



## *Emerging Voices*

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### **Centuries of the Narratological Construction of Gender: *Seven Little Australians* and *The Graveyard Book***

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Turner's *Seven Little Australians* (Turner, 1894) was written more than one hundred years prior to Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* (Gaiman, 2008) and their settings are separated by more than 15000km. Despite these vast disparities in time and location, they share a surprising level of commonality founded in gender-based power constructs generated through their narration. As popular children's novels, each narrative has played a role in perpetuating the patriarchal norms including the silencing of strong women and the forgiveness of flawed men. The impact of these literary voices in the shaping of children's understanding of gender norms cannot be understated. In 2018, a decade on from the release of *The Graveyard Book* (Gaiman, 2008) and 124 years since the publication of *Seven Little Australians* (Turner, 1894) children's literature still places the narratological power firmly in the hands of the male protagonists. This decade's most successful children's novels remain populated with an over-representation of male characters. (Better Reading 2018). Young readers are well overdue for a shift in narratological power.

Narratological and ideological constructs are inextricably entwined within a narrative text. The analysis of their relationship assists with the determination of the 'ideological or aesthetic thrust' of the story (Bal 2009, p. 9). Culler (2011, p. 84) concurs with this assessment of narratological analysis, describing the 'poetics of narrative' as a means to understand how they 'achieve their effects' upon the reader. The reader's role as the affected in the perpetuation of literary ideologies provides yet another layer of complexity to the interactions occurring during the reading of a narrative. A co-dependent relationship is formed between the 'reader and written text', summarised beautifully by Rimmon-Kenan, 'Just as the reader participates in the production of the text's meaning so the text shapes the reader' (Rimmon-Kenen 2002, p.121). The concept of reader-shaping by the narrator's authority is slightly different within children's literature however, as the reader's relationship with the text is less interactive in terms of analysis. This assertion requires addressing when considering ideological construct perpetuation within children's narratives. Hunt in Snelling argues that, within children's literature, 'the use of a controlling authorial or narrative voice to compensate for the inexperienced reader's limited access to the multiple textual strategies...results in a closing down of the interpretative possibilities of a narrative. Hunt's assessment magnifies the importance of narratological consideration when completing a comparative analysis of gender-based ideologies within Turner's *Seven Little Australians* (1894) and Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* (2008).

An analysis of *Seven Little Australians* (1894) and *The Graveyard Book* (2008) reveals that the narration and reader-positioning within each story perpetuates similar masculine, feminine and patriarchal ideologies despite the significant time and setting differences between the narratives. Both texts subscribe to the stereotypical development of gender-based dichotomies. Character weakness, irrationality, and vulnerability are attributed to the female characters like Meg and Scarlett who are contrasted with strong, logical males like Pip and Silas. More powerfully, both texts include, 'passive ideology' consisting of normalised values (Hollindale cited in Stephens, 1992, p. 10). The female actors like Judy and Miss Lupescu, who demonstrate the masculine trait of strength, are erased from the narrative once they have fulfilled their acting function. These women perform as catalysts for the flawed



or developing males, Pip, Bunty, and Bod to seek redemption and resume their pre-destined patriarchal positions as strong, white, males.

Narratology plays a fundamental role in developing the ideological dichotomies. Semantic axes are constructed with the careful offering of voice to a character through direct speech, the appropriately selected focalised moments to provide their perspective, and carefully constructed interactions with other actors and characters throughout the narrative. Bal queries the legitimacy of the principle of semantic axes as an effective means for character analysis but concedes that it is the way most readers conduct their 'semantic characterisation' (2009, p. 127). With this acknowledgement from Bal, it is appropriate to continue with the comparative analysis of gender-based ideologies within *Seven Little Australians* and *The Graveyard Book* and confirm the notion that the similarities present in the two narratives indicate that despite a century of supposedly forward motion in the liberation of women, the 21st Century female literary character remains bound by the very same stereotypical constructs that constrained her in the 19th Century. Perhaps contemplation of this assertion's applicability beyond the realm of the literary is worth acknowledging but is an issue for a separate analysis.

A literal weak versus strong dichotomy relating to physicality, is a common and legitimate, albeit stereotypical binary opposition presented between male and female characters. A less common contrast is one between a dimensionally 'weak' female character and a stronger, more masculinised female. This semantic axes is developed between Judy and her sister Meg in *Seven Little Australians*, and what results from this oppositional relationship is a far more subversive, highly effective method of passively positioning the reader for the subliminal acceptance of negative feminine ideology. Meg is focalised, on page 48 of the *Seven Little Australians* (1894), by an External Focalisor (EF) and described to the reader by an External Narrator (EN) as a 'simple-minded romantic'. Such a description bestowed upon Meg by the authoritative voice of the EN, positions the reader to accept Meg as a shallow young woman with few interests beyond fashion and marriage. Meg's characterisation is cemented by the minimal presence of Meg's own 'voice', in the form of direct speech throughout the narrative. The few occasions when Meg is afforded her own voice are in frivolous conversations about boys and fashion or in apologies like that made to Alan when she immaturely declares, 'I'll never flirt again while I live.' (1894, p. 74). At the diegetic level this construction of Meg as the 'simple feminine romantic' provides a neat contrast to her 'complex, strong, masculine' sister Judy. Of greater significance is the occurrence at extradiegetic level; the implicit shaping of the reader's acceptance regarding the narrative's feminine ideology. Meg's very existence coupled with her potential romance and subsequent 'romantic fulfilment' with Alan at the end of the narrative is positioned in stark contrast to Judy's character. Unwilling to conform to the Victorian feminine ideals, Judy's future has ceased and her strong-willed character is tamed. Snelling (2010 p. 33) reached comparable conclusions to the interpretation of the feminine ideologies shaping the *Seven Little Australians'* reader, 'Judy's transgressive potential is silenced while Meg's more traditional feminine qualities survive'.

*The Graveyard Book's* inclusion of normalised negative feminine ideologies is comparable to *Seven Little Australians* in terms of its passivity. While Scarlett and Miss Lepescu cannot be contrasted as true binary characters due to their initial similarities, their characterisations eventually drift apart to an oppositional representation. When introduced to the reader, both are presented as strong, powerful females with their associated narratology supporting this asserted interpretation of their construction. Scarlett's introduction into the *The Graveyard Book* (2008 p. 34) narrative is abrupt, confident and most significantly conducted with DS, 'Boy, what are you doing?' Despite her very young age and gender, Scarlett has a voice in this narrative from the outset, and she uses it to demonstrate her strength of character. Similarly, Miss Lepescu's entrance into the narrative immediately confirms to the reader, her authoritative positioning. She is initially focalised by Bod but described by an EN. Bod's voice is silenced on this occasion, leaving Miss Lepescu to initiate conversation. Her initial DS, directed at Bod, is stern and abrupt. Like Scarlett, she refers to Bod as 'boy' making the power structure that exists between the two characters explicit to the reader. Despite similarities in their entrances and initial construction, there are telling contrasts in the outcomes of Scarlett and Miss Lepescu. Scarlett's demonstration of feminine vulnerability during her final moments in the graveyard, saves her. After being unable to accept the violence involved in destroying Bod's enemies, she is cleansed by the all-powerful patriarch, Silas, who later advises Bod that he 'took her memories' (p. 270). Contrastingly, the genuinely strong and powerful



Miss Lepescu cannot escape her non-conformist masculinities and is subsequently killed. In the moments prior to her demise, she uses her final provision of narrative voice in the form of DS to articulate the need to, 'save the boy' (2008 p. 230). This confirms for the reader, that Bod's young male life is of far greater importance than her own non-conforming character. To cement this sentiment, in her final moments, Miss Lepescu is focalised by an EF, and with the voice of an EN, it is declared to the reader that she was 'half way between grey wolf and woman, but her face was a woman's face' (2008 p. 230). The use of EF in this statement positions the reader to accept this articulation as an objective narration of fact but its explicit inclusion by the authoritative EN suggests otherwise. Bal (2009 p. 153) explains, 'The narrative can appear objective, because the events are not presented from the point of view of the characters. The focalizer's bias is, then, not absent...but it remains implicit. The reader is being shaped through this narration to accept the inevitability of a half wolf, half women being unable to survive the narrative with the burden of such non-conformity.'

While the physical and moral strength of the non-conformist women within each of these narratives plays a role in their demise, so too does their unwillingness to remain within the safe confines of the domestic realm. Scarlett and Judy effectively demonstrate the perils of venturing beyond domestic boundaries as pubescent girls. Place in each of the narratives, is used to highlight female vulnerability when attempts are made by female characters to navigate in territories beyond the confines of the domestic sphere. In *The Graveyard Book*, the implicit bias of the EF, coupled with the authoritative voice of the EN, advises the reader on two occasions within a very short passage, that Scarlett is returned by Silas to her 'kitchen' and upon Silas's departure 'the girl and her mother [were] talking in the kitchen' (p.269). This passive entwining of patriarchal ideology wherein the strong, dominant, older male delivers the young, vulnerable maiden back to the safety and familiarity of her mother and her kitchen is precisely how children's fiction works in 'socializing their target audience' to understand and internalise cultural practices (Stephens, J. 1992, p. 8).

*Seven Little Australians* provides a comparable patriarchal lesson to its reader through its characterisation and subsequent portrayal of Judy, although the perspective is slightly different. Judy's death represents a patriarchal taming. From the outset of the fabula, Judy is developed as a wild, untamed youth but the complexity of her non-conformist characterisation is represented at every level of the story. At the narratological level Judy's DS is frequently masked using 'mock melodrama and cleverly deployed quotations' demonstrating an unwillingness for this character to conform even at the molecular level of the narrative (Snelling, p. 35). 'I "Is that a dagger that I see before me, the handle to my hand?"' (Turner, p.15) intertextualised from Macbeth and, "'Sure an' if ye'd jist stip down and examine it yirself...'" (p. 21) an 'Irish brogue', which according to the EN was affected by Judy 'at intervals, for some occult reason of her own' (p. 21). At the diegetic level, Judy openly challenges the patriarchal construct within her own family, rebelling against her father, Captain Woolcot. The concern generated by her 'sharp, clever and frequently impertinent' nature is passed on to the reader very early in the narrative as her mother's concerns are relayed by an EN transmitting Captain Woolcot's thoughts using represented thought. 'The restless fire of hers...and lent amazing energy...would either make a noble daring, brilliant woman...or she would be shipwrecked on rocks' (p. 22). At an extradiegetic level, Judy's representation challenges the colonialist oppression Australia faced in its infancy. Captain Woolcot 'personifies the rigid world of the English middle class' and his daughter, the, 'unruly Australian offspring' (Pearce, 1997, p. 10).

Despite Judy's rebellion within her own home, her masculine daring and willingness to deviate from every narrative norm, she survives. The moment she dares to contemplate a permanent place outside of the homestead, within the Australian bush, her character's ideological boundaries have been crossed and her subsequent demise is imminent. 'Pip was going to be a stockman...Judy was going to be his aide-de-camp...' 'Give me a run of Salt Bush country and a few thousand sheep, said Pip'. 'Hear! hear!' chimed in Judy'. These few short words of DS provide the reader a rare, fleeting glimpse of Judy's authentic, genuine personal DS (1894 pp. 142-3). Judy uses her voice to indicate her desire to depart from the normalised feminine constructs within the domestic sphere and encroach upon the masculinised world of the outdoors. Judy's fate is sealed. According to Pearce, (1997, p. 15) 'Judy's end proves conclusively that the Australian Bush is no place for a woman'. As the masculine realm metaphorically and literally crushes the proposed rebellion of Judy, it concurrently quells any notion that a woman can survive



outside the safety of domestic boundaries controlled by a patriarch. In a description provided by an EN, the feminine ideologies within the *Seven Little Australians* are passively but unmistakably revealed. 'There was a green space of ground on a hill-top...where they left little Judy. All around it Mr Hassal had white tall palings put – the short grave was in the shady corner of it (1894 p. 173). Judy is being focalised for the final time in this passage. The EF provided by and EN provides the reader with a detailed analogy of Judy's impossible battle as a non-conforming woman. The present yet, elusive views, the inability to bask in the glorious sunshine or to take centre stage; all these things Judy may have realised if she were a man. The very same patriarchal boundaries that restricted her life continue to imprison her in death. Stephens (1997) concurs that this scene echoes the ideology presented in many nineteenth-century narratives wherein 'their very femininity is sanctioned by their incarceration in their future realm'. With Judy, Miss Lespescu and Scarlett now silenced, the conformist characters like Meg, Pip, and Bod receive narrative reward through development, and weak male characters like Bunty receive redemption.

The effective perpetuation of social ideologies within narratives requires normalisation of the cultural constructs through a range of actors, characters and the selected narrative techniques within the fabula. Waller (Waller cited in Hollindale 1988, p. 7) confirms this process 'works to conceal struggles and repressions, to force language into conveying only those meaning reinforced by the dominant forces of society'. The patriarchal framework is presented to the readers of both *Seven Little Australians* and *The Graveyard Book* (2008) through both the male and female characters. Within the confines of the patriarchal narrative Judy, Miss Lepescu and Scarlett experience narrative oppression, confinement and silencing, while their male counterparts Bunty, Pip and Bod are all offered the opportunity for growth, change and if needed, redemption. Poignantly, their narrative progression and redemption is triggered by silencing or removal of an oppositional female character. The reader is being passively positioned to accept the sacrifice of a woman for the betterment of the patriarch members. Bod, while operating with a comfortable reader-alliance through the majority of the story, is depicted as immature when compared to his female counterpart character, Scarlett. Upon entering the fabula, Bod focalises Scarlett while an EN describes her as 'a little older than he was, a little taller..' having Bod as the focaliser generates a sense that he accepts this description as true and accurate, it encourages the reader to do the same. At this point in the narrative, Scarlett is being characterised as the stronger, more mature character. With Scarlett conveniently removal from the fabula, Bod's pathway to manhood is cleared. In a significant passage, Bod is advised by the patriarch of the narrative, Silas, that both the strong women of the narrative are now gone and the very next conversation between Bod and Silas is about exiting the graveyard. A strong connection is apparent, between the removal of the strong women and the preparedness of Bod to reach his potential as a man.

*Seven Little Australians* (1894) presents a comparable outcome for all three of the male characters closely associated with Judy. Pip and Bod share a similar path towards maturity, a path cleared by the exclusion of Judy and Scarlett from the masculine realm. For Pip this transition occurs at Yarrahppini. 'And now there was cattle-drafting...Judy had pleaded to go, but everyone said it was out of the question...' '[Pip's] face glowed. Hurrah Fizz! he said standing up in his saddle..' (1894 p. 139). This passage is revealed to the reader through EN with Pip focalised on his steed by an EF to highlight the significance of this moment in Pip's transition from boyhood to manhood. The omission of Judy from this event passively but poignantly marks the end of Judy's 'childhood freedoms' particularly in light of her previous declarations about her masculine aims and ambitions. This event marks the commencement of Judy's transition from childhood to womanhood and subsequent relegation to 'marginal positions' within the patriarch (Pearce, 1997, p. 15). Judy's marginalisation is pointedly coupled with Pip's 'rite of passage' to manhood through outdoor adventure.

Bunty is represented as a more deeply flawed male. His weaknesses and flaws are overtly articulated in the early part of the narrative. His initial introduction to the reader is anything but complimentary, described by the EN as 'fat and very lazy' (1894 p. 4). His characterisation worsens as his physical shortcomings are superseded by his weakness of character. Having accidentally struck his father's horse with a cricket ball, Bunty is asked directly by Captain Woolcot, 'do you know anything of this Bunty?' Bunty's response, 'No, of course not!' (1894, p. 80), is an overt demonstration of his dishonourable willingness to lie to avoid trouble. Despite his cowardliness and apparent aversion to consequence, as a male, Bunty's position within the patriarch is retained with redemption not unobtainable. Bunty's reliance



upon Judy for transformation from weak to sound character, commences on the first occasion Judy is physically exposed and left vulnerable by the Australian Bush following her escape from boarding school, but falters soon after her arrival back at the farm. Presented as an oppositional character to Judy, Bunty is offered his first opportunity for redemption when asked by Judy to assist in gathering her some food to aid in her recovery. His credibility appears to be improving as he attempts, in earnest, to do the right thing for Judy. He fails. He manages to return with food but not without being caught in the process. The pinnacle of his failed attempts to demonstrate fortitude occurs after the Captain is whipping him for his involvement in injuring the horse. During the flogging, Bunty's voice cries "'Twasn't me, 'twasn't my fault!'" (1894, p. 104) Despite his desires to be strong, Bunty remains unwilling to accept responsibility. His bitter cowardliness descends further upon realising he is missing out on a picnic with his siblings. Unable to endure the punishment alone, he declares, "'Judy's home!'" (1894 p. 105). Once more, Bunty's voice is leant to betrayal. The passive implication here, is that Bunty's strength of character is inextricably entwined with Judy's proximity. This assertion is cemented soon after Judy's death. In a passage summarising the changes to each of the children following Judy's death, an EN reveals to the reader, 'he did not tell so many stories in these days.' More significantly, the EN declares a fundamental shift in Bunty's willingness to take responsibility and uses represented thought to specify and personalise the changes within Bunty. 'Whenever he felt inclined to say "I never, 'twasn't me, 'twasn't my fault', a tangle of dark curls rose before him...' The connection to Judy involves her moment of death being focalised by Bunty as a reminder to remain courageous. The connectedness between Bunty's journey towards manliness and subsequent patriarchal acceptance, and Judy's death is explicit.

The sacrifice of women for the saving of men is just one of the many negative feminine ideological constructs developed within *Seven Little Australians* (1894) and *The Graveyard Book* (2008). Judy is the literal saviour of her younger brother the General and the metaphorical saviour of both Bunty and Pip. The reader is positioned to accept Judy's sacrifice as a positive role that she plays for her family. This shaping of the reader occurs in the final chapter wherein sadness frames the tone of the final phase of the fabula but atonement prevails as each character's growth and improvements are detailed to the reader by the authoritative EN. In a comparable turn of events, Scarlett and Miss Lepescu perform similar sacrificial roles in *The Graveyard Book* (2008). Miss Lepescu's sacrifice is overtly articulated as she dies to 'Save the boy', (2008 p. 230). Scarlett's sacrifice is less explicit but no less significant. She has her memory erased and is permanently removed from the masculinised realm of the 'impossible' having been deemed too risky by the patriarch and the narrative's patriarchal constructs. The complexity of their sacrifice is realised when considering that their demise may have as much connectedness to their unwillingness to conform to the societal norms as it does to the advancement of their male counterparts. Scarlett, Judy and Miss Lepescu all stray from the feminine realm into the masculine, so the sacrificial component of their demise may simply provide narrative convenience and purpose to their silencing. Regardless of the reasons, the patriarch constructs framing these two narratives saw the removal of three strong women and the maintenance and redemption of their oppositional male characters. Based upon this evidence from within the texts, denying the existence of ideology within these two, or any other narrative, is futile and as Stephens (1992, p. 8) suggests, 'not necessarily undesirable'. Ideological constructs provide the reader with a window into the existing societal norms and accepted behaviours present in their culture. The ideologies presented in narratives share an inextricably entwined relationship with the society from which they are drawn. Through the reader, narratives function as a means of ideological reflection cultural norms as well as shaping and questioning them. Their presence in children's literature is even more complex as the potential reader is less capable of unpacking the presented constructs. The comparative study of *Seven Little Australians* (1894) and *The Graveyard Book* (2008) demonstrates minimal changes to feminine and patriarchal ideological constructs in the century between the publishing of these two narratives a concerning phenomenon when considering the supposed advancement in the rights and positioning of women in the 21st Century; but perhaps not surprising when contemplating the ongoing levels of violence aimed at controlling and 'taming' women. The mirror of literature being held up to society continues to provide a very accurate reflection.



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