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Rigorózní práce

Ned Kelly:
aspekty mýtu a mužství v textech ze tří generací

(Ned Kelly: Aspects of Myth and Manhood
in Texts from Three Generations)

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis, titled “Ned Kelly: Aspects of Myth and Manhood in Texts from Three Generations”, is the result of my own work and that I used only the sources cited. The text of the thesis (excluding the preliminary pages, footnotes and the References section) is approx. 171’000 characters long. I also declare that I have not previously used this work to gain any other academic title than the one applied for.

Prague, 3 June 2013

Adam Prentis

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TITLE:

Ned Kelly: Aspects of Myth and Manhood in Texts from Three Generations

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ABSTRACT:

The thesis concerns itself with the analysis of various personality aspects of the protagonist of Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000) – Ned Kelly. Albeit a historical figure, Ned Kelly is approached as a fictional character with focus placed on his symbolic status of Australian nationality, myth and manhood, and on the literary means that point to this. The thesis looks into the ways in which Ned Kelly's manhood status is constructed and maintained, and into the fictionality derived from an absence of hard evidence and conflicting testimonies concerning the protagonist's life and deeds. The separate aspects are placed in an evolutionary context through comparisons with older portrayals of the same character from two earlier generations – in Max Brown's *Australian Son* (1948) and J. J. Kenneally's *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and their Pursuers* (1929), all of which use a heroising approach to the man.

The work shows that Ned Kelly may be perceived in many complex ways. Comparing the three books, it is found that although considerable unifying tendencies and moments exist, some aspects have a significant difference in focus or emphasis. A shift is noted from a confrontational idealising defence of what is perceived as a historical person to a more mythical glorifying of imperfection. No other clear developmental tendency was found.

KEYWORDS:

Australian literature, manhood, national myth, outlaw, hero, Ned Kelly, Peter Carey

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ABSTRAKT:

Práce se zabývá analýzou různých osobnostních aspektů Neda Kellyho, hlavní postavy knihy Petera Careyho *True History of the Kelly Gang* (Pravdivý příběh Kellyho party; 2000). I když je Ned Kelly historickou postavou, je k němu přistupováno jako k fiktivní postavě, se zaměřením na jeho australskou národnostní, mýtickou a mužskou symboličnost a na literární způsoby, kterými je těchto obrazů docíleno. Práce zkoumá způsoby, jimiž je vystavěn a podporován Kellyho status mužství, a fiktivnost, která je odvozená z nejasných a nejednoznačných výpovědích týkajících se jeho života a působení. Jednotlivé aspekty jsou vztaženy do vývojového kontextu skrze porovnání se staršími vyobrazeními této postavy ze dvou předešlých generací – v knize *Australian Son* (1948) od Maxe Browna a *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and their Pursuers* (1929) od J. J. Kenneallyho – všechny tři texty zaujímají kladné stanovisko k Nedu Kellymu.

Práce ukazuje, že Ned Kelly může být vnímán mnoha komplexními způsoby. V porovnání výše zmíněných knih bylo zjištěno, že i když zde existují značně sjednocující prvky tendence, v některých aspektech se projevuje výrazně odlišný důraz či zaměření. Je vysledován posun z konfrontační a idealisující obhajoby historické osoby k spíše mýtickému oslavování nedokonalého člověka. Žádné další jednoznačné vývojové tendence nebyly průkazně zjištěny.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

australská literatura, mužství, národní mýtus, loupežník, hrdina, Ned Kelly, Peter Carey

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Introduction

Already during his lifetime, the Australian outlaw Ned Kelly's various public images differed to such an extent that it would be hard to guess the man's true character. (cf. Innes 83-4 and others) Even the people in direct contact with him would have interpreted his words and actions in different ways – in the light of which point of view they accepted as their own. Although there certainly was a one true and real Ned Kelly, that man is not only long dead, but is becoming more and more detached from the character he gave birth to: the starkly contrasting and ever-changing Ned Kelly of hearsay and popular legend, of newspaper articles and police reports, of "Kelly Gang books" and popular biographies, of films and comic books, of cultural memory and postcolonial fiction. (cf. McFarlane 26 and others) Thus it may be understood that although Ned Kelly is a real historical person¹, in the books that purport to tell his life story, he is first and foremost a literary figure in the hands of writers who must themselves decide what image to give the man and how they will achieve this portrayal. And so, as time moves on and history slips inevitably further and further, with the man himself and the testimonies of witnesses forgotten or layered with the dust of a distant past, a reader interested in his story is more and more likely to find themselves confronted with Ned Kelly, the fictional man.

This paper undertakes to make a complex analysis of the fictional Ned Kelly as he is set out in Peter Carey's highly-acclaimed and influential novel *True History of the Kelly Gang* (first published in 2000), and through a comparison with two older portrayals of the character in Max Brown's *Australian Son* (1948) and J. J. Kenneally's *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and Their Pursuers* (1929), to give a glimpse of the dynamics of the character's evolution in the written word.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first aims to give the reader a minimalist context by briefly introducing Australian literature of the colonial and postcolonial eras, the concepts, expectations and ideals of masculinity in Western culture, and the basics pertaining to the Ned Kelly myth. The second part offers overviews of the three aforementioned books to further increase the reader's contextual means for evaluating the third part, which is the mainstay of the thesis:

1 Readers who have never heard of Ned Kelly and are completely unaware of his story may find a brief summary of his life and the relevant events at the beginning of chapter 1.3 The Ned Kelly Myth.

the analyses and comparisons of various aspects of the fictional Ned Kelly, as he is directly or indirectly portrayed by the separate authors. This begins with a focus on Kelly's manhood – both on his pre-adult childhood and transitional youthhood, and on his adult masculinity and the way in which he fulfils this role. The analysis then gradually moves on to a more abstract take on aspects of fictionality and mythhood.

The expectations are as following: that Ned Kelly will be shown to clearly and strongly comply with Western manhood initiation and masculinity criteria; that mythhood and ambiguity of events will be depicted in a significant way; that the character of Ned Kelly will differ in each book, but more so in Peter Carey than in the other two; that the changes in character will be increasingly mythical in tendency, with a movement from factual or matter-of-fact description to more vivid and emotional discourse; that Ned Kelly will be most strongly represented as an Australian national symbol, a hero and a victim of police (government) persecution; that Peter Carey's Ned Kelly will contain contemporary (and) postcolonial tendencies, such as the questioning of the narrator's reliability in depicting reality, the questioning of sexuality, gender roles, identity and national symbolism.

1 THEORETICAL PART

1.1 Australian Colonial and Postcolonial Literature

The first problem any person writing on colonial and postcolonial literature stumbles on, right on the outset, is to explain the terms themselves and to describe the scope of the subject. (cf. McLeod 2) Many of the experts on the subject spend considerable time arguing for this or that take on the generalised and the more specific meaning of the field, and one could understand whole books to be a protracted attempt to make clear the boundaries and characteristics of the problem – as in Elleke Boehmer’s critical overview *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*.

There will be an effort to avoid embroiling the reader in the bitter struggle for the definition of *colonial*, *colonialist*, *postcolonial*, *postcolonial literatures*, *postcolonial studies* etc., as the purpose of this work lies more in the analysis of a fascinating developmental tendency – one of history turning into myth, fact into fiction. Thus these theoretical sections will be limited to brief and simplified summaries that give only a basic context and framework. The reader is welcome to deepen their theoretical understanding of the matter in the cited texts and the bibliographies they contain.

1.1.1 Defining colonialism

“Colonialism refers to the practice of planting and securing colonies”, where colonies change from their initial meaning of (roughly) “distinct kinds of farming settlement [...] in distant locations” to “areas subject to systems of rule or control by European powers”. Imperialism might then be defined as “the attitudes, structures, philosophies or processes that facilitate the practice of colonialism”. (Mullaney 3)

In the field of literature, Boehmer contrasts between *colonial* and *colonialist*, stipulating that:

In general, texts described as colonial or colonialist are taken to be those [...] which exhibit a tinge of local colonial colour, or feature colonial motifs[.] (Boehmer 2)

Colonial literature, which is the more general term, will be taken to mean writing concerned with colonial perceptions and experience, written mainly by metropolitans, but also by creoles and indigenes, during colonial times [...] colonialist literature in contrast was that which was

specifically concerned with colonial expansion. [...] It embodied the imperialists' point of view.
(Boehmer 2-3)

Colonial could thus be considered to relate to the content of the writing, that is life in the colony, and *colonialist* to relate to the function, that is the reinforcement of the colonising power. From this point of view the Ned Kelly narrative and its popular renditions of the time are of a colonial tone, but most if not all of the reactions of the contemporary press (cf. Brown 11 and elsewhere) are colonialist in their effort to protect their concept of civilisation and the established order by consistently denigrating the bushranger's public image.

1.1.2 Defining postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is a tougher morsel to chew, but an attempt will be made to serve only that which has been already digested and offered up by minds more knowledgeable of the subject. To begin with it is possible to note Boehmer's stipulation that

postcolonial literature is generally defined as that which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonial perspectives. (Boehmer 3, original italics)¹

This offers a view of postcolonialism as a reactionary force, attempting to change and negate the colonial paradigm. John McLeod sees postcolonialism

not just in terms of strict historical periodisation, but as referring to disparate forms of representations, reading practices and values. (McLeod 5, original italics)

That is in a more general aspect, not just history, not just writing, but as an overarching school of thought. For a third opinion, a more specific definition will be given by Julie Mullaney:

Postcolonial literatures encompass that complex and various body of writing produced by individuals, communities and nations with distinct histories of colonialism and which diversely treats its origins, impacts and effects in the past and the present. (Mullaney 3-4)

Postcolonial literatures are often characterised by such adjectives as "new", "global", "plural", keeping in touch with contemporary tendencies. The scope of studies termed postcolonial is complex in nature and, as Mullaney notes, "addresses itself to the ramifications of colonialism from the point of first contact, to beginnings as well

1 Although British spelling is adhered to throughout this work, cited texts are reproduced with the spelling conventions of the referenced source and may thus differ from the main typographic style.

as putative endings [...] [and] stresses continuities *and* departures.” (Mullaney 4-5, original italics)

A more radical, reactionist interpretation is given by Robert Young in his work *Postcolonialism: A Short Introduction* (2003), as quoted by Mullaney:

“A lot of people don’t like the word postcolonial ... It disturbs the order of the world. It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures. Its radical agenda is to demand equality and well-being for all human beings on this earth.”
(Mullaney 6)

As it is possible to see, the term postcolonial can be understood (simply speaking) in a more general or a more specific sense, it can be viewed according to its topic (countries with a colonial past), according to its approach (critical and reactionary), according to its goals (pushing for equality in a world recently or as yet dominated by others), or according to its specific themes and effects.

1.1.3 Symbols of nation and resistance

One of the strongest forces connected with the move from colonial to postcolonial, in history and as mirrored by literature, is nationalism. Separating oneself from the imperial power required having an identity to place in its stead – an identity to claim as one’s own, as unique, strongly rooted to the land and people, something to be proud of, to defend, support and fight for. A people with a strong sense of self will not be so willing to have their dignity hurt by foreign rule. So it was that culture, with its ability to instil with pride, to glorify “in the form of reinterpreted history, religious revivals, elegiac and nostalgic poetry – developed into an important front for nationalist mobilization.” (Boehmer 96)

The Australian society at the time of coloniality and independence (and further on until the late 20th century) did not have a great history of their own or a long-rooted cultural heritage to lean on, as the Aboriginal inhabitants of the land were pushed deep into the shadows and largely ignored. It was necessary for Australians to come up with their own symbols, or to draw inspiration from a culture close to them in blood and cause – the Irish, from whom many of the colonists were descended. As Boehmer notes, although Ireland is generally not counted among (post)colonial countries, “the Irish resistance struggle was in certain other colonies taken as talismanic”. (4) This seems to hold true for the story of Ned Kelly, the son of Irish immigrants, and Ireland gains considerable prominence especially in Peter Carey’s rendition of the story.

In fact, the overpowering influence of the Kelly Gang events comes, among others, from being “brought into conjunction with a number of more or less

compatible legends (101). Among these were the twin legends of the 'noble bushranger' and the 'noble convict': victims both of a palpably unjust penal code," (Huggan 142) with figures such Jack Donahue and Ben Hall paving the way for Ned Kelly with their feats of daring, grim bushranger fates and popular fame asserted especially in the Australian oral culture of "bush ballads". (cf. Seal 10) Elleke Boehmer notes:

Nationalist movements have relied on literature, on novelists, singers, and playwrights, to hone rallying symbols of the past and the self through which dignity might be reasserted. The well-known image of the oppressed speaking out of silence has meant a willed intervention by colonized people in the fictions and myths that presumed to described them. (Boehmer 5-6)

It is then hardly surprising that the Ned Kelly myth is so successful, coming at a time when Australia was slowly gaining impetus for independence (20 years before its separation from the British Empire in 1901), and containing the very essence of the iconic struggle of the (indigenised) common Australian bushman against the overpowering might of an unjust (imperial) colonial government.

1.1.4 The power of language

As language was used to power the cohesion and functioning of the British Empire, both as a means of communication and as an agent of cultural influence, it was also through language that colonies (re)gained their cultural sovereignty.

[B]oth the language and its literature become a site of contest for the colonized, a means of challenging the political and cultural ideologies of the Empire. (Mullaney 4)

To conceive an independent national identity, postcolonial writers concentrated on developing a symbolic vocabulary that was recognizably indigenous[.] (Boehmer 179)

Australian writers, such as Henry Lawson and A. B. Paterson, began "self-consciously developing images of their country to replace those generated in Europe" (Boehmer 104), glorifying the bygone frontier days of Australia and lauding the heroism of that time and the harsh struggle of everyday life. (104) Some of the key notions that were understood and advanced as specifically Australian include: mateship, egalitarianism, the vast wild bush and the bush ballad.

Mateship is "an ethos of undemonstrative loyalty shared by men" (Boehmer 104), a strongly masculine trait consigned to pairs or groups of men toiling in the solitary hardship of the bush. Egalitarianism would at first only be truly demanded between European-descended men, and though equality for women would follow, racial considerations would not be waived until considerably later. (cf. Boehmer 105) The bush, the landscape and environmental conditions unique to Australia, gave the

people who strived to tame it and live with it an aura of tough endurance, resourcefulness and daring. The bush ballad as an element of oral culture, offered a whimsical take on what would otherwise be a bitter life.

English was the native tongue for the former Australian settlers, citizens of an independent Australia; there was no need for the Australians of European descent to forcefully “acculturise” (conquer) the language, but rather they naturally developed their own local variants and specificities. (Boehmer 201) A case in point could be the word “flash/flashness” (used to denote a person of showy apparel and behaviour, generally a young man of low moral fibre) and the phrase “bail up”, meaning to waylay and rob someone (or as a directive to submit to robbery) – both of which appear with great frequency in all three of the analysed books.

1.1.5 A note on Commonwealth literature

The need for self-identification and propagation through nationhood-establishing symbols necessarily varies in intensity from country to country. Unlike other colonies, Australia had gained independence and self-determination at an early stage, without much struggle and without the fear of ongoing repression – the need to differentiate itself from the “mother country” and the rest of the world would not be felt so urgently, would not be asserted with such force. (Boehmer 177) As McLeod remarks, an important predecessor to postcolonial studies and literatures was the term “Commonwealth literature”, used “from the 1950s to describe literatures in English emerging from a selection of countries with a history of colonialism.” (McLeod 10) This approach was one that “promoted unity in diversity” (12) and can be seen as much less antagonistic, though hindered by Western centrism. Considering Australia’s relatively mild fight for independence, the European-culture bias of the Ned Kelly story, the documentary or realist mode typical of early nationalist texts (Boehmer 116), the publication dates and absence of any clear anti-imperialist tendencies, it would not be unfitting to describe both J. J. Kenneally’s and Max Brown’s books as belonging to a “Commonwealth” literature, in contrast with Peter Carey’s work, which can be felt to carry a stronger, more probing and poignant postcolonial voice.

1.2 Masculinity in Western Culture

Although not necessarily essential for this analysis, it is important to diverge somewhat into the field of masculine studies. Ned Kelly is a male protagonist, but more than that he is a national symbol, a hero of mythical proportions who yet

captures the hearts and minds of a people, and he is thus the obvious candidate for a masculine role model. This raises a number of questions concerning possible expectations, areas to focus on in the portrayal of his character, details to consider especially important when missing, or the (dis)similarities between the Australian symbol of manhood and other ideals, Western or even universal.

In his book *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (1990), the anthropologist David D. Gilmore offers a simple definition of *manhood* as “the approved way of being an adult male in any given society”, a status that must be earned, gained and upheld through various rituals, trials and expectations. (1) He argues a certain universality to the criteria of manhood,

that underlying the surface variation in emphasis or form are certain convergences in concepts, symbolizations, and exhortations of masculinity in many societies but— and this is important — by no means in all. I will speak here of tendencies or parallels in male imagery around the world, a ubiquity rather than a universality. (Gilmore 2-3)

The phrase used by Gilmore and others to describe these “widespread resemblances in male images” is the “deep structure of masculinity”. (3) This structure builds on acceptance of the ideal of the given culture not only by men, but also women; manhood “is not simply a reflection of individual psychology but a part of public culture, a collective representation.” The individual thus has to balance the demands of his self with those of society. (4-5)

[M]ost societies hold consensual ideals— guiding or admonitory images— for conventional masculinity and femininity by which individuals are judged worthy members of one or the other sex and are evaluated more generally as moral actors. (10)

A male national hero/symbol such as Ned Kelly can clearly be expected to resemble or personify one such ideal, though it might be more of “Australian-ness” than of Australian manhood.

One of the most important features of manhood, as Gilmore remarks, is that

there is a constantly recurring notion that real manhood is different from simple anatomical maleness, that it is not a natural condition [...] but rather is a precarious or artificial state that boys must win against powerful odds. (11)

In his search for universal attributes or tendencies of manhood, Gilmore finds repeating themes in various cultures throughout the whole world. Greek men from the isle of Kalymnos go diving without equipment, risking life and health to prove “their precious manhood by showing their contempt for death” (12), the urban Mexican must be not only “tough and brave, ready to defend his family’s honor at the drop of a hat”, but he must also “perform adequately in sex and father many

children.” A Balkans “real man is one who drinks heavily, spends money freely, fights bravely, and raises a large family”. (16)

When looking at a Western-based ideal of masculinity, the cultural impact of nearly two thousand years of Christianity must not be overlooked. Jesus Christ himself is the ultimate Christian ideal and, although unattainable by mortal men in his Godhood, he is given as “the supremely manly man”, both in physical appearance and behaviour, and in morality – fearless, strong, fully committed and prepared to fight wrong-doing, yet loving, gentle and wise – an ideal stressed especially in Nineteenth-century English-speaking countries. (cf. Gilmore 18)

Manhood has often been used as a signifier of strength powering cultural domination or conversely a movement of resistance or nationalism, as Gilmore notes in the case of Confederate writers and cowboys of the American Wild West (20), or Boehmer writes when describing both imperialism (Boehmer 73) and anti-colonial nationalism (117).² The Ned Kelly story is another example of a masculine-oriented narrative serving as a flag for nationalism to carry; though female characters may not be quite as marginalised or downplayed in all cases, as we will see.

A psychological explanation of the need for giving stringent requirements to obtaining manhood draws from post-Freudian theorists, focusing on the ontogenetic unity of the male with the female mother during the prenatal period and infancy; until a critical threshold of “separation-individuation” (Gilmore 26) is reached. Gilmore describes:

The special problem the boy faces at this point is in overcoming the previous sense of unity with the mother in order to achieve an independent identity defined by his culture as masculine – an effort functionally equivalent not only to psychic separation but also to creating an autonomous public persona. (27)

This notion is key to Gilmore’s concept, as the difficulty separating from the mother (unlike for a girl, whose femininity is reinforced by her original unity with her mother) is one of the main motivations and reasons for placing such stress on gaining manhood through specific hardships and demonstrations (unlike womanhood, which is generally accepted by cultures to be naturally possessed; cf. 11, 27-28).

To become a separate person the boy must perform a great deed. He must pass a test; he must break the chain to his mother. He must renounce his bond to her and seek his own way in the world. [...] The ineradicable fantasy is to return to the primal maternal symbiosis. [...] In this

2 Postcolonial writing frequently replies to this emphasis on masculinity by showing women’s strong roles in the struggles for nationhood and their alternative viewpoints (cf. Boehmer 216-8).

view, the struggle for masculinity is a battle against these regressive wishes and fantasies, a hard-fought renunciation of the longings for the prelapsarian idyll of childhood. (Gilmore 28-9)

This matter can be divided into two steps: becoming a man, and remaining a man. That is firstly to successfully pass what we might call the “entrance exam” into recognised manhood, and secondly to fulfil the constant minimum requirements to maintain this status. Both of these aspects will be looked into in the following sub-chapters.

1.2.1 Initiation rites

Initiation rites are a form of ritualised social communication with a distinct declarative function: generally speaking, they change the status of being of a person from candidate to member. In the case of manhood initiation, this means the act of transforming a boy into a man; the weak, dependent child is broken apart and remoulded into an independent, productive adult. The strength of this declarative act stems from its ritualisation and from the social significance given to it by members of a specific culture, but it is further emphasised by its difficulty and complexity. It is not one simple, single communicative act (and certainly not a mere speech act), but rather a prolonged, “stressful period of indoctrination, or ‘apprenticeship’”. (Gilmore 108) As such, manhood initiation rites can be described from the point of view of structure. To avoid overgeneralisation, it must be noted that no description of manhood rites can be claimed to be universally inherent in every existing culture, and on the contrary a weakening of significance of any specific socially recognised manhood rites can be seen in modern egalitarian societies. At the same time, the vestigial importance of these rites and knowledge of manhood initiation in prototypical cultures provides sufficient evidence to enable such rites of passage to be divided into three stages (cf. 124).

The stages are: *separation*, when the boy “severs relations with childhood [...] by renouncing his mother or being forcibly taken away from her”, *transition*, when he is taken to an isolated place and “remains in limbo” neither boy nor man, and *incorporation* into manhood through “vigorous exit ceremonies”. (125)

Looking at the three steps through the prism of functionality, *separation* removes the boy’s source of nurture and dependence (his mother and the safety of their hearth) and moves him into the second stage, *transition*, in which his character develops in a state of independence – any help is limited and living conditions are made significantly worse through various restrictions – the boy has to fend for himself and become productive. This period is the youth’s apprenticeship, and its

timespan varies from weeks to years (cf. Gilmore 125-6). When this lengthy ordeal completes its purpose and the apprentice has changed, learned and gained new attributes, the final step occurs: the boy is put to the test, and if successful, he is *incorporated* into manhood – he is publicly declared a man. This part is crucial for the person’s social status: if he is known to have failed at the test, it may be extremely difficult or wholly impossible for him to achieve a position of respected manhood. Incorporation thus functions as the public declaration and certification of manhood, but it also serves as a psychological switch which confirms to the initiate himself that he now truly is a man – he has earned the title.

The theoretical nature of the past three paragraphs demand some actual examples be given. In Australia, traditional Aboriginal culture maintains this initiation sequence in its many diversities. Separation is forceful and dramatic. In New South Wales, the Wiradthuri tribes “cover the women, children and novices with rugs when it is announced that the sky spirit and initiator, Daramulun, is on the way. His arrival is accompanied with an unholy din [...] When the women and children are uncovered, they find that the novices have noiselessly disappeared[.]” (Mol 384) Similar scenes occur in other tribes, in South-East Queensland or South-Western Arnhem land for instance – each unique in its specifics, but all containing strong elements of secrecy, accompanied by “bone chilling” myths of the novice’s transformation through gruesome death (whether by the hands of the sky-bearing Daramulun or the deep-water Karwadi), with terrifying noises and mothers wailing, stopped from finding their children (cf. 384-5). The boys, torn out of their familiar environment, are then kept in a prolonged state of otherness, where nothing is as before:

The second phase involves liminality, lostness, or meaningless[.] [...] Old attachments have to be pruned drastically before new attachments can be grafted on. [...] What the novices used to do (speak, eat, or sleep) is now forbidden. [...] The world, in other words, turns upside down. (Mol 385)

The methods vary from tribe to tribe, from giving them “portions of human excrement to eat and urine to drink while the bull-roarers produce an eerie thunder”, to having their kidnapper-guardians “rub their genitals on the food which is given to the boys” (385-6). No effort is spared to keep the initiates from finding succour from what they are used to. During this time, the initiates depend on their new guardian, who is generally a complete stranger to them, frequently a future in-law from another clan – he sees to it that the stringent restrictions are upheld, but at the same time he looks after his younger companion and helps him, acting at times as something of a mentor in what might be paralleled (though certainly not

equated) with a European apprenticeship (cf. Mol 386). The estrangement does not last, however, and finally leads to a fuller unity of the initiate with his tribe, no longer a boy, but a man (cf. 386).

A well-known Aboriginal tradition connected with manhood initiation is the *walkabout*, popularly understood to mean “an initiation ceremony undertaken by teenage boys as their introduction to manhood – solitary journey” (Leitner & Sieloff 158). Although this may certainly be a part of the transition from child to adult in many tribes, the term is also used in a more general sense, as “time when (especially Aboriginal) person spends time away from tribe in a solo period of travel and self evaluation” (158), or as Oxford Dictionaries put it: “a journey (originally on foot) undertaken by an Australian Aboriginal in order to live in the traditional manner”³

A reader of Peter Carey’s *True History of the Kelly Gang* might easily see a strong connection between teenage Ned’s abrupt separation from his mother and his strange and unpleasant wandering “apprenticeship” under the guidance of Harry Power with the traditions of Aboriginal tribes, and deduce that Carey is thus using Ned to connect European Australian culture with Aboriginal. Caution is necessary, however, as such a conclusion could be greatly misleading. As noted before, similar initiation rites are used in many other cultures and cannot be seen as uniquely Australian. Comparable systems of male initiation can be found, for instance, amongst the Orokaiva of northern Papua (Whitehouse 703), or in numerous tribes throughout Africa (Gilmore 164, 166). Carey’s focus on Ned Kelly’s youthful period should thus be interpreted rather as emphasising the character’s progress towards and achievement of manhood status than as making intercultural connections between European and Aboriginal Australians. See chapter 3.2 for more on this subject.

A youth who has passed his initiation and has been acknowledged the state of manhood is only at the beginning of his journey, however, as he may expect his manliness to be the subject of scrutiny and evaluation throughout his whole adult life. This struggle is one that is supported in many societies through the institution of manhood criteria, as it is desirable to discourage escapist tendencies in favour of “a participating, contributing manhood”. (Gilmore 29)

3 “walkabout.” *Oxford Dictionaries*. April 2010. Oxford University Press. 09 May 2013. Web: <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/walkabout>>

1.2.2 Criteria of manhood

So what constitutes a real man? Gilmore spends considerable time discussing the matter on a multitude of examples, but this paper will only give a compact review of his findings.

Firstly, as Gilmore accepts from Michael Herzfeld, it is “being good at being a man” rather than “being a good man” (Gilmore 30), that is keeping to the cultural expectations is more important for achieving manhood status than upholding more general morals. With this in mind, the defining qualities of manliness that an individual’s social standing is gauged from are typically (in no specific order of importance or universality): performative excellence, public activity in masculine company, no fear of pain or death – a willingness to protect family and honour at any cost, assertive courtship, potency in procreation, provisioning dependants, loyalty to social class, personal autonomy (the freedom to do what he needs to, to confront the domineering forces of others), visible acts of daring (to prove his disdain for injury and death), respectfulness to women and elders, impressive physical constitution and dexterity, self-assurance and leadership in war and strategy.⁴ It will be interesting to evaluate Ned Kelly’s image in regards to each of these.

The items on this formidable list of requirements are not always enforced in all societies and the specifics of application vary greatly. To simplify, Gilmore proposes a more concise and more nearly universal triad of expectations, based on performance:

To be a man in most of the societies we have looked at, one must impregnate women, protect dependants from danger, and provision kith and kin. (222-3)

The forcefulness of manhood ideologies stems from the danger it poses to men: the “penalty of being robbed of their identity, a threat apparently worse than death.” The reason for this strictness, Gilmore argues, is because men “especially in atomistic social contexts, are not always under the domination of others and are therefore harder to control socially.” (221) Thus a concept of “real manhood” is required to ensure their voluntary cooperation with societal needs, especially considering that “men are innately not so very different from women and need motivation to be assertive.” (230)

These requirements are all the more important not only in atomistic (secluded) social contexts, but also in competitive egalitarian societies where resources are scarce and inner inhibitions must be overcome to advance collective interests.

4 For more on the separate items see (in the order above) Gilmore 30; 33; 39, 45, 67; 40; 41; 42; 46; 49; 62; 66; 86; 86; 101.

(Gilmore 221-2) Both of these conditions apply in the wild reaches of the Australian bush – and a demand for “manly” men especially during the harsh times throughout the Nineteenth century may be expected just as much as the need to create a symbol of Australian manliness as an ideal for men (and the new nation as a whole) to relate to – all the more reason to exonerate and glorify Ned Kelly.

1.2.3 Masculinity and modern civilisation

The aforementioned descriptors relate to a raw manhood, a masculine ideal passed on from more savage times that stands somewhat in opposition to the needs of a modern society, one marked by industrialisation and the rapid growth of cities, where autonomy is lost in the crowd and physical hardiness slowly gives way to a more sedate comfort – a development well under way in the second half of the Nineteenth century, when Ned Kelly lived, and fully in place in the current times one-hundred-and-thirty years later. This is explored by Christopher E. Forth in his book *Masculinity in the Modern West*. (Forth 2)

Forth stipulates a “double logic of modern civilization” which “both supports and dismantles the ‘natural’ rationale for male dominance” – in the growing competitiveness of a compacted society and the decreasing requirements of physical exertion, among other influences. (5) Overall, Forth claims that three major developments “implicit to the original concept of civilization have had profound implications for the male body and the vexed notions of masculinity that are attached to it” with a fourth “unsavoury fellow traveller” (7) in sedentary lifestyles. These developments of a “soft” civilisation are summarised in opposition to the “old” ideals of a “hard” masculinity – a full quote of this section is justified:

The *refined manners* that grease the wheels of sociability are frequently contrasted to the putatively more direct and authentic expressions of simpler times; the *cerebral regimens* that constitute the training ground for most modern professions are counterposed morally and medically to more physically active and risky male occupations; the *consumer luxuries* that inevitably accompany material abundance and which are a spur to industry are frequently denigrated as fostering an ‘effeminate’ submission to appetite, appearances and vice supposedly absent in earlier, simpler times; finally, the *sedentary existence* that seems implicit in this polite, cerebral, and consumer-oriented society is almost always condemned as the exact opposite of manly action and health, the root cause of obesity and muscular atrophy that were meant to be ‘cured’ through sports and military training. (Forth 8, italics added)

Despite this, the modern male body is still asked to strive for ideals of bravery, strength, endurance and sexual potency, along with grace, beauty and harmony of form, while at the same time enduring discomfort and containing displays of

emotion. (Forth 8-9) This lasting “nostalgic” ideal of “rugged manhood” is placed outside the “corrupting city” (10), in more secluded locations where civilisation has not yet fully mastered nature – this dichotomy is also easily visible in the case of Ned Kelly, a tough man of the wild bush, versus the effeminate and corrupt police force controlled from a faraway Melbourne. As Forth notes:

[S]ettlers often represented the potential for moral and physical regeneration through the encounter with harsh and physically taxing new conditions [...] what Richard Slotkin calls a ‘regeneration through violence’ of older, decadent and ‘effeminate’ societies. (14)

And as colonies such as Australia progressed, the tension between the “refined and unhealthy” city and the “robust” country increased, at once emulating the culture of European cities and “displacing its most distinctive national myths into rural contexts.” A case in point being the Australian bush myth which placed the tough, coarse (Australian) man well above the refined, consumer-oriented (English-like) urban citizen. (15)

Yet even a more rural society would require the sophistication of civilised manhood, demanding that men “had to incorporate aspects of both the savage and the civilised in a balance” that appears even more untenable and unattainable than the fulfilment of the “raw” ideals stipulated by Gilmore, mentioned in subchapter 1.2.2. This paradoxical situation brings about the notion of gentlemanliness – the true gentleman being at once fully civilised and authentic in his manhood. (cf. 17, 21ff.). This is supposedly achieved through manners and discipline, where manners can be understood as “an array of codes and practices instilled in individuals so that their bodily actions, emissions and emotional expression are curbed in the interests of maintaining decorum and politeness” (22) and discipline is the ability to uphold the aforementioned at all times and in all situations. Thus can the wildness of the warrior body be tempered by the grace of the noble spirit.

With the growth of civilisation, sedentary lifestyles increased and the man of action was seen with heightening nostalgia as a person of the glorious and unfettered Middle Ages. In reinforcement of the gentleman paradox, the boundaries set by civilisation itself must needs be crossed to awaken that authenticity of a bygone time. (40) The life and character of Ned Kelly offer themselves to exactly such a view, possibly fuelling his real and mythical popularity, or conversely, the myth and mystery surrounding the man may have boosted or even recreated his character to fit that of the desired ideal. This would be nothing new, as literature’s fascination with the gentleman-ruffian is noted in Erin Sky Mackie’s monograph on the subject. (Mackie 2)

At the same time, with physical activity and also violence on the retreat, the modern manhood ideal retains a focus on warfare and the question of life and death:

unless a male has risked his life struggling on equal terms with another male, he has not really actualized his masculine potential. In this scenario only the male who is willing to risk it all emerges as the 'master', while the one who yields by choosing life over death is placed in the subordinate, implicitly 'feminized' position of a slave or bondsman. (Forth 115)

The low level of physical hardship and the decreasing opportunity for individualised combat in countries with rising levels of comfort and refinement meant concerns about the loss of manhood had to be addressed in another way – somewhat ironically, by empowering men through story-telling:

Edifying tales of men who could silently bear extraordinary hardships circulated as counter-narratives to the standard accounts of how weak and effeminate elites had become. (Forth 116)

Forth gives the example of the hardy sailor untainted by luxury accomplishing “feats of martial prowess and military discipline” (116), but this could just as well apply to the hardy bushman untainted by luxury accomplishing feats of horsemanship and derring-do – such as Ned Kelly. This gives yet another explanation to understand the success of the Kelly narrative, and all the more reason to expect this aspect of manliness to be stressed or at least subtly brought out in subsequent re-tellings.

With civilisation and its legal and governmental system affecting more and more aspects of social and individual life, a strong need was felt to display some part of manhood as yet free of restraints, forever wild and untameable. The willingness to fight, duel and brawl offered this option, as it “challenged the government’s presumed monopoly of the use of violence and was thus generally illegal”. (118; also cf. Mackie 72) Ned Kelly’s fighting spirit in the face of the superior numbers and resources of the police can again be seen as emblematic of this idealistic yearning. His “war” against what he and many of his admirers saw as an unjust and oppressive colonial government also resembled the nation-building process of baptism by fire (cf. Forth 123) and may well have been echoed by nationalist sentiments in the decades following his execution.

1.3 The Ned Kelly Myth

The Kelly Gang story is unlike many of those from colonial and postcolonial literature in that instead of “maybe happening” or “apparently happening”, the

bushrangers' ordeals were well-documented already by their contemporaries. On the other hand, this groundedness in reality is paradoxically contrasted by the contrariness and wild differentiation of interpretations of Ned Kelly and his deeds. (cf. Boehmer 14, 16; McFarlane 24-25)

There is something of a dilemma whether to proceed as might be expected, or as could be more suitable: whether to give an outline of the real historical events surrounding Ned Kelly and his companions, or to refuse to attempt any such "historical" grounding, as the analysis of the character portrayed in the books will not consider this aspect in so much as it might be held as a criterion for assessment, but only in such a way as in a reader new to the narrative and devoid of facts might gain an impression of historical reality from the book. A compromise will be made by laying out a very brief and undetailed summary of the historical context and the course of events.

Edward "Ned" Kelly was born in Australia in December 1854. His father "Red" Kelly was an Irish convict, his mother Ellen Kelly (née Quinn) an Irish immigrant. He was the oldest son with a number of brothers and sisters. His father died in 1866 after two years in prison and the family moved to a "selection" of land near Greta in rural Victoria. Ned had various troubles with the police, ending up in jail for three years between 1871-4. In 1878, Ned's mother was imprisoned and Ned was outlawed. He and his companions Joe Byrne, Dan Kelly (his brother) and Steve Hart got into a firefight with a party of four policemen in search of them in Stringybark Creek – three of the police were shot. The Kelly Gang, with a growing reward on their heads, evaded capture and robbed banks in Euroa and Jerilderie. One of the most important extant pieces of writing about Ned Kelly is the "Jerilderie Letter" by the bushman himself, the full text of which was not published until after his death. In 1880, after shooting a man named Aaron Sherritt, the gang (wearing self-made armour) was apprehended and besieged in an inn in Glenrowan by a large police force. In the ensuing protracted firefight, Ned's three companions died along with a number of civilian casualties. Ned was heavily wounded and arrested by the police. He was placed on trial and sentenced to death, alongside strong public support for a reprieve. He died by hanging in Melbourne Gaol on 11 November 1880. (cf. O'Reilly 1-2, Seal 10-11) A Royal Commission was appointed in 1881 to inquire into irregularities in the handling of the case by the police. (Kenneally 22/2)⁵

The man died, but the myth that was already coalescing about him and his fellows during their lifetime spread like wildfire. "Kelly the myth quickly outstripped Kelly the man," Michael Fitzgerald notes while reviewing the 2003 exhibition in

5 Given as Chapter/Page. See References for note on page number citation regarding Kenneally.

Melbourne titled *Kelly Culture: Reconstructing Ned Kelly*. (Fitzgerald 56) Ned Kelly's fame soon transcended local boundaries to make him "Australia's sole national hero" (Seal 9), with plays about him staged not only during his life, but on the days following his death and then repeatedly in years to come, with Australia's first feature film attempting to capture his essence, with heaps of books written either for or against him, with the effort either to clear history from hearsay or on the contrary to embellish popular fantasy with even more mythology, so that "with each telling, the man seems to disappear from view." (Fitzgerald 58; cf. McFarlane 26, O'Reilly 2 and others)

[S]tories of his exploits were taught in primary school, and children often emulated Kelly and his gang in the school playground. [...] Long before learning other national narratives, [...] we learned about Ned Kelly. (O'Reilly 1)

When an Australian wants to give a big compliment in recognition of a person's courage, pluck or general worthiness, they will say the person is "as game as Ned Kelly". (cf. Seal 9)

1.3.1 The Ned Kelly myth in a postcolonial context

It is not surprising, considering his life, that this "bandit, who shot policemen and was hanged for murder" (Seal 9) had mixed reactions to his escapades and, especially when history was yet fresh, conflicting mythologies. It is all the more understandable when realising the highly antagonised social environment of the British colony; returning to Boehmer and postcolonial theory:

But if the ambition of the colonizer was to know, to appropriate, and to rule, the reality for colonized, enslaved and indentured peoples, even where they were consulted about the colonial process, was very different – very far removed from the colonizers' lawcourts, city halls, and libraries. [...] for many peoples imperialism represented, if not the destruction of their communities and populations, then a harsh existence of dispossession and privation. (Boehmer 20)

In Australia, this was the case of mainly the Irish and Irish-descended colonists, the indentured people forced into a hard life, labouring to survive not only the pressure of an unknown and (to the European mind) wild land, but also the oppression and prejudice of a mistrustful government. Thus, despite being of the colonisers, the Irish-Australians were placed on par with the colonised, with those who were referred to as the *other*, a term which "signifies that which is unfamiliar and extraneous to a dominant subjectivity, the opposite or negative against which an authority is defined." (Boehmer 21)

As Kenneally notes, “Irish patriotism was such an unforgiveable crime in the eyes of British Government officials in the Colony of Victoria, that even the serving of a savage sentence would not wipe out the campaign of anti-Irish hatred so well organised in the Colonies.” (Kenneally 1/2). This alienation begins to make sense of why it was possible, or rather unsurprising, that Ned Kelly, a member of this class of *other* people, could have been portrayed in such unanimously negative terms as he was in the contemporary press. Looking at this through the prism of the imperial discourse of power (cf. Boehmer 48), the newspapers are defending Empire, and the civilisation and order that it is symbolised by, from the ruthless savage of the “degenerated” Irish-Australian country folk. (cf. Boehmer 21) Yet typically for the Ned Kelly story, the view from the other side, from the common people of that and later times, is completely subverted – in their narrative the police are savage brutes misusing Law and the courts to their own ends, tyrannising the honest poor – it is the police who are the cowardly, effeminate other. (cf. 1.2.2 herein)

This is in fact an early example of a more universal situation, that is of a colony turning against its coloniser in the need to separate itself, to establish its own unique identity – a tendency to react to colonialism by turning the imperialist patriotism the other way, towards a nationalist pride and sovereignty. (cf. Boehmer 95) Interestingly enough, though, the Ned Kelly story remained (and remains) controversial long after the creation of an independent Australian federation, as we can see from Kenneally’s letter to the Australian government from 1929 appended to his *Inner History*: “It would be well, in this Christian community, for our Governmental heads to recognise Christian principles, and regard Ned Kelly as he now appears before his Creator, and cease condemning him on the refuted testimony of the various Judas Iscariots, whose perjury sold him for so many pieces of silver.” (Kenneally 22/5). This is echoed ever so slightly in Brown who, despite acknowledging “the willing assistance” of Government ministers and officials, does not fail to remark in his foreword that “behind the name of evil given these young men was a certain worth little understood then or *now*” (Brown 5, 9; italics added), and can be seen as late as 1980 in the Victoria State Government refusing to take any part in celebrating the 100th anniversary of Kelly’s last stand. This antagonistic take on Ned Kelly may still linger in certain circles today (cf. Huggan 149), but for the most part it is drowned out by the consistently positive popular renditions of the man which are reinforced by the veneration shown by more official institutions such as the State Library of Victoria exhibition and conservation efforts (Fitzgerald

56; Huggan 149) or the “parade of Neds” organised for the opening ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Summer Olympic Games (McFarlane 24).⁶

1.3.2 The Ned Kelly myth in the context of colonial Australia

The myth is at once similar and starkly contrasted to the imperial adventure story, which instilled in readers “an image of self-confident British manliness, an ideal of robust character combining Christian honour with patriotism”. (Boehmer 74) Similar in its lauding of self-confident manliness, Christian honour and patriotism; opposite in that these traits are not awarded to British men or the British Crown, but to the Australian Ned Kelly and his fellow countrymen and women. Britain, represented albeit indirectly through the Australian police force, is shown on the contrary as cowardly, honourless and mercenary (the police, lounging on double pay, dare not confront the Kelly Gang and instead unjustly harass their families and supporters, with no higher cause but to satisfy their employer). (cf. Brown 155, 161; Kenneally 9/1, 12/3)

Unlike the nationalist, or rather nativist, efforts of many anti-imperialist struggles to laud the authenticity of the native people and culture (Boehmer 96), the Kelly narrative does not invert imperial values, but merely calls for their just application – for equality before a European-based system of law. From this point of view, even in later versions, Ned Kelly is a colonial figure who reinforces the position of white colonist dominance over an almost completely ignored Aboriginal culture.

Considering the aforementioned remark, it is something of a testament to the power of impression of the Ned Kelly figure that far from ignoring him, Aboriginal culture has accepted him as one of their own, as a symbol of what good may come from Europe. As Deborah Bird Rose writes in her insightful study on the matter, “Aboriginal people in the Victoria River District have not found Ned Kelly to be ambiguous. They have analysed his actions and defined him as purely moral.” (Rose 184) In one of the Aboriginal stories about him, Ned is symbolic of “God, Noah, and Jesus” (182); he is shown as miraculous⁷, as saviour, as protector against oppression

6 Note that none of this is proof of the actual character of the actual Ned Kelly. In fact, seeing as the further away we move from the historical reality, the more uncontroversially positive his image becomes, this could suggest rather the opposite – that the imperfect man has become perfected by idealisation. However, the previous sentence is also mere conjecture and could easily be reversed. No amount of words can change fiction into fact.

7 “Ned once visited Wave Hill station long before any whitefellows had come into the Victoria River District. There he taught people how to make tea and cook damper. Although there was only one billy of tea, and one little damper, everybody got fed.” (Rose 179)

and ultimately as giving his life only to be resurrected⁸ and to live on: “Captain Cook is now dead, while Ned Kelly lives.” (Rose 184) He does this all while retaining what might be called a typical Nedesque quality – as Rose notes: “Ned, being Ned, shot the police. In doing so, he aligned himself with the moral position of those who were being dispossessed.” (Rose 183).

8 “Ned Kelly was opposed to what Captain Cook and his mob were doing to Australia. He went to England[.] [...] There he was killed, and there, apparently, he rose up to the sky. [...] His morality applies to English people as much as it does to Australians.” (Rose 183)

2 PRACTICAL PART: Overview

2.1 Ned Kelly in Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*

Peter Carey is an Australian author born in 1943. He worked in an advertising agency, while steadily building his career as a writer. He has lived in various global metropolises, permanently moving to New York in 1990 (though understandably returning to Australia on visits). He began publishing in 1974, won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1988 for his novel *Oscar and Lucinda*, and won it a second time for the extremely successful *True History of the Kelly Gang* (hereafter also *True History*) published in the year 2000. (Jones, web; O'Reilly 3)

The *True History* is a novel in the form of a series of faux-manuscript letters allegedly written by Ned Kelly himself to his supposed daughter. As such, it is written mostly in first person from the clearly subjective perspective of the book's protagonist (excepting a few newspaper clippings, commentaries by Joe Byrne, and the prologue and epilogue penned, it is suggested, by schoolmaster Thomas Curnow, a witness of the Glenrowan events unsympathetic to Ned). The gritty impression of reality is at once enhanced and debunked by the matter-of-fact yet over-the-top description of each "parcel" (representing one of thirteen chapters), for example Parcel 1 is described thus:

National Bank letterhead. Almost certainly taken from the Euroa Branch of the National Bank in December 1878. There are 45 sheets of medium stock (8" x 10" approx.) with stab holes near the top where at one time they were crudely bound. Heavily soiled. (Carey 5)

The second, more prominent attribute of the book is the style of writing – text flowing freely without recourse to precise rules of grammar, punctuation, with a simplicity and an honest, but bitter urgency such as one might expect from Ned Kelly – in loose resemblance of the real Jerilderie Letter. Again, an example from the beginning of Parcel 1 (serving at the same time as an opening statement of purpose and a paradoxical tongue-in-cheek nod to the many conflicting accounts of the real story:

I lost my 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. (7)

Despite the grammatically non-standard style, Carey does not back away from the use of poetic descriptions which reinforce the strong effect of the language:

Curtains of bark hung from the trunks like shredded skin. As he fell I ran to where he lay wide eyed & crumpled then taking possession of his gun I discovered nothing more lethal in his hand than a mass of clotted blood. He had been trying to surrender. (Carey 292)

This serves to give Ned Kelly “a powerful and unique voice that cannot be ignored”. (O’Reilly 4) It at once pulls us into the narrative, at once reminds us of its subjectivity. Though Carey does not attempt to claim historical verity in any way, many readers may see the book as a strong bid to give new life and conviction to the true Ned as he is envisioned in the popular mind through the acceptance or refusal of his various literary and audiovisual reiterations. (O’Reilly 4; cf. Huggan 151)

The *True History* differs from the following two narratives in that it can be seen as something of a *bildungsroman*, considering its strong focus on Ned Kelly’s childhood and his difficult growth into adulthood. However, this adulthood is not completed by “the ideological awakening, reformation and assimilation of their protagonists”, but is crowned by increasing resistance and active revolt which ends in capital punishment. (cf. Mullaney 30)

The fact is, though, that the narrative gives much more space and focus to Ned’s childhood, early and late teens – much more than Brown or Kenneally, who both try to keep to the more verifiable (and contested) parts of his life. Carey, on the other hand, is content to create a rich background to develop the bushranger’s character, as he is free of the trappings of literature of fact. Carey devotes almost half the book to this section of Kelly’s life previously somewhat overlooked by popular writers.

Carey depicts Kelly as very much human, full of emotions, bitterness, a pride which is all the more visible when he derides others for “flashness” (e.g. Carey 223); as a simple man and victim, but also an avid reader and ingenuous strategist. But more than this he is portrayed as a fearless Australian of Irish descent, fiercely loyal to his family and especially his mother, an excellent horseman and a passionate, diligent yet naïve man (e.g. 47, 118, 181, 245). The complexity of his character is such that it is difficult to choose one single aspect that would aptly define Carey’s Ned Kelly. It is for this reason especially that a more detailed analysis and comparison will be made for each of the more noticeable facets of his personality (see chapter 3).

2.2 Ned Kelly in Max Brown's *Australian Son*

Max Brown was born in Invercargill, New Zealand, in 1916. He died in 2003. When he was eleven years old, he moved to Melbourne. He put his hand to various professions, writing his first book *Australian Son*, the fruit of much effort, after returning from military service in the Royal Australian Air Force during World War II. The work was first published in 1948 and was later revised in 1956 and once more, published posthumously, in 2005. (Webb^{1,2}, web) The version used herein is from the original 1948 edition.

Australian Son is at once a novel and a biography. In his foreword, Brown states his intention to come as close to the reality of the history as possible.

I have read every line I could find which dealt with the gang[.] (Brown 10)

Considering the year and considering the controversies shrouding the gang from their beginning, Brown openly admits that this task was not completely viable:

Already hands of the living and the dead had stretched out to seal my mouth. Already I knew there were great gaps in the Kelly history which I could not mend. Moreover, there were major issues concerning which were opposed accounts. (11-12)

Brown is open about the unreliability of information and states straightforwardly and with humility that his text will be a selection, a subjective process in the best effort of judgement:

What I finally decided to do was to select, as I believed, the most valid aspects of the myth– to let Kelly speak more freely than to date; and, without making new bricks, to re-create from the buried rubble some sort of ruin which might stand for a time. (12)

The book is divided into 44 chapters with the foreword by the author and one appendix, Ned Kelly's "Jerilderie Letter". It begins with a broad sweep of the historical context of late Nineteenth-century Australia, the social stratification and upheaval caused by the gold rush and the fresh influx of poor "selectors" of land into the Australian countryside occupied by the older settlers with their large sections of land and many cattle, something of a rural upper class which was not happy to share the land with the newcomers. (cf. 24-5) The focus turns to Ned Kelly's parents and wider family, but does not dwell in much detail on Ned's childhood and moves quickly through his teens, highlighting his difficulties with the law and his three-year prison sentence. The mainstay of the book concerns the events beginning with the Fitzpatrick incident in 1878 and ending with the bushranger's imprisonment, trial, and hanging, with a brief note of the aftermath, the distribution of the £8000 reward, and the findings of the Royal Commission.

The point of view is kept to the third person with a strong author's voice at times reminding the reader of the questionability of some parts of the narrative, giving the book as a whole a strong sense of reliability and honest appraisal. Short sections are quoted from Ned Kelly's writings or from contemporary newspapers. The text does not focus solely on Kelly, but spends a considerable portion of the book describing the activities of the police officers in charge (without open prejudice) – presumably because such information was more readily verifiable than the uncertain and myth-filled accounts claiming to know the actions and motives of the evasive outlaws.

Of all the aspects possible, *Australian Son* shows Ned Kelly most of all, as the title of the book itself suggests, as a national symbol of Australian-ness. Describing Glenrowan through the possible thoughts of a traveller passing by in later days, Brown writes, calling up the image of a tough, yet humble and intimate resilience:

Did great generals fight with large armies and clever tactics? Was it here these raw Australians evinced that fabulous quality of toughness, uncalled for in meat, rebellious farmers and striking workmen– but admirable in leather, business men or the front line of Empire? (Brown 226)

At another point, Brown notes the gang's spreading fame and popularity especially amongst the poorer classes:

Their deeds became bush ballads, sung and recited wherever poor men met[.] (136)

He colours the image in with a dash of Australian joviality and youthful energy, when writing of the aftermath of the Euroa bank robbery:

[T]he newspaper reports could not conceal that the coup had been a complete success– and that four ignorant youngsters, scarcely out of their teens, had, with unmatched insolence, played a colossal practical joke on authority. (104)

Although Ned is given various negative descriptors, these do not stick to him, as the context of the whole text gives clear indication to the reader that these are false epithets (e.g. Brown 270). However, Brown does not raise Kelly up as an ideal of perfection, but rather, realistic in imperfection, as a man of the common folk (e.g. 105, 127, 175) with extraordinary willpower, character and capabilities (e.g. 135), who was bitterly antagonistic to an oppressive police force – well-displayed in Brown's description of Kelly's letter to a member of the Legislative Assembly, Mr Cameron:

It was a document showing terrific dynamic and resentment, and a sincerity that may have seemed surprising. Here flared evidence of a man who had mastered fear, and who, if he did not get what he considered justice, was willing to be obliterated rather than yield. (107-8)

2.3 Ned Kelly in James Jerome Kenneally's *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and their Pursuers*

Of the three authors, James Jerome Kenneally is the one closest to the historical Ned, whom he might have even seen with his own eyes and whose escapades he certainly heard of while the bushranger still lived. Kenneally was born in 1870 in Gaffneys Creek, Australia, not far from what would come to be known as “Kelly country”. He worked as a journalist and writer. He died in 1949 in Melbourne, Australia. (Ryan, web)

This fact explains the character of *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and their Pursuers* (hereafter *Inner History*), which is clearly written not as a novel or book of fiction, not even as a biography or historical monograph, but rather it is built up as the case for the vindication of Kelly. It uses excerpts from the Royal Commission inquiry into police failures pertaining to the Kelly outbreak and testimonies of witnesses of the outlaws’ behaviour and the events surrounding them to create an impassioned plea at once based on facts and testimonies and utterly biased in favour of Ned Kelly – surprisingly enough the first major book to side with the outlaws (Shore, web). This is reflected in the force and determination with which Kenneally formulates his defence and the bitterness emanating from the text, for example:

To the everlasting discredit of a large section of Australia’s bitterly anti-Kelly Press and equally bitter anti-Kelly authors of so-called Kelly Gang books [...] (Kenneally 1/5)

It is very evident, therefore, that the police, metaphorically speaking, intended to use LOADED DICE to rob the Kelly family of their FREEDOM. (1/2, capitals original)

“Loaded dice” is a term repeated very frequently by Kenneally to describe what he considered as a “Miscarriage of Justice” (1/3) and the prolonged and targeted persecution of the extended Kelly family by a corrupt, hateful and prejudiced police force.

It is not surprising, therefore, that of all the possible aspects, the *Inner History* portrays Ned Kelly first and foremost as a *victim* of government oppression. To reiterate the previous point, Kenneally concludes his summary of the Fitzgerald episode, when Ned Kelly was accused of attempted murder of a police officer – the moment he became outlawed – with the remark:

It was this unique outrageous miscarriage of justice that caused Ned Kelly to offer armed resistance to an administration correctly described as “Loaded Dice.” (2/5)

This then is the reason for Ned Kelly's actions, their justification: they are not a crime, but the desperate reaction of a man pushed too far who refuses to bow down to his oppressor.

Kenneally shows Kelly in various other aspects such as a gentleman (e.g. 6/2 and repeated in 9/4), an excellent marksman (e.g. 2/4), but also an ordinary man who makes mistakes (cf. 6/1). The bushrangers are frequently contrasted with the cowardly police (cf. 7/3, 18/6 etc.), with the notable exception of "three of the bravest men of the Victorian police force" (4/3) who were shot in Stringybark Creek.

Overall, the structure of the book, divided into 22 chapters, is a mix of quotes from the proceedings of the Royal Commission (the testimonies of police officers and other third party witnesses of Ned), quotes from Ned Kelly's letters, quotes from other letters, and Kenneally's own commentary (apparently based on his journalistic work uncovering the story). The narrative is somewhat jumbled, beginning with a description of the country, previous outlaws and the profiles of Ned and choice family members, which give a sketchy context of Ned's childhood. Kenneally then jumps straight to the Fitzpatrick incident in 1878 and continues from there more or less chronologically – but with frequent asides, reiterations, and forward allusions – up to a detailed multifaceted account of the Glenrowan siege, the subsequent trial, hanging and its immediate aftermath. The final chapter includes a mostly defamatory list of the people who had received part of the £8000 reward on the bushrangers' heads, a critique of the selective findings of the Royal Commission, and a letter by Kenneally which he had sent to the Australian government to protest a vandal desecrating Ned Kelly's prison grave in 1929.

A more detailed and exemplified description will be formed throughout the following part of the work, which will focus on the separate aspects of Ned Kelly and compare the three portrayals of the aforementioned authors.

2.4 Summary of Part 2: Overview

The three aforementioned books are closely connected in their content: their topic, main storyline and most plot points, their protagonist Ned Kelly, their antagonist the repressive state (represented by the police); they are also related through the nationality of their authors (Australians of European descent); but they also differ in significant ways – not only in details of story and characterisation, but also in their time of origin and, most importantly, in their form.

Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*, written at the turn of the 3rd millennium, can be described as an epistolary novel, a one-sided correspondence

between a father, Ned Kelly, and the daughter he has never seen. Its chronological description of Ned's life from his first remembered moments till his last day of freedom makes it, in essence, a *bildungsroman*. It fashions itself as an authentic testimony of the famous Australian bushranger, yet its ostentatiousness and absence of any serious historical introduction or claim clearly show it to be a work of fiction. Kelly's narration gives power to his words and at the same time casts their reliability into doubt – this mix of subjective pseudo-factual claims and gritty detailism gives the whole narrative a pallor of elusively unrealistic realism – fitting for a text of contemporary fiction.

Max Brown's post-World War II *Australian Son* might best be described as a novelistic biography, as it attempts to show the life of Ned Kelly as close to the truth as the author was capable of researching, and yet the chronological narrative is written and reads much like a novel, despite the narrator, Max Brown, retaining a strong presence with honest admissions of opinion and uncertainty of fact. The book is open in its respectful admiration of the Kelly Gang and has a more serene, less antagonising take on the events.

James Jerome Kenneally's *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and their Pursuers*, published within living memory of Ned Kelly in the first third of the 20th century, is the oldest and also most unusual text of the three. Unusual considering its book format, but unsurprising when realising the author's journalistic profession and emotional attachment, through birth, to the locality and people which Kelly, in a way, represents. The *Inner History* is something of a journalistic case study, albeit strongly biased and judgemental. It begins by giving the setting – the place, the time, the persons involved – and then it goes on to present the events, answering the basic journalistic questions of where, when, who, what. Its bias and its purpose – to clear the bushrangers' names – makes it an impassioned defence of the Kelly Gang, and a bitter accusation of the Victorian (south-east Australian) government and police force. As such, Kenneally draws upon actual documents, letters, transcripts from legal proceedings, police reports and personal testimonies to refute Kelly's crimes either as baseless slander or as the desperate self-defensive actions of a hunted man, while at the same time arguing the case against what he perceives as an acute and unpardonable "miscarriage of justice" perpetrated by the local government and police. The text is chaotic and, at times, highly redundant – matching its persuasive aim. Information is given as fact and evidenced using the aforementioned excerpts and citations, and yet the emotional and subjective commentary of the author gives the *Inner History* a highly unreliable and fictitious feel.

3 PRACTICAL PART: Analyses & Comparisons

The following chapters will focus on separate aspects of Ned Kelly's character – the attempt was made to choose a complexity of aspects through which to map as much of the protagonist's personality and purpose as possible. The primary source for each section is Peter Carey's *True History*, but throughout this whole part comparisons will be made to Max Brown's *Australian Son* and to James Jerome Kenneally's *Inner History*. Although this analysis cannot be absolute either in detail or in the entirety of extent, it is hoped that the breadth and depth of the investigation will allow the reader to glean something of the manifold facets that jointly create the image of Ned Kelly, the fictional man.

3.1 Ned Kelly, the boy

My 1st memory is of Mother breaking eggs into a bowl and crying that Jimmy Quinn my 15 yr. old uncle were arrested by the traps. I don't know where my daddy were that day nor my older sister Annie. I were 3 yr. old. While my mother cried I scraped the sweet yellow batter onto a spoon and ate it the roof were leaking above the camp oven each drop hissing as it hit. (Carey 7-8)

Thus begins Ned's life, as if slowly looming in from the mists of forgotten memory. No information is given of the previous years, but the following ten or so years of boyhood are well described by Carey. This first image serves also as a summary of Ned's childhood: with his mother in the foreground, crying yet caring for him, his siblings and his relatives; his father absent, though not forgotten; his elder sister distant and hardly understood; the dismal setting of a poor family's squalor; and the ever-present shadow of police oppression.

Ned grows up striving to help his mother and to replace his father, whom he loses first morally when Ned comes to suspect him of wearing a woman's dress (20-21), then physically as he is put in prison for the slaughter of a calf that Ned stole (28), and mortally as he dies soon after returning from prison – an event that brings the 12-year-old boy into youthhood (41). Though he has trouble respecting his father,

Ned acknowledges the practical abilities that he has learned from him which are “locked forever in my daily self” (21).

Much work is required from the eldest boy, and he feels the responsibility (24). With 5 siblings, 1 older and 4 younger (10), a sixth is born with the terrified assistance of an 11-year-old Ned: “Cut she said and I saw the pearly cord going from her stomach down to the dark I shut my eyes and cut[.]” (31) This event gives cause to a false rumour that Ned had “seen [his] mother’s naked bottom” (31) – which is at once humiliating and infuriating to him – an attack on the honour of his mother and himself, suggesting that the family’s poverty goes hand in hand with loose morals and bad upbringing.

Ned goes to school, he feels very much looked down upon as “the Catholic boy”, but is determined to fight to prove himself – whether preparing the class’s inkwells as “the best monitor that were ever born” (Carey 33) – a desire that is echoed violently at Ned’s last stand in Glenrowan, as he comes towards the police shouting “I’m the b----y Monitor, boys!” (Carey 418) – or beating up the big school bully for badmouthing his father:

Patchy Moran were a good foot taller his voice broken like a man. Said he You are an adjectival tinker you can’t give me orders. And with that he punched me in the temple so I fell. [...] I thought he soon would kill me but I closed with him on the barren ground beneath the peppercorn tree and then by skill or luck I got round his dirty neck and pulled him to the ground. [...] Patchy howled in my arms cursing and pleading but I held his shoulders to the earth as he thrashed and drove [the bull ants] into greater fury still. (18)

The persecution of the school bully and his inevitable defeat at the hands of the smaller Ned is not only a parallel with Ned’s later resistance against the bullying police (who are defeated in the aftermath of Ned’s death both in public opinion and in the findings of the Royal Commission established to investigate police failures in the case), but it is also emblematic of other literary characters (cf. Gilmore 194) – and serves to reinforce Ned’s place in the heroic mythos.

Ned’s school years are crowned with success when he saves a boy from drowning – it is the son of the well-to-do hotelier Mr Shelton, who awards Ned a green and gold sash for bravery in front of the whole class, disrupting at least for a moment the ethnic prejudices bearing down on Ned throughout his life:

I done as ordered and saw his little slit of mouth all twisted in a grin and then Eliza Mutton and George Mutton and Caroline Doxycy and the Sheltons and Mr Irving staring at me with his wild bright eyes. [...] The Protestants of Avenel had seen goodness in an Irish boy it were a mighty moment in my early life. (37)

We do not know if the schoolmaster's eyes are "wild bright" with respect, anger or disbelief, and this glorious moment for Ned retains hints of the ambiguity that haunts the whole novel, as he is at once admired by the representatives of the unattainable English-Australian socio-ethnic class, and at once placed on a pedestal with a sash as some prize poodle whose worth is accorded to him by those who imagine themselves his betters. The words hint at a yearning for peace, mutual respect and cooperation. However, the main obstacle for this, Ned's Irish descent, cannot and will not be denied, as is shown by the later events in his life – it is part of his identity and he will not give it up no matter what.

Max Brown

Brown makes hardly any note of Kelly as a boy, paying only cursory attention to his family at the time and does not attempt to characterise young Ned personally. From the indirect description of his family's situation, an image is suggested of poor conditions, hard work and police oppression, and a close connection to his mother's relatives the Quinns. An interesting point, albeit of little significance, is that Brown identifies Ned as being 10 years old when his father dies, opposed to the 12 years of Carey – showing discrepancies even in such simple facts.

J. J. Kenneally

Kenneally also pays little attention to Ned's childhood, giving only a brief sketch in his profiles of Ned, his parents and some of his siblings. Focus is placed on the effects of the unjust treatment of his family by the police, which "strongly influenced" him – especially his father's imprisonment on a "trumped-up charge", which "intensified [Ned's] distrust in the honesty of the police of that day". (Kenneally 1/3) A connection is made with Carey's story, as Kenneally declares Ned to have worn a "green silk sash" "with a heavy bullion fringe" (18/7) under his armour at Glenrowan and claims this was immediately stolen – he gives no explanation as to its meaning however.

3.2 Ned Kelly, the youth

[B]y the time my 13th birthday come around I had a small breaking yard and thought myself an expert in the matter [...] I had become a very serious boy it were my job to replace the father as it were my fault we didnt have him anymore. (Carey 47)

Ned's youth, his transition period from boy to man, is delineated by Carey by his father's death at age 12 and the return from his first stay in prison at age 17 (followed shortly by another 3 year term). The five six years are filled with many hardening experiences. For one his physical stature increases from his "head not being able to reach my uncle's sloping shoulder" (50) to "6 ft. 2 in. broad of shoulder my hands as hard as the hammers we had swung inside the walls of Beechworth Gaol. I had a mighty beard and was a child no more although in truth I do not know what childhood or youth I ever had." (192)

The second change is his increase in skill – especially in horse breaking and horsemanship, but also in his fighting prowess and workload ability – in preparation for the performative excellence he is shown to have in later days (see chapter 3.8).

At the same time, he remains quite untouched in the matter of girls and courtship, at fourteen when "I were trying so hard to be a man I had kept myself a child. Looking at my sister I saw how her cheeks glowed her bosoms pushed out against her blouse I blushed to think the things they would now be allowed to do together" (71), as at seventeen upon being sent to prison for three more years, he notes with sadness: "my last hope of youth was stripped away I had never kissed a girl but were old enough to be a married man." (194)

The greater adjustment comes in his relation to his mother. Ned fights bitterly to stay by her side and help her, placing himself in the role of his father ("I could chop down 5 trees in one day [...] but Frost never picked up an axe": 67) and refusing both his consecutive stepfathers Bill Frost and George King (115, 203). But his mother (and Carey) see that Ned needs to distance himself from his mother to grow up, and so he is sent away on what is necessarily his apprenticeship with the bushranger Harry Power (78) – to learn the trade, the robbing and the hiding.

This apprenticeship harkens to the idea of the need to make a boy into a man, as Gilmore notes: "the inner resources and determination needed for success are not naturally present but must be inculcated or artificially induced in the boy through a stressful period of indoctrination, or 'apprenticeship'," (Gilmore 108) and thus Ned is sent into the bush, an act reminiscent of the apprenticeships of various Australian and African tribes (cf. chapter 1.2.1 herein).

The youthful Ned must pass a number of hardships (such as enduring servitude, travelling barefoot for several days and taking part in Power's highway robbery) which might be labelled as "rites of passage" that are to forge an adult man out of the as-yet-childish boy through a separation-transition period with "vigorous exit ceremonies" (cf. Gilmore 124-5). In the case of Peter Carey's Ned Kelly, the whole formal concept of apprenticeship crumbles and is turned on its head as Ned rebels against his mentor (whom he holds very little respect for), and beats up one of

Power's adult friends for badmouthing his mother (a parallel can be made with Ned's revolt against the more powerful authorities that oppress his family). The subsequent "exit ceremony" is similar to that of the Japanese Sanshiro in Kugata's film *Sanshiro Sugata*, the boy "has not faced death" (Gilmore 192-3), though subverted somewhat humorously at the end:

When I turned to Harry his thumbs was in his belt beside his guns. / Come here said he. / He's going to shoot me I thought but followed. [...] I could feel the water flowing around my ankles it might as well have been my heart. / Give me the boots. / [...] I were dismissed. (Carey 104-5)

With the apprenticeship halted prematurely, Ned must still undergo one of the most bizarre parts of Carey's narrative, joining again with Power to hunt down Bill Frost for abandoning his mother, with the intent to kill him. This culminates in a chaotic and dreamlike ride through night and a bushfire, and in a distressed 15-year-old Ned shooting Frost in the tent of a Chinese prostitute:

I fired my musket from the hip I thought I missed but when he staggered against the lantern I observed his hand pressed to his gut the black blood flowing like jam between his fingers. (143)

Although Frost is not killed by the shot, Ned does not know this. The act of seeming murder binds him again to Power as his apprentice, as Ned, ridden with guilt and the fear of being caught, does everything his mentor tells him to. When Ned discovers that Power has been lying to him all along and sleeping with his mother at the same time, he bursts into a fury that brings about another "exit ceremony":

But Harry Power could not afford having a boy speak to him thus he therefore pulled his Colt .31 revolver from his belt and pressed it to my head above the ear.

Now the quiet descended all around me I looked into Harry's eyes they was dead and pale as a curtain. (Carey 154)

This is subverted once again, though this time in a victory for Ned that makes a decisive end to any further attempts at an apprenticeship, with the same righteous anger and fear-negating determination that marked his boyhood scrap with the school bully:

I returned his smile laying my left hand on his shoulder he were a big hard man I could feel the heft in him but as I were no longer afraid I punched him in the bowel. [...] My hands was trembling I asked him did he wish to live or die. (154)

Ned's youth is marked by the absence of any viable male role model – with his father dead and disrespected for not tending to his family sufficiently, his stepfathers hated or at the least held in contempt for being lazy and big-mouthed, one of his uncles attempting to rape his mother and then burning down their house, his other

relatives too distant to matter, the only one left is Harry Power, whom he respects for his bushman skills (139), but describes with distaste as a man of pitiful practical abilities and no hygiene, “crashing around drunk” (83), whose “bowel were v. badly twisted” (85) and who “could not feed himself or even clean his teeth” (91) – although Ned learns much of bushranging from Power, he ultimately denounces him as a liar. Ned is thus left to fend for himself, powered by the bitterly negative motivation of deciding not to be like the adults he knows. This also reinforces his feelings for his mother, as he sees himself as her sole protector, the only man faithful to her. (275)

Max Brown

Brown’s take on Ned Kelly’s youth is diametrically different. *Australian Son* does not give so much detail of the period (no fabulous escapades like Carey’s hunt for the errant stepfather) and places more focus on Kelly’s trouble with the police and his time in jail, which are not missing in Carey, but are sidelined by the other ordeals. Brown paints the much more positive, glorifying and heroising image of a

young Ned– intelligent and strong beyond his years– abounding with arrogant health from sun, wind, freedom and long riding, imagination fired by the fantastic growth of this young land and pride stiffened by the martyrdom of his race. (Brown 31)

Even his body does not correspond to Carey’s version – Brown makes him “an inch short of six feet” when twenty years old, smaller than Carey’s Ned, but “well proportioned” with an emphasis on his “presence” of power and his “direct, examining” eyes. (44)

The most significant difference, however, is in the matter of role models. Although giving varying opinions on the character of Kelly’s father, Brown writes that:

Ellen Kelly all her life was proud of Red Kelly, which suggests the match was a good one. Moreover, his son [...] spoke of his father with pride. (18)

So Ned does not come from a dysfunctional family as in the *True History*, but quite the opposite from a good, socially healthy family despite the misfortune of the early death of his father. There is no mention of a Bill Frost, and George King seems to be accepted without any problem. There is no uncle attempting to rape his mother. As for Harry Power, “Ned Kelly’s professor in bushranging” (36), although not one-sidedly praised, he is made into a positive, jocular character: “a petty thief on horseback who, for some years, had will-o’-the-wisped around the country relieving travellers of cash and valuables with chivalry and good humour.” (33) Ned himself is

said to have “found it exciting riding about the country watching the old man at work”, the whole matter written off as “only a lark” (37), a fun teenage adventure – an approach hardly recognisable in Carey’s darkly brooding and suffering Ned forced into serving a gross contemptible liar.

J. J. Kenneally

Kenneally is mostly in line with Brown, though he gives a much shorter account of the period. He focuses almost solely on those moments which are connected to the police and which are considered systematic persecution and prejudice. He lists four charges that “are the only charges ever made against Ned Kelly before being outlawed” (Kenneally 1/5), three of which are from his youth¹: one, holding the bridle reins of Harry Power’s horse (dismissed for lack of evidence, Kenneally does not discuss whether Ned was actually an associate of the bushranger; the reader could be expected to understand this as slander with no factual basis, but at another point he quotes a policemen connecting the two without criticism: cf. 3/2); two, delivering an “obscene note” and threatening a hawker named McCormack, for which Ned is sentenced to six months in jail (Kenneally deems this “an outrageous miscarriage of justice” and shows Ned as innocent of malicious intent); three, receiving a stolen horse, which landed him three years in jail (again termed “an outrageous miscarriage of justice” and argued against as the horse, stolen when Ned was still serving his previous sentence, was not reported until after Ned received it). (1/5)

No apprenticeship is suggested. Although this developmental process is not depicted or commented on because of the *Inner History*’s focus on Ned’s adult life, there is never any doubt that Ned had achieved manhood.

As for the matter of role models, Kenneally describes Ned’s father as “a fearless young man of some education and outstanding ability” (1/2). There is no Bill Frost, but the brief mention of George King casts him in a negative light: “Ned Kelly thrashed King for ill-treating his mother. King left Greta never to return.” (1/3) There is no uncle attempting to rape his mother. The only description of Harry Power is that he is “a bushranger” (1/3) and no connection is made between him and Ned other than the failed police accusation.

All three texts show the young Ned to have courage and fighting prowess, as an outstanding person already. His character, where described, is principally the same as that of the adult Ned, only with less strength and skill. The events portrayed –

1 Each of the charges and the events precipitating them are also contained in Peter Carey’s and Max Brown’s accounts with similar effect.

whether they might be his bushranger apprenticeship, his prison sentences, or other significant moments – serve more to explain or excuse his later actions than to redefine his personality.

3.3 Ned Kelly, the family member and the son

She pushed Dan firmly towards me. Look after him said she he were a lot of trouble getting born don't let him go to waste you hear me?

Yes Ma. (Carey 275)

Kelly family ties are very strong and Ned is constantly shown as part of his family, both in the temperament he has received from his bloodline², and in his unhesitating need to protect his family from dishonour³ and danger, as in the above quote, or when he goes to defend Dan from a false accusation (227) or refuses to abandon his mother in jail (282). These familial ties include the many relatives from the Quinn tree who suffer the same level of police intervention – despite becoming unfairly estranged by his uncles, he retains that they “would not kowtow to no one and this were a fine rare thing” (181). Even his mother’s second husband Bill Frost, Ned’s stepfather, although despised by him and never acknowledged as family (but always as an intruder and an enemy), achieves some value – thinking Frost dead by his hand, Ned is “v. guilty for having killed the father of [his] mother’s child.” (Carey 147) The strength of the family bond and Ned’s activity in fulfilling his role of protector is in line with Gilmore’s observation on masculine family values:

Honor is tied up with meeting expectations as a member of a corporate group defined by genealogy or affinity [...] and thereby protecting the group’s collective reputation. (Gilmore 131)

Ned is willing to risk all for the Kelly honour – as is noted in the previous two chapters, he does not hesitate to attack men who are much stronger than him when they speak ill of his mother – he puts his own life at stake for the sake of his family, allowing for another of Gilmore’s findings:

To be men, most of all, they must accept the fact that they are expendable. (223)

2 His father’s “soul were within each soul of ours” (Carey 45) and when a man orders him to pick up something from the floor, “it were a grave misjudgment on his part trying to force a Kelly so I knocked him in the gullet.” (118)

3 See chapter 3.1.

His family ties are brought in parallel with his Irish origin and ethnicity, as “we Irish was raised to revile the traitors’ names when I were a child [...] we learned the traitors better than the saints” (175). Irish culture is an important factor for Peter Carey’s Ned (cf. Innes 88), especially the mythology (see chapter 3.10), but also what is depicted as a fierce loyalty to blood and a bitterly rebellious spirit in opposition to the dominating English (175); Irish Catholicism is also mentioned, but see chapter 3.6 for more on that topic.

Among all his relations, his mother Ellen Kelly holds a unique and unambiguously dominant position. References to her abound not only in the “parcels” of Carey’s book dealing with Ned’s childhood and growing up, but continue throughout. He clings to his mother emotionally and feels responsible for her, as “it were my job to replace the father” (47), but he is also very protective of her and jealous, as he says: “I would much prefer that she invited no new husbands to her bed” (66).

This is not quite mirrored by his mother, as she tries to sever the relationship between them (mayhap to trigger the apprenticeship journey to manhood, see chapter 3.2). Ned bears this badly:

My father were lost just 2 yr. before and I didnt deserve to lose a mother too not even if I had offended her she should not cast me out. (84)

He ultimately rebels from Harry Power to return to her – only to find out his mother even paid the bandit money to take him on (111). Even though he falls out with his mother at times (178), his childly affections and loyalty remain – albeit mingled with hurt, as she prefers her third husband George King to her son (206). Mum’s number one position is only partially displaced by Ned’s love Mary Hearn (see chapter 3.4).

The above stipulations point quite clearly to what Lyn Innes describes as “Carey’s insistence on the Oedipal character of Ned’s relationship with his mother.” (Innes 90; cf. Smyth 210) And Carey seems to imply as much on multiple occasions, even if Ned never owns up to it and would most certainly fiercely refuse such an allegation. Yet even his stepfather calls Ellen Ned’s “girlfriend” (Carey 233), and when watching whom he thinks is his mother riding, Ned is “[thrilled] to behold she rode with her back straight her stirrups long her skirts rucked up to show her knees”⁴ (209). The dissonance created by this and his passion for Mary Hearn create a complexity of

4 The rider turns out to be a boy, Steve Hart. Based on this and many other moments in the book, Heather Smyth suggests that “Carey challenges the masculine symbolism of the Kelly gang” (Smyth 186), introducing an element of homoeroticism and cross-dressing to unleash “the cultural anxieties about sexuality and the gendered signification of clothing and behavior” (209); at the same time it is recognised that “Carey invents for Ned a girlfriend, Mary Hearn, rather than leaving him an ambiguous bachelor.” (194)

character that is at once intriguing and elusive – adding to Ned’s mythical and mystery status.

Max Brown

Brown shows the Kelly family (and their Quinn relatives) in a similar light, describing them as a whole with Ned as just one of many, focusing on their conflicts with authority:

[T]hey had never learnt to respect the law’s right to defend wealth. [...] Having suffered from the authority of the Queen’s representatives [...] they preferred the authority of their own fists[.] (Brown 30)

Brown also stresses their “gay⁵, turbulent Irish blood and the reckless rebel tradition” (31). His following description characterises Ned also, giving him a raw authenticity, an unbound and impulsive emotionality, a dangerous loyalty:

They loved the intimate warmth of their hearths, the excitement of the fast gallop, the expansion and laughter of spirit of intimates at a bar-counter, the colourful gesture, the shrewd deed. [...] If they liked you, they would give you their shirt or steal for you. If you were their enemy, they could be furtive and suspicious, and fight with a raw and mystical hate. (31)

Ned’s relationship with his mother is unambiguous and reciprocal, there is no suggestion of arguments or any animosity between them. It is of much less prominence, but from what is shown it seems to be a son’s respectful and protective love for his mother (e.g. 90), yet with the trademark Kelly passion:

They say that when Ned was told that his mother was sentenced to three years in Pentridge, he flew into a rage and swore he would take vengeance that would make his name ring down the generations. (56)

Before his death, Ned Kelly turns his thoughts and voice to his mother’s fate, and his mother is the last person to speak with him before his execution day. Brown quotes Ned:

There is one wish in conclusion I would like you to grant me– that is the release of my mother before my execution [...] for the day will come when all men will be judged by their mercy and their deeds. (Brown 258)

And she reminds him of the expectations he is held to as a Kelly family member:

Finally Kelly was visited by his mother. Her last words to him were: “Mind you die like a Kelly, Ned!” (259)

5 Here meaning “joyous” or “jolly”.

Brown includes the Jerilderie Letter, which Ned Kelly concludes with words that ring deep and resonate the maternal tie⁶:

I do not wish to give the order full force without giving timely warning, but I am a widows son outlawed and my orders *must be obeyed*. Edward Kelly. (282, original italics)

The harsh fate of his mother is seen by Ned as a reason for the severity of his requests. His connection with his mother is so strong that he characterises himself through his relation with her. He is not merely a man or an outlaw, but he is “a widows son”.

J. J. Kenneally

Similar to Brown, the beginning of the text places the focus on the family as a whole. Irish ethnicity and police persecution are again what characterises them the most, the source of their stubborn independence and passion:

Added to their inherited resentment of oppression, the Kellys developed a bitter hatred of the law as it was then administered, and herein lay the origin of their subsequent career of resistance and defiance. (Kenneally 1/3)

In his case for the defence of Ned, Kenneally defends the whole Kelly family and stresses the “outstanding ‘Prestige’ which they enjoyed where they were well known”, reiterating a moment later that “Mrs Kelly and her family were very highly respected and loved by the people of Greta”. (1/3) In fact, the police oppression of “loaded dice” is seen as a systematic attempt to ruin the Kelly family’s social standing and to alienate them from their community, to “root the Kellys out of the district” (1/2)

Ned Kelly not only gives to his family, but is also on the receiving end of family support. Special notice is given to Margaret Skillion, née Kelly, one of Ned’s younger sisters, who is portrayed as a very strong and capable woman⁷ and instrumental in keeping the gang provisioned and supported throughout their time as outlaws:

It was Mrs Skillion [...] who possessed the unlimited confidence of her brothers and their mates. It was Mrs Skillion who was always in close touch with her outlawed brothers and supplied them with the necessaries of life. [...] It was Mrs Skillion who frequently led the police, who were on foot, on many a wild goose chase over rough and extremely difficult country. (1/5)

6 Interestingly, Carey uses these same, famous words from the Jerilderie Letter in a “coffin letter” outlawing anyone who “harbours or assists the police” in North Eastern Victoria. (Carey 394)

7 A similar contention is made in Brown (156), though her activity is not depicted as being of so great an importance as in Kenneally.

Ellen is described as “the loving mother of Ned Kelly” (1/3) and her son’s relationship with her is as unambiguous and respectful as Brown’s. Ned Kelly is concerned about his mother’s safety and her unjust imprisonment following the Fitzpatrick incident, but he also worries for the family honour and “strongly object[s] to his sister’s name being brought into his mother’s defence” (2/5), apparently as it should not have been necessary and would have left Kate unprotected to the public. Much space is given to Ned’s letters to the government where he argues for the innocence of his mother and other family members (e.g. 6/3-4)

3.4 Ned Kelly, the lover and the father

As I rose I caught the eye of Caroline Doxey she smiled at me the 1st time ever. I put my shoulders back and walked up to Mr Irving’s platform. (Carey 36)

Women are there to admire Ned, to thrill him and encourage him simply by being. Although Ned has a number of sisters, he grows up naïve and inexperienced in romance, focusing on his “manly” role of protector and provider – he does not realise his elder sister Annie has matured until she is proposed to: “I were trying so hard to be a man I had kept myself a child. Looking at my sister I saw how her cheeks glowed her bosoms pushed out against her blouse[.]” (71)

Ned does not have many opportunities to meet or interact with girls and he is clumsy in his actions when he begins to feel an attraction to the feminine – realising with delay that his prolonged stare is unsuitable:

After a long time a v. pretty girl come along she was [...] already showing a womanly shape and she folded her arms across her chest when she saw me looking at her. Having sisters of my own I knew to look away. (131)

He follows the girl, Caitlin, as she invites him to come with her, and as he sits with her in beautiful seclusion of nature, he experiences one of his few moments of tranquil happiness:

Soon we come across the source of all the greenery it were a spring seeping from the rocks it were cool and dark with ferns growing from the crevices. Here we sat together side by side I were very happy for a while. (Carey 131)

But such moments of interaction with girls are few and far between, and as the seventeen-year-old Ned is sentenced to three years of jail, he sadly remarks: “[M]y last hope of youth was stripped away I had never kissed a girl but were old enough to

be a married man.” (194) Though this and the previous reflections show he is interested in or would like to have some kind of relationship, he is very passive in this respect, so that even his younger brother Dan in a moment of drunken teenage spite sneers at him that he has no girl because he has his mother as a girlfriend (225).

It does not take long and Ned, aged 24, meets Mary Hearn in what seems to be a brothel – though Ned does not admit this and seems not to realise it. Ned is immediately excited by her physical presence, the text gives us a direct feed to where his eyes and nose are focused:

[She] could be no more than 5 ft. tall but her beauty were much finer more delicate her hair were the colour of a crow's wings glistening it would reflect the colour of the sky. Her back were slender with a lovely sweep to it her shoulders was straight her head held high. When she come into my arms she smelled of soap and pine trees and I judged she were 16 or 17 yr. of age. (242)

They dance and talk and Ned feels “suddenly more happy than I had ever hoped to be.” (242) The situation develops rapidly, Mary Hearn undresses before him and Ned does not hesitate to move from caressing to sex.

Ned Kelly does not think twice and shows no sign of trying to assert self-discipline to stop his sexual urges, as would have been expected from a gentleman and a Christian (cf. Forth 93); on the contrary he relishes the act, though not only in the physical, but also in the emotional aspect – overcome with bodily desire, but at the same time equating that desire with the socially positive decision to marry (Carey 247). Giving in to his “natural urges” while accepting responsibility for the liaison, in what might be seen as balancing the popular ideals of current-day Western society.

His relationship with Mary overpowers even his feelings for his mother, as in one moment he proposes to Mary and claims he does not care what his mother might think of the matter (257). He is lost in his passion, yearning for Mary at all times and fancying himself to be Romeo (316) – one of Carey's numerous intertextual nods to famous literary heroes. But even though he vows never to part with her and the child they have conceived together (324), Mary leaves to America and Ned, paralysed by his loyalty to his mates and to his imprisoned mother and supporters, does not follow:

I remained at my station that is the agony of the Captain if rats is tearing at his guts still must he secure the freedom of his mother and all them men in gaol. (Carey 371)

Mary and the child disappear, the only trace being a cryptic telegram received from San Francisco, which Ned understands to mean his child is born (386) – this

fulfilment of fatherhood is cause for a great celebration by the whole country, the common people who “couldnt afford to leave their cows & pigs but they done so because we was them and they was us”. (387)⁸

Peter Carey’s Ned is not only shown as a somewhat awkward yet passionate lover, but also as a family man with a great potentiality for fatherhood. Already as a boy he looks at his newborn sister Grace with tenderness:

She were a little foal a calf her eyes were wide her newborn skin glistening white and bloody
nothing bad had ever touched her. (31)

His eyes see a person of great and frail beauty, a child so worthy of admiration and protection for her pure, unspoilt humanity. At another time later on, as a youth, this understanding is echoed in the feelings that overcome the contempt he holds for his mother’s further husbands as Ned remarks on his stepfather’s daughter:

[She] were no bigger than a loaf of bread she lay asleep in a fruit box on the table if ever dross
were turned to gold then here she was. (163)

And once more as he watches Mary Hearn breastfeed her child (born before Ned met her), he is softened to decide the baby “should have a father to look after him and it were then I got it into my head that I would make application for the post.” (248)

Although his view of the child changes when he discovers its father is George King, his mother’s husband, (265) he accepts his role of father and protector as he notes: “I went outside to keep watch over my family.” (325)

Max Brown

It is not clear what opportunities for being in contact with girls Brown’s Ned had in his early years, but he is made to look back before his execution, to think of “the girls he had known but never had the chance to love”. (Brown 260)

But if he did not have the chance to love them, they had the chance to love him – Ned Kelly is depicted as a ladies’ man, well-liked for his manly appearance and gallantry (106), with many a woman “dazzled by the exploits of the four” (117) – though not all, one exception appearing in Mrs Gill the printer’s wife in Jerilderie, “who for one did not find Mr. Kelly attractive.” (130)

Unlike Carey, *Australian Son* does not contain any romance, though Mary Hearn is replaced by a speculative Mary Miller, his cousin:

8 Also see chapter 3.7.

Others swear that Mary loved Ned Kelly, that she was the girl from Greta to whom he later threw kisses from the dock in Beechworth, and who prayed for him on her knees before the steps of the old Melbourne gaol when the bell tolled twice at the hour of his hanging. (116)

The need for Ned to have such a “sweetheart” is clear from Gilmore’s study on manhood – if not directly sexual prowess (as Carey conveys), then at least admiration and success with women is expected (see subchapter 1.2.2).⁹

Brown makes no suggestion that Ned Kelly ever had sexual intercourse, fulfilling the expectations given to an unwedded Christian, and no suggestion is made of Ned’s suitability for fatherhood or of any interaction with babies.

J. J. Kenneally

Kenneally says nothing of Ned’s early contact with girls and no mention is made of any romantic relationship throughout his life. Gallantry is placed in the fore, as is suggested in various places (e.g. 6/1, 11/4), the police even counting on his chivalry to save their lives as they hide behind women, being “confident that the Kellys would not fire a shot through the wall while there were women inside”. (16/5) When robbing the banks in Euroa and Jerilderie, Ned asks on both occasions whether the lady of the house “was in a delicate state of health – he did not want to give her a fright if she was” (6/2, 9/4). This is frequently contrasted with the behaviour of the police, who for instance open fire on a building full of women and children (18/1).

It is not only Ned’s considerations towards women that are noted, but also the way female characters view him. In this sense Ned is shown as an impressive man who receives the admiration and/or respect of women (e.g. 6/2, 9/4).

No sexual activity of Ned is mentioned or even hinted at in any way, neither is he described as a fatherly person – only at one point a furious Ned relents from shooting a man for slandering him, when he finds out that the person is a widower and would leave behind a 14-year-old girl to care for her five younger siblings (10/3).

⁹ Speculations of this sort abound to this day, for example see the Sydney Morning Herald article from March 2012 (Meacham, web).

3.5 Ned Kelly, the criminal and the victim

Criminal and victim can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Any criminal activity has its victim (damaged party) and every victim has their damaging party. The two aspects will be contrasted in this chapter, beginning with Ned Kelly's criminality.

I went peaceful as a lamb but I did not forget about George King or the sentence I would pass on him as soon as possible. (Carey 261)

If a criminal is a person who takes the law into his own hands, then Ned Kelly is undoubtedly a criminal. He considers killing people left right and centre, repeatedly threatens them with death while armed with deadly weaponry – regardless of whether or not he would really shoot them, he forced them into obeying him (e.g. Carey 374). He also shot three policemen (albeit in defence of his own life, as the police were “intent on doing damage” to the gang; 283). His crimes are admitted to so freely and happen so obviously in reaction to circumstances, that the reader might feel obliged to pass over them without pausing to consider them actually criminal. There are some moments, however, where Kelly himself shows there is something not quite right going on, as when he gives the fatally wounded policeman the mercy shot:

Sgt Kennedy looked up at me sharply. You have shed blood enough said he.

I fired and he died instantly without a groan. (293)

Although these situations might be excused as an act of self-defence or desperation, Ned is not only a killer, but also a thief and a robber. When he breaks into a cattle pound to “take back what I legally owned”, we could maybe agree with him that “this did not seem a crime to me not then or now.” (229) But when he steals fifty horses a moment later, he has no qualms saying:

Never having been a thief before I were surprised to discover what a mighty pleasure stealing from the rich could be. (234)

In each of these cases, however, as also when he robs the banks in Euroa and Jerilderie, he does not appear to do so for selfish reasons, but more as an act of warfare to defend against the enemy or to gain resources for his side. That is how he himself claims to understand it:

I'm sure you know I have spilled human blood when there were no other choice at that time I were no more guilty than a soldier in a war. (25)

Thus Ned is portrayed not so much a criminal, but rather as a soldier. However, both these aspects are overshadowed by that of a victim. Despite his dreams, threats

and plans to cause death, Ned Kelly repeatedly claims he had no other choice in the circumstances. For example when riding to murder his stepfather Bill Frost (who does not appear in the other versions of the story):

So we pushed on towards the murder and you can rightly say I would of proved my manhood better by turning back to Greta but on that fateful night I were caught between my 15th & 16th yr. and in my wisdom thought I had no choice but accompany Harry Power. (138)

Or during the shoot-out with the police in Stringybark Creek, when Ned is forced to kill by the mortal danger of the situation and the split-second reaction required to defend himself:

Strahan popped up from behind the log his carbine raised. I squeezed the fateful trigger what choice did I have? (287)

Or when he allows Joe Byrne to go kill his former mate Aaron Sherritt, a police informer, Ned claims it was against his own preferences as he himself would not do such a thing:

I did not wish Aaron Sherritt's death though he were a traitor he would of seen me hanged as soon as look at me. (Carey 399)

Ned is forced into these situations, yet all he wants is for him, his family and his friends to be left alone to work and live in peace. Moments of tranquillity are described briefly, but with fondness:

In 2 blessed yr. of peace I read LORNA DOONE 3 times I also read some Bible and some poems of William Shakespeare. (218-9)

Soon others was drawn into the ranges [...] they come not to avoid honest graft the opposite [...] We was building a world where we would be left alone. (234)

However, this wish is destroyed by “the injustice we poor Irish suffered in this present age.” (7) The police will not leave them alone, locking up his uncles and cousins on false charges without evidence (158), threatening to “lockup the mothers & babies too” (165), and sentencing Ned to three years in prison for “receiving a horse not yet legally stolen” (194). The persecution culminates in the incident with Constable Fitzpatrick, which is somewhat chaotic, but is clearly shown not to be any attempt at murder, the charge Fitzpatrick levies on them and the reason for Ned being outlawed and his mother imprisoned. (270-6)

It is not only Ned who feels this as a gross injustice, Carey claims, but even murderers agreed, as an envelope with “NED KELLY” on it is passed on to “the widow’s son outlawed” (395) allegedly from his mother:

Prison is a hard place the souls within it murderers or worse but them 2 words was carried by some unknown person to someone else unknown there were no gain to it only risk but even the lowest of them prisoners knew what were done against my mother were UNFAIR. (341, original capitals)

Overall, Peter Carey's Ned is portrayed as a victim, a man forced into criminal activity by the actions and injustice of those, who are supposed to uphold the law. This view is very similar in both *Australian Son* and *Inner History*, with some differences noted below.

Max Brown

Brown is slightly more ambiguous on whether Ned Kelly is a criminal or a victim. His Ned threatens violence (Brown 97), reacts violently to being disobeyed (89), admits to stealing "280 horses" (131) and makes his own law (185). Although it is also suggested the situation is that of a war (82), the most interesting matter of note is Ned's inconsistency on whether or not he wanted to kill the police at Glenrowan or not. The testimonies are conflicted:

He told them he had been in Beechworth the previous night, had shot several police, was expecting a train from Benalla with police and black-trackers, and *was going to kill each one of the bastards*. (184, italics added)

A moment later it is suggested Kelly wanted to lure the police out of the train, steal their horses, hijack the empty train and go "rob banks now unprotected by police" (189). But when questioned by police as to whether he wanted to kill the people in the train, he says: "Yes, of course I did[.] God help them, they would have got shot all the same. Would they not have tried to kill me?" (214) Finally, in a statement while waiting for execution, he writes:

I can solemnly swear now before God and man that it *was never my intention to take life, even at Glenrowan* I was determined to capture [the police] for the purpose of exchange of prisoners[.] (258, italics added)

This is in line with Brown's attempt to "do some justice to a man, who, in his day, appeared to many not as a black-hearted murderer, but as a new Messiah of Australian democracy" (12). His approach thus unsurprisingly shows Ned and his family as more of a victim. He notes that "it was evident that, at the age of 14, Ned was already marked" (38) and that the police had instructions to send them to jail "whenever the Kellys commit any paltry crime" (49-50). Of the Fitzpatrick incident Brown remarks that the "evidence of one policeman, who, a few weeks later, was to

be cashiered from the force” sent Ned’s mother “with a babe on breast” and two men “without records” to jail (56).

J. J. Kenneally

Kenneally’s *Inner History* makes it hard to see anyone but the police and government as criminals. Kenneally quotes the same police instructions as Brown, but with much more stress on it being a planned campaign of injustice (e.g. 2/5; see previous chapters). Kelly is vindicated not only of murder (self-defence and desperation are appealed to), but also of stealing cattle, as “the few people who still believed all the accusations against the Kellys now freely admitted that they had wronged innocent people” (Kenneally 1/1). The Fitzpatrick incident is a one-sidedly provoked affair (2/1), the Kellys want to be left alone to work (4/1), it is said that Ned “would shoot no man if he gave up his arms and promised to leave the police force” (4/1), vowing to “shoot to kill only in a fair fight” (4/2).

There is only one moment when the Kelly gang is put in doubt, the same sole moment the police are shown in a good light, and that is when Kenneally sums up the result of the battle at Stringybark Creek:

Thus perished three of the bravest men of the Victorian police force. It is little wonder that the story of the dreadful tragedy awakened everywhere feelings of horror and indignation[.]
(Kenneally 4/3)

As with Carey and Brown, Kenneally also describes Ned’s consistent persecution by the authorities as leading to “war” (6/1). As such, Ned maps out a plan of campaign – the first step is to acquire resources by robbing the bank in Euroa (6/1) – making it not so much a crime but a military operation (the same goes for the stealing of horses; 6/3). Kelly’s strategies are lauded and those of the various police superintendents are derided (e.g. 7/3, 11/4), but all the same the injustice of Ned’s outlaw status (the legality of which is questioned due to the Outlawry Act ending before Glenrowan; 16/1) and the imprisonment of his mother and other persons is brought up again in later chapters to remind the reader of Ned’s victim status (21/2ff.).

3.6 Ned Kelly, the Christian

Christianity is such an obvious part of Western society (not only) in the nineteenth century that it seems to be often sidelined in fine literature, with only passing references to its ethics, cultural values and traditions – they are taken for granted,

as matter-of-fact and mundane as the air the characters breath; as the back-drop for protagonists to differentiate themselves against (cf. Jager 613); or as part of the cultural symbolism of Western and colonialist discourse (cf. Boehmer 46-8, Mullaney 51).

Ned Kelly is portrayed as a member of the Irish Catholic ethnic/culture group, but it is interesting to note how much this is reflected in his actions and thoughts – if and when markers of Christianity appear in the text and what light they shine on events.

Soon we passed that solid stone edifice wherein Bill Frost supposedly lay dead I couldnt help but cross myself I were so ashamed and sorry[.] (Carey 145)

Carey's Ned "can't help but cross himself", recourse to Christianity is in-built in his nature, it is something he does not ponder on¹⁰, does not really act upon, but does not doubt. He crosses himself before engaging the police in Stringybark Creek (287) and in the aftermath, with three men dead by his hand, he wishes the rain "could wash away my sin but it come on the cold breath of the Southern Ocean there were no forgiveness there." (293)

In Jerilderie he allows a captive Mrs Devine to prepare Sunday Mass (373), but himself does not attend regularly – after sleeping with Mary Hearn, he notes:

On Sunday early we went to mass for me it were the 1st time in many years and when the priest heard my sins he said I must get married and I told him I would attend to that immediately. (Carey 257)

Ned accepts the priest's words, confesses his various sins, yet continues with his actions under the excuse that he has no choice (see chapter 3.5). Overall, Christian markers are relatively inconspicuous and Carey mentions Irish mythology much more than any Christian beliefs (e.g. 137; see chapter 3.10). However, it is the crucifix, the officiating priest and the "prayer proper to the Catholic Church for such occasions" that accompany Ned in his last moments on this earth (421); and his two final requests, showing where his thoughts and reliances turned to, are that his mother be released from prison and "his body handed over for burial in consecrated ground" (421). Christianity is in Ned's blood – an instinctive part of him inherited from his ancestors, which remains hidden under his skin only to seep through in moments of danger, shame and death.

10 Apart from reading "some Bible" in the two years "blessed peace". (Carey 218)

Max Brown

The format of Brown's text makes a subtle approach as that of Carey hard to achieve. Yet glimpses of the same natural Irish Catholic disposition can be seen in quotes of Ned's letters:

I have no intention of asking mercy for myself or any mortal man [...] I will not take innocent life if justice is given [...] and have but once to die; [...] I will seek revenge for the name and character which has been given to me and my relations, while God gives me strength to pull a trigger. (Brown 81)

Ned's ready acceptance and use of the Christian discourse on mortality is contrasted with his misapprehension of the virtues of mercy, forgiveness and love – this paradox culminates in his appeal to God for the ability to kill.

On the other hand, Ned's sexual morals appear impeccable – with not even the slightest hint or suggestion that he had partaken of or would have even considered partaking of illicit sexual relations, or any sexually inappropriate behaviour towards women or men (see chapter 3.4).

A brief yet clear Catholic marker in common with Carey occurs during the Jerilderie robbery, as the outlaw also allows Mrs Devine to prepare the Mass in Jerilderie; this is taken a step further as Ned not only permits the Mass prepared with Dan keeping watch, but he also instructs his brother to participate in the preparations, to "give her a hand" (Brown 122).

Much more prominence is given to Ned's faith towards the end of the book. When Ned is captured at Glenrowan, Dean Gibney of the Roman Catholic Church comes to him and "prepare[s] the outlaw for his last hour" (218). The next sentences are decisive in forming and strengthening the Christian aspect of Ned:

He found him very penitent, and when he asked him to say "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me," Kelly repeated the words most reverently and added, "It is not today I began to say that." (218)

Thus Ned Kelly is shown as a man deeply religious and humble, a man of many failings and sins, but who ultimately desires the mercy of his God and turns to him in his last moments with hope of a heavenly afterlife. In the court proceedings (not included in Carey's version for the understandable reason that Ned could hardly have written about them secretly), Ned speaks out in answer to the judge:

My mind is as easy as the mind of any man in this world, as I am prepared to show before God and man. (249)

[A] day will come at a bigger Court than this, when we shall see which is right and which is wrong. (249)

Brown's Ned begins his last day at 5 a.m. by falling onto his knees and praying for twenty minutes, after which he "appeared quite contented" (259). The litany of the dying is administered to him (259) and finally, as in the *True History*, the crucifix, officiating priest and "appropriate prayer" accompany him to the moment of his hanging (260).

J. J. Kenneally

The *Inner History* stresses the respectability of the whole Kelly family (Kenneally 1/3) and Ned's morality and innocence of wrongdoing (see chapters 3.4 and 3.5) – in accordance with Christian values – but does not make any specific note of Christianity until Mrs Devine is allowed to prepare Mass with Dan Kelly's assistance (9/4), a brief moment which is almost identical in all three accounts. The next marker comes towards the end of the book with the arrival of Dean Gibney to the captured outlaw, with two chapters devoted to the actions and evidence of this "Hero of Glenrowan", who attends to Ned's spiritual needs and goes on to risk bullets and fire to attempt to save the lives of other people caught in the battle (ch. 19, 20).

Kenneally quotes Ned's speech at court with a slightly different wording, but to the same effect as Brown (Kenneally 21/6). Ned walks to the scaffold with "his spiritual advisers", and he "answer[s] the priests, who recited the litany of the dying" (21/7).

Though the *Inner History* does not give much voice to this aspect of Ned Kelly and hardly mentions it throughout the text, this is countered in Kenneally's closing letter to the government, where he describes the bushranger as "one whose penitential dispositions before death earned for him the forgiveness of sins, and the right to receive the last rites of his Church" (22/5) and in his appeal to the majority Christian values of the contemporary Australian society, he draws an almost Christ-like parallel of martyrdom for Ned:

It would be well, in this Christian community, for our Governmental heads to recognise Christian principles, and regard Ned Kelly as he now appears before his Creator, and cease condemning him on the refuted testimony of the various Judas Iscariots, whose perjury sold him for so many pieces of silver. (22/5)

3.7 Ned Kelly, the commoner

To know a man [...] you have to see him at work at useful jobs: you have to know his energy quotient as a worker, a producer, a builder. (Gilmore 110)

Ned's commoner origin is important for his image of manhood, as it requires him to do physical work and move around a lot – tending to the family selection (Carey 59), breaking in horses (47), working as a “faller” (206), surviving in the wilderness (234) ... Ned Kelly's rough, but well-shaped physical condition (192) places him squarely into the class of the poor, manual labourer and in opposition to the sedentary and frequently physically weaker elite. (cf. Forth 87) The everyday activities that the rough rural environment necessitates are the source of Ned's raw physicality and also a proving ground for his capabilities, as from his boyhood onward he can rely on no one but himself to bear the brunt of his own and his family's livelihood.

His adherence to the common people of Australia is also important for his bushranger status and especially that of a national symbol (see chapter 3.9):

As the poor pay fealty to the bushranger thus the bushranger pays fealty to the poor. (Carey 136)

He is one of them and he remains one of them in a resolute show of reciprocal loyalty. He represents them in a boxing match, wearing the Irish green of the majority of the poor and scorned selectors – his victory over the Protestant orange raises him to a God-like level of popularity and fame amongst his own. (213)

The common folk keep to Ned throughout, accepting him, cheering for him and celebrating his successes with him. Ned learns the lesson of Harry Power and does not forget those who support him or suffer in his defence, for they give him his power and invulnerability:

It had been men who protected Harry and it were a man who betrayed him in the end. Harry always knew he must feed the poor he must poddy & flatter them he would be Rob Roy or Robin Hood[.] (343)

Ned accepts this, accepts “his people” who harken to him “because we was them and they was us and we had showed the world what convict blood could do.” (Carey 387) Their socially despised convict origin becomes a badge of honour, showing their strength as they are able to overcome prejudice and the difficulties and disadvantages of their discriminated position. Ned Kelly becomes the common Australian people's Robin Hood, robbing the banks that represent their oppressors and giving them money in their poverty (366), standing up and fighting (and winning) against their seemingly all-powerful tormentors, and although Ned and his

mates are defeated at Glenrowan, their indomitable bravery shows that they – and by affiliation all ordinary Australians – are not “less than dog manure beneath [the Government’s] boots” (276), but “of true blood and beauty born” (387).

Max Brown

Australian Son shows this aspect of Ned similarly to the *True History*. His body strong and fit, conditioned by rough life (Brown 31, 42) and when he works as a “feller and later as overseer”, his prowess is subtly lauded by the remark that he was “at no times earning less than top wages” (45) – supporting his masculinity even more.

His connection to the people of the land is, however, described in a more ideological, Marxist contrast between the “working class” and the “bankers and capitalists” (46), of which Brown notes:

Kelly was not of them and had no sympathy with them, for blood and bone, he was of the people– of the Australia which had fought at Eureka and was building a nation with its sweat, and carrying on in a new land the age-old struggle waged against the princes of Europe. (46)

This class struggle is given as a motive why “after three years of steady work Kelly [...] opened large scale war on the wealthy stock-owners” (47). Ned is supported in this cause by his fellow commoners, becoming “a more powerful influence in this part of the world than wealth and police authority itself” (48). And he speaks out for his supporters, advising the rich “to subscribe a sum and give it to the poor of their district” as then the poor will stand by them and “if the poor are on his side he will lose nothing by it. If [the rich] depend on the police they will be drove to destruction.” (49)

Ned Kelly is assisted by “hundreds of poor farmers” and cheered on by “the lower classes of the city”, much to the distress of the “infuriated” upper classes who are demoralised by the failures of the police and the many successes of the gang. (104-5) The outlaw uses the money taken from the banks “as a fighting fund to pay expenses of all who had helped to make the campaign a success” (106), acting to deserve the growing popular respect (see chapter 3.9), while these same people are alienated by newspapers of the day describing them as “a meeting of thieves, prostitutes and foolish persons” (254).

J. J. Kenneally

Kenneally also keeps this aspect strong, although Ned’s physical condition is supposed rather than directly described (e.g. Kenneally 1/6) and the nature of Kelly’s social position is depicted more in terms of a well-knit local network (e.g.

10/3, 13/3) defending itself against “a leaven of dishonest men who refused to live entirely within the law” who manipulated the authorities, gaining influence over the police for their own gain (1/1).

3.8 Ned Kelly, the hero (the manhood ideal)

The idyllic male hero is first and foremost an icon of manhood, more recently tempered by the modern gentlemanly ideal. A comparison will thus be made with the qualities listed in subchapter 1.2.2 – as an exception to the standard format, the separate qualities will be discussed in subchapters of their own and at each time all three portrayals will be compared; in a number of cases, these attributes are discussed in other chapters and the reader will thus be referred to the appropriate section for more details.

Performative excellence

Discussed partly in chapter 3.2 and elsewhere. It is not only performance, but “masterful execution” (Gilmore 113) that is the sign of a great man – and if so, Ned Kelly is great in all three books. He is described as an amazing horseman (Carey 245, 361; Brown 97; Kenneally 6/2), a wonderful shot – he does not miss (Carey 358; Brown 68, 72-3; Kenneally 2/4), a powerful fighter (Carey 18, 215; Brown 40; Kenneally-b 18) and even a masterful orator (indirectly Carey 360; Brown 51, 247; Kenneally 21/6). Carey includes one more area for Ned to excel in – wrestling, when he defeats the fearsome Wild Wright in a boxing match (Carey 217). Gilmore notes:

Because it symbolizes all other skills, wrestling ability is, above all, the measure of a man and a symbolic arena for self-promotion[.] (Gilmore 89)

Thus this detail added by Carey serves to maximise Ned’s manhood status.

Public activity in masculine company

This quality is missing in all two of the texts, most pronouncedly in Peter Carey, where Ned is depicted as rather asocial, staying mostly only at home or in hiding with his three mates. Brown notes that prior to Glenrowan they were “cut off from simple, free-and-easy relationships with ordinary people” (Brown 191). Either way, Ned’s public activity is limited to the two bank robberies, the day before the Glenrowan siege, and a varying number of disputable or dreamlike forays into night-time gatherings (e.g. Carey 387, Brown 115). Kenneally, however, has the gang resting in the comfort of the wider Kelly family (Kenneally 13/3) and attending

“socials and dances among their friends” (14/2), creating an image of Ned as a socially active and successful man.

Although Ned’s other qualities redeem him to the extent that the writers throw no negative light on him for this lack of public activity¹¹, its effect can be seen in the (albeit minority) questioning of his heterosexuality, which has considerable basis on his time spent secreted away with his mates (cf. Smyth 206).

No fear of pain or death...

...showing a willingness to protect family and honour at any cost, and proven by visible acts of daring.

The first part is discussed in chapter 3.3 and is shown by all three narratives. The second part is accounted for in all three texts, among other, by Ned’s refusal to bow down to the police and by the daring displays of horsemanship Kelly gives on more than one occasion (see Performative excellence above). Carey goes into more detail and thus gives his Ned more specific opportunities to show his daring, such as when he punches the big and fearsome Harry Power (Carey 154), when he brushes past the cowardly police (261), or when he declares he will never abandon his mates or his mother and child (337). Another such moment common to all the texts is when a heavily injured Ned steps out in his armour to meet the police at Glenrowan (Carey 414, Brown 211, Kenneally 18/5).

Impressive physical constitution and dexterity

Discussed in chapter 3.7. All three authors portray Ned as a physically strong and healthy person. Carey stresses this even more by contrasting him with the two men closest to his bushranger image: Harry Power and Joe Byrne. Both are described on occasions as unhealthy and obnoxious – while the former’s “bowel were v. badly twisted” (Carey 85) and his mouth probably smelled from not cleaning his teeth (91), the latter also becomes “afflicted by the diarrhoea” (335) and becomes “pale and sick he had no charm” (344). This serves to subtly bring out Ned as the masculine ideal, as:

Good health signified a variety of aesthetic, physical and moral traits, producing a man who was attractive, pleasing and calm, who held himself upright and walked with an energetic step, and whose internal organs functioned efficiently and harmoniously. (Forth 67)

11 Considering Australia’s low population density in rural areas, the vastness of the land and the hardships endured, it was nothing unusual for groups of men to be out of touch with the broader society for long periods of time, and for families on distant farms to keep mostly to themselves.

Provisioning dependants

Discussed in chapters 3.3 and 3.7. Ned takes care of his family and the people who support him, he is strong, capable and productive in all versions of the story. Although he does not completely succeed in providing for his kin when outlawed, his ability to do so is undoubted at any time and his efforts are frustrated only because of the array of forces turned against him. He is more successful in providing for his supporters and, in a metaphorical sense, in providing a voice to the oppressed.

In this, Ned Kelly acquires the reputation and symbolic greatness in par with the likes of the legendary English Robin Hood, Scottish Rob Roy or William Wallace, the Carpatho-Ruthenian Nikola Šuhaj or the Japanese kyokyaku (Gilmore 191), an outlaw fighting against unjust persecution, punishing the evil and helping the poor and the weak – a national myth (see chapter 3.9). And like all of the aforementioned, he is eternalised by the poets and artists his story inspires (cf. Forth 90).

Loyalty to social class

Discussed in chapter 3.7. Ned Kelly is shown to be completely loyal in all three narratives. He represents the poor, the common people, especially the selectors of rural Australia and all those oppressed by the dominating social elite, and it is them he fights for and them he vindicates by his refusal to bow down to persecution. Ned's successes resisting farcical attempts to capture him and his smoothly operated bank robberies cause the police to become the laughing stock of a broad range of the populace that already holds them in contempt, and are thus victories that the common folk celebrate on his behalf.

Assertive courtship & potency in procreation

Discussed in chapter 3.4. Kenneally does not write on the subject. Brown shows women to be dazzled by Ned, though he is also said to be "friendly but shy" (184). Only Carey makes him actually successful, and that on the very first occasion he tries to court a woman – with immediate results, though the reasons Mary Hearn accepts him are not clear (he could possibly be considered a prostitute's customer). Carey's Ned is also potent in procreation, a child on the way soon after the relationship is begun.

Respectfulness to women and elders

Discussed in chapter 3.4. Ned does not get into much contact with the elderly, but he is shown as very respectful to women in all cases, though to a lesser degree in

True History. He does not hurt them and speaks politely to them. Especially in Kenneally he is shown to pay women special consideration as during both the bank robberies in Euroa and Jerilderie he asks about the lady of the house's state of health so as not to cause them any hurt or grievance. In a slight negation of this attribute, Carey's Ned is capable of speaking less than respectfully to his own mother, sending her away angry and somewhat insulted from a visit (Carey 207).

Personal autonomy

This is discussed mainly in chapters 3.2 and 3.3. Ned's refusal to give up his freedom and refusal to back down against the domination of stronger forces makes him symbolic of this trait in all three of his portrayals, though with some differences. While the *Inner History* depicts him as almost completely unhampered by the laughable police efforts to find him, *Australian Son* does show him to be severely constrained by his outlawed status in the months preceding the Glenrowan siege. Carey has Ned forced into certain actions by circumstances and partially enthralled by his lover Mary Hearn, but at the same time his fierce need for independence leads him to repeatedly rebel and strike out against his antagonisers no matter the odds stacked against him.

Self-assurance and leadership in war and strategy

Carey's Ned refers to himself as the "Captain" (Carey 371) and is the one who ultimately decides what the gang will do. He is also portrayed as a strategic mastermind in his preparations of the Euroa and Jerilderie robberies and he himself suggest as much, showing self-assurance, when preparing the (unsuccessful) Glenrowan encounter:

The Commissioner thought he were the servant of Her Majesty the Queen but he were my puppet on a string he ordered the Special train as I desired [...] they never imagined they would be captives in a drama devised by me. (400)

Brown and Kenneally give much the same impression. Brown writes of "unsurpassed brilliance of psychological and tactical insight" (Brown 135) and Kenneally quotes Ellen Kelly saying: "My boy Ned would have been a great general in the big war – another Napoleon – whichever side he was on would have won." (Kenneally 1/3)

The gentleman

Based on the previous subchapters, the character of Ned Kelly appears to be depicted very much as that of the generalised masculine ideal. His prowess in reading, writing and strategy may lead the reader to consider Ned Kelly the true

man of modern times, achieving a synthesis of physical fitness and mental ability, rough manliness and tempered manners. (cf. Forth 43, 89)

Although Ned is shown more as a proponent of a “rugged, courageous manliness of action” (cf. Gilmore 176), he is also fully capable of the self-control and civility of the more gentlemanly aspect of manhood. (cf. Gilmore 163, Forth 60)

However, this image is not quite stable, and the straightforwardly idyllic picture is not even attempted, as it is filled with the cracks of contradiction and controversy. Rather, a hero is formed who is – with his questionable status – all the more suitable for a disillusioned postmodern world (cf. O’Reilly 4).

3.9 Ned Kelly, the Australian (the national symbol)

There is no doubt that Ned Kelly is one (indeed it seems the most conspicuous) of Australia’s national symbols. It is one of the first things noted in any study of the subject. The reasons for this are also broadly agreed upon, though focus may be placed on various aspects – to quote some opinions on the matter:

Who else is so famously Australian? [...] Who else so potently conjures up the essence of Australianness, as it is stereotypically conceived, involving such qualities as doggedness, populist appeal, and lack of deference for such Establishment as the nation may boast? (McFarlane 26)

Doggedness, populist appeal and lack of deference for the establishment – a somewhat self-ironising view of Australia’s stereotypical character, which shows a similar kind of humour as in Graham Seal’s summary:

Ned Kelly has become Australia’s only real national hero. The image that is perpetuated by this interaction embraces the paradoxes and concerns of the Australian character. Yes, Ned Kelly was a murderer, but he only shot policemen, who have never been very popular in Australia anyway. He robbed the rich, perhaps not to help the poor, but at least to show that the wealthy and the powerful could not always have things their own way. Finally, and most important, Ned Kelly was ‘game’. He fought for what he believed in, and died for it. (Seal 15)

Ned Kelly is considered far from perfect, but it is his paradoxical status that makes him so genuinely Australian. He does not bow down to the authorities nor the rich and powerful, and he is brave, keeping true to himself at all costs.

A slightly different and more profound view is given by Deborah Bird Rose in her study on the Aboriginal stories of Ned:

As myth-dream Ned Kelly is both invader and outcast; his position encodes the longing to belong and the fear that white Australians will never belong – will always be castaways in the continent of Australia. (Rose 184)

This harkens to a much deeper emotionality than the tongue-in-cheek somewhat critical remarks quoted previously. It denotes something of the hybrid “in-between” identity addressed by Homi K. Bhaba (McLeod 217) – the liminality of a white Australian culture walking the tight-rope between their European origins and their far-from-European home country, giving an all the more pressing reason for the nation-establishing efforts of late colonial and early after-colonial literature (see chapter 1.1.3). Kelly the bushranger is emblematic of this ambivalence, but at the same time he serves to more firmly anchor white Australia to Australia itself.

Even his “vocation” is iconic of a new, independent culture. Although a bushranger “is essentially the same as the outlaws or bandits of any nation” (Seal 9), the image that builds up suggests Kelly is not simply a bank robber, a gangster, a criminal or any of the other specific characters of cultures worldwide – he is a bushranger. (Kušnír 38) He is the specifically Australian outlaw as unique to the country as every country is unique unto the rest of the world.

It seems pointless to prove again that the character shown in the previous chapters does in fact coincide with the demands meted out by the descriptions above. Rather, the following lines will examine how the three authors proclaim this Australian popularity and “symbolhood”.

Peter Carey

Although it might seem conceited if Ned talked of his own popularity, Carey manages to pull off a good number of mentions to Ned’s fame without giving the impression the bushranger is bragging. The first such case, showing he is well known in the area, is when he is approached by an influential innkeeper to set up a boxing match, Ned remarks: “ I knew him both by sight and reputation I were most surprised to learn he had any knowledge of me whatsoever.” (Carey 211)

This is in Ned’s full prime, before he is outlawed. At the end of the (victorious) match, Carey makes use of the rare moment Joe Byrne is made author of the lines to unreservedly glorify Kelly, raising him to god-like status: “On that day you was Jesus Christ Almighty even Father Duffy come to worship you.” This is immediately confirmed by Ned, but at the same time humbly downplayed and even complained of: “As a result of winning the fight I become what is known as popular which were even worse than being hated as a traitor[.]” (217)

When robbing the Euroa bank, Ned talks to a group of “men they was Australians [...] the historic memory of UNFAIRNESS were in their blood” (359-60, capitals original), implying that experience with unjust persecution is an innate Australian trait. He tells them his version of the Fitzpatrick incident and Stringybark Creek. The result is complete acceptance by representatives of the whole society:

In the hut at Faithfull’s Creek I seen proof that if a man could tell his true history to Australians he might be believed [...] And lo they did applaud us with their eyes bright their faces red bank managers & overseers & ex policemen[.] (360-1)

Everyone not only believes Ned, but applauds him, showing him active support and acceptance – even members of elite and otherwise hostile social groups: financiers, work leaders and the police.

Ned is also glorified by proximity, when he notes of his mates on the eve of the Glenrowan battle:

Dan & Joe come back in from the night then all eyes went reverently to those armour’d men. Them boys was noble of true Australian coin. (407)

The impression that is given is that they (and by relation Ned) are heroes of the nation, the Australian version of the noble knight in shining armour. They are not fake pretenders to such a status, but they are “true” – authentic in their Australian character, the best that Australia has to offer that no other nation can provide.

In the last-but-one chapter of the book, Carey gives a nod to the whimsical self-derogative humour exemplified above, as he includes a comment by one of Kelly’s detractors, the schoolmaster Thomas Curnow, which completes the picture:

What is it about we Australians, eh? he demanded. What is wrong with us? Do we not have a Jefferson? A Disraeli? Might not we find someone better to admire than a horse-thief and a murderer? Must we always make such an embarrassing spectacle of ourselves? (419)

As O’Reilly notes, Australians “*do not* have a Jefferson or a Disraeli” (O’Reilly 4; italics original) and it is their admiration for Ned Kelly and the character traits he represents that make Australian culture stand out in a global context.

Max Brown

Brown has it easier than Carey, as he maintains a clear voice throughout the book and is able to comment on such matters without fear of showing Ned as boastful. The foreword itself might suffice, giving testament to the bushranger’s Australian importance and defending him with a heart-felt conviction:

Yet, I suspect, that behind the name of evil given these young men was a certain worth little understood then or now, which, in a perverse way, put the seal of manhood on our young

Australian nation; and that their fame, which made the bushland ring, will therefore never cease to ring in Australian hearts. [...]

Strange that four such young men, born of the soil, educated by few books, but by the deeds of men and the signs of earth, should live so briefly and be remembered so long in spite of the fiercest campaign of calumny the young colony had witnessed.

People are not remembered for nothing[.] (Brown 9)

As in the *True History*, Ned's conversation with the men and women in Faithfull Creek shows that "the more he spoke, the more attentive and sympathetic became his audience" (96) who then entertain "respect and admiration which Kelly engendered wherever he went[.]" (97).

The gang's successful robbery of the Euroa bank becomes a defining moment – the "upper classes were infuriated" (104), but the reaction of the common Australians is described in a grand scale, encompassing the full scope of the continent:

But the poor, from The Bluff to the tropic of Capricorn, talked constantly of Kelly. The kids ran barefooted down to the corner or out to the butter box perched on a gum-tree beside the road to get the papers. And by word of mouth, from pub to pub, along ten thousand miles of roads and rough bush tracks, yellow at noon and purple in the twilight, spread and grew the legend of four bush lads who were to imagine nothing better than to live and love lightheartedly and die in nonentity along the green plains between their stony hills. (105)

Nothing quite trumps this magnificent visionary description, but further moments appear to affirm Ned's position: bush ballads and children playing "Police and the Kellys" (136), remembering Glenrowan where "these raw Australians evinced that fabulous quality of toughness" (226), crowds of people rushing to "catch a glimpse of the man whose deeds of blood and defiance had sent such thrills of horror and admiration across the continent" (232), a note on Ned's jolly humour (194, 251), petitions signed by people from the whole country (252) from all levels of society (256) – this all cut short by Ned's death, and yet culminating in the aftermath with a commentary that is at once humbly simple and powerfully edifying:

An old man recorded in later years: "Bourke Street lit by gaslight– the crowds silent and subdued as if some debacle had occurred. The verdict of old residents is that he was a much injured man who would have made a brave citizen of the world if fate had allowed." (262)

J. J. Kenneally

Kenneally writes of the Kelly family's local popularity (Kenneally 1/3), and he defends them vigorously from the "large section of Australia's bitterly anti-Kelly

Press and equally bitter authors of so-called Kelly Gang books” (1/5); at various moments Kenneally writes of some popular legend or speculation (1/6, 10/2, 18/7-8) – it is clear that Ned Kelly was famous, but from the determination with which the *Inner History* attempts to clear his name, the impression is given that Ned’s status is far from decided and must be fought for.

On the other hand, Kenneally also gives account of the Faithful Creek event and writes that “wherever Ned Kelly explained to the public how his people had been persecuted by the police he made very many friends” (6/2); people sing songs in praise of the gang (9/4); during Ned’s trial “an immense public meeting was held” in his support (21/7). And the popularity of Ned’s character is also testified to by the *Inner History* being “eagerly bought up”, as the author declares in his closing letter to the Australian government (22/5).

3.10 Ned Kelly, the supernatural figure

What haunts us there is the enigma of the man, the unknown body that hides behind that strangely archaic and yet strangely modern suit of armour. (Innes 85)

The essence of Ned Kelly’s heroic character, mythical status and enigmatic narrative almost begs for supernatural elements to appear and be used – and they are. This aspect is more pronounced in Peter Carey, not so much as attributes of Ned himself, but in uncanny occurrences and in the depiction of Irish folk superstitions (from stories told by his mother; Carey 47) come true. These bring about a very powerful imagery, creating a dominant mythology that overshadows the Christian markers (see chapter 3.6) which are shown to weaken in contrast: while “St. Brigit had lost her power” (108), the Banshee is a real figure that Ned’s mother has to banish with the swing of her axe (107).

Harry Power’s incantation for his bunions (101), the antics of the intelligent horse Daylight (158), the amazing horse-charming ability of George King (233), or the scary resemblance of James Kelly to Ned’s dead dad (47) could all be explained as subjective interpretations of events caused by a superstitious and slightly fantastical mind. However, myth becomes reality in a way that is hard to reconcile with a positivist view of the world¹² with the appearance of the Banshee, the non-

12 Of course, a claim of insanity or hallucination would suffice as an explanation, and this would be an acceptable interpretation of the literary text considering that the narrative is given from Ned’s very specific viewpoint. However, it would be a refusal of trust alienating the reader from the fictional world of the narrator.

human substitute boy (136) and the rat charmer that curses his mother's hut with a plague of rats (200).

None of the aforementioned occurrences seem to have an immediate effect on the development of the main storyline, they are more independent events adding to the overall atmosphere. The brief mention of his mother's clairvoyant dream (154), however, touches on the Ned Kelly myth more directly as it connects with other versions of the story (see below) and gives Ned's life a prophetic resonance.

Ned himself comes closest to the supernatural in the prologue of the *True History*, in the most iconic Ned Kelly scene – with the sun rising on a besieged Glenrowan, Ned is described as a “creature”:

It was nothing human, that much was evident. It had no head but a very long thick neck and an immense chest and it walked with a slow ungainly gait directly into a hail of bullets. Shot after shot was fired without effect[.] (Carey 3)

Such a depiction evokes imagery of headless ghosts, of the long thick necks of serpents and dragons, the enormous bodies and plodding tread of giants, the invulnerability of monstrous beings. However, this otherworldly character is subverted in the epilogue that returns to the same moment with a parallel script, but a wholly different commentary which serves to show him at once as a mere man, and at the same time to give him all the more recognition for overcoming his human frailty:

But he was not the Monitor, he was a man of skin and shattered bone with blood squelching in his boot. The Martini-Henry bullets slammed against him and he was jolted and jarred, his head slammed sideways, yet he would not stop. (418)

Carey depicts Ned as “a man of skin and shattered bone” – vulnerable, mortal, human – who transcends to grasp and achieve in part the supernatural status of the enigmatic forces that surround and effect his life.

Max Brown

Although Max Brown professes to give as honest an account of the story as possible, he mentions many moments which hearsay have transformed into the fantastical. He mentions several legends in his foreword, but he then notes:

It is not legend– it is truth– that, in this hour, bleeding from his many wounds and staggering under his hundred pounds of plough-shares through the mist and half-light of the morning to

join his mates, Kelly actually did assume supernatural proportions in the eyes of the troopers, who cried out to each other: "It's the bunyip!"¹³ It is the devil himself!" (Brown 13)

Brown recognises that this aspect of Ned is important and that many saw him and see him as "approaching the stature of god or devil" (13).

Ned Kelly is endowed with prophetic powers, as he foretells that Constable Lonigan will be the first man he shoots (51), or that his judge, Sir Barry, will follow him to the afterlife (263).

Unlike in Carey, there is no mention of Irish myths, no Banshee wailing in the dark, no substitute boy. However, Ned's mother is also shown to have visionary dreams (233).

Glenrowan is the culminating point of the Kelly gang's adventures and it is there that Ned Kelly achieves the most epic and mythic proportions – as noted in the foreword – it is proof of the paradox of his character that he appears the most invincible at the moment he is injured, captured, and (physically) defeated. He cannot be hurt, because he is "in iron" (203). The police are so "awed of the fabulous name of Kelly" (209) that in their minds the outlaws achieve gargantuan levels of power:

By a simple misunderstanding the police became even more scared, and envisaged thirty armoured and desperate men ready to sally out from behind the hotel walls. (204)

When Kelly lurches out through the mists, he is everyone's greatest fear, the guardsmen scream "It's a ghost!", "It's old Nick himself", and "it's the bunyip", adding "He's bullet-proof!" (210) The police open fire and in this last glorious moment of freedom, the mortal man transcends into myth, all the more supported by the human frailty he overcomes:

Kelly, in spite of his wounded foot and arm, continued to advance, laughing derisively, bearing his great weight of iron, staggering under the impact of the shots, and firing deliberately but without accuracy at the inner ring of police. (211)

J. J. Kenneally

Kenneally is more intent on defending what he considers a great man from slander and injustice, but even so some supernatural elements appear – though they are not central to his case, they add to Ned's status and seem to be considered an undeniable part of the "complete inner history" of the gang.

13 "Bunyip" is the term for a dreaded Australian mythical creature, an enigmatic and terrifying spirit.

Ned's prophetic warning to Lonigan is described and upheld as "Ned Kelly had not recognized Lonigan when he fired the fatal shot" (Kenneally 1/5). Ned's supposed prowess reaches literally "superhuman" heights as his enemy Aaron Sherritt uses the descriptor and looks "upon him as invulnerable", and in the words of Superintendent Hare: "Nearly everyone in the district thought him invincible." (14/3)

The siege at Glenrowan is not mythicised to significant degree, and Ned's last stand is described matter-of-factly (18/5), though it is afterwards mentioned, in line with Brown but without the phantasmagorical effect, that: "One of the police thought Ned Kelly was a ghost; some thought it was the devil." (18/6) The police's hugely inflated fears are later commented on with considerable satire:

It was, apparently, feared that the two youths – Dan Kelly and Steve Hart – would, in broad daylight, overcome the fifty armed policemen, and then, carrying heavy armour, escape on horseback. (20/3)

Ned's "challenge" to Judge Barry and the man's death twelve days after Kelly's execution is also included (21/7), a reminder of Kelly's prophetic powers that reinforces the overall impression that the bushranger is an extraordinary man.

3.11 Ned Kelly, the contradicting views

In his historic persona he is, to some white Australians, a man of monumental, and tragic, proportions. To others he is a quintessential Australian outcast – horse thief, murderer, Irishman and Catholic. (Rose 183-4)

Although to a casual observer the person of Ned Kelly may seem, now, to have been unequivocally assessed, the defensive and/or mindfully balanced way in which most articles about Ned Kelly begin shows that, even today, there is no easy consensus on what sort of man the bushranger was (cf. Rose 183, Innes 83 etc.). But if the person's demeanour is ambiguous now, it was all the more so in the past and during his lifetime. It may be useful to compare how and to what extent this contradiction of views is admitted in the three texts analysed in this paper, and how they work to diffuse or develop this aspect of Ned.

Peter Carey

As can be construed from the previous chapters, Peter Carey approaches Ned's character in a positive manner overall. On the other hand, he describes many

moments of human imperfection, which contrast with the heroic and representational image of the bushranger and create ambiguity. A young adult Ned is depicted as brooding and overcome with hate, wishing for nothing less than to kill his stepfather (cf. Carey 206, 208), he is always quick to anger with a dangerously explosive temper (cf. 209, 237, 368). The valiant Australian admits to being “very afraid” (284) and is not without mistakes, as when he shoots a surrendering Sergeant Kennedy, thinking the man is raising his pistol hand. The fact haunts him the following night:

All night I had bad dreams very confused I saw Kennedy raising his hand to surrender and me shooting him again & again. (294)

But although such remarks suggest imperfection, a negative trait, they serve rather to build Carey’s Ned as a realistic human who might be admired all the more for overcoming his own failings.

What is more important for this aspect is the subjectivity and unreliability of the narrator which undermine his trustworthiness. This harkens to what Huggan calls “a manipulation of collective memory”:

As with other mythic narratives surrounding oppositional figures like the outlaw, the Kelly legend continues to depend on a manipulation of collective memory [...] notable for its strategic omissions [...] and for its highly selective reading of a number of often far from reliable historical sources. (Huggan 142-3)

The reader cannot know whether Carey’s Ned has told everything and whether the information he has given is correct and accurate. Even if the narrator was trying to give as full an account as possible, he is failed by his memory and his emotions. When Steve Hart joins the gang, Kelly tries to order him away, doubting his abilities and especially his loyalty. This angers the younger Hart, who claims that Ned has helped him and his family a number of times in the past. To which Kelly admits:

I had no memory of this at all. (Carey 250)

This admission is startlingly significant in its plain and open abruptness and when contrasted with the detailed description of Ned’s past deeds crammed into the previous 250 pages. The reader is shown that there are gaps in the story. Gaps which are not visible, gaps without warning or mention. Gaps which cannot be filled in even when the narrator is directed towards them – Ned has no memory of the events and is not capable of recalling anything about it even after having it brought to his attention.

Another situation where contradicting views and versions are touched on is the so-called Fitzpatrick Incident, when Constable Fitzpatrick makes a solitary visit to

the Kelly home and returns with a wounded hand and the claim that Ned tried to kill him. Ned gives his own view, in which the policeman's hand is shot in self-defence and in which Ned actually saves a despicable Fitzpatrick from a furious Mrs Kelly. The contrast between the official police version of the event and the "real" one of the bushranger is commented on with some bitterness:

If you have read Cons Fitzpatrick's sworn statement you will not know of our kindness to the snivelling cur. (Carey 272)

Carey brushes on this conflict of opposite renditions on many occasions when his protagonist reminds the reader that he is not the person the government claims him to be and that various matters have been either misconstrued or suppressed (cf. 276, 356, 377 etc.). Ned stoutly refuses the brutal image that the press draws of him, e.g. when they claim he not only shot but also mutilated Sergeant Kennedy (313).

Finally, direct mention is made of Ned's inability to accurately perceive his own behaviour and appearance. On discovering that instead of making 500 copies, Mr Gill the printer has given his "Jerilderie letter" to the police, Ned tries to master his anger and to appear non-plussed, but the result is somewhat different:

I imagined myself v. calm but Joe later told me the pupils of my eyes had turned an unholy red. Goodnight said I or so I'm told then turned and walked out of the window. (382)

Ned is so overwhelmed by his emotions that he does not know what he did or said in the moment. It is his trusted companion Joe Byrne who later fills him in on the situation, allowing him to write the above description. A contrast is made between Ned's view of his words, actions and bearing, and the view of other parties, accepting and assimilating the dissonance which has accompanied the historical Ned Kelly from the beginning of his active life.

Max Brown

Due to the nature of the book, *Australian Son* is much more direct and open in its comments on the contradictory approaches to the bushranger. As Brown notes right from the beginning in his preface:

Strange that four such young men, born of the soil, educated by few books, but by the deeds of men and the signs of earth, should live so briefly and be remembered so long in spite of the fiercest campaign of calumny the young colony had witnessed. (Brown 9)

Brown is open in his support for Kelly the hero and the mention of the opposite view is used, in an effect similar to Peter Carey, to heighten the magnificence of the man and his mates. At the same time it must be noted that Brown is very open

about the fact that not all is known about the bushranger's life, deeds and motives, and that much is masked in hearsay and legend (cf. 11-12).

Australian Son offers both sides of the Fitzpatrick Incident, but this becomes more interesting when compared to the version of Carey's Ned: Brown's Ned is said to have been completely absent from the whole affair and he protests the allegation primarily for that reason (Brown 54-55). Having fled into hiding, the Kelly gang's actions become loose of the stabilising effect of factual evidence: not so much the what, when and where, but mainly the how and why are left to the mercy of rabid imagination. Brown notes that the shooting of Sergeant Kennedy, for instance, has attracted the wildest of tales, from a ghoulish mutilation of the ear of a dying man to a heroic duel between two gentlemen (73). Although he cites newspaper articles from the time, as a whole their interpretation of events is shown to be lacking – they serve to represent the opposing view of Ned Kelly as a malicious criminal (cf. Brown 78, 104; see also chapter 3.5).

As concerns this aspect of Ned, therefore, the overarching idea of *Australian Son* is the one mentioned earlier: that the lack of real, reliable information makes it difficult to decide what is the truth for a large part of the bushranger's life. Brown repeatedly reminds the reader of this absence of knowledge and of the various possible interpretation of multiple situations (cf. 163, 166, 175, 201, 219 etc.). As a whole, this means that contradiction and ambiguity are a visible part of Max Brown's Ned Kelly, albeit in his assessment of the bushranger the author chooses to accept the positive interpretation as the one closest to the truth.

J. J. Kenneally

It could be possible to say that there are no contradicting views in Kenneally, only the noble truth put forth to combat false slander. At the same time the ambiguity of Ned's character is as much an important part of the Inner History as of the other two texts, in that Kenneally vigorously denounces the “dangerous criminal” version of the story and, considering the date of publication (1929), is one of the first to publish a complete text arguing the “hero and victim” approach to Ned Kelly. As such, he pitted the one interpretation against the other, quite possibly supporting the ambiguity that later authors have been careful to comment on and that Kenneally himself clearly refuses in his defence of the bushranger (see also chapter 3.5 herein).

A note on the three titles

An interesting pointer to each of the author's approaches are the titles they chose for their texts. Kenneally's *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang and their*

Pursuers immediately suggests a number of things. “History” denotes a focus on real events, “inner” claims a source of information close to the gang, that the author has “insider” knowledge of the people and their actions. “Complete” gives the impression that nothing will be left out, so that a full, objective revealing of the truth and nothing but the truth will be given. And “their pursuers” with its connotations of aggression tells the reader who are the “goodies” and who the “baddies”.

To compare this with the other two titles, Max Brown’s *Australian Son* contains no claims of truth or complete knowledge, but in using the positively connoted family word “son” it also shows which side it takes. Peter Carey’s *True History of the Kelly Gang*, on the other hand, does not declare where its loyalty lies. Instead it focuses on the other aspect found in Kenneally’s title, that is the claim of historical truth. This claim is in pretence only, a touch of satire, as becomes clear from the content of the book and the form it uses (as discussed in previous chapters), but its use shows how important the question of truth is to the topic. Carey’s title also draws from its connection to two similar-sounding titles of older books: J. J. Kenneally’s aforementioned *Inner History* (1929) and C. H. Chomley’s *The True Story of the Kelly Gang of Bushrangers* (1900)¹⁴. If known to the reader, this paraphrase could increase the ambiguity of Carey’s title, as while Kenneally is a staunch supporter of Ned Kelly, Chomley is very critical of him. (cf. Eggert 3)

14 Chomley, C. H. *The True Story of the Kelly Gang of Bushrangers*. Melbourne : Wyatt & Watts, [1900].

Conclusion

I do not pretend that I have led a blameless life or that one fault justifies another; but the public, judging a case like mine, should remember that the darkest life may have a bright side, and after the worst has been said against a man, he may, if he is heard, tell a story in his own rough way, that will lead them to soften the harshness of their thoughts against him, and find as many excuses for him as he would plead for himself. (Ned Kelly in Max Brown's *Australian Son*, p. 247)

The above quote, credited to Ned Kelly himself (though whether the real man or the fictional one, it is up to the reader to decide if it makes any difference), does well to sum up the essence of this famous narrative. For it is not the character of the man itself which determines his audience's sympathies, but rather the "own rough way" in which it is presented. The story of Ned Kelly remains deep within Australian cultural memory, the "collective activity occurring in the present in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future" (Huggan 151), and this specific chunk of cultural memory seems to have developed as much as it has expanded.

The Ned Kelly presented by Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* certainly has a complex and intriguing personality and his self-narrative fulfils many roles. A great prominence is given to his years of childhood and youth and it is in these aspects that the reader gets closely acquainted with him – his stubborn, somewhat naïve, family-bonded, heartfelt fighting spirit – these attributes remain the same throughout his adult life. His relationship with his mother is one of emotional dependency. His relationships with women are non-existent until the sudden, passionate affair with Mary Hearn that makes him a father avowing marriage – only for mother and child to disappear with equal suddenness and with hardly any lasting impact on Ned. The bushranger is forced into his criminal life by unfair circumstances, killing only in self-defence and stealing only from the rich who surely came by their great property through foul play. He is drenched in Irish Catholic culture, crosses himself at any given moment and does not doubt a priest's words on the rare occasions he meets one, but does not let this hinder his actions. He is of the untamed country, his body honed by physical hardship, a man of the common people – and the common people claim him as their own. He is the stuff of heroes,

a man of true grit – a master at all he does, fearless, loyal unto death, fending for those who need him, never bowing down to oppression, sexually potent, rough yet gallant, a captain of men. He is *the* Australian. He is the dark figure treading through the mists, bullets bouncing away. He is myth immortalised by man.

This turn-of-the-21st-century Ned does differ from his post- and pre-World War II alter egos, though a clear evolutionary pattern is hard to map: the changes are not as streamlined as could be hoped and in some cases, Max Brown's version comes closer to Carey than to Kenneally. Both *Australian Son* and *Inner History* practically leave out Kelly the boy and only Brown mentions Kelly the youth in any detail, with no focus on a gruelling apprenticeship passage into manhood, which is a distinct and important part of *True History*. Both Kenneally and Brown depict Ned's feelings for his mother as those expected of a son. Both show Ned as dazzling the ladies, yet without any romantic or sexual relationship and without child – a weaker depiction of the sexual potency criterium of manhood. Kenneally is much more unambiguous on Ned's impeccable character. Both make a clearer point of Ned following Christian values, while Brown includes faith markers more frequently (but less than the Catholic-culture markers in the *True History*). Brown shows Ned's connection with the poor in a more class-struggle ideology, making Kenneally closer to Carey in this. Brown is closer to Carey in depicting Ned and his gang as rather secluded, whereas Kenneally imagines them as socialites. Both paint a less detailed, less "manhood-making", but cleaner image of Ned's heroism. Brown surpasses Kenneally and Carey in open claims of Ned's status of Australian national symbol. While Brown and Kenneally remain within the scope of realism, *Australian Son* is slightly closer to Carey in the frequency and detailing of mythical occurrences. These differences show that a haziness and variance in detail and interpretation are fundamental to the Ned Kelly character and narrative.

The attributes that hold strong throughout all three comparisons (with varying levels of emphasis) are: the strong family bond of the Kellys – the family members keep together, protect each other and share a headstrong disposition; Kelly's long-lasting troubles with unjustified police persecution which force him into killing – Ned's criminal acts are either police slander or the desperate reactions of an unjustly hunted man; Ned's Catholic cultural background – projected not so much in his morals, but rather in occasional moments of his speech and towards the end of his life when captured at Glenrowan, at the trial and before his execution; his physical hardiness and the reciprocal support of the common people – standing together against the oppression of a corrupt and elitist city-based police force; his heroic manliness – as shown in his performative excellence, fearlessness, loyalty and a myriad of other facets; his moments of prophetic utterance – described with

conviction as fact but with no attempt at arguing the matter in detail; the aforementioned unreliability of fact and contradictory essence permeating the narrative.

The bushranger depicted in these three books is at once the same Ned and a different Ned. There is some Chimaeric basis, a ground essence of Kelly that each of the authors call upon to imbue their story with the man's spirit – what we might call the “deep structure of Kelly” that shows itself in a loosely linked chain of events, sometimes bizarre details, quotes attributed to the man or drawn selectively from contemporary news coverage, and personality traits offered to the reader in various guises. These elements are not assessed on the basis of truth and reality, but through the prism of cultural heritage and acceptance. The question is not “Does it match the truth?”, but rather “Does it match the mythical image?”. This deep structure is camouflaged by the often unique and contradictory trappings of the specific text, so that while the “body” of the Ned Kelly character remains buried and solid as stone, the details, the form and the face are very much written in the shifting sands of myth.

A comparison with texts from the “opposite” side of opinion, such as the novels by the police superintendents Francis Hare and John Sadleir, newspaper articles of the majority of the contemporary press or early Kelly Gang books, would certainly show a stark contrast in some aspects (and possibly some surprising similarities), but the confrontational tone might lead to a lop-sided picture of Ned, rather than the gently swaying mosaic recreated herein. As previously noted, it is not so much the character as the story-teller that matters most. The suggested existence of a deep structure to the story does not mean that no version of the story may differ from these tentatively-sensed foundations, but rather that if it does differ or is found insufficient, it will be refused as unacceptable or at the least as flawed. This can be seen in the approach to the many film adaptations of the story, which have yet to produce what could be felt as the definitive Ned Kelly film (cf. McFarlane 26-7, O'Reilly 5, Fitzgerald 58).

To summarise the results, a comparison shall be made with the expectations outlined at the beginning of this paper. Although the achievement of manhood is not of vital importance to all the books (having been emphasised in Carey only), Kelly's manhood status is fundamental and crucial to his character. Differences in story and focus show that many aspects of character and moments of story are subject to the varying approaches of the authors, and ambiguity is present in each text (though Kenneally shows it only in his opposition to any negative criticism). The character of Ned Kelly does indeed differ in each of the books, and more so in

Peter Carey's novel – though not so completely and one-sidedly as was presumed, and the differences are mostly in detail and focus. The mythical aspect does increase in each of the later books, with Kenneally the most interested in appearing to give indisputable facts. However at the same time Kenneally idealises his protagonist, refusing almost any fault, whereas Brown and Carey aim to glorify a flawed man. Ned Kelly is most strongly represented as a victim, a hero and a national symbol, but also as a family member. Peter Carey's choice of viewpoint creates a strong subjectivity which questions the narrator's reliability, destabilises reality by introducing mythical beings, and opens up the protagonist's psychological and sexual identity. However, the *True History of the Kelly Gang* does not seem to question national symbolism, but rather reaffirms it.

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