

T H E W I L L O F T H E P O E M

Religio-Imaginative Variations in the Poetry of

James McAuley,
Francis Webb,
and Vincent Buckley

by

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T H E W I L L O F T H E P O E M

"When I write, I do, not my own will, but the will of my poems - that is, I try to serve most scrupulously some spiritual event which my life proposes to me, of which the shape is not yet defined - but whether this is also the will of God I cannot know on earth." 1.

James K. Baxter

". . . play not only rules the metamorphosis of reality through fiction, but that of the writer and of the reader as well. Both become ludic figures by assuming the imaginative variations suggested by the work. The imaginative variations of the author, expressed in writing, become the paradigm for corresponding imaginative variations on the part of the reader." 2.

Paul Ricoeur

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1. "Literature and Belief", The Man on the Horse, p. 47.
 2. "Philosophical hermeneutics and theology", ~~Theology Digest~~, 2, 1976, 163.
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SUMMARY

While considering the work of James McAuley, Francis Webb and Vincent Buckley, this thesis concentrates on the religious character of their poetry. Since it assumes that religious language is primarily metaphorical (as distinct from dogmatic), the thesis describes the poetry by way of its religio-imaginative relationships and structures. James McAuley's poetry is religious, not so much because it is Catholic, as because it voyages between despair and hope, believing always in the reasoned will. Francis Webb's poetry, continually discovering glory in dereliction, dramatises the revelatory and redeeming power of the rejected ones - and so works within the "Suffering Servant" model of Isaiah. While Vincent Buckley's poetry gradually abandons Catholic language in favour of its own "idiom of sensation", the religious quality of that sensation is discovered more in liminal than in paradisaic possibilities - in the way "holy spaces" are always in some sense expatriate ones. Since each of these poets belongs in the period of Vatican II Catholicism, the thesis next relates their work to that context. Here, however, it searches for imaginative connections and disconnections by setting up its comparison on the basis, not of dogmas, but of models. Finally, the thesis interprets Webb's Eyre All Alone as a search for renewed religious language, returning to its opening assumption that religious language is primarily metaphorical.

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