



## My Brilliant Career

*Miles Franklin*

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"My Brilliant Career" is the story of Sybylla, a headstrong young girl growing up in early 20th century Australia. Sybylla rejects the opportunity to marry a wealthy young man in order to maintain her independence. As a consequence she must take a job as a governess to a local family to which her father is indebted. "My Brilliant Career" is an early romantic novel by this popular Australian author.

## My Brilliant Career Details

Date : Published August 3rd 2006 by Waking Lion Press (first published 1901)

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Author : Miles Franklin

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## From Reader Review My Brilliant Career for online ebook

### **Mel says**

About a year ago I realised, with the exception of Nick Cave, I'd never actually read any books by Australian authors and that I should probably fix that. I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I couldn't quite believe it was written by a 16 year old. It was sort of the anti-Little House on the Praire. Here being a poor agricultural worker was very hard work, people went hungry and people lost what little they had very easily. There were drunken fathers who ruined lives and kindly neighbours who helped out. The book was also a little the opposite of Jane Austen as while there was a wealthy landowner who fell for the young heroine she definitely did NOT fall in love with him back and spent most of the book trying to escape his marriage proposals. I have to say I really enjoyed the character of Sybylla. She was highly opinionated. She was dissatisfied with life and wanted more, music, literature and culture. Yet she gave up on these things to maintain her own independence. She was a very strong willed person and yet the same time suffered from very low self esteem, to the point where it crippled her ability to make good decisions. She came across as somewhat manic depressive, blissfully happy and then having a depressive breakdown. Yet her emotions were very real and her discussions very frank. I loved the way she spoke very openly about the problems of her life and the society she was living in. From the sexism, to the drinking to the droughts. If she reminded me of anyone it was a little of Claudine from Collette's novels. Though perhaps slightly more intelligent and insightful. But I think the two of them would have made a truly fantastic couple. This really was a fantastic book and I have already bought a copy of the sequel and am really looking forward to reading it.

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### **Kel says**

I first read 'My Brilliant Career' when I was in high school as part of the English curriculum. I could not remember much about the story, but I could not shake the feeling that identified greatly with the main character, Sybylla Melvyn.

As part of my personal journey of rediscovering the Great Australian Spirit, I decided to re-read 'My Brilliant Career'. I have been pleasantly surprised.

Although at times Sybylla Melvyn annoyed with her self-centric, teenage view of the world, many other times she surprised me with her view of Australian women and their lot in the late 1800's. From the oral traditions of my family and other reading and research, it might be argued that Sybylla was quite a 'rebel' for the time, although there were possibly many other young women right across Australia that shared her dreams to be free of the normal female and social class restraints of the time.

In several parts I couldn't help but feel Sybylla's thoughts of herself, and her self-centredness are commonly reflected in our current Generation Y (who are often berated for such feelings and thoughts), but on the other hand, Sybylla's readiness to do whatever tasks need to be done (no matter how begrudgingly) is certainly indicative of the young of times gone by.

'My Brilliant Career' is inspirational in that Sybylla remains true to herself no matter how tempting it might be to 'sell her soul' in order to escape what appears to be a life sentence of poverty, hard work, and loneliness.

The language of the book intrigued me. The construction of sentences, the vocabulary, the periods of lyrical and poetic waxing were refreshing in this era of often blunt and to-the-point story-telling.

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### **Lúcia Collischonn says**

I hate Sybylla. That's right. She wants to be sad and lonely and poor. I do not pity her because she brought this on herself. At the same time, I understand her in sooooooooo many ways. Just adding: Harold Beecham should be played by Hugh Jackman. Hugh Jackman should play ALL THE CHARACTERS OKAY. HUGH JACKMAN.

Now for something completely different: My brilliant career is Jane Eyre meets Pride and prejudice IN THE AUSTRALIAN BUSH.

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### **Elena T. says**

Sybylla Melvyn è bloccata, intrappolata nel bush australiano in una vita che non le appartiene, quando ciò che vorrebbe è sognare di libri e orizzonti perduti e coltivare la sua passione per la scrittura e per i sogni. Profondo, attuale, una donna di ieri ma così simile alla donna di oggi che si barcamena tra amore e carriera, in una lotta di classe e di genere, nel tentativo di non cucirsi addosso la vita tanto convenzionale dalla quale tanto spesso ha provato a scappare.

Promotrice di riviste letterarie e femminista convinta, la Franklin aveva iniziato a scrivere il suo capolavoro a sedici anni. Si rivelò il grande classico della letteratura australiana dal quale venne tratto l'omonimo film diretto da Gillian Armstrong con protagonisti Sam Neil e Judy Davies.

Delizioso ?

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### **Karin says**

I was expecting a much more enjoyable read than this since I have mainly enjoyed the Australian novels I have read in the past. This is a classic and there is no doubt that this writer had talent and I can see why she later made a career out of writing, but this novel, which was written when she was 16 has a protagonist who was apparently ahead of her time (yes and no, since there were others of that time with the same commitment to not marry, and even before her time, although it was certainly rare), but overall I found her rather selfish and short sighted. This and her treatment of one of the characters spoiled what might have been an enjoyable read, once I got past the beginning of the book, which I really didn't like. There were entire stretches that I enjoyed, and I thought it would be a three star read, but, alas, they were not enough of the book to make it so.

There is no summary here, because there is one on the book description.

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## **Lucy says**

I am actually giving this book 3.5/5 because it wasn't bad enough to earn a 3, nor was it good enough for me to give it a 4.

I read this book for my Advanced English class and there were times when I wish I could just get this book over and done with; other times, however, I quite enjoyed it.

I really dislike Sybylla. She is so vain and conceited, and WEIRD. Honestly, you should read this book just to see how she thinks. Her mindset is so strange! The way she treats her suitors- it just makes me want to slap her!

And the way she treated Harold Beecham at the end of the novel. He was fully pleading with her to marry him (she was engaged to him for three years- though they were physically separated during that time) but she continued to reject him until he gave in and left her. She's such a bitch! (Mind the language).

Other than my annoyance with the protagonist, I quite liked this book. It isn't like other 19th century books- no, this book is in a category all its own. The novel started off rather boring, but as I progressed, and met Harry, there was quite a lot of romance which I enjoyed, so it wasn't too bad.

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## **Karen ?\* says**

Sybylla is headstrong, feisty, opinionated and independent. At the start of the book she is a teenager growing up in rural Australia in the 1890s in a very poor household with an alcoholic father and a mother who has come from money and is now living in poverty.

To Sybylla's relief, her much wealthier Grandmother asks to take her for a time to "straighten" her out and Sybylla finds a much more comfortable life, until she is ultimately forced to take a role as a governess and decide what her future 'career' shall be. Wife? Governess? Spinster daughter?

I absolutely loved the time and place. It is so different to the Australia I know, but also had the familiar descriptions of oppressive heat, dry ground and smell of eucalyptus. The writing is very well done and is interesting to think about how Ms Franklin was able to get support from Henry Lawson to have this published with what must have been quite a controversial main character for the time.

As the book reached its conclusion, however, I really found Sybylla quite irritating. I was hoping for a bit more personality growth and maturity and I was actually left really disappointed with the ending. Although I suppose that is what also makes this a unique book as the ending was quite unusual for the time and unexpected.

A classic I am glad to have finally read!

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## **Suzanne says**

About time this 'Aussie girl' read this book, written by a fellow 'Aussie girl'. Miles Franklin the iconic Australian author, has penned this classic, written when she was barely an adult herself. She was a woman

born of another era. Her times were meant to be spent, toiling the land (or should I say house), performing house duties and supporting her family that was lacking money. She was better than that – well she knew she was better spent bettering herself and continuing the continuance of lifelong learning - she yearned to be able to write, perform music and use her cleverness for something better. Sybylla is 16 and this is 'her' story.

I am not overly romantic or have any grandiose visions of happily ever afters or needing a man to complete a picture of happiness, but even I was disappointed for her. Miles comments that there is no plot, as her life does not contain one – or anyone else that she knows has one either. There is too much work to be toiled than to have the luxury of a plot. Harry Beecham calling her Syb made me sad as he was lovely. There was also another lovely scene where Sybylla talks of Harry's lovely large comforting hands. I borrowed the physical copy after listening to this on audio, but searching for a little paragraph to place the quote here was too hard!

An interesting classic that has its little bit of relevance today.

As an after thought, and after perusing a lovely hard copy that was donated to the University library where I work, I would not recommend listening to the audio version. Too much to be missed out on in regards to the poetry.

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### **Camille says**

The condescending airs and graces of Sybylla and her narration had me grinding my teeth and recalling very clearly the 1927 autobiography *My Life* by Isadora Duncan. I wanted more *Pride and Prejudice* and less 'woe is me'.

But in the last quarter of the book I began to realise how I'm not much different from Sybylla with my prejudices and condescension. You don't travel? You don't like to dine out at places where the napkins are made of cloth? You don't appreciate a bit of art? You don't operate in the same value, socio-economic or physical realm?

Here I was reading the book and becoming exasperated by a creature whose character and actions were displeasing to me, yet were merely my own behaviour in its 19th century guise. And the more that I think about this book, the more horrid my own self will appear.

Miles Franklin certainly shows her feminist ardour in this book, and although I was wanting a different ending that conformed with the fairy tale we've been brought up on, it actually challenges the boundaries and moves the fenceposts of women's rights in Australia at the end of the 19th century.

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### **Pauline says**

Henry Lawson famously avoided making an opinion on the 'girlishly emotional' parts of this book, so this 'girl reader' is going out on a limb to say that it is precisely those parts that make this book worth reading. In refusing to give us a romantic heroine who plays by the rules of the genre, Miles Franklin has created a rare and fascinating character. Instead of reassuring us, Franklin leaves open the crucial questions of what is good conduct in a young woman, and what is a price worth paying to secure financial security. The teenage Sybylla is flamboyant, disrespectful and given to frequent solipsism. She is driven almost mad by her lack of

options as a poor and apparently ‘ugly’ ‘little bush girl’ and despite the obvious economic risks refuses to conform or even apologise for that lack of conformity where this would imply divergence with her own conscience. Ralph Waldo Emerson (as author of “Self-reliance”) would have been proud. Or would he? Miles Franklin was way ahead of her time in giving a young woman the right to sacrifice the prospect of husband and family for her own conscience. Yes, it’s Australian, but it’s not the cloying nineteenth century morality tale you might expect, and it’s far easier to read than the nineteenth century English novels, with a galloping rhythm and a great ear for dialogue. Chapter Twelve was the low point for me. After that I began to seriously appreciate Miles Franklin for creating a complex, often annoying and thoroughly likeable character in Sybylla Penelope Melvyn. Happy Australia Day to lazy, ungrateful sheilas everywhere.

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### **Jane says**

In 1901 a remarkable heroine made her debut, in a book that purports to be her autobiography.

If you took equal amounts of Becky Sharp, Cassandra Mortmain and Angel Devereaux, if you mixed them together, with verve and brio, and you might achieve a similar result, but you wouldn’t quite get there, because Sybylla Melvyn is a true one-off.

She’s also nearly impossible to explain; a curious mixture of confidence and insecurity, tactlessness and sensitivity, forthrightness and thoughtfulness .... She’s maddening and she’s utterly charming ...

But the most important thing about Sybylla, the thing that she doesn’t ever quite say, is that she wants to set her own path in life, to be mistress of her own destiny.

That’s not easy when you’re the daughter of a poor farmer from Possum Gully. It was a hard life; you were either working or you were sleeping; there was nothing else. Her mother came from a good family and her father, a working man, had tried to improve his family’s situation, but he gambled and lost. And then he turned to drink. It was hardly surprising that Sybylla’s preoccupation with books, music and drama drove her poor mother to distraction.

In the end she decided to send Syblla to her own mother on the family farm. It was a much bigger, much more prosperous farm, and it was much closer to society. Sybylla was in her element, with time to indulge her love for the arts and performing, and with an appreciative audience; her grandmother, aunt and uncle were amused and entertained. She blossomed, and her insecurity about her appearance and her disappointment with the world began to slip away.

She might have gone to Sydney, to become a performer, guided by a family friend, lawyer Everard Grey. She might have married Harry Beecham, the owner of the neighbouring farm, who was well-off enough and indulgent enough to allow her the freedom to write her book. But she dithered, and as soon as anyone got to close she pushed them away. She still had insecurities, and she still wanted to be in charge of her own fate, and to dream her own dreams.

But Sybylla’s fate wasn’t in her own hands; her father had taken out a loan and, in lieu of interest, he had given his daughter’s services as a governess. In a place so much poorer and starker than Possum Gully. She pleaded to be rescued, but she was stuck there. She tried to hold on but it was a struggle, and I think it would be fair to say that Sybylla was not cut out to be a governess.

Sybylla's story ended where it started – at Possum Gully. That sounds downbeat, but it wasn't entirely, because she had lived and learned.

As a story, 'My Brilliant Career' is much like its heroine; brilliant but infuriating. Because, of course, Sybylla is the story, and though the other characters are well drawn and the story is well told everything else is in her shadow.

I had unanswered questions. Why was her mother quite so hard on her? How did Sybylla become quite so accomplished? And why did nobody ever really lose patience with her?

But I loved following Sybylla's journey, watching her grow up, and it was lovely to see her gaining a little tact and diplomacy, maturity even along the way. The writing is overblown and melodramatic, but it suits the heroine and it paints her world wonderfully well. And, best of all, it shows the restrictions that her gender and the times she lived placed on her, and it shows that none of that can break her spirit.

It's a coming of age story – no more and no less – but it's a coming of age story like no other.

Miles Franklin wrote 'My Brilliant Career' when she was just sixteen years-old. It's a wonderful achievement, and though she was upset that it was read as autobiographical, it's unsurprising that it was taken that way. I suspect that there's a grain of truth a vivid imagination has turned into a compelling story.

Certainly that's what Sybylla would have done ...

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### **Brenda says**

3.5★s

Sybylla Melvyn was the eldest of her siblings and living in poverty with her parents in rural NSW in the late 1800s. She fought with her mother constantly, was wilful and headstrong and after being told by her mother continually that she was ugly and useless, Sybylla believed it all. The day came that she was sent to live with her maternal grandmother and aunt on a property which was the opposite of her family home; she flourished under their care, enjoyed music and the arts and the company of more genteel companions.

But her headstrong nature and constant assurance that she wasn't worthy of anyone's love would drive all around her to distraction. When she met young Harold Beecham, wealthy owner of the adjoining property, his quietness and seeming lack of emotion caused Sybylla some angst. After a time a sudden and unexpected change of circumstances meant Harold departed while Sybylla left the comfort of her grandmother's home for a position as governess for a number of slovenly children in an equally filthy home...

I'm glad I read this very Australian classic; the descriptions of the harsh country in the never ending drought, the hard work of property owners to make ends meet, the struggle of families to put food on the table – what a terrible time those long ago days were. Sybylla was a difficult character to like – her arrogance on the one hand and low opinion of herself on the other made her someone I felt the great need to slap! Again and again! Anyone who hasn't read this classic Australian novel (which seems like an autobiography, but isn't) by the wonderful Miles Franklin (Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin) most definitely should do so.

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### **Stephanie says**

I have a bit of a love/hate relationship with this book.

For its time, and the fact that it was written by Franklin when she was a teenager (!), it is a brilliant novel. The writing ability that Franklin had so young is amazing - she manages to capture so much of Australia, and her protagonist, Sybylla, lives and breathes from the first moment she steps onto the page.

I did find Sybylla to be a frustrating protagonist, due to her general inability to decide on what she wants (or who she wants), but that frustrating nature is part of what makes her feel real. Even when she was annoying me with her indecision and mood swings, I found myself wishing fervently that she would get what she wanted (if she could only decide what it was!).

I'm really glad that I picked this up as part of the Australian Women's Writer's Challenge, since I'd shamefully not read any of Franklin's work before. I find myself awed by her talent, and deeply impressed with how much she worked to change the face of Australian literature.

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### **Angeline says**

If the ending was any good, I could excuse the slower parts at the beginning, but the ending was terrible! It's given me a new appreciation for classics with good endings!

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### **Jillian says**

I liked it. I've always avoided this book being under the misunderstanding that it was a dry and dusty tome. (ie boring!) I'm glad I gave it a go, as it is certainly not boring. Sybylla is an odd girl, kind of like Anne of Green Gables with a fervent feminist streak. It's nice to see a romance written by a young girl that doesn't have a cloying, happy ending, and I admire her resolve to do the "right" thing by Harold in the end, even though that may not be what he thinks he wants. I'm quite certain I could never have been that committed to an ideal given similar lack of opportunities, but perhaps if I'd had to grow up in the stultifying world of colonial Australia things would be very different. The book is definitely a bit childish and melodramatic, but I think it shows nicely the way that feminism and female suffrage were viewed at the time of Federation, from the point of view of someone who lived through it.

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### **Jorge Cienfuegos says**

Me ha gustado mucho esta historia costumbrista del campo australiano. No sé qué ha sido, porque en teoría no cuenta gran cosa...; quizás la prosa o puede que esa heroína con una mentalidad tan poco recomendable para una mujer en aquella época. El caso es que ha sido un grato descubrimiento.

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### **Bettie? says**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/11620>

Opening: **I Remember, I Remember**

**"Boo, hoo! Ow, ow; Oh! oh! Me'll die. Boo, hoo. The pain, the pain! Boo, hoo!"**

**"Come, come, now. Daddy's little mate isn't going to turn Turk like that, is she? I'll put some fat out of the dinner-bag on it, and tie it up in my hanky. Don't cry any more now. Hush, you must not cry! You'll make old Dart buck if you kick up a row like that."**

**That is my first recollection of life. I was barely three. I can remember the majestic gum-trees surrounding us, the sun glinting on their straight white trunks, and falling on the gurgling fern-banked stream, which disappeared beneath a steep scrubby hill on our left. It was an hour past noon on a long clear summer day. We were on a distant part of the run, where my father had come to deposit salt.**

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### **Angela Randall says**

I read this for year 12 English, so my memories of it are both vague and tainted by the fact that I had to dissect the book. End result though: I still love it.

When I started the book, I found it very difficult to get in to. The protagonist just seemed to be a whining, demanding, annoying excuse for a human being. It's really tough to keep reading when you start to hate the character telling the story. In fact, I recall a "first impressions" essay I wrote after reading very little of the book where I said pretty much exactly that. I hated it. I even considered dropping English altogether. I really did not want to read another word.

But I was forced to go on, and I'm glad for that because the book was actually incredibly good.

Without giving away any spoilers, the protagonist becomes far less annoying and evolves into someone you can really feel for.

Just keep reading. This book will reward you for it.

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### **Eve says**

Hmm, I've always said that Jane Eyre is without a doubt my #1 favorite book. After today, this is in close running for the spot. So much to think about. Sigh. I hope my review (to come later) will do this book justice.

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## Joanne says

Miles Franklin - Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin - is probably Australia's most revered female writer. "My Brilliant Career" is her very first book, published in 1901 when she was barely 21. It was hugely successful, but she eventually withdrew it from publication until after her death, because it upset her that so many people believed it to be autobiographical. It probably was so, but like most new writers, she perhaps didn't think others would make the connections.

It's a passionate book, both about life and love, and about the Australian bush. The heroine, Sybylla Melvyn, is probably as boisterous and passionate as Franklin was herself. The writing is of its time - it's wordy and descriptive, often overblown by today's preferences, but the fierceness with which she loves the country and its people carries the novel through. Sometimes I wanted to slap Sybylla - often in fact! - but she was a girl on a mission - her own life - and nothing was going to stop her. Not even the perfect man, when he appeared on the horizon. She was an early Australian feminist.

Miles Franklin went on to write another seven novels under her name, and seven more as "Brent of Bin Bin", in an effort to hide her identity. She also wrote several non-fiction books.

It's a masterfully written book by such a young first time writer, especially for its time. But you need to be prepared for long wordy, reflective passages. Just go with it.

It almost seems cheeky to give it a rating - so I'll just go with 5.

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