

4 The Romantic period, 1780–1832

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This overview of the history of the Romantic period provides a narrative of the major social, political and cultural trends which occurred between the years 1780 and 1832 and which impacted on the literature produced by the men and women who lived through them. The Romantic period witnessed enormous political and social upheaval with such political events and social processes as the American and French Revolutions, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the prosecution and criticism of the transatlantic slave trade, the Great Reform Act of 1832, the Industrial Revolution, and much more. In this period Britain relinquished its American Colonies but found a new empire in other parts of the world, transforming itself into a global superpower. The Romantic Age saw a wholesale change in the ways in which many people lived and this was reflected in the culture of the time. It was a time when Britons forged a new national and imperial identity defined against the cultures and peoples of the world that they encountered in accounts of travel, exploration and colonial settlement.

Chronology

	HISTORY AND CULTURE	LITERATURE
1776–84	American War of Independence	
1784	Act for regulating East India Company	Charlotte Smith, <i>Elegiac Sonnets</i>
1785	William Pitt introduces Bill for reform of Parliament William Paley, <i>Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy</i>	William Cowper, <i>The Task</i> Robert Merry (Della Crusca), <i>The Florence Miscellany</i> Sir William Jones, 'A Hymn to Na'ra'yena'
1786	Thomas Clarkson, <i>An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species</i> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i> Impeachment proceedings against Warren Hastings John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery	Robert Burns, <i>Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect</i> William Beckford, <i>Vathek</i>
1787	Formation of a Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade Mozart, <i>Don Giovanni</i>	
1788	<i>The Times</i>	