Brigitta Olubas. *Shirley Hazzard: Literary Expatriate and Cosmopolitan Humanist*. Amherst, New York: Cambria, 2012, 284 pp.
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The case of Shirley Hazzard—like that of Christina Stead, with whom she may be compared but from whom she also dramatically differs—tests the limits of 'nation' as a category that can claim, define or in any sense contain her fiction. Even though its trace recurs in the journeys of Hazzard's female protagonists, Australia is thoroughly supplanted by places elsewhere. Yet if the Miles Franklin Literary Award for *The Great Fire* (2004) is any indication, Australians still want to claim her, against the grain, as our own. And not without reason. In her masterpiece, *The Transit of Venus* (1980), for example, the harbour environs of Sydney, where 'girls put their smooth faces to gardenias, inhaling December for a lifetime' (*Transit* 37), provide a sensory undertow that pulls against geographic isolation and cultural marginality. Born in 1931, Hazzard lived for only the first fifteen years of her life in Sydney before moving with her family to Hong Kong, also travelling to and working, for various interludes, in cities around the globe—in Wellington, London, Naples and New York. So it is hardly surprising that Australia, in her writing, seems caught in the aspic of mid-century provincialism. Her own passage through life took her to the great cities of the world, into the heart of global politics of which she was an acute observer. From 1953 she was employed in a clerical role at the United Nations, and in 1963, met her future husband, esteemed translator and biographer Frances Steegmuller, forming a very influential literary couple. New York has been her main city of residence since 1951. Living there still, she is held in high esteem, as most recently seen in a reception held in her honour at the New York Society Library, at which this sympathetic yet incisive study by Brigitta Olubas was also launched.

Given Hazzard's international reputation, not to mention the emotional charge, ethical demand and sheer artistry of her fiction, it is hard to believe that Olubas's book is the first full-length critical study of her writings ever published—in the field of Australian literature or anywhere else. Hazzard has not languished alone, of course. There is much work still to be undertaken on many other writers of significance for Australian literature, and Cambria Press's Australian Literature Series (edited by Susan Lever) here continues to play a key role. Another reason for this extraordinary gap in Hazzard's case is suggested by Olubas's carefully considered subtitle. The rubrics of 'literary expatriate' and 'cosmopolitan humanist' cohere with the merest outline, given above, of Hazzard's biography; her 'cosmopolitan mobility' through the cities of the world. Without strong national orientation, at least in Australia, writers can be invisible in terms of the institutional underpinnings of local reception, arguably still a factor in the longevity and renewal of attention to literary work. Yet this may be exactly what makes Hazzard's work so timely for Australians now, given the porosity of national borders in the era of the internet and accelerated globalisation. Though transnational literary connections are not new, global circuits are increasingly embedded in daily life. This is also evident in the global, rather than cultural nationalist, orientation of much recent writing by Australians. Olubas's account is informed by this contemporary perspective, but understands Hazzard's writing in terms of twentieth century's changing global dynamics, highlighting her fiction's engagement with McCarthyist and Cold War eras, and—in *The Great Fire*—with the reconfigured global system within which Anglo-American cultural coordinates have increasingly been decentred. Hazzard's 'literary expatriate' career therefore illuminates the trajectory that leads to the present moment in which we find ourselves.

A complex web of historical and geopolitical tensions, expressed in the conjunction of 'cosmopolitanism' and 'humanism', stands at the heart of this analysis which presents us not only with the first full retrospective of Hazzard's career but also a series of exact and exacting readings highlighting the paradoxes that motivate her writings. A succinct biographical outline, provided in the introduction, leads into larger themes crystallised through Olubas's reading of three early pieces, all published in *The New Yorker*, a selection that prefigures elements in Hazzard's mature fiction. The generally chronological organisation of subsequent chapters, treating Hazzard's writings mostly in order of publication, offers a steadying thread through sometimes labyrinthine interconnections necessarily produced across the whole. Each individual chapter of the book is self-sufficient, but when read overall, our attention is increasingly drawn to cumulative patterns that speak to abiding concerns: earlier works are shown to prefigure middle and later works, while later works reprise and nuance earlier scenes and concerns.

There is, however, one very purposeful deviation from the book's otherwise chronological ordering. In Chapter One, we are given a clarifying account of Hazzard's non-fictional writings about the United Nations, and a significant frame for the ethical demand imposed by the fiction. Frequently dismissed as naïve, or as espousing conservative liberal humanist ideals, Hazzard's *Defeat of an Ideal* (1973) and *Countenance of Truth* (1990) are presented by Olubas as rhetorically powerful, 'meticulously researched' and prescient works about moral corruption in the United Nations, root and branch, with its US-policy dominated inception and administration. Most importantly, there is her early, trenchant exposure of the Austrian Nazi Party connections of UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim. In analysing these writings and their context, Olubas develops a highly nuanced account of the literary tradition with which Hazzard aligns herself, with reference to her vantage point as a detached observer inside the organisation. We learn that Hazzard never had, nor claimed to have, executive power within the UN, having been employed in clerical roles only. This institutionally gendered position, in Olubas's argument, underwrites her claims about corruption, given her inside access, while conferring on her the privilege of detachment from the workings of power. Olubas shows how Hazzard's fiercely guarded moral authority draws explicitly from and coheres with the tradition of literary humanism represented by John Milton, as articulated for instance by mid-century literary critic Lionel Trilling. In this context, the phrase 'cosmopolitan humanist' gains remarkable purchase. For me, it recalls Alvin Gouldner's (1957) sociological use of 'local' and 'cosmopolitan' to describe the opposed affiliations of people working in the same organisation. Similarly, Hazzard's deepest allegiance was not to the local hierarchy of her 'organisation', but to the 'cosmopolitan' view of human communities that the organisation was meant to serve. Hazzard's affiliations may newly resonate for those who find themselves struggling today within organisations captive to neoliberal and managerialist agendas.

We also learn, however, that what spurred Hazzard's critique was belief in the United Nations as an ideal. Olubas discerns as one of her key principles—a core value pervading her fiction—steadfast adherence to veracity, or truth. This immediately brings to mind Edward Said's *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), with its call for intellectuals to adopt the model of the autonomous literary amateur who speaks truth to power. In this area, Olubas opens new doors, prompting further questions about Hazzard's prosecution of the role of public intellectual in an international setting—and it would be fascinating to know how this informed, reflected or articulated her views and responses in other areas too. Hazzard's humanism—her individualism and literary idealism—emerges as her central ethos, and one that is not reducible to superficial prescriptions, especially given the way Olubas defines and

locates her particular inflection of humanism, its historical and biographical definition, its contradictory belatedness and political prescience, in the Cold War moment she occupied.

I have dwelt on this chapter because of its import for the fiction. The gravity of this worldly frame—testifying to Hazzard's ideological framework, progressive politics and ethical concerns—orients without foreclosing the readings that follow. In these the focus moves to the intricacies of Hazzard's narrative design and composition, to the elements of what many agree is her dazzling prose style. The chapter on the short fiction shows how Hazzard's critique of the institution structures two collections, *People in Glass Houses* (1967), satirising an 'Organisation' analogous to the United Nations, and *Cliffs of Fall and Other Stories* (1961), treating the modern institution of marriage. In the substantial following chapter, Olubas reads the two Italian novellas, *Evening of the Holiday* (1966) and *The Bay of Noon* (1970), as a paired set. Contesting early responses that dismissed these as lightweight, middlebrow romances, Olubas elucidates their exquisite narrative design, showing how this contributes to their thematisation of the 'middle', of 'middleness'. The 'middle' in Hazzard's fiction is a temporality that emerges in tension with the extremity of prolepsis or belatedness, of love that strikes prematurely, that is deferred or missed through false starts, mismatches or untimely endings. The middle forms itself against plot and character coordinates that enfold the vastness of the globe, elements amplified in Olubas's readings that follow, in chapters on each of the two major novels, the culminating works of the oeuvre: *The Transit of Venus* (1980) and *The Great Fire* (2004).

Much can be gleaned from Olubas's readings of all four novels, individually and collectively, and I will not paraphrase them here, except to note key dimensions arising. These include the structural centrality of Hazzard's practices of citation and allusion. Olubas draws attention to her profound love of the poetic lyric—by Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi, as well as by Shakespeare, Keats, Hopkins and Auden—and notes how the lyric paradoxically expresses itself through her extended fictional narratives. Perhaps Hazzard's orientation to this set of fatherly precursors compensates for her extra-national location, supplementing what Olubas identifies as the 'absence of *patria* as a point of vitality' in her writings (11). Elective literary fathers may also address, or ballast, the gender crossings that populate her fiction. Perversity in the configuration of Hazzard's characters is an aspect that Olubas presents and analyses compellingly as a recurring trope or theme across the four major fictional works, with their incestuous brother-sister pairings, age-inappropriate lovers, and tropes of gender indeterminacy. In Hazzard's universe, if I understand the implications, perversity signals narrative delay, re-routing desire and thwarting not only narrative closure and the finality of death, but also, importantly, working to suspend moralising or pre-emptive judgement. Most importantly, drawing on Peter Brooks (for whom melodrama is the privileged narrative mode of post-revolutionary secular modernity), Olubas shows the ways in which Hazzard's temporal structures work melodramatically, through processes of concealment and encryption. Moral truths are occulted and narratively withheld, or coded proleptically; that is, they may be present in plain sight but cannot be deciphered until the moment of recognition arrives, usually belatedly, or in hindsight. Hazzard thus draws the reader into ethically complex structures of knowing and unknowing, in narratives shot through with a melancholic awareness that truth, self-knowledge, and the full coordinates for moral judgement often arrive too late.

Olubas's stated intention, from the outset, is to map the terrain, to pave the way for further work to be done, and this proves to be, if anything, modest with respect to what she has already achieved. Clearly, though, there is more to be understood about Hazzard's enabling

literary networks, her friendships and exchanges with peers and contemporaries, in Australia, New York, and elsewhere. The literary and intellectual partnership between Hazzard and Steegmuller is an important element awaiting full consideration. Similarly, Olubas's treatment of both the selected shorter and occasional writings and the major works will surely draw readers—whether for the first time or returning to Hazzard anew—inspiring them to try out new perspectives and approaches. In my view, this book—exacting though it is in pursuit of the intricacies of Hazzard's design—demonstrates what a gift intelligent, passionately engaged and theoretically attuned literary criticism can be. Olubas helps us to grasp the warp and weft of Hazzard's ethical concerns, channelled through her commitment to the word and to her art, in her historical context and development over time. She shows us how these threads are intricately woven together, at every stage, in the realisation of what now appears as an astonishingly imaginative fictional universe, one that also makes its urgent address to the concerns of the contemporary world.

Brigid Rooney, University of Sydney

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