

# A. D. Hope and the Ambivalence of Modernity



# A. D. Hope and the Ambivalence of Modernity:

## *Reconsiderations*

Edited by

A. D. Cousins and Dani Napton

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For Daniel

\*

For Peter and Shelley,  
for everything



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# INTRODUCTION

## A. D. COUSINS

How A. D. Hope understood and responded to modernity has been long as well as vigorously debated. Readers of his poems in particular have sought to determine, for example, just what elements of modernity he valued, repudiated, or chose to make use of throughout his long literary career. That said, before trying to engage with such matters (among others) as the present volume does, one must consider this by way of preliminary. Alluding to “the ambivalence of modernity” raises some inevitable questions, not least among them being: which, or whose, “modernity”; and “ambivalence” of what kind? A useful way to begin a response is with mindfulness of this remark by David Antin, namely, “From the modernism that you want you get the postmodernism you deserve.”<sup>1</sup> Over the last several decades there’s been a tendency, not universal of course although widespread enough, to suggest that, once upon a time, scholars would customarily offer a monolithic (or narrowly inclusive as well as homogeneously composite) and Eurocentric (or Anglophone) account of modernity. They would also customarily try to map out the modernity of their choice by attributing developmental phases to it. Now, as the tale often runs, “modernity” has been acknowledged and described rather as a multifarious, refracted, multivalent aggregate of epistemologies, outlooks, practices, and artefacts across the Cosmopolis. It cannot be comprehensively or, by definition, uniformly charted; it has multiple or uncertain chronologies; it defies constraint within neat schemata. A not unfamiliar illustration will clarify how that fable of antithesis sometimes plays out.

In Lynda Nead’s account of how her *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* differs from Marshall Berman’s *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, the fable plays

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Marjorie Perloff in her “Postmodernism / *Fin de siècle*: The Prospects for Openness in a Decade of Closure,” *Criticism* 35, no. 2 (1993), 161-92 at 177. See also David Antin, “Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching the Present in American Poetry,” *boundary 2* 1 (1971), 98-133.

out as a narrative of displacement—as an academic version of the socio-political topos “displace the predecessor.”<sup>2</sup> Berman begins his Introduction with this statement, which I quote nearly in full as it provides Nead with a starting point for repudiation of her predecessor’s research:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air.”<sup>3</sup>

Modernity, the experience of the modern, is for Berman a transnational, transcultural, multifarious and, primarily, an ambivalent phenomenon. He cites Marx—the quoted phrase acts as his book’s subtitle—but presents a vision of modernity that distinctly accords too with Nietzsche’s views on what constitutes “the modern” (as Berman himself notes, at 21-23, and as I shall discuss presently). Nead takes issue with his globalizing perspective, even if she doesn’t challenge any of its specifics, and especially with the historical overview in which he unfolds it.

That is to say, paraphrasing and glossing the passage quoted above (4-5), Nead chooses neither to agree with it in any given respect nor, likewise, to contest it. Instead, she rejects both the *marxisant* historicism in which it is defiantly embedded and Berman’s therefore unsurprising hostility to the post-structural, the postmodern.<sup>4</sup> Implicitly dismissing his developmental account of modernity, with its attempts at what might be called a cumulative periodization variously related to notions of rupture, she writes: “In [Berman’s] account, modernity, as an historical process, is total and inexorable; its ontological progress is plotted in conventional terms of early, middle and late and may be tracked in analogous forms in cities throughout the advanced world.”<sup>5</sup> She continues, “*Victorian Babylon* is a study of a far

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<sup>2</sup> Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982; rpt. London: Verso, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> See Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 32-36.

<sup>5</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 5.



more focused instance of modernity: London in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, from around 1855 to 1870.”<sup>6</sup> By way of identifying her study’s intellectual framework, she alludes to Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Michel Serres (6-8). It appears, then, that the fable of displacement shaped by Nead is, self-evidently, not just about valorising her work (dismissively yet not disrespectfully) at the expense of Berman’s. Her introduction restates, in effect, the tale of a war notionally won and lost in the late twentieth-century—as it were, a secular theomachy in which an elder god (Marx) must now be seen as ineffectual if not dead and as having been supplanted by the *fin-de-siècle* divinities of post-structuralism (Foucault et al).<sup>7</sup> A war in which Berman had shown himself to be an eager combatant, of course. Moreover, for this seems no less apparent, Nead’s understandable wariness of grand narratives—and hence her fashioning of a layered micro-narrative—finds support in the writings of those who were themselves the confident manufacturers of grand, totalizing narratives.

At first glance, it might be thought that Nead’s engagement with Berman has a tangential relevance to the questions raised at this essay’s start. But that is not so, and certainly for a couple of reasons. Her view on modernity has been unquestioningly affirmed, not very long ago, in Australia; it has been accepted as a judicious point of departure for understandings of Australian modernisms. More important, Nead suggests in her Introduction that her approach to the question of just what defines “modernity” does not “abandon the concept of modernity altogether, but ... pay[s] particular attention to the local elements that constitute modernity and to the tensions

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<sup>6</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Smith uses the apt and witty phrase “*fin-de millennium*.” See his *Modernism’s History: A Study in Twentieth-Century Art and Ideas* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1998), 16. For a sample of the divergent scholarship on modernity, see also, among a multitude of studies and across disciplinary boundaries: Ted V. McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Search for a Postliberal Order* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996); J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914* (New Haven: Yale, 2000); Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013); James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Wendy Brown, *Nihilistic Times: Thinking with Max Weber* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2023).

and irregularities that create modernity's conditions of existence."<sup>8</sup> One infers that, according to her line of thought, "modernity" is the sum of our micro-narratives about it. Past attempts at synoptic overviews of the modern have been found no longer credible. Indeed, an aim of this book is to bring a number of micro-narratives focused on A. D. Hope's apprehension of the modern into implicit dialogue. At the same time, however, the book does not lose sight of those grand narratives through which the nineteenth century established topoi that would come to pervade discourses about modernity across the twentieth century—throughout much of which Hope lived. We know most of those commonplaces well, to be sure; yet the fact that they are well known, and were so during the last century, is precisely the point. They were prominent in the then-contemporary intellectual landscape and could not be simply ignored.

### (i)

I shall consider here a single but serviceably illustrative instance: the notion of vacancy, or nihilism, given various formulations within the nineteenth century. In examining it, I shall focus representatively on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche; but, for reasons of space, I shall pay most attention to the latter—and with a necessary caveat. I am not suggesting that Nietzsche's concept of nihilism is a key to all mythologizings of the modern in the twentieth century. Rather, I'm proposing that his idea crystallizes—or emblemizes—how experience of the modern was often perceived in his lifetime and in the century thereafter.<sup>9</sup> What might seem an oblique way of beginning will actually lead to the heart of my argument. In the year after Hope's birth, Arnold Bennett published his highly successful novel *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908).<sup>10</sup> No one would connect Bennett's novels with modernism, although he was interested by the latter's different guises and,

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<sup>8</sup> Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> I am not ruling out, as one would gather, the phenomenon of Nietzsche's direct influence upon contemporary and subsequent readers. On some relevant contexts of Nietzsche, see Waller R. Newell, *Tyranny and Revolution: Rousseau to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), especially at 112-186. Cf. Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 16-18, 71-76 and Alasdair Macintyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 114-136.

<sup>10</sup> Arnold Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale*, introd. John Wain (1983; rpt. London: Penguin, 2007). Subsequent reference is from this edition.

especially, its manifestations in current fiction.<sup>11</sup> Yet his novel does continuously explore life in a world where, now, traditional and comforting systems of belief have failed (even though many people still adhere to them) and no teleological vision of individual existence seems possible: a modern world, that is to say, where large and benevolent certainties have gone forever; where the individual, in response to the impact of whatever unknowable forces, drifts along meaninglessly; where life ends in squalid dissolution.

Whether by design or otherwise, the novel's vision of private and civil life seems to harmonize in some respects with thinking by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and also Darwin. For example, as regards the last of those three, Bennett's narrator says this of Constance, one of the tale's paired heroines; "Constance, under the various influences of destiny, had remained essentially what her [devoutly religious] father had been. Not in her was the force of evolution manifest. There are thousands such."<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, Constance "suffer[s] from disgust with the modern world" and what is, to her, all its incomprehensibility.<sup>13</sup> Mention could be made, in passing, of that incomprehensibility as being shared by her sister, Sophia, though on a larger scale. Earlier, when Sophia has been described in observation of a sleeping man's face, Bennett's narrator remarks: "[The man's appearance] recalled Sophia to a sense of the inner mysteries of life, reminding her somehow that humanity walks ever on a thin crust over terrific abysses. She did not physically shudder; but her soul shuddered."<sup>14</sup> Yet as regards Schopenhauer, then Nietzsche, one could note Bennett's fondness for juxtaposing depictions of grotesque deaths, through which he emphasises that all life ends in mere sordidness.

Not far into *The Old Wives' Tale*, Bennett's narrator dwells on the mean, wretched death of an elephant owned by Wombwell's Menagerie, which visits the heroines' home town (103-104). Soon after, he describes their invalid father's accidental death, vividly portraying how it likewise demeans him by transforming him, at the last, into a gross caricature of even

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<sup>11</sup> See Patrick Donovan, *Arnold Bennett: Lost Icon* (Lewes: Unicorn, 2022), 152-63. See too John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 152-181.

<sup>12</sup> Bennett, *Old Wives' Tale*, 586.

<sup>13</sup> Bennett, *Old Wives' Tale*, 601.

<sup>14</sup> Bennett, *Old Wives' Tale*, 444.

the pitiable, bed-ridden man he had become.<sup>15</sup> John Baines's death is itself, furthermore, thereupon transformed into a symbol of his generation's simultaneously disappearing religious faith, cosily pious nationalism and politics innocent of the masses' imminent power (112-113). Similarly, toward the novel's end, Bennett juxtaposes the deaths of Gerald Scales, husband to Sophia, and of Sophia herself. Scales—the once-charming, flamboyant narcissist who squanders his inherited money and his life—dies a bizarre and beggarly outcast from society. Looking at Scales's corpse, Sophia registers minutely the distortions wrought on him by want, illness and, finally, death: "This face on the bed was painfully, pitiable old. A withered face, with the shiny skin all drawn into wrinkles! The stretched skin under the jaw was like the skin of a plucked fowl. The cheek-bones stood up, and below them were deep hollows, almost like egg-cups."<sup>16</sup> The narrator's account of her response to what she views is telling: "Sophia then experienced a pure and primitive emotion, uncoloured by any moral or religious quality .... What affected her was that he had once been young, and that he had grown old, and was now dead. That was all. Youth and vigour had come to that. Youth and vigour always came to that. Everything came to that."<sup>17</sup> The narrator adds: "It was the riddle of life that was puzzling and killing her."<sup>18</sup> And, after a fashion, it does kill her. Struck down by a severe stroke in reaction to the horror of Scales's abject death, she herself dies—having become unresponsive, altogether powerless, and with her handsome looks distorted.<sup>19</sup>

Before considering Bennett's novel in relation to some nineteenth-century statements about vacancy as a concept elemental to modern assessments of human experience, and thereafter relating those in turn to Hope, I want to glance at a pair of texts that work variations, as it were, on the motifs I've just now examined in *The Old Wives' Tale*. Those texts appeared when Hope was young, or still relatively young. The first is Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Fly" (1922, published 1923); the second, Virginia Woolf's essay "The Death of the Moth" (1941, published 1942).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bennett, *Old Wives' Tale*, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Bennett, *Old Wives' Tale*, 577.

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, *Old Wives' Tale*, 577.

<sup>18</sup> Bennett, *Old Wives' Tale*, 577.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, *Old Wives' Tale*, 583.

<sup>20</sup> Reference is from: Katherine Mansfield, *Selected Stories*, ed. D. M. Davin (1953; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 355-361; Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, 4 vols, 1 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1924), 359-361.

As does Bennett's tale, Mansfield's suggests the pointlessness of all existence and of human life in particular; but her story highlights the pointless cruelty of human life. It emphasises, too, near its conclusion that we can both recognize and be repelled by our instinct (or at least capacity) for brutal, indiscriminate destructiveness. Mansfield's story unfolds quite simply and its simplicity, its spare narrative, heightens our revulsion at the cruelty with which it ends. In the course of conversation with a former employee, a man identified solely as "the boss" is reminded of his son's death during the Great War. He asks himself, "How was it possible? [My] boy was an only son."<sup>21</sup> The narrator adds: "Ever since his [son's] birth the boss had worked at building up this business for him; it had no other meaning if it was not for the boy. Life itself had come to have no other meaning."<sup>22</sup> Amid this bewilderment and grief, the boss notices "that a fly had fallen into his broad inkpot, and was trying feebly but desperately to clamber out again."<sup>23</sup> Mansfield draws attention to the creature's powerlessness and pathos: "Help! help! said those struggling legs."<sup>24</sup> Having rescued the fly from his inkpot, and watched it free itself from residual fluid, the man proceeds repeatedly to drip ink on the insect—which repeatedly struggles to regain its autonomy.

Just for an instant, the man considers helping and sparing the creature. But, then:

[T]he boss decided that this time should be last, as he dipped the pen deep into the inkpot.

It was. The last blot fell on the soaked blotting-paper, and the dragged fly lay in it and did not stir. The back legs were stuck to the body; the front legs were not to be seen.

"Come on" said the boss. "Look sharp!" And he stirred it with his pen in vain. Nothing happened or was likely to happen. The fly was dead.<sup>25</sup>

"As flies to wanton boys," of course, yet with some differences. This theatre of petty cruelty may be a distant, microcosmic re-creation of what happened to the man's son, and to many other sons, during the Great War (note the boss's military-like command—in all its fatuity—to the insect); it seems

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<sup>21</sup> Mansfield, *Selected Stories*, 359.

<sup>22</sup> Mansfield, *Selected Stories*, 359.

<sup>23</sup> Mansfield, *Selected Stories*, 359.

<sup>24</sup> Mansfield, *Selected Stories*, 359.

<sup>25</sup> Mansfield, *Selected Stories*, 360.

also however something more than a display, in private, of trauma and displacement. It hints that an impulsive, haphazard and in fact self-divided malice is embedded in human consciousness. The reader is told: "The boss lifted the corpse on the end of the paper-knife and flung it into the waste-paper basket. But such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened."<sup>26</sup> The exact nature of that "wretchedness" isn't specified and perhaps couldn't be anyway. Nevertheless, it arguably points beyond the man's personal mental disturbance toward something in humankind at large.

Woolf's presentation of her speaker in "The Death of the Moth" differs almost completely, as one soon learns, from Mansfield's portrayal of a bereaved father in "The Fly." Even so, the two characterizations are not entirely unlike. Each figure is cast as the observer of a small death (and, the death of an insect). Each is, after a fashion, compassionate—although "the boss" kills the fly, despite a flash of pity for it, and Woolf's persona, far more compassionate than is her male counterpart, tries to save the moth. More important, Mansfield's character and Woolf's speaker both witness small deaths that become suggestive of existence's ultimate pointlessness, of the will-to-life's futility. Looking at the moth, busy to no purpose or effect in its tiny domain and uncomprehending of its vast environment, Woolf's persona says: "Watching him, it seemed as if a fibre, very thin but pure, of the enormous energy of the world had been thrust into his frail and diminutive body. As often as he crossed the pane, I could fancy that a thread of vital light became visible. He was little or nothing but life."<sup>27</sup> Pursuing this thought, the persona reflects: "[T]here was something marvellous as well as pathetic about [the moth]. It was as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life and decking it as lightly as possible with down and feathers, had set it dancing and zigzagging to show us the true nature of life."<sup>28</sup> And, she relates, when the moth's evanescent life starts suddenly to vanish:

One could only watch the extraordinary efforts made by those tiny legs against an oncoming doom which could, had it chosen, have submerged an entire city, not merely a city, but masses of human beings; nothing, I knew, had any chance against death. Nevertheless after a pause of exhaustion the legs fluttered again. It was superb this last protest, and so frantic that he

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<sup>26</sup> Mansfield, *Selected Stories*, 361.

<sup>27</sup> Woolf, *Collected Essays*, 360.

<sup>28</sup> Woolf, *Collected Essays*, 360.

succeeded at last in righting himself. One's sympathies, of course, were all on the side of life.<sup>29</sup>

As meaninglessly to the moth on this day, Woolf's speaker indicates, so likewise to us on another. So to everything, in fact.

What those three diverse yet also evidently connected texts imply about the notion that a sense of life's vacancy—an apprehension of life's pointlessness, futility, essential emptiness—is elemental to the modern understanding of existence, will in turn illuminate, I suggest, Hope's explorations of how one negotiates a world littered with ruins and fragments. For a start, one could return to the declaration by Bennett's narrator, in *The Old Wives' Tale*, that "Constance, under the various influences of destiny, had remained essentially what her [piously Christian] father had been. Not in her was the force of evolution manifest. There are thousands such."<sup>30</sup> Whoever's evolutionism lies behind Bennett's words there, we recognize at once his narrator's intimation that human consciousness and knowledge do evolve and, amid their changing, older modes of consciousness and forms of knowledge do survive. In short, then, Constance continued to inhabit (for some blend of reasons) the now-dead mental landscape inhabited by her father before her. Bennett's passing reference to evolution readily if broadly identifies one aspect of his thought on modern ways to grasp the actualities of current human experience. Further, it buttresses, or is part of, the nihilism that one discerns in his novel as in both Mansfield's short story and Woolf's essay. The nature of those texts' variously shared nihilism is another issue; yet it is an issue that, at the last, does indeed shed light on much of Hope's verse.

If there is a moment of explicit continuity between Darwinism and *The Old Wives' Tale*, there are more substantial though implicit affinities between Schopenhauer's conceptualizing of death and each of the texts severally by Bennett, Mansfield and Woolf. As I shall go on to argue, however, there are no less substantial and more comprehensive affinities between their writings and Nietzsche's theorizing of death, nothingness, and the artist's role in society—which is precisely what takes us in the direction of Hope. But, initially, one needs to focus on Schopenhauer. In his discourse examining "Death and Its Relation to the Indestructibility of Our Inner Nature," Schopenhauer begins with the assertion that "Death is the real inspiring

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<sup>29</sup> Woolf, *Collected Essays*, 361.

<sup>30</sup> Bennett, *Old Wives' Tale*, 586.

genius or Musagetes of philosophy.”<sup>31</sup> Well afterwards, he makes this comment, which accords unmistakably with the texts considered above: “We know, of course, of no higher gamble than that for life and death. We watch with the utmost attention, interest, and fear every decision concerning them; for in our view all in all is at stake.”<sup>32</sup> “On the other hand,” he insists, “*nature*, which never lies, but is always frank and sincere, speaks quite differently on this theme” (original emphasis).<sup>33</sup> He elaborates: “Her statement is that the life or death of the individual is of absolutely no consequence. She expresses this by abandoning the life of every animal, and even of man, to the most insignificant accidents without coming to the rescue. Consider the insect on your path; a slight unconscious turning of your foot is decisive as to its life or death.”<sup>34</sup> So we have seen suggested in each of the works I’ve discussed.

Further evidence might not seem to be required here. Nevertheless, one could helpfully adduce, too, Schopenhauer’s subsequent and affirmative declaration:

Now, since nature abandons without reserve her organisms constructed with such inexpressible skill, not only to the predatory instinct of the stronger, but also to the blindest chance, the whim of every fool, and mischievousness of every child, she expresses that the annihilation of these individuals is a matter of indifference to her, does her no harm, is of no significance at all, and that in these cases the effect is of no more consequence than is the cause. Nature states this very clearly, and she never lies.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps even more distinctly than do the lines quoted thus far, these harmonize with the vision—delineated across *The Old Wives’ Tale*, “The Fly” and “The Death of the Moth”—that an individual life ultimately signifies nothing. In response to that vision, Schopenhauer nominates three courses of action. First, he posits escape from the world’s turmoil into aesthetic experience that can offer access to perception of Platonic Ideas (403-457). Second, he proposes self-realization by way of developing one’s moral consciousness (as, for example, at 589-602). Finally, he puts forward the notion of aspiring to lead a life of renunciation, of asceticism (as,

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<sup>31</sup> Reference here is to Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols, 2 (1958; rpt. New York: Dover, 2021), 463-509, at 463. Subsequent reference is from this edition.

<sup>32</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 473.

<sup>33</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 473.

<sup>34</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 473.

<sup>35</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 473.



likewise, at 634-639). Only the last of those is said to offer, as we know, the achievement of a tranquil and transcendent existence. But the most important thing here is that, when we set Schopenhauer's view on the world against his opinions on how to rise above it and ourselves, we recognize the texts respectively by Bennett, Mansfield, and Woolf to be in accord with the former rather with than the latter. A more comprehensive as well as suggestive agreement between their writings and foundational nineteenth-century formulations of the vacancy topos, to put it that way, can be found by turning to Nietzsche.

My aim here is not, as I've stressed earlier, to imply that Nietzsche's concept of nihilism is a key to all mythologies of the modern in the twentieth century. I do however want to work with the long-established proposition that Nietzsche provided a model (in other words, it was quite possible to read him as providing a set of plausible tactics) for identifying the nature of the modern and for negotiating modernity. Like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche accepts that the evident incoherence and brutality of experience in the world must now be interpreted primarily as expressing the intrinsic purposelessness of human existence, the emptiness of life in general. For example, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche alludes to "the fearful, destructive havoc of so-called world history" and "the cruelty of nature."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in *The Gay Science* he takes, as an assumption informing modern consciousness, the belief "that the way of the world is not at all divine—even by human standards it is not rational, merciful, or just. We know it: the world we live in is ungodly, immoral, 'inhuman'; for far too long we have interpreted it falsely and mendaciously."<sup>37</sup> His response to what he sees as a truly modern understanding of existence—the modern consciousness—is to characterize it in terms of a twofold ambivalence.

For a start there is his assertion that, finding ourselves caught in the shapeless, valueless tumult of the world, we can powerfully and positively react with an aesthetic creativity. This does not involve some attempt at a

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<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, eds. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (1999; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), here at 40. Cf. 23-24. Further reference is to this edition. Cf. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, ed. Oswyn Murray, trans. by Sheila Stern (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 64-65.

<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 204. Cf. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. R. Kevin Hill, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin, 2017), 554.

Schopenhauerian escape into the realm of Ideas. It means, rather, that the disorder of Becoming provokes a true artist, especially the musician or tragic poet, to set before us a beglamoured version of “the way of the world” and thereby empower us at once to confront and to engage with life’s actualities. Writing of the ancient Greeks’ mythopoeic imagination, and of Homer’s in particular, he observes (to cite one instance) early in *The Birth of Tragedy*: “The same drive which calls art into being to complete and perfect existence and thus to seduce us into continuing to live, also gave rise to the world of the Olympians.”<sup>38</sup> His text ends by discussing interplay, within “[m]usic and tragic myth,” between the Apollonian and Dionysian. There he declares:

If you could imagine dissonance assuming human form—and what else is man?—this dissonance would need, to be able to live, a magnificent illusion which would spread a veil of beauty over its own nature. This is the true artistic aim of Apollo, in whose name we gather together all those countless illusions of beautiful semblance which, at every moment, make existence at all worth living at every moment and thereby urge us on to experience the next.<sup>39</sup>

The highest purpose of art is, then, not to offer escape but to transfigure the world and reconcile us to inhabiting it—a temporary and forceful redemption of human experience from being overwhelmed by a world that “is not rational, merciful, or just.” Our nihilistic perspective, Nietzsche suggests, allows us to appreciate the achievements of the greatest Athenian tragedians. More to the point, it engenders and confirms our sense of what modern art must do.

This productive ambivalence has a counterpart in the realm of philosophy, of course. If, now adrift amidst a desacralized and devalued world, “for a long while we will not know what to do with ourselves” as Nietzsche prophesies in *The Will to Power* (27), we can nevertheless, he also insists, see our situation in terms of opportunity rather than of vacancy.<sup>40</sup> “We have forsaken the land and gone to sea!” he exclaims in *The Gay Science*.<sup>41</sup> There, he subsequently enthuses: “[W]e philosophers and ‘free spirits’ feel illuminated by a new dawn [... and] finally the horizon seems clear again,

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<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 115. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (1990; rpt. London: Penguin, 2003), at 93.

<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 119.

even if not bright; finally our ships may set out again, set out to face any danger.”<sup>42</sup> “A new species of philosopher is appearing,” he announces in *Beyond Good and Evil*. “[P]hilosophers of the future,” he goes on to call them.<sup>43</sup> The nothingness that signalizes modernity offers, in other words, opportunities to discover and (or) make something—to create, however warily. Out of a newly discerned primal nothingness, we become Creators for and of ourselves.

To set the texts respectively by Bennett, Mansfield and Woolf in relation to those foundational mythologizings of modernity by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche is to recognize at once that, although each of the texts does have points of contact with Schopenhauer’s version of the vacancy topos, each has a stronger affinity with Nietzsche’s formulation of it and response to it. Like Nietzsche, Bennett, Mansfield and Woolf suggest that, in their notionally emptied moment, humankind does not know precisely “what to do with [itself].” Yet of greater significance is this. All three authors seek to fashion the disorder of Becoming—its random cruelty, its inevitably spoiled beauty—into an aesthetic representation that invites their readers to confront and engage with the “way of the world,” which certainly “is not at all divine.” One could add that their modes of doing so accord, in effect and obliquely, with Nietzsche’s assumption that the highest, empowering art will reflect “the brotherly bond between Apollo and Dionysos,” wherein can be perceived “the pinnacle of both the Apolline and the Dionysiac artistic intentions.”<sup>44</sup> Or, as Nietzsche also asserts: “[O]nly as much of that foundation of all existence, that Dionysiac underground of the world, can be permitted to enter an individual’s consciousness as can be overcome, in its turn, by the Apolline power of transfiguration, so that both of these artistic drives are required to unfold their energies in strict, reciprocal proportion.”<sup>45</sup> That consideration of Hope’s contemporaries, positioning them in contexts illustrative of nineteenth-century fables about modernity and its ambivalence, leads directly to some consideration of how Hope himself negotiates the modern and its contrarities.

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<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 199.

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (1990; rpt. London: Penguin, 2003), severally at 70 and 140. Cf. Iris Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953; rpt. London: Fontana/Collins, 1976), 14–15.

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 115–116. Cf. *The Will to Power*, at 572–573.

## (ii)

Hope's explorations of modernity and his responses to its ambivalence—themselves at times ambiguous or, at many others, determinedly confrontational—appear from the outset of his career as a poet. One could begin at the beginning, with “The End of a Journey,” where the persona says of Ulysses's predicament, the hero having returned victoriously to Ithaca and Penelope: “He prayed but knew Athene would not come. / The gods at last had left him, and the day / Darkened about him.”<sup>46</sup> Those final words echo Sir Bedivere's famous lament near the close to Tennyson's *Morte D'Arthur*: “‘And I, the last, go forth companionless, / And the days darken round me, and the years, / Among new men, strange faces, other minds’.”<sup>47</sup> Bedivere's complaint mourns the passing of a hero (King Arthur) and his epoch, grieves at his own entering upon the alien and crepuscular times now at hand. Incorporating Bedivere's declaration into the thoughts of Ulysses, Hope at once affirms and contradicts the speech assigned by Tennyson to the last Knight of the Round Table. Ulysses accepts, as does Bedivere, that an epoch has finished; he understands that emptier days lie ahead. It is no great matter that Bedivere has to move on, physically as well as mentally, whereas Ulysses has come to journey's end in life on Ithaca. What does matter is, however, that Bedivere can hold onto the faint possibility of King Arthur's healing and immortality (256-264). Ulysses has before him an old age of imprisonment in the banality, the vacuous meanness, of everyday existence.

This we know because, in closing “The End of a Journey,” Hope has the soured Ulysses seem once again to hear the Sirens singing:

“Son of Laertes, what delusive song  
 Turned your swift keel and brought you to this wreck,  
 In age and disenchantment to prolong  
 Stale years and chew the cud of ancient wrong,  
 A castaway upon so cruel a shore?” (29-35)

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<sup>46</sup> Reference here, and unless otherwise noted, is to A. D. Hope, *Collected Poems, 1930-1965* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1966). See 1, lines 25-27. Subsequent in-text references are to line.

<sup>47</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Poems*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), 236-238. Subsequent in-text references are to line.

The hero achieves his long quest for home but, we are shown, that quest has been delusory. His loyalty to hearth and home, to his birthplace and his family, has been entrancement by a dream. As a result, his actual homecoming has withered his life, not fulfilled it. Worse still, Ulysses is an archetype of the wise man—the *prudent* man—and, here, Hope portrays him as an archetype of misjudgement, imprudence, who has exiled himself in consequence to a dystopia. Hope implies by way of Ulysses's moment of fantasy that, rather than be seduced by conventional wisdom and aspirations, Ulysses should have listened originally to the Sirens and then (as it were) "forsaken [his old] land" and "set out to face any danger"—venturing beyond the supposed comforts of the familiarly endorsed (a notion that would have been thoroughly understood by Bennett, Mansfield and Woolf.) It may well not be that Hope is in fact recalling *The Gay Science* throughout his poem's last stanza; nonetheless, in effect he captures the spirit of Nietzsche's sea-going imagery.<sup>48</sup> The first poem from Hope's first "collected poems" puts before his readers a representation of traditional pieties, of the heroic code, of a traditionally conceived purposefulness to life as reducing life to virtual nothingness.

So Hope starts and so he will diversely continue—which is not to propose that "The End of a Journey" can be presented as though it somehow epitomises everything he would write afterwards.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, having glanced at "The End of a Journey," I want now to pursue my earlier remark that Hope's responses to the ambivalence of modernity are themselves on occasion ambiguous or, often, determinedly confrontational. A point of departure could helpfully be Nietzsche's ideas of nihilism as bifold and of the true artist's role as enacting at once Dionysian and Apollonian impulses.

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<sup>48</sup> It is thus also quite reasonable to read Hope's poem as a "modern" overwriting of Tennyson's "Ulysses."

<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, different manifestations of what appears in this initial poem appear too in other poems from across his career. One could quickly cite, among many instances: "The Death of the Bird" (printed in this volume of "collected poems" at 69-71) and draw attention especially to its last four stanzas. One could likewise cite "Lot and His Daughters" (likewise, at 76-79). And subsequently there are "Moschus Moschiferus: A Song for St Cecilia's Day"; "Exercise on a Sphere"; *The Loves of Ophrys and Andrenus* along with *Sir William Herschel's Long Year*; and, "Evening Star." As regards the later poems, see respectively: *New Poems, 1965-1969* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1969), 10-11; *A Late Picking: Poems 1965-1974* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1975), 19-21; *The Age of Reason* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1985), 41-52 and 95-104; *Orpheus* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1991), 34. Cf. F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry*, new edition (1950; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), 72.

Like his three contemporaries whom I've discussed above, Hope can capture throughout his verse "the cruelty of nature" (not least, of human nature) and display the world's being "ungodly, immoral, 'inhuman'" thereby refusing to "[interpret] it falsely and mendaciously." For an example, one could adduce his "Moschus Moschiferus: A Song for St Cecilia's Day." The title of Hope's poem brings together the Siberian Musk Deer (that is, *Moschus Moschiferus*) and the patron saint of music, who was a martyr: what could they have in common, it might be wondered? Hope's bitter answer to that quite reasonable inquiry is this.

Hunters trap the delicately beautiful deer, which they want solely for its 'musk-pods' (4), through the power of music to allure—music played upon 'a slender flute' (10): "A wild enchantment lures him [the deer], step by step, / Into its net of crystalline sound, until / The leaves stir overhead, the bowstrings snap / And poisoned shafts bite sharp into the kill" (29-32). St Cecilia sang in honour of God; the hunters use music to a miserably and meanly destructive end, honouring the logic of the marketplace. "Cause and effect are very simply linked: / Rich scents demand the musk, and so the deer, / Its source, must soon, they say, become extinct" (42-44), Hope's persona calmly observes. Then he adds, in mocking celebration: "Divine Cecilia, there is no more to say! / Of all who praised the power of music, few / Knew of these things. In honour of your day / Accept this song I too have made for you" (45-48). His poem violently albeit coolly overturns the tradition of writing odes in commemoration of St Cecilia's feast day, refusing to associate music with harmony—heavenly or otherwise. That is to say, Hope turns away from any idea of music's being ultimately sacred in origin, or a means of worship, or intrinsically an affirmation of concord. To whatever else music might attest in our world, he suggests, it memorably does testify to humankind's capacity for callous destruction, for being inhumane: after all, through music we grotesquely and cruelly make the Siberian Musk Deer a martyr to our greed.

Hope fashions his poem, then, as a graceful narrative of horror. We are confronted with an instance of humankind's willingness not just to violate life and beauty, but to use art—and the mode of human creativity most valued by Nietzsche, it might be recalled—as the ingenious means of achieving that violation. Yet we can take a conflicted pleasure in this account of human perverseness precisely because Hope transforms the latter's macabre ugliness: because, in condemning it, Hope imposes a bitterly ironic elegance upon it. In doing so, he resembles Bennett, Mansfield, and Woolf in their aesthetic metamorphosing of life's brutality and squalor. He also however, like them, thereby realizes (with whatever