

# Introduction

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This volume represents the first collection of scholarly writing on the work of Shirley Hazzard. It follows the first monograph on her work, published in 2012, and represents a welcome expansion of the critical conversation about this important author. Shirley Hazzard presents something of a critical conundrum. Born in Australia in 1931, she has lived in the US since 1951, publishing acclaimed works of literary fiction that sit just outside some defining stylistic and cultural frames of reference including mid or late twentieth-century modernism, self-reflexive postmodernism and, most particularly, national literature. Her output – four novels, two collections of short stories, a memoir, two non-fiction monographs and a collection of essays – draws on her own vast familiarity with European culture, while locating itself within a more expansive global topography and appealing to a cosmopolitan sensibility that looks both back and forward. Her writing is noted for its self-reflexive delicacy of phrasing, its wit and irony, its intensely personal resonances and the finely realised sense of place it evokes. While her work has been granted the highest honours – the US National Book Award (in 2003, for *The Great Fire*) and National Book Critics Circle Award (in 1980, for *The Transit of Venus*) and Australia's most prestigious literary prize, the Miles Franklin Award (in 2004, for *The Great Fire*) – and has largely remained more or less continuously in print, signalling an ongoing engagement with generations of readers, it has until now not generated a sustained scholarly dialogue. This collection of essays by major literary scholars initiates this overdue conversation. It takes up questions of the poetics and the ethics of Hazzard's work, and considers the global and the political scope of her fictional universe. In the process it traverses the critical terrain of the operations of romance, the significance of global perspectives in reconfiguring the spaces of late modernity, the role and place of moral and ethical considerations and questions of human wisdom, insight and error, as well as the vexed question of belated and gendered modernism at the mid and late twentieth century.

The collection is divided into five parts, which follow for the most part the chronology of Hazzard's literary career, with the first three parts devoted to each of her first three novels. The fourth part revisits the question of chronology by pairing her early writing on the UN, both fiction and non-fiction, with *The Great Fire*, her last novel, through the critical

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rubric of the mid-century, which provides the subject matter of both. The final part presents two discussions of Hazzard's biography, providing a further illuminating context for her literary output.

In Part I, taking Hazzard's first novel, *The Evening of the Holiday* (1966) as their subject, John Frow and Fiona Morrison observe its transitional qualities in terms of Hazzard's own progression from short story to novel, with Frow noting that in form this work is closest perhaps to that of the novella "in terms of its length, its intensity, and its tight thematic focus", and that therein lies in part its achievement: "Its writing is marked by restraint, subtlety, and concision of phrasing. There is no stretching after significance: things mean what they are, and yet they mean it so intensely and so economically that every word, every image seems charged with an inner force." Frow pursues the detail of this restraint through the novel's formal and stylistic properties, its use of dramatic irony and the agonising play of what he terms its "comedy of incommensuration", which he notes "is never fully absorbed by [its] tragic tone". At the heart of his discussion is his consideration of Hazzard's striking complication of human and narrative time, the deferring of "the force of things remembered", the "future anterior" of his title, which is to be understood finally in aesthetic terms. Fiona Morrison also begins from an awareness of the "intermediate" position of this first novel, which leads her to consider Hazzard's engagement with "narrative, figurative and thematic questions of transition", within the carefully construed mode of "pastoral elegy" with its "related questions of gendered apprenticeship, female inheritance and mid-century writing". Morrison's concern with the properties of elegy and the pastoral foregrounds the "deeply ceremonial love affair" between Hazzard's Anglo-Italian protagonist Sophie and the Sicilian architect Tancredi, inflected at every point with what she calls "Italy's ambiguous deep time" with its circumscription of loss, what Hazzard calls in the novel the "intricate lasting nature of any form of love", which has preoccupied her across her writing life. Morrison notes the role conventionally played by the pastoral and elegy within the career of the classical poet, and argues that *The Evening of the Holiday* does work akin to this for Hazzard: her "romance narrative engages the mode of pastoral elegy as part of a process of Sophie's self-fashioning through the persistent demonstration of composure and self-possession in the face of overwhelming antiquity and associated historical and personal loss".

Hazzard's second novel, *The Bay of Noon* (1970), is examined in diverse but mutually informing ways across the three chapters of Part II. In "Another Journey to Italy", Lucy Dougan examines a web of intertexts that bind this novel to the postwar Italian neorealist cinema which provides, fleetingly, part of its subject matter, and to the modernist literary heritage around which it enigmatically and elliptically hovers by teasing out connections with Roberto Rossellini's *Journey to Italy* (1953), which in turn engages with James Joyce's long short story "The Dead". Dougan extends these references to consider Hazzard's novel within the literary tradition of the "art romance", which traces the passage of northern protagonists "into a fantasy south", a space of "erotic excitement, heightened experience, and most importantly, art", a progress defined by incessant searching for a point of "creative origin" which is never achieved. Dougan argues that these "small, local, almost inconsequential acts of intertextual engagement" enacted by the novel align with a larger reality of "the imaginative reconstruction of a Naples buried by centuries of tourism and years of war". Brigid Rooney relocates the novel's setting away from the chronotopic specificity carved out by Dougan, into a mobile cosmopolis of displacement and depatriation. Rooney's essay takes as a point of departure the oblique conclusion of the novel, which sees a speculative

## Introduction

further journey away from the port of Naples towards Capri, away from the strata of departure and arrival that structure, so much of Hazzard's global topography, to the metaphors of colonial exploration. From this reference point, Rooney prizes Hazzard's own birthplace, Sydney, away from the security of a biographical point of origin, suggesting rather that it is "no more than one coordinate among many in the wider, global arc of cities traversed, networked and configured in Hazzard's fiction". What aligns Sydney and Naples in Rooney's reading is their status as province, "the repressed, generative site of those earlier dreams that recede and qualify the encounter with strange new places, dreams that enable the traveller to develop her 'exquisite blend of receptivity and detachment' ". Sharon Ouditt reads *The Bay of Noon* within the frame of travel writing to account for the strange centrality of the city itself in the narrative: "What is striking about the novel is less the narrative arc that propels Jenny forwards than the fascination with Naples as a city in and for itself; the investment in attempting to understand it on its own terms, rather than dipping into the clichés in which it has been veiled by less patient visitors." Ouditt's discussion also returns us to the importance of questions of temporality in Hazzard's work, suggesting that Naples here "represents old Europe, Ancient Europe and modern Europe all at once", while refusing "an ordered or ordering perspective": "there seems to be no plan . . . Instead it resembles an undifferentiated backstage muddle, but one inflected with potent, if discontinuous, historical references".

Part III brings us to *The Transit of Venus* (1980), the first of Hazzard's two long, prize-winning novels. *Transit's* dense complexity preoccupies the authors of both chapters, with Gail Jones describing the novel as a "densely notated system of precedents" in which "all actions are anticipated, literary exemplars are co-present, there is a kind of assumption here that signs and symbols everywhere abound and that one must read with an awareness of the occult and occultation". Here again, temporality has a defining presence, inflecting the novel's many registers, what Jones terms Hazzard's "complicated artifice". Jones traces the novel's intricate poetics of vision, the flawed and mistaken seeing of characters but also of readers, which she describes as "a kind of contest between art and science, touch and vision", where invisibility itself takes on material and narrative force. Robert Dixon's discussion of *Transit's* literary intertexts and resonances recalls these features which are also discussed in earlier chapters. He draws on the novel's citations, both oblique and overt, of Thomas Hardy and Dickens, but also of contemporary and popular culture, including the *Titanic* and the portrait photography of Cecil Beaton. Both Dixon and Jones note the reference to Edward Bulwer-Lytton's "genuinely preposterous novel" *Zanoni* in *Transit's* opening scene, with Dixon connecting it to Dickens, present perhaps most graphically in Hazzard's novel through reference to David Lean's 1946 film of *Great Expectations*, while Jones foregrounds instead *Zanoni's* sensational plot, "a triangulated romance in which death expresses love", which anticipates the melodrama of *Transit*, while interconnecting even more intricately with its succession of shipwrecks, when she notes parenthetically that "Hazzard perhaps knew that *Zanoni* was also the name of a famous Australian shipwreck – the *Zanoni* sank off the coast near Adelaide, in a freak storm, in 1865." Both Dixon and Jones attend, finally, to the novel's gravity, with Dixon addressing "the relation between re-reading, disclosure, and ethical responsibility" that obtains through the plot's succession of veiled and secreted crimes, linking the private world of the protagonists with the larger traumas dominating and defining the postwar world, and Jones observing that Hazzard's concern is with "how to imagine great historical forces at work in ordinary lives".

This sense of the weight of unimportant and unhistoric lives within the broad canvases of postwar political life is taken up by Nicholas Birns and Claire Seiler in Part IV. Seiler relocates Hazzard's last novel *The Great Fire* (2003) back in time a half-century to the period of its subject matter. In Seiler's reading, at the centre of the novel is "not its outwardly affirmative romantic storyline, but rather a distinctly mid-twentieth-century meditation on forms and experiences of suspension". She observes the deep ambivalences that mark the novel's politics, alongside the invocations of suspension, rather than suspense, determining its narrative and style, arguing that "suspense . . . provides a false clarity: it gives purpose, it invokes necessity, and it promises an ending. Where suspense is clarifying, suspension is not." This stylistic feature provides a distinctive vantage point through which we might read Hazzard's last novel through historical displacement as a mode of precise engagement, as Seiler concludes: "The mid-century suspensions of *The Great Fire* ultimately reimagine a brief, complex moment of suspension and pause, of uncertainty and deliberation, before suspense itself became a standard justification for war." Seiler's reading works to complicate our response to Hazzard's plotting and stylistics, which have themselves, as the earlier chapters have demonstrated, always been ethically and aesthetically complex. Nicholas Birns focuses squarely on Hazzard's UN writing from the postwar period itself, writing that speaks to the shadow of the war's ideological and institutional legacies. He argues, moreover, that this context is clarified in important ways when we locate it both historically and geographically; that is to say, with reference to Hazzard's often disavowed but also persistently invoked Australian origins. Birns argues that we must "understand the way there is something 'Australian' in the very idea of the UN. The United Nations could not exist without ideas of British imperial federation circulating around the turn of the twentieth century, which constituted the first meaningful rhetoric of global cooperation in the modern world". The Australian reference point for Hazzard's global perspective is thus an orientation in relation to modernity – signalled for Birns in the construction of Sydney Harbour Bridge – and the enduring legacies of British colonialism. In highlighting the "idealism" that drives the satire of *People in Glass Houses* (1967), Birns notes that Hazzard's fiction and the polemic of her public writing about the UN are deeply interconnected through her cosmopolitanism: "The confusion between the UN and NATO that Clelia Kingslake tries to sort out in the 'A Sense of Mission' reminds us that the Mediterranean in Hazzard's era was a Cold War front which the US Sixth Fleet continually patrolled, standing off the Soviet navy entering in from the Black Sea. We should not forget that Italy during nearly the entire time Hazzard lived and travelled in it bordered Yugoslavia and was very nearly a frontline state in the Cold War".

The final part sees two important biographical treatments, which provide significant contextual material for scholars and general readers of Hazzard's writing alike. Both chapters weave their account of Hazzard's life and significance around interviews conducted with the author: Jan McGuinness from 2008 to 2010 and Martin Stannard in the 1980s and 1990s, and both provide new information and insights. McGuinness provides a detailed narrative of Hazzard's life from Sydney in 1931 to Manhattan in 2010, via Hong Kong, New Zealand and Italy. These geographical coordinates are known already to Hazzard's readers through her fiction as well as through the accounts she has already provided in published interviews; in this chapter what we already know is expanded and amplified in fascinating ways. McGuinness examines anew the multiple connections between Hazzard's life story and her fiction, suggesting the ways these have become at key points difficult to disentangle, and identifying some of the key actors in both. She is able to do this partic-

## Introduction

ularly through the wealth of new information she has uncovered in her interviews over the past several years, speaking for the first time to Hazzard's sister, who still lives in Australia, and to some of her old friends in Italy, the UK, and New York. Martin Stannard describes the succession of conversations he had with Hazzard in the course of researching his 2009 biography of Muriel Spark, shedding light on one of Hazzard's most significant friendships, and the lives of these two women in the literary, intellectual and social worlds of Manhattan in the 1970s and 1980s. Stannard's chapter also includes a moving portrait of Hazzard's husband, the acclaimed literary biographer and translator Francis Steegmuller, in the failing health of his last years. In this figure, who hovers around the conversations about Hazzard's writing and her recollections, might be brought together some of the core themes of her work: memory and loss, love and the persistence of love, the daily practices and privileges of work and care.

This collection does not aim to provide exhaustive coverage of Hazzard's life and work. It seeks rather to extend the critical conversation about her place and significance for contemporary readers, and to provide the groundwork for ongoing inquiry. It demonstrates the significance of her achievement as well as something of the ways her work continues to engage readers, drawing proper attention to the value of literary writing. As John Frow remarks at the conclusion of his discussion, Luisa (from *The Evening of the Holiday*) says at one point that "perhaps if we lived with less physical beauty we would develop our true natures more", and adds that "the aesthetic", which he notes is represented in her work by Italy, as well, I would add, as by her style, her extraordinary sentences, "is both what redeems ethical imperfection and necessarily fails to do so. It is on that redemption and that failure that Hazzard stakes her writing."