

COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE
UNIT I POETRY

AUSTRALIA – A.D. HOPE

Alec Derwent Hope AC (21 July 1907 – 13 July 2000)



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 pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

(Perth, Canberra, Adelaide, Melbourne and
Sydney)

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.



Analysis: A.D Hope was an Australian poet and essayist known for his satirical slant. He was also a critic, teacher and an academic. He was referred to in an American journal as “the 20th century's greatest 18th-century poet ”.

In the poem, "Australia" A.D Hope questions the idea that Australia is civilized. In the first five stanzas the poet talks about Australia. He describes how it is both a new and old country, geologically old but politically new and how it is both a European colony and an independent but a parasitical country. The next two stanzas talk about the wilderness of Australia.

The poet describes Australia as being a “ nation of trees, drab green an desolate Grey” that “darkens her hills “. He sees Australia as a country that is bleak and almost colourless and dull. This very much resembles the “field uniform of modern wars”, where everything is in shade of grey and green.

The poet likens the country to a ‘sphinx’. The sphinx was a figure from Egyptian myths which possessed the body of lion and head of a man. This comparison could be directly related to the author's vision of Australia.

The poet suggests that Australia’s realm of intelligence and power have now been “worn away” which suggests that Australia used to be better than it is now . He believes that Australia is a country that is old. People may call Australia “A young country, but they lie”. Australia to him is the “last of lands, the emptiest. A woman beyond her change of life, a breast still tender but within the womb is dry”. Australia may be considered as young by the world’s standards, but it is empty within. It has only external beauty but no inner beauty.

Australia to him is devoid of culture which is “without songs, architecture, and history”. He sees Australia as being a country that has neither historical background nor culture to speak of. He believes that it has the capabilities to do so, however, the ideas are drowned among “island sands”.

Australia is portrayed as a country that is nothing at all, where there are “monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth” The five main cities are compared to " five teeming sores “. The people who come to live in Australia do not boast of living but rather merely surviving.

He believes that people who move here are rather unwelcome, and they are "second-hand Europeans” that grow rapidly on these “alien shores". He sees these people as people who “drain” Australia” . For him it is a " vast parasite robber state” which has lost its original vitality.

The last two stanzas refer to the modern civilization of Australia. For Hope the civilization of Australia is nothing but the false imitation of cultured apes which is mistaken as modern civilization.
