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## Eco-critical reflections in the trilogy of Miles Franklin

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### ABSTRACT

This paper titled “Eco-critical reflections in the trilogy of Miles Franklin” outlines the significant elements of nature that formulates the life of Australian Squatters. The lives of farmers, squatters are most intricately woven into a rugged Australian fabric that regulates the activities in that region. Land as an integral part of indigenous writings is carried forward by Franklin in a delicate way. The trilogy seems to be only a saga of Australian life at the surface level but the landscape is equally blended with the tales. The three novels of Miles Franklin, published under the pseudonym of Brent of Bin Bin is interlinked by either their setting or the characters who appear in the sequels also. The ‘land’ is not viewed as just a setting for the tales but is at the crux of all action and events unfolding in the trilogy.

**Key words:** Ecocriticism, Trilogy, earth- centered approach, Squattocracy, Pastoral community, landscape, man-nature interaction, terrain, Aesthetic appeal

### INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism is at the node of man- nature interactions focusing on a fair play by all organisms, including human beings. It’s an earth-centered approach to literature. According to the American philosopher, Cheryll Glotfelty, “Ecocriticism is the study of relationship between literature and the physical environment”.(Glotfelty and Fromm , xiii) This paper attempts to trace the depiction of man- nature interactions in the Australian landscape, as encapsulated by Miles Franklin in her Trilogy – *Up the Country* (1928), *Ten Creeks Run* (1930) and *Cockatoos* (1954).

Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin, in short, Miles Franklin was born in Talbingo in New South Wales. Her early memories about the bush life becomes the theme of her six chronical novels penned under the pseudonym Brent of Bin Bin . The trilogy discussed in this research paper is a part of the six Historical fiction which describes the Bush life over a period of time. Early Australian Literature had the oral tradition of passing on their legends to their posterity. Aboriginal literature primarily focused on the landscape or the terrain. Landscape suggests the features of a land especially its aesthetic appeal. The paper is a humble attempt to explain the inexplicable relation that a Bush man shares with his land as depicted in Miles Franklin’s select works, penned under the pseudonym of Brent of Bin Bin. The three novels are set in Talbingo, New South Wales revolving mainly around two Australian Squattocracy families- The Labosseers and the Mazerers.

*Up the Country* (1928) is the first novel in the trilogy followed by the sequels *Ten Creeks Run* (1930) and *Cockatoos* (1954). The narrative of *Up the Country: A Saga of Pioneering Days* is set in Three Rivers station, a hub of frequent floods, which coincides with the wedding of the lovely Rachel Mazere to Simon Labosseer, who has taken up grazing land on the other side of the mountains sharing boundaries with Boko Pool. Bert, Boko Pool's son is the hero of the novel who gets involved at the hands of Bush rangers. Though the story seems to be that of one discussing about how the squatters thrive in a land which doesn't actually belong to them, the story is also about the late Nineteenth century Australia which has a rough terrain. The explicit detailing of the grazing fields, homesteads along with the life of Squatters also makes it a journey through the rugged terrain of Talbingo which appears in the novels as 'Bool Bool'. In the Prologue to *Up the Country*, titled as Three Rivers, 1852, there is a reference to the greatest flood ever witnessed by Talbingo and this time too, the incessant rains are a threat to the maize crop about to be harvested as evident from the words of Brennan, a friend of Philip Mazere senior who owns the farm called 'The Three Rivers'.

"By the pipers, we've had enough for this time of year! It had better leave off now. For there was danger of it flattening the tall, tasselled maize...taller there than anywhere else in the world."( Franklin, 26)

The rains were posing a danger to the upcoming marriage of Rachel and Simon as well as from the words of coachman Bill, "It's a banker miss, an' rising fast".( Franklin ,37) . Life seems to be hard for people in homesteads with frequent floods bothering them.

*Ten Creeks Run: A Tale of the Horse and Cattle Stations of the Murrumbidgee* unfolds with a horse muster at Bool Bool (Talbingo), an event for the squatters to sort out their herds and celebrate the building of a new bridge over the Tumut River. Bert continues to be the central character in the sequel to *Up the Country* but the fifteen-year-old lad has turned Fifty now, becoming uncle Bert to Milly and Jack. The Stanton's who owns the 'Ten Creeks Run' and the Healey's are introduced in the second novel of the trilogy. Franklin carefully knits the stories in to the landscapes as evident from the lines – "It was the liveliest time of the year for these inaccessible stations. House and huts were full."( Franklin,4). Though the novel is all about horse races, their breeding and the like, a fair amount of the reader's attention is also captured by the mountainous terrain that's sure to give the rider a bumpy experience. " A fine draft of colts and fillies were expected this season ...the runs were to be combed from Wangambril almost to ... the fringe of the Bimberies ...and Ten Creeks."( Franklin, 4-5). The stations seem to be rough lands, hostile to inhabitations and people could only set up farms or stations for animal breeding to run their lives.

*Cockatoos: A story of the Youth and Exodists*, the third in the trilogy describes the life of poor farmers, Oswald's Ridges, who are being compared to Cockatoos ( the birds who scratch seeds). Ignez Milford takes over Brent now and the physical setting is also the plains, south of Goulburn instead of Bool Bool. Ms. Milford dreams of becoming a great singer leaving behind her peasant community. Ignez is a representative of all the people who left Australia. Ploughing the land for farming becomes a herculean task for the cultivators and Larry Healey of the Saunders Plains had a hard time attempting the same.

"His horses were hidebound and weak, and the earth was caked like cement...the ploughman moved in suffocating cloud which filled his ears and nostrils and at times obscured the beasts from sight".( Franklin, 3)

The trilogy is a typical of Australian pastoral community depicting Australia of the Nineteenth century. Pastoral land acts at the fulcrum for all the human activities like cattle rearing, farming in the trilogy discussed. All the three novels uniformly reflect the hard life of the pastoral community.

## CONCLUSION

Franklin's trilogy is remarkable for portraying the Australian landscape alongside the squatter families. The sequels are related to each other either through the setting of the place or generations of families occupying the land. A different side of Miles Franklin comes to play as 'Brent of Bin Bin' where the feminist side is little compromised for giving a narrative on pastoral community of Australia. The novels seem to be tales about Australia during different time period.

The recurrent theme of 'sense of place' or association with land is equally present in the trilogy that makes it apt for an ecocritical study. When viewed from an ecocritical lens, the core concept of Ecocriticism – interconnectedness, is explicitly visible among the bush people and their physical environment in Franklin's Trilogy.

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