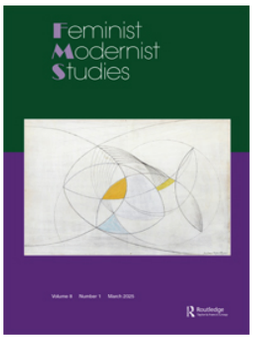

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Elizabeth Harrower and contemporary modernism: trauma, dead letters, and the legacy of Elizabeth Bowen

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ABSTRACT

In the decades following the Second World War in Australia, Elizabeth Harrower was a well-known literary figure. Her first four novels – *Down in the City* (1957), *The Long Prospect* (1958), *The Catherine Wheel* (1960), and *The Watch Tower* (1966) – were well received, and Harrower was a part of the most prominent literary circles in the nation at the time. In the early 1970s, however, Harrower suddenly withdrew from public life, canceling the imminent publication of another novel, and refusing further offers to write or to teach writing. It was only after persistent pressure that Harrower eventually agreed to publish her last novel, *In Certain Circles*, in 2014, as well as a collection of short stories, *A Few Days in the Country*, (2015). Both received extraordinary critical acclaim and major national awards, thus restoring Harrower to contemporary literary discourse. This article examines the temporal strangeness and complex modernity of *In Certain Circles* in terms of its delayed publication. It also observes the influence of modernist author Elizabeth Bowen on Harrower's work, and on *In Certain Circles* in particular, tracing this through the motif of the missent or dead letter as a means of understanding Harrower's innovation in trauma's narrative representation.

KEYWORDS

Elizabeth Harrower; Elizabeth Bowen; contemporary modernism; trauma; literary influence

In the decades following the Second World War in Australia, Elizabeth Harrower was a well-known literary figure. Her first four novels – *Down in the City* (1957), *The Long Prospect* (1958), *The Catherine Wheel* (1960), and *The Watch Tower* (1966) – were well received, and Harrower was a part of the most prominent literary circles in the nation at the time, counting Patrick White, for example, as one of her closest friends. In the early 1970s, however, Harrower suddenly withdrew from public life, canceling the imminent publication of another novel, and refusing further offers to write or to teach writing. It was only after persistent pressure from her friend Michael Heyward, managing director of Text Publishing, that Harrower eventually agreed to publish her last novel, *In Certain Circles*, in 2014, as well as a collection of short stories, *A Few Days in the Country*, the following year. Both received extraordinary critical acclaim and major national

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awards, thus restoring Harrower to contemporary literary discourse. This article examines the temporal strangeness and complex modernity of *In Certain Circles* in terms of its delayed publication. It also observes the influence of modernist author Elizabeth Bowen on Harrower's work, and on *In Certain Circles*, in particular, tracing it through the motif of the missent or dead letter as a symbol of trauma. By paying particular attention to the letter as a mode of (mis)communication in Harrower and Bowen's novels, I argue that the changes in this metaphor help us to understand changes in the figuration of trauma before and after the Second World War, wherein trauma functions as a kind of bridge between the "modern" and the "contemporary" to entail the core of Harrower's contemporary modernism.

Harrower's disappearance and reappearance on the public scene means that she occupies a unique position in Australian literary history, working as both a post-war Australian modernist and as a contemporary writer. In this respect, and in the way in which her writing has been received since her reappearance, Harrower's writing might be seen to highlight a return to the conditions of modernity in contemporary Australian writing, but with a change to their ultimate treatment or resolution. Harrower's work thus draws together the shared concerns of modernist and contemporary Australian literature and culture, especially where they have to do with women's lived experience of trauma. In other words, Harrower's writing can be seen to demonstrate what we might call a contemporary modernism.

Contemporary modernism is a term of some interest in theories of modernist legacies. One question it raises is posed by David James in *Modernist Futures*: "What does it really mean to consider that a given movement may also have a replenished moment, a phase of re-emergence – in another time, for another culture – through which its promise obtains renewed pertinence?"[1] For most critics dealing with "contemporary modernism," the term thus comes to mean the adoption of ostensibly modernist themes, techniques, and objectives in the service of contemporary concerns and contexts. This is the case for James, who traces explicit and unabashed modernist influences and legacies in the work of several prominent contemporary authors, including Philip Roth, J.M. Coetzee, and Ian McEwan. This laudatory attitude to modernism is important, since for modernists the exhortation to "make it new" defined the anxiety of influence, most famously, of course, in T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919). A similar argument is taken up by Niall Gildea and David Wylot, who observe the way in which "modernism's thematic investments in certain issues – now recurrent in contemporary fiction – have themselves *become* modernism, and subsequently absorb contemporary fiction into the modernist paradigm."[2] In this sense, modernism was never really over.

But Harrower represents a different case altogether: rather than operating as a contemporary writer adopting modernist strategies, Harrower is a modernist writer who is, and whose work is, brought back to (public) life in the twenty-first century. Harrower and her work are thus located paradoxically in two periods simultaneously as they are revived and published much later than the original time of authorship. Harrower's contemporary modernism is then a kind of modernist delay which in one sense speaks to modernism's late uptake in Australia – largely due to a preference for realism as the popular imaginary focused on nation-building and a perception of or insistence upon Australia's growing maturity. But Harrower's contemporary modernism is also suggestive of the gap between speech and receipt, as in a glitching telephone line, or the delivery of a letter.

In the tantalizing provocation of Harrower's original writing and its much-later publication, her circumstance echoes – indeed, answers – James's suggestion that "the *promise* of modernism has yet to be fully realized."[3] All of this is to say that Harrower's contemporary modernism operates less like a forgotten piece of embroidery taken up to begin again, than it does like a dead letter: sent, thought lost, now read for the first time.

This sense of belatedness also defines Harrower's preoccupation with the conditions of trauma and with the ways in which trauma can be narrativized, and which bring her modernism and her contemporariness into relation with one another. Trauma refers to a psychological wound so great that it cannot be immediately understood or remembered, only known later in its unexpected irruption.[4] The narrativization of trauma is typically considered in terms of a Freudian "working through," such that reintegrating and reordering the memories of trauma into linear story is seen as the means of trauma's resolution. Harrower's earlier novels resist such resolution to some extent, tending to remain in the space of trauma and suffering, rather than to propose narrative and psychological resolution. But in line with more contemporary theories of trauma's narrativization, as in, for instance, Anne Whitehead's work in *Trauma Fiction*, *In Certain Circles*, concludes with an emphasis on change, on learning and moving forward.[5] Concerned to narrativize a shared, often gendered, traumatic experience, Harrower's texts construct a readerly community of suffering and its respite. That is, in one respect, such communities can be seen as "a crucial source of support and a literal 'reaching out' for understanding, friendship and critical appreciation."[6] This recognition of the value of community also suggests that Harrower's contemporary modernist response to trauma ultimately invokes community as necessary to the narrativization of traumatic experience and an approach to its resolution. Crucially, this is a move recognized in more recent criticism on modernism and affect. Julie Taylor, for instance, has pointed out that the identification of modernism with its cerebral qualities – formal experiment, engagements with philosophy, explicit demonstrations of literary knowledge – meant, for a long time, inattention to modernist feeling.[7] Indeed, perhaps the former was a result of the latter: a focus on the mind as a move away from, in a time of global violence and destruction, feeling too much. Studies like Taylor's have, more recently, taken up an interest in those modernist feelings, both the negative (anxiety, trauma) and the positive (happiness, love), as well as the way the one can function as an antidote for the other.[8]

Harrower's work also exhibits a clear sense of literary heritage traced from European modernism, by both men and women, despite her insistence that it would be impossible to identify these, to the extent that Europe is bound up with the sense of individual and cultural identity and growth.[9] Indeed, as Robert Dixon observes, in Harrower's writing the "idea of Europe stands as a symbol for personal becoming," while for Megan Nash, *In Certain Circles* "calls attention to the fact that certain expansive, global concerns were always already at work in her novels."[10] Of particular interest to me here, is the influence of Anglo-Irish modernist writer Elizabeth Bowen. Bowen's influence on Harrower has been noted by Susan Sheridan, perhaps most significantly as it appears in *In Certain Circles*, which bears several similarities to Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* (1938).[11] Harrower's short stories, published in *A Few Days in the Country*, also demonstrate significant influence by major innovators of the modernist short story, Katherine Mansfield and James Joyce, particularly in their use of the epiphany as a signifier of the recognition of traumatic experience and as a marker of adolescence. Wood, too, suggests

Virginia Woolf as an influence, noting that "a great deal happens invisibly between the three sections of *In Certain Circles*, as it does between the three parts of *To the Lighthouse* [1927], a novel that was perhaps in Harrower's mind."[12] I have argued elsewhere that Bowen innovates our models of trauma, emphasizing a logic of survival and endurance rather than one of unspeakability; I consider here the extent to which this logic is adopted in *In Certain Circles*, so that this work on Bowen and her innovations in representing trauma might be taken up in further discussions of Harrower.[13] Indeed, in Jim Davidson's 1980 interview with Harrower, he identifies precisely these strategies, noting that her early works "are about surviving, or enduring," suggesting to the author that "it's as though you feel that wherever possible perseverance is preferable to textbook psychological analysis."[14] Both Bowen and Harrower work to connect and compare individual and cultural trauma in the uncertain, often dark, experiences of adolescence and the pre- and post-war scenes of London and Sydney. Yet, whereas Bowen's characters, across novels, repeatedly and stoically assert that "one must live how one can," grim in the face of the looming dread of war, Harrower's characters are irrevocably changed by the war just over, and the continuing "ruin" of their accumulating experiences lamenting, now, "how are we to live?"[15]

In Certain Circles, written, Harrower says, around 1971, is perhaps most famous for having been withdrawn from publication by its author; in the interview with Davidson, Harrower reflects that this was because "I really didn't like it very much. I still don't regret that. […] [O]n the whole it seemed wrought, manipulated, not organic."[16] However, other contexts may need to be taken into consideration here. In a letter to fellow Australian writer Michael Costigan, Harrower admits that "Too many things in general had gone wrong."[17] In a letter to Stead, too, she says that

> Too much had happened all at once, so I had none of the right sort of attention needed for writing novels to spare. It was written from willpower, and had some interesting statements in it, but was quite lifeless, poor thing.[18]

In suggesting that too much had happened, or too much had gone wrong, the reasons for which Harrower elected to refrain from publishing *In Certain Circles* are suggestively close to the traumatic experiences of Bowen's life. Bowen's mother died when she was just thirteen, and she suffered from a stammer for the rest of her life – the word which famously gave her the most trouble, was "mother." Similarly, as James Wood relates, Harrower's withdrawal of *In Certain Circles* may have been because her

> mother, to whom she was very close, had died suddenly the year before [… and] she was absolutely "frozen" by the bereavement. She also claims to remember very little about her novel […] and adds that she has been "very good at closing doors and ending things […] What was going on in my head or my life at the time? Fortunately, whatever it was I've forgotten."[19]

Repeating this cryptonymic imagery, "[s]he has said that she thinks of her fiction as something abandoned long ago, buried in a cellar."[20] *In Certain Circles*, then, was "lifeless," dead and "buried." It is, we might say, a letter written but never delivered.

Much description of Harrower's work could also be said to equally well describe Bowen's writing. For example, Wood points out that Harrower's sentences "have an unsettling candor, launch a curling assault on the reader, often twisting in unexpected ways."[21] Like so many of Bowen's novels and, indeed, as in so many of those by

Woolf, Harrower's narrative adopts a tripartite structure, moving between three distinct chronological periods. Moreover, William H. Wilde, Joy Hooton, and Barry Andrews argue that

> [a]t the centre of all Harrower's novels is an intense psychological drama, a struggle between the strong (as far as position is concerned) and the weak […]. She has a keen understanding of the motivating forces of selfishness, envy, ignorance, malice, pride, pity and fear and of the way these forces can work within a small familiar group to produce misery for the innocent or defenceless. At a deeper level, her fiction tentatively and searchingly explores the ambivalent problems of responsibility and freedom, guilt and innocence, naivety and experience.[22]

And in the press release for the announcement of the 2015 Voss Literary Prize, awarded to *In Certain Circles*, the judges assert that this "novel presents the fragility and tenuousness of human interconnection as a figure for the postwar world."[23] Its modernism is, as Sheridan has described Australian women's writing at mid-century, "not 'modernist' in the Patrick White sense of stylistic innovation, but a return to the modern realist tradition which explores personal experience and psychological conflict, often from a female perspective."[24] For Michelle de Kretser, moreover, "Harrower's fiction obsessively circles the workings of power within the domestic sphere" and "[w]atchfulness, cruelty and the suffering of the innocent feed her work."[25]

This "pattern of imagery" is one preoccupied with conditions of trauma and ways in which trauma can be narrativized, rather than exceeding our capacities for seeing and knowing, as Cathy Caruth proposes in *Unclaimed Experience*.[26] For Clare Hanson, one of the most striking "recurrent pattern[s]" in Bowen's work describes a relationship between an older woman and a young girl, herself "unformed and not yet defined by the codes of patriarchy."[27] In *The Death of the Heart*, this relationship is a destructive one: while Anna Quayne, the older woman, who "ought," Hanson says, "to act as Portia's mentor […] instead cuts her off and diminishes her," Portia too, I have argued elsewhere, forces those around her to confront the traumas of their past.[28] In some respects, this pattern can also be seen in *In Certain Circles*: at different times, both Anna and Zoe (Quayle – the similarity in the unusual surnames should not go unnoticed) disrupt the "circles" of each other's family relations in ways which come back to haunt later in their lives. Certainly, the similarity of Harrower's character names to Bowen's signals a deliberate engagement with the earlier writer's work.

Sheridan points out that Harrower's *The Watch Tower* quotes directly from Bowen's Second World War novel *The Heat of the Day* (1948): "His pity, speaking to her out of the stillness of his face, put her in awe of him, as of a greater sufferer than herself – no pity is ignorant, which is pity's cost."[29] In *The Heat of the Day*, the moment takes place during a brief reunion between Stella and her young adult son, Roderick, following the death of her double-agent lover, Robert. Stella, highly independent, and still struggling to comprehend the shock of Robert's death, is surprised and touched by Roderick's sensitivity and a perception of her suffering which is greater than her own. Clare, in *The Watch Tower*, quotes the passage to her bored sister, feeling in Roderick's pity her own tendency to suffer with and for others. But Clare misses the point of the scene: the focus is not on Roderick's pity but on Stella's acknowledgment of and recoil from it. The two scenes thus reiterate Bowen's and Harrower's individual and typically modernist reflections

on survival after trauma, either to "live how one can" or to ask, "how are we to live?" depicted in Stella's stoic continuation and Clare's personal determination to take on the perceived burden of the inadequacies of others. Both approaches, nevertheless, fail to sufficiently acknowledge or deal with trauma, by turns ignoring or dwelling in it. *In Certain Circles*, however, advances these concerns, inflecting a contemporary approach to trauma in which there is a way to move beyond suffering.

Despite these explicit echoes of Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* and *The Death of the Heart*, I cannot help but see *In Certain Circles* as in many ways closer to the traumatic preoccupations of other novels by Bowen: in particular, *Friends and Relations* (1931), *The House in Paris* (1935), and *A World of Love* (1955). Perhaps the most important way in which this affinity is demonstrated is that these three novels, like *In Certain Circles*, are concerned with miscommunication, and specifically, with the symbolic use of letters misposted, misdelivered, or misread – in other words, they are concerned with the mistakes of lives mislived. In *Friends and Relations*, for example, a letter written by the teenaged Theodora and mistakenly received by Laurel disrupts her marriage to Edward when it reveals his secret love for his sister-in-law, Janet. In *The House in Paris*, Karen reads the outline of a telephone message her mother had taken down for her, but which she destroys when she realizes that it reveals Karen's adultery and duplicity. And in *A World of Love*, Jane discovers a series of anonymous love letters in a trunk in the attic, claiming them for herself, and falling in love with a ghost.

In Certain Circles repeats the symbolic representation of traumatic disruption and miscommunication through the entwined lives of two sets of siblings, orphans Stephen and Anna Quayle, and wealthy Russell and Zoe Howard. Stephen and Zoe eventually marry, although the marriage is an unhappy one, preventing both from pursuing the careers and dreams for which they each hoped. Meanwhile, Anna and Russell are in love, but each is married to another. After a misposted suicide note from Anna terrifies the group, all are forced to admit the truth of their romantic and professional desires.

Certainly, each of the female characters is seen to be living what we might describe as a wasted life; as in so many of Harrower's novels, the "women's minds teem," Gwendoline Riley says, "with speculation, justification, scrambling to explain both the behavior of the bully and their own seemingly inescapable need to understand it: using themselves up," while for Wood, one of the most important aspects of this novel is that it "link[s] feminist questions with the more general problem of wasted human potential."[30] These problems for the younger female characters in *In Certain Circles* are all the more surprising, perhaps, given Mrs. Howard's (their mother's) noted success in her professional and personal life. And yet, this is perhaps a warning: the battle is not yet won, we must remain alert. Although, in Bernadette Brennan's terms, Zoe "*seems* to be free to script her life," the script she is living is not what she had intended. She has written, it seems, the wrong story – a narrative to be retracted.[31]

Of course, the most striking example of miscommunications – the misappropriated or purloined letter in this novel – are the old suicide notes which Anna mistakenly sends to her friends and family. Just as the letter posted at the beginning of Harrower's story, "English Lesson" "dropped from [Laura's] fingers, slid out of her control," so too does Anna's missive escape its sender's grasp.[32] "I kept those letters as a – because too much was invested in them of someone worth more than I am, to throw them away," she confesses to Zoe:

> They were in a drawer. I wrote my Christmas cards and stamped them and put them in the same place, till it was time to post them. When I was leaving on my travels I stuffed them all in a basket, intending to post them somewhere along the way.[33]

This is a device which has been variously called by critics implausible, melodramatic, and unrealistic. However, the misposted letters should come as no surprise, since they are integral to the motif of miscommunication – Anna does not even tell the truth in her own diary, as when she crosses out "*I wish* – " and then "*I hope* – ," before writing "in very small letters, as though she meant to hide them even from herself: *Goodbye.*"[34] Zoe, too, later finds "the secret words 'Happy days'" scrawled "across blank diary pages" to be "undecipherable."[35] The symbol of missed or failed communication is also recalled in Zoe's recognition of the trauma of her marriage:

> Sometimes it seemed that nothing much had happened. There was only a vague distress, the dreamlike sensation of having mislaid something vital. Some messenger from life stood before her with a telegram reading: *you have lost your life* or *sadness unto death*. It seemed dramatic, and half-touched her, this eternal telegram. Yet really, apart from the sensation of irretrievable loss, there was nothing wrong at all.[36]

As I have noted, Harrower even adopts the symbol to justify her own decision to withdraw *In Certain Circles* from publication, arguing that she did not want to publish a work she had been "forced" to write, and which therefore did not have any life or energy to it: "there are a lot of dead novels out in the world," she observes, "that don't need to be written."[37]

It seems to me, then, that these dead letters, letters of death, letters which invoke and remind us of death, recall Jacques Lacan's words on the misplaced or stolen letter in "The Purloined Letter": "But as for the letter," he says:

> … be it taken as typographical character, epistle, or what makes a man of letters – we will say that what is said is to be understood *to the letter* [*à la letter*], that *a letter* [*une letter*] awaits you at the post office, or even that you are acquainted with *letters* [*que vous avez des lettres*] – never that there is *letter* [*de la letter*] anywhere, whatever the context, even to designate overdue mail.
>
> For the signifier is a unit in its very uniqueness, being by nature symbol only of an absence. Which is why we cannot say of the purloined letter that, like other objects, it must be *or* not be in a particular place but that unlike them it will be *and* not be where it is, wherever it goes.[38]

If the letter is a "symbol only of an absence," is both there and not there, then it might be understood as a model for trauma, for the way in which trauma, as a psychic wound, is both present and absent, remembered and forgotten. Notably, each of the women in *In Certain Circles* attempts to hide her trauma even from herself – tucking letters away in the back of a drawer, writing in a tiny hand, ignoring the concerns of others. Nevertheless, in the way it inevitably does, trauma comes back to haunt, so that for Anna, the letters both are and are not suicide notes; until confirmed, like Schrodinger's cat, and like the depressively suffering Lily and Zoe, she is both alive and dead. A similar event occurs in Harrower's story "Alice," in which an anonymous letter exposes Alice's husband's infidelity, but does not free her from the unhappy union. It figures as a "horrible accident" that "they couldn't get over."[39] There is no escaping trauma, not escaping the

knowledge of one's wasted or mislived life. Like the letters, its memory is delivered to these recipients.

In *Bowen's Friends and Relations, The House in Paris,* and *A World of Love*, these "textual traces" of other lives, these misclaimed letters, dead letters, are destroyed: torn, scattered, burnt. In that context, I have argued, it suggests that trauma remains – it cannot be destroyed or forgotten, only conveyed or incorporated in some other sense.[40] In *In Certain Circles*, however, the dead letters, the suicide letters, are given over to the police.[41] They are made evidence, objects in the pursuit of an unnecessary justice (since Anna is alive and well, and not, as they are tellingly afraid, "dead by her own hand").[42] It is perhaps in this external validation of the value of her life, the legal moderation of the mis-sent letters, that *In Certain Circles* moves away from a model of trauma which must remain, which must dwell, and instead promotes the possibility of working through, of catharsis and change.

In this respect, Harrower diverges most clearly from Bowen in the conclusion to *In Certain Circles*. Bowen's preferred ending is what I call a "threshold conclusion," in which characters teeter on the edge of something about to happen, or which has just happened, so that little is resolved. Whereas Harrower's earlier novels do echo this tendency, ending in, as Wood puts it, "despair or horrified stasis," *In Certain Circles* "pierce[s]," as Nicholas Birns has it, the "late-modern stasis" which is "the default mood of the book."[43] It concludes with an emphasis on change, on learning and moving on past that threshold of stasis or suspension, even when this proves difficult. In Zoe's final observation, then: "What a slow learner, she thought, slowly rising. Still, the day was lovely. And now she could move on."[44] It is an important move in several respects. For instance, Joy Damousi has shown with respect to Australian culture

> a significant shift from a mid-twentieth-century sense that grieving was not spoken of in the community and was restrained by obligation and duty, to a late twentieth-century consensus that we can articulate grief, that it is desirable and necessary to do so and that we *need* to grieve.[45]

Zoe, Anna, and Lily's newfound freedom is suggested to have come from their articulation of the trauma, which has lain beneath the surface of their lives, and which has laid them low, causing all three to suffer from debilitating periods of depression. Rather than succumbing to the repetition of trauma, then, the women of *In Certain Circles*, ultimately, escape it; as Harrower, herself, points out, "I think I feel now that when people go to the end of an experience then that's a good thing, because they don't have to keep repeating that experience."[46] This would suggest a strikingly modernist moment of epiphany; if, as Harrower says of her own writing, "[t]o the extent that illusions are thrown off, people become less dangerous to themselves and others. The contest is with the world of illusion," the women of *In Certain Circles* are rewarded for recognizing the misguided idealism of their post-war youth and demonstrating the capacity for growth – even if they do not actually grow yet.[47]

A similar moment occurs at the end of "The Fun of the Fair," the first story in *A Few Days in the Country*, written around the same time as *In Certain Circles*. In this story, a child, Janet, shocked into a recognition of the exploitation and shared suffering of vulnerable people which she has witnessed being practiced at the fair, runs away from her uncle and aunt: "Aimlessly, frantically, turning and twisting round caravans and

tents, up and down the paths of trodden earth, pushing through the thinning crowds, she ran, not crying now, but brilliant-eyed."[48] The story can be read as an echo of Joyce's "Araby" (1914), in which a young boy's personal prejudices and selfish desires are humiliatingly exposed: Janet undergoes a brief experience of trauma, but in doing so she changes, and enters a new phase of maturity. The story's conclusion thus resonates with the conclusion to *In Certain Circles*, writ small. In Sheridan's terms, "[c]elebrating change, in the end, rather than bare survival, takes *In Certain Circles* outside the destructive mode that distinguished Harrower's other novels."[49] However, for Elizabeth McMahon, the conclusion of *In Certain Circles* exemplifies how the revelation of "self-knowledge," as a novelistic epiphany, is

> characterized by forms of blindness, misapprehension, misrecognition and misalignment. The multiple aspects of the body and psyche do not come together in one moment, they are not all equally or sufficiently developed: being half asleep, adolescent, orphaned, arrested or unreal.[50]

In other words, even where there is some understanding of the self, it is not clear-sighted but always touched by a kind of misreading or misunderstanding of one's own story, as Zoe's determination to simply "move on" and into the "lovely" day might signify. In this sense, it is closer, perhaps, to the last story of Joyce's *Dubliners*, "The Dead," in which there is a distinction between the epiphanies of the character and of the reader. In *In Certain Circles*, then, there is a delineation between the forced learning and growth the characters have undergone, and that of the reader, who can still see their limitations and weaknesses – their true humanity.

This recognition suggests that Harrower's response to war and trauma in Australia can be compared to those in other cosmopolitan centers, especially, in Britain, and the dual sense of psychological threat and the ethical responsibility of the writer which is figured in such works. Transnational figures like Bowen can help us to understand the emotional discourse of trauma as it appears in the work of Australian women modernists like Harrower. Overcoming something like the orphanhood of Anna and Stephen, the eponymous "certain circles" might not only refer, then, to the closed spaces inhabited by the novel's characters, or even the uncertain circles in which their communication circulates, but perhaps, too, the circles of women writers themselves – women united in the experience of individual and cultural trauma, and the need to write a way through it – to work it through. In fact, it is in the communal suffering and help offered between the three women, Zoe, Lily, and Anna which enables Zoe's learning and change and for each woman a release from an unsatisfactory present – the lingering trauma of a life mislived.

Notes

1. James, *Modernist Futures*, 1.
2. Gildea and Wylot, "The And of Modernism," 456.
3. James, *Modernist Futures*, 5.
4. Caruth, "Introduction," 8.
5. Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*; Harrower, *In Certain Circles*, 250.
6. Kelada, "Bridging the History," 54.
7. Taylor, "Introduction," 2.
8. Ibid., 11.

9. Davidson, "Interview," 172.
10. Dixon, "Metageography and Ironic Nationality," 51; Nash, "Traversing 'the Same Extreme Country,'" 120.
11. Sheridan, "Pity's Cost."
12. Wood, "Rediscovering Elizabeth Harrower."
13. Gildersleeve, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Writing of Trauma*, 2.
14. Davidson, "Interview," 169.
15. Gildersleeve, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Writing of Trauma*, 9; Sheridan, "Pity's Cost."
16. Davidson, "Interview," 171–2.
17. Harrower, Letter to Michael Costigan.
18. Harrower, Letter to Christina Stead.
19. Wood, "Rediscovering Elizabeth Harrower."
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Wilde, Hooton, and Andrews, "Elizabeth Harrower."
23. "Voss Literary Prize Winner 2015."
24. Sheridan, "Sex and the City," 5.
25. De Kretser, "Noted," 63.
26. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.
27. Hanson, *Hysterical Fictions*, 48.
28. Hanson, *Hysterical Fictions*, 60; Gildersleeve, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Writing of Trauma*, 76.
29. Sheridan, "Pity's Cost"; Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 296.
30. Riley, "Elizabeth Harrower's Watchful Brilliance"; Wood, "Rediscovering Elizabeth Harrower."
31. Brennan, "Ideas of Certainty," 20 (original emphasis).
32. Harrower, *A Few Days in the Country*, 155.
33. Harrower, *In Certain Circles*, 236.
34. Ibid., 79; see also 60–61.
35. Ibid., 157.
36. Ibid., 182 (original emphases).
37. Harrower cited in Riley, "Elizabeth Harrower's Watchful Brilliance."
38. Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" 39.
39. Harrower, *A Few Days in the Country*, 28.
40. Gildersleeve, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Writing of Trauma*, 50.
41. Harrower, *In Certain Circles*, 226.
42. Ibid.
43. Wood, "Rediscovering Elizabeth Harrower"; Birns, *Contemporary Australian Literature*, 61.
44. Harrower, *In Certain Circles*, 250.
45. Damousi, *Living with the Aftermath*, 3.
46. Harrower cited in Davidson, "Interview," 169.
47. Ibid., 166.
48. Harrower, *A Few Days in the Country*, 14.
49. Sheridan, "Pity's Cost."
50. McMahon, "Moments of Being," 142.

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