Beware of Ruins Study Guide

Beware of Ruins by A. D. Hope

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Contents

Introduction

A. D. Hope's "Beware of Ruins" (1981) is a poem about memory and imagination motivated to engage by viewing ruins from a Renaissance past. Seeking the world's past arouses the poet to find and reconstruct his own past of things read and experiences lived—the ruins being, themselves, a kind of materialized memory which inspires flights into memories of one's own cultural and personal experiences. The poem is also about aging, about how one would romantically and ideally reconstruct, through ruins, another's past, but with much more difficulty, reconstruct oneself in one's own past. In this latter sense, "Beware of Ruins" gestures toward an expression of how one is dead to the past and moving toward the death in the future.

"Beware of Ruins" has been chosen for inclusion in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (1988), and in A. *D. Hope: Selected Poems* (1986). The poem appears, in terms of commentary, ignored. Perhaps the poem is thought to stand on its own without need of praise or blame, or, on the other hand, stand on its own in terms of serf-sufficiency, needing neither notes nor interpretation. While the poem most assuredly stands alone in each of these senses, "Beware of Ruins" has been underappreciated and underanalyzed, at least in the United States.

Author Biography

The foremost poet of Australia, Alec Derwent Hope, was born in Cooma, New South Wales in 1907. He was the oldest of five children of a Presbyterian minister and a former teacher, and was educated at home in most subjects by his mother and in Latin by his father. In 1911, the family moved to Campbell Town, on the east side of Tasmania. Hope was lucky enough to have access to his parents ample library of classical, English, and religious literature, which ironically, did not contain a single volume of Australian fiction or poetry, work considered at that time undeveloped by "cultured" people. Hope remembers his first verses being written when he was eight, "a pious rhyme in fifty-two stanzas - one for each week in the year - composed for my mother's birthday and designed to encourage her in her Christian duty." Hope recalls that his mother "gently suggested that I might perhaps consider improving my own conduct rather than hers." Hope also received formal education at a Quaker school in Hobart until the family moved back to New South Wales in 1921. There he resumed secondary school and became enamored with a young painter who took Hope on as a kind of protege. She thought his poetry was imitative and overly passionate. She suggested he burn it all and begin again, this time drawing from his own experiences. Hope thought that was one of his best poetry lessons. Afterwards, Hope attended the University of Sydney. Though he wanted to study medicine, his talents in the humanities commanded attention and he studied literature, philosophy, and psychology. He also co-edited the university's Arts Journal. After graduating in 1928 with a University Medal in philosophy, Hope went to University College, Oxford on scholarship to read English. His career at the venerable institution was less than dazzling. In 1931, he graduated near the bottom of his class. The experience was invaluable in that Hope studied under such literary luminaries as C. L. Wrenn (translator of *Beowulf),* J. R. R. Tolkien, and C. S. Lewis.

Hope returned to Sydney ashamed of his Oxford performance. At that time, there was an economic depression. Hope could not find a job so he went off to camp on land owned by his father. There, he began teaching himself Russian and emending Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus,* a task that would end up taking him almost fifty years. In 1932, after his sabbatical, Hope trained at Sydney's Teacher's College, and became a tutor in the arts at St. Paul's College. Hope did not find this work fulfilling and suffered bouts of temporal schizophrenia. His condition was aggravated when Hope became a relief teacher in Sydney secondary schools. In 1936, Hope began research for the Department of Education and moved to Canberra to take charge of a trades school. By the time he returned to Sydney late in 1936 he was engaged. In 1937, Hope was next appointed a lecturer in education at the same school at which he had studied, Sydney Teacher's College. This appears to have been a dreadful experience, especially when he was assigned to teach statistics: he found he knew less than some of the students who eventually taught the class. He did however, meet James McAuley, a promising young poet who read Hope's work and told him what elements to discard. This was Hope's second most valuable poetry experience. Hope was next appointed to

lecture in English at Sydney Teacher's College, a position which suited him better than his previous appointment. During this period Hope had three children.

Before he became known as a poet, Hope gained notoriety as a biting literary critic who denounced Jindyworobak, the name of a movement which tried to make poetry Australian by packing it with distinctly Australian objects and words. Hope also made a name as a radio personality, "Anthony Inkwell," who conducted children's poetry programs for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. In 1945, Hope was appointed senior lecturer in English at the University of Melbourne and held that position until 1951 when he became professor of English at its Canberra satellite campus. The Canberra campus soon became the independent Australian National University where Hope became the new university's first professor of English. There, he taught Australia's first course in Australian literature.

When Hope's artist friend told him to burn his poems and begin again, Hope saw fire as a friend. Later it became his enemy. While moving to another residence, Hope stored most of his works at the university for safekeeping. Unfortunately, a fire broke out and burned almost all of it. What remained, he put into his first book, *The Wandering Islands* (1956), which was met with a chilly reception because the poems were thought to be not Australian enough, and too "learned, bookish, and cosmopolitan." The rest of Hope's biography is literary history: a string of publications in both poetry and criticism, and a list of numerous awards. Most of them were from Australia, but Hope was appointed special consultant in poetry at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., and in 1972, received the Order of the British Empire for, among other things, his *Collected Poems* (1972). In 1979, Hope published *The New Cratylus,* in which his unrepentant views against modernism remained strong. His latest book of poems was *Orpheus*

(1991). As of the early 1990s Hope was still writing and translating.

Poem Text

Beware of ruins: they have a treacherous charm;

Insidious echoes lurk among their stones;

That scummy pool was where the fountain soared;

The seated figure, whose white arm

Beckons you, is a mock-up of dry bones

And not, as you believe, your love restored.

The moonlight lends her grace, but have a care:

Behind her waits the fairy Melusine.

The sun those beams refract died years ago.

The moat has a romantic air

But it is choked with nettles and obscene

And phallic fungi rot there as they grow.

Beware of ruins; the heart is apt to make

Monstrous assumptions on the unburied past;

Though cleverly restored, the Tudor tower

Is spurious, the facade a fake

Whose new face is a death-mask of the last

Despairing effort before it all went sour.

There are ruins, too, of a less obvious kind;

I go back; cannot believe my eyes; the place

Is just as I recall: the fire is lit,

The table laid, bed warmed; I find

My former world intact, but not, alas,

The man I was when I was part of it.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-3:

The poet as narrator cautions his reader about ruins, at this point, any ruins. Their "treacherous charm" might, at this point, remind one of a kind of cliche about women since Eve. The ruins' "insidious echoes" make them ghostly as a graveyard, and the "scummy pool" adds a tad of horror to the scene, especially with its echoes of a temporally distant fountain. This may evoke feelings of discomfort, but intrigues one to plunge farther into them, to reconstruct a past that beckons, allures one away from the present.

Lines 4-6:

Near the pool is a seated figure of white marble or plaster, white like bones are, white: the color of survival, the color of ghosts. The seated figure, like the ruins, beckons one as love once dead but come back, white like death in life, like a consumptive paleness sometimes considered beautiful. Perhaps the figure is a woman?

Lines 7-9:

Moonlight on the figure (now revealed as a woman) further associates her with love, but something lurks *behind* her appearance like a memory. Melusine is a mermaid creature from a story by Jean d'Arras written in 1387. Melusine looks human but every Sabbath turns into a kind of mermaid, more accurately, a snake from the waist down, a creature who cannot be seen by her husband lest it destroy their relationship. When he sees her in the bath one Sabbath, she runs off never to be seen again in human form. Thus Melusine is a creature of treacherous appearance, a bit evil, not to be trusted, at least from the waist down. Folded into this image is the masterful ninth line, which indicates that while moonlight might be the light of love, it lacks the warmth of the sunlight which lies "behind" it like a memory. In this way, moonlight is the ruins of sunlight, and therefore, a treacherous light.

Lines 10-12:

The moat is misleading. It is choked with irritating nettles and fungi growing in the rot-filled water. The "phallic" nature of the fungi makes the moat obscene, as if the moat were pornography filled up with images of the penis.

Lines 13-18:

In the scene of stones, pool, statue, and moat, appears a Tudor tower. Perhaps a reasonable interpretation of this stanza is that one is apt, through time, to feel that one's past—or oneself in the past—was better than it really was, good thoughts soothing the mind. Such thoughts are "monstrous assumptions," spins or interpretations of the "unburied past" made (dug up) in the present. Through interpreting the past in a good light, memory puts a kind of facade on the past (the Tudor tower). This facade is, perhaps, the last good instance one remembers, an instance the rememberer uses to cover what is and what was the crumbling tower (the past). In this stanza the past is represented by both a decaying tower and a corpse, a tower that will decay despite its facade and a corpse that decomposes despite its death mask.

Lines 19-24:

The last stanza marks a reversal of images while still adhering to the subject of memory. Where the first three stanzas involved a present narrator walking into a ruined present with a statue, pool, moat, and tower, and from it reconstructing a favorable, standing past, here the narrator walks into a past scene—perhaps a sensual one—fully intact and as beckoning as the seated figure in the first stanza. But here the man is not who he once was, is older (this poem was written when the poet was 74). This time, it is not the past scene that is in ruins, but the narrator's present serf, a man who has aged and is becoming himself a ruins. The narrator is unable to reconstruct himself as a young man in the way he might attempt to reconstruct the past of a ruined scene.

Themes

Memory and Reminiscence

The word "echoes" is the first indication that "Beware of Ruins" concerns memory. As ruins are a kind of echo of time past, an echo is a kind of ruins of time passing, an original sound decaying. The poem speaks to the problem that memory interprets the past as better than it was, perhaps because it is easier and more pleasurable for the mind. As eyes graze over ruins, trying to imagine them once again intact, so the memory (one's past eyes) grazes over one's past (ruins) and attempts to reconstruct it. What Hope finds is that while he accurately remembers a past scene he experienced, it is much more difficult to imagine himself as a younger man in the scene. Why? Because it is painful? Because he is ashamed of who he was in the past? These choices seem unlikely because of the word, "alas." It is more probable that the poet just cannot find a young serf to place back in the past he has reconstructed so pleasantly, so invitingly. In other words he is unable to reconstruct the ruins of himself. At this juncture, it could be inferred that Hope's present serf is too alive to be usurped by the past. If so, then, Hope gets this wrong and such a state is not regrettable. For only if he were dying in the present might he be able to imagine himself as a vital young man, egregiously vital. This points to a function of memory not usually made light of: that in order to remember the past the present is temporarily put on hold, paralyzed, or in decay. If the present cannot be stilled, it might be too fully alive and able, even serf-satisfied. Rather than mourning lost youth with an "alas," perhaps Hope should have understood his unconscious satisfaction with an aging self: there is no need to supplant it with a younger counterpart. This, by the way, could fit with Hope's biography, for while his first fifty years were full of doubt, displeasure and insecurity, his later years, in which he wrote "Beware of Ruins," were successful. But then one must also be wary of biography since it too is a ruins.

Truth and Falsehood

Ruins hearken back to a past one is apt to interpret as having been better, in the way that some people "cling" to the past as if it were one's parent, as if fearful or deeply dissatisfied of the present and future. For it has been said that those glancing far behind (or far ahead) of them are avoiding what is "right in front" of them or "before" them (both, curiously enough, expressions of the present). Though appearing to occur in the present, moonlight is refracted light, issues from sunlight already past. The moon contributes its false light to romanticize the ruins; thus, in this sense, it is false.

Now then, people are said to "take refuge" in the past and "retreat" into a past they "re-collect" or "re-member." Such expressions point to the truth behind the falsehood of memory, a memory which reconstructs the past as better than the present. If people "take refuge" from the past, it must be that the present is *chasing* them; if we "retreat" to the past, then we must be *battling* the present and where it is headed□the future. But

the problem is, the past is *scattered* so that we must "re-collect" it. And the past is *dismembered* so that to gain access we must "re-member" it. But such actions are reconstructions, and reconstructions are not originals. Hope is not admonishing us never to reconstruct the past, but more interestingly, to question such reconstructions, remain aware that while memory reconstructs, it does not duplicate. Moreover, the additions and subtractions made by memory are likely to be treacherous because they are made not only out of insufficient knowledge but, sometimes, from a need that points to a deficiency in the world (scummy pools, choked moats), in oneself, or both.

Death

This poem is not about literal death, but death in a figurative sense: the death of the past in the present and the present in the past. The narrator cautions us that while we might want to imaginatively follow the beckoning arm of the white-as-death statue into a "love restored," and imaginatively remake the scummy pool into a beautiful fountain, we must be careful because the past is dead to us. And literal reconstruction is no better, even if based on the memories of many people, and thereby more accurate. The Tudor tower can never be duplicated since it is decayed and knowledge of it in the past is always insufficient, always *passed* knowledge. On the other hand, the poem speaks of the death of the present in the past. We cannot re-place ourselves in the past for we have been utterly changed by the present. "You can't go back": the reason being that one is as dead in the past as the past is dead in the present. What exists are ghosts, the flavor of once-was, the white present of absence. The poet has aged out of the past and, as much as he would like to, is unable to return. The best he can do is put himself as he is in a past that once was. This, however, is too much a lie to produce pleasure. He must content himself with the lesser evil of being dead to the past and alive in the present. The poet sadly reconciles himself to what is.

Style

"Beware of Ruins" consists of four six-lined stanzas, each with a rhyme scheme of *abcabc.* The meter is a fairly regular iambic pentameter except for the fourth line in every stanza which is a ragged iambic tetrameter. This is a conversational meter (iambs describing the usual topography of spoken English), as if the narrator is casually giving advice to his readers as we walk with him around the ruins. There is only one near rhyme: "place" with "alas," what appears to be this poem's acceptable flaw. Iambs are sometimes accompanied by other patterns. For example, lines 1, 14, 19, and 20:

Beware of ruins: they have a treacherous charm Monstrous assumptions on the unburied past There are ruins too of a less obvious kind I go back cannot believe my eyes the place

These occasional trochees, anapests, dactyls, pyrrhics, and amphibrachs give the lines variation and interest, keep them from sounding too regular or too stiff. While the rhyme scheme of the poem is rather unusual, the meter is almost as old as poetry. It is as if Hope had placed a new facade (rhyme scheme) on an old structure (iambic pentameter), a structure which apparently he does not find ruined by extensive use. The meter marks Hope as partly classical, the rhyme scheme as partially innovative. Hope is a poet who doesn't move toward the future without a foundation in the past, the kind of past that still stands on its own feet.

Historical Context

Malcolm Fraser was the Liberal and National candidate for prime minister of Australia in 1975. He won. Despite the "liberal" in the party name, Fraser's administration cut every kind of social expenditure (for the poor, for science, the arts, and education) but contributed lavishly to the military, farms, and businesses. He also raised the salaries of government workers, and most controversially, Fraser vastly increased the apportionment to Australia's secret police, the ASIO. Despite or because of these measures, unemployment increased over one percentage point from 1975-77 while inflation somewhat decreased. In 1977, another election was called for the benefit of the incumbent parties and they won again, defeating Labor decisively. Again, in 1980, Fraser was elected. Why did the Liberal and National party continue to win elections despite their decreased social spending? Probably because by 1980 inflation had fallen five percentage points since 1975 when Fraser first took office. It is still a much debated historical point whether the decrease in government spending was responsible for the fall in inflation. A second reason for continued election of Fraser was that those who controlled the money put Fraser back in office for his increased development of export industries that both garnered the country money and pleased overseas investors. This enabled the paying down of foreign debt. Other reasons for Fraser's success was a rational foreign policy, that cemented relations with China, and denounced racism wherever it was seen, going to the point of being instrumental in ending white rule in Rhodesia and ushering in black rule for the transformed country renamed Zimbabwe.

Certain trends were apparent in Australia in the seventies and eighties. Immigration increased from 7.5 million in 1947 to 17 million in 1990. Whereas immigrants had previously been mostly white and European, the government increasingly allowed a more diverse panorama, especially those of Asian descent. The government also increasingly transformed itself, at least officially, from an agent of assimilation to one moving towards a program respecting a diversity of practices and peoples under one government. Women's rights also made strides during this period, especially when the native Australian, Germaine Greer, published her extremely influential book *The Female Eunuch* in 1970. During the postwar period, Australia grew further away from Britain and closer to the United States, supporting the United States with soldiers for the Vietnam War. For the sake of its economy, Australia also grew closer to Asia, especially Japan. The role of the central government, in terms of power, gradually overtook the state governments. Unionization also continued and to this day Australia remains one of the most unionized of Western countries. Finally, like most countries in the world since the 1980s, the economy has come to dominate politics and the interests of most Australians.

Critical Overview

While little or no criticism appears available on "Beware of Ruins," at least in the United States, what Ruth Morse writes about Hope's poetry in her introduction to *A. D. Hope: Selected Poems* (1986) applies: "The general effect [is] a kind of elevated conversational tone: the lines give the impression of a speaking voice, but are often more formal or complex than an actual speaker would be. While his syntax exploits normal English order, his adherence to formal metres gives him the added resources of a traditional rhythm and rhyme."

Writing in his work *A. D. Hope,* Kevin Hart argues that Hope is a visionary who longs "for an organic wholeness" and a "heightened sense of the primacy and irreducibility of poetry." But Hope's poetry is not visionary in the tradition of the French poet, Rimbaud who sought a disordering of all the senses during the Symbolist Movement. Instead, Hope gains "vision through a creative ordering of the senses, a vision which," Hart continues, "encourages the poet to remain in society, not to set oneself against it."

Finally, Robert Darling (1997) calls Hope "a poet of the imagination rather than the observed world," and utilizes a quote from Hope to clarify. Hope says that the poet's "licence ... is to create quite another nature than that in which he lives, though he must find his elements there." If Darling's and Hope's statements are used to analyze "Beware of Ruins," it can be said they both clarify and obscure the poem. The world in "Beware of Ruins" is a scene most likely fashioned from a site of ruins seen in the real world and, in addition, the ruins (memories) seen or read about in books, books being understood as both part of the world and apart from it. Hope creates the poem from the remembered fragments of things experienced in three dimensions (the world) and things that have appeared on the dimensions of the page, canvas, or screen. This makes Hope a poet of the "observed world," a world which comes to the poet's memory as ruins, the simultaneity of preservation and destruction. The ruins, however, are given a new nature through the constructions of the imagination, specifically the poem.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Jhan Hochman is a writer and instructor at Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon. He is the author of Green Cultural Studies: Nature in Film, Novel, and Theory, *1998. In the following essay, Hochman attempts to flesh out and analyze A. D. Hope's notions of romantic reconstruction and romantic reliving of the past.*

In "Beware of Ruins" (1981) A. D. Hope cautions against attempts to process the past, to romanticize either it or one's place in it by recalling or recasting these in a favorable, even romantic light. In the first three stanzas of the poem, two kinds of romanticization are cautioned against: imaginative and literal reconstruction of actual ruins. In the final stanza, however, another kind of romanticization is addressed, one that attempts not so much to reconstruct or bring back the past, but imaginatively relive it, relive one's own past by reinserting oneself into one's past memories. Both processings of the past - romantic reconstruction and romantic reliving - are, according to Hope, either treacherous or impossible.

The ruins described by the first three stanzas are stones that were once a structure (probably a castle), a pool once a fountain, a statue, a moat, and another structure perhaps part of the same scene: a decaying Tudor tower with either a real or imagined facade. All of these elements inhabit the story of Melusine, mentioned in stanza two. In "The Noble Story of Melusine, or The Romance of Melusine in Prose" (1387) by Jean d'Arras, Elinas, King of Albania (another says Scotland), diverted his grief for causing the death of his wife in a hunting accident. One day he went to a fountain to drink. Approaching, he heard a woman singing, the beautiful fairy Presine. Eventually Presine agreed to wed Elinas on condition he never visit her during childbirth. But when the birth of his triplet daughters was announced, Elinas was so excited he forgot himself and burst in on the queen bathing their daughters: Melusine, Melior, and Palatina. Presine cried out and disappeared with her daughters to Lost Island. There she reared them and daily took them to a mountain to view Albania. Presine told her daughters that their father's breach of promise banished them from Albania. Time passed. At fifteen, Melusine asked her mother of what her father was guilty. Angered, Melusine decided on revenge: with her sisters, Melusine set out for Albania where the three girls took the king and all his wealth, and, by a charm, enclosed him in a mountain. Presine found out and punished them, condemning Melusine to become, every Saturday, a serpent from the waist down. If, however, Melusine married a man that promised never to see her on Saturdays, she would be able to have a "normal" life. Melusine later met Raimondin, a man who had killed his uncle in a hunting accident. Raimondin was grieving and wandering in a forest and arrived at the Fountain of Thirst near a high rock. There he glimpsed, by the light of the moon, three ladies, the principal being Melusine. Her beauty and amiability quickly won him. She soothed him, concealed the accidental killing of his uncle, and married him, making him promise to never see her on Saturdays. If he breached the oath she said she would leave him. With her great wealth, Melusine built him many castles, especially Lusignan. But Destiny - that would have Melusine single - was incensed against her: Destiny fashioned a characteristic deformity for each of Melusine's children. Even then, Raimondin's love for her remained

unshaken, at least until Destiny renewed her attack: Raimondin's cousin made suggestions of Melusine having an affair. Raimondin peeked through a bathroom door one Saturday to find out and beheld Melusine alone splashing in a tub, her lower torso a snake. Melusine departed from him, and, in obedience to Destiny, roamed the earth as a suffering specter. Only when one of her descendants was to die at Lusignan would she become visible. Her words at parting were, "But one thing will I say unto thee before I part, that thou, and those who for more than a hundred years shall succeed thee, shall know that whenever I am seen to hover over the fair castle of Lusignan, then will it be certain that in that very year the castle will get a new lord; and though people may not perceive me in the air, yet they will see me by the Fountain of Thirst; and thus shall it be so long as the castle stand in honor and flourishing - especially on the Friday before the lord of the castle shall die." Immediately, with wailing and loud lamentation, she left the castle of Lusignan, and has ever since existed as a specter of the night. Robert Graves, in *The White Goddess* (1966), believes that the tradition of the mermaid or snake-torsoed female goes back to Aphrodite ("risen from sea-foam") who in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1485-86) is blown in from the sea on a large scallop shell. Aphrodite has also been identified with the moon-goddess, Eurynome, whose statue at Arcadia was a wooden mermaid. And finally, in English ballads, the mermaid stands for the bitter-sweetness of love.

This poem that began as a warning ends more like a lament for the irreversibility of one's own aging.

With such research or knowledge, Hope assembled his haunted ruins. The assemblage is incredibly adept, for in the poem, Melusine is identified with the moon, indicating romance, water (tides and reflecting pools, but fountains as well), femaleness (the sun being male), and a kind of un-dependability since Melusine is apt to regularly vary like the moon. Melusine is a changeling figure, one a man cannot love without regret. Since Melusine is a specter or fairy, love cannot be dependably restored, reconstruction of the castles she built cannot be faithfully executed, and one should avoid inserting one's own "love restored" in such a scene. Love is dead and ruins remain ruins despite imagination and restoration. Romanticization is exposed as artificial, a lie, and as such should cause one to lose the thirst for a past never to flow again. In addition to employing the specter of Melusine, Hope indicates these ruins are treacherous by refocusing our eyes from the romanticized past to the more dilapidated present, to the phallic fungi and nettles, to how moonlight is old, cold, and inhospitable to love, at least in comparison to the relatively fresh warmth of sunlight. Finally, that restored facade on a Tudor tower is a death mask which Hope sees most pessimistically, not as the tower fully intact, but the tower before it began to decay. A building facade cast as a death mask is a kind of personification, the kind of mask fashioned from a face contorted in despair at the onset of the body's decay or death. Hope, himself, puts the worst mask on the past, cautioning us against the devil of decay, lying and laying beneath the angel of appearance.

The second type of reprocessing the past occurs in the poem when an attempt is made by the narrator/poet to relive his past. This reprocessing differs from the kind in the first three stanzas where another's past was imaginatively or actually reconstructed in ruins,

or the past of another served as the diorama in which to insert one's own past ("love restored"). In this final scenario, Hope claims that he is able to accurately reconstruct his past, itself a romanticized or romantic one, with its *mise en scene* of a fire lit, a "table laid," and a "bed warmed." The reason he cannot insert himself into this intact environment is not because of the scene, but because of himself, because he has aged. Whereas in the first three stanzas, the intact observer is able - even if imprudently - to insert himself into the reconstructed ruins, in the final stanza the recaller is himself a ruins unable to insert himself into the intact, remembered scene. This poem that began as a warning ends more like a lament for the irreversibility of one's own aging.

The two kinds of dioramas of the past into which one attempts to get into (in order to restore love), then, are the dioramas of some other past (ruins) and the dioramas of one's own past. What Hope seems to imply is that insertion of oneself into the diorama of some other past points up the deadness of the past to the present, while insertion of oneself into the diorama of one' s own past points to the deadness of the present in the past. Either way, for the Hope in "Beware of Ruins," the past is a diorama of death, an assembled still life in three dimensions, a *nature morte,* whose very lack of animation is what allows it to be "enlivened." And if the past seems "enlivened" it is not because the past can ever become alive but because the Imagination - that first and foremost lovesick desecrator of graves and exhumer of corpses - casts a bewitching spell to make it seem so.

Source: Jhan Hochman, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Jeannine Johnson currently teaches writing and literature at Harvard University. She has also taught at Yale, from which she received her Ph.D., and at Wake Forest University. Her most recent essay is on Adrienne Rich's "To a Poet, " published in the Explicator. *In the following essay, Johnson examines Hope's failed attempt, in "Beware of Ruins, " to spare his readers from the pain of nostalgia.*

A. D. Hope's "Beware of Ruins" delivers a warning against nostalgia. In this poem, Hope cautions us not to romanticize the past, whether it be our own personal past or the history of previous generations. The poet fears our tendency to misremember the past as having been better than it was, and he questions our inclination to imagine our lost loves as having been restored amidst the wreckage of time. The title becomes a kind of refrain in the poem, repeated in the first and third stanzas and then revised in the final stanza. Hope repeats his warning, as if aware of our unwillingness to heed it. However, as the poem progresses, the poet shows himself to be just as susceptible to the kind of fantasies that he distrusts, revealing that he, too, is included among those to whom the poem is directed.

The past is represented by "ruins" in this poem not because it is corrupt or destroyed but because it can never be properly relived or accurately reconstructed. In the first three stanzas, the poet explores a site of literal ruins, the stone remains of an ancient castle or palace. He notes a "scummy pool," the broken sculpture of a "seated figure," a "moat," and a "Tudor tower." These are striking features, but the poet warns us about misinterpreting their significance. These ruins "have a treacherous charm; / Insidious echoes lurk among their stones...." It is one thing to recognize that the current state of disrepair does not correspond to the castle's former condition, and that, for instance, the "scummy pool" marks the spot where once "a fountain soared." But it is another thing altogether to try to derive some personal meaning from this wreckage by imposing our own lives on it. The poet knows too well that "the heart is apt to make / Monstrous assumptions on the unburied past." He declares that the parts of our history which lie unburied are those that we are especially likely to idealize. He implies that our vision is untrustworthy, that it misleads our inner sight and causes our imaginations to stray into false memories.

Hope uses the poem's form to help him sound the alarm about idealizing the past. The fourth line in each stanza is indented and, since it contains eight rather than ten syllables, is shorter than the other five. This structural irregularity calls attention to the ideas and images in those fourth lines. In the first three stanzas, the objects in the fourth line are a seated figure, a moat, and a facade. All of these objects are enticing illusions, and the poet's language becomes progressively stronger in describing them as he tries to demonstrate just how deceptive they are. The seated figure "Beckons" us to project our dreams upon it, but it is finally revealed to be "a mock-up of dry bones / And not, as you believe, your love restored." The poet concedes that "The moat has a romantic air," but exposes that impression as false. In fact, the water around the ruins "is choked with nettles and obscene / And phallic fungi rot there as they grow." What might have been

symbols of joyful sexuality transform, in the poet's unglorified view, into sinister "phallic fungi." This rotting form becomes something even more menacing in the third stanza: the facade is not only a "fake" but a "death-mask of the last / Despairing effort before it all went sour." The poet makes it clear that when we apply a romanticized screen to the past, we do nothing more than create a plaster cast of a corpse, and that even this effort is knowingly futile.

In contrast with the suspicious facade, a table set for dinner and a warm bed appear in the truncated fourth line in the final stanza. In describing these objects, the poet declines to use the threatening language of the first three stanzas, suggesting how much greater is the danger of projecting false visions on these more familiar articles. Several other shifts also occur in the fourth stanza and further underscore the risks one takes in a different kind of visit to the past. In this stanza, the poet's voice changes from the second person to the first person, signaling that the scope of his concerns is becoming more exclusive. The site also changes from an impersonal, common relic to a more private preserve, a ruin "of a less obvious kind." This spot is unique to the poet, and his physical passage inside this room located in his "former world" symbolizes a retreat into the interior of his emotions: "I go back; cannot believe my eyes; the place / Is just as I recall...." Ironically, the poet doubts his own vision, which is what he urged us to do in the first three stanzas. His eyes are thoroughly reliable, but his imagination and serf-perception still fail him. He reports that "I find / My former world intact, but not, alas, / The man I was when I was part of it." Now that he looks inward, Hope realizes that the most momentous changes have been the alterations within himself, not in the world around him.

Hope's poetic theory is conservative, and he steadfastly believes that the only legitimate poetry is formal poetry. He criticizes free verse, which is poetry written without rhyme, meter, or other regular formal patterns. In "Free Verse: A Post-Mortem," one of several essays included in the collection, *The Cave and the Spring,* Hope makes the following pronouncement: "The truth about free verse is that it is not free and it is not verse. It is not free because it has no discipline by which its freedom may be assessed. It is not verse because it has neither measure nor metre." Somewhat unfairly, Hope views free verse as inherently un-rigorous, and he considers it to be more closely related to prose than to poetry. He asserts that since free verse does not develop according to a strict design, it cannot create the kind of tension and anticipation that formal poetry can. He continues to explain that "surprise comes from variations on the pattern that metre leads us to expect. Without expectation of one thing we cannot be surprised by another, which is why free verse in spite of its variety rarely gives us those shocks of delicious surprise that real poetry always affords." In other words, what shocks or makes an impression is not merely what is new or unusual but what is unexpected, and expectation is produced by establishing and adhering to some form of convention.

The kinds of surprises for which Hope aims are perhaps to be found in "Beware of Ruins." His six-line stanzas proceed according to a rigid ABCABC rhyme scheme, creating and fulfilling the expectation of particular end-word sounds. Of the twelve rhymed pairs in the poem, eleven are true rhymes: in the first stanza, for example, "charm" rhymes perfectly with "arm," "stones" with "bones," and "soared" with

"restored." Only one minor violation of our expectations for the rhymes appears in the poem. In the final stanza Hope couples "place" with "alas," creating a slant rhyme. After the regularity of the true rhymes, this slanted pair calls particular attention to these two terms and their relationship to each other. The consequences of visiting the places of our past, Hope has contended throughout the poem, are serf-delusion and disappointment. Just as our expectations for a true rhyme are frustrated, so are our expectations for a permanent link to the past. However, the poet does not assign blame to the place, but to us: for it is the expression of "alas" that violates the sound established by "place," not the other way around. That is to say, it is our perception of the past (verbalized by the single word "alas"), not the past itself, which creates discord and grief.

Though Hope's poems are often traditional in form, their effect is not altogether conventional. His voice is often humorous and even sardonic, as in the poems "Australia" and "The Bed," and he frequently addresses themes of sexuality and romantic passion, as in the poems "Imperial Adam" and "Meditation on a Bone." However, humor is absent in "Beware of Ruins," and sexuality exists in this poem in the more muted hues of bygone loves. Though the poem begins with the poet imploring us to beware of our penchant for nostalgia, its final effect is more subtle. The earnestness of the first three stanzas is replaced by a more measured humility in the last stanza. The poet confirms the necessity of allowing ourselves to try to relive the past and to revisit lost loves, even though that endeavor will inevitably cause us some pain: Hope implicitly admits that to try to prevent us from doing so would be to try to deny what it means to be human.

Source: Jeannine Johnson, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2000.

Adaptations

A taped interview with Hope is conducted by Ruth Morse for Canto Carcanet in Broadbottom, Cheshire, 1988.

Topics for Further Study

According to "Beware of Ruins," what is Hope's theory of memory? Do you agree with it? If not, where are its weaknesses?

Discuss the color white in the context of death (don't forget Moby Dick!). Research cultures that employ white as the color of death. Can you make any generalizations about cultures that use white and those that use black?

Discuss why the future and the present□as well as the past□might also be full of "treacherous charm."

Do research on death masks. Find out for what purposes they were used and how they were made.

Compare and Contrast

1980: Chief Justice of Australia's High Court, Sir Garfield Barwick was, without declaring his interest, sitting in judgment on cases brought to his courtroom by wealthy corporations in which Barwick's own private family company, Mundroola Pty Ltd, owned shares. Most cases were decided in favor of those corporations in which the judge had interest.

June, 1999: Prime Minister John Howard refuses to sack one of his front-bench team whose company, Cape York Concrete Pty Ltd, was awarded a $175,500 defense contract. Howard admitted that Parliamentary Secretary Warren Entsch breached ministerial code by failing to declare, as required by Mr. Howard's code, that he was director and company secretary of Cape York Concrete the company receiving the substantial government contract.

1981: AIDS is first recognized as a distinct disease in the U.S. The earliest American cases were traced back to 1977.

June, 1999: In the United States, the cumulative number of reported AIDS cases from the

beginning of the epidemic in 1981 through June 1998, is 665,337.

1981: At the Sequoyah nuclear plant, near Chattanooga, Tennessee, eight workers are exposed to radioactive water, as a core is nearly exposed; it is only one of a series of such accidents.

1999: A leading US scientific organization comes up with new findings supporting Nevada's Yucca Mountain nuclear site as suitable for the long-term storage of spent nuclear fuel. The reason is that water is not expected-based on research into the geologic past of the site-to seep into the area.

1979: Restoration of Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" begins in Milan.

May, 1999: The 20-year restoration of Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" is completed and the controversial results are exposed to public display. The restoration has been lauded by the Italians and contested by the international community.

What Do I Read Next?

Illuminations (1968), by Walter Benjamin is a collection of essays from one of the most interesting and independent thinkers of theFrankfurt School. Especially apropos to "Beware of Ruins" is the essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

Michel Foucault's *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977), is a collection of essays, and interviews with the author. See especially, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History."

A Primer of Freudian Psychology (1982) is a small introduction to Freud's thought and practice, of which memory and dreams comprise two indispensable constituents. Includes an index.

The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (1996) contains many poems of aging, memory and death. See especially "Sailing to Byzantium," and "A Prayer for Old Age."

"Gerontion" (1920) by T.S. Eliot is an excellent poem on aging.

Further Study

Hope, A. D., *Australian Literature 1950-62,* Melbourne:

Melbourne University Press, 1963.

This is a chapbook that briefly mentions names, publications, dates, and characteristics, the latter in terms of themes and techniques used by authors. It is divided into sections on poetry, novels, short stories, drama, and criticism. There is also an overview of magazines and anthologies.

Hope, A. D, *Collected Poems, 1930-1965,* New York:

Viking Press, 1966.

Hope's poems are printed chronologically but what poems belong to what collections is not indicated. A short preface by the poet introduces the volume.

Hope, A. D., *The New Cratylus: Notes on the Craft of Poetry,* Melbourne:Oxford University Press, 1979.

Hope gathers together his conclusions on the nature of language and the way it operates in poetry. The work is more of a workshop manual than a treatise because it is primarily aimed at recruiting potential poets.

Pietrangeli, Carlo, *The Sistine Chapel: A Glorious Restoration,* New York: Harry Abrams, 1994.

Michelangelo's creation of the monumental frescos in the Sistine Chapel marked a revolutionary event in Western art. A nine-year restoration, carried out by experts at the Vatican Museums, is described and illustrated in this work.

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Hope, A. D., *The Cave and the Spring: Essays on Poetry,* Rigby Limited, 1965.

Hope, A. D., *Selected Poems,* selected and introduced by Ruth Morse, Manchester: Carcanet, 1986.

Ward, Russel, *Concise History of Australia,* Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1992.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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