

Miles Franklin (1879-1954)

'Without an indigenous literature, people can remain aliens in their own soil'.

Miles Franklin died in 1954. A new generation of the public rediscovered her work following the international screen success of *My Brilliant Career* in 1979, and her vision for the perpetuation of Australian literature survives annually in the Miles Franklin Literary Award.

Stella Maria Sarah Miles Lampe Franklin was born at Talbingo in south east NSW in 1879. She spent her early years at Brindabella and Thornford, near Goulburn, where she attended a one-teacher school.

The extreme reaction of her squatter relatives to the depiction of themselves in her first book, *My Brilliant Career*, which appeared in 1901, shocked the young writer into seeking anonymity in her later writing. She left home and moved to Sydney in 1904, writing for the *Bulletin* under the pseudonym of Mary Anne and mixing with Sydney feminists and intellectuals.

In 1904 Franklin finished *My Career Goes Bung*. Still smarting over her first book's reception, she set the record straight by debunking Sydney society and its falsity, while building up the simple and direct values of country people. But it remained unpublished until 1946 as publishers considered it 'too advanced'.

In 1905 she sailed for America beginning an exile that was to last thirty years. Under the influence of feminist activist and social reformer Alice Henry, Miles joined the National Women's Trade Union League, became editor of its magazine, and managed the national office in Chicago until 1915.

In 1915 Miles Franklin sailed to England leaving her manuscripts in Chicago for safekeeping (they were later burnt and she never saw them again) and undertook voluntary social work in slum nurseries in London. She then served as an hospital orderly with the Serbian army in the war zone in Macedonia. At the war's end she returned to London doing social work for the National Housing Council.

In 1928 a novel called *Up The Country* was published by Blackwood the Edinburgh publisher. The author's name was given as Brent of Bin Bin of the British Museum. Gradually the evidence mounted that this was a pen name of Miles Franklin. The book was the first of the series of the six well received Brent novels about a squatting family in Australia's alpine country from the 1830s to the 1920s.

Miles Franklin Literary Award

She had returned to Australia in 1927 and in 1933, Miles' Franklin's last large novel, *All That Swagger*, won the Prior Memorial Prize awarded by the Bulletin.

In her lifetime she wrote seventeen books, twelve of them novels including *Joseph Furphy* in 1944 written in association with Kate Baker. In 1950 she was asked to give a series of lectures on Australian literature at the University of Western Australia. Later she rewrote and polished the lectures and they became the book *Laughter Not For a Cage* published after her death in 1956. In it she stressed the importance to the writer of the Australian literary tradition, 'Without an indigenous literature, people can remain aliens in their own soil'. In her seventies she wrote *Childhood at Brindabella*.