Water, Wisdom, and Worldliness in the Prose Lives of Guthlac

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Introduction: the Texts and their Relations

The Mercian hermit Guthlac of Crowland (*c*. 673-714) is the subject of a Latin hagiography composed *c*. 730-740 by the monk Felix.[1] This *Vita*, dedicated to the East Anglian King Ælfwald, was translated into Old English prose prior to the mid tenth century.[2] Water, both literal and metaphorical, plays a prominent part in Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci*. Guthlac's hermitage site, on the fenland island of Crowland, was reachable only by boat, and several of Guthlac's miracles relate directly to this watery landscape. The water of the fens also has a symbolic value: it separates Guthlac from the world and his mastery of this hostile environment attests to his sanctity. In addition, Felix's *Vita* is infused with purely metaphorical waters. Drawing on a variety of source texts, Felix depicts ordered streams, gentle dew, and nourishing drafts that signify wisdom, while fierce whirlpools and stormy seas represent the turbulence of the world. All these waters intersect and merge to produce a text with both literal and metaphysical significance, successfully promoting Guthlac through its edifying portrait of a man of God.[3]

The Latin and Old English *vitae* of Guthlac have a complex textual tradition; they present varying treatments of these waters, related to the ways successive authors handled their sources. In its surviving form the Old English translation is generally faithful to the physical geography of Felix's text, taking pains to produce an effective description of the landscape. However, Felix's more metaphorical uses of water are not replicated with such fidelity. The inter-textual and cross-referential waters that characterize Felix's text are often reduced or altogether omitted from the Old English. The result is a streamlining of the metaphorical waters, leaving only more commonplace images, well steeped in Christian tradition. This chapter will highlight hagiographic water's significance to readers in Latin and the vernacular through an examination of how water in all its forms contributes to the spiritual richness of Felix's text, as well as considering the effect that the Old English *Life of Guthlac*'s omissions and adaptations have on our reading of the saint. Differences between the two texts offer important insights into the translation's origins and development, exposing the original

[1] The *terminus ad quem* for the *Vita*'s composition is suggested by its dedication to Ælfwald, who died 749, and the description of Guthlac's contemporaries Cissa and Wilfrid as still living. The lack of reference to Guthlac in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, despite his interest in the region, suggests a *terminus post quem* of *c*. 730. Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. by Colgrave, pp. 18-19.

[2] A number of other Guthlac materials survive from Anglo-Saxon England. The Exeter Book contains two Old English poems about Guthlac: *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*. Guthlac also appears in the *Old English Martyrology*, and is referenced in the pre-Conquest list of saints' resting places preserved in London, British Library, MS Stowe 944 and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 201. See *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, ed. by Muir, pp. 111-59; *The Guthlac Poems*, ed. by Roberts; *The Old English Martyrology*, ed. by Rauer, p. 80; *Die Heiligen Englands*, ed. by Liebermann, p. 11.

[3] On Guthlac as 'vir Dei Guthlacus' see Kurtz, 'From St Antony to St Guthlac', pp. 126-27.

translator's skill, the role of copyists in further shaping the *Life*, and how the texts' respective audiences were expected to respond to water imagery.

Nothing is known of Felix beyond what is revealed to us by his work.[4] Felix, who describes himself in his Prologue as 'catholicae congregationis vernaculus' (a servant of the Catholic community, pp. 60, 61), must have been a monk, but the identity of his monastery is unknown.[5] The indebtedness of the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* to earlier works gives a good sense of the texts available to Felix. As Bertram Colgrave, who edited the *Vita*, highlights, the text is heavily dependent on other sources; even Felix's description of himself is, in fact, one of many borrowings from Aldhelm.[6] Felix also quotes scripture extensively, and draws on Vergil, Bede's *Prose Life of Cuthbert*, Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*, Evagrius's translation of Athanasius's *Vita Antonii*, Jerome's *Vita Pauli*, and the works of Gregory the Great.[7] Felix's use of source materials, as Britton Brooks has examined, creates both short lexical echoes and complex inter-textual allusions that bolster Guthlac's standing.[8] Longer quotations locate the saint in a hagiographic tradition, while shorter echoes of familiar scriptural, Aldhelmian, and Vergilian Latin serve to catalyse the reader's attention and highlight particular images. These references also afford the educated reader access to a larger interpretative framework within which Guthlac may be placed.

Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci* appears to have been popular in England throughout the Early Medieval period. Eight of the surviving thirteen Medieval manuscripts are from the Anglo-Saxon period, the majority late, suggesting recopying.[9] The Old English prose *Life of Guthlac* survives in only two manuscripts: a complete text is preserved in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D.xxi, ff. 18-40 (s.xi^2); and two chapters, centred on Guthlac's hermitage and vision of hell, appear, somewhat reframed, as Homily 23 in the late-tenth-century Vercelli Book.[10] The two versions of the Old English text appear to depend on a

[4] On attempts to identify Felix see *Das angelsächsiche Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac*, ed. by Gonser, pp. 14-15.

[5] Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. by Colgrave, p. 16. All quotations from the *Vita* and translations are from Colgrave. All other translations are the author's unless otherwise stated.

[6] The opening exordium of Aldhelm's *Epistola ad Acircium*. Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium*, ed. by Ehwald, p. 61.

[7] Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. by Colgrave, pp. 16-17, 57-58. See also Weston, 'Guthlac Betwixt and Between', pp. 5-6.

[8] Brooks, 'Felix's Construction of the English Fenlands'.

[9] Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. by Colgrave, pp. 26-46. All the manuscripts are entirely Insular in origin except one: Boulogne, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 106 (637). It is unclear which of that manuscript's contents, including the Guthlac material, were written at Bath and which at St Omer.

[10] *Das angelsächsiche Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac*, ed. by Gonser, pp. 36-52. As Donald Scragg observes, Vercelli 23 is 'not a homily in any conventional sense'. It faithfully excerpts the longer narrative, and 'makes no concession to an audience unfamiliar with the context'. 'Vercelli Homily 23', ed. by Scragg, p. 381, n. 3. The Vespasian text has been edited by Charles Wycliffe Goodwin, with collations from Vercelli, and by Paul Gonser and Jane Roberts (as Crawford), who both print the two texts in parallel. Vercelli Homily 23 has been edited by Paul E. Szarmach, Herbert Pilch, and Scragg. The Vespasian text has been translated by Goodwin and Michael Swanton in *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, pp. 39-62. Quotations from the Old English Life are from the Vespasian text ed. by Gonser, unless otherwise specified.

common source, but at some considerable remove, indicating repeated recopying.[11] Paul Gonser, in his 1909 edition of the *Life of Guthlac*, argues that the Vercelli and Vespasian texts descend independently from the original.[12] The Vespasian text is Late West Saxon, but has been subject to what Donald Scragg terms 'large-scale linguistic modernization'.[13] Vercelli Homily 23 contains a larger number of Anglian words, and evidences the translation's original early non-West Saxon form.[14] The retention of material related to Anglian kings and Guthlac's Mercian origins, as well as evidence that his cult was always stronger in Mercia, make a non-West Saxon origin probable for cultural reasons also.[15] The spellings preserved in the Vercelli text suggest that the both manuscripts' common source was relatively early, as does evidence that the original translator used the *Romanum* Psalter.[16] Jane Roberts has concluded that 'an Alfredian date cannot be proved for the making of the original translation of the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* into English, but it is the most attractive of the various possibilities open'.[17] Such an early date for an Old English prose hagiography may account for the translation's unusual presentation; it exhibits none of the deference to authority or consciousness of its own status as a translation that characterize later prose Lives, such as those of Ælfric.[18] In common with one other relatively early vernacular prose hagiographic translation, *The Life of Mary of Egypt*, the *Life of Guthlac* does not indicate that is it a translated text.[19] The Old English text includes Felix's Prologue, preserves the use of first-person pronouns, and refers to Felix's contemporaries as living, so reads as if it is itself the work of Felix.

Any attempt to compare the *Life of Guthlac* to the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* with the aim of establishing the translator's approach is complicated by the fact that neither surviving version of the Old English *Life* is a good record of the original, as well as by discrepancies between Colgrave's edition of Felix's *Vita* and the translation's source text.[20] As Jane Roberts observes,

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[11] The relationship between the two texts was first noted by Goodwin in 1848: *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Goodwin, pp. iv-v.

[12] *Das angelsächsiche Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac*, ed. by Gonser, p. 48. See also Gonser, pp. 36-42; Crawford (now Roberts), 'Guthlac: An Edition', pp. 124-29.

[13] Scragg, 'The Corpus of Anonymous Lives', p. 210.

[14] Scragg, 'The Corpus of Anonymous Lives', p. 210. On Anglian features see *Das angelsächsiche Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac*, ed. by Gonser, pp. 49-51; Crawford, 'Guthlac: An Edition', pp. 162-66, 89-209. p. 48. Further support for an Anglian origin for the translation comes from Jane Roberts's analysis of unhistorical gender congruence in the text. Roberts, 'Traces of Unhistorical Gender Congruence', pp. 36-37. See also Crawford, 'Guthlac: An Edition', pp. 218-24.

[15] On evidence for Guthlac's cult see Roberts, 'An Inventory of Early Guthlac Materials'.

[16] Appleton, 'The Psalter in the Prose Lives of Guthlac'. Günter Schere thought the *Life of Guthlac* late, but most scholars take an opposing view. Scherer, *Zur Geographie und Chronologie des angelsächsischen Wortschatzes*, p. 5.

[17] Roberts, 'The Old English Prose Translation', p. 367.

[18] See Whatley, 'Lost in Translation'; Stanton, *The Culture of Translation*.

[19] Whatley, 'Late Old English Hagiography, *ca*. 950-1150', p. 450; Whatley, 'Lost in Translation', p. 193. Compare *The Old English Life of St Mary of Egypt*, ed. and trans. Magennis.

[20] Roberts, 'Two Readings', p. 201. As no manuscript of the *Vita* is especially reliable, Colgrave's is a 'reconstructive text'. The result may come close to Felix's eighth-century original, but, as Whitney French Bolton highlights, differs from the source used by the Old English translation. Bolton narrows the source manuscript down to a member of Colgrave's Group 4, with C_2 (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 389, s.x^2) and N (British Library, MS Cotton Nero E.i, s.xi^{med}) especially like. In his critical apparatus Colgrave provides

Gonser's collation of the Vespasian and Vercelli texts reveals that 'a fuller and much different original translation lay behind the Life'.[21] Roberts goes on to state that: 'words, phrases and even sentences have disappeared from it [Vespasian] and from the homily, and, on the evidence of the parallel parts, at different times and to different ends.'[22] The Old English text remains an editorial challenge: both manuscript copies contain many unusual words, the Vespasian text has clearly been extensively revised, and the Vercelli text has numerous copying errors.[23] Editors have favoured emendation in many places, obscuring readings that may be closer to the original translation.[24] As Roberts observes, 'any attempt to present a detailed comparison of the *Vita* and the *Life* to illustrate the translator's methods (as conducted by Gonser 1909, pp. 52-94) can produce little trustworthy evidence on this score, because so much of the original translation has been obscured by revision'.[25] Nevertheless, it is possible, using the editions of Gonser and Colgrave, together with the work of Roberts, to offer an analysis of how the Vespasian text differs in effect to Felix's work, and, by employing the Vercelli text and critical apparatus, tentatively to suggest some changes which may be the product of the translator's labour rather than later copyists' alterations.

The Old English translation of the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* was presumably intended as a substitute for the Latin, directed to an audience unable to engage with Felix's original, yet desirous of the narrative in its entirety. As Roberts notes, it would take about an hour to read out the *Life of Guthlac*, making it too long to be used in most preaching contexts, although it could serve as the source of preaching material, as Vercelli 23 shows.[26] We might imagine the text as refectory reading, or as intended for a literate, lay audience — perhaps members of an Anglian noble family especially devoted to the saint. The nature of Felix's Latin may have encouraged the production of a translation at a relatively early point. Colgrave notes that Felix's style is difficult, and clearly caused problems even for highly-educated Medieval readers — Orderic Vitalis, writing in the twelfth century, described the *Vita* as 'prolixus et aliquantulum obscurus' (very long and the style somewhat obscure).[27] This complexity influences the approach shown by the Vespasian and Vercelli texts, which eliminate many of Felix's more convoluted phrases. Yet other omissions from the Vespasian text seem to be driven by more than a desire for clarity: they adjust the emphasis of the material, altering its message.[28] It is clear from discrepancies between the two texts that some of this simplification and reorientation originated not with the translator, but with later copyists. As Roberts observes 'each [manuscript] preserves structures modelled upon the Latin where the other shows simplification or an attempt at simplification'. As the Vercelli text only overlaps with a small portion of the Vespasian *Life*, scope to recover the nature of the original by comparison is severely limited.[29]

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readings from these two manuscripts, enabling more accurate comparison. Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. by Colgrave, p. 52; Bolton, 'The Manuscript Source'. See also Crawford, '*Guthlac*: An Edition', pp. 70-78.

[21] Roberts, 'Two Readings', p. 201. See also Crawford, 'Guthlac: An Edition', p. 125.

[22] Roberts, 'Two Readings', p. 201. For a fuller analysis of differences between the texts see Crawford, 'Guthlac: An Edition', pp. 136-50.

[23] 'Vercelli Homily 23', ed. by Scragg, p. 381; Crawford, 'Guthlac: An Edition', p. 227.

[24] On this problem, with examples, see Roberts, 'Two Readings'.

[25] Crawford, '*Guthlac*: An Edition', p. 233.

[26] Roberts, 'The Old English Prose Translation', p. 365.

[27] Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 17. The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* evidences Felix's fondness for neologisms.

[28] See for example Waugh, 'The Blindness Curse'; Whatley, 'Lost in Translation'.

[29] Roberts, 'Two Readings', p. 202.

Despite these textual problems, the *Life of Guthlac* is generally viewed as a close translation of the Latin. Yet, for all its apparent fidelity to Felix, the *Life* has a distinct identity. The *Life* restructures the *Vita* considerably; the Prologue and fifty-three chapters of the Latin become four chapters in the Old English, with a Prologue and twenty-two sections.[30] Felix's complex descriptive style is much simplified, and, as Lisa Weston notes, the majority of the inter-textual allusions which characterize Felix's prose are lost.[31] I suggest that while much of the stylistic simplification seen in the *Life of Guthlac* is due to streamlining by later copyists, the original translator recognized phrasal echoes of well-known Latin texts, but as these would be lost in the vernacular, carefully and stylishly rephrased these passages to preserve their original effect. The translator has, as Colgrave puts its, 'unusual skill', handling Felix's difficult style with assurance.[32] This excellent Latinity would have allowed the translator to perceive and respond to Felix's myriad inter-textual echoes. For example, in Chapter 2, Felix quotes Vergil in his description of the origins of Penwalh, Guthlac's father: 'Huius etiam viri progenies per nobilissima inlustrium regum nomina antiqua ab origine Icles digesto ordine cucurrit' (Moreover the descent of this man was traced in set order through the most noble names of famous kings, back to Icel in whom it began in days of old, pp. 74, 75). The phrase 'antiqua ab origine' is *Aeneid* I.642, the ancestry of Dido.[33] Section 1 of the Old English translation retains this important information, but reframes it, as the complimentary *Aeneid* echo would be undetectable in Old English. Vergil is replaced with paired superlatives that assert the greatness of the descendants of Icel: 'He wæs þæs yldestan and þæs æþelstan cynnes, þe Iclingas wæron genemnede' (He was of the oldest and noblest kin, who were named the Iclings, p. 104). Similarly, Chapter 34's echo of *Aeneid* II.303 'et arrectis auribus' (with ears alert, pp. 110, 111) becomes the paired 'and hawode and hercnode' (and looking and listening, p. 136) in *Life of Guthlac* Section 6, highlighting this moment with alliteration and homoioteleuton. Instances such as these make it probable that some of the *Life*'s alterations, including those to the water imagery, are the work of the original translator, deftly adapting Felix's echoing style in order to preserve much of its effect for a vernacular audience.

The difficulties in separating what may be the translator's response to quotation from later copyists' simplification can be exemplified by the *Life of Guthlac*'s treatment of the opening of Felix's Chapter 19, which describes the dawn of the first day of Guthlac's spiritual life. Felix's Latin reads: 'Ergo exutis umbrosae noctis caliginibus, cum sol mortalibus egris igneum demoverat ortum et matutini volucres avino forcipe pipant, tunc indutos artus agrestic de spatula surgens arrexit, et signato cordis gremio salutary sigillo' (So when the mists of the dark night had been dispersed and the sun had risen in fire over helpless mortals, while the winged tribe chirped their morning songs from the beaks that birds possess, then he dressed and raised his limbs from his rustic bed and, signing himself with the sign of salvation on his breast …, pp. 82, 83). This image is rendered in the Section 2 of the *Life* as: 'Mid þy þære nihte þystro gewiton, and hit dæg was, þa aras he and hine sylfne getacnode insegle Cristes rode' (When the darkness of night had departed, and it was day, then he rose and signed himself with the seal of Christ's cross, p. 110). While the use of 'mid' in the Old English neatly mimics the ablative absolute construction of Felix's Latin, almost all the associated imagery is removed. Felix's dawn is full of Vergilian phrasing — 'matutini volucres' (*Aeneid* VIII.456) and

[30] For a discussion of this restructuring see Roberts, 'Old English Prose Guthlac', pp. 364-65; Weston, 'Guthlac Betwixt and Between', p. 15.

[31] Weston, 'Guthlac Betwixt and Between', p. 16. On other alterations, see: Roberts, 'Guthlac of Crowland and the Seals of the Cross', pp. 118-21; Waugh, 'The Blindness Curse'; Whatley, 'Lost in Translation'.

[32] Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 19.

[33] Appleton and Robinson 'Further Echoes of Vergil's *Aeneid*', p. 354.

'mortalibus egris' (*Aeneid* II.268, etc.).[34] The elevated language highlights this dawn as both literal and spiritual brightening. In contrast the Old English text dispenses with these Vergilian echoes, and also with the details of Guthlac's rising, making Guthlac's pious gesture appear much more immediate. The abruptness of the *Life*'s decisive gesture of piety from the nascent saint highlights the significance of this dawn, an effect Felix achieves through lyrical language. This passage exemplifies the kind of simplification seen in the Vespasian text. The absence of stylish touches, of the kind discussed above, in the Old English prose raises questions about whether this was a one-stage process. Did these changes occur simultaneously, or were Vergilian echoes rephrased by the translator, then the passage trimmed by a later copyist to streamline the narrative? Similar uncertainties arise around the omission or adaptation of water imagery in the *Life*.

Comparison of the Vespasian and Vercelli texts reveals one passage that is retained in Vercelli but omitted in Vespasian, indicating that a later copyist is responsible for the omission. In Chapter 31 Guthlac is taken by demons and given a vision of hell:

> Non solum enim fluctuantium flammarum ignivomos gurgites illic turgescere cerneres, immo etiam sulphurei glaciali grandine mixti vortices, globosis sparginibus sidera paene tangentes videbantur (p. 104).
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> 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 (p. 105).

This marvellous image, which riffs off *Aeneid* III.574 ('attollitque globos flammarum et sidera lambit arneid'), is not included in the Vespasian text.[35] But Vercelli does preserve a translation of this section: 'And nalas þæt an þæt he þær þa leglican hyðe ðæs fyres upþyddan geseah, ac eac þa fulan hrecetunge swefles þær geseah upgeotan' (And he not only saw the flaming wave of the fire swell up there, but he also saw the foul belching of sulphur welling up there).[36] As Jane Roberts notes: 'the compiler behind the Vespasian life may have cancelled this passage either because of its complexity or because of the density in it of obsolescent words'.[37] As discussed below, in Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci* this image of water-like fire in the abyss connects hell to earlier depictions of the world as a watery chaos. This connection, partially preserved in Vercelli by words such as 'hyðe', is absent from Vespasian, illustrating how watery imagery inherited from Felix may have undergone multiple alterations during the creation and transmission of the *Life*.

The above passage exemplifies the way in which Felix's more metaphorical waters are handled in the *Life*: either diluted because they are a lexical echo identifiable only in the Latin,

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[34] Colgrave identifies 'mortalibus egris' as Vergilian, and 'matutini volucres' is noted by Lisa Weston. Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 187; Weston, 'Guthlac Betwixt and Between', p. 6. Further use of Vergilian language to describe dawn occurs in Chapter 41 where Felix writes 'excussa ergo opacae noctis caligine, cum sol aureum caelo demoverat ortum' (So when the sun had driven away the black mist of night and dispelled the golden dawn from the sky, pp. 128, 129). Felix's 'opacae noctis' is *Aeneid* X.161-62, while 'sol aureum' recalls 'sol aureus' of *Georgics* I.232 and IV.51. Neither of these instances has been noted previously. This imagery is absent from Chapter 12 of the *Life.*

[35] This parallel has not been noted before. On the image of waters reaching the sky in Anglo-Saxon texts, see Wright, *The Irish Tradition*, p. 135.

[36] 'Vercelli Homily 23', ed. by Scragg, p. 390.

[37] Roberts, 'Two Readings', p. 207.

or deleted as part of a programme of simplification. Yet, although it operates on a less inter- and intra-textual level than in the *Vita*, water remains integral to the construction of Guthlac's sanctity in the *Life*, through its emphasis on the literal waters that define Guthlac's environment. While the waters of the *Life* are predominantly material, at points metaphorical imagery is actually amplified in the Old English, producing effective envelopes, absent from the Latin. These new metaphors may be attributed to the original translator's project to ensure that the spiritual force of Felix's work remain in Old English; they suggest something about vernacular prose style, but also reveal which figurative images could be expected to resonate with a vernacular audience. The two texts reveal how their respective audiences were expected to respond to both literal and metaphorical water, highlighting the relative currency of particular images within both groups. While Felix envisages a readership able to apprehend and appreciate watery metaphors inherited from Scripture and patristic sources, allowing him to sustain a Gregorian association between water and knowledge, the Old English employs water in a more limited range of uses, with metaphors that draw on the waters of everyday life.

Prologue: The Source of the Waters

The Prologue is very important to both the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* and the *Life of Guthlac*, as it frames the reader's response to the watery material that follows. Felix's Prologue sets up both ordered, nourishing water as an image of learning, and chaotic water as a reflection of the world; these images aid in the interpretation of the literal landscape of Crowland and anticipate the metaphorical waters of the rest of the *Life*. The first image of water in the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* is metaphorical. Felix modestly states that his work should not be viewed as prideful, but as the product of obedience, 'dum alii plurimi Anglorum librarii coram ingeniositatis fluenta inter flores rethoricae per virecta litteraturae pure, liquide lucideque rivantur' (seeing that there are many other English scholars in our midst who make the waters of genius flow in pure and lucid streams among the flowers of rhetoric and amid the green meadows of literature, pp. 62, 63). This delightful image of literary culture as a kind of *locus amoenus* follows an explicit quotation from Gregory's *Moralia in Iob* that holy writing not be measured by the rules of Donatus. Gabriel Knappe has described this section as a 'commonplace passage on Christian eloquence', but while some of Felix's statements are conventional, the source for the image of the streams and flowers in unclear.[38] Felix's description anticipates the waters of scriptural knowledge that appear later in the text, but in a more secular context. The flowers may derive from Jerome's *Praefatio in Danielem prophetam*, where he describes enjoying the 'flores rhetoricos' of Quintilian and Cicero.[39] There is also a reminiscence of Aldhelm's *Prosa de Virinitate* 3, describing the mental disposition of the virgins, which 'per florulenta scripturarum arva late vagans bibula curiositate decurrit' (roaming widely through the flowering fields of scripture, traverses (them) with thirsty curiosity).[40] The idea of genius as streams appears to be Felix's own, possibly influenced by Gregorian images of wisdom as water (discussed below)

[38] Knappe, 'Classical Rhetoric in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 14, n. 40. See also Knappe, *Traditionen der klassischen Rhetorik im angelsächsischen England*, pp. 156-57.
[39] Jerome, *Praefatio in Danielem prophetam*, col. 1291. Felix's usage is the only one in *Patrologica Latina* except Jerome's and direct quotations thereof. *Patrologia Latina Database*, [Accessed 18 March 2017]. On this text in Anglo-Saxon England see Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 313.
[40] Aldhelm, *Prosa de virginitate*, ed. by Ehwald, p. 232; translation from Aldhelm, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, trans. by Lapidge and Herren, p. 61.

— a playful demonstration of rhetorical skill while performing humility.[41]

This modesty image is slightly reconfigured in the Old English translation. While the *Life* preserves Felix's initial request for pardon if readers 'her hwylc hleaterlic word onfinde' (find any ridiculous word here, p. 101), Gregory's comment on Donatus is removed, presumably because reference to the Latin grammarian would be meaningless to an audience needing the narrative in the vernacular. Felix's image of scholars directing the streams of genius among the flowers of rhetoric in the meadows of literature is rendered, with care, as: 'swa ic menige wat on Angelcynne mid þam fægerum stafum gegylde, fæger and glæwlice gesette, þæt hig þas boc sylf settan mihton' (as I know many in England who, gilded with the fair letters, fairly and cleverly set, might have composed this book themselves, p. 101). This passage is not inter-textual, drawing instead on the reader's experience of the material text. The professed humility seems more genuine, but the image of intellectual waters created by Felix in anticipation of later depictions of knowledge as water has been lost.

The Prologue also provides the first image of water as a symbol of the world. Felix, again reflecting on his writing process, states: 'Sed ne sensus legentium prolixae sententiae molesta defensio obnubilet, pestiferis obtrectantium incantationibus aures obturantes, velut transvadato vasti gurgitis aequore, ad vitam sancti Guthlaci stilum flectendo quasi ad portum vitae pergemus' (But for fear that my laboured defence and long drawn out periods may cast a veil over the minds of my readers, let us stop our ears against the pestiferous incantations of our detractors as though we were traversing the waters of a vast whirlpool and let us steer our pen towards the life of St Guthlac as though we were making for the haven of life, pp. 62, 63). The Old English text removes the quotation from Psalm 58.4-5 (57.5-6) 'et *obturantes aures* suas | quae non exaudient vocem *incantanti*um' [emphasis mine], which would be inaudible in the vernacular, but retains the image of the tempest: 'Ac þylæs ic lengc þone þanc hefige þara leornendra mid gesegenum þara fremdra tælnysse, swa swa ic strange sæ and mycele oferliðe, and nu becume to þære smyltestan hyðe Guðlaces lifes' (But lest I longer weigh-down the minds of those learning with speaking of the criticisms of strangers, I sail as if over a strong and mighty sea, and now come to the most tranquil of harbours, the life of Guthlac, p. 102). In the *Vita* these chaotic waters foreshadow later images of the world being like turbulent water, from which Guthlac offers sanctuary, and form an envelope with the final miracle. Although the *Life* appears to set up a similar pattern, the imagery is not sustained — probably due to the truncation of the text by copyists.

Felix's text presents itself as being a kind of ordered water; the false modesty of his discussion of rhetoric presenting a text suffused with precious waters, while the storm imagery imparts an image of the *Vita* as life-giving safe haven, just as Felix's hermitage island, complete with safe landing place, was a secure space amidst the chaos of the surrounding fens. Felix's text then becomes a sustaining draught with which readers may hydrate themselves, a model for ordered life that offers shelter from the chaos of the world. By including only the image of the rough sea and highlighting the tranquil nature of the harbour Guthlac offers, the Old English Prologue presents an idealized image of the saint, but does not establish a relationship between water and intellect, nor does it reflect as self-consciously on its own status as a sustaining text. Nevertheless, its forceful image of the *Life of Guthlac* as 'þære smyltestan hyðe' provides an emphatic direction to the reader to approach this text as a spiritually edifying work offering sanctuary from the tribulations of the world.

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[41] The image may be influenced by Gregory's streams of truth (*fluenta veritatis* in *Regula Pastoralis* 1.2, *Moralia in Iob* VII.37, XXXIII.10) and knowledge (*scientiae fluenta* in *Regula Pastoralis* 3.39).

Water as a Desert

Water in its literal form is integral to the initial construction of Guthlac's sanctity. It is most prominent in earlier parts of the *Vita*, where Felix deals with the occupation of the island Crowland. The disordered water of the fens provides a barrier, isolating Guthlac and testing his physical and spiritual reserves. In this way it occupies the same role as the desert in the lives of earlier hermit saints such as the Desert Fathers. Felix encourages the reader to perceive this connection between fenland and desert. In *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* Chapter 24, Felix writes that texts about the Desert Fathers were a direct inspiration to Guthlac: 'Cum enim priscorum monachorum solitariam vitam legebat, tum inluminato cordis gremio avida cupidine heremum quaerere fervebat' (For when he read about the solitary life of monks in former days, then his heart was enlightened and burned with an eager desire to make his way into the desert, pp. 86, 87).[42] These texts were also a direct inspiration to Felix; as Benjamin Kurtz highlights, Felix's *Vita* is deeply textually indebted to the Evagrian *Vita Antonii*.[43] Numerous narrative borrowings show that Felix perceived a link between Guthlac's *Life* and that of Antony of Egypt, with the fenland around Crowland, as Michael Lapidge and Rosalind Love observe, 'playing the role of Antony's Egyptian desert'.[44] Felix's other sources also shape his construction of water as desert. The *Vita sancti Guthlaci* is indebted to Jerome's *Vita S. Pauli* and Bede's *Prose Vita S. Cuthberti*, texts which share the *Vita Antonii*'s focus on the hermit saint in the landscape, and use Antonian material as a basis.[45] Cuthbert, like Guthlac, is an island-dwelling hermit, occupying a site on Farne surrounded by the turbulent waters of the sea. Felix's combination of sources shows that he perceived an Antonian tradition in England, of which Cuthbert was the exemplar, and represented Crowland within this pattern.

Cuthbert was certainly not the first to view an island surrounded by water as being a suitable substitute for a mountain in the desert. Insular Christianity, particularly in areas of Irish influence, provides many examples of island monasteries and hermitages.[46] In a landscape where an excess of water was more likely to pose difficulties than an absence thereof, high places surrounded by sea or marsh, such as Iona and Lindisfarne, were logical substitutes for high points in the desert, such as Antony's mountain. In choosing these sites, Insular Christians participated in a tradition of adapting a spiritual template to the local landscape. Benedict of Nursia, whose life as related in Gregory's *Dialogi* is an influence on both Felix's text and Bede's Prose *Vita Cuthberti*, chose to inhabit a mountain surrounded by poorly managed pagan lands at Monte Cassino. Martin of Tours, whose life is narrated in another of Felix's sources, Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*, inhabited the island of Gallinaria (Isola d'Albenga) as a hermit. Guthlac, as described by Felix, is merely the latest iteration of the tradition of the saint inhabiting a high point surrounded by waste space.

Felix is at great pains to depict Guthlac's home as a desert, repeatedly using the word *heremus* (desert) in Chapter 25 to describe the space. This image is not entirely accurate; as Kelly A. Kilpatrick highlights, the area was better connected than Felix's deliberate focus on

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[42] Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 86-87.
[43] Kurtz, 'St Antony to St Guthlac', esp. pp. 104-27; Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 16-17.
[44] Lapidge and Love, 'The Latin Hagiography of England and Wales (600-1550)', p. 212.
[45] See Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, pp. 16-17; Bede, *Vita sancti Cuthberti*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave; Jerome, *Vita Sancti Pauli primi eremitae*; *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*.
[46] See Pickles, 'Anglo-Saxon Monasteries as Sacred Places', pp. 40-44. See also Della Hooke in this collection, pp. 00-00.

the desolate marsh-scape conveys.[47] Yet, Felix's text is in other respects a very faithful representation of the disordered watery environment of the fens. As Helen Foxhall Forbes notes: 'the fenland landscape described by Felix is not a complete fantasy, and his references to dark and stagnant water or boggy places are matched in other contexts, such as descriptions of features and landmarks described in the boundaries of estates recorded in charters'.[48] Felix creates neologisms in order to present this watery landscape more precisely, generating words such as *riviga* (stream) used in the 'rivigarum anfractibus' (tortuous streams, p. 86, 87) of Chapter 24.[49] The Old English *Life of Guthlac* attempts to replicate this exactitude, and, as Brooks has noted, takes the *Vita*'s resemblance to charter bounds, perceived by Foxhall Forbes, much further. Felix's 'rivigarum anfractibus' is translated in Section 3 of the Life as 'fule eariþas' (p. 113); as Brooks discusses, *eariþas* is a *hapax legomenon* based on the vocabulary of charter bounds.[50] Both Felix's text and the Vespasian *Life* depict disordered, wet space that can be visualized in very precise terms by their readers, emphasizing Guthlac's saintly achievement in successfully inhabiting such a landscape.[51]

In Chapter 24 Felix introduces the hermitage site with an extended description of the fenland:

> Est in meditullaneis Brittanniae partibus inmensae magnitudinis aterrima palus, quae, a Grontae fluminis ripis incipiens, haud procul a castello quem dicunt nomine Gronte, nunc stagnis, nunc flactris, interdum nigris fusi vaporis laticibus, necnon et crebis insularum nemorumque intervenientibus flexuosis rivigarum anfractibus, ab austro in aquilonem mare tenus longissimo tractu protenditur (p. 86).
>
> There is in the midland district of Britain a most dismal fen of immense size, which begins at the banks of the river Granta not far from the fortified settlement which is called Grantchester, and stretches from the south as far north as the sea. It is a very long tract, now overhung by fog, sometimes studded with wooded islands and traversed by the windings of tortuous streams (p. 87).

Felix emphasizes the scale of this watery, un-navigable waste, highlighting Guthlac's isolation. Chapter 3 of the Old English translation echoes this passage very closely, but introduces additional features, giving a more defined and evocative picture of the space:

> Ys on Bretonelande sum fenn unmætre mycelnysse, þæt onginneð fram Grante ea, naht feor fram þære cestre, ðy ylcan nama ys nemned Granteceaster. Þær synd unmætre moras, hwilon sweart wætersteal, and hwilon fule eariþas yrnende, and

[47] Kilpatrick, 'The Place-Names in Felix's Vita Sancti Guthlaci', esp. p. 37. Despite Felix's assertions of Crowland's remoteness, Guthlac's frequent visitors hint at the reality.
[48] Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 92.
[49] Felix provides the only use of this word in the Dictionary of Medieval Latin. *Anfractus* is Aldhelmian. See *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British* Sources; *Patrologia Latina Database*; 'Library of Latin Texts–A'; 'Library of Latin Texts–B'.
[50] Brooks, *Restoring Creation*, pp. 237-38. Brooks discusses numerous examples charter-bound vocabulary used to describe the fens. Brooks, *Restoring Creation*, pp. 234-43.
[51] The Vercelli text does not include a description of the fen. As it focuses primarily on Guthlac's combats with demons, water imagery is less important to its effect.

> swylce eac manige ealand, and hreod, and beorhgas, and treowgewrido, and hit mid menigfealdan bignyssum widgille andlang þurhwunað on norðsæ (p. 113).[52]
>
> There is in Britain a fen of immeasurable greatness that begins from the river Granta, not far from the city, which by the same name is named Grantchester. There are immeasurable moors, sometimes dark standing water, and sometimes foul running streams, and also many islands, and reeds, and mounds, and thickets of trees, and it, the vast expanse, with manifold largeness, extends continuously to the North Sea.

In the *Life of Guthlac* this description opens Section 3, rather than coming part way through a chapter as it does in Felix, emphasizing the significance of this space to the construction of Guthlac's sanctity.

The water of the fen is not wholesome or ordered, as the Old English text makes especially clear. It is chaotic water, which renders the environment hostile. Fens are repeatedly presented as negative spaces in the literary corpus: they are the abode of Grendel in *Beowulf*, and *Cotton Maxims* notes: 'Þyrs sceal on fenne gewunian | ana innan lande' (A monster shall live in the fen, alone within the land, ll. 43-44a).[53] The *Rune Poem*, punning on *secg* (m. 'sedge', 'man'; f. 'sword'), presents even the plants of a fen as hostile:

> ᛈ eolhx secg eard hæfþ oftust on fenne,
> wexeð on wature, wundaþ grimme,
> blode breneð beorna gehwylcne
> ðe him ænigne onfeng gedeð (ll. 41-4).[54]
>
> Elk's sedge is mostly to be found in a fen; it grows in the water, wounds fiercely, blood burns every warrior, anyone who seizes it.

The fen's association with monsters and chaos makes it spiritually equivalent to spaces occupied by the Desert Fathers, so Guthlac's ability to live contentedly in this environment demonstrates his sanctity.[55]

Felix not only presents Guthlac not only as successfully inhabiting the remote fenland site, but also as having some control over its waters, navigating channels and offering protection from threats. For example, Chapter 37 relates Guthlac's recovery of a parchment stolen by birds.[56] Guthlac successfully directs the document's owner to where it balances on a reed in the middle of a pool. The principal miracle is, as Felix tells us, the preservation of the parchment from water damage: 'Mirabile dictu! tangi, non tactae, contiguis videbantur ab

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[52] *Das angelsächsiche Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac*, ed. by Gonser, p. 113.
[53] *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, ed, by Shippey, p. 78.
[54] *The Old English Rune Poem*, ed. by Halsall, p. 40.
[55] For further exploration of the mutable relationship between water and land in Anglo-Saxon England see Wickham-Crowley, 'Living on the *Ecg'*.
[56] The Latin term used for the birds is *corvi*, usually translated 'raven' (*corvus corax*). Colgrave translates as 'jackdaw' (*corvus monedula*), because he sees the mischievous behavior described in the *Vita* as more typical of that species. Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave, p. 187. However, Felix specifies that there is only a pair of naughty birds, 'duo alites corvi' (Chapter 38), whereas jackdaws are highly sociable and usually live in larger family groups. The fact that there are only two birds points either to ravens, or to carrion crows (*corvus corone*), which are intelligent, bold and opportunistic.

undis' (marvellous to relate, they were apparently being touched by the waves around them and yet were intact, pp. 118, 119). The use of 'mirabile dictu' highlights Guthlac's power over water as the principal miracle, but, as Robin Waugh has shown in detail, the Vespasian *Life* omits this aspect, and Guthlac's miracle becomes the decidedly less wonderous finding of the document.[57]

In the concluding section of Chapter 38 Felix emphasizes Guthlac's harmonious relation with the natural world in a passage that quotes Bede's *Prose vita Cuthberti*, Isaiah and Matthew, but draws in more of the environment by adding air and water to the list of things that obey Guthlac:

> Non solum vero terræ aerisque animalia illius iussionibus obtemperabant, immo etiam aqua aerque ipsi veri Dei vero famulo oboediebant. Nam qui auctori omnium creaturarum fideliter et integro spiritu famulatur, non est mirandum si eius imperiis ac votis omnis creatura deserviat. At plerumque idcirco subiectae nobis creaturae dominium perdimus, quia Domino universorum creatori servire negligimus, secundum illud: 'Si oboedieritis et audieritis me, bona terrae comedetis', et reliqua: item: 'Si abundaverit fides vestra ut granum sinapis' et reliqua (p. 120).
>
> Not only indeed did the creatures of the earth and sky obey his commands, but also even the very water and the air obeyed the true servant of the true God. For if a man faithfully and wholeheartedly serves the Maker of all created things, it is no wonder if all creation should minister to his commands and wishes. But for the most part we lose dominion over the creation which was made subject to us, because we ourselves neglect to serve the Lord and Creator of all things, as it is said: 'If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land', and so on; and, 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard see', and so on, p. 121.

This passage looks back to the preceding bird miracles, flatteringly models Guthlac after Cuthbert, and provides a scriptural framework incorporating the idea that keeping covenant with God can improve man's place in creation. The waters of the fen obey Guthlac because, through his virtue, he establishes a relationship with God so close that it undoes aspects of Adam's curse and restores creation around the saint to a more pre-lapsarian state.

The absence of this passage from the Vespasian text and its treatment of the parchment miracle mean that Guthlac is not shown to have dominion over the waters; this compromises the *Life*'s construction of Guthlac's sanctity by weakening the connection between literal waters and piety. It is impossible to determine whether the original translator or a later copyist omitted this passage, but as a result the act of inhabiting the watery landscape, while still a defining feature of Guthlac's sanctity, is not so clearly and explicitly connected to his piety in the *Life* as it is in the *Vita*.[58] For Felix, Guthlac's seclusion, although very literal, is nonetheless a textual construction that works to place the saint in a hagiographic tradition; this aligns the literal and metaphorical waters of the text, with piety enabling Guthlac to resist the chaotic waters of the word and benefit from the vital liquids of faith and doctrine.

The Waters of Wisdom

[57] Waugh, 'The Blindness Curse', pp. 407-10.
[58] The Vercelli text does not include this section so no comparison can be made.

Felix employs metaphorical water imagery that works in conjunction with the literal waters of his text to construct Guthlac's sanctity. Felix associates ordered, gentle water with knowledge, and represents the troubled world as a turbulent sea. Like the physical water of the fens, these metaphorical waters are more prominent in the earlier sections of the text. These traditional metaphors interact with the more concrete geographical setting of Guthlac's hermitage to ensure that Crowland is viewed by the reader as a spiritually significant space: Guthlac's successful ordering and transformation of the fenland reveals his wisdom and unworldliness.

The image of wisdom as water that must be ordered is famously explored in the *Metrical Epilogue* to the Old English translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*:

> Đis is nu se wæterscipe ðe us wereda god
> to frofre gehet foldbuendum.
> He cwæð ðæt he wolde ðæt on worulde forð
> of ðæm innoðum a libbendu
> wætru fleowen, ðe wel on hine
> gelifden under lyfte. Is hit lytel tweo
> ðæt ðæs wæterscipes welsprynge is
> on hefonrice, ðæt is halig gæst.
> Đonan hine hlodan halge and gecorene,
> siððan hine gierdon ða ðe gode herdon
> ðurh halga bec hider on eorðan
> geond manna mod missenlice.
> Sume hine weriað on gewitlocan,
> wisdomes stream, welerum gehæftað,
> ðæt he on unnyt ut ne tofloweð.
> Ac se wæl wunað on weres breostum
> ðurh dryhtnes giefe diop and stille.
> Sume hine lætað ofer landscare
> riðum torinnan; nis ðæt rædlic ðing,
> gif swa hlutor wæter, hlud and undiop,
> tofloweð æfter feldum oð hit to fenne werð (ll. 1-21).[59]

> (This is now the portion of water that the God of hosts promised us to comfort earth dwellers. He said that he wished that in the world ever living waters would flow forth from the innards of those under the sky who thoroughly believed in him. It is little doubt that the portion of water's wellspring is in the kingdom of heaven, that is the Holy Ghost. From thence the saints and the chosen drew it, afterwards they who obeyed God directed it through holy books hither on earth variously though the minds of men. Some guard it in their mind, wisdom's stream, detain it with lips, so that it does not flow out useless. But the deep pool dwells in man's breast through God's grace, deep and still. Some let it run over land-shares in streams; that is not an advisable thing, if such clear water, loud and shallow, flows over fields until it becomes a fen).[60]

[59] *Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care*, ed. by Dobbie, pp. 111-12. See Daniel Anlezark's essay in this volume, pp. 00-00.

[60] *Wæterscipe* is usually translated as 'body of water', but as Mark Atherton highlights, it is used in the Old English Benedictine Rule to refer to channelled water associated with water mills, and the image of controlled water would be a more apt rendering of Gregory's metaphors. See also Atherton, *The Making of England*, 82-4.

The opening section of this poem neatly summarizes the kind of water and wisdom images that Felix presents. The poet, as Malcolm Godden notes, 'evidently develops passages in Chapters 38 and 39 in the [Old English] *Pastoral Care*, which are reworkings of Gregory's metaphors'.[61] It is possible that Felix, encountering the same metaphors in his reading of Gregory, was likewise encouraged to present images of knowledge as spiritual waters profitably absorbed by the virtuous, and also to connect Guthlac's ordering of the waters of the fen to his mental discipline.

Regula Pastoralis III.14 is one of the sections lying behind the Old English verse:

> Humana etenim mens, aquae more circumclusa ad superiora colligitur, quia illud repetit unde descendit; et relaxata deperit, quia se per infima inutiliter spargit. Quot enim supervacuis verbis a silentii sui censura dissipatur, quasi tot rivis extra se ducitur.[62]
>
> (For the human mind behaves like water; when closed up it collects into higher levels, in that it seeks again that height from which it descended. And when let loose, it loses itself, in that it disperses itself uselessly through the lowest places. For by as many superfluous words as it is dissipated from the censorship of its silence, by so many channels is it led away out of itself.)

Regula Pastoralis has not been identified as one of Felix's sources, but the same image of water and wisdom occurs with almost identical phrasing in *Moralia in Iob* Book VII, par. 37.[63] This text is used in the *Vita*, so Felix knew the image, and may have been influenced by its depiction of wisdom as ordered water, related to ordered words.

Drawing on a tradition of scriptural exegesis, Gregory, like Felix, presents water as multivalent: it can represent both positive and negative forces. As Gregory states in *Moralia in Iob* Book XIX, par. 6:

> Aquae in scriptura sacra aliquando sanctum spiritum, aliquando scientiam sacram, aliquando scientiam prauam, aliquando tribulationem, aliquando defluentes populos, aliquando mentes fidem sequentium designare solent.[64]
>
> (Waters in Holy Scripture are wont sometimes to denote the Holy Spirit, sometimes sacred knowledge, sometimes wrong knowledge, sometimes calamity, sometimes drifting peoples, sometimes the minds of those following the faith).

The variety of water imagery in the Book of Job provides an opportunity for Gregory to explore all these metaphorical readings of water, articulating ideas that can be seen to flow into Felix's work. Although exact verbal correspondences are hard to find, and many of the images have their origins in scripture, Gregory's fondness for aqueous imagery is arguably a significant influence on Felix's own varied watery metaphors.

Felix presents gentle or nourishing waters as a positive force representing knowledge or grace, Gregory's *scientia sacra*. In Chapter 22 he describes Guthlac's progression to the state of Psalteratus: 'Cum enim litteris edoctus psalmorum canticum discere maluisset, tunc

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[61] Godden, 'Prologues and Epilogues', p. 467.
[62] Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis*, LXXVII, col. 73A.
[63] Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, ed. by Adriaen, 143.
[64] Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, ed. by Adriaen, 143A.

frugifera supra memorati viri praecordia roscidis roris caelestis imbribus divina gratia ubertim inrigabat' (When indeed, after having been taught his letters, he set his mind to learning the chanting of the psalms, then the divine grace sprinkled this same man's fertile heart copiously with the moist showers of heavenly dew, pp. 84, 85). The collocation 'roris cælestis' draws on the scriptural 'rore caeli', used twice in Genesis, and more pertinently three times in Daniel, where being wetted with the 'dew of heaven' leads to Nebuchadnezzar recognizing the power of God (Daniel 5.21).[65] The water imagery is lost at this point in Section 2 of the Old English. Felix's echo of scriptural Latin, 'rore caeli', is not retained, but the fertile heart remains: 'Mid þy he þa wæs in stafas and on leornunge getogen, þa girnde he his sealmas to leornianne; þa wæron þa wæstmberendan breost þæs eadigan weres mid godes gife gefyllede' (When he was educated in letters and learning, then he yearned to learn his psalms; then the fruitful breast of this blessed man was filled with God's grace, p. 112). This omission removes the idea of grace as water, but was probably triggered by the translator's recognition of a scriptural echo that would not work in Old English, whereas the metaphor of a fertile breast is easily comprehended.

Elsewhere the *Life* is at pains to conserve water imagery. In Chapter 43 Felix contrast spiritual liquids with more worldly ones. Recalling Gregorian images, he presents scripture as a liquid that may be drunk. Felix describes how when Guthlac and a visiting Abbot were in conference, 'divinarum Scripturarum haustibus inebriarent' (they were drinking deep draughts from the holy scriptures, pp. 132, 133).[66] Guthlac, employing visionary powers, interrupts their discussion to reveal the true whereabouts of the abbot's two absent servants: 'Dicebat enim illos ad cuiusdam viduae casam devertisse et, dum non adhuc tertia hora esset, in delicatis viduae fulcris inebriari coepisse' (For he said that they had turned into the house of a certain widow, and, though it was not yet the third hour, had begun to drink deep draughts at the widow's luxurious table, pp. 134, 135). The repetition of *inebrio* connects and contrasts these two incidents. Section 14 of the Old English text helps the reader to understand the initial drinking metaphor by adding a literal interpretation prior to Guthlac's interruption: 'mid þan hi þa sylfe betweonum drencton of þam willan haligra gewrita, þa betwyx þa halgan gewritu þe hi spræcon …' (while they gave themselves mutually to drink from the well of holy scriptures, then betwixt their discussion of holy scriptures …, p. 149).[67] The translation retains the complex image of the waters of scripture as they contrast so beautifully with the liquid imbibed by the servants who 'wæron ondrencte mid oferdrynce' (were drunk with overdrink, p. 150). In both versions of the life the virtuous metaphorical waters drunk in an orderly way by the hermit and the abbot are juxtaposed with the problematic worldly liquid immoderately consumed by the two servants, and fruitful spiritual irrigation with unprofitable fen-like drunkenness.

Metaphorical water is not always a symbol of good in the *Vita*: reflecting Gregory's waters of *scientia prava*, wickedness can also be drunk. In Chapter 35 Guthlac's servant Beccel attempts to slay him. Guthlac realizes that Beccel is afflicted by an evil spirit and says 'Quare amari veneni pestiferas limphas non vomis?' (Why do you not spew out the deadly draught of

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[65] Although Weston suggests that the source is Aldhelm's *De metris*: 'Roscidis sacrorum dogmatum umbribus ubertim perfudit'. Weston, 'Guthlac Betwixt and Between', pp. 7, 25. This image is given considerable importance in the Old English poem *Daniel*. See Portnoy, '*Daniel* and the Dew-Laden Wind'.

[66] Cf. 'haustibus evangelici nectaris' (draughts of Gospel nectar, pp. 144, 145) in Chapter 46. Retained in the Old English *Life*, Chapter 17, p. 156.

[67] The manuscript reading is *dremdon*, but both Goodwin and Gonser emend to *drencton*. *Drencton* preserves the verbal parallel with the servants' drunkenness and is to be preferred. *Dremdon* might easily have been substituted by a scribe unfamiliar with the image employed.

bitter poison?, pp. 112, 113). Felix elsewhere uses *lympha* for holy water (Chapters 11 and 53), but here the liquid is metaphorical and represents the evil Beccel has absorbed. This imagery of evil as a liquid is much expanded in the Old English, creating an envelope that gives greater clarity and context to Guthlac's urging of Beccel to reject the poison. Felix describes Beccel's initial corruption by an evil spirit which entered him and 'pestiferis vanae gloriae fastibus illum inflare coepit' (began to puff him up with pestiferous arrogance and vainglory, pp. 112, 113). In the Old English Section 7 Beccel's heart and thought are 'mid his searwes attre geond sprengde and mengde' (sprinkled and mixed with his poison of treachery, p. 137), anticipating Guthlac's question 'For hwon nelt þu þæs biteran attres þa deaþberendan wæter of þe aspiwan?' (Why do you not spew the death-bearing water of that bitter poison from you?, p. 138). This amplification of the imagery of evil as infectious poisonous liquid, reminiscent of the image of disease as a poison in some Old English medical charms, skilfully makes the image clearer for a vernacular audience, giving greater impression of Guthlac's prophetic insight, the focus of this episode.[68]

Water and Worldliness

For Felix, the most problematic waters by far are those that represent life in the world. These metaphorical waters flow into to the literal ones surrounding Guthlac's hermitage, which, as discussed above, are a desert-like space representing the world at its most disordered. In Chapter 27, which describes Guthlac's arrival on Crowland and his taking up of spiritual arms, Felix comments: 'sic et sanctae memoriae virum Guthlac de tumido aestuantis saeculi gurgite, de obliquis mortalis aevi anfractibus, de atris vergentis mundi faucibus ad perpetuae beatitudinis militiam, ad directi itineris callem, ad veri luminis prospectum perduxit' (so also He led Guthlac a man of saintly memory from the eddying whirlpool of these turbid times, from the tortuous paths of this mortal age, from the black jaws of this declining world to the struggle for eternal bliss, to the straight path and to the vision of the true light, pp. 92, 93).[69] These metaphorical obstacles through which Guthlac is guided by God recall the literal landscape obstructions navigated in Chapters 24 and 25 to reach the hermitage site, such as the 'rivigarum anfractibus' (tortuous streams) of Chapter 24. The Old English *Life* does not make the same connection; Section 3 simply describes Guthlac as being led 'of þære gedrefednysse þissere worulde' (from the confusion of this world, p. 117). By using this image of life as chaotic water, through which Guthlac finds a path, Felix connects Guthlac's successful crossing of the fen with his transition from a secular life spent in the pursuit of worldly glory to a higher spiritual existence as a hermit. The physical and spiritual movements become reflections of one another.

Felix's use of the noun *gurges* (whirlpool) in the above passage connects back to the storm imagery of the Prologue, where Felix resolves to ignore potential detractors, 'velut transvadato vasti gurgitis aequore' (as though we were traversing the waters of a vast whirlpool, pp. 62, 63), and to make for the life of Guthlac 'quasi ad portum vitae pergemus' (as though we were making for the haven of life, pp. 62, 63). The noun *gurges* is repeatedly employed by Felix in the *Vita* to describe the world. The collocation 'saeculi gurgites' occurs twice: once in the above passage, and once in Chapter 18 where Felix describes Guthlac as being 'inter saeculi gurgites iactaretur' (tossed amid the whirling waves of the world, pp. 80, 81), a troubled state leading to his calling to the religious life. Section 2 of the Old English echoes this image with 'betweox þises andweardan middaneardes wealcan' (betwixt the tumult

[68] A similar addition of an envelope in the Old English occurs with the spears of the evil spirits in Chapter 6.

[69] 'atris … faucibus' is from *Aeneid* VI:240-41.

of this present world, p. 109), capturing the watery associations with *wealcan*.[70] For both texts, the tumult of waters provides an effective image of the chaotic nature of worldly life, connecting its troubles to the fen through which Felix navigates to his spiritual and physical anchorage at Crowland, but only in the Latin are these links sharpened by intra-textual allusions.

As well as using water to link literal and metaphorical landscapes, Felix also employs repeated vocabulary to connect the worldly life to the horrors of hell. Felix's repeated use of *gurges* for the worldly life associates the metaphorical tumult of the world with the fiery chaos of hell. While the Old English connects water with worldliness, it does not connect worldliness so explicitly with hell, presenting the terrors of that space as much more separate from Guthlac's life. As discussed above, in Chapter 31 Guthlac is abducted by demons and shown hell, which Felix describes using *gurges*: 'fluctuantium flammarum ignivomos gurgites … turgescere' (the fiery abyss swelling with surging flames, pp. 104, 105). The translation is only preserved in Vercelli 'þa leglican hyðe ðæs fyres upþyddan' (the flaming wave of the fire swelling up).[71] Although the Old English images used to translate *gurges* have some connotations of water, they lack the precise lexical connection made in the Latin, which ties the cares of the world to the place where they might well lead. As a result, hell is a much more separate and unknowable space in the Old English — effectively terrifying, but harder to interpret.

Extending this particular metaphor, the monastic may be seen as Guthlac's port offering shelter from the storm, just as his *Vita* is a haven for Felix in the Prologue. This image of the monastic life as a harbour reflects Aldhelm's *Prosa de Virginitate* 10, which may be one of Felix's inspirations:

> dum illi periculoso saeculi naufragio et grassante dirae tempestatis turbine uelut inter Scillam Siciliae et barathrum uoraginis nauigantes ad portum coenubialis uitae festinantes, licet aliquantulum quassatis cymbae compagibus, Christo gubernante feliciter peruenerunt.[72]
>
> while the others, sailing (as it were) near the perilous shipwreck of this world with the whirlwind of a dreadful tempest raging, as though between the Sicilian Scylla and the gulf of the whirlpool [i.e. Charybdis], hasten towards the harbour of the monastic life, and with Christ as their pilot arrive safely, even though the timbers of their ship are somewhat shaken.[73]

As Andy Orchard highlights, this image recurs towards the end of the text, where Aldhelm reflects on his own literary endeavours, perhaps influencing Felix's Prologue.[74] This idea of the world as a stormy sea on which man is tossed occurs repeatedly in Felix's work. As Orchard notes, this image is commonplace in medieval Christian texts, and there are many possible authorities from whom Felix might have absorbed it; for example, Gregory the Great employs

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[70] *wealcan* is commonly used of water. See Bosworth and Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 1171.

[71] 'Vercelli Homily 23', ed. by Scragg, p. 390. On the difficulties of editing this passage, and alternate possibilities which may bring the Old English closer to the Latin see Roberts, 'Two Readings', pp. 206-10.

[72] Aldhelm, *Prosa de virginitate*, ed. by Ehwald, p. 238.

[73] Translation from Aldhelm, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, trans. by Lapidge and Herren, p. 67.

[74] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 96. Image discussed pp. 96-98.

it in the epistle to *Moralia in Iob* and Homily 29.[75] But whatever this image's conventional origins, Felix handles it with nuance, using repeated vocabulary to ensure that metaphorical waters mirror the hazardous literal waters surrounding Guthlac, and the dangers of succumbing to the worldly life are made clear.

This image of life as a whirlpool from which we must seek safe harbour is repeated in Chapter 41, in which Guthlac heals the possessed youth Hwætred by holy water and exsufflation.[76] Literal water and air are followed by a metaphorical echo, as Felix states: 'Ipse autem, velut qui de aestuantis gurgitis fluctibus ad portum deducitur, longa suspiria imo de pectore trahens, ad pristinae salutis valitudinem redditum se esse intellexit' (And the youth, like one who is brought into port out of the billows and the boiling waves, heaved some deep sighs from the depth of his bosom and realized that he had been restored to his former health, pp. 130, 131). The use of *gurges* and *fluct-* echoes the earlier description of hell, emphasizing the danger from which Hwætred has been delivered. Recalling the Prologue, Guthlac is again associated with providing a harbour — controlled, sheltered, and managed water, where one is safe from the disordered violence of the world. The Old English translation presents a very different image for Hwætred's recovery, leaving the Prologue un-echoed. The focus in Section 12 is instead on awakening, as Felix's image of Pega's recovery from paralysing grief in Chapter 50 of the *Vita* is transferred to Hwætred, who revives 'swa he of hefegum slæpe raxende awoce' (as if he awoke from a heavy sleep, p. 148).[77] Rather than presenting possession as a storm, the Old English imagines unconsciousness. The image is an effective way of conveying Hwætred's loss of self, but does not participate in a broader metaphorical framework. In the *Vita* Hwætred finds safe harbour in Guthlac, as Felix aims to do at the start of the writing process. Literary *vita* and historical events become productively blurred, allowing the reader's consumption of the life of Guthlac to offer access to the haven of the saint himself, an association strengthened by Felix's final miracle account.

Conclusions

The final miracle of the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* is much reduced in the surviving text of the Old English translation; in the *Vita* this miracle contains water imagery that connects back the Prologue, but this is omitted in the Vespasian text. Felix's Chapter 53 concludes the *Vita* with the healing of the blind Wissa, whose sight is restored by Pega's application of a mixture of holy water and salt that her brother Guthlac had blessed. Wissa is then able to guide those who guided him to Guthlac on the journey home. In the Vespasian text, a brief Section 22 describes the same blindness cure, effected only by salt, being given to an unnamed boatman of Æthelbald; this boatman then returns home but no mention is made of guiding others.[78] As Waugh has highlighted, the blindness envelope with the Prologue is maintained, but the water imagery that accompanies it is lost.[79] This abrupt truncation of the final miracle may well be the work of a later copyist rather than the original translator. The transformation of Wissa,

[75] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 97; Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*; Gregory the Great, 'Homily 29'. See also Schmidtke, 'Geistliche Schiffahrt'; Schmidtke, 'Geistliche Schiffahrt II'; Smithers, 'The Meaning of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*'; Smithers, 'The Meaning of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* (Continued)'.

[76] On exsufflation see: Hill, 'When God Blew Satan out of Heaven'.

[77] The corresponding description of Pega in Section 20 of the Old English removes the image of awakening from Felix's Chapter 50.

[78] Æthelbald gets an arguably more flattering treatment in the Old English text. See Whatley, 'Lost in Translation'.

[79] Waugh, 'The Blindness Curse'.

whose trade is never specified in the *Vita*, into a *scipesman* (boatman) is intriguing; perhaps the conclusion of the Old English was originally fuller, and the restoration of a boatman's sight, enabling him to navigate through the fens to safe anchorage, and to convey others with him, effectively recalled the Prologue's image of sailing through tribulation to safe harbour in Guthlac. But this is merely speculative — in its surviving form the Old English *Life of Guthlac* presents a rather abrupt ending, removing the potential for textual reflection available in the Latin, before offering a final exhortation to pray to Guthlac.

In Felix's *Vita* the healing of Wissa is an apposite and carefully handled conclusion to Guthlac's hagiography. This post-mortem miracle not only demonstrates Guthlac's continued power, but also connects the reader back to the water and blindness images of Felix's Prologue, encouraging a response to the text itself, as well as the material it contains: the reader and Wissa share in mutual enlightenment granted by the edifying waters associated with Guthlac. The instant of Wissa's cure is described by Felix as follows:

> Illa quoque partem glutinati salis a sancto Guthlaco ante consecratam arripiens, in aquam offertoriam levi rasura mittebat; ipsam denique aquam, cum intra palpebras caeci guttatim stillaret, mirabile dictu! ad primum tactum primae guttae, detrusis caecitatis nubibus, oculis infusum lumen redditum est; priusquam enim alterius oculi palpebris salutaris limpha infunderetur, quicquid domi esset in ordine narrabat, visumque sibi in eodem momento donatum fatebatur. Deinde, postquam diu clausas gratia per gratiam frontis reclusit fenestras, cognovit inventum olim quod perdidit lumen, dux se ducentibus factus est revertens rursus (pp. 168-70).
>
> She [St Pega] also took a piece of glutinous salt which had previously been consecrated by St Guthlac and, grating it lightly, let the scrapings fall into consecrated water. She made this water drip, drop by drop, under the blind man's eyelids and, marvellous to relate, at the first touch of the first drop, the clouds of blindness were scattered and the light returned, pouring into his eyes. Now, before the heading water had been poured into the lid of his other eye, he described in detail all that was in the house, and said that sight had at that moment been given to him. Then after grace had, by grace, opened the windows of his head which had been so long closed, he realized that the light which he had once lost was found, and returning home he became a guide to those who were his guides, pp. 169-71.

The *guttae* that Felix depicts here recall the dew of grace and streams of knowledge presented earlier in the *Vita*. When Wissa's blindness has been cured by these consecrated drops of saline, he is able to navigate the fenlands and testify to the power of Guthlac. As the chaotic water of the landscape of the fens related to the tumult of the world earlier in the text, the power of Guthlac, associated here with holy, ordered water, enables the enlightened Wissa to traverse the world successfully in both a physical and metaphorical sense, and to transmit both literal and spiritual guidance to others.

Wissa's absorption of these healing waters at Guthlac's shrine, leading to illumination, is a suitable conclusion for the *Vita* as it reflects the reader's own absorption of Felix's text. By extending the images applied to edifying texts in the *Vita*, Felix's own work can be seen as a restorative draught to be imbibed in the same manner, then shared with others. Just as the ordered streams of genius watered the meadows of literature in the Prologue, the streams of wisdom contained in Felix's text, which convey the power of Guthlac, irrigate the reader and restore them. With this final image of the once blind man successfully guiding others because of the saint's aid, reflecting how faith in Guthlac offers the reader a guide through the tribulations of the world, Felix concludes his text in a manner reminiscent of his Prologue.

Wissa, who is led by his friends 'ad portum insulae Crugland' (to the landing-place of that island of Crowland, pp. 168, 169) to be healed, reminds the reader that they were included in the statement: 'ad vitam sancti Guthlaci stilum flectendo quasi ad portum vitae pergemus' (let us steer our pen towards the life of St Guthlac as though we were making for the haven of life, pp. 62, 63). Felix, like Wissa's friends, has guided the reader to Guthlac, and, if faithful like Wissa, they will emerge restored and better able to navigate the trials of the world. Felix's final statement on Wissa: 'grates Deo persolvens dignas, quas nullus reddere nescit' (and he returned fitting thanks to God, which none could fail to give, pp. 170, 171), models the reader's own response to Guthlac and the *Vita*. Felix concludes with literal waters that recall and mingle with the metaphorical waters of the Prologue: the completion of the *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, for both author and reader, represents arriving, refreshed with restorative streams, at the safe haven of the waters of life, to which the reader has been safely navigated.

Although water is deeply significant in both treatments of Guthlac's life, it is clear that the two texts' projected audiences are expected to think about it in different ways. Felix, with his fondness for Gregory and Aldhelm, views Guthlac as an orderer of water, a harbour to which his readership may be guided. The Old English *Life*, as preserved in the Vespasian manuscript, makes no such demands: its readers are not envisaged as possessing the necessary intellectual framework to navigate complex inter-textual water metaphors. Given images such as that found in the *Metical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care*, it would be an error to presume that figurative waters were unattractive or meaningless to those who consumed literature in the vernacular. It appears from the *Life*'s retention of the harbour metaphor in the Prologue, and the handling of episodes such as Beccel's affliction and the abbot's drunken servants, that the original translator did make efforts to preserve and explain some of Felix's metaphorical waters, particularly where the images drew on familiar literal waters. This exploitation of the cultural associations of watery spaces, such as fens, within a spiritual context suggests a reasonably sophisticated primary audience. However, the actions of subsequent copyists, presumably driven by a context that prioritized simplicity, have reduced the importance of figurative waters in the *Life* to a few key incidents. The result is that water in the *Life of Guthlac* is more literal than metaphorical and primarily serves as one of several markers of Guthlac's power; it does not work to place him in a broader tradition of spiritual waters. In contrast, Felix's waters explicitly connect Guthlac to saintly forebears and place his hagiography as part of a tradition of spiritually edifying texts. Felix is evidently writing for a readership able to navigate Gregorian and Aldhelmian echoes in order to place both saint and text within an established tradition. The popularity of Gregory's *Moralia in Iob* in eight-century England suggests that Felix's audience would have been conversant with his metaphors, allowing the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* to merge the material waters of the Fens with their metaphorical counterparts in broader Christian tradition to drive forward its spiritual purpose — the praise of Guthlac.[80]

[80] On Anglo-Saxon manuscripts of and quotations from Gregory's *Moralia in Iob*, see Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 305-06.

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