



Crime Writing Australia

by Stephen Knight

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One of the most interesting books in my collection is a first edition from 1946 of a novel published in Sydney called *Showdown*, written by none other than the legendary lover himself. Flynn, as a Tasmanian journalist and general layabout, travelled with a boat in the islands and actually wrote a perfectly competent travel book on the topic. His novel too is perfectly competent, and rather like a quite good [Errol Flynn](#) film script.

This novel can stand as archetypal for this masculine self-seeking, apparently personal rather than imperial, which many writers explored. Louis Becke, Ernest Fevenc were classics, and so was the English journalist Beatrice Grimshaw. Later versions were written by the South Australian Paul McGuire: his novel *Burial Service* (1938) was successful in America, and Geraldine Halls, writing as Charlotte Jay, whose *Beat not the Bones* won the very first [Edgar prize](#) in 1953.

As an area of conscious exploration by Australians, the islands seem to have faded from the scene; perhaps because boats never go there now, but also perhaps we do not confront the issues which were displaced onto the islands. It is striking how many authors wrote about both the inland and the island, as if the northerly setting was a manageable displacement for the obscure interior, where the conflicts with the Aboriginal people were too complex and too guilt-ridden to be adequately confronted.

In very recent years the voice of those people has been heard in crime fiction itself. Certainly not through Arthur Upfield's book: there has been understandable annoyance at his touristic approach and his appropriating Aboriginal themes and issues in the person of Bonaparte. Feelings that were certainly behind the construction by Mudrooroo of a consciously Aboriginal voice and figure in the stories he wrote about Detective Watson Holmes Jackamara of the Black Cockatoo Dreaming around 1990. Jackamara is tough, wise and ironic, as Mudrooroo expropriates the idea of the all seeing detective into a quite different, and even somewhat threatening version of a cunning man.

Archie Weller in other short stories has worked more imaginatively with crime fiction from a consciously Aboriginal viewpoint, but a sharper sign of the newly resistant voice is Philip McLaren's quite formally traditional police story in which both man and woman detective are working in a Sydney Aboriginal detective unit: *Scream Black Murder* is a powerful title. Effective in simply generic terms as a pacy thriller, this book is also a conscious statement about political and racial crimes.

That new voice of Aboriginal writing in a genre that has formally traced a whole series of white incursions and conflicts is a striking example of the colonised possessing and using as a weapon the instruments of the coloniser. Striking as it is, it is recent and not very far developed, not yet at least. But I believe there is more to say about Australian crime fiction in the context of post-colonialist analysis, and I feel that an account can be given of the whole sweep of the fiction, from its colonial beginnings to the present, which adapts certain insights from this recent mode of analysis.

While the people colonised in the first place were Aborigines, they were not used very much as labour in profitable industries. The often brutal separation of the races black and white has, as one of its results, the limited range of any real hybrid culture. Some elements have emerged in art and music now, but very little in literature until very recent years.

But there is in Australia another area of difference where labour was controlled for profit, and that difference lay between the types of white immigrant. At first convict, then free immigrant, there was a white labouring class that was in a way also colonised. It was seen as much in the mid nineteenth century in the terms 'sterling' for the land-owning, England-born gentry and 'currency' for the newly colonised indigenes, whites born here and by implication born to serve — if unwillingly. Admirers of materialist arguments will be pleased that the self-describing metaphor is based on money.

I would argue that 'sterling' and 'currency', or perhaps squatter and digger, are two opposed strands visible in Australian crime fiction — perhaps Australian literature generally as well, and that the varying patterns in Australian crime fiction can be related to this underlying structure. Through the language of postcolonial criticism we can get a grip on the whole pattern of Australian crime fiction and even, as I will argue, understand why certain authors and texts behave especially successfully.

Obviously enough, I would see the low-level coping sagas of convict life as being in the voice of the white colonised, and also the goldfields mysteries and the continuing tradition of the criminal saga to the present whether ironic, serious or, as in the case of Robert G. Barrett, farcical. The great wealth of Mary Fortune's stories belong in this category and her *Lucy Cooper* offers a version focused on a woman character. Equally obviously I would see the squatter thriller, the *fin de siecle* city mysteries and the high-society Sydney club puzzles as being 'sterling' literature, exploring the anxieties and deploying the values of the Australian property owning class.

To all postcolonial critics, what is most interesting is the hybrid texts. They occur in Australian crime fiction, and this analysis even can explain success: it seems the case — perhaps invariably — that the texts which have been most successful have been those that effectively hybridize the generic features that inherently belong to either colonised or coloniser.

Marcus Clarke's [His Natural Life](#) is a classic example, combining as it does the painful detail of the convict saga and the emotional operatic of the squatter thriller: property and humiliation are interwoven, and the fact that the two versions of the novel have one a sterling and one a currency ending just focuses the point.

The same is true of Fergus Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, though I do not think that was the sole reason for its success — London readers were swept away by its pace, colour and energy of plotting, but in its Australian context it clearly combines the urban realism found in the goldfields mystery with the city anxiety basic to the *fin de siecle* murder stories — it's a squatter thriller on currency territory.

Arthur Upfield's work has a clearer version of combination at its heart. The bush myth of *The Bulletin* is one element — the outback landscapes, the ironic human responses; the other element is a aboriginalised version of the noble bushman — Bonaparte is something like Captain Starlight crossed with Sherlock Holmes and gone native, or partly native. These are intriguingly multiple texts that deserve much greater analysis to find the reasons for their success, which include elements of international travelogue — Upfield sold very well in the UK and the USA. However complex the mix, it is undeniably hybridised.

The modern period seems to many Australians a long way away from the old squatter and digger days. Can a critique based on those old distinctions still hold up? I suggest it can, with a difference. Whatever the situations now in terms of who owns Australia, in the 1970s, post-Vietnam, it was clear that the dominant cultural and economic force in the land was American. And can it therefore be an accident that the dynamic of new crime writing came very largely from the implantation here of American models? Peter Corris is one of the very few writers around the world to have adapted successfully the American private eye to local conditions. And [Marele Day's](#) strong instigation of feminist writing was in the same genre; it is also relevant to note that Claire McNab's lesbian version of the same initiative was first published in America by the ground breaking Naiad press.

There is, I think, something like an unhybridised presence of the currency tradition in the less flamboyant, less internationally influenced crime writers: serious-minded feminists like [Jan McKemmish](#) and 'Melissa Chan'; those in the ironic tradition like Susan Geason and Jean Bedford; men working in long-standing forms such as Garry Disher with his updated criminal sagas; John Carroll, with tough stories that remain firmly local in their tradition and feeling. By the same token, Kerry Greenwood's engaging fables about an English amateur woman detective in the twenties are a form of sterling fiction, though consciously, and a little ironically, archaic.

The hybrid form is the stronger both because it is a generic mix and so interesting in its combination, but also because it tends to obscure the social and political positions conflict that are realised, deliberately or not, in the non-hybrid forms. They are both tonally complicated, so interesting, and also comforting because of their combination of inherently conflicting elements.

Crime writing has, in some real way written Australia; it realised different forms of convict experience, both realistic and romanticised; it played a substantial role in the development and dissemination of the bush myth; it recognised something of the role of women in the developing country; it recorded the strains and struggles of the developments driven by gold-mining; it ventured in ways both imperialistic and psychic into the islands in the north; it absorbed and reformed English initiatives in urban detection, especially *in fin de siecle* Melbourne and mid twentieth-century Sydney; it has recently charted and redirected the arrival of American power; it responds to and also prompts a range of feminist responses, mostly, but not entirely, in our own period; most recently of all, Australian crime fiction has been a genre in which marginalised voices have been able to speak to a large audience, stating their evaluative claims strongly and clearly. This is a sign that real changes in national attitudes are realised in generic changes in crime fiction — this largest, and most little known, of the national genres.

*Stephen Knight is currently Professor of English at Cardiff University, Wales, after a distinguished career as an academic and crime fiction reviewer in Australia. This piece is extracted from an essay about his latest book *Continent of Mystery: the Thematic History of Australian Crime Fiction*, published by [Melbourne University Press](#).*

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Australia's Best Crime Writers. by Anastasia Hadjidemetri |September 4, 2017 Share: The winners of the 2017 Ned Kelly Awards for the best in Australian crime writing were announced at the Melbourne Writers Festival on Friday 1 September. Irish-Australian writer Adrian McKinty has won the Ned Kelly Award for Best Crime Fiction with his intriguingly titled novel, *Police at The Station and They Don't Look Friendly*, the sixth book in his celebrated Sean Duffy series. This is his second Ned Kelly Award. The ACWA is dedicated to promoting greater recognition for crime, thriller and mystery writing in Australia and to protect the general professional interests of all creators of crime and mystery works. But we're not just here for the professionals. We want to provide something for everyone who is devoted to the crime genre. As organisers of the annual Ned Kelly Awards, we aim to celebrate the very best in Australian crime writing. International Crime and Australia. (2006, July 16). In WriteWork.com. Retrieved 22:58, January 14, 2019, from <https://www.writework.com/essay/international-crime-and-australia>. WriteWork contributors. "International Crime and Australia" WriteWork.com. WriteWork.com, 16 July, 2006. Web. 14 Jan. 2019. "Good news: you can turn to other's writing help. WriteWork has over 100,000 sample papers". Prof.

Writing crime fiction requires a knack for writing elements of crime fiction such as drama and tension. Learn how to write suspenseful crime fiction. Suspense is a critical aspect of writing crime fiction. All the elements outlined below can help to increase suspense over the course of your novel: Conflict. Suspense arises from conflict. Before you can effectively create suspense throughout your crime novel, you need to have a handle on its central conflict. Crime writing as therapy. Karen M. Davis: If I had been asked ten years ago if I would ever write a book, I would have laughed and said that I didn't have the inclination or the know-how. However, I've learned that real life is unpredictable and truly stranger than fiction. Writing therapy is a form of expressive therapy that uses the act of writing and processing the written word as therapy. Writing therapy posits that writing one's feelings gradually eases feelings of emotional trauma. (Wikipedia.)