The Modern Age
On Queen Victoria’s death, her son Edward VII came to the throne and reigned until 1910. He was succeeded by George V who reigned until 1936. In 1917 George V decided to change his German name Saxe-Coburg-Gotha into the English Windsor. During World War I, for the first time, aeroplanes, submarines, tanks and chemical weapons were used. World War I was a terrible shock for a whole generation.
In 1931 there was a transformation of the British Empire into the British Commonwealth, an association of self-governing-countries (Statute of Westminster).
The economic decline of the 1920s led to widespread unemployment and the Wall Street Crash, the collapse of the American stock market in 1929 contributed to the so-called Great Depression.
When George V died, he was succeeded by his son Edward VIII, but he abdicated after ten months, so that he could marry an American divorcée. He was succeeded by his brother who became king with the name of George VI (1936-1952). When Germany invaded Poland (1939), France and Britain declared war on Germany. In May 1945 Germany surrendered, in August 1945 Japan surrendered. In October 1945 the United Nations Organization (UNO) was established.

The Modernists
James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Thomas Stearns Eliot are the most important representatives. “The Waste Land” came out in 1922 and made Eliot the leading modernist poet writing in English. Eliot received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.
Joyce published “Ulysses” in Paris in 1922. In England the novel was banned for obscenity until 1936. “Ulysses” tells the story of a day in the life of Leopold Bloom who wanders about the streets of Dublin just as Homer’s Ulysses wandered about the Mediterranean. What happens to Bloom is far less heroic, it is, in fact, banal and common. Joyce uses the epic structure to stress the lack of heroism, ideals and trust in the modern world.
The most famous works by Virginia Woolf are “Mrs Dalloway” (1925) and “To the Lighthouse” (1927). Woolf shows the lives of various characters on one single day in “Mrs Dalloway” and on two different days in “To the Lighthouse”. She rejected traditional eventful plots and described what went on in her characters’ minds by using the interior monologue. Thoughts can cover years ranging through past, present and future because internal events (time of the mind) are much more important than external events (time of the clock).
The omniscient author is abandoned and the character’s point of view comes out through the interior monologue. The extreme form of it is the stream-of-consciousness technique; various images are put together, often without punctuation and grammatical or syntactical connectives, in the attempt to show the chaotic flow of thoughts in the human mind.
“Mrs Dalloway” (1925) is set in London and it’s the story of an irrelevant day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, the wife of a Member of Parliament. Nothing extraordinary happens and the significance depends on the characters’ interior monologues, which express their inner lives. Clarissa spends the day preparing for the party she is going to give that evening at her house. The novel starts with one of Clarissa’s monologues which introduces the stream-of-consciousness technique. Past and present impressions run through her mind. The result is a chaotic and vital stream of consciousness.