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Madness, Medication—and Self-Induced Hallucination? *Elleborus* (and Woody Nightshade) in Anglo-Saxon England, 700–900

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1. Introduction

The usual practice in *ASPNS* word-studies is to analyse Old English plant-names individually, predicating the search for new information about them on this sharp focus (e.g. Biggam 2003). Many plant-names, however, survive in glosses (or sometimes translations) which associate them with other words, both Latin and Old English. Although Anglo-Saxon glossaries, with their complex histories of excerpting, compilation, augmentation and reduction, present scholars with formidable challenges, they also encourage us to widen the scope of *ASPNS* surveys, to include not merely single vernacular plant-names, but groups of semantically overlapping names, and to respond to the bilingual character of Anglo-Saxon literacy by assessing Latin words alongside vernacular ones. The present article, along with its companion study (Hall forthcoming, which covers the later Anglo-Latin traditions, which are generally quite distinct from the early material considered here), is in the first instance a methodological experiment arising from this impulse: it takes the Latin word *elleborus* (with its variants *helleborus*, *elleborum*) as a hub for investigating a range of Old English words which potentially overlap in meaning. It provides new insights into the semantics of *elleborus* in early medieval Anglo-Latin, but, more importantly from the point of view of *ASPNS*, also into the various Old English equivalents adduced for it by Anglo-Saxons. This method facilitates more sophisticated approaches to determining the meanings of Old English plant-names. Moreover, it suggests one way of reconstructing Old English semantic fields on a rigorous basis of primary evidence—by contrast with, for example, the methods of the *Thesaurus of Old English* (Roberts–Kay–Grundy 2000), which is predicated on using modern

dictionary definitions to fit words into a structure inspired by Roget's *Thesaurus*, potentially distorting Old English semantic structures in so doing (see Hall 2007a, 9–11).

The material studied here relates in the first instance to the earliest Anglo-Saxon scholarship arising from the school at Canterbury—Old English glosses, and Aldhelm's *Enigmata*. In this tradition, *elleborus* seems to have been interpreted to denote woody nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara* L.)—perhaps, I argue, through the misinterpretation of Dioscorides's *De materia medica*. To this tradition belong the glosses *wedeberge* and *þung* (and perhaps *ceasteræsc*). It is possible to elaborate on the evidence of glosses by adducing a word which does not gloss *elleborus*, but which does seem on other grounds to denote woody nightshade: *ælfþone*. This is a step which is not inherent in the methodology of taking a Latin hub and assessing all of its glosses and translations—and the study may have passed over other Old English words for woody nightshade which have yet to be identified—but it is a natural extension of its principles (it was, indeed, a briefer study of *ælfþone* which made apparent the need for this article and Hall forthcoming: Hall 2007a, 155). Taken together, this evidence affords a rich set of insights into learned Anglo-Saxon responses to Mediterranean texts; traditional medicine and beliefs; and even, perhaps, into the deliberate use of plants to induce altered states of mind.

The approach presented here is not without challenges. It is not always crystal clear what words are to be counted as glosses or translations of *elleborus*—as my brief discussion below of *wælwyr*t emphasises (§4). Nor is the method practical (at least in an article-length analysis) for very well attested plant-names (such as *þung*, discussed in §3 below), though it might be used as one model for a second stage in more traditional *ASPNS* studies, whereby the completion of individual word-studies can be followed by an assessment of semantic interrelations. The method's greater breadth also poses practical problems for comprehensiveness in the study even of less well-attested plant-names. Thus, although continual reference is made here to Middle English evidence (esp. §5), I have maintained *ASPNS*'s traditional chronological cutoff point fairly firmly. Likewise, although this study brings to *ASPNS* a new focus on Anglo-Latin evidence, I have not gone so far as to consider all the Latin-Latin or Greek-Latin glosses known in Anglo-Saxon England which mention *elleborus*. This evidence has been neglected by editors, corpus-builders, and analysts (even more than vernacular glosses, which have themselves fared worse than most genres of Old English), meaning that to do it justice here would have required efforts disproportionate to its usefulness in elucidating the vernacular evidence on which *ASPNS* is focused. But its omission here is nonetheless regrettable. Much the same can be said of our large (and until the recent publication of the *Corpus of Old English* far more accessible) corpus of Old High German glosses. Old High German glosses on *elleborus* use cognates of Old English words only rarely, but I have adverted to these where they seem relevant.¹ Even so, I am conscious

¹ See Björkman 1901–5, II 263 [*alada*], 268 [*germara*], 269 [*hemera*], 290 [*kristwurz*], 294 [*marthistil*], 296 [*nieswurz*], 298 [*sitterwurz*], 303 [*wiznizwurz*]. Cf. *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, s.vv., where

that although they demand the same rigorous study as the Old English material, and that this would again provide useful comparisons with the Old English data, they have not received it here.

In terms of *ASPNS* word-studies, the present article comprises comprehensive studies of the word *wedeberge*, which prominently glosses *elleborus*, and *ælfpone*, which seems on other grounds to be a synonym of *wedeberge*. *Ceasterwyr*t and *ceasteræsc* are assessed in some detail, but their attestations are too few and fleeting for much to be said either about them or from them. Standard *ASPNS* appendices are provided for these words. Others again are too common, and their relevance to explicating *elleborus* too slight, for comprehensive assessment: *þung* and *hamorwyr*t. It is to be hoped that the present article will prove useful in later *ASPNS* studies of these names, but it is also clear that such later work may demand reassessments of the interim conclusions here.

2. Aldhelm's *elleborus* and woody nightshade

In Classical Latin *elleborus* was, like its Greek etymon ἑλλέβορος, conventionally divided into two varieties, *albus* (prototypically denoting *Veratrum album* L.) and *niger* (prototypically *Helleborus orientalis* L.; *OLD*, s.v. *elleborum*; cf. s.v. *uērātrum*; André 1985, s.v. *elleborus*; cf. s.v. *uērātrum*). But it is not self-evident that it was understood in this way by Anglo-Saxons. Fortunately, the ninety-eighth riddle of Aldhelm's *Enigmata*, *Elleborus*, composed sometime before Aldhelm died in 709/10 (and apparently towards the beginning of his poetic career, no earlier than around 670), affords a detailed description which allows us to ascertain with confidence what Aldhelm understood by the word:²

Ostriger en arvo vernabam frondibus hirtis	I am purple and I grow on hairy stalks;
Conquilio similis: sic cocci murice rubro	I am like a whelk, with a red shell of a berry;
Purpureus stillat sanguis de palmite guttis.	A purple dye drips down from my crown like blood.
Exuvias vitae mandenti tollere nolo	I do not wish to take the life of one who eats me,
Mitia nec penitus spoliabunt mente venena;	Nor will my mild venom fully destroy his reason,
Sed tamen insanum vexat dementia cordis,	Yet madness of the heart will make him a madman
Dum rotat in giro vecors vertigine membra.	And he will turn his limbs in circles, addle-brained.

Some translators have rendered the title of the riddle as *hellebore* (Pitman 1925, 61; Stork 1990, 227), but neither the *Helleborus* or the *Veratrum*, as Linnaeus used the words (and which the common Modern English name *hellebore* generally denotes), exhibits the kind of red fruits which Aldhelm must be describing here (cf. Erhardt-Seebolt 1936, 164; Cameron 1985, 131). Erhardt-Seebolt posited that Aldhelm's *elleborus* should be identified as *mezereon* (*Daphne mezereum* L.), on the basis of the unique gloss 'Eliforus wedeberge † ceasteræsc' (ed. Rusche 1996, E244): she argued that the etymon of *ceaster-* in *ceasteræsc* is

available.

² Ed. Ehwald 1919, 1144; trans. Stork 1990, 227–28. Aldhelm's passion for word-play and polysemy makes translation a limiting exercise: see Cameron 1985, 131–32; cf. the more literary handling by Lapidge–Rosier 1985, 93.

the Greek plant-name *κέστρον*; that one of the genera denoted by *κέστρον* in Dioscorides's *De materia medica* is *Daphne* L.; that mezereon is a *Daphne* native to the British Isles and has red berries; and so that mezereon is the subject of Aldhelm's riddle. However, Cameron's reconsideration dispensed with this interpretation, principally because mezereon's berries do not hang like drops, and because it does not cause the kinds of symptoms which Aldhelm describes (1985, 131–33; cf. 1993, 110–12; see also below, §4). Cameron preferred a passing suggestion of Erhardt-Seebold's, of woody nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara* L.; Erhardt-Seebold 1936, 169 n. 2). The possible effects of ingesting parts of woody nightshade plants are not fully understood; Cameron's conclusions were drawn primarily from only one account of poisoning by *Solanum dulcamara*. However, if we accept agitation for arm-whirling, the symptoms described by Aldhelm are among those observed of poisoning by all parts of the plant (e.g. Cooper–Johnson 1984, 217–18; Bruneton 1999, 479–83; Ceha *et al.* 1997). It is clear both that Aldhelm did not mean the same thing by *elleborus* as his Mediterranean sources and that what he was probably thinking of was woody nightshade.

This provides us with a valuable starting point for understanding what Anglo-Saxons might have understood by *elleborus*, and therefore by its vernacular equivalents. But the reasons for *elleborus*'s semantic shift are not yet clear and this is something of a problem for Cameron's interpretation (as he himself emphasised, 1985, 133). So far, no substantial sources for Aldhelm's poem have been established, and his text must, as Cameron argued, reflect personal observation (or at least culturally inculcated knowledge). Howe, demonstrating that Aldhelm made extensive use of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* in composing his *enigmata*, tentatively suggested that lines 6–7 of Aldhelm's *Elleborus* could be indebted to Isidore's entry for *elleborus* (1985, at 40 n. 11; ed. Lindsay 1911, XVII.ix.24):

Elleborum memorant in Graecia circa Elleborum quendam fluvium plurimum gigni, atque inde a Graecis appellari. Hunc Romani alio nomine veratrum dicunt pro eo quod sumptum motam mentem in sanitatem reducit. Duo sunt autem genera: album et nigrum.

They relate that *elleborum* is primarily produced in Greece around the Elleborum, a certain river, and it is named after that by the Greeks. The Romans call this by the alternative name *veratrum*, because once consumed, it brings back the disturbed/shaken mind to sanity [cf. *vera* 'true'] But there are two kinds: white and black.

Certainly Howe is not the first scholar to have brought Isidore's text to bear on Aldhelm's *Elleborus*—the late tenth-century scribe who copied the text of the *Enigmata* in BL MS Royal 12.C.xxiii, for example, also saw fit to add Isidore's entry on *elleborus* as a marginal gloss to Aldhelm's riddle (ed. Stork 1990, 227; cf. Rusche 2005, 438–40).³ But Isidore's text describes *elleborus* as a plant which remedies insanity, rather than, as is surely that case in Aldhelm's text, causing it. Some mis-reading of the text, involving *insanitatem* for *in sanitatem*, could be

³ Otherwise, since Aldhelm is unlikely to have coined *ostriger*, that word probably comes from the Épinal-Erfurt glossary tradition, though no anterior source for the gloss is yet known (ed. Pheifer 1974, 38 [no. 716]; see also 107); *rubri* and *cocci* occur in collocation in Sedulius's *Carmen Paschale* book 5, line 165, and probably underlie Aldhelm's use of the same words, but the contexts are quite different (see *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*).

imagined, but I am aware of no version of the *Etymologiae* whose text would encourage this explanation.⁴ However, some light may be shed on Aldhelm's identification of *elleborus* with woody nightshade by the earliest attested Old English gloss on *elleborus*: *wedeberge*.

3. *Wedeberge*

Wedeberge takes its first element from *wede-*, a transparent, if morphologically somewhat problematic, derivative of *wod* 'mad' also found in *wedehund* ('mad dog'), presumably meaning 'madness' (see Sauer 2003, 164–65). The second element, *-berige*, simply means 'berry'. Previous commentators have identified *wedeberge* with hellebores (Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v.; Clark Hall 1960, s.v.) or *Veratrum album* L. (Bierbaumer 1975–79, II 125–26, III 250), but this seems unlikely because these are not berry-bearing. However, *elleborus*: *wedeberge* does recall Aldhelm's riddle, in imputing berries to *elleborus* (and less distinctively in associating it with madness). It can also be shown to derive from an intellectual milieu with which Aldhelm himself has connections. Its earliest attestation comes in the Erfurt Glossary entry '*elleborus* poedibergæ' (with scribal confusion between *wynn* and *p*; ed. Pheifer 1974, 21 [no. 388]), and subsequently in the closely related Corpus Glossary, once as '*Eleborus* woedeberge', with 'þung' subsequently added interlinearly by a corrector, and once as '*Helleborus* woidiberge' (the duplication presumably reflecting the spelling variation in the lemma; ed. Hessels 1890, 46, 63 [E 120, H 86]). The additional gloss *þung* also appears in a closely related gloss in the First Cleopatra Glossary, compiled around the 930s (Rusche 1996, 2–6, 33–38), '*Elleborus* : *wedeberge*. þung' (ed. Rusche 1996, E25; for the relationships see Kittlick 1998, 43, 212–15). These texts all derive ultimately from early scholarship at Canterbury.

Several possibilities for the origins of the lemma *elleborus* have been suggested (Lindsay 1921, 115; Pheifer 1974, 85; for the theoretical possibility that Épinal-Erfurt could have derived the lemma from Aldhelm's riddle see also Iv–Ivii; Lapidge 2007, 41–42). These issues are clarified, however, by Rusche's recent studies of the wider textual tradition of Anglo-Saxon plant-name glossaries, which lasted into the twelfth century, and on which the following paragraphs are based (forthcoming). The two key texts are the Durham Plant-Name Glossary and the Laud Herbal Glossary. As its name suggests, the Durham Plant-Name Glossary (Durham, Cathedral Library, Hunter 100), was copied in Durham, in the early twelfth century. It includes the entry '*Elleborus* vedeberige *uel* thung' (ed. Lindheim 1941, 13 [no 148]). It draws almost all its material from two sources (cf. Lindheim 1941, 5–6): a seventh-century Greek/Latin-Old English plant-name glossary whose lemmata come from Dioscorides's *De materia medica*, which also contributed lemmata and glosses to the Épinal-Erfurt glossaries; and those entries in the *Old English Herbarium* which include vernacular

⁴ The Anglo-Saxon epitome of the *Etymologiae* edited by Lapidge, 1988–89 [1996]—which can be revealing, Hall 2007b, 302–6—omits the entry.

plant-names—which seem not to have been available to early Anglo-Saxon glossators. The Laud Herbal Glossary (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 587) is a twelfth-century copy of the single biggest compilation of plant-name glosses of its time in England, rooted in Anglo-Saxon sources. Its *wedeberge* entry, showing the Laud scribe’s characteristic difficulty in handling the Anglo-Saxon letter *wynn* (see Stracke 1974, 5), reads ‘*Helliborum .i. yediberge*’ (ed. Stracke 1974, 44 [no. 777]). Although the Laud Herbal Glossary has many more sources for its Latin entries, its main sources for vernacular glosses are a list of plant-names in the Greek primer, the *Hermeneumata Pseudo-Dositheana*; the *Old English Herbarium*; and a text very like the Durham Plant-Name Glossary.

Since Durham and Laud have the *elleborus: wedeberge (pung)* gloss which we find in Erfurt and Corpus, then we would expect the source of the gloss to be the Dioscorides glossary.⁵ Admittedly, on internal evidence, the source of the Laud gloss seems more likely to have been the *Hermeneumata Pseudo-Dositheana* glossary: the entry ‘*Helliborum .i. yediberge*’ occurs near the beginning of the *h-* words (it is the fourth of thirty-five entries), which is where, according to Rusche’s preliminary work, the *Hermeneumata* batch seems to occur in each alphabetic section of Laud. Admittedly too, neither *elleborus* or *wedeberge* occurs in the text which Rusche considered the best text of the Dioscorides glossary, the *Nomina herbarum Grece et Latine* in Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, 1828–30, folios 94–95 (ed. Rusche 1996, 554–66). So an origin in the *Hermeneumata* glossary should not, without more detailed research into the textual histories of the glossaries, be ruled out. But whether we are dealing with an origin in the Dioscorides glossary or the *Hermeneumata*, the gloss *elleborus: wedeberge (pung)* has its origin in seventh-century vernacular glossing at Canterbury. To put it another way, the gloss shows that a conception of *elleborus* broadly consonant with Aldhelm’s but at odds with the Classical meaning existed in seventh-century Canterbury, a milieu which Aldhelm shared, but in a textual tradition whose origin is independent of Aldhelm’s riddle. And whether or not *elleborus: wedeberge* itself comes from the Canterbury Dioscorides glossary, that glossary raises the possibility that a copy of Dioscorides’s *De materia medica* was available in seventh-century Canterbury (cf. Rusche 2003, at 191; Lindheim 1941, 5–6). The prospect that this putative manuscript of the *De materia medica* was written in Greek, along with the magnitude of the text, would explain its lack of influence in later Anglo-Saxon medicinal scholarship.

In seeking to understand the background to Aldhelm’s *Elleborus*, and to the gloss *wedeberge*, a closer examination of the *De materia medica* may, then, be worthwhile. It contains entries on both *ἑλλέβορος λευκός* and *ἑλλέβορος μέλας* (book 4, chh. 148, 162). The former is described (ed. Wellmann 1906–7, 290; trans. Beck 2005, 304) as having

⁵ A potential problem with this inference is that our manuscripts of the *Old English Herbarium* also include *wedeberge* as a synonym for *elleborum album*, in which case this could in theory have been the source for Durham-Laud (conceivably independent of Épinal-Erfurt). However, as I discuss elsewhere in this volume (forthcoming, §2), Durham-Laud in fact show rather that the *Herbarium* probably borrowed the earlier gloss *elleborus: wedeberge* rather than adding it independently.

φύλλα μὲν ὅμοια ἔχει τοῖς τοῦ ἄρνολόσσου ἢ τεύτλου ἄγριου, βραχύτερα δὲ καὶ μελάντερα καὶ ἐρυθρά τὴν χροῖαν· καυλὸν δὲ ἔχει παλαισιταῖον, κοῖλον, περιφλοιζόμενον, ὅταν ἄρξηται ξηραίνεσθαι· ῥίζαι δὲ ὑπεῖσι πολλαί, λεπταί, ἀπὸ κεφαλίου μικροῦ καὶ ἐπιμήκους ὡσπερὲ κρομύου συμπεφυκυῖαι·

XXXXXsort out breath marksXXXXX

leaves similar to the leaves of the plantain or of the wild beet but shorter, darker, and red in color; it has a stem that is a span tall and hollow and that loses its skin all around as it begins to dry up. The roots are below ground, many, delicate, and growing together from a small and longish head as from an onion.

Dioscorides does not associate it with anything that might be denoted either by *wede* or *berge*. The black hellebore, however, is described thus (ed. Wellmann 1906–7, ii 306–7; trans. Beck 2005, 312):

ἑλλέβορος μέλας· οἱ δὲ Μελαμπόδιον, οἱ δὲ ἔκτομον, οἱ δὲ πολύρριζον καλοῦσι· Μελαμπόδιον δὲ, ἕπειδὴ δοκεῖ Μελάμπους τις ἀπόλος τὰς Προΐτου θυγατέρας μανείσας ἀὐτῶ καθῆραι καὶ θεραπεῦσαι. ἔχει δὲ τὰ φύλλα χλωρά, πλατάνω προσεμπερη, ἑλάττονα δὲ πρὸς τὰ τοῦ σφονδυλίου καὶ πολυσχιδέστερα καὶ μελάντερα καὶ ὑποτραχέα· καυλὸς βραχύς, ἄνθη δὲ λευκά, ἐμπόρφυρα, τῷ δὲ σχήματι βοτρυοειδῆ, καὶ ἐν ἀὐτῷ καρπὸς κνήκῳ παραπλήσιος ... ῥίζαι δὲ μέλαιναί, λεπταί οἱ ἰοῦναι ἀπὸ τινος κεφαλίου κρομυώδους ἠρητιμέναι,

The black hellebore: but some call it *Melampodion*, others *ectonon* [sic], and others *polyrrhizon*; and they call it *Melampodion* because it seems that a certain Melampus, a goatherd, purged and cured with it the daughters of Proteus who were stricken with madness. It has pale-green leaves closely resembling those of the plane tree, but smaller by comparison to the leaves of cow parsnip, much more cloven, darker, and somewhat rough. The stem is short, the flowers white, inclining to purple, resembling grape clusters in configuration, and containing fruit nearly resembling safflower. ... The roots are black and slender, seemingly hanging from an onion-like little head.

This hellebore—identified by Aufmesser as *Helleborus orientalis* or *Helleborus cyclophyllus* L. (2000, 187)—is, amongst other things, ὠφελεῖ δὲ ἐπιληπτικῶν, μελαγχολικῶν, μαινομένων, ἄρθριτικῶν, παραλελυμένων (‘good for epileptics, the atrabilious, the insane, arthritics, and paralytics’; ed. Wellmann 1906–7, 308; trans. Beck 2005, 313). Like *wedeberge*, then, it is connected with madness. Some manuscripts of the *De materia medica* were illustrated, but when they were not, identifying plants from Dioscorides’s verbal descriptions was tricky. Although the hellebores are in reality quite unlike woody nightshade, Dioscorides’s description fits woody nightshade in several important respects, while woody nightshade does not appear elsewhere in his text. One of the distinctive features of woody nightshade is that its upper leaves, like those of plane trees, tend to be trifoliate, and unlike those of planes, they are often cloven almost to the petiole. They are not outstanding candidates for the description ‘pale green’, but they are both darker and smaller than the leaves of the cow parsnip (*Heraclum maximum* L.)—and it is not, in any case, immediately clear how ‘χλωρά’ would have mapped onto the structuring of colours in the Old English lexicon, and what effects this might have had on its interpretation (cf. Ruff 2003). Woody nightshade flowers can be white or purple (albeit usually the latter, as Aldhelm appears to emphasise), and hang in clusters. The pods of Safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius* L.) may or may not have been a useful point of comparison for Anglo-Saxons (it is not native to Britain), but woody nightshade berries certainly hang alongside the flowers in clusters like grapes.

Admittedly, woody nightshade's stem is not short, but the flowers are on short peducles, to which Dioscorides's text might have been taken to refer. Its roots are not black, but yellow (Millspaugh 1974 [1892], 482), but this may not have been obvious unless woody nightshade's roots were traditionally used by Anglo-Saxons.

I suggest, therefore, that underlying Aldhelm's identification of *elleborus* with woody nightshade is a misidentification of Dioscorides's black hellebore. This is a risky conclusion both because of our uncertainty as to whether Anglo-Saxons had access to the *De materia medica* and because Dioscorides's description is not a perfect fit. But it is one worth considering, not least because it provides an explanation for a nagging problem in interpreting Aldhelm's *Elleborus*. The most obvious way in which Aldhelm might have had personal access to the *De materia medica* is in the time which he spent studying under Archbishop Theodore at Canterbury; Dioscorides's description of *helleborum nigrum*, and possibly its misidentification, may, like much knowledge of Greek in Canterbury glosses, have been mediated through Theodore (see Lapidge 1996 [1986]; 1996 [1988]; cf. Bischoff–Lapidge 1994, 249–55 on Theodore's medical learning). A variant on this argument (and not a mutually exclusive one) derives from the evidence for close contact between Aldhelm and the glossing tradition underlying Épinal-Erfurt. Aldhelm drew vocabulary from the glosses, and they from him (Pheifer 1974, lv–lvii; Lapidge 2007, 31–43), so there is a good chance that there is some relationship between the gloss *elleborus: wedeberge* and Aldhelm's poem *Elleborus*. Conceivably Aldhelm misinterpreted the gloss 'madness-berry', coined to mean 'berry curing madness', as 'berry causing madness'; but this could surely only be one ingredient in a more complex web of intellectual sources and/or contacts. All the same, if my interpretation is accepted, it both clears up a problem in the understanding of Aldhelm's riddle, and adds to the evidence for the availability in early Anglo-Saxon England of Dioscorides's *De materia medica*.

Later, it seems, in the textual tradition, the word *þung* also joined the gloss *wedeberge*; but *þung* is too widely-attested to be given full consideration here (hopefully, rather, the present study will help in due course to illuminate the semantic range of *þung*). It appears to have denoted a range of plants whose common feature is their toxicity (Bierbaumer 1975–79, I 136, III 239), suggesting that in this tradition, *elleborus* was considered (potentially) poisonous—which is of course consistent with Aldhelm's poem. In the present state of knowledge, *þung* is not itself more diagnostic of the kind of plant denoted by *elleborus*. Moreover, it is hard to be sure whether it was intended to supplement the information provided by *wedeberge*, or to denote another plant entirely—or even to do both.

Focusing more closely on the word *wedeberge* itself, then, does this word represent an early, common Old English word for woody nightshade—or is it, as D'Aronco assumed (1988, 30), a gloss-word, coined specially to denote *elleborus*? The attestations of *wedeberge* listed so far seem all to be textually related, which is generally a precondition for supposing a

word to be a gloss-word (though see n. 5). Likewise, the compound *wedeberge* has neither cognates in other Germanic languages nor later English reflexes.⁶ Meanwhile, if *elleborus* (*niger*) was understood to denote a berry-bearing plant—as Dioscorides’s text, if available, may have suggested—then *wedeberge* would afford a sensible and illuminating rendering. Admittedly, Aldhelm’s riddle is, as I discuss below, probably predicated on common knowledge about the characteristics of woody nightshade, which suggests that vernacular words for the plant must have been available. This being so, it does seem odd that an Anglo-Saxon glossator would invent a word for woody nightshade when other words were surely available, and this could militate in favour of taking *wedeberge* as a member of the common lexicon. However, it is also plausible that a glossator coined *wedeberge* because he did not know what *elleborus* was, and simply created what he viewed as a descriptive compound—which later encouraged the consonant identification of *elleborus* with woody nightshade.⁷

Wedeberge does, however, occur in one more Anglo-Saxon gloss, attested along with ‘Elleborus wedeberge, þung’ in the First Cleopatra glossary, in the entry ‘Eliforus wedeberge’, to which was later added the additional gloss ‘ceasteræsc’ (ed. Rusche 1996, E244). This occurs in a batch of glosses to Aldhelm’s works, numbered S12 by Kittlick, and must originally have glossed Alhelm’s riddle *Elleborus*; Kittlick considered from its language that the batch originated in an Anglian-speaking region (1998, §14.4). Whether this Aldhelm glossary was composed entirely independently, or whether it used existing glosses has not to my knowledge been investigated. If it is independent, then it shows that the word *wedeberge* was in general circulation; assuming that the glossator correctly identified the plant which Aldhelm described (as Aldhelm presumably thought his readers would), it must have denoted woody nightshade. But contact with, for example, the Épinal-Erfurt tradition must be suspected. *Wedeberge* seems likely to have been coined as a gloss-word for a lemma most likely deriving from Dioscorides’s *De materia medica*, or possibly from the *Hermeneumata Pseudo-Dositheana*.

4. *Ceasteræsc* (and *hamorwyr*t)

⁶ *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *wēde-berȝe*. The dictionary, s.v. *wōde* §4a, does include the fourteenth-century gloss ‘Carica: wodeberie’, but as *carica* denotes a fig-tree, this must, as the entry implies, be a ‘wood-berry’, quite independent of *wedeberge*.

⁷ Another possible explanation is provided by the probable existence of another early Anglo-Saxon word for woody nightshade: *ælfbone* (etymologically ‘elf-vine’), discussed below. It may be that Canterbury’s earliest, evangelical scholars, working at the forefront of the English Christianisation movement, may have thought the noun *ælf* (‘elf’) too redolent of pagan beliefs (or indeed of actual demons) for inclusion in the glossary, preferring instead to coin a new word—an explanation which might also help to explain why words like *gydig* (‘possessed by a god’) and *ylfig* (apparently etymologically ‘possessed by elves’ and later meaning ‘in a prophetic state’), though apparently old words, do not occur in our texts until the eleventh century (see §6 below). As these examples emphasise, however, then if this was the case, the scruples of Canterbury’s early scholars were not shared by later writers.

The addition of *ceasteræsc* (literally ‘(Roman) fortification-ash’) to the First Cleopatra Glossary entry ‘eliforus wedeberge’ provides a further equivalent for *elleborus*. However, this gloss seems to be unparalleled; indeed, *ceasteræsc* appears as a gloss only here. The word does occur in four medical texts in the collection known, since Cockayne’s edition, as the *Lacnunga*: three in a single sequence of drinks for *þeor* (apparently ‘inflammation’)—one of which, as Meaney noted (1984, 239), also appears in section 30 of Leechbook III (ed. Wright 1955, f. 117r)—and one later in a remedy ‘Gif sceap sy abrocen’ (‘If a sheep is afflicted’; ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 148, 150, 179 [remedies 73, 74, 77, 143]).⁸ Meanwhile, the *hapax legomenon ceasterwyr*t occurs in section 39 of Bald’s Leechbook I (ed. Wright 1955, f. 39a), and has been assumed to share *ceasteræsc*’s denotation. The only information useful for identifying these plants which these texts reveal is that *ceasterwyr*t had seeds (which at least makes berry-bearing plants such as woody nightshade unlikely). Neither name seems to occur in cognate languages—unsurprisingly, as *ceaster* was an Old English loan-word from Latin—or in later varieties of English.

Earlier lexicographers based their interpretations of *ceasteræsc* on the lemma *eliforus*. Cockayne cited the lemma in his glossary entry for *ceasteræsc* (1864–68, II 368), giving the translation ‘helleborus niger, black hellebore’, adding that this ‘has leaves like those of the ash’, and his entry has probably been the basis for dictionary definitions preceding the *Dictionary of Old English* (Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *ceaster-æsc*; cf. s.v. *ceaster-wyr*t; Toller 1921, s.v. *ceaster-æsc*; Clark Hall 1960, s.v. *ceasteræsc*). To make reliable use of the *ceasteræsc* gloss, it is necessary to know whether it originated as a marginal gloss to a text of Aldhelm’s riddle (in which case it might reflect his description of *elleborus* more than inherited wisdom about the meaning of the word), or whether it was added later in the gloss’s textual tradition on the basis of someone’s wider knowledge about *elleborus*, or transferred by the Cleopatra scribe from another instance of *elleborus* in his sources, whose lemma originally came from elsewhere. Unfortunately, we cannot readily decide between these, and it will be clear already that we cannot assume that Anglo-Saxons associated *elleborus* with our hellebores. Cockayne was wise to seek to explain why the generic element *-æsc* would appear in a word for *Elleborum nigrum*, but unfortunately his claim that the black hellebore has leaves like an ash strikes me as unconvincing. Though their individual shape is not unlike the ash’s, this is not a very distinctive similarity: similarity in arrangement would be more impressive, and this is lacking. One might compare the words *æscprote* and the rarer *æscwyr*t, which seem prototypically to have denoted vervain (*Verbena officinalis* L.), and whose leaves’ form therefore would recall sets of ash leaves rather than individual ash leaves.

Later commentators have been more cautious. Bierbaumer offered three identifications for *ceasteræsc*—*Helleborus niger*, *Veratrum album* and *Daphne mezereum* L. (1975–79, I 27–28; cf. II 19, III 45)—while the *Dictionary of Old English* similarly offered the circumspect

⁸ On my use of Wright 1955 in preference to Cockayne 1864–68 or other editions, see Hall 2005, 197 n. 5.

definition ‘a plant, perhaps a true hellebore, but more probably a pseudo-hellebore such as mezereon, woody nightshade, or dwarf elder’ (s.v. *ceaster-æsc*). Bierbaumer’s entry, and presumably the *Dictionary of Old English*’s, are based on the arguments of Erhardt-Seebolt; in particular, both she and the *Dictionary of Old English* associated *ceasteræsc* with the Greek plant-name *κέστρον*, presumably taking *ceaster-* as a folk-etymologisation inspired by the common Old English noun *ceaster* (Erhardt-Seebolt 1936, 164; though the *DOE* did not list *ceasteræsc* or *ceasterwyr*t as compounds s.v. *ceaster*). Dioscorides’s *κέστρον* seems to have denoted *Stachys officinalis* L. (Beck 2005, 252) or *Stachys alopecuros* (Aufmesser 2000, 202), both commonly known as *betonica* in Latin, *betony* in English today and apparently in Old English variously as *betonice*, *bisceopwyr*t and *attorlape* (cf. *DOE*, s.vv.). These are all very common words in the Old English medical texts (and Middle English reflexes of *bisceopwyr*t are attested glossing *elleborus*: *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, s.v. *helleborus*). Moreover, Erhardt-Seebolt associated another well-attested plant-name with *κέστρον* too—*hamorwyr*t (literally ‘hammer-plant’), taking it to be a translation of *κέστρον* following *κέστρον*’s other sense of ‘stylus, chisel’. This could in turn connect *ceasteræsc* both with *hamorwyr*t and with *hamorwyr*t’s own partial synonyms (it glosses *perdicalis*, Toller 1921, s.v. *hamer-wyr*t, connecting it in turn with another *perdicalis* gloss, *dolhrune*, see *DOE*, s.v. *dolg-rūne*). Evidently, if the association of *ceasteræsc* with *κέστρον* is correct, then the name needs to be understood as part of a fuller study of several of the most common Old English plant-names.

However, the associations of *ceasteræsc* with *κέστρον* and with *hamorwyr*t strike me as tenuous. Phonetically *ceaster-* would be a plausible folk-etymologisation of *κέστρον* (or more likely its Latin equivalent *cestrum*), and *-wyr*t is a common suffix in plant-names based on foreign words; but *cestrum* is in our Latin texts a rare word in either of its senses—plant-name or word for chisel (*Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, s.v. *cestros*)—and is apparently unattested in early medieval Anglo-Latin (*Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, s.v. *cestros*). It seems an unlikely source, then, for *ceaster-*, which is easily explicable as the common noun ‘(Roman) fortification’. That the ‘stylus/chisel’ sense of *κέστρον* inspired the name *hamorwyr*t is likewise implausible—besides the rarity of the word and the fact that Anglo-Saxons are unlikely to have confused hammers and chisels, the explanation has the added detraction that, as Cockayne pointed out, *hamorwyr*t seems to have partial cognates in *dyphamor* and *hamorsecg*, and in the Old High German simplex *hemera*, suggesting that the plant-name originated before likely influence from Greek or Latin texts.⁹

⁹ 1864–68, III 330; cf. 321–22, 343–44; see now Björkman 1901–5, II 269; *DOE*, s.v. *dȳþ-hamor*—suggesting the denotation cattail (bullrush in British English), *Typha* L. While sealing the case against any connection of *hamorwyr*t with *cestrum*, Old High German *hemera* does open up another avenue of enquiry here, since it is itself prominently attested as a gloss for *elleborus*; on this evidence, Cockayne glossed *hamorwyr*t as ‘black hellebore, helleborus niger’ (1964–68, III 330), doubtless inspiring Bosworth and Toller’s definition ‘black hellebore’ (1898, s.v. *hamer-wyr*t). A fuller study of the Old English and Old High German evidence might bear this inference out, but it seems somewhat doubtful: other Old English and later English evidence points towards an identification of *hamorwyr*t with

We must examine *ceasteræsc* from scratch. As Cockayne was aware, any attempt to identify the denotation of *ceasteræsc* must accommodate its generic element *æsc*. Since *elleborus* is a herb, it seems unlikely that *ceasteræsc* could actually denote an ash (*Fraxinus* L.), but presumably *ceasteræsc* denoted something sufficiently similar to the ash to be named after it. It is worth noting that we may in seeking plants which are similar to ashes need to be sensitive to properties of the ash which may have been more important to Anglo-Saxons than to us. Thus although ash-trees' leaves are particularly distinctive in arrangement, the properties of ash wood led to its use in the manufacture of ships and weapons, uses enshrined in the extension of the semantic range of *æsc* to include certain kinds of ships and spears (see *DOE*, s.v.), which may have had a bearing on the name *ceasteræsc*.

No kind of hellebore or veratrum stands forward as resembling an ash in the arrangement of its leaves (and certainly not in producing wood), meaning that we can probably dispense with the older dictionary interpretations of *ceasteræsc*. Erhardt-Seebolt suggested that *ceasteræsc*'s most likely denotation is the mountain ash (*Sorbus aucuparia* L.) 'and its shrub-like varieties', thereafter arguing that this was in turn identified with mezereon (*Daphne mezereum* L.). This reasoning strikes me as tenuous. The mountain ash certainly looks like an ash, but although mountain ashes are not tall trees (usually reaching no more than 18 metres), the idea that shrubby examples might be connected with the herb *elleborus* is not one which I find compelling. That mountain ash and mezereon might be associated or confused seems even less likely: mezereon's leaves, for example, may individually be similar to the mountain ash's in shape (as Erhardt-Seebolt emphasised), but they do not share ash leaves' distinctive arrangement. Mezereon's berries too are individually like the mountain ash's, but the mountain ash's hang in bunches where the mezereon's grow from the stem.

The *Dictionary of Old English*'s suggestion of dwarf elder (*Sambucus ebulus* L.) is more promising, at least insofar as the leaves of the dwarf elder are like the ash's in shape and arrangement. Admittedly, Aldhelm's riddle *Ebulus* ('dwarf elder') associates the dwarf elder firmly with the *sambucus* ('elder') rather than with the ash (ed. Ehwald 1919, I 141; see further Cameron 1985, 129–30), but some ostensible evidence for a link with *elleborus* might be perceived in the entry '<helleborus> ualuyrt' in the *Corpus of Old English* text of the Leiden Glossary (LdGl D41 [0123 (42.4)]). *Wælwyrt* and its probable variants *wealhwyrt* and *weallwyrt* almost certainly denoted dwarf elder (amongst other things), as they have continued to do in English, and this citation would imply that it was identified with *elleborus* elsewhere in Old English.¹⁰ If so, then the methodology of this article would also demand the consideration also of another gloss on *ebulus*, *ellenwyrt*. However, this interpretation is not

pellitory of the wall, *Parietaria officinalis* L. (Toller 1921, s.v. *hamer-wyrt*; cf. Clark Hall 1960, s.v. *hamorwyrt*; *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *hemer-wort*; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. *hammerwort*). I do not, then, pursue *hamorwyrt* further here.

¹⁰ Bierbaumer 1975–79, I 138–39, II 123–24; *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *wal-wort*; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. *wallwort*; *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, s.v. *Walworte*; cf. *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *ellen-wyrt*.

viable. One problem is the fact that one of the *Lacnunga* entries attesting to *ceasteræsc* runs ‘Wið ðeore, ealhtre, wælwyr̥t, weoduweaxe, æscrind in eorþan, cneowholen, wermod se hara, rædic, ceasteræsc, lytel sauinan’ (ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 151 [no. 77]). This, then, seems to take *wælwyr̥t* and *ceasteræsc* to denote different plants—though this could be explained as semantic variation, or a mistake arising from the text’s transmission. More importantly, then, the manuscript form of the Leiden gloss is ‘*Elleus . ualuyrt*’ (ed. Hessels 1906, 43 [no. XLII.4]), and the lemma here must be a corruption not of *elleborus*, but of *ebulus*. Since most of the lemmata in this section of the Leiden Glossary come from Sulpicius Severus’s *Dialogi*, Hessels suggested (1906, 102) that *Elleus* might be a corruption of a form of the word *helleborus* as found in another text by Sulpicius, his *Vita Sancti Martini* (ch. 6; ed. Fontaine 1967–69, I 266). However, Hessels also commented that ‘it seems identical with *ebulo*, wælwyr̥t of Aldhelm’s *Aenigm.*’ (1906, 266). This latter interpretation is surely the correct one: as Hessels noted, the gloss *ebulus: wælwyr̥t* is attested in the late tenth- or early eleventh-century glosses on Aldhelm’s *Enigmata* in BL. MS Royal 12. C. xxiii (ed. Stork 1990, 219 [riddle no. 94]), and the same pair is attested in the Erfurt glossary (ed. Pfeifer 1974, 22 [no. 393]), along with numerous related texts (cf. Hall forthcoming, §3). This is surely the correct interpretation of the Leiden gloss, and the reading *elleborus: ualuyrt* can be dispensed with.

While I am unconvinced by previous identifications of *ceasteræsc*, then, I am sceptical about the prospects of finding a reliable alternative. Perhaps a more likely candidate is the one-species genus *Dictamnus* L., also known as *Dictamnus fraxinella*, whose leaves, as the name suggests, are very like those of the ash in form and arrangement. It seems to be native only to more southerly regions of Europe, though perhaps one way of explaining why a plant might have been associated with old Roman fortifications would be to suggest that exotic plant species tended to find their way to these hubs of demographic and mercantile movement. Equally, we could probably do worse than to identify *ceasteræsc* with *æscþrote* and so with vervain. This is not, I hope, the last word on *ceasteræsc*. But it will be evident that further considerations here will not illuminate the significance of Anglo-Latin *helleborus*.

5. *Ælfpone*

The final lexeme in my unravelling of the riddle of Aldhelm’s *elleborus* and its denotation of woody nightshade is not a gloss, but has been mentioned above as a possible reason why woody nightshade might have been denoted by a gloss-word *wedeberge* rather than an extant Old English word. This word is *ælfpone*, which is attested in Old English only in the medical texts of MS Royal 12 D.xvii, the mid-tenth-century manuscript containing the texts known as Bald’s Leechbook (in two books) and Leechbook III.

The medical texts themselves provide no evidence for what plant(s) *ælfþone* denoted, and without glosses to assist us, we must look to comparative linguistic evidence. *Ælfþone* seems to have been an old name: its second element is unique in Old English, but cognate with Old High German *thona*, ‘vine, creeper’ (*Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v.; Hoops 1889, 49; Thun 1969, 391–92), suggesting that the compound *ælfþone* is archaic, and originally denoted some kind of vine. The first element, *ælf*, is the etymon of Modern English *elf*, and like it denoted supernatural beings (see further Hall 2007a; cf. Gunnell 2007; Shippey 2005). Thun, developing the conclusions of Hoops, observed that Continental West Germanic plant-names in cognates of *ælf*- most consistently denote woody nightshade, which fits with the meaning of *þone* (1969, 391–92). Bierbaumer reached the same conclusion (1975–79, 19–10). This reasoning is complicated by Middle English evidence: the forms ‘elfrone’ and ‘elfyone’ identified by Hunt in fifteenth-century plant-name *synonyma* as counterparts to *personacia*, and ‘var. appl. to large-leaved plants incl. burdock, beet, water-lily, darnel’ (1989, 202). *Elfryone* at least seems certainly to be a (scribally corrupted) reflex of *ælfþone*, denoting something quite unlike woody nightshade. Another relevant Middle English plant-name is *elf-thung*, compared with *ælfþone* by both the *Middle English Dictionary* (s.v. *elf-thung*) and *Dictionary of Old English* (s.v. *ælf-þone*). In this reading, presumably, *ælfþone*’s archaic and opaque second element came to be replaced with a productive generic meaning ‘poisonous plant’. Moreover, both attestations associate *elf-thung* with *elleborus*. The earlier and most pertinent is an annotation made by the renowned Tremulous Worcester Scribe to the eleventh-century copy of the *Old English 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, appears to add ‘elueþunge tunsingwurt’ (ed. Crawford 1928, 21) as the title for the Old English entry ‘Deos wyr̥t þe man elleborum album 7 oðrum naman tunsincgwyrt nemneð 7 eac sume men wedeberge hatað byð cenned on dunum, 7 heo hafað leaf leace gelice’ (‘This plant, which is called *elleborus albus*, and by another name *tunsingwyrt*, and [which] some people also call *wedeberge* grows on mountains, and it has leaves like an allium’; ed. De Vriend 1984, 180; see further Hall forthcoming).¹¹ However, despite the overlap of form between these Middle English words and *ælfþone*, rather little can be made of this later evidence. While there is no reason to doubt that *ælfþone*’s Middle English reflex *elf-thone* could denote plants entirely unlike woody nightshade, it is also clear that these plants do not fit with the etymological meaning of *-þone*. The denotation of *ælfþone* must have shifted from vine to other kinds of plants during the medieval English period, and we cannot be sure when. The denotation of *elf-thung*, likewise, could be distant from *ælfþone*’s early meanings—a conclusion encouraged by the differing interpretations of *elleborus* attested in later Old English (see Hall forthcoming). Here, I develop the hypothesis that in our Old English

¹¹ De Vriend read not *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.

medical texts, the meaning of *ælfþone* was conservative—and that, although we cannot be certain, it denoted woody nightshade.

Ælfþone appears as an ingredient in a bath in section 47 of Leechbook III, as part of a long series of remedies ‘Wip lyftadle’, which appears to mean ‘against paralysis’ (Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *lyft-ádl*). However, our understanding of the connotations of *lyftadl* is poor—as perhaps were Anglo-Saxon understandings of the conditions which *lyftadl* denoted (cf. Cameron 1993, 14, 95)—and the remedy exhibits too many components for much to be made of it. More revealingly, *ælfþone* is also prescribed in two baths (which may be distant textual relatives of one another) for the condition *micel lic*. One occurs in Bald’s Leechbook II, section 32: ‘Bæp wip þam miclan lice eolone brom . ifig . mucwyrð ælfþone . beolone . cottuc . efelastan wyl on wætere swiþe geot on bydene 7 sitte on.’ (‘Bath against the *micel lic*: elecampane, broom, ivy, mugwort, *ælfþone*, henbane, mallow, *efenlaste*; boil well in water, pour into a tub and sit in it’; ed. Wright 1955, f. 29v). The other appears in Leechbook III, section 26, a section devoted to remedies for *micel lic*. Erroneously giving *bið* for *bæð*, the remedy in question says ‘Wyrð bið wip þam miclan lice . elene . ælfþone . marubie . curmealle . ellentanas . 7 actanas wyl swiðe on wætre 7 beþe on swiðe hatum þæt lic’ (‘Make a bath against the *micel lic*: elecampane, *ælfþone*, horehound, centaur, elder-twigs and oak-twigs; boil well in water and bathe the body in it, very hot’; ed. Wright 1955, f. 116v). What *micel lic* could denote is unfortunately unclear. Literally the term means ‘large body’, which might most obviously reflect large-scale inflammation; this reasoning, and a scatter of more specific evidence in our medical texts, suggests the identification of the ailment with elephantiasis, and, since this was connected lexically and conceptually with leprosy in much medieval thought, perhaps also more generally with leprosy and ailments with similar symptoms such as psoriasis or scabies (Hille 1969). It may be significant in this connection, then, that there are some hints that Anglo-Saxon elves were thought to cause cutaneous ailments, which might fit with the possible wider associations of *micel lic* (Hall 2007a, 106–9). In addition to the evidence adduced by Hille, it is perhaps also worth noting that *micel lic* is mentioned in the contents list of Bald’s Leechbook II, in the entry for section 61, whose corresponding main text is now lost: ‘Læcedom wip þære geolwanadle 7 wið þæm miclan lice . 7 dolhdrencas twegen 7 oþer mæg wip lungenwunde eac’ (‘Remedy against jaundice and *micel lic*, and two wound-drinks, and the second will serve against a lung-wound also’; f. 64r). Here it appears that *micel lic* and *geolu adl*, which is assumed to be jaundice, are treated with the same remedy, suggesting some similarity—one paralleled, and perhaps inspired, by Isidore of Seville’s juxtaposition of elephantiasis, leprosy and jaundice in his *Etymologiae* (ed. Lindsay 1911, IV.viii.10–13). Although not much can be made of it, this may be significant because a detailed description of symptoms in a remedy *Gif him bið ælfsogoða* (‘If someone has an elf-*sogoða* [some sort of internal pain]’) in Leechbook III seems clearly to

describe jaundice, thus linking jaundice with elves (ed. Wright 1955, f. 124v; Hall 2007a, 105–6).

One possible conclusion from this consideration of *micel lic*, then, is that the use of *ælfþone* in remedies for *micel lic* may reflect the use of a plant with *ælf* in the name to heal illnesses which might be caused by elves. More certainly, however, components of woody nightshade have been shown in recent scientific studies to be effective as cyclooxygenase inhibitors, making them to at least some extent effective in limiting inflammation (Jäggi *et al.* 2004; Tunón–Olavsdotter–Bohlin 1995; cf. Birnesser–Klein–Weiser 2003). Conceivably, of course, they would have been more effective in combination with the other ingredients listed in the remedies (one might note in passing that all the Old English remedies mentioning *ælfþone* also contain *elene*, ‘elecampane’, *Inula helenium* L.). Meanwhile, woody nightshade has clinically demonstrated potential to alleviate eczema and neurodermatitis (Nieder 1996), both of which might be relevant to the cutaneous ailments with which *micel lic* is associated. The range of problems for using this kind of data in assessing the clinical effectiveness of Anglo-Saxon medicine is substantial. But the theoretical possibility that *ælfþone* might have contributed to reducing the symptoms of *micel lic* is clear.

Ælfþone also appears in another two remedies, which seem likely to be distant textual relatives, and which are also similar to a third remedy in Leechbook III to be considered shortly. The first appears in Leechbook II section 53: ‘To leohtum drenc ælfþonan gyþrifan . betonican þa clufyhtan wenwyr . eoforþrotan . heahhiolþan . ealehtran eolonan twa snæda . clatan . wegbrædan . ontre . cropleac to wætan healf halig wæter . healf sie hluttur eala .’ (‘As a *leoht drenc*: *ælfþone*, ?cockle, betony, the cloved lesser celandine, ?carline thistle, *heahhiolþe*, ?lupin, two slices of elecampane, ?burdock, plantain, ?radish, ?wild garlic; to wet them let half be holy water, half clear ale’; ed. Wright 1955, f. 102v). The second is in Leechbook III section 68, identified in the contents list as ‘Wiþ wedenheorte leoht drenc’ (‘A *leoht drenc* against a *wedenheort*’; ed. Wright 1955, f. 111r), and running (ed. Wright 1955, ff. 126v–127r)

Leoht drenc wiþ wedenheorte elehtre . bisceopwyr ælfþone . elene . cropleac . hind hiolþe . ontre . clate . nim þas wyrta þonne dæg 7 niht scade . sing ærest on ciricean letania . 7 credan . 7 pater noster . gang mid þy sange to þam wyrstum ymbga hie þriwa ær þu hie nime . 7 ga eft to ciricean gesing . xii . mæssan ofer þam wyrstum þonne þu hie ofgoten hæbbe .

A *leoht drenc* against a *wedenheort*: ?lupin, betony, *ælfþone*, elecampane, ?wild garlic, *hind hiolþe*, ?radish, ?goose-grass. Take these plants when day and night separate; sing first over them the litany, creed and *pater noster* in a church; walk along with that song to those plants; walk round them three times before you take them; and walk back to the church; sing 12 masses over those plants when you have soaked them.

Counting *heahhiolþan* in the former text as a mere variant of *hind hiolþe* in the latter, all but one of the eight plant-names listed in the latter citation are included in the former; the remaining plant-name in the latter is *bisceopwyr*, which seems to be a synonym of *betonice*

in the former (both denoting betony, *Stachys officinalis* L.; see *DOE*, s.vv.). A common origin for these remedies, then, seems likely.

The latter remedy is designated as ‘Wip wedenheorte’. The meaning of *wedenheort* is elucidated by its better attested derivative *wedenheortness*, defined by Bosworth and Toller as ‘Madness, frenzy, fury’ (1898, s.v. *wédenheortness*; Toller 1921, s.v. *wedenheortness*; cf. s.v. *wéden(d)-seóc*). More telling again, however, is another remedy ‘Wip wedenheorte’, in Bald’s Leechbook I, section 63, which must be another textual relation of *Wip wedenheorte leoht drenc* just quoted from Leechbook III: ‘Wip wedenheorte bisceopwyr̄t . elehtre . banwyr̄t . eoforfearn . giprife . heahhiolope þonne dæg scade 7 niht þonne sing þu on ciricean letanias þæt is þara haligra naman 7 *pater noster*’ (‘Against a *wedenheort*: betony, ?lupin, ?centaury, *eoforfearn*, ?cockle, *heah hiolope* when day and night separate; then sing litanies in a church—that is the names of the saints and the *pater noster*’; ed. Wright 1955, f. 52r). Here the remedy occurs as one of a group ‘Wip 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’; ed. Wright 1955, f. 51v). In Bald’s Leechbook, then, the person with a *wedenheort* is identified with the diabolically possessed. Although Anglo-Saxon elves are never associated with the term *wedenheort*, their capacity to inflict madness or similar symptoms is well attested (Hall 2007a, 119–56). It is also noteworthy, of course, that this symptom is linked lexically with *wedeberge*. If *wedeberge* is a (partial) synonym of *ælfþone*, it seems appropriate that it was linked with a state with whose treatment *ælfþone* is later associated.

Literally, *leoht drenc* could either mean one which is not heavy, or one which is bright or perhaps clear; but the term might connote something more specific. The entry in Leechbook II’s contents list for the section containing this *leoht drenc* reads ‘Læcedomas 7 leohte drencas mannum to hælo 7 unspiuole drencas wip untrumum innopum eahta cræftas’ (‘remedies and *leohte drencas* for the health/healing of people and ?vomit-prevention drinks against unwell insides, eight prescriptions’; f. 63r). Of these eight remedies, four are specifically *leohte drencas*, and some sort of association with remedying digestive troubles seems clear, though it may not have been exclusive. The collocation *leoht drenc* occurs elsewhere in Leechbook II, but at no point is it much elucidated.

These texts connect with a further remedy mentioning *ælfþone*. This occurs in section 64 of Leechbook III, a few sections earlier than the *Leoht drenc wip weden heorte*. It runs ‘Wip deofle lipe drenc 7 ungemunde do on ealu cassuc . elehtran moran . finul ontre . betonice . hind heolope . merce rude . wermod . nefte . elene . ælfþone . wulfes comb . gesing . xii . mæssan ofer þam drenc 7 drince him biþ sona sel’ (‘A sweet/mild drink against the/a devil and for someone out of their mind: put *cassuc*, lupine, carrot, fennel, ?radish, betony, *hind heolope*, wild celery, rue, wormwood, cat’s mint, elecampane, *ælfþone*, wild teasel in ale; sing 12 masses over that drink and drink it. He will soon be well’; ed. Wright 1955, f. 125v). *Liðe*

seems not to have any specific connotations in a medical context, but this may simply reflect our lack of evidence. Once more, we have *ælfþone* used against the devil; the liturgical content of the remedy is reminiscent of *Wiþ wedenheorte leoht drenc*; and besides *ælfþone*, it shares *ontre*, *betonice* (~*bisceopwyr*t), *hind* (~*heah*) *heoloþe* and *elene* with the two *leohte drencas*.

Ælfþone, then, is closely associated with remedying a *wedenheort*. It seems likely, once more, that administered in correct doses, it could have been clinically effective in this. Precisely what clinical symptoms *wedenheortness* might be associated with is not clear. Dendle has argued that epilepsy may be at least one of the conditions denoted by the term, positing that the *elehtre* ('lupine', *Lupinus albus* L.) prescribed in some of the relevant remedies could have helped this condition, particularly by rectifying manganese deficiencies (2001). Fever is another possible denotation, which could certainly be ascribed to elves by Anglo-Saxons (Hall 2007a, 121–29), and for which woody nightshade has been prescribed in Western traditional medicine (e.g. Tunón–Olavsdotter–Bohlin 1995, 67), its known anti-inflammatory properties encouraging the inference that it should have been effective to some degree. Whatever the case, some sort of agitation seems a likely symptom of a *wedenheort*, so although they have not to my knowledge been subjected to recent clinical tests, the mild narcotic properties which are well attested for woody nightshade in modern herbals (e.g. Allen–Hatfield 2004, 198–99; Weiss–Fintelmann 2000, 249; Millsbaugh 1974 [1892], 484) may have been of use.

The remedies in Leechbook III just quoted, 'Wiþ deofle liþe drenc' in section 64 and 'Leoht drenc wiþ weden heorte' in section 68, form part of a larger sequence against what Jolly called 'mind-altering afflictions', running from sections 54–68 (ff. 122v–127r; Jolly 1996, 133; see further Hall 2007a, 119–30). In this sequence too comes the last and most prominent of our remedies attesting to *ælfþone*. Leechbook III, section 62 (ed. Wright 1955, ff. 123v–124r) runs:

Vvið ælfadle nim bisceopwyr . finul . elehtre . ælfþonan niopowearde . 7 gehalgodes cristes mæles ragu . 7 stor do ælcra handfulle . bebind ealle þa wyrta on claþe bedyp on fontwætre gehalgodum þriwa . Eft wiþ þon, lege under weofod þas wyrte læt gesingan ofer . viiii . mæssan . recels . halig sealt . iii . heafod cropleaces ælfþonan niopowearde . elenan . nim on morgen scenc fulne meoluce dryp þriwa haliges wæteres on supe swa he hatost mæge . ete mid . iii . snæda ælfþonan 7 þonne he restan wille hæbbe gleda þær inne lege stor 7 ælfþonan on þa gleda . 7 rec hine mid þæt he swæte 7 þæt hus geond rec 7 georne þone man gesena . 7 þonne he on reste gange ete . iii . snæda eolenan . 7 . iii . cropleaces . 7 . iii . sealt . 7 hæbbe him scenc fulne ealað 7 drype þriwa halig wæter on . besupe ælce snæd . gereste hine siþþan . do þis . viiii . morgenas . 7 viii . niht him biþ sona sel .//

Against *ælfadl* take betony, fennel, ?lupine, *ælfþone* from low down, and lichen from the blessed sign of Christ; and add a handful of each incense. Bind all these plants in a cloth; dip it in font-water which has been blessed three times. Also against that, lay these plants under an altar and have 9 masses sung over them: incense, holy salt, 3 heads of ?wild garlic, *ælfþone* from low down, elecampane; take in the morning a cup ful of milk; add three drops of holy water; [let him] sip it as hot as he can manage; eat with it 3 slices of *ælfþone*. And when he desires to rest, place hot embers in there; place incense and *ælfþone* on the embers, and fumigate him with it so that he sweats, and fumigate throughout the house, and make the sign of the cross over that person thoroughly. And when he goes to rest, eat 3 slices of elecampane and 3 of ?wild garlic and 3 of salt, and have for him

a cup full of ale, and put three drops of holy water in it. Swallow each slice; let him rest afterwards. Do this for 9 mornings and 8 nights. He will soon be well.

Ælfadl seems likely to be a general term denoting any ailment caused by *ælf* (Hall 2007a, 105), so it is hard to make judgements as to *ælfþone*'s clinical effectiveness here. This remedy apparently deploys it as a topical application, as a drink, to be eaten and to be burnt. All four methods could harness various of the plant's chemical properties.

It seems clear that *ælfþone* in our texts tends to be prescribed for ailments which could be ascribed to elves, so the linguistic connection between *ælfþone* and elves more generally is likely to be relevant here. But precisely how is uncertain. Was *ælfþone* named because of its efficaciousness in healing ailments attributed to elves? Or was it used to heal them because of its name, on a principle of curing like with like? Or both? Either way, it seems likely that it had chemical properties which should have been clinically effective to at least some degree in treating the symptoms for which it was prescribed.

6. Discussion: Aldhelm, elves and *elleborus*

Taken together, the evidence discussed above comprises an unusually detailed dossier on woody nightshade in Anglo-Saxon culture from around 700–900—which serves to emphasise the usefulness of following all the leads established by glosses on a single Latin lemma. Aldhelm leaves us in no doubt that woody nightshade could cause symptoms which he called *dementia cordis* and which we might broadly term ‘mind-altering’, and this is broadly consistent with modern clinical observations concerning woody nightshade poisoning. It might be that Aldhelm observed the effects of woody nightshade in connection with accidental poisonings—most likely, if modern cases are anything to go by, of children eating the berries. However, for the riddle to be meaningful, Aldhelm must have expected his audience to recognise the symptoms which he described. So either accidental poisonings were sufficiently common in early Anglo-Saxon England for a general awareness of the symptoms to be maintained, or knowledge of the effects of woody nightshade was reasonably widespread because they had some other cultural importance, presumably related to deliberate consumption—or both.

It is noteworthy, in this connection, that Aldhelm ascribes *dementia cordis* to his *elleborus*, since some of the medical texts which I have discussed focus on curing people with a *wedenheort*, literally ‘frenzied mind’, apparently linked in our tenth-century manuscript with demonic possession. No Latin source is presented for *dementia cordis* in the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* database, so one suspects that Aldhelm's Latin phrase here reflects or even alludes to the vernacular Old English term *wedenheort*. This link is consolidated by the early rendering of *elleborus* as *wedeberge*, which again links the Latin plant-name with a derivative of the word *wod*. Aldhelm may or may not have seen this gloss, but he certainly studied in the same

school that produced it, at roughly the same time. If they are not chimeric, these connections between Aldhelm's poem and vernacular terminology consolidate the likelihood that Aldhelm's poem reflects traditional knowledge concerning woody nightshade. The detail may also be significant in that the word *wod* and its derivatives, though usually attested in Old English to denote undesirable states of mind, seem to have had a positive dimension at some point in the development of Anglo-Saxon traditions: the name of the god Woden derives from *wod*, and it seems unlikely, *a priori*, that the name of the god held no positive connotations. Moreover, *wod*'s cognates include the Latin *vates* 'prophet' and Old Irish *fáith* 'poet' (*OED*, s.v. *wood*, a.). One wonders, then, whether having a *wedenheort* or (*dementia cordis*) was invariably viewed as a bad thing, as the medical texts imply.

The association between woody nightshade and *dementia cordis* or perhaps *wedenheortness* also deserves to be considered in conjunction with the fact that what seems to have been the common Old English word for woody nightshade, *ælfþone*, contains the word *ælf*, 'elf'. That madness and other symptoms associated with mental disorders might be ascribed to elves in Anglo-Saxon belief is clear, as I have mentioned above. *Ælfþone* might, then, have originally meant something along the lines of 'vine which causes the symptoms which elves cause'. Picking up on the duality of the meanings of *wod*, this reading could be extended to incorporate the possibility that early Anglo-Saxons deliberately used woody nightshade to produce mind-altering effects. This possibility implies that strange states of mind caused by elves might not only be seen as afflictions needing to be cured, but positive effects to be sought. Such a duality would also be paralleled by constructs of nympholepsy and epilepsy in the Classical Hellenic world, and of possession in some more recent cultures, in which possession can have both positive and negative connotations according to context, or even concurrently (Connor 1988, esp. 156–58, 165, 174–79; Temkin 1971, 3–27).

The main Old English evidence for a positive side to elves' influence is a single word, *ylfig*, attested only in eleventh-century manuscripts. Four of the five occurrences are textually related glosses on the word *comitiales* ('epileptics') in chapter 52 of Aldhelm's *Prosa de virginitate*, composed sometime before Aldhelm's death in 709 (ed. Gwara 2001, II 696–67; Oliphant 1966, 85 [C1211]); a further one is added by the compiler of the Harley Glossary (BL Harley 3376 and its *disiecta membra* Lawrence, University of Kansas, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, Pryce MS. P2 A: 1 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Lat. Misc. a. 3., f. 49), who not only included the Aldhelm gloss but also the entry 'Fanaticus .i. minister templi' ('*Fanaticus*: i.e. the priest of a temple'), above which he wrote 'futura praecinens . 1 ylfig' ('one foretelling things to come, or *ylfig*'; ed. Oliphant 1966, 178 [F151]; collated with MS, folio 76r). Determining the provenance and implications of this material is tricky to say the least, but I have argued, I think reasonably securely, that *ylfig* was a member of the common Old English lexicon, coined centuries before its first attestation, meaning 'speaking prophetically (through the influence of elves)' (2006, 234–43). This being so, the *ælf* in

ælfþone might refer to an association of the plant not (only) with illness, but with causing prophetic states of mind of the sort which were associated with elves. A key question, of course, is how suitable woody nightshade actually is for producing altered states of mind which might promote prophetic speech reasonably reliably and safely. The general possibility that it might be suitable is clear, but unfortunately we have no firm evidence either way. Hopefully future scientific research will elucidate the problem. But for now there appears to be a reasonable case that Aldhelm's description of woody nightshade poisoning relates an association of the plant with elves in Old English, of elves with causing altered states of mind, and perhaps moreover with a custom in early Anglo-Saxon society of deliberately using the plant to achieve altered mental states.

This line of argument is at odds with the evidence of the Old English medical texts for a diametrically opposed use of woody nightshade. I have shown how in the Old English medical texts—principally Leechbook III—*ælfþone* is strongly associated with healing ailments potentially caused by elves, including altered states of mind. Most strikingly, one of the conditions for which *ælfþone* is used is a *wedenheort*, whose causing Aldhelm arguably considered characteristic of woody nightshade. One response to this problem would be to argue for change over time: a plant whose name originally meant 'vine which causes states like those caused by elves' came to be interpreted as 'vine (or, since in Old English the meaning of the word became opaque, *þone*) which acts against elves'. However, the paradox cannot easily be resolved terms of diachronic variation, because it is apparent in Aldhelm's poem itself. Aldhelm describes *elleborus* to cause *dementia cordis*, even though he had surely read Isidore's claim that *elleborus* cures insanity, and was arguably in touch with Dioscorides's claims that *ἑλλέβορος μέλας* cured it. It may be, then, that Aldhelm saw in woody nightshade a power both to cause and to cure madness, presumably depending on the circumstances and way in which the plant was used. This, in turn, is consistent with the known properties of woody nightshade. We should, then, envisage synchronic variation in the uses of woody nightshade, and possibly in the interpretation of its name, probably throughout the period covered by our texts. Whether this variation indeed reflected the different clinical effects which could be derived from the plant in different conditions—different parts of the plant, different stages of growth, different combinations with other plants, and so forth—or rather different cultural significances in different contexts is probably impossible to judge. But the evidence certainly provides striking new insights into the uses (and abuses) and wider cultural associations which plants might have in early Anglo-Saxon England.

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APPENDIX A1: WEDEBERGE CATALOGUE

<i>CNo.</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Short Title & Reference</i>	<i>Spelling</i>
1	Glossary: Erfurt	ErfGl (Pheifer) 388	poedibergæ
2	Glossary: Corpus 2	CorpGl 2 (Hessels) 5.120	woedeberge
3	Glossary: Corpus 2	CorpGl 2 (Hessels) 8.86	woidiberge
4	Glossary: Cleopatra 1	ClGl 1 (Stryker) 2019	wedeberge
5	Glossary: Cleopatra 1	ClGl 1 (Stryker) 2237	wedeberge
6	Glossary: Durham	DurGl (Lindheim) 148	vedeberige
7	Glossaries: Laud	CollGl 26 (Stracke) 777	yediberge
8	Herbarium	Lch I (Herb) 140.0	wedeberge

APPENDIX A2: RELATED CITATIONS

<i>CNo.</i>	<i>Related</i>	<i>Context</i>
1	2, 3, 4, ?5, 6, 7, ?8	Gloss on <i>elleborus</i>

APPENDIX A3: DATES AND LOCATIONS

<i>Source</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>
Glossary: Erfurt	c. 675 × 700	Canterbury
Glossary: Corpus 2	MS <i>s.</i> viii/ix	Canterbury
Glossary: Cleopatra 1	930s	Canterbury
Glossary: Durham	MS <i>s.</i> xii	Durham
Glossaries: Laud	MS <i>s.</i> xii	Canterbury
Herbarium	?c. 900 (MSS and some attestations later)	unknown

APPENDIX B1: CEASTERÆSC CATALOGUE

<i>CNo.</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Short Title & Reference</i>	<i>Spelling</i>
1	Glossary: Cleopatra 1	ClGl 1 (Stryker) 2237	ceasteræsc
2	Leechbook III	Lch II (3) 30.1.1	ceasteræscs
3	Lacnunga	Med 3 (Grattan-Singer) 73.1	ceasteræsc
4	Lacnunga	Med 3 (Grattan-Singer) 74.1	ceasteraxsan
5	Lacnunga	Med 3 (Grattan-Singer) 77.1	ceasteræsc
6	Lacnunga	Med 3 (Grattan-Singer)	cæsteræsc

<i>CNo. Source</i>	<i>Short Title & Reference</i>	<i>Spelling</i>
	143.1	

APPENDIX B2: RELATED CITATIONS

<i>CNo.</i>	<i>Related</i>	<i>Context</i>
2	4	Gloss on <i>elleborus</i>

APPENDIX B3: DATES AND LOCATIONS

<i>Source</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>
Glossary: Cleopatra 1	930s	Canterbury
Leechbook III	MS c. 950	?Winchester
Lacnunga	MS c. 1000 × 1010	Abingdon

APPENDIX C1: CEASTERWYRT CATALOGUE

<i>CNo. Source</i>	<i>Short Title & Reference</i>	<i>Spelling</i>
1 Bald: Leechbook I	Lch II (1) 39.5.4	ceasterwyrt

APPENDIX C3: DATES AND LOCATIONS

<i>Source</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>
Bald: Leechbook I	Mostly compiled c. 900; MS c. 950	?Winchester

APPENDIX D1: ÆLFONE CATALOGUE

<i>CNo. Source</i>	<i>Short Title & Reference</i>	<i>Spelling</i>
1 Bald: Leechbook I	Lch II (1) 32.4.7	ælfone
2 Leechbook III	Lch II (3) 26.1.3	ælfone
3 Leechbook II	Lch II (2) 53.1.1	ælfonan
4 Leechbook III	Lch II (3) 47.1.5	ælfone
5 Leechbook III	Lch II (3) 68.1.1	ælfone
6 Charm 19 [Leechbook III]	Charm 19 (Storms) 1	ælfonan
7 Charm 19 [Leechbook III]	Charm 19 (Storms) 36	ælfonan
8 Charm 19 [Leechbook III]	Charm 19 (Storms) 40	ælfonan
9 Charm 19 [Leechbook III]	Charm 19 (Storms) 41	ælfonan
10 Charm 21 [Leechbook III]	Charm 21 (Storms) 1	ælfone

APPENDIX D2: RELATED CITATIONS

<i>CNo.</i>	<i>Related</i>	<i>Context</i>
1	?2	Ingredient in a bath <i>wip þam miclan lice</i>
3	?5, ??10	Drinks against diabolical possession

APPENDIX D3: DATES AND LOCATIONS

Source

Bald: Leechbook I–II
Leechbook III

Date

Mostly compiled c. 900; MS c. 950
MS c. 950

Location

?Winchester
?Winchester