

# Using Cognitive Science to Think about the Twelfth Century: Revisiting the Individual through Latin Texts

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E. A. Mullins

## Abstract

This study has several key purposes. First, it tests the potential applicability of the modern discourses of neuro- and cognitive science to the study of medieval texts and languages: more specifically, it does this by using two core methodological tools, namely *the embodied view of the mind* and a theory of metaphor developed collaboratively by the linguist, George Lakoff, and the philosopher, Mark Johnson, to explore the range of significances which may be drawn from the ways in which human life and existence are represented in a sample of twelfth-century Latin texts. Second, it challenges the view, held by some modern scholars, that by the medieval period Latin was an intrinsically inadequate language for the purposes of self-expression. And finally, it problematises the existing discourses in medieval studies on the individual, self, and subjectivity, first, by developing a new mode of analysing the mental lives of medieval people, and second, by challenging the view that advanced forms of self-awareness were “discovered” during the twelfth century.

By following this course, this study offers a number of fresh insights into twelfth-century texts and the phenomena of the individual, self, and subjectivity. Most importantly, it shows that the ways in which human life and existence are represented in medieval texts are best understood in terms of complex interactions between the biological mind and body and their effects in the world (especially their “socio-cultural” effects). From this conclusion, it is argued that the basis of the individual, self, or subject must be found, not just in socio-cultural development, but also the biological realities of human existence. Furthermore, this study contributes to existing literature on the twelfth century by exploring the range of influences, ancient and contemporary, which affected how medieval people thought about themselves and other people, while affirming their basis in the interaction between the mind, body, and culture.

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## *List of Abbreviations*

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- OED*: Oxford English Dictionary, available online at: <http://www.oed.com/>
- OMT Oxford Medieval Texts published by Oxford University Press.
- Orderic, *Epilogue* *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vol. 6, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1969-80), pp. 550-7.
- Peter, *Letters* *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. J. Haseldine (Oxford, 2001).
- PL* *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, series *Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844-64).
- PMLA* *The Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America*
- The Life of Christina* *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot (reprinted Oxford, 1987).

Walter, *De Nugis*

*De Nugis Curialium*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, revised by C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983).