"Ides Ælfscinu" in *Judith* 14  
—Elves and Women's Beauty in Old English Literature

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1 Introduction

This paper deals with the ambiguous Old English word, "*ælfsciene' in the Old English poem *Judith* 14. "*Ælfsciene,' which modifies the preceding word "ides" (= Mod. E. woman), is used as one of the key words to characterize Judith, the heroine of the poem. Three different interpretations have been presented so far concerning this adjective: "beautiful like an elf," "bright, shining like an elf," and "divinely inspired." These interpretations look quite different from one another, yet they all seem to derive from the same root, which is the interpreter's attitude toward the beauty of elves in Old English literature. In this paper, elves and women's beauty in Old English Literature will be reconsidered from a philosophical point of view through a close examination of the Old English adjective "*ælfsciene'."

1.1 Old English "*ælfsciene' in *Judith* 14

Judith, a faithful Christian widow, beautiful and wise, decides to save all the people in the city of Bethulia, which has been besieged by the Assyrian army led by the heathen general Holofernes. One night, while the city is facing its fall, Judith and the maid who accompanies her succeed in infiltrating the Assyrian camp, pretending to cry for Holofernes's mercy and help. Soon, lusty Holofernes is attracted to Judith and invites her to his banquet, and later, to his chamber on the fourth night after her arrival:

\[
\text{þæt wæs þy feorðan dogore,}
\]

\[
\text{þæs ðe Judith hyne gleaw on ðeðonce} \\
\text{ides ælfscinu ærest gesohte.} \quad \text{(Judith 12-14\textsuperscript{1}); italics mine)}
\]

It was on the fourth day
that Judith, wise in thought,

\[\textit{a woman of ælfscinu}, \text{ first visited him.} \quad \text{(translation and italics mine)}\]

The poem \textit{Judith} is composed by an unknown poet, based essentially on the \textit{The Book of Judith} from Apocrypha in the Vulgate. It is well known that the poet often changed the original Latin story rather freely in order to make \textit{Judith} to be acceptable to his / her Anglo-Saxon audience. For example, the poet emphasizes the brave aspects of the heroine Judith's character, deleting some descriptions of her feminine beauty, to make her resemble the typical hero of the Anglo-Saxon traditional battle poems such as \textit{Beowulf}. In \textit{Judith} 14, the word 'elfscinu (*ælfsciene)' is clearly an original expression used by the poet because we cannot find a relevant word of it in \textit{The Book of Judith}.

According to \textit{A Microfiche Concordance to Old English},\textsuperscript{2} the word 'ælfsciene' is found only 3 times throughout the extant Old English literature (\textit{Judith} 14, \textit{Genesis} 1827, \textit{Genesis} 2731). In all three cases, it appears just before / after the words for women; 'ides' or 'mæg,' without exception. Also, it is apparent from the texts that both women modified by the word 'ælfsciene,' Judith, a widow and Sarra, Abraham's wife, immediately attract all the men and women around them and surprise them because of their countenance.

Actually, the word 'ælfsciene' appears to be used by the poets to describe the heroine's feminine beauty as is seen in many Modern English translations for this word: (a woman) "beautiful like an elf" or "bright, shining like an elf." These translations, based on the Indo-European tradition which often connects brightness to beauty or goodness\textsuperscript{3}, seem quite natural and persuasive to the readers. Moreover, the spelling of 'elfscinu (*ælfsciene)' < 'ælf' + 'sceine' = elf + sheen, at the same time, reminds us of some mysterious bright beauty of an elf and this word-association causes us to wonder: Were elves in the Old English period really beautiful. The \textit{OED}\textsuperscript{4} description under the entry "elf" is as follows:

The name of a class of supernatural beings, in early Teutonic belief supposed to possess formidable magical powers, exercised variously for the benefit or the injury of mankind. They were believed to be of dwarfish form, to produce diseases of various kinds, to act as \textit{incubi} and \textit{succubi}, to cause nightmares, and to steal children, substituting changelings in their place.\textsuperscript{4}

(underlined by the present author)
Also, Heather Stuart presents us with an interesting viewpoint, in reference to Anglo-Saxon elves:

... as far as is known, Anglo-Saxon elves were not considered physical entities, and were certainly not thought to be beautiful.\(^9\)

'Ælf' must be a supernatural creature with some magical powers but from these descriptions of the appearances of Anglo-Saxon elves, it is difficult to find any distinctive evidence of their beauty. Stuart says: "the original meaning of *ælfsciene may have been 'flickering with light like an elf.'"\(^\text{10}\) Further, she, who considers the influence of Christianity on Anglo-Saxon literature to be strong, goes on that both women modified by the adjective '*ælfsciene' are "divinely inspired,\(^\text{11}\) completing supernatural deeds after a revelation from God.

*Dictionary of Old English (DOE)* seems to take all these discussions into consideration to state the meaning of 'ælfscyne' as follows:

Radiant or fair as an elf, beautiful; has also been understood as 'delusive as an elf' (taking *scyne* as 'flickering') or 'divinely inspired.'\(^\text{12}\)

Patricia Belanoff seems to recognize a certain beauty in the Old English word 'ælf.' She mentions Judith's beauty modified by the word '*ælfsciene.' She insists that both heathen and Christian elements can be seen in the poem and the adjective '*ælfsciene' means some complex beauty, containing these two antagonistic elements: "The quality represented by the word must be recognized as being far more complex than ordinary beauty..."\(^\text{13}\)

On the basis of these discussions, it seems meaningful to reconsider elfish beauty in Old English Literature from a philological point of view through a close examination of the Old English adjective '*ælfsciene.'

2 Old English 'ælf' and 'sciene'

Before considering the word '*ælfsciene,' we should examine two constituents of this compound: 'ælf' (= elf) and 'sciene' (= sheen.)
2. 1. Old English 'ælf'

According to *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*\(^{10}\), there are 7 examples of the Old English word 'ælf' (or 'ylfe') throughout the extant Old English literature: 3 examples in poetry and 4 in prose. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* by Bosworth and Toller (BT) defines 'ælf' as "an elf; genius, incubus."\(^{11}\) DOE explains that "/ælf/ appears mainly in medical texts and charms." All 7 examples, except one from *Beowulf* 111, cited in DOE (*Charm* 20 8, *Lch* II (2 Head) 65, *Lch* II (2) 65. 5. 3, *Lch* II (2) 65. 1. 6, *MCharm* 4 20, *MCharm* 4 25) are found in the medical books or the folk medicine charms against the disease caused by an 'ælf.' From these examples, we can have an image of the Germanic 'ælf' which is a supernatural being and causes affliction, disease and pain to both men and animals.

On the other hand, *Beowulf* 111 gives us a different image of an 'ælf.' In this case, 'ælf' is included with the supernatural creatures such as the Giants and other monsters defined as Cain's descendents: *cotenas ond ylfe ond orceneas, swylyce gigantas*. BT cites this passage under the entry of 'eoten' and translates it as follows:

> Wæs se grimmel gæst Grendel, Caines cyn, — ðanon untydras ealle onwocon, eotenas and ylfe and orceneas, swylyce gigantas (*Beowulf* 102-113.)

Grendel was the grim guest, the race of Cain, — whence unnatural births all sprang forth, monsters, elves, and sectres, also giants\(^{2}\)

In this passage of *Beowulf*, Grendel, the monster which attacks Heorot every night and devours men who assemble there for the banquets, is illustrated as Cain's descendent in order to define him as a traitor to God from a Christian point of view. For the purpose of this context, the 'ælf' is treated equally to Grenderl and other evil creatures. Although none of the other examples of Old English 'ælf' are found in Christian contexts, the image of the 'ælf' here reminds us of that of other examples because both images are similar, being "supernatural": 'untydras' (= unnatural births.) It seems reasonable that Anglo-Saxon elves were understood by Christians as those which lived in a world which was quite different (= supernatural) from their world.

DOE lists 9 words which contains the word 'ælf' and their meanings are as
follows: 13)

ælf-adl  elf-disease (of uncertain nature)
ælf-cynn  race of elves, referring to their supposed agency in bringing about some affliction; or perhaps referring to the affliction itself.
ælfen  glossing nympha 'nymph'
alvere  of uncertain meaning and etymology; possibilities include: 'whole army', 'alien (invading) host'; 'one wholly prepared for service')
ælfig  afflicted in mind, mad, frantic
ælfisc  elvish; having the qualities thought to pertain to elves
ælf-siden  influence or enchantment of elves, referring to an affliction of uncertain identity thought to be caused by supernatural agency and attended by fever
ælf-sogeþa  disease thought to have been caused by supernatural agency, perhaps anaemia
ælf-þone  a plant, probably woody nightshade, bittersweet; used to treat ailments thought to have been caused by supernatural agency, especially skin disease and mental illness

These words also suggest an image of the 'ælf,' which is a supernatural creature that causes afflictions, diseases or a pain.

On the other hand, Nils Thun refers to the positive image of the 'ælf' found in the Anglo-Saxon names containing 'Ælf-': Ælfred, Ælflic, etc. He explains that "the Anglo-Saxon names were coined at a time when elves were regarded as friendly creatures. Names lose their connotations very soon, which accounts for the fact that they were still used at a time when the reputation of the elves had significantly declined."(392) Moreover, he mentions that the word '*ælfsciene' is an exception which carries a positive image of an 'elf' and puts '*ælfsciene' to the very end of the list of the surviving words containing a positive image of an 'elf.' However, his comment is not persuasive without any precise evidence:

The adjective ælf-sciene 'shining like an elf, bright (beautiful) as an elf' is used in poetry (Judith, Genesis). The survival of this word is more unexpected than the continued use of the names just mentioned. A certain
lack of reflection over the exact meaning of words belonging to poetical vocabulary may in the last resort account for the word.\textsuperscript{14)

Stuart also classifies the word "*ælfsciene" as a compound with a positive meaning just like Anglo-Saxon names containing 'Ælf-.' He gives an ambiguous explanation of the word "*ælfsciene" that "...one stray adjective, ælфsciene, 'elf-bright', indicates the existence of a benevolent race of elves, for which there is no other evidence in the extant OE literature."\textsuperscript{15)"

2. 2. 2. OE sciene

\textit{The Concordance}\textsuperscript{16)} says Old English 'sciene' can be found 27 times in poetry and 25 out of 27 of these examples are cited in BT. BT defines the meaning of 'sciene' as "beautiful, fair, bright,"\textsuperscript{17} while \textit{OED}\textsuperscript{2} refers to it in the explanation of etymology under the entry of "Sheen": "In English the sense was influenced by association with the root of SHINE v. In early examples it is often difficult to determine whether the sense is merely 'beautiful', or whether there is some added notion of 'shining, bright'." \textit{OED}\textsuperscript{2} explains the meaning of the word sheen: 1. beautiful, 2. bright, shining, resplendent. It also notes concerning the second meaning. "In early use this sense may have been merely contextual, the adj. being applied in the sense 'beautiful' to objects (e.g. heavenly bodies, jewels, metals) the beauty of which is dependent on their brightness. In later use, owing to association with SHINE v., SHEEN n. 1, the sense 'shining' is felt as primary."\textsuperscript{18)}

As for the interpretations of the word "*ælfsciene", all the explanations above seem to suggest that those interpretations which are attached to the beauty of an 'ælf' such as 'beautiful, shining as an elf' are derived from the word 'sciene' rather than from the word 'elf.' Let us examine closely the 27 examples found in poetry. The words in bold in the chart below represent the nouns / pronouns which are modified directly by the word 'sciene,' while the numbers in parentheses refer to the total number of the examples; the words in quotation marks are the Modern English translations corresponding to the Old English words.

<p>| ides (4) | 'woman' | Genesis 626, 704, 700, 821 |
| gesceap (3) | 'shape, appearance' | Genesis 503, 549. Christ 1386 |
| lamb (2) | 'lamb' | Paris Psalter 113. 4. 4, 113. 6. 3 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mægð</td>
<td>'woman'</td>
<td>Genesis 1252, Beowulf 3016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boda</td>
<td>'angel'</td>
<td>Genesis 656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cyning</td>
<td>'king'</td>
<td>Genesis 338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deor</td>
<td>'animal (panther)'</td>
<td>Panther 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>forrnyel</td>
<td>'morning star'</td>
<td>Meters of Boethius 29. 25</td>
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<tr>
<td>fugol</td>
<td>'bird (phoenix)'</td>
<td>Phoenix 591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>geaflas</td>
<td>'jaws'</td>
<td>Phoenix 300</td>
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<tr>
<td>gimm</td>
<td>'gem'</td>
<td>Christ 695</td>
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<tr>
<td>hiw</td>
<td>'hue'</td>
<td>Panther 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hyrst</td>
<td>'armour'</td>
<td>Judith 316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lic</td>
<td>'body'</td>
<td>Genesis 265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lif</td>
<td>'life'</td>
<td>Christ 1469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rice</td>
<td>'kingdom'</td>
<td>Judgement Day II 296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steorra</td>
<td>'star'</td>
<td>Christ 1147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stan</td>
<td>'stone'</td>
<td>Andreas 766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>væstm</td>
<td>'plant'</td>
<td>Genesis 467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wlit</td>
<td>'form (of Christ)'</td>
<td>Christ 914</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the examples listed above are the nouns, regardless of whether they are animate or inanimate, seen in the Christian contexts. 'Ides' (4 times) and 'gesceap' (3 times) appear frequently and those examples refer to Eve without exception. 'Mægð' (2 times) is used for beautiful women in a general meaning. Stuart\(^9\) says that the word 'sciene' is a key epithet for Eve, a woman, tempted by a cunning serpent, who becomes a mother of all the sins and agony in the world. On the other hand, it is never used for Sarra who is placed among the traditional woman saints. She is totally obedient to her husband, Abraham and has a baby boy miraculously by God's revelation at the age of over one hundred. Sarra is quite different from Eve and other typical women because she did "a superhuman task" of having a baby at her great age. Because of this act, Sarra is qualified as a special woman "inspired by God." She belongs to the higher spiritual status than that of Eve and this is why she is never modified by the word 'sciene,' which can be used for beautiful women but does not have such specific connotation of "inspired by God."

We can summarize the research results about Old English 'ælf' and 'sciene' as follows: Old English 'ælf' is a supernatural being which gives affliction, disease and pain to both human and beasts. It is difficult to find any aspects of
beauty in the meaning of this word. The word 'ælf' is found mainly in the secular medical books and charms with strong Germanic background. However, the only exception, Beowulf 111 represents a significant Christian influence. From these facts, Old English 'ælf' seems to be understood to be a creature which dwells in a supernatural world which is completely different from ours.

Old English 'sciene' essentially means 'beautiful' but it can hold the meaning 'shining, bright' simultaneously. 'Sciene' often appears in a Christian context and it is employed with 'ïdes' or 'gesceap' when referring to women's beauty. Quite frequently, the concept of being 'beautiful, shining or bright' in the Christian context is understood to be equivalent to being 'holy or sacred.' Belanoff 20 points out adequately that in the word '*ælfsciene,' two conflicting aspects of heathen and Christian coexist at the same time.

2. 3. Genesis 1827 and 2731

In this section, two examples of the word '*ælfsciene' seen in Genesis (Gen 1827, Gen 2731) will be examined. These two examples resemble each other on two points: First, in both cases, the word '*ælfsciene' appears in a form of "mæg ælfscieno" and the word 'mæg' (= Mod. E woman) refers to Sarra, Abraham's wife. Second, the situation where the phrase "mæg ælfscieno" is used is almost the same in both examples: In Gen 1827, Abraham uses the phrase "mæg ælfscieno" to address his wife Sarra, while in Gen 2731, King Abimelech uses it to address Sarra. In both cases, Abraham lied by saying that Sarra was his own sister and offered her to the lecherous king in exchange for his life. Soon after the king received Sarra, great disasters occurred all over his land. The king had to return Sarra to Abraham in order to suppress God's fury.

<Gen 1827>

Abraham moves to Cannan with his wife Sarra and his nephew Loth, following God's command. However, they have to again move to Egypt temporarily because Cannan is besieged by a mighty famine. Abraham is very afraid that his wife's beauty will be the death of him: His wife will be sent to the king's harem, while he himself will be killed by the king. It is then that he lies that Sarra is not his wife but his own sister.

Siððan Egypte eagum moton
on þinne wîte wîtan wîance monige,
When many haughty Egyptians shall gaze with their eyes upon thy countenance, then should the nobly-born chieftains suppose, *mæg ælfscieno*, that thou art my bright bed-fellow whom some one of the warriors will wish to have for himself.22)

(<Gen> 2731>)

Abraham and his wife Sarra moves to the land governed by Abimelech. Being afraid that his wife's beauty will be the center of everyone's attention and he will be killed by the king, Abraham lies that Sarra is not his wife but his sister. Then, Sarra is sent to the King Abimelech. God is very furious to see Abimelech's extramarital deed although it was done by him unconsciously. God appears to Abimelech in a dream to tell him the truth, after which Abimelech returns Sarra to Abraham.

Ne þearf ðe on edwit Abraham settan,
ðin freadrihten, þat þu fleetpaðas,
*mæg ælfscieno*, mine træde,
ac him hygeteonan hwitan seolfr
deope bete.  

(<Gen> 2729-2733; italics mine)

Nor need Abraham, thy lord and master, set it in reproach against thee that thou hast trodden the ways of my dwelling, *mæg ælfscieno*: for I have richly repaired thine offence with him, with white silver.23)

(italics mine)

BT cites both Gen 1829 and Gen 2731, defining the word "*ælfscine*" as "beautiful, like an elf or nymph, of elfin beauty" with a translation of "O woman of elfin beauty!".24) Concerning Judith 14, BT dares to give another entry "ælfscinu" and defines it as "shining like an elf or fairy, elfin bright, of elfin beauty."25) BT interprets Judith 14 differently from Gen 1829 and Gen 2731, with more
attention to the brightness. However, it translates *Judith* 14 into Modern English exactly the same as it did in *Gen*: "Judith, the woman of elfin beauty." Doane also puts a gloss to the word "ælfsciene" in *Gen* 1829 and *Gen* 2731 as "beautiful like an elf ("puclhara").**"26) Stuart**27) argues that it is difficult to interpret "ælfsciene" as "beautiful" because Sarra is already at the age of over hundred in *Gen* 2731. Also he denies that the phrase "mæg ælfscieno" is "a simple epithet of physical beauty" since this phrase is a key epithet only for Sarra.

We already discussed how the two examples from *Gen* 1827 and *Gen* 2731 are quite similar to one another in their form and situations. In both examples, Abraham moves to foreign lands where he doesn't have any relatives or friends to help him. He has to offer his wife Sarra to the king in order to save his own life, deceiving the king about the truth of Sarra being his wife. Especially in *Gen* 1827, Abraham, Sarra and Loth move to Egypt as famine refugees although they are guided there by God. Abraham is worried that the beautiful Sarra will be an eye-catcher especially among the foreign refugees. Then he talks to Sarra as follows:

Saga þu, Sarra, þat þu sie sweostor min,  
lices mæge, þonne þe leodweras  
fremde frícgen hwat sie freondluþu  
ellðeodigra uncer twega,  
fæorren cumenra.  

*Genesis, 1832-1836*

Say then, Sarra, that thou art my sister, my blood-relation, when the strange men ask thee what degree of familiarity may exist between us two foreigners, who come from so far away.**28)  

Abraham and Sarra are foreigners from far away countries (ellðeodig, feorren cumen) to the people in Egypt. This fact seems to play an important role in the story. Sarra's beautiful countenance attracts all the men around her and the rumor about her immediately goes up to the king. Her exotic beauty must have been different from theirs.

In *Gen* 2731, Abraham and Sarra move to a foreign land again. Abraham, who does not have any relatives or friends to help him, offers Sarra to the king in order to save his own life. In addition, he lies and tells to the king that Sarra
is his own sister. Abimelech, to whom God appears in a dream in order to tell him that his lust for Sarra has caused God's fury, demands to know why Abraham has deceived him. Abraham then tells the king about his life as a foreigner from a far away land:

\[ \text{Ic þas færes a} \\
\text{on wenum sat hwonne me wraðra sum} \\
\text{elltteodigne aldre beheowe,} \\
\text{se ðe him tas idese eft agan wolde.} \quad (\text{Genesis, 2700-2703}) \]

I always kept this peril in mind, when some foe should deprive me—a stranger—of my life, who wished to have this woman for his own.  

Here again, Abraham directs our attention to the fact that he is a foreigner (elltteodig). That he kept moving from one land to another according to God's command means that he is fated to be a foreigner all his life. Sarra might be fated to face a miserable life, too, because of her extraordinary beauty. In Gen 2731, when returning Sarra to Abraham, Abimelech calls Sarra "mæg æelfscieno," after he has heard Abraham's story and understood the reason for his deception.

In Section 2, we have already seen that out of our 7 examples of Old English 'ælf,' Beowulf 111 is the only example strongly influenced by Chrisitianity, in which case, 'alfs' could be understood to be a supernatural beings which exist in a completely different world from that in which people in those days lived. Foreigners are quite similar to the Old English 'ælfś' in a sense, living in a world which is different from their native one. Foreigners, especially in those days would have been quite mysterious, being different from the natives in many ways, i.e. religion, way of life, appearance. etc., which might both attract and awe them. The word 'æelfscieno' would have contained such connotations of awe and astonishment towards strangers. In both of the two examples in Genesis, the kings who deprived Abraham of his wife Sarra, caused God's fury because of their lechery and they, together with their families, were punished by God. It is notable that in both cases, the appearance of a foreign woman Sarra was an omen of the unfortunate king's fate to come. People might have such very specific feelings towards foreigners in those days.
2. 4. Judith 14 reconsidered

Much has been said on the interpretation of the Old English 'ælfscine' in Judith 14 so far; however, few have gone into details because 'ælfscine' can be translated into Modern English literally. In this section, we will reexamine the example in Judith 14 and reconsider the interpretation of the Old English 'ælfscine,' first, in 2. 4. 1, by surveying some dictionaries and the Modern English translations published so far, then, in 2. 4. 2, by analyzing Judith 14 in comparison with two other examples in Genesis with special attention to the characters of two women: Judith and Sarra. Lastly, in 2. 4. 3, we will discuss the polysemic word and its effect in the Old English poem Judith through the Old English word 'ælfscine.'

2. 4. 1. Survey of Modern English translations of 'ælfscinu' in Judith 14

Some dictionaries and the Modern English translations published so far have interpreted 'ælfscinu' in Judith 14 as follows:

The meaning of 'ælfscinu' (Judith 14)

*Dictionaries, Modern English translations and texts cited here will be listed in the notes at the end of this paper. 39 "Discussions" in the table refers to the cases where Judith 14 is discussed in the papers.

《Dictionaries and Glossaries》

Thorpe (1834) elfin-bright
Sweet (1896) elf-sheen, beautiful as a fairy
Kluge (1897) wunder schön
Cook (1904) beautiful as an elf
Jente (1921) glänzend oder schön wie die Elfen, wunderschön
Bosworth and Toller (1929) shining like an elf or fairy, elfin bright, of elfin beauty
Juzi (1939) glänzend wie ein Elf
Raith (1944) bright as a fairy, beautiful
Clark Hall (1960) bright as an elf or fairy, beautiful, radiant
Sweet15/ Whitelock (1970) beautiful as a fairy
Bright 4 (1971) beautiful as an elf
Timmer (1978) beautiful as an elf
Griffith (1997) beautiful as an elf / marvelously attractive
Mitchell & Robinson\(^6\) (2001) beautiful as a fairy
Marsden (2004) woman of elfin beauty

**Discussions**
Thun (1969) shining like an elf, bright (beautiful) as an elf
Huppé (1970) elvishly beautiful
Stuart (1972) beautiful as an elf / delusive as an elf / divinely inspired
Chamberlain (1975) magically / elvishly / beautiful
Chance (1986) beautiful lady shinning like an elf
Taylor (1990) elf-bright
Griffith (1997) wonderfully beautiful

**Translations**
Garnett (1889) elf-sheen
Cook and Tinker (1902) with elfin beauty
Gordon (1926) of fairy beauty
Grein (1930) elfschön
Bone (1943) beautiful as a fairy
Raffel (1964) radiant
Hamer (1970) elf-fair
Huppe (1970) alluringly lovely
Bradley (1982) of elfin beauty
Trask (1997) elf-shining
Treharne (2000) of elfin beauty

The table above does not suggest a clear image connoted by the word 'ælfscine' because 'ælfscine' is translated into Modern English literally. It can be pointed out that Modern English translators tend to intensify the aspect of beauty of the elves when they translate the Old English word 'elf.' It is very interesting that Raith (1944), Sweet\(^13\)/ Whitelock (1970), Mitchell & Robinson\(^6\) (2001), Gordon (1926) and Bone (1943) translate 'ælf' with Modern English "fairy" instead of "elf." According to *OED*, the word "fairy" comes into English via Old French in the 14\(^{th}\) century.

The Teutonic belief in elves is probably the main source of the mediaval
superstition respecting fairies, which, however, includes elements not of Teutonic origin; in general the Romanic word denotes a being less terrible and more playful character than 'elf' conceived. In mod. Literature, elf is a mere synonym of FAIRY, which has to a great extent superseded it even in dialects.\textsuperscript{310}

(underlined by the present author)

This suggests that the Old English 'ælf' is considered a rather harmless creature by some Modern English editors and translators. Such images of elves as harmless have spread over the world since the medieval period. Moreover, beautiful female fairies appeared in the Arthurian romances; people's imaginations have been especially influenced by those depicted in pre-Raphaelite drawings.

Huppé explains the meaning of "ælfscinu" in Judith 14 in the discussion part of The Web of Words (1970) as follows:

The designation of Judith as ælfscinu, 14, "elvishly beautiful", is particularly effective here in suggesting her deadly allure for Holofernes ... In Judith, ælfscinu suggests synoptically both the allure and the danger of the beauty to the evil who desires to possess it.\textsuperscript{320}

On the other hand, Huppé translates "ælfscinu" in Judith 14 as "alluringly lovely" in the same book. His interpretation of the Old English 'ælf' is different from all the other translators: He understood 'ælf' to be a dangerous creature which allures people rather than just a beautiful fairy.\textsuperscript{330}

2. 4. 2. Judith and Sarra

Judith and Sarra are the only two women modified by the adjective 'Ælfsciene' throughout the extant Old English literature. We should be careful when drawing a general conclusion from an analysis of the examples especially when the number of examples available is limited and the styles and the dialects of the existing works vary; however, it is notable that these two women share some quite interesting similarities and those similarities have strongly influenced how 'Ælfsciene' has been interpreted. Moreover, Stuart, quoted below, mentions an important point concerning the meaning of 'Ælfsciene':

Finally, we cannot doubt that both Judith and Sarah could be seen to have
been divinely inspired so as to perform their superhuman tasks, in much the same way as Beowulf receives his *mægen* from God. It is apparent that *ælfsceine* may mean 'inspired'; and that the meaning has been derived from the interaction of disparate notions about elves, specters, possession, saintliness and divinity.34

Judith and her maid penetrated the Assyrian camp in order to save the people in Bethulia which had been surrounded by the heathen general Holofernes and his army. After praying for God's help, she succeeded in beheading Holofernes all by herself. Judging her by this incident, she is the very woman who completed the "superhuman task" that Stuart mentions above. On the other hand, Sarra also did the "superhuman task" of bearing a baby boy after one hundred years of being barren. Taking these facts into consideration, Stuart interprets '*ælfsceine' as "divinely inspired" by paying attention to not only the beautiful appearance of these two women's, but also to their specific characters. Stuart's suggestion is very attractive; however, through closely reading and observing the poet's way of using the word '*ælfsceine' in the contexts, one must conclude that there is room for additional consideration. There we can find some more interesting similarities between Judith and Sarra.

As is seen in section 3, Sarra appears as a refugee from a far away land both in *Genesis* 1827 and *Genesis* 2731. Abraham is convinced that his beautiful wife Sarra should be an eye-catcher among foreign refugees. He worries that he should be killed after being deprived of Sarra by the king. In this anxious state, he calls her "mag alfschino" in *Genesis* 1827. Sarra is fated to be a center of people's attention not only because she is a beautiful woman but also because she is a foreigner full of mysterious attraction. In the case of *Genesis* 2731, Sarra is called "mæg ælfscierno" by King Abimelech just after the king understood Abraham, who had lied that Sarra was not his wife but his sister in order to save his life. In a sense, Abraham took advantage of the king's lechery; however, this was the only way left for Abraham, a foreigner who has no relatives or friends to help him. Moreover, in *Genesis*, the two kings, who deprived Abraham of Sarra without knowing the truth, were punished by God. In other words, the appearance of a beautiful foreign woman was an omen for the unfortunate future of these kings.

A quite similar situation can be observed in *Judith*. Judith penetrated the Assyrian camp in order to save the people in the Hebrew city, Bethulia. To the
heathen general Holofernes, Judith is both a beautiful foreign woman and a
refugee from a city which is facing the fall. The phrase "ælfscienu ides" is used
at the opening part of the fated night in which Holofernes is beheaded. It is
reasonable for the audience to imagine that lecherous Holofernes, who was so
fascinated by a foreign refugee, Judith, would face his unfortunate future soon.
Here again, the appearance of a beautiful female stranger works effectively in the
story as an omen for the miserable future of the ruler.

A stranger in a foreign land — a distinctive quality which can be seen simil-
arily both in Judith and Sarra is found in the 'ælf' in Beowulf 111. In Beowulf
111, 'ælf' is introduced to the audience as a stranger who has the same nature,
from a Christian point of view, as Cain's descendents — a supernatural creature
which lives in a completely different world from where ordinary people live.
Strangers in a foreign land like Sarra and Judith, in a sense, have similar qualities
to those which the Old English 'ælf' has. They are different from the native
people in many respects including religion, way of life, appearances, etc. The Old
English 'ælfsciene' could connote some specific qualities in its meaning: feel-
ings of awe or surprise toward a foreign, unknown being, or something which
foretells an ominous future. These qualities may correspond with what Belanoff
mentions: "The quality represented by the word [= 'ælfsciene'] must be recog-
nized as being far more complex than ordinary beauty..." 35

2. 4. 3. Old English 'ælfsciene' and its effect in Judith

"The language and images by which the Judith-poet depicts his multifaced
heroine and "... poetic ambivalence in her characterization"36 — these are what
make the Old English poem Judith attractive. Belanoff analyzes that the heroine
Judith is a fusion of two antagonistic qualities: sacred and secular, using two key
words denoting women 'ides' and 'mægþ.' 'Ides' is the Old English word for a
sacred woman while 'mægþ' is for a secular one, and usually, these two words are
never used for the same woman simultaneously. In other words, an 'ides' cannot
be a 'mægþ' in Old English literature; however, Belanoff points out that there is
only one exception, which is Judith to whom the poet uses these two words in
order to describe her quite complex character. Furthermore, she refers to the
particular quality of this poem, which is a fusion of Christianity and paganism.
She also insists indirectly that the poet is careful in his / her choice of words
according to the circumstance when depicting the heroine Judith:
The Judith-poet has created a character who powerfully unites the two traditions that we, in retrospect, see as coming together during the Anglo-Saxon era. I have been arguing that the poet used the connotative powers of both traditions to depict his heroine.\(^{37}\)

The poet tried to transform the original image of Judith into that of a pious Christian heroine within the framework of traditional Germanic poetry, changing considerable parts of the story rather freely. Consequently, a unique heroine, who has two antagonistic qualities — sacred and secular, and Christian and pagan — within one personality, is created.

The word '*ælfsciene' (’ælf’ + 'sciene' = elf + sheen) itself is polysemic, which consists of both Christian and pagan aspects. From the Christian viewpoint, the Old English 'ælf' and 'sciene' are essentially contradictory: the former is a supernatural being which is never beautiful and lives in a completely different world from that in which ordinary people live, while the latter represents a quality of beauty and brightness, understood often by being connected to the concept of holiness and sacredness in the Christian context. In the Anglo-Saxon world, it is impossible to find one who has these opposing qualities within one personality at the same time. In other words, one who is modified by the phrase "beautiful, shining as an elf" cannot exist in the real world where the ordinary people live; however, a foreigner who lives in another world for native people could correspond to the Old English 'ælf' which also lives in another, so to speak, supernatural world.

It was on the fourth day
that Judith,
Ælfscinu ides,
wise in thought,
first visited him.

*(Judith 12-14; translation and italics mine)*

What image of a woman hit the audience when they heard the phrase "Judith … ælfscinu ides" at the beginning of the description of the fated day in which Holofernes would be beheaded? It is unknown if the poet chose the word '*ælfscine' here consciously; however, it can be said at least that the ambiguity the word '*ælfscine' has works quite effectively in the story, corresponding to Judith's complex character.
2.5. Conclusion

We have researched the interpretations of the Old English word '*æelfsciene' appearing in Judith 14 and have analyzed the meaning of this word from various aspects. There are three examples of the word '*æelfsciene' throughout the extant Old English literature: Judith 14, Genesis 1827, Genesis 2731. '*Ælfscine' is preceded or followed by the word 'ides' or 'mæg,' both of which denote women. Three different interpretations for the phrase in question in Judith 14 have been presented: "beautiful like an elf," "delusive (flickering) like an elf," and "inspired by God." Most Modern English translators and editors tend to interpret this phrase as "beautiful like an elf," which is a literal translation from Old English into Modern English. They interpret '*æelfsciene' based on the Indo-European tradition which often connects shining things to beauty or the goodness. This association seems to derive from the spelling of '*æelfsciene': 'ælf' + 'scean' = elf + sheen. However, this simple interpretation of Modern English translators comes under doubt when we closely examine the appearances of the 'ælf' in Old English literature. It does not seem beautiful at all.

Therefore, first, we tried to analogize the meaning of '*æelfsciene' by analyzing the examples of the two constituents of this compound: Old English 'ælf' and 'scean.' Within the word 'ælf' is a strong Germanic image of a supernatural being which gives affliction, disease and pain to both human beings and animals. It could be understood from a Christian's viewpoint as an alien which lives in another world. On the other hand, the word 'scean' essentially connotes a concept of beauty along with shine and brightness, which are easily connected with holiness or sacredness. The examples of 'scean' are often found in a Christian context. The image of the word 'scean' seems to be clearly contradictory to that of 'ælf.' Consequently, the Old English '*æelfsciene' is an ambiguous word which consists of two completely opposite qualities of both the Christian and pagan world.

Then, two extant examples from Genesis (Genesis 1827 and 2731) were closely examined and were compared to the only example from Judith (Judith 14.) Two common qualities between Judith and Sarra, who are the two women modified by the adjective '*æelfsciene' throughout the Old English literature, have been pointed out so far; both of them are pious and full of Christian virtues. In addition, they perform the superhuman acts. This paper discussed a new quality which is common to both Judith and Sarra: Both of these women are foreign refugees from far away lands. Foreigners and Anglo-Saxon elves after
conversion are quite similar in certain respects. Both of them are outsiders who live in their own world which is different from that of the native people. Moreover, one interesting point, that the appearance of a beautiful foreign woman is an omen to the rulers in both Genesis and Judith is newly indicated. It is uncertain whether the poet had certain word preference for "*ælfsciene"; however, it can be imagined that various responses should have been drawn from the audience who heard the phrase "ælfscinu ides." The ambiguity in the word "*ælfsciene" works quite effectively in the story against Judith's complex character.

Notes:
10) Healey and Venezy.
12) Bosworth and Toller, s.v. eaten.
13) A. Cameron, et al., s.v. ælf-adl, ælf-cynn, ælfen, ælfere, ælfig, ælfisc, ælf-siden, ælf-sgeþa, ælfþone.
17) Bosworth and Toller, s.v. sciene.
18) Murray, s.v. sheen.
20) Belanoff, 251.
21) G. P. Krapp, ed. The Junius Manuscript, ASPR I (New York: Columbia Univ. 1931). All citations from Genesis are taken from this version.
23) Mason.
24) Bosworth and Toller, s.v. alfsceine.
25) Bosworth and Toller, s.v. alfsclinu.
27) Stuart, 1972, 22.
28) Mason, 79.
30) Dictionaries, glossaries, Modern English translations and texts referred here are as follows:

**Dictionaries and Glossaries**


**Discussions**


**Translations**

J. M. Garnett, trans., *Elene; Judith; Athelstan, or the Fight at Brunanburh and Byrhtnoth, or the Fight at Maldon: Anglo-Saxon Poems* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1889).


B. Raffel, trans., *Poems from the Old English*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press,
要旨

古英語の *ælfsciene (< ælf + sciene = elf + sheen) は、女性を修飾する形容詞で、一般的には "beautiful like an elf" と現代英語訳される。ところが、現存する古英語文献上の ælf (= elf) は、美とは無縁の、人や動物に害を及ぼす負の存在として描かれており、文字通りの翻訳とは矛盾する。古英詩 Judith に現れる *ælfsciene という語の解釈について、用例の詳細な分析と考察を行い、文献学の立場から新たな解釈を加えた。