

**Images of Salvation:
A Study in Theology, Poetry and Rhetoric**

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Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

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Abstract

Humankind yearns for reconciliation, fulfilment and salvation, and the human heart has always sought deliverance from negative forces. In particular, this yearning for salvation is most apparent when poets envisage such yearning in living situations and in recognisable life circumstances. Reading them shows how the quest for salvation is being achieved in daily steps that incarnate movements of hope and a contesting of despair.

This dissertation captures some significant images of salvation expressed in selected Australian poetry. It argues that what is classically called final salvation is imaged in the trope of transcendence in poetry. Because the concept of salvation both indicates the right path and promises a way of liberation and fulfilment, gaining salvation is not an escape from the world, but rather an engagement with it, through just and humane actions. The study's poetic selections image salvation as redressing wrongs, regenerating the land, seeking new life, and envisaging better states of affairs.

This dissertation functions at the interface of theology and poetry. It shows how a reader in the Christian community may identify some key images in public poetry as foreshadowing religious salvation. This is possible because, like the poet engaging in an aesthetic experience, the believer brings a remarkable openness to reality in the exercise of the religious imagination. This analogical imagination identifies images in poetry that do touch the human spirit in deeply spiritual ways.

The study employs the competence of methodical hermeneutic interpretation. It proceeds as an aesthetic-theological reading employing critical-analytical scholarship. Rather than attempt a formal explication of authorial intent, the hermeneutic reads in a careful excavation of the poems for those significant "scraps of experience" that coax the imagination towards hope in the mystery of salvation. The dissertation approaches the poetic texts using "Christian literary theory" as its hermeneutical framework.

The dissertation presents readings of selected poetry and prose of three celebrated Australian voices, Judith Wright, Les A. Murray and David Malouf. The study's primary data are their poetic images recognising and affirming the dream of transcendence embodied in human happiness, moments of rescue and relief, events of forgiveness and transformation, and insights for a better life for humans and the planet. The study shows how poetical insights image partial fulfilments in transcendent perceptions, transformed personal destinies and envisaged social reforms.

This exercise in contextual theology searches for depth and perennial resonances that sustain Australians in their culture. The discussion is especially concerned with the poetic use of the trope of hope and its effects, and especially with the power of metaphor for accessing the sublime. The study distils ten virtues for salvation from the readings of the selected poems as pathways for implementing salvation in the world. The study presents poetic images of promise, rescue and transformation that refresh discourses regarding salvation.