

READING THE HISTORICAL PHENOMENON OF AUSTRALIAN BUSHRANGERS

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ABSTRACT

Outlaws in their various images have been important parts of history. In Australia, the longest lasting image of outlaws is the bushranger. Despite its popularity, there is a range of depictions of bushrangers and these are not necessarily similar. Interpretation of the bushrangers in colonial time differs from contemporary imagining. This papers aims at unfolding the various interpretations of the bushrangers in different periods in many types of artifact. Information was collected and interpreted by library research. The artifact analysis will be seen through a postmodernism theory by Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. Since the phenomenon of bushranger stemmed from the colonial period, this study will commence from the period up to contemporary period. It can be concluded that a study of the different periods finds out that knowledge of the bushrangers does not make up a linear history, but rather a discontinuity in the historical narratives.

Keywords: *history, bushranger, Australian bushranger*

ABSTRAK

Orang yang tidak taat hukum (penjahat) dalam gambaran yang berbeda adalah merupakan bagian sejarah yang penting. Di Australia, gambaran nyata bagi orang tak taat hukum adalah pengembara/petualang di hutan. Selain popularitas, terdapat berbagai gambaran berbeda tentang petualang tersebut. Interpretasi pada jaman kolonial berbeda dengan gambaran di masa kontemporer. Artikel bertujuan menunjukkan berbagai interpretasi terhadap petualang pada masa dan artefak berbeda. Informasi diperoleh dengan penelitian pustaka. Analisis artefak dilakukan dengan teori postmodernisme dari Michel Foucault dan Roland Barthes. Disimpulkan, studi dalam berbagai masa menunjukkan bahwa pengetahuan tentang petualang bukan merupakan sejarah linier, tetapi lebih pada ketidakberlangsungan dalam cerita sejarah.

Kata kunci: *sejarah, petualang, Petualang Australia*

INTRODUCTION

Whether it is fact or fiction, the figure of outlaws always gains people's attention. Their fighting spirit against the elites seems to never fade. As a proof, on 10 June 2004 an exhibition of outlaws from 9 countries was opened at Melbourne Museum. This exhibition included over 500 objects sourced from across the globe, such as bushranger medals, fragments from Jesse James's coffin, 108 Chinese Water Margin ceramic icons, armor worn by Kelly gang member Joe Byrne, Ned Kelly's death masks, Cobb & Co coach that are used to be the targets of bushrangers, Billy The Kid, various films about the outlaws, and many more. The exhibition was also accompanied with more programs related to the theme of outlaws: Bail Up! (Kid activities of making Ned Kelly mask and draw a Wanted poster of Bushrangers); The Age Melbourne Writers' Festival exploring writers' and readers' enduring fascination with outlaws; Outlawed Forum where speakers from Melbourne tertiary institutions examine the common elements of the outlaw figure from different countries; and Screening of Outlawed films at Cinema Nova on Tuesday nights in September this year, including introductory talk and post-film discussion with experts. This event at least becomes a proof that a discussion of Australian outlaws or bushrangers is still relevant.

The image of bushrangers as Australian hero is an interesting phenomenon because regardless of the time it still dwells in people's mind. The image of bushrangers is recreated into new forms of character yet they still show a typical Australian ethos. This paper is a discussion of the bushrangers in popular discourse. This paper will trace how the image of bushrangers is described and interpreted by various texts from the 19th century to the present time.

Russel Ward has tried to invent the Australian image from the bush ethos which is shown mainly by the Irish working class and the Currency. Life in the outback is full of difficulties. Hardships and isolations lead the men to treat one another as brothers. Thus, they shape the culture of mateship. This can be shown by the free and easy hospitality that become everywhere in the interior. The sense of 'up-country' life is shown best in different ways by the bushrangers. The first bushrangers were the convict bolters who took to the bush. They were completely independent of the authorities, more adaptable to the harsh environment, and loyal to one another. Ward says that these people were the first who shaped the 'true' Australians. Bushranging becomes a phenomenon in that the bushrangers gained supports from the people. In fact, the first bushrangers were created by the bad treatments of their masters. This partly explains why people seemed to have more sympathies to them rather than to the police whom they thought as a representation of the repressive colonial system.

While bushrangers embody the Australian country ethos, the image of outlaws as heroes of the people is not typically Australian. Bushranger is one of the most universal and enduring of legendary figures that are variously named romantic highwayman, social bandit, noble brigand, or robber-hero. Epitomized by the stereotypical character of Robin Hood, the outlaw has over the years often changed his dress, habitat, and the manner of performing his lawless deeds. The forest may be replaced by the bush; the bow and arrow by gun, but essentially the myth remains the same: the fearless, independent outlaw, dedicated more or less to defense of the helpless, righting of the wrongs, humbling of the rich and powerful, and dauntless display of the extraordinary courage, deemed to be beyond the ken of the common run of men. Angiolillo believes that appearance of the outlaw seems to occur when living conditions among the larger mass of a society are such that frustration, anger, fear, insecurity, poverty, discrimination, protest, and lack of hope are widespread among the people. Kooistra also argues that these individuals were not considered wicked or depraved. They have been popular media creatures whose criminal exploits have been celebrated in songs, newspapers, books, plays, movies, and even television dramas. These outlaws were viewed as social heroes, and not just during their lifetime, but for decades afterwards. They are lawbreakers who have been transformed from ordinary criminals into legendary Robin Hood figures of epic proportion. As a former colony of the British Crown, Australia

is very likely to carry the tradition and custom from the mother country. Spraggs argues that the cult of outlaws, particularly the highwaymen, in England had started as early as the fourteenth century a bandit gangs the Forville brothers. This kind of cult gained more popularity with the publications of novels and fictions showing the courage and pride of gentleman robbers.

Research Method

This is a library research focusing on the attempt to unfold the various interpretations of the bushrangers in different periods in many types of artifact. The postmodernism perspective is employed in approaching the various images of bushrangers coming from different histories and time dimensions, from colonial up to today's contemporary period.

DISCUSSION

Bushrangers in Australian Public Discourse

Barthes asserts that in the historical discourse of civilization, the process of signification is always aimed at 'filling out' the meaning of History. The historian is not so much a collector of facts as a collector and relater of signifiers; that is to say, he organizes them with the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series. From looking at its structure and without having to invoke the substance of its content, historical discourse is in its essence a form of ideological elaboration, or to put it more precisely, an *imaginary* elaboration, if we can take the imaginary to be the language through which the utterer of a discourse 'fills out' the place of subject of the utterance. Foucault introduces the term 'effective history' which differs from traditional history in being without constants. Knowledge, even under the banner of history, does not depend on 'rediscovery'. It emphatically excludes the 'rediscovery of ourselves'. History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being. Effective history shortens its vision to those things nearest to it; it unearths the periods of decadence. It has no fear of looking down, so long as it is understood that it looks from above and descends to seize the various perspectives, to disclose dispersion and intensity.

Foucault articulates the idea of discontinued history further in his book *The Order of Things*. He coins the term 'episteme' that explains the pattern of thought in an era. He says that there is only one episteme in an era: 'in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one *episteme* that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge'. Another characteristic of episteme is the discontinuity. Foucault writes 'this archaeological inquiry has revealed two great discontinuities in the episteme of Western culture: the first inaugurates the Classical age and the second, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, marks the beginning of the modern age'.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault uses the terms 'discourse' and 'discursive formation' to refer to how knowledge is shaped by language (*langue*) or statements. Both Barthes and Foucault believe that history is never value-free. History is a text which is written and on certain culture and ideology. Thus, historiography also constantly changes in line with the dynamic in society. Fragmentations and dispersions in historiography emerge as the sign of progress rather than merely a critique for the older version of history. Regarding Foucault's theories, Windschuttle says that Foucault's study on criminals, sexual deviants, and other individuals living on the margins of society (society's outcasts) holds the key to understand the mainstream. Based on the theories above, the following section will examine how the phenomenon of bushrangers is interpreted from time to time. Furthermore, the study of the outlawed bushrangers will also discover the social and cultural changes within Australian society. In this analysis, all media is eligible to be used as sources since interpreters always demand any effective means in any given era to reveal their interpretations. A medium that is popular in one era is not necessarily popular in the following eras.

It will be useful to see a very brief overview of the Australian bushranging eras before we start studying the genealogy of the interpretations. Harry Nunn divides bushranging history into three eras. The first era is what he calls 'The Convict Bolters'. Bushranging started in Van Diemen's Land with the convicts who escaped from misery. By 1832, there were 112 convicts who escaped from Macquarie Harbour Penal station and took to the bush. In New South Wales bushranging started to flourish in 1789. The increase in the number of transported convicts, the harsh discipline, and inefficiency of the penal system led to increased numbers of escapees which in turn created the need for more easily policed and more secure penal settlements. At the Norfolk Island penal settlement, the discipline and conditions were so harsh that the death was frequently sought as a release from the misery. Many bushrangers from Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales were sent to the Island.

The second era of bushranging occurred mainly in Victoria. This era was usually called the era of 'Wild Colonial Boys' and the 'Gold Rush Bushrangers' happening from 1852 to 1854, and the new 'native-born' bushrangers during the 1870s. Hold-ups and robberies began in 1842 with 'Yankie Jack' Ellis and his gang. Separation of Victoria from New South Wales in 1850 and a sudden huge increase in population with the gold rush brought difficult situation for many people. This couple with development of self-government and acquisition of landholdings influenced the character of bushranging, which was also given impetus with an inflow of 'Vandemonians', the ex-convicts from Van Diemen's Land. These bushrangers were characteristically linked with gold fields, gold escorts, bank robberies, cattle duffing, and highway stick-ups.

The third era of bushranging lasted between 1860s and 1870s. In New South Wales, during the 5 years, from 1862 to 1867, 23 bushrangers were either killed or hanged. The news of fresh gold strikes in 1860 attracted thousands of diggers across the border from Victoria. In the quest for gold and adventure were many who turned to bushranging. These new bushrangers were usually either native born or sons of immigrants. Victoria became the centre of the bushranging epic during the entire bushranging era. It is undoubtedly because of the mystique surrounding Ned Kelly and his gang who were going around from 1878 to 1880. However, modern technology such as the electric telegraph and the railway had cut across time and space. As the consequence, the bushrangers the Kellys and Captain Moonlight (early 1879) were defeated by the police.

Images of Bushrangers in Colonial Australia

Bushrangers become an important element in Australian social life because of its heroic character. Moreover, bushrangers in fact become a milestone in Australian culture because they are a source of many Australian literary works. The first Australian play to be staged was entitled *The Bushrangers*. The play written by David Burn was presented at the Caledonian Theatre, Edinburgh, Scotland in 1829. As such, it is historically important. David Burn himself was born in Scotland in 1799 and came to Van Diemen's Land as a free settler in 1826. This play is based freely on the exploits of the bushranger, Matthew Brady, who, with 14 or 15 other convicts, engineered an escape from the dreaded penal settlement at Macquarie Harbor in 1824. Three bushrangers Brady (Matthew Brady), MacCabe, and Bird rebelled against the wardens of Macquarie Harbor. They could not bear the torture and the forced labors anymore. The penal service that they have to do has gone beyond the limit.

Brady and his 2 fellows decide to 'take to the bush' because they don't see any hope of better life. The punishment that they have to bear in Macquarie Harbor is even harder than in England. They have to bear harsh treatment, such as ruthless flogging. On 20 November 1830, *Sydney Gazette* reported: 'the prisoners of all classes in Government are fed with the coarsest food; governed with the most rigid discipline; subjected to the stern, and frequently capricious and tyrannical will of an overseer. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, a convict will find his employer suspicious, or whimsical, or a blockhead, not knowing good conduct from bad, or a despot, who treats him like a slave, cursing and abusing, and getting him flogged for no reasonable cause'.

Burn also describes the bushrangers as gentleman outlaws who help women. It can be seen when the bushrangers meet Jefferies who is trying to rape Margaret. Jefferies, who escaped earlier from prison, called himself 'bushranger fellow' which Burn denounces because Jefferies has been known as a cannibal who ate his own mate in order to stay alive in the bush. In historical record, Jefferies, Hopkins, and Russel ran away from Macquarie Harbor. Their provision failed. They agreed to toss up to decide who should die to save others. Russel lost and was immediately shot by Jefferies. The two men lived on the flesh for 5 days. Margaret refers to Mrs. Tibbs who was forced by Jefferies to walk fast with her baby in her arms. Jefferies snatched the baby from her and dashed its brains out against a sapling. In contrast, Brady as the leader of the gang laid down rules for its guidance: they must neither injure the defenseless, nor molest females, but could kill traitors, revenge injuries, and carry away all that was likely to prove useful to them.

Another play adopting bushrangers as the protagonist is Charles Harpur's *The Tragedy of Donohoe* which was edited by Edward Smith Hall. The play was published in the *Sydney Monitor* from 7 to 28 February 1835. It was rewritten later on by Charles Harpur as *Stalwart the Bushranger* in 1867. This play follows the Romantic melodrama concerning public and political themes: the shifting definitions of law and tyranny; the passion for justice and liberty in conflict with individualistic self-assertion; the demands of mercy and of revenge. By romantic convention, characters of comradeship and loyalty are given to the gang of sardonic bushrangers, whereas the civil and police authorities are rendered in a richly Hogarthian portrait of colorful cowardice, place-hunting and property-worship. *Stalwart* renders with clarity the contradictory tragic and comic potential of the Australian cultural inheritance as established at the country's penal foundation; where conflict between, and competing definitions of, justice and individualism within a transplanted class society remain potent and unresolved. *Stalwart* recognizes himself as by nature proud, passionate and impulsive, but he finally embraces evil in despair, to end a hunted existence. Yet, the disposition of the people to make heroes of them worried the authorities until the twentieth century. Harpur *understood* *Stalwart*, but his sympathies were with his victims. *Stalwart the Bushranger* shows no respect for the upholders of law and order, but there is not respect, either for the common people who jeer at the stupidity of the police. *Stalwart* and his fellow bushrangers are victims as well as purveyors of social evil.

From 1 July 1882 to 11 August 1883, *The Sydney Mail* published *Robbery under Arms*. The story was composed by Rolf Boldrewood whose real name was Thomas Alexander Browne. The story was published as a novel in 3 volumes in 1888. This is a story of colonial outlaws during the goldrush days. The novel describes how poverty turns the Marston family into bushrangers. Ben Marston, the father, has a habit of duffing stocks in the Sydney-side at night. This act is actually a common habit among settlers in the district. People can easily take unbranded stocks and keep them until someone claims them their property. They will let them have the stocks only with a ransom. Or else, they simply branded the stocks as theirs and deny anyone who makes a claim over the stocks. Jim Marston and his younger brother Dick Marston follow the way of their father. They decide to take to the bush, leaving their mother and Aileen their sister. They join the adventure under the leadership of Captain Starlight and commit a number of robberies. The novel is narrated through the character of Dick Marston, the prisoner, and bushrangers. Through his eyes, the Australian landscape is captured accurately. However, Boldrewood's attitude towards developing nationalism is ambiguous. He wants to say that colonial life fosters physical excellence and is the best way to live for an Australian. Nevertheless, he writes the novel for British readers; consequently he presents Australia as they would expect to see it. Boldrewood creates the character of a real gentleman in Captain Starlight, the Englishman rather than Ben, Jim, or Dick Marston because they are Australian-born Irishmen. The author's confused attitude is revealed in Dick's dialogues.

Boldrewood still manifests his belief in English social class even among the bushrangers albeit ambivalent. Dick's statement does not reveal any conclusion of his attitude toward English aristocracy and Australian nationalism. Boldrewood is merely attracted to the excitement and vitality of the bushrangers.

In the 19th century, Britain was dominated with the vast growth of high culture which was the character of Victorian values. While some British-born authors, such as Boldrewood produced fine Romantic literature on the theme of bushrangers, the same theme was exploited by the common Australians to celebrate their sympathy to bushrangers. They told the stories and glorified the bushrangers in ballad. Ballad, with all its honesty and candidness, was just the opposite of literature which glorified the Romantic ideas. Popular culture contested high culture. A great number of ballads passed the name of bushrangers into eternity. Below are some lines of 'Bold Jack Donahoe' dedicated to Jack Donahoe who committed robberies in New South Wales in the 1820s:

*Then come, my hearties, we'll roam the mountains high!
Together we will plunder, together we will die!
We'll wander over mountains and we'll gallop over plains
For we scorn to live in slavery, bound down in iron chains.*

Some ballads were also sung in memory of Ben Hall who was the least violent and most tragic of all bushrangers:

*Come all Australia's sons to me
A hero has been slain
And cowardly butchered in his sleep
Upon the Lachlan Plain.*

People also pay tribute to Frank Gardiner, the bushranger who robbed mail coaches and goldfield towns in New South Wales in the 1860s. Gardiner was aware that, in order to retain sympathy of the bush farmers and workers. He had to be seen to act, in accordance with the conventions of the highwaymen tradition. In a ballad, he is regarded as the friend of the poor. This is the last verse of the ballad:

*Farewell, adieu to outlawed Frank, he was the poor man's friend
The government has secured him, the laws he did offend
He boldly stood his trial and answered in a breath
'Do what you will, you can but kill, I have no fear of death'*

Ned Kelly and his gang gain the most popularity in popular culture. A large number of ballads and songs have been created when he was still alive and after his death on the gallows. Here is a quote from a song entitled 'The Bold Kelly Gang' which was published in 1879, a year before he was sentenced to death:

*Oh there's not a dodge worth knowing or showing
But you'll learn (this isn't blowing) from the bold Kelly gang
We've mates wherever we go
That somehow let us know the approach of every for to the Bold Kelly Gang*

About 1879 a broadsheet of four Kelly songs was published in Hobart, Tasmania. One of the songs 'The Ballad of the Kelly Gang' is a good song, and one that has stood the test of a century of singers.

Seal argues that songs like this, together with a variety of Kelly's beliefs, tales, and forms of speech make up a strong oral tradition in Australian society. Many more ballads are sung about The Kelly gang, for example *Farewell for My Home in Greta*, *Farewell Dan and Edward Kelly*, and *My Name is Edward Kelly*. Charles Noble, a nineteenth-century concert singer even wrote a parody of a Schumann song in late 1879 or 1880 and to have performed it 'with success'. The title of his song is *The Kellys' Foes*. The ballads and songs about bushrangers usually tell about the boldness in their

manner. Their brave, manful manner is often contrasted to the cowardice and treachery of the police and the troopers. Their mastery of the Australian landscape is also an important theme in the ballads. Ballads serve as the media that immortalize the name of the bushrangers.

In addition to high culture and popular culture, a good intellectual work about Australian bushrangers should also be referred. In 1899, George A. Boxall's *The Story of the Australian Bushrangers* was published in London. The book has long been regarded as the most accurate and comprehensive single book on an era of widespread lawlessness and injustice. The importance of Boxall's book lies in its balanced view of the bushranger phenomenon. Boxall suggests that we do not oversimplify or generalize all bushrangers as criminals. He says that even a civilized man may be degraded by unjust and oppressive laws. He says that it is unfair to blame the earlier bushrangers because they were the products of the civilization of their day, and were not themselves responsible. In Chapter I of the book, Boxall gives a comprehensive description of the desperation of the convicts who were often abused to work for 7 days a week and punished with brutal punishment, such as: flogging. Moreover, their food ration was on the lowest quality. Boxall believes that the early bushrangers were the victims generally of unjust laws. Neither can we blame the native-born bushrangers, since they were the vicious products of a vicious past. Their crimes were due to vicious environment and education.

Images of Bushrangers in the First Half of the 20th Century

Nineteenth century saw a divide opinion about bushrangers in high culture, such as literature. While popular culture like ballads and songs immortalized the bushrangers with their chivalric, bold manner. In the 20th century, the depiction of bushrangers took more sophisticated means. After his death in 1880, Ned Kelly's image has been outshining other bold bushrangers, such as Ben Hall or Frank Gardiner. This tradition continues during the 20th century. So, in the following parts, this essay will carry out more examinations on the images of The Kelly gang in public discourse. Seal writes that in the 1930s, an infant local broadcasting and recording industry found its Australian voice in the form of country music, originally copied from American recordings. Country music in the United States had its own tradition of 'badman' heroes and after the initial wave of mindless imitation had subsided a little, Australian singers began looking for local heroes to balladise. In 1939, Tex Morton and 'Smiling' Billy Blinkhorn both recorded songs about Ned Kelly for Regal Zonophone. These were followed by numerous Australian country songs celebrating the Kellys and sung by such popular and big-selling artists as Slim Dusty, Smoky Dawson, and Buddy Williams. These songs were derived from the existing oral traditions. In these songs, the most widely used aspect was the concept of the outlaws as brave, resourceful men who 'died game'.

Besides musical records, there were several films produced upon the stories of the Kelly gang. In 1923, a silent film was produced, *The True Story of the Kelly Gang*. This is a confusing movie which insists on drawing morality from the gang. It portrays Constable Fitzpatrick as a hard-line trooper, and shows the bravery of the police in fighting the gang. Some scenes seem to be rather forcefully produced, in order to give moral lessons to people though the results even make the movie looks awkward. For example, it is shown that the Kellys' sympathizers and their 'bush telegraphs' assist the gang only for money. The movie alters Kelly's famous last words 'Such is Life' into 'And such is the inevitable fate of all who rebel against the righteous and mighty forces of law and order' just before Ned is hanged. It ends with a final card saying 'The wages of sin is death' that sounds like a cliché.

A play about the Kellys was published for the first time in 1943 under the title *Ned Kelly*. Douglas Stewart, the playwright, might not have been the first person to write about The Kellys, but his play was the first play to be published. In the play, Stewart (through the character of Steve Hart) portrays the Kelly gang as the heirs of Ben Hall, Power, and Thunderbolt, the kings of the road. Ned lays down their chivalric, gentleman manner as his gang's rules like bowing to the ladies and kissing

the blooming babies. Ned makes Steve Hart hand back the watch that he stole from Reverend Gribble because, as he says, his men 'are not thieves'.

In the first half of the 20th century, the aura of Ned Kelly still was not waning. It was growing stronger not only among the common people, but also among the noted people. Ned Kelly attracted Sidney Nolan, the most famous Australian painter and internationally the best known Australian artist, to produce 27 paintings, with Ned as the central themes. The Kelly's paintings painted in 1946 to 1947 are considered as his most carefully planned of any he has done. Nolan paints Kelly as a hunted outlaw, as he usually treats other subjects in other paintings. In doing his paintings, Nolan was much influenced by his own life. As his life changed he painted different Kellys: from being heroic, unassailable and defiant, Kelly becomes dejected, forlorn, and rather frightened in later paintings. Nolan feels that Kelly has emerged as a more complex figure in the paintings. Some see him as a prototype of a guerrilla rather than a comic figure painted by a naïve artist. Nolan says 'I can see how the works link us to the past with our memories of the landscape and the oddity of the Kelly outbreak...Strange things link us, because Australians are a tribe and I don't mean that in any disparaging ways...We are the only tribe that can think of Kelly as part of our culture and history. I paint Kelly as a part of Australia's culture and mine.' Interpreting the Kelly saga, Alan Moorehead writes 'Nolan's approaches Kelly as revolutionary rather than a criminal. He is on Kelly's side. His haunting, monolithic figure in the iron mask has the flames of hell upon it, but that slit for the eyes is wonderfully expressive of defiance; this is the crisis of a strong man in chaos, and once again the tragedy is beautiful.'

In 1951, a film about the Kelly gang was released, *The Glenrowan Affair*. It was directed by Rupert Kathner. The Kelly gang is narrated by an old man (who is known at the end of the film as Dan Kelly) talking to a painter who is painting the landscape of Greta, the home of Kelly's family. Being unable to capture the Kelly's gang, the police arrest everyone associated with the gang and put them in jail. According to Seal, this film was wildly inaccurate. The film also shows that the Kellys' sympathizers actually only want their money. Despite the partial story, it shows the role of Kate Kelly, Ned's sister, as heroine. The police chief tells the constables to watch Kate because she knows the bush as well as Ned and she is a very good horsewoman.

Images of Bushrangers from the 1950s to 2000

In *The Australian Legend* (1958), Russel Ward believes that bushrangers came to occupy a good place in Australian legend partly because Australians needed military figures as people of other countries do. This interpretation is drawn upon the traditional legend brought from Britain. The Ward's strongest argument says that the bushrangers' ethos was closely related to the working class, particularly the Irish, and the sense of up-country life. The common people or the bushmen shared the same ethos as the bushrangers. However, among the bushmen, the bushrangers possessed the greatest Australian spirit. It was shown from their complete 'independence' of the British authorities. They had an outstanding ability to adapt to the harsh environment; they were resourceful and loyal to each other. Ward says that bushrangers were the 'genus' of the true Australians. Among the people bushrangers became folk-heroes because they were symbols of the emergent Australian national feeling. This national feeling was born of their adaptability to the harshest Australian landscape.

During the Easter of 1967, a symposium on Ned Kelly was held at the Wangaratta Adult Education Centre. The symposium discussed Ned Kelly from different perspectives and it offered a more careful interpretation of Ned Kelly. Professor Manning Clark, in his article, suggests that Ned was in ambivalent situation. He was aware of the divine prohibition of theft and murder, but aware too, that such acts against the men who had condemned 'many blooming Irishman' to a life of tyranny were not crimes. He seems to have sensed that the English had repeated in Australia their abominations against his people. Ian Jones comments that the story of the Kelly's rebellion is not conclusive. Many vital links are missing. The Kellys were much more than mere criminals. Any

attempt to interpret the escalation of the Kelly outbreak and the support afforded the Kelly gang as merely the results of a group of people supporting criminals in pursuit of criminal gain, is illogical. The gathering and turning back of the sympathizers at Glenrowan is irrefutable and we would be justified in saying that Ned Kelly, the man, was infinitely greater than his legend, a man of greater nobility and moral courage than anything we have even hinted at in the past.

Another movie which exploits the story of the Kelly gang was released in 1970, *Ned Kelly*. The movie is starring Mick Jagger. It shows how the conflict between the Kellys and the authority started. Constable Fitzpatrick who gets drunk comes to the Kelly's home to arrest Dan Kelly. Being asked to show a warrant for the arrest, he shows his revolver and puts it on the table. Then he tries to molest one of the Kelly's girls in the house, so that Dan defends his sister. This is the scene that becomes an argument. In this movie, Ned Kelly is absent from the house which contradicts Fitzpatrick's testimony at court, saying he was shot by Ned. Yet, the sole testimony is accepted by the court and subsequently Mrs. Kelly is sentenced for 3 years in jail. The film once again lifts up a female figure, Mrs. Kelly as a heroine, a victim of repressive authority upon false testimony of a corrupt police officer. Ned shows his rather indifferent character in this movie. It becomes blurred whether it is Mick Jagger's character (who is a rock star) which influences his role as Ned, or it is Ned's real traits that fit Mick Jagger.

Historiography has developed from a classic linear history, indicated by a timeline to various versions, which are fragmented from one to another. History is no longer seen as continuity, but as discontinuity, as Foucault says. In the 1980s, the historical accounts on bushrangers showed such symptom with the narration of 'spatial history'. In 1980, Alan Sharpe wrote a book *Bushranger Country* in which he invites the urban Australians to explore bushranger country. Sharpe argues that in so doing, they will not only discover another way of life, they may also restore some of the better values into their own. The book is illustrated with many pictures of places which the bushrangers had walked on.

Peter C. Smith is another writer who writes the history of bushrangers in a spatial perspective, *Tracking Down the Bushrangers* (1982). Smith interprets the bushrangers from their physical abilities and familiarity with the bush that enabled them to travel the countryside performing acts of daring and bravado which was in contrast to the dubious capabilities of the police. Smith suggests that the remarkable feats of the bushrangers were based on their intimate knowledge of the country. They were at home in the bush. The bushranging outbreak took a place over a huge expanse of land that was the background to post-gold rush youth. It was the wild unknown to those who were strangers to it. He asserts that to appreciate the full dimension of bushranging we must appreciate the country in which it took place. Smith's book evokes excitement from the adventures and above all, the book tells the readers about the bushranging incidents and provides a direction to get to the regions.

With regional maps, photographs of figures of both, bushrangers and police officers, buildings, tombstones, and memorials, Smith's *Tracking Down the Bushrangers* is more attractive to read rather than Charles White's *History of Australian Bushranging* (1980), which was published in 2 volumes. White makes a comprehensive research on the history of bushrangers since the beginning in Van Diemen's Land. White writes the bushrangers in their many faces, from the incendiary and murderer, such as Daniel Morgan to the bold Gardiner and Hall who never during the career attempted to wound or kill either the persons whom he robbed or the police who hunted him.

The 1990s saw a new interpretation on bushrangers. In *Bandits on the Great North Road* (1993) Cliff Hanna says that the bushrangers become ambiguous figures to the last, a blend of romance and brutality, of kindness and cruelty, of high spirits and desperation, he is both the murderous robber and the cheeky boy who gains people's admiration. She argues that from the beginning, the bushrangers were more than simply outlaws. As 'bandits', they were the first to manifest open dissatisfaction with the confining nature of British rule, a dissatisfaction which later

became the distinguishing characteristics of the native-born. Like Ward's argument, the bushrangers were the first among Europeans to see the Australian landscape as a haven rather than a hell, as a place of freedom rather than a penitentiary. They drew attention to the difference between the English ('sterling') and native-born ('currency') classes, and between the power of the rich and helplessness of the poor. In this way, they reinforced the need for a more egalitarian, democratic society, and helped to establish in Australian culture the myth of the underdog. So, the bushrangers are a force for social change.

Bushrangers in Contemporary Imagining

The newest *bildungsroman* that describes the life of Ned Kelly was published in 2000. Written by Peter Carey, the novel becomes an Australian and international bestseller. The novel describes Ned's life at its best; the narration gives an excellent intertwining of the events in Ned's life that are often missed in other stories, books, and movies. At this time, Ned speaks about himself, from his first memory when he was three years old, his early relation with the police, his apprenticeship with the famous bushranger Harry Power to earn money, his relation with Mary Hearn, his bushranging, and the gang's fight with the police at Glenrowan Inn. The novel mainly describes Ned as a devoted son who always tries to support and protect his mother, Mrs. Kelly. The reasons why Ned was involved in crimes at his early age is explained in this novel. The Hollywood version of *Ned Kelly* movie was released in 2003 by Universal Studios, starring Heath Ledger, Orlando Bloom, Naomi Watts, and Geoffrey Rush. In this movie, Ned (Heath Ledger) is portrayed like what he describes himself in the Jerilderie Letter. The director (Gregor Jordan) decides to use Ned Kelly as the narrator of the movie, different from other previous movies in which Ned's character is exploited by other people. Constable Fitzpatrick is described as the cause of the Kellys rebellion, similar to *Ned Kelly* film in 1970 version. Mrs. Kelly is sentenced three years of hard labor on Fitzpatrick's testimony. In this movie, Ned is described as a good-mannered man, a devoted Irish Catholic who respects women, and as a man who turns gloomy after shooting Constable Lonigan and Sergeant Kennedy. It is a bit different from Mick Jagger's Ned. The movie also shows the antagonism between the powerless working class who are mainly Irish and the English-born people. Ned the narrator says 'It is not easy for Irish folks to live in Queen Victoria's colony'. It suggests oppression toward the Irish by the Crown's authority at Ned's time. Ned and his gang are heroes against the repressive authority. The movie shows the corruption of Victorian police in the 1870s.

We may also notice that in the present time, the bushrangers have become the icon of the state of Victoria. In mass printing, *The Age* constantly uses 'the Kelly country' phrase in place of Victoria. The armors, used to be worn by the Kelly gang, have been printed in Victorian tourism postcards. Children are also introduced to the character of Ned Kelly and his armor. If we take a walk in Melbourne city centre, the images of Ned Kelly are painted on the walls on Bourke Street and Elizabeth Street. All of this means that Ned Kelly or the bushrangers have become a national pride. Their fighting spirit and mastery over the Australian landscape outweigh their malice.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis, we can draw some important points. In the 19th century, the interpretation of bushrangers was divided into 2 major opinions. The plays and novel show bushrangers as possessing good qualities and gentleman manners. Yet, the plays do not really glorify the bushranger figures as shown in *The Tragedy of Donohoe* and *Stalwart the Bushranger*. Both plays neither take side on the bushrangers nor defend the police, but put sympathy to the victims. The novel *Robbery under Arms* shows an ambiguous nationalism. There is a belief in the English class structure and the new Australian culture of freedom and equality. A different interpretation is shown in ballads and

songs. The ballads and songs tend to see bushrangers as bold people in opposition to the coward police. They are regarded as the common people's friends. In short, there was ambivalence in society's opinion of bushrangers in the 19th century.

With the introduction of country music in Australian popular culture, the image of bushrangers was lifted up in the first half of the 20th century. Country songs celebrated these outlaws as brave and resourceful people. Film also became a new technology that exploited the stories of bushrangers. Most silent movies portrayed the bushrangers as outlaws who brought evil to the society. In contrast, law and order had to be upheld, and the figure that rose was the police. The silent movies usually praised the police as the protector of people. This sort of narration was due to the tight censorship of the government because in their view the bushrangers did not teach morality and respect to law. In the 1940s, bushrangers were celebrated in high culture for the first time by Sidney Nolan's *The Kelly* paintings. Nolan saw these bushrangers as an element that bound the Australian people as a tribe, a solid nation. He also took side on the Kellys and saw them as part of Australia's culture and history rather than common criminals. Nolan invited the audience to link themselves to the past through the character of bushrangers and there is no shame in it. This period also witnessed the rise of Kate Kelly as the heroine along with the bushrangers. The heroine possesses equal bush knowledge and horse skill as the bushrangers as shown in *The Glenrowan Affair*.

In the 1950s, Russel Ward interpreted bushrangers as figures that Australians needed. It is alike what Barthes says that historians not only collect facts, but more write a 'fiction' with an aim to fill out the vacuum in the society. The bushrangers, Ward argued, were the first real Australians, the *genus* of Australian nation. In the 1960s, history played an important role in interpreting the bushrangers. The details of the bushrangers' life and their qualities were seen from different angles. Some saw them as violent criminals, but most of them saw them as people of outstanding qualities, such as Ned Kelly described by Aaron Sherrit (was killed by Joe Byrne for being the police's scout) as 'superhuman'. Also, historical researches looked more closely on the social contexts, such as poverty and social antagonism between the selectors and the squatters. Ned Kelly was described as a tough, indifferent character in *Ned Kelly* film released in 1970. Yet, his character was shaped by the circumstance that forced him to take to the bush. A different interpretation was seen in the 1980s when the bushrangers were seen as the people who mastered the harsh Australian landscape. To understand the bushrangers, it required an 'understanding' of the Australian landscape and vice versa. The spatial history of bushrangers is shown in the books by Peter Smith, Alan Sharpe, and Kevin Passey. The significance of bushrangers was growing more in the 1990s, although their figures are still ambiguous, a blend of kindness and cruelty. Nevertheless, they were regarded as the first who had seen the Australian landscape as a place of freedom rather than a penitentiary. The bushrangers were a social force which encouraged egalitarianism and democracy in Australia.

In contemporary culture, bushrangers are coming back. They are 'speaking' about themselves after more than one century people have been talking about and describing them. This new interpretation can be seen in the method of narration in Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*. Ned Kelly tells a long story of his life since his childhood and devotion to his mother which leads him to bushranging. In *Ned Kelly* movie (2003), Ned also tells about his own life. Ned is described as a good person, representing the Irish folks who find it hard living in a colony of the English Crown. Besides, bushrangers are now becoming a national pride.

In conclusion, the Australian society's attitude toward bushrangers has been changing from time to time. Beginning with ambivalence between the mother country's culture and the new Australian ethos, Australian society is moving toward a new strong nation which possesses their own distinctive characters. As time is moving toward the present time, through the interpretations of bushrangers, we notice a social and cultural progress in Australia. The culture of openness and egalitarianism are inextricable characters of the Australians since the Australian authority do not interfere or censor the interpretations of bushrangers anymore. The exercise of repressive power upon

people is discontinued. People have their freedom of speech and the culture of democracy guarantees the right. Speaking out their own opinion is not a taboo and it is shown by the metaphors of Ned Kelly telling the story of his own life in *Ned Kelly* movie (2003) and Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*. Bushrangers are passed onto a national character. One important point in the bushrangers' heroism is that there is a place for a heroine (Kate Kelly and Mrs. Kelly) which is rarely found in other Australian heroes whether it is the bushmen, diggers, shearers, Anzac soldiers or even in canonical history books of Australia. This is another development in Australian history. So, going back to Foucault's theory by reading the 'texts' or 'imaginary elaborations' (in Barthes's term) about the 'outcasts' bushrangers, we can discover the progress in the mainstream culture of Australian society.

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APPENDIX

Silent Movies:

Bail Up! The Bushranger on Australia's Silent Screen available in VID format, produced by the National Film and Sound Archive. 1996.

Kelly Gang (1906)

Robbery Under Arms (1920)

The Kelly Gang (1920)

The Story of the Kelly Gang (1906)

The Story of the Kelly Gang (1910)

Thunderbolt (1910)

Trooper Campbell (1914)

Trooper O'Brien (1928)

When the Kellys Were Out (1923)

Other Movies:

Ned Kelly. A movie directed by Tony Richardson. Original Release: 1970, Video Recording. DVD version released by MGM Home Entertainment, 2003.

Ned Kelly. A movie directed by Gregor Jordan. Starring Heath Ledger, Orlando Bloom, Naomi Watts, and Geoffrey Rush. DVD Collection released by Universal Pictures, 2003.

The Glenrowan Affair. A movie directed by Rupert Kathner. Original Release: 1951. DVD version released by ScreenSound Australia, 2002.