

**Ghosts of Ned Kelly: Peter Carey's *True History* and the
myths that haunt us**

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November 2011

Submitted in total fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts
(by Thesis Only).

Abstract

Ned Kelly has been an emblem of Australian national identity for over 130 years. This thesis examines Peter Carey's reimagination of the Kelly myth in *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000). It considers our continued investment in Ned Kelly and what our interpretations of him reveal about Australian identity. The paper explores how Carey's departure from the traditional Kelly reveals the underlying anxieties about Australianness and masculinity that existed at the time of the novel's publication, a time during which Australia was reassessing its colonial history. The first chapter of the paper examines *True History's* complication of cultural memory. It argues that by problematising Kelly's Irish cultural memory, our own cultural memory of Kelly is similarly challenged. The second chapter examines Carey's construction of Kelly's Irishness more deeply. It argues that Carey's Kelly is not the emblem of politicised Irishness based on resistance to imperial Britain common to Kelly narratives. Instead, he is less politically aware and also claims a transnational identity. The third chapter explores how Carey's Kelly diverges from key aspects of the Australian heroic ideal he is used to represent: hetero-masculinity, mateship and heroic failure. Carey's most striking divergence comes from his unsettling of gender and sexual codes. The paper argues that Australians continue to invest in Kelly because he provides an opportunity to stabilise an identity threatened by changing perspectives on history; in Kelly, we see the changing shape of our ideal selves.

This is to certify that:

- (i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Masters;
- (ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and
- (iii) the thesis is 30 000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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Introduction: un-dead Ned – the presence of the past

“The past is not dead. It is not even past.”

William Faulkner’s words form the epigraph to Peter Carey’s *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000). The quote comes from *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) and is uttered by Gavin Stevens to his wife while discussing her wayward personal history. It refers to the way that past actions survive long into the future through consequence, remembrance and guilt. This kind of survival of the past was very much in evidence in the Australian consciousness at the time of *True History’s* publication, as Australia’s colonial history was being called into question. During this period, an array of Kelly narratives appeared in popular culture in the form of novels, exhibitions, films, and children’s books.¹ Why did we feel the need to revisit this figure at this crucial point of national reassessment?

In this thesis, I consider our continued investment in Ned Kelly and what Peter Carey’s reimagination of the Kelly myth reveals about Australian ideas of national identity and gender. I will argue Australians continue to invest in Kelly because he provides an opportunity to stabilise an identity threatened by changing perspectives on history. I will explore the degree to which Carey provides a revision of such a use of Kelly and show that Carey’s departure from the traditional Kelly reveals the underlying anxieties about Australianness and masculinity that existed in Australian identity politics at the turn of the 21st century.

In the first chapter, I will examine the relationship between cultural memory, myth and national identity in *True History*. Carey’s use of Irish cultural references, and Kelly’s insistence upon an Irish identity that is based on cultural

¹ For example, Robert Drewe’s novel *Our Sunshine* (1991), and Gregor Jordan’s film *Ned Kelly* (2003), which was largely based on Drewe’s novel. The children’s books *Ned Kelly’s Helmet* (1998) by Paul Stafford and *Whistle Man* (2000) by Brian Ridden also appeared at this time. In 2002 an exhibition was held at the Old Melbourne Gaol, which gave an historical account of the life of Ned Kelly. The following year another exhibition of Australian bushranger films was held at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, *Iron Helmets, Smoking Guns: The Making of Australia’s Bushranger Myth*. This exhibition provided a retrospective of Australian outlaw films dating from the 1920s to the present day, and featured many films based on Kelly.

memory, work to question the position of Kelly the famous bushranger as a relevant cultural figure in contemporary Australia. In the second chapter, I explore the way in which Irishness and Australianness are represented in *True History*. Carey does not rely on the politicised Irishness that is common in Ned Kelly narratives. Instead, the novel allows for a more fluid representation of national identity that moves away from the insular nationalism often associated with Kelly, in favour of a more transnational identity. The third chapter examines Australian heroism and how this is defined and illustrated by the traditional Kelly myth. I will focus on the ideas of hetero-masculinity, mateship and failure as key components of the Australian heroic ideal. I will then go on to examine that way that Carey's Kelly both adheres to and diverges from the Australian heroic ideal. Carey's most striking divergence comes from his unsettling of gender and sexual codes, which remain an unresolved undercurrent throughout the novel.

I will first outline the facts that are known about Kelly's life and recount the traditional Kelly myth. I will then go on to discuss the difficulties inherent in writing about the past and how *True History* plays with this difficulty and sets up its own illusion of reality. The following episodes are most commonly included in Kelly stories.² Kelly was born in 1855 near Beveridge in Victoria and grew up in a poor Irish farming family. As an eleven-year-old, he rescued a neighbourhood boy, Dick Shelton, from drowning and was awarded a green sash for his bravery.³ Kelly wore this sash underneath his armour in his final shoot-out.⁴

Around 1870, Kelly spent time in prison on a number of occasions for horse-stealing.⁵ The Kelly myth generally emphasises his innocence or the disproportionately harsh sentence awarded to him.⁶ Kelly's entry into lawlessness is often justified on the basis of his family's poverty and the racial

² For example, see popular histories such as: J. J. Keneally, *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and Their Pursuers* (Melbourne: H. Hearne, 1934); John Molony, *Ned Kelly* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002); Ian Jones, *Ned Kelly: A Short Life* (Port Melbourne: Lothian, 1995).

³ Jones, *Short Life* 37; Molony, *Ned Kelly* 21.

⁴ Jones, *Short Life* 37; Molony, *Ned Kelly* 205.

⁵ Graham Seal, *The Outlaw Legend: A Cultural Tradition in Britain, America and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 148.

⁶ Molony, *Ned Kelly* 42.

injustice the family suffered as Irish settlers.⁷ When freed from jail in 1874, Kelly lived a quiet life for a number of years, working at a sawmill⁸ and winning a boxing match against a well-known fighter named Isiah “Wild” Wright.⁹

In 1878, Kelly was involved in what became known as the “Fitzpatrick Affair”, involving the assault of police Constable Alexander Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick claimed that the Kelly family and their neighbour attacked him, armed with revolvers, when he visited the Kelly residence to serve a warrant for the arrest of Dan Kelly (Ned’s brother) for horse theft.¹⁰ The Kellys alleged that Fitzpatrick was drunk and molested Ned’s fifteen-year-old sister, Kate.¹¹ The Kellys denied being armed and claimed that Ned Kelly was not involved, having been in New South Wales at the time.¹² A doctor was unable to confirm whether or not Fitzpatrick’s injury was a gunshot wound and Ned Kelly’s presence at the scene is still disputed.¹³ Ellen Kelly, along with her son-in-law and her neighbour William “Brickie” Williamson were arrested and charged with aiding and abetting attempted murder. They were subsequently imprisoned.

Kelly went into hiding with his brother Dan and his friends Steve Hart and Joe Byrne. Rewards were offered for Ned and Dan’s capture¹⁴ and a heavily armed police search party was sent in pursuit. The Kelly gang ambushed the police at their camp and Kelly shot dead three of the police officers. The remaining officer escaped.¹⁵

The Kelly gang then embarked on two bank robberies: one at the town of Euroa and the other at Jerilderie. The Jerilderie robbery is particularly notable for its daring. The outlaws stole police uniforms and used them to disguise themselves during the hold up.¹⁶ While at Jerilderie, Kelly tried to persuade the editor of the local newspaper to print a letter he had written. Instead, the editor

⁷ Seal, Popular Tradition 112; Graham Seal, Encyclopedia of Folk Heroes (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001) 138.

⁸ Seal, The Outlaw Legend 148.

⁹ Molony, Ned Kelly 62.

¹⁰ John McQuilton, The Kelly Outbreak: The Geographical Dimensions of Social Banditry (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1979) 3; Seal, The Outlaw Legend 151.

¹¹ Seal, The Outlaw Legend 151-52.

¹² Molony, Ned Kelly 216.

¹³ Keneally, Complete Inner History 17.

¹⁴ Keneally, Complete Inner History 44.

¹⁵ Seal, The Outlaw Legend 152.

¹⁶ Molony, Ned Kelly 222.

turned the letter over to police.¹⁷ The outlaws are depicted as gentlemanly in their dealings with their hostages.¹⁸

In the year following the robberies, the Kelly gang discovered that their companion, Aaron Sherritt, was a police informer.¹⁹ Shortly afterwards, Joe Byrne shot him dead at his home.²⁰ The Kelly story's climax comes a few days later, at the shootout at Glenrowan. On the 27th of June 1880, the Kelly gang arrived at Glenrowan and took several people hostage at the Glenrowan Inn. Their plan was to derail a coming passenger train that was carrying a police troop on board. In some versions of the Kelly story, Glenrowan was also supposed to have been the starting point for Kelly's "colonial stratagem", a republican rebellion.²¹

The Kelly gang came prepared for conflict, having fashioned suits of armour from pieces of ploughs.²² Their plan was foiled by one of their hostages, Thomas Curnow, who convinced the outlaws to let him go. He was able to warn the coming police and the train was halted before it could be derailed.²³

Early the next morning, the police surrounded the Inn and a gun battle ensued. Dan Kelly, Joe Byrne and Steve Hart were killed and Ned Kelly was captured.²⁴ Kelly stood trial for murder in the face of fierce public protest. Over four thousand people attended rallies²⁵ and over thirty-two thousand people signed a petition for his release.²⁶ At the trial, Kelly received a death sentence. When the sentence was handed down by the judge, Redmond Barry, Kelly responded with "I will meet you there where I go." He was hanged in November

¹⁷ Frank Clune, Ned Kelly's Last Stand: The Life and Times of Australia's Ironclad Outlaw (Melbourne: Pacific Books, 1962) 110.

¹⁸ Seal, The Outlaw Legend 164.

¹⁹ Alex C. Castles and Jennifer Castles, Ned Kelly's Last Days: Setting the Record Straight on the Death of an Outlaw (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005) 2.

²⁰ Manning Clark, A History of Australia (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993) 349.

²¹ Jones, Short Life 157.

²² Seal, Encyclopedia of Folk Heroes 139.

²³ Molony, Ned Kelly 173.

²⁴ Clark, A History of Australia 350.

²⁵ Clark, A History of Australia 351.

²⁶ Molony, Ned Kelly 196.

1880 at the Old Melbourne Gaol.²⁷ Redmond Barry died of a heart attack two weeks after the trial.²⁸

Carey retells this traditional myth from Kelly's own point of view in the form of a series of letters written to his daughter. Carey's Kelly writes these letters in an attempt to provide his daughter with his own version of the story. The novel recounts detailed aspects of Kelly's childhood, such as the death of his father, his schoolboy experiences and Dick Shelton's rescue. It includes additional details, such as the advent of his outlawry as an off-sider to the bushranger Harry Power, the shooting of the policeman at Stringybark Creek, Aaron Sherrit's betrayal and the construction of the armour. The betrayal by Curnow and the shoot-out at Glenrowan form the final climax of the novel, which then ends with Kelly's execution.

Carey introduces several fictional elements. He invents a lover for Kelly, Mary Hearn, and a daughter, to whom Kelly writes but is never able to meet. Carey includes smaller details about the Kelly gang's Irish heritage, such as their membership of the rebel group, the "Sons of Sieve", and transvestism associated with this group.

In writing about the past, the relationship between history and fiction is one fraught with complications. This is even more true in historical fiction, where the line between history and fiction is inevitably less than absolute. Writing about Australian colonial history is particularly problematic, as this period has become the subject of much political interest and reworking. The early 2000s saw a furore of debate about the degree of strategic omission or fabrication in narratives of Australian colonial history in relation to the treatment of Aboriginal Australians. Fiction had encroached upon the territory of history with far-reaching consequences, as the founding myth of Australia as a largely peaceful settler colony was being thrown into question.

²⁷ Castles and Castles, *Last Days* xiv.

²⁸ Robert Engwerda, Geraldine Carrodus, *Southern Voices: Australian history to 1918* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 2010) 183; Max Brown, *Max Brown's Ned Kelly: Australian Son* (Melbourne: Angus and Robertson, 1948) x; Graham Seal, *Tell 'Em I Died Game: the legend of Ned Kelly* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 2002) v.

Negotiating history and fiction becomes especially difficult when dealing with such a heavily mythologised and culturally loaded figure as Ned Kelly, who exists simultaneously on a number of planes. Firstly, Kelly exists as the historical persona, the man who lived in colonial Victoria, and whose actions are recorded on the historical record. Secondly, he exists in the realm of myth. The mythical or traditional Kelly is the one of ballad and legend, and whether seen as a hero or a villain, he remains a national icon. Separate from, but drawing on both of these forms, is the fictionalised Kelly in *True History*. Carey makes use of both the historical Kelly through the “Jerilderie Letter”, and heroic aspects of the mythologised Kelly, as well as fictionalising elements of Kelly’s narrative and character.

I will explore *True History*’s interweaving of history and fiction in light of debates about the problem of the proximity of these two forms. One aspect of the problematic relationship between history and fiction, as Inga Clendinnen has outlined, stems from their different purposes. According to Clendinnen, fiction has a primarily aesthetic purpose, and non-fiction, such as history, a primarily moral purpose. Clendinnen argues that readers relate to these two text types differently, and that the potential confusion between the purposes of aesthetics and morality makes the “jostling for territory” between history and fiction important.²⁹ Iain McCalman also sees the problem in the elision of history and fiction as stemming from the moral associations of history. He argues that should “the truth value” of history be diminished, historians’ ability to “influence the world” will likewise be reduced.³⁰

This ability of historians to influence the world is discussed by Ann Curthoys and John Docker in *Is History Fiction?* (2006). They note the rise in “public and legal scrutiny” of historians as past events, such as wartime atrocities and national foundational histories, are contested, as in the debate around

²⁹ Inga Clendinnen, “The History Question: Who Owns the Past?,” *Quarterly Essay* 23 (2006): 34.

³⁰ Iain McCalman, “Flirting with Fiction,” *The Historian’s Conscience: Australian Historians on the Ethics of History*, ed. Stuart Macintyre (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004) 159.

colonial Australian history.³¹ In these debates, the historian is often seen as an authority on past truths; a collector and presenter of facts, so that the historical narrative appears as a straightforward account of the past.

Curthoys and Docker have noted the apprehension that results from disagreements about past events: "public audiences want what historians say to be true and do not like it when historians disagree among themselves or suggest that a true answer may never be found."³² In actuality, the historian's account of the past is by nature subjective and selective. The historian has no direct connection to the reality of the past and is instead limited to working with various pieces of evidence that cannot give a completely representative picture of what occurred.³³

The selective nature of historical discourse also results in a highly subjective end product that can closely resemble fiction, acting more as a substitute for the past than a facsimile of it. The process of compiling history, as Hayden White has noted, is also highly subjective.³⁴ It can be governed by political and moral values and personal history or experiences, which all influence the way that the past is represented.³⁵ Franklin Ankersmit adds that historical subjectivity can additionally be the result of aesthetic and stylistic preferences, lack of imagination or congeniality with a particular subject.³⁶ David Wishart points out that a rigid theoretical approach does not alleviate this inherent subjectivity of history. He states that, in fact, it is the theory that changes history from a dialogue that takes place between the historian and the facts of the past into a monologue "where the historian does all the talking."³⁷

The convention of organising facts about the past into a narrative form further increases the proximity of history and fiction. White has explained the

³¹ Ann Curthoys and John Docker, Is History Fiction? (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006) 4.

³² Curthoys and Docker, Is History Fiction? 4.

³³ P.A. Roth, "Narrative Explanation: The Case of History," History and Theory.27 (1988): 12.

³⁴ Hayden White, The Content of the Form: A Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1987) 48.

³⁵ David Wishart, "The Selectivity of Historical Representation," Journal of Historical Geography 23.2 (1997): 115.

³⁶ Franklin Ankersmit, Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983) 235.

³⁷ Wishart, "Selectivity," 115.

difference between history and fiction as being

first and foremost their content, rather than their form. The content of historical stories is real events, events that really happened, rather than imaginary events, events invented by the narrator. This implies that the form in which historical events present themselves to a prospective narrator is found rather than constructed.³⁸

However, the content of historical fiction is also “real events,” meaning that actually, neither the content nor the form can act as differentiating features.

Paul Ricoeur argues that history and fiction are not only similar but that they are inextricably linked, each borrowing from the other. Aside from the narrative form,³⁹ history borrows “the representative function of historical imagination.” This is the way that certain events come to be seen as tragic, or heroic, or comic.⁴⁰ It is this element of history, Ricoeur argues, that causes a great affinity between history and fiction; and that because of this, a “history book can be read as a novel.”⁴¹

Related to this are the ethical uses to which history is put. “Epoch-making” historical events are able to convey certain emotions, such as admiration or pride for foundational histories. In the case of horrific historical events, it is the moral duty of history to convey this feeling of horror. However, as Ricoeur points out, horror is the premise of fiction, not history,⁴² or to put it another way, emotion has no place in the realm of history.

Fiction, in turn, borrows certain elements from history. Most fiction is narrated to the reader as having occurred in the past, or in a rapidly receding present. This fictional past is presented as “quasi-historical”; it is a “past that might have been.” Ricoeur sees the fictional past and the real past as closely linked, with fiction simply having taken an alternative time-line to the one taken by the real past.⁴³

The proximity of history and fiction, their representative function and their moral purpose, were all highly visible in the Australian cultural landscape

³⁸ White, Content of Form 27.

³⁹ Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984) 185.

⁴⁰ Ricoeur, Time and Narrative 186.

⁴¹ Ricoeur, Time and Narrative 186.

⁴² Ricoeur, Time and Narrative 188.

⁴³ Ricoeur, Time and Narrative 190.

at the time of *True History's* publication. At this time, public debate about Australian colonial history led to a shift in perspective about Australia's past. These changes focussed on the very essence of Australia's foundational history and the nature of Australian colonisation. The historical narrative of colonial Australia, which had been one of heroic and noble struggle against the odds, was transformed to one of violence and brutality.

The public debate that surrounded this changing view of Australia's colonial past had its roots in the late 1980s, when various state Aboriginal agencies lobbied for an enquiry into the forced removal of children of Indigenous descent from their families,⁴⁴ a practice that had stretched from the late 1880s to the 1960s.⁴⁵ The children affected by this practice are now known as the Stolen Generations. This lobbying eventually led to the 1997 *Bringing Them Home Report*, which caused controversy and dispute among critics and politicians. The then Prime Minister, John Howard, refused to issue a formal parliamentary apology to Indigenous Australians, with his Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Affairs Minister John Herron going on to deny the existence of the Stolen Generations, and questioning the methods of the report.⁴⁶ This point of view was supported by some sections of the political spectrum, with various critics⁴⁷ similarly seeking to similarly deny or discredit the Stolen Generations.⁴⁸ These denials were then met with further rebuttals,⁴⁹ all of which fuelled the ongoing "History Wars"; a debate around the reinterpretation of Australia's colonial history, with competing versions of whether Australian colonial history should be written to acknowledge and seek to remedy the violent and racist aspects of

⁴⁴ Antonio Buti, "Bringing Them Home the Alswa Way," 23rd Annual Australia and New Zealand Law and History Society Conference (Murdoch University: 2004).

⁴⁵ Peter Read, The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883 to 1969. 1981).

⁴⁶ Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, The History Wars (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003) 155.

⁴⁷ Andrew Bolt, Peter Howson, Keith Windschuttle and Ron Brunton (see Macintyre and Clark, The History Wars; Robert Manne, "Windschuttle's Second Fabrication", in Making Trouble: Essays Against the New Australian Complacency (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2011).)

⁴⁸ Robert Manne, "In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right," The Quarterly Essay. 1 (2001).

⁴⁹ Notably Robert Manne and Raymond Gaita (see Macintyre and Clark, The History Wars, 145.)

Australia's past, or as a more celebratory narrative, which foregrounded pride in national achievements.⁵⁰

Alongside the Stolen Generations controversy, and adding to its furore, was the publication of Henry Reynolds' *An Indelible Stain? The Question of Genocide in Australia's History* (2001). This work expanded on earlier publications by Reynolds⁵¹ and examined the massacre of Aboriginal people by colonists in the context of genocide. Reynolds became the target of criticism by controversial historian Keith Windschuttle, who accused him of fabricating the Aboriginal massacres, and of creating myths of genocide. After a series of heated discussions between Windschuttle and Reynolds in a number of forums, such as the ABC *Lateline* program, the Canberra Press club and a public debate at a Sydney bookshop, Windschuttle embarked upon a study of Australian frontier history, to attempt to discredit the "genocide thesis." The first volume of his *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* was published in 2002. In this work, he accuses Reynolds, along with other prominent historians, of deliberately politicising history and inventing atrocities.⁵²

Both the issue of the Stolen Generations and the frontier massacre debate changed the way that Australians related to the past, as largely unquestioned historical narratives of colonial Australia were questioned. The History Wars emphasised the subjective nature of history. The complexities in accessing and interpreting historical facts allow for a highly varied range of readings of the past.

This intersection between history and fiction came to the fore in the literary world with critical reactions to Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005). This historical novel deals with the massacre of Aboriginal people in the Hawkesbury river area. Soon after this novel was published, an article by the historian Mark McKenna appeared in the *Australian Financial Review*, wherein he lamented the decline of academic history and the subsequent blurring of the role of novelist and historian in historical fiction. He criticised Grenville for wanting her fictional work to be seen as history: "If ever there was a case of a novelist

⁵⁰ Anthony Maston, "Foreword", in Macintyre and Clark, *The History Wars* vii.

⁵¹ *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981) Sydney: UNSW Press; *Dispossession: Black Australians, White Invaders* (1996) Melbourne: Allen & Unwin

⁵² Macintyre and Clark, *The History Wars* 162-63.

wanting her work to be taken seriously as history, it is Grenville."⁵³

Following on from this, in 2006, Inga Clendinnen, in her essay "The History Question; Who Owns the Past?", stressed the importance of keeping history and fiction on opposite sides of the "ravine" she sees as separating them.⁵⁴ Clendinnen pointedly criticised Grenville for her historical methodology. Sarah Pinto echoes Mark McKenna in noting that it was Grenville's ongoing focus on historical research when discussing *The Secret River* that meant "she couldn't help but make truth-claims about her novel."⁵⁵ For Clendinnen, the novel's reception and writing went beyond being "not history" to become, in fact, "anti-history."⁵⁶

The critical point of difference between history and fiction for both McKenna and Clendinnen is that only history has the possibility to access the real, authentic past. Stella Clark⁵⁷ and Pinto both note that this is a surprising position for the historians to take considering the degree of debate about the constructed nature of truth both within and beyond the discipline of history.⁵⁸

Grenville's novel was perhaps so pointedly attacked because it traversed a contemporary historical debate about Aboriginal genocide. No such debate existed at the time concerning the Kelly myth, yet Carey's novel was similarly scrutinised. Inga Clendinnen recounts a writers' festival where Carey was barraged with detailed questions about his departures from history and demands to justify fictionalised aspects of *True History*.⁵⁹

One of the reasons for the attention Carey's novel received is perhaps the centrality of Ned Kelly to the nationalist Australian imaginary, combined with the increasingly contested nature of Australia's colonial past. Ned Kelly is central to ideas of Australian national identity.⁶⁰ Although, for some, Kelly remains

⁵³ Mark McKenna, "Writing the Past," [Australian Financial Review](#) 16.12.2005 2005: 8.

⁵⁴ Clendinnen, "The History Question," 34.

⁵⁵ Sarah Pinto, "History, Fiction and *the Secret River*," [Lighting Dark Places: Essays on Kate Grenville](#), ed. Sue Kossew (New York: Rodopi, 2010) 184.

⁵⁶ Inga Clendinnen, quoted in Jane Sullivan, "Making a Fiction of History," [The Age](#) 21.10.2006 2006: 12.

⁵⁷ Stella Clarke, "Havoc in History House," [The Australian](#) 04.03.2006 2006: 8.

⁵⁸ Pinto, "History, Fiction," 190.

⁵⁹ Clendinnen, "The History Question," 32.

⁶⁰ Bruce Tranter and Jed Donoghue, "Ned Kelly and Australian Identity," [Journal of Sociology](#) 44.4 (2008).

simply a horse-thief and murderer, for others he represents the archetypal Australian hero, embodying characteristics felt to be uniquely Australian; such as mateship, anti-authoritarianism and support of the underdog. Most versions of the Kelly narrative focus on these characteristics, showing Kelly defying the authority of the Victorian police force, supporting the rural poor, and dying bravely.⁶¹ Graham Seal has described Kelly as “one of the few nationally and internationally identifiable symbols of Australia.”⁶²

Perhaps another reason for this attention is that Carey introduces several fictional elements that reimagine Kelly’s national and gender or sexual identity. These departures from the traditional Kelly serve to unsettle elements that are central to Kelly’s heroism, such as his heterosexuality, masculinity, altruism and support of the underdog.

The most obvious reason for such attention is the novel’s illusionary presentation as an historical document. Carey’s rendition of the Kelly story in *True History* is so realistic that Andreas Gaile describes the text as a “near-perfect illusion of reality [that] almost manages to dupe the reader.”⁶³ Paul Eggert goes further to argue this illusion of reality is so convincing that some readers may “believe that Carey’s work is a real autobiography, printed from a manuscript actually written by Ned Kelly.”⁶⁴ Iain McCalman writes that it was suggested in a Canberra Press Club conference that Carey’s fictional narrative may even come to replace the historical version of events.⁶⁵ Such a conflation of Carey’s novel with historical narratives can be seen with historian Alex McDermott’s comparison of *True History* with several non-fiction historical Kelly works, such as Ian Jones’ *Ned Kelly: A Short Life* (1995) and Andrew McQuilton’s *The Kelly Outbreak* (1979).⁶⁶

Carey uses various techniques to give *True History* this illusion of historical authenticity. The novel is primarily composed of thirteen parcels of

⁶¹ Graham Seal, *Ned Kelly in Popular Tradition* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1980) 15-16.

⁶² Seal, *Popular Tradition* 26.

⁶³ Andreas Gaile, "The True History of the Kelly Gang at Last!," *Meanjin* 60.3 (2001): 215.

⁶⁴ Paul Eggert, "The Bushranger's Voice: Peter Carey's True History of the Kelly Gang (2000) and Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter (1879)," *College Literature* 34.3 (2007): 123.

⁶⁵ McCalman, "Flirting with Fiction," 153.

⁶⁶ Alex McDermott, "In His Own Write," *Eureka Street* (2001), 06.3.11
<<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/pages/102/102mcdermott.html>>.

letters, ostensibly written by Ned Kelly to his daughter in America. These letters are interposed with newspaper cuttings; some annotated by the mother of Kelly's child, notes from archivists and anonymous editorial background. All of these are contrived but are stylised in such a way as to seem authentic.

The designs of the book cover and jacket are another technique of historical authentication. The initial release of *True History* by the University of Queensland Press was in a limited edition hardback that was designed to look like a nineteenth-century book, with a half leather binding, unmarked spine and plain cream covers.⁶⁷ Paul Eggert notes that this edition also used rough-grained paper stock, reminiscent of hand-made paper and with "sections individually guillotined rather than as a whole quire, creating something like a rough, deckled-edge finish", which all act as "factitious markers of historical authenticity."⁶⁸ Other, later editions of the novel included similar markers, such as historical photographs and samples of Kelly's handwriting on the cover, and detailed maps on the end-papers.⁶⁹

The historical authentication continues within the text. Kelly's narrative is precluded with an "undated, unsigned account"⁷⁰ of the shooting at Glenrowan on June 28th 1880. This anonymous voice, presumably that of Thomas Curnow;⁷¹ the school teacher who betrays Kelly and causes his arrest, then assures the reader that the parcels that make up the text are written in "Ned Kelly's distinctive hand" (2). This voice is followed by the objective voice of the archivist introducing and describing the first parcel, before Kelly's own narrative voice commences. These techniques allow the novel to be framed in an historical context, and the reader only enters the text proper after moving through various voices that all validate the historical authenticity of the text.⁷²

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Webby, "Literary Prizes, Production Values and Cover Images," *Judging a Book by Its Cover: Fans, Publishers, Designers and the Marketing of Fiction*, eds. Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 64.

⁶⁸ Eggert, "Busranger's Voice," 123.

⁶⁹ Webby, "Literary Prizes," 68-69.

⁷⁰ Peter Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000) 2. All further references to this text are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.

⁷¹ Lyn Innes, "Resurrecting Ned Kelly," *Sydney Studies in English* 29 (2003): 72.

⁷² Eggert, "Busranger's Voice," 123, Bruce Woodcock, *Peter Carey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 145.

The title of the novel introduces the idea of the problematic nature of historical truth. The title recalls C. H. Chomley's *The True Story of the Kelly Gang of Bushrangers* (1907), an early popular history of the Kellys.⁷³ Bruce Woodcock points out that historically a "true history" was seen as a reliable chronicle, as differentiated from a fable or a myth. This tradition dates from classic models such as the *True Historie of Lucian the Somosatenian* (circa 200 AD), and became incorporated into historically-based works. Despite their name however, true histories tended to be a mixture of fact and fiction, and were often written in epistolary and picaresque styles.⁷⁴ Woodcock has noted the presence of such styles in *True History*, which, although fictional, asserts its own factual reliability.

Eggert has made the connection between *True History* and these older forms of historical accounts. Eggert explores the style used by Chomley in *True Story*, and other Kelly histories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as J. J. Keneally's *Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and their Pursuers* (1929) and S. Davies' serial in the *Melbourne Herald* "The Kellys Are Out: New Kelly Gang History" (November – December 1930). Eggert points out that these older Kelly histories follow the "true history" model outlined by Woodcock, where fiction and fact are blended, though are still taken as valid historical accounts.

Eggert describes Chomley's approach to history, for example, as seeing "a true story of actual events and a popular history of them [as] the same thing."⁷⁵ Eggert identifies specific narrative techniques that Chomley used to achieve this blend of fact and fiction in *True Story*, which include novelistic "scene setting, the quoting of words spoken by those involved...reliance on tiny details for verisimilitude and wry comedy."⁷⁶

The later "The Kellys Are Out" gives an even more dramatised account of the Kelly story, and here, as Eggert points out, "whole slabs of dialogue are invented," and the "Jerilderie Letter" is "cut up into heavily bowdlerized chunks of quotation, its text adjusted at will to suit the narrative context."⁷⁷ The effects

⁷³ Eggert, "Bushranger's Voice," 124.

⁷⁴ Woodcock, *Peter Carey* 145.

⁷⁵ Eggert, "Bushranger's Voice," 124.

⁷⁶ Eggert, "Bushranger's Voice," 124.

⁷⁷ Eggert, "Bushranger's Voice," 125.

of these narrative techniques are to produce a text that appears to be much closer to the modern novel than the modern historical text.

Carey's novel contains a similar combination of fact and fiction, with the basic sequence of events adhering to historical facts. Like "The Kellys Are Out", *True History of the Kelly Gang* makes use of the historical "Jerilderie Letter", retelling incidents mentioned in the "Letter" using a similar narrative voice to the historical Kelly's. At the same time, *True History* contains some significant departures from historical fact.

True History's insistence upon its own authenticity may appear to make its account of history less problematic, as it is positioned as Kelly's "true" personal account. But in fact, by emphasising the authenticity of Kelly's account, its subjectivity is simultaneously foregrounded,⁷⁸ drawing our attention to the subjectivity inherent in all historical accounts. This is particularly visible when the contested and ambiguous nature of Kelly in the Australian cultural imaginary is considered, where he can exemplify both a hero and criminal.

The tension between historical truth and subjectivity is found even in the novel's title. Although the novel is entitled *True History*, it is actually a fictional account of the Ned Kelly story, presented as true in the form of Ned's own personal true history. The title's "true" and "history" sit uneasily alongside each other, their proximity drawing attention to the subjectivity of all historical discourse.⁷⁹ The conspicuous lack of an article in the title suggests the novel is neither "a" true history; implying one of many, nor "the" true history; implying the only one. Carolyn Bliss makes sense of the title by seeing it as referring to Ned's true history and illustrative of his "sad and ultimately futile attempt to find the truth."⁸⁰

The inseparability of personal truth and subjectivity is further established with Ned's opening sentence;

⁷⁸ Lisa Fletcher and Elizabeth Mead, "Inheriting the Past," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 45.2 (2010): 191.

⁷⁹ Fletcher and Mead, "Inheriting the Past," 198, Paula Shields, "The Reluctant Outlaw," *Fortnight* 394 (2001): 26.

⁸⁰ Carolyn Bliss, "'Lies and Silences': Cultural Masterplots and Existential Authenticity in Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*," *Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey*, ed. Andreas Gaile (New York: Rodopi, 2005) 291.

I lost my own father at 12.yr of age and know what it is to be raised on lies and silences my dear daughter you are presently too young to understand a word I write but this history is for you and will contain no single lie may I burn in Hell if I speak false (5).

Here, Ned's fervent intention to tell his own truth immediately emphasises its inherent subjectivity, and in turn the subjective nature of all historical accounts. In this opening sentence, telling the truth is explicitly linked with salvation, but simultaneously Carey departs from historical fact with the introduction of Kelly's fictional daughter.⁸¹

Carey has explored the proximity of fiction and history in his earlier novels, such as in *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988). Oscar and Theophilus Hopkins are both historically based; upon the English poet Edmund Gosse, and his father Phillip Gosse, and it is Edmund Gosse's autobiography, *Father and Son* (1907), that partly forms the inspiration for the novel. *Oscar and Lucinda* interweaves historical characters with the fictional characters. Marian Evans, for example, which is the novelist George Eliot's real name, is a friend of Lucinda's mother. Lucinda meets her while in London, and subsequently becomes the subject of one of Evans' letters.

Illywhacker (1985) too, is very much concerned with the conscious fictionalisation of the past, as the novel unfolds from the point of view of the self-confessed liar and confidence man, Herbert Badgery.⁸² M.D. Fletcher argues that the lies that Badgery tells about his own history form part of a theme of lying that runs through *Illywhacker*. Fletcher goes on to argue that this can relate to lies Australians tell themselves about their own history, around ideas such as national independence and *terra nullius*. This idea is explicitly stated when Leah remarks, "The land is stolen. The whole country is stolen. The whole nation is based on a lie which is that it was not already occupied when the British came here. If it is anybody's place it is the blacks" (307).⁸³

The on-going reassessment of Australian history, and the continued engagement with Ned Kelly as a point of reference for Australian identity both

⁸¹ Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 291.

⁸² Woodcock, Peter Carey 81.

⁸³ M. D. Fletcher, "Australian Political Identity: Aboriginal and Otherwise - Carey/Malouf/Watson," 2000 Conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association, eds. F. Castles and J. Uhr (Australian National University: 2000).

show that the past is far from dead. The past lives on in various guises; individually, in people's memories, or collectively in the form of myth.

Myth, Memory and Misunderstanding: the problem of inherited Irishness

In the last quarter-century, historical discourse has increasingly included personal, collective and cultural memories as modes of retelling the past.

Memory, both individual and collective, is central to *True History*. The novel emphasises the unreliable aspects of the process of remembering: fabrication, misunderstanding, nostalgia and selectiveness. Carey engages with Kelly's appeal to a culturally remembered Irishness to destabilise its validity, which in turn can challenge our contemporary cultural memory of the Ned Kelly myth.

Dominick La Capra¹ and Kerwin Lee Klein² have both identified the appearance of memory in recent historical discourse as a product of the collective trauma caused by turbulent historical events. This has been most notable in relation to the Holocaust. In La Capra's view, the traumatic past event makes its return as memory discourse.³ La Capra casts the historian in the role of Freudian psychoanalyst, allowing engagement with the past to become a form of therapy.⁴ Klein sees the role of memory as similarly therapeutic, but not in the quasi-clinical frame of reference adopted by La Capra. Instead, Klein identifies the rise of memory as an antidote to the postmodern view of history as "oppressive fiction", where memory acts as a "therapeutic alternative to historical discourse."⁵

Such a relationship between history and memory is useful in considering Carey's novel. Here, the "true history" is a fictionalised and highly personalised account that revisits a problematic chapter of Australia's colonial history. Carey's reassessment of an Australian nationalist hero came at a time when the nation's past was brought into the public consciousness and questioned through cultural

¹ Graham Huggan, "Cultural Memory in Postcolonial Fiction: The Uses and Abuses of Ned Kelly," *Australian Literary Studies* 20.3 (2002).

² Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse," *Representations* 69 (2000).

³ Dominick La Capra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 53.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, Working-through (Further Recommendation on the Technique of Psychoanalysis," trans. James Strachey, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. XII (London: Hogarth, 1958) 158.

⁵ Klein, "Emergence of Memory," 145.

debates such as the History Wars and that of the Stolen Generations. Huggan argues that this socio-political reassessment of the past in turn necessitated a reassessment of Australia's national icon.⁶

The difference between memory and history has been described by Pierre Nora as the difference between a living thing, a "bond tying us to the eternal present", and a "reconstruction...of what is no longer." Nora sees history as "perpetually suspicious of memory," and as having the ultimate goal of suppressing and destroying memory.⁷ Up until about two decades ago, history was solely associated with the collective past and memory with the individual.⁸ Memory, although forming the basis for history, was thought to be nothing but an unreliable and misleading private testimony. History, on the other hand, "aspired to scientific status" in its exactitude. Nora argues that particularly the last few decades have seen a universal change in how people relate to the past, stemming from the upsurge of memory.⁹

Kerwin Lee Klein has examined this recent rise of memory within historical discourse. Klein argues that the growing incidence of memory as a mode of engagement with history acts as an "antihistorical discourse", with memory becoming a "primitive or sacred form" opposed to sanctioned historical discourse.¹⁰ In Klein's model, which echoes Nora, the upsurge of memory is aligned with postcolonialism and a move to decolonisation. Klein's opposition between history and memory characterises history as the reinforcement of prevailing power structures and the idea of "the state"; and memory by oppressed and marginalised groups. The rise of memory represents a return of the repressed, with memory offering a "counterhistory" that challenges the established historical version.¹¹

Nora similarly sees the emergence of memory, which he terms "memorialisation", as democratising the past. The greater presence of voices that are not aligned with the dominant power structures allow the task of

⁶ Huggan, "Uses and Abuses," 138.

⁷ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Memoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 8.

⁸ Pierre Nora, "Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory," *Transit* 22 (2002): 6.

⁹ Nora, "Current Upsurge." 8.

¹⁰ Klein, "Emergence of Memory," 127.

¹¹ Klein, "Emergence of Memory," 137.

manufacturing the past to be shared, rather than being the preserve of the historian alone.¹² The recent upswing in the use of memory to relate to the past has resulted in wider criticism of official versions of history and the recovery of previously repressed areas of history.¹³

The historical Ned Kelly, when considered in relation to Nora and Klein's history/memory divide, may appear to be located in the realm of memory. Kelly as a cultural icon stands in opposition to the colonial establishment and is concerned with empowering the underdog. Despite the apparent anti-establishment position he holds, however, Kelly is often mobilised to perpetuate and uphold conservative nationalist ideologies, and he forms an Australian male heroic ideal in nationalist discourse. This suggests that he may actually be situated within Klein's "history" binary, rather than the counterhistorical realm of memory within which he may at first appear.

Carey has previously explored this history/memory divide and the way that this leads to differing interpretations of past events in *Oscar and Lucinda*. The narrator is mistrustful of local history, and in discussing the place-name "Darkwood" explains that:

Darkwood, for instance, they will tell you at the Historical Society, is called Darkwood because of the darkness of the foliage, but it was not so long ago you could hear people call it Darkies' Point, and it was not so long before that when Horace Clarke's grandfather went up there with his mates and pushed an entire family of aboriginal men, women and children off the edge (2).

This passage also shows the process of silencing undesirable aspects of the past, as memory is gradually drowned out by dominant historical narratives. This leads to a misunderstanding of history. Woodcock notes that we often misinterpret history, "misreading its remnants through the glass of our own distorting viewpoints",¹⁴ and fail to acknowledge marginal histories that have become displaced by dominant versions of the past.

Collective and cultural memory and the relationship between identity, mythology and nationalism are important concepts to consider in relation to Kelly. I will outline these concepts, and then go on to explore how they converge

¹² Nora, "Current Upsurge," 8.

¹³ Nora, "Current Upsurge," 1.

¹⁴ Woodcock, *Peter Carey* 82.

in the figure of Kelly. Contemporary memory studies reveal strong connections between history, memory and identity.

“Collective memory” has been a central focus of contemporary memory studies, an idea formalised by Maurice Halbwachs in *The Social Frameworks of Memory* (1925). Halbwachs describes “collective memory” as the social framework which defines all memory and in which it exists. According to Halbwachs, collective memory is primarily transferred orally and based upon actual shared memories. As a result, Halbwachs’ collective memory has a relatively short lifespan, existing only as long as the individuals who share in the memory are still alive.

Jan Assmann developed his theory of cultural memory out of Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory. Although they are both concerned with the memory of a group, there are some significant differences between them. In contrast with Halbwachs, Assmann’s cultural memory is text-based, and relies upon a non-personal record of events, rather than remembered individual experience. As a result, cultural memory has much a longer life than collective memory, superseding the lives of the individuals who have direct access to this memory. Assmann defines cultural memory as engineered by culture, rather than individuals, and as ritualised in texts, myths and monuments.¹⁵

Assmann describes cultural memory as a “connective structure” that founds group identity through a coherence of ritual and text.¹⁶ Cultural memory acts to consolidate identity and to create a sense of unity within a group, whereby the group is able to identify itself in relation to the “otherness” of those who do not share in the memory.¹⁷ Assmann argues that the main societal function of remembering the past is to foster a sense of continuity in the community, which, in turn, encourages social development and change, as the present is viewed as a direct product of a collective past.

In addition, for Assmann, cultural memory is the foundation for the creation of myths. Cultural memory celebrates the past as a place of mythological

¹⁵ Jan Assmann, Das Kulturelle Gedaechtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung Und Politische Identitaet in Fruehen Hochkulturen. (Muenchen: Beck, 1997) 17.

¹⁶ Assmann, Kulturelle Gedaechtnis 25.

¹⁷ Jan Assmann & John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," New German Critique. 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (1995): 130.

heroism, while the present is often a poor and mediocre reflection of that past. According to Assmann, reliving these ideals of mythical heroism is the purpose of the ritual and text of cultural memory, as it is the loss of these ideals that renders the present inferior, while through collective remembering they may be restored at some point in the future.¹⁸ Assmann describes cultural memory as being in a continual state of flux, as the present is constantly evaluated and reconstructed in light of the past and plans are made for the future. He proceeds to posit that any definition of identity that comes as a result of this background of cultural memory is visibly of a highly constructed nature, to the point of being “deeply imaginary.”¹⁹

The links between history, mythology, memory and identity are particularly important in the construction of national identities. Jeffrey Olick has examined the importance of history in the creation of the nation, with histories acting as mediations between demands for change and equally strong demands for the continuity of past, present and future to be preserved. The manipulation of history by nation-states has located histories closer to mythology.²⁰

Victor Roudometof, however, suggests that there is a sharp division between historical records and the mythological aspects of the past, with heavily mythologised national figures, such as Ned Kelly, existing in a dual fashion: the “realistic” historical version and the commemorated, mythologised version.²¹ However, the term “realistic” is problematic in this context as it suggests a single objectively “true” version of events. A substitution of “historicised” perhaps would be more suitable.

Even with the question of historical truth aside, Roudometof’s positioning of myth and history into discrete categories is problematic, and the relationship between history and mythology is much more complex than Roudometof allows. This can be seen with the appearance of Ned Kelly in the Australian imaginary. It

¹⁸ Assmann, *Kulturelle Gedächtnis* 17.

¹⁹ Eric Kluitenberg, *The Politics of Cultural Memory: Identity, Belonging and Necessity*, 1999, Available: <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9907/msg00083.html>, 15 June 2009, Kluitenberg, *Politics of Cultural Memory*.

²⁰ Assmann, *Kulturelle Gedächtnis* 118, Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 110.

²¹ Victor Roudometof, "Introduction: Beyond Commemoration: The Politics of Collective Memory," *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 31.2 (2003): 162.

is of course true that there was a real historical Ned Kelly, who in some regards differs from the mythological, or cultural image of Kelly, but the relationship between these two Kellys is much more fluid and interdependent. Different cultural uses of the mythological Kelly can change the way that Kelly is remembered historically, and similarly, different historical discourses can change the way that Kelly is mythologised. This tension between mythology and history is central to *True History*: the “true history” of the title referring to a reimagining of a heavily mythologised historical persona.

A further distinction can be drawn between mythology and memory. Duncan Bell has suggested that not only are mythology and memory separate concepts in relation to national identity, but that they often act in opposition to one other. Bell is cautious in using the term “cultural memory” as defined by Assmann, arguing that this mode of construction of a group identity acts as a naturalising force that masks the existence of a variety of ideologies and their relationships of power.²² Bell notes that much as there is no single unified version of any particular identity, neither can there be a unified collective memory shared by many individuals over successive generations, as this denies the dissident voices that become subsumed by a dominant ideology.

According to Bell, and echoing Halbwachs, memory can only be the product of an individual mind, framed by society. Collective memory (which he terms “collective remembrance”) is limited by the life of the individuals who have directly experienced the remembered act and this memory cannot be transferred to other individuals.²³ Instead, Bell suggests the idea of a “national mythscape”, a conceptual territory where narratives are mythologised and negotiated in creating nationalist discourse. Rather than these myths being synonymous with memories, the two can act in opposition, with one forming a recognisably dominant narrative, providing a background against which opposing voices can be heard. This juxtaposition of the dominant and

²² D.S.A. Bell, "Mythsapes: Memory, Mythology and National Identity," British Journal of Sociology 54.1 (2003): 72-73.

²³ Bell, "Mythsapes," 73.

oppositional voices affects the meaning of each voice, as each is heard in light of the other.²⁴

I use the term “cultural memory” to refer to a collective cultural identity that is based upon a shared heritage, although the people sharing in this memory may have no physical connection to the place from which the culture originates. Myths and folklore form a large part of this collective identity, for cultural memory and narratives are often inherited through an oral tradition. I will argue that mythology and memory are inextricably linked with national identity, and that with figures of nationalist mythology, the historical version is intertwined with the mythologised version to such a degree that they are inseparable. This becomes clear with the critical response to Carey’s novel. Although this is clearly a work of fiction, it came under fire for its departures from history.²⁵

Bell’s, Assmann’s and Roudometof’s differing interpretations of the relationship between myths, memory and history are each useful for analysing Carey’s novel. In the text, Carey’s Kelly relies upon Irish cultural memory to assert his own Irish identity. This cultural memory is not formed from Kelly’s own experience, but is the result of inherited cultural memory as defined by Assmann, based upon national myths and folktales. The novel explores the effects of such an inherited cultural memory and the potential for confusion it contains, as a result of the various coexisting and competing understandings of the cultural memory.

By extension, Carey is able to explore the contemporary Australian cultural memory of Ned Kelly by playing upon the relationship between the Ned Kelly of Australian myth and the Ned Kelly re-imagined in the text. This recalls Bell’s argument of the gap between the character of mythscape and an individual’s experience of such a character. This is a complicated relationship, partly because the nature of the mythologised Kelly of Australian cultural history is already a dualistic one: he is viewed alternately as a murdering criminal or an Australian hero. This contested nature of Kelly again emphasises the difference between the historically “accurate” version, and that which inhabits the

²⁴ Bell, "Mythscape," 73.

²⁵ Clendinnen, "The History Question," 32.

Australian myth. This discrepancy came to the fore with heated debate around the historical accuracy of Carey's Kelly.²⁶

Klein's argument about the history/memory binary is useful in considering *True History*, with its use of memory to create an authentic illusion of a voice recollecting the past. The novel's focus on Kelly's own inherited Irishness, and the structure of the text as a personal remembrance allows Carey to provide an alternative to the established Kelly narrative. Huggan sees *True History* as offering a version of Kelly that successfully "counteract[s] those nostalgia-ridden narratives of sanctified victimhood which continue to block access to Australia's colonial past."²⁷

This is achieved partly through the engagement with Kelly's Irish identity. The Irish cultural context is an important point of reference to the understanding of Carey's Kelly. Kelly's actions and attitudes are shaped by his identification with Irish culture and tradition in the context of his colonial Australian environment. In *True History*, there is an emphasis on Kelly's Irishness as culturally inherited rather than personally experienced. Carey problematises Kelly's Irish identity by focussing on the misunderstood and misrepresented aspects of Kelly's culturally remembered Irishness. The effect of this is to make Kelly's Irishness seem inauthentic and problematic.

By drawing our attention to the problems with Kelly's Irishness, Carey can interrogate aspects of Australian nationalism, making these similarly problematic. Our collective memory of colonial Australia, of which Kelly remains an emblem, is often nostalgic, and ignores the trauma and oppression that occurred at this time. Carey's deconstruction of Kelly's Irish identity, with its emphasis on misunderstood aspects of Irishness mirrors misunderstandings and omissions in the construction of our own Australian cultural identity.

Although Kelly in *True History* contains elements of the mythologised Kelly of Australian cultural identity, he is a more complicated representation, exhibiting additional imagined facets to his character, such as his romance with the fictional Mary Hearn, and the existence of a daughter. These elaborations upon the Kelly of Australian mythscape create a dissident version of an already

²⁶ Clendinnen, "The History Question," 32.

²⁷ Huggan, "Uses and Abuses," 143.

contested character and introduce elements entirely based on fiction. This fictionalisation sits uneasily alongside the insistence on “truth” that surrounds the novel, created by the title, the depth of historicised detail within the text and the highly personal and subjective narrative of Kelly’s letters.

In *True History*, Kelly’s understanding of his Irishness is challenged by other “more” Irish characters and becomes the cause of much misunderstanding. The majority of the novel is comprised of the narrative voice of Kelly giving his own account of his life and actions, interspersed particularly towards the end with newspaper articles, which Mary Hearn has annotated with her comments. There is a dialogue of Irish and Irish-Australian voices in *True History*; both between characters, such as Ned and Ellen Kelly or Mary Hearn, and within a character, in Kelly’s internal dialogue of memories, stories, myths. These dialogues are the location for the creation of Kelly’s Irishness and act as the site of cultural misunderstanding and confusion. This is illustrated though Kelly’s attempt to speak from an Irish point of view.

For most of the text, Kelly speaks confidently from the perspective of an Irishman, arguably a questionable position for him to adopt considering his “native” Australian background, having been born in the colony. His authenticity is not subject to scrutiny until late in the text, when Mary Hearn, newly arrived from the old country, asserts her greater degree of Irishness, “I am ever so sorry to go against you Joe Byrne but you are colonials. I am the Irish one” (312). Within the context of Mary’s personal history and national identity, the Kellys’ Irishness is called into question. This may be true in Mary’s personal context, but in the context of the Australian colonialism in which she is embedded this view is similarly flawed, with the Irish being as “colonial” in Australia as any other European. This juxtaposition of dominant and oppositional understandings of Irishness forms a dialectic of ideas of Irishness, Australianness and national identity in general. The existence of a multitude of possible understandings of national identity that this dialectic allows can be extrapolated to the various understandings and significances of Ned Kelly for Australian identity, unsettling the unified nature of this icon of the Australian imaginary.

Kelly’s attempt to speak from an Irish perspective in the text is further drawn into question with the misinterpretations surrounding the incident of

John Kelly's transvestism, through which Carey simultaneously destabilises the masculine associations of Australian nationalism. The Kelly children take the discovery of the women's "dress with roses on its hem" (14) that John Kelly had been seen wearing, as a shameful admission of his sexual perversion. This has a great effect on Ned Kelly and causes a rift in their relationship as Ned distances himself from his father from that point onwards:

I lost my own father from a secret he might as well been snatched
by a roiling river fallen from a ravine I lost him from my heart so
long I cannot even now make the place for him that he deserves
(18).

John Kelly's dress is again interpreted in a sexualised way by the Irish Sergeant O'Neil, who tells the young Ned and his brother Jem that he had seen their father in the dress and taunting them that "he was off to be serviced by his husband" (14).

Further on in the text, Kelly is again exposed to transvestism in his family, this time of his brother Dan and his friend Steve Hart, who don the dresses of the wife of a Kelly sympathiser, to the great horror of all present.

We are the Sons of Sieve.
All the normal questions and profanities was prevented by our
host he brung 2 saddled horses to Steve and Dan.
Bad cess on you boys said the furious old fellow. Harry
Power never done nothing like this to my missus he were an
adjectival friend to us.
Joe Byrne were confused he looked to Steve.
We is the Sons of Sieve.
O be off with you cried the old man you is an adjectival
disgrace to bushranging I hope you effing die (304).

The political significance of the acts of transvestism is not revealed until later in the text when Mary Hearn recognises its Irish cultural significance, which is then explained to the Kelly Gang by Steve Hart,

Its what is done in Ireland Joe said Steve sitting down
beside him.
Joe seemed to wish no more affiliation with the boy in the dress
than with the harpy woman. God Jesus help me said he.
Its what is done by the rebels insisted Steve as I'm sure
you heard your own da relate. Its what is done when they wish to
scare the bejesus out of the squatters (311).

The complexities of Irish-Australian cultural memory operating within the text become evident in the different interpretations of this political transvestism, and Steve Hart's explanation of it. Hart's understanding of this Irish custom is formulated from an Australian perspective, a position made evident from his mention of the "squatters". Hearn challenges this Australian interpretation, and the authenticity of the Kelly Gang's Irishness:

There ain't no squatters in Ireland Steven Hart.
The knights then its just the same.
Knights?
The knights cried Steve the adjectival Queen of England
for your information.
Then do you see. She paused.
What should we see Joe asked her coolly.
Mary lit an extra candle and the light washed up her arms
and across her scratched and lovely face. You are Joe Byrne? She
wedged the candle into a knothole in the table and now were
clearly revealed the other deep knot I mean the fury in Joe Byrne's
forehead.
Then you should know Joe that this costume is worn by
Irishmen when they is weak and ignorant.
Doubtless Joe could not believe his ears. We is all adjectival
Irish here his voice went lower hers went higher in reply. I am ever
so sorry to go against you Joe Byrne but you are colonials. I am the
Irish one and it is the truth I am telling when I say I have seen
many men in dresses before today (311-312).

Mary then goes on to recount her own experiences with the Molly Maguires, whom she encountered as a child in Donegal. She tells of how she witnessed a group of cross-dressed men dismember a horse, while it was still alive, when it was stabled overnight in her father's smithy, before attacking her father who tried to intervene (316).

Mary's cultural knowledge of the reality of violence associated with the Molly Maguires is at a far remove from Steve's more heroic and fictionalised knowledge that has its basis in story, myth and cultural memory. Steve's merging of Irish and Australian cultural histories, with his confusion of squatters, knights and the Queen of England, illustrates the fluidity of national identities constructed through cultural memory.

The difference between Steve's romanticised and Mary's realistic understandings of the Molly Maguires/Sons of Sieve, can be reflected back onto

Kelly himself, who, in his status as a questionable Australian hero is likewise the subject of a similar duality in understanding. Rather than being taken as an uncomplicated, one-dimensional symbol of nationalist heroism, Kelly's status as the archetypical Irish outlaw and Australian hero is likewise destabilised as the possibility for differing and conflicting versions of heroic identities is established.

Mary's revelation of her own understanding of the Molly Maguires acts as a node of overlap between Irish and Australian cultural memories in the novel. The previously straightforward process of drawing on an inherited Irish cultural memory becomes problematised when confronted with a "more authentic" version of the same cultural memory. This has the effect of complicating the relationship between cultural memory and national identity construction, reinforcing Bell's argument that the existence of a unified collective cultural memory that allows for a possibility of dissident voices is problematic. In addition, it recalls Bell's suggestion of the impossibility of inherited collective remembrance existing beyond actual remembered experience.

The contested cultural and historical associations of the Molly Maguires/Sons of Sieve are reminiscent not only of the outlaw character in the Australian imaginary, but also the memory of Australia's colonial past as a whole. The divergence between Mary Hearn's memory of the reality of the violence brought about by the Molly Maguires and Steve Hart's romanticised understanding of the same can further act to recall the changing attitudes to the violent aspects of Australia's colonial past that were being negotiated in the Australian consciousness at the time of the novel's publication.

The difference in cultural understanding that is created with this scene is the source of sense of loss for Kelly, as his inherited version of Irishness is discounted in the face of Mary's lived Irish experience.

That is the agony of the Great Transportation that our parents would rather forget what come before so we currency lads is left alone ignorant as tadpoles spawned in puddles on the moon (317).

This ties in with Seamus Deane's argument that all acts of colonialism and nationalism are acts of translation, founded upon the idea of loss and an attempt

to restore an original condition that has fallen away.²⁸ Steve and Dan's confused translation of the Sons of Sieve and Kelly's complete lack of awareness of the cultural translation taking place here show the loss and distortion of cultural information that occurs in the transposition from an Irish to a colonial Australian context. The recognition of this difference affects the expression of cultural identity for Kelly and his gang after this point in the novel.

Similar distortions in cultural transposition occur with other markers of Kelly's Irishness. Carey's Kelly creates his Irishness primarily through inherited Irish myths and folk-tales, most explicitly though the pre-modern warrior Cuchulainn. Cuchulainn dates from the Red Branch mythical cycle and remains a popular Irish folkloric character. Kelly remembers his mother Ellen, telling him and his siblings a "treasure" (25) of traditional Irish myths in their childhood when their father was in prison:

She knew the stories of Conchobor and Dedriu and Medb the tale of Cuchulainn I still see him stepping into his war chariot it bristles with points of iron and hard prongs and straps and loops and cords (25-26).

This suggests a strong oral tradition, as does the slightly varied repetition of the story further on in the text. Cuchulainn becomes important for Kelly in the shaping of his own identity, with repeated references to the pre-modern hero throughout the novel (25, 178 and 371).

The importance of Cuchulainn to Kelly's Irish identity is an example of Carey's fictional addition to the traditional Kelly story. Neither the "Jerilderie" nor the "Cameron Letter" mentions Cuchulainn, although they do include the nationalist Irish rhetoric more commonly associated with Kelly. As with the Sons of Sieve, Carey's use of this Irish element allows him to comment about cultural memory and national identity.

Not only does Kelly make repeated references to Cuchulainn throughout the novel, he is also associated with the iconic Kelly armour, the image of which remains a visual signifier for the Kelly myth. When Kelly first conceives of the

²⁸ Seamus Deane, "General Introduction," The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, ed. Seamus Deane, vol. 1 (Derry: Field Day, 1991) xxv.

ironclad suits, he expresses a belief that they will turn him into “an engine like Great Cuchulainn in his war chariot” (371).

The armour is further paralleled with Cuchulainn with police descriptions of the ironclad Kelly emphasising its dehumanising aspect;

It was nothing human, that much was evident. It had no head but a very long thick neck and an immense chest and walked with a slow ungainly gait directly into a hail of bullets (1).

This inhuman element recalls the dehumanising transformation of Cuchulainn’s *ríastrad*, or battle frenzy, known as his “warp-spasm”. This is a frightening bodily transformation that Cuchulainn undergoes, aiding him in battle.

The first warp-spasm seized Cuchulainn, and made him into a monstrous thing, hideous and shapeless, unheard of. His shanks and joints, every knuckle and angle and organ from head to foot, shook like a tree in the flood or a reed in the stream. His body made a furious twist inside his skin, so that his feet and shins switched to the rear and his heels and calves switched to the front. The balled sinews of his calves switched to the front of his shins, each big knot the size of a warrior’s bunched fist. On his head the temple-sinews stretched to the nape of his neck, each mighty, immense, measureless knob as big as the head of a month-old child.²⁹

In addition to these bodily transformations that make Cuchulainn unrecognisable, the warp-spasm render Cuchulainn insensible to friend or foe, and in this state he kills all who cross his path.³⁰

Carey’s mobilisation of Cuchulainn for Kelly’s heroic ideal, and the connection that is made between the two figures can suggest that Ned Kelly’s place in the Australian imaginary is parallel with Cuchulainn’s in the Irish; that Kelly is the Australian Cuchulainn. As cultural icons, several similarities can indeed be found between the two. Both were associated with conservative forms of nationalism – the Australian Legend and the Irish Literary Revival – that located the “essential” national spirit in a largely imagined rural past. Although originating from pre-modern Irish myth, Cuchulainn was invoked at the beginning of the Literary Revival, in 1880, by Standish O’Grady, and became the Revival’s dominant emblem. The Literary Revival was a cultural movement that

²⁹ Thomas Kinsella, *The Tain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) 150.

³⁰ Thomas Herron, *Spenser's Irish Work: Poetry, Plantation and Colonial Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 176.

looked into a heroic, heavily mythologised past for a definition of a new Irish identity.³¹ Both Kelly and Cuchulainn are revealed to be dubious heroes on closer inspection. For some, Kelly's actions amount to nothing more than armed robbery and murder.³² Similarly, the extreme violence of the warrior Cuchulainn can be viewed as less than heroic.

Kelly invokes the Cuchulainn myth as a symbol of heroism, just revenge on the colonial authorities, and solidarity with the common man. These heroic ideals are in sharp contrast to the nature of Cuchulainn as he appears in the traditional myth. The early Irish epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*), more commonly known as *The Tain*, recounts a war in which Queen Medb of Connaught invades Ulster, which is single-handedly defended by the teenage hero Cuchulainn. This epic forms the basis for the oral history that Carey's Kelly refers to.

In *The Tain*, Cuchulainn is presented as a ruthless and violent killer who in addition to quite gruesomely killing many warriors in battle, targets unarmed individuals without much provocation. Among their number is an unarmed charioteer, whose master, Orlam, Cuchulainn has decapitated. Cuchulainn sets the severed head of the master on the charioteer's back, and says

'Take this with you and keep it like that all the way into the camp. If you do anything but exactly what I say you'll get a shot from my sling.'

The charioteer went up close to the camp and took the head from his back, and told Medb and Ailill his story.

'This isn't like catching birds,' she said.

'And he told me,' the charioteer said, 'that if I didn't take it on my back all the way into the camp he'd break my head with a stone.'

Orlam's charioteer was standing at this time between Ailill and Medb outside the camp. Cuchulainn hurled a stone at him, shattering his head so that the brains spattered the ears.³³

The previous chapter, "The Tain's Account of Cuchulainn's Boyhood Deeds", contains many more accounts of such deeds of savage violence committed by

³¹ John Wilson Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival: A Changeling Art* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993) 33.

³² Havelock Ellis, *The Criminal*, Eliborn Classics Series (London: Adamant Media, 2005) 161.

³³ Kinsella, *The Tain* 95-96.

Cuchulainn “before the end of his sixth year.”³⁴ This includes the killing of a man who attempted to wake him from his sleep, whom Cuchulainn struck “on the forehead with his fist and drove the dome of the forehead back into the brain.”³⁵ Such acts of gratuitous violence are at a far remove from the more noble and heroic image that Kelly is presumably attempting to draw upon with his identification with the Cuchulainn myth. Indeed, Kelly claims to be loath to perform acts of violence without giving “fair warning to all those who has reason to fear” (376) him.

Kelly’s fixation on Cuchulainn as an heroic ideal can suggest a degree of backwardness. Kelly turns to the traditional Irish Cuchulainn myth as the most accessible version of Irish heroism available to him. Kelly’s version of Irishness is limited in many ways, which is partly a class issue, as his experience of Irishness is reduced to what is available in the colony from oral history passed on from his immediate family and friends.

The parliamentary lobbying and mass-movements taking place in Ireland in the late nineteenth century around the issues of land reform and Irish Home Rule created a new brand of Irish hero such as Charles Stuart Parnell and Michael Davitt, who acted as champions of the common man without resorting to the violence that is associated with the pre-modern image of Cuchulainn.³⁶ In *True History*, Kelly is aware of this new brand of Irish hero; although he seems to have a poor understanding of it and scorns Steve Hart’s veneration of these men; “you would think Steve Hart were a Professor to hear him on the state of Ireland blah blah blah rattling off the names of his heroes Robert Emmett & Thomas Meagher & Smith O’Brien” (223).

The discrepancy between Cuchulainn of *The Tain* and Kelly’s idea of him illustrates the mutability of cultural remembrance and how it can be modified in order to be put to various ideological uses. Kelly creates his own understanding of Cuchulainn’s heroism, and bases his own heroic identity on this construction. The difference between the two Cuchulainns – Kelly’s more heroic version, and

³⁴ Kinsella, *The Tain* 84.

³⁵ Kinsella, *The Tain* 79.

³⁶ James Gordon and Sir Richard Musgrave, *History of the Rebellion in Ireland, in the Year 1798 &C: Containing an Impartial Account of the Proceedings of the Irish Revolutionaries* (Dublin: T. Hurst, 1803) 207.

the brutal one of *The Tain* – in turn draws attention to the dualistic nature of Ned Kelly, who is likewise seen alternately as a violent killer and a hero. Carey's focus on Kelly's fixation on Cuchulainn as the model for his heroism reveals the deliberate or constructed nature of this identity. This denaturalises the heroism associated with Kelly and the degree of conflation between Kelly, the historical man and Kelly, the mythologised hero, is made visible.

Carey's examination of the centrality of Cuchulainn in the construction of Kelly's heroism introduces the possibility of taking the historical Kelly out of context. Kelly's appropriation of Cuchulainn – where he creates an heroic icon out of a violent and brutal character – can again be applied to our cultural memory of Kelly as a hero. In addition, considering the parallel between Kelly and Cuchulainn, the suggestion of the backwardness of Kelly's identification with the pre-modern hero, despite the availability of more relevant alternatives, can similarly be related back onto Kelly's enduring popularity in the Australian imaginary. This can suggest that Kelly may play a similarly out-dated role for Australian identity, and that the continued cultural investment in him has become irrelevant, and even destructive.

The Irish folk tales that appear throughout *True History* form another example of Irish cultural memory, and are used by Kelly to make sense of himself and his life.³⁷ Aside from Cuchulainn, the novel contains references to other characters of Irish folklore such as St Brigid (100) and the Banshee (99). Other lesser-known Irish stories also find their way into the novel, such as the story of the Tipperary woman who shows her husband how to cheat the Devil (83) and the curse of Kevin the Rat-Catcher (190).³⁸

For Andreas Gaile, the Irish folktales and heroic stories in the novel provide a much lacking "national mythology" for the "patchwork of transported cultures" in Australia.³⁹ It is true that Kelly's Irish cultural memory is located in and constructed out of these stories, but this process in *True History* is not as straightforward as Gaile suggests. These stories can be seen as having the more

³⁷ Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 294-95.

³⁸ Peter Carey quoted in Laura Moss, "Car-Talk: Interview with Peter Carey," *ARIEL: A Review of English Literature* 32.4 (2001): 98.

³⁹ Andreas Gaile, "Re-Mythologizing an Australian Legend: Peter Carey's *True History* of the Kelly Gang," *Antipodes* 15.1 (2001): 39.

complicated function of illustrating the difficulty of transplanting cultural knowledge from Ireland to colonial Australia; that, as Carolyn Bliss puts it, it “wilt[s] in the dry, sceptical, pragmatic Australian cultural climate.”⁴⁰

Although the stories themselves survive, they lose their power and are received with marked scepticism when told to Kelly. When Harry Power begins the tale of how he met the Devil on the Melbourne road, the young Ned repeatedly interrupts him to ask whether the story were true, and “when the Devil spoke were he Irish?” (86). Kelly himself seems aware of the diminished power of the Irish cultural transpositions, remarking that St Brigid “had lost her power to bring the milk down from the cow’s horn. The beloved saint withered in Victoria” (100).⁴¹

Other stories aside from these Irish myths are present in *True History* and these illustrate the mutable meaning of narratives in the same way. R.D. Blackmore’s *Lorna Doone* and the St Crispin Day’s speech from Shakespeare’s *Henry V* are both stories with which Kelly identifies in the construction of his heroism. The inclusion of these narratives within the novel are significant in that they are deployed for deliberate and strategic misuse and are made to carry meanings that they did not originally hold,⁴² as in the case of Cuchulainn and the Sons of Sieve. *Lorna Doone* is a novel Carey’s Kelly treasures and reads and re-reads. Graham Huggan claims that Carey’s Kelly “nurtures his rebel fantasies”⁴³ through his reading of this novel, as he identifies strongly with the hero John Ridd,⁴⁴ who “lost his da at the exact same age” as Kelly lost his father (207). *Lorna Doone* is later used in *True History* by Thomas Curnow, who flatters Kelly by comparing him to the narrator of *Lorna Doone* in an attempt to win Kelly’s trust and access to his written history.⁴⁵

Directly following this, Curnow recites the St Crispin’ Day speech from *Henry V* to stir the men to fight, despite knowing that the men and boys he is

⁴⁰ Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 295.

⁴¹ Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 295.

⁴² Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 295.

⁴³ Huggan, "Uses and Abuses," 135-36.

⁴⁴ Andreas Gaile, "Towards an Alphabet of Australian Culture," *Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey*, ed. Andreas Gaile (New York: Rodopi, 2005) 42.

⁴⁵ Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 295.

addressing are about to be massacred in the shootout.⁴⁶ There is a notable irony in the use of this speech in this context, as it is “quoted in support of the very imperial Englishness against which he believes himself to be fighting.”⁴⁷ The deployment of these stories within the narrative of *True History* has the effect of foregrounding the way in which narratives are used, misused and misunderstood in order to create other narratives. This, in turn, draws attention to the role of the Kelly myth in the narrative of Australian nationalism:

the myth of the anti-authoritarian Kelly Gang, as it enters popular consciousness, begins to enable and authorise the simplistic nationalism that Kelly’s fight against the established order in Australia was meant to challenge.⁴⁸

True History’s interrogations of myth and cultural memory allow for a re-imagining of Kelly that, as Huggan has suggested, effectively removes the colonial nostalgia traditionally associated with Kelly. This occurs through the possibility of projecting Carey’s destabilising of cultural memory within the text onto our cultural memory of Ned Kelly.

⁴⁶ Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 295.

⁴⁷ Huggan, "Uses and Abuses," 136.

⁴⁸ Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 297.

International Currency: moving beyond nationalism

Irishness is a central aspect of the mythical Kelly and has been used to establish a victimological narrative around him. This Irish victimhood stems largely from the “Jerilderie Letter”, written by the historical Kelly. The letter makes heavy use of a politicised Irishness that calls on the history of Irish oppression by the British as a justification for the outlaw’s lawless acts. Kelly’s Irish identity is foregrounded in *True History*, albeit through a less political and more cultural version of Irishness than that in the “Jerilderie Letter”. However, the centrality of Kelly’s Irishness is at the same time complicated in the novel. Carey creates a more heterogeneous cultural identity for his Kelly, by placing a greater emphasis on Kelly’s Australianness and by introducing an American connection for him. These aspects of Carey’s reimagining of Kelly have the effect of transforming the insular nationalism with which Kelly is generally associated.

The historical Kelly’s identification as Irish, despite his Australian birth, was not uncommon in the Australian colonial period. During the early nineteenth century, the colonies lacked any unified Australian identity.¹ Colonial society was instead made up of various immigrant ethnic, cultural and class identities.

True History engages with the construction of Kelly’s Irishness, both through the use of Irish myths and folktales, and to a lesser extent through the adoption of Irish nationalist rhetoric. Carey introduces a degree of unreliability to Kelly’s markers of Irish identity, and an ambivalence on Kelly’s part towards them. Kelly’s romanticising of his Irish past sits alongside his scorn for “living in Romances and Histories always thinking of a braver better time” (223).² This conflict in Carey’s Kelly’s attitude to the imagined Irish past contributes to what Graham Huggan terms a “contradictory desire to revisit and to purge the past.”³ Such a contradictory desire can in the same way apply to our own relationship with Australian history, particularly at the time of *True History*’s publication.

¹ Charles S. Blackton, “The Dawn of Australian National Feeling, 1850-1856,” *Pacific Historical Review* 24.2 (1955): 121.

² Huggan, “Uses and Abuses,” 135.

³ Huggan, “Uses and Abuses,” 135.

Moreover, Carey positions his Kelly, along with being Irish, as a founding father for Australian identity, which creates a duality of Irish and Australian belonging.

Ireland has had a much longer colonial history than Australia. By the time Australia was 'discovered' by Europeans, Ireland had already experienced invasions by the Viking Norsemen,⁴ "Christian missionaries, the Normans, the pre-Reformation English, the Elizabethans, the Cromwellians and the Williamites."⁵ Britain's colonisation of Australia placed Ireland in a complex situation, as the Irish shifted from the position of the colonised at home to alignment with Britain as the coloniser in Australia. British colonial activity in Ireland meant that the Irish still existed as an underclass in Australia to some degree, as Britain sought to replicate the colonial power structures in the new country.⁶

The resulting middle-ground position that the Irish inhabited in Australia granted them the ideological fluidity to operate either within or counter to the British establishment⁷ as both "invader and outcast".⁸ A focus on Irish victimhood is often utilised in nationalist discourse as a vehicle to legitimise European presence in Australia. Such victimological narratives appear as literary motifs and can be found as well in the personal narratives of individuals.

Jennifer Rutherford has examined the recent emergence of this Irish victimology in personal narratives told by individual members of the far-right

⁴ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, "High-Kings, Vikings and Other Kings," Irish Historical Studies 22.83 (1979).

⁵ Deane, "General Introduction," xx.

⁶ Stephen Castles, Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis and Michael Morrissey, Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988) 19.

⁷ The Irish in Australia were far from an homogenous group, and were divided in some cases by sectarian difference. The Anglo-Irish Protestants, sometimes referred to as the Ascendancy, were often supporters of British colonialism and had a different relationship with the British ruling order than that of the Munster Catholic group. The Munster Catholics represented the majority of the Irish population in Australia, and were more like to be in lower socio-economic positions than the privileged Ascendancy (James Jupp, The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins (Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 466.). When discussing the Irish-Australians, or the Irish in Australia, it is to the Munster Catholic majority to which I refer, unless otherwise stated.

⁸ Deborah Bird Rose, "Ned Kelly Died for Our Sins," Oceania 65.2 (1994): 182.

nationalist One Nation Party, a political party that was notable for its xenophobic and regressive policies.⁹

[The Irish] did not invade this country, they were dumped here. They weren't allowed to go back in most cases...I mean the IRA were retreating out of Northern Ireland when the six counties were ceded, watched their families and children being bayoneted by the English, had their children stolen away and put into British institutions so they could lose their Irish accent...I mean I rang the Irish government and said, you know, "what would be my chances of putting in a land claim for my farm...at Cavan that was taken from my great, great, great grandmother when you forced her off our land that she's lived on for centuries"...What people in history haven't been raped, pillaged and murdered...I'm sick of name-calling. I'm sick of pointing the finger. I'm sick of saying...well, I'm black, I need help...I know white people that need just as much help. For every one of the stolen generation there's fifteen stolen white children.¹⁰

Of the various narratives from One Nation supporters recorded, Rutherford identifies similar structural elements; a claim on Irish ancestry, a story about attempts to reclaim a lost farm, and finally, a situating of the history of Indigenous dispossession within the history of Irish dispossession and an emphasis on the inability for the Irish diaspora in Australia to redress the situation.¹¹

Various commentators, including Ann Curthoys,¹² Graham Huggan¹³ and Susan Martin,¹⁴ have noted the importance of the construction of a European

⁹ One Nation advocated return to (a largely imaginary) cultural homogeneity, with an abolition of multiculturalism and a zero net immigration policy, along with repealing the *Native Title Act* (Pauline Hanson, *Policies and Political Goals of One Nation*, 1998, Available: <http://www.gwb.com.au/onenation/policy.html>, 09.01.2010.)

¹⁰ "Michael", a One Nation member interviewed at a One Nation meeting in Canberra (Jennifer Rutherford, "The Irish Conceit: Ireland and the New Australian Nationalism," *Ireland and Australia, 1798-1998: Studies in Culture, Identity and Migration*, eds. Philip Bull, Frances Devlin-Glass and Helen Doyle (Sydney: Crossing Press, 2000) 196.)

¹¹ Rutherford, "Irish Conceit," 197.

¹² Ann Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology," *Journal of Australian Studies* 61. Imaginary Homelands (1999): 3.

¹³ Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism*, Oxford Studies in Postcolonial Literatures, ed. Elleke Boehmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 65.

¹⁴ Susan K. Martin, "Dead White Male Heroes: *True History of the Kelly Gang* and Ned Kelly in Australian Fictions," *Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey*, ed. Andreas Gaile (New York: Rodopi, 2004) 312.

Australian victimhood. Curthoys describes this as a “victimological narrative”,¹⁵ which is mobilised in an attempt to reconcile the racist and violent aspects of Australian history with a European sense of belonging in Australia. The national veneration of heroic defeat and failure is an example of this victimological narrative, and it is illustrated in the national celebration of tragic figures such as the failed explorers Burke and Wills, and the Gallipoli story.¹⁶

The increased awareness around the year 2000 of colonial Australian frontier violence and genocide resulted in a move to elide these emerging negative associations. Foregrounding European victimhood and struggle was one way to deal with this change of perspective on Australian colonial history. Through emphasising European victimhood and oppression, European aggression becomes excusable.¹⁷ Additionally, the Irish victimological narrative allows for a narrative of European struggle and difficulty to be foregrounded. This allows the European Australian to “earn” belonging in Australia, paying for it with their suffering.¹⁸

Ned Kelly has often been read according to a victimological narrative. The Irish-Australian outlaw is one of the most enduring cultural emblems to emerge from colonial Australia.¹⁹ He is most at home in the bush, so much so, that Russel Ward in his *The Australian Legend* (1965) labels the early Australian outlaw as “more ‘Australian’ than anybody else.”²⁰ Characteristics associated with the outlaw include resistance to an unjust establishment, resourcefulness and independence from authority.²¹

¹⁵ Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile," 11.

¹⁶ Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile," 9.

¹⁷ Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile," 4.

¹⁸ Andrew Lattas, "Aborigines and Contemporary Australian Nationalism: Primordality and the Cultural Politics of Otherness," *Race Matters: Indigenous Australians and "Our" Society*, eds. Gillian Cowlishaw and Barry Morris (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997) 234.

¹⁹ Bruce Tranter and Jed Donoghue, "Ned Kelly: Australian Icon," *The Australian Sociological Association 2008 Annual Conference: Re-imagining Sociology* (University of Melbourne: 2008). 3; Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965) 168.

²⁰ Ward, *Legend* 136.

²¹ Ward, *Legend* 168.

Although Australian nationalism, as with any form of identity, cannot be defined as a single unified national narrative,²² Andrew Theophanous notes that narratives of Australian nationalism can be loosely grouped into two strands: one that emphasises ties to Britain; and the other that emphasises a limited form of egalitarianism and social justice.²³ It is this second form with its championing of anti-authoritarianism that found expression in the adoption of the Irish-Australian outlaw as an Australian cultural icon.²⁴

Up until the 1960s, Australian identity was not the charged political issue it has recently become, and was largely characterised by what Russel Ward describes as “Australian Legend” nationalism.²⁵ Ward defined Australian nationalism and the “Australian spirit” as “intimately connected with the bush, and deriving rather from the common folk than from the more respectable and cultivated sections of society.”²⁶ Ward saw this “national spirit” originating in the late nineteenth century. This nationalistic image of Australia had close ties with literature. Writers such as Joseph Furphy, Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson both served to illustrate, and perpetuate it.²⁷ The “Australian type” as outlined by Ward was characterised by an exclusive Anglo-Celtic cultural focus, which later became the subject of criticism for its marginalisation of other cultural groups and women.²⁸

With the abandonment of the White Australia Policy in the 1960s,²⁹ Australian identity gradually began to be redefined by multiculturalism. Despite this cultural shift, at the turn of the 21st century there emerged a certain nostalgia or fantasy of the Anglo-Celtic Australian cultural homogeneity associated with the Australian Legend nationalism. This nostalgia is clearly evident in Miriam Dixson’s “core culture” argument. Dixson has stated that

²² Anthony D. Smith, National Identity (Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1991) 72.

²³ Andrew C. Theophanous, Understanding Multiculturalism and Australian Identity (Melbourne: Elikia Books, 1995) 281.

²⁴ Tranter and Donoghue, "Ned Kelly: Australian Icon." 3.

²⁵ Huggan, Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism 55; Ann Curthoys, "Identity Crisis: Colonialism, Nation, and Gender in Australian History," Gender & History 5.2 (1993): 169.

²⁶ Ward, Legend 1.

²⁷ Ward, Legend 4.

²⁸ Curthoys, "Identity Crisis," 169.

²⁹ Huggan, Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism 74.

multicultural Australia requires an Anglo-Celtic “core culture” to act as a “holding centre” to protect against the “disintegration” and “social unravelling [that can be seen] in Russia, in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan or Indonesia.”³⁰

Huggan points out that Dixson’s core culture argument once again reflects the “spirit of Australian Legend nationalism, writ large this time in the generous language of modern liberal-humanist/cultural-pluralist thought.”³¹ Dixson’s argument can indicate a desire to return to older, more familiar and stable forms of Australian nationalism during a time in which the status of the Australian Anglo-Celt was being challenged. The popularity of Australian outlaw narratives at the turn of the 21st century may be one manifestation of this yearning for a more culturally simplified past, where European presence in Australia was not the controversial topic it has become.

The on-going significance of the outlaw as a nationalist cultural icon can be seen in its longevity. The outlaw first emerged in Australian folklore in the 19th century; mostly in the form of popular ballads. Many of these early outlaws were escaped Irish convicts,³² and Waters notes that the early versions of outlaw ballads, the first entry of the outlaw into the realm of myth, were often characterised by “Irish defiance of British tyranny”, and expressed “Irish-Australian hostility to the British Crown and hence Australian colonial authority”.³³ An Irish cultural heritage was common too among later outlaws such as Martin Cash, Captain Moonlite, Jack Donahue (the historical basis for the “Wild Colonial Boy”) and, most famously, Ned Kelly.³⁴

The outlaw’s situation in a victimological position stems partly from his oppositional relation to the colonial establishment. This is further strengthened with the tragedy and morality with which he is invested. Outlaws are often

³⁰ Miriam Dixson, The Imaginary Australian: Anglo-Celts and Identity, 1788 to the Present (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999) 7-8.

³¹ Huggan, Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism 77.

³² Ward, Legend 136.

³³ Edgar Waters, “Folksong Making in Australia,” The Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore, eds. Gwenda Beed Davey and Graham Seal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³⁴ Waters, “Folksong Making,” 113, Graham Seal, The Outlaw Legend: A Cultural Tradition in Britain, America and Australia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 172, Seal, Popular Tradition 15.

portrayed as moral agents resisting laws that uphold an unjust, immoral system. The eventual destruction of the outlaw at the hands of the establishment imbues him with a martyr-like status. This is even more true of outlaws with an Irish heritage, because of their ability to draw on the long history of Irish resistance to British colonial activity in Ireland.

Gregor Jordan's film *Ned Kelly* presents a highly victimological Irishness. Jordan sees Kelly's Irish identity as central to the Kelly myth: "At the core of the story is a person fighting for a cause...He's part of a persecuted [Irish] minority so he fights back."³⁵ Kelly's Irishness is positioned as central to his victim status in the film. In the scene prior to the Glenrowan siege, Kelly explains to the townspeople: "We're Irish boys and selectors' sons. Had war declared on us by Victoria, by New South Wales, by the Crown...it's Regina versus us." Jordan's Kelly also attempts to justify his unlawful action based upon his Irish heritage, telling a group of hostages, "My Irish brethren have been unlawfully imprisoned and blacklisted from their selections. How do you expect me to behave other than to stand up against this treatment?" Drewe's *Our Sunshine*, upon which the film is based, also centralises Kelly's Irishness.³⁶

Although *True History* contains elements of such a victimological Irishness, Carey downplays this by introducing other cultural identities for Kelly. Colonial anti-Irish prejudice is the root of the Irish claim to victimhood in Australia, and is very much present in the text, forming the primary background to Kelly's criminal actions. Kelly experiences this prejudice as early as when he was eleven years old at the Avenel School, where he "learned from [his teacher] Mr Irving that all micks [Irish] was a notch below the cattle" (29). Also transported to colonial Australia, along with the British hostility against the Irish, were other tensions within the Irish community. Animosity between the Irish members of the Australian police force and Irish selectors had its roots in the Royal Irish Constabulary who were used to brutally uphold British rule in

³⁵ Gregor Jordan, *Ned Kelly Production Notes*, AFI Research Collection, 4.

³⁶ John Thieme, "'Gossip Grown Old': Mythopoeic Practice in Robert Drewe's *Our Sunshine* and David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*," *European Journal of English Studies* 2.1 (1998): 28.

colonial Ireland during the agrarian uprisings of the early nineteenth century and the Irish separatist movement of the 1850s.³⁷

In *True History* these tensions are recreated. The opening section of the novel contains an account of the hostility between the Irish Sergeant O'Neil and Ned Kelly's Tipperary-born father, John Kelly, whom O'Neil claims was a traitor and a coward, betraying the men with whom he had raided a farmer's house, setting "their home alight and those who escaped they piked to death" (10). O'Neil suggests that this betrayal saved John Kelly's life, as the other participants were put to death while Kelly was merely transported to Australia. This story of John Kelly's betrayal forms part of the systematic harassment to which the Kelly family is subjected. Kelly, when recounting his childhood, states that

Sergeant O'Neil had filled my boy's imagination with thoughts that would breed like maggots on a summer day you would think his victory complete but he begun to increase his harassment of my father rousing him from bed when he were drunk or fast asleep he also needled and teased me whenever he seen me in the street (11).

This focus in *True History* on the racial tension within the Irish-Australian community and between the Irish and the English introduces the idea of the Irish as colonial victim into Carey's narrative.

For the Irish outlaw, this victimhood acts as justification for illegal activity, allowing it to be framed as a political act. There is evidence to suggest that the historical Kelly actively engaged in such justification. This can be seen in the "Jerilderie Letter"; an open letter written by the bushranger to the Victorian government. The "Jerilderie Letter" is the better known of two³⁸ texts produced by the historical Kelly and this document has informed later myths and retellings of the Kelly story. In the letter, Kelly blames his descent into crime on the Victorian Police Force's discrimination towards him and his family. Kelly then castigates the Irish members of the police as national traitors, who

for a lazy loafing cowardly bilit left the ash corner deserted the shamrock, the emblem of true wit and beauty to serve under a flag

³⁷ John D. Brewer, "Max Weber and the Royal Irish Constabulary: A Note on Class and Status," *The British Journal of Sociology* 40.1 (1989): 83.

³⁸ Along with the "Cameron Letter" (1878).

and nation that has destroyed massacred and murdered their forefathers by the greatest of torture.³⁹

Hence, for Kelly, “indomitable Ireland” became a symbol for his own plight, allowing him to elevate himself into something more than a common criminal.⁴⁰

The Irish nationalist rhetoric of the “Jerilderie Letter” is the primary mode by which the historical Kelly asserts his Irishness. This nationalist Irishness and its resistance to oppression positions Kelly in opposition to the British establishment. This resistance forms an important element of the myths that grew up around Kelly and is an attribute that has been transferred to other Irish Australian outlaws. The authorial voice of the “Jerilderie Letter” has affected later mythologisings of Kelly, notably in *True History*, the inspiration for which came partly from the “Jerilderie Letter.”⁴¹

Carey’s Kelly creates his Irishness chiefly through Irish myths and folktales, particularly, as discussed earlier, through the Irish mythological hero Cuchulainn. In addition to his knowledge of Irish myths, Kelly is relatively well versed in the history of Irish resistance to Britain of the uprisings of 1798.

[A]t 5 yr. of age I could recite the names John Cockayne Edward Abby even poor Anthony Perry who finally betrayed the rebels after the English set his head alight with pitch and gunpowder (167).

These Irish nationalist stories contribute to what Carey’s Kelly describes as the larger “historic memory of UNFAIRNESS”. Huggan notes that this memory has long fuelled Ireland’s opposition to the British colonial establishment.⁴²

The political force of Irish nationalism adopted by the historical Kelly in the rhetoric of the “Jerilderie Letter” is downplayed in *True History*. In the novel, the young Kelly’s awareness of the names of the Irish rebel heroes and traitors is the only appearance of Irish political nationalism on Kelly’s part. Carey further complicates Kelly’s association with Irish nationalism in the low opinion he expresses of Steve Hart’s hero-worship of Irish nationalists (223).

³⁹ Edward Kelly, “Jerilderie Letter”, Melbourne.

⁴⁰ Patrick O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia: 1788 to the Present*, Third ed. (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2000) 138.

⁴¹ Nathanael O’Reilly, “The Voice of the Teller: A Conversation with Peter Carey,” *Antipodes* 16.2 (2002): 164.

⁴² Huggan, “Uses and Abuses,” 135.

The ambivalent attitude to Irish nationalism expressed by Kelly in *True History* complicates the appeal to Irish nationalism associated with the historical Kelly. The Irish nationalism invoked by Kelly in *True History* is of a broader, more general form than Hart's, and it is Hart who is much more politically aware of Irish issues than Kelly. As Huggan notes, this element of Carey's Kelly can distance him from the kind of victimological Irishness associated with Ned Kelly as a figure of resistance.⁴³ Although Kelly's Irishness is central to *True History*, it is not a political Irishness, as with his highly politicised Irish identity found in the "Jerilderie Letter". Instead, Carey's Kelly's Irish identity is founded on a more cultural Irishness, accessed through myths and folktales rather than political rhetoric.⁴⁴

Although Kelly's Irishness is an important marker for his identity, throughout the course of the novel Kelly gradually moves away from it, particularly following the denouement of the transvestism incidents. According to Heather Smyth, the various characters' different perceptions of The Sons of Sieve act as a marker of the colonial cultural gap and as the "breaking point" of the Kelly gang's reliance upon Irish cultural markers in the creation of their identity.⁴⁵ Immediately after this scene, Kelly feels his own distance from Mary Hearn's Irishness and he now sees her as "a stranger from an ancient time" (317). From this point onwards, Kelly positions himself closer to an Australian identity, even referring to Steve and Dan as "noble of true Australian coin" (389).

The birth of Kelly's daughter is another point that moves him further from claiming an Irish identity, and opens up the possibility for other cultural identifications to take place in the novel. The daughter forms the absent central point of the narrative of *True History*. This has implications for ideas of national identity by creating a preoccupation with genetic and cultural inheritance in Australia.⁴⁶

⁴³ Huggan, "Uses and Abuses," 135.

⁴⁴ John Kinsella, *On Peter Carey's True History of the Kelly Gang*, 10-01-2007, Available: www.johnkinsella.org/reviews/carey.html, 15.01 2011.

⁴⁵ Heather Smyth, "Mollies Down Under: Cross-Dressing and Australian Masculinity in Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18.2 (2009): 212.

⁴⁶ Fletcher and Mead, "Inheriting the Past," 193.

True History is Kelly's attempt to write a personal history for his daughter, to avoid her being raised on "lies and silences" (5). It is this story of Kelly's, of the hardships faced by his family, that bequeaths meaning and belonging to his daughter, and to the contemporary Australian readership.⁴⁷

Lisa Fletcher and Elizabeth Mead argue that the scene of the daughter's birth shows the novel's self-conscious attempt to grant meaning and belonging to an imaginary settler "family".⁴⁸ The news of the daughter's birth spreads "like yellow gorse across the hills" (369) and creates joyous unity in the local community, who appear as an extended family; "these was your own own people girl...we was them and they was us" (369). It is during this scene evoking an imagined family that Kelly is moved to announce his famous "colonial stratagem" (370). Kelly's daughter, although absent and never known to her father, is the catalyst for the situation from which Kelly's republican legacy springs, and it is the birth of the absent daughter that cues the birth of the imagined settler family that "rise[s] from the earth like winter oats" (369).⁴⁹

This birth scene positions Kelly as the progenitor of a new identity, bringing the people together and establishing a position of resistance to the colonial establishment. The new identity that emerges in this scene cannot, however, be described as Australian. The scene emphasises the local scale of Kelly's actions, with the settler family of the novel coming from "Greta & Moyhu & Euroa & Benalla" (369). Carey's focus on the local here further distances Kelly from the conservative nationalism with which he has been associated.

Despite this distance, Fletcher and Mead argue that the scene nevertheless reveals anxieties about white settler belonging, which are similar to those of the conservative nationalism generally associated with Kelly. Fletcher and Mead note that the novel recalls Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra's idea of the "bastard complex",⁵⁰ a recurring preoccupation with origins that haunts white Australian literature, motivated by a need to claim a legitimate presence in the

⁴⁷ Fletcher and Mead, "Inheriting the Past," 203.

⁴⁸ Fletcher and Mead, "Inheriting the Past." 202.

⁴⁹ Fletcher and Mead, "Inheriting the Past," 203.

⁵⁰ Fletcher and Mead, "Inheriting the Past," 203.

nation.⁵¹ Furthermore, Fletcher and Mead argue that Kelly still forms a part of a “genealogy of Australian victimhood,” defined by his Irish ancestry.⁵²

The line of inheritance and Australian belonging with which the novel is preoccupied begins with Kelly’s father John. Ned Kelly recounts the unnamed “torture” and suffering endured by his father, who had been “transported to the prisons of Van Diemen’s Land I do not know what was done to him he never spoke of it” (5). It is the suffering and eventual death of John Kelly that Ned Kelly describes as granting “everlasting title to the rich soil of Avenel” (41), a title that is passed through Kelly to his unknown daughter and to the wider settler community.⁵³

The fact that the origin of the colonial Australian line of inheritance is situated in Ireland is significant and contributes to the undercurrent of anxiety about Australian settler origins. The Irish origin draws on the same Irish victimological narrative that I discussed earlier, and acts as a vehicle to legitimise white settler presence in Australia.⁵⁴ The unnamed suffering endured by John Kelly and his death is literally described as the granting “title” to the land in the novel. This is a very clear illustration of the idea discussed by Andrew Lattas that it is white settler suffering in Australian nationalist discourse that becomes the means to confer a right of ownership to the land.⁵⁵

Yet, despite these similarities with the Kelly of conservative nationalism, Carey grants significant complexity to his Kelly. The revelations around the transvestism combined with the departure of Mary Hearn and Kelly’s unborn daughter to San Francisco allow Carey to introduce a wider scope of nationalism into the novel. What Smythe defines as a “breaking point” of Irish identification could rather be seen as a point of integration of other identities, both Australian and American. Throughout the novel America is presented as an escape and a potential refuge for the wanted Kelly gang. “We’ve spilled their blood the only hope is California” (327) Byrne remarks at one point. Although there is a less

⁵¹ Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991) 23.

⁵² Fletcher and Mead, "Inheriting the Past," 203.

⁵³ Fletcher and Mead, "Inheriting the Past," 203.

⁵⁴ Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile," 3.

⁵⁵ Lattas, "Aborigines."

active insistence upon Kelly's Irishness after the explanation of the Sons of Sieve, mention of Irish cultural markers still occurs, though now co-existing with markers of other cultures.

A further expansion of nationalistic scope can be seen in the creation of the iconic Kelly gang armour. The image of the armour remains an instantly recognisable visual signifier for Kelly and his gang, appearing in countless books and films and Sidney Nolan's "Ned Kelly" series of paintings.⁵⁶ The Kelly armour has a great deal of cultural significance, with the former Federal Arts Minister Peter McGauran describing the image of the Kelly armour as "intrinsically linked" to notions of our Australian identity.⁵⁷ In *True History*, the creation of this Australian icon is inspired from images of the American Civil War. Kelly encounters these images in the old newspapers that are plastered on the walls of an abandoned shepherd's hut in which the outlaws take refuge while on the run from the police.

I come across the badly damaged likeness of a ship called the *Virginia* the southerners had clad it all with iron there were another ship the *Monitor* its bridge were like a tower forged of steel ½ in. thick an ironclad monster with a pair of 11 in. guns like the nostrils on a face. O that a man might smith himself into a warship of that pattern (371).

Kelly then relates this image back to the Irish tradition, firstly to Molly's Children, by remarking to Hart that "this is what them Molly's should of worn" (371). Next, he relates it back to his much-loved image of the warrior Cuchulainn (371).

Carey's positioning of the source of inspiration for the Kelly armour outside of Australia, in the United States, and his conflation of the armour with Irish cultural markers creates the space for a more transnational identity. On the other hand, Carey's connection of the Kelly armour with the American Civil War's Confederacy further complicates Kelly's nationalism. Although the connection with America expands Australian nationalism outside its traditionally narrow form, aligning Kelly with the Confederates can simultaneously reinforce the conservatism and backward nationalism that Kelly can represent.

⁵⁶ Seal, *Popular Tradition* 158.

⁵⁷ McGauran quoted in Kathy Marks, "Australia Refuses to Allow Export of Ned Kelly's Armour," *The Independent* 2001.

According to Graham Seal, popular attitudes to Ned Kelly traditionally reinforce the location of “real” Australia in the Australian bush; that is, “anywhere but in the cities.”⁵⁸ Carey’s location of Kelly’s daughter in America, and giving the famous Kelly armour an American connection reassesses the restrictive and insular Australian identity popularly associated with Kelly, expanding it to a cosmopolitan and transnational plane.

Huggan has stated that *True History* illustrates the flexibility of nationality, and clarifies the point that “‘the local’ and ‘the national’ are signs circulating within a global symbolic economy.”⁵⁹ This flexibility is illustrated with the shift that takes place with Kelly’s identity, from being situated in an Irish, largely mythologised past at the beginning of *True History*, to an Australian present and an American future toward the novel’s end. This re-positioning dramatically reassesses the Kelly narrative, although this, as Huggan has commented, may be more a strategy for marketing the novel globally,⁶⁰ rather than a desire to expand the limited nationalism popularly associated with Kelly.

Carey provides a reimagining of Kelly that departs from the traditional Kelly’s Irish-Australianness. The traditional Kelly’s Irishness allows the Kelly myth to become a victimological narrative that can be utilised to legitimise European belonging by earning a place through suffering and hardship. The novel draws attention to the complication of this kind of identification by presenting Kelly’s Irishness as problematic. Throughout the course of the novel, this problematic Irishness finds its solution in a transnational identity that spans Australia, Ireland and America.

⁵⁸ Seal, *Popular Tradition* 16.

⁵⁹ Huggan, *Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* 2.

⁶⁰ Huggan, *Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* 2.

Good Mates and Social Bandits: anxiety and heteromasculinity in Australian heroism

Mateship, heteromasculinity and failure are enduring and heavily naturalised themes in Australian heroic narratives. *True History's* novelistic account of the Kelly myth allows Carey to destabilise these heroic conventions. Carey presents a Kelly that tests the boundaries of gender and sexual norms by introducing a sexual ambiguity that runs through the novel. This proves to be controversial, both within *True History* and in the critical reactions to the novel. Carey's representation of Kelly subsequently throws the broader concepts of Australian nationalist heroism into question.

Although the status of Ned Kelly as an Australian hero has been questioned by some,¹ for others there is no doubt about his heroism. Graham Seal, for example, refers to Kelly as "Australia's only national hero,"² and Bruce Tranter and Jed Donoghue state that Kelly is the only widely recognised colonial Australian hero.³ There are several facets of the Ned Kelly narrative that make Kelly particularly suitable for transformation into a national hero.

One of the reasons for Kelly's veneration as a hero, even early in the historical Kelly's career, was his status as a "gentleman" and as the "Australian Robin Hood".⁴ The historian Ian Jones describes Ned Kelly as the only "real Robin Hood who has ever lived,"⁵ and Seal sees this aspect of the outlaw as "the essential Kelly."⁶ This celebration of Kelly as a noble robber originated with the historical Kelly, at times even from his victims. The wife of the Euroa bank manager whose bank was held up by the Kellys was so impressed with Kelly's conduct during his hold-up that she repeatedly lauded Kelly's gentlemanly behaviour to such a degree that "Ned Kelly was a Gentleman" later became the title of a ballad.⁷ This example of respect for Kelly, coming even from the victims

¹ Ellis, *The Criminal* 164.

² Seal, *Popular Tradition* 15.

³ Tranter and Donoghue, "Ned Kelly: Australian Icon."

⁴ Seal, *Popular Tradition* 77.

⁵ Ian Jones, *Ned Kelly: A Short Life* (Port Melbourne: Lothian, 1995) 301.

⁶ Seal, *Popular Tradition* 27-28.

⁷ Seal, *The Outlaw Legend* 164.

of his crimes, aligns with Eric Hobsbawm's definition of the "social bandit." In *Bandits* (1969) and *Primitive Rebels* (1971), Hobsbawm examines various similar "noble robber" characters that appear in the folklore of different cultures throughout history. Hobsbawm found many similarities in these characters and the narratives constructed around them.⁸

The social bandit represents much more than a criminal and stems from the archetype of which Robin Hood is a well-known example. These social bandits became elevated into champions of social justice, representing the struggle between the common man and the ruling class. The manifestation of this struggle differs depending on the cultural and historical context of the bandit. In the example of Ned Kelly, this struggle centred upon the tensions between wealthy landowners, known as the squatters, and tenant farmers, known as the selectors.⁹

Hobsbawm argues that the support the social bandit won from the community in which he lived constituted an early form of social protest.¹⁰ The popularity of the social bandit springs from his existence as a point of identification for oppressed people. The social bandit provided an outlet through which oppressed people could vicariously experience victories over the ruling structure.¹¹ Ned Kelly still remains associated with such an idea of the struggle against oppression, of the underdog opposing an unjust authority.¹²

The support that the social bandit won from his community stemmed from his position in a social minority group, which resulted in an ethical ideology divergent from that of the ruling class.¹³ This ideological difference accounts for much of the social bandit's appeal among the minority community.¹⁴ Thus Ned

⁸ Ray Cashman, "The Heroic Outlaw in Irish Folklore and Popular Literature," *Folklore* 111.2 (2000): 192-94.

⁹ Graham Seal, "The Robin Hood Principle: Folklore, History and the Social Bandit," *Journal of Folklore Research* 46.1 (2009): 75.

¹⁰ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, 3 ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971) 13-15.

¹¹ Cashman, "Heroic Outlaw": 191.

¹² Jones, *Short Life* 301.

¹³ Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* 23.

¹⁴ Hobsbawm, *Bandits* 35.

Kelly's defiance of authority gave voice to the needs of the rural poor and represented the desires of the average Australian selector.¹⁵

Other conditions that Hobsbawm defines as necessary for social banditry are a location in a pre-capitalist or pre-industrial society¹⁶ of traditional peasantry.¹⁷ Pat O'Malley has criticised these last conditions as inadequate, suggesting that social banditry has a broader root of class conflict, not restricted to traditional peasantry or capitalism and industry.¹⁸ John McQuilton supports this view, suggesting that social bandits are symptomatic of profound rural discontent.¹⁹

If O'Malley's modification of Hobsbawm's characteristics of the social bandit is accepted, colonial situations such as Australia and Ireland are particularly fertile environments for proliferation of the social bandit. The Irish outlaw in Irish folklore and popular literature also had great symbolic significance and popularity. Highwaymen such as Redmond O'Hanlon, William Brennan and Donal O'Keefe²⁰ were the subject of many chapbooks and ballads, to the degree that these chapbooks formed some of the most frequently used readers in Catholic hedge schools in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²¹

In Australia, the social bandit took the form of the bushranger.²² As I discussed earlier, this Irish identity allowed Irish-Australian bushrangers to add a political dimension to their law-breaking. O'Malley has applied Hobsbawm's redefined characteristics of the social bandit to Australian bushrangers and attributes the popularity of the bushranger as social bandit in Australia to rural class conflict surrounding land, primarily in New South Wales and Victoria.²³ The historical Kelly made a public display of burning the mortgages held by the

¹⁵ Jones, Short Life 301.

¹⁶ Hobsbawm, Bandits 37; Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels 23.

¹⁷ John McQuilton, The Kelly Outbreak: The Geographical Dimensions of Social Banditry (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1979) 2.

¹⁸ Pat O'Malley, "Class Conflict and Social Banditry: Bushranging in Nineteenth Century Australia," Social Problems 26.3 (1979): 274.

¹⁹ Hobsbawm, Bandits 20, Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels 23.

²⁰ Cashman, "Heroic Outlaw": 194-203.

²¹ Cashman, "Heroic Outlaw": 191.

²² Waters, "Folksong Making," 113; Seal, The Outlaw Legend 172; Seal, Popular Tradition 275.

²³ O'Malley, "Class Conflict," 275.

Euroa and Jerilderie banks during his hold-ups.²⁴ The largely unorganised nature of class conflict in colonial Australia at this time was vital to the popular support of the bushranger, whose demise from 1885-1900 coincided with the rise of more institutionalised modes of social action both in rural and urban areas.²⁵

Russel Ward, on the other hand, argues that bushrangers were invested with such importance, particularly prior to the First World War, because Australia had not yet taken part in any major international conflicts at this time as an entity independent from Britain. This meant that the nationalistic sentiment usually associated with the soldier had no outlet here. This was instead transferred to the bushranger,²⁶ who became a symbol of the “emergent national feeling.”²⁷

The social bandit aspect of Kelly forms an important part of Carey’s Kelly, who is described by Anthony Quinn as “nothing less than a folk hero and a freedom fighter.”²⁸ Robert Ross likewise sees Carey’s Kelly as “heroic.”²⁹ For Andreas Gaile, Carey’s Kelly embarked upon a “lifelong fight against police brutality and governmental despotism,” wherein his crimes are seen, in the moral code of the novel, more as acts of self-defence than aggression.³⁰ Portraying Kelly as a social bandit allows Kelly’s heroism to be universalised, while still retaining its cultural specificity.

The historical Kelly actively sought to cast himself as an outlaw hero. Seal notes that from his very first hold-up, the historical Kelly was “at pains to ensure things were done in proper highwayman style.”³¹ Jones, too, has pointed out that Kelly cultivated the image of the highwayman hero; “Dick Turpin with shavings of Michael Dwyer.”³² However, the historical Kelly’s cultivation of the highwayman hero is not to be confused with a cultivation of the social bandit, as

²⁴ Seal, *The Outlaw Legend* 164.

²⁵ O'Malley, "Class Conflict," 280.

²⁶ Ward, *Legend* 135.

²⁷ Ward, *Legend* 153.

²⁸ Anthony Quinn, "Robin Hood of the Outback," *New York Times* 2001.

²⁹ Robert Ross, "Heroic Underdog Down under - Peter Carey's New Novel Revives Adoration of Ned Kelly, a National Hero, While Indirectly Commenting on Australian Identity," *World and I* 16.5 (2001): 251.

³⁰ Gaile, "Re-Mythologizing": 37.

³¹ Seal, *The Outlaw Legend* 164.

³² Jones, *Short Life* 302.

not all highwaymen or bush outlaws necessarily fit the social bandit definition. Dick Turpin for example, although a well-known outlaw, is more of a glamorous criminal than a social bandit.

This idea of Kelly consciously creating his own highwayman hero image is explicitly stated in *True History*, where it has the effect of de-naturalising the social banditry associated with Kelly. Carey's Kelly recounts his mentor in bush-ranging, Harry Power, modelling himself on the outlaw hero image for the protection that this afforded:

Harry always knew he must feed the poor he must poddy & flatter them he would be Rob Roy or Robin Hood he would retrieve the widow's cattle from the pound and if the poor selectors suffered harassment or threats on his behalf he would make it up with a sheep or a barrel of grog or fistful of sovereigns (325-326).

This passage explicitly links Kelly with the archetypal social bandit hero, Robin Hood. Additionally, it illustrates Carey's Kelly's awareness of the necessity to adopt the role of the heroic outlaw in order to protect himself. Prior to this, Kelly notes that, "the bush protected no one. It had been men who protected Harry and it were a man who betrayed him in the end" (325). When seen in this context, Kelly's and Power's sharing of the spoils of their crime is seen less as a Robin Hood-like act of wealth redistribution and more as a payment to rural families in exchange for their protection. This can challenge the heroism popularly associated with Kelly as his apparent altruism is revealed to be motivated largely by self-preservation.

The eventual defeat of the social bandit is inevitable and part of his appeal, with betrayal being the "standard end" for almost every individual bandit.³³ Failure and defeat also form a central focus for narratives of Australian heroism, as has been noted by several commentators. These central themes are tied to anxieties about white settler belonging.³⁴ Ross Gibson, for example, describes heroic failure as necessary in Australian mythology to make peace with an indomitable land. Gibson cites the examples of Ludwig Leichardt, the

³³ Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* 14.

³⁴ Ross Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992); Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile."; Martin, "Dead White Male Heroes."

failed explorer, and Patrick White's *Voss* as illustrations of this Australian veneration of failure.³⁵

Ann Curthoys holds a similar view, arguing that the emphasis on heroic defeat in Australian mythology forms a part of the victimological narrative that allows white Australians to see themselves as "battling courageously against enormous odds," a battle which legitimises their ownership of the land.³⁶ The tragic explorers Burke, Wills and Leichardt, along with the central myth of Australian heroism – Gallipoli – are examples of such representations of valorised failure. Curthoys echoes Andrew Lattas, who argues that the function of foregrounding and celebrating European Australian suffering in this way is to confer a "right of ownership" to the Australian land through a hard-won struggle that redeems the nation.³⁷

Gibson has suggested that the motif of heroic failure in narratives of Australianess began to wane in the 1980s to be replaced with a celebration of success.³⁸ Curthoys, however, sees this judgement as "too hasty", citing the growing popularity of historical fiction from the 1980s as giving this brand of heroism a new popularity.³⁹ The continuing appeal of the Kelly narrative within recent Australian historical fiction is a good example of this.

Various commentators⁴⁰ situate Ned Kelly within this tradition of celebrated failure. Susan Martin notes that along with the "strikingly incompetent explorers" Burke, Wills and Leichardt, "shot or executed bushrangers" are popular subjects for Australian heroism.⁴¹ The tragedy of the impending doom within the Kelly narrative is an integral aspect of its popularity.⁴²

³⁵ Gibson, *South of the West* 17.

³⁶ Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile," 18.

³⁷ Lattas, "Aborigines," 234.

³⁸ Gibson, *South of the West* 173-74.

³⁹ Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile," 3.

⁴⁰ McQuilton, *Kelly Outbreak* 38; Kathryn James, *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 53; Martin, "Dead White Male Heroes," 304; Gaile McGregor, *Eccentric Visions: Re Constructing Australia* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994) 99-100.

⁴¹ Martin, "Dead White Male Heroes," 304.

⁴² McGregor, *Eccentric Visions* 99.

True History is still largely imbued with this same sense of failure and defeat. Carey's Kelly still fails to effect real social change and still ends on the gallows, thus fulfilling the defeat narrative. At the same time, there are other elements of Carey's novel that provide a counterpoint to this well-known narrative of failure. The existence of a daughter and Kelly's success in giving voice to his own story in the form of his letter to her grant Kelly a sense of hope and autonomy that is not found in traditional Kelly narratives, where the focus is very much on Kelly's tragic failure.

Kelly's death is the essence of this failure, and is very much the focus of traditional Kelly narratives, which emphasise his stoicism at his execution.⁴³ His final words, "Such is life," tend to form the tragic end of the Kelly narrative. Kelly's death is included in Carey's novel, but this is relayed in the neutral, anonymous voice that frames the main narrative. In *True History*, Kelly is described as "wincing" at the touch of the noose, before an unemotional description of the death (400). The neutral account of this integral aspect of the Kelly myth further counters the narrative of failure generally associated with Kelly. Carey's rejection of heroic failure, combined with the suggestion of a more transnational approach to national identity, can suggest the call to move beyond the traditionally insular versions of Australian nationalism.

Another departure from the traditional Kelly narrative in *True History* is to do with gender. Maleness is a central and heavily naturalised aspect of Australian heroism,⁴⁴ which the novel reassesses by reimagining Kelly's heteromascularity. The compound term "heteromasculine" has been used to describe the images of maleness that are at once hypermasculine and heterosexual.⁴⁵ In Australia, ideas of maleness are traditionally dominated by hypermasculinity and heterosexuality. Australian masculinity and heroism hinge upon a concept of (exclusively male) mateship. The masculine exclusivity of Australian national identity and heroism has been described as not only virtually "womanless", but "largely misogynist."⁴⁶

⁴³ Graham Seal, *Ned Kelly in Popular Tradition* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1980) 15-16.

⁴⁴ Martin, "Dead White Male Heroes," 304.

⁴⁵ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 187.

⁴⁶ Margaret Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia 1788-1975* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1976) 12.

The importance of masculinity to Australian constructions of heroism has been attributed to the importance of the “bushman,” a significant contribution to the archetypical Australian hero. The bushman comes from “the bush,” and is usually “of poor but honest Anglo-Irish stock.” The genealogy of the Australian hero can be tracked from its beginnings at Eureka to the bushman of the Australian Legend and further to the Anzac hero.⁴⁷ This procession of heroic archetypes, always male, was largely located in a predominately male environment.

Male exclusivity led to the importance of the idea of male mateship in Australia.⁴⁸ Australian mateship is characterised as a form of inter-dependent male bonding that displays ambivalence and hostility towards women.⁴⁹ The centrality of mateship to ideas of Australian masculinity stemmed partly from the gender imbalance in colonial Australia, particularly in the rural areas. In New South Wales in 1841, for example, the ratio of men to women stood at approximately four to one.⁵⁰ In addition to this scarcity of women in colonial Australia, the popularity of mateship was motivated by negative attitudes to women, which Heather Smyth attributes to a fear of the “feminine principle” associated with the landscape.⁵¹

Male mateship was so central to early ideas of bushman heroism, that it became the very “ethos of Australian manhood.”⁵² In *The Australian Legend*, Russel Ward states that mateship even became a “consciously-held substitute for religion.”⁵³ As well as its association with the bushman and Australian masculine identity, “mateship, sacrifice and courage” was tied in with ideas of Australian heroism, primarily through the Anzac myth.⁵⁴ Anzac remains a focal point for

⁴⁷ Kay Schaffer, Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 20.

⁴⁸ Bob Pease, "Moving Beyond Mateship: Reconstructing Australian Men's Practices," A Man's World? Changing Men's Practices in a Globalized World, eds. Bob Pease and Keith Pringle (London: Zed Books, 2001) 192.

⁴⁹ Elaine Thompson, Fair Enough: Egalitarianism in Australia (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1994) 134.

⁵⁰ Thompson, Fair Enough 134.

⁵¹ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 188.

⁵² Schaffer, Women and the Bush 29.

⁵³ Ward, Legend 35.

⁵⁴ Henry H. Neary, The Kellys, Australia's Famous Bushrangers (Sydney: C Merritt, 1946) 23.

Australian identity and concepts of heroism. It is unusual for any mention of the Anzac tradition to occur without some reference to mateship as a virtue.⁵⁵

Mateship in the context of war was characterised by the idea of heroic sacrifice for one's fellow-soldiers, exemplified by figures such as John Simpson Kirkpatrick and his donkey, and Edward "Weary" Dunlop.⁵⁶ Heroic sacrifice is visible in the Kelly myth. It was Kelly's attempt to rescue his companions at Glenrowan that led to his capture.⁵⁷ Carolyn Bliss sees the Kelly narrative as "a story of unswerving mateship maintained in the face of overwhelming odds,"⁵⁸ and Graham Seal believes that it is this aspect of mateship to the Kelly narrative that contributes to its on-going heroic appeal.⁵⁹

Despite the inclusion of fictionalised female characters in *True History*, the novel still primarily revolves around the absence of women, recalling the "womanlessness" of Australian heroic narratives.⁶⁰ Kelly's unknown daughter, his departed lover and his imprisoned mother all form an unseen presence that motivates both Kelly's actions and his narrative and foreground the male relationships.

The importance of mateship to ideas of Australian masculinity and heroism is underpinned with ambiguities and anxieties about sexuality, which Carey engages with in *True History*. These anxieties stem from the strong homosocial bonds that make up the male mateship relationship and its potential proximity to a homosexual relationship. This is illustrated by two of the founding images of Australian national identity: male bush mateship and convict society.⁶¹

Situational homosexuality is the phenomenon of same-sex relationships resulting from the restriction to a single-sex environment for long periods. Situational homosexuality was extremely widespread in the Australian penal colony, partly because of the scarcity of women and the close proximity in which male inmates were held. At this time it was common for convict men to assume

⁵⁵ David Lamond, "Cultural Mythology and Global Leadership in Australia," *Cultural Mythology and Global Leadership*, eds. Eric H. Kessler and Diana J. Wong-Mingji (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2009) 359.

⁵⁶ Lamond, "Cultural Mythology," 361.

⁵⁷ Jones, *Short Life* 131-36.

⁵⁸ Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 290.

⁵⁹ Seal, *The Outlaw Legend* 174.

⁶⁰ Fletcher and Mead, "Inheriting the Past," 202.

⁶¹ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 188.

women's names and form "married" relationships with one another.⁶²

Homosexual practices became so widespread in Australia's penal colony that they even provoked parliamentary questions and caused Sydney to be dubbed "Sodom of the South Seas."⁶³

There is some debate around the relationship between mateship and homosexuality in colonial Australia. Russell Ward states that the Australian bushman "appeased spiritual hunger by a sublimated homosexual relationship with a mate, or a number of mates, of his own sex."⁶⁴ Tom Inglis Moore similarly likens the relationship of male mateship in the bush to that of "the intimacy of man and wife in a happy marriage," but is quick to state that these relationships involved "no physical element."⁶⁵ Robert Hughes, on the other hand, argues that these homosexual relationships were not as sublimated as suggested by Ward and Moore, but that "mateship found expression in homosexuality."⁶⁶

In contrast, Dennis Altman notes that some Australian homosexual men actually felt excluded from the cult of mateship precisely because of their homosexuality.⁶⁷ The existence of debate around this issue, regardless of the cause and effect linkage between these elements, reveals the anxieties around heteronormativity in Australian masculinity.

Bushranging has also been associated with homosexuality, forming, as it does, another example of an Australian largely all-male subculture. It is the gang loyalty and mateship aspects of the bushranger that have been associated with homoeroticism.⁶⁸ This is expressed in the life of the historical bushranger Andrew George Scott, also known as Captain Moonlite, who was romantically involved with James Nesbitt, a member of his bushranging gang. Nesbitt was killed in a police shootout and died in Scott's arms. While in prison, Scott wrote a

⁶² Robert French, Camping by a Billabong: Gay and Lesbian Stories from Australian History (Sydney: Black Wattle, 1993) 3-11.

⁶³ Robert F. Aldrich, Colonialism and Homosexuality (London: Routledge, 2003) 218.

⁶⁴ Ward, Legend 93.

⁶⁵ Tom Inglis Moore, Social Patterns in Australian Literature (Berkeley: University of California, 1971) 223.

⁶⁶ Robert Hughes, The Fatal Shore: A History of Transportation of Convicts to Australia 1787-1868 (London: Collins Harvill, 1996) 320.

⁶⁷ Dennis Altman, "The Myth of Mateship," Meanjin 46.2 (1987): 166.

⁶⁸ Craig Johnston and Robert Johnston, "The Making of Homosexual Men," Staining the Wattle: A People's History of Australia since 1788, eds. Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988) 90-91.

number of letters declaring his love for Nesbit and wore a ring made from a lock of Nesbit's hair. The two were eventually buried in the same grave.⁶⁹

The Kelly gang have also been associated with homosexuality since at least the 1960s, with Sidney J. Baker labelling the Kellys a "group of homosexuals", based on the fact that they wore perfume, occasionally danced with men and embraced.⁷⁰ Robert Aldrich goes further to suggest that homosexual relationships, particularly between Aaron Sherritt and Steve Hart, helped the cohesiveness of the men in the Kelly gang.⁷¹

The basis for some of the anxiety around the heteronormativity of the Kelly gang originates from historical evidence that Steve Hart was known to dress in women's clothing and occasionally competed in horse races dressed in this manner.⁷² Historical references to Ned Kelly wearing women's clothing exist too, with Police Commission reports on the pursuit of the Kellys noting Kelly's transvestism.⁷³

It could be argued that such behaviour can be attributed to an expression of Australian larrikinism, rather than an indication of homosexuality. However, the debate amongst critics about the Kelly gang's sexuality indicates that Australian heteromascularity is threatened by the possibility of the Kelly gang's sexual ambiguity.

These anxieties around heteromascularity situate the Kelly gang in a position of tension between concepts of masculine heroism and anxieties about masculinity and sexuality. This tension can spring from attempts to remove the homosocial aspects of Australian nationalism, with its championing of mateship, from its homosexual associations.⁷⁴ Moreover, the Kellys' ambiguous sexuality can illustrate the fragility of concepts of Australian masculine heroism. This fragility is made most visible with the repeated re-inscriptions of Kelly's

⁶⁹ Robert Aldrich and Gary Wotherspoon, eds., Who's Who in Gay and Lesbian History: From Antiquity to World War II (London: Routledge, 2001) 378.

⁷⁰ Sidney John Baker, The Australian Language: The Meanings, Origins and Useage; from Convict Days to the Present, 2nd ed. (Milsons Point: Currawong Press, 1966) 94.

⁷¹ Aldrich, Colonialism and Homosexuality 232.

⁷² Elizabeth McMahon, "Australia Crossed-Over: Images of Cross-Dressing in Australian Art and Culture," Art and Australia 34.30 (1997).

⁷³ Lucy Sarah Chesser, Parting with My Sex: Cross-Dressing, Inversion and Sexuality in Australian Cultural Life (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2008) viii.

⁷⁴ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 187-88.

heterosexuality in fictionalisations of the Kelly narrative. Historical elements that upset the normative gender roles are either omitted or countered with explanations or explicit expressions of masculinity.⁷⁵

One example of this is with Sidney Nolan's iconic "Ned Kelly" series of paintings, in which *Steve Hart Dressed as a Girl* (1947) depicts Hart wearing a dress, stockings and boots, and riding side-saddle.⁷⁶ Hart's pose in the painting is one of effeminacy, with the reins held gently in his left hand, and his right resting near his hip on the horse's unsaddled back. This stance is reminiscent of the "akimbo position" in drawing and painting, where the hooked arm rests delicately upon the hip. This "proto-camp gesture" originates from the seventeenth century when it was associated with the aristocracy, but by the mid-eighteenth century it had already become a gesture of "the effeminate sodomite."⁷⁷ Furthermore, the title of this painting is another significant aspect in terms of gender inversion. *Steve Hart Dressed as a Girl* is the later of two works with the same subject matter. The earlier painting is simply entitled *Steve Hart* (1945) and features a more masculine Hart, bearded and with "a less intense facial expression."⁷⁸

The unsettling sexual aspect that *Steve Hart Dressed as a Girl* presents is neutralised in the National Gallery of Australia with the reassuring annotation by Nolan stating that "all the Kellys may have dressed like this at times to deceive people for fun," along with an historical fact about Hart's exceptional prowess on horseback.⁷⁹ This statement reveals the depth of anxiety around the issue of gender and sexuality as it attempts to remove the sexual implications of the cross-dressing in the painting and re-inscribe Hart's heterosexual normativity by emphasising his horsemanship, a traditionally masculine skill.

Similar re-inscriptions of Kelly's heterosexuality are present in more recent Kelly narratives. Robert Drewe's *Our Sunshine* (1991) includes references

⁷⁵ Martin, "Dead White Male Heroes," 305.

⁷⁶ See Sidney Nolan, *Steve Hart Dressed as a Girl*, The National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

⁷⁷ David Coad, *Gender Trouble Down Under: Australian Masculinities*, Identites, Normes De Communautés Anglophones (Valenciennes: Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 2002) 67.

⁷⁸ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 206.

⁷⁹ Comment in the National Gallery of Australia for *Steve Hart* (1947).

to the Kelly gang's use of perfume, which formed part of the basis for Baker's allegations of the Kellys homosexuality. These references are immediately followed by an emphasis on the violence associated with the outlaws. A gang-member states, "We're the most stylish murdering thieves north-eastern Victoria's ever seen."⁸⁰ This connection between perfume, style and violence allows the typically feminine gendered concepts to be countered by the typically masculine violence, again stabilising the heteronormativity of the Kellys.

Various historians have noted the Kelly gang's interest in clothing and style, and their status as "bush dandies", wearing high-heeled boots, flashy handkerchiefs and their hat-straps under their noses.⁸¹ John Molony describes the Kelly gang's use of perfume and John McQuilton also mentions the use of large, white, perfumed handkerchiefs. McQuilton also quotes a witness at a hold-up who declares the Kellys' style would have made them "the admiration of the girls at Greta."⁸² Heather Smyth notes that this love of perfume and style may well have been male conventions at the time, but it also has the potential for "modern campy meanings" to emerge, and these have been playfully exploited by Carey.⁸³

Gregor Jordan's 2003 film *Ned Kelly*, like the annotated Nolan painting, contains both transvestism and reassurances of the Kellys' heteronormativity. Early on, the film establishes Kelly and Sherritt's heterosexuality as the two men engage in homophobic banter, immediately after which they ogle a passing woman. As in *True History*, the film includes transvestism but this clearly takes the form of disguise, with Joe Byrne dressing in women's clothing to lure Aaron Sherritt out of his house in order to shoot him for betraying the gang.⁸⁴ Interestingly, there is no historical basis for this particular act of transvestism.⁸⁵

Jordan's representation of gender politics is in sharp contrast to that offered by Carey. Sarah Pinto and Leigh Boucher argue that Jordan's Kelly presents a limiting brand of Australian masculinity, one that closes down

⁸⁰ Robert Drewe, *Our Sunshine* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1991) 116.

⁸¹ Frank Clune, *The Kelly Hunters: The Authentic, Impartial History of the Life and Times of Edward Kelly, the Ironclad Outlaw* (Melbourne: Angus and Robertson, 1954) 198.

⁸² McQuilton, *Kelly Outbreak* 110.

⁸³ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 209.

⁸⁴ *Ned Kelly*, dir. Gregor Jordan, 2003.

⁸⁵ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 209.

masculine possibilities rather than opening them up.⁸⁶ This restrictiveness results from the reliance upon war film conventions, which emphasise battle, struggle and resistance. Jordan's Kelly's actions are defined by violent anger. Throughout the course of the film, he threatens various characters, sometimes even having to be physically restrained from violent action. Kate Millett describes this as the "hunter-fighter-fucker" mode of masculinity.⁸⁷

Although *True History* contains some re-inscriptions of Kelly's heterosexuality, Carey exploits the anxiety around masculinity by simultaneously unsettling Kelly's heteronormativity as it is created. Carey re-inscribes Kelly's heterosexuality primarily by introducing a female love interest into the narrative. Mary Hearn takes a central role in the narrative and appears not only in Kelly's account of his life but directly addresses the reader through her annotation of newspaper cuttings that appear in the novel (331-338).

Kelly's heteronormativity is further emphasised in the narrative through the character of the unborn daughter to whom the text is addressed. David Coad sees the emphasis that is placed on Kelly's heterosexuality with these female characters in *True History* as Carey's "refusal to exploit the homoerotic potential" of the Kelly myth. Despite the stabilising suggestions of heteronormativity referred to by Coad however, a close reading of the novel reveals that Kelly's gender identity remains ambiguous. The inclusion of the transvestism of both Ned Kelly's father and brother, and gang member Steve Hart forms a significant disruption of the heteronormativity associated with the Kelly gang.

While *True History's* Sons of Sieve is a fictionalised rebel group,⁸⁸ they appear to closely resemble other groups that used transvestism as part of social and political uprisings in Ireland, such as the Whiteboys or Queen Sive Oulagh's Children, the Levellers, Lady Clare Boys, Ribbonmen, the Hearts of Oak, Peep O'Day Boys and the Defenders. These groups were active in Ireland from the late eighteenth century up to the mid nineteenth century and protested about land

⁸⁶Sarah Pinto and Leigh Boucher, "Fighting for Legitimacy: Masculinity, Political Voice and *Ned Kelly*," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies* 10.1 (2006): 20.

⁸⁷ Pinto and Boucher, "Fighting for Legitimacy," 6.

⁸⁸ Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

issues such as opposing the enclosure of common land and the burden of increasing rent.⁸⁹

The Whiteboys were known as the “most violent and uncompromising popular opponents of the Anglo-Irish landed elite.”⁹⁰ Methods employed by these groups included intimidation and threats, often in the form of threatening letters. Properties and crops were set alight, orchards uprooted and animals maimed and dismembered. Murders occasionally took place, generally in night-time attacks, where victims were abducted from their homes, tortured, then buried alive or hanged.⁹¹

Transvestism as social protest was a relatively common and widespread occurrence throughout Europe from the early modern period up to the Victorian age.⁹² The practice of transvestism in social uprising was most common historically in the “impoverished lower classes [who] frequently cross-dressed for the purposes of riot or demonstration.”⁹³ Examples of instances of political transvestism outside of Ireland include riots in Dijon in 1630, where a group of cross-dressed men attacked the royal tax officers and in Beaujolais in the 1770s, where transvestite peasants attacked the landlord’s surveyors.⁹⁴ It has been alleged that the groups of Parisian market woman who marched on Versailles in 1789 were actually men in women’s clothing.⁹⁵ This practice was relatively common too in the British Isles, where transvestite riots included those of the

⁸⁹ Maurice J. Bric, "Priests, Parsons and Politics: The Rightboy Protest in County Cork, 1785-1788," Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland, ed. Charles H. E. Philpin (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1987) 163. Bric notes that until the late nineteenth century, the term “Whiteboy” was used to describe other similar agrarian rebel groups. (Bric, "Priests, Parsons and Politics," 164.). I will also now use the term “Whiteboy” to refer to all of these groups, despite differences they may have had.

⁹⁰ Victor V. Magagna, Communities of Grain: Rural Rebellion in Comparative Perspective (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 16.

⁹¹ David Featherstone, Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008) 65, Mairin Nic Eoin, "Sovereignty and Politics," The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions, eds. Seamus Deane, Angela Bourke, Andrew Carpenter and Jonathan Williams (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).

⁹² Malcolm I. Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, Women in Protest: 1800-1850 (London: Croom Helm, 1982) 286-87.

⁹³ Peter Ackroyd, Dressing up; Transvestism and Drag: The History of an Obsession (Norwich: Thames and Hudson, 1979) 54.

⁹⁴ Ackroyd, Dressing Up 54.

⁹⁵ A. W. Smith, "Some Folklore Elements in Movements of Social Protest," Folklore 77.4 (1966): 244.

Reberras of Wales, who were protesting against taxes and turnpike tolls, and in the Porteous riots of 1736 in Edinburgh that were led by a man going by the name of Madge Wildfire.⁹⁶

Cross-dressing for social protest has been reduced by some historians to an act of necessity, completely removed from gender and sexual politics but others have asserted that it is inextricable from these associations. A. W. Smith explains this kind of transvestism as simply the most easily accessible disguise available to men in agrarian societies.⁹⁷ Malcolm I. Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, on the other hand, challenge this as an inadequate explanation, noting that rioting labourers were often too well-known locally to be unrecognisable in women's clothes and that a man wearing female clothing is far more likely to attract attention than to escape it.⁹⁸

While obviously it cannot be assumed that collective cross-dressing indicated localised outbreaks of gender identity crisis,⁹⁹ gender politics did play a key role in this practice. Women were associated with "the passionate, the disorderly, the violent and chaotic side of human nature", so masquerading as them was "fraught with significance."¹⁰⁰ Through cross-dressing, the male rioters were able to assume the symbolic authority and sexual power afforded to mothers, granting them a greater power to defend social justices.¹⁰¹ The reversal of the fundamental social indicator of gender, outside of sanctioned contexts for this, such as carnival, took on a dangerous character of subversion and allowed for that questioning of other social and political hierarchies.¹⁰²

Cross-dressing additionally allowed for an association with otherworldly myths and folk-tales. The Whiteboys swore allegiance to Queen Sive Oulagh and referred to themselves as Queen Sive Oulagh's Children. Queen Sive is a character of traditional myth in the countryside around Kilkenny and Tipperary, and is associated with "rough justice." The Whiteboys' connection with a female

⁹⁶ Ackroyd, Dressing Up 54.

⁹⁷ Smith, "Folklore Elements," 244-45.

⁹⁸ Thomis and Grimmett, Women in Protest 144-45.

⁹⁹ Kevin Kenny, Making Sense of the Molly Maguires (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 24.

¹⁰⁰ Ackroyd, Dressing Up 54.

¹⁰¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975) 147-50.

¹⁰² Ackroyd, Dressing Up 54.

personification was important for their mobilisation of the local people.¹⁰³ The importance of the female gendered element of these Irish rebel groups allowed them to appear as an “almost mythical form of justice”, situated between the everyday and the other world in the peasants’ imaginations.¹⁰⁴

Images of women and ideas of the feminine played an important role in Irish nationalism of the nineteenth century. By cross-dressing for a nationalist cause, the rebels were able to draw upon the pre-modern Irish myths associated with this version of Irish nationalism.¹⁰⁵ Writers of the Irish Literary Revival, such as James Clarence Mangan, Jonathan Swift and Sean O’Casey represented Ireland as a woman. These writers popularised the images of Ireland as Erin, the Dark Rosaleen, the *Sean Van Bhocht* (Poor Old Woman), and Kathleen ni Houlihan throughout various stages of Irish nationalism.¹⁰⁶ These personifications acted as embodiments of Ireland who called on the young men of the nation to fight to defend them. The image had become so enshrined in nationalist rhetoric through the Irish Literary Revival that by the time of the Easter Rising its metaphorical status had been replaced by a factual one.¹⁰⁷

The transvestism in Carey’s novel gains validity through the Whiteboys’ history of rebellion and foregrounds the connections between gender and nationalism.¹⁰⁸ Rural Australia at the time of the Kellys shared many social and political similarities with the Ireland at the time of the Whiteboys. Issues of tenancy rights and land ownership were dominant concerns in both Ireland and Australia and in both places landlords monopolised land and fixed rents and lease conditions at unmanageable levels.¹⁰⁹ In Ireland, this situation led to the

¹⁰³ Eoin, "Sovereignty and Politics," 287.

¹⁰⁴ Featherstone, *Resistance*.

¹⁰⁵ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 199.

¹⁰⁶ C. L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) 2.

¹⁰⁷ Antoinette Quinn, "Ireland/Herland: Women and Literary Nationalism 1845-1916," *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Mary O'Dowd, vol. V (New York: New York University Press, 2002) 895.

¹⁰⁸ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 200.

¹⁰⁹ McQuilton, *Kelly Outbreak* 9.

rural protest of groups like the Whiteboys, and in Australia the unrest caused by these land issues has been linked to the Kelly Outbreak.¹¹⁰

Through the adoption of the Sons of Sieve in *True History*, Carey is able to borrow the association between gender inversion and national anti-authoritarian protest from Irish history, which can reveal the relationship between gender and power structures.¹¹¹ The Sons of Sieve also strengthens the social bandit aspect of the Kelly gang. Both Terry Eagleton¹¹² and Murray G. H. Pittock¹¹³ refer to the Whiteboys as Hobsbawmian social bandits, based upon their aim of defending the rights of the rural community through organised anti-authoritarian violence.

The presence of cross-dressing and the confusion that it causes for Ned Kelly and other characters in *True History* challenges the heteronormativity of Australian settler identity and concepts of Australian heroism.¹¹⁴ The critical response to the transvestism in *True History* has generally focussed on the cross-dressing in the novel as a “lie” that acts to destabilise Kelly’s sense of self.¹¹⁵ This “lie” is then corrected and the situation resolved with Mary Hearn’s revelation of the political implication of the transvestism. For some critics, Hearn’s revelation serves as a “clearing up” of the mystery of the novel’s transvestism,¹¹⁶ as it relocates this from its sexual associations to a political act.

This shift of focus from transvestism as a sexual and gendered act to a socio-political one has been the focus for several critics in discussions of the transvestism in the novel. For Huggan, Hearn’s explanation positions the transvestism as “a sign not of his ‘effeminacy’, but on the contrary, a membership of a secret society of Irish rebels feared for their excessive use of force.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ McQuilton, *Kelly Outbreak*, John McQuilton, "Police in Rural Victoria," *Policing in Australia: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mark Finnane (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1987) 53.

¹¹¹ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 200.

¹¹² Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent: Reviewing Fish, Spivak, Zizek and Others* (London: Verso, 2003) 9.

¹¹³ Murray G. H. Pittock, "Jacobite Ideology in Scotland and at St Germain-En-Laye," *The Stuart Court in Exile and the Jacobites*, eds. Eveline Cruickshanks and Edward T. Corp (London: Hambledon, 1995) 119.

¹¹⁴ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 192.

¹¹⁵ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 193.

¹¹⁶ Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 293.

¹¹⁷ Huggan, "Uses and Abuses," 147.

Huggan's statement seems to take the violence associated with the Molly's Children as effectively countering the effeminacy of the transvestism. Smyth sees implicit in Huggan's statement a suggestion that armed political action can only be gendered masculine or characterised by masculinity, much like the Australian bushranger.¹¹⁸

Similarly, Mary Ellen Snodgrass states that Hearn helps Kelly to gain the "political sophistication" to understand the cross dressing, and that this "in no way diminishes" the manhood of Dan or John Kelly.¹¹⁹ Both Carolyn Bliss and Bruce Woodcock see Hearn's explanation of the Sons of Sieve as a clarification of the "true meaning" of the novel's transvestism, which in Woodcock's opinion counteracts any "queering" of the Kelly narrative that may have been caused by the cross-dressing.¹²⁰

For other critics, the political aspect does not act as a complete resolution of the gender unsettling caused by the transvestism. Anne Marsh sees the transvestism as "haunting" Carey's novel as a "queer punctuation" that deconstructs the masculine stereotype with a queer presence.¹²¹ In the same way, for Smyth, the political explanation of the cross-dressing does not dispel the novel's sexual disturbance. Smyth's close reading of the novel reveals that the unsettled imagery of the cross-dressing persists long after Hearn's explanation of its political significance. Smyth also argues that the novel's transvestism is not the only way that the Kelly gang's heteronormativity is challenged.¹²² This is seen in the undertone of sexual innuendo that runs throughout the novel, which is particularly visible in the scene where Kelly first encounters Hart.

This scene is full of covert sexual and Oedipal references.¹²³ Immediately preceding Kelly's meeting with the cross-dressed Hart, Kelly recounts a recurring dream wherein he sees his father's face "lacerated by 1000 cuts". Kelly then states, "I knew I done this then I saw that woman's dress in that dreadful tin

¹¹⁸ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 194.

¹¹⁹ Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Peter Carey: A Literary Companion* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2010) 95.

¹²⁰ Woodcock, *Peter Carey* 153, Bliss, "Lies and Silences," 294.

¹²¹ Anne Marsh, "Ned Kelly by Any Other Name," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1.1 (2002): 62-63.

¹²² Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 195.

¹²³ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 210.

trunk" (198). The feelings of guilt towards his father expressed in Kelly's dream are combined with a sexualisation of his mother in his encounter with Hart.

Kelly, upon seeing a figure clad in a dress galloping past, assumes it is his mother, for, as he says, "no woman on earth could ride like my mother, it were thrilling to behold she rode with her back straight her stirrups long her skirts rucked up to show her knees" (198). Kelly decides to give chase, as "Mother always liked a race" (199), and is horrified to discover that the rider is not his mother as he had assumed, but instead a "dark haired boy clad in a dress!" (199). The Oedipal implications of this sequence are clear, with Kelly's reference to his mother's visible knees and his description of her as "thrilling to behold." Kelly's Oedipal relationship with his mother is again hinted at soon after this. His brother Dan taunts him: "your ma is your donah as everybody knows...Hubba hubba Mamma is your girl" (213). This close proximity between Steve Hart's transvestism and the Oedipal associations with Kelly serve to sexualise Hart's transvestism and unsettle the Kelly gang's heteronormativity. It is interesting to note that a similar Oedipal connection is made in Drewe's *Our Sunshine*, as both mother and lover appear as "round and brown" breasts that Kelly nuzzles.¹²⁴

The significance of clothing in unsettling gender norms is felt throughout the novel, with the recurring motif of the gendering and cross-gendering of clothing accentuating the sexual possibilities of the transvestism.¹²⁵ In the scene that follows Kelly's first encounter with Hart, Kelly's boxing match with Wild Wright, the motif of cross-dressing is extended further. Before the boxing match, Kelly exhibits some confusion about the silk boxing shorts he is asked to wear, which he mistakes at first for a "green silk handkerchief" and then a "pair of ladies' scanties" (202). Such cross-gendering of clothing is present at various points throughout the novel. When Kelly is presented with the silk sash from the Shelton family, a gift for saving Dick Shelton, he mistakes it for "women's stuff" and thinks it is a dress to give his mother (33). George King's boots are described as having "higher heels than a Cuban more like a fancy woman's shoe" (192) and Annie Kelly's dress is darned "like an old man's sock" (29).

¹²⁴ Martin, "Dead White Male Heroes," 311.

¹²⁵ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 210.

Even the iconic Kelly armour does not escape from the cross-gendering of clothing. Although on one hand the armour acts to stabilise Kelly's shifting masculine identity, this is at the same time complicated through the armour's association with women's dresses. John Kinsella has drawn "transvestite connections to dressmaking" in the construction of the armour.¹²⁶ This connection is made with Kelly's remarks to Hart: "this is what them Mollys should of worn yes this were the very seamstress he needed for his dresses" (371). Kelly then goes on to describe using paper-bark to make patterns for the armour "just as women use the paper for a dress" (373). The cross-gendering of the armour goes further with Hart decorating his ironclad suit with "black and orange flowers of his own invention" (383), echoing the "black & orange lace [with] many flowers of strange description" (302) that decorate the dress that Steve had previously stolen and worn.¹²⁷

In addition to the cross-gendering of clothing in *True History* is a sexualisation of women's dresses. When Kelly first meets Mary Hearn he gives her a new dress, "a bright red dress [with] a very large bustle" (226), a gift that essentially serves as foreplay for their first sexual encounter. This is repeated with Kelly's second visit to Hearn. Kelly appears this time with a red sequined silk dress (232) and decides that he wishes to marry her. In these two encounters, the gifts of the dresses act as almost a currency for payment for sexual services. The first of these dresses had originally been worn by Dan. Kelly confiscates it and attempts to return it to its owner (224-226). It instead becomes a gift for a prostitute, who becomes the mother of Kelly's child. Giving such a sexualised context to the transvestite dresses grants the cross-dressing a sexual ambiguity that is not wholly removed with its later political associations.¹²⁸

In addition to the transvestism, Carey unsettles the Kelly gang's heterosexual norms in other ways. One of these is the suggestion of

¹²⁶ John Kinsella, [On Peter Carey's True History of the Kelly Gang](http://www.johnkinsella.org/reviews/carey.html), 10-01-2007, Available: www.johnkinsella.org/reviews/carey.html.

¹²⁷ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 212.

¹²⁸ Martin, "Dead White Male Heroes," 312.

homosexuality between Aaron Sherritt and Joe Byrne.¹²⁹ The relationship between the historical Sherritt and Byrne was very close. Various commentators have raised the issue of possible homosexuality within the Kelly gang, particularly between Sherritt and Byrne.¹³⁰ In *True History*, Sherritt and Byrne are described as having a “queer and private way of conversing” (222), sleeping beside the fire “curled up like cattle dogs” (222), and Aaron is described as “always whispering in Joe’s ear, seeking out Joe’s eye” (321). Later, when allegations of betrayal are made, Dan remarks to Joe that Aaron “plans to shoot you and eff you before your body has grown cold” (377).

Carey’s novel also contains sexual innuendo between other members of the Kelly gang, in particular Ned Kelly and Steve Hart. Upon encountering Steve Hart for a second time, Ned and Steve embark upon an exchange that is notable for its sexually charged nature:¹³¹

I ain’t a sissy he repeated
I had a fascination about him I suppose and when he
announced he would put his horse in my paddock I did not prevent
him...I kept my hands in my pockets as he lay [the saddle] across
the fence.
I’m a Lady Clare Boy he said.
I pushed my hands deeper in the pockets.
Wisely he came no closer I’ll tell you what I am said he.
That were a door I did not wish to open (222).

Smyth sees the possibility of interpreting Kelly’s physical gesture of putting his hands in his pockets as both a signal of social unease and as a sexual gesture.¹³² The sexually charged exchange above is followed by Kelly’s description of Hart’s eyes as “secretive and fervent” (223) and of him as “nimble & pretty as a pony” (369). In Kelly’s first meeting with Mary Hearn he remarks, “I desired her so very badly I had little time to think of Steve Hart” (232). Smyth notes that although “Ned may ‘mean’ that his preoccupation with Mary has distracted him from his

¹²⁹ Smyth, “Mollies Down Under,” 210-11.

¹³⁰ Robert Dessaix, *Australian Gay and Lesbian Writing: An Anthology* (Sydney: Oxford University Press, 1993) 7. Dessaix notes that Manning Clark, Gary Wotherspoon and John Molony have explored the issue of the homosexuality of the Kellys.

¹³¹ Smyth, 210.

¹³² Smyth, “Mollies Down Under,” 211.

anger at Steve, the syntactical allusion to a former desire for Steve cannot be missed".¹³³

The sexual innuendo throughout *True History* reveals both Kelly's homophobia and the homosexual potential of bush mateship associated with the Kelly myth.¹³⁴ The presence of this sexual undercurrent in the novel interacts with the transvestism and causes the sexual potential of this to remain even after its political associations are revealed. Rather than the transvestism in *True History* representing either an act of gender inversion or a political act, as suggested by many critics, it is actually Carey's "intervention into the gendering of Australian nationalism."¹³⁵ Carey foregrounds the centrality of heteromascularity to ideas of Australian nationalist heroism, as illustrated by the Kelly narrative, and interrogates it to reveal its fragility.

Rather than constructing his Kelly as an exemplar of heroic Australian values of mateship, heteromascularity and heroic defeat, Carey creates a Kelly that subverts these markers of heroism and reveals their underlying anxieties. The revelation of Kelly's social banditry as largely self-motivated debunks the Robin Hood associations of the outlaw that form a central focus of Kelly in the Australian imaginary. In addition, Carey rejects the trope of Australian heroic failure, giving the potential for a more positive national narrative that is not preoccupied with negotiating contested belonging. Finally, Carey's subversion of Kelly's heteromascularity reveals the homophobia that underpins the ethos of bush mateship.

¹³³ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 211.

¹³⁴ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 211.

¹³⁵ Smyth, "Mollies Down Under," 210.

Conclusion: he'll never make old bones

In September of this year, the historical Ned Kelly was once again in the news, featuring in several national newspapers and an SBS documentary.¹ The renewed interest in Kelly was sparked by the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine's Ned Kelly Project, which had positively identified Kelly's remains. Kelly's bones were found in a mass grave of thirty-four bodies in the grounds of the Old Melbourne Gaol.² The Ned Kelly Project matched mitochondrial DNA from bones suspected to be Kelly's with a DNA sample taken from Kelly's great great nephew, Leigh Oliver. Kelly's bones exhibited markings caused by injuries sustained by Kelly during the Glenrowan shoot-out. The right shinbone showed clearly visible bullet holes, with the bullets causing the injury being found inside the bone. Injuries to the left elbow also had visible defects consistent with gunshot wounds.³ This was the first time that Kelly's remains had been scientifically identified.⁴

Prior to this positive identification, the whereabouts of Kelly's remains, particularly his skull, had been the subject of controversy and conjecture. Immediately after Kelly's execution, his brain was removed and his body dissected by medical students. Dissection was illegal outside of a coronial inquiry and there was a public outcry when this was reported in the press. Kelly's skull was studied by phrenologists and then returned to police who used it as a paperweight for some years. In 1929, Kelly's body was unearthed from the Old Melbourne Gaol during demolition works. As the bodies were exhumed, workers and bystanders stole pieces of skeleton from a grave marked "E. K.", believing they were Kelly's. The site foreman retrieved the skull from this grave and handed it to the National Institute of Anatomy, who handed it to the National Trust in 1971.⁵ The following year, National Trust historians claimed the skull

¹ Ned's Head, dir. Rebecca Ciallella, SBS, 2011.

² Bridie Smith, "131 Years on, Ned Kelly Mystery Is Laid to Rest," The Age 29.10.2011 2011.

³ Smith, "131 Years On."

⁴ Deb Withers, The Ned Kelly Project, 2011, Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, Available: <http://www.vifm.org/the-ned-kelly-project/>, 29.10.2011.

⁵ Ned's Head, dir. Ciallella.

labelled "E. Kelly" they had received could not be Kelly's, based on the fact that Kelly's skull had been split in two by medical students in 1880.⁶

This skull was put on display at the Old Melbourne Gaol until 1978, when West Australian farmer Tom Baxter stole it from the display cabinet in protest at the remains being exhibited. Baxter handed the skull to the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine in 2009 for testing and attempted to have Kelly posthumously pardoned during the negotiations for the return of the skull.

In 2004, the Baxter skull was identified as belonging to murderer Ernest Knox,⁷ and then in 2011 it was proven instead to be Frederick Deeming's, the man rumoured to be Jack the Ripper.⁸ A small piece of Kelly's skull was among the bones identified in the Ned Kelly Project, but most of it still remains missing.⁹

The obsessive interest in the physical remains of Kelly resembles that which occurs around saintly relics. Zoë Crossland¹⁰ and Keith Dunstan have both noted this similarity, with Dunstan commenting that Kelly's physical remains are treated by some "as if they were splinters of the true cross."¹¹

The duplication and proliferation of saintly relics is a common phenomenon. Katherine Verdery points out that if all the relics of St Francis of Assisi were gathered together, they would equal much more than the remains of a single man.¹² Such a multiplication of objects associated with Kelly could be seen immediately after the Glenrowan battle, with the *Melbourne Punch* publishing a satirical catalogue of the items scavenged from the Glenrowan scene:

⁶ Lauren Niland, The Curious Case of Ned Kelly's Skull, 2011, The Guardian, Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/from-the-archive-blog/2011/sep/02/curious-case-ned-kelly-skull?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>, 29.10.2011.

⁷ Ned's Head, dir. Alan Hall, ABC, 2004.

⁸ Smith, "131 Years On."

⁹ Ned's Head, dir. Ciallella.

¹⁰ Zoë Crossland, "Of Clues and Signs: The Dead Body and Its Evidential Traces," American Anthropologist 111.1 (2009): 74.

¹¹ Keith Dunstan, Saint Ned: The Story of the near Sanctification of an Australian Outlaw (Sydney: Methuen, 1980) 8.

¹² Katherine Verdery, The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 28.

Article	Number
The actual threepenny bit taken from Ned Kelly	14, 805
Ned Kelly's spurs (very rare)	170
Ned Kelly's revolver	7, 212
Ned Kelly's armour, complete suit	18
The outlaws' horses	1500
Ned Kelly's skull-cap	73
Bullets picked up in the ruins	78, 000, 000, 000. ¹³

The duplication of holy relics seems to have no effect in diminishing their power, as long as belief in the origin of the relic remains secure.¹⁴ Various techniques have been used to strengthen the belief in relics and to affirm their origin. Historically, this was achieved through elaborate reliquaries that linked the relic with the origin.¹⁵ Crossland suggests that meticulous forensic labelling provides another opportunity to fulfil this function, and notes that the Baxter Kelly skull was found to carry the label "E. Kelly" inked onto its surface, to strengthen its claims to authenticity.¹⁶

The process of forensic identification of Kelly's remains is a site for the convergence of the fictional and historical Kellys. The hundreds of stories, ballads, novels and films that have been built up over time on the foundation of the historical man become both more real and more removed through the focus on the physical, as the distance between history and fiction is emphasised. The microscopic examination of DNA, the macro shots of bullet holes and the lead pellets that made them draw the myth and the history together, but also contain the potential to demythologise the man.

The mystery that had surrounded Kelly's remains added somewhat to his allure and his containment now in the annals of scientific discovery may put an end to some of his mythic power. The analysis of Ned Kelly's bones reduces the myth of Kelly to its humble mortal origins, as Kelly's stained, incomplete skeleton

¹³ "Relics of the Kelly Outlaws," Melbourne Punch 08.06.1880 1880.

¹⁴ Verdery, Political Lives of Dead Bodies 29.

¹⁵ Patrick J. Geary, Furta Sancta: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 6.

¹⁶ Crossland, "Of Clues and Signs," 74.

is shown as the clearest remaining physical link to the man on whom these many myths have been built.

In contrast to this, Carey's reimagining of Kelly builds another layer of myth onto the Kelly story, shifting it one step further from history. Carey's version of Kelly puts him to new ideological uses, to expand models of national and gender identity, where he had been previously used to reiterate conservative identity politics.

Rather than relying upon the victimological Irish identity that is commonly emphasised in Kelly narratives, Carey allows Kelly's identity to develop throughout the novel to become one of transnational inclusion. Not only is Kelly's strident Irishness left behind in the course of the novel, it is also called into question, with other Irish characters challenging Kelly's culturally remembered Irish identity. Through this challenge of cultural memory and culturally remembered figures, Carey is able to similarly question the usefulness of our repeated harking back to a colonial figure such as Kelly. This questioning on Carey's part, coupled with his reinvention of Kelly, can suggest that it is necessary to reassess and consciously engage with the figures we invest in.

True History offers a radical departure from the heroic aspects of the traditional Kelly myth, particularly in relation to Kelly's heteromascularity. The critical reception of Carey's reimagining of this aspect of Kelly revealed an underlying anxiety about Australian masculinity, with commentators eagerly attempting to explain away the novel's unsettling gender aspects. Even with the explanation of their political context in the novel, these remain as an undercurrent that provides an alternative to the restrictive brand of masculinity associated with Australian heroism. Carey's Kelly differed from other Kelly narratives produced at this time, such as Jordan's *Ned Kelly*, which tended to adhere to more conventional models of national and gender identity.

True History illustrates Kelly's versatility and Carey's departure from the traditional Kelly myth creates a new Kelly myth, and one perhaps better suited to a contemporary Australia that is moving towards more inclusive modes of identification. Carey's reconfiguring of Kelly illustrates that the reason we continue to invest in Kelly is because he can successfully be adapted to reflect what we wish to see in ourselves. Just as Kelly can reflect a hypermasculinity and

a conservative, insular nationalism he can also reflect the opposite: progressive gender and transnational identities. Like all mirrors, the Kelly figure is less interesting in its own right than for that which it can reflect.

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Title:

Ghosts of Ned Kelly: Peter Carey's True History and the myths that haunt us

Date:

2011

Citation:

Pericic, M. (2011). Ghosts of Ned Kelly: Peter Carey's True History and the myths that haunt us. Masters Research thesis, Arts - School of Culture and Communication, The University of Melbourne.

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