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'Englishness' and the Worcester Tremulous Hand

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The 'Tremulous Worcester Scribe' or the 'Tremulous Hand' has captured the imagination of scholars for a number of generations. A century and more ago he was rather romantically described as an old man who was making the texts written in the language of his youth understandable to his younger brethren, but it is unlikely that he was old enough for that, a fact which has been recognised since Ker established in 1937 that the Tremulous Hand was at work well into the thirteenth century, possibly even as late as 1250.

His work has come down to the present day in some twenty Anglo-Saxon manuscripts which he glossed, corrected and annotated. Most of them can be demonstrated, for various reasons, to have belonged to the library of Worcester Cathedral Priory. The manuscripts are mostly in Old English, some in Latin, and some in a mixture of both. They consist of homilies, penitentials, a herbal, the Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, a bilingual Benedictine Rule, and English and Latin versions of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care* and *Dialogues*. Only one surviving manuscript is entirely in the hand of the scribe, and is known as the *Worcester Fragments*, since the pieces of parchment of which it is made up were found as part of the binding of 'an old book' in Worcester Cathedral library in the last century, and subsequently pieced together and bound as Worcester Cathedral MS F174. The manuscript consists of a version of Ælfric's *Grammar and Glossary* in a form of English later than Ælfric's own, a short piece of rhythmical English lamenting the passing of the great teachers of former years who taught their people in English, and an incomplete English *Soul and Body* debate.

The Tremulous Hand's glosses are mainly in Latin. Some are in Middle English, but many of these have been erased, and are only recoverable with the aid of ultra-violet light. The glosses are linguistic rather than exegetical and are written in the margins and between the lines of the text. Some are phonological, such as the
superscript substitution of 'i' for the Old English prefix 'ge-', apparently to
distinguish this from the pronoun 'ge' which is glossed with the Latin 'vos',
superscript 'k' over a 'c' which is to be pronounced as a voiceless stop, and added
superscript 'h' where 'c' is to be pronounced as affricate.6 Dr Christine Franzen has
produced a definitive study of the Hand's Latin glosses in her book The Tremulous
Hand of Worcester,7 and is at present doing further work on the Middle English
glosses. These she sees as an early attempt by the Hand to understand and make use
of the Old English texts, although he later adopted a method of using as 'cribs' some
of the Latin texts which he found in the Cathedral Library.8

My work has been mainly on the annotations made by the Hand, and the
variety of topics within the manuscript texts beside which he puts his distinctive
marks gives an insight into his interests and purposes. The evidence shows that the
Tremulous Hand was preparing texts for English teaching and preaching, either for
his own use or for the use of others, and apparently adapting these particular
manuscripts because they were the only English ones to which he had access.9
Christine Franzen suggests 'they may have been intended to be culled and used as
source material, perhaps for preaching, with the Latin glosses clarifying the
difficulties with the old language'.10 The Hand appears to have had a reasonable
knowledge of the structure of Old English, but had some difficulty with the lexis,
and his knowledge of Latin helped with this.

If his linguistic glosses alone had survived, it might be thought that his interest
in Old English and the Old English texts was mainly of an antiquarian nature, but the
existence of his many annotations argues a practical purpose in his work. The
annotations take a number of forms: he 'flags' various topics by means of *nota* and
*exemplum* marks, and by headings in the margins. These annotations mark
theological concepts, such as the nature of Christ and the Trinity, and the ever-
engrossing topic of predestination. He is interested in ecclesiastical concerns, such
as the nature of the Mass and the other sacraments and the mechanics of their
celebration, and marks passages on tithes and teaching. Penitential texts and notes
about specific sins are marked consistently, as well as matters of everyday conduct.
The Tremulous Hand also marks passages from the works of Augustine, Gregory,
Bede and other writers by setting their names into the margin. He often extracts
Latin versions of the Old English bible quotations and sets them out into the margin.

The Tremulous Hand marks a large number of liturgical items such as prayers,
canticles and creeds, and also passages for teaching, such as the sevenfold gifts of
the Spirit, the seven prayers within the Lord's Prayer and an account of the defeat of
Antichrist, which are written either in English or else in both a Latin and English version in the text. Apart from these liturgical and theological items, he marks a number of passages which appear to interest him because they contain a translation of, or explanation for, an English word or phrase, such as his *nota* beside an explanation in the text of a homily in Cambridge, MS Corpus Christi College 198: 'hæt we cweðað on englisc, ðu eart wod' [this we say in English, You are mad], and his 'flagging' of a passage in Bodleian MS Hatton 113 which explains the word 'Amen': 'hæt bið on englisc swa hit geweorðe' [that is in English, So may it be].

A particular feature of the Hand's annotations is the vast number of biblical passages, written in Old English in the text, which he extracts in Latin into the margin. This is particularly to be seen in the *Pastoral Care* in Cambridge, MS Corpus Christi College 12. All the Old English biblical quotations in the text, and there are many, are set out in Latin in the margin, sometimes on lines which have been ruled for the purpose. Many of the other manuscripts on which he worked have bible passages which are treated in this way.

It may be argued that the Hand's method of glossing and annotating the Old English in Latin does not demonstrate a great commitment to the English language, but along with the examples cited above, two particular items do show this commitment. One is his careful transliteration of Ælfric's *Grammar and Glossary* into his own form of English, where we have the end result but not the working text, and the other is the demonstration of his working methods in two versions of the Nicene Creed. On an Old English version of the Creed on a leaf at the end of Bodleian MS Hatton 114 the Tremulous Hand punctuates, makes careful indications of word divisions, and glosses heavily in Latin, and on flyleaf iv of Bodleian MS Junius 121 he writes out his Middle English version. There is a facsimile and transcription of this version in Crawford's article cited in note 6 above. This demonstrates very clearly his methods of using his knowledge of Latin to 'clarify the difficulties with the old language'.

The *Annales Prioratus de Wigornia 1-1377* provide an historical background for the life and times of the Tremulous Hand, and in them are to be found a number of small details which can confirm the dating of the Hand. Neil Ker's 1937 article demonstrated that the scribe could have been working as late as the second quarter of the thirteenth century, but that the duct of his hand could well have been formed in the late twelfth century. He therefore could have lived between, say, 1175 and 1250, a time when much was happening in Worcester, and indeed throughout England.
It must be assumed that he was a cleric, since he was literate in both Latin and English, and was almost certainly a monk in the Cathedral Priory, since it is unlikely that anyone other than a member of the community would have such ready access to the Cathedral library as to enable him to work again and again on the manuscripts which it contained. He may also have been a priest, in view of his many annotations which relate to matters which would only be of interest to priests. He may, of course, have been a secular religious, perhaps attached to the Bishop's household, but his glossing and annotating activities appear to have been carried out over a long period, during which bishops came and went, and their households with them. It is unlikely that he was a parish priest; it seems improbable that he would have been able to spend sufficient time away from his parish to accomplish such a volume of work in the Cathedral library, and at this period the Benedictines tended not to exercise parochial cures or undertake general parochial work.  

It may be that as a youngish monk in the Cathedral Priory the Tremulous Hand was under the rule of Senatus, the writer and theologian, who as precentor and librarian ('Cantor' and 'Camerarius' when witnessing charters in 1175 and 1186-89), and from 1189 until his resignation in 1196, as prior, would have had dealings with the novices of the house. Senatus did not die until 1207. It is known that there was a long-standing tradition of glossing and copying manuscripts at Worcester, and this would have come within the province of the librarian. Senatus is believed to have written the lives of the two great Englishmen who had connections with Worcester, St Oswald and St Wulfstan, and he is known to have written a concordance of the Gospels, letters on the mass and treatises on penance. He was also a preacher. It seems possible that the Tremulous Hand was influenced by the learning and interests of Senatus: he was obviously interested in the great men of English history, since he marks their names in his annotations, and the bible, the mass and penance are all topics which figure largely in his work. He also glosses, annotates and marks up for copying a large number of Old English homilies. It has even been suggested that he wrote his version of Ælfric's *Grammar and Glossary* under the influence of Senatus. 

As a monk in the Cathedral Priory of Worcester during the episcopate of the Norman William of Blois, the Tremulous Hand was probably oppressed by that Bishop's high-handed and arbitrary dealings with the monks. The Hand's annotation at the beginning of chapter seventeen in the Hatton manuscript of the *Pastoral Care*, 'optimum capitulum ad prelatos' [the best chapter for prelates], may perhaps have some bearing upon this. The chapter deals with the necessity for a
ruler ('reccere' in the Old English, 'rector' in the Latin) to be the equal of his subordinates in humility, but strict against the sins of transgressors. Rulers must not consider their power, but their likeness to other men: 'Hwæt hit is gesæd ðæt ure ealdan fæderas wæron sceapes hierdas' [Indeed it is said that our forefathers were shepherds]. The Latin here has 'Antiqui etenim patres nostri non reges hominum, sed pastores pecorum fuisse memorantur' [Indeed it is remembered that in former times our fathers were not kings of men, but shepherds of flocks]. The Tremulous Hand could well have been thinking of a Bishop who was high-handed and imperious in his dealings with the monks in his Cathedral, and more like a king than a shepherd.

An annotation made by the Tremulous Hand in Cambridge, MS Corpus Christi College 178, in a passage on the Seven Sins and the Twelve Abuses, may help to place him in a positive historical context: his marginal annotation on folio 85 reads 'quod rex non debet commedere ante tutam horam' [that the king should not eat before the appropriate hour]. This is a Latin translation of part of the excerpt from Ecclesiastes 10 in the Old English text, marked as a 'flag' by the Hand's introductory 'quod'. The passage concerns the duties of a king, and how he must pray and eat at the appointed hour, and the Old English continues after the words extracted by the Tremulous Hand 'wa þære leode þær se cining bið cild' [woe to the nation where the king is a child]. It seems probable that the Tremulous Hand wrote this during the minority of Henry III, when many evils befell the country in the years between 1216, when Henry succeeded his father, and 1227 when he announced that he had reached his majority.

Throughout all the work of the Tremulous Hand a theme which constantly recurs is that of the English language, and indeed, 'Englishness'. This scene is set by his transcription of the alliterative passage in the Worcester Fragments which begins '[S]anctus Beda was iboren her on breotene mid us . . .' [Saint Bede was born here in Britain amongst us]. This praises the holy and learned men of England before the Norman Conquest, and laments their passing:

> þeos lær[e]de ure leodan on englisc. 
> næs deorc heore liht. ac hit fære glod. 
> [nu is] þeo leore forleten. ond þet folc is forloren. 
> nu beoþ oþre leoden. þeo lær[e]þ] ure folc. 
> and feole of þen lorþeines losiæþ. ond þæt folc forþ mid. 
> [these taught our people in English, their light was not dim, but it
shone forth in beauty; now the teaching is abandoned, and the people ruined; now there is another nation who teach our people, and many of the teachers perish, and the people as well.]

Many of the annotations pursue this theme. In both the Corpus Christi and Hatton versions of the *Pastoral Care* the Tremulous Hand notes Alfred's words about the learned men of former days who never thought that the teaching and language of their age would be forgotten. He extracts English names, such as those of Alfred and his clergy in the *Pastoral Care*, and Alfred again in Cambridge, MS Corpus Christi College 198 on folio 74v, where his 'ælfredus rex' marks a passage in a homily on Gregory the Great, whose books 'ælfred cyning of ledene on englisc awende' [King Alfred translated from Latin into English]. The names of Alfred's clergy are extracted in the Hatton *Pastoral Care*. Bede's name is marked many times, and Archbishop Wulfstan's name is extracted in Bodleian MS Hatton 113 where the text reads 'Incipiunt sermones lupi episcopi' [Here begin the sermons of Bishop Wulf]. From these same sermons the Tremulous Hand extracts the names of English kings: 'eadgar' from a passage on the sinfulness of the English nation, and 'eadward' from the denunciation of great treason in England and the murder of Edward. In the Old English version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* the Hand marks the account of Gregory's sending Augustine 'ond oðre monige munecas ond preostas mid hine. drihten ondrædende beoden godes word. Angelbeode . . . [and many other monks and priests with him, fearing the Lord, to preach the word of God to the English]. The Hand's annotation 'de ira eruendi' [rescuing from wrath] appears beside the story of Pope Gregory's puns and the English slaves.

A further passage which shows an attachment to all things English is in Cambridge, MS Corpus Christi College 178 on folio 137, in a text headed 'De sanguine prohibito', the latter part of which takes the form of a letter to 'broðor eadward'.19 The Hand extracts the English name 'eadward' into the margin, and adds his 'flag': 'De anglicus moribus relictis' [Concerning the forsaking of English customs] beside the Old English text: '. . . ge doð unrihtlice þæt ge þa engliscan þeawas forlætað þe eower fæderas heolden . . .' [You behave wrongly in that you abandon the English customs which your fathers observed].

The Tremulous Hand emerges from a study of his annotations as a man who was committed to the concept of 'Englishness' and to the use of the English language itself. His version of the 'Sanctus Beda' passage in the *Worcester Fragments* implies a cultural fervour for the teaching of the great English scholars of
the past, and suggests very strongly that his own glossing and annotating work was for this same practical purpose of teaching and preaching in the vernacular for his own generation of Englishmen, and particularly for those in his own linguistically conservative area of the south west Midlands. Norman French would probably have been the more usual language for this purpose amongst the educated and higher classes. Douglas A. Kibbee in his *For to Speke Frenche Trewely* writes 'knowledge of French was clearly a boon to the ambitious clergyman', but he also cites Abbot Samson of Bury St Edmund's who 'preferred that his monks preach in French, or better yet, in English'.

Although a commitment to the use of and enthusiasm for the English language in the early thirteenth century does not necessarily involve an antipathy towards the Anglo-Norman ruling classes and their language, the 'Sanctus Beda' passage and the other annotations mentioned above do perhaps suggest that the Tremulous Hand was not wholly committed to French customs and language. There is some evidence of anti-Norman feeling in Worcester in the two centuries after the Conquest, although perhaps 'anti-French' rather than 'anti-Norman' would be a more accurate term, particularly in the latter part of the period, when after Henry III's attaining his majority in 1227 many French came to England. There was great antipathy to the Poitevins with whom Henry surrounded himself, and M. T. Clanchy writes of the 'dominant role played by aliens in the governments of John and Henry III'. The Tremulous Hand himself could have had experience of this, perhaps in John's time, and certainly when Henry visited Worcester, first of all at the age of eleven when he attended the ceremonies surrounding the rededication of the Cathedral and the translation of St Wulfstan in 1218, again when he held his Parliament in Worcester in 1223, and later after the declaration of his majority when he kept Christmas in Worcester in 1232.

There is evidence of this antipathy in a number of texts. One, as it stands, postdates the Tremulous Hand, but this is not to say that there was not an earlier version. Görlach in his study of the textual tradition of this text, the *South English Legendary* supports a Worcester provenance for the *Life of St Wulfstan*, particularly in the versions in the Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 108 and British Library MS Cotton Julius D IX manuscripts of the *Legendary*. He quotes from Braswell's Toronto thesis: 'It should be pointed out that the anti-Normanism of Worcester and its environs was traditional from the early 12th century to the late 13th.' Görlach notes that no source for the anti-Norman lines in the Laud manuscript, which refer to the fall of Harold Godwinsson and the coming of the Normans, has been found, and
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they may be 'the author's own contribution';

\[ \ldots \text{ alas þulke stounde,} \]
\[ \text{þat Enguelond was þorúȝ tresoun: þare i-brouȝt to grounde!} \]
\[ \text{For þulke þat þe kinge truste to: failleden him wel faste;} \]
\[ \text{So þat he was bi-neobe i-brouȝt: and ouer-come at þe laste;} \]
\[ \text{And to the grounde i-brouȝt, and alle his: and al Enguelond also,} \]
\[ \text{In-to vncouȝe mannes honde: þat no riȝt ne hadden þar-to;} \]
\[ \text{And neuer-eft [it] ne cam a-ȝein: ro riȝt Eyres none-} \]
\[ \text{Vnkuynde Eyres ȝeot huy beothþ: ore kinges echone} \]
\[ \text{And neiȝh-ȝwat alle þis heiȝe Men: ond of þe ȝoȝwe al-so.} \]

M. E. Wells comments on these lines 'Obviously the author of these lines did not come of Norman blood. These words, it is true, were written more than two centuries after the Battle of Hastings ... yet the bitterness of the author's words is surprising ... his strictures are not limited to the Normans of William's generation'.

Görlach also refers to Braswell's remarks on William of Malmesbury, who 'quotes the "Curse of Urse" in his *Gesta regum anglorum*, thus offering ... the first example of Worcester anti-Normanism ...'. This ritual ecclesiastical curse was pronounced, possibly, although this is not recorded, at the instigation of the Anglo-Saxon Bishop Wulfstan, by Archbishop Ealdred upon the new Norman sheriff of Worcester, Urse de Abetot. Soon after the Conquest, the sheriff began to build a castle on high ground over the Severn, and the building encroaches upon the Cathedral precincts and the monks' burial ground. He refused to stop the work, and Ealdred pronounced the curse, which was a word-play upon the name of Urse, although apparently to little effect, since the castle remained standing and the sheriff's descendants remained as powerful landowners in the area.

A brief comment by the poet Laȝamon in his *Brut* suggests that he too had no good opinion of the Normans:

\[ \ldots þeos leodes heo amærden; \]
\[ \text{Swa is ál þis lond iuaren. for uncuûȝe leoden;} \]

This condemnation surely carries echoes of the Tremulous Hand's 'Sanctus Beda' passage, 'and feole of þen lorþeines losiaþ and þet folc forþ mid'.
La3amon wrote, if the autobiographical introduction to his poem is to be believed, in his home on the banks of the Severn at Areley Kings, only ten miles or so from Worcester.

He wonede at Ernleȝe; at æðelan are chirechen.
vppen Seuarne staþe; sel þar him þuhte.
on fest Radestone; þer he bock radde.
Hit com him on mode; and on his mern þonke.
þet he wolde of Engle; þa æðelan tellen.
wat heo ihoten weoren; and wonene heo comen.
þa Englene londe; ærest ahten.32

La3amon must have been a near contemporary of the Tremulous Hand, and perhaps they could even have known each other. They lived within ten miles of each other and the Cathedral would have been the 'mother church' of La3amon's parish. P. J. Frankis suggests that La3amon may have used some of the books in the Cathedral library,33 although Eric Stanley does not share this view.34 The interests of the two men appear to be similar: La3amon was writing a history of the earlier inhabitants of England in his own version of the style and language of the Anglo-Saxons, and the Tremulous Hand was using their language and their teaching and liturgical texts for his own purposes in teaching and preaching and pastoral care. It seems to be more than a coincidence that two men of such similar commitment and interests should be working within a few miles and within a few years of each other, and in an area where the memory of the last Anglo-Saxon bishop was still venerated. It may be that here in the Worcester area we may discern one of the threads of continuity between the English of Anglo-Saxon times and its re-emergence in later centuries.

Whether or not the Tremulous Hand was anti-Norman, or anti-French, his glosses and annotations clearly demonstrate that he used and was vitally interested in the English language. It is surely significant that in the *Worcester Fragments* he copies out a passage in praise of Bede who 'wisliche bec awende' [wisely translated books], and of Ælfric, 'he was bocare, and þe fif bec wende. Genesis. Exodus. Vtronomius. Numerus. Leuiticus' [He was a writer, and translated the five books, Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus] and of the bishops and saints who taught their people in English. He too was attempting the same praiseworthy task. It would seem that his historical setting is mainly within the age of church reformation following the Fourth Lateran Council, but he was making use of the
only English books which were available to him, those in the language of earlier Englishmen, to whose language and customs he looked back with admiration.
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NOTES

1 W. Keller, *Die Litterarischen Bestrebungen von Worcester in angelsächsischer Zeit*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach- und Culturgeschichte der Germanischen Völker 84 (Strassburg, 1900).


7 Dr Franzen's book *The Tremulous Hand of Worcester* was published in Oxford in 1991.

8 Dr Franzen discusses this fully in chapter 3 of her book cited in note 7 above.

9 My forthcoming book on the annotations of the Tremulous Hand (King's College London Medieval Studies) gives a transcription of the annotations and of the passages annotated, and discusses the purposes of the Hand in his annotating work. See also Franzen's discussion in her book cited in note 7 above.

10 See Franzen as in note 7 above, p. 190.


12 See Ker's 1937 article in note 2 above.


lists the works of Senatus, and see also the relevant entry in the Dictionary of National Biography.

16 See details of Butler's edition in note 5 above. This suggestion is made on p. 88.

17 The conflicts between William of Blois and the monks of Worcester are chronicled in Luard's edition of the Annales (see note 9 above) between the years 1219 and 1225. After this affairs apparently became more peaceful. The Victoria County History for Worcester (see the section therein on 'Ecclesiastical History', p. 13), recounts that it was only after great pressure from the legate Guala that the monks elected William of Blois, 'who for eighteen years was a strenuous upholder of episcopal rights against the attempted encroachments of the religious houses - notably Worcester, Malvern and Evesham'.

18 See the bibliographical references for this text in note 4 above.

19 Edited by F. Kluge, 'Fragment eines angelsächsischen Briefes', Englische Studien 8 (1885), 62-63 (at 62); see also O. Jespersen's transcription and comment on p. 61 of his Growth and Structure of the English Language (Oxford, 1923).


21 See Kibbee, as in note 20 above, p. 19.


23 These events are all recorded in Luard's edition of the Annales under the relevant years.


26 See Görlach as above, p. 34.

27 C. Horstmann, The Early South English Legendary, from Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 108, EETS, os 87 (1887), ll. 83-91.


29 Görlach as above in note 40, p. 34.


32 Brook and Leslie as note 31 above, ll. 3-8.

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34 E. G. Stanley, 'The Date of Lajamon's "Brut"', *Notes and Queries* 213 (1968), 85-86.