such beliefs could also be used to impart meaning to illnesses, potentially providing a rationale for their infliction and certainly a set of cultural references through which the experience of illness could be safely constructed within the community, and the curing of those afflicted facilitated. These points suggest a further dimension to my association of *ælfe* with demarcating group identity: that they not only helped to demarcate boundaries of acceptable behaviour (whether by good or bad example), but that they were viewed as an active force in policing at least some of those boundaries. *Ælfe* have long been seen as malignant forces in Anglo-Saxon belief, but in my analysis they are understood rather as powerful beings who would exercise their power in fundamentally ordered ways—albeit perhaps violently and perhaps not fairly—for the long-term benefit of the community. They presumably differed in this from the monstrous threats with which, at least in the early Anglo-Saxon period, they were systematically contrasted, and which we may guess to have been genuinely malignant.

Specific evidence that *ælfe* may have interacted with in-groups in less harmful ways is slight, but it is important, partly because it may connect with other evidence considered in the next section. The word *ylfig*, which on balance seems probably to have been a member of the common Old English lexicon from at least the eighth century to the eleventh, denoted prophetic states of mind (§5:4). The implication of its semantics and etymology is that *ælfe* could be sources of prophetic power to at least some sections of the community, implying that their associations with altered states of mind could be positive as well as negative (and conceivably both at once). The same point is suggested by the evidence that some Anglo-Saxons, at least around the seventh century, would employ a plant called, amongst other things, *ælfþone* (etymologically '*ælf*-vine') for its mind-altering qualities, though other explanations for the name are possible. The idea of supernatural sources of healing or prophetic powers was familiar in Christian Anglo-Saxon society: it is ubiquitous in the saints' lives and homilies produced or otherwise circulated in the region, while religious specialists were deemed to have special access to divine power for healing purposes (e.g. Jolly 1996, 170 *et passim*); and Anglo-Saxons' invocation of divine power in cursing is likewise extensively attested (Niles 2003, 1120–

46). It is not unlikely, then, that certain Anglo-Saxons should have claimed supernatural sources for their powers. The putative existence of *ælfe* in these roles after conversion need not only represent inertia in belief: access to Christian supernatural power was jealously guarded by a limited group of ritual specialists—monks and priests—but other members of the Anglo-Saxon community might have wanted or needed to claim supernatural power, making non-Christian traditional sources a significant resource.

These speculations are to some extent supported by later evidence. That non-Christian supernatural beings might be the source of otherworldly information is attested in England in the fourteenth century, in the poem known, like its eighteenth-century Scottish counterpart, as *The Wee Wee Man* (on which see Lagopoulou-Boklund 2002, 147–52). The speaker of the poem encounters a 'litel man' of strange appearance, whom he interrogates for prophetic information (ed. Wright 1866–68, II 452–66). Much the same implications arise from other texts discussed above (§7:4.2): Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle*, from the 1420s (admittedly identifying its otherworldly informant as the Devil); *Thomas of Erceldoune*, of the fourteenth or fifteenth century; and the trial in 1438 of Agnes Hancok. Thomas's interrogation of his lady at their parting, in the face of her oft-repeated desire to leave, is also strikingly reminiscent of Óðinn's interrogation of the *vǫlva* in the Eddaic poem *Baldrs draumar* (ed. Neckel 1962, 277–79), emphasising a wider and older context. Supernatural beings providing wisdom—whether prophetic, as in *Vǫluspá*, *Baldrs draumar* and *Grípispá*, or concerning healing and protection, as in *Sigrdrífumál*—are prominent in Old Norse poetry; though usually female, they may be male, like Fáfnir in *Fáfnismál* or Óðinn himself in *Grímnismál*. But the potential power of non-Christian otherworldly beings, male and female, to provide knowledge in English-speaking cultures is shown most dramatically by the Scottish witchcraft trials, which suggest that at least by the early modern period, such ideas were a reasonably widespread and important part of healers' construction and representation of their knowledge.

Other narratives concerning the beneficence of otherworldly beings also recall the better-attested power of *ælfe* to harm, because they associate the receipt of supernatural power from otherworldly beings with harm from them (§7). *Serglige Con Culainn* associates Cú Chulainn's awakening from his *serglige* with his recitation of a *bríathar-thecosc*. Elspeth Reoch was struck dumb but gained special knowledge; Andro Man lost a cow to the Quene of Elphen. More tangentially, Vǫlundr punishes Níðuðr's social transgression and takes advantage of Bǫðvildr's spatial one, but according to other accounts, Bǫðvildr receives a son from this event who brings glory to his kin. Limited though they are, then, the Anglo-Saxon hints that *ælfe* could be positive sources of supernatural power are well contextualised. *Ælfe*'s power to harm suggests that they

established boundaries which it was dangerous to cross, but the comparative evidence helps to suggest that risking transgression could bring benefits instead or as well.

Whether people could martial the powers of *ælfe* to harm others is unclear. *Ælf* occurs often enough as a simplex in the Old English medical texts to show that *ælf*-ailments were at least sometimes caused by *ælfe* themselves; but would-be magic-workers in medieval Scandinavia invoked *álfar*, and Luther's *Tischreden* attest to *elbe* acting as witches' familiars, as they did in some Scottish trials.[241] The idea of sending *ylues* to afflict an individual may also underlie the verse lament of the hero Wade quoted in a sermon *Hvmiliamini sub potenti manu dei ut vos exaltet in tempore visitationis* in the twelfth-century manuscript Peterhouse College Cambridge 255 (ed. Wilson 1972, 15; on dating see James 1899, 314; collated with MS, II f. 49r):

Su*m*me sende ylues & summe sende nadderes. sumne sende nikeres the bide*n* pates[242] punien. Nister man nenne bute ildebrand onne.	Some send *elves* and some send snakes; some send *nikeres* which dwell by the water [reading p*ater*]; no one knows but Hildebrand alone.

The impliction here seems to be that some hostile force sent *ylues* to beset Wade, implying an ability to co-opt them into causing harm to members of the in-group. Though early and English, however, Wade's complaint is too short and ill contextualised to be developed.

It is also worth noting an area where there is no evidence for *ælfe* causing harm. Although there is circumstantial evidence for associating *ælfe* with socially unsanctioned pregnancy, no Anglo-Saxon comparisons emerge for the prominent later association of supernatural beings with changelings—replacing healthy children (or occasionally adults) with sickly or deformed ones (see Purkiss 2000, *passim*; Skjelbred 1991, 219–21) —or even for harming children especially. Our Anglo-Saxon evidence is not without mention of malformed or ailing children,[243] and though the silence concerning changeling-lore still proves nothing, we should be cautious about assuming that it already existed in early medieval culture. The idea that the children begotten on members of the in-group by otherworldly beings would be malformed is attested in England by the thirteenth century and exemplifed by my quotation above from the *Man of Law's Tale*.[244] Meanwhile, associations of supernatural beings with changelings in Europe are attested back into the thirteenth century (Schmitt 1983 [1979], esp. 74–82), and in Antiquity; but such associations begin to be attested for *elves* only in the fifteenth century.[245] Perhaps

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[241] Cf. Edwards 1994, 21; Wilby 2000; Hall forthcoming [d]; §§6:1, 7:4, 8:3.
[242] The last letter is ill-formed and unclear.
[243] See Meaney 1989, 20–22; Crawford 1999, 98–100 (whose reference in n. 28 should be to Cockayne 1864–66, III 145).
[244] §6:3.1; cf. *De nugis curialium* ii.11 (ed. James 1983, 158–60); *Þiðreks saga* ch. 169 (ed. Bertelsen 1905–11, I 319–22); and the rise of *elf* as a term of abuse, see *OED* (s.v. *elf* §§2b, 3, *oaf*).
[245] Beginning with associations of *elf* with *lamia* in the *Promptorium parvulorum* (ed. Way 1843–

Anglo-Saxons had other traditional discourses handling babies' malformity or failure to thrive. Comparison with Scandinavia suggests culturally-sanctioned abandonment; if so, non-Christian changeling lore might have been a response to the strong Christian opposition to abandoment.[246]

The combined Old English evidence, thus contextualised, suggests something of the potential significance of *ælfe* as a source of supernatural power, hinting at complex interrelationships between *ælfe*'s power to help and their well-attested power to harm. The power available from contact with *ælfe* may have been proportional to the risks which that contact entailed, and possibly indeed to the harm which it caused. If so, *ælf*-beliefs potentially also afforded not only a means to manipulate illness at a psychological and social-psychological level to facilitate curing the afflicted, but a means of constructing certain kinds of suffering in a positive way, as sources of knowledge and power in themselves. These are themes which can be explored through the evidence for the relationship between *ælfe*, Anglo-Saxons, and the social boundaries of gendering.

2. Gendering

Our evidence concerning the relationship between *ælfe* and gendering gives rise to two main issues. Firstly, it seems that early Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* were exclusively male, but that they were associated with traits which Anglo-Saxons considered effeminate (see §§4:2, 5:3.2–3, 6:3; cf. 7). What does this mean? Secondly, *ælf* came by the eleventh century to be able to denote females as well; this usage seems not only to exhibit a change in *ælf*'s semantics, but a new addition to Anglo-Saxon inventories of belief (§5:3.2–3; cf. 7:1.3, 7:4.1, 8:3). What does *this* mean? These are difficult questions, so it is worth emphasising first of all that the very fact that we can now ask them is an exciting development. Whereas nineteenth-century historians' assumptions about gendering have in other fields been revised because they proved incompatible with the primary sources— as in Norse or ancient Hellenic material—the Anglo-Saxon written sources challenge them less obviously (see respectively Meulengracht Sørensen 1983 [1980]; Halperin– Winkler–Zeitlin 1990; Magennis 1995). Our perspectives on womens' positions in

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65, I 138; for later evidence see Green 2003, 41–45).

[246] Crawford downplayed the prospect of abandonment in her recent *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England*, emphasising parental love (1999, 92), and oblation was of course generally accepted by Churchmen (Boswell 1988, 228–55); but these are not necessarily exclusive of practices of abandonment. Problematic sources though they are, Ine's laws explicitly cover infanticide, along with at least one recently-noted hint in an anonymous homily (Caie 1998; contrast Crawford 1999, 93–94). See further Boswell (1988, esp. 198–227, 256–66) and compare recent assessments of infanticide in medieval Scandinavia: Clover 1988, 150–72; Pentikäinen 1990; Jochens 1995, 85–93; Wicker 1998.

Anglo-Saxon culture are concomitantly limited. Serious efforts have begun in recent years to redress this, but our approaches are very much in a process of transition, meaning that there is no firm framework in which to assess the new evidence.[247] Recent work has proceeded through new analyses of under-used texts such as the Anglo-Saxon penitentials, and through the use of cultural and critical theory to try to penetrate the ideologically dominant discourses of Anglo-Saxon writers—principally those associated with the tenth- and early eleventh-century monastic reform movement—to assess what they conceal and reveal about the multifarious Anglo-Saxon constructions of gender which they sought to control. What the evidence assembled in this thesis allows us to do is return to issues of Anglo-Saxon gendering from an entirely new standpoint. Doing so is daunting, not least because it involves projecting closely-reasoned conclusions drawn from difficult evidence into another evidentially problematic, and ideologically charged, area. But if nothing else, the evidence for *ælfe* encourages us to ask new questions and to look for new answers.

An important preliminary concern is how far it is appropriate to talk of 'masculine' and 'feminine' gender in Anglo-Saxon culture. Clover has argued that in early medieval Scandinavian cultures, before Christianisation and what she tentatively called 'medievalisation' prompted a departure on the long road towards the alignment of gender with sex, gender could better be divided into the two groups *hvatr* and *blauðr*. *Hvatr* meant 'bold, independent, powerful, vigorous', and *blauðr* 'weak, soft, powerless' (1991). The alignment had more to do with power and independence than biological sex, but aristocratic men dominated the *hvatr* group, and women the *blauðr* group. Although this approach is certainly useful (cf. Woolf 1997; Whitney 1999; Gradowicz-Pancer 2002), I have preferred the traditional terms *masculine* and *feminine*, as these are established in work on Anglo-Saxon gendering, and have generally proved appropriate labels for objectively observable groupings in Anglo-Saxon societies (e.g. Stoodley 1999). But Clover's work provides important caveats. I neither claim, then, nor intend to offer definitive interpretations of the data presented here. But I do aim to show the kinds of new perspectives which we can gain through evidence like that assembled already in this thesis, and through integrating it thoroughly with evidence from other kinds of souces, such as archaeology and legal texts.

[247] Stafford 1994 marks the historiographical shift. For some major contributions see Frantzen 1997; 1998; Lees–Overing 2002; Taylor 1998, 33–52; 1983; Godden 1995. For work on gender and the Benedictine reformists see further Stafford 1999; Cubitt 2000b; Foot 2000, esp. ɪ 85–110; Wareham 2001; cf. Jayatilaka 2003. See also the late and, in origin, non-Anglo-Saxon—but at times refreshingly lewd—*Carmina Cantabrigensia* (ed. Ziolkowski 1994).

2.1 The effeminacy of *ælfe*: early Anglo-Saxons and mythological transgressions

As I have said, *ælfe*'s associations with seductive feminine beauty, nymphs, *siden* and the eventual semantic development of *ælf* to denoting females as well as males make the conclusion that *ælfe* had feminine traits—at at least some times in some discourses— hard to avoid. If nothing else, this poses a powerful challenge to the image of Anglo-Saxon culture dominant in our sources, which generally minimises any hint of gender disturbance or transgression. But one would wish at least to attempt to interpret the meaning of this cultural construct of effeminate *ælfe* further. Fortunately, *Wið færstice* situates *ælfe* in a comparatively fully-articulated system of belief (§8). *Wið færstice* juxtaposes *ælfe* (who may, moreover, be identical with the charm's non-combatant and arguably magic-working *smiðas*) with armed and violent women (themselves well-paralleled). That this juxtaposition was not unique to the charm is suggested by its recurrence in Issobel Gowdie's confessions and by hints that *álfar* and *dísir* were also systematically juxtaposed as male and female counterparts in Norse traditions (§§2:2). What is striking for present purposes is that *Wið færstice* ostentatiously inverts everyday Anglo-Saxon gendering. Weapon-bearing was associated with masculinity, and freedom, at profound and ideological levels—but in *Wið færstice*, it is women who bear and use weapons.[248] We do not simply have evidence, then, that in Anglo-Saxon belief *ælfe* were effeminate: we also find them juxtaposed with *hægtessan* who are in important respects masculine, arguably as co-authors of supernatural harm, in what is conceivably a systematic structural pairing.

We may interpret the contrast between effeminate *ælfe* and martial *hægtessan* as a feature in a system of belief, whereby otherworldly beings were believed to trangress the gender boundaries experienced in everyday life. These otherworldly beings, then, were not an idealised image of society or a straightforward model of proper behaviour. But nor were they monsters—though there may, of course, have been a degree of ambiguity about these categories. Rather, we may understand *ælfe* and *hægtessan* as society's mirror-image: in the mirror, we do not see ourselves distorted, but we do see ourselves, on one axis, inverted. This was presumably not the only system through which these groups could relate in Anglo-Saxon cultures. Its concern with weapon-bearing is arguably (male) aristocratic in its orientation. My assumption of symmetricality between male and female

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[248] The gendering is clear in early Anglo-Saxon burial assemblages, weapons correlating with male skeletons and weaving-kit with female (Stoodley 1999, esp. 77–80); likewise, Old English specified male *menn* with *wæpnedmann* ('armed person', as opposed to *wifmann*, 'woman-person'); one's patrilineal ancestry was the *serehealf* or *serehand* ('spear-side', as opposed to *spinelhealf*, 'spindle-side'). A variety of sources point to the further ideological association of weapon-bearing with freedom (Brooks 1978, 82–83). The association of weapon-bearing with masculine gender has continued in England since that time.

mythological transgression is reminiscent of Bynum's argument that in later medieval sources, men 'use images of reversal to express liminality', one of the main reversals being in gender. The male experience of liminality or crisis could involve adopting feminine traits. Moreover, men 'tended to assume that reversal was symmetrical… men writing about women assumed that women went through sharp crises and conversions and that their liminal moments were accompanied by gender reversal' (1984, at 110, 111). This provides a neat parallel to my reading: male Anglo-Saxons construed the liminality of the supernatural beings around their societies through gender reversal. In liminal space, males were seductively beautiful and worked magic, and females bore and used weapons. But Bynum also argued that women and other less powerful groups in fact did not experience liminality as gender reversal (1984, 112–18). If my model of a belief-system involving systematic gender inversion holds, then, it may do so only for the aristocratic men who created our sources.

Imagining a range of Anglo-Saxon discourses besides medical texts like *Wið færstice* —a range like the one which we have attested for Scandinavia—we might suppose that sexually transgressive mythological figures could, depending on context, have been discomforting, laughable or even contemptible. But it is clear from all our sources—for *ælfe*, *hægtessan* and analogous figures—that they were powerful. In the cases of both *hægtessan* and *ælfe*, gender transgression is associated with gaining the powers associated with the other sex: martial skills on the one hand and magical ones on the other. The putative systematic contrast between *ælfe* and *hægtessan*, then, was arguably one of the ways in which Anglo-Saxon social mores were enculturated and maintained: these beings showed what the in-group was not.

Cultural strategies of this sort are not what the monstic reformers would have had us think of when we thought of Anglo-Saxon England, but sparse though the evidence is, it is sufficient to suggest that such non-Christian belief-systems did operate in shaping and maintaining Anglo-Saxon norms. Moreover, this reading suggests a new context for approaching an increasingly prominent issue in debate on early Anglo-Saxon gendering. A number of confidently-sexed male skeletons from the period in which grave-goods were still deposited with bodies, from the fifth century to the earlier part of the eighth, have been found with artefacts associated in the vast majority of cases with female skeletons, such as dress fasteners and jewellery; furthermore, they lack artefacts associated with males—principally weapons. There are also a few females with weapons; these are too few for reliable interpretation, but one case remains noteworthy because the osteological sexing has now been confirmed by DNA analysis, encouraging the idea that such transgressive burials are not to be dismissed as accidents by bone-specialists (Lucy 2001, 89; see further §8:2.2 n. 227). These inhumations have been most extensively

studied in Stoodley's recent analysis of 1636 undisturbed adult Anglo-Saxon burials, from forty-six sites covering most of early Anglo-Saxon England.[249] Stoodley counted nineteen confidently-sexed males buried with women's dress accessories—1.16% of his whole sample and 4.63% of his confidently-sexed males—and there are other cases.[250] How well these statistics reflect either Anglo-Saxon burial practices (in particular, they exclude cremation burials) or everyday life (of which mortuary practice is a notoriously problematic indicator) is an open question, but the figures suggest that a demographically significant proportion of early Anglo-Saxon biological males sometimes dressed in ways normally associated with women, such cross-dressing being ideologically important enough to find expression in burial practice.

This sort of mismatch has traditionally been explained as mis-sexings; the burials do not generally show special treatment in other respects.[251] Comparisons from other regions are hard to come by, as the establishment of sexing without reference to grave-goods is nascent (cf. Effros 2000; Solli 2002, 218–21)—though examples are emerging from the Germanic-speaking Continent and Scandinavia.[252] But the recent studies by Stoodley, Lucy, Shepherd, and Knüsel and Ripley emphasise that we would be unwise simply to dismiss this unexpected data. There are also a few females with weapons; these are too few for reliable interpretation, but one case remains noteworthy because the osteological sexing has now been confirmed by DNA analysis, encouraging the idea that such transgressive burials do not solely represent the uncertainties inherent in skeletal sexing (Lucy 2001, 89; see further §8:2.2 n. 227). Moreover, there is comparative evidence suggesting contexts in which a proportion of men may dress in ways which transgress their gender. Knüsel and Ripley emphasised anthropologically-observed societies containing biological men who routinely dress as women, usually because they have a ritual status in the society in question as a shaman or in a similar function.[253] The same interpretation has been plausibly offered in a Scandinavian context, in particular regarding the man buried at Vivallen in Sweden between around 800 and 1100 wearing a woman's linen dress, with other artefacts associated with female burials, as well as with more unusual objects (Price 2000, 18–21; Solli 2002, 221). The potential correlation between a burial like this and the Scandinavian association of men performing *seiðr* with cross-dressing (see §§6:3.1; 7:2.2) has not gone unnoticed, and Wiker has recently

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[249] I am grateful for Dr Stoodley for clarifying the character of this sample.

[250] 1999, 76–77, 218 table 45; Lucy 1997, 157–62; 2000, 89; cf. Shepherd 1999, 231–41; Knüsel–Ripley 2000, 188–91.

[251] e.g. Härke 1997, 132–33; Dickinson 2002, 83; cf. Stoodley 1999, 10, 33–34. Even the figure of 4.6% does not transcend the 6% error rate conventionally reckoned with in osteological sexing.

[252] Lucy 2000, 89–90; Zachrisson and others 1997, 57–58; cf. Price 2000, 18–19; Jesch 1991, 21–22, 30; more generally Solli 2002, 218–31.

[253] 2000, esp. 164–69; Shepherd 1999, esp. 222–27, 242–43; for other anthropological examples see Saladin D'Anglure 2003 [1992]; Balzer 2003 [1996].

contextualised this by pointing to the blurring of borders between genders and between human and animal prominent in Iron-Age Scandinavian small arts up to around the mid-sixth century (2001). Other, problematic, linguistic and textual hints suggesting similar conceptions elsewhere in medieval Europe do exist,[254] but what is more important is the undoubted fact that, not unlike the saints studied by Bynum, various men at various times have gained liminality through sartorial gender-transgression, and in gaining liminality, they have also gained supernatural power. It is important to recognise that the male gender transgression which these sources suggest need not necessarily have involved the assumption of female identity. The fact of transgression may have been more important than the outcome; it could rather be interpreted as a show of special independence predicated on the symbolic transgression of cultural boundaries, bringing with it special power.

Our evidence for *ælfe*, then, presents us with supernatural males with clear effeminate traits, arguably part of a systematic belief-system, while early Anglo-Saxon culture appears, if mis-sexing of skeletons does not wholly deceive us, to have included a number of men who wore women's clothes. The possibility that there was some cultural connection between the two phenomena demands exploration. If beliefs concerning *ælfe* served to establish gender norms by showing what normal men were not, they also provided potential paradigms for men's socially meaningful gender transgression.

As Stoodley noted, we do have a tempting Anglo-Saxon textual comparison for the male skeletons with feminine burial assemblages: Bede's account of the pagan Northumbrian 'primus pontificum' ('chief of bishops') Coifi (1999, 76; for *pontifex* as 'bishop' see Page 1995, 119). Coifi, deciding to convert, takes up a sword and a spear, mounts a stallion, and attacks his own *fanum* ('shrine'). Bede explains the symbolism of this action with the comment 'non enim licuerat pontificem sacrorum uel arma ferre uel praeter in equa equitare' ('for the bishop of [their] religion was not permitted to bear arms or to ride except on a mare'; ed. Colgrave–Mynors 1991, 184–86 at 184); and, as Hines concluded, 'the two constraints upon the priest … impose an emblematic feminization upon him'—potentially a striking parallel to our putative cross-dressing Anglo-Saxon ritual specialists.[255] Unfortunately, it is altogether possible that this episode

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[254] The note 'Hos Galli Eluesce wehte uocant' ('the *Galli* call these [hallucinations] *Eluesce wehte*') discussed above ostensibly envisages some Anglo-Saxon speech-community equivalent to the castrated priests of Cybele (§5:5), but can hardly be relied on. The possible further meaning of the Old High German *hagazussa* as 'in weiblicher Kleidung auftretender fahrender Schauspieler, Spielmann' ('a travelling actor, minstrel, performing in women's clothing'; *AHDWB*, s.v. *hagazussa* §5) may hint that men might have dressed as women in order to be *hagazussan*. As Bullough noted, the early medieval Penitential of Silos includes an intriguing reference within a list concerning incantations, consultation of demons and proscribed healing practices to men who dance wearing women's clothes (Bullough 1976, 362; Bullough–Bullough 1993, 61; see also Dumézil 1973b, 114–21).

[255] 1997, 379–80. Page questioned the representativeness of Coifi's portrayal on the grounds that

is purely Bede's invention—a device whereby he imposed his own conceptions of a priesthood on the pagan past, developing distinctive features for it in his narrative so that Coifi could transgress them at the dramatic moment of conversion (cf. Page 1995, 121–22).

But even disregarding Bede, we do have Anglo-Saxon comparisons for the idea that early Anglo-Saxon ritual specialists acquired power through gender transgression: monks and to some extent priests were expected to do just this. At least in theory, monks established their ritual status by taking on celibacy, distinctive haircuts and dress, and eschewing weapons. This practice was usually construed theologically in terms of the transcendence rather than the transgression of gender, and Ælfric, doubtless mindful that 'non … vir utetur veste feminea abominabilis enim apud Deum est qui facit haec' ('a man must not use womanly clothes, for he is abhorrent to God who does these things', Deuteronomy 22:5; ed. Weber 1975, I 264), certainly did not see it as gender transgression (cf. ch. 206 of his first Old English letter to Wulfstan and ch. 114–15 of his pastoral letter for Wulfsige; ed. Whitelock–Brett–Brooke 1981, 300, 219). However, section 35 of Alfred's law-code suggests that other Anglo-Saxons—perhaps because they lived earlier, but perhaps also because they were laymen—construed the marks of the Christian ritual specialist otherwise (ed. Liebermann 1903–16, I 68–69 at 68):

> Gif mon cierliscne mon gebinde unsynnigne, gebete mid X scill.
> […]
> Gif he hine on bismor to homolan bescire, med X scill. gebete.
> Gif he hine to preoste bescire unbundenne, mid XXX scill. gebete.
> Gif he ðone beard ófascire, mid XX scill.gebete.
> Gif he hine gebinde ⁊ þonne to preoste bescire, mid LX scill. gebete.

> If anyone binds an innocent man of the *ceorl*-class, he will compensate with 10 shillings.
> […]
> If, as an insult, he cuts his hair/shaves him to a make him a *homola* (?man with head-hair shaven off),[256] he will compensate with 10 shillings.
> If he cuts his hair/shaves him, unbound, (as though) to make him a priest, he will compensate with 30 shillings.
> If he completely shaves the beard, he will compensate with 20 shillings.
> If he binds him and then cuts his hair/shaves him (as though) to make him a priest, he will compensate with 60 shillings.

This law is in a widespread tradition of legislation in early medieval law-codes against certain insults, many of which, particularly in Scandinavia, involved impugning

'in the violent life of the times few prominent men could afford to renounce self-defence' (1995b, 117–18 at 117), but if random violence really were an ever-present threat, Anglo-Saxon women, children, slaves and clerics would have had to be armed no less than men. In fact, the access to and direction of violence in Anglo-Saxon society must have been culturally constructed, certain groups as a rule being spared it.

[256] The meaning of *homola* is unclear (cf. *DOE*, s.v. *bysmor* §A.4), but as Bosworth and Toller (1898, s.v. *homola*) pointed out, the word must be related to *hamelian* ('mutilate') and to Older Scots *hommill*, *hummill* (of livestock, 'with horns removed'; of ears of corn 'with the bristles removed'; *DOST*, s.vv.)

masculinity (see e.g. Meulengracht Sørensen 1983 [1980]), and many of which again concern forcible hair-cutting.[257] Alfred's law, which does not seem hitherto to have been noted in this context, shows that while it was well and good for an Anglo-Saxon to have a priest's haircut if he were a priest, it was an insult to impose such a haircut on a layman —as James also found in his wider survey of early medieval Germanic-speaking Europe (1984, 89–95). It was an insult of the same order as tying someone up (depriving him, amongst other things, of his physical power) or shaving off his beard (depriving him of an outward marker of masculinity, which would appear to have been worse; cf. the importance of beards in early Irish society, Sayers 1991, 165–67). Indeed, if the fines imposed do not simply reflect the implicit disrespect done to the Church, then giving someone a priest's haircut was a worse insult than either of these. My juxtaposition of Bede's account of Coifi with Alfred's law is not to argue for any direct crinicultural continuity between pre- and post-conversion Anglo-Saxon ritual specialists—though Mc Carthy's recent and detailed study of the Insular tonsure has rescued precisely this prospect from its not entirely venerable historiography.[258] Rather Alfred's law-code shows convincingly that it would not be at all inconsistent with what we know of later Anglo-Saxon culture to hypothesise that earlier Anglo-Saxon ritual specialists also marked their special status by taking on appearances which would ordinarily be considered degrading, and arguably transgressive of normal gender-practices.

To press the analogy between pre-conversion Anglo-Saxon ritual specialists and monks, monks had a mythological paradigm for their transcendence of gender: the angels of the heavenly city. The evidence for *ælfe* offers a basis for supposing that earlier Anglo-Saxon men likewise had a mythological model for their systematic gender transgressions. In taking on feminine trappings to gain supernatural power, they were undertaking a transgression for which *ælfe*, in their world-views, provided a model. Whether or not *ælfe* dressed as women to effect *siden* as Óðinn seems to have done to effect *seiðr*, *ælfe*'s evident supernatural power and feminine characteristics are sufficient to suggest that they could have provided a powerful model for systematic male cross-dressing in early Anglo-Saxon society in pursuit of ritual and/or supernatural power. Indeed, we might even speculate that the early Anglo-Saxon men dressed as women gained power not only from a gender transgression conceptualised through mythologies

[257] See section 33 of Æthelberht's laws (ed. Liebermann 1903–16, I 5), which has close Frisian analogues (Stanley 1976); Sayers 1991, 174–77 on medieval Ireland (cf. the examples concerning horses in medieval Wales, Hall 2002, 31–32); more widely James 1984, 89–93. On the symbolic power of early medieval hair more generally, see Bartlett 1994, esp. 57–59; Diesenberger 2003.
[258] Mc Carthy emphasised how not only various Irish writers but also Aldhelm and Ceolfrid identified Simon Magus—the prototypical sorcerer in early Medieval Christian ideologies—as the originator of the Insular tonsure. The basis for this seems not to be any tradition about Simon, however, but an identification of the Insular tonsure with that of native, albeit possibly only Irish, *magi* (2003, esp. 161–63, 166; cf. Venclová 2002, esp. 466–70).

concerning *ælfe*, but specifically from *ælfe* themselves—which would fit neatly with the evidence of *ylfig* that *ælfe* might bring about states of prophetic speech.

Before concluding this topic, it is worth emphasising that it is risky to speculate further on how beliefs in *ælfe* related to more formal elements of what we might, for want of better terms, label pre-conversion public religion: our evidence at this point is vanishingly slight. We may at least recall the interrelationships in early medieval Scandinavian belief of Yngvi-Freyr, *álfar* and *vanir* discussed above. Though parts of his arguments are untenable, North has shown that there was probably a deity Ing in early Anglo-Saxon belief-systems, and that he was arguably an especially prominent deity (1997a). This figure seems not only to be cognate with Freyr in name (insofar as Freyr is also referred to as Yngvi-Freyr), but to have shared with him and his mythological relatives the motifs of travel in a wagon (see for example Turville-Petre 1969; North 1997a, 44–48) and possibly a *hieros gamos* (Tolkien 1983 [1964], 127–28; for other resonances between *Beowulf* and Old Norse mythological material see Orchard 2003b, 116–23). The Norse mythological parallel to this marriage is itself most fully recounted in the Eddaic *Skírnismál*, which further involves *seiðr*-like magic, and many other features of which seem to have close Anglo-Saxon counterparts (§7:2.1 n. 187). The paradigmatic importance of the *Skírnismál* myth in ritual is suggested by Adam of Bremen's association of Fricco with the celebration of marriages (§2:1.2). Our evidence is not inconsistent, then, with a hypothetical pre-conversion Anglo-Saxon god paralleling Yngvi-Freyr, lord of the *álfar* and arguably an *álfr* himself, associated with the use of *seiðr* in seduction: a god Ing and a people of *ælfe*, the latter at least associated with *siden* and seduction. While, as I have indicated above, Taylor and Salus's analyses are unsatisfactory (see §4:1 n. 98), it is also worth noting that their argument that the putative *alfwalda* of *Beowulf* is to be identified with Freyr fits well into this reading (1982, 441; cf. Taylor 1998, 99–106). Our Anglo-Saxon evidence is not, however, of a kind which will permit the confident reconstruction of mythologies of this sort.

Although certainty is impossible, then, there are reasons to think that male, effeminate *ælfe* were of systematic social significance in Anglo-Saxon society, as a model of unmasculine behaviour. They were also paired with supernatural females most prominently called *hægtessan*, who transgressed female norms of behaviour by exhibiting masculine traits; I have argued that this represents a systematic symmetry, these females presumably serving as models of unfeminine behaviour. There is also reason to think that men might gain supernatural powers like *ælfe*'s by entering liminal cultural space through gender transgression. If this was the case, it certainly did not last: insofar as the Christian ritual specialists who dominated post-conversion Anglo-Saxon

culture used similar techniques, they constructed them through ostentatiously different mythological paradigms.

2.2 The female *ælfe~elven*

These changing patterns in Anglo-Saxon society advert to the possibility that Anglo-Saxons' norms and constructions of gender were changing between the migration and the Norman Conquest. This being so, it is of especial interest that at some point in the early Middle Ages, female equivalents of male *ælfe* entered Anglo-Saxon belief-systems, attested first as equivalents of *nymphae*. Around the eighth century, at least in written registers, there was no common Old English word for a nymph-like female, or a female *ælf*. But by around 1200, Laʒamon's female *aluen* enjoyed supernatural powers to shape the child Arthur's future and to heal him in their otherworld over the sea (cf. Edwards 2002). By the time when Edward I commissioned his own round table, *elven~elves* were seducing men and dancing through woods and meadows, daisies flowering in their wake (§§7:1.3; 8:3). How early this change began is hard to guess, but my demonstration that it appeared in writing by the early eleventh century demands that we revise previous assumptions that it represents 'Celtic' influence through the rise of folklorically-inspired literature in the Anglo-Norman twelfth-century renaissance (§5:3.3). We must now situate the arrival of female *elven* in the changing culture of Anglo-Saxon England prior to the early eleventh century. If nothing else, this is powerful evidence against the traditional assumption that non-Christian belief survived conversion only in a more or less fossilized state: female *elven* show rather that it continued to live and change. However, they may also be added to the growing evidence that, contrary to older views, we are not to look to the Norman Conquest to explain major changes in English gendering.

Detecting whether there may be a link between developments in the gendering of *ælfe* and that of Anglo-Saxon society is difficult. The history of Anglo-Saxon women is overwhelmingly the history of queens and nuns; neither group need be very representative of women and femininity generally, and while their positions in Anglo-Saxon society changed over time, the reasons for this and so its significance for the history of gender relations are hard to disentangle.[259] The rise of female *elven* may show developments in how myth reflected society rather than in the structure of society itself. We also know too little about the origins of the female *elven*. Their emergence in the eleventh century could represent the adoption of a popular belief by the aristocracy or of

[259] On queens see Stafford 1983; 1997; on nuns Foot 2000, I esp. 30–34, 61–84; see further the references in §9:2.0 n. 247.

women's belief by men; alternatively, they may have arisen as an innovation in aristocratic society, representing one of many strategies whereby this group effected social change. Nor does the non-Christian character of these changes mean that churchmen were not involved.

However, obscure though the rise of female *elven* is, the prominence of otherworldly females across high medieval Europe suggests that we are dealing with a general trend in, or an English alignment with, wider medieval European culture. Moreover, although the evidence is scanty, this seems likely to have been part of wider reshaping of beliefs. Two relevant developments may be hypothesised: the stripping of gender-transgressing features from male *elven~elves*, aligning their characteristics with masculine ones; and the decline in traditions of martial supernatural females. Our medieval evidence is too scanty to be sure of either of these developments, and *Wið færstice* and Issobel Gowdie's confessions in particular show how slowly beliefs must have changed in some sections of society. But the *heluenbok* in *Non habebis deos alios* seems to denote a grimoire—like the Canon's Yeoman's *elvish nice loore*, in the domain of learned, masculine magic. Chaucer equated his one male *elf* with an *incubus*—an active, violent and demonic being (cf. Yamamoto 1993–94 and the similar Middle High German meanings of *alp*). That male *elves* continued to cause ailments was consistent with the behaviour of indubitably male demons. The Scottish conceptions of *elvis* and *fareis* suggest gender inversion insofar as their female ruler is more prominent than her husband (cf. Purkiss 2000, 66–68; Green 2003, 37). But her power does not extend to making her male subjects seem effeminate; there is no suggestion that their special knowledge or power to cause harm reflects magic-working rather than innate ability. This provides enough evidence to guess, at least, that late Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* were on a road to losing their more markedly effeminate traits.

As for the weapon-bearing women, the words *hægtesse*, and to a lesser extent *wælcyrige*, were to have long histories in English, but are poorly attested in Middle English, so it is hard to trace changes in their meanings; their apparent decline may owe more to restructuring in the Middle English lexicon than to wider cultural change. However, although martial, otherworldly women did enjoy a long life in medieval literature—and only partly because of the revival of Classical traditions of Amazons— otherworldly females whose femininity is not compromised by weapon-bearing are far more prominent.[260] The power of otherworldly females to seduce and patronise heroes

[260] In addition to Icelandic literature, which may have been unusually conservative (see, e.g., Clover 1986; Kroesen 1997), the story of the powerful, unmarried queen who kills her suitors or has them killed is prominent in the late thirteenth-century *Nibelungenlied* (Aventiure 6–7; ed. Boor 1972, 60–85) and occurs in the *lai Doon*, surviving in a late thirteenth-century manuscript (ed. Paris 1879, 61–64). On traditions of Amazons see Crane 1994, esp. 18–26, 76–84; Solterer 1991. For non-martial, otherworldly females, see in addition to those cited here §7:2.0 n. 186.

suggested by Norse and Irish evidence for martial otherworldly females is still attested in high medieval Britain, but while this assistance may constitute advice or magical objects (as with Rhiannon in *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet*), finance (as with the anonymous otherworldly woman in *Lanval*), or beneficial prophesying and healing (as with Argante and her *elven* in Laȝamon's *Brut*), it never extends to offering a helping hand in battle: the closest these otherworldly females come to gender transgression is in their occasional achievement of the sovereignty which all their sex, we are told, desire (*Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 1037–40; ed. Benson 1987, 119). We have just enough continuity of evidence in Ireland from early medieval to modern times to trace how traditions of the valkyrie-like *badb* were combined into traditions of non-martial *síd*-women there (Lysaght 1996, 191–218); some similar development must probably be assumed for Scandinavia.

Perhaps the *meyjar* of *Vǫlundarkviða*, whose lack of weaponry is probably one reason why they have so long been excluded from histories of Scandinavian supernatural females (cf. §7:3, esp. n. 194), lie at the cusp of this change in Anglo-Scandinavian aristocratic culture: they lack the ostentatious armaments of Eddaic heroines like Sigrún, their seductiveness consequently gaining a new prominence, but they retain their formidable power to protect men and determine the course of their actions.

It would appear, then, that in aristocratic discourses at least, the martial *hægtessan* of *Wið færstice* and our early glosses were gradually losing their prominence and significance in England during the medieval period. The decline of martial otherworldly females which I have sketched fits neatly with Clover's hypothesis of a process of 'medievalisation' in gendering, whereby Europe's iron-age societies, to which gender transgression was ideologically important and empowering, developed into the medieval societies whose concern was rather to align gender with sex (1993, esp. 385–86). If the Irish situation is anything to go by, however, these *hægtessan* did not leave a vacuum in belief systems: their place was taken by ideologically more acceptable replacements. In England, it is not unlikely that this replacement was the new female *elven*. No longer expressing gender norms by an inversion which also provided models for transgression by members of the in-group, Anglo-Saxons increasingly construed femaleness by constructing paragons of femininity: beautiful, seductive, unarmed but magic-working otherworldly *elven*.

In this model, Anglo-Saxon gender norms do not change substantially. Rather, the means by which they are constructed change. But a change in the means by which gender was constructed inevitably had effects on the ways in which gender could be performed —arguably, in this case, removing the availability of a paradigm for transgressive behaviour. Christian ideologies must, as Clover suggested, have played an important part in these processes. Accordingly, it is tempting to speculate that the putative displacement

of martial *hægtessan* by female *elven* relates to two other developments in Anglo-Saxon culture: a decline in nuns' autonomy and a rise in the fear of female sexuality. The power and autonomy of *virgines*—unmarried or once-married chaste women—in the early Anglo-Saxon Church is striking (Ortenburg 2001, esp. 64 n. 16). Suggesting that this power was paralleled in non-Christian beliefs, and later curtailed, has unfortunate overtones of the narratives still circulating in Norse scholarship whereby mythological women are understood as echoes of some prehistoric matriarchy.[261] But although the argument that martial females in Old Norse literature echo the (one-time) capacity of unmarried or widowed women to become culturally male when required to pursue feuds may hold water (Clover 1986), we have no reliable evidence for Anglo-Saxon institutions of this sort (cf. §8:2.2 n. 227). No simple cut-off for the prominent place of women in the early Anglo-Saxon Church can be argued: as Ortenburg emphasised, women without husbands have continued, as a rule, to have more power than married women in English cultures (2001, 68), and Foot has shown both that the decline in female religious life during the Anglo-Saxon period was not as extensive as it once seemed and that its causes and effects were probably complex (2000, esp. I 61–84). Despite all these caveats, however, it is possible that the power and independence of the armed supernatural females of which we have hints in early Anglo-Saxon beliefs provided mythological paradigms for certain independent actions by early Anglo-Saxon women, attested in the power of women in the early Anglo-Saxon Church, and that the diminution nuns' power is reflected in the rise of *elven* in Anglo-Saxon beliefs.

Turning to sexuality, we cannot tell how far martial, supernatural Anglo-Saxon females were also associated with seduction, but it does seem likely that their loss of martiality if nothing else encouraged a shift in emphasis towards seductiveness. It is difficult to guess how far women were seen as a sexual threat to men in early Anglo-Saxon culture. It is easy to suppose a general ideological trend in early medieval Europe whereby women and sex were increasingly both seen as a threat and ever more intimately linked with one another (e.g. Morris 1991, esp. 129–53), but hard evidence is thin on the ground. Felix, partly modelling his *vita* of the Anglo-Saxon Guthlac on Evagrius's *Vita Sancti Antonii* in the eighth century, dispensed completely with the sexual temptations which Anthony endured (Kurtz 1926, 110–13). This might reflect incompatibility with a culture which did not expect women either to take the sexual initiative, or to pose a threat to men if they did; if so, it would be consistent with a pattern for which Cormak (1992) and Jochens (1995, 77–78) have argued in early Christian Scandinavia. But Kurtz viewed

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[261] e.g. Heinrichs 1986, esp. 113–14, 140; Jochens 1996, esp. 34–35; for the seminal critique of such ideas see Bamberger 1974. It is worth noting, however, that Glosecki has recently offered a careful and detailed case for a degree of matriarchy in the early Germanic-speaking world (2001).

it simply as an example of Anglo-Saxon prudishness, and he may have been right. Anglo-Saxon laws punishing only male seductors, abductors or rapists need not suggest that women were not also punished for their parts in such events, merely that they were outside patterns of reparation; Edward and Guthrum's proscriptions against *horcwenan* (no. 11; ed. Liebermann 1903–16, I 134–35) and the appearance of mutilation and the stripping of property for adulteresses in the law-code II Cnut (no. 53; ed. Liebermann 1903–16, I 348–49), could represent our first codifications rather than innovations. But, taken at face value, evidence of this sort does suggest a growing concern not only with formally regulating secular sexual activity, but with the role of women in it (see Frantzen 1998, 142–44; cf. Fell 1984, 64; Shippey 2001, para 15); and it seems likely that Christianisation introduced concepts of sin and associations of sin with sexual behaviour which had not previously existed in Anglo-Saxon culture and would have encouraged the idea of female seductiveness as a spiritual threat to men. If so, then the rise of female *elven* in Anglo-Saxon beliefs may reflect new constructions of the danger posed by women to men's spiritual well-being—a purpose to which they were certainly put in the *Southern English Legendary*, and one paralleled in Ireland by *Serglige Con Culainn* (§§7:1.2–3). Christianisation is unlikely, however, to be the whole story: thus, for example, the decline in gender-blurring images on Iron-Age Scandinavian small arts analysed by Wiker (2001) dates to around the sixth century, long before Scandianvia's conversion. Christianisation was only one of many forces behind Europe's 'medievalisation', and may be as much a symptom as a cause.

There are, then, plausible contexts in which we can understand the rise of female *ælfe~elven*, principally a drive in Anglo-Saxon culture over time more rigorously to align sex with gender. Their appearance may also relate to the gradual curtailment of women's power and independence, and possibly with more extensive study of Anglo-Saxon gender history, this idea will become testable. What is undoubted, however, is that the female *elven* show Anglo-Saxon non-Christian belief to have remained dynamic after conversion —even among monks—in ways which challenge previous assumptions about the causes and pace of Anglo-Saxon cultural change.

3. Christianisation

Ælfe did not always retain their positive associations: they might be demonised, being aligned with monsters and with the Devil and demons. This demonisation did not take long: our earliest clearly datable example is early ninth-century if not earlier. It may be compared with the later eighth-century Old Saxon Catechism, whose language suggests 'an Anglo-Saxon imperfectly acquainted with OS [Old Saxon] adapting a presumably OE

[Old English] text as best he could for OS addressees' (Green 1998, 345): 'end ec forsacho allum dioboles uuercum and uuordum, Thunaer ende Uuoden ende Saxnote ende allum them unholdum the hira genotas sint' ('and I renounce all the Devil's deeds and words, Thunaer and UUôden and Saxnôt and all those evil beings which are their companions'; ed. Braune 1969, 39). With themes like these in early Anglo-Saxon catechisms, it is no surprise that *ælfe* should have been aligned with the Devil.

However, the implication here that conversion had swift and substantial effects on beliefs in *ælfe* comes with caveats. The first is that the catechism—even where it was heard, understood and remembered—may not have prompted any paradigm shift in those catechised. Evidence for pre-conversion and to some extent post-conversion Scandinavian beliefs suggests that an individual might seek the patronage of one god, and both criticise other gods and face their displeasure (North 2000); transferring the concept to Anglo-Saxon culture, John inferred that 'the nearest parallel to Woden in the modern world would be a Premier League football manager' (1996, 23). The Old Saxon Catechism can be understood in the same way: the catechised transfers his allegiance to one god (and the god's *genôtas*) and denigrates the others (whose existence is not denied). These observations provide some context for the evidence that the demonisation of *ælfe* was an extremely slow process. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, preachers were propounding conservative-looking *elf*-traditions, but trying to convince their audiences that *elves* were at the same time fallen angels—but not necessarily damned ones (§7:1.3). By the seventeenth century in Scotland, witchcraft prosecutors did not refer to *elvis* and *fareis*, labelling them 'devils' and the like as a matter of course, but this was far from the case for the people they tried (see §7:4, cf. 8:3). The evidence of our Anglo-Saxon medical texts shows unease. Not only were Anglo-Saxon clerics—latin-literate men of royal courts—convinced of the power of *ælfe*, but when it came to the crunch they were far from confident that chasing away *deoflas* would also undo the harm of *ælfe* (§6, esp 6:2.2).

It has been possible to show, then, what has long been suspected but hitherto undemonstrated, that beliefs in *ælfe* experienced considerable continuity in Anglo-Saxon world-views. They remained potentially positive forces and sources of power to at least some sections of community for over a millennium after the Anglo-Saxon settlements. Nor did they just remain: they changed with the times, maintaining their relevance to culture and society even as Christianisation proceeded. This does not only tell us about Anglo-Saxon culture. It also illuminates, for example, the history of themes which became so prominent in the early modern witchcraft trials.

4. Future directions

This study opens up a range of new possibilities for understanding the medieval past, only some of which I have developed here. It has provided a case study in the power of detailed analyses of the meanings of medieval vernacular words, when suitably contextualised in an anthropologically-based framework, to afford information about the societies in which they were written and spoken. One hopes that these approaches might be adopted and developed. In particular, the study suggests the value of further examinations of medieval English words for supernatural beings. I have shown that to understand the meanings of *ælf* and of *ælfe*, one needs to understand words of related meaning, and have often wished to understand better what *þyrs* or *wælcyrige* meant. Such detailed studies have become immeasurably easier with the completion of electronic corpora and major research dictionaries of medieval English: one profitable use of the research time saved is to work to integrate this lexical data into Anglo-Saxon cultural history. The place of monsters and supernatural females in Anglo-Saxon world-views is reconstructable and can provide rewarding insights into Anglo-Saxon society; magic and illness also emerge as ripe for close assessment.

The research in this thesis specifically invites fuller extension into post-Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia, developing the new potential for assessing change and continuity. But there is more to be said about Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* too. I have only been able to hint at the place-name evidence for the situation of supernatural beings in landscapes, but these hints, alongside my analyses of other evidence for early Anglo-Saxon conceptions of space, are sufficient to show that we may be able to integrate supernatural beings (Christian and non-Christian) into new reconstructions of Anglo-Saxon cosmologies and identity (see Appendix 2). Developing these approaches would afford an excellent opportunity for integrating literary, archaeological and linguistic evidence along the lines recently propounded by Hines (2004, 37–70).

I have also emphasised how Anglo-Saxon traditional beliefs included beings which we have hitherto dissociated from early Germanic-speaking cultures, connecting them instead with early Ireland and the high Middle Ages. I have, of course, used high medieval and Irish comparative material to interpret the Anglo-Saxon material, but our independent Old English evidence is nonetheless extensive enough that the conclusion will stand. Beliefs in otherworldly beings can no longer be assumed to have been peripheral to the powerful Germanic-speaking cultures of early medieval Europe. Much as the rich medieval Scandinavian evidence for witchcraft beliefs has in recent years made Scandinavia something of a case-study for European witchcraft—comprising, for example, one of three contributions to the medieval volume of the Athlone History of

Witchcraft and Magic in Europe series (Raudvere 2002; cf. Ankarloo 2002)—medieval Ireland provides an outstanding candidate for a case-study in what we might call European fairy-belief. This prospect has perhaps been overlooked because of discourses —from within Ireland and outside—emphasising the distinctiveness of its early medieval evidence (or, to put it another way, marginalising it). I do not claim that Irish beliefs were European beliefs, any more than Scandinavian ones were. But they may provide us with a new framework for understanding patchier Continental evidence. Moreover, although witchcraft and witchcraft trials are prominent in the study of early modern Europe, the majority of areas did not experience witch-panics. Among the many explanations which must be adduced for this, Hutton has suggested that some societies conceived of other kinds of supernatural culprits, from outside the community, suggesting a correlation between the prominence of fairy-belief and the dearth of trials in the Gaelic-speaking world (2002, 31–32 at 32). A fuller understanding of medieval Europe's otherworldly beings may yield an extensive harvest for historians.

Appendix 1: The Linguistic History of *Elf*

1. The phonological and morphological history of *elf*

Old English *ælf* shows *i*-mutation and a nominative plural in *-e*, establishing it as an etymological *i*-stem. The German cognates alongside a few early Old English name-forms in *aelb* (e.g. van Els 1972, 121) and the unique Old English spelling 'ælbinne' show that the Old English *f* derives from Germanic β;[262] they and the Norse cognates also confirm the Old English evidence that it was masculine. An etymon */ɑlβi-z/* is thus clear. The morphological history of Old English *i*-stems is largely one of analogical transference to other classes—though, for reasons which I have discussed above, *ælf* maintained the *i*-stem plural inflections for longer than most (§3:3).

The phonological history of *ælf* in each of the conventionally distinguished Old English dialects is given in the following table (which presents the nominative singular form; other forms do not differ). There has been debate about some of the developments involved (see Hogg 1997, 207–12), but the processes relevant to the development of *ælf* are clear enough; since the phonetic value of the West Saxon spelling <ie> is unclear, I repeat it in the table overleaf.

I-mutation might be expected to fail in compounds beginning in */ɑlβi-/*, since long-stemmed *i*-stems seem at least sometimes to have lost their *-i* in this context before *i*-mutation occurred (Hogg 1992a, §5.85.11). This would have produced compounds in Southern *ealf-* and Anglian *alf-*. But *ealf-* occurs only in names in a few post-Conquest copies of Old English charters, probably reflecting hypercorrect spellings by late scribes; likewise, *Alf-* forms in personal names are probably usually to be attributed variously to Latinate spelling and late confusion of *æ* and *a*. However, a genuine *alf-*form, showing failure of *i*-mutation, may occur in the compound *alfwalda* in *Beowulf* (usually emended to *alwalda*; §4.1 n. 98). Nor is *ielf, the *i*-mutated form of West Saxon */æᵘlβi/*, attested (the form <IELF> on coins being an epigraphic variant of <ÆLF>: Colman 1992, 161–62; 1996, 22–23); the absence is worth noting because *ielf* is frequently cited in grammars and dictionaries.[263]

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[262] Cf. §5:3. *Contra* Colman 1992, 201 and 1997, 22 who derived the *f* in Old English *ælf* from Proto-Germanic [f].

[263] E.g. Hogg 1992a, §5.84, n.4; Campbell 1959, §200.1 n. 4; Holthausen 1934, s.v *ielf*; Wright–Wright 1925, §385.

		Prehistoric			**Earliest texts (seventh century)**		**Tenth century**
		Pre-OE, with loss of -*z* (Hogg 1992a, §4.10)	First fronting (+ Anglian retraction or failure) (Hogg 1992a, §§5.10–15)	Breaking (Hogg 1992a, §5.20)	*I*-mutation, -*i*-deletion (Hogg 1992a, §§5.79(2a), 5.82, 6.18, 6.20)	/β/ > [v], /f/ > [f] (Hogg 1992a, §7.55)	West Saxon \<ie\> > \<y\>, /y/; second fronting in some Mercian varieties (Hogg 1992a, §§5.163–68, 5.87); final outcomes
Anglian	Northumbrian (Northern)	*ɑlβiz > *ɑlβi	*ɑlβi	*ɑlβi	ælβ	ælf	ælf
	Mercian (Midland)	*ɑlβiz > *ɑlβi	*ɑlβi	*ɑlβi	ælβ	ælf	ælf, elf
Southern	West Saxon (South-Western)	*ɑlβiz > *ɑlβi	*ælβi	*æᵘlβi	*ielβ	*ielf	ylf
	Kentish (South-Eastern)	*ɑlβiz > *ɑlβi	*ælβi	*æᵘlβi	*elβ	elf	elf

Figure 6: the phonological development of 'ælf'

In Middle English, reflexes of *ælf*, *ylf* and *elf* are all attested, in topological distributions consistent, as far as can be judged, with the Old English dialects. The West Saxon vowel is retained in the compound *vluekecche* (with the Anglo-Norman influenced spelling <v~u> for *y*; see Mossé 1968, §§11, 29; ed. Müller 1929, 89) and may, Kitson has suggested, be the etymon of early modern English *ouphe* and its later counterpart *oaf* (2002, 105 n. 25). Otherwise, it was unrounded to /i/, as in *ylues* in the Wade-fragment quoted above (§9:1), and in the reflexes of personal names in the place-names *Ilfracombe* (< *Ylfredes-), *Elmscott* (< *Ylfmundes-) and perhaps *Ilsington* (putatively < *Ylfstan-; Watts 2004, s.vv.; cf. Colman 1997, 23–24). In the West Midlands, Anglian *æ* developed before /lC/ as in other contexts: unaffected by second fronting (Hogg 1992a, §5.87), it coalesced with *a*, giving the forms *alue*, *aluen* found in both manuscripts of Laȝamon's *Brut*. However, in the other reflexes of Anglian dialects, Old English *æ* from */ɑlCi/ became *e* giving *elf* (Luick 1914–40, I §366; Jordan 1974, §62; cf. Hogg 1997, 207–12). This was more or less identical with the South-Eastern *elf*, so it was natural that *elf* became the standard English form, being the root used by Chaucer and almost all other later Middle English texts, regardless of their place of origin. Often when *elf* forms the first element of a compound it is followed by what is presumably an inorganic composition vowel, as in *elvene lond*, *vluekecche* (cf. Campbell 1959, §367).[264]

An exception to this regularity is that early West Saxon shows the 'Anglian' form *ælf* —to the extent that *ylf* is never attested in the myriad pre-Conquest attestations of Anglo-Saxon personal names, its existence there being vouched for only by the few later attestations of place-names just mentioned. What is important for this thesis is that there is no serious doubt that *ælf* was an accepted West Saxon form. That it was not merely a scribal form is shown by other later reflexes of place-names containing *Ælf*-names, and Old English hypercorrect forms with *ælf*- for *æl*- (see Appendix 3). The form *ælf* would not have presented a strange or difficult combination of sounds in historical West Saxon: loan-words and the *i*-mutation of *æ* retracted by back-mutation had independently restored /ælC/.[265] Moreover, early West Saxon shows Anglian-type retraction of */ɑ/ in breaking contexts, in forms like *waldend* for later *wealdend* (cf. Stanley 1969; Lutz 1984). We might understand the variation between early and late West Saxon to reflect competing regional dialects (cf. Hogg 1992a, §5.15) or competing registers (cf. Fulk's

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[264] Cooke has argued that *vluekecche* and some other words show a singular *elfe-, originating in morphological levellings related to the transference of *ælf* to the weak declension (on which see §5:3.3). However, this form is poorly attested as a simplex and examples are generally late enough that the *-e* may be merely orthographic. His comparisons, *delf~delve* and *shelf~shelve*, occur only as the first element of compounds (2003, 6–7 n. 18). He interpreted compounds such as *eluene lond* to contain fossilised weak genitive plurals (2003, 2–3), but inorganic theme vowels explain these more elegantly.

[265] E.g. *ælmæsse* ('alms' < Latin *eleëmosyna*), *pælle* (< Latin *pallium*), *hælfter* ('halter', probably from Old English *haluftri; cf. the restoration of /ærC/ by metathesis; Hogg 1992a, §7.94).

demonstration that *waldend*-type forms were part of the poetic register of Southern Old English, 1992, §§318–39), but some sort of variation is clear (cf. Gretsch 2000, 89–106; Colman 1996, 22–25 on the South-Eastern evidence for further variation). The /ɑlC/ forms, when *i*-mutated, should have produced the /ælC/ form found in *ælf* (cf. West Saxon *hælfter*, probably from **haluftri*). In practice, these outcomes almost never occur except in *ælf* and probably—depending on the processes of metathesis in the word's history—*wærc* (traditionally considered an 'Anglian' form, but well-attested in early West Saxon; see Hogg 1992a, §5.82, n. 4; Fulk 1992, §335.4; Frank 2002, 60–62). But /ɑlCi/ was not a very frequent combination in prehistoric Old English: so although some words in this group were common, such as **/ɑldir-/* ('older'), we should not be surprised to see somewhat haphazard levellings within the set. It is not unlikely, then, that variation in the development of **/ɑlC/* in West Saxon produced corresponding variation in the development of **/ɑlCi/*; but that levelling followed in which the variants produced by the *wealdend*-varieties dominated, with rare adoptions from the *waldend*-varieties. It is tempting to suggest that *ælf* specifically gained favour over *ylf* because so many early West Saxon-speaking nobles had names in *Ælf-*: given the political dominance of Mercia during much of West Saxon history, this social group was perhaps also the most likely to exhibit Mercian-style *waldend* varieties, and to insist on Mercian-style pronunciations of their names. It is also conceivable that the singular *ælf* and the plural *ylfe* were sometimes interpreted to show a morphologically significant vowel-alternation. But both points are speculation.

As well as varying phonologically, *elf* varied morphologically. The inflexions of *ælf* are poorly attested—we have nominative singular and plural examples (see notably §§4:1, 6:3; cf. 5:2), probably the dative singular (though the example could be an accusative plural; §3:6), and the genitive plural (§§1:0, 3:1); the genitive singular is attested only in place-names in what seem to be examples of a personal name *Ælf* (Appendix 2), which may not be representative (see Colman 1996, 13–17). The extensive analogical alterations to the masculine *i*-stems make it hard to reconstruct how the masculine *i*-stem paradigms declined in early Old English,[266] but the following paradigm for *ælf* in the historical Old English period, after the collapse of unstressed front vowels, may be inferred:

[266] Fulk 1992, 421–22; cf. Campbell 1959, §§599–601; Bammesberger 1990, 123–27; Hogg 1992b, 131–32.

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	ælf	ælfe
Accusative	ælf	ælfe
Genitive	ælfes	ælfa
Dative	ælfe	ælfum

Figure 7: *the morphology of 'ælf'*

Like almost all English nouns, *elf* was eventually transferred to the paradigm derived from the masculine *a*-stems, with nominative and accusative plurals in *-es*, as in the form *ylues* mentioned above. However, its plural forms were in non-West Saxon dialects identical to those of the large feminine *ō*-stem declension and it may at times have been analysed as a member of this class (cf. §§2:3.2 n. 48; 5:2.3), before transference to the *a*-stem declension, which presumably took place in the North by early Middle English times (Mossé 1968, §55–57). Meanwhile, in some Southern and West-Midland varieties, *ælf* was first transferred to the weak noun class inherited from the Indo-European *n*-stems. This was a natural development, since the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension to which *ælf* belonged was morphologically rather anomalous. Other members occasionally exhibit weak forms already in early West Saxon (e.g. *leodan*, *seaxan*, *waran*; Campbell 1959, §610.7; §2:3.2 n. 45), and as unstressed vowels collapsed, *ælf* was liable to be associated even in West Saxon with the feminine *ō*-stems, which were particularly prone to transference to the weak declension (e.g. d'Ardenne 1961, 213–14).

As Cooke has argued, the transference of *ælf* to the weak declension accounts for Middle English plurals in *aluen* or *eluen(e)*. It is matched in the Continental West Germanic dialects, and accounts also for the plural *elfen* in the eleventh-century Antwerp-London Glossary.[267] This is important, because Middle English forms such as *elven* have traditionally been derived from Old English *ælfen* (< *ælf* + *en(n)* 'female *ælf*') —which occurs only in a few interrelated glossaries—rather than from *ælf* itself (*MED*, s.v. *elven*; *OED*, s.v.; cf. s.v. *elf*; apparently followed by the *DOE*, s.v. *ælfen*; cf. §5:3). Oddly, Cooke, showing most of these examples really to be weak forms, did accept one citation to show a Middle English derivative of *ælfen*: Laȝamon's line 'To Argante þere quene, aluen swiðe sceone' ('to the queen Argante, a very beautiful *aluen*', line 14278; ed. Brook–Leslie 1963–78, ɪɪ 740; Cooke 2003). But this too is probably simply a weak dative singular, as in line 11272, 'And forð he gon wenden; to Arðure þan kingen' (< OE *cyning*, dative singular *cyninge*; ed. Brook-Leslie 1963–78, ɪɪ 588).

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[267] See §5:3.3; Heinrich von Morungen's famous line 'Von den elben wirt entsehen vil manic man' ('Many a man indeed is enchanted by the *elben*'; ed. Moser–Tervooren 1977, ɪ 243).

2. Germanic cognates

The principal medieval Germanic cognates of *ælf* are *álfr* in Old Norse, variants along the lines of *alp* and *alb* in medieval High and Low German dialects, and *alf* in medieval Frisian. The *elf*-word occurs in East Germanic only in personal names (see Förstemann 1900–16, s.v. *ALFI*; cf. Woolf 1939, 223, 230), but this is unsurprising in view of the limited subject matter of our Gothic corpus. In Old Norse, */ɑlβiz/ became an *a*-stem,[268] and then underwent the regular developments /β/ > [v] /f/ > /v/ (Voyles 1992, §5.1.11; cf. Noreen 1923, §§184.3, 192) and later the lengthening of /ɑ/ before /lf/ (Noreen 1923, §124.3). Meanwhile, in the German dialects, */ɑlβ-/ produced *alb* and *alp* by /β/ > /b/ (> /p/) (Voyles 1992, §§9.1.15, 9.1.21), and *alf* in Frisian by /β/ > /f/ (Voyles 1992, §§7.1.8, 8.1.18). Old Frisian *a* did not undergo *i*-mutation before /lC/ (Voyles 1992, §7.1.9); the history of *i*-mutation in the other medieval German dialects has been a subject of considerable debate (see Voyles 1992, §3.5.3). We would expect Old High German *alp* to develop like its *i*-stem counterpart *gast* ('guest'), with *alp* in the nominative singular and *elpe* in the plural, though some plurals, such as *alpe* and *alpen*, demand derivation from */ɑlβɑ-/ if we are not to assume some analogical levelling. *Álfr* remained in the *a*-stem declension, but the Continental West Germanic dialects, like southern Middle English, extended the *n*-stem declension to develop weak forms.

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[268] See Noreen 1923, §§387–88, *contra* Peters 1963, 252; another example is Old Icelandic *þurs*, 'ogre', cf. Old English *þyrs*.

Appendix 2: Place-Names Containing *Ælf*

Particularly in view of my concern to situate *ælfe* in Anglo-Saxon constructions of space, place-names might in theory be a vital source of evidence. Old English place-names containing words for supernatural beings are a little-tapped resource: hitherto, research on 'pagan place-names', in a microcosm of the extensive work done in Scandinavia, has focused on names likely to denote ritual sites or to contain names of individual gods.[269] However, the Old English material is too problematic to be useful here. As Cameron (1996, 122) commented,

> there are some names which reflect a popular mythology, a belief in the supernatural world of dragons, elves, goblins, demons, giants, dwarfs, and monsters. Such creations of the popular imagination lived on long after the introduction of Christianity and traces of these beliefs still exist today, but we really have no idea when the place-names referring to them were given.

Indeed, despite Cameron's inclusion of elves in his list (cf. Gelling 1978, 150), no *ælf*-place-name can be confidently identified for Anglo-Saxon England (cf. Gelling 1962, 18 on *os*). Sometimes etymological dithematic personal names can appear to attest to *ælf*: thus Alveston in Warwickshire, appearing already in Domesday as *Alvestone* and looking like **ælfes tun* (putatively 'the *ælf*'s enclosure'), is earlier attested as *(æt) Eanulfestun* ('Eanwulf's estate'; Watts 2004, s.v. *ALVESTON Warw*). Post-Old English forms, then, cannot as a rule offer secure evidence for *ælf*.[270] Moreover, a monothematic Old English personal name **Ælf* has been reconstructed, in which case no *ælf*- place-name is secure.[271] This usage might be thought to break the rule of thumb in Germanic

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[269] On Scandinavian historiography see Holmberg 1990; 1992b; 1994; Andersson 1992. The dearth of Scandinavian studies involving other aspects of belief is emphasised by Kousgård Sørensen (1992, esp. 222). For prominent recent studies of theophoric and sacral place-names in Scandinavia see Brink 1996; 1997; 1999a, b; 2001; cf. Hedeager 2001; Fabech 1994; 1999; Sundqvist 2002, 99–101. These have English counterparts particularly in Wilson 1992, 5–21; Blair 1995; Meaney 1995; Cubitt 2000b.

[270] Cf. Watts 2004, s.v. *ELVEDEN*. To banish some ghosts: we must ignore Ailey Hill in Ripon, attested in 1228 as *Elueshov*, *Elueshowe* and etymologised by Smith as Old English *elf* + Old Norse *haugr*, 'the elf's mound' (1961–63, v 168)—tempting though the site is, with its long history as a burial site and proximity to St Wilfrid's minster (see Hall–Whyman 1996). Ekwall's etymologisation of a late thirteenth-century *alvedene* as *ælfa* + *denu* (1922, 64; accepted by Cameron 1996, 122) is also unreliable. The name *elfaledes* (etymologised by Smith as ' "elves' seat", *v.* elf, hlēda', 1964–65, iii 147) survives in copy of an undated Old English boundary clause, the relevant text reading 'Of scirann more on elfaledes, of elfaleden on hreodan burnan' ('from the shiny bog to *elfaledes*, from *elfaleden* to the reedy steam', S1551; ed. Finberg 1961, 80). But the language shows influence from its fifteenth-century scribe: the Old English text must have been **of sciran more on X-as, of X-um on hreodan burnan*, the masculine plural underlying *elfaledes* precluding *hleda* (for which Smith in any case offered no secure toponymic parallels, 1956, s.v. *hlēda*). The etymology of *elfaledes* is thus back up for grabs, and it is clear that our forms may reflect fifteenth-century English—so etmya such as **elfet-lædas* ('swan' + 'drains, watercourses') and **elm-faledas* ('elm' + '(cattle) folds') are viable.

[271] Note Smith 1964–65, iii 119–20, cf. ii 103–4—*contra DOE*, s.v. *ælf* §2b. For the Old English sources see Pelteret 1990, 86–87, 121–22 [nos 63, 147].

onomastics that 'nobody was simply called by the name of a heathen god' (Kousgård Sørensen 1990, 395; cf. Holmberg 1990, 368), and Feilitzen found that there is 'no safe independent evidence for OE *Ælf*' except in place-names (1960, 6 at n. 1; *contra* Redin 1919, 3, 59, 121). But *Ælf* may have been a shortened form of dithematic names, and is attested as such in manuscript (ed. Förster 1917, 153–54); the place-name evidence is, at any rate, hard to dispute: a number of names, such as Alvingham (Domesday *Aluing(e) ha'*), must originate in a population name **Ælfingas*, and *-ingas* compounds seem always to be formed on masculine personal names or place-names (thus 'the people of Ælf'; Watts 2004, s.vv. *ALVINGHAM*, *ALFINGTON*, *ALPHINGTON*, *ALVINGHAM*, *ALVINGTON*, *West ALVINGTON*; Cameron 1996, 66–67, 71–72). Whether a monothematic name, then, or an abbreviated dithematic one, *Ælf* occurred in place-names, meaning that almost no place-name in *ælf-* can be reliably assumed to include the common noun.

There may be one exception: *ælfrucge*, in Kent, occurring in a copy of a charter from the first half of the fifteenth century, considered to be genuine, from 996 (S 877; Miller 2001, 149). The relevant text runs 'of At ersce <to> ælfrucge, of ealfruige to peallestede' ('from oak-stubble-field [reading *ac*] to *ælfrucge*, from *ealfruige* to ledge-place'; ed. Miller 2001, 146). Place-names in the South of England whose first element was a personal name usually formed it in the genitive case (e.g. Gelling 1990–, I 13–14), so although there are exceptions to this, we probably have here *ælf* and *hrycg* ('ridge'), with some post-Anglo-Saxon interference in the spelling.[272] But one place-name is a slender basis on which to reconstruct the place of *ælfe* in Anglo-Saxon landscapes.

A context for interpreting the place of *ælfe* in the landscape could be provided by analysing other place-names, containing names of gods or words for monsters.[273] Although gods and monsters are both associated with (burial) mounds, the place-names

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[272] Wallenberg 1931, 347; cf. Miller 2001, 156. Although it would be possible to read *ælf-*, *ealf-* as **healf* ('half'), assuming *h-* loss and taking *æ* to be a hypercorrect spelling for *ea*, each of Smith's examples of names in *healf-* has words for portions of land as its second element (*hid* 'hide', *æcer* 'field', *snæd* 'detached area of land'; 1956, s.v. *half*). Wallenberg was disconcerted by the form in a version of the text updated to Middle English, *alfryng* (ed. Miller 2001, 209). But I take this form to be a mistake, frequent in the scribe's work (Lowe 1993, 15–19). In the case of *Alfryng*, the scribe presumably misread the minims in *-ruige* as *-ringe* (which he then spelt *-ryng(e)*), possibly encouraged by the word *elf-ring* ('elf-ring', 'ring of daisies', on which see §8:3 esp. n. 236).

[273] The corpus of pagan theophoric place-names was established by Gelling 1973, 120–27, which needs only slight updating: the removal of Thurstable (Bronnenkant 1983) and the addition of *frigedene* ('Frig's valley'), from a copy of a charter discovered after Gelling wrote (S712a; cf. Scherr 2002). Sandred showed that *Ingham*-names in East Anglia could contain the potentially theophoric name *Ing*, but did not accept that conclusion (1987). Other words for supernatural beings are not conveniently listed. My conclusions are based on data gathered various pre-1100 sources: the collections of charter-boundaries in the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*; Sean Miller's online corpus of Anglo-Saxon charters at <http://www.anglo-saxons.net/hwaet>; *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names* (Parsons–Styles 1997–) where available—I am indebted to David Parsons and his team for kindly supplying me in advance of publication with data for *dwerg*, *elf*, *elfen* and *ent*—and the earlier surveys of Jente and Peters (1921; 1961).

generally associate gods with clearings, valleys and hills, by contrast with monsters, associated with pits, pools, bogs and streams. The topographical associations of the gods correlate with *ælfrycg* and with the haunts of *elves* as portrayed later by the *Southern English Legendary* and *The Wife of Bath's Tale* (though the correlation is complicated by the associations of *aluen* with water at several points in Laʒamon's *Brut*), and have Eddaic comparisons.[274] The topographical associations of monsters correlate impressively with Anglo-Saxon literary evidence (cf. Whitelock 1951, 72–76). This suggests that gods and monsters were associated with different kinds of places, their mutual exclusivity reflecting the conceptual distinction between them apparent in the Old English morphological and anthroponymic evidence (see §§3:2–4). The possible ramifications of this for understanding how early Anglo-Saxons constructed their environment, and *ælfe* in it, are considerable. But the difficulties with the data are profound: proper and common nouns are not necessarily comparable, nor need the two sets originate in the same period; the significances of theophoric place-names could vary over time (cf. North 1997a, 239–40); there are gaps in our data which cannot be random, such as the absence of theophoric names north of the Humber (cf. Hough 1997; Kousgård Sørensen 1990, 397–402); and so forth.

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[274] For the *Legendary* see §7:1.3; *The Wife of Bath's Tale* lines 860–81 (ed. Benson 1987, 116–17); for the *Brut* Edwards 2002. At the end of *Skírnismál*, Freyr is to meet Gerðr in a *lundr* ('grove' stanza 41; ed. Neckel 1962, 77). In stanza 16 of *Vǫlundarkviða*, Níðuðr's queen says of Vǫlundr, 'Era sá nú hýrr, er ór holti ferr' ('He is unnerving now, who travels from the wood'; ed. Neckel 1962, 119). Other high medieval English literature occasionally links *elves* with woods (e.g. *The Seege or Batayle of Troye* line 503–12; ed. Barnicle 1927, 41), but in works based directly on French or Anglo-Norman literature (where the association of *fées* with woods is well-attested; see Gallais 1992, *passim*).

Appendix 3: Two Non-Elves

Several occurrences of *ælf-* have been excluded from this thesis. One is a scribal error, as
the correction of another Anglo-Saxon scribe confirms: the form 'se ylfa god' (putatively
'the god of the *ylfe*') for 'se sylfa god' ('God Himself') in psalm 59 of the Paris Psalter
(ed. Krapp 1933, 13). Some other examples of *ælf*, however, stand unaltered in their
manuscripts, but have not been considered here because I take them to be hypercorrect
forms of words in *æl-*. This position is worth justifying, and offers some tangential
support to my arguments above. *Ælfmihtig* occurs three times in a short text in Corpus
Christi College Cambridge MS 320, folio 117, containing formulas and directions for
pastoral use, and dating from around 1000 (Ker 1957, 105–6 [no. 58]): 'Gelyfst ðu on
god ælfmihtine'; 'Ic þe bidde & beode þæt þu gode ælfmihtigum gehyrsum sy'; 'God
ælfmihtig gefultumige us' ('Believe in God Almighty'; 'I ask and command that you be
obedient to God Almighty'; 'May God Almighty help us'; ed. *Dictionary of Old English
Corpus*, Conf 10.2 (CCCC 320) B11.10.2). *Ælmihtig* never occurs here. The provenance
of this manuscript is unknown, but its language is consistently late West Saxon; there is
no other instance of initial /æl-/ in the text for comparison. *Ælfþeod-* occurs twice in
Brussels, Bibliotheque Royale, MS. 1650, but curiously the examples are attributed to
different hands (both from about the first quarter of the eleventh century; see Gwara
2001, ɪ 94*–101*, 189*): it would appear that hypercorrection was contagious. Hand A,
deriving material from the lost, early Common Recension glossary (on which see §5:4.2),
glossed *peregre* ('as though foreign') with 'ælfþeodelice', for *ælþeodelice* ('as though
foreign'; ed. Gwara 2001, ɪɪ 70; cf. Goossens 1974, 172 [no. 381]). The largely
indistinguishable hands CD, deriving once more from a lost body of glosses (see Gwara
2001, ɪ 218*–34*), gloss *externę peregrinationis* with 'dre ælfþeodi', presumably for
fremdre ælþeodignysse ('foreign journey abroad'; ed. Gwara 2001, ɪɪ 248; Goossens
1974, 252 [no. 1620]). The hypercorrect forms may or may not originate with the
Brussels scribes themselves; each has a correct counterpart in Oxford, Bodleian MS.
Digby 146 (ed. Gwara 2001, ɪ 70, 248), which is textually related, but the principle of
lectio difficilior could be invoked.

　The hypercorrection here must relate to the fact that groups of three consonants were
liable to lose their middle consonant in West Saxon (Hogg 1992a, §§7.84–86; cf.
Goossens 1974, 105), which would affect *ælf*-compounds whose second element began
with a consonant. How widespread this was or how profound its effects were in the
common lexicon is open to doubt, but it had extensive effects on personal names, where
æl- for *ælf-* is well-attested in late Old English (e.g. Colman 1992, 201–3). Observing

that words, and perhaps particularly names, whose first syllable was spelt as <ælf->
could be pronounced as [æl-], some scribes presumably inferred that some historical *æl-*
compounds were actually *ælf-* compounds. This suggests clearly that West Saxon <ælf>
is not merely a scribal form of the expected West Saxon form *ylf*—West Saxons
evidently might say [ælf]. But the hypercorrection may have involved an element of folk-
etymology, in which case the words must reflect a semantic congruence of *ælf* with
-*mihtig* and -*þeodig*. In this reading, God was not 'all-mighty', but 'mighty as an *ælf* is
mighty'; a foreigner not 'of another people' (*æl-* < **alja-* 'other, foreign, strange'), but
'from an *ælf*-people'. Both of these readings are well-paralleled in other Old English
evidence and would help to emphasise how late such associations lasted for *ælf*—but
unfortunately, such evidence is too tangential to be relied on.[275]

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[275] *Ælfþeodig* may also have a correlative in the manusripts of Laȝamon's *Brut*: whereas the more
conservative Caligula manuscript has King Locrin reject his wife Guendoline, in the words of his
accusers, 'for alþeodisc meiden' ('for a foreign maiden', line 1151), the later Otho manuscript calls
her 'one aluis maide' ('an elvish maid'; ed. Brook–Leslie 1966–78, I 58–59). But we should
perhaps reckon with the meaning 'delusory' in the Otho text (cf. §5:5): *alþeodisc* seems to occur in
Middle English only in the *Brut*, and *alþeodi* is rare and restricted to the West Midlands (*MED*,
s.vv.), so the meanings of *alþeodisc* may not have been obvious to the redactor(s) behind the Otho
text.

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