Long Paddock

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Post-Symbolism: James McAuley and A. D. Hope

The postwar writings of James McAuley and A. D. Hope demonstrate a strongly critical reaction to the Symbolist tendencies evident in the poetry of many of their predecessors. The anti-Modernist stance adopted by both men leads them to propound arguments which are dismissive not only of the Symbolist poetics which underlie Modernism, but beyond this, suggest a criticism of the entire project of Romanticism. In McAuley's case in particular this aesthetic argument is linked to a broader political attack on the social movements arising from the "Age of Revolution".[1] As McAuley summarises their positions in his 1975 anthology, *A Map of Australian Verse*: "as between Hope and myself, the literary conservatism has been stricter in his case, the philosophical and political conservatism in mine".[2] The attitudes of these two leading Australian poets have been seen as detrimental to the development of Modernism in Australian poetry – particularly in their involvement, with Harold Stewart, in the Ern Malley hoax of 1944.[3] However, the polemics of division have also been responsible for a characterisation of McAuley and Hope which does not sufficiently acknowledge their interest in and awareness of developments in modern poetics. In their critical writings in particular there is evidence of a tension – especially in their discussion of the Symbolist movement – which arises from the earliest poetic influences of both men, for whom Symbolist and early Modernist writings were crucial, and which runs as a counter-theme throughout their engagement with the theory and practice of poetry.

There is an obvious correlative, and probable direct influence, in the writings and career of the American critic and poet, Yvor Winters. Winters' reputation as a refractory critic of the orthodoxy of Modernism, most evident in his attacks on T. S. Eliot, has meant that his own poetry has been often overlooked in anthologies of American verse. But the trajectory of Winters' career as a poet, from the 1920s to the 1940s, in many ways prefigures the paths later taken by Hope and McAuley. Winters' early poems, which appeared in four small volumes between 1921 and 1927,[4] were seen by contemporaries as outstanding examples of American Imagism, comparable to the early work of William Carlos Williams. Winters, in the Introduction to his Early Poems (1966), describes the key influence of his reading of the French Symbolists during this period: in 1923, he writes, "I was reading extensively in French literature and was making a beginning on the Symbolists, who were not in the curriculum". Terry Comito suggests that this reading included Rimbaud, Laforgue, Mallarmé, Corbière, "but above all Baudelaire and Valéry".[5] What Winters derived from these poets was "a confirmation of his sense that images must in some way constitute a revelation". Winters himself later described these poems as "material cohering by virtue of feeling and rhythmic structure, and very little by virtue of intelligible theme".[6]

His stylistic shift to formal verse structures and traditional metres, which occurred around 1928, is quite uncharacteristic of the direction taken by his contemporaries during this period. It was the result of a conscious alteration in Winters' conception of poetry, which was to remain consistent for the remainder of his career. Above all, it represents a reaction to the implications Winters discerns in the Symbolist method, and its application in twentieth-century verse. Winters came to see the autotelic Modernist

poem, in its attempt to break down the barrier between subject and object through immersion in the image, as a form of "dissolution"; he now argued for an "evaluative" poetics of control and intellection. According to the critic Dick Davis,[7] this shift can be seen in Winters' exchange of the influence of Rimbaud – whom he described as being "destroyed by a metaphysical vision" – for the "spiritual discipline" of Baudelaire. Winters presents his revised position in the 1929 essay, "The Extension and Reintegration of the Human Spirit through the Poetry Mainly French and American Since Poe and Baudelaire". Here, in a significant foreshadowing of the later writings of Hope and McAuley, he argues for a renewed "classicism", one which would constitute the "reformation and apotheosis" of the Romantic project. Winters does not wholly deny the metaphysical aims of Romanticism; rather, he condemns the self-annihilation which he sees as a consequence of the Romantic and Symbolist quest. There is an ethical responsibility to reassert the claims of reason: immersion in phenomena must be followed by reintegration, through what he calls "discipline spiritual and literary". The poetic experience is to be objectified through clarity of thought and denotative statement, and this process is reflected in a return to traditional metres.

As Howard Kaye has noted,[8] Winters' attitude toward the dangers of the Symbolist method is allegorised in his poem "The Spring Serpent", where the snake is intended to represent the Symbolist image:

> The little snake now grieves
> With whispering pause, and slow,
> Uncertain where to go
> Among the glassy leaves,
> Pale angel that deceives.
> With tongue too finely drawn,
> Too pure, too tentative,
> He needs but move to live,
> Yet where he was is gone;
> He loves the quiet lawn.
> Kin to the petal, cool,
> Translucent, veined, firm,
> This fundamental worm,
> The undefined fool,
> Dips to the icy pool.

Here is Winters' own commentary on this poem:

> The grief and uncertainty (for their own sake) are romantic traits, and so is the hedonistic sensuousness throughout the poem; the snake is a deceiver, and this is always true of the indefinable and shifting perception; his tongue is too pure, and pure poetry, the extreme form of romantic poetry, is poetry as free as possible from concept, from definition.[9]

Winters termed his revised approach the "post-symbolist method", which he defines in Section IV of his 1959 essay, "Poetic Styles, Old and New".[10] Here Winters argues for a unity of rational and sensory experience within the poem: "it ought to be possible to embody our sensory experience in our poetry in an efficient way, not as ornament, and with no sacrifice of the rational intelligence," he writes. Winters is most critical of the Romantic theory "that all ideas arise from the association of sense-perceptions", and therefore, "that ideas could be expressed in terms of sense-perceptions". He sees this associationism as the basis of Poundian Imagism, and of other post-Romantic theories of

poetry, warning that the result is "the romantic image...the mindless image, the impenetrable image". And he emphasises: "Mallarmé's poetic absolute is a version of this idea". The two poets Winters offers as alternate models are Paul Valéry and Wallace Stevens, and "Poetic Styles, Old and New" concludes with an analysis of Stevens' "Sunday Morning", in which, according to Winters, "the rational and sensible soul are united". Both Valéry and Stevens address concerns which arise directly from the Romantic-Symbolist tradition. The void of a post-Christian universe and the poet's search for consolation are themes of both "Sunday Morning" and Valéry's "La Cimètiere Marin". As Dick Davis writes, "the commitment to reason and the simultaneous evocation of sensuous reality make Valéry, for Winters, the exemplar par excellence of the post-symbolist style".[11]

Underlying Winters' poetic theory is a fear of the irrational, of the anti-intellectual chaos which he sees as symptomatic of modernity, with its emphasis on the unconscious, and in this he is a clear precursor of McAuley's views. "Irrationality, spontaneous impulse, "spiritual extroversion", seemed to him the first step to madness," writes Howard Kaye, "and the annihilation of the mind was associated with physical dissolution". [12] Winters supported the rational Aristotelian ethics of Aquinas – which perhaps correlates with McAuley's later Catholic conversion – and in a number of his early poems there is imagery of atomism and disintegration, a reaction to the new physics and the revised metaphysics of the modern age.

James McAuley describes his earliest poetic influences in an essay reviewing his own work in *A Map of Australian Verse* (1975): from 1936 to 1939, he writes, he was most drawn to "some aspects of the work of Stefan George and R. M. Rilke",[13] and poems reflecting this influence appeared in the Sydney University magazine Hermes. But McAuley also read widely in the French poets during this period: Michael Heyward notes the influence of Gérard de Nerval's Sylvie (the source of the recurring symbol of Aldebaran, the "double" star, in McAuley's work), as well as the poetry of Apollinaire, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé.[14] McAuley was also drawn to the early Modernism of Eliot and Pound at this time, but was dismissive of "purely verbal" work, such as that of Hopkins.[15] The effect of this early reading is apparent in the poetry of his first volume, *Under Aldebaran* (1946).

McAuley had by this stage already made an attempt to formulate his poetic theories in his 1940 MA Thesis, "Symbolism: An Essay in Poetics", and the issues raised in this essay indicate some of the parameters of his subsequent work.[16] In the introduction to his thesis McAuley emphasises the centrality of the Symbolist method to his own conception of poetry: "a great deal of poetry is concerned with the attempt to express symbolically the supernatural, superconscious world," he writes, "The realities of this world cannot be expressed directly – the infinite must reveal itself in finite terms, and hence through symbols". But in Section I, "Mystical Symbolism", McAuley already qualifies the visionary implications of this doctrine: "how can we differentiate between mysticism and insanity?" he asks, noting that "it is not in the least easy to differentiate the outpourings of lunacy from the symbolic writings of some of the most significant figures in European culture". An attack on Modernist avant-gardes is already implicit here, but this does not necessarily entail the dismissal of the Symbolist quest itself. Symbols must be employed as a means of coming to terms with reality – the goal of the mystic – rather than of escape from reality, which McAuley defines as "schizophrenia". The aim is not the attainment of "a metaphysically 'higher' level of reality," according to McAuley; rather, "the mystic is only valuable in so far as he relates his fantasies to the ordinary known level of reality".

Indeed, in his commentary on Blake's hermeticism, McAuley is most approving of the anti-Gnostic acceptance of the flesh in Blake's work. He concludes: "Blake rejected the Gnostic myths as objective cosmologies and treated them as what they really are –

projections of subjective states of mind". In McAuley's interpretation of the Doctrine of Correspondences he therefore emphasises the expression of spiritual experience in sensory terms: "if the mystic 'hears' a celestial sound, or 'smells' a celestial odour, it is not an actual sound or colour he is thinking of but something analogous, i.e. something of which actual sounds or colours are a symbol". And he adds that "it is the mark of the suburban theosophist, the cabbalistic bank clerk, to be seduced by the glamour and mystery of symbolic trappings until the human immediacy of the thing is lost".

Section Two of McAuley's thesis, "The Symbolists", an historical survey from Novalis to contemporary Surrealism, reflects Brennan's earlier attempt to systematise the Symbolist legacy. The essay commences with a quote from Novalis – "Speech is Delphi" – and McAuley notes "the extraordinary attention paid to words" in nineteenth-century poetry. The Romantic logos had itself become "the appointed symbol of the world of imaginative realities which it brought into being". In the shift from Romanticism to Symbolism, this emphasis on the mystical power of language becomes paramount: "with the coming of Baudelaire verbal magic becomes a formula, a spell," writes McAuley. In the occult pantheism of Gérard de Nerval, both Nature and language are equally revelatory of the logos: "for the same occult meaning that informs nature informs the words we use of it, and it is for the poet to discern this inner life through the outer covering of the world".

In McAuley's analysis of Baudelaire, correspondences can be read on three levels: as synaesthesia, linking sensations; as connections between sensations and spiritual or psychological states; and, finally, as the keys to a mystical reality, in what McAuley defines as "mystical symbolism proper". Nature is therefore seen by the poet as the means of deciphering both "his own soul and the suprasensible world", an idea which recalls the pantheism of the English Romantics. McAuley carefully retreats from the full implications of this doctrine, concluding with Coleridge that "in our life alone does nature live" ("Dejection: An Ode"), and that in the process of symbolic meaning, "the reference is always to the poet's subjectivity, not to the absolute".

This attitude shapes his interpretation of Mallarmé, whose poetry explores "the furthest confines of the Romantic quest". McAuley describes the idealist teleology, deriving from Hegel, which underlies the analogy of "word made flesh" in the Mallarméan doctrine of *la parole essentiale*: "the pure poet is concerned only with language in its purified form," writes McAuley, and the goal is "to transform reality into something else". In "Hérodiade" Mallarmé symbolises the soul's resistance to reality, describing what McAuley calls "a new Eden, of which 'La Parnasse' is the angel with flaming sword protecting it from the real". Nature is subjectivised in the symbol or image: "the symbolist decides that he will present his emotional experience as much as possible in images alone, with as little direct statement as possible". This relates directly to conceptions of the image typical of the American poets publishing in Harriet Munro's *Poetry* in the 1920s, such as Yvor Winters.

McAuley notes the adaptation by Eliot of Laforgue's objective correlative, defined as "an aspect of a social or psychological situation as a symbol for a subjective emotion". But, he comments, "when symbolist aesthetics has appeared in English writings, it has usually been shorn of its transcendental metaphysics". Indeed, Surrealist writing is defined by McAuley as "mysticism decapitated": "there is nothing more boring than other people's unelucidated symbols," he complains, "It is only by using symbols in a consciously realised context that they can be effective at all". This statement underlies McAuley's antagonism toward the Apocalyptic Surrealism of his British contemporaries – imitations of which were soon to appear in *Angry Penguins*, particularly in the work of its editor, Max Harris ("an Antipodean Dylan Thomas"[17]).

Mallarmé, he concludes, was “seduced by the idealist heresy. It is true that poetry is not concerned with making propositions which can be affirmed or denied in the ordinary way. But that does not mean that poetry enters an ideal world above space and time.” For similar reasons he condemns the philosophy of Bergson, so influential on the Vitalist poetics of the preceding twenty years, and McAuley's objection to this “idealist heresy” in Bergson and Mallarmé is the same: “just as we cannot isolate pure sensation, or pure thought, so we cannot isolate pure intuition”. His concluding definition of poetry is therefore materialist: “the peculiar quality of poetry lies in its ability to present things as they appear in moments of intuitive awareness,” he writes. McAuley accepts the Imagist restriction of “things as they appear” or “no ideas but in things”. In this conclusion, as Michael Heyward notes, there are also echoes of John Anderson's empiricist philosophy of art.[18]

McAuley's development during this period can be traced in the poems of his first volume, *Under Aldebaran*, which have been carefully arranged by date. Among the earliest poems in the volume (1936–1938) is a translation of Rilke's “Autumn”, in which the figure of the solitary wanderer, familiar from German Romanticism and adopted by Brennan, is described:

> Who now is homeless shall not build this year.
> He shall be solitary and long alone;
> Shall wake, and read, and write long letters home,
> And on deserted pavements here and there
> Shall wander restless, as the leaves are blown.

In the book's third section, which covers the period 1939–1942, there are clear resonances with the themes explored in McAuley's thesis. The epigraph to this section is from Hölderlin's “Wozu Dichter”, in which he questions the role of the poet in the modern world: this inquiry is central to the investigation of McAuley's thesis, and is explored further through his poetic experiments of the period. The opening poem is significantly titled “Gnostic Prelude”, recalling the essay's critique of the “heresy” of Gnostic idealism. The influence of Brennan is unmistakable here, both in the tone of the poem and in the Symbolist cosmology of its imagery: McAuley is describing the aspiration to a paradise lost, figured (as in Slessor's “Sleep”) as “the dark instinctive gnosis of the womb”. The dawn of birth involves the painful loss of this “Dark Eden”, and McAuley's imagery here recalls that of “Woman To Man”. The poem closes with a traditional Symbolist lament:

> How then the blood in sightless grope
> Seeks vainly for that Eden slope
> And far declivity of doom;
> Nor ever now is felt or heard
> The murmur of sweet bones interred
> The distant heartbeat pumping in the gloom.

Throughout these poems McAuley emphasises a rational or Apollonian aesthetic approach. In “Landscape of Lust” the poet's dwelling is described in these terms:

> In country cabins, richly poor,
> Where golden-headed wattle stands

Like an Apollo at the door
We make our lodging, and with hands
Inured to honest lovers' toil
We cultivate our living soil.

The classical worship of an Apollonian ideal is also the theme of "Latona", dedicated "to the memory of Paul Valéry".[19] This is detailed in the later poem, "Marginal Note", which once again focuses on the metaphor of light to describe the "lucid order" of an art of proportion and plenitude. Sanity and balance are the essential characteristics of the poet's approach: only "the level eye receives its radiance".[20]

There is, however, another aspect to McAuley's poetry from this period, and it finds expression in poems that appear to make direct reference to Symbolist sources. These are often prophetic in tone and visionary in aspiration, and bear similarities to the Apocalyptic style of the 1940s. "The Blue Horses" is dated 1940, the year of McAuley's thesis. Here, the horses are as Blakean as they are Expressionist, representatives of an Age of Revolution which in McAuley's view stretches from the Romantic era into the 1930s. The poem describes an epiphany of infinite correspondences within the order of Nature, the Symbolist universe now expanding in Einsteinian physics:

For in the world are spaces infinite
And each point is a mighty room
Where flowers with strange faces bloom
In the amazing light;
And every little crystal minute
Has many aeons locked within it
Within whose crystal depths we see
Time upon times eternally.

By the poem's conclusion the animal or Dionysian energy of the "hooves of fate", which "stampede" the revolutionary masses, must be viewed in the context of contemporary totalitarianism. The irrational is examined according to the Romantic-Symbolist tradition, but in its modern form is not condoned: the "animal passions" of the unconscious are now seen as too threatening.

In poems written at the time of the Ern Malley hoax in 1944 a central core of Symbolist ideas remains, but these are contained within carefully measured argument. "Chorale" is in strict quatrains, and includes a clear statement of the Doctrine of Correspondences, paraphrasing Baudelaire:

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

In the poem's final section we are reminded that only "The centre gives a perfect azimuth / But other bearings have a false direction", and the poem closes with a Yeatsian admonition to maintain this Apollonian "centre" against the chaotic forces of history:

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.

This tendency to conflate political with aesthetic arguments is particularly evident in the most prophetic of McAuley's early poems, "The Incarnation of Sirius".[21] Here McAuley matches the Apocalyptic tone of the Angry Penguins poets in an allegory on the revolutionary age and its consequences. The idealist heresy is illustrated in a Gnostic myth of cosmic war, and the acceptance of this heresy ("the monstrous form of God's antagonist") by modern poets in particular is clearly highlighted:

But at its showing forth, the poets cried
In a strange tongue; hot mouths prophesied
The coolness of the bloody vintage-drops:
"Let us be drunk at least, when the world stops!"
Anubis-headed, the heresiarch
Sprang to a height, fire-sinewed in the dark,
And his ten fingers, bracketed on high,
Were a blazing candelabra in the sky.
The desert lion antiphonally roared;
The tiger's sinews quivered like a chord;
Man smelt the blood beneath his brother's skin
And in a loving hate the sword went in.

Again, "rebellion" involves a form of inversion, or heresy, in McAuley's hierarchy of values; the Romantic cosmology of Blake is once again invoked ("the tiger's sinews quivered like a chord"), but not accepted by the poet.

McAuley's concern with issues arising from Symbolist poetics was shared by both Harold Stewart and A. D. Hope. Stewart's *Phoenix Wings*, composed between 1940 and 1946, contains translations of Mallarmé and Valéry. His second volume, *Orpheus and other poems* (1956), traces the Orphic cycle in twenty-seven rhymed poems, written between 1946 and 1948. His Symbolist concern with the elucidation of mythic patterns is explicitly stated in the 1947 poem, "Prelude: The Myths":

Myths are a never-empty urn
Of meaning: poets thence in turn
Pour out the symbols that presage
The rise or ruin of their age.

This interest was later apparent in Stewart's poetic readings of Oriental mythology, and the Introduction to Stewart's major work, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, includes a detailed definition of Symbolist metaphysics, including the Doctrine of Correspondences.[22]

Hope's closeness to McAuley during this period is also significant. In 1944–45 the two men wrote versions of the same poem, titled "The Muse". Both are explicit renditions of a Triple Goddess figure, and both appear to have been modelled on

Brennan's "She is the night". In McAuley's poem the "trembling web" of Arachne stretches between light and the void of "oblivion". It is also Ariadne's thread, which leads the Apollonian hero to triumph over "the deep-resounding minotaur" – the submerged or unconscious self, in its "labyrinth of memory". In stanza three it has become Penelope's unfinished tapestry: she weaves "the threads of language", awaiting the return of "the wanderer whom the gods exiled". As in Judith Wright's poetic allegories, when the symbolic Bride and Bridegroom are reunited, "the gods are reconciled". This is a version of the Romantic-Symbolist myth of the artist's relationship to Nature, and its celebration in mystical *hieros gamos*, as described by Brennan. In Hope's version, addressed "To James McAuley 1945", Arachne, Ariadne and Penelope are also used as figures of the Goddess, but the mythological reading of the poem has altered. Ariadne is betrayed by the Hero, and far from rejecting the unconscious, seeks comfort in the arms of Dionysos himself.

Hope's reservations about the Symbolist project are similar to those of McAuley. In the 1963 Introduction to his *Selected Poems*, Hope writes: " 'Pure poetry' seemed to me an illusion that has cost us most in the great variety of forms practised in the past and has impoverished those to which we have largely confined ourselves". Echoing McAuley, he describes it as "a heresy of our time". Yet, describing the composition of "The Double Looking Glass", Hope relates how he "had the idea of writing a poem in the style suggested by certain poems of Mallarmé and Valéry". He later disclaims any overt traces of this influence in the poem: "As for Mallarmé and Valéry, the poem itself took charge as soon as I began to write, and the only changes I had to make afterwards were to excise certain incongruous relics of my original intention to follow them". In spite of this, "The Double Looking Glass" bears close resemblances to extended Symbolist allegorical poems: like Valéry's Young Fate, Susannah is brought from dream to recognition of her real nature, and her soliloquy in stanzas 4–7 recalls McAuley's vocabulary of correspondences:

> Here all things have imagined counterparts:
> A dragon-fly dim-darting in the stream
> Follows and watches with enormous eyes
> His blue narcissus glitter in the air.
> The flesh reverberates its own surprise
> And startles at the act which makes it bear.
> Laced with quick air and vibrant to the light,
> Now my whole animal breathes and knows its place
> In the great web of being, and its right;
> The mind learns ease again, the heart finds grace.
> I am as all things living...

In the annual anthology *Australian Poetry 1943*, selected by H. M. Green, the approach of these three poets is highlighted. The selection opens with McAuley's "The Blue Horses", and includes Hope's "Return from the Freudian Islands" (a satire on psychoanalysis), as well as Harold Stewart's "The Leaf-Maker". The young Ern Malley hoaxers therefore already occupied a central place in the Australian poetry of their time; none of the leading Angry Penguins are included in Green's anthology.

It is important to note that the Angry Penguins group should also be seen in relation to the Symbolist tradition. According to Richard Haese,[23] Sidney Nolan read widely in the French Symbolist poets during the 1930s, particularly Rimbaud and Verlaine, and

his first exhibited painting in the Contemporary Art Society show of 1939 was a portrait of Rimbaud. Describing Nolan's "emulation of the practice of Arthur Rimbaud in literature", Haese comments that "Nolan's overriding aim was to be original in the sense of using the direct experience of the senses as the basis for art".[24] Nolan was one of the poetry editors of *Angry Penguins*, and contributed an essay on Rimbaud to the magazine in 1943. Haese describes Rimbaud as "Nolan's psychological doppelganger",[25] and he relates how Nolan and Sunday Reed worked together on translations of the French poet (Nolan's painting "Royalty" is based on Rimbaud's poem of the same title).[26]

The anarchist views of the Angry Penguins group led Harris to establish contacts with George Woodcock and Herbert Read. This brought them into conflict with the Zhdanovist ideological approach to aesthetics of contemporary communists such as Jack Blake. Albert Tucker vigorously debated the communists in his articles, attacking Blake in "Art, Myth and Society" (*Angry Penguins* 4), and later criticising the Marxism of both Bernard Smith and Noel Counihan. In "Exit Modernism", a review of Place, Taste and Tradition which appeared in *Angry Penguins Broadsheet* in 1945,[27] Tucker dismisses Smith's Marxist critique of aestheticism in the following terms:

To qualify as a supporter of aestheticism or as a resident of the ivory tower one must believe that art aims to realise aesthetic and not social or political values. (Smith's) Fascist-Nazi category is a big sack into which he pops all contemporary non-social and non-political painting tied up in neat little bundles labelled "myths", "spellweaving", "decadence", "art for art's sake", and so on.

This argument echoes the issues debated in the correspondence of Jack Lindsay and Randolph Hughes, and the relationship between politics and aesthetics was central to artistic discussions of the period. The more conservative McAuley would also be expected to have reacted to the anarchist politics of the Harris-Reed group, and according to Michael Heyward, Herbert Read ("a dead sucker for any gross rubbish that comes his way"[28]) was a particular target of the hoax.

Haese relates the Modernism of these artists and poets to a "modern romantic tradition", defined as "that stream of Modernism which had its origins in symbolism, culminating in twentieth century expressionism and surrealism". He further notes that: "for social, ideological or temperamental reasons, the irrational and emotional nature of this stream, and its liberating potential, struck a deeply responsive chord".[29] It is this naive irrationalism which particularly disturbed both the Apollonian McAuley and the anti-Freudian Hope. Haese stresses the continuities between this form of Modernism and the Romantic-Symbolist tradition:

The symbolist-expressionist-surrealist tradition has long been recognised by its chief apologists as an enriching extension of the earlier romantic movement, and André Breton made the link in the first Surrealist manifesto in 1924. Herbert Read laboured the point in 1936.

However, in the hoaxers' view, the Surrealism of Max Harris in particular was a corruption, not a continuation, of the Symbolist tradition. In a review of Harris' *Dramas From the Sky*, Stewart commented: "there is a fatal facility about all such semi-surrealist verse – it is no harder to do than a free-association test".[30] Hope referred to "Maxie Harris and the schizo boys" – echoing the "schizophrenia" label in McAuley's thesis – and famously described *The Vegetative Eye* as "a Zombi, a composite corpse, assembled from the undigested authors Mr Harris has swallowed without chewing and animated by psychological voodoo".[31] The hoaxers therefore attempted to match Harris with a collage-text of their own; collaboration was chosen as a means of avoiding "unconscious" associations.[32] This argument was not accepted by Herbert Read in particular, who found in the poems "a metaphysical unity which cannot be the result of unintelligent discussion".[33] McAuley later admitted that the first poem in the sequence,

"Durer: Innsbruck", was an unpublished poem of his own, used as a bait for Harris. The boundary separating parodic or inferior Symbolism from Surrealism is uncertain: McAuley's own early work, as Heyward points out, was criticised by Frederick Macartney for being too close to the French Symbolists, "more concerned with general effect than with definite meaning".[34] "Malley" may well have been a bowdlerised form of "Mallarmé", as Heyward suggests; he notes the Mallarmé pastiche which concludes "Documentary Film", as well as a reference to Blake in "Sweet William". It is perhaps significant that in the following issue of *Angry Penguins* the Ern Malley poems were tentatively praised by the local expert on Symbolism, A. R.Chisholm. They were particularly championed by Sidney Nolan, who saw them as works of genuine international interest, an evaluation proven by the overseas attention the hoax received, and in their subsequent publication history.

James McAuley's aesthetic views crystallised in the years following his Catholic conversion in 1952, and there is a new rigidity in the essays collected in *The End of Modernity* (1959). In "The Perennial Poetry", McAuley states his central argument: "the fact is that the roots of poetry are metaphysical and religious," he writes. The inspired poet reconstitutes, from the Modernist Waste Land, "the hierarchy of being which scepticism has levelled to the ground... the ancient symbols by which men once understood *who they are*." He laments the desocialisation of the poet in the modern world, and sees in this the origin of the Symbolist doctrine of "pure poetry":

Beauty was found to reside in a certain uncanny thrill not explicable by the manifest content of words. Let the poet concentrate on this indescribable sheen and gloom and glamour of words to the exclusion of all else. The poet in exercising his art should enjoy, not a relative autonomy within his own sphere, but an absolute autonomy beyond considerations of good and evil, true and false. The poem has neither use nor meaningfulness outside its existence as "pure poetry".

This doctrine of art for art's sake leaves the poet with no "cultural role" in a society lacking a "hierarchy of values".

The political resonances of this argument are most apparent in "The Magian Heresy", the central essay of *The End of Modernity*. Here McAuley returns to the subject of his thesis, presenting an historical survey of the Symbolist aesthetic in poetry, following the pattern of Brennan's prose. He describes a crisis in verse which emerges "from the beginning of the modern period" with Hegel, and notes the social engagement of the Romantic poets with what he calls "the dominant modern ideological tendencies" of the revolutionary age. But he cites Engels in defence of his position that poetic creativity is antithetical to "revolutionary ideas". According to McAuley, this is in fact borne out by the manner in which poetry has developed over the past two centuries: "poetic modernism is not the direct expression of the neo-gnostic secularist Enlightenment of modern times, for the poets feared and rejected this". What evolved instead was Symbolism, under the labels of "art for art's sake" and "pure poetry". In denying the materialism of the modern age, these poets "remained nevertheless attached to another conception of reality, and it was even reduced, in extreme cases, to a purely instrumental role: in an attempted conquest of the Absolute".

In an important passage McAuley describes the magian tendencies of the Symbolist aesthetic, in which the word becomes

magic, gnosis, paracletic inspiration, prophecy, revelation, even divine creation. The poet was to be no longer a mere literary person: his true role was that of hierophant, prophet, seer, shaman or magus.

Against the "anti-metaphysical gnosis" of the secular Enlightenment, the poet seeks "a new poetic gnosis, fed however by the underground streams of European occultism,

cabbalism and theosophy". It is this Symbolist mysticism – arising from German Romantics such as Novalis – and its attempt "to turn poetry into a substitute for religion" which McAuley labels "the magian heresy". In Rimbaud, he writes, "the ambition to be a true magus was taken to its furthest limit. Out of his readings in alchemy and occultism he developed a doctrine whereby, God being deposed, the poet must usurp divine creative power". Following his "occultist masters", the aim of Rimbaud's "magian enterprise" is "the transformation of the present order of reality...the attempt to attain the privileges of divinity".[35]

McAuley reserves his most scathing criticism for the Surrealists, concluding that "the drive towards "inwardness" reaches here its final degradation...the Romantic movement devours its offspring". In the final section of this essay McAuley, like Winters, looks forward to "a post-modern poetry", inferring that "poetic modernity, whose inmost impulse was the magian heresy, has come to an end". In an apparent reference to the Ern Malley poems, he asks: "To what extent does the perversion of the poet into the pseudo-prophet or pseudo-thaumaturge result in the production of pseudo-poetry?" It is the same question posed in the Introduction to his 1940 thesis.

In the final essay, "Notes and Speculations", McAuley formulates his own adaptation of the Symbolist method. He notes the musical effects available in English poetry, which can attain "the potency of a spell", but warns that it is "decadence" to make an "exclusive cult" of musicalisation. McAuley then attempts to reformulate Symbolist mythology in the terms of Catholicism: Christ becomes the King-Magus, The Royal Archimage, and the Divine Alchemist, "the true shaman who performs the 'journey to heaven' in very deed". He is the "Arch-Poet", and Adam Kadmon in the Kabbala (as in Blake's *Jerusalem*). This passage concludes with McAuley's affirmation of his belief in the immanence of the "Kingdom of Glory" and a Christian teleology of faith in which "the masterwork in which we unknowingly collaborate will be revealed at the end of time". This explanation of Symbolist metaphysics in Christian terms is McAuley's ultimate statement; any argument about aesthetics is now subsumed by the question of faith.

This is apparent in his later criticism: in his 1973 monograph on Brennan he detects "a literary Gnosticism which is more verbal than real", and *The Personal Element in Australian Poetry* (1970) concludes with a warning about "the emergence of black poetry, with its verbal violence, its formlessness, its antinomian and antilogical frenzy". McAuley's Catholicism was shared by other leading poets of the 1950s, most notably Vincent Buckley and Francis Webb, as well as later poets such as Les Murray.[36]

A. D. Hope, in his later critical writings, demonstrates a similarly equivocal attitude to the Symbolist influence. In *The New Cratylus* (1979) Hope criticises the "poem without subject", and reinterprets Mallarmé's "A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance" as "Un chien qui manque de dents jamais ne pensera".[37] He describes what he calls "dream-poems", which are written when "the part of me that says 'I' is temporarily absent, asleep" (25) – a direct reference to Rimbaud – but concludes: "the dream-workers on the whole give the impression of *playing* at poetry" (28). Hope is also critical of Symbolist theories of musicalisation and "pure poetry": "what Walter Pater meant by saying 'All art aspires to the condition of music' is uncertain," he writes, "but the remark was influential enough to suggest a false analogy between pure music and pure poetry" (43).

Hope acknowledges the Symbolist sources of English language Modernism, and he remarks that Eliot in particular shows the "damaging influence" (69) of "the late Symbolists in France". Like McAuley, he sees Symbolism as a false religion, quoting A. M. Schmidt's comment that the Symbolists "ransack all literatures, strip all rituals bare, and amass a repertory of pseudo-symbols in order to make use of them as required" (69). Hope also echoes McAuley in his dismissal of "the mindless sludge of surrealist verse"

(77). This is blamed, as in *The End of Modernity*, on the emphasis placed on the irrational in Romanticism: "the romantic, believing that 'the tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction', had plunged us into nightmare", writes Hope (124).

The resulting emphasis on "emotion" in poetry, which is traced from Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* through to Eliot's objective correlative, is particularly problematic for Hope: "the poem which is nothing more than an overflow of powerful feelings is one of the will-o'-the-wisps of the 'pure poetry' delusion", he writes, lamenting "the promotion and praise that the irrational now enjoys throughout the world" (135). Hope defines this "pure poetry delusion" by quoting a letter from McAuley: "To treat 'the world' as functioning in poetry only in virtue of its capacity to furnish accidental correlatives of an individual interior state is a monstrous inversion" (137). Baudelaire and Mallarmé, "impressed by the specious sophistry of Poe's essays" (140), established a poetics of suggestion, in which the discursive elements of poetry are suppressed. Their aesthetic is developed in

such later attempts to formulate a theory of pure poetry as Imagism, which, having got rid of all the ingredients of the poetry of former times, including the mystique of Symbolism, proposes to make it out of images alone, and Surrealism, which makes a conscious sweep of all conscious elements and manipulations and leaves it to the subconscious element to produce poetry in its purest form. (143)

In spite of the vehemence of this attack, Hope's attitude toward the poetics of the Symbolist project is not entirely negative. While he writes that "the Symbolists in general are now for the most part museum pieces and nothing more" (127), he concedes that "Mallarmé will last forever". In his concluding essay, "The Burden of the Mystery", Hope notes his sympathy with the Cosmic Rhythm of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, describing "a sense that has been with me all my life, that I can only describe as 'everything is set to music', as if the world as a process "went to a tune" or an immense and all containing, continuing and directing rhythm" (162). Hope paraphrases Yeats' essay on Synge:

What we learn from poetry is not necessarily a matter of "information" at all, it is an enlargement of our capacity to know, it is a freeing of our powers of vision from the way our ordinary occupations and interests tend to limit them and hedge them in, so that we can, in Wordsworth's phrase, "see into the life of things". (169)

He qualifies this, however, by adding that "this liberation does not mean that we leave the affairs and objects of the ordinary world for some neo-platonic empyrean" – a restriction of which McAuley would have approved. In his attempt to define a "metaphysical" role for poetry, Hope concedes that "it would be foolish to pretend that all poetry, or even most poems, have any metaphysical intent, or consciously set out to present a metaphysical view of their subject. But," he adds, "when they are, it is more often not what they say that makes them metaphysical, but what they *are*" (177). The ultimate test of a poem is therefore not its discursive meaning, but its connotations, and on this point Hope reveals his debt to the Symbolist aesthetic.[38] The essay concludes with a quote from Valéry:

I have known some who have meditated endlessly on this little word "symbol", to which they attributed an imaginary depth of meaning and whose mysterious overtones they tried to define. But a word is a bottomless abyss.

NOTES

[1] John Pringle adopts this terminology in his essay on Hope and McAuley in *Australian Accent* (1958), which is titled "The Counter-Revolution".

[2] *A Map of Australian Verse* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1975), 128–129.

[3] Michael Heyward, in *The Ern Malley Affair*, emphasises Hope's role as an agent provocateur in the hoax.

[4] *The Immobile Wind* (1921), *The Magpie's Shadow* (1922), *The Bare Hills* (1927) and *Fire Sequence* (1927).

[5] Comito, *In Defence of Winters* (University of Wisconsin Press 1986), 101.

[6] Quoted in Kaye, "The Post-Symbolist Poetry of Yvor Winters", *The Southern Review* (1971), 177.

[7] Davis, *Wisdom and Wilderness: The Achievement of Yvor Winters* (University of Georgia Press 1983), 58.

[8] Kaye, 183.

[9] Ibid. Kaye gives no reference for this quote.

[10] In D.C.Allen, ed., *A Celebration of Poets* (Johns Hopkins Press 1959), 44–79.

[11] Davis, 201.

[12] Kaye, 196.

[13] McAuley, 201.

[14] Heyward, *The Ern Malley Affair*, 34.

[15] Quoted ibid, 37.

[16] McAuley, "Symbolism: An Essay in Poetics", 1940 MA Thesis, University of Sydney. Rare Books, University of Sydney Library. The bibliography to this thesis is of particular interest: it reveals a wide reading in the literature of Symbolism, including works by Denis Saurat, Silberer's Problems of Mysticism and its Symbolism, Ewer's A Survey of Mystical Symbolism, and Yeats' writings on Blake; Variety by Paul Valéry is also cited. The key influence on McAuley's interpretation of Symbolism, however, appears to have been Chisholm's Towards Hérodiade, which is noted along with Wilson's Axel's Castle. The conclusions McAuley draws in regard to the limitations of the Symbolist project are in many respects similar to those of Chisholm; it is unlikely that he would have read Brennan's lectures by this time.

[17] Epithet cited in Haese, *Rebels and Precursors* (Allen Lane, Melbourne 1981), 99.

[18] Heyward, 43.

[19] A. R. Chisholm's *Approach to M. Valéry's Jeune Parque* (Melbourne, 1938) describes the Apollonian impulse in Valéry's poem in the following terms (9): "In the end the Parque surrenders to the Sun-God, that is, to the principle of individuation; for the sun in this poem has nothing in common with that 'midi le juste' which in 'Cimitière marin' as in Leconte de Lisle's 'Midi' is a symbol of Nirvana. The sun this time is essentially the light of phenomenal reality; it is Nietzsche's Apollo".

[20] This emphasis on Apollonian symbolism perhaps explains the choice of title for the Ern Malley poems, "The Darkening Ecliptic".

[21] McAuley adapts the figure of Anubis in this poem from Mallarmé's "Tombeau" for Baudelaire.

[22] H. Stewart, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* (Weatherhill, NY 1981), xxi–xxv.

[23] Op.cit., 23 and 49.

[24] Ibid, 94.

[25] Ibid, 186.

[26] The Sydney Charm School was also indebted to French Symbolism for its aesthetic approach. According to Haese, the leading Sydney critic Paul Haefliger emulated both Mallarmé and Huysmans in his prose (ibid 256).

[27] *Angry Penguins Broadsheet 1* (1945), 9–12.

[28] McAuley quoted by Heyward, 125.

[29] Haese, 185.

[30] Quoted in Heyward, 21.

[31] Ibid, 117.

[32] This, perhaps deliberately, overlooks the collaborative tradition within Surrealism itself. With their republication in *Locus Solus* in 1961, the poems were placed by editors Ashbery, Koch, Mathews, and Schuyler alongside such famous Surrealist collaborations as Breton and Éluard's "The Immaculate Conception" and the Exquisite Corpse poems, as well as cut-ups by William Burroughs. Seen in this context, McAuley and Stewart were indeed working within a major tradition in avant-garde poetry; by contrast, Max Harris' poetry from this period now seems dated and is seldom anthologised.

[33] Read's letter of support to Harris, quoted by Heyward, 156.

[34] Macartney quoted by Heyward, 54.

[35] This argument is taken up by John Tranter in his major poem of the 1970s, "Rimbaud and the Modernist Heresy". Mallarmé's description of the quest of the Great Mage for "what would have been the truth" is used as an epigraph, and Tranter describes how "hermetic secrets grow through discord / and resolution to hermitic silence", in an argument which seems directed towards the neo-romanticism of Robert Adamson's verse. McAuley's essay is a useful interpretative key to this poem.

[36] Murray's essays appear at times to consciously echo McAuley's views. In "Some Religious Stuff I Know About Australia", Murray refers to a "high-society Satanism which seems to pop up in our society from time to time, and which may be related to the excruciations of tiny old-money caste driven to Gnosticism and worse by the shameless success here of the lower orders". He is especially critical of Patrick White in this regard, detecting in White's novels a "trick of inverting ordinary snobbery and transposing it into mystical election" ("Eric Rolls and the Golden Disobedience") – a complaint which echoes McAuley's warnings about the confusion of literature and mysticism. In "The Narrow-Columned Middle Ground" Murray attacks "scholar poets", lamenting the end of the Lawson tradition with the emergence of the Vision school: "I well remember Kenneth Slessor's adamant scorn for the literary balladists and indeed all nineteenth-century verse," he writes. A direct critique of the Symbolist tradition is evident in his didactic poem, "Poetry and Religion":

You can't pray a lie, said Huckleberry Finn;

you can't poe one either. It is the same mirror:

mobile, glancing, we call it poetryfixed centrally, we call it religion

and God is the poetry caught in any religion,

caught not imprisoned...

In "Poèmes and the Mystery of Embodiment" Murray seems to be directly attacking poetry which derives from the French tradition, with its emphasis on musicality: "clearly we are dealing here with the magical effects of a poème, not those of a poem," he writes, "and with a major case where the general Enlightenment strategy of denying and denigrating magic of all sorts succeeded in weakening the salutary magics that might have countered the rise of a thoroughly vicious poem-vision". (All quotations taken from *The Paperbark Tree*, Carcanet 1992.)

[37] Hope, *The New Cratylus* (Oxford University Press 1979), 27. Subsequent references included within text.

[38] This is also contrary to the position adopted in "The Discursive Mode", Hope's well-known essay published in the first issue of *Quadrant* (edited by McAuley).