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**Emma Hamilton**

University of Newcastle, Australia

## **Such Is Western: An Overview of the Australian Western via Ned Kelly Films**

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The very existence of the Australian Western, also variously — and delightfully — dubbed the “kangaroo Western” and the “meat-pie Western,” has been subject to scholarly debate. Grayson Cooke, for example, asserts that Australia has “never developed ‘the Western’ as such, as a complex mechanism of national identity,” although he does acknowledge a small number of films, such as bushranger narratives that could be classed as “Westerns” (6, see also [as Cooke also cites] Collins and Davis 96; Hoskins 22). For William Routt the consonances between some Australian feature films and American Westerns are “the result of certain cultural coincidences... rather than the outcome of direct influence of the one upon the other” (2), a perspective which complicates, indeed renders void, the notion of an Australian Western. Ultimately, arguments against the notion of the Australian Western tap into a variety of concerns including: the weakness of Australia’s domestic film industry, which allegedly causes the reproduction rather than the reinterpretation of American trends; the ubiquity of American influence in terms of genre, production, and box office clout; and, significantly, how best to shield Australian stories, whereby the rejection of the category of “Western” recasts those films as something distinct and unique rather than as the products of a transnational interplay.

Recent work on the international and intertextual Western, however, has pointed to the inevitability of the Western as a film genre that transcends a particular place, and even a particular historical time. Cynthia Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper’s edited collection, *International Westerns*, points precisely to this phenomenon, highlighting that the issues presented in the Western are those of a country “modernizing”

at the turn of the twentieth century and, therefore, are transferrable to other nations in transition (*vix*). Peter Limbrick's touchstone article on the possibilities of the Australian Western argued that the Western, at its core, is about societies making sense of imperial-colonial relationships, that it is: "a settler colonial mode of cinema that turns to certain narrative and representational strategies as part of a larger cultural project of grounding white settler cultures within colonized landscapes" (69). This was a perspective expanded on by this author who pointed out that, considering the historical parallels between American and Australian experiences, it is little wonder that the conventions of the Western genre would fall on fertile Australian soil. These parallels in terms of both nations' contested settlement, their renegotiated meanings of a violent "frontier experience," and their attempt to weave a cohesive national identity from the disparate threads of ethnicity, experience and displacement have led to the development of films that are distinctly Western. Dissonant historical experiences, for example, surrounding convictism, Australia's relationship with Britain and the Asia Pacific, and domestic civil rights movements have correspondingly led to a cinema that is also distinctly Australian (Hamilton 133).

This article examines the arguments surrounding the "Australian Western," via the history of Ned Kelly feature length film Westerns. It does so with particular purpose of illuminating the development and cycles of the "Australian Western" and their relationships to American developments in the genre. Born in 1855, Ned Kelly was a real figure in Australian history; a bushranger subsequently mythologized as a folk hero. Kelly, a "native born" Australian of Irish convict ancestry with a long history of arrests and imprisonments, formed what would be dubbed the "Kelly gang" in response to an arrest warrant for which Kelly proclaimed his innocence and following the arrest of his mother. Composed of his brother, Dan, and friends Joe Byrne and Steve Hart, the gang would be involved in, amongst other crimes, the assault and murder of police officers, the murder of a police informant, and armed robbery. Despite the severity of his crimes Kelly made public proclamations decrying police persecution and discrimination and sought to reposition his crimes then as justifiable rebellion against oppressive colonial conditions, especially those imposed upon poor Irish families. The gang met its end at a hotel in the Victorian town of Glenrowan where, after the bandits' failed attempt to derail a train transporting police personnel, they engaged in a shoot-out with police while clad in hand-made armor. This shoot-out led to the deaths of Dan Kelly, Byrne and Hart and the wounding and capture of Ned Kelly, who was executed by hanging in 1880 after (allegedly) uttering the final words: "Such is life" (for an overview of Kelly's life see Barry's entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography online). Instead of being cast as a villain of Australian colonial society, Kelly has been subsequently reimagined as a hero embodying many of the values embraced in an emerging colonial ethos: anti-authoritarianism, independence, and as a "battler" concerned with conditions of the lower classes and disrespectful of signs and affectations associated

with wealth. In many ways the rehabilitation of Kelly's image acted by proxy to rehabilitate the image of a "new" and white Australia, turning the "convict stain" into a source of pride and recasting colonial authorities into agents of oppression and reinforcers of "Old World" English class divisions rather than as "civilizing agents."

The Kelly iconography allows for a significant analysis of what, exactly, constitutes the Western, of how the Western can be reconstituted in an Australian context, and how Australian Westerns can reinform American concepts of the frontier. For some, such as Stephen Gaunson, American outlaw films fit easily within an American Western genre and this accounts for their popularity, while Australian outlaw films fit only within a "bushranging cycle," a genre that was disrupted by censorship legislation implemented in Australia in the early 1900s in an attempt to stymie the glorification of criminality (*The Ned Kelly Films* 5). Implicitly Gaunson's suggestion here is that the American Western and the Australian bushranging film are mutually exclusive, rather than linked and that, indeed, Australian films too can be Western. Similarly, Daniel Eisenberg argues that Kelly films would still exist even if the Western genre did not, as "bushranger films are precursors... rather than a part of the [Western] genre itself" ("You Got the Wrong F\*\*\*in' Black Man!" 204). This article will explore such arguments and counter-arguments, giving consideration to the history, production and themes of Ned Kelly filmic representation in order to illuminate the development of the Western in Australia. Such consideration highlights the ways in which the Western genre functions as a language through which to explore the meaning of settlement in occupied spaces, but whose dialectic differences reflect particular national contexts and relationships to Hollywood soft power.

Aside from art exhibitions, folk songs, written material, theatrical performances, and even a representation, armored and all, at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games opening ceremony, the Kelly myth has been perpetuated through successive films spanning almost one hundred years, from 1906 to 2003. *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, directed by Charles Tait and released to burgeoning cinema audiences in 1906, was certainly Australia's, and possibly the world's, first feature film (Walsh 102). Tait's version of the Kelly saga came at an interesting juncture in the development of the American filmic Western, released as it was just three years after Edwin S. Porter's silent short film *The Great Train Robbery*. Widely considered to be the first identifiable Western film, it too features bandits involved in armed robbery who are eventually killed by the representatives of the law, and both films were verified hits that spurred on the genre within their respective national contexts. While substantial portions of Tait's Kelly film have been lost, Ina Bertrand has used contemporaneous evidence to assert that "the public loved the finished product... [which took] a rather romantic view of the story and an air of sorrow rather than anger at the gang's exploits," and the positive reception of the film prompted concerns that it might incite a rash of public imitation (15; Cooke 6). Tait's film may not have had some of the technical astuteness that

many scholars detected in Porter's work but, even with scenes missing, the influence of American filmic developments on Australian style was clear to see. Walsh suggests that "very early 'American shot' framing" combined with Tait's theatrical background and auteurism to produce "an emerging and self-conscious cinematic imagination, a desire to incorporate new ways of doing things to tell stories in more powerfully affective ways" (105). One could argue that it is certainly no coincidence that these films emerged at this historical moment; both films reflected upon technological innovations and societies (and masculinities) in transition and frontiers closing at the dawn of the twentieth century — issues not unique to either nation — but which were interpreted and reinterpreted in particular contexts.

The success of *The Story of the Kelly Gang* spawned a cycle of bushranger films, with twenty films focused on bushranging plots being produced in the subsequent six years, many of which concerned other "real life" Australian outlaws such as Dan Morgan and Ben Hall (Eisenberg 147; for an overview of these films see Routt 13–16). The success of *Kelly Gang* also spawned public morality concerns and concerns that the valorization of outlaws would adversely impact on the surviving victims or their families (Bertrand 15). Subsequently, governmental legislation was introduced that censored the showing of bushranger films in New South Wales and Victoria, Australia's most populous (and profitable) states, from 1912 (Eisenberg 147). This substantially impacted upon the way in which the Kelly narrative would unfold over the coming decades when film-maker Harry Southwell would reinterpret the Kelly legend. Southwell would direct *The True Story of the Kelly Gang* (1920), *When the Kellys Were Out* (1922), *When the Kellys Rode* (1934), and he would be involved in the development of *The Glenrowan Affair* (Rupert Kathner), which would be released in 1951 and from which he withdrew. Censorship and public morality had a profound impact upon the telling of Kelly's story, both in terms of its distribution but also in terms of conceptualizing Kelly in less romantic and heroic terms and the increasingly favorable views of the police as victims of lawlessness and brutality, cut down while attempting to defend "civilization" (Bertrand 16–17). Similar concerns about public morality would influence the shape of the emergent outlaw Western in America, yet in different ways. For example, Hughes points out that the success of *The Great Train Robbery* stimulated a rise in outlaw Westerns and producers sought to contain the moral outrage directed at this development by rehabilitating the outlaw entirely, so that he was really not an outlaw at all (64–65). Thus, while early Jesse James films, such as the first produced in 1911, may have been willing to acknowledge his criminality, later films, constrained by the specter of censorship, posited that "whatever vices Jesse James possessed, fail to compare with the cinematic virtues with which he was now endowed" (64). In this formative cinematic period both Australian and American films sought to reflect on the transitions occasioned by the closing of the frontier through the lens of outlaw and began grappling with the conventions of the Western genre and its translation into film, with various audience reactions.

It is important to note that the Kelly films were only part of a broader range of films that could accurately be termed “Australian Westerns,” that is, films set in Australia whilst simultaneously maintaining a tone inspired by American Western conventions. These films include, for example, “*Robbery Under Arms* (Kenneth Brampton, 1920), *Girl of the Bush* (Franklin Barrett, 1921), *Greenhide* (Charles Chauvel, 1926), *The Squatter’s Daughter* (Ken G. Hall, 1933), *Rangle River* (Clarence G. Bager, 1936), *Captain Fury* (Hal Roach, 1939), *The Overlanders* (Harry Watt, 1946), *Eureka Stockade* (Harry Watt, 1949), *The Kangaroo Kid* (Lesley Salender, 1950), *Kangaroo* (Lewis Milestone, 1952), *The Phantom Stockman* (Lee Robinson, 1953), [and] *The Shiralee* (Les Norman, 1957)” (this list was also provided by Hamilton 132–133). Added to these films could also be a subgenre of Westerns focused on examining the meanings of the frontier through the lens of White-Indigenous relations. In this period, much as in the examination of First Nation-White relations in American Western films, the focus tended to be on one-dimensional portrayals of Indigenous peoples largely told through pro-colonization, white gazes, before more complex renderings would develop. Such films include, for example, “*Heritage* (Charles Chauvel, 1935), *Uncivilised* (Charles Chauvel, 1936), *Bitter Springs* (Ralph Smart, 1950) and *Jedda* (Charles Chauvel, 1955)” (Hamilton 133). Like their American counterparts, these films largely reinforced a mythology surrounding the Australian outback and a (generally) white male capable of conquering it. Such mythology sought to reinforce white, hegemonic ideologies while sidelining more complex historical realities of the fraught and contested nature of white occupation of the continent, which had various impacts upon the individuals involved in it.

The telling of such stories, including those obviously influenced by American Western conventions, led to arguments that a distinct “Australian Western” could not have developed owing to the production context of this formative period. That is, as Cooke points out, the censorship of bushranger films and the saturation of the Australian market with American Westerns meant that Australia never developed a unique interpretation of the Western film genre (3–4, 7). He adds that the structure of the Australian film industry and the limitations in its distribution networks also worked against the development of an “Australian Western” (Cooke 8). Certainly it is true that the Australian market has, virtually from its birth, been saturated with American cultural products. Glen Lewis asserts that by the middle of the 1920s, “American movies made up 94 percent of all overseas features shown in Australia. The Australian market was a small but lucrative one,” helped along by “a remarkably high rate of movie attendance” (8–9). Yet one could also argue that Kelly specifically, and Australian cultural artefacts more broadly, have never simply been an isolated Australian phenomenon and to suggest that the American film industry simply absorbs or dominates local film is to perhaps sideline a more significant process of dialogue and cultural exchange, one that ensures that Western conventions

can be adapted to local conditions and, just as significantly, that local re-visionings of the Western reinforce the American Western as well.

In addition, one can argue that the presence of American Westerns, or Australian productions informed by American Western conventions, alone does not guarantee the reception of audiences; rather national audiences reinterpret and make sense of generic conventions through the lenses of their national and individual identities. This was a point well made in Sarina Pearson's recent attempt to explain the overwhelming popularity of American Westerns in the Oceanic region. Pearson points out that while contemporary scholarship can simply dismiss this popularity as the audience absorbing the point of view of colonizing powers, more is at work here; rather, Western films allowed audience the possibility of mounting a critique of nationalist narratives and provided a complex method of identification. She suggests that Western films were (and are) effective in "offering [viewers] iconography that challenged their European masters... [cowboys were] powerful modes of masculinity, dangerous and violent but permeated by a sustained sense of cosmic justice that could be deployed to express anti-colonial critique... Celluloid cowboys were legitimate historical objects of affection, desire and empowerment, as well as contradiction and ambivalence" (161–162). There is little doubt that Australian Westerns pro-offered the same complexities, especially to a nation struggling to assert its independence and identity whilst still remaining a Commonwealth nation and composed of a diverse array of citizens in ethnic, class, gendered and other terms. In part what is evident here is the remarkable chameleon qualities of the Western, the complexity of modes of identity expression and acquisition, the capacity of the Western to transcend particular locality, and the ability of Western viewers to themselves transcend obvious identifications in favor of complex allegorical readings of texts. What is also evident, however, is that simply asserting that the exposure of Australian audiences to mass produced American Western products is not enough to invalidate the development of an authentic Australian Western genre, owing to the complexities of reception, interpretation and the flexibilities of generic conventions.

By 1970, with changes to censorship and to the Western genre itself, Kelly was once again re-imagined in celluloid, this time, (in)famously by Mick Jagger in *Ned Kelly* (Tony Richardson). This version of Kelly was funded by Columbia under the proviso, according to Columbia President Mike Frankovitch, that it be presented as a "contemporary Western" (Gaunson, "International Outlaws" 258). The narrative about Kelly reverted to traditional Western concepts of the outlaw-as-hero presented in the first Kelly film and Jagger was recruited as a big name draw card to the title role, but the film was largely received as a farce due in no small part to the limited acting experience of Jagger and public resistance to a (by now) wealthy Brit playing at being a poor Irish-Australian colonial (Bertrand 17). While even Jagger referred to the film openly as a "load of shit" (Gaunson, "International Outlaws" 262), it also pointed to transitions in Australian and American Western films. Changing

social mores and censorship legislation meant that Kelly could once again be positioned in a positive light and allowed for a film that examined the experiences of those living in the colonies as rendered complex by factors such as ethnicity, class and notions of respectability. In this sense, *Ned Kelly* can be seen as an Australian contribution to a broader shift in the Western genre, signaled in America by the rise of revisionist Westerns during this same period. Such Westerns began to see the frontier as an already occupied and intensely contested zone, and accordingly told stories that were increasingly rendered complex on the grounds of race, gender and class. One could argue that the concerns of revisionist American Westerns were also reflected in the emergence of other Australian films of the period concerned with giving voice to Indigenous issues. Australian Western films such as *Mad Dog Morgan* (Philippe Mora, 1976) and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (Fred Schepisi, 1978), for example, sought to refute stereotypes of the frontier and Indigenous peoples' places within it, instead recasting Indigenous men in leading roles as outlaw-come-(anti-)heroes who challenge the audience to reconsider Australian history, frontier, ownership and the nature of violence (see, for example, Daniel Eisenberg's analysis of Indigenous outlaw heroes, in Miller and Bowdoin Van Riper).

American Western films, such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (George Roy Hill, 1969) and *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969), demonstrated similar concerns to cast outlaws as main characters and render their behaviors complex and outside of simple moral binaries, as did some non-Westerns such as Arthur Penn's 1967 film *Bonnie and Clyde*. A spate of other revisionist Western films sought to render the traditional morality of the West as, at best, flawed and contradictory and the traditional binaries of lawful and lawless, as broken down along with concepts of hegemonic masculinity. The pro-Indian Western cycle, the "South of the border" professional Westerns, Acid Westerns, and closing-of-the-frontier nostalgic Westerns were all significant American Western subgenres at this time that reflected a reshaping of what the Western actually was. These films demonstrated not only the capacity of film-makers to use the Western to reinterpret the nation's past in light of new historical developments, but also to see the significance of the Western in a global context, inspired as they were (at least in part) by anti-colonial movements throughout Asia, a growing human rights movement not only nationally but throughout the world, and by global cinema trends, evident for example, in the "spaghetti Westerns" and the inspiration taken from Japanese samurai films. The re-emergence of a Ned Kelly film at this time, one that, though flawed, sought to render traditional moral binaries as complex and cast Kelly as, potentially, a victim of governmental oppression, destined to die in a society that is rapidly changing around him, reflected many of, and contributed to, the concerns of American revisionist Westerns.

Considering Kelly as part of a broader global genre does not take away from the Australian Western but acknowledges the realities of cultural exchange. In-

deed the Western has always developed via a process of transatlantic (or global) exchange. Ned Kelly himself was never “just Australian”; as Gaunson points out, Kelly’s exploits were regularly reported in England, and in America he was popularized in a dime novel serial, *The Iron Outlaw*, while he was alive. Posthumously his representation was also spread across the Atlantic via exhibition, theatre and film (“International Outlaws” 257). Many subsequent Kelly films may have been produced in Australia and based on an Australian outlaw but his story has been influenced by a multitude of other nationalities in that process: even the most recent 2003 Ned Kelly incarnation, arguably the most “Australian,” is classed by Brian McFarlane “an Australian/French/UK/US co-production” (30). More broadly, Graham Seal points out that the outlaw hero representations are “remarkably similar” across the globe regardless of other differences in culture (67–89); one could argue that such similarities represent an inter-cultural dialogue that is compounding and mutually reinforcing. For the Western genre this means that processes of transnational exchange are, and have been, an inherent part of formulating the genre rather than an influence that dilutes meaning, corrupts or takes away from either the genre or its manifestation in particular local contexts and particular moments in history.

More contemporarily the Kelly legend has risen twice again: once in the 1993 film *Reckless Kelly* (Yahoo Serious), less mainstream fare that translated Kelly into a modern context and that self-consciously spoofs the legend and the role of culture in propagating it, and again, in the 2003 film *Ned Kelly* (Gregor Jordan), starring a raft of Australian acting talent including the late Heath Ledger, Naomi Watts, Geoffrey Rush, Joel Edgerton and Bud Tingwell. This film continued the positive version of Kelly as a social bandit, heroic and chivalrous, and, importantly, falsely accused, and the Kelly family as persecuted by police but, despite the array of big name Australian talent, it too was largely conceptualized by critics in negative or bland terms. However, Nathanael O’Reilly asserted that such reviews hardly seemed to matter to the “large, eager audience” and a variety of tourism campaigns and Kelly books have been launched in its wake (and in the wake of Peter Carey’s acclaimed volume *The True History of the Kelly Gang*) (496). These Kelly films would be part of a wider reinvention of the Australian Western underway at this time represented by films such as *The Tracker* (Rolf de Heer, 2002), and *The Proposition* (John Hillcoat, 2005), which sought a more explicit deconstruction of traditional notions of the frontier space and were inspired by the sentiments of earlier revisionist Westerns. Added to these can be additions that consider Indigenous experiences and could be seen as part of the ongoing sub-genre of Australian Westerns that seek to render the frontier as a contested and Indigenous space such as *Rabbit Proof Fence* (Phillip Noyce, 2002) and *Ten Canoes* (Rolf de Heer, 2006). Films like *Mystery Road* (Ivan Sen, 2013) and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015) stylistically echoed the American Western conventions. Such deconstruction reflects trends in the American Western genre since the early 1990s sparked by films such as

*Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990) and *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, 1992). The parallels in the development of the Australian and American Western cycles are significant in highlighting the intersections between the two variants of the genre, influenced as they are by cultural transactions, international events, shared histories and developments within their local film industries.

The evolution of the Western genre pointed to here highlights a correlation between cycles of the genre in divergent national contexts, and there are major thematic and discursive correlations between the American and the Australian Western that also go towards illuminating exactly what the Western and its Australian variant are. The primary function of an American Western, arguably, is to meditate upon concepts of identity, both personal and national. From the encounters between central protagonists with the landscape and gendered and racialized “Others” at particular places and moments in time emerges a historical discourse about what it is to be American at an individual and national scale, one that adapts and changes as views about the historical past shift and as the needs and understandings of contemporary viewing audiences transform (see, for example, Maynard vi). The capacity of the Western to act as a dialogue on identity was acknowledged by Cooke (6) as precisely a reason to reject the Australian Western, which he perceived as having little to say about identity. For those that argue that Australian interpretations of the Western are derivative the capacity of such films to illuminate (or complicate) Australian identity is nullified. Yet taking the conventions of the American Western and applying them to international contexts such as Australia does not nullify their capacity to illuminate notions of identity construction, making them only replicas, but rather demonstrates notions of global citizenship, and in particular the ways in which the international phenomena such as colonization and industrialization are felt in all places but not in all places and for all individuals in the same ways. It also demonstrates that American soft power is not necessarily a one way street but, rather, that transnational reinventions of the Western genre can invert such power balances and speak to American ideologies in a variety of ways.

Traditional Australian Westerns, such as *The Man from Snowy River* (George T. Miller, 1982), have played a central role in constructing and promulgating ideas of Australian identity founded in the bush and the man who “conquers” it (see, for example, Ward). Contemporary Australian Westerns, much like their American counterparts, have deconstructed the role of the frontier and modernization in the making of an idealized Australian identity, one that is now conceived of as too simple, exclusive and ahistorical (see especially *The Proposition*). Many scholars have noted the centrality of Ned Kelly filmic representations in developing discourses surrounding Australian identity that adapt and change over time; indeed it is important to stress that his representations are not monolithic, nor received monolithically by audiences. In many ways Kelly represents both the mainstream and “the Other”; Kelly’s representation is of a white male, a figure central to Australian legends re-

garding its own identity, and it is difficult not to notice the absence of Indigenous or migrant voices with textual impact in the narrative; yet Kelly also sits outside of the mainstream owing to his class, ethnicity and values. Such complexity is acknowledged by O'Reilly in discussing Peter Carey's novel regarding the Kelly Gang, and which is applicable to other filmic representations: Kelly "speak[s] for Australians who feel oppressed in one way or another" (495), including potentially Indigenous Australians and migrant communities. Such ambiguity reflects the breakdown of traditional binaries associated with Western regarding civilization and wilderness, law and unlawful, good and bad; binaries which have also been increasingly rendered complex or broken in American Westerns.

This complication of traditional binaries associated with the Western genre is reflected, for example, in other elements of the most recent 2003 Kelly film. Most obviously it complicates the notion of heroism and its associations with law through explicit plot points designed to create sympathy for the outlaws. The film also relies on the symbolism of the hero's sash, given to Kelly as a youth for rescuing a drowning boy, which he wears during the final shoot-out, when he is killing law officers who stand for the institutions who originally christened him a "hero," and which is eventually taken from him as a souvenir of the Glenrowan incident. Such symbolism renders complex and deconstructs what it is to be a hero and how such status is conferred or denied in contingent ways. While the family unit remains central to character motivations, the representation of women as bearers of civilization is rendered complex in this film by women's sexual availability regardless of marital status, class or social mores regarding casual sex or extramarital affairs. The film acknowledges the gender bind for women, for example, Julia Cook (Naomi Watts), an upper-class, married English woman asserts that she will not give Ned an alibi that would prove the police accusations against him as false and free his mother because to do so would acknowledge their sexual liaison and therefore bring her disgrace and result in the loss of her children. Yet it still acknowledges that in practice women's autonomy is more complex than as passive, sexually repressed and "civilizing" agents. Likewise, the film renders complex notions of monolithic whiteness to the extent that it highlights the disparities between English and Irish, divisions further compounded by factors of class and convictism.

Like American Westerns identity construction is intimately tied to representations of land, where the land has both material and psychological significances (see, for example, Warshow 404). In *Ned Kelly* (2003), for example, the landscape assumes a similar function: the land is material in the sense that the Kellys work the land and derive sustenance from it and it marks both the possibilities of class mobility and the realities of ongoing poverty. The film uses repeated close-ups of native flora and fauna, a technique that is not simply, as is sometimes read, a tokenistic and exotic representation designed to appeal to an international audience whilst also reassuring Australians that the film is, in fact, Australian (Brammer 134), but rather to illustrate

a psychological shift towards Australianness and away from English imperial ambitions, a shift that is reflective of Kelly's inner state and that makes a broader statement about Australia's history as a British dominion. Such thematic analysis reveals the ways in which broader shifts in the Western genre towards greater complexity and moral ambiguity are evident in Australian films but are reinterpreted to reflect the distinct social, cultural, ethnic, class-based and geographic national context. That is, these themes illustrate that Australian films too can be Western.

Ultimately, the notion of the Australian Western has been a contested one in historical and representational studies. If one accepts that the American Western is a mechanism for examining and rendering complex identity within specific contexts, it is perhaps inevitable that there is resistance regarding its capacity to reflect critically on identity in different contexts, especially when those contexts, like Australia, have relatively small and vulnerable local film industries that seek to shield local stories. Yet the local and the global have always been interrelated in the development of the Western. Not only have Australia and America experienced historical parallels in their development, which has led to a cross-cultural appreciation for the Western as a vehicle to reimagine the meaning of the past, but they have also shared in a transatlantic exchange of cultural ideas, been influenced by international developments and, importantly, have each participated in an ongoing exchange about the generic conventions of the Western that has fundamentally shaped and reshaped the genre, allowing it to breathe life into contemporary issues and remain relevant. The Ned Kelly film cycle, seemingly a ubiquitous symbol of Australiana, illuminates such exchanges and demonstrates the ways in which the Western transcends its purely American context to meaningfully inform other stories; this is especially the case inasmuch as the Western can be considered a universal language with which to communicate stories of colonialism and displacement.

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## **SUCH IS WESTERN: AN OVERVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN WESTERN VIA NED KELLY FILMS**

### Summary

The very existence of such a thing as the "Australian Western" has been the subject of scholarly debate. This article utilizes the lens of Ned Kelly filmic representations to explore the development of the Western genre in Australia, and especially the ways in which historical consonances and disso-

nances, and processes of transatlantic cultural exchange have led to the development of films that can be reasonably recognized as both distinctly Western and distinctly Australian. Thus, this article gives consideration to the history, production and themes of Ned Kelly filmic representation in order to illuminate the development of the Western in Australia. Such consideration highlights the ways in which the Western genre functions as a language through which to explore the meaning of settlement in occupied spaces, but whose dialectic differences reflect particular national contexts and relationships to Hollywood soft power.

## **„TAKI JEST WESTERN” — PRZEGLĄD AUSTRALIJSKIEGO WESTERNU NA PODSTAWIE FILMÓW O NEDZIE KELLYM**

### Streszczenie

Samo istnienie czegoś takiego jak „australijski western” jest tematem akademickiej dyskusji. Niniejszy artykuł wykorzystuje pryzmat filmowych reprezentacji słynnego australijskiego bandyty Neda Kelly w celu zbadania rozwoju gatunku westernu w Australii, a w szczególności sposobów, w jakich historyczne harmonie i dysharmonie oraz procesy transatlantyckiej wymiany kulturowej doprowadziły do rozwoju filmy mogące być słusznie postrzegane zarówno jako wyraźnie westernowe, jak i wyraźnie australijskie. Tak więc esej ten poddaje pod rozwagę historię, produkcję i tematykę filmowych interpretacji postaci Neda Kelly'ego, żeby rzucić światło na rozwój gatunku westernu w Australii. Taki взгляд uwydatnia sposoby, w jakich gatunek westernu funkcjonuje jako język, przez który można badać znaczenie osadnictwa na kolonizowanych terenach, ale którego dialektalne różnice odzwierciedlają konkretne narodowe konteksty i powiązania z „miękką siłą” (*soft power*) Hollywoodu.

*Przeł. Kordian Bobowski*