

industry in nineteenth century Australia, or the trajectory of Victorian politics of the same period. Beyond that, anyone who wants to write the biography of someone who has left behind limited personal sources will find this a good model.

**Kate Matthew**

Doug Morrissey, *Ned Kelly: A Lawless Life*, Connor Court, Ballarat, 2015, pbk, ISBN 9781925138481, xv + 256 pp, \$32.95.

'Mad, bad and dangerous to know' was Lady Caroline Lamb's pithy description of Lord Byron but, as Doug Morrissey shows, the words might be even more appropriately applied to Ned Kelly. With irrational delusions that merged into paranoia Kelly was a career criminal, in an organised network of criminals, for whom extreme violence was simply part of his stock in trade. He lived *A Lawless Life* — as the subtitle indicates — but the scale and nature of his violent criminality is all too often either ignored or excused by his biographers. Ned's modern equivalent in organised crime might be the leader of an outlaw motor-cycle gang, with fingers in many criminal pies (but especially in the re-birthing of stolen cars), ready to use extreme violence including murder to advance his plans or evade arrest, and generally indifferent to the mores of society at large. It is hard to imagine that such a figure, whose behaviour would be condemned by all except his fellow gang-members and, perhaps, their families, could ever have a sympathetic and romantic mythology develop around his activities. But Ned Kelly, with his bloodthirsty gang whose behaviour outraged the overwhelming majority of his contemporaries, has generated a literature and framed a popular perception that, most often, places him somewhere on the martyrdom spectrum. This sentiment is at the heart of Peter FitzSimons' *Ned Kelly: The Story of Australia's Most Notorious Legend* (2013) and is merely the latest reworking of the popular myths. Morrissey's book is more than a simple account of *A Lawless Life*. It is an important revisionary attack on the dominant historiography with its 'old clichés and metaphors' and he highlights the limited research and repetition of multiple errors that are characteristic of most Kelly biographies.

This myth-busting book, assisted by John Hirst's valuable editing, reflects Morrissey's deep knowledge of Kelly Country and its people and provides an important counterweight to the familiar, generally sympathetic and overly romantic accounts of Kelly's life and exploits. In the popular imagination, fostered it must be said by some fairly indifferently researched accounts, Ned Kelly's criminal history and murderous activities are whitewashed and transformed into several enduring and endearing myths that present him as a precursor of 'the little Aussie battler'. Among other things, he was the victim of police persecution who fought back; he was pushed into crime by circumstances beyond his control; he was a latter-day Robin Hood who stood up for the peasant selectors in their land war against the squatters; he was an Australian-born Irish patriot and a native republican. Morrissey exposes the foolishness of these, and several other myths associated with Australia's most notorious bushranger, and in so doing he reveals

the two most common failings of Kelly's biographers. First, most take the Jerilderie Letter at face value and secondly very few push their research beyond the most obvious and familiar sources. In fact, the majority of Kelly biographers write the same story but with a twist or an emphasis that fits their preferred explanation for a life of theft, intimidation, exploitation, murder and a projected massacre. Morrissey, however, draws on a wider range of material than previous writers and consequently provides both a more complete examination of the evidential material and an altogether subtler analysis than that found in the usual accounts.

For all Kelly biographers, including Morrissey, the Jerilderie Letter is, without doubt, a most important document but the mythologisers generally ignore the many distortions, lies and misrepresentations at its core. When the National Library held its blockbuster exhibition, *Treasures From the World's Great Libraries*, in 2001 crowds flocked around the case displaying two pages from the Jerilderie Letter that Kelly dictated to Joe Byrne. Those pages, in many ways, represent a distillation of the self-justification that underpins the Kelly legend. Page 40 contains Ned's claims that he offered Constables Scanlan and Kennedy a chance to surrender before he shot them and that he allowed Constable McIntyre to escape, implying that, as he saw it, he acted honourably. Page 45 carries his assertions that he had been 'wronged' and his family persecuted by the 'big ugly fat-necked wombat headed big bellied magpie legged narrow hipped splaw-footed sons of Irish Bailiffs or English landlords' of the Victorian Police. The great merit of this book is that Ned Kelly's claims and assertions in the letter are subjected to forensic scrutiny informed by over fifty years of scholarly research. Not only does Morrissey draw attention to the misuse or misunderstanding of the letter by other biographers but he also provides a splendidly detailed annotation of the letter with the original text and commentary side by side. For this annotated Appendix alone all students of the Kelly episode are in Morrissey's debt but the entire book is a most important rebuttal of the many myths that have grown up around Ned Kelly.

**David Kent**

Elsbeth Hardie, *The Girl Who Stole Stockings: The true story of Susannah Noon and the women of the convict ship Friends*, Australian Teachers of Media, St Kilda West, 2015, pbk, ISBN 9781876467241, 344 pp, \$34.95.

*The Girl Who Stole Stockings* by Elsbeth Hardie examines 101 women convicts transported to New South Wales on the ship *Friends* in 1811. Its main protagonist is a twelve-year-old girl named Susannah Noon who was the author's (several times great) grandmother. The book replicates in many respects my own examination of one hundred women who arrived on the *Princess Royal* in 1829, publication of which in 1988 established a template for this kind of qualitative sampling of the convict records. I, too, was a descendant of the main protagonist, whose name was also Susannah (Watson). Since the publication of my *A Cargo of Women* there have been many examinations of female convicts by the boatload. Too many of them settle for being only a dictionary of multiple biographies. Some add an individual