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Hugh MacColl after One Hundred Years

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Stein Haugom Olsen

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Outside the intellectual mainstream ?

The successes and failures of Hugh MacColl

Stein Haugom Olsen

Østfold University College, Norway

Résumé : En plus de son œuvre logique, MacColl a aussi écrit et publié des travaux que l'on qualifierait aujourd'hui de *cultural criticism*. Ces écrits concernaient deux des thèmes centraux de la période victorienne : l'avancement et l'influence grandissante de la science, et le déclin de la religion. À l'image de son œuvre logique ignorée, jusqu'à très récemment, aucune attention n'a été accordée à ses œuvres littéraires ou celles relevant du *cultural criticism*. Cet article examine les travaux de MacColl qui ne relèvent pas du domaine de la logique et discute la façon dont MacColl a approché et traité les deux thèmes de la science et de la religion. Il fournit ensuite une explication du peu d'attention accordée à ces œuvres malgré les talents intellectuels évidents de leur auteur. Cette explication impute l'oubli de l'œuvre de MacColl aussi bien à la façon dont il traite ces thèmes qu'à sa position d'outsider. En effet, MacColl vivait expatrié dans une ville provinciale française sans lien avec l'environnement culturel et littéraire de Londres. Par ailleurs, il était au sens véritable du terme, un auteur dont les sensibilités correspondent au milieu de la période victorienne, mais dont les œuvres paraissent tardivement à la fin de cette période et au cours de la période edwardienne, alors que les termes du débat sur la science et la religion avaient déjà changé.

Abstract: In addition to his work in logic, MacColl also wrote and published a short story, a poem, and several novels as well as works that one today would refer to as 'cultural criticism'. All of these works were concerned with two of the most central themes of the Victorian period, the growth and increasing influence of science and the decline of religion. Just as his work in logic has been ignored, until very recently, so no attention has been paid either to his literary works nor to his works of 'cultural criticism'. This paper discusses why so little attention has been given to these works in spite of MacColl's obvious intellectual talents. An explanation for this neglect can be found both in the way in which MacColl handles these themes and in his outsider position. MacColl was not only an expatriate living in a French provincial town without any contact with the metropolitan literary and cultural environment of London. He was also in a very real sense a mid-Victorian who produced

his works in the late Victorian and Edwardian period when the focus of the debate about science and religion had changed.

Introduction

In 1924 Virginia Woolf gave a lecture in Cambridge entitled ‘Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown’ in which she made her famous statement that ‘[I]n or about December 1910 human character changed’:

I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910. [Woolf 1966, 320]

Virginia Woolf’s choice of date was not completely arbitrary. There were a number of developments in the years just before 1910 that indicated a change in the nineteenth century conception of ‘human character’. Chekhov’s short stories appeared in English in 1909. Dostoyevsky’s novels did not begin to appear in Constance Garnett’s influential translations until 1912, but there had been earlier English versions, and he was also known through French renderings. In Vienna, Freud had already laid the foundations of psychoanalysis and though he was not yet been published in England, he and Jung had lectured, in 1909, in the United States. And in December 1910 the first London exhibition of Post-Impressionist painting, ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists’ took place. The exhibition focused on the work of Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin, but also attempted to illustrate the development from Manet down to the most recent ‘post-impressionists’, Matisse and Picasso, who were both represented in the exhibition. The exhibition, by rejecting impressionism as old-fashioned, baffled even sympathetic observers. For most English people interested in art the exhibition was their first glimpse of the works of Cézanne, Van Gogh, Picasso, and Matisse who rejected ‘the abominable error of naturalism’ which they saw the impressionists as perpetrating. All these developments had this in common that they emphasized the individual human being, the individual sensibility, the individual reaction. The attention of artists, authors, and psychologists moved away from the outside world of facts and nature to the inner world of the human mind. So a change was taking place.

The change in ‘human character’ that Virginia Woolf identifies led to a shift in ‘all human relations’:

[T]hose between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature. [Woolf 1966, 321]

As a striking illustration of the change that has taken place Virginia Woolf ask the reader to:

[C]onsider the married life of the Carlyles and bewail the waste, the futility, for him and for her, of the horrible domestic tradition which made it seemly for a woman of genius to spend her time chasing beetles, scouring sauce-pans, instead of writing books. [Woolf 1966, 320–321]

And she obviously assumes that her readers will agree with her in ‘bemoaning’ this situation.

Virginia Woolf sees the first signs of this change in Samuel Butler’s *The Way of all Flesh* and in the plays of George Bernard Shaw. Though *The Way of All Flesh* was not published until 1903, it was begun thirty years before in 1873, when Butler was 37, and he finally put it aside in 1884, having revised only the first part [Butler 1966, 7–8]. So if *The Way of All Flesh* did indeed signal a change in the conception of human character and in ‘all human relations’, then it seems that this change was already well under way towards the end of the 1870s.

Indeed, it is arguable that the changes in human relations that Virginia Woolf lists started much earlier than that. The change in the relations between master and man was diagnosed by Thomas Carlyle in *Chartism* where he recalls a feudal period in which:

[T]he old Aristocracy were the governors of the Lower Classes, the guides of the Lower Classes; and even, at bottom, that they existed as an Aristocracy because they were found adequate for that. Not by Charity-Balls and Soup-Kitchens; not so; far otherwise! But it was their happiness that, in struggling for their own objects, they *had* to govern the Lower Classes, even in this sense of governing. For, in one word, *Cash Payment* had not then grown to be the universal sole nexus of man to man; it was something other than money that the high then expected from the low, and could not live without getting from the low. Not as buyer and seller alone, of land or what else it might be, but in many senses still as soldier and captain, as clansman and head, as loyal subject and guiding king, was the low related to the high. With the supreme triumph of Cash, a changed time has entered; there must a changed Aristocracy enter. We invite the British reader to meditate earnestly on these things. [Carlyle 1840, 58]

The industrialisation of Britain changed the relationship between master and man from a relationship which involved mutual, if unequal, rights and duties to a relationship where the soldier, clansman, loyal subject, tenant, or servant was replaced by the ‘operative’ or the ‘hand’, both metaphors that make the man less than human and where the only relationship between master and man is cash in hand for work done. This dehumanisation of what had been human relations was one of the major targets of criticism for those who became the cultural critics of the period.

Also the other changes in human relations mentioned by Virginia Woolf did not develop overnight and autonomously but had their background in the industrial revolution and the development of a complex and bureaucratized industrial society that opened up a host of new opportunities for women, including middle class women, to work, and that changed the very ideals of this society from an ideal of leisure to an ideal of work. The changes in 'religion, conduct, politics, and literature' did not really follow upon the change in human relations but were contemporaneous with them and took place over the whole of the Victorian Period. Indeed, these changes in British society and the British polity during the reign of Queen Victoria were of such a character that it makes little sense to speak of a 'period'. 'Had the great Victorians lived under three or four sovereigns', said Hugh Kingsmill in 1932,

[T]hey would be judged on their own merits instead of being regarded as embodiments of an epoch which owes the illusion of its spiritual unity to the longevity of a single person. [Kingsmill 1932, 684]

The outsider

Hugh MacColl was born in the year that Queen Victoria succeeded to the throne and lived through the whole of her long reign, dying in 1909. In that sense, he was a Victorian. However, it is arguable that MacColl, though he lived *in* the Victorian Period was not *of* it. Indeed, he had impeccable credentials as an outsider. He was born in January 1837 in Strontian, a village in Argyllshire (abolished as an administrative region in 1975 with other Scottish counties) in the very west of the Scottish Highlands [Astroh, Grattan-Guinness, & Read 2001, 81–98]. Even today it is remote and isolated, described on the webpage *Undiscovered Scotland* as 'a white-painted oasis on an inlet in the sea-loch, Loch Sunart'.¹ When his father died in 1840, his mother moved back to Letterfearn where she came from and then to Ballachulish, where the children started to learn English. MacColl was supported at school by his older brother, Malcolm, who had to cease this support in 1857 when he was dismissed from his post in the Scottish Episcopalian Church because of a disagreement with his bishop over the proper interpretation of the Eucharist. Malcolm, however, did manage to recommend himself to William Gladstone and became in time a political ally of Gladstone's. He also persuaded Gladstone to support Hugh at Oxford, but Gladstone set the condition that Hugh would take orders in the Anglican Church. This Hugh refused to do and consequently remained without a university education. This clearly prevented MacColl from taking the conventional path to financial security and entry into English intellectual life. Up to the reform of the ancient universities that resulted from the reports

1. See: www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/strontian/strontian/index.html, accessed 30 May 2010.

of the two Royal Commissions² ‘The standard career pattern for Oxbridge dons led from undergraduate to fellow to orders to a parish living or the bar, and resignation of the fellowship. [...] [F]ellowships were regarded as steps in a career structure leading out of the university’ [Heyck 1982, 163]. From the mid-1850s another career path was added for those who were academically able: the ancient universities opened up college fellowships to merit, to be determined by competitive examinations. Both these paths would have been open to MacColl had he entered Oxford as his brother intended.

However, it is doubtful if MacColl’s interest in logic would have developed in quite the same way, had he been sent to Oxford. Though logic was a required subject for anyone reading for Greats, it was a minor part of the curriculum in *Literae Humaniores*. Indeed, under the regulations of 1853 the *Lit. Hum.* school ‘was still very much a classical school, even though Aristotle was by then studied in a more philosophical manner and Plato was beginning to be taken seriously’ [Walsh 2000, 313]. In the early 1860s, says Walsh in *The History of the University of Oxford*,

Oxford philosophy generally remained largely parochial, above all in Logic, of which subject neither then nor later was there any clear definition. To find out what ‘Logic’ comprised you had to look at past papers, a procedure that was in any case strongly commended by some tutors. [Walsh 2000, 317]

William Spooner, Warden of New College from 1903 to 1925 and famous for producing ‘spoonerisms’, took Greats in 1866 and had this to say about logic as it was then taught:

Our Logic we worked at principally in Mill, which many of us knew with great thoroughness, supplementing it on the critical side by reading his work on Hamilton, Mansel’s *Prolegomena Logica* and his appendix on Aldrich’s *Logic*, and Ferrier’s *Institutes of Metaphysic*. [Hayter 1977, 42–43]

It is of course possible that MacColl should have entered the school of *Disciplinae Mathematicae et Physicae* but even in the early 1860s this road to an honours degree did not have quite the prestige of the *Lit. Hum.* school.

Though MacColl’s social background and the fact that he did not enter Oxford no doubt contributed to making his position that of a social and intellectual outsider, it did not really confirm him in this role. There were a number of examples of educationally deprived Scotsmen that had come to London and made good and even become famous. Thomas Carlyle came from Ecclefechan in Dumfriesshire, and though he received four years of formal education at the University of Edinburgh, he took no degree and the Scottish universities being much more democratic and open institutions than the ancient universities of England did not offer the same kind of entrance ticket to a rewarding

2. The Royal Commission on Oxford reported in 1852 and the Commission on Cambridge in 1852–1853.

career and intellectual respectability. Yet Carlyle became the ‘Sage of Chelsea’ producing a range of works of what we today would call ‘cultural criticism’.

Closer to home, there was, of course, Hugh’s elder brother, Malcolm MacColl:

Malcolm did so well at school that a wealthy lady paid for him to attend a seminary in Dalkeith near Edinburgh where schoolteachers were trained. He taught at Callander, Stonehaven and Perth. In 1854, at the age of 23, Malcolm was admitted to the relatively newly opened Theological College at Glenalmond near Perth. In 1856 he was ordained Deacon of the new Mission of the Episcopal Church at Castle Douglas in Kirkcudbrightshire. He was ordained priest in St Mary’s, Glasgow by the Bishop of Glasgow in August 1857. [Astroh, Grattan-Guinness, & Read 2001, 84]

But Malcolm did not stop there. The entry in the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that he earned, termed him a ‘publicist’ and ‘a political and ecclesiastical controversialist’. He came into confrontation with his bishop over his stand on the ‘real essence’ of the Eucharist, and was dismissed from his post at Castle Douglas. Persisting in writing letters to Gladstone about the threat to high church clergy in Scotland, he finally attracted Gladstone’s notice and started on a career as a pamphleteer for Gladstone who secured his introduction into and modest preferment in the Church of England. The church living that Gladstone gave him, says the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,

[W]as practically a sinecure, and he devoted himself to political pamphleteering and newspaper correspondence, the result of extensive European travel, a wide acquaintance with the leading personages of the day, strong views on ecclesiastical subjects from a high-church standpoint, and particularly on the politics of the Eastern Question and Mahommedanism. He took a leading part in ventilating the Bulgarian and Armenian ‘atrocities’, and his combative personality was constantly to the fore in support of the campaigns of Gladstonian Liberalism. [Anonymous 1911]

What finally determined Hugh’s outsider position was his choice to live and work in France. In their presentation of ‘MacColl’s Boulogne’, Astroh, Grattan-Guinness, and Read emphasize the British influence in Boulogne, its close economic and cultural links with Britain, its cosmopolitan flavour as ‘one of the most elegant seaside resorts and spas of the *Belle Époque*, much frequented by the elites of both nations’ [Astroh, Grattan-Guinness, & Read 2001, 85]. However, though London was only five and a half hours away and Paris only three, Boulogne was a provincial town. The developments in art, in literature, in attitudes, mores, sensibilities, and beliefs that took place in Paris and in London in the last quarter of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th did bypass the British community at Boulogne, or, at least, they bypassed Hugh MacColl. The changes ‘in human character’ that Virginia Woolf

mentions as culminating in 1910 are not in any significant way reflected in MacColl's literary and philosophical production. There is some evidence that MacColl himself felt how this move had marginalized him in relation to British intellectual life and prevented him from participating fully in the ongoing discussions in that world. 'If I were a professor of logic', he writes in 1904 in a letter to F. H. Bradley, then:

I would certainly get your books and study them; but as I am only an amateur, driven by I know not what mental perversity towards abstract studies from which I can never hope to reap any material gain or benefit, I am afraid I must content myself with the few books on logic that I already posses. Though I have contributed articles on logic both to *Mind* and to the *Athenaeum*, I do not see these publications regularly. Living as I do, and as I have done since 1865, in a foreign country, my opportunities of reading English magazines or standard works on Science, Logic, or Literature are very few; and I cannot afford the luxury of a large library. [Keene 1999, 308]

The logician

There is hardly any point in branding a man 'an outsider' unless there is a circle of people or a community into which he for some reason fails to enter though he desires to do so. Hugh MacColl became a school teacher like Thomas Carlyle and his brother Malcolm, but unlike them Hugh remained a school teacher all his life. Carlyle and Malcolm MacColl found other roles in which to exercise their abilities and in the process of doing so they became well known public figures. Hugh, too, was looking to fill other roles, but failed to do so. 'Hugh hoped,' say Astroh, Grattan-Guinness, and Read,

to return to his cultural mainland, and to receive some kind of public recognition for his pioneering contributions to logic. Even as late as 1901, MacColl when 64 years old recommended himself to Bertrand Russell as a lecturer in logic (MacColl 1901a). Due to a University of London Parliamentary Act of 1898 some changes to the university's teaching arrangements were made. Apparently, MacColl got to know about these changes. [Astroh, Grattan-Guinness, & Read 2001, 86]

And in MacColl's letter to F. H. Bradley quoted at the end of the last section there is a tone of bitterness and frustration at his failure to become an academically accredited, professional logician.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the way in which knowledge was authorized and underwritten in Britain changed. Up to the reform of the ancient universities from the 1860s onwards and the foundation of new institutions, the development of new knowledge and intellectual work generally was a matter for the individual and the authority of an individual in

any one field of knowledge depended upon the recognition someone got for his work from his peers or, in some fields, from the general, and generally informed, public. However, as a part of the reform of the universities a career structure was introduced within the universities based on certification of merit. This development paralleled the development of what Harold Perkin has called the rise of professional society [Perkin 2002], a development which was driven by the need for certified professionals and specialists to solve increasingly complicated technical, social, and administrative problems. Indeed, the universities became the main providers and certifiers of the most sophisticated specialists and professionals. Intellectual authority in fields of knowledge was consequently institutionalized. 'By the last two decades of the nineteenth century', says Ian Small,

[T]o give authority to a particular practice or body of knowledge required the professional status which only the university, or some similar institution, could bestow. Thus there were two ways in which the process of professionalization in the nineteenth century affected the universities: first, there was the attempt to accommodate the needs of the newly emerging professions by establishing new subjects within the universities; and second, there was the attempt to reorganize the practices of the universities themselves along more professional lines, a process which can be seen both in general university reforms, and in particular reforms in different disciplines. [Small 1991, 22]³

A logician, then, in the last quarter of the 19th century was not merely someone doing logic, but also someone who was part of a community of certified professionals, deriving his authority in his field from belonging to this community. It is in this context that MacColl's failure to take up a place at Oxford becomes significant. Had he entered Oxford and pursued his studies and his work as part of an academic career he would have become part of the new professional class whose authority was founded in their professional roles. He could then in Stefan Collini's words have laid a claim to 'a title to be heard' [Collini 1991, chap. 6]. If one feels that the neglect of MacColl's logical work needs an explanation, it may perhaps be found here.

Perhaps. The description of the development the professional academic given in the above paragraph is based on the general outline presented by Heyck in *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*. However, in some subjects, in particular in literary studies ('English literature') and philosophy, the borderline between the knowledgeable and interested amateur and the professional was fuzzy well into the twentieth century. University teachers in these subjects did not necessarily have any formal qualifications for the subjects they were teaching, and the interested and

3. For a general account see [Heyck 1982], especially chapter 6: 'The Reform of the University System'. For the development of the discipline of history and the professionalization of this subject, see [Levine 1986]; and for the discipline and professionalization of literary criticism, see [Atherton 2006].

knowledgeable amateur was listened to with as much respect as the university don.⁴ The Rev. Thomas Dale, the first professor of English in England, appointed in 1828 to the Chair of English Literature and Language at the recently founded University College, London, and then, in 1835, to the chair of English Literature and History at the even more recently founded King's College, was an evangelical clergyman. Indeed, most of the early professors of English literature came 'from the Low Church or Dissenting Ministry, then from journalism, and later from the Oxford "Greats" School, particularly from Balliol' [Palmer 1965, vii]. Even in the first decades of the twentieth century the appointment of teachers of English literature at the two ancient universities was a haphazard affair. In 1911 the King Edward Chair of English Literature was founded at Cambridge with money from Harold Harmsworth (the founder with this brother, Alfred, of the *Daily Mail*). When, after only a year the first holder of the chair, A. W. Verrall died, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch was appointed to succeed him:

[T]here was much surprise when the Crown appointed so un-academic a person as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch to succeed him. Ridgeway told me his story of the appointment, and I give it though I have never heard it confirmed or denied. When the vacancy occurred, Grierson had just finished his great edition of Donne and had emerged as one of the chief scholar-critics in the country. Asquith, then Prime Minister, had decided that he was the man for the chair. The matter was as good as settled, when Lloyd George got busy and said they ought to make a party appointment. Quiller-Couch had been keeping Liberalism going in Cornwall for many years, and Lloyd George knew *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. Asquith yielded to Lloyd George's pressure, and Quiller-Couch was offered the chair. [Tillyard, 1958, 39]⁵

And when Tillyard himself, a classical scholar specializing in Greek vases, was recruited to teach English literature at Cambridge immediately after the First World War, it was even more of a haphazard affair and came about as a result of what he calls three accidents. The story is too long to be told in all its details, but an extract from Tillyard's account of the last of the three accidents, which include reference to the two others, will give the general idea of the process:

In the summer of 1917 I was back on leave from the Salonica front. Having my home in Cambridge, I spent most of it there. All my contemporaries were away except Forbes, whose short sight emptied him from service; and we met repeatedly. The regulations

4. Carol Atherton chronicles the resistance among literary critics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century both within and outside the academies to accepting that there was a professional role of academic critic which was different from that of the knowledgeable and interested amateur [Atherton 2006].

5. The story is given in some more detail in [Atherton 2006].

for the English Tripos had recently been passed, and Forbes held forth on the virtues and the freedom of the new examination. He had already agreed to Chadwick's demand that he should leave history and lecture for it. I was interested, but from a distance only; the pressure of the war and the prospect of a return to the front prevented any enthusiasm. However, my interest must have been sufficient for Forbes ultimately to come out with the proposal that I should lecture for the paper on literary criticism which was part of the new Tripos.

[...]

So it was arranged that I should see Chadwick next evening. It was the first time I had met this extraordinary man, who combined extreme shyness with an uncanny power of getting his own way. After the first agonising moments when his apparent terror froze any conversation I might have been good for, I quickly found myself discussing a topic very near to my heart at the moment, namely Balkan politics, and with a man who, without having travelled, knew all about them. It was a splendid talk; and it obliterated all thought of the errand I had come on. As I rose to go, Chadwick suddenly asked if I would lecture for the criticism paper of the English Tripos when the war was over; and I, hypnotised by Chadwick's quiet but compelling importunity, replied as suddenly that I should be delighted. [Tillyard, 1958, 16–18]

And in philosophy the story was apparently not very different even as late as the nineteen fifties:

In 1945, Herbert Hart was a 38-year-old London barrister who had spent the previous six years largely working in military intelligence. What could be more obvious, then, than that he should be thought the perfect candidate for a full-time teaching position at Oxford in philosophy, a subject with which he had had no sustained connection since it formed part (though only part) of his undergraduate degree sixteen years earlier? Similarly, in 1952 Hart was a 45-year-old philosophy tutor who had by that point published only three essays and two book reviews. Self-evidently, he was the ideal man to elect to Oxford's Professorship of Jurisprudence.

By the standards prevailing at the beginning of the twenty-first century, these two appointments are bound to seem scandalous, perhaps even barely intelligible. [Collini 2008, 286]

Hart, of course, proved to be perhaps the most important legal philosopher of the 20th century just as Tillyard became one of its most important academic literary critics.

What these anecdotes illustrate is not merely that the borderline between the amateur and the professional was, and indeed for a long time remained,

fuzzy in such areas of intellectual activity as literary criticism and philosophy. It also highlights another absence in the Hugh MacColl story that contributed to making him an outsider. Quiller-Couch, Tillyard, and Hart were all ‘well connected’ though their networks of connections were of different kinds. In Quiller-Couch’s case it was political while in the case of Tillyard it was partly academic, partly social. Tillyard’s account of the three accidents that brought him into English studies are essentially an account of how he established various forms of friendships in academia at various points in time and how these friendships opened up opportunities that would not otherwise have presented themselves. And it is not irrelevant to the story that he was a Cambridge man in a double sense. Not only was he a graduate of the university, but he also had his home there. In Hart’s case the network developed as a result of his employment in military intelligence during the war, though his post there was in its turn conditioned by his social standing and background (he was, of course, an Oxford graduate). Stefan Collini points out what he calls a ‘tantalizing detail noted in [Nicola Lacey’s] biography’:

[W]hen Hart was involved in delicate negotiations on behalf of MI5 during the Second World War to enable that agency and MI6 to share secret information, three of the officials in MI6 with whom he had closest dealings were Hugh Trevor-Roper, Gilbert Ryle, and Stuart Hampshire. [Collini 2008, 286]

Collini points out that in the case of individuals belonging to literary and intellectual elites there is a particular problem reconciling the account of the achievements of such figures as these achievements appear ‘tangibly individual, the expression of apparently autonomous creative energies’ with an account of ‘the enabling effect of belonging to certain advantaged groups’ because in these cases the enabling effect ‘is usually more implicit or resistant to demonstration than in the case of conventional social and economic elites whose power and influence are so highly visible’ [Collini 2008, 285]. The fuzzy borderline between the amateur and the academic professional in such a discipline as philosophy did not make it any easier for just anyone to gain a hearing and recognition. MacColl’s case certainly strengthens the point that the presence of the enabling effect of belonging to an elite is necessary to gain such recognition. For, in Hugh MacColl’s case not only did his failure to get into Oxford prevent him from entering the new class of professional academics, but there was also an absence of any enabling effect of belonging to any form of elite.

The novelist

In a letter to Bertrand Russell from 1905 MacColl says that ‘[F]or . . . twelve or thirteen years, I devoted my leisure hours to general literature’. In this period (from 1884 to 1896) he published a poem [MacColl 1884], two novels [MacColl 1889, 1891a], and one short story [MacColl 1891b]. He apparently also wrote three more novels but these were not accepted for publica-

tion.⁶ It does appear then, that MacColl had the ambition to gain recognition as a novelist.

Both MacColl's published novels deal with current topics that attracted serious interest from many quarters, among them authors of fiction. *Mr. Stranger's Sealed Packet* is the third novel in English to be published about Mars and one of fourteen novels about Mars published in the last two decades of the 19th century.⁷ It also focuses and gives extended treatment to the topic of science and technology and the possibilities for new discoveries that the combination of these opens up. And MacColl handles the topic of science and its technological application ably. In a longish review of *Mr. Stranger's Sealed Packet* in the book reviews section of *Nature*, he is given high praise for 'his acquaintance with the Cosmos':

A work of fiction, founded upon scientific facts, is interesting to us, inasmuch as it may extend, to no inconsiderable degree, the scientific knowledge of its readers. Such attempts, however, to assimilate science with fiction may have an injurious effect, unless treated by one having an intimate knowledge of the phenomena which he describes, and we have to congratulate the author of this work upon his acquaintance with the Cosmos, exhibited in this account of an imaginary journey through interplanetary space. [Gregory 1889, 291]

The review spelt out in some detail MacColl's scientific ideas and it concludes:

We might quote many other descriptions of phenomena all agreeing with acknowledged facts and rigid scientific principles. We refer to observations of the extreme blackness of the shadows cast by the rocks of the Martian satellite which was supposed to have been visited, the noiseless explosions of the meteor above described, the apparent motionlessness in space of the flying machine, in spite of its enormous velocity, the inferior attraction of Mars and its satellites, and the explanation of how men got transferred from the earth to Mars. Indeed, the work is as interesting to us as

6. According to *Chatto & Windus Manuscript Entry Books*, MacColl submitted manuscripts in 1891 (*Was She his Wife?*), in 1893 (*Sister Joan*), and in 1896 (*The Search for Meerin*). See the *Extracts from Chatto & Windus Manuscripts Entry Books* (Reading: The University of Reading, The Library, Archives & Manuscripts; Chatto & Windus, Early Contracts File, 1896).

7. The frequency and number of novels about Mars increases further in the first decades of the 20th century. A bibliography of novels about Mars is to be found on the BookBrowser site on the Internet at <http://www.bookbrowser.com/TitleTopic/mars.html>. This bibliography lists novels about Mars chronologically as well as by author. An even fuller bibliography comprising all fictional stories about Mars has been compiled by Gene Alloway, Senior Associate Librarian, University of Michigan (NSF/NASA/ARPA Digital Library Project), available on the Internet (<http://www-personal.engin.umich.edu/cerebus/mars/index.html#bibs>).

to the general reader, and as a means of disseminating scientific knowledge may be eminently useful. [Gregory 1889, 292]

Ednor Whitlock deals with an equally current and also controversial theme. It is a novel of faith and doubt and as such joins a genre that includes novels like Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* (written 1873-1884; published 1903); William Hale White's *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881), Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1888); as well as Edmund Gosse's autobiographical *Father and Son* (1907). And like *Mr. Stranger's Sealed Packet* it presents and endorses values entrenched among the majority of the reading public of the time. MacColl's views of women, of religion, of education, of colonisation, and his general moral views are conservative, 'establishment' views that at the time would have appealed to a broad readership and offended very few.⁸

Nevertheless, MacColl failed to gain recognition by his contemporaries. The two novels that MacColl did publish received only few and short notices in the periodical press, and these notices were either condescending in their faint praise or dismissive in their comments. *Mr. Stranger's Sealed Packet* did receive some praise also in other periodicals for its handling of scientific ideas, but there was only condescending and faint praise for the plot and characters:

Mr. Stranger's Sealed Packet belongs to the class of 'Voyages Imaginaires,' the planet Mars being the goal of the journey, and the vehicle an electro-magnetic flying-machine. Most of the incidents have been used before by the various writers who have essayed this kind of composition—the flying chest, for instance, is in the story of Malek and Schirine in the *Persian Tales*. But there is no ground for supposing Mr. MacColl to have annexed them; rather they are such as would be apt to suggest themselves independently to persons exercising their invention in this direction. The scientific portions are very carefully and plausibly worked out, and the slight story is effective. [Anonymous 1889b]⁹

[T]he voyage to Mars, which is really the subject of Mr. MacColl's book, becomes a mere holiday excursion. Mr. Stranger's adventures are well conceived and varied, very entertaining and exciting. There is, of course, a love story, not without a touch of pathos. It is, perhaps, a little astonishing to find on a page near the end of the book a sudden and hasty exposition of the whole scheme of Christianity. On the whole, *Mr. Stranger's Sealed Packet* is a thoroughly readable book, and can be confidently recommended to any one who has a taste for romance of the kind. [Anonymous 1889a]

8. For a detailed discussion of MacColl's attitudes and beliefs as expressed in his two published novels, see [Olsen 1998].

9. The notice, like the other quoted in the following, occurs in a review of several novels altogether all dealt with in less than a page.

One notes the remarks about MacColl recycling standard ‘incidents’ and motifs, the ‘slight story’, and the ‘thoroughly readable book’ for ‘any one who has a taste for romance of the kind’.

Ednor Whitlock received harsher treatment:

Whitlock was a young lad of eighteen who was working for a Cambridge entrance scholarship with a view to taking Holy Orders. One afternoon, to avoid a shower, he entered the Free Library of the town of Wishport, and, with singular taste, endeavoured to while away the time with a copy of *The Westminster Review*. In that far from exhilarating periodical he was foolish enough to read an essay on ‘The Evidences of Christ’s Resurrection’, which converted him to Atheism on the spot. He went home and wept bitterly, and for the space of 350 pages he struggles more or less vainly with unbelief, flavoured with love. Or is it that love is flavoured with mathematics, and ethics, and metaphysics, and theology? It is hard to say, for there is such a confused blend that one is lost in wonder whether the book is meant to be a novel or a theological treatise. The sermons and the theological discussions are endless—and oh, so dull! It is reasonable to suppose that the book would never have been written but for ‘Robert Elsmere,’ and therefore Mrs. Ward must be held to some degree responsible. But it is on *The Westminster Review* that the most awful responsibility rests. Had it not been for that magazine Edwin Whitlock would never have wandered from the faith of his fathers, and therefore the story of his mental troubles and spiritual vagaries would never have been written. Our grievance against *The Westminster* is distinct. [Anonymous 1891a]

Other reviews are hardly less damning and it is the didactic tone and long excursion on theology, mathematics, and metaphysics that are singled out for condemnation:

The late Mortimer Collins was a mathematician as well as a versifier; but certainly nobody would have guessed it from his novels. That Hugh MacColl also enjoys the unusual distinction of combining abstruse mathematics with his imaginative gifts is only too evident from his novel *Ednor Whitlock*. (1 vol.: Chatto and Windus). The general drift and purpose of the work is to counteract the rationalistic influence of an article which appeared in the *Westminster Review* many years ago, and of which Mr. MacColl has forgotten the title. In the course of his comment, or refutation, he makes ingenious use of the doctrines of curves, making free use, he is careful to explain, in order to avoid suspicion of plagiarism, of an article of his own in another quarterly magazine. In short, *Ednor Whitlock* is about as stiff and solid reading as

can be desired by the least frivolous of readers—many a professed mathematical or theological treatise is twenty times as entertaining. Mr. MacColl is an admirable and suggestive controversialist, in the heavy ordnance division, in all essential and substantial matters; but he is no hand at a love story. He must needs be instructive in and out of season, and cannot even let French idioms alone. That *Ednor Whitlock* should achieve popularity cannot have been within its author's wildest dreams. [Anonymous 1891c]

Kindlier reviews tend to be condescending and overbearing:

Readers of Mr. MacColl's previous story, *Mr. Stranger's Sealed Packet*, will not need to be told that he is a writer possessing a distinct individuality of his own. Whatever merits or defects his stories may reveal, they are certainly original. In his new venture, Mr. MacColl shows us a youth of great promise who passes through the dark and gloomy throes of scepticism, to emerge finally into the clear atmosphere of faith beyond. Some of the discussions on evolution and theology may seem just a little tedious, but they are ably conducted. There is a thread of romance running through the narrative which invests it with sufficient interest for those persons who do not care for polemics. [Anonymous 1891b]

The fact that MacColl's novels did not receive recognition by his contemporaries cannot be ascribed to his position as an outsider. 'Novelist', though it may be a social role, is not a profession in the way that logician or philosopher became a profession with the development of the modern research university. The 'autonomous creative energy' to which Collini refers is consequently much more important in the making of a novelist and the enabling effect of belonging to an elite much less important than in the case where an intellectual creative activity has developed into a profession. MacColl, in other words, had the same chance of making it as a novelist as, say, Anthony Trollope who in spite of his socially disadvantaged origins, his lack of a university education, and his many years as a post office official in Ireland became one of the most celebrated and highest earning novelists of the 19th century.

The question of contemporary recognition is, of course, different from the question of artistic merit. Marie Corelli was outstandingly successful as a novelist and one of the great earners of the writing fraternity of the Victorian period, but her novels had no artistic merit. Grant Allen called her, in the pages of *The Spectator*: 'a woman of deplorable talent who imagined that she was a genius, and was accepted as a genius by a public to whose commonplace sentimentalities and prejudices she gave a glamorous setting', and James Agate represented her as combining 'the imagination of a Poe with the style

of an Ouida and the mentality of a nursemaid'.¹⁰ No one today beyond those who are interested in Victorian popular culture knows even her name. And similarly, a failure to achieve recognition as a novelist by one's contemporaries tells one nothing about the artistic merit of the novels in question. It is not unknown that novelists who received no recognition by their contemporaries and whose artistic merit was unappreciated in their own time are rediscovered by later ages. Indeed, the process of revaluation is a constant feature of literary practice. The question concerning MacColl's status as a novelist is consequently not settled by the failure of recognition in his own time. The question which one must ask is whether his novels have sufficient artistic merit to repay attention or whether they are simply bad novels that do not repay attention and therefore should remain forgotten and unread by those who look for literary merit.

Unfortunately, the answer to this question is that both *Mr. Stranger's Sealed Packet* and *Ednor Whitlock* fail artistically. They do not fail grandly trying to realise an ambitious artistic goal. They fail trivially in many respects. To detail such failures would be tiresome and would not offer the usual rewards of critical appreciation: an enhanced experience of the work under discussion. However, elsewhere I have traced the ways in which MacColl's novels fail in order to make the point that artistic failure is a central reason for leaving novels unread and forgotten.¹¹ The majority of forgotten and unread novels, MacColl's novels among them, are forgotten and unread for good, aesthetic reasons. There is, however, no reason to repeat this argument here.

A controversialist?

One predominant feature of MacColl's two published novels is their didactic intent: they are, as one of the reviewers has it, 'instructive in and out of season' [Anonymous 1891c]. The novels give a clear impression that MacColl had enthusiasms and concerns he wanted to share with a greater public and where necessary, he wanted to educate that public and persuade them to accept certain religious views and metaphysical doctrines that he felt were under attack. 'Mr. MacColl', says the same reviewer, 'is an admirable and suggestive controversialist, in the heavy ordnance division, in all essential and substantial matters; but he is no hand at a love story' [Anonymous 1891c]. In the last two years of his life he also published a number of shorter essays as well as a

10. These two judgements exactly in the form given here appear together almost every time there is a reference to Marie Correlli on the Internet. I have so far not identified the venues where they were published.

11. In [Olsen 2001], I attempt to show in some detail and through a comparison with other contemporary novels the ways in which MacColl's novels fail artistically. The article has been reprinted in [Peer 2008, 31–51], with the title "Why Hugh MacColl is not, and will never be, part of any literary canon".

philosophical treatise [MacColl 1906-1907, 1907-1908, 1908-1909, 1909, 1909-1910] dealing with the interrelated questions of the argument from design, the foundation of ethics, the survival of the soul, and the existence of a Christian God.¹² These themes all appear in MacColl's novels, but are taken up in more detail in his prose writings.

As the reviewer in *Nature* of *Mr. Stranger's Sealed Packet* observed, MacColl was intimately familiar with many aspects of modern science. And as the novel shows, he was also eager to share his knowledge and, indeed, his enthusiasm with his readers. At the same time, as is abundantly clear from *Ednor Whitlock*, MacColl was deeply committed to defending the Christian faith, in particular in its Anglican form. For MacColl Christian faith gives life its meaning and provides a foundation for morality. 'No stable system of ethics', says MacColl

can be constructed on mere human authority. The final authority *must* be superhuman, and this superhuman authority cannot be effectively appealed to till the educated and uneducated alike are firmly convinced that it really exists. [MacColl 1909, 129]

In order to secure this conviction and counter the corrosive influence of science on religious belief, MacColl attempts to formulate what one can call a post-Darwinian or post-evolutionary version of the argument from design and in this way provide a rational basis for Christian faith.

It is in his attempts to intervene in these religious and moral debates that MacColl's position as an outsider is revealed most clearly. First, it is remarkable that between the publication of his two novels in 1889-1890 and the publication of his articles in *The Hibbert Journal* seventeen years later, MacColl's views concerning the design argument and the foundation of morality seems to have changed hardly at all. There is no awareness in MacColl's writing of the change in human nature that Virginia Woolf focuses on, nor any development in MacColl's view of religion or morality. These appear to have passed MacColl by.

Secondly, even by the time MacColl published his two novels the views he expressed about the relationship between science and religion and about the foundation of morality were out of step with the views held by those making up the intellectual mainstream at that time. The argument from design was losing its relevance and its adherents already in the 1850s before the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and for good reason. In the third quarter of the century the realisation spread that the argument from design simply assumed what it aimed to prove. 'Design' is an intentional term and choosing to see something as designed is to choose a vocabulary and a perspective in which the designer is already built in. For someone who would dismiss the vocabulary of 'design' and instead adopt the evolutionist vocabulary provided by *The Origin of Species*, the argument had no force.

12. For a detailed discussion of MacColl's views on these questions see [Cuypers 1998].

But if the argument from design could not prove God's existence, neither could the negative version of it prove that there is no God. By the time Frederick Temple, as Bishop of Exeter, came to give his Bampton Lectures in 1884, he was stating the official view of the matter when he said that the argument from design

is not strong enough to compel assent from those who have no ears for the inward spiritual voice, but it is abundantly sufficient to answer those who argue that there cannot be a Creator because they cannot trace His action. [Temple 1984, 208]

In 1891, when *Ednor Whitlock* was published, the theological function of the argument from design had long since changed from a demonstrative to a non-demonstrative one. What was required for the truly Christian, was a leap of faith. Once that was taken, problems of doubt did not arise, only problems of interpretation of the word of God.

There is the same problem with MacColl's view of morality as needing a basis in "The belief that an invisible Being or Beings take note of all we do, and can even read our most secret thoughts [...]" [MacColl 1909, 149]. The view that morality ultimately needed a religious basis might still have been the view of the majority of believers in 1890, but the fear that 'Society must fall to pieces if Darwinism be true' was no longer widespread. Twenty years had then passed since the publication of *The Descent of Man* (1871) and more than thirty years since the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *Essays and Reviews* (1860), and, in spite of Darwin's theory of evolution gaining wide acceptance not only among the generally informed public, but also among the most influential minds within the Church of England, the much feared regression of man into a mere beast and the decline of society into moral chaos had not occurred. Moreover, it was becoming accepted among Victorian intellectuals that morality could be separated from its religious basis, and that the example of Christ had its force whether or not he was divine. In *Robert Elsmere* (1888) Mrs. Ward called the "dissociation of the moral judgment from a special series of religious formulæ [...]" the crucial, the epoch-making fact of our day" [Ward 1987, 534]. And, most important of all, towards the end of the century there was a decline in orthodoxy as radical evangelicalism slowly lost its grip on the religious consciousness and moral conscience. Generally, believers became more relaxed about the way they practiced their belief, and consequently also more relaxed about the way in which Christian morality was founded. This was at least partly a generational change. It was in its extreme the replacement of the Philip Gosse of the early and mid-Victorian world with the Edmund Gosse of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, or the Theobald Pontifexes of that world with the Ernest Pontifexes. Ernest makes his name with a book of essays apparently written in 1866 or 1867 where he has this to say about faith and the church:

The writer urged that we become persecutors as a matter of course as soon as we begin to feel very strongly upon any subject; we

ought not therefore to do this; we ought not to feel very strongly even upon that institution which was dearer to the writer than any other—the Church of England. We should be churchmen, but somewhat lukewarm churchmen, inasmuch as those who care very much about either religion or irreligion are seldom observed to be very well bred or agreeable people. The Church herself should approach as nearly to that of Laodicea as was compatible with her continuing to be a Church at all, and each individual member should only be hot in striving to be as lukewarm as possible. [Butler 1966, 415]

Though late Victorian attitudes to religion never became quite as lukewarm as Ernest recommends, the passage gives a description of an attitude that was developing at the time when Butler stopped his work on *The Way of All Flesh* in 1884.

The changes briefly mentioned above may not be, as Virginia Woolf would have it, changes in human nature but they were significant shifts in attitudes, shifts that are registered neither in MacColl's novels, nor in his essays, nor in his monograph. There was also another deep-seated change in the approach to human nature and human behaviour that made MacColl's moral views seem out of phase with the wider intellectual climate in Britain and Europe in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Temple in his 1884 Bampton lectures speaks of 'the inward spiritual voice' which is also the voice of conscience. This is where morality finds its basis. This attention to the inner nature of man becomes an important feature of developments in art, in literature, and in psychology in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. All the works and developments mentioned in the first section of this paper as an illustration that Virginia Woolf's contention that "in or about December 1910 human character changed" have this in common that they emphasize the inward nature of man, the individual human being, the individual sensibility, the individual reaction. And again, one can find this development both mentioned and illustrated in Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*. At the end of chapter 5, Butler has the narrator, Overton, reflect:

I fancy that there is some truth in the view which is being put forward nowadays, that it is our less conscious thoughts and our less conscious actions which mainly mould our lives and the lives of those who spring from us. [Butler 1966, 54]

MacColl is not in any way touched by this reorientation of attention to the inner life in religion, in art, in literature, and in psychology. Of course, this reorientation of attention does not invalidate MacColl's own metaphysical and ethical project, but the fact that at no point in his works is there any reference to such a development, does indicate that life in Boulogne did not pull MacColl into dialogue with the most recent intellectual developments.

Conclusion

As I previously remarked, there is hardly any point in branding a man ‘an outsider’ unless there is a circle of people or a community into which he for some reason fails to enter though he desires to do so. That MacColl sought recognition for his contributions to logic and to join the newly professionalized academia seems clear. It also seems true to say that he did seek recognition as a novelist. In both areas he failed to attain recognition in his own time. Present attempts to rediscover and draw attention to MacColl’s work in logic represents a belated recognition of the importance of his work in this field. I have argued here and elsewhere that his work in the field of ‘general literature’ does not deserve similar attention.

Hugh’s brother achieved fame as a controversialist and one might think that this would have provided a role model for Hugh and that he also aspired to recognition in this respect. There is, however, nothing in MacColl’s writings that indicates that he aspired to such a role. He had enthusiasms and concerns he wanted to share with a greater public and where necessary, he wanted to educate that public and persuade them to accept certain religious views and metaphysical doctrines that he felt were under attack. When he failed, as he did, to gain any wide hearing for his views, this was because the public debates which he wanted to join were no longer at the centre of public attention, the attitudes he represented were recognizably those of another period, and the arguments he presented were no longer current.

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