

Hans-Peter Wagner

A History of
British, Irish and American
Literature

Hans-Peter Wagner

**A History of
British, Irish and American
Literature**

 **Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier**

A History of British, Irish and American Literature

2nd revised and enlarged edition

Hans-Peter Wagner

Trier : WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2010

ISBN 978-3-86821-220-4

Layout: Markus Nußbaum

CD-ROM: Jens Ossadnik

Cover design: Brigitta Disseldorf

© WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2010

ISBN 978-3-86821-220-4

For *Picture Credits* see CD-ROM

No part of this book, covered by the copyright hereon,
may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means
without prior permission of the publisher

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier

Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier

Tel.: (0651) 41503, Fax: 41504

Internet: <http://www.wvttrier.de>

E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

Table of Contents

Preface	VII
BRITISH AND IRISH LITERATURE	1
I. The Anglo-Saxon Period (449-1066)	3
1. General Background	3
2. Poetry	4
3. Prose	5
II. The Middle English Period (1066-1500)	6
1. General Background	6
2. Latin and French Literature in England	7
3. Literature in English	8
III. The Sixteenth Century	12
1. General Background	12
2. Poetry	14
3. Drama	16
4. Prose and Prose Fiction	17
IV. The Seventeenth Century	19
1. General Background	19
2. Poetry	21
3. Drama	29
4. Fiction	37
5. Nonfiction	38
V. The Eighteenth Century	41
1. General Background	41
2. Poetry	45
3. Drama	52
4. The Novel	56
5. Nonfiction	76
VI. The Nineteenth Century	79
1. General Background	79
2. Poetry	82
3. Drama	96
4. The Novel	99
5. Nonfiction	111
VII. The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries	114
1. General Background	114
2. Poetry	122
3. Drama	156
4. Prose Fiction	190
4.1 The Novel	190
4.2 The Short Story	245

5. Children's Literature	253
6. Popular Fiction	255
6.1 Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Hyperfiction	255
6.2 Crime Fiction	263
7. Nonfiction	270
 AMERICAN LITERATURE	 281
I. The Colonial Period	283
1. General Background	283
2. Poetry	285
3. Drama	289
4. Prose	290
II. From the Revolution to 1800	292
1. General Background	292
2. Poetry	293
3. Drama	297
4. Prose Fiction	297
5. Nonfiction	298
III. The Nineteenth Century	301
1. General Background	301
2. Poetry	304
3. Drama	313
4. Prose Fiction	316
4.1 The Novel	316
4.2 The Short Story	325
5. Nonfiction	328
IV. The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries	332
1. General Background	332
2. Poetry	340
3. Drama	375
4. Prose Fiction	407
4.1 The Novel	407
4.2 The Short Story	460
5. Children's Literature	467
6. Popular Fiction	472
6.1 The Middlebrow novel, punk, horror, fantasy, and the Western	472
6.2 Science Fiction and Hyperfiction	477
6.3 Crime Fiction	484
7. Nonfiction	491
 APPENDIX	 501
Chronological Tables	503
Further Reading	521
Glossary of Literary Terms	532
List of Illustrations	544
Index	556

Preface

This book attempts to render more accessible those parts of the vast jungle called literature which we normally refer to as British, Irish and American. In order to achieve this task it has been arranged by periods and genres in a way that might seem radically simple to some readers. But every literary history must select and establish an order of some kind in the face of diversity.

British and Irish literature are presented here together in the first part of the book because – notwithstanding national differences and the existence of separate histories of Irish literature¹ – the European literature in English is never simply national. To take just two examples: while most British readers will be aware of the fact that James Joyce was an (expatriate) Irishman, they will consider his writings as part of the heritage in English-language literature; and whereas Roddy Doyle is one of contemporary Ireland's literary stars, his books are again appreciated by readers in Wales, Scotland and England alike. Yet unlike Scotland or Wales (which also have their own heritages and histories²) Ireland deserves special attention because of cultural, historical and political events (mostly related to Britain) that have had a deep and lasting influence on literature. One might, for instance, refer to the fact that to this very day the British government has stationed troops in Northern Ireland to maintain the enforced political order. Into the 1980s, people died in Ireland and England because of this fact; as late as November 2005 the Belfast dramatist Gary Mitchell had to go into hiding with his family in order to avoid being killed by the Ulster Defence Organization (UDA) who resented his critical views of the brutality of this para-military organization. Meanwhile, the Celtic Irish culture, including Gaelic, although boosted by educational policies in Dublin, is being overpowered by English much like Breton in France, where a similar phenomenon has occurred. To a certain extent, Irish literature can claim the status of postcolonial writing (the New Literatures in English³), but even some Irish critics and writers question that status, claiming a role apart. It is because of this in-between status that Irish literature has not been accorded separate chapters here even while its special role – from James Joyce down to Brian Friel – has been taken into account.

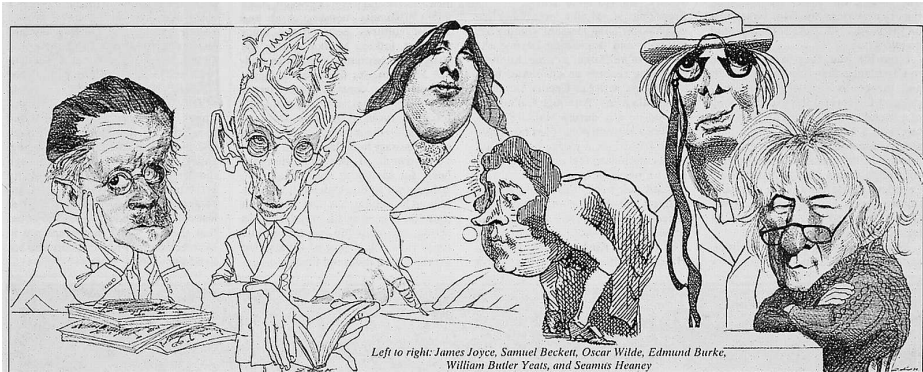
If the terms British and Irish pose a problem in the title of this book, so does American, as the word could be taken to refer to North America. The focus of this book is, however,

1 See Christina Hunt Mahoney, *Contemporary Irish Literature* (London and New York: St Martin's Press, 1998); Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary, eds. *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*. 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and especially Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

2 See, for instance, the literary histories concerned with Scotland, by Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (London: Macmillan, 1984); and by Brown and Riach (listed in the bibliographical section); and on Wales, by Meic Stephens, ed. *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).

3 On these literatures only discussed in this book as far as the writers live in Britain, see Christa Jansohn, ed. *Companion to the New Literatures in English* (Berlin: Schmidt, 2002).

exclusively on the literature of the United States and excludes Canadian literature⁴, with the notable exception of a classic novel by Margaret Atwood reacting to the socio-political climate in the USA.



Left to right: James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Oscar Wilde, Edmund Burke, William Butler Yeats, and Seamus Heaney

Major Irish Writers as seen by David Levine

This literary history focuses mainly on the modern period and provides analyses of fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction; the latter includes literary criticism, theory, travel writing, and outstanding works in historiography and the social sciences. The book contains illustrations for several reasons. Firstly, because from medieval illuminated manuscripts down to recent hypertexts, art has been an essential part of literature, its mute sister as it were. Thus many nineteenth-century novels first appeared in illustrated versions and some contemporary authors (e.g., Alasdair Gray) insist on illustrating their own works. Secondly, the never ending symbiosis between art and writing in any given period is sufficiently important to warrant the inclusion of some pictorial examples that inspired writers to a degree of which they might not even have been aware. Thirdly, the visual material as well as the brief discussions of movements in art at the beginning of each chapter are supposed to encourage the reader to consider the ways the arts feed on or respond to each other – often in most surprising ways that are far from any correspondence.

Those readers especially interested in this fascinating relation between art and writing at any given period covered here will find, in addition to the pictures accompanying the text of the book, visual material galore (more than 450 illustrations) as well as the full text of the book on the CD in the back of the book. This CD also facilitates the search for both names and pictures and thus serves as another index.

If the book has a particular focus, it is on contemporary literature. This means that the reader will find discussions here of some genres and developments that have been neglected by other literary histories; important examples are children's literature and the various subdivisions of the popular market – performance art (integrating drama and poetry), television drama, crime fiction, science fiction, fantasy and horror, the Western, comics, and hypertext. Discussing both the great works of highbrow literature and representative writings of

4 See Konrad Groß et al., eds. *Kanadische Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005), and Carol Ann Howells and Eva-Marie Kröller, eds. *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

the popular canon, the book takes cognizance of what readers (including students) are told to read by the popes defending the literary canon and of what the post-capitalist market offers by way of entertainment in an alternative canon. Both areas are extremely important, and none should be neglected, since they contribute to the creation of postmodern mentalities. To illustrate this as it were with an American example – the novels of Thomas Pynchon and the Superman comics series are both worth studying, not because of any inherent value they might possess but because they contribute to, and reflect to some extent, the establishment of the American mind in our time.

Finally, it is a great pleasure to acknowledge the help of several people in the preparation of this book. Santina Rupp dealt most professionally with parts of the index. Ulrike Lackner has shown great patience with my exasperating wishes for alterations in preparing the electronic version of the manuscript; Birgit Pretzsch and Jan Hollm were my first and most critical readers who gave me their time and literary judgments when they had more important things to do; Dirk Vanderbeke enlightened me on some popular genres. Odile made it possible for me to write this book and I hope that I shall have enough time left in my life to thank her for this; and Dr Otto proved a daring and understanding publisher by granting me my particular wishes concerning the make-up of this book.

Preface to the second edition

In this second edition, errors and typos have been corrected. The major new features, in addition to several new illustrations, are the updating of the chapters and appendices on the twentieth century and the complementation of the various bibliographies. In fact, the sections on contemporary culture and literature and the chronological tables now extend into the twenty-first century, with a cut-off date at 2010. I wish to express my gratitude to Dr Otto, WVT Trier, for his support all along the way. I wish to thank my most constructive critic over the years, Professor Dr Anja Müller, whose review of the book proved immensely helpful as did her additional suggestions. Without the constant support of Odile over the years, the second edition could not have appeared.

Saarbrücken, January 2010

Peter Wagner

