TO WHAT EXTENT DO HISTORIANS CONTRIBUTE TO THE CULTURAL MEMORY OF NED KELLY?

The role of historians in contributing to the development of Ned Kelly's cultural memory has changed over time, each epoch of historical interrogation revealing the intersection of traditional historical methods and emerging popular depictions that subsume these. Collective cultural memory, obtained through generations of repeated historical practices and construction,[1] refers to the proliferation of significant signs and identities that provide historians with "common frameworks for appropriating the past."[2] Referencing mnemonic historical triggers of a symbolic, institutionalised heritage to which the construction of identity functions within a larger collective,[3] cultural memory is inherently connected to the value systems of the society it is embedded in. In the context of Ned Kelly's legacy, forged and sustained by mass mediatisation, cultural memory functions to ensure the propagation of a dominant myth, in turn conveying a shared identity and knowledge[4] informed by notions of collective class struggle and Australian national identity. Within contemporary reproduction, the entrance of Kelly into popular history has resulted in the continuation of a memory propagated by media producers, signifying a notable transformation in the involvement of historians in shaping prevailing recollection. In this, historians increasingly become guardians of 'historical truth'; popular media and history the means by which this is disseminated within the cultural memory. Considering this, the proliferation of cultural memory within the Australian identity, as propagated by media producers and historians, reveals the multiple temporalities involved in the continuation of Kelly myth; whereby popular representation functions as the dominant narrative of cultural memory.

The theory of cultural memory is dependent on the media in which it is implemented,[5] consequently dominant understandings of Ned Kelly become grounded in accordance with early press representations, revealing the function of forms of popularised history in shaping the collective memory. Coinciding with the modernisation of the newspaper industry and growing mass circulation of media, the embedding of the Kelly Gang's depredations from 1878-1880 within everyday reporting resulted in the accelerated formation of a cultural memory assembled contemporary to Kelly's time. The ability of the press to incorporate heterogeneous voices and synthesis Pro and Anti Kelly rhetoric[6] into dominant understandings resulted in the successful emergence of narrative blocks regarding cultural memory; newspapers functioning as the dominating mode of remembrance during, and immediately preceding, Kelly's evasion of police. Particularly, interpretation continues to exist within the parameters of cultural memory formed by the press; the dominant line of proportion within early construction and criticism.[7] Inseparable from

[1] J Assmann & J Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', in *New German Critique*, vol. 65, 1995, pp. 125-126, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/488538> [accessed 24 April 2023]

[2] A Rigney, 'Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory', in *Journal of European Studies,* vol. 35, 2005, p. 18

[3] J Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', in *Cultural Memory Studies*, vol. 1, 2008, pp. 109–118.

[4] J Assman & J Czaplicaka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', pp. 130-131

[5] N Pethes, Cultural Memory Studies, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, p.10 <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/resources/pdfs/978-1-5275-3311-0-sample.pdf> [accessed 29 April 2023].

[6] L Basu, 'Ned Kelly as Memory Dispositif: Media, Time, Power, and the Development of Australian Identities', De Gruyter, 2012, p. 39

[7] Ibid, p. 24

the multiple temporalities and debates existing around Kelly, the newspapers indulged in versions of both myth-making and demythologising methods of memory building; utilising the outlaw tradition as in pre-existent media forms to "make sense of, interpret, shape, and help to memorialise the Kelly events."[8] The press thus managed to "erect multiple layers of interpretation",[9] building upon, and reinforcing, early foundations of the memory, the sensationalism of events working to imbue the story within the public interest and ensure the memorialisation of Kelly. Such is seen in archival newspaper reports from the time, references to Kelly framed in regards to "excitement in Melbourne throughout yesterday [that] was intense"[10] in which the incorporative capabilities of the news media regarding the events unfolding before them established a memory grounded in popularised media and propelled by public fascination. Historians and prosecutors, such as Charles-Henry Chomley, criticise the legitimacy of newspaper sources, arguing that in their lack of subjectivity and historical foresight the media functioned to perpetuate a popularised myth.[11] Particular, Chomley interrogates extant journalistic sources resulting from the Glenrow siege as they followed a form of 'gonzo journalism',[12] an unconventional style of journalism reliant on the participatory manner of the reporter to relay facts in a subjective and personalised manner. Embedded within the action and eventually becoming actively involved in the siege, the journalists framed future reproduction of the myth; in deciding what to report they directed the dominant narrative of events that transpired and thus became the original producers of cultural memory. Of particular significance remains their first descriptions of Kelly emerging in his armour, with the correspondent of *The Ballarat Sta*r newspaper describing him as "the man in the iron mask."[13] Such referencing of his armour and helmet evident across the reports immediately foregrounded them as mnemonic signifiers within the Kelly memory, becoming the most inspiring prompts to subsequent historians. Within, these foundations of the myth reveal the role of media in the continuation of the cultural memory of Kelly, with the pastiche of press interrogation providing the foundation for his legend over the last 150 years.

Where historians contribute to understandings of historical figures including Ned Kelly, it is popular representations that utilise collectively retained aspects of cultural memory to interrogate dominant myth, in so producing and disseminating prevailing interpretations. The movement towards mythologising and reimagining the role of Kelly within the Australian lexicon is seen in the visual depiction of Kelly expedited by Australian artist Sidney Nolan (1917-1992) within his canonical 1946-47 'Ned Kelly' series. Achieved through creating a visual version of the myth, particulate highlighted in Kelly's armour and helmet, Nolan ultimately embedded Kelly within the long-term cultural memory, presenting him as an emanation of the Australian landscape; an

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[8] Ibid, p. 30

[9] Ibid, p. 34

[10] The Age, 'From the Archives, 1880: Ned Kelly captured after shootout in Glenrowan', in *The Age*, 2021, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/from-the-archives-1880-ned-kelly-captured-after-shootout-in-glenrowan-20210625-p584d2.html> [accessed 13 May 2023].

[11] Chomley, C.H, 'The True Story of The Kelly Gang of Bushrangers.' Read Books Ltd, 2017, p. 68

[12] Mcdonald, W, & K Davies, 'How a "gonzo" press gang forged the Ned Kelly legend', in *UNSW Newsroom*, 2020, <https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/social-affairs/how-gonzo-press-gang-forged-ned-kelly-legend> [accessed 1 June 2023].

[13] "Capture of Ned Kelly". in *Ballarat Star*, Victoria, 30 June 1880, p. 1, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/202512903?searchTerm=ned%20kelly%20iron%20mask> [accessed 11 May 2023].

important impetus in centering Ned Kelly as within the national identity through linkage towards the bushman myth. The series, commenced in a time where Nolan himself was an outlaw; having absconded from the Australian army in 1944 and living under a false identity, is imbued with self expressed autobiographical elements; utilising oral tradition obtained via his grandfather who was a policeman in the hunt.[14] Within, Nolan portrays an elevated view; the subject appealing beyond an artistic level in regards to interest in the Australian identity foregrounded by a concern with the socially cohesive value of myths and the connection of the Kelly story as "arising out of the bush and ending in the bush."[15] Nolan was interested not in producing an 'authentic' version of the story, rather his motivation lay in his "wish to hear more of the stories that take place within the landscape."[16] Drawing considerably on his own interpretation of the myth received in extant written sources such as Historian JJ Kenneally's 1929 pro-Kelly book *The Inner History of the Kelly Gang* that is a culmination of oral tradition and Royal commission evidence,[17] as well as personal experience translated into expressionistic art, Nolan ultimately created an iconic Australian image. Nolan presents a starkly simplified depiction of Kelly in his armour as inspired by his involvement in a modernist movement interested "in myth and the desire for some kind of national identification."[18] The Angry Penguins group, propelled with the revolutionary to liberate the Australian identity in art, represented this movement, drawing from the landscape on the basis of its "expansive mythical and imagist qualities."[19] Nolan's subject choice of Kelly thus enabled him to not only understand the Australian land, arguably at the foreground of the collective memory of Kelly since its emergence, but define the story of a hero within Australian nationalism, thereby creating a personage that challenged existing cultural establishments. Defined in terms of the burgeoning legend of Kelly's bushman identity, the emergence of popular myth thus became the mechanism in which Nolan, occupying a space of acute awareness regarding the significance of Kelly's memory, sustained a unique national identity. Pre-eminently, the repeated use of the stylized armour and helmet established Kelly's story in contemporary global awareness, Nolans attempt to challenge the collective national understanding of Kelly resulting in the emergence of a new dominant perpetuation. The 2000 Sydney Olympic opening ceremony demonstrates the extent to which this version of Kelly has been ingrained in memory, the inclusion of stylised helmets mimetic of "a group of armoured Kelly figures"[20] confirming the continuation of a cultural memory drawn from Nolan. Such mythologised version of Kelly, an enigmatic portrayal that remains in the foreground of his cultural memory, thus reveals the extent in which cultural producers, including Nolan, have produced a popularised history that is the dominant understanding of Ned Kelly.

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[14] NDH Underhill, 'Cultural Advice', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Canberra, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2016, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/nolan-sir-sidney-robert-sid-17826> [accessed 6 May 2023]

[15] S Nolan, M Bail & A Sayers, 'Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly', Canberra, National Gallery of Australia , 2002, p. 16 <https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Ned-Kelly_Publication_CGW.pdf> [accessed 17 May 2023].

[16] Ibid, p. 16

[17] A Sooke, 'Ned Kelly, Sidney Nolan and the story of Australian art', in *BBC,* 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20130926-ned-kelly-man-in-the-iron-mask> [accessed 26 May 2023].

[18] J Clark, 'Sidney Nolan, Landscapes & Legends', Sydney, International Cultural Corporation of Australia limited, 1987, p. 74

[19] National Library Australia, Selected Poems of Max Harris ANGRY PENGUIN, Canberra, National Library of Australia, 1996, p. 8, <https://www.nla.gov.au/sites/default/files/theangrypenguin.pdf> [accessed 4 May 2023]

[20] B Tranter & J Donoghue, 'Ned Kelly', in *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 46, 2010, p.3 <https://www.academia.edu/24418033/Ned_Kelly_Australian_Icon> [accessed 7 May 2023].

However, where popular authors are primarily responsible for prevailing representations of Kelly, historians continually function to ensure his cultural memory remains grounded in historical 'truth'. Considering the memory as founded within oral, sensationalised accounts, contemporary historians take Kelly myth in popular representations, such as Nolan's, and provide it with historical foundation. A prevailing example of this lies in continued applications of Eric Hobsawm's 1969 'social bandit' theory'[21] to Kelly's personage. Within, the typification of the 'social bandit' argues that the construction of a historical personage is centralised upon the functional and ritual dimension of demarcated identities within their community,[22] an explanation based upon Marxian class analysis and philosophy of history: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle."[23] Alluding to the connection of a cultural product; namely the heroic criminal, to particular structural conditions, Hobsbawm effectively postulated the existence of the fundamentally political revolutionary as representative of an oppressed class of people; a form of historical categorisation that came to define 20th century constructions of Ned Kelly. Historian John McQuilton, recognising the entrance of Kelly within the cultural memory and linkage to the social bandit theory through Nolan's paintings, subsequently postulated connection within his 1979 book *The Kelly Outbreak 1878-80*, a consideration of the formulation of historical social structures and their impact on the development of Kelly myth. For McQuilton and Hobsbawm, the social bandit's identity was explicitly linked to their structural and cultural conditions, thus an understanding of a historical personage could be achieved only through a formalised approach to history grounded in social interrogation. Within his book, McQuilton argues that "the existence of social banditry in Victoria in 1878 cannot be explained without placing the Kelly outbreak in the context of its times."[24] Namely in reference to previous representations that he believes precluded the banditry dimension through a perpetuation of dominant myth separated from historical context, McQuilton stresses the importance of comprehensive biographical and contextual analysis; presenting Kelly as the forgotten embodiment of Australian inequitable land distribution and representative of the oppressed 'selector' classes. He thus extends on the proliferation of Kelly myth as informed by popular historical representations; shaping the cultural memory and ensuring dominant recollections are founded upon historical interrogation. This reconfiguration of popular myth has entered the cultural memory and informed subsequent creators, with self proclaimed 'Kelly Historian' Ian Jones expanding on the social bandit theory within the book *Ned Kelly: A Short Life (1995)*. Adopting a methodology akin to McQuilton, Jones interrogates the patterning of cultural understanding regarding the Kelly memory, arguing that the existence of a 'Robin hood like figure'[25] allowed for the development of a myth that replaced original cultural memory. His book is an interrogation of the 'enigma' of Kelly within history; a holistic portrait of the myths development which he took from historical academia and, as an author and television writer, transported into an engaging biography. Becoming the dominant narrative for much of the next half century, the radicalised elements of Jones' view of Kelly as a figurehead for incipient rebellion,

[21] EJ Hobsbawm, Bandits, New York, Dell Publishing Co., 1969,

[22] P Post, 'Rituals and the Function of the Past: Rereading Eric Hobsbawm', in *Journal of Ritual Studies*, vol. 10, 1996, p.10 , <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44398699> [accessed 17 May 2023].

[23] F Engels & K Marx, 'The Communist Manifesto', in *Project Gutenberg*, 61st ed., The Project Gutenberg Ebook, 2005, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/61/pg61-images.html> [accessed 17 May 2023].

[24] McQuilton, J, 'The Kelly outbreak, 1878-1880 : The Geographical Dimension of Social Banditry' Carlton Vic., Melbourne University Press, 1987, p.4

[25] I Jones, 'Ned Kelly : a short life,' Port Melbourne, Lothian, 1996, p.338

drawn from McQuilton, allowed for emerging memory founded in popular representation to become informed by historical interrogation. As such, where McQuilton established the basis for a shift in understanding to entrench Kelly as a social bandit within the cultural memory, Jones ultimately facilitated the widespread acceptance of this theory, his balance between popular author and historian allowing for his portrayal to extend upon dominant memory. From this, the function of historians within the Kelly myth is revealed, whereby popular media disseminates a cultural memory that is expounded upon by historians, who function as contributors to the memory rather than dominating producers.

While historians are involved in the construction of Kelly's cultural memory, mass media portrayals have the effect of homogenising audiences and controlling historical memory; resulting in dominant, proliferating representations. Foucault, for example, fits popularised history representations into an overall theory of hegemony, claiming that in the continuation of myth, historical fiction and film dominate as primary modes of "reencoding popular memory."[26] Indeed, converging across multiple modes of deliverance and interrogation, contemporary media approaches to dominant cultural memory discourses have become primarily 'myth makers', whereby their interpretation remains at the foreground of Kelly memory. Constituting contemporary interrogation concerned with creating a cultural environment conducive to further depictions of the memory over preserving historical narrative, the dissemination of dominant epistemes of the Kelly narrative within popular history is contrasted to previous representations grounded in academia. This epochal change in temporality, constituting a shift in Kelly's cultural memory, is seen in the use of such unconventional modes of historical deliverance, foregrounded in Peter Careys' epistolary novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*[27] (2000). Representing an emerging postmodern paradox of 'truth' within history, the novel presents as a work of historical fiction; an amalgam of history and biography culminating in "uneasy negotiation between fact and fiction."[28] In this Carey 'creates' a new history of Kelly; deliberately dissolving the boundary between fiction and nonfiction whilst subjugating historical truth in a self expressed interest of embedding Kelly's own voice into global cultural memory.[29] Reinforced by the form of PostModern deliverance focused on the centralising of the historical personage and destabilisation of singular 'truth', the book is ultimately seen as an example of an insistently mythologised literary movement concerned with the potency of myth in the cultural consciousness rather than the accuracy of collective memory. Indeed, this becomes true across emerging mediums of fiction, Australian History Professors Sarah Pinot and Leigh Boucher affirming this in their interrogation of Gregor Jordan's 2003 film *Ned Kelly.* Focusing on exploring the role of popular history in perpetuating gendered discourses, both take analytical interest in the film as reflective of an Australian socio-political culture concerned

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[26] M Foucault et al., 'Foucault at the movies', New York, Columbia University Press, 2018, p. 106 <https://anarch.cc/uploads/michel-foucault/foucault-at-the-movies.pdf> [accessed 22 May 2023].
[27] P Carey, True history of the Kelly Gang, University of Queensland Press, 2000.
[28] A Huyssen, 'Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory', Stanford, Calif. Stanford Univ. Press, 2003, p. 14 <file:///Users/zoe_dyson/Downloads/Huyssen,%20Present%20Pasts%20CHAPTER%201.pdf> [accessed 9 May 2023].
[29] P Carey, 'Peter Carey on True History of the Kelly Gang: "At 56, I wrote what my younger self could not have managed"', in T*he Guardian*, 8 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/08/peter-carey-how-i-wrote-the-true-history-of-the-kelly-gang> [accessed 2 June 2023].

with dominant cultural narratives of 19th century Victoria.[30] More widely, the film can be seen as a hagiographic representation of Kelly, mimetic of the collective cultural fascination emerging from Nolan and propagated by Carey. The film, invoking the particularities of Kelly's masculinity to assume a place in the cultural sphere, thus becomes an example of the limit of such medium that is shaped by the dominant ideologies of Australian identity; the mode of deliverance concerned with the perpetuation and dissemination of cultural understandings rather than historical accuracy. Emphasising the "ambivalent and, above all, commodified status of Kelly as national icon"[31] both works ultimately reposition Kelly firmly at the centre of Australian pop culture, constituting a popularisation via film and media. Arguably the most salient tools by which sensationalised collective memory is created, preserved and promulgated; mass media depictions thus become demonstrative of the significance of popular history in the creation of a prevailing cultural memory of Ned Kelly.

The role of historians in shaping Ned Kelly's cultural memory has thus evolved over time, influenced by the intersection of traditional historical methods with emerging media depictions. Where historians arguably remain as key contributors to the memory of Kelly, the zeitgeist of postmodernity has ultimately seen the emergence of popular historical interrogation that, prioritising entertainment over accuracy, has subsumed historical works to become the dominant producers of cultural memory.

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[30] L Boucher, 'Sarah Pinto and Leigh Boucher "Fighting for Legitimacy: Masculinity, Political Voice and Ned Kelly"', *in Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies*, vol. 10, 2006, p.1 <https://www.academia.edu/7412379/Sarah_Pinto_and_Leigh_Boucher_Fighting_for_Legitimacy_Masculinity_Political_Voice_and_Ned_Kelly> [accessed 21 April 2023].

[31] G Huggan, 'Cultural Memory in Postcolonial Fiction: The Uses and Abuses of Ned Kelly', in *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 20, 2002, p. 164 <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=googlescholar&id=GALE|A87565590&v=2.1&it=r&sid=AONE&asid=fcb1cea8> [accessed 7 May 2023]

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<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/from-the-archives-1880-ned-kelly-captured-after-sho
otout-in-glenrowan-20210625-p584d2.html> [accessed 13 May 2023].

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