Introduction The near eradication of Gaelic culture and vernacular Irish literature during the colonial period in the centuries following the Norman invasion resulted in a vacuum that was only slowly filled by a new form of recognizably Irish literature, though written in the English language. This was for a long time known as Anglo-Irish literature, the term ‘Irish literature’ being reserved for the new literature written in Irish that emerged in the early 20th century.

Anglo-Irish beginnings Whilst earlier centuries threw up such figures as James Ussher and George Farquhar, the Anglo-Irish literary tradition begins in the age of George Berkeley and Jonathan Swift. In the ensuing decades, Trinity College, Dublin, produced such writers as Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, and R B Sheridan, all of whom made their livelihoods and reputations in England. Maria Edgeworth, the daughter of an ‘improving’ landlord in County Longford, wrote the first distinctly Irish novel (Castle Rackrent) in 1800. Throughout the 19th century such Protestant Irishmen as Charles Lever, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, and Bram Stoker Wrote to serve the English taste for romantic or else supernatural tales from Ireland. At the same time others such as Lady Morgan, Sir Samuel Ferguson, and Lady Wilde – the mother of Oscar – reflected a fascination with the remnants of Gaelic culture which they found around them that had its origins in the antiquarianism of the previous century and that served to lay foundations for the literary revival of the 1890s, out of which modern Irish literature was born.

A convergence of traditions No modern literature could exist in Ireland without a convergence of Protestant (colonist) and Catholic (native) traditions. In the early 19th century, native Irish writers such as John and Michael Banim, Gerald Griffin, and William Carleton established a line of native Irish fiction writing which was later to flourish as the modern Irish short story and novel. In the Romantic period, J J Callanan and James Clarence Mangan adapted Irish matter to the modes of English poetry, often translating earlier Irish poems and songs preserved by oral tradition among the Irish-speaking peasants. A lively ballad literature centrally concerned with the political woes of Ireland emanated from The Nation, a journal founded in 1842 by Thomas Davis, while John O'Donovan and others carried on the translation of ancient Irish manuscripts, thus providing materials for future writers, meanwhile arousing a renewed interest in the Irish language.

Influence of Yeats It was with the return of W B Yeats to Dublin and the foundation of a National Literary Society in 1892 that the claims of a separate tradition of Irish literature in the English language began to take definite shape. The literary revival that he fostered with Lady Gregory and others produced a succession of writers who achieved international reputations, among them chiefly John Millington Synge and Seán O'Casey, who bestowed their fame on the Abbey Theatre. A somewhat younger writer, James Joyce, broke from the revival group and came to dominate literary modernism in continental exile during the 1920s, while Catholic Ireland retired into social and religious conservatism approved by the new Irish state after independence.

The weight of censorship Seán Ó Faoláin, Frank O'Connor, and Liam O'Flaherty were among those whose work was banned in Ireland under the 1929 Censorship Act, which inaugurated a period when it was said that no Irish writer worth their salt wrote books that could be bought in Ireland. Among those whose writing represented a complex and often brilliant reaction to the prevalent clerical and petty...
bourgeois ethos were the poet Patrick Kavanagh, the playwright Brendan Behan, and the novelist Flann O'Brien, all of whom challenged and revised the canon of the literary revival in different ways. Irish women writers were not numerous in this period though Kate O'Brien, Teresa Deevy, and Mary Lavin sustained a tradition of sensitive writing, while Denis Johnston inaugurated expressionist drama at the Gate Theatre, to some extent the rival of the Abbey Theatre.

**Irish writing in the second half of the 20th century** In the second half of the 20th century, writers such as Thomas Kinsella and John McGahern exposed the cracks in the official culture and produced writing of the first order, while John Montague and Brian Friel generated a postcolonial literature based on an amalgam of modern and particularly US models and Irish subject-matter. Irish writing in the 1970s was dominated by an upsurge of poetic talent in Northern Ireland led by Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, and Derek Mahon, while the poets Brendan Kennelly, Richard Murphy, and Eavan Boland added lustre to the southern tradition. In the Republic, the official era of PQ ('Peasant Quality') in Irish drama eventually gave way to a turbulent new realism spearheaded by Thomas Kilroy and Tom Murphy, as well as a more sophisticated conception of literary fiction developed by John Banville. The 1980s brought a flood of new talent exemplified in all genres and styles by Frank McGuinness, Roddy Doyle, Dermot Bolger, Jennifer Johnston, and others. A second generation of Ulster poets, including Paul Muldoon and Mebdh McGuckian, produced a poetry remarkable for its wit and occasional opacity.

**Postmodernism** In the early 1990s, richly vernacular and often melodramatic drama by Sebastian Barry and Marina Carr brought revisionist and feminist viewpoints to the Irish stage while remaining rooted in an acutely psychological vision of Irish society. The late 1990s saw the arrival of the post-modernist drama of Martin McDonagh and Conor MacPherson, keeping the tension high while incorporating powerfully self-reflexive elements into the Irish dramatic tradition. Novels and stories by writers such as Michael Collins and Colm McCann have been tragically alert to the plight of young Irish people in an age of renewed emigration, while Patrick McCabe and Eoin MacNamn have portrayed the dysfunctional aspects of modern Irish life in variously comical and tragic lights. Colm Toibin and Deirdre Madden have exemplified the best of literary prose, while Robert McLiam Wilson and Glenn Patterson have injected a new vitality into Northern fiction.

**Cultural changes** The 1990s also saw the demise of the term 'Anglo-Irish literature' long used for Irish literature in English as distinct from modern writing in the Irish language. Irish writers in both traditions today inherit a complex legacy involving English, US, and cosmopolitan ingredients together with a characteristically Irish concern with identity and language that has refused simplification and, for that reason, remains subtly pervasive and enriching. Cultural changes in the wake of rapid economic development, along with social and political shocks involving sexual and financial abuses, have shone new light on the old themes of the family, community, religion, emigration, and ‘the Troubles’, while the bridge between literature and film forged by novelist and director Neil Jordan is one of the most exciting features of the literary climate in Ireland today.

**articles**

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