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Taming the Hobyahs: Adapting and re-visioning a British tale in Australian literature and film.

Abstract:

Since its first collection and publication in 1891, the gothic fairy tale ‘The Hobyahs’ has inspired various incarnations in Australian literature and film. This paper explores the trajectory of ‘The Hobyahs’ from its proposed Scottish ori-genesis and adaptation within the context of Victorian (Australian) primary school education, to its re-visioning in Australian director Ann Turner’s debut film *Celia* (1988). In so doing, the paper raises questions about what was misplaced, or lost, as this British tale evolved within Australia’s changing historical contexts and argues that re-visions of the tale made possible through the process of filmic re-contextualisation engaged more authentically with its original gendered undercurrents. Examining the evolution of ‘The Hobyahs’ from print to film also expands upon previous scholarship that has acknowledged the tale’s distinct Australianness and suggests a broader contention regarding the cyclical nature of Australia’s relationship to British fairy-tale traditions: that re-visions have the potential to destabilise earlier twentieth-century Australian adaptations and, in the process, critique the notion of Australian fairy-tale formation itself.

Biographical note:

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Hobyah! Hobyah! Hobyah! Tear down the hempstalks, eat up the old man and woman, and carry off the little girl!

Despite their contestability and innate biases ‘born of [their] time and place’ (Warner 2014: 124), decades-old psychoanalytic approaches to children’s literature have advanced the notion that fear in childhood is umbilically connected to the fairy-tale genre. When harnessed as therapeutic tools, fairy tales have the unique ability to tunnel passageways into children’s unconscious fears (Bettelheim 1976), to assay and pacify anxieties through the child’s identification with archetypal characters and conflicts (von Franz 1996), or even to elicit the ‘pleasure in pain’ – the *Schadenfreude* – of recognising one’s real distance from imagined textual representations of misfortune and terror (Howarth 2014). When considered within an Australian historical context more specifically, the link between childhood, fairy tales and fear enters a further dimension in colonial tales of errant children or lost babes in the bush: children who become, through the process of storytelling, didactic exemplars of the danger and precariousness of growing up and living in the wilds of a ‘savage’ island outpost. Among the host of mythical creatures the child could encounter within the hostile landscape of the Australian bush, none could be more terrifying than a horde of Hobyahs. To appreciate the true terror of Hobyahs – as well as their close ties to Australian childhood and to fairy-tale traditions – one must acknowledge their history in print as well as their adaptations and re-visions in the twentieth century.

Since the tale of ‘The Hobyahs’ was first collected and published in *The Journal of American Folklore* in 1891, it has inspired various incarnations in Australian print. However, what is particularly novel about this tale’s history is the significant role Australian film has played in re-capturing the essence of its earliest telling. Examining the trajectory of this gothic tale from its proposed Scottish ori-genesis and adaptation within the context of Australian (Victorian) primary school education, to its re-visioning¹ in Australian director Ann Turner’s debut film *Celia* (1988), highlights how ‘the little girl’, as both fairy-tale construct and as symbol, has journeyed full circle. Phrased another way, Australian feminist filmmaker Ann Turner’s re-vision of the tale of ‘The Hobyahs’ to include a distinct child-centred narrative through the vehicle of the horror film genre re-aligns the tale more closely with its nineteenth-century origins than early twentieth-century Australian textual adaptations, which first localised the tale for a specifically colonial child-readership. Acknowledging the subversive discourse that this 1980s cinematic fairy-tale re-vision provides for twenty-first century viewers, in a sense subverts the silencing of the child observable at a time when Australian children’s literature was said to serve a nationalist agenda or, in the words of one commentator, functioned as ‘imported literary machinery with local labels’ (Niall 1984: 190).

The Hobyahs’ dark past

In its earliest recorded guise, a Mr ‘S V Proudfit’ first contributed the tale of ‘The Hobyahs’ for publication in America’s most prolific periodical record of oral history, *The Journal of American Folklore*, in 1891. Under the subheading ‘A Scotch nursery tale’ it was noted that, as a child, Mr Proudfit ‘used to hear the following story told in a Scotch family that came from the vicinity of Perth’ and that ‘the effectiveness of the

story lies in a certain sepulchral monotone in rendering the cry of the Hobyah, and his terrible “look me” (Proudfit 1891: 173). ‘The Hobyahs’ tells the story of a band of nocturnal woodland creatures who, in the dead of night, repeatedly threaten a rural household (it is questionable whether the occupants are, indeed, a family), chanting taunts to destroy the dwelling, devour the old man and woman and capture the little girl. With a little dog named Turpie and his incessant barking the household’s only means of protection, the Hobyahs inevitably succeed: night after night, Turpie’s attempts to ward off the Hobyahs deprives the old man of sleep and drives him to a sadist piece-by-piece dismembering of the dog’s body. According to this nineteenth-century telling, Turpie’s death by decapitation (after five nights of limb amputation, beginning with Turpie’s tail) allows the Hobyahs to tear down the house made of hempstalks², eat the adults and assault the little girl by stuffing her into a bag and carrying her away into the night. The conclusion of the tale is far from merely cautionary: instead, it mythologises local folklore and invokes Celtic superstition. Taking the little girl to their home and abusing her by repeatedly ‘knock[ing] on top of the bag’ (Proudfit 1891: 174) with cries to ‘Look me! look me!’, the Hobyahs’ daytime sleeping allows the girl’s cries to be heard by ‘a man with a big dog’ who rescues her from the bag, takes her to his home, and positions the dog in her place. When the Hobyahs wake to begin their nightly ritual, the big dog’s devouring of the creatures explains why ‘there are no Hobyahs now’ (Proudfit 1891: 174).

Reading the tale in its entirety, it is interesting to conjecture that, aside from British ancestry, perhaps sheer barbarity and violence bind ‘The Hobyahs’ to a tradition of Australian fairy tales or, as Robert Holden asserts, to Australia’s ‘folklore of fear’ (Holden 2001). In his study of Australia’s fascination with, and mythologising of, monstrous creatures indigenous to the Australian landscape, Holden explains that the Hobyah, like the Bunyip, came to symbolise the terror and threat of the bush – a fear Australia inherits from the anxieties and tensions of its colonial past. He asserts that with the arrival of Europeans and the colonisation of Australia ‘it was the bunyip that became the embodiment of that fear of the unknown’ (Holden 2001: 55). An inherited colonial, rather than indigenous, addition to this tradition of fear, ‘The Hobyahs’ perpetuation of the little-girl-lost narrative continued to fuel Australia’s ‘fear for the safety of the settlers’ children and uncertainty as to their relationship with an alien, unforgiving land’ (Holden 2001: 61).

In the second publication of the tale by folklorist Joseph Jacobs in his 1894 collection *More English fairy tales*, the inclusion of ‘The Hobyahs’ with accompanying illustrations by ‘Mr Batten’ (John D. Batten, 1860-1932) intensified the terror of the Hobyahs. Here, the Hobyahs are visually represented as possessing reptilian facial features, bulging eyes and tadpole-shaped bodies – a depiction which perhaps inspired Jacobs’ remark in his appended notes that Batten’s portrayal ‘would have convinced [him] that they were the bogles or spirits of the comma bacillus’ (Jacobs 1894: 255). This description serves to not only perpetuate the inherent horror of the tale, but also alludes to the Hobyahs’ strength in multiplicity, as well as their collective, inherent ‘evil’, here likened to an unwelcomed disease. In addition to their appearance, the tale’s repetition of the old man’s nightly butchering of the little dog Turpie, as well as the Hobyah’s terrorising chants several nights over, place ‘The Hobyahs’ within the

tradition of the formula or cumulative tale popular in Britain at the time – tales that often referenced the cruel and the morbid. The narrative device of eating or being eaten, violence and the death of protagonist animals are commonly associated with this tale type (Thomas 2006). Perhaps even more enlightening with regard to the tale's alignment with generic convention, the death of the wicked and the triumph of good over evil signal the conclusion of the formula: 'The Hobyahs' disposes of the terrorising characters in a 'matter-of-fact fashion, while it is understood that, with them thus removed, the good will prosper' (Thomas 2006: 132).

Despite overlooking the first 1891 periodical publication and erroneously assigning 1895, in place of 1894, as the publication date of Jacobs's *More English fairy tales*, Holden (2001) is right to attribute the first mass publication of 'The Hobyahs' to Jacobs's compendium. One of forty-five tales to be published in Jacobs's second collection of English folktales, the volume included lesser-known nursery and folktales, including interesting titles such as 'The pied piper of Franchville', 'Catskin' and 'A pottle o' brains'. In his introduction, Jacobs states that whilst his previous collection *English fairy tales* (1890) had already 'established itself as a kind of English Grimm' (Jacobs 1894: v) – having propagated such classic tales as 'Jack and the beanstalk', 'Tom Tit Tot' (Rumpelstiltskin) and 'The story of the three little pigs' – this later endeavour sought to provide 'access to tales entirely new and exceptionally well told' and to those 'less familiar ones buried in periodicals or folk-lore collections' (Jacobs 1894: ix). Not so coincidentally then, Jacobs's association with the British Folk-lore Society led him to contribute entries to *The Journal of American Folklore* from 1888, its year of institution, and to write an original article on fairy-tale collector Andrew Lang in 1913. His attribution of the tale of 'The Hobyahs' to Proudfit, as well as referencing *The Journal* as the original source text, supports the observation that the 1891 and 1894 'versions' of The Hobyahs are indeed one-and-the-same.

Despite its earliest publication in *The Journal of American Folklore* – attracting, in the first instance, a Scottish-American audience inclined to preserve the posterity and circulation of oral history from British homelands – Jacobs's popularising of the tale and his connections to the colonies provide a convenient narrative for scholars to bolster the tale's inclusion within a tradition of Australian fairy tales. Holden has noted that 'Given Jacobs' Australian origins, it seems appropriate that after he had introduced the hobyahs in 1895 [*sic*] they eventually found their way to this native land' (Holden 2001: 168). Jacobs was himself a prime specimen of colonial self-made success; born in the colony of New South Wales in 1854 to a publican father, Jacobs's receipt of a privileged private school education furnished him with the ability to return 'home' and continue his intellectual pursuits, studying at Cambridge and in Berlin, and writing a host of popular publications as a literary folklorist and as a scholar of Anglo-Jewish history. The timeline for the publication of Jacobs's collection, together with Holden's statement that Jacobs was 'born in Sydney and attended Sydney Grammar School before going to England in 1872' (168), buttress Holden's claim that 'The Hobyahs' is an authentic Australian folk tale.

Reinforcing the relationship between 'The Hobyahs' and Australia, Holden further mentions how the fairy tale's employment as a didactic educational tool in Victorian schools from the 1930s continued yet also adapted this tradition of cautionary bush tales

for a new generation of Australian child readers. Although Holden refrains from comment on or analysis of the adaptations themselves, he notes that the earliest use of ‘The Hobyahs’ in the context of Australian education began with its printing in the Victorian primary school periodical *School Paper* for Grades Three and Four, and, later, in various revised editions of the *Victorian Readers* – a series of literacy textbooks produced by the state Education Department, which were aimed at promoting reading, writing and spelling in Victorian state schools. ‘The Hobyahs’ featured in the Second Book of the *Victorian Readers*, which was first published in 1930, then in a revised edition in 1937. Clare Bradford’s reflection that the influence of the *Readers* on Australian children in the first half of the twentieth century was the result of the combined ‘pervasiveness of their use, and the fact that most children had few other sources of reading material’, helps account for their popularity well into the 1950s (Bradford 2009: 291).

Whilst alterations to the tale of ‘The Hobyahs’ in the *Victorian Readers* will be explored further below, it is necessary to first call attention to the most significant aspect missing from these early Australian educational publications that Holden’s account overlooks: in the pages of educational texts issued to tens of thousands of Victorian school children throughout the twentieth century, the ‘little girl’ had vanished. Moreover, by the 1920s the migration of the story from folk legend to fairy tale was complete, with the opening line changed from ‘*Once there was*’ to, in the school adaptations, ‘*Once upon a time*’. Considering the transformation of the tale from a Scottish folk yarn to a cautionary Australian fairy tale thus provides further context for an examination of how Turner’s filmic re-vision drew out the feminism of the original telling.

The Hobyahs at school and at home

Bearing in mind its publication history, ‘The Hobyahs’ was not a typical nineteenth-century moral folktale collected for dissemination in the pages of children’s books. It had not, in its nineteenth-century periodical form, earned the generic status of children’s literature, but remained a Scottish nursery tale collected in the interests of preserving British (Scottish) folklore. Interpreting the tale through this historical lens is revealing. In Celtic mythology, dogs are imbued with symbolic significance, often represented as the trusted protectors of heroes, as healers, and as companions for the journey into the afterlife (Monaghan 2004). Particularly in Scottish legend, dogs symbolise death and rebirth and often feature in tales as reminders of ‘otherworldliness’ – as creatures who sense that death is near and alert their owners of the presence of supernatural powers or beings (Monaghan 2004). Turpie’s role in the 1891 iteration of ‘The Hobyahs’ supports the latter interpretation: the old man’s decision to ignore the dog’s warnings and to kill his protector ushers in his death. Similarly, the girl child as the Victorian embodiment of innocence and purity is whisked away and saved from evil/sin by the adult male protector and his dog. Considering the tale in its socio-historical context also raises a series of questions: is the little girl the child of the ‘old’ man and woman? What is their relation? Within the contexts of the 1890s, one could examine the absent parent, the high incidence of abandoned and orphaned children or, given the Hobyahs’ likeness to the bacillus, the threat to childhood posed by morbidity, sickness and death.

Examining the tale's earliest publication in Australia and its omissions, advances the proposition that contemporary colonial reviewers may have shared similar questions and concerns about these story elements. Within the context of the history of Australian education, 'The Hobyahs' was transformed not only with regard to the localisation of its story elements, but also its shift from folktale to a didactic educational tool circulated for the entertainment and instruction of Australian children.

The tale's earliest Australian adaptation in some ways rectified the inexplicable or contradictory aspects of the original narrative, and at the same time heavily edited the tale to appeal to a child-readership. In 1926, the educational periodical the *School Paper* included the tale of 'The Hobyahs' in its May volume. Published monthly for each grade level and sold at a token price to students through newsagencies, the journal served as a major teaching resource for the state school sector (Blaxell and Drummond 2006: 316). From its first issue in February 1896, the *Paper* also served a number of broader purposes in the context of Australian education: to publish a variety of material that stimulated students' interest in reading, to propagate well-known classics of prose and poetry, to arouse curiosity in the natural world and to develop interest in 'the home colony, in Australia and in the British Empire' (Gibbs 1987: 190). 'Indirectly', as Gibbs asserts, '[the *Paper*] promoted correct moral attitudes and...became a vehicle for promoting conservative social values in the minds of young readers' (1987: 190). Surprisingly then, in the *School Paper*'s iteration of 'The Hobyahs', the innocent child is nowhere to be seen, and the tale's moral – reward for one's repentance of their sins – is promoted through the narrative of the old man's role in rescuing the old woman.

The tale opens with the narrator alluding to the editorial choices made in adapting the tale for the *Papers*' intended readership: 'Once upon a time, my dears (and it wasn't in my time nor yet in your time: but a very good time it was for all that)' (Victorian Department of Education 1926: 58). The setting is a similar 'house all made of hempstalk' (ibid: 58), but this time, only a little old man and a little old woman reside there. The old man's victimisation of the dog somewhat mirrors the nineteenth-century telling: after the first night of barking, the man cuts off Turpie's tail. However, by the second night and despite the man's attempts to remove Turpie's head, the story explains that:

the axe was very blunt, and the hair on little dog Turpie's neck was very thick; so Turpie was only stunned and cast outside into a big patch of ferns. Then little dog Turpie could not bark any more. (ibid: 59)

The cessation of Turpie's barking brings about the fulfilment of the Hobyahs' threats. However, though the Hobyahs carry off the little old woman, the old man's decision to hide under his bed gives him time to display his remorsefulness and receive reward for his repentance:

When the little old man found the little old woman was gone, he was very sorry. He knew what a good little dog Turpie had been, and he cried and he cried when he thought about what he had done to poor little Turpie. He cried and he cried till morning light, when he heard the scratch, scratch, scratch of little paws, and there was little dog Turpie as bright as a bee. (Victorian Department of Education 1926: 60)

The little old man now figures as the hero; he follows Turpie as the dog tracks the Hobyahs' scent, cuts open the bag with his knife, and secures Turpie in the woman's place to devour the creatures come morning. The distinct sanitising of the violence, death and fear is notable in this adaptation of the tale, as is the omission of the historically-cautionary storyline: the threat of the bush and the rescue of the lost child from within it.

Another significant addition appears in this adaptation: the inclusion of repetitive phonic and linguistic devices to aid the teaching of reading and writing. Lines including the repetition of verbs (for instance, 'Out from the deep woods, run, run, running, came the Hob-yahs...Skip, skip, skipping on the ends of their toes ran the Hob-yahs' (Victorian Department of Education 1926: 58)), the separation of the tale into numbered paragraphs and the hyphenated spelling of 'Hob-yahs' are textual strategies to support the practice of reading and recitation. To support children's vocabulary, eight words from the tale – hemp, stalks, creeping, slumber, stunned, frighten, sniffing, gobbled – are extracted above the text, with definitions and hyphenated spelling to distinguish distinct syllables (eg. Creep-ing; Slum-ber). Inserted after the seventh paragraph of text, French artist Timoleon Lobrichon's (1831-1914) painting 'Une surprise', with the accompanying caption 'Though 'twas a terror, 'twas a pleasing fear' (Victorian Department of Education 1926: 59), visually breaks up the prose. The image depicts two children's experience of Schadenfreude as they play with a Jack-in-the-box: 'a near relative of the Hob-yahs and other bogies' (Victorian Department of Education 1926: 59). The overtly moralistic tone of the narrator's intrusion, coupled with aids to assist in the instruction of students' literacy, support Gibbs's assertion that the *School Paper* emphasised 'heroism and bravery, charity, obedience and hard work' (Gibbs 1987: 198) in the tales themselves and, presumably, in its expectations of students.

The circulation of the *School Paper's* adaptation of 'The Hobyahs' was dependent upon the publication's popularity. Gibbs explains that despite the *School Paper's* historical descent from a long line of British educational magazines, its variety and breadth in subject matter, the *Paper* 'represented a continuous expenditure by parents for each child' (1987: 212): an economic reality that ushered in the shift from ephemeral to more durable book-style readers for each primary grade, which could be supplied to schools at no cost. The Second Book of the *Victorian Readers*, which included 'The Hobyahs', became the first Australian publication to completely localise the tale.

'The Hobyahs' adaptation in the *Victorian Readers* appeared among other stories of a moral and fantastical nature such as 'The three billy goats gruff' and 'The field mouse and the acorn', giving the Second Book its distinctive fairy-tale feel. Included in the publication was an appended language list of common phonic word groups and accompanying illustrations by Elsie Jean McKissock. McKissock's imaginings of the Hobyahs, perhaps the most familiar images of the creatures, add a humanising element to the tale, representing the Hobyahs with human facial features and what appear to be striped-stockinged legs. With the tale set in the bush, the little old man and the little old woman now lived in a hut made all of bark with 'a little yellow dog called Dingo' (Victorian Department of Education 1930: 56). One night the Hobyahs emerge 'out from the gloomy gullies' (56), creep 'through the grey-gum trees' (56) and commence their nightly ritualised cries to 'Pull down the hut, eat up the little old man, [and] carry

off the little old woman' (57). The story continues in much the same way as the 1926 edition, with obvious exceptions: Dingo is decapitated and the little girl is excluded. Once the old man emerges from under his bed and makes his remorseful decision to give back Dingo's head, Dingo rescues the old woman from the bag with his sharp teeth, thus securing the extinction of the Hobyahs. It has been suggested that through this *Victorian Reader* adaptation, 'The Hobyahs' 'has imprinted itself on the psyche of many Victorians and is the single story most readily remembered by many of them, not always with approval' (Dowling 1994: 5).

In spite of these observations, acknowledging the localisation or appropriation of the tale by Australian educational publications in the early twentieth century signals nothing particularly new or unique about the trajectory of this tale. Scholars in the field of Australian children's literature have commented on the fact that British tales took on an Australian flavour at times, coinciding with resurgent nationalism (Niall 1984; Saxby 1998). More recently, and in spite of these critical assessments, scholars are beginning to acknowledge early twentieth-century Australian fairy tale authors' conscious construction of their sense of space and place, and fashioning of Australian identity (Kellock Floyd 2015). Scholars are also beginning to point to these early tales as integral nodes in the network of contemporary, twenty-first century Australian fairy-tale writers and illustrators such as Shaun Tan (Do Rozario 2011). Moreover, juxtaposing the various incarnations of The Hobyahs – whether classified as literary adaptations or complete retellings – supports scholars' formulations that as fairy tales evolved from oral to literary culture, they inevitably reflected, and were affected by, their situatedness within historical, social and cultural contexts (Zipes 2012; Warner 2014). Aside from the retention of the terrifying Hobyahs, the shifting or changing story elements in the tale's various iterations – the adapted setting from a house made of hempstalks to one of bark, and the disappearance and reappearance of certain characters (the resurrection of the dog-protector and erasure of the child) – confirm the notion that the passage of time contextualised or adapted the tale to its changing socio-cultural environment. Perhaps of more interest to the interwoven histories of 'The Hobyahs' and Australian fairy-tale adaptation is therefore an examination of when, and possibly why, the little girl reappeared.

Recovering the girl: *Celia* (1988)

It can be contended that Australian efforts to harness the subversive potential of the tale of 'The Hobyahs' were echoed later in the twentieth century – at a time when new media and mass social movements made the process of re-visioning, rather than merely adapting, Australian fairy tales even more possible. With a number of changes to federal government cultural policy and an increase in tax-driven incentives, by the 1970s the Australian film industry experienced what has been described as a revival: the propagation of domestic productions that participated in, yet at the same time departed from, the province of international film (Bullen and Sawers 2016: 236). Despite this New Wave in national cinema, fairy-tale films produced in Australia during the decades that followed have usually been regarded as adaptations 'made for an international market' or as 'low-budget animated fairy-tale films made for television and video' such

as Burbank Films Australia's *Alice through the looking glass* (1987), *Thumbelina* (1993) or *Cinderella* (1996). According to Bullen and Sawers, these are films that 'frequently reflect allegedly universal themes rather than a distinctly Australian sensibility' (Bullen and Sawers 2016: 237). In light of this assessment, Ann Turner's debut film *Celia* (1988) (also released under the title *Celia: Child of terror*) is a noteworthy exception; in this feature film, the tale of 'The Hobyahs' facilitates or enables a feminist allegory that, conversely, uncovers the subversiveness of the tale's original gothic roots. Thus while *Celia* can be analysed from a number of critical perspectives – for its socio-political commentary on post-WWII Australia, for its critique of childhood innocence, or for its discourse on morality and natural justice (to suggest but a few interpretive lenses) – investigating Turner's use of 'The Hobyahs' as a narrative frame is particularly revealing. Not only do the Hobyahs recur as motifs symbolising the child protagonist's (Celia's) psychological terror and loss, but the tale itself – its reception and its historicity in print – figures as a significant story element. In essence, *Celia* can be read as a feminist re-vision of 'The Hobyahs', contemporaneously acknowledging and challenging the inherited, rather than indigenous, tradition of Australian fairy tales.

Set in the Melbourne suburb of Surrey Hills in the late 1950s, with Rebecca Smart in the title role, *Celia* charts the story of nine-year-old Celia Carmichael's eventful summer holiday following the death of her beloved Grandmother, who resided in the family's backyard bungalow. Celia's neighbours, the Tanners, move in next door, only to move out again after being ostracised for their Communist sympathies. The film's sub-plot sees Celia's cherished pet rabbit Murgatroyd – a gift from her father to ensure her disassociation from the 'Reds' next door – confiscated and killed under the Bolte Government's rabbit muster, which sought to cull the rabbit population during this decade. The film ends with a brutal murder when Celia shoots her police-sergeant Uncle John, who was responsible for impounding Murgatroyd. The murder is covered up by Celia's mother while Celia's returns to her make-believe games in the local quarry.

In many respects, the history of the 'The Hobyahs' within the context of Australian education propels the filmic plot forward. However, references in the film to specific passages of the tale, as well as Turner's own reflections (Hussey 2003), suggest that an alternative version of 'The Hobyahs', distinct even from the localised *Victorian Reader* adaptation, was the source text for the film – that is, Turner's invocation of the tale appears to have been drawn from a version of the tale that was devoid of the little girl as a character. Thus while it is clear that *Celia* draws on the tale of 'The Hobyahs', there is little evidence to suggest Turner's awareness of its earliest telling and its inclusion of the little girl.

Celia has been read as a tale of loss: Celia experiences the loss of her grandmother, her pet rabbit and, eventually, her innocence (Hussey 2003). The adaptation of 'The Hobyahs' utilised in *Celia* can, on first inspection, be seen to support this assertion. The film opens with a prologue depicting Celia's misfortunes: discovering the body of her dead granny, her grandmother's funeral and her nightmare of strange noises and figures – a blue hand with long fingers and sharpened claws slinking through her bedroom window. As the opening credits fade, the scene cuts to a close-up of an illustrated page and to intradiagetic narration by Celia's teacher, Mrs. Greenway (played by Kerri-Anne

Kennerley), reading a storybook to her class of students. The close-up shot of the book's illustrations – blue, goblin-like creatures with long fingers, pointed ears and sharp, angular noses, together with Mrs. Greenway's narration – identifies the tale as 'The Hobyahs'. Throughout the film, Celia's night-time hallucinations are plagued by these blue spirit-beings (performed by heavily-costumed human actors) who, she believes, stole the little old woman (her grandmother) and carried her off into the night. The film refrains from featuring or reconciling the ending of the tale, instead leaving the audience with Mrs. Greenway's recitation of its ominous verse:

Through the long grass, creep, creep, creeping came the Hobyahs. Skip, skip, skipping on the ends of their toes ran the Hobyahs. Then the Hobyahs cried: 'Pull down the hempestalks, eat up the little old man, and carry off the little old woman'.

The distinctive illustrations and reference to hempestalks in this passage, coupled with the film credits, reveal that extracts from a popular British educational edition of *The Hobyahs* (1980) by James H. Fassett – a title produced under the successful Beacon Readers label by publishers Ginn & Company – were used in filming, supporting the speculative claim that Turner's reinsertion of the 'little girl' character into the framing tale may have been mere coincidence. In later interviews, Turner's comments reveal that her harnessing of the perspective of the girl through the tale of 'The Hobyahs' operates as an implicit allegory, serving the film's feminist aesthetic and agenda. Nonetheless, the decision to include and give voice to the perspective of the female child also forges an inadvertent connection to the original Scottish source text:

The fairy tale is one story where there is a little old man who's in control, whereas in the main story *Celia* really is about the women, it's not about the little old man. It's not about the man saving the woman, it's about the mother saving the daughter and very much [about] the female world. Whereas the fairy tale that it is invoking is not about the female world at all. (Hussey 2003: 286)

Turner's comments raise the idea that the girl protagonist in *Celia* ultimately functions to reclaim the subjectivity of the little old woman. In seeking to reinsert the child/female as central to the tale of 'The Hobyahs', Turner's film, whether knowingly or not, critiques and interrogates the practice of Australian fairy-tale adaptation by superseding the localised Ozification of the tale that was published earlier in the century. Not only does the film invoke a British version of the tale and, in so doing, eclipse the history of the *Victorian Readers*, but it invokes and gives subjectivity to the girl of the earliest telling as a reaction to the patriarchal tropes and symbolic disempowerment of women that define the tale's history in print. *Celia*'s destabilisation of earlier twentieth-century adaptations thus exemplifies the ambivalence of Australia's relationship to British fairy tale traditions and the cyclical nature of fairy-tale adaptation. Turner's appropriation of the fairy tale genre as feminist allegory innately 'resists the fundamental values of the narratives from which [she] borrows' (Bullen and Sawers 2016: 240). While *Celia* achieves 'not only the possibility of the feminine to find a voice amongst a largely masculine genre', suggested by Turner's ability to 're-read the trope of history in Australian film' (Hussey 2003: 283), it also re-reads the masculine tropes implicit in fairy tale and, in so doing, unwittingly revises the colonial pull of early Australian adaptations.

Exploring how *Celia* re-visions the gendered undercurrents of ‘The Hobyahs’ earlier tellings not only sheds light on Turner’s contribution to the corpus of Australian fairy-tale film but also on the shifting significance of the tale within Australia’s historical contexts: from its imported colonial flavour, to localised didactic tool, to, finally, its function as a vehicle for Australian social commentary. In an audio interview with David Stratton featured in the DVD release of the film (Turner and Stratton 2009), Turner states that the narrative lens of *Celia* allowed her to explore the insidiousness of Cold War conservatism – especially conservatism that bred violence, scapegoating and intolerance. The difficulty, Turner states, was ‘not to judge’ but for the issues to be seen ‘through a child’s eyes’ and remain open to interpretation. The character of *Celia Carmichael* therefore exemplifies what scholar Maria Tartar (1994) describes as the subversiveness of curiosity and strong will. *Celia* in this sense revises the literary devices of the cautionary tale, which traditionally uses intimidation to ‘persuade children to obey the laws set down by parental authority, celebrating docility and conformity while discouraging curiosity and wilfulness’ (Tartar 1994: 30). Rather than the passive child chastised for her bad behaviour, *Celia* is active, energetic, curious and defiant. Unlike the girl in the nineteenth-century iterations of ‘The Hobyahs’ – the passive victim in need of liberation by the man with the big dog – the reappearance and distinct incarnation of ‘the girl’ in the film unconsciously resists the erasure of the child and re-asserts her prominence.

Both the bond (whether close or hostile) between female characters in *Celia* and the protagonist’s disregard for her uncle and father’s authority can be seen to ‘disrupt the neat parallel between girlhood and innocence’ (Hussey 2003: 287), thereby engaging with discourses of female agency. *Celia*’s father, Ray, is presented as a morally weak character: he has an issue with drink, covets his neighbour’s wife and attempts to bribe *Celia* into obedience. His opposition to *Celia* is signified by his distaste for the coda of the fairy tale itself, typified in his exclamation that ‘I don’t know what you see in that book. It’s horrible’ (Umbrella Entertainment 2009). On the other hand, *Celia*’s mother, Pat Carmichael, moves from a state of powerlessness to strength as she conceals evidence of her daughter’s guilt. Her cover-up of the murder of Uncle John reinforces the undercurrent of female knowingness that runs through the narrative – a place of knowing beyond the symbolic, beyond patriarchy. *Celia* dons feminine markers – her mother’s gloves, lipstick and pearls – to commit her sinful act. The murder, together with its whitewashing, further aligns *Celia* with Turner’s commentary on children’s ability to see through the veil of adulthood. As *Celia* navigates through the prejudices of the anti-communist movement, juxtaposed against the Victorian rabbit muster, *Celia*’s loss of innocence is signalled by her entrance into and emulation of the adult world – to ‘learn to lie’ and to live in a world that rewards deceit’ (Hussey 2003: 287). In this way, *Celia* (1988) acts as antithetical to the cautionary tale, celebrating the subversiveness of childhood fantasy, matriarchy and imagination.

Celia’s placement within the historical continuum of Australian fairy-tale traditions through its re-vision of ‘The Hobyahs’ is further established through the film’s emphasis on the materiality of the fairy-tale book as object, as well as its alignment with Australia’s ‘folklore of fear’ through its classification within the horror film genre. As such, the power of fairy tale to inspire young as well as adult minds – its potential to

incite violence as well as fantasy, escape and healing – emerges as a prominent theme. Celia has a number of textual encounters with literature throughout the film, including physical copies of *The Hobyahs*. Celia's playing with the Tanner children and befriending of their free-spirited communist mother, Alice, provides Celia with the sanctuary and comfort she needs to overcome the death of Granny Carmichael; it also closely entwines the female characters with representations of feminine resistance through the power of reading and print. Parallels between Alice and Celia's grandmother are revealed as the audience learns about Granny Carmichael's penchant for communist literature. *The selected works of Lenin* and Burns' *Handbook of Marxism* feature on the bookshelf of Granny's bungalow, a space that Celia later visits as the end of summer and return to school draws near. Celia's desire to borrow Mrs Greenway's copy of *The Hobyahs* for the Christmas holidays and her fascination with the materiality of the physical book-as-object is also notable. Celia often appears engrossed in the book, reading it on her bed and as an escape from fishing on a daytrip with her father. In this way, children's literature is linked to the notion of childhood impressionability, echoed also in the thin veil Celia draws between fantasy and reality in the liminal space of the abandoned quarry – a place where Celia plays with her (imaginary?) Granny, and engages in inventive role-play. The quarry also emerges as a space where Celia invokes the Hobyahs and can live out her, at times, sadistic fantasies: a space free from the restraints of innocence. Set in the quarry, the conclusion of the film – a scene which contemporary reviewers denigrated for its 'immorality' (Shelly 2012) – shows Celia playing as judge and juror in a mock trial, attempting to hang her friend and accomplice to Uncle John's murder, Heather. In this way, the ending simultaneously amalgamates the monstrous and the child in one, leaving viewers with a resistant reading of Australian fairy tale wherein the child and female rebelliousness are visible.

Whilst the Hobyahs take on a host of significances in the film, the most obvious being their personification of childhood terror, *Celia* invokes the creatures in a way that revises their symbolic uses in earlier Australian contexts. Contemporary reviewers of *Celia* felt that true fans of the horror film genre would be misled by the film's tagline 'Child of terror' but for 'the moments involving the imaginary Aussie creatures called Hobyahs and unexpected acts of violence during its climax' (Shelly 2012). Celia is, at first, frightened by the deformed bodies of the blue creatures, but then shifts to invoking them as symbols of her enemies and as totems of female power. In one scene, Celia defaces a newspaper photograph of Premier Bolte – the political figure responsible for the removal of Murgatroyd – by colouring his features to resemble the blue of the Hobyahs. Similarly, when Uncle John steals her adored pet from her home in the middle of the night, Celia yells 'It's the Hobyahs!' As a result of her father's sanctions – his burning of her beloved Granny's books, denial of friendship with the Tanners, and dislike of vermin rabbits – Celia and her friends attempt to conjure the Hobyahs in the quarry, creating makeshift voodoo dolls of their oppressors and repetitively chanting around a burning bonfire for the Hobyahs to 'Take him! Take him! Take him!' and finally 'Death! Death!'. Celia's resentment of her father and his close relationship to his brother, Uncle John, lead her to invoke the Hobyahs in a sinister, yet empowering, way – as spirits who can 'take away' Celia's oppressors. Another meaning to The Hobyahs emerges as Celia kills Uncle John; her shrill cry of 'Hobyah!' as she pulls the trigger of her father's rifle and her consolatory words to Heather, 'That's alright, now

the Hobyahs are dead' (Umbrella Entertainment 2009), pronounces their defeat and signals the end of Celia's childhood innocence. Despite Uncle John's earlier attempt to replace Murgatroyd with a pet puppy, after the sergeant's death Celia ties the dog to a tree as an act of rejection: the girl takes ownership of the man and his dog and emerges as the deceiving heroine.

The richness of Ann Turner's *Celia* (1998) lies not only in its exploration of the pleasures and terrors wrought by the loss of innocence, but also in its obfuscation of the boundaries of Australian fairy-tale film as a genre. Categorised among Australia's 'classic' horror films due, mostly, to its dark and sinister climax, its reference to and re-vision of the tale of 'The Hobyahs' makes it equally worthy of analysis within the context of Australian fairy-tale scholarship and feminist filmmaking more broadly. Drawing connections between *Celia* and the Scottish origins of 'The Hobyahs' re-inserts the little girl's importance to the tale back into a frame of Australian literary and cultural history. Moreover, analysing *Celia* within the framework of the historical evolution of the tale of 'The Hobyahs' reveals the subversive potential that multimedia practices hold for Australian fairy tale traditions: the ability of ever-evolving new media to subvert the effects of colonisation on traditional folktales and reclaim the complex web of iterations otherwise silenced by the homogenising process of popularising national tales through the medium of print (Bacchilega 2013). Tracing the tale's various literary adaptations exposes various narrative alterations and omissions within Turner's subversive film text and demonstrates that the little girl of the earliest nineteenth-century iteration is – in the Australian imagination – far from lost; rather, she is reinvigorated for another generation of inquiring eyes to see and re-vision.

Notes

1. In this paper, I am inclined to align with Vanessa Joosen's (2011) view that 'The discussion of contemporary adaptations of fairy tales has led to a mass, or even a mess, of terms and concepts that often lack clear definitions and distinctions: fairy-tale retelling, reversion, revision, reworking' (9). To draw some parameters, I make the distinction in this paper between fairy-tale adaptations – tales that align closely with a source tale or, borrowing Joosen's term, merely alter elements of the 'pre-text' – and more extensive or allusive retellings – what I term 're-visions'. My use of the prefix 're-' adds a further feminist undercurrent to the concept of revisioning: the female artist's 'act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction' (Rich 1972: 18). I also use the term 'fairy-tale film' as articulated by Jack Zipes, to refer to 'any kind of cinematic representation recorded on film, on videotape, or in digital format that employs motifs, characters, and plots generally found in the oral and literary genre of the fairy tale' (Zipes 2011: 9).
2. Hempstalks or hemp stalks, refer to the fibrous stalks of the hemp plant. From as early as the mid-sixteenth century, hemp was a staple agricultural product of Britain used in the manufacture of textiles and other mercantile industries. The use of the stalks as building material may therefore suggest the low social status of the occupants or that they were at a time employed in those industries.

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