Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

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Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other Creative Writers Who Died between 1800 and 1899, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations

Russel Whitaker
Project Editor

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Russel Whitaker

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Preface

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NCLC is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors' works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, *NCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *NCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *NCLC* is devoted to literary topics that cannot be covered under the author approach used in the rest of the series. Such topics include literary movements, prominent themes in nineteenth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (*CLC*) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (*TCLC*).

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An *NCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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Hugh Miller
1802-1856

Scottish nonfiction writer, essayist, journalist, folklorist, autobiographer, and editor.

INTRODUCTION

Miller is best known for nonfiction works that critics describe as "literary natural history." Such books as *The Old Red Sandstone; or, New Walks in an Old Field* (1841) and *Foot-prints of the Creator; or The Asterolepis of Stromness* (1849) reflect both Miller's studies as a scientist, particularly in the field of geology, and his skills as an engaging prose stylist. These works, along with Miller's autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters* (1854), reveal their author as one of the most remarkable figures in nineteenth-century Scottish letters.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Miller was born in Cromarty into a line of Scottish seafaring men. When he was five, his father died at sea, and Miller was subsequently raised by Harriet Roy, his father's second wife. Miller's stepmother and his uncles Alexander and James all imparted their strong religious values to Miller. Miller's family also instilled in him a love of reading. An intelligent but easily bored student, Miller was forced to leave school at the age of fifteen because of disciplinary problems. Between February 1820 and November 1822, he worked as an apprentice stonemason to his mother's brother-in-law, David Wright. His work as a stonemason in the subsequent years led to the publication of his first book, *Poems, Written in the Leisure Hours of a Journeyman Mason* (1829). That same year, he also published *Letters on the Herring Fishing in the Moray Firth,* a work that utilizes the detailed and highly descriptive prose style for which he later became known. While pursuing his literary interests, Miller met a member of the Cromarty women's literary society, Lydia Mackenzie Fraser. They loved each other but Miller refused to marry her so long as he remained a stonemason and thus a member of the working class. While continuing to write, publishing newspaper articles that revealed his special interest in geology, Miller became an accountant at the Commercial Bank in Cromarty, a position that provided him with sufficient income to marry Fraser. He found the routine of the position unpleasant, however, and began corresponding with geologists such as Sir Roderick Murchison and Louis Agassiz. Murchison later suggested to Miller that he undertake publishing a reference work that compiled his geological observations, advice which Miller eventually followed. In 1839, Miller was offered the opportunity to be the editor for *The Witness,* a Free Church of Scotland newspaper founded by the Reverend Robert A. Candlish. Under Miller's editorial guidance, it developed into a publication concerned with a variety of subjects, including literature and science. Miller's journalistic writings, some of which were posthumously collected in *Essays: Historical and Biographical, Political and Social, Literary and Scientific* (1862), illustrate Miller's interest in social reform and church policies. Miller's outspokenness in many of his articles caused tension between him and the Free Church of Scotland. Candlish unsuccessfully tried to replace Miller, who remained at the newspaper until his death. As a consequence of his years as a stonemason, Miller came to suffer from a malady common to workers in that occupation, in which stone and dust collects

in the lungs. As his physical health declined, Miller also began to experience a deteriorating mental stability whose manifestations included frequent nightmares, delirium, and sleepwalking. Miller died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in 1856. His suicide note indicated that he believed his sleepwalking was evidence of a diseased mind.

MAJOR WORKS

Miller's religious faith and his fascination with the natural history of Scotland provided the subject matter for much of his writing. Miller was a defender of the Bible as the ultimate source of knowledge pertaining to both the supernatural and the natural worlds, and he was thus an opponent of evolutionary theory. His attempts to reconcile geology and religion were combined with a passion for history and literature, giving works such as *The Old Red Sandstone* and *Foot-prints of the Creator* the broad scope and highly readable prose style that made them best-sellers in his lifetime. The combination of literary writing, scientific observation, and deeply held spiritual beliefs are also present in his autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters.* In this work Miller represents himself as someone who raised himself above his working-class origins through hard work, religious faith, and intellectual pursuits. Because of this emphasis on personal development, some critics have viewed Miller's autobiography as an early example of the self-help book.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

A groundbreaking figure in the history of the sciences, Miller's works on natural history "were to be found in the remotest log-hut of the Far West, and on both sides of the Atlantic ideas of the nature and shape of geology were largely drawn from them" according to geologist Archibald Geikie. Modern critics still continue to study Miller's geological works, largely considering them seminal to the development of literary natural history as a genre. In addition to his legacy in natural history, Miller's works reflect the cultural changes in nineteenth-century Scottish society, specifically those deriving from the debate over the theory of evolution versus biblical doctrine. Although Miller's contributions to folklore are not as well recognized as his work in the sciences, some scholars such as David Alston consider Miller's importance as a folklorist to be significant, praising his thorough examination of the folklore and beliefs of a small geographical area. In addition, his political writings for *The Witness* illuminate various issues of reform that are vital to an understanding of mid-nineteenth-century Scottish society. They also, as George Rosie maintains, cover a wide variety of subjects pertaining to countries outside the British Isles—from parliamentary proceedings in Canada, to the introduction of the guillotine in Constantinople. For their complex mingling of scientific, personal, religious, and sociopolitical themes, and for their engaging and highly readable style, Miller's works continue to be esteemed by scientists and literary scholars alike.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Letters on the Herring Fishing in the Moray Firth (letters) 1829

Poems, Written in the Leisure Hours of a Journeyman Mason (poetry) 1829

Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland; or, The Traditional History of Cromarty (folklore) 1835

The Whiggism of the Old School, as Exemplified by the Past History and Present Policies of the Church of Scotland (journalism) 1839

The Old Red Sandstone; or, New Walks in an Old Field (nonfiction) 1841; revised as *The Old Red Sandstone; or, New Walks in an Old Field, to Which Is Appended a Series of Geological Papers Read before the Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh* 1858

Foot-prints of the Creator; or The Asterolepis of Stromness (nonfiction) 1849

**My Schools and Schoolmasters; or The Story of My Education* (autobiography) 1854

The Testimony of the Rocks; or, Geology and Its Bearings on the Two Theologies (nonfiction) 1857

The Cruise of the Betsey; or, A Summer Ramble among the Fossilferous Deposits of the Hebrides, with Rambles of a Geologist; or, Ten Thousand Miles of the Fossilferous Deposits of Scotland (nonfiction) 1858

Sketch-book of Popular Geology: Being a Series of Lectures Delivered before the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh (lectures) 1859; expanded as *Popular Geology: A Series of Lectures Read before the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh, with Descriptive Sketches from a Geologist's Portfolio* 1860

†*The Headship of Christ, and the Rights of the Christian People* (essays) 1861

Essays: Historical and Biographical, Political and Social, Literary and Scientific (essays) 1862

Tales and Sketches (folklore and sketches) 1863

Edinburgh and Its Neighborhood, Geological and Historical, with the Geology of the Bass Rock (essays) 1864

Leading Articles on Various Subjects (essays) 1870

Works. 13 vols. (autobiography, essays, folklore, nonfiction, and journalism) 1870-79

*This work has also been published under the titles *An Autobiography: My Schools and Schoolmasters; or, The Story of My Education* and *My Schools and Schoolmasters; or, The Story of My Education: An Autobiography.*

†This work has also been published under the title *The Witness Papers: Headship of Christ and the Rights of the Christian People, A Collection of Essays, Historical and Descriptive Sketches, and Personal Portraitures.*

CRITICISM

John M. Clarke (essay date January 1903)

SOURCE: Clarke, John M. "Hugh Miller and His Centenary." *New England Magazine* n.s. 27, no. 5 (January 1903): 551-63.

[*In the following essay, Clarke assesses Miller's reputation in his native Scotland and in America on the one hundredth anniversary of his birth.*]

The people of Scotland have just been celebrating with unbounded enthusiasm the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Hugh Miller.

In America Miller's name is not very familiar to the younger generation, but to those in the prime of life who, thirty or forty years ago, were reading with susceptible minds, it recalls diverse impressions: the story of a remarkable life, telling with wonderful beauty and cleverness of the rise from humblest beginnings to a conspicuous and influential climacteric; the scientific investigations of a geologist among the rocks and fossils of the Old Red Sandstone and the lavas of the Bass Rock; fulminations against a crude form of the doctrine of evolution presented by Robert Chambers's anonymous but striking book, "Vestiges of Creation"; an occasional glimpse of activity in ecclesiastical politics gathered from a chance allusion to his editorship of a powerful newspaper; and finally the tragic end of a brilliant life wrecked by long continued overwork.

Carlyle, not always a genial critic, characterized Miller's writings as luminous, memorable, wholesome, strong, fresh and breezy; Dean Buckland is credited with saying that he would give his left hand to possess Miller's powers of description; Dickens thought him "a delightful writer"; all quite superfluous expressions to the lover of fine English and lucid portrayal who has read ***My Schools and Schoolmasters,*** or ***The Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland,*** or to the geologist of to-day who, in the attempt to produce popularizations of his science, has lost the combination in the ***Old Red Sandstone, Footprints of the Creator*** and ***Rambles of a Geologist.***

Miller has been dead nearly fifty years but his books are still read without lessening fervor and even those which embodied his scientific investigations have not grown old nor useless, as is the usual fate of the publications in a growing science. Scotland has done well to remember with so much ardor the centenary of his birth.

Among the deep gashes which the waters of ocean and land working together have made in the east coast of Scotland, and just at the edge of the Highlands, is the Cromarty firth, a noble harbor where all the navies of the world could ride in security protected from the storms without and sentinelled by two noble headlands fronting the greater Moray firth and known as the "Sutors." Along the south side of this embayment, on a spit of land which is the remodelled beach of an ancient and greater firth, nestles the venerable and quaint village of Cromarty, where Hugh Miller was born on the tenth of October, 1802. Here all his early life was spent, and his writings are redolent of the town, its natural beauties, its inhabitants, its superstitions, traditions and history. The traveller who reaches this remote and peaceful spot, not by railway, for Cromarty does not reckon this among its conveniences, but by the little steam ferry which crosses the firth at a very oblique angle from the nearest station, Invergordon, wanders up gray walled and narrow streets around the base of the hill and soon comes upon a low, long house with straw thatched roof, grouted walls, and gables facing the street. This house, built by his great-grandfather, is the spot where Miller was born. One must stoop low on entering to avoid a crushing blow to hat and head and lower yet to pass from room to room of this little biggin. The low-ceiled rooms of the second story look out through diminutive windows where the thatch is carefully cut away, into the little court in front, and behind upon the larger and more pretentious structure erected by Miller's father in the days of a brief prosperity, but never occupied by him.

Miller's father was a sailor engaged in trade along the coast, but, like his ancestors for many generations, he went down with his ship, leaving Hugh, a little boy of five years, and two girls still younger to the charge of the desolate widow. Not long after, both sisters died together of scarlet fever and the little fellow was left alone with his mother. The mother had two brothers, "Uncle Sandy" and "Uncle James," serious minded and sagacious workmen, the one a carpenter, the other a saddler, and these took upon themselves the guidance of the boy Hugh. No part of Miller's autobiography is more pleasing than the tender thread of gratitude to these uncles which he has woven throughout his narrative, but it was "Uncle Sandy's" keen powers of observation, retentive mind and minute familiarity with all the traditions of the countryside which seem most to have aroused his interest in nature and shaped the bent of his zeal. But both concerned themselves deeply in his education and planned for him—for the boy had early showed more than usual mental acumen—a distinguished career in some one of the professions. So the

little lad was entered at the "Dames' school," across the way from the thatched home, where two maiden sisters dealt out the mysteries of a written and printed language. Miller tells how useless and perfunctory it all seemed to him, this learning how to spell words and range them in sentences, until one day, of a sudden, he made the tremendous discovery that there were stories under these words, the story of Benjamin and Samuel, of David and of Daniel, that, as he says, "the art of reading was the art of finding stories in books." A new world had opened, and now his whetted appetite could not be sated on scripture tales alone. There followed those immortal tales, "Jack the Giant-killer," "Bluebeard," "Sindbad the Sailor," (and right here in telling this story the distinguished author breaks out vigorously: "Those intolerable nuisances, the useful knowledge books, had not yet arisen, like tenebrious stars, on the educational horizon to darken the world and shed their blighting influence on the opening intellect of the youthhood") and soon after Pope's translation of the "Odyssey" and "Iliad," and "Pilgrim's Progress"; thenceforward everything that the little town could be made to produce. Presently he was entered at the parish school, which, fronting on the shore near the east base of the sand spit, commands the whole length of the firth to the Sutors, and from the windows of this school every sailing craft which in line of business or in stress of weather entered the firth was seen and registered by the boys. There probably never was a school where the scholars knew and could draw so well upon their slates the lines and rigging of every variety of schooner, carvel and smack.

But the boy was learning more outside than within school. His teachers were not sympathetic and he himself was becoming wayward. The hills invited him and days which were due to the school were spent, usually with some of his companions of whom he was the acknowledged leader in all kinds of mischief, in the seacaves along the rocky shore of the southern Sutor or among the woods and glens of Cromarty hill. His school career terminated violently. Commanded to spell the word *awful* he spelt with the broad pronunciation to which he was used, *aw*-w-f-u-l. "No," said the master, "a-w, *aw,* f-u-l, *awful.* Spell it again." This seemed to him preposterous, to put another *aw* in the middle of the word and he refused. The hand to hand encounter which followed was a fierce and bloody one and both master and pupil retired from the conflict sadly battered, Miller, however, never to return.

Casting about now for a life's work he decided, greatly against the wishes of his uncles, to apprentice himself to a stone mason.

At that day a mason had to quarry as well as hew and lay his stone, and the work was arduous and severe but, the day's work done, there were the long northern evenings free for other devices. So this future geologist and man of letters bound himself for three years to a master mason to quarry and hew stone during the day, while his long evenings were devoted to the most careful study of the best masters of English prose and poetry. He served his time and became skilful at his trade, but he likewise became accomplished at his diversion, and though Scotsmen easily break out into verse and he set up no claim to fine poetic diction, yet subsequently he published a volume of verse produced during this period, ***Poems Written in the Leisure Hours of a Journeyman Mason,*** his first book and only attempt in this line.

It was during this period, however, that his eyes were beginning to see into the secrets of the rocks. As the stone quarries where he wrought and the stone he hewed were for the most part of the Old Red Sandstone formation, he saw how similar it was in its structure to the sands of the beach where he had roamed so often with Uncle Sandy and his boy friends. It is a rather curious coincidence that the Old Red Sandstone which fringes the Cromarty hill was actually deposited in an ancient lagoon or embayment not vastly unlike the present Cromarty firth, and it was by this, his only means of comparison, that the young geologist was enabled to interpret the rock beds. He had seen on the Cromarty beaches that some of the sand deposits had been blown about by the wind and in these the grains looked unlike those which had simply been washed over by the water, and he searched for similar differences in the sand grains of the Old Red. He saw the rippled surfaces, the marks left by rills and wave borne pebbles, and these simple observations gradually led him into a world of new interest and endeavor. The little hints he caught he must interpret for himself. There were for him but few side lights and no books which served to solve his problems for him. His finer discoveries of the fossils in the rocks, the vast shoals of bizarre fishes, seem not to have been made during this time of his apprenticeship.

When he had served his period he betook himself to Edinburgh where he wrought at his trade in the neighborhood as long as his health permitted, but his lungs had begun to fill up with rock dust and he was compelled, on the verge of consumption, to abandon his work. Then followed a period of rest and slow convalescence spent about the beloved hills of Cromarty, and that was the time most fertile in additions to his own and the world's knowledge of the geology of his home country.

Miller was superior in all his undertakings and as a stone mason he wrought better, more artistically and intelligently than his fellows. On the Conon River, up back of Dingwall, is still standing a farm wall of his handiwork even yet pointed out as a model of such coarse construction; the parish churchyard and the bury-

ing ground of old St. Regulus at Cromarty hold examples of his mortuary sculpture, done when, as an itinerant sculptor he "wandered from one country burying ground to another, recording on his tablets of stone the tears of the living and the worth of the dead," and they are notable for the chastity of their style in contrast to the usual horrid and grewsome decoration of contemporary designers. The pediment of a dial still standing in one of the Cromarty gardens is a fine example of his achievement which shows not only his manual facility but the elevation of his standard of taste.

It would have been fortunate for geological science and well for Miller had some happy turn of the wheel made it possible for him to continue his study of the rocks without interruption, but it was not thus ordered and at no period in his life was he at liberty to pursue his chosen science save in the intervals of pressing necessary work. His achievements therefore as a geologist must be looked upon as little short of marvellous. One must pause a moment here to consider the conditions which surrounded him.

Geology in the period from 1830-1845, when his first results were achieved, was a little known science outside of a few centres of learning. It was, however, a very widely misunderstood and misinterpreted science; in a country so given over to controversial theology as Scotland, it was especially regarded as fraught with danger to the standards of the Church. One could not enter this field save at some cost to his standing in a conservative community. The Old Red Sandstone had been heard of before, but it had been regarded an unimportant local formation without evidences of ancient life. As his problems developed, the few books that could give this seeker any light seem not to have come his way. Miller had, indeed, to build up his own science from his own observations, and how well he did this is shown in many ways. Not alone are his conclusions as to the origin of the Old Red Sandstone vital facts today, but his keen insight foresaw and suggested peculiar features of its origin which in these latest years have started special trains of important investigation. He found that the rocks were filled with myriads of strange creatures which he believed and demonstrated to be fishes, though nothing like some of them had ever before been seen and he had naught with which to compare them except the fishes he knew in the waters of Cromarty. Yet such were his synthetic powers that he was able to reconstruct them with an accuracy that seems to-day, in the light of fuller knowledge, astonishing. Huxley, who long afterward brought to bear upon these Old Red fishes his brilliant and finely trained powers, remarked: "The more I study the fishes of the Old Red the more I am struck with the patience and sagacity manifested in Hugh Miller's researches and by the natural insight which in his case seems to have supplied the place of special anatomical knowledge."

The young stone mason, however, unable because of impaired health to continue the laborious toil of his business and not successful in obtaining enough mortuary sculpture to meet the demands of living, was now turned into another line of activity. In 1834 a branch of the Commercial Bank of Scotland was established in Cromarty and to him was offered the position of accountant therein; so after a preliminary training at Linlithgow he entered upon the career of a bank clerk.

Just at the close of his period of enforced leisure, Miller had completed the manuscript of his delightful ***Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland,*** his first prose work, which has now run through fourteen editions. No more enjoyable reading could come into the hands of young or old. Miller's mother was a Highlander and from her he seems to have imbibed the Highland fondness for, and in some measure the awe of, the mysterious in nature. The ancient superstitions of Cromarty are laughed at, but not too heartily; tales of times which had no historian are told with interest, pathos and humor, and all are set forth in pure and forcible English. The pen of the young author had at last found its function in masterly prose.

For five years Miller served as bank clerk in his native town. They were years not of conspicuous mark in his career but of quiet assimilation and especially of keen furtherance of his geological studies. But his fertile mind toward the end of this time had become afire with interest in the ecclesiastical condition of the country. It is bootless for us to exclaim, as has been often done in this latter day, how much more would have been accomplished for science if Miller had kept free of entanglement in a theological controversy. To the writer, at least, it is not altogether clear that he could have rendered a greater service to science than by the very means which circumstances threw in his way. His church was in peril and it was his conviction, as he has said, that the country possessed "no other institution half so valuable as the church or in which the people had so large a stake." Disruption in the established church of Scotland was impending. Growth of democratic ideas in church government had developed increasing hostility to the intrusion of ministers upon livings, contrary to the wishes of the parish communions. Where the church is an establishment, church polity is state politics. The Cromarty bank clerk began the new episode in his career with a virile and cogent pamphlet on the burning question of intrusion addressed to Lord Brougham and opposing the position of the establishment, which attracted attention throughout the land. He became at once a marked man, and though he had even claimed to be thoroughly an "establishment man," he was immediately invited by the organized opposition party to take the editorship of their newspaper, the Edinburgh *Witness.* In 1839 his editorial work began, in 1843 occurred the Disruption and the establishment of

the Free Church, in which movement he was unquestionably the largest lay factor. The *Witness,* under his editorship, became a mighty influence throughout Scotland; to it he gave the best years of his endeavor until his calamitous death in 1856. It was far from being simply an ecclesiastical organ, championing at every cost the interest of the Free Church; its columns teemed with pregnant editorials on all matters of public moment, of social and educational interest, and of his paper he modestly says that none other in Scotland had so wide a circulation among the men who had received a university education. In it he published what, when subsequently gathered together, made his best and most widely known books, ***Schools and Schoolmasters, Old Red Sandstone, Footprints of the Creator, Cruise of the Betsey*** and ***Rambles of a Geologist,*** and through this paper and these books his name became known and honored, not alone in Scotland, but among all English-speaking people.

"What we more especially owe to Miller," says Sir Archibald Geikie, speaking for the geologists, "is the awakening of a widespread interest in the methods and results of scientific inquiry. More than any other author of his day he taught men to recognize that beneath the technicalities and jargon that are too apt to conceal the meaning of the facts and inferences which they express, there lie the most vital truths in regard to the world in which we live. He clothed the dry bones of science with living flesh and blood. He made the aspects of past ages to stand out once more before us, as his vivid imagination conceived that they must once have been. He awakened an enthusiasm for geological questions such as had never before existed, and this wave of popular appreciation which he set in motion has never ceased to pulsate throughout the English-speaking population of the world. His genial ardor and irresistible eloquence swept away the last remnants of the barrier of orthodox prejudice against geology in this country. The present generation can hardly realize the former strength of that bigotry or appreciate the merit of the service rendered in the breaking of it down. The well-known satirical criticism of the poet Cowper[1] expressed a prevalent feeling among the orthodox of his day, and this feeling was still far from extinct when Miller began to write. No one, however, could doubt his absolute orthodoxy, and when the cause of the science was espoused by him, the voices of the objectors were finally silenced. There was another class of cavaliers who looked on geology as a mere collecting of minerals, a kind of laborious trifling concealed under a cover of uncouth technical terms. Their view was well expressed by Wordsworth when he singled out for contemptuous scorn the enthusiast—

> Who with pocket hammer smites the edge
> Of luckless rock or prominent stone,
> Detaching by the stroke
> A chip or splinter, to resolve his doubts,
> And with that ready answer satisfied,
> The substance classes by some barbarous name
> And hurries on: He thinks himself enriched,
> Wealthier and doubtless wiser than before.

"But a champion had now arisen who, as far as might be, discarding technicalities, made even the dullest reader feel that the geologist is the historian of the earth, that he deals with a series of chronicles as real and as decipherable as those that record human events and that they can be made not only intelligible, but attractive as the subjects of simple and elegant prose."

Without education, except in the schools of which he had so charmingly written, Miller had risen to a position of the widest influence throughout Scotland, but notwithstanding this distinction he ever maintained the reticence and modesty of the country lad. He declined to stand for election as Lord Rector of Marischal College at Aberdeen and for the vacant professorship of Natural History in Edinburgh University, but he was satisfied to feel that, as he expressed it, "after a hard spent day he had not been an altogether unprofitable servant."

Sixteen years of arduous and amazingly productive toil as editor of the *Witness* told upon his health. He had suffered much from headaches, his nerves had become frayed with persistent overtaxing. Edinburgh streets in 1856 were filled with desperadoes and highwaymen, and he grew fearsome lest an inroad should be made upon his precious geological collections. He had got in the way of going about armed, had become somnambulistic, and one black night, toiling and overstrained till almost dawn with the proof sheets of his ***Testimony of the Rocks,*** the mind broke down, and in the darkness his life abruptly ended.

On August 22, 1902 (the exigencies of Scottish weather justified the change in date) a great throng entered Cromarty from all Britain, with representatives from Canada, the United States and Italy. The sun shone bright and warm upon the flag-decked buildings, the American colors being here and there intertwined with the multifold British flags and Scotia's yellow. The occasion was well supported; back of it appeared such names as Lords Balfour, Kelvin, Lister, Sir Archibald Geikie, Sir Norman Lockyer, Right Hon. James Bryce, Professors Masson, Bonney, Lapworth, Joly, Sollas.

On the hilltop just west of the town stands a fine shaft surmounted by a statue of Miller, and the pediment graced by sculptured bay leaves and "Pterichthys." At the foot of this shaft gathered a mighty throng of 2,000 people, who had come to do homage to the man, and here addresses were delivered by the provost of the town, Mr. Junor; by the member of Parliament, Mr. Bi-

gnold, representing local interest and pride; by Rev. Dr. Rainy, principal of the Free Church College, Edinburgh, on behalf of the church for which this life had done so profound a service, and by Sir Archibald Geikie and the delegate from the Geological Society of America, speaking for the science which he loved and to which he had given much. The public halls of the little town could not accommodate all who wished to sit down to the luncheon that followed, but the 250 who succeeded in gaining access to this function were regaled with a flow of distinguished eloquence and rare tributes from Sir Thomas Hanbury, Dr. John Horne of the Geological Survey of Scotland, Dr. Macadam Muir of the Glasgow Cathedral, Dr. Andrew Carnegie, Professor Middleton of Oxford, Sir James Grant, president of the Royal Society of Canada, and others. Thereafter in the Free Church (most appropriate spot!) Sir Archibald Geikie paid the tribute of all geologists to Miller's memory in a delightful and elegant address. It was an additional pleasure to all present at these ceremonies to be able to meet the only surviving child of Hugh Miller, Mrs. Miller Mackay of Lochinver.

A committee of the townspeople, represented by the provost, Mr. Junor, and Mr. John Bain as secretary, had brought about this celebration, partly in the hope that with the tributes laid on Miller's shrine might come to the town of his birth a more substantial memorial to his services—a public library and a museum of his scientific remains. The success of this project, through the devotion of Miller's admirers, the assiduity of his townsfolk and the munificence of Dr. Carnegie is assured.

Note

1. This is in the "Task," and runs thus:

> "Some drill and bore
> The solid earth and from the strata there
> Extract a register, by which we learn
> That He who made it and revealed its date
> To Moses was mistaken in its age."

W. M. Mackenzie (essay date 1905)

SOURCE: Mackenzie, W. M. "Literary Style." In *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study,* pp. 25-50. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905.

[*In the following excerpt, Mackenzie analyzes Miller's prose style and the literary models that influenced his development as a writer.*]

So far, then, have we been able to follow Miller in the careful training of himself for literary achievement. Without exactly playing "the sedulous ape," he studies closely the general form, the tones and turns of expression characterising a well-defined group of writers, and shapes his own performance accordingly. It need not, therefore, be pronounced either futile or pedantic to endeavour to trace out more closely some of the affinities of Miller's style with the materials he so used. No analysis, indeed, can cumulatively explain the total result: style is a compound, not a mere literary mixture. Short of that, however, we can surely work to fuller knowledge and a clearer definition of the constituents, and so open the way to a keener appreciation of the whole.

Happily Miller has left us in no doubt as to his models and standards. He is confessedly of the Augustans, the men of Queen Anne's time, and the prose-writers who derived from them. He did not make literature of the vernacular as Burns did; that was possible only for a poet. He sought his models where every educated Scotsman did till the time of the Carlyle fashion, and was the last notable exponent in a dying mode. When Baron Hume declared that he excelled in "that classical style" with which his contemporaries had lost touch, Hugh modestly explained that he owed the merit "chiefly to accident; to having kept company with the older English writers—the Addisons, Popes, and Robertsons of the last century." And he goes on to say, "the tone of these earlier writers I have, I daresay, contrived in some measure to catch." The selection here is evidently summary, and the list may be easily extended by further testimony, both circumstantial and explicit.

Thus Miller's prose taken generally, is of the "middle style," the peculiar achievement of the eighteenth century writers, "familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious"—Johnson's characterisation—which, if it never rises to the convoluted sublimity of the earlier men, never, on the other hand, sinks to the commonplace of colloquialism. It cannot be held that it is a style capable of the effects which have been drawn in modern times from a critical return to more archaic sources; but then, on the other hand, it is not, for ordinary purposes, so dangerous a medium, nor does it run such a risk of affectation and painful artificiality. For use in scientific exposition its fitness is unquestionable.

Miller had an early and close acquaintance with the *Spectator* papers. After their manner the unborn *Egotist* was conceived. Plainly his notion of "correctness" meant to a large degree a following of Addison whom he "had known so long, and, in his true poems, his prose ones, had loved so much." But his more serious range of subjects, and his more serious and direct treatment of them, were bound to react upon his forms of expression. It is with Addison in his graver moods that he has most in common. It is probably, in the main, owing to his influence that Miller's prose is predominantly loose rather than periodic. The following sen-