

Fashioning the famine queen

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Throughout the nineteenth century the monarchy was often spoken of as the 'golden link' or 'golden bridge' between Britain and Ireland. Yet it meant different things on either side of the Irish Sea. With the decline in the actual powers of the monarchy, self-appointed constitutional experts such as Walter Bagehot, whose *The English Constitution* was published in 1867, backed the view that the role of the monarchy was to provide an emotional focus to mitigate divisions in society.¹

For British politicians, therefore, the golden bridge of the monarchy was a means whereby the Irish might become reconciled to their position within the United Kingdom. For Irish nationalist politicians, meanwhile, the golden bridge could provide a continuing symbolic link with Britain, which might, to an extent, disguise the high degree of autonomy they hoped to gain through Repeal or Home Rule.

Most Irish nationalists were monarchists, therefore, of either the enthusiastic or the grudging but realistic varieties. This ought not to come as a surprise. In the nineteenth century the vast majority of countries were monarchies of one form or another. International relations were predominantly relations between monarchs, a fact which gave Queen Victoria a greater political influence than her domestic constitutional position warranted. In the age of nationalism, subjecthood was still as viable a form of political identity for the individual as membership of a nation, and the two were by no means incompatible in principle. Monarchy seemed the natural form of government and had the blessing of the Catholic Church, a fact of great significance in Ireland where the overwhelming majority of nationalists were Catholics.²

Though in theory accepting of the monarchy, many nationalists became in practice increasingly anti-monarchical in temperament. In the case of a few, such as the republican Maud Gonne, this was for ideological reasons. In the case of the many, however, it was a logical political response to the anti-nationalist function which the monarchy was seen to be playing, albeit a response which in time became ingrained and visceral.

Temperamental anti-monarchism ought not to be necessarily equated with espoused republicanism. Some of the most virulent anti-monarchists of the

¹ For a full account of the relationship between the British monarchy and Irish nationalism see James H. Murphy, *Abject Loyalty: Nationalism and Monarchy in Ireland during the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Cork, 2001). ² See Tom Garvin, *1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin, 1996), p. 11.

1880s, for example, were the young Turks of the Irish Parliamentary Party, William O'Brien, Tim Healy and the Redmond brothers, who officially supported the continuance of the monarchy in Ireland. The views on the monarchy of the ageing Fenian, and official republican, John O'Leary, seemed benign by contrast. For him Queen Victoria was 'a highly respectable foreign lady' who 'symbolized that British rule which was hateful to my soul' but who could not help being 'the English Queen of Ireland'.³

Republicanism was the preference of only a minority in Ireland and stood not so much for a particular vision of society as for a particular version of Ireland's relationship with Britain: total separation. It was a relationship in which the last link, golden or otherwise, had been broken and as such it was not accounted by the majority as a very realistic option. For the sake of the coherence of its empire, Britain would never allow this. In any event Britain was the dominant world power. As its nearest neighbour Ireland could never hope to live in isolation from it.⁴

II

It is not possible to gauge scientifically what ordinary people in nineteenth-century nationalist Ireland thought of the monarchy. But it may be possible to construe their views to an extent from the public discourse of their political leaders.⁵ However, the connection between the culture of official political discourse and the opinions of ordinary people is a complex one. To a degree each reflects the other. What politicians can say in public is determined both by a sensitivity to their constituency in the broad sense and by the constraints of what it is allowable to say in public at any given time. Politicians who offended against the views of those they sought to represent were often subject to an immediate rebuke in an age of public meetings and processions, before the era of the television studio and the need for opinion polls. Thus in July 1883, when nationalist politicians co-operated with Liberals and Tories in a trade exhibition in Cork which opened with the singing of 'God Save the Queen,' there was a significant public boycott of the event.⁶

Until the 1870s the political culture which constrained Irish politicians worked in favour of monarchy, thereafter it worked against it. In April 1869 Daniel O'Sullivan, the mayor of Cork, made semi-private remarks insulting to the royal family which were subsequently reported in the newspapers. Enmeshed as they were in the general political culture of the United Kingdom

3 John O'Leary, *Recollections of a Fenian and Fenianism* (2 vols, London, 1898), vol. 2, 131. 4 See Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921* (Manchester, 1998), p. 6. 5 See Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Brookfield, VT, 1997), p. 2. 6 FJ [*Freeman's Journal*], 4 July 1883.

at the time, Irish politicians found themselves supporting the British outrage at his remarks. Yet by the early 1880s the self-assertiveness of nationalist politicians had grown to such an extent that insults about the royal family were almost *de rigueur* for those who wanted to advance their political careers in Ireland.

As for the views of ordinary people, they not only influenced politicians but were also influenced by them.⁷ This was especially so concerning enthusiasm for monarchy. The nationalist political class came to deride popular support for monarchy as the result either of a sense of colonial inferiority, which they termed 'flunkeyism', or as the phoney result of direct pressure from the landlord and higher commercial classes, which were Protestant and pro-Union, on the lower ranks of society. And once nationalism had decisively set its face against monarchy in the early decades of the twentieth century, individuals could express support for monarchy only at the cost of having their Irishness questioned. Yet interest in monarchy continued and continues to exist, as evidenced in recent decades by the large number of Irish television viewers of royal weddings and funerals. It remains an unresolved issue.

III

For most of the nineteenth-century elections of members of parliament in Ireland, as in Britain, were rather imperfect affairs from the point of view of modern democracy. Until 1872 electors voted in public and were subject to pressure and bribery. The Catholic Relief Act of 1829 allowed Catholics to sit as MPs but reduced the number of electors in the process. Gradual parliamentary reform occurred by means of legislation in 1832, 1850, 1868, 1884 and 1885, which redrew constituency boundaries and progressively reduced property qualifications for voting, though universal male and partial female voting rights were not conceded until 1918.

In such circumstances public meetings, banquets and processions were of enormous importance. Such meetings could have a number of ostensible purposes: to listen to speeches, to agree on resolutions, to draw up memorials, to make pledges, to greet returned heroes or bid farewell to departing ones, to bury the recently deceased or memorialise the venerable dead. But their real purposes included gauging public support, assuring allegiance, pressurising authority and securing a mandate for action.

There were five major forces in nineteenth-century nationalist Ireland which were capable of attracting significant support from different sectors of the public, as evidenced by attendance at mass gatherings: physical-force activism, religion, land agitation, constitutional politics and monarchy. There were of course other minor movements which attracted mass support but they tended

⁷ Williams, *Contentious Crown*, p. 2.

to fall within the ambit of one of the five major forces. Thus Father Mathew's Temperance Movement of the 1840s came to an extent under Daniel O'Connell's spell and many of the cultural, language and sporting movements that sprang up towards the end of the century were infiltrated by the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

Quite obviously, largely constitutional political movements relied heavily on the effects of the mass meeting, from the 'monster' meetings of O'Connell's Repeal Association in the 1840s to the great public meetings, often associated with elections in a more enfranchised age, of the Irish Party in the 1880s. One of the reasons why constitutional political leaders in nationalist Ireland were so nervous of the monarchy was because support for it was demonstrated in essentially similar ways. Royal visits occasioned great gatherings of people along the routes of royal processions, which could be compared with numbers attending nationalist political meetings. And there is no doubt that hundreds of thousands of people did turn out to see royal visitors to Ireland. It is often asserted, for example, and probably not without justification, that one million people saw Queen Victoria during the course of her 1853 visit to Dublin.⁸

Given the large numbers turning out for royal visits, two questions arise. What was the disposition of the crowds, and what was the significance of their disposition? Though nationalist politicians often tried to play down the level of enthusiasm, few seriously disputed that on most royal visits the crowds were enthusiastic. One of those who did was John O'Leary, who nearly fifty years afterwards claimed to recall that on her 1849 visit Queen Victoria 'was received with considerable curiosity, and, as far as one could judge a total absence of all other feelings. She passed down the broadest street in Dublin, or perhaps in Europe, amid a gaping crowd, but, as far as I could see or hear, without a single cheer or other sign of sympathetic interest. And her Majesty did not like her position, if one were to judge by her looks and no wonder either.'⁹ O'Leary's account is contradicted by all contemporary accounts of the 1849 visit, which report enormous enthusiasm on the part of the crowds.

Another way of gauging the existence of widespread enthusiasm is through English sources. Referring to Queen Victoria's entry into Dublin on her 1900 visit, her assistant private secretary, Frederick Ponsonby, noting that there was some booing at two points on the route, nonetheless, wrote of it that 'Although I had seen many visits of this kind, nothing had ever approached the enthusiasm and even frenzy displayed by the people of Dublin.'¹⁰

Such reactions were not the sole province of those who wanted to see the monarchy popular in Ireland and thus might be expected to overstate enthusi-

⁸The one million figure is claimed in the entry on Queen Victoria in Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee (eds), *DNB [The Dictionary of National Biography]*, vol. 22 (Supplement) (London, 1909), p. 1304. ⁹O'Leary, *Fenianism*, vol. 2, 61. ¹⁰Frederick Ponsonby, *Recollections of Three Reigns* (London, 1951), p. 63.

asm. Of crucial significance, therefore, is English opinion opposed to royal visits to Ireland, which, by criticising the popular welcome for royalty, acknowledged its reality. Thus for Richard Monckton Milnes the huge welcome which Queen Victoria received in Ireland in 1849 was 'idolatrous and utterly unworthy of a free, not to say ill-used, nation'.¹¹

The question of what such enthusiasm signified is a more complex one. A common English, and sometimes Irish, explanation was that the Irish were natural monarchists and, being Celtic and thus supposedly emotional, prone to enthusiasm for the royal family. 'The [Irish] people are more easily moved to loyalty for the Queen and royal family than the English or Scotch', the lord lieutenant, Lord Spencer, told Gladstone in 1885.¹² Four years later an English MP complained to the House of Commons that Irish MPs had not helped English Radicals to oppose increased royal grants. However, he went on, 'I am not surprised at this because chivalric devotion to persons and great respect for hereditary rank have been, and still are, more powerful factors with the Irish race than they are with ourselves.'¹³

Some nationalists claimed conveniently that the crowds which welcomed royal visitors were merely the representatives of a distinct, non-nationalist minority. Thus when Victoria's second son, Prince Alfred, duke of Edinburgh, visited Dublin in 1884 *United Ireland* claimed that he had been greeted by 'the few flunkeys who are always to be found in Dublin', whereas 'the vast bulk of the people' ignored him.¹⁴

The less settling truth was probably that those who greeted royal visitors were often the same people who supported Home Rule, and even the Fenians. Some may have been interested in mass gatherings of a variety of political complexions as a form of entertainment.¹⁵ Others may simply have been unself-consciously capable of sustaining several sorts of allegiances simultaneously. In April 1868, for example, the viceroy, Lord Abercorn, told Queen Victoria that former Fenians had been seen cheering the prince and princess of Wales on their recent visit.¹⁶

No doubt the fickleness of the populace was an unsettling thought for nationalist leaders and was the principal cause of their growing hostility towards the monarchy. In truth, however, support for the monarchy was less deeply rooted than support for nationalism, as Queen Victoria herself noted in 1897 in the wake of the enthusiastic reception which the recent visit of the duke and

11 Quoted in *DNB*, vol. 22 (Supplement), p. 1298. **12** Lord Spencer to W.E. Gladstone, 26 January 1885, in Peter Gordon (ed.), *The Red Earl: Papers of the Fifth Earl Spencer, vol. 1 (1835-1885)* (Northampton, 1981), p. 291. **13** E.H. Pickersgill, in *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, vol. 338, col. 1333 (25 July 1889). **14** *United Ireland*, 6 September 1884. **15** R.V. Comerford writes that many people attended the funeral of Terence Bellew MacManus in 1861 'because it was a spectacle and an excuse for ovating', *The Fenians in Context* (Dublin, 1985), p. 79. **16** RA [Royal Archives], D 24/34, Lord Abercorn to Queen Victoria, 25 April 1868.

duchess of York had occasioned: 'It was the same on the occasion of our three visits there, but alas, it did not produce a lasting effect, and the Queen feels that this may still be the case.'¹⁷

And yet the reception of royal visitors was a key preoccupation for nationalist leaders to the extent that they often felt it necessary to engage in a hermeneutics of royal occasions in order to explain, or explain away, popular enthusiasm. In his *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)*, John Mitchel assesses Queen Victoria's 1849 visit which, due to his transportation to Tasmania, he had not personally witnessed.

In the course of only two paragraphs Mitchel offers four explanations for the warmth of her reception. The first is that it was the doing of 'the great army of persons, who, in Ireland, are paid to be loyal, [and] were expected to get up the appearance of rejoicing'. The second is 'the natural courtesy of the people' which prevented them from protesting against the visit. The third is 'the Viceroy's precautions against any show of disaffection'. And the fourth is the people's expectation, false as it turned out, that a lack of protest might bring clemency for those recently convicted and transported on account of the brief 1848 rebellion.¹⁸ The cheering crowds were thus acting in a fashion which showed that they were simultaneously venal, instinctively respectful, cowed by the threat of force, and pursuing a shrewd political calculation.

If nationalist leaders were unwilling easily to accept that royal visitors were popular in Ireland and were perplexed in their own attempts to account for the reception of the population, there are perhaps three further personal factors which help to make royal popularity in Ireland comprehensible. The first was the fame – celebrity in today's terms – of the ruling family of what was in the nineteenth century the world's greatest empire. Secondly, there was the glamour of younger royal visitors. This was still an advantage to the 30-year-old Queen Victoria in 1849 and was certainly an advantage to the princess of Wales in 1868 and to Princess Louise who visited Ireland in 1871.

The final factor had to do with what was perceived as the personal disposition of royal visitors in favour of Ireland. If the crown as an institution was set in favour of the Union, perhaps the wearer of the crown might be better disposed to a change which might favour nationalist Ireland. This was rarely the case, but Irish Catholic nationalists persisted in fantasising otherwise, a practice which was possible only because of the very limited information which the wider public had of what members of the royal family actually thought about Ireland.

All this meant that the popularity of the crown in Ireland was more a matter of the personal popularity of individual members of the royal family than it was in Britain, a fact confirmed by the widely reported story of what an old woman

¹⁷ RA, D 43/39, Queen Victoria to Lord Cadogan, 3 September 1897. ¹⁸ John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)*, (London, n.d.), pp. 215–16.

in the crowd had shouted to Queen Victoria about her children on her arrival in Kingstown in 1849, 'Ah, Queen, dear, make one of them Prince Patrick and Ireland will die for you!'¹⁹ It was advice which Victoria took, naming her third son Arthur William Patrick Albert.

IV

In the most general sense of the word the politics of nineteenth-century Ireland can be seen in terms of the major forces in Irish life – physical-force activism, religion, land agitation, constitutional politics and monarchy – moving away from conflict and coming into a variety of alignments. In the 1830s and 1840s O'Connell, for whom physical-force activism was always anathema, tried unsuccessfully to recruit monarchy for Irish nationalism and for repeal of the Union. In the 1860s there was a clash between Fenianism and the Catholic Church.

By the 1880s, however, constitutional politics, physical force activism, land agitation and Catholicism had all more or less merged into a nationalist accommodation, if not always a nationalist consensus. The Land League and Irish Parliamentary Party were intimately connected with each other. The 'new departure' initiative of the late 1870s was an attempt to garner support for constitutional politics from at least some sections of the physical force tradition. Finally, in 1884 there was agreement between the Catholic bishops and the Irish Parliamentary Party whereby the latter agreed to press Catholic claims in education.

Monarchy alone remained as a Trojan horse of Unionism within the nationalist polity. It was opposed both because nationalist politicians feared its influence might indeed reconcile Irish people to the Union, and because enthusiasm for monarchy in Ireland was used to feed a British discourse which saw Ireland as a country that could be appeased by concessions short of Home Rule and which did not take nationalist demands seriously. These were the reasons for the often virulent nature of nationalist opposition to monarchy and for the extremes of emotion which it evoked. It was the enemy within which had to be turned into the much more manageable enemy without. It had to be excised from the 'common myths and historic memories' of the Irish nation.²⁰

British opinion, too, had to be made to see that Ireland was not a contented part of the United Kingdom; insulting the monarchy was the most public and yet the safest and easiest way to do so. Ironically, though, this was a fact also recognised by British governments who at times almost seemed relieved that nationalists were blowing off steam against the monarchy rather than opposing

¹⁹ Stanley Weintraub, *Victoria* (London, 1996), p. 205. ²⁰ Anthony D. Smith argues that five factors contribute to the entrenching of national identity: a homeland, common myths and historic memories, common non-public culture, common legal rights and duties, and a common economy with territorial mobility, *National Identity* (London, 1991) p. 5.

the state in more active ways. In 1872 Lord Spencer wrote to Queen Victoria, in a rather insensitive manner given her devotion to the memory of her late husband, that he was at least consoled 'such childish tricks' as the recent attack on the statue of Prince Albert in Dublin indicated that 'no grave acts of rebellion or armed force are contemplated'.²¹

V

The absence of palpable monarchy from Ireland for long periods, for which Queen Victoria was much criticised in Britain, punctuated by moments of its sudden presence, had the effect of bringing latent and sometimes dormant ideological conflicts into a heightened tension and eliciting a reaction. Thus, beginning in the 1860s, a discernible, if not always neatly defined, tendency emerged whereby royal occasions provoked counter assertions of nationalist identity and discontent.²² This tendency grew in intensity in two phases, the first in the late 1870s and early 1880s, and the second in the late 1890s, accompanying changes in society and generational shifts in nationalist and republican leadership. Sometimes, indeed, reaction against the monarchy had the effect of pushing nationalism forward, as with the galvanising celebrations of the 1798 rebellion in 1898 which were a response to the celebrations of the queen's diamond jubilee in 1897. To an increasing extent nationalism began to find self-definition in what at times came close to being a dialectic of opposition to monarchy.

As O'Connell had generally wanted to claim loyalty to the crown for Irish nationalism, he had been ambivalent about the implications of the sobriquet of 'uncrowned king' and preferred the Enlightenment title of 'Liberator'. It was not so in the 1880s. In time the 'uncrowned king' title was used of Parnell, whom Queen Victoria once tellingly referred to as a 'Pretender'.²³ Queen Victoria was increasingly known to have Conservative political tendencies. But this did not matter as her power was now quite limited. What did matter was that, encouraged both by the Liberals, who wanted a focus for domestic unity to transcend class divisions, and by the Conservatives, who wanted a unifying national ideology to support imperial expansion abroad, the monarchy had become the symbolic focus of British national cohesion.

In 1889 John Morley, one of the most popular Liberal politicians ever to hold office in Ireland, told the Commons that 'the Monarchy has entered into

²¹ RA, D 27/104, Lord Spencer to Queen Victoria, 10 June 1872. ²² A similar pattern is discernible in other countries and in more recent times. The highly successful tour of South Africa undertaken by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, after World War I, was quickly followed by the victory of the Afrikaner National Party. Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Australia for its bicentenary in 1988 was followed by the beginnings of the Australian republican movement. ²³ Queen Victoria to Lord Granville, 29 January 1881, in George Earle Buckle (ed.), *Letters of Queen Victoria* (2nd series, 3 vols, London, 1928), vol. 3, 186.

the very web of English national life, and is the outward and visible symbol of the historic character of the nation'.²⁴ The *Dictionary of National Biography* put the matter succinctly:

The crown after 1880 became the living symbol of imperial unity, and every year events deepened the impression that the queen in her own person typified the common interest and the common sympathy which spread a feeling of brotherhood through the continents that formed the British empire.²⁵

This judgment was generally true, except in the case of nationalist Ireland, where Queen Victoria's embodiment of imperial Britain was to the detriment of her popular standing. Nor were nationalist activists slow to draw comparisons between Parnell and Queen Victoria unflattering to the latter, as in the following American journal article, which contrasts the Irish taxation money going to support the queen with Parnell's service *gratis* to Ireland:

The contrast presented by the character of Queen Victoria and Mr Parnell is not only striking – it is even startling. Nothing can be more noble and generous than the one; nothing more selfish, mean, and vixenish than the other. Mr Parnell donates his talents, his fortune, his life to the Irish. He loves them with all his heart. Victoria deprives them of £8,000, and hates them with all the mean spite and petty malice of her waspish nature. He is the 'uncrowned king of Ireland.' She is regarded as a sceptred impostor. He would exalt the Irish into free men; she would degrade them into slaves and beggars. She gives them 'an alms out of her own bag' and sinks them into involuntary mendicancy, which galls and humiliates their national pride.²⁶

VI

In considering Queen Victoria's posthumous reputation in Ireland it is ironic to note that the very success of her 1900 visit ensured a deepening personal hatred of her among many staunch nationalists for whom loyalty to the monarchy was now incompatible with Irish national identity and who were disconcerted by the continuing capacity of monarchy to capture public acclaim in Ireland. Their opposition to her needed a focus and they found it in creating an image of Queen Victoria as the famine queen.

²⁴ *FJ*, 30 July 1889. ²⁵ *DNB*, vol. 22 (Supplement), p. 1366. ²⁶ C.M. O'Keeffe, 'Queen Victoria and Mr Parnell', *Celtic Monthly*, 3 (June 1880), 521. This appeared three years before Parnell received a testimonial of £37,000 from the Irish people.

The Irish association of Queen Victoria with blame for the Famine, though it may have had earlier roots, began to become widespread at the time of her 1887 golden jubilee, when in England she became the symbol for British imperial success. If she could take the credit for Britain's successes she was also liable for Britain's failures, some Irish nationalists argued. The jubilee, for example, was celebrated at the Church of the Holy Innocents, 37th Street, New York, with a requiem mass for those who had died in the Famine, complete with catafalque surrounded by six candles.²⁷ The famine-queen myth also came to be associated with the allegation that Queen Victoria, as a sign of her supposed indifference to Irish suffering, had given only five pounds for famine relief. In fact £2,000 and then a further £500 were donated on her behalf. It is uncertain when or how the story of the £5 arose but it may be associated with a real incident during the mid-1890s when the queen gave £5 to Mary Donnelly whose family was swallowed up in the Kerry mud slide. *United Ireland* drew attention to the incident and used it to criticise the amount of Irish tax payers' money the queen was receiving for her upkeep.²⁸

The famine-queen caricature sees Queen Victoria as being somehow directly responsible not only for the Famine but also for the entire canon of nationalist grievances during her reign. The famine queen largely displaced the hostile memory of those British politicians, such as Lord Clarendon, the 'starvation Viceroy',²⁹ and Lord John Russell, the 'Attorney General of Starvation',³⁰ who at the time of the Famine had been the real objects of nationalist ire in a way in which the queen had not been. In 1848, for example, the *Freeman's Journal* had commended another paper for drawing 'the line of demarcation between the starvation ministry and the Queen'.³¹

The early twentieth-century antipathy to Queen Victoria was particularly strong among radical nationalist women of English or Anglo-Irish background. It was their efforts in particular which resulted in her lasting vilification in nationalist mythology as the famine queen. Prominent among the promoters of the slogan were Maud Gonne and Anna Parnell. The latter's poem on the death of Queen Victoria is a good example of their efforts:

Not four more years have passed to-day
 And now the Queen, the Famine Queen,
 Herself has passed away,
 And that dread form will never more be seen,
 In pomp of fancied glory and of pride,
 or humbled, scored, defeated as she died;
 For by God's will she was amongst the first to fall
 Beneath those mills of His that grind so wondrous small.³²

²⁷ *New York Times*, 22 June 1887. ²⁸ *United Ireland*, 23 January 1897; *FJ*, 16 May 1897. ²⁹ *FJ*, 4 April 1850. ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 May 1878. ³¹ *Ibid.*, 12 July 1848. ³² Anna Parnell, '22nd

Maud Gonne's major attack on Queen Victoria's 1900 visit took the form of her 'Famine Queen' article in Arthur Griffith's *United Irishman*, causing most of the copies of the paper to be seized by the police on publication day.³³ According to Gonne, the queen, whose soul was 'vile and selfish', hated Ireland, a country 'whose inhabitants are the victims of the criminal policy of her reign, the survivors of sixty years of organised famine'. She contrasted the fate of 'poor Irish emigrant girls, whose very innocence makes them an easy prey', with 'this woman, whose bourgeois virtue is so boasted, and in whose name their homes were destroyed'. The article comes to a climax with the queen transformed into a mythic hybrid of a ghoulish witch, confronting a defiant, personified Ireland. The English were afraid of losing the Boer War and:

In their terror they turn to Victoria, their Queen. She has succeeded in amassing more gold than any of her subjects, she has always been ready to cover with her royal mantle the crimes and turpitudes of her Empire and now, trembling on the brink of the grave, she rises once more to their call ... Taking the Shamrock in her withered hand, she dares to ask Ireland for soldiers – for soldiers to fight for the exterminators of their race. Ireland's reply, 'Queen, return to your own land ... See! Your recruiting agents return alone and unsuccessful from my green hills and plains, because once more hope has revived and it will be in the ranks of your enemies that my children will find employment and honour.'³⁴

In fact the visit was so arranged as to wrong-foot such criticism. The queen did not engage in army recruitment and spent most of her public appearances meeting children.

The famine queen passed quickly into the common parlance of nationalist mythology. As late as 1995, for example, the discovery of a statue of the queen at University College, formerly Queen's College, Cork, where it had been buried several decades earlier, enabled the myth to have another outing in the letters columns of Irish newspapers from correspondents hostile to the statue being put on public display.³⁵

Nor did Queen Victoria's reputation concerning Ireland fare much better in English discourse. This was for very different reasons, though out of a similar over-estimation of the power of monarchy as that which had caused nationalist antipathy. In England Queen Victoria became the scapegoat for the failure of British policy in Ireland. The tone was set within a few years of her death by Sir Sidney Lee in the *Dictionary of National Biography's* discussion of the success of her 1900 visit:

January 1901', in Jane McL. Côté, *Fanny and Anna Parnell* (Dublin, 1991), p. 262. ³³ *FJ*, 7 April 1900. ³⁴ Elizabeth Coxhead, *Daughters of Erin: Five Women of the Irish Renaissance* (London, 1965), p. 45–6. ³⁵ See Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork, 1996), pp. 171–2.

But it brought into broad relief the neglect of Ireland that preceded it, and it emphasised the errors of feeling and judgment which made her almost a complete stranger to her Irish subjects in their own land during the rest of her long reign.³⁶

In the 1930s Frank Hardie castigated the failure to build on the success of her 1849 visit as 'the greatest mistake of her life' and reported that 'It has been said that Queen Victoria lost Ireland for England.'³⁷ In the early 1950s, when it was clear that the British Empire was in its twilight years, Algernon Cecil, wrote:

if Victoria had brought herself to cross the Irish Sea year by year, or even rather less often, she would have won the hearts of her Irish subjects ... and, as he [Lord Salisbury] saw, more than Eire hung upon the result. 'If Ireland goes,' he once told his daughter, from whom I had the story, 'India will go fifty years later.' Ireland went, and India, to all intents and purposes, not so much as fifty years later.³⁸

The queen's supposed neglect of Ireland had ludicrously now become the cause of the break-up of the entire British empire. This was a line of argument which at once obviously over-estimated the influence of the monarchy and under-estimated Irish nationalism. It was part of the discourse which had sustained the British will to continue to rule in Ireland and enabled members of the political establishment to believe that nationalist grievances were superficial and that Ireland could become a contented part of the United Kingdom, if only it was only given justice or received enough royal attention.

In this view Queen Victoria was responsible for fatally damaging the Union of Britain and Ireland through her neglect of the latter. The monarchy had injured the constitution. But the truth was quite the reverse. It was the monarchy in Ireland which was fatally damaged by its zealous commitment to a very problematic constitution.

³⁶ DNB, vol. 22 (Supplement), p. 1368. ³⁷ Frank Hardie, *The Political Influence of Queen Victoria, 1861-1901* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 18, 177. ³⁸ Algernon Cecil, *Queen Victoria and her Prime Ministers* (London, 1953), p. 83.