

P A R T T W O

A GRACE AGAINST DESPAIR

James McAuley

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A GRACE AGAINST DESPAIR: JAMES McAULEY

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Abbreviations:

<u>CP</u> :	<u>Collected Poems: 1936-1970</u> , Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1971.
<u>MLN</u> :	<u>Music Late at Night</u> , Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1976.
<u>TG</u> :	<u>Time Given</u> , Brindabella Press, Canberra, 1976

SECTION ONE

A FIRST PIECE

"I cannot pretend that the tension between the modern and the traditional has ceased within myself. I know I have to live in ambiguities and dilemmas, not letting go one end in order to cling with both hands to the other in false simplification."

James McAuley, "Culture and Counter-culture"
(Quadrant, September, 1976, 19.)

I had read in books that art is not easy
But no one warned that the mind repeats
In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still
The black swan of trespass on alien waters.

Ern Malley, "Durer: Innsbruck, 1495"

SECTION TWO

THE VISION OF CEREMONY

When, in 1952, James McAuley converted to Catholicism, it seemed to some that he had been seduced by the consolations of orthodoxy.¹ A Vision of Ceremony (1956) and The End of Modernity (1959) were seen as companions in Catholic certitude. This image of the "Catholic poet" can easily promote a serious misreading of McAuley's work, one which fails to incorporate the creative function of his uncertainty, the expressive role of his restraint, and so fails to articulate that intimate, interactive relationship between hope and despair which enlivens his religious imagination. While it must be acknowledged that belief plays a strong, sure part in these volumes, it must also be acknowledged that McAuley's commitment to coherence and traditional symbolism is, at its best, a dynamic part of the larger relationship between hope and despair, and not a cool, externalised resolution of it.² Without denying the importance of Catholic philosophy and belief in A Vision of Ceremony and The End of Modernity, I want first of all to examine the "Catholic poet" image. In doing so, I will direct attention towards the presence in his work of an artesian, contemplative heart and the pressure of a restrained despair, and suggest that these must be carefully explored, if we are to discover the "world unsimplified"³ which the public, discursive map of verse both discloses and disguises.

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1. Cf. Leonie Kramer, "Introduction", James McAuley . . ., p. xiv.
 2. I need to stress, perhaps, that a phrase like "McAuley's commitment" is not intended to suggest a biographical reading of the poetry, that I am using the phrase (and others like it) as a shorthand way of referring to the commitments, disclosures and disguises evident in the poems themselves.
 3. "The Family of Love", Collected Poems, p. 10.

In The End of Modernity, McAuley argues that "the roots of great poetry are metaphysical and religious".(138) McAuley's philosophy is basically Thomistic¹: there is an objective, knowable metaphysical order; reason, submitting to the "grammar of the real", has primacy in the epistemological process. Coherence and order are possible through "intellectuality" or metaphysical wisdom, which must recognise the primacy of the sacred. If artistic values are to undergo conservation and renewal, the artist must respect the primacy of the intellect and of the sacred.

The culture of Western modernity is anti-poetic because it is anti-intellectual and anti-realist. Accordingly, "An Art of Poetry" (Collected Poems, 70) opens with the line, "Since all our keys are lost or broken", while The End of Modernity declares, "The positivism of the modern mind constitutes an anti-poetic."(139) While the poem believes "where Christ has set his hand/ Only the real remains", the prose work articulates how Christ is an antidote to the modernist anti-poetic:

In (Christ) the primitive theory of language is verified. His words are 'words of power'; what he speaks, is; name and essence are one. He is himself the Divine Word which expresses the Ineffable Name of God, and all created things are vocables which when gathered together in their right order become a polysemous speech responding to the primal Word that brought them into existence. (166)

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1. McAuley was, during the fifties, associated with Dr Austin Woodbury, of the Aquinas Academy, and with Dr Wilf Radford, of the Marist Fathers' Seminary. Both men taught Thomistic philosophy. Dr Radford told me that McAuley's mind had a connaturality with Thomism, a philosophy often described by its adherents as "Moderate Realism". McAuley also greatly admired Etienne Gilson's The Unity of Philosophical Experience, a central work in Thomism, which argues that the question of knowledge is the central problem in the history of philosophy, and that different philosophies evolve depending on the answer they give to the question of how active/passive the knower is in the act of knowing. (Cf. "A Small Testament", Quadrant, December 1976, 7.)

In "An Art of Poetry", therefore, the poet is "Drawn inward by his love" to trace art to its "secret springs". The passivity indicates the poet's reception of supernatural grace ("his love"). There is a Thomistic catch-phrase that "grace perfects nature". For McAuley, poetic inspiration may involve heightening of natural powers, and poetry itself may be a work of grace.¹

Much of McAuley's thinking in The End of Modernity is based on the distinction between the supernatural and the natural order. This distinction forms the basis of his attack on the "desire to ascribe to the poetic word a preternatural power" or the Magian Heresy:

. . . the attempt to identify poetry with anything in the supernatural order argues the absence of a due sense of the infinite distance that separates divine things from human things. To turn the analogy that exists between poetry and mysticism into an identity is possible only after the loss of any sense of proportion and reality.²

On the basis of this, McAuley defends a poetry which recognises "the true proportions of things" (while yet preferring general to particular truths) and rejects a poetry which pretends to "magic, gnosis, paracletic inspiration, prophecy, revelation, even divine creation".³ Among the Magian heretics he names: Blake (for strictly identifying poetic inspiration with divine revelation), Novalis (for thinking poetry is the absolutely Real), Rilke (for turning all existence into poetry), and Surrealism (for transmuting dream and reality into a sort of absolute reality or surreality). These are the descendants of Simon Magus, who is "the type of all those who seek to transcend the human state without submitting to the divine redemptive scheme".⁴ It is worth noting that McAuley's distinction between the

1. Cf. The End of Modernity, p. 167.

2. "The Magian Heresy", Quadrant, March, 1977, 44.

3. "The Magian Heresy", p. 42.

4. The End of Modernity, p. 149, footnote 2. Simon Magus appears in The Acts of the Apostles (8:9-24).

natural and the supernatural corroborates itself with an implied distinction between the fallen and the redeemed world.

For all their confidence in intellect, McAuley's philosophy and poetry arrive ultimately at the heart. Rational certainty becomes dispensable. This is, in fact, a paradigm of conversion, where one begins with "rational motives of credibility"¹ and then:

this rational certainty is, so to speak, transformed and lifted to the level of supernatural certainty by the fact that the act of faith is a work of God in the soul - grace here as elsewhere perfecting and divinizing nature.²

In The End of Modernity the philosophical framework of credibility is left behind, and McAuley invokes the old symbolism: "In the old symbolism the heart was the principal organ, the seat of life, soul, intellect, memory, will." (131) Pascal's dictum that "the heart has reasons that reason does not know" is interpreted not as a disjunction between feeling and reason, but as the intuition of what is above both feeling and reason.³

McAuley argues that what is necessary for poetry is contemplative leisure or "active receptivity".⁴ Ideally, the poet would achieve a "level of detachment where the mind is stripped of sensations, emotions and images in order to 'experience divine things'"⁵.

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1. This phrase is taken from McAuley's account of his own conversion in "A Small Testament", Quadrant, December, 1976, 7. It is a phrase which was very common in Catholic apologetics at that time - particular apologetics grounded in a Thomistic notion of the relationship between rational and revealed truth. (Cf. Avery Dulles, Apologetics and the Biblical Christ.)
 2. The End of Modernity, p. 35. This also, I would suggest, hints at the deeply subjective substratum operating beneath the objective surface of The End of Modernity. The public argument projects out from issues more intimately connected with the private process of conversion.
 3. Cf. The End of Modernity, p. 131.
 4. Cf. The End of Modernity, p. 132.
 5. "From a Poet's Notebook", Quadrant, March, 1977, 35.

The pattern of consciousness found in his later poetry is increasingly that of sensations, emotions, images actively received, then stripped away to evoke a contemplative detachment - a paradoxical gain-in-loss. In this regard, even as it is being affirmed, the Catholic aesthetic of "An Art of Poetry" is itself discarded, or transcended, by the heart's deeper knowledge:

We know, where Christ has set his hand
 Only the real remains:
 I am impatient for that loss
 By which the spirit gains. (CP, 71)

McAuley's emphasis on the contemplative paradox is more than a statement of via crucis spirituality. It also represents a transformation of "The Tomb of Heracles", where the stoic's world is eaten hollow with despair. Grace and discipline stand against despair: the poetry struggles to transform one darkness into another, to make nothingness into all, to make the passivity of the sterile heart into the active receptivity of the contemplative heart:

Wisdom, intellectual inquiry, and art all require for their perfection a recollected contemplative . . . Poetry grows out of silence; even if tumultuous it leaps forth from stillness . . . Much that happens is not conscious - there is needed a certain attentiveness and waiting in darkness.¹

Even in the aggressive and discursive poem, "A Letter to John Dryden", it is the silence which sings. There is a moment of lyricism which breaks through the polemic:

Incarnate Word, in who all nature lives,
 Cast flame upon the earth: raise up contemplatives
 Among us, men who walk within the fire
 Of ceaseless prayer, impetuous desire.
 Set pools of silence in this thirsty land: (CP, 94)

The poem has two voices. One is a public and polemic voice which distinguishes between metaphysical and empirical knowledge and

1. The End of Modernity, p. 124.

attacks positivism and relativism. This voice holds centre-stage for most of the poem. There comes a moment, though, when the voice of anxious reason surrenders to the voice of the heart, where we "may reach/ Tremendous meanings without tongue or speech". The heart is momentarily flooded with light:

Open, eyes of the heart, begin to see
The tranquil, vast, created mystery,
In all its courts of being laid awake,
Flooded with uncreated light for mercy's sake. (CP, 95)

In "To the Holy Spirit" (CP, 69) McAuley uses the Bird of Paradise to symbolise the Holy Spirit. The measure of the poem's success is the measure to which the doctrinal consciousness is organic rather than imposed. The Holy Spirit's prophetic truth is uttered as a fire-dance, which becomes a fertility ritual. The mate - again the hidden and "unseen" one - is "filled with the nuptial splendours of (his) desire". There is a spiritual eroticism here which is not common in McAuley:

Engender upon our souls your sacred rhythm: inspire
The trembling breath of the flute, the exultant cosmic psalm,
The dance that breaks into flower beneath the storm-voiced
mountain;
Array in your dazzling intricate plumage the swaying choir.
(CP, 69)

The swaying choir links up with the earlier description of the bird as "plumed with glowing iris along each curving wire". Both connote a central stillness surrounded by movement. This meditative undertow incorporates the doctrinal elements and gives the poem its integrity. Time and eternity are unified in the contemplative vision as they are in the union of the Bird of Paradise and his "drab earthly mate". This union is already implied in the opening where the Holy Spirit, placed in timeless rest, calm, and height, descends his mountain to make his visit in time.

In McAuley's theological imagining, then, the Holy Spirit illuminates the actively receptive heart and fills it with "sacred rhythm" and "incandescent ritual". In this way he completes the meaning of the wagtail in "Canticle" who:

Sings all night long insistently
As if his song could prove
What wisdom whispered from the start,
That only love can fill the heart. (CP, 68)

Given this sense that the Holy Spirit restores the heart's ritual, it is not surprising to find that McAuley constructs his New Guinea in imaginative terms very similar to those used in this poem.

While it is still contained within McAuley's larger framework of lean hope or endangered order, New Guinea is imagined as a confrontative reminder of the heart-centred symbolic consciousness abandoned by Western secularism. He sees New Guinea as a test of the quality of the Australian people and fears that the country's instinctive sense of the sacred order will be polluted by what Australians might offer: "sterile secularism" and "disintegrated liberalism with its inability to rationally affirm or practically defend its own values".¹

We might corrupt the native culture with "the major respectable vices of cold-heartedness and hypocrisy".² With disorder in our own country, we could not be expected to bring order to New Guinea: "the shapeless cannot give shape, nor the formless form."³ This conviction becomes the turning point of "New Guinea":

We in that land begin our rule in courage,
The seal of peace gives warrant to intrusion;
But then our grin of emptiness breaks the skin,
Formless dishonour spreads its proud confusion. (CP, 80)

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1. "My New Guinea", Quadrant, March, 1977, 40.
 2. "My New Guinea", 41.
 3. "My New Guinea", 41.

Even so, McAuley's imagination will not conceive New Guinea free from all effects of Original Sin. His is not a sentimental view of New Guinea as the land of the noble, innocent savage. He criticises the Cargo Cult mentality for its millenarian and apocalyptic pretensions, and for using "magical shortcuts in the absence of real knowledge of causes".¹ The poet of the artesian heart, however, finds a pulse. Here is a society which keeps vital contact with the elemental experiences of birth, death, and sex, "a world where the inexorable organic rhythms were insistent".² Here is a psyche which finds in ordinary things - things combining both use and meaning³ - a symbolic power. This spiritual and symbolic potency of the land - "Regions of prayer, of solitude, and of death" - is rehearsed in the first three stanzas. There is something here for the deeper heart - "Life holds its shape in the modes of dance and music,/ The hands of craftsmen trace its patternings." (CP, 80).

There is something, too, which encourages the poetry's attraction to remote disorder. New Guinea is not too sophisticated for demons: "but stains of blood, and evil spirits, lurk/ Like cockroaches in the interstices of things." (CP, 80). McAuley sees demons as integral to Christian faith: "to be a believing Christian means to accept as fact what the gospels say not only of the action of divine power . . . but also of the action of created spiritual beings - angels and demons."⁴ There must be an exorcising of the demonic. This may be correct Catholic doctrine, but it is also an emphasis intrinsic to McAuley's underlying imaginative structure. A sense of artesian hope is

1. "My New Guinea", 38.

2. "My New Guinea", 37.

3. Cf. The End of Modernity, pp. 79-80. For McAuley, art should have "use" as well as meaning.

4. "My New Guinea", 39.

being constructed in the emphasis he gives to Bishop de Boismenu's description of New Guinea as "a school of detachment and sanctity".¹ Similarly, the "lean plough" of "Envoi" (CP, 6) operates in his observation that, according to the spiritual law, pain and desolation are the price paid to establish the kingdom of God.² This is true throughout A Vision of Ceremony: the commitment to coherence and traditional symbolism is expressed in such a way that we feel the pressure exerted by forces of disorder and chaos - pressure largely contained by the disciplined attitude and style of the verse itself. "Exploit", for instance, uses tightly framed, rhyming quatrains to support its commitment to the Christian hope of life-in-death, but it also indicates the edge of despair:

That stealthy breathing, is it mine?
 Are mine those sounding feet?
 Am I myself, in this design,
 The quarry I must meet -

The monster in its lurking-place,
 The thing that I must kill,
 The central nightmare I must face
 With failing powers of will? (CP, 102)

"Vespers" (CP, 83) can no longer believe in the happy endings promised by nursery rhymes, and, if it does believe in Christ, it links belief with suffering:

No, Wisdom's self has shed the warm salt tears
 Which melt the glassy ice; and he has willed
 Nothing whatever should be unfulfilled
 That childhood promised to my later years;
 Only this added, which I could not know,
 That first the bitter tears, like his, must flow. (CP, 84)

There are tears too in "Merry-go-round" (CP, 98), when the speaker is distanced from the kaleidoscopic joy and colourful spontaneity of the merry-go-round. This sense of sadness is disciplined, but not

1. "My New Guinea", 39.
 2. "My New Guinea", 40.

displaced by the close, where joy is associated with the ephemeral and transitory, while the real is a crowd which is "outside", toward which we move with reluctance. "To Any Poet" (CP, 85) betrays a similarly ambiguous approach to joy. While the poem argues

Living is thirst for joy;
That is what art rehearses.
Let sober drunkenness give
Its splendour to your verses

(CP, 85)

it actually exhibits a sobriety Dionysus would find disappointing. The opening injunction to "Take salt upon your tongue" underlines the role of discipline in art. The closing stanza, in its identification of the poet with the "sable swan", supports the vision of ceremony in such a way that it anxiously withdraws the poet "out of range/ Of barking ignorance". Interestingly, this is the poem McAuley wrote to complement the more ordered view of "An Art of Poetry". In his view it "expresses something about the commitment of the poet to his own experiences".¹ Perhaps it shows, rather, his preferred perception of experience. Just as this poem warns against feeding the heart "With sorrow, darkness, and lies", so "An Art of Poetry" (CP, 70) censures forces, such as individualism, which contract the heart. Both poems value lucidity of voice and serenity of movement and both are concerned to protect the genuine sources of such art. Whereas "To Any Poet" closes with the poet somewhat endangered by "barking ignorance", "An Art of Poetry" locates that ignorance within the problem of contemporary belief and also withdraws to the centre of true wisdom:

Since all our keys are lost or broken,
Shall it be thought absurd
If for an art of words I turn
Discreetly to the Word?

(CP, 70)

1. Cf. John Thompson, "James McAuley: An Interview", Southerly, 27, 1967, 100.

"Nocturnal" (CP, 104) is also governed by this characteristic perspective. The solitary poet, committed to a society and poetry based in the natural order, realises that the Swan, symbol of ceremony and design, is about to abandon us to "Dishonour in our deeds, death in our art". It is only the celestial possibility represented by the Swan which strengthens the will and "makes the heart go on". "In a Late Hour" (CP, 105) creates a figure who, in a world which has lost metaphysical reason and reached "the last estrangement -/ The sense of nature gone", is both stubbornly faithful to Christ and deeply aware that any order is rescued from hurt:

Though the stars run distracted
And from wounds deep rancours flow,
While the mystery is enacted
I will not let you go. (CP, 105)

If we are to appreciate that A Vision of Ceremony represents "a strenuous attempt to reconcile (McAuley's) tough empirical sense of the realities of our immediate everyday world with his conviction that man is a spiritual being"¹, then this kind of argument is necessary. However, it has its dangers. It can too easily accept, as one of its hermeneutical assumptions, a difficult gap between empirical experience and belief, and then read the tension between these as a personal struggle rather than an imaginative construct (and this would apply whether the struggle is seen as ending in honesty or in repression). I have tried to counteract this tendency by assuming that the "strenuous attempt to reconcile" empirical and spiritual perspectives (rather than realities) originates in an imaginative construct which interrelates hope and despair, discipline and freedom, the vision of ceremony and the "formless fear".² Later, in

1. R.F. Brissenden, "The Wounded Hero", p. 277.
2. "Exploit", CP, p. 101.

considering Under Aldebaran, I will suggest that this structure of perception is operative in pre-conversion poetry. Even so, the poetry itself actively encourages this danger since, at least in A Vision of Ceremony, it does seem to authorise an identification of subjectivity and negativity.

"An Art of Poetry" declares:

Scorn then to darken and contract
 The landscape of the heart
 By individual, arbitrary
 And self-expressive art. (CP, 70)

Why should "individual" and "self-expressive" art be linked with "arbitrary" and found to contract, rather than contact, the heart? Why should an expression of self be seen, so strongly, as an exercise in anti-metaphysical individualism? In McAuley's schema, arbitrariness and individualism are the necessary consequences of an anti-realist aesthetic:

At the very instant at which the mind loses its absolute allegiance to the rule of rational faith as the proper measure of reality, there spring into being three characteristics of the modern world which tend to stultify intelligence, namely: humanism - man is made the measure of all things, including the things of God; arbitrariness - 'heresy' means picking and choosing, the will deflecting the intellect; and individualism - the ego receives the prerogatives of the Supreme Being.¹

While it is quite clear that this apparently logical discourse itself participates in McAuley's order/disorder model, it is also clear that this model has become entangled with some favourite Thomistic distinctions - supernatural/natural, objective/ subjective - and that it is being pushed off-centre, away from its tensive co-ordinates. In this one-sided position, the model begins to authorise continuity between "rational faith" and "God", between the non-rational

1. The End of Modernity, p. 36.

self and humanism, arbitrariness and individualism, as well as discontinuity between "God" and "man". These structural relationships, too simplistic and absolute in themselves, rob the model of any tensive character which remains. What we have, in other words, is McAuley's imagination disguising itself as metaphysical reason, but also attempting, by way of an attack on what is arbitrary, individual, and self-expressive, at once to express and repress its need to construct a world both fallen and upheld.

This may help explain an intriguing "blindspot" in McAuley's metaphysics, a "blindspot" he uses to over-objectify his suspicion of the personal element in poetry. His metaphysics of "person" is, in general, too essentialist. In common with a great deal of Thomistic philosophy at that time, his is a metaphysics which does not acknowledge personalist and existentialist philosophies. In an easily overlooked section of The End of Modernity¹, he claims not to understand a distinction between "person" and "individual" made by the French Thomist, Jacques Maritain. Maritain writes:

In each of us, individuality, being that which excludes from ourselves that which other men are, might be described as the narrowness of the ego . . . Personality, on the other hand, is rooted in the spirit inasmuch as the spirit holds itself in existence and superabounds in existence . . . it testifies to the generosity or expansiveness in being which pertains to its spiritual principle. Personality means interiority to oneself and requires at the same time the communications of knowledge and love.²

While Maritain's distinction allows him to argue that if a work of art is "subjective" its meaning is both universal and individual, McAuley assumes that if a work of art is subjective it is self-centred, not God-centred.

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1. "A Note on Maritain's Views", pp. 111-116.
 2. Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, pp. 105-106.

If I consider this a poetic as well as philosophical problem, it is not because I am assuming McAuley's poetry must be directly personal, or that it hides a personal subtext which has been suppressed in the interests of objectivity. There is, quite obviously, a reasoned attempt on his part to exclude the random particularities of immediate experience, to "Elucidate the carnal maze/ With clear light from above" (CP, 70). This does not automatically result in bad poetry: concealment can be a mode of revelation as "Vespers" and "Nativity" demonstrate, and "impersonal" poetry can be as moving as "To the Holy Spirit" or as exciting as "A Leaf of Sage". Yet it does represent a danger that metaphysical reason may, in its turn, dominate his imagination, willing it to become overly committed to "objectivity" (making it almost a substitute for "hope"), overly suspicious of "subjectivity" (making it almost a substitute for "despair" or, at least, "disorder" and a surrogate for other, less voluntary images of evil), and thus dismantle the imaginative structures which give the best poetry its "sober drunkenness". Without these, the faith can become one too rational and the verse too "willed", as in this moment from "A Letter to John Dryden":

Christ is what men have in common, he,
 He is the Word, the source of unity,
 The Reason of man's reason, and its Light;
 Those who participate in him, unite,
 And those who turn their backs face out to endless night.
 Who does not gather with the Logos, scatters;
 With him, man makes and mends, without him, shatters,
 And nothing that he schemes or hopes for matters. (CP, 91)

The assumption of The End of Modernity, like that of "An Art of Poetry" and "A Letter to John Dryden" is that, given the distance between the supernatural and the natural, and given the shattered culture of Western modernity, the poet must either deny disorder or deny Christ.

For Maritain, creativity involves both a revealing and sacrificing of the creative self - and, through this, a revelation of more general truths. The sense of self and the sense of truth intersect in the creative intuition.¹ McAuley claimed not to understand this. Yet, there is a very real sense in which his poetic practice vindicated Maritain's theory. "Nativity", for example, shows how his imaginative construction of self corresponds with his imaginative construction of objective reality:

The thin distraction of a spider's web
Collects the clear cold drops of night.
Seeds falling on the water spread
A rippling target for the light.

The rumour in the ear now murmurs less,
The snail draws in its tender horn,
The heart becomes a bare attentiveness,
And in that bareness light is born.

(CP, 69)

The power of this simple poem is precisely that one cannot distinguish between the sense of a subject and the sense of an object. Both are perfectly constructed and captured in the fragility of the opening stanza, the growing silence, the reserved tenderness of the snail, and the bare attentiveness which receives the light.

"Celebration of Divine Love" (CP, 73-76) has much the same imaginative integrity. It presents itself as a public pattern of conversion, yet its commitment to traditional symbolism leads ultimately to a more personalised contemplation of a more localised landscape. It derives much of its power from the way it restrains, then releases, the "individual" and "self-expressive" dimension of its art, and from the way its restrained despair is transfigured by the heart's active receptivity. It also reveals a religious imagination informed by the myth and theology of Adam's and Eve's Fall.

1. Cf. Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, p. 107.

The poem opens with the image of an infant in innocent delight, but then needs to introduce - "even here" - its sense of a flawed world:

Things turn and show an underside of fear;
 Night-terrors come; the Eden colours fade;
 The joy that seemed a supernatural power
 Weakens and grows discouraged and afraid. (CP, 73)

As the child enters this mystery of evil and begins to "learn/ The outer life of exile on the plain", he becomes both victim and sinner. His mind is divided between Cain, who is active after material and commercial interests, and Abel, who is contemplative and peaceful. It is significant that the Abel figure is defensively peaceful: he rescues peace from the surrounding violence. The child then participates in the second fall - the murder of Abel. He becomes both cause and effect of "love's shattered law", as his heart learns an "obscured guilt", which has its correspondence in creation "Grown tuneless and distraught". He is still like Abel in that he receives a primordial wounding. He is still like Cain in that he is driven by desire and "marked with an inward flaw". Finally, though, it is the sinner, not the victim, who most carries the poem's sense of evil: as the second stanza closes it must leave Abel behind and go with Cain "To wander in the earth without vocation" (CP, 74).

The childhood world of innocence and obscure guilt is at once abandoned and confirmed when we arrive at the world of adult action. McAuley associates the Flood with the "sexual night": "Now in the sexual night the waters rave". What is important here is not any confession of youthful debauchery, but the persistent combination of love and loneliness. The sexual night is the spiritual condition of those who "receive/ A stranger to their bed, and wake alone". While the poem maintains the victim/sinner tension by incorporating the destructive/redemptive possibilities of the Flood, it also places more

emphasis on human action as having a voluntary quality:

Waters of judgment! Yet they might have been
 Living waters, sanctified.
 Pity the castaways of that vast storm,
 Who, passing through the deathly element,
 Survive unliving and are not reborn: (CP, 74)

Loneliness then drives the speaker in search of meaning. The magi he first consults are prophets of an entirely and exclusively terrestrial hope, who advocate a "desecrated life", and seem to incorporate two biblical symbols: Babylon and Babel. When the speaker resists them and discovers faith, he does so within the biblical symbol of exile. This symbol, as McAuley uses it, also signifies the way of tradition and of the "undivided will". This is particularly emphasised by the reference to Psalm 137, the song of the faithful remnant.

It is also a symbol which attracts the contemplative heart: the song is heard "out of the bowed darkness" and its truth makes the heart stand still.

Now the poem begins to celebrate Christian belief through its traditional symbols, which are seen to illumine and elevate natural and biblical symbols. The Annunciation, symbolising Christ's becoming human, confirms "a deep sense/ Of natural order in the way of things". It also completes Old Testament types of redemption - "The Ark, the Rainbow, the Returning Dove" - but in such a way that emphasis still falls firmly on humankind's voluntary participation in a pattern which, while it requites piety and rewards care, guarantees that any violation of the natural order "brings sure recompense". In the sixth stanza, which, in its visionary quality, recalls "The Incarnation of Sirius" and anticipates the dying vision of Quiros, we have a vision of the Church as "The sacred mother of terrestrial things". The

church is perceived as a confirmation and convergence of other symbols: the "living Temple" of the New Jerusalem, the Woman of Revelations, and Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. If this risks a certain denial of the present world, so that it tends to "turn to dust and shade", the orchestrated tones do embody the rational component of belief and the tapestry itself reflects the sense of interconnectedness and hierarchy which accompanies it. The beauty and the danger of this belief is revealed as the Church displays her wealth:

Music reflects angelic hierarchies;
 And crafts that Wisdom has perfected shine;
 There Holy Poverty with Joy resorts,
 And Love that is most human grows divine.
 Caught in her splendour other glories fade,
 And earthly kingdoms turn to dust and shade. (CP, 75)

Then, as if it recognises its own temptation to pseudo-transcendence, the poem next focuses on Christ - but as symbol of the redemptive process, more than as promise of the redeemed state. It moves back into the tensions with which it opens. The figure of Christ "reigning on the cosmic tree" relates Eden and Calvary as type and anti-type, just as it also relates creation and redemption (again interpreting the notion of grace perfecting nature). Other interactions - between perfection and pain, Original Sin and Redemption - reinforce this:

He is the bond and stay of his creation,
 Unmeasured measure of immensity;
 The nails that pierce his hands and feet make fast
 The axis of the world, his outstretched arms
 Give falling nature its stability. (CP, 75)

When the poem next combines the story of Christ's resurrection with one of exorcism, we realise how the traditional symbolism - with all its celebration of natural order and angelic hierarchy - has been used to locate evil and redemption within the human figure. While this is obviously a way of saying that Christ's victory over death is his

victory over Satan, it also says that the "demons" belong to "the epileptic will" and are exorcised when the "right mind" listens to "The Word":

Now is the three hours' darkness of the soul,
 The time of earthquake; now at last
 The Word speaks, and the epileptic will
 Convulsing vomits forth its demons. Then
 Full-clothed, in his right mind, the man sits still,
 Conversing with aeons in the speech of men. (CP, 75)

In its final stanza, the poem shifts its celebration of order - natural and redeemed - closer to "the speech of men" and to a lyric mode. Here we find that the sense of despair which enlivened the opening stanzas has been neither repressed nor resolved by rational faith. What has occurred is a transformation: the poem ends with the transformed negativity of the contemplative, via negativa vision. At this point traditional symbols give way to familiar and concrete images - the heron, the sharp frosts, and the time of pruning. In the clear lines of the heron and the cool lucidity of winter, the poem establishes a more immediate resonance between the "old mysterious symbols" and the "old fidelities of earth" while developing a beautiful correspondence between the structure of perceived experience and the structure of belief which it has been celebrating. The sense of a fragile existence is transmuted into a longing for eternity. The sense of loss is transmuted into a sense of abandonment in love - a belief that what we cannot keep will yet be tenderly kept and restored. The sense of winter is transformed into a yearning for summer and for communing in solitude beyond reason:

Before the herons return
 Abide the sharp frosts and the time of pruning;
 For he shall come at last for whom you yearn
 And deep and silent shall be your communing;
 And if his summer heat of love should burn
 Its victim with a sacrificial fire,
 Rejoice: who knows what wanderer may turn,
 Responsive to that fragrant hidden pyre! (CP, 76)

This ending, where the poet is servant within the mystery of sacrifice, accords with "Invocation" (CP, 63), McAuley's self-dedication as a poet. The Muse is tenderly addressed. She is nurse and friend. The poet has been suckled by her - this suggests the poet's submission to the real. So too, the "wondering mouth" recalls the kind of wonder McAuley associates with a metaphysical intuition and a reverence for creation. Love of the Muse also involves solitude, but such a solitude as ripens, softens, and gives fulfilment to "crude/ Harsh vigour". Complexity is transformed into that McAuley ideal - "a lucid line". This is only achieved by an abandonment. The sense of what words cannot say is transformed into the belief that these are "words that are no longer mine". Implicit in this is the turning to the Word for an art of words, as well as the recognition that the poetic inspiration involves a heightening of the natural faculties.

With this abandonment, the poem has as its final mood patience and acceptance. There is a meaning larger than individual isolation, and so mortality is trusted for its sense of exile and of welcome:

I do not now revolt, or quarrel
 With the paths you make me tread,
 But choose the honeycomb and laurel
 And walk with patience towards the dead;
 Expecting, where my rest is stayed,
 A welcome in that windless shade.

(CP, 63)

That welcome is found in "Winter Nightfall" (CP, 103) the first of McAuley's Trakl poems. It exemplifies what will become a familiar mode: the simple, familiar objects, the selective stress, building up a pressure of symbolic meaning. The images are clear, almost stark (outlines, as it were, of the Swan). The double stress of "Snow falls" introduces a focusing stillness. The double stress becomes an important key to the meditative technique of later poems. Then there

is a falling away from the stillness with "on the darkening boughs". This pattern is repeated: "Evening bell rings through the shade." This metrical method provides a central insight into McAuley's religious mode: the central experience surrounded by the transitory; the heart, still, and the remote disorder.

There is a meal of bread and wine - familiar, but also suggestive. The wanderer is welcomed in. Where does he go? There is a "stony sill" which is "hard with pain". Why should pain be the way in to this welcome? Once again, there is a striking correspondence between the "self" and "world" constructs. McAuley has written of this poem:

But then we become aware that this house is also finally a grave, whose threshold of stony pain the wayfarer must cross; and the waiting meal is not on this side of death but on the other. There is a controlled ambiguity, a range of multiple meaning kept afloat by the simple words and images, and this is typical of Trakl.

It becomes typical of McAuley as well. He will return to Trakl and deepen his own technique of "controlled ambiguity". For the moment, though, I want to examine further how this ambiguity finds expression in the language of belief, and to consider Captain Quiros as a poem in conversation with the myth and theology of the Fall.

1. The Grammar of the Real, p. 203.

SECTION THREE

THE ARDENT HOPE

Even as it celebrates Quiros's dream of a Christian society founded in peace and justice, Captain Quiros is more deeply concerned with the apparent ineffectiveness of that dream. Even as it redeems Quiros's failure by appealing to the obscure designs of God, it never quite decides that the failure had to be: rather, it examines the problem of freedom and evil. Quiros's vision is, throughout, endangered by the evil men do: greed, revenge, unchastity, dishonesty and - as one might expect of McAuley - indecision. It is also endangered by involuntary forces, such as sickness and storm. Somewhat like the Great South Land itself, it is a vision never realised: it is never an immediate presence, but a presence beyond and calling. This is partly because the poem's characters are never dramatically realised¹; partly because the poem, intellectually conceived, carries the conviction that paradisaic hopes will only ever be attained in an eschatological order.

It is also because McAuley's imaginative predisposition links hope and failure. This is clearly happening as Belmonte begins to tell of Mendana's voyage:

With this new enterprise and its disaster
 My theme begins; for in it Quiros sailed
 As Pilot first, but in the end as master
 Who saved the remnant when the venture failed.
 Then of that noble voyage I shall tell
 That sought the South Land; of what there befell;
 Of ardent hope and how much it availed. (CP, 112)

The indications are already ominous: "enterprise" and "disaster" so nearly placed; the rhyming of "availed" with "failed" and "sailed",

1. Cf. Vivian Smith, James McAuley, p. 36.

relating hope to failure and effort; the rhyming of "disaster" and "master" - slightly redeemed by the portrait of Quiros as "master/ Who saved the remnant", though this itself recalls the remnant of Israel, and invokes a theology of tough and tested fidelity¹.

While paradise remains an eschatological hope, the free agent is not absolved from making every effort of prayer and sacrifice. Yet, he is often betrayed: by his will, by forces of fate and chance, and especially by other people. Here, John Leal is probably a more significant Christian model than the heroic, tragic Quiros who commands much of our attention. Leal appears briefly as Quiros is trying to lead the remnant of Mendana's ambition to safety in the Philippines. Most of the expedition are hopelessly ill and dispirited. There are "Only a few that hardship could not daunt." Belmonte praises Leal "above the rest": having turned from soldiering to "a penitential life of prayer/ And service . . .", Leal, though ill himself, spends his time caring for the sick. His apparent reward is bitterly recorded:

Yet at last his own
Death came to him, neglected and alone,
The slave of love worn out with constancy. (CP, 137)

Leal stands in stark contrast to Donna Isabel, who is "punctilious in her devotions" to Christ, yet keeps for herself a large store of oil, wine, food and water, while her sailors have only flour paste and slimy water. McAuley's Christian vision is not without irony, irony which exposes the vacillations and selfishnesses of the will. Therefore, the poem's religiousness should not be too quickly identified with the theology of providence expressed by the Father

1. Cf. Xavier Leon-Dufour, Dictionary of Biblical Theology, pp. 428-430.

Commissary; it should be associated with the poem's own combination of irony and faith, and with its exploration of evil and freedom.

Nor is this the only moment when McAuley's irony exposes the effect of Christians on their vision. While Mendana's expedition is anchored at "The Marquesas Islands", eleven natives paddle out to his ships, hoping to trade food. They are fired upon; three are killed. The Camp Master displays them on posts in order to terrify the natives into submission. Mendana approves - and his failure of will is framed by two images of crucifixion. As the three natives hang from the posts, "Lorenzo took a lance and thrust it through/ One of the bodies." This irony is fiercely underlined as Belmonte then records of Mendana:

Before departing he erected three
Crosses of wood on shore beyond the tide,
And cut the day and year upon a tree:
Images that more fitly signified
The first descent of Christian men among
This friendly folk, than those three bodies hung,
One with gaping spear-wound in its side. (CP, 118)

This incident, where the image of Christ is discovered more deeply in a pagan civilisation, anticipates McAuley's use of Malope, "A man instinct with power, authentic, whole" (CP, 120). Malope's is a world where ritual unifies ancient truths and immediate situations, a place of enlivening tradition and mythic imagination:

This is that island world, Malope's place,
Much like our childhood world of presences
That look out from a mythic time and space
Into the real: a land of similes
Where man conforming to the cosmos proves
His oneness with all beings, and life moves
To the rhythm of profound analogies. (CP, 121)

In one sense Malope demonstrates an intimate connection between natural and supernatural grace. A man of great natural virtue, he

also senses that Christ is the fulfilment of the native Word, "The primal lore the ancestral spirits gave" (CP, 127). Admittedly, this is treated somewhat ironically - Malope thinks the visitors will themselves be greater because of their superior revelation and mistakenly expects "peace and amity". However, the irony is directed more at the Christians' lack of virtue; it leaves Malope's integrity untouched. Malope undergoes what traditional theology would describe as "baptism of desire":

Clearly the white ones have received a Word
More potent than our own forefathers heard:
The proof lies in the power they have displayed. (CP, 127)

Therefore, when Malope is murdered, he is received into the Christian heaven: he traces "the Path of Fire", no longer finding the "She-Ghost" who might trap him in her maze (CP, 120), but Mary, "Lady of the Way", who shows the maze "Completed as a Cross" (CP, 132). Not long before this, Mendana had expressed his failure of will and admitted himself trapped by the maze (CP, 128). Malope's death is itself preceded by Lorenzo's killing of the Camp Master - denying him the sacrament of Penance (CP, 130) - and the vengeful, disordered killing of "one of the Camp Master's friends" (CP, 131). In another crucifixion parody, the heads of these two men are set on poles and raised to view along with the Royal Standard (CP, 131). It is then that the Vicar says Mass. His sermon anticipates, in parody, the Father Commissary's theology:

The Vicar then said Mass, and at the end
Declared these grievous happenings were ordained
For wilful disobedience and sin;
Henceforth by meek submission they might win
A better life than so far they had gained. (CP, 131)

The Vicar's eschatology has taught him indifference to human affairs. When he enunciates what is, in many ways, the poem's central theology,

McAuley undercuts him by having these Christians bury their murdered fellows "and divide/ Their goods among the victors" (CP, 132) - thus identifying them with the murderers of Christ.¹ It is then that Malope is killed and received by Christ, "Who had hung upon the wood;/ In Whom he learnt the meaning of his days." (CP, 132). Within this maze of ironies, McAuley may offer a belief in the Cross, but he certainly does not propound a simplified belief in a Christian society. In the midst of it all, when it is already clear to him that Mendana has failed, and just after he has had some presentiment of the "Day of Blood", Quiros receives his destiny, and a coded vision of the only answer McAuley ever really offers: a leaping fish (Christ) which momentarily discloses "hidden grace"; the morning star (Mary)²; and the sound of a cock crowing:

Then calmed by prayer, southward his vision went
 Where like a kite of stars with blazing streamer
 The Cross hung over the last continent,
 Still waiting for the impress of the dreamer.
 To lead with bloodless sword a new crusade:
 This was the hope, the solemn vow he made,
 To which henceforth his energies were bent.

Meanwhile the bay was quiet in night's presence,
 Save where a leaping fish an instant showed
 The water's hidden grace of luminescence;
 Then on the eastern verge the planet glowed,
 Shedding the mild rays from its tranquil lamp.
 Out of the silent darkness of the camp
 With lost and lonely clamour a cock crowed. (CP, 129)

Although Quiros's purpose is holier, less bloody and less mercenary than Mendana's, he discovers that God does not necessarily bless even the best of intentions. The precarious character of Quiros's Christian heroism is indicated in the opening of "New Jerusalem":

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1. Cf. John, 19:23-24.
 2. In Catholic devotion, Mary is often referred to as the morning star. This practice is still evident, for instance, in the issue of The Catholic Weekly dedicated to the Marian Year. (June 3, 1987) The litany which Quiros and his crew recite (CP, 146) includes the term.

Those who have quenched the heart, who would not dare
 For any cause to set life on a throw,
 Who never walked with failure, death, despair
 In long familiar converse: how can they know
 What the world looks like in a blaze of glory? (CP, 155)

This faith has its foundation in stoicism, especially in its rhyming of "dare" with "despair", and it gambles between long despair and brief glory. By the time he sets foot on what he mistakenly believes to be The Great South Land of the Holy Spirit and celebrates the feast of Pentecost, violence has already been done to the natives. Once again, through an act of disobedience, a native has been shot and, in yet another parodic reminder of the crucifixion, his mutilated corpse is hung upon a tree. Quiros himself is ill and his division of command is beginning to cause confusion. Pentecost, however, is presented, perhaps rescued, as a moment of glory and happiness. The vigil is celebrated with fireworks, reminding us that "The heart is born to celebrate."¹ The dawn cooperates with its "gleaming purple and bright gold", (although this rather ominously recalls Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib"). Quiros, in dedicating the land, declares, "here is a new heaven and earth" as he institutes the "knightly Order of the Holy Ghost" and commits it "to the uttermost/ Reaches of time". The prayer he gives his knights is significant:

For this grace only shall these servants pray:
 That they may give and never count the cost,
 That they may fight when everything seems lost,
 Heedless of wounds, unshaken by dismay. (CP, 158)

As Bradley has pointed out, Quiros exposes his presumption by failing to include the third part of St Ignatius's prayer: to labour and not to ask for any reward.²

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1. Cf. "The Royal Fireworks", A Vision of Ceremony, Collected Poems, p. 82.
 2. David Bradley, "James McAuley: The Landscape of the Heart", G. Dutton, ed., The Literature of Australia (1976), p. 456.

The dying speech of the Father Commissary reminds Quiros that his "task and privilege" is to restore the world to Christ, but that such restoration can be perfected only at the end of time. While this is the theological core of Captain Quiros, it needs to be carefully appreciated. The Franciscan does not absolve Quiros from engaging vigorously with history's incomplete designs. Rather, he strikes a tension between end-time and present time:

For in the midst of time God has not willed
The End of Time. Not ours to bring to birth
That final Realm; nor shall our labours build
Out of the rubble of this fallen earth
The New Jerusalem, which will never be
Christ's perfect Bride save in eternity. (CP, 163)

This is easily misrepresented. It does say that an ideal Christian society will exist only in eternity. Yet it also disciplines the escapist possibility of such an eschatology: the providential purpose is working back towards "the midst of time", as well as forward to "The End of Time" (and the difficult intimacy operating between these terms is given visual representation in the way they stand almost against each other on the page). The placing of "Not ours to bring to birth" and "nor shall our labours build" certainly denies these efforts perfection here and now, but it also lets the end-of-line linger on, quietly confirm, the activities themselves. Quiros must, "in the midst of time", continue his work - indeed, the very incompleteness of his endeavour will encourage greater passion, and will also occasion divine grace (usually for others). However, his actions must not be corrupted at the heart by utopian ambition. The theology, then, is a frame for reconciling Quiros's quotation of the gospel command to be perfect and the Father Commissary's counsel that "all shall be made perfect at the last" (CP, 164). This reconciling is done in the heart: at the centre of Captain Quiros's theological

tension is the belief that "God will approve/ The work you have pursued with burning love" (CP, 164). Love, which for McAuley is equally a matter of feeling, "intellectual passion", and faith, is used to hold together temporary uncertainties and failures, continued effort, and the promise of final joy. If it seems that McAuley barely believes in the success of such endeavour, this derives from a further tension: between his theology and his imaginative predisposition to believe

That every living fruit the soul can bear
Is born of patience and despair.¹

This, it must be stressed, is not the same as a tension between a religious worldview and a more secular one. It is, rather, a tension between hope and despair - which itself provides the fundamental shape of McAuley's religious imagining.

Therefore, the Father Commissary's speech needs to be read in relation to the more lyrical passages which follow it. The speech may provide the theological core of Captain Quiros, but here is its emotional base:

Can this be all that the great Ocean gave,
A doubtful glory and a broken rite?
Spears of the sun lie shattered in the wave;
Hope into history sinks out of sight
Like a drowned sailor on a coral reef
Where fish with flash of scarlet and goldleaf
And lapis-lazuli take watery flight.

Still I invoke you, my prophetic star,
Rising each spring above the Southern Sea
Whose waters in their overturning are
Renewed with teeming life unweariedly:
Your rays of blue and rose, Aldebaran,
As on the very night that I began,
Charge the abyss with magic energy.

1. "Celebration of Love", Collected Poems, p. 37.

Until He comes, who will come, may there be
 The cosmic dance pursued in that lost land;
 Let the drum-voices wake to prophecy;
 And through the maze-print on the trodden sand
 Let masks of vision lead the warriors on;
 May time revolve as shadow round a stone,
 Untroubled by destruction's blundering hand.

(CP, 164-165)

This structure is very typical of McAuley: disillusionment breaks through, but is restrained by "Still"; order and meaning are willed back into the situation by the invocation of Aldebaran; the perspective is thrown forward to the final coming of Christ, then returned to the present moment, now transfigured by a ritual of hope. Nevertheless, the opening sense of history's grief is very strong: "Spears of the sun lie shattered in the wave". As hope surrenders to a time-bound perspective, the simile of the drowned sailor rises, carrying certain complexities. It does more than communicate loss of hope. Its initial sense of defeat is somewhat restrained by the lovely colours of the fish (as a personal condition is comfortingly converted into a natural one). It also recalls that Belmonte himself was saved from drowning (CP, 148) - Belmonte the poet, now turning failure into song. This submerged association leads easily into the invocation of Aldebaran. Aldebaran is a strangely ambivalent symbol, if we recall its earlier appearance:

Then in the evening vault Aldebaran,
 Eye of the Bull, renewed its changing fire.
 Out of the starry labyrinth it shone,
 Guiding the heart through memory and desire,
 The dark alternate tenses of our days.

(CP, 146)

Aldebaran, then, illumines Belmonte's art "with its sad alternate fire:/ Blue as of memory, red as of desire"¹ - so that the poet's position corresponds to the poem's religious structure. This

1. "The Incarnation of Sirius", Collected Poems, p. 24.

correspondence generates and authenticates the final prayer. Here the recurring image of the maze is related to "trodden sand" emphasising that hopes identified with time are not well-grounded. Instead McAuley/Belmonte proposes a more ritualised mode of life, one of figural imagination, by which this "lost land" might enact and renew "The figured Now which is eternity" (CP, 173). Time becomes more shadow than substance. Yet as this hopeful prayer concludes, we arrive at a very familiar construction of McAuley's: "Untroubled by destruction's blundering hand." - a negative way of saying something positive, an absence edging towards a presence. All this is contained within the space the prayer constructs and "believes": the space between the present world and the final coming of Christ. Into that space Belmonte/McAuley casts his prayer: urgent, but also strangely passive, as if the "may" and "Let" indicate a voice seeking permission to believe. These words, then, relate to the prayer's structure in such a way that its eschatology serves more deeply to expose the vulnerability of history.

In his dying vision, Quiros sees "history . . . shaped to a new theme" (CP, 172). This theme is barely consoling. It is largely the theme of Quiros's voyaging: failure checked by a remnant of faith and by love. Quiros first sees those images of Australia which succeed his broken quest and which continue its ironies. The Dutch see a "barren coast", useless for their commercial purposes. Though Bougainville finds in New Guinea "minds kept childish by the drug of sense", his reports encourage a dream of "the paradise of Natural Man" (a dream which, like Quiros's Christian one, cannot dissociate itself from violence). Quiros finds difficult comfort in Cook's final discovery of Australia; he sees Cook as a "Child of an age grown dull to

blasphemy" who will "lightly accept" being adored by islanders and who will be killed to provide them sacred sustenance. So Quiros has to face the failure of his dream: Australia is not settled as a New Jerusalem, but as a place of damnation. But still, he recognises something of Malope's authentic wholeness in the Aboriginal ritual life:

"I saw the South Land, vast, worn down, and strange:
 Man in his tribes, and insect, beast, and tree,
 Set in a cyclic pattern beyond change.
 There solemn long-shanked birds danced ritually,
 And painted men enacted and renewed
 With mime and song in rapt exalted mood
 The figured Now which is eternity." (CP, 173)

This rite too is soon broken by the penal settlement. Quiros does glimpse happier moments as "A nation rises fortunate and free" (CP, 174). These give way, however, to figures of dread Apocalypse, figures which embody an ironic confirmation of all that the old explorers feared.

In this anti-Christian era, when "grace and nature both appear to wilt", the faithful remnant must live estranged from custom and ritual. Quiros's vision of failure is checked by a belief that this remnant's disregarded suffering may yet have influence (the same belief which informs the prayers in "A Letter to John Dryden" and "Celebration of Divine Love"):

"They take the world from which they seem estranged
 Into love's workshop where it will be changed,
 Though they themselves die wretched and alone." (CP, 175)

Quiros envisages the poem's voyage of dream, failure and hope turning towards the notion of some dark, redeeming love, his ultimate hope being that "The energies of Mercy will prevail/ Till time is closed up with a thunderclap." (CP, 175). The final victory of love and mercy

is then figured in the Virgin Mary:

"In the world's night I see the Virgin stand,
Crowned with the stars, the Spirit's perfect Bride,
And the bright rays that issue from her hand
Are reins by which she gently sways the tide." (CP, 175)

The Virgin is certainly a consoling presence. Since she is "Crowned with stars", she represents the woman of Revelations who, threatened by the dragon, gives birth to "the son who has to rule all the nations with an iron sceptre" (Rev., 12:5). She also represents the ultimate realisation of Quiros's dream, since the phrase, "the Spirit's perfect Bride", recalls another passage from Revelations:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, as beautiful as a bride all dressed for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice call from the throne, 'You see this city? Here God lives among men. He will make his home among them; they shall be his people, and he will be their God; his name is God-with-them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness. The world of the past has gone. (21:1-4)

Even so, her consolation is not easily possessed: the Virgin stands "In the world's night" - the vision remains embattled, and the space between the eschaton and the present still troubles. Moreover, the Dragon has not, at least in the poem, been defeated and Mary stands very near her own anti-type: the Mother "holding in her lap/ The head of Antichrist, her own misbirth" (who herself resembles the famous prostitute of Revelations, 17). In this way the tensive character of the poem's religious imagination is sustained. While this is the Virgin who guided Malope to Christ, she is also the Virgin menaced by evil. She is victorious - but in the "End of Time"; "in the midst of time" she is still struggling, as Mendana's experience shows:

Daily they searched those empty latitudes,
Where the exultant whale finds pasturage:
Four tiny arks filled with cabals and feuds.
At night they saw malignant Scorpion wage

His warfare overhead, with curving sting,
 And glittering claws stretched forward, menacing
 The just virgin of the Golden Age. (CP, 118)

The primary reference here is not to Mary, but to Astraea, who, during the Golden Age, lived on earth as the goddess of justice, but who, because of humankind's increasing wickedness, withdrew to heaven and was placed among the stars as Virgo. Still, each figure occupies a very similar space: between the woundedness or wickedness of human history and the ideal of justice and mercy. Each is, in a sense, removed from earth, though each figures the true meaning of history. When Astraea next appears she is even closer to Mary, since she prefigures the gospel image of the grain which dies in order to give life:

In the late watch, that month, the north-east sky
 Showed forth the Virgin with her angel-wings,
 As in the old star-maps: holding on high
 A bough in one hand, while the other brings
 An ear of corn, fruit of the Golden Age:
 What can that ancient mystery presage
 But that the grain must die before it springs? (CP, 146)

This passage from death to life is then immediately related to its anti-type: the passage from life to death symbolised in "that fatal tree" of Eden. (CP, 147)¹. On a night which seems to restore the original gleam of "wild Chaos", Belmonte remembers Adam and Eve, then, as if to indicate their heritage, records:

A sudden illness, violent and obscure,
 Almost extinguished Quiros at the start,
 And to the end remained without a cure. (CP, 147)

Thus Mary may embody a final victory of Mercy, but there are many hints in the poem that her status as "the Spirit's perfect Bride"

1. The term, "fatal tree", is Milton's: Paradise Lost, IV, 514.

cannot be too quickly divorced from her role as the Second Eve, her place within the Fall-Redemption drama.

The real source of the poem's religious structure is not the Father Commissary's theology of providence, but rather the unspoken way in which Captain Quiros re-enacts the myth of the Fall. In making this claim, I am arguing only a general correspondence, one directed towards similar religious issues, and encouraged by McAuley's Catholic climate of imagination and imaginative predisposition, but not necessarily motivated or sustained by close and critical appropriation of the Genesis texts themselves. Those aspects of the Fall myth which I see as operative in Captain Quiros are: the metaphysical struggle between order and chaos, reflected in the human story of good and evil; this tension between good and evil as experienced in the flawed human will and expressed in the problem of guilt (as also in the promise of redemption). These inform the ironies and disappointments of Captain Quiros and, more than anything else, guarantee that its eschatology avoids escapism and indifferentism. While this mythic impulse is already implied by what has been said about the tension between failure and hope, and between "the midst of time" and "The End of Time", I want now to explicate some other aspects, particularly as they elucidate the relationship McAuley establishes between evil, failure, and will.

The failure and evil consequences of the first voyage are clearly attributed to Mendana's failure of will. He sows the disorder which will undo him when he picks "a relative as Admiral" and includes "Three haughty brothers of his wife", who soon quarrel with the Camp Master - another troublesome character whose first thought "Was not to keep the peace" (CP, 113-114). The pattern is indicated very early in

the poem:

With faction at the top, disorder spread
Under Mendana's moody vacillations. (CP, 114)

This disorder takes strength from Isabel's vanity and ambition, as well as from Lorenzo's unrestrained pride "By which he ministered to anarchy" (CP, 114). There is an element of moral allegory in the poem, dealing with the relationship between will and disorder. When Admiral Lope wants to steal a better ship, it is "the false counsels of the family clique" (CP, 114), which weaken Mendana's distaste for lawlessness. This act of piracy provokes a prayer, admittedly from a commercially-minded priest, that Mendana's expedition should fail. If it does fail, it may not mean that the priest has indeed been successful in invoking divine retribution, but that he has merely been the first of many victims who express the expedition's inherent flaw:

So things went on, disorders of every kind,
The Devil walking loose to spread the flames. (CP, 115)

It is at this point that Quiros wants to preserve his virtue by withdrawing. However, he lets himself be persuaded by a dangerous collusion of King's man and Christ's: Mendana makes a futile vow to re-establish order in the service of the King, and the Vicar, with piety and opportunism sweetly blended, urges "Christ's holy purpose" (CP, 115). If we need any sign that their enthusiasm ignores the fallen state of humankind, this is immediately provided:

Once out to sea, matters a while improved,
As if Old Adam had been left on shore. (CP, 115)

In this way, McAuley clearly frames the voyage in relation to the Fall myth, and its presence can be traced throughout. If he had indeed been left on shore, Old Adam arrives at "The Marquesas Islands" with them: as natives paddle out towards the ships, they are shot. Mendana's disapproval loses authority before the Camp Master's

philosophy "That killings at the outset well convey/ The lesson to be learnt . . ." (CP, 116). Old Adam next discovers the island women, who with their "voluptuous grace", represent "too yielding access to damnation" (CP, 117). If McAuley betrays some puritanism and a patriarchal bias (reading the Fall myth with Woman as Tempter), he is also acknowledging one of his own favourite poets: Milton. While this section seems to celebrate natural innocence, it hints, too, at the dangers which pleasure can have for the reasoned will. Its Miltonic echoes should remind us of Raphael's advice to Adam:

In loving thou dost well, in passion not,
Wherein true love consists not; love refines
The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat
In reason, and is judicious, is the scale
By which to heav'nly love thou may'st ascend,
Not sunk in carnal pleasure, for which cause
Among the beasts no mate for thee was found.¹

Indeed, something of this God-like hierarchy lies at the poem's heart, as we see when McAuley uses Belmonte to voice his own profession and lament:

For poems of this kind are out of fashion,
Together with the faith, the will, the love,
The energy of intellectual passion
That built the greatness which we have resigned. (CP, 142)

When Mendana next capitulates to the "ill-inclined", abandoning his plan to leave a settlement and continue searching for the Solomons, his failure of will causes considerable chaos: natives are shot for stealing water-pots; food is stolen; then three more natives are shot and hung up for all to see (CP, 117). When Mendana, "caught/ Where violence pulled like a strong undertow", fails to condemn these actions, disorder seems to occupy his mind:

From this time on, the fabric of his mind
Began insensibly to gap and fissure,
As if some dark distrustful spirit would find

1. Paradise Lost, VIII, 588-594.

An unpredictable release from pressure:
 A secret man, strangely irresolute
 For one so pertinacious in pursuit
 Of that to which his whole life was consigned. (CP, 118)

Discontent and treachery now flourish - and the stars seem to approve as the Scorpion menaces Virgo. Mendana, blaming himself for "loss of discipline", prays to Our Lady of Solitude and tries to make peace. Immediately after, one of his ships disappears, as if his failure in freedom is being sealed by forces of malign fate (CP, 119).

In describing the destruction of Malope's world, McAuley is clearly blaming Mendana. He lets power slip into the hands of the Camp Master, "the duke of strife", whose actions are described as "boisterous", "vehement", and "ambiguous". His disordered actions reinforce the discontent of Isabel's brothers, who conspire to alienate Malope (by having two natives killed secretly) and so pressure Mendana into abandoning the settlement (CP, 124). They also plot, with Isabel, to kill the Camp Master. Mendana, sick and "Wrought by an inner torment of decision", too easily resigns himself to their advice. Even so, as he considers how delay, sickness and grief "Have left (his) will frustrated and perplexed" (CP, 128), he is able to recognise his fault and recognise it precisely in terms of his participation in the Fall:

"How straight, how clear, in the beginning seem
 Those tasks we undertake at heaven's calling!
 Danger we run to embrace, and never dream
 How vast the labyrinth and how appalling
 The ambiguities that sap the heart;
 Till that which God assigned for us our part
 Becomes the shameful instance of our falling." (CP, 128)

His knowledge is, however, ineffectual: both the Camp Master and Malope are murdered. After this Mendana, "weakening more and more", abdicates authority in favour of Lorenzo. Once more, external forces

seem to cooperate in Mendana's fall:

As if in punishment
 For treachery, disorder, cruelty,
 Which had too long outraged it, Heaven sent
 Swift fevers and devouring dysentery
 Till more were sick than well. So through the veil
 Of nausea they heard the funeral wail,
 And hostile drum-beats thudding endlessly. (CP, 135)

Then, as Mendana and Lorenzo die and the natives grow more and more aggressive, the survivors petition Isabel to save them from "the Devil's tightening claws" (CP, 135). This, referring back to the struggle between Scorpio and Virgo, creates a lovely irony. Isabel is hardly a figure of justice, nor indeed a Virgin figure; and the sailors are now reaping the reward of their own treachery against the just order.

In contrast to Mendana, Quiros remains a man of honourable will, and the evil and failure which attend his voyage derive more from forces beyond his control. Despite the blessing of Pope and King, Quiros is soon in trouble. After being shipwrecked in the Atlantic, he arrives at Cartagena only to find that here King's orders are reverently obeyed, but not carried out. He receives no finance. In Panama he is again refused. Making his way to Lima, he finds a small reminder of Mendana's failure of will:

Even now harsh fortune scarcely would relent.
 The Viceroy, the great Count of Monterey,
 Though favourable, was sick and negligent
 While his subordinates caused more delay. (CP, 145)

Most significantly, Quiros must, in order to get his three ships, accept three men against his will, men with neither loyalty nor skill, men who will corrupt his enterprise: Bilbao, Iturbo, Prado. So the visionary is supplied with "a usual ship's complement/ Of good and ill" (CP, 145). Even though Bilbao and Prado may be seen as

responsible for their own actions, they also serve to distance evil from Quiros's individual will. In this sense they substitute as embodiments of external, involuntary evil. Similarly, the "sudden illness, violent and obscure" which then strikes Quiros, represents an evil beyond his choice. Yet Quiros is shown to have the spiritual integrity necessary to combat evil:

Only the fiery vigour of his heart
Now kept his judgment and his will intact. (CP, 147)

This capacity for vision, judgment and will distinguishes him from Mendana, whose sickness was so closely allied to his "inner torment of decision".

As he is leaving the Isle of Beautiful Folk, Quiros prays for this "shadowed race". Though they are a people of great natural virtue, they are not redeemed and live in "the long exile of the Lord's delay". In biblical terms, they are still living "in a land of deep shadow", without the light of Christ.¹ Quiros prays that their natural virtue will find its perfection in Christ. His prayer, addressed to the "fruitful palms", prompts Belmonte to recall Psalm 92: "Justus ut palma", with its promise that "the just will flourish like the palm tree". It celebrates the wonderful works and deep designs of God, announces that the wicked will perish and the virtuous obtain an ever-green reward, and so guarantees the final restoration of paradise, the final victory of good over evil. However, the victory will not occur "in the midst of time" for Belmonte next records a troubling moment:

1. Cf. Isaiah, 9:2-7, which, in the Catholic liturgy, is used for Christmas, so that the "great light" is interpreted as Christ.

I felt the lonely strangeness of the South,
 And shuddered, though I could not have said why.
 As we stood off, there came brief rain and thunder;
 Once more I glimpsed the island, lying under
 An arc of iris broken at the sky.

The broken rainbow seems deliberately to deny utopian enthusiasms. It recalls, too, the description of the original assault perpetrated by Mendana's men in "The Marquesas Islands":

With that first violence the happy time
 Burst like a bubble, the irised colours fled. (CP, 116)

Disorder now begins to corrupt Quiros's virtuous endeavour. Prado, Satan-like, prowls about "Insatiate for mischief . . . Sowing his hints." (CP, 151). Quiros himself is finally implicated by "his idealist's remoteness from the pressure of immediate reality"¹:

Weakened by sickness, Quiros seemed remote,
 Giving his orders without consultation;
 If he addressed the company the wrong note
 Was sounded in his passionate oration:
 Too much of Honour and of Fortitude,
 When what was needed in the present mood
 Was to take treason firmly by the throat. (CP, 151-152)

Bilbao then makes an error in piloting, rebels against Quiros's reproof, and is imprisoned on board the Almiranta. This sets off "a wave of murmurs . . . Among the malcontents" (CP, 152). Yet Quiros, despite contrary advice from Torres, persists in his mild government, which he sees as expressing his personal dedication to Christ's law of love. Quiros appears to be rewarded: land-birds are sighted, and since they are compared to "the dove/ That bore the olive-twigg to Noah's hand" (CP, 153) they signal an end to destructive powers and the healing of the broken rainbow which marked the departure from the Isle of Beautiful Folk. Soon after, Quiros arrives at what will be New Jerusalem.

1. Vivian Smith, James McAuley, p. 32.

Even here, disobedience quickly brings death - a soldier in the landing party, disobeying Torres, shoots a native. The superior weapons of Spain establish "a pause in the hostilities", but the group is itself plagued by "confusion of command". When, after the brief paradise marked by Pentecost, the Order of the Holy Ghost, and Corpus Christi, Quiros again sets sail, he is finally undone - by storm and by the indecision of his Pilot (CP, 160). McAuley places his emphasis less on fate, and more on the failure of the other's will, a failure he carefully distances from Quiros himself:

The Captain, lying sick, could not forestall
 An outcome that events themselves decided
 While the Chief Pilot and the Admiral
 Share a command uncertainly divided:
 The necessary orders were not given. (CP, 160)

It is indeed a "Fulcrum of chance" (CP, 160), but the force which turns the lever is dividedness of will. The moral seriousness of this is underlined as the Scorpion and Devil are recalled: "we swayed in the wind's claws" (CP, 160). As the Father Commissary then teaches Quiros the stern mysteries of divine providence, he speaks of "this fallen earth" (CP, 163): not only is perfection impossible except in eternity, but the imperfection which so bedevils the voyage is directly related to the Fall.

Finally, Quiros's intentions to undertake another voyage are undone, not simply by his death, but by forces of ill-will outside him. His country is "A specious fabric of exterior power/ Enfeebled by decay and lassitude." (CP, 167). His King is indecisive and the Church deceitful and opportunistic. Even in his final illness, Quiros retains his honour and we are carefully told that he is a "prince of charity and valour" (CP, 171). In his visionary experience he is

almost invisibly configured to the Lamb of Revelations¹: finally, that is, he has put off the Old Adam for the New. After his death, Belmonte sees the morning star: not only does this vindicate Quiros, but it also redeems Mendana, since it was he, on the eve of his "Day of Blood", who had quoted the text: "To him that overcometh shall be given/ The morning star." (CP, 128).

Mary is described as the morning star in the litany by which Quiros dedicates his "holy enterprise" to her honour (CP, 146).² Belmonte's sighting of the star tells us, therefore, that the voyager has reached the shore. It also places Quiros firmly within the mythology of the fall, since it recalls, even re-enacts, how Malope found, in the Lady of the Way, one who would rescue him from the serpentine coils of betrayal and bad will.

This mythic substructure, which has Quiros voyaging towards an ever-deepening appreciation both of the world's fallen condition and of the uplifting influence of divine grace (which can guide the individual will to authentic goodness, as well as to eternal salvation), is reinforced, at key moments, by Belmonte's understanding of his poetic responsibility. In attempting to relate the poetic and the human voyage, Belmonte re-focuses the poem's sense of a fallen world and its belief in disciplined will:

He who would rise, in deed or poetry,
To the height of a great action, must have first
Eaten the harsh bread of reality,
And, schooled by blows, must with sad skill be versed
Both in the deep corruptions of men's will

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1. The description of Quiros's last words as "prophecy that seemed to break/ The seals of an illuminated scroll" (CP, 171) recalls the description of the Lamb in Revelations, 5:7-9.
 2. This litany is published in The Catholic Weekly, June 3, 1987.

And in their shallow weakness, which can still
Level the best intentions to the worst. (CP, 138)

If such a purgative path leaves the poet, like Quiros, with "a clear purpose, tempered and serene" (CP, 138), prayer confirms the purpose. Belmonte is quite explicit about this: it is the Ignatian method of meditation which illumines the facts of his story, so that they glow "in their true light and meaning" (CP, 113). This meaning is beyond feeling and reason; it is apprehended by the heart. Belmonte declares that his story is something he has "long kept in (his) heart" (CP, 112) - echoing a phrase used in the gospel to describe Mary's prayerful searching of the mystery of Christ.¹ This phrase also recapitulates McAuley's view that poetry grows in contemplation², as well as his awareness that "In the old symbolism the heart was the principal organ, the seat of life, soul, intellect, memory, will."³ If Belmonte's ideas evoke memories of "Terra Australis" (CP, 16), the correspondence between inner and outer voyages is once more sealed in a way one might expect of the artesian heart:

Go, little stanza, set like a ship to sail
Inner and outer Ocean. Will you bear
Across the boundless playground of the whale
This burden of stores and lives? How will you fare
In wintry gulfs when storms beat from the Pole,
Or through the reef-maze as the waters shoal
In a blind world of rain where men despair?

Terra Australis you must celebrate,
Land of the inmost heart, searching for which
Men roam the earth, and on the way create
Their kingdoms in the Indies and grow rich,
With noble arts and cities; only to learn
They bear the old selves with them that could turn
The streams of Eden to a standing ditch. (CP, 113)

If this shows yet again how the poem's religious structuring is informed by the Fall myth, it also, in stressing the vulnerability

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1. Cf. Luke, 2:19, 51.
 2. Cf. The End of Modernity, p. 124.
 3. Cf. The End of Modernity, p. 131.

of human and poetic aspirations in a maze-like world, reveals how darkly that myth operates in McAuley's work, how determinedly he tries to hold Old Adam in relationship with New Adam. In this moment, Old Adam is almost breaking away from hope: only the troubling rhyme of "fare" and "despair" holds to a stoic style of hope (anticipating the later rhyming of "despair" with "dare" - CP, 155). Moreover, this poet's attempt "to sail/ Inner and outer Ocean" will bring him, with Malope's death, to the destruction of his desired "land of similes" (CP, 121). The poem is deeply aware of the dead Malope as the dark wound at the centre of its own aspirations to recover the figural imagination and move "To the rhythm of profound analogies" (CP, 121). In this way, even as Belmonte bravely performs his analogies, the poem tells itself that it has endured its own version of the Fall.

This sense of a post-lapsarian poetry is reinforced as the "Proem" for Part Two self-consciously declares that its own high, frail purpose is "out of fashion" (CP, 142). In calling "for the gift of tongues and prophecy", Belmonte is calling on the Holy Spirit to inspire his work, and also sharing McAuley's view that great poetry originates in metaphysical and religious truths. If great poetry is difficult for Belmonte, it is because of a failure of metaphysical imagination, the loss of

the faith, the will, the love,
The energy of intellectual passion
That built the greatness which we have resigned. (CP, 142)

Even so, Belmonte's is not an easy espousal of traditional forms. He acknowledges the inherent difficulties of narrative verse itself, of learning how

To shut the sounding Ocean in a book
By verbal spells; charm to an ampersand
Each curling seashore; teach rough waves the dance
Of formal metre - might one not sooner chance

To draw our huge Leviathan with a hook? (CP, 141)

He acknowledges as well the difficulty of writing a Christian poem, where the voyage becomes a "solemn rite", a baptismal passage into the redeemed world. This difficulty is attributed not merely to "the age", with its "demonic powers"; Belmonte also notes the difficulty of mapping "spiritual cosmography" and of integrating his story within the biblical mythic pattern. As he then proceeds to defy literary fashion and to celebrate the poem's ordering influence on one whose "life's concerns have seemed like ships dispersed/ On different coasts without a rendezvous" (CP, 142), Belmonte continues to avoid a simplistic stance. The dignity and difficulty of the poetry to which he aspires expose a restless relationship between the poet's will and his failing world:

So lightly may the poet's will refuse
To hold the difficult height of the sublime;
Soon tiring, soon distracted, it pursues
Some lesser fancy, trifling for a rhyme.
O God, amidst distractions manifold,
And in a failing world, let me uphold
A wonder-working icon against time! (CP, 143)

Here, as often in McAuley's work, heroic will and stoic faith provide a way of defying the dark time, of resisting its invitation to disorder and despair. It is the dying Quiros who reveals the theology of redemption which reciprocates such an imaginative structure: he invokes the via crucis notion that one person's sacrifice may be of benefit to others - if in an unseen and mysterious manner. Such suffering may participate in the redemptive suffering of Christ and may, therefore, mediate its eschatological efficacy to the fallen world and its incomplete history. His final hope in poetry is illumined by this theology:

"Terra Australis, heartland of the South,
In the Great Lauds your myriad creatures raise
May there be never wanting the singer's mouth

To give words to that canticle of praise
 Which from all beings pours forth to the Spirit.
 And from our broken toil may you inherit
 A vision to transform your latter days." (CP, 176)

If we do inherit a vision, it is not simply related to a theology of divine providence. Rather, that theology helps construct a restless relationship between history and eschatology, itself reinforced by a comparable relationship between despair and hope. In this way Captain Quiros is deeply informed by McAuley's Catholic belief in original disobedience and sin and in redemption through the cross of Christ. In the story of Old Adam it finds rehearsed the problem of human will and its relationship to evil. In the story of New Adam it finds a promise, often derived from "broken toil", that the will may be elevated by grace and achieve, if not paradise on earth, an endeavour of honourable love. However, while the language of Catholic theology gives McAuley a new way of saying this, he has, in many ways, been saying it since his first volume. Remembering how Belmonte invoked Aldebaran as his guiding star, I want now to return to Under Aldebaran: to show how the fundamental framework of McAuley's religious imagination is established there, before his conversion to Catholicism, and so to argue a profound reciprocity operating between "faith" and "sensibility" within his religious imagination.

SECTION FOUR

THE ARTESIAN HEART

Quiros sails under Aldebaran. He is, as "The Inception of the Poem" (CP, 108) acknowledges, a theme of McAuley's youth and there are significant indications that Under Aldebaran is already shaping the world that Quiros will discover. Quiros is explicitly introduced in "Terra Australis" (CP, 16), where McAuley announces his own exploration of "mythical Australia", his ambition to discover profound correspondences between the land's contours and those of the heart. At other times, Quiros is present by association - but the associations are very strong. For instance, McAuley's "Jesus" (CP, 20) - a figure of solitude, sacrifice, and destiny - is very close to Quiros.

"Henry the Navigator" (CP, 21-23) anticipates Captain Quiros: Henry has maps "where the soul/ Finds its similitudes" (CP, 22); his adventurous idealism is endangered by the disobedience and greed of his subordinates (who seek Moorish cargoes instead of honour); his mild government is eventually rewarded when Gil Eannes gathers sufficient willpower to overcome doubt and sail beyond the known world. Furthermore, the analogy McAuley draws between Henry's age and the modern world is very similar to that drawn between the modern world and the voyage of Quiros:

Our age is early too, and must prepare
 Its new projections, of great-circle routes
 Into an unknown world. Thus our despair
 It put to the Straits again, although in air;
 And the old terrors take new attributes. (CP, 22)

In addition, the apocalyptic figures which feature in Quiros's dying vision have earlier counterparts in poems like "The Blue Horses" (CP, 7) and "The Incarnation of Sirius" (CP, 23-24). The former also

expresses a conflict between aspiration and achievement:

But we are never in possession
and nothing stays at our command. (CP, 8)

This is a tension central to Captain Quiros - as, indeed, to the whole of McAuley's work. "Chorale" (CP, 25-27) has a similar structure: while it celebrates the possibility of achieving, in art, a world much like Malope's with its "algebraic/ Choir of symbols" (CP, 26), it also resists paradisaic illusions and reminds itself, in terms a voyager would find congenial:

And yet our praise, intent upon one truth,
Distorts the truth as maps do in projection:
The centre gives a perfect azimuth
But other bearings have a false direction. (CP, 27)

"Celebration of Love" (CP, 34-37) reveals love as the new continent that "Awaits a bold devout discoverer" (CP, 35), but, the lover's hope is explicitly described as "Alternate" (CP, 34) and his aspirations to union are held in play with his recognition that "by continual growth love keeps us strangers" (CP, 36). It is "The Incarnation of Sirius" which links this with the "sad alternate fire" of Aldebaran (CP, 24) - a description which, of course, is still working in Belmonte's vision of Aldebaran,

Guiding the heart through memory and desire,
The dark alternate tenses of our days. (CP, 146)

More importantly, both Under Aldebaran and Captain Quiros experience this "alternate" character of life as a threshold for hope, even if it is a disciplined and astringent hope: as Captain Quiros believes "the promise does not fail" (CP, 175), so "Envoi" claims that beauty "does not wholly fail" (CP, 6).

This suggests more than a continuity of diction and imagery. The continuity is generated by and contained within important imaginative patterns - and these, if explored, will manifest the fundamental framework of McAuley's religious imagination, as well as the reciprocity operating between this imaginative foundation and his Catholic belief. In Under Aldebaran there is a dialogue taking place between a deeply ingrained sense of imminent disorder and a persistent search for transcendent meaning. In a poetry which is everywhere empowered by his own reasoned will, McAuley draws from the artesian heart whatever he can of beauty, and rescues from a faintly alien, even hostile world of remote disorder whatever he can of order and meaning.

"Envoi", in which McAuley explores his identity as an Australian poet, opens with a sense of remoteness and disorder, and closes with an uneasy tenderness towards the land and the "fretful seed" it resentfully bears. Poet and land are unified by a sense of common ambivalence: for both any triumphs are hard-won, for both they are triumphs over waste and indolence, and for both the truth is born in bareness:

And I am fitted to that land as the soul is to the body,
I know its contractions, waste, and sprawling indolence;
They are in me and its triumphs are my own,
Hard-won in the thin and bitter years without pretence. (CP, 6)

As land and consciousness choose each other's shapes and tones, we see demonstrated the active receptivity of McAuley's imaginative process. Details of the observing landscape are selectively observed, and the interaction supports a feeling of distant intimacy appropriate to both speaker and landscape.

There the blue-green gums are a fringe of remote disorder
And the brown sheep poke at my dreams along the hillsides;
And there in the soil, in the season, in the shifting airs,
Comes the faint sterility that disheartens and derides.

Where once was a sea is now a salty sunken desert,
 A futile heart within a fair periphery; (CP, 6)

The opening stress on "there" immediately communicates a sense of distance, yet the "blue-green gums" and the brown sheep poking at dreams are introduced with a tone of familiarity. The geographical contrast between Australia's central desert and its coastal sea is internalised as a contrast between the troubled, private heart and the public appearance: "A futile heart within a fair periphery". The poet is an observer in a landscape to which he has difficulty belonging. His place is difficult to define: the fringe, the hillside, the shifting airs. These are places of transition. At the same time, these places of transition exist in the poem alongside the "Salty sunken desert". There is transition, but there is also a central and enduring deadness. The poem resists and contains its own faintly sterile heart. While "disorder" gives a falling, deadening inflection, the third line picks up the rhythm and employs it as an invocatory ritual - "in the soil, in the season, in the shifting airs". The ritual, however, is mildly subversive: what it summons is "faint sterility". McAuley's ritual invokes, as if often does, a contained negative experience of life.

The artesian heart is, therefore, the dominant image. The water from the artesian bore is hard and bitter, but it does bring life to the centre where there is a deep reluctance. In the final stanza, McAuley associates this image with the problem of individual will.

Beauty is order and good chance in the artesian heart
 And does not wholly fail, though we impede;
 Though the reluctant and uneasy land resent
 The gush of waters, the lean plough, the fretful seed. (CP, 6)

While beauty may be the result of order, which implies positive willing, it is also the result of good chance, which is involuntary on our part (and which may later be called "Providence"). The restraint we feel in the line, "And does not wholly fail, though we impede", is typical of McAuley. We may generate a negative force either through reluctance (which is our failure to will) or resentment (which is our negative willing), but we cannot prevent Beauty's final, hard-won triumph, a triumph somehow beyond our will. Transcending the conflict between disorder and order, the final victory goes to "The gush of waters, the lean plough, the fretful seed". This is the remote order. Beauty and order are believed in because they do "not wholly fail" - the negative utterance is contained in a verbal discipline, as the negative sense of existence is contained in discipline of hope. The poet's pen has become a "lean plough".

In "Terra Australis" McAuley's heartland is again charged with both positive and negative forces. The reader is asked to voyage within and is guaranteed a correspondence between the external world and the internal: a "land of similes". Once again, the poet's union with the land is one of uneasy tenderness. While the wattle is present as the healer of doubt, the contortions of the angophora, which represent the preaching gestures of Moses, give us a prophet disfigured by his destiny. While there is something menacing about the white cockatoo which "screams with demoniac pain", the magpies assume the camaraderie of mates: "There you come home; the magpies call you Jack/ And whistle like larrikins at you from the trees." As the poem's focus moves towards the inland, the images suggest a growing solitude. The emu is insolent and will not say what mystery it bears - but its place is "between" and "on the edge". McAuley is at his best summoning the desert's ascetic loveliness:

But northward in valleys of the fiery Goat
 Where the sun like a centaur vertically shoots
 His raging arrows with unerring aim,
 Stand the ecstatic solitary pyres
 Of unknown lovers, featureless with flame. (CP, 16)

Red ant-hills are transfused with the sun's light. Yet why should this lead to a combination of "ecstatic" and "solitary", of ecstasy and "pyre"? It is noticeable that the landscape is wasted away and becomes, as if by a contemplative detachment, itself "featureless with flame". The closing sense of pain and joy is close to Brennan's image of "the cicada's torture-point of song". ("Fire in the heavens.") We already have, therefore, the dominant elements in McAuley's religious consciousness: the contemplative detachment of the via negativa and the ambivalence, under Aldebaran, of the heart's will.

In "Celebration of Love" (CP, 34-37), love is ambivalent. This poem opens as a song of praise and communion. The landscape announces love, and the communion of the lovers is mirrored and vindicated by a communion between the external and internal worlds:

the living day's
 External presences attend and bless
 Her coming with an inward happiness. (CP, 34)

Creatures, wild, natural, free, join in the celebration and contribute a tone which is playfully exuberant. The experience of isolation is incorporated as a way of strengthening love. Love itself is pictured as a voyage, a discovery of the self. It is the epitome of creation. It is also recreative, recovering innocence and order. Despite such grandeur, love is at ease with the familiar and the ordinary, as the poem's final transition indicates. Yet there are subversive

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1. Christopher Brennan, Selected Poems, chosen by G.A. Wilkes, Angus & Robertson, 1979, p. 57.

elements. Even in this apparently serene ceremony, McAuley is resisting a violent and negative impulse. The almost desperate avowal that "every living fruit the soul can bear/ is born of patience and despair" is supported by a belief that the "soul/ Is born a solitary". This sense of a barely contained negativity is given forceful utterance in the third stanza:

Until we made life new I had not known
 What force lies in our being to defeat
 The emptiness that seems an active power
 Assimilating life. But we have grown
 So full of being that we can complete
 The gap in things where time and fear devour. (CP, 35)

This existential sense of world-woundedness¹, coupled with a desire for some redeeming order, is basic to McAuley's religious imagination. Not only does it inform the explicitly Christian poem, "Jesus", but it also helps explain his early interest in mythic figures whose divinely-inspired destinies link their service of others with suffering as well as with honourable heroism.

"Jesus" opens with a sense of quiet familiarity, focused by the tone of "Touching" and the image of "workman's hand":

Touching Ezekiel his workman's hand
 Kindled the thick and thorny characters;
 And seraphim that seemed a thousand eyes,
 Flying leopards, wheels and basilisks,
 Creatures of power and of judgment, soared
 From his finger-point, emblazoning the skies. (CP, 20)

Here the familiar world has very quickly been revealed "Under the aspect of another meaning"². The literal description of the Hebrew script - "thick and thorny characters" - becomes a symbolic hint of

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1. I am following R.F. Brissenden's argument that McAuley's sense of despair "has nothing to do with the specific problems of the twentieth century", but relates to something "inherent in the inscrutable order of the universe". Cf. "The Wounded Hero", *Southerly*, 4, 1972, 270.
 2. "One Tuesday in Summer", *Surprises of the Sun*, CP, 199.

Christ's redemptive suffering. This description also reminds us of the prophetic contortions of the angophora in "Terra Australis". Jesus's own prophetic consciousness is then conveyed in lines which recall the visionary quality of "The Incarnation of Sirius". At the same time, McAuley is careful to connect his description of Christ's visionary experience with a world of sense and use. As the poem releases the strange, awesome figures of an undisguised and immediate revelation, it also keeps itself grounded in "workman's hand" and "fingerpoint", still recalling the quiet familiarity of the opening, and modifying any impulse towards a remote, abstract symbolism. For all his apocalyptic status, this Christ remains a carpenter's son.

Even so, the apocalyptic language, mediating Christ's divine consciousness, does threaten to pull both poem and Christ away from the more familiar world. It creates an almost poignant sense of the vast interior distances which constitute that consciousness - distances which tend to make him an ideal figure isolated in the real world he is destined to redeem and love. As the second stanza turns us back towards the world of ordinary animals and flowers, this sense of Christ's distance is heightened rather than diminished.

Then turning from the book he rose and walked
 Among the stones and beasts and flowers of earth;
 They turned their muted faces to their Lord,
 Their real faces, seen by God alone;
 And people moved before him undisguised;
 He thrust his speech among them like a sword. (CP, 20)

As McAuley describes Christ's relationship with people, there is strongly present a quality which persists throughout his work: a sense of distant communion. He phrases the experience negatively: "people moved before him undisguised". This use of negatives to create an affirmative awareness and stance is one of the most significant aspects of McAuley's style, which has its own via negativa. Here too

people stand before Christ in attitudes of passivity and loneliness - attitudes which are, as it were, unredeemed counterparts of his sense of destiny and solitude. He alone can know them (for God alone knows the soul born a solitary); he can know them because they cannot hide from him. They do not know him. Any possibility of an easier, closer communion is undone by the sense of distance which the poem confirms and expands with its closing line:

And when a dove came to his hand he knew
That hell was opening behind its wings.
He thanked the messenger and let it go;
Spoke to the dust, the fishes and the twelve
As if they understood him equally,
And told them nothing that they wished to know. (CP, 20)

While the dove's terrible purpose distances it from its more usual symbolic function, the last line acknowledges at once Christ's challenging, close perception and some reluctance or failure of will which makes his listeners draw back from what he says. In this way it extends and completes the play between intimacy and distance which informs McAuley's imagining of Christ. As he contains, but does not reduce, Christ's remoteness, McAuley is transforming the kind of feeling which structures itself in phrases like "love keeps us strangers"¹. into a religious perception.

Since that perception is still illumined by Aldebaran's "sad alternate fire", it is not surprising that McAuley uses the biblical sources for "Jesus" in a way which increases its underlying ambivalence. In the first two lines we seem to have Christ reading the scriptures - an incident such as that recorded by Luke, where Christ reads in the synagogue at Nazareth.² There, however, Christ is reading Isaiah and the text - to do with liberation - is very consoling. McAuley does

1. "Celebration of Love", CP, 36.
2. Luke, 4:16-22.

not take that option. Instead, he uses Ezekiel, the visionary and apocalyptic prophet of exile, isolated within a rebellious society, and preaching against false prophets. This easily authorises the "wheels and basilisks" of the first stanza and introduces a feeling that God is a power poised on the edge of fierceness. This is then modified by the almost Franciscan attention to "the stones and beasts and flowers of earth", which recalls gospel texts on divine providence.¹ However, the consolations derived from meditation on the natural world are brief: "He thrust his speech among them like a sword." This line reestablishes a complex toughness in McAuley's portrait of Christ, as it catches up a number of references which modify any image of a mild Messiah. While primarily referring to the word of God as sharper than any two-edged sword,² McAuley is also presenting the Christ who said he brought, not peace, but the sword.³ This in turn serves as a disturbing reminder that throughout Ezekiel, the sword is the instrument of God's destructive fury. Nor does the dove displace these darker associations: not only does Noah's sign of peace become Christ's sign of the terrible suffering to which the spirit leads, but doves are also associated with sacrifice.⁴ There is, arguably, an even darker resonance at work: in Ezekiel God says of the faithless Israelites, "I shall slaughter them all like doves of the valley each for his sin."⁵ Such associations, especially as they operate within a context of verbal restraint and implication, build up, powerfully, the sense of some incommunicable pain. Even the possible consolation of speaking with "the dust, the fishes and the twelve" is now denied him, since this possibility moves so finally into the close, where his mission meets their reluctance.

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1. For example, Matthew, 6:25-34.
 2. Hebrews, 4:12.
 3. Matthew, 10:34.
 4. Cf. Luke, 2:25.
 5. Ezekiel, 7:16.

If this combination of inner pain and public power makes McAuley's Christ something of a wounded hero, it also encourages us to examine how "faith" and "sensitivity" reciprocate in "Philoctetes" and "The Hero and the Hydra", where some wounded heroes of classical mythology embody McAuley's concern with coherence and chaos, guilt and redemptive responsibility. These heroes act between a sense of "care" and a sense of "despair" (to anticipate the highly significant rhyme employed in "Music Late at Night"). As Brissenden has remarked:

The main figures in these myths - Prometheus, Heracles, Chiron and Philoctetes - are all heroic, strong and benevolent. Moreover the courses of action towards which their divinely given courage or wisdom, their sense of justice and loyalty, their basic good nature and philanthropy, impel them are seen ultimately both as having a beneficent result and as being part of some total process which is not without significance. Yet at the same time what they do also involves them and sometimes those whom they most wish to help in a degree of injury and pain which seems calamitously disproportionate.¹

In "Philoctetes" (CP, 39-41), Philoctetes, exiled on the island of Lemnos, wants to make his world cohere, but cannot quite decide whether his wound is the result of personal carelessness or divine design. Thinking of how the honour intended him by Heracles has become his downfall, he is attracted to a general irony: "- The highest gift more readily destroys us -" (CP, 39). Yet he also refers the blame to himself and his "careless hand". This is why Philoctetes is so concerned to "name" his guilt: he cannot reconcile his sense of its large obscurity with his experience of its precise individuality.

Sometimes in dreams
My soul is led before unknown tribunals
Where I must plead before a faceless judge
Whose silence is the weight of my own guilt,
Which, though a thousand witnesses accuse me,
Is never named, but none the less condemned.
Where in this waste is there a tongue to cry
My guilt before my face, that I may know? (CP, 39)

1. "The Wounded Hero", Southerly, 4, 1972, 271.

precarious possibility of coherence in a world where irrational forces (both human and divine) continually wound the will. Prometheus, giving heavenly fire, intends "to make man rational" (CP, 50), but Zeus prefers to rule by deceit and fear. Their disagreement creates discord in human history, where the Promethean fire "Inflames (the) will and multiplies desire" (CP, 50). As Io finds Prometheus bound to his punishment, he tells her how in "this exhausted hour" gods and men see clearly "the irrational knot/ Of flesh and feeling" which writhes in their inner "empty darkness" (CP, 45). Io has herself been punished: because she aspired to union with Zeus she has aroused the jealousy of Hera, lost her childhood innocence, suffered a "bestial transformation", and incurred the curse of wandering the earth. Since Prometheus seems calm in his suffering, she asks him to share the secret of his hope with her. At first, he projects a world redeemed, where gods and humans will cooperate. He promises Io that she will bear a son, Heracles, who will break the "cyclic torment" which he, Prometheus, suffers and represents. This promise is almost immediately undone. As if the vulture returns on cue, suffering renews itself and Prometheus becomes the giver of "blind hopes, that blow the sparks up from the fire,/ Contriving many arts in search of rest" (CP, 48). He has to fall back on a defiant form of hope as he invokes the phoenix to image a future age of peace when

the meek will learn
 In suffering and patient thought to share
 The task of gods, and hold a world in care. (CP, 51)

That age, however, will mean the destruction of Zeus's rule by deceit and fear, and the cooperation of divine and human wills. It will also mean the reunion of Prometheus and Cererone, who once provided law, dance, courtesy and tradition, the "inborn rituals that can save/ From self-destructive fear" (CP, 51), but who "fled/ And left her former

works untenanted" (CP, 52) as humankind more and more identified with disorder and abandoned rituals and myths.

Chiron too remembers a wonderful and pastoral age when the senses and their pleasures were naturally attuned, but is wounded by the "blind frenzy" of Heracles, his friend. While he sees that such a destructive possibility brings about the need for law, and while he offers his own death "To free the Titan from his banishment" (CP, 54), Chiron also sees that the Promethean heritage of rationality, combined with the stoic will of Heracles, will not be enough to recapture the sinless, sensual earth he loved. He sees himself located within a much larger pattern, where "guilty care" substitutes for freedom and encourages despair:

Men will bewail my fate when I am gone
 And in it see the pattern of their own;
 Their poisoned instinct writhes incurable
 Within the ancient cave of touch and smell;
 They feel the Hydra-taint of guilty care
 Rankle their joy and bring them to despair. (CP, 55)

Chiron cannot guarantee to break the cycle of this despair. Though he sacrifices his immortality, he does not expect the efficacy of his sacrifice to extend beyond this individual instance and initiate an all-inclusive economy of regeneration or resurrection. This awareness is mediated through the contrast he draws between the dry stalks and the regenerating corn, a contrast which incorporates the gospel's image of the grain dying to give life as well as McAuley's emerging appreciation of the difference between stoic and Christian hope:

In winter when the owl sat humped with cold
 I came down to their firesides and told
 Stories of gods and heroes; and often then
 Would tell of one who brought down fire to men,
 And how, before the Hero sets him free,
 Some god must give his immortality

And die: not as the sacred ear of corn
 Lies in darkness waiting to be reborn,

But as the dry stalk falls and vanishes.
 A dear exchange it seemed - nor did I guess
 What Hydra-poisoned arrow, from what bow,
 Would send me willing to the shades below. (CP, 53)

Similarly, Heracles dies with the knowledge that he "fought the monsters of the lower world", but that his victory was momentary, merely "Clearing a little space, and time, and light/ For men to live in peace" (CP, 58). Here the only response available to death is "the fierce mercy of the flame's embrace" as Heracles is burned to release him from the poisoned shirt of Nessus. Even so, the structure of evil is remarkably similar to that employed by the Christian myth of the Fall. Heracles has in some sense participated in the evil by first killing Nessus. Deianira has been tempted to cooperate with evil because she hoped for greater love. Heracles himself recognises the duality of good and evil when he declares "heaven is divided" (CP, 58). The mystery of evil, therefore, is related to forces greater than human knowledge and malignant will. Heracles asks his followers not to seek revenge for his death because he senses that it is not merely the result of individual choice:

I cannot search the weave, but partly see
 More error will be found in it than crime.
 When heaven persecutes it clothes its will
 In ignorance and unintended acts.
 I strove to please the gods, but their demands
 Are set in conflict; heaven is divided. (CP, 58)

"The Hero and the Hydra" concludes, in "The Tomb of Heracles" (CP, 59), with McAuley's well-known disavowal of stoicism, as both "superb and desolate". Though admirable, the heroism of Heracles cannot transcend the "classic anguish" of his world, where "rigid fate" ensures that every heroic resistance must circle back to death's disorder. If McAuley's conversion to Catholicism allows him to break through this impasse, it does not mean that he leaves behind the tension evidenced here between heroic effort (hope) and death's

disorder (despair). That tension is relocated: in the doctrines of Original Sin and Redemption, and in the distance between the great ceremony of traditional symbolism and the more private believer of "Private devotions" who treads "Between the reasons for despair".¹ In a sense, Bradley anticipates this when, remarking on how McAuley's use of myth is part of a search for objectifying ritual, he recognises that "the same contradictions exist within this form as in the previous poems" ² of Under Aldebaran. Smith, too, implies something of the reciprocity between belief and poetry which I would want to emphasise when he writes:

In tracing McAuley's thought up to this stage it becomes clear that stoicism is the only possible and logical attitude in front of a belief in eternal recurrence and the cyclic nature of time; his conversion marks the breakthrough from this Greek conception of time to an eschatological reaffirmation of an order in life and the universe . . . If one looks at his work as a whole one notices that his conversion is reflected in his poetry not as a turning to new themes, but as a penetration to the essential significance of the themes and a resolution of the tensions that have always preoccupied him . . .³

While I would argue that the tensions are more relocated than truly resolved, Smith appreciates the sense in which McAuley's conversion derives from his poetry. Bradley touches on the analogies operating between "The Hero and the Hydra" and the myth of the Fall:

The epic fragments, pressed to prefigure a Christian symbolism, are made to yield complex instances of the function of guilt and rejection of guilt in the life of heroic endeavour, especially in the image of the Hydra, that taint of unredeemed desire or original sin, which drives the Hero to madness and despair.⁴

While I would suggest that the Greek myth also presses "to prefigure a Christian symbolism", this demonstrates the interaction between

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1. Music Late at Night, p. 6.
 2. David Bradley, "James McAuley: The Landscape of the Heart", G. Dutton, ed., The Literature of Australia, p. 451.
 3. Vivian Smith, James McAuley, pp. 17-18.
 4. Bradley, "The Landscape of the Heart", p. 452.

Captain Quiros, A Vision of Ceremony and Under Aldebaran: the drama enacted between disorder and hope, and within that the central role of the will - whether this drama is presented in terms of Greek or Christian mythology, whether it examines the stoic or the graced will.

This commitment to coherence can be seen emerging in the earlier, apocalyptic poems, "The Blue Horses" and "The Incarnation of Sirius". These poems are preparing to reject any poetics, any metaphysics, of unrestrained freedom. They show McAuley's fascination with and rejection of what he was later to call "the Magian heresy" (as well as his reaction to the destructive possibilities of the war years). Though they are obviously not as visible as in A Vision of Ceremony and The End of Modernity, notions of metaphysical reason and disciplined will can be heard, as it were, in the background, waiting for their cue.

"The Blue Horses" (CP, 7-9) is the closest McAuley comes to affording allegiance to Dionysian forces in his poetry. In his own words, the poem expresses "that animal imaginative passion which creates the forms of a culture but will not rest in them, eternally invoking chaos against the simplifications of reality on which custom depends".¹

It is also a poem which cannot quite make up its imagination, cannot quite believe in unfettered inspiration. The final stanza demonstrates this uncertainty - the poet is trying to see with Blake's inner eye and also to accompany Prufrock and friends along some real, industrial streets:

1. Under Aldebaran, p. 75.

The hoof-beats thunder in my ears.
 Leave to the councillors the garbage-plot,
 The refuse and the greasy tins
 Of this slum-culture - these are not
 The area where love begins.

The brutal and the vile are set
 As watchers at the gate,
 But the Blue Horses scream aloud:
 A sudden movement shakes the crowd
 Stampeded on the hooves of fate.

(CP, 9)

In "The Incarnation of Sirius" (CP, 23-24), the revolutionary hope of a millenium is reduced to a moment of bloody destruction and abortion. Then order returns. Peter Coleman argues that this poem is symptomatic of a new freedom in McAuley's work, a recantation of his anarchic and revolutionary ideas.¹

Coleman's is essentially a reading of the poem as ideology, showing the poet's new intellectual certainty. Where does the final image of Aldebaran, so powerful and so disturbing, fit into this reading?

And then the vision sank, bloody and aborted,
 The stars that with rebellion had consorted
 Fled back in silence to their former stations.
 Over the giant face of dreaming nations

The centuries-thick coverlet was drawn.
 Upon the huddled breast Aldebaran
 Still glittered with its sad alternate fire:
 Blue as of memory, red as of desire.

(CP, 24)

While this poem may advance an anti-millenarian position, that position is itself informed by an implicit myth of Eden Lost. In McAuley's conception, the error of millenarian hopes is precisely their denial of the fallen world, which then engenders their belief in a false (entirely natural) order and an inverted redemption (to suit the "great anagram of God"):

1. The Heart of James McAuley, pp. 29-31.

For the millennial instinct of new flight
 Resolved the antinomy that fixed their light;
 And, echoing in the troubled soul of Earth,
 Quickened a virgin's womb, to bring to birth

What scarce was human: a rude avatar
 That glistened with the enclosed wrath of a star.
 The woman died in pangs, before she had kissed
 The monstrous form of God's antagonist. (CP, 23)

Though McAuley himself often feels that the forces which threaten his poetic and religious order are external, the more significant forces are, in fact, internal. This disorder may be contained by the poetry, but it cannot be denied. "Chorale" (CP, 25-27) tells of the transforming, healing function of art. The thirst for order, the search for symbolism, is given its most ideal expression:

The universe becomes an algebraic
 Choir of symbols, dance and counterdance,
 Colours and forms in shimmering mosaic:
 Man enters it as an inheritance. (CP, 26)

However, there is still an undertone of uncertainty: such praise easily "Distorts the truth as maps do in projection" (CP, 27); the seraph holds his lamp "above the time/ And places of our deepening despair" (CP, 27). Nor does the poem close in certainty - the final stanza gives the sense of the "Seraph in the soul" as someone who heroically resists the gathering forces of disintegration:

When the delirium swirls within the gyre,
 And comets die, and iron voices wake,
 Be witness to the sun; and mounting higher
 Hold the lamp steady, though creation shake. (CP, 27)

Significantly, McAuley's imagination here reveals the hierarchical impulse which is correlative to his emphases on disciplined will, metaphysical reason, and the supremacy of the sacred. The seraph exercises control from "above", having climbed "The orders of creation as a stair" (CP, 27). If this supernatural force is called upon a little desperately, it may be because McAuley is so deeply aware of

how creation can shudder from its forms.

Poetry which values and expresses the power of will as McAuley's does courts the danger of a lofty coherence, where the rational dimension of poetry (as of experience, as of faith) has its authority privileged, with imagination assuming a role which is more illustrative than genuinely expressive. If I see this as a problem, it is not because I am assuming that poetry must avoid certitude, but because I am arguing that poems like "Envoi", "Chorale", "Gnostic Prelude" and "The Incarnation of Sirius" establish uncertainty and despair as integral and enlivening elements within McAuley's particular search for adequate symbolism and ceremonial form.

Indeed, in these poems, a kind of repression - which I prefer to call "restraint" - operates expressively and mimes, in its interaction of discipline and freedom, the structural sense of artesian hope which underpins so much of McAuley's best work. This becomes more evident as, with Surprises of the Sun, McAuley's religious imagination renews contact with its lyric foundation, and as, in Music Late at Night and Time Given, his landscape lyrics express, with a force at once terrible and tender, the little that can be said. Yet the seeds of this development are present already in Under Aldebaran: in a little poem like "At Bungendore" (CP, 5), where the underriding tension between hope and despair expresses itself in the speaker's disciplined stance between the world's good will and his own sorrow.

"At Bungendore" assumes a real and objective world which operates according to natural law, and from which humankind has been alienated by some unspecified failure of will. In this way, it too anticipates

the myth of the Fall and the theology of Original Sin. More importantly, however, it anticipates the lyric mode which will mature in McAuley's later work. Particulars are flatly observed, yet given a pressure of symbolism so that a line, such as "A far-off bird-cry falls", becomes suggestive and mysterious. Details are placed side by side in the poem, details which have no immediate similarity: lamb, rain, bird-cry, peach-buds. Then, a hidden thread is discovered. Yet, as if to keep hope restrained, the poet finds his own sorrow even as he finds the world's secret:

The blossoms have their will;
I would that I had mine:

That earth no more might seem,
When spring shall clot the bough,
Irised by the gleam
Of tears, as it does now.

(CP, 5)

"Revenant" (CP, 19) also anticipates what will happen when the poetry finds a receptive stillness before the particularities of immediate experience. The speaker is at once identified with and isolated from the scene (described with the intimate observations of a stranger). Yet, as the simple objects are named with reverence, the pressure of reality builds - until one feels another world coming through, full of connotations and correspondences:

And here's a plate
With a bread-crust turned to mould; a glass
Stained with the dregs of wine. That's all.

This perception somehow transforms the poet, who is now liberated from the past and its terrors: "One need not even be afraid./ There's nothing." A world of correspondences has been evoked to show that there is "nothing", and the poet now discards that world of immediate sensations and goes off as a solitary, "Walking like a man that has been freed". In its theme of reconciliation, its conjunction of

familiar and strange, and its mood of contemplative detachment, this poem anticipates the religious awareness of "In the Huon Valley" and "Fingal Valley".

If there are profound correspondences operating between McAuley's poetry of belief and his pre-conversion work, these are not simply the result of some happy chance where belief finds experience amiably receptive to its frames. Rather, the receptivity of Under Aldebaran is more active, and it is reciprocated by a similar receptivity in Captain Quiros and A Vision of Ceremony. The correspondences are, therefore, being generated from within the imagination itself, as it integrates and mediates between uttered experience, myth and dogma. It is because of this that I describe the religious character of McAuley's poetry in terms of the interactive convergence of these elements. At the heart of Under Aldebaran is the hope for some coherence which might, largely by an act of will, contain and sustain its metaphysical intuition of despair. This hope receives meaning from and gives meaning to the myth of the Fall, a myth whose imaginative structures disclose analogies which both comfort and challenge the stoic will. Not only does the myth objectify disorder and deepen the tension between its voluntary and involuntary character, but it also reaffirms the terrible responsibility of freedom. It tells its story of a fallen world and so confirms, more profoundly, the anguish of history, even as its eschatological direction demands of hope an even stricter discipline. This interaction is itself extended into and encouraged by those Catholic doctrines which McAuley selects for special emphasis: the doctrines of Original Sin and of Christ's redemptive function in the sacraments.

If I have also argued that the certainties of "A Letter to John Dryden" are dangerous to McAuley's religious imagination, it is not because I am implying superficial distinctions between "dogma" and "life". It is because I am trying to name the power working in poems like "Pieta", "Morning Voluntary" and "Parish Church" - poems which are less certain, but more integrally religious, poems which refuse to employ a religious symbolism which is merely consolatory. McAuley's public-polemic mode can weaken those tensions which structure his imagining and can then actually inhibit the convergence of uttered experience, myth and dogma. Rather than imply that this temptation enters his poetry with his conversion, I have tried to show that it operates in moments when Under Aldebaran opts for remote order. Yet I have also suggested that this first volume, in a poem like "At Bungendore", predicts an eventual, liberating convergence of lyric and religious inclinations. In order to develop this argument, it is necessary now to turn to Surprises of the Sun.

SECTION FIVE
THROUGH MEMORY AND DESIRE

While A Vision of Ceremony is more inclined to locate disorder in the individual will and to counteract it with universal meanings and "old mysterious symbols", Surprises of the Sun is more aware that disorder is not always voluntary and that ceremony may visit the informal moment. While these poems also evidence an attempt to incorporate more contemporary concerns and styles, they return to what might be described as the earliest landscape of McAuley's religious imagination. The promise of "Envoi" is recovered and renewed as they lay bare the private ground of the remote disorder and break it open with the lean plough. Moreover, as they make a positive art out of a negative situation, these poems also confirm and strengthen the receptivity, detachment, and bare attentiveness which characterise McAuley's maturing religious imagination.

With "Numbers and Makes" (CP, 199) the poetry returns to its origins and critiques its basic instinct to frame disorder within the disciplined search for meaning. The speaker, who as a child once tried to make order from the random details of passing trains and cars, now resists an impulse to betray historical fact with symbolic truth: "Why change the memory into metaphors/ That solitary child would disavow?" This indicates a new reverence for the particular, coupled with an awareness that a "selective stress upon certain details"¹ can suggest an adequate symbolism. McAuley's technique of selective stress respects the tension between the particular and the general. For this reason, it is a kind of symbolism which offers a

1. Cf. McAuley's Introduction to his Selected Poems in the "Australian Poets" Series.

middle path between too much meaning and too little, between the order of doctrine and the order of private impressions and sensations. The denial of metaphor itself becomes a characteristic kind of affirmation:

Pure research,
Disinterested - but why, and into what?
There was no question then, no answer now. (CP, 199)

There was no question: the sensations were sufficient "answer" in themselves; they rendered the question unnecessary. Now, the adult experiences dissatisfaction: a sense of a limited world, coupled with a desire to order sensations, to link them with some transcendent "why" and "what". The answer, however, will not come - if it did, it would betray the experience. The possibility that words might betray as well as serve is for McAuley a kind of pruning. His confidence in words is brought up against his personal sense of what cannot be - and this confrontation results in the strengthening of a language which is bare and slender, yet carries a powerful charge, a mixture of positive and negative. This resistance to metaphor is not a retreat from meaning, but a disciplining of theoretical and doctrinal preconceptions. What is happening is that the poet of "Envoi" is re-emerging to speak, with renewed voice, of "the thin and bitter years without pretence".

There is also, at this time, a shift in McAuley's poetic theory which reciprocates this imaginative development. Surprises of the Sun was published in 1969. In his 1975 Blaiklock Lecture, McAuley recalls:

Since 1960 I have written short poems, and the lyrical vein is strong in many of them. There is some lowering of formality as regards tone and diction, and at times a greater acceptance of the poetic possibilities of accidental particulars as they occur in experience. The poems are written mainly in a language of immediate impressions, and any view of the world they offer

is suggested by this means and not by a declared theoretical or doctrinal framework.¹

In 1963 he argues that Brennan's work suffers because the personal experience which is the "vital core" of his poetry "is expressed only in accordance with the canons of art which he maintained".² He repeats this judgment in The Personal Element in Australian Poetry (1970): "The conclusion I have edged towards is that Brennan might have done better if he had been content with a less formidable poetic technology, and a more direct use of his personal experience."³ Also in 1963, considering the problem of "adequate symbolism", he seems to shift away from his preference for a traditional symbolism:

The hardest problem confronting the poet in my time has not, I think, greatly changed or become less urgent: it is the struggle for an adequate symbolism. I use the word in its wide sense. Even a selective stress upon certain details in a realistic account of a situation can charge those details with meaningfulness beyond themselves. Or such details may be separated out of any particular occasion and used in a more general and abstract way . . . Particularity or generality, concreteness or abstraction, colloquial diction or formal, and all other such matters, are not to be decided upon in advance by some general critical prescription: they are means at the poet's disposal, to be used in fulfilling his specific intention in each poem.⁴

This movement may indicate some increasing uneasiness with the worldview encoded in Catholic dogmas, and suggest "that the sense of that 'rhythm of profound analogies', characteristic of the earlier lyric verse, has faded to a much humbler and more fitful mode of poetic perception which emerges at times in barely shaped statement . . ."⁵ I read it more as a relocation of the

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1. "The Rhetoric of Australian Poetry", Blaklock Lectures, p. 90.
 2. Christopher Brennan, p. 41.
 3. The Personal Element in Australian Poetry, p. 40.
 4. Cf. McAuley's Introduction to his Selected Poems in the "Australian Poets" Series.
 5. David Bradley, "The Landscape of the Heart", p. 459.

persistent order/disorder tension. In The Personal Element in Australian Poetry, McAuley, trying to assess and accept the significance of autobiographical poetry, imagines the question in terms of a balance which must be held between public and private, between meaningful and random experience, so that poetry can still restrain internal chaos:

Why had modern poetry made this effort to digest particular, personal experience? In one aspect it is surely a product of that unfolding realization of the unique value and significance of each individual human person, and his life-history, which characterizes the western and Christian tradition . . . On the other hand, it is also possible that some of this poetry is a retreat from meaning and an abandonment of rational control. When no structures of belief and rational interpretation or moral principle remain, the poet can fall back upon a record of his random sensitivities: the private world does not then complement the public one; it proclaims the ruin of the public world as well as its own disorder. ¹.

Rather than accept the distinction between "belief" and "experience" which McAuley himself seems to be implying, I would suggest that the poetic theory keeps its mythos even as it modifies its logos. McAuley may indeed be realigning his allegiance in regard to general and particular truths, but he is also still imagining poetry as some kind of redemptive order. The "evil" is still imagined as some principle of chaos which might corrupt meaning so that the world seems "eaten hollow with despair" ². - though evil is now located more reciprocally in internal and external worlds. The "good" is still associated with some principle of coherence and discipline - whether it manifest itself as "selective stress" or "moral principle" - and this principle is still located in the exercise of reasoned will. In this sense, McAuley's suspicion of the personal element in poetry indicates, not so much a withdrawal from experience in favour of belief, as an

1. The Personal Element in Australian Poetry, p. 61.

2. "The Tomb of Heracles", CP, 59.

imaginative need for and commitment to discipline, whether he is intoning praise for "angelic hierarchies"¹ or flatly observing the everyday routines of a hospital ward.²

Because of their discipline, McAuley's own autobiographical poems play between freedom and restraint, and do not collapse their meaning into "random sensitivities". As they become more "confessional", they become, ironically, more available for public meaning. In "Wistaria" the symbol is at once localised and universalised, so that it can perform its mediatory function and "absorb all feelings into sight". Abandoning an abstract mode, it finds in something very concrete a truth of feeling which transcends the private experience:

Of all things, I liked best that tough old vine
Roping our side fence, offering my days
Clusters of hope that stirred the sense like wine. (CP, 202)

The wistaria also mediates between McAuley's own ambivalent heart and a world where only hope can complete the gap in things. The heart, with its "mute aching sweetness", calls upon the imagination to transform its flowers into "bells, pagodas, pale balloons", to give another meaning to "long afternoons/ Where time stretched forward, empty of event". This is momentary: the images change back to flowers; the imaginative power was escapist. There is nothing escapist in the way the child's desire and need is now recorded by the adult: without pretence, without the luxury of irony, and with only bare meaning. Still, this grim realism does not destroy the symbol. The wistaria remains to receive, even rescue, the deeper meaning of the child's fantasy. It signifies how hope, to resist death in the soul, will make do with little:

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1. "Celebration of Divine Love", CP, 73-76.
 2. "B.P.I", Quadrant, December, 1976, 4.

The soul must feed on something for its dreams
 In those brick suburbs, and there wasn't much:
 It can make do with little, so it seems. (CP, 202)

This hope is made even more precarious once we remember that the poem is a memory, and that it opens by asking if the wistaria is, in fact, still there, still powerful.

Such an astringent hope is given an even more private application in "Father, Mother, Son" (CP, 181). For fifty years McAuley's father, a lapsed Catholic, has secretly held to his old faith by saying the "Hail, Holy Queen". This prayer captures that deep Catholic pulse of sorrowing hope before the Mother of God:

Hail, holy queen, Mother of mercy; hail, our life, our sweetness,
 and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve;
 to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this
 valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes
 of mercy towards us; and after this our exile show unto us the
 blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet
 Virgin Mary.

That his father should, all the same, say the prayer slightly wrong represents his fumbling integrity. This prayer is a hidden thread, holding the people as it holds the poem. Family relationships are characterised by the same sense of exile and hope:

But here three people smile, and, locked apart,
 Prove by relatedness that cannot touch
 Our sad geometry of family love. (CP, 182)

Mother and father have been faithful to "Their terms of plighted troth", but each, in the deeper privacy of the heart, is distant from the other. Love's communion exists at the level of public choice, but within is isolation. The son identifies with his father in common helplessness.

Yet the helplessness is restrained by the poem. End-of-line stress communicates a submerged stubbornness in the father: "he has held", "he has said". While stress also conveys the captivity created by these relationships ("stand between", "locked apart"), the placement of "to gain" underlines the ambiguity of hope. These stresses build in a stubbornness, a tight grip. They themselves become the thread to hold hope. They, therefore, lend the grief and despair its restraint, enacting the slender hope of "unless that gold thread hold, invisibly." This slender hope is the poem's properly subjective truth, and it is here that Catholic belief is incorporated into McAuley's elemental image of exile.

"Tabletalk" (CP, 202) also refuses to generalise. There is a question ("What is the wisdom that a child needs most?"), but the poem presents precisely the absence of any answer. Instead we have the lapsed Catholic's bravado attack on his old religion and his affection for "Anglican restraint" (an affection formed, one suspects, more by temperament than theology). Family and friends are equally opportunities to practise the virtue of prudence, which "consists in learning to withhold/ The natural impulse of the sharing mind". With an ascetic honesty McAuley exposes the fundamental anti-naturalness of this isolating perspective which parades as religious commitment. In this the poem does not so much assert an alternative, as resist the heritage of distrust. Its strategy is to meet one form of restraint with another: the negative and destructive restraint of personal experience is transfigured in the positive and creative restraint of the poem. At its deepest level, McAuley's verbal discipline is a method, not for celebrating order, but for containing disorder.

While these autobiographical poems represent change - particularly in their use of confessional matter and colloquial mode - they also focus the continuity within McAuley's religious imagination. This is particularly true of "Because" (CP, 200). While the theology of Original Sin which so concerned Captain Quiros is merely hinted at here, the tensions identifying the "mystery of sadness", which relate it to the Fall myth, are even more powerfully operative - perhaps because they are able to discover and express themselves within the shape of their experience, the "sad geometry of family love".

The poem depicts a family experience dominated by an inexpressive father, who keeps spontaneous impulse at bay - because of his own unacknowledged fears, fears which he passes on to his son (who later recognises them as a kind of inherited evil). With typical irony, McAuley has pain enter at the moment of expected love: when the son expected a kiss, he received instead his father's embarrassment and rebuff, which teach him to hide his feelings. The mother shares this irony: she is intimidated by her husband to the point where her own "more generous feelings" are submerged in a routine where there is no casual touch, no unexpected excitement, but only something as predictable as the daily newspaper. This irony of fallen expectations is enacted in the way the third line "falls":

My father and my mother never quarrelled.
They were united in a kind of love
As daily as the 'Sydney Morning Herald'
Rather than like the eagle or the dove.

I never saw them casually touch,
Or show a moment's joy in one another.

Irony begins to interact with hope - the McAuley style of hope, that is - as the second stanza introduces the ascetic realism which characterises the poem's central mood. By having the mother sing the

wedding song, "Because", the poem at once comments ironically on the marriage and yet holds to hope, through connotations of providential design and reasoned commitment. While the poem throughout indicates repression and depression and exposes the fallen nature of love, its flat framing initiates and enacts an interesting collaboration between repressive and redemptive energies.

That such sadness can still be "a kind of love", is supported by the complex response which the flattened tone embodies and invites. It is possible that the reader will feel the hurt more deeply because it is delivered in so casual a way. It is possible the reader will find such understatement penitential, as if it holds the speaker back from self-pity and from condemnation. There is, in the tone, a suggestion of feeling about to break through, becoming chaotic and explosive. McAuley's best poetry quite often communicates this sense of controlled violence. Here it is indicated in the emphatic positioning of a phrase like "Cut like a saw", in the stiff separation on the page between "The rebuff still stuns" and "My blood", and in the way the factual record of the mother's songs is suddenly charged with sentiment: "her voice was sweet".

Although the tone disciplines, it does not deny the loss - of innocence, time, and love. This experience is being admitted even as it is being changed into meaning - as can be seen in the slight end-of-line pause needed for "once they stood", where the poem acknowledges disillusionment, but also, very discreetly, introduces an allusion to the Fall myth. In this sense, the poem situates itself as a play between "Fall" and "Redemption". As the parents fall into reality, the speaker shares and saves their sadness. He at once

deflects blame away from them and locates the "fault" within himself:

I never gave enough, and I am sorry;
But we were all closed in the same defeat. (CP, 201)

While this turns the alienation each experiences into a thin thread of community, it also incorporates the tension, dramatised by the Fall myth, between voluntary and involuntary participation in the mystery of "evil". The poem is redeeming hurts by realising that the speaker can take responsibility for these hurts, even though he is not guilty of them.

Even so, these attempts to construct hopeful meaning do not displace the fearful effect of the closing stanza:

It's my own judgment day that I draw near,
Descending in the past, without a clue,
Down to that central deadness: the despair
Older than any hope I ever knew. (CP, 201)

There is darkness, as well as meditation, in the rhythm. "Down to that central deadness" slows, then stops starkly on "despair". Here the centring, still focus is achieved, then the transitory nature of life is picked up again in the fall-away flow of "Older than any hope I ever knew", until the end is almost a whisper against the dark.

Yet, precisely because it utters such disorder, this in turn directs the poem back to its title. Its irony is now more savage (and vulnerable), its acceptance of necessity more thin-lined, but its commitment to meaning is still intact: it is "thin", it is "bitter", but it is also "without pretence".

"Time Out of Mind" (CP, 179) likewise presents the soul in crisis.

The speaker acknowledges conflicts between being and action, between

interiority and exteriority, between intention and achievement. These conflicts, which frustrate his desire to achieve "True form or feature", are not so much resolved as restrained, and that by a structure which sets despair in relation to joy and then casts this within an eschatological perspective. The first step is expressed:

Only those joys that lie
Closest to despair
Are mine to hold on by
And keep me clear. (CP, 179)

This is further framed by an eschatological perspective, where mind and time both find meaning "Only in knowing/ My self's Self". Yet for a work which so foregrounds the issue of the "self", this poem illustrates an interesting irony, as when it confesses:

In youth my range
Was fear, vanity, lust.
Shall I take in exchange
Fatigue, rage, self-distrust? (CP, 179)

This may be confessional in content, but its mode is more abstract and remote than that of "Because". The language disguises more than it discloses: terms like "vanity" and "lust", though indicative of general moral principles, nevertheless have a private meaning and feeling depending on the individual's experience and conscience. One might agree that lust is a disordering of human nature, but one does not thereby agree that the particular experience which the poem disguises is lust. In this way, bringing an abstract term to bear on a concealed particular experience, McAuley subverts the universal meaning of the terms and closes the poem off from the reader. For all its public manner, the poem remains very private. It also authorises a conflict between the human "self", as unsure, "unknown", and potentially shapeless, and the divine "Self", as absolute form and meaning. In this way it displaces and weakens the interaction of

order and disorder which characterises the poetry generally. That is, it simplifies the tension, associating all order with God and all disorder with the human self's internal confusion, and fails to achieve that enlivening complexity which occurs when God is more shadowed and the human self less culpable.

What the autobiographical poems achieve is a more complex and evenly weighted distribution of the tensions and meaning-directions which operate throughout McAuley's poetry. They represent a process occurring in his imagination which is analogous to the process of self-acceptance and self-forgiveness. "Because", as it negotiates the distinction between blame and responsibility and the distance between condemnation and forgiveness, integrates the voluntary and involuntary character of the evil it signifies in "despair". It also, in the relationship it establishes between its last line and its title, between its personal and theological dimensions of reference, manages not only to hold despair against hope, but also to synthesise the public and private directions of that interaction. A Vision of Ceremony is much more inclined to locate the cause (as distinct from the manifestation) of "evil" in the self/will (which seems more sinning than sinned against), just as it is more likely to associate "redemption" with an order received from above and protected in a language where objective, universal, public, metaphysical meanings cohere. Captain Quiros is aware of the involuntary character of evil, but it cannot quite make the voluntary and involuntary present in the one moment. "Because" does manage this. It represents McAuley's imaginative model acknowledging its temptation to disguise and simplify the meaning of "evil", "disorder", or "despair", and realigning its balances.

Vivian Smith, arguing that A.D. Hope's attack on the lyric actually encouraged its development, makes a very interesting point about the change in McAuley's lyrical mode:

If one compares a beautiful earlier lyric like "Nativity" with a later poem like "Because" one notices a similar development . . . Both poems use a basic quatrain form; both are related to religious concerns; but the first is again timeless . . . looking back to an early tradition of medieval or Latin hymns and songs while the second is more ironical, social, critical and self-placing, firmly set in a particular time and place. "Because" is more discursive and explicit than "Nativity".¹

As a corollary to this, it could be said that another effect of McAuley's autobiographical sequence, "On the Western Line", is that it encourages and expands the religious possibilities of the lyrical mode. The lyrics of Surprises of the Sun and "The Hazard and the Gift" incorporate a new appreciation of the possibilities of a vernacular situation and language. They also integrate McAuley's religious tradition - again, at the level of mythos, more than logos. They express a metaphysical intuition, an instinct for transcendence, in the way they occupy the space between situation and speaker. In this they extend the poetry's characteristic frames: landscapes, for instance, are at once objectified and fragile; language is disciplined and yet barely contained; and the "self" is at once consoled and confronted by the scene it receives and shapes. This framework of contained negativity also establishes a mode which is poetically and religiously appropriate - a meditative lyric which corresponds to a via negativa.

This convergence of lyrical and religious impulses is acknowledged in "Late Sunday Afternoon" (CP, 221), where a landscape and a liturgy engage in conversation.

1. "Experiment and Renewal: A Missing Link in Modern Australian Poetry", Southerly, 47, 1987, 16-17.

"Late Sunday Afternoon" releases much of its power in the surprise and ambiguity of its last line. Throughout the poem there is a tight control which carefully prepares for this sudden release of power and meaning. We are presented with a landscape which has a latent unease, which comes to us as "muddy pools" and "failing light". The poem tells of change, but the verse itself is deliberately still. Because of double stresses, the slow succession of impressions takes on a symbolic suggestiveness. Colour is used to underline the mixed feeling:

Bronze foil and russet overlap
 New shoots of green. Black starlings clap
 Their yellow beaks, announcing change. (CP, 221)

The third stanza transfers this landscape into the soul. The scene shifts to a Mass being celebrated. A bell signals the moment of consecration and the poet observes his fellow believers (there is still the watchful distance) move to receive the Eucharist. Their movement parallels the slow procession of the first two stanzas. McAuley then focuses the ambiguity, and focuses it within himself. Caught between desire and dread, he takes communion - "Tasting death upon my tongue". Death and renewal in the natural order stand in relation to death and renewal in the Christian order of mystery and each enlarges our vision of the other. It is a beautiful poem in the way the sacred and profane are allowed a dialogue.

It is important to resist any assumption that these "landscape lyrics" represent an escapist language, withdrawing from public commitment in order to rest in the private consolations of belief. The landscapes continue to trouble the will. "St John's Park" (CP, 222) is a very good example. It creates its own picture-book of hours - the worldly scene, depicted according to selected detail, framed by the stasis of

an eternal perspective. Contrasting impressions are rendered with bare simplicity, but framed by a detachment which is the outer tone of a commitment to something greater, something present behind and above the blue sky and the cold air:

The mountain is streaked white, the air is cold.
Under a pure blue sky the players begin.
Thickly-clotted prunus lines the way in,
And wattles put on helmets of heavy gold.

A dark-green gum bursts out in crimson flowers.
Old people slowly rot along the wall.
The young ones hardly notice them at all.
Both live in the same picture-book of hours. (CP, 222)

This is powerfully suggestive, and disturbing. "Thickly-clotted prunus lines the way in": the "clotted" suggests an ageing bloodstream; the "way in", by remaining indefinite, is layered with a suggestion reminiscent of "Winter Nightfall" (CP, 103). At the same time, the wattle tells us that it is spring - but why are its flowers referred to as "helmets", why is its gold "heavy"? While it is conventional to contrast the carefree, careless young with the neglected old people, there is a brutal confrontation with mortality in the verb "rot". Faced with such inevitable loss, how could one believe? Instead of forcing an answer, the poem travels further into the pain:

Four-turreted a square tower balks the sky,
Casting a shadow; an organ softly plays.
The afternoon wears out in a gold daze.
On ragged wings, uttering its carking cry

A raven scavenges; a flock of gulls
Flies from the tip. The last teams leave the park.
The old have crept inside to meet the dark.
Loss is what nothing alters or annuls. (CP, 222)

Is there a reference to, even a refusal of, Brennan's decision to abandon faith in the allusion to the four-turreted tower?¹ If the

1. Cf. Brennan's "1908", Poems (1913), (Facsimile Edition).

tower "balks the sky", does this symbolise a loss of faith, occasioned by a growth in secularism and positivism? Organ music, coming from somewhere (and again the indefinite becomes more suggestive), provides a counterbalance for the scavenging raven's carking cry. The raven and the gulls are scavenging on a tip. Are the old seen as life's refuse? Why, when they leave, do the teams of young people seem unaware of the old people who have "crept inside to meet the dark"? Why must death be so lonely? Does life feed upon itself?

The effect of the poem is to evoke our own doubts, by raising these troubling questions, and refusing to answer them. Once again, the poem's ascetic honesty leads it to face the dark pit at the heart of nature. It keeps from falling by balancing the negative almost against itself: "Loss is what nothing alters or annuls." This technique is at the heart of the peculiar quality of hope which distinguishes McAuley's poetry. Out of it comes the possibility of transcendence. The sign offered by the stars struggles to dominate the noise and rush of traffic, and eternity takes on a beautifully fluid epiphany:

At nightfall glaring traffic rushes by
 Filling the air with reek and the scream of brakes.
 Faint stars prick out a sign. And Vega wakes
 Liquid and trembling on the northern sky. (CP, 222)

While it seems that McAuley has found his most effective mode and subject, we have to recognise that Surprises of the Sun and "The Hazard and the Gift" still contain poetry more polemic in purpose. The worst example of this is "At Penstock Lagoon" (CP, 216). It is true that McAuley attempts to frame the poem within a positive-negative landscape. However, to know, at the end, that the landscape offers "one small bright patch of red" is insufficient consolation for

the stridency of Section IV. Even "Wet Day" (CP, 222) is marred by the final, discordant stress on "stink". What at first appears to be a meditation on time passing, gradually becomes an attack on "our vulgarity" - that is, the trust broken in our relationship with natural beauties and simplicities. There is, however, an uneasy relationship between those elements of transition which are not our fault and those which are (and the poem, unlike "Because", is delivering blame rather than taking responsibility). It intends to work on the disjunction between the clean, natural, passing of the pelican and the gulls and the dirty passage of man, who is blamed because "Cans, bottles, and junk appear as the tide runs out". This refuse is used, finally, to gesture towards Christian doctrine with: "I think/ The world has never been redeemed". Such a statement seems too heavy for the cans and bottles. This poem does not contain the negative. It releases it. In doing so, it makes a chance incident bear too heavy a weight of mythic and moral judgment.

Yet, in "The Garden" (CP, 218) a troubled murmur can become "a grace against despair". Without any need to apportion blame, with a willingness to accept responsibility for the deeper level of "broken trust", a level closer to the truth of the Fall myth, it can raise "From the wounded tree a balm/ From the depths a kind of psalm." Similarly, "Plein-Air" (CP, 226) suggests some kind of acceptance that "The world's the same whatever I may think". The burden of reconciliation is not given to the orthodox intellect. Existence will remain fragile and wounded no matter how certain our dogmas.

McAuley's poetry of this period does retain something of its hierarchial way of authorising even immediate experience. However,

even if it does in this sense retain faith in images of supernatural grace, that faith is called upon in order to confront experience, not to console it. This can be seen in "One Tuesday in Summer" (CP, 199), where the storm's apocalyptic possibilities confront ordinary perceptions, perceptions which in turn resist any religious interpretation. This tension between mundane and revelatory interpretations is the point at which the reader's experience begins to parallel the poem's:

What Mr Pitt had said
I didn't quite believe, or disbelieve;
But still the words had got into my head. (CP, 200)

The poem sets up a distance between too facile a faith and too agnostic a realism, and it is precisely in this space that its religious imagination constitutes itself. This space is also occupied by a tension between the familiar and the strange:

By nightfall things had their familiar look.
But I had seen the world stand in dismay
Under the aspect of another meaning
That rain or time would hardly wash away. (CP, 200)

The meaning itself is only just held. It is a faith which exists almost in default of scepticism, present because it cannot be made to "wash away".

"In the Huon Valley" (CP, 208), though calmer, has a similar method and sense of explosive stillness. The particular and familiar details are so presented that we feel something is about to burst through from beneath the apparent serenity and order. Much of the effect lies in the way double stresses are set against more subtly moving rhythms, so that the ear alternates between a heavy stillness and a rhythm that runs slightly away from stillness. The double stresses build up a

scene of fullness and largeness - propped boughs, pears ripen, windfalls lie, grow rich, elm-gold, big-white plumes. These give a meditative focus, but out of the stillness comes a liberating sense of continuity and change, of a transitory world made positive with promise. The small image of fall and decay is transformed, as rotten fruit is transformed for the wasp, so that a larger life is harvested from small instances of fall and decay. Again, the benefits of Autumn are presented in the contained negatives: "It isn't true that one never/ Profits, never learns". But this poem is not heavily explicit about the meaning of life; it does not want a definitive position: "Something is gathered in,/ Worth the lifting and stacking". Life's worked-at worth is now suggested rather than stated. This is not so much a decline in certitude as a growth in compassionate unobtrusiveness. The poem allows the symbolic pressure to work for itself. It allows its reader more space. It is not so concerned with creating an order. It is more confident in letting it be released.

"Vale" (CP, 206) also disciplines its autumnal heart. The poem, which tells of the death of Ulrick King, is a world of pared-down reality. The gain of life is expressed negatively as "nothing to regret". From Ulrick's suffering the poem takes a picture of warm courage and "sensual strength of deep organic love". Spiritual vitality compensates for physical deficiency because the spiritual law is that joy is born of pain. This is what the symbol teaches: the rose is root, and thorn and crimson (and so the blood of love's passion becomes the blood of sacrifice). The negative becomes a kind of affirmation: "The end was a decline. What does that prove?/ There's no melodic close." The astringency of this hope is clearer if we compare this treatment with Francis Webb's Ward Two sequence. Webb

finds in deformity and suffering a more positive paradox. Webb's is a deeper vision of mercy and forgiveness. McAuley's is a stubborn hope that silence and darkness tell of a place where every tear will be wiped away. Both poets have a via crucis spirituality, but for Webb Christ is a more full-bodied presence in the suffering, whereas for McAuley he is more an outline through and beyond the suffering. In "Vale", McAuley sounds his authentic note, his torture-point of song:

Kindness and courage like a stream flow on
 Into the living. Grief dries out, the pain
 Fades too. The honours that our flesh has won
 Like flowering trees remain.

The pulsing clang of the cicada choir
 Fulfils the night: I am back thirty years;
 Your voice throbs in the cadence of desire
 To silence beyond tears.

(CP, 207)

This poem also contains a moment when concerns for order, for suffering, and for contained negativity, are quietly registered within the selected detail of Ulrick's life:

I can still feel the keys and see the score;
 You take time out to roll a cigarette;
 I hear your crutches creak across the floor.
 You've nothing to regret:

(CP, 207)

This is a very clear illustration of the continuity and change within McAuley's religious imagination. There is still the mystery of sadness, here manifesting its involuntary dimension, and the attempt to contain this - signalled in the image of music as well as in the formal character of the verse. There is the vernacular observation. There is the via negativa style of "You've nothing to regret".

This via negativa style shows its cleanest edge in "Pieta". (CP, 179)

This is a perfect example of the poetry's ability to place the dark emptiness of despair within a slender frame, which then contains and disciplines the negativity of the hollow heart, until there arises an

insistence that there is hope - even if that hope is no more than an outline shaped when the inability to understand encounters the determination to believe. The poem has its biographical foundation in the death of McAuley's son. The title places this within the tradition of Mary, mother of sorrows. Even though that tradition has expressed itself in the "Stabat Mater" and the "Pieta" itself, it could as easily authorise sentimental resolutions of such a painful, and inexplicable, experience. Here, though, belief is signified only by two words - "Pieta" and "Cross" - and the rest of the language is given over to a detached, objectified record of utter pain. This means that theological language is contested more than privileged and that any belief it encodes is characterised, not by facile consolation, but by a refusal to give in to terror. This terror is, within the pattern of McAuley's poetry, an evil beyond the will and beyond the reason. If the refusal is transformed by stoicism, by the via crucis spirituality earlier associated with Bishop de BoisMENU, that spirituality is itself transformed by the poem's halting, hurt rhythm and by its emotional and visual bareness:

A year ago you came
Early into the light.
You lived a day and night,
Then died; no-one to blame.

Once only, with one hand,
Your mother in farewell
Touched you. I cannot tell,
I cannot understand

A thing so dark and deep,
So physical a loss:
One touch, and that was all

She had of you to keep.
Clean wounds, but terrible,
Are those made with the Cross.

(CP, 179)

Surprises of the Sun and "The Hazard and the Gift" do, therefore, indicate important developments in McAuley's religious imagination -

particularly the convergence of religious and lyrical impulses, the more vernacular sense of the lyric (and, with that, a new reverence for random particularities), and the way the landscape lyrics at once objectify and interiorise the fragile quality of existence, as also of the human will. These poems also keep continuity with the poetry's persistent tensions - whether those tensions are manifested in terms of desire and dread, discipline and freedom, hope and despair, or even in the distance between the unredeemed and littered world of "Wet Day" and the "world of sense and use" of "At Rushy Lagoon". With Music Late at Night and Time Given, it is the lyric meditating a landscape which gives final expression to the "true form" of life, and it is a rhyming of "despair" with "care" which signals how the old tensions still attend that last commitment to coherence, and to hope.

SECTION SIX

BETWEEN THE REASONS FOR DESPAIR

In 1970 I had a serious illness and emerged with that exquisitely keen sense of life and its fragility which such experiences give. The result was a number of short poems which use a language of sense-impressions to render aspects of a world. . . It seems that in the last decade I have come full circle back to the kind of poem I began with, but with a greater depth of experience which has brought me closer to fulfilling the persistent desire to write poems that are lucid and mysterious, gracefully simple but full of secrets, faithful to the little one knows and the much one has to feel.¹

It is tempting to see the poetry of Music Late at Night and Time Given as a confrontation with the real and desacralised world, in which ceremony surrenders to melancholy as

The likelihood of hope recedes
Into the contours of the day.²

As "Private Devotions" (MLN, 6) and "Parish Church" (TG, 42) indicate, the traditional and public rituals, the confident coherences of Catholicism have lost any immediate power to "complete/ The gap in things where time and fear devour".³ The poetry no longer asserts itself theologically, and only rarely - and less forcefully - renews its attack on metaphysical and moral incoherence. It no longer speaks explicitly of universal patterns printed in being, but withdraws to very particular landscapes, where it wonders about the worth of the world and of human effort, as it tries to articulate and accept death, its last mystery of sadness.

Yet, it is also a poetry which has not forgotten its own "Anonymous Message":

Believe O believe a native
Of the country of despair:

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1. James McAuley, A Map of Australian Verse, p. 204.
 2. "Motel, Burnie", MLN, 13.
 3. "Celebration of Love", CP, 35.

You must never give up hope,
 Even just as something to wear. (CP, 218)

What occurs in Music Late at Night and Time Given is not so much the loss of (one kind of) religious confidence as a process which holds that loss in relation to its corresponding gain: a process, that is, which reduces the great meanings held by the "old mysterious symbols", but which enlarges the little meanings, the secrets within sense-impressions. As what "one knows" decreases, what "one has to feel" increases - and in a way which is still both disciplined and free. The short, end-stopped lines which now predominate have the effect of constructing a landscape at once objectified and frail - and it is this, more than anything else, which prevents these landscapes from becoming surrogate religious objects. These lines also contribute to an eschatological effect commonly achieved in the last line of a poem, where a sudden expansion of the space between observer and landscape ensures that the observer is at once taken beyond the sensate moment and yet returned to the small, uncertain self. The landscape continues to confront as well as to console. What occurs is not so much a decline in religious belief, as a consolidation of religious imagination.

This involves a consolidation of those tensions which have always characterised the poetry, and which are now focused in the rhyming of "despair" and "care". Indeed, "care" when it is so rhymed, operates in the poetry so as to reveal its tension-point. It can indicate an anxious resistance to disintegrative possibilities, as it does in "Private Devotions":

Trespasser now tread with care
 Between the reasons for despair
 All the way as far as death. (MLN, 6)

It can also indicate a less reactive, more creative commitment, a style of desire and hope strangely heightened by the thresholds apprehended in Music Late at Night:

Again that soundless music: a taut string,
Burdened unbearably with grief
That smiles acceptance of despair,

Throbs on the very threshold of spring
In the burst flower, the folded leaf:
Puzzling poor flesh to live and care. (MLN, 23)

This double-edged quality of "care" is reinforced in the way the last poems deal with the (often implied) theme of death, which is seen as confirming the natural order, but also expressing its disintegration. Employing a tension very similar to that used to relate voluntary and involuntary aspects of evil, "Realities" imagines death as both necessary and chaotic:

And I lie quiet, thinking
Of those other dominions
We place above and below:
And how in the end we go
In no particular order
Through holes in our reality
There, and have no returning. (TG, 35)

While they very rarely refer to Original Sin and Redemption, these last poems still operate within the relationships represented by such religious doctrines and stories. Their disciplined forms gather meaning "Which they gradually let go"¹, thereby creating a visual and verbal counterpart to the work of reasoned will. The two titles are also characteristically suggestive. Music Late at Night holds itself between an almost redemptive kind of commitment and its darker sense of gathering grief. Time Given balances the fragility of existence - the loan of time - against the fidelity of one who must give it back, one who has known victories and defeats and who has asked "how time should be used".²

1. "In Northern Tasmania", MLN, 15.
2. "Convalescent Walk", TG, 37.

It also corresponds to an attitude of "active receptivity". Whether in its private devotions or in its observed landscapes, this poetry still treads with ambiguous care "Between the reasons for despair".

In "Winter Morning" (TG, 32), the vast and aching heaven is set against and around the smallness of the dog's howl "thrown up like a rope-trick". With the immediate introduction of "It is an hour for prayer without words", an association is established between the rope-trick hurled up at hollowness and the speaker's own prayer. This sense of distance is at one with the poem's sense of displacement. Stars and trees are without any article to anchor them to the concrete order. The speaker's face becomes "a face". Time is included: "Time is moving through displacements". In the very moment of displacement, though, the poem establishes a cold, bare communion between soul and world inasmuch as the face in the mirror is as brief and brittle a reflection as the winter morning:

Spring stars glitter in the freezing sky.
 Trees on watch are armoured with frost.
 In the dark tarn of a mirror a face appears. (TG, 32)

The poem's suggestive technique is evident if we isolate the double stresses. We find the central and controlled ambiguity: spring stars, dark tarn, blind earthworm, dog's howl, rope-trick. Something very similar is at work in the opening of "At Assisi" (TG, 33). The stress-pattern of "Pools of light down steep alley-ways" enacts a faith seen as light-in-darkness. This is suggestively linked, by the succeeding image ("A stray dog seeks companionship"), to the faith of the exile, existing between solitude and community. Within this web of suggestion, the image of "St Clare's body like dark leather" evokes the notion of a faith that is stern, a sanctity that is hard. After some simple description, we are once more confronted with the "sad

alternate fire" of Aldebaran. There is something sharp, as well as something clear, in the presence of this star: "Aldebaran glitters in the cold." By cataloguing simple impressions, "Walk and grappa and prayer and sleep", the poem attempts to name the totality and the ritual of ordinary experience. Then it strikes echoes with an older symbolism:

Gnarled vines and crippled olives drive
 Stubborn roots in stony ground.
 It's not the past that matters here. (TG, 33)

Agony is suggested - ultimately the agony of Christ (the vine) in Gethsemane (an olive grove) and on Calvary (where the cross is driven into the ground, and nails into the hands and feet, making them crippled). We recall "Wistaria" (CP, 202) where the tough old vine offers clusters of hope. We must also remember "New Guinea Lament":

Desire like a rusty nail
 Pierces time's foot until it seems
 His aching tread will fail. (CP, 21)

In "At Assisi", desire and time are reconciled in Christ, who makes present the timeless: "It's not the past that matters here." This final line is typically affirmative in its negative way. As well, the declarative stance does not so much teach as trouble. The alternatives - that it is the present or the future which matters - are foreign to the poem's complex resonances. In this way, the final line forces us back into the suggestions for a less obvious meaning.

"Another Day, Another Night" (MLN, 16) seems to lose all confidence in coherence:

And we sit down to wine and meat and bread.
 The pain of loss infects the loneliness,
 And there is less and less that can be said.
 When the wind lapses in a vast silence,
 Pale blue and amber target the clouded moon.

Things have a way of turning out absurd. (MLN, 16)

While this may seem to abandon hope in that "pure transparency" of things which "An Art of Poetry" (CP, 70) so ardently desired, it also returns us to the unfulfilled mind and disconsolate sense of "When Shall the Fair" (CP, 3) . Lowering its expectations with regard to universal order, it also relocates the tension between order and disorder - and complicates it: the things of this world are at once precisely present and threatened by the wind's will. This resounds with the manner in which the observer values their particularity and presence, but in such a way that he feels more deeply the absence of a more permanent coherence. In this way, the poem exemplifies a pattern of departures and developments found throughout these last poems.

Perhaps "Another Day, Another Night" is an expression of the "exhausted will" described in "Nocturne" (MLN, 5), where nightmares and angels take on an eerie familiarity. With the opening line, and its triple stress, the possibilities of movement are deadened even as they are introduced: "A gull flies low across the darkening bay." At the same time, the world is summoned only to be abandoned: "The world sinks out of sight." This emptying is analogous to that purged perspective earlier described as "bare attentiveness".¹ It also anticipates the final symbol of the empty field:

The world sinks out of sight. The moon congealed
 In cloud seems motionless. The air is still.
 A cry goes out from the exhausted will.
 Nightmares and angels roam the empty field. (MLN, 5)

The implications of this are disturbing - and perhaps more so because they are in no way definite. Is the empty field a place of desolation, or of denuded faith? While McAuley does not usually make his angels and demons into friends, here nightmares and angels are

1. "Nativity", CP, 69.

put together, and given a common action - "roam" - which connotes carelessness, delinquency, and even malevolence. This ending is very effective: after carefully creating a still scene, the poem breaks it down, and frees the troubling image of nightmares and angels journeying through the exhausted will, the will whose cry for order cannot repress their roaming.

Yet it is too easy to see these two poems only as confessions of defeat. "Nocturne" may confess its "exhausted will", and it may enact that exhaustion in its closing lines, but it also holds itself back from disintegration by its rhymed quatrains, and its strategic use of multiple stress - as, for example, in "A cry goes out from the exhausted will", where the stubborn character of the cry is coded in its triple stress. "Another Day, Another Night" may succumb to a depressing sense of absurdity, but the final line is a little more complicated. "Things have a way of turning out absurd" does, in fact, believe in a "way" even as it admits absurdity. Indeed, the line has its origins in the battler optimism of "Things have a way of turning out". While "absurd" then gives the "fall" to such optimism, it cannot quite cancel its memory, so that the final line actually works a confrontation between a contemporary style of cynicism and an older form of hope. Moreover, such poems are balanced by others, such as "Book of Hours (TG, 38), which reaffirm the will's commitment to meaning.

"Book of Hours" admits that there are random elements in life which may be included in a framework, but not completely explained by it: "Two little girls pass by and one is lame;/ Six yachts ride at anchor on broken light." There is a code in "ride at anchor on broken

light". This is what the poem says and does, holding together stillness and movement, unifying visible fragments. The second stanza allows the movement and fragmentation, then the poem makes another hold on the mind:

And all this seems to make a kind of claim,
As if it had been given that one might
Decipher it: if there were such a skill

Which one could learn by looking - get it right,
As children learn to read a word, a name,
Another, until meaning comes at will. (TG, 38)

Despite his polemic moments, McAuley's commitment to transcendent truth is not arrogance or escapism. It is, rather, an exercise in responsibility: an attempt to give disciplined meaning to the casual sadness of one little girl who is lame.

If meaning does come "at will", this is now less because the discipline is directed at creating coherence, and more because it is concerned to enhance a condition of active receptivity. This is certainly the way meaning and will cooperate in "Morning Voluntary" (MLN, 12). This poem enacts the transformative vision of the abandoned heart: a distant, observing eye, by receiving, becomes one with the landscape. There is a sense of standing still before ordinary things and finding a suspicion grow that they are no longer quite the same. McAuley chooses particular sounds, colours and objects which, when given selective stress, create a symbolic mood. Imagery and language are pared down until they have a fragility - a kind of transparency. It is as if, having a lot he wants to say, yet recognising that "Very little can be said", McAuley tries to get the words out of the way.

The images have a bareness, but little detail - they are small, single

moments in a larger, more unified perception. Impressions delineate the familiar: milk and bread, puddles, clouds. Then the white birch is introduced and it lingers because it is given more space. It is a beautiful, but unsettling image: the tree opening its arms to surrender its autumn leaves (their wealth of life turned into the gold of death) which drift to earth and to decay (mound). The poem hints at a crucifixion motif (a tree "with arms outspread"). It hints - but refuses to have its own mystery broken. "Stalky vines glow darker red." Following the birch's three lines, this single line borrows extra stress. Red suggests a dark vitality, as if the familiar landscape is glowing with a deeper life and darker blood. (Nor is it impossible that the image carries a eucharistic resonance.) Bare, brief statements are again used to record unwelcome impressions: bad newspapers, loud music. Then a second image is given a large breathing space:

Flat strokes dinned out overhead
 Dropping through the red and gold
 Tell the tale that must be told (MLN, 12)

Into the red and gold - colours in which he has seen his world, colours which could easily symbolise Eucharist and hope - come sounds of mortal destiny. This is unavoidable ("must be told") and sets a distance between himself and all that he has felt close and familiar: "Friday's child is full of dread." Life's colour is spotted by the flat strokes, the tale, the dread, the cold, the starlings, the doubt, the sense of a deep, black death. "Spots of black invade the red." Still, the final stress falls on "red".

This is why the poem's voice is so important. A tone is created by the controlled rhyme (which gives the impression of a "centring"), by the single-sentence lines which slow down, by the long vowels and soft

consonants. The overall voice is very gentle, and the emotional rhythm amazingly still. Combined with the fragile imagery and form, these aspects create a voice which is meditative, sombre and calm. This is the sound of a disciplined, stubborn, yet still-feeling hope.

To appreciate this kind of controlled ambiguity, which by now occupies so central a place in McAuley's religious imagination, it is helpful to add a note on Trakl's influence. In The Grammar of the Real, McAuley declares his preference for the poems of Trakl's penultimate phase: "well-formed lyrics of extraordinary, intense inward and mysterious beauty, unease, disgust, and suffering dread" (202). He admires "a controlled ambiguity, a range of multiple meaning kept afloat by the simple words and images" (203). McAuley goes on to speak of an "interplay of positive and negative in a value-changed landscape" (214), and of how, in Trakl's mind, the coming of Christ opened for "man" his uttermost heights, but also his uttermost depths (217). McAuley comments: "The tendency of Trakl's mind was to see his world, and himself, as involved in that uttermost fall." (217) Yet, he stresses:

Because there is so much that is fearful and horrible and distraught in the poems, it is important to establish that their foundation is a vision of innocence, of peace and happiness, of goodness and rightness, and of intimacy with God. (211)

We could be reading a commentary on McAuley's work. The affinity McAuley found is clearly, cleanly, even leanly, expressed in the translation of "Monchsberg" (MLN, 17). This poem is very like McAuley's work in its vision of birth in brokenness, and in the multiple meaning whereby "bear", by suggesting "carry", "give birth" and "suffer", sets up a Christian resonance:

Heavy is such a task:
Born in a broken time,
To carry it all within,

And bear it into freedom,
 In a world toward evening where
 Insatiate hungers prowl.

O music out of decay
 Intoning a dark prayer!
 Rooks build in the sound

Of bells. A level mild sun
 Lights up new sprigs of green
 On boughs that shiver with cold.

(MLN, 17)

"Music Late At Night" (MLN, 23) has its own controlled ambiguity. It uses double stresses to create a painfilled stillness in which "The helpless heart says, hold and wait". Within the stillness and restraint, there is a "rigid silence" promoting the voice of despair, the dread of never-ending night. Within the stillness and restraint, there is also - on the other edge, as it were of the poem's "taut string" - a "soundless music" by which the poem accepts despair and affirms poor and puzzled flesh. This ambiguity is further established in the interplay of images. While the moon is cold and withdrawing, it is, so to speak, framed by the gate which is "clouded with spicy prunus flowers". If the street is empty, it is also "lighted" and expecting a new day. In this way the "empty street" lends a little hope to the "helpless heart", which cannot hold the moon. If the "helpless heart" is itself held between despair and acceptance, it is because its condition corresponds with both the "rigid silence" and the "soundless music". The paradoxical character of such music is then keyed in the connection established by its accompanying rhymes: the "taut string" is related to "the very threshold of spring" and "grief" to "the folded leaf".

This controlled ambiguity has authority within Music Late at Night and Time Given because it expresses profound and interreaching correspondences in the way the hopeful imagination constructs its world, self, and death. The hope expressed in "In Northern Tasmania"

(MLN, 15) is keyed by the rhyming of "cold" with "gold" and by the image of "Bare hawthorn thickets pearled with rain". Later rhymes corroborate this structure: "shine" and "decline"; "know" and "let go". Such control gives this statement of decline an accepting tone:

At dusk I look out through old elms
Where mud-pools at the gatepost shine.
A way of life is in decline,

And only those who lived it know
What it is time overwhelms,
Which they must gradually let go.

(MLN, 15)

This poem is constructing its world and self so that both shape a pattern of renewal and decline, but shape it receptively, since world and self can only contain ambiguity. They cannot so order it that it becomes certainty or even simplicity. The line, "Wattles are faintly tinged with gold", and the rhyming of "gold" with "cold", is remembered in "Explicit"¹, which constructs a death consonant with this self and world:

So the word has come at last:
The argument of arms is past.
Fully tested I've been found
Fit to join the underground.

No worse age has ever been -
Murderous, lying, and obscene;
Devils worked while gods connived:
Somehow the human has survived.

Why these horrors must be so
I never could pretend to know:
It isn't I, dear Lord, who can
Justify your ways to man.

Soon I'll understand it all,
Or cease to wonder: so my small
Spark will blaze intensely bright,
Or go out in an endless night.

Welcome now to bread and wine:
Creature comfort, heavenly sign.
Winter will grow dark and cold
Before the wattle turns to gold.

1. Quadrant, December, 1976, 5.

If McAuley's instinct for belief is exemplified in the way his sense of self, seen as "small", is related to an "all", this relationship carries as much dread as promise. Death may enlighten. Death may darken. Death, that is, is as much reason for despair as for hope: rather than introduce the believer into the divine understanding of all things, it may initiate the ultimate incoherence, the "endless night". This death is suitably attuned to the world it is about to visit, for that world struggles between Milton's argument for heavenly purpose and modernity's broken order. Victory is expressed, with characteristic astringency and in a negatively affirmative tone, as a kind of rescue mission: "Somehow the human has survived."

The closing sense of the poem is that it does resist despair, but does not easily affirm faith. The seasonal metaphor is used to hint at spring and new life - but the effect is neither clichéd, nor certain. The double stress on "grow dark" presents winter as a dark and cold necessity, while spring becomes a muted possibility. The tone is not serene: it moves from grim jocularly to raw hope. The question of tone is critical when speaking of this poem's religious consciousness. Whether we read "Explicit" as tired doctrine or stubborn faith depends so much on what tone we hear. (This is often the case with McAuley, and the tone is not always easy to discern.) If we miss the grim jocularly which opens "Explicit", then our reading may give too serious and heavy a stress to the rhyming words and misrepresent as certainty (even banality) the poem's carefully controlled uncertainty.

In "A Small Testament", speaking of the "final aloneness" at the core of the self, McAuley writes:

The new thought that occurred to me is that perhaps it is at this inmost point of isolation that the possibility of the genuinely mystical begins. May it be that the possibility of contact between the self and the truly transcendent, with God, opens precisely where empirical contacts fail? ¹.

If this is a variation on the via negativa theme, "Fingal Valley" (TG, 39) outlines the failure of empirical contact:

Insect and bird are owners,
But nothing here is mine,
At most a moment's leasehold,
To cherish and resign. (TG, 39)

The tension between "cherish" and "resign", which is anticipated in the subdued contrast between the poem's steady sensuousness and its isolated impressions, indicates a kind of sacred place in the poetry, a place towards which the shapes of self, world and death are continually moving.

From one point of view, this place can be approached only through "aspects of a world", only if the poetry learns to be at peace with randomness and particularity. The honeyeater from "Autumn in Hobart" (TG, 41) becomes an emblem of this more forgiving poetry, where selection may yet constitute sufficient coherence even as it receives and renders impressions:

Snow-cloud, a rainbow, blue sky, rain,
All at one time: the wet streets shine
In pale gold sunlight, a cold breeze ruffles
The reds and yellows of wet streets.
The yellow-throated honeyeater knows
How to like this place: he's active, greedy,
And defines his world with music (TG, 41)

Just as this manages an affirmation without loss of ambiguity, so "Convalescent Walk" (TG, 37) manages, with chastened simplicity, to contain the achievements and losses of history with a perspective which is immediate, yet eschatological. A picturebook stillness

1. Quadrant, December, 1976, 7.

is created, then, at the end, the eye is suddenly lifted:

November wanted to stand still.
The air was so full of thistledown drift
Each spider-web strung in the trees
Had changed to an opaque white disc.

The full-blown roses seemed huge. The world
Was nothing but intense pure colours,
And breath of eucalypt and lilac.
We spoke of victories and defeats,

And how time should be used. The dog
Rolled on daisies and dandelions
As we returned through Ogilvie High,
And sunlight burnished the breasts of starlings. (TG, 37)

Here November has a will of its own, but it is a flawed will: while the world is intensely present, it also pauses on the edge of frailty in thistledown drift, spider-web, and full-blown roses. Just as this world, where full-blown roses seem huge, constructs itself as promise and decay, so the self-defining memories of the walkers shape a story of "victories and defeats". If they discuss "how time should be used", the poem itself argues that time cannot be commanded - thus setting up a tension between their use of time and November's - a tension heightened by the eschatological resonance of the last line, which, by deferring judgment beyond time, actually extends the ambiguity of time.

This is not to say that all the last poems are works of controlled ambiguity. "At Jeanneret's Beach" (TG, 40) is, for McAuley, remarkably, simply affirmative. As it records impressions from a particular day, the poem builds an atmosphere of relaxed freedom and of creative purpose. The first stanza ends with the theme of will, but without anxiety: "The day is here for anything we choose." It is possible, perhaps, that the poem's unassuming nuances reconcile some of the poetry's long struggle. The campers who "wade out beyond the foam" are not so unlike solitary swans in outline. Those voices which

"come half up the dry hillside" remember the exile and the dry heartland. Aldebaran and Vega were never as securely, positively illuminative as these stars:

How bright we see the stars, the planets shine,
 The Milky Way, the Magellanic cloud.
 The day was there for everything we chose;
 Now sleep and silence enter at the close. (TG, 40)

The chance and freedom for creative possibilities is complete, and the will is resigned.

Still, most of these poems retain some version of the will's struggle and many speak more painfully than this. World, self, and death are more often discovered at the point where the voice comes "Out of the bowed darkness".¹ Such a point is "Moulting Lagoon" (TG, 36), in which the artist prays that he may be allowed to enjoy the natural world a little longer. Here, once more "In a Late Hour", he holds to his belief in beauty. Yet, even as the poem testifies to this belief, it is at once troubled and defined by the limits of its own response: "My marks on paper are a kind of postscript." It is content to reapply the Flemish master's saying, "As I can", which in turn reinterprets persistent relationships between aspiration, inspiration, craft and discipline. So too the "black swans" reintroduce, but so much more quietly, the ambiguities combined in the companion poems of A Vision of Ceremony: "Mating Swans" and "Tune for Swans". (CP, 64-66) The refrain, "if so it may be", is so structured as to sharpen both uncertainty before death and resignation before God. "It sounds so simple": this final statement is, in its effect, remarkably complex since it combines tensions between aspiration and achievement, between hope and disappointment, with the poem's underlying belief in a

1. "Celebration of Divine Love", CP, 74.

beauty which becomes more vulnerable as it becomes more desirable.

"Moulting Lagoon" is also a prayer. Its refrain and diction ("Grant" and "Let") indicate its petitioner's stance before the power and will of God (although God is, characteristically, more an outline, and is never present by name). As a prayer, it constructs belief after the poetry's predominant images of self, world and death. It observes the natural seasons, where death and renewal keep their order, but privately hopes that God might intervene to delay the speaker's death. The refrain, "if so it may be", reacts against a submerged appreciation of "so it must be", so that belief is being shaped at a tension-point where the will of God interacts with the mortal necessity of nature.

In "Private Devotions" (MLN, 6) it is the necessity for care which impresses itself on Friday's child, whose belief is both reluctant and resigned. While the title hints that these devotions might be out of tune with public ceremonies, they actually show that the poetry's "motives for credibility" are imaginatively consistent and persistent. The focusing image of the empty tabernacle recapitulates, reinterprets and perhaps reconciles the interior emptiness earlier imagined as a world eaten hollow with despair. This is the liturgical image for Christ's death, and it also recalls "the three hours' darkness of the soul", which combined that public imagery with a more private application.¹ While it does, within the symbolism of the Easter Triduum, expect Christ's resurrection, that hope is disciplined by the poem, which finds its "rumour of resurrection", not in the liturgy, but in the landscape:

1. "Celebration of Divine Love", CP, 75.

Ghostly-pale a full moon climbs
 Out of the folds of linen cloud. (MLN, 6)

While this lacks the determined style of "the epileptic will/
 Convulsing vomits forth its demons"¹; it still has a delicacy and a
 muted determination more in keeping with this poem. Here the
 Christian pattern of death and resurrection is not so much a
 resolution of despair, as a dreaded and desired necessity. This
 particular version of the will's struggle to believe is introduced in
 the first line, "Twisted vines are turning red". This releases a
 eucharistic implication, which immediately remembers and anticipates
 other references to the sacrament. Certainly, "Morning Voluntary"
 (MLN, 12) is anticipated - "Stalky vines glow darker red" - as is "At
 Assisi" (TG, 33) with its "Gnarled vines". This is no easy ritual.
 Even when "Explicit" makes appeal to the sacrament, the mood is moving
 between comfort and desolation. Furthermore, "Private Devotions" is
 here powerfully remembering "Winter Nightfall" (CP, 103), where the
 wanderer is welcomed by death's ambiguous embrace:

Hard with pain the stony sill;
 Indoors on the table shine
 With pure brightness bread and wine;
 Enter, wanderer, take your fill. (CP, 103)

These complex associations gather in the opening line, preventing any
 entry into a world unsimplified. Similarly, the conventional metaphor
 of life-as-journey blends beautifully with the image of the rosary as
 a thin, but guiding thread. This itself recalls and redeems all those
 images of the labyrinth and the maze of despair which have gone
 before - and particularly that of the fumbled prayer of "Father,
 Mother, Son" (CP, 181). Further, the image of the exile trespassing
 homewards keeps the rosary image from becoming sentimental. Since

1. "Celebration of Divine Love", CP, 75.

the fingers are "reluctant" and the speaker is aware of reasons for despair waiting on either side of him, these devotions are rigorously realistic. This realism dominates the final line, where the will's struggle to believe is expressed as a kind of resigned choice:

"There's no escape from what we need." Here, the word, "need" should not be restricted to a psychological connotation; it may also imply some intrinsic necessity in the created order.

If McAuley's belief seems here to be relying on its private coherences, and to be empathising with that part of the liturgical year which celebrates Christ's battle with darkness, it is fascinating to read one of Gwen Harwood's memories:

We talked sometimes of the cloudy sadness that descends in middle age; not the profound despair that can lead to illumination, but the greyness no act of will can lift. Jim said the true cause of this state could be found in the story of the fall. Man in his unfallen state would have known the nature of the world without having to learn it through the use of a flawed intellect; but now he is troubled by obscure questionings. The liturgy, Jim said, restores to us some of Adam's lost knowledge; he called it "the key to metaphors".¹

Whatever it may say about McAuley himself, this memory reflects the imaginative structures which describe his religious imagination: the fall which causes flawed intellect and wounded will, the sacred symbolism which restores a lost and integrated way of knowing, but only partially, since "in the midst of time God has not willed/ The End of Time" (CP, 163), so that the human wanderer, even should she or he aspire to perfection, cannot escape the "obscure questionings" of the divided heart.

"Parish Church" (TG, 42) uses the stained glass window to indicate "the key to metaphors", even as it gives immediate expression to

1. Gwen Harwood, "Gentleness", Quadrant, March, 1977, 15.

"the story of the fall" in its story of personal disillusionment and isolation within the Catholic Church after Vatican II. This poem gives final expression to McAuley's religious poetry, showing the changes, continuities and complexities which constitute his image of faith. While the stained glass window symbolises the "cosmic map" of Christ's birth, death and resurrection, and implies an objective, transcendent model of religious symbolism and language, it also represents a concrete, descriptive focus and contains a less than comfortable repetition of "bonewhite", as if redemption is very much a process experienced by lean and brightening bones. This note of suffering extends into the disillusionment and loneliness of the second stanza. It is easy - and, surely, sensible - to read this in the light of McAuley's own professed dissatisfaction with some of his Church's liturgical renewal. Typically, he opposed, not the renewal, but some of its formless expressions. His own contribution to liturgical renewal was considerable - and highly disciplined.¹ However, it is more relevant to see this stanza as another version of the Fall: high hopes have arrived at the point where the individual, lonely for Adam's innocent delight, must confront those ambiguities, within and without his will, which have charted his own voyage under Aldebaran:

I bring with me my griefs, my sins, my death,
And sink in silence as I try to pray.

Though in this calm no impulse stirs my breath,
At least there's nothing that I would unsay. (TG, 42)

Beneath this uncomplicated, colloquial surface, there are crucial reconciliations being achieved. It is not only that the lines sustain an interaction of self, world, death and belief; they also remember

1. Cf. Richard Connolly, "Sounds Late at Night", Quadrant, March, 1977, 75-77.

and largely reconcile the poetry itself. The image of someone trying to pray recalls the father's fumbling of "Hail, Holy Queen", and the reluctant rosary of "Private Devotions". It also anticipates the line in "B.P.I", where McAuley describes himself in hospital, trying to pray "as badly as (he) ever did". The accompanying stress on silence recalls "Winter Morning", when

A dog's howl is thrown up like a rope-trick.
It is an hour for prayer without words.

It also remembers the dead Ulrick King whose "voice throbs in the cadence of desire/ To silence beyond tears". These memories constitute a kind of hermeneutic background, so that we realise this is not a silence which represents religion's escape from language, but one which gathers these memories - of desire and of dread - into its own "cadence of desire". Similarly, "Though in this calm no impulse stirs my breath" does more than depict life as a stilled voyage. The calm is a variation on the "bare attentiveness" of "Nativity", on the "windless shade" of "Invocation", and possibly on "the giant face of dreaming nations" which restores itself in "The Incarnation of Sirius". Certainly, it interprets and applies the meditative, yet active, stillness of many of the later lyrics. Further, it summons "the ships of Quiros", linking itself to all the ambiguous achievements and failures of that adventure. Little wonder, then, that the final line is, because of its negative mode, so affirmative. This line works between the stubbornness once exercised "In a Late Hour", its kind of Christian stoicism, and the achieved simplicity with which "Moulting Lagoon" continues and changes that belief. Let the artist of "Moulting Lagoon" have the final word:

Late, it always seems too late, but it isn't:
The beauty almost destroyed, or the light fading;
The true proverb is still the Flemish master's,
Als isch kan. It sounds so simple.

SECTION SEVEN

A LAST PIECE

Jim was profoundly moved by the film of Thomas Mann's Death in Venice. He held a small company spellbound during a whole lunchtime while he spoke of the beauty and pathos of the film, and of "man's search for absolute beauty". He said that the film in its own way "spoke the language of desire". He said that when we are closest to grasping what we most desire we are closest to the possibility of despair.

Gwen Harwood
"Gentleness", Quadrant, March, 1977, 16.

It is necessary to understand
That a poet may not exist, that his writings
Are the incomplete circle and straight drop
Of a question mark

Ern Malley, "Sybilline".