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

[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.

[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, I 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, ɪ 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', Jᴜᴅ. 10.4; ed. Weber 1975, ɪ 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', Jᴜᴅ. 10.7, 10.14, 10.17; ed. Weber 1975, ɪ 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, ɪ 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 Sᴀᴍ. 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, Him þoȝt hire like at a loke his lady his modire. Scho was so faire & so fresche, as faucon hire semed, An elfe out of anothire erde or ellis an aungell.	Sir Alexander looks at her and his whole heart leaps; she seemed to him alike in appearance to his lady his mother. She was so beautiful and so vivacious, she seemed like a 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.