



The Living and the Dead

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To hesitate on the edge of life or to plunge in and risk change--this is the dilemma explored in 'The Living and The Dead'. Patrick White's second novel is set in the thirties London and portrays the complex ebb and flow of relationships within the Standish family. Mrs Standish, ageing but still beautiful is drawn to secret liaisons, while her daughter Eden experiments openly and impulsively with left-wing politics and love affairs. Only the son, Elyot, remains an aloof and scholarly observer- until dramatic events shock him into sudden self-knowledge.

The Living and the Dead Details

Date : Published March 2nd 1993 by Penguin Classics (first published 1941)

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Author : Patrick White

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From Reader Review The Living and the Dead for online ebook

Terry Wheeler says

The writing here is so assured and very masterly. I often stopped and reread sentences or paragraphs that had a true poetry about them. The setting and style recalled Virginia Wolf's 'Mrs Dalloway' but unfortunately the plot here did not hang together as well as that novel does. White is missing the great myths that captured his imagination with the later novels. You get the impression after reading this novel that White did not think very much of London in the 1930s.

Billy Comiski says

As usual quite dark and great character building. There's jazz, sex, abortion, gin and civil war. A highly underrated White book. My favourite line appears at the end of the novel: "then we are here, we have slept, but we have really got here at last."

Christian Schwoerke says

I didn't enjoy this early White novel as much as I did Voss, The Tree of Man, Riders in the Chariot, or The Vivisector, but this was no less immersive, and it held me hostage in the same sort of hypersensitive, hyperjudgmental world that White created in those novels, where words are not to be trusted to accurately describe the inchoate inner life. The focus was less clear for me in this novel—a family and its wrestling with the meaning and purpose of their lives against the interwar backdrop of a fractured and fractious England—but that "lack of focus" may have been the point.

Aveugle Vogel says

"off a barrow in Pimlico"

Marc says

Mixed opinion: the style is very much in line with Virginia Woolf and certainly bears the theme of the distance, the impotence to live, to dare to live. Yet the story does not convince and regularly there are also weak passages. Reading halfway aborted.

Szplug says

White's sophomore novel—and one of the few with a non-Australian setting—shows scattered glimpses of

his future greatness, but is marred by his ill-fitting Joycean influences which, unfortunately, render the entire composition somewhat sterile and brittle—very little of the *living* and too much of the *dead*. I, at least, found myself wondering why I was spending time following the saturnine rituals of White's dysfunctional London family during the period when the Spanish Civil War held Europe's dilated eyes: neurotic, rebellious daughter; neurotic, intellectual son; and neurotic, repressed mother. The opening sentence—*Outside the station, people settled down again to being emotionally commonplace*—in many ways sets the tone for the entire novel: this is a tale of an *emotionally commonplace* city, with the family in White's focus pushing about that dead, settled centre from which the living must struggle to escape—by means of artistic, sexual, or revolutionary energies with perils all their own. Later in life, White himself would refer the book as *the drabbest, dreariest thing ever written*, and though this is a decidedly harsh condemnation, it's not *that* far off of the mark. White was even then such a deft, artistic writer that he manages moments of incandescence and sublimity; but those moments are much too interspersed with relentless misery and ponderous relations to elevate this book above the average.

George Ilsley says

The title of this collection comes from the last few words of James Joyce's short story "The Dead".

White's idiosyncratic approach to language and sentences makes me love him even more.
