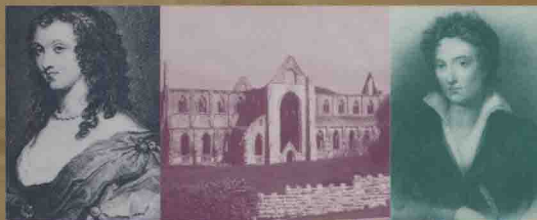


VOLUME 3

British and Irish  
Literature and Its  
Times; Celtic Migrations  
to the Reform Bill  
(Beginnings-1830s)



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Profiles of Notable Literary Works and the  
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## 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 Wasteland*, for example, is set in Europe in the early 1920s, when the region was rife with the disenchantment of the post-World War I era. Coincidentally, Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Páramo*, set in Latin America over a spread of decades that includes the 1920s, features a protagonist whose last name means "bleak plain" or "wasteland." 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 Barнет'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

wastelands referred to above—exposes illuminating differences, which are indeed tied 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 *The Adventures of Don Quixote* (Spain), Nadine Gordimer's *Burgher's Daughter* (South Africa), or



John Dryden's "Mac Flecknoe" (Great Britain)—leave impressions that are commonly taken to be historical. In taking literature as fact, one risks acquiring a mistaken notion of history. Based on powerful impressions evoked in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, for example, and other such works people often presume Cleopatra to have been Egyptian by birth, when she was not. To adjust for such discrepancies, this series distinguishes between historical fact 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 by drawing 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—for example, Flora Nwapa's novel *Efuru* (Nigeria) or Mary Wollstonecraft's essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Britain). Literature, as illustrated by these works, 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 Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (early-1700s 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, on *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, reflects attitudes about fidelity to one's spouse that were undoubtedly influenced by the licentious behavior of the king and upper-class society in 1660s England.

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 *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, and how strong and enduring its appeal has been to readers in and out of the society that produced it. Attention has been paid to literary works set from prehistorical to Victorian times that have met with critical and/or popular acclaim. There

has also been a careful effort to include works from different reaches of the British Isles, to represent female as well as male authors, and to cover a mix of genres, from the short tale, to epic poetry, blank verse, and sonnets, to various types of plays (comedy, history, tragedy, and ballad opera), to essays, biographies, and the novel. The inclusion of selected works at the expense of others has been made with this range of concerns in mind.

### **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. Subsections vary depending on the literary work. Taking a deductive approach, the section starts with events in history and telescopes 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. 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 subsection takes an inductive approach, starting with the literary work, and broadening outward to events in history. It is followed by a third subsection specifying sources that inspired elements of the work and discussing 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.



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## Introduction



“Your Roman-Saxon-Danish-Norman English,” quipped Daniel Defoe acidly in his 1701 poem *The True-Born Englishman*. The barb was a response to disparaging remarks about England’s king, William of Orange, and some of his followers, who were Dutch, not English, and it alludes to the blend that defines the English people and their literature, a mixture that mushrooms into an even richer amalgamation when one includes Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Inhabiting the region before the invasion of the Romans in 55 B.C.E. were British Celts, who began what in time would become a Celtic-Roman-Saxon-Danish-Norman-British-and-Irish literary continuum. The continuum harks back to the oral tales of the British Celts, or to two branches who migrated to the region from mainland Europe: the Goidelic (or *Gaelic*) Celts moved into Ireland, then Scotland; the Brythonic Celts (historical source of the term *Britain*) settled in Wales and other parts of the isles.

It was in the Middle Ages that scribes first recorded the oral tales of the British Celts, penning other literature too and in a mix of languages, adding Latin, French, and English to the varieties used by the Celts. Gradually a national consciousness developed, out of diverse building blocks. The departure of the Roman army in 409 C.E. paved the way for Anglo-Saxon conquests. A few hundred years later Scandinavians—the “Danish” of Defoe’s quip—began their invasions, which would continue for centuries (as reflected

in *The Battle of Maldon*). The Danish Scandinavians vanquished three kingdoms, plundered countless monasteries, whose documents they destroyed, and established a society of their own in the isles. In 878, a local Saxon ruler (Alfred) finally managed to push back the Danes and to consolidate the Anglo-Saxon kingdom that today’s historians identify as Britain’s first “national” monarchy, the House of Wessex. Subsequently the Danes regained control for a time, during which *Beowulf* may have found its way into manuscript form. Still the Anglo-Saxon kingdom survived, but only briefly, collapsing after the Norman invasion in 1066.

Originally from Scandinavia, the Normans had settled in France a few generations earlier. They resettled in England after 1066, remaining intimately involved in French politics, becoming embroiled in conflicts with the French king over lordship of English possessions in France. The conflicts kept erupting into warfare, with the Normans growing so militant that they began to think of themselves as English rather than French. Meanwhile, the Normans kept a steady hold on the British Isles, introducing some traditions and adopting others. In time the Normans claimed English as their language rather than French, a gradual process that quickened around 1350 and was virtually complete by 1450.

Medieval writing in various languages contributed greatly to the evolution of cultural identities in the region. In addition to recording tales



of the Celts, writers under Anglo-Saxon and Norman rule composed “histories,” some of which were mythical. Around 1135, Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote a history of the kings of Britain (*Historia Regum Britannie*) that endowed the region with a legendary past. The work traced Britain’s kingship back to Brutus, a descendant of the Trojan founders of Rome, claiming that he arrived in Britain about 1170 B.C.E., defeated giants, and then founded New Troy, or London. The work goes on to recount rulers who succeeded Brutus, through the celebrated King Arthur, up to the invasions of the Anglo-Saxons. It is a mythical, unverifiable account, which Europe nevertheless embraced and medieval writers preserved. Their tales promoted chivalry and related ideals, focusing especially on Arthur (see *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Le Morte d’Arthur*). Meanwhile, other writers were recording the tales of the Celts, which likewise included Arthur, but with some different traits (as noted in the entry on *The Mabinogion*).

From the start, literature intersected with history, reflecting and helping to shape government, inter-regional policy, religion, ethics, family life, and more in the British Isles. Across genres, writers used literary works to critique, entertain, and document the times in which they were set, addressing issues such as the ones that follow, which resurfaced over the centuries.

- **Evolution of monarchy and Parliament**—*Richard II* (1300s); *Henry V* (1400s); *The Faerie Queen* (1500s); *Gulliver’s Travels* (1600s-1700s)

- **Inter-regional relations**—*The Mabinogion* (500-1200); *Rob Roy* (1700s); *Castle Rackrent* (1700s)

- **Male-female relations**—*The Eve of St. Agnes* (1200s); *Songs and Sonnets* (1500s-1600s); *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (1600s)

- **Pursuit of knowledge**—*Dr. Faustus* (1500s); *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1600s); *Frankenstein* (1700s)

- **Rise of the common man and woman**—*Piers Plowman* (1300s); *Pamela* (1700s)

- **Individual’s relation to Christianity**—*Paradise Lost* (beginning of time); *Le Morte D’Arthur* (400s); *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1600s)

- **Slavery and British empire**—*Oroonoko* (1600s); *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1700s)

- **Social class consciousness**—*The Duchess of Malfi* (1400s); *The History of Tom Jones* (1700s); *Wuthering Heights* (1700s)

Of course, how such issues were addressed depended largely on when a literary work was written. The Wife of Bath in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (written c. 1387-1400) argues that, contrary to popular opinion in her day, widows are entitled to remarry and enjoy physical intimacy with a man. Four centuries later, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) ventures outside the matrimonial sphere, making the shocking proposal for the time that women be educated alongside men. Both works champion women’s rights, but the nature of these rights depends on the era.

The religious passions of the 1400s continued into the 1500s, a formative century in which England’s Church broke off from Rome, despite stubborn resistance from English priests. Henry VIII, England’s monarch, took the Pope’s place as religious head of the new Church of England (Anglican Church). After this disharmony came friction within the kingdom between Anglicans and Puritans, who dissented from the Anglican Church. The disharmony climaxed in a civil war, which led to a brief overthrow of the monarchy for a republican government (1649-60), then a restoration of the monarchy—but with a significant change. Many English subjects no longer felt that their monarch ruled by divine right, as indicated by their interference with the royal line of succession in 1688. Parliament, exercising more say in government than ever before, placed two Protestants on the throne—William of Orange, referred to in the first line of this introduction, and his wife Mary.

Meanwhile, Ireland remained Catholic, posing a threat to England’s Protestant establishment. The establishment’s fear was that the Catholic countries of France and Spain would use Ireland as a base to invade England, so precautions were taken. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Queen Elizabeth, King James, and republican ruler Oliver Cromwell brought Ireland under English control through military force and renewed colonization (achieved by transplanting of English lords into Ireland). Other parts of the Isles fell under English control too, sooner than Ireland. England annexed Wales by an Act of Union in 1536, while Scotland united with England in a similar act in 1707, losing its separate parliament but gaining a share in English prosperity, as suggested in *Rob Roy*. Still, Ireland remained distinct, until 1800, when another Act of Union finally absorbed its parliament into England’s. Meanwhile, as indicated, Ireland’s oral and written traditions had from the



start contributed to the regional literary continuum. Jonathan Swift's writings, for example, fit neatly into the continuum after Chaucer's and before Wollstonecraft's; like their works, his critiqued aspects of the regional status quo.

Swift used satire, a deft instrument in the hands of Irish and British writers alike around this time. Of course, Chaucer had used it to great effect much earlier. Now, in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century, writers further developed the genre, using satire to critique both society and specific individuals. In his poem "Mac Flecknoe," John Dryden employed satire to disastrous effect, against playwright and poet Thomas Shadwell, damaging his reputation for centuries to come. The poet Alexander Pope likewise satirized a personal dispute between two families in his mock epic *The Rape of the Lock*. Around the same time, general social satire came into vogue in witty comedies such as William Congreve's *The Way of the World*, which concerns love and marriage and was followed later in the century by renowned comedies in the same vein (*She Stoops to Conquer* and *The Rivals*). Images of slavery abounded in the plays of Congreve's day, with love and marriage depicted as a type of bondage (the wife-slave image in these plays has been connected to the rise of abolitionist sentiments in England). Though she was a dramatist of the day, Aphra Behn invoked another genre altogether to literally tackle the subject of bondage; atypically for the period, her novel *Oroonoko* (1688) concerns slavery in part of the British Empire—Surinam, South America. Until the twentieth century, her novel would mostly be ignored, largely, it is thought, because of Behn's gender.

The novel itself was a new genre, just emerging around the turn of the eighteenth century. Satire was still in vogue at the time. Joseph Addison, who along with Richard Steele issued the periodical *The Spectator* (1711-14), abhorred satire aimed at individuals. It threw darts, he said, that poisoned reputations. In the end, though, Addison and Steele were not the ones to squash the penchant for satire. Rather it declined with the rise of the novel, whose origins have been located by some in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749). Others argue that Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688) and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) had already initiated the genre. In any case, all four authors are associated with the rise of the novel, which set out to portray varieties of human experience with fidelity to reality. Adding greatly to these varieties were works by female writers who followed Aphra Behn

(for example, Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*, Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*). "I know something now of my Irish subjects," King George is reported to have said after reading Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*.

Interrupting the stream of realistic tales was the gothic novel, which concerned itself with terror or horror. Probably most renowned among the gothic novels of terror is Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, a novel set in the late sixteenth century that has a villain who commits diabolical acts, but has no genuinely supernatural characters. The villain is simply a malevolent human being. That malevolent people sometimes orchestrated events to satisfy their evil desires had long been acknowledged in literature. There were a bevy of plays around 1600 that featured ill-intentioned characters, among them, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1596), William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606), and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613). The villains are nobles, driven by a thirst for revenge or personal power.

Literature set at the end of the eighteenth century addressed evil too, but differently. A cataclysmic event occurred in 1789—the French Revolution, in which commoners seized control of government from the nobles. England was meanwhile in the midst of a vigorous Industrial Revolution, which drew rural dwellers into cities and gave rise to a burgeoning middle class, and to workers who aspired to climb into it. People began to view society as a set of competing social strata, and literature changed in keeping with the political and economic developments. In the 1790s the Romantic movement emerged, featuring poems in everyday language that expressed emotional reactions to racism (William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*), poor vagrants (William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*), and exploited workers (Percy Bysshe Shelley's "England in 1819"). Again, this focus was not altogether new, but its nature changed. Two hundred years earlier Shakespeare's *King Lear* had lamented the plight of the poor in an era filled with religious sermons and a poor law that mandated charity. Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* ("The Human Abstract") made a similar lament, but tied it to inequities in his society and to his contemporaries' responsibility for them—"Pity would be no more / If we did not make somebody poor." From writings set in prehistorical times to the pre-Victorian 1830s, literary works such as these both reflected and advanced the social dialogue.



# Chronology of Relevant Events

## British and Irish Literature and Its Times



### THE BUILDING OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND

The peopling of the British Isles occurred over a span of several millennia. Anthropological evidence suggests that the first settlers may have arrived in Ireland during the Bronze Age and that the “Beaker Folk”—so called because of their distinctively shaped drinking cups or “beakers”—settled in Great Britain around 2000 B.C.E. After the Beaker Folk came perhaps the most populous settlers to appear in the British Isles, the Celts, who arrived in waves from the first millennium B.C.E. Their migration was followed by the invasions of different peoples—the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, and finally, the Normans, each of whom left a significant cultural impression that contributed to the development of traditions on the Isles. Monks distinguished themselves as early historians of this developmental phase.

Historical Events		Related Literary Works
8000 B.C.E.	8000-1750 B.C.E. First people arrive in Ireland across land bridge from Scotland; Beaker Folk arrive in Britain; Stonehenge is built.	
	1000-55 B.C.E. Celtic peoples arrive and settle in Britain and Ireland	<i>King Lear</i> by William Shakespeare; <i>The Mabinogion</i> ; <i>The Táin</i> ( <i>The Cattle Raid of Cooley</i> )
	55-54 B.C.E. Julius Caesar leads two expeditions into Britain	
	43 C.E. Roman conquest of Britain begins; Londinium (London) founded	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> by William Shakespeare
50	48-79 Southeastern Britain is conquered, Roman roads constructed	
	60-62 Queen Boudicca raises revolt against the Romans in East Anglia; Romans suppress revolt but suffer severe losses	

## Historical Events

## Related Literary Works

	122-33 Romans build defensive barrier, Hadrian's Wall, to protect northwestern frontier of Britain from invaders	
	407-10 Roman army withdraws from Britain	
	427-500s Invasions by Angles, Saxons, and Jutes; Britons try to fight invaders; founding of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms begins	<i>Le Morte D'Arthur</i> by Sir Thomas Malory
<b>500</b>	500 Members of the Irish kingdom of Dál Riata cross to today's Scotland	
	547 British monk Gildas writes <i>De Excidio Britanniae</i> (Concerning the Fall of Britain), outlining early history involving the Britons and Saxons; the tract criticizes various individuals for their behavior	
	731-32 Bede completes his <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i> (Ecclesiastical History of the English People), a record of events in Britain from Caesar's invasion in 55 B.C.E. to 731 C.E.	
	786-95 First Viking raids; Norsemen arrive on Lambay Island off the Dublin Coast	
<b>800</b>	800-1014 Viking settlements in Ireland evolve into towns	
	802 Welsh monk Nennius writes <i>Historia Brittonum</i> (History of the Britons), including the alleged founding of Britain by Brutus and mentioning Arthur, a British commander	<i>Le Morte D'Arthur</i> by Sir Thomas Malory
	842-58 Under leadership of Kenneth Mac Alpin, Scots assimilate Picts to form what will become the kingdom of Scotland	
	860s-70s Viking army overruns parts of England, including Northumbria and East Anglia	
	871-99 Reign of Saxon king Alfred the Great, who defeats Vikings (Danes) on land and sea; Alfred agrees to a boundary that confines Vikings to area of northern and central England called the Danelaw	
	899-924 Alfred's son, Edward, conquers the southern Danelaw	
	937 Edward's son Athelstan conquers the northern Danelaw	
	976-1014 Brian Boru conquers and unifies most of Ireland, becoming High King	
	991 August 11—The Vikings defeat the English forces, led by Byrhtnoth, at the Battle of Maldon	<i>The Battle of Maldon</i>
<b>1000</b>	1014 Brian Boru, High King of Ireland, is killed after victory over Vikings in the battle of Clontarf	
	1017-35 Cnut of Denmark defeats Aethelred's son Edmund, becomes uncontested king of England, reigning as well over Denmark and, from c. 1028, over Norway	<i>Beowulf</i>
	1040 Mac Bethad Mac Findláech (Macbeth) kills Donnchad (Duncan), begins peaceful 17-year reign as king of Scotland	
	1057 Macbeth is killed by Malcolm	<i>Macbeth</i> by William Shakespeare
	1066 William of Normandy defeats and kills King Harold II at the Battle of Hastings and is crowned William I (the Conqueror) of England.	

## THE MIDDLE ENGLISH ERA FROM THE NORMAN CONQUEST TO THE TUDOR ACCESSION

The aftermath of the Norman Conquest saw the establishment of a centralized government in England. The heirs of William the Conqueror safeguarded this centralized government even when succession struggles, such as the one between Stephen of Blois and Mathilda of Anjou, threatened to tear the realm apart. In retrospect, the founding of the House of Anjou, or Plantagenet, as it was later called, produced a royal dynasty that brought England some of its most glorious triumphs (English victories over France at the Battles of Crécy and Agincourt) and its most dismal failures (the loss of Normandy during the reign of John I and the loss of France less than 50 years after Agincourt). Rivalries among the Plantagenets and their successors led to bloody civil wars and the shocking depositions of the anointed kings Richard II and Henry VI. Two powerful factions, the Yorkists and the Lancastrians, battled intermittently over the English throne for 30 years before Richard III, a Yorkist, was killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field. The leader of the Lancastrian faction, Henry Tudor, became the new king and the founder of his own royal dynasty.

1066-87 William I centralizes authority of the English Crown and establishes a Norman aristocracy

1087 *The Domesday Book*, a survey of English landholdings, is completed; William I dies; William II accedes to the throne

1106 Henry I, successor to William II, conquers Normandy for himself, establishing England's first foothold in France

1135 Henry I dies, naming his daughter Mathilda as successor; his nephew Stephen of Blois argues that an oath of allegiance to Mathilda was forced and so is void; Stephen seizes the throne

c. 1138 Geoffrey of Monmouth completes *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain), spreads myth that Britain was founded by Brutus, a descendant of the hero Aeneas from the fallen city of Troy, creates the Arthur adapted by subsequent writers of Arthurian romance

1138-49 Mathilda attempts to take the English throne from Stephen, sparking a decade of bitter civil war that ends with Mathilda being forced to leave England

1152 Henry of Anjou, son of Mathilda and Count Geoffrey of Anjou, marries Eleanor of Aquitaine, after her marriage to Louis VII of France is annulled

1154-89 Reign of Henry II, Mathilda's son and first ruler of House of Plantagenet (or of Anjou)

1190-92 Richard I ("The Lionhearted") leads third crusade, later (1199) dies of an arrow wound while attempting to take a treasure from his vassal

c. 1200 Layamon's *Brut* appears, containing the first treatment of King Arthur in English; poem is an English translation of a French adaptation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, which was written in Latin

1199-1216 Reign of John I, Richard's brother, who loses Normandy to Philip II of France

1215 King John signs the Magna Carta—a decree to protect feudal rights against royal abuse; establishes the idea that no one is above the law, even the king; establishes trial by jury

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; *Le Morte D'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory

1200

1300

c. 1225 University at Cambridge is founded by students from Oxford, whose own founding is often placed at 1167

1283 Edward I conquers Wales

1296-1305 Scotland is militarily occupied by England; William Wallace commands Scottish resistance at battles of Stirling Bridge (1297) and Falkirk (1298)

1300s The Age of Chivalry, which began in the 1100s, flourishes; a code of conduct for knights becomes idealized as French romances are introduced into England

1301 Edward of Caernarvon, the royal heir, becomes the first English Prince of Wales

1314 Scots decisively defeat the English at Bannockburn

1337 England's Edward III issues claim to French throne; Hundred Years' War between England and France begins

1346 Edward, the Black Prince of Wales, the son of Edward III, defeats the French at Crécy

1349 England is ravaged by the "Black Death," an epidemic of the bubonic plague

1350-1450 Rise of English as a literary language in England, replacing French

1360 Edward III signs a peace treaty with the French; English kings continue to style themselves as kings of France

1376-77 Edward, Black Prince of Wales, dies; his young son inherits the throne from Edward III as Richard II

1381 Peasants' Revolt—possibly the most significant popular rebellion in English history—occurs; the revolt is suppressed and its leader, Wat Tyler, is killed by the Lord Mayor of London

1388 As a result of the Black Death, Parliament enacts the Statutes of Laborers, to control prices, prevent laborers from reneging on their contracts, and force "the idle" to work

1388-89 Lords Appellant lead "Merciless Parliament" to purge the government of Richard II's handpicked advisors and supporters

1399 Richard II seizes the estate of his deceased uncle, John of Gaunt

1399-1413 Henry, duke of Bolingbroke, son of John of Gaunt, revolts against Richard II, deposing him and reigning as Henry IV, first ruler of the House of Lancaster

1400

1400 Richard II dies in Pontefract Castle, probably early this year

1400-1409 Owen Glendower leads last Welsh revolts against England; English suppress uprisings in other regions too

1411 St. Andrews University is founded in Scotland

1415-20 Henry V defeats French at Battle of Agincourt; five years later, he signs Treaty of Troyes, designating him France's next king, and weds Catherine, daughter of French king Charles VI

1422 Henry V dies of dysentery; his infant son, Henry VI, succeeds him as king of England

1429-31 Joan of Arc has the French Dauphin crowned as Charles VII at Rheims; she is later captured, sold to the English, put on trial, found guilty by a mainly English court, and burned at the stake

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

*The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

*Piers Plowman* by William Langland

*Richard II* by William Shakespeare

*Henry V* by William Shakespeare