

# Music hall Unionism: Robert Martin and the politics of the stage-Irishman

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Robert Martin (1846–1905) is remembered now only because of his sister Violet (1862–1915), the ‘Martin Ross’ of the authorial partnership ‘Somerville and Ross’. Yet in his time he was a prominent Unionist political activist and, as ‘Ballyhooly’, a comic journalist and stage performer. In 1911 the journalist John McGrath recalled how, around 1890, the Dublin Corinthian Club banqueted Martin as ‘Ireland’s foremost man of letters’. McGrath suggested W.B. Yeats deserved this title, but the Corinthians knew nothing of him.<sup>1</sup> Edith Somerville reprinted verses by a tenant suggesting Robert had received a magic flute from the fairies (‘He got it by great intrest as a favour from the gentry/ It was sint to him by finvarra the rular of Nockma’).<sup>2</sup> One narrator in the ‘Cyclops’ episode of *Ulysses* sneers at ‘a fellow with a Ballyhooly blue ribbon badge spiffing out of him in Irish’.<sup>3</sup> This paper sketches Martin’s life and relates his worldview to the hedonistic Tory image of landlord-tenant relations popularised by Charles Lever and exploited by Unionist and landlord spokesmen, to the anti-domestic fantasies of male audiences, and to the image of Queen Victoria as imperial matriarch.

Robert Martin was born on 16 June 1846, eldest son of James Martin and his second wife Anna Selina Fox. The Martin estate at Ross in Connemara was mortgaged because of famine relief expenditure and never fully recovered. James Martin had five daughters by his first marriage – one virtually sold to a wealthy husband to help family finances – five by his second, and two younger sons, and kept afloat by leader-writing for a London Conservative paper, and becoming a Poor Law auditor (a classic case of nineteenth-century official patronage as outdoor relief for the gentry). Violet Martin’s memoir of her brother suggests his attachment to the estate reflected adolescent memories of horse-racing on the strand or roaming the mountains with dog and gun, while his attitude to the tenantry recalled, with nostalgia or bitterness, deference to ‘the young master’.

1 John McGrath, ‘W.B. Yeats and Ireland’, *Westminster Review*, July 1911, pp. 1–11. For McGrath and his relationship with Yeats see Warwick Gould, John Kelly and Deirdre Toomey (eds), *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Volume 2: 1896–1900* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 10, 14, 21, 35, 118. 2 Edith OE Somerville and Martin Ross, *Irish Memories* (London, 1918) pp. 165–8. 3 James Joyce, *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (London, 1986) p. 255. Martin’s song ‘Ballyhooly’ celebrates the ‘Ballyhooly Blue Ribbon [temperance] Band’ whose ‘temperance drink’ is whiskey punch, ‘Ballyhooly’ [Robert Martin], *Bits of Blarney* (London, 1899).

Robert Martin attended Trinity College, Dublin, then entered the London Bohemian journalism which absorbed many impecunious Irish gentry and their younger sons. Martin wrote for the Tory evening paper the *Globe* and the *Sporting Times*. His life centred on newspaper offices and theatrical first nights; despite nostalgia for Ross he was always restless there. When James Martin died in 1872 (allegedly from trauma when 'ungrateful' tenants voted for the Home Ruler Colonel Nolan in a by-election), Robert leased out the house, only occasionally visiting to shoot woodcock.

In 1877 he returned to Dublin, becoming active in journalism and amateur theatricals. His fine voice, musical ability and physical presence (he stood over six feet tall) captivated audiences. He composed and performed comic songs (accompanying himself on the piano), activities which became the mainstay of his subsequent career. He also composed humorous pantomimes, including travesties of Aladdin and Faust; the elderly Faust, as played by Robert, resembled Gladstone. Martin also raised funds for charitable organisations which tried to relieve distress in the west; these organisations attracted nationalist denunciation as aristocratic patronage aimed at perpetuating deference. For the rest of his life he was 'Bob' to friends, 'Master Robert' to tenants and 'Ballyhooly' to audiences, readers and casual acquaintances.

The Land War and agricultural depression extinguished Martin's rental income; his agent embezzled rents, despoiled the property, and eventually absconded to Canada. His exposure had been delayed because Martin accepted the agent's claim that the tenants could not pay.<sup>4</sup> Martin worked for pro-landlord groups as an emergencyman, organising labour and supplies for boycotted individuals and caretakers for evicted farms, and narrowly escaped assassination. Violet believed the unpopularity and isolation associated with these events matured him.<sup>5</sup>

In 1886 he married Constance Roche, widow of a Cork landowner. Connie was somewhat older and wealthier than him; his family thought she had Jewish blood (her maiden name was Schmidt). They had one daughter, Barbara. The marriage was troubled by Robert's flirtations and Connie's drinking; although she was on friendly terms with Violet, Robert's mother disliked her, and she remained an outsider in the wider Martin family circle.<sup>6</sup>

Robert's household moved to London and resided in Bayswater. Besides his theatrical and literary work (he helped his sister and cousin with publishers), Robert addressed Unionist by-election meetings. A Liberal obituarist commented ironically that he inherited the oratorical talent of his anti-Union grandfather Charles Kendal Bushe.<sup>7</sup> In March 1887, when he spoke 'as a boy-

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Collis, *Somerville and Ross: A Biography* (London, 1968), pp. 50-1. <sup>5</sup> Violet Martin's fragmentary memoir (*Irish Memories*, pp. 3-40) breaks off with the early 1880s. <sup>6</sup> Collis, *Somerville and Ross*, p. 74; Gifford Lewis (ed.) *The Selected Letters of Somerville and Ross* (London, 1989) pp. 156, 213. <sup>7</sup> *Galway Express*, 16 September 1905 p. 3, 23 September 1905

cotted man and on Land League topics' at a Derbyshire by-election, 'He actually reduced the miners to tears'.<sup>8</sup> A speech to the Lincoln Primrose League drew denunciations from the New Ross Town Commissioners:

Mr Martin recited many incidents showing the cruel character of boycotting ... at New Ross in Wexford, where being unable to secure a vehicle on account of the boycotting, he had to walk eleven miles with food for starving men, and when he got there he found them without water, as the National League had poisoned the wells. After great difficulty he got some barrels of water sent to the men, and by that means the decrees of the League were set at naught (applause).

The (National League) Town Commissioners denied wells had been poisoned, quoting reports by the local JPs, the RIC district inspector, and the clerk of petty sessions. One member commented, 'This Bob Martin must have as much strength as he has the power of lying, when he says he carried food eleven miles'; another referred to 'the means which the ILPU are employing against Home Rule, in England ... He was introduced ... as "Honest Bob Martin" ... he should be called "Bob the Liar"'.<sup>9</sup> Others reacted differently. Martin was elected to the Carlton Club for his political services, and considered this the greatest honour he received.<sup>10</sup>

In spring 1888 Robert's mother and two unmarried sisters (including Violet) returned to Ross. The tenants became outwardly deferential, and Robert visited regularly, sang comic songs and physically expelled drunks at the tenants' New Year dance. He thought of establishing part-time residence but soon grew bored.<sup>11</sup> In February 1891 Martin oversaw governmental famine relief in Connemara. On 13 April Lady Zetland, spouse of the lord lieutenant, passed Ross while inspecting relief works, accompanied by Robert. The Martins organised a torchlight welcome by their tenants, and a local singer rendered Robert's comic songs. Robert led cheers for the Zetlands, Balfour, the Martins, and the queen; one newspaper subsequently praised 'a Galway landlord and his tenants [who] united to give a true Irish *caed mille failthe* [*sic*] to an illustrious visitor'.<sup>12</sup> When Parnell and the Conservative Cabinet Minister W.H. Smith died on the same day, Martin composed sententious verses contrasting Smith's honoured record with the Luciferian fall of Parnell.<sup>13</sup>

p. 3, 30 September 1905 p. 3. <sup>8</sup> Violet Martin to Edith Somerville, 27 March 1887, in Lewis, *Selected Letters*, p. 39. <sup>9</sup> Irish Press Agency Leaflets, No. 42, *Irish 'Unionist' Tactics in England and Scotland: An Astounding Falsehood and its Exposure* (published by the London-based Irish Press Agency for circulation to newspapers and as election leaflets); *Wexford People*, 29 February 1888. <sup>10</sup> *Galway Express*, 30 September 1905 p. 3 (article reproduced from *Sporting Times*). <sup>11</sup> Collis, *Somerville and Ross*, pp. 73-4, 76-82. <sup>12</sup> Lewis, *Selected Letters*, pp. 170-4. <sup>13</sup> *Bits of Blarney*, pp. 80-1.

Lever's earlier picaresque novels end with the exiled heir's triumph over his supplanters. Martin's fantasies followed a similar pattern; to his sister's dismay he spoke of redressing his father's electoral humiliation. In 1895 Violet wrote to Edith Somerville, 'I believe two constituencies in England are open to him, and I do wish he could go in for one, instead of this rotten and humiliating game. In '72 Captain Trench ... polled six hundred votes against Nolan's three thousand and when one thinks of the altered franchise and the complete loss of influence on the landlords' side I should say that if Robert got two hundred he would be lucky.'<sup>14</sup>

Martin did not become a candidate, as ultimately his financial well-being depended on a stage career which was incompatible with parliamentary life. He remained, however, a member of Oughterard Poor Law Guardians and Petty Sessions (his experiences as a JP provided humorous dinner-party anecdotes), and frequently came over to vote with Unionists on these local bodies, perform at local charitable concerts, use official contacts to obtain favours for locals, and judge the Oughterard Races. He wrote for the pro-landlord *Dublin Daily Express* (as 'Ballyhooly'), electioneered and attended annual meetings of the Irish Landowners' Convention, but his life centred on London.<sup>15</sup>

Early in 1905 Robert Martin developed kidney disease and retired to Ross, and within a year his weight dwindled from fifteen to seven stone. He spent his last months reminiscing about politics and the Land War. Humorous to the last, he called his nonagenarian mother 'the little girl that brought me up'. He wrote a formal last letter to the Carlton, but was unable to write to his *Sporting Times* colleagues as he was too weak. Robert Martin died on 13 September 1905 in Oughterard. Tenants dug his grave and carried his coffin. He chose to be buried in Oughterard rather than the family vault at Killannin, annoying tenants who had expected funeral festivities.<sup>16</sup> His widow Connie lived at Ross until her death in 1914, when Barbara sold the house.

## II

The Martins of Ross, like many of their counterparts, imagined landlord-tenant relations as a familial connection, with their inherently irresponsible tenants consigned to perpetual childhood. The moralist version of this ideology was exemplified by evangelical landlords, such as Lord Farnham, whose 'moral agents' supervised tenant behaviour. Robert Martin preferred the hedonistic version popularised by Lever's novels, where tenants and landlords share a semi-libidinal bond cemented by indiscriminate largesse, mutual drunkenness and, ultimately, military service. This Tory idyll was supposedly threatened by calculating upstarts

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, *Selected Letters*, p. 222. <sup>15</sup> *Galway Express*, 16 September 1905, p. 3, 23 September 1905, p. 3, 30 September 1905, p. 3. <sup>16</sup> Collis, *Somerville and Ross*, pp. 136-8.

driven by naked economic rationality, allying with 'patriotic' demagogues and naive English rationalists to present self-aggrandisement as reform.

Lever's preference for aristocratic spontaneity and amateurism over bourgeois calculation and foresight was shown by his working methods. Issuing his novels in instalments, he wrote each episode as its predecessor appeared, with no margin for delay. When offered a bonus for a full text, he declared himself incapable of writing material in advance.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Martin lived by his fluent journalistic pen, priding himself on never correcting proofs. Much of his material, delivered semi-spontaneously to coteries of family and friends, never saw print.<sup>18</sup>

Lever's books were widely read. Thackeray's Lever parody, *Barry Lyndon*, assumes familiarity with the originals; when advocating land reform to English readers in 1868 George Sigerson felt obliged to refute Lever's claim that Ireland's problems could be solved by compelling absentee landlords to renew their personal bond with their tenants, who as a naturally 'feudal' race allegedly desired personal rule unfettered by law.<sup>19</sup>

Of particular relevance to Robert and Violet Martin is Lever's *The Martins of Cro' Martin* (1856), loosely based on the Martins of Ballinahinch, whose massively-indebted Connemara estates went bankrupt during the Famine, relief efforts hastening the final collapse. The heiress Mary died in childbirth after emigrating to Canada, where her descendants made a new life. Later, a visiting Canadian Martin inspired Somerville and Ross's first novel, *An Irish Cousin*.<sup>20</sup>

Echoes of this plot occur in some of Robert Martin's stories. In 'St Patrick's Day in the Morning', the Ballyblake estate (its Connemara location indicated by placenames) is acquired by an English insurance company, as was Ballinahinch under the Encumbered Estates Court. In Martin's tale, 'English remedies for Irish grievances' such as whitewashing cottages, fitting them with glass windows and removing pigs to sties, give way to strict rent enforcement and eviction when tenants prove unresponsive. In 'The Submerged Shamrock', indebted aristocrats emigrate like the Ballinahinch Martins, selling out to a publican's widow turned temperance reformer; the story celebrates tenant resistance to her attempts to make them 'drown the shamrock' in water.<sup>21</sup> Some of Martin's sketches are miniature Leveresque tales, notably 'The Kerry Recruit', where a Ribbonman who inadvertently joins the army while drunk stays in the force from loyalty to the young master who enlisted after gambling losses; both die in the Crimea.<sup>22</sup>

Robert's most easily accessible literary work comprises two small volumes. The 1882 verse collection *Days of the Land League* reflects the violence of the early Land War. 'The Irish Tenant' is a Browningsque monologue, in which a

<sup>17</sup> Lionel Stevenson, *Dr Quicksilver: The Life of Charles Lever* (London, 1939); Tony Bareham (ed.) *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* (Gerrards Cross, 1991). For examples of these themes in Lever's novels see *Charles O'Malley* (1841) and *The Knight of Gwynne* (1847). <sup>18</sup> Martin, *Irish Memories*, p. 37. <sup>19</sup> An Ulsterman [George Sigerson], *Modern Ireland: Its Vital Questions, Secret Societies and Government* (London, 1868), pp. 11–18. <sup>20</sup> Lewis, *Selected Letters*, p. 61. <sup>21</sup> *Bits of Blarney*, pp. 199–204. <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63–71.

tenant getting drunk in a shebeen mixes slogans about oppression with memories of 'the Masther's' benevolence and 'the Misthress' nursing the tenant's dying son:

That's the way that she robbed and crushed us, and the Masther's a great deal worse.

They were sayin' above at the meetin', he deserves all the people's curse. And as one Miss Parnell was statin', that the landlords should all lie flat Through makin' manure of our fathers, and talk that's the like of that.

Father Mick's exhortations that 'all the money he gave to my childhers, was cash that he stole from me' and 'while the misthress had silks and satins, it was rags that my childhers wore' appear as demagogic incitements. The revolt of the tenants produces a moral inversion, displayed when the Master is murdered outside the shebeen and his murderer seeks refuge:

Give me some drink, more, slantha! Sorry? I cannot tell,  
This new way that leads to heaven, seems the ould way that led to hell,  
Come give me some more whiskey, 'sorry' how can it be,  
How on earth can I ever be sorry for the man who was good to me?

Is it give you just one night's shelther, and you've brought to a bloody ind,

The man you and I, Ned Moran, were proud once to call a frind?  
You've killed a desperate oppressor? well maybe you've said what's right,  
And the man who murdered his masther, shall sleep in my house to-night.<sup>23</sup>

'One Who Knew Better Days' describes a landlord's widow – perhaps the 'misthress' of 'An Irish Tenant' – dying of 'famine' in English lodgings, while her children cry for food and she bitterly recalls helping the 'robber band' of tenants who dispossessed them. This was a standard theme of Unionist propaganda, based on the plight of landlords' female relatives dependent on payments from the estate and drawing on established imagery presenting the famine through the sufferings of landed families.<sup>24</sup> Martin presents tenants as children killing their fathers and exiling their mothers; the destruction of the landlord family mirrors the wider attack on aristocratic paternalism.

Despite these parricides, Martin presents the familialist moral order incarnate and inviolate in the monarchy. 'Lady M—' celebrates Victoria's assistance to

<sup>23</sup> *Days of the Land League* (Dublin, 1882, reprinted 1884, adding some formal verses written for Martin's Dublin dining club), pp. 5–6. The reference is to Fanny Parnell's poem 'Hold the Harvest'. The title parodies a pro-Land League collection *Lays of the Land League*, see Margaret O'Callaghan, *British High Politics and a Nationalist Ireland: Criminality, Land and the Law under Forster and Balfour* (Cork, 1994), p. 123. <sup>24</sup> *Days of the Land League*, pp. 8–9.

the widowed Lady Mountmorres, boycotted after the shooting of her impeccable husband during the Land League agitation in Connacht. Here the queen reasserts domestic virtues and Christian Beatitudes threatened by unmanly peasants who hunt women.

Martin presents emergency men and magistrates in the classic colonial image of the solitary British hero facing down native rabble, standard imperial mythology recurring in Unionist literature from Trench's *Realities of Irish Life* to Marjoribanks' life of Carson.<sup>25</sup> The coloniser's solitary determination shows his self-sufficiency and right to rule; the failure of the colonised to enforce their threats justifies their subordination. Martin's 'Irish Cowards!' assimilates assertion of landlord authority to the deeds of Anglo-Irish imperial soldiers, while the Land Act reflects the threat to Empire from Gladstonian appeasement:

'Cowards!' a Society forming in defence of their lives and lands,  
Trying in vain to strengthen the Government's trembling hands  
Upholding the law of England in the midst of a desperate game,  
That's how the Irish landlords have come by the cowards' name ...

See how the thieves' agitation with the Government ably copes,  
Rewarded at last with a plunder exceeding their wildest hopes;  
And they buy off the traitors with money which they steal from the loyal  
few,  
And say to the landlords, 'Be thankful for the little that's left to you' ...

It was one of those Irish 'cowards' who in Afghan won the day,  
It was one of those loyal Irish who showed the British the way;  
It was Gladstone gave back the position won by many a glorious feat,  
It was Roberts won the battle; it was Gladstone who said, 'Retreat' ...

The fight it may be too heavy, the odds of ten thousand to one  
May beat down those Irish cowards, – it may be their day is done;  
If so, in the day of rebellion Old England may count the cost,  
And sigh for the loyal 'cowards' her Premier has ruined and lost.<sup>26</sup>

*Days of the Land League* ends with a bitter epigram on the Kilmainham Treaty:

The Irish 'twixt moonlight and moonshine  
The difference now understand:  
The law of the Land League is moonlight  
And moonshine the law of the land.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> William Stuart Trench, *Realities of Irish Life* (London, 1869), pp. 70–7; Edward Marjoribanks, *Life of Lord Carson* (2 vols, London, 1932), vol. 1, 107–10; Kathryn Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character* (London, 1990). <sup>26</sup> *Days of the Land League*, pp. 3–4. <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

*Bits of Blarney*, an anthology of humorous sketches, short stories and songs, reflects the anti-Gladstonian campaigns of 1886–92. ‘A Parliamentary Candidate’ is supposedly the diary of a Conservative landowner, Harry Largeman, parliamentary candidate for the borough of Shackleberry. Like other right-wing Bohemians on the make in the metropolis, Martin adopts the persona of a deep-rooted English gentleman beset by cosmopolitan adventurers mouthing un-English Radical slogans: ‘My opponent is Adolphus Dryberger, a Radical Jew, whose programme is redolent of the Land of Promise. His territorial possessions consist of a doubtful carpet bag, while his acquaintanceship with Shackleberry dates from his becoming the Radical candidate ... a week after the vacancy occurred.’ Martin attacks Gladstonian claims that Liberal by-election victories after 1886 indicated growing British support for Home Rule. The election turns on anti-vaccination and Largeman’s alleged failure to employ Shackleberry tradesmen (‘my ancestors employed Shackleberry tradesmen before Dryberger’s progenitors escaped from Judea’). Dryberger denounces Largeman’s Catholic grandmother; Largeman’s references to the Liberals’ Catholic allies are dismissed – ‘the Irish are Irish and therefore excusable’. Just before polling a Liberal clergyman falsely accuses Largeman of adultery. Martin concludes ironically:

The result of the poll was described as a GREAT RADICAL VICTORY – DRYBERGER 3,360: LARGEMAN 3,325. This is the ‘flowing tide’, ‘the nation’s voice’, ‘the condemnation of the Government’, etc. And yet the Government or the Opposition had nothing whatever to do with the result.<sup>28</sup>

In a comic song, ‘Donegal’, a bath (lost by an English tourist) is discovered in Ireland, and the corporation, lord mayor and city marshal gaze in bewilderment. A councillor uses it and catches cold; the bath is denounced as unnatural and its owner savagely chastised. This satirises nationalist use of civic ceremonial (when tried for sedition in September 1887, T.D. Sullivan, lord mayor of Dublin, processed to court accompanied by the robed corporation and civic officers). Martin’s audience are assured that these titles and accoutrements conceal unwashed savages.<sup>29</sup>

Somerville and Ross were acutely aware of their semi-marginalised position as unmarried women within an extended family that was both supportive and stifling, and this influenced their suffragism. Martin, in contrast, revelled in headship of the family without taking its responsibilities too seriously. The sporting press and music halls lay beyond Victorian respectability and favoured humour more risqué than that found in mainstream publications.<sup>30</sup> Consciously addressing a male audience, Martin voices misogynistic suspicion of domesticity.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37–41. <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116–18; Marjoribanks, *Life of Carson*, vol. 1, 117–18. <sup>30</sup> Donald Thomas, *The Victorian Underworld* (London, 1998), pp. 184–8

The identification of Liberalism with Protestant nonconformity and temperance drove brewers, publicans and music-hall habitués to Tory defenders of aristocratic and proletarian hedonism against self-righteous bourgeois interference. Such Tories feared enfranchised women would extend domestic values into the political sphere, endangering havens of male camaraderie and self-indulgence. If Martin's images of carefree drunkenness, dirt and violence discount nationalist claims to equal citizenship, they also fantasise escape from social constraints. His imagined Ireland is conflated with the alcoholic nirvana desired by male music-hall listeners and readers of sporting papers, threatened by a common enemy.

*Bits of Blarney* features misogynistic ridicule of female Radical activists and temperance reformers. Miss Sarah Jenkins, a Liberal platform speaker 'found that a little personal knowledge of the Emerald Isle would be decidedly useful when she was taken to task in her geography by a man of Unionist politics, who suffered from the disadvantage of having lived in Ireland the greater part of his life'. She leaves Peckham Rye for Ennis, assuming that Clare, as the most disturbed part of Ireland, is most visibly oppressed. After mishaps on the ramshackle Irish railways and an uneasy perch on an outside car whose jarvey tries to ingratiate himself by praising the suffering landlords, she arrives at the Liberator's Arms Hotel, Ennis. The food, beds, and ginger-beer ('Miss Jenkins was a teetotaller') are 'archaeological unpleasantries'; local nationalists exude 'an atmosphere of whiskey hateful to her soul'. Martin continues:

Feeling sad and extremely dirty, Miss Jenkins walked by the seashore, when suddenly she beheld an establishment which bore the label of 'Sea Baths'. Here, then, at last was cleanliness, and Miss Jenkins was not slow to avail herself of the chance. In she went, and soon found herself enjoying a large and thoroughly comfortable bath.

Miss Jenkins was a happy woman for the first time since she had left home. She rolled in the water in delight, and, suddenly seeing a string above her, in her old-maidish joy she pulled what she believed to be the string of a shower-bath, and a dash of water came which missed her. She pulled again, this time without result. Then a third pull was equally ineffectual. At last she looked. Through the open trap she saw a man with a bucket of water in his hand gazing at her nude form.

'If you keep pushing to the westward', he said, 'I'll give ye the full body of the strame'.

\* \* \*

Miss Jenkins has left the Liberator's Arms for England.<sup>31</sup>

The male reader is invited to share the physical sensations of Miss Jenkins, to visualise her – participating in her symbolic violation – and feel she deserved it as a meddling prig. The story also foreshadows Somerville and Ross's humorous emphasis on Irish dirt and disorder and satire on visiting English reformers.

Alcoholic jocularity becomes sentimentality when the maternal Queen Victoria is evoked. 'Hearts around the Queen' cites Victoria's charitable appeals for survivors and dependents after naval and military incidents and industrial accidents while inviting its audience to mourn her son-in-law Prince Henry of Battenberg, dead of fever in 1896 during the conquest of Ashanti:

Only a woman after all –  
The poorest understand,  
Only a woman after all,  
The Queen who rules the land.  
And, therefore, must all hearts be true,  
Who know what sorrows mean;  
The song goes up, 'God comfort you!'  
From hearts around the Queen.<sup>32</sup>

Royal visits to the central imperial military hospital at Netley, overlooking Southampton Water, symbolise the familial bond uniting her subjects:

The sight that to some most joy affords  
Is the old Queen sitting in Netley wards  
With her wounded soldiers around her;  
It shows how our Queen played a woman's part  
And the good deeds born of a noble heart  
Are the gems with which Fame has crowned her.<sup>33</sup>

This imagery extends to the prince of Wales in 'The Old Woman of Elbow Lane'. During the prince's 1885 visit to Ireland the Dublin sanitary officer, Sir Charles Cameron (a member of the Corinthian Club) showed him a Dublin tenement. Martin contrasts nationalist stridency with the old woman's recognition of the prince's kindness and concern.<sup>34</sup>

### III

Many 1880s Unionists employed a Leveresque idiom to present the Irish as a race of clowns who neither desired nor understood equal citizenship. They even

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110–11. <sup>33</sup> Philip Hoare, *Spike Island: The Memory of a Military Hospital* (London, 2001), describes how Victoria's visits were assimilated to the 'Lady with the Lamp' iconography established by Florence Nightingale. <sup>34</sup> *Bits of Blarney*, pp. 225–6; Sir Charles Cameron, *Autobiography* (Dublin, 1921).

projected themselves in these terms. Margaret O'Callaghan notes that the memoirs of the Kerry land agent Sam Hussey present a Leveresque 'broth of a boy', while his business papers display ruthless economic rationality. The Ulster Unionist leader Edward Saunderson presented himself as a stage-Irishman to English visitors and engaged in calculatedly 'Irish' taunting of nationalists in parliament, provoking angry responses which 'proved' Irish infantilism.<sup>35</sup>

Robert Martin celebrated the backwoods Irish country gentleman while living in London; his popular song 'Killaloe', about the attempts of 'a French Mossoo' to teach Irish peasants French, celebrates the narrator's vigorous refusal to be civilised – but its jokes presuppose knowledge of French.<sup>36</sup> Leveresque humourists exploited modern forms of cultural consumerism, a mass print audience and a widespread awareness of world events, which Martin could celebrate or travesty. One song parodies Stanley's 'Through Darkest Africa' – after searching 'Darkest Ireland', Ballyhooly decides to 'colonise the nearest public house'.<sup>37</sup> *Bits of Blarney* evokes Connemara ('the Western Highlands') like a tourist brochure. The inhabitants, whom Martin knew to have been involved in violent land agitation, become apolitical equivalents of Scottish ghillies:

They wish nothing better than to spend the day with those who work in the Western Highlands with rod or gun ... A couple of sporting lodges ... which are inhabited at this time of year, supply them with any notions they may have about the rest of the universe. Wars, foreign policy, elections ... are things as unknown to them as carriages or cathedrals. But if you want to spend a time amongst good and faithful fellows, you will find few better than these Gaelic-speaking Irishmen who live miles from anywhere.<sup>38</sup>

Martin could only maintain his feudal fantasies as a tourist in the land of his ancestors.

Robert Martin did not enter the Unionist pantheon. A planned memorial volume fell through, and Violet, a professional writer whose time cost money, never completed her memoir.<sup>39</sup> He was too southern to interest later Ulster Unionists. His humour was too coarse and aggressively Unionist to be cherished like the wittier and less political Percy French.

Martin's combination of Unionism and stage-Irishness did, however, influence nationalist Ireland. The *Freeman's Journal* denounced the *Irish RM* stories as a prose version of the Ballyhooly Ballads.<sup>40</sup> Arthur Griffith execrated 'a thing

<sup>35</sup> Reginald Lucas, *Colonel Saunderson, MP: A Memoir* (London, 1908), pp. 15, 193, 199–202; Alvin Jackson, *Colonel Edward Saunderson: Land and Loyalty in Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 96–102, 112, 189–90. <sup>36</sup> *Bits of Blarney*, pp. 34–6. <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167–9. <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140–4. <sup>39</sup> Martin, *Irish Memories*, p. 3; Martin to Somerville 10 July 1906, in Lewis, *Selected Letters*, pp. 277–9. <sup>40</sup> Violet Powell, *The Irish Cousins*, (London, 1970), p. 115.

called Robert Martin, which has done more to slander Ireland than any man alive'.<sup>41</sup> He depicted Martin celebrating the Wyndham Land Act with landlord shylocks in 'the Rabbi Ben D'Israeli Habitation of the Primrose League'.<sup>42</sup> Politics may have divided Martin and Griffith, but they had antisemitism in common.

Griffith's denunciations, like Martin's fantasies, had older roots. Catholic and Young Ireland writers imagined the Irish peasant as ideal citizen, exemplifying domestic virtue and patriotic heroism, in conscious counterblast to the Leveresque. Nationalists retorted to invocations of starving gentlewomen and disrupted aristocratic families with images of homes destroyed by eviction and emigrant daughters forced into prostitution; the maternal image of Victoria became Maud Gonne's 'Famine Queen'.

Frank Hugh O'Donnell accused Yeats' *Countess Cathleen* of fabricating antecedents for the grotesques of 'Ballyhooly'.<sup>43</sup> Nationalists who disrupted Synge's *Playboy*, which (like 'An Irish Tenant') depicted a murderer lionised in a Connacht pub, saw it as a stage-Irish caricature of drunken and amoral lawlessness; Trinity students who cheered it as insulting nationalists echoed Robert Martin.

<sup>41</sup> *United Irishman*, 24 October 1903, p. 5. <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 October 1903 p.5. <sup>43</sup> Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the Nation* (London, 2001), p. 24. See also Gould, Kelly and Toomey, *Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2, p. 677.