

Summary of the Age of Romanticism-This period extends from the war with the colonies, following the Declaration of Independence, in 1776, to the accession of Victoria in 1837, both limits being very indefinite, as will be seen by a glance at the Chronology following. During the first part of the period especially, England was in a continual turmoil, produced by political and economic agitation at home, and by the long wars that covered two continents and the wide sea between them. The mighty changes resulting from these two causes have given this period the name of the Age of Revolution. The storm center of all the turmoil at home and abroad was the French Revolution, which had a profound influence on the life and literature of all Europe. On the Continent the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo (1815) apparently checked the progress of liberty, which had started with the French Revolution, but in England the case was reversed. The agitation for popular liberty, which at one time threatened a revolution, went steadily forward till it resulted in the final triumph of democracy, in the Reform Bill of 1832, and in a number of exceedingly important reforms, such as the extension of manhood suffrage, the removal of the last unjust restrictions against Catholics, the establishment of a national system of schools, followed by a rapid increase in popular education, and the abolition of slavery in all English colonies (1833). To this we must add the changes produced by the discovery of steam and the invention of machinery, which rapidly changed England from an agricultural to a manufacturing nation, introduced the factory system, and caused this period to be known as the Age of Industrial Revolution.

The literature of the age is largely poetical in form, and almost entirely romantic in spirit. For, as we have noted, the triumph of democracy in government is generally accompanied by the triumph of romanticism in literature. At first the literature, as shown especially in the early work of Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley, reflected the turmoil of the age and the wild hopes of an ideal democracy occasioned by the French Revolution. Later the extravagant enthusiasm subsided, and English writers produced so much excellent literature that the age is often called the Second Creative period, the first being the Age of Elizabeth. The six chief characteristics of the age are: the prevalence of romantic poetry; the creation of the historical novel by Scott; the first appearance of women novelists, such as Mrs. Anne Radcliffe, Jane Porter, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen; the development of literary criticism, in the work of Lamb, De Quincey, Coleridge, and Hazlitt; the practical and economic bent of philosophy, as shown in the work of Malthus, James Mill, and Adam Smith; and the establishment of great literary magazines, like the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly*, *Blackwood's*, and the *Athenaeum*.