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Feminist Defiance in My Brilliant Career (1901): Female Independence and the Rejection of Marriage

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Abstract
This article examines Miles Franklin's novel My Brilliant Career (1901) through a feminist and postcolonial lens, focusing on Sybylla Melvyn's rejection of marriage and her efforts to achieve artistic autonomy amid the limitations of British settler colonialism. The novel subverts the Victorian ideals of womanhood-domestic, passive, and submissive—by featuring Sybilla, who defies patriarchal and colonial expectations. Drawing on the theories of Woolf and Spivak, this analysis highlights how Sybylla's refusal to surrender her intellectual and economic independence to the institution of marriage reveals that feminist ambitions are inextricably intertwined with the formation of national identity in the Australian colonial context. Her struggle to define herself beyond the role of wife or daughter criticizes the doctrine of coverture and exposes gendered exclusions in the Australian literary canon. The study argues that My Brilliant Career articulates a proto-feminist spirit that not only defies colonial legacies but also demands a rereading of Australian national identity through the lens of women's autonomy and resistance.

Keywords: *Australian colonial context, feminist, My Brilliant Career, rejection of marriage*

Introduction

Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin (1879-1954) was a significant Australian novelist, feminist, and social reformer who shaped Australian classic literature. She was born on 14 October 1879 in Talbingo, New South Wales. The bush Australian landscape inspired her first novel, My Brilliant Career (1901). The Blackwood of Edinburgh and London, which is not an Australian publisher, published it for the first time in 1901, which coincided with the Australian Federation. Franklin sent the manuscript to Henry Lawson, who brought it to London and passed it to the literary agent J.B. Pinker. With Pinker's help, her manuscript was sent to Blackwood's. My Brilliant Career (1901) received widespread praise from British reviewers and enthusiastic responses from Australians, calling it the authentic portrayal of Australian identity, as described by A.G. Stephens in the Bulletin's Red Page as "A Bookful of Sunlight". Despite the novel's fame, it also caused her discomfort, so she withdrew the book from circulation for many years. Even when the sequel, My Career Goes Bung, finally appeared in 1946 after being unpublished for four decades, Franklin remained unwilling to allow the original novel to be republished. Moreover, her will stipulated that My Brilliant

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Career (1901) could not be reissued until ten years after her passing in 1954. Around Australia's bicentenary in 1988, My Brilliant Career (1901) and Miles Franklin received renewed attention.

My Brilliant Career (1901) is a pivotal Australian novel that challenges gendered expectations in a British settler-colonial society. Some existing scholarship has examined its feminist and postcolonial themes (Sheridan, 2002; McClintock, 1995), the victimization of women (Kaladevi, 2020), and a brilliant model for women (Zhang, 2014). However, few studies critically analyze how the protagonist's rejection of marriage articulates a uniquely Australian feminist defiance—one that intertwines personal autonomy with resistance to colonial domesticity. This paper addresses this gap by interrogating Sybylla Melvyn's refusal of matrimony as an act of feminist self-determination that subverts both patriarchal and British imperial norms.

Sybylla, a "bush girl" in late 19th-century New South Wales, dreams of artistic achievement despite her family's underestimation and financial precariousness. When wealthy landowner Harold Beecham proposed marriage, offering security, she refused, fearing losing her freedom. This paramount moment encapsulates the novel's central conflict: women's ambition versus society's recipes. Unlike British feminist heroines such as Jane Eyre (1847), whose narratives often reconcile independence with marriage, Sybylla's outright rejection highlights a clear settler colonial context in which women's autonomy was limited by gender and imperial ideology (McClintock, 1995, p. 29). By employing the feminist theory and post-colonial discourse analysis, this paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How does My Brilliant Career's (1901) narrative depict the heroin Sybylla Melvyn?
2. How does the rejection of marriage in My Brilliant Career (1901) represent the heroin's struggle for self-independence in a British settler colonial society?
3. How does My Brilliant Career (1901) explore female independence and ambition as a feminist identity?

Literature Review

Feminist Theory and Postcolonial Theory

In his discussion of the development of the term "feminism," Walters (2005) emphasizes the contributions of authors like Virginia Woolf, especially in her groundbreaking argument A Room of One's Own (1929). Woolf argues that females who lacked the intellectual space and financial independence, as depicted in "A Room of One's Own," are necessary to produce literature. She critiques the patriarchal structures that denied women education, authorship, and authority, which created the absence of women from the literary canon. Woolf's work laid a foundational argument for later feminist literary criticism.

Elaine Showalter, a prominent American feminist critic, categorizes women's literature in three different periods: feminine, feminist, and female. The first period, starting from 1840 to 1880. This feminine era reflects "Women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture and internalized its assumptions about female nature" (Walters, 2005, p. 16). Women authors have a tendency to write under male pseudonyms and mimic patriarchal literature. Furthermore, the feminist movement that emerged between 1880 and 1920 marked a significant evolution from earlier women's rights efforts. This period shows the characteristics of being deeper and wilder than the first women's movement, appearing in most fields, including politics, economics, culture, employment,

welfare, and many others, with a primary focus on the situation of women and their sense of existence. It was in this environment that feminist criticism began and came into being. This second wave remains the women's writing that criticized male norms and beliefs. During this period, women encouraged women's rights and values, such as a call for self-independence, financial ability and autonomy. The last phase is the Female Phase (1920–present), a period of introspection. Showalter says, "women reject both imitation and protest, two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature". (Walters, 2005, p. 20). In the last phase, the feminist is not seeking to discover someone who dislikes the female character in the male texts, and they direct their focus to the female writer, to identify the inner meaning in their text, and attempt to explain in various ways from the point of view of a feminist.

Feminist and postcolonial theories intertwine as "a path of convergent evolution" (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 249). The term suggests that feminism and postcolonialism may have originated in different historical contexts and concerns, but they evolved in similar directions as they confronted comparable forms of oppression, for example, patriarchal domination (in feminism) and colonial or racial dominance (in postcolonialism). Feminism and postcolonialism do not develop in separate spaces, but rather are like two rivers that eventually meet because they follow the same terrain: the struggle against oppression and domination in their intersecting forms. Ania Loomba argues "that gender and sexuality are crucial in how colonial relationships are conceptualized, expressed, and acted out." (Orsini, 2024, p. 641). Loomba shows that colonialism is not only a matter of politics and economics, but also of the way in which the body, gender, and sexuality are used to shape and enforce power. Women in the colonies were often portrayed as "backward", "helpless", and in need of colonial "protection". Similarly, the patriarchal logic considers that women need to be controlled or protected by men. Colonialism represents the masculinization of European power and the feminization of the colonies. The colonizer imagines colonized countries as bodies that need to be "conquered", "penetrated", or "tamed". Moreover, colonial women became a symbolic battleground between colonizers and indigenous men. For example, many colonial texts use indigenous women as symbols of honor or degradation of local culture, and the treatment of them is a measure of a society's "civilization" or "barbarity". The practice of sexual violence by the colonizers is a form of control and domination; to this extent, it is not just an individual crime, but part of a power system. Therefore, political intentions to regulate and control the bodies and private lives of the colonists impact on the regulation of marriage, family, and morality in the colonies

Gendering Australian Literature

Feminism, especially the Second Wave Feminism, has had an impact on Australian literature. The feminist wave also enriched and expanded women's writing beyond autobiographical and social realism genres. It highlights the attention to gender inequality, stereotypes, and women's lived experiences, and influences the literary landscape. This period is the rise of feminist literary criticism and the growth of female authors articulating the feminist perspective. The suffrage in 1901 and in New South Wales in 1908 involved women's voices. However, the representation of females was not accommodated in the Federal Parliament until 1943, which led to the formation of a women's group to promote their voices at the political level. This transformation influences the Australian canon in which feminism intersects with the discussion of race, class, sexuality, identity, and power.

Gender critique began by pointing out how women, Indigenous and immigrant characters, and sexuality were structurally excluded from the prevalent representations of what it means to be Australian in literature.

A cynical white male who chose to envision his home in the bush rather than the metropolis embodied the naturalized characteristics of the Australian character type. Kay Schaffer's work on Women and the Bush (1988) argues that "the bush is a fantasy landscape whose feminization and romanticization in history, fiction, and film is structured through forces of desire." (Gildersleeve, 2022, p. 235). Schaffer shows that the Australian landscape is not just a geographical setting in literature, but a symbolic space steeped in gender and sexual meaning. By portraying the bush as feminine, Australia's colonial and national culture affirms the power relations between men/women, colonizers/colonized, culture/wildlife, which are internalized in historical, literary, and film. Later on, the term "gender" soon became equal to "women" because masculinity was taken for granted as the normative standard in much of Australian literature. Men, especially colonial white men, represent the "universal man" as the narrative and language control. "Men" is not considered a gender, but rather a norm. As women remain "the other", the "gender" only appears as a category when it comes to women. Thus, when gender studies were present in the Australian literary field, it was immediately seen as a study of women because men had been considered "neutral or default".

A renewed attempt to identify and reevaluate the contributions of women to Australian literature emerged in response to the enduring dominance and frequently accepted existence of classic Australian masculine stereotypes. The writers in the nineteenth century, such as Rosa Praed, Catherine Helen Spence, Barbara Baynton, and Ada Cambridge, along with the writers in the early twentieth century, like Miles Franklin, Christina Stead, Catherine Martin, Henry Handel Richardson, and others, revolved to shaping the Australian literary canon. In some cases, these writers adopted male pseudonyms to navigate a literary landscape that privileged male voices and allowed their work to gain publication and critical attention in a male-dominated field.

Method

To answer the research questions above, this study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology informed by feminist theory and postcolonial discourse analysis. Such an approach situates Sybylla Melvyn's struggles within both the gender expectations of her immediate society and British imperial structures that shaped the role of women in settler-colonial Australia. The primary text under examination is Miles Franklin's My Brilliant Career (1901). The selection of text excerpts was guided by their relevance to the novel's central issues, namely gender, autonomy, and colonial domesticity. Particular attention was paid to the passages in which the main character, Sybylla Melvyn, articulates her aspirations, confronts social expectations, and ultimately rejects marriage as a means of survival in the context of a settler colony.

Feminist theory is operationalized by examining how Sybylla's voice, agency, and embodiment reject or conform to patriarchal expectations of women's roles, particularly marriage as a form of economic and social security. Postcolonial discourse analysis provides the framework for situating these gender struggles within the broader colonial mentality, which was imposed on Australian society at the turn of the 20th century. This includes

reading Sybylla's rejection not only as a personal rebellion, but also as a symbolic critique of the British imperial domestic ideology transplanted into the colonies.

To ensure interpretive rigor, the analysis was carried out through three steps: (1) close reading of key narrative episodes to highlight language, imagery, and characterization; (2) triangulation of insights from feminist and postcolonial theories with existing scholarships (e.g., Sheridan, 2002; McClintock, 1995; Zhang, 2014) and (3) reflective consideration of alternative readings to avoid imposing a single deterministic framework. These steps acknowledge the literary form and socio-historical context of the text.

Results

Literature has long served as a mirror to patriarchal ideologies and colonialism. Female characters are often portrayed as passive, silenced, or marginalized figures, and their voices are suppressed by social norms that privilege male agency. Drawing on feminist and postcolonial frameworks, this analysis examines how the heroin of Sybylla in My Brilliant Career (1901) represents the independence from the limitations imposed on women in male domination and British settler colonialism.

Sybylla's dream of a brilliant career

Sybylla's dream of pursuing a career reflects the feminist resistance to self-independence. The narrative reinforces that the Australian society always perceives a female top career as a good wife and mother. Her desire to be independent by rejecting marriage and pursuing her ambition clashes with society's expectations. When she expresses her ambition to be an artist, her grandmother, Mrs. Bossier, exclaimed:

"Career! That is all girls think of now, instead of being good wives and mothers and attending to their homes and doing what God intended. All they think of is gadding about and being fast, and ruining themselves body and soul. And the men are as bad to encourage them," (Franklin, 2013, p. 64).

The quote passage reflects that Mrs. Bossier criticizes her dream as an artist or a writer, as women have to meet the expectations of the gender expectations of late 19th-century settler colonial Australia. She critiques females or girls prioritizing careers over domesticity and reveals their independence as a betrayal of the divine. The quote "what God intended" reflects the Victorian ideology of women's role as wives and mothers, and women must obey the rule of God. British settler colonialism inherited its belief that Australian females are "angels of the house" as the Victorian writer, Coventry Patmore, describes the Victorian perfect woman in his poem "The Angel in the House". Women have the duty of being pure, nurturing, and submissive, while men handle the outside world. Mrs. Bossier insists that a female career outside the home is like "gadding about" and "ruining themselves", inferring that female morality and spirituality decay. Pursuing a career imposes moral panic on women because they deviate from society's norms, causing physical ruin and a decrease in morality. In short, Mrs. Bossier exemplifies the conservative and patriarchal perspectives on controlling women's autonomy, and Sybylla's society justifies the restriction of women's rights and freedoms, where women were deemed ideal only if they were good wives, dutiful mothers, and caretakers of the home.

In contrast, society denies women who aspire to be independent both economically and intellectually. From a feminist perspective, the quote above reflects the challenges women face when demanding autonomy. By stigmatizing women who dare to step outside of the domestic sphere, the accusations are a social mechanism used to uphold the patriarchal

status quo. Moreover, Mrs. Bossier's quote, "And the men are as bad to encourage them," encapsulates the idea that men who support women are considered complicit. The society controls over women's bodies and choices as it thinks that women's decisions on their careers are a collective decision, not an individual right. Thus, Sybylla lives in fear of women's freedom and the desire to confine them back into predetermined roles, not by choice, but through social constructs that claim to speak in the name of religion and morality.

Furthermore, Sybylla was trapped in a patriarchal society that stifled her ambition and independence. Her aspirations were not regarded as equal to those of men, leaving her in a state of deep misery. She expresses "…it was only man who could take the world by its ears and conquer their fate, while women, metaphorically speaking, were force to sit with tied hands and patiently suffer (Franklin, 2013, p.33). Sybylla is a powerful embodiment of female disempowerment under patriarchy. Despite her fierce desire for intellectual and personal independence, Sybylla finds herself constrained by the gender equality in a patriarchal structure. Men are active agents of change; he is capable of seizing the world "by its ears" and gaining their own destinies and ambitions. In contrast, women are neglected; she was in a passive role, metaphorically "with tied hands," as society restricts women's agency. An unjust system erases female ambition and denies women autonomy, where women are suffering from their imposition. This aligns closely with feminist critiques, such as Virginia Woolf's assertion in A Room of One's Own (1929) that women need both literal and figurative space to write and think freely. Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern in Can the Subaltern Speak? (1988) reinforces the woman's position as "the other," and the colonial and Western discourses often silence the oppressed, especially women. The quote above can be read as an allegory of colonial domination, in which the "man" represents the colonizer who claims the power to shape history, and the "woman" symbolizes colonized subjects denied voice and agency. Thus, Spivak's theory challenges us to read beyond the surface of feminist narratives in colonial contexts. While Sybylla speaks and speaks loudly, her voice exists within a settler colonial discourse that still marginalizes and diminishes women's voices and positions.

Sybylla's Marriage Rejection

The issue of marriage dominates much of Sybylla's narrative. The grandmother's suggestion that Sybylla might benefit from early marriage reflects a generational expectation. Just as Sybylla's mother was married at a young age, the grandmother implies that Sybylla will likely follow the family tradition. Marriage is not a personal choice but a family choice.

"Because the social laws are so arranged that a woman's only sphere is marriage, and because they endeavour to secure a man who can give them a little more ease, you must not run away with the idea that it is yourself they are angling for, when you are only the bothersome appendage with which they would have to put up, for the sake of your property." (Franklin, p. 144).

The passage implies that the marriage institution confines women to limited roles within society. The term "secure" represents that a woman's primary role, according to traditional expectations, is to find and marry a man who will give her a better life. Women often seek to marry a man who can provide them with financial stability and social status, or one who is free from the burdens of poverty or hardship. From a feminist perspective, the quote critiques that marriage places women as instruments of property exchange. Women represent "only the bothersome appendage," where their identity and worth are reduced to the relationship to men through marriage, and serve the male interest. Additionally, in a

colonized context, women are the object to be exploited for economic gain with little regard for their autonomy or personal growth. Male dominates women and control their lives, even though males secure the financial life. Thus, women are subjugated by the power of males and the control of society.

My Brilliant Career (1901) story narrates her attitudes to marriage in her relationship with three young men. Her grandmother's jackeroo, Frank Hawden, was depicted as healthy, wealthy, with good character, and had the potential to be rich in three years. When Hawden proposed to her, Sybylla replied "I loathe and despise him. I would not marry him or any one like him though he were King of England. The idea of marriage even with the best man in the world seems to me a lowering thing, but with him it would be pollution---the lowest degradation that could be heaped upon me! I will never come down to marry anyone." (Franklin, 2013 :84). Sybylla strongly rejected the idea of marriage, especially with a man she despised. Sybylla clarified her attitude towards marriage in her conflict with her first pursuer. Marriage, in her eyes, brings a witty life. Another suitor was Everard Grey, her grandmother's adopted son. He was a promising lawyer from Sydney. He was talented in all the arts and went to a good concert in Sydney. Grey appreciated Sybylla's artistic talent and promised to find her a good master in Sydney. Sybylla remained his close friend, and when Grey proposed to her, she rejected his ridiculous idea. Sybylla's love was for the hero, Harold Beecham. He was handsome, well-mannered, big, tall, a rich landowner, and masters an excellent pianist. Sybylla's rejection of marriage suggests that marriage was the most restrictive and unjust life for women. The notion of love made her chuckle, and she was adamant that she would never, ever be married. She remained unhappy in marriage.

My Brilliant Career showcases Sybylla's rejection of Harold's marriage proposal as a powerful feminist statement that challenges the traditional role of women in patriarchal society. Sybylla and Harold Beckham were falling in love. Sybylla felt inferior to her appearance and poor life, while Harold was a successful landowner. Sybylla wanted to change her life by chasing her dream, but Harold offered her the instant life of a rich wife. Sybylla's declaration," Intend to accept him! I haven't once thought of a such as possibility. I never mean to marry anyone" (Franklin, 2013, p.112) reflects the society's demand that a woman's ultimate fulfillment lies in marriage and domesticity. In The Madwoman in the Attic (1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar investigate that nineteenth-century literature often reflected and reinforced the societal belief that marriage was "the only honorable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, their pleasantest preservation from want" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, p. 126). Beyond this idea, women are limited in social and economic choices, and literature by or about women frequently presents women's aspiration to grapple with their intellectual and economic and social equality. In this context, My Brilliant Career offers a radical deviation from that tradition.

Sybylla's feminist identity

From a feminist perspective, Sybylla asserts her agency and prioritizes self-determination over submission to a marriage institution that historically limits women's autonomy. Sybylla believes marriage limits her life and creativity in achieving her dream of being a writer or an artist. However, Harold convinced her, "I will be good to you! You can have what you like" (Franklin, 2013, p. 223), unwittingly reinforces the imbalance of power. Sybylla's trembling response, "No, I would not yield. He offered me everything—but control" (Franklin, 2013, p. 223) is the heart of her feminist disobedience. Harold's offer suggests generosity, but he acts under male authority; he remains the one who gives permission, while Sybylla remains the one who receives. It aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's critique that

within traditional marriage, the man is often the subject, and the woman, the object (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 26). In the relationship of marriage between men and women, women's identity and agency are subordinated to men. Traditionally, women were considered responsible for domestic tasks such as taking care of children, cooking, cleaning the house, and caring for the family (Hapitta, O. D., Azhari, D. R., & Nurjannah, C.N. (2024)). Sybylla recognizes that material comfort or affection cannot replace freedom of thought, movement, and expression. Therefore, Sybylla's refusal ideologically reflects her position as the "object" of a man's narrative and instead asserts her own subjectivity. Her refusal acts disrupt the gender expectations of domesticity and romance in both literature and society.

Sybylla's resistance to conventional femininity and her rejection of marriage highlight her awareness of patriarchal oppression. Her position reflects that even a woman with ambition and vision remains vulnerable in a world structured to silence and control her. She struggles against the shadows of the British settler colonialism legacy in articulating her independence and self-determination. Her figure represents the feminist identity in which she challenges the oppressive system. Hooks argues that women who are oppressed are in a condition of "the absence of choices" (Hooks, 2000, p. 7). Sybylla's experience articulates this condition: her ambition is hindered not by lack of will, but by the relentless opportunity and path available to her. She remains the feminist subject who resists, questions, and critiques the culture and society system she seeks to overcome.

Sybylla's experience epitomizes this condition: her ambitions are stifled not by lack of will, but by the paucity of viable paths available to her. She becomes emblematic of the feminist subject who resists, questions, and critiques—yet remains entangled in the very systems she seeks to overcome. Moreover, her struggle for independence is intertwined with the settler-colonial context of Australia, where land, identity, and power are entangled. The failure of Sybylla to fully gain her independence despite her intellectual performance suggests that colonial legacies, much like male domination, persistently shadow her dream. Her identity as a white woman within settler colonialism does not serve a certain privilege. Her desire for freedom conflicts with the British legacy and entrapment, leading to feelings of anxiety and helplessness.

Discussion

My Brilliant Career (1901) reflects Sybylla's struggle for self-independence in a patriarchal and British settler colonial society through rejecting marriage. Miles Franklin emerges as a significant feminist intervention in Australian literature. Like Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, Franklin's novel encapsulates the Australian female voice criticizing the colonial imposition of coverture. Sybylla's perception that marriage just controls and limits her freedom is shadowed by the coverture system in her rural society. The gender inequality persists in Sybylla's world, where women are expected to accept their domestic sphere and conform to male domination. Through My Brilliant Career (1901), Miles Franklin challenges the Victorian ideal of womanhood as the women are depicted as passive, domestic, submissive, and tenuous. The heroin Sybylla Melvyn in My Brilliant Career (1901), who rejects marriage to her love, Harold Beecham, is not solely about her personal choice. Sybylla is the symbolic heroin who surrenders her independence and autonomy to a system that would hinder her intellectual, economic, and social independence.

In addition, Miles Franklin depicts the character Sybylla Melvyn as a subversion of the idealized women of Australian society in the late 19th century. Sybylla was stubborn,

unyielding, and tomboy as the representative of being unwomanly. Her figure highlights that an unwomanly girl is excluded from the ideal of the Australian female. Sybylla's figure symbolizes the rejection of the Victorian ideal of womanhood, which valued passivity and domesticity. She challenges the patriarchal and gender expectations in Australian society. Women's autonomy and voices are silenced by the legacy of British settler colonialism, and women are powerless in changing their destiny. They cannot break away from this legacy, as the patriarchal and social system has trapped their intellectual freedom.

Sybylla's ambition in her career represents the feminist independence and resistance to male domination. She was ambitious to be an artist or writer, and she never gave up on pursuing her brilliant career. Although she grew up in poverty and was disconnected from the literary environment, she loved to borrow some literature from her neighbor. Her ambition to pursue a career and be an educated girl reinforces the struggle against the patriarchal system. This aligns with Orsini's argument that "feminist theory attaches great importance to knowledge as a means of waging the struggle against male domination". (Orsini, 2024, p. 623). Knowledge is never neutral, as a patriarchal system shapes and reflects the male perspective. The main point is that females must have a way of thinking based on their experiences and uncover the patriarchal biases present in the creation of knowledge. Through the knowledge, women can understand the structures of power, values, norms, and institutions as their beginning step to understand the existing social system. In short, knowledge is a tool in the struggle for gaining power. Women who possess knowledge can control social and political change. Thus, Sybylla's ambition of her career reflects the colonial pressure on the female position. She resists gaining her intellectual independence in order to be equal to males and the freedom to choose her life path.

Conclusion and recommendation

Sybylla Melvyn in My Brilliant Career (1901) represents a doubly oppressed figure of realm marriage and in her pursuit of her career in the patriarchal system and British settler colonialism in 19th-century Australian society. The legacy of Victorian ideal womanhood expects her to conform to the domestic ideal. She rejects the multiple marriage proposals as her critique of the marriage institution and her resistance to the gendered expectations of her role. At the same time, Sybylla's ambition to become a writer or an artist goes against society's demand. Sybylla has no access to intellectual and personal growth. Her struggles from these oppressions reflect a feminist assertion that women experience marginalization in both private and public spheres.

Sybylla gains her independence by rejecting marriage. Her refusal to marry is not rooted in a lack of affection for Harold Becham. Her awareness that marriage offers financial security, but also control and limits her choices, will erase her independence. In a broader context, Sybylla's rejection on marriage critiques the coverture system of Victorian common law. The marriage institution will strip the female autonomy and aspiration. Sybylla denies the submissive roles as a housewife and refuses to be oppressed under a male-dominated society. By articulating her aspiration and ambition to be a writer or artist, Sybylla articulates her feminist identity. Sybylla seeks self-independence and financial independence as a way to break down her poverty and gender discrimination. Thus, My Brilliant Career (1901) enriches readers' understanding of female independence and ambition in the Australian colonial context.

Based on the discussion and findings, this paper recommends that Australian literary studies further explore and reveal more works that disrupt the colonial and patriarchal ideological legacy, especially in gender or women's studies. The novel My Brilliant Career (1901) exemplifies the importance of revisiting the Australian classic discourse through the knowledge of feminist and post-colonial discourse. Such analyses, such as the intersection of heroin's life with the growth of Australian national identity, and the intersection between feminism and Australian national identity, can be further explored or extended to this novel or other works within the Australian literary canon.

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