

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS

MARCELLA WOLF ROCHA

THE ANXIETIES OF THE WOMAN WRITER IN *MY BRILLIANT CAREER*

PORTO ALEGRE

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Trabalho de conclusão de curso apresentado como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Licenciada em Letras - Língua Inglesa e Literaturas de Língua Inglesa -, pelo curso de Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

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“Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything.”

(Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 1818)

ABSTRACT

This paper is an analysis of Miles Franklin's novel *My Brilliant Career* from the point of view of anxiety of influence and anxiety of authorship. The theories of anxiety of influence and anxiety of authorship were repurposed from their original readings of Harold Bloom, and Gilbert and Gubar, so that they could fit the analysis of a woman writer and a fictional woman writer respectively. The novel has a character who is also the narrator, which allows an analysis of her as a woman writer, instead of Miles Franklin alone. The anxiety of influence appears in the plot and in the strategies which seem similar to canonical English novels written by women, but with a different ending. The anxiety of authorship is demonstrated through Sybylla, a narrator and writer inside the novel, who has to prove herself as an author, and thus break with the image men have built of woman in literature.

Key-words: Anxiety of influence. Anxiety of authorship. Australian literature. Women writers. Feminism. Miles Franklin.

RESUMO

Este trabalho é uma análise do romance *My Brilliant Career*, escrito por Miles Franklin, do ponto de vista da ansiedade de influência e ansiedade de autoria. Estas teorias das ansiedades foram ressignificadas de suas leituras originais de Harold Bloom, e Gilbert e Gubar, para possibilitarem a análise de uma escritora mulher e de uma escritora ficcional respectivamente. O romance conta com uma personagem que é também a narradora, o que abre portas para a análise dela como escritora mulher, ao invés de analisar apenas Miles Franklin. A ansiedade de influência aparece no enredo e nas estratégias, que parecem similares às da literatura canônica escrita por mulheres na Inglaterra, porém com fins diferentes. A ansiedade de autoria se demonstra a partir de Sybylla, a narradora personagem que precisa provar sua capacidade como autora, rompendo assim com a imagem construída pela literatura dos homens de como são as mulheres neste meio.

Palavras-chave: Ansiedade de influência. Ansiedade de autoria. Literatura Australiana. Escritoras mulheres. Feminismo. Miles Franklin.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	8
2 THE ANXIETIES OF LITERATURE.....	10
2.1 The Anxiety of Influence.....	10
2.2 The Anxiety of Authorship.....	12
3 THE ANXIETIES IN <i>MY BRILLIANT CAREER</i>	16
3.1 Miles Franklin and the anxiety of influence.....	17
3.2 Sybylla and the anxiety of authorship.....	22
4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	26
REFERENCES.....	27

1 INTRODUCTION

My theme choice is directly related to my personal taste for literature. I read a lot of the canon of British literature, and fell in love with the women writers of the 19th century. Their writing represented to me a rupture with the male centered literary world they had until then. And while reading those women I felt carried back to their time. It sounds all very romantic and cliché, but I am a sucker for a good cliché. The characters of those novels had worries very different from the ones I have. They worried about marriage, besides all else.

When I read *Jane Eyre* for the first time was also when I heard Miles Franklin's name for the first time. Professor Ian Alexander, my advisor, caught me with the book exiting the Letras building, and while we talked about what I was reading, he mentioned an Australian author who had written a novel in similar conditions of *Jane Eyre*, but with the complete opposite ending. I knew that this was a novel I had to put in my reading list.

As the last semester approached, I had too much in mind as to what could be the theme of my Senior thesis. I had a lot of ideas, and most of them involved *Jane Eyre* in some way. The problem was, I was going too far from the novel, and I wanted to stay closer to it. I would never have imagined to drift so far. When Ian suggested *My Brilliant Career*, I promised to give it a try, and by the time I had finished reading, I knew it was the right novel to talk about.

I wish I had studied more Australian literature, and women writers, throughout my undergraduate program, so this paper came as a chance to study more of the subjects I like, rather than what I am obligated.

In this paper, I intend to discuss the relationship Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* (1901) has with its immediate and most obvious precursors, *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). For that, I am going to analyze it through the points of view of anxiety of authorship (GILBERT, GUBAR. 1979) and anxiety of influence (BLOOM, 1973).

I believe that I will be able to demonstrate how, even though she is a woman writer from the 19th century, as the ones Gilbert and Gubar study in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Miles Franklin does not suffer from the anxiety of authorship that other women suffered from. Instead, she suffered from the anxiety of influence, described by Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) and *The Western Canon* (1996). To overcome this anxiety, Miles Franklin creates a *clinamen* in a character who is not only a narrator, but also an author, who suffers from the anxiety of authorship that her creator has been spared of.

It is possible to analyze *My Brilliant Career* from many different points of view considering anxiety of influence, considering that the novel flirts with both romantic and realist styles of writing. Considering that, I intend to focus my work solely on the romantic side of the novel, and in the female authors who may have inspired that.

2 THE ANXIETIES OF LITERATURE

For my analyses in this paper, I am dealing with two different notions of anxiety applied to literature. The first is Harold Bloom's notion of anxiety of influence. The second is Gilbert and Gubar's notion of anxiety of authorship.

2.1 Anxiety of Influence

Harold Bloom has published *The Anxiety of Influence: a theory of poetry* in 1973. Ever since, his theory has been received with both good and bad reactions. Its first version has its limitations, for being a theory centered in romantic poetry only. However, it tackles the analysis of similarities between different authors, analyzing literary history through a psychological point of view. In his first version, he works with six revisionary ratios, to which a poet will refer to when confronted with a strong poet predecessor. This same theory has been revisited by Bloom in *The Western Canon*, in which he adapts some of the things he said, and broadens the applicability of his own theory.

The first revisionary ratio of the original theory is *clinamen*, which is when the poet feels his precursor has the poem right up to a point where they disagree. When the ideas of the two strong poets disagree, the later will execute a *clinamen*, meaning a swerve from the original work as to correct what the first poet has done wrong. The second movement is *tessera*, which is when fragments of the precursor influence the poet to go further on to what the other one has failed to do. The fragments of the first poet in *tessera* with the later will be repurposed to create a new poem, antithetically completed. *Kenosis* is a movement of deflating the poet of his own divinity as to also empty himself of his precursor. The movement of *kenosis* is a movement of avoiding repetition of the precursor. *Daemonization* is "a movement towards a personalized Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime;" (BLOOM, 1973, page 15), as if the poet would take the power of the precursor and make it seem weak by showing his own power is stronger. The movement of *askesis* is a movement of isolation of the poet of his precursor, and isolation of the precursor himself, so both poems would go through *askesis*. And the last is the return of the dead, or *apophrades*, in which the new poem sounds just like it was written by the precursor, so much so that the two poets merge, creating one literary identity for both. The art of the new poet sounds so much like his precursor that it looks like he has written the previous works as well.

The anxiety of influence is the need a poet has to establish his poetry as unique when compared to his precursors, undergoing the six processes from the original revisionary ratios. The relationship of a poet with the greatest artists that wrote and published immediately before him was read as following similar rules as the Freudian father-son relationship. According to Freud, sons suffer from the Oedipus complex, undergoing a struggle with their fathers, which caused in them a desire to overcome their achievements. Like Oedipus, the poets had an unconscious want to take over their poetic father's kingdoms, which in literature would stand for the appraisal their poetry has gotten through the years.

“As Harold Bloom has pointed out, "from the sons of Homer to the sons of Ben Jonson, poetic influence [has] been described as a filial relationship," a relationship of "sonship." The fierce struggle at the heart of literary history, says Bloom, is a "battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads.”” (GILBERT; GUBAR, 1979, page 6)

The Freudian reading of Bloom's theory says that the poet must detach from his literary father to really become a poet himself. To Bloom, the lyric of a poet is affected by the lyric of his predecessor, and while the poet still holds on to language and format of his predecessors, he will never be a strong poet himself. In order to achieve that, the poet must go through at least one of the ratios to detach from his poet forefathers, such as in the Oedipus rivalry the son rejects his father, and thus create his own lyric.

The original version of the theory of the anxiety of influence is male centered, “(...) not [as] a recommendation for but [as] an analysis of the patriarchal poetics [...] which underlie our culture's chief literary movements.” (GILBERT; GUBAR, 1979, page 47), which is why it is not the most adequate version of a theory to analyze *My Brilliant Career*. Gilbert and Gubar already stretched it a bit to adapt it into the anxiety of authorship. They also say that “Bloom's male-oriented theory of the anxiety of influence cannot be simply reversed or inverted in order to account for the situation of the woman writer” (1979, page 48), to which I agree.

In *The Western Canon*, however, Bloom affirms that this anxiety of influence is not about the poet and his precursor, but about the text. According to his revised version of his theory, to which he still refers as anxiety of influence, “[a]ny strong literary work creatively misreads and therefore misinterprets a precursor text or texts.” (BLOOM, 1996, page 8), understanding that not only poets go through this anxiety, but writers of other types of texts as well. He finally affirms that “[p]oems, stories, novels, plays (...)” (BLOOM, 1996, page 9)

are responses to previous texts which depend on the reading of this previous texts by the writer.

I will center my analysis on women writers, and specifically in their writing of novels. For that I will consider the anxiety caused by the influence that a previous woman writer can have on a following woman writer. Poets are attached to their poetic forefathers through not only their “achievements, [...] but the traditions of genre, style, and metaphor that they inherit(…)” (GILBERT; GUBAR, 1979, page 46). I believe that novelists also inherit from their foremothers traces from genre and style, and would even hint at the possibility of a plot inheritance, for women writers usually dealt with the lives of women of their time, and those all had similar objectives.

Having that in mind, I will analyze Miles Franklin through her plot and character construction, in search of her anxiety of influence. Because she was writing in the end of the 19th century, I will consider 19th century women writers as her literary foremothers.

2.2 Anxiety of Authorship

The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) is a 700-page long theoretical analysis of 19th century women writers and the troubles they had to overcome to become writers. They analyze authors such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, the Brontë sisters and Emily Dickinson, and through their works, they trace a profile of writings by women and the difficulties they had to surpass to be able to write in a man's world. The first section of the book is called “Toward a Feminist Poetics”, and this is where I want to focus.

While analyzing Bloom's theory, Gilbert and Gubar came to the conclusion that the “theory of the "anxiety of influence" cannot be simply reversed or inverted in order to account for the situation of the woman writer.” (GILBERT; GUBAR, 1979, page 48). As men writers have a relationship similar to the Freudian father and son relationship, they say women writers seek for a mother-daughter literary relationship. Thus, the women writers they analyzed, such as Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot and Emily Dickinson, who were writing up to the middle 19th century, sought to detach from a poetic foremother, but the lack of foremothers caused them to have no predecessor to reject. Instead, they had to reject the portrayal of women in literature written by men, proving their right to a literary voice.

According to Gilbert and Gubar, women have always been portrayed as either angels or monsters in literature:

“ (...) as Dorothy Dinnerstein has proposed, male anxieties about female autonomy probably go as deep as everyone's mother dominated infancy, patriarchal texts have traditionally suggested that every angelically selfless Snow White must be hunted, if not haunted, by a wickedly assertive Stepmother: for every glowing portrait of submissive women enshrined in domesticity, there exists an equally important negative image that embodies the sacrilegious fiendishness of what William Blake called the "Female Will." (GILBERT; GUBAR, 1979, page 28)

The ideal woman is the angel, and the archetype men writers idealize when creating a female protagonist. They are usually portrayed as an angelical housewife who does everything a woman is expected to do, and nothing forbidden to them, what Virginia Woolf called “the angel in the house”, for they were a majority of domestic figures.

“She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it--she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace. In those days--the last of Queen Victoria--every house had its Angel.” (WOOLF, 1942)

The monster is the exact opposite of the angel when it comes to behavior. For every angel-woman, there was a monster-woman, for “(...) every angelically selfless Snow White must be hunted, if not haunted, by a wickedly assertive Stepmother[.]” (GILBERT, GUBAR, 1979, page 28). The monster-woman was a deformed representation of women, one that could not attempt the pen without making words lose their meaning, whose bodies were misshapen, and whose talents were none. The monstrous woman did everything she was not expected to do, and for this disagreement with the norm, she was a model not to be followed. The more women who attempted the pen were represented as monsters, the less real women wanted to attempt the pen and be seen as such. Thus, women writers saw themselves as the monsters they read about, because a woman was not expected to write. Writing was a man's job.

“(...) the female monster populates the works of the satirists of the eighteenth century, a company of male artists whose virulent visions must have been particularly alarming to feminine readers in an age when women had just begun to "attempt the pen." These authors attacked literary women on two fronts. First, and most obviously, through the construction of cartoon figures like Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop and Fielding's Mrs. Slipslop, and Smollett's Tabitha Bramble, they implied that language itself was almost literally alien to the female tongue. In the mouths of women, vocabulary loses meaning, sentences dissolve, literary messages are distorted or destroyed.” (GIBERT; GUBAR, 1979, pages 30-31)

The portrayal of women as either angels or monsters in literature was a source of anxiety for Gilbert and Gubar. To overcome this anxiety, the women they analyzed had to detach themselves from both the archetypes of angel and monster, to create realistic female characters instead of the archetypical ones already created by men. Not all writers managed this complete detachment from those molds, and this was part of what Gilbert and Gubar call anxiety of authorship.

They define anxiety of authorship as “a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a "precursor" the act of writing will isolate or destroy her.” (GILBERT; GUBAR, 1979, page 49). This fear of isolation, and of not having a literary voice is the driving force of the writing of women.

“Thus the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention - all these phenomena of “inferiorization” mark the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterpart.” (GILBERT; GUBAR, 1979, page 50)

Thus, I understand anxiety of authorship as the feeling that comes from having to deny the way women have been portrayed in literature up until they start writing, and the state of doubt if they had a voice in literature. This feeling is expressed in their writing of poetry, novels and even personal diaries, and is a feeling related to 19th century women, who had little to none female predecessors to look up to.

This anxiety is expressed in many different ways, especially through female characters. Because of this anxiety of authorship, women writers and their characters were usually presented as having at least one enormous flaw of character. They were portrayed as very sick women, with weak bodies and nerves, whose physical inability prevented any closeness to the perfection of the angel women, such as Mrs. Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*. Sometimes, they were shown as mad women, such as Bertha Mason, from *Jane Eyre*, whose madness destroyed any possibility of her being an adequate wife.

The anxiety of authorship is also not a universal feeling, and Gilbert and Gubar leave it very clearly that their theory is focused in 19th century women. Miles Franklin was also a woman writing in the 19th century, but it was the 1890s, and tons of women had written and had already been published then, which provided her with plenty of literary foremothers. However, her character who is also a woman writer, still presents plenty of that anxiety. Thus,

I have decided to analyze Sybylla Melvyn, the author-character whose pen is supposed to have written *My Brilliant Career* under Gilbert and Gubar's lenses. Sybylla is not a real person in the real world, but the same characteristics from anxiety of authorship apply to her as a writer, and this is what I intend to demonstrate in the following chapter.

3 THE ANXIETIES IN *MY BRILLIANT CAREER*

My Brilliant Career is an Australian novel published in 1901, written by Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin. The novel is said to have a lot of autobiographical aspects in relation to Miles Franklin's life, but it is actually the fictional autobiography of young Sybylla Melvyn. She narrates her life, from her happy childhood in Bruggabrong to her disadvantaged life in Possum Gully, her time with her grandmother and aunt in Caddagat, her job as a governess in Barney's Gap, and her humble return to Possum Gully.

These movements in Sybylla's life, and moments they represent, from discomfort and deprivation followed by discoveries of a happier adult life resemble to *My Brilliant Career's* most obvious precursor, *Jane Eyre*. In Charlotte Brontë's story, Jane undergoes a lot of the same events that Sybylla repeats in her life. Even though Sybylla's first childhood was rather pleasant, she discovers the unpleasantness of a bad childhood when her family moves to Possum Gully, and she has to go through a life of being poor and helpless, such as Jane's helplessness in Lowood, where she studied.

When both Sybylla and Jane are reaching a more mature age, in the end of their teens, they are sent to new houses, where they discover the possibility of a happy life, and meet the men they fall in love with. This moment of happiness is ruined for both of them by another physical transition to a new place. Jane goes to the Moors, where she meets her family and lives until she receives money from an inheritance. Sybylla is sent away to Barney's Gap, to be a governess to pay her father's debts. Their last transition and movement are also movements of returning to where they belonged – for Jane, to Thornfield Hall, where her romantic hopes are fulfilled, and for Sybylla to Possum Gully and the independence of unromantic domestic life.

However, the biggest separation between the two novels is how they deal with the marriage plot, and its expectance. Marriage was expected from women in the 19th century because of their socialization and laws that restricted their rights to economic independence. They were raised in their families to want and search for marriage in order to be happy. Thus, marriage in a 19th century novel about a woman is an expectation to be dealt with.

Being a woman writer in the end of the 19th century, Miles Franklin's writing hints at the anxieties I have mentioned earlier. As an author, she demonstrates her anxiety of influence through her plots, which never happen in the way that would be expected from any reader who is familiar with romantic English fiction contemporary to her. She uses her plot to reject

the tradition of romance, inaugurating a new kind of narrative in Australia, which mixes urban romance and realism from the bush in a singular narrative.

Not only Miles Franklin as an author, but also her character Sybylla hints at those anxieties as well. Sybylla is also a woman writer, despite being a character in a novel. And for being a women writer being written by a woman writer, she is very consistent in that aspect of her constitution. Miles Franklin succeeds on printing all the anguishes of a 19th century woman onto Sybylla. She tries constantly through the narrative to affirm her place as a writer, which is why she does not get married in the end.

3.1 Miles Franklin and the Anxiety of Influence

Gilbert and Gubar, when referring to women writers and anxiety of influence, say that the theory cannot be inverted from male-centered to female-centered, because the women writers they were analyzing had little to no female predecessors to look back to. However, Miles Franklin has a century of women writers as her literary foremothers. This could make her a part of the first generations of women writers who suffered from a type of anxiety of influence, to which I will address now.

There is a moment in the novel in which Miles Franklin mentions other authors that are contemporary or immediately previous to her. Some were still alive, and some were already dead at the time she was writing.

“The regret of it all was I could never meet them—Byron, Thackeray, Dickens, Longfellow, Gordon, Kendall, the men I loved, all were dead; but, blissful thought! Caine, Paterson, and Lawson were still living, breathing human beings—two of them actually countrymen, fellow Australians!” (FRANKLIN, 1901, chapter 7 - Self-Analysis)

Curiously, all the authors she mentions in a contemplative note are male. Not all of them were novelists, and the Australians, who could be a source of influence to the bush realism she brought to her novel, were better known for their poetry. She could have mentioned Catherine Helen Spence, whose novel *Clara Morison* had great impact in Australian literature. Miles Franklin herself dedicated a long portion of her work as a critic, *Laughter, not for a cage*, to Catherine Helen Spence’s novel, denouncing the negligence it has suffered. However, she only mentions one female author in *My Brilliant Career*, Marie Corelli, in another moment when she is mentioning other famous people, unknown by the other girls she knew from Possum Gully:

“I studied the girls of my age around me, and compared myself with them. [...] They were totally ignorant of the outside world. Patti, Melba, Irving, Terry, Kipling, Caine, Corelli, and even the name of Gladstone, were only names to them. Whether they were islands or racehorses they knew not and cared not.” (FRANKLIN, 1901, chapter 7)

Half of the people in this list are women, however only Corelli is a woman writer, and a very popular one. Adelina Patti and Dame Nellie Melba were opera singers, and Terry refers to English actress Ellen Terry. The other names belong to an actor, Henry Irving, very popular writers Rudyard Kipling and Hall Caine, and William Gladstone, who was a politician. She mentions those names as a representation of what Sybylla considers culture, but not in the same tone in which she mentions the writers later.

Sybylla never mentions women writers in a tone of admiration, even though the more romantic parts of her narration sound alike to what was being written by women at that time. Instead she chooses the names of English poets and novelists to illustrate Sybylla’s literary idols, who she regrets never being able to meet, and Australian poets as Sybylla’s source of inspiration.

I will not attain myself at the works of realism to which *My Brilliant Career* relates to, neither at the authors mentioned on chapter 7. Miles Franklin’s inspirations could have been very different from the ones Sybylla had access to, and, judging by Miles Franklin’s later writings, were indeed very different. Knowing only the same authors as Sybylla would not have allowed Miles Franklin to build *My Brilliant Career* the way she did, so I have decided to focus my analysis in the women writers who probably inspired her. Their tradition, in my point of view, meant something to Miles Franklin, which is why she tries to detach from them through her plot.

As I have pointed out earlier, *Jane Eyre* is the most obvious precursor to *My Brilliant Career*, which is why I will use it in my analysis as an example of the traditions Miles Franklin was trying to detach from. My other example of tradition is *Pride and Prejudice*, which is immediately previous to *Jane Eyre*, and a very probable precursor to the later.

Marriage was a very important aspect in a woman’s life in the 19th century. Therefore, most literature written by and about women talked about marriage, either as a plot or a subplot. Traditional female novelists such as Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters have works revolving around the lives of 19th century women, such as themselves. The one similarity between most of their protagonists is marriage. Even though most of these authors never got married, their characters ended up married to the male lead, either for love or money.

Having that in mind, I consider the way Miles Franklin deals with marriage throughout the novel her biggest detachment from her predecessors, as well as the way she builds her heroine as a character. Canonical heroines such as Elizabeth Bennet, from *Pride and Prejudice*, and Jane Eyre, from *Jane Eyre*, go through a process of acceptance of their fate as women, the fate to get married. Each goes through a different process, but the outcome is the same for both.

Elizabeth Bennet has an opinion about marriage as strong as Sybylla's, but despite the strength of their opinions, they differed in point of view. Elizabeth would only get married for love, with a man who could admire her, and who she could admire as well. In so, she would never marry Mr. Darcy in the conditions of his first proposal, for he had no real admiration for her, and she had none for him. To accept her marital design, Elizabeth had to get to know the real Mr. Darcy, and discover reasons for which she could admire him. Only then she could finally accept her fate and become his spouse.

Jane Eyre was never a believer when it came to marriage. She was below the ranks of the man she was interested in, and so she never gave much thought to it, up until her feelings are finally reciprocated by Mr. Rochester. When she is about to marry him, Bertha Mason's brother reveals Mr. Rochester's previous marriage, ruining her wedding, and marriage possibility. She has to go through an internal process of change, by finding a family and inheriting money of her own, so she could finally get married. This is when she hears Rochester's name in the wind, and goes back to Thornfield Hall where she belonged, with her true love and husband-to-be.

Sybylla states since the beginning of the novel that she will not ever get married, because she despises the very idea of marriage.

“Marriage to me appeared the most horribly tied-down and unfair-to-women existence going. It would be from fair to middling if there was love; but I laughed at the idea of love, and determined never, never, never to marry.” (FRANKLIN, 1901, chapter 7)

Marriage is an alien idea to Sybylla, and getting married would mean an enormous change in her character. Such a change would be very possible to any of Miles Franklin's predecessors, but not to her. Sybylla is consistent in her idea of never getting married throughout the entire novel up until the very end, and this distances her from the other heroines.

She is presented with four opportunities in which the marriage calling comes to her, from two different men. Despite her romantic inclinations towards Harold Beecham, she never really intends to take the calling and get married.

The first opportunity Sybylla has to become a married woman is when she is proposed by Frank Hawden. He is a young man of 21 years of age who inherited a property in England and would become its master when he turned 24. Sybylla's first reaction is laughter, for he was only a boy to her point of view. She mocked his age, his appearance and his intentions, and told him to wait "[...] till your whiskers grow." (FRANKLIN, 1901, chapter 11), referencing his youth and lack of a beard.

After she rejects Mr. Hawden, she meets Harold Beecham. This is a turning point in Sybylla's story, and it is the moment that a reader, accustomed with the expectations set by *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre*, is likely to believe she will behave exactly like a romantic heroine. However, she does not. She introduces the chapter on Harold Beecham describing it as "[...] a full account of my first, my last, my only *real* sweetheart [...]" (FRANKLIN, 1901, chapter 13, author's emphasis). Sybylla reacts immediately to Harold's arrival, to the point that her aunt believes she might be interested in him before she confesses her partiality to the reader.

Sybylla considers Harold Beecham a real man, because he is strong, tall, bearded. He is the example of what a bush man should be to her. And Harold Beecham is the one who presents Sybylla with her second chance at a marital calling. He proposes to her during a dinner at Five-Bob Downs, his estate. It was her first time being proposed by a "real man", and the script does not go as she expected. She accepts, but only for thinking that his love is not real, for she does not really intend to go on with the wedding and honor her word.

"This was an experience in love. He did not turn red or white, or yellow or green, nor did he tremble or stammer, or cry or laugh, or become fierce or passionate, or tender or anything but just himself, as I had always known him. He displayed no more emotion than had he been inviting me to a picnic. This was not as I had pictured a man would tell his love, or as I had read of it, heard of it, or wished it should be. A curious feeling—disappointment, perhaps—stole over me. His matter-of-fact coolness flabbergasted me." (FRANKLIN, 1901, chapter 20)

The third time Sybylla is presented with marriage is when Harold Beecham goes bankrupt, and has to give up Five-Bob Downs. This time the reader would expect Miles Franklin to free Sybylla from this arrangement she has put herself in, but despite any expectations Sybylla renews her engagement vows, this time really intending to marry him. This is the only time Sybylla actually considers getting married as a viable option, because

she could help Harold rebuild his fortune, and he would really need her as not only a trophy wife, but a helping hand.

Up until this point in the novel, Miles Franklin has already let down the reader's expectations in relation to the traditions of marriage in the 19th century, which appears in literature such as *Jane Eyre*, Franklin's most obvious precursor. Ignoring her relation with realism leads to very Bloomian thoughts that it happens solely because Miles Franklin's text is a version of what her literary mothers have written, but going through a *clinamen*, taking the swerve that her precursor should have taken at that same point. I believe her writing is much more than a version of her predecessors', but she is clearly influenced by them. Marriage is a big deal for Sybylla because she, as well as her creator, knows the fate to which a literary heroine is destined. She also knows marriage is expected of her from the members of her family, such as her mother and grandmother.

Like *Jane Eyre* is sent to Mr. Rochester as a governess, Sybylla is forced to go away from Caddagat, to live with the M'Swats from Barney's Gap, where she is supposed to work as a governess. It is also the moment she gets away from her "real sweetheart". Living with this uncivilized family Sybylla constantly misses her party at Caddagat, as well as the people from Five-Bob Downs. Any *Jane Eyre* reader would expect her to finally figure out that her destiny is to be Mr. Beecham's wife, and finally accept her marital destiny. However, when leaving Barney's Gap sick with depression, Sybylla gets sent away to Possum Gully, and to her sad life from before Caddagat.

The fourth time, and final calling happens after the reader thinks everything is already over between Sybylla and Harold, because through her descriptions they are led to believe he intends to marry Sybylla's sister, Gertie. This is also a common strategy to Miles Franklin's foremothers, leading the reader to believe that the lead woman has no chance at a happy marriage anymore, because she has been traded for another woman. It happened in *Pride and Prejudice*, when Elizabeth finds out Mr. Darcy has been promised to Miss Anne de Bourgh, and also in *Jane Eyre*, when Mr. Rochester pretends to be interested in Blanche Ingram instead of Jane.

And once again, Miles Franklin leads her reader to think she is using canonical English novel strategies, when she is actually not. When Sybylla expects Harold Beecham's visit to be about proposing to Gertie, she discovers that he still wants to marry her, Sybylla, even though they have been apart for a very long time. At this point, the average reader of 19th century women writers almost knows Sybylla and Harold's happy ending is about to happen. And this is the moment Sybylla says her final 'no'.

After all, Sybylla Melvyn is not a traditional heroine such as Jane Eyre and Elizabeth Bennet. She is just as witty, just as strong of a character, but her final goal is not love and marriage, but a brilliant career.

Miles Franklin's anxiety of influence manifests itself in all aspects she seems to have in common with her predecessors, but which are twisted somehow. Nothing turns out the same as to her foremothers. Everything that seems obvious about *My Brilliant Career* is not that obvious, and nothing happens the way the reader expects. Miles Franklin was able to build a plot and a main character with a lot of misleading characteristics that might recall to English novels before her, but which actually end up giving the uniqueness to her novel.

3.2 Sybylla and the anxiety of authorship

Sybylla Melvyn is a character whose biggest ambition and desire in life is to become a writer. She is also the narrator of *My Brilliant Career*, and through her words we are able to presume that the novel is Sybylla's novel. She explains in the introduction of the book that "(...) this story is all about [her]self (...)" (FRANKLIN, 1901, introduction), which leads to the knowledge that the novel is her autobiography.

Sybylla barely had the money for paper because her family was poor, therefore she had little access to books. This is why I will not analyze Sybylla as an author for traces of anxiety of influence, such as I have analyzed Miles Franklin. Rather, I am going to analyze her anxiety of authorship, for she had little or no access to a literary foremother, having to build a literary voice all by herself.

Even though it is clear that she is both the narrator and the writer of the novel, it is only in chapter 7 that we read about Sybylla's desire of writing for the first time. Sybylla affirms that when she was 13, she had tried to write "a prodigious novel in point of length and detail, in which a full-fledged hero and heroine performed the duties of a hero and heroine in the orthodox manner." (FRANKLIN, 1901, chapter 7), but she was rejected by publishers. And this is the point in which Sybylla realizes the need of having her own literary voice, even if she had to do things different from the "orthodox manner".

From the expressions "orthodox manner" and "full-fledged hero and heroine" I read that Sybylla was trying to write a traditional novel, within the molds of what she had read so far. But in doing that, she would be mirroring someone else's style, rather than attempting to write in her own voice.

Chapter 7 has a section called Self-Analysis, in which she discusses the troubles of being an ugly woman with a reputation of being clever. Her realization of her cleverness results in her a despair at all the obligations a woman must fulfill, such as getting married, for she believes that she would never be a good wife. To her, a clever woman is the representation of what Gilbert and Gubar will later call a monster woman.

“Those of you who have hearts, and therefore a wish for happiness, homes, and husbands by and by, never develop a reputation of being clever. It will put you out of the matrimonial running as effectually as though it had been circulated that you had leprosy.” (FRANKLIN, 1901, chapter 7, Self-Analysis)

The mother is an important tool of insecurity for Sybylla, because she insists on the idea that her daughter is not like other girls, and for that she is unwanted. She constantly calls her mad, and at a point calls her a she-devil, saying Sybylla could never find another house that would keep her for longer than a day. Because of her strong opinions and cleverness, Sybylla was very difficult to be dealt with as a daughter, and her mother would then rather argument that she was mad, for women were raised to have the same angel/monster perception about their own gender.

"My mother is a good woman—a very good woman—and I am, I think, not quite all criminality, but we do not pull together. I am a piece of machinery which, not understanding, my mother winds up the wrong way, setting all the wheels of my composition going in creaking discord." (FRANKLIN, 1901, Chapter 6)

To her mother's perception, Sybylla could be either a nice and acceptable woman, who is meant for marriage, or a terrible mad woman, who was meant for isolation.

Sybylla is very concerned with her appearance, even though she does not intend to get married. Her insecurities are typical of a teenage girl, which she is by the time of the events she narrates. The fear of being an undesired, mad, ugly woman is also the fear of being isolated because of those characteristics. Therefore, she starts to express the same anguishes which Gilbert and Gubar described as anxiety of authorship.

Besides all of her insecurities, there is a feeling of inferiorness she feels toward men. As described by Gilbert and Gubar, she “experience[s] her gender as a painful obstacle” (page 50), feeling inferior because the world is made for men, and she is nothing besides a clever and plain woman.

“You, a chit in your teens, an ugly, poor, useless, unimportant, little handful of human flesh, and, above, or rather below, all, a woman—only a woman! It would

indeed be a depraved and forsaken man who would need your services as a stay and support!" (FRANKLIN, 1901, chapter 24)

This inappropriateness of being just a woman expresses itself not only because Sybylla sees herself as inferior, but also because she is trying to perform a task that she saw as a male task. Her mentions of all the authors she loves only encompasses male writers, which makes it seem like the world of literature is only meant for men, even though it is the only career she has ever considered for herself. And still, in her final considerations, when she is speaking to "her sisters", other women from the bush, she only mentions that they are "[d]aughters of toil, who scrub and wash and mend and cook, who are dressmakers, paperhangers, milkmaids, gardeners, and candle-makers all in one (...)" (FRANKLIN, 1901, chapter 38). Even though she wants to be a writer, her fellow bush women are not writers, nor readers as well.

Sybylla fears never becoming a writer if she ever decides to get married, and then has to dedicate herself to her husband, such as happened to her mother. She would not only not have a literary voice, but also, she would not have a voice at all, for having to answer to the voice of a man at all times. When referring to her mother and father, she says that "[a] woman is but the helpless tool of man—a creature of circumstances." (FRANKLIN, 1901, Chapter 5).

Gilbert and Gubar affirm that "[i]n order to define herself as an author, [the woman writer] must redefine the terms of her socialization." (page 49?) Thus, Sybylla has finds a way to affirm her place as a writer by contrasting that with the place of wife. Therefore, she constantly reaffirms how unfit for marriage she is, and how she could never be a wife. Her biggest argument for not marrying Harold Beecham is that she is not good enough for him. Considering that her true will is to be a writer, she is only fit for writing because she is not fit for marriage. The woman writer is a lonely figure, rather than just isolated, and thus also inadequate for life as a couple.

This construction of unfitness is an evidence of her anxiety of authorship, her way of demonstrating her "(...) dread of the patriarchal authority of art," (GILBERT; GUBAR, 1979, page 50), and also of the patriarchal authority in general. Not giving in to the patriarchal authority of marriage meant also not giving in to this same authority in literature, even though her references of literature came from men in their entirety.

Her narration is filled with the hints of this anxiety, and those hints help her compose a perfect excuse to never become a wife, even though this is what society expects from her. Even if she felt love or any inclination to get married, she had an anxiety that was only possible to overcome by herself, and only then allow her to claim a literary voice. She wants

to be seen as capable of writing, such as the men writers she had read, but she was also a woman, whose socialization had been made for love and romance.

The reason Sybylla rejects all possibilities of marriage is not because she does not have feelings for Harold Beecham, but because she still sees herself as the monster-woman, who is a writer, and thus is not meant for marriage. She lived in a time in which she was expected to have a husband, and not a career. However, she wanted a literary voice instead of a marriage, and knew she must go through this anxiety to prove herself as a writer. She believes she cannot be both wife and writer, and thus she chooses the path she had always wanted: her career.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

When I took this project, I hoped that I could learn a little bit more about women in literature, about literature in English that came from different countries rather than Britain and the United States, and about the world we live in. I finish this project knowing that there is a whole other world of literatures to be studied outside of the box we are presented with in college. I also finish this paper knowing that there is a place in the world for me, as a teacher, a researcher in literature, a woman and a feminist.

Reading *My Brilliant Career* for a second and probably a third time throughout the process of writing has shown me aspects I had not thought about in my first reading, and those were crucial for my analysis of both Miles Franklin and Sybylla. Mainly, I had not realized the depth of Sybylla's character, nor how much she resembled a real woman writer of the 19th century.

As a woman writer in the 1890s, Miles Franklin had at least a hundred years of women writing before her, who acted as her literary foremothers. She had most likely read what they had written, and thus had no probability of suffering from anxiety of authorship. However, her literary foremothers had an effect on her writing as well, as she did not want to be just a mirrored version of what they had written. This feeling of anxiety of influence, as denominated by Harold Bloom, is what makes Miles Franklin's novel so similar, yet so different to what had been written by women up until the publication of her book.

Seeing Sybylla as a woman writer, on the other hand, leads to very different conclusions. Sybylla, as written by Miles Franklin, had not read all the women writers her creator probably had. She only had access to novels and poetry written by men. This caused in her an anxiety of authorship, which as described by Gilbert and Gubar, causes the woman writer to feel isolated, and to see herself as mad for wanting to do a task usually attributed to men. Sybylla's socialization was typical for a 19th century woman, however she did not accept it for she really wanted to have a career as a writer.

Sybylla's anxiety of authorship leads her to despise marriage, and never want it for her life. Miles Franklin's treatment of marriage in her novel is what differentiates her the most from her predecessors. Thus, I can conclude that Sybylla's anxiety of authorship is what helps Miles Franklin to overcome her anxiety of influence. If Sybylla had not wanted to be a writer, Miles Franklin's heroine would be just another heroine in literature, perhaps just an accidental writer with a published diary. However, Miles Franklin has built a character whose very own anxieties reflected and added onto the feelings her creator had.

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