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| White, Patrick (1912-1990) |
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| Born in London to parents from established Australian families, Patrick White became one of Australia’s most influential writers, culminating in his receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973. After a sickly Australian childhood, he was sent to England in his early teens to attend boarding school, where he felt ostracized due to his colonial upbringing and his nascent homosexuality. After two years as a stockman on a ranch in Australia, White returned to England to attend Cambridge from 1932-35, where he published his first works. He served in the Royal Airforce during the war. While stationed in Egypt, White met a Greek army officer named Manoly Lascaris, who became his lifelong companion. After the war, White returned permanently to Australia. White’s work was often better received abroad than at home. One such example is his brilliant early novel *The Aunt’s Story* (1948), about a sensitive, unmarried woman liberated by the death of her mother to travel through Europe, but who descends into madness via her struggle to relate self to other. The novel is inspired by Woolf in its preoccupations and play with narrative structure. Its modernist weaving of past and present is also evident in the later novels, including *The Eye of the Storm* (1973), the story of the estranged adult children who attend the deathbed of their formidable matriarch. Despite much incomprehension by Australian readers, White won the Miles Franklin award twice, for *Voss* (1957) and *Riders in the Chariot* (1961). Other important works include *The Tree of Man* (1955) and *The Vivisector* (1970). White’s dense, difficult works are concerned with the relations between reality and illusion, madness and sanity, spirituality and ordinariness. |
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