CHAPTER II: THEME OF ISOLATION / ALIENATION

You cannot build bridges between the wandering island:
The Mind has no neighbours, and the unteachable heart
Announces its armistice time after time, but spends
Its love to draw them closer and closer apart.

[The Wandering Islands]
The most exciting or unusual thing about a poet is not what he has in common with his contemporaries, but what makes him uniquely himself. A poem or a creation by the poet written in a particular framework is to evoke or not to evoke certain responses in the reader. And these responses are dependent on how the reader reads the poem and considers it and poet unique. Alec Derwent Hope too has the same opinion:

I like to think of that if a poem is any good it should be able to speak for itself and I hope that this is so for these poems, and besides, I deplore, the habit of writers explaining their own work. It seems always to smack of promotion, special pleading or apology. Once a poem is published it becomes public property and should take its chance with the world on its own merits.

Ideas, thoughts, feelings reflecting intimate personal affairs or world affairs, shaped in a special way in rhythm, rhyme and tone constitute a poem. The dominant subject at the center of all poetry is mainly man. Hope's poetry is no exception; in a very different style he deals with 'man in all aspects'. And his poetry reveals particularly the modern man of post-war era. While analyzing his poems it is observed that the pattern falls into broadly four thematic concerns—myth, erotic, love, art and self, though there are many streams flowing within each 'Self' that is man himself is the main concern of Hope. And when a poet deals with man in all aspects that itself reveals that he deals
with love, joy, death, birth, union, separation, sorrow, pain, inner conflicts, spiritual quest etc. Here the discussion is on those poems, which deal with estrangement, isolation and loneliness. The poems comprising this group are composed at different times, The End of a Journey (1930-60), The Wandering Islands (1943), The Death of the Bird (1948), The Damnation of Byron (1934-42), Aubade and Trees. Born in 1907 started writing at the age of eight, getting published in 1991, indicates that the poet has covered a long period of time. But before analyzing the poems, independently, and that too of a modern poet one should remember:

Poets like all people, belong to a time and place, and therefore any act of creative writing on their part is likely to bear the marks of milieu.\(^2\)

Every writer is a part of his society, his country, and his universe. And Hope is brilliant and significant among his contemporaries; a leading poet of his country who dealt mostly with universal themes. Most modern poetry reflects that man in general is in a difficult and unpleasant situation, where it is hard for him to know what to do. Hope's, "remarkable first volume, The Wandering Islands, was rejected by one publisher as too hot to handle. Behind (and despite) his sometimes reactionary facade, his thought and poetry have long engaged with some of the most pressing questions of our time, in a way and with an ease that the most contemporary theory still struggle to achieve."\(^3\)

It is because of this specific quality that his work is autonomous and beautiful in itself. But when a poet is engaged with some of the pressing questions of his time, then it is very important on the part of a reader to dive deep in that particular time of history.
The most commonly accepted divisions of poetry are: Ancient poetry, Medieval Poetry, Renaissance Poetry, and the Age of Materialism, Modern Poetry and Contemporary Poetry. Unfortunately Hope’s poetry got published late but he wrote during the period of modern poetry. However, according to H.M. Green, the period was of “World Consciousness and Disillusionment” particularly in Australia. The period of 1900s is known as period of great change and art in any form reflects disillusioned, lonely, shattered man coping with anxious pressures of thought and confusion on the economic front, and with new ideas on the intellectual front. Creative writing at the turn of the century revealed pessimism and the spiritual quest. Writers were generally seen toying with radical problems. In 1922 The Wasteland of T.S. Eliot was published. He uses a wide range of other poems as sources and combines elements from different literatures around the world, ultimately reflecting the pessimistic spirit and feelings of many poets of the Age.

To study the pessimistic spirit, chaos and feelings of poet it is essential to have a glance on its shaping forces. Literature has four main shaping forces: the outside pressures from the world, internal history, the people, and the physical environment. An individual with a literary bent should remember that the nineteenth century would be remembered in history for the emergence of world literature because of the gradual increase of imperialist power and colonial expansion. The British Empire was the biggest in the world, both in terms of the people and the area under her rule. Three countries of Europe – Britain, France and Germany – controlled about 45% of the world trade and 60% of the world market. This increase in colonial expansion led Europe to come into contact with cultures and literatures of Asia and Africa mainly. But it doesn’t mean that the pristine glory of European literature ended altogether. Instead it was the period of emergence of world literature and National literature particular.
The spirit of the age manifests itself in man isolated and lost in the modern world. Because of the inter-imperialist rivalries, the growing aggressiveness, feeling of hatred and opposition, conflict within Europe, the formation of the alliance system and last, but not the least, increase in the tensions in Europe, strong feeling of excitement, worry and hectic activity in quick movements pointed towards the preparation for war, and war had to be considered inevitable. Every state was ready with its war plans and strategies. It was crystal clear that once the war broke out, it would be near to impossible in limiting its extent, and it would become a general war and every country would get drawn into it directly or indirectly. Finally, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne and his wife Sarajevo provided the immediate occasion for the outbreak of World War-I. The declaration of war by Serbia was soon followed by a chain of wars, including countries from all continents.

World war-I killed millions of people, the destruction was terrible and beyond human imagination. To understand the true nature of the catastrophe and its impact mainly on European societies, it should be remembered that most of the dead and the survivors, scarred physically and mentally were the flowers of Europe between the ages of 18 and 35.

Eric Maria Remarque, who had been forced to join the German army, published a novel in English entitled *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The dedication page of the novel carries the statement: "This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by war" the war came to an end, and it was believed that would be followed by an era of peace, freedom, democracy and a better life for everyone. But as things took their course, in the next few years or so, those hopes were
belied and shattered. The power of Europe diminished as a result of war though its hold over the colonies mainly in Asia and Africa did not end. By 1931, the 'white' dominions of the British Empire became virtually free. They remained as members of what is now called the British Commonwealth of Nations, but British laws were no longer applicable to them and they pursued their own policies.

The post-war years were periods of unrest. The rise and fall of the economy during war years, the problem of reorganizing it to meet the requirements of peace and nation building, the misery caused by the war in terms of survivors who were crippled and unemployed, gave rise to widespread discontent.

Along with the atrocities of the World War-I the whole universe witnessed the brutalities and worst of inhuman acts in history, committed by the Nazis and Fascists. The German political situation after World War-I presented a confusing look. The situation was fully exploited by men like Hitler and Mussoulini. The seized political power and imposed their will on the people. They watered the seedlings of totalitarianism and 'racial exclusiveness'. Nazis believed that Jews were responsible for the misfortunes of Germany. The mere existence of Jews on earth was repugnant to the Germans, and Nazi rule under Hitler relates to the non-stop and systematic ethnic cleansing. As Nazi philosophy gave great importance to the purity of the rare as the sole criterion of nationality, that too paved the way to eliminate Jews from each sector of life. Unable to bear the pangs of poverty, many Jewish families went into exile and hundreds of them committed suicide. Still the Nazis were not satisfied. The theory of racial purity and the supremacy of the Aryan race made the Nazis consider the rest of humanity to be sub-humans; and they believed in their complete extermination and enslavement. To
accomplish this task they tried to convert Europe into huge slave and death camps.

Secondly, the term fascism has been used to describe the system set up by all the three Axis powers, namely Italy, Germany and Japan. Concentration camps were set up and antifascists and Jews were sent there and were killed. The aggressions committed by these countries mainly led to the II World War the most destructive war in history:

Ordinances were issued to root out people who were considered unstable and incurable, and within that period thousands were slaved. In July 1941 an order was issued on "the final solution of Jewish problem. This meant the planned biological destruction of the Jewish race ....."

Initially the victims were shot, but it was considered expensive and messy; therefore abominable means of killing human beings were invented by man himself. "The victims were marched into cellars, which they were told were places for bath. They were actually gas chambers with a gas proof metal door. Then the crystals were pushed and after twenty-five minutes the gas laden air was removed through exhaust pumps and the metal door was opened," which was followed by removing valuables from dead bodies that were burnt in furnaces. The ashes were thrown in nearby streams. Recently many proofs were found against Japan and Germany that show that Nazi doctors were conducting biological experiments. These doctors induced various kinds of diseases into the victim’s body; vaccines were tried and biological changes taking place were studied. This type of mass murder and persecution of the Jews came to be known as the ‘holocaust’ and is regarded throughout the world as an outrage upon civilization.
Another paramount factor which affected every country in the world was the Great Depression of 1929; the New York Exchange crashed after a steep increase; Depression spread all over Europe and affected the whole world. The course of depression led to a rapid growth in unemployment. By 1932 hundreds and thousands of people had become homeless migrants. Half a million - city workers were compelled to go back to agriculture. The Depression struck a fatal blow at liberalism, democracy and capitalism, and it also meant deprivation of homes and savings, prolonged malnutrition and mainly loss of self-respect. Two world wars, depression, and anticipation of a more terrible third world war were the experiences of all the individuals who lived through all or part of those years. “Throughout the world there was a sense of uncertainty and doubt which writers tried to express in their poetry. Poets including Guillaume Apollinaire (France), Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sasoon (England) and Gussepe Ungaretti (Italy) wrote about their experiences of the horrors of war in plain, everyday language, showing that poetry did not have to be about beautiful things but it could also be about the ugly, terrible things which are also a part of the world.” For a moment if we think, even if there had been no wars, the modern poet would have found himself in a situation much more difficult than that faced by his predecessors. Because many of the unpleasant things which haunted this generation were breakthroughs in science and technology, industrialization, new weapons of mass destruction, the decay of religious faith and moral values, the mechanization of individual personality and the drastic change from communal stability to the urban atomizing society. For writer’s man’s fate appeared uncertain, and the writers of the modern age wanted to give expression to those new depths of consciousness that had so far remained unexpressed.

In this politically prevailing confusion man felt lonely and isolated from society at large. He became estranged. It is quite evident in the age of such
turmoil and traumas, that realism gradually replaced romance, and there was a
suring from hope and confidence towards doubt and disillusionment.

Australia and Australian poets were no exceptions. In 1901 she achieved
independence, but it was quite clear that she could no longer isolate herself in
either war or peace from the affairs of Europe or Asia. But on the whole,
“Australian literature had too short a life to cover, like the literatures of the
older nations, a great variety of ages and societies. It includes, broadly, three
main periods: the colonial, nationalists, and modern.” 8 The writing of each
period varies sharply in character. The particular period of ‘Disillusion and
world consciousness’ in Australian poetry dealt with complexities and all its
problems. “Hope, McAuley, Judith Wright and in their different ways Slessor
and Fitz Gerald do ask what life is underneath, what it is  9 Their works
can be mainly termed as mirrors of life. Why writers at that particular phase
didn’t write on love, beauties of nature, hope, death and so on; what made them
lay emphasize on life and its complexities, man’s existence, essence of life and
so on was because they wanted to trace some of the underlying springs of
thought and action. In 1930s a new philosophy influenced many writers. At that
time, “in literature the outside pressures were evident, but it is difficult to
estimate how deeply or widely their diffusion went.”10 From France, England,
America came a number of influences but though no one can measure there its
impact, shades can be seen in the works of various writers. As Lindsay was
influenced by Nietzschean philosophy, in the same manner Whitman inspired
Bernard O’Dowd to believe in democracy and humanity.

Two French writers Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus received global
acclaim as existentialists. Sartre’s famous novel La Nausea (1938) means
‘nausea’ or the absurdity of life and Camu’s L’Estranger (1942) means
stranger or outsider depicting the alienation of man. Matters which are of great
interest to the existentialists are freedom, decision, investigation of
interpersonal relationships, finitude, guilt, alienation, despair, death and so on. But the main concern of existentialists lies in a situation where: "Man, freedom and his quest for authentic personal being meet with resistance and sometimes with frustration, "and" the individuals quest for authentic selfhood focuses on the meaning of personal being." Sartre asserts that for man's existence man himself is completely responsible. This philosophy begins from man's existence, which precedes his essence. According to Sartre, "We mean that man first of all exerts, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If a man, as the existentialist see him, is not definable, it is because, to begin, with he is nothing. He will not be anything later, and then he will be what he makes of himself." Thus although Australian writing emerged along its own lines, it was also indebted to writers and movements overseas. Modern Australian poetry was also inspired; purely lyrical in form it reflected personal emotions of a universal kind, some metaphysical some broadly philosophical and few satirical. Few poets looked beyond Australian frontiers and dealt with a variety of themes. All these qualities can be found in one poet who expressed beautifully through his poetic strength, and proved that he and his poetry were autonomous in content and style.

A.D. Hope is placed among the 'intellectual poets' of Australian poetry. His poetry with his own unique style reflects knowledge gained by intensive reading and extensive traveling. He writes only when he is sure of his power of writing. His works are the outcome of a deep meditation on subjects and matters of great significance. His main concern is 'main' in all aspects. "Poems such as The Death of the Bird, The Wandering Islands, Imperial Adam and Australia have become classics of Australian literature. Alongwith many others of his works, they have placed A.D. Hope firmly, and with only one or two others, in the company not only of our own finest poets, but of the finest writing anywhere in the world in the middle decades of our country."
Writers and philosophers of the time had written about the utter helplessness of man and meaninglessness of life in the context of the Global war. Hope too grappled with the theme, which he shares with many major writers of twentieth century, the theme of isolation and loneliness, which he handles in a distinct style and manner. The publication of *The Wandering Islands* (1955) was a rock like achievement. It is the title of his first collection of poems, and won him the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1958. The title of the collection and the poem of the same name strike a somber note: suffering and pity are universal and differently tackled by writers and thinkers of different Ages. But the poem *The Wandering Islands* explicitly starts with a question to make the situation of the isolated human being somewhat better. He wants to improve man’s lot so searches for a solution.

*The Wandering Islands* gives an account of a sailor left helpless on the wandering islands, which never come together, and from which he can never be rescued. The image of ‘island’ is used for the human being. Hope, however, calls them wandering which means moving aimlessly. And ‘island’ symbolizes lonely, isolated and surrounded by intolerable conditions. In the very first line the poet announces the sad and deteriorated condition of man;

You cannot build bridges between Wandering Islands;
The mind has no neighbours, and the unteachable heart
Announces its armistice time after time, but spends
Its love to draw them closer and closer a part.

These lines beautifully express man’s intolerable loneliness and unalterable condition; to overcome this he moves aimlessly from place to place. Even if there is union it is occasional. ‘The mind has no neighbour’s and the unteachable heart announces an occasional armistice’ but which ultimately
leads to their separation i.e. ‘closer and closer apart’. The union is momentary relief and in their isolation, the wandering islands challenge geographical conditions. They repel and are responsible to none. They don’t fear exploitation by Cook, De Quiro or other imperialists or colonial powers. They are not afraid of the explorers, tourists and missionaries. The island can’t be safeguarded by social or moral conventions.

The opening lines reveal the real condition of modern man too, ‘you cannot build bridges between wandering islands.’ It clearly states that in this century man is wandering aimlessly. They are unable to communicate or share thoughts and feelings each other. Even if bridges are built they can’t keep them connected together. It is an attempt in vain because the islands more apart or wander here and there. This is what exactly the state of human being is:

A refuge only for the shipwrecked sailor;
He sits on the share and sullenly masturbates,
Dreaming rescue, ...........

Here man is compared to a shipwrecked sailor and these islands are only a refuge for the doomed man; they give him momentary hope and occasion for dreaming. The island existence and shipwrecked sailor with related images run through many of Hope’s finest poetry. The shipwrecked sailor becomes the image of isolation – and is dreaming of better situations. Also getting engaged in unnatural acts to satiate his needs and desires. Yet the ‘island’ and shipwrecked sailor are unprotected from injury, grief and love caused from occasions when they rush together but it is temporary:

.... Sudden ravages of love surprise
Them like acts of God – its irresistible function
As a part of geography or an institution.

Here Hope compares 'sudden ravages of love' with acts of God. One cannot control God's act nor resist God's act so is the case with love. No doubt the act of love is very much their but this experience proves to be momentary. It is not fruitful again left alone; however this relief is soon replaced by:

An instant of fury, a bursting mountain of spray,

...........
........... the sounds
And Swirl of foam, the wandering Islands part.
But all that one mind ever knows of another,
- Or breaks the long isolation of the heart,

'The bursting of mountain spray' suggests the fast pace of the forthcoming threat of parting the wandering islands away from one another, which will further lead to loneliness and estrangement. The islands represent both individual human, and the mind.

But the most interesting and shocking final result of it all is:

'The Rescue will not take place'

The solitude and isolation of the island and mainly shipwrecked sailor cannot be improved. He is in despair and there is no hope for him to overcome the situation, as there is an open declaration by 'wave' and 'wind', nature itself, that 'rescue will not take place'. The sailor by fate and the island by nature have to be lonely and isolated.
William Walsh considers *The Wandering Islands* as one of the poems that mark the peak of Hope's achievement. It is a powerful meditative poem on the theme of isolation. It is a poem, which symbolizes the total isolation of human psyche in a world of crumbling human relationships, where man is forced to be a wandering island. The bleak chance of bridging the gap develops the terrible fear of isolation in Hope. Hope's contemplation on modern man's condition in terms of the Wandering Island is nonpareil. Hope's assessment about the contemporary life of man shows his power of acceptance and he is not moaning on this situation. Instead the entire situation of contemporary man makes him feel bitter and satiric. He is unlike John Donne. Hope's *The Wandering Islands* refutes the theory of Donne's 'island' image. Because Donne asserts in many of his writings that man is a world. Donne is his prose work which contains meditation, expostulation and prayer, each conveying a profound message uses this geographical image of island and infers that "we are connected by being the work of a single creator, all equal by being part of that creator's total universe. No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent a part of the man."  

Time and again writers of all ages had experimented with the spirit of age; their works reveal the real condition of isolated human beings. The poems, which came out during the first half of twentieth century, mostly reflected the pessimistic side of modern life, and the disillusioned depressed man was wandering like islands aimlessly. The barrenness and decay of human life is fully portrayed in *The Waste land* too which is the title of a poem by T.S. Eliot published in 1922. "It uses wide range of other poems as sources and combines elements from different literatures from around the world. It is a pessimistic poem and reflects the feeling of many poets writing in the early 1900s." But it is very evident after deep study of the poem that, ".... one of the themes of Section V, what the
thunder said, is 'the present decay, of Eastern Europe'....". In *The Wandering Islands* Hope in his unique style and beauty explains the feeling of loneliness, isolation and estrangement of a human being in general. He is not talking about decay of European neither Australian life nor he is pouring out any personal feeling through this particular poet like Mathew Arnold. The Victorian poet Mathew Arnold, often expressed the sadness of living in an age in which what one loved was often at risk of being lost and which in turn creates a mood of lonesomeness and pessimism. ".... the very title of one of his poems to Marguerite — *Isolation* anticipates their way of stating the predicament, while another to her expresses the pathos of alienation in a single image: "Yes! In the sea of life existed/....... we mortal millions live alone."

So, *The Wandering Islands* makes the characteristically solid impact of Hope's best poems, seeming to have behind it the weight of knowledge, experience and the spirit of the age which has been grasped and deeply pondered. Despair and a sense of alienation have haunted the sensitive souls and as philosophy applied to literature, the poem emphasizes man's responsibility for forming his own nature; he is entirely responsible for himself.

The sense of estrangement and loss is illuminatingly identified in *The End of a Journey* (1930-60). Hope took over thirty years to accomplish the target of writing a single poem, but the outcome shed light on many aspects. Here the discussion will highlight the fall of modern man. It is not the heroic account of *Ulysses* returning home as narrated by Alfred Lord Tennyson. But it is more meditative and realistic in its content and approach. One can feel in between a tinge of philosophy and a shade of autobiography too; Hope started writing *The End of a Journey* in 1930. He came back to Australia in 1931 to start his life afresh after many years of travel and study on the continent: The legend of Robinson Crusoe comes to mind. Unlike Hope's doomed sailor, he struggled to make the best of adverse circumstances so much so that he rescued
not only himself but also Friday. While Hope's sailor is masturbating and dreaming of harlot, Crusoe makes life comfortable for himself, preparing himself for the day he will see a rescue ship, and civilizing Friday, Hope has a sequel, to *The Wandering Islands* called *Man Friday*; The cross-reference is obvious, though Friday has a new home away from home, yet he is lonely and years for his native place so much so that:

Many return to Australia in 1931 was even more miserable than my leaving England ... I had come in the very depth of the Great Depression of the thirties.¹⁵

The title indicates that for Hope it was an end of a Journey as he came back to Australia. He contemplates over his success and failures:

Returning in 1931 to a depressed Australia, with a disappointing third class degree – he had not, it seems taken full advantage of his company at Oxford.¹⁶

Myth is an intricate part of Hope’s poetry. He transplants the ‘myth’ in his own unique way. In *The End of a Journey* for the first time the traditional hero undergoes a sea change. The poem, “Converts a legendary hero into a disillusioned common man, and thus casts ironic shadows on the original story.”¹⁷ Hope’s Ulysses is seen standing on the beach. He is not the one who leads the Trojan war in Homer, instead a modern Ulysses who is un-heroic, an old weary tired man. The heroic stature is in fragments and each part is yelling for self-introspection, pricking his conscience to reassess his journey accomplished and the journey ahead. Further exploration and attentive reading
of the poem will expose that the Ulysses of *The End of a Journey* is no more the hero of Homer, Tennyson or Dante but the common man of modern age, feeling lost, lonely and wanting to isolate himself from the prevailing conditions. The return of Ulysses after years of wandering is condemned.

The poem begins in the neo-classical mode, with the return of Ulysses. Meeting Penelope is not romantic, rather a tragic realization:

She found herself, faith wasted, valour lost,
Raped by a stranger in her sullen bed:

Hope starts from the sexual encounter of Ulysses where the classic epic ends the adventurous journey. Here, the sexual union of the couple was not of love and passion but it was like, a stranger raping her in a 'sullen bed.' Penelope is now dull, lacks vigor feels cheated and kills her natural instinct of youth. The courage, strength, vigor saved all these years ended up in rape by her hero who himself is estranged and lost. The tragic reversal of the modern hero reduces his stature into a dissipated pathetic being. The happy union of Homeric Penelope and Ulysses has degenerated into a horror and cruelty for both. The sexual act ends up in realizing:

Thought the night tedious, coughed and shook his head,
An old man sleeping with his housekeeper.

While portraying modern man's unpleasant situation the very next line proves that he is not the hero of Tennyson 'a heroic and unyielding quester' but an estranged, lost man who got up the next day with a bad hangover of the past acts; he regrets his past deeds, he rose with the dawn and stepped outside waking up and getting out, seeing the bodies which 'stank' of suitors and the
unfortunate maidens who attracted him momentarily, 'full breasted, delicate waisted and heavy-thighed'.

Here again there is an autobiographical element because during Hope's stay in Oxford he had "taken full advantage of his company at Oxford enjoying himself too much at Haycock Abbey, perhaps, under the spell of Matild Talbot and the young women who would visit her." 20

As a quester in search of knowledge, castaway to explore new areas he presents a violent picture of man being a lion who is again ready:

Setting his jaw, he turned and clambered down
A goat-track to the beach: the tide was full.
He stood and brooded on the breaking wave
Revolving many memories in his skull:

Not able to overcome his deeds, memories still pursue him. Hector represents noble men. Homer presented Hector as a man of human affections, devoted to his wife and noble in defeat and victory. But Hope's Hector is in a traumatic situation seeing his son in the grave and himself betrayed and butchered by his own people. Despair and brutalities of the world wars in addition to the atrocities of Nazis is beautifully superimposed. "The total number of the civilian population killed by the Nazis is estimated to be over ten million. These included killings through mars murders-for example, the entire male population of the village Lidice in Czechoslovakia, Heydrich and other brutalities ..." 21

Turning away from the sight of the hanging bodies, Ulysses is surrounded with a situation like a castaway. His own home is a petty kingdom and he has to sail against all odds and difficulties and nobody will come to his help neither 'men' nor 'God'. He can only stand helplessly on the beach:
He stood and brooded on the breaking wave
Revolving many memories in his skull:

Ulysses has the realization of having reached the end of a journey. He would be going nowhere. His fate is to see his own Ithaca a strange place. His situation is difficult like that of a prisoner in the cave. The terrible realization of rootlessness even in his own land is gripping. Now on his own land he is aware of the fact that ‘Athena would not come.’ Here Hope seems to be a bit non-theistic. He agrees: “Man is left to himself, and nobody can do for him what he is unable to do for and by himself.”

‘God at last had left ....’ has an autobiographical element too. Because in the poet’s childhood days his faith in God was seriously shaken. His parents were teachers and taught him to believe in the power of prayer, but the poet had a different experience. In his childhood when his mathematical sums used to be always wrong and his parents insisted that he should try and do them again, in:

......desperation I would kneel and pray to God for help and guidance. He never answered and my sins continued shaky. I put aside unworthy suspicions that perhaps God wasn’t very good at long division himself, but once the thought that He didn’t exist occurred to me, I could not shake it off....

In a very rational way Hope has conveyed his message by making Ulysses his mouthpiece. The myth of Ulysses has time and again been reconstructed by writers in their own way to convey their philosophy or message. James Joyce’s first epic-length novel, *Ulysses* hailed as a work of genius was published in 1922 – the same year when T.S. Eliot published his
widely regarded poem **The Wasteland**. In an effort to create a modern hero, Joyce deconstructed a Greek warrior into a ‘wandering Jew’. His hero, Leopold Bloom suffers the emotional trauma of betrayal and loss, while fighting the anti-Semitism of 1904 in Dublin. Homeric ‘Ulysses’ represented Stoicism and power but Joyce’s hero is an endearing human being, exiled from home facing solitude extensively.

He is “an articulation of the city of the dead. The mechanical existence and the mechanistic ethos of Industrial Man are portrayed by means of mechanical organization, mechanical characters and the deliberate deployment of mechanical clichés of language: naturalism, but with an ironic intent. We should regard the book not as the expression of Joyce himself but of a persona – the gold – like thinking – machine that is the real object of modern worship. It portrays a materialistic world entirely given over to the sterile dichotomies of the “time philosophy”.”

Hope is no doubt inspired by myth and the prevailing conditions of man. But he is not exploring the myth to show its classical grandeur or like James Joyce’s portraying something particular with an objective in mind. Instead, in his own unique way and style, he enquires and ponders about modern man who is without hope or help from man or God:

In an age and disenchantment to prolong
Stale years and chew the cud of ancient wrong,
A castaway upon so cruel a shore?”

The penultimate line of the poem has an autobiographical shade too. He was again on a cruel shore like a ‘castaway’ perhaps because he was still unsuccessful in publishing his poem and faced criticism; Australia could be the ‘cruel shore’ after returning from England. He confessed:
There followed months of walking the streets of Sydney applying for jobs advertised the papers only to find they had been filled.  

This was the end of a journey and the beginning of another one. Like the hero of *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago, the solitary exploits against the nearly impossible odds was challenging. The students of Moscow University in an open letter to Hemingway in *Inostrannya Literature* gave it this explanation:

> Everywhere people struggle for happiness, for a life worthy of man. They do not always win they must experience both misfortune and defeat. But he, who like the old man is capable of daily feats, who knows how to seize victory, does not despair after the most grievous failure. He does not despair- and continues the struggle.  

Tennyson thought of Ulysses as about to take up his wanderings again, in his old age. He had a motto, 'that all had gone by, still life must be fought out to the end'. But Hope’s Ulysses had a tinge of existentialism, “Man as isolated being is cast ignominiously into an alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent human truth, value, or meaning, and the represent man’s life as it moves from nothingness whence it comes towards the nothingness where it must end, as an existence which is both anguished and absurd.”  

In a nutshell at the center of this lonely, unhappy and decaying world stands Ulysses i.e., Hope’s modern man thinking of past follies; he sets on his Journey ahead of which he knows is on an Herculean task fully realizing the
helplessness and meaninglessness of life in its last phase. He has no hope from man, God, universe or nature and is lost and left alone as the bird of *The Death of the Bird*. Unlike trees, birds are more like man. They cannot root themselves in one place; they have to move and explore almost the whole earth, searching not only for food but also for territory, nesting sites and other necessities for survival. It all depends on the conditions, whether they are optimum, for them or else it will be fatal. *The Death of the Bird* is one of the best and finest examples of dramatic poetry, which presents somber note. It strikes the chord of heart and soul. The Eminent critic C.D. Narsimaiah opines:

The mind of an Indian reader of the little poem is telescoped to a similar experience which the legendary author of Ramayana had. As Valmiki was watching two birds, lost in love making, a hunter’s arrow killed the male bird leaving its mate distraught in its grief. Such was the sage’s empathy for the tiny thing that his soka (sorrow) was transmuted into sloka (song) which became an archetype of great beauty and tenderness (Karuna) permeating like consciousness of the Indian people and those of South Asia, uniting at once the ‘elite’ and lumpe Letarait.\(^{28}\)

Birds have inhabited the imagination of poets of all cultures and ages. Some say larks make sweet division of day and night. But for Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet it brings the message of division from their secret, paradise of union. For Christians the ‘Dove’ represents the spirit of God at the time of Jesus baptism. In the same way for the European Romantic poets of the 18\(^{th}\) and early 19\(^{th}\) century birds represented themselves with a philosophical
meaning. Shelley’s *To a Skylark* and Coleridge’s *The Ancient Mariner* are two powerful examples. For Shelley the struggle is an un bodied, unselfconscious joy, beyond the reach of senses, close to heaven and an emblem of God. For Coleridge the albatross is the harbinger of innocence and the example of tragic loneliness and isolation. Wilde’s story, *The Selfish Giant* is not mere fiction; it is the bird that heralds spring and its song melts to the brutal giant’s heart. In D.H. Lawrence’s short story *The Whistling of Birds* herald spring and new life even in the face of death. The story was powerful as it was written at the time. But for Australians the poetry of birds is part of their psyche because some of the birds and animals which are found in Australia are found no where else on the globe. Being geographically isolated with wide deserts, and cut off from the rest of humanity leads to the feeling of isolation. Australia as a lonely lands with its unique flora and fauna which gradually came to be an integral part of the poet’s imagination.

In *The Death of the Bird*, Hope returns to his preoccupation with the theme of isolation. The journey of a bird and it’s tragic and arouses a feeling of loss, hopelessness and disillusionment. In a very clear and subtle manner in the beginning itself Hope asserts:

> For every bird there is this last migration:
> Once more the cooling year kindles her heart;
> With a warm passage to the summer station
> Love pricks the course in light across the chart.

The ‘bird’ in Hope’s poem joins the migratory group in search of new mildew breeding regions. The bird’s migration is from winter regions to salubrious climates. The onset of winter brings the memory of a summer seasons elsewhere and ‘love pricks’ it to move, and also shows the way. The feeling of
love and domesticity plays a vital role in the poem. But this oscillation between seasons also manifests itself in enjoying one and missing the other. This routine is not new for the bird, as it has been performing it throughout its life; moreover, it is part of its collective consciousness. The bird's flight is at once away and towards, leaving and arriving:

Season after season, sure and safely guided,
Going away she is also coming home.

A home away from home is a paradoxical element in the bird's life. The bird is caught between motherly affection and her passion for a mate. He can't be a mother and beloved at the same time. She is continuously haunted by the home and mate left behind as she reaches the nest. She can't live happily and contented as the memory impinges her world; separation from the mate gets stronger and stronger. Finally the duty towards her 'brood' cannot stop her from joining her lover and soon the bird takes its own course:

Custom and fear constraining her no longer,
Drives her at last on the waste leagues of air.

The bird takes the bold step of returning home, all alone and in despair. Nothing is sure about her flight and she herself is aware of the danger that threatens her, which further results in isolation. Getting isolated from the group, she is all-alone in the 'unfriendliness of space'. There is no one to share the pangs and pains of distance and space. The bird alone is fighting against the entire cosmos:
Single and frail, uncertain of her place,
Alone in the bright host of her companions,
Lost in the blue unfriendliness of space,

Suddenly without warning, without reason the guiding spark of instinct winks and dies. She can’t find the path anymore and is in utter confusion. At the end, she gives up the struggle and feels, ‘no way’ and ‘no sign’; single and frail, she is not certain about her place in the universe. Because nature is unfriendly and indifferent towards the little bird, death came as a relief. However, the death of the bird makes no difference to the universe. Neither did she share her loneliness with space nor did it have grief or malice for her death.

Hope’s *The Death of the Bird* is a multidimensional poem. His bird is also the ‘soul’ in reality, a soul, which is at odds with circumstances. The journey of the soul is beautifully described and how it ends and merges with the universe. It makes the reader realize the unavoidable, predictable helplessness and frailty before the question of ‘Death’. When the poet speaks of its shunting between summer and winter it has a personal shade too. It can be also interpreted as symbolizing the poet’s hanging between domesticity and adventure of writing and exploring poetry. But the image of a bird is also something of an icon for their culture, history of space, distance and poignant loneliness. He doesn’t speak of a specific bird like the albatross, skylark, nightingale or dove. But in a way second to none, a bird in general a kin to disillusioned, lonely, isolated ‘common man’ of *The End of a Journey*, each conveying the deep meaning vividly.

*The Damnation of Byron* (1934-42) which took near about eight years to complete. It is a multifaceted poem. It presents Byron in Hell. He is damned because of his dissipation, “sickened and maddened by a surfeit of sexual contacts in which he knows himself to be quite alone.” He is tortured,
punished and very alone. When the women of Inferno receive him, the landscape is:

But cactus or euphorbia here and there
Thrusts up its monstrous phallus at the sky.
Any moving against this silvered, lustrous green
Like a pink larva over the whole dry
Savannah of hell, the bodies of women are seen.

The place where Hope sees his hero suffering is a sexual world, ‘a hell’ without air or the tenderness of trees; These are only thorny plants; it is barren and infertile. The female body is also lean and dry like ‘pink larva’ in the dry savannah. However, when he sees women he is surprised, and attracted by their beauty:

The Thighs incurred, the skin misted with light,
The mouth repeating its own rich circumflex ....
At first he moves and breathes in his delight
Drowned in the brute somnambulism of sex.

Due to his obsession with sex, Byron has fallen into the hell of sexuality. To describe his lust, Hope uses the image of a bull;

He is a kind of symbol of the male;
As a great bull, stiffly, deliberately
Cross his paddock, lashing his brutal tail,
The Sullen engine of fecundity,
Here the Byronic man is compared to a sexually obsessed bull; which is uncontrollable. The bull represents lust, full of powers, stiffly, deliberately crosses the boundaries and lashing its tail. The bull dominates the cow in coitus. It becomes aggressive in its behaviour as it only wants sexual pleasure. But for the poet the ‘bull’ is the image of man, lust and over indulgence, which makes him bitter; he expresses it as the first step of man’s downfall, the very beginning of man’s downfall from morality. In this act of procreation a sullen engine of fecundity is playing a more active role because women always play a passive role:

…. for all their cow like air,

The pale bread of their bellies magnificent rise

From the blond triangle of pubic hair,

Woman has been compared to a cow; docile, affectionate, mild, passive and tolerant. But ultimately the cow that endures the dominant act of the bull is not a loser. Immediately after the act the male realizes the transitory nature of sexual pleasure; he finds himself all alone and helpless. The overindulgence of sex is the tragedy here.

Moving ahead from the poet’s impersonal poem to a most personal, one can easily detect elements of ‘loneliness’ and personal melancholy due to lack of companionship. The best example in this category is a short poem named *Trees* from *Antechinus*, which was published in 1991. It reflects the poet’s grief and sense of loss and loneliness after the death of his wife:

Since you left me forever, I find my eyes

See things less clearly than they used to do.
After the final separation caused by 'death' the poet misses his wife every moment. His vision is getting blurred not due to old age but because of lack of companionship; he realizes that he enjoy life or know the meaning of life. The no more tree may symbolize children as he says:

That there still lives on, that in their foliage
hid, Those trees remember you.

The poet enjoyed 50 years of companionship, and now along with his children he remembers her and feels there is a vacuum in his life. The closing lines of the poem are philosophical and show how the poet comes to terms with his lonely and pathetic condition:

What I learn now is: moments of this sort
Are these that most endure.

The poet is not only sure of his lasting loneliness but aware of the fact that only these moments are going to last forever, and the time which he had spent with his wife was momentary. He believes that life is less to be enjoyed and more to be endured. However, he feels that love and companionship do alleviate the fret, worry and solitude of more in old age rather than in youth.

Next to Trees is a poem in which Hope sings an Aubade a beautiful short lyric. Aubade is the Spanish word for a love song mainly at sunrise. It is a dawn piece of failure. The opening lines declare:

She will not come now,
Turn and sleep again;
Hear the winds blow
Listen to the rain
Man is forever separated from his beloved. He is condemned to restless nights hearing the sound of rain and wind. Yet, another autobiographical element can be traced from the lines above. The poet’s grandmother had died and he thinks of her and her ambition to live a hundred years so that she could get a certificate from the Queen. However, as the title of the song suggests it is the personal loss that the singer is mourning. Though the speaker knows, ‘she’ will not come now; still he doesn’t want to continue with day today life; at sunrise he feels:

‘What is left to do?
No step on the stone,
No hand at the door;
You must sleep alone
Now and evermore

So, from the impersonal to personal poems, using myth and day to day imagery Hope clearly brings out the condition of a lonely man. He paints the picture of man standing at the center of this world, estranged, isolated and lost. Secondly, the personal melancholy due to lack of companionship is revealed.

Man’s fate appeared uncertain and frightening aspects become apparent. The primary aim was to express the absurd meaninglessness of life. In the wake of the second world-war most countries of the world experienced, agonizing problems. Despair, sense of alienation and loneliness haunted the sensitive souls like ghosts. The world was in a state of chaos and disintegration. Man was on the edge of an abyss.

Like Saturn, Hope too is in search of salvation. His ‘Ulysses’, ‘castaway’, ‘bird’ all has come to an alien world, where life was absurd and meaningless. Nothing was positive. The world presents a dismal picture of
negation. Phrases like “The Gods at last had left him”, “The Rescue will not take place”, “you cannot build bridges between wandering islands”, “love to draw them closer and closer apart”, “moments of this sort are those that most endure” from his poems deal with the theme of isolation, estrangement and loneliness. But the beauty of it is that Hope does not convey his message through an ‘ism’, but in a unique style which is ‘beautiful’ and autonomous in its own way. Hope’s attempt is different from the attempt of the rest of the contemporary Australian poets.
NOTES

5. Ibid., p. 116.
6. Ibid., p. 120.
12. Ibid., p. 15.


