
Patrick MacGill: A Path to Socialism shared with Jack London

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Abstract. Until relatively recently the works of the early twentieth-century Irish novelist Patrick MacGill have been neglected by literary commentators. MacGill made his reputation, initially, through his poetry that was centred on the hard lives and conditions of the ‘Navy’ – the itinerant labourers of the British industrial world. He subsequently published two novels that record the conditions of the Irish migrant agricultural and industrial labourers in Scotland, namely *The Children of the Dead End* and *The Rat-Pit*, establishing his reputation as a social commentator of the lower reaches of the working class. Several literary commentators such as Jack Mitchell (1982), Seamus Deane (1985), Owen Dudley Edwards (1986), and Terry Phillips (2010), have considered these early works to have a socialist view while others, Lochlann McGlynn (1944), and Joe Mulholland (1972) have admired the descriptive skills and the realism in his writings. This article considers their points and places in context MacGill’s education in socialism in Greenock and Glasgow around 1909 and highlights examples where his socialist views are manifestly visible outside his novels.

Patrick MacGill and Jack London were writers whose early literary works are formed of their experiences in the lower layers of the working class. In this article, the similarities in the formative years of MacGill and those of Jack London are exposed showing a striking commonality in their experiences that leads them both to socialism and to record those experiences in literature.

Key Words. Patrick MacGill, Socialism, Social Commentary, Jack London.

Resumen. Hasta hace relativamente poco tiempo, la crítica literaria había descuidado las obras del novelista irlandés de principios del siglo XX Patrick MacGill. MacGill se hizo famoso inicialmente por su poesía, que se centró en las duras vidas y condiciones de los "Navy", los trabajadores itinerantes del mundo industrial británico. Posteriormente publicó dos novelas, *Children of the Dead End* y *The Rat-Pit* que registran las condiciones de los agricultores y obreros inmigrantes irlandeses en Escocia, estableciendo su reputación como comentarista social de los estratos más bajos de la clase trabajadora. Varios críticos como Jack Mitchell (1982), Seamus Deane (1985), Owen Dudley Edwards (1986) y Terry Phillips (2010), han considerado que estas primeras obras tienen una visión socialista, mientras que otros,

Lochlinn McGlynn (1944) y Joe Mulholland (1972) han admirado las habilidades descriptivas y el realismo en sus escritos. Este artículo contextualiza la educación de MacGill en el socialismo en Greenock y Glasgow alrededor de 1909 y muestra ejemplos en los que sus puntos de vista socialistas son manifiestamente visibles fuera de sus novelas. También se exponen las similitudes en los años formativos de MacGill y de Jack London mostrando un nexo de unión que lleva a ambos tanto al socialismo como a plasmar esas vidas de las clases más bajas de la sociedad en sus obras.

Palabras clave. Patrick MacGill, socialismo, comentario social, Jack London.

Patrick MacGill was born in late December 1889 in the township of Glenties, County of Donegal. His parent were smallholders/crofters in this remote rural area. He completed his schooling at the age of ten, he tells us in his autobiographical work *Children of the Dead End* (1915), after only three years of learning, he immediately was then working with his father on the family and on neighbours' small holdings. The next significant period in his life, as he recorded himself, was his time from the age of twelve as a hired agricultural worker, following the path of others from poor rural (catholic) Donegal through the hiring fair at Strabane, working on the richer (protestant) farms in County Tyrone with the imperative to send most of the hiring fee home at the end of the season, usually six months. He was expected to get himself hired for the next six months following, and so it was expected to continue, as it was for all the boys and girls sent out from Donegal. MacGill expressed his bitterness at this exploitation of a child in his autobiographical works. There was an alternative to this local *modus operandi* which was to go with an agricultural working gang to Scotland, this he did though the conditions were not improved from his working in Tyrone, and his resentment continued. By the age of fourteen and a half he was working in Scotland. At the end of his first working season, he gambled his earnings away, we are told in his autobiography, and too ashamed to return home to Donegal without money, he stayed in Scotland. After a time, he was hired to a farm finishing there at the end of May 1906. There followed a period as a tramp and itinerant labourer eventually coming to the engineering works at Kinlochleven, a remote area of Scotland, where the construction of a dam and factory was in progress. While working at Kinlochleven, MacGill started to write stories/articles on his working life sending them to newspapers. Most of the engineering works at Kinlochleven had finished by the autumn of 1908, as recorded by Gregor and Crichton in *From Croft to Factory* (1946), with the factory going into production in February 1909. MacGill then made his way to Glasgow/Greenock and found work on the Caledonian Railway where he remained for an estimated period of two and a half years. At this point in his life, MacGill was nineteen years of age and he had already been working manually for eight years, (nearly half his life), on the family small holding, as hired hand on the farms of Tyrone, as an agricultural gang worker on the farms of West of Scotland, and as a navy on the works at Kinlochleven.

The neglect of Patrick MacGill by literary commentators was, in the opinion of Lochlinn McGlynn, "The penalty for writing well about Ireland", It was that "he had ceased to belong to it" [Ireland] *The Bell* (1944 Vol IX : 31). McGlynn believed MacGill was deemed to be a victim of his literary success. The attraction of MacGill's prose for McGlynn was in the familiarity of the landscapes, towns and villages described, having had a shared background in the same valleys of Donegal. As for myself, an attachment to MacGill comes through familiarity with the background of his descriptions of the works at Kinlochleven, this being my home village. For all that, McGlynn has praise for the lyrical depictions of Donegal, he attributes MacGill as an Irish realist writer, "he was the fore-runner of O' Flaherty (Liam) and O' Donnell (Peadar) and the other (Irish) realists" (1944: 37).

The realism that MacGill displayed in his prose can be and is seen in his lyrical descriptions of his people and their lives, records McGlynn. The article then includes the text of a MacGill description of the children of the house waiting for sleep, listening to the winds, and watching the moon..." this is simple reporting, but it is very real. The children of the Glen are just like this" (1944: 36). For McGlynn, the realist writer MacGill encloses realism in the lyrical and romantic descriptions of his countryside and its people and not solely, as might be expected, in the realism of MacGill's descriptions of itinerant life, as in *The Children of the Dead End* and *The RatPit*.

The realism in MacGill's language and in his descriptive skills are also admired by Professor Joe Mulholland who records, "his novels contain some of the most striking prose written by an Irishman in this century" (twentieth century that is) in his article *Patrick MacGill: The Birth of a Legend* (1972: 35). Mulholland also considers the language to be "incisive and hard-hitting" (1972: 33).

"It is perhaps this incisive and hard-hitting language employed in MacGill's poetry *Songs of a Nabby* that the working socialists took to themselves", reports Mulholland, that the verses were recited, known by heart, and used extensively in pamphlets and journals. (1972: 32). The admiration between the working socialists and MacGill can be seen to be mutual in the action of MacGill during the Thames Iron Works strike of 1911 where it was reported in the *Daily Express*: 29 November 1911 that MacGill's poem *The Men of the Thames* was read out during the Great Express Meeting at Greenwich demanding a warship be built on the Thames. *The Daily Express* was leading a petition to the First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, at the time Winston Churchill, requesting that a contract for a new warship be placed with the shipyard. The poem was also printed in that edition of the *Daily Express*, MacGill later provided a companion poem *Back to Work* for a *Daily Express* edition of 31 December 1911 when the strike was concluded. It is clear from this action that MacGill's sympathies lay with the working people in that he provided active support to a socialist cause. I should report, however, that MacGill's effort proved to be fruitless, a contract was not awarded to Thames Iron Works and the company closed in 1912.

Where earlier commentators (the few that there were) focussed on MacGill's lyrical remembrances of Donegal and its people and for his decrying of the clergy, the landowners, and merchant class for exploitation of the people. More recent commentators have recognised the socialist theme in his works, specifically in his early novels *Children of the Dead End* and the *RatPit* and have added, as Mulholland has, some perspective and context to his socialism.

Although MacGill had read Karl Marx and other socialist treatises, Mulholland proposes that "his kind of socialism was rooted in his own hatred of injustice rather than in a deep knowledge or understanding of socialist theory". (1972: 33). His war, Mulholland tells us, "Was not in fact with all priests and all capitalists [...] What he did was pit his strength against the exploitation of the common people's ignorance and (their) defencelessness by those in a position to control their lives". (1972: 33).

A more political commentary can be seen in *Early Harvest: Three Anti-Capitalist Novels Published in 1914*, (1982) given by Jack Mitchell, identifying three works he categorises as anti-capitalist, which appeared and barged into the mainstream of the English novel, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* by Robert Tressell, *The Children of the Dead End* by Patrick MacGill, and *Gillespie* by John Macdougall Hay. "All three helped, to a varying degree, to lay the foundations for a new departure in realism." (1982: 67). Perhaps it would be an appropriate comment to note that the authors whose works barged into the mainstream of the English novel were two ex-patriot Irishmen, Tressell, MacGill, and a Scotsman: Hay. Does this say something about English novelists writing at the time? Perhaps the commentary on the social conditions was more in the social document or reportage class of writing, in the recording/reportage of social conditions as in *The Children of the Abyss* by Jack London, rather than in novel form.

However, MacGill is found wanting in the eyes of Mitchell as a commentator or analyst of the class struggle, whilst lauding the “gift of the revolutionary writer to make ordinary and worn words appear fresh and meaningful.” (1982: 77) He declares the struggle depicted in MacGill’s writings as to be of “the world of middle-class values, which MacGill rejects, is not [...] contrasted morally with that of the working class as such, but with that of the social outcasts.” (1982: 79) He continues, “tends towards a contrast between the outcasts on the one hand and the whole of society on the other” (1982: 79). The tendency to sentimentalise is stated as being “ominous” (1982: 79). These criticisms by Mitchell should be seen in light of MacGill’s intentions, those being to record the conditions of the social outcasts of his experiences, the itinerant labourers of the TattieHowkers¹ and the itinerant world of the Navy and their struggles against society, as MacGill writes in the Foreword to *The Children of the Dead End* (1967), “I have endeavoured to tell of the life of the navy; the life he leads, the danger he dares, and the death he often dies” and further, “Norah Ryan’s painful story shows the dangers to which an innocent girl is exposed through ignorance of the fundamental facts of existence”.

In his commentary, Mitchell places MacGill’s socialism as a sentimental ILP² brand of socialism, a variation on Christianity, having rejected Marx in favour of humanist or British socialism. This opinion can be confirmed in the writings of MacGill in the chapter: *Books: Children of the Dead End* (1967: 136-45) where MacGill records his encounters with socialism on his Sunday afternoons, he describes the socialist speakers as preaching, looking upon the socialist speakers as men who had an earnest desire for justice, he further articulates this belief:

All around me were social injustices, affecting the very old and the very young as they affected the supple and the strong. Social suffering begins at any age, and death is often its only remedy. That remedy is only for the individual; the general remedy is to be found in Socialism. Industry, that new inquisition, has thousands on the rack of profit; Progress to millions means slavery and starvation. (1967: 139-40)

This period in Greenock and Glasgow 1909-11, where MacGill was working, are the years preceding the period that historians would label as ‘Red Clydeside’ 1910-30.

The leading socialist organisers and speakers of those times were Scottish and ILP leaders: James Maxton (credited with being an aficionado of MacGill’s poetry), Emanuel Shinwell, John Maclean, David Kirkwood, John Wheatley, and Tom Johnston all of whom would, within ten years, be elected Members of Parliament representing socialist views in the Labour Party.

We are told also that Marx’s *Capital*, though more logical, did not appeal to MacGill or appealed to him the least, and that Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty* did appeal, at least more than Marx. (MacGill 1967: 140) George’s philosophy proposed that the roots of poverty were held in the increasing values of land, and thus the increasing rent of land increased the costs for enterprises and thus reduced the amount of money available to pay wages. He proposed an annual land value tax to stabilise and to stem the increases in land value and to hence stabilise the costs for enterprise, which would thus make more money available for wages. George’s generally humanist views were reportedly held in great esteem by Leo Tolstoy, who devoted the final years of his life to George’s principles, and were also esteemed by Winston Churchill, Bertrand Russell, and Aldous Huxley amongst others.

Thus, you might characterise MacGill’s socialism as Scottish in nature and holding the views of the ILP, a Christian / Humanist view allied with, perhaps, the idealism of his youth, he, being about 19 years of age at the time of working in Greenock.

¹ Scottish dialect: potato diggers.

² Independent Labour Party.

In placing MacGill's works in the context of Irish Literature Seamus Deane in his article *Extremes* in *London Review of Books*, (1985) comments that "MacGill's stereotyped lyricism and outright, if not outraged, realism was a potent blend" (1985 np) when set against the Irish Literary Revival as represented by Synge and Joyce. He notes also that, despite a tendency to melodramatise rather than analyse, "the melodrama is not exploited for its own sake: it is the vehicle for MacGill's socialism, tempering his anger at injustice with a sympathy for the victims of it" [...] "It is the rage against society, who of course are ordinary people, the housewife who will not give a starving beggar a crust of bread or the clergyman who sets his dog on the man who seeks help for a dying friend" (1985 np). This anger against society was also recognised by Mitchell. It should also be said, however, that a point of note in Deane's article is how realist writers such as MacGill and later Irish writer Peadar O'Donnell, both socialists, who wrote about people who must migrate to Scotland and England for seasonal work labouring on the land or on building sites, were not considered to be novelists.

A summary on MacGill's socialism is probably best given by Terry Phillips in *Wisdom of Experience: Patrick MacGill's Irishness Re-assessed*, where the themes recognised by earlier commentators are. "His Socialism is based always on personal experience and lacks analytical sophistication [...] he finds little interest in abstract ideas but finds great interest in his fellow human beings" (2010: 33).

These are then, the principles MacGill carried with him to London when he accepted to work on the editorial team of the *Daily Express*, the offer being based on previous articles he had written and the success of his first publication *The Gleanings of a Navy's Scrapbook*. During his time working for the *Express* he encountered, at some point, the Reverend Sir John Neale Dalton, canon of St George's Chapel at Windsor. He was offered a post in the library of Windsor Castle translating Middle Age Manuscripts. This provided him with the address of 4 The Cloisters, Windsor that decorates the small amount of correspondence currently available in libraries, prior to MacGill volunteering for army service in 1914.

In London there were literary links to the Fabian Society, the intellectual view of Democratic Socialism, whose members espoused gradualism and reformist efforts as agency for social change, as opposed to revolutionary means of say British Socialist Party. The theories of Henry George were respected within the Fabians, which would have been in line with MacGill's sensibilities of a humanist socialism, the main difference between MacGill and the Fabian position would have been his direct experience as against their more theoretical position. Fabian society members who would have been known to MacGill, were George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, St John Ervine, and Hugh Dalton (son of Canon Dalton and a future Labour government minister), and G. K. Chesterton. We know that Patrick MacGill is not included in the membership list of the Fabian Society. MacGill would have been amid discussions and views that generally complemented his own views on socialism. Within such social circles, friendships were made and were retained with like-minded souls, it is reported in *the Dundee Courier* of 29 October 1923, on the christening of Patrick MacGill's twin daughters Ursula and Patricia, that the godfathers are St. John Ervine (playwright and biographer) and G. K. Chesterton (novelist), both were members of the Fabian Society and of a Democratic Socialist view. This might be seen as some evidence of MacGill's socialist views being maintained despite the great literary successes of the 10 years preceding the christening, and his absorption by English middle-class society.

While many commentators have given their views on the points where MacGill's early socialism is visible in his writings, there is also available a small amount of correspondence where MacGill is direct in his terms that can be deemed to be socialist. The correspondence relates to exchanges concerning his books of verse, at this point, for all of correspondence, the address is 4, The Cloisters, Windsor suggesting a period from 1912 to 1914 when he was employed by Canon Dalton: the text of such a letter is below:

Dear Comrade,

I've signed the paper re. Tolstoy and sent it along. I hope the good object will be obtained, but I'm afraid "the things that should be" are long in coming in the land of the Czar. I beg to enclose a copy of my new book as a present. You'll find it on top of the 6 others which you can have for the benefit of the branch of B.S.P.³ at the usual trade terms 4/6 per ½ doz sale or return. I suppose financially it will not be very strong (your branch). The S.D.P.⁴ to which I belong in Greenock is and was always in a struggling way, which I think is one conspicuous sign of the Cause. But the great spirit more than recompenses. I was employed for 3 months on the London Daily Express. When I say it's owned by Pearson you'll understand how glad I was to leave. I have now a job here translating and copying old English mss of the 13th century, a job in which I'm much interested. I'm not to blame however for my surroundings as one must work somewhere, and I've induced my master (?) to read *The Clarion*. He's not a bad sort, but belongs to the class which sooner or later have to go.

Yours fraternally,

Patrick MacGill.

(Donegal County Library – Letterkenny)

The general tenor of the letter is all socialism, the terms of salutation and of communication style, sympathising with his correspondent on the state of branch finances, with comment on his "master's" class, which will have to go. This is the most articulate letter available, in terms of socialist content, the few other notes that are available have similar salutations, with short content to the point of terseness regarding sending and ordering of copies of his books of verse.

Socialism for MacGill, we should accept, was a matter of fighting the social injustices, a Christian/ Humanist view that had grown out of his experiences of life with the social outcasts, the itinerant class, those below the working class. He articulated this view through his verses and particularly in his early novels *The Children of the Dead End* and *The Rat-Pit*, a view not immediately visible in his later novels. He expressed this view publicly through his active support of the Thames Iron Workers strike, via the *Daily Express* newspaper, which was employing him at the time, with his verses *Men of the Thames* and *Back to Work* and in the socialist language of his correspondence with his socialist comrades and with the buyers and admirers of his early verses.

In looking at parallels for MacGill we should perhaps, as Mitchell (1982) noted of the "Scenes of digging and blasting, drinking and fighting at the camp a Scottish version of Jack London's Klondike" (1982: 77) consider this as a relevant comparison. Jack London spent one winter season in the Klondike from which he gleaned the materials for his famed short stories and two powerful novels, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* both of which became international successes.

The comparison might be apt although the scale was somewhat different, at Kinlochleven around three thousand men working in a wilderness, whereas across the Yukon an estimated thirty thousand men (and women) plus were attempting to find gold in a wilderness. The parallels between Kinlochleven and the Klondike are recognisable directly in the comparable harsh locations and temporary, primitive, uncivilised, lawless, living conditions and the characters who inhabited these dystopian worlds. The parallels between Patrick MacGill and Jack London, on investigation, run deeper and are not limited to their subject matter but can be seen in the experiences of both of their early lives before their breakthroughs into literary careers, leading to their taking up of a socialist stance.

³ British Socialist Party.

⁴ Socialist Democratic Party.

Jack London had a fractured childhood, according to his biographer Earle Labor writing in *Jack London: An American Life (2012)*, he was wet nursed for the first two years of his life, his father left his mother and subsequently there was a stepfather, John London from whom Jack took his family name. A venture by the family into farming failed with the family returning to the city of Oakland, California. With the family in straitened circumstances Jack was expected to work and earn money for the household, he recorded his bitterness in a later letter to a friend:

Duty – at ten years I was on the street selling newspapers. Every cent was turned over to my people, and I went to school in constant shame of the hats, shoes, clothes I wore [...] From then on, I had no childhood. Up at three in the morning to carry papers. When that was finished I did not go home but continued on to school. School out, my evening papers. Saturday I worked on an ice wagon. Sunday I went to a bowling alley and set up pins for drunken Dutchmen. Duty – I turned over every cent and went dressed as like a scarecrow. (Labor 2012: 21)

There is in this letter the feelings of resentment comparable to those recorded by MacGill as he was also expected to continually support the family through his feed working in Ireland and from his working time in Scotland with the pressure such that at times, he did not answer letters from home:

I wrote home to my own people. I was longing to hear from somebody who cared for me. In reply an angry letter came from my mother. “Why was I not sending home some money?” she asked. Another child had come into the family and there were many mouths to fill. “I would never have a day’s luck in all my life if I forgot my father and mother.” (MacGill 1967: 116)

His resentment expressed:

My parents had sinned against me in bringing me into a world in which I had to fight for crumbs with the dogs of the gutter [...] bringing me into the world and then living on my labour – such an absurd and unjust state of things. (MacGill 1967: 117)

London relieved the drudgery of his situation through literature, at the age of ten he became voracious reader, as was MacGill to do at the age of eighteen years

The health of London’s stepfather was failing and with no plans for high school the option for London was fulltime work in a factory, named as Hickmott’s Cannery in West Oakland. At fourteen years of age London was not the youngest employee in the factory, six- and seven-year-old children were also employed there. The enormity of such ruthless exploitation left an indelible impression him: “My wages were small, but I worked such long hours that I sometimes made as high as fifty dollars a month [...] I have worked in that hell hole for thirty-six straight hours, at a machine, and I was only a child.” (Labor 2012: 32). The bitterness would be dramatized by London in a story, *The Apostate*, some ten years later.

Early experiences and the bitterness associated with them, seems to have fuelled the autobiographical themes in both MacGill and London’s early works. London grew to abhor the lethal effects of factory labour, whereas MacGill grew to abhor the lethal effects of navvy labour and the dehumanising effects of the Irish agricultural migration work.

The path for London now diverged from that of MacGill in that it headed into adventure, not solely following the struggle to exist. He abandoned his factory work and joined the Oyster Pirates of the San Francisco Bay area working outside the law, learning of the low life on the

waterfront. There followed an initial period of being “on the road” which meant in America using rail freight cars and more dangerously the roofs of rail passenger cars to get from place to place. (Labor 2012: 40-2). London subsequently signed on as an able seaman to a ship bound for the Bering seas and seal hunting. Aboard the ship there is a coming-of-age fight with another crewman “Big Red John” to prove himself (at the age of seventeen) and gain the respect of the other crewmen. (Labor 2012: 48). This would seem to have been a standard practice within writings about male groups at the time, MacGill documents a similar incident in *Children of the Dead End*, this is *his* fight (about the age of seventeen) with Carrot Dan (another redheaded man) to gain respect. (1967: 146-50). The experience of London’s first run across the Pacific from San Francisco to Japan was to be the inspiration for his first publication *Story of a Typhoon off the Coast of Japan*, published in *The San Francisco Morning Post* and further, provided the basis for London’s best-selling classic novel *The Sea Wolf*. Further sketches of his times in Japan were included in his later work *John Barleycorn*.

Labor records in the biography, an epiphany for Jack London as expressed in his essay *How I became a Socialist*, published in *Comrade Vol 2 No 6 1903*, at a point following a short spell in prison for vagrancy:

I found myself looking upon life from a new and totally different angle. I had dropped down from the proletariat into what the sociologists loved to call the ‘submerged tenth’ and I was startled to discover the way in which that submerged tenth was recruited. (1903: 122)

These victims of a ruthless, unregulated economic system had been recruited just as I had been recruited as a “work beast”, and when worn out and broken by the relentless grind they had been tossed into the pit of human destitution. (1903: 122)

London experienced a dreadful vision of his own future, he realised only education would lead him out of, as he defined it, the Social Pit.

I ran back to California and opened the books. I do not remember which one I opened first. It is an unimportant detail anyway. I – was already It, whatever It was, and by aid of the books I discovered that It was a Socialist. Since that day I have opened many books, but no economic argument, no lucid demonstration of the logic and inevitableness of Socialism affects me as profoundly and convincingly as I was affected on the day when I first saw the walls of the Social Pit rise around me and felt myself slipping down, down into the shambles at the bottom. (1903: 123)

A wider view of the need for education, not just of himself, but also of the oppressed rural people of his homeland is attributed to MacGill by Mullholland

Like other socialists he yearned for the day when the people of his own country would be educated enough to discern religion from superstition, tyranny from authority, reward from exploitation. His cri de coeur in a later novel [...] Glenmornan [...] If they were only educated, if they only read books, papers, anything. (1972: 33)

As would MacGill in Greenock, London came to listen to the street orators in Oakland, California. He found a socialist mentor in one of their number, and through the Oakland Free Public Library, found another mentor in a Christian Socialist librarian who introduced him to the works of Marx and Darwin, also cultural critics such as Arnold, Carlyle, and Ruskin. This

element of self-education can be seen to be central and visible in the development of both London and MacGill.

London attempted to continue formal education through University of Berkley, but with his family under financial pressure had to leave to make money. He subsequently made his voyage to the Yukon, survived one season overwintering and returned to California with his observations and tales of his fellows that would become the most well-known of his works, as MacGill would later come down from Kinlochleven with his observations and tales of his fellows that will become part of his best-known work.

Patrick MacGill can be seen as a kindred spirit of Jack London, a parallel traveller through similar experiences. Both had witnessed and experienced working amid the outcasts of their society, “the submerged tenth” as Jack London recorded it, and both had made their outrage visible in their published works. Patrick MacGill followed a similar path to Jack London through his self-education, through his path towards socialism, and how he took his formative experiences and made them accessible to a reading public.

That MacGill’s works were of interest to others with socialist views across the literary world such as Jack London and Sinclair Lewis (Nobel laureate 1930) is caught in this brief view of their correspondence.

Makawao Maui.
30 June 1915

Dear Sinclair Lewis:

In reply to yours of June 3, 1915. I have been home on the ranch only for several rush days in the past ten months. I have been going some, and am going some, hence brief replies to my correspondents.

Several months ago I ordered a copy of *The Rat-Pit*. It must be waiting for me now on the ranch, where I expect to arrive at the latter end of July. Your copy will also be waiting for me at that time. If I feel moved to say something about the book I shall certainly say it, and send it to you ---- if you will catch me with a letter of reminder that will arrive at the ranch on or about July 20, of this year.....

Sincerely yours
Jack London

p.s. Don’t forget the letter enet *The Rat-Pit*, about July 20 - (Labor et al 1988: 406)

We can infer from this short note that there was already an interest in MacGill’s works from the socialist communities as far distant as the United States. That Jack London had ordered a copy of *The Rat-Pit* is testament, but also that Sinclair Lewis thought enough of the work to send a copy to Jack London for comment, although Lewis at this point in his career was working as an editor for George Doran, the US publisher of MacGill’s work so we might assume Lewis was soliciting comment for advertising purposes, as does Labor et al (1988: 406) However, the continuation of the correspondence is not available and we are left with this glimpse of a connection between London and MacGill through a work carrying a shared concern for London’s “Submerged Tenth”.

There is no direct reference visible between MacGill and London that guides MacGill on the path to socialism. MacGill may have read London, but he does not declare it. I would be more of the opinion that MacGill and London represent the members of that lower layer of the working classes that recognised the social deprivation around them and recognised that socialism and education were the ways to better the lives of those trapped within it.

Although today MacGill’s works are not remembered by the reading public, perhaps we should consider this: Jack London’s best remembered works are his adventure novels, not his

works with socialist themes. Best remembered, *The Call of the Wild* was a success at the time of publication but was not the most successful of his works, it was outsold by *The Sea Wolf* with the later *Burning Daylight* as the topmost seller of London's lifetime. What looks to have kept the *Call of the Wild* in the public consciousness is the number of adaptations, at least seven, made for the cinema and television over the years from 1923 up to the present day of 2020, without which, perhaps Jack London's name and work might be as little remembered as MacGill's name and work.

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