ARTHUR WILLIAM UPFIELD: A BIOGRAPHY

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BLittComm MA

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of

Murdoch University

February 2005

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at a university or other institution.

(Travis Barton Lindsey)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an exhaustive account of the life and work of Arthur William Upfield (1890-1964). It is presented as a critical biography and narrates the life of the writer, in his socio-cultural milieu, from birth. It also positions Upfield as a writer who dealt with issues of Aboriginality at a time when this was a singularly polemical subject. My work is informed by the theory of Zygmunt Bauman and others and is posited in the context of late-modern biography theory.

English-born, Upfield arrived in Australia in 1911 and took work in the bush, serving overseas with the Australian army at the outbreak of World War I and marrying an Australian army nurse in Egypt. Returning with his wife and son to Australia in 1921 he intermittently carried his swag until he was employed patrolling the Western Australian number 1 rabbit-proof fence for three years to 1931. By that time he had published four novels, including two crime novels featuring his fictional creation, the part-Aboriginal, part-European, Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte ("Bony"), arguably the first fully-developed character in Australian popular fiction.

Leaving the fence, Upfield settled with his family in Perth and wrote full-time until joining the Melbourne *Herald* in 1933. Retrenched, he resumed career writing to be further interrupted by a war-time intelligence posting in 1939. In 1943 the first Bony mysteries were published in America, where Upfield's critical success was maintained until his death. In 1945 he left his wife for Jessica Uren, to whom he remained devoted.

Upfield's in all twenty-nine Bony novels, many of which have been translated across eleven languages, afforded him notable success both at home and abroad, in good part due to his descriptive gifts and the uniqueness of his fictional character, the part-Aboriginal Bony.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful for the help and encouragement in this work of many people, especially the knowledgeable and generous Joe and Gaby Kovess, Bill and Francesca Upfield and Don and Lynette Uren. Joe Kovess has been generous, too, in his sharing of his extensive and painstakingly gathered listings of Upfield's articles and other writings. Others, too, have been generous - Philip Asdell, the chairman (Peter Fleming) and the board of Bonaparte Holdings Pty. Limited, Jan Howard Finder, Bill Finlay, Patricia Kotai-Ewers, Paul McEvoy, the late Louise Mueller, Brian Pinchback, Pamela Ruskin, Haille Smith and many more, including my tolerant wife Felicity.

My special thanks for their interest, guidance and encouragement go to my supervisors Professors Vijay Mishra, Horst Ruthrof and Kateryna Olijnyk Longley.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This is a critical biography with a difference. It is neither a purely chronological account of the life of a writer, nor is it a theoretical engagement with the production of biographies. Instead, its purpose is to present for the first time in Australian letters a comprehensive account of the life, works, philosophy and outlook of Arthur William Upfield (1890-1964). Furthermore, it positions Upfield as a writer in the context of the first half of 20th century Australian history, one who dealt with issues of Aboriginality at a time when this was an under-theorized area of critical knowledge.

From the sketchy evidence we have, it seems Upfield's early life in England was serene and reasonably stable. Born and bred in Hampshire he enjoyed a middle-class existence until for health reasons he was dispatched at the age of 20 to South Australia, where he arrived early in 1911. For some years, and it seems by choice, he took employment on outback stations, intermittently humping his swag, until in the 1930s he rode for nearly three years a section of the number one rabbit-proof fence in Western Australia, where one of his novels provided a blueprint for a real-life murder. This period, during which several novels were produced, was interrupted by his volunteering for military service in World War I and eventuated in his marriage in Egypt to an Australian Army nurse.

Following a period in 1933-34 when he was contracted to, and then retrenched from, the Melbourne *Herald*, Upfield supported his family and himself through his writing. During World War II he worked as a civilian for a department of military intelligence

and found great success with his mystery novels in the American market. Upon resigning from his wartime post he resumed writing on a full-time basis. In 1946 he left his wife and son for a widow, Jessica Uren, for whom he had developed deep feelings. The somewhat inhibited Upfield thus seems to have discovered love late in his life - an intense love which ended only with his death. That period is sketched in Jessica's letters, in her unpublished manuscript *Beauty for Ashes*[1] and in interviews with Jessica's son, Don. With love also came a consolidation of Upfield's style of mystery fiction and he remains to this day one of only a handful of Australian authors who were or are able to support themselves through their writing.

As an Australian writer of popular fiction Upfield has few equals, although his special contributions to Australian letters are little remarked in the standard histories of Australian literature. (*The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* does, however, go some way towards remedying this.)[2] What stands out is his creation of the part-Aboriginal, part-European, Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte ("Bony") of the Queensland Police, arguably the first fully-developed character in Australian popular fiction. So important was Bony to his creative imagination that between 1929 and (posthumously) 1966 Upfield produced twenty nine crime mysteries featuring Bony. All but one of the Bony novels have been at various times published in Australia, Britain and America and many have been translated across at least eleven languages.[3]

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1 Jessica Hawke, *Beauty for Ashes,* ts., undated, archive of Don Uren, Mansfield, Victoria.

2 Elizabeth Webby, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 72, 125.

3 *The Barrakee Mystery* (1929) has so far not been published in Australia. For various title translations see for example: *Zanik Jezera,* trans. F. Jungwirth (Prague: Mlada Fronta, 1965). *Den Sorte Jomfru,* trans. N. Gabe (Copenhagen: Wangel, 1960). *De Moord op de Weerprofeet,* trans. A.M. van Steyn-Dingjan (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1958). *Bony Ostaa Naisen,* (Helsinki: Otava, 1971). *Le Business de M. Jelly,* trans. Michèle Valencia (Paris: Editions 10/18, 1998). *Mei-Tantei Napoleon* (Tokyo: Tokyo Sogen-Sha, 1958). *Die Leute von Nebenan,* trans. Arno Dohm (Munich: Goldman, 1957). *Passi del Diavolo* (Milan: Garzanti, 1950). *Politiinspektoren Kjoper en Kvinne* (Oslo: Elingaard, 1975). *Un Autor Muerde el Polvo,* trans. A. Custodio (Mexico: Novaro, 1956). *I Laga Ordning* (Stockholm: Lindquist, 1976).

Given Upfield's status as a full-time, popular writer with an international reputation it is surprising that he is the subject of only two book-length studies. The first major text is Jessica Hawke's biographical work *Follow My Dust!*, published in 1957, which carries on its dust jacket the notation "Written in collaboration with Arthur Upfield," an assertion that is strongly supported by stylistic evidence.[4] The work draws heavily from, although from a textual perspective it is frequently an improvement upon, Upfield's mostly unpublished autobiographical work, *The Tale of a Pommy*.[5] (The Melbourne *Herald* published in January 1934 articles relating to Upfield's early years in Australia and Upfield incorporated these articles into his autobiography.)

Jessica Hawke's 238-page book comprises in its first 39 pages a sequential account of Upfield's family life in England to the time of his departure for Australia. After that it becomes in large part a collection of yarns surrounding Upfield. The period 1914-20, during which time he married, is covered in one sentence - "Upfield joined the A.I.F August 23rd 1914 and became a soldier for five years"[6] - and the yarns cease

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Upfield's letter to Louise Mueller of 14 August 1960, archive of Louise Mueller, Germantown, Wis., complains that the Russians were publishing his books without payment, but there is no other evidence for this.

[4] Jessica Hawke, *Follow My Dust!* (London: Heinemann, 1957). Hawke is the maiden name of Jessica Uren, Upfield's de facto wife from 1946. The publication was thought on stylistic evidence by a number of contemporary reviewers to have been written by Upfield.

[5] Arthur W. Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy*, mostly unpublished ms., circa 1938, archive of William Upfield, Melbourne, Victoria. Upfield was working on an autobiography in 1934 (see Arthur Upfield, letter to Charles Lemon, 3 October 1934, 2138A Battye Library, Perth.) but the serial of events covered in the ms. ceases with an account of the Snowy Rowles murder case of 1932. This manuscript was tentatively retitled *Beyond the Mirage* sometime between 11 November 1937 and 11 May 1938, and then *Men, Women and Camels* around the end of May 1938. When Angus & Robertson, who were reluctant to publish it themselves, failed through their agents to interest Oxford University Press, Upfield wrote on 27 December 1938 to Angus & Robertson (Mitchell Library MS3269) ". . . re rejection of *Men, Women and Camels* by Oxford Press. I am more than inclined to agree with their reasons for rejection, and to save further expense the typescript should be destroyed and written off like a bad debt. It is a form of writing which I have not made my own." The work was seen in one quarter at least as "essentially a series of anecdotal essays about bush life in Australia." Footnote references hereafter to *The Tale of a Pommy* show my own sequential numbering of pages, since the manuscript is a cobbling of various typescripts and a number of articles by Upfield published in January 1934 by the [Melbourne] *Herald* under the series title "My Life Outback." The page numbering on my copy is otherwise highly eccentric, suggesting significant textual changes.

[6] Hawke, *Follow* 111.

with Upfield's departure from the (Melbourne) *Herald* in 1934. The period to around 1953 is then covered in six pages, but there is only one, very brief, reference to Upfield's family life after 1910.[7] These are glaring gaps which I propose to fill. There is also the matter of the post-1953 void, which I address. However, I am reliant upon *The Tale of a Pommy*, as well as Hawke's work, for their accounts of Upfield's early years.

The second major text on Upfield is Ray B. Browne's *The Spirit of Australia: The Crime Fiction of Arthur W. Upfield*, published in 1988.[8] The first 46 pages of this 266-page work are devoted to the life and philosophy of Upfield, with some pages in other chapters also taking up Upfield's philosophical position. The comparatively small biographical element clearly draws upon *Follow My Dust!* and a number of published articles of an "introducing the author" nature. Browne's discussion of Upfield's philosophy is derived from the texts of the Bony novels. The work as a whole is interesting in its analysis of some of Upfield's novels, but it is uneven and marred by errors of interpretation and fact. Let me cite a couple here.

One of the early mistakes in Browne's work is his locating the rescue drama surrounding the 19th century wreck of the steamer *Georgette* in the surf (sic) of the Darling River in country New South Wales instead of on the West Australian coast.[9] This may not be a serious error, but here is another, which as it forms part of the book's conclusion requires a longer commentary. The ending reads in part:

> As we look back at the life and the works of Arthur Upfield, what conclusions can be drawn? . . . He was first of all, it seems, a Britisher gone Australian . . . . But he was also

[7] Hawke, *Follow* 113; "Only just got back," Upfield said. "Was married. It was a failure. Headed for the Back country."

[8] Ray B. Browne, *The Spirit of Australia: The Crime Fiction of Arthur W. Upfield* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988).

[9] Browne, 21.

> undoubtedly very British and very Australian, at the same time, in his fierce independence. He loved the freedom of the Australian Outback, he respected the Aboriginals for their freedom in living in this Outback. Though he envied their freedom he really did not want to become a part of it. He could work in it and enjoy it for short periods of time, but when a job was finished, he wanted to go back to his semi-White, or all-White, existence, with his half-caste wife, their three children and their little home. His life style was what he preferred, perhaps not superior to the Aboriginal's, but one that he preferred.[10]

No earlier reference has been made to the possibility of Upfield at any time having an Aboriginal wife and children, so it seems reasonable to think that that part of the above extract commencing "Though he envied their freedom . . . " really belongs elsewhere in the book and relates to a conclusion on the character of Bony, not Upfield. When I contacted Professor Browne at Bowling Green State University to probe him further, his reply was equivocal - "I do not know any more about him than is in the book."[11] My own research, however, has not detected even the remotest possibility of the one-time existence of an Aboriginal wife and children, which existence, if it were true, would almost certainly by now be publicly known.

There is, then, a need for a thoroughly-researched biography of Upfield, which this study attempts to provide. It is based on primary documentation accessed in private, and some public, archives and gathered in interviews with relatives and friends of the subject. Although it draws in part upon the existing Hawke text for some elements of Upfield's early years, this study is based in great part on new and hitherto unpublished material.

If there is one word that may be used to describe Upfield's life, it is "ambivalence." That ambivalence - in Zygmunt Bauman's terms a language-specific disorder of the naming function that language is meant to perform, which produces the possibility of

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[10] Browne, 250.

[11] Ray B. Browne, e-mail 27 August 1996 to Kateryna Longley, Dean of Humanities, Murdoch University, Perth.

assigning an object or an event to more than one category[12] - may be discerned across a range of issues. Ambivalence, which, says Bauman, produces a symptomatic discomfort when we are unable to "read" a situation properly and exercise a choice between alternatives, is thus a side product of one of the main functions of language, that of naming and clarifying.[13] Naming and clarifying, he says, gives us a structure; something to manipulate, to bend to probabilities. And ambivalence, he points out, "may be fought only with a naming that is more exact, and classes that are yet more precisely defined. . . ."[14]

I particularly note Bauman's argument on the social construction of ambivalence where he says "There are friends and enemies. And there are *strangers.*"[15] He continues that this binary opposition each defines the other and, each representing relationships, they together provide the frame which enables *sociation*. The *stranger*, who is neither friend nor enemy, threatens this *sociation* - he is:

> . . . a member of the family of *undecidables* - those baffling yet ubiquitous unities that in Derrida's words again 'can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, resisting and disorganizing, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics.'[16]

After elaborating on "undecidables" and noting that they are "all neither/nor; which is to say that they militate against the either/or," Bauman deals with classes of *strangerhood* before observing:

> Some strangers are not, however, the as-yet-undecided, they are, in principle, *undecidables*. They are the premonition of that 'third element' which should not be. These are the true hybrids, the monsters - not just *unclassified*, but *unclassifiable*. They do not question just this one opposition here and now: they question oppositions as such . . . .[17]

Bauman's points are here scantily put, but they resonate in the early Australian State legislators ultimately futile attempts to classify the "neither/nor" "half-caste." (That

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12 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
13 Bauman, 1.
14 Bauman, 2, 3.
15 Bauman, 53.
16 Bauman, 55.
17 Bauman, 58.

difficulty was the Europeans' - as the *sociation* of Aboriginal culture was relatively undisturbed by the 'half-caste' as *undecidable*. He or she was generally readily accepted as Aboriginal and as *stranger* formed for the Aborigine part of the *as-yet-undecided* class.) In this classificatory vein, and proceeding from the general to the particular, Upfield-in-the-bush was, arguably, positioned as *stranger*. (This may well be for cultural reasons the enduring classification for every non-Aboriginal person in the bush, but I don't intend to develop that line.) What may be strongly argued is that the *stranger* Upfield positions his fictional character Bony as *stranger* and is quite untroubled in leaving Bony as undecided, crossing with ease between black and white classifications, and retaining the value of the "in-between." The ambivalence in Upfield's life - for example, he rejoiced in his bush-bestowed nickname of "Hampshire" and at times emphasized his Englishness, yet he was fiercely loyal to the bush and its people and was devoted to his idea of Australianness - flows over to his creative work.

In pursuing my secondary aim of positioning Upfield as a writer in the Australian milieu, dealing with Aboriginality at a time when this was a singularly polemical subject, I note Homi Bhabha's interest in ambivalence and hybridity, but in particular his claim that:

> The concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the *name* of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation.[18]

This partly informs the thematic, legislative and socio-cultural threads woven into sections of my thesis.

I pause now to position this biography in the wider context of late-modern biography theory and begin with Barthes' influential 1968 essay, "The Death of the Author."[19]

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[18] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995) 34.

For Barthes the expulsion of the author expels as well any fixed referents, leaving the text naked and open to unconfined interpretations. Writing on the essay, Sean Burke suggests that the "single message" of "The Death of the Author" is that:

> . . . the abolition of the author is the necessary and sufficient step to bring about the end of a representational view of language, for it is only through the function of the author as the possessor of meaning that textual language is made obeisant to an extratextual reality . . . .[20]

However, that insight offers little hope for any speedy return of the expelled subject. Indeed, all of this is somewhat unfortunate for the biographer, for whom the subject remains tangible and who in fashion terms may sometimes feel as though caught in a Dickens-style hat and coat on a summer beach. For this reason Catherine Peters' views on biography are reassuring.

Peters writes "biography has to accept that it is a traditional, rather old-fashioned form, evolving slowly rather than by great imaginative leaps and profound intellectual discoveries."[21] Perhaps because of this quality biography is proving stoically tolerant towards the attempts of recent years to subvert the genre, indeed it seems to be flourishing.[22] Biography, nevertheless, has its philosophical champions, even if much of what is said in its cause is formed in what William H. Epstein terms "rhetorics of

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[19] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988) 167-172.

[20] Sean Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 43.

[21] Catherine Peters, "Secondary Lives: Biography in Context," *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. John Batchelor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 44.

[22] Martin Stannard, "A Matter of Life and Death," *Writing the Lives of Writers,* eds. Warwick Gould and Thomas F. Staley (London: Macmillan, 1998) 8: "Alongside this persistent and creative anxiety [induced by the intentional and affective fallacies, the destruction of the author etc] however, another phenomenon has taken shape: the rise of biography as a popular form. Richard Holmes dates this sudden expansion of the market from about 1960 . . . Interestingly, this directly parallels the collapse of interest in the author in literary criticism influenced by structuralism." (In Richard Holmes, "Biography: Inventing the Truth," *The Art of Literary Biography*, 20, Holmes says: "It [biography] is arguably the most successful, and intellectually stimulating, literary form, which has held a general readership in Britain since 1960.")

resistance,"[23] within which rhetorics biography stands as that which is sought to be colonised.

One champion is Stanley Fish, who, long interested in reception theory, may be seen as a coincidental defender of biography, whether that be traditional biography or otherwise. In his essay "Biography and Intention" he remarks upon similarities between the formalists Wimsatt and Beardsley ("The Intentional Fallacy") and the antiformalist Jacques Derrida before making an important observation:

> For Wimsatt and Beardsley, the independence of the verbal artefact from the circumstances of its production assures its ability to speak for itself, to embody a unique and stable meaning; while for Derrida, the same independence abandons the writing to its "essential drift" and therefore destabilizes a meaning that can be infinitely remade by the succession of contexts into which it is inserted. Nevertheless, it remains the case that from either the American or continental perspective, the question of meaning is rigorously divorced from questions of biography and intention.[24]

Fish then argues against that divorce "not because it is inadvisable, but because it is impossible."

Fish believes that "meaning is a function of what a particular speaker in a specific set of circumstances was intending to say," holding that there cannot be a meaning specifiable apart from the contextual surrounds of its intentional production. Bluntly, "the act of construing meaning is ipso facto the act of assigning intention within a specific set of circumstances . . . ."[25] Fish continues along his persuasive path to observe that in principle it does not matter whether the originating author of a text is

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[23] William H. Epstein, Introduction, *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism,* ed. William H. Epstein (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991) 6: "[Speaking of the essays in the book] Although our returns to biography and our prefiguration of its future are generally expressed through rhetorics of resistance, we all believe in the biographical - not because we have the theoretical technology with which we can somehow "cure" it, but, more poignantly, because we have faith in its ancient and yet still vital therapeutic powers."

[24] Stanley Fish, "Biography and Intention," *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism,* ed. William H. Epstein (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991) 10.

[25] Stanley Fish, "Biography and Intention," 11.

transposed into a series of (Foucault's term) "transcendental anonymities,"[26] for to read the product of those anonymities is still to endow them - be they the spirit of an age or of cultural, literary or linguistic origin - with an intention and a biography. We cannot, avows Fish, at the same time construe a text and free ourselves from the considerations of biography. "Biography," says Fish, "is here to stay."[27]

Fish's views are echoed by many. John Halperin, in his biting essay "The Biographer's Revenge," holds amongst other things that:

> The concern which seems to me to justify the profession of criticism, the concern which can, at times, enable the critic to make for his own contemporaries a contribution to the elucidation of classic literature, is not the study of the component parts of a text to one another, but rather the study of the historical and biographical milieux in which texts are brought into being and by which their nature is determined: the study of the relation, to put it plainly, of art to life.[28]

Halperin further states that there is an undeniable fact about all novels: "they are told by an implied author, who is created by the biographical author and is necessarily part of the formal experience of reading the novel."[29] You cannot talk about form, says Halperin, without talking about authors.

Fish is, of course, an academic whose work on critical theory and Renaissance English literature depends in part upon the notional (at the time of inscription at least) vitality of the author and Halperin is an academic and biographer with a similar interest in defending biography. This slightest of biographies is interpretatively useful, as is for the reader knowledge of any writer of a text. Epstein's term, "rhetorics of resistance," though, sits well with much of what is written in defence of biography against the destruction of the subject.

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[26] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" trans. Joseph V. Harari, *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988) 199-200.
[27] Stanley Fish, "Biography and Intention," 15.
[28] John Halperin, "The Biographer's Revenge," *The Literary Biography. Problems and Solutions*, ed. Dale Salwak (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) 154, 155.
[29] John Halperin, "The Biographer's Revenge," 162.

So knotted is subjectivity that one of the few practical approaches at present open to the biographer is to fire a quiver at, and then skirt (or at the outset simply skirt) that particular obstacle. One example of a different working strategy in the wider field, however, is that formulated by the biographical critic, Cheryl Walker, who while acknowledging a number of points made by "death of the author" sympathisers, states that she is loath to give up all vestiges of the author. Walker says:

> The strategy I have chosen is what I call persona criticism, a form of analysis that focuses on patterns of ideation, voice, and sensibility, linked together by a connection to the author. Yet persona criticism allows one to speak of authorship as multiple, involving culture, psyche, and intertextuality, as well as biographical data about the writer.[30]

Walker's argument (justification) for persona criticism is persuasive and offers, as she says, a multiplication of critical horizons. Such innovative strategies are, however, not common in the field.

Catherine Peters has already been quoted as saying that "biography has to accept that it is a traditional, rather old-fashioned form, evolving slowly . . . ." Jürgen Schlaeger's view is similar:

> Compared with the images of our culture which post-modernism projects, biography is, in spite of its intertextual construction, fundamentally reactionary, conservative, perpetually accommodating new models of man, new theories of the inner self, into a personality-oriented cultural mainstream, thus always helping to defuse their subversive potential.[31]

In these views (Peters' and Schlaeger's) John Batchelor notes, biography is "immune" from deconstruction, which is not to say, he continues, that there is no place for theory in the biographer's activity. "There will be theory, either consciously or by default, informing the nature of the biographer's relationship with his/her material."[32] Batchelor goes on to comment: "Because literary biography is a pragmatic and

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[30] Cheryl Walker, "Persona Criticism and the Death of the Author," *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism,* 109.
[31] Jürgen Schlaeger, "Biography: Cult as Culture," *The Art of Literary Biography,* 63.
[32] John Batchelor, Introduction, *The Art of Literary Biography,* 2.

historical form, its relationship with literary theory will always be open to negotiation."[33]

These tempers of resistance here quoted are of course convenient for the biographer - as indeed they are for me as the author of this basically traditional biography of Arthur Upfield. But, like the authors of the tempers, I am convinced of the defenders' arguments. The thrusts of the rhetorics are indeed "pragmatic," which term I have noticed appears frequently in the rhetorics themselves. Meanwhile people read biographies, apparently well aware of what it is they are supposed to be reading, and people write biographies, in increasing numbers. Subjectivity aside, and noting the absence of any convincing formalist determinations such as those mapped by Hayden White for classical nineteenth-century European historiography,[34] much late-modern comment on the genre of biography concerns itself with specifics.

Against the foregoing theoretical incursion it is important for me to spell out my own interest in the subject of this biography. At the outset I state that I claim no special right to delve into the life of Arthur Upfield, but it so happens that the wife of his putative stepson, Donald Uren, and my wife have been friends for more than fifty years. The more I learned of Upfield the more I became interested in his life and his contribution to Australian writing. It also so happens that a part of my boyhood and early teenage years was spent in the country - I can still feel the dry east wind and taste the waterbag. I can hear, too, from the 1940s and 1950s the speech of the people of the bush, a speech little changed from that much earlier translated into Upfield's pages. If this confession doesn't help foreground the common view that I,

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[33] John Batchelor, Introduction, *The Art of Literary Biography,* 8.
[34] Hayden White, *Metahistory* (1973; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

like those before me, am writing about myself[35] - something which my conscious mind has sought to avoid - then it does raise questions over family relationships on the page, more particularly since Upfield left his wife and son for Jessica Uren (and Donald) in 1946.

Upfield's defection caused bitterness in his wife Anne and son James Arthur, but this seems within a fairly short time to have been hidden beneath a veneer at least of ordinary, courteous behaviour. This process may have been quickened by Upfield's fair and reasonable voluntary settlement and, perhaps, an early realisation that Upfield would in the event of acute difficulties be prepared to act as a sort of "donor of last resort." In any case, apart from one to-be-expected testamentary matter which was resolved, differences have not filtered down to succeeding generations and I have been blessed with very willing, and dispassionate, help from William Upfield (Arthur's grandson) and Donald Uren, as well as the trustees of Arthur's estate. None has attempted in even the slightest fashion to influence my narrative.

My own sensitivities towards the families and the trustees have been in part protected by Upfield's sexual inhibition (or, more correctly, that rectitude which was common in his time) - there is no revelatory impropriety at all that I have discovered and with which otherwise in terms of disclosure (and hurt) I may have had to struggle. Upfield himself had to wrestle with the status of his fulfilling relationship with Jessica Uren. As an aside, Don Uren generously gave me copies of his mother's letters to Upfield, from which I have freely quoted. What, though, happened to Upfield's letters to Jessica, which she would certainly have kept, I don't know. I would wish to have that

[35] Humphrey Carpenter (in conversation with Lyndall Gordon), "Learning about Ourselves: Biography as Autobiography," *The Art of Literary Biography*, 273: "We [i.e. biographers] are all really writing about ourselves. That's the hidden agenda."

gap filled, but it is possible that the letters were destroyed by Upfield some time after Jessica many years later entered a nursing home. Similarly, there has been no discovery of otherwise aberrant behaviour in the narrative's principals, with the slight exception, perhaps, of Upfield's always interesting attitude towards those literary icons, Nettie and Vance Palmer. Drawing the man, however, has posed some not unexpected problems.

From a mass of material, and exercising tests and judgements to determine as far as possible facts only, the biographer must construct his work. Where the subject is a story-teller the difficulties are of course compounded,[36] so that without scrupulous care the biographer is in danger of presenting more penumbra than portrait. In Upfield's case, where for his early years and in the absence of third-party confirmation I have had largely to rely on his unpublished autobiographical work, a series of articles in the Melbourne *Herald*, Jessica Uren's *Follow My Dust!* and sundry notes and articles, I have adopted a sort of "truth" measure based on repetition and my own judgement, with a slight leaning towards the autobiography as the more naive, and therefore possibly "purer," purveyor. (I am not suggesting that truth is a function of repetition, or that an autobiography - or indeed a letter - is some sort of haven in a landscape of lies.) In this I have been frustrated by another gap.

On 16 January 2000 I telephoned a retired New South Wales schoolteacher, of whom I had heard, who had in her possession in trust 24 letters written by Upfield to his friend Mr. E. V. Whyte of Albemarle Station, near Wentworth, from the 1920s to the early War years. The schoolteacher, who has written a local history, was attempting

[36] Richard Holmes in his essay "Biography: Inventing the Truth," *The Art of Literary Biography*, 17, comments: "The biographer has always had to construct or orchestrate a factual pattern out of materials that already have a fictional or reinvented element."

without success to have the letters published. She would not disclose their contents to me, but hinted that they help to reveal the subsequently published biography, *Follow My Dust!*, except perhaps for the earliest years, to be fanciful in part. Such a fictional element, if I have read the schoolteacher correctly, was to be expected, but it should have been useful to have had confirmation or otherwise of my own determinations. On 23 April 2002 I again sought access to those letters, but my request was politely declined. (*Follow My Dust!* was of course not published until 1957, but Upfield was working on his autobiography/biography over many years. Whilst the letters may perhaps suggest fleeting flavourings of facts with fiction they may well add very little to our understanding of Upfield.)

Another difficulty, amongst a number, arose in the personality or nature of the subject. Arthur Upfield, as my narrative shows, was a somewhat inhibited man, at times almost something of a misanthrope, who was often content to spend long periods alone and who seems to have had little intimate contact with other writers, except for J. K. Ewers from the time of their first contact in 1930. This assessment of Upfield in its reductions seems a little unfair to a man who undoubtedly possessed a generous spirit, but one outcome of these isolations was that from my point of view in compiling the necessarily linear narrative of the life, an occasional aridity emerges, which is a largely unavoidable state. It could therefore be said that biography requires from place to place re-creations in a fictional sort of way for matters for which real historical evidence is not available. This is perhaps part of what could be termed the biography syndrome.

In the early part of what follows on Upfield's life, the incidence of ambivalence in and around the subject is partly framed, which is to say that towards the end of those

chapters the examples are summarised. After those early chapters the points of ambivalence simply run with the text and are not highlighted. Similarly, points of ambivalence in those chapters on the genesis of Bony and the Aboriginal context are remarked but not otherwise framed.

2 THE FIRST 20 YEARS (1890-1910)

Arthur William Upfield, for the greater part of his life in the thrall of a now old Australia with its heated, scented silences, with his cigarette smoke blousing into his eyes and between the words on his driven page, would have been wryly amused at the contrast of his public eulogies with his 1964 private departure at a Sydney crematorium, economically farewelled by six or seven friends and acquaintances and without the attendance of his wife, his son or his beloved Jessica.

In another world, in the town of Gosport, county of Hampshire, on the western side of the entrance to Portsmouth harbour, William Arthur Upfield (his first names were to be reversed) was born in his parent's home at 88 North Street on 1 September, 1890.[1] He was later to lose sight of his birth year, perhaps because of a cantankerous resistance to classification of any sort or perhaps because, as he once claimed, the certificate was destroyed in a campfire in Queensland and he couldn't remember what was in it.[2] He was to provide approximations, the most common being 1888, but since most of the years nominated by Upfield made him older than he really was, vanity is unlikely to have intruded.

Arthur was the first of five sons born to Annie Upfield, *née* Barmore, and her husband James Oliver Upfield, who was to become the sole proprietor of the drapery

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[1] Certified copy of entry of birth no. CJ525157, 11 March 1993, General Register Office, registration district of Alverstoke, County of Southampton, obtained by Jan Howard Finder, of Albany, New York, and dispatched in photocopy to me in 1998. Finder states that he sighted the original journal entry on a visit to the UK in 1995.

[2] Arthur Upfield, "'Pour Encourager Les Autres.' Arthur Upfield Writes About Himself," ts., probably circa 1940, Angus & Robertson Collection MS3269, Mitchell Library, Sydney, 1. In his letter of 23 July 1953 to Charles Lemon (Battye Library, Perth, 2138A) Upfield wrote "I don't rightly know how old I am, but think 60 or 61 . . . ."

business started by Arthur's grandfather, Oliver.[3] By Arthur's own account it was an apparently successful business which on three levels capaciously housed the shop and its stock, the proprietor's family, their three domestic staff and six or seven live-in shop assistants.[4] At its peak the shop and dressmaking staff apparently numbered forty, of whom nearly half dined-in, because they lived at a distance.[5]

In her biography Jessica Hawke states that Annie Barmore, as an eighteen-years-old from Birmingham, was an assistant in the shop when she married Arthur's father, James, who was then twenty six years old.[6] In *The Tale of a Pommy* Upfield merely says "In course of time my father became a partner in the business and married a Barmore from Birmingham."[7] The same account says of Annie's father that he was:

> . . . an inspector in the Small Arms factory and a most important political lieutenant to [the colourful centre-right, Birmingham-dwelling Parliamentarian] Joseph Chamberlain. He was a fluent speaker, and during an election he contracted an illness which developed into pneumonia from which he died two days after 'Joey' was returned to Westminster.[8]

Perhaps partly because of his emerging from a "trade" background in the England of that time, Upfield in some accounts would lead himself by the hand, protesting his disinterest, through a recitation of the more noteworthy of his ancestors. For example, *The Tale of a Pommy* opens with:

> Almost everyone is a snob, and people who write their autobiographies are not free from conceit. They are among the millions of ancestor-snobs and, if they are unable to trace their ancestry for more than three generations, they invent the details of a family tree or pay others to do it for them. I, too, am a snob, but not an ancestor-snob. I am a motor car snob. [He later owned a Daimler.]

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[3] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 6.
[4] The shop and residence was either rented or the building was owned and on a Crown lease, for Frank Upfield's letter to Arthur Upfield of 16 December 1935 refers to "paying £400 rent all these years."
[5] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 7.
[6] Hawke, *Follow* 2.
[7] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 7.
[8] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 7.

After a decent interval of pages Arthur manages to mention that one Upfield was a captain in Cromwell's army; another, who had migrated to America and had invented and patented a clothes prop, was hanged as a spy during the American Civil War, and yet another lived to 104. On the maternal side one relation, a Way, into which family Grandfather Oliver Upfield had married, became Lieutenant-Governor of South Australia and another, a Barmore, married a Canon of York Minster.[9] *Follow My Dust!* refers only to the Lieutenant-Governor and the hanged spy.[10] Another example lies in a paper dated around 1940 in which Arthur wrote: "It is unlike me to boast of my ancestors, but as a great number of people still think that ancestors make the man….," when he again recites those names mentioned in *The Tale of a Pommy*.[11]

To return now to the infant Upfield, William Arthur, according to *Follow My Dust!*, very soon became known as Arthur William - an attempt by his mother to thwart the diminutive, "Little Bill." Two more sons, Frank and Edward, were born and, as related in *Follow My Dust!*, around the age of six or seven, Arthur was dispatched to live with his nearby grandparents and one of their then-unmarried daughters.[12] The reason for this is not known, but the strain upon Annie, the young mother, in coping not only with her own family but with the responsibilities of the very large residential and dining-in establishment as well, must have been huge. Another factor could have been Arthur's fairly frequent winter bouts of bronchitis, when he spent long periods in bed and no doubt required special attention.[13] Annie also carried the burden, not uncommon, of an addiction to brandy, but just when this first manifested itself is not

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[9] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 7, 17, 18.
[10] Hawke, *Follow* 2.
[11] Upfield, 'Pour Encourager Les Autres' 1.
[12] Hawke, *Follow* 5.
[13] Hawke, *Follow* 11.

known. As far as I know Arthur did not learn of his mother's affliction until 1935,[14] but he made no public record of the fact and throughout her life accorded his mother her proper due of love and affection. His mother, as evidenced by her letters to him and in a letter to him from his brother, Frank, remained devoted to Arthur.

Meanwhile, the six or seven years old Arthur, as *Follow My Dust!* tells us, met his brothers only at school. The grandfather appears to have been stern, yet fair, and the grandmother lively and intelligent. They were generous in their affection for young Arthur and were influential in his moulding. He was read stories - apparently including those of Dickens and Carroll as well as those from the old and the new testaments[15] - and saw the outside world through the pages of the *Illustrated London News*. The aunt, however, married and for a period Arthur found himself back with his parents and, now, four brothers.

Arthur was at some point again dispatched to the care of his grandparents and another, widowed aunt. Eventually the grandparents died, to Arthur's distress, and he returned to his parents' home.

The drapery business occupied a great deal of his parents' time for, according to *The Tale of a Pommy*, it was open during the week for twelve and one half hours daily and on Saturdays for fourteen and one half hours.[16] In addition Sundays were highly structured. When with his parents, *Follow My Dust!* relates, Arthur attended not church, but the Methodist chapel - in the morning Sunday school followed by chapel,

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[14] Frank Upfield, letter to Arthur Upfield, 16 December 1935, archive of Don Uren: "It's a curse from hell. I saw your mother under its influence in 1909-1910 and I've (as I have tried to make clear) seen its influence on her now."

[15] Hawke, *Follow* 10.

[16] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 7.

in the afternoon Sunday school again for two hours and in the evening yet again chapel. Playing games on the Sabbath was not allowed, but the younger children were read to and after supper the family gathered in the drawing room to listen to father's stories and to chat.[17]

Upfield attended several schools and during his three years at his last, described in *The Tale of a Pommy* as a technical school, he was kept down in the same class.[18] Plagued with an inability to spell, he eventually did well in history and geography, the same source continues, but performed miserably in every other subject, including English Literature. "I was not even an 'also-ran.' I never ran at all." Nonetheless, he still managed to produce at the age of fifteen, and unknown to the school, a 120,000 words, hand-written manuscript concerning a voyage to Mars.[19] Around the age of sixteen Arthur was removed from school by his father and, at a cost of one hundred guineas, articled to a firm of estate agents.[20]

One requirement of Upfield, according to *The Tale of a Pommy*, was the passing of an examination in each of the three articled years, leading to a fellowship in the auctioneers' institute.[21] He did not pass one examination. After he started his apprenticeship, however, Arthur wrote a letter on some political matter to a local newspaper, which was apparently glad to publish it in an edited form. When no reader took issue with it, he dashed off another letter refuting his earlier views and

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[17] Hawke, *Follow* 14.
[18] Hawke, *Follow* 24.
[19] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 13, refers to a 400 page story concerning an invasion of Europe by China. Hawke's *Follow My Dust!* 25, however, relates that at this age and stage, Upfield's work was a 120,000 words story concerning a voyage to Mars, with the China story following at a later date.
[20] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 14.
[21] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 14.

this, too, after editing, was to Arthur's great delight published.[22] In addition, *The Tale of a Pommy* continues, Upfield managed to produce his second novel, which in 150,000 words told of the invasion of Europe by China. Hawke adds that Upfield also produced a sequel in which China was repulsed.[23] Upfield very clearly found study unpleasant.

Around eighteen years of age, the account in *Follow My Dust!* continues, Upfield became a part-time trooper in the Hampshire Carabineers Yeomanry and he also discovered girls. It was in a horse-drawn cab, clad in the severely restricting, tight-fitting uniform of the Carabineers that Upfield had his first experience with a woman. The encounter, Hawke says, was not a success.[24] The sexual morality of his formative years, instilled by his grandmother, aunts and mother, was present and was to remain with him for the rest of his life.

Upfield was clearly cut out for a career in something other than real estate. King George V acceded to the throne in 1910 and in the following year, when two of Arthur's more-compliant brothers were apprenticed to the family business, Arthur was dispatched to Australia to try farming. *The Tale of a Pommy* states that the family medico's opinion on Upfield's long-term health was the main motivation in his emigration, but the believed availability of land was also a factor: "We knew that white people occupied Australia, but we were sufficiently naive to believe the politicians when they said that anyone could get land in Australia for the asking."[25]

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[22] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 13.
[23] Hawke, *Follow* 30, 35-37. An earlier footnote has already remarked the different sequence of titles claimed in *The Tale of a Pommy*.
[24] Hawke, *Follow* 37. *The Tale of a Pommy* simply refers to Upfield "courting a young woman."
[25] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 19.

The evidence reveals Upfield's early life to 1910 to be marked by ambivalence in a number of areas. As I have shown, he occupied a space between his parents and his grandparents, being cared for alternately by one set, then the other and at one stage seeing little of his brothers except for his time at school. This ambivalence extended to the dichotomy of Church/Chapel. His religious foundations remained with him for the rest of his life, but despite his occasional deeply spiritual utterances he seldom appeared at a church service, in 1961 claiming to have attended church only half a dozen times in the previous fifty years; this despite his living in a time when attending church was seen as an affirmation of the individual's good character and standing.[26] In his later life with Jessica Uren, the pair regularly said grace before meals and knelt by the bed for prayers before sleep.[27] A certain ambivalence may therefore be seen in his religious convictions.

During his closing school years, while his fellow pupils flowed onwards, Upfield eddied. Given the nature of schoolboys it is likely that as a result of his consistent failures he spent a good part of those years as something of an outsider, one who never quite fitted in with his ever-changing classmates. His certainly volumetrically-worthy production of his first novel was a singular achievement, but this, too, would have set him apart from his fellows - even if only as a consequence of the time required in its production. Upfield's career in the parentally-chosen field of realty in some respects mirrored his later school years. His career path swept towards a fellowship in the auctioneers' institute, but he did not. He wilfully placed himself outside that goal-oriented work sphere as evidenced by the completion of his next two, no doubt quite unpublishable, novels.

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[26] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 14 March 1961, archive of Louise Mueller.
[27] Donald Uren, personal interview, 6 November 1996.

Upfield's minor years, then, are scored by his ambivalence, his occupation of the space in between. At the end of this period he is of his family, not in his family, and he is about to position himself as *stranger*.

3 THE BUSH MOULD (1911-14)

Upfield boarded in the Port of London the Orient Line's Royal Mail Steamer *Orvieto*, which was bound for Brisbane. He disembarked, in terms of his contract, in Adelaide on 4 November 1911.[1] It was a time of prosperity, for primary production was increasing and export prices were good. Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson were still among the most popular of writers and Arthur Hoey Davis and Joseph Furphy had made their mark. The pink-paged *Bulletin* coloured shearing sheds, surgeries and minds. Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts were prominent in Australian painting and Nellie Melba sang on the world's stage. Australia, though, was still sparsely populated - a census of 1911 was to show a mere 4,455,005, but it should be noted that Aborigines were excluded from the count at that time.[2]

Upfield's first engagement, according to his own account in *The Tale of a Pommy,* was on a wheat farm at Pinnaroo, east of Adelaide. He writes that at every station on the way to Pinnaroo farmers waited in the hope of persuading a new-chum to leave the train to work for him instead of going on to his assigned destination. Upon arrival, the account continues, Upfield found himself quartered in an up-turned 2000 gallon galvanised iron water tank with an entrance hacked out with snippers. Inside was a rough bush bunk. Upfield was roused at 3 o'clock each morning to feed and harness the horses ready for carting hay at first light. When the day grew hot they switched to

[1] Passengers List, folio 869, RMS *Orvieto*, 4 November 1911. State Library of South Australia. This item was located by W.R. Finlay in 1999.

[2] Reasonably reliable estimates of the Aboriginal population did not start to emerge until the mid-1920s. "Fate of Aborigines. Results of Census," *West Australian*, 24 January 1928: 8 states that in 1927 in Australia there were an estimated 59,945 "full-bloods" and 15,468 "half-castes."

stripping the crops. Upfield was disappointed in himself when he soon quit for something a little more congenial.[3]

According to Hawke, Upfield's next position was on a small farm out of Adelaide, where he stayed for four months and learned basic rouseabout skills.[4] (This account is absent altogether from *The Tale of a Pommy*.) He even had time to read, Hawke continues, devouring Lawson's poems time and again, together with Arthur Hoey Davis' - Steele Rudd's - *On Our Selection*. The *Bulletin*, too, was absorbed for its representations of the bush and a yarn over a wire fence gave Arthur a more personal picture of life in the faraway station country. Now determined to get a job as a boundary rider, Upfield returned to Adelaide for easy access to agencies specialising in station employment. In the meantime, he writes, he was employed as fourth cook at one of Adelaide's largest hotels.[5]

Upfield pestered the agents and eventually, according to Hawke, he obtained a posting to Momba Station,[6] via Wilcannia in New South Wales, to where he was carried by train, Cobb and Co. coach and buckboard. Upfield describes his awakening to his new, bush life thus:

> To One-Spur Dick I owe a debt never to be repaid. Here on Tearle Station [sic - Momba is more likely to be correct], western New South Wales, set down in the middle of the night by a mail driver, blurred into obscurity by lack of sleep, it had been One-Spur Dick whose drawling injunction to "Get up before the sun burns the whiskers off you" awoke me to this new world.
> Fully dressed, I arose from the soft sand beside the track where I had collapsed like a pricked balloon into unconsciousness on alighting from the buckboard, to observe four men regarding me with amused eyes.

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[3] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 21.
[4] Hawke, *Follow* 42.
[5] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 21.
[6] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 22, names Tearle Station as his destination. I cannot find any other reference at all to a Tearle Station, whereas *Follow My Dust!* 47 refers to Momba Station, located north of Wilcannia on the Paroo River.

> "Another parcel post bloke," [7] one observed, as though I were a beetle.
> "Yass. English or Orstralian?"
> "What are you, young feller?" inquired a one-eyed, thickset, whiskery, sun-blackened man dressed in blue shirt and moleskin pants, and wearing but one draggled spur.
> "English," was my reply, then to gaze around me at the stone-built bungalow house and the skirting corrugated iron buildings.[8]

Arthur added to his armory of skills those of soldering, bullock and mule teamstering, direction finding, water location and eventually the basics of tracking, this latter under the tutelage of two part-Aboriginal, part-European stockmen. His first lesson in direction-finding though, a very elementary one, arose when he was dispatched with the teamster, One Spur Dick, on a fourteen-bullocks wagon to fetch the winter wood supply for the kitchens:

> During the morning of the first day, when we were amongst dense mulga, it occurred to me to ask how would I get back to the homestead were my companion to drop dead. The one-eyed driver - he had lost an eye in a fight at Mt. Brown - sternly repressed a leering grin and commanded me to use my brain. For half an hour I endeavoured to do this, my cursed imagination producing vivid pictures of a lost man dying of thirst. Eventually admitting my failure to use my brain, Dick said with grave deliberation: "I like a bloke who arsts questions. I got no time for a bloke , be he new chum English or new chum Australian, wot thinks he knows everything and arsts no questions to hide his ignorance. Now you see them wheel tracks? You go and stand in one of 'em with your back towards the wagon." Having done as he ordered, he said: "Now shut your eyes. Got 'em shut?" Receiving my affirmative answer, he said: "Now you keep 'em shut and walk in that track for twenty minutes and you'll knock out your mosquito brain on the storehouse door." [9]

Upfield writes that he was tutored by One Spur Dick for about six months, finally acting as his offsider[10] on the wool runs from the station to Broken Hill:

> The constant travelling over those 120 miles…banished for ever any longing for city life, delayed for twenty years the final and compulsory settling down. After the one terrible period of nostalgia, hastened by the letter from a woman in England in reply to mine

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[7] While *The Macquarie Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms,* 1984, defines a parcel-post man as "an inexperienced man; new chum," Hawke's (really Upfield's) broader definition in *Follow My Dust!* 56, provides an explanation: "[the city offices of the pastoral companies] send up young fellers, paying their fares if they stop a year. They get landed at stations with the mail, sort of . . . A lot of old coves, too, often go broke in Adelaide and get themselves sent up again by Parcels Post."

[8] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 22.

[9] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 22-23.

[10] The term 'offsider' derives from the teamster's assistant who attends the offside line of animals; that is, according to *The Macquarie Dictionary* (3rd ed. 1997), the line on the right-hand side of the team. The offsider was valuable on bends, for the team must pull together and must be kept in a straight line.

> describing the falsity of the immigration literature we had studied together, a letter asking to be released from her vows of fidelity, I found a mental peace never to be described with mere words. In me was born a passionate love for the Australian bush which will burn until the end, a love stronger than love of family, so strong that even now it threatens to claim me.[11]

Arthur's conversion on the road to Broken Hill put paid to all that had happened before. Deep and sincere, his love for the bush indeed surpassed that for family (his mother excepted) and was to remain unchallenged for more than thirty years.

Despite his growing skills as a teamster, Upfield still longed to be a boundary rider. When a vacancy arose he pestered the station manager until reluctantly - for Upfield was essentially still a new chum for whom summers were a testing time - he was appointed.[12]

Upfield, according to Hawke, was required to maintain an 80 mile section of the vermin-proof boundary fence, which he patrolled with two camels - a bull and a cow. The bull was loaded with water, rations, tent, stretcher, tools and wire. The cow carried the long saddle - the space in front bearing eating irons and current food, and that behind the hump providing the rider's seat. In a line clearly sourced from Upfield, Hawke writes "Any man who likes cats will like camels, will come to understand them . . . . "[13] Upfield, who was fond of cats, did indeed develop a kind of exasperated affection for his camels and, with the help of advice from others and a period of trial and error, he became skilled in their handling. Each beast had a personality and a set of eccentricities which needed to be at least watched, if not pandered to, for if they became bloody-minded they could wreak damage on their

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[11] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 24.
[12] Hawke, *Follow* 73.
[13] Hawke, *Follow 75.*

handler. Beyond all that, they were the lifeline to safety in the event of injury to, or sickness in, the man.

The job itself involved keeping the vermin-proof fence vermin proof, and that was not always easy. The wind could blow sand above the netting, or scour beneath it, allowing the passage of rabbits. A tree could fall across the line, or emus and kangaroos become entangled, rending old sections of fence. Rabbits might burrow beneath, despite the netting embedded in the ground, and, of course, posts rotted, wire rusted and dry creek beds flooded, carrying away stretches of fencing.

Always there was something to be done, but there was time for a little recreation, according to *The Tale of a Pommy*.[14] Arthur's stretch of fence passed near a depression named Meenamurtee Lake, which was afforded a life of one or two years whenever it was filled with floodwater, as it then was, from the normally dry Paroo River. Upon arriving at the lake the camels would feed upon the succulent pigface while the man swam and, from the unglazed window of what was once the hut of a Chinese vegetable grower, shot wildfowl. In the evening he would wade into the water and with a hand-line fish for perch and cod. Upfield records that in March on his first evening in this fine camp, "with the incessant quackings and honking of the water birds drifting in through the open window," he wrote for several hours before retiring.[15] What the subject of his penning was is not known, but this is Upfield's first mention of his writing in Australia, although later on he makes several references to his faithfully dispatching a letter each week to his mother.

Summer re-appeared and Upfield changed the pattern of his days so that he started his patrol before dawn. Around noon he would make camp and spend the afternoon

[14] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 27.
[15] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 37.

in the shade, lazing with the novels of the Irishman Charles Lever, the Australian Nat Gould's racing stories and the crime fiction of the Englishman, Charles Garvice.[16] Upfield himself also refers to his consumption at this time of Victor Hugo, the British novelist Israel Zangwill, Darwin (presumably Charles, but this is not clear), the *Daily Mail* and, in the *Union Jack*, the exploits of Sexton Blake.[17]

Christmas soon followed - Upfield's second in Australia and celebrated on the fence - around which Hawke paints an apocryphal tale, recreated here in essence: his mother had sent him a plum pudding in a cloth and two jars of fruit mince, which with salted, boiled mutton, soda bread and tomato sauce, spread in the shade of a tree, comprised Christmas dinner. Beyond it was hot, so hot that wax matches tossed on the ground would ignite within seconds. The spasmodic "clunk" of bells suspended from the camels' necks provided a carol of sorts and Upfield suffered one of his very few bouts of homesickness. This eased a little the next day when, Hawke claims, he was repairing a gate across the Wilcannia road and spoke to a traveller, the first person he had seen for a couple of weeks. "Yesterday wasn't Christmas," the traveller said. "Christmas Day was six days back."[18]

After more than a year on the fence Upfield found himself talking to people who weren't there. He drew his cheque and joined Trollope's "nomad tribe of pastoral labourers - of men who profess to be shepherds, boundary riders, sheep-washers and the like . . . ." Trollope, who visited Australian sheep stations in the 1870s, including that owned by his son Frederick, saw the tribe as a strange institution, workmen degraded by their right to receive free rations and shelter for the night in station huts.

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16 Hawke, *Follow* 77.
17 Upfield, 'Pour Encourager Les Autres' 2.
18 Hawke, *Follow* 80.

But he also acknowledged their virtues. "These rough-looking men," Trollope continues:

> work hard, and are both honest and civil. Theft among them is almost unknown. Men are constantly hired without any character reference but that which they give themselves; and the squatters find from experience that the men are able to do that which they declare themselves capable of doing.[19]

The squatters relied on the "nomad tribe", for they needed temporary workers for a whole range of tasks. Upfield joined its rank forty or so years after Trollope wrote of it, but in essence it had not changed all that much.

According to *Follow My Dust!* Upfield, after cashing his Momba Station cheque for £98 in Wilcannia, wandered up the Darling River pushing his swag on a bicycle with its pedals removed. He slipped easily into the life of a swagman, sometimes taking work along the way.[20] The station shearing sheds, except for those months when shearing was in progress, provided good shelter and fellowship, for often others would also be passing by. The latest arrival would be assigned to approach the cook for a ration handout, another would be appointed cook to the swaggies and others would have to try their hand at catching fish or shooting duck for the communal pot. After dinner the group would yarn around the fire, so that eventually Arthur learned the idiosyncrasies of bosses, cooks and policemen in towns and stations along the Darling.

Hawke's account continues that finding himself at the end of winter in Bourke, Upfield sold his bike for four pounds, bought a boat for three pounds and with a man called Paroo Ted , rowed down the Darling twelve hundred meandering miles to its junction with the Murray River at Wentworth. They caught fish and shot ducks

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[19] Anthony Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand* (1873), as to P.D. Edwards and R.B. Joyce, eds., *Australia* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1967) 314, 315.

[20] Hawke, *Follow* 83 et seq.

along the way, sometimes selling their produce.[21] *The Tale of a Pommy*, however, makes no mention of any such epic voyage, nor was this the subject of a Melbourne *Herald* article. My own view is that while Upfield may have rowed some way down the Darling River, it is unlikely that he rowed any significant distance.

At Wentworth, Hawke continues, Upfield parted company with Paroo Ted, bought another bike and took short-term jobs - boundary-riding, fencing and cutting scrub for sheep fodder - on the road to Broken Hill. Somewhere along the way he teamed up with one Irish Tim, and the pair tried their hand at opal-gouging at White Cliffs, north of Wilcannia.

Unsuccessful with the opal, Hawke relates, Upfield then walked to Winton, in central Queensland, returned to Bourke and crossed to Daly Waters in the Northern Territory. He there joined a droving team taking cattle to Longreach in Queensland. A series of short term jobs then took him to a vineyard near Brisbane, listed in his Army records as Toombul Vineyards, Nudgee.

On the other side of the world dolorous bells were sounding. Austria declared war on Serbia, Germany declared war on both Russia and France and invaded Belgium, and at midnight on 4 August, 1914, Great Britain and its Empire declared war on Germany.

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[21] Hawke, *Follow* 92-94.

4 THE GREAT WAR AND AFTERWARDS (1914-21)

Upon the declaration of war Upfield and many, many others quickly volunteered. In Brisbane on 22 August 1914 Upfield was sworn in as a private in the Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force, when his age was overstated at 27 years, eleven months.[1] His war service records show that he was attached to the 5th Army Service Corps, with the rank of driver, and was shipped on His Majesty's Australian Transport A25 *Anglo Egyptian* to Egypt on 23 September, 1914.[2] His rate of pay upon embarkation was six shillings per day, plus deferred pay of one shilling per day to be issued on completion of service.

On 9 May, 1915, two weeks after the Gallipoli landings, Upfield was dispatched on a British Railway Company's steamer, the *Clacton*, to the Dardanelles. By his own account he landed at Anzac Cove in a pinnace on 20 May under routine shellfire from the Turks.[3] Artillery and sniper fire was a constant until, probably fortunately for Upfield, he was struck down by gastritis of such severity that, according to his war service records, he was on 2 August 1915 placed on board H.M.S. *Galeka* for transport to hospital in Alexandria.

When he recovered from his gastritis Upfield was moved to a convalescent hospital near Alexandria and it is likely that he there met Anne Douglass, the daughter of a Victorian farming family, who had joined the Australian Army Nursing Service in

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[1] Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force Certificate of Discharge, London, 16 September 1919, archive of William Upfield.
[2] Unit Embarkation. Nominal Rolls of Australian Imperial Force:1914-1918. AWM8. National Archives of Australia.
[3] Arthur W. Upfield, "One Digger's War. Laughter & Death at Gallipoli," *Herald* 23 April 1934: 17.

Melbourne on 24 May 1915. Nothing is known of Arthur's courtship of Anne. Apparently, however, the wedding was solemnised in two ceremonies - one in the Church of Scotland's St. Andrew's Church in Alexandria and the other in the office of the British Consul General in Alexandria - both on 3 November, 1915.[4] Upfield was aged 25 years and Douglass 32.[5]

The marriage got off to an unsteady start because the couple, despite as they thought following correct procedures, innocently offended Army nursing regulations relating to marriage. The marriage of nurses on active service was discouraged for reasons held to be the attraction of criticism, the distraction of nurses from their serious business and the potential embarrassment to the Nursing Service. Jan Bassett, in her work on Australian Army nursing ,[6] notes that the Australian Base Depot in Cairo was told in October 1915 that the decision was theirs as to whether a married nurse would be allowed to continue in the service or not. The colonel of the unit, Bassett continues, believing that the British practice was automatically to discharge married nurses, sought clarification. On 15 November the colonel was informed by Australia that all nurses who married would automatically vacate their positions.

In the meantime, Staff Nurse Anne Upfield was asked to resign because of her marriage. Bassett notes that this was despite Anne on 24 October asking the matron of her unit for permission to marry Upfield on 3 November. Arthur already had

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[4] A handwritten Certificate of Marriage copied from the marriage register of St. Andrew's Church, Alexandria, and Extract of Certificate of Marriage, District of the British Consul General at Alexandria, states that the marriage of Arthur William Upfield and Anne Douglass was solemnized on 3 November 1915. Archive of William Upfield.

[5] Extract of Birth Entry No. 90516, Office of the Government Statist, Melbourne, states that Anne, daughter of James Douglass and Christina Douglass nee Gray was born at Lake Marinal on 12 September 1882. Upfield was later to write in error in notes prepared for his agent Pamela Ruskin around 1952: "During the first war, in which I was engaged, I married a woman twelve years my senior." Those notes remain in the possession of Pamela Ruskin, Melbourne.

[6] Jan Bassett, *Guns and Brooches: Australian Army Nursing from the Boer War to the Gulf War* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992) 40-41.

permission from his commanding officer to marry, which they did, even though Anne had not received a reply from the hospital to her request. Bassett's account continues that Anne was dispatched back to Melbourne on 14 November 1915. The next day, Bassett says, Arthur angrily wrote to the senator responsible for the ruling, pointing out that other married nurses remained in the service. Further, he claimed, it was unreasonable for the hospital, knowing they were to be married, not to warn of the consequences, for otherwise they would not have married. Arthur saw Anne's career as ruined and her reputation tarnished. He sought an inquiry, or at least his return to Australia so that he could do everything in his power for her support, but all to no avail.

Anne was discharged from the Australian Army Nursing Service in Melbourne on 31 December 1915.[7] Her description was given on the certificate as height 5 feet 6 inches, complexion fair, eyes blue and hair brown. Her conduct and character were recorded as "good" and her intended destination was Barrakee, in Victoria, where her parents farmed.

Arthur remained attached to camps in Egypt. In February 1916, according to his war service records, he received two days confined to barracks and an extra picket for disobeying an order and in April he was admitted to hospital with sunstroke; otherwise he did not come to notice before embarkation to Britain. On 12 June 1916 he marched into Parkhouse Training Depot in England and took leave for a visit to his parents in Gosford. In this year Arthur's second youngest brother Nelson was killed on the Somme.

[7] Certificate of Discharge, Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force. Melbourne, 31 December 1915. Archive of William Upfield.

During this attachment in Britain Arthur found time to write. In early 1917 he sent a story titled "The Love of a Chow" to the *Novel Magazine* in London. It was rejected, but the editor was kind enough to scribble on the slip "try again." Arthur did, twice, and to his great joy was twice accepted. The first success, published in April 1917 and titled "The Water Witch: A dramatic adventure in the Australian bush,"[8] concerns a boundary rider living in a corrugated-iron hut on the Paroo River. The boundary rider meets a beautiful white woman who has been brought up entirely by Aborigines. The rider falls in love with the girl and after overcoming resistance from the Aborigines the pair marry. Upfield, the tough, taciturn bushman with the marshmallow heart was to employ a similar theme for a good part of his writing career.

Arthur's second success with the *Novel Magazine* was published in October 1917. Titled "The Death Heralds: A man's weird adventure in the Australian bush,"[9] the story concerns a young horseman looking for work along the Darling River. He hears the death heralds, a most awful screaming, which later turn out to have a natural cause. The heralds are entwined with a murdering publican, whose lovely sister saves the horseman's life, when the horseman and the girl ride off to marry and live in Wilcannia. And the London *Daily Mail* in 1918 accepted a 300 words sketch, concerning the comings and goings in a training depot of drafts for France, for which Arthur claims he was paid three guineas.[10]

On 14 May 1918 Upfield, according to his war service records, crossed from Southampton to France, where he reinforced 17 Company, Australian Army Service Corps. Two weeks later he was admitted to a field ambulance station, and then a

[8] Arthur W. Upfield, "The Water Witch," *Novel Magazine* No. 145 (1917): 94-99.
[9] Arthur W. Upfield, "The Death Heralds," *Novel Magazine* No. 151 (1917): 15-20.
[10] Arthur W. Upfield, "Drafts for Haig," *Daily Mail* 6 September 1918: 6. Upfield, 'Pour Encourager Les Autres' 2, states that he was paid £3. 3. 0 for the item.

general hospital, with myalgia, which is currently defined as a state of "diffuse muscle pain, usually accompanied by malaise, occurring in many infectious diseases . . ."[11] The complaint is highly unlikely to have been concocted for the purposes of repatriation. It - or general aches and pains which may be ascribed to rheumatism or some similar ailment - makes periodical appearances throughout Upfield's life. On 20 June 1918 he was shipped back to Britain, where he served in two depots.

Upfield on the whole says little about the First World War. In *The Tale of a Pommy* he briefly mentions the subject in very general, philosophical terms, except for a reference to his own, apparently War-caused, neurosis, which I shall touch on later. In Hawke's *Follow My Dust!* the conflict is introduced, then dismissed, in the laconic, supposedly spoken lines "Went up to Queensland before the War. Gallipoli, France and the rest. Only just got back."[12]

Upfield's service was undistinguished. However, at Gallipoli he was undoubtedly for two and a half months under frequent, probably daily, gun fire and by his own account was under rifle fire on two occasions at least. As far as I know, a 1934 newspaper article by Upfield is the only detailed account of his experience under fire. In it he describes in a matter-of-fact way both the shelling and the reactions of those about him. An incident of two rounds of sniper fire plopping into the sand at his feet is also objectively treated. However, there then follow some revealing lines:

> Coming back [from the front-line], Taylor, who was behind me, sighed immediately after he had, so I thought, trodden on and snapped a stick. He had said that he would never leave Anzac. After that my nerves started to go. I missed Taylor's strength.[13]

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[11] "Myalgia," *Mosby's Medical & Nursing Dictionary,* 1986 2nd ed.
[12] Hawke, *Follow* 113.
[13] Arthur W. Upfield, "One Digger's War: Laughter and Death at Gallipoli. No. 4," *Herald* 23 April 1934: 17.

Also in the subject of the War Upfield was much later, again in 1934, to write to his friend, the author, teacher and columnist J. K. Ewers:

> You are wrong when you say the remembrance of Anzac Day recreates old hatreds, because the soldiers never hated anybody even when they pointed guns at the enemy. The fact of which we should be proud is that the War banished for thousands of men the old State jealousies and made them regard Australia as a whole, one country instead of six. Where we might agree is that the mourning should be replaced by joy in that the War brought Australia some good in making many of us nation-minded.[14]

Probably Upfield was prompted to write to Ewers on the Anzac Day theme by his, Upfield's, series of six articles on the War and its aftermath, published in the Melbourne *Herald* in April, 1934.[15] Only the one, Gallipoli, article already referred to gives an account of Upfield under fire. Another makes passing reference to a German air raid experienced while Upfield was nearing the front in France, from where he was, as I have already noted, rescued by myalgia.

Upfield was discharged in London on 15 October, 1919, after five years and 55 days service, with the rank of Honorary Sergeant (Driver).[16] He produces two tantalising items, set around the time of his discharge from the army, when he writes:

> Domestic concerns compelled me to seek discharge from the AIF in London, and I duly signed a paper absolving the Commonwealth Government of all future responsibility concerning my welfare. Then, time having straightened the tangle, I was obliged to pay my own fare back to Australia in whose army I had served for over five years.
> It was much easier to adapt myself to military conditions in 1914 than it was to re-adapt myself to civilian conditions early in 1920. In 1914 there was nothing whatsoever wrong with me. In 1920 there certainly was. I was, unknowingly, suffering from neurosis having its genesis on Gallipoli. I was debilitated, unfit to swing an axe all day, erect a fence, or perform manual labour longer than half an hour, but I secured a civilian clerkship at the ordnance depot, Tidworth . . . .[17]

What are we to make of the 'domestic concerns' and the 'neurosis' references?

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[14] Upfield, letter to J.K. Ewers, 17 July 1934, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers, Perth.

[15] Arthur W. Upfield, "One Digger's War. How the Boys Went into Camp. No. 1," *Herald* 19 April 1934: 22 ; "One Digger's War. All Aboard - and Colombo Invaded. No. 2," 20 April 1934: 22 ; "One Digger's War. Ducks For Christmas Dinner," 21 April 1934: 32 ; "One Digger's War. Laughter and Death at Gallipoli. No. 4," 23 April 1934: 17 ; "One Digger's War. When the Germans Nearly Won. No. 5," 24 April 1934: 20 ; "Why Mourn the Birth of a Nation?" 25 April 1934: 34.

[16] Certificate of Discharge. Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force. London, 16 September 1919. Archive of William Upfield, Melbourne.

[17] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 82-83.

The "domestic concerns" can only be the subject of speculation, since that particular matter is not referred to again by Upfield. It seems likely that Anne, rather than the Gosport Upfields, was at the centre of the concern, for she was pregnant with the baby due in February 1920, but whether the "concerns" were a matter of timing or temperament we are unlikely to discover.

The "neurosis having its genesis on Gallipoli" is only slightly expanded upon in two further references in *The Tale of a Pommy*:

> That there had been something very much wrong with me I came to understand ever more clearly as day by day the dog and I walked leisurely upriver . . .[18]

and

> It required several more years for me to work back to normal mentality after the War. The process was gradual, imperceptible. It was as though my mind, far from being halted in growth by the War, had been thrown back, wilted like a plant in dire need of water.[19]

The earlier-mentioned debilitation aspect of the neurosis suggests a number of things, including depression and the possibility of some sort of connection between the neurosis and the myalgia, which in 1918 caused Upfield's repatriation from France. We shall never know, but it does seem highly likely that at this stage of his life, anyway, Upfield would have been very difficult to live with.

Meanwhile Anne, following her discharge from the Australian Army Nursing Service, had moved across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand. On 27 January 1917 she was authorised under War Regulations to leave for England on the steamer *Rotorua*, scheduled to depart four days later.[20] It is possible, then, that Anne could have arrived in England around April 1917. Where she lived and whether she nursed is not known, but Arthur was in April 1917 at the training depot in the English town of

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18 Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 96.
19 Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 170.
20 Permit to Leave New Zealand. Christchurch, 27 January 1917. Archive of William Upfield.

Parkhouse. Arthur's and Anne's only child, James Arthur, was born on 8 February 1920 near Stockbridge in Hampshire. Many years later when Jean, the wife of J. K. Ewers, was expecting a child Arthur was to write:

> I hope Jean will not be as 'inconsiderate' as Anne. [James] Arthur was born on Sunday afternoon and I had to go into a church to fetch nurse and doctor in the morning of that day.[21]

From probably early 1920 Arthur worked as a civilian clerk in the ordnance depot in Tidworth, Wiltshire, about twelve miles from the Upfields' house in Andover. He eventually became private secretary to the officer-commanding, when, according to *The Tale of a Pommy,* Arthur was ". . . but one step from a permanent post in the British Civil Service - War Office Branch." Upfield notes that deliberately he threw away the opportunity for preferment in the Civil Service, explaining:

> For little more than ten years I had been out of contact with English people, and this time period had made me neither superior nor inferior to the status I had occupied when a young man. Without doubt they and their customs and mental outlook had not changed. It was I who had changed. Little snubs we received from people who thought we did not keep strictly to our place in the scheme of life both annoyed and irritated, and we found it boring to have to consider carefully whether to avoid the snubs . . . My Australian wife and I talked about Australia for ever longer periods and of our separate lives in Australia before the War. With ever-growing clarity I came to see that neither my wife nor I would be happy in England, no matter what height I reached.[22]

Upfield states that he burned all his rejected articles and manuscripts (no detail is provided) to make room in their steamer trunks and in time the family boarded a one-class ship, the *Berrima*, scheduled to arrive in Melbourne in mid-January 1921. His account continues:

> The long voyage did me a great deal of good, and I was just in time to join in the harvest work on my father-in-laws farm. That, and a couple of visits to Melbourne in search of a job, was the world's beginning in showing me "where I got off."[23]

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21 Upfield, letter to J.K. Ewers 25 July 1939, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
22 Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 83.
23 Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 85.

Upfield and his family stayed with Anne's parents on the farm at Barrakee and while Upfield felt "it was my duty to secure a billet to finance a home for my wife and small son," he eschewed a pick and shovel or similar bread-line job. He notes that for a married man to go on the land, unless to his own farm, was quite impossible. In any case, the Repatriation Department had refused him a block of land or vocational training.[24]

On his third visit to Melbourne Upfield took a job in a factory - what sort he doesn't say - and was "commanded by a bell which issued orders four times a day." In the minds of his fellow workers, he notes, was a fear of unemployment; but he sought release:

> It was autumn and one evening when walking in a park I happened to walk through a wisp of smoke arising from a little heap of smouldering gum-tree leaves. After that the damned bell could ring till it was cracked.[25]

Upfield was on the tramp again:

> It was February 27 when I last heard the factory bell, and when I arrived in Wentworth I possessed the sum of five pounds, to the penny. The objective was Wilcannia, for somewhere in that vast district was One Spur Dick, Irish Muldoon, George Bycroft and others I had known, who, if still alive, would surely kill a rabbit if not a fatted calf.[26]

Whether the earlier-referred-to Gallipoli neurosis was a factor in this decision to return to the bush, whether his marriage bonds had greatly weakened, or whether he was simply overwhelmed by despair over his ability to earn a living can only be a matter of speculation. In Hawke's *Follow My Dust!* Arthur is quoted as saying to an old friend just after he took to the road - as I have mentioned in another context : "Was married. It was a failure. Headed for the Back country."[27] Such a laconic remark has a perverse touch of the romantic, but it might also have been a seed partially to justify

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[24] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 87.
[25] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 87.
[26] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 90.
[27] Hawke, *Follow* 113.

Jessica Hawke's own eventual entwinement with Upfield. Probably there were elements of both the neurotic and the disillusioned-with-marriage - unmistakable signs of the latter certainly emerged later - mixed in with what Upfield frequently refers to as "the Lure of the Bush."

5 BACK TO THE BUSH (1921-27)

In *The Tale of a Pommy* Upfield uses this point-of-departure, the taking to the road from Melbourne, to deliver his thoughts on the bush as the place to which he belonged. Similar sentiments are scattered throughout his writings:

> When a man can ride all day without seeing more of man's handiwork than a wire fence: when seeing only unmarred nature in the midst of which sight of a dwelling will give him a mental shock: when he needs must sleep at the foot of a tree or in the lee of a bush because there is no shelter to be had beneath a roof: when he is without human contact for a day, a week, a month, he can say that he lives in Australia, Australia Proper . . . . Praise God that over some two thirds of the continent the rainfall is less than ten inches. Praise God for the droughts. Praise God that the axe and the plough and the machine will never destroy Australia Proper to make room for a further increase in the transplantation of a foreign civilisation . . . For nearly five years I dwelt in Australia Proper before spending five years abroad with the AIF. I was not born in Australia Proper . . . My parents had never touched the continent, therefore I could not have inherited a receptivity to the lure, the call of Australia Proper. And yet five short years of wandering in it had made me its slave in the company of many white men as well as all the blacks and the members of the mid-races.[1]

This time, however, there was a touch of poison in the Lure. Very soon after taking to the road again, Upfield caught up with his old friend, now retired to the banks of the Darling and totally blind, One-Spur Dick. They spent a little time together. Upfield writes:

> The interlude with One-Spur Dick had deepened the mental depression born of the knowledge that I was a failure in that I had been unable to make a home in or near the city for my wife and small son. Added to this was an uneasy conscience that I could have tried harder to find a situation which would have provided that home. I had accepted failure too easily. I had not stoutly resisted the call of Australia Proper. The life road I was now travelling wasn't going to take me upward into the light of prosperity and happiness and contentment. I had lost more on the swings than I had gained on the roundabout, and, because I could not put this knowledge from me, I was not happy. Without these thoughts my present circumstances would have provided a fountain of joy.[2]

Arthur eventually, though, put his "Gallipoli neurosis" behind him.

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1 Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 86, 88-89.
2 Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 115.

According to *The Tale of a Pommy*, Upfield made his way through Wentworth to Wilcannia - near where he saw One-Spur Dick in the incident just mentioned- and with his bike and swag headed up the Darling River in the direction of Bourke. *The Tale of a Pommy* and *Follow My Dust!* between them relate that Upfield took work on stations and on two separate occasions patrolled with camels a section of the dingo fence near the South Australian border with New South Wales. He acquired additional skills and new insights into the bush and its people.

Hawke and Upfield himself write that he observed the phenomenon of a rabbit migration. He watched a river flow uphill[3] and he saw what a great flood could do. He led a strike on one station over a lack of potatoes and found himself, in the end, standing alone and defeated but wiser in the ways of men. The accounts continue that Upfield visited Lake Frome and there experienced a monstrous, throbbing dust storm that blasted sand dunes over everything in its path. One day he watched ants taking tiny, sun-heated stones, including a fragment of glass, down their holes for warmth. He waited thirty two minutes before the glass was brought back to the surface for re-heating.

He reportedly holidayed in Adelaide and later Melbourne, where he stayed at the Menzies Hotel and went broke, from which state he was rescued by his mates on the station from which he'd departed telegraphing £20. This incident highlights one aspect of Upfield's character. If he had money he would spend it. During the good seasons of his life he spent hugely and he tipped well. During the droughts - and in the first half of his life they greatly outnumbered the good times - he more often than

[3] Hawke, *Follow* 158-59. She (or rather Upfield) provides an explanation - the leading edge of the water at first flowed on the real floor of the channel through cracks in the upper clay. Down-river from the observer was a barrier of rock which dammed the water, making it rise to the surface and causing it to flow backwards until it topped the barrier.

not had little choice but to tighten his belt. In none of these accounts, from shortly after his departure from One Spur Dick, is reference made in either *The Tale of a Pommy* or *Follow My Dust!* to Anne or young James Arthur.

One has to be very careful when dates are mentioned by Upfield, but in *The Tale of a Pommy* that which he refers to as "a period of negative living" beginning in Gallipoli, only ended in 1925, when, encouraged by his settler friends Angus and Mary, ambition returned.[4] What Upfield wanted was a place in which to write. He took a job as a relief cook on Albemarle Station, west of Menindee in New South Wales, fairly soon moving permanently as cook to the station outpost named Wheeler's Well. There for nearly three years he wrote, he welcomed visitors, he cooked for the occasional billeted station worker and he trapped rabbits

Upfield had had some recent success in items published. In 1922 the *Hants County Journal,* according to Arthur's note, printed a series of three articles on Australia.[5] And the Broken Hill newspaper, the *Barrier Miner*, in 1924 published a series of four pieces titled "The Blight."[6] Polemical articles, the third of what is believed to be the *Hants* series concerned Federal Government budget deficiencies and unemployment, including what Upfield saw as a new phenomenon - the appearance on the road of whole-family, as well as individual, sundowners. The *Barrier* series, with few changes,

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[4] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 178: "Three woman have exerted pressure on my life: my mother, my wife and Mary. Of all the people I have known in Australia Proper, two are outstanding in their influence on me - a man and a woman, both courageous and both true. They stood up like tall lighthouses to encourage me with their example as well as with their friendship - Mary and One Spur Dick. A man is indeed fortunate to have known one or the other: I am doubly fortunate by having known both."

[5] Upfield's note on a clipping headed "Australia Today. 111. - Government Waste and Failure," above Upfield's by-line reads: " Series of three articles H.T. Journal £1.1.0 each Oct 1922." The journal is thought to be the *Hants. County Journal*, but I have been unable to confirm this, the date of the article or the page number.

[6] Arthur W. Upfield, "The Blight 1," *Barrier Miner* 4 October 1924: 3; "The Blight 11," 11 October 1924: 3; "The Blight 111," 18 October 1924: 2; "The Blight of Death 1V," 25 October 1924: 6.

could well have been written in the new millennium. Upfield decries the withering of rural towns, the departing populations and the closing of hotels and churches. "It may well be that the Japs will come and develop the great natural resources we have so dismally failed to utilise," comments Upfield. The fault, he suspects, lies not only with the drought, but heavy taxation on the squatters for services they do not receive in the bush, together with the increasing ownership of stations by absentee landlord companies:

> A few men living in the shelter of the cities hold vast areas of land, thousands of acres, on which never feed a hoof. Unlike the average farmer who owns a small holding, they take all possible out of the land and put nothing back. Like vampires they are sucking the vitality out of what should be a populous, go-ahead country . . .

The inefficient policing by the government of legislated-for leasehold improvements is also attacked, as well as the unfairness of the land balloting system, described as a lottery of luck. Upfield is speaking for the ordinary man of the bush.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Upfield manages to weave his general political views into his first two Bony novels. The narrative voice of *The Barrakee Mystery* disparages in full paragraphs the Land Board allotments as well as the blight of absentee landlord companies.[7] In *The Sands of Windee* workers' wages and arbitration court award rates are woven into the tale.[8]

In 1926 *Wide World Magazine* gave Upfield a big boost by publishing an article on dingoes, accepting another (published much later) on fur trapping and asking for a

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[7] Arthur W. Upfield, *The Barrakee Mystery* (1929; London: Pan, 1970) 49, 51. See also 101, 105.

[8] Arthur W. Upfield, *The Sands of Windee* (1931; Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1958) 90, 144, 145.

10,000 words article on the opportunities awaiting migrants in Australia.[9] However, it was his first mystery novel which occupied most of his time.

After about a year at Wheeler's Well, according to *Follow My Dust!*, Upfield in 1926 held a rewritten manuscript, that which was eventually published in London by Hutchinson in 1929 as *The Barrakee Mystery* and which was to introduce to the world the part-Aboriginal, part-European fictional character, Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte. According to Hawke, Upfield for the time being did nothing with the manuscript, for he doubted his work, especially when compared with other writers. Upfield's mother regularly posted to him the *Times Literary Supplement* and in it Upfield some time previously had been shocked to see a review in a side column, which he thought of as for the "also-rans," of a work by the Australian writer and historian, Royal Tasman Bridges, whom Upfield admired.[10]

According to Hawke, a few months after supposedly completing his mystery manuscript Upfield saw in the *Times Literary Supplement* a literary agent's advertisement, the tenor of which set it apart from the others. Upfield wrote to the agent, George Frankland, and there started an association which was to last until Frankland's death in 1940. Hawke continues that Frankland criticized, dissected and tore apart the manuscript of *The Barrakee Mystery*, sending the pieces back together with a bill for three guineas. Arthur found the critique straight and true, but for the moment he set *Barrakee* aside in order to start work on something which had been gestating for a while, *The House of Cain*.

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[9] Arthur W. Upfield, "Fighting the Dingo," *Wide World Magazine* April 1926: 441-446. A one-paragraph follow-up appeared in the November 1926 issue. "Fur Getting in Australia" appeared in October 1927: 64 - 70. "The Land of Opportunity" was published in August 1928: 364 - 373 and was continued in September 1928.

[10] Hawke, *Follow* 177.

A straight thriller, *The House of Cain* features an unmarried, forty-years-old-returned-soldier station manager, a spirited young woman and in a supporting role a somewhat dandified Melbourne white sleuth named Detective-Sergeant Oakes. Set in Melbourne and northern South Australia, possibly around the Sturt Stony Desert, for Innaminka is named, the tale centres on a remote homestead owned by a serial wife-poisoning American millionaire who is an outwardly gracious, if eccentric, host to murderers whom he has rescued from the law. Upfield's spare hours were spent in the story's construction, interrupted by a few months away from Wheeler's Well trapping rabbits. This manuscript, too, was dispatched to George Frankland and to Upfield's great joy was accepted by Hutchinson in London and, later, Dorrance in America.[11] Meanwhile, the pieces of *The Barrakee Mystery* were re-shaped and re-fitted and sent back to Frankland, this time with success.

According to *Follow My Dust!* Upfield took leave after signing the contract for *The House of Cain* and visited near Wilcannia his mentors, Angus and Mary, who had been so encouraging of his writing. Hawke states they told Upfield that they prayed each night that he would write a book, so Upfield's success was a wonderful thing for them. "Think about it sometimes…And do remember to read John 14, verse 14."[12] Upfield continued his holiday by train to Adelaide, where he was befriended by a book shop owner. Hawke states that the bookseller urged Upfield to write about sex, because that sells, and he freely espoused that which never failed to anger Upfield - "People don't want to read about Australia." Hawke continues that Upfield did then

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[11] Arthur W. Upfield, *The House of Cain* (London: Hutchinson, 1928) and (Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1929). See also the edition used in this study (San Francisco: Dennis McMillan, 1983). The work has not yet been published in Australia.

[12] Hawke, *Follow* 184. The King James Version of John 14 :14 reads "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."

try his hand at a novel of " 'It' in satin pants," but failed.[13] I am unable, however, to find any other reference to this attempt.

Sex in his novels, or rather the lack of it, is something that is occasionally touched upon by Upfield. For example, he wrote to the editor of the *West Australian* in 1931 protesting against views recently expressed by Norman Lindsay:

> Attention is again drawn to the Australian censorship of books by the cabled outburst of Norman Lindsay in an article published in a literary journal. A protest against Mr. Lindsay's protest may be justified in case our censorship becomes more lax than it is. . . . It does appear that the surest road to wide publicity is to clothe, with board-school prose, the hackneyed ideas expressed on the walls of any public convenience. One must pity people who are forced to adopt this course to obtain notoriety. Unable to think originally, unable to produce original plots . . . . These people, whose mental development must have stopped at the age of 19, would have us believe they are the intelligentsia, when what they know and what they think is thought and known by the inhabitants of a monkey cage.[14]

To J. K. Ewers in 1935 he wrote:

> Sex does not take a big part in human life . . . . To write sex one should do it like Wilde or Elinor Glyn and stick to the theme from first to last. Any semi-sex lunatic could write about sex - you find it on the wall of public conveniences . . . . [15]

And in 1937 to Walter Cousins of Angus & Robertson he said:

> There is no sex in my books, which is a severe handicap, and whilst my mother is alive I do not intend to indulge in it.[16]

Whilst he knew that sex did indeed sell in popular literature, Arthur's upbringing - more particularly the influence of his grandmother, the aunts and his mother - meant that he was uncomfortable with any public display of the subject. Upfield's natural inclination was towards a romantic view of love, which he tended to handle a little awkwardly in his novels.

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13 Hawke, *Follow* 186.
14 Upfield, letter, *West Australian* 12 December 1931: 5.
15 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers 15 July 1935, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
16 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson 8 January 1937 [but in error dated 8 January 1936], Angus & Robertson Collection.

In due course Arthur received six presentation copies of *The House of Cain*, of which one of the *Times Literary Supplement's* anonymous reviewers commented, after a quite detailed outline: "It is a remarkable and original story, told with ability."[17] After George Frankland's fees and the copy-typiste's bill there may not have been a great deal left over for Arthur,[18] who would no doubt have been astonished to learn that at least one collector in the year 2000 was prepared to pay up to £Stg800 for a copy of the book.[19]

After a stint as a full-time trapper in an area around Lake Victoria in western New South Wales- in one ten-weeks period he claimed to have collected over eight hundred fox pelts which fetched £300 - [20] a drought put Upfield on the road again. With another man he left New South Wales and drove a truck across the Nullarbor to Western Australia.

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[17] Rev. of *House of Cain, Times Literary Supplement* 1368 19 April 1928: 293.

[18] Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., letter to George Frankland, 1 October 1927, archive of William Upfield: "[We] would be glad to publish [*The House of Cain*] on the following terms - Twenty five pounds (£25) on publication in advance and on account of a royalty of ten per cent. of the published price on all copies sold up to 3,500; twelve and a half per cent. from 3,500 to 5,000 and 15% after 5,000. The usual terms for cheaper editions and Mr. Upfield to give us the offer of his next three novels." Upfield's letter to J.K. Ewers of 14 November 1930 states that Frankland's fees were £2.5.0 to read and criticize a manuscript, when if it were deemed good enough he would arrange for it to be typed and corrected at a cost of £20 plus the proof-reading charge, sending the author a carbon copy of the work. As Upfield observed, "This uses up the usual £25 royalty advance."

[19] Advertisement - "Wanted." *Book and Magazine Collector*, London, 201 (December 2000): 152.

[20] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 228.

6 THE WEST AND THE RABBIT-PROOF FENCE

(1927-29)

Upfield makes only a very brief reference to his earliest days in Western Australia, but according to Hawke he spent the summer of late 1927 clearing growth in the south-west of Western Australia amongst the giant karri and superb jarrah hardwood forests. He moved in winter to the eastern wheat belt on the Kalgoorlie side of Merredin, hard country where often the riches of a successful season barely cover the losses of the previous year's failure. A little time was also spent in Dongara, a small and pleasant fishing and farming centre south of Geraldton.[1] There the westerlies fly across from Africa and trees grow horizontally. Arthur then, around October 1928, accepted work on the Government payroll patrolling the no. 1 rabbit-proof fence.[2]

F. H. Broomhall writes that the no. 1 rabbit-proof fence started at Starvation Boat Harbour (west of Esperance on the south coast) and stretched up 1,139 miles to Cape Kerandren on the north-west coast. Completed in 1907, it was maintained by eight boundary riders, for whom along the track were constructed huts every thirty miles or so, together with wells, soak holes, rain-sheds and, where necessary, tanks blasted out of the solid rock. The patrolmen's duties were to keep the fence and its gates in good repair, to cut scrub to a prescribed width either side of the fence and to rake and burn leaves and rubbish blown against the wire which otherwise might create a fire hazard. The trap yards built at intervals into the fence required emptying of rabbits, dingo baits needed to be laid and on some sections rain gauges had to be

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1 Hawke, *Follow* 187.
2 Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 237

checked.[3] The aim was to confine the rabbits to the dry areas east of the fence but while the idea of isolating the rabbit was good the fence was to prove ineffective.

The house of the rabbit inspector, to whom Upfield and his fellow patrolmen were responsible, and the main administrative centre for the southern section of the fence, were in the small, eastern wheat belt town of Burracoppin. The Perth to Kalgoorlie highway, railway and water pipeline passes through Burracoppin on the east-west axis and the fence crossed them about a mile out on the north-south axis. Upfield's section of the fence started at Burracoppin and stretched northward for 163 miles, passing through marginal wheat land into sparse pastoral country and ending at the Government-owned station at Dromedary, where camels were bred for the fence patrol men. Once clear of the marginal farming land there was not a homestead for 100 miles until Dromedary. Upfield's line was fairly easy to maintain, compared with that which he had met in other places, for there was a reasonably good track alongside the fence and no sand dunes to smother the wire.[4]

Transport for Upfield was a roofed, unsprung, two-wheeled dray with iron tyres drawn by two camels in tandem. When the camels were released prop shafts were lowered to keep the dray level and canvas side sheets could be dropped, for the dray also served as a dwelling. His routine was mostly to walk - never more than sixteen miles a day - behind the dray attending to small jobs on the fence. At night the camels were tethered separately, each with a pile of scrub feed cut for them. The day

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[3] F. H. Broomhall, *The Longest Fence in the World* (Carlisle WA: Hesperian Press, 1991) 4-6.
[4] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 21 July 1930, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers; and Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 230-38.

started early so that the afternoons could be spent reading in the dray. In the evening, by the light of a hurricane lamp, Upfield worked on his novels and articles.[5]

Upfield wrote that when asked if he found the solitude burdensome, he would reply "There is no time to be lonely." He asserted that in one week a boundary rider would read, and in greater variety, more than the average city dweller over a year. His account continues:

> The only part of the life that palls is those windless periods, when for days and nights not a leaf stirs in country where there is but little bird life and no animal life. When the wind is first heard in the distance, roaring across the top of the scrub, one feels inexpressible relief.[6]

Around February 1929, about four months after Upfield started work on the fence, his second published novel, *The Barrakee Mystery*, which of course introduced Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte to the world, was produced in Britain by Hutchinson. Set on a sheep station in the far west of New South Wales, the plot concerns the mysterious death of King Henry, an Aborigine, during a thunderstorm and the emerging Aboriginality of one of the principle characters. Bony, through his familiarity with the bush and its people, and his acute powers of observation and reasoning, solves the mystery and contributes his own humane brand of justice. The *Times Literary Supplement*, in its "New Books and Reprints" column, commented:

> A mystery story whose plot is original yet entirely probable, whose setting is unusual, and whose characters are neither puppets nor monsters, deserves recognition. . . .Because the local police fail even to find a clue a half-caste bush detective from Queensland is put in charge of the case. This man is both remarkable and likeable . . .[7]

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[5] Arthur W. Upfield, "Patrolling the World's Longest Fence," *The Murchison Murders* (circa 1934; Miami Beach, Fl: Dennis McMillan Publications, 1987) 57-68 and Hawke, *Follow* 189-90.

[6] Upfield, "Patrolling the World's Longest Fence," *The Murchison Murders* 64. With his "little bird life and no animal life" Upfield is perhaps taking a touch too much licence.

[7] Rev. of *The Barrakee Mystery, Times Literary Supplement* 1417 28 March 1929: 262.

The Australian reviews were, except for the *Age*, good,[8] but the English critiques were at this time generally considered more important because essentially Australian works had to be crafted to find favour with English publishers for an English readership. Australian writers, including Upfield, had much to say about this over the years. *The Barrakee Mystery*, which was never to be published in Australia, was printed in America in 1965 as *The Lure of the Bush* to generally favourable reviews and for a public well familiar with Upfield.[9]

Whilst *The Barrakee Mystery* introduces a not-yet-fully-developed Bony, this popular fiction text, the first of twenty nine featuring Bony, presents a significant counter-statement to the prevailing discourses. In brief, we have here in the principal character an intelligent, part-Aboriginal, commissioned police officer in an era when part Aboriginal commissioned officers in any service were unheard of and one who is a university graduate (an achievement not to be emulated in real life until the 1960s). As well there is a narrative voice sympathetic towards, and familiar with, Aboriginal society. The structure of the subsequent Bony novels, whilst varying in location and

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[8] Rev of *The Barrakee Mystery*, *Age* 1 June 1929: 6: "[*Barrakee*] suffers like his first, *The House of Cain*, from fantastic elements in the plot . . . . But in Mr. Upfield's hands the motif becomes crude and unconvincing. For the half-caste [referring to a principal character, not Bony] is the son of a white woman and a black father, whereas the idea of a white woman submitting to the embraces of a blackfellow is repellent . . . . Mr. Upfield writes extremely well . . . . Many of the scenes and incidents in his book are handled with considerable literary skill: but the plot in its main features is an outrage on common sense."

[9] Revs. of *The Lure of the Bush* [in Australia and Britain *The Barrakee Mystery*], *The Book Review Digest.* Ed. Dorothy P. Davison and Josephine Samudis. 61st annual cumulation. (New York: H.W. Wilson Coy., 1966) 1277: *Best Sellers* 15 June 1965: 148: "It is a pleasure to read this first volume, not only because of the skill and unique ability of Bony . . . but because it is rich in depicting the lore and the hardships of Australian back country . . . . " *Book Week* 11 July 1965: 19: ". . . the brilliant Upfield is no longer with us; but as long as books are read, his anthropological presentation of Australia . . . will stimulate the intellectually curious." Anthony Boucher, *New York Times Book Review* 20 June 1965: 25: "[This book] is, in many respects, a pretty bad book. It is phenomenally long and slow, the prose seems somewhat antiquated even for 1928, and the treatment of interracial relations would meet with no objections in South Africa or Mississippi. But the germ of Upfield's later magnificence is here . . . and Bony, on this first appearance, is already himself - and by his very existence contradicting all that the novel asserts about racial mixtures."

plot, do not differ markedly from *The Barrakee Mystery*. Nearly always the bush, too, is a participant and the reader learns something new.

In order to frame Upfield's text in its surrounding discourses it is necessary for the next three chapters to leave Upfield on his fence patrol and consider firstly Australian legislative and socio-cultural discourses around the time of Bony's appearance. That chapter will be followed by a sketch of Aboriginal representation in Australian literature in a period up to the late 1920s and, for contextual reasons, an outline of my theory on the genesis of Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte.

7 ABORIGINES IN SOCIETY

Upfield's life and work - and his place in that tableau of pioneering writers in the centring of Aboriginal characters in fiction - necessitates a reconsideration of attitudes towards Aborigines in the Australian socio-cultural environment in the years to and through the 1920s to the early 1930s, that is, in the period more or less straddling the 1929 debut of Bony. The historical influences of, for instance, a lingering Social Darwinism and the construction of a "White Australia" ideology are not central to this section, the purpose of which is through an eye-glass to present a picture.

One has to begin, of course, with the discourse of legislation - the iron frame around the sepia photograph - which is most succinctly covered by C.D. Rowley in his first volume, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society: Aboriginal Policy and Practice,* of a three volume work.[1] In 1909, around eight years after Federation, the New South Wales Aborigines' Protection Board was granted the first of statutory powers for regulating who could live on reserves and for removing children from families to be trained as domestic servants in single-sex institutions.[2] By 1911 every State except Tasmania had enacted special Aboriginal legislation, the emphasis of which was, says Rowley, protection and restriction.[3] In 1911, also, responsibility for the administration of Aborigines in the Northern Territory passed to the Commonwealth Government, where for constitutional reasons it remained until 1967.[4] For my purposes here, the

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1 C. D. Rowley, *Aboriginal Policy and Practice,* 3 vols. (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970). Vol. 1, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society.*

2 T. Donaldson, "Australian Tales of Mystery and Miscegenation," *Meanjin* 50, Nos 2 and 3 (Winter, Spring 1991): 344.

3 Rowley, 227.

4 Rowley, 222.

Northern Territory Aboriginals Act of 1910, passed by the South Australian Government in preparation for the Commonwealth's administration, may serve as an exemplar for those of the other States. In sections of this legislation I am reminded of Homi Bhaba's already-noted idea that "the concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority; the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation."

Rowley notes that in the Northern Territory Aboriginal Act of 1910:

> The definition of 'Aboriginal' . . . included 'half-castes' with Aboriginal partners and those under 16 years of age. 'Half-caste' meant anyone with an Aboriginal parent or grandparent. In addition there was a special category of 'half-caste' including any offspring of an Aboriginal mother and non-Aboriginal father; this would include a person whose mother had an Aboriginal grandparent.[5]

The Chief Protector was the legal guardian of every Aboriginal child and "half-caste" child, irrespective of whether the child had a living parent or relative, until such time as the child attained eighteen years of age. Subsequent amendments produce a significant ambivalence.

Rowley continues that the Aboriginals Department created under the Act determined the establishment and supervision of reserves and the leasing of land to missions. Only Aborigines and authorised persons could enter reserves. A Protector could remove Aborigines from any camps in or near a township and the police could expel any individual Aborigine from a town for "loitering." There were barriers raised in other directions - marriage between an Aborigine and a non-Aborigine required Ministerial approval and, in addition, it was an offence for a non-authorised, non-Aboriginal person to be found within five chains of a camp where there were

[5] Rowley, 231.

"aboriginals or female half-castes."[6] There were further restrictions, all seemingly aimed at minimising growth in the "half-caste" population and assisting in a policy of containment towards the Aboriginal population. There was soon to emerge an ambivalent counter-policy of assimilation.

An extensively revised Ordinance of the Northern Territory (No. 9 of 1918) replaced all previous Aboriginal legislation, broadened the category of those to be protected and formed a base work right through to the 1950s. Rowley observes that the definition of "Aboriginal" now embraced all female "half-castes" (unless they were married to males of "substantial" European descent) and all "half-caste" males under eighteen (previously sixteen) years of age. It became an offence for a non-Aboriginal male to "habitually consort" with an Aboriginal or "half-caste" woman. In addition, there was an ambivalent separation of town and country districts, thus clearing the way for regulating the employment of Aborigines in the towns without interfering with the pastoral industry, which relied heavily on the labour of Aborigines.[7]

The 1918 Ordinance included clauses allowing any mission station (or similar private institution) to be declared an Aboriginal institution for the care of Aboriginal and "half-caste" children, when the child so placed came under the control of the mission superintendent. Rowley notes that "half-caste" children seem to have been the major concern,[8] for they were still emerging despite the prophylactic qualities of legislation. He later makes the comment that:

> These missions saw their social and educational function as preparing the people, by their efforts in tuition and conversion, to participate in European society. In practice their great material achievement was to present, within the tribal lands, enough of the counter-

[6] Rowley, 231-32.
[7] Rowley, 235-37.
[8] Rowley, 236.

> attractions needed in food supplies, clothes, steel and other industrial goods to keep people there. By so doing, they made possible an interim process of adjustment based on Aboriginal decisions for Aboriginal purposes.[9]

At a Canberra conference in 1937 of the State and Commonwealth governments' Aboriginal authorities- described by Reynolds as "a major attempt to coordinate state and federal policy"[10] - the matter of part-Aborigines was of great concern. After noting with irony "history showed that Aborigines 'died out,'" Rowley says:

> [The conference] saw [the part-Aborigines'] future as absorption in the 'white' population; and in this sense 'assimilation' seemed to offer the final solution of the 'problem.' Aborigines would continue to 'die out'; the problem then was to limit half-caste births, turn those with 'dark blood' back to Aboriginal society to share its fate, and absorb those with 'lighter blood' into White Australia.[11]

It would seem, however, that at some time before the 1937 conference of governments above-mentioned, official policy in most instances towards Aborigines had already moved from one of containment to one of assimilation. It was not until 1964 and the repeal of The Northern Territory Welfare Ordinance that Aborigines were freed from a number of controls in a significant move towards equality.[12] Throughout Australia enabling changes emerged in other legislations.

There was thus in the Aboriginal Act of the Northern Territory through the 1920s and early 1930s (and in the States' legislation) a formally established "separateness." Aborigines were cordoned off by legislation threaded with ambivalence and difference - in for example definitions, resource separation/utilisation and containment/assimilation; they were subordinated to whites. It may well be argued that society's perceptions shaped the legislation, rather than the other way around,

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[9] Rowley, 246-47
[10] Henry Reynolds, *Dispossession* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989) 207.
[11] Rowley, 286.
[12] Rowley, 241.

but the legislation would undoubtedly have reinforced dominant society perceptions of the indigene as an inferior subject.

I turn now to the discourse of selected newspapers in a sampling of their stories concerning Aborigines around the decade of the 1920s and in so doing I draw in part on my Master of Arts dissertation of 1997.[13] The stories, displayed for their insights towards Aborigines in that period, have been edited by me and are presented in date sequence. Bhabha's concept of cultural difference and its focus on the ambivalence of cultural authority in its attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy, here also is illustrated strongly in places.

The Sydney *Bulletin* - which then bore on its editorial masthead "The National Australian Newspaper. Australia for the White Man"[14] - in late 1919 carried an editorial against the reintroduction of "colored labor" into Queensland. Headed "The Multitude of Colored Laborites" the item reads in part:

> The blackest men - the African kind - never annoyed Australia and never wanted to. The trouble lies with moderately dark men from India . . . pale yellow men from China . . . and pale brown men from Japan . . . . The Kanaka - a scarce and feeble and transitory person - was once imported [into Queensland]. . . . The local aboriginal must, of course, be classed for industrial purposes as a white man. This is the only country he has, and there are reasons, including the wrath of God and the conscience of man, why he shouldn't be expelled or disqualified. But he is so few and so futile that Australia has no color problems save imported ones . . . . If the "nigger" is brought here he is under Supervision . . . .[15]

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[13] Travis B. Lindsey "Arthur William Upfield: Against the Tide," MA diss., Murdoch University, 1997, 29 - 37. I culled the weekly [Sydney] *Bulletin* and the dailies the [Melbourne] *Age*,[Melbourne] *Argus* and the *West Australian* for stories concerning Aborigines in the period from around 1920 to 1955 at arbitrary five year intervals, but in a pattern such that a reasonable unfolding over that period could be claimed.

[14] From 1880 until 1908 the editorial page of the *Bulletin* bore the slogan "Australia for the Australians." On 7 May 1908 that slogan was changed to "Australia for the White Man" and this was carried through the years until 1960. On 3 August 1960, on pages 56-57, the magazine published an article titled "White Australia Under Fire." On 7 December 1960 the editorial page was revamped and the slogan "Australia for the White Man" disappeared.

[15] James Edmond, "The Multitude of Colored Laborites," editorial, *Bulletin* 4 December 1919: 6.

The editorial four times employs the term "nigger(s)," always in inverted commas, as well as, unmarked, "tinted stranger," "tinted brother" and "tinted races." The reference to "the local aboriginal" sits strangely ambivalent in the context of the editorial, but the reason has been explained, at least to the satisfaction of the editorial writer.

Murders and shootings were common. In September 1923 the *West Australian* reported a case being heard before a judge and jury, where the accused, a medical practitioner named Haslam of Denial Bay in South Australia, was charged with having wilfully wounded with intent to kill Dick Wombat, an Aborigine. The accused is reported to have claimed after the shooting that "at the time of the incident he was drunk with chloroform, as he had been operating." According to evidence, Haslam returned to his residence next door to the hospital to find his household in great distress, for Wombat had threatened to kill his wife Annie Wombat and her child, both of whom were apparently sheltering in the house. The report continues:

> (Haslam) said he would frighten (Dick Wombat) and went outside with a repeating pea rifle in which he always carried an empty shell. He pulled the trigger, and the gun went off. Something rushed away in the darkness. He fired six shots to attract attention. Next morning he was told that Dick had been shot.[16]

The jury found Haslam guilty of common assault.

In June 1927 the *Argus* reported that, consequent upon the findings of a Royal Commission into alleged atrocities near the Forrest River Mission in the Kimberley, two police constables had been arrested and charged with having in 1926 wilfully murdered an Aboriginal male named Boondung. (The Royal Commission itself arose as a result of disclosures by the head of the Forrest River Mission.) The report says in part:

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[16] "Aborigine Wounded. A Doctor on Trial," *West Australian* 6 September 1923: 11.

> The cases arise out of the expedition of police, civilians and black trackers, headed by [the two constables] which went out in June to arrest a black named Lumbia on a charge of having murdered Frederick William Hay, part-owner of Nulla Nulla Station, and it is alleged that while the party was out 11 natives were shot and burned.[17]

A magistrate in Perth dismissed the charges on the grounds of insufficient evidence.[18] The Forrest River Mission incidents, however, have emerged as a subject of controversy in West Australian history. Neville Green's *The Forrest River Massacres* is one signal contribution to the debate.[19]

Also in 1927, an Adelaide-headquartered organisation known as the Aborigines' Protection League organised a petition to Canberra seeking the establishment of a "native State" in northern Australia for the Aboriginal people. According to the *Age*, the petition suggests that:

> . . . a large area of land, such as Arnhem Land near the Gulf of Carpenteria, should be handed over to the natives, to be retained and managed by themselves (with such assistance as may be necessary), according to their own laws and customs, but with a prohibition against cannibalism and cruel rites.[20]

The reference to cannibalism is a curiosity which may possibly have been inserted to make the petition more acceptable to white signatories.

Census data are influential inputs into social policies, so the January 1928 release of the latest census of the Aboriginal population, when the white population was probably less than six million,[21] would have been received with interest. The *West Australian* reported:

> "The fate of the aboriginal population being considered of importance to Australia," says the Director of the Commonwealth Bureau of Statistics in a special report, "and of interest to science throughout the world, the desirability of making a sustained effort to

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17 "Murdered Aborigines," *Argus* 1 June 1927: 20 and 2 June 1927: 11.

18 "Alleged Native Murder," *West Australian* 11 August 1927: 11.

19 Neville Green, *The Forrest River Massacres* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995).

20 "Proposed Aboriginal State," *Age* 19 April 1927: 8.

21 Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1928) 881, says that at census date 4 April 1921 the population of Australia, exclusive of full-blood Aborigines, was 5,435,734. The next census of the white population was not due until 1931.

> procure reliable information about them was brought up for discussion at the conference of Statisticians held in Sydney in October, 1925. The matter received the hearty support of the conference and it was decided to conduct regular censuses."

The scientific detachment of the Director's statement - something perhaps not entirely misplaced in a statistician - does nonetheless read a little strangely now in its separation from the *manner* of a people's being.

The report continues, and I quote it in some detail for its economic portrait and because it demonstrates that contrary to then-popular belief the Aborigine was not continuing to disappear:

> The director states that the results of the last three censuses were: 1925, 62,394 full bloods, 13,393 half-castes; 1926, 59,296 full bloods, 15,102 half-castes; 1927, 59,945 full bloods, 15,468 half-castes. The figures for half-castes might be considered fairly reliable. They pointed to a steady increase in their number, averaging about 1,000 per year. The figure for full bloods suggested that the decline of true aboriginals has been arrested. It would, however, at the present stage of statistical inquiry, be unwise to draw conclusions from such figures. The aboriginal census, 1927, the report continues, was a great advance towards ascertaining the extent to which the aboriginal population has entered into the economic life of Australia. No information at this point was furnished by New South Wales, but the figures of full blood aboriginals in European employ for the whole of Australia would be about 10,000, and for half-castes upwards of 4,000. On the part of Queensland there was a marked tendency to gather the aboriginals into Government and mission stations; only about 14 per cent. were entered as leading nomadic lives.
>
> It was hoped that the aboriginal census to be taken on June 30, 1928, would be another step nearer to statistical truth regarding the aborigines, who, ever since the discovery of Australia, had attracted universal interest, and might be destined to play a greater part in the development of tropical Australia than we at present realise.
>
> The aborigines were distributed throughout Australia as follows:- New South Wales, 964 full-bloods, 5,829 half-castes; Victoria, 56 full-bloods, 506 half-castes; Queensland, 13,523 full-bloods, 4,210 half-castes; South Australia, 2,149 full-bloods, 1,554 half-castes; Western Australia, 22,995 full bloods, 2587 half-castes; Northern Australia, 20,258 full bloods, 782 half-castes.[22]

Despite the caveat on the numbers, there was reason to think that what was commonly referred to as the "problem" was *not* dying away, and it seems probable that this and like data were influential in shifting Government policy from one of, in the terms of the day, containment to one of assimilation. The Aborigine was a social

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[22] "Fate of Aborigines. Results of Census," *West Australian* 24 January 1928: 8.

and economic reality in what was for great numbers of them a hostile cultural environment. One year after the delivery of this statistical report the part-Aboriginal, part-European, Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte was to enter that environment.

The Brooks case, an account of which follows, was in its stark revelations perhaps to mark the beginning of the end of public tolerance towards violent treatment of the Aborigine. For that reason, and for the social attitudes embedded in them, I quote from the newspaper reports at some length. In September 1928 the *West Australian*, under the heading "Native Murderers. Cattle Killing Raids. Hostility to White Men," reported:

> A message from Alice Springs states that since the police returned from arresting natives for the murder of Fred Brookes [sic], a pastoralist [sic, later nominated as a dogger and then as a prospector], bush natives have again descended to the station of the squatter named Stafford, one of whose bullocks they killed before Brookes. Prowling about at night, they have . . . killed more cattle . . . .

Interestingly, some historical and social background to the event is supplied in the same press account by a parliamentarian, who is reported thus:

> Referring to the messages from Alice Springs, Dr. H. Basedow, M.H.R., formerly special Aborigines Commissioner for the Northern Territory and South Australia, said that the opposition by natives to the white man in those particular localities had been pronounced ever since the white men had gone there. . . . [The explorer] Ernest Giles met with opposition . . . . There had also been attacks on the Barrow Creek telegraph station. . . . Since those incidents he could recall instances where travellers had been molested by the aborigines, but it seemed these attacks were actuated by interference with the native women.
> From reports given by the police, it would appear that Brookes was attacked simply because of the supplies of flour and other material which they knew he kept. The police report also stated that it was necessary to adopt or resort to extreme measures, and he [i.e. Basedow] took it that most of the natives were shot on sight, as usually happened in nine out of ten such cases. Consequently, the latest advices would indicate an avenging party….
> "The cause of the trouble is undoubtedly the killing of cattle by the natives," Dr. Basedow added, "but they are doing it in all conscientiousness, believing themselves justly entitled to do so, seeing that the white man never hesitates to help himself to the natives' game . . . ." [23]

[23] "Native Murderers," *West Australian* 5 September 1928: 15.

Dr. Basedow's interpretation of the term "extreme measures" was to prove quite right.

The Central Australia Supreme Court sat in Darwin on 7 November to try the two Aborigines charged with having murdered Brooks [sic] in August. The Court heard that a "lubra" was sent to Brooks' camp as a decoy and held his arms while he was ambushed and clubbed by eight attackers. One of the accused said that the police tracked the group over sixty miles through sandy soil, when, the group showing fight, the police shot all but the two accused.[24] The next day the report continues:

> . . . Constable Murray [the officer in charge of the police party] stated that seventeen aborigines, including two women, were killed during the police chase of the alleged murderer . . . . He came up with six native men and 25 women and children. They showed fight and threw boomerangs from a distance of 80 yards. The police opened fire and killed the six. He considered boomerangs were effective at 150 yards.
> Asked why he did not shoot to wound instead of kill, the constable stated, "What could I do with a wounded black-fellow, hundreds of miles away from civilisation?"
> Fights occurred with hostile blacks on three occasions, continued the constable. They threw spears and other weapons and ran away. The police fire was very effective and none escaped.
> The principle witness, a small black boy, who said he saw the murder [of Brooks], was much discredited under cross-examination today, and after a short retirement, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty.[25]

The matter did not, however, rest there.

The alleged killing of 17 Aborigines during the attempt to arrest the murderer of Brooks, and an early suggestion that the attack on Brooks was motivated by extreme hunger - the Centre was in the grip of a severe drought - caused the Federal government to establish an inquiry into the cause of the recent hostility of Aborigines in the Centre resulting in the murders of three white men.[26] Within a few weeks the inquiry was constituted as an independent board of three, comprising as chairman a

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[24] "Alice Springs Murder," *West Australian* 8 November 1928: 18.
[25] "Alice Springs Murder," *West Australian* 9 November 1928: 21.
[26] "Killing of Natives," *West Australian* 12 November 1928: 12.

Mr. O'Kelly, who was the Police Magistrate at Cairns, the Government Resident of Central Australia and the Police Commissioner of South Australia.[27] (This composition, however, was not everywhere seen as truly independent.) The inquiry started in January 1929 and I give here the views of some of the witnesses because of the further insights they provide into the prevailing attitudes towards Aborigines.

The Rev. E. E. Kramer, "a well known missionary of the Aborigines' Friends' Association," in his appearance before the Board supported the view that missionaries caused trouble between blacks and whites. "Young missionaries not understanding the aboriginal temperament treated them as equals, and provoked trouble by allowing too much familiarity." On the same day a Mr. Maynard, who was a drover in Central Australia for 25 years, said he thought that the cause of the recent shootings was an influx into the area of people who did not know how to treat them. "The aborigine had to be treated firmly and made to work for his living."[28] The head of the Hermannsburg mission station said he believed in legalised corporal punishment for blacks who misbehaved[29] and later, in other locations, six settlers gave evidence, including an elderly widow named Isabel Price who ran a sheep and cattle lease 120 miles from Alice Springs. Mrs. Price

> . . . told the Commission a vivid story of her lone fight against drought and the menace of trouble from unruly blacks. She gave a typical instance of how her daughter had saved her from a half-civilised black whom she had ordered to fetch her goats. He had raised his hand to knock her down when her daughter had whipped out a revolver and fired low to frighten him. She thought that the recent attacks on white men were due to too lenient treatment. Blacks became arrogant after being let off for a crime, and the news of the acquittal of two on a charge of the murder of the prospector Mr. Fred Brooks had travelled quickly, with the additional news that "Policeman can't shoot blackfellow any more." [30]

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[27] "Killing of Natives," *West Australian* 28 November 1928: 15 and also 4 December 1928: 15.
[28] "Missionaries and Blacks," *West Australian* 3 January 1929: 16.
[29] "Native Missions," *West Australian* 7 January 1929: 16.
[30] "Treatment of Blacks," *West Australian* 9 January 1929: 16.

The day after the settlers' evidence, the leader of the subject police party, Constable Murray, stood before the Board and revealed that in addition to the 17 Aborigines shot after the murder of Brooks, 14 others were killed by the party after an attack on a station-owner named Moreton. One newspaper report, headed "Alleged Native Shooting. Constable's Thrilling Story" in part reads:

> Murray was emphatic that in each instance, shots were fired as a last resort to save the lives of himself and his companions. He told a thrilling story of hand-to-hand encounters with wild Myalls. Once, he said, he was so closely pressed by armed natives that he could not draw his revolver. He tore a spear from one assailant, and plunged it through his chest . . . .[31]

The next day at the Board inquiry Mr. O'Kelly, the chairman, during cross-examination of Constable Murray, "strongly criticised the casualness with which, he asserted, police reports treated the taking of blacks' lives." Constable Murray's superior officer at Alice Springs, a sergeant, came in for similar criticism. The inquiry then closed with the examination of the pastoralist Moreton, who had been attacked by Aborigines.[32]

The Board's report was conveyed to the press by the Minister for Home Affairs, without comment, on or about 30 January 1929. According to a newspaper article the Board accepted that

> . . . the shots, which altogether resulted in the deaths of 31 blacks, had been necessary in self defence . . . . There was not a scintilla of evidence, the report states, that the shooting of the blacks had been in the nature of a reprisal or a punitive expedition.

The Board also found no evidence of starvation among the Aborigines, nor any provocation which might have accounted for the recent attacks on white men. Inexperienced missionaries, with their doctrine of equality, and inexperienced settlers "making free with the blacks and treating them as equals," were criticised and held

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[31] "Alleged Native Shooting," *West Australian* 17 January 1929: 16.
[32] "Alleged Native Shooting," *West Australian* 18 January 1929: 20.

responsible for trouble. As well there was a litany of other, minor, causes of unrest, including offences by Aborigines going unpunished and insufficient police patrols.[33]

The Board report was presented to the House of Representatives on 7 February, 1929, when, according to C.D Rowley, it was ordered to lie on the table and was never printed.[34] A scar, however small, had appeared on the public conscience.

And the reviewer "Polycarp" of the *Bulletin* had this to say in October 1930 of a book by the Reverend E.R. Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines*:

> As one who knows something of abo. psychology, I should like to advise the well-intentioned missionaries to let Binghi alone . . . .
> Here was a Christ-like missioner with the heart of a lion and the best of intentions, but what good, on his own showing, did his lifetime among savage tribes effect? We read, for instance, how on the far north-west Forrest River Mission, after years of labor . . . the rev. missioner had to capture some of "his boys" for spearing the mission cattle, march them as prisoners to Wyndham, and get them sentences of up to two years in Broome gaol. That is perhaps typical of what the missions mean to the Stone Age abo.
> Give the remnants plenty of room, even though it be desert country; leave them alone there, keep out undesirable whites, from the missionary down to the lecherous Afghan ex-camel driver, and let Binghi go out to extinction in peace. He can no more take to our much divided Christianity than he can do to our complex civilisation.[35]

"Polycarp" apparently wasn't aware of the Aboriginal census statistics released in 1928, but his views seem quite in tune with those expressed by the *Bulletin's* writer, James Edmond, eleven years earlier in December 1919, in his "he [the Aborigine] is so few and so futile" editorial.

I have been concerned here to present a sampling of newspaper stories concerning Aborigines spanning the ten years or so to 1930, that is, over the decade in which Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte made his appearance. What emerges is a

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[33] "Shooting of Natives. Justified by Board. Missionaries Criticised," *West Australian* 31 January 1929: 21.
[34] Rowley, 288.
[35] Polycarp, "Leave the Abo. Alone," rev. of *Forty Years with the Aborigines*, by E.R. Gribble, *Bulletin* 1 October 1930: 5.

strong "White Australia" attitude; a distinct dichotomy between elements of legislation and its application in practice in a widespread acceptance of "frontier" violence against the Aborigine, which attitude only started to change around 1929; and a widespread view of the Aborigine as a lesser figure than the white man. While opposing voices are heard, the 'other', the Aborigine, is a largely excluded object of some contempt. This is not, one would think, culturally the right time to introduce into popular literature a part-Aboriginal, part-European hero.

8 ABORIGINES IN AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

In order to further understand Upfield's risk-taking in his introduction of the popular hero Bony it is necessary now to consider, however schematically, the discourse of Australian literature in its representation of Aborigines in the period up to the late 1920s.

My starting point is Henry Savery's *Quintus Servinton: A Tale founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence*, which is generally considered to be the first Australian novel by virtue of its setting (in one quarter part, New South Wales), its date and place of publication (either 1830 or 1831 in Hobart), and the domicile of its author during the penning of the work (Hobart).[1] The felon Savery provides an account of the convict system as it affects his transported hero, but Aborigines are not part of his tale.

G.W. Rusden, who later enjoyed a distinguished career facilitating National Schools in New South Wales and Victoria,[2] wrote around 1841 a narrative poem, *Moyarra,* in which a young Aboriginal man, Moyarra, falls in love with Mytah. In opposition to tribal law they elope and are hunted down and killed. For reasons that need not be expanded upon here, J. J. Healy labels *Moyarra* "a stranded, anachronistic work." [3] Of some mark, though, is the blackmailer James Tucker's 1845-completed, but 1929-published, novel, *Ralph Rashleigh.* This is described by Cecil Hadgraft as a picaresque

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[1] Cecil H. Hadgraft, biographical introduction, *Quintus Servinton: A Tale founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence,* by Henry Savery, 3 vols. 1830-31. (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1962). xxx. Elizabeth Webby, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 61, confirms the prime status of *Quintus Servinton.*

[2] "G.W. Rusden", *Encyclopaedia of Australia,* 1973 ed.

[3] J.J.Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989) 33-35.

work notable for its description of the convict system.[4] Healy, however, observes that the third part of the novel outlines Rashleigh's leaving of white society for a four-year sojourn among the Aborigines, when the narrative contains an objective account of Aboriginal customs, and further notes that "most writers on Australia at that time included a descriptive ethnographic account of the Aborigines. . . . " [5] The Aborigine provides background, rather than prime interest.

T. A. Browne, as Rolf Boldrewood, takes one small step in his 1878 serial, *The Squatter's Dream*, which is described by Healy as "an ordering of a squatter's past." The story includes as characters Wildduck, an Aboriginal girl, and Doorival, a faithful companion to one of the white men, but these are passing, semi-fleshed players.[6] Browne's *Robbery Under Arms*, first serialized in 1882 in the *Sydney Mail*, presents a rather more substantial, but still incomplete, figure in the malevolent "half-caste," Warrigal, devoted servant to the outlaw Starlight. Warrigal is threaded through the story, creating unease in his appearances, for he is the attendant of ill-trust and misfortune. In the seven-odd pages of "How I wrote 'Robbery under Arms'", which apparently first appeared as an article in *Life Magazine* and which prefaces at least one edition of *Robbery Under Arms*, [7] Boldrewood makes no mention of Aborigines at all.

Rosa Praed, born in Queensland in 1851, left with her husband in 1876 for Britain, subsequently returning to Australia only once for a visit. All her forty six volumes, says Hadgraft, were written outside Australia and include two works of reminiscence,

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[4] Cecil H. Hadgraft, *Australian Literature: A Critical Account to 1955* (London: Heinemann, 1960) 40.
[5] Healy, 37.
[6] Healy, 52-55.
[7] Rolf Boldrewood, preface, *Robbery Under Arms,* by Rolf Boldrewood (Melbourne: Cassell, 1947) 21-28.

Australian Life - Black and White (1885) and *My Australian Girlhood* (1902).[8] In these works Praed, whose early years were spent in station country, recalls her Aboriginal companions with affection, according to Healy, who also points out that Praed would have been deeply affected by the 1857 massacre by Aborigines of a Mrs. Fraser and her family at Hornet Bank Station. Praed's father took part in the subsequent revenge and "dispersals."[9] Of particular interest are *Fugitive Anne* (1902) and *Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land* (1915).

In *Fugitive Anne*, and here I borrow and greatly condense Healy's plot outline,[10] Anne Bedo escapes from a tyrannical husband on board a ship and in the company of a faithful Aboriginal servant named, forbiddingly, Kombo, sets out for her aunt's station in her home district. Anne's skin burns brown and she easily passes for a part-Aboriginal boy. In this ambiguous position Anne fears a reversion to a primitive state by Kombo, who discovers the massacre of the aunt and the aunt's establishment by wild Aborigines. Anne seeks sanctuary in the arms of a white explorer. In *Lady Bridget in Never-Never Land*,[11] the aristocratic and strongly Socialist Lady Bridget, who sympathises with the plight of the Aborigines, arrives to marry a squatter named McKeith, whom she eventually sees as an appropriator of the Aborigines' land and as one who has lost his humanity. The relationship between Bridget and McKeith is at one level reflected in the relationship between Wombo, a station Aborigine, and Oola, a "half-caste" girl, who have unlawfully eloped and who have sought protection, provided by Bridget in McKeith's temporary absence, on McKeith's station. McKeith ejects the Aboriginal couple, who are now certain to be killed, and Bridget returns to England. (Happily, Bridget and McKeith are reunited in the end.)

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[8] Hadgraft, *Australian Literature* 88.
[9] Healy, 63.
[10] Healy, 66-67.
[11] Rosa Praed, *Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land* (1915; Sydney: Keegan & Paul, 1987).

In both *Fugitive Anne* and *Lady Bridget in Never-Never Land* the Aboriginal characters, while of plot-line importance, still do not occupy prime positions.

In the work of E.L. Grant-Watson, however, the Aborigine moves closer to the centre. The British-born (1885), natural science graduate Grant-Watson arrived in Western Australia in 1910 at the invitation of the anthropologist Radclyff-Brown. According to Dorothy Green, he took part in a number of expeditions to remote areas and returned to Britain two years later, deeply affected by the bush and its timelessness, which touched his inner experience and which remained with him.[12] For this reason Green feels that Grant-Watson, who wrote ten novels, of which six were set in Australia, may be gathered, even if only peripherally, by Australian letters. Healy comments:

> It is clear . . . . that he produced no great work of literature . . . . But his experiences in the North-West and his attempt to probe the consciousness of the Aborigines in fictional terms was important, since his was a serious European consciousness trying to grasp an archetypal Australian experience.[13]

And Green notes:

> He is one of the first writers of Australian fiction to be deeply conscious of the central fact of the desert, a fact as important to this country psychologically as the sea to the Scandinavians and the English, or the Greeks.[14]

Although I am here mainly concerned with the early representation of Aborigines in novels, Grant-Watson's first short story, "Out There," published in the London *English Review* in 1913,[15] is worthy of special mention. What emerges from "Out There" is, in Healy's words, "the conception of the Aborigines as being in harmony

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[12] Dorothy Green, "The Daimon and the Fringe-Dweller: The Novels of Grant Watson," *Meanjin Quarterly* 30.3 (1971): 279.
[13] Healy, 124.
[14] Green, 284.
[15] E.L. Grant Watson, "Out There," [London] *English Review* (December 1913): 85-101.

with the land and with the rhythms of existence."[16] Grant-Watson also, in this story of a white station manager who cohabits with an Aboriginal girl, except for a brief interlude when he marries a white woman who is consequently murdered by the Aboriginal girl, presents white/black sexual relations in what seems to be a frank manner for the times.

At the outset of Grant-Watson's story, Jefferies, the station manager, is attracted to the Aboriginal women:

> There was one girl of fourteen whom he had particularly noticed. She had looked at him quickly out of the corners of her eyes as women will. Her face, with its smiling cheerfulness, could not be called ugly; it was enigmatic and bestial perhaps, but attractive. Her body was desirable and beautiful. He sat long into the night thinking of her. He must possess her, demand of her all her secrets. She might help him to penetrate that baffling mystery of the land . . . . [17]

Jefferies approaches Manya, the father of the fourteen-years old Mary, for the girl's company. "Manya," he said, "I want that girl of yours, the one I call Mary. You let her come back with me be my woman?" Mary settled easily into the homestead:

> She was frankly sensual, natural and childish. Her habits were indeed primitive and rather ugly, but he took a sort of pride in her shamelessness and in her showing so frankly herself.[18]

Henrietta Drake-Brockman observed that "Out There" - "a grim short story" - foreshadowed the theme of Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo*, adding that Prichard was the first to present a "full-length" portrait of a multi-faceted Aboriginal woman.[19] The white/black sexual aspect of *Coonardoo*, however, was to foment

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16 Healy 128-29.
17 Grant Watson, "Out There" 87.
18 Grant Watson, "Out There" 89.
19 H Drake-Brockman, *Katharine Susannah Prichard* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1967) 26. Whether Prichard's 1929 *Coonardoo* or Martin's 1923 *The Incredible Journey* may be considered the first novel to centre an Aborigine turns here on the meaning of Drake-Brockman's term "multi-faceted." In my view, Martin deserves the accolade.

significant protest in a way that does not seem to have occurred following publication of Grant-Watson's story.

In his first novel, though, *Where Bonds are Loosed* (1914) with its prime white character Sherwin, Grant-Watson is said by Healy to have created in the Aborigines merely "an undifferentiated supporting cast" and in Coffee, Sherwin's servant, "the apotheosis of stereotype."[20] Much later Grant-Watson's *The Desert Horizon* (1923) concerns the problem of white settlement on the edge of West Australian desert country. The prime character is Martin, who, with his wife, becomes, as did his predecessors, part of a cycle of growth and decay, of victory and defeat. Healy says of the Aborigines in the story:

> The Aborigine is just one aspect of the perpetual horizon that surrounds the action . . . Grant-Watson recognised that the Aborigines move across the same desert land but in a different world. They are present, aloof, strange, comprehensible. Any accommodation to the land which is an accommodation of self must accommodate the Aborigine also. In this sense, the Aborigine is meshed inextricably into the self-search of the white Australian. It is not a choice, it is an insistence.[21]

Green notes that Grant-Watson's *Daimon* (1925) was planned to form with *The Desert Horizon* a single whole.[22] Grant-Watson has not moved an Aborigine to the prime spot in his novels, but he has in his works of fiction brought Aborigines as a whole to a new level of consciousness for white Australians, to a new subjectivity.

Catherine Edith Macauley Martin (c.1848 - 1937) was the writer who, in her *The Incredible Journey* (1923),[23] as far as I can determine, moved the Aborigine to the centre

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[20] Healy, 132.
[21] Healy, 135-36.
[22] Green, 286.
[23] Catherine Martin, *The Incredible Journey* (1923; Sydney: Routledge, 1987). First published by Jonathan Cape, London, the work was reviewed in the (Melbourne) *Age* on 8 December 1923, p.4, by an anonymous critic who said: ". . . *The Incredible Journey* is the most notable contribution recently made towards stories of Australia . . . . The story is told with a fine simplicity . . . . The writer has a gift for descriptive writing . . . . The Australian reader will find the story an agreeable variant to the trash which forms so much of current English and American fiction."

of the page and I deal here with Martin in some detail because of the influence I believe she had on Upfield and his moulding of Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte. Margaret Allan, in her introduction to the 1987 edition of *The Incredible Journey*, notes that Catherine Martin -"this elusive figure," which may partly help to explain why Healy makes scant reference to Martin - grew up in a rural environment in South Australia. No autobiography is known to exist, says Allan, and it is thought that the list of her work is incomplete. In the 1870s Martin published some poetry of her own together with translations from German poetry. And in 1890 she published anonymously *An Australian Girl* in which, according to Allan, the heroine Stella criticizes those missionaries who live among the Aborigines but fail to take an interest in their culture.

In Martin's *The Incredible Journey*, however, Aborigines occupy the centre of the page, the whites appearing as shadowy figures in the margin. The heroine Iliapa, with her woman friend Polde, undertakes a hazardous trek across desert country to retrieve her young son, stolen away by a white man.[24] Aspects of the Aborigines' lives are explored, but the main theme is the selfless devotion of the mother, Iliapa. There is a claim for the apparent prime status of *The Incredible Journey* in Susan Sheridan's comment:

> *The Incredible Journey* is the only colonial women's text of this period that I can find in which the Aboriginal woman is central to the narrative and is constructed as a subject in her own right . . . . This novel is extraordinary in placing Aboriginal characters at the centre of the novel and encouraging readers to identify with them.[25]

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[24] Henry Reynolds, *Dispossession* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989) 142: " Frontier settlers often took young children away from their families to be 'bred up to stock-work' or to be used as household servants. Although some people disapproved, the common view was that the children would be better off living in a 'civilised' environment."

[25] Susan Sheridan, "'Wives and mothers like ourselves, poor remnants of a dying race' : Aborigines in Colonial Women's Writing" in Anna Rutherford, ed., *Aboriginal Culture Today* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1991 reprint) 86. (This collection is also cited as a special double issue of *Kunapipi* 10. 1, 2 [1988].)

Katharine Susannah Prichard, in her *Coonardoo* (1929), emulated Martin's 'centring' deed, but with added dimensions, including that of a black/white sexual relationship. Numbers of critics have pointed out that in her station setting Coonardoo, the heroine, may be seen as not just an individual but the embodiment of Aboriginal woman, sympathetically portrayed. I deal here with *Coonardoo* and issues surrounding it in some detail for two reasons - the fallout from its serialisation exposed a society at the very least ambivalent towards white/black relationships, a society in which the 'half-caste' Bony was soon to make his entrance. Upfield was later to repeat an allegation against the work, which, coincidentally, failed to engage him.

Coonardoo was awarded, in a report by the four judges dated 18 August 1928 and published in the *Bulletin* four days later, joint first prize in the *Bulletin's* literary competition of that year. (There were initially five judges, but one became seriously ill.) Marjorie Barnard's and Flora Eldershaw's *A House is Built* was the other joint winner and Vance Palmer's *Men Are Human* was placed third. The judges' report included the interesting lines:

> Our first choice is *A House is Built*, an Australian prose epic of marked literary quality. We find, however, such great merit in *Coonardoo,* with its outstanding value for serial publication, that we recommend it also as worthy of a first prize.

I shall return to this statement later. And in a plea for Australian writing, the judges asserted:

> We desire to express our appreciation of the high average of excellence shown in the novels we have been called upon to read. Among the rejected are many that will compare more than favourably with novels from abroad circulated through our lending libraries or filling the shelves of our booksellers.[26]

[26] "'The Bulletin' Prize Story Competitions. Report," *Bulletin* 22 August 1928: 9.

There was, though, claims Shoemaker in his *Black Words, White Page*, dissension amongst the *Bulletin's* competition judges, for Cecil Mann (the Australian Journalists' Association nominee on the judges panel) apparently wrote of Prichard's submission:

> With any other native, from fragrant Zulu girl to fly-kissed Arab maid, she could have done it. But the aboriginal, in Australia, [sic] anyway cannot excite any higher feeling than nauseated pity or comical contempt.[27]

This dissension, continues Shoemaker, was widely reflected in readers' reactions following the *Bulletin's* serialisation of *Coonardoo* between September and December 1928. While some readers gained from the story's insights into Aboriginal culture, "the vast majority were outraged by the moral issues addressed in the novel - specifically the author's sanction of a love affair between a white man and an Aboriginal woman."[28] Shoemaker goes on to note the different, i.e. favourable, reception of the novel in Britain and says "When it was written, *Coonardoo* was undeniably ahead of its time. But Australian society did not become open to the interracial ideas it espoused for at least another twenty years."

Vance Palmer's third prize work, *Men Are Human* (1930), suffered in the fallout for that work too, like Palmer's *The Man Hamilton* (1929), dealt with the subject of interracial sexual relations. According to Healy the *Bulletin's* S.H. Prior, in refusing to publish *Men Are Human*, wrote to Palmer:

> I am sorry, because it is well done, but our disastrous experience with *Coonardoo* shows us that the Australian public will not stand stories based on a white man's relations with an Australian Aborigine . . . . There is no chance, I suppose, of you whitewashing the girl?[29]

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[27] Adam Shoemaker, *Black Words, White Page* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989) 39. Shoemaker's reference reads "Quoted in Ric Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers,* (Sydney, 1975), p.54." I have confirmed this, but the source of Throssell's own reference is not clear.

[28] Shoemaker, 39.

[29] Healy, 140. Healy references "Letter from S.H. Prior to Vance Palmer, dated 9 June 1929 (Palmer Letters, National Library of Australia)."

In summary, then, it took a great many years before Grant-Watson in the early 1920s raised the Aborigine to the level of conscious subject, another year or so for Iliapa to reach the centre of the novel's page in Catherine Martin's 1923 groundbreaking work, *The Incredible Journey*, and a further five years for Coonardoo to take her centring in Prichard's work of the same name. The outrage which attended the serializing of *Coonardoo*, with its thematic issue of, amongst others, black/white sexual relations, would seem to reveal the existence of a number of things, including a marked sense of social Darwinism. If such an outburst followed the earlier publishing of Grant-Watson's similarly-themed short story, "Out There," I do not know of it. However, it seems highly likely that the *Coonardoo* reader outrage would have been directly proportional to the Australian circulation of the publishing vehicle, when the *Bulletin* numbers, with their rural weighting, would probably have greatly exceeded those in Australia of the London *English Review*, in which Grant-Watson's story appeared.

In this climate of a legal, paternalistic containment of the Aborigine, of a common perception of their lawlessness and positioning outside society, and at a time when only two Aboriginal centre-of-the-page principals had been feted in the novel, it is remarkable that Arthur Upfield ventured in the field of popular fiction a "half-caste" detective hero with a name, as well as parentage, which sets him apart, which resonates in the term "stranger." It is even more remarkable that that hero was so successfully sustained through, in all, twenty nine novels over thirty seven years, including the posthumously published *The Lake Frome Monster*.

Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte of the Queensland Police made his debut in *The Barrakee Mystery*, published in London around February 1929,[30] only months after the serialization in Australia of *Coonardoo.* It might reasonably be thought that Coonardoo and Bonaparte were conceived at much the same time, but in any event Upfield deserves recognition for his early positioning in Australian letters of an Aboriginal hero. That he was able to bring his hero to an undoubted high level of popularity, and maintain that popularity in the cultural climate of his time, is cause for celebration of Upfield's talents.

Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra in their *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Post-Colonial Mind* (1991) present a number of theoretical insights, especially on the question of Aboriginal representation in Australian literature. The subject can only be very lightly touched upon here, at the risk of injustice to Hodge and Mishra, who amongst other things note the contradiction of the long dominance of the (empty) landscape in art and literature over the (dense) sociality of the few cities, one function of which contradiction is the legitimation of the illegitimate. This is to argue, say Hodge and Mishra, that:

> the prior rights of the Aboriginal peoples are the largest barrier to non-Aborigines' sense of their right to be here. [Thus] constructions of Australianness have tacitly deferred to and incorporated the basis of this competing right.

They go on to say that the Aboriginal ability to read the land like a text constantly affirms their possession of it, but this at the same time causes the new possessors themselves to foreground a knowledge and love of that same land.[31] It might be argued, then, that what the expatriate swagman Upfield, born at the height of Imperial power, has drawn in the persona of his part-Aboriginal, part-European

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[30] Philip T. Asdell, *A Revised Descriptive Bibliography of First Editions of the Works of Arthur W. Upfield: Australian, British and U.S.* (Frederick, Md.: n.p., 1988, with 1997 addendum) 4.

[31] Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991) 143-44.

character, Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, is at once an affirmation of the legitimate and a legitimation of the illegitimate.

In the next chapter I consider the Upfield-generated, and generally accepted, model(s) for Upfield's fictional hero, which I discard in my different argument pointing to another source.

9 THE GENESIS OF BONY

According to Hawke, in her biographical work written in collaboration with Arthur Upfield, Upfield was boundary-riding from an outstation for five months around 1924 with one other, a part-Aboriginal, part-European called Tracker Leon, who had spent some years as a tracker with the Queensland police. Leon was supposedly found as a baby with his dead mother in the shade of a sandalwood tree. He had been brought up in a mission school, where he made such progress that he was afforded a high school education.

Hawke's account continues that the even-tempered, pedantic Tracker was brown-skinned, lean, of less than middle height, and possessed of eyes of a piercing blue. Unusually for one not of pure Aboriginal descent, he bore the cicatrices of the fully initiated. Tracker Leon and Upfield got on well together until Upfield drifted away, but they were to meet again.[1] A year or two later, again according to Hawke, Upfield, now a cook at an outstation called Wheeler's Well, was rewriting a manuscript in which the narrative line concerned the emerging part-Aboriginal parentage of a supposedly white-skinned boy and the mysterious death of a tribal Aborigine. A white detective with bush skills is assigned to the case. Part way through the rewriting task Tracker Leon rode up and the two yarned on into the night. Upon leaving the next day, Tracker and Upfield, as was customary, exchanged reading matter, Tracker taking copies of *Wide World Magazine* and the *Times Literary Supplement* and leaving for Arthur two books - *The Last Days of Pompei* and *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*. A few days later, so the account continues, Upfield glanced at the titles and immediately

[1] Hawke, 128-29.

began a rewrite of his mystery novel, this time with an unusually named detective hero whose background, appearance and skills closely resembled those of Tracker Leon.[2] The work, *The Barrakee Mystery*, was supposedly completed in 1926 [3] but was of course not published until 1929.

Bony's background, personality and appearance is fairly consistently described in the Bony novels thus: Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte of the Queensland Police, the product of an Aboriginal mother and a white father, was discovered at the age of two weeks beneath a sandalwood tree in the far north of Queensland, his mother dead beside him. A kindly matron at a mission school took Bony under her wing and taught him many things. He did so well at the mission school that he was given a high school education and later won a Master of Arts at the university in Brisbane.[4] He joined the Queensland police service and, although having little respect for the rules, he rose in the ranks because of his ability to reason, his extraordinary patience and his tracking skills. These latter were matched only by those of what were described as "wild Aborigines." Bony never failed to crack a case, and in this, it emerges in the later novels, he was driven by his status of "a man of two races," which in his eyes meant that if he should fail he would be finished. Of medium height and slim build, Bony had dark hair, a dark-hued complexion, the facial construction of a white man and piercing blue eyes. A humane man, Bony's one weakness was his vanity. For example, in *The Barrakee Mystery*, where he was guessed to be aged

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[2] Hawke, *Follow* 168-69.
[3] Hawke, *Follow* 177.
[4] As a university graduate of Aboriginal descent, Bony was well ahead of his time. According to Tamsin Donaldson, "Australian Tales of Mystery and Miscegenation," *Meanjin* 50:2-3 (1991): 345, the first real-life people of Aboriginal descent to graduate from a university were Margaret Valadian of Queensland and Charles Perkins of New South Wales, both in 1966.

between forty-five and fifty years, he says "If everyone had heard of me there would be no murders."[5]

Besides the extraordinary resemblance to the Tracker Leon of the 1957 *Follow My Dust!*, Bony shares broad similarities with one who is described as a part-Aboriginal friend of Upfield's, one who is not named, in biographical notes supplied by Upfield to the *San Francisco Chronicle* in late 1950. The notes read in part:

> When I had been in the bush about a year, I met a half-caste aboriginal who, many years later, I named Napoleon Bonaparte. I did, eventually, meet a full-blood by that name. The half-caste became my friend. Why? Because of his dry humour and his profound natural wisdom. He was the son of a station owner, and had received a high school education. Like all his type, the bush had drawn him back and claimed him. Nothing detrimental in that. Were it not for my wife the bush long ago would have claimed me. He had a degree; I hadn't. He had never been accepted by society; I ignore society as such. So what? He taught me how to track .. as far as I could go with him. He read the character, the names, the age, and the gender of any human tracks he came across. He revealed to me the wonder of ants' nests, how to obtain water by tapping the root of a certain tree and setting fire to the foliage. He tried to get me interested in *The Iliad* and failed.
> No one ever spoke an ill word of him. No one could. His voice was without accent, modulated, a trifle pedantic. His looks! Whenever I saw Basil Rathbone on the screen I saw Bony. I am unaware if Basil Rathbone has blue eyes capable of looking right through you.[6]

And in a circa 1954 draft article, a copy of which was given to me by Pamela Ruskin, the former journalist and agent of Upfield, Ruskin attributes this to Upfield:

> I did not invent Napoleon Bonaparte. I copyrighted him from life, adding very little to his fictional make-up. I adopted him because I sought a bridge to span the aborigines to the white race. I adopted him because of his aboriginal instincts and knowledge and for his intelligence and education gained from his white father.[7]

There is one other, earlier reference to a Trapper Leon-like individual. Upfield's unpublished autobiographical work completed around 1938, *The Tale of a Pommy*, and which work, as I have said, may be seen as the well from which Hawke's biography was drawn, refers to a swagman Upfield met around 1925 on the road to Bourke.[8]

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[5] Upfield, *The Barrakee Mystery* (1929; London: Pan 1970) 63, 64, 65, 70, 73, 82, 83.
[6] Upfield, "Bony to his Friends." Biographical notes supplied to *San Francisco Chronicle* via his publisher Heinemann on 26 November 1950, ts., Meanjin Archive, University of Melbourne.
[7] Pamela Ruskin, untitled draft article probably circa 1954, ts., archive of Pamela Ruskin, 3.
[8] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 130-33.

According to this account, Upfield was engrossed in watching a battle taking place between bull ants and black ants at his feet when he was disturbed:

> . . . I heard a voice from behind me, a voice which was soft and liquid and finely modulated. "There is not a great difference between the behaviour of men and that of the ants," remarked the voice. "Neither the Ant nor Man could maintain the social structure without the application of laws and the blind obedience to them . . ."
> These observations, coupled with the pleasing voice, caused me quickly to twist around to look upward into a dark-brown face having sharp Nordic features and the blue eyes of the Nordic, which at the moment were beaming . . . .
> He was wearing clean khaki trousers of drill and a shirt of the same colour and material. On his feet were the usual elastic sided boots. He was hatless and I saw no hat attached to his swag. His hair was short and fine and straight. For a half-caste he was remarkably free of self-consciousness and entirely free of shyness.

Upfield and his new, but never named, companion engaged in an extraordinary conversation, inspired by the ants, concerning ideology, ancient empires and a possible new empire under Lenin's successors. The pair for a time travelled together:

> What a companion was that half-caste! To me, a quite ordinary man, his erudition was delightful and never at any time forced on one. His mind was a storehouse of knowledge of the kind obtained by wide reading as well as through observation. He showed me to what height of efficiency a human being could reach in the art of tracking: and the wiles that could be used to fault the keenest tracker. He opened my eyes - which I had thought were wide open - to gaze at worlds beyond the mundane, the worlds of the insect, the bird, the animal and the reptile. At odd moments he permitted me to see into his heart and regard the picture therein of the eternal warfare between the influences of his black and his white parents.
> The companionship endured for a month when he said he would have to end his walkabout and re-join his old mother's tribe. That going back to the tribe was anti-climax; and from the vantage point of today I am convinced that the white man's crime against the black was not, and is not, their wholesale reduction in numbers, but refusal to give them a chance of competing for a civilised livelihood and life's prizes. The crime is all the greater against the half-caste.

The unnamed (1925-positioned) swagman in the circa 1938 *The Tale of a Pommy*, the (roughly 1913-positioned) station-owner's son in the 1950 notes for *The San Francisco Chronicle* and the (1924-positioned) Tracker Leon of *Follow My Dust!* (1957), although of different life circumstances, share a tendency towards pedantry, plus a number of physical characteristics. Further, Tracker Leon shares nearly all of Bony's characteristics, including cicatrices, as well as a similar found-beside-dead-mother-

beneath-the-shade-of-a-sandalwood-tree-in-north-Queensland-and-adopted-by-a-mission-matron background.[9] The similarities are so complete as to lead me, when considering all the evidence, to conclude that Tracker Leon is a fictional by-product of Bony, created to meet the demands of a reading public and the machinery which serves it. This view is, I believe, enhanced by the only very tenuous connection between Tracker Leon and the unnamed, 1913-positioned, "half-caste" swagman encountered in *The Tale of a Pommy*. This unnamed creation shares a little more than half of Bony's list of characteristics - missing are descriptions of height, build, colour of hair, educational qualifications and cicatrices, if any - but the publicity-induced need for such a "real-life" inspiration for Bony would have existed, even in the 1930s.

One other, but small, indicator of the probably fictional status of the unnamed swagman is Upfield's use of the phrase already remarked upon in his circa 1938 *The Tale of a Pommy*:

> At odd moments he permitted me to see into his heart and regard the picture therein of *the eternal warfare between the influences of his black and white parents*. [The italics are mine.]

This is similar to two phrases in the sixth Bony novel, the 1938-published *The Bone is Pointed*: the narrative voice's "Within Bony's soul constantly warred the opposing influences planted therein by his white father and his black mother"[10] and Bony's "You cannot know of the eternal battle I fight."[11] This is the first time in a Bony novel that the "eternal/warfare" phrases have appeared,[12] phrases which suit Upfield's style and which I believe emerged hand in hand with the composite "eternal warfare" phrase (see above) in *The Tale of a Pommy*. (I am not suggesting that Upfield

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[9] Hawke, *Follow* 129 and Upfield, *The Barrakee Mystery* 64.
[10] Upfield, *The Bone is Pointed* 136.
[11] Upfield, *The Bone is Pointed* 164.
[12] A milder precursor, it should be pointed out, appears on page 276 of the 1931-published *The Sands of Windee* : "He [i.e. Bony] explained his upbringing, and attempted to explain the duality of race constantly in turmoil within his soul."

originated these phrases, merely noting the context in which he employed them.) Upfield was in fact working on *The Tale of a Pommy* and *The Bone is Pointed* at the same time.[13] A variant of the phrase next occurs in the twelfth Bony novel, *The Mountains Have a Secret* (1948): "[Bony] in whom ever warred the influence of two races."[14] The kernel here is that Upfield seems at a very late date to have either deliberately constructed the 1913-positioned unnamed swagman to better serve as the model for Bony, or, as I believe, the swagman was in the whole a late insert, which manipulation lost its point when his autobiography, *The Tale of a Pommy*, was refused by his publishers.

The unnamed, roughly 1913-positioned, "half-caste" model (". . . who many years later I named Napoleon Bonaparte") shares a little more than one third of Bony's characteristics and was, I believe, created specifically for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. No mention is made in *The Tale of a Pommy* of such a man even remotely of this time, although *Follow My Dust!* does record an episode of around 1913:

> Upfield learned fast. He was aided much by his early love of maps, and assisted by one or two half-caste stockmen with whom he hunted kangaroos, for they showed him how to read tracks, how to uncover the surface root of a needlewood tree, break a surface root and place a quart pot under the break, and by setting fire to the foliage, force the sap down . . . . [15]

The reference in the *San Francisco Chronicle* notes to the subject being the son of a station owner is strongly redolent of the character Ralph Thornton, the station owner's son, who learns of his Aboriginal paternity and whom the bush eventually claims, in the first Bony novel, *The Barrakee Mystery*, and of course the *Chronicle* notes

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[13] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 11 November 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection, Mitchell Library; "I have the next Bony yarn planned, and I have a strong and original background for it. I am so keen about it that I do not wish to hurry in its writing and will complete it about June or July next year . . . The job upon which I am now working is my autobiography which I am calling The Tale of a Pommy." This latter was further edited in May 1938 by Smethurst of the *Barrier Miner* and, according to Upfield, minor changes made - see Upfield, letter 25 May 1938 to Angus & Robertson.

[14] Upfield, *The Mountains Have a Secret* 93.

[15] Hawke, *Follow* 63.

were written about seven years before the emergence of the apparently definitive *Follow My Dust!*

In summary, then, I conclude that the Tracker Leon of *Follow My Dust*, the unnamed station owner's son of *The San Francisco Chronicle* notes and the unnamed swagman of *The Tale of a Pommy* are (like Bony himself) fictional characters created at different times to meet the "origin" demands of the reading public and that which serves it. There is elsewhere, though, a model upon which I believe Bony was based.

I have already referred to Catherine Martin's 1923 novel, *The Incredible Journey*, in which it seems for the first time an Aborigine, a woman called Iliapa, was the prime subject. In the course of the novel, an Aborigine named Nanka tells his story, from which I here quote at length because it is at the very base of my position on the origin of the character Bony. The character Nanka speaks:

> You know I have been long, long away from all my own people, (he said). A police trooper took me to Alice Springs, then away to the Northern Territory. For many years I have been a tracker to the police force. I am now, but not in uniform. I am on what they call the secret service. They gave me the name of being one of the most cunning trackers in Australia. When the inspector of police wants to find things out from the blacks he will sometimes say, "You may as well tell me what really took place, for we have a tracker here, as you know, who can become the very shadow of a guilty man. He may then go to the left or to the right, to the north, south, east or west; he may lie in a cave; or climb a mountain to the sky; he may hide among the rushes round a swamp, or go far by the Great Salt Water that has only one shore; but Jim - that is what they call me - will find him. Jim can track a spider or a bullock, a man or a lizard, even on horseback, running all the time, hardly looking at the ground." After a time they sent me sometimes all alone as far as Queensland and New South Wales to find out about men who were thought to have done some evil thing. I have been sent here in that way. I will tell you why. Some moons ago an inspector of police came on a visit from Adelaide. One day he got a letter from a brother who looks after the men that are in prison all their lives. One of these is a boundary-rider of Roalmah, who was tried some years ago for killing a black man one night at the Wonka Creek. . . . The boundary-rider paid a very clever man of law to speak for him, so he was not hung, only kept all the time in prison. [16]

[16] Martin 50-51.

In the introductory tale, *The Barrakee Mystery* (1929), Bony appears as the very likeness of Catherine Martin's Nanka. In common with Nanka, Bony was for many years a black tracker in the far west of Queensland[17] and also, like Nanka, escape for his quarry is impossible: ". . . he [Bony] is entitled to admiration for his powers of observation and deduction, as proved by many past successes in the solving of mysteries concerning aboriginals."[18] Further on we read where Bony had solved the case of the kidnapping of the daughter of the Governor of Queensland, which resulted in his being offered senior membership in the police force, and that, now a detective-inspector, he has never failed in a case.[19] In addition, in *The Barrakee Mystery*, Bony, lent by the Queensland police to another jurisdiction(as in nearly all the Bony mysteries), is on Nanka's "secret service," that is to say he is under an assumed name and is here ostensibly painting river boats while living with the workers at the station crime-scene. Bony, who never wears a uniform, even surpasses Nanka's unrepressed sense of modesty with his, Bony's, already-mentioned "If everyone had heard of me there would be no murders." Because of these similarities in background, skill and character, and because of the convenient time frame - the 1923 publication for Martin and the supposed 1926 completion for Upfield - I think it most probable that Martin's character Nanka was the source of inspiration for Upfield's Napoleon Bonaparte.

There are two significant differences between Martin's Nanka and Upfield's Bony. The first significant difference is that in the absence of information indicating otherwise, it must be presumed that Nanka is a full-blood, whereas Bony, of course, is part Aboriginal, part-European. And that positioning of Bony is in itself interesting

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17 Upfield, *The Barrakee Mystery* 73: "For many years he was a blacktracker. . . . "
18 Upfield, *The Barrakee Mystery* 63.
19 Upfield, *The Barrakee Mystery* 73.

for reasons other than the provision of literary scope. In a time when Aborigines were corralled by legislation and social attitudes Upfield, I believe, placed Bony beyond the pale in a deliberate counter-attitudinal statement. Bony in his very basics is a familiar figure, but Upfield has also, and again I believe deliberately, retained the value of the 'in-between' and left Bony as the *undecided*, the stranger. These attributes, the undecided, the stranger, are emphasised in the Bony novels as a few footnoted references show.[20] I believe, too, that in order to further emphasize the 'betweenness' of his fictional character - his black/white ambivalence - Upfield christened him with the slightly absurd name (to Anglo-Celtic ears anyway, even if such appellations in the bush were not all that uncommon) of Napoleon Bonaparte, a name which sets the wearer apart and helps to ensure that he does not quite fit in.

The second significant difference between Martin's Nanka and Upfield's Bony is that Nanka, although very highly skilled, is a mere black-tracker, whereas Bony has been promoted from black-tracker to detective-inspector. It is extremely unlikely that in the 1920s there was in real life a part-Aboriginal commissioned officer in any Australian police force, so Upfield's action, besides aiding his story line, represents another important counter-attitudinal social statement that adds to the risk he took in such a hero in the field of popular literature.

To summarise, then, I have in the previous two chapters broadly examined, insofar as attitudes towards Aborigines and part-Aborigines are concerned, the Australian socio-cultural environment of the years to and through the 1920s and early 1930s, that is, the period more or less straddling the debut of Upfield's fictional character, the part-

[20] In most of the novels, Bony initially presents/establishes himself as "stranger" - for example, see *Barrakee* 65, *Windee* 15, *Mr. Jelly's Business* 11-12. The "undecidable," the "neither/nor," is emphasized early, or fairly early, in each text, except in *An Author Bites the Dust* - see my later comment.

Aboriginal, part-European, Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte. In that examination I have presented an outline of the quite possibly well-intentioned, but, from the viewpoint of society today, paternalistic and repressive legislation which cordoned Aborigines; a legislation threaded, in the earlier-referred-to concepts of Homi Bhabha, with ambivalence and woven on a loom of cultural difference and supremacy. That legislation placed Aborigines and part-Aborigines at a level inferior to that of the rest of society and although it might be argued that society's perceptions shaped the legislation, rather than the other way around, the legislation would undoubtedly have reinforced dominant society perceptions of the indigene.

I have also sampled and presented newspaper stories of the subject period; stories which in attitude could be seen as justification for the legislation of the times and a reflection of the prevailing attitudes of society: the Aborigine, among other things, was a murderer of whites, as well as his own people; he was a cannibal and he stole cattle. He had no respect for the law and, worse, he was not, as was widely thought, heading towards a memorial in scientific columns - his numbers were increasing and something would have to be done. Voices sympathetic to the plight of the Aborigine were heard, but they were unable to influence the commonality.

I have also shown that as far as is presently known only two novelists in the period to early 1929 - Catherine Martin and Katharine Susannah Prichard - have presented centre-page portraits of Aboriginal principal characters, both, coincidentally, female characters, one of whom provoked outrage in sections of the public. Into this unpromising milieu in the Australian autumn of 1929, as I have pointed out only months after the serialisation of Prichard's fictional character, emerged the third full-length indigenous character in Australian letters, the part-Aboriginal, part European,

Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, for which pioneering effort Upfield deserves recognition. I have shown why I consider the received versions of Bony's genesis - Tracker Leon and others - to be themselves fictional creations and I have explained my theory that the inspiration for Bony lies in Catherine Martin's fictional character, the tracker Nanka, in Martin's work *The Incredible Journey*.

Meanwhile, it is 1929 and Upfield continues to patrol the rabbit-proof fence in his camel-drawn dray.

10 WRITING AND THE FENCE (1930-31)

Something within Upfield compelled him to write and the rigours of his days patrolling the fence in an unsprung cart barely slowed his output. In these times he also contributed a number of articles and letters to the Perth newspapers *The West Australian*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Western Mail* and, later, the *Daily News*, some of which I quote in detail because of the insights they afford. He wrote to an editor on the Australian novel:

> The attempt, no matter how laudable, to create a wholly Australian literature will not succeed until we are as far removed from British influence , ideals and aspirations as are the people of the United States. If the Australian author wishes to write stories which will grip the Australian reader he must write stories which will grip the British reader, for in the essentials of life we are British people. . . . When the present antipathy towards Australian novels . . . passes, we shall discover that there are half a dozen Australian writers producing novels with Australian backgrounds equal to, if not above, the average of those produced by writers in Great Britain.[1]

These views are in some respects broadly in agreement with those expressed much earlier in a prize-winning essay by the prominent Australian literary figure, Nettie Palmer. That essay was published in book form as *Modern Australian Literature* in 1924 and reads in part:

> This brings us to one factor which cannot be overlooked in glancing at our literary development. The facilities for ordinary publishing hardly exist in Australia. It has not been found possible, for instance, to publish novels here, except those of the cheapest kind, and numberless short stories lie buried in the files of newspapers. We are dependant, so far as these things are concerned, on the tastes of English publishing-houses that apply their own tests to an Australian book and select what they want . . .With all this the truth remains that since 1900 a large body of important work in prose and verse has been produced. [2]

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[1] Arthur W. Upfield, letter, *West Australian* 26 April 1930: 5.

[2] Nettie Palmer, *Modern Australian Literature (1900-1923)* (Melbourne: Lothian Publishing, 1924) 58-59.

Kateryna Arthur (now Longley) touches the essence of the above letters in her 1984 essay on Katharine Susannah Prichard.[3] Nettie Palmer, in her role as critic, however, was later to provoke deep anger in Upfield.

Now, with his new-found confidence, Upfield produced an article on writing a novel from which I too quote in some detail because of the picture it paints:

> The secret of success is not difficult to find. A study of the careers of the successful will reveal it in one word, practice . . . . The first story of novel length was written at the age of 14. Nothing done since gave as much pleasure as the writing of that novel . . . .
> Since then a dozen novels have been written, but none in the comfortable leisure of the first. One was written when boundary riding the border fence between South Australia and New South Wales, two when cooking for Queensland station hands, another when prospecting in the Flinders Ranges [I am not aware of any other reference to this prospecting period], part of yet another at the close of days spent looking for work in Adelaide, three in the south of Western Australia. They were written on work benches and tucker boxes, when the flies were a pest, or mosquitoes bit, or when sandstorms raged, and when the mercury in the shade stood as high as 120 degrees. They were written because the pleasure they gave me was transcendent. As a saint loved the martyrdom of the stake, so did I love the martyrdom of the pen. The joy of creating banished all discomforts, and was a threefold spur to determination . . . .
> My tenth manuscript of a novel was the first to be sent to a publisher. Being presented in my non-copperplate script, it was returned unread. The eleventh was unlucky, being burned with the rest of my effects in a camp fire near the Queensland border fence. The twelfth effort struck oil, and the first milestone on the long road was passed when the six presentation copies of my first novel came to hand . . . .
> In this country the fact that an Australian novel has been found worthy to be published in London cuts no ice. The fact that the book has been written by an Australian automatically damns it unless the scene of the book lies outside of Australia. It is a benighted outlook that will one day fade away, and we shall come to be as proud of our writers as we are of our athletes.[4]

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[3] Kateryna Arthur [now Longley], "Katharine Susannah Prichard and the Negative Text," *Katharine Susannah Prichard Centenary Essays*, eds. J. Hay and B. Walker (Nedlands: Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, 1984) 38 : "[the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky's concept of *ostraneniye* (defamiliarization)] . . . is derived from the long-established literature of Europe and it offers an explanation for modernist strategies of disruption and fragmentation. But in the Australian situation, what could an artist do when the world he or she confronted was "invisible" not because it was buried under layers of habit but because it had not been sufficiently under art's gaze to come into view at all? This was the problem confronted by all early Australian writers and painters. Prichard was still faced with it when she set out to give her first hand accounts of Australian life. And so her aim had to be not to *estrange* but to make *less strange.* Her programme of familiarization, with its inversion of the *ostraneniye* principal, could be called *Austraneniye.* For Prichard, as for any writer who wants to describe a new world (whether it be actual or imagined), realism is the most efficient mode provided only that it is, at the relevant historical moment, so familiar a medium that its mediating strategies claim little or no attention for themselves." It might perhaps be argued that Upfield in his Bony books exercised a descriptive realism and in his hero a form of *ostraneniye.*

[4] A. W. Upfield, "Writing a Novel", *West Australian* 26 July 1930: 4.

Here is a cussed character, wedded to his craft and to the bush, the settings of his stories, who overcomes his obstacles through sheer perseverance.

Arthur around this time also wrote the first of a number of published articles on Aborigines. His attitude throughout these articles was supportive and his views were generally progressive, as were the views of others of the period. They simply failed to prevail. The colloquialisms of Upfield's range of fictional bush characters - the language of his time and place - have sometimes, however, led to misinterpretations of his, the author's, own sympathies.[5] The language and social attitudes of many of those fictional bush characters of the 1920s and beyond were similar, as I have already said, to those of the real-life bush characters I encountered while growing up in Western Australia in the 1940s and the early 1950s. A fairly heavily edited outline of what I believe to be Upfield's first published article on Aborigines follows:

> There is in this country a small section of people, whose opinions carry no little weight, that would have the aboriginals of Australia herded into reservations there, doubtless, to subject them to educational experiments, religious training and social discipline . . . . [Sociologists come, study the Aborigine for a short period] receive their publicity and depart, unaware that genuine bush dwellers are greatly amused by their foolish observations.
> Collectively, the published impressions of these 'students' of the aboriginal give the world the idea that that the Australian native is a miserable, destitute, uncultural person standing upon the lowest rung of the race ladder. Believing this, we swell with conceit, conscious of our superiority, and thank God we are not as the abo. is.
> Yet let us pause and compare him with the white man . . . .

Upfield's article then goes on to compare the white man's lot in crime-infested cities, in which are large numbers of unemployed and asylums for lunatics, with the Aborigine's rigorous practice of birth control, regard for tribal law and his satisfaction with the simple harvesting of that which the land provides, concluding:

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[5] See for example David Harcourt, "The Racism of Arthur Upfield," *Nation Review* 1-7 June 1973: 1009 and Heather Paish, "Bony and the Colour Question," *Issue: South Australian Journal of Social and Cultural Comment* 4.15 1974: 33-38

> And the cranks among us would compel the Australian native to accept this our civilisation. They would make them breed as the wild things and as the white man does. They would make him labour to enrich themselves and others. They would give him gaols and asylums, and hospitals for his little children. They would herd him into reservations, rob him of his freedom, snatch away his undoubted happiness. In plain, blunt English, they would murder him by degrees, and then, as the little boy who held in his hands a bird that had fluttered out its life, they would say in stupified [sic] surprise:-
> "Why, he's been and gone and died."[6]

A later article headed "Aboriginal Race Suicide" reads in part:

> During a long sojourn in the bush of Central Australia I came in contact with a goodly number of semi-civilised blacks - that is, semi-civilised according to the white man's standards - and close study of these natives has brought out many significant facts which upset preconceived ideas of them. Comparing them with whites it must be admitted that in many ways they are more intelligent and that their philosophy is certainly superior . . . .
> [Two friends of mine, Larry and Emily, are typical.] Like all their compatriots they are generous to a fault. If they make a promise they keep it and they have a really absurd faith in the white man's integrity and honesty . . . .
> The white man believes that only money can secure happiness, and is forever grasping at material possessions: the black man can see no point in laying up treasures on this earth. To be satisfied with little is the secret of happiness. To set aside reservations for these happy but unfortunate people, or in any way to impose upon them our civilisation and our religion will not, however, lessen the rate of their deliberate race suicide. . . .Once I asked [Emily] why [she had no children] and her answer revealed wisdom. "Bimeby orl Australia full of white-feller," she said. "No room poor blackfeller . . . . Wot use baby, eh?"
> [A major concern] is the rapid ousting of the black by capital, which is covering their lands with fences, sheep and cattle. The wild lands are forever dwindling in area, and you cannot confine a black fellow even to a thousand acres.
> We regard the aboriginal as a savage. Yet time will prove that the white man's civilisation is doomed unless he accepts something of the wisdom of the aboriginal . . . . Of all the races on the earth the Australian aboriginal is least affected by the Curse of Adam.[7]

Other articles on Aborigines followed. One, headed "Future of the Aborigines,"[8] noted the superiority of the Aborigine's philosophy and morals and called for more protection for black women from marauding white and Asian males. Another, headed "Justice for the Blacks," [9] refers to the murder of a Constable McColl of the Northern Territory Police and "a number" of Japanese sailors by Caledon Bay Aborigines, when the Federal Government decided against the mounting of a

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6 Arthur W. Upfield, "Aboriginal Philosophy", *West Australian* 20 September 1930: 12.
7 Arthur W. Upfield, "Aboriginal Race Suicide," *West Australian* 19 March 1932: 4.
8 Arthur W. Upfield, "Future of the Aborigines," *Herald* 5 October 1933: 6.
9 A. W. Upfield, "Justice for the Black," *Herald* 1 December 1933: 6.

punitive expedition, the Church Missionary Society instead sending a small party to approach the Aborigines.[10] (The perpetrators did in fact surrender to the leader of this party, the Rev. H.E. Warren.)[11] Upfield's article notes in part that:

> . . . the mass of Australians are not unmindful of our past history where it touches the aboriginal and are anxious to make amends for the mistakes of the bygone years.

Amongst other things he goes on to call for recognition in white courtrooms of black laws and black justice.

However, to return to 1930, numbers of articles by Upfield in this period on bush topics were printed in the Perth *Sunday Times* and overseas magazines. His major success in this year of 1930, though, was the publication in London of his third (successful) novel, *The Beach of Atonement*.[12]

Set in Perth and the shire of Dongara, on the mid-west coast of Western Australia, *The Beach of Atonement* is described by Upfield as a 'psychological novel.' A skin buyer, Arnold Dudley, shoots his wife's lover and disappears after abandoning his car on the Great Northern Highway. Dudley, who remains in love with his wife, camps on an isolated stretch of coast, where he meets and greatly helps a long-widowed farmer, Hester Long, who is struggling to work her property. A younger woman of the district, Edith Mallory, falls in love with Dudley, whose relationship with Hester, however, deepens. In the words of the *Times Literary Supplement*, ". . . the climax is rather grand, yet it savours of the quixotic in its futility. Spiritually magnificent, it is also economically foolish . . . ." The story, in the course of Dudley helping on Hester's farm, carries vivid descriptions of bush activities - setting rabbit traps, skinning rabbits, burning off, dragging for foxes and so on.

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10 "Blacks in the North. Armed Force Cancelled," *West Australian* 30 September 1933: 15.
11 "Blacks Surrender. Peace Mission Successful. Returning to Darwin," *Age* 14 March 1934: 7.
12 Arthur W. Upfield, *The Beach of Atonement* (London: Hutchinson, 1930).

The Beach of Atonement also carries a rather grand dedication:

> To the many courageous women dwelling in the depths of the Australian bush, each helping to add to the British Empire a further meed of greatness, and each at the same time flinging back the lie that the youth of Great Britain are lacking in the spirit of adventure, I dedicate this book.
>
> A.W.U.
> 150 miles from nearest town, Western Australia.

The *Times Literary Supplement* greeted *The Beach of Atonement* with a non-committal outline of the story.[13] However, J. K. Ewers, in an anonymous review in *The West Australian*, was much more positive, describing it as a remarkable novel in many ways:

> . . . How [Dudley] seeks expiation, and how he is assisted by two sterling women, makes engrossing reading. Such a plot might easily have developed into a neurotic recital of melodrama, but the author's admirable treatment of it lifts this book out of the ruck of novels . . . . This is an outstanding novel, strong in characterisation, brilliant in colour, and convincingly told.[14]

Ewers, an author, teacher, and critic, then wrote to Upfield suggesting he enter *The Beach of Atonement* for the Henry Lawson Literary Society's award (there is no record of Upfield so entering the book) concluding with a pleasant invitation:

> Should you be about town, I should be glad if you would drop in for a yarn any evening or during the daytime of week-ends. The no. 14 tram passes my door. A note will keep me indoors for the occasion.[15]

Later in the year Upfield was to relate an interesting little tale to Ewers in the subject of *The Beach of Atonement* and a critic. According to Upfield, his agent George Frankland received a letter from "a famous authoress and critic" saying she had *Atonement* for review in a big London Sunday paper and would be happy to boom the book for a consideration of £10. "My agent cabled me about it and I refused. *Atonement* in that paper got two lines only."[16]

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13 Rev. of *The Beach of Atonement*, *Times Literary Supplement* 1476 15 May 1930: 416.
14 Rev. of *The Beach of Atonement*, *West Australian* 19 July 1930: 4.
15 J. K. Ewers, letter to Upfield, 19 July 1930, archive of Don Uren.
16 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers 14 November 1930, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

Much later, Kate Baker, friend to the by then long-dead Joseph Furphy, wrote to Upfield saying how she had enjoyed *The Beach of Atonement.* Upfield, in his response, espoused a now-familiar philosophy:

> . . . I am glad that you appreciate *The Beach of Atonement*. Very few people did and do. I try always to write of people as they are and not as they should be, or are supposed to be. In consequence my books are not considered literature, but as I know nothing about literature, for which I honestly thank God, I am not bound by the chains of literary convention. My belief is that it is the story that matters, and nothing but the story . . . . [17]

However, to return yet again to 1930, Upfield was delighted to receive Ewers' letter, with its invitation to call. He replied - throughout his life he was scrupulous in his acknowledgments - thanking Ewers for his review and telling of the environment in which he wrote. Commenting on his three novels, he wrote that of the *House of Cain* the critics thought the plot improbable, but the description vivid and of *Barrakee* they thought the plot feasible and the setting "extremely well done."

> The reviewers of these books pointed out the road for me to follow. In effect, they said I was good at description. So I backed 'description' for a first place in *Atonement.*[18]

Upfield closed with a promise to call on Ewers when next in Perth, adding:

> I can talk about swagmen, and camels and opals with facility, but if you talk about the classics a vacant look will enter my eyes.

With his third novel published, Upfield turned his attentions to the manuscript of that which was to emerge as *The Sands of Windee*, featuring for the second time Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte. His flow of newspaper and journal articles reduced, but he did maintain his correspondence with J.K. Ewers, whom he was to address as "Mr. Ewers" for a year or more before settling on the familiar Keith. Ewers was Upfield's first literary friend (although Upfield would have eschewed the term "literary") and the connection was to be maintained for a great many years,

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[17] Upfield, letter to Kate Baker, 22 December 1931, archive of Bonaparte Holdings, Bowral.
[18] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 21 July 1930, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

despite a temporary falling out in 1948 during an expedition to the Kimberley. Upfield's correspondence from the fence is quite revealing.

In August 1930 Upfield, in the course of what seems like a soliloquy on undisturbed writing time, refers to his son's school at Guildford, an outer suburb of Perth, and to his wife's capacity to ensure undisturbed evening peace.[19] This is the first reference I can find to Upfield's family since around the time of his departure from the Melbourne factory job in 1921, but it seems from Arthur's mention of a Perth nursing case of Anne's that the family arrived in Western Australia at least around the middle of 1930, if not earlier. It does not seem, however, that the relationship gained very much from this propinquity-of-a-sort. Burracoppin is on the railway line about 190 miles east of Perth and Upfield had only occasional weekends off. Anne, too, was sometimes away. For instance, she had one private nursing assignment in Pinjarra, south of Perth, which continued for at least four months. And Arthur was getting restless, for he later said to Ewers:

> I have been wandering up and down the fence for nearly three years. And I am sick of it. Never get married, you place chains about yourself which prevent freedom of movement, and find that, when you come to a mountain and crave to climb to its summit to see what lies on the further side, you are held back to the grind of a life unchanging and, therefore, hateful. Which is why I am always saddened by the sight of a bird in a cage. I feel so often like the bird.[20]

Towards the end of the year Upfield wrote rather disarmingly to Ewers:

> It is very nice of you to write to me and take an interest in my attempts at literature. Being one of the people who are naturally friendless - entirely a personal fault - your letters are much appreciated, especially as they are from one whom I can meet on common ground.

After talking of his writing, a problem in the retail availability of his books and his surprise at the number and favourable tones of the reviews of *The Barrakee Mystery*, Arthur went on to say:

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[19] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 26 August 1930, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[20] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "About 20 February 1931," archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

> So far I have tried hard to maintain an originality of plot, trying not to fall into the ruts made by E. Wallace, Garvice and Gould. When one has read a book by either of these men one has read all the books written by each.[21]

The year 1930 closed with the manuscript of *The Sands of Windee* in the hands of his English agent. Another, *A Royal Abduction,* a non-Bony, was dispatched for typing. Despite this temporary unburdening, Upfield the compulsive writer did not altogether relinquish his slightly misanthropic tendencies, saying to Ewers:

> I am camped forty six miles north of Burracoppin and as a stray motorist is camped with me, and will proceed towards a post office tomorrow, the opportunity occurs to answer your letter received the other day.
> As a matter of clear fact I am not pleased with the opportunity. People camping with me prohibit my adding 2,000 words to the current novel, and such interruptions always result in my answering a letter or two. It is not often, however, that I am interrupted on the track, where I manage to write an average of 10,000 words per week . . . .[22]

On a similar topic, Upfield was around six months later to drop a note of apology to Ewers:

> Whilst walking home through the park last night it struck me very strongly how seeming unkind was my remark re missing or losing a thousand words. When I said that, my mind was occupied by weekly averages which have been lowered by my recent indisposition, and nothing was further from intention than to give you the impression that I regretted coming over. Unfortunately, my tongue is not always controlled by my mind. There are times when engaged in conversation that my mind is occupied by a quite different subject. It makes me a crass dud at following out verbal instructions, for instead of retaining them fixedly I think of other things produced by the instructions. Is this a form of incipient lunacy? I suspect that the failing has lost me friends, and now I do not wish to lose your friendship.[23]

And much later he was to write:

> Approaching now the half-century mark I have, of course, fixed convictions. One of them is that Australia is **the** finest country on earth, and by this I mean the country itself and not the people living in it. I mean not the slightest disparagement to the people, but that the country itself, and its climate, is really astonishing. I have seen a desert bloom in forty-eight hours. I have seen rabbits massed like sheep. I have seen the Sturt pea covering square miles, and that is the Eighth Wonder. And I have seen men fell giant trees, which is the great foolishness.[24]

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[21] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 4 October 1930, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[22] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "About 20 February 1931," archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[23] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "Wednesday" [probably circa September 1931], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[24] Upfield, "Pour Encourager Les Autres" 3.

Upfield, still patrolling the no.1 rabbit-proof fence from Burracoppin to Dromedary, in the New Year of 1931 was soon to find himself a character in a real-life drama more or less scripted by his own pen. Firstly, though, it is necessary to return to the origins of Upfield's second Bony novel, *The Sands of Windee*.

11 MURDER ON THE FENCE (1929-32)

George Ritchie, the Dromedary camel station overseer, always welcomed Upfield's arrival, for Upfield and the northern fence rider were his only regular visitors. On one particular occasion they yarned and, according to *The Tale of a Pommy*, Ritchie spoke of a new man in the area, Snowy Rowles. Rowles had arrived at the camel station on his motor-bike looking for a job just when the stockmen of nearby Narndee station had mustered Dromedary's mules for purchase. The stockmen were not as skilled as might have been thought in breaking in the mules, so Snowy was asked to show what he could do. A young, fit, blonde fellow with light blue eyes, Snowy displayed such talent that the Narndee owner gave him the job of breaking in the mules and taking them across to Narndee, where he remained employed.[1]

One month later, the account continues, it so happened that Arthur was again back at Dromedary on a day when Snowy Rowles was expected to call in with the luxury of fresh meat from Narndee station. Snowy arrived, but the meat didn't - he had forgotten. Rowles laughed and said if it was meat they wanted, he'd get them some. He roared off into the scrub on his motor-bike, to reappear ten minutes later riding herd over the rough ground on a kangaroo, which he ran into the wire-enclosed fowl yard. "There's your meat," he called. "What's wrong with that?" The next day he specially returned to Dromedary to bring Ritchie and Upfield a quarter of mutton.[2] There was much about Rowles that was attractive:

> Eager to perform his share of the camp chores, a cheerful loser at cards, generous in his opinion of others, always nattily dressed and cleanly shaved, he was welcomed wherever he went.[3]

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1 Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 239.
2 Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 248.
3 Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 249.

Upfield was still dwelling on the murder plot for his next book when one night at Dromedary he said to the overseer, George Ritchie, that he would pay a pound for a simple and effective method of destroying a human body. "Easy," said George, holding out his hand for the money. He went on to explain, according to *The Tale of a Pommy*, that he would entice the victim into the bush where there was plenty of dry wood, shoot him and burn the body. When the fire was cold he would scoop the ashes through a sieve to retrieve unburnt bones and metal pieces like buttons and boot nails. The metal he would either throw down a well or dissolve in sulfuric acid - every station kept some for tin-smithing - and the bone remains would be crushed to dust in a prospector's dolly-pot and tossed to the wind. Dolly-pots, upright iron cylinders into which ore was put to be crushed by an iron ram, were common enough. Dromedary had one. The process seemed feasible, indeed foolproof when Ritchie added that so no chance passer-by would wonder why the fire had been lit, he would shoot a couple of kangaroos and burn them on the same place.[4] Carcases were always being burnt around camps in order to keep down the flies. Arthur, pleased, paid his pound.

Upfield now assembled his characters and set to work on his new mystery, *The Sands of Windee*, featuring Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte. However, with such a foolproof method of body disposal he was unable to produce a flaw for Bony to seize upon. He offered George Ritchie another pound to come up with the flaw. Ritchie failed and confronted Snowy Rowles with the problem. Snowy failed too.[5]

Around this time the Rabbit Inspector swapped George Ritchie and Arthur around, so that Arthur was stationed permanently at Dromedary camel station. On Sunday 5

[4] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 252-53.
[5] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 254-56.

October 1929, according, Arthur says, to his departmental journal, it so happened that George Ritchie, Snowy Rowles, the Rabbit Inspector's son, the northern boundary rider and Arthur were all together in the Dromedary living room when the murder method and the murder flaw puzzle were discussed.[6] This meeting was later to assume some importance. Arthur's problem remained a common topic of conversation until Arthur himself, while looking down his camel's throat, found the flaw. The novel progressed.

Snowy Rowles, in his old car, left Narndee station at the end of October 1929 to take up fox poisoning. A month later, a contractor called James Ryan, in his new Dodge runabout, called at Dromedary on his way to Burracoppin, when he promised Arthur he would bring back his mail and some rations. Ryan didn't reappear when expected and the obliging Rowles went to look for him. In the middle of a two-day saga of broken-down and retrieved vehicles, Snowy Rowles, James Ryan and a young passenger called George Lloyd spent a night at Dromedary with Upfield, singing songs.[7] Arthur never saw Ryan or Lloyd again, but that Christmas Eve he did see Snowy Rowles outside the pub at Youanmi, north of the camel station. According to *The Murchison Murders*, Rowles explained that Lloyd was up at Mount Magnet and had lent his truck to him, Snowy, to travel down to Youanmi; to Upfield's companion he later told a different story.[8] Ryan and Lloyd were to become pieces in a puzzle.

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[6] Arthur W. Upfield, *The Murchison Murders* (probably 1934; Miami Beach, Fl.: Dennis McMillan Publications, 1995). 15. However, according to the trial report "Murchison Mystery," *West Australian* 12 March 1932: 16, the meeting took place on 6 October 1929 and those present were Ritchie, Rowles, David Coleman (the Rabbit Inspector's son), Maddison (the northern boundary rider) and his wife and Upfield.

[7] Upfield, *The Murchison Murders* 16-17.

[8] Upfield, *The Murchison Murders* 18.

Early in 1930 Arthur was returned to his old section of the fence, because the Department couldn't find anyone else accustomed to handling camels on patrol. Further changes followed. The Depression was starting to bite and the Rabbit Department put off staff, retaining only returned soldiers. In the resulting shuffle, according to *The Tale of a Pommy*, Arthur found himself patrolling 100 miles north of Burracoppin, that is to say he now didn't go as far as the camel station, and 100 miles south. His transport this time was a dray hauled by a single draught horse. Feed was periodically dropped off by truck. The horse was easier to handle than the camels and the arrangement suited Arthur quite well.

The Sands of Windee progressed rapidly once the problem of finding a flaw in the method of the body disposal had been resolved, and in the second half of 1930 the manuscript was in the hands of Arthur's agent in London. Upfield of course resented unplanned interruptions when he was writing and he had difficulty being civil to the intruder. Often he didn't bother hiding his displeasure. *The Sands of Windee*, however, was itself to produce an unplanned interruption.

After being interviewed near Meekatharra in the course of a missing persons inquiry, John Thomas Smith, alias Snowy Rowles, was arrested in March 1931 on a count of escaping from gaol in the northern wheat belt town of Dalwallinu, where a number of years earlier he had been serving time for burglary. He was sentenced to three years on this, the absconding count, but a more serious charge was being prepared.

The Sands of Windee was published around May 1931, when it was already known that the novel's idea of concealing a murder by the laying of kangaroo ashes over the

sieved traces of human ashes had been put into practice in an actual murder in the Western Australian bush. Upfield wrote to Ewers:

> I am somewhat alarmed by the cable which has appeared in all the Eastern States press and has been given out by wireless companies. It reads thus: "London, June 5th - ··· *Sands of Windee* by Arthur Upfield of Western Australia. The idea of concealing the murder by the mixing of human and kangaroo ashes is supposed to have been put into practice in an actual West Australian murder. The perpetrator, it is assumed, overhead Upfield discussing the plot of his story with bush companions."[9]

Rowles was charged on 7 January, 1932, with having murdered Leslie George Brown, alias Louis Carron, station worker, on or about 20 May 1930, near the 183-mile gate on the no. 1 rabbit-proof fence. It had taken the police more than a year to complete their investigations. The prosecution alleged that near the 183 mile gate were discovered several heaps of ashes of campfires, in one of which were found crushed bones and other items, the most important of which was a molar tooth. The molar tooth had been burnt, but not destroyed and it bore a cavity which matched dental records of Leslie George Brown. A piece of lead of the same weight as a 0.32-calibre bullet was also found in the fire.

The trial opened in Perth on 10 March 1932. In outlining the evidence, the Crown Prosecutor also told the court that (in the words of the *West Australian* newspaper):

> Rowles had been present at a discussion when Mr. Arthur Upfield, a novelist, had gone into the question of disposing of human remains by burning them and then crushing the bones into small pieces. Whoever burned the remains found in the camp fires near the 183-mile gate certainly followed the procedure outlined in that discussion.[10]

Under a multi-layered heading - "Murchison Mystery. Second Day of Trial. A Sensational Suggestion. Novelist Gives Evidence." - Arthur's evidence was highlighted in the newspaper. After saying that he was a boundary rider on the no. 1 rabbit-proof fence, Arthur referred to the night at the camel station when a group,

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[9] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 26 June 1931, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[10] "Murchison Mystery," *West Australian* 11 March 1932: 19.

including Rowles, was discussing George Ritchie's suggested method, which Arthur outlined, for disposing of a body. The defence counsel, Mr. Curran, and Arthur then clashed:

> Mr. Curran: You do not say Rowles joined in (the discussion)?
> Witness (heatedly and pointing a finger at Mr. Curran): Look! It was a small room and you don't think he sat dumb all night. Certainly he joined in.
> Mr. Curran: What did he say?
> Witness: How can I say that after two years?
> Mr. Curran: You remember that Ritchie suggested the plot though.
> Witness: Yes. Ritchie had suggested it several months before.
> Mr. Curran: Oh, so you go around the Murchison discussing plots for murder stories with the various people you meet?
> Witness: Yes

The presiding judge then intervened with the observation that he did not see what that had to do with the case.[11]

On the eighth and final day, the presiding judge said in the course of his lengthy summary :

> There is a curious thing in this case which may be mentioned for what it is worth. Upfield, who is a budding author [His Honour was here less than generous], gave evidence that he was in the neighbourhood for some time. He says he remembers a discussion one night in a small room when the accused, among others, was present, in October, 1929. The interesting discussion was how a human body could be destroyed without leaving a trace . . . The bones found in the ashes I have referred to were certainly
> crushed up.

The jury deliberated for two hours and returned a verdict of guilty. The *West Australian's* final paragraph on the trial reads:

> [Mr. Justice Draper] asked Rowles if he had anything to say before sentence of death was pronounced. In a clear voice he said, "I have been found guilty of a crime that has never been committed." "Is that all? Is that all you have to say?" asked Mr. Justice Draper. Rowles remained silent. Mr. Justice Draper broke the hush that followed by donning the black cap and pronouncing sentence of death.[12]

Rowles was charged only with the murder of Carron. Lloyd and Ryan, the two station workers acquainted with the camel station and Upfield and closely acquainted with

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[11] "Murchison Mystery," *West Australian* 12 March 1932: 16.
[12] "Murchison Mystery," *West Australian* 21 March 1932: 13.

Rowles - the four had of course enjoyed a rousing sing-song just before Christmas 1929 - disappeared around the same time as Carron. Appeals by Rowles' lawyer to the State Full Court and the High Court of Australia were denied. A few days before sentence was carried out Rowles denied any knowledge of the fate of the camel station visitors, Lloyd and Ryan, and he reaffirmed his innocence of the murder of Carron, saying that Carron had accidentally poisoned himself with butter used for baiting foxes.[13] Rowles discovered the body upon returning to camp, he claimed, but being an escaped prisoner he burned the body instead of informing the police.[14] Snowy Rowles, the fearless, the likeable, the murderer, was hanged at 8 a.m. in Fremantle Gaol on 13 June 1932.

Meanwhile, the times became more difficult as the Depression worsened. In February 1931 Upfield, still on the fence, wrote to Ewers "One simply cannot leave a job these days, and one should really thank God for all his favours."[15]

Two months after *The Sands of Windee* was published it was selected as book-of-the-month by the Crime Book Society,[16] a group with half a million members in Britain. The London *Bookman* gave it a reasonably good review, as did the *West Australian's* "Telamon," who wrote:

> While perhaps not reaching the intensity of *The Beach of Atonement*, the *Sands of Windee* is nevertheless a book which will appeal by virtue of its well-sustained suspense and by its kindly and satisfying humanity.[17]

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[13] "Rowles's Fate," *West Australian* 13 June 1932: 15.

[14] Upfield, *The Murchison Murders* 54.

[15] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "About 20 February 1931," archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[16] Bruce Graeme, "The Crime Book Society's Selection for June is *The Sands of Windee* by Arthur W. Upfield," *The Crime Book Society Magazine* June 1931: 3, 7: "This is more than a mere mystery yarn, it is a novel, well-written, absorbingly interesting in a score of ways, and, above all else, it is intensely human."

[17] "Telamon," "Australiana," rev. of *The Sands of Windee, West Australian* 22 August 1931: 5.

In September 1931, however, Nettie Palmer, a fragment of whose comments on Australian literature has already been mentioned, reviewed *The Sands of Windee* in her column in the journal *All About Books: For Australian and New Zealand Readers.*[18] The review, which is here covered in some detail because of its emotive and lasting effect on Arthur, begins and ends with questions:

> Looking at two new novels, written in Australia and somehow purporting to be Australian, *The Sands of Windee* by Arthur Upfield and *The Butterfly With Big Feet*, by Neville Smith, one is first led to ask one question: Is it absolutely necessary, in order to attract English readers, for an Australian book set in the present day to have an English hero? It seems a pity, partly because an Australian writer is unlikely to be skilled in the presentation of English characters, and the result is something artificial . . . .

The ordinary reader of *The Sands of Windee* may in this feel a little confused, for Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, the hero, is quite plainly depicted as the Queensland-domiciled-and-educated product of an Australian Aboriginal mother and a white father. The major supporting characters (except two on a middle level) are also plainly Australian and as well the story is set entirely in the far west of New South Wales, thus making it hard to see in what manner it "somehow purports to be Australian."

The review continues with an acknowledgment that the novel has been dubbed book-of-the-month by an English crime book society and adds half a teaspoon of praise: ". . . the setting, on a sheep station in the West of New South Wales, is on the whole sound enough." This, after an observation that Bony seems at first a "successfully fantastic figure," is followed by "The chapters dealing with [Bony's] investigations of a supposed murder in a sandy wilderness are quite interesting, like any puzzle that is well worked out." The reviewer then notes (quite reasonably):

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[18] Nettie Palmer, "Some New Australian Books from Nettie Palmer's Notebook," rev. of *The Sands of Windee, All About Books: For Australian and New Zealand Readers* 3.9 September 1931: 179.

> The book, however, has to contain a heart interest, into which are brought - for English readers - a heroic, silent Englishman, and - perhaps for American readers - a sub-heroic and more talkative American.

Mrs. Palmer, however, now becomes didactic:

> Moreover, the personality of "Bony" is soon mutilated by moral issues that have no place in a detective yarn, where the central murder itself is never considered an immoral act, but as a cog-wheel without which the whole machinery of story would refuse to work. There is also a "character," Jeff Stanton the millionaire station owner, who seems at first to fulfil the necessary demands of fantasy in such a story, but who is later brought down to earth by the author's dissertations on matters like Arbitration Court awards for station hands.[19] This simply cannot be done: a detective story is by nature as unreal as a game of chess, and any social or moral issues that arise in it must be handled lightly and satirically. It is, of course, very difficult to write a light novel and to keep it on the same plane all through. Helen Simpson - a witty, alert, expatriate Australian - nearly does it sometimes . . . . The trouble, though, with the ordinary writer of mysteries and thrillers is that he so very soon abandons the standard set in his first chapter: his cake is nearly all dough.

A final squeeze and Upfield, limp, is discarded:

> The number of detective novels turned out today must be unimaginably huge, but are their writers learning, with all their experiments, anything more about how things should be done?

Nettie Palmer and her award-winning novelist husband, Vance Palmer, were of course very influential in Australian letters between the Wars and for a time afterwards. Arthur saw himself as patronisingly dismissed in Nettie's review of *The Sands of Windee* and thus was born, on Arthur's part at least, a lifelong enmity. On one side of the pit, as Arthur saw it, were he and those of like mind, and on the other were the Palmers and the rest of the literati. Upfield in a letter to Ewers was later to say of Nettie, somewhat ungraciously, ". . . one day I'll cut her throat."[20]

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[19] Mrs. Palmer is not quite right, but Upfield couldn't help himself. In *The Sands of Windee*, p.90, the narrative voice notes that Stanton the station owner, to his great credit, offered employment to several Aborigines at white man's wages and on pp.144-45 Bony (still presenting as a station employee) discusses arbitration wages with another employee on a long motor drive, which conversation also reflects well on Stanton, who pays at a higher rate.

[20] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 17 July 1934, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

Despite his words to Ewers earlier in the year about the inadvisability of changing jobs Arthur now did just that, for as he noted in *The Tale of a Pommy*:

> The English success of *The Sands of Windee* came at a time when I was experiencing domestic difficulties, and my wife and I having saved money we decided that the day had come when I might break away from my beloved bush and begin to earn a living with my pen.[21]

[21] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 276.

12 PENNING, PENURY AND THE PAPER (1931-34)

By late August of 1931, well before the commencement of the *Sands of Windee* murder trial, Arthur and his family were settled in a rented, semi-detached house overlooking Hyde Park in Mount Lawley, a suburb of Perth. In explanation to Ewers he wrote:

> We have had trouble with our boy at Woodbridge [i.e.Woodbridge House School, described by Arthur as a preparatory school in the village/outer suburb of Guildford]. He has not been too well, and as my wife and I have enough, with care, to live on quietly for a year we have thrown up our jobs . . . Now that one of my books is selling and my agent has two manuscripts of works he thinks are superior to *The Sands of Windee,* we have decided to take the plunge. So you see I have a year to make good.[1]

In the few months to the end of the year Arthur worked on his manuscripts, otherwise finding time only for a few newspaper articles and a letter to the editor. By the end of December, 1931, he and his family had moved yet again to a rented house in the hills village - not yet a Perth suburb - of Kalamunda, where they planned to supplement their income with paying guests. They knew that guests were unlikely to book until Easter, but felt obliged meanwhile to spend money on furnishings.

Upfield had three manuscripts with his agent, George Frankland, in Britain: the two non-Bonys, *A Royal Abduction* and *Gripped by Drought*, and a new Bony novel, *Mr. Jelly's Business.* (This latter was not published in book form until 1937, but it was put out as a serial in four Australian city newspapers in 1932.)[2] However, the only substantial cash in sight at the end of 1931 was £30 promised by the Melbourne *Herald* for the

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[1] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[2] *Mr. Jelly's Business* was serialised in the [Adelaide] *Advertiser,* [Brisbane] *Daily Mail,* [Perth] *Daily News* and the [Melbourne] *Herald* on various dates.

serial rights to another non-Bony novel, *Breakaway House*.[3] The *Herald,* however, withdrew its promise and Arthur was in a fix.

Despite his cash flow difficulty, or perhaps because of it, Arthur managed to spare Nettie Palmer a thought in two articles published in the *West Australian* in early 1932 - "Literary Fashions," by U.W.A. and "What is Literature?", also by U.W.A. My first thought upon reading these articles was that because of their construction and grammatical refinement they were not Upfield's, even though the sentiments were. There are, however, three pieces of evidence which convince me that they are, basically, Upfield's work but with some shaping by J. K. Ewers. The first, carrying some weight, is that Upfield says they are his: "My two articles "What is Literature?" and "Literary Fashions" . . . are quite nice little satires which give Nettie Palmer a lovely smack across the kisser."[4] The second surrounds the rejection by an editor of some articles of Upfield's, when Upfield sends them to Ewers, saying: "Might I trespass further on your kindness to re-style these articles," which suggests that Ewers has before so acted.[5] And the third is that one of the articles refers to "Mr. Serge Dotski, Russia's great creative novelist." This has Arthur's stamp and it even mentions Mr. Arthur W. Upfield.

"Literary Fashions"[6] tells of the opening (by the smashing of a bottle of French champagne over a bust of Descartes) of a great building dedicated to literature in the presence of a distinguished gathering of literati, including Mr. Dotski and Australia's

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[3] Set in the Murchison in Western Australia, this work, a non-Bony mystery, appeared as a serial in the Perth *Daily News* between 1 September and 21 October, 1932, and was eventually published in book form by Angus & Robertson simultaneously in Australia and Britain in 1987.

[4] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 4 January 1931 [but should be 1932], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[5] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers 27 June 1933, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[6] U.W.A., "Literary Fashions," *West Australian* 9 January 1932: 5.

premier literary critic, Miss Hettie Lovelace, who deplores the passing of the great creative novelists. When the current three or four giants pass over

> Who will take their places? The tragedy is that the common people spend their money on the productions of such people as Nat Gould, Ethel M. Dell, and Arthur W. Upfield. The wonderful sky of last century's literature, equal in brightness to the literature of the century before, is being blackened, and it is our duty, nay, let it be our single purpose, to pour a never-ending stream of ridicule on these purveyors of trash . . . .

The piece, under the centenary dateline of Melbourne, 6 January 2032, then marks an address applauding the emancipation of the "modern" Australian writers.

"What is Literature?" relates the story of a potentate's story teller, who, a word magician, raised the language to the pinnacle of perfection and sent everyone to sleep. After pursuing and then debating a definition of "literature," Upfield says:

> These "experts" are apt to label any novel written one hundred years ago as literature, and hesitate to so label a modern novel in fear of being contradicted by another "expert". My view is that the superior critic who can find no merit in a modern novel unless it is written by a Russian is less able to answer my question than I am . . . .
> The acid test of a story . . . is the ability of the author to create the illusion of reality.[7]

The views in both of the above articles are frequently expressed by Upfield, more particularly in his 1948 Bony novel, *An Author Bites the Dust*. However, whilst publication of these opinions would have made Upfield feel a little better, he still had income worries.

Arthur's despair in the earliest days in Kalamunda shows clearly. In a letter to Ewers he writes:

> [I am] in a hole so deep I cannot see the sky. . . . Unfortunately Easter comes late this year. I am heartily sick of everything, and were I single I would today be some 1000 miles north. James Arthur is our problem. It was his condition of health which decided me to leave the bush, but I freely admit I thought then that it was possible for me to earn the basic wage with my pen . . .
> One truth has become plain. A writer cannot long remain in one place for his store of material is limited and to renew it he must get about amongst fresh scenes and meet new

[7] U.W.A., "What is Literature?" *West Australian* 27 February 1932: 5.

> characters. Another truth is evident, too. A writer writing of Australia will never make living wages.[8]

A few days later Upfield, in a letter tinged with embarrassment, was obliged to ask Ewers for "£3, or if not that £2. I can return it after Easter."[9] Ewers, as he did on several occasions, helped out and Arthur was, amongst other things, able to continue his meetings with Ewers in tearooms near the Perth town hall at 11 o'clock each Saturday morning.

The Kalamunda house - named "Dalcraigs" - was described by Upfield as one of the mint houses in the area, "quite unlike the ordinary, bare guest house. It should be attractive to people who like privacy and beautiful surroundings." Arthur did the cooking and Anne looked after the house for a tariff of 7/- per day, or 35/- per week. Eventually Easter arrived, the occupancies were splendid, the tennis court was under constant hire and Arthur was beginning to think normally again.

The Snowy Rowles trial had now receded, to Arthur's relief, and he was starting work on a slim volume on the case.[10] He complained about the volume of mail he was receiving, from old school and army mates to strangers who merely wanted his signature on a piece of paper. However, with matters literary again on his mind, Arthur felt compelled to deliver advice to Keith Ewers:

> I do not write a book with the ultimate aim of reading parts of it at literary society meetings. You be advised by me and follow suit. You can please the public, but even you can't please the Nettie Palmers of this world . . . .
> I would like you to read carefully the accompanying article. The Palmers and the Melbourne mob would like to be one and all 10% as good as Marshall and a quarter of 1% as good as Wallace. They sneer at everyone successful, or trying to be successful, and

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[8] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "Sunday" [early 1932], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[9] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "Friday" [possibly early 1932], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[10] Upfield, *The Murchison Murders*. The manuscript suffered a number of rejections, but was eventually published by The Midget Masterpiece Publishing Co., Sydney. The date of publication does not appear, but it is probably 1934. The work was republished in America in 1987. The Melbourne *Herald* published related articles by Upfield - " 'Snowy' Rowles, Gay Daredevil," 23 January 1934: 19 and "The Murchison Bones Murder Case," 24 January 1934: 17.

> shout about literature mainly to conceal their jealousy and incompetence. They are the sort of people who borrow or steal a book, but never buy one . . . .

What the enclosed article was I do not know, but the juices were now really flowing and Arthur thundered to his friend:

> You come down to the buyer class, and to the devil with the 'litery' blokes and bloke-esses. I warn you, you will never do any good if you don't.[11]

Arthur continued writing, sustained by a very modest income for the remainder of 1932. His two non-Bony novels - *Abduction* and *Drought* - were published, royalties arrived from earlier efforts and the three Perth major papers printed a number of articles. *A Royal Abduction*,[12] set it would seem on the West Australian side of the Nullarbor Plain, concerns the kidnapping of a European princess and her incarceration in remote limestone caves. It earned from the *Times Literary Supplement* a comment that ". . . the least geographically-minded reader will enjoy this bold and exciting yarn." [13]

Gripped by Drought, located on a pastoral property in the far west of New South Wales, tells the story of a three-years-long drought surrounding an unfortunate marriage and is dedicated to Upfield's friend, E. V. Whyte of Albemarle station near Wentworth, who helped him with the pastoral statistics.[14] Upfield had earlier mentioned to Ewers that when writing *Drought* he had had few interruptions, enabling him in one good week to produce 26,000 words. When reading the completed manuscript "it gripped even me, to the extent that I had to read the 107,000 words at one sitting. Which is

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[11] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 30 March 1932, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[12] Upfield, *A Royal Abduction* (1932; place not shown, but believed to be either San Francisco or Missoula, Montana: Dennis McMillan Publications, 1984).

[13] Rev. of *A Royal Abduction, Times Literary Supplement* 11 February 1932: 96.

[14] Arthur W. Upfield, *Gripped by Drought* (1932: Missoula, Montana: Dennis McMillan Publications, 1990).

why I think it will be a winner."[15] Unfortunately, *Gripped by Drought* attracted comparatively little critical attention, although Keith Ewers gave it a long and favourable notice in the Perth *Daily News*.[16]

And Arthur wrote, while ostensibly sitting on a rocky ledge of the Darling Ranges overlooking Perth, a reflective prose piece on fortune in life for *Jarrah Leaves*.[17] The magazine, a literary annual "wholly written and illustrated by West Australians," also contained pieces by his friends Keith Ewers and the journalist, Charles Lemon.

The number of guests booking into the Upfield establishment, seldom very high, started to decline and after Easter 1933 they were again facing "a bad corner." Not surprisingly, there were stresses in the family. Arthur wrote to Ewers

> It seems that they [i.e. the family of another author], like my own wife, are bitterly disappointed that novels have not brought us a fortune, and therefore think writing is a waste of time. From the point of view of money, I agree. But I cannot agree that from the point of accomplishing something worthwhile in life placing one's brain between 2000 sets of book covers is worth nothing.[18]

He added that they would probably have to walk away from Kalamunda. Anne, who, like Arthur, seems to have been a worker and who shouldered a number of burdens in her marriage, may perhaps be forgiven for not always maintaining the faith. She was not keen on Arthur taking to the road again and to help out further she resumed her private nursing.[19]

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15 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 16 August 1931, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

16 John K. Ewers ("Yorick"), "Upfield's New Novel: Drought in N.S.W.," rev. of *Gripped by Drought*, [Perth] *Daily News* 12 November1932: 9: "Upfield in this book has created from the very dust of life a company of genuine minor characters . . . and numerous others that vivify the pages and make this one of the most revealing books of Australian station life ever written."

17 Arthur W. Upfield, "The Gamble of Life," *Jarrah Leaves* 1933-34: 31. Upfield's letter to Charles Lemon of 3 October 1933 mentions that this piece had been rejected by both the *West Australian* and the Perth *Sunday Times*.

18 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 27 April 1933, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

19 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 27 June 1933, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

Without success, Upfield wrote to several station people in the Murchison seeking a job and eventually the pair of them applied for postings as officer-in-charge and matron of a hospital run by the Aborigines Department. Arthur carried a reference from a man friendly with the Chief Protector of Aborigines and Anne bore a reference from Sister Rosalie of the Anglican convent school, Perth College. Sister Rosalie also knew the Chief Protector well and called on him on behalf of the Upfields.[20] Unfortunately, the pair did not get the jobs, guests didn't start flocking to their Kalamunda boarding house and Hutchinson rejected *Mr. Jelly's Business* without explanation.

Despite his own difficulties, Arthur still showed concern for his friend Ewers with the following advice:

> It seems that you have a craze - a temporary one I hope - for starting new novels. Cut that out or you will be starting a dozen and finishing not one. Get down to one, make up your mind to write it. Get it done - and then bake it. You will find it won't matter a damn how unsatisfactory it seems when you put finis on it, for after three months you will start its rewriting with the plot and its characters well developed. During those three months the characters will grow from sickly babes to adult, healthy people. I cannot think that there are many authors who write good novels right off, slap bang.
> And despite what I have said and written, don't get the idea that your second novel must be a masterpiece. If you consciously strive to produce a masterpiece you will come a gutzer - a word not gained from Nettie Palmer. Whereas, if you write in a spirit of independence you might well do so.
> Finally - here is father laying down the law again - remember that for every Nettie Palmer book-buyer there are exactly 727 Arthur Upfield book buyers, and that Smart [a publisher] is not interested in the Nettie Palmers.[21]

By September 1933 Upfield was employed in the features department of the Melbourne afternoon paper, the *Herald.* ("At 3.30 p.m. the first edition is rushed out by a huge fleet of delivery vans and to watch this daily departure is much like seeing several fire brigades setting away to a fire," wrote Arthur.) I don't know whether

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[20] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 4 July 1933, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[21] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "Saturday" [possibly September 1933], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

Upfield sought the position, or whether it was offered to him, but the *Herald* had already published in serial form four of his novels and a number of articles. It is quite possible that the paper made overtures to Arthur as part of their strategy for beating their afternoon rival, the *Star*. Anne, with James Arthur in her care, stayed behind to carry on the boarding house as best she could.

Farewelled by his friends on Perth railway station, Upfield was met upon his Saturday morning arrival in Melbourne by Bernard Cronin, a novelist and fiction sub-editor on the *Herald*. Upfield was placed in a cheap, but decent, hotel and that afternoon - it was cold and raining - he went to St. Kilda to look at an advertised bed-sitting room. "I found the room alright," said Upfield, "but the landlady was drunk and still in her fancy pyjamas."[22] He decided against that location and eventually found a place in Spring Street, just around the corner from the Herald Building. Upfield's impressions of Melbourne were still unfavourable. "I only like the gardens and the girls. They at least know how to dress."[23]

Upfield's job was to produce for the paper four serials each year. His salary at £5.5.0 per week for the serial work - other articles accepted were paid on lineage - was meagre, but the job was created for him and he was promised that if he proved himself his salary would increase within six months to £10 per week. He had a desk, the services of a shorthand typiste and a suggestion from the editor-in-chief, Sidney Deamer, that the first work be a racing serial to coincide with the Spring racing carnival in Melbourne. The Melbourne Cup, one of the world's great horse racing events, was and is run on the first Tuesday in November each year. Arthur told

[22] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, undated [probably September 1933], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[23] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, undated [probably September 1933], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

Ewers that Deamer didn't want a Nat Gould yarn, but a thriller with a Melbourne Cup background, adding that what he, Upfield, didn't know about racing could be covered by the paper's combined sporting staff. Expenses incurred in absorbing the atmosphere of the race track at the weekends would be met by the *Herald*.[24]

Upfield therefore had four or five weeks to complete his first assignment for the paper. He had initially to produce a 1,000 word synopsis of the story so that Australia-wide syndication could be arranged. If passed, the next step was to produce 15,000 words so that an editorial decision could be made as to whether to proceed or not. In the meantime, he had to find out about horse racing. Arthur didn't waste time. He spent three hours in the library reading up on horse doping and horse poisoning cases, got the flash of an idea, presented it to the chief sporting writer - a man named Hart - and late into the night wrote out his synopsis. ("It is the first time I have written a synopsis of a story and I have become convinced that it is a splendid way. [It] enables me to create the flesh with rapidity.")[25]

It was a rush, and Upfield resented the Saturdays he had to spend at the racetrack talking to jockeys, owners and supposed horse dopers, but he managed to produce 80,000 words of *The Great Melbourne Cup Mystery*. The serial commenced in the *Herald* before Melbourne Cup Day, 1933, while Arthur was still writing it. However, to his chagrin, he had to slice the last 40,000 words down to 20,000. The reason, as far as Upfield knew, was that the *Herald's* features policy was now being more closely

[24] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, undated [probably September 1933], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[25] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, undated [probably September 1933], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

aligned to that of their rival paper, the *Star*[26] but the more likely reason, as he learned later, was that after each Melbourne Cup Day interest in racing tends to wane for a while. In 1996 *The Great Melbourne Cup Mystery* was published in book form in Australia.[27]

With the bulk of his first task completed, Upfield explored the Melbourne literary scene, no doubt feeling thoroughly self-conscious as he did so. He had early elicited the views of two of his newspaper superiors on Nettie Palmer, so he could write:

> According to Cronin, and [A. W.] Wynne [then head of the *Herald's* book publishing department], Nettie cuts no ice whatever. She is regarded as a joke because she favours only those novels which in no possible way could compete with those written by her wretched husband.

Then, with a vanity worthy of Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, Arthur added "Slating *Windee* as she did I am to take as a compliment, indicating as it does that she is fearful of me."[28] Arthur was not to make such an unlikely presumption again of a critic until, many years later, his *An Author Bites the Dust* was published.

With the encouragement of Cronin, Upfield went along to his first meeting of the Australian Authors' Society. Unfortunately, as he wrote, he either went to the wrong place or no-one turned up - "An evening wasted."[29] His next foray to the Society, a Saturday guest night, was as he described it possibly not a great deal more successful:

> Everyone was in evening dress bar . . . the author of *The Pearlers* [J. M. Harcourt] and [Leonard] Mann, author of *Flesh in Armour*. We three looked idiots. A woman had the audacity to point out to us that as guests turned up in evening dress the members of the society were expected to do so. I told her I was paying a great mark of respect to the fool

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[26] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "Wednesday" [probably October 1933], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[27] Arthur W. Upfield, *The Great Melbourne Cup Mystery* (Sydney: Imprint, 1996). Angus & Robertson in a letter to Upfield dated 24 January 1934, Angus & Robertson Collection, Mitchell Library, had declined to publish this work.

[28] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, undated [probably September 1933], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[29] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 27 September 1933, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

> society by wearing a collar and not for all the tea in China would I hire an evening suit as the other guests evidently had done.

Arthur, with some delight, added:

> You would like Mann. A bloke after our own hearts. A bird was reciting some of his poetry with his eyes cast up to heaven, and I asked Mann how he was enjoying himself. He replied "B----- awful!" When I asked him if he went in for this sort of thing he said: "This is the second time. I don't think there will be a third." [30]

Upfield, clearly, was not comfortable in settings such as these.

At the *Herald*, however, Arthur was settling in and becoming aware of those undercurrents seldom immediately apparent to the new chum. He discovered that the reviewer "Touchstone" was not on the paper's staff, but was thought to be an employee of Robertson and Mullins the booksellers, and that "10% of the staff above the rank and file are genuine and 90% hold their jobs by sheer bluff." He then instanced the probably apocryphal story where:

> The cricket writer fell ill for nearly a week, but his contribution was received as usual. It later slipped out that his particular call boy carried on with the job when he was away, submitting matter a trifle superior, if anything.[31]

But to his pleasure Arthur had shared the owner's, Keith Murdoch's, table - "He invited me to lunch in his private dining room to get to know him. I found him unvaryingly conversant with subjects one would think he had no interest in."[32]

Meanwhile, back in Kalamunda, in a response to a solicitous letter from Keith Ewers, Anne Upfield wrote ". . . I have had some people in, so have not felt lonely at all. [James] Arthur has just been wonderful since his Dad left."[33] James Arthur was then aged thirteen years. By the end of 1933 Anne, with James Arthur, had moved out of Kalamunda and taken a nursing job again in Pinjarra, south of Perth. Arthur had been

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30 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "Wednesday" [probably October 1933], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
31 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 18 November [1933], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
32 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 24 October 1933, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
33 Anne Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 3 October 1933, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

sending Anne £2.10.0 a week from his salary, leaving himself £2.15.0 plus his articles lineage money on which to live in Melbourne, but the guesthouse could not be maintained. Arthur owed the Kalamunda landlord £14 in back rent and he was still paying off Keith Ewers' loans at the rate of £1 per week.

With his Melbourne Cup serial run finished, Upfield proposed to Wynne that the *Herald* run *Breakaway House* as a serial (it didn't); that his autobiography, *The Tale of a Pommy*, appear in a series of articles (twelve articles, syndicated in four other papers and relating to Upfield's earliest years in Australia, did so appear in January 1934 under the heading " My Life Outback"); and that he, Arthur, be given a roving commission to go north to examine the problems of the Aborigine in his relations with the white and Asian man (nothing happened here either).[34] In the meantime, Upfield worked on a rewrite of *Breakaway House*, so that by the middle of February, 1934, he could claim to have produced in five months for the *Herald* 202,400 words. Arthur didn't know whether that was good or not, but according to Arthur "Old Fink", the chairman of directors, personally congratulated him, saying "You appear to be turning into a brilliant journalist."[35]

At the beginning of 1934 the Australian economy, with the world economy, was starting to improve, but unemployment was to remain very high for some time to come. Upfield for the present felt reasonably secure, even though he struggled on his salary, for he believed that his contract, which was due to expire in February, would be renewed. Anne, however, had only been in her Pinjarra nursing job for a short time when there was some sort of an upset and she went to live in a boarding house.

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[34] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 18 November [1933], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[35] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 15 February 1934, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

Arthur persuaded the *Herald* to advance the fares to Melbourne for Anne and James Arthur, thus, amongst other things, worsening the family's debt load. The pair left for Melbourne on 12 February 1934 and the three-roomed furnished cottage, one not connected to electricity, at Mt. Dandenong, about a one hour run east of Melbourne, that Arthur had taken in December for £1 per week. The move at least did James Arthur good, because he struck a good teacher at his new school and was pushed up from fifth to eighth grade.

Arthur was now starting to feel uneasy. Then, two weeks after his contract expired, he, with sixteen other writers in the *Herald* stable, was laid off. The editor in chief, Sidney Deamer, told Arthur that when the cost-cutting war with the rival paper, the *Star*, was over he would have him back - possibly in July -[36] but this was not to be, even though the *Star* subsequently failed. Upfield later wrote of this period: "There then followed a year of terrifying poverty which left its mark on me and on my memory."[37]

[36] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 28 March 1934, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[37] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 11 November 1937, Angus &. Robertson Collection.

13 STRUGGLES, SUCCOUR AND SUCCESS (1934-39)

Upfield was now unemployed, with a wife, a son, a year's lease on a house in Mt. Dandenong and debts. Anne had £2 in her purse and Arthur had £6 in contributions due to him. Happily, the *Herald* agreed to cut Upfield in on the syndication of his second series of bush articles and he could expect £17.10.0 from that.[1]

By mid-1934 Upfield was earning on average with his pen £4 per week.[2] The Sydney *Bulletin* bought a short story and later in the year another three and he was successful with a number of articles in various publications. He also accepted a commission to write a biography - "from a typed manuscript poorly done" - of Francis Edward Cobbold, who had led a colourful life as a sailor, a Fijian trader and an Australian pioneer pastoralist.[3] Upfield's expenses on this project, however, were higher than expected (although he did get around Christmas 1934 an all-costs-covered four weeks tour of north Queensland cattle stations with his chauffer-driven patron) and the work, completed in the first quarter of 1935, did not produce the hoped-for net return. The subject of the biography, Cobbold, was expected to have the work privately published in London, but I do not know if this was in fact done. Upfield's completed manuscript is lodged in the Australian National Library.[4]

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1 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 28 March 1934, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
2 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 17 July 1934, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
3 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 18 November 1934, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
4 Arthur W. Upfield, *Francis Edward Cobbold: Sailor, Fijian Trader and Australian Pioneer*, ms. which may have been privately published in London, 1935, MS5806, National Library Canberra. Upfield was commissioned by Cobbold, when Cobbold was about 83, to write the biography. The preface concludes with "When compiling the work I was assisted by Mr. Cobbold to the point of collaboration. He has provided the bones: I have placed on them merely the flesh of the historical background and the life blood of personalities. Arthur W. Upfield. March 1935." The prose is quite crisp (but how much of the original, from which Upfield worked, was left intact I do not know) in contrast with the somewhat florid preface and the concluding lines of the work – "We leave the room and his presence with regret, for one has not been conscious of the passage of time. . . . And so we take our adieu."

The Palmers, never far from Arthur's thoughts, frequently surfaced in his conversations and correspondence. Nettie was great friends with Arthur's former landlady, who had conspired to bring about a face-to-face meeting, but this never came about. Arthur's keen interest in Nettie and Vance, though, continued undiminished:

> The ever constant question on my lips is: "What do you think of Vance Palmer's work?" and the ever constant reply is: "It's all right, but his writing is too laboriously perfect and flat." And that is the strength of him. I have read three of his articles and they are as flat as dishwater and have no more guts and punch than unleavened bread." [5]

Even more unkindly, Arthur wrote a few weeks later:

> As I have told you, she [Nettie Palmer] is a joke. Her knowledge of books is about 15% with 85% bluff. Mention Nettie here and you raise a smile. Mention Vance and you produce pity for a man who is earnestly trying to write masterpieces and falls down. All admit that he writes carefully constructed prose, but as a story teller the *Sporting Globe's* office boy is an improvement.[6]

Now, in July 1934, Arthur was really irate, writing a trifle slanderously from Mt. Dandenong:

> The Palmers live only half a mile away and one day I'll cut her throat. I spent hours with an old identity getting the facts and the progress of the Dandenongs from Year One, and like a fool mentioned the work I was doing to several people here. They told Nettie and she immediately dashed off a lot of tripe about the place for the [Melbourne morning paper] *Argus*.[7] It was all screamingly funny because the errors were countless, and lots of people wrote to the paper pointing them out. But she got the cash - I didn't. They are a very mangy crowd and hardly anyone has anything to do with them. "Poor old Vance," is the cry amongst the literary people of Melbourne.[8]

Matters literary continued to fester within Arthur, so that he dashed off a squib published in the *Bulletin's* Red Page under the heading "More on the Literary Snobocracy":

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[5] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 5 December 1933, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[6] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 27 December 1933, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[7] Upfield is possibly referring to Nettie Palmer, "In the Dandenongs. A Walk to the Silvan Dam," *Argus* 24 March 1934: 11. This is a description of a bush ramble.
[8] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 17 July 1934, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

> Cecil Mann's article on literary societies (Red Page 26.9.34) got right down to the guts of what is The Old Man of the Sea riding the Australian writer. He asks, in effect, what have writers to do with these la-di-da yops who live on literature, not by literature, and the answer is nix. Further to his views is here the opinion of one who for long has been attempting to earn a crust with a pen . . . .The study of literature is ever mentally stimulating, which should be the prime reason for the formation of any literary society. If they embrace other objects - the boosting of mediocre work, self-boosting and relation-boosting; permitting men and women to set themselves up as masters of literature and masters of the art of criticism; and directing public attention to work the merit of which has failed to draw any attention but their own - it is time that some working writer should tell them to go somewhere and take a running jump at themselves.[9]

Upfield's characteristic bluntness, combined with a deliberate cocking-the-snoot vernacular, is unlikely to have won over the literati on the other side of the pit. His point, however, is made.

In the second half of 1934 the Melbourne Centenary Competition attracted the attention of writers. Keith Ewers was thinking of entering one of his new novels and Arthur was giving his opinion, for he, Arthur, always cast a keen, if jaundiced, eye on literary competitions:

> I don't think your novel will win the Competition, not if it is the finest novel ever written. The Competition will be all cut and dried, as was the one in which *Coonardoo* came first. The fact that a novel bears only a nom-de-plume cuts no ice, because any literary man acting as a judge would know the author's style. Vance Palmer will get the first prize, you may rest assured. No-one can compete against a literary clique which controls literary competitions here in the Eastern States.[10]

Soon after Upfield wrote again to Ewers:

> You do not appear to realise that these affairs are arranged beforehand among a small, allegedly literary clique. Through a reliable source I learned many weeks ago that Palmer was to win the literary short-story prize of £50. A Mrs. Denver put up the money. The judges are all friends of the Palmers and all are in the clique . . . .The *Bulletin* Novel Competition (first one) was arranged to boost Miss Prichard.[11] The money was put up

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[9] Arthur W. Upfield, letter, *Bulletin* 17 October 1934: (Red Page) 5.

[10] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 14 September 1934, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers. Vance Palmer's *Men Are Human* had taken third prize in the first *Bulletin* competition in 1928 and his *The Passage* won the second *Bulletin* competition in 1930. Thus it was an easy step for Arthur to feel that Palmer would take out the Centenary Competition.

[11] I earlier mentioned that in a judges' report on The Bulletin Prize Story Competition, dated 18 August 1928, *Coonardoo* was awarded equal first prize with Marjorie Barnard's and Flora Eldershaw's *A House is Built*. The judges remarked "Our first choice is *A House is Built*, an Australian prose epic of marked literary quality. We find, however, such great merit in *Coonardoo,* with its outstanding value for serial publication, that we recommend it also as worthy of a first prize." While Upfield's allegation of a prearranged boosting for Prichard

not by the *Bulletin* but by a firm in which her husband's people held a big interest.[12]

Vance Palmer's novel *The Swayne Family* shared the Melbourne Centenary Prize and on 14 November 1934 *All About Books. For Australian and New Zealand Readers* published on its front cover a photograph of Mrs. Palmer above the caption "Nettie Palmer. The Leading Authority on Australian Literature."

Arthur's articles in the *Herald* and *Walkabout* and his short stories in the *Bulletin* only just allowed him financially to pull through 1934. His slim volume on the Snowy Rowles case - *The Murchison Murders* - was published probably in that year by The Midget Masterpiece Publishing Co. Ltd. of Sydney and is unlikely to have produced much for the author. The manuscript had been refused by Hutchinson of London[13] and by Angus & Robertson in Sydney.[14] However, as a result of that contact in 1932/33 a profitable relationship between Angus & Robertson and Upfield was to develop.

January 1935 passed with Anne and James Arthur holidaying with Anne's parents near Barrakee and Arthur dealing with his Kalamunda guesthouse creditors, who had thus far received 10/- in the £. He sent £4 to Keith Ewers, with thanks for his patience and a probably unnecessary assurance that the balance would be covered by the end of February. And for the first time Nettie Palmer's voice was heard in the

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seems most unlikely to be true, the phrasing of the judges' comments is curious and it is easy to see how such an allegation could arise.

12 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 18 November 1934, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
13 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 22 August 1932, Angus & Robertson Collection.
14 Angus & Robertson, letter to Upfield, 13 February 1933, Angus & Robertson Collection.

Upfield household. "Nettie wants choking. She yabbers about literature on the wireless." Arthur had bought a radio for 3/- down and 3/- a week.[15]

R. G. Campbell, the editor of the *Australian Journal,* had published a story of Arthur's in the January 1935 edition,[16] afterwards sending Arthur extracts from applauding readers' letters and asking for a serial, for which he would pay £50. With no syndication extras mentioned, Upfield wasn't prepared to accept the serial offer, but he did work up a number of stories which were published from mid-1935 through to July 1938. Upfield was also successful with a series of articles published by *Walkabout* from January 1935 onwards, an achievement made all the sweeter, because, according to Arthur, *Walkabout* had refused submissions by Vance Palmer.[17] Arthur later mentioned that his, Arthur's, *Walkabout* articles were picked up by a Melbourne firm called Kosmos, who translated and placed them (on a 50/50 basis) in nearly every European country, bar Russia. He was told that of the first five *Walkabouts* worked by Kosmos, his, Arthur's, articles were the most successful placements because they were written in an intimate style and not in the more common guide-book prose.[18]

Vance Palmer's success, however, continued elsewhere and when Palmer's prize-winning novel *The Swayne Family* was heard being read over the Australian Broadcasting Commission's radio station 3LO, Arthur felt compelled to call at its serial desk to lobby for his own work. Arthur's *The Beach of Atonement* was next read after Palmer's book - for which reading the ABC paid Arthur £10.10.0 - and a useful partnership with the ABC's "Scribe," Leslie Williams, was thus formed. Scribe was an actor and what he wanted for his 9.35 a.m. readings was not so much "literature" but

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15 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 26 January 1935, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
16 Arthur W. Upfield, "Joining Up With Rafferty," *Australian Journal,* 1 January 1935: 31-34.
17 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 27 February 1935, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
18 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 11 October 1935, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

a good story which provided scope with its characters, for he gave voice to them all. So wide was Scribe's circle of listeners that he was allowed to determine what would be read. According to Arthur, Scribe confessed that *The Swayne Family* was quite the worst thing he had ever inflicted on the public, "but as Mr. Palmer regularly gives literary talks on 3LO, he had been instructed to put it on."[19]

With his Cobbold biography completed, Upfield started work on a new Bony novel which was eventually to emerge as *Wings Above the Diamantina.* And, of course, he continued corresponding with Keith Ewers - so far as I know until December 1958. I think both men gained from it; from the occasional exchange of a confidence, to the asked-for criticism of the other's work, to the exchange of professional experiences and, of course, scuttlebutt. Upfield, after yet another shot at the Palmers, once said quite revealingly to Ewers "The greatest point of having you as a pal is that I can get a hell of a lot of dirty water off my chest."[20] That release sometimes extended to a personal frankness. For example, Upfield, in telling Ewers how and where to submit a novel to the ABC for airing, had reached the point of the covering letter, saying:

> Now take my tip and don't rush him with a long description of the book. Be as brief as you can, and should he turn it down - which I think he will not do - don't write and tell him where he is wrong. You are a little inclined to argue - as with the *West Australian* - and believe me it does not do.[21]

Ewers, in his autobiography *Long Enough for a Joke*, generously acknowledged Arthur's help - "His experience with publishers was invaluable to me . . ."[22]

A mid-year letter of Upfield's to Ewers provides a good example of Upfield's sort of professional chit-chat. There is the now almost customary gesture towards Nettie and Vance:

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[19] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 14 May 1935, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[20] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 27 February 1935, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[21] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 14 May 1935, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[22] John K. Ewers, *Long Enough for a Joke* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1983) 133.

> The Palmers must have sneaked off quietly. I did not know they had left, although they live less than a mile from here. I hope sincerely that the ship goes down and drowns them both. Australian literature - true Australian literature - will be much the sweeter for their passing.

A quick whip-around:

> [William] Hatfield, I hear, is very close to the hacks in Sydney. They tell me that Mr. and his wife get around in alleged bushman's rig - wide-brimmed hats, stockwhips and all. [Ion] Idriess is mentally peculiar, but he does make money. I wouldn't mind being a rank lunatic if I could make money.

And a dwelling on mutual tribulations:

> Our joint experience of the *West Australian* is not singular to that paper. The *Argus* and the *Age* have always refused my stuff. [The *Argus*, however, was to publish three Bony novels in serial form between 1946 and 1954.] The Sydney papers will have none of it. [Likewise, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published two Bony novels in serial form between 1945 and 1954]. Cronin did well with the *Argus* for some time and then, when they bunged back an article, he sent it to the *Sun* - the morning paper - which duly published it. Since then the *Argus* will not look at Cronin's stuff. If I sent stuff to the *Star* and they published an article, I would be damned with the *Herald*. So the market in these large Australian cities is exceedingly cramped and no better than that of Perth.[23]

Keith Ewers had taken Arthur's advice and was successful in having his *Fire on the Wind* read over 3LO by Scribe, with Arthur's *Gripped by Drought* scheduled to follow on air. According to Arthur, Scribe received nearly seventy letters, with only one condemnatory, following his reading of Upfield's *Beach of Atonement*. Arthur was pleased, but disappointed that a radio play he had submitted to 3LO was not successful.[24] This play was not mentioned again by Upfield.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world Arthur's father was dying of cancer and Arthur, with his three brothers married, was concerned for his mother's welfare. James Oliver Upfield was buried on 18 November 1935. On the eve of the funeral the third son, Frank, wrote to Arthur with the estate details. (Their mother had already written to Arthur on the manner of his father's passing.) The mother was to receive an adequate tax-free annuity and after certain disbursements, including

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[23] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 1 July 1935, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[24] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 11 October 1935, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

£Stg1,000 to a charity in memory of the son killed on the Somme battlefield, it seemed likely that the four surviving brothers would eventually each receive about £Stg2,500. (This figure, however, was overestimated.) Frank, like executors the world over, was already seeing things as nightmarish.[25]

Other letters now arrived from Frank - he was a good communicator and his words flowed very well. In one letter he spoke of their mother's alcoholism and the difficulties the family had in ensuring that their father was properly cared for in his last days. The drapery business, which was away from the High Street, was not doing well - when Frank took over from their father more was owed on the stock than it was valued at - and Frank feared another breakdown in himself. He implored Arthur not to give the slightest hint in his letters to their mother, for whom a house opposite Frank's was eventually bought, that he had been told all this. "She thinks the world of you and your son, as is only right." Frank closed one of these letters with a deferral to Arthur - "Any advice from you as head of the family will receive very careful consideration."[26]

On the morning of 2 March, 1936, Upfield at the age of forty five years suffered a serious collapse. The doctor was called and after a strychnine injection, no doubt intended as a nerve stimulant, Arthur was removed to a private hospital. (Upfield noted: "When I say 'private' I have no intention of being snobbish, but so overcrowded are the public hospitals in Melbourne it was impossible to get into any one of them.") Shortly after being admitted, he was attacked by arthritis in his knee -

[25] Frank Upfield, letters to Arthur Upfield, 17 November 1935 and 16 December 1935, archive of Don Uren.

[26] Frank Upfield, letters to Arthur Upfield, 25 January 1936 and 27 January 1936, archive of Don Uren.

this was to plague him for a long time - and elbow and the upshot was a month-long bed rest. He ascribed his collapse to overwork, insufficient exercise and bad teeth.[27]

The stay in hospital, and the convalescence, would have been expensive for Arthur in terms of words not written and, quite probably, in the medical costs as well. However, his fortunes were fairly soon to improve. The *Australian Journal* had in January commenced in serial form *Wings Above the Diamentina,* when the reader response was so great that the editor, R. G. Campbell, offered Upfield £90 for his next work. And Angus & Robertson were to bring out in hardback in September the same *Wings Above the Diamantina*, the third Bony novel and the first of his now seven published novels to be produced in Australia.

The physical collapse in March also cost Arthur something in exposure, for he was contracted to the ABC to deliver a series of talks over 3LO on "This Author Business" when he became sick. Scribe read the first talk for him, but with the disruption the series collapsed. Meanwhile, according to Arthur, Scribe had received 134 letters of appreciation - and not one condemnation - following his reading of Arthur's *Gripped by Drought*. This, to Arthur's delight, was in strong contrast to the reading of Frank Dalby Davison's *Forever Morning*, when Scribe received only 11 letters. (Davison was friendly with Vance Palmer.) "I am mentioning all this," wrote Upfield to Ewers, "because I am convinced that the literary world in this country is all wrong and to take the slightest notice of it is ridiculous."[28]

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[27] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 29 April 1936, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[28] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 29 April 1936, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

In January 1937 Upfield received a remittance of £Stg1,184 from his father's estate [29] and with his new-found wealth in May bought the house he was renting in Mt. Dandenong, together with an acre of adjoining land. He had a hall and three rooms added, including a good-sized study.[30] It is not known what input, if any, Anne had towards these improvements.

Keith Ewers, now married, had with his wife meanwhile left Perth for an extended stay in the United Kingdom. Upfield, in the fashion of a somewhat confused host, attested that he would very much like them to visit his mother, but Ewers and his wife were to return from Britain in the second half of 1937 without seeing Upfield's mother and family. Upfield had found excuses:

> I cannot arrange for the visit at the present time because the family is so thrown out of gear by the death of my father [six months previously] that everything is at sixes and sevens.[31]

And

> I have heard from home that my mother is very poorly with this arthritis in the groin . . . It is in the balance if she will be able to walk again without pain or become a complete cripple for life. If you write to her she might be tempted to invite you against medical advice, and should you accept, and afterwards she became worse, I would be held responsible. In these unfortunate circumstances I must ask you to defer your contact until well into your next summer, by which time we shall know the best or the worst about her.[32]

The beginning of the next northern summer was then six months distant.

Upfield's display of filial piety is either deeply felt or he simply does not wish the educated and urbane Ewers to see his family, despite his earlier-revealed apparent pride in his ancestry. I am inclined towards the latter view. Upfield had, however, in a generous gesture typical of the bushman in him, offered to give Ewers a hand in need

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29 Frank Upfield, letter to Upfield, 14 January 1937, archive of Don Uren.
30 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 6 August 1937, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
31 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 29 April 1936, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
32 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 29 December 1936, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

- "If you should want £50 at any time, place a small circle on one of the corners of the first page of your letter and I will cable it."[33]

Upfield passed on small matters to Ewers. Mary Mitchell, an author whom Arthur admired, had come to live near the Upfields. "She is, I should say, about 40, perhaps 30. Greying hair and plenty of it, and the type a sexual adventure would have blossomed into a damn fine woman." Then, in a most uncharacteristic statement, he added

> It may not be too late even now, and I may myself try to correct that past error of a too strict personal morality . . . She is undoubtedly clever and I wish I could write as well as she does.[34]

Helen Simpson also earned an accolade - "without doubt the woman can write" - but Arthur had winced when hearing over the wireless what he thought was her unnaturally cultivated voice.[35]

The Palmers, of course, also earned a mention or two while the Ewers were abroad:

> They [the Palmers] have returned but there has been nothing much about them. Nettie addressed the Literary Society on "Famous Personages I Have Met" and Vance detailed his amazing adventures sneaking out of Spain. The stupid fool! Think of the material he could have obtained by being a little bit courageous and staying there. I suppose he thought that he would fall into the hands of the rebels, who would have given him short shrift, he being a fool Communist.[36]

And "Poor old Vance has come down to reviewing the pictures and books over 3AR, our second class national station. If ever a silly woman ruined her husband, Nettie has ruined hers. . . ."[37] It is doubtful whether the ABC's 3AR was inferior to its sister, 3LO, but it now pleased Arthur to think so.

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[33] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 20 December 1936, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[34] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 29 April 1936, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[35] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 6 August 1937, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[36] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 20 December 1936, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[37] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 6 August 1937, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

Wings Above the Diamantina emerged in late September, 1936, to quite a good press. This was to mark the beginning of a long association, a friendship, between Upfield and Angus & Robertson's director, W. G. Cousins, whom Upfield was nonetheless for many years to address as "Mr. Cousins." Cinesound Ltd. expressed interest in *Wings Above the Diamentina* and their representative called on Upfield, offering £70 for the Australian film rights. According to Arthur, he responded that he would require at least £500 for his work to be destroyed on the screen and that was the end of the matter.

Again according to Arthur, *Wings Above the Diamentina*, when serialised in the *Australian Journal*, pushed up the monthly sales of the journal by 10,000 and paved the way for the serialisation of Arthur's latest Bony manuscript, *Winds of Evil*.[38] *Wings Above the Diamentina* was subsequently published in Britain in 1937 by John Hamilton Ltd., but overtures to Dorrance and Company in America by Angus & Robertson were unsuccessful. Angus & Robertson conveyed the news to Arthur quite sensitively:

> They say it is a very fine book and every Reader has enjoyed it thoroughly, but they "have a feeling that it is something of greater Australian than American reading interest. His books are good, but we still have a quantity of *House of Cain*."[39]

Arthur was not too disappointed over the failure to find a publisher for *Wings Above the Diamentina* in America. "America wants either blood or sex and I am not at the present in the position to supply either."[40]

The year 1937 arrived in fine fashion with Arthur, holidaying at Bermagui on the south coast of New South Wales, hauling in after a fifty minutes fight a 223lb. striped

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38 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 20 December 1936, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
39 Angus & Robertson, letter to Upfield, 20 April 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.
40 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 3 June 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.

marlin. Two days later he caught a 380lb shark. The marlin catch was reported in the press and Arthur received a congratulatory telegram from W. G. Cousins on his achievement.[41] A couple of months later Upfield took another break, when with Scribe of 3LO he went on a 'boosting' tour of Victoria's Riverina region. He spoke, amongst other things, on depictions of the bush and its people by Australian writers and advances in book publishing in Australia, happily on the way meeting the people in charge of the Country Women's Association library.[42]

A good part of 1937, however, was devoted to Angus and Robertson's publishing of *Mr. Jelly's Business* and *Winds of Evil* and Arthur's drafting of his fifth Bony novel, *The Bone is Pointed.*

Set in Burracoppin, where Arthur had been headquartered while riding the no.1 rabbit proof fence, *Mr. Jelly's Business* had earned a particularly good report from Angus & Robertson's Reader: " Surely this is the very best detective story yet written by an Australian! It is the best, too, from more than one point of view. . . ."[43] The novel eventually emerged in June 1937, with Arthur ensuring that review copies were not dispatched by Angus & Robertson to either *All About Books: For Australian and New Zealand Readers* or the ABC in Melbourne:

> Vance Palmer is now in control of the [ABC] book reviews and would be certain to ignore or damn it and I have had trouble with the wife, who slanderously dealt with my *Sands of Windee* and me in *All About Books*. I am old enough always to try to avoid trouble, not to enjoy seeking it.[44]

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41 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 23 February 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.

42 Upfield, letters to Angus & Robertson, 1 March 1937 and 2 April 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.

43 Angus & Robertson's Reader's rev. of *Mr. Jelly's Business*, by Arthur W. Upfield, undated [but probably 1936], Angus & Robertson Collection.

44 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 26 April 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.

Winds of Evil, set in the far west of New South Wales and the fifth Bony work, was serialised in the *Australian Journal* from March 1935, when it raised the circulation of the journal, according to Arthur, by a further 5,000.[45] Upfield, whose marketing instincts were well developed, spent some time negotiating with Angus & Robertson on the timings of serials and the hard back edition, so that the one could feed the other. *Winds of Evil* was brought out by Angus & Robertson later that year, but not with the timing Upfield had hoped for - it was on the shelves after the *Australian Journal* had completed its serial instead of part way through the serial run.

Upfield now felt that he was starting to make an impact with his writing, but he couldn't work out why his books didn't sell in greater numbers. After all, Scribe by September 1937 had read over 3LO five Upfield novels, including the first three Bony mysteries, and had told Arthur that based on letters of appreciation received he, Arthur, was by far the most popular of all the Australian authors he had read on his programme. Furthermore, the *Australian Journal* had published in serial form two Bony mysteries and a number of articles and short stories. Its editor, R. G. Campbell had told Upfield that he considered Bony the most popular character ever to appear in his pages and Upfield and Rex Grayson , judging by readers' letters, his two most popular authors.[46] (Rex Grayson was the pseudonym of the editor himself, Ronald Grayson Campbell,[47] but I don't think Upfield ever knew this, for when the pair eventually fell out Upfield would almost certainly have made mention of it.)

One Sunday in October 1937 then, Scribe, Campbell and Arthur held a sort of conference in the Upfields' house to determine why Arthur's books didn't sell in

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45 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 3 June 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.
46 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 1 October 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.
47 John Arnold and John Hay, eds., *List of Australian Writers: 1788 – 1992, A-K* (Clayton: National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 1995) 78.

greater volume. Scribe pointed out that for every city listener he had ten in the country, and those ten didn't find it easy to look in a book store window. He added that he had spent a lot of time on the telephone answering queries on where the books could be bought, the short answer being that the novels, having been published in Britain some time ago, couldn't be bought, except for three - *Wings Above the Diamentina*, *Mr. Jelly's Business* and *Winds of Evil*. The public generally, said Scribe , thinks that Upfield's books aren't available and it will take time to overcome that perception.[48] And Campbell offered his opinion.

Campbell said that the majority of his readers lived in the country and simply didn't have access to a system for purchasing books. The local storekeeper-newsagent is asked, but he doesn't know where to write for copies or how much money to send. He, Campbell, had had letters enclosing ten-shilling notes and asking for books, but apart from being able to dispatch two copies of *Wings Above the Diamentina* he has had to send the money back to the people.

Williams' – Scribe's - solution was to rely on time, that is the Australian publication of Upfield's works and possible paper-back reprints of the earlier Hutchinson books, to resolve the problem. Campbell's idea was to advertise in the *Australian Journal* and say something like "look, you can buy *Wings*, *Jelly* and *Winds of Evil* at such'n such a price, and here is where you write to." Arthur put this latter to Angus & Robertson, saying he thought he could arrange for such an advertisement to appear opposite one of his pieces and offering to share the cost.[49] The matter there appeared to die.

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[48] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 1 October 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[49] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 1 October 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.

The year closed with Upfield working on both his next Bony novel - to emerge as *The Bone is Pointed* - and his autobiography, *The Tale of a Pommy*. He corresponded with Angus & Robertson on serials matters - the firm was quite active in print and broadcasting placements - and referred also to Ion Idriess' latest work:

> I have just read *Over the Range* and would like you to pass to Mr. Idriess my sincere congratulations. It is well worthy of its fine sales, when all too often a best seller is not. He is doing more to help struggling Australian authors to popularity than all the literary snobs tenfold. More power to his elbow. Wishing you the compliments of the Season. . .[50]

Cousins responded, saying he had shown the letter to Idriess, who greatly appreciated the remarks - especially those about the literary snobs.[51]

Upfield spent a successful couple of weeks in the new year game fishing in Bermagui before returning to his works-in-progress, which now included a series of seven historical stories, under the banner "These Things Have Happened," for the *Australian Journal*. Upfield liked R. G. Campbell, the editor - "He is good to work for and he has certainly given me a lot of publicity."[52] Arthur had determined, however, that because of his, Arthur's, influence on the sales of the journal, Campbell could pay more than the now-customary £60 for his emerging Bony novel, *The Bone is Pointed*, and he said so to Angus & Robertson.[53] Later in the year, however, this matter of payment caused a rupture which was probably unfortunate for both parties. Arthur explained:

> I have severed relations with the *Australian Journal* because the editor became angry when I declined to accept his usual £60 for the serial rights of the current job.[54]

Upfield's major success in 1938 was Angus & Robertson's acceptance of his sixth Bony novel, *The Bone is Pointed*. The work was also published in Britain in the

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50 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 27 December 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.
51 Angus & Robertson, letter to Upfield, 31 December 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.
52 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 11 November 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.
53 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 11 November 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.
54 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 1 July 1938, Angus & Robertson Collection.

following year. Set in western Queensland, the particular points of interest beyond the mystery aspects lie in accounts of pointing the bone and a description of a massive rabbit migration, which latter phenomenon Upfield had witnessed in his early days in Australia. The manuscript had before typing been edited by Keith Ewers,[55] who occasionally helped in this way - a fee being paid whenever Arthur could afford it. Angus & Robertson's Reader had noted "Admiration and sympathy for the aborigines, and an intimate knowledge of the bush, are evident throughout the book."[56]

In telling J.K. Ewers of what he attempted to do in *The Bone is Pointed*, Upfield said:

> I set out to write a readable book having much aboriginal law centred around the ancient boning of a human being. The more anthropologists of repute study the Australian abo. the further they are mystified by the origin of the race, and the more clearly do they come to think that the race was highly developed when the white and yellow races were human gorillas. I know that the general idea of the abos., based on the *Bulletin* drawings and jokes, is that they are half-wits, and here I have tried to make people understand that the reverse is the truth.[57]

After a brief reference to his idealisation of the fictional station-owners, the Gordons, who were progressive in their treatment of the Aborigines, Upfield makes this interesting comment in the same letter to Ewers: "Propaganda to leave the blacks alone, entirely free of white and yellow men, is my own and is supported by Dr. Thompson."[58]

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[55] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "Saturday" [possibly July 1938], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[56] Angus & Robertson's Reader's rev. of *The Bone is Pointed*, 17 August 1938, Angus & Robertson Collection.

[57] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "Saturday" [possibly July 1938], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[58] It is not clear to whom Upfield refers, but this is possibly a Dr. Donald Thomson. In an item headed "Welfare of Natives," the *West Australian*, 9 September 1938: 27, a Canon C.H. Nash reportedly refers to Thomson as a supporter of segregation in the segregation, adaptation or absorption "solutions" for dealing with Aborigines.

At the core of *The Bone is Pointed* is the apparent ability of tribal Aborigines to cause the death of others by willpower in the ceremony of pointing the bone. Such cases have been recorded over a long period. Upfield told Ewers that his authority for 'boning' lay in Sir Baldwin Spencer's work and, for the will-power element in the process, that of the Aboriginal preacher, lecturer and author, David Unaipon.[59] In May 1938 Angus & Robertson had sent Upfield at his request Spencer's and Gillen's anthropological work, *Across Australia*.

In *Across Australia* Spencer and Gillen talk about the pointing stick, or pointing bone - the two instruments perform the same function - used by the Arunta people. The bone, let us say, is some inches long and tapered like a skewer. After it is 'sung' to endow it with evil magic it is taken to a secluded spot in the bush and, after the user has muttered a curse over it, is placed in the ground for several days. When it is retrieved, say Spencer and Gillen, it is sometimes pointed out in the bush by jerking it in the direction of the enemy and muttering incantations for the evil magic to depart and kill the victim. At other times the user waits until dark and creeps close to the camp until he can see the victim's face in the firelight, when the same procedure is followed. The evil magic goes straight to the enemy, who soon afterwards sickens and dies. The victim's life, however, is sometimes saved by a medicine man, who is able to discover and remove the bone.

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[59] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, "Saturday" [possibly July 1938], archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers. In the light of April and May 1938 correspondence with Angus & Robertson, the reference to Baldwin is clearly to Sir Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *Across Australia* 2 vols. (London: n.p., 1912). (Also, Upfield's letter to Angus & Robertson of 28 July, 1938, says "I owe you £2.2.0 for the Spencer and Gillen book . . . These books have been of great value and will be of value in the future.) The reference to Unaipon is most likely to his *Native Legends* (c.1929), in particular to that account headed "Witchcraft" in David Unaipon, *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, ed. Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2001) 166-88.

In what publicists may now see as a stroke of good fortune for booksellers, if not for the unfortunate subject, a man in Queensland died from boning. Melbourne's *Argus* in August 1938 reported under the heading "Bone Pointed. Aborigine Dies" that a dispute had arisen at an Aboriginal camp beyond Mt. Isa and a man called Major had had a bone pointed at him. Major was later found lying outside the camp in a deteriorating state and was unable to explain what had happened. He died in hospital and a post-mortem determined that the cause of death was "obsession and a persecution complex." Other Aborigines explained the bone-pointing, but would not say who pointed it.[60]

There was, however, difficulty with Arthur's autobiography. In November 1937 Upfield told Angus & Robertson that he was working on *The Tale of a Pommy,* saying:

> There is nothing milk and waterish about it, but I have left the war severely alone and I shall not delve into psychology and sex experience. If I can't make a living by writing clean stuff then I'll go back to carrying my swag.[61]

The manuscript was duly dispatched to Angus & Robertson under the title *Beyond the Mirage*;[62] however in that month of May 1938 Upfield's old friend, John Smethurst, retired editor of the *Barrier Miner*, came to spend a few days with Arthur and was prevailed upon for a critique. Smethurst thought the work a failure as an autobiography, but as a volume of memoirs it might succeed. Smethurst made a number of suggestions, including a further re-titling to *Men, Women and Camels*, and Arthur duly sent off the revised text.[63]

In August Angus & Robertson asked Upfield if he thought it might be better,

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60 "Bone Pointed. Aborigine Dies," *Argus* 9 August 1938: 11.
61 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 11 November 1937, Angus & Robertson Collection.
62 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 11 May 1938, Angus & Robertson Collection.
63 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 25 May 1938, Angus & Robertson Collection.

because of a higher royalty, to offer *Men, Women and Camels* first to Oxford Press, adding "If they turn it down, of course, we will go ahead with it."[64] In December Angus & Robertson informed Arthur of a rejection by Oxford Press, when Arthur responded:

> I am more than inclined to agree with their reasons for rejection, and to save further expense the typescript should be destroyed and written off like a bad debt. It is a form of writing I have not made my own . . . . [65]

I do not know what Oxford Press' stated reasons were for turning down the work, but Upfield was, of course, disappointed.

Upfield's original choice of title for his autobiography, *The Tale of a Pommy* - "I hardly think that a better title can be got for it" - is worth considering because of the sometimes-perceived negative aspect of the term "Pommy." Upfield in the work commented:

> As the title of this work will infer, I am a Pommy, meaning, of course, that I am English by birth and parentage. I consider the English people to be the salt of the earth, and I have equal right to think it as the Australian who believes that those born in Australia are the earth's salt. We have here another form of snobbery, of which I am guilty equally with many millions. Yet after all, this salt of the earth theory is merely an opinion, the vocal expression of which no longer creates a brawl . . . .There is a belief that no good came from the Great War when in fact certain good did come from it. The Australians and the Pommies learned tolerance for each other, and since the Great War the word 'Pommy' is much less used and seldom as a taunt, this despite the jokes and drawings appearing in several weeklies depicting the Englishman as a rabbit-faced imbecile. As these same weeklies love to depict the Australian farmer as Dad or Dave, or both, or as in ill-mannered, badly-dressed lunatic, I for one cannot understand anyone objecting to the word Pommy. Still less can I understand myself for filling space by writing about it.[66]

In August 1938 Anne had departed for her parent's home in northern Victoria, where her mother was dying of cancer. A local nurse was engaged after four or five weeks and Arthur drove up to fetch Anne home. The Upfields returned to Anne's family farm later in the year, probably because of the death of Anne's mother on 1

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[64] Angus & Robertson, letter to Upfield, 6 August 1938, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[65] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 27 December 1938, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[66] Upfield, *The Tale of a Pommy* 3.

November 1938, when the temperature was around 120°F, where what stock remained was dying and where the paddocks were bare of anything but a little straw stubble. Arthur was persuaded to pay a mortgage interest bill on the farming property to prevent foreclosure. The mortgage was for £2,000 and the property, says Arthur, was worth £6,000 in a normal year. But of course, it wasn't a normal year and Upfield, who was now again short of cash, had to scrape in his sixpenny royalties due from Angus & Robertson.[67]

Upfield was pleased in the closing months of the year to be complimented on his work by Philip Whelan, who donated a notable collection of Australian books, including Arthur's, to the National Library in Canberra. Arthur autographed books for the collection and thanked Whelan, saying in part:

> It pleases me that you appreciate my work, because I have deliberately submerged crime and sensation below the surface of character and natural phenomenon . . . .[68]

The year 1938 closed with Arthur telling Cousins of Angus & Robertson that early in the new year he was to attend a P.E.N. Club dinner at which H. G. Wells was to be the guest of honour - "I have only attended literary functions on two occasions and was not impressed by the exhibited snobbery."[69] After this dinner, Upfield said, and the completion of his current Bony novel, *The Mystery of Swordfish Reef*, he might begin work on a tale concerning a murdered critic. (It would, however, be ten years before this, *An Author Bites the Dust,* appeared on the shelves.) Upfield did attend the P.E.N. Club dinner, but he said nothing of Wells for there he ran into an old friend, George Sutton. Sutton was the Australian representative of Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers)

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67 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 11 January 1939, Angus & Robertson Collection.
68 Upfield, letter to Philip Whelan, 6 November 1938, Whelan Papers, MS2449, National Library, Canberra,
69 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 27 December 1938, Angus & Robertson Collection.

Ltd., who were still selling *The Sands of Windee*, and since Arthur hadn't had a statement for about four years he was more interested in collecting his royalties than anything else.[70]

The new Bony novel, *The Mystery of Swordfish Reef*, was dispatched to Angus and Robertson in February 1939 when Arthur, with an eye to the market, unrealistically hoped that it could be issued before summer - and the best of the fishing - was over. Serial sales of Arthur's work had declined somewhat and he now pinned his hopes for a cash recovery on this new work. He saw himself battling against indifference, not so much from the public as from reviewers. He was conscious of "a degree of hostility towards coloured people" and knew that there was a segment of the buying public which looked in their reading for lords and ladies and, in mysteries, gentlemen sleuths from Scotland Yard.[71]

The Mystery of Swordfish Reef was issued in June 1939 much later than the mid-March peak of the swordfish season. In this story Bony is removed from his bush element to the sea, in particular to the real town of Bermagui and its swordfish industry in New South Wales. Arthur, a member of the Bermagui Big Game Angler's Club, was a competent game fisherman and so, too, not surprisingly, was the fast-learning Bony. And Arthur's marketing persona had been active. The secretary of the club had been very helpful and had produced for Arthur a list of the names of the members' launches, together with their owners' written permission to use the real names of the boats.[72] There were 250 members of the club and they and the townspeople were set to boost the book. In Melbourne a window front display in a large sports store had

[70] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 11 January 1939, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[71] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 25 January 1939, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[72] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 25 January 1939, Angus & Robertson Collection.

been arranged. Later in the year Arthur was made a life member of the Bermagui Big Game Anglers' Club.[73]

By now the thoughts of most were on the rising tensions in Europe and Arthur, Anne and James Arthur, with much of the rest of the world, feared the outcome. In the middle of 1939 Arthur received from the Ministry his manpower card, which he completed and returned with, he claimed, a note on the reverse: "I am confident I would make a better general than the fools we had last time." [74] As an ex-serviceman he could have been expected to register with the old Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force Reserve and be put on guard duty over a public utility of one sort or another. However, that had a distinct lack of appeal. "No sir," he wrote to Ewers. "Not when I'm 51 [he was actually 48] and still suffer from arthritis. No, sir, not when having served for over five years I could starve for all that a grateful country cared."

On Sunday 3 September 1939, just before eight o'clock in the evening, Arthur completed his new Bony novel, *Bushranger of the Skies*. Four minutes later, on the wireless, he heard the Prime Minister of Great Britain declare war on Germany.[75] At 9.15 p.m. Prime Minister Robert Gordon Menzies declared that Australia, too, was at war with Germany.

Arthur volunteered again, on 7 September 1939 writing to military headquarters offering his services ". . . which I believe could be utilized in some special category, such as the censorship branch. I am fifty one years of age [he was in fact now 49] and

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[73] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 12 December 1939, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[74] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 25 July 1939, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[75] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 5 September 1939, Angus & Robertson Collection.

for a character reference I offer my appointment to the Commission of the Peace." [76] (He had been appointed a Justice of the Peace in either 1937 or 1938.) Late in 1939 Upfield received an appointment, but payday wasn't quite soon enough:

> I have received an appointment at Military Headquarters at work which suits me down to the ground . . . Having sworn not to divulge the nature of this work I regret being unable to say anything further about it. However, I don't get my first pay till Friday week, and as I was well and truly flattened, and still am, I would accept it as a very great favour if you would let me have a cheque for royalties before the end of the month.[77]

Tiny pieces of information on Upfield's wartime job later emerged:

> . . . in strictest confidence, I received an appointment as a military censor, ranking for pay as a captain, this being £7-17-6 a week. I am supposed to tell no-one what I am doing, so please say nothing. The work is of intense interest because it has nothing to do with the somewhat stupid Information Ministry.[78]

He was, however, of civilian status. Much later he was to refer to:

> . . . the whispering campaign against Upfield immediately after the War, begun and maintained by the Communist elements among writers whose subversive activities it was my job to watch and record for four years.[79]

Upfield's change of status to that of a functionary of a wartime government marks naturally the end of another period of his life. In considering the frame 1911 to 1939, then, and looking for patterns, it is easy to see a repetition of the separateness, the in-betweenness, the ambivalence which marked his early years up to his migration to Australia.

The act of migration itself, even though in Upfield's case under paternal direction, is a statement of separation. That separation is compounded by his further removal, soon after his arrival in Australia, from an urban density to the rarefaction of the real bush. It was to the real bush that he returned, too, not long after his post-military departure

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[76] Upfield, letter to Officer Commanding Victoria Barracks Melbourne, 7 September 1939, A1336, National Archives of Australia.
[77] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 12 December 1939, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[78] Upfield, letter to J.K. Ewers, 12 February 1940, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
[79] Upfield, letter to J.K. Ewers, 27 January 1956, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

from Britain in late 1920. This latter separation is the more pronounced since it is a distancing from not only contiguous society, as before, but wife and child as well. The separateness shifts to a condition of inbetweenness with the relocation of Upfield's family to within occasional commuting distance for Upfield from Burracoppin in Western Australia. And this inbetweenness remains, despite Upfield's later domicile in mainly rural, or semi-rural locations, for, as he wrote, he was a slave to Australia Proper.

Upfield is ambivalent about the Great War, as quite possibly were the majority of men and women who took part in it. On the plus side, he saw it as a vehicle for both the nation-alism of the states of Australia and, to some extent, the diminution of overt Australian-British rivalry. On the other hand, his experience under fire, by his own account, left him with a neurosis which affected his behaviour for a number of years. This is believable, because nineteen years after the event he publicly admitted in a newspaper article - which would have taken a certain amount of courage - that after the shooting by the Turks of his friend Taylor "my nerves started to go." As well, the Great War, besides providing the essential ingredient of propinquity for Upfield's marriage, caused in its regulations the departure of the bride eleven days after the ceremony.

Upfield's marriage itself, by his own statements and actions, appears to have had significant difficulties right from the outset, with the repatriation of Anne to Australia soon after the ceremony and her discharge from the Australian Nursing Service. Up until 1939 at least, Arthur has spent more time away from Anne than with her. It is possible to ascribe this imbalance to a series of factors such as the exigencies of the War, Arthur's neurosis and the economic effects of the Great Depression. However,

there is evidence suggesting that the separation is more likely due to Arthur's propensities: for example, his reference to "domestic concerns," his supposed 1921 mention of his failed marriage and his enjoinment to Ewers not to get married because "you place chains about yourself." Arthur did in fact leave Anne in 1946, but it is evident that early in the marriage Arthur situated himself for the greater part somewhere outside the marriage, in some sort of ambivalent "in-between" position, neither wholly married nor wholly single.

Upfield's first departure from England in 1911 was, it would seem, at the behest of the family medico. His second departure, in late 1920, was of his own volition and was inspired by the snubs wrought by the English social structure and the counter-attractions of life in Australia. Despite being, as it were, repelled by the English caste system, Upfield in an ambivalent act still ties himself to it in his listing of his ancestors in *The Tale of a Pommy* and elsewhere. Further, this apparent pride in family is strangely distanced in his contrived 'inability' to arrange a meeting between his mother and J. K. Ewers when Ewers was in England. In a further strangely ambivalent act, Upfield takes pride in somewhat defiantly referring to himself as a "Pommy" in his so-labelled autobiographical work, a work which reveals Upfield's deep love of the Australian bush. We see ambivalence upon ambivalence. And of course Upfield's wartime job, when, while a member of the writing community, he was apparently monitoring it for subversion, is nicely equivocal. Upfield is occupying a well-defined "inbetween" space.

14 THE SECOND WAR AND AMERICA (1939-45)

Anne and Arthur were living at Mt. Dandenong, 30 miles out of Melbourne, and Arthur's work was at military headquarters in St. Kilda Road at the edge of the central business district. He left home at 7.30 a.m. for the train to the city and seldom returned before 8p.m., daily travelling time consuming between three and four hours.[1] Saturday morning work was standard and Upfield worked sometimes on Sundays as well.[2] He found this routine exhausting, but initially he was not too tired to produce a very occasional article. In the weekend hours at home Arthur and Anne took great interest in and enjoyed their garden.

James Arthur volunteered for the Australian Imperial Forces, was sworn in at Caulfield, in Victoria, on 26 April 1940 and embarked in August of that year for the Middle East.[3] Interestingly, he named his grandmother, Annie Upfield of Gosport, as his next-of-kin. However, in December 1940 he changed this to his father, Arthur, and then, later again, to his first wife Betty Jeanetta Upfield, whom according to Army records he married in February 1944. A signaller, James Arthur took part in the rearguard actions in Greece, from where he escaped in a small boat to North Africa. In 1943 he was shipped to New Guinea after Australian forces were withdrawn from the Middle East to stem, with American aid, the Japanese advance on Australia and in 1945 he spent a short time in Borneo. James Arthur was discharged in November 1945, but he was to be significantly and lastingly debilitated by his military experience.

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1 Upfield, letters to J. K. Ewers, 4 September 1941 and 1 October 1942, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

2 Upfield, letter to Philip Whelan, 1 September 1941, Whelan Papers.

3 A.I.F. Records, VX13272 Upfield, Series B883, National Archives of Australia. James Arthur's records are headed "Arthur James Upfield."

Arthur in 1940 applied for a posting as an official war correspondent to the Australian Imperial Forces for reasons partly designed to keep his name before the reading public.[4] His age, 49, and his medical history would not have stood him in good stead and he was unsuccessful. He took this minor setback well and maintained his interest in his military job, in the early years at least. And Angus & Robertson, despite the difficulties of paper and ink, brought out in 1940 *Bushranger of the Skies*. It was the Battle of the Scribe late that year, though, which occupied a deal of Arthur's spare time.

After ten years at the microphone, and a singular service to Australian writing, Scribe was on 22 August 1940 to be dumped by the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Leslie Williams - Scribe - had of course been reading Upfield's novels over radio station 3LO since 1935 and he and Arthur had toured country districts promoting Australian books. Arthur expected an uproar over the sacking and was quite prepared to help foment one. He wrote in August 1940 to Walter Cousins asking for the addresses of Roy Bridges, William Hatfield and E. V. Timms, whose books had also been read by Scribe and whom he sought as allies in the coming fight with the ABC.

The position as Arthur understood it, or chose to understand it in a letter to Walter Cousins,[5] was that after reading one Vance Palmer novel, and receiving only one letter of appreciation from listeners, Scribe, who himself disliked the book, was unwilling to risk another Palmer reading. However, both Nettie and Vance had been "slowly and surely getting in on the ABC work," said Arthur. Vance had allegedly demanded of Charles Moses, general manager of the ABC, that Scribe read a later novel of Palmer's. Scribe explained to Moses why he wouldn't, but Moses then left

[4] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 12 February 1940, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[5] Upfield, letter to Angus and Robertson, 16 August 1940, Angus & Robertson Collection.

on military service. The director of talks, John Proud, joined the Navy and "the Palmers and their clique" were, claimed Upfield, able to strengthen their position with unfortunate results for Scribe. It was announced over the air, said Arthur, that Scribe was resigning because of war work, but the public was kept unaware of the real reason for the departure. The outcome, however, was a happy one, but for what reasons I don't know. The usurping programme, "Morning Story," comprising a series of short stories read by the authors themselves and which Upfield described as "an absolute fiasco," was itself soon cut and Williams was, according to the *Age's* radio guide, reinstated on 7 October, 1940.

Scribe had started his book readings over the Australian Broadcasting Commission Melbourne station 3LO early in 1931. Heard only in Melbourne until the end of 1938, his programme was broadcast nationally from January 1939. However, in February 1943, due to budget cuts affecting the whole of the ABC Talks Department, Scribe's programme was taken off the air. Vance Palmer, in 1942-43 a member of the ABC's Victorian and National Talks Advisory Committees, but never an officer of the ABC, was the author of the last book - *Hurricane* - read over the air by Scribe.[6]

Upfield's correspondence, like his writing - "What's the use? No markets now" - is sparse in the early war period. In one letter to Ewers he tells of his and Anne's anxiety over the welfare of James Arthur[7] and in another he wonders about public tastes in that there seemed to be a swing towards Australian history and historical novels.[8]

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6 ABC Archives, e-mail to T. Lindsey, 19 July 2002.
7 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 4 September 1941, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.
8 Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 27 January 1942, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

Singapore fell in February 1942 and the Japanese were getting close to Australia. Upfield despaired of the War effort and wondered how the Government could call for help "when we have thousands of yellow-gutted young men who are not even making munitions." Within one hundred yards of his home, he mentioned in a letter to Ewers, he had counted sixteen of the "yellow scum." In the same letter, and speaking of his military job which at times took him away from home for considerable periods, he wrote:

> I am opposed by back-door intrigues among my office associates and am looking for another job. Could explain further at this point, but believe my letters are being secretly opened and reported.[9]

Upfield does not refer again to this interesting episode.

The year 1942 ended much better than it had started. Australian troops had pushed the Japanese back over the Kokoda trail in Papua New Guinea and this, combined with outstanding American successes in the Pacific theatre, meant that the immediate threat to Australia of invasion had receded. For Arthur the year also produced a singular achievement - his Bony books found an American publisher - and a great tragedy - his mother died. When he heard the news of his mother he went and sat alone in St. Paul's Cathedral in the city.[10]

The arrival in Australia in 1942 of American forces had not only provided a bulwark against the Japanese - at another level it promoted an interest in things Australian amongst those servicemen and their supporters back home. As one small example of this, an American services officer walked into Angus & Robertson's Sydney

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[9] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 27 January 1942, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[10] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 14 March 1961, archive of Louise Mueller: "The day I heard that my mother had been indirectly killed in a bombing raid I was holding a hush-hush job in Melbourne. I went into the Cathedral and just sat there in the silence. Nothing happened and yet it did without my knowing it. The process was slow, very slow, the changing outlook on life and people . . ."

bookshop and bought every Bony book in stock to place in camp libraries.[11] Arthur sought advantage in this development.

Around the middle of the year, according to Upfield, he had suggested to Walter Cousins that an American publisher might be found for some of the Bony books.[12] Five titles were dispatched to Angus & Robertson's New York agent, Leland Hayward Inc., and to Arthur's delight Doubleday Doran and Company accepted three for immediate publication, took an option on the fourth, but rejected (for the time being anyway) the fifth, *The Bone is Pointed.*[13] After his 1929 publication in America of the not-too-successful *The House of Cain*, and his failure to interest an American publisher in 1937 in *Wings Above the Diamantina*, Arthur had at last tapped the market which was to reward him with status and income. This imminent success would not affect Upfield's Australian or British publishers, since Australian import restrictions severely curtailed the availability of books from America.

Meanwhile, in military headquarters in St. Kilda Rd., Melbourne, Upfield now found himself working alongside the one-time leading intellectual socialist poet, Bernard O'Dowd, who must indeed have been a remarkable man for he was then aged 76. Upfield described him as "clear-minded, short-sighted [and] a hater of literary snobs" and likened him to Mr. Chips. O'Dowd told Arthur that Kate Baker and Nettie Palmer were very fine people and also opined that while Vance Palmer was a good

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[11] "Bony to his Friends," [biographical notes supposedly supplied by A.W. Upfield to *San Francisco Chronicle* via William Heinemann Ltd.] ts., unsigned undated [probably November 1950] *Meanjin* Archives.

[12] Upfield, letter to Charles Lemon, 28 May 1943, MS2138A, Charles Lemon Collection, Battye Library, Perth: "About 12 months ago I had a brainwave and got A & R to send some of the Bony books to an agent in New York, and this resulted in Doubleday Doran accepting four and taking an option on three others. . . . " However, in a letter to Angus & Robertson dated 14 September 1947 Upfield writes "When you sent those four books to Leland Hayward you did me a heck of a good turn." This suggests that the idea was probably Angus & Robertson's.

[13] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 1 October 1942, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

reviewer and writer of international news commentaries, he was "no damn good as a novelist."[14]

Upfield liked O'Dowd, with whom he was to keep in touch - sometimes through correspondence with Marie Pitt, the partner of O'Dowd and a poet in her own right. (She wrote to Upfield in 1943 in praise of Bony.) In one letter to Pitt, Upfield was to recall that he had once said to O'Dowd that his, Arthur's, greatest misfortune was his inability to grasp poetry. He liked Masefield and much of Kipling, but of course, said Arthur, these were popular poets and so didn't count for much. Other poets for the greater part he could not fathom, but the fault was within himself - "I never could see the sense of just stringing words together without a story line." His lack of an ear for poetry, he continued, matched his lack of an ear for music. Arthur, however, then caught himself and, gallant as always with women he liked, hastened to add that he appreciated Mrs. Pitt's poetry because it brought to life the bush and its people, to Arthur the familiar and the dear.[15]

In 1943 in New York Doubleday Doran and Company brought out the first Bony novels - *Mr. Jelly's Business* (retitled *Murder Down Under*), *Wings Above the Diamantina* (retitled *Wings Above the Claypan*) and *The Mystery of Swordfish Reef*. (In 1944 followed *Winds of Evil* and *Bushranger of the Skies*, the latter retitled *No Footprints in the Bush*.) All the twenty-nine Bony novels were to be published in America at various times between 1943 and 1983.

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[14] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 1 October 1942, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers.

[15] Upfield, letter to Marie Pitt, 20 February 1945, 20/5(B) Moir Collection, La Trobe Library, Melbourne.

The American reviews overall were good, *Murder Down Under* drawing from the *New York Herald Tribune*:

> . . . Mr. Upfield . . . makes a successful debut in our midst, with promise of more to come. He's one of those prolific authors, with quite a list of works headed this way; which should be velvet for all concerned. Not to dwell on the pleasing novelty of the Antipodean setting, *Murder Down Under* is a solid, meaty affair worth any fan's attention.[16]

The *New York Times* was critical of the novel's leisurely pace and digressions,[17] but the *New Yorker's* critic considered it the "most refreshing mystery to appear in a long time. . . ."[18] There were a great many reviews in America and Upfield kept track of them through a cuttings agency.

Wings Above the Claypan drew mixed, but overwhelmingly favourable, comment. The Chicago *Book Week* said:

> . . . this story has a smooth power that will surely carry you along; at the same time, the descriptions of strange flora, fauna and weather phenomena, nicely handled, will make you grateful for not being rushed.[19]

On the other hand, the *New York Times'* Isaac Anderson, already critical of pace and digression, added landscape to his list of dislikes: "The story has many good points, but the author might have spared us some of the scenic background."[20] *The Mystery of Swordfish Reef* fared not quite as well as the first two novels with the critics, but Upfield was on his way.

Doubleday Doran's royalty statement for the six months ended 1 May, 1943, reveals just what America meant for Upfield in terms of income. The statement relates solely

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16 Will Cuppy, rev. of *Murder Down Under* [in Australia and Britain *Mr. Jelly's Business*] by Arthur W. Upfield, *New York Herald Tribune* 10 January 1943: 13.

17 Isaac Anderson, rev. of *Murder Down Under*, *New York Times* 17 January 1943: 24.

18 Rev. of *Murder Down Under*, *New Yorker* 23 January 1943: 60.

19 Elizabeth Bullock, rev. of *Wings Above the Claypan* [in Australia and Britain *Wings Above the Diamantina*], *Book Week* 9 May 1943: 8.

20 Isaac Anderson, rev. of *Wings Above the Claypan*, *New York Times* 16 May 1943: 8. [The above five footnoted reviews were all quoted in *Book Review Digest* 39th cumulation (New York: H.W. Wilson Coy., 1944) 822.]

to *Murder Down Under* (*Mr. Jelly's Business*) and shows for 6,517 copies of the regular, Canadian and export editions US$1,498. There was added for a further 4,291 copies of the 'Crime Club' set US$214 and there was subtracted the January 1943 advance to Arthur of US$623. After withholding tax at the rate of 30% on the advance and royalties he received a net US$575. Thus in six months (in fact from the date of publishing rather less) *Mr. Jelly's Business* alone produced for Upfield around US$1,200 after United States tax, or, at the then rate of exchange, £370. This was nearly as much as he received in a year for his work at military headquarters.

Upfield, pleased, wrote to his journalist friend Charles Lemon:

> After a long struggle I seem to be coming into my own. I set out to thrust the Australian bush upon the people of England and Australia via the medium of the detective novel. I long ago felt that I had fallen between two stools, pleasing neither the lover of the detective mystery nor the lover of the straight novel. I think now that I was on the right track, because the USA reviewers think highly of the background and place me with Dorothy Sayers and company. I was always sure that there is a vast public who like the type of matter found between the covers of magazines such as the *Wide World* and *Geographic* and now I sense that I was right and that the lack of encouragement from the alleged literary nabobs in Australia reveals nothing today but their parish pump outlook. [21]

As 1943 advanced, so did the threat to Australia recede. Upfield's military job was failing to maintain his interest. Early in 1944 he considered it to be something of a waste of time [22] and he was keen to get out and resume his writing career.[23] Both he and Anne were keeping reasonable health and James Arthur, although still in the Army, was for the time being at least back in Australia.

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[21] Upfield, letter to Charles Lemon, 28 May 1943, Charles Lemon Collection.

[22] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 12 April 1944, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers: "War-time life has become a habit, and a deadening habit at that. I catch buses and trains and investigate and dictate letters, and it seems that it is all wasted time and effort." He was also influenced by his American publishers wanting more Bony titles - see Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 18 April 1944.

[23] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 18 April 1944, Angus & Robertson Collection: "The time has most certainly come for me to get back to my business."

Arthur presented James Arthur, who was always known as Arthur, with a Bible. The covering letter reads:

> Dear Arthur,
> I have been trying to get you a Bible, as you asked for your Mother's which she did not want to part with because it was given to her by a dear friend. However, the Bibles I have seen are either too small in print or too large in size. Here is a handy-sized Bible which was given to me by an Aunt 33 years ago when I was about to leave for Australia. You will find it in good condition and I am sure that you will keep it - or I wouldn't send it. It is now yours and I hope that some time in the distant future, when life is a little kinder to you and you have son of your own, that you will be able to hand it down to him. Like me, you will find a great deal in it hard to understand until after a deal of study. But the four Gospels, especially that of St. John, are all plain enough and if we mould our lives on the life and mission of Christ we shall achieve much and find great happiness.
> Always your affectionate Dad.[24]

The Bible itself bears the inscription "Arthur W. Upfield, Alma House, Gosport. L. Upfield. 1.9.11." L.Upfield is probably Lucy, the older sister of Arthur's father, James Oliver Upfield.

Upfield was released from his wartime job in late May 1944, when he immediately started work on a new Bony novel which was eventually to emerge as *Death of a Swagman.* He aimed to let Miss Pindyck of the American agents Leland Hayward have the completed manuscript by Christmas, but three months later he had only 30,000 words, saying to Angus & Robertson:

> The lessons taught by the mass of reviews from the USA are being kept in mind. In the beginning of my new freedom I found much difficulty in changing my mind back again to fiction after four and a half years of writing reports in legal verbiage . . . .[25]

The year closed with a boost for Arthur when he was asked to accept honorary membership of the Eugene Field Society in St. Louis. (Eugene Field was a popular American author and journalist, who died in 1895.) The Society's letterhead contained

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[24] Upfield, letter to James Arthur Upfield, 20 August 1944, archive of William Upfield.
[25] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 7 August 1944, Angus & Robertson Collection.

a long list of honorary members, including Walter de la Mare and other famous poets and writers.[26] Arthur was in good company.

By February 1945 the manuscript of *Death of a Swagman* was being typed. Never before, said Arthur, had he suffered so many interruptions and irritations and if the book were a flop he should be neither surprised nor hurt. He in fact had not been very well for much of the novel's eight months gestation; however, he had received another little boost. According to Upfield, Craig Rice (the pseudonym of Georgianna Ann Randolph), an author and a critic for the *Chicago Sun*, placed Arthur's *Winds of Evil* at the head of her list of the top ten "whodunits" of 1944. The book's outstanding feature was its atmosphere, she said. Arthur was delighted, especially since he didn't know Rice and had never had any contact with her. He was moved to somewhat mysteriously comment:

> To those of our literary giants who would sneer at such a distinction I would be tempted to say that it were better to empty a dustbin thoroughly than to place furniture wrongly in the best room of a palace.[27]

Upfield was working on his next novel and suggesting to Angus & Robertson that they try the *Australian Women's Weekly* for serial rights - newspapers like the *Herald* only paid £35 - when there occurred an incident that confirmed a set of Arthur's beliefs. During April, on a day when Arthur was away from home, an inspector of schools called to see him. The inspector told Anne that he was interested in Australian literature and wanted to refer to Upfield's work in lectures he was delivering. Anne, believing she was acting in Arthur's interests, did not encourage the inspector. A couple of months later the local schoolteacher called and asked Arthur if

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[26] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 22 November 1944, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[27] Upfield, letter to Marie Pitt, 20 February 1945, Moir Collection.

he would see the inspector, who had returned to the school that day. Upfield thought that the inspector was quite possibly a "lit-ry" man who merely wanted to sound out Arthur's American success and he sent the schoolteacher away. To his surprise the teacher returned, saying that the inspector had to deliver a lecture to a group of educationalists and since the inspector favoured modern writers he wanted Arthur's support. The inspector called on Arthur in the late afternoon.

Contrary to Upfield's expectation, the inspector appeared more a hard-headed pragmatist and he delivered a message that Arthur was glad to hear. He, the inspector, was concerned that the Vance Palmer/Dalby Davison crowd controlled the sources of literary criticism. As a consequence, only the works of Vance Palmer, Davison and their followers were pushed. "Modern" writers, including Hatfield, Idriess and Upfield, were shunned. This, said the inspector, was damaging to Australian literature, since the public was being channelled into reading third-raters whose day had passed. Upfield adduced something more.

What the inspector didn't say, averred Arthur, was this: there is a book battle being waged in the Victorian Education Department. Arthur had heard whispers over the past few months. The Palmers, claimed Upfield, controlled a Commonwealth section which enabled them to bring out their own books at the taxpayers' expense. Arthur had seen these books puffed and it was the intention of the controllers to get their reprints into every school in Australia. Some educators were alert to what was going on and were of the opinion that those books had no literary merit and were unsuitable for children. The inspector plainly stated to Upfield that what was currently being pressed on the librarians did not compare at all well with the work of the 'moderns.' Further, from what the inspector said, it seemed that those in the

Victorian Education Department who were aware of what was happening were planning to bring all school libraries under their control so that the existing *ad hoc* system of book purchases by individual schools could be replaced by one of central *fiat*. The criteria for selection were to be cleanness and information. And the Department, surmised Arthur, was not going to be led by the Palmers into determining what was, and what was not, Australian literature. Arthur, happily, was able to hand the inspector extracts from over one hundred American reviews of his novels, most of which emphasized their informative qualities. ("I happened to have this material in hand, having got it typewritten for presentation to the Manpower Department at the time I wanted to leave my war job.") All in all, Arthur was impressed with the school inspector, not less so when the inspector mentioned that he had read one complete chapter of *The Bone is Pointed* to the Australian Literature Society.[28]

Around the middle of 1945 Upfield, who was well advanced on a new Bony mystery, *The Devil's Steps*, was concerned over the launch in Australia of *Death of a Swagman*. Doubleday Doran in New York was to bring it out later in the year, but in Australia there were still shortages of paper and ink. Arthur felt that the longer publication was deferred in Australia the better, for that could only improve the quality and quantity of the run. He was, however, happy to leave the decision to Walter Cousins for he, Arthur, was now no longer on his uppers, "although sometimes I do get into a tangle."[29] *Death of a Swagman* was eventually to be published in Britain in 1946, and in

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[28] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 24 June 1945, Angus & Robertson Collection. This three and one half pages, typewritten letter, addressed to "Dear Mr. Cousins," concludes with "All this is from bits and pieces, and impressions, and between the lines, added to previous whispers. I am sure you will be interested, as it will concern not only myself but Idriess and Hatfield and those who will come to the front from the services after the war."

[29] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 24 June 1945, Angus & Robertson Collection.

Australia in 1947. A contract with a Czechoslovakian publisher was also signed in 1947.[30]

The War ended in Europe in May 1945 and in the Pacific in September 1945. People wept. Children in the suburbs celebrated noisily by dragging behind their bicycles long lines of tin cans joined by string.

[30] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 12 May 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection.

15 A LIFE CHANGE (1945-46)

On the flyleaf of a King James version of the Holy Bible in a homestead in Victoria is this inscription:

> To Honore, My Beloved Companion and Fellow Pilgrim on the Road that is Narrow and Hard, yet all of interest and beauty and love. Read and be comforted: Ponder and be inspired.

It is signed "John" and is dated 9 December 1945. Within the Bible a yellowed, creased, typewritten letter reads:

> John to Honore.
> Beloved: This book is an opal. The heart of it is a fire which will never go out. We hold it at varying angles to see the flame of God's love for us and the fires of His promises. Beneath the stone, it burns and flames, and to them that watch and watch is given the vision of LOVE. When the way is hard, read for us Psalm 37, and then turn to John 17, verses from one to twenty five, reading 'honour' for 'glorify'. There is only the one road for us to follow to the end, which is the beginning of Life and Love which do not perish. Thank you with a full heart for consenting to travel with me.
> John.[1]

Jessica Uren, nee Hawke, was born on 6 October, 1907. The eldest of three girls, she was brought up by her stepsister, their mother having died in childbirth. She married a civil engineer with the Victorian Railways, Tom Uren, and for a time the couple lived in the Uren family hotel in King Street, Melbourne, before moving to the suburbs. They had one son, Donald. In 1944 Tom suffered a stroke and a few weeks later died. Jessica was devastated. [2]

Jessica, with Donald aged nine, moved to Kalorama in the Dandenong Ranges just east of Melbourne. There she bought and managed a general store. She had no professional qualifications, nor had she any retailing experience. She did, though, have a warm personality and a lively intelligence and the business fared well.

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1 The letter is undated. Both it and the Bible are in the archive of Don Uren.
2 Don Uren, personal interview, 3 August 1998.

Kalorama is only a mile or two from Mt. Dandenong, where Arthur and Anne lived, and Arthur had for some time found it convenient to use the Kalorama Post Office, which he regarded as more secure and efficient than the one at Mt. Dandenong. In the course of these visits he sometimes bought odds and ends from the Kalorama store. A friendship developed between Arthur and Jessica, and in August 1945 something much deeper, for Arthur wrote his first letter to Jessica.[3] (The whereabouts of this letter and others from Arthur to Jessica is not, however, known to me.)

The relationship developed and the two planned a week together. Around that time, from early February to late March 1946, Jessica wrote nearly daily to "John," so addressed because she had once dreamed that she would marry a man named John. Arthur's name for her was "Felicity," or sometimes "Honore." Already Jessica was thinking of leaving Kalorama, for she did not want their secret to become public and the subject of gossip.[4] She could not, however, help her feelings:

> I feel the love of the Eternal with me when I look at the distant hills, when I look at you. I know in my deepest heart that I am only complete when by your side.[5]

In a following letter Jessica wrote:

> Maybe you will have time to read all my letters, but to read yours would take me days, for I would be wandering amid the beauty of each one. I often wonder if I am worthy of your love. I pray that I am and will continue to be.[6]

She encouraged Arthur to keep visiting the city: ". . . you must not lose touch and it is

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[3] Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 7 February [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings: "Yes, we have come a long way since August. Your first letter is dated August 4th. I shall never forget that day . . . "

[4] Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 7 February [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings: "[The suspicion of friends] is one of my reasons for leaving, because I do not want gossip to become too marked. Somehow it does not seem to be the thing for us, and I do not want gossip about you. If I remain here for another six months the whole world would read my secret."

[5] Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 7 February [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

[6] Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 8 February [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

the only contact with your kind, so continue to stand firm on this matter."[7]

Sometimes Jessica's letters mentioned Donald. He had been holidaying with friends and returned home to prepare for the first time for boarding school in Melbourne. Jessica was most concerned for his welfare and dreaded leaving him at his new school. That day passed without incident, but she continued to fret until Donald's first boarders' weekend. "He looks well, was very thrilled to be home, said everything at school was rotten, swore loudly, consumed a few sweets and promised me lots of kisses later."[8]

Arthur and Jessica planned a week together in a cottage with a verandah and a garden that Jessica had secured for the tryst. The week arrived, when their departures from their respective abodes were carefully orchestrated. Upon her return to Kalorama Jessica wrote:

> I am very humble, very proud, deeply grateful for the precious gift of your love. You have given me love which is so perfect that I know so surely its inspiration. You have given me so spontaneously of your very self, all of you that can be given so gloriously by a man named John to a woman named Felicity, so that we are complete, and I can only whisper ' Thank you, My John, for all you gave.' [9]

Jessica feared that Anne would destroy Arthur. One week after returning from their cottage idyll, and after a preliminary "Thank you, my own John for bringing to me the precious gift of your love and your very self," Jessica wrote:

> I am afraid I do worry about you and for you, because I have felt that you might sacrifice yourself needlessly. With you and for you I have faced your problem, trying to think only of you and not of my own happiness and deep joy were you to come to me for always. Once I told you that Anne would destroy you. I repeat that warning because I love you and want to save you. You have done all that is humanly possible for Anne and [James] Arthur and I firmly believe that eventually they will be happier because it is the only way

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7 Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 8 February [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
8 Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 15 February [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
9 Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, dated in error 5 February [1946] but written on 5 March [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

> they can be at all reasonable human beings. I want you to look ahead to release with me.
> I want you to go ahead steadily with your plans and to remember that if you want to save yourself you must be firm in the decision you have reached.
> I often wonder how you have been able to work at all. I know you are weary. I have long since felt that I want to give you love, warmth, understanding and a haven for which your soul craves. You may be sure that if you continue until your life's end in the atmosphere in which you have lived and struggled to breathe for so long your health will not improve, your dreams will fade, you will lose all interest, all desire to work and serve and you will be finished. I don't want to stand helplessly by and watch the delicate beauty of your soul die, watch your brain grow steadily more and more tired until you are no longer a man with gifts which could have been fully and beautifully used for mankind, but a man who might have been.
> . . . perhaps I will not seek to influence you again My Own John, but now I solemnly urge you to do your part in saving yourself so that we may go on together with the knowledge in our hearts that love such as ours cannot be put aside. Love such as ours is given to so few, and we know so surely it is not of ourselves, but inspires us to love more greatly.[10]

Jessica did, of course, seek to influence Arthur in all sorts of ways, but she made few direct, written references to Anne. On 31 March Jessica wrote:

> I am hoping that your Sunday was a happy one, no upsets, and that your Anne is much better. I am wondering what is ahead for her, but feel sure that she will be happier than she has been, because in her innermost mind she will be free.[11]

And again:

> I am very glad that Anne is contentedly busy and hope that [James] Arthur does not upset her.[12]

Two more very brief references appear below.

Jessica's letters often touched on the practical aspects of her relationship with Arthur. Upfield had raised the matter of finances and Jessica responded:

> I want ours to be a perfect partnership in every way . . . So, my John, let us by all means begin our financial plan. There will be no question of yours and mine, but ours as far as I am concerned. At the moment my money is not tied - here is the position: apart from my house at Surrey Hills, which is fully paid for and entirely my own, I have. . . . So you see, apart from my War Bonds, and apart from what I may receive for the business, I have available at any time £1000. [My house] gives me a clear income of £3/7/6 per week.
> Although we will discuss these details, I am writing them as you have done so that you will be able to consider them and do for us what you think best. I love you because you want to work for me, to earn our daily bread as my man. . . . Perhaps it would be best to purchase a house with my money, because you might need your ready cash to cover Anne

[10] Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 12 March [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
[11] Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 31 March [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
[12] Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 2 May [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

> and our living expenses. One of us must have a sound cheque book. Work things out from there, My John. I leave it to you.[13]

I do not know how Jessica's capital was allocated after their cohabitation, but it seems probable that a sizeable portion went towards purchase of their dwelling known as 'Atlas,' in Yarra Junction.

There is revealed in the wooing of Jessica a curiosity in the person of "Faithful," whose identity and precise relationship to Arthur I do not know. I have been unable to find any reference to Faithful outside the following comments of Jessica's:

> I do not mind in the least your meetings with Faithful. You understand her, you will be gentle with her. For several reasons she has my real sympathy and I love you when you say that she first placed your feet upon our road.[14]

And this:

> I do understand what is in your mind regarding Faithful. My fears for you were very real, as real as my love is. I did not want you to suffer or to lose your faith in truth.
> Thank you for telling me of your conversation with Faithful - I know that I can leave your own part in Faithful's future entirely with you. Her next move I can almost see, yet I earnestly want to believe that she is as great a Christian as I once believed. I can believe it, if your parting with her is brought about beautifully and as you say with no hurt to her and eventually great profit. I think you will understand what I mean, for I truly do not want Faithful to be hurt. You have all my trust, I shall not interfere.[15]

The final reference to the mystery woman appears within one month:

> For her own sake I wish your Anne did not have so often an urge to wash blankets. I appreciate your confidence regarding Faithful. At the right time your tangle is being unravelled. Two women withdrawn to leave me in sole possession. I wish I could express just what I feel. Not any sense of triumph, but great responsibility for the gift of your love, for the tender guardianship of a man's heart and soul. You bring to me love which fills completely my arms and my heart.
> Mine is the earthly responsibility to develop your talents that they may bloom into hitherto unseen beauty.[16]

Soon after 2 May, 1946, Jessica and Arthur were permanently together at 'Atlas', their cottage in Yarra Junction. Jessica's ties were already broken, for new people had

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13 Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 18 March [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
14 Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 29 March [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
15 Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 31 March [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
16 Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 1 May [1946], archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

taken over the store in Kalorama, but Arthur for his part created a mirage. He told Cousins of Angus & Robertson that he had found it necessary, in order to obtain peace and quiet, to leave his home for a while so that he might get along with the writing of his next book.[17] And on 22 June Upfield further wrote to Cousins:

> . . . henceforth my address will be: Post Office, Yarra Junction, Victoria. I have secured a small place there in beautiful surroundings of valley and mountains, and feel confident of peace and security to get along with the work. With my typiste now is the manuscript of an unusual type of story for me, viz. a love story against a strong religious background. The work should be finished by the end of the month. I am intending to post a copy to Leland Hayward, as this kind of stuff does sell well in America. My own opinion is that the story shall either be a flop or a big success. There will be no middle course for it.[18]

Arthur's departure seems to have been deeply resented by Anne and James Arthur,[19] although two of Anne's letters to Arthur in 1948 were very civil in tone.

Arthur appears to have acted fairly in the split of his assets, which he apparently divided evenly between himself and Anne. According to one reference, Anne got the unencumbered Mt. Dandenong house, a bank account holding two hundred pounds and payment of four pounds a week.[20] Anne was never to consent to a divorce, so Arthur and Jessica's status remained that of *de facto* husband and wife. Jessica, however, was in June 1955 to change her surname by deed poll to Upfield. The two were to remain devoted to each other.

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[17] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson 6 May 1946, Angus & Robertson Collection.

[18] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson 22 June 1946, Angus & Robertson Collection.

[19] William Upfield, personal interview, 30 July 1998.

[20] Upfield, notes headed "Written without regard for spelling. . . . ," dated circa 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin, Melbourne**;** "I . . . decided to make an equal share to each of us. I gave the unencumbered property at Mount Dandenong to my wife, opened a banking account for her with a couple of hundred and decided to pay her four pounds a week thereafter." Two later references show variations. Upfield's letter 14 March 1961 to Louise Mueller, includes: ". . . when back at my typewriter on a vital book to consolidate what I had won in America, I used to hear my virago of a wife shouting abuse, or banging things about, at times refusing to speak for a week. . . .I handed to her legally my house and its contents, I opened a bank account for her with £500, I put my records and books into my car and drove away with only the suit I wore and about £100 in the bank." Clearly forgetting what he had not long before said, the then seventy-years-of-age Upfield wrote on 24 July 1961 to Louise Mueller with this: " My first marriage was wartime, 1915. . . . At the close of WWII, when I had to get back to my writing in order to live, she had become impossible. I owned the house. I handed it and the contents to her legally. I opened a bank account for her, and then one day I walked out and drove away in my car to the Outback . . . . Met and married my Jessica, and not once have we looked cross-eyed at each other."

By the end of June, 1946, Arthur had completed *Eight Days*, copies of which he sent to Leland Hayward in New York and to Angus & Robertson with the comment "The nearest description I can apply . . . is to name it a religious romance."[21] In August Angus & Robertson sensitively declined *Eight Days*, enclosing a copy of their Reader's report, whereupon Upfield with dignity asked for the manuscript to be returned to him.[22]

The Reader's report on *Eight Days* reads in part:

> In spite of its obvious sincerity, this love story is not acceptable for publication. The author has not the literary capacity to deal seriously with emotions, philosophies and ideals and would be well advised to stick to his excellent tales of action and mystery. Both John and Felicity have been married and had children, but neither has found true love and companionship. They meet in Felicity's shop; she falls in love with him, and later he comes to love her. Felicity is now a widow; John still has his 'responsibilities.' They decide to spend a glorious week together in a cottage in the mountains, pursuing the "mystic road of faith and love." Living together confirms their devotion to each other . . . . This story gives a general impression of ingenuous sentimentality. It would take a great artist to translate a love affair such as this into a worthwhile novel . . . .[23]

The rejection of *Eight Days* would have greatly disappointed Arthur and Jessica, but the principal characters in the story seem to have been so thinly disguised that had it in fact been published it would in the context of the times have possibly attracted more contumely than celebration. In an archive in Victoria there is a manuscript which is probably a re-working of *Eight Days*. The cover sheet reads: "*Beauty for Ashes* by Jessica Hawke. Mrs. Jessica Uren, 'Atlas,' Yarra Junction, Victoria."[24]

Of about 100,000 words, *Beauty for Ashes* traces the life of Raymond Butler, an author and swagman of New South Wales, who in Western Australia meets and falls in love with Helen West, a widow. (Tired of her life of vacuous tea and card parties, Helen

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21 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 20 July 1946, Angus & Robertson Collection.
22 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 16 August 1946, Angus & Robertson Collection.
23 Reader's rev. of *Eight Days*, 8 August 1946, Angus & Robertson Collection.
24 Jessica Hawke, *Beauty for Ashes*, unpublished ms., undated, archive of Don Uren.

had bought a store in the Darling Ranges behind Perth). Calling each other 'John' and 'Felicity' they plan and execute a week together in a rented cottage, with the story closing as they leave the cottage at the end of their week. There are very strong auto/biographical elements here - large parts of it carry the stamp of Upfield's prose - and it is interesting for the ingenuous (to borrow the Reader's very appropriate word) and intimate picture it paints of the couple. Arthur and Jessica left Yarra Junction for Airey's Inlet at the end of 1951, so if the typescript's cover sheet is any guide the work has lain dormant since at least that time. The only mention of this text I have been able to find is in a letter Upfield wrote in May 1949 to his new London agents, Richard Steele & Co:

> *Beauty for Ashes.* As this was written in collaboration with Jessica Hawke, I would like to have an outline of its wanderings, and any comment made if and when it is rejected. [25]

And there the trail ends.

[25] Upfield, letter to Richard Steele & Co., 10 May 1949, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

16 ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR (1946-48)

Meanwhile, fairly early in Arthur's and Jessica's changing circumstances, Doubleday & Company around April 1946 had brought out Upfield's tenth Bony novel, *The Devil's Steps,* for which they had paid an advance of US$600.[1] Set in the Dandenong Ranges near Melbourne, the story in a touch of whimsy includes Upfield himself - named Clarence B. Bagshott - as a suspect.[2] Bony found it necessary to call twice at Arthur's house in the course of his investigation, but happily the two got along very well. When the book was issued the dust jacket included a boost from Professor Ernest Hooton of Harvard University.

Isabelle Taylor, of Doubleday & Company, had a daughter who was an anthropology major at Radcliffe College, which at the undergraduate level shared classes and other facilities with Harvard University. In one of her first lectures from Professor Hooton, the daughter was startled and thrilled when Hooton, in talking of what was then often referred to as "the cross-breeding of races," spoke of *Murder Down Under* (in Australia and Britain *Mr. Jelly's Business*). Hooton said that Arthur Upfield had created one of the most interesting and scientifically correct portraits of a "half-caste" that he, Hooton, had ever encountered in fiction. (The term "half-caste" was of course in

[1] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 12 February 1946, Angus & Robertson Collection. Upfield, in a letter to William Heinemann, 16 March 1951, Meanjin Archives, was to claim that Doubleday & Company sold 15,000 copies, and the reprint house Unicorn Press sold 20,000 copies, of *The Devil's Steps* and that the work had also been translated and taken up by Garzani of Milan.

[2] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 17 November 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection: "Clarence B. Bagshott was first introduced in my story *The Devil's Steps*. There, as in *An Author Bites [the Dust],* I described him, his home, his writing room, his garden, and the two tall wireless masts, that there could not be any possible mistake made by the locals, and certain persons with literary affiliations, that Clarence B. Bagshott is Arthur W. Upfield. . . . "

common currency at that time. In Australia the term had been enshrined in legislation - in Western Australia, for example, until 1936.)[3] The daughter told Hooton that her mother was responsible for publishing Upfield's books in America and she obtained Hooton's permission to quote him:

> Arthur W. Upfield's stories are most original and diverting. His descriptions of life in rural Australia are of great interest. "Bony," his half-caste aboriginal detective, is an unique figure in this class of literature. Evidently Mr. Upfield is a shrewd anthropological observer as well as a skilled novelist.[4]

Professor Hooton's opinion added to Upfield's status, so that, for example, as late as 1958 Upfield and Jessica were invited to wine and dine with a group of two visiting American professors and other academics at the American embassy in Canberra. From there some members of the party, including Arthur, went on to Leeton in New South Wales "to study at the feet of a master in field anthropology."[5] Also, in 1962 Upfield complained to his serials agent, Pamela Ruskin, "I have on my list now no fewer than five U.S. professors thinking I am the Australian expert on the Aborigines."[6] Upfield has a gift for descriptive writing; however it would seem that insofar as some culturally-based aspects of his work are concerned he felt no compulsion to publicly acknowledge his debt to the anthropologists Sir Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, whose major publication on the Australian Aborigines had

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[3] See the *Aborigines Act, Western Australia, 1905,* s. 2, 3. The *Aborigines Act Amendment Act, Western Australia, 1936,* struck out the term "half-caste" and inserted the term "native," still with a complex definition of the term.

[4] Doubleday & Company, copy of letter to Upfield, 16 July 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection. Upfield had sent a copy to Angus & Robertson, to whom in his letter of 18 October 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection, he remarked that Mrs. Taylor had not before written directly to him.

[5] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 5 May 1958, Meanjin Archives.

[6] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 12 October 1962, archive of Pamela Ruskin. It is worth mentioning here a letter from Professor R.F. Bernhardi-Grisson of Essen, to Upfield, dated 8 August 1962, archive of Bonaparte Holdings. Written in German and translated by Alfred Ruskin in his letter to Upfield of 19 October 1962, also in the archive of Bonaparte Holdings, an extract reads: "Your crime stories are out of this world, and I consider them most valuable literature, of world standard, in particular, I admit, because I am extremely interested in anthropology. . . . I can only hope that your anthropological observations, which are made by a poetic seer and are, therefore, in part by far more valuable than those of dry and calcified 'expert' researchers, will be gathered together one day. . . . "

been on Upfield's book shelf since May 1938.[7] Upfield's own knowledge of Aboriginal culture, however, was extensive and it should be noted that Hooton's remarks attached to *Murder Down Under* (in Australia and Britain *Mr. Jelly's Business*) which was first published in 1937.

While Arthur was faring well in America, the publishing industry in Australia was labouring under difficulties. The situation, said the Minister for Trade and Customs in September 1945, "tends to close the avenues for the development of Australian talent in writing and art work,"[8] that is to say the Minister didn't think enough Australians were being published. Accordingly, the Tariff Board was instructed to conduct an inquiry into the industry.

The Tariff Board's inquiry lasted from November 1945 to February 1946, when the witnesses included librarians, writers, artists, publishers, students, academics and "the owner of the world's copyright of the feature known as *Felix the Cat*." The witnesses, not surprisingly, sometimes contradicted each other. For example, Katharine Susannah Prichard Throssell (on page 12 of the Board's report) lamented the "failure to give adequate opportunity for expression of Australian writers of all types of literature." They had had a "desperate struggle" for existence in the face of cheap English and American imports and had suffered from "serious handicaps" in their own country because "there are so few firms which would publish Australian novels, short stories, biographies, descriptive sketches or anything in the nature of belles lettres." Upfield's friend, Walter Cousins of Angus & Robertson, which firm had

[7] Angus & Robertson, letter to Upfield, 5 May 1938, Angus & Robertson Collection, said they were dispatching at Upfield's request (he was working on *The Bone is Pointed*) a copy of Basedow's *The Australian Aborigine* and Spencer's and Gillen's *Across Australia*. Upfield, in his response of 16 May 1938, said he was retaining only the latter work.

[8] Australia (Parliamentary Papers), Tariff Board, *The Tariff Board's Report on the Publishing Industry* (Canberra: Commonwealth Government Printer, 1947) 5.

commenced publishing fifty years previously, presented a contrary view and said that the greatest problem at the present time was that of production.

In elaborating on the difficulties of production, Cousins (on page 14 of the report) said that up to 1941 there had been "no obstacle preventing the publishing of any worthwhile manuscripts." However, since then, there had been "serious production difficulties because of (a) the abnormal demand for books; (b) the shortage of man-power, and (c) the need to produce certain books for the Commonwealth Government." From 1938 to 1945, Cousins continues, Angus & Robertson's yearly average production of Australian books to total books was 73 per cent. And at the time of his evidence, "the company's programme of new books in course of, or awaiting, publication, 91 per cent. of which are of Australian origin, is the greatest in its history."

The Tariff Board inquiry concluded that the current disabilities of writers, artists and publishers should disappear as the economy strengthened, but there would remain some problems. The Board confirmed a 1930 decision that the placement of import duties on books and periodicals would be inimical to Australia's best interests. Insofar as the curbing of undesirable types of literature was concerned, a wider form of censorship than presently existed would be required. However, the institution of any such procedure would in the Board's view be "unworkable and objectionable." "High-grade Australian work," the Board continues, "can and does find a ready market . . . it is only second and lower grades that could conceivably benefit by the exclusion of imported matter, and it is doubtful whether the encouragement of these classes justifies drastic governmental action."

The Board did think justifiable the expenditure of public funds to assist the publishing industry and noted that "some money is now spent to that end by the Commonwealth Literary Fund." All in all it was desirable, they said, to foster a greater demand for, and production of, Australian literature and to improve the channels of distribution of that literature through the creation of a special authority. The Tariff Board's report no doubt provided a good snapshot of the state of the Australian publishing industry, but apart from the debate generated by its support for an unspecified flow of funds to the industry it is difficult to see what real affect it had.

The report on the inquiry is dated 7 November 1946, but it was not ordered to be printed until 5 June 1947, perhaps for reasons brought out in the report itself. The timing of these activities was potentially useful to Upfield's new Bony story, *An Author Bites the Dust*, published in early 1948, but there is no evidence that the industry inquiry triggered in Arthur's mind the writing of this novel. He set great store by *An Author Bites the Dust*, which was intended in good part as a satire on the Australian literary scene.

The year 1947 ended on an upbeat note for Arthur with *Death of a Swagman* being handed a very good notice and the accolade of "Chief Sherlock" by, says Upfield, Cyril Pearl in a column in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* on 27 December.[9]

In May 1947 Upfield signed a copy of his *Death of a Swagman* for the Whelan Collection in the National Library, for by that time a copy of each book published by

[9] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 12 January 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection. See also Dr. Watson, Jun., "Mysteries of the Year. These take the Sherlocks," [Sydney] *Daily Telegraph* 27 December 1947: 15: "The most important Sherlock, for the best detective story of the year, goes to an Australian writer, Mr. Arthur Upfield (*Death of a Swagman*) . . . ." I do not know whether "Dr. Watson, Jun." was indeed Cyril Pearl.

Angus & Robertson was so autographed by the author and dispatched.[10] And in America Doubleday Doran had negotiated the cheap edition rights of *Death of a Swagman* with Penguin Books of America for US$250 upon signing of the contract and US$750 upon publication of their planned 25 cents edition. Doubleday thought this a very good contract, for Penguin was the second reprint house to issue *Death of a Swagman.*[11] Upfield was very pleased and in 1951 claimed that Penguin of America had sold 120,000 copies of *Death of a Swagman.*[12] There had been one recent failure with Doubleday, though, for they had refused *Dead Men Sometimes Rise* on the grounds of its similarity to *The Bone is Pointed*, which had just been published in New York, and the fact that it had been written from the point of view of the murderer, thus negating the mystery aspect. Upfield, though, liked the stuff it contained and the characters, so he resolved to embark on a solid rewrite,[13] which in all probability was that which eventually emerged in 1963 as *Madman's Bend.*

Later on, around the time Penguin Books of America actually produced *Death of a Swagman*, Upfield wrote to Angus & Robertson on the subject of reprint houses, noting that Unicorn Press in America had already brought out three titles and had agreed to take *An Author Bites the Dust* at the end of Doubleday Doran's run. (It seems that Unicorn Press reduced expenses by taking over the original publisher's plates.) Upfield netted, after withholding tax and commission, about £130 from each reprint house sale and he was well satisfied with this. He claimed that two American women critics, with whom he had forged friendships, said that it was much harder to gain acceptance by the reprint houses, because they were in a position to take only the cream. According to Upfield, his critic friends also said that sales in America of the

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10 Angus & Robertson, letter to Upfield, 21 May 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection.
11 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 26 May 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection.
12 Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 16 March 1951, Meanjin Archives.
13 Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 13 February 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection.

average mystery novel (presumably of the prime issue) numbered around 3,000, whereas Upfield at this time put his sales of the original edition at between 8000 and 9000:

> From 26,000 of *Mr. Jelly's Business* ([*Murder Down Under*] I came down to 7,000 with *Bushranger of the Skies* [*No Footprints in the Bush*] and since then have crept up a little with and following *Death of a Swagman*.[14]

In August the Australian Geographical Society, whose monthly magazine *Walkabout* had already accepted eight articles by Upfield, offered him a place on an expedition to the north on what he considered generous terms. Arthur accepted with alacrity and left in mid-August for what he saw as his refresher course. According to Arthur, the journalist and critic George Farwell had also been invited, but the party got no further than Birdsville because of flooding in the Diamantina River. Arthur, though, considered the trip a success, for he had joined the privileged band of those who had seen water in the usually dry Lake Eyre and who had wondered at the sight of flowers at its edge. In an aside to Angus & Robertson Upfield wrote that on the journey he had to smooth over a degree of hostility created by

> the misstatements, absurdities and the re-telling of silly gossip in the books of Ernestine Hill and Frank Clune. Were I either one of them I wouldn't go into that country again.[15]

All these things, though, were mere skirmishes before the main engagement.

Upfield was told in September 1947 by Doubleday & Company that they would bring out *An Author Bites the Dust* in February of the following year. The eleventh Bony mystery, *An Author Bites the Dust* at one level examines the background, beliefs and associations of an Australian author-critic, and those of his literary companions, in an exploration of the question "what is the difference between literature and commercial

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[14] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 2 January 1948, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[15] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 14 September 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection.

fiction?" The author-critic, Mervyn Blake, is murdered and an urbanised Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte is lent to the Victorian Police to solve the crime. References to Bony's appearance and background are slight, so that if the reader did not know Bony was part-Aboriginal he or she would not be able to deduce that he was.[16] The author-character, Clarence B. Bagshott who made his debut in *The Devil's Steps* and who is recognised outside the printed page as Arthur W. Upfield, makes a reappearance. Bagshott is here described as "tall, lean and hard, middle-aged and active." He "has no guile, very little culture, and the vice of exaggeration."[17]

Bony had once accompanied Bagshott on a swordfishing trip to Bermagui, since when they had occasionally written to each other, and he now calls on Bagshott for information on the personality of the murdered author. Bagshott is, perhaps not surprisingly, very helpful to Bony, who innocently asks if Mervyn Blake has ever criticized Bagshott's books. Bagshott is astounded, pointing out that he, Bagshott, produces commercial fiction, whereas the great and late Mervyn Blake produced literature. Continues Bagshott:

> In this country literature is a piece of writing executed in school-masterly fashion and yet so lacking in entertainment value that the general public won't buy it. Commercial fiction - and this is the term employed by the highbrows - is imaginative writing that easily satisfies publisher and editor because the public will buy it.[18]

There is much, much more.

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[16] Upfield, letter to Charles Lemon, 2 January 1948, Charles Lemon Collection: "…At first she [Angus & Robertson's editor] raised two silly points, one being that Bony was not made sufficiently a half-caste, and the other that Miss Pinkney was not sufficiently countered as the village gossip. As she wrote direct, I wrote back, pointing out that America has been harping at me to evade as much as possible Bony's mixed race, and that I had done so rigidly with this book because Bony mixed with literary snobs and suchlike who would not accept him too freely . . . . " However, in the next book, *The Mountains Have a Secret*, Bony's Aboriginality has been restored, not to wane again.

[17] Arthur W. Upfield, *An Author Bites the Dust* (1948; Sydney: Arkon - Angus & Robertson, 1980) 72.

[18] Upfield, *An Author Bites the Dust* 73.

Bagshott is reasonably generous to the murdered author, Blake:

> The fellow's a master of words. His similes are striking, and he knows how to employ paradox. But he can't tell a story. Let me enlarge on that by comparing his work with mine. He has the mastery of words but not the gift of story-telling. I have the gift of story-telling, but not the mastery of words. The great novelists have both gifts.[19]

The twist of the knife, as it were, comes not from Bagshott but from the murderer in the closing pages:

> My novel and those that followed it were scorned and jibed at as being mere commercial fiction, a term they employed for the work of most Australian authors who would not acknowledge them as leaders of literature.[20]

And

> His [Mervyn Blake's] novels were acclaimed as fine contributions to the national literature by people whose work he in turn praised with equal fervour.[21]

After being told by Doubleday Doran of its acceptance of *An Author Bites the Dust* Upfield was anxious that Angus & Robertson should have first refusal in Australia. In offering the manuscript, Arthur told Walter Cousins that "having written it I was conscious of embarking on the biggest gamble of my career." After very, very briefly outlining the literature/commercial fiction aspect of the story, he continued that while Doubleday Doran was considering the typescript there appeared an "astonishing" article in the *New York Times* by the American historian and literary commentator, Hartley Grattan. (Grattan was promoted by his publishers as "America's foremost authority on Australia" - he in 1942 wrote *Introducing Australia* following his third visit in 1940.)[22]

On 22 June 1947, in the *New York Times*, Hartley Grattan had written in part:

> Australia is in no very acute need of a good five cent cigar, but it does desperately need a good literary critic . . . . Right now, when Australian writing is thriving as never before in

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19 Upfield, *An Author Bites the Dust* 74.
20 Upfield, *An Author Bites the Dust* 218.
21 Upfield, *An Author Bites the Dust* 218.
22 C. Hartley Grattan, *Introducing Australia* (New York: The John Day Company, 1942).

> the twenty years I have been following it, the absence of an authoritative critic is a misfortune. The immense mass of stuff that is finding its way into print as the publishing business expands needs to be expertly sorted out as it appears. A sound critic, writing regularly for a newspaper or weekly magazine, is a national necessity . . . . So Australia unquestionably needs a live and functioning critic who knows a hawk from a handsaw, who isn't involved in one or another of the cliques, and who has the income and leisure to do his job properly. Until this paragon is found Australian and foreign readers are going to miss many good things, or chance on them belatedly, while wasting precious time on the mediocre or definitely bad.[23]

This article was later repeated in sections of the Australian press.

I return now to Upfield's letter to Cousins offering him first refusal in Australia on *An Author Bites the Dust*. After remarking on the emergence of Grattan's *New York Times* article in the period that Doubleday Doran was considering his *Author* typescript, Upfield continues:

> The article so completely backed up *An Author* that I could not think other than that Mrs. Taylor [of Doubleday Doran] had submitted the typescript to him for a second opinion, and that finding I had expressed what he already knew, he stole my thunder.
> I cabled Leland Hayward asking them if Grattan had read my yarn, and further to my astonishment they cabled that he had not and subsequently wrote that Doubleday would certainly not allow anyone not connected with themselves to read a submitted ms.[24]

Upfield looked forward to the American reviews of his forthcoming book being of news value at home. However he felt a need in the meantime to keep *An Author* under wraps.

The suspicion of a conspiracy was taking root in Arthur's mind as he continued his letter to Cousins, whom he asks to read the typescript himself:

> I do not like to send the typescript to A & R in the usual way, for it then to be given to a Reader for the usual report, the Reader possibly being a literary person who might make a report similar to that I received on *Eight Days*, and who also would be au fait with what is coming and thus be prepared, together with his literary pals, to counter it . . . . I think from this letter you will be able to appreciate some if not all of the implications , the possible boost to my sales in the USA and the quite probable service to Australian

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[23] C. Hartley Grattan, "Readers and Writers Down Under," *New York Times* 22 June 1947, section 7: 18, 20. The article, amongst other things, singles out "four unusually important books of literary biography and criticism," including *Creative Writing in Australia* (1945) by John K. Ewers, but fails to mention the Palmers, except for Vance's editing of a selection of A.G. Stephens' work.

[24] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 30 September 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection.

> literature in general, for the latter has been my first thought all through the writing of *Author* . . . .[25]

The conspiracy theory in Arthur's mind grew. Grattan's *New York Times* article was not contested by Australian newspapers; neither, it seems, did Australian literary societies nor many critics, if any, publicly take issue with Grattan's views on the state of Australian criticism. All was quiet. Commented Upfield to Cousins, who had accepted *An Author Bites the Dust* for publication:

> I wonder what moves are behind that silence? Of course, when the book appears in Australia, I am going to receive much abuse. The more abuse the better. It is preferable to being ignored . . . .

While Upfield, with our clarity of vision, may appear deluded in this matter, his ability to reason was still intact, for in the same letter to Cousins he also wrote:

> I won't say that *Author Bites* converted Grattan to write his article. His views were his before he read *Author Bites* - if he did read it. I ask how he came to think that "Australia desperately needs a responsible critic," how he came to the opinion that Australian literary cliques were a blight, when we have Palmer and Davison and many other fine literary critics. And I think I know the answer. The answer lies in the concluding paragraph of his article which reads: "Until this paragon [the responsible critic] is found Australian and foreign readers are going to miss many good things, or chance on them belatedly . . . ."[26]

Cousins told Upfield that he had personally read the typescript of *An Author Bites the Dust* over a weekend - "and liked it very much indeed" - adding that he had also asked their chief editor to look it over.[27] In the Angus & Robertson archives in the Mitchell Library a hand-written and undated note, initialled 'B.D.' and possibly penned by the chief editor, reads:

> Thank you for this. I think AU exaggerates the importance of his slap at critics; and I can't quite imagine Grattan rushing an article out because he saw this ms - if he did, which is unlikely. I'm afraid the "critics" will continue to ignore him from the literary viewpoint. But this is a jolly fine popular book, which is the main thing.[28]

The firm's Reader's report, too, was favourable:

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[25] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 30 September 1947, continued.
[26] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 18 October 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[27] Angus & Robertson, letter to Upfield, 15 October 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[28] B.D., unheaded hand-written note probably to Walter Cousins, undated [probably October 1947], Angus & Robertson Collection.

> A splendid Bonaparte story with a most unusual theme. There is some luck in Bony's discovery of the murderer, but much excellent deduction as well, and the story should hold the interest of the most hardened readers of crime novels. The "commercial fiction" versus "literature" theme is obviously inspired by some actuality and the opinions, often sound, are no doubt Mr. Upfield's. But if he can assure us that no libel action is possible (and I found none of the characters recognisable) this should rather add to the book's zest.
> Recommended.[29]

An Angus & Robertson editor had written direct to Upfield with two queries - on the understated Aboriginality of Bony and the character Miss Pinkney's curiosity - [30] before two further matters were raised, this time via Walter Cousins. These latter concerned the need to change the name of the locale in the Dandenong Ranges as it was a real village, and was Upfield sure that he had not maligned a real author? Arthur yet again demonstrated his capacity for the forthright:

> The Great Mervyn Blake [i.e. the murdered author] is an entirely fictional build-up. I have not associated with Australian authors for the last fifteen years because I found they gave me nothing in comparison with the stockman and the town drunk.

He added that Clarence B. Bagshott was indeed Arthur Upfield, but he couldn't refrain from observing, perhaps not entirely accurately, that nowhere in the story is there anything like the following real-life comment from an Australian critic. This critic, John McKellar - ungraciously labelled by Arthur "a stooge of the Melbourne P.E.N. Club and the Australian Literature Society" - in commenting on John K. Ewers' *Creative Writing in Australia* (1945) wrote:

> A comparatively long notice is given to Hatfield, and Arthur Upfield gets a good paragraph. But not even Upfield himself would assert he was a creative writer. Upfield is a commercialised writer. His self-proclaimed credo is to know the market and to write for money. Creative literature is not for him.[31]

As an aside, the reference to Upfield was slightly expanded in the 1956-revised

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[29] Reader's rev. of *An Author Bites the Dust* by Arthur W. Upfield, undated [probably circa October 1947], Angus & Robertson Collection.

[30] Angus & Robertson, letter to Upfield, 28 October 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection. Refer to an earlier footnote in this chapter.

[31] John.McKellar, "Comment on *Creative Writing*," *Meanjin Papers* 5.2 (1946): 160. See also Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 17 November 1947, Angus & Robertson Collection.

edition of Ewers' work, but all reference to him was erased in the 1962-revised edition.

Upfield had lent a copy of the typescript of *An Author Bites the Dust* to his friend Charles Lemon in Perth. Lemon congratulated him on what he had written, but chided him with

> . . . you have left the author of the book (yourself) a little open to the charge of fighting off-stage. In other words the discerning reader of the criticism you give may be inclined to say "here is a critic who is aloof from the real battleground, the circles in which the others move." But you should have no fear of meeting them on their battleground, that of critic of their works and contestant of their views in their own societies and forums.[32]

Arthur later wrote to Lemon on the subject of the Angus & Robertson editor who had written to him with her queries:

> I'm betting that editor is tied up with the literary mob in Sydney and is furious that she didn't have the opportunity to turn down the typescript, a danger which I saw and countered by persuading Cousins himself to read the typescript and give judgement. Already a few stray winds reaching me indicate that the literary crowds have been told about the book.[33]

In the event, *An Author Bites the Dust* received good notices in America.[34] In Australia the reviews were very fair to favourable, but the theme of "literature versus commercial fiction" was, to Arthur's great disappointment, not taken up and no fracas ensued. He was to some extent, though, buoyed by the support given *An Author* by Ewers, Lemon and others. E. V. Timms wrote:

> I chuckled hugely at the shafts you let fly at certain targets. But it needs an elephant gun to really bring down such thick-skinned game as that - don't you think?[35]

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[32] Charles Lemon, letter to Upfield, 18 October 1947, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

[33] Upfield, letter to Charles Lemon, 2 January 1948, Battye Library.

[34] For example, see: Rev. of *An Author Bites the Dust*, *Saturday Review of Literature* 31.30 6 March 1948 [Quoted in *The Book Review Digest*, 44th cumulation, (New York: H.W. Wilson Coy., 1949) 859]: "Shows that Boney [sic] can function as well among literary savages as with the aborigines. In some ways best of his cases to date. Top rank."

[35] E. V. Timms, letter to Upfield, 23 April 1948, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

And Miles Franklin found *Author* interesting because of its picture of literary cliques, "from which I am excluded because of my illiteracy." She confided in a "fellow-feeling with Bagshott's popularity and sales" and liked Miss Pinkney, her cat and Bony.[36]

Upfield much later quantified the support he received:

> *An Author Bites the Dust* earned for me a great deal of respect if nothing else, and those with me have been able to keep the Commonwealth Literary Advisory Committee on the hop with well-timed criticism. Fourteen writers wrote me about *Author Bites*, but they could not come into the open on my side, fearing they would be penalised when applying for a [Commonwealth Literary Fund] grant.[37]

And at a literary gathering in Perth, according to Upfield, Mrs. Jean Ewers mentioned to the author Henrietta Drake-Brockman that her husband was away north on a trek led by Arthur Upfield. "What?" Mrs Drake-Brockman is alleged to have said, "THAT man? Why, he's been writing about US!"[38]

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[36] Miles Franklin, letter to Upfield, 25 January 1949, 3659/1 CY 1262, Miles Franklin Collection, Mitchell Library. In her critical work *Laughter, Not for a Cage* (Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1956) 220, Franklin writes "Arthur Upfield spreads his stories from Melbourne to Perth, Townsville or Alice Springs, and with unaffectedly natural backgrounds has won commercial success abroad and Penguin status in "whodunnits." He is unusual in the genre, with his genial aboriginal detective and endearing little girls to assist; in his restraint in the number of corpses, his use of ordinary people instead of horrendous killers, and his ability to entertain without drums of grog or even sneers at spinsters and/or landladies."

[37] Upfield, letter to Charles Lemon, 12 February 1953, Charles Lemon Collection.

[38] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 10 September 1948, Angus & Robertson Collection.

17 A TREK, THE SEASIDE, RAIN, POLITICS AND MUD (1948-53)

In June 1948, not long after *An Author Bites the Dust* was published, Upfield led an Australian Geographic Society-sponsored party of six on a 5000 miles tour of the north-west of Western Australia. The party included Michael Sharland, naturalist/journalist; Ray Bean, *Walkabout's* staff photographer; Harry Tate, motor mechanic and friend; George King, cook, and Arthur's long-time friend, Keith Ewers.[1] The aim was to compile a photographic record of the route and to gather material for articles for the Society's journal, *Walkabout*. The trek took them, in two trucks, from Kalgoorlie and through Wiluna to Port Hedland. From there they followed the coast to Broome and Derby, before turning inland through Fitzroy to arrive at Wyndham on the north coast. The return journey took the party back to Port Hedland, then right along the coast to Perth.

The trek itself was arduous, covering in ten weeks what Upfield thought should have taken four months. Arthur was in the leading truck with two of the team and Keith Ewers was in the second truck with the other two. Unfortunately, that intimacy between the two men which had thrived in written exchanges and the ordinary social hours became strained with prolonged contact. Both men could be opinionated and in addition Upfield sometimes felt that his leadership was being challenged by Ewers.[2] Matters were not helped much, either, when one day Upfield noticed that

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1 "Australian Geographic Society," *Walkabout* 1 October 1948: 29.

2 Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 9 July [1948], archive of Don Uren: "Keep up the good work with Keith. I am sure you will retain all the honours if you continue to be firm and use the quietly controlled authority technique"; and her letter to Arthur Upfield, 19 July 1948, archive of Don Uren: "As for Keith, I'm sure he deserved to be reprimanded and perhaps at the end of your training he will be fit to lead the next expedition."

Ewers had brought with him a copy of E. V. Timms' *Forever to Remain*. Arthur, who had already read the book, said he thought it "quite first class Australian literature, both for story and prose." Keith eventually read the novel and observed "This book you raved about is nothing much. Just a story." Upfield made no reply, but he was hurt.[3] The falling out between the two was, however, later repaired.

On the tour Arthur took particular notice of what books were stocked in the stores. Ion Idriess' work was everywhere, but although Arthur's own novels were fairly well known all the way to Wyndham, copies were not available. He let Angus & Robertson know. Arthur also met the writer Mary Durack and the artist Elizabeth Durack and found them both charming, later noting "perhaps fortunately, they knew nothing about detective fiction."

While in Broome Upfield went to sea and watched the diving for pearl shell, later writing an article on Broome for *Walkabout* magazine [4] and using it as the setting for his Bony novel, *The Widows of Broome*. He led a small party on a diversionary trip into the Great Sandy Desert to photograph the already-known Wolf Creek meteorite crater for the magazine and this, too, later emerged as a setting for another Bony novel, *The Will of the Tribe*. (Keith Ewers also made use of the trek in an award-winning travel work.) [5]

Upfield was not, however over-impressed by the Kimberley, that vast tract of land in the north of Western Australia:

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[3] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 10 September 1948, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[4] Upfield, "Pearling Town of the North-West," *Walkabout* March 1949: 29-32.
[5] J.K. Ewers, *With the Sun on My Back* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1953). In a letter to Upfield dated 23 February 1952 (the date is correct) Ewers states that the work shared second prize with one other of £500 each in the Jubilee Prize non-fiction section. No first prize was awarded.

> The wonderful Kimberleys are a wash-out, and the people, save for one here and there, dead from the ears up. The country and the people have been stupidly dramatised and over-drawn. The colouring of the hills is memorable, but the crocs are more shy than the crows, and the blacks better educated than the whites . . . and the ruin of a possibly fine area through overstocking by senseless pastoralists left me profoundly depressed. [6]

The Kimberley had not caught Arthur in one of his more charitable moods.

Jessica wrote nearly every day to Arthur - words of longing, of daily events and of literary things. She collected Arthur's petrol coupons, planted thirty two trees around their house, remarked that no trains ran to the Dandenongs one weekend because of a shortage of coal and otherwise seemed to relish her role as an author's personal assistant. She collated reviews, passed on for information or decision those things that needed to be known or decided and copied important letters in longhand.

One relayed letter was from Mrs. Taylor of Doubleday & Company in New York, who said they would be bringing out *The Mountains Have a Secret* in August. Mrs. Taylor also remarked, according to Jessica, on a favourable review of *An Author Bites the Dust* by Will Cuppy of the *New York Herald Tribune* and his somewhat eccentric response to the word "stare:"

> Your mention of Will Cuppy's aversion to the word 'stare' makes you eligible for the What's-the-Matter-with-Will-Cuppy Club. If the word 'stare' appears once in a manuscript Will will pick it up and comment on it. Several authors are ready to bend his head in for this overworked idiosyncrasy of his . . . .[7]

Jessica tactfully suggested that Arthur reply to the publisher and, "in case you can't remember," thoughtfully supplied the address. The next line reads "Now, my dearest snuggly John, I am about to snuggle into your pillow, and clutch your pyjamas to my breast, and think about you."

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[6] Upfield, letter to Angus & Robertson, 10 September 1948, Angus & Robertson Collection.
[7] Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 5 July [1948], archive of Don Uren.

While Arthur was away, Jessica spent three weeks holiday at the Hotel Richmond in Portland, Victoria, where she walked, played cards, enjoyed pre-dinner brandies and made friends. Her daily letters continued. Towards the end of that visit she wrote:

> I have truly enjoyed my stay in Portland and it taught me much; it has been a kind of 'refresher' on my sense of values. Many people I met were natural and charming, others indicative of a rotten world, no ideals, nor morals, restless, cynical gold diggers and hunters, all drinking themselves into increasing ugliness. We must cling tightly together, close to the Eternal, my sweetheart, because truly we know there lies our greatest strength, and be sure that you are always with me when I pray.[8]

While Arthur was on his north-west trek he also heard from his wife, Anne, for their son James Arthur and his wife Dorothy had in June produced William Arthur, named after his grandfather. Anne, in writing to Arthur, enclosed a letter written to her soon after William Arthur's birth by James Arthur, who was anxious to know how Arthur felt now that he was a grandfather. Anne's letter was very civil and closed with: "Nothing much here to report. Same as when you were home. So a good old cheerio. Yours affectionately, Anne."[9] A subsequent letter to Arthur from Anne asked him to handle for her the business of the sale of her late father's 640 acre Barrakee property insofar as her one-fifth share was concerned. Anne told Arthur she was prepared to accept £7.10.0 per acre, from the proceeds of which she would cover her share of the property's £2,000 mortgage.[10] Again the letter was pleasant in tone and Arthur presumably agreed to Anne's request.

Upon his return from the north-west Arthur was in touch with Angus & Robertson on various matters, including their intention to bring out in October 1948 *The Devil's Steps*, already published in America and Britain. In the event Angus & Robertson simply put the manuscript aside, eventually after two years of inaction refusing to

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8 Jessica Uren, letter to Upfield, 29 July [1948], archive of Don Uren.
9 Anne Upfield, letter to Upfield, 27 July 1948, archive of Don Uren.
10 Anne Upfield, letter to Upfield, 2 August 1948, archive of Don Uren.

return the November-1946-contracted rights to Upfield.[11] (The work was not published in Australia until 1965.)

Upfield had got along very well with Angus & Robertson, in particular with its managing director Walter Cousins:

> All my letters to him were promptly and satisfactorily answered, and he did many things for me, such as selling serial rights and declining to accept any commission. Twice, when I was broke, he posted me a substantial cheque as against royalties. It was he who sent the six Bony titles he published between 1933 and 1940 to MCA, New York, who found Doubleday for me.[12]

Since the War, however, when the by-then-diabetic Cousins appeared to share power with a chosen successor, the attitude of the firm had been puzzling to Upfield. The conspiracy theory surrounding *An Author Bites the Dust* again raised itself in Arthur's mind, fuelled by Angus & Robertson having sent copies of the novel to Britain for sale, when the disposal of just a dozen copies would according to Arthur have prevented any British house from publishing it.[13]

The focus of Upfield's ire was on Cousins' heir apparent, who amongst other things was responsible for what Arthur saw as an atrocious dust jacket for *Author*. Upfield was later to say to William Heinemann Ltd:

> When Walter Cousins took up *An Author Bites the Dust* he wrote me saying he had ordered a first printing of 5,000 copies, but due to this book being murdered within his own organisation it sold only 2,000. When I visited Cousins six months after this book was out, and but a short time before he died, I told him the book had been murdered within his own organisation. He didn't speak, but the truth of it lay in his eyes. He took me around the retail shop and gave me several expensive books and when we parted he said: "We can take the knocks, eh?"[14]

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[11] Upfield, letter to Richard Steele & Son, 10 May 1949, archive of Bonaparte Holdings: " . . . on 6 November 1946 a contract was signed for *The Devil's Steps* . . . . I wrote three weeks ago [asking for a release from the contract]. No satisfaction." Walter Cousins was on sick leave at this time.

[12] Upfield, letter to Richard Steele & Son, 10 May 1949, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

[13] *An Author Bites the Dust* was eventually published in Britain in 1967 by Angus & Robertson.

[14] Upfield, letter to Heinemann, 1 December 1950, Meanjin Archives.

Cousins had been looking ill and old. When in 1949 he died it was for Arthur "a grievous loss to several authors as well as to me."[15] All else aside, he had lost a friend.

Arthur and Jessica, though, made new friends when in the early hours of the New Year Arthur managed to run his car into a tree, dealing himself a gashed forehead. He was attended to by the doctor in Yarra Junction, George Charters, who was married to Rhona Charters, also a medico, and who as a child had known Upfield. The two couples struck up a social relationship, which was shrewdly observed by Rhona Charters and recorded in an interview with Joe Kovess. George on his rounds, and sometimes with Rhona, would call at an appropriate time on Arthur and Jessica, when a pot of coffee would be bubbling on the wood stove. (Yarra Junction did not get electricity until late in 1949.) In turn, Arthur and Jessica would call on the Charters. Sometimes their discussions would centre on medical aspects of Arthur's current work and between them they would make sure it was right.

Rhona perceived Arthur as a man's man, very shy where women were concerned, but altogether a delightful person. She did see, though, how he would have trodden on the toes of a number of people - especially in his ongoing battle with the literary set. He was conscious, she thought, of his lack of formal education - even a little paranoid about it - and that made him sometimes prickly.[16]

Arthur and Jessica were a few years later to move to Airey's Inlet, where they had over the stove a high mantelpiece, lined in the morning with boxes of matches. Rhona Charters vividly recalls that by the end of the day there wouldn't be a single box left, for Arthur and Jessica, both heavy smokers, would remove a box each time

[15] Upfield, letter to Heinemann, 1 April 1950, Meanjin Archives.
[16] Rhona Charters, interview with Joe Kovess, October 1985.

they lit a cigarette, putting the box down wherever their footsteps took them. In the evening all the boxes would be collected and replaced on the mantelpiece ready for the next day.

Back in the world of books, though, there was now in 1949 a hiatus in the publishing of Upfield's work, even though the American market readily supported him. Doubleday in New York planned to bring out *The Widows of Broome* in January 1950 and six or seven months later the as yet not completed *The Bachelors of Broken Hill*. They did, however, reject the typescript of *Cake in the Hatbox*, into which Arthur had put a deal of effort. "There is, frankly, very little suspense," commented Mrs. Taylor, before diplomatically adding:

> You see one of the disadvantages of building up such a fine reputation as you enjoy is the increase in critical appraisal each book will get, and I don't want you to run the risk of an adverse reception to your new book.[17]

Cake in the Hatbox was reworked and was eventually published in America in 1954 as *Sinister Stones*, but in the meantime Doubleday had increased Upfield's advance on each novel to US$850, leaving the royalty scale unchanged.[18]

The Widows of Broome was duly published early in 1950, to overall good reviews. The *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* noted that "This Australian mystery writer has a flair for plot and a sense of character" before adding "His somewhat stilted writing can easily be forgiven for the sake of his unusually interesting background."[19] The *New York Times* said "Both Mr. Upfield and Bony have never been better . . . ."[20] However, it is of course difficult to summarise a collection of reviews. One archive I

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17 Doubleday & Company, letter to Upfield, 21 September 1949, archive of Don Uren.
18 MCA Management, letter to Upfield, 16 November 1950, archive of Don Uren.
19 Rev. of *The Widows of Broome* by Arthur W. Upfield, *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* 12 February 1950: 15.
20 Elizabeth Bullock, rev. of *The Widows of Broome, New York Times* 22 January 1950: 22.

examined contained clippings of 57 American reviews of *The Widows of Broome* ranging from the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* "Very cleverly worked out and a fine piece of writing,"[21] down to the *Albuquerque Tribune's* "Upfield's contribution to quality in mystery continues to be consistently outstanding,"[22] and across to the *Oakland Post-Enquirer's* " It's good entertainment of the who-dunit sort and the tale rolls along at an excellent pace."[23] Five of the reviews were generally unfavourable, with the most savage line coming from the *Chicago Sun-Times* - "Its plot is slogged [sic] with verbiage in acute need of the knife and its finale unwraps a psychotic criminal without reference to probability or clinical text-books."[24] According to Upfield *The Widows of Broome*, between publication in January 1950 and the end of October 1950, sold 114,000 copies.[25] As well, *The Bachelors of Broken Hill* was brought out by Doubleday in October of that year.

Earlier in 1950, however, Upfield's disappointment in Angus & Robertson lead him to offer *The Mountains Have a Secret* to Oxford University Press, Melbourne, for publishing in Australia. That house did not publish fiction, so they referred Upfield's offer to C. B. Christesen in the Melbourne office of William Heinemann Ltd. (Christesen had founded in 1940 the literary magazine *Meanjin*.)[26] The London office of Heinemann took *The Mountains Have a Secret* and *The Widows of Broome* for publication in Britain and these, with subsequent acceptances, neatly repaired the emerging gap in the publication of Upfield's titles in that country.

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[21] Rev. of *The Widows of Broome, Philadelphia Inquirer* 5 February 1950.
[22] Rev. of *The Widows of Broome, Albuquerque Tribune* 13 January 1950.
[23] Rev. of *The Widows of Broome, Oakland Post-Enquirer* 7 January 1950.
[24] James Sandoe, "Book Day," rev. of *The Widows of Broome, Chicago Sun-Times* 27 January 1950.
[25] Upfield, letter to Heinemann, 16 March 1951, Meanjin Archives.
[26] "C.B. Christesen," *The Macquarie Dictionary*, 1997 ed.

Captain Arnold Glyde from Heinemann, London, was enthusiastic, writing to Christesen:

> We must congratulate you on putting us in the way of another first rate author. This . . . Upfield is a thriller writer of achievement and promise . . . . Please send his personal story. [27]

Christesen responded with:

> His standing in the literary world here is not particularly high, but he is generally recognised as a competent writer on the 'popular' level. Personally I consider him to be rather more than this . . . . I suspect he feels bitter about his reception in Australia - as witness his defence of the 'commercial' novelist and his attack on the 'literary' writer in *An Author Bites the Dust* (1948). However, no hearts were broken and Upfield remains one of the best of our 'commercial' writers . . . . [28]

Later, Christesen commented:

> I took him [Upfield] to lunch recently. He is certainly a rough diamond; but we got along famously.[29]

In a letter to Christesen around this period Upfield echoes an observation of earlier years, and he also seems in the context to acknowledge quite graciously a quality of Vance Palmer's for as far as I know the first and only time:

> . . . As I cannot write a detective story a la Agatha Christie and Ngaio Marsh, or a novel like those produced by Sinclair Lewis and Vance Palmer, I have had to follow a middle-of-the-road course by emphasizing character and atmosphere.
> Strangely enough, this middle-of-the-road type of yarn has been greatly successful only in the United States and among a class of reader whom I had always thought of as being addicted only to Dr. Johnson. Most of my American fan mail has come from persons having positions in the universities, the museums and geographical societies. In this country my readers are located outback and in rural areas.
> *The Devil's Steps* come closest to the detective story and *The New Shoe* farthest away from it. . . .[30]

The New Shoe was taken up by Doubleday during the year and in Britain in 1952.

Heinemann, between 1951 and 1966, were to publish in Britain eighteen Bony titles and in Australia, in collaboration with Pan Books, seven of those titles. Arthur,

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[27] Heinemann London (Arnold Glyde), letter to Heinemann Melbourne (C. Christesen), 26 July 1950, Meanjin Archives.
[28] Heinemann Melbourne, letter to Heinemann London, 19 September 1950, Meanjin Archives.
[29] Heinemann Melbourne, letter to Heinemann London, 31 October 1950, Meanjin Archives.
[30] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 3 April 1951, Meanjin Archives.

though, discovered that he was to lose his new friend at court when Christesen dropped a personal line:

> I am resigning from this firm . . . I feel I have had a particularly raw deal. . . . Unfortunately, politics are at the back of it all . . . . As an Australian I was most anxious to help develop our native literature. But that was not to be . . . not in this field anyway.[31]

Upfield replied promptly, in a quite revealing note:

> From bits and pieces I read in the *Argus* I was beginning to suspect dirty work behind the scenes, and your experiences remind me of my own with the *Herald* away back in 1931. Having previously lived among civilised people in the outback, I couldn't take it, or continue to permit myself to be upset by the jibes and jealousy I encountered at the meetings of literary gatherings. Able, however, to earn a crust without having to cringe to editors or publishers, especially after '43 when I 'got into' America, I have been fortunate in being able to live aloofly, despite obvious disadvantages caused by being out of contact. . . . Although we do not, it would seem, agree on the methods adopted in furtherance of Australian literature . . . I hope sincerely you will find even greater scope for your mission in life, the advancement of Australian literature.[32]

Christesen's departure from Heinemann a few months into 1952 did not affect Arthur's relationship with the firm, with whom for the time being anyway he was well satisfied.

On another horizon, two examples of engaging trivia emerged. When *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* asked Upfield to name the ten best, living detective-story writers, he listed, not in any order of preference, Anthony Boucher, Raymond Chandler, A.B. Cunningham, Dashiell Hammett, Dorothy Hughes, Q. Patrick, Ellery Queen, Mary Roberts Rhinehart, Georges Simenon and Cornell Woolrich.[33] Also, Doubleday in New York wrote to him with a mathematical problem when the house Reader, editing for the publisher the most recent Bony story, *Venom House*, queried figures on a wool clip. The Reader, checked by the editor, reckoned that if you allowed, as Bony did, ten pounds of wool for each sheep and four pounds for each lamb, then multiply

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[31] Heinemann Melbourne, letter to Upfield, 13 December 1951, unsigned carbon copy, Meanjin Archives.

[32] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 16 December 1951, Meanjin Archives.

[33] Upfield, letter to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,* 17 July 1951, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

that by the number of ruminants stated, you get a much bigger poundage than that totted up by Bony. Enough for one hundred bales, in fact, where Bony had calculated a measly ninety four bales. "I would appreciate it if you would let me know whether we have done wrong," the editor asked.[34] Doubleday's calculations were indeed correct, but it was decided that the easiest way out was simply to alter the number of sheep.

In the second half of 1951 a lively young mother and freelance journalist, Pamela Ruskin, called on Upfield by appointment at the old Occidental Hotel near the top end of Collins Street, in Melbourne. She had just read *The Widows of Broome* and thought an interview would be nice, perhaps even a story. As Pamela relates it, upon walking into the lounge she found Arthur sitting ramrod straight, a homburg on the seat beside him, and clutching a whisky as though his life depended on it. He seemed almost paralysed with fright. "Well, how nice to meet you, Mr. Upfield. I did so enjoy *The Widows of Broome*. Tell me, do people really drink that reactive?" she asked, referring to battery acid, a feature of the novel, rather than Arthur's whisky.[35] They got along very well and a no-nonsense article, which especially pleased Arthur because it "tells tale without sugar and expresses facts without blah" and concentrates on Bony rather than his creator, appeared in the *Australasian Post* soon after.[36] Pamela was to become Arthur's Australian serials agent[37] and she and her husband, Alfred, developed a lifelong friendship with Arthur and Jessica.

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[34] Doubleday & Co, letter to Upfield, 5 September 1951, archive of Don Uren.
[35] Pamela Ruskin, personal interview, 23 July 1998.
[36] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 4 November 1951, archive of Pamela Ruskin.
[37] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 10 March 1952 and also letter to Pamela Ruskin, "Monday" [possibly 16 March 1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin: "Please proceed in future as my Australian [serials] agent . . . . Editor won't say when he will publish; editor can keep on saying he will publish, and pay, next year and next year and so on. Having obtained the offer and acceptance, agent's job is to rattle the editor for payment, and in this I have greater confidence in a woman agent than a male one."

The homburg Pamela had seen was one Arthur wore when motoring up to Melbourne in his Daimler. He was immensely proud of the immaculately-presented motor car and so feared it being marked in the heavy Melbourne traffic that it was always left parked somewhere on the edge of the business district, the journey being completed by taxi.[38] Both the homburg and the Daimler were something of a veneer which ill-suited the man.

The year 1951 closed with greetings from E. V. Timms. He mentioned that his *Forever to Remain,* admired by Arthur, was in its fourth reprint and he remarked on a fine spread on Arthur by Heinemann in the Sydney papers. Things on the Sydney literary front, he reported, were quiet, with not much new blood - "its the old brigade who are mainly carrying on" - adding:

> But the indifference of our Australian (save the mark) newspapers to the work of Australians generally is something to marvel at - they give columns and columns to overseas blokes whose books here wouldn't sell more than a handful of copies. But it's the old story - if it's imported it's good, if it's a local product it must be mediocre. But I suspect, as I am sure you do, that most of our critics are themselves failed writers in the independent field, and it still hurts.[39]

Upfield, too, thought the sentiment of the superiority of the imported still widespread, but in one set of notes dispatched to Pamela Ruskin he wrote:

> The hostility to Australian books was first broken down by Idriess and William Hatfield, who backed up the late Roy Bridges, one of the best stylists Australia has produced.[40]

Upfield, now in the one spot for more than five years, was feeling restless. He and Jessica sold up at Yarra Junction in the Dandenong Ranges and moved to Airey's Inlet on the south coast of Victoria, seventy miles or about two and a half hours drive from Melbourne. There was chaos for two or three months with carpenters adding to the house, so Arthur used the time for a little stock-taking and for looking out to sea.

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38 Pamela Ruskin, personal interview, 23 July 1998.
39 E. V. Timms, letter to Upfield, 17 December 1951, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
40 Upfield, ts. notes, no heading, undated but circa 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

Venom House, published in New York on 17 January 1952, was the fifteenth novel and the fourteenth Bony mystery published in New York. Fourteen novels, including ten Bony mysteries, had been published in Britain and in Australia nine works, including eight Bony mysteries, had been printed. He was just over the half-way mark in his Bony output.

Meanwhile, the bright and breezy Pamela Ruskin in Melbourne was pushing Arthur's latest Bony work, *Venom House*, for serialisation - although brought out in New York in early 1952 it was not to be produced in Britain by Heinemann until the following year. When arming Pamela with the volume Arthur admitted that his views about serial publication in Australia were probably distorted, before dryly observing that the general rule was for Australian magazines to pay Australian authors £50 and English authors £250.[41] Ruskin placed *Venom House* with the *Australasian Post* for £150 and a grumble from them about the price. She was delighted and Upfield was very pleased.

Ruskin around this time had also suggested that Upfield submit a short story featuring Bony to the *Australasian Post*, but he declined:

> Thank you for the invitation to submit a short featuring Bony. However, years ago I decided that a Bony plot for a short would always serve for a novel, and therefore to use same in a short would be a waste of material. In addition, the short needs special treatment, and at the moment I am disinclined to experiment. [42]

However, two weeks later, Upfield told Ruskin:

> Have just been commissioned by an American magazine to write a series of short stories about Bony for one hundred dollars a yarn, plus reprint royalties. Have to get busy immediately the latest novel is completed for The Crime Club.[43]

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41 Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 25 February 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin.
42 Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 11 February 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin.
43 Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 25 February 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

I have not found any subsequent reference by Upfield to Bony short stories, but it is possible that the above commission produced "Wisp of Wool and Disk of Silver," a short story featuring Bony published by *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in December 1979. The plot, the murder method and its circumstantial flaw is in essence that of *The Sands of Windee*, first published in 1931, but why it took *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* so long to actually print the story I do not know. I am not aware of any other short story featuring Bony.

When the Upfield house additions were finished, Pamela and her husband Alfred motored down to Airey's Inlet for a heart-to-heart on the eccentricities of the publishing set and the snares in contracts. As might be expected, Pamela and her husband were quite accepting of Arthur's and Jessica's de facto relationship. Upfield acknowledged this - "We are both most appreciative of your reaction to the domestic set-up" -[44] for their situation was outside the norms of the time and Arthur, probably a little more so than Jessica, was sensitive to it.

With Pamela's arrival came a re-survey of radio and film rights, subjects with which Arthur had been less than whole-heartedly engaged for quite a few years. Upfield the marketer set the scene for Pamela:

> You can announce to all and sundry that Upfield hasn't pushed his Bony material for two reasons. One, that since 1943 the U.S.A. has kept him financially independent, and two - the most important - has ever been Upfield's ambition that ultimately Bonaparte will become another Charlie Chan. Both American film and radio interests have indicated this to be probable. I have never been anxious to sell my radio and film rights in Australia for next to nothing, even though I could have done so twenty times over, on the grounds that it were better to conserve possibly valuable assets. [45]

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[44] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, "Friday" [circa June 1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin. Ruskin's letter to Upfield of 15 June 1952 in part said: "Don't worry about your domestic set-up, I'll handle it with studied vagueness where necessary. I can imagine how much you wish it were not necessary."

[45] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, "Friday" [circa June 1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin.

Charlie Chan, the fictional Honolulu detective of Chinese-American background, created by E.D. Biggers, first appeared in print in 1925 - four years before Bony - in a series of only six novels.[46] This is the first and only reference to Charlie Chan in the Upfield archives and (despite the fractured English of Charlie and the sometimes tortured constructions of Bony) there is nothing at all to suggest that the fictional American was in any way an inspiration for the creation of Bony.

The Australian Broadcasting Commission had been awarded by Upfield first reading rights to, and had featured, eight Bony novels,[47] but this did not include performing rights. The sixteen Bony novels so far were therefore available to a bidder, subject to a satisfactory agreement. Upfield for various reasons including availability of copies suggested four titles for consideration.

Ruskin, with a promise of 25% commission, approached a company called Australian Radio Productions. Philip Jones of that company offered £50 per book, but then complicated matters by seeking expanded rights, so Upfield proposed a conference of Jones, Ruskin and himself. He wrote to Pamela:

> I am not wishful of taking this matter out of your hands; merely that I think my knowledge and experience would greatly assist you in squeezing the last penny from Bony on the radio. When Jones writes of British and American radio territory, then one thing adds to another and the total is an odd number.[48]

The director of Penguin Australia, Bob Maynard, had with his wife and children very recently visited Arthur and Jessica at Airey's Inlet and Arthur had potentially useful information, which he included in the same letter to Pamela:

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[46] Jack Crowley, "Chan, Charlie," *Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, 1999.

[47] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, "Friday" [circa June 1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin; "Titles read by A.B.C.: *The Barrakee Mystery, The Sands of Windee, Mr. Jelly's Business, Wings Above the Diamantina, Winds of Evil, The Bone is Pointed, The Mystery of Swordfish Reef, No Footprints in the Bush [Bushranger of the Skies]*."

[48] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, "Friday" [possibly 24 May 1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin.

> Now between ourselves. Philip Jones lives only a few doors from him [i.e. Maynard] at Blackburn. They are not friends exactly, but good neighbours. Mrs. Jones has long been an ardent Bony fan, and both like the Bony stories because in each the chief characters are few and they are therefore attractive to radio production.

Upfield was consistently acute in matters of contract negotiations.

The conference was held at the Australian Radio Production Office in South Yarra, but Ruskin, for private reasons, was unable to attend. Arthur met with the chief executive Morris West (who later resigned in order to write full time), Philip Jones and their publicity manager, a man called Money, whom Arthur knew in the 1930s as editor of *Listener In*. Arthur wrote to Pamela:

> My impressions of these three men were generally good, being best with Money, then Jones and finally West. On arrival we had two beers, and then there appeared a photographer who flash-bulbed West and Jones and myself discussing scripts, and finally myself at a typewriter churning out a masterpiece. Then we went down to the St. Kilda Road end of Domain Road for lunch, and after lunch West and I agreed on the main points.[49]

Those main points were conveyed at length by Upfield to Ruskin, who then negotiated with West in the detail.

Late in June 1952 Upfield agreed with Australian Radio Productions on a contract which provided for, amongst other things, a minimum of 26 half-hour episodes at a one-and-only twenty guineas per episode, with a 'replay' right after four years. Upfield had first right of refusal to supply all plots (not scripts), with the plots reverting to him. And Arthur was to receive 35% of any net sales in America,[50] which proposed sales as far as I know never eventuated.

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[49] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, "Saturday" [possibly 6 June 1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin.

[50] Pamela Ruskin, letters to Upfield, 17 June 1952 and 25 June 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin; and Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 27 June 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

In August 1952 Arthur, Jessica and Pamela called on Morris West to hear the first disc of the radio show. Arthur was pleased that Jessica could come[51] and Pamela found Morris West in a discussion on additional plots "unexpectedly cooperative and altogether very charming and pleasant. All of which means that I still think he is a very smooth customer."[52]

The show was sold on a national basis in a series of eventually 32 self-contained half-hour episodes under the title of "*Ininja - the Avenger*," which title was changed before the series aired to "*Man of Two Tribes*."[53] The actor Frank Thring played Bony. The form of the radio episodes may be recalled:

ININJA - THE AVENGER
Episode 11 "The Squatter's Wife"
T.T. OPENING MUSIC
LANCE: (THIRTY. TRACE OF OXFORD) Is that you, Kelly?,
KELLY: (FILTER) Yes, Hatton. How are you?
LANCE: Very worried. Will you do something for me?
KELLY: If I can. What's the trouble?
LANCE: I'm afraid my brother has killed his wife.
KELLY: Hell! Aren't you sure?
LANCE: Everything points to it - but I haven't found the body. Look, Kelly, you know Spendor, the Brisbane Commissioner of Police, don't you?
KELLY: Yes, but—
LANCE: It's no good calling in the local constable. He'd be worse than useless.
KELLY: What do you want me to do?
LANCE: Get on to Spendor. Tell him it's a case requiring delicacy and bushcraft. Tell him to – send Napoleon Bonaparte!
T.T. MUSIC
ANNOUNCER: Ininja - the Avenger - an All Australian programme starring Arthur W. Upfield's creation - Detective Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte - the man of two tribes.
T.T. MUSIC
PAUSE FOR COMMERCIAL
T.T. MUSIC
ANNOUNCER: The Squatter's Wife.
T.T. MUSIC
ANNOUNCER: The Myallinga homestead is one of the most . . . .[54]

[51] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 13 August 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin: "I do want Jess to accompany me to A.R.P and hear those discs, because she is the brains of this show down here and, too, because she wants to hear them."
[52] Pamela Ruskin, letter to Upfield, 25 August [1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin.
[53] Pamela Ruskin, letter to Upfield, 24 July [1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin.
[54] "The Squatter's Wife," writer unknown, "*Ininja - the Avenger*: Episode 11," - other details unknown. Typewritten page found in the archives of Bonaparte Holdings. It is not known whether this (part) script went to air or not.

By July 1953 Australasian Radio Productions had completed the first 22 episodes of the programme, which included adaptations of ten Bony book titles and which was scheduled to commence broadcasting in Melbourne on Tuesday 28 July in the 8.30 p.m. time-slot. By December 1953 the programme was being broadcast on thirteen major radio stations throughout Australia and, according to Australasian Radio Productions Pty. Ltd., on Tuesday night in Melbourne alone the series attracted 230,000 listeners and in Adelaide 80,000.[55]

One radio critic in Adelaide in 1954 - Eugene Lumbers ("James Cramond") - earned a rebuke from Upfield when he quoted an opinion from *John O'London's Weekly* that it found Bony "irritating but fascinating." Stoutly averred Lumbers in a response to Upfield:

> . . . that is my opinion, too. On Tuesday nights when the programme is broadcast I frequently fall down on my job as a critic by listening to Bony when I should be fastening my claws into something else . . . . He irritates me because he is so sure of himself, but then what detective isn't? . . . I find Bony fascinating because he is a half-caste. He would be, I should think, a progressive sort of fellow in outlook and would have justifiable contempt for most of the whites with whom he comes in contact . . . . I think it is about time we had an Australian detective story pure and simple and left MI5, Scotland Yard and the bloody FBI way behind. So good luck to Bony! [56]

Upfield was eventually to be disappointed in the overall quality of the series, but was nonetheless bemused that the programme did not seem to generate any increase in the sale of his books.

Around the middle of 1952 the ubiquitous Pamela Ruskin, who with the weather and politics now assumes some prominence in Arthur's life, was scooting around Melbourne with the serial rights for *The Mountains Have a Secret* and *The Bachelors of*

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[55] Australasian Radio Productions Pty. Ltd., letter to Upfield, 10 December 1953, archive of Don Uren.

[56] Eugene Lumbers, letter to Upfield, 11 March 1954, archive of Don Uren.

Broken Hill. She called on R. G. Campbell of the *Australian Journal,* whom she knew slightly, and related the outcome to Arthur:

> It wasn't very successful, however; he likes and admires your work alright but, boy, he doesn't seem to like you very much at all. I must say he was very nice and apologetic about it, so I departed gracefully.[57]

Upfield apologised for not warning Pamela about Campbell, with whom he had once been on friendly terms, relating the tale of their deteriorating relationship but neglecting to mention his own refusal to accept from Campbell only £60 in 1938 for the serial rights to *The Bone is Pointed.* Arthur continued:

> Some of these editors are more than tough, and I blame the writers themselves for it. They won't hang together, they won't get themselves into a union, and only by concerted political action will they induce the Government to restrict the importation of syndicated serials, comics, etc., even illustrations.[58]

Ruskin was making good progress with a story for *People* magazine on Upfield, saying:

> I have taken a few liberties with circumstances here and there to give more life to the story. I do hope you won't get too annoyed at the occasional uncomplimentary bits and the attitude ". . . he says but it may not be quite like that . . ." in a couple of spots.[59]

Pamela now did something she had never done before - she sent the subject of her essay a copy of the completed article before it was submitted. Fortunately Upfield liked it, but the marketer in him suggested that the comment of Bob Maynard, the director of Penguin Australia, be more prominent: "Penguin, of course, publishes only those who are world tops in their particular field." He also made a number of minor deletions, thoughtfully substituting filler material so that the retyped pages would fit into the manuscript.[60]

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[57] Pamela Ruskin, letter to Upfield, 21 May 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin.
[58] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, "Friday" [possibly 24 May 1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin.
[59] Pamela Ruskin, letter to Upfield, 29 May 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin.
[60] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, "Saturday" [possibly late May 1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin.

Ruskin, in the period of her association with Upfield and after his death, wrote a number of articles on the author. She sometimes referred to his "weather-beaten face, grizzled hair [and] ears like jug handles," harking back to their first meeting, where he sat ". . . tight-lipped, stiff-collared and rigid with shyness." And she mentioned that he was "a crusty man, tough and rough on the outside, often abrupt and irritable but underneath that irascible exterior he was affectionate, loyal and kindly."[61]

In an interview a great many years later Ruskin said that when Upfield was with people he didn't know very well he would force the words out because he knew he had to; however, once he knew you he was quite chatty. He had a very dry, somewhat inhibited sense of humour so that, said Ruskin, "you would almost look up and think 'Ah, yes! He's being funny.'"[62] Upfield himself, in notes he once sent to Ruskin, provided a revealing list which showed his hates as polite conversation, conceit and human mobs, and his loves as cats, big-game fishing and fresh air.[63] Nonetheless Pamela quite sincerely liked Arthur and thought that once the ice was broken he was "very sweet."

By mid-winter 1952 Arthur had nearly finished another Bony mystery - *Murder Must Wait* - which would be published in New York in May and in London in September of the following year. He had a ten-days job for the *Argus* in sight and a couple of yarns to do for an American magazine. Inside the Airey's Inlet house it was nice and dry, but outside it was absolutely and utterly wet. Arthur had to keep his car at a garage in town, because the track to the house became impassable with rain. All those attempting it got bogged.

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61 Pamela Ruskin, "Arthur Upfield. They Still Follow his Dust," *This Australia* 5.3 (Winter 1986): 53-58.

62 Pamela Ruskin, personal interview, 23 July 1998.

63 Upfield, "Notes," ts., undated but probably late 1951, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

Jessica's son, Donald Uren, had completed boarding school and was about to leave to jackaroo on Barooga Station, near Tocumwal in New South Wales. From the age of nine, when he first met Upfield, Donald had got on very well with him - if he had a problem he went to Arthur and relied heavily on his advice. Arthur encouraged Donald, who was keen on the bush, to consider a career in a rural industry and this he did - he was to jackaroo for general experience before eventually joining Dalgetys, a leading stock and station company.[64] At five in the morning on the day Donald left home for Barooga, Arthur and Jessica, with young Uren carrying his swag, plodded down the near-unploddable track to the car in the village so they could drive to Geelong for the train.

Outside in the wider world Australia had air, sea and ground forces fighting with the United Nations in Korea to stem the invasion of the south by North Korean and Chinese troops. At home, anti-Communist measures were constantly being strengthened. In this context Upfield was in August 1952 mentioned in the House of Representatives in Canberra.

The Labor member for Yarra, Mr. S. M. Keon, noted that the Prime Minister, the then Mr. Menzies, was chairman of the political committee which controlled the Commonwealth Literary Fund. Keon thundered:

> Whatever constitutional difficulties the Prime Minister may claim lie in his way in dealing with Communism, as chairman of this committee he has a direct and personal responsibility. The dissatisfaction with the Commonwealth Literary Fund extends throughout the literary community of Australia. In the March issue of a literary magazine called the *Austrovert*, which is published by a group of literary people in Melbourne, the following comment appears:
>
> > In the last six months attacks in print on the policy of the Fund have come from Edgar Harris (Georgian House), the *Bulletin*, the novelist Arthur Upfield and Clive

[64] Donald Uren, personal interview, 6 November 1996.

> Turnbull. Add to these numerous vocal complaints and you get the result that few are really satisfied with the Fund's actions - even several of those who have recently received Fund fellowships.
>
> I do not claim to be competent to pass a literary judgement on the work of the persons who have received these awards, but people of such diverse opinions as Arthur Upfield and the publishers of the *Bulletin* are all dissatisfied with the operation of the fund.

Mr. Keon said much more:

> . . . A certain group, and that group only, has benefited from the fund. One award was made to Mr. Judah Waten, a prominent member of the Communist Party in Melbourne. . . . But if a list of those who were responsible for the recent Communist peace carnival were compared with a list of those who have enjoyed Commonwealth grants of £600 or £800, the same names would be found on both lists. I have mentioned Mr. Waten. Other people who have benefited from the fund and who were members of the Youth Carnival Literary Committee are Vance Palmer, John Morrison, and Eric Lambert . . . .[65]

The deputy chairman of the chamber was eventually obliged to call for order and announce that the honourable member's time had expired.

Harry Heseltine, Vance Palmer's biographer, records that following Keon's attack Palmer "was immediately defended in the House by the Prime Minister, R. G. Menzies, who said of him, 'I regard him for his distinguished work and for his sheer honest and continuous work on the committee.'" In 1942 Palmer had been appointed to the Advisory Board of the Commonwealth Literary Fund and in 1947 he became chairman, when he wielded considerable influence, but he was now wounded.[66] Heseltine writes that there was no reason to suppose that Palmer was ever a member of the Communist Party, but in 1953 Palmer felt obliged to resign from the Board, quite probably as a consequence of the turbulence which followed his naming by Keon. The subject raised by Keon remained in Parliament for a few weeks and attacks on Communist influence in the arts and in the Commonwealth Literary Fund were launched from both sides of the House.

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[65] Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard),* Vol. 218, 1951-52, (28 August 1952) 717-18.

[66] Harry Heseltine, *Vance Palmer* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1970) 24-25, 27.

Upfield made only passing reference to his being mentioned in Parliament by Keon. Some years earlier, however, Upfield had made an interesting observation to Charles Lemon, when after touching upon Hartley Grattan's comments concerning Australia's need for a good literary critic he had said:

> . . . the literary racket in this country is well tied up by the several nationally-wide literature associations, such as the Society of Australian Authors and the PEN Club. It was my wartime job to keep my fingers on subversive elements and their activities, and I was astonished to find how these literature societies are white-anted by the Commos. You won't believe it possible, but it is so, for all the executive positions are held by Commo writers.
> These people are constantly in correspondence with their ilk in all States, and what I learned during the war lead me to suppose that it is probable because I will not waste time joining up with them the edict has gone out to kill Upfield. The best way to do that is, of course, to ignore my work in the press, or merely mention it. This was reflected in the reviewers' reception of *Death of a Swagman*. That was quite a competent job, but the reviews of it totalled about 10 per cent of those earned by the pre-war books. Not that it matters much because they are too late to injure me very greatly. I have never had argument with any of them, but I have declined to join their societies on the grounds that I live too far from Melbourne to attend, and so as I am not a member of the union I must be kept on the outer.[67]

Upfield, after this comment to Lemon, referred some years later to the same supposed conspiracy against him by the literary establishment,[68] but the extent to which, if at all, Upfield helped fuel Keon's attack can only be a matter for conjecture. I can find no evidence of any connection between Upfield and Keon, other than that quoted above from the Hansard account of Keon's address.

Jessica occasionally wrote to Pamela Ruskin on authorial matters when Arthur was weighed down. The letters show a sensitive appreciation of marketing strategies and relationships and they flow well. In one letter to Pamela, late in 1952, Jessica wrote about an article that Hetherington of the *Argus* was seeking on the then-imminent Bony radio programme:

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[67] Upfield, letter to Charles Lemon, 20 April 1948, Battye Library.

[68] Upfield, letter to J. K. Ewers, 27 January 1956, archive of Patricia Kotai-Ewers: ". . . and the whispering campaign against Upfield immediately after the war, begun and maintained by the Communist elements among writers whose subversive activities it was my job to watch and record for four years."

> Here's how Arthur is moving: he is writing today to Hetherington suggesting that as you are connected with Australian Radio Productions, you obtain material for release from ARP, write the story for the *Argus*, adding 'body' by building up Bony as the only Australian fictional sleuth to achieve fame and affection in the USA as well as being acclaimed one of the world's first ten in detective fiction. Give it all to Bony etc. as you have done so well before . . . . To be clearer, the last of the foregoing is just a lead for you. Arthur's letter to JH will just suggest you do the job.[69]

As well, Jessica by now helped correct Arthur's texts and was later shown to be consulted on the storyline of the Bony books.[70]

Jessica's letters also included little domestic items of the sort seldom mentioned by Arthur. For example, Arthur one wet day found on the beach a very unhappy and storm-battered penguin, which he brought home and placed in a blanketed box. "We were hopeful of having a penguin pal around, as others have done, but alas, he snuggled in and died." And this item, where the unkind might think Arthur's marketing zeal ran away from his aesthetic sense:

> Arthur, growing tired of the typewriter, decided to put down a concrete path. Most original, too - far more satisfying than footprints. Five concrete slabs, the first three bearing chevron-like stripe designs, the next a most impressive A W U and finally the door stone. B-O-N-Y. Was hoping to take a picture today, but![71]

December 1952 was for Arthur and Jessica busy with visitors and, in Arthur's words, "a woman artist who insists in painting my 'mug' on canvas." The quiet of the new year and most of January was a relief. Late January, however, was the Allan Lane cocktail party, timed for the visit to his Melbourne branch of Sir Allan Lane, who conceived and ran the Penguin Books enterprise. Arthur and Jessica motored up to Melbourne for the event and stayed, as they often did, at the exclusive Windsor Hotel, where they entertained Pamela and Alfred Ruskin to dinner and compared notes. Some time after the cocktail party Sir Allan, with Bob Maynard, drove to

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69 Jessica Uren, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 22 September 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

70 Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 13 August 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin: "Finished the latest Bony job and now we are both polishing it for the typiste."

71 Jessica Uren, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 22 September 1952, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

Geelong to see some people, then continued on to the Upfield's for a home-cooked dinner. Jessica thoroughly enjoyed the occasion[72] and Arthur was quietly pleased with the publicity subsequently given him by Lane.[73]

The latest Bony - *Murder Must Wait* - was listed for publication in New York in May and Heinemann took it for September. Arthur was soon back at his desk working on the next. Jessica commented:

> My poor author has had a desperate struggle for freedom to withdraw in submission to the urge (and necessity) for creation of the new book . . . . All this freedom after having been forced to rudely say "no more bloody visitors for three months - I have to survive." So I guess two of our friends will sulk. I'm a bit sorry. I hate to hurt people, but I agree there comes a time for ruthlessness and I shut my ears while John [i.e. Arthur] speaks. So, today is chapter five. John is in his small corner and I in mine, opening my heart and nattering while I keep a watchful eye and alert ear for stray callers who 'just happened to be down this way.' It's really strange how this approach has grown from once-upon-a-time good manners. We would never call upon our best friends without invitation and a convenient time set by them, but nowadays people calmly invite themselves.[74]

In London, the latest Heinemann-published Bony, *The New Shoe*, was winning excellent reviews and Heinemann was shaking off the dust with five re-issues. They were also examining their distribution system in response to a blast from Arthur to his London agent. Dwye Evans from Heinemann, London, both cabled and wrote to F. T. Sambell of their Melbourne office, saying in part:

> *The New Shoe* has had excellent notices in this country, and people here are beginning to recognise him [i.e. Upfield] as an important detective story writer. As he is a native

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[72] Jessica Uren, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 21 February 1953: ". . . we really enjoyed Sir Allan's visit, although his mind is so dynamic and so probing on people: he is almost a natural mind-reader. . . . Shop was scarcely mentioned, but Bob [Maynard] did say that that they would publish five titles and John [i.e. Arthur] is quite content at that."

[73] "A Visit to Bony," *Argus* 21 February 1953: 8: "The little Victorian township of Airey's Inlet recently had a visit from Sir Allan Lane. . . . Sir Allan was staying with Arthur W. Upfield, the only living Australian author to have reached a Penguin edition, and he was greatly interested in the Split Point lighthouse, the setting for Upfield's latest crime novel, *The New Shoe*. Upfield's famous
detective . . . will soon be heard on the air. . . . "

[74] Jessica Uren, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 21 February 1953, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

> Australian, and has had some measure of success there in the past, it seems pathetic that we cannot do better for him.[75]

Three months later not a great deal had changed. The local Airey's Inlet general storekeeper, who sold a lot of paperbacks of all types, had sold twenty four hardback copies of *The New Shoe*, which he had obtained from Heinemann at wholesale rates. Encouraged, when he heard about the newly published *Venom House* he placed an order. Nothing happened and the storekeeper told Arthur this tale:

> Being in town I called at Heinemann's. I said "I've called to fix my account and pick up my order for Upfield's *Venom House*." They said they wouldn't be getting *Venom House* for weeks yet. I then said "Well, let me have half a dozen more *New Shoes*. They said "Oh. We haven't any until the next shipment arrives." So I shrugged my shoulders and said "What's the bloody use!"[76]

Upfield avowed that he really didn't understand Heinemann, for with the radio series soon to be launched he thought there would be an increased demand for his books from the broader radio audience. Once again the ghosts of *An Author Bites the Dust* entered his mind. However, since Upfield's royalty on the Heinemann books was only £1.2.0 per 100, he was disinclined to spend his own money, or a great deal of his own time, on publicity for them - the publisher's cooperation was always necessary. He harked back to the Angus & Robertson days, when they made a book live for years and he could expect Australian sales of at least seven to eight thousand copies a title.[77] However, by July Sambell of Heinemann had the availability of books and other matters fairly well in hand. They even displayed in a Melbourne store window Upfield's portrait and his collection of framed dust jackets.

Upfield in August spent two weeks in hospital after prostate surgery. He had also, for some time, been complaining about a "sick heart" and Jessica had been periodically unwell with respiratory tract infections. Pamela Ruskin, who had just sold the

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75 Heinemann London, letter to Heinmann Melbourne, 2 March 1953, Meanjin Archives.
76 Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 30 June 1953, archive of Pamela Ruskin.
77 Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 30 June 1953, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

Victorian serial rights of *Murder Must Wait* to the *Argus* for £100, wrote saying that she and her family would be in the vicinity Sunday two weeks hence and would like Arthur and Jess to picnic with them, concluding with "What do you think? Don't be polite and if you feel too bloody awful to be bothered with us, say so in your own forthright fashion." Arthur replied gracefully welcoming them on the Sunday suggested, but the strain of his and Jessica's current situation showed. By now they were both determined to move to a place where they could hire domestic help and where it would be warmer.

Upfield, however, still maintained his output and by the end of October 1953 *Death of a Lake* had been accepted for publication in New York early the following year. The manuscript of *Cake in the Hatbox* (in America *Sinister Stones*) was ready for serialists and publishers and he had written two pages of his next Bony mystery. The text of this latter, appropriately, concerned the murder of a weather forecaster, and in a curious episode it was to draw Upfield to the attention of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation.

Christmas 1953 found Arthur in rude health, but worrying about whether the *Argus* was going to fold before it had paid him the serial monies owing. Jessica was not so well

18 BERMAGUI, A BIOGRAPHY AND BOWRAL (1954-58)

In March 1954 Arthur and Jessica packed their swag - this time five large crates, two chairs and a sewing machine - and went on the tramp. What wasn't in the swag was sold with the Airey's Inlet house. Their intentions were to spend a few days with Donald Uren on the station, potter around for three weeks at Bermagui, then look for a house somewhere. If nothing took their fancy on the New South Wales coast, well, they would try South Australia or Western Australia. Jessica wrote to Pamela Ruskin:

> . . . not for the first time I am finding my personal and treasured possessions a bothersome burden. Arthur-John is also tempted to leave much for the incinerator, or better still toss it over the cliff.[1]

The holiday at Bermagui, on the south coast of New South Wales very roughly halfway between Sydney and Melbourne, became extended. A house was planned - "It will be small, snug and sweet," wrote Jessica - on a site overlooking the town jetty and from where craft could be watched crossing the bar to the sea. Arthur felt that they would be broke by the time the builder called for his last payment, so he readied himself for the trauma by frequent trips to sea chasing marlin.

Death of a Lake, published in February in New York and due out mid-year in Britain, was serialised in May in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The American reviews were very good[2] and so pleased with the book was Arthur that he was moved to seek an

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1 Jessica Uren, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 11 March 1954, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

2 Drexel Drake, rev. of *Death of a Lake*, *Chicago Sun Tribune* 11 April 1954: 12: "The puzzle is minor and slowly spun out, but the picture of isolated life in Australia's vastness is unusually captivating"; James Sandoe, rev. of *Death of a Lake*, *New York Herald Tribune* 21 March 1954: 13: "This is really a most absorbing piece of work, less for the perfunctory if plausible tangle of passions which admit it to the Crime Club category than for the account of the drying up of that

opinion of its worth in a letter dated 18 June 1954 addressed to "Dear Roderick." "Roderick" I believe to be Dr. Colin Roderick, an academic and author, but whether the letter or one like it was dispatched or not I do not know. (There is no such letter in Roderick's papers in the National Library.) I quote at some length from the typewritten, ink-amended text marked "Draft," because of the rather endearing way in which Upfield leaves himself a little bit vulnerable:

> Some time ago you asked for a book I could not supply save in a cheap reprint. I am sending you a copy of my last issued in America for two reasons. It is an infinitely better and more pleasing book than is issued in London, and the story is one I'd like to bring to your notice as illustrative of what I have always tried to do.
> What I have tried to do may be better put by stressing negatives. I realised that to compete successfully with Edgar Wallace and Agatha Christie, S.S. Van Dine and Erle Stanley Gardner would be hopeless. That even had I their gifts and erudition it would be hopeless to compete with an Australian story and background. I did think some 25 years ago, and still think, that an Australian could write Australian fiction which would appeal in overseas countries just because it was Australian. You know the kind of hurdle that has always been.
> I have concentrated on backgrounds and people, and have been content to travel the mystery-crime road just as far as my talents would permit. Instead of rushing to London or New York and there competing with the local writers on their ground, I have clung to Australia which I think has a vast variety of unique backgrounds just waiting to be exploited.
> The mystery ingredient of *Death of a Lake* is slight, no attempt having been made to make it more so, the better to bring to the foreground one of these unique Australian backgrounds. I would much appreciate your opinion on whether this particular type of mystery story - i.e. *Death of a Lake* - could take its place in National Literature. If, of course, it be possible for a crime story to be included in National Literature.[3]

There is a touch of pathos in the last line of Upfield's draft, an expression of doubt that acknowledges the high ground of the literati. Perhaps this prompted Upfield to put the draft aside.

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lake in the teeming wastes of the Australian bush, which is Mr. Upfield's richer and predominating concern"; Anthony Boucher, rev. of *Death of a Lake, New York Times* 7 March 1954: 27: "Arthur W. Upfield has been less successful than he often is in creating the character and pattern behind a crime, but has more than made up for that by producing as exciting a picture of regional color as even he has achieved"; L. G. Offord, rev. of *Death of a Lake, San Francisco Chronicle* 21 March 1954: 23: "This sort of thing is Upfield at his best, with a natural-history background that dwarfs any human activity, superbly observed and described."
The above four reviews were quoted in and extracted from *Book Review Digest* 50th cumulation (New York: H.W. Wilson Coy., 1955) 904 -5.

[3] Upfield, letter marked "Draft" to "Dear Roderick" [probably Dr. Colin Roderick], 18 June 1954, archive of Don Uren.

Colin Roderick and Arthur Upfield did, though, have a connection. In his *An Introduction to Australian Fiction* Roderick devotes four paragraphs to Upfield, of whom he in part says:

> A great deal of skilful planning goes into the composition of a good thriller, and it is pleasing to see Arthur Upfield raising the Australian standard in this kind of writing. His work has a distinct appeal beyond the Australian littoral, even though it is Australian in atmosphere and situation . . . .
> Upfield writes convincingly. He has some control over the telling phrase and the economical pattern.[4]

In 1956 Roderick accepted the position of honorary secretary of the preliminary committee formed to inaugurate the fund to endow a chair of Australian literature at the University of Sydney, founded in 1850 . Upfield was formally invited to the initial public meeting.[5] And later, around 1960, it seems that Roderick was planning to deliver an Australian Broadcasting Commission radio 'Armchair Chat', titled "The Detective Novel with a Special Reference to *The Bone is Pointed* by Arthur Upfield." His notes read in part:

> *The Bone is Pointed* is one of several detective stories in which Arthur Upfield makes a distinct contribution to Australian writing . . . . The first thing I have to tell you is that the best detective novels have been written by French, English, Australian and American writers. And of the Australians, Arthur Upfield is today the outstanding figure - mainly because of the character he created as his detective, the fictitious half-caste Inspector of Police, Napoleon Bonaparte . . . . [6]

The serialised *Death of a Lake* in the *Sydney Morning Herald* brought Arthur more fan mail than any other of his serials.[7] It was also picked up by an Italian publishing house[8] and by Upfield's German publishers, for whom by 1962 he was apparently to

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[4] Colin Roderick, *An Introduction to Australian Fiction* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1950) 138-39.

[5] The invitation, addressed to 'Mr. Arthur Upfield,' was to a public meeting in the Sydney Town Hall at noon on Monday 28 May 1956. In the archive of Don Uren.

[6] Unsigned, undated draft placed by an archivist at 1960 in the Colin Roderick Collection, National Library, Canberra. I have not been able to confirm that this talk was in fact broadcast by the ABC - it is possible that the script was set aside.

[7] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 29 June 1954, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

[8] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 1 August 1954, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

be, after Victor Gunn, their best-selling crime author since the re-commencement of publishing in Munich in 1950.[9] The translations into German, however, for Dr. A. Dohm proved tricky.[10] *Death of a Lake* was published in Britain in June 1954 to pleasing review and undoubtedly quite coincidentally, Jessica had persuaded Arthur to include in *Lake* "a really bad woman." Wrote Pamela Ruskin: "Jolly good thing that. Really good ones are better in life than in books."[11]

Cake in the Hatbox (in America, *Sinister Stones*) was published in New York in the second half of 1954.[12] However, because it hadn't yet been listed in Australia Pamela Ruskin was persevering with R. G. Campbell for its serialisation in the *Australian Journal*, despite the distance between him and Upfield. In an aide-mémoire to Pamela on the subject of Campbell, Upfield wrote:

> I didn't start the blue. Like a summer fire, I flare up and quickly die down - never persist with hard feelings. [There is room for some doubt here.] Would today be well off if I did. I never permit personal feelings to enter a business deal. I don't like Satan, but if he proposed a business deal, I would at least consider it. Therefore, if Campbell wishes to

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[9] An undated, unsourced advertisement in German, clearly of newsprint origin, in the possession of Don Uren states that between 1950 and March 1962 Goldmann's Pocket-Crime Novel sold 663,000 copies of Upfield's Bony novels, the highest number of sales after Victor Gunn. It seems likely that the advertisement appeared in a book-trade paper.

[10] Dr. A. Dohm, letter to Upfield, 26 July 1954, archive of Don Uren. For example, Dohm sought elaboration on the meanings of *jackaroo*, *yabbies*, *flats*, *chequemen* and "*caught me bending*" amongst a host of others. He also sought the different meanings of *ruddy*, *bloody*, *damned good*, *damned bad* and *crook*. Also in the subject of translation, a letter from H. Lodding, a consulting engineer of Gothenburg, to Upfield, dated 9 August 1960, archive of Bonaparte Holdings, said that when marooned in a small German town where no English books were available, he compromised by buying a copy of Upfield's *Die Leute von Nebenan* [The People Next Door], published by Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag and which did not provide the title of the original. Lodding was disappointed in the "rather doubtful translation," but was shocked when it appeared that "the fact of Bony's mixed origin had been painstakingly eliminated!" Lodding thought that the mutilations robbed the story of most of its charm and made several features of it pointless or even incomprehensible. He wanted to know whether Upfield was aware of these facts. A typed note on Lodding's letter indicates that Upfield replied on 21 August saying in effect (and somewhat remarkably) that the book could be Communist issued. *Die Leute von Nebenan* is a translation of *An Author Bites the Dust* and Bony's background was deliberately pared down by Upfield.

[11] Pamela Ruskin, letter to Upfield and Jessica Uren, 23 June 1954, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

[12] Philip T. Asdell, *A Revised Descriptive Bibliography of First Editions of Arthur W. Upfield: Australian, British and U.S.,* 21, notes that while *Cake in the Hatbox* was published in America (as *Sinister Stones*) in 1954 and in Britain in 1955, it was not published in Australia until 1976 in the Reader's Digest Condensed Version. The first Australian complete text appeared in a Pan Books edition in 1983.

> negotiate, I am quite agreeable. Oh! And I never use bad language. Only Australian words.[13]

Arthur added: "You may think Campbell a nice guy. He is in every respect save in paying out money. Or rather on agreeing on a price to pay." For serial rights to *Cake in the Hatbox* Campbell offered Ruskin £150. Ruskin asked for £175, even though she was prepared to accept £150, and there the matter died of obduracy. *Woman's Day*, however, subsequently picked up the serial for £150, so the pain over Campbell was assuaged.[14]

Theo Sambell of Heinemann, Melbourne, now arranged for his publicity manager, Darlene McCourt, to take Arthur in hand for three days in Sydney. A tight schedule of radio and press interviews was set for Arthur, while Jessica shopped for furniture for their new house. Jessica didn't relish the prospect of buying everything in three days, but Arthur decreed they couldn't afford to dally in Sydney and it must all be done at once. "Anyway," Arthur wrote to Pamela Ruskin, "I have promised her most gravely not to drink because, it would seem, when I am drunk I say meaningless things and gabble too fast in saying them."[15] Jessica later revealed to Pamela:

> Our trip to Sydney was hectic but very successful, the author being at his most charming and cooperative self, and believe me, charm is one of his greatest talents! Lots more are hidden in his heart and mind. I find him a treasure trove, plus there is the ever-appealing adventure element of surprise.[16]

Upon returning to Bermagui Arthur as usual wrote appropriately to all the people who had helped him, and those whom he had met, on his rounds with Darlene McCourt.

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13 Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 29 June 1954, archive of Pamela Ruskin.
14 Pamela Ruskin, letter to Upfield, 8 November 1954, archive of Pamela Ruskin.
15 Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 20 July 1954, archive of Pamela Ruskin.
16 Jessica Uren, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 1 September 1954, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

Around this time Pamela Ruskin was interviewed on Melbourne radio on the subject of Upfield, who heard the greater part of it before static interfered. After later complimenting Pamela on her presentation, Arthur delivered some perhaps revealing instructions. He asked Pamela not to mention the Snowy Rowles murder-on-the-rabbit-proof-fence matter again, before adding:

> And (here Jess puts in her oar) please keep off the swagman angle as I am supposed to be socially advanced from those days, as I was before those days. The point is that the note to be struck is that I am the guest of the squatter, not the bloke who calls for a handout.[17]

These sentiments are something of an aberration, for hitherto the swaggie and the Murchison years had been a source of pride, as they were to be again. Possibly Upfield, or Jessica, was overly sensitive to social degrees at a difficult time of settling into a new town, or else Upfield was intent on re-creating a blank sheet on which to paint his biography.

Towards the end of the year Arthur was concerned to discover that a British reprint house had pumped up its blurb with the flattering, but false, claim that he, Upfield, was the first and only foreign writer elected to The Mystery Writers of America Inc. organisation. Upfield was disconcerted and apologetic when he wrote to the MWA, receiving this reply from Dorothy Gardiner, its executive officer:

> I am amused at your London reprint house's claim of you as the first and only foreign member of MWA - the imagination of the blurb writer, as usual, is boundless. To make you feel better and to soothe any possible upheavals on the part of our many English members I'll make a note of the incident in *Third Degree*, but I doubt if anyone will be much excited about it - they all know blurb writers and publishers, but I don't want them to think the information comes from you. Actually, of course, no one is 'elected' to MWA - we pursue them as we pursued you! Anyway, please do not worry about this insignificant incident.[18]

Upfield in fact may have seeded the blurb-writer's blossom, for in unsigned, typed notes in the possession of Pamela Ruskin, clearly prepared by Upfield and dated from their context at around 1951, appears this line:

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17 Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 15 August 1954, archive of Pamela Ruskin.
18 Mystery Writers of America Inc., letter to Upfield, 30 November 1954, archive of Don Uren.

> The other [of two most satisfying back-pats from America] was the admittance as an associate member to the Mystery Writers of America society .. the first foreigner so admitted.

Christmas 1954 arrived with the £150 cheque in the mail for *Cake in the Hatbox* from *Woman's Day*. As well, the manuscript of the latest Bony, *The Battling Prophet*, was on its way to New York with its first Australian serial rights already sold to Associated Newspapers for £300 for publication in the *World's News.*[19]

Serial sales in Australia were going well for Upfield, but timing still upset plans. Arthur was particularly frustrated with the several deferments in the book publication of *Cake in the Hatbox* by Heinemann in London. He tackled the Melbourne man, Sambell, who was attentive and followed up at length the various points made by Arthur. The paper situation in Britain was again difficult and that was the prime reason for the deferments. Why not publish in Australia, then? Well, said Sambell, the simple fact is that the comparatively high costs of printing in Australia means that it is far cheaper to publish in one run in Britain and export to Australia - that way both publisher and author get a fair margin. Sambell disagreed with some of Arthur's philosophy on serial sales, but overall was anxious to mollify the author.[20] *Cake in the Hatbox* was eventually published in Britain in July 1955, to very favourable reviews.

There was now an increasing breadth and depth in the recognition afforded Upfield. In September, 1955, in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the writer Sidney J. Baker reviewed *Cake in the Hatbox* under the heading "Australian With The 'World At His Feet.'" The item reads in part:

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[19] Associated Newspapers Feature Services, letter to Upfield, 14 December 1954, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

[20] Heinemann Melbourne, letter to Upfield, 6 April 1955.

> For all its lowbrow appeal, *Cake in the Hatbox* is probably as important as any novel written by an Australian in recent years . . . . Since the Australian public is only now becoming appreciatively aware of Mr. Upfield's existence, the unique nature of his books is often overlooked. His extraordinarily detailed knowledge of Australia's outback, his rich descriptions of desert and bush . . . have not only pushed him into the upper bracket of the few Australian authors who can make a living out of their writings, but have made him one of the most consistent performers in Australia's literary history. . . .It is now evident that he is in world-class as a writer of mysteries.[21]

Upfield commented on the review to Pamela Ruskin: "It has given me extreme gratification, because for the first time I have been admitted to par with the Literature rackets."[22] On the subject of reviews generally, he had a few years earlier said: "Upfield's hostility is directed only to 'literary' critics, and not to the general newspaper reviewer-critic, who has always been fair and even generous."[23]

Flash floods could still cut the road ahead, however. *The Battling Prophet*, the twentieth and latest Bony novel, was rejected by Doubleday in New York. The story centres on the death of a famous long-range weather forecaster and embraces rural Australian politics, which lacked appeal for Doubleday (The title was eventually published in America in 1983.) Heinemann, though, was interested and *The Battling Prophet* was published in Britain in February 1956. The American rejection put Arthur eight or nine months behind and created an uncomfortable, but not crippling, gap in his dollar cash flow.

Bizarre interpretations - bizarre now with the Cold War era long gone - drew Upfield to the attention of the Australian security intelligence authorities when *The Battling Prophet* emerged. I have tried without success to unearth from Government archives

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[21] Sidney J. Baker, "Australian with the World at his Feet," rev. of *Cake in the Hatbox,* by Arthur Upfield, *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 September 1955: 17.

[22] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 15 September 1955, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

[23] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, "Saturday" [possibly late May 1952], archive of Pamela Ruskin.

details of Upfield's wartime security activities, but have been compensated in some measure in the uncovering of the following incident.

Upfield's own précis of *Prophet*, as conveyed to Pamela Ruskin for serial-sale purposes, sets the stage:

> Additional to the usual mystery element the story concerns the death of a famous meteorologist, à la Inigo Jones,[24] who achieved 100 per cent accuracy in his long-range forecasting and thus removed the weather gamble for the man on the land - after official contempt of his methods, and much frustration. Also by achieving this success, his methods were desired by foreign governments, and also were opposed by interests inside Australia who make money from the bankruptcy of the men on the land caused by bad seasons.[25]

Arthur's portraits were to create a distinct ripple in the rain gauge.

In June 1955 the Regional Director, Tasmania, of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) drew the attention of ASIO headquarters to derogatory references to the security services in *The Battling Prophet*, then being serialised in the *World News*.[26] Nothing, apparently, was done about it and the next intimation of something wrong in the world of popular fiction comes in July 1956 in a minute paper headed "Broadcast Critical of Security" from Director B.2 to Director B.1 of ASIO in Melbourne.[27] B.2 says:

> A friend of mine who is a responsible citizen has mentioned that on 13.7.56, over Station 3 AR., he heard a broadcast which ended at 9 a.m. and which seemed to him hostile to the Security Service. The broadcast was entitled "The Battling Apostle" [later corrected to "The Battling Prophet"] from a book by Colin Roberts [later corrected to "from a book by Arthur Upfield adapted for radio by Colin Roderick. He is probably identical with Dr. Colin Roderick, well known author and literary personality."] I suggest that you ask the

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[24] "Jones, Inigo Owen," *Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd ed. 1997: "1872-1954, Australian meteorologist born in England." Jones' claims for his long-range weather forecasts were surrounded by controversy.

[25] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 21 April 1955, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

[26] Regional Director [name blacked out], ASIO, Tasmania, memorandum headed "Publication - 'World News,'" to Headquarters ASIO, 27 June 1955, series A6119, item 3053, National Archives of Australia

[27] The designations 'B.1' and 'B.2' are in this year of 2005 most unfortunate, for the Australian Broadcasting Commission as part of its television "Play School" broadcasts has been for some time featuring "Bananas in Pyjamas." The two heroes of this segment, stylised talking bananas wearing blue and white striped pyjamas, are called B1 and B2.

> Regional Director, New South Wales to obtain the script from 3 AR.[28]

Around the same time an ASIO field officer in Queensland minuted his regional director in Queensland in the same subject, following his receipt of information that a chapter of *The Battling Prophet*, serialised over the ABC's regional station in Queensland, "referred to 'The Security Service' and Commonwealth Investigation Service in a most derogatory fashion." The field officer, displaying an initiative somewhat lacking in B.2, obtained a copy of Upfield's book and drew to his director's attention the offending pages, concluding with:

> Although the book is fiction, I do feel, as does my source, that the broadcasting of such statements over the ABC could do harm to this Organisation.[29]

A copy of the relevant part of the conclusion to *The Battling Prophet*, as it appeared in serial form in the *World's News*,[30] is attached to the Government file and has had the deleterious passages marked. But first, in the novel the scene is set at an Official Inquiry, at which are the Chief Commissioner of the Queensland Police and representatives of the Chief Secretary's Department, the Commonwealth Government, the Queensland Governments, the Commonwealth Security Service and the Commonwealth Investigation Service. Bony, of course, is there - his job is on the line because of his alleged interference in the activities of the security services.

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[28] Director B2 ASIO, minute paper headed "Broadcast Critical of Security" to Director B.1, 16 July 1956, series A6119, item 3053, National Archives of Australia.

[29] Field Officer [name blacked out] ASIO Brisbane, minute headed "Arthur Upfield (NT)" to Regional Director Queensland, 18 July 1956, series A6119, item 3053, National Archives of Australia This minute was re-directed to Headquarters ASIO and carries a notation that Upfield's offending book was placed in the HQ Reference Library.

[30] Arthur W. Upfield, "The Battling Prophet: Bonaparte tells how officialdom nearly spoilt his trap for the murderer: conclusion," *World's News* 16 April 1955*:* 36-41.

At the outset of the Inquiry, Bony, who uncovered the murderer of the meteorologist, said that he was hindered by certain forces:

> One is the Security Service, its agents in every town, in trades unions and commercial offices. We know that Security Service has no police powers and that its function is to report only to the Prime Minister of the day. Outside, no one knows its members and agents.
> Another force is the Commonwealth Investigation Service, which has power to arrest and arraign for trial. Information from the first supplied to the Prime Minister is passed to the second for action when considered necessary. This we all know.
> In theory, sir, an excellent brake on subversive activities. In practice a waste of public money, because there are no legal bars to subversive activities unless the country is at war. And the main result of the activities of these services is that, while unable to control subversion for which they were established, they have proved in this particular case a hindrance to the elucidation of crime, prosecuted by an officer of a law enforcement organisation.

The formalities continued, with Bony delivering another stab:

> What is clear, sir, is that the foreign agents were always ten jumps ahead of the Commonwealth Service, and I was five jumps ahead of the foreign agents. [Bony's modesty is legendary.]

And after the Inquiry, at which Bony shone, the Chief Commissioner of Police said this:

> The S.S. and the C.I.S. will be so shaken up that they won't recognise each other next week. They've had it coming to them . . . . [31]

ASIO's Regional Director, NSW, in the course of the paper flurry, made two interesting observations:

> Nowhere throughout the play [his reference was to the transcript of the radio play "The Battling Prophet"] does the author appear to be in possession of any inside knowledge of our Service.

And

> Arthur Upfield has not previously come under adverse notice of this Office.[32]

One of Director B.2's informants, though, was scandalised by the whole affair, and B.2, who saw looming large the imprimatur of the Australian Broadcasting

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[31] Arthur Upfield, *The Battling Prophet* (1956; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960) 191-194.

[32] Regional Director NSW ASIO, memorandum headed "Reference to Security" to Headquarters ASIO, 3 August 1956, series A6119, item 3053, National Archives of Australia.

Commission, wanted a letter of protest sent to the ABC.[33] B.1 section, in a minute to Director B.1, merely suggested the matter be drawn to the attention of the ABC.[34] However, an undated, hand-written, common-sense note - the signature and designation are indecipherable, but it is possibly B.1 himself - on the B.1 section minute of 15 August 1956 apparently put the matter to rest:

> I think we should beware of being too thin-skinned. If Mr. Upfield makes a habit of attacking us, he becomes interesting, but I don't think we should worry about one reference in a work of fiction.

Upfield would have been delighted had he known of the stir that *The Battling Prophet* created.

In between his novels Arthur had been adding to his autobiography - a typescript had of course been refused by Angus & Robertson in 1938 - and this work now assumed renewed importance with Heinemann's Sambell suggesting that he produce one. Upfield responded to Sambell with:

> Your suggestion about the autobiography has been in our minds for some time. About one third of this work has already been done….For a long time I have debated whether to produce the story as an autobiography or biography, and I am now strongly in favour of the latter method, as I can put Upfield on the table as an objective character and thus describe him ruthlessly and have no need to cloak him with semi-respectability in order not to offend his friends and past associates. In almost all autobiographies I have come across, the writer lays stress on famous people he has met, and says little about his own sins, morals and views.[35]

Meanwhile, Upfield had assiduously completed his twenty-first Bony, *The Man of Two Tribes*, which was in Doubleday's enthusiastic hands by September 1955.

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[33] Director B.2 ASIO, minute to Director-General, 17 August 1956, series A6119 item 3053, National Archives of Australia.

[34] B.1 Section ASIO, minute headed "The Battling Prophet" to Director B.1 and copied to B.2, 15 August 1956, series A6119 item 3053, National Archives of Australia.

[35] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 26 September 1955, Meanjin Archives.

In February 1956 Arthur dispatched typescripts of the Upfield biography, one to Heinemann in London and another to Theo Sambell in Melbourne, to whom he wrote:

> As you will observe by the title page, the work is the entire property of Jessica Upfield, and I think that from the beginning it might be wise to avoid clashing with my own Bony books and me, by having any correspondence in connection with it addressed to her. I am now merely introducing the job . . . .
> I won't influence your judgement other than by pointing out that the story begins from birth; out to Australia, the wandering through the back-country, the meeting with the origin of Bonaparte, the second meeting after which he received this name, and his progress through the subsequent books reaching out into the world. Thus you will find that this biography is closely related to the Bony series, and that both should assist the other in sales. [This helps reinforce my view that the apparent real-life model for Bony - Tracker Leon - was simply a construction for readership purposes.]Our original title was *The Bastard from the Bush*, but think no publisher would include the word 'bastard' in a title and thus have called it *That Blighter from the Bush*.[36]

Upfield closed his letter with a suggestion that if Sambell wanted a second opinion on the work that he call in Mr. Dickens of the Collins Book Shop, rather than a "literary person," when he, Upfield, would be prepared to pay a fee for the trouble.[37] A third copy of the typescript had been sent to Doubleday in New York, and now began an anxious wait.

In the waiting time minor successes occurred. The German publishers produced their fourth Bony and submitted a contract for more, while Danish, Swedish and Mexican publishers also issued titles. "There is not a great deal of money in these, but it does all add up."[38]

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[36] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 13 February 1956, Meanjin Archives. In this letter Upfield also states that the title *The Bastard from the Bush* was a borrowing from the parody of the same name which was supposedly derived from "The Captain of the Push," a poem attributed to Henry Lawson. "The verse, or poem, or what it may be, is a sort of theme song. The first verse is given in the context." In the published biography - *Follow My Dust!* - one verse of "The Bastard from the Bush" is quoted at the end of chapter three.

[37] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 12 April 1957, Meanjin Archives, plans the publicity tour for *Follow My Dust!* In it Upfield suggests that "Charlie Dickens" be invited to one lunch in Melbourne - "If a dinner, then perhaps there is a Mrs. Dickens. . . . Dickens has always been a good backer for Upfield, and I want him to meet Miss Jessica Hawke."

[38] Arthur Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 20 March 1956, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

Earlier, Upfield the marketer had been upset when people visiting Bermagui complained that they were unable to buy Bony books in Sydney and Newcastle, so at Heinemann's expense he had arranged towards the end of April a publicity trip to Sydney and Melbourne. Yet again he fired a missive to Heinemann - this time to London - in the subject of supply, disappointed also that only 4,000 copies of *Cake in the Hatbox* had been sold in Australia and New Zealand, when the book had been out for nearly eight months. Heinemann in London delivered a conciliatory reply to Upfield, covering every point he raised and repeating that the economics of production meant that it was better to publish in London and export. Somewhat surprisingly, they also said that quantities ordered were entirely the concern of Sambell in Melbourne and that there were no restrictions on him.[39] Sambell largely redeemed himself when he put in a first order of 5,000 for *Man of Two Tribes*, to be published in London in October 1956, and when his company accepted *Follow My Dust!* for publication.

Man of Two Tribes had been issued six months earlier in New York by Doubleday (as *The Man of Two Tribes*) to quite good reviews[40] and Sambell's Australian ordering gesture for the British edition seemed to be rewarded (even allowing for a nice positioning in the Christmas season) with 3,903 copies selling in less than two

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[39] Heinemann London, letter to Upfield, 3 April 1956, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

[40] Anthony Boucher, rev. of *The Man of Two Tribes*, *New York Times* 6 May 1956: 28. (Quoted in *Book Review Digest* 52nd accumulation [New York: H.W. Wilson Coy., 1957] 945: " . . . Such monstrous imaginings ill accord with Upfield's quiet naturalism; but if you can forget the plot, you'll be rewarded by some of his best descriptions of strange Australian country (in this case the vast and unearthly Nullarbor Plain) and some stirring adventures for the incomparable Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte."

months.[41] Sales may have been helped by the work being one of three runners-up in the (British) Crime Writers' Association best mysteries awards for 1956.[42]

Many years later the Australian writer and editor, Geoffrey Dutton, was asked to produce a descriptive and critical essay, with a biographical outline, on one book only for each of up to one hundred Australian authors. In this work, *The Australian Collection: Australia's Greatest Books*, Dutton included Upfield's *Man of Two Tribes*, saying amongst other things:

> Upfield's novels are frequently dismissed as mere thrillers. Such a book as *Man of Two Tribes* is far more and has a secure place as a work of art. Upfield's simple style leads the reader below the surface of both man and nature.[43]

Upfield's focus in the next while is mostly on the forthcoming biography. In September, 1956, he wrote to Theo Sambell, mentioning a snippet which had appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and which read:

> Sydney's Talking About That search for a title for the biography of Arthur Upfield, creator of Detective Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, which is being written by Jessica Hawke (the pen name of Mrs. Upfield).

Of itself, this is quite O.K., said Upfield.[44] However, he wanted the publicity machine to focus on Jessica Hawke, eschewing the Upfield connection:

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[41] Heinemann Melbourne, Royalty Statement to 31 December 1956 to Upfield, 31 March 1957, Meanjin Archives.

[42] Anthony Boucher, rev. of *The Bushman Who Came Back*, by Arthur Upfield, *New York Times* 18 June 1957, section 7: 18: " The Crime Writers Association, Great Britain's equivalent of our Mystery Writers of America, recently announced its awards to the best mysteries of 1956 . . . Best novel, *The Second Man* . . . . Runners-up: *Time Right Deadly* . . . *Man of Two Tribes* . . . *Gideon's Week* . . . ."

[43] G. Dutton, descriptive/critical essay on *Man of Two Tribes*, *The Australian Collection*: *Australia's Greatest Books*, ed. G. Dutton. (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1985) 226. In his Introduction (p.8) Dutton says: "Not all the books discussed here are of the highest literary merit. Such a standard would be impossible to attain in the literature of a young country. But they are all, in their different ways, classics."

[44] According to Don Uren, Jessica Uren changed her name by deed poll on 15 June 1955 to "Upfield." Earlier, I.J.C. Lasry, a solicitor of Healesville, in his letter of 5 April 1955, archive of Don Uren, had responded to some of Arthur's queries on the legal status of Jessica in the event of his death. In the matter of ownership of realty he warned of considerable complications, adding: "I would strongly suggest that steps be taken either to register the property in her correct name (jointly with yourself), or alternatively that she take steps to change her name by deed poll."

> People are going to say "Ah, yes!" Upfield wrote his own biography, when this would not be true and not to Jessica's credit. When the book comes out and you are agreeable to us engaging in some publicity we shall be happy to throw everything into it on the lines of Jessica Hawke about to become a famous writer in her own right. If a degree of mystery is maintained - who is this new writer? - all the better.[45]

The title of the biography was finally agreed at *Follow My Dust!*, a reference to an incident which arose during the Upfield-led, 1948 Australian Geographic Society tour of the north-west of Western Australia. According to Don Uren, Upfield was driving the lead vehicle and his mechanic friend, Harry Tate, the second. Harry wasn't a bushman and to Arthur's annoyance Harry twice got lost. The second time Arthur admonished his friend, saying " Harry!! All you have to do is follow my dust! " The jacket of the book, however, took longer than the dust to settle.

The first dust jacket offering brought a sharp response from Arthur:

> I'm not arty. I must have reality in pictures in preference to two dabs and one cross to represent a cow's behind. And I'm game to bet that of every ten people who enter a bookshop, at least seven of them are not morons and dislike blue and green paint mixed with blood to represent a retired Australian bullock driver using a whip with which he couldn't tickle a fly's nose.[46]

Upfield and Sambell came to agreement and Sambell was left to fight with London. The finally-agreed jacket was a success, certainly with Arthur and Jessica - "It is a surprisingly original job, and pleases us mightily."[47] In colours of ochre, black and azure, the first quarter carries the top half of an Aboriginal totem, the second a man standing at a fence, the third the lower half of an Aboriginal totem and the fourth a close-up photograph of a laughing Upfield.

Publication of *Follow My Dust!* was set for May 1957 and Arthur planned the publicity tour. He and Jessica were to arrive at the Windsor Hotel in Melbourne on Tuesday 8

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45 Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 2 September 1956, Meanjin Archives.
46 Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 30 August 1956, Meanjin Archives.
47 Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 14 December 1956, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

May and spend the evening with friends. Wednesday was to be a shopping day for Miss Hawke, while Arthur "literary-lunched." In the evening they were to host the Sambells to dinner. Two days were then to be devoted entirely to Heinemann, before travelling by train to Adelaide and Perth, where the publicity process was to be repeated. Sydney was to be visited if and when the then-current negotiations for television rights to the Bony series reached contract stage. Arthur hoped that the signing of the contract would coincide with the book issue.[48]

Follow My Dust! duly appeared, with the dust jacket carrying the notation "a biography of Arthur Upfield by Jessica Hawke in collaboration with Arthur Upfield and with an introduction by Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte." Press publicity in Australia was good and reviews were generally favourable in both Britain and Australia. I have already commented in my introductory chapter that when *Follow My Dust!* was published it was thought on stylistic evidence by some reviewers to have been written by Upfield.[49] As I have said, the work is sourced in good part from the largely unpublished autobiography, *The Tale of a Pommy*, and is essentially a collection of yarns. In my view the bulk of the work was written by Arthur, with a significant polishing by Jessica.

One interview with Jessica in the Melbourne *Age*, however, unfortunately included these words:

> In writing this biography Jessica Hawke began with an initial advantage. She is Arthur Upfield's wife. But, as they have been married for only twelve years, she had to draw on

[48] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 12 April 1957, Meanjin Archives.

[49] Ian Mair, "Famous Author Raises Dust. Biography of Arthur Upfield," rev. of *Follow My Dust!,* by Jessica Hawke, *Age* 11 May 1957: 18: ". . . although on stylistic evidence the writing could well have been by Upfield himself." Pamela Ruskin in "Arthur Upfield: They Still Follow His Dust," *This Australia* 5.3 (Winter 1986): 53-54, says: "Jessica Hawke . . . was the author of . . . *Follow My Dust!* written 'in collaboration with Arthur Upfield' and generally believed to have been written by him."

her husband's memory for material for her book, which is acknowledged as written "in collaboration with Arthur Upfield." [50]

Anne Upfield, Arthur's wife, took out a writ against the *Age* and on 11 June 1957 she sought from the paper an apology, with costs. The apology was offered the next day, Anne accepted and that was more or less the end of the matter. James Arthur had been helpful in steering Anne towards an early resolution,[51] but Arthur, much embarrassed even though the matter did not receive publicity, later voluntarily reimbursed the *Age* for the costs payout of £105.

The latest novel, *Bony Buys a Woman* (in America *The Bushman Who Came Back*) was published in New York in June 1957, to very good reviews,[52] and in Britain the following September. According to Arthur, it was nominated by Anthony Boucher of the *New York Times* as his "Book of the Year"[53] and was one of four finalists nominated for "Best Mystery of the Year" by the eleven hundred members of the Mystery Writers of America.[54] By May 1958 translation rights to this work, according to Arthur, had been disposed of to Germany, Mexico, Holland, Italy, Norway and Finland.[55]

On the domestic front, however, Arthur and Jessica had for some while suffered from niggling health complaints, for which they blamed Bermagui's strong sea air and

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[50] "Her Husband's Biography," *Age* 9 May 1957: 8.

[51] James Arthur Upfield, letter to Upfield, 12 June 1957, archive of Bonaparte Holdings: ". . . I had been waiting to see what I could do to straighten things up as regards the writ. . . . [The apology] was accepted [this morning]. So the matter is closed."

[52] For example, see Anthony Boucher, rev. of *The Bushman Who Came Back*, by Arthur Upfield, *New York Times* 23 June 1957, section 7: 18: "The complex half-caste Bony is, I think, my favorite fictional detective of the past twenty years; and he's never appeared in a novel richer in adventure, suspense, local color, folklore and absorbingly studied contrasts in cultures. I'll be much surprised if Upfield doesn't repeat on the next C[rime] W[riters] A[ssociation] 'best' list."

[53] Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, "Wednesday" [possibly February 1958], archive of Pamela Ruskin.

[54] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 5 May 1958, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

[55] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 5 May 1958, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

the summer humidity. In any event, they had now lived there for around four years. A price was put on their house, this was met, and they moved to Bowral, an attractive small town sitting in wooded highlands sixty miles south of Sydney on the main Sydney to Melbourne highway. "The climate is on a par with Mt. Dandenong, almost," Arthur wrote, after they in November 1957 moved into their three bed-roomed, brick house in Jasmine Street.

A few months into the new year Arthur and Jessica were honoured socially in Canberra in a manner that, judging from his detailed description of events, clearly delighted Arthur. As Arthur recounts it, he and Jessica late in April motored to Canberra, where they were guests of honour at a cocktail party at University House hosted by two visiting American professors, Adler and Broome. Among the seventy guests were the first counsellor and the cultural attache from the American embassy, their opposite numbers from the British High Commission and representatives from the Australian National University. Later, Arthur and Jessica dined at the University with their hosts at the top table, where Arthur was seated next to Dr. H.C. Coombs, who was then governor of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. Arthur dryly noted that for the first time Fame came into contact with Money, but Coombs, later Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia and Chancellor of the Australian National University, was a powerful advocate for the arts.

Coombs and Upfield apparently got on well:

> We discussed the Elizabethan Theatre, of which Coombs is a strong supporter. We talked about Australian literature and its support by the Australian taxpayer, and felt ourselves on mutual ground. Finally, we discussed the proposed Chair of Australian Literature and agreed that the subject was too narrow for such a project.

Arthur, however, couldn't refrain from adding that which reveals his inner self, in this case:

> "You can't help laughing!" A ruddy swagman sitting at high table in the National University and 'intelligently' talking to the Governor of the Commonwealth Bank! Subsequently learned of the amazed comment in the body of the hall at the way in which Coombs and Upfield 'got together.' As the characters in *They're a Weird Mob* said of their boss: "Bugger 'im."[56]

The same account relates that the following evening Arthur and Jessica were invited to a party at the home of the American cultural attache. Arthur described it in part:

> Shortly after this party began, Jess and I were skilfully separated. The women gathered about her, and the men then talked to me. People brought to me two, three, or more, well-read Bony books for autographing, and Jess was kept busy doing the same with her book. They wanted to know where they could get the old titles. They wanted to know more about the Nullarbor Plain, the Nor-West, the Grampians. They had really read the books. The first counsellor at the British High Commission told me he had issued an instruction that all personnel in Australia and those at home listed to come here, must study Upfield. And, could his wife call on us?

Upfield noticed a general absence of Australians at these two functions and thought they were being kept out while the American and British seals of approval were stamped on the Bony books, not for their mystery content, but for the backgrounds, pictures and the character of Bonaparte. Arthur was asked about the genesis of Bony and the locations of the stories, and opined that Bonaparte could be, if he were not already, "a bridge spanning the gulf between the black and white races, and who could be a standard," observing:

> These people were not being smarmily condescending. They weren't drunk. The cultural attache told me it was his opinion that knitting the black with the white races was the only hope of salvation. It wasn't East against West, but race against race.

According to Arthur in the same detailed letter of 5 May, the wife of the visiting Professor Adler told Jessica that the Australian element at the Australian National University was "furious" because none of it was invited to the two parties. Arthur saw that as an intentional exclusion and continued his revealing comment to Sambell:

> We have been told that Canberra has been buzzing with comment and astonishment. I think I could not have been more astonished had the American side granted me an

[56] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 5 May 1958, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

> honorary professorship at Harvard and the English side bestowed a knighthood. To sum it all up, there was that undoubted genuine approval of the Bony books. You know how sensitive I am to slight and snobbery, and Jess is even better at detection of it than I am.

Before returning to Bowral Arthur and Jessica travelled to Leeton for a field workshop in anthropology.

19 RECOGNITION, REFLECTION AND THE WESTERING SUN (1959-64)

At the beginning of 1959 Arthur was aged sixty eight years and Jessica was fifty one. Arthur had published four mystery/romances, one factual account of a Western Australian murder, twenty two Bony mysteries, many articles and some short stories. Jessica had the biography to her credit. Arthur had been writing full-time - still one of only a few Australians able to do so - for about sixteen years, but money had nearly always been something of a concern. Throughout his adult life Arthur never quite lost the bushman's habit of spending whenever he had cash in his pocket. He would stay in the best hotels and demand service - "I want my tea now, Miss!" - but would tip generously.[1] For a while his letterheads, printed by Pamela Ruskin's husband, carried the motto "All Fame and No Bloody Money."

At this stage of his life, with seven Bony novels still to come, Upfield found himself assuming something of the mantle of an elder statesman. He was in demand for talks to a variety of local social groups; he was sought for radio and television interviews - he actually found television easier than radio - and he developed a tendency to reminisce. But he still had to write.

Generally speaking, it took Arthur about seven months to complete a book. On a board he would paste paper listing the characters and outlining the plot, but initially he would have only a hazy idea of the ending. Typing away with two fingers and ignoring spelling - to look up words in a dictionary meant for him a break in his

[1] Donald Uren, personal interview, 6 November 1996.

thought pattern - he would complete the first draft. This would be put in a drawer for a month. The manuscript would then be closely read for "impressions, timings and what-not" before the rewrite commenced. This period was crucial, as Arthur pointed out:

> My greatest problem then is to keep friends and others at bay, because interruption will snap the thread, when I have to struggle and flounder about repairing it. All I ask is five hours - from one o'clock to six - every day for from five to six weeks. And that seems impossible to secure, despite my Jessica's full cooperation.[2]

When a major work was completed Upfield would try to avoid the typewriter for two or three months, but always letters had to be answered.

Letters from readers arrived on a variety of topics. By way of example one arrived from a Leonard Canno of New York, who was struck with the naming of Superintendent Canno, a character in *Murder Must Wait*. Leonard Canno had never heard of anyone whose name was exactly the same as his. Arthur wrote back regretting that with the passage of time he couldn't remember how the name was chosen. His normal practice, he said, was to give characters names "befitting their positions and characteristics," and here he found the telephone directory useful. But he couldn't find a Canno listed anywhere. Perhaps, he thought, he had heard 'Canet' or 'Canot' pronounced on the radio.[3] And Brother Howard from a religious order in Adelaide wrote on 1 September 1958 with a request:

> Do you think you could lay on Bony's boasting a little more lightly. I find it very annoying when you make it as bare-faced as you do in *The Bachelors of Broken Hill* (pp.14,15). A man may be vain, and Bony you have made a vain man, but surely such boastfulness is unnatural . . .

Arthur's response was economical:

> In reply to your kindly letter of the 1st inst., I can only ask you: who invented the bloody character - you or I?[4]

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[2] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 17 February 1960, archive of Louise Mueller.

[3] Upfield, supposed letter to Leonard E. Canno, undated but marked "draft of letter posted 3 November 1953," archive of Don Uren.

[4] Upfield, letter to Brother R. Howard, 15 September 1958, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.

Always for Arthur the straight path was the quickest. The days were busy.

Arthur still occasionally heard from his Melbourne family. James Arthur's wife Dorothy was prompted in February to write to Arthur for temporary help in a difficult period - James Arthur was still periodically receiving medical treatment as a consequence of his War service and their lives were not easy.[5] Arthur tided them over.[6] James Arthur's and Dorothy's son, William, was then in his last year of primary school. William much later joined the Royal Australian Navy and in 1970 married Francesca Petrini. They have two children, Tara and Troy.[7]

In February 1959 Doubleday in New York published *Journey to the Hangman* (in Britain and Australia *Bony and the Mouse*) - which Heinemann in London brought out two months later, after first publishing *Bony and the Black Virgin*. The Americans had unfortunately, and to Arthur's anger, refused *Bony and the Black Virgin*, saying it was too mystical for American taste,[8] but the title was eventually published in America by Collier Books in 1965. In mid year Arthur and Jessica went on a promotional tour to Brisbane and Melbourne for Heinemann, which included a number of television, broadcasting and press interviews.

In February, 1960, Arthur learned that Doubleday in New York had accepted *Bony and the Kelly Gang* (in America *Valley of Smugglers*). This was brought out in both New York and London in August and Upfield the marketer shines both in the text and out of it. He had demanded a Christmas market and was given it.

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5 Dorothy Upfield, letter to Upfield, 7 February 1959, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
6 James Arthur Upfield, letters to Upfield, 14 May 1959 and 1 June 1959, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
7 William Upfield, personal interview, 30 July 1998.
8 Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 6 June 1959, Meanjin Archives.

Set in the highlands near Bowral, *Bony and the Kelly Gang* in part concerns an historical re-enactment of the Kelly gang's last stand at Glenrowan, in Victoria, in 1880. In Upfield's words to Sambell of Heinemann the novel ". . . backs the Kelly Gang 100%, makes them angels, and the Irish police who chased and caught them the greatest scoundrels possible." Arthur, with a touch of licence then adds "It allies the modern Inspector Bonaparte with the old time Kelly heroes."[9] Upfield later said to Louise Mueller "The only reason I love the Irish is because they are always agin the gov'ment. So am I."[10]

The reviews for *Bony and the Kelly Gang* were mixed, but in around four months - to the end of 1960 - on the stands in Australia Heinemann sold 4,800 copies.[11] The serial rights sold well - the *Sydney Morning Herald* paid £400 sterling for Australian and New Zealand coverage[12] - and the principal of the Bowral Catholic secondary school bought from the local newsagent a dozen copies for end-of-year prizes.[13]

In March James Arthur wrote concerning his mother Anne, who was then recuperating in a Melbourne convalescent home from a heart ailment. Anne had rented part of her Mt. Dandenong house to a family who, when they learned she would be away sick for a lengthy period, refused to pay rent. James Arthur had had to use his own meagre resources to serve notice on the recalcitrant tenants before evicting them and attempting to recover the rent. As well, he had recently covered the insurance premium and municipal rates. The house needed painting, repairs and two

9 Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 28 February 1960, Meanjin Archives.
10 Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 21 July 1960, archive of Louise Mueller.
11 Heinemann Melbourne, letter to Upfield, 23 January 1961, Meanjin Archives.
12 Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 29 June 1961, Meanjin Archives.
13 Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 11 January 1961, Meanjin Archives.

new rainwater tanks, but despite this, and its loneliness, Anne was determined to return to it to try and re-let part again. James Arthur's view was that Anne should sell the property; however Anne was obdurate and James Arthur sought Arthur's intervention.[14] It is highly likely that Arthur helped James Arthur and Anne out, but just how is not recorded.

Arthur's and Anne's grandson, William, with child's eyes recalls Anne as being dressed always in a chocolate-brown skirt, with a cream top and a long wrap.[15] However, Anne as a person is difficult to determine. She always seems peripheral to Arthur's life, except insofar as she refused to allow a divorce, and Arthur's references to her from the beginning - at least in all the material I have perused - are slight, occasional and lacking in affection. The two letters Anne wrote to Arthur about two years after the separation are well-phrased in a neat backhand script, are civil in tone (as I have already observed) and do not accord with the lingering intense dislike between the two reported in some personal interviews by others.[16] Anne died in Geelong on 29 June 1964, about four months after Arthur, aged eighty one years.

At the end of May Arthur was put to bed for a fortnight, then removed to Sydney for surgical examination. He was discharged after nearly two weeks, with inconclusive results, and was required to return later in the year.[17] He was well enough, though, to start another Bony book - published later the following year as *Bony and the White Savage*[18] - and was angered to learn that the Russians were producing his novels

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14 James Arthur Upfield, letter to Upfield, 1 March 1960, archive of Bonaparte Holdings.
15 William Upfield, personal interview, 30 July 1998.
16 Anne Upfield, letters to Upfield, 27 July 1948 and 2 August 1948, archive of Don Uren.
17 Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 21 July 1960, archive of Louise Mueller.
18 Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 2 January 1961, archive of Louise Mueller: "My New York agent received a surprise [when he] delivered the latest Bony [i.e. *White Savage*] to the

without paying a royalty.[19] (I am, however, unable to confirm that the Russians were indeed publishing his works.)

Jessica's health was now increasingly of concern. Her blood pressure had been high for some time and during the year she had had what was thought to be a slight stroke. She remained active and cheerful, but there were occasional signs of some sort of deterioration. Only a couple of years before, in an address to the local Rotary Club on "The Art of Taking Criticism," Upfield according to his notes had said:

> There is one critic I cannot side-step. This critic is Miss Jessica Hawke, the author of a biography and other works. I refer to her some of my work. It often happens that I place before her a piece with which I am particularly pleased and I wait for her cheers. Instead of a cheer, she says: "I don't like it. It's too flat." I ask what is wrong with it. I don't want negative criticism. [By "negative criticism" Arthur meant that which does not explain itself by specific example.] When she repeats her comment I grow angry. When she persists I become furious and take the damn thing back to my room and rewrite it. I present it again to this immovable, granite-like critic and she says: "Now it's perfect. Why didn't you do it the first time?"[20]

During the year Upfield had entered a continuing correspondence with Mrs. Louise Mueller of Germantown, Wisconsin. A mother and the wife of a research chemist, Louise was an avid reader, a Bony devotee and a shrewd amateur critic. In contrast to his general run of letters up until now Arthur's letters to Louise are more carefully constructed, I believe because he saw the correspondence as a future archive subject to the scrutiny of others.

At the year's end Arthur went on an enjoyable radio and television promotional tour to Sydney, but the arrival of the new year, 1961, saw him doing something quite painful - painting the house. He cut his cigarette consumption in half and with his

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publisher late one day and early the next day they rang him to say they were happy to accept . . . . Generally it takes them three weeks."

[19] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 14 August 1960, archive of Louise Mueller.

[20] "The Art of Taking Criticism." Unsigned, undated, typed notes filed with material dated around September 1958, archive of Bonaparte Holdings. The preamble indicates that the addressees were members of the local Rotary Club and the text is undoubtedly Upfield's.

paint brush followed the shadows around the house because of the usual January heat. Even during this most mundane of tasks Upfield was interrupted by callers - a war correspondent who was compiling a profile of Australian writers, Theo Sambell from Heinemann and others. And with paint on his fingers Arthur scorned J.B. Priestly, whom he had once met and who was the subject of a newspaper clipping newly sent to Arthur by Louise Mueller:

> The [news item] about Priestly is like him and many others who visit this country from the U.K . . . . They've pulled the once great British Empire down into the mud . . . . If my grandson lives as long as I have, all other things being equal, in Australia he will live in a really important world centre. I predict this because the spirit of rebellion is dead in the hearts of Englishmen, and thrives in the hearts of Australians, including me.[21]

Priestly at one time had written:

> Mr. Arthur Upfield seems to me a genuine and valuable discovery in the field of detective fiction. He is original . . . . If you like detective stories that are something more than puzzles, that have solid characters and backgrounds, that avoid familiar patterns of crime and detection, then Mr. Upfield is your man.[22]

In March Upfield received three letters from readers in America and Britain eulogising his work. He mentioned this to Louise Mueller and was then moved to reveal much more of himself than he usually did. For this reason I quote in some detail from his letter:

> You know, once upon a time I was the most bombastic, intolerant, impatient, objectionable person in the world. I was crammed full of inhibitions and an unlimited ambition without any qualifications to support the ambition. I can recall only one good thing I did at this time of banishment to Australia. Never did I miss a week writing to my mother and father. Never did my mother miss writing to me, and always saying: "I pray for you nightly." At some place or other I read a book by Arthur Stewart Hutchinson, who wrote *If Winter Comes*. It was about a young officer returned from World War One who was at a loose end what to do. The War had wrecked his character. Then his mother died, and from that time on unusual thoughts entered his mind and he began on what appeared to be the most silly, the most hare-brained scheme ever - becoming, if memory serves, a hedge-row preacher. The gist of the story was that if one opens the mind Love will walk in. It was the hero's mother who bridged the chasm.

Arthur continued:

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[21] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 3 February 1961, archive of Louise Mueller.

[22] J.B. Priestly on Arthur Upfield, "Mr. Upfield is a Find." Quoted on the dust jacket of *Death of a Lake* (London: William Heinemann, 1954).

> I read that book before my parents died, but the aunts, of whom you will have read in *Follow My Dust!*, passed on before. I sat on sand dunes and watched the sun go down. I read everything that came my way - from Charles Garvice to Darwin. With my mail came a Bible from a man in Tasmania who knew me back in 1910, and this Bible had been given me by one of the aunts on my leaving England for the relations' good. Having nothing else to read I read the Bible from Genesis to Exodus. I didn't get the message, but I appreciated the prose so much that I read it again. It didn't send me crusading. It didn't send me back to church, and I suppose I have been to church less than half a dozen times during the last fifty years. It never reformed me, because I continue to smoke hard and drink when I wish, both being terrible sins to the aunts.

And he spoke again of his mother:

> The day I heard that my mother had been indirectly killed in a bombing raid I was holding a hush-hush job in Melbourne. I went into the Cathedral and just sat there in the silence. Nothing happened, and yet it did without my knowing it. The process was slow, very slow, the changing outlook on life and people, the seeing myself as others had seen me.

Arthur, in this most reflective of moods, then wrote of money and of Jessica, with this to say:

> You will recall that Moses existed in the desert before the burning-bush voice spoke. You will also remember that Moses in his last day was taken to the top of a high mountain, and there was shown his armies marching into the Promised Land. And in that hour he died. In a faint, reflective manner that has been my fate. I have reached the crest of the wave and never have been able to get over it into the promised land of real wealth.
> What is this wealth? Much money through great sales and films? Maybe. But I have reached the promised land in life. For seventeen years my Jessica and I have never quarrelled, never spoken a cross word. We have never lacked anything needful to live comfortably. All that we have, all we hope for, is shared without any sacrifice by either. She says often I am the most wonderful man in the world and I tell her that isn't news. When I say that she is the most beautiful woman ever, she tells me that isn't news. I can see Moses sitting on his mountain top, and see myself sitting on the top of a mountain of regrets.[23]

Arthur and Jessica in April 1961 travelled to Tasmania for one month to gather material. When stopping over in Melbourne on the way back they met a one-time editor of *Die Welt* and his wife, who said they had migrated to Australia on the strength of Upfield's books. They had been surprised to discover that Arthur was better known in Germany than Australia and they embarrassed Arthur with their

[23] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 14 March 1961, archive of Louise Mueller.

knowledge of his books. Upfield was forced to confess that he was ever unable to recall the names of his characters in those books before the last one.[24]

Arriving home, Upfield started work on a new Bony mystery set around the Wolf Creek meteorite crater he had seen on his 1948 north-west expedition. There was a temporary hiatus in this work, however, due to an earthquake which caused £300,000 damage to Bowral, £200 of it to Arthur's and Jessica's house. Few, if any, in town had insured against earthquakes, because they just didn't happen there. When told of the outcome, Louise Mueller dryly remarked "Better a fracture of the pocket book than an arm." And one of Arthur's correspondence friends, Robert Spicer, a medico of Miami, Florida, in a gesture unrelated to the earthquake, sent him for reference purposes copies of Gonzale's *Legal Medicine* and Dorland's *American Medical Dictionary.*

In another letter to Louise Mueller, Upfield revealed more of himself:

> I have met several 'great' men, and was disillusioned when I found they had feet of clay. My feet are not even of hardened clay. I am, of course, mentally unbalanced. I so detest the Jones that I will not keep up with them. . . . The postman, the butcher and the baker all call me Arthur and it is a standing deal that when Arthur makes a pile from a film deal he is going way out to Broken Hill and spend the dough on an everlasting pub crawl, and will want a mate. The local socialites have been set back, the latest being the wife of a knight. Said this Lady Thingmabob: "Oh, I must call on you one afternoon. Where do you live exactly?" "I live in the slum behind the gasworks" was my answer, and it was repeated when she doubted it. Sometimes I lose my temper. . . .

On family matters he continued:

> There were five brothers. One was killed on the Somme in 1916. Two have dropped dead in their shoes . . . . My four brothers were the real sons of my father. They were all careful sticks-in-the-mud . . . .Yes, I have one son who is somewhere in the north of Queensland. They have a son aged, I think, thirteen. I think a lot of the grandson. Not much of my son because he is too much like I was at his age.[25]

Arthur's gratuitous cocking of his snoot at Lady Thingmabob is utterly believable and

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[24] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 30 May 1961, archive of Louise Mueller. Upfield adds: "Subsequently there came the German publisher's royalty statement covering the second half of last year, and this shows a sales total of 54,000 in all editions, and does not include first sales of any new book."

[25] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 24 July 1961, archive of Louise Mueller.

is consistent with the sort of offensive defence he seems to have quite often employed on social occasions.

In August Arthur and Jessica travelled to Sydney to meet the executive vice-president of Doubleday Doran and for Jessica to shop. Upfield was presented with a pair of gold cufflinks engraved with his initials and the emblem of the Crime Club, and a hot-off-the-press copy of *The White Savage*, for which the reviews were good.[26] The British edition emerged about two weeks later. Arthur had just completed the latest Bony work, which he called *The Body on Lucifer's Couch*, while noting "The publishers will doubtless think they have a better title." As usual they did - *The Will of the Tribe* - and it was scheduled for printing in New York in July 1962 and in London in September of that year.

In November, with Jessica, Arthur was feted in Melbourne. Eight days were devoted to Heinemann, including eight radio broadcasts, two television appearances and an afternoon at Police headquarters visiting the specialist branches and having their work explained. Heinemann gave two luncheon parties - one for the booksellers and another for the press and Arthur gave a party for the publisher's executives.[27] One pleasant dinner in Melbourne was with Pamela and Alfred Ruskin - Pamela was still pursuing for Arthur Israeli rights in addition to her other work.

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[26] For example - Anthony Boucher, rev. of *The White Savage* [in Australia and Britain *Bony and the White Savage*] by Arthur W. Upfield, *New York Times* 20 August 1961: section 7, 22: "It's an odd, off beat case, of the kind that only happens to Bony (or possibly Maigret) - slow but powerful, with vivid realization of the primitive coastal setting."

[27] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 17 November 1961, archive of Louise Mueller. Arthur's generosity towards his publishers is partly explained in his letter to Heinemann Melbourne of 2 October 1961: "Between ourselves, my company's income last year was as near as dammit to five thousand pounds, and the accountants say I should spend more on exes."

The year closed with Arthur and Jessica placing their Bowral house in the hands of agents. If their price were met they would move to Devonport, on the north coast of Tasmania, "where the climate is less vicious and where there is material for two or three books." After all, they had been four years in Bowral. Fortunately, however, no early offer eventuated, for Jessica's health deteriorated.

In mid-February 1962 Jessica entered hospital in Sydney for one week for tests and observation, to Arthur's great anxiety. The outcome was a blow, for Jessica was suffering from arteriosclerosis, a calcification of the arterial walls which may produce, amongst other things, a reduced blood flow to parts of the brain. She was only fifty four years of age and the prognosis was poor. She no longer read, but would sit listening to the radio or for an hour would watch television. Arthur now did the housework and the cooking, but he insisted that Jessica lie down in the bedroom for two or three hours each afternoon so that he could write. He constantly worried about what would happen to Jessica if he fell sick, for he was now approaching seventy two years.[28] In telling Louise Mueller of the above, Arthur added:

> Looking back again, I realise just what Arthur Upfield owes to this Jessica. Always a sound critic, she never wavered once she made a point. Neither has ever spoken a word in anger, and both have been so closely engaged in and with books that we have never been bored with each other and never needed to go out for entertainment merely because of feeling house-worn.

Jessica's son Donald in May 1962 married Lynette MacLeod, a registered nurse, at the Wesley College chapel in Melbourne. Arthur and Jessica attended the wedding ceremony, but because of Jessica's condition they were unable to continue to the reception.[29] Arthur now thought that if their Bowral home sold they would not move to Tasmania but to Victoria, to be near Donald and Lynette. "But I shall not agree to

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[28] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 28 March 1962, archive of Louise Mueller.
[29] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 8 May 1962, archive of Louise Mueller.

my Jessica becoming a burden on them while I stand. And at the moment I can stand fairly upright." [30]

Arthur, to go with his other troubles, developed a gastric ulcer. And a review of another man's book in the *Canberra Times* carried, claims Arthur, this final sentence: "Perhaps he may turn into a successor of the late Arthur Upfield." Arthur wasn't sure, but didn't think he yet felt late.

Winter arrived and so did a gastric influenza epidemic that laid low Arthur, Jessica, two of Bowral's three doctors and half the town's population. The hospital was full and there was no nurse who could call on them. For six days Arthur and Jessica survived on Scotch whisky and warm water, encouraged over the phone in this by the only ambulatory medico, who eventually was able to come to their bedside.[31]

Jessica's spine was deteriorating and her behaviour was becoming erratic. She would turn on the gas stove and forget to light the flame, and on a short visit to Sydney she became lost in the hotel's women's toilet. Arthur wrote to Pamela Ruskin:

> I couldn't go in there, so I took a chance, opened the door and shouted. She said she couldn't find her way out because there were so many doors and all she could see was a hundred pictures of herself.[32]

Arthur implored Pamela not to mention any of this in her letters, which he read aloud to Jessica, adding "We are still madly in love." Thankfully, Upfield had managed to find a woman to help with the housework for three mornings each week, but he still did the cooking.

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[30] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 28 March 1962, archive of Louise Mueller.
[31] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, "July 1962," archive of Louise Mueller.
[32] Upfield, letters to Pamela Ruskin, 20 July 1962 and 12 September 1962, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

Arthur was living on whisky and Bonox when *The Will of the Tribe* came off the presses to generally favourable reviews. Anthony Boucher of the *New York Times* delivered an acute critique:

> An occasional reader may have sampled the work of Australia's Arthur W. Upfield and been put off by the fact that his prose is sometimes clumsy, or by the lack of overt physical action. For a man who has been writing for over thirty years, Upfield is surprisingly awkward (from both aesthetic and commercial viewpoints) - yet his tremendous virtues make up for the technical defects, and I hope that any readers who have been discouraged will try again with two Upfield books on the market. His 1945 *Death of a Swagman* has been republished . . . and there's a new and admirable novel, *The Will of the Tribe* . . . . [In this] the interplay between whites and blacks, and between several levels of blacks, from assimilated to wholly wild, is subtly and sensitively handled, and Bony emerges as one of the rare detective figures with genuine stature as a man. As in most Upfield novels, the geography, the geology and the cultural anthropology are living elements in the story. Gaucheries and all, the book has a vitality enjoyed by few suspense (or indeed other) novels . . . . [33]

Upfield's professional correspondence still took much of his time - there were contracts for re-issues in paperback that had to be attended to and Pamela Ruskin was still producing Upfield articles. The Victorian Commercial Teachers' Association sought, and was granted for a very modest fee, permission to reproduce *Bony and the Kelly Gang* and *The Mystery of Swordfish Reef* in shorthand for their students to translate. And of course there were always fan letters. Arthur replied to each one and often wondered why so many were from women.

By August Arthur was one month into his rewrite of *The Barrakee Mystery* - a task suggested by Heinemann, who had in mind to reissue it under a different title -[34] and he had made some progress with a radical, converting-to-Bony rewrite of *Breakaway*

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[33] Anthony Boucher, rev. of *The Will of the Tribe*, *New York Times* 29 July 1962, section 7: 16. There may have been a weight of such criticism, for in his letter to Louise Mueller of 5 October 1962, archive of Louise Mueller, Upfield wrote: "While abed I re-read your long criticism of *The Will of the Tribe* and agree with all you said. Much of it is supported by the reviewers, and I am brought to face the fact that that no longer have I Jessica's critical support. She could point out grammatical errors and repetitions, and sometimes errors which she could not define and yet which she instinctively spotted. I become so close to the story that when checking for errors I cannot see the wood for the trees."

[34] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 15 February 1962, archive of Louise Mueller: "The London publishers suggested they republish *Barrakee* under a title like *Bony's First Case*."

House, which had been serialised in the Perth *Daily News* in 1932. In this latter rework, a job also initiated by Heinemann,[35] Upfield planned to thread into the story line, for the first time, Bony's wife Marie. The youngest of the children has married and Marie is home alone, when she receives a telegram from Bony: "Pack your old fishing clothes and shoes and come waltzing matilda with me . . ."[36] Neither of these rewrites was completed, but Arthur earlier had had accepted in autumn his twenty eighth Bony, *Madman's Bend* (in America *The Body at Madman's Bend*) - scheduled for publication in New York in early 1963 and in Britain in the middle of that year.[37]

Again Arthur was confined to bed with what he described as heart trouble. The digitalis with which he was dosed induced nausea, but he felt that ambition would not let him perish. He did, though, have to call in his royalty account from Heinemann[38] despite his books continuing to sell well, especially in Germany:

> You will be interested to know that my books have been and are still selling in Germany better than any other country, including the U.S. and U.K.[39]

Late in the year Arthur and Jessica spent a few days in Sydney during Book Week. Arthur gave several radio interviews and was the subject of a telecast, all to do with *The Will of the Tribe*. Jessica was taken shopping for clothes, they attended two parties and in all enjoyed themselves. Arthur, however, found himself in the middle of a fight between Angus & Robertson and Heinemann over who should publish *Madman's*

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35 Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 28 August 1962, Meanjin Archives.

36 Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 5 October 1962, archive of Louise Mueller.

37 Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 15 February 1962, archive of Louise Mueller: "…I began it on New Year's Day . . . . [and] wrote the final paragraph yesterday." This time frame is very short, but Upfield's letter to Louise Mueller of 22 November 1962 explains that *Madman's Bend* is a substantial rewrite of *Dead Men Sometimes Rise*, declined by Doubleday in 1951.

38 Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 17(?) August 1962, Meanjin Archives : ". . . but September will see us broke. Would be convenient to cash in . . . the sixpences accruing to June 30th . Or could you send me a cheque for £107 which I could eventually repay from my personal account? This last sum may seem odd, but it is the amount of the monthly salary I draw from the company when the company is financial." (Heinemann sent a cheque for £107.)

39 Arthur Upfield, letter to Pamela Ruskin, 12 September 1962, archive of Pamela Ruskin.

Bend.[40] The dispute was eventually amicably settled, perhaps because of Arthur's masterly refusal to become involved.

Christmas Day 1962 in Bowral was the coldest on record. Arthur stayed in, read Mark Twain, and cared for Jessica. In February he lamented that he had not done much writing for six months. In March his gall bladder was removed and he developed double pneumonia, producing a stay of five weeks in hospital, followed by seven weeks in a convalescent home. Jessica, meanwhile, had to be put in care in a Bowral nursing home, for Arthur was no longer able to look after her.[41] He was distressed, shaky and had lost a lot of weight.

By July Arthur was back in his own house. He had gathered something of his spirit and was attacking his correspondence, writing to Louise Mueller:

> I have done more business when incapacitated than ever before, and now at the age of 73 [sic] I feel I must live another five years to obtain some benefit from it. Peculiarly enough, I don't feel old, only ham-strung.[42]

Jessica, whose nursing home was two streets away, came home for a few hours every other afternoon. Arthur tried to keep her happy, but it was difficult, for Jessica thought only of coming home permanently. She cried often.

Upfield was also in touch with Theo Sambell of Heinemann. There was yet again a flurry about film and television rights in England and Australia, but a television series

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[40] Angus & Robertson had been re-publishing old Bony titles for some time and Upfield's letter to Louise Mueller of 22 November 1962, archive of Louise Mueller, explains that because *Madman's Bend* was a rewrite of a 1951 manuscript declined by Doubleday in 1951 - *Dead Men Sometimes Rise* - it was not strictly new, so he offered it to Angus & Robertson. The dispute ended in Heinemann's favour.

[41] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 10 June 1963, archive of Louise Mueller.

[42] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 24 July 1963, archive of Louise Mueller.

was not to emerge until 1972.[43] There were also for attention new contracts for paperback reissues in America and elsewhere. Upon signing the paperback contracts with the Americans Upfield received £1,500 and was thus easily able to discharge his accumulated medical costs.[44]

Arthur spent his seventy third birthday in September alone, reading *Forever Amber*, for it was not the day for Jessica to visit. He felt that his health was improving and now occasionally went to the golf club at five of an evening for drinks with friends. (This, I should think, would have been at the invitation of friends or acquaintances who were members.) He also had had a partly-completed Bony novel - *The Monster of Lake Frome* - put away for more than a year and he told Louise Mueller that he was feeling the urge to add to the six chapters it had reached. Nonetheless, he warned that if Louise did not hear from him for several months she should write to his accountant, David (Jock) Rossell, for he, Arthur, was "in a condition and at an age when something drastic could happen."[45]

Despite his determination, each day now became a struggle for Upfield. Jessica was every third day being picked up by taxi at twelve-thirty to visit Arthur and was taken back to the nursing home at five-thirty. Sometimes she was very vague, at other times less so, but a strict routine on the home visits was found best. Arthur developed a

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[43] Albert Moran, *Moran's Guide to Australian TV Series* (North Ryde: Australian Film, Television and Radio School, 1993) 90, records that the first of twenty six one hour, colour episodes of the Bony (sic) - in fact Boney , see Tony Harrison's *Australian Film and Television Companion* and other sources - television series was transmitted on 21 January 1972. The series, produced by the Australian John McCallum and his company, Fauna Productions, starred the New Zealander James Laurenson, who, darkened with makeup, played Boney, attracting some criticism in this role because of his non-Aboriginality. (By one report, McCallum apparently insisted that 'Bony' would have been pronounced by everyone 'Bonny,' hence the series title 'Boney.') The same Moran source (p.89) records the August 1992 airing of a pilot film/13 TV episodes of the Boney (in fact Bony) series, starring Cameron Daddo as a white-man Bony brought up by Aborigines.

[44] Upfield, letter to Heinemann Melbourne, 29 July 1963, Meanjin Archives.

[45] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 4 October 1963, archive of Louise Mueller.

hernia and the doctors refused to operate. Forced to visit Sydney to be fitted with a truss, he did four radio broadcasts while there "so that the trip wasn't entirely wasted money." Suffering from nausea, Upfield also mentioned that *The Monster of Lake Frome* was only half completed "and now I've lost the trend and it will take me some time to pick it up again."[46] He was cheered, however, by a letter from one of the heads of Angus & Robertson in Sydney:

> Recently I attended an international book exhibition in Washington as representative of the Australian Book Publishers' Association, and I was struck by the number of booksellers and trade representatives there who know and admire your books. Scarcely a day passed without several of them coming to the Australian stand to inquire after you and ask me to give you their regards.[47]

And the latest Bony, *Madman's Bend*, was selling well.

When Christmas 1963 approached, Louise Mueller sent a note to Jock Rossell asking him if he would be kind enough to buy a small gift for Arthur and Jessica. He did so, and Arthur, still meticulous, wrote on Christmas Day thanking Louise for the gift and saying that Jessica had arrived from the nursing home half an hour ago - they planned to go through the collection of Christmas cards and letters. On New Year's Day 1964 he was admitted to hospital with malnutrition.

Arthur now engaged a woman to come in every day and cook dinner. He wrote to Louise Mueller:

> I haven't done any writing for six months, but I believe this last visit to the hospital, plus the new cook, will set me up properly. Alas, my poor Jessica is getting worse . . .[48]

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[46] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 11 November 1963, archive of Louise Mueller. *The Lake Frome Monster* (1966; London: Pan Books, 1972) bears the notation "The manuscript of this novel . . . has been completed and revised by J.L. Price [a Bowral solicitor and a friend of Arthur's] and Mrs. Dorothy Strange . . . ." Jock Rossell, letter to Louise Mueller, 5 October 1965, archive of Louise Mueller, refers to the involvement of a "Ghost-writer," who may have been Mrs. Strange, in England.

[47] Angus & Robertson, letter to Upfield, 1 October 1963, Angus & Robertson Collection.

[48] Upfield, letter to Louise Mueller, 4 February 1964, archive of Louise Mueller.

In the afternoon of Wednesday 12 February 1964 Arthur William Upfield died. Haille Smith, a solicitor, had spent that morning at the courthouse in Bowral, but upon resuming after lunch he learned that his next case would be delayed. Returning to his office he picked up his partner, Haille Paine, and the pair drove the short distance to Upfield's house. There, seated around the kitchen table, they witnessed Arthur's signature on a newly-drawn will before leaving as the clock drew three. Two hours later the grocer's boy, calling with a delivery, discovered Upfield dead near his back door.[49]

While presses set obituaries, Upfield's body was taken to nearby Moss Vale. On Friday 14 February 1964 the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on its front page "Noted Writer of Mysteries Dead" and the Melbourne *Age* said on its cover "Novelist Arthur Upfield Dies."[50] The *New York Times* printed at the head of its obituary page "Arthur Upfield, Author, 75, Dead. Writer of Mystery Stories Set in Australian Bush."[51] But that notice which would probably have pleased the draper's son from Gosport the most appeared in an obituary headed "Mr. Arthur Upfield," flanked by "Forthcoming Marriages" and "Ecclesiastical News" in the London *Times*.[52] There were

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[49] Haille Smith, personal interview, 10 August 1998.

[50] The *Age* obituary in part claims that the Bony books sold more than three million copies. That may possibly be so, but Upfield was unable to calculate, and seldom guessed at, his sales.

[51] "Arthur Upfield, Author, 75, Dead. Writer of Mystery Stories Set in Australian Bush," *New York Times* 14 February 1964: 29. Of about 10 column inches, the item provides a not-very-accurate life account and refers to Bony as a pompous, long-winded talker, before observing that many critics complained that the plots moved too slowly, with Upfield's "long descriptions of remote areas" bogging down criminal action. "Nevertheless, Mr. Upfield built up a wide following, and his best-seller, *The Widows of Broome*, sold more than 200,000 hard-cover copies in the United States alone. He . . . became best known for his mysteries . . . ."

[52] "Mr. Arthur Upfield. The Outback in Crime Fiction," *Times* 14 February 1964: 12. Of about 11 column inches, and clearly sourced in good part from Hawke's *Follow My Dust!*, the item refers to *The Barrakee Mystery* before saying: "In the long series of "Bony" stories which followed, Australia itself was as much an active character as any of the human beings . . . . Upfield, by pedantic literary standards, wrote rather badly: his grammar was liable to slip. But in Bony he created a unique and memorable character: in his approach to crime he shared some of Simeon's sadness and sympathy, and he had real descriptive power. Few other writers have brought a seemingly lifeless desert more colourfully to life and been more successful in communicating the unexpected beauty of Australia's hills and forests and rocky coasts."

commentaries in many journals and newspapers telling of Upfield's achievements, in the greater part focussing on his literary creation, Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte.[53]

Saturday 15 February 1964 was a typical, hot summer's day in Sydney. At a memorial garden in the northern suburb of Ryde, Arthur William Upfield was privately cremated. Only six or seven people were present. Arthur's beloved Jessica was not there, neither were his wife Anne, nor his son James Arthur. There was no eulogy.[54] The bronze plaque placed later that year above his ashes reads:

> In Loving Memory of
> My beloved husband,
> Our father and grandfather
> Arthur William Upfield
> Died 12 February, 1964
> Aged 74 Years
> In Jesus' arms forever.[55]

A bauhinia tree bearing mauve flowers for much of the year overhangs the site.

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[53] Another seventeen obituaries have been traced by Joe Kovess, but of course it is likely that there are yet more. Fairly representative is "Noted Author Found Dead," [Adelaide] *Advertiser* 14 February 1964: 1; followed on p.2 by Jonathon Stone, "Upfield, Creator of Inspector 'Bony.'"

[54] Don Uren, personal interview, 20 May 1998. The ashes are located at reference EX37 in the Northern Suburbs Memorial Gardens and Crematorium, North Ryde.

[55] The plaque was placed on 14 September 1964, but the Crematorium's records do not show by whom. The timing, for Anne died in June 1964, suggests it was placed by Arthur's son, James Arthur.

20 CONCLUSION

Upfield's life, like that of his fictional hero, is marked by ambivalence. An adaptive Colonial and an adoptive Australian, both his life and his writings bear the touch of the bush. Neither heroic, nor romantic, nor a literary luminary, his unique genre contributions nonetheless achieved for him on three continents and in Britain an eminence matched by few Australian writers of his time.

Shaped by and shaping in a recent but less well-lit era - our light too shall come to seem the scratch of a distant match - Upfield, against the tide, promoted the status of Australian Aborigines and was a pioneer in the centring of Aborigines in Australian literature.

In the first few pages of *An Author Bites the Dust* the character Martin Lubers says, "It's the pictures painted by the words that count, not the words that paint the pictures." This critical biography of Upfield has attempted to get behind the pictures painted to create the life of a popular Australian writer whose achievements - and failures - must be seen in the context of a complex personal life and an Australian nation-state still uncertain about its settler history.

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