PATRICK WHITE CENTENARY:
THE LEGACY OF A PRODIGAL SON

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Edited by

Cynthia vanden Driesen
Bill Ashcroft

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Novels

Happy Valley - HV
The Aunt's Story - AS
The Tree of Man-TM
Voss - V
The Solid Mandala - SM
Riders in the Chariot - RC
The Vivisector – VIV
The Eye of the Storm - ES
The Twyborn Affair - TA
The Hanging Garden - HG

Plays

"The Ham Funeral" - HF
"Night on Bald Mountain" - NBM
"Season at Sarsaparilla" - SS
"Big Toys" – BT

Short Stories

"The Twitching Colonel" - TC
"The Night the Prowler" – NP
"The Cockatoos" - COC

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INTRODUCTION

CYNTHIA VANDEN DRIESEN
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

White is known to have speculated, at times, as to whether his works would be read after his death. That his reputation is in no danger of fading is surely attested by this birth centenary publication – the outcome of a conference held in India in December, 2012. It was attended by some of the best-known of White scholars as well as some excellent new contributors from all over the world; the latter being a promising augury for the future. White had an awareness of Indian culture, though it was his wide acquaintance with European culture that saturated his work, along with his deep roots in his native Australia. Perhaps it needs to be stated here that the epigraph to White's earliest novel, *Happy Valley* (1939) was a quotation from Gandhi; and his earliest published short story, "The Twitching Colonel" (1937) records the experience of a retired British colonel who is literally consumed, it would appear, by what he has experienced in India.

This particular volume emerged out of the 6th ASAA conference (2012) – which had necessitated a special re-alignment of the normal tri-ennial conference schedules so that we could accommodate this birth centenary. (We had just completed our scheduled fifth conference, which had been held only in the previous year – also in Hyderabad but at Osmania University). While most of the chapters in this collection are contributions from the conference there are a small number of invited contributions designed to supplement perceived gaps in the collection; all of these, of course, from recognised authorities in the field of White studies. Conference attendees were allowed ample space and time to expand the initial conference presentations into complete research papers. It is a matter worthy of comment that so many conference participants/contributors to this

book had also been active participants at the first national conference on Patrick White (held at Flinders University in Adelaide, 1978): Bill Ashcroft, May-Brit Akerholt, John Barnes, Kirpal Singh, and Cynthia vanden Driesen - testifying to decades of interest and accumulated expertise on the subject of White's work.(Shepherd and Singh, 1978).It was fortunate that Kirpal Singh, a co-organiser of that early conference and now an eminent figure on the international literary and cultural scene most particularly in Singapore and Australasia, attended the Indian conference and delivered a lively and provocative plenary presentation on the occasion. Unfortunately due to pressing time constraints, he was unable to despatch his completed paper for inclusion in this publication. His valued participation in the event is duly acknowledged here.

The divisions in the presentation of the Contents of this volume have been designed, with some difficulty, to work along some discernibly unifying thematic motifs. Within each group though, there is a great deal of interesting variety, as there is between the different parts of the volume. This complexity necessitates a somewhat lengthy introduction for which the patience of the reader is invoked.

Revaluations

The essays begin with a section entitled "Revaluations" which appropriately emphasises the achievement of this particular celebratory publication marking the centenary of White's birth. John Barnes, in looking over the entire trajectory of White's long career notes the several transitions in critical estimates of the writer and his reputation in a mode that seems somewhat reflective of a personal odyssey of his own. Expressing, at the first national conference, some reservations regarding Patrick White's ability to convince re the mystical experience at the centre of his work, he comments; "It is a disturbing judgment but one that cannot be ignored, raising as it does the central question of the "reality" of White's vision." (Shepherd and Singh 1978, 2) At this conference his evaluation was much less equivocal:

> There can hardly be any doubt that his [White's] fiction has had an influence on Australian literature and culture for which there is no parallel. It would certainly seem that judged from the vantage point of over six decades, this 'prodigal son's' return to Australia in 1948 has had a significance that neither he nor anyone else could have foreseen.

All of the plenary speakers at the centenary conference focused on broad and evolving perceptions of White's work ranging from his earliest works to the latest. Perhaps all were seeking to convey that sense of a general revaluation, which seemed so appropriate to the celebratory nature of the Indian conference and this publication. Two contradictory trends through decades of earlier White criticism appear finally to achieve a kind of resolution: one - that White's efforts to convey a meaningful notion of the transcendental truths he probed were ultimately foiled by the limitations of language; the other - that White's great achievement was to project an unique sense of the gritty concreteness of the everyday world; it was not possible that the twain could ever meet. Ashcroft, Barnes and McCredden all establish their most recent views that in White's work the two worlds are in fact indubitably integrated and that the perceptions projected through the one are crucial to a grasp of the other. Whatever the variations in the modalities through which they worked through, the synergies in the final conclusions are striking. It can be expected that for a long while these chapters will offer conclusive pronouncements on White's achievement.

Most of these critics are eminent professional observers of the Australian literary scene. Ashcroft is indeed an internationally acclaimed theorist in cultural studies; and John Barnes is still an iconic figure in the field of Australian studies. Lyn McCredden, a more recent contributor to White criticism provides an impressive discussion of the inter-relationship of these aspects of White's works:

> The powerful inner lives of Patrick White's characters move out restlessly, hopefully, eschewing authoritative knowing, seeking artistic possibilities in what this essay has been arguing is a sacred struggle. The sacred, in the works of Patrick White, is the impossible, constant longing to make meaning: an honouring of

> "all that I have ever lived, splintering and coalescing", a bowing to what is beyond human language and knowing.

Bridget Grogan, a gifted young White scholar from South Africa with a doctoral thesis on his work (her geographic location indicates the continuing spread of White studies globally) is fascinated with the capacity of the White text to focus on the spiritual and the transcendental while never losing focus on the physicality, the sheer fleshly existence of the protagonists. John McLaren, a long-time White observer and editor of a collection of essays on White, celebrates in eulogistic mode the writer's characteristic ability to move beyond conventional limits in his exploration of human experience.

Even chapters, which seem to deal with recurrent themes in White's texts, introduce a new note, a divergence from the established patterns of discourse on the particular topic. For instance, Nat O'Reilly makes the point that the general assumption of White's rejection of suburbia has been too easily made:

> His narrative technique makes it impossible to identify any one position as White's. *Riders in the Chariot* presents an ambivalent attitude toward suburbia, containing both celebration and condemnation, and previous assertions by critics that White and his fiction are anti-suburban have failed to take into account the nuances and complexity of White's representations of suburbia.

Jessica White, Patrick White's grand- niece, and herself a writer, explores the familial connection with the land. Jessica works around the intriguing notion, beginning with her own childhood close to the land and notes how it marked her own skin with freckles and other signs which imprinted on her body the lived experience of contact with the land. She notes how several of White's protagonist like Mary Hare and others carry this imprint and works through to an impassioned appeal to readers to read this writer for the rewards the effort would bring. It is worth quoting her description of White's prose for its evocative appeal:

> Readers, I think, need to take a leaf from the page of the receptive Mary Hare and to burrow through the vegetation of White's

> writing. Some might be frustrated by what they perceive as overwriting, but to me his language is like the Australian bush: on first glance a swathe of muted greys and greens that, as you walk slowly through it, reveals itself to be hundreds of beautiful, tiny leaves, strips of bark and minute blossoms.

Himself a creative writer, Satendra Nandan is preoccupied with establishing the importance of the artist in White's work. He traces the emergence of White's vision of the artist through a focus on three works: *Voss*, *Riders in the Chariot* and *The Vivisector*. Through a sustained concentration particularly on *The Vivisector,* where the artist figure is placed in the central position of protagonist Nandan shows that White's artist is perennially engaged in a search for the Infinite.

Pavithra Narayan's discussion is particularly significant for this celebratory collection. She highlights the status White has now achieved in the Australian context stating that the birth centenary year provides an opportunity to revisit White, the 'political writer. Her view is that we need to re-examine our world against the backdrop of his critical essays and public speeches. White's role here accords with what Edward Said has indicated is the particular importance of the writer in the contemporary world - of "speaking the truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering." (Said 2001)

Genre

May-Brit Akerholt's discussion of White's drama is marked with the sensitivity and insights to which her long professional involvement with the theatre gives her ease of access. This practical expertise combined with her academic research (she has published a book on White's drama) confers a particular distinction on her contribution.

Greg Battye's chapter contests the opinion of Didier Maleuvre that photography "cannot yield a portrait." Battye, himself a photographer of repute, brings his professional expertise to bear in contesting Didier's claim His careful research shows how William Yang's black and white photos were used by artist Whitely to round

out his famous painting of White and establishes his (Greg's) view that "photographs can capture not just the moment but also the life." This chapter presents a fine, perceptive and scholarly analysis in which the technicalities are handled with a finesse that enhances the intrinsic interest of the chapter. It is a truly innovative contribution to White studies. Helff's examination of the filmic version of White's *The Eye of the Storm* shows how new technologies can generate ancillary works of art which enhance the potential for further growth of possibilities in the appreciation of White's texts. Along with Battye, Helff also indicates some fascinating new directions in which White studies can grow in showing how White's oeuvre can intersect with other media, such as photography and film.

White's poetry has not received much critical attention. This is hardly surprising, since apart from his earliest, mostly undergraduate, forays into the genre White's main work has been in the genre of the novel. Glen Phillips' discussion of this early poetry of White's, (in tandem with a comparison with the work of Katharine Susannah Prichard and showing some synergies between them) highlights its links with the English poetry of the period and reveals an unexpectedly intimate grounding in his British context – despite his avowals of feeling alienated from it. It might be argued however that White's best poetry is to be found in the novels – their creative use of language, their concentrated imaginative power, and the powerful insights afforded into human experience.

Individual Novels

Few of the chapters concentrate entirely on a single novel but each provides new interest in what might appear like well-trodden terrain. Meira Chand's "In the Shadow of Patrick White," recounts an early, and unusual, introduction to White's work in a bookshop in Japan and the lasting attraction established. She assesses her writing of a particular novel of her own in tandem with a consideration of *A Fringe of Leaves*, a novel in which she detects synergies with her own project. The chapter is appealing in the insights afforded into how a writer from a completely different cultural context can become attracted to the genius of White.

It may be thought that there is an undue concentration on the single novel *Voss*. (White himself wondered at his readers' perennial fascination with this novel, as John Barnes records in the preamble to his Chapter). Nevertheless, each of these discussions offers a fresh insight. Antonella Riem's study of how White's language works in this novel is underpinned by a wholly unique theoretical view on how language operates in a colonial context. Harish Mehta's innovative study of the 'diplomatic' encounter between the Aborigines and the white explorers in this text offers considerable food for thought**.** Jeanine Leane's work presents a first-ever achievement in White criticism in that it offers an appraisal by an Indigenous critic of his representation of the black/white encounter in Australia from an Indigenous perspective.

Elizabeth Webby and Margaret Harris, at present collaborating in a major research project on the archive of White papers held at the National Library in Canberra, elucidate a delicate theme that has hardly drawn commentary from White critics before - White's empathetic and sensitive portrayal of children in his novels. An additional interest derives from their drawing on their privileged access to unpublished material. Interesting links are traced between White's first novel *Happy Valley* (1939) and his last (posthumously published) *A Hanging Garden* (2012). This chapter is usefully juxtaposed beside Alastair Niven's challenging speculation, proffered at the end of his incisive discussion of the novel. He suggests that this last work of White's should not be regarded as a fragment abandoned by a writer in his declining years but is, in fact, the product of a confident artist still writing at the height of his powers.

Brian Kiernan's discussion of *The Twyborn Affair* was an invited contribution designed to fill a notable gap in the consideration of this most important work in which White explores the complications of his own familial and personal heritage but which has not attracted sufficient critical study. Himself the author of an early book on White's work (still quoted even in this publication) Kiernan's chapter (a reprint from an earlier work) displays sensitivity to the multiplicity of readings which this literary work invites and keeps a complex of ideas in play in a manner which ensures no foreclosure on the varied possibilities of interpretation.

To some who may think that several of White's novels have not been afforded sufficient discussion, a quick check would show that every work of White's has been cited and considered in one way or another especially in the longer general discussions. The strong impression left by this collection of essays would be that White's influence in the Australian context is not only already massive, it is also poised to grow still further as the essays which follow in the next sections should establish.

Comparative Studies

White's earliest published short story, "The Twitching Colonel" (1937) is given a startling new postcolonial interpretation by European scholar Isabel Alonso-Breto whose comparison of this work to that of a Sri Lankan writer juxtaposes the postcolonial rebellion of the retired British colonel and that of the seemingly obediently colonised schoolteacher. The daringly experimental nature of this contribution underlines the celebratory aspect of this collection and indicates the chameleon-like possibilities of the White text, its continuing capacity for growth and its openness to varied possibilities of interpretation.

Some contributors have chosen to explore recurring themes or motifs in White's oeuvre with the focus moving beyond the confines of a single novel to trace recurrent thematic patterns. Perhaps the most significant of these would be the motif of religion. Indian scholars who have traced in some detail the affiliations between White's work and several aspects of Indian belief systems have made important contributions Both Gursharan Aurora and Amrit Kaur show an admirable familiarity with White's work as well as with the Indian religious texts and concepts they have selected for comment. They draw impressive and convincing parallels between White's works and their Indian sources with an ease and aplomb which might well explain White's continuing popularity on the sub-continent.

New Zealand scholar Mark Williams, well-known for his scholarly book on White (1993) draws also on his specialist knowledge of the New Zealand context to present a carefully researched and stimulating comparison between White and the

eminent New Zealand poet James Baxter. This is an important contribution to this particular collection of essays on White, highlighting as it does, what is emerging as a new focus in approaches to White: "What does it mean to describe White as 'a public intellectual?"' Williams sees here a need to focus on the religious dimension in White's work, in comparing him to "James K. Baxter, a writer both deeply religious and vehemently critical of his nation's moral life and political history." The final chapter in this section takes the international comparisons to White still further with Julie Mehta's fascinating discussion of the postcolonial implications of the concept of abjection exemplified in the fate of the outcast and drawing on parallels between White's Aboriginal fringe-dweller and victim Dubbo in *Riders in the Chariot*, Arundhati Roy's persecuted and murdered outcast Velutha in *The God of Small Things* and Gemmy the rejected black/white man in David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*. The discussion, prosecuted with Mehta's characteristic energy, mediates a vision of the body of the outcast as an eloquent accusation against the abuse of power, in seemingly civilised societies, and suggests White's continuing influence in the dissemination of these ideas amongst writers and readers alike, well beyond Australia.

Socio-Political Issues

Exploration of these issues was planned from the outset as an integral part of the conference, not only in order to cater to the interests of the Association's multi-disciplinary membership but also to show the impact of White as a public intellectual in the Australian context. In his creative works as well as in his public pronouncements, particularly later in life, White gave frequent and passionate expression to his deep awareness of the injustices done to the Aboriginal people of Australia. His Bi-Centenary speech is perhaps the most impressive of these:

> Aborigines may not be shot and poisoned as they were in the early days of colonisation, but there are subtler ways of disposing of them … They can be induced to take their own lives by the psychic

> torment they undergo in police cells … (Brennan and Flynn 1989,184).

All of the contributors in this section are recognised experts in their field and each records an awareness of significant progress and developments in this area of Australian life with regard to which White felt so deeply and had expressed considerable concern. Each has alluded to White's views in the preambles to their papers. The fact that, perhaps for the first time in Australia, in this publication, Indigenous Australian academics and writers have contributed to a celebratory collection on a white Australian writer is itself a factor of some significance.

Fred Chaney's personal involvement in several of the issues he discusses and his practical contributions at the very highest administrative level in advancing Indigenous causes; (he was, at one time, Chair of Reconciliation, Australia), confers a particular distinction and authority on his contribution. Anne De Soyza is another author who has been a player, in a practical sense, in the field in which she writes about. In this discussion she outlines an example of forward thinking on the perennial problem of assisting Indigenous progress by confronting the established idea that this could only be achieved by retaining an overarching allegiance to traditional ways and showing the need for a radical re-thinking of this policy.

Kieran Dolin, a qualified lawyer as well as a literary researcher, combines his specialist knowledge of the law with his literary expertise to assess the impact of the revolutionary *Mabo* land rights decision on Australian writing. Dolin investigates how the founding myths of Australia are being re-written since the *Mabo* case, which represents a watershed in the advancement of Indigenous rights. Keith Truscott offers a rare Indigenous perspective on the key development of the *Mabo* decision in the Aboriginal story in Australia. He encapsulates in it an innovative new interpretation of the term 'Indigenous' which is reflective of the celebratory mood released in the Aboriginal psyche by the revolutionary legislation which restored a people's self-respect.

Vicki Grieves has researched widely on the shadowed relationship between white station owners and Aboriginal workers in the

pastoral industry. In her presentation at the conference she discussed an investigation regarding a family possibly connected with White's family home but continuing difficulties in obtaining permission from the family resulted in her abandoning this project. Nevertheless the chapter still evokes interest in this little-known aspect of black/white encounters and indicates the opening up of this area to scholarly investigation.

New Zealand has a special partnership role in the Association and New Zealand scholars have always made a distinctive contribution to ASAA conferences and publications. In this book, Mark Williams has submitted an impressive comparison of White with New Zealand writer James Baxter as public intellectuals in their different contexts; while Jane Stafford's detailed and sensitive commentary on a New Zealand writer also helps reinforce the cultural links that exist between the two countries. White himself acknowledged the awareness of a bond with these 'neighbours' in an address in Auckland:

> Dear Neighbours … It comforts me – and many others of like mind in my country – that you are here across the Tasman – and that we can rely on you to support us in our ideals for the South Pacific …

In the same speech he relates the story of his childhood devotion to a Solomon Islander a gardener on the family property with whom he had shared a deep bond of understanding and affection. (Brennan and Flynn 1989:167)

The two last essays deal with other public issues outside those of Indigenous concerns which were also areas of concern to White. Stephen Alomes proffers, with considerable empathy, even passion, an astute analysis of why an Australian republic could not be achieved through the last public referendum held on this issue. He goes to considerable lengths to show his awareness of the implications for Australian sovereignty; concerns which he notes were shared by White. Ameer Ali's discussion, like those of all the writers in this section, is stamped with the distinctiveness of firsthand knowledge of the public issues involved. Beginning with a highly apposite quote from a speech by White, Ameer grasps the opportunity here of stimulating discussion at an international level

on an issue which is of considerable importance not just within the Australian context but worldwide.

In these, as in the other essays that centre on public issues it should be noted that contributors shows an awareness of White's own thinking on the topic being discussed and align their own discussions accordingly. The broadening of focus resulted in an enrichment of the intellectual encounters at the conference itself and has contributed to the general interest of this book. Moreover, it has served to reinforce White's status as public intellectual - contributing most strikingly to the impression that his work has achieved and will continue to achieve even more impressively in the future, of what he set out as the original ambition of his writing career. This had been the motive dictating his decision to return to his native Australia rather than settle in London, the cultural Mecca for so many other Australian artists of his time - his wish to help people this country with "a race possessed of understanding." (White 1958, 40)

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PART I

REVALUATIONS

CHAPTER ONE

AUSTRALIA'S PRODIGAL SON

JOHN BARNES
LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

Preamble: Meeting Patrick White, July 1988

In his later years Patrick White, with his black beret and walking stick, became a familiar, easily recognisable public figure. I did not need anyone to explain who he was when I met him on the grounds of La Trobe University one afternoon in July, 1988. He had come to the Bundoora campus to give, what proved to be, his last public speech. It was his second visit to the university: in 1984 he had given a very successful lunchtime talk supporting the newly formed Nuclear Disarmament Party. This time he was speaking in the evening, giving the final talk in a series named after Ben Meredith, the first Master of Menzies College. I had been invited to chair his talk and to join the small group who were to dine with him at the college beforehand.

Patrick White was now obviously very frail – just how frail I did not realise until I read David Marr's *Life* and his *Patrick White Letters* years later. Shrunken and hollow-cheeked, looking older than he was, he hardly seemed to be the same man who had visited us only four years earlier. The conversation over dinner, which was hosted by the Vice-Chancellor and his wife, was polite, restrained and inconsequential, probably because everyone, including Patrick, was on their best behaviour. There was an awkward silence, though, when he asked if any of us knew about rap-dancing. A group of middle-aged academics, we had not researched that topic! When the subject of his own writing came up, as it was bound to do, he complained that university teachers were interested only in *Voss*.

"No-one teaches *The Aunt's Story*," he asserted, sounding like a man who had suffered a personal injury. *The Aunt's Story* is my favourite White novel, and I was that year teaching it in the Australian Literature course; but the dinner did not seem to be the place to challenge what sounded like an often-voiced prejudice against university teachers, so I let the unfair criticism pass.

An excited crowd, mostly students, and a television cameraman greeted Patrick at the university theatre where he was to speak. There was a sense in the air that this was a special occasion. By the time we were settled on the stage, all seats had been taken, the doors had been closed, and there was uproar outside, as those who had been shut out banged on the doors and shouted to be admitted. The theatre had 499 seats, one short of the 500 for which safety regulations require the attendance of a fire officer. As the protests grew louder, the Vice-Chancellor, who was seated in the audience, rose and advised the attendants that he would take full responsibility for breaking the rules. After the doors were opened, the aisles were completely filled and the doorways were crowded.

This was my first experience of an Australian writer being treated as a celebrity. When I mentioned in my introduction that he was the first and only Australian winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature I was interrupted by applause. And when Patrick came to the microphone there was prolonged applause. "Very kind of you", he said; "Hope we shall still be friends at the end." He need not have worried.

It was the year of the Bicentenary, which he called in his talk "the year of the great Australian lie." His theme was "a sense of integrity – particularly our own," and the audience enthusiastically responded to his account of what was wrong with Australians, a large proportion of whom he characterised as "children at heart – kidults". His talk was more a recital of what he disliked than an argument about contemporary society. There were two entertaining moments when one got a glimpse of the actor in White. Having complained that the Bicentenary celebrations would leave us "all but broke," and dismissing "babbling about the Games" (Sydney hosted the Olympic Games 12 years later), he promoted, "as shamelessly as an ABC radio ad" a cheese – Gippsland Blue was the "best in the world. Not a racehorse or a boxer, but a humble,

civilising cheese." Then, turning to politics, he uttered a *cri de coeur* to then Foreign Minister Bill Hayden who, it was rumoured, would soon become Governor-General. (He did.) "DON'T DO IT, BILL," shouted Patrick, to the delight of the audience."

After this theatrical flourish, he offered what amounted to a *credo*. Acknowledging that he was seen as "a bitter, angry old man," he said that he was 'angry' because "the earth is angry" (an indirect reference to his concern about the effect of nuclear testing on the environment), and he went on to voice his conviction that "we must all, in the years to come, work towards a civilisation based on humanity". Underlying his mocking portrait of what he had called "a kidult society" was his belief that "most people hunger after spirituality." Patrick White always rejected the claim that he was a moralist who preached sermons in his novels, but in what he thought would be his last public performance, he took on the role of a preacher, telling his flock: "Follow the path of humility and humanity, and Australia might develop a civilisation worthy of the name."

The audience responded with a perfect storm of applause. After the closing civilities – the Master of Menzies College thanked Patrick for a talk that "offered comfort to the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable" – several students came on stage and asked me if he would sign copies of his books. I doubted that he would as he looked exhausted, but he immediately came back to the lectern – which caused more people to come up with their books to be signed. Although he grumbled, "Why is it always *Voss*, *Voss*?" he did not refuse to sign any of the copies, mostly well-worn paperbacks and mostly *Voss*, which were thrust at him. It was an appropriate ending to a memorable evening.

[The text of the talk is available in Brennan and Flynn 1989,189 - 195].

The Prodigal Son

In 1948, two talented expatriate Australian novelists returned to Australia with the intention of settling back permanently into their original homeland: Patrick White in Sydney and Martin Boyd in Melbourne. Both men's work had found recognition in Australia;

Boyd was awarded the Gold Medal of the Australian Literature Society for his first major novel, *The Montforts* (1928), and White was given the same award for his first published novel, *Happy Valley* (1939). However, within three years Boyd left Australia, never to return; he had not written anything during his stay. White spent the rest of his life in Australia writing novels, stories and plays, which earned him a greater international reputation than any other Australian writer. He became a major influence upon Australian writing.

White's return to his homeland and his decision to remain despite his increasing disappointment, even anger, at the direction that Australian society was taking, set him apart from the three other prominent expatriate Australian novelists in the twentieth century: Henry Handel Richardson (1870-1946), Martin Boyd (1893-1972), and Christina Stead (1902-83). All of these writers produced their best work while living away from Australia and it would seem, preferred to remain expatriate, though Stead returned late in life, to die in Australia. For each of them, personal relationships that they had formed early in life resulted in their spending their most productive years abroad: for White a personal relationship resulted in his return. Richardson was born in Australia and was aged 17 when her widowed mother took her to Europe. She married in Europe and returned later only for a six-week visit. The two novels on which her Australian reputation rests are autobiographical – *The Getting of Wisdom*, a fictional version of her school years, and the trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, a version of the life of her Irish-born father, who had died during her Australian childhood. Stead's literary career began after she left Australia in 1928 at the age of 26 and was completed by the time she re-settled in Australia in 1974, nine years before her death in 1983. She lived in several countries and wrote novels with settings in those different countries, notably England, France and America, as well as Australia. Her first novel was set in Sydney, where she had grown up, and a later novel, *For Love Alone,* was based on her own early experience as a young woman, who chose to travel abroad to widen her experience of life and love. Her experience of childhood in Sydney was the subject matter of her masterpiece, *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940), but she transposed the setting to

the United States, where she was then living. It wasn't until 1965, that she was 'discovered' in Australia.

Boyd's privileged class and personal circumstances most closely resembled those of White. He was actually born in Switzerland, where his well-to-do parents were travelling, returned at the age of six months to Melbourne and was educated there. At the time of the First World War he went to England to join the British army. After the war he came back to Australia but did not settle; he returned instead to England where he started writing fiction, and remained there for 27 years. When he returned to Australia in 1948, he sought to recover what he had known in the past by restoring his mother's childhood home, the Grange, at Yarra Glen, outside Melbourne, intending to live there permanently. For him Australia meant his family – noted for its artistic talent – and its social eminence. As a writer he described himself fairly accurately as "recording the existence of a vanishing social group" (1972, 232). He was drawn back to England, initially with the idea of making a prolonged visit, with friends there, but eventually abandoned the idea of settling in Australia. The most important thing that happened to him as a writer during the three years in Australia was the discovery, during renovations at the Grange, of his grandmother's diary, which he took back to England with him. This was to prove the mainspring for his best-known work, *The Langton Quartet*, (1988) directly based on the family experience.

"Nostalgia for scenes of childhood**"** was a powerful element In White's decision to return, but the personal issues he was dealing with, including his feelings about Australia and England, were far more complex than those motivating Boyd. Like Boyd, he had been born abroad – in London, where his parents were travelling – and brought back to Australia at the age of six months. At thirteen he was taken back to England and "dumped" at a private school, Cheltenham College, where "there was never a day when I was not called 'a bloody colonial' or a 'bloody cockney'" (qtd. in Marr 1994, 273). Released from his "expensive prison" after four years and back in Australia, he felt himself to be "a stranger in my own country, even in my own family "(White 1981, 46). Both his parents were from landed families (they were, in fact, second cousins) and initially, he went along with their expectation that he