

July 27, 11:00~12:00: Plenary Lecture II, Room 2-1702

Brigitta OLUBAS, University of New South Wales, Australia

## **“The space of nations is never simply their own’: Hiroshima in Australian Literature”**

### **Key words**

national literature, Hiroshima, expatriate writing, diasporic writing

### **Abstract**

In this paper I want to take up the opportunity provided by this conference on Australian Studies in Japan to consider the literary relation between Australia and Japan in terms of an expanded understanding of the forms of the nation. I will examine two very different Australian literary constructions of Japan through the representation of the event of Hiroshima in works by Nam Le and Shirley Hazzard. As a first point of departure, I wish to make use of the work of Vilashini Cooppan, who has argued compellingly for the capaciousness and the permeability of national forms and figures in her 2009 study *Worlds Within*, which examines both the “global connections” and the immense interiorities of national stories. Cooppan’s twinned or doubled movement of contraction and expansion, drawing in particular on her contention that “Nations . . . are fantasmatic objects knotted together by ambivalent forces of desire, identification, memory, and forgetting, even as they simultaneously move within, across, and beyond a series of spatial and temporal borders (us/them, territory/flow, present/past, life/death). The space of nations is never simply their own. What the structure of national identification conceives of as the outside—the world beyond the border, the cultural other outside the compact—is in fact always already inside, always already present in the very moment and process of national formation.” My second point of departure is the consideration by Yasue Arimitsu in her 2014 essay “Nation, Identity and Subjectivity in Globalizing Literature” of exiled or diasporic writers who avoid reflecting or representing the nation in their work. Arimitsu examines this writing as an account of “a human reality unenclosed by the limits of national ethic and cultural identities” and “a world whose boundaries are uncertain and unknowable”.

Nam Le’s story “Hiroshima” presents the time leading up to the American bombing of Hiroshima through the unknowing eyes of a child who will witness the event. By contrast, Shirley Hazzard represents the period after the bombing through the eyes of westerners visiting the ruined city, basing these observations on her own experience as a 16 year old who had been taken to the site in 1947. The tensions between these two literary events, separated in time and cohering around an historical event which happens outside the frame of the narrative in both cases, highlight some of the complications of national literary forms and representations. This point is compounded by the divergences between the two authors, both acclaimed in Australia and internationally. Nam Le arrived in Australia with his family as a child, as a refugee, while Hazzard left at age 17 and insists that she has no homeland. While both are characterized by their global topographies and imaginings, Nam Le tells us that his knowledge of the diverse locations of his work is based in intense but

second-hand research, while Hazzard's narratives are largely based on her own experiences. The paper will explore and build on these divergences and complications.

**OLUBAS, Brigitta**

Brigitta OLUBAS is Associate Professor of English in the School of the Arts and Media, University of New South Wales. She is President of ASAL (the Association for the Study of Australian Literature) and editor of the Association's scholarly journal *JASAL*. She has published widely on Australian literature and visual culture, including *Shirley Hazzard: Literary Expatriate and Cosmopolitan Humanist* (Cambria, 2012) supported by an Australian Research Council Discovery Award, and *Remembering Patrick White: Contemporary Critical Essays* (jointly with Elizabeth McMahon) (Rodopi, 2010). Her current research focuses on two projects: "The Literary Lives and Afterlives of Shirley Hazzard and Francis Steegmuller", which traces the literary and cultural associations of Hazzard and her husband, literary translator Francis Steegmuller, across high culture and popular forms through the long twentieth century; and a project focusing on the global materialities of combat and borders in the work of contemporary Australian artist Ian Howard. She is editing a collection of scholarly essays on Shirley Hazzard for Sydney University Press's new series on Australian Literature (forthcoming 2014), and an edition of Hazzard's nonfiction writing for Columbia University Press.