



The Watch Tower: Text Classics

Elizabeth Harrower

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After Laura and Clare are abandoned by their mother, Felix is there to help, even to marry Laura if she will have him. Little by little the two sisters grow complicit with his obsessions, his cruelty, his need to control.

Set in the leafy northern suburbs of Sydney during the 1940s, *The Watch Tower* is a novel of relentless and acute psychological power.

Elizabeth Harrower was born in Sydney in 1928. Her first novel *Down in the City* was published in 1957, and was followed by *The Long Prospect* a year later. In 1959 she began working for the ABC and as a book reviewer for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In 1960 she published *The Catherine Wheel*, the story of an Australian law student in London, her only novel not set in Sydney. *The Watch Tower* appeared in 1966. She was admired by many of her contemporaries, including Patrick White and Christina Stead, and is without doubt among the most important writers of the postwar period in Australia. Elizabeth Harrower lives in Sydney.

'Harrower's greatest novel [is] *The Watch Tower* (1966), the bitter story of two sisters, Laura and Clare, who lose their parents and fall under the sway of Felix Shaw, an abusive and controlling drunk...[It is] her masterpiece.' James Wood, *New Yorker*

'Haunting and delicate.' *Kirkus Reviews*

'This is a harrowing novel, relentless in its depiction of marital enslavement, spiritual self-destruction and the exploited condition of women in a masculinist society...It is a brilliant achievement.' *Washington Post*

'Haunting...Harrower captures brilliantly the struggle to retain a self.' *Guardian*

'Elizabeth Harrower's thrilling 1966 novel *The Watch Tower* comes rampaging back from decades of disgraceful neglect: a wartime Sydney story of two abandoned sisters and the arrival in their lives of Felix, one of literature's most ferociously realised nasty pieces of work.' Helen Garner, *Australian*

'I read this book twice. Once for sheer pleasure - if pleasure can be the correct term for an experience that is so distressing - and once for the purposes of this review...It left me with the strongest sense I have had for a very long time of the infinite preciousness of consciousness, at whatever cost, and of our terrifying human vulnerability.' Salley Vickers, *Sydney Morning Herald*

'A superb psychological novel that will creep into your bones.' Michelle de Kretser, *The Monthly*

'I read *The Watch Tower* with a mixture of fascination and horror. It was impossible to put down. I then read all Harrower's novels: *The Long Prospect* (a prescient study of a relationship between a man and a clever but unrecognised young girl), *Down in the City* and *The Catherine Wheel*. Her acute psychological assessments are made from gestures, language and glances and she is brilliant on power, isolation and class.' Ramona Koval, *Australian*

'To create a monster as continually credible, comic and nauseating as Felix is a feat of a very high order. But to control that creation, as Miss Harrower does, so that Clare remains the centre of interest is an achievement

even more rare. *The Watch Tower* is a triumph of art over virtuosity...a dense, profoundly moral novel of our time.' H.G. Kippax, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 November 1966

‘Beautifully written and a powerful commentary on the subjugation of women in the 1940’s both in the work place and in the home, Harrower has created a complex array of characters. The psychological tight rope that Laura and Clare must walk on a daily basis is deeply felt by the reader. The book is surely a mini-masterpiece.’ Salty Popcorn

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Harold Cole:

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Sheila Cyr:

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