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## Leeds Studies in English

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## Abbreviations

ADS	Archaeology Data Service
ASPNS	Anglo-Saxon Plant-Name Survey
BML	British Medieval Latin
BSBI	Botanical Society of the British Isles
CGL	<i>Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum</i>
CNo.	Catalogue Number
COD	<i>Concise Oxford Dictionary</i>
DMLBS	<i>Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources</i>
DOE	<i>Dictionary of Old English</i> (Toronto)
DOEPN	<i>Dictionary of Old English Plant Names</i> (online)
DOEWC	<i>Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus</i> (online)
DOI	Digital Object Identifier; <i>Dictionary of the Irish Language Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials</i>
DOST	<i>Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue</i>
DSL	<i>Dictionary of the Scots Language</i> (online)
EDD	<i>English Dialect Dictionary</i>
EPNE	<i>English Place-Name Elements</i> (A. H. Smith)
Gk, Gr.	Greek
HTOED	<i>Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary</i>
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
LAE	<i>Linguistic Atlas of England</i>
Lat	Latin
MCOE	<i>Microfiche Concordance to Old English</i>
ME	Middle English
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
MHG	Middle High German
MLG	Middle Low German
ModE	Modern English
ModIce	Modern Icelandic
ModLG	Modern Low German
ODEE	<i>Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology</i>
OE	Old English
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OF	Old French
OHG	Old High German
OI	Old Irish
OIce	Old Icelandic
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
ON	Old Norse
OS	Old Saxon
PASE	<i>Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England</i> (online)
PIE	Proto-Indo-European
PN W	<i>Place-Names of Wiltshire</i> (J. E. B. Gover et al.)
PN Wo	<i>Place-Names of Worcestershire</i> (A. Mawer et al.)

RCHM(E)	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments (of England)
TLL	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i>
spp.	species (botanical, singular)
ssp.	species (botanical, plural)
TOE	<i>Thesaurus of Old English</i>
VEPN	<i>Vocabulary of English Place-Names</i>

### Short Titles

Old English source texts may be indicated by short titles assigned by the *Dictionary of Old English* and *Microfiche Concordance to Old English*, which refer to specific editions of the texts. They occur particularly in the appendices, and examples include: Lch II (1); Med 3 (Grattan-Singer). The key to these references can be found at the DOE website under ‘Research Tools’ then ‘List of Texts’. See <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca>.

### Botanical Latin

Plant-names in botanical Latin aim to provide an international identification for a particular plant or group of plants. They are followed by abbreviations indicating the botanist who assigned and/or reassigned the name, and the most common abbreviation is ‘L.’ indicating ‘Linnaeus’, the famous Swedish botanist. Examples include: *Bellis perennis* L. (daisy); *Betula pendula* Roth. (silver birch).

### Dates

Manuscript dates are often given in a form beginning ‘s.’ (for *saeculo* ‘in the century’). Some examples follow:

- s. xi<sup>in</sup> beginning of the 11th century
- s. xi<sup>1</sup> first half of the 11th century
- s. xi<sup>med</sup> middle of the 11th century
- s. xi<sup>2</sup> second half of the 11th century
- s. xi<sup>ex</sup> end of the 11th century

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

Alaric Hall

## **1. Introduction**

The usual practice in Anglo-Saxon Plant-Name Survey (ASPNS) word-studies is to analyse plant-names individually, predicating the search for new information about them on this sharp focus, although not ignoring translation evidence (for example, Biggam 2003). Many plant-names survive in glosses (or sometimes translations) which associate them with other words, both Latin and Old English so that, although Anglo-Saxon glossaries, with their complex histories of excerpting, compilation, augmentation and reduction, present scholars with formidable challenges, they also encourage us to widen the scope of our research to include groups of semantically overlapping names.

The present article, along with its companion study (Hall, in this volume, covering the later Anglo-Latin traditions, which are generally quite distinct from the early material considered here) is, in the first instance, a methodological experiment arising from the bilingual character of Anglo-Saxon literacy. Building on approaches I developed for studying words for supernatural beings in Old English (Hall 2007a: 85–7; compare Hall 2011: 9), it takes the Latin word *elleborus* (with variants like *helleborus* and *elleborum*) as a hub for investigating a range of Old English words which potentially overlap in meaning. It provides new insights into the semantics of *elleborus* in early medieval Anglo-Latin, and also into the various Old English equivalents adduced for *elleborus* by Anglo-Saxons. This method facilitates a sophisticated approach to determining the meanings of Old English plant-names. Moreover, it suggests one way of reconstructing Old English semantic fields on a rigorous basis of primary evidence, as an alternative to the methodology of the *Thesaurus of Old English* (TOE; compare also the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary*), which is predicated on using modern dictionary definitions to fit words into a structure inspired by Roget's *Thesaurus*, potentially distorting Old English semantic structures in so doing (see Hall 2007a: 9–11). The material studied here relates in the first instance to the earliest Anglo-Saxon scholarship arising from the monastic school at Canterbury: Old English glosses, and Aldhelm's *Enigmata* ('Riddles'). In this tradition, *elleborus* seems to have been interpreted as woody nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara* L., also known as 'bittersweet') — perhaps, as I

will argue below, through the misinterpretation of Dioscorides's *De materia medica*. To this interpretation belong the Old English plant-name glosses *wedeberge* and *þung* (and perhaps *ceasteræsc*).

It is also possible to elaborate on the evidence of glosses by adducing a word which does not gloss *elleborus*, but which does seem on other grounds to denote woody nightshade, namely *ælþone*. This is a step which is not inherent in the methodology of taking a Latin hub and assessing all of its glosses and translations — and the present article may have passed over other Old English words for woody nightshade which have yet to be identified — but it is a natural extension of the method of exploring all the possible vernacular synonyms for a Latin word. (It was, indeed, a briefer study of *ælþone* (Hall 2007a: 155) which made apparent the need for this article.) Taken together, the synonyms of *elleborus* afford a rich set of insights into learned Anglo-Saxon responses to Mediterranean texts; traditional medicine and beliefs; and even, perhaps, into the deliberate use of plants to induce altered states of mind.

The approach presented here is not without challenges. It is not always crystal clear what words are to be counted as glosses or translations of *elleborus*, as my brief discussion below of *wælwyrt* emphasises (in Section 4). Nor is the method practical (at least in an article-length analysis) for very well attested plant-names (such as *þung*, discussed in Section 3 below), though it might be used as one model for a second stage in ASPNS studies, whereby the completion of individual word-studies can be followed by a more extensive assessment of semantic interrelations. Likewise, for reasons of space, I have maintained ASPNS's traditional chronological cutoff point fairly firmly, although continual reference is nevertheless made here to relevant Middle English evidence (especially in Section 5). And although this study focuses on Anglo-Latin evidence, I have not gone so far as to consider all the Latin-Latin or Greek-Latin glosses known in Anglo-Saxon England which mention *elleborus*. This evidence has been neglected by editors, corpus-builders, and analysts (even more than vernacular glosses, which have themselves fared worse than most genres of Old English), meaning that to do it justice here would have required efforts disproportionate to its usefulness in elucidating the Old English semantics. But its omission here is nonetheless regrettable. Much the same can be said of our large corpus of Old High German glosses. Old High German glosses on *elleborus* use cognates of Old English words only rarely, but I have adverted to these where they seem relevant.<sup>1</sup> Even so, I am conscious that although German glosses demand the same rigorous study as the Old English material, and that this would again provide useful comparisons with the Old English data, they have not received it here.

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

Building on past work, which has shown that by *elleborus* the early Anglo-Saxon poet

<sup>1</sup> See Björkman (1901–5: II): pages 263 (*alada*); 268 (*germara*); 269 (*hemera*); 290 (*kristwurz*); 294 (*arthistil*); 296 (*ieswurze*); 298 (*itterwurz*) and 303 (*izniwurz*). Compare entries for these words in the *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, where available.

Aldhelm understood ‘woody nightshade’, I argue below that this misidentification may arise from the description of the black hellebore (Gk *helleboros melas*, ἑλλέβορος μέλας) in Dioscorides’ *De materia medica*, which seems to have been available in seventh-century Canterbury. I argue that the Old English word *wedeberge* (‘madness-berry’) was coined as a gloss-word for *helleboros melas*. Meanwhile, a thorough examination of the evidence for the semantics of *ceasteræsc*, which also glosses *elleborus*, regrettably proves inconclusive, with past suggestions shown to be problematic, but no clear alternative emerging. It is to be hoped, however, that this analysis might underpin future work on this difficult word.

The Old English evidence for the denotation of *ælfþone*, etymologically ‘elf-vine’, is limited, but West Germanic cognates suggest that the word meant ‘woody nightshade’, thus also being relevant to understanding Aldhelm’s *elleborus*. The word is attested in Old English medical texts; understanding its role here involves quite detailed study of the medical terminology of the texts. There is some reason to think that woody nightshade tended to be prescribed for conditions associated with elves and/or demons, and that it might have been clinically effective to some degree against these conditions, which apparently involved some kind of skin condition or inflammation, and fevers. Combining this evidence with Aldhelm’s riddle and the evidence from its intellectual milieu, I argue, albeit tentatively, that we can glimpse the use of woody nightshade in Anglo-Saxon England, not only to help cure altered mental states, but to cause them, in what may be our strongest case so far for the use of non-alcoholic intoxicants in Anglo-Saxon culture.

## 2. Aldhelm’s *elleborus* and woody nightshade

In Classical Latin *elleborus* was, like its Greek etymon *helleboros* (ἑλλέβορος), conventionally divided into two varieties, *albus* (prototypically denoting *Veratrum album* L., white hellebore) and *niger* (prototypically *Helleborus orientalis* Lam., lenten-rose). (See the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (OLD), under *elleborum* and *uērātrum*; and André (1985), under *elleborus* and *uērātrum*.) But it is not self-evident that it was understood in this way by Anglo-Saxons. Fortunately, the ninety-eighth riddle of Aldhelm’s *Enigmata*, itself entitled *Elleborus*, affords a detailed description which allows us to ascertain with confidence what Aldhelm understood by the word. The riddle was composed sometime before Aldhelm died in 709/10, and apparently towards the beginning of his poetic career, no earlier than around 670 (Lapidge 2007). It is in the nature of riddles that the correct sense of their constituent words is hard to determine (see, for this riddle, Cameron 1985: 131–2), and my translation aims to represent the full range of plausible possibilities, albeit at the expense of elegance:<sup>2</sup>

*Ostriger en arvo vernabam frondibus hirtis*  
*Conquillio similis: sic cocci murice rubro*  
*Purpureus stillat sanguis de palmite guttis.*  
*Exuvias vitæ mandenti tollere nolo*  
*Mitia nec penitus spoliabunt mente venena;*  
*Sed tamen insanum vexat dementia cordis*  
*Dum rotat in giro vecors vertigine membra.*

Purple-bearing, lo!, I was growing in a field/the countryside, with shaggy/rough/hairy foliage/stalks/branches | similar to a shellfish/purple-fish/purple dye/purple cloth; thus with red murex/purple dye of my berry/red dye | purple blood drips/trickles from the

<sup>2</sup> Compare the more literary handling by Lapidge and Rosier in Aldhelm (1985: 93), or the fine translation by

vine-shoots in drops. | I do not wish to take away from the chewer the trappings of life, |  
nor will my gentle juices/poisons/potions utterly rob him of his mind; | but nevertheless a  
madness of the heart shakes/agitates/torments him, mad, | while, deranged by giddiness,  
he whirls his limbs in a circle.

Some translators have rendered the title of the riddle as ‘Hellebore’ (Pitman, in Aldhelm 1925: 61; Stork 1990: 227), but Modern English *hellebore* denotes Linnaeus’s *Helleborus* and *Veratrum*, neither of which has the kind of red fruits which Aldhelm must be describing here (compare Erhardt-Siebold 1936: 164; Cameron 1985: 131). Erhardt-Siebold posited that Aldhelm’s *elleborus* should be instead identified as mezezeon (*Daphne mezereum* L.), on the basis of the unique gloss *Eliforus wedeberge t ceasteræsc* (Rusche 1996: E244): she argued that the etymon of *ceaster-* in *ceasteræsc* is the Greek plant-name *kestron* (κέστρον); that one of the genera denoted by *kestron* in Dioscorides’s *De materia medica* is *Daphne* L.; that mezezeon is a *Daphne* native to the British Isles and has red berries; and that mezezeon is, therefore, the subject of Aldhelm’s riddle. However, Cameron’s reconsideration dispensed with this interpretation, principally because mezezeon’s berries do not hang like drops, and because it does not cause the kinds of symptoms which Aldhelm describes (Cameron 1985: 131–3; compare Cameron 1993: 110–12; see also below, Section 4). Cameron preferred a passing suggestion of Erhardt-Siebold’s, of woody nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara* L.; Erhardt-Siebold 1936: 169, note 2). The possible effects of ingesting parts of woody nightshade plants are not fully understood; Cameron’s conclusions were drawn primarily from only one account of poisoning by *Solanum dulcamara*. However, if we accept agitation for arm-whirling, the symptoms described by Aldhelm are among those observed of poisoning by all parts of the plant (for example, Cooper and Johnson 1984: 217–18; Ceha et al. 1997; Bruneton 1999: 479–83). It is clear both that Aldhelm did not mean the same thing by *elleborus* as his Mediterranean sources and that what he was probably thinking of was woody nightshade.

This provides a valuable starting point for understanding what Anglo-Saxons might have understood by *elleborus*, and therefore by its vernacular equivalents. But there is as yet no explanation for how *elleborus* came to mean ‘woody nightshade’ for Aldhelm, and this is something of a problem for Cameron’s interpretation (as he himself emphasised: 1985: 133). So far, no substantial sources for Aldhelm’s poem have been established, and his text must, as Cameron argued, reflect personal observation (or at least culturally inculcated knowledge). Howe, demonstrating that Aldhelm made extensive use of Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae* in composing his *enigmata*, tentatively suggested that lines 6 to 7 of Aldhelm’s *Elleborus* could be indebted to Isidore’s entry for *elleborus* (Howe 1985: 40, note 11; Isidore of Seville 1911: XVII.ix.24):

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

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

Certainly Howe is not the first scholar to have brought Isidore’s text to bear on Aldhelm’s *Elleborus*: the late tenth-century scribe who copied the text of the *Enigmata* in the manuscript British Library, Royal 12.C.xxiii, added Isidore’s entry on *elleborus* as a marginal gloss

Juster (Aldhelm, forthcoming).

to Aldhelm's riddle (Stork 1990: 227; compare Rusche 2005: 438–40).<sup>3</sup> But Isidore's text describes *elleborus* as a plant which remedies insanity, rather than, as is surely the case in Aldhelm's text, causing it. Some mis-reading of the text, involving *insanitatem* for *in sanitatem*, could be imagined, but I am aware of no version of the *Etymologiae* whose text would encourage this explanation.<sup>4</sup> However, some light may be shed on Aldhelm's identification of *elleborus* with woody nightshade by the earliest attested Old English gloss on *elleborus*: *wedeberge*.

### 3. *Wedeberge*

*Wedeberge* takes its first element from *wede-*, a transparent, if morphologically somewhat problematic, derivative of *wod* 'mad' also found in *wedehund* ('mad dog'); presumably in *wedeberge* it means 'madness-' (see Sauer 2003: 164–5). The second element, *-berige*, simply means 'berry'. Previous commentators have identified *wedeberge* with hellebores (Bosworth 1898; Clark Hall 1960) or *Veratrum album* L. (Bierbaumer 1975–9: II.125–6; III.250), but these are not berry-bearing. However, *elleborus: wedeberge* does recall Aldhelm's riddle, in imputing berries to *elleborus* (and, less distinctively, in associating it with madness). It can also be shown to derive from an intellectual milieu with which Aldhelm himself has connections. Its earliest attestation comes in the Erfurt Glossary entry *elleborus poediberge* (with scribal confusion between the letter wynn (*p*) and *p*; Pfeifer 1974: 21, no. 388), and subsequently in the closely related Corpus Glossary, once as *Eleborus woedeberge*, with *þung* subsequently added interlinearly by a corrector, and once as *Helleborus woidiberge* (the duplication presumably reflecting the spelling variation in the lemma; Hessels 1890: 46, E120; 63, H 86). The additional gloss *þung* also appears in a closely related gloss in the First Cleopatra Glossary, compiled around the 930s (Rusche 1996: 2–6, 33–8): *Elleborus wedeberge þung* (Rusche 1996: E25; for the textual relationships see Kittlick 1998: 43, 212–15). These texts all derive ultimately from early scholarship at Canterbury.

Several possibilities for the origins of the lemma *elleborus* have been suggested.<sup>5</sup> These issues are clarified, however, by Rusche's examination (2008) of the wider textual tradition of Anglo-Saxon plant-name glossaries, which lasted into the twelfth century, and on which the following paragraphs are based. The two key texts are the Durham Plant-Name Glossary and the Laud Herbal Glossary. As its name suggests, the Durham Plant-Name Glossary (MS Durham, Cathedral Library, Hunter 100) was copied in Durham, in the early twelfth century. It includes the entry *Elleborus vedeberige uel* ['or'] *þung* '*elleborus: wedeberge* or *þung*' (Lindheim 1941: 13, no. 148) and drew almost all its material from two sources (compare Lindheim 1941: 5–6): a seventh-century Greek-Latin-Old English plant-name glossary whose lemmata come from Dioscorides's *De materia medica*, which also contributed

<sup>3</sup> Other sources can also be identified. The word *ostriger* in the first line of the riddle is unusual, being a compound of *ostrum* 'blood of the sea-snail, purple' and *-ger* '-bearing'; it appears in the Épinal-Erfurt glossary tradition, so was either coined by Aldhelm and then included in the glosses, or Aldhelm's source (though no other anterior source for the gloss is yet known; Pfeifer 1974: 38, no. 716; see also p. 107). *Rubri* and *cocci*, both in the second line of the riddle, occur in collocation in Sedulius's *Carmen Paschale*, Bk 5, line 165, and probably underlie Aldhelm's use of the same words, but the contexts are quite different (see the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* project).

<sup>4</sup> The Anglo-Saxon epitome of the *Etymologiae*, edited by Lapidge (1988–9), which can be revealing for understanding the Anglo-Saxon transmission of Isidore (Hall 2007b: 302–6), omits the entry.

<sup>5</sup> Lindsay (1921: 115); Pfeifer (1974: 85); and, for the theoretical possibility that Épinal-Erfurt could have derived the lemma from Aldhelm's riddles lv to lvii, see Lapidge (2007: 41–2).

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

From these textual relationships (for further examples of which see Wotherspoon, this volume, Section 2), it follows that, since Durham and Laud have the *elleborus wedeberge* (*þung*) gloss which we find in Erfurt and Corpus, then we would expect the source of the gloss to be the Dioscorides-based glossary.<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, on internal evidence, the source of the Laud gloss seems more likely to have been the *Hermeneumata Pseudo-Dositheana* glossary: the entry *Helliborum .i. yediberge* occurs near the beginning of the *h*- words (it is the fourth of thirty-five entries), which is where, according to Rusche’s preliminary work, the *Hermeneumata* batch seems to occur in each alphabetic section of Laud. Admittedly too, neither *elleborus* or *wedeberge* occurs in the text which Rusche considered the best text of the Dioscorides glossary, the *Nomina herbarum Grece et Latine* in MS Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, 1828–30, folios 94–5 (Rusche 1996: 554–66). So an origin in the *Hermeneumata* glossary should not, without more detailed research into the textual histories of the glossaries, be ruled out. But whether we are dealing with an origin in the Dioscorides glossary or the *Hermeneumata*, the gloss *elleborus: wedeberge* (*þung*) has its origin in seventh-century vernacular glossing at Canterbury. To put it another way, the gloss shows that a conception of *elleborus* broadly consonant with Aldhelm’s but at odds with the Classical meaning existed in seventh-century Canterbury, a milieu which Aldhelm shared, but in a textual tradition whose origin is independent of Aldhelm’s riddle.

Whether or not *elleborus: wedeberge* itself comes from the Canterbury Dioscorides glossary, that glossary raises the possibility that a copy of Dioscorides’s *De materia medica* was available in seventh-century Canterbury (compare Lindheim 1941: 5–6; Rusche 2003: 191). The prospect that this putative manuscript of the *De materia medica* was written in Greek, along with the magnitude of the text and therefore the investment required to copy it, would explain its lack of influence in later Anglo-Saxon medicinal scholarship.

In seeking to understand the background to Aldhelm’s *Elleborus*, and to the gloss *wedeberge*, a closer examination of the *De materia medica* may, then, be worthwhile. It contains entries (in Book 4, Chapters 148 and 162) on both *helleboros leukos* (ἐλλέβορος λευκός) ‘white hellebore’ and *helleboros melas* (ἐλλέβορος μέλας) ‘black hellebore’. The former is described (Dioscorides 1906–14: II.290; translation by Beck in Dioscorides 2005: 304) as having:

φύλλα μὲν ὅμοια ἔχει τοῖς τοῦ ἀρνογλώσσου ἢ τεύτλου ἀγρίου, βραχύτερα δὲ καὶ μελάντερα καὶ ἐρυθρά τὴν χροάν; καυλὸν δὲ ἔχει παλαισιτιαῖον, κοῦλον, περιφλοιζόμενον,

<sup>6</sup> A potential problem with this inference is that our manuscripts of the Old English *Herbarium* also include *wedeberge* as a synonym for *elleborum album*, in which case this could in theory have been the source for Durham-Laud (conceivably independent of Épinal-Erfurt). However, as I discuss elsewhere in this volume, Durham-Laud in fact show rather that the *Herbarium* probably borrowed the earlier gloss *elleborus wedeberge* rather than adding

ὅταν ἄρξηται ξηραίνεσθαι. ρίζαι δὲ ὕπεισι πολλάι, λεπταί, ἀπὸ κεφαλίου μικροῦ καὶ ἐπιμήκους ὡστερεὶ κρομύου, συμπεφυκυῖαι.

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

Dioscorides does not, then, associate the white hellebore with anything that might be denoted either by *wede* or *berge*. The black hellebore, however, is described thus (Dioscorides 1906–14: II.306–7; translation by Beck in Dioscorides 2005: 312):

ἐλλέβορος μέλας: οἱ δὲ Μελαμπόδιον, οἱ δὲ ἔκτομον, οἱ δὲ πολύρριζον καλοῦσι; Μελαμπόδιον δὲ, ἐπειδὴ δοκεῖ Μελάμπους τις αἰπόλος τὰς Προΐτου θυγατέρας μανείσας αὐτῶ καθηραι καὶ θεραπεῦσαι. ἔχει δὲ τὰ φύλλα χλωρά, πλατάνω προσεμφερή, ἐλάττονα δὲ πρὸς τὰ τοῦ σφονδυλίου καὶ πολυσχιδέστερα καὶ μελάντερα καὶ ὑποτραχέα. καυλὸς βραχύς, ἄνθη δὲ λευκά, ἐμπόρφυρα, τῶ δὲ σχήματι βοτρυοειδῆ, καὶ ἐν αὐτῶ καρπὸς κνήκω παραπλήσιος ... ρίζαι δὲ μέλαιναί, λεπταί, οἶνει ἀπὸ τινος κεφαλίου κρομυώδους ἠρτημέναι.

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

This hellebore — identified by Aufmesser (2000: 187) as *Helleborus orientalis* Lam. (Lentenrose) or *Helleborus cyclophyllus* Boiss. (Greek hellebore) — is, amongst other things, ‘good for epileptics, the atrabilious [melancholic or ill-tempered], the insane, arthritics, and paralytics’ (ὠφέλει δὲ ἐπιληπτικούς, μελαγχολικούς, μαινομένους, ἀρθριτικούς, παραλελυμένους; Dioscorides 1906–14, II.308; translation by Beck in Dioscorides 2005: 313). Like *wedeberge*, then, it is connected with madness. Some manuscripts of the *De materia medica* were illustrated, but when they were not, identifying plants from Dioscorides’s verbal descriptions was tricky. Although the hellebores are in reality quite unlike woody nightshade, Dioscorides’s description fits woody nightshade in several important respects, while woody nightshade does not appear elsewhere in his text. One of the distinctive features of woody nightshade is that its upper leaves, like those of plane trees, tend to be trifoliate, and unlike those of planes, they are often cloven almost to the petiole (leaf-stalk). They are not outstanding candidates for the description ‘pale green’, but they are both darker and smaller than the leaves of the cow parsnip (*Heracleum maximum* Bartram) with which they are compared in the above quote from Dioscorides — and it is not, in any case, immediately clear how Greek *chlōra* (χλωρά) would have mapped onto the structuring of colours in the Old English lexicon, and what effects this might have had on its interpretation (compare Ruff 2003). Woody nightshade flowers can be white or purple (albeit usually the latter, as Aldhelm appears to emphasise), and hang in clusters. The pods of safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius* L.), also mentioned above, may or may not have been a useful point of comparison for Anglo-Saxons (it is not native to Britain), but woody nightshade berries certainly hang alongside the

it independently.

flowers in clusters like grapes. Admittedly, woody nightshade's stem is far from short — the plant is in fact a vine — but the flowers are on short peduncles (flower- or fruit-stalks), to which Dioscorides's text might have been taken to refer. Its roots are not black, but yellow (Millsbaugh 1892: 482), but this may not have been obvious unless woody nightshade's roots were traditionally used by Anglo-Saxons.

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

Later, it seems, in the textual tradition, the word *þung* also joined the gloss *wedeberge* (and its cognate is to my knowledge also the only word attested as a gloss on *elleborus* in Old Norse: Heizmann 1993: 160); but *þung* is too widely attested to be given full consideration here (hopefully, rather, the present study will help in due course to illuminate the semantic range of *þung*). *Þung* appears to have denoted a range of plants whose common feature is their toxicity (Bierbaumer 1975–9: I.136; III.239), suggesting that, in this tradition, *elleborus* was considered (potentially) poisonous — which is of course consistent with Aldhelm's poem. In the present state of knowledge, *þung* is not otherwise diagnostic of the kind of plant denoted by *elleborus*. Moreover, it is hard to be sure whether it was intended merely to supplement the information provided by *wedeberge*, or to denote another plant entirely.

Focusing more closely on the word *wedeberge* itself, then, does this word represent an early, common Old English word for woody nightshade — or is it, as D'Aronco assumed (1988: 30), a gloss-word, coined specially to denote *elleborus*? The attestations of *wedeberge* listed so far seem all to be textually related, which is generally a precondition for supposing a word to be a gloss-word (though see note 6). Likewise, the compound *wedeberge* has neither cognates in other Germanic languages nor later English reflexes.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, if *elleborus* (*niger*) was understood to denote a berry-bearing plant — as Dioscorides's text, if

<sup>7</sup> See the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED), under *wēde-berȝe*. The dictionary, under *wōde*, sense 4a, does include the fourteenth-century gloss 'Carica: wodeberie', but as *carica* denotes a fig-tree, this must, as the entry implies, be a 'wood-berry', quite independent of *wedeberge*.

available, may have suggested — then *wedeberge* would afford a sensible and illuminating rendering. Admittedly, Aldhelm’s riddle is, as I discuss below, probably predicated on common knowledge about the characteristics of woody nightshade, which suggests that vernacular words for the plant must have been available. This being so, it does seem odd that an Anglo-Saxon glossator would invent a word for woody nightshade when other words were surely available, and this could militate in favour of taking *wedeberge* as a member of the common lexicon. However, another possibility is suggested by the probable existence of another early Anglo-Saxon word for woody nightshade, discussed below: *elfþone* (etymologically ‘elf-vine’).

It may be that Canterbury’s earliest, evangelical scholars, working at the forefront of the English Christianisation movement, may have thought the noun *ælf* (‘elf’) too redolent of pagan beliefs (or indeed of actual demons) for inclusion in the glossary, preferring instead to coin a new word — an explanation which might also help to explain why words like *gydig* (‘possessed by a god’) and *ylftig* (apparently etymologically ‘possessed by elves’ and later meaning ‘in a prophetic state’), though apparently old words, do not occur in our texts until the eleventh century (see Section 6 below). As these examples emphasise, however, if this were the case, the scruples of Canterbury’s early scholars were not shared by later writers. Yet another, simpler, explanation would be that a glossator coined *wedeberge* because he did not know what *elleborus* was, and simply created what he viewed as a descriptive compound — which later encouraged the consonant identification of *elleborus* with woody nightshade.

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

#### 4. *Ceasteræsc* (and *hamorwyrt*)

The addition of *ceasteræsc* (literally ‘(Roman) fortification/town-ash’) to the First Cleopatra Glossary entry *eliforus wedeberge* provides a further equivalent for *elleborus*. However, this gloss seems to be unparalleled; indeed, *ceasteræsc* appears as a gloss only here. The word does occur in four medical texts in the collection known, since Cockayne’s edition, as the *Lacnunga*. Three of these texts are remedies in a single sequence of drinks for *þeor* (apparently ‘inflammation’) — one of which, as Meaney (1984: 239) noted, also appears in Section 30 of *Leechbook III* (Wright 1955: folio 117r) — and the last a remedy ‘If a sheep is afflicted’ (*Gif*

*sceap sy abrocen*; Grattan and Singer 1952: 148, 150, 179, that is, remedies 73, 74, 77, 143).<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the unique term *ceasterwyr*t occurs in Section 39 of Bald's *Leechbook I* (Wright 1955: folio 39a), and has been assumed to share *ceasteræsc*'s denotation. The only information revealed by these texts which is useful for identifying the plants is that *ceasterwyr*t had seeds (which at least makes berry-bearing plants such as woody nightshade unlikely). Neither name seems to occur in cognate languages — unsurprisingly, as *ceaster* was an Old English loan-word from Latin — or in later varieties of English.

Earlier lexicographers based their interpretations of *ceasteræsc* on the lemma *eliforus*. Cockayne cited the lemma in his glossary entry for *ceasteræsc* (1864–6: II.368), giving the translation 'helleborus niger, black hellebore', adding that this 'has leaves like those of the ash', and his entry has probably been the basis for dictionary definitions in the following decades (Bosworth 1898, under *ceaster-æsc*, *ceaster-wyr*t and, in Toller's 1921 supplement, under *ceaster-æsc*; Clark Hall 1960, under *ceasteræsc*). To make reliable use of the *ceasteræsc* gloss, it is necessary to know whether it originated as a marginal gloss to a text of Aldhelm's riddle (in which case it might reflect his description of *elleborus* more than inherited wisdom about the meaning of the word), or whether it was added later in the gloss's textual tradition on the basis of someone's wider knowledge about *elleborus*, or transferred by the Cleopatra scribe from another instance of *elleborus* in his sources, whose lemma originally came from elsewhere. Unfortunately, we cannot readily decide between these, and it will be clear already that we cannot assume that Anglo-Saxons associated *elleborus* with our hellebores. Cockayne was wise to seek to explain why the generic element *-æsc* would appear in a word for *Elleborum nigrum*, but unfortunately, his claim that the black hellebore has leaves like an ash strikes me as unconvincing. Though their individual shape is not unlike the ash's, this is not a very distinctive similarity: similarity in arrangement would be more impressive, and this is lacking. One might compare the words *æscprote* and the rarer *æscwyr*t, which seem prototypically to have denoted vervain (*Verbena officinalis* L.), and whose leaves' form therefore would recall sets of ash leaves rather than individual ash leaves.

Later commentators have been more cautious. Bierbaumer offered three identifications for *ceasteræsc*: *Helleborus niger* L.; *Veratrum album* L.; and *Daphne mezereum* L. (1975–9: I.27–8; compare II.19; III.45) — while the *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE) similarly offered the circumspect definition 'a plant, perhaps a true hellebore, but more probably a pseudo-hellebore such as mezereon, woody nightshade, or dwarf elder' (under *ceaster-æsc*). Bierbaumer's entry, and, presumably, that of the DOE, are based on the arguments of Erhardt-Siebold; in particular, both she and the DOE associated *ceasteræsc* with the Greek plant-name *kestron*, presumably taking *ceaster-* as a folk-etymologisation (Erhardt-Siebold 1936: 164).

Dioscorides's *kestron* seems to have denoted *Stachys officinalis* (L.) Trevis. (Beck in Dioscorides 2005: 252) or *Stachys alopecuroides* (L.) Benth. (Aufmesser 2000: 202), both commonly known as *betonica* in Latin, *betony* in English today and, apparently, in Old English variously as *betonice*, *bisceopwyr*t and *attorlape* (DOE). These are all very common words in Old English medical texts (and Middle English reflexes of *bisceopwyr*t are attested

<sup>8</sup> Since there is no up to date edition of Royal 12 D. xvii, facsimiles (Wright 1955; Doane 1994, no. 298) are readily available, and folio references will easily be found in Cockayne (1864–6), I cite from Wright's facsimile, taking the usual editorial liberties of expanding abbreviations, normalising spacing and ignoring lineation. Cockayne's edition, while impressive, is error-prone (see, e.g., Hall 2005: 197, n. 5). The Corpus of Old English handling of the manuscript is also problematic: it uses the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records edition where available; next in order of preference is Storms 1948; and where these are not available, Cockayne. This produces electronic texts exhibiting very different editorial approaches for a manuscript text showing very consistent ones.

glossing *elleborus*: see the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (DMLBS), under *helleborus*). Moreover, Erhardt-Siebold associated another well-attested plant-name with *kestron* too — *hamorwyr*t (literally ‘hammer-plant’), taking it to be a translation of *kestron* following its other sense of ‘stylus, chisel’. This could in turn connect *ceasteræsc* both with *hamorwyr*t and with *hamorwyr*t’s own partial synonyms (it glosses *perdicalis*; see Bosworth 1898, Toller’s 1921 supplement, under *hamer-wyr*t, connecting it in turn with another *perdicalis* gloss, *dolhrune*, for which see the DOE, under *dolg-rüne*). Evidently, if the association of *ceasteræsc* with *kestron* is correct, then the name needs to be understood as part of a fuller study of several of the most common Old English plant-names.

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

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

No kind of hellebore or veratrum stands forward as resembling an ash in the arrangement of its leaves (and certainly not in producing wood), meaning that we can probably dispense with the older dictionary interpretations of *ceasteræsc*. Erhardt-Siebold suggested that *ceasteræsc*’s most likely denotation is the mountain ash, also known as the rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia* L.) ‘and its shrub-like varieties’, thereafter arguing that this was in turn identified

<sup>9</sup> Cockayne (1864–6: III.330; compare pages 321–2, and 343–4); see now Björkman (1901–5: II.269); DOE, under *dyþ-hamor* — suggesting the denotation ‘cattail’ (‘bullrush’ in British English), *Typha* L. While sealing the case against any connection of *hamorwyr*t with *cestrum*, Old High German *hemera* does open up another avenue of enquiry here, since it is itself prominently attested as a gloss for *elleborus*; on this evidence, Cockayne glossed *hamorwyr*t as ‘black hellebore, helleborus niger’ (1864–6: III.330), doubtless inspiring Bosworth’s definition ‘black hellebore’ (1898, under *hamer-wyr*t). A fuller study of the Old English and Old High German evidence might bear this inference out, but it seems somewhat doubtful since other Old English and later English evidence points towards an identification of *hamorwyr*t with eastern pellitory-of-the-wall, *Parietaria officinalis* L. (see Bosworth 1898, Toller’s 1921 supplement, under *hamer-wyr*t; compare Clark Hall 1960, under *hamorwyr*t; MED, under *hemer-wort*; OED, under *hammerwort*). I do not, then, pursue *hamorwyr*t further here.

with mezeoreon (*Daphne mezereum* L.). This reasoning strikes me as tenuous. The mountain ash certainly looks like an ash, but although mountain ashes are not tall trees (usually reaching no more than eighteen metres), the idea that shrubby examples might be connected with the herb *elleborus* is not one which I find compelling. That mountain ash and mezeoreon might be associated or confused seems even less likely: mezeoreon's leaves, for example, may individually be similar to the mountain ash's in shape (as Erhardt-Siebold emphasised), but they do not share ash leaves' distinctive arrangement. Mezeoreon's berries too are individually like the mountain ash's, but the mountain ash's hang in bunches where the mezeoreon's grow from the stem.

The DOE's suggestion of dwarf elder (*Sambucus ebulus* L.) for *ceasteræsc* is more promising, at least insofar as the leaves of the dwarf elder are like the ash's in shape and arrangement. Admittedly, Aldhelm's riddle *Ebulus* ('dwarf elder') associates the dwarf elder firmly with the *sambucus* ('elder') rather than with the ash (Aldhelm 1919: I.141; see further Cameron 1985: 129–30), but some ostensible evidence for a link with *elleborus* might be perceived in the entry '*helleborus ualuyrt*' in the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* text of the Leiden Glossary (LdGI D41 [0123 (42.4)]). (The form *helleborus* is a reconstruction from the manuscript form *elleus*). *Wælwyrt* and its probable variants *wealhwyrt* and *weallwyrt* almost certainly denoted dwarf elder (amongst other things), as they have continued to do in English, and this citation would imply that dwarf elder was identified with *elleborus* elsewhere in Old English.<sup>10</sup> If so, then the methodology of this article would also demand the consideration of another gloss on *ebulus*, *ellenwyrt*. However, this interpretation is not viable. One problem is the fact that one of the *Lacnunga* entries attesting to *ceasteræsc* runs: 'For *theor*: Lupin, wallwort, 'woodwex', ashbark below ground, butchersbroom, wormwood the grey kind, radish, 'ceasteræsc', a little savine' (*Wið ðeore, ealhtre, wælwyrt, weoduweaxe, æscrint in eorþan, cneowholen, wermod se hara, rædic, ceasteræsc, lytel sauinan*: Grattan and Singer 1952: 151, no. LXXVII). This, then, seems to take *wælwyrt* and *ceasteræsc* to denote different plants — though this could be explained as semantic variation, or a mistake arising from the text's transmission.

More importantly, the manuscript form of the Leiden gloss is *Elleus ualuyrt* (Hessels 1906: 43, no. XLII.4), and the lemma here must be a corruption, not of *elleborus*, but of *ebulus*. Since most of the lemmata in this section of the Leiden Glossary come from Sulpicius Severus's *Dialogi*, Hessels suggested (1906: 102) that *Elleus* might be a corruption of a form of the word *helleborus* as found in another text by Sulpicius, his *Vita Sancti Martini* (Severus 1967–9: I.266). However, Hessels (1906: 266) also commented that 'it seems identical with *ebulo*, *wælwyrt* of Aldhelm's *Aenigm[ata]*'. This latter interpretation is surely the correct one: as Hessels noted, the gloss *ebulus wælwyrt* is attested in the late tenth- or early eleventh-century glosses on Aldhelm's *Enigmata* in MS British Library, Royal 12.C.xxiii (Stork 1990: 219, Riddle no. 94), and the same pair is attested in the Erfurt Glossary (Pheifer 1974: 22, no. 393), along with numerous related texts (compare Hall, in this volume, Section 3). This is surely the correct interpretation of the Leiden gloss, and the reading *elleborus ualuyrt* can be dispensed with.

While I am unconvinced by previous identifications of *ceasteræsc*, then, I am sceptical about the prospects of finding a reliable alternative. Perhaps a more likely candidate is the one-species genus *Dictamnus* L., also known as *Dictamnus fraxinella* ('ash-like') Pers., 'burning

<sup>10</sup> See Bierbaumer (1975–9: I.138–9 and II.123–4); the MED, under *wal-wort*; OED, under *wallwort*; *Dictionary*

bush', whose leaves are very like those of the ash in form and arrangement. It seems to be native only to more southerly regions of Europe, though perhaps one way of explaining why a plant might have been associated with old Roman fortifications would be to suggest that exotic plant species tended to find their way to these hubs of demographic and mercantile movement. Equally, we could probably do worse than to identify *ceasteræsc* with *æscprote* and so with vervain. This is not, I hope, the last word on *ceasteræsc*. But it will be evident that further considerations here will not illuminate the significance of Anglo-Latin *helleborus*.

## 5. *Ælfpone*

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

The medical texts themselves provide no evidence for which plant(s) *ælfpone* denoted, and without glosses to assist us, we must look to comparative linguistic evidence. *Ælfpone* seems to have been an old name: its second element is unique in Old English, but cognate with Old High German *thona*, 'vine, creeper' (*Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch*; Hoops 1889: 49; Thun 1969: 391–2), suggesting that *ælfpone* is archaic, and originally denoted some kind of vine. The first element, *ælf* (plural *ælfe*), is the etymon of Modern English *elf*, and like it, denoted supernatural beings (Hall 2007a; Shippey 2005; Gunnell 2007). Thun, developing the conclusions of Hoops (1889), observed that Continental West Germanic plant-names in cognates of *ælf*- most consistently denote woody nightshade, which fits with the meaning of *pone* (Thun 1969: 391–2). Bierbaumer reached the same conclusion (1975–79: I.9–10). This reasoning is complicated by Middle English evidence: the forms *elfrone* and *elfyone* were identified by Hunt in fifteenth-century plant-name *synonyma* as counterparts to *personacia*, which was apparently applied to 'large-leaved plants incl[uding] burdock, beet, water-lily, darnel' (Hunt 1989: 202). *Elfryone*, at least, seems certainly to be a (scribally corrupted) reflex of *ælfpone*, denoting something quite unlike woody nightshade.

Another relevant Middle English plant-name is *elf-thung*, compared with *ælfpone* by both the MED (under *elf-thung*) and the DOE (under *ælf-pone*). In this reading, presumably, *ælfpone*'s archaic and opaque second element came to be replaced with a productive generic meaning 'poisonous plant'. Moreover, both attestations associate *elf-thung* with *elleborus*. The earlier and most pertinent is an annotation made by the renowned 'Tremulous Worcester Scribe' to the eleventh-century copy of the Old English *Herbarium* in MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 76 around the first half of the thirteenth century (see Franzen 1991: 66–9). The annotation, on folio 112r, appears to add *eluepunge tunsingwurt* (Crawford 1928: 21) as the title for the Old English entry 'This plant, which is called *elleborus albus*, and by another name *tunsingwyr*t, and [which] some people also call *wedeberge* grows on mountains, and it has leaves like an allium' (*Ʒeos wyr*t þe man *elleborum album* 7 *oðrum naman tunsingwyr*t *nenneð* 7 *eac sume men wedeberge hatað* byð *cenned on dunum*, 7 *heo hafað leaf leace gelice*;

*of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST), under *Wabworte*; and compare the DOE, under *ellen-wyr*t.

De Vriend 1984: 180; see further Hall, in this volume).<sup>11</sup> However, despite the overlap of form between these Middle English words and *ælfþone*, rather little can be made of this later evidence. While there is no reason to doubt that *ælfþone*'s Middle English reflex *elf-thone* could denote plants entirely unlike woody nightshade, it is also clear that these plants do not fit with the etymological meaning of *-þone*. The denotation of *ælfþone* must have shifted from 'vine' to other kinds of plants during the medieval English period, and we cannot be sure when. The denotation of *elf-thung*, likewise, could be distant from *ælfþone*'s early meanings — a conclusion encouraged by the differing interpretations of *elleborus* attested in later Old English (see Hall, in this volume). Here, I develop the hypothesis that in our Old English medical texts, the meaning of *ælfþone* was conservative — and that, although we cannot be certain, it denoted woody nightshade.

*Ælfþone* appears as an ingredient in a bath in Section 47 of *Leechbook III*, as part of a long series of remedies *Wip lyftadle*, which appears to mean 'against paralysis' (Bosworth 1898, under *lyft-ádl*). However, our understanding of the connotations of *lyftadl* is poor — as perhaps were Anglo-Saxon understandings of the conditions which *lyftadl* denoted (compare Cameron 1993: 14, 95) — and the remedy exhibits too many components for much to be made of it. More revealingly, *ælfþone* is also prescribed in two baths (which may be distant textual relatives of one another) for the condition of *micel lic*. One occurs in Bald's *Leechbook II*, Section 32: 'Bath against the *micel lic*: elecampane, broom, ivy, mugwort, *ælfþone*, henbane, mallow, *efenlaste*; boil well in water, pour into a tub and sit in it' (*Bæþ wip þam miclan lice eolone brom . ifig . mucwyrft ælfþone . beolone . cottuc . efelastan wyl on wætere swiþe geot on bydene 7 sitte on*; Wright 1955: folio 29v). The other appears in *Leechbook III*, Section 26, a section devoted to remedies for *micel lic*. Erroneously giving *bið* for *bæð*, the remedy in question says 'Make a bath against the *micel lic*: elecampane, *ælfþone*, ?horehound, centaur, elder-twigs and oak-twigs; boil well in water and bathe the body in it, very hot' (*Wyrft bið wip þam miclan lice . elene . ælfþone . marubie . curmealle . ellentanas . 7 actanas wyl swiðe on wætre 7 beþe on swiðe hatum þæt lic*; Wright 1955: folio 116v). What *micel lic* could denote is unfortunately unclear. Literally, the term means 'large body', which might most obviously reflect large-scale inflammation; this reasoning, and a scatter of more specific evidence in our medical texts, suggests the identification of the ailment with elephantiasis, and, since elephantiasis was connected lexically and conceptually with leprosy in much medieval thought, perhaps also more generally with leprosy and ailments with similar symptoms such as psoriasis or scabies (Hille 1969; and compare Liberman 2002; Lee 2006: 69–70, 72–5). It may be significant in this connection, then, that there are some hints that Anglo-Saxon elves were thought to cause cutaneous ailments, which might fit with the possible wider associations of *micel lic* (Hall 2007a: 106–9).

In addition to the evidence adduced by Hille, it is perhaps also worth noting that *micel lic* is mentioned in the contents list of Bald's *Leechbook II*, in the entry for Section 61, whose corresponding main text is now lost: 'Remedy against jaundice and *micel lic*, and two wound-drinks, and the second will serve against a lung-wound also' (*Læcedom wip þære geolwanadle 7 wið þæm miclan lice . 7 dolhdrencas twegen 7 oper mæg wip lungenwunde eac*; folio 64r). Here it appears that *micel lic* and *geolu adl*, which is assumed to be jaundice, are treated with the same remedy, suggesting some similarity — one paralleled, and perhaps inspired,

<sup>11</sup> De Vriend read not *elueþunge*, but *clueþunge*; I have not been able to consult the manuscript. *Clueþunge* is not a word, however, and though it could be an error for *clufþunge*, *elueþunge* seems likelier to underlie the readings of Crawford (1928) and De Vriend (1984).

by Isidore of Seville's juxtaposition of elephantiasis, leprosy and jaundice in his *Etymologiae* (Isidore of Seville 1911: I; Bk IV.viii.10–13). Although not much can be made of it, this may be significant because a detailed description of symptoms in the *Leechbook III* remedy 'If someone has an elf-*sogoða*' (*Gif him bið ælfsogoða*), where *sogoða* apparently denotes some sort of internal pain, seems clearly to describe jaundice, thus linking jaundice with elves (Wright 1955: folio 124v; Hall 2007a: 105–6; compare McGowan 2009, 118).

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

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

*Leoht drenc wif wedenheorte elehtre . biseopwyrte ælfþone . elene . croleac . hind hiolope . ontre . clate . nim þas wyrta þonne dæg 7 niht scade . sing ærest on ciricean letania . 7 credan . 7 pater noster . gang mid þy sange to þam wyrtum ymbga hie þriwa ær þu hie nime . 7 ga eft to ciricean gesing . xii . mæssan ofer þam wyrtum þonne þu hie ofgoten hæbbe,*

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

Counting *heahhiolopan* in the former text as a mere variant of *hind hiolope* in the latter, all but one of the eight plant-names listed in the latter citation are included in the former; the remaining plant-name in the latter is *biseopwyrte*, which seems to be a synonym of *betonice* in the former (both denoting betony, *Stachys officinalis* (L.) Trevis.; see DOE). A common origin for these remedies, then, seems likely.

The *Leechbook III* version of the remedy is designated as *Wif wedenheorte*. The meaning

of *wedenheort* is elucidated by its better attested derivative *wedenheortness*, defined by Bosworth and Toller as ‘Madness, frenzy, fury’ (Bosworth 1898, including the 1921 supplement by Toller; compare *wéden(d)-seóc*). More telling again, however, is another remedy *Wip wedenheorte*, in Bald’s *Leechbook I*, Section 63, which must be another textual relation of *Wip wedenheorte leoht drenc* just quoted from *Leechbook III*: ‘Against a *wedenheort*: betony, ?lupin, ?centaury, *eoforfearn*, ?cockle, *heah hiolope* when day and night separate; then sing litanies in a church — that is the names of the saints and the *pater noster*’ (*Wip wedenheorte bisceopwyr̄t . elehtre . banwyr̄t . eoforfearn . giþrife . heahhiolope þonne dæg scade 7 niht þonne sing þu on ciricean letanias þæt is þara haligra naman 7 pater noster*; Wright 1955: folio 52r). Here the remedy occurs as one of a group ‘For a fiend-sick person: when the/a devil nourishes a man or controls him from within with illness’ (*Wip feondseocum men . þonne deofol þone monnan fede oððe hine innan gewealde mid adle*; Wright 1955: folio 51v). In Bald’s *Leechbook*, then, the person with a *wedenheort* is identified with the diabolically possessed. Although Anglo-Saxon elves are never associated with the term *wedenheort*, their capacity to inflict madness or similar symptoms is well attested (Hall 2007a: 119–56). It is also noteworthy, of course, that this symptom is linked lexically with *wedeberge*. If *wedeberge* is a synonym of *ælfbone*, it seems appropriate that it was linked with a state with whose treatment *ælfbone* is later associated.

Literally, *leoht drenc* could either mean one which is not heavy, or one which is bright or perhaps clear; but the term might connote something more specific. As Carole Biggam has pointed out to me, an originally substantive usage of the plural adjective *leohte* ‘not heavy’ had given rise by the early Middle English period to a noun meaning ‘lung(s)’ (OED under *lights*; MED under *lightes*). While it seems clear that *leoht* in the phrase *leoht drenc* is functioning as an adjective, it might nonetheless have a sense here like ‘lung-related’. Unfortunately, it is hard to be sure. The entry in *Leechbook II*’s contents list for the section containing this *leoht drenc* reads ‘Remedies and *leohte drenças* for the health/healing of people and ?vomit-prevention drinks against unwell insides, eight prescriptions’ (*Læcedomas 7 leohte drenças mannum to hælo 7 unspiule drencas wip untrumum innoþum eahta cræftas*; folio 63r). Of these eight remedies, four are specifically *leohte drenças*, and some sort of association with remedying digestive troubles seems clear, though it may not have been exclusive. The collocation *leoht drenc* occurs elsewhere in *Leechbook II*, but at no point is it much elucidated.

Notwithstanding their obscurity, however, these texts connect with a further remedy mentioning *ælfbone*. This occurs in Section 64 of *Leechbook III*, a few sections earlier than the *Leoht drenc wip weden heorte*. It runs ‘A sweet/mild drink against the/a devil and for someone out of their mind: put *cassuc*, lupin, carrot, fennel, ?radish, betony, *hind heolope*, wild celery, rue, wormwood, cat’s mint, elecampane, *ælfbone*, wild teasel in ale; sing 12 masses over that drink and drink it. He will soon be well’ (*Wip deofle liþe drenc 7 ungemynde do on ealu cassuc . elehtran moran . finul ontre . betonice . hind heolope . merce rude . wermod . nefte . elene . ælfbone . wulfes comb . gesing . xii . mæssan ofer þam drence 7 drince him biþ sona sel*; Wright 1955: folio 125v). *Liðe* seems not to have any specific connotations in a medical context, but this may simply reflect our lack of evidence; if we are to take it as a (partial) synonym of *leoht drenc*, it would support a meaning of ‘light, mild drink’ for both terms. Either way, we once more find *ælfbone* used against the devil; the liturgical content of the remedy is reminiscent of *Wip wedenheorte leoht drenc*; and besides *ælfbone*, it shares *ontre*, *betonice*(~*bisceopwyr̄t*), *hind*(~*heah*) *heolope* and *elene* with the two *leohte drenças*.

*Ælfbone*, then, is closely associated with remedying a *wedenheort*. It seems likely, once

more, that administered in correct doses, woody nightshade could have been clinically effective in this. Precisely what clinical symptoms *wedenheortness* might be associated with is not clear. Dendle has argued that epilepsy may be at least one of the conditions denoted by the term, positing that the *elehtre* ('lupin', *Lupinus albus* L.) prescribed in some of the relevant remedies could have helped this condition, particularly by rectifying manganese deficiencies (2001). Fever is another possible denotation, which could certainly be ascribed to elves by Anglo-Saxons (Hall 2007a: 121–9), and for which woody nightshade has been prescribed in Western traditional medicine (for example, Tunón, Olavsdotter and Bohlin 1995: 67). The known anti-inflammatory properties of woody nightshade encourage the inference that it should have been effective against fever to some degree. Whatever the case, some sort of agitation seems a likely symptom of a *wedenheort*, so although they have not to my knowledge been subjected to recent clinical tests, the mild narcotic properties which are widely attested for woody nightshade in modern herbals (for example, Millspaugh 1892: 484; Weiss and Fintelmann 2000: 249; Allen and Hatfield 2004: 198–9) may have been of use.

The remedies in *Leechbook III* just quoted, *Wip deofle liþe drenc* in Section 64 and *Leoht drenc wip weden heorte* in Section 68, form part of a larger sequence against what Jolly called 'mind-altering afflictions', running from Sections 54 to 68 (folios 122v–127r; Jolly 1996: 133; compare Hall 2007a: 119–30; Pell 2011). In this sequence too comes the last and most prominent of our remedies attesting to *ælfþone*. *Leechbook III*, Section 62 (Wright 1955: folios 123v–124r) runs:

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

Against *ælfadl* take betony, fennel, ?lupin, *ælfþone* from low down, and lichen from the blessed sign of Christ; and add a handful of each incense. Bind all these plants in a cloth; dip it in font-water which has been blessed three times. Also against that, lay these plants under an altar and have 9 masses sung over them: incense, holy salt, 3 heads of ?wild garlic, *ælfþone* from low down, *elecampane*; take in the morning a cupful of milk; add three drops of holy water; [let him] sip it as hot as he can manage; eat with it 3 pieces/slices of *ælfþone*. And when he desires to rest, place hot embers in there; place incense and *ælfþone* on the embers, and fumigate him with it so that he sweats, and fumigate throughout the house, and make the sign of the cross over that person thoroughly. And when he goes to rest, eat 3 slices of *elecampane* and 3 of ?wild garlic and 3 of salt, and have for him a cup full of ale, and put three drops of holy water in it. Swallow each slice; let him rest afterwards. Do this for 9 mornings and 8 nights. He will soon be well.

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

It seems clear that *ælfþone* in our texts tends to be prescribed for ailments which could be ascribed to elves, so the linguistic connection between *ælfþone* and elves more generally is

likely to be relevant here, as McGowan has recently emphasised (2009: 118). But precisely *how* is uncertain. Was *alfþone* named because of its efficaciousness in healing ailments attributed to elves? Or was it used to heal them because of its name, on a principle of curing like with like? Or both? Either way, it seems likely that it had chemical properties which should have been clinically effective to at least some degree in treating the symptoms for which it was prescribed, while, as Pell has implied, the naming may also have facilitated placebo effects (2011).

## 6. Discussion: Aldhelm, elves and *elleborus*

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

It is noteworthy, in this connection, that Aldhelm ascribes *dementia cordis* to his *elleborus*, since some of the medical texts which I have discussed focus on curing people with a *wedenheort*, literally ‘frenzied mind’, apparently linked in our tenth-century manuscript with demonic possession. No Latin source is presented for *dementia cordis* in the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* database, so one suspects that Aldhelm’s Latin phrase here reflects or even alludes to the vernacular Old English term *wedenheort*. This link is consolidated by the early rendering of *elleborus* as *wedeberge*, which again links the Latin plant-name with a derivative of the word *wod*. Aldhelm may or may not have seen this gloss, but he certainly studied in the same school that produced it, at roughly the same time. These resonances between Aldhelm’s poem and vernacular terminology consolidate the likelihood that Aldhelm’s poem reflects traditional knowledge concerning woody nightshade. The detail may also be significant in that the word *wod* and its derivatives, though usually attested in Old English to denote undesirable states of mind, seem to have had a positive dimension at some point in the development of Anglo-Saxon traditions: the name of the god Woden derives from *wod*, and it seems unlikely, *a priori*, that the name of the god held no positive connotations. Moreover, *wod*’s cognates include the Latin *vates* ‘prophet’ and Old Irish *fáith* ‘poet’ (OED, under *wood*, sense a.). One wonders, then, whether having a *wedenheort* (or *dementia cordis*) was invariably viewed as a bad thing, as the medical texts imply.

The association between woody nightshade, *dementia cordis*, and *wedenheortnes* also deserves to be considered in conjunction with the fact that what seems to have been the common Old English word for woody nightshade, *alfþone*, contains the word *alf* ‘elf’. That madness and other symptoms associated with mental disorders might be ascribed to

elves in Anglo-Saxon belief is clear, as I have mentioned above. *Ælfþone* might, then, have originally meant something along the lines of ‘vine which causes the symptoms which elves cause’. Picking up on the duality of the meanings of *wod*, this reading could be extended to incorporate the possibility that these effects were not necessarily bad: as Aldhelm’s familiarity with the symptoms of woody nightshade poisoning might imply, early Anglo-Saxons might deliberately have used woody nightshade to produce mind-altering effects. Such a duality would also be paralleled by the cultural construction of nympholepsy (seizure/possession by nymphs) and epilepsy (seizure) in the Classical Hellenic world, and of possession in some more recent cultures, in which possession can have both positive and negative connotations according to context, or indeed concurrently (Temkin 1971: 3–27; Connor 1988: especially 156–8, 165, 174–9).

The main Old English evidence for a positive side to elves’ influence is a single word, *ylfig*, attested only in eleventh-century manuscripts. Four of the five occurrences are textually related glosses on the word *comitiales* ‘epileptics’ in Chapter 52 of Aldhelm’s *Prosa de virginitate*, composed sometime before Aldhelm’s death in 709 (Oliphant 1966: 85, C1211; Aldhelm 2001: II.696–7); a further one is added by the compiler of the Harley Glossary (MS British Library, Harley 3376 and its *disiecta membra* (scattered parts) MS Lawrence, University of Kansas, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, Pryce P2 A: 1 and MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Lat. Misc. a. 3., folio 49), who not only included the Aldhelm gloss but also the entry *Fanaticus .i. minister templi* (*Fanaticus* i.e. the priest of a temple), above which he wrote *futura praecinens t ylfig*, ‘one foretelling things to come, or *ylfig*’ (Oliphant 1966: 178, F151; collated with MS folio 76r). Determining the provenance and implications of this material is tricky to say the least, but I have argued, I think reasonably securely, that *ylfig* was a member of the common Old English lexicon, coined centuries before its first attestation, meaning ‘speaking prophetically (through the influence of elves)’ (Hall 2006: 234–43). This being so, the *elf* in *ælfþone* might refer to an association of the plant not (only) with illness, but with causing prophetic states of mind of the sort which were associated with elves.

A key question, of course, is how suitable woody nightshade actually is for producing altered states of mind which might promote ‘prophetic’ speech reasonably reliably and safely. The general possibility that it might be suitable is clear, but unfortunately we have no firm evidence either way. Hopefully future scientific research will elucidate the problem. But for now there appears to be a reasonable case that Aldhelm’s description of woody nightshade poisoning relates to an association of the plant with elves in Old English, of elves with causing altered states of mind, and perhaps moreover with a custom in early Anglo-Saxon society of deliberately using the plant to achieve altered mental states. There has been some enthusiastic hunting for evidence of the use of narcotics and intoxicants other than alcohol in early medieval Europe (see, for example, Price 2002: 205–6); the evidence presented here, fragile though it is, is to my knowledge the strongest so far adduced for these in Anglo-Saxon culture.

This line of argument is at odds with the evidence of the Old English medical texts for a diametrically opposed use of woody nightshade. I have shown how in the Old English medical texts — principally *Leechbook III* — *ælfþone* is strongly associated with *healing* ailments potentially caused by elves, including altered states of mind. Most strikingly, one of the conditions for which *ælfþone* is used is a *wedenheort*, the cause of which Aldhelm arguably considered characteristic of woody nightshade. One response to this problem would be to argue for change over time: a plant whose name originally meant ‘vine which causes

states like those caused by elves’ came to be interpreted as ‘vine (or, since in Old English the meaning of the word became opaque, *þone*) which acts against elves’. However, the paradox cannot easily be resolved in terms of diachronic variation, because it is apparent in Aldhelm’s poem itself. Aldhelm describes *elleborus* as causing *dementia cordis*, even though he had surely read Isidore’s claim that *elleborus* cures insanity, and was arguably in touch with Dioscorides’s claims that *helleboros melas* cured it. It may be, then, that Aldhelm saw in woody nightshade a power both to cause and to cure madness, presumably depending on the circumstances and way in which the plant was used. This, in turn, is consistent with the known properties of woody nightshade. At the same time, paradoxical attitudes to and uses of plants should not surprise us; Meaney notes ambivalent attitudes to elder below (this volume, Section 8.1). A comparable paradox is apparent in current British cultural attitudes to alcohol: the physiological and clinically measurable effects of ingesting large quantities of alcohol prominently include slower reaction times and reduced co-ordination, muscle control, cognitive abilities, short-term memory, and perceptual field. Yet extreme drunkenness is currently culturally associated with — and therefore to some extent produces — the in some respects startlingly different outcomes of disinhibition, sexual promiscuity, and even violence (Fox 2008).

We should, then, envisage synchronic variation in the uses of woody nightshade, and possibly in the interpretation of its name, probably throughout the period covered by our texts. Whether this variation indeed reflected the different clinical effects which could be derived from the plant in different conditions — different parts of the plant, different stages of growth, different combinations with other plants, and so forth — or rather different cultural significances in different contexts is probably impossible to judge. But the evidence certainly provides striking new insights into the uses (and abuses) and wider cultural associations which plants might have in early Anglo-Saxon England.

## Appendix A

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

Appendix A1: *Wedeberge* catalogue

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

Appendix A2: Related citations

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

Appendix A3: Dates and locations

## Appendix B

<i>CNo.</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Short Title &amp; Reference</i>	<i>Spelling</i>
1	Glossary: Cleopatra 1	CIGl 1 (Stryker) 2237	<i>ceasteræsc</i>
2	Leechbook III	Lch II (3) 30.1.1	<i>ceasteræsces</i>
3	Lacnunga	Med 3 (Grattan-Singer) 73.1	<i>ceasteræsc</i>
4	Lacnunga	Med 3 (Grattan-Singer) 74.1	<i>ceasteraxsan</i>
5	Lacnunga	Med 3 (Grattan-Singer) 77.1	<i>ceasteræsc</i>
6	Lacnunga	Med 3 (Grattan-Singer) 143.1	<i>ceasteræsc</i>

Appendix B1: *Ceasteræsc* catalogue

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

Appendix B2: Related citations

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

Appendix B3: Dates and locations

## Appendix C

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

Appendix C1: *Ceasterwyrte* catalogue

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

Appendix C3: Dates and locations

## Appendix D

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

Appendix D1: *Ælfþone* catalogue

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

Appendix D2: Related citations

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

Appendix D3: Dates and locations

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