



## ANZAAB *Aspects of Book Collecting* Patrick White

The Grisly Wife Bookshop

**Background:** No serious collector of Australian literature can avoid collecting Patrick White. The writer is among Australia's finest and is our only recipient of a Nobel Prize for Literature. Fortunately, for the collector who also wants to read White's work, reasonably-priced reprints of his works in English and other languages are obtainable with little effort.

**Range:** White's first work *Thirteen Poems* was privately published in 1929/1930 and circulated primarily to members of his family. After his first novel, *Happy Valley* published initially in early 1939 in the United Kingdom and in June 1940 in the United States, White published a volume of poems — *The Ploughman and Other Poems* — and 26 novels, plays, memoirs, short story collections and prose works. Most of his works have been translated into European languages. Manuscript material is extremely scarce (White claimed that he destroyed manuscripts, notebooks, letters etc) although a wealth of material surfaced in 2007 and was acquired by the National Library of Australia and much of it can be viewed on that institution's website. A considerable number of his short stories appeared initially in overseas or Australian literary journals. Because of his stature there are numerous critical works of a scholarly nature on White.

**Availability:** Most quality second-hand book dealers with Australian literature sections will stock some editions of works by Patrick White and his works appear regularly in catalogues and book-related websites. As with all collecting of first editions, individuals should aim to acquire copies in excellent condition but be aware that it is preferable to have any copy of his scarcer works with the intention of upgrading whenever possible.

**Price-range:** Earlier novels by White are naturally scarcer and will tend to be more expensive. The first edition of *Happy Valley* in fine condition with a dust wrapper can expect to realise \$8,000-\$10,000. Only 2000 copies of the first issue were printed. A copy personally signed and inscribed by White for his London housekeeper recently fetched \$25,000 at auction. For many of his later novels, collectors should expect to pay \$300-\$500 for fine copies in unclipped and fine dust wrappers. Issues of literary journals containing White short stories can be obtained with some patience in fine condition for \$20-\$50.

**Footnote:** The essential source for the White collector is Hubber and Smith's *Patrick White: A Bibliography* published by Quiddlers Press and Oak Knoll Press in 2004. Copies of this are generally still available for approximately \$100. Many general bookdealers and collectors were unaware until recently that many of White's novels first appeared in the United States rather than the United Kingdom. Book Club Editions and Trade editions often raise problems for the collector and Book Club Editions of *Voss* for example are frequently misdescribed and can be distinguished mainly by the presence of a small rectangular indentation at the base of the rear board. Hubber and Smith describe these and other identifying features in identifying first editions. Two works by David Marr *Patrick White: A Life* (1991) and White's *Letters* (1994) are also valuable works as they indicate White's close involvement with the production side of his works including the design of dust wrappers and his correspondence with publishers and other writers.