

Ágnes Réffy Horváth

**Saint Guthlac, the Warrior of God
in the Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book¹**

During the Middle Ages, hagiography was one of the most common and typical literary genres. The lives of saints were sacred stories designed to teach the faithful to imitate actions which the Church decided were paradigmatic. The message was clear: ordinary Christians too must remain steadfast and resist the temptation of the forces of evil. In addition to this, the medieval hagiographer intended to show how God's almighty power manifested itself in the miraculous acts of a particular saint.

The genre became fashionable from the end of the fourth century. With Constantine's reign the freedom of Christian worship was theoretically ensured in the Roman Empire. People were forced to look for new ways of proving their devotion in religion. Following in the steps of the prophet Elijah, John the Baptist and also the example of Jesus' fasting in the wilderness, zealous Christians renounced worldly goods, chose solitude and asceticism, and went to live into the deserts under ascetic conditions. The biographies of these confessor saints were to be known as *vitae*. The most influential works of Christian hagiography were Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* (and its Latin translation by Evagrius), Jerome's Lives of Paul the Hermit, Hilarion and Malchus, Sulpicius Severus's *Life of Martin*, and Pope Gregory's *Life of Benedict* in his *Dialogues*. The example of the first "Desert Fathers" became well known almost immediately, and their lives inspired others. The Anglo-Saxon church became

¹ The author is grateful for the support of the Soros Foundation and to Dr. Katalin Halácsy for her encouragement.

familiar quite soon with these saints' lives which were to exercise a strong influence over the hagiographic literature of Western Europe.

In this paper I would like to show that while the Old English Guthlac poems fit in the hagiographic tradition of the Medieval Church, they still show a considerable amount of originality derived from the characteristics of Anglo-Saxon poetry. I intend to demonstrate that besides the Latin text they frequently borrowed from the treasury of Old English literature.

The primary source for our knowledge of St. Guthlac is the early eighth-century life by Felix, an Anglo-Saxon monk, written for the East-Anglian king, Ælfwald. There are thirteen medieval manuscripts, which contain either full or fragmentary versions of Felix's *Vita*. Since at least the second part of the *Guthlac* poem depends heavily on this Latin life, it will be necessary to examine some of its aspects. Felix's *Vita* was in turn influenced by earlier hagiographic works. Benjamin Kurtz describes Felix as he is

at work with the *Vita Antonii*, the *Vita Cuthberti* and the *Dialogi Gregorii* open before him, and perhaps the *Vita Martini* as well, while with the plan and spirit of the Antonius as model he pieces out the details of the oral tradition with passages and phrases from his manuscript, drawing at first most largely from Evagrius, later most often from Bede.²

Apart from Felix's *Vita*, the only early documents of any length concerned with the Guthlac material are the Old English poems on Guthlac, entries in the *Old English Martyrology*, and the Old English Prose translation of the *Vita*.³

It is accepted opinion now that the verse section devoted to St. Guthlac in the early eleventh-century collection of Old English literature consists of two distinct poems. They are known as *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, and can be found in folios 32–52 of the Exeter Cathedral MS 3501, which has been in the cathedral library at Exeter since the mid-eleventh century. *Guthlac A* consists of 818 lines and cannot have been much longer than 900 lines (some 80 lines are missing between lines 368 and 369), when it was written into the Exeter Book collection of verse in the latter part of the tenth century. The dependence of the poet upon Felix's *Vita* has often been debated, and, though few close, significant parallels can

² Benjamin P. Kurtz. "From St. Anthony to St. Guthlac." *University of California Publications in Modern Philology*, xii., no.2 (1926), p. 126.

³ Jane Roberts. "An Inventory of Early Guthlac Materials." *Mediaeval Studies*, xxxii. (1970), p. 201.

be found between the two, general critical opinion appears now to favour the poet's knowledge of Felix's *Life* even if he was not influenced strongly by it.

The remaining 560 lines of the poem are called *Guthlac B*, and they provide a detailed account of Guthlac's death. This part is incomplete, and it is impossible to judge how much of the original poem has been lost. Taking the style of the Guthlac poems into consideration, one can say that the poet of *Guthlac B* was probably a different man, and his close dependence on the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* has long been recognised. Nevertheless, he used Felix's material freely, not mechanically. He developed themes that were unimportant in or absent from his source. According to Jane Roberts, "The imagery and the diction of the poem suggest a date of composition late in the eighth century, and at any rate contemporary with the Cynewulfian canon."⁴

In this paper, I will examine both of the poems, and demonstrate the characteristic features of hagiographic literature in them while concentrating on the Anglo-Saxon colouring.

GUTHLAC A

In *Guthlac A*, the poet's main concern is the soul of just men, and the life of this particular saint, Guthlac is just one of the many ways in which a man might reach the Kingdom of Heaven. The opening twenty-nine lines were first recognised as the end of the previous poem, *Christ III*, and only later in Israel Gollanz's edition of the Exeter Book (1895) did it gain its present place at the beginning of *Guthlac A*.⁵

These lines begin with the generalised picture of the joy accompanying a righteous soul's entrance into heaven. In this part, the beauty of heaven is described by the guiding angel. The eternal happiness of God's city is contrasted with the transitory nature of this world. God, the "highest king of all kings" ("se hyhsta ealra cyninga cyning" [16b–17a]) is seen as he rules his city. This picture is well known from the *New Testament*, thus:

⁴ Jane Roberts. *An Inventory*, p. 202.

⁵ Jane Roberts. *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.

For we must all be manifested before the judgement seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil.⁶

After this introductory section there is almost a new beginning in the poem. Attention shifts from the heavenly home to the ways of serving God in the world, in order to achieve holiness. Following Robert E. Bjork's division of the prologue one can say that "the introduction consists of four verse paragraphs dealing generally with Heaven (lines 1–29), earth (30–59), common men (60–80), and the ascetic (81–92)."⁷ This section already contains many of the conventional ideas of Old English elegiac verse. It is interesting to compare these lines with parts of *The Wanderer*, e.g.:

[...] Swa þes middangeard
ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð ond fealleð,
forþon ne mæg weorþan wis wer, ær he age
wintra dæl in woruldrice.

(*The Wanderer*, 62b–65a)⁸

Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið,
þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,
swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
winde biwaune weallas stondað,
hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas.

(*The Wanderer*, 73–77)⁹

⁶ 2Cor. 5,10 *The Holy Bible*. Translated from the Latin Vulgate, The New Testament, first published by the English College at Rheims, 1582.

⁷ Robert E. Bjork. "Old English Words as Deeds and the Struggle towards Light in Guthlac A." *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives: A Study in Direct Discourse and the Iconography of Style*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1985, p. 29.

⁸ All parenthesised references of *The Wanderer* are to this edition: George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, eds. "The Exeter Book." *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936, p. 135. "So this middle earth / each of all days ageth and falleth. / Wherefore no man grows wise without he has / his share of winters..." All the parenthesised Modern English translations of the poem are from this edition: Michael Alexander. *The Earliest English Poems*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966.

⁹ In Alexander's translation: "A wise man may grasp how ghastly it shall be / when all this world's wealth standeth waste, / even as now, in many places over the earth / walls stand wind-beaten, / hung with hoarfrost; ruined habitations."

The transience of earthly glory is described with beautiful pictures in the Guthlac poem as well:

Ealdað eorþan blæd æþela gehwylcre
 ond of wite wendað wæstma gecyndu;
 bið seo siþre tid sæda gehwylces
 mætræ in mægne. Forþon se mon ne þearf
 to þisse worulde wyrpe gehycgan...

(*Guthlac A*, 43–47)¹⁰

The section closes with the explicit statement: “He fela findeð fea beoð gecorene” (*Guthlac A*, 59).¹¹ This notion can be found in the *Bible*: “For many are called, but few are chosen.”¹² With this sentence the poet returns to the ways in which one can serve God, and the redeemed and the fallen are contrasted with each other. We can see on the one hand those who praise earthly glory above all, and on the other hand the pious who serve God. The necessity of obedience toward God is emphasised time after time, which is not surprising, since apart from the aim of entertainment, the chief function of hagiographic literature was the instruction of believers. All through this part God’s order is described in hierarchical terms.

The poet gradually narrows down his scope of vision. He first describes a particular soul that reaches heaven, than looks at the whole of mankind in order to investigate the different ways one chooses to lead his life, and finally concentrates on the chosen saint.

From the generalised picture of the individual redeemed soul, the prologue descends to the many on earth who may potentially enjoy the same bliss, and “we” can “by right” belong to any one [of these ranks] if we fulfil the holy commands (32b–34b) [...] The initial words of the first

¹⁰ All parenthesised references of *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* are to this edition: George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, eds. “The Exeter Book.” *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936. All Modern English translations of the Guthlac poems are to the following edition: S. A. J. Bradley. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. London, Melbourne and Toronto: Everyman’s Library, 1982. “Earth’s vitality is aging in each of its noble qualities and the species of its offspring tend away from beauty; this latter season of each fruit is feebler in vigour. Therefore this man need not look to this world for an improvement.”

¹¹ Bradley’s translation: “He will meet many but few will be chosen.”

¹² Matt. 22,14 *The Holy Bible* Translated from the Latin Vulgate the New Testament first published by the English College at Rheims, 1582.

three sections are in themselves guides to the structure *'Monge,' 'Sume,' 'Sume.'*¹³

From ordinary men the poet directs our attention toward the eremitic, lonely dwellers (“anbuend”), who are the chosen warriors of God (“gecostan cempa”). Finally the poet chooses an example, and approaches Guthlac himself. There is a general introduction of the saint in lines 93–107. Some of the introductory ideas are reintroduced in this passage such as his obedience, his hatred of sin, the desire to dwell in Heaven, angel guardian, spiritual goodness etc.

Contrary to Felix, who described Guthlac’s life from his birth, the *Guthlac A* poet concentrates on his protagonist’s life after his “conversion,” and he only mentions the fact that he was a soldier earlier, and that he “gelufade frecnessa fela” (“loved many horrible things”). In this section there is an interesting reference to the oral tradition of the saint’s legend as the poet declares: “Hwæt we hyrdon oft” (“What we have often heard”). The poet himself could have turned to such an oral source, when writing his poem. This formula could have also indicated the presence of the oral poetic style, which was also an important feature of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

The saint’s conversion from an earthly warrior to *miles Christi* was described in a manner different from Felix. In the Latin *Vita* the saint’s change of lifestyle was due to an inward conflict, caused by the realisation of the transitory nature of earthly life. In *Guthlac A* it seemed to be a matter of external direction through divine power. An angel and an evil spirit fought over the saint, but the final decision was in the hand of God. In the ancient fight between the forces of good and evil, the idea of the world’s transitory nature and the possession of earthly treasure reappear once more in the two “fighters” reasoning.

After Guthlac is won over for the good cause, the poet goes on to describe his hermitage. In contrast to Felix, no human helper has had a part in Guthlac’s education, the God-sent “frofre gæst” (Holy Spirit) taught him, and even the place of his hermitage was revealed by God himself:

[...] Wæs seo londes stow
 bimipen fore monnum, oppæt meotud onwrah
 beorg on bearwe, þa se bytla cwom
 se þær haligne ham arærde...

(*Guthlac A*, 146b–149)¹⁴

¹³ Robert E. Bjork, p. 29.

Felix is very precise in describing the place of Guthlac's hermitage:

Ipse enim imperiis viri annuens arrepta piscatoria scafula, per *in via lustra* inter atrae plaudis margines Christo viatore ad praedictum locum usque pervenit; Crugland dicitur, insula media in palude posita quae ante paucis propter remotioris heremi solitudinem inculta vix nota habebatur. *Nullus hanc ante famulum Christi Guthlacum solus habitare colonus valebat, propter videlicet illic demorantium fantasias demonum...*¹⁵

From now on, this place gains primary importance in the poem. The desire to acquire of this particular spot becomes the reason for the continual fight with the evil spirits. The poet of *Guthlac A* does not regard it as necessary to give the exact location of the saint's new home, but he makes it clear with poetic pictures that it was an unpleasant place:

[...] on westenne
beorgas bræce, þær hy bidinge,
earne ondsacan, æror mostun
æfter tintergum tidum brucan,
þonne hy of wapuðum werge cwoman
restan rynecþragum, rowe gefegon;
wæs him seo gelyfed þurh lytel fæc.
Stod seo dygle stow dryhtne in gemyndum
idel ond æmen...

(*Guthlac A*, 208b–216a)¹⁶

¹⁴ Bradley's translation: "This rural locality had been hidden from people until the ordaining Lord revealed the hill within a wood when that builder turned up who erected a saintly retreat there."

¹⁵ Both the Latin and the English texts of the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* are from this edition: Bertram Colgrave. *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956, pp. 88–89. "Tatwine accordingly assented to the commands of the man and, taking a fisherman's skiff made his way, travelling with Christ, through trackless bogs within the confines of the dismal marsh till he came to the said spot; it is called Crowland, an island in the middle of the marsh which on account of the wildness of this very remote desert had hitherto remained untilled and known to a very few. No settler had been able to dwell alone in this place before Guthlac the servant of Christ on account of the phantoms of demons which haunted it."

¹⁶ Bradley's translation: "in the wilderness, he violated the hills where they, wretched antagonists, had formerly been allowed at times a lodging-place after their punishments, when they came weary from their wanderings to rest for a while, and enjoyed the quiet; this had been conceded them for a little time. This secret place stayed prominent in the Lord's consciousness; empty and desolate, remote from hereditary jurisdiction..."

Later the poet calls our attention once more to the fact that this *westen* (wilderness) is haunted by evil spirits and gives the following words into Guthlac's mouth:

Wid is þes westen, wræcsetla fela,
 eardas onhæle earmra gæsta.
 Sindon wærlogan þe þa wic bugað...
 (*Guthlac A*, 296–298)¹⁷

The *mearc lond* (174a, borderland, wasteland) recalls the memory of the moorland where Grendel lived with his mother in *Beowulf*:

Hie dygel lond
 warigeað wulfhleopu windige næssas,
 frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream
 under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð,
 flod under foldan. Nis þet feor heonon
 milgearnas, þæt se mere standeð;
 ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas,
 wudu wurtum fæst wæter oferhelmað.
 Þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon,
 fyr on flode. No þæs frod leofað
 gumena bearna, þæt þone grund wite.
 (*Beowulf*, 1357b–1367)¹⁸

The fearful, mysterious marshes have always been associated with different kinds of horrible creatures and demons in Anglo-Saxon literature. It is not surprising therefore that they inhabit the saint's chosen hideaway and, he, Guthlac has to put up with living there alone amid these repugnant creatures that haunt that place.

¹⁷ Bradley's translation: "Wide is this wilderness and the multitude of the fugitive settlements and the secret dwellings of wretched spirits, and those who inhabit these lodging-places are devils..."

¹⁸ All the parenthesised references of *Beowulf* are to this edition: Francis Klæber. *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1950. All the Modern English translations of *Beowulf* are from this edition: Michael Alexander. *Beowulf*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973. "Mysterious is the region / they live in – of wolf-fells, wind-picked moors / and treacherous fen-paths: a torrent of water / pours down dark cliffs and plunges into the earth, / an underground flood. It is not far from here, / in terms of miles, that the Mere lies, / overcast with dark crag-rooted trees / that hang in groves hoary with frost. / An uncanny sight may be seen at night there / – the fire in the water! The wit of living men / is not enough to know its bottom."

After depicting the saint's hermitage *Cristes cempa* (Christ's warrior) is pictured in front of us, and the concept of spiritual warfare is introduced. Although real action begins only in the next section, the poet foreshadows Guthlac's battles and his victories.

After a short eulogy on Guthlac's good character (170–178a) the poet describes the “battle-field.” Guthlac erects the sign, the cross of Christ under which he intends to overthrow the devil. Guthlac, like a real warrior of God, fights with a *gæstlicum wæpnum* (spiritual weapon). The notion of spiritual weapons came from the Bible. St. Paul even describes how to go into the battle with Evil:

Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and power, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. Therefore take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: in all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.¹⁹

This spiritual battle is a central concept in hagiographic literature, and also, in fact in other early Christian writings (e.g.: homilies). This fight theme was especially popular with the Anglo-Saxon audience who grew up on “Beowulfian” heroic literature:

In each case the opponents were the forces of evil, whose natural habitations, as the Anglo-Saxons believed were the marshes and the fens, the equivalent of the desert of the Egyptian hermits.²⁰

Although Guthlac successfully occupies the territory where the evil spirits have dwelt before, the troop of the evildoers (*teon-smiðas*) come back time after time. It is interesting to note that in *Guthlac A* the devils do not have a separate,

¹⁹ Eph. 6, 10–18. *The Holy Bible* Translated from the Latin Vulgate, the New Testament, first published by the English College at Rheims, 1582.

²⁰ Bertram Colgrave. “The Earliest English Saints’ Lives Written in England.” *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xlv (1958), 35–60.

external reality. Although different attacks are described, and these are more and more violent, the evil spirits' appearance remains more or less the same. Almost all through the poem they are referred to as *feondas* (devils, demons, enemies) *wræcmæcgas* (outcasts). These names show that the forces of the devil should not be pictured by the reader, they do not have a conceivable human form. Comparing this with Felix's *Vita*, one can see a great difference. Felix, who was relying on the Antonian tradition, presented the evil spirits in different forms,²¹ and thus they had a more tangible entity than their counterparts in the poem. Taking into consideration the inconceivable character of these black forces in *Guthlac A*, the reader of the poem is inclined to take the fight with the evil spirits on an allegorical level.

Thus Guthlac's fight, like that of every ascetic, is "in his heart [or 'soul']," and may justly be described as an inner psychological struggle, as well as a battle on psychological terrain.²²

In depicting the fight the poet sometimes recalls the battle imagery:

Da wearð breahm hæfen. Beorg ymbstodan
 hwearfum wræcmæcgas. Wod up astag,
 cearfulra cirm. Cleopedon monige,
 feonda foresprecan firenum gulpon...

(*Guthlac A*, 262–265)²³

Reading these lines, the picture of the waiting, tense and inimical troops of *The Battle of Maldon* can come into one's mind as they fought with words until such time as they could come to grips with each other. On other occasions, however, the description of the battlefield suggest a more spiritual landscape:

Symle hy Guðlac in godes willan
 fromne fundon, þonne flygereowe
 þurh nihta genipu neosan cwoman
 þa þe onhæle eardas weredon,

²¹ For instance, in XXXVI, the evil spirits terrified Guthlac in the forms of various beasts. Bertram Colgrave. *Felix's Life*, p. 115.

²² Paul F. Reinhard. "Guthlac A and the landscape of spiritual Perfection." *Neophilologus*, lviii. (1974), p. 334.

²³ Bradley's translation: "Then there was a clamour raised. Fugitive wretches surrounded the hill in clusters. The din mounted up, the hubbub of beings filled with anxiety. Many, the devil's spokesmen, shouted out and bragged outrageously."

hwæpre him þæs wonges wyn sweðrade;
 woldun þæt him to mode fore monlufan
 sorg gesohte þæt he siþ tuge
 eft to eple...

(*Guthlac A*, 348–355a)²⁴

From this point of view, the evil spirits fight more for the soul of the saint than for a physical home, and this way Guthlac's hermitage can symbolise the saint's soul. The fight actually takes place in Guthlac's own heart and mind, and for this reason he cannot take care of the

devils in one fell swoop; as spiritual doubts, fears and terrors recur, the devils present him with a constant battle that cannot be won until his last trials prove him worthy and he vanquishes his own demons.²⁵

It is interesting to note that the reader can recognise Beowulf's dragon in the portrayal of the wild-flying enemies:

[...] Hordwynne fond
 eald uhtsceaða opene standan,
 se ðe bymende biorgas seceð,
 nacod niðdraca, nihtes fleogeð
 fyre befangen; hyne foldbuend
 (swiðe ondræ)da(ð)...

(*Beowulf*, 2270–2275a)²⁶

Until Guthlac is able to conquer his own demons, he has to follow the teaching of his guardian angel, and as the repetition of a theme is a characteristic of this poem, Guthlac recalls the opening pictures of the salvation of the soul and the obedience of the mind:

²⁴ Bradley's translation: "They found Guthlac continually confident in the will of God, when, wild and on the wing, they, who inhabited secret dwelling, came seeking through the darkness of the nights whether his delight in that place was dwindling. They wished that a pining for human love would go to his heart so that he would set his course home again."

²⁵ Daniel G. Calder "Guthlac A and Guthlac B: Some Discriminations." *Anglo-Saxon: Essays in Appreciation*, ed. L.E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese. Notre Dame, 1975, pp. 65–80.

²⁶ Alexander's translation: "The Ravager of the night, / the burner who has sought out barrows from old, / then found this hoard of undefended joy. / The smooth evil dragon swims through the gloom / enfolded in flame; the folk of that country / hold him in dread."

[...] Hu sceal mín cuman
 gæst to geoce, nemne ic gode sylle
 hyrsumne hige, þæt him heortan geþonc...
 (*Guthlac A*, 366b–368)²⁷

After this section, part of the poem is missing, and the story goes on with Guthlac’s speech against the evil spirits. This speech, however, is not much different from his earlier declarations of faith.

In the following section, Guthlac’s “travels” in the air starts. He is lifted up by the devils and they show him the blameworthy customs within the walls of the monasteries. Here the monastic and eremitic life is contrasted in a similar fashion with the first part of the poem, where the ascetic lifestyle was compared with others.²⁸ Guthlac, as always, wins a decisive victory in the word-battle. He points out that there is hope for human sinners, but the evil spirits will never find comfort. Guthlac shows a genuine understanding of human nature:

Ic eow soð siþþon secgan wille.
 God scop geogude ond gumena dream;
 ne magun þa æfteryld in þam ærestan
 blæde gebe ran, ac hy blissiað
 worulde wynnum, oððæt wintra rim
 gegæð in þa geogude, þæt se gæst lufað
 onsyn ond ætwist ylðran hades
 ðe gemete monige geond middangeard
 þeowiað in þeawum. Þeodum ywaþ
 wisdom weras, wlencu forleosað,
 siððan geogude geað gæst aflihð.
 (*Guthlac A*, 493–504)²⁹

²⁷ Bradley’s translation: “How shall my spirit come to safety unless I yield to God a listening mind so that to him the heart’s thoughts...”

²⁸ *Guthlac A* lines 60–80 are contrasted with lines 81–92.

²⁹ Bradley’s translation: “I, on the other hand, will tell the truth to you: God created young people and human happiness. They cannot bring forth maturity and fruit at the very first, but they take pleasure in the world’s joys, until a term of years passes away in youthfulness so that the spirit favours the aspect and essence of a maturer status, which many men throughout the earth fittingly serve in their customary ways...”

These lines may call Guthlac's own conversion to mind. The saint could have spoken from first-hand experience, God's mercy had a decisive force in his change of lifestyle, as well.

In their final temptation the evil forces take Guthlac to the doors of hell. In Felix's version the torments of hell are described vividly:

Coniunctis itaque in unum turmis, cum immenso clamore leues in auras iter vertentes, supra memoratum Christi famulum Guthlac ad nefandas tartari fauces usque perducunt. Ille vero, fumigantes aestuantis inferni cavernas prospectans, omnia tormenta, quae prius a malignis spiritibus peressus est, tamquam non ipse pateretur obliuiscatur. Non solum enim fluctuantium flamarum ignivomos gurgites illic turgescere cerneret, immo etiam sulphurei glaciali grandine mixti vortices, globosis sparginibus sidera paene tangentes videbantur; maligni ergo spiritus inter favillantium voraginum atras cavernas discurrentes, miserabili fatu animas impiorum diversis cruciatuum generibus torquebant...³⁰

The poet of *Guthlac A* does not visualise the terrors of hell in a detailed way, since the devils appeal straight to Guthlac's mind:

Ongunnon gromheorte godes orettan
in sefan swencan...

(*Guthlac A*, 569–570a)³¹

As an ironic parallel with the opening picture of the poem, the evil spirits want to send Guthlac's soul into hell, almost in the same way as God's angel invited the blessed spirit to the eternal bliss of heaven:

Ne eart ðu gedefe, ne dryhtnes þeow
clæne gecostad, ne cempa god,
wordum ond weorcum wel gecyþed,

³⁰ Bertram Colgrave. *Felix's Life*, Ch. XXXI, p. 105. "Thus with all their forces joined in one, they turned their way with immense uproar into the thin air, and carried the afore-named servant of Christ, Guthlac, to the accursed jaws of hell. When he indeed beheld the smoking caverns of the glowing infernal region, he forgot all the torments which he had patiently endured before at the hands of wicked spirits, as though he himself had not been the sufferer. For not only could one see there the fiery abyss swelling with surging flames, but even the sulphurous eddies of flame mixed with icy hail seemed almost to touch the stars with drops of spray; and evil spirits running about amid the black caverns and gloomy abysses tortured the souls of the wicked, victims of a wretched fate, with various kinds of torments..."

³¹ Bradley's translation: "Cruelhearted, they tormented God's warrior in his mind..."

halig in heortan. Nu þu in helle scealt
 deope gedufan, nales dryhtnes leoht
 habban in heofonum, heahgetimbru,
 seld on swegle, forþon þu synna to fela
 facna gefremedes in flæschoman.
 We þe nu willað womma gehwylces
 lean forgielðan þær þe lapaðst bið
 in ðam grimmostan gæstgewinne.

(*Guthlac A*, 579–589)³²

Guthlac's determination to follow God's rule alone and his obedience bring him final victory. Now it is the saint's turn to threaten the evil spirits with the torments of hell, and this time the torments are depicted in even darker colours:

Sindon ge wærlogan, swa ge in wræcsiðe
 longe lifdon, lege biscente,
 swearte beswicene, swegle benumene,
 dreame bidrorene, deaðe bifolene,
 firenum bifongne, feores orwenan,
 þæt ge blindnesse bote fundon.
 Ge þa fæggran gesceaft in fyrndagum,
 gæstlicne goddream, gearo forsegon,
 þa ge wiðhogdum halgum dryhtne.
 Ne mostun ge a wunian in wyndagum
 ac mid scome scyldum scofene wurdon
 fore oferhygdum in ece fyr,
 ðær ge sceolon dreogan deað ond þystro,
 wop to widan ealdre; næfre ge þæs wyrpe gebidað...

(*Guthlac A*, 623–636)³³

³² Bradley's translation: "You are not worthy, no servant of the Lord purely assayed, no virtuous soldier well known for words and deeds, holy in heart. Now you shall sink deep into hell and not possess the light of the Lord in the heavens, the mansions aloft and a throne in the sky, because you have committed too many sins and evils in the flesh. Now we will pay the reward for each one of your crimes where it will be most loathsome for you, in the fiercest spiritual suffering..."

³³ Bradley's translation: "You are betrayers of trust: accordingly you have long lived in exile, inundated with flame, having been miserably deceived, deprived of heaven, despoiled of happiness, delivered up to death, ensnared by sins, without hope of life, that you would find a cure for

In spite of the terrors of hell, Guthlac is sure that he will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In confirmation of this belief, God's angel, St. Bartholomew appears and orders the demons to take back the saint to his home.

Guthlac's victorious arrival at his *beorge* is the opening picture of the final section of the poem. He possesses now the *sigewong* (victorious plain), which was the object he desired after his conversion to eremitic life,

and so it represents his higher hopes for spiritual achievement, on it, as well as through it, he projects his fears and doubts, and in his decisive winning of it we recognise the outer sign of an inner victory...³⁴

This home for his body also symbolises the perfect soul (*gæstes hus* [802]), and as the surroundings of his dwelling-place revive in this scene, so is the saint's soul reborn again:

Smolt wæs se sigewong ond sele niwe,
fæger fugla reord, folde geblowen;
geacas gear budon. Guþlac moste,
eadig ond onmod eardes brucan.

(*Guthlac A*, 742–745)³⁵

God banished the evil spirits from that place, and in a similar fashion, Guthlac's soul became inaccessible for the evil forces. The poem culminates in the picture of the perfected soul. In the final part of the poem, the poet gives a marginal description of the saint's life after his glorious victory. Guthlac's death is not even mentioned, only the manner in which his soul was led to the eternal home. The poem ends in Heaven, step by step the poet widens his horizon, and using Guthlac's example he generalises his message. The pictures of the city of God, God's angels, and the redeemed souls reappear, and together with the description of the prologue create a frame to the poem. The closing, cosmic picture of *Guthlac A* (790–817) is very similar to that of *The Dream of the Rood*:

blindness. In ancient days you renounced this lovely creation and spiritual happiness in God when you rejected the holy Lord. You could not be allowed to go on living for ever in days of content, but contumely for your crimes you were thrust because of your presumptuous thoughts, into everlasting fire where you shall endure death and darkness, and lamentation into boundless eternity: never will you relief experience relief from it."

³⁴ Daniel Calder, p. 77.

³⁵ Bradley's translation: "Guthlac, blessed and resolute, could enjoy his dwelling place. The green sight stood under God's protection; the defender who came from the heavens had driven the devils away."

[...] ic wene me
 daga gehwylce hwænne me Dryhtnes rod,
 þe ic her on eorðan ær sceawode,
 on þysson lænan life gefetige
 me þonne gebringe þær is blis mycel,
 dream on heofonum, þær is Dryhtnes folc
 geseted to symle, þær is singal blis,
 ond me þonne asette þær ic syþþan mot
 wunian on wuldre, well mid þam halgum
 dreames brucan. Si me Dryhten freond,
 se ðe her on eorþan ær þrowode
 on þam gealgtreowe for guman synnum:
 he us onlȳsde ond us lif forgeaf,
 heofonlice ham. Hiht wæs geniwad
 mid bledum ond mid blisse þam þe þær bryne þolodan;
 se Sunu wæs sigorfæst on þam siðfate,
 mihtig ond spedig, þa he mid manigeo com,
 gasta weorode, on Godes rice,
 Anwealda ælmihtig, englum to blisse
 ond eallum ðam halgum þam þe on heofonum ær
 wunedon on wuldre, þa heora Wealend cwom,
 ælmihtig God, þær his edel wæs.

(*The Dream of the Rood*, 135b–156)³⁶

³⁶ All the parenthesised references of *The Dream of the Rood* are to this edition: Bruce Dickins and Alan S. C. Ross, eds. *Dream of the Rood*. London: Methuen. 1963. All the translations of this poem are from this edition: S. A. J. Bradley. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. London, Melbourne and Toronto: Everyman's Library, 1982. "[...] and I hope each day for the time when the Cross of the Lord, which I once gazed upon here on earth, will fetch me from this transitory life and then bring me to where there is great happiness, joy in heaven, where the Lord's people are placed at the banquet, where there is unceasing happiness; and will place me where I may afterwards dwell in glory and fully partake of joy with the saints. May the Lord be a friend to me, who here on earth once suffered on the gallows –tree for the sins of men. He redeemed us and gave us life, and heavenly home. Hope was renewed with dignity and with happiness for those who had once suffered burning. The Son was victorious in that undertaking, powerful and successful, when he came with a multitude, the company of souls, into God's kingdom, the one almighty Ruler, to the delight of the angels and of all the saints who had previously dwelt in glory in the heavens, where their Ruler, almighty God, came where his home was."

In both poems, the audience's attention is directed toward the Heavenly City of Jerusalem, the home of the righteous.

It is clear from *Guthlac A* that the poet is not primarily concerned with the life of St. Guthlac, but uses the example of his passion to illustrate one way in which a man who has faith may gain everlasting joy.

GUTHLAC B

Though there is still dispute over the relationship between *Guthlac A* and Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, scholarly opinion agrees on the fact that *Guthlac B* was based on the *Vita*, namely on its fiftieth chapter. This section of the Latin work deals with the saint's illness and death. Death scenes had already gained primary importance in the course of the narrative in the Latin prototypes (e.g. in Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*, in Jerome's *Life of Paul*, etc.).

Felix followed this tradition, but his death scene was closest to Bede's *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, and he might have borrowed from his predecessor. This was not an unknown phenomenon among the medieval hagiographers, since

[i]n this narrative frame, action becomes ritual, and specific action becomes specific ritual. For sacred biographers, there existed a veritable thesaurus of established approved actions, which they could employ in their text. The repetition of actions taken from Scripture or from earlier saint's lives (often this practice extended to appropriating the exact language) ensured the authenticity of the subject's sanctity...³⁷

In the same way, the poet of *Guthlac B* could turn to Felix's material freely. Unfortunately, *Guthlac B* is incomplete, and it is impossible to estimate the exact number of the lines lost.

Just as in the prologue of *Guthlac A*, the poet of *Guthlac B* starts his poem with a generalised cosmic view. He moves back in time to the creation, and the original sin of men. He uses Felix's starting theme, the inescapability of death. "Nam sicut mors in Adam data est, ita et in omnes dominabitur."³⁸ But he develops this topic further. He describes "earthly heaven," Paradise, the home of eternal joy. This is the only place in the poem where the poet diverges

³⁷ Thomas J. Heffernan. *Sacred Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 6.

³⁸ *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*. Translated by Colgrave, Ch. L, p. 152: "For just as death was prescribed in Adam so it is to have dominion over all."

considerably from Felix's material. The Fall of Man is described in beautiful alliterative lines (819–843a). But the idyllic picture is disrupted by the appearance of death, as a punishment for the disobedience of the first couple. In contrast with the first part of the prologue, dark visions dominate the description:

Sipþan se eþel uðgenge weað
 Adame ond Euan, eardwica cyst
 beorht oðbroden, ond hyra beamum swa,
 eaferum æfter, þa hy on uncyððu,
 scomum scudende, scofene wurdon
 on gewinworuld. Weorces onguldon
 deopra firena, þurh deaðes cwealm,
 þe hy unsnyttrum ær gefremedon.
 Bære synwære sipþan sceoldon
 mægð ond mæggas morþres ongyldon,
 godscyldge gym, þurh gæstgedal,
 deopra firena.

(*Guthlac B*, 851–863a)³⁹

Adam and Eve became exiles from God, and because of their sin mankind had to suffer, as well. This part of the poem is very important, it establishes the basic motifs that recur later.

One can trace a complex metaphorical pattern in the prologue to *Guthlac B*, which operates in the narrative on several levels. Images of a paradise with all its beauty gone pervade the prologue and extend throughout the poem; and partly-personified Death stalks through the action in several forms: as a separation of soul from body; as a drink mankind sips from the cup Eve gave to Adam; and as a thief in the night who unlocks life's treasure and steals it away.⁴⁰

³⁹ Bradley's translation: "Thereafter this homeland grew inaccessible to Adam and Eve; this radiant and most excellent of dwelling-places was snatched from them and from their children alike and their offspring after them, when, hurrying, in shame, they were thrust into an alien land, into a world of toil. For the action of the profound sins which rashly they had formerly committed they paid in the anguish of death. From then on, in the punishment of wickedness, women and men, guilty before God, would have to pay for their crime the penalty of their profound sins, through the soul's dis severance..."

⁴⁰ Daniel Calder, p. 70.

From the generalised picture of earthly hardship, the poet turns our attention towards those who tried to compensate for man's first sin, and among them Guthlac's figure appears at the end of the prologue (879). Bearing in mind the fact that the poet uses Felix's material it is not surprising that he refers to a written source, *us secgað bec* ("book tells us how" [878]).

After a short eulogy about the saint's fame (881a–893), the poet looks back on the different stages of Guthlac's life, and gives a sketchy description of the most important events. This epitome follows the outline of Felix's story. The attacks of the devils, where the picture of the battle-field appears (894–915) corresponds to chapter XXXVI; the obedience and praise of the birds (916–919) corresponds to chapters XXXVIII and XXXIX; Guthlac's healing of the sick in mind and body (919b–932a) has parallels in chapters XLI–XLII. It is clear from this part that Guthlac has already won the most decisive spiritual battles by the time the events in the poem start. These references to earlier plots in the saint's life might be proof against the supposition that *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* were actually one poem. Though it might be possible that *Guthlac B* was intended as a complementary piece, since Guthlac's death is only vaguely mentioned in *Guthlac A*, and the poet of the latter might have known this poem when he wrote his own version. However, even if *Guthlac A* might have presented some themes to illustrate the saint's life, the *Guthlac B* poet was still more influenced by Felix's account. The miracles that were performed after his victory over the host of devils are briefly mentioned, and finally Guthlac's own death is introduced quite abruptly:

[...] endedogor
 þurh nydgedal neah geþrunge,
 siþþan he on westenne wiceard geceas,
 fiftynu gear, þa wæs frofre gæst
 eadgum æbodan ufan onsended,
 halig of heahþu. Hreþer innan born,
 afysed ond forsdīð. Him færinga
 adl in gewod . He on elne swa þeah
 ungeblyged bad beorhtra gehata,
 bliþe in burgum –

(*Guthlac B*, 933b–942a)⁴¹

⁴¹ Bradley's translation: "The day of the ending of warfare and austerities as to the world, through death's inevitable disseverance, was now near advanced – fifteen years after he had chosen a

A new fight starts, on this occasion between Guthlac and Death. The theme of the separation of body and spirit appears here first, but this notion recurs again and again during the course of the poem, expressed by beautiful compounds. There are several poetic expressions for the body as the soul's container (e.g.: *bancofa* – 'bone dwelling' [942], *lichord* – 'body-treasure' [956], *banfæt* – 'bone vessel' [1193], *banhus* – 'bone house' [1367], *banloca* – 'bone enclosure' [980], *sawelhus* – 'house of the soul' [1030], *flaschoma* – 'fleshly covering' [1031], *gwothord* – 'earthen treasure' [1266], etc.). At the same time the terms for death are very often compounds containing the word *gedal*, 'separation' as their final element (*gæstgedal* – 'separation of the soul and body' [1138], *deaðgedal* – 'separation of death' [963], *sawelgedal* – 'parting of soul and body' [1035], *lifgedal* – 'parting from life' [1046], *nydgedal* – 'forced dissolution' [934], *feorggedal* – 'separation from life' [1178], *peodengedal* – 'death of a master' [1350]).

At the beginning of the third section Guthlac's courage and determination is emphasised. The fall of man theme reappears, but this time the *bittor bædeweg* (bitter drinking vessel) is offered to Guthlac. Death is depicted as a bloodthirsty warrior *wiga wælgifre* or as a monster-like creature like Grendel, when he sets off to get his prey:

[...] Swa wæs Guðlace
 enge anhoga ætryhte þa
 æfter nihtscuan, neah gepyded,
 wiga wælgifre.

(*Guthlac B*, 996b–999a)⁴²

St. Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians personifies Death as God's enemy: "And the enemy death shall be destroyed last."⁴³ The poet of *Guthlac B* was also influenced by this scene, and the personification of death and Guthlac's fight with it stand in the centre of his poem. Guthlac has foreknowledge of his approaching death, which knowledge is natural since the gift of prophecy was a characteristic feature of the saints.

dwelling-place in the wilderness. Then the Holy Ghost from the heights, the Comforter, was sent from above to the blessed evangelist. His breast was afire within, inspired with yearning for the onward path. Suddenly sickness invaded him, but even so with courage he waited unafraid for the sublime things promised, cheerful in those places of refuge."

⁴² Bradley's translation: "Just so had the cruel companionless thing, a warrior greedy for slaughter, approached closely, right up to Guthlac now, through the darkness of night."

⁴³ 1Cor. 15,26.

From the Antonian tradition in general, and from Bede in particular Felix had inherited a kind of dramatic setting and action for the dying days of a saint. But the setting and action he inherited were largely external in form and impersonal in affect: Descriptions of the saint's final temptations and fortitude, healing miracles and 0prescience of his own death, and consoling and instructive conversation with a servant or close friend.⁴⁴

The Guthlac poet redeveloped Felix's description both stylistically and thematically. This is particularly perceptible in the description of Guthlac's meeting with his servant Beccel, who remains unnamed in the poem. In the Latin version Guthlac offers consolation only once to Beccel, in the Old English poem there are four encounters between the two men, and the saint tries to encourage his servant on each occasion. Apart from consolation, the saint prophesies on his approaching death, and keeps the discussion centred on his final departure. This death gains primary importance in Christian cosmology. From the beginning of the poem, the *Guthlac B* poet uses the connection between Guthlac and prominent figures in Christian history. The most important people, who are mentioned, are Adam, Christ and Satan. Christ in traditional Christian typology is a second Adam, who redeemed the world and gave back what was taken away from the human beings. In a similar way,

[a]s the poem advances, the poet clearly shows how the saint's deeds reverse the destructive process that sin initiated. Becoming an obvious type of Christ, Guthlac ultimately re-enacts the redeeming, revivifying ritual of Christ's death and resurrection.⁴⁵

This typological parallel was further developed by the fact that Guthlac's "passion" from his sickness to his death is presented in seven days, followed by the eighth when Guthlac's soul travels to the eternal home. The historical fact reported by Felix, and also noted down by the *Guthlac B* poet, that Guthlac died during the Easter period, gives even more emphasis to the connection between Guthlac and Christ.

The perpetually recurring cycle of the seven-day week was a natural and immediate symbol for the normal course of history, while Christ's

⁴⁴ James L. Rosier. "Death and Transfiguration: *Guthlac B*." *Philological Essays*, Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt (The Hague, 1971), p. 84.

⁴⁵ Bjork, p. 91.

resurrection, as an event which prefigured the salvation of the just, obviously transcended history. At the same time the seventh day on which God rested after creating the world, was an immediate symbol of heavenly rest.⁴⁶

Guthlac in predicting his death uses elaborate pictures (e.g.: Death is an approaching warrior who departs the soul from body [1033b–1035a]). His steady faith and courage in facing death is contrasted with Beccel's grief and sorrow. In Old English society the bonds between lord and his thane were very important. The lord gave protection and in return he received unconditional loyalty. Without his lord, the warrior became a homeless exile. The possibility of this kind of separation fills Beccel with sorrow, in spite of his Christian faith in the existence of Heaven.

The fourth part of the poem starts with Guthlac's speech to his servant. The saint talks about the separation of his soul in a happier tone. Eternal joy is the heavenly reward that Guthlac will receive. This section is very important because there are explicit references to Christ's resurrection, and to his victory over death. It is Easter-day. Guthlac's Christ-like quality is indicated by the poet when he narrated how the saint (*eadga wer* – 'blessed man') in spite of his poor physical condition rose from his bed. His long speech here is the most memorable teaching in the poem because it carries the message of redemption.

In the fifth part of the work the picture of death is fully developed:

[...] Deað nealæcte,
 stop stalgongum, strong ond hreðe
 sohte sawelhus. Com se seofeða dæg
 ældum ondweard þæs þe him in gesonc
 hat, heortan neah, hildescurun,
 flacor flanþracu, feorhhord onleac
 searocægum gesoht.

(*Guthlac B*, 1139b–1145a)⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Thomas D. Hill. "The Typology of the Week and the Numerical Structure of the Old English *Guthlac B*." *Mediaeval Studies*, xxxvii (1975), 531–536.

⁴⁷ Bradley's translation: "Death was drawing near; with stealthy steps it advanced, and, strong and cruel, it sought out the house of the soul. The seventh day came into existence for mortals since the flying volley of arrows in belligerent showers sank into him, burning, close to his heart, and unlocked the treasury of his spirit, it having been probed with cunning keys."

Guthlac as a real *miles Christi* fights bravely against him, but he is *awrecen wælpilum* (struck by the deadly dart). The poet describes the saint's agony elaborately. Guthlac gives his final instructions for his burial, and sends a message to his sister. This sister remains unnamed, though we know from Felix's version that she was called Pega. The fact that only the saint is referred to by name in the poem, indicates the poet's effort to make the audience concentrate on Guthlac's figure, and on his glorified death, alone.

There is a short digression from the death scene, when a response to the servant's question indicates that Guthlac was strengthened by the presence of a God-sent angel. This angelic visitation is the privilege of the saints, and it is also a proof for the saint's sanctity.

Guthlac's reference to the friendship between himself and his servant underlines the strong emotional bond between a lord and his thanes which existed in Anglo-Saxon society. The description of this relationship makes *Guthlac B* more "human." In the course of the encounters between Guthlac and his servant, the same themes reappear (separation of soul and body, heavenly joy, etc.), but they all point toward the same end, the final redemption of Guthlac's soul. There are four long comforting speeches set among four descriptions of advancing disease, and four expressions of grief on the servant's part. Each time a theme recurs it is developed further, and finally we arrive at the much-foreshadowed death of Guthlac. The saint remains firm till his last moment. Compared to Felix's Guthlac, who just "passively" leaned against the wall, the Old English warrior saint had *ellen on innan* (courage inside) until the very end.

Though he follows Felix's *Vita* the poet of *Guthlac B* gives an even more elaborate description of the miraculous phenomena that accompanied Guthlac's death. This passage is one of the most beautiful parts of the poem. The sweet odours, the blossoming flowers, the noble radiance recall somehow the picture of Paradise that was described at the beginning of the poem. The saint's happy mood, however, is contrasted with the pain caused by the darts of death. We are reminded once more of the struggle between Guthlac and Death. Again the saint rises, *eadig, elnes gemyndig* (mindful of his courage); takes the Eucharist and his soul leaves his body.

In the seventh part of the poem Guthlac's soul is taken to heaven by angels. The saint has accomplished his task in the world and for this reason he has

deserved his heavenly reward.⁴⁸ There is an interesting reference to the fact, that the saint's body grew cold. With this statement the poet further emphasises the irreversible separation of body and soul. This notion can also be found in *The Dream of the Rood*, where Christ's dead body is described in the same way: "Hræp colode / fæger feorgbold..." (*The Dream of the Rood*, 72b–73a).⁴⁹

It is also interesting that the flood of light that accompanies the two deaths is described with similar words, though *beam* means 'cross' in *The Dream of the Rood* and 'beam' in *Guthlac B*:

[...] Ða þær leoht ascan,
 beama beorhtas. Eal þæt beacen wæs
 ymb þæt halge hus, heofonlic leoma,
 from foldan up swylce fyren tor
 ryht aræred...

(*Guthlac B*, 1309b–1312a)⁵⁰

And in *The Dream of the Rood*:

Þuhte me þæt ic gesawe syllicre treow
 on lyft lædan leohte bewunden,
 beama beorhost. Eall þæt beacen wæs
 begotten mid golde...

(4–7a)⁵¹

The marvellous light and sweet smells are familiar from Felix's description; the Old English poet, however, talks about the trembling of the earth as an explanation for the servant's fear. With the description of the movement of earth the poet further emphasises the Christ-like character of his hero, since Jesus' death was also accompanied by an earthquake.

The servant's journey to the saint's sister gives the poet the opportunity to draw from the Old English commonplace: the themes of departure and arrival. Like the passage that described the surroundings of the dead saint, this part is also

⁴⁸ "What Adam took away from mankind and Christ restored Guthlac (B) likewise restores through his saintly life" (Calder, p. 78).

⁴⁹ Bradley's translation: "The corpse, the beautiful lodging place of life, grew cold..."

⁵⁰ Bradley's translation: "Then a light blazed out there, brightest among beams. This beacon quite surrounded the holy house, a heavenly incandescence raised straight up, like a fiery tower..."

⁵¹ Bradley's translation: "It seemed to me that I saw a wondrous tree spreading aloft spun about with light, a most magnificent timber. The portent was all covered with gold..."

highly ornamented (in Felix's version there is only a short reference to this journey). There are decorative variations, kennings: *wæghengest* ('wave-horse,' 1329), *waterpisa* ('water-courser,' 1329), *brimwudu* ('sea wood,' 1331), *lagumearg* ('water horse,' 1332), *hærnflota* ('sea-ship,' 1333). The beauty of the repetitive variations is enhanced by assonance (e.g.: *sund-*, *sond-*) and the presence of rhymes (e.g.: *sond*, *lond*). It is not the aim of this paper to analyse the diction, metre and the language of this poem, but it is important to note down Schaar's remark: "patterns of repetition, recomposition and balance" are typical of Old English poetry in general, "but they are not often to be found in other individual poems with such consistency, in such density and profusion."⁵²

It is because of its use of language that scholarly opinion classify *Guthlac B* as part of the "Cynewulfian school," while *Guthlac A* bears greater resemblance to the older narrative tradition (*Beowulf*, *The Dream of the Rood*).

The final part of the extant *Guthlac B* deals with Beccel's report to the saint's sister. In this section the loss of the servant's companion is described beautifully. Beccel's grief is similar to that of the lordless Wanderer:

Ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstondan,
 ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman.
 For ðon domgeorne dreorigne oft
 in hyra breostcofan bindað fæste;
 swa ic modsefan minne scolde –
 oft earmcearig, eðle bidæled,
 freomægum feor – feterum sælan,
 siþþan geara iu goldwine minne
 hrusan heolstre biwrah, ond ic hean þonan
 wod wintercearig ofer waþema gebind,
 sohte sele dreorig sinces bryttan,
 hwær ic feor oþþe neah findan meahte
 þone þe in meoduhealle min mine wisse,
 oþþe mec freondleasne frefran wolde,
 weman mid wyllum.

(*The Wanderer*, 15–29a)

⁵² C. Schaar. "Critical Studies in the Cynewulf Group." *Lund Studies in English*, xvii (1949), p. 41.

[...] Wyn eal gedreas!
 Forþon wat se þe sceal his winedryhtnes
 leofes larcwidum longe forþolian,
 “ðonne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre
 earme anhogan oft gebindað.
 Þinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten
 clyppe on cysse ond on cneo legge
 honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær
 in geardagum giefstolas breac.
 Ðonne onwæcneð eft wineleas guma,
 gesihð him biforan fealwe wegas,
 baþian brimfuglas, brædan feþra,
 hreosan hrim ond snaw, hagle gemenged.
 Ðonne beoð þy hefigran heortan benne,
 sare æfter swæsne: Sorg bið geniwad.

(*The Wanderer*, 35b–50)⁵³

It is impossible to determine how much is missing from the poem, but if we accept the assumption that *Guthlac B* has strong links with Felix’s *Vita* than it is presumable that the poet gave an account of Pega’s journey to Guthlac’s hermitage, of the saint’s burial and perhaps of the discovery of the uncorrupted body some time later. But the message gets to the audience however, even in its unfinished form. Guthlac’s life reflects the course of human history, and his death seems to anticipate the final resurrection. The saint imitates Christ through his blameless life, and in this way takes part in redemption.

⁵³ In Alexander’s translation: “No weary mind may stand against Weird / nor may a wrecked will work new hope; / wherefore most often, those eager for fame / bind the dark mood fast in their breasts. / So must I also curb my mind, / cut off from country, from kind far distant, / by cares overworn, bind it in fetters; / this since, long ago, the ground’s shroud / enwrapped my gold friend. Wretched I went thence, / Winter-wearied, over the waves’ bound; / dreary I sought hall of a gold-giver, / where far or near I might find / him who in meadhall might take head of me, / furnish comfort to a man friendless, / win me with cheer.” And “[...] Fallen all of his joy. / He knows this who is forced to forgo his lord’s, / his friend’s counsels, to lack them for long: / oft sorrow and sleep, banded together, / come to bind the lone outcast; / he thinks in his heart then he his lord / claspeþ and kisseth, and on knee layeth / hand and head, as he had at otherwhiles / in days now gone, when he enjoyed the gift-stool. / Awakeneth after this friendless man, / seeth before him fallow waves, / seabirds bathing, broading out feathers, / snow and hail swirl, hoar frost falling. / Then all the heavier his heart’s wounds, / sore for his loved lord. Sorrow freshens.

As we have seen, the Old English Guthlac poems show a considerable amount of originality, even though they owe much to the Latin hagiographic tradition. Their protagonist St. Guthlac, a *warrior* simply exchanges one form of warfare for another. This kind of fighting spirit probably impressed the Anglo-Saxon audience. In both of the poems Guthlac's fights stand in the centre of the work. In *Guthlac A* the poet describes the saint's victorious battle over the evil spirits of the marshland, in *Guthlac B* the heroic fight with Death is in the focus. The dark forces are very similar to Beowulf's monsters, they share the fact that in both works they are the outcasts of God, the seeds of Cain. In *Guthlac B* the evil spirits are even characterised in changing forms, one of which was a dragon:

Hwilum wedende swa wilde deor
 cirmdon on corðe, hwilum cyrdon eft
 minne mansceaþan on mennisc hiw
 breahma mæste, hwilum brugdon eft
 awyrgde wærlogan on wymes bleo,
 earne adloman attre spowdon...

(*Guthlac B*, 902–12)⁵⁴

This picture has a Biblical antecedent as well, since *The Book of Revelation* also portrayed Satan as a dragon.⁵⁵ Alongside the heroic ideal of the fighting champion and the epic imagery, the characteristic sentiments of the Anglo-Saxon society gain space as well. The transitory nature of earth and the terrible state of the outcast creatures are expressed with words that are well known from the Anglo-Saxon elegies (*The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*). The bond that requires loyalty and love between lord and thane is described in Guthlac's relationship to both God and his servant.

In *Guthlac A* the fight with the demons moves towards allegory. There is a cosmic perspective in which the reader can see the saint's internal battle. The fights happen in space, and with a circular structure the poem begins and ends in heaven. *Guthlac B*, on the other hand, tells us about the fulfilment of Guthlac's soul. The progress moves through time from Adam to Guthlac.

⁵⁴ Bradley's translation: "Sometimes raging like wild beasts they clamour in chorus, sometimes the evil and wicked ravagers would turn back into human form with the utmost din, sometimes the damned faith-breakers would be transformed again into the shape of a dragon."

⁵⁵ Rev. 12.

It is clear from the Guthlac poems' structure, language and style that these two poems have always existed as two distinct compositions by two different poets, though their placement in the Exeter manuscript suggests that someone wanted them to be read as a single account of the saint's life. But the forced tie between the poems does not hold them together, and the critics have concentrated on the two separate parts. One thing can be said, however: in both of them, the figure of the saint shares a common theology and achieves the same heavenly reward. Both poems fit in the wider context of Anglo-Saxon literature, but while *Guthlac A* "consecrates a place" *Guthlac B* "fulfils and redeems time."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Calder, p. 75.

The opening of Guthlac A, one of two poems about the Anglo Saxon saint, Guthlac, in the Exeter Book. View images from this item (2). Usage terms © Exeter Cathedral Library and Archives. The Old English Andreas, like Guthlac, is also about reclaiming landscapes that have been taken by sinister forces. But whereas the fens of the latter are at a distance from human habitation (like Grendel's fens in Beowulf), Andreas sees St Andrew undertake a perilous mission to a stone-built city named Mermedonia, whose inhabitants are devil-worshipping cannibals. After a dangerous journey by sea, Andrew enters the city to free St Matthew and the other captives held there, whereupon he is seized and tortured by the populace, who are spurred on by demons.