The cultural nationalism that governed much of the most significant literary and intellectual activity in Ireland between 1880 and 1930 was a force distinct from, though intimately involved with, political nationalism. Cultural nationalism may be taken to mean that conviction (which originated in nineteenth-century Germany, and which was fanned into general life by the fervour of Romanticism) whereby the essential, spiritual life of a people is assumed to subsist in its culture, and which language makes available.

As such, cultural nationalism is a useful, even energizing, adjunct to a struggle waged primarily in the interests of a political nationalism whose aim is simply that of legislative independence. And in Ireland the relationship between the two forces was largely of that order. Cultural nationalism offered a rationale according to which the political struggle for independence could be prosecuted with a heightened sense of justification (although, it is necessary to add, many of those who were active in the interests of cultural nationalism would not have seen the matter in such stark terms).

In Ireland the materials necessary to generate a sense of the country's distinctive cultural inheritance were fairly ready to hand by the end of the nineteenth century. Over a century of antiquarian and philological researches, in which European scholarship had played a major role, had unearthed the literary and cultural remains of the Celtic past. French scholars, Ernest Renan (1823-92) and Marie Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville (1827-1910), had given intellectual weight to the idea of the Celt, which had been popularized by Matthew Arnold's derivative though influential essay of 1867, On the Study of Celtic Literature, German philological enterprise had rescued texts and grammar from obscurity and, in such translations as Kuno Meyer's The Voyage of Bran (1899) or Four Old Irish Songs of Summer & Winter (1903), had made the work readily available to the literary imagination.

What crucially was lacking, however, was a distinctive Irish language in which the Irish spirit might be discerned and nurtured. The Gaelic tongue, which had remained in widespread use until the end of the eighteenth century, was facing extinction one hundred years later, the tragic Famine of the latter 1840s a coup de grace from which it seemed scarcely capable of recovering. Accordingly, one of the most fraught debates of the period 1880 to 1930 was whether a distinctive Irish identity might be forged in the English language (the mother tongue of most of the island's inhabitants) or whether the revival of Irish was a 'necessity' (in Douglas Hyde's formulation) if the idea of Irish nationhood was to be anything more than a political expedience.

The Irish Literary Revival was a movement that sought to supply the Ireland of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with a sense of its own distinctive identity through the medium of the English language. This movement's main writers and thinkers believed that a general awareness of the splendours and riches of Gaelic literary antiquity and of the residual fires of the Celtic way of life (still burning in rural districts, particularly in the West) would generate a sense of national self-worth and of organic unity, which would give to the political struggle a dignity and purpose it would otherwise lack. Indeed, W. B. Yeats, its primary propagandist, believed that the cultural movement was even a substitute for political activity, and he identified its origins in the strength of political disaffection that followed the collapse of Parnell's parliamentary campaign for Home Rule in 1886 and his death in 1891. Young men, Yeats believed, took to culture when politics failed them.

Yet, in a predominantly catholic country, it was primarily Irish protestants who involved themselves in this crusade or whose work contributed to it. Among them were Standish James O'Grady (a unionist in politics, but a powerful popularizer of ideas about the Celtic past), W. B. Yeats, AE (George Russell), Lady Augusta Gregory and Douglas Hyde. The reasons why these individuals became so enamoured of things Celtic, so obsessed with the 'matter of Ireland', bears some brief examination, for it was uncharacteristic in the period, if not unknown, for members of their caste and class to be so in quite the ways they were.

Protestant Anglo-Ireland, the ruling elite in nineteenth- century Ireland, had throughout most of the nineteenth century political and cultural nationalism with nervous distaste. With rare exceptions (Samuel Ferguson and Thomas Davis), protestant Irishmen had resolutely es­poused, when culture interested them at all, an imperial and cosmopolitan view, epitomized in the writings of the great unionist historian, W. E. H. Lecky (1838-1903). That a movement should have developed in which members of the protestant elite supported the cause of an Irish cultural nationalism has drawn much study and comment.

There would be grounds for believing that these writers had simply fallen under the spell of a compelling and fortuitous literary opportunity. In all their writings on the matter of Ireland (and this is especially true of Standish O'Grady), there is an enthusiastic ardour, a buoyant rhetoric that suggests an enraptured discovery of something primal, enthralling in its strangeness. Such an explanation was granting to nationalist amour propre, for it suggested that even the colonial elite could not blind itself to the incomparable riches of the Irish cultural inheritance, thereby giving substance and aid to political separatism; and in such terms, catholic Ireland, largely supportive of political nationalism, occasionally seemed willing to accept the Literary Revival as a contribution to the more important struggle.

However, it is as an aspect of the dynamics of a late colonial society that the Irish protestant elite's interest in things cultural can more convincingly be explained. Since 1869 the Catholic Emancipation Act, the protestant elite and its unionist politics had endured recurring crises. The Famine of the 1840s, the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869, the Land War of the 1880s and the threat of the Home Rule Bill of 1886 all had impelled a formerly secure and arrogant caste to ponder its future with less than equanimity.

A nascent Irish political nationalism, pre­dominantly catholic in complexion and Gaelic in aspiration, was increasingly prepared to view the Anglo-Irish protestant world as simply the alien culture of a garrison society. The doctrines of the Irish Ireland movement, propagated with especial force by D. P. Moran (whose idea of a 'Battle of Two Civilizations' caught a widespread mood) insisted that Ireland's authentic cultural nationalist identity was unquestionably as a Gaelic and catholic nation, in which the Anglo-Irish, English-speaking protestant could have no part. So pervasive was this attitude among nationalist intellectuals that Douglas Hyde (son of a Church of Ireland protestant clergyman) fell under its influence. Indeed, his 1892 lecture, 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland' (which led to the foundation of the Gaelic League) and the influential lectures praised in the writings of the great unionist historian, W. E. H. Lecky (1838-1903), that movement should have developed in which members of the protestant elite supported the cause of an Irish cultural nationalism has drawn much study and comment.

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unity of culture was manifest in a pagan, mythic, rural paradise. In their work, preliterate Ireland knows nothing of the political and sectarian strife of the modern; its simple grandeur and other-worldliness are a rebuke to the reductive and subjectivistic doctrines of the aggressively political nationalists. The authentic Celtic tradition, in such a view, was organic and coherent, aristocratic and individualistic. As such, it could be exploited in their writings as a powerful symbolic corrective to the sectarian, exclusionist, democratic and collectivist doctrines of Irish Ireland and modern Irish political nationalism (from which Yeats and his fellow-workers had much to lose).

Nevertheless, the fact that the Literary Revival probably had its opportunistic and self-interested aspects should not obscure the movement’s idealism. Lady Gregory, Yeats and AE genuinely believed that in their works they were giving Ireland what it needed, that they were indeed saving the political nationalists from themselves and from the sterile materialism of a merely political creed. While the implicit condescension of such a stance can seem unattractive — a cultivated and from the sterile materialism of a merely political creed. While the implicit condescension of such a stance can seem unattractive — a cultivated and from the sterile materialism of a merely political creed. While the implicit condescension of such a stance can seem unattractive — a cultivated and from the sterile materialism of a merely intellectual and materialist world. It must assume that the spirit that vitalized a Cuchulain is still dynamic in a reality that must stimulate a quest for his analogues or avatars in such figures as a Charles Stewart Parnell, or in the figure of a modern revolutionary. So in Irish cultural nationalism we see an illogical blend of medival fervour and occult yearnings, mingled with an evangelical certainty and excitement.

Cultural nationalism invests the records of the past with the spiritual charge of the sacred. Archai texts are not simply archaeological remainants; they are chapters in the sacred book of the people. The modern Irish writer (often from a background where protestantism had been a religion of the book) is in fact a scribe at work upon a sacred manuscript, his own creation capable of being subsumed in the greater text. There is then, not surprisingly, a recurrent suggestion that the Revival itself was composing a sacred book, its writers merely the priests of a sacred order. At such moments in cultural nationalism, the occult and literature combine to produce a heady brew indeed. George Moore satirized this aspect of the Literary Revival in his autobiographical novel Irish Tenantry and his anti-Celtic polemic Parnell, but the book itself is ambivalently insecure about its claims to be the sacred text of the movement. That even so sardonic a mind as George Moore’s was tempted by the religious sanction that cultural nationalism might suggest how powerful a narcotic it could be.

In aspiring to participate in the composition of a sacred book of the people, of course, the Revival writers were taking a large step away from the man of the present. The cultural nationalism of the Irish Literary Revival had characterized much late nineteenth-century English literature. Their own cultural nationalism encouraged that departure in several further ways. Firstly, the belief that literature could serve the people by revealing in its sacred pages the true soul of the race, hidden by temporary appearances under the shroud of convention, meant that writers invested the legends and myths of the past with symbolic powers. So Irish Irish Literary Revival saw Cuchulain not simply as a mythological personage, but as a figure embodying the truly Irish spirit. Accordingly, his portrayal in modern literature lifts the veil of appearance to reveal a higher reality. As such, Cuchulain appears in the Revivalists’ writings as a symbol, his presence a revelation of occult,
esoteric truths; and, in so doing, he wrests literature away from mere realism or naturalism. As an image of a universal principle in the Irish world, he transcends any mere subjectivism. For he is so much more than simply a passing mood in author or reader. Cuchulain is the manifestation of an objective, communal reality.

Secondly, the Revivalists' literary involvement with the remains of a primitive people gave an obviously textual, non-realistic quality to their writings. To read their redactions, translations, versions of myth and folk-tale is to realize almost continuously the literariness of literature, that a book is always a book in the making. The *Lost Songs of Connacht*, for example, achieves its effect in part by printing Irish and English together. Most of its early readers knew little or no Irish, and the old Gaelic script gave to the experience of reading the work, one imagines, a sense of archaic, esoteric things rendered assimilable by an act of translation. The work is as much a celebration of that act, a testament to literary power, as it is a book of love lyrics.

In its moving away from the dominant modes of nineteenth-century literary production (in which the realist novel had pride of place) towards symbolism, objectivity and the self-reflexive text, the Irish Literary Revival has seemed to many to be an age of apocalyptic imaginings to deeds of desperation. In his *Hail and Farewell* (for whom Ireland is an occult secret and naively quaint in his *The Untitled Field*), D. P. Moran directed the barrage of his aggressive scorn on the fey trivialities of the Celtic Twilight school. As such it did play its part in that raising of Irish consciousness which was a part of the process that led to legislative independence for most of the island. It also demonstrated that the English language in Ireland, influenced by its long association with Irish speech patterns and modes of thought, was a flexible, mature, subtle instrument, capable of great nobility and energy as well as of sardonic wit and lyric intensity. Perhaps most importantly of all, it demonstrated, albeit in ways not all Irish people always have found congenial, that the English spoken in Ireland could be the means whereby a society reflected on itself.

and of singing voices, for Emain Macha was wholly given over to festivity.

Then about the time that the shrill cry of the cock is first heard, a rapid fear swept like a wind through the whole city, and smote an universal silence, and men held their breaths awaiting some prodigy. Anon thither arose upon the air a night shrill and agonizing scream, as of an animal pierced, thatutters a cry in its agony. And three times the cry thrilled through the city. But simultaneously were heard low thunderous murmurings, that the earth trembled; but this came from the Tayna Bruc, wherein was the warlike equipment of all the Red Branch; and aged warriors who had fought under Rury recognised that solemn warning, and they knew what shield it was that announced impending disaster. And, after this, there arose sounds of battle, crash of meeting hosts and shattering spears, the shoutings of warriors, and the war-cries of the Clans of Ulla, and between these noises was heard, far away, the roaring of the sea. Then the prodigy died away, and men saw the reflection of their own fear in the white faces of their comrades.

But in the king's palace the feast was broken up, and the king summoned a council of his great men, and there it was determined that Cathvah the druid should be interrogated concerning the import of the prodigy. Then Cathvah arose with his druidical instruments in his hands, and chanted the chant of divination; and under the power of that chant the veil that hides futurity was rent before his mind, and in a sacred phrenzy he walked towards the Girran2 of the women, and the king and his knights followed him reverently. Then he approached the bride of the chief bard of Ulla, singing her out from amongst all the women in the Dūn, and he stood above her and prophesied: 'No common child bearest thou in thy womb, O lady. Beneath thy zone, veiled yet in infancy, I see a woman of wondrous beauty, bright gold her hair, eyes piercing and splendid, tongue full of sweet

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6. The name of the armaments' store in Emain Macha (Armagh); from the Irish *Teil Brucht* (the suggested meanings of this name, see *Tóit Te Oil Brúin*, "Cultural Nationalism", *Éigse*, 15 (1975), 103-13.

7. A sun-palace, set apart for the women.