

Pastures of the Blue Crane: a vanguard of activism in Australian young adult literature

Hesba Brinsmead's *Pastures of the Blue Crane* (1964) is one of the earliest examples of Australian young adult literature. Awarded the 'Children's Book of the Year Award: Older Readers' in 1965 and reprinted by the University of Queensland Press in 2004, the novel's portrayal of racial and gender concerns were progressive for the time of its publication when, as Clare Bradford notes, "it was generally accepted that Australian culture was based on Britishness and that the ideal Australian was white" (p. 5). Yet through character development, Brinsmead "advocates an Australia where the equality of citizens transcends their racial origins" (Bradford, 2004, p.5).

It did this by questioning the status quo of attitudes to race, adolescence and identity (Eaton, 2013). This focus on adolescence and identity situates it in the young adult field and its protagonist, Amaryllis Mereweather, is a continuation of feisty, progressive female protagonists found in earlier Australian fiction, such as Sybylla Melvyn in Stella Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* (1901).

Yet despite holding this position and critical recognition, the novel has been under examined by literature scholars. This paper aims to address this gap in scholarship by examining representations of racism and gender in the narrative to understand how they reflected, amplified, and antagonised entrenched social and cultural concerns of the time. The paper will then turn its consideration to how the narrative functions when read in and against a contemporary Australian society, still divided by race and gender but changed from the accepted "British" Australian culture Brinsmead wrote in. Finally, the paper will argue that despite changes to Australian society and culture, the novel still functions as a vanguard of activism and empathy in Australian young adult literature.

References:

- Bradford, C, (2004). Introduction. In Brinsmead, H. *Pastures of the blue crane*. St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press. [Google Books version].
- Brinsmead, H. (2004). *Pastures of the blue crane* . St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press. [Google Books version].

- Eaton, A. (2013). Reading bareback: Mary E. Patchett's *Ajax The Warrior*. In Dalziell, T., & Genoni, P (Eds). *Telling stories : Australian life and literature 1935-2012*. (pp. 154-160). Clayton, Vic: Monash University Publishing.
- Franklin, M. (1901). *My brilliant career* (8th ed.). Sydney, NSW: HarperCollins Publishers.