

PC

Peter CAREY

Born 1943, Bacchus
Marsh, Victoria Lives in
New York, NY, United
States

Peter Carey is the award-winning author of more than 20 novels, short stories and screenplays. Since 1990 he has lived in New York, where he taught creative writing for more than 2 decades. Twenty-five years ago, he wrote *True History of the Kelly Gang*, a fictional autobiography by Australia's most notorious bushranger, Ned Kelly. The story, we are told, is pulled together from bundles of torn and ragged papers retrieved during the smouldering remains of the gang's last siege at Glenrowan that had been transferred to the 'Melbourne Public Library'. The book is addressed to Kelly's daughter – a child who Carey invents. In a twist on its fictional origin, State Library Victoria holds the true

archive of Carey's novel. It contains thousands of his manuscript pages, notebooks, research materials, photographs, emails and the laptop on which the story was written.

On its own, the archive can only suggest the creative process behind the book, an experience Carey likens to walking a tightrope. For this exhibition he recalls the thousand days he took to write *True History*, and the 30 years it gestated within him. He recounts his first encounter with paintings from Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly series and Kelly's own Jerilderie Letter, which inspired the lead voice of the novel, as well as the intonations of his childhood, his extensive research for the manuscript and its editing. A digital exhibition within this display draws together and illustrates these different time periods to better understand the book's development, an undertaking Carey otherwise likens to grasping at a

constantly moving river or cloud.

1

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

Draft manuscripts, 1998–2000

Papers and drafts of Peter Carey's

True History of the Kelly Gang

MS 13420

How very weird to return to this old manuscript, the scene of so much doubt and anguish, not to say obsession.

1

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

True History of the Kelly Gang

St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland
Press, 2000 Cover: Kate Barry

RARELT Copy 2 A823.3 C189TR

2

***Pravdiv'y pŕ'ibĕh Neda Kellyho a
jeho bandy***

Translated by Dominika Křest'anová
(Czech) Prague: Argo, 2003

Cover: Markĕty Hlinovské, Libor
Batra RARELT A823.3

C189TRKP

3

***Kerī Gyangu no shinjitsu no
rekishi***

Translated by Miyagi Yōko
(Japanese) Tokyo: Haykakawa
Shobō, 2003 Cover: Babasaki
Jin

RARELT A823.3 C189TRM

4

Kyāli gyaṃ-era āsala itihāsa

Translated by Sālehā Caudhurī
(Bengali)

Dhaka: Sandeśa, 2007

RARELT A823.3 C189TRCA

5

***Den sanne historia om Kelly-
gjengen***

Translated by Åsmund Forfang
(Norwegian) Oslo: Det Norske
Samlaget, 2002

Cover design: Jesper

Egemar SLT A823.3

C189TRF

6

***Het ware verhaal van de Kelly-
bende***

Translated by Inge Kok (Dutch)
Amsterdam/Antwerp: Uitgeverij Atlas,
2001 Cover photo: Jerry Bauer

RARELT A823.3 C189TRK

7

L'autèntica història dels

Kelly Translated by Margarida

Trias (Catalan)

Barcelona: Proa, Enciclopèdia catalana,
2002

Cover design: Miquel Puig

Cover photo: Stone

RARELT A823.3

C189TRTP

8

Kellyn kopla: tosi tarina

Translated by Seppo Loponen
(Finnish)

Helsinki: Tammi, 2002

Cover: Markko Taina,

Corbis/Lehtikuva RARELT

A823.3 C189TRL

9

***La verdadera historia de la
banda de Kelly***

Translated by Enrique de Hériz
(Spanish) Barcelona: El Aleph
Editores, 2003

Cover: Opalworks, Getty
Images RARELT A823.3

C189TRH (2003)

10

***Den sande historie om Kelly-
banden: roman***

Translated by Niels Brunse
(Danish) Copenhagen: Samleren,
2002

Cover design: Lotte Bruun
Rasmussen

Cover photo: Mitchell Library, State
Library of
New South Wales

RARELT A823.3

C189TRB

11

La ballata di Ned Kelly

Translated by Mario Biondi (Italian)
Milan: Mondolibri, 2002

Cover photo: Corbis, Grazia

Neri RARELT A823.3

C189TRBI

12

Prawdziwa historia Neda Kelly'ego

Translated by Magdalena Gawlik-
Małkowska (Polish)

Warszaw: Prószyński i S-ka, 2000

Cover: Dave McKean

RARELT A823.3

C189TRG

13

Pr'ibeh Neda Kellyho

Translated by Viktor Krupa
(Slovak) Bratislava: Slovensk'y
spisovatel, 2003 Cover: Dušan
Grečner, Zuzana Lamačková
RARELT A823.3 C189TRKR

14

***Istinnaiâ istoriia shaiki
Kelli: roman***

Translated by IG Gurova
(Russian) Moscow: Izd-vo
'AST', 2003 RARELT
A823.3 C189TRM

15

Kaili bang

Translated by Meng Xiangsen
(Chinese) Taipei: Huang guan
wen hua chu ban you xian gong
si, 2005

RARELT A823.3 C189TRME

16

Istinita priča o Kelijevoj

bandi Translated by Mira
Orlović (Serbian) Belgrade:
Narodna knjiga-Alfa, 2004

RARELT A823.3 C189TRO

17

A verdadeira história do bando de Ned Kelly

Translated by Pedro Serras

Pereira (Portuguese) Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2002

Cover: Atelier Henrique Cayatte, Rita Múrias RARELT A823.3 C189TRP

18

Véritable histoire du gang

Kelly Translated by Elisabeth

Peellaert (French) Paris: Plon, 2003

Cover: Raphaël Thierry

RARELT A823.3

C189TRPE

19

Kelly jõuk

Translated by Matti Piirimaa
(Estonian)

Tallinn: Ersen, 2002

RARELT A823.3 C189TRPI

20

Istinita povijest Kellyjeve bande

Translated by Vladimir Cvetković
Sever (Croatian)

Zagreb: VBZ, 2002
Cover: VBZ Studio
RARELT A823.3
C189TRS

21

***Die wahre Geschichte von Ned
Kelly und seiner Gang***

Translated by Regina Rawlinson and
Angela Schumitz (German)

Frankfurt: S Fischer, 2002

Cover design: + malsy,

Bremen Cover photo: H.

Spichtinger / zefa RARELT

A823.3 C189TRR

1

Maggie DIAZ

(1925–2016)

Peter Carey's first wedding

Digital print from 1964 black-and-white negative, 2025

H2013.257/14a

2

Barry OAKLEY

(Born 1931)

A Wild Ass of a Man

Melbourne: Cheshire Publishing, 1967

Cover: John Sayers

SLT A823.3 OA4W

3

Jack KEROUAC

(1962–1969)

Lonesome Traveler

New York: Ballantine, 1973

RARES 813.54 K45L

4 **Robert MELVILLE**

(1905–1986)

***Ned Kelly: 27 Paintings by
Sidney***

Nolan London: Thames and
Hudson, 1964 Bernard Smith
Collection

BSMITH 759.994 N71ME

5

James JOYCE

(1882–1941)

Ulysses

New York: Random House, 1934

RARES 823.91 J85U

6

Allen GINSBERG

(1926–1997)

Howl, and Other Poems

San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1959

RAREP 811.54 G43H

7

Max BROWN

(1916–2003)

Australian Son: The Story of Ned Kelly;

Including the Jerilderie Letter: a recently discovered statement of 8,300 words made by Ned Kelly

Melbourne: Georgian House, 1956

SLT 923.4194 K29B

8

Ned KELLY

(1854–1880)

Letter written by Joe Byrne at the dictation of Ned Kelly / the Jerilderie Letter

56+ pages, paper, February 1879

Anonymous donation 2000

MS 13361

9

Andrew SAYERS

(1957–2015)

Sidney Nolan: The Ned Kelly Story

New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994

A 759.994 N71SA

I was a baby when the seed was planted, 3 years out of school, 2 years since my devastating failure in the first year of a science degree. I had drifted into advertising where the gods determined I would fall among novelists and playwrights who would lead me to a place I could never have imagined.

My most important workmate was a former schoolteacher, 32 years old, the father of 6 children, but an apprentice just as I was, still waiting for the day when his copy would be accepted by our boss. I drove Barry Oakley to work.

PC

4/24

He gave me Kerouac's Lonesome Traveler and other books he had reviewed, made sure that I saw Chekhov and Beckett and Ionesco, accompanied me to the first 2 art exhibitions of my life.

It was lunchtime at the office when we boarded the tram to see

The Ned Kelly Paintings 1946–47: Sidney Nolan at George's Art Gallery. I had no expectation of anything except the egg and lettuce sandwich waiting for me back at work, no idea that Nolan's Kelly paintings were about to burn into my brain and leave their mark forever. It was 1963 and (to quote *One Hundred Years of Solitude*)

the world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point.

– Gabriel Garcia Márquez

It was the year I discovered Ornette Coleman and Ingmar Bergman, Robbe-Grillet, Bob Dylan, *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound, when I stumbled into James Joyce's *Ulysses* and – ignorant as I may have been – recognised a holy place, a blasphemous cathedral which had been banned, unbanned, banned again. These ecstatic moments are denied the old and wise, reserved for the very young who turn the pages of *Ulysses* and can hardly believe that such a string of words exists

I cant help it if Im young still can I
its a wonder I'm not an old
shrivelled hag before my time
living with him so cold never
embracing me except sometimes
when hes asleep the wrong end
of me not knowing I suppose who
he has any man thatd kiss a
womans bottom.

Are you allowed to say that?

PC

7/24

It was the year I read *Howl* and

 saw the best minds of my generation
 destroyed by madness, starving
 hysterical naked.

 – Allen Ginsberg

PC

8/24

I sought out Max Brown's *Australian Son: The Story of Ned Kelly* and it was here I found that Ned Kelly had also been a writer

who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed (Allen Ginsberg) was tortured by the cruelties of the British law.

56 pages. In every one he was on fire, enraged, breathless, a widow's son outlawed. Dear God, I thought, has no one ever really understood what Ned wrote before he robbed the bank at Jerilderie. Did no one see what I saw, that that our famous bushranger was a raging poet.

my mother and four or five men lagged innocent, and is my brothers and sisters and my mother not to be pitied also who has no alternative only to put up with the brutal and cowardly conduct of a parcel of big ugly, fat necked, wombat headed, big bellied, magpie legged, narrow hipped splay-footed sons of Irish bailiffs or English landlords which is better known as officers of justice or Victorian police who some calls honest gentlemen.

– Ned Kelly

I transcribed the letter and carried it on my person like the relic of a martyred saint. I knew (if no one else did) that I would be a writer and I would know how to do something with this letter when the time arrived. In 1964 I wrote my first unpublishable novel. In 1966 I tried again. So it went. Attempts. Failures.

Sweet dreams and flying
machines in pieces on the
ground. – James Taylor, *Fire
and Rain*

By 1974, when I finally became airborne, I had lost the Jerilderie Letter.

1

Charles NETTLETON

(1826–1902)

Ned Kelly in chains

Gelatin silver photograph, 1880

MS9298/6/PHO1

2

GIBBS, SHALLARD, and Co.

(1872–1894, printers, Sydney

Illustrated News)

***Ironclad Bushranging: Ned Kelly
Taking the Attacking Force in Rear***

1880

Lithograph

ISN00/08/80/SUPP

1

Charles NETTLETON

(1826–1902)

***Ned Kelly the day before he was
hanged***

Gelatin silver photograph, 1880

H18202

2

GIBBS, SHALLARD, and Co.

(1872–1894, printers, Sydney

Illustrated News)

***Ironclad Bushranging: Ned Kelly
Taking the Attacking Force in Rear***

1880

Lithograph

ISN00/08/80/SUPP

Years passed. Three lives later I was living in New York City. It was 1993 and the Metropolitan Museum of Art was exhibiting the same Kelly paintings I had seen 30 years before. If I did not rush to see them it was because I was certain they could never dazzle the man as they had the callow boy. But my friend the Vassar professor was acting as a docent for the exhibition and it was he who finally persuaded me to visit and then – dear Jesus – what wonders. I was amazed and proud, of us, of Ned, of Nolan, and I began taking my downtown friends uptown see the show. And as I circled the rooms telling the strange story to my victims, it struck me: I was going to write this bloody novel after all.

PC

12/24

Why write about Ned Kelly, said my old Sydney friend. We know all about him.

And yes, we knew the police reports, and the court transcripts. We knew the Land Acts and the day Ned fought Wild Wright. We knew Jerilderie, Euroa, Stringybark Creek, and Constable Fitzpatrick. We knew the history all the way to the execution in Melbourne Gaol. But you cannot know a boy's soul from a police report. And Ned Kelly was a boy for most of his short life and we – having the image of the bearded outlaw in our mind – hadn't spared a thought for that smooth-cheeked boy who loved his mother, lost his father to police, was apprenticed to a bushranger named Harry Power.

1

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

***A selection of Peter Carey's
readings for The True
History of the Kelly Gang***

1991–2001

MS 13420/7

Modern Ireland 1600–1972 by RF
Foster, 1989

Ned Kelly: A Short Life by Ian
Jones, 1995

***In Search of Ned: A Travelogue
of Kelly Country*** by Kevin J
Passey, 1988

***The Sharing of the Green: A
Modern Irish History for Australians***
by Oliver MacDonagh, 1996

***Walks and Talks of an American
Farmer in England*** by Fred
Olmsted, 1852

Cattlemen of the High Country by
Tor Holth, 1980

***Drunks, Whores and Idle
Apprentices: Criminal***

***Biographies of the Eighteenth
Century*** by Philip Rawlings, 1992

***Animals' Treatment First Aid:
Horses, Dogs, Birds, Cattle*** by
Elliman Sons & Co, 1900

Irish Country Cures by Patrick
Logan, 1981

Droving Days by HM Barker, 1966

***The Friendship that
Destroyed Ned Kelly*** by Ian
Jones, 1992

***The Complete Inner History of the
Kelly Gang and Their Pursuers*** by
JJ Kenneally, 1950

The Modern Farrier by George
Lowson, 1841

2

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

Research materials

1997–2000

***Papers and drafts of Peter Carey's
True History of the Kelly Gang***

MS 13420/6.2, 6.3, 20

PC.

14/24

I raided Ian Jones's *Ned Kelly* to find my story's spine, but I also read obsessively around the subject.

I visited Eleven Mile Creek, Benalla, Stringybark Creek, Greta, the first time with my dear friend Paul Priday and Sam, my 11-year-old son, the second time with the architect Richard Leplastrier and publisher Laurie Muller. Laurie was a horseman. Laurie taught me the landscape from a horseman's point of view, forced me to climb hills I would rather have ignored, sleep out in a swag on a rainy night when, honestly, I preferred a motel bed. The 3 of us visited Powers Lookout while hung-over from duty-free Laphroaig, but not even alcoholic poisoning could diminish Richard Leplastrier's supreme visual intelligence.

1

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

Bound draft

***manuscript 1998–
2000***

***Papers and drafts of Peter
Carey's True History of the
Kelly Gang***

MS 13475/ F Box 3989/2–3

2

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

Notebook 1997–

2000

***Papers and drafts of Peter
Carey's True History of the
Kelly Gang***

MS 13420/14.3

3

UNKNOWN MANUFACTURER

(c.1870s–80)

Compass issued to police sent out to track the Kelly gang

compass, brass, glass and paper,

c.1870s–1880

H13277

4

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

True History of the Kelly Gang

St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2000

Cover design: Kate Barry

LT A823.3 C189TR

5

True History of the Kelly Gang

London: Faber and Faber, 2001 RARELT

A823.3 C189TR

6

True History of the Kelly Gang

St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland
Press, 2001

Cover design: Jenny

Grigg RARELT A823.3

C189TR

7

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

Apple Mac PowerBook

3400 Series 1997

Papers and drafts of Peter

Carey's True History of the Kelly

Gang

MS 13420/22

8

True History of the Kelly Gang

St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland
Press, 2001

Cover design: Peter Evans

RARELT A823.3 C189TR

9

***True History of the Kelly
Gang***

New York: Vintage Books,
2002 Cover design: Suvi

Asch RARELT A823.3

C189TR

10

True History of the Kelly

Gang London: Faber,
2002

Cover design: Suvi Asch
RARELT A823.3 C189TR
(2002)

11

***True History of the Kelly
Gang***

New York: Knopf, 2001

Cover design: Chip Kidd
RARELT A823.3 C189TR

12

***True History of the Kelly
Gang***

North Sydney, NSW: Vintage,
2005 Cover design: Jenny

Grigg RARELT A823.3
C189TR

13

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

***Gary Fisketjon manuscript
edits 2000***

***Papers and drafts of Peter
Carey's True History of the Kelly
Gang***

MS 13420/ 5.2

14

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

***Fax from Gary Fisketjon to
Peter Carey 25 February***

2000, reproduced 2025

***Papers and drafts of Peter
Carey's True History of the Kelly
Gang***

MS 13420/ 6.5

15

Peter CAREY

(Born 1943)

***Faxed copy of Peter Carey and
Gary Fisketjon style sheet***

1

March 2000, reproduced 2025

***Papers and drafts of Peter
Carey's True History of the Kelly
Gang***

MS 13420/ 6.4

I made notes, saved a leaf at Stringybark Creek, composed an encyclopedia of smells. The book that finally emerged owes so much to Richard and Laurie, but also to my first 10 years of life in Bacchus Marsh, one hour's drive from Beveridge where Ned was born. It was just 60 years since Ned's departure when I arrived and you could hear the language of Ned's letter in in the playground of State School #28. And it was that *language* that made me want to write this novel, to make a modern poetry from the voice of a man who had been throttled by the state on Russell Street, around the corner from where you are standing now. All sorts of problems lay ahead of me, but I would never have a problem with the voice.

It's easy to recognise a writer who's just come from their desk. You can see it in their haunted eyes, as if they're still living in another world. This manuscript is that world. It is where I lived a thousand days, always confident about the voice but, Lord ... what was it really like to be an Irish immigrant a century ago. What was it like to be sixteen, locked inside a cell in Beechworth. What were the dimensions of the cell. Where was the shelf, the cruel unbending bed? What does a boy feel to have his father stolen from him, handcuffed to the stirrup iron of a policeman's mare.

My notebooks are a mess of endless questions, inept drawings. What happens when Easter arrives in Australian Autumn instead of Holy Irish Spring? When the convicts were transported was the banshee left behind?

For Ned to come alive I needed to think of things we had never thought before. That is the thrill and the terror of a writer's life, to walk out on the tightrope every day. The manuscript reveals none of this. If you read the bottom left-hand corner of the manuscript you will easily learn what words were printed on a given day. But there is nothing to show what words have been inserted, transposed, deleted, or when the banshee crawled in from the dark.

You could ask my computer if you had the skill, but the computer isn't talking and the only way to get the information is to read all 4000 pages of the manuscript, not like you or I might read a finished book, but like a saint or mad person in a cell, someone with patience to annotate a river or a cloud.

As it happens, my published novel imagines this very reader. Is it he or she or they? A librarian perhaps? It is a someone I invented, a someone who has collected Ned's scattered pages and collated them into thirteen parcels? This has allowed me to map the passage of time, to add layers of information and also – an important point – provide chapters for my readers. Of course my Ned was not thinking in terms of books or chapters. He had no time for commas and it is this that gives his voice an urgency and passion, never pausing when it would be grammatically correct to do so.

‘This is a fabulous story,’ my New York agent said, ‘But you don’t need to write it like this.’ But I did need to write it like that. And she was the excellent agent who had long ago introduced me to Garry Fisketjon (who published Cormac McCarthy) and who I knew would surely know how to read what I had written. I had never wished for line editing from *anyone*, but now I welcomed Gary’s insistent questioning. Yes he was American and we can be amused that he queried the word ‘mopoke’. But he GOT the book, LOVED the book, never relented in his demand that it be as good as it could be, that the jacket be right, that the map be perfect.

There was no escape from his passion. He tracked me down in Europe and spent five hours on the phone arguing about ampersands because, he said, he wanted posterity to fully understand that *you knew what you were doing*.

He made lists for the foreign publishers and proofreaders who would publish later, just so that they would understand that what might be an error in *The Chicago Manual of Style* was exactly what the author wished in print. Gary went out on a limb for that book, sold it to the sales force, the booksellers, and anyone else who would listen to him. Finally I knew what writers mean when they say they say they were 'well published'. Some have questioned my title, but Gary never did. He trusted the book was what Ned named it, with a label declaring it was the true story of a widow's son who had been subject of perjury, false witness by the police and press. *True History* it must be and nothing less.