

Graham Huggan: Cultural Memory in Postcolonial Fiction: The Uses and Abuses of Ned Kelly

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Remembering Kelly

The story of the Irish Australian bushranger Ned Kelly has become paradigmatic for the selective retelling of history as folk legend, and for the ideological processes by which social memory may be reworked into the fabric of a nation's founding cultural myths. As John Ryan — among others — has pointed out, the 1880s, a period of radical nationalism in Australia, allowed Ned Kelly to be 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, these figures could be grafted — with the help of a little historical sleight of hand — onto a long line of morally ambivalent 'good badmen' whose romanticised outlawry embodied libertarian ideals within an oppressive colonial system (102–03).¹ To these might be added a number of legends surrounding Irish nationalist insurgency,² not forgetting the now-stereotypical 'bush legend' itself with its virtues of endurance and self-reliance, and its celebration of mateship as a marker of loyal adherence to the bushman's code (106). These legends, needless to say, have been endlessly reinterpreted and challenged, with revisionist accounts variously puncturing the Kelly myth by stressing the vicious criminality of the gang, stripping them of their (self-) glorified guise as frontier-society 'Robin Hoodlums' (Greenway), by using the camp theatrics of some gang members to upset the standard narrative of rugged male adventure-heroism: and by emphasising the racism underlying Kelly's mythicised status as a 'moral European' (Rose), a racism now generally acknowledged as being built into the structure of the so-called 'Australian legend' itself.

As with other mythic narratives surrounding oppositional figures like the outlaw, the Kelly legend continues to depend on a manipulation of collective memory more notable for its strategic omissions than for its 'keeping alive [of] pastas that history [has] obliterated' (Hamilton 14), and for its highly selective reading of a number of often far from reliable historical sources. At the same time, the sheer quantity of Kelly material currently available on the market testifies not just to the durability of the legend, but also to its continuing profitability as a commodity circulating within an increasingly globules memory industry. These products indicate the powerful role played by popular culture and its representations in shaping social memory (Hamilton 25). Among them we might include several Kelly films and television programs, ranging in quality from the abysmal *Ned Kelly* (starring Mack Jigger as Ned), to the widely acclaimed 1980 TV mini-series *The Last Outlaw*, a wide array of popular songs, from contemporary ballads such as Midnight Oil's 'If Ned Kelly Were King' and Redgum's 'Poor Ned', to the recently revived *Ned Kelly, the Musical*; and an even larger number of books and other printed works, many of them designed for mass-market distribution, including Thomas Kencally's children's tale *Ned Kelly and the City of Bees* (1995), and Monty Wedd's hugely successful comicstrip *Ned Kelly*, which ran uninterrupted for over two years in the mid 70s. Meanwhile, as one might expect, the Internet has become a fertile source for Kelly memorabilia, spawning a variety of electronically connected Kelly fan clubs and helping to produce that latter-day variant on the figure of the Victorian collectomane, the starstruck nerd.³

A feature of the Kelly industry has been its ability to mobilise popular sentiment for ostensibly high-brow representations, such as — probably most notably — Sidney Nolan's vivid paintings or, more recently, the New York-based novelist Peter Carey's fictionalised account *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), winner of many literary awards, among them the 2000 Commonwealth Writers Prize and the 2001 Booker Prize, and his most commercially successful work to date. These items, and many others like them, suggest that it matters less how faithfully Kelly and his legend have been remembered than how effectively they have

been remodelled to meet a variety of changing ideological interests and consumer needs. In what follows, I want to focus on two recent *literary* representations: Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), and Robert Drewe's less well-known but equally intriguing fictive exploration of the Kelly legend, *Our Sunshine* (1991). These novels, I shall argue, illustrate the importance of the literary text in structuring the individual/collective memory process, while also drawing attention to the ways in which memory is dependent on metaphor — more specifically, metaphors of the body — to actualise remembered experience.⁴ Both works, I shall also suggest, are postcolonial renderings, not just of one of Australia's most powerful national narratives, but also one of its most enduring and yet paradoxically amnesiac cultural myths. In remembering Ned Kelly, both writers draw attention to alternative histories inscribed upon the wild colonial body, through which the nation's chequered past can be creatively transformed and its present critically reassessed. The conclusion of the essay goes on to offer reflections on the malleability (and current fashionability) of the legend of Ned Kelly, assessing its implications for a Western ex-settler society whose own thriving memory industry bears so many of the contradictory signs of the nation's colonial past.

Claiming Kelly

Robert Drewe's novel *Our Sunshine* (1991) ranks as one of the most inventive literary attempts to date to grapple with the Kelly legend. Drewe's 'chronicle of the imagination' (183) rejects the standard teleological account of Ned Kelly as doomed folk-hero; instead, it employs a pared-down style to assemble a collage of impressionistic fragments in which the Kelly legend, in keeping with the visceral language used to relate it, is not just effectively dismantled but violently torn apart. More specifically, the text stages a struggle over the uses and abuses of Kelly's memory, a struggle in which the fictionalised figure of Kelly himself claims the right to remember people and events that others have appropriated in his name (5). It soon becomes clear, however, that Kelly's memories are themselves impossibly belated. Even the most private of reminiscences has been reassigned in advance as public property, as in the ironically patriotic claim *our sunshine* — implicit in the novel's title.⁵ The legend has outstripped the life, dictating the pattern in which it is remembered (183); the life, in a sense, is already relived, the story since retold.

This 'belatedness' of memory accounts for the second-hand quality of a text that playfully rehearses the clichéd scenarios of colonial melodrama as black farce and journalistic self-parody. Consider, for example, Kelly's mocking incantation of the litany of atavistic names given to him by the press, a list he succeeds in turning into an ironic fanfare for his own 'monstrous' achievements:

Devil incarnate of the Antipodes, Satan's right hand, our Mephisto, the Vulture of the Wombat ranges, beast of prey, outback monster, rural sadist, flash young ghoul, savage yokel, bog-Irish fiend, homicidal maniac, corpse robber, cheap assassin, man of blood, bog butcher, jumped-up bush butcher, brute creation, crawling beast, jungle gorilla, creeping thing, reptile, viper in society's bosom, sewer scum, vermin, bog worm, peat maggot ... pack wolf, shark, spineless jellyfish, strutting rooster, scrub bull ... cut-rate highwayman, champion of the ... street-corner loungers, evil marauder, predator, common thief, desperado, thug ... Things he'd been called by the gentlemen of the press, ta rah! ... A corner of the faintest memory flickered. Hadn't Dad called him Sunshine? (5–6)

Here, as elsewhere in the text, Drewe summons up a repertoire of demonised animal imagery to stress not so much the brutality of the Kelly gang, nor the fine line that divides them from their equally vicious captors, but rather the predatory aspect that links the legend itself to those who continue to use it to compete for scraps of Kelly's legacy in the name of 'science', the 'national interest', or the 'public good' (49).

The apparent interchangeability of human and animal worlds also gives the novel a surreal twist, as the theatricality already present in the legend tips over into performances of circus-act grotesquerie and vaudeville show (4). This carnivalistic spirit is embodied in a form of what we might call, after the American anthropologist Michael Taussig, *colonial wildness*. Wildness, for Taussig, is a figure which, deployed in a wide variety of colonial contexts, has the potential to combine 'the anarchy of death with carnival, in a process that entertains yet resists the seductive appeal of self-pity and redemption through suffering' (467). Certainly, Drewe's novel endorses Taussig's view that the performativity of colonial wildness allows 'the space of death [to] incorporate the laughter of carnival as oppositional practice' (466). Yet the novel — as if

in defiance of its title — also amply demonstrates the ‘dialectics of terror’ (466) on which performances of colonial wildness, however liberating these might appear, so obviously depend.

This terror is represented in the text in graphic images of bodily penetration and mutilation that dispel the myth of remembrance as redemption, uncovering memory instead as a violent, sexually encoded mechanism of powerful repression and explosive release. For beneath the bright surface of Kelly's memory games is a deep structure of displaced colonial trauma, captured in surrealistic visions of the hell of transportation: ‘a greasy winter shore bisected by a loamy rivermouth, a city's slimy bay, froth-stained with tar and sawdust, phlegmy flotsam, puffy things with pecked-out eyes. And on the high-tide line, strings of smelly sea-grapes pretending to be rosaries’ (58). This trauma is also visible in the destructive convergence of memory and history represented in one of the novel's closing scenes, in which Kelly, tragicomic armour pierced, envisions his own transformation from self-glorifying wild colonial boy into abject colonial mimic-man (Naipaul), the shift from first- to third-person narration also suggesting that he is no longer subject of his twice-told tale, but rather second-hand object of derisive contempt:

Why are parrots pecking his shins? Lorikeets scaling his legs, parakeets dancing up his calves, hanging from his kneecaps. Feathery body heat rustling in his pants legs worse than mice. Hot beaks nibbling at his veins, claws gripping. Any deeper and they'll be pecking his bone marrow. Creeping up and ripping his foreskin off, Holy Mother! In the rising light, he gets to his feet, whacks and whacks his shins with his rifle butt to smash the little pecking parrots. (172)

The symbolism of castration, as in the death of Joe Byrne (168) accompanying scenes such as this one, further critiques the Kelly legend, puncturing a surface of male bravado to reveal deep-seated anxieties within. This ‘unmanning’ of the legend reminds us that memory is frequently connected in the text with Freudian metaphors of dismemberment and severance. Probably the most gruesome of these is the severed head of the notorious bushranger Dan Morgan, paraded through the streets of Melbourne in a scene remembered from Kelly's childhood (49). A not dissimilar scene takes place after the final showdown at Glenrowan, when an angry crowd attempts to wrest the charred remains of two former Kelly gang members, like Morgan's head scarcely recognisable as human, from the police who had previously killed them, while in a parallel incident another police officer, responsible for guarding the barely conscious Kelly, claims the prisoner's bullet-riddled body for his own (176–77). The scene reminds us of the commodified discourse of claim and counterclaim — of custodial rights — surrounding conflicting versions of the Kelly legend, an appropriative discourse on which Drewe's novel skilfully plays and into which we, too, as readers of his text are drawn. The novel emerges in this context as a ferocious, if also fiercely comic, anti-requiem which, in refusing to mourn the death of Kelly, points rather to the ways in which his memory has been co-opted for individual and collective (national) ends. At the same time, Drewe himself self-ironically replicates these predatory tactics: *Our Sunshine* performs less a recuperative version of Kelly's life told by Kelly himself than a further staged invasion of his body. By metaphorically penetrating the body of Kelly — by aggressively inserting itself into the corpus of Kelly folklore — Drewe's novel fulfils the contradictory tasks of reanimating a worn-out legend, thereby ensuring its transmission to the ‘grandchildren of the next century’ (2), while wrenching it free from the collective memory on which it feeds — and tearing it apart.

Speaking Kelly

Like *Our Sunshine*, Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000) offers a self-reflexive account of the Kelly legend which, playing fast and loose with historical sources, emphasises the ambivalent and, above all, commodified status of Kelly as national icon and anti-imperial resource. From the outset, the novel cheerfully acknowledges its debts by making a connection between the archival source on which it draws, a fictive version of the incomplete manuscript handed over by Kelly to the schoolmaster, Tom Curnow, who betrayed him, and the ‘wholesale souveniring of [Kelly gang] armour and guns and hair and cartridges that occurred at Glenrowan on June 28th 1880’ (Carey 4). However, the written manuscript upon which the novel claims to draw can hardly be considered a reliable documentary item; rather, it acts as the trigger for a sequence of highly entertaining picaresque adventures in which the inscribed narrator, Kelly, doubles as comic ‘remembrancer’ (Burke 10) and tragic protagonist of his (mock-)heroic quest.⁶ Not for the first time

in his work, then, Carey deliberately dissolves the boundary between oral and written, fictional and non-fictional sources, thereby maintaining a dynamic balance between competing versions of the historical past.

Throughout Carey's novel history slides imperceptibly into the more distant recesses of folk memory, while the documented discoveries of archival research converge with the fabrications of the adventure tale. This structural ambivalence is reinforced by the remarkable act of sustained ventriloquism by which Carey is able to give voice to Kelly's memories of his ancestral Irish, as well as his more immediate Australian, past. The narrative is consistently *doubled*, as the subjective recounting of Australian colonial history encounters half-buried memories of an Irish ancestry — an ancestry that clearly causes Kelly as much pain as pride, and through which the repetitive patterns of a larger 'historic memory of UNFAIRNESS' (299, Carey's capitals) can be seen inexorably to emerge. In addition, Kelly's perception of ancestral memory itself is presented as being deeply riven. On the one hand, he scorns the attitude of those (such as his fellow gang member Steve Hart) who nourish themselves on the stories of the rebel Irish martyrs, describing Hart witheringly at one point as 'like a girl living in Romances and Histories always thinking of a braver better time' (196). On the other, he is by no means immune himself from such forms of anticolonial revenge nostalgia, as when he likens the gang to legendary Irish warriors such as the all-conquering Cuchulainn in his apocalyptic war chariot (326), or when he romantically enlists his latest recruits to a hallowed tradition of victims of British imperialism:

men who had been denied their leases for no other crime than being our friends men forced to plant wheat then ruined by the rust men mangled upon the triangle of Van Diemen's Land men with sons in gaol men who witnessed their hard won land taken up by squatters men perjured against and falsely gaoled men weary of constant impounding on & on each day without relent. (328)

For Kelly, the superimposition of Irish folk memory onto recent Australian colonial history produces a double effect in which the fear of renewed betrayal lurks beneath the sanctioned pride of violent dissent. The contradictory desires to revisit and to purge the past are reflected in the text in a dialectical interplay between metaphors of burial/unearthing (49, 327, 352) and containment/expulsion (309). Through this interplay, a series of secret histories are temporarily brought to light, only to be further suppressed. A paradigmatic example here is the buried trunk containing a dress worn by Kelly's father, which turns out to be a sign not of his 'effeminacy' but, on the contrary, of his membership of a secret society of Irish rebels feared for their excessive use of force (17; see also 254). These metaphors are reinforced by the idea of memory itself as a kind of malignant parasite, insinuating itself into the bloodstream and building its destructive strength from within (12), and by the similarly embodied notion of memory as a bruise that slowly forms upon the body, providing evidence of recent affliction but also suggesting a much longer history of incubated anger now recorded on the surface of the skin (98; see also Kelly's description of the Jerilderie letter as being 'tattooed onto my living skin', 309). These alternative metaphors — memory rising within the body, memory inscribed upon the body — mirror Carey's attempt to create an inner biography which, as it were, gradually takes over Kelly's body, getting inside the historical character in an effort to articulate its pain, to make it speak.

What is at stake here, as in Drewe's novel, is not just a *recovery* of memory mapped onto the wild colonial body, but an *implantation* of memories designed to bring a collective history of destruction to the fore. Thus, while Kelly prefers to envision himself as an actor in a violent history of his own making (245), he also seems predestined to become the pathological host for malevolent ancestral forces which, nourishing themselves on his body, slowly destroy it from within. These forces are conjured up in the text in a number of grisly stories, such as those associated with the ominous Banshee (86–87), or the tale served up to the twelve-year-old Kelly by the policeman O'Neil about the atrocious consequences of a Certain Man's (Kelly's father's) perfidious acts in Ireland, which plants the seed in his young mind of a recurring history of treachery and self-defeat (11–12, see also 328). Memory, whether unconsciously absorbed or deliberately implanted, is thus potentially lethal — literally so when the *Monitor*, the fondly remembered battleship that provides the inspiration for the Kelly gang's ludicrous armour, eventually becomes the symbol of invincibility that kills (327, 349). Quotational memory (Plett),⁷ Carey implies, is scarcely less dangerous to Kelly, whose rebel fantasies are nurtured by his reading of Shakespeare — whom he comically fails to see

at one point as being quoted in support of the very imperial Englishness against which he believes himself to be fighting (340) — and the similarly ambiguous West Country historical romance, *Lorna Doone*.

It is highly ironic, of course, that Kelly entrusts his memoirs to the man who turns out to betray him, more ironic still that this same man painstakingly attends to the manuscript, his own personal keepsake of the Kelly Outrage (4), only after its author's death. And most ironic of all is that Carey, who, like Drewe, certainly cannot be accused of not being aware of capitalising on Kelly's legacy, seems himself to have taken on the role of a latter-day Curnow. The manuscript emerges in this context as another souvenir — perhaps the most valuable souvenir of all — from the siege at Glenrowan (350), lovingly restored by an owner who now brings back to life the very subject he himself had helped to kill. This dialectic is maintained through the device of a fictional memoir that inhabits its chosen subject. Is ventriloquism to be seen here as a related form of parasitism? Is 'speaking Kelly' to be understood as a sympathetic gesture of remembrance, or should it rather be seen as a surreptitious act of treachery and destruction? These are open questions: more certain is that Kelly's narrative, while idiosyncratic enough, is always inflected by other half-remembered narratives: the voice through which it claims to speak is never Kelly's own. Drewe's novel reinforces this obvious point by presenting a burlesque of multiply mediated Kellys; Carey's strategy is rather to offer a complex network of competing ventriloquisms in which the fiction of 'Kelly's voice' is projected onto other, equally fictional narrative voices, and in which the simulated memoir the 'true history' with 'no single lie (7) that Kelly has written for his daughter — ultimately pays tribute to neither history nor truth, but the generative mendacity of tall tales (Huggan 87).

Why Bother with Ned? Soundings from the Memory Industry

'Why bother with Ned, fumes Dennis Loraine in a recent, characteristically vituperative letter reacting to government prevarication over the purchase of the last piece of Kelly armour in private hands.⁸ The letter, one of a number of similar responses published in the *Herald Sun* (23 May 2001), reads as follows:

What kind of Australian government would legislate to ensure a piece of scrap iron from Ned Kelly's armour remains in this country?

Especially when governments have privatised, or sold, power companies, telecommunications companies, hospitals, railways, tram routes, major roads, manufacturing and service icons, airlines and shipping companies.

The privatisation and selling off of Australia has placed this and future generations in jeopardy and at the mercy and greed of overseas owners.

Thus it is that Kelly, pitched into his starring role as protective symbol of an endangered Australian cultural heritage, is once again summoned up from the mists of history at the moment he might seem likely to disappear. And thus it is that Kelly's left shoulder plate, the improbable missing link in a renewed struggle over the privatisation of cultural memory, must join other souvenirs from Glenrowan in being restored to its rightful place as an indispensable national resource.

This latest attempt to remember Kelly raises the usual questions, though, as to what continues to be forgotten. It seems fair to assume that for a growing number of Australians, the national narrative embodied in Kelly — and, through Kelly, enshrined in the Australian legend is embarrassingly exclusive, and that the history of Aboriginal genocide and dispossession — increasingly institutionalised in a number of official events, museum exhibits and state memorials — now constitutes the most significant form of memory work being undertaken in postcolonial Australia today. All the same, there are numerous signs that the folk memory associated with the Kelly gang has made a recent comeback. Why? One reason may lie in the current appeal of a variety of nation-based outlaw mythologies to a transnational memory industry — an industry in which nostalgically rebellious figures such as Robin Hood, Jesse James and Kelly himself circulate as iconic representations of an oppositional history that disguises other, probably more significant oppositional histories, ensuring that these latter remain ignored or inadequately understood.

It is in this context that the American historian Kerwin Lee Klein declares, at the beginning of a recent essay, 'Welcome to the memory industry', for who can now dispute that 'memory has become the leading

term in our new cultural history?' (128). Why the memory boom? And why the ambivalent response to it? Several factors may be cited here:⁹ the recent revitalisation of attempts — many of them within the framework of the Holocaust — to come to terms with personal and collective trauma, releasing deep-seated anxieties not just over the past, but over the specific forms in which it should be recalled; the further anxiety that with the much-vaunted 'acceleration of history' (Nora) in contemporary postmodern culture, the art of remembrance might itself run the risk of being lost;¹⁰ the centrality of memory to contemporary discourses of personal and cultural identity, and the linkage of these discourses to emancipatory social movements, victimised individuals and embattled ethnic groups; the quasireligious belief in the power of collective memory to act as an antidote to the worst excesses of history, and to counteract baleful 'postmodern reckonings of history as the marching black boot and of historical consciousness as an oppressive fiction' (Klein 145); and, not least, the increasing commodification of memory as the function of a consumer-driven late-capitalist society in which historical consciousness has been eroded by nostalgia — a society of the souvenir as much as the spectacle, in which an ever-growing number of commercially viable memorabilia and pseudo-historical reconstructions has granted the illusion of access to, while effectively substituting for, the lived experiences of the past.

Klein's concerns, however exaggerated, about the negative implications of the current memory industry should certainly not be underestimated. Such implications might include, for instance, the paradoxical reification of bourgeois subjectivity in the name of postmodernist relativism (24);¹¹ the romanticisation, even sanctification, of atrocity victims and 'people without history' (Wolf) as global standard-bearers for the oppressed; and the manipulation of memory for authoritarian purposes, as in falsely inclusive national projects of commemoration that primarily serve the powerful in society, consolidating the agenda of the state — as appears to be the case with the Kelly legend — or protecting the interests of a nation's ruling elite. Collective myths such as Kelly's are, after all, among the most significant of those raw materials through which any national(ist) struggle over the uses of cultural memory may be expressed. For as Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton argue in their introduction to a collection of essays on memory and history in twentieth-century Australia,

It is through the simplified and selective narratives of collective myths that historical events are rendered emotionally comprehensible and memorable. Mythic narratives are thus the wellspring of nationalism and they are constantly mobilised to serve differing ideological and political interests. (2)

Memory, on the other hand, is always likely to supersede state-sanctioned attempts to regulate it. As Andreas Huyssen suggests, it is in the 'tenuous fissure between past and present' that memory is constituted, and this tension makes it 'powerfully alive and distinct from the archive or any other mere system of storage and retrieval' (3) Memory continually reinvents itself in a multiplicity of different representations, and these representations are at once a powerful creative force for the transformation of the past in the present, and a reminder of the large number of different positions we may inhabit in relation to our own, as well other people's, histories. This more positive view is shared by those who work toward an enabling definition of *cultural memory* as a collective 'activity occurring in the present in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future' (Bal *et al.* vii).

This notion of 'cultural memory' has been at the forefront of a great deal of recent interdisciplinary research, taking in the work of (oral) historians, sociologists, anthropologists, cognitive psychologists, literary/cultural critics, and many more. Much of this research, drawing on the pioneering work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, has operated on the premise that memory is a social/collective, rather than a personal/individual, phenomenon. Cultural memory needs to be distinguished, though, from Halbwachs's 'collective consciousness', insofar as it attends to the inevitable power differentials in any representation, however apparently inclusive, of collective memory. In this sense, recent conceptions of cultural memory can be seen both as an expansion of and a departure from Halbwachs's original theories, acknowledging memory's potential as a medium of — often oppositional — collective agency, while also recognising the opportunities it affords for co-optation by dominant social groups and autocratic regimes. This ambivalence can also be seen in recent *postcolonial* approaches to cultural memory, many of which have stressed the uneven power relations at work in acts of collective commemoration and cultural retrieval, both under and after colonial regimes.

An axiom — albeit an increasingly challenged one — of postcolonial criticism is that postcolonial representations counteract homogenising Western views of history, often by appealing to a collective memory submerged beneath the self-privileging rhetoric of Western historical accounts. This postcolonial memory work is by no means necessarily celebratory: rather, much of it involves a sense of deep hurt, resentment, even despair. One way of counteracting the tendency to despair is by performing *remembrance-as-mockery*, thereby revealing the absurdity of (European) empires' pretensions to a progressivist history of their own; another is by enacting one form or another of *remembrance-as-retrieval*, thereby rescuing the past (while resisting the temptation to romanticise it) from the prison-house of Western representation. Both strategies might be seen as enacting a Foucauldian counter-memory to the European historical record, in which the literary text emerges as a powerful medium for the exploration of a cultural memory constructed in tension with the hegemonic narratives of the imperial past.

There are dangers, however, associated with this oppositional model of cultural memory. For one thing, the model overlooks the reactionary tendencies of a collective memory invoked to rationalise the perpetuation of local, sometimes oppressive, traditional practices, for another, the model lends itself to hoary distinctions between the mnemonic capabilities of so-called 'oral' and 'literate' cultures; and for a third, the model underestimates the extent to which memory may be used to sanction alternative narratives of exploitation aimed at maintaining neocolonial relations of power within the post-independence nation-state. This last is the focus of a valuable recent collection of essays edited by the anthropologist Richard Werbner. *Memory and the Postcolony* (1998), a collection which, in the editor's own words, 'locates politicized memory at the very heart of postcolonial studies' (2). Memory, for Werbner, is crucial to the process of social/cultural transformation in ex-colonies (his focus is on post-independence Africa), but it is also subject to less acceptable forms of political manipulation:

In postcolonies where, as in Zimbabwe, much is made of the historic sacrifice of life in the cause of the nation-state, memory as public practice brings together, uneasily and with much tension, the making of political subjectivity and the significance given to violent death. Following civil war and state terror in the post-colony, the traces of political violence remain problematic. Increasingly, new moral uncertainties confront people in what might be called postwars of the dead — the intense peacetime struggles over the appropriation of the heroism, martyrdom or even last remains of the dead. (7)

Public ceremonies of commemoration may be designed, that is, less to honour the dead than to protect a handful of the living, shoring up the threatened authority of the nation's ruling elite. This 'elite memorialism', as Werbner calls it (7), calls to attention the obvious point that any commemorative act or event has exclusive tendencies: some people are remembered, but not others; some people are remembered in order that others might be forgotten or obscured. For memory inhabits the interstices between remembrance and amnesia (Huyssen). Constitutively 'split, it presents a site not of reconciliation but of struggle between elite and popular accounts of the past; between private and public versions of history; between competing desires to preserve the past and to remodel it for present needs.

In considering the enduring usefulness of the mythic narratives surrounding (falsely) representative figures in defining the parameters of national identity, as ever the crucial question remains: who are the 'we' of the nation? (Hamilton 25). Who is it, exactly, that Kelly represents? And who is it that his memory has been made to serve? These are precisely the questions that Drewe's and Carey's novels address. Both writers indicate that Kelly's private battle against the authority of the colonial state has long since been overshadowed by a highly public struggle — one that continues to have relevance in postcolonial Australia — taking place over the conflicted memories that are embodied in his name. In articulating the tensions between history, individual and collective memory, this struggle points to their convergence in *cultural* memory as an aggregate term for 'the many shifting histories and shared memories that exist between a sanctioned narrative of history and personal memory' (Sturken 119, also qtd in Hamilton 20). Cultural memory, by definition, gauges the import of the present as much as the serviceability of the past. It is certainly tempting, in the current postcolonial conjuncture, to see the resurgence of Kelly folklore as a form of collective repression that shifts the problems of a rapidly changing multi-ethnic society back into a romantically 'Celticised' past. If this were all, it might legitimately be asked, then why bother with Ned? But it clearly isn't all. For as the nation is forced to face the pressures brought upon it by its own colonial history,

so the status of the national icon must be imaginatively reassessed. Fiction plays a valuable role in such creative revisioning processes. In their respective novels, Drewe and Carey both deploy the deconstructive, rather than recuperative, potential of cultural memory to present clear-eyed readings of Kelly's life in which the romantic impulse toward anti-imperial nostalgia is comprehensively debunked. Novels such as theirs confirm the value of a sustained critical engagement with the Kelly legend, joining it to a wider historical struggle to counteract those nostalgia-ridden narratives of sanctified victimhood which continue to block access to Australia's colonial past. They also posit a link between the revisionist imperatives of postcolonial fiction and a transformative cultural memory which, stripped of the accretions of romantic mythology, might prove as useful in addressing the collective needs of the present as it is in uncovering the combined injustices of the past.

Notes

1 As Kent Ladd Steckmesser observes in his 1983 study — itself romanticised — of the historical representation of Western outlaws, '[w]orld history reveals that the idealized outlaw is a universal figure. Every nation at some time has had a brigand whose exploits become the subject of popular legend. Australia's Ned Kelly, Russia's Stenka Razin, Brazil's Lampião, and Germany's Schmderrhannes are examples of the type. They are close to the hearts of the people who endow them with all the virtues of Robin Hood. This idealization reflects the recurrent belief that the bandit may be legally in the wrong, but is morally right' (145).

2 As John Ryan remarks in his useful essay on the changing historical significance of the legend (*ALS* 1967), Kelly's exploits were inserted by many Irish nationalists into the Irish anti-authoritarian bushranger tradition, a tradition upheld by Kelly himself in his Jerilderie letter when he calls upon all Irishmen 'to raise old Ernie isle once more from the pressure and tyrannies of the English yoke' (qt in Ryan 105).

3 Ned Kelly web sites provide a prodigious amount of often poorly categorised information. Among the more reliable sites is the one set up by the State Library of Victoria, one of the major archives of Kelly material. Another search, via Australia's Cultural Network, is more indicative of the current status of Kelly fan culture, including a breezily annotated list of books on Kelly judged according to a rating system of (maximum 5) iconically rendered 'Neds'

4 See Yates's seminal *The Art of Memory* (1966) for an in-depth study of classical and medieval representations of memory; for a more recent, and equally impressive, study of the specific metaphors through which memory and mnemonic processes have historically been represented, see Draaisma (2001).

5 'Sunshine' is the mekname given to Ned by his father (see Drewe 6, 47).

6 Several of Carey's other novels, especially *Illywhacker* (1985) and *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1994), are notable for playing on the conventions of the picaresque to undercut notions of historical veracity. *True History of the Kelly Gang* adds to the mix by intercutting between the fictional quest narratives of historical/medieval romance and the factual claims of the non-fiction novel (e.g. Defoe)

7 On the function of quotational memory, see the introduction to Plett 1991, esp. 15–16. Plett distinguishes between what he calls 'individual', 'print' and 'electronic' memory depositories. The first of these provides 'the basis of the tradition of oral literature in preliterature societies' (*Intertextuality* 15); the second and third allow for 'an almost infinite enlargement of collective (quotational) memory without making individual memory superfluous' (16). Even if it makes sense in quantitative terms, Plett's developmental model seems unduly simplistic, not to mention ideologically dubious. His focus on reader recognition also fails to account for the possibilities of strategic misquotation, and for entirely different uses and interpretations of the same quotation within a literary text.

8 This particular battle has since been won, with the State Library of Victoria outbidding its rivals. However, although Kelly's armour is now all in Australia, it remains scattered in different places, providing another twist to the metaphors of dismemberment ironically dramatised in Drewe's and Carey's books

9 Many of these go far beyond the methodological wars of academic historians. Much of the debate concerns the relationship between memory and history, seen by some as fundamentally oppositional (Nora) and by others as reciprocal or dialectical (Le Goff, Klein). However, even for historians like Le Goff, for whom memory represents 'the raw material of history' (xi), it is given subordinate status as both an 'object of history' and 'an elementary level of its development' (*History* 129), whereas for Klein, the memory boom signals nothing less than a 'historiographic crisis' in which memory has become less a supplement to than a replacement for history, one which 'reflects an increasing discontent' with, and a 'therapeutic alternative' to historical discourse (25).

10 Compare, for example, Nora — ‘We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left’ (7) — and Huyssen: ‘the spread of amnesia in our culture is matched by a relentless fascination with memory and the past’ (25).

11 As Klein remarks, one of the reasons for memory's sudden rise is that it promises to let us have our essentialism and deconstruct it too' ('Emergence' 24), memory can thus be used — often simultaneously — as a recuperative discourse for the assertion of identity and as a system of difference underpinning the ‘claims of memory work to deconstruct the [universal] Western self (24).

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