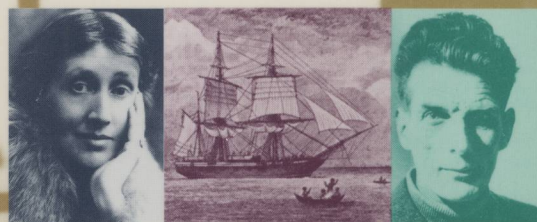VOLUME 4

British and Irish
Literature and Its
Times: The Victorian Era
to the Present
(1837–)

World Literature
and Its Times

Profiles of Notable Literary Works and the
Historical Events That Influenced Them

Joyce Moss

VOLUME **4**

British and Irish

Literature and Its

Times: The Victorian Era

to the Present

(1837–)

World Literature
and Its Times

Profiles of Notable Literary Works and the
Historical Events That Influenced Them

Joyce Moss

GALE GROUP

World Literature and Its Times

Profiles of Notable Literary Works and the Historical Events That Influenced Them

VOLUME **4**

British and Irish Literature and Its Times

JOYCE MOSS

General Preface

The world at the turn of the twenty-first century is a shrinking sphere. Innovative modes of transmission make communication from one continent to another almost instantaneous, encouraging the development of an increasingly global society, heightening the urgency of the need for mutual understanding. At the foundation of *World Literature and Its Times* is the belief that within a people's literature are keys to their perspectives, their emotions, and the formative events that have brought them to the present point.

As manifested in their literary works, societies experience phenomena that are in some respects universal and in other respects tied to time and place. T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land,* for example, is set in post-World War I London, when Europe was rife with disenchantment. Coincidentally, Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Páramo,* set in Latin America over a spread of decades that includes the post-World War I era, features a protagonist whose last name means "bleak plain" or "waste land." The two literary works, though written oceans apart, conjure a remarkably similar atmosphere. Likewise Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko,* set largely in the British colony of Surinam in the early 1660s, and Miguel Barnet's *Biography of a Runaway Slave,* beginning in 1860 in the Spanish colony of Cuba, both feature defiant slaves. The plots in this case take place two centuries apart, suggesting that time, as well as place, is of little consequence. A close look at the two slaves, however—and the two waste lands referred to above—exposes illuminating differences, indeed related to the times and places in which the respective works are set.

World Literature and Its Times regards both fiction and nonfiction as rich mediums for understanding the differences, as well as the similarities, among people and societies. In its view, full understanding of a literary work demands attention to events and attitudes of the period in which a work takes place and of the one in which it is written. The series therefore examines a wide range of novels, short stories, biographies, speeches, poems, and plays by contextualizing a work in these two periods. Each volume covers some 50 literary works that span a mix of centuries and genres. The literary work itself takes center stage, with its contents determining which issues—social, political, psychological, economic, or cultural—are covered in a given entry. Every entry discusses the relevant issues apart from the literary work, making connections to it when merited, and allowing for comparisons between the literary and the historical realities. Close attention is given as well to the literary work itself, in the interest of extracting historical understandings from it.

Of course, the function of literature is not necessarily to represent history accurately. Nevertheless, the images and ideas promoted by a powerful literary work—be it Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (Spain), Nadine Gordimer's *Burgher's Daughter* (South Africa), or Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (Britain)—leave impressions that

are commonly taken to be historical. In taking literature as fact, one risks acquiring a mistaken notion of history. Kipling's *Kim,* for example, ascribes a number of negative traits to Easterners, conveying a common perception in his day of their being inferior to Westerners. To adjust for such portrayals, this series ties such perceptions to the era and distinguishes between historical facts and literary impressions.

On the other hand, literary works can broaden our understanding of history. They are able to convey more than the cut-and-dried record, by portraying events in a way that captures the fears and challenges of a period or that draws attention to groups of people who are generally left out of standard histories. This is well illustrated with writings that concern the position of women in different societies, such as Flora Nwapa's novel *Efuru* (Nigeria), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (Britain), or Edna O'Brien's *Country Girls* (Ireland). As demonstrated by these works, literature engages in a vigorous dialog with other forms of communication. It often defies stereotypes by featuring characters or ideas that are contrary to preconceptions. In fact, many of the literary works covered in this series feature characters and ideas that attack or upset deeply engrained stereotypes of their day, from Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas's *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (mid-1500s Latin America) to Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (late-1800s Britain), to Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* (mid-1900s Cameroon Republic).

Even nonfiction must be anchored in its place and times to derive its full value. Octavio Paz's essay *The Labyrinth of Solitude* explains the character of contemporary Mexicans as a product of historical experience; the entry on the essay amplifies this experience. A second entry, on Albert Memmi's *Pillar of Salt,* uses the less direct genre of biography to describe the life of a Tunisian Jew during the Nazi occupation of North Africa. A third entry relates Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* to scientific and religious developments in Britain at the time, and to challenges to its empire abroad.

The task of reconstructing the historical context of a literary work can be problematic. An author may present events out of chronological order, as Carlos Fuentes does in *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (Mexico), or may create works that feature legendary heroes who defy attempts to fit them neatly into a specific time slot (such as the warrior Beowulf of Denmark, glorified in England's epic poetry; or the emperor Sunjata of Mali

in the Western Sudan). In the first case, *World Literature and Its Times* unscrambles the plot, providing a linear rendering of events and associated historical information. In the second, the series profiles customs particular to the culture in which the epic is set and written, arming the reader with details that inform the hero's adventures. The approach sheds light on the relationship between fact and fiction, both of which are shown to provide insight into a people and their epics. As always, this approach is taken with a warm appreciation for the beauty of a literary work independent of historical facts, but also in the belief that ultimate regard is shown for that work by placing it in the context of pertinent events.

Beyond this underlying belief, the series is founded on the notion that a command of world literature bolsters knowledge of the writings produced by one's own society. Long before the present century, fiction and nonfiction writers from different locations influenced one another through trends and strategies in their literatures. In our postcolonial age, such cross-fertilization has quickened. Latin American literature, having been influenced by French and Spanish trends among others, itself influences Chinese writers of today. Likewise, Africa's literary tradition has affected and been affected by France's, and the same relationship holds true for the writings of India and Great Britain. The degree of such literary intermixture promises only to multiply given our increasingly global society. In the process, world literature and its landmark texts gain even greater significance, attaining the potential to promote understanding not only of others, but also of ourselves.

The Selection of Literary Works

The works chosen for *World Literature and Its Times 4: British and Irish Literature and Its Times* have been carefully selected by professors in the field at the universities detailed in the Acknowledgements. Keeping the literature-history connection in mind, the team made its selections based on a combination of factors: how frequently a literary work is studied, how closely it is tied to pivotal events in the past or present, how strong and enduring its appeal has been to readers in and out of the society that produced it, and how reflective it is of new developments in literature of the region. Attention has been paid to literary works set from the Victorian era to the present that have met with critical and/or

popular acclaim. Those works by an author of this time span that are set in an earlier period have been placed in *World Literature and Its Times 3: British and Irish Literature and Its Times* (an example is George Eliot's *Middlemarch*). In both volumes, there has been a careful effort to include works from different reaches of Britain and Ireland, to represent female as well as male authors, and to cover a mix of genres, from poetry, to the novel, to drama, and the essay. There are, of course, many more integral works by pivotal writers than could be included. Again, the selection has been based on the above-delineated range of concerns.

Format and Arrangement of Entries

The volumes in *World Literature and Its Times* are arranged geographically. *World Literature and Its Times 3* and *World Literature and Its Times 4* are devoted to British and Irish literature and its times. The volumes are divided chronologically according to when the literary works are set. Covered in the *World Literature and Its Times 3* are works set from the Celtic migrations into the region to the early nineteenth century Reform Bill. *World Literature and Its Times 4* features works set from the Victorian era to the present.

Within a volume, entries are arranged alphabetically by title of the literary work. Each entry is organized as follows:

1. **Introduction**—identifying information in three parts:

    The literary work—specifies the genre, the place and time period in which the work is set, when it was written and/or first published, and, if applicable, when it was first translated.

    Synopsis—summarizes the storyline or contents of the work.

    Introductory paragraph—introduces the literary work in relation to the author's life.

2. **Events in History at the Time the Literary Work Takes Place**—describes social and political events that relate to the plot or contents of the literary work. The section may discuss background information as well as relevant events during the period in which the work is set. The subsections in this section vary, depending on the particular literary work. In general, the section takes a deductive approach, starting with events in history and telescoping inward to events in the literary work.

3. **The Literary Work in Focus**—summarizes in detail the plot or contents of the work, describes how it illuminates history, and identifies sources used by the author and the literary context in which the work was generated. After the summary of the work comes a subsection focusing on an aspect of the literature that illuminates our understanding of events or attitudes of the period. This second subsection takes an inductive approach, starting with the literary work and broadening outward to events in history. It is followed by a third subsection, which specifies sources that inspired elements of the work and discusses its literary context, or relation to other works.

4. **Events in History at the Time the Literary Work Was Written**—describes social, political, and/or literary events in the author's lifetime that relate to the plot or contents of a work. Also discussed in this section are the reviews or reception accorded the literary work.

5. **For More Information**—provides a list of all sources that have been cited in the entry as well as sources for further reading about the different issues or personalities featured in the entry.

If the literary work is set and written in the same time period, sections 2 and 4 of the entry on that work ("Events in History at the Time the Literary Work Takes Place" and "Events in History at the Time the Literary Work Was Written") are combined into the single section "Events in History at the Time of the Literary Work."

Additional Features

Whenever possible, primary source material is provided through quotations in the text and material in sidebars. There are also sidebars with historical details that amplify issues raised in the text, and with anecdotes that provide a fuller understanding of the temporal context. Timelines appear in various entries to summarize intricate periods of history. Finally, historically relevant illustrations enrich and further clarify information in the entries.

Comments and Suggestions

Your comments on this series and suggestions for future editions are welcome. Please write: Editors, *World Literature and Its Times,* The Gale Group, Inc., 27500 Drake Road, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48331-3535.

Acknowledgments

World Literature and Its Times 4: British and Irish Literature and Its Times is a collaborative effort that evolved through several stages, each of which was monitored by a team of experts in British and Irish Literature. A special thank you goes to John McLeod of University of Leeds, School of English, in the United Kingdom and to Robert Aguirre of Wayne State University, Department of English, in the United States for their careful guidance at every stage of the development process.

For their incisive participation in selecting the literary works to cover in this volume, the editors extend deep appreciation to the following professors:

Robert Aguirre, Wayne State University, Department of English

Julia Brown, Boston University, Department of English

Sandra Donaldson, University of North Dakota, Department of English

Carol Jago, Santa Monica Public High School, English Department

James Kincaid, University of Southern California, Department of English

John McLeod, University of Leeds, School of English

Indira Viswanathan Peterson, Mount Holyoke College, Chair, Asian Studies Department

The following professors carefully reviewed the entries to insure accuracy and completeness of information. Sincere gratitude is extended to these professors:

Robert Aguirre, Wayne State University, Department of English

Roger Beck, Eastern Illinois University, Department of History

James Berg, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, Center for Teaching and Learning

Julia Brown, Boston University, Department of English

Sandra Donaldson, University of North Dakota, Department of English

Howard Eiland, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of English

Barri Gold, Muhlenberg College, Department of English

William Hughes, Bath Spa University, Department of English

Farhad Idris, Frostburg State University, Department of English

James Kincaid, University of Southern California, Department of English

Jack Kolb, University of California at Los Angeles, Department of English

David Lloyd, Scripps College, Department of English

John McLeod, University of Leeds, Department of English

Introduction

"Th' whole worl's in a terrible state o' chassis!" says a character in *Juno and the Paycock*, drunkenly slurring the word "chaos" in a line that aptly evaluates recent history. In this one exclamation, Sean O'Casey's play captures the condition of grappling with uncertainty that surfaces in the literature of Britain (England, North Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) and Ireland from the Victorian era to the present. Early in the Victorian era, the uncertainty found its way into essay as well as poetry. Works of natural history, such as Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), challenged certain common interpretations of the Bible, while poems like Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850) struggled mightily with new findings in geology, such as the geological record of mass extinctions in the earth's distant past. In the face of these developments, society's longstanding confidence in a controlling, benign divinity foundered. A rush of questions spewed forth more publicly than ever before: Was there a God? An afterlife? Was a person's soul immortal and distinct from a beast's? Was the human race intended for an awesome destiny, or doomed to vanish without a trace, like countless species before it? Tennyson makes his agonizing way through the minefield of such questions, emerging with his faith qualified but in tact. Similarly, another poet of the era, Robert Browning, wrote "Prospice," verse that suggests faith in the afterlife.

Influenced by the French Revolution and by Romantic innovations in poetry, Victorian novelists meanwhile made the everyday lives of common people a major concern. In response to the growth of women readers and writers, domestic realism became the dominant fictional mode. The focus riveted attention to an unparalleled degree on previously disenfranchised groups—women and youth. The Victorians both touted and assailed a dominant ideal of womanhood—the passive, morally superior, self-sacrificing, sexually disinclined angel of home and hearth, a fountainhead of nurturing sustenance. The image, while propagated throughout the century, was at the same time attacked for its falsity by, for example, the unconventional heroine of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). By century's end, the image had been discredited, not only in novels, but also in drama, where the outspoken woman (see *The Importance of Being Earnest*) became fashionable to some degree. Still the ideal persisted, far from quashed by the counter-images, as shown in 1904 by its appearance in the drama *Peter Pan*, which would be adapted the next decade into the novel *Peter and Wendy*.

Featured even more conspicuously than the ideal woman in *Peter Pan* is the other disenfranchised group, children. Their heyday as fictional stars began early in the Victorian era, perhaps most notably in novels by Charles Dickens, whose *Great Expectations* (1860-61) follows the fortunes of an orphan, a familiar protagonist in Victorian fiction, often featured in "social-problem" novels, which had come into vogue by the middle of the century. Written by and for the middle class,

these novels played an educational role, enlightening the uninformed about the plight of Britain's outcasts and newly industrialized working class. The orphan would often be depicted as beleaguered and forlorn, a neglected waif in a largely hostile environment. Yet optimism found its way into the social problem novel. The novelists, like the poets, showed an abiding belief in the possibility of worldly goodness. There were exceptions, of course, the novels of Thomas Hardy being perhaps the strongest. A philosophical streak of pessimism undergirds Hardy's plots, as does an iconoclastic bent, manifested in his then much reviled *Jude the Obscure* (1894-95), which addresses social barriers to education, female sexual inhibitions, and the religious as well as irreligious in late-nineteenth-century England.

Hardy's pessimism prefigures later developments in fiction and drama, but perhaps even more transitional, in style as well as content, is Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*. Conrad's novel concerns itself with empire, from the British point-of-view or, more accurately, points-of-view, since the novel conveys a rather elusive reality through the medium of more than one consciousness, or storyteller. In its preoccupation with empire, Conrad's novel follows on the heels of nineteenth-century colonial adventure stories (e.g., H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* or Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*) and anticipates twentieth-century postcolonial fictions, from V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) to Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). The problem of empire resurfaces over time, cast in different lights by various literary works. In much the same fashion, Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers* (1991) features the young outcast again, but now in the guise of a late-twentieth-century biracial girl in Scotland. The subject remains the same; the variables and outlooks change for these and other issues that recur in the various works:

- **Racism**—*Cambridge, Ulysses, Sour Sweet*
- **Evolution and degeneration**—*The French Lieutenant's Woman, Dracula, Arcadia*
- **Love and marriage**—*Sonnets from the Portuguese, The Country Girls, Under Milk Wood*
- **Catholicism**—*Brideshead Revisited, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, The Power and the Glory*
- **Fascism and socialism**—*Goodbye to Berlin,* "The Lion and the Unicorn," *The Remains of the Day*
- **War and betrayal**—*Juno and the Paycock,* "Anthem for Doomed Youth" and Other Poems, *The Heat of the Day*
- **Imperialism and the decline of empire**—*The Grass Is Singing, Midnight's Children, Troubles*

- **Crime and hypocrisy**—*Great Expectations, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Lord of the Flies*
- **Social climbing and social classes**—*Jude the Obscure, Howards End, Pygmalion, Disaffection*
- **Women's rights**—*Jane Eyre, Nights at the Circus, The Sea, The Sea*
- **Homosexuality**—*The Importance of Being Earnest, Women in Love, What the Butler Saw*
- **Psychology**—*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Waste Land, Mrs. Dalloway*

The breadth of literary works for a given issue begins to convey the depth of the British and Irish experience. In the sampling above, racism moves from Africans in the early 1800s British West Indies (*Cambridge*) to the Irish in early 1900s Ireland (*Ulysses*) to Chinese immigrants in late 1900s Britain (*Sour Sweet*). Of course, a particular work addresses concerns beyond the one identified above. *Ulysses* could as easily be slotted into love and marriage, Catholicism, or psychology as into racism in Ireland.

Ireland is in fact a case apart, a country united to Britain (in 1800) shortly before the Victorian era, violently divided from it by war (1919-21) shortly after. These changes affected the stream of Irish literature, which reaches back to the ancient Celts (see *The Táin* in WLAIT 3: *British and Irish Literature and Its Times*). England exerted a powerful influence on Ireland, one that the Irish struggled consciously to shed in the early 1900s by mounting their own literary revival, which drew on native folklore, language, and popular culture. The result was a period of multifaceted Irish literature made evident by the disparate voices, not only within the revival (see William Yeats's "September 1913" and "Easter, 1916" and John Millington Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*) but also in contrast to or apart from it. James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* reflects a cosmopolitan approach, antithetical to the nationalistic one taken by participants in the revival, nevertheless emerges as vitally integral to the epoch.

During Joyce's time, in the throes of the profound disillusionment that followed World War I, the struggle to make sense out of existence intensified. There were new tools now, perhaps most notably the phenomenon of the unconscious, as revealed by Sigmund Freud, whose work first became known in Britain and Ireland around 1912. Writers experimented with the new psychology, redefining reality not as objective experience to be relayed by an omniscient narrator but rather as a subjective experience, filtered through the perspective of the narrator.

This redefinition led to fictional innovations such as stream of consciousness narration. In time, the experimentation grew into a movement, modernism, which would dominate the first half of the twentieth century without altogether displacing the traditional realistic style. Wilfred Owen's poetry of the 1920s, for example, stubbornly insisted on exposing World War I's horrors for what they were, while realistic novels of the 1930s and early '40s concerned themselves with fascism, socialism, and a resurgence of horrors engendered by World War II. In contrast to the note of optimism in Victorian literature, much of the modernist literature was laced with disillusionment, perhaps most conspicuously T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land.*

Pessimism found its way as well into postmodern literature, a type that emerged after World War II and tended to manipulate conventions of the novel, featuring a narrator, for example, who stepped out of the storytelling mode to chat with the reader, as John Fowles's narrator does in *The French Lieutenant's Woman.* Drama too showed pessimism, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* which concerns the absurdity of the human condition, being a noteworthy example. The pessimism, however, was far from unrelieved. Rather it was infused with comedy, hardly a new element in British and Irish literature. Life without comedy would be impossible, observed Sean O'Casey, who had earlier invoked it in *Juno and the Paycock* to relieve tragic aspects of a family's life during the Irish Civil War. In similar fashion, Beckett used comedy to undercut a pervading sense of despair in his post-World War II drama.

Twenty years later Joe Orton would use comedy to hilarious effect in *What the Butler Saw,* not to relieve tragedy but to highlight sexual confusions of his day.

Here the grappling with uncertainty concerned not the meaning of existence, but one's sexual identity, a topic addressed more forthrightly in literature of the 1960s than ever before. The growing frankness bespoke a progress of sorts. In Oscar Wilde's 1890s, writers referred to homosexuality clandestinely, if at all; by D. H. Lawrence's 1910s the subject was no longer taboo—Lawrence, though he ultimately decided against it, even toyed with openly admitting one of his male character's physical desire for other men in *Women in Love.* By Joe Orton's late 1960s homosexuality has begun to become a viable option in society and is a directly broachable subject in comedy.

Likewise, postcolonial fiction showed a heightened frankness that bespoke progress. In decline before World War II, the British Empire was succeeded after it by a commonwealth of nations including dominions, such as Canada, and the newly independent nations of Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia. The transition prompted a postwar immigration boom into Britain that enhanced its cultural mix, encouraging the growth of vigorous communities of East Indians, Africans, and Chinese, among others. There followed a not-always-peaceful grappling with uncertainty, over how the newcomers would fit into larger society—economically, politically, socially, and artistically.

In literature, new voices have broadened the amalgam of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish writings. V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* concerns the diversity of colonial society in Trinidad, as well as the title character's passion for a house. The novel slips easily into the established line next to E. M. Forster's *Howards End,* a work in the literary canon that concerns middle-class diversity and passion for a home in early-twentieth-century England. Postcolonial writings added dimension to the established collection of literary portrayals too. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children,* published 80 years after Rudyard Kipling's *Kim,* adds perspective to its image of colonial India, even serves as something of a corrective to views propagated by such celebrated British novels.

Midnight's Children features a character living in a time of historical crisis. In fact, much of twentieth-century British and Irish literature conveys this sense of crisis, and not necessarily by depicting grand events. James Joyce's *Ulysses* conveys it through a commonplace day in the life of two Dubliners; J. G. Farrell's *Troubles* through the story of an Englishman's trip to an Irish hotel; Seamus Heaney's "Station Island" through a pilgrimage on which he wrestles with the very question of his responsibility to the explosive events around him; and Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* by juxtaposing a household of late twentieth-century and early-nineteenth-century inhabitants.

Thus, British and Irish literature of the past two centuries is replete with the aura of historical crisis in *Juno and the Paycock,* which proclaims the world to be in a terrible state of "chassis." If this sense of chaos bears witness to upheavals of the two centuries, it also plays a vital role in their literary creativity. The chaos, in other words, is double edged. Today it can be tied to the diversity of voices that generate literary works, and, as earlier, it points not just to a troubled world but also to the end of old certainties and the possibility of change.

Chronology of Relevant Events

British and Irish Literature and Its Times

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REFORM

In contrast to many of its European neighbors, Britain managed, with the help of social and political reform, to maintain a stable government in the nineteenth century. Members of the burgeoning middle and working classes strove to make their voices heard through demonstrations, petitions, and the formation of new political movements. While much of the population lived in straitened circumstances, the government adopted some important measures that began to address popular demands: a series of Reform Acts (1832, 1867, 1884) extended the voting franchise to the majority of adult males, a secret ballot was introduced, and Factory Acts established more reasonable hours and conditions for workers. Some of the most sweeping reforms were introduced by the early-twentieth-century Liberal Party, alternative to the Conservative Party in government. By the end of World War II, the Labour Party had become the alternative to the Conservatives. Winning the postwar election, Labour oversaw a government whose welfare reforms turned Britain into a partly capitalist, partly socialist society. A few decades later the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher reversed the process, beginning to dismantle the welfare reforms.

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 4*
1830-37	Reign of William IV	
1830s-40s	Number of convicts transported from Britain to Australia is estimated at 58,000; practice of transportation begins to taper off in succeeding decades	*Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens
1832	Passage of parliamentary Reform Bill extends voting franchise to smaller property holders and householders occupying property valued at £10 or more	
1833	Abolition of slavery throughout British territory at home and abroad; Factory Act sets minimum working age at nine	

Historical Events		Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 4*
1833-38	Bill abolishing slavery substitutes apprenticeship for bondage for seven years; substitution is abolished August 1, 1838	
1834	New Poor Law provides relief only to those who agree to abide by regimen of the workhouse	*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë
1837-1901	Reign of Queen Victoria, who ascends to throne of England at age 17	
1838	The Chartists, a large organization of workingmen, draw up a "People's Charter" advocating extension of the franchise, secret ballot, and other legislative reforms	
1839	Government begins to provide money for public schools	
1840	Queen Victoria marries Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, becomes model wife, exhorting devotion to duty and domesticity; penny post (inexpensive mail service) is established	
1840s	The "Hungry '40s"—Britain suffers a severe economic depression, resulting in widespread unemployment; Chartists' riots erupt after Parliament rejects People's Charter	
1842	London police establish detective department	
1846	Prime Minister Robert Peel resolves to end traditional protectionism of British goods, advocates policy of Free Trade; Parliament repeals the Corn Laws of 1815	
1848	Revolutions erupt in France, Austria, Germany, and Italy; in England, Chartists stage demonstration after third presentation of People's Charter to Parliament; cholera epidemic highlights need for public-health measures	
1850s-70s	Britain recovers from depression, begins to experience economic prosperity as technology and industry advance	
1857	Transportation of convicts is abolished	
1861	Prince Albert dies of typhoid; the widowed Queen Victoria enters prolonged period of mourning	
1867	Representation of People Act (Second Reform Bill) extends voting franchise to almost all men over 21	
1868-80s	Prime Ministers Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone institute protection of children from abuse, higher sanitation and safety standards in housing, and other social reforms	
1870	W. E. Forster's Education Act makes elementary education available to all children in England and Wales	
1870s-1910s	Agricultural depression leads to a fall in the price of land	
1872	Police strike; secret ballot becomes compulsory; Education (Scotland) Act makes school compulsory in Scotland for children from ages five to 13	
1874	Factory Act establishes a maximum work week of 56 hours	
1878	Four police inspectors are found guilty of corruption; Detective Department of London police is reorganized as Criminal Investigation Division	
1880	Elementary education becomes compulsory for all children from age seven to 10	
1880s-90s	Gradual decline of Victorian values; increasing migration of people to the city—80 percent of the population recorded as living in towns; socialist organizations attract British intellectuals, including George Bernard Shaw and William Morris	

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 4*
1884	Formation of the Fabian Society, an organization designed to promote socialism gradually	
1887	"Bloody Sunday"—Socialist League march in Trafalgar Square is disrupted by police brutality, hundreds of demonstrators are injured	
1888	The serial killer Jack the Ripper murders five London prostitutes but is never apprehended; county councils are established	
1889	London dock strike succeeds; spread of trade unionism; employment of children under 10 is prohibited	
1891	London police move to New Scotland Yard; elementary education becomes free in government schools	*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle
1897	First Workmen's Compensation Act is passed	
1899	School attendance is made compulsory until the age of 12	
1900	Labour Party is founded	
1901-10	Death of Queen Victoria; accession and reign of Edward VII	
1905-11	Liberal government institutes important social reforms, including old-age pensions, and health and unemployment insurance	
1910-36	Reign of George V	
1924	First Labour government is elected in Britain	
1926	A miners' dispute over wages and hours sparks a nine-day general strike	*Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh
1930s	Worldwide economic depression, following the crash of Wall Street in the United States	
1931	Fall of Labour government in Britain	
1936	Death of George V; Edward VIII abdicates throne of England to marry American divorcee Wallis Simpson; Jarrow Crusade—200 Englishmen stage hunger march to garner public sympathy and aid for the community after a major shipyard is closed, costing 8,000 workers their jobs	
1936-52	Reign of George VI	
1940	Winston Churchill is elected prime minister, forms a coalition government as Britain enters World War II	
1944	Education Act reorganizes secondary school system, makes school attendance compulsory until the age of 15	
1946-51	Labour Government is elected, nationalizes key industries and services, including the Bank of England, railroads, mines, steel, gas and electricity; National Health Service is instituted to give free medical treatment to all British citizens	
1951-64	Conservative Party reassumes power	
1952	Accession of Elizabeth II	
1964-79	Labour Party regains power in government	
1969	Abolishment of capital punishment	
1970	Age of majority is lowered from 21 to 18	
1970s	Conservative Party gains control of Parliament; decade is marked by inflation and industrial upheaval; rise of Scottish nationalist movement	

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 4*
1979-97	Margaret Thatcher becomes prime minister; Conservative Party begins 18 years in government	
1980s-90	Thatcher's government targets economic problems, privatizes national industries and dismantles parts of the welfare state, reduces spending in education	*Disaffection* by James Kelman; *Adoption Papers* by Jackie Kay
1984	National coal miners' strike	
1989	Thatcher's government introduces poll tax	
1990-97	Thatcher resigns; John Major serves as prime minister	
1997	Labour government is returned to power; Anthony Blair becomes prime minister	
1999	Devolution in Scotland and Wales—power is partly transferred from British Parliament at Westminster to newly convened Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly	

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ROLES

For most of the nineteenth century, many women labored under the ideal that they be a self-sacrificing wife and mother, or "angel in the house." As the nineteenth century progressed, a woman's rights movement took hold and gained momentum. Generations of female mavericks petitioned for better working conditions, more control over their earnings, more freedom within their marriages, more power to leave unhappy marriages, and the right to vote. During the 1840s, the first petitions for women's suffrage were submitted to the British Parliament. Their failure did not deter the suffragists, who became increasingly militant as the twentieth century dawned. Women would at last gain the vote after the First World War, meanwhile taking large strides in social life and the work world. Nineteenth-century parliamentary acts gave women increasing and finally complete control over their own property. Also women were admitted to professions formerly closed to them—such as medicine—and allowed to study at newly established women's colleges at Oxford and Cambridge University. Reforms of the twentieth century further narrowed the gap between the social, political, and economic rights of women and those of men. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 made the grounds for divorce the same for women and men. Armed with the vote, women continued to make political strides in the twentieth century too, finding their way into some of the highest offices in Britain before the century's end.

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 4*
1830s-40s	Economic problems and dearth of available men contribute to surplus of single women; middle- and lower-class working women experience financial hardships; movements for women's suffrage gain momentum and petitions are submitted to Parliament	*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë
1837-1901	Reign of Queen Victoria	
1839	Child Custody Act makes it possible for a mother to gain custody of her children under seven years of age	
1842	Ashely's Mines Act excludes women and children from having to work in the mines	
1845	After a yearlong courtship, England's most renowned female poet, Elizabeth Barrett, elopes to Italy with poet Robert Browning	*Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning; "My Last Duchess and Other Poems" by Robert Browning