



The Eye of the Storm

By Patrick White

First published in 1973

Genre & subject

Australian Fiction

Domestic fiction

Synopsis

Elizabeth Hunter, an ex-socialite in her eighties, has a mystical experience during a summer storm in Sydney which transforms all her relationships: her existence becomes charged with a meaning which communicates itself to those around her.

Author biography

Patrick Victor Martindale White (28 May 1912 – 30 September 1990) was an English-born Australian writer who is widely regarded as one of the most important English-language novelists of the 20th century. From 1935 until his death, he published 12 novels, three short-story collections and eight plays.

White's fiction employs humour, florid prose, shifting narrative vantage points and a stream of consciousness technique. In 1973, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, the first Australian to have been awarded the prize.

Discussion starters

- The title *The Eye of the Storm* refers to the cyclone that Elizabeth experiences, but it also has symbolic meaning. What do you think it might refer to? In what ways is the dying Elizabeth at the eye of a storm? In what sense have the other characters endured storms of their own? What is the significance of the physical storm?
- 'The past is always difficult to understand' – Dorothy. How do the various characters feel about their pasts? How do they respond emotionally to their memories? Did you feel sympathy for them and why, or why not?
- How does Elizabeth respond emotionally to becoming dependent on those around her? How did her deterioration make you feel? Why do we often find dependence on others a source of embarrassment and frustration?
- Elizabeth's nurse refuses to give her free access to painkillers, claiming 'that would be entirely unethical'. What does the book have to say about the ethics of euthanasia? How does the nature of Elizabeth's husband's death affect this message? What does our own society have to say about the moral and ethical issues involved in euthanasia and assisted suicide?
- 'All ailments are hereditary, as are moral flaws.' – Elizabeth. Do you agree that moral flaws are hereditary and, if so, what implications might this have? To what extent are we responsible for our own moral decisions, and to what extent do we inherit – and learn – our morality from our parents? Where else might we look for moral guidance?

- Why do you think Elizabeth's experience of the storm is so ecstatic? To what extent is her experience spiritual? Why are people often drawn to life's spiritual dimension during times of intense happiness or sadness? What might this suggest about the way our society views spiritual experiences?

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