

Chapter 7

Narratives and Contexts

The analyses above have established a new corpus of evidence for reconstructing and interpreting the meanings of *ælf*. The aim of this part of the thesis is to interpret the wider meanings of this linguistic evidence, the present chapter providing a framework for this by establishing a reading context of closely comparable medieval narratives.

However, the structuring of Part 2 of this thesis according to classes of evidence rather than their significance for my argument means that a summary of my main arguments and conclusions so far will be convenient here.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 *Ynglinga saga*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2 *Serglige Con Culainn*

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

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

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

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

Dotháet Cú Chulaind iar sin co tard a druim frisin liic, 7 ba holec a menma leis, 7 dofuit cotlud fair. Co n-accai in dá mnaí cucai. Indala n-aí brat úaine imbe. Alaili brat corcra cóicdiabail im súde. Dolluid in ben cosin brot úane chucai, 7 tibid gen fris, 7 dobert béim dind echfleisc dó. Dotháet alaili cucai dano, 7 tibid fris, 7 nod slaid fón alt chétna. Ocus bátar fri cíana móir oca sin .i. cechtar dé imma sech cucai béus dia búalad combo marb acht bec. Lotir úad íarom. Arigsitar Ulaid uli aní sin, 7 asbertatár ara ndúscide. ‘Acc!’ ol Fergus. ‘Náchi nglúasid res atchí.’

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

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

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

¹⁸¹ On texts and language see Dillon 1941–42; 1953, xi–xvi; Salberg 1992, esp. 161–62; cf. Carey 1994, 81–83; Findon 1997, 145–46.

¹⁸² Findon 1997, 117–18; cf. Cross 1952, 247 [F234.1.15] and the wooing swan-maidens in *Völundarkviða* st. 1–2.

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

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

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

1.3 The *Southern English Legendary*

That it would not be far-fetched to imagine themes like this in tenth-century England is emphasised by the *Southern English Legendary*, composed in the South-West Midlands in the late thirteenth century (Pickering–Görlach 1982, 111; cf. Görlach 1974, esp. 51–62). The passage in question comes from a cosmography included in the account of the Archangel Michael. After describing how some evil spirits oppress sleepers as *maren*, it declares¹⁸⁴

<p> Þe ssrewen wolleþ ek oþerwile · mankunne to bi-traie A-liʒte a-doun in monnes forme · biniʒte & bidaie And liggeþ ofte bi wymmen · ase hi were of fleiss & blode Ac þe engendrure þat hi makeþ · ne comþ neuere to gode And ofte in forme of womman · aday and eke nyʒt Hi leteþ men hom ligge bi · and bitraieþ hom outriʒt For hi wetep wuch beoþ men · þat to folie habbeþ wille Al one in som deorne stude · hi stondeþ þanne wel stille And mani fol hom liþ so by · in wode and eke in mede Ac þer nis non þat so deþ · þat ne acoreþ þe dede Hore membres toswelleþ somme · & somme ofscapeþ vnneþe And somme fordwineþ al awei · forte huy be[o] ibroʒt to deþe More wonder it is iwis · hou eni ofscapeþ of liue for an attri þing it is · to lemman oþer to wiue And ofte in forme of womman · in mony deorne weie Me sicþ of hom gret companie · boþe hoppe & pleie Þat eleuene beoþ icluped · þat ofte comeþ to toune And bi daie mucche in wode beoþ · & biniʒte upe heie doune Þat beoþ of þe wrecche goster · þat of heuene were inome And mony of hom a Domesday · ssolleþ ʒute to reste come </p>	<p> The evil creatures desire also at other times to betray mankind, alight down in human form by night and by day, and lie often with women as though they were of flesh and blood; but the offspring that they beget come never to good. And often in woman's form, in the day and also night they let men lie with them and betray them outright: for they know which are the men who have desire of folly: Alone in some hidden place they stand then very quiet/still, and many a fool lies with them thus, in the wood and in the meadow. But there is none who does so that does not suffer from the deed: their penises swell-up ?somewhat, and some [?men] survive with difficulty, and some dwindle completely away, whereby they are brought to death. A greater wonder it is, for sure, how any escapes alive, for a poisonous thing it is, to a [male] lover or a woman. And often in the form of woman on many a hidden path men see a great company of them both dance and play, that are called <i>eluene</i> [following other MSS], who/which often come to town, and by day they are often in the wood, and by night upon high hills; that are from among the wretched spirits who/which were taken out of heaven. And many of them yet will come to rest on Doomsday; </p>
---	--

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

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

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

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

Conid taibsiu aidmillti do Choin Chulaind la háes sídi sin. Ar ba mór in chumachta demnach ria cretim, 7 ba hé a méit co cathaigtis co corptha na demna frisna doínib 7 co taisféntais aibniusa 7 díamairi dóib, amal no betis co marthanach. Is amlaid no creteá dóib. Conid frisna taidbsib sin atberat na hanéolaig síde 7 áes síde.

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

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

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

Mór espa do láech
laigi fri súan serglige,
ar donadbat genaiti
áesa a Tenmag Trogaigi,
condot rodbsat,
condot chachtsat,
condot ellat,
eter bríga banespa.

Great is the idleness/folly for a warrior
to lie in the sleep of a wasting-sickness,
because it belies demons,
peoples of Tenmag Trogaige,
and [that] they have injured(?) you,
and bound you,
and afflicted(?) you,
in the power of woman-wantonness.

Unlike the other texts, *Ynglinga saga* does not orientate itself to Christian demonology,¹⁸⁵ but it parallels Findon's reading of *Serglige Con Culainn* nevertheless. Lönnroth remarked of female *Finnar* that 'Several Yngling kings are bewitched by the wealth and beauty of such women ... but a marriage with them will always turn out to be disastrous, since they are evil and practiced in the art of *seiðr*' (1986, 81–82). This is more or less correct (cf. Hermann Pálsson 1997, 141–56), but in Vanlandi's case, the disaster surely begins with Vanlandi's own actions. Stepping outside the controlled space of his society, he rashly follows his erotic desires—the text does not imply that Drífa was the wooer—without respecting the consequences. Unlike the *Southern English Legendary* and *Serglige Con Culainn*, the death of Vanlandi does not seem to warn against extramarital liaisons *per se* (though see *Ynglinga saga* ch. 14; ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, 1 30–31): Vanlandi's transgression is in breaking a promise. The consequence is that Vanlandi is ignominiously murdered in his sleep by a woman using magic. The implication is certainly that places and peoples from beyond the in-group are dangerous, but also that their threat is manifested in response to individuals' impropriety. Nor is this reading at odds with the general tone of *Ynglingatal*, which frequently accords its subjects ignoble deaths (Lönnroth 1986, 91). Moreover, Clunies Ross has recently argued that Old Norse mythology foregrounds issues of procreation, marriage, and women as tokens in inter-group exchange (1994–98, esp. 1 85–186), while the similar narrative of Helgi Hálfðanarson and the *álfkona* has recently been read as a criticism of Helgi's lust (Ármann Jakobsson 2003, 178–84; Kalinke 2003, 161–63;

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

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

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

2. Males and magic

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

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

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

2.1 *Skírnismál* and the Bergen rune-stave

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

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

Purs ríst ec þér oc þríá stafi,
 ergi oc æði oc óþola;
 svá ec þat af ríst, sem ec þat á reist,
 ef goraz þarfar þess.

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

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

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

Ríst ek bótrúnar,
 ríst ek bjargrúnar,
 einfalt við alfum,
 tvífalt við trollum,
 þrífalt við þursum

I carve remedy-runes,
 I carve protection runes,
 once over by *álfar*,
 twice over by *tröll* ('?magic-workers, trolls')
 thrice over by *þursar* ('?magic-workers, giants')

 við inni skæðu
 'skag'-valkyrju
 svát ei megi
 þótt æ vili
 lævis kona
 lífi þínu

 by the harmful
 'skag'-valkyrja,
 so that you may have no power of action
 though you always want,
 ?crafty woman,
 in your life

 ek sendi þér,
 ek síða þér
 ylgjar ergi ok úþola.
 Á þér renni úþóli
 ok 'ioluns' móð.
 Sittu aldri,
 sof þu aldri

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

 ant mér sem sjalfri þér.

 love me as you love yourself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2 The *Gesta Danorum*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Saxo’s narrative has another analogue, moreover, which suggests that Othinus’s love-magic was identified specifically as *seiðr*. Óðinn’s seduction of Rindr is described once outside the *Gesta Danorum*, in a line of stanza 3 of Kormakr Qgmundarson’s *Sigurðarkviða*, praising Sigurðr jarl, who ruled around Trondheim in the mid-tenth century; like other such praise-poems, it is assumed to be genuine. Kormakr’s verse mentions that ‘Óðinn seið til Rindar’ (‘Óðinn ?enchanted Rindr’; ed. Finnur Jónsson 1912, B1 69), denoting Óðinn’s magical seduction of Rindr with *síða*.¹⁸⁹ In itself, this suggests that Kormakr thought *seiðr* to have been integral to Óðinn’s wooing of Rindr. Moreover, Óðinn is associated with *seiðr* once elsewhere in the poetic corpus (admittedly by emendation from *síga*, but this does not seem to be doubted), in stanza 24 of *Lokasenna*, where Loki indicts him with the accusation:

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

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Finnur’s ‘Ódin fík Rind ved sejd’ (‘Óðinn took Rindr by *seiðr*’). The precise force of *til* is not clear: conceivably Óðinn *seið* towards Rindr; but *síða til* may simply be an otherwise unattested prepositional verb, with a specific meaning which is irrecoverable.

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

2.3 Evidence for *ælf*e

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁹¹ e.g. *Math uab Mathonwy* (ed. Williams 1930, 67–92, esp. 67–74; cf. Higley 1994; Valente 1988); the account of Codal in the Old Irish metrical *Dindsenchas* (ed. Gwynn 1903–24, iv 268–71).

¹⁹² The first half of the twentieth century saw much discussion of how far the origins of Old French *lais* like *Yonec* are to be understood as 'Celtic' (see Illingworth 1960–61, with refs), but I prefer to emphasise wider cultural continuities.

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

3. *Vǫlundarkviða* again

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

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

Meyjar flugo sunnan, myrvið í gognum,
alvitur ungar [MS *alvitr unga*], ørlög
drýgia;
þær á sævar strönd settuz at hvílaz,
drósir suðrænar, dýrt lín spunno.

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

Ein nam þeira Egil at veria,
fögr mæri fira, faðmi líósom;
önnor var Svanhvít, svanfiaðrar dró;
enn in þriðia, þeira systir,
varði hvítan háls *Vǫlundar*.

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

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

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

‘declaring of fate’, that the *meyjar margs vitandi*, ‘maidens knowing about many things’, lay down for men.

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

The opening of *Vǫlundarkviða* has received curiously little attention in the study of medieval Scandinavian supernatural females.¹⁹⁴ Studies of the poem have instead emphasised comparison with folk-tales of swan-maidens, while McKinnell pointed to parallels with the Old French *fées*.¹⁹⁵ These comparisons are helpful, but should not, I think, exclude *Vǫlundarkviða*’s *meyjar* from the mainstream traditions of Norse supernatural females: they are examples of a continuum of otherworldly females whom we might generally label *dísir* (see also §§2:2, 8:2). As the applicability to *Vǫlundarkviða* of Hines’s quotation above suggests, we are surely dealing here with a well-established Norse mythological theme; *Vǫlundarkviða*’s *meyjar* are similar to the three canonically mythological ‘*meyjar, margs vitandi*’ (‘maidens, knowing much’) coming from a *sær* (‘large body of water’) and shaping the fate of men in *Vǫluspá* stanza 20.¹⁹⁶ Like Cú Chulainn, faced with Fann’s seduction, or Freyr, seeing Gerðr for the first

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁹⁷ To offer only a few examples, *Vǫlundarkviða*'s *meyjar* are *ljóss* ('light, bright'), as are women in *Hávamál* 92 and *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 53; in *Hávamál*, Óðinn describes his desire for 'Billings mey ... sólhvíta' (Billingr's sun-white maid', st. 97), while Þórr's daughter is in *Alvissmál* called 'miallhvíta man' ('the snow-white maid'; st. 7); *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* calls Sigrún 'sólbjört' ('sun-bright'; st. 45) and 'hvít' ('white'; st. 48), the latter word being used also of Erna in *Rígsþula* (st. 39) and Svanhildr in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* (st. 55). Cf. §4:2. ¹⁹⁸ Helgi Hundingsbani is, while a boy, characterised in stanza 9 of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* as 'álmr ítrborinn, ynðis líóma' ('a high-born elm, a ray of delight'; ed. Neckel 1962, 131), and *Rígsþula* stanza 34 says of the child Jarl that 'bleit var hár, biartir vangar' ('pale was the hair, bright the cheeks'; ed. Neckel 1962, 285). But, prodigious though Helgi was, boys were not considered yet to be masculine (Clover 1993), so these descriptions are in a different category from similar descriptions of grown men.

Þá qvað þat Heimdallr, hvítastr ása—
vissi hann vel fram, sem vanir aðrir—:
'Bindo vér Þór þá brúðar líni,
hafi hann iþ micla men Brísinga!'

Then Heimdallr, the *hvítastr* of the *æsir*—
he knew well what was to come, like the other
vanir—said this: 'Then let's dress Þór in a
bridal veil, let him wear the necklace of the
great *Brísingar*!'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. The Scottish witchcraft trials

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

¹⁹⁹ Now conveniently martialled using the *Survey of Scottish Witchcraft* (Goodare–Martin–Miller–Yeoman 2003), conceived as ‘an extensive database of all people known to have been accused of witchcraft in Scotland between 1563 and 1736’, the quotation being from the ‘Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database Documentation and Description’ to be downloaded with the database itself, p. 55.

²⁰⁰ Larner 1981, 89–102; see also Goodare 1998; Yeoman 2002.

²⁰¹ For the classic example of continuity compare the *Our Lord forth raide* charm (ed. Chambers 1861, II 153; cf. Catherine Caray, Orkney, 1616) with the Second Merseburg Charm (ed. Steinmeyer 1916, 365; cf. Grendon 1909, 148–49; Branston 1957, 38–39; Larner 1981, 140; for later, English examples see Davies 1996, 26–27). See also Niles 1980.

²⁰² See Davies, forthcoming; cf. 2003, 70, 182–84; Purkiss 2000, 85–193; Wilby 2000.

²⁰³ For some of the debate underlying these inferences see, in addition to Davies and Purkiss, Macdonald (2002, esp. 45–46). The *Survey of Scottish Witchcraft* counted 3,837 individual Scottish cases, and overlooked some besides; it gave 113 cases with a ‘fairies’ characterisation (though this figure requires modification—Hall forthcoming [d]—and of course most trials offer too little evidence to be useful). Of these 113, 40—or 35%—also have either or both of the characterisations ‘Folk Healing’ and ‘White Magic’ (‘Folk Healing’ and/or ‘White Magic’ occur themselves in 181 cases).

²⁰⁴ See Henderson–Cowan 2001; Purkiss 2000, especially 85–157; 2001; Wilby 2000; Hall forthcoming [d]; cf. Maxwell–Stuart 2001; Hutton 2002, especially 27–32.

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

Of course, using the witchcraft trials as evidence for traditional beliefs is predicated on identifying features which represent the beliefs of the accused rather than those of their educated prosecutors—who could shape the narratives produced throughout proceedings, from before the point of arrest to the later transcription of primary records. However, recent approaches to the subject²⁰⁵ tend to agree with Larner's insight (1981, 136) that

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

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

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

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

4.1 Andro Man

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

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

Andro's surviving indictment (ed. Stuart 1841–52, I 119–22) begins

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

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

stand deid, and that thow suld be weill interteneit, but wald seik {forsake} thy meat {food} or thow deit, as Thomas Rymour did.

ITEM, Thow confessis that be the space of threttie twa yeris sensyn or thairby, thow begud to have carnall deall with that devilische spreit, the Quene of Elphen, on quhom thow begat dyveris bairnis, quhom thow hes sene sensyn; and that at hir first cumming, scho causit ane of thy cattell die vpon any hillok callit the Elphillok, bot promiseist to do him gude theireftir.

The word *Elphen* ('fairyland'), contains *elf*, establishing a lexical connection between its queen and *elvis*, confirmed by another part of the confession quoted below.²⁰⁷ The fundamental relevance of this material to the history of *elf* is, then, established.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2 Elspeth Reoch

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eftyr þat oft oyssyt he
Til cum til hyr in prewate,
And tauld hir mony thyngis to fal,
Set trowyt noucht þai sulde be al.

after that, he often used
to come to her in private,
and told her many things to come,
though not all should be believed.

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

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

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

This summary of resemblances to earlier narratives is not to diminish the complexities of Elspeth's account—which are legion. Besides the fact that Orkney was a hub of cultural exchange for the British Isles and Scandinavia, a complex interweaving of personal experience, popular belief, and response to interrogation must underlie Elspeth's confession. Thus Purkiss read Elspeth's narrative—speculatively but not unattractively—as a response to an incest experience (2001; cf. 2000, 90–96). If Purkiss is right, then we have in Elspeth's account a good example of the direct employment of fairy-lore in individuals' construction and handling of their personal experiences. This kind of

²¹¹ For other and later examples see Thomas 1973, 727–28; Purkiss 2000, 116–41, cf. 152–56; Wilby 2000.

interaction between life and story has also been argued by Spearing and Pearsall to have been among the potential meanings of the Middle English poem *Sir Orfeo*, in which ‘the terrifying experience that he [the poet] coded as being abducted by the fairies and then being brought back is one that we might code as going mad and being cured’ (Spearing 2000, at 265–66; Pearsall 1996). Likewise, the Middle English *Sir Degarré* makes the potential of fairy-encounters to reflect or encode incest narratives clear (esp. lines 168–69; ed. Laskaya–Salisbury 1995, 105). As in the other narratives mentioned here, Elspeth’s fairy encounters begin in what seems to have been liminal space, helping to construct the danger (to women) of certain areas of their environment. This transgression of the boundaries of safe space and the fairy assaults consequent on it provides a means of constructing Elspeth’s experiences, but as with Andro Man’s first encounter with the Quene of Elphen, when she killed his cow, or with Cú Chulainn’s sudden demonstration of profound wisdom following his *serglige*, the harm dealt to Elspeth comes with supernatural powers. This provides another means of constructing her suffering as in some ways a positive experience, and seems indeed to have become a factor in her successful selling of her services as a cunning woman.

If nothing else, the Scottish witchcraft trials emphasise the complexity of the negotiations of belief—between individuals, communities, classes, experiences and narratives—that must also have been taking place in Anglo-Saxon society with regard to *ælf*. However, the trials also consolidate various of the arguments above. They show that *elvis* were male and anthropomorphic in at least some strands of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century popular belief, contrasting with the earlier literary evidence. Although the trials tend to be no more informative than the Old English medical texts about the roles of *elvis* in causing ailments, Elspeth Reoch’s attests to the combination of a nocturnal sexual assault by an otherworldly being with subsequent detrimental effects on health as a *quid pro quo* for the acquisition of supernatural power. This repeats certain associations found for *ælf* in the Old English material, but also motifs attested in the *Southern English Legendary*, *Serglige Con Culainn* and the medieval Norse narratives. The Scottish witchcraft trials show that narratives of otherworldly beings found in medieval literature could—and by the seventeenth century did—have close counterparts in popular belief. They seem likely in some respects to reflect the direct continuation of Anglo-Saxons’ usage of *ælf* and conceptions of *ælf*.

5. Conclusions

It emerges, then, that Irish and Scandinavian narratives from up to the early thirteenth century tell of anthropomorphic otherworldly beings seducing or trying to seduce

members of the in-group by magically inflicting altered states of mind, or otherwise inflicting ailments in the context of sexual contact. These are well-paralleled by the late thirteenth-century *Southern English Legendary*, emphasising their potential relevance to English culture. These texts parallel many prominent features of our evidence for the semantics of *ælf*: anthropomorphicity, seductive beauty, *siden*, and fever and hallucination. Although a threat to members of the in-group, these otherworldly beings seem to threaten only individuals, mainly in response to those individuals' transgressions. In this way, they do not threaten society as a whole and, moreover, help to uphold its values and structures by punishing those who transgress them. This observation is consistent with the models proposed above to explain the early semantic evidence for *álf* and *ælf*, associating them with human in-groups by contrast with society-threatening monsters. It reflects a world-view whose useful life in Europe was long. Working to interpret nineteenth-century Norwegian folk-medicine within wider cognitive frameworks, Alver and Selberg examined beliefs in witches and *huldre*—etymologically the *huldufólk* ('hidden people'), a euphemism for *álfar*—as sources of illness (1987). They opposed earlier assumptions that the propensity of *huldre* to inflict harm meant that *huldre* were fundamentally destructive (1987, 25):

basically, huldres are a *superior* power in relation to humans, not a destructive power. According to tradition, there are rules about how humans should deal with huldres. If these rules are broken, the huldres punish. But if rules are observed, or a favor is done for the huldres, then they reward.

'This belief in supranormal beings', they concluded, 'can function as social control' (1987, 40). By contrast, witches 'represent the powers of chaos on the offensive' (1987, 26). Not only does this model apply well to the earlier Scottish witchcraft trials, but the relationship between the witches and the *huldre* is fundamentally similar to that of *ælf* with monsters in early Anglo-Saxon beliefs.

The idea that *ælf* in the medical texts were like Judaeo-Christian-Mediterranean demons, incompatible with beautiful anthropomorphic beings, is not disproved by the comparative material which I have adduced, and could indeed have held for some members of society. But I have shown that it is unnecessary: causing illness or altered mental states is a core part of the narratives of the otherworldly beings *Drífa*, *Fann*, *Skírnir* and *Othinus*. These texts also emphasise the extent to which such traditions could be maintained among the Latin-literate, clerical elite in Christianised medieval societies. *Serglige Con Culainn*'s effort to incorporate its *síde* into Christian constructions of the supernatural world conspicuously fails to convince; the unresolved tensions between Christian and non-Christian belief which it shows for medieval Ireland offers a paradigm for the uneasy pairings of *ælf* and *deofol* or *feond* in the Old English medical texts. Admittedly, most available medieval comparisons concern female otherworldly beings,

but I have identified enough similar narratives of males to show that a coherent interpretation of the Old English evidence for *ælf* need not be compromised by problems of gendering. But the prominence of females contextualises the rise of a female denotation of *ælf* during the Old English period, as I discuss more fully below (§9:2.2).

The evidence of the Scottish witchcraft trials consolidates the medieval comparisons. It shows the existence of narratives like those recorded in medieval texts widely in society, and how they could be part of dynamic interactions with people's constructions of reality. The trials also suggest continuity in English-speaking culture of beliefs concerning *ælf*. Despite the prominence of female *elves* and *fairies* in Middle English literature and its high medieval comparanda, and although a *Queen of Elphen* or a similar otherworldly female is prominent in the trial-evidence, the trials show clearly that male *elvis* existed in Scottish belief. I develop these themes further in my analysis of Issobel Gowdie's trial in the next chapter (§8:3). The Scottish witchcraft trials also attest to the use of stories of *elvis* and *fareis* in cunning-folks' constructions and presentations of their powers and processes of healing. These provide a context for understanding aspects of the meanings of *ylfig*—for seeing *ælf* not only as sources of harm in Anglo-Saxon culture, but also as sources of power. This is a point which I develop in my final chapter (§9:1).