

ABSTRACT

The 1798 Irish rebellion together with the preceding decade is justly regarded as a watershed event in the forming of Irish national identity. Therefore it is not surprising that it has inspired numerous, and often conflicting, interpretations in both historiography and literature. This study concentrates on both English- and Irish-language historical novels and plays written about the rebellion in the course of the twentieth century, especially after the year 1916. Attention is drawn to the interpretations of the event contained in these literary works, comparing them to the various views of 1798 as they have evolved in Irish historiography. As the rebellion, especially from the 1970s onward, has been increasingly seen in the light of the later conflict in Northern Ireland, this connection has an important place in the analysis.

On the theoretical level, the thesis draws from the findings of Hayden White, who has famously questioned the border between historiographical and fictional treatments of historical events. At the same time, this relativism is complemented by selected features of the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, who highlighted the inevitable ethical questions connected to representations of history. In accordance with the theoretical preliminaries, the study explores the relative value of interpretations of history contained in literature. On the level of content, emphasis is laid on the fact that surprisingly many of the relevant novels and plays display a highly balanced view of the rebellion, which is not the rule in the often more polemical works of historians. In addition, due focus is placed on the formal possibilities of literature in representing history, including the use of symbols, the recourse to mythical or literary allusion, as well as metahistorical features, which put under scrutiny the very concept of history.

After a largely chronological overview of the most important novels and plays in question, the study concentrates on the analysis of three literary works, which for various reasons come as the most rewarding in terms of the interpretation of the rebellion: the Irish-language novel *L'Attaque* (1962) by Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, Thomas Flanagan's novel *The Year of the French* (1979), and the play *Northern Star* (1984) by Stewart Parker.