

# The Devil and James McAuley: The Making of a Cold War Warrior

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I saw Jim McAuley only once – it could have been in 1971 – at a Peace with Freedom function at Sydney University. Or was it the Association for Cultural Freedom? Leonie Kramer was there. I was a member of SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), and had come with my boyfriend to see what Peace With Freedom were up to. I recall thinking that McAuley, who represented everything despicable to us, was a surprisingly small man. His deeply etched face suggested he had taken quite a bit of punishment in his time, while his voice, so clearly tutored into its cultured modulations, was almost feminine. He had a presence, there was no denying that, but with my predisposition to regard McAuley as the enemy – the boyfriend was also a modern poet – I was unable to detect the charisma about which I have since heard so much.

When he was at university in the late thirties, McAuley cut a dazzling figure among his admiring university cohorts, as Michael Heyward makes clear in *The Ern Malley Affair*. Everyone was in awe of him. He could dominate a room on entry. Wildly funny he was a master of the sardonic and given to outrageous puns and scaring repartee. The shoddy world he perceived around him provided plenty of fuel for contempt, and he showed no fear or favour when it came to making someone look like a fool. To add to his lustre, McAuley was a brilliant and inventive pianist. Earlier in his life he had considered becoming a concert pianist; at university it was jazz piano which made him something of a legend. Point him toward a piano and he could perform any number of improvised jazz and blues numbers, often with his own devilish lyrics.

His close friend Hal Stewart had the perspicacity and wit to see that his friend's impressive style was protean dissembling:

Not Looking-Glass Land's Anglo-Saxon Hare  
Could strike such poses i' the tangled air  
As McAuley, who, with his trouper's repertoire  
Can boast a wardrobeful of attitudes,  
Who if his gallery applauds for more  
Will rant them vastly superior platitudes  
And autograph their arses at the door. (Qtd in Coleman 17)

McAuley's acknowledgment of his dissembling was more self-lacerating, as in the poem 'Reflections', where the cardboard cutout of a game cock is made to strut, caper and prance before the pecking hens, while inside:

A howling desolation feeds that pride,  
 At whose dead centre sits a child that weeps  
 Lost and disconsolate, and never sleeps. (qtd in Coleman 9)

This last line was not merely a conceit. He often did not sleep. Since his adolescence the night had not bought him peaceful repose but uncanny visitations which increasingly terrified him. In his poetry sleep and dreams were not images of peace, but of dread. Close friends like Alec Hope and Amy Witting worried about the intensity of Jim's nightmares, which would bring him screaming out of sleep. Often he would lash out violently at his tormentor and on one occasion he broke all the windows of his room (Witting). McAuley himself could display a certain insouciance in respect of these nocturnal terrors. Around 1937 he wrote a series of three poems, never published, he called 'Nightmare Songs' which introduced his constant night-time companion 'a big man in a stovepipe hat':

He is my shadow on the wall,  
 Some say he isn't there at all,  
 It isn't true, it isn't true!  
 He is just as real as me or you. (Vance Palmer Papers NLA)

Despite the jaunty nursery-rhyme form of these songs, they have a desperately dark, possibly suicidal, undertone.

In his early poetry sex became inextricably linked to nightmare, nowhere more clearly so than in the tormented, ugly poem, 'Gnostic Prelude', infused with sexual anxiety and guilt. Sexuality is represented as a descent of the spirit; images of intercourse are transmuted into blind groping toward agony and desolation:

When nightmare breathes upon the mind  
 As on a glass and peers behind  
 With mad and watchful eyes, malevolently;

When in the sexual night descended  
 The spirit quivers undefended  
 At the quick of human mystery;  
 When a woman's hair is a bush of pain  
 And the heart is a blind man in the rain  
 That nightlong sings of what it cannot see. (*Collected Poems* 8–9)

When Amy Witting was helping McAuley with his translations of Rilke, Novalis, and Stefan George for his MA, she too came to the realisation that McAuley was not a single, coherent personality. For all his roistering bohemian style and 'astounding social ambitions' he suffered overwhelming bouts self-disgust and terrible nightmares. He was an utterly divided personality. When they read together the story 'Sylvie' by Gerard de Nerval, he immediately recognised his own sign in

the star Aldebaran, with its alternating colours of pink and blue (Witting). 'Under Aldebaran' was the title he gave to a story published pseudonymously in an issue of *Hermes* edited by Gough Whitlam in the third term of 1939 and to his first book of poetry published in 1946.

When Jim McAuley got his call-up at the beginning of 1943 he was only dimly aware of the dramatic changes the war would bring to his material world and the consequent realignment of his temporal ambitions. At the same time he was tentatively groping toward metaphysical questions which would impel a radical transformation in his psychological and spiritual self. His engagement with the cultures and contradictions of New Guinea was the common factor in changes to both his temporal and his spiritual life. In that awesome, unsettling place of bird-reptile shape, with its mysterious tremors, secretive valleys and impenetrable forest, a decisively different McAuley took form.

McAuley's job at the School of Civil Affairs (after 1946 the Australian School of Pacific Administration), gave his life direction and purpose, but it did not help to quiet his nights. During the war Jim had woken the barracks with his screams and he had appeared the following morning looking battered and bruised, as if he had been beating himself against the walls or the furniture (Legge). A colleague from ASOPA, Anne Robson (who later married John Kerr), recounted a sea voyage to New Guinea when they were all sleeping on the deck and Jim's nightmares had kept his companions awake. He had to be restrained from throwing himself overboard (Witting). The hallucinogenic fevers of malaria, which he contracted in 1944 and which continued to plague him for another twenty years, greatly exacerbated his nocturnal terrors.

Early in 1949 McAuley had one of his regular trips to Papua when he visited the Catholic mission in the Mekeo district and was introduced to the retired Archbishop of Papua, Alain de Boismenu. Almost eighty years old, Bishop de Boismenu still retained a compelling presence. Meeting with this man was to turn McAuley's life around.

For De Boismenu Papua was the Devil's playground: a place of 'sorcerers and snakes, bound together by a shadowy conspiracy', according to de Boismenu's famous acolyte, Paul Claudel (Duperay 5). Doing battle with the Devil in order to save souls was de Boismenu's central vocation. To defeat the Devil's intention he emphasised the use of solemn exorcisms to drive out the diabolic adversaries and he performed many such exorcisms himself (Kramer 233). He was an inspired exorcist. On their first meeting de Boismenu and McAuley must have talked a good deal about God's adversary and de Boismenu's first-hand knowledge of his intervention in the world, because it was during that meeting he told McAuley of his experience as the spiritual director and exorcist for an extraordinary woman, Marie Thérèse Noblet. Although she was not a nun, de Boismenu had brought Noblet from France to Papua and made her the mother superior of an order of Papuan nuns in 1922. She had died in 1930 and was revered at Kabuna where her order, called the Handmaidens of the Lord, continued. McAuley was riveted by the story that de Boismenu told him about this amazing woman, who presented him with 'a startling and disconcerting chal-

lenge' ('My New Guinea' qtd in Kramer 28).

Marie Thérèse Noblet was born in 1889 in France.<sup>1</sup> A very sickly child, she understood, even at young age, the lesson of her special saint, 'the little flower' Thérèse of Liseaux, that in suffering we give ourselves to God. Diagnosed with incurable Potts disease at seventeen, she was taken to Lourdes in 1907 where she experienced a miraculous cure, every trace of the disease having vanished.

Marie Thérèse was to learn that the Devil hated those God has chosen for his endowment and from the age of twenty-one she was frequently the object of mischievous and cruel nightly attentions from 'the Old One', as she termed the Devil. She began to experience acute pains in her side and her suffering often led to swoons. It was then she was made to realize that God had chosen her for the role of victim, destined to share the suffering of Christ for the redemption of souls. God personally invited her to ascend to Calvary and she accepted willingly. As she later described the event, at that very instance she felt a violent stab in her heart and during the afternoon a big red cross appeared over the heart – the sacred stigmata. Henceforth whatever suffering she was forced to endure it was never enough. When God asked her to take more, she never hesitated in saying yes.

When she was twenty-five the Devil flung her violently on the pavement and as a result she developed spinal trouble with violent pains, which also brought on attacks of meningitis, paralysis of the legs and arms, and acute heart trouble. She was in a state of extreme paralytic exhaustion and on several days she appeared to be dead. Taking advantage of her death-like state the Devil made a particularly vicious attack, tying her from head to foot with cords bound so securely the only way her cousin could release the body was to cut them. On another occasion the Devil carried her through the air and dumped her in an icy stream.

In 1921 Archbishop de Boismenu was asked to investigate the Devil's activities. During an exorcism he performed de Boismenu questioned the Devil, who spoke through the mouth of Marie Thérèse in Latin and sometimes in Papuan dialects. De Boismenu reported seventeen possessions between 5 and 25 of January 1921, during which time Marie Thérèse was struck blind. Her blindness was declared complete and incurable by the doctor.

Archbishop de Boismenu saw for himself that Marie Thérèse was a chosen child of God and that she would be a most valuable recruit to his mission in Papua, where the Devil was trying so hard to keep the people ensnared in paganism. In Papua her suffering would ransom many souls. They travelled to Lourdes in February 1921 for the Feast of our Lady of Lourdes. The Devil also accompanied them and de Boismenu was forced to perform 'discreet exorcisms' on the train to keep her adversary at bay. On the Feast of our Lady of Lourdes she was so overcome with suffering that she went into a swoon, crying out 'As much as you will Jesus, as much as you will' (Elliott 57). She was rapt in an ecstasy which continued for some time and when she returned to herself she was cured of her blindness. Two months later, just below her throat, a purple stigmata became visible and at the same time the red stigmata of the cross on her breast changed in form and colour to a triple papal cross of purple.

In September 1921 de Boismenu and Marie Thérèse left for Papua. On the voyage the Devil made many attempts to stop her: he took the form of a gorilla and tried to strangle her, while on another occasion he tried to drown her. Fortunately she was wedged in the porthole as the Devil tried to drag her out. Arriving at Kabuna in December 1921 she pronounced her religious vows and progressed immediately from novice to Mother Superior. On that day a small red cross appeared over the stigmata on her throat. Often ill and always in excruciating pain, exacerbated by the Devil's persistence, Marie Thérèse died at the age of 40. She was credited with doubling the number of conversions during her nine years among the pagan Papuans.

Throughout 1949 and 1950 McAuley carried the story of Marie Thérèse in his head and he was engaged in an unfinished project to write a long essay about her. She became the key to his continuing spiritual enquiry. In June 1951 he recorded in his journal that he had reached a point where he had to seriously ask himself 'whether the Catholic Church is not in fact ... the only full and authentic source of that living water for which my soul is inflamed with an increasing thirst' (qtd in Coleman 44).

His belief in the experience of Marie Thérèse Noblet was central to his formulation of this question. His study of the gospels had progressively vindicated her story, he explained in a letter some years later to Dorothy Green: 'it was the Gospels that made me assent to Marie Thérèse's case, not vice versa. But having got to that point I found Marie Thérèse's case personally important' (McAuley to Dorothy Green, August 1954). McAuley reserved his decision on the Catholic Church until he returned to PNG in December 1951.

At Kabuna he was laid up for six days with a particularly bad bout of malaria. Archbishop de Boismenu sat with him through every terrible night. When he had recovered from his fevers his decision was made, irrevocably: he would be received into the Catholic church.

In his one public discussion of Marie Thérèse Noblet's deep and lasting influence on his life, in his essay 'My New Guinea', McAuley was very circumspect about the nature of her mystical experience. Her story was 'not at all in conformity with sober Anglo-Saxon good taste' (qtd in Kramer 28), he allowed, nor could the modern intellect readily assent to the idea of angelic and demonic activity in the world. Which was to beg the question: how was it that this scornful, intellectual man became so utterly persuaded that Marie Thérèse Noblet's experience had a special resonance for him and why, after a decade or more of reading about mystical experience, did this woman speak profoundly to him in a way that others had failed to?

One persuasive clue can be found in his poetry, where he displays a predisposition to accept the preternatural as something more tangible than a rich symbolism. In 'Gnostic Prelude' McAuley's imagination, driven by self-loathing and despair, is powerfully engaged with the idea of the demonic antagonist. Later poems have an intensely apocalyptic strain, a pervasive sense of powerful malevolent forces at work in the cosmos, such as the 'Incarnation of Sirius', a poem suffused with the

imagery of Revelations, where a virgin gives birth to 'the monstrous form of God's antagonist' (*Collected Poems* 30). In his sequence, *The Hero and the Hydra*, there is no redemption; no respite from the threatening shadow deep within the psyche of man 'This sick and treacherous animal/ That other creatures fly from in disgust' (*Collected Poems* 61). The hero's wound is self-inflicted, never to be healed; the overriding despair of the poem is expressed in the line, 'We suffer, each his torment, each alone' (*Collected Poems* 60). McAuley knew this state was almost intolerable for the soul to bear. He longed for consolation.

In a rare personal note tucked among the lists of books in his journal, McAuley gave voice to a desperate metaphysical yearning. On 13 May he wrote

One keeps wanting to find out if it is all really easy, as if one could step straight out of shame, weakness, prejudice, anger, envy, sloth by learning some easy trick. But one has to trade in the old man for the new that is certain ...

But that feeling that one never had the necessary qualities, or that in very childhood they have been killed out or stunted – the nerve ending snipped off customarily as one docks a puppy's tail – the feeling of having been mutilated and dulled for the sake of conventional morality, permanently maimed ... even writing the words brings back a gush of sickness and bewilderment never really faced or got rid of.

But isn't it THEREFORE that I must keep trying, because of the secret conviction slowly formed over years that this way is the only chance of real growth? (Qtd in Cook 292)

Such occasional notes reveal that in 1949 McAuley was feeling his way into religious conviction which would culminate in his conversion three years later. The fragility of his self-concept suggests he was highly susceptible to the pull of a unified and coherent system of belief which might provide a stable centre to his life in place of the despairing void which threatened to overwhelm and annihilate him. He desperately wanted to give up the solitary struggle against his inner torment.

The psychological maiming of his childhood, 'never really faced or got rid of', which he had identified in his singular journal entry in May 1949, could well have been an element in his psychic predisposition to dramatic conversion (see Rambo). 'Small things can pit the memory like a cyst', he wrote in one of the autobiographical poems of his later years, which described an emotionally devastated childhood where his parents were never seen to 'casually touch /Or show a moments joy in one another'. The portrait of his father was of a man pathologically unable to show affection:

Having seen other fathers greet their sons,  
I put up my childish face to be kissed  
After an absence. The rebuff still stuns

My blood. The poor man's curt embarrassment  
 At such a delicate proffer of affection  
 Cut like a saw. ('Because', *Collected Poems* 246)

This painful picture of father and son (albeit written many years after his conversion) is of particular interest when read against psychological studies of religious conversion, which have found that to a significant degree converts had problematic relationships with their fathers (see Ullman). No doubt such deep-seated psychological factors were part of the complex process which led to his conversion, yet for McAuley, the lure of mystical experience was especially compelling. The extraordinary mystical experiences of Marie Thérèse struck a resonance with him which other mystics, including the great poet, John of the Cross, had not done. It seems that she had been able to articulate for him something which could not be contained in the didactic, intellectual construct of language in all the books he had been reading. He needed to feel the revelation. The intensity of his reaction to *Noblet* does suggest that it was her tortured body, with its infirmities and stigmata which was the site of revelation. The language of the body, inscribed and engraved by the diabolical and the divine, spoke to him as no printed word had ever done, perhaps because he understood that his own body had been the site of diabolical activity: he too had suffered violent night-time visitations.

Time and time again McAuley made it clear that the connection between the mystical way of Marie Thérèse and his own conversion was the chief witness, Archbishop de Boismenu. The tantalising possibility remains that on his second visit to de Boismenu at Kabuna, McAuley had a mystical encounter and this was the immediate catalyst for his decision to convert to Catholicism.

He was laid up at Kabuna for six nights with malaria and the old archbishop sat with him through every night. Was de Boismenu wrestling with the Devil, as he had done so many nights before in that place? Was he exorcising the man in the stovepipe hat? It is very possible that McAuley had come to understand that, like Marie Thérèse, he was the subject of attention from the Prince of Darkness and that his nocturnal terrors were demonic interventions meant to deflect him from his true path toward a union with God. It is not fanciful that for McAuley, like demons in the bible, exorcism and conversion were inextricably intertwined. The evidence he has provided to support that inference is very persuasive.

At the conclusion of his letter to Dorothy Green he gives a poetic description of the moment of his conversion:

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  
 Fully clothed, in his right mind, the man sits still  
 Conversing with aeons in the speech of men.

The last two lines are a direct reference to Jesus's exorcism for a demoniac in Gardarenes (Luke 8:35) who, while possessed, gave his name as Legion. The account of his exorcism is preceded by the parable of the sower and the seed in which Jesus says: 'Those by the wayside are the ones that hear; then the Devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts lest they should believe and be saved' (Luke 8:12). McAuley believed himself to have fallen by the wayside – until the intervention of de Boismenu.

One of McAuley's most important poems, 'New Guinea', written on the death of Archbishop de Boismenu in November 1953, contains another compelling suggestion that it was through exorcism he finally came to faith. The poet speaks of New Guinea as a land of apocalypse, where 'men are shaken by obscure trances' and where 'evil spirits lurk like cockroaches in the interstices of things'; a place of the extraordinary and the spectacular, filled with 'the figures of my innermost dream'.

Whence that deep longing for an exorcizer,  
For Christ descending as a thaumaturge  
Into his saints, as formerly in the desert  
Warring with demons on the outer verge.

Only by this can life become authentic  
Configured henceforth in eternal mode:  
Splendour, simplicity, joy – such as were seen  
In one who now rests by his mountain road. (*Collected Poems* 99)

Faith and salvation – 'the eternal mode' – are made possible through the intervention of the exorcist in his ceaseless battle against the Devil's attempts to deflect men from God. The battle was fought by the 'thaumaturge' de Boismenu in New Guinea, just as it was fought by the first fathers of the church, like St Anthony, who retreated to the desert to endure constant confrontations with the Devil and his horde of demons.

For McAuley, never one to downplay his historical role in the world, the parallel between himself and the early church fathers became a persistent theme in his post-conversion life. In 1957 he presented a passionate paper in which he likened his role as a committed Catholic in a secular intellectual environment to that of the early embattled Christians. He saw himself as 'the bearer of wisdom whose origins lie outside and above the accepted universe of discourse'. For him what this wisdom contained was 'absolute, supreme and has the prior right', though, he acknowledged, 'to the world it may seem foolishness and superstition'. He knew that he was 'living in the last Age of the world' and that 'things are moving toward the final travail and triumph, toward the end of history'. His primary textbook of history was not Hegel or Spengler or Toynbee, but the Apocalypse of St John the Divine. 'St John has a vision of a Christian remnant in a corrupt world, a world turned wholly after the Beast and worshipping him', he wrote. What was demanded

he would willingly give: 'the blood witness; the testimony of martyrdom' ('The Clash of Cultures' 24–37). This 'central historical concern of St John; the testimony of blood', as a polemical catchcry he would return to over and over again.

McAuley's understanding that his age was especially vulnerable to the Devil's project infused all his writing after his conversion. In his poem 'The Vintage', McAuley drew on the apocalyptic imagery of St John to describe the angels calling him to enter the anti-Communist struggle:

I see in deepest midnight  
A glare upon the sky  
I hear behind the silence  
The spirit-voices cry  
Bidding my tongue reply

Cry that the seals are broken  
That cannot be restored  
Deceit has bred Confusion  
Confusion the abhorred  
Avenger with the sword. (qtd in Coleman 58–9)

Angelic chorus aside, in the temporal realm it was B.A. Santamaria who brought McAuley into the fold of anti-Communist activism. Early in 1956 they had spent two days together in a Jesuit retreat and from that moment on McAuley's engagement in the political struggle was complete and total. On his return to Sydney McAuley sent Santamaria the poem, 'In a Late Hour', which underscored his complete commitment. Again McAuley renders the present political crisis as an apocalyptic historical moment:

The hearts of men grow colder,  
The final things grow near.  
Forms vanish, kingdoms moulder,  
The antirealm is here; ...

Though the stars run distracted,  
And from wounds deep rancours flow,  
While the mystery is enacted  
I will not let you go. (*Collected Poems* 129)

Even in his 1955 Commonwealth Literary Fund lectures, the Satanic antirealm, in the guise of 'modernity', formed an awesome backdrop for his argument that modern secular society could not create genuine poetry. In his opening McAuley borrowed from Hans Christian Anderson's parable about a mirror created by an evil sorcerer whose grinning face reduced the good and beautiful to almost nothing, while it accentuated everything worthwhile and ugly. In Anderson's fable the mir-

ror had shattered and shards of it had entered the eyes or the hearts of men so they could not tell right from wrong. In McAuley's adaptation, those shards of mirror had been made into the philosophic systems of the post-Enlightenment which had ruthlessly expelled any residue of the Christian tradition to create 'modernity'. What was true for political systems was true for literature: 'People who wear spectacles from the great sorcerer's looking-glass cannot see things in their true stature'. In his view the relationship between modernity and poetry was 'the same as that between a dog and the gas chamber' ('The Grinning Mirror' 309–10).

This argument became the central thesis for his 1959 book of polemic, *The End of Modernity*, in which he argued vehemently that the liberal-humanist dream had turned into a nightmare which could 'only end in modern political totalitarianism of the kind that is now chiefly represented by Communism' ('The Clash of Cultures' 35). Western modernity had not developed as a result of European Christian traditions, he insisted, but a Satanic revolt against the authority of Christian doctrine, 'a revolt that was, perhaps, inevitable at some stage, because it reproduces the original drama of man's fall' ('The Clash of Cultures' 32).

Again, when his first issue of the magazine *Quadrant* appeared in December 1956, McAuley introduced its purpose in a lengthy prologue which rehearsed his preoccupations with modernism and the moral and social crisis in contemporary society, before arriving at the ultimate Satanic challenge:

Suddenly this one huge glaring vision, this enormous mask made of blood and lies, starts up above the horizon and dominates the landscape, a figure of judgment speaking to each person in a different tone or tongue but with the same question: And what do you think about me? Then indeed we hear the ghosts of rhetorical humanisms, academic positivisms, and progressive illuminisms (whose frightening heir and fulfilment Communism is) speak and gibber in the streets imploring us to maintain the most rigorous neutrality ... But events whirl these ghosts resistlessly away like dead leaves in a gale. ('Prologue' 3)

McAuley's image of the dupes of humanism and positivism swept around like leaves in a gale interestingly is borrowed from Milton's image of fallen angels lying 'Thick as Autumnal leaves' (McLaren 98).

In 1960 McAuley completed his epic poem *Captain Quiros*. Quiros was a compelling figure for McAuley: a brilliant navigator and devout Catholic, obsessed with the idea that he could find the Great South Land and create there an ideal Christian world, the New Jerusalem. For McAuley this subject was historical, spiritual and political. In his epic narrative of this complex, driven man McAuley brought together the pressing concerns of his life as a Catholic. He sent a copy of the unpublished poem to Santamaria, telling his friend that he would see more significance in the poem 'because the experience I have brought to bear in interpreting the historical situations is our own experience' (McAuley to Santamaria, nd). At a fundamental level *Captain Quiros* was about James McAuley: he can be

found in Quiros and Belmonte both. On his deathbed he relates to Belmonte a vision of Terra Australis into the secular sterility of the mid-twentieth century when

... dreadful signs appear,  
 Figures and portents of the apocalypse.  
 The ancient Dragon wakes and knows his hour,  
 The shaken stars fall in a burning shower,  
 Blue horses rearing throw their charioteer. (215)

In his last moments the dying Quiros hears a voice 'as deep as twilight' say

...You shall be  
 The children of the second syllable. (215)

Here too is an echo of the Apocalypse of St John the Divine. The second syllable of the word CHRISTUS is the Latin word for incense. St John prophesied that when the seventh seal is opened, incense will rise to the hand of God and the seven trumpets will sound the Last Judgment and the End of Time. The death of Quiros brings to an end his quest for a new world with a powerful apocalyptic flourish. It is Belmonte, the poet and scribe of Quiros' travails, who brings the epic narrative to its close. In the final stanza he leaves the dead navigator and walks into the night:

The purest ray of the star of morning shone.  
 Like a bright jewel in the angels wing  
 Whose scarlet plumage rose aslant the dawn. (215)

The bright morning star, which Belmonte witnesses as he walks away from Quiros, reinforces the poem's ultimate message. In Revelations Jesus names himself 'the Bright and Morning Star' come to testify that the prophecy of the book is true and that the time of the apocalypse is at hand, saying: 'Surely I am coming quickly' (Revelations 22:20).

Throughout the 1960s McAuley continued to attack the intellectual left, as 'a priesthood of dissent', rooted in a secular ideology which led inexorably to Communism; because their ideology was the Devil's temptation:

The fundamental word is the serpent's ideology: 'you shall be as gods'. Man shall decide, shall rule, shall reveal, can determine the categories of good and evil ... within the secularist cosmos an enlightened elite will form the vanguard of progress perfecting man and society ... man's end lies within this world not in eternity. ('On Being an Intellectual' 51)

Intellectuals who subscribed to this 'secular gnosis' were really dancing to the ideological piper of Communism. It was as if they were 'under a spell, discon-

nected from reality and swayed by certain psychological mechanisms along certain preordained paths' ('On Being an Intellectual' 148). Of course they were under the spell of Communists, (the Devil's agents) adroit at manipulating the intellectual predisposition to guilt and self doubt. During the Vietnam War he focused his apocalyptic anxiety increasingly on the domestic protest movement. The derivativeness of the student movement, with its jaunty irresponsibility and faddishness, did not deter him. In the 'mania for dressing up in costume, for play-acting and the fantastic self-importance' he detected the mark of 'psychically flawed, unstable persons, many apparently driven by inferiority, resentment and other spirits whose name is Legion' ('Admirable Jeunesse?' 47). In McAuley's hands this characterisation was no simple turn of phrase. Legion was the name given by the man possessed by demons in Gardarene.

Even after the Vietnam War was over, his view that the counter-culture was an enemy of preternatural dimensions continued to feed his political anxiety. His last public appearance, in April 1976, was to sound a warning yet again about the counter-culture. It was to be his final duty to warn of the dangers of 'the manipulators and organisers' who would exploit the 'naive and careless' youth. With the stubborn single-mindedness of a dying man he persisted in projecting a sinister force, bent on the destruction of Australian society, directing its 'hard-minded apparachiks' purposefully into conservatism, feminism, progressive education, the campaign for Aboriginal rights, and all those other manifestations of a changing world that he couldn't abide ('Culture and Counter-Culture' 20).

When he was finally told that the cancer had spread to his liver and he had only months to live he wrote his poem 'Explicit'. For many who knew him well the second stanza of this poem provided his most fitting epitaph:

No worse age has ever been –  
Murderous, lying, and obscene;  
Devils worked while gods connived:  
Somehow the human has survived. (*Collected Poems* 332)

I hope I have given you a taste for the depth and intensity of McAuley's concern with the Devil's project, in his own life and in a world teetering on the brink of the apocalypse.

It is significant, I think, that three decades of McAuley criticism has pointedly ignored or downplayed the apocalyptic and demonic preoccupations in his poetry. There is an unwillingness among literary critics to read the Apocalypse of St John literally as the prognosis for the future, as McAuley did. So his repeated use of the imagery of the Book of Revelations is not considered anything more than a source of sometimes bizarre symbolism. As for Marie Thérèse Noblet, she never rates any consideration at all, even though his second book of poetry, *A Vision of Ceremony*, is dedicated to her and she is the central concern of one of his most quoted essays, 'My New Guinea'. She is overlooked, I would guess, because most critics would consider a little-known French missionary of no interest, or, as McAuley

observed, find her story of diabolical torture, stigmata and rapture, 'not in conformity with sober Anglo-Saxon good taste'. Yet to sidestep the aspects of McAuley which transgress social normity is to sell him short, indeed to miss his very essence. As he said himself, his fierce and openly expressed belief that individual lives are subject to preternatural intervention and that he was living through the last age of the world may seem like 'foolishness and superstition' to an intellectual environment dominated by rational scepticism and materialism. It is what he believed nevertheless. On the other hand, taking him at his own word, as I am trying to do, and respecting his claims to intellectual understanding beyond my ken, how do I render his beliefs explicit without, at the same time, making him appear quite loopy?

Despite my initial resistance and incredulity, I have come to accept McAuley's insistence in letters, poems and essays that the mystical experience of Noblet was central to his self definition and that through her he broke free of the Devil's clutches and it was her intercession that brought him into God's grace. My problem is with what de Certeau has coined 'the corporeal vocabulary' of Noblet: 'the body engraved, wounded, written on by the other' (de Certeau 15). I do not know how to read this except as pathology. Equally, a study of McAuley's complete work makes it indelibly clear that, at least for the decade after his dramatic conversion, his primary intellectual text was the Apocalypse of St John the Divine. Yet when I read it I am astounded by the hallucinogenic excess; by its sheer lunatic energy. There is a paradox for me that in seeking to understand McAuley's ideology I fail to comprehend the basis of his understanding: what he describes as 'the wisdom whose origins lie outside and above the accepted universe of discourse' ('True and False Unity' 108).

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1. This account of Marie Thérèse Noblet is drawn from the following sources: *Marie Thérèse Noblet* by Andre Duperay, 1938; *Child of Calvary* by Edmund Elliott, Carmelite Fathers, Melbourne, 1961, which largely draws on a biography in French by her chaplain at Kabuna, Fr Pineau; and translations of letters and diaries from of Archbishop de BoisMENU in the personal possession of the New Guinea historian James Griffin. These sources and others were known to James McAuley who was fluent in French.