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BOOK REVIEW**MARK FAULKNER: A NEW LITERARY HISTORY
OF THE LONG TWELFTH CENTURY. LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE BETWEEN OLD AND MIDDLE
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CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE.

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A New Literary History of the Long Twelfth Century. Language and Literature between Old and Middle English by Mark Faulkner offers a new narrative of what happened to the English language following the Norman Conquest, as opposed to how the aftermath of the events of 1066 is traditionally presented in the literature. The “transitional” (i.e., between Old and Middle English) period from 1050 to 1215, dubbed by Faulkner as “the long twelfth century”, has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the past two decades or so. Drawing on that research, but mostly relying on his own analyses of relevant samples of post-Conquest English, Faulkner presents a compelling account of the state of English and its cultural and social significance in the titular period.

The book is divided into two parts: “Preliminaries” and “The Affordances of English”. The first part outlines the traditional depiction of the long twelfth century as a vague transition between two well-defined and documented periods, Old and Middle English, which can be summarized as rupture, discontinuity, demise of English; the time when “English went underground” to cite the 2003 BBC series *The Adventures of English*. This image is juxtaposed with a review of more recent studies and approaches, such as Elaine Treharne’s 2012 *Living*

Through Conquest, as well as works by Mary Swan, Stephen Pelle and George Younge and many others, which made the traditionally neglected long twelfth century their main focus, thus reframing the conventional version of history of English.

Part II investigates the use of English in three different genres: documentary record, history, and sermons. The first chapter from this part, “English and the Linguistic Ecology of the Long Twelfth Century” sets the stage for the following analytical chapters. Faulkner bases his discussion of twelfth-century English multilingualism on Haugen’s linguistic ecology, which allows him to investigate more complex relationships between languages, their speakers, and societies in which they function, all comprising a linguistic ecosystem. He then proceeds to Chapter 4, “English as a Language of Documentary Record” in which he analyzes royal confirmations to Christ Church from 1020 to 1154 and the bilingual, Latin-English form which emerged around 1000 and was in circulation to c. 1150, demonstrating that this documentary bilingualism testifies to the prestige English enjoyed well after the Conquest. Chapter 5, “English as a Language for Writing History” studies how English was used for chronicling and rewriting the past. Using the *Caligula Annals* as an example, Faulkner shows that Old English traditions were far from discontinued after 1066, a continuity which also manifests itself in extensive copying and rewriting of pre-Conquest texts, as evinced by the *Domitian Bilingual* and the *Parker Chronicle*. Such literary practices go to show that English was seen as an appropriate means for validating claims in order to achieve certain legal goals. Chapter 6, “English as a Language for Sermon Writing” takes a look at the *Vespasian* and *Lambeth Homilies*, as well as other related manuscripts, demonstrating that English continued to be used for preaching throughout the long twelfth century – which stemmed from pragmatic reasons – and continued to rely on Old English religious vocabulary to a great extent. On the other hand, those sermons also addressed newer theological issues, thus necessitating the use of new religious vocabulary and proving English to be an effective vehicle for spiritual matters. The book ends with a short, concluding Chapter scrutinizing the poem “*Sanctus Beda was iboren her*”, which once again testifies to the continuity between the long twelfth century and the Old English, Anglo-Saxon tradition.

Faulkner is amongst leading experts in the twelfth-century English language, as evinced by his numerous publications on various aspects of this topic. His latest work thus draws on years of research and expertise, resulting in a compelling historical-linguistic account of the period in question. Faulkner devises his own toolset for studying the twelfth century English in terms of dating source texts and assessing the extent to which these texts were recopied and adapted, which allows him not only to shed new light on a so-far somewhat dimly illuminated avenue of research, but also to point out possibilities for further research. The book, though rather short, boasts an impressive

bibliography (42 pages), over 600 footnotes, and plenty of data neatly organized in tables –an excellent starting point for anyone interested in pursuing further investigations.

A New Literary History of the Long Twelfth Century. Language and Literature between Old and Middle English is an insightful piece of research which revisits one of the most promising, and yet at the same time one of the most neglected periods in the history of English language and writing. In a Cambridge blog entry devoted to the book Faulkner expresses his hope that it promotes twelfth-century English – a hope which this seminal work is bound to fulfill.

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