

A. D. HOPE

AUSTRALIAN POET AND ESSAYIST

QUICK FACTS

INTRO	AUSTRALIAN POET AND ESSAYIST
A.K.A.	ALEC DERWENT HOPE
WAS	CRITIC POET AUTHOR WRITER LITERARY CRITIC
FROM	AUSTRALIA
TYPE	LITERATURE
GENDER	MALE
BIRTH	21 JULY 1907, NEW SOUTH WALES
DEATH	13 JULY 2000, CANBERRA (AGED 93 YEARS)

BIOGRAPHY

Alec Derwent Hope AC OBE (21 July 1907 – 13 July 2000) was an Australian poet and essayist known for his satirical slant. He was also a critic, teacher and academic. He was referred to in an American journal as "the 20th century's greatest 18th-century poet".

LIFE

HOPE WAS BORN IN COOMA, NEW SOUTH WALES. HIS FATHER WAS A PRESBYTERIAN minister and his mother a teacher. He was educated partly at home and in Tasmania, where they moved in 1911. Three years later they moved to Sydney. He attended Fort Street High School, the University of Sydney, and then the University of Oxford on a scholarship. Returning to Australia in 1931 he then trained as a teacher, and spent some time drifting. He worked as a psychologist with the New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry, and as a lecturer in Education and English at Sydney Teachers' College (1937–44).

He was a lecturer at the University of Melbourne from 1945 to 1950, and in 1951 became the first professor of English at the newly founded Canberra University College, later of the Australian National University (ANU) when the two institutions merged. At the ANU he and Tom Inglis Moore created the first full year course in Australian literature at an Australian university. He retired from the ANU in 1968 and was appointed Emeritus Professor.

He was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1972 and a Companion of the Order of Australia in 1981 and awarded many other honours. He died in Canberra, having suffered dementia in his last years, and is buried at the Queanbeyan Lawn Cemetery.

POET AND CRITIC

Although he was published as a poet while still young, *The Wandering Islands* (1955) was his first collection and all that remained of his early work after most of his manuscripts were destroyed in a fire. Its publication was delayed by concern about the effects of Hope's highly-erotic and savagely-satirical verse on the Australian public. His frequent allusions to sexuality in his work caused Douglas Stewart to dub him "Phallic Alec" in a letter to Norman Lindsay. His influences were Pope and the Augustan poets, Auden, and Yeats. He was a polymath, very largely self-taught, and with a talent for offending his countrymen. He wrote a book of "answers" to other poems, including one in response to the poem "To His Coy Mistress" by Andrew Marvell.

The reviews he wrote in the 1940s and '50s were feared "for their acidity and intelligence. If his reviews hurt some writers – Patrick White included – they also sharply raised the standard of literary discussion in Australia." However, Hope relaxed in later years. As poet Kevin Hart writes, "The man I knew, from 1973 to 2000, was invariably gracious and benevolent".

Hope wrote in a letter to the poet and academic Catherine Cole: "Now I feel I've reached the pinnacle of achievement when you equate me with one of Yeats's 'wild, wicked old men'. I'm probably remarkably wicked but not very wild, I fear too much ingrained Presbyterian caution". Cole suggests that Hope represented the three attributes that Vladimir Nabokov believed essential in a writer, "storyteller, teacher, enchanter".

Hope's editor and fellow critic was David Brooks who was responsible for posthumously publishing the *Selected Poetry and Prose of AD Hope* in January, 2000.

AWARDS

- 1956: Grace Leven Prize for Poetry
- 1965: Britannica Australia Awards for Literature
- 1966: Australian Literature Society Gold Medal
- 1967: Myer Award for Australian Poetry
- 1969: Ingram Merrill Foundation Award for Literature (New York)
- 1969: Levinson Prize for Poetry (Chicago)
- 1972: Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)
- 1976: The Age Book of the Year Award for *A Late Picking*
- 1976: Robert Frost Award for Poetry
- 1981: Companion of the Order of Australia (AC)
- 1989: New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards Special Award
- 1993: ACT Book of the Year for *Chance Encounters*
- Honorary doctorates from four Australian universities

Tiger, by A.D.Hope

An intriguing if slightly enigmatic piece by the Australian poet A.D. Hope (1907-2000). Hope was a great admirer of W.B. Yeats and I think it shows in this poem's aristocratic stance, its disdain for the values of materialism and the market place, for what Yeats called 'the fool heart of the counting-house'. So what are the paper tigers, and what is the real tiger? Well, your guess is as good as mine, but I take the paper tigers to be embodiments of that materialism, the big corporations, consumerism, the culture of conformity, and the real tiger to be the embodiment of whatever stands against that: independence of spirit, creativity, the natural world. There may seem to be a bit of a contradiction in the poem, in that in line seven we have 'the harmless paper tiger' but then in line twelve we are told that it 'riddles and corrupts the heart', which doesn't sound very harmless. But perhaps Hope means that the paper tiger is a purely human construct that has only such power over us as we allow it to have, as compared with the real tiger that exists in its own dangerous, exhilarating reality beyond us.

Tiger

At noon the paper tigers roar

— *Miroslav Holub*

The paper tigers roar at noon;

The sun is hot, the sun is high.

They roar in chorus, not in tune,
Their plaintive, savage hunting cry.

O, when you hear them, stop your ears
And clench your lids and bite your tongue.
The harmless paper tiger bears
Strong fascination for the young.

His forest is the busy street;
His dens the forum and the mart;
He drinks no blood, he tastes no meat:
He riddles and corrupts the heart.

But when the dusk begins to creep
From tree to tree, from door to door,
The jungle tiger wakes from sleep
And utters his authentic roar.

It bursts the night and shakes the stars
Till one breaks blazing from the sky;
Then listen! If to meet it soars
Your heart's reverberating cry,

My child, then put aside your fear:
Unbar the door and walk outside!
The real tiger waits you there;
His golden eyes shall be your guide.

And, should he spare you in his wrath,
The world and all the worlds are yours;
And should he leap the jungle path
And clasp you with his bloody jaws,

Then say, as his divine embrace
Destroys the mortal parts of you:
I too am of that royal race
Who do what we are born to do.

A.D. Hope