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**Title:**  
Patrick White - a tribute

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PATRICK WHITE - A TRIBUTE.

Compiled by Clayton Joyce

Collins Angus and Robertson.

ISBN 0 207 17279 X

Recommended retail price \$12.95

Reviewed by Don Dunstan.

Coming as it does hard on the heels of David Marr's biography, already a benchmark in Australian biographical writing, a collection of short pieces by thirty-eight Australians giving their own views about, and, in some cases, personal reminiscences of Patrick White seems like a set of footnotes to the book. Collections of pieces on a topic are always uneven in quality and this collection is no exception. There are some contributions so slight as to make one wonder the compiler found them good enough for inclusion. There are others, however, which are perceptive and important to appreciating and understanding White and his importance to Australian literature. I make a habit of cutting out articles which are relevant to a book on my shelves and keeping them with the book so that I have a ready reference to something which has appealed to me as of importance. I had already done that with James Waites' sympathetic portrait of Manoly Lascaris before it was republished in this book; it was good to have it preserved in bound form.

There are some pleasing little treasures in the book- William Yang has contributed some photographs which are illuminating and sometimes funny- there is one of Tyler Coppin, Patrick White and Kerry Walker looking as if they are attempting to portray the Daughters of the American Revolution. Phillip Adams entertains in his inimitable fashion while exposing White's tendency to display his own clay feet; there is a page of Richard Meale's first setting of an aria of Edward Bonner from 'Voss', (full of tricky triplets), and verse by Elizabeth Riddell, Peter Skrzynecki, and Chris Wallace-Crabbe.

Clement Semmler writes warmly of the great qualities of Patrick White which transcend the not infrequent awfulness of his treatment of other people, ( a good deal of which has not even yet been chronicled,) :

'Beneath a sometimes forbidding and frosty exterior (which is the true artist's defence against mass stupidity,) lay a warm, compassionate and generous soul, with an endearing if sardonic (and who could blame him?) sense of humour as he surveyed the vagaries and aberrations of his fellow human beings. His novels and plays . . . do not necessarily reflect his true character and emotions, as some undiscerning critics have tried to make out- rather they are the instruments with which a fastidious yet wholly sensitive man hoped to turn back the tide of unknowing.'

Veronica Brady's contribution would alone be worth buying the book for - wholly about his work and written with force and understanding so as to make it an important reference for anyone seeking to appreciate the nature and value of Patrick White's writing:

• White is for many a difficult writer; uncomfortable to those who look for the comforts of familiarity but very exciting, life-giving even, for those who like to be challenged and to join in what he, himself calls "a daily wrestling match with an opponent whose limbs never become material, a struggle from which the sweat and blood are scattered on the pages of everything a serious writer writes" - and I would add, the serious reader reads. True, it is also an absurd and irreverent, even comic struggle, and this precisely because it is so deadly serious. It is also risky. White has a gambler's imagination. Overturning commonsense, turning the world into language and attempting a style which defies the separation of fact and value, self and world, he walks a fine line between meaning and meaninglessness, chaos and order, risking the fall into personal fantasy, even prejudice. So there are times when his writing seems merely wilful or sentimental, working off in words feelings which neither experience nor situation can sustain.'