

ARTHUR WILLIAM UPFIELD: A BIOGRAPHY

Travis B. Lindsey

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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.

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