

## PATRICK WHITE CENTENARY CONFERENCE Nov 5-7 Hyderabad 2012

### PLENARY SPEAKERS

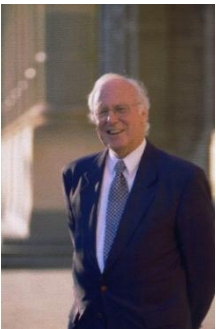


#### BILL ASHCROFT - University of NSW

Bill Ashcroft is a renowned critic and theorist, founding exponent of post-colonial theory, co-author of *The Empire Writes Back*, the first text to examine systematically the field of post-colonial studies. He is author and co-author of sixteen books and over 160 articles and chapters, variously translated into six languages, including *Post-Colonial Transformation* and *On Post-Colonial Futures* and *Caliban's Voice*. He holds an Australian Professorial Fellowship at the University of NSW working on the project "Future Thinking: Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures."

#### **Abstract: Horizons of Hope**

In some quarters, Patrick White has been burdened with the reputation of a patrician and excessively modernist stylist, an upper class Anglophile whose damning condemnations of Australian suburbia indicated a snobbish detachment from Australian life. However when we read his novels we find, from *The Aunt's Story* onwards, a rapier-like satire of those who tried to replant England in Australia. Although novels such as *The Tree of Man* and *Voss* have rehearsed the great myths of Australian exploration and settlement, what has gone largely unexamined in his writing is his consistently elaborated postcolonial reading of Australia, a reading, above all, of its possibilities. While the critical dimension of his writing included strong indictments of the treatment of indigenous people and the banal superficiality of modern suburban life, this has received inordinate attention, to the detriment of its utopian potential. Patrick White's writing is remarkable for its vision of horizons of possibility for a society struggling into some sense of its place and time.



#### JOHN BARNES - La Trobe University

John Barnes is Emeritus Professor of English at La Trobe University, where he taught for many years, specialising in Australian literature. He had previously taught at the Universities of Melbourne and Western Australia; and in his retirement has taught at the University of Barcelona. His books include: *World Unknown: An Anthology of Australian Prose* (co-edited with Hume Dow); *Australian Writers and their Work: Joseph Furphy; The Writer in Australia: A Collection of Literary Documents 1856-1964; Australian Writers and their Work: Henry Kingsley; An Australian Selection: Short Stories by Lawson, Palmer, Porter, White and Cowan; The Portable Joseph Furphy; Cross-Country: A Book of Australian Verse* (co-edited with Brian McFarlane); *The Penguin Henry Lawson: Short Stories; The Order of Things: A Life of Joseph Furphy; Bushman and Bookworm: Letters of Joseph Furphy; FURPHY: The Water Cart and the Word* (co-authored with Andrew Furphy); *Socialist Champion: Portrait of the Gentleman as Crusader*. He has been a co-editor of *Westerly* and was on the editorial board of *Meanjin* before founding *Meridian: The La Trobe University English Review*, which he edited for 15 years. Following his retirement from La Trobe he edited *The La Trobe Journal* of the State Library of Victoria Foundation for 10 years. He has recently completed a biography of Charles Joseph La Trobe, the first Governor of Victoria, and is currently working on a collection of 'essays in remembering'. In 1988 he chaired the meeting at La Trobe University at which Patrick White gave his last public address.

#### **Abstract: Patrick White - Australia's 'Prodigal Son'**

Patrick White's first three novels were written outside Australia, and he seriously considered pursuing a literary career as an expatriate. However, unlike his notable predecessors (Richardson, Boyd, Stead), who wrote all their major works abroad, he spent the greater part of his writing life in Australia, where he achieved an international reputation such as no other Australian writer before him had done. In his early and much-quoted essay, 'The Prodigal Son' (1958), White identified himself as a 'recently returned expatriate', and outlined the concerns that had led him to return to Australia. His later self-portrait, *Flaws in the Glass* (1981), revealed more of the personal issues – and, in particular, the role of his partner Manoly Lascaris – that were involved in his decision; and David Marr's 1991 biography documented his complex relationship with Australia throughout his life. Drawing on these and other sources, this paper attempts to explore ways in which White's fiction was affected by his decision not to stay in

Europe, and goes on to offer some suggestions about the continuing significance of his choice for Australian literary culture.



**FRED CHANEY AO**

Fred Chaney was born in Perth in 1941. He graduated in law at the University of Western Australia in 1962 and practiced law in New Guinea and Western Australia in private practice with emphasis on mining related work until he entered the Senate in 1974. Fred was involved in the Aboriginal Legal Service in a voluntary capacity in the early 1970's. He was in the Senate until 1990 and was Leader of the Opposition in the Senate from 1983 to 1990. He was Member for Pearce in the House of Representatives from 1990 to 1993. Among his Ministerial appointments in the Fraser Government were Aboriginal Affairs, Social Security and Minister Assisting the Minister for National Development and Energy. After leaving Parliament he undertook research into Aboriginal Affairs policy and administration as a Research Fellow with the Graduate School of Management at the University of Western Australia from 1993 to 1995. He was appointed Chancellor of Murdoch University in 1995 and continued in that capacity until 2003.

In 1994 he co founded the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation established to help young Aboriginal people succeed which now has 15 projects in government schools across Australia and continues to serve as its deputy President. In 1994 he was appointed as a part-time Member of the National Native Title Tribunal, a full-time Member in April 1995 and was Deputy President from 2000 to 2007. In January 1997 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia. He served as Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia Ltd from 2000 to 2005 and continues as a Director on the Board. In 2005 he was appointed chairman of Desert Knowledge Australia. In 2007 he chaired the Consultation Committee on a Human Rights Act for Western Australia. . In 2008 he was the first recipient of the Sir Ronald Wilson Leadership Award for leadership in combating racism. In 2011 he was a member of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians which reported to the Australian Government in 2012

**Abstract: The Australian Journey - From Exclusion to Reconciliation and Recognition.**

The 18<sup>th</sup> century settlement of Australia inevitably involved the displacement of the Aboriginal inhabitants and 19<sup>th</sup> century attitudes to race were reflected in the founding of the Australian nation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From constitutional exclusion in 1900 Australia moved to gradual establishment of full civil and political rights through a series of reform measures within varying policy frameworks as that century progressed. The material circumstances of and enjoyment of rights by Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders however have lagged the de jure legal position and successive governments have found making progress towards equal enjoyment of citizenship rights slower than they would have wished. The complex cultural and policy issues standing in the way of what is currently described as 'closing the gap' and Australia's struggle to find an appropriate relationship with its Aboriginal and Islander peoples will be explored in the context of current all-party commitments to recognise them in the Australian constitution and widespread government and community involvement in reconciliation.



**LYN McCREDDEN –Deakin University**

Professor Lyn McCredden is a teacher and researcher in Literary Studies at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Her publications include monographs on James McAuley, Australian women's poetry, feminism and the sacred, and most recently, two volumes which focus on the sacred: *Intimate Horizons: the Post-colonial Sacred in Australian Literature* (with Bill Ashcroft and Frances Devlin-Glass, 2009), and *Luminous Moments: The Contemporary Sacred* (2010).

**Abstract: The Sacred and the Secular in the Fiction of Patrick White.**

Critical accounts of White's fiction have established his interest in the realm of the sacred: Voss and Laura's transcendental experiences; the apocalyptic references of *Riders in the Chariot*; the aesthetic search for God in *The*

*Vivisector*, and much more. However, little has been done to investigate whether there emerges in White's work an undergirding theology, or an historical or systematic development of his sacred concerns. This paper will explore a range of White's texts in order to ask: does White's oeuvre present us with an explicit understanding of sacred and secular? And through which historical, aesthetic or theological frames can we best approach his work?



**SUVENDRINI PERERA – Curtin University**

Suvendrini Perera completed her PhD at Columbia University, New York, and her BA at the University of Sri Lanka, Kelaniya. She is Professor of Cultural Studies at Curtin University, Australia, and has published widely on topics relating to race, ethnicity, multiculturalism and refugees. Her recent books include *Australia and the Insular Imagination: Beaches, Borders, Boats and Bodies* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009), *Enter at own Risk* (co-edited with Graham Seal and Sue Summers Black Swan, 2010) and *Living Through Terror* (coedited with

Antonio Traverso, Routledge, 2010). With Sherene Razack she is working on an edited anthology, *At the Limits of Justice: Women of Colour Theorise Terror*.

**Abstract: Idealist, Anarchist, Lunatic, Patriot? Patrick White and the Role of the Public Intellectual.**

'If our patriotism is to be of any worth it must be twin-faceted, reflecting allegiance to Australia and the world. At the same time I feel we must beware of such sentimental, political and material ties of the past, as those with the British monarchy, the CIA, Japanese business .... We shall flounder of course in our attempts to evolve, and I shall be ridiculed as an idealist, an anarchist, a lunatic.'

(Patrick White, "Patriotism," in *Patrick White Speaks*, 1984)

Was Patrick White Australia's last great literary figure who was also a great public intellectual? His speeches and interviews, now over a quarter century old, testify to his passionate engagement with the questions that continue to trouble public debate: national identity, relations with the outside world, global responsibility. In this discussion, I consider Patrick White's notion of the "twin-faceted" allegiance of the public intellectual with reference to contemporary relations between Australia and its region. Given the location of the conference at the University of Hyderabad, my focus will be on recent Australian-Indian relations.



**KIRPAL SINGH –Singapore Management University**

Kirpal Singh is Professor at Singapore Management University. His Ph.D. was completed at the University of Adelaide, Australia, and it was whilst studying there that he helped organise, with Ron Shepherd, the first National Conference on the work of Patrick White in 1978 at Flinders University. He co-edited with Ron Shepherd the collection of papers from that Conference from contributors who have gone on to work consistently in the field of White Studies – *Patrick White :A Critical Symposium* (1978). Kirpal Singh is a poet, literary

and cultural critic, and, has written and published several collections of poetry and edited many literary journals and books. He was a founding member of the Centre for Research in New Literatures, Flinders University, Australia in 1977; the first Asian director for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1993 and 1994, and chairman of the Singapore Writers' Festival in the 1990s. He is currently Director of the Wee Kim Wee Centre for Diversity Education at the Singapore Management University. He is internationally acclaimed as a creativity expert and futurist charting the possibilities for moving beyond contemporary anxieties as we map the future. In 2010 he was appointed Chairman of ACAint (American Creativity Association-international). His services have been called on by several government and non-government bodies and organizations as well as large corporations such as AMEX, IBM, 3M, and L'Oreal. Dr. Singh's creative writing – poetry and fiction – are widely anthologized, and he is a regular guest at international arts and writers' festivals.

**Abstract: Patrick White and the Challenge of National Literatures.**

One would imagine that a nation would honour the writer who clinched the country's first (and so far, the only) Nobel Prize for Literature. From the very start White had been provocative and controversial figure and was for a while denied national recognition in his native Australia, even while he was acclaimed abroad. When he received the

Nobel Prize he was lauded but then, again, his reputation began to wane. Not only his difficult writing style and complex themes, but also his outspoken stand on a number of political issues, his uncompromising honesty and possibly also his alternative life-style led many Australians to distance themselves from him and his writing. White's career and his compatriots' response to him is an instructive journey in the matter of literary politics. I will be exploring, in this paper, some of the challenges associated with the way nations receive their international celebrities.



**MARK WILLIAMS - Victoria University of Wellington**

Mark Williams is Professor of English at Victoria University in Wellington New Zealand. His most recent books are *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872-1914* (Victoria UP, 2006) , written with Jane Stafford, and *The Auckland University Press Anthology of New Zealand Literature* (2012), which he edited with Jane Stafford. With Ralph Crane and Jane Stafford he is currently editing volume nine of the *Oxford History of the Novel in English*.

An earlier publication which should be noted here is his book, *Patrick White* (St.Martin's) Press, 1993). This publication discusses all of White's twelve novels, traces the connections between his life and work and offers an assessment of his achievement in the context of the contemporary novel.

**Abstract: Patrick White and James K. Baxter: Suburban Jeremiads**

I start with the difficulties encountered in Australia and New Zealand from the 1960s as both countries sought to reconfigure national identities derived from common sources in Victorian imperial racial attitudes, attitudes which were often incorporated into, rather than expelled from, cultural nationalism. To a large extent this process of national 'rebranding' has been conducted at state level as a managerial response to an urgent need to modernise settler economies, attract skills and capital, and differentiate contemporary national imageries from colonial ones. In both countries this elite-driven managerialism has been in conflict with the populist politics of settler recidivism. Yet in both also, ethically charged advocacy of a more just national order, is often led by artists and intellectuals but with significant support in the majority white populations, has been crucial in articulating the terms of change and broadening its appeal.

Addressing the role of public intellectuals in this process of postcolonial revision, I focus on Patrick White's engagement with Australia's ethical relation to its colonial past by way of a comparison with that of the New Zealand poet, James K. Baxter. In both countries we observe a familiar shift within the dominant pattern of national life - especially in the sympathies of arts and intellectual communities - from the social to the cultural and from modernism to post-colonialism. Yet the terms of those shifts are distinct: while New Zealand has placed at the centre of national attention the colonial moment and its effects on the ongoing relations between indigenous and migrant cultures, in Australia the contemporary has been privileged over historical recognition. Baxter as a poet and public figure directly engaged in the politics of national change, urging Pakeha New Zealanders to abandon their sense of superiority and learn from Maori.