The Discourse of Well-Being in Late-Modern Ireland

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By

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"Dear SIR–I shall feel grateful should you permit me space in your valuable paper to draw the attention of the 'powers that be'…"
PRO BONO PUBLICO, *Irish Daily Independent*, 14 September 1900

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea for this book originated over two years ago from an informal discussion with colleagues over the large-scale research project "Discourses and contexts of well-being in the history of English", of which the study was conceived as the Irish section.

There is no doubt that the concept of well-being has generated scholarly discussion with regard to both individual and social dimensions, and from such diverse disciplinary angles as psychology and economic theory. Conversely, the idea of looking at social well-being in historical contexts, and even more so through the prism of text and discourse analysis, is novel and is explored here through letters to the editor from late-modern Ireland. The flexible framework developed in the volume allows to more systematically account for the structure of letters from different news outlets, while at the same time establishing patterns in terms of discourse strategies, argumentative discourse and lexical choices. As such, the study was intended to develop an integrated approach to the Irish public sphere at the turn of the twentieth century, a period of intense cultural ferment and growing national consciousness.

I am profoundly grateful to Prof Nicholas Brownlees: without his valuable and constructive feedback, the project might never have got off the ground. In addition, I would like to express heartfelt gratitude to staff at the National Library of Ireland: I owe it to their great professional assistance in January 2022 that the project came to fruition. Finally, I am profoundly grateful to Cambridge Scholars Publishing, whose generous support and great expertise played a fundamental role in enabling the book to eventually take shape.

Modena, February 2023

CHAPTER ONE

"…LIKE SOFT WAX":
THE DISCOURSE OF WELL-BEING AND/IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRELAND

1.1 What this book is

On 28 May 1902, readers of the *Cork Examiner* coming across the newspaper's correspondence column will have noted its somewhat unusual headline: MAIDS IN REVOLT. The section included five letters through which former housemaids as well as ordinary citizens joined vigorous debate on the salary and productivity of servants in Ireland. In one of the letters, ANOTHER EX-DOMESTIC was harshly critical of the treatment meted out to servant girls, particularly (if not only) in Cork City:

> Having read from time to time letters in the 'Examiner' with reference to servant girls and their mistresses, I can quite agree with all 'Domestic' said in her letter of the 21st referring to mistresses and their houses. I know myself from past experience what a good many of those girls have to put up with, and is it any wonder that numbers of them prefer to work in England and other countries, even though they may have to work harder? They will tell you they get paid for it, and are treated with human respect and kindness. Some mistresses, particularly in Cork, think they never get half the worth of the small wages they pay their servants. But if they had to do the same work themselves they would be far more lenient and conscientious towards their servants.

The opening segment of the letter proves that the correspondence published by the *Examiner* only marked the last stage of a controversy raging for some time through the medium of the press–cf. *Having read from time to time letters in the 'Examiner' with reference to servant girls and their mistresses…* The writer then draws readers' attention to the often deplorable working conditions of so many girls, which she herself appears to have experienced (*…what a good many of those girls have to put up with…*). If they stay on, *Another Ex-Domestic* complains, they will both

continue to earn *small wages* and be denied the *human respect and kindness* they would on the other hand receive in England or further afield.

Although letters such as this did not constitute a majority of those appearing in the periodical press of the age, they were nonetheless significant. To begin with, they displayed people's sensitivities about issues such as employment conditions and social justice. Moreover, they raised readers' awareness of people's needs, expectations and/or assumptions about how Irish society more generally should work to be fairer and more inclusive. In other words, letters to the editor, among other things, provide concrete evidence of individual views about crucial dimensions of social well-being. If nothing else, therefore, they can be seen as articulating a society's discourse of well-being, at least as far as discourse from below is concerned, as it were.

This volume is intended to analyse people's discourse of well-being on the basis of the *Litir_Corpus*, a collection of letters to the editor from three national newspapers from late nineteenth/early twentieth-century Ireland. In particular, the study fields the following research questions: (1) What dimensions of social well-being can be isolated as the most important to readers (e.g., social justice, public health)?; (2) How does letter writers' discourse tend to unfold in relation to each of them and, accordingly, (3) what patterns can be established in terms of letter structure, argumentative discourse and underlying lexical choices?

Before providing an outline of the volume in Section 1.4, it is sensible to discuss the rationale of the research in more detail. While, therefore, Irish letter writers' discourse is analysed more systematically in the second part of the volume, this chapter begins by defining the concept of well-being, which is explored in Section 1.2 both in terms of its current relevance and with respect to its ramifications in the Irish context. Subsequently, Section 1.3 outlines the background to Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century, in order to justify the choice of this period for the analysis of well-being discourse performed here. As a result, the chapter mainly introduces readers less familiar with well-being to its core contents and implications, and those less acquainted with Irish history to the political and cultural climate of *fin-de-siècle* Ireland.

1.2 "Well-being matters": The centrality of the notion of well-being in society

The concept of well-being has been popularised across academic and political circles for the last number of years. This may not be surprising for two main reasons. The first has been the paramount need to improve

human welfare after more than two years of unprecedented challenges such as those posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the prohibitive cost of living driven up by hostilities in Ukraine. The second is that social scientists and liberal politicians have been united by a natural inclination to refine their knowledge of the forces behind people's well-being. Complex though they are, questions such as "What makes individuals happy?" or "What contributes to happy societies?" are among those psychologists, social and political scientists, and increasing numbers of economists have been preoccupied with for some time now.

But what do we exactly mean by "well-being"? Before we propose a working definition for the purpose of this study, practical common sense suggests starting from the general, accepted notion of "happiness". This has been surmised to indicate "the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his or her life as favourable", psychologists drawing "a distinction between the well-being from life as a whole and the well-being associated with a single area of life", which "they term 'context-free' and 'context-specific'" (Blanchflower and Oswald 2000, 2). Whether they borrowed the same terminology or not, scholars from diverse disciplines have worked towards the development of methods to investigate what brings about context-free and context-specific happiness. In this respect, it is noteworthy that "happiness", "life satisfaction" and most frequently "subjective well-being" have been used interchangeably (Maccagnan et al. 2019, 219).

By combining elements from psychology and economic theory, Maccagnan et al. (2019, 219) note that three components have been incorporated by researchers and policy-makers seeking to measure subjective well-being, i.e. an "evaluative" dimension "reflecting overall life satisfaction" at a cognitive level; "an 'eudemonic' dimension, reflecting sense of life purpose; and an 'emotional' dimension, including both positive affective states, such as happiness and joy, and negative affective states, such as sadness and worry". Awareness of these aspects has informed a wide range of works aimed at identifying the factors or settings conducive to subjective well-being.

As far as factors are concerned, first of all, Blanchflower and Oswald (2000) considered gender, marital status, membership of the labour force as opposed to unemployment, and educational achievements by relying on data from Britain and the United States over a period of increasing material prosperity, namely between the early 1970s and the late 1990s. Overall, their evidence led to the conclusion that "reported well-being is greatest among women, married people, the highly educated, and those whose parents did not divorce" and it was predictably low among the

unemployed, while second marriages tended to be less happy (Blanchflower and Oswald 2000, 17).

Recent research by McNamara et al. (2021), furthermore, has drawn on the face-to-face and web-postal 2014-2015 Community Life Survey UK Cabinet databases as well as a bespoke community survey conducted in Nottinghamshire. The aim was to assess the relationship between sense of belonging in and identification with the community, and subjective well-being by factoring in loneliness in contrast with social support. Their findings are reportedly in keeping with the literature stressing the major role of community identity in promoting the health and well-being of residents. Thus, while community identification was previously demonstrated to predict residents' well-being and increase resilience to socio-economic change, the authors build upon such findings to highlight that, across two different communities and based on a national sample, community identification can be estimated to positively predict residents' well-being. This is seen by McNamara et al. (2021, 1397) as a significant addition to prior works and guidelines of policy-making in that loneliness interventions are "often delivered at the neighbourhood level", but

> they rarely focus on local community identification as a key outcome. Our work indicates that feelings of belonging to one's neighbourhood constitute a potentially significant social psychological resource for residents. From this, we suggest that elements of interventions which can enhance community membership and which can overcome barriers to inclusion should help to enhance residents' well-being.

Research on the settings that facilitate well-being has been carried out in relation to the workplace (cf. Yuan 2015) and places perceived as shaping individuals' own identity (Knez et al. 2020), to name but two environments. Yuan's (2015) study, to begin with, was undertaken to analyse to what extent inner and outer happiness in terms of subject well-being and job satisfaction respectively influence creative output in the workplace. Accordingly, Yuan distributed 300 questionnaires to employees from Taiwan's leading designer companies, whose credentials were confirmed by the Taiwan Graphic Design Association and The Graphic Design Association of the Republic of China, two key professional associations with a reputation on the Island. In more detail, designers in their capacity as "heavy users" of idea production were asked to establish what correlation, if any, there is among inspiration, subjective well-being, and job satisfaction. Findings enable Yuan (2015, 208) to uncover tight links between intrinsic job satisfaction and inspirational

experiences. Hence, the survey appreciates the discernible impact of psychological well-being on inspiration, whereas

> there are lower correlation levels between inspiration and extrinsic satisfaction of a job, and social well-being. The two kinds of correlation mentioned above establishes *[sic]* that creativity and inspiration have a close relationship with our emotional responses, and that it is a means that lets employees feel happier, have a better well-being, with a greater probability of generating innovative ideas.

The interrelation of place and identity with subjective well-being, in addition, lies at the heart of Knez et al.'s (2020) thoughtful reflection upon the emotional ties and cognitive bonds to favourite places, wellness feelings associated by individuals and groups with such places, and their readiness to "sacrifice themselves" in terms of environmentally friendly behaviours, higher taxation and cuts in living standards striving for the goal of protecting those places. Knez et al.'s research setting was the territory of the municipalities of Mariestad, Götene and Lidköping in South-West Sweden. This is where a biosphere reserve is situated, an area running along Lake Vänern's southeastern shore inhabited by humans for about 6,000 years.

Taken together, the findings from Knez et al.'s statistical analysis of landscape surveys covering 2,989 households from the area suggest that the more strongly people identify with a place emotionally and cognitively, the more intense feelings of well-being will be both individually and collectively. Even more so, respondents broadly share the belief that the curative feelings engendered by a favourite place foster people's pro-environmental attitude towards it. It follows that, in order to help with the maintenance and preservation of a site, people are on average more willing to put up with higher tax rates and even "accept cuts in [their] standard of living […]. Pro-environmental behavior, however, is more related to us as a collective than as an individual, and more to our collective than personal favorite sites" (Knez et al. 2020, 8).

The rich diversity of studies on subjective well-being, which the current section does in no way have the ambition to represent in full, leaves no doubt about the beneficial impact of happiness in terms of individual life satisfaction. This explains why academics and policy makers have extended the scope of their projects to account for social well-being, too. By definition, this implies monitoring the effects of subjective well-being on other dimensions of life and most notably in terms of the so-called "secondary benefits" (or co-benefits) of subjective well-being. While these outcomes are not necessarily the prime objective

of policy intervention targeting subjective well-being in the first place, Maccagnan et al. (2019, 218) persuasively argue that secondary benefits

> in terms of improved health, education and social relationships may for example occur […]. While there has been increasing attention paid to the valuation of the intrinsic value of subjective wellbeing […], it is probably the assessment of the co-benefits of subjective wellbeing improvements which is of more interest from the point of view of policy-makers. These co-benefits are often measurable and can be considered more tangible by policy-makers than subjective wellbeing in and of itself, and so it is important that they are properly assessed. This is very relevant for policy-makers working in these fields, as it enables the design of new–and possibly innovative–policies and the comparison of costs and benefits of different interventions.

According to Maccagnan et al., the close relationship between subjective well-being and social outcomes should encourage research grounded in empirical studies weighing the co-benefits of subjective well-being to varying degrees. Accordingly, representative surveys following individuals over time could generate a wealth of longitudinal data on dimensions such as health–taking account of mortality rates, prevention of new diseases, survival from illness and regularity of physical exercise–education–namely in the form of educational achievements–and society at large, i.e. in relation to the spread of criminal and antisocial activities as opposed to prosocial behaviours (blood donation, charity work) and other social activities including time spent with others and greater enjoyment of social interactions.

It is at this level that social well-being most apparently spills over into the domain of policy-making proper, informing our understanding of the issues that matter most to citizens and galvanising government action as a result. From the viewpoint of decision-makers within government departments, this has been prompted by growing international consensus that traditional macroeconomic indicators such as GDP fail to project a comprehensive picture of overall societal progress, largely because they hardly focus on broader living standards, distributional outcomes or people's lived experiences. In the light of this, there has been a spate of interest in well-being in all its ramifications over the last decade, as can be appreciated from work undertaken by the OECD and on the part of individual countries such as New Zealand. Wherever public attention has been devoted to well-being, multi-dimensional well-being frameworks have been developed: Ireland, the country this work is concerned with, has been no exception.

In July 2021, therefore, the Department of the *Taoiseach*[1] produced a key document preparing the country to navigate its course to measuring progress in a more innovative way. This was published as the *First Report on a Well-Being Framework for Ireland* and was part of an important and ambitious cross-government initiative intended to pursue a multidimensional approach to evaluating the impact of public policy, propelled by a desire to understand and do better by people. In this vein, the Framework was entrusted with the task of describing how people are living their lives at present and into the future, and as far as possible how this differs across different population groups, observing distribution and drawing out inequalities. For this reason, the Framework explores different dimensions that form a more comprehensive picture of the core elements making up well-being for Ireland across person, place and society.

As far as person is concerned, for instance, leading indicators include mental and physical health in relation to unmet needs for medical attention owing to financial, geographic and waiting-time issues. As regards place, the emphasis is on headline indicators such as housing and the local area, in order to keep track of the percentage of disposable income people spend on housing as well as distances between home and everyday services. With respect to society, finally, indicators are designed to point to work and job quality in relation to mean weekly earnings; community, social connections and cultural participation, not least in terms of the number of people in whose vicinity individuals live and on whose support they can count in case of serious problems; and civic engagement and cultural expression, seen as relevant to gauging people's satisfaction with the way democracy works in the country, perceived social inclusion and recent experience of discrimination.

The Framework is praiseworthy in that it coordinates a genuine effort to seriously consider the implications of every dimension involved along with the interconnectedness of indicators themselves. Going back to person, therefore, access to health services is crucial to maintaining a healthy life. This reiterates the importance of factors such as the time it takes to be treated for health interventions or the distance between households and health facilities. In turn, a two-way interaction is brought into spotlight between health and social connections, which was categorised into society at the outset: briefly, if anyone does not feel well, it is harder to maintain social connections, while lack of social connections can be harmful to one's mental health. With reference to society,

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[1] The Irish-language term *Taoiseach* literally translates as "leader, chief, ruler" (Ó Dónaill 1977, 1203) and currently refers to the Head of the Irish Government.

furthermore, the whole area of economic security is paramount with a view to the ability to make ends meet in the present as well as into the future, which brings in vital aspects including cost of living, burden of debt repayment and stability in maintaining adequate living standards. Income and wealth are not dealt with in isolation, however, but also as predictors of health outcomes, with higher economic security leading to longer and healthier lives as the negative repercussions of economic insecurity are felt in terms of mental health.

Still within society, civic engagement and cultural expression draw attention to opportunity and take-up as individuals' ability to access and avail of opportunities to shape their locality and country through civic participation. Opportunity enables stakeholders to acknowledge limits on access to public office or other forms of civic engagement including (but not limited to) voting or public consultation, the frequency of opportunities and mechanisms to increase engagement. At the same time, knowledge and skills, a headline indicator primarily associated with person, is instrumental in illustrating differences in civic engagement, so that levels of literacy, numeracy or digital skills may also serve as predictors for variable degrees of engagement. A conspicuous feature of community, social connections and cultural participation such as community activity, finally, measures the overall connectedness of individuals to their community. This encompasses volunteering, membership of community groups such as sporting clubs, artistic or creative groups, and involvement in heritage conservation, among others. Yet community activity is also relevant to mental health: hence, taking part in activities of various sorts could enhance mental and physical health; conversely, persistent illness or disability may prove a serious hindrance to maintaining social connections or participating in community activities.

Against this backdrop, the Framework is meant to develop tools to progress a country where citizens live fulfilled lives, they feel empowered to contribute to and participate in their communities, and their common perception is that equality of opportunity has been guaranteed to everyone. It therefore envisions a society where concrete steps are taken to provide better opportunities and a better quality of life to all, with sustainable, innovative and connected communities looking like a more realistic target across urban and rural settings. A dominant theme in the approach is inclusion, whereby people from all cohorts are offered the means to live with dignity and make their lives more meaningful to the greatest extent possible. The outcomes-based approach adopted by the Framework is designed to determine the impact of public policy on the well-being of

individuals and communities. In so doing, it is deeply rooted in the dimensions outlined earlier on and integrated into the Programme for Government commitment. In the main, the "overarching goals" of the Framework are identified as follows (p. 14):

> Enable people to have meaningful and purposeful lives that are conducive to good mental and physical health, including enabling their educational development and providing a high standard of living; Ensure a sense of place and environment, including through an appropriate and safe, secure, and sustainable place to live, for a good quality life; Enshrine balance, inclusivity and equality of opportunities across society, encouraging and empowering families, friends and communities to grow, connect and engage.

This study is not concerned with contemporary Ireland. Nevertheless, the analysis performed across Chapters 4-6 demonstrates the relevance of dimensions such as social justice, standards of living, health and civic consciousness, let alone inclusivity, to well-being in historical contexts as well, though largely in the absence of the kind of comprehensive political and regulatory framework established through the document described here. A further common thread, as it were, between the present-day focus on social well-being and the project implemented through this volume is the input from the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). NESC acted as a major vehicle for consultation on the Irish Government's Framework in all the stages of its development. Accordingly, its work combined contributions from different social partnership pillars with advice from external experts. Moreover, it consulted more widely with external parties by way of in-depth exploratory meetings and a large-scale survey of about 450 stakeholders.

NESC's activities and publications provided valuable guidance for a rigorous working definition of well-being behind this research. First and foremost, NESC have been clear that the relationship between individual and collective well-being should remain at the forefront. Secondly, they stressed that individual well-being finds tangible expression through the interplay of six domains, i.e. economic resources, work and participation, relationship and care, community and environment, health as well as democracy and values. This reinforces the notion that individual and collective well-being are "constructed and reconstructed in processes that include individual reflection and social interaction" (NESC 2009, 5). In third place, the role of public policy in this context is such that three kinds of "goods" should be secured and provided: individual freedom for people to uphold and achieve their own ideal of good life; a sense of direction and

uniformity, in order to protect not only individual, but also common good; and a set of public and private goods meeting individual needs. These elements lead NESC (2009, 4) to view well-being through the prism of "human flourishing", a concept "which incorporates the idea that well-being is about having a sense of purpose in life, participation in civic life, having friends, loving and being loved". On these grounds, NESC (2009, 4) propose a definition of well-being that was also accepted for this work, namely one that sees "well-being" as related to people's

> physical, social and mental state. It requires that *basic needs* are met, that people have a sense of purpose, that they feel *able* to achieve important goals, *to participate in society and to live the lives they value and have reason to value*. People's well-being is enhanced by conditions that include *financial and personal security*, *meaningful and rewarding work*, supportive personal relationships, strong and *inclusive communities*, *good health*, *a healthy and attractive environment*, and *values of* democracy and *social justice*. Public policy's role is to bring about these conditions by placing the individual at the centre of policy development and delivery, by assessing the risks facing him/her, and ensuring the supports are available to address those risks at key stages in his/her life. [My emphasis]

The italicised needs and/or parameters of well-being in the passage were identified in this research as the most ubiquitous in the letters to the editor within the *Litir_Corpus*, as explained in Chapter 3. The main thrust of the volume is therefore the investigation of the discourse of well-being from below, namely in terms of the complaints, grievances, hopes and opinions voiced by letter writers at the turn of the twentieth century, rather than from the viewpoint of policy makers. But what kind of country could Ireland be said to be in this period? And what makes it so interesting for an analysis of well-being such as that attempted here? The next section is devoted to a brief overview of *fin-de-siècle* Ireland, both politically and culturally.

1.3 Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century:
An overview

In order to make the work behind the qualitative analysis more robust (cf. Chapter 3), this study zooms in on the ten-year interval between 1895 and 1905. For this reason, this is not the place to engage in a detailed assessment of the historical events unfolding in such a period of momentous change as the turn of the twentieth century. Having said that, the general survey in this section may come in handy for readers less

familiar with Irish history, and is in any case useful to clarify why, of all phases in modern Irish history, that of revivalist Ireland lends itself well to a study of well-being discourse. In subsection 1.3.1, for a start, Ireland's political evolution through this period is traced, while 1.3.2 deals with the strength of cultural nationalism behind the Revival project as a defining moment of the years covered by the volume.

1.3.1 Flying by the nets? A profile of Irish politics

By about 1870, Ireland had assumed a position of economic, social and political stability it had hardly enjoyed since the eighteenth century. As David Fitzpatrick (1992) argues, a whole generation was coming of age for whom the likes of economic collapse, social breakdown or fear of starvation were off the agenda. As the optimism of the better-off caused social resentment to subside, the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870 envisaged a future where the relationship between landlords and tenants could become more harmonious through the mediation of state intervention. Capital investment was successfully targeted and channelled into the manufacturing sector of Belfast's region, where engineering, shipbuilding and the linen sector thrived. Was this a country ready to "fly by" the "nets" of nationality, language and religion, to quote Joyce's Stephen Dedalus in *A portrait of the artist as a young man*? Hardly, at least judging by the state of Irish politics over the following three decades.

From a nationalist perspective, Ireland's bravest political endeavour of the time went by the name of "Home Rule". This project was essentially aimed at self-government through a devolved Irish parliament to be reinstated in Dublin, which would allow the Irish people to have their say over Irish matters almost one hundred years since the abolition of the old assembly in College Green. The cause of Home Rule was championed by Charles S. Parnell, a Protestant landlord who devoted himself to forging a disciplined populist party with single-minded determination. Agreeing as they did on a range of issues far beyond Home Rule, Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) members were soon on their course to winning the vast majority of Irish seats, which they duly achieved in the 1885 general election. The IPP thereby "completed its transformation into a team of Catholic merchants, shopkeepers, lawyers, and journalists pledged to vote in accordance with party directives. Parnell thus created Westminster's first modern political party" (Fitzpatrick 1992, 181).

Behind Parnell's stunning success were his resolve to quell factionalism and enlist popular support, along with his ability to foster links with the Catholic Church. The Hierarchy accepted to endorse Home

Rule in return for the IPP's sympathetic ear for demands on denominational education at the core of the Church's institutional mission. Parishes soon became busy places where local organisers and fund-raisers would play a vital part, while at the same time providing an infrastructure for political discussion. When the IPP's vote was courted by the Conservative Party in need of support to undermine Gladstone's majority in 1886, furthermore, circumstances seemed to conspire to consolidate Parnell's hold on the balance of power. Gladstone's reaction was to overcome his previously stiff opposition to Home Rule and facilitate the introduction of a Government of Ireland bill in keeping with the IPP's aspirations. Although the bill was eventually rejected and Parnell fell into disgrace as a result of the bitterness ensuing the O'Shea divorce suit, his enduring influence even after death (1891) speaks volumes about his popularity with the nationalist public opinion.

The split created by Parnell's fall initially eroded the nationalist movement's credibility, the IPP's rank and file sharply divided into pro- and anti-Parnell factions well into the 1890s. Attempts to reunite the Party on a consistent Home-Rule platform were thwarted in a climate of mutual distrust and rivalry between parliamentarians including John Dillon and Tim Healy. This is faithfully reflected by some of the letters in the *Litir_Corpus*, which did not however form part of the analysis performed in this volume, falling as they did outside the scope of well-being discourse as defined earlier on. It was not until the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899 that nationalist Ireland, galvanised by opposition to the war, could be gradually reunited under John Redmond's leadership.

Capitalising on common pro-Boer sentiment, a new more advanced nationalism slowly began to dawn on the country. Speaking out against enlistment in the British Army, Maud Gonne was among the founding members of *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* ["Daughters of Ireland"], an organisation vowing to counteract the allegedly pernicious influence of English culture on the Irish people's aspirations to artistic expression and their cultural upbringing. In parallel, Arthur Griffith worked tirelessly to weave together the disparate political and cultural strands of Irish nationalist thought. What he aimed at was an umbrella organisation capable of amalgamating them into a coherent whole: this started with *Cumann na nGadhael* in the 1890s and then evolved into *Sinn Féin*, a separatist party whose "answer to the home rule question was to give up seeking the sanction of the British and get on with the business of setting up a parliament in Dublin by unilaterally withdrawing Irish members from Westminster" (Mathews 2003, 9-10). Originally estimated to be a minor party, *Sinn Féin* would later spearhead the nationalist fight, as its stellar

performance in the 1918 general election was to extend a strong popular
mandate to the armed rebellion which, through the War of Independence
(1919-1921) and the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921, would lead to
the establishment of an independent Irish Free State in January 1922.

Yet the British administration in Ireland had different views. Headed
by Gerald Balfour, Prime Minister Lord Salisbury's nephew, it took
charge of implementing the Conservative Government's policy of pushing
through reform while dampening nationalist enthusiasm for Home Rule.
Balfour, "whose brother, Arthur had been chief secretary during the Land
War, coined the phrase, 'killing Home Rule with kindness'. During his
term of office, he presided over a land act; the expansion of the country's
light railways"; and radical reform of local government resulting in control
of local authorities effectively being handed over to nationalists in 1898
(Mulhall 1999, 34; Gailey 1987; Fitzpatrick 1998).

In retrospect, Ireland's apparent stability was less threatened by the
British administration's gentle push to stifle the impulse of Irish
constitutional nationalism, let alone the nascent advanced-nationalist
movement, than an alienated Protestant minority most vociferous in
Northern Ireland. Weaker though it seemed, what was left of the old
"Ascendancy" (Foster 1992) still ran a well-oiled propaganda machine
against land reform and Home Rule. Stubborn resistance from urban
Ulster's Protestants stiffened in the face of landlords' more limited power,
with Belfast Presbyterians' barely disguised contempt towards their
Southern "half-brothers", so to speak, displayed ever more openly. Living
proof of such a mindset was Protestant workers' resolve to buck the trend
towards a mixed workforce, Catholics being actively excluded from well-
paid jobs and skilled employment more generally. Between 1869 and
1912, more than once were Catholic workers forced out of Belfast
shipyards by their Protestant counterparts. As violence erupted, unionist
spokespeople were quick to denounce it, but rioting and drilling were part
and parcel of the weapons brandished by militant Orangemen and their
politics.

While the IPP was adamant that the way forward was for a Home Rule
Act equipped with safeguards to appease Protestant conscience, bodies
such as the Irish Unionist Alliance (1891) or the Ulster Unionist Council
(1905) insisted that no form of Home Rule would compromise the value of
"unaltered preservation of the Union. In private, under pressure from their
parliamentary allies, both sides contemplated the option of exclusion for
Ulster" (Fitzpatrick 1992, 191). Concluding an agreement was not on the
cards yet, arguably because of ongoing controversy over the number of
counties affected, the period of exclusion as well as the extent of the

powers to be granted to the Dublin parliament. "Partition", namely the Island's subdivision into separate administrations, was not discussed in detail, although we know it was going to become both a keyword in Irish history and the political settlement produced by the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, and copper-fastened by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of the following year.

Whether invigorated by Parnell's rise to prominence in the 1880s (O'Connor 2013) or, as William Butler Yeats (1955, 559) put it, "disillusioned and embittered" by the leader's precipitous decline and failure to secure Home Rule, Ireland was to enter the new century by exuding a great deal of positive, creative energy. Unlike the IPP, which pursued self-government as an end to be accomplished without ceasing to espouse British virtues, an "Irish-Ireland" movement envisaged de-anglicisation as a precondition to establish a Gaelic, Catholic society. A tangible expression of this project was the language revival, sparked by a handful of enthusiasts between 1870 and 1880, and led by the Gaelic League since its inception in 1893. The League went to great lengths to dispel a widespread perception of the Irish language as a mark of cultural inferiority. Its dedicated teachers taught the basics of the language to schoolchildren, clerks and shop assistants alike, while the League also breathed new life into national pastimes such as fiddling, dancing and traditional music altogether (McMahon 2008). Meanwhile, Yeats (1955, 560)

> had begun a movement in English, in the language in which modern Ireland thinks and does its business; founded certain societies where clerks, working men, men of all classes, could study the Irish poets, novelists and historians who had written in English, and as much of Gaelic literature as had been translated into English.

These were the early signs that "the 'torrent' of politics was seen suddenly to run into the channel of 'culture', in a curiously unquestioned way, creating a ferment which is automatically assumed" to have been a pre-requisite for the Easter Rising of 1916, a major historical watershed moment in twentieth-century Ireland (Foster 1993, 262). Whereas the revolutionary upheavals that followed should form part of a more exhaustive treatment outside this section, an explicit reference to the cultural revival experienced by Ireland in this period cannot be omitted from this overview and was included in the next subsection.

1.3.2 "…she had the walk of a queen":
Cultural nationalism and revivalism

Following Mulhall (1999, 36), never was Ireland "so well endowed with creative writers as it was" at the turn of the twentieth century. There is no denying that cultural nationalism was a driving force of the Irish Revival, with which the period has traditionally been associated. As Hutchinson (1987) argues, cultural nationalism should be acknowledged as a separate movement from political nationalism. Its chief aim is the pursuit of a national community's moral regeneration. In order for it to bear fruit, as indeed it did in Ireland as the nineteenth century drew to a close, cultural nationalism avails of the past as an inspiration to reach higher stages of development.

While political nationalists' ideals are supported through civic consciousness developing in the form of a polity of accomplished citizens sharing laws and mores, cultural nationalists tend to proceed on a different basis. The nation's fundamental character is therefore less statehood than a distinctive civilisation, which they see as the ultimate outcome of a powerful combination of history, culture and geographical location. The unacknowledged legislators, as it were, of the nation so conceived are therefore historians and artists, whose literary societies and academic circles are entrusted with the task of unleashing the nation's creative force and propagating it to all members of the nation.

In the Irish context, the recovery of such dynamic force resulted in a linguistic and a literary movement. The former envisaged a future rooted in the reconstruction of a Gaelic civilisation mustering its strength from the idiom and customs of the half-a-million Irish speakers from Ireland's West. In the light of its goal to reinstate the Irish language as a national medium, the linguistic movement advanced a radical agenda where the construction of a new Irish nation hinged on a popular culture postulated to be essentially distinct from England's. By virtue of this, the movement gained traction from the outstanding contributions of philologists, historians and folklorists. For scholars of European reputation such as Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill, and through the impulse of the Gaelic League's activists, the movement was to move "well beyond a mere restoration of Irish as a literary medium through the production of dictionaries, language primers and Irish journals to the idea of a general regeneration of a Gaelic community with its customs, sports, music, dancing", competitions and festivals (Hutchinson 1987, 120; McMahon 2008).

    The Anglo-Irish literary movement, on the other hand, pushed forward a different idea of the Irish nation.[2] Although it shared with the language movement the vision of a country no longer discouraged by its provincialism and marginal relevance, its single-minded focus was not on Irish as the line of demarcation between Ireland and Britain. In fact, the movement concentrated much of its creative energy on the vernacular spoken by the country's bilingual peasantry. This was an English whose peculiar idioms and rhythms were supposed to form the basis for a new Anglo-Irish culture. William B. Yeats's own crusading literary revivalism originated from close contact with a whole corpus of myths and legends handed down from generation to generation in the West of Ireland, along with his warm friendship with Lady Augusta Gregory. "All about her", Yeats (1924, 411) remembered, "lived a peasantry who told stories in a form of English which has much of its syntax from Gaelic, much of its vocabulary from Tudor English".

    Among Yeats's own acquaintances, Douglas Hyde was no less important. His *Love Songs of Connacht* granted Yeats full access to the West's long-established oral tradition. "Rendered for verisimilitude in the Irish rhythms of the English spoken in the Gaeltacht", Hutchinson (1987, 131) observes, these folk songs "marked as Yeats stated 'the coming of a new power into literature' and provided the Anglo-Irish revival with the linguistic basis for a distinctive Irish literature in English". The same speech as commanded Yeats's attention was also regarded by John Millington Synge as unlocking full creative potential. Synge agreed with Gaelic nationalists that the future awaiting Ireland would have to imply reconnecting with peasant culture. "Unlike the increasingly conservative leaders of the Gaelic League", nonetheless, he hardly saw "English language and culture as an impurity in Irish identity that needed to be removed", to the effect that "the Hiberno-English dialogue that Synge developed to emulate rural Irish speech became the defining characteristic of his writing" (Cusack 2009, 121; Bliss 1972).

    As part of his cultural upbringing, Yeats had developed an appreciation of the works of Celtic scholars such as George Petrie and Ernest Renan. Just as eighteenth-century antiquaries like Charles Vallancey and Sylvester O'Halloran had played a leading role in the foundation of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) in 1785, which they hoped "would unite the warring communities in Ireland in a love of ancient Celtic antiquities and culture" (Hutchinson 2001, 507), Petrie was a committed cultural nationalist. Born

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[2] For an in-depth discussion of the origins of the term "Anglo-Irish", its historical evolution and cultural implications, see Beckett (1976).

of Scottish Protestants in 1790, he followed a vocation as a landscape painter while at the same time taking an interest in antiquities, to the study of which a substantial part of his life would be dedicated (Macalister 1917). Although he was a supporter of the Union, Petrie's nationalism led him to fear the consequences of the bitter legacy left behind by Daniel O'Connell's campaigns between the 1820s and the 1840s.

O'Connell's relentless drive for Catholic Emancipation, duly achieved in 1829, and a repeal of the Act of Union (1800), for which he politically mobilised Ireland's Catholics like never before, had resulted in these losing their sense of inferiority in social, political and professional terms. Moreover, O'Connell's activism had helped form an intimate association between Irish nationalism and Roman Catholicism. This did not sit comfortably with Protestants. Some of these defined themselves as Irish by reason of the fact that "it was from the Protestant middle classes (the nobility and landed gentry were, on the whole, indifferent) that" the notion of an Irish national identity had begun to be entertained: "the vision they saw", however, "was not of a free, *Catholic*, Ireland" (Sheehy 1980, 19; Walker 1996). Rather, they regarded Ireland as a country where people from different religious backgrounds and denominations would live as equals. Other Protestants still grew anxious that O'Connell's politics would in the long term bring about Catholic ascendancy and, by definition, the much dreaded Rule from Rome.

Petrie's apprehension over Irish society's polarisation should be factored in in accounting for his outspoken advocacy of "a moral and cultural regeneration, which would awaken Protestants and Catholics to an awareness of their common heritage as a unique rural and Christian civilisation before its subversion by the Normans" (Hutchinson 2001, 508-509). Not for nothing were words such as *common heritage* to resonate in a well-known lecture delivered only a few decades later by another distinguished scholar, Breton Celticist Ernest Renan. In order to illustrate the very concept of "nation", Renan (1882, 80) made it plain he saw that as

> a living soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other is in the present. One is the *common* possession of a rich *heritage* of memories; the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to preserve worthily the *undivided inheritance* which has been handed down. Man does not improvise. The nation, like the individual, is the outcome of a long past of efforts, and sacrifices, and devotion. [My emphasis]

What is noteworthy in the passage is not only the noun *heritage* as well as the adjective *common*, but also their synonyms *inheritance* and *undivided*, let alone the passions stirred by the emphasis on *devotion*. The latter was key to Yeats's steadfast commitment to the cause of a national cultural revival. Even though, as Pierce (2002, 8) notes, Renan had "in mind the disputed territory of Alsace-Lorraine", his remarks turned out to have "a wider application". Furthermore, whereas the terms he used were not Yeats's, "the sentiments" were, at least in so far as Yeats was searching for evidence of a common past epitomising unity of culture for the Irish people.

This was encapsulated by the myths and legends to whose influence he was exposed. In Ireland as well as elsewhere, myth would be seen as ammunition in the effort to legitimise the reasons for a separate national identity. In this, Sayers (2004, 278) stresses, Irish myth was no different from that from other national contexts, containing as it did "the spirit of the nation in the sense that its distinctiveness enables a purely Irish experience". On these grounds, Sayers goes on to say, not only Yeats and Lady Gregory, but also Patrick Pearse, Maud Gonne and Michael Collins later "linked their aspirations for Irish independence to Irish folklore". For Protestants such as Yeats and Gregory, the Irish folk tradition copper-fastened Irish cultural nationalism in that it embodied "a neutral past" dating back to "Ireland's pre-invasion Celtic period": as such, it "could unite Ireland's divided ethno-religious communities" and therefore elide post-Reformation sectarian divisions (Hutchinson 2001, 518).

Late nineteenth-century Ireland saw the emergence of rival projects, as the sense of antagonism between Protestants and Catholics was sharpened by the gradual drift towards more radical twentieth-century advanced nationalism. However, the period under investigation here has attracted keen scholarly interest owing to the broad appeal it was designed to hold for members of both communities (cf. Howes 1996), both Catholic and Protestant "seeking purpose and identity": a period where the creation of a distinctive Anglo-Irish literature served the purpose of exercising "an important nationalizing effect on English-speaking Ireland", to whom "models of Gaelic heroism and self-sacrifice" were diffused (Hutchinson 1987, 147).

An exhaustive treatment of Revival Ireland and its overall lasting cultural impact is largely beyond the scope of this work. However, it seemed vital to briefly outline its historical background in order to justify the choice of *fin-de-siècle* Ireland as the context in which to conduct our analysis of the discourse of well-being. More than anything else, these were years during which art went to great lengths to ensure that "the daily

affairs of the nation are always informed by a sense of unity that transcends the immediate situation" (Cusack 2009, 44), or else it galvanised "an inclusive" movement proving "a spiritual resource in which the divisions of Irish society between Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist, Parnellite and anti-Parnellite […] could be made nugatory in a rich harmony of independent, freedom-loving, national self-assurance" (Brown 1999, 88-89). No better choice, it was felt, could have been made with a view to a study of the needs and expectations raised by the people who lived to be surrounded by the creative ferment and climate of opinion of the era.

Tellingly, people with radically different agendas almost spoke in unison in the period under investigation here. George Wyndham, "appointed Irish chief secretary after the general election of 1900", felt that Ireland was "'in a plastic state', and could be moulded 'almost at will'" (Mulhall 1999, 32). Just as significantly, William B. Yeats (1922, 83) described himself as coming to grips with "the sudden certainty that Ireland was to be like soft wax for years to come". The idea was that Ireland was a country in becoming, one likely to be shaped by competing forces in the Irish public sphere (Flanagan 1975). At no other time does it seem worthier to deal with public debate and find out more about the contributions by opinionated readers to setting the agenda as best they could and making their voices heard in relation to what needed improvement and how to ensure Ireland might become a better, more inclusive, fairer and/or prosperous society.

As we will see in more detail in Chapter 2, the clue to accessing the national conversations of the era was yielded by letters to the editor from the print media. In her thorough enquiry into such letters, Gabrina Pounds (2006) notes that these made their first appearance in ad hoc correspondence sections in 1620s England. This was a time when the country was already spurring the development of the press in Europe through both newsletters and daily publications. At the outset, Pounds sees letters as a text type in flux, not least because the respective readership, editorial policies and style do not only evolve over time, but they also differ on a country and a paper basis alike. In spite of this, letters to the editor can overall be categorised as either "letters of opinion", by definition addressed to the publication's editor, or "letters asking for advice", replies to which were drafted by columnists from various areas of expertise, among others (Pounds 2006, 31). In this book, the focus is on letters to the editor as letters of opinion.

These compel scholarly attention in their capacity as means through which readers are empowered to voice and debate opinions on current

affairs and accordingly stimulate the democratic process through participation, whether in the form of criticism or appeals for action. In this regard, Pounds builds a comprehensive analytical framework within which she triangulates insights into writers, editors and other readers' role and analyses the discourse of letters. Her comparative study of British and Italian letters is serious not only in terms of the detail of her findings per se, but also owing to her ability to capture the complexity of letters. In Pounds's (2006, 32) view, therefore,

> [i]t is difficult to assess the precise reasons why some readers decide to write letters to the paper. Even though the predominant motive is arguably the wish to participate in a debate by sharing one's opinions, this can take many forms: expressing protest, outrage, criticism, providing or requesting clarification and information, or advocating a course of action. In some cases, particularly for regular writers, the motivation may simply be one of prestige. Papers do not only publish letters with the laudable intent of fostering public participation in the life of the community, but also because they recognize that letters have selling power. Editors may actually find that, because of their entertainment value, 'outraged' letters of protest have more selling power than serious letters of debate and may solicit and publish only letters of this kind.

Before the next chapter deals in more detail with the style of letters, including but not limited to those addressed to media outlets, however, the next section will provide an outline of the overall organisation of the book, to the reader's benefit.

1.4 Organisation of the volume

In this chapter, first of all, the concept of well-being was formulated at various levels. In Section 1.2, therefore, well-being was discussed in subjective terms, then in relation to its social dimensions and finally, in the context of its current relevance to Irish public discourse and policy making. Secondly, in the attempt to draw attention to late nineteenth/early twentieth-century Ireland as a suitable target for an investigation of well-being in historical contexts, emphasis was laid in Section 1.3 on dominant trends in Irish politics (1.3.1) and the cultural nationalism behind the Revival project (1.3.2).

In Chapters 2 and 3, more food for thought is provided about how the investigation of the Irish discourse of well-being was carried out. First of all, Chapter 2 contextualises the research in the light of a number of theoretical approaches the volume aims at integrating. In the first place, the chapter deals with letters according to the main directions taken in the