

Epiphany – Patrick White

Patrick White is the only Australian to win the Nobel Prize for literature. Until late in life he kept his experience of epiphany in the closet. He knew that talking about it was deviant from the social mainstream.

Awareness of God came to him in 1951 when he was nearly forty. He did not speak about it publicly until the publication of his self portrait *Flaws in the Glass*, thirty years later in 1981.

Epiphanies can be ordinary or they can be dramatic and visionary. White's was ordinary. It occurred when he and his lifetime partner Manoly Lascaris were living on a farmlet at Castle Hill on Sydney's outskirts. White explains what happened:

During what seemed like months of rain, I was carrying a tray load of food to a wormy litter of pups down at the kennel when I slipped and fell on my back, dog dishes shooting in all directions. I lay where I had fallen, half blinded by rain, under a pale sky, cursing through watery lips to a God in whom I did not believe. I began laughing, finally, at my own helplessness and hopelessness, in the mud and stench from my filthy old oilskin. It was the turning point. My disbelief appeared as farcical as my fall. At that moment I was truly humbled.

Prior to this slip-in-the-mud epiphany, White says he believed in nothing but his own egotism and 'in my own brash godhead'. After it he and Manoly began attending worship each Sunday at Castle Hill Anglican church for a short while, and White came to view his novels as the artistic expression of the reality he experienced with his slip in the mud experience:

What I am increasingly intent on doing in my own books is to give professed unbelievers glimpses of their own unprofessed faith. I believe most people have religious faith, but are afraid that by admitting it they will forfeit their right to be considered intellectuals.

From Bruce Wilson REASONS OF THE HEART, p 3-4

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