

## **A.D. Hope's "Australia"**

Hope was born on July 21, 1907, in Cooma, New South Wales, Australia. He spent most of his childhood in rural areas in New South Wales and Tasmania. He received his B.A. from Sydney University in 1928 and then went on to Oxford University for two years. He returned to Australia, working as a psychologist with the New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry. In 1937 he accepted a position as lecturer at Sydney Teachers' College, and then in 1945 at the University of Melbourne. In 1951 he was appointed the first Professor of English at Canberra University College, and held the position until his retirement in 1968. In his mid-thirties his poetry was starting to appear in periodicals, but it was not until 1955 that he published his first collection of poems, *The Wandering Islands*. After his retirement from teaching, he was appointed Emeritus Professor at the Australian National University. He was awarded the Robert Frost Award for Poetry in 1976, the Levinson Prize for Poetry in 1968, and the Myer Award for Australian Literature in 1967. He was awarded an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1972. He died on July 13, 2000 in Canberra, A.C.T, Australia.

Hope is recognized as one of the most influential and celebrated Australian poets of the twentieth century. The subjects of his verse are varied in scope, stylistically though, his poetry can be regarded as conservative. He is considered a major writer of erotic verse. Hope is also viewed as a satirical poet, as many of his works poke fun at technology, conformity, and the absurdity of modern life. His other poems explore such topics as creativity, nature, music, and the wonders of science. Hope's incorporation of myth and legend is viewed as a defining characteristic of his poems. In other works, Hope discusses the role of the artist in contemporary society and asserts his theory of poetic expression.

Hope's poetry rejects much of the modernist and postmodernist poetic forms, particularly the free verse poem, and utilizes traditional structure, i.e. the iambic quatrain as well as classical mythology and legend. His poetic theory as reflected in his verse seems to be neoclassical, outdated, and too conservative — more in line with eighteenth-century poetry than twentieth century verse. Critics have also noted the lack of any identifiable Australian material in his work and perceive him as an outsider within the tradition of Australian literature. His satirical verse has been a recurring topic of critical attention, and his nonconformist and biting viewpoint has attracted mixed reactions. Moreover, he has been derided for the self-pity, strident tone, and condescension in some of his verse. Despite the anachronistic nature of Hope's poetic oeuvre, his biting satire, the clarity of his language,

and sophistication of his poetic vision is praiseworthy and he contributed much to traditional prosody in contemporary poetry.

A Nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey  
In the field uniform of modern wars,  
Darkens her hills, those endless, outstretched paws  
Of Sphinx demolished or stone lion worn away.

They call her a young country, but they lie:  
She is the last of lands, the emptiest,  
A woman beyond her change of life, a breast  
Still tender but within the womb is dry.

Without songs, architecture, history:  
The emotions and superstitions of younger lands,  
Her rivers of water drown among inland sands,  
The river of her immense stupidity

Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.  
In them at last the ultimate men arrive  
Whose boast is not: "we live" but "we survive",  
A type who will inhabit the dying earth.

And her five cities, like five teeming sores,  
Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state  
Where second hand Europeans pollulate  
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home  
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find  
The Arabian desert of the human mind,  
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come,

Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare  
Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes  
The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes  
Which is called civilization over there.

The poem, "Australia", written in ABBA rhyme scheme, which adds a gentle, easy-going flow to the poem describes Australia as being a nation that is bleak and almost colorless, as everything seems dull and monotonous. It is a country that fades into the background, as the field uniform is meant to allow people to blend into the scenery. The poet likens the country to being like a "Sphinx", a creature of great wisdom, but whose realm of intelligence and power has now been "worn away".

The next stanza carries with it a great deal of negative residual images. He believes that Australia is a country that is old. Australia may be considered young by the world's standards, yet it is the most empty. Its superficial image may be one comparable to a woman still fresh and alert, however, inside there is nothing, only emptiness: a disparaging view of Australia as having only external beauty but no inner one.

Australia, according to the poet, is a country that has neither historical background nor culture to speak off. Yet, he believes that it has the capabilities to do so, however, the ideas are drowned among "inland sands". This can be seen as he blames the detractors for the slow erosion of Australia, where it has become a country that is no longer as intelligent as it was before.

Australia is next portrayed as a country that is nothing at all, where there are "monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth" and the five main cities, compared to "five teeming sores." The people who come to live in Australia boast not of "live[ing]" but rather boast of merely "surviv[ing]." The author is trying to put forth a point here that people who move here are rather unwelcome, and that they are "second hand Europeans" that give birth rapidly on these "alien shores" and these newcomers are like giant leeches that take in all that is good in his country.

His direct reference to patriotism comes in the last two stanzas, where he feels that there are some like him who turn gladly home to withdraw from the "lush jungle of modern thought" to seek the "Arabian desert of the human mind." This means that the author enjoys retreating from the expansive world rather to stay in a desert. The last two lines of the poem are most memorable where he envisions Australia as being the civilization and the rest of the world just being cultured apes which they merely call civilization without it really being so.

\* \* \* \* \*