

**Ann McCulloch, *Dance of the Nomad: A Study of the Selected Notebooks of A. D. Hope*. Canberra: Pandanus, 2005, xxxii + 368pp.
AU \$45
ISBN: 174076168 5**

From the late 1930s until the early 1990s, A. D. Hope was a significant figure in Australian culture. From the 1960s onward one might even have called him a major figure. When Australian literature's one Nobel laureate, Patrick White, died in 1990, the *Australian's* announcement carried with it a photograph of the eighty-three-year-old Hope, taken that day, standing behind his dining table in his home in Canberra—had his lunch been interrupted?—with his left hand up to his ear as if to make sure he had caught the word properly. A. D. Hope, Judith Wright, Patrick White, they were like that, figures of intellectual, moral, cultural authority, ahead of their time, or deliberately behind it, circling around it, standing to one side of it, writing it. And yet, for years now, one has been able to stand in front of a fresh intake of students in English or Australian literature at a major Australian university and ask how many of them have heard of these figures, and hardly see a hand. Patrick White wrote several of the true masterpieces of our fiction, and the same, in terms of our poetry, could be said for Wright and Hope. Yet two-thirds of Australian literature is out of print. When last I checked, half of Patrick White was unavailable. It's not so long ago that we could have said the same for A. D. Hope and Judith Wright, though for the time being thankfully this is not the case. For Wright there are a *Collected Poems*, a biography, and a few other titles; for Hope there is a slim *Selected Poetry and Prose*.

How important an event it is, then, when something new appears—when one of the workers in the vineyard manages to pull off a minor miracle and gets a publisher to release a substantial new volume of work. It is an event to be celebrated, a victory against the tide.

In the Hope papers in the National Library of Australia is a substantial collection of notebooks kept by A. D. Hope from 1950 through, as Ann McCulloch tells us, to the death of his wife Penelope in 1988. The Library's manuscript guide lists only the notebooks from 1952 to 1976, and these, I presume, are the ones I have seen while conducting my own research: one manuscript box of them (Box 10), with ten folders inside, in each of nine of which are two duodecimo notebooks, many of them about two hundred pages in length, though some are shorter. Many if not all of them are

carefully indexed so that Hope—and his researchers after him—can find his way around them.

The Dance of the Nomad is a generous selection of entries from these notebooks. It is described on its own title-page as “A Study of the Selected Notebooks of A. D. Hope,” but it is not that: it is the selection itself, edited and with a Preface, Overview and introductory essay by Dr Ann McCulloch, of Deakin University. Her credentials in this area are strong: she was a friend of Hope’s in the last decade of his writing life (1983-93), and has published several essays and compiled and produced several hours of valuable video footage concerning his life, contacts and ideas. Her generous introductory materials in this volume are followed by the selection itself—three hundred pages of entries—divided thematically into eleven sections (“Negative Capability,” “Anti-Modernism,” “Argument and Commentary on Critics and Writers,” “What is Art?” etc.), each of which itself is given a few paragraphs of introductory comment (sometimes more) and rounded off with a set of notes.

The earliest entry is from Notebook IV (1952-56), and the latest from Notebook XXII (1981-83). McCulloch does not indicate why there are no entries for the period before 1952 or after 1983, although, concerning the former, one might make an educated guess, that the earliest notebooks may have been destroyed along with a great many other early manuscripts in a fire in Hope’s Canberra University College office in 1953, just three years after Hope had moved from Victoria to head up English teaching at the University of Melbourne’s Canberra outpost (it would still be another seven years before he became the first Professor of English at the fledgling Australian National University).

It was a rich time for Hope. *The Wandering Islands*, his long-awaited first collection, appeared in 1955 to international acclaim, and, his reputation growing steadily, the next decade saw him composing what are arguably, but only arguably, his finest poems—Hope had a double *floreat*, or perhaps it would be better simply to say a very extended one. His retirement, in 1968, brought forth a substantial *Collected Poems* (in fact two of them), but, far from a tailing off, ushered in a period of further creative growth that seemed sometimes to take even the poet himself by surprise. In the two decades following, from the early 1970s to the early 1990s, there were three collections of essays, four new collections of poetry, a memoir, verse dramas, and a good deal more. The notebooks give us an intriguing insight

into the reading and thinking behind these works. If we know what to look for—if, for example, we are researching the origins and development of a particular poem—there is a good chance that we can watch the ideas that inform it growing almost from seed. An initial entry, an entry eight pages later, another twenty-seven pages after that. Not the texts of the poems, however, for the notebooks are not quite like that: there are drafts of poems in them, and sometimes these are drafts of poems that for one reason or another have never found their way into one of Hope's collections (McCulloch indeed is to be thanked for making a few of these available for the first time). But these are late drafts, almost penultimate ones. One senses that Hope has not entered the poem here until it is almost ripe. Which brings us to an interesting distinction.

I have seen writers' notebooks that appear to have been almost an extension of their hands: coffee- and wine-stained, full of lines, images, phone numbers, shopping lists, things drafted two or three times, crossings-out, half-baked ideas, curses, laments, confessions: books to work with, to let nothing escape—books one can imagine the writer hoping will be burned or buried with them, rather than become public after their death, exposing their underwear to everyone. Hope's are not like this. My second thought, when I myself first opened them—the thought after the thought that they were such a brilliant idea—was that they were written with a double mind: to record things that Hope thought might be useful—things that he didn't want to forget, that he wanted to put away for the time he might need or know how to use them—but also with an eye to another reader, and ultimately to publication. Generally speaking, a little more of Hope is revealed than the poetry itself reveals (until one learns how to read it...), but these are not *journaux intimes*, they are not *son coeur mis à nu*. They are the products of a disciplined mind, intrigued by the paradoxes in the laws that have made it. All of those things which have come to be seen, or are coming to be seen, as hallmarks of Hope's thought—his adaptation of Keats's idea of Negative Capability, his preoccupation with Sex and Death, his fascination for the paradoxes inherent in the ideas and systems which sustain us—are not only in evidence here, but in many cases find here some of their clearest statements. It is hard to imagine anyone who reads their way through it not going away with a great deal to think about, and their own current notebook several pages advanced.

I wish I could find some two or three short entries that would give an idea, but the thought of making a judicious selection could distract one for weeks.

So let me select two or three almost at random, based on their brevity alone. This, for example, entitled “Opaque Glass,” from Book VII (1961):

Ingenious devices for letting in the light without allowing you to see out, such as modern techniques provide—e.g., glass brick walls, crinkle-glass, sanded glass and so on—remind me very much of most present-day forms of education.

Or this, entitled “More Thoughts on Economics of Time,” from Book XIX (1976):

The economics of Time gives each of us a roughly equivalent capital which cannot be bartered or exchanged. This gives the economics of time a stability which the economics of space, of goods and possessions and money does not have. But it *is* subject to inflation of a sort. Those religions which preach a life after death or before birth or which promise both in the form of a soul continually reborn in other bodies, affect the value of our time holdings in much the same way as the wildest inflation of a currency system.

But already I am betraying the notebooks, their huge range, their erudition, their humour, their scurrilousness, their incisiveness, their intellectual depth, offering nothing of the intimate glimpses of such friends and acquaintances as James McAuley and Norman Lindsay, nothing of the windows onto his own poetics, and only the merest glimpse of the edges he so frequently takes us to, makes us look over.

I wish, too, that I could be praising quite so strongly the way Ann McCulloch has arranged this book as I do the fact that she has managed to produce and have it published in the first place. McCulloch has written, in the past, about Patrick White and Nietzsche, and there is reason to think that Nietzsche has entered the fabric of her thought. Perhaps she was struck by a certain Nietzschean quality in the notebooks—the thought itself—though Hope is not quite so iconoclastic, but more particularly its epigrammatic style, one pithy morsel followed by another with no apparent need to relate or develop them. And it was Nietzsche, if I remember rightly, who first offered the idea of nomadic thought—enacting it, but also giving us the term itself. And Hope, as more than one of his poems explains, saw himself as a kind of nomad. This volume, whatever else it does, testifies eloquently to the restlessness of his thought, the way it will not settle, or settle *for*.

McCulloch is also, to judge from her Introduction and a number of her earlier published essays, a Deleuzian. Again I have sympathies in this

direction. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have made nomadic thought into a compelling concept. McCulloch's reading of Hope has become Deleuzian as she has immersed herself more and more in the latter's work: she asks, for example, whether Hope's detachment is schizophrenic or paranoiac, and gives her reasons for the question. She speaks of Hope's deterritorialisations, his creation of striated spaces. She writes of her own thematic classifications of Hope's entries as reflecting a rhizomatic reading that itself reflects something in Hope's own character. To the extent to which she moves in this direction, it seems to me, she is not so much introducing as she is channelling. This would not be so much of a problem had she done some other things first (see below), but it is a problem when it seems to have supplanted these things. On the positive side, it is a challenging and refreshing re-framing of Hope that offers us a few more clues as to how we might approach his complex, now-anti-modernist-now-almost-post-structuralist personality, and it is more or less limited to the Introduction.

The Nietzschean inflection is another matter. As a one-time scholar of Friedrich Nietzsche, McCulloch would have come across and probably known very well the Penguin Nietzsche Reader (edited and translated by R. J. Hollingdale), a selection of Nietzsche's epigrams arranged thematically, under such headings as "Philosophy and Philosophers," "Logic, Epistemology, Metaphysics," "Morality" and "Art and Aesthetics." It's an enticing and useful way of introducing Nietzsche and his thought, and one can see why it might have appealed to McCulloch, as I think it has done (every bit as much as the Deleuzian rhizomatics) as a means of ordering and presenting the Hope. But there's a significant difference. Readers of the Nietzsche can look at the bottom of the entry that appeals to them and, seeing that it is from *The Gay Science* or *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, go to that text for more, or to assess the representativeness or otherwise of Hollingdale's selection and classification. These works of Nietzsche are in print. Hope's notebooks, on the other hand, are not—at least, not until now, and this selection is all that we are going to have, for quite a time to come. To a certain extent, this is to say, the reader is at the mercy of McCulloch's classifications, and all the more so because they are not given much help to assess or counteract them. In fact the most basic—and vital—device for enabling us to do this is missing. There is no index. The reader would be well advised—strongly advised—to take very careful notes as they make their way through the selection, since, when they want to go back to it, to find something, there is going to be little else to guide them.

Why is this so important? Precisely for the reasons I began with. The publication of Australian literature is in such a parlous state that there is, for the foreseeable future, very little opportunity for correcting errors or presenting alternate versions. If one makes a selection of anything—let alone of something with so marginal a market appeal as the notebooks of A. D. Hope—then that selection is likely to stand for a very long time, and must be prepared very carefully.

I am very much in two minds about saying some of these things. In merely getting this selection into print Ann McCulloch has done A. D. Hope and the many who admire and study his work a great service. But it is also, and unnecessarily, a hasty production that might have been quite a bit better had a little more time, care and advice been taken (the volume opens, for example, with a poem Hope wrote to the editor—"Letter to Ann McCulloch"—the lineation of which has been so butchered that one barely recognises it as a poem at all).

So, congratulations, yes, and gratitude, but also some regret. The book has been published by Pandanus Books, a welcome and exciting recent development in Australian publishing. On its first page (its half-title), we are told "Pandanus Online Publications, found at the Pandanus Books web site, presents additional material relating to this book," and we are given the web address. I was going to suggest, in closing, that it is perhaps not too late to rectify the situation, and that an Index for *Dance of the Nomad* be posted on this site, or printed and pasted into copies before they leave the warehouse. But I have just heard that Pandanus Books are soon to be no more. Given the situation described in my opening paragraph, how could I be surprised?

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