

Media Release

Monday, 17 October 2016

Patrick White legacy lives on; novelist, short story writer and editor wins 2016 Patrick White Literary Award

Perpetual announces literary award win for Carmel Bird

Perpetual, as trustee, has announced the acclaimed novelist, short story writer and editor Carmel Bird, as the winner of the 2016 Patrick White Literary Award.

Perpetual National Manager of Philanthropy & Not For Profit Services, Caitriona Fay said: "Like many philanthropists, Patrick White established the award to create a legacy – one that would reward Australian writers and help them to continue to flourish.

"This legacy now extends more than 40 years and has had a significant impact on the lives of so many in the literary community. It is a demonstration of just how important philanthropic giving is in the community."

Benefitting from the proceeds of the Trust of Patrick White's 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature, Ms Bird will receive \$20,000 in recognition of her outstanding contribution to Australian literature.

Reflecting on the achievement, Ms Bird said: "I am honoured and also overcome with joy to have been selected to receive the Award, to have been added to the list of distinguished writers who have received it in the past. Patrick White has been one of the key writers in my life. In awe, I met him in 1961, never imagining that one day I might receive a wonderful gift from him.

"First of all I fell for the plays, then the stories, then the novels which I began reading in the sixties. I like to believe his work has in many subtle ways affected my own. Perhaps his interest in what he called the 'sin of goodness' can be found in some of my own narratives. I treasure the deep, pictorial quality of his prose, its spirituality, its humour, its grandeur, the power of its music.

"A story I love about Patrick White is that when he was a child he went to my homeland of Tasmania for a holiday, remembering it ever after as Paradise Lost. I do like that. I am so grateful to Patrick White first of all for his work. And naturally I am grateful to him for setting up the award."

Carmel Bird is a writer of both fiction and non-fiction. Her first collection of short stories appeared in 1976. Since then she has published novels, essays, anthologies, children's books and also manuals on how to write.

Commenting on behalf of the 2016 judging panel, Dr Bernadette Brennan said: "The judges are pleased to select Carmel Bird as the 2016 winner of the Patrick White Award.

"Carmel has contributed widely and uniquely to Australian literature since her first book in 1976. Carmel has since gone on to publish 30 more books – her imagination is extraordinarily wide-ranging and her fiction consequently creates a world that criss-crosses textual, intellectual and geographical boundaries."

The 2016 judging panel members comprised Dr Bernadette Brennan (Chair), Professor David Carter and Associate Professor Debra Adelaide.

Ms Bird will be officially honoured for her contribution to Australian literature at the Patrick White Literary Award celebration at Readings Carlton, 309 Lygon Street, Carlton, Victoria on Friday 11 November 2016. Members of the public are welcome to attend. To book, visit the Readings website - <http://www.readings.com.au/events>

The Patrick White Literary Award was established by Mr White to advance Australian literature "by encouraging the writing of novels, short stories, poetry and/or plays for publication or performance". For the past 43 years it has been bestowed to an author who has made an ongoing contribution to Australian literature, but who may not have received due recognition.

For further information:

Jessica Effenev

Honner

(02) 8248 3745

Jessica@honner.com.au

Note to editors

About the Patrick White Literary Award

The Patrick White Literary Award was established by the author with the proceeds of his 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature, and it is managed by Perpetual as trustee of the philanthropic trust behind it. The Award has been given annually to an author who has 'already made a contribution to Australian Literature' but who may not 'have received due recognition for that contribution'.

The broad terms of the Award mean that authors of different status and experience may qualify for consideration. Many winners have been older writers but some have been younger, and all have been encouraged by it to continue writing. Poets, novelists, playwrights and short story writers have been among the now 42 recipients who have so far benefited from Patrick White's generosity and vision. Past winners include Christina Stead, David Campbell, Randolph Stow, Thea Astley, Fay Zwicky, John Romeril and Robert Adamson.

The judging committee's current members are Dr Bernadette Brennan (Chair), Associate Professor Debra Adelaide and Professor David Carter.

About Carmel Bird and her work: the Judging Committee's citation

The winner of the 2016 Patrick White Award is the prolific and acclaimed novelist, short story writer and editor Carmel Bird.

Carmel Bird has contributed widely and uniquely to Australian literature since her first book in 1976, the short story collection *Dimitra*. Since then she has published 30 books, which include nine novels, seven short story collections, six edited anthologies, several creative writing manuals and also books for children. Her most recent collection of stories is the exquisite *My Hearts Are Your Hearts* (2015) and her latest novel is *Family Skeletons* (2016), a black comedy about family secrets. Both display the originality, wit and elegance that have distinguished so much of Carmel Bird's work.

Carmel Bird was born and raised in Tasmania, a place that has influenced much of her writing with its themes of dispossession, the uncanny, and the taking or silencing of innocence. She attended the University of Tasmania and commenced a career in teaching in 1961 while at the same time writing her early stories. She has taught fiction writing at several universities in Victoria including Melbourne, Monash, Swinburne and RMIT, and also in Florida and Spain. Carmel Bird now lives in Castlemaine, in central Victoria. Several of her books have been shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award, as well as many other awards. In 2001, she received the Philip Hodgins Memorial Medal for Writing.

Bird's imagination is extraordinarily wide-ranging and her fiction consequently creates a world that criss-crosses textual, intellectual and geographical boundaries. Her philosophical enquiry gives us stories that blend genres and also question faith and spirituality as well as personal, family and local history. Using elements of the Gothic, fantasy and fairy tale as easily as realism, Bird can be surreal, experimental and macabre, but also humorous, humane and warm. Critics have noted these qualities, shared with other celebrated writers such as Angela Carter and Thea Astley, and at least one has identified a 'rogue quality' in her work reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. But Bird's voice is truly original: witty, stylish and allusive, it invests trust in the reader to appreciate her literary and cultural references.

As an editor Carmel Bird has also contributed greatly to Australian culture, and in this respect one of her more significant publications is *The Stolen Children: Their Stories* (1998). Gaining the trust of Indigenous people whose life stories had been revealed in the *Bringing Them Home* report, Bird performed a vital role in ensuring these stories were captured and transmitted to a wider audience.

As a teacher of the craft of writing Carmel Bird has made a unique contribution. Her manual *Dear Writer* is composed fictionally, in the form of letters to an aspiring author, and has long been a recommended text in creative writing courses; its reprints (most recently in 2013 as *Dear Writer Revisited*) testify to its value to emerging writers.

Bird's work can be grouped as literary, with novels such as her first, *The Bluebird Café* (1990), and *Red Shoes* (1998) or *Cape Grimm* (2005); or it can be labelled comic or crime, such as *Cherry Ripe* (1986), *Crisis* (1998) or *Unholy Writ* (2000), but in fact much of her work happily resists classification.

It is not just the extensive body of Carmel Bird's work that is so important, but also the way her writing is interconnected: characters, tropes, symbols and even plot lines reappear in playful, inventive ways to remind her delighted readers that books can and should speak to each other, and that literature is an ongoing conversation for the author as well as for the reader.

The judges are proud to recognise Carmel Bird's long, diverse and outstanding contribution to Australian literature by selecting her for the prestigious 2016 Patrick White Award. They congratulate her on her successes and anticipate many more.

About Perpetual Philanthropic Services

Perpetual is one of Australia's largest managers of philanthropic funds, with \$2.4 billion in funds under advice for charitable trusts and endowment funds at 30 June 2016. Perpetual is trustee for more than 1,100 [charitable trusts and endowments](#) and provides individuals and families with advice on establishing charitable foundations and structured giving programs. Perpetual also assists charities and not-for-profit organisations with [investment advice and management](#).

Perpetual's Philanthropic Services and advice are provided by Perpetual Trustee Company Limited (PTCo), ABN 42 000 001 007, AFSL 236643. This publication has been prepared by PTCo and contains information contributed by third parties. It contains general information only and is not intended to provide advice or take into account personal objectives, financial situation or needs. The information is believed to be accurate at the time of compilation and is provided by PTCo in good faith. To the extent permitted by law, no liability is accepted for any loss or damage as a result of any reliance on this information. PTCo does not warrant the accuracy or completeness of any information included in this document which was contributed by a third party.