

## NAOMI RIDDLE

Ethel Turner, *Tales from the Parthenon* ed. Pamela Nutt, *et al.* Sydney: Juvenilia Press, 2014.

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Eleanor Dark, *Eleanor Dark's Juvenilia*. Ed. Jane Sloan *et al.* Sydney: Juvenilia Press, 2013.

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In her introduction to Ethel Turner's *Tales from the Parthenon*, Pamela Nutt paints a picture of a young Turner who is as strong willed and rebellious as the characters she portrays. During her final years at Sydney Girls' High School, Turner, irritated by her rejection from the school paper, broke with tradition and founded her own publication:

...the editor of the school paper proper evidently considered the aspiring contributions I used to drop into her box as beneath contempt, so in a wrathful moment I rallied my particular friends around me and started a rival paper. (xxi)

Turner would go on to establish the *Parthenon* after leaving school in 1889, a monthly magazine that she co-edited with her sister Lilian. *Tales from the Parthenon* (2016), edited by Pamela Nutt with others, presents three excerpts of Turner's most popular serialisations from the pages of this magazine, giving us a rare glimpse into the early writings of a young woman who would later become one of Australia's most iconic children's authors.

This edition has been meticulously crafted in collaboration with the students of Presbyterian Ladies' College in Sydney, and offers a wealth of scholarly and resource material. The introduction alone includes detailed archival images and illustrations, as

well as an array of explanatory notes and appendixes that serve to highlight the connections between Turner's early work and her most well known publication *The Seven Little Australians* (1894). Nutt provides a substantial biographical account of Turner's childhood: her move from England to Australia, and her upbringing in the newly formed Sydney suburbs, a locale that would heavily influence and shape the imaginative worlds of her stories. Given she was writing in the years leading up to federation, Nutt highlights Turner's early preoccupation with children's stories that were located in a distinctively Australian context. Indeed the three tales, "Gladys and the Fairies" (1889), "A Dreadful Pickle" (1889) and "Bobbie" (1890) all seek to portray children's experience as decidedly urban and modern, with the action mostly taking place in domestic interiors, house gardens or city streets, rather than more traditional rural or bush settings.

Of particular interest is how each of these serialised excerpts suggests the evolution of Turner's character of the rebellious and independent young girl, a character who would reappear across much of her later work – Midge troops off to the inner city slums in search of 'poor people' in "A Dreadful Pickle", Gladys tricks and steals an elf's cap and wand for her own ends in "Gladys and the Fairies" and Bobbie strikes Ted across the face before running away in "Bobbie". As Nutt suggests, whilst all of these tales have moral lessons embedded within them, with rebelliousness often being curbed and curtailed, it is significant to see Turner's repeated avowal of female strength and independence, and her suggestion of its place within a modern Australia.

Whilst Turner appears to have been somewhat of a handful during her school years, the modernist writer Eleanor Dark née Pixie O'Reilly seems to have been by all accounts a model student, with teachers praising her for her intelligence, focus and literary talents. *Eleanor Dark's Juvenilia* (2016), edited by Jane Sloan with others, offers a similarly invaluable collection of Dark's short stories and poems, which were published during her time at Redlands College in Sydney. Like *Tales from the Parthenon*, this edition has been created with the help of current secondary school students from Redlands College, and much care has been taken to give a complete picture of Dark's time there from 1914-1919. We are not only provided with a number of archival images and illustrations, but also several appendixes that include Dark's school report and archivist Marguerite Gillezeau's 2011 Foundation Day speech.

As Sloan suggests in the introduction, Dark's years spent at Redlands provided necessary stability after her mother's death in 1914, and the school's ethos of

community and social justice had a profound impact on the young writer. Indeed Dark's first published stories in *The Redlander*, "Thunderbolt's Discovery" (1916) and "The Gum Tree's Story" (1916), not only belie her interest in the Australian landscape but also suggest a developing concern with nationalism, ownership of the land and migration, concerns which would play out in Dark's later novels.

Dark's school years were bookended by the beginning and end of World War I, and it is interesting to consider how the relatively contained experience of school life alongside such widespread death and destruction would have influenced the young O'Reilly. This dual experience is evident in Dark's poem "Sentinel Pines" (1919), named after the row of trees at the school entrance, with the poem both celebrating the spirit and safety offered by Redlands and also drawing attention to "the glare of the road where the world hurries by." (15) A focus on the effect of war is much more explicit in the mature and ambitious "Jerusalem Set Free", which Dark completed in 1918 at just age seventeen. In referencing William Blake's "Jerusalem", Dark sets up a technically complex series of verses that account for the necessary and brave sacrifices that have been made in order to secure a "scarred, weary, old world" (9).

As is the case with previous *Juvenilia* editions, the value of both Turner's *Tales from the Parthenon* and Dark's *Juvenilia* lies in the way they reveal the early preoccupations of these young women writers, how they point to threads that will be picked up and refined upon in later works. It is also worth noting that both editions suggest the importance of school publications in enabling a writer to develop their own narrative technique and style, with the stimulating and competitive publishing worlds of both Sydney Girls' High School and Redlands College appearing to have had as much influence on both Dark and Turner's early writing as their own natural flair and talent.