

“THE PAST IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY”: THE AUSTRALIAN MIDDLE AGES

Louise D’Arcens

University of Wollongong, Australia

For any historically-minded reader, the phrase ‘the Australian Middle Ages’—unlike, say, ‘the French Middle Ages’ or ‘the Welsh Middle Ages’—is patently oxymoronic. Any attempt to lay claim to a Middle Ages in a place whose European settlement began at the decidedly modern date of 1788 must be deluded, mendacious, or, at the very least, a joke. Yet for anyone familiar with the phenomenon of medievalism as a creative practice, such a proposition is far from absurd. The creative nature of medievalism means that the absence of the Middle Ages, far from being an obstacle to its transhistorical survival, is a condition that in fact guarantees the abiding presence of this period in the modern cultural imaginary. In places such as Australia, where the archeological and material traces of an *in situ* medieval past are necessarily absent, this absence, and the sense of historical discontinuity that accompanies it, are the conditions on which all medievalist practice is predicated.¹ When evoked in this context, the much-cited phrase “the past is a foreign country”, with which L. P. Hartley opens his 1953 novel *The Go-Between*, takes on another, less metaphorical resonance; for in Australia the medieval past belongs literally to other, far-off lands. As I will go on to argue, these conditions of absence and distance, whether

¹ For a comparable argument about the role played by distance in the study of the Middle Ages in the U.S., see Paul Freedman and Gabrielle Spiegel, “Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies”, *American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), pp. 677-704.

wistfully acknowledged or willfully embraced, have even from the earliest days of settlement granted Australian medievalism a significant interpretive freedom, paving the way for a wide-ranging and fertile engagement with a world that can, in the most concrete sense, only ever be imaginary for Australians.

Yet to focus on absence, geographical distance and historical discontinuity alone would be disingenuous. For as a local cultural discourse, Australian medievalism emerged as a legacy of British colonialism, and as such also reflects the extent to which this nation has, its physical remoteness and avowed modernity notwithstanding, maintained a sense of proximity to, and continuity with, the medieval European heritage of its settler culture. Its literature, architecture, parliamentary rituals, and performance culture all attest to colonial Australia's desire to situate itself within deep European and English tradition. This forceful, indeed often urgent, assertion of proximity with illustrious European tradition has been motivated not only by a simple desire to overcome geographical isolation but, more murkily, by a denial of the shame of its origins as a British penal colony—and, more problematically still, by a willful disavowal of the aboriginal past that has been treated with such disregard in the wake of British colonialism. In this last respect the phrase “the past is a foreign country” assumes a more sinister inflection when applied to Australian medievalism, exposing its evocation of one antique tradition as a refusal of another that is as sophisticated and even more ancient.

It is the charged, complex dialectic of proximity and distance, and the ways it has shaped Australian medievalism, that will be the focus of this paper. Focusing for the most part on literary and theatrical examples from Australia's colonial era, with some discussion of the physical and material culture surrounding their production, I wish to demonstrate that this dialectic has long been the distinguishing principle of Australian medievalism, encompassing even its most stylistically and ideologically divergent articulations. In a number of cases it has manifested itself through sophisticated, sustained, and self-consciously ‘Australian’ engagements with medieval characters, events, and motifs. As I will go on to argue, however, it is equally, though more obliquely, detectable in what can be described as early Australia's ‘throwaway’ medievalism: that is the more voluminous body of texts

in which the presence of medievalist tropes is incidental, fleeting, and historically indiscriminating. While the study of the former category of texts is undeniably more exegetically satisfying, and yields more obviously rich material for cultural diagnosis, I wish, focusing on an example from colonial theatre, to make a case for the importance of also examining throwaway medievalism for what it can tell us about the dominant tastes and ideological concerns that have shaped popular Australian medievalism.

The more sophisticated texts in question, which I will go on to discuss later, are most commonly novels from the later colonial period—that is, the final three decades of the nineteenth century—through to the years immediately following the formation of Australian nationhood via the Federation of the Australian colonies in 1901. Despite their often complex and ideologically revealing engagement with the Middle Ages, these texts are only just beginning to be examined for their medievalist content. Although there is no shortage of high quality work on them by Australianists, virtually none of it takes into account their medievalism, except very occasionally (and very briefly) under the rubric of colonial literature’s responses to European romanticism and Gothic literature. The last few years have, however, witnessed a growing tendency to treat medievalism in Australian literature and culture as a subject worth analyzing in its own right. This shift began fairly unobtrusively in the late 1990s with a small number of individual scholars, virtually all of them medievalists working in English literature departments, producing isolated studies either of medievalism or of the development of medieval studies in Australia.² Inspired in part by recent work within medieval studies analyzing medievalism as an instrument of European nationalism, these scholars were nevertheless concerned that this work’s

² The main figures in this regard have been Stephanie Trigg, Andrew Lynch, Louise D’Arcens, Jenna Mead (who produced the earliest work in this area), David Matthews, and Geraldine Barnes. For summaries of the development of academic studies of the Middle Ages in Australia, see Louise D’Arcens, “Europe in the Antipodes: Australian Medieval Studies”, in *Medievalism and the Academy II: Cultural Studies. Studies in Medievalism X*, ed. David Metzger, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1998, pp. 13-40, and Helen Fulton, “Medieval Studies in Australia”, *AUMLA Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 100 (2003), pp. 1-12.

neglect of colonialism as the obverse of European nationalism meant that medievalism's complex intersection with colonialism was also being overlooked.³ While some scholars have been more oriented toward correcting this bias by writing about the important but occluded role of medievalism in Australian social, political, and material culture, others such as myself have additionally used the conceptual and ideological framework offered by postcolonial studies to challenge explicitly the omission of Australia from the received narratives of medievalism. Postcolonial theory, particularly Homi K. Bhabha's extrapolation of Freud in his discussion of the post/colonial uncanny (*unheimlich*), has proven especially valuable, as its emphasis on the notion of repressed, estranged familiarity helps explain the unexpected iterations of the medieval in the antipodean environment.⁴ Less conspicuously theoretical, but equally valuable, has been work on white settler culture, which has provided a sophisticated lexicon for elucidating the complex and divided cultural allegiances reflected in the medievalism produced in societies such as colonial Australia.⁵

A rapid increase in momentum over the past few years has seen this formerly solitary pursuit transformed into a collective concern, as scholars of Australian medievalism have not only grown in their ranks

³ See, for instance, Louise D'Arcens' comments in "Europe in the Antipodes: Australian Medieval Studies", "From Holy War to Border Skirmish: The Colonial Chivalry of Sydney's First Professors", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30:3 (2000), pp. 519-45, and "Antipodean Idylls: An Early Australian Translation of Tennyson's Medievalism", in *Postcolonial Moves in Medieval, Early Modern, and Baroque Studies*, ed. Patricia Ingham and Michelle R. Warren, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2003, pp. 237-256.

⁴ See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, especially pp. 136-137.

⁵ See, for instance, Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, "Settler Colonies", in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Sangeeta Ray, Maldon, MA, and Oxford, Blackwell, 2000, pp. 360-376. Johnson and Lawson articulate Australian settlers' self-understanding as British yet not-British. They argue that the settlers' sense of alienation from their parent culture was shot through with an internalized hegemonic notion of themselves as "second class" or "feral" English subjects. Another useful discussion of the mixture of allegiance and resistance in settler subjects, see Stephen Slemon, in "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World", in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia, London, Arnold, 1996, pp. 72-83.

but have also, more importantly, begun to form a range of vital research collaborations. These include regular panels at national conferences in the areas of medieval studies and Australian literature, and, most recently, specialized symposia devoted exclusively to exploring the significance of pre-modern Europe within Australian culture. A number of these events have been sponsored by the Network of Early European Research, an Australian Research Council-funded national confederation of medievalists that counts the study of Australian medievalism among its priority areas of investigation.

One especially significant development has been the publication in 2005 of the volume of essays *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, edited by Stephanie Trigg. This aim of this volume is to “re-examin[e] the various historical and mythological deployments of the medieval and Gothic past across a range of social cultural fields ... in the Australian context”.⁶ Co-published through Brepols’ *Making the Middle Ages* series and the University of Melbourne Press, this volume aims simultaneously to introduce Australian medievalism to the international field and to initiate Australian readers into the rich but hidden tradition of local medievalism. It is wide-ranging in its scope, spanning from colonial to modern Australian culture, and examining the traces of the medieval, and the active evocation of the medieval, in Australian literature, architecture, popular culture, secular and religious communities, and political institutions and rituals, and is significant for bringing together the work of medievalists and Australianists. The fact that this broad survey volume is far from exhaustive in its coverage is less a shortcoming than a reflection of the relative infancy of research into this area, and an indication of the large-scale recovery project that lies ahead. This will be a two-fold project involving both exhuming neglected materials and looking at well-known elements of Australian culture with new eyes trained to detect their medievalist substratum.

I should clarify at this point that my definition of medievalism expands to include texts, discourses, and objects that others might describe as ‘anti-medievalist’. At least one of my examples evokes a medieval origin for the ills of inequality in contemporary society, while

⁶ Stephanie Trigg, ed, *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2006, p. xiii.

another argues for the modern survival of both positive and negative qualities inherited from medieval peoples. 'Medievalist' should thus not be taken here to signify unproblematic nostalgic longing for medieval social, cultural, and aesthetic forms, or simple ideological partisanship (whether progressive or conservative) with medieval forms of political and social organization. Rather, in so far as Australian cultural practices can be seen to actively engage with the Middle Ages in a way that is not only inflected by the modern and the colonial, but indeed is aimed at interpreting or even 'creating' the modern and the colonial, even those that are anti-medievalist in sentiment can fall under the investigative rubric of medievalism.

Trigg's volume has garnered good reviews, and enough public interest for her to be interviewed on the Australian Broadcasting Commission's national radio program *Late Night Live*. Given its presenter, Phillip Adams, is renowned for being a commentator on politics, arts and culture with an educated, generally left-leaning following, it was surprising to hear the degree of incredulity and, indeed, flippancy with which he treated the idea that modern Australian culture could still bear the traces of its pre-modern European origins. More improbable still, it seems, was the notion that his fellow-citizens could actively wish to 'recreate' the medieval past in Australia.⁷ Adams's response reflects the force of Australia's contemporary self-definition as not just a modern nation but, more specifically, an Asia-Pacific based, post-colonial, multicultural polity whose cultural and political debt to England, and Europe more generally, has eroded, and is now only vestigially present in traditions such as cricket and rugby, Australia's 'empire sports'.

Ironically, Adams's view of postmodern Australia is shared by many practitioners of contemporary Australian medievalism, whose local iterations of broader international medievalist trends reflects the nation's participation in the global economy and in the circuits of information and popular culture that, while global and to some extent rhizomatic in their flows, emanate out of the central machinery of the U.S. culture industry. This is clearly evident, according to Adina Hamilton, in the

⁷ "Medievalism in Modern Oz". *Late Night Live* with Phillip Adams, July 4, 2006. <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/latenightlive/stories/2006/1675465.htm>. See http://stephanietrigg.blogspot.com/2006_07_01_stephanietrigg_archive.html for Trigg's reflections on the interview.

activities of medievalist re-enactment communities such as the Australian chapter of the Society for Creative Anachronism [SCA], and in the aspirations of the Crossroads Medieval Village Co-operative, a counter-cultural initiative that aims to build a medieval-inspired environmentally sustainable village, complete with replica of the medieval castle of Chalençon, in rural New South Wales. Hamilton claims that a reflective ideological engagement with the particularities of Australian identity, nationality, and history is relatively unimportant to these movements: "On the contrary, [they] demonstrate an awareness of their place within a series of wider contexts that are likewise inclusive, such as the genre of science fiction, the permaculture movement, or the international presence of the SCA and the wider world of living history. They celebrate the local whilst referencing the global."⁸ Similarly, in his fine analysis of fantasy role-playing games [FRPGs] in Australia, Matthew Chrulew argues that their medievalism "is not so much a heritage of British colonialism, driven by a nostalgia focused on an idealized chivalric past: rather, it is part of Australia's larger participation in a global semiosphere driven by the American culture industry, where nostalgia tends on the whole to be more eclectic. Here medievalism recreates fantasy as substitute history, a surrogate site gratifying the unscrupulous desire for the past".⁹ Using a medievalist idiom that might be described as a populist *mélange* of Tolkienism, New Age paganesque, and urban 'Goth' aesthetics, the gamers generate and perpetuate a virtual Middle Ages that is both everywhere and nowhere.

This is not to say that these contemporary Australian medievalist communities eschew all association with the local. Hamilton notes, rather, that their members have a "keen sense of place" which allows them to "find opportunities to imagine specifically Australian forms of medievalism" in which aesthetic, environmental, and communitarian principles that are deemed to be medieval are integrated with "local landscape, language and culture". The Crossroads Co-operative's in-

⁸ Adina Hamilton, "A New Sort of Castle in the Air: Medievalist Communities in Contemporary Australia", in *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, pp. 205-222 (p.221).

⁹ Matthew Chrulew, "«The Only Limitation Is Your Imagination»: Quantifying the Medieval and Other Fantasies in Dungeons and Dragons", in *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, pp. 223-240 (pp. 225-226).

terest in sustaining local flora and fauna within its nostalgic-futuristic village scape is just one example of this. Hamilton extends this assessment to the work of a range of Australian fantasy writers such as Kerry Greenwood, whose work features Australian futuristic-medievalist communities.¹⁰

These integrated imaginative visions are possible because their creators are unhampered by such concerns as reflecting on the epistemological difficulties involved in ‘re-creating’ the medieval past, or interrogating the meaning of ‘Australianness’. But—and this is of more immediate interest for the current discussion—others have brought a more searching approach to their explorations of the afterlife of the Middle Ages in Australian culture. The novelist Jessica Anderson, for instance, has twice woven Arthurian legend into her stories as a parallel narrative to the lives of her modern Australian characters. In her award-winning *Tirra Lira by the River* (1979), Tennyson’s *Lady of Shallot* lingers as the sometimes shadowy, sometimes consciously-evoked doppelgänger of the heroine Nora Porteous, whose task in old age is to understand, and ultimately relinquish, the colonialist, Anglocentric medievalism that has alienated her from her antipodean environment and from herself as an Australian woman. Anderson’s later novel, *One of the Wattle Birds* (1992), features the recently-orphaned student Cecily Ambruss, whose appraisal of Arthur’s fate in Malory’s *Morte Darthur* is so intertwined with her own new experience of solitude and autonomy that by the novel’s end her Sydney beachside surroundings become the setting for her modern chivalric quest for self and origins.¹¹ Considering these novels together, we can see Anderson’s earnest exploration of both the dangers and the delights of viewing modern Australia through the lens of medievalism. The fact that the later novel stages a rapprochement between postcolonial Sydney and the Arthurian world suggests optimistically that chivalric medievalism is no longer simply the romantic imperialist discourse of Nora Porteous’s youth, but has become, rather, a dynamic and mutually transformative engagement in which the medieval past and the modern Australian polity illuminate

¹⁰ Hamilton, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-221.

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of these novels, see Louise D’Arcens, “«Where No Knight in Armour Has Ever Trod»: The Arthurianism of Jessica Anderson’s Heroines”, in *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, pp. 61-80.

one another. Just as the Australian scene is infused with the qualities of medieval romance, in Anderson's vision the characters realize that their pursuit of the Middle Ages is inseparable from their self-understanding as women and as Australians.

The Two Colonial Gothics

The medievalism of Anderson's characters is inseparable from their ambivalence toward their respective English and European origins. Sometimes they feel they are simultaneously members of Old and New World cultures, other times they feel part of neither; sometimes they seek out the medieval past as a site of cultural and personal continuity, other times they wish to cast off its weight of convention and embrace the freedoms granted by distance. In this respect they belong to the established cultural lineage I alluded to at the beginning of this essay, wherein Australians' medievalist practice, as a legacy of their colonial heritage, has long reflected their sense of themselves as both deeply connected to, yet also set adrift from, a pre-modern past that they revere yet also seek to supersede. This sense of divided loyalties is detectible in the medievalism of the Australian colonies, and later of the new Australian nation, from the 1850s through to the Great War.

While to nineteenth-century English and European eyes the Australian landscape cannot have borne the signs of a medieval past, this did not prevent its inhabitants or visitors from medievalising it. One of the most concrete and conspicuous means of achieving this was architectural. The colonial civic centres, especially Sydney and Melbourne, were transformed from the middle decades of the nineteenth century by the construction of a number of impressive and ambitious buildings in the then-fashionable Gothic Revival style. The continuing visual dominance of these landmark structures, with their evocations of premodern grandeur, ritual, and piety, prompts Trigg to argue with good reason that "Australia conceives the historical past primarily under the sign of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic".¹² Just two of the most

¹² Stephanie Trigg, "Introduction", in *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, pp. xi-xxii (p. xiii).

famous in Sydney are the main building of the University of Sydney, designed in the 1850s by Sir Edmund Blacket, and St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, designed in the 1860s by William Wilkinson Wardell. Among Melbourne's best-known (and, today, best-loved) Gothic Revival buildings is the English, Scottish, and Australian Bank, also designed in Venetian Gothic style by William Wardell and built between 1883 and 1887.¹³ Nor was this limited to urban centres: among the more striking rural examples was what historian Michael Sharland has called the "fowl castle", an eccentric Gothic tower-shaped dovecote, which is one of two battlemented towers built at mid-century by the landholder Joseph Archer on his properties in the Tasmanian Midlands.¹⁴ Most famous, perhaps, and entirely singular in the Australian context, is the monastic township of New Norcia, located on the Victoria Plains north of Perth in Western Australia, which grew up around the isolated aboriginal mission that had been founded in 1846 by displaced Spanish Benedictines.¹⁵ Although its distinctive and eclectic blend of Gothic Revival, Spanish Mission, and Italian Renaissance-influenced buildings was to come some decades after the initial settlement, the founda-

¹³ See Sarah Randles, "Rebuilding the Middle Ages: Medievalism in Australian Architecture", in *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, pp. 147-169. For a more comprehensive discussion of Australia's Gothic Revival Architecture, see Brian Andrews, *Australian Gothic: The Gothic Revival in Australian Architecture from the 1840s to the 1950s*, Melbourne, Miegunyah Press and Melbourne University Press, 2001. For a more theoretically sophisticated analysis of Gothic style and imperial and post/colonial ideologies, see the essays in *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*, ed. Andrew Smith and William Hughes, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

¹⁴ Sharland's description, from his *Stones of a Century* (1957), is quoted by Jenna Mead in "Medievalism and Memory Work: Archer's Folly and the Gothic Revival Pile", in *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, pp. 99-118 (pp. 105-106).

¹⁵ The history and recent developments of New Norcia are outlined in a number of publications, one of which is *A Place Like No Other: The Living Tradition of New Norcia*, ed. David Hutchison, South Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995. See the settlement's website <http://www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au/> for information about its history and its current activities. A more recent foundation, the Cistercian abbey of Tarrawarra in Yarra Glen, East of Melbourne, is discussed by Megan Cassidy Welch in "«A Place of Horror and Vast Solitude»: Medieval Monasticism and the Australian Landscape", in *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, pp. 189-204.

tional act of naming it after Benedict's birthplace is a clear evocation of the ancient monastic tradition of which it continues today to be a living artefact.

And yet the name *New Norcia* is more complex than this, for it is suggestive of continuity but also of rupture, implying that the establishment of this community was also the foundational moment of a new tradition belonging to the red soil of the New World. It is true that as a Spanish and Catholic settlement New Norcia was somewhat anomalous within Australia's dominant British Protestant *translatio imperii*; nevertheless, its historical ambiguity was typical, underlining the extent to which medievalising the land- and streetscapes of colonial Australia was an undertaking fraught with ambivalence. On the one hand these buildings, especially the earlier ones, were highly visible assertions of the colonies' links with the imperial centre—Archer's towers, for instance, functioned, in Jenna Mead's apt phrase, as “a synecdoche for Englishness”¹⁶—and as evocations of a venerable past surviving into the present. This pursuit of cultural continuity is epitomized in Edmund Blacket's statement that “[i]t is impossible for an Englishman to think of an University without thinking of Mediaeval Architecture”, a conviction that underpinned his Gothic Revival design for the University of Sydney.¹⁷ On the other hand, they embodied the proud beginnings of a distinct local settler culture. First of all, they came to differ from their English and European counterparts, both medieval and medievalist, at a material level, in that they were partly built from local raw products such as Pymont sandstone and Australian blackwood, mingled local motifs among the traditional symbolism of their heraldic carvings and stained glass windows, and altered their dimensions to accommodate the greater heat and harsher light of the antipodean environs. Secondly, and more importantly, they made tangible the prosperous colonies' aspirations to challenge the primacy of their imperial parent culture, and to shed some of its ideological baggage. While the design of the University of Sydney's main buildings might have purposely evoked the great medieval English universities, the notable absence of religious iconography on their windows and stonework reflects the colonists'

¹⁶ Jenna Mead, *op. cit.*, p. 104

¹⁷ Sarah Randles, *op. cit.*, p. 155

determination to avoid the sectarian divisions that plagued the British university system. Similarly, as Sarah Randles perceptively notes, the grandeur of St Mary's cathedral "evoked the sense of an unbroken religious tradition" between Old and New Worlds, but also advertised a different sectarian complexion for the colony, "help[ing] to give Catholicism a position in the mainstream of Australian society very different from that which it had occupied in Britain".¹⁸

The impulse to medievalize the Australian scene also took an imaginative form, and continued into the literature produced in the later nineteenth century, which is the main focus of my discussion. Here too the Gothic, medievalism's menacing sibling, proved to be a particularly serviceable literary idiom for those attempting to render the forbidding and, to European eyes, perverse grandeur and desolation of the landscape. As the unruly opposite of the resplendent architecture that bore the same name, the Australian literary Gothic 'medievalized' the landscape in so far as it imputed to it those characteristics of otherworldly horror, dereliction, and engulfing gloom that in the Gothic genre were commonly associated with medieval castles and baronial halls. One of the best-known among the wealth of available examples is Marcus Clarke's famously ambiguous defence of Australia's Gothic landscape in his preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's collected verse. Having claimed earlier that "Europe is the home of knightly song, of bright deeds and clear morning thought", while "[i]n Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write", Clarke goes on nevertheless to avow that the poet can learn to sing using this land's sublime Gothic vocabulary: "whispered to by the myriad tongues of the wilderness, [the poet] learns the language of the barren and the uncouth; he can read the hieroglyphics of haggard gum trees [...] [t]he phantasmagoria of that wild dreamland called the Bush interprets itself".¹⁹

¹⁸ Sarah Randles, p. 153

¹⁹ Marcus Clarke, "Preface", in Adam Lindsay Gordon, *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*, in *Poems*, by Adam Lindsay Gordon, (with a memorial poem by Henry Kendall and a Preface by Marcus Clarke) [1893], Sydney, University of Sydney Library, Scholarly Electronic Text and Image Service, 1998, p. 9. <http://purl.library.usyd.edu.au/setis/id/v00010>. The Gothic continues into the present as a dominant idiom for representing the Australian bush; two notable recent deployment of it are found in

Late nineteenth-century writers also reached for familiar Gothic tropes when contemplating the violence at the heart of Australia's colonial history, from the enforced banishment and institutional brutality endured by convicts in the years of penal settlement to the cruelty and degradation meted out by white settlers to the dispossessed indigenous Australians. Again Marcus Clarke figures, with his representation of the barbarity of Australia's then recently-defunct convict system in his 'realist' historical romance *His Natural Life* (serialized 1870-71; book publication 1874), which is universally ranked among the most important Australian novels of the nineteenth century.²⁰ Punctuated by vignettes of convicts descending into savagery, murder, and even cannibalism, Clarke's gruesome account of penal servitude in the colony of Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania), confronts us with a purgatorial world of tortured souls alienated from their humanity. Clarke's recourse to these Gothic images presents convictism as, to use David Matthews' incisive phrase, "Australia's own equivalent to castellated culture"²¹—that is, a ghastly punitive past that echoes the Gothicized medieval past, and within whose contours lurk the spectral presences of the abused and their tormentors. Elsewhere, as is exemplified by J. M. Marsh's poem "At Sandy Crossing", the primeval horror of the land colludes with the nightmarish isolation of frontier life, leading to madness, alcoholism, moral decay, and a cycle of violent retribution between settlers and aborigines. Marsh's bleak image of a deserted out-back ranch reads like a veritable sampler of Gothic commonplaces. I quote from the second stanza only:

Swift the filing years have flitted o'er the stage of hoary time
Since the house of "Sandy Crossing" flourished in its baleful prime
... Now the prowling fearsome dingo howls his monody of woe,

Andrew McGahan's novels *1988* (1995) and *The White Earth* (2004); the latter won the 2005 Miles Franklin Award, Australia's most prestigious literary prize. Perhaps the most famous cinematic representation of the devouring bush is in Peter Weir's *The Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975).

²⁰ This novel is better known outside of Australia as *For the Term of His Natural Life*. The most recent authoritative edition is Marcus Clarke, *His Natural Life*, ed. Lurline Stuart, St. Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 2001.

²¹ David O. Mathews, "Marcus Clarke, Gothic, Romance", in *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, p. 9.

And the hooting mopehawk answers when the moon is very low —
Like to sprites of evil omen o'er the forest harpy's lair
For the blood of many victims ever cries for vengeance there.²²

There is no direct evocation, it is true, of the Middle Ages as a historical period or even as a source of ancient legends. What we encounter, rather, in these works is a kind of medievalist gesture of equivalence in which Gothic Australia shares the sinister, irrational, and barbarous sensibility conventionally reserved for the Gothic Middle Ages.

The Two Gurths: Anglo-Saxonism as colonial Lingua Franca

Along with these Gothicized landscapes and political systems, the colonial population itself was medievalized by Anglo- and Irish-Australian novelists, who attributed to their fellow settlers the vestigial signs of a medieval ancestry. While, as we have seen, Clarke portrayed those within the convict system as dehumanized and monstrous, other prominent writers of the late nineteenth century drew on a markedly different medieval legacy to express their views of Australian society: that is, Anglo-Saxonism. Research into the medievalism of these novels is only just beginning, so there is much more still to be said about what they can tell us about the place of the Middle Ages in the colonial *mentalité*. But even in these early stages, this research indicates that for Australian novelists Anglo-Saxon England provided fertile soil for the elaboration of Australia's racial and political future.

Knowing about this is valuable not simply because it gives us insight into Australian literary medievalism, but also because it adds a much-needed antipodean dimension to what is already known about nineteenth-century creative Anglo-Saxonism. Much has been said about the role of Anglo-Saxonist visions of early medieval England in the development of both conservative and democratic models of Victorian

²² J. M. Marsh, "At Sandy Crossing", in *A Golden Shanty: Australian Stories and Sketches in Prose and Verse*, [1890], Sydney, University of Sydney Library, Scholarly Electronic Text and Image Service, 2003, p. 47. <http://purl.library.usyd.edu.au/setis/id/bulgold>.

English nationalism,²³ and about the centrality of Anglo-Saxonist discourse to the formation of national consciousness and political institutions in North America, the most comprehensive study being Reginald Horsman's 1981 book *Race and Manifest Destiny*.²⁴ Far less, however, has been said about the transmission of Anglo-Saxonist nationalism to the Australian colonial environment, or about the role of this discourse in the formation of notions of Australian literary nationalism. I will be examining this by focusing on the late nineteenth-century fiction of Rolf Boldrewood, author of the famous bushranging romance *Robbery Under Arms*, and one work of turn-of-the-century writer Joseph Furphy, who is best known for his association with and contributions to the then-nationalist journal *The Bulletin*, and especially for his sprawling, comic bush epic *Such is Life*, the character of which was described by its author with the now-famous phrase: "temper democratic, bias offensively Australian".²⁵ The very divergent interpretations of the early English Middle Ages in the work of these two authors reflect the ideological elasticity of Anglo-Saxonism as a medievalist discourse, and also, more particularly, bear testimony to the towering influence throughout the Australian colonies of Sir Walter Scott's story of post-conquest England in *Ivanhoe*, which was widely used as a vehicle to deal conspicuously or obliquely with local preoccupations with race and political institutions.

In the myriad of ideological uses to which Saxon England was put in Victorian England and nineteenth-century America, two dominant strains can be isolated. First there was the more politically-oriented version that insisted on the pre-conquest freedoms enjoyed by the Saxons, and the egalitarianism of their social and political institutions, which,

²³ *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1997, Asa Briggs, Asa Briggs, "Saxons, Normans and Victorians", in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs*, Brighton, The Harvester Press, 1985-1991, vol. II, pp. 215-235, Clare A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1990.

²⁴ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981.

²⁵ Letter from Furphy to J. F. Archibald, editor of *The Bulletin*, April 4, 1897, printed in *Bushman and Bookworm: Letters of Joseph Furphy*, ed. J. Barnes and L. Hoffman, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 28.

the argument went, were destroyed by the descent of the Norman Yoke upon the Saxons. Second, there was the rather different, more racially-inflected version that celebrated the energising impulse of the Norman invasion, which was believed to have injected the lost 'race vitalism' into the degenerate English Teutons and helped them to realize their manifest destiny of cultural and political domination over the globe. According to Horsman, both the myth of pre-conquest freedom and that of the world-conquering Teutons dominated American appropriations of Anglo-Saxonism; even independence through revolution did not disturb this. Rather, even in separating from England, America was understood by some to be expressing the atavistic Anglo-Norman urges to conquer and to preserve their own freedom: "in the very act of revolution the Revolutionary generation believed they were reinforcing their links with their Anglo-Saxon ancestors while separating from the government of Great Britain".²⁶

A comparable, though also distinct, sense of racial and historical atavism can be found in nineteenth-century Australian literary representations of the relationship between Anglo-Saxon England and colonial Australia. This is strongly evident in the work of Rolf Boldrewood (real name Thomas Alexander Browne), who was arguably the most thoroughly and conspicuously committed to an Anglo-Saxonist vision of the Australian white settler population. Boldrewood, whose entire *oeuvre* reveals a fixation with the Norman conquest and its aftermath, and especially with Scott's version of post-conquest England, engaged in an elaborate, indeed, at times rather tortuous, literary *translatio imperii* in which he mapped the racial profile of *Ivanhoe*'s Normanized England onto the propertied classes of the Australian colonies. For instance, in his semi-fictional travel memoir *My Run Home* he evokes the image of the British colonies as modern-day Norman settlements, claiming that it is 'the old Norse recklessness' that leads young Englishmen of modest prospects to 'set up for themselves at Bunderabulla Crossing-place, the red River, or snow-capped Hokanui'.²⁷ This interpretation of the medieval English past as offering a racial-historical mandate for British imperialism is even more pronounced in *The Miner's Right: A Tale*

²⁶ Horsman, *op. cit.*, p.23.

²⁷ Boldrewood, *My Run Home*, London, Macmillan, 1897, p. 55.

of the *Australian Goldfields* (1890), which describes Sydney as “that picturesque city which the sea-roving Anglo-Saxon has reared on the strand of the peerless Haven of the South”²⁸, and the sailors who bring settlers out as “those gallant offshoots of the old Norse brood, whom the Motherland sends out yearly on the decks of her still increasing fleet to plant her standard and win new empires on the furthest bounds of the round world”.²⁹

The extent of his commitment to this racial paradigm is also clear in his fantasizing of an Anglo-Norman ancestry both for himself (he added an Anglo-Norman ‘e’ to his Irish ‘Brown’) and for his *nom-de plume* Boldrewood, for whom he claimed descent from the world of *Ivanhoe*, saying of his ancestral lands “here stood the mighty oaks, the lofty elms, which might have been saplings when Gurth and Wamba sang their roundelay”.³⁰ By taking this pen name, which is first given to the narrator-hero of *My Run Home*, the author bestowed upon himself an ancient fused English lineage in which his ancestor Rolf, despite being a Norseman, fought with Harold at the Battle of Hastings and then went on to marry Edelgitha, the Saxon heiress of Boldrewood Chase.³¹

This mixed Englishness is central to the Australianized Anglo-Saxonism that is evident throughout Boldrewood’s writings. We see it in the protagonist-narrator of *The Miner’s Right*, to take just one example. By describing himself as “Hereward Pole, a cadet of the ancient house of Shute, in honour and antiquity second to none of the companions of the Norman conquerer”,³² this narrator evokes a joint Saxon-Norman lineage: his ancestors were Norman, but he is named after the famous Saxon resistance leader Hereward, whose legend had been revived by

²⁸ Boldrewood, *The Miner’s Right*, London, Macmillan, 1890, p. 323

²⁹ Boldrewood, *ibid.*, p. 332.

³⁰ *My Run Home*, p.60. The adoption of Boldrewood as a *nom-de-plume*, as well as the author’s transformation of his birth-surname ‘Brown’ to the more Anglo-Norman ‘Browne’ on the death of his Irish father in 1864, reflects his conformity to what Sophie Gilmartin has described as a tendency, from 1830 on, to present English pedigrees as ‘an ancient mixture of the Anglo-Saxon and the Norman’. See Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 5.

³¹ *My Run Home*, pp. 63-64.

³² *The Miner’s Right*, p. 167

numerous Victorian Anglo-Saxonists, including Charles Kingsley in *Hereward the Wake*. The influence of *Ivanhoe*'s Normanized England is perhaps most nakedly evident, however, in Boldrewood's extensive discussion of Scott's swineherd Gurth in his strikingly-titled novel *A Sydney-Side Saxon*, which had been serialized in 1888-89 and published as a novel in 1894. Despite his own failure as a landowner and the abiding financial debt that dogged him, the majority of Boldrewood's novels channel the voice of privileged, landholding (what is locally called "squattocratic") Australia, and *A Sydney-Side Saxon* is no exception to this. It should be noted, however, that squattocratic aspirations notwithstanding, Boldrewood did not pass over Gurth's enslavement to Cedric, the Saxon thane. The narrator of *A Sydney-Side Saxon*, the impoverished English farm labourer-turned-wealthy Australian landholder Jesse Claythorpe, self-consciously defines himself against the example of the swineherd, of whom he says the following:

Here was a white man born a slave, and made to work whether he liked it or not ... [o]f course, it was a long time ago, when King Richard, the Lion-hearted, was alive. There couldn't be anything like that now. But when I began to study things a bit, it didn't seem as if there was a mighty deal changed in the present day. Wasn't father a thrall? A slave, if you like it better, though he hadn't a collar round his neck — leastways none you could see.³³

Here Gurth, with his collar of thralldom, is taken to be a prototype of the oppressed manual labourers of nineteenth-century England, which leads Jesse to seek a life for himself in Australia, where he will be "more like Gurth's master than the poor swineherd himself" (22). However, Boldrewood goes on after this to racialize the story rather than dwelling on it as a class allegory. He attributes Gurth's enslavement not to class oppression, but to a disempowerment but that is attributable to his Saxon apathy—he is a "son of Beowulf (19)"—a racial quality which Boldrewood suggests has continued in the even more degenerated English lower classes, and which can be overcome

³³ Rolf Boldrewood, *A Sydney-Side Saxon*, London, Macmillan, 1894; Sydney, Cornstalk Publishing, 1925, pp. 20-21. All future references will be to this edition.

not by class activism but by populating the colonies, thereby activating their dormant colonizing tendencies bequeathed to them by their Norman forebears. Out of this he develops an imaginative racial allegory in which the Australian colonies are populated by mixed Anglo-Norman types who embody an ideal combination in which unpretentious Saxon endurance and love of freedom are enhanced by the Norman flair for colonization; thus they atavistically reanimate the best qualities of their combined racial stock. Boldrewood's novels sustain this historico-racial allegory, it must be said, by way of a studious refusal to acknowledge that colonial Australia's beginnings were not as a lucrative paradise for free settlers but, rather, as a forsaken convict settlement founded on the enforced transportation of England's poor, urban criminal underclass (not to mention Irish political prisoners). The image of 'new Norman' intrepid sea-farers might serve as a representation, however romantic, of English merchants, explorers, or pastoralists; but the analogy comes somewhat unstuck when applied to those English men and women who arrived in the colonies in chains. Indeed, the latter give the lie to what Boldrewood's biographer Paul de Serville describes as "the combination of Saxon tenacity and Norman enterprise" that for Boldrewood "defined the English national character".³⁴

It is nevertheless surprising that Boldrewood could not find some space for convicts within his ethno-historical allegory of Australian society. Indeed, their non-volitional labour could have offered a transplanted example of the English rural underclass whom Jesse believed to be the descendents of Gurth, and thus could have reinforced the novel's preoccupation with the trait of Saxon apathy. Any pure Saxons encountered in the novel, such as the alcoholic and indigent former gentleman Jack Leighton, whose family had lived in the same region of England "since King Harold's time ... before the battle of Hastings" (134), are presented as fallen types, in the likeness of Scott's degenerate Saxon Athelstane the Unready. These Saxon-types can only be redeemed by intermarriage with 'perfected' mixed-English (that is, Anglo-Norman) types, in order to produce Australian offspring of perfected, composite racial stock. Leighton is redeemed by marriage to

³⁴ Paul De Serville, *Rolf Boldrewood: A Life*, Carlton South, Miegunyah Press, 2000, p. 19.

Jesse's sister who, despite being her husband's social inferior, offers him much-needed racial regeneration. According to the social Darwinist logic that lurks beneath the surface of the text, it is the very composite nature of this new Anglo-Norman-Australian racial type that renders it infinitely reproducible without degeneracy; so no intermarriage with other racial groups (particularly indigenous Australians) is required, or indeed desirable. This establishing of a paradoxical 'mixed purity' allows Boldrewood to come up with an elaborate medievalist solution to what Robert Dixon has called the "impossible condition" of English racial renewal: "that Britons should somehow renew themselves while preserving their 'racial' and cultural integrity on the frontier".³⁵

However, as I have argued elsewhere,³⁶ Boldrewood's preoccupation with the racial aftermath of the Norman occupation of England throws into stark relief the novel's avoidance of the more pressing and immediate situation created by British colonial occupation: that is, the enslavement and dispossession of indigenous Australians. While Boldrewood's narrator Jesse recounts his horror at the thought of Gurth's enslavement, he quickly takes the opportunity, upon arriving in the outback, to purchase an aboriginal man Talgai, and remains completely untroubled by any notion that Talgai's racial destiny might lie anywhere but in servitude. This contradiction is underwritten by the novel's twofold notion of the English character. First, Boldrewood naturalizes Anglo-Australian settlers' dispossession of indigenous lands, and their subjugation of indigenous people, by suggesting that their emigration to Australia is an atavistic repetition of William's victory at Hastings. They are presented as simply responding to a racial compulsion to impose themselves on those whom they vanquish. Second, and more surprisingly, the Saxon racial memory of oppression under the Normans—the so-called 'Norman Yoke thesis'³⁷—functions in the novel

³⁵ Robert Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure*, p. 129.

³⁶ See Louise D'Arcens, "Inverse Invasions: Medievalism and Colonialism in Rolf Boldrewood's *A Sydney-Side Saxon*", *Parergon: Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 22:2 (2005), pp. 159-182

³⁷ The 'Norman yoke' thesis, which argued that the constitutional freedoms enjoyed in Anglo-Saxon England had been stripped away post-Conquest and replaced by an oppressive occupying rule, was especially significant for those arguing for

to reinforce the white settlers' mandate to control the indigenous population. Jesse's racial identification with Scott's fictional saxon 'white man born a slave' with his symbolic collar, shifts our attention away from the real black slaves, with very real collars, whom he would have encountered repeatedly in the course of his decades in the colony. The English as colonizers can thus retain the moral righteousness reserved for the injured, as well as asserting their right to regain their historical destiny through conquest.

While colonial romance writers such as Boldrewood used nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonist discourse to buttress racialized notions of Australia's destiny as an outpost of Empire, the evocation of the same discourse by early nationalist and modernist writer Joseph Furphy was deeply resistant to instrumentalizing Saxon England as a founding myth for Australia's independent nationhood. Writing in the years leading up to, and immediately after, the formation of Australian nationhood in 1901, Furphy had recourse to many of the same tropes as Boldrewood, but used them to entirely different ends, to formulate his views on the ideal form of social and political organization for Australia. In this respect Furphy made a highly distinctive Australian contribution to Anglo-Saxonist discourse that expands our sense of the ideological uses to which it could be put in the long nineteenth century.

There has been an enormous amount of critical attention paid to Furphy's contribution to Australian bush mythology, with its distinctive masculinist, rural ethos of 'mateship'. His work, especially in his masterpiece *Such is Life* (begun in the 1890s, published 1903), has frequently though not unanimously been situated within the practices of literary nationalism because of its development of myths and images that characterize the Australian people. However, Furphy's writing is also distinctive as nationalist literature in that he attempted, as Australia moved toward and into nationhood, to formulate an ideal vision of an independent Australian polity, that is a Christian Socialist polity, and under these auspices his literature called for law reform and redistribution of land and wealth. None of the voluminous scholarship on Furphy

parliamentary and suffrage reform in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain. For a summary of this phenomenon, see Christopher Hill's famous essay "The Norman Yoke", in *Democracy and the Labour Movement: Essays in Honour of Dona Torr*, ed. J. Saville, London, 1954, pp. 11-66.

examines the role of medievalism in his vision of Australian nationhood, despite the repeated references to medieval literature and history throughout his work. I wish to redress this by focusing on Furphy's use of Saxon England in his elaboration of an Australian utopia.

The influence of Walter Scott's vision of twelfth century England in *Ivanhoe* is clearly apparent in Furphy's novel *Rigby's Romance*. In chapter 18 of the novel we find a discussion in which Gurth is presented as an exemplum of dispossession and alienated consciousness among the working class. *Rigby's Romance* is an enlarged version of a chapter that Furphy had excised from *Such is Life* sometime before 1901. He revised and expanded it, and it was published over 1905 and 1906 as a serial in the weekly newspaper *Barrier Truth*, produced in the central Australian mining town Broken Hill and read enthusiastically by many of the miners there. It was not published in novel form till some years after Furphy's death in 1912.³⁸ In *Rigby's Romance* we again see Furphy supplementing his evocation of national character embodied in egalitarian bush mateship with an argument for State Socialism as the ideal form for the future Australian polity. Its main narrator is the peripatetic Tom Collins, Furphy's famously unreliable narrator from *Such is Life*, who pits himself as an avowed conservative against the central figure in the symposium, Jefferson Rigby, a North-Eastern American and committed Socialist.

The chapter in which we encounter the novel's discussion of Gurth is devoted to Rigby's lamentation of the repeated historical alienation of the lower classes from their own will and political agency. For Rigby Saxon England has significance as one instance of a universal history of class inequality. Gurth is emblematic of subjected and alienated lower classes everywhere who have forfeited their freedoms "through ignorant neglect of their own responsibilities and slavish toleration of class encroachment".³⁹ While freedom may have once been an egalitarian Saxon birthright, Rigby traces its erosion:

³⁸ The process leading to the publication of this text is recounted by Julian Croft in his chapter on *Rigby's Romance* in *The Life and Opinions of Tom Collins: A Study of the Works of Joseph Furphy*, St. Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 1991, pp. 216-245.

³⁹ Joseph Furphy, *Rigby's Romance: A "Made in Australia" Novel*, Melbourne, C. J. DeGaris Publishing House, 1921, p. 95. All future references are to this edition.

My own remote ancestor, the free Saxon barbarian, who voted his chosen leader to the chieftainship, was represented in the time of Ivanhoe by a descendant wearing a brass collar, inscribed: "Gurth, the son of Beowulf, is the born thrall of Cedric" [...] Cedric's freedom had broadened down till it absorbed not only Gurth's freedom, but Gurth himself (79-80).

Here Scott's Saxon thane Cedric, elsewhere regarded by Scott's readers as a generous Master to Gurth, or as a noble but doomed resistance leader against the occupying Normans, becomes, at the hands of Rigby, a self-interested slave-owning landholder whose racial affiliations are secondary to his dominant place within the oppressive Saxon social order.

It seems that despite his negativity toward the Anglo-Saxon past, Furphy was clearly familiar with the major strains of British Anglo-Saxonism. He was, for instance, an avid reader of Thomas Carlyle, who had famously done his own exegesis in *Past and Present* of Scott's character Gurth. What is of interest here is that Furphy's vision of Saxon England clearly distances itself from his British precursors, eschewing in particular the paternalism of Carlyle, for whom the protected thrall Gurth is better off than atomized contemporary labourers. It is worth noting also that Furphy's doubt concerning the lasting impact of Saxon freedom is also distinct from the views of the Chartists and other working-class thinkers and agitators in Britain.

His appreciation of Carlyle notwithstanding, it is not surprising that Furphy should approach the figure of Gurth in the way that he does, considering the strong alternative influence on him of writings from the American Labor movement, American abolitionist tracts, and American utopian novels, especially Socialist utopias such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.⁴⁰ The chapter on Gurth in *Rigby's Romance* begins with a quotation from James Russell Lowell, the prominent American abolitionist also noted for his strong criticism of the popular instrumentalization of Anglo-Saxonism in America to racist

⁴⁰ The influence of American socialist thought on Furphy, and especially on Rigby's *Romance*, is sketched in Joseph Jones, *Radical Cousins: Nineteenth Century American & Australian Writers*, St Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 1976, pp. 102-107.

ends. Interestingly, however, Furphy's character Jefferson Rigby differs from both Lowell and his namesake Thomas Jefferson, who was a great espouser of Saxon liberty, in his clear refusal to found his utopian vision of Socialist Australia on the myth of pre-conquest Saxon freedom. Rigby's argument—which places him, and by proxy Furphy, in a tiny minority of nineteenth-century thinkers—contends that that the Norman Conquest was:

a matter of indifference [...] what did it matter to Gurth whether Saxon earl or Norman baron kept him making bricks without straw? [...] By the way, the manual-labour Saxon was hopeless enough and servile enough under the Saxon earl Leofric, a few decades before the Conquest (80).

Thus his portrait of pre-conquest England is of a land mired in social inequality that was only minimally affected by foreign occupation. This attempt to rebut the widespread romantic adaptation of *Ivanhoe* directly aligns Furphy with Mark Twain, whom he admired deeply and who was also renowned for his alarm at the impact of *Ivanhoe* on people's view of the medieval past, and of themselves as descendants of Scott's characters. *Rigby's Romance* bears the clear influence of *Life on the Mississippi*, the text in which Twain famously accuses Sir Walter Scott, and specifically his authoring of *Ivanhoe*, of doing more harm to society than any writer who has ever written.⁴¹

Judging by Furphy's correspondence, and by the fact that *Rigby's Romance* contains a lampoon of *Robbery Under Arms*, it is clear that Furphy was no admirer of Boldrewood; so there is a strong chance that his account of Saxon England is written in partial reaction against Boldrewood's, as well as under the influence of Twain and others. Furphy's account, especially if we consider the possibility that it might be a reaction against Boldrewood's, is a decisive, though uneasy, attempt to move away from this racialization of historical institutions and social

⁴¹ For instance, the various mock-serious honorifics by which the narrator Tom refers to Rigby, such as Major, General, Judge, and Colonel, are the same as those that Twain notes in *Life on the Mississippi* are adopted by pretentious Southern gentlemen under the influence of Sir Walter Scott. In *Radical Cousins*, Jones notes these honorifics in *Rigby's Romance* (p.103), but does not connect them to Twain.

relations. The kind of Anglo-Norman imperialist triumphalism that was central to Boldrewood's vision of colonial Australia is not unlike the Southern plantation owners who were criticised by Furphy's hero Lowell and by Twain for identifying themselves with Scott's aristocratic Anglo-Norman colonists.

Furphy's idiosyncratic interpretation of Scott's England is significant for two major reasons. First, by rejecting the significance of the Norman Conquest he eschews the narrative in which the Normans embodied an energising impulse that was vital to the realisation of England's colonial mission. Second, by focusing on the class element of the Gurth exemplum, Furphy attempts to downplay the racial implication within it. The continued subjection of the lower classes in Saxon England and their descendants in England and in newly-Federated Australia is not a reflection of irreversible racial degeneration, as many readers of Scott contended. Rather, freedom can be regained through the human sacrifice involved in agitation and uprising. He goes on to chide his fellow bush-workers for their acquiescence to oppression, saying "What could my ancestor, the free barbarian Gurth, do? What he did is exactly what you're doing now. He obediently contributed his human birthright to the building up of Cedric's monopoly" (81), and then goes on to challenge them: "Let your whole life be a protest against the system which aims at leaving a coming generation the miserable option of serfdom, suicide, or Sicilian Vespers" (81). Only organized resistance can cure the disease of individualism, and break the stranglehold of squattocratic amassing of land and capital, which together threaten his vision of a Christian Socialist Australia.

While I have been emphasizing Furphy's distance from Anglo-Saxonist racism, critics have in recent years pointed to the racism inherent not only in his outlook but, more generally, in the ideological platform of the Labor movement in late nineteenth- and early- twentieth century Australia, particularly its support of the White Australia policy.⁴² I do not wish to be an apologist for Furphy's racial blind-spots, for instance his avowed suspicion of Chinese miners and workers in Aus-

⁴² See, for instance, Frances Devlin-Glass, "«Touches of Nature that make the Whole World Kin»: Furphy, Race, and Anxiety", *Australian Literary Studies*, 19:4 (2000), pp.355-372. Devlin-Glass argues, however, that Furphy was relatively liberal according to the white supremacist standards of his time.

tralia. Indeed, one of the least assimilable parts of Rigby's argument, and one that resonates with Social Darwinist notions of racial degeneration and perfectibility, is his claim that Gurth's descendants have fought for greater freedoms in accordance with "the grand law which guarantees the sure recoil of any redeemable race against aggression" (80). Nevertheless, it is important to situate these notions within his historical vision of class conflict and domination. His distrust of the Chinese, for instance, like that expressed by other Labor protectionists, came from his belief that their underselling of their labour was part of a servility that had resulted from having surrendered themselves to despotism—a feature which, going back to our chapter in *Rigby's Romance*, is not unique to them but links them to every race in every time under every political system, including the Saxons. Here we see Furphy subscribing to the thesis of monogenesis, that is the belief in a shared origin for humans, rather than the then-fashionable polygenic theories in which races are separate species. What distinguishes populations, in Rigby/Furphy's view, is not racial difference but their "progress-potency", that is whether they have fought to win back the freedom that is their universal birthright. The descendants of Gurth have won their (limited) freedom, and must continue to do so, through protest and martyrdom, while conversely the 'Asiatic' races have conceded despotism and hence have degenerated. These people are not, however, condemned to exclusion from Rigby's vision of 'the coming Australia'. Rather, if they can throw off servility and struggle for the restoration of their primordial liberties, they will take their natural place within this egalitarian polity.

Taken together, the radical difference between Furphy's and Boldrewood's appropriations of the same events from the Anglo-Saxon past highlights the variability of medievalism in Australia's early novels. It confirms the seemingly unlikely fact that the distant place and time of medieval England offered a vital historical precedent for the gamut of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought about the racial and political future of Australia, whether this future was as a flourishing British colony or as an autonomous nation.

The Drivel of our Fathers: Haphazard and Ephemeral Medievalism

Thus far I have looked at novels that subjected their medieval themes to extensive, reflective treatments, and gave them immediacy and meaning for their colonial readers. But there was another, very different, yet arguably more pervasive kind of medievalism in colonial Australia—a more incidental, desultory, perhaps even promiscuous form of medievalism—that is just as telling in what it conveys about the Middle Ages in colonial Australian culture. This second kind of medievalism, in its very diffuseness, and the superficiality and casualness of its references, manifests in a very different way the same dialectic of proximity and distance that underpins the novels. Its ubiquitous appearance in colonial material culture—in arts and crafts, paintings, pageants and civic spectacles, costume balls, even costume sports events⁴³—and in its various literary and creative guises, in particular verse and popular theatre, reflects a generalized sense of ‘knowing’ cultural ownership of the medieval past, and, at the same time, the sense of distance that allows for its creative instrumentalization. Artistically, much of this medievalism is not of the highest calibre; indeed, it is frequently unabashedly ephemeral, superficial, and unconcerned with medieval culture. Yet as cultural analysts we ignore it at our peril. For although less conspicuously amenable to literary analysis, it is a significant barometer disclosing colonial attitudes to Europe and the pre-modern period, and is arguably in its very indistinctness, distinctive of one direction that Australian medievalism would take, and has continued to take up until the present.

The presence of incidental medievalism in colonial Australian verse, which is also only just beginning to receive belated scholarly attention, is so general as to be beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice to say that the oeuvres of poets great and small are festooned with an eclectic smattering of brief medievalist references as well as the occasional foray into pseudo-medieval stylistics, such as John Dunmore Lang’s

⁴³ My thanks to Veronica Kelly of the University of Queensland for her guidance on researching nineteenth-century pictorial periodicals in search of medievalism in colonial material and performance culture.

1843 “Reliques of Auncient Poetrie” and especially Catherine Martin’s “Lord Hector” which weds Keatian prosody to a blithe purloining of Chaucerian language and grammar in descriptions of the eponymous knight’s “doughty deeds” and slaying of “the Paynim brood”.⁴⁴ The exception to this is Adam Lindsay Gordon, who attempted longer medievalist poems, such as “Fauconshawe”, a mystery about a murdered knight, the Swinburnian “The Rhyme of Joyous Garde”, told from the point of view of the aged and lamenting Launcelot, and the lengthy, ponderous medievalist dramatic lyric “Ashtaroth”, which is set mostly in a Norman castle and a convent on the Rhine.⁴⁵ Yet Adam’s work can be seen as the exception that proves the rule. A range of medieval authors (Dante and Chaucer in particular), texts, historical figures, and literary characters can be glimpsed in colonial Australian verse, among a miscellaneous assortment of historical references ranging from the classical to the Napoleonic. Certainly Anglo-Saxonism makes an appearance, in the equestrian declaration of Fytte VII of Gordon’s “Ye Wearie Wayfarer”: “Yet if once we efface the joys of the chase / From the land and outroot the stud, / GOODBYE TO THE ANGLO-SAXON RACE! / FAREWELL TO THE NORMAN BLOOD!”.⁴⁶ It also appears in Henry Kendall’s “The Sydney International Exhibition” for instance, although Kendall’s celebration of the “Saxon train” on the Australian shores and the “Norsemen from their strong sea-wall” is but one element of the poem’s celebration of the cultural pot-pourri that makes up the Australian exhibition.⁴⁷ More common are fleeting references to Arthurian legend, particularly in the work of Gordon, Kendall, and the Irish-Australian Victor Daley, and, more generally still, non-specific evocations of chivalry, knights, and courtly love. Although he is in crowded company, the work of Gordon should be singled out as

⁴⁴ Catherine Martin, “Lord Hector”, in *The Explorers and Other Poems* [1874], Sydney, University of Sydney Library, Scholarly Electronic Text and Image Service, 1999, pp. 77-83. <http://purl.library.usyd.edu.au/setis/id/v00029>

⁴⁵ Adam Lindsay Gordon, *Poems*, pp. 49-53, 133-39, 173-279.

⁴⁶ Gordon, “Ye Wearie Wayfarer”, in *Poems*, 26-42: see p.37.

⁴⁷ Henry Kendall, “The Sydney International Exhibition”, in *The Poems of Henry Kendall* [1920], Sydney, University of Sydney Library, Scholarly Electronic Text and Image Service, 1998, pp. 228-35. <http://purl.library.usyd.edu.au/setis/id/v00009>

exemplary in this respect. Putting aside the more thoroughgoing medievalism of “Fauconshawe”, “The Rhyme of Joyous Garde” and “Ashtaroth”, his work is awash with such chivalric commonplaces as knights, priests, ladies, castles, nunneries, hermit’s wells, and so on. The frequency of these images in Australian verse suggests the extent to which these motifs had become part of the popular historical and romantic imaginary of Australian readers. Even such a fervently anti-medievalist poem as James Edmond’s “The Drivel of Our Fathers”, with its summary dismissal of such medieval figures as “warriors who skedaddled”, “the saints who liquored for their faith”, and “Vikings who were sick upon the waves” gives a clear indication of how habituated audiences were to both religious and heroic depictions of the Middle Ages.⁴⁸

A different and arguably more culturally illuminating form of superficial medievalism can be found in the theatrical culture of colonial Australia, in the burlesques that were enormously popular vehicles for presenting the Middle Ages to Australian audiences. Locally-produced and -adapted burlesques on a range of European and English medieval themes appeared throughout the later nineteenth century, but for consistency of reference I will limit my discussion to William Mower Akhurst’s 1869 *The Battle of Hastings; or the duke, the earl, the witch, the why and the wherefore*. These plays, which travestied grandiose events and personages from medieval history and legend, had pre-modern settings, but peppered their dialogue with local and topical references. They were visually and aurally sumptuous, with spectacular transformation scenes, fairy spectacles, and ballet interludes. Their flippant, promiscuous treatment of their historical matter has led theatre historian Eric Irvin to make the following evaluation:

It is not necessary to recount the plots of these burlesques. Their titles tell us all we need to know. They were beautifully mounted; superbly costumed; set to bright, catchy music; housed in a series of finely painted stage pictures; and replete with the atrocious puns so much enjoyed by audiences of the time.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ James Edmond, “The Drivel of Our Fathers”, in *A Golden Shanty*, pp. 77-79.

⁴⁹ Eric Irvin, *Australian Melodrama: Eighty Years of Popular Theatre*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1981, p. 21

No-one would cavil at Irvin's description of the burlesques' use of populist spectacle; but one can question his assessment of them as so banal as to be essentially content-free diversions which, in defiance of nineteenth-century medievalist practice, evacuated their medieval legends of all historical and cultural meaning for their colonial audiences. Rather, these plays can be seen to be poised uneasily between the throwaway approach to premodern legend and history described by Irvin and the imperialist triumphalism epitomized by Boldrewood. Furthermore, the burlesques' ambivalent use of medieval English source material dramatizes a cultural tension in which a nostalgic reiteration of shared origins with England rubs shoulders with the proleptic staging of separate Australian nationhood.

Richard Schoch, who has spearheaded the recent rehabilitation of this maligned Victorian genre, contends that burlesques by their very nature implicate themselves in that which lies outside of them, including other texts and performances, and their cultural-historical contexts.⁵⁰ In this respect they seem a particularly apposite genre for treating medievalist themes, for their referentiality echoes and reinforces the appropriative impetus at the heart of medievalism. The language of Akhurst's *The Battle of Hastings* appears on the one hand to be lampooning the ponderous cod-Norse of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1848 novel *Harold, or the Last of the Saxon Kings*, but the play is also very likely to have been inspired more generally by the exhaustive commemoration of the Battle of Hastings throughout the British Empire two years earlier in 1866, the eight-hundredth anniversary of the Norman Invasions.⁵¹

The particular importance of these burlesques lies in the contradictory combination of their facetious representation of the English medieval past and their more carefully-wrought physical form. This disjunction is vital to understanding these burlesques' theatrical, ideological, and historical value, as it reflects how they sat incongruously at the cusp of antiquarian fetishism and populist anachronism. In harbouring this incongruity, these plays reflected the ambivalence at the heart of Australian medievalism; their physical splendour reflected the antiquar-

⁵⁰ Richard Schoch. *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, UK, and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 30.

⁵¹ On Victorian representations of the Norman conquest, see n.22 above.

ian desire to reanimate the nationalist high points of English medieval history, while their fast-and-loose verbal and performative treatment of their material reflected an apparently more irreverent attitude toward this illustrious past.

In whatever genre, nineteenth-century theatrical medievalism was significant for its very nature as a representational medium; for the stage had the singular capacity to offer a simultaneously physical and spatio-temporal embodiment of the Middle Ages that was unavailable to other representational forms. Medievalist theatre was thus not simply part of the larger nineteenth-century antiquarian project: it was, rather, arguably the most successful iteration of antiquarianism, as it animated and presented —as in literally made present— personages, events, and scenes from the Middle Ages. Their satiric treatment notwithstanding, the burlesque writers, performers, and stage artists clearly revelled in vividly recreating such weighty historical moments as William’s victory over Harold at Hastings.

This antiquarian impulse is most visible in the plays’ use of scenery, costume, and staging. In the context of the medievalist burlesques written by Akhurst, the libretti indicate that the medievalist *mise-en-scène* was produced by John Hennings, the celebrated local scenic artist who worked in the tradition.⁵² In the libretto of *The Battle of Hastings* the “magnificent scenery” is listed as created by Hennings “from historical sketches”, while the setting notes mention such historically specific scenes as “a half-ruined Roman villa restored in the Anglo-Saxon style”.⁵³ Schoch claims that the pictorial antiquarianism of medievalist drama in nineteenth-century England was a recuperative gesture reflective of a modern urban society anxious about its alienation from history. I want to suggest that this antiquarianism is much more complex and ambivalent not only in burlesque *per se*, with its frank adulteration of the historical by the topical, but most particularly in colonial bur-

⁵² Hennings’ career is discussed at length by Mimi Colligan in *Canvas Documentaries: Panoramic Entertainments in Nineteenth-Century Australia and New Zealand*, Carlton South, Melbourne University Press, 2002, and by Anita Callaway in *Visual Ephemerata: Theatrical Art in Nineteenth-Century Australia*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2000.

⁵³ Akhurst, *Battle of Hastings*, p. 7.

lesques where the desire for historical repossession is shadowed by the anticipation of future separation.

Of course, these plays' striving for pictorial fidelity, and their antiquarian embodiment of the past through costume, gesture, and scenery, were significantly and deliberately mitigated by their signature embracing of anachronism. First of all, as Schoch persuasively argues, "[o]ne of the inherent complications of Victorian theatrical medievalism was [...] [that a] Shakespearian past inevitably ghosts or haunts theatrical representations of the medieval past".⁵⁴ The Shakespearian idiom is certainly detectible in *The Battle of Hastings*'s character Taillefer, A Norman minstrel who is a stage Frenchman in the tradition of Dr Caius in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It is also entirely possible that the visual idiom of these burlesques was influenced by the famously antiquarian or 'upholstered' performances of the chronicles by the Shakespearian actor Charles Kean, who had recently toured Australia in 1863-64. This is especially so since Hennings was the set designer for Kean's best-known Melbourne productions.

This Shakespearian mediation joined forces with the burlesques' trademark farcical dialogue and comedic performance modes to generate what was at times an extremely attenuated relationship between the burlesques and their medieval source material.⁵⁵ Their irreverent approach to historical personages is marked, for instance, by their pantomimic casting of Harold and his brother Gurth as breeches roles and Hilda the Dane as drag role, as well as by their inclusion of ballets—that is, leg shows, a move that disgusted both the audience and the critic of *The Battle of Hastings*.⁵⁶ They also, as mentioned earlier, localized their medieval material, as can be seen in *The Battle of Hastings* when Harold Godwinson remarks on the rise of the omnibus as a feature of the Melbourne streetscape.⁵⁷ There is, furthermore, often only the most

⁵⁴ Richard Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean*. Cambridge, UK, and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 10.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the burlesque acting style of this period, see Barnard Hewitt, "Mrs. John Wood and the Lost Art of Burlesque Acting", in *Educational Theatre Journal*, 13:2 (May 1961), pp. 82-85.

⁵⁶ *Argus* review

⁵⁷ Akhurst, *The Battle of Hastings*, p. 23.

desultory adherence to the broadest contours of the medieval legend being staged. In short, these plays, unlike historical drama, were a determined combination of the monumental and the ephemeral.

The question of what audiences might have got from these productions must take into account what awareness of the Middle Ages they brought to their viewing of them. According to some critics the burlesques are notable for their straddling of erudition and popular entertainment. In order for their irreverent treatment to be intelligible, they depended on audiences who were conversant not only with the medieval texts and events being burlesqued, but also earlier performances and productions, which were also often being lampooned. And yet much of the burlesques' humour, especially their torrential punning, would have passed over the original audiences' heads. This suggests rather that these plays traded in knowingness, that performative currency that Peter Bailly argues was common to nineteenth-century popular comedic entertainment. While Bailly refers principally to music hall, his formulation of knowingness as "a select conspiracy of meaning that animates [an] audience", giving it a "flattering sense of membership" that reflects its "own well-tested cultural and social competence"⁵⁸ could equally describe the mode of appeal the Australian burlesques made to their audiences. This is borne out in the plays' libretti and review notices, which disclose the dramatists' and reviewers' expectations that audiences will have a strong grasp on local news and civic topography, as well as a reasonably high competency in Shakespeare, but only a general knowledge of medieval and medievalist works. To the knowing rather than erudite audiences of the Australian burlesques, the Middle Ages becomes, to use Bailey's incisive phrase, "what everybody knows, but which some know better than others".⁵⁹

And yet this should not be taken to mean that the burlesques were devoid of any historical or ideological significance for their audiences. In fact, their concluding scenes in particular support Shoch's contention that in this period "performing the Middle Ages was itself a political event because it strove to construct and express a national iden-

⁵⁸ Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, Cambridge UK and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 137.

⁵⁹ Bailey, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

tity through the display of historical relics and historical bodies".⁶⁰ As a spectacular culmination of the historical and pictorial elements of the play, *The Battle of Hastings*'s final scene is the most ideologically charged. Fusing the mythology of medieval nation-formation with that of racial heritage, this play ends with a song that rehearses the notion, also found in Boldrewood, that the Norman conquest inaugurated the emergence of a 'naturally-selected' imperial race comprised of Saxon, Norman, and Danish: "The Saxon gave thee liberty, / Merry land of England. / The Dane the sceptre of the sea, / [...] The Norman arms and chivalry, / [...] And none shall take these gifts from thee, / Merry land of England".⁶¹

Yet it would be reductive to claim therefore that these plays' conclusions are unproblematic triumphal celebrations of English leadership and ancient nationhood. For the semantic and dramatic instability of burlesque ensures that everything that is celebrated is also simultaneously satirized and contested. With the Australian burlesques, it is vital to bear in mind that while they are plays about English nationhood, they are also plays about the development of nationhood *per se*. It is not unreasonable to speculate that colonial Australian audiences, with their own national sovereignty as yet unrealized, would have responded to these final scenes' spectacular staging of nation-formation in a way that was distinct from English audiences. I want to suggest that these burlesques' unstable dramatizations of medieval English nationhood, although not deliberately critical of England or her Empire, nevertheless carry nested within them a proleptic evocation of Australian nationhood. They can thus be said to epitomize Shoch's conception that historical burlesque did not so much distort history as proffer "a true myth of origins for a political reality which had yet to be realized".⁶²

In relation to Australian medievalism more specifically, the burlesques' position is complex. On the one hand, they are an extremely popular local form; and yet their 'Australianness' is less easily located than one might think. It is tempting to locate it within the local allusions; but when Harold Godwinson celebrates the Melbourne omnibus,⁶³ what

⁶⁰ Shoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage*, p. 116.

⁶¹ Akhurst, *The Battle of Hastings*, p. 32.

⁶² Shoch, *Not Shakespeare*, p. 163.

⁶³ Akhurst, *The Battle of Hastings*, p. 23

is taking place is simultaneously local and a reiteration of the metropolitan theatrical practices of England. Ironically, localization was an international practice, so local references are more a reflection of what theatre historian Veronica Kelly might call burlesques' "pre-nationalist" participation in "the economic and discursive currents of nineteenth-century international commercial entertainment".⁶⁴ As a genre, medievalist burlesque is, then, 'Australian' insofar as it encapsulates the distinctive ambivalence of Australian medievalism. It both enacts and travesties antiquarian nostalgia; it is reverential yet deflationary; loyal to England yet envisioning separation; and, finally, desirous in equal parts of restoring and preserving, and mutating and destroying, the medieval past.

The Colonial Middle Ages and the Medievalist Trace

This dialectic of historical fidelity and imaginative departure is, of course, reflective of medievalism as an intellectual and cultural practice in general, whether Old or New World. In his account of medievalist theatre in Victorian England, for instance, Schoch reminds us that the recuperative and creative impulses of Victorian medievalism both emerged in the context of the perception among the English in the nineteenth century that they were "a people dispossessed of their own history—dememorialized in their own time".⁶⁵ However, if we think of medievalism as flourishing in this gap of dememorialization, oscillating between departure from and return to the medieval past, then Australian medievalism, which responds to a double dispossession from European history across time and space, can arguably be seen to be one of the most potent and complex expressions—indeed, even a quintessential example—of medievalist practice.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Veronica Kelly, "Colonial 'Australian' Theatre Writers: Cultural Authorship and the Case of Marcus Clarke's 'First' Play", *Australian Literary Studies*, 18:1 (1997), pp. 31–44 (p. 34).

⁶⁵ Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage*, p. 12.

⁶⁶ A comparable claim about the "exemplary" nature of Australian medievalism is made by Trigg, although she is evaluating the particular phenomenon of medieval revival: "there can be no pretence of medieval survival ... [in] this regard, Ausra-

Thinking about Australian medievalism as quintessential medievalism is useful because it enables us to understand Australian appropriations of the Middle Ages like Boldrewood's, Furphy's, and Akhurst's without resorting to pejorative notions of them as derivative of English forms, which are then erroneously elevated to the status of models, despite themselves being appropriations. If we accept the idea that *Ivanhoe*, *A Sydney-Side Saxon*, *Rigby's Romance*, and *The Battle of Hastings* are all part of the continuum of representations of the Norman Conquest, the fact that Scott's and Carlyle's texts are written earlier than the others, and in England, does not place them in a more 'original' position than the Australian texts. This does not preclude a contextualisation of the colonial texts both in relation to their Australian context and their relation to British medievalism; but it displaces the hierarchy that conventionally works against the colonial texts. Many of the examples I have discussed were responding to British medievalism, but we should not thus be led to dismiss them as merely simulacral.

I want to suggest, rather, borrowing a key term from the lexicon of Jacques Derrida, that the Australian texts expose most nakedly something fundamental to medievalism itself: that its appropriative logic is one in which the Middle Ages can be understood not simply as an original historical moment to be represented or reanimated, but what in Derridean terms can be called a *trace* that is differentially interpreted across time and space, enduring yet also changing across the medievalist representations we study. The notion of the trace as it is elaborated by Derrida is complex and undergoes different iterations throughout his work, but one of the clearest articulations can be found in the statement that "[t]he trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself".⁶⁷ In this sense of the trace, the Middle Ages are thus not immediately and straightforwardly present in the Australian texts discussed here: the

lian medievalism is actually exemplary. Unable to mask the very real differences between the medieval and the modern through an implied physical continuity, it foregrounds the acts of recuperation that I argue condition and structure all [acts of revival]". *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australia*, p. xvi.

⁶⁷ Jacques Derrida. "Différance", in *Speech and Phenomena: and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 156.

Norman conquest, for instance, becomes the locus for a whole array of differing socio-historical fantasies. But neither do the various mediations of this event render it completely absent, as though it were only its representations. And yet medievalism is a hermeneutic rather than a forensic practice; for while it acknowledges the historical existence of the medieval period, it does not seek to reconstruct and thereby recover the original 'presence' of the Middle Ages. In order not to fall into relativistic platitude, we need to acknowledge that the modern (and colonial) traces we study gesture back beyond themselves; but they do not point to a pure origin but to a complex, internally divided origin, to which we cannot have unmediated access and of which we cannot take full possession through historical knowledge. As these very different texts I have examined demonstrate in their own individual ways, it is in its very adaptation of medieval traces to local conditions that Australian medievalism best expresses not only the colonial condition, but the medievalist condition.

D'Arcens, Louise, "«The Past is a Foreign Country»: The Australian Middle Ages", *Revista de poética medieval*, 21 (2008), pp. 319-356.

RESUMEN: En este trabajo se discute cómo la dialéctica proximidad/distancia ha sido durante mucho tiempo una de las características distintivas del Medievalismo australiano. Por una parte, las condiciones locales de distancia con respecto a Europa le han proporcionado al Medievalismo australiano una libertad de interpretación muy específica; pero, a causa de la herencia del colonialismo británico, este Medievalismo también refleja el sentido de continuidad de Australia en relación con su herencia europea medieval. Al examinar esta dialéctica a través de un amplio abanico de interacciones "australianas" autorreflexivas y sofisticadas con la Edad Media, en este ensayo también se defiende la necesidad de analizar el Medievalismo de Australia por lo que puede aportar con respecto a los gustos y preocupaciones ideológicas dominantes que han moldeado las actitudes australianas hacia el pasado medieval.

ABSTRACT: This essay argues that a dialectic of proximity and distance has long been the distinguishing principle of Australian medievalism. On the one hand, local conditions of distance from Europe have granted Australian

medievalism a distinctive interpretive freedom; yet because it is a legacy of British colonialism, this medievalism also reflects Australia's sense of continuity with its medieval European heritage. Tracing this dialectic through a range of more sophisticated and self-consciously 'Australian' engagements with the Middle Ages, this essay also makes a case for examining Australia's throwaway medievalism for what it can tell us about the dominant tastes and ideological concerns that have shaped Australian attitudes to the medieval past.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Australia. Colonialismo británico. Anglosajonismo. Literatura. Cultura popular.

KEYWORDS: Australia. British Colonialism. Medievalism. Anglo-Saxonism. Literature. Popular Culture.