https://doi.org/10.51814/nm.156761

Mark Faulkner: *A New Literary History of the Long Twelfth Century: Language and Literature between Old and Middle English.*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2022.

JANNE SKAFFARI

Early Middle English and the linguistic situation in England in the long twelfth century have received increasing attention in the last two decades: there is an interdisciplinary Early Middle English Society and a new journal bearing the name of the period, and there are important resources available, such as the *Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English 1150 to 132 (LAEME)*, upgraded last year, and the *Production and Use of English Manuscripts 1060–1220* catalogue, now hosted by Stanford University. Moreover, there continues to be research on major texts of the period, such as the *Peterborough Chronicle* and the *Ormulum*, which can now be researched with the help of a new edition (Johannesson & Cooper 2023). Although the evidence available is not quantitatively as impressive as the literature of the later Middle English period, it is possible to view the dearth of vernacular English material from the long twelfth century as relative: what we can research – and what we must acknowledge as extremely relevant – are not just the texts originally composed at this time but also copies of older English material, in which the transition from Old to Middle English becomes visible.

One of the researchers highlighting the importance of vernacular writing in this transitional period is Mark Faulkner, Ussher Assistant Professor in Medieval Literature at Trinity College Dublin (see, for example, Faulkner 2012). In his new book, *A New Literary History of the Long Twelfth Century: Language and Literature between Old and Middle English*, he discusses at length texts written in English and the linguistic situation in England in the century and a half after the Norman Conquest of 1066. The 290-page book divides into two parts, with two chapters in the first one, titled "Preliminaries", and five in the second one, "The Affordances of English". Following these, the 43-page bibliography boasts a lengthy Secondary Sources section (pp. 243–277); approximately a quarter of the studies listed are from the last ten years or so, which is further proof of the attention given to the period recently.

As the first of the "Preliminaries", Chapter 1 ("Introduction", pp. 3–31) surveys previous research – both literary history and historical linguistics, with shared interests but often not enough interaction – and proposes a modern, philologically orientated approach for the study. What the reader sees throughout the book is the author's attention to both literature – broadly understood – and languages and linguistic features in the transitional period between Old and Middle English. The second preliminary chapter,

"Approaching Twelfth-Century English-Language Texts" (pp. 32–64), introduces a range of tools necessary for research into such texts, from standard grammars and dictionaries to electronic resources such as *LAEME* and the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*. These are used to evaluate and date particularly "unnoticed, unprinted or badly edited texts" (Faulkner 2022: 62) of the twelfth century. The author illustrates the features and challenges characterising such material by discussing four translations of a selected psalm in the chapter. The analyses of the translations highlight the complexity of the material well.

The "Affordances" part of the book opens with Chapter 3, "English in the Linguistic Ecology of the Long Twelfth Century" (pp. 67–101). Surveying the multilingual linguistic landscape of England, Faulkner identifies c. 1140 as something of a turning point: until then, English was losing ground to Latin as a language of writing, but from the mid-twelfth century on, it was French – written and spoken – that gained in prestige; for example, people crossing the Channel to accept positions in England became much more unwilling to learn the local language than before. When Latin and later also French were available for a non-monoglot writer, English was a very specific code choice tied up with matters of identity, domain, topic and audience, among other things. These factors are considered in the rest of the book.

The next three chapters focus on different genres of texts. The first of these chapters, "English as a Language of Documentary Record" (Ch. 4, pp. 102–148), deals with the bilingual (Latin and English) documentary form. One of the main arguments here is that while bilingual writs were issued until the mid-twelfth century, the role of English in them was increasingly symbolic when Latin strengthened its position as the language of record in England. The author discusses the language choices witnessed in a number of writs, charters and diplomas, most of them from Christ Church Canterbury. English and bilingual documents were in the minority at this time, but the use of English served a purpose in underlining continuity from the pre-Conquest period into the reign of William I and beyond. For example, in some documents the vernacular was useful when the community was trying to establish its long-term rights to certain estates.

In Chapter 5, "English as a Language for Writing History" (pp. 149–183), the focus is mainly on two versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, manuscripts F

and A, or the Domitian Bilingual and the Parker Chronicle; the Peterborough version (manuscript E) also deserves some attention. In the early twelfth century, the additions to these texts broke with the sparse traditional style: not only did the entries become longer as local material, including documents, was incorporated, but they also began to display features that would soon appear in Latin historiography, such as first-person pronouns and direct speech. The "flagrant local partisanship" (Faulkner 2022: 178) of these additions was untypical of the earlier versions of the Chronicle. As in the documents discussed in Chapter 4, the use of English in the later chronicles was a choice made for the benefit of the communities involved in text production.

Chapter 6, "English as a Language for Sermon Writing" (pp. 184–224), is devoted to homiletic texts, a genre in which English was still an important language as late as the second half of the twelfth century, unlike in the documentary and historical writing discussed in the preceding two chapters. It was indeed practical and necessary to preach to English lay audiences in the vernacular. The chapter offers a case study of one of the Vespasian Homilies and discusses some of the Lambeth and Trinity homilies. Such collections reveal the authors' familiarity with Old English homilies, most importantly by Ælfric, generations after his death, yet at the same time contain linguistic features pointing to Middle English, such as French-derived words. Even those sermons with the least links to pre-Conquest writing use some core theological terms hailing from Old English.

In the "Conclusion" (Ch. 7, pp. 225–234), the author discusses one more text, the early-thirteenth century "Sanctus Beda was iboren her" from Worcester Cathedral Library MS. F. 174. He discerns a contradiction between the poem's lamentation of the loss of older vernacular literature and learning and its indebtedness to pre-Conquest tropes. The poem also displays use of linguistic resources typical of the long twelfth century and is thus further evidence of the fact that the tradition of English writing was not completely disrupted a century or so after the Norman Conquest, but English remained a language of writing and continued to evolve as one.

Overall, this *New Literary History of the Long Twelfth Century* is a valuable contribution to the field of Early Middle English studies. One of its particularly useful features is that documents as well as 'literature' are treated by the

author so that a more comprehensive picture of the status of writing in English emerges. The "literary history" of the period, mentioned in the title, thus has a broad scope. The subtitle also identifies language as a focal point, which shows in the discussion of the linguistic situation and, moreover, in the analyses of individual manuscripts, texts and excerpts, which often zoom in on lexis, grammar and orthography. A lot of careful philological work has gone into tracing the transmission of the texts studied, as well as the place of the vernacular in them.

Throughout his book, Mark Faulkner argues in a detailed and convincing way that English writing culture was not disrupted in the twelfth century. It lived on in different ways in different types of texts, retaining pre-Conquest words and wordings but also accepting influences from the time of writing, be they lexical borrowings from French or ideas from scholarship in Latin. Although many of the texts discussed by the author come from Canterbury and the south-east, there is also evidence from other areas, which suggests that writing in the vernacular was not continued in just one location.

The author's analyses provide a great deal of food for thought for anyone interested in the language and literature of the period. For those looking for early Middle English texts for their students to read, this literary history may seem to offer little, but it does contain many short examples of vernacular writing in the long twelfth century that a teacher of the history of English can utilise. Stepping outside the canon is illuminating and refreshing. For the standard texts of the period, the reader may turn to Bennett and Smithers (1966) and others, but I join Mark Faulkner in calling for new resources for teaching and researching the texts of the long twelfth century, which are so deserving of more attention. N

JANNE SKAFFARI
UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

References

Bennett, J.A.W. & G.V. Smithers (eds.) 1966. *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198114932.book.1

Faulkner, Mark 2012. Archaism, belatedness and modernisation: 'Old' English in the twelfth century. *Review of English Studies* 63 (259): 179–203. https://doi.org/10.1093/res/hgr050

Johannesson, Nils-Lennart & Andrew Cooper (eds.) 2023. *The Ormulum: An Edition from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 1 and London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 731*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.