

Introduction
Charisma and Aftermath

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Ireland, though not a state in its own right until 1922, had its succession of statesmen: feudal leaders like the various O'Neills of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, civic and parliamentary leaders from Flood and Grattan onwards, and revolutionaries from Tone to Pearse. In that tradition, Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–91) stands as the last great parliamentary statesman, successor to Grattan and O'Connell, more powerful yet ultimately less successful than either of his great predecessors. After Parnell, the Home Rule agenda, though ably continued by Redmond, had the wind taken out of its sails both by the Ulster Unionist Edward Carson (who wielded Parnellish power in his northern bailiwick) and by various extra-parliamentary forms of nationalism (cultural, separatist).

It is universally agreed that the downfall and death of Parnell marked a true crisis and a caesura in Irish politics and history. Born during the Great Famine into the landowning Protestant elite, Parnell had taken command of the process by which Ireland in the post-Famine decades embarked on a course towards modernization and self-empowerment. Between Land League and Fenians, Parnell pursued a two-pronged policy of dismantling both the landlord system and the parliamentary union with Great Britain, setting the agenda for both struggles. Parnell wielded great power and influence; at its zenith, he fell. He fell from a great height, as Westminster powerbroker and undisputed chief and champion of Irish national politics; he fell steeply and opprobriously, as the result of a divorce scandal right at the peak period of Victorian moralism and prudery; and he fell deep, losing his sway over his followers, attacked and injured, and dead by the age of forty-five. Parnell, in his downfall and death, affected Irish public opinion as profoundly as he had during his glory years; and Parnell's absence throughout the next decades left Ireland with a Parnell-shaped hole in the middle, filled only partially by a Parnell myth. The sudden void left in the wake of Parnell's passing was something the next generations had to come to terms with, consciously (as with Yeats and Joyce) or in

semi-articulate or deflected apprehensions at the turbulence and steerlessness of Irish modernity, at the disjointed incohesion of Irish society between Dublin, Belfast, and the West.

Irish society after 1891 seems to exhibit the sudden withdrawal symptoms from a political elixir that between O'Connell, the Derrynane squire, and Parnell, the Wicklow landlord, had become increasingly potent in Irish public life: charisma. Ireland, though not a state, had got used to having statesmen who could wield the informal but strong power of charismatic leadership. Noticeable in its sudden absence, charisma seems an important key to understanding the appeal of Parnell and the fact that this appeal continued even after his passing and in the void he left behind. That Parnell was a charismatic leader is almost a commonplace; but the deeper meaning of that term is worth reflecting on.

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Between the German defeat of 1918 and the Spanish Flu epidemic, which would claim his life in 1920, Max Weber undertook a systematization of various types of leadership; it was part – a small part – of the magnum opus that was published, posthumously and in half-finished condition, as *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. In the chapter on leadership and authority ('Herrschaft'), Weber defined, alongside the established forms of 'dynastic' and 'institutional' authority, a third type, which he dubbed 'charismatic'. He took the term from theological usage, where 'charisma' denotes the fact that the worship of God is not just a matter of dutiful obedience but also a matter of joy (Fig. 1). Charismatic leaders, so Weber argued, derive their authority neither from their lineage nor from their office, but by force of personality inspire an almost religious fervour and devotion in their followers, to the point of being credited with superhuman powers.

Weber's comments are brief, and although the term has become famous, the concept of charisma remains unelaborated. It has been noted how uncannily the thumbnail sketch of the charismatic leader foreshadows the later cult of Hitler; but that only raises the question of who else, historically rather than prophetically, Weber can have had in mind as a prototype. Probably his implicit frame of reference included, generically, the Hegelian hero-figures that Thomas Carlyle had made the subject of his massively influential *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*.¹ Possibly also Weber

¹ The notion of hero-worship, *Heldenverehrung*, is explicitly mentioned: 'Über die Geltung des Charisma entscheidet die durch Bewährung – ursprünglich stets: durch Wunder – gesicherte freie,



Fig. 1 Miss Tipperary embracing Parnell. Supplement to *Weekly Freeman*, 17 Jan. 1885

had noted, around the Paris Peace conference which embittered him so deeply, authority figures representing minority nations (Poland's Ignacy Paderewski, Czechoslovakia's Tomas Masaryk, or Norway's Fridtjof Nansen), who had gained their public stature and their authority as a pianist, writer, and polar explorer, respectively. Maybe he recalled the fervently acclaimed Boer leaders of South Africa, Kruger and De Wet; maybe even

aus Hingabe an Offenbarung, Heldenverehrung, Vertrauen zum Führer geborene, Anerkennung durch die Beherrschten' ('It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This is freely given and . . . consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader'). Max Weber, 'Merkmale der charismatischen Herrschaft', par. 10 of chapter 3 of the first section of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922). English translation by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York, 1947). Cf. also Joep Leerssen, 'Sacral States: The Politics of Worship, Religious and Secular', in *Great Immortality: Studies on European Cultural Sainthood*, ed. Marijan Dović and Jón Karl Helgason (Leiden, 2019), 15–27.

Marx. We do not know – Weber does not say. But few pre-1918 statesmen can be seen as more perfectly approximating the type of charismatic leadership than Charles Stewart Parnell.

Parnell was a charismatic leader in the full Weberian sense of the term. He embodies the Hegelian idea of the ‘world-historical hero’ which, directly or by way of Carlyle, underlies Weber’s concept: someone who at crisis moments has a transcendent intuitive grasp of the direction that history is taking. Parnell was, in the eyes of his followers, one of those ‘great historical men’

whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirit. They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purposes and their vocation, not from the calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order; but from . . . that inner Spirit, still hidden beneath the surface, which, impinging on the outer world as on a shell, bursts it in pieces, because it is another kernel than that which belonged to the shell in question. . . . Such individuals . . . were practical, political men. But at the same time they were thinking men, who had an insight into the requirements of the time – what was ripe for development. This was the very Truth . . . which was already formed in the womb of time. It was theirs to know this nascent principle; the necessary, directly sequent step in progress, which their world was to take; to make this their aim, and to expend their energy in promoting it.²

We hear Yeats’s ‘long-legged fly’ in these lines, and the anguished regrets of the bereft Parnellites in Joyce. Parnell, authoritarian and arrogant as he was, derived charisma in the Weberian sense from ‘an extraordinary force of personality which caused him to be credited with, if not superhuman, then at least extraordinary powers of leadership’.³

Uniquely and almost uncannily suited to the Weberian notion of charismatic leadership, Parnell stands out among the great political champions of modern Ireland. O’Connell comes close, but his popular appeal was at least in part fed by a lingering Jacobite messianism which, as Breandán Ó Buachalla has shown,⁴ had in the previous generation also

² Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (trans. Sibree, 1857), introduction. The 1837 German edition (by Gans) did not include Hegel’s introduction; Sibree follows the 1840 edition (by Karl Hegel).

³ Paraphrased from Weber, ‘Merkmale der charismatischen Herrschaft’. In the original: ‘Charisma soll eine als außeralltäglich (ursprünglich . . . als magisch bedingt) geltende Qualität einer Persönlichkeit heißen, um derentwillen sie als mit übernatürlichen oder übermenschlichen oder mindestens spezifisch außeralltäglichen, nicht jedem andern zugänglichen Kräften oder Eigenschaften oder als gottgesandt oder als vorbildlich und deshalb als «Führer» gewertet wird.’

⁴ Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aisling Ghéar* (Dublin, 1997).

been projected onto Bonnie Prince Charlie and Napoleon; he was a saviour-figure rather than a hero-figure. And while the official post-1920 Irish cult of the Men of 1916 tried to turn the martyr-figure of Pearse into a sacral icon, that leader was singularly lacking in personal charisma, Parnell-style. Ditto for De Valera. If any of the 1916 generation would come close to charismatic leadership, it would have been Michael Collins. And that also means that Collins, had he survived and lived to lead the country, might plausibly have drifted into that military-style strongman authoritarianism that had also attracted other charismatic leaders such as the Polish condottiere Józef Piłsudski – to name no others.

Parnell's extraordinary hold over the hopes and imaginations of his followers is demonstrated in the anguish that he left behind: no one could fill his footsteps; Redmond, Pearse, and De Valera look puny in comparison. His downfall and death were more than a catastrophe: they were a trauma – which is a catastrophe that refuses to be laid to rest, which is obsessively, neurotically relived and renewed over and over again, much as in the post-Parnell poems of Yeats and, again, in the evocations and hauntings of Joyce. Parnell cannot be laid to rest the way O'Connell and Pearse were laid to rest. Tellingly, it is following the death of Parnell that the notion of resurrection begins to dominate Irish politics and the Irish imagination.

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To be sure, nationalism in many cases will dream of a reconstitution of lost greatness and of the reversal of a historical decline. Thomas Davis wanted to see Ireland, long a province, be a nation once again. Germany throughout the nineteenth century was suffused by the *Reichsidee*: that the abolition of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 had led merely to an interregnum, and the empire was merely in abeyance, not gone forever. But such notions usually hinged around the idea of restoration. What was new in the cultural nationalism of Romantic vintage was the idea of a rising, revivification, or reawakening from a death-sleep; or a rebirth or renaissance. Such terms are found in the Catalan *Renaixença*, the Galician *Rexurdimento*, the Albanian *Relindja*, the Bulgarian *Vǎzrazdanie*. Ireland applied no less than three such terms to itself in the post-Parnell decades: a Renaissance or Revival (in literature) and a Rising (at Easter 1916). And in the background of these reawakenings is the refusal of Parnell to be laid to rest – not so much like a Christ rising from the dead (as devout Pearse would like to see things) but as a Barbarossa, or King Arthur, or Holger



Fig. 2 John Tenniel, 'The Irish Vampire', *Punch*, 24 Oct. 1885

Danske, a Once and Future Leader waiting for the moment of his return from the underworld; or like a Dracula rising from the grave (Fig. 2). It was, after all, in the discussion of world-historical figures that Hegel had said that they always appear twice.

'The first time as tragedy, the second time as farce': that was Marx's sarcastic addition to Hegel. I do not want to go that way (De Valera as the farcical encore to tragic Parnell): Hegel's point is, rather, that the end of the great hero-leader is never the last word.

Another comment by Marx, made almost in the same breath, is more apposite: he points out that the great Hegelian hero-figures leave in their wake an oppressive absence, a dead weight stifling fresh departures. These words have often been applied to the condition of post-Parnell Ireland:

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before,

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precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language.⁵

Parnell gone made it impossible to get over Parnell. The most strenuous attempts to be post-Parnellite only emphasized this by the mere fact of trying so very hard. The stupor and death-sleep that Yeats and Pearse wanted to Revive or Rise from, to be Reborn from, was not just (as they foregrounded) the long centuries of subjection and self-alienation under English rule, but the one induced by the fall and death of Parnell. Tellingly, that project of Revival, Renaissance, and Rising was accompanied by the creaking coffin-hinges of Bram Stoker's book, published in 1895, and by the despairing paralysis of Joyce's *Dubliners*.

Stoker's *Dracula* and Joyce's *Dubliners* exist almost in tandem. One is the undead arrogant gentleman, refusing to be dead and gone, sucking the life-blood from the living, sapping their vital energies until they wither and decline. The characters in early Joyce are like his victims, limply struggling to escape from a nightmare which is not even history, but rather time marking time, time turned viscous, appointments missed and opportunities spoiled, a future indefinitely deferred. Parnell after dead turned into an undead presence, a Shade. Yeats summoned that shade to his side in his 1913 poem, mainly as a projecting screen for his own disenchantment with the deadness of Romantic Ireland:

If you have revisited the town, thin Shade,
 Whether to look upon your monument
 (I wonder if the builder has been paid)
 Or happier-thoughted when the day is spent
 To drink of that salt breath out of the sea
 When grey gulls flit about instead of men,
 And the gaunt houses put on majesty:
 Let these content you and be gone again;
 For they are at their old tricks yet.

⁵ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, chapter 1, trans. Saul K. Padover, online at www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/cho1.htm. Among the first to apply this sentiment to late nineteenth-century Ireland was W. J. MacCormack, *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Irish Literary History* (Cork, 1994). MacCormack has also rightly drawn attention to the extent to which Parnell's charisma was described by Yeats (whose vocabulary was Golden Dawnish rather than Weberian) in 'demonic' terms: 'Yeats and Gothic Politics', in MacCormack, *Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan LeFanu, Yeats and Bowen* (Manchester, 1993), 193–206.

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Go, unquiet wanderer,

And gather the Glasnevin coverlet
 About your head till the dust stops your ear,
 The time for you to taste of that salt breath
 And listen at the corners has not come;
 You had enough of sorrow before death –
 Away, away! You are safer in the tomb.⁶

Parnell's political downfall and death were more than the end of a career: they were a sudden vacuum destabilizing the political order of things; an abrupt, implosive disappearance, a disruptive vanishing, an annihilation. The annihilation of Parnell from Irish public life is almost like a Big Bang in reverse: it brings into being a welter of turbulence, absences, and hollow spaces. These fan out in three directions that seem unrelated and disparate unless we realize that they originate from a common vanishing point. One of these is well-known as the turn to culture – something presented as such by Yeats, but slightly flatteringly so, in order to present himself as a revolutionary fresh departure in Irish life. What distinguishes the self-proclaimed turn to culture of Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival from its pre-Parnell run-up is, precisely, the turn from an earlier mode of restoring justice (Repealing the Union, a nation once again, Home Rule) towards a new mode of a national reboot: be this phrased as de-Anglicization (involving revival of the Irish language), a literary revival/renaissance, or a political rising. The other is an intensified sense of Ireland as stagnation: as per the naturalism of Moore's Irish novels, early Joyce, midlife Yeats, and indeed the Irish Gothic à la Stoker. The third lies in a disparate array of small utopianisms, the scattered fallout of the great Parnellite Home Rule movement which as a political force has fissioned into a Redmondite successor party and Fenian, Irish-Ireland separatism.

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The small utopian reform movements are perhaps the most intriguing, and the most easily overlooked. At the European level,⁷ they form part of a wide reformist trend inspired by William Morris and with a figurehead in Leo Tolstoy; they involve the Fellowship of the New Life, artists' colonies,

⁶ 'To a Shade' (1913), in W. B. Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 2nd ed. (London, 1950), 123.

⁷ The following comments on comparative aspects of European national-reformist movements have been collated taken from the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. J. Leerssen, 2 vols. (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), online at ernie.uva.nl.

sexual libertarianism à la Edith Lees and Havelock Ellis, cooperative and agricultural credit initiatives, vegetarians, teetotallers, adepts of Dr Jaeger's sanitary woollen reform clothing, Thomas Allinson's wholemeal bread, sunbathing, and open-air excursions on foot or by bicycle; nudists, pacifists, Esperantists. The initiatives were rarely part of an overarching political doctrine and in many aspects shaded over into speculative occultism or hermetic societies (spiritism, Steiner's anthroposophy, and the weirder fringes of German *Lebensreform*). For that reason, they are nowadays often (not altogether fairly) dismissed as quirky, naïve, or quixotic; yet allotment gardening, the Garden Cities movement, the Fabians, and the suffragettes also formed part of this utopian-reformist spectrum. Within Ireland, reformist utopianism blended into the background of other movements. AE (George Russell) is now almost exclusively remembered as a star-gazing esotericist and speculative occultist; but he was also an activist on behalf of the Cooperative Movement. The fact that Shaw invariably wore Jaeger's *Normalkleidung* was not just his personal eccentricity. The Yeats sisters were not just helpmeets of W.B.'s preening aestheticism but adepts of Morrisite arts-and-crafts printing and reform clothing, and involved in the feminist networks around the Slade School of Arts (where they, like the Gore-Booths, had studied). Yeats's theatrical ventures interacted with grassroots amateur theatricals of a decidedly progressive-reformist, Ibsenite slant; indeed, the rift of 1903 saw the departure, precisely, of the more Ibsenite-reformist members (the Fays, Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh, and indeed Maud Gonne) away from Yeats's more elitist and exclusive Abbey Theatre venture. What is more, many of the revivalist activities of the Gaelic League are part of a wider, international folkloric turn that aimed to invigorate working-class and middle-class leisure culture with the wholesome energy of folk tradition. Irish dancing was revived in Ireland much as Morris dancing was in England, or folk dancing in Norway and Sweden; the introduction of an Irish kilt was part of a general European urban-bourgeois adoption of traditional rustic dress; artists everywhere in Europe, not just Jack B. Yeats in Ireland, were turning to a faux-naïf invocation of popular culture in the fin de siècle revival of the woodcut. And amateur theatre companies were active everywhere, not just in Dublin, following the Norwegian example.

In recent years, critics and historians have rightly drawn attention to the extent to which the pre-1916 generation of Irish national activists were part of a Europe-wide reformist movement.⁸ This reformism spanned class

⁸ Declan Kiberd, ed., *Handbook of the Irish Revival 1891–1922* (Dublin: Abbey Theatre Press, 2015); Roy Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890–1923* (London, 2015).

divisions, involving both elite groups and aspiring lower middle classes. To the extent that their activities played into the political ambitions of non-dominant nationalities, they can best be identified in the term defined by Miroslav Hroch⁹ as ‘protagonists’ (*Vorkämpfer*) of the national movements in Europe’s imperial peripheries (Iceland, Norway, Finland, the Baltic, the Balkans, Bohemia, Hungary, Catalonia) – or, rather, in Europe’s subimperial, subsidiary capitals: Reykjavík, Christiania/Oslo, Helsinki, Riga, Zagreb, Prague, Budapest, Barcelona. Here, a middle-class city culture, rooted in the increasing leisure interests of white-collar workers and expressing itself in café-chantants, theatrical, athletic, and choral societies and a burgeoning press, could draw on the rustic-regenerative nostalgia of its characteristic ‘unspoilt’ hinterlands to oppose an identity to the hegemonic metropolitan centres. Tellingly, choral and theatrical performances were often given in ‘traditional’ peasant garb, retrieved from grandparents’ wardrobes or copied from plein-air genre paintings of 1870s–80s vintage. As that dress style was disappearing from the countryside, it was now adopted as ‘national’ by (sub-)urban actors, often for performative purposes (amateur theatre, choral concerts). This cultivation of rustic cultural specificity could be no more than a form of subsidiary regionalism in the Europe’s pre-1914 empires: thus, in Andalusia and Galicia, Brittany, Bavaria, or Scotland (although in those regions and countries, too, autonomist sentiments would develop in some circles after 1914). But in many other cases, the new subimperial exceptionalism slotted into the discourse of nationalism and proclaimed the locality’s character as being radically incommensurable with its imperial subordination, vindicating its separate standing amid an international palette, across Europe, of progressive civic communities asserting their separateness. Typically, the invocation of the peasant hinterland as a marker of traditional rootedness and separateness went hand in hand with a shared participation in a pan-European artistic modernity: art nouveau (*Jugendstil*, Catalan *modernisme*), Symbolism, and post-Ibsenite social realism or naturalism. Typically, also, the cultural and political activists in such cities (subimperial or provincial capitals aspiring to become national capitals) would show the contradictory impulses of conservative nativism (drawing inspiration from traditional peasant culture in the hinterland), and progressive cosmopolitanism (drawing inspiration from other European city and minority cultures). Macronationalisms like Pan-Slavism, Pan-Celticism, and Pan-Latinism were the

⁹ Miroslav Hroch, *Die Vorkämpfer der nationalen Bewegung bei den kleinen Völkern Europas: Eine vergleichende Analyse zur gesellschaftlichen Schichtung der patriotischen Gruppen* (Prague, 1968).