

Ethel Turner. *Tales from the Parthenon*.
Ed. Pamela Nutt et al. Sydney: Juvenilia Press, 2014. 62 pp.
AU\$15.00
ISBN 9780 733422 740
<https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/juvenilia/catalogue/19th-century>

Eleanor Dark. *Eleanor Dark's Juvenilia*.
Ed. Jane Sloan et al. Sydney: Juvenilia Press, 2013. 25 pp.
AU\$12.00
ISBN 9780 733433 733
<https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/juvenilia/catalogue/20th-century>

Mary Grant Bruce. *The Early Tales*.
Ed. Pamela Nutt et al. Sydney: Juvenilia Press, 2011. 90 pp.
AU\$15.00
ISBN 9780 733429 415
<https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/juvenilia/catalogue/19th-century>

In 1884, London children's publisher Ward, Lock and Co. opened a Melbourne branch. As a result, a number of Australian authors found a substantial international readership, especially in Britain. Ethel Turner and Mary Grant Bruce were among the authors signed to Ward, Lock and both can be described, with little contest, as the two most popular Australian children's authors of the early twentieth century. Turner was author of the classic *Seven Little Australians* (1894) and more than forty books in total, primarily for girls, and Bruce was the author of the 15-book 'Billabong' series, among dozens of other titles.

For all of their popularity and international appeal, there has been minimal scholarship on either author until recently. Both authors are the focus of an article by historian David Walker (1978) and Brenda Niall's *Seven Little Billabongs* (1979), but much has changed in literary studies in the ensuing decades. Children's literature scholar Claudia Nelson, like Walker, has considered Turner's wartime 'Cub' trilogy (2003), while Susan Martin has written articles on *Seven Little Australians* (2010) and the relationship between gardening and national space in several of Turner's novels (2003). In my co-edited volume with Kristine Moruzi, *Colonial Girlhood in Literature, Culture and History, 1840–1950* (2014), Turner features in two chapters, and Bruce in one. Nevertheless, in contrast with this small but growing body of scholarship, the most influential American and British children's literature of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century is widely researched.

It is therefore unsurprising that there has been little interest in the juvenilia of these prolific and widely-read Australian authors. Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster, both of whom are pioneering figures in the study of literary juvenilia, observe that childhood writings are most commonly examined in order to understand a 'writer's route to maturity' and to determine the relationship of their early work to their adult writings (3). With the limited attention paid to Turner and Bruce more generally, their early writings in colonial magazines and newspapers have all but been ignored.

Alexander and McMaster are the current and founding editors, respectively, of Juvenilia Press, which has published selections from Turner's and Bruce's early writings. The Press has been publishing juvenilia, beginning with works by Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Louisa May Alcott, since 1992. The first volume to contain the writings of

an Australian author was *The Gipsy Dancer and Early Poems* by Dorothy Hewett, published in 2009.

Most of the volumes in the series include the work of authors for adults whose writings as young people did not appear in professional publications. Both Turner and Bruce differ not only in that their novels were almost all intended for a youth readership, but because the juvenilia selected for inclusion in these volumes was commercially published.

Pamela Nutt includes selections from the monthly literary magazine that teenaged Ethel published with her sister, Lilian Turner, from 1889 to 1892. The *Parthenon* is a surprisingly sophisticated publication given that the sisters wrote almost all of the content and canvassed for advertisers. It sold approximately 1,500 copies per month out of a print run of 2,000 at a price of 6d, but today only survives in complete print runs at the State Library of New South Wales and Fryer Library at the University of Queensland. Ethel Turner wrote the *Parthenon*'s children's column under the pseudonym 'Princess Ida.' It was here that she honed her craft and floated some of the ideas that she would develop in later novels. Nutt's volume includes two complete short serialised stories, 'Gladys and the Fairies' and 'A Dreadful Pickle,' as well as one chapter extracted from 'Bobbie,' which was subsequently published as *Miss Bobbie* (1897).

'Gladys and the Fairies' is a short, didactic tale (a fairy warns the protagonist that every time she does not take her medicinal 'steel drops,' parts of fairy country are eroded) which in some ways prefigures early twentieth-century attempts by the likes of Ida Rentoul Outhwaite to 'Australianise' fairyland. The good-natured but mischievous 'pickle' was a common figure in turn-of-the-century Australian children's literature. Indeed, in Turner's original manuscript, *Seven Little Australians* is entitled 'Seven Pickles'—perhaps not the most globally marketable title. 'A Dreadful Pickle' records an early experiment with a 'little pickle' heroine, eleven-year-old Midge Laurayne, who provokes mayhem when she sneaks away from her wealthy home in order to visit the poor 'like "the girls in the book"' (21). Midge is kidnapped and stripped of her fine clothing, and the story concludes with a reassurance to the reader that Midge did not die (sparing her the fate of *Seven Little Australians*' Judy) but that 'the "pickle" part of her nature died, and she was a reformed character' (32). Both stories evidence the potential insights to be gained by drawing these early stories in to scholarship on colonial Australian children's literature more broadly and on Turner specifically. The extract from 'Bobbie,' however, shows the constraints of the Press's slim volume, in that we can only read seven pages of the original text as it appeared in the *Parthenon*, meaning that it cannot be effectively compared with Turner's eventual novel. With only two extant copies of the magazine's run available in libraries, the need to more fully reproduce or digitise this unique periodical seems pressing.

Nutt's volume on Mary Grant Bruce includes two short stories, 'Her Little Lad,' published in the Christmas supplement of Melbourne's *Leader* newspaper in 1898, and 'Dono's Christmas,' in the same paper in 1900. In contrast with Turner's focus on suburban life, Bruce usually depicted life in the bush. While Billabong station was a bucolic setting that posed little threat to its young protagonists, Bruce's two early stories are focused on the dangers of the bush to children. 'Her Little Lad' is a sentimental tale, in which young mother Norah Deane (the first name of Billabong's heroine) is left at home alone on Christmas Eve while her husband buys Christmas presents. Her son, Ted, is bitten by a snake and Norah must set out from the isolated bush property carrying her son in order to seek help. 'Dono's Christmas' is a similarly tragic story involving a woman stranded on a rural property with a

sick child. While ‘stolid’ (52) Chinese cook Ah Mow (a precursor of Billabong’s gardener Lee Wing), rides out to alert a doctor, older son Dono Tremayne volunteers to seek out his absent father. Bruce was perhaps taken by the image, in Turner’s most famous novel, of the falling tree which causes Judy’s death; Bruce’s Dono is also tragically killed by a tree branch which crushes him.

Both of these volumes include detailed introductions by Nutt that provide a significant amount of historical and contextual material, as well as images from archival sources. While the restricted page span of these volumes means that they are not a substitute for consulting the original magazines and newspapers in which the authors published, they will certainly be welcome and accessible reading for those who enjoy historical children’s literature and may act as a spur to further scholarly research on Turner and Bruce.

The Juvenilia Press actively seeks to involve postgraduate, undergraduate and advanced high school students in the editing process. Nutt’s two volumes were produced with the assistance of students at Sydney’s Presbyterian Ladies’ College, while *Eleanor Dark’s Juvenilia*, edited by Jane Sloan, was compiled with the involvement of students at Redlands, Sydney, the high school which Dark attended. This volume includes Dark’s publications as Pixie O’Reilly in the school’s annual magazine, *The Redlander*, between 1916 and 1919. Where Bruce and Turner, especially, were active contributors to magazines and newspapers in their teens and early twenties, straitened family finances meant that after finishing school Dark was unable to attend university or concentrate on writing. She instead worked as a stenographer and then married; her first novel *Slow Dawning* was not published until 1932. O’Reilly’s short stories and poems from *The Redlander* amount to only eleven pages of text, but are evidently rare specimens of her writing as a young person. ‘The Gumtree’s Story’ is a lost child narrative, while several of the O’Reilly poems capture the life of schoolgirls of the period, mirroring the spirit of the school story genre, which had become ubiquitous at the time.

Alexander points out that juvenilia have long ‘been considered outside the corpus of respectable material for study; and the negative implications of the word “juvenilia” have added to their marginal literary status’ (93). In order to overcome this marginality, most editorial and scholarly work on juvenilia has focused on authors who are firmly established in the canon, like Austen and the Brontës. Two of these recent titles by the Juvenilia Press push the notion of marginality further by reclaiming the early writings of authors who wrote for young people. For scholars of children’s literature, in particular, the exploration of juvenilia might offer crucial insights into constructions of childhood during an author’s lifetime. With much of this early material not yet digitised or still in manuscript form, there is clearly much more editorial work to be done in preserving and promoting the juvenilia of some of Australia’s earliest writers for both child and adult readerships.

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