

# The Papish Minister: Shan Bullock, John Haughton Steele, and the Literary Portrayal of the Nineteenth-Century Clergyman<sup>1</sup>

PATRICK MAUME

Shan Bullock (Figure 1, 1865–1935) was in some ways an archetypal regional writer. Most of his work revolves around recollections of his childhood and adolescence at Crom Castle (at the south-eastern tip of Upper Lough Erne) and Killynick, his father's farm near the Woodford River which forms the Fermanagh–Cavan border.<sup>2</sup> His stories explore the lives, beliefs and hardships of the local small farmers and their families. Their world is bounded by the market towns of 'Bunn' (Belturbet), 'Glann' (Clones), and 'Lismahee' (Lisnaskea), with occasional holiday excursions by rail to 'Kyle' (Bundoran).<sup>3</sup> Other settings, such as North Leinster, also feature in his work;<sup>4</sup> yet Dublin, Belfast, and even Enniskillen are seen as impossibly remote. Bullock knew that this region lay on a sectarian shatterzone, and this contributed to a major theme in his fiction: tension between the Catholics of the vast, bleak hills of South Fermanagh and the neat, restricted, relatively prosperous Protestant inhabitants of the loughside.

Bullock's perspective is punctuated by the knowledge that he has become an outsider to the world he describes. From 'Bunn' the railway takes some of his characters out of the stories' universe, as they move across South Ulster to Dundalk as the first stage of the emigrants' journey. In part this feeling of alienation has its roots in Bullock's own circumstances: he spent most of his adult life as a civil servant in London, and set a small but significant number of his stories there. His appeal as a regional writer rests on an awareness that the soci-

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the kind assistance of the British Academy, which provided him with a Research Fellowship at the time this essay was originally written. <sup>2</sup> Bullock's formidable father Thomas, who was Lord Erne's steward, resented the landlords he served; but he remained a Tory, disliking 'the mob', Protestant or Catholic, believing the repeal of the Corn Laws had ruined the country, and despising his son for abandoning the manly life of the farmer to become a London clerk. <sup>3</sup> One novel, *The Charmer* (London, 1897), is set entirely in 'Kyle'; it describes the awkwardness of holidaying farmers meeting English tourists. <sup>4</sup> One novel, *The Cubs* (London, 1906), describes Bullock's schooldays at 'Thalma' (Farra), Co. Westmeath.

ety and beliefs which seem all-encompassing to the smallholders of his stories appear less significant in a wider perspective, and are facing significant change. His constant explorations of the region of his childhood reflect an ongoing attempt to understand and represent its way of life; they also embody a suspicion that no adequate representation is possible, that writing is inherently incapable of representing this harsh, unselfconscious world. He voices this suspicion, yet cannot refrain from the attempt.<sup>5</sup> In one particular series of stories revolving around a Church of Ireland minister, Bullock explores this character's status as outsider and intellectual – a role which mirrors Bullock's own vantage-point. The conditions of their production, their value as social history and their relationship to Bullock's own religious attitudes form an interesting investigation of a particular kind of regional writing, which has implications for other literary portrayals of Irish clergymen.

The Bullock Papers at the Queen's University of Belfast, consisting mostly of literary manuscripts deposited by Bullock's daughter in 1965–66, include fifteen stories linked by the figure of a Church of Ireland clergyman.<sup>6</sup> Four were published in journals in 1900–01: 'An Interlude' and 'Three Twenties' in

5 For fuller discussions of Bullock's career see Patrick Maume, 'Ulstermen of Letters: the Unionism of Frank Frankfort Moore, Shan Bullock, and St John Ervine' in Richard English & Graham Walker (eds), *Irish Unionism: New Perspectives on Politics and Culture* (Dublin, 1996) pp 63–80, and 'The Margins of Subsistence: The Novels of Shan Bullock' in *New Hibernia Review*, ii, no. 4 (Winter 1998), pp 133–46. 6 The Bullock Papers, in two boxes in the Special Collections section of QUB Library, are divided as follows: *Section 1: Letters* contains 4 documents, three letters by Bullock on family matters, and one from A.E. (George W. Russell) about Bullock's attempts at poetry. *Section 2: Novels*: features (a) a manuscript/typescript of an unpublished novel, *Little Victorians*; (b) a manuscript/typescript of unpublished novel, *Sheila Passes*, dealing with theme of second sight; and (c) the collection of short stories about the Minister, discussed in this essay. *Section 3: Plays* encompasses several unpublished manuscript plays adapted from stories. *Section 4: Short Stories and Essays* consists of (a) thirteen stories in typescript and manuscript and (b) 22 manuscript and typescript essays. *Section 5: Miscellaneous* includes a family history, newspaper obituaries of Shan Bullock, and family photographs. The QUB catalogue refers to a 'longhand MS plan of an episodic novel with alternative titles, *His Reverence, A True Blue, or The Papish Minister*'. This plan is not to be found amongst the Bullock Papers, and it is therefore not possible to tell how authoritative it was; as no story provides a definite beginning or end to the series, it is possible Bullock may have intended to compose a framing narrative after accumulating enough stories, but for some reason never got round to doing so. The passage of time can be determined in some cases by internal references. The cataloguer states that the lost plan divided the fifteen stories into five groups of three as follows: Group I – 'Orange Lilies', 'A True Blue' and 'Black Sheep'; Group II – 'The Foundling', 'Looking Back' and 'A June Rose'; Group III – 'Orange and Green', 'An Interlude' and 'Things New and Old'; Group IV – 'The Silent Hour', 'A Bad Sixpence' and 'The Fatted Calf'; Group V – 'Three Twenties', 'Aunt Rebecca' and 'Miss Sharp'. The method of referencing devised by the QUB cataloguer – each story beginning with '2c' – will be adopted throughout this essay.

*Outlook*,<sup>7</sup> 'A June Rose' and 'The Foundling' in the *British Monthly*.<sup>8</sup> It is not clear why Bullock failed to develop the sequence into a book, as he did with the interlinked short stories entitled *Irish Pastorals* (1901).<sup>9</sup> The absence of a formal unity means there are several omissions from what readers would expect to find in an ordered collection. It is impossible, for example, to form an initial impression of the Minister, the Revd James Moody, as details of his arrival in the community are absent. He is introduced, in 'Orange Lilies', in the first year of his ministry, clashing with the local Orangemen over the conduct of their church parade.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, there is no definite conclusion to the series: Bullock initially intended to depict Moody's retirement at the end of 'Miss Sharp', a story in which Bullock's *alter ego*, Jan Farmer, appears as a boy;<sup>11</sup> but he changed his mind – possibly because an earlier story, 'Looking Back', is a sequel to his novel *By Thrasna River* (1895), in which Jan appears as a young man.<sup>12</sup>

Moody is a composite figure. One model was the Revd Mr Logan, chaplain to the earl of Erne and rector of Holy Trinity, Derryvore, during Bullock's childhood. Some episodes in the stories are clearly based on reminiscences of Mr Logan, which Bullock describes in his account of his youth entitled *After Sixty Years* (1931). In both the fictional and factual representations Bullock stresses such factors as the Minister's unceasing work for his flock, the tensions between his version of Protestantism and theirs, and a strain of naïveté which sometimes makes the clergyman a figure of fun.<sup>13</sup>

Bullock's other principal model was Logan's successor, John Haughton Steele (1850–1920), who does not appear in the autobiography since he only came to Crom in 1883 after Bullock had left. Steele came from prominent Church of Ireland clerical dynasties. On his mother's side he was a cousin of the Trinity College scientist the Revd Samuel Haughton who, like Bullock, was shaped

7 'An Interlude' in *Outlook* [1901], pp 958–61 (MS in Bullock Papers, 2c[vi]iii); 'Three Twenties' in *Outlook* [26 April 1901], pp 306–11 (MS in Bullock Papers, 2c[vi]iv). This publication was probably the New York journal, rather than the London weekly of the same name run by Henley and Wyndham. 8 'A June Rose', Supplement to *British Monthly*, March 1901 [pages unnumbered] (MS in Bullock Papers, 2c[vi]iii, 2c[vi]ii); 'The Foundling' in *British Monthly*, May 1901, pp 313–4 (MS in Bullock Papers, 2c[vi]). This journal was an offshoot of Sir William Robertson Nicoll's *British Weekly*. For several stories there is more than one manuscript or typescript; but it is possible to tell from internal evidence which is the later version (which constitutes the citation in each note). Since Bullock made manuscript revisions to the copies of published stories in the archive, only catalogue numbers are given in future references to these stories. 9 Bullock's decision may reflect a growing preference for the novel rather than the short story; he published no further short story collections after *Irish Pastorals*. 10 Bullock Papers, 2aIi. 11 Cancelled ending to 'Miss Sharp' in Bullock Papers, 2cViii. 12 'Looking Back' in Bullock Papers, 2cIiii. 13 See *After Sixty Years* (London, 1931), pp 167–70. In an unpublished stage adaptation of 'An Interlude' (Bullock Papers, 3[c]), Bullock substitutes for the Minister a figure resembling his own father – a J.P. who owned a large farm.

by a powerful father whose life was dominated by the old order of church-and-state Toryism which dominated Fermanagh,<sup>14</sup> and which was shaken by social and economic change. His father, Dr William Steele, was a distinguished headmaster of Portora between 1857 and 1891, rector of Devenish (some miles west of Enniskillen on Lower Lough Erne) from 1872 to 1898, and chaplain to several Lords-Lieutenant from 1874.<sup>15</sup> From 1874 to 1883 John Haughton Steele was curate at Devenish; he carried out routine pastoral duties, while his father came over every Sunday to preach.<sup>16</sup> The son loved the old monastic site on Devenish Island, and hoped to be buried there. He was proud to think that the Church of Ireland was heir to the ancient Irish Church, and his mother taught him to be 'a priest as St. Patrick was'.<sup>17</sup> He was a theological student at the time of Disestablishment – an event he resented as an act of sacrilegious despoliation; indeed when the formal secularization of Trinity occurred Steele saw it as an attack on religion.<sup>18</sup>

Steele and his younger brother, William Babington Steele (1865–1953),<sup>19</sup> were both enthusiastic amateur historians: John compiled the pedigree of the Crichton family (the earls of Erne) with a selection of extracts from original documents, while William published a history of the parish.<sup>20</sup> Bullock befriended John on one of his annual visits to Fermanagh, and spent many hours in his company; he was one of the few local people who shared Bullock's intellectual and literary interests. They corresponded regularly, and Steele acted as Bullock's literary adviser, reading all that the writer published. Bullock admired the breadth of Steele's mind, the dignity of his services and the simplicity of his personality; he thought that Steele's gifts were wasted in a country parish.<sup>21</sup>

The stories, however, are not simple transcripts. The autobiography stresses, for example, Mr Logan's love of ritual,<sup>22</sup> while Steele (unlike his fiercely Evangelical father)<sup>23</sup> developed High Church tendencies at Trinity College Divinity School, but repressed them because of the attitudes of his congregation.<sup>24</sup> Mr Moody also falls under suspicion of crypto-Catholicism – he is nicknamed 'the Papish Minister'<sup>25</sup> – but Anglican practices are only apparent in two

<sup>14</sup> Fermanagh was, at this time, more Anglican than any other county in Ireland, and the seat of several powerful landed families – including the Ernes and Enniskillens – who were leaders in the Orange Order and organized Ulster Tory resistance to Parnell and the Land League. <sup>15</sup> For the Steele family background see William B. Steele, *The Parish of Devenish, County Fermanagh: Materials for its History* (Enniskillen, 1937), pp 41–2, 44; see also Joseph Darlington, *The Dilemma of John Haughton Steele* (Dublin, [1932]) pp xiii–xvi. <sup>16</sup> E.G. Elliott, *The Parish of Devenish and Boho* (Enniskillen, 1990), p. 119. <sup>17</sup> John Sullivan, introduction to Darlington, p. ix. <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 27–8. <sup>19</sup> William Babington Steele was curate (1892–98) and then rector (1898–1945) of Devenish; see Elliott, pp 122–4, 129–32, 135–7. <sup>20</sup> John Haughton Steele, *Genealogy of the Earls of Erne* (Edinburgh, 1910); William B. Steele, *The Parish of Devenish*. <sup>21</sup> See Bullock's letter to Steele in Darlington, pp 48–51. <sup>22</sup> *After Sixty Years*, pp 62, 169. <sup>23</sup> Elliott, p. 120. <sup>24</sup> Darlington, pp 28–30, 39, 46. <sup>25</sup> In 'A True Blue' a dying Orangeman taunts Moody: 'I suppose you've brought Cross and holy water? ...

or three stories.<sup>26</sup> Indeed Moody is, at times, described in terms recalling a Non-conformist minister rather than an Anglican. For instance, in 'Aunt Rebecca' Moody's predecessors are depicted as poor itinerant men who lived off what the people gave them;<sup>27</sup> this description makes these figures resemble Methodist preachers rather than Anglican rectors.<sup>28</sup> This may reflect the Nonconformist sensibilities of the *British Monthly*, the journal in which he was first introduced to readers; but it may also be associated with J.H. Steele's pastoral style; in Devenish, influenced by his father, he sought to reach out to non-churchgoers by adopting certain Methodist practices, such as holding weekday services and 'cottage lectures' in private houses.<sup>29</sup> He co-operated with the local Primitive Methodists, and thought they seemed more spiritual than his own flock or the Catholics.<sup>30</sup>

The image of the Minister as outsider draws partly on historical circumstances.<sup>31</sup> Indeed one of the major themes of the collection is the contrast between the outward deference shown to Moody as minister, and the difficulty involved in making any lasting impact on his parishioners' lifestyles. His regular pastoral visits serve as a structuring motif in the stories, and Bullock concentrates on the hostile reception he gets from certain loughside inhabitants. As Moody walks through the hill district in 'A Black Sheep', the Catholic inhabitants shun him because he is a Protestant minister.<sup>32</sup> In 'Orange and Green' he is assaulted by Catholics when he complains that their noisy Sunday dances are disrupting his church services.<sup>33</sup>

Moody's visits to his own parishioners prove almost equally unwelcome. Many other writers – especially those who were clerics themselves – represented the clergyman doing his rounds positively, as a fatherly reformer spurring his slovenly flock to better ways of living. For example, the Catholic Canon Joseph Guinan portrays an energetic new priest ordering parishioners to tidy their houses and banish their pigs to outhouses, treating their protests as childish, and

You'd like to confess me?' (Bullock Papers, 2cIii). 26 See, for example, the flowers on the altar in 'A True Blue' (Bullock Papers, 2cIii), organ music in 'Miss Sharp' (Bullock Papers, 2cViii) and Lenten fasting in 'The Silent Hour' (Bullock Papers, 2cIvi). 27 Bullock Papers, 2cVii. 28 In the autobiography Mr Logan is contrasted with memories of the older type of jocular, foxhunting, hard-drinking parson (*After Sixty Years*, p.169); no such comparison is made in the stories. 29 Elliott, p. 121; one such visit is the basis of the story 'Aunt Rebecca' (Bullock Papers, 2cVii). 30 Darlington, p. 46. 31 It is interesting to note, however, that the Ernes never appears in the stories, nor is there any suggestion that the Minister's relationship with them influences his parishioners' attitude towards him; Logan is shown interacting with the Ernes in the autobiography, and Steele was a social visitor and personal friend of the fourth Earl. See Darlington, p. 45. 32 'A Black Sheep' in Bullock Papers, 2cIiii. 33 'Orange and Green' in Bullock Papers, 2cIIIi; the Protestants immediately retaliate, despite Moody's desperate attempts at peacemaking. As one character exclaims, 'serve him right ... for meddlin' with such vermin: but, man, think o' the insult to us all, an' the insult to the Cause'.

reporting those who do not comply to the Sanitary Inspector, without Guinan showing any recognition that parishioners might legitimately find this rude and overbearing.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, Bullock focuses on disruption of poor and busy lives by the intrusion of a social superior and the tensions between the middle-class 'respectability' associated with the Victorian Church and the demands of a small farmer's life – an important cause of declining church attendance. An incident in 'The Black Sheep' illustrates this point:

Here was the churn in butter, there stood the Minister on the step; here was the pot mad boiling, there sat the Minister in the parlour. 'Mammy, mammy, here's the Minister', cried the children as they ran: 'Aw, dang the Minister', said Mammy and scowling ran to wash her face. Daddy, Mother says you're to come to the Minister' went the message to the fields: Tell her to go herself; I'm busy', was the answer back out of the sunshine. Impossible for the Minister not to see and hear, deaf and blind though he tried to be. He knew why the door was so long in opening and why it closed so quick; read truth into the empty words that greeted him, saw truth beneath the hollow smiles. He was not wanted.<sup>35</sup>

Moody tries to persuade the local blacksmith – hard-working, honest, friendly – that he should go occasionally to church. The blacksmith explains that he works so hard during the week that he needs to sleep on Sunday. The Minister then persuades the blacksmith to think of his soul; the man relents, but after a few weeks of impassioned sermons concludes, 'Sure I find it easier to sleep in bed than in yon coffin of a pew'.<sup>36</sup>

Elsewhere in the collection, Moody's misunderstanding of his parishioners is exposed even more cruelly. His attempts to persuade his congregation to observe Lent are initially greeted with scorn and suspicion; later, after they have come to respect him personally, they fallaciously promise to abstain from various pleasures. In 'The Silent Hour' one woman, expecting a neighbour for tea and gossip, gets rid of the visiting Minister by reminding him that she promised to set aside time for daily silent contemplation.<sup>37</sup> In 'A Bad Sixpence' Moody's servant John, though hardworking and outspokenly honest, drinks more than is good for him and refuses to apologize. The Minister discusses the matter with Garth the schoolmaster, who, wishing to play a malicious practical joke on Moody, suggests a temperance campaign in which those unwilling to adopt total abstinence will pledge not to drink 'more than they can conveniently carry'. The Minister's innocence blinds him to the ambiguity of the pledge, and he becomes the laughing-stock of the countryside. He remains unaware of this until John exposes Garth's hypocrisy by bringing him back drunk from the fair.<sup>38</sup>

34 Joseph Guinan, *The Island Parish* (Dublin, 1908), pp 75–93. 35 'A Black Sheep' in Bullock Papers, 2cIiii. 36 *Ibid.* 37 'The Silent Hour' in Bullock Papers, 2cIVi. 38 'A Bad Sixpence'

Moody is not, however, merely a figure of fun; nor is his emotional distance from his parishioners always to his disadvantage. Some features of their lives which disturb him are due to constraints imposed by their harsh circumstances; but to explain is not always to excuse. In 'An Interlude', when a farmer, asking the Minister's advice about marriage, reacts to his surprise at a blunt reference to dowries by pointing out that a small farmer cannot afford notions of romantic love, the Minister (and the reader) seem naïve; but when the farmer rejects the Minister's advice to marry a hard-working girl with a good temperament, solely because her rival has a better dowry – 'there's not', he says, 'the difference of a pony an' trap an' twenty pounds between any two women in the world' – the Minister may be naïve but his interlocutor is something much worse.<sup>39</sup>

In several stories the Minister pits himself against bigotry – sometimes at considerable physical risk. His temperance campaign is partly directed at the 'rough' society of the Orange lodges, which are described as 'little better than shebeens'.<sup>40</sup> In 'A True Blue' Moody attends the deathbed of an Orangeman who has consistently showered him with abuse, and though he is greeted with taunts his patience and reverence eventually convince the dying man to accept consolation.<sup>41</sup> 'Orange Lilies' depicts Moody at an Orange church parade, tearing down the Lodge's arch and proclamation, while an increasingly agitated crowd looks on.<sup>42</sup> The Minister faces down the crowd by invoking his religious authority and comparing their behaviour to pasting Orange pictures – perfectly acceptable in the right context – on to the printed text of a Bible.

This triumph is, however, rendered unsatisfactory by Bullock's failure to make it clear whether the Orangemen were deliberately provocative or simply acting in the manner to which they were accustomed under his predecessor; nor does he explain why the Minister did not consult the Lodge authorities beforehand about the conduct of the service. Nevertheless, the story's ending beautifully encapsulates one of the collection's major themes. As a gesture of peace the Minister picks up the lilies from the fallen arch; describing them as 'God's beautiful flowers', he takes them from the church and places them around the communion table. Bullock explains:

That was characteristic of the Minister; but it is doubtful whether he acted wisely. Certainly he did not conciliate the Loughsiders. Outside

in Bullock Papers, 2cIVii. <sup>39</sup> 'An Interlude' in Bullock Papers, 2c[VI]iii. <sup>40</sup> 'A Bad Sixpence' in Bullock Papers, 2cIVii. In Devenish Dr Steele enlisted the local Orange leadership in opposing dancing, promoting temperance, and rendering Orange social activities more respectable by organising Orange soirées; see Elliott, p. 121. <sup>41</sup> 'A True Blue' in Bullock Papers, 2cIii. <sup>42</sup> 'Orange Lilies' in Bullock Papers, 2aIi. Bullock's novel *The Cubs* describes a similar incident where the clergyman involved is assaulted and dies from his injuries (pp 303-5). It would be interesting to know if either fictional incident derives from a real event.

the porch their lilies were emblems, and they blamed him for debasing them; inside the porch their lilies were flowers, and they blamed him for exalting them.<sup>43</sup>

The Minister's defiance of public opinion is not confined to politics. In 'The Foundling' an abandoned baby is found near the road one night. It transpires that the mother, Jenny Falls, is a young woman whose sweetheart had insisted on going to America, in the hope of earning enough to buy a farm when he returned to marry her. In order to bind him to her, she went through a form of marriage:

'We went together one night across the mountain an' we came to Larry the priest – an' he married us' ...

'Who is this Larry?' asked the Minister.

'Ah, just a man that lives in the mountain, sir – away in the wild hungry mountain, where they do strange things – a kind of hermit that lives by himself in the heather, an' tells fortunes, an' cures dog bites, an' marries people that comes to him ... Ah, it was foolish, sir. But sure I was afraid to let Tom go an' I was mortal fond of him.'

'How did he marry you, Jenny?' asked the Minister.

'Ah, he spoke some strange words over us, an' joined our hands an' put a ring upon me, an' made us jump over crossed sticks – just married us. You'll not be thinkin' much of that, sir', said Jenny with a sigh. 'Naw, how can ye? Who could? But all the same I'm married to Tom, in spite of the world ...'<sup>44</sup>

Jenny goes on to explain how, when she discovered her pregnancy, 'I knew what father'd do'; therefore she hires herself out to a family some distance away. They treat her well until her child is born; when the neighbours' gossip can be endured no longer Jenny is turned out. She decides to return to her father 'an' trust to chance'; but on her way back she leaves the child in what she thinks is a safe place, and goes to beg for food. She is knocked unconscious by a fall, and arrives back to find the child has been discovered and taken away by two locals.<sup>45</sup>

This marriage by folk-ritual is an extraordinary detail, with implications for the character of Bullock's regional world-view. Significantly, the event is set in the remotest mountains – a Catholic locale – and the unordained celebrant is described as a 'priest' though the couple are Protestants.<sup>46</sup> The situation is more reminiscent of a Scotch marriage or an eighteenth-century 'couple-beggar'<sup>47</sup>

43 Ibid. 44 'The Foundling' in Bullock Papers, 2c[VI]. 45 Ibid. 46 Ibid. 47 'Couple-beggars' or 'Tack 'ems' were suspended clergymen or pseudo-clergymen who made a living by conducting informal or irregular marriage ceremonies without formal authority from church or state. They existed into the early nineteenth century but disappeared with the tightening



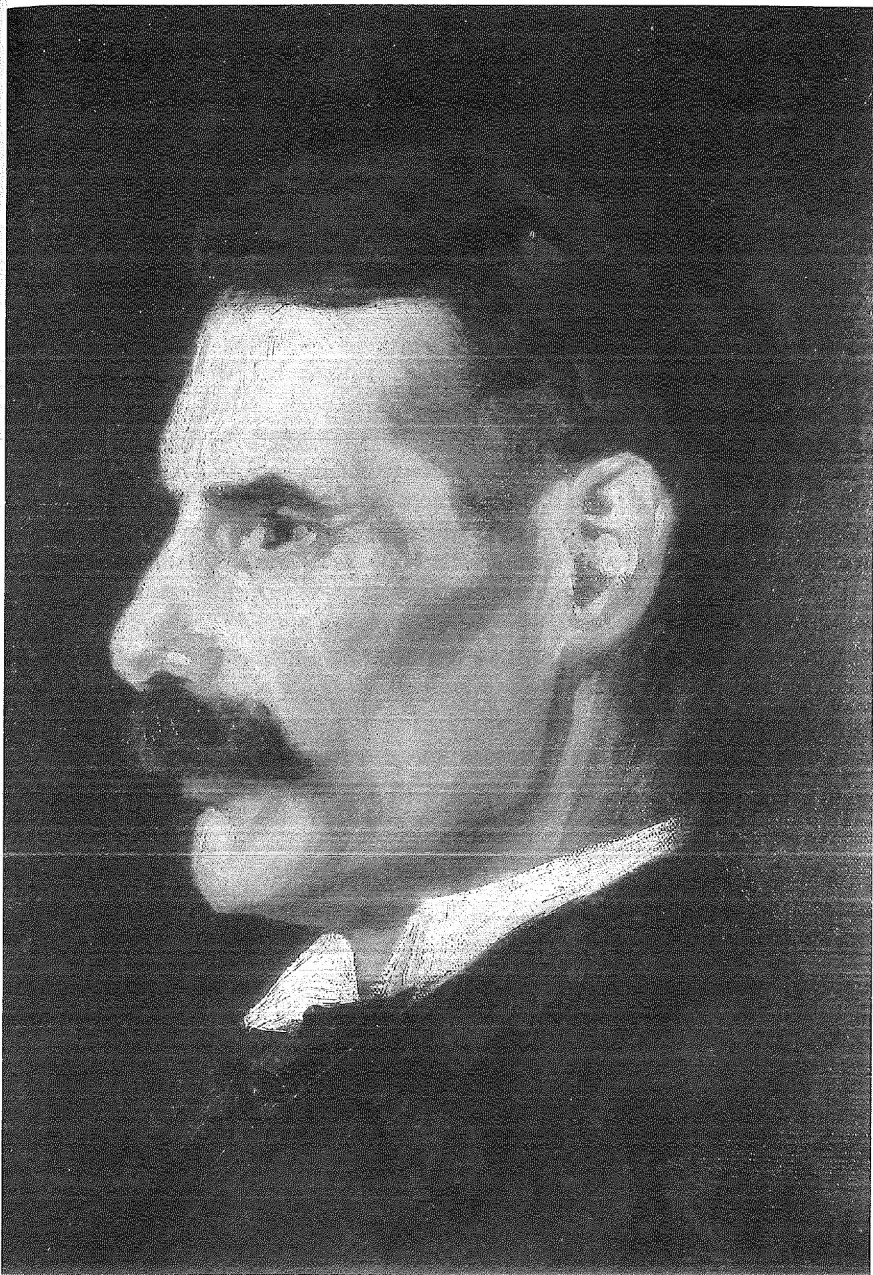
than of the expectations of Churches and State in mid-Victorian Ireland; Bullock treats it as unusual, but not unique. Jenny's behaviour is unparalleled in Bullock's works. The nearest equivalent is Rose Daly in *By Thrasna River* who, afraid that her young man is falling into bad company, persuades him to elope to Liverpool and begin a new life there; but in that case Bullock intimates that while the elopement damaged her reputation, there was no sexual union before marriage.<sup>48</sup>

After hinting at the terrible dangers facing a woman in Jenny's position, Bullock backs away and produces a conventionally happy resolution. Her father does not turn her away; the Minister shields her with his moral authority, though he is widely criticized – as Bullock writes, 'long ago the Minister had learnt to endure blame' – and her lover Tom returns to claim her.<sup>49</sup> As if to emphasize the point about fidelity, Bullock produced another story, 'A June Rose', about a woman with the Wordsworthian name of Lucy Gray, who chastely awaits the return of an emigrant lover, who in the end proves unfaithful to her. Indeed so unswerving is her fidelity that it appears to reflect the Victorian precept – exemplified in certain works by Trollope – that while a man may love again a woman is bound to her first choice.<sup>50</sup> The excessive sentimentality of 'A June Rose' apparently made Bullock uneasy: the original version is narrated in the third person; but Bullock rewrote it as a story related by Moody, who is made responsible for its sentimental tone.<sup>51</sup>

Bullock was acutely aware of the pressures small-farmer society placed on women. 'Three Twenties', for example, depicts the courting of Maria, the Minister's ageing female servant, by a local miser intent on acquiring her small savings; the story ends with a horrifying description of her, half-starved and in rags, assuring the visiting Minister that she wants for nothing and her husband is the best of men.<sup>52</sup> In 'Looking Back', an exhausted and suicidal married woman – who appeared in a younger incarnation in *By Thrasna River* as a handsome and lively flirt – pours out her frustration to Moody:

You're all the same – all selfish an' hard an' cruel. Women? Oh, God help poor women in this miserable world! A month an' it's all over with them, only drudges an' slaves, fit for nothin' but child bearin' an' car-

of marriage laws. An example appears in Séamas Ó Maitiú, *The Humours of Donnybrook: Dublin's Famous Fair and its Suppression* (Dublin, 1995), pp 26-7. <sup>48</sup> Shan Bullock, *By Thrasna River* (London, 1895), pp 334-50, 397-400. <sup>49</sup> 'The Foundling' in Bullock Papers, 2c[VI]. <sup>50</sup> This fidelity motif is evoked most famously by Lily Dale in Trollope's *Framley Parsonage* (1860-61) and in *The Small House at Allington* (1862-64). <sup>51</sup> 'A June Rose' in Bullock Papers, 2c[VI]ii. It is not clear which story represents Bullock's second thoughts: the Queen's University archivist placed them in this sequence, but the order of publication in the *British Monthly* suggests 'The Foundling' may react against the sentimentalism of 'A June Rose', rather than vice versa. <sup>52</sup> 'Three Twenties' in Bullock Papers, 2c[VI]iv.



1 Dermot O'Brien, *Shan Bullock* (1912). By kind permission of the School of English, Queen's University of Belfast.

ryin' meat to pigs, an' servin' meals to the men that owns them. Fit? No, not even for that. For let ye drudge your life out an' you've only to keep them hungry five minutes too long an' you're not fit to wipe their boots.<sup>53</sup>

The story ends with her accepting her fate and returning home. Her husband is not particularly bad by local standards, her children need her, and she has no alternative; but it is significant that Bullock should voice such thoughts.

Part of the Minister's rapport with women derives from the fact that he is presented as less than fully masculine. He appears to be sexually inactive: his marriage is childless, and his wife suffers from an illness which leaves her in constant pain.<sup>54</sup> In one story Moody performs various household tasks usually reserved for women, when he finds that one character, Rose Trotter, has gone out after a domestic quarrel, leaving her children unattended and the house in disarray.<sup>55</sup> This is not Moody's usual behaviour: in 'Three Twenties' and 'A Bad Sixpence' he employs two maids and a gardener;<sup>56</sup> yet Bullock chooses to emphasize the Minister's 'feminine' side in a story which revolves round his attempt to console a desperate woman. Moody is presented as a man of thought rather than action: he is repeatedly seen meditating in his garden when some petty dispute invades his peace,<sup>57</sup> or sitting alone in his little boat on the lough, brooding over his failure to assuage the sectarian acrimony in the parish.<sup>58</sup>

The idea of a clergyman (especially one of High Church or Catholic tendencies) as somewhat more feminine than ordinary men is not unusual; but in this Moody resembled his chronicler. Shan Bullock was happily married; but his writings are haunted by the fear that because he was a clerk and worked with his pen, he lacked the vigour of the Loughside farmers. Brought up with an Evangelical distrust of fiction, Bullock regularly portrays writers as futile and irresponsible fantasists – for example, Harry Tomson in *By Thrasna River*, Frank Barry in *The Barrys* (1899)<sup>59</sup> – and questions whether literature has anything to offer the Loughsiders, just as Mr Moody is haunted by the dilemma of whether the beauty of holiness has any relevance to his parishioners' hard lives. Moody's brand of High Anglicanism was diametrically opposed to what Evangelicals would have considered 'muscular Christianity': he had a wonderfully expres-

53 'Looking Back' in Bullock Papers, 2cIlii. 54 'A True Blue' in Bullock Papers, 2cli. The Revd Mr Logan was married, while John Haughton Steele was a bachelor who lived with one manservant on a cottage overlooking Lough Erne, doing his own cooking, housework and carpentry. 55 'Looking Back' in Bullock Papers, 2cIlii. A variation on this image appears in 'The Fatted Calf', where a shrewish wife accuses Moody of male bias, because he favours her henpecked husband. 56 'Three Twenties' in Bullock Papers, 2c[vi]iv; 'A Bad Sixpence' in Bullock Papers, 2cIVii. 57 See 'An Interlude' in Bullock Papers, 2c[vi]iii; 'The Fatted Calf' in Bullock Papers, 2cIViii. 58 See 'Orange Lilies' in Bullock Papers, 2ali, and 'Orange and Green' in Bullock Papers, 2cIlii. 59 See Maume, 'The Margins of Subsistence', pp 138-40.

sive musical style when playing the organ,<sup>60</sup> and had a general predilection towards the outward, aesthetic, symbols of faith. It is interesting that the Minister also expressed doubt on orthodox Church teaching: while he is troubled by the thought that the blacksmith, though a good man, will go to Hell if he does not go to Church, he does not seriously question this precept. Bullock's looking back on the blacksmith as a symbol of lost innocence seems to indicate that such guiltlessness has its own troubles and uncertainties. For Bullock, then, meditative, self-questioning art appears to have become a virtual substitute for religion.<sup>61</sup>

Other contemporary ideas and trends also cause problems for the inhabitants of Bullock's fictional landscape. 'Things Old and New' depicts a newly-ordained Methodist minister, Daniel Hanley, returned home for his first service, foolishly antagonising his audience by zealously proclaiming the theologically liberal version of Christianity he has acquired at college, based on the 'new heaven and earth' revealed by Kant, Hegel, Darwin and others. The Loughsiders, previously unaware of the very existence of these authors, are scandalized, and call Hanley a heretic. Bullock is clear that the young man was too proud of himself, too confident that his hearers would abandon the beliefs of a lifetime on his mere word and that his scholarship would command unquestioning submission to previously unheard-of ideas. Bullock rewrote the second draft of the story, putting into the mouth of the chief accuser, Henry Marvin, a moving account of what the old faith, the old Bible, the old heaven, mean to him and his friends who have gone before him;<sup>62</sup> nonetheless, the young man's alienation from his old neighbours by exposure to new ideas mirrors Bullock's own development, and his story is clearly told by a narrator who no longer inhabits the old world.<sup>63</sup> In 'Miss Sharp', the last story in the collection, Bullock himself appears as a boy observing the Minister interviewing an incompetent applicant for the post of organist; the boy judges her with the unselfconscious harshness of boyhood and a farming society based on scarcity, with no room for 'foosterers';<sup>64</sup> although his perception of her incompetence is clearly correct, the adult narrator's greater sensitivity to the Minister's perception of her plight marks Bullock's movement away from the attitudes of rural Fermanagh.

John Haughton Steele was also moving away from the Fermanagh of his youth in a way Bullock did not suspect when writing these stories. During his

60 See 'Miss Sharp' in Bullock Papers, 2cViii. 61 For the *fin-de-siècle* Aesthete-Philistine controversy as a secularized version of earlier Evangelical attacks on Anglo-Catholic Ritualism, see 'Some Aspects of Aestheticism' in Ian Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and His Contemporaries* (Brighton, 1987), pp 3-42. 62 In the first draft of this story, Henry Marvin was harsh and unsympathetic, in accordance with his portrayal elsewhere in Bullock's fiction; in *By Thrasna River* (pp 297-304) he marries off his daughter Rose to Wee James Trotter, dismissing talk of love as town-bred folly. 63 'Things Old and New' in Bullock Papers, 2cIIIiii. 64 'Miss Sharp' in Bullock Papers, 2cViii.

researches into the pedigree of the earls of Erne, Steele was struck by the manner in which the Planters were forbidden to have Gaelic tenants unless these conformed to Protestantism, and the fact that the change from Catholic to Protestant rites in the historic buildings coincided with the dispossession of Gaelic landowners by Planters. He began to wonder whether the Church of Rome – as opposed to the Church of Ireland – might be the Church of St Patrick. Over succeeding years this suspicion increased; he developed an idealized image of the Gaelic noblemen who fled from Lough Swilly in 1607 as martyrs abandoning all their worldly prospects in order to stay faithful to their religion. After a visit to Rome in 1909, during which he went into a church to pray for guidance and discovered it was the church of St Peter in Montorio where the Earls are buried, he decided he must follow in their footsteps – though this meant abandoning his livelihood and paining many of his dearest friends.<sup>65</sup> After returning to Fermanagh he resigned his position, sold his possessions, and told his flock that he must leave them. They assumed that he was going to take up a Church of Ireland post elsewhere. Bullock happened to be in Fermanagh on a visit:

It was my good fortune – a fortune that I must consider providential – to hear [Steele's] farewell sermon in Derryvore ... He was deeply moved. Others, too were moved to the heart. Not before, and only twice since in the presence of death have I felt such stress of emotion. And when at last I went up to take the communion from him, and he bent over and took my hand, saying what was to be good-bye for evermore, any fortitude I had melted away. I can never forget that parting, nor the touch of my friend's hand gone now to the dust that gave him.<sup>66</sup>

It may be significant that a cancelled entry for one story, describing Mr Moody's farewell to his congregation at a final service, is reminiscent of this account; perhaps Bullock was still working on the stories at this time, and added the passage after Steele's departure. The excision might have been occasioned by Steele's conversion. If Bullock still thought of publishing these stories in book form, he probably abandoned the idea at this stage; events had given the title 'The Papish Minister' an unintended significance.

Tradition among local Catholics claims that Steele left Derryvore for Dublin at night, fearing Orangemen would attack him if they learned his intentions.<sup>67</sup> He converted to Catholicism in Birmingham, then journeyed to Rome to study for the priesthood.<sup>68</sup> News of the conversion caused a sensation in Fermanagh,

<sup>65</sup> Darlington, pp 52-4, 57, 66-73. <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49. The two deaths referred to are probably those of Bullock's mother and wife. <sup>67</sup> Information from Mr and Mrs Doherty of Belturbet. <sup>68</sup> Darlington (p. 78) confirms that Steele chose to be formally received as a Catholic in Birmingham rather than Dublin because he thought efforts would be made to restrain him; there were even rumours, spread by his friends, of mental illness.

and he received many invitations to return there to celebrate Mass. He turned these down – not wishing to cause sorrow to former friends and co-religionists, though a delegation of Catholics from Crom travelled to Dublin to attend a Mass he said there soon after his return from Rome.<sup>69</sup> Shortly thereafter he suffered a stroke and spent the rest of his life as an invalid, living first at a monastery in Birmingham and then at St Patrick's College in Cavan town, where he died in 1920. He never revisited Lough Erne, though he wrote that the very thought of it was a refreshment to him and that in idle moments he instinctively returned to it in memory.<sup>70</sup> As an Anglican he had hoped to be buried at Devenish, where his parents and brother are buried; instead his grave is in the grounds of the Catholic cathedral in Cavan.<sup>71</sup>

Bullock, living in retirement in Surrey, supplied some recollections of their friendship. He praised the heroism of Steele's sacrifice, while not necessarily agreeing with it; he expressed the hope that they might meet in an after-life:

Though I have not seen him or heard from [in many years], he was one of my oldest and dearest friends. The separation in recent years was not of my seeking. I recognised that he had obeyed a call, and our friendship was true beyond any question of opinion. I owed very much to him: the memory of him has remained and will remain always a sacred thing ... I cannot hope to have such another friend in this world; but, please God, I may meet him again. And however it happens, I have the memory of him with me always, and that last hand-grip he gave me at the altar-rail.<sup>72</sup>

Steele's answer to the changing world of *fin-de-siècle* Ireland was not Bullock's, and Mr Moody should be viewed primarily in relation to Bullock's own beliefs and to the Irish literary portrayal of clergymen. Bullock does not present the clergyman as an agent of civilization putting barbarism to flight; indeed he questions the certainties of tract-writers on such matters as pastoral visits and temperance crusades, without denying the values which lie behind them. He does not look back nostalgically to a pious rural community, as did Ulster 'kailyard' writers of the Quota Press<sup>73</sup> and their Catholic counterparts.<sup>74</sup> Unlike the great regional novelist Thomas Hardy, Bullock does not resent the clergy as obscurantist threats to his freedom.<sup>75</sup> For Bullock to take that view in

69 Ibid., p. 45. 70 Ibid., p. 17. 71 Darlington's statement that he was buried at Devenish is mistaken; I thank Bridie Fay Doherty of Breifne Historical Society for showing me the grave. 72 Darlington, pp 48, 51. 73 See, for example, Lydia M. Foster *The Bush that Burned* (Dublin, 1931), and *Elders' Daughters* (Belfast, 1942). 74 See Catherine Candy, *Priestly Fictions* (Dublin, 1996). 75 See, for example, Hardy's portrayal of reforming nineteenth-century clergymen – especially Tractarians – as a caste of cold and snobbish hypocrites replacing an unselfconscious folk-religion (tolerated by easygoing predecessors of the Parson Thirdly type) with a sterile correctness intolerant of human affections and frailties. See, for example, the

the Fermanagh context would have meant siding with the Orangemen. Instead, he adopts a largely secularized Arnoldian High Anglicanism. Looking back from the vantage point of London, he thought that the old order of Church and State in Ireland – based on Anglican confessionalism – had died with Disestablishment and the Land Acts. At the same time he believed Catholic nationalism to be incapable of providing a workable alternative. Bullock supported a ‘salvage operation’, to recover the worthier features of the old order and incorporate them into a new world-view capable of dispelling post-Darwinian nihilism and resolving sectarian divisions. He used Wordsworth and Hardy as literary models to explore his memories of rural life, and to combine nostalgia with awareness of the countryside’s harshness. The very self-consciousness which drives him to record these experiences also separates him from them, thus making him a pioneer of the tradition of regionalist exploration of rural life which was to dominate Ulster literature well into the twentieth century.<sup>76</sup> Mr Moody prefigures the self-consciously liberal perspective of much later ‘Troubles’ fiction, as well as those present-day explorers of cultural traditions who may be seen as unconscious, secularized heirs of the civilizing nineteenth-century clergyman.

Among Bullock’s contemporaries his clearest equivalent is Daniel Corkery, another introspective writer who saw himself as both sympathetic towards – and fatally estranged from – life around him. Like Bullock, Corkery employed the image of a lonely priest trying to console a dying smallholder who was constricted by a lifetime’s toil; this image may be seen as the equivalent of the isolated Irish provincial intellectual trying to awaken his hard-burdened neighbours to fuller life.<sup>77</sup> Their insights and blindnesses were very different; yet they shared a willingness to examine the provincial life around them and imagine its transfiguration. Bullock’s ‘Papish Minister’ stories are good minor literature at best; but they display that ceaseless willingness to interrogate his own nostalgia. The stories struggle – not always successfully – to avoid sentimentality in representing a society whose constraints and beliefs were so different from those he encountered in London; the tales mark him out from the ‘kailyard’ as one of Ireland’s most interesting and neglected regional writers.

vicar in *Under the Greenwood Tree* who replaces the church musicians with an organ; the clergyman in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* who replaces the genuine medieval church with a ‘correct’ Gothic design; and the haughty young ‘priest’ in the story ‘A Son’s Veto’ (in *Life’s Little Ironies*) who despises his uneducated mother and causes her death by snobbishly preventing her proposed remarriage. <sup>76</sup> See John Wilson Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (Dublin, 1974). <sup>77</sup> Daniel Corkery, ‘The Priest’ in *The Stormy Hills* (Dublin, 1929), pp 244-60. Note also the priest’s use of his garden as a refuge.