Saint Guthlac, the Warrior of God
in the Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book

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, Ælfwold. 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

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.”

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.

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:

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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.:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[...] Swa þes middangeard} \\
ealra dogra gehwam dreoséð ond fealléð, \\
forþon ne læg weorþan wis wer, ær he age \\
wintra dæl in woruldrice. \\
\text{(The Wanderer, 62b–65a)}^8
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bid,} \\
þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð, \\
swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard \\
winde biwaune weallas stondæð, \\
hríme bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas. \\
\text{(The Wanderer, 73–77)}^9
\end{align*}
\]

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


\(^9\) 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 hoar-frost; ruined habitations.”
The transience of earthly glory is described with beautiful pictures in the Guthlac poem as well:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ealdað eorþan blæd æþela gehwylcre} \\
\text{ond of white wendað wæstma gecyndu;} \\
\text{bíd seo síþre tid sæda gehwylces} \\
\text{mætre in mægne. Forþon se mon ne þearf} \\
to pisse worulde wyrpe gehycgan...
\end{align*}
\]

\(\text{(Guthlac A, 43-47)}\)

The section closes with the explicit statement: “He fela findeð fea beoð gecorene” \(\text{(Guthlac A, 59)}\).\(^{11}\) 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 \textit{Guthlac A} and \textit{Guthlac B} are to this edition: George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, eds. “The Exeter Book.” \textit{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. \textit{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 feeble 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 \textit{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.’\(^3\)

From ordinary men the poet directs our attention toward the eremitic,
lonely dwellers (“anbuend”), who are the chosen warriors of God (“gecostan
cempan”). 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
frennessa 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
[...]
Wæs seo londes stow 
\text{bimipen fore monnum, oppæt meotud onwrah} 
\text{beorg on bearwe, ða se bytla cwom} 
\text{se þær haligne ham arærde...}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{14}\) Guthlac A, 146b–149

\(^{13}\) 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 invia lustra
inter atrae plaudis margines Christo viatore ad praedictum locum usque
pervenit; Crugland dicitur, insula media in palude posita quae ante
paucis propter remotoris heremi solitudinem inulta vix nota
habebatur. Nullus hanc ante famulum
Christi Guthlacum
solus habitare
columus 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 \textit{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:

\[ [...] \text{on westenne}
\text{beorgas bræce, þær hy bidinge,}
\text{earme ondsacan, æror mostun}
\text{æfter tintergum tidum brucan,}
\text{þonne hy of wærum werge cwoman}
\text{restan rynepragum, rowe gefegon;}
\text{was him seo gelyfed þurh lytel fæc.}
\text{Stod seo dygle stow dryhtne in gemyndum}
\text{idel ond æmen...} \]

\textit{(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 \textit{Vita Sancti Guthlaci} are from this edition: Bertram Colgrave. \textit{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 untitled 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wid is } & \text{̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃̃"
SAINT GUTHLAC, THE WARRIOR OF GOD

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 gæsilicum 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-smidæs) 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.
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) wæcmaegas (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, 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.

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

\[
\text{Da weard breahmn hæfen. Beorg ymbstodan} \\
\text{hwærfum wæcmaegas. Woð up astag,} \\
\text{ceafuræ cirm. Cleopedon monige,} \\
\text{feonda foresprecan firenum gulpon...}
\]

*(Guthlac A, 262–265)*

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:

\[
\text{Symle hy Guðlac in godes willan} \\
\text{fromne fundon, þonne flygereowe} \\
\text{þurh nihta genipu neosan cwoman} \\
\text{þa þe onhaele eardes weredon,}
\]

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


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.”
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.\textsuperscript{25}

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

\textit{[...]} Hordwynne fond
eald uhtsceaða opene standan,
se ðe byrnedende biorgas seced,
nacod niðdraca, nihtes fleoged
fyre befangen; hyne foldbuend
(swîðe ondræ)dað(ð)...\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{(Beowulf, 2270-2275a)}

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:

\textsuperscript{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.”


\textsuperscript{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.”
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. 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:

\[
\text{Ic eow sod sippon secgan wille.}
\text{God scop geogude ond gumena dream;}
\text{ne magun þa æfterylde in þam ærestan}
\text{blæde geberan, ac hy blissiað}
\text{worulde wynnum, oddæt wintra rim}
\text{gegeð in þa geogude, þæt se gæst lufað}
\text{onsyn ond ætwist yldran hades}
\text{ðe gemete monige geond middangeard}
\text{þeowiað in þeawum. Þeodum ywaf}
\text{wisdom weras, wlan luferosad,}
\text{siðdan geogude gead gæst aflihð.}
\]

\[(\text{Guthlac } A, \text{ 493–504})^{29}\]
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 leves in auras iter vertentes, supra memoratum Christi famulum Guthlac ad nefandas tartari fauces usque perducunt. Ille vero, fumingantes aestuantis inferni cavernas prospectans, omnia tormenta, quae prius a malignis spiritibus perpessus est, tamquam non ipse pateretur obliviscatur. Non solum enim fluctuantium flamarum ignivomos gurgites illic turgescere cerneres, 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...

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)

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
clane gecostad, ne cempa god,
wordum ond weorcum wel gecyped,

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..."
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 wraescide
longe lifdon, lege biscente,
swearte beswicene, swegle benumene,
dreame bidrorene, deade bifolene,
firenum bifongne, feores orwenan,
þæt ge blindnesse bote fundon.
Ge þa fægran gesceafte in fyrdagum,
gæstlicne goddream, gearo forsegon,
þa ge wiðhodgum halgum dryhtne.
Ne mostun ge a wunian in wyndagum
ac mid some scylcum scofene wurdon
fore oferhygendum in ece fyr,
ðær ge sceolon dreogan dead ond þystro,
wop to widan ealdre; næfre ge þæs wyrpe gebidað...

(Guthlac A, 623–636)\(^{33}\)

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\(^{32}\) 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 *heorge* 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:

Smalt wæs se sigewong ond sele niwe,
faæger fugla reord, folde geblowen;
geæcas 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.”
"... I look forward 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]In 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...
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:

Silpan se eapel udgegene wearð
Adame ond Euan, cardwica cyst
beorht oðbroden, ond hyra bearnum swa,
eaferum æfter, þæ hy on uncyrðu,
scomum scudende, scofene wurdon
on gewinworuld. Weorces onguldon
deopra firena, þurh dearðes cwealm,
þe hy unsnyttrum ær gefremedon.
ðære synwraeæ silpan sceoldon
mægð ond mægas morþres ongylðon,
godscyldge gyrn, 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 disseverance…”

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 secgad 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 geþrunungen,
siþpan he on westenne wicærd geceæs,
fiþynu gear, þa was frofre gæst
eadgum æbodan ufan onsended,
halig of heahþu. Hreþer innan born,
afysed ond forþœð. Him færinga
ædl in gewod. He on elne swa þeah
ungebylged bad beorhtra gehata,
blæþe in burgum –

*Guthlac B, 933b–942a*[^1]

[^1]: Bradley’s translation: “The day of the ending of warfare and austerities as to the world, through death’s inevitable disengagement, 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.: bancosa - 'bone dwelling' [942], lichord - 'body-treasure' [956], banseet - 'bone vessel' [1193], banhus - 'bone house' [1367], banloca - 'bone enclosure' [980], sawelhus - 'house of the soul' [1030] flæschoma - 'fleshly covering' [1031], greothord - '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], dea/Jgedal - '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 be dewege (bitter drinking vessel) is offered to Guthlac. Death is depicted as a bloodthirsty warrior wiga vælgifre or as a monster-like creature like Grendel, when he sets off to get his prey:

[...] Swa wæs Gudlac
eenge anhoga ætryhte þa
æfter nihtscuan, neah geþyded,
wiga vælgifre.

(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 oprecedence of his own death, and consoling and instructive conversation with a servant or close friend.

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]: 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.

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

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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 flæþracu, feorhþord onleac
seorocægum gesoht.

(Guthlac B, 1139b–1145a)47

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. 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 feorghold...” (*The Dream of the Rood*, 72b–73a).

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*:

[... ] Da þær leoh t ascan,
beama beorhtas. Eal þæt beacen wæs
ymb þæt halge hus, heofonlic leoma,
from foldan up swylce fyren tor
ryht aræréd...

*(Guthlac B, 1309b–1312a)*

And in *The Dream of the Rood*:

Þuhte me þæt ic gesawe sylicre treow
on lyft lǣdan leohhte bewunden,
beama beorhost. Eall þæt beacen wæs
begotten mid golde...

(4 -7a)

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

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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), wæterpisa (‘water-courser,’ 1329), brimmwudu (‘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.”

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 wærig mod wyrdewidstånnan,
ne se hreohygelhelpegefremman.
For ūn domgeornedreorigneoft
in hyrabrestocfanbindadfæste;
swaimodsefanminnescelede–
oftearmcearig,edłebidæled,
freomægumfeor–feterumsælan,
síþangearaiugoldwineminne
hruwanheolstrebiwrarah,ondicheanþonan
wodwintercearigoferwæpemagębind,
sohte sele dreorigsincsesbryttan,
hwærícfeorneþ þ neahfindanmeahte
poneþeimenmeoduhealleminmewisse,
þeþemecfreondlesnesfrefrangolde,
wemanmidwynnum.

(The Wanderer, 15–29a)

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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 / claspeth 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 córđe, hwilum cyrdon eft
minne mansceapan on mennisc hiw
breatma mæste, hwilum brugdon eft
awyrgde wærlogan on wyrmes bleo,
earne adloman attre spiwodon...

(*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.

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\(^{54}\) 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." 

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56 Calder, p. 75.