

What's the contribution of Irish writers to literature?

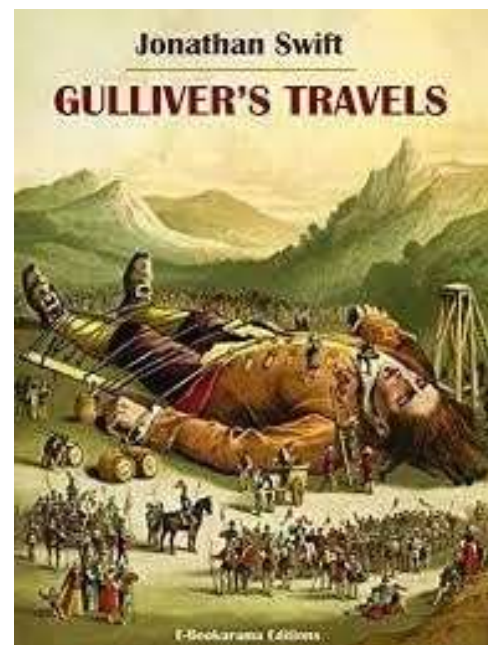
Nicknamed the "Emerald Isle" due to its lush landscape, the Republic of Ireland is dotted with medieval castles like Cahir Castle and takes up most of the island off the coast of England and the Wales. Its capital, Dublin, is the birthplace of many writers like Oscar Wilde.



Ireland has made an important contribution to the world of literature and Irish literature is one of the most prolific in the Anglo-Saxon world. If certain works written

in Irish and other Gaelic dialects constitute a major part of it, the most famous works throughout the world have been written in English and are characterized by a wonder at nature, inherited from ancient traditions, and an often exaggerated, absurd and satirical narrative style.

Irish writers who wrote in English brought many linguistic and formal innovations, and produced many seminal works in the history of English literature, including Jonathan Swift, who is probably the greatest prose satirist of the English language and his work *Gulliver's Travels*, which through elements combining philosophy, logic, fantasy and science-fiction, manages to mark a peak of social and political satire, in the mode of pamphlet or narrative description.



In general, we can distinguish four main types of writing among the various Irish works : medieval literature, theatre, poetry and prose.

Irish medieval literature is divided into four cycles according to scholars.



First of all there is the mythological cycle which focuses on the mythical settlement of Ireland and on the action of the Gods. The battle of Mag Tured (Cath Maige Turedh) and the courtship of Étain (the Tochmarc Étaine) are the basic texts. This cycle mainly concerns the pagan mythology of Ireland, but many of the gods had turned into kings and heroes.

Then there is the Historical Cycle or Cycle of Kings. This is the most recent of the four main cycles of medieval Irish literature. It concerns legendary kings of Ireland and collects legends about the great kings of Ireland. The central work is The Book of the Conquests of Ireland (Lebor Gabála Erenn), written in Old and Middle Irish.

The Ulster Cycle (an Rúraiocht), also called the Red Branch Cycle (Cráobh rúadh) or the Heroic Cycle, is more particularly devoted to the kingdom of this name and has as its main subject King Conchobar Mac Nessa and of his nephew, the hero Cú Chulainn. The most important account of this cycle is The Raid of the Cows of Cooley (Táin Bó Cúailnge).

Finally, the fourth and final cycle of medieval Irish literature is the Fenian Cycle, also known as the Ossianic Cycle after its narrator Oisín. It is one of the four main cycles of Irish Celtic mythology alongside the mythological cycle, the historical cycle and the Ulster cycle. Chronologically, it is the third of these cycles, placed between the historical cycle and that of Ulster. This revolves around the hero Fionn Mac Cumhaill, during the reigns of the High Kings of Ireland (Ard-Rí na hÉireann).

It was with the last decade of the 19th century that Irish theater enjoyed great success, with, among others, the reputation of the Irish Literary Theater in Dublin in 1899, as well as thanks to the emergence of Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde.

Bernard Shaw was an Irish music critic, playwright, essayist, playwright and screenwriter, born in Dublin. Acerbic and provocative, pacifist and non-conformist, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925. His humorous style, highlighted in his plays, made him an undisputed master of English-speaking theatre. It was his play *The Hero and the Soldier*, which marked the beginning of his international notoriety.

Oscar Wilde, also born in Dublin, is best known for the success of his play, particularly in London, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which soon became his masterpiece. It even gave rise to two film adaptations. The first appeared in 1952, and was directed by Anthony Asquith. As for the second, it is a work by Oliver Parker, dating from 2002.



The Irish Literary theater company later became the Abbey Theater and produced plays by W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, John



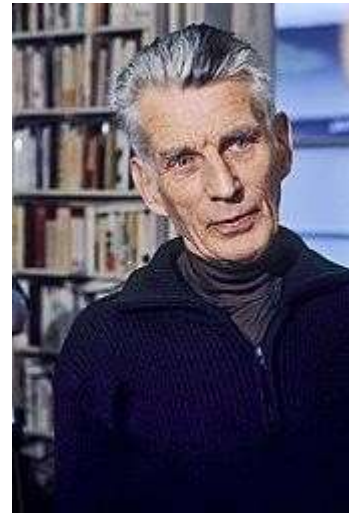
Yeats, introducing elements of Japanese NŌ theatre, notably in Ezra Pound. The Abbey creates a particular style that will influence future authors by developing a tendency to mythologize everyday situations and by choosing plays in the Hiberno-English dialect.



After the creation in 1928 of An Taidhbhearc, a theater devoted to the Irish language, we can see a revival of theater in the Irish language, in particular thanks to the Gate Theatre, also created in 1928, which introduced screenings in the Irish language for many classics of the European scene.

Since the 1970s, a number of companies have been created which wish to compete with the dominance exercised by the Abbey company by introducing different styles and approaches. We can note the Focus Theatre, The Children's T Company, the Project Theater Company, Druid Theatre, TEAM and Field Day. These companies saw the beginnings of many authors, actors and directors who have since enjoyed success in London, Broadway and Hollywood.

The 20th century saw a large number of authors achieve success, such as Samuel Beckett. Born April 13, 1906 in Foxrock (Dublin) and died December 22, 1989 in the 14th arrondissement of Paris, Samuel Beckett is an Irish writer, poet and playwright of mainly French and English expression, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969.



He is the author of novels, such as *Molloy*, *Malone dies* and *L'Innommable* and of prose poetry, but he is best known for his theatrical work. His most famous play is *Waiting for Godot*, a masterpiece of the theater of the absurd. His work is austere and minimalist, which is generally interpreted as the expression of a deep pessimism regarding the human condition. This pessimism does not however exclude humor, omnipresent in his work, one being at the service of the other, taken within the broader framework of an immense enterprise of derision.

Over time, he treats these themes in an increasingly pithy style, tending to make his language increasingly concise and dry. In 1969, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature for "his work, which through a renewal of the forms of the novel and theater, takes its elevation in the destitution of modern man".

Other Irish playwrights also enjoyed success, such as Yeats, although the latter is best known in the field of poetry. In particular, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923, whose committee then described his work as "always inspired poetry, whose highly artistic form expresses the spirit of an entire nation".

Indeed, the poetry is another type of writing among the various Irish works.

The history of Irish poetry holds a certain particularity. Indeed, Irish poetry has a long and complex history. Irish literature and poetry is one of the oldest and has had an almost unbroken tradition from the 6th century to the present. It encompasses poetry in both Irish and English. The complex interactions between these two traditions, as well as between them and other English-language poetry, have produced a multiform body of work that is difficult to classify.

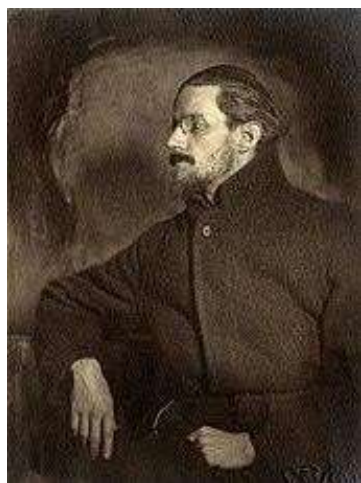
The eighteenth century saw a revival of bardic poetry on the one hand, and the first important Irish poets in the English language such as Jonathan Swift and Oliver Goldsmith on the other. In the nineteenth century, Irish poets writing in English tried to reinvent the Gaelic tradition in their new language, often translating the songs of the old bards and other Irish poetry, retelling the stories of Celtic mythology in Victorian verse. This trend can be seen in the early work of W. B. Yeats.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Yeats' style changed under the influence of his contact with modernism and with authors who could be described as "mystics", such as *Rabindranath Tagore*. The generation of Irish poets after Yeats was, to put it simply, divided into two: on the one hand, those who were influenced by the Celtic style of yesteryear, and on the other, those who followed modernist figures such as James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, two poets who are, however, better known for their novels and plays.

During the twentieth century, Yeats' influence tended to dominate, whether he was seen as a model or as the one to rebel against. However, this period also saw the emergence of important new figures such as Paul Muldoon, Patrick Kavanagh, Seamus Heaney, John Montague and Brian Coffey. This period also saw a revival of poetry in the Irish language, in part due to the government's policy of supporting the Irish language.

Finally, prose is known to be the latest style of Irish literature. Mainly used to tell the epics of Ireland, a few verses are nevertheless sometimes inserted in these texts.

Prose is the ordinary form of oral or written discourse, not subject to the rules of versification, musicality and rhythm that are specific to poetry. It must nevertheless respect the rules of grammar and can present one of the large ranges of stylistic quality and prosodic nuances, according to the efforts or the culture of the author or the speaker.



One of the most emblematic figures of this style of writing is James Joyce, an author of the 20th century. He was born in 1882 and is often referred to as the father of the literary genre stream of consciousness (inner monologue) which is best represented in his best-known novel, *Ulysses*. Joyce has also written *Finnegans Wake*, *The People of Dublin* and a semi-autobiographical *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Joyce's very modernist style had a great influence on the next generation of Irish writers which notably included Samuel Beckett, Brian O'Nolan who wrote under the name of Flann O'Brien (1911-1966), and Aidan Higgins. James Joyce died in 1941.

To conclude, Irish literature has a wide range of works and is of great importance in the world of literature. Some authors such as Oscar Wilde, Samuel Beckett, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, Jonathan Swift have distinguished themselves from other Irish authors and have acquired worldwide notoriety in the fields of theatre, poetry, and prose.