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Annotated Bibliography: Regency and Victorian Era YA Books

History novels are a great way for people to learn more about the past and is a way to explore today's world by connecting the past with the present. It also teaches readers from the mistakes of the past and shows them what attitudes from the past affect today along with some preventative measures. Often, it also dispels the romantic notions that people have about events or even whole time periods as it shows the horrors of wars, what the working class had to go through, and how social movements have affected today's culture. However, this is not the case when historical works are taught in school.

From what I heard from classmates and my own experience in middle and high school, teachers prefer classical or canonical work to novels meant for young adults. Therefore, it became very hard to relate to characters or to the situations that characters got into because there wasn't any context given to explain what was happening unless one knew about the social structure of the time period and setting. Events, social constraints, and even setting become lost as the authors in these works were writing for the time period they were in and assumed readers knew what they were referring to. While students could connect to the characters they were reading about, all too often I heard peers complaining about assigned books because they found it didn't make sense to them or they weren't able to relate to any of the characters. A few examples of these books were *Wuthering Heights*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Great Expectations*. These books were meant for the adults of the time they were written and not for young adults several decades later.

With this in mind, I wanted to find historical books that took place during the Regency and Victorian Eras in England, the time periods and setting where many of the books in question took place. Not only would some of the situations would be explained in these books, I hoped that they would be much more enjoyable for today's teens than the canonical works they need to read for class.

I also hope to achieve more than to give teens books to help understand class readings. Several of the ones I found also seek to empower the reader and give them encouragement to find themselves or grow as a person. Many of these have female protagonists even when women at the time did not have the power to vote or the right to be educated like men were yet. The social constraints of these eras can also be an analogy to parents when they do not recognize that their children are growing up and are no longer children at all. Characters become quite cunning and outsmart others in order to solve problems, reveal mysteries, and to achieve their own goals when they aren't supposed to be somewhere. Yet, teens are also shown the dangers of such actions and the consequences of doing so. For example, Kim in *Mairelon the Magician* from Patricia C. Wrede is a girl trying to survive on her own in London and does so by cross-dressing and tricking others but also knows what would happen if she was discovered. If her gender was discovered by her allies on the streets, she would have to become a prostitute in order to continue to survive in London whereas if the government found out about her, she would swing from the gallows as a thief.

On a more personal note, part of the reason why I wanted to explore more historical novels is because I grew up reading fantasy books. While I still enjoy a good fantasy book, my tastes are expanding to include historical and mystery novels. Because the heavy stress on canonical works in school, I felt like the assigned readings were more focused on that then trying to introduce

new topics and genres to students. Many of my peers hated reading and when one considers what they were being forced to read, it becomes understandable as they're told again and again to read works like *The Crucible* or *Their Eyes were Watching God*. As such, I wanted to find novels that teachers might be able to use to bring history into context and yet still be enjoyable for the students who had to read them.

Annotated Bibliography

Bray, Libba. *A Great and Terrible Beauty*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005. Print.

Summary: Raised in India, Gemma is brought to England and Spence, a girls' academy, after her mother's death. She also starts to have visions and is warned by a man who followed her from India to fight the visions off. Her friends, wanting some adventure before they become Victorian wives, join her in trying to understand her visions. However, they soon discover that there are dangers they had not anticipated lurking around the corner.

(http://www.amazon.com/Great-Terrible-Beauty-Gemma-Trilogy/dp/0385732317/ref=pd_bxgy_b_text_z)

Commentary: Taking place during the late Victorian years, this novel also covers the nature of being selfish and using others to get what people want. It does have a gothic story to as it takes place at a boarding school and the unknown element of Gemma's visions.

Cameron, Sharon. *The Dark Unwinding*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2012. Print.

Summary: Katharine Tulman is sent to investigate a rumor that her uncle is squandering the family fortune and have him committed to an asylum. When she arrives, she finds that her uncle isn't a lunatic but an inventor who employs a whole village. She is soon torn between protecting her own inheritance and preserving the community that her uncle has managed to create.

(http://www.amazon.com/The-Dark-Unwinding-Sharon-Cameron/dp/0545327865/ref=pd_sim_b_6)

Commentary: Cameron creates a world where what is right and wrong is brought into question along with how keeping an open mind. It is based off the 1850's and Welbeck Abbey in England and creates a gothic world that readers can get lost in while growing to understand the era.

Croxall, Jack. *Tethers*. Amazon, 2013. Web book.

Summary: Thirteen year olds Karl and Esther live in the quiet town of Shraye when they find a journal full of strange passages and scribbles. Not only that, but the book seems to beckoning them away from Shraye and to a chain of dark events. The two find themselves on an important voyage full of peril and discovery.

(http://www.amazon.com/Tethers-Jack-Croxall-ebook/dp/B00BBS39L2/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1386106653&sr=8-2&keywords=Tethers)

Commentary: This novel is one of discovery and breaking away from quiet town life as Karl and Esther go off to find out what the journal is about and why their names can be found inside its pages.

Harvey, Alyxandra. *Haunting Violet*. Walker Childrens, 2011. Print.

Summary: Violet Willoughby may not believe in ghosts, but she certainly plays looks like it as the fraudulent medium in her mother's elaborate ruse. That doesn't stop a ghost who suffered a violent death from visiting her and enlisting her help in finding the killer who is still on the loose. The only person who can help her is her childhood friend, Colin, who she loves and yet cannot be with.

Commentary: As the Victorian Era was full of mystics and tales of the supernatural, people made livings off making others believe that they were mediums. That is the case with Violet and

also explores how some people may have felt as part of the deceit and those being being deceived. It also covers breaking away from overbearing parents as Violet's mother forces her into being part of the fraud.

MacColl, Michaela. *Prisoners in the Palace: How Princess Victoria became Queen with the Help of Her Maid, a Reporter, and a Scoundrel*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2013. Print.

Summary: Liza's dreams are dashed when her parents die unexpectedly. Instead of enjoying her debut into society, she becomes a lady's maid to Princess Victoria. She is soon given the chance to secure the throne for the princess along with determining her own fate and love for herself.

(http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/15791102-prisoners-in-the-palace?from_search=true)

Commentary: Based off documents that the royal family wrote, MacColl creates and explores how Princess Victoria became Queen Victoria through a girl who has to deal with the princess herself and who has to live in the servants quarters when the other servants don't want her there.

Pullman, Philip. *The Ruby in the Smoke: A Sally Lockhart Mystery*. New York: Laurel-Leaf Books, 1988. Print.

Summary: Sixteen year old Sally has an unusual education as she doesn't know anything about what other women are taught but knows military tactics and how to run a business. However, when her father dies mysteriously, she sets out to find out who killed her father and what her father meant with his last warning: "Beware the seven blessings."

(http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/114982.The_Ruby_in_the_Smoke)

Commentary: While liberties were obviously take with what a girl could do in Victorian London, *The Ruby in the Smoke* is a dark mystery that also explores drug use and the theme of

death. It might help teens understand the world through that and how people can become addicted to drugs.

Ross, Kate. *Cut to the Quick*. New York: Felony & Mayhem Press, 2010. Print.

Summary: Julian Kestrel looks and acts like the perfect Regency-era dandy with not much care about the world except for his next drink. However, that is all an image. His true nature comes out when he spends a weekend at a country estate and finds a dead girl's body in his bed.

Commentary: Period accurate and highly aware of class distinctions, Ross creates a lovable character who solves mysteries under the guise of being careless. An intriguing mystery, Julian Kestrel seems to draw the readers in and expose the nature of the Regency time period.

Stevermer, Caroline and Patricia C. Wrede. *Socery & Cecelia: or The Enchanted Chocolate Pot*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2004. Print.

Summary: The cousins Kate and Cecelia exchange letters telling each other of their exploits while Kate is in London and Cecelia live in the country. They soon uncover a plot when Kate is almost poisoned and Cecelia notices someone spying on her and a friend. Between the two, they soon are trying to solve the mystery of who tried to kill Kate and keep anyone else from falling into deathly trap.

Commentary: The tale that Stevermer and Wrede weave is a great story to help teach *Pride and Prejudice* as the cousins have to pay a lot of attention to the social restrictions placed on them a few years after *Pride and Prejudice* was supposed to take place. To add to this, the girls also strike out against what others tell them to do and grow into their own persons while trying to

protect themselves and others. It does add in the element of magic but the situations that the two find themselves in would be quite plausible if there was magic during the Regency Era.

Wallace, Karen. *The Unrivalled Spangles*. New York: Atheneum Books, 2006. Print.

Summary: Ellen and Lucy are sisters raised in the circus and dazzle crowds with their horseback routines. While Lucy loves the attention and circus life, Ellen dreams of becoming a governess. Just as she feels like she will be able to escape the circus life she hates, tragedy strikes the Spangles and it is up to Ellen to keep their business alive.

(http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/149844.The_Unrivalled_Spangles?from_search=true)

Commentary: Focusing on the circus life of the nineteenth century, this can be an enjoyable book while teaching readers about the times and the attitudes of the time period as told by Ellen.

Wrede, Patricia C., *Mairelon the Magician*. New York: An Orb Book, 1991. Print.

Summary: Set in a magical Victorian England, Kim is a pickpocket and thief hired to steal from a traveling magician when she finds out that the magician of the title is actually a wizard in hiding, accused of a crime he didn't commit. After being discovered trying to steal from him, Kim finds herself under the employment of Mairelon as his apprentice and assistant. This leads to her to trying to find out who exactly hired her to steal from Mairelon in the first place and how to clear Mairelon's name.

Commentary: While it is hard to pin down the exact year that this book is supposed to take place, the setting and characters are defined by the setting like Kim, who conceals her gender to avoid having to work in a brothel. It also works as a tool to understanding British nobility and the working class of the time as Kim and Mairelon jump between the two in order to solve

mysteries. I would suggest this novel if a teen had to read *Great Expectations* and they didn't understand what was going on.