It is a pleasure for me to be here for this Ivy Day Symposium as we commemorate the life and legacy of Charles Stewart Parnell. Ever since my student days, I have maintained a special interest in that era in Irish history stretching from the death of Parnell to the Easter Rising, seeking to understand the dynamics of the developments through which Ireland finally achieved its independence in 1922.

I was introduced to Parnell and his world through the lectures of Professor John A. Murphy at UCC and the work of my academic mentor, Professor Joe Lee, in his book, *The Modernisation of Irish Society*, where he judged Parnell’s rapid ascent after he entered parliament in 1875 to be ‘the most brilliant political performance in Irish history’.

In recent weeks, as part of the literary history course I am teaching at New York University’s Glucksman Ireland House focusing on the period between 1880 and 1940, I have been introducing my students to Parnell as a political titan and a literary icon.

I chose 1880 as a starting point for this course because I see Parnell as a key figure in the pre-1916, if I may use Joe Lee’s preferred word, ‘modernisation’ of Irish nationalism. Indeed, in his book, Lee credits Parnell with the creation of the first modern political party in Irish history. I am now inclined to trace the political roots of modern Ireland to the new departure represented by Parnell’s rise to the leadership of the Irish Party in
1880. This encourages me to see Parnell’s fall in 1890 as an interruption of progress towards self-government rather than a cul-de-sac for parliamentary nationalism.

I want to thank the Felix Larkin and the Parnell Society for inviting me to be here this evening. When Felix asked me to speak, he could not have known that I would by now be this year’s Parnell Fellow at Magdalene College, Cambridge, a position I assumed on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of October. When I finish at NYU in December, I look forward to walking the grounds of Magdalene in Parnell’s footsteps.

**Parnell as Literary Icon:** It may not be unique in the canon of world literature to have a political figure as an object of interest to two major writers, but it is surely an unusual occurrence. I refer to the fact that Charles Stewart Parnell is a meaningful presence in the writings of W. B. Yeats and James Joyce, even though neither knew Parnell personally. Indeed Joyce was only 9 years old when Parnell died.

Parnell’s impressive afterlife in Irish literature is a striking phenomenon. After all, Parnell had been dead for more than 30 years when *Ulysses*, in which Parnell attracts multiple references, was published in 1922. Yeats’s poem, ‘Come Gather round me Parnellites’ was written in September 1936 and ‘Parnell’ the following year, which was closer to the 50\textsuperscript{th} than the 40\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Parnell’s death.
How can this, on the face of it, extraordinary literary/political connection be explained? What does it tell us about Parnell? And what does it tell us about Yeats and Joyce in their engagement with the public life of their homeland?

**Parnell’s Heart:** As Honorary President of the Yeats Society, allow me to begin with Yeats, who had no family affinity with Parnell. Indeed, John Butler Yeats had a poor opinion of Parnell, blaming him and his followers for the political demise of Isaac Butt, a family friend of the Yeats’s. When Parnell died in 1891, Yeats penned an unspectacular poetic lament, ‘Mourn - and then Onward’

… there is no returning,

He guides ye from the tomb;

His memory is a tall pillar, burning

Before us in the gloom.

This was not vintage Yeats and the poem never appeared in any published Yeats collection.

Yeats backed Parnell in the controversy that led to his political downfall. He relished the prospect of Irish politics being shaken up by the dispute that pitted Parnell against some of the more conservative elements in Irish society. At that time, Yeats saw scope for building on Parnell’s legacy through cultural activity and within a few months of Parnell’s death he was busy orchestrating the establishment of the Irish Literary Society in London and then the National Literary Society in Dublin. He later built his analysis of modern Irish history around Parnell when, in his Nobel Prize lecture on the Irish
Dramatic Movement delivered in 1923, he argued that the ‘stir of thought’ and ‘the long gestation’ that led to the Anglo-Irish War had begun when Parnell fell from power in 1890 and the Irish people turned their attention from political to cultural activity. Yeats’s thesis has, of course, been contested, including by his biographer, Roy Foster, but it is, at a minimum, a brilliant piece of Yeatsian myth-making.

By the 1920s, Yeats viewed Parnell in a very different light, as part of the Anglo-Irish tradition in which he came to take an increasing pride. In his strident 1925 Senate Speech on divorce, Yeats numbered Parnell in his Anglo-Irish pantheon alongside Burke, Grattan, Swift and Emmet. The Anglo-Irish, he insisted, were ‘no petty people’, but ‘one of the great stocks of Europe’. They had, in Yeats’s view, created the best of Ireland’s ‘political intelligence’.

‘Parnell’s Funeral’ concludes with some powerful lines contrasting Parnell with, in Yeats’s view, lesser political figures, including Eamon de Valera, the most successful Irish politician of the 20th century:

Had de Valera eaten Parnell's heart
No loose-lipped demagogue had won the day.
No civil rancour torn the land apart.
...

Their school a crowd, his master solitude;
Through Jonathan Swift’s dark grove he passed, and there plucked bitter wisdom that enriched his blood.
The poem also wonders about the effect Parnell’s heart might have had on W.T. Cosgrave, Kevin O’Higgins and even, unfortunately, Eoin O’Duffy, leader of the Blueshirts.

‘Come Gather round me Parnellites’ is an unusual poem for Yeats, a rollicking drinking song, reminiscent of the ballads that Yeats turned out in the 1890s. It offers a pithy assessment of Parnell’s career.

Come gather round me Parnellites,
And praise our chosen man;
Stand upright on your legs awhile,
Stand upright while you can,
For soon we lie where he is laid,
And he is underground;
Come fill up all those glasses
And pass the bottle round.

And here’s a cogent reason,
And I have many more,
He fought the might of England
And saved the Irish poor,
Whatever good a farmer’s got
He brought it all to pass;
And here's another reason,
That Parnell loved a lass.

And here's a final reason,
He was of such a kind
Every man that sings a song
Keeps Parnell in his mind.
For Parnell was a proud man,
No prouder trod the ground,
And a proud man's a lovely man,
So pass the bottle round.

The Bishops and the party
That tragic story made,
A husband that had sold his wife
And after that betrayed;
But stories that live longest
Are sung above the glass,
And Parnell loved his country
And Parnell loved his lass.
Yeats, therefore, bent Parnell’s image to his own evolving purpose, from the advanced Irish nationalism he embraced in the 1890s to the idiosyncratic Anglo-Irish hagiography to which he turned in the 1920s and 1930s.

Joyce’s Parnell

I think we can safely number James Joyce among the Parnellites about whom Yeats wrote, for references to Parnell are sprinkled throughout Joyce’s writings. In the wonderfully memorable Christmas Dinner scene in *A Portrait*, Joyce conjures up the unrestrained passions unleashed by Parnell’s downfall. Set in the immediate aftermath of Parnell’s demise, it captures the raw feelings of the protagonists on both sides. I was drawn to this scene when I first read it as an undergraduate in the 1970s and have never ceased to be excited by it. The scene brilliantly illuminates the crossover between literature and history that has been a perennial interest of mine.

Here’s how it begins:

—That was a good answer our friend made to the canon. What? said Mr Dedalus.

—I didn't think he had that much in him, said Mr Casey.

—I'LL PAY YOUR DUES, FATHER, WHEN YOU CEASE TURNING THE HOUSE OF GOD INTO A POLLING-BOOTH.

—A nice answer, said Dante, for any man calling himself a catholic to give to his priest.
—They have only themselves to blame, said Mr Dedalus suavely. If they took a fool’s advice they would confine their attention to religion.

—It is religion, Dante said. They are doing their duty in warning the people.

—We go to the house of God, Mr Casey said, in all humility to pray to our Maker and not to hear election addresses.

—It is religion, Dante said again. They are right. They must direct their flocks.

—And preach politics from the altar, is it? asked Mr Dedalus.

—Certainly, said Dante. It is a question of public morality. A priest would not be a priest if he did not tell his flock what is right and what is wrong.

The discussion between Simon Dedalus and Mr Casey on one side and Mrs Riordan on the other gets increasingly unrestrained, with Dante Riordan revelling in Parnell’s vanquishment and Parnell’s admirers bitterly critical of the church for its treatment of their lost leader. Cries of blasphemy and ‘we’ll have no God in Ireland’ are hurled across the dinner table.

Joyce’s contemporary, John J. Horgan, testifies to how well Joyce ‘recaptures the tense atmosphere of those days’ in the wake of the Parnell split. Horgan writes that the exchanges recorded in A Portrait ‘with its bitter language reproduces only too well the scenes which then occurred in many Irish homes.’¹ It’s hard to think of any recent Irish

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political event that has evoked such unbridled passion.

In his short story, ‘Ivy Day at the Committee Room’, set in the early 20th century, Joyce broods over the memory of Parnell and provides an insight into the frailty of the recently-reunited Irish Party. Its candidate’s canvassers have no great enthusiasm for their man, the publican, ‘Tricky Dicky’ Tierney. Their main concern is that they be paid – “I wish he’d turn up with the spondulics” and “how does he expect us to work for him if he won’t stump up?” The highlight of their day is when some bottles of Guinness are delivered with the compliments of the candidate.

Joe Hynes, a character who will appear again in Ulysses, speaks with greater passion about the socialist candidate, Colgan, ‘a plain, honest man with no hunker-sliding’, someone ‘who is not going to drag the honour of Dublin in the mud to please a German monarch’, a reference to the impending visit of King Edward the 7th and whether there should be an Address of Welcome from Dublin Corporation. Although Mr Henchy offers a benign assessment of the King:

    an ordinary knockabout like you and me. He’s fond of his glass of grog and he’s a bit of a rake perhaps”,

Hynes insists that if Parnell were alive ‘we’d have no talk of an address of welcome.’ The story concludes with an emotional rendition by Hynes of a poem he wrote on the Death of Parnell:

He is dead. Our Uncrowned King is dead.
O, Erin, mourn with grief and woe

For he lies dead whom the fell gang

Of modern hypocrites laid low.

The day that brings us Freedom’s reign.

And on that day may Erin well

Pledge in the cup she lifts to Joy

One grief – the memory of Parnell.

Everyone in the room rallies around the memory of Parnell who had been dead for more than a decade at that time. Even the unionist, Crofton, respects Parnell because he was a gentleman. Henchy sums up Parnell’s achievement more punchily – ‘He was the only man that could keep that bag of cats in order.’ As depicted by Joyce, the Irish Party faithful are clearly still in thrall to Parnell in those opening years of the 20th century. Tellingly, there is no mention in the story of Irish Party leader, John Redmond, or any other member of its leadership. This suggests that the party Parnell had led was not what it used to be, as more radical elements emerged to challenge its ascendancy.

Parnell is also a presence in Ulysses, set in 1904, which explores the cusp between the last generation of Home Rulers and the game-changing separatists who came into their own in the second decade of the twentieth century while Joyce was busy writing his
great novel. Joyce set *Ulysses* almost exactly halfway between the death of Parnell and the Easter Rising of 1916. In one hallucinatory passage from the surrealistic ‘Circe’ episode, Bloom, who had clearly once harboured political ambitions, imagines himself as a successor to Parnell as a great reformer. More prosaically, he remembers rescuing Parnell’s hat and returning it to its owner following an altercation at a political meeting.

I am inclined to view *Ulysses* as Joyce’s farewell to Parnell, as an elegy for the fading Parnellite generation of Joyce’s father, John Stanislaus, or Simon Dedalus in Joyce’s work. In the ‘Hades’ episode, where the mourners at Paddy Dignam’s funeral, Joe Hynes and Mr Power decide to ‘go around to the Chief’s grave’. They mull over the idea that he is not dead, but that ‘one day he will come again.’ Hynes dismisses this idea. ‘Parnell will never come again, he said. He’s there, all that was mortal of him.’

This idea surfaces again in the ‘Eumaeus’ episode where one of the customers in the cabman’s shelter near Butt Bridge recalls a Dublin Fusilier claiming to have seen Parnell in South Africa, where he had ‘changed his name to De Wet, the Boer general.’ Bloom’s response is characteristically pragmatic: ‘Highly unlikely of course that there was even a shadow of truth in these stories and, even supposing, he thought a return highly inadvisable, all things considered’ because times move on. To me, this is a hint that Joyce thought it time to move on from Parnell because Parnellite nationalism had descended into the rhetorical windiness satirized in the ‘Aeolus’ episode. Bloom’s view of Arthur Griffith as a ‘coming man’ echoes Joyce’s own admiration of Griffith whose
Sinn Féin he saw as the latest iteration of the Fenian tradition. Molly, an instinctive sceptic about most things, doesn’t rate Griffith on account of the state of his trousers.

Mention of Parnell generates lively exchanges in which Skin-the-Goat Fitzharris, a member of the Invincibles, blames Mrs O’Shea for Parnell’s travails. ‘She put the first nail in his coffin.’ Bloom, who is sympathetic to Parnell and Katherine O’Shea, describes their situation in terms uncannily like his own predicament, with Bloom as Captain O’Shea and Blazes Boylan as Parnell: ‘... it was simply a case of the husband not being up to scratch with nothing in common between them beyond the name and then a real man arriving on the scene, strong to the verge of weakness, falling victim to her siren charms and forgetting home ties.’ This all points to Bloom’s admiring affinity with Parnell. Joe Hynes, the sentimental Parnellite from *Dubliners*, acts as a calming element in the rambunctious ‘Cyclops’ episode which gives us full sight of the Irish Ireland nationalism of the early 20th century that contributed to driving Joyce away from his homeland and deeply disenchanted Yeats.

In an essay on Parnell published in a Trieste newspaper, Joyce wrote of the “extraordinary personality of a leader who, with no forensic gift or original political talent, forced the greatest English politician (Gladstone) to follow his orders.” He added that “the influence that Parnell exercised over the Irish people defies the critic’s analysis.” In Joyce’s view, nothing could disturb ‘the forlorn serenity of his character’. It is hard to disagree with Joyce’s canny assessment of Parnell.
Joyce expressed a deeply cynical view of Gladstone, believing that "Gladstonian liberalism was an inconstant algebraic symbol whose coefficient was the political pressure of the moment and whose exponent was political advantage." Joyce’s take on Parnell astutely recognized his capacity to unify different strands of Irish life – parliamentarians, land leaguers, Fenians and Irish Americans. As he put it: "Parnell, convinced that such a liberalism would only yield to force, united every element of national life behind him, and set out on a march along the borders of insurrection."

Whereas Yeats blamed the Bishops and the Party for Parnell’s eclipse, Joyce saw Gladstone’s Liberals as the prime culprits. The Irish Party had deposed its leader, as Joyce put it, ‘obeying Gladstone’s orders.’

Joyce, who was a connoisseur of betrayal, evokes Parnell’s appeal to his followers not to throw him to the English wolves. With merciless candour, Joyce observed that: “They did not throw him to the English wolves: they tore him apart themselves.

**Conclusion:** This all reveals Joyce to have been an acute interpreter of the Ireland of his boyhood. His interest in Parnell derives from his father’s infatuation with the Chief. The *Dictionary of Irish Biography*’s entry on Joyce senior observes that:

The fall of John Joyce coincided with the political fall and death of Parnell, whom John Joyce (and his son) vigorously supported. John took little interest in active politics after this, even after the Irish Party reunited. The family moved from their comfortable middle-class life to more difficult circumstances on the north side of Dublin.
In my book, *Ulysses: A Reader’s Odyssey*, I wrote, a little fancifully perhaps, that, had Parnell survived to deliver some form of Home Rule in the early 20th century, John Stanislaus Joyce could well have become a prominent figure in a self-governing Ireland and his talented son, James, might have been part of a new Catholic elite centred around College Green.

In this imaginative reading of Joyce’s personal saga, Parnellite ‘history is to blame’ for his family’s decline. Such a reading could put a different complexion on Stephen Dedalus’s depiction of history as ‘a nightmare from which I am trying to awake’. Perhaps this is the nightmare of a generation whose hopes for a Parnellite apotheosis were cruelly dashed in 1891.

Sadly for Parnell, the Home Rule dog never barked for him. And when it did, it was too late. By the time Joyce got down to work on *Ulysses*, the Home Rule moment had passed. In *Ulysses*, Joyce playfully suggests that his fictional Bloom had given Arthur Griffith the idea for his influential political tract, *The Resurrection of Hungary*. By the time *Ulysses* was published, Griffith, Bloom’s ‘coming man’ truly had come into his own as President of Dáil Éireann.

Early 20th century Ireland, a land still under the long shadow of Parnell, was the undisputed home base for Joyce’s fiction. Yeats was a writer in perpetual pursuit of the heroic, seeking heroes in the Gaelic past, in the person of John O’Leary, in the lives of
the great Anglo-Irish writers of the 18th century, in his own personal pantheon of Gregory, Synge, Gonne and others. Parnell was part of Yeats’s parade of heroes.

By contrast, Joyce did not do heroism. His ‘hero’ Leopold Bloom is an antithesis, doing heroism in his own particular way, battling with the adversities of everyday existence. While Joyce consciously shied away from the heroic, Parnell, his father’s hero, was probably about as close as he came. If I had to put a political label on Joyce, I would probably term him a Parnellite Sinn Féiner of a 1904 vintage. Joyce would undoubtedly be pleased to see Ivy Day being marked here in Woodenbridge and in Glasnevin this weekend. As he wrote in the ‘Hades’ episode, ‘Let’s go round by the chief’s grave’.

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