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A. D. Hope, the Life and the Art: Let it Rip

There are two phrases that come to mind each time I think of Alec Hope. Firstly I recall his response to a story of my own when my own life went into turmoil. “Let it Rip” he proclaimed. On another occasion when he was drawn to direct me on his own story he said simply “do not deliver me neat”. Hope was dedicated to expressing the view that one should not contain feelings and, in intellectual matters, there were to be no false categorizations bounded by cause and effect. Life was to be expressed as openly as possible in the living of it and in intellectual matters, which frame his story, there were to be no false cause and effect relations posed. There was a horror, on his part, at the thought that he might be categorized in such a manner.

Of course there was for Hope quite a leap between the life lived and the writing of poetry which while drawing on the life was indeed something other. This essay therefore will be broken into two parts. I will begin with “Let it Rip” and in the process explicate why it is unlikely that Hope would be “delivered neat” and why I believe that, in a unique way, Hope was a formidable voice of the twentieth century. Finally I will draw attention to a third saying that often entered our conversations when I tried to interrogate the life; “No names, no pack drill”. This phrase influenced how he chose to transform what was of life significance to him into art as much as it did his determination to make an assessment or overall explanation of him impossible. I believe that latter point, whereby Hope invited an interest in his life, was mostly drawn towards letting his art speak for him and I believe that all that he left behind, filled with clues and false pathways, was carefully constructed to ensure that it was the poetry that survives the centuries rather than gossip and invalid cause-and-effect constructed controversies.
In inviting me to be a biographer, Hope put me through certain tests. Of course I did not know this at the time and it was in returning to notes taken on those first twenty or so weekly Friday afternoon meetings that I detected a pattern. It was early established that I worked within his preferred negative-capability context – that is, he deduced that my work was not driven by one particular “ism”, that I did not adhere to a particular belief system. His saying “No names, no pack drill” was mentioned every week and I came to understand that what was meant be this was that if he refrained from answering some questions he did so because his answers, transferred to the public arena, might come back to cause him pain or cause pain to others. He could do without “the pack drill” and was therefore unwilling to bring the “names” to my scrutiny. He was well aware also, that interpretation was an ambiguous and unreliable matter. I mention these exchanges to partly explain why I chose to have Hope represent himself by using his words in the selected notebooks. Of course this selection is at most twelve percent of the notebooks and therefore dictated by ideas outside him; representing what I considered best presented the poet, the man and the way in which he worked within the intellectual milieu of his times.

To return briefly to my being tested by Hope, I well remember the poems he chose to read to me in our first meeting. One of them, “Teaser Rams”, which had not been published at this time, was a daunting experience for me given its explicit sexuality. I was not at that time familiar with his erotic poetry. I knew as I listened to this poem for the first time that a response was anticipated. I remember it as a difficult moment. Interestingly this particular poem I heard him read on a number of occasions and each time he would respond to responses differently. At one time he appreciated the laughter; on another occasion laughter was aggravating. He noted that it was not a poem written for laughter but rather one that sought a great deal of sympathy for the woman who sought sexual satisfaction. In an earlier conversation whilst I was quizzing him on first girl-friends we were interrupted by the poet Mark O’Connor whose poetry Hope admired. His introduction of me to Mark was “Meet Ann, she eats birds for breakfast”. I was puzzled by this introduction, for obvious reasons, but later that day
when a colleague told me that Hope had expressed to her that he was concerned because my questions were leading to his confession that he was a virgin to the ripe old age of twenty-two, I began to make sense of it a little. At the time, though, I wondered why it at all mattered when he lost his virginity, and further, how one could possibly determine the truth of it. I suspected that Hope would know that his concern about my questions would be communicated to me by our mutual contact. Hope played games and he enjoyed my perplexed state. And really this state of bafflement was one that I lived in for many years in relation to what I was told, not only by Hope, but by those around him. The first lesson was always that truth is elusive, provisional and perhaps terrifying. In later years when I made the six documentary films on Hope I was given a further warning. Hope was staying with my family in Melbourne and over a number of days was subjected to numerous questions on film. At this stage having read most of his poems and his notebooks I had decided on what I saw as his main preoccupations and the questions I posed were asked in relation to these. In all there were about forty hours of interviewing of which eight hours were represented in the final six programs. As was the methodology used by the documentary team at the end of each interview I had to perform “noddies”: that is, the camera men needed to get a series of shots of me “nodding” after or during Hope’s response to questions. They also required me to ask a number of questions again so that the camera could focus on me as during the actual interviews the camera was focused on Alec. Of course this meant that Hope would answer them again but he knew that his response would not be included in the final film footage. I performed this task and Hope had the time of his life answering some of the questions in a totally different and mischievous manner to the answers that had been recorded. Which were the true ones? Again, the recognition, on my part, that I was dealing with an accomplished game-player. Truth was indeed elusive. Of course his game-playing was reserved for controversial matters, or for questions that dealt with theories he was at odds with or activities in life that he was either disinterested in or believed to have a kind of futility about them - these included politics, sport and business. On the other hand, when invited to describe his childhood, Hope does so without game-
playing and with a great deal of energy. These accounts might involve reading the bible with his mother (which he did nightly with her in his early childhood), going for walks with his younger sister in the bush of Tasmania and their particular interest in a neighbouring cow and bull paddock, creating sagas not unlike the Brontë children with his siblings, describing what he remembered as his first poem, “a long serious religious poem [for his mother] in ballad stanza consisting of fifty-two stanzas each introduced with a text from the bible and designed to teach her Christian duties” and his awareness that he had an unusually close relationship with his mother given their isolation and the fact that his father was often away attending to his duties as a minister of religion. There are moments where I watched Alec return to that place back in time and he always succeeded with his descriptions in taking me with him - this description, for example, of his kitchen which in those times was added on to the main house by a small passage given the frequency of houses being burnt down when the kitchen was incorporated in to the body of a house:

It was a long room with a huge table, a wooden table, scrubbed every day, and windows on both sides and a great range on which there was always a huge pot of black tea – just standing there and heating, keeping warm at one end – fed with wood, and that was one of my earliest jobs, getting up at 6 o’clock in the morning, making my mother a cup of tea, if there were no maids in the house to do it. And then we killed our own pigs – at least our father’s parishioners came and did this nasty job for us. We cut them up and salted them and they hung in the kitchen ceiling – very unclean. At the same end of the farm was a great bread oven. It wasn’t used the first time we went to the house. We bought out bread from the town. But during the war we couldn’t get into town. Our mother salted up the oven again… the whole thing was red hot. She pulled out the wood and put the bread in and as the oven cooled it cooked the bread. I remember it was the most delicious bread I have ever eaten.
The interview consisted of further wonderful descriptions that bring to the fore an immediacy of his childhood.

Having put aside the dilemma of a potential biographer and the recognition that what is written about anyone says as much about the biographer as it does about the subject, I return to the subject himself and to the stories he wanted to survive. Hope had given time to how he wanted to be remembered as well as how he might be remembered. In *Orpheus*, his last published book of poems, you may well remember that he asks in his poem “The Mermaid in the Zodiac”:

I wonder among what poets I shall be found,
Shall I be sorted with the goats or with the sheep?

He recognized that he did not belong with “the scribblers” of his time and concludes

I expect I shall stand, looking rather out of place,
Between the mouth-organs and the didgeridoos;
Not a sheep in sight, but a goat with a puzzled face
Among all those Kangaroos.

He also toyed with the idea of writing an autobiography but decides against this for reasons outlined in his notebooks:

“But what’s an autobiography? Surely it’s a romance of which one is oneself the hero.” These words spoken by a character in Robertson’s Davies’ novel *World of Wonders*, hit me hard as I am hesitatingly and rather ashamedly jotting down a few reminiscences with the intention of leaving them to be read after my death. The sentence I have quoted is of course not a definition. There can be many other sorts of autobiographies. The suggestion that all people who tell the story of their own life, deliberately manipulate it to show themselves in an attractive light is of course absurd. The sting lies in the alternative ideas that that one cannot help romancing about oneself. Whether one is pleased with
oneself or deeply dissatisfied or anything in between; one cannot give an impartial account since an impartial account would have to see the subject equally from within and from without and to take into account motives and aims which are actually hidden from us. No-one can help some unconscious editing just as no-one can help presenting a more rounded and coherent view of his own life than the facts probably warrant. What we omit may distort things as much as what we assemble and arrange for telling and who can omit something when everything is relevant or tell all without putting the emphasis on some things more than others. None of this is a reason for not writing an autobiography, since it presents an important, sometimes an essential part of a jigsaw which can never in any case be complete (13/6/1982).^4

In the end these jottings were developed and channeled into Peter Ryan’s edition of Hope’s selected memories titled *Chance Encounters*,^5 or chosen as entries in the notebooks, or were placed into notes labeled “Travel”, “Work-experience” *et al*, or were transformed into poetry.^6 As ever, whenever Hope considered telling his story either to me or to a larger potential audience in his notes they were always offered as half-truths – always he was aware of the difficulties of representing the truth, whether epistemological or personal. I am reminded of his jotting elsewhere that he is constantly aware of “the narrowness of the bases of knowledge of the world and the way what we are often gets in the way of what we are totally unaware”. Hope may speak of the jigsaw but he actively, when providing the pieces, would do so knowing that the pieces would not fit together.^7

*Let It Rip*

Having canvassed the un-knowable nature of the subject I wish now to engage with the theme of “Let it Rip”. By this adage I understand that Hope believed that one should express what one feels, whether anger, gloom, joy or fear. I also understand this in terms of Hope’s
work as a reviewer of others’ works or when writing a poem about well-known people – that he would do so without caring or perhaps even considering the impact it may have on these people. The principle of “Let it rip” can be governed by the need to honour some criterion of excellence perhaps in poetry, or reserved for those warranting the stings from the satiric muse or an expression in art of matters of the heart. “Let it rip” perhaps honours the subjectivity of the modernist mode whereby truth was seen as at least expressible in the representation of subjectivity or able to represent what Hope refers to in “Western Elegies” as

our occasions
of ordinary love, our daily bread of communion...

How to translate into fire-bird language the trivial
Round of my days, the chaff and chores of my office,
The lunch with a friend, the trip to the dump or the market,
The gastric attack or the Old Boys’ annual dinner?

Or, further, this “Let it Rip” may be directed as well at the metaphysics of meaning, that exists beyond one language, “which teaches that not mere words but the heart is what must be translated”.
9 We are all familiar, I suspect, with Hope’s view that poetry was not to be the overflow of feelings, and that the narrator is not himself. Hope is not saying that a poem does not find its source in the poet’s life experience, but that the sources are actually irrelevant. What is important to Hope is the error invoked when one overlooks “the fact that whether the emotion in the poem is a personal one or not, the emotion of the poem, the emotion created by the poem is another matter entirely: it is not in any sense ‘self-expression’”.
10 It is therefore problematic to read his poems as autobiographical. In reading Orpheus, for example, it would be a mistake to read the seven of the thirty-two poems in the collection that draw on the personal life as specifically autobiographical. The voice of these seven poems might tell us “I’d like some snatch before I die”,
11 or, when in his late 70s he notices his loosely wrinkled skin and other indications of old age, plead
Please God, I shall be spared that other drift
Toward the collapse of mind that haunted Swift.\textsuperscript{12}

or, in "Visitant", express the view that

Earth swings away to the cold.
Though I have what I came here to find,
Time changes and alters the mould.
As a new age replaces the old
I feel the world leave me behind.

It is not my world any more;
But of course was it ever mine?
Bred up to a different law,
I came from a distant shore
To watch, to appraise, to divine.\textsuperscript{13}

As noted, these are Hope poems where the voice is deliberately centred
in Hope’s experience. Apart from these already referred to that entail
directly rendered points of view about mortality and the anguish over
what there is left to do, and how his work might be treated after death,
there are those that draw on his childhood. Whether one is a disciple
of Freud or not, and Hope certainly was not, it is impossible when
looking at his art that deals with childhood to not consider a psycho-
logical interpretation. I remind you of his comment that

Whether one is pleased with oneself or deeply dissatisfied or
anything in between; one cannot give an impartial account
since an impartial account would have to see the subject
equally from within and from without and to take into
account motives and aims which are actually hidden from
us.\textsuperscript{14}

Dreams of course are of interest – and there were ones that particu-
larly haunted him. He had nightmares of being chased by old bulls
perhaps not unrelated to his fascination with the neighboring
paddock that he and his sister often visited. Dreams that pre-dated these consisted of his being terrified by tigers and lions that in his dream were attacking his house and all he could see were their paws. In one particular dream, he and his family were abandoning a house after an attack by tigers and lions. In the dream, Hope says, “for some strange reason we were getting into chaff bags to be hauled into a cart and driven away and my father wanted me to be put into his chaff bag; I was terrified not being with my mother”, and adds “That can tell you something about her”. Of course from the Freudian perspective this dream may not only tell us what Hope thought of his mother but also what he felt towards his father. Hope of course would deride such analysis. Freudian analysis is not rhizomic; it offers an enclosed system of analysis and if applied to his poetry would reduce it to something less mysterious and less expansive than his message. He wants his work, I believe, to keep alive the enigma of the inner world that we cannot finally know. If dreams are repeated, and if enigmatic repetitions occur in his art, they are not to be defined away by a limited system. Hope often spoke of a rage he felt as a child, a rage that he remembers relating to people not quite understanding him when he could actually understand them. This was prior to his mastery of language; it was prior to his discovery that language could beguile, could render in music the unanswerable questions of both the heart and the mind. Repetitions in Hope’s poems that draw on his childhood sources, whether nightmares or in close proximity to his land, have a resonance perhaps more akin to Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence than to the more rationalized Freudian idea concerning “a compulsion to repeat”. Whereas Freud’s “compulsion to repeat” is usually characterized by behaviour that is neurotic and signals a pathology that cannot be resolved, Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence offers another kind of affirmation which I believe is similar to Hope’s and for me explains why Hope distances himself from Freudian ideas which threaten to reduce one’s childhood experiences to mere causes in the unfolding of self.

The allure of eternal recurrence stems from its power perhaps to rescue us from the past, from its pain, from its selected memories and from a past that we are helpless within and that we cannot change.
Married to the psychological insight that in certain circumstances, entire parts of a forgotten past can return, a belief in eternal recurrence might be able to rescue the person from this kind of forgetting (that is repression) and therefore from the anguish that compulsive repetition causes. Raymond Belliotto acknowledges that it is difficult to know whether the doctrine of eternal return is “a cosmological doctrine, a hypothesis, a moral imperative, a psychological test, a reaffirmation of the death of god, or an attempt at secular redemption from the nihilistic moment”. Like Belliotto I consider that the “psychological testing” that the doctrine evokes is most pertinent and is elucidated when Nietzsche’s doctrine is understood in the context of his work as a whole. To comprehend its metaphor it requires an acceptance of Nietzschean perspectivism (that knowledge is provisional and truth-finding engages multiple perspectives); that metaphor itself for the poet, and I would add the philosopher, is not a rhetorical figure but a vicarious image with which he has replaced the concept (“The sphere of poetry”, Nietzsche argues, “does not lie outside the world, like some fantastical impossibility contrived in a poet’s head; poetry aims to be the very opposite, the unvarnished expression of truth, and for this very reason it must cast off the deceitful finery of so-called reality of cultured man”); that Dionysian insight, shared with Zarathustra, of the unbearable insight of life requires the veil of illusion or the apollonian form in order to be experienced at all and the experience of eternal recurrence comes with the functioning of the will to power. Art, as Simon Schama notes, “begins with resistance to loss”, and, “like memory, is never truly solid and seldom free of melancholy ambiguity, for it presupposes the elusiveness, if not the outright disappearance, of its subject”. Freud points out in “Mourning and Melancholia” that the work entailed in working through blocked memories can only happen if the person experiences mourning and achieves a separation from the loss of love and hate. Art perhaps does not work without a “will to power”; it perhaps accepts that the craving to “nail down transient experience”; to construct an artifact of consciousness; to enact a mourning of loss, of intensities of love or hate, is doomed to failure yet its struggle against disappearance is a heroic one that leaves traces of its defiance.
What is this doctrine and why does it demand a personal response followed swiftly by a self-consciousness that seeks a metaphorical representation? Nietzsche writes of this doctrine first in *The Gay Science*, imagining a demon that reveals what he calls “the greatest weight”:

What if, some day or night, a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest hour and say to you: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; that there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence...”

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine”.

How could this be so? The call for honesty, the call for re-evaluation, makes one self-conscious of where one stands in relation to the life lived. The eternal return was experienced by Nietzsche as the supreme thought, but also as the supreme feeling, an intensification of both intellect and affect. Nietzsche calls to the free spirits to love their fate, to accept all aspects of our living, to affirm the joy and the woe and not to wish it otherwise. “Becoming innocent” is this process of affirmation, to will a life that accepts all of what is, to wish for things to be otherwise is to deny the world and oneself; to seek revenge or to experience resentment is the choice of the herd; the “free spirit” or the “higher human type” wants nothing in his/her life to be different.

Have I gone off on a tangent here? I do not think so. My purpose was to demonstrate that Hope’s philosophies have a Nietzschean strain. Art for Hope was a way of “justifying existence”. Hope once told me that he saw no point in regretting one’s past behavior. Not only did he agree with Nietzsche that there existed a class of people
separate from others who were prepared to ask the unanswerable questions, he also believed that art, in particular poetry, and philosophical poetry, justified the world in a way formerly reserved for religion.

Hope is critical of Freud, but like Freud he has the power to seduce his readers into imaginary scenarios where we are asked to test the limits of our fears and desires.

Freud in his essay “The Uncanny” turns to E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “The Sand-Man” to explain the “true” meaning of that story. Freud’s essay is told to hypnotize his audience, to put us into a kind of trance as, just for a moment, by recognizing that the story is more than it seems on the surface, we have access to those things that we prefer to remain hidden. Yet if they do remain hidden, Freud would argue, we are in danger of compulsively repeating behavior that is pathological in origin without awareness. Poetry, perhaps, with its symbolic networks at play, with its capacity to access half-glimpsed truths, may also show us the “uncanny”, the secrets, and the deepest of fears.

Subsequently, Hope’s application of “Let it Rip” does not only cover that which he attacks with clear-headed logic and carefully chosen imagery and subject matter, it also deals with how Hope accesses his past as a source that cannot be fully defined or explicated. Indeed when I asked Hope why he avoids discussing areas of childhood and why it is important to sustain it as a secret place he responded: “It is not due to any shyness about my childhood, but mainly because I am quite aware of how much of the sources go back to that, and I keep off it because it was so important to me and I think particularly interesting. I was a small boy growing up way out in the country and away from other children”, and he added “I sometimes have been reproached for not writing about Australia when practically everything I write has got its background”.

Hope is fascinated by the relationship of the outside to the inside; between the objective and the subjective. He scrutinizes the way the objective self, or so called objective self, often forgets that one cannot be objective with oneself and that we are the object of the conscious mind at the same time that we imagine that we are separate from it. Furthermore his view that we are not only the results of the choices
that we made but also those that we did not make \textsuperscript{22} presents a man who in advocating that one should “let it rip”, is advocating that poetry when representing life does so most honestly when it accesses that which we know but do not know that we know. It is therefore comprehensible that he wishes to keep his childhood in its secret place to be accessed through poetry rather than logic and empirical description.

Hope’s theory of dreams which he posits in direct opposition to Freud does give credence to the role of an unconscious but he prefers to render them as “the dream workers” employed to access the underside of Hope the poet who is freed from grammatical correctness, from customs and laws, from structure and civilization. He delights in his dream workers because they keep him in touch in a Dionysian way with “whole theatres of improbable dreams”; he is taken over by “revelers and roisterers”, who add to scripts written during the day and make him face the fears that he represses, and these inner beings are exhaustive in their tasks providing for the sleeping mind the truth of his fears, and physical landscapes “full of colour and light that change and glow / And unfulfilled love now made up to me”. Dreams, we are told, “are the simple means a poet contrives / To tap creative energy from a host / Of clues he is forbidden to meet below / Levels of consciousness he is master of”.\textsuperscript{23} “Forbidden” is a strong word. It does emphasize that Hope in accepting the vast terrain of the unconscious does anticipate his poetry will tap it but not in order to know it other than symbolically.

There are areas in his work and in his life where “Let it Rip” performs another function. As a satirist he is a keen observer of his times and the discursive mode is one that he employs to draw attention to what he sees as foolishness. One such poem is “Rough Riders in the Chariot” in which he lets it rip at his contemporaries Patrick White and Manning Clark. I have presented it here as originally written by Hope in his notebooks (1981)\textsuperscript{24}:

Said Patrick to Manning: “Let us take the war-path,
God’s prophets of doom in his Chariot of wrath;
With ABC backing we’ll go on the air
with a message of Judgment and Death and Despair”
Said Manning to Patrick: “My God, mate, You’re right! You were born to denounce them as Habbakuk white And as I’m Henny-Penny, they’ll come at my call When I tell them the sky is beginning to fall

“Adorable blackness, O fabulous gloom! Let us bring to New Holland our tidings of doom; With my trick pack of cards and your fake crystal ball We’ll prophesy ravage and ruin for all

“But we’d better be careful, each keep to his own Pet nightmares and bugbears, since yours is the throne And mine is the fat multinational pig And the liberal thugs who protect Mr. Big.”

Said Patrick to Manning: I wholly agree; You rubbish Mal Fraser, leave Zelman to me. For invincible ignorance, mate, I’m the one Though for partisan politics you take the bun.

But why do we waste our remarkable gifts In imputing false motives and underhand shifts? Why not denounce everyone, make a clean sweep And give up just sorting the goats from the sheep?

Why not tell the whole nation they’ve all had the chips And become the four horseman of A-POCA-LYPSE, With you on your pale horse and me on my roan A-gnashing my teeth and you pointing the bone?

So Manning and Patrick together went off To lay a last wreath on the tomb of St. Gough And, returning to set all New Holland on fire Their voices were grim and their language was dire.

But these pretty prophets found, when they had done, No-one left to denounce but each other’s one; And they went round the bend- I shall prophesy now- In bitter contention for “Diper-than-Thou!

(March 1981)
Hope's poetry is steeped in irony. His poetry comes from an extraordinary mind that found the diverse emotions of the human heart in disparate traditions whether in ancient mythologies, biblical stories, rational mythologies, cosmologies and philosophies of science, of ethics, of relativities across cultures, across tongues. He dealt with the ordinary and the inexplicable and how all of these emerged from the life lived, from his experience of loving, of being alienated often as a spectator, from feeling blessed in this separation and yet damned by it. His was a mind that belonged to what he called a particular species of human being who "reflect on themselves and their surroundings and ask themselves the why and how of their existence and the cosmos as they perceive it". Most people "do not ask themselves the great how and why questions and if the questions do come up they do not pursue them but accept ready-made or conventional answers provided by religion or by the science of the day. They have no metaphysical interests or curiosity". Hope had an insatiable curiosity fed by the way he viewed his life in the living and in its changes, which even understood for a moment, do not keep their patterns to hold and understand.

In a significant sense Hope stands as a voice of the twentieth century, as much for the things he defied as for all that he affirmed.

Voice of a Century

To spend one's life amid delicate and absurd things; a stranger to reality; half an artist, half a bird and metaphysician; with no care for reality, except now and then to acknowledge it in the manner of a good dancer with the tips of one's toes; always tickled by some sunray of happiness; exuberant and encouraged even by misery - for misery preserves the happy man; fixing a little humorous tail to the holiest of things.

Hope of course condemns much of his world. His unrepentant distaste for free verse; his contempt for a world that is dictated by materialist acquisition; his amusement at the fierceness with which rationality undermines superstition and yet how this does not stop
people inventing other superstitions, sometimes ones that “wear an appearance of science – a rational structure which blinds the believers to the false premises”. His poetry is marked by the joy and exhilaration with which he is able to contemplate the hypothetical nature of all explanations of the world. Feminists, Marxists, puritans, modernists have all had a go at him and one sees their points of view as valid enough. In being a voice of a century he understood the extent to which it, as well as he, was measured by its historicity. In knowing the beast he tapped its whole ontology and topography – its history, its politics, its love-making, its art, its society, its violence, its landscape and its aesthetics.

In a short poem in 1981 titled “Politics and Logos” one recognizes that turn of mind that sees a kind of irony in a commitment to politics. Is it astute or more conservative rhetoric to justify non-engagement with political issues?

*Politics and Logos*

The Right is often wrong but it has true function;  
The Left is sometimes right but with odious union  
That the Right is on the way out, the Left is here to stay  
Unaware that it will be the Right of a later day  
We need both their visions and their gift for the absurd  
To keep our insight active and to activate the word.

Perhaps the one arena which Hope held fast to was his certainty with language, in particular poetic language that engaged with metaphysical questions. As his contemporaries broke with the old forms and denied the possibility of language representing the real, and as contemporary thought found the gap between semblance and the real widen, Hope held fast to finding the “fire-bird language” and knew simultaneously that life is a game of chance.

Allow me to end on a short poem that has the autobiographical voice but nevertheless a universal application:
Card Game

Club, diamond, heart and spade,
Under these the game is played.
Warfare, wealth, love and death
Dominate our every breath.

Players are not free to choose
Suit assigned nor hand refuse
Dealt them, careless of their skill
Shuffled blindly, well or ill.

Wealth I had no talent for;
Lacked all aptitude for war;
Death at most might set me free;
Hearts were always trumps to me.\footnote{20}

NOTES

1 Orpheus (Sydney: Collins/Angus&Robertson, 1991), 26–8.
3 Orpheus, 42.
7 Hope, Notebooks, Book XXI (1979), 10–11.
8 “Western Elegies, III: The Hoopoe”, Orpheus, 6.
10 See Hope, Notebooks, Book XIV (1972), 19: “There is no substance in this; it is moreover a dangerous delusion that swamps many a young poet at the start. Poets do deal largely in emotion; they work in it as their material, or part of their material; they create new emotion in the sense that ‘the emotions in the poem’ – part of the material – are quite different from the ‘emotions of the poem’ – the esthetic effect”.
11 “Intimations of Mortality”, Orpheus, 15.
12 “Memento Mori”, Orpheus, 56.
13 Orpheus, 43.
14 Hope, Private papers.
15 Hope, Interview with Ann McCulloch, The Dance of Language, Program One: “Biography”.
16 Raymond Angelo Belliotto, Stalking Nietzsche (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 78
28 Hope, “Card Game”, Orpheus, 32.